

THE
GREAT EMPRESS

A PORTRAIT.

BY M. SCHELE DE VERE
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.

"FACTS STRANGER THAN FICTION."



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PREFACE.

IN the following pages the author has endeavored to give the portrait of a truly great woman—great in her birth and station, great in her charms and her genius, but great also in her terrible sins. The features are all hers—nothing has been added, nothing omitted; but if the colors at times appear faded, the reader will remember the distance that separates us from the epoch in which she lived.

The author has drawn his information mainly directly from those ancient authors who speak of Agrippina and her times, but he wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to the excellent works of Champigny and Stahr.

NOVEMBER, 1869.

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THE GREAT EMPRESS.

I.

EARLY DAYS.

TWICE did Germanicus, the beloved of the gods and the favorite of the Roman people, enter the Eternal City under circumstances so startling as to rouse all Rome—so touching that his memory long outlived the murder of the Cæsars and the crash of falling thrones. It was when his uncle Tiberius was seated upon the throne of the world that he first appeared in Rome in solemn triumph, and never perhaps had the fickle people of the great city showered more heartfelt blessings upon victorious generals than when they received the young hero with an acclaim which startled the eagles that soared in happy augury over his head, and silenced the shout of his comrades-in-arms. Nor had they waited until he approached the gates of the city, but for the distance of twenty miles the road had been lined on both sides by the excited populace, and the body-guard of the emperor himself had, without waiting for orders from their great master, saluted him there. It was a glorious day in May, full of golden sunshine, and the

air still balmy and fragrant with the perfumes of a late spring, when the Romans once more beheld, at the head of the great procession, the eagles which the unfortunate Varus had lost in the dark forests of Germany, and which Germanicus now brought back amply avenged and encircled with a halo of brilliant victories. When they first saw them, their enthusiasm broke forth, and they made the welkin ring with their shouts of joy and their cries of admiration. Next came captives of noble birth and high distinction among their own people, taken from the numerous tribes of the German races, and their lofty bearing gratified the pride of the Romans, while their curiosity was greatly excited by the strange costumes, the unfamiliar moustache, and the golden hair, flowing in abundant locks over neck and shoulders, which characterized the formidable race. Before them walked the fair Thusnelda, the wife of the great Herrman, with the infant child whom she had borne in servitude and sorrow. Without remorse, without compassion, the people gazed eagerly at the noble captive, who walked slowly but firmly on her pitiful path, with lofty brow and tearless eyes, pressing her babe to her bosom, and looking neither to the right nor to the left. Nor were they moved by the touching grief of a younger princess, who followed next; but, wanting the noble heroism, the almost sublime elevation which even Roman writers admired in the great chieftain's widow, she came with drooping head, her rich tresses flowing in careless disorder over her bosom, and hiding her agonized features and weeping eyes behind their golden veil.

A glance only at the spoils of war, a few words of contemptuous criticism at the effort to represent the mountains and rivers of the conquered kingdoms by pictures and emblems, and then all eyes were strained to the

utmost to catch the first glimpse of the young Emperor. At last his golden chariot came in sight: there he stood in all the beauty of his noble features, in all the manly graces of his person, and decked with the gorgeous panoply of arms which victorious heroes wore on these solemn occasions. By his side stood his proudest treasures—the five sons which the noblest of Roman wives had given him. There was the youngest, whom merciful Fate saved from the horrors of the throne by an early death, and whose exquisitely beautiful statue as Cupid the grim emperor kept near his chamber, and often kissed ere he retired to bed. There was the tiny boy whose soldiers' shoes gave him, with the affectionate soldiers, the sportive name of Caligula, which was afterward to become a byword of dread and of infamy. There were the three elders, who bore the noble features of their father, and seemed to promise a rich harvest of great deeds and lofty merits. The stern Romans took no notice of the conqueror's faithful wife, the glorious daughter of the famous Agrippa—she who had ever been by her husband's side amid the dangers of his distant campaigns, and the still greater perils of the imperial palace at Rome; she who had cheered him in times of dismay and counseled wisdom in the hour of triumph; she who had stood, alone and unsupported, except by the infant child in her arms, at the head of the bridge over the German river when her husband's legions fled in utter rout, and had checked the disorderly flight of their broken ranks, while she greeted the four unbroken legions, who defiled with undaunted courage and with their ensigns displayed before her, in words of warmest praise, her heart swelling with wifelike pride and emotion.

The people grew silent as the chariot passed; their hearts overflowed for once with that genuine love which

finds no words for expression. And another feeling overcame them. They were a superstitious race, and in the midst of their shouts of triumph their minds were suddenly filled with sad misgivings. It was not the slave who stood behind the hero and in this moment of crowning happiness whispered in his ear that he was only mortal. It was not the shadow that flitted now and then across the noble, open features of the conqueror as he noted that the emperor was absent, but that the triumphal arch on the slope of the Capitoline Hill, under which he passed, bore the name Tiberius, instead of his own, and that the lion's share of the triumph was virtually withheld from the rightful owner. It was simply the memory of the manner in which all who had won their affection had been suddenly snatched away in their hour of greatest popularity that moved their hearts, so that with one accord, half unconscious of what they uttered, they broke forth in the touching words: "Alas, brief and ill-starred are the loves of the Roman people!"

Two short years elapsed, during which the illustrious general had won the love of the fastidious Athenians, placed the royal diadem upon the brow of kings made and unmade by his hand with supreme power, penetrated to the very confines of the empire at the Upper Falls of the Nile, and fallen a victim to the jealousy of his master or the intrigues of his rivals. Once more he entered the Eternal City, but it was amid tears and lamentations. He had died in the far East, in the great city of Antioch, famous by its splendor, which was second only to Rome—more famous still by the handful of humble men who there first assumed the name of their great Master, and from thence, through Paul and Barnabas, sent the only true faith to all the nations of the earth. His faithful wife, whose heart had been ready to break with grief and rage,

had listened to his dying words imploring her to check the first fury of her indignation and to suppress her suspicions for the sake of her children. She had done so; she had attended with apparent calmness his solemn funeral, missing, with national pride, the images of his ancestors which stood at home in the niches along the walls of the paternal mansion; but comforted—if comfort there could be—by the loud grief and the silent respect of all the powerful nations of the East. When his body had been consumed on the Forum of Antioch, she gathered the ashes of the beloved of her heart, whose youth and generosity were as famous in the Orient as those of the great Alexander, but whose goodness and true greatness were fully known only to the wife of his bosom. Bearing the precious urn in her arms, she embarked with her children and sailed directly for Rome. Her courage, tried in many a battle and tested in the intrigues of the imperial palace, never forsook her for a moment; and when she met on the broad Mediterranean the foe who was accused of having poisoned Germanicus, and whose hostile defiance of the stricken widow nearly led to a desperate encounter, she never quailed, and remained equally calm when he threatened in his fury and when he slunk away, cowed by the stern denunciation of her naval commander and the unmoved majesty of the bereaved mother.

When the sad news reached Rome, the whole city assumed at once all the outward signs of deepest mourning, and the authorities gave orders for the usual honors paid to dead Cæsars in a decree marked by uncommon earnestness and depth of feeling. Triumphal arches were erected to him in Rome and in all the countries where his victories had immortalized his name; his statues were set up in countless cities, and after the fearful fashion

of those days divine honors were offered to them; and all this more from a personal feeling for the hero who had died young, by premature disease, far away from his native soil, in the midst of a career which he had rendered as brilliant by his virtues and genius as by glorious deeds, than from mere enthusiasm for his achievements, for the illustrious name he bore and the imperial blood that flowed in his veins. The people felt instinctively almost what their emperor was to become, now that he was no longer restrained by respect for the noble sentiments of his adopted son. Germanicus had been in their eyes the last friend of freedom; and now he was gone, carrying with him all that remained to them of hope for the future, they were almost maddened with grief, and went at night to the emperor's palace to cry under his windows, "Give us back Germanicus!"

In private, also, families mourned for him as for a brother: some in their furious grief took the Lares of their fathers and threw them into the street; others offered sacrifices on the family altar; vows were made to the gods to appease their apparent wrath; and in their sad, barbaric ignorance several of the common people even showed their excessive grief by exposing children, that had just been born to them on the ill-fated day, to a premature death.

When the bereaved widow reached the coast of Italy, the sorrow of the nation broke forth in a perfect paroxysm, and countless multitudes of people of all classes and ranks thronged the roads on which she approached Rome. Loud complaints rose on all sides, and tears flowed from all eyes, as the widow appeared in her white mourning robes, the golden urn in her hand and ineffable suffering on her still youthful countenance. The authorities of all the districts through which she passed on her mournful

errand, met her and swelled the ranks of the solemn procession, and everywhere the altars of the genii of the departed were smoking with sacrifices. As she came nearer to the city, the consuls and the senators in their official robes and all the pomp and circumstance of their high rank, joined her; foreign princes who were in waiting on the pleasure of the emperor appeared in garments of mourning; and kings and satraps came to pay homage to the greatness of the departed and the grief of his widow. Her sons and daughters had followed her from Terracina, and surrounded by her children, escorted by thousands of noble knights and the great of the earth, the widow walked, the urn in her arms, across the Campus Martius toward the family vault of the emperors, and there she deposited, still silent and tearless, the ashes of Germanicus. The people, in a perfect ecstasy of woe, broke out in wild acclamations, declaring her to be the true glory of Rome, the genuine child of the godlike Augustus, the last surviving matron of ancient virtue. They offered passionate vows to the gods for her safety, and adjured all the deities they knew to preserve the health and the happiness of her offspring.

Like all rash vows, these also were to fall fearfully upon those who uttered them in a moment of passion. Little did the excited Romans then foresee that among the children for whose escape from threatened dangers and impending calamities they so eagerly prayed, there was a Caligula and a Nero. Still less could they imagine that in the little girl of five years who looked so calmly and thoughtfully at the impressive scene, the like of which Rome has not seen before or after, they beheld one who was destined to be at once the sister of an emperor, the wife of an emperor and the mother of an emperor, for whom she ruled the whole world! In her, Fortune

seemed to have chosen a favorite, whom she proposed for some mysterious purpose of her own to load with her choicest gifts; for beauty, power, genius and the loftiest throne on earth, in fact all that this world can give to its children, was granted to her in her youth. But unexampled as her success was also her wickedness, and every triumph purchased by a crime turned against her, until even her son for whom she sacrificed truth, honor and virtue, crowned his fearful career by murdering her to whom he owed both his life and his throne.

Far from imperial Rome, on the banks of the Rhine, where the swift waters of the Moselle bring their deep-green tribute to the great river, Agrippina had been born in the midst of her father's legions. It was a lonely, dangerous place this fortified camp of the Romans, rising in solemn solitude from the heart of gigantic forests, with the mighty stream washing its huge ramparts. Fierce enemies, the barbaric warriors of the German people, filled the woods on the opposite banks, from which their wild songs of national pride and their shouts of defiance could be heard by night and by day. But there were enemies even nearer home; the very first year of the child's chequered life had seen the eight legions of her father Germanicus in open rebellion, and her infant cries had been drowned by the infuriated clamor of the discontented soldiers. They had taken advantage of the great general's absence to assail their officers and to murder some of their commanders, so that all obedience was at an end. Her mother Agrippina, whose name she bore, had stood her ground with truly heroic courage during the absence of the emperor, her husband; and who can tell what magic influence the fearful tumult without, and the terrible struggle in the heart of the lonely woman, may have had upon the in-

fant as she rested on her mother's bosom? At last, after days of anguish, the father came; he was adored by the army for his personal beauty and goodness, and as a noble scion of the imperial house. The soldiers rushed up to his horse, casting themselves at his feet, and imploring him to take pity on their cruel sufferings and to intercede in their behalf with the emperor. Some, weather-beaten veterans, showed him the countless scars, earned in many a bloody battle, with which their bodies were covered; others, speechless with indignation, pointed out to him the disgraceful marks of the centurion's rod; while still others, more pathetic than all, pretended to kiss his hands and gently thrust them within their lips, that he might feel their toothless gums, and thus judge of the length of their services for which they claimed in vain a fair reward. And ever his faithful wife stood by his side, the helpless babe in her arms; never terrified by the passionate energy of their complaints; never hesitating to bid her husband beware when they urged him with loud cries to lead them to Rome and to assume the purple. The noble commander emptied his private coffers to satisfy the just demands of the insurgents, but they were not content with the sacrifice. A new rebellion broke out soon after, and Germanicus proudly refused to be the commander of mutinous Romans. In the mean time, another son had been born to him, and he was anxious to remove his wife and his children to a place of safety. But Agrippina, a woman of masculine spirit and devoted to her husband, full of the pride of her imperial ancestors, and yet humbly obedient to her chosen lord and master, would not be moved to quit his side. At last he commanded, and she prepared to leave, her infant child, the pet and playfellow of the soldiers, in her arms, and her baby-daughter clinging firmly to her purple robe; and

such was the majesty of her appearance even in the hour of her sorrowful departure, such the touching charm of the mother with her tender offspring, that the hearts of the soldiers suddenly melted and opened to remorse. The skillful general saw the change and seized the moment; he reminded them of the love they had ever borne him, the victories they had achieved together, the emperor whom they loved and served, and Rome herself, for whom they and he had ever been willing to give up all that was dear to them—and they surrendered at discretion. What a scene! There was the camp with its stern appliances of cruel war; below, the broad stream pouring its beautiful waters unmindful of man's petty strife, year after year, age after age, down into the great ocean; and beyond it bloodthirsty foes eagerly awaiting the moment when they might profit by the defection of the troops, and once more conquer the eagles of Roman legions! And here the beautiful matron standing lofty and erect, as if high above all vulgar strife and human passion, a future emperor in her strong arms, a future empress at her knees; looking lovingly and longingly at her noble husband, as he stood there in the full splendor of male beauty and perfect grace, looking down upon a host of grim warriors in weatherbeaten armor, kneeling at his feet. For they did kneel down and implored him to punish the guilty, to spare the penitent and to lead the pardoned legions directly against the enemy, that they might wipe out with their life's blood the folly of their rebellion. Only one thing they asked of him—to retain his wife, and to entrust her, as heretofore, to the safeguard of his own Roman soldiers.

Amid such scenes of fierce warfare and wild tumult the child grew up, only to lose her father when she was barely three years old by premature and violent death,

and her mother, the granddaughter of the great Augustus, by banishment, at the age of twelve. For she was within the dread circle of the imperial family, where treachery lurked behind every marble pillar and poison passed freely from hand to hand. There was bitter enmity between the emperor and her noble but stern mother. Already, when the ashes of her father had been brought to Rome, it had been the subject of universal remark that neither Tiberius nor even the aged empress, the mother of the deplored commander, had shown themselves publicly. This increased, of course, only the already widespread suspicions that even the highest in the land, the nearest in blood, were not quite guiltless of the death of the hero, and the precocious mind of Agrippina was fed with insidious suggestions by the indignant friends of the family. They pointed out to the ill-treated widow, as she sat, the picture of woe, in the midst of her orphaned children, how her own kinsman, the emperor, had thus wantonly outraged her feelings and purposely scorned to join a nation in a nation's sorrow. The child heard with open ear, though but half-comprehending mind, that his own unpopularity made him jealous of every mark of popular favor toward others, and that the love of the people for her great father would be a sure cause of hatred on the part of the emperor. For the house of Germanicus was a power in the empire at the time when there were so few great powers left to Rome. Agrippina herself, the mother, a true Roman matron, chaste, proud and surrounded by children, gratified the pride and won the love of the people by virtues which were no longer cultivated, but which Roman pride loved to meet with yet as a type of ancient greatness. She stood apart from the other women of the family of the Cæsars by her faithful widowhood,

the lofty purity of her manners and the number of her children; preserving with tender care the memory of her husband in her own heart and in the minds of the people, and forming thus, by the prestige of the past and the hopes of the future, a landmark for the nation amid the general uncertainty and the want of successors to the throne. The army, especially, little pleased with the unwarlike disposition of Tiberius, would have liked nothing better than to proclaim a son of their beloved chief at once emperor; and whatever there remained in Rome of ancient nobles, illustrious citizens, neglected commanders and suspected friends of the young emperor, rallied around the afflicted family, and thus added to their political influence and to the envy and suspicions of the emperor.

The proof of the reality of these dangers was not long wanting. Tiberius, chafing at the warm interest felt by the Romans in the welfare of the widow and her helpless offspring, issued an edict to check their sensibility, and reminding them of the words of the divine Augustus, that "princes are mortal, the state is eternal," bade them return to their affairs and resume their amusements. We need not wonder that the haughty Agrippina gathered her little ones in silent wrath around her as she saw the great tide of life thus close at his bidding over the remains of her beloved Cæsar, and that neither mother nor children henceforth bore much love to their harsh kinsman on the throne. Then came the sad tragedy of the trial of those whom popular opinion accused of having killed Germanicus by magic and poison. The charge of magical incantations was readily believed by the populace of Antioch, where he had died, and that of Rome, where he was most beloved; that of poison was proved, after the faith of those days, by the fact that the heart of

the murdered man would not burn. The people satisfied themselves, during the trial, fully of the culprit's guilt, and threatened to tear the murderer, if acquitted, to pieces with their own hands. The senators remained as doggedly convinced that the prince had met his death by foul means. Only the emperor doubted. Who can imagine the indignation of the insulted widow, who had hoped to see her noble husband's blood avenged and her own irreparable grief assuaged by the punishment of the murderer, and now found the victim's uncle, her own nearest relative, refuse to do her justice? Who would not be willing to pardon her if in the depth of her sorrow and the bitterness of her disappointment she appeared at times to the condoling friends a very "she wolf," and henceforth the calm majesty of her character descended under the unbearable burden of her terrible fate to frequent ferocity? The children were ever around her during this time of sore trial and intense excitement, and her favorite and namesake seemed to have shared most deeply both her grief and her fury. Surely, there must have been evil seed sown in those days of suffering in the heart of the child, and many a terrible thought and bloody deed of later years had no doubt its beginning in the feelings roused at that early age.

Then the accused murderer died suddenly and secretly during the trial; his servants discovered him lying on the floor of his chamber with his throat severed and his sword on the ground beside him, when they opened the door in the morning. The people cried with one accord that he had been killed by the emperor's orders to conceal his own share in the murder, and the widow was but too willing to credit the rumor. Even when Tiberius restrained the ever-ready praises of the populace, and protested that this was no matter of public joy and thanks-

giving, but the last act of a domestic calamity, fit only to be buried in the recesses of his own memory, she saw in his words merely hypocrisy and a desire to diminish the prestige of her husband's name. She spoke openly of this, and rejoiced in unseemly manner, that the mystery of the death of Germanicus threw undoubtedly a blight upon the fame of Tiberius from which he never again recovered. From that moment his countrymen, from the princess near his throne to the lowest client at his patron's door, thought of him only with feelings of disgust and horror, and dreaded him with a loathing which neither his debauchery nor his numerous cold-blooded murders of knights and nobles would alone have engendered.

This change in the people's mind reacted sadly on the emperor's mind, and affected seriously the fate of his nearest relations. The imperial family had yet many scions, and after the death of Germanicus, whom Rome had instinctively chosen for the throne, his own son, Drusus, first cousin to the child Agrippina, held out rich promises for the future. To prepare him for the toils and honors of imperial rule, Tiberius made him joint consul with himself; little mindful, apparently, of the fact, which the Romans seized upon eagerly as an evil omen, that all the former colleagues of Tiberius, from Varus to Germanicus, had perished by violent and shocking deaths.

Although the next in succession were, by blood connection, the children of Agrippina, his cousins, Drusus forgot or nobly overcame the habitual jealousy of rival claimants so far as to show great affection for them, and to display especial tenderness for the bereaved children. The sons, of whom Nero was now sixteen, were, of course, nearer to him after the Roman manner; but yet he showed no small interest in the fair and helpless Agrip-

pina, who already then made people marvel at the germs of beauty and brilliant ability which she occasionally displayed. But the protection which the unhappy family found in their kind kinsman's favor was soon to end, for he also fell a victim to vile crime in his own house. His faithless wife and her lover, with the help of a confidential physician and a corrupt slave, contrived to administer poison to him, and his death caused new fantastic horror about the character of Tiberius to obtain credence among the Romans, whose wild credulity speaks eloquently of their fears and sufferings under that emperor's rule.

For a moment the unhappy family of Germanicus seemed to be called upon once more to bask in the bright sunshine of favor. The people, little regretting the death of a man in whom they pretended they had only seen the vices of the father, turned with new interest and deepened sympathy to the family of their favorite, and found new charms and lustre for them in the disaster which had befallen the rival branch of the imperial house. Tiberius, on his part, affected the appearance of antique fortitude, and tore himself, with wonderful firmness, which obtained for him no small admiration, from the tomb of his son and the embraces of his family, to devote, as he said, his remaining years to the affairs of the republic. The Romans simply laughed at this. But when he next appeared before the senate, and, deploring the loss of his sons and nephews, which left him childless, asked leave to recommend to the assembled fathers the last survivors of his hopes, the youthful children of Germanicus, all hearts beat higher, and eager friends hastened to bring Nero and Drusus, the two eldest, into the assembly. "I adjure you, fathers," he said, turning to the senate, "by the gods of our country, to receive, to cherish and direct these great-grandchildren of Augustus." Then, address-

ing the young men, he added: "Nero and Drusus, behold your parents! In the station to which you have been born your good and evil are the good and evil of the state."

Surely, here was bright hope held out to the long-neglected children, and their bosoms swelled with high anticipations of the brilliant future. But, alas! it was all a mockery and a sham! The Romans, keenly alive to the emperor's overacted hypocrisy, were not taken in for a moment by the farce which pretended to restore the republic and to do justice to the sons of Germanicus. Nor was their mother deceived. Agrippina was not to be bribed by a few fair words; her virtue was invincible, and she watched with unceasing vigilance over the children of her noble husband. The manner of his death, the indifference of Tiberius and his neglect of her interests for many years had given her a deeply-rooted mistrust of the emperor. Unfortunately, her bold and almost fierce spirit knew no check or control, and without fear or shame she proclaimed aloud her wrongs and her suspicions at a court where every word flew straight to the emperor's throne. There, the power behind the throne, stood the empress-mother, whom Agrippina had mortally wounded in her self-love by proudly boasting of her numerous family in contrast with the utter loneliness of her rival. The empress called her, in return, the Niobe of the palace, and would readily have sent Apollo's arrows into the hearts of her children. Spies and intriguers, with whom the palace abounded, placed the worst construction upon the proud mother's words, and tempted her by insidious cunning to give vent to her pride and impatience. The jealousy of the emperor awoke anew—if it ever had slumbered—and the courtiers soon felt themselves free to report the bitter taunts and rash

complaints of Agrippina. The feeling grew worse every day; aspiring favorites intrigued against the friends and allies of her family, and an alarm was raised lest the state should be split into factions by her partisans in Rome and in the provinces. The emperor partly feared in good earnest that the passions of Agrippina might break out more vehemently at a time when the peace of the empire was at stake, and that "the rivalry of the women of Cæsar's house would undermine the fortunes of his children;" and partly he felt more and more willing to sacrifice everything to his growing inclination for indolence and retirement. His declining years increased his timidity, and his infirmities demanded repose after so many years of incessant labor and continued excitement.

At the very time when he thus sighed for peace and thought of nothing but quiet enjoyment of life, the unfortunate widow allowed her passionate temper to break forth in several scenes of anger and recrimination. Her enemies had accused a favorite cousin of hers of seeking to destroy the emperor's life by poison, and of employing at the same time the more subtle agency of charms and incantations. She rushed into his presence, and finding him engaged in sacrificing to his father's divinity, she attacked him with the bitter words: "Should the same man offer sacrifices to Augustus and also persecute his children?" And then came a perfect torrent of violent invectives, interspersed with equally vehement assurances of her relative's innocence, until Tiberius forgot the haughty reserve behind which he used to take refuge, and answered her with a Greek line implying: "Must I be denounced because you are not an empress?" The cold sarcasm cut her to the heart, but it cooled her passion. She fled to her rooms, and shame, mortification and rage at the condemnation of her kinsman threw her into a

violent fever. When the emperor visited her sick room, her spirit was broken, and she besought him to give a protector to the widow and the children of Germanicus. The emperor listened to her supplications, but left her without saying a word, and from that moment her fate was sealed.

Unfortunately, she had neither the art nor the will to conceal her true feelings toward him, whom she more than suspected of having caused the death of her husband; and when false friends instilled in her mind the shocking suspicion that Tiberius sought an opportunity to poison her also, she was thoughtless or willful enough to let her apprehensions be seen in public. She was residing under the roof of the head of the family, but it was only on rare and special occasions that the emperor departed from the usual custom of the Romans and invited the ladies of his house to dine at his table. Soon after, Agrippina was thus honored; but as if she had wished to draw the lightning by her rashness from the threatening thunder-clouds, she rejected every dish presented to her with cold and impassive mien; and when at last Tiberius, who reclined by her side, offered her some apples with his own hand, recommending their flavor, she handed them untasted to her slaves. The emperor, already disposed to notice all that might seem offensive to his suspicious mind, could not fail to be deeply wounded by such treatment, the motive of which he easily discerned. He turned to his mother, who was on his left, and said to her in an under tone that "surely no one could be blamed for apparent harshness who was thus openly and at his own table suspected of poisoning his own kinswoman."

We need not wonder, then, that the toils which were surrounding the unhappy family of Germanicus were

gradually drawing closer around them, and that, whilst from without alarming calamities befell them, one after another, a sense of bitter wrong and terrible revenge should have gradually filled the hearts of the more helpless members. Among these, again, Agrippina seems to have been most sensitive to the shocking outrages which the enemies of her noble father and the degraded courtiers in their effort to pander to the emperor's jealousy inflicted upon her illustrious house. The first approaches were made cautiously from a distance; her sister, who had married a son of the ill-fated Varus, was charged with treason, but escaped by the indolence of the emperor; then her brother Nero was exposed to like danger by his own wife and younger brother Drusus, who had been suborned to lead him into some grave indiscretion. But the young prince was already too wary, and his then blameless conduct offered no handle for exposing him to a serious accusation, while the less cautious Drusus continually laid himself open to the enemies of his family.

Just then they lost the last friend they had at court, the empress-mother, who, gratified as she was by their depression, still had exerted herself, for reasons of her own, to prevent their complete ruin. When the princess died at the great age of eighty-six, and the third brother of Agrippina had pronounced her funeral oration, the crisis came in the affairs of the family. A harsh letter was presented to the senate, in which Tiberius inveighed bitterly against the vehemence in language and manner of the mother, and accused her sons, his grand-nephews, of personal vices and great dissoluteness. The senators were grievously embarrassed, not knowing what was expected of them by their pitiless master, and not daring to proceed, without his special sanction, upon mere rumors and general complaints. Unfortunately, at this moment,

the "loves of the Roman people became once more fatal and ill-starred." They had heard of the letter; their old attachment revived with passionate fervor; they crowded around the senate doors, bearing aloft the portraits of their favorites, and shouting aloud that the charges were a forgery, and the emperor's nearest of kin were threatened with death without his knowledge and against his true intention. The cunning courtiers represented this movement at once as an act of rebellion, and the images of Nero and Agrippina as the standards of civil war. New orders were issued, and the servile senators, with utter disregard of decency or justice, banished the mother and one of her sons to a barren island, while the second son, Drusus, was, in mockery of the privilege which protected him from imprisonment in public dungeons, buried in a subterranean chamber of the imperial palace.

The future empress, who is otherwise ready enough to tell us in her memoirs what she felt and what she did in some of the great crises of her life, passes over these scenes in sullen silence. We need not her words, however, to assure us of the fearful storm of passion that must have arisen in her bosom, when she, now twelve years old and in form and in feeling a woman already, saw those she loved best upon earth fall victims to atrocious injustice and cruel violence. She stood by, helpless and speechless, as her mother, true to the indomitable ferocity of her character, resisted the infamous order with energy, and in the struggle, if we believe the story which obtained general credence at the time, actually lost one of her eyes! She stood by as Nero was seized and sent, without a moment's delay, to an exile from which no member of the imperial family had ever yet been known to return. And thus, at one fell blow, she lost her mother, whom she was never to see again, and was

cut off from the two elder brothers, whose purer character and tenderer affections might have had a happier effect on her mind, prematurely filled with intense bitterness of hatred, an ardent desire of revenge and a sublime contempt for truth and principle instilled into her by precept and by example. But her cup of woe was not full yet; the child in years was to be matured suddenly in the scorching heat of the emperor's savage passion, which soon blazed all around her.

A false Drusus had arisen in the East, and personating with much skill her unfortunate brother, who was in prison, he had been welcomed by the Greeks, fond at all times of anything novel and strange, and by the legions of Egypt and Syria, who had loved and admired the father. The enterprise was soon defeated, but it served the emperor, now more jealous than ever of the legitimate claims of his kinsmen, as a welcome pretext to remove the innocent youth, who had been too fearfully wronged ever to be trusted again with freedom. After holding him for three years in cruel confinement, the relentless monster allowed him to perish in lingering torment by depriving him of food. And this in his own palace, while he reveled in orgies too licentious to be known in our day, and, drunk with wine and drunk with blood, ruled with absolute power over a hundred millions of men! But there was worse behind; for with a bluntness of perception which is, thanks to God! simply incomprehensible to our mind, he sent a letter to the senate in which he detailed at full length the sufferings of the unhappy prince; how he had gnawed for nine long days the stuffing of his pallet to appease his raving hunger, and repeated every sigh of suffering and every vow and imprecation uttered in his last moments! Still, he boasted that when Drusus died no drop of imperial blood had

been shed, no spark of his own divine spirit extinguished by the hand of the executioner!

The senate shuddered; the people cowered and shrank in silent tremor to their wretched homes. The bones of the unhappy prince had not yet been scattered to the four winds—for even the rites of sepulture, so highly valued by the Romans of that day, were denied him—when another fearful calamity fell upon the house of him whom they had destroyed by their ill-starred love. The mother, in her cheerless exile on a barren island, hearing of the miserable end of her two elder sons, resolved to escape by her own deed from the unbearable miseries which she felt were in store for her stricken heart. With a fortitude not unworthy of her determined and vigorous character, she starved herself to death; and again the senate obeyed the mandate of their master, who ordered them, even while the unanimous voice of the nation extolled her for her rare virtue, to heap ignominy upon her name, to declare her birth-day a day of evil omen, and to praise him for not taking her life by violent means. How the daughter's heart must have swelled with powerless wrath at the atrocity of her murderous kinsman! How she must have despised the great nobles of Rome, who applauded his crimes and decreed solemn thanks to his clemency! How familiar the poor child became thus, at so early an age, with the blackest depth to which the human heart can sink, and the fiercest passions that can there be roused by cruel wrong and inhuman barbarity. This is surely not to be wondered at, if we remember the nature of that epoch in which a half-insane monster ruled the world, and the greatest nation on earth, crouching at his feet, offered him divine honors; when virtue had become a mockery and vice reigned supreme in the land; when the greatest of men, chiefs of the senate or

leaders of the nobility, preferred death to a life in such a state of affairs, and deliberately submitted to painful and lingering starvation in order to escape the future, while yet uninjured and unassailed not in their lives only, but in their honor.

The poor girl's mind was still further disordered and tainted by the close companionship in which she and her younger sisters were forced to live with their brother, whose masterly hypocrisy had enabled him, even as a boy, to conceal with equal success his hatred of the enemies of his family and his fondness for the lowest of vices. While she looked upon him with pride and anxious expectation, as the sole survivor of the five brothers she once had had, he taught her, unfortunately, the mournful mysteries of Roman depravity, and loosened by the contempt he inspired the bonds of affection which had heretofore given her support and comfort amid the sad tragedies of her early life.

She was now twelve years old, the very image of her noble mother, fully conscious of her precocious beauty, the imperial blood in her veins, and the brilliant destiny that might be hers; but also fully aware of the dangers by which she was surrounded, and filled with all the intense hate and passionate thirst of revenge bequeathed to her by the widow of Germanicus. The children left the paternal house one by one. First the son, as yet known only as Cajus, was enrolled among the augurs and pontiffs, and entered, as quæstor, upon the lofty career of imperial princes. Then the second sister married a man of comparatively low birth, whose father and grandfather, however, had both been consuls, and who himself was enjoying high fame as an orator and the patron of literary men, while his modesty and reserved contentedness commended him to the jealous Cæsar. The third and young-

est also had left Agrippina to wed a Cassius, of ancient though plebeian family, whose illustrious ancestors derived new honor from their worthy descendant. Thus the eldest was left alone, and we can readily imagine how her eager temperament and her passionate love of splendor and power led her to accept with joy the offer of the emperor to betroth her to a man of higher lineage and rank than either of her brothers-in-law, and how willingly she accepted his invitation to meet her future husband at the imperial villa at Capri.



II.

THE BETROTHAL.

TIBERIUS was sixty-six years old, and weary of his mother, who had claimed to the end of her life his obedient gratitude for the empire which she had bestowed upon him in his youth; weary of the world that despised him secretly and worshiped him in public as a divinity; and, alas! weary of himself. He felt his bodily infirmities grow upon him as his years advanced, and wished anxiously to conceal the inroads which old age was fast making on a once-powerful constitution. His figure, formerly full and firm, was now so bent and shriveled as to make bodily exercise a painful effort. His forehead was bald, and though in former years he had been so far above personal vanity as to be able to pardon a prætor's unseemly jokes, who had collected for the festival of Flora, at which the emperor was present, a set of performers who were all bald, and even had the five thousand link-boys appointed to light the populace on their return home from the theatre, closely shaven, he was now more sensitive to the slightest allusion to his baldness than to the most violent invectives. His features, which were finely cut and of noble expression up to middle age, were now deformed and disfigured by blotches, which he had the bad taste to try to conceal

under patches. He felt in his heart, even more forcibly than his failing health, the fact that his temper was no longer under his control, and that the goddess of his reason was not always firmly seated on her throne. Unfounded charges of severity or cruelty roused him in the moment of passion to outbursts of genuine ferocity, which he afterward regretted with serious alarm and sorrow. He could not always preserve his presence of mind in public even, and, no longer master over himself, he lost the mastery over others. Perhaps the natural indolence engendered by his age, after so long and so stormy a career, and the desire to be free of cares and far from turbulent Rome, had more effect on his resolution to quit the city than the desire to indulge, unnoticed and uninterrupted, in the wild orgies and fearful excesses of which the people believed him guilty. Once only, during the eleven years which he spent away from Rome, did he condescend to visit the main land. He went across to the beautiful shores of Campania, and remained there a few days; immediately the whole region began to swarm with senators and knights, patricians and freedmen, with men of all ranks and all races. They encamped on the shore; nobles and slaves, Romans and provincials, all lay in the fields or on the shingle, hoping to catch a glance from the great Cæsar's eyes. They would bribe the slaves of the imperial household to allow them to approach the sacred presence; they worshiped the freedmen and courtiers with abject adulation to gain admittance at the palace. Soon the crowd amounted to countless thousands; they waited a day, they waited all night long, and when the morning broke they saw the great Cæsar slowly sailing back to his inaccessible retreat, and an order came sending the whole herd back to Rome, unheard and unseen. Once more he actually came near

the city, led there by his insatiable thirst of blood. He had condemned men to death because they mourned for their slain friends, and sentenced women for the tears which they had shed. When unfortunate prisoners asked for death, he had told them, in bitter mockery, that the years of their captivity had not yet brought about reconciliation! He now wanted to see the corpses of the condemned as they lay heaped up one upon the other, or floated slowly down the sluggish waters of the Tiber; watched stealthily by spies, so as to report the friends and relatives who stood by and looked with speechless horror at the bodies of their beloved. He came as far as the gardens on the opposite banks of the Tiber, and there reveled in the sight and in the number of death-warrants submitted for his signature; and when he was filled with carnage and execution, without setting foot in the Eternal City he returned stealthily to his well-guarded island.

For with all his vast power—with a senate ready to drown their souls in the life-blood of a nation; with nobles and philosophers willing, at a word from him, to starve themselves to death, and with a people worshiping him as a god—the great emperor had his troubles in the great city. Whatever he could do to close his ears, the vast upheaving of this ocean of life sounded forth a low but unceasing murmur of reproach; to-day it was a note thrown into his box at the theatre; to-morrow the bold invective uttered by a condemned prisoner to his face in the open senate; for the condemned, the only free men, dared to say all. At one time—and he never knew when it might happen—a simple-minded, well-meaning man would arise in solemn denunciation, and repeat, at full length, before senate and emperor, in spite of frowns and murmurs, all the complaints and charges he had overheard among the people. At another time, a king from

the far East, little civilized, would write to him in a public missive: "You are a monster! the murderer of your family; and the best thing you could do would be to kill yourself!" Tiberius could not endure Rome any longer; he fled from its reproaches which he hated, and from its adulations which he despised, and sought refuge—in the beauties of Nature!

In vain Rome, missing the splendor of his court and the prestige of his presence, besought him to return; in vain did the senate ask permission at least to wait on him in his retreat, that they might once more enjoy the sublime happiness of beholding his countenance. It is true he made an effort, several years afterward, to return, prompted by some mysterious impulse. He went, accompanied by a few friends, alone and by quiet and unfrequented roads; but when he was within seven miles, just in sight of the great temples on the Capitoline Hill, a favorite serpent of his died, overcome by a host of musquitoes. "Let us fear the crowd; it is powerful," he said, looking upon the incident as a warning, and retraced his steps.

When he left Rome first, he pretended with habitual dissimulation that he was only going to erect a temple on the spot from which the great Augustus was said to have ascended to heaven; but still he left Rome, not as the ruler of the world, surrounded by his court and escorted by the great of his people, but stealing away like a thief in the night, with a single friend by his side and a retinue of astrologers and soothsayers. That the emperor should at all leave the capital was a step unknown heretofore in the history of Rome, and filled the minds of the people with sad forebodings; they looked upon a voluntary abandonment of the great city as an act of dread import. The searchers of the heavens, true interpreters of the

popular instinct, whispered that Tiberius was not destined to return, and terrible disasters occurred, as if to signalize the unheard-of absence of the master: an ill-constructed amphitheatre gave way under the pressure of an immense crowd, and fifty thousand men and women, of all ranks, were killed or injured; and soon after a large portion of the city was laid in ashes during a fearful conflagration.

Little, however, did Tiberius mind the marvel of the people or the wrath of the gods—he held both in like disrespect. He hastened to bury himself in the solitude of the lovely island of Capri. This beautiful spot, formerly little better than a barren rock, the resort of wild goats, from which it derived its name, had attracted already Augustus by its sheltered seclusion, its genial climate and its close vicinity to Misenum, the great naval station of the Mediterranean Sea. It was no small merit in the eyes of Tiberius that its limestone cliffs plunged all around in abrupt precipices into the deep sea and allowed vessels to approach only at a single point, defended by immense columns of rock. At the foot of these rocks were those caverns of fairy beauty, famous in olden times as in our day for the unsurpassed charm of their dark blue light, and accessible only by means of hidden stairs, cut out of the live rock in the interior, and used by the emperor for his most gorgeous entertainments. The few level spots on the high plateau of the island were delicious to the exhausted voluptuary by the freshness of the evening breeze, the coolness of the summer and the mildness of the winter. Soon the whole country bloomed forth, as if by the touch of a magic wand, into a fairy-land of the poet's creation; luxurious vegetation sprang up on the rocks covered with rich soil from the main land, and twelve villas arose on the fairest sites, named

after the great gods of Olympus, and shining in all the splendor with which the caprice of an emperor and the resources of the universe could enrich them. At a height of more than a thousand feet above the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean, on the dizzy cliff which forms the eastern promontory, hung in perilous freedom the emperor's favorite villa. Reclining on his couch, inlaid with tortoise-shell and covered with gorgeous purple, he could enjoy a view of such surpassing beauty that the world has not its like again. The eye took in at a single glance the whole enchanting range of the Italian coast, from the well-rounded cape of the enchantress Circe to the temples of Sorrento, afar off, but clearly visible in the transparent atmosphere. Right before him lay the three bays of Salerno, Naples and Gaeta, which in beauty of outline and richness of coloring surpass their fairest rivals on earth; while on the horizon gentle ridges teeming with noble vineyards and long mountain-ranges closed the prospect; and in the centre Vesuvius arose with its unbroken outlines, and its sides as yet unscarred by lava. No cone of ashes stood out then, as now, from its centre, for the great volcano had slumbered since the dawn of history, and rich cities and beautiful villages clustered at its feet and climbed up on its flanks, happily unaware of the fearful dangers lurking within the bosom of the giant whom they held as in loving embrace. Toward the south he saw the fair Sicilian sea and the tiny islands, detached rocks greened over with deceitful verdure, where the sirens sang. With caressing sweetness they dotted the merry waters, which sparkled with spray and greeted as in exulting joy the bright rays of the sun that flashed from their white crests. The enjoyment of all this exuberant splendor was perhaps still enhanced, to the morbid mind of the recluse, by the contrast of this loveliness with

the stern grandeur of Mount Solar, a towering mass of limestone with rugged sides and bare head, as it rose behind the villa, boldly and almost defiantly into the blue ether.

Here the sick emperor loved to listen for hours to the sea, as it came stealing to the foot of the precipice, sheer down eighteen hundred feet, and breathed upward its compassionate hush, so softly and so sweetly that it seemed as if it might lull the unceasing strife of unhallowed passions in the poor sufferer's bosom. The very air breathed its gentle echo as it sang around him, in varied keys, with tender pity for his miserable fate. He needed it all; for surely he could not, without shuddering once in a while, look upon the sudden break in the ridge, where his victims were pitched before his eyes from the terrific rock into the soft, remorseful sea; nor upon the walls on his right, behind which lay the infernal chambers, which even the Roman people, never too scrupulous, razed wellnigh to the ground for horror of the vices now practiced there. Were there no days of tempest and tribulation, when the great, poor emperor groaned over human misery and his own wretched loneliness on his lofty throne—no nights of sadness and sorrow, when pity seized what was still human in his heart; when he brooded in utter hopelessness of spirit over "the dark forward and abyss of time," and grim despair beckoned him from afar into eternal gloom? Surely such moments must have come and added to his fearful suffering.

When all was well, when the sun was bright and the sea was calm, the sick emperor luxuriated in the quiet seclusion of his beloved island. The rocks were guarded with strictest vigilance, and woe to the unwary fisherman who landed at the forbidden coast—terrible chastisement awaited him; and soon the beautiful bays and

lovely shores were looked upon only from afar, and with hushed horror.

At first, curious travelers would come over from Rome, and even from distant provinces, to gaze at the mysterious island. But they all brought their fearful stories back, and with bated breath and with pallid cheek would tell of the grewsome sights and the heartrending sounds with which the air all around was filled. Some had sailed with a merry crew around the tall cliffs looking toward the south, and wondered at the absurd tales repeated by credulous slaves, when all of a sudden, from the towering cliff above their heads a shapeless mass had been seen to be flung into the wide space, to whirl down the awful abyss and to be dashed to pieces, right before their eyes, on the hideous rocks. And before they could well recover from the ghastly fright, they had seen boats push out from under the awful gloom of those tall cliffs, and out of unseen bays and bights, with uplifted spears ready for the unfortunate victims who might, by a miracle, have escaped the rocks and the plunge in the sea. No need for them of the solemn warning, uttered by fierce sailors, to be off in an instant and never more to dare come so near the emperor's domain! They had seen enough of Capri.

Or they had passed around the massive promontory, far out of sight of the twelve awful villas, and rocked their gay, gilded boats on the glassy sea, when a flash and a light had suddenly revealed to them, amid a huge dead mass of rock at the base, a tiny pigeon-hole on the level of the sea, barely high enough to tempt the smallest of barks. And a little cockle-shell had started boldly on the errand to see whither the mysterious gateway would lead, with two Roman youths of noble blood and daring courage as its sole crew. They had shot forth like an

arrow; they had lowered themselves, and finally crouched to the bottom and thus glided smoothly, as if drawn by magic charm, into the tempting gateway. Their friends waited and waited; no boat was seen to return; but after a time, which seemed to them an eternity, a head, with the pallor of death on its cheeks, had suddenly turned up by their side; and when they had hastily drawn in the exhausted swimmer, his first breath had besought them to be off without a moment's delay. They had laid on the lash to make the oarsmen do their best, and the boat had skimmed the waves, dashing through the white spray like a seabird skimming the crests for his prey. At last, when they were safe once more and amid friends, the youth had told them of a sight that would make a mourner and a man of sorrow of him for his life. He and his companion had seen the gods of Tartarus at their awful feast, in a vast hall, lighted up by a light not of the sun or the moon, but by a blue splendor, floating about in a magical haze of reflection, shrouding the austere proportions of the immense cave, and changing the rocks and rugged sides into a magic temple. And in the far distance, in the gloom of deepest blue, they had seen a fearful company of ghastly men, clad with supernatural splendor, but with faces not of this earth; as if flesh and blood had grown white and ethereal, sublimated out of all the tints of life. His companion had been struck with amazement and uttered a sound; instantly unseen hands had seized him, and he had vanished into the fearful gloom, silenced for ever. He, himself, with quick presence of mind, had cautiously plunged into the waters, though they looked like the blue of his mother's eyes, and, diving at the risk of his life, had been favored by the gods so as to be able to swim out and rejoin his companions.

No wonder that soon the whole region around the beautiful island was peopled with the ghosts of murdered men and the spirits of unearthly beings, so that no one dared approach, even from afar, who was not bidden to come there; and that the dwellers on the seashore spoke, with the refined voluptuousness of the day, delightedly of the zest which the awful island and its mysterious terrors gave to their own enjoyment amid the peaceful luxuries of country life.

The emperor's solitude, however, did not prevent him from taking his wonted share in the government of the world; nor did he relax for a moment the powerful grasp in which he held the doomed empire. Couriers, in well-organized relays, brought him day by day despatches from all parts of the realm; the official journal was daily read to him with all its details and stenographic reports, and telegraphic signals informed him hourly of all that occurred at Rome. Much of his time was thus given to business; more, however, to idle dreams and waste speculations, interrupted occasionally by interviews with soothsayers, by debauchery of the deepest dye, and cruelties and crimes which were mentioned even then only in cautious whispers.

He was there, in the villa that bore the name of the great Jupiter, when on a still and silent day the betrothal of Agrippina with her first husband took place in his presence.

In a secluded grove of luxurious laurels, overshadowed by a noble group of Oriental plane trees, voices were heard, as if in subdued accents, while everything else was still and silent. The scene was one of fairy-like beauty; for blossoms flaunted on the bushes and sparkled on the rare turf; fountains splashed and sparkled under the branches; laughter and music filled the air with a

confusion of sweet sounds, and among trees of foreign shape and fragrant bushes bands of revelers flitted to and fro. But they kept away from the place where a few citron trees, then the rarest of all plants, and known as Median apples, overshadowed a couch of luxurious softness and embroidered in gorgeous arabesques of gold and precious stones. On it reclined the old man; his countenance was hideous with premature old age and the disfiguring marks of debauchery. His eyes, enormous in size and bloodshot, were glimmering with the light of sin, and had a weird, unearthly brightness when he opened them suddenly; for he could see with them, at least for a time, as well in the darkness of night as in the bright daylight. His complexion was glowing in deep, perpetual blushes, and his hanging cheeks were bloated, like his whole body, with the indolence of fearful gluttony. There was an indescribable, loathsome contrast between the signs of sin which he bore on his person, and the white toga, rich in its broad hem of Tyrian purple, and the chaplet of rose and aloe leaves which was lightly pressing on his hoary head.

There he lay, exhausted and weary in the early morning, with a sinister and ferocious expression in every lineament and savage rage lurking in every wrinkle; his whole countenance filled, as it were, with the concentrated infamy of many ages. Suddenly, a light step was heard on the crisp sand, and with sylph-like quickness, there bounded forth a Bacchante of marvelous beauty. Grapes of golden hue, relieved by ruddy vine leaves, encircled her temples in a rich garland and waved in airy dance as she came gliding in softly, touching her cymbals with timid finger and looking wistfully at the dread emperor's face. He smiled, and off she bounded again in the wild, intoxicating Bacchic dance, her lus-

trous and defiant eyes throwing out vivid flashes of light, her bosom heaving in the roseate warmth of her youth, and all her limbs swaying to and fro—now in a tumult of wild passion and now in the soft waves of infinite grace. As he gazed at her with a passing thrill of admiration, she stood still for an instant in all the perfect symmetry of sculpture; as he wearily closed his lids, she became at once again all motion and fire, till her deep-black hair fluttered in ringlets around her, her light robes flew back from the jeweled brooch on her knee, and her tiny sandals clinked on the bright mosaic in unison with the capricious clank of the cymbals. The emperor looked again, as she passed now near, now at a distance before his eye, but ever radiant with sublime beauty; his blotched face became suffused with a deeper tint; his eye blazed up in unwonted fire, and he beckoned her to fill the golden goblet by his side with Falerian wine. He raised it eagerly to his lips, as if to drain its ruby vintage to the bottom; but he fell back exhausted, overcome by the power of his passion, and soon he was writhing in one of those paroxysms of rage which made men whisper in stealthy conclave that their master was a madman. As he roared and roused the echoes of the high rocks all around him, the courtiers flocked, quick as thought, to his couch; Greek physicians approached; the day's astrologer drew near; and what with powerful cordials, whispered prophecies and the soothing remedies applied by the experienced attendants, he was soon restored to himself. But what a return! He who, not so very long ago, had been able to boast of a strength as supernatural as his crimes—who could with outstretched arm bore a hole through a sound apple, and draw blood from the head of a youth by giving him a fillip—lay now utterly helpless, unable to raise his hand, as impotent as

an infant, maddened by his insatiable thirst and the dark gloom that was steadily settling upon his mind.

As soon as he seemed himself again, courtiers approached with all the signs of humblest devotion, and whispered in subdued accents that the happy Roman was waiting whom the emperor intended to raise to the lofty dignity of Agrippina's husband. Tiberius recovered, by an effort, the habitual calmness of his features, and gave a sign to admit the young man.

The noble family from which he had chosen a husband for his niece had borne the strange name of Brazen-Beard from the day on which its founder had been favored by direct inspiration from the gods, and had become identified with the brilliant victory by which the young republic, in days of hoary antiquity, had been rescued from the danger of utter destruction. The ancient legend ran thus:

A few hours only from the city, amid reeds and canebrakes, glimmer darkly the waters of a lake which fills the former crater of an extinct volcano. This is the famous lake of Regillus, on the banks of which, many hundred years ago, the gigantic struggle of infant Rome with the mighty but doomed people of the Latins took place, and the accursed race of the old kings perished for ever. When the battle was at its fiercest and the sun already sinking behind the mountains in the West—when the Romans were nearly exhausted, and only a few unconquerable spirits still held out against overwhelming numbers—at that critical moment two beautiful youths of more than human size and splendor appeared on powerful horses, and throwing themselves with rapturous energy, at the head of the Roman squadrons, upon the enemy, broke their ranks and dispersed them in wild flight. The victory was as glorious as it was sudden,

and the Romans encamped on the battle-field, offering sacrifices to the gods and singing the praise of the bravest among the brave. On the evening of the day on which the two unknown horsemen had turned the tide of the battle, two youths of passing beauty were seen to alight on the Forum at Rome. They were clad in armor from head to foot, but horse and horsemen alike were covered with dust and the signs of fierce battle. They sprang from their horses, and after having bathed in the well near the temple of Vesta, they announced the victory to their favorite among the Romans, caressing his face with their hands and changing his beard from black to red, in token of the divine manifestation. Thenceforth the name of Brazen-Beard was common to the family, who inherited by special favor from on high, it was believed, the fiery red beard as regularly as the strange title. The two youths vanished at the same moment, and were never seen again: grateful Rome recognized in them the kindly twin sons of the great Jupiter and honored them in signal manner. Their assistance was solemnly celebrated year after year; and on these occasions the descendants of their favorite appeared at the head of the proud host of knights. Five thousand of these noble warriors, clad in purple and crowned with laurel wreaths, as if returning from some mighty triumph, rode in solemn procession from the temple of Mars, outside of the walls, through all the streets of the city, past the Forum, to the temple of Castor and Pollux, and thus presented a gorgeous spectacle, worthy, even in the brilliant days of Augustus, of the grandeur of the Roman Empire.

But this was not all. For on the Forum, on the very spot where the divine youths had laid aside their armor and refreshed themselves in the cool waters of the beau-

tiful spring after the heat and the strife of the battle, the gratitude of the republic raised two colossal statues of the twins, as they stood by the side of their horses. And, strangely enough, they alone amid all the thousand and ten thousand statues with which ancient Rome was once peopled as with a second nation of bronze and marble, have remained standing, tall and stalwart, while all other monuments of plastic art have been buried under the accumulated dust and débris of countless generations! Fearlessly towering on high, they saw two-thirds of the city blazing into flame when Nero was ruling; they never fell when all around them sank into dust, and calmly and grandly they looked from their colossal height upon the horrors and the agony of the dying empire; upon the brutal barbarities of the Middle Ages; upon all the fearful destruction brought upon the Eternal City by the wrath of God—the rage of men—the fire from the clouds and the earthquake from below. As they stood in the days of Roman grandeur before the palace of the masters of the world, so they still stand, unconscious of the change in fickle man, and unaltered in their grim identity as the everlasting hills, from whose side they were taken before the great castle from which the triple-crowned head of the Church now rules over millions of men. There they now stand on high, on the Quirinal mountain, looking down upon the world at their feet from a lofty, lonely square, where the gushing and splashing of the waters in a vast granite basin alone breaks the silence solemnly echoing all around, and an Egyptian obelisk covered with weird mysteries stands between them in solitary sadness.

Their favor, however, seemed to have continued with the descendants of their first chosen messenger to the people of Rome. The sons of the old warrior had preserved the ancient renown, and generation after genera-

tion had excelled in that virtue which the Romans praised above all others. Fortune seemed to have pointed them out specially to the admiration of men; for, with a constancy unexampled in the annals of Rome, eight generations had succeeded each other in unbroken line, and yet in each but one son had represented the family; but that son had never yet failed to fill the highest of priestly offices, and to achieve the honors of the consulate or of a triumphal entry into Rome as a victorious imperator. The last of them, who had once held in his hand the fate of the empire, had unfortunately escaped historic infamy only by an act of truly Roman virtue. When Antonius, in distant Greece, was paying for his infatuated devotion to the beautiful queen of Egypt with the finest armament of his day and the most brilliant future ever opened to a Roman, his allies and generals left him one by one. First, three or four friendly kings of the East went over to his fortunate rival; then some of the commanders followed their example. All of them plead their reluctance to serve the haughty Cleopatra, and all of them were courteously welcomed by Octavius. Then, also, the Brazen-Beard Domitius, who was one of his legates and perhaps his most trusted friend, forsook him in the hour of his distress. With him the enmity to the renowned Egyptian was no pretext; he hated her bitterly, and with infinite pride had never deigned to call her otherwise than by her name, refusing her the title of queen. The malcontents in Antonius' camp had proposed to him to depose their commander and to assume himself the supreme control of the army; but he was sick, and dared neither to accept nor to refuse. He took boat, however, and quietly went over to Octavius. His treachery wounded the unfortunate Cæsar more deeply than all the other defections, and he showed it by his conduct toward his

faithless friend. In public he laughed and said that no doubt Domitius had longed to see his fair friend Nais in Rome once more, but while Cleopatra prepared for revenge, he sent him back his whole field-equipage, together with all his friends and servants. This contemptuous generosity was said to have broken the heart of the great Roman, who was not quite himself in his sickness; it is certain that he died a few days afterward, bitterly repenting of his broken faith.

These Brazen-Beards were naturally extremely proud of their pure descent and lofty renown. Bending low before the reigning family of the Julian emperors, they looked down with haughty contempt upon the new nobility which began to fill the senate and to occupy the higher offices at court. They could bear with patient acquiescence the competition of senators and knights whose position was due to the signal merits of father or grandfather. But they despised the class of *nouveaux-riches*, whose sole claim to distinction lay in the colossal fortunes which they had succeeded in amassing by fair or by foul means; for even amid the almost fabulous prodigality which then characterized the rich men of Rome, there were points of difference by which the nobleman of old lineage was distinguished from the parvenu in his lavish expenditures. The former, whose fortune had been gained on a large scale by the command of an army or the government of a province, spent it as a *grand seigneur*; less with a view to personal enjoyment or mere ostentation than because it became him to live worthily of his name and of his duty to sustain the splendor of the empire. The lowborn millionaire, on the contrary, would even in his grandest displays betray the low ways by which the money had been accumulated, and often spend it reluctantly. The former founded

temples and endowed Rome and the provinces with baths of unexampled splendor; the latter built tenement-houses and defaced and disfigured the life of the Romans by artificial splendor and disgusting exhibitions.

Tiberius had, therefore, acted with worldly wisdom when he selected for the beautiful girl, his niece, a husband of such irreproachable lineage. For it was as difficult in the days of the empire to find a suitable husband for the daughters of the reigning house as it is in our day for many a mother of charming princesses. The proscriptions of Sulla had destroyed a number of senatorial families and diminished the number of knights by thousands, while their confiscated property had served to reward the usurper's friends and to found so many new families of nobles. The second measure of this kind, carried out at the time when the republic had to give way to the new monarchy, had been even more disastrous to the old nobility, and few families were now surviving who could, like the Brazen-Beards, look back upon an unbroken line of ancestors reaching up to the glorious days of the republic. No one was, of course, considered worthy of being admitted within the sacred circle of the imperial family who had not himself, or at least in the person of one of his forefathers, taken an active part in the government of the world, as consul, senator or ruler over a conquered kingdom. But even where these conditions were found fulfilled, the question of fortune was apt to present new difficulties; for he only was rich in Rome whose means were of royal dimensions. When a Seneca with his comparatively modest habits required a fortune of nearly ten millions of dollars to live in comfort; when a Cicero, who continually boasted of his frugality while bewailing the smallness of his means, could buy a table of thuya-wood for thirty thousand, and a

fair girl, the granddaughter of a mere *proprætor*, was praised because she wore modestly jewels of the value of over a million only, instead of displaying the whole set, which was worth three or four times as much—what must then have been the fortune required to enable a nobleman to live in a manner worthy of an imperial bride?

Fortunately, the choice of the emperor had fallen upon a man who, as far as outward appearances went, seemed to be deserving of the dangerous honor of becoming a member of the Cæsar's family. His father—a famous general and an upright man, who had advanced farther into Germany than any of his predecessors in command there, and who had earned the rare and striking distinction of having a statue erected to his honor at Athens, with the simple but eloquent inscription, "For his thoroughness"—had married a niece of the great Augustus. The future husband of Agrippina belonged, therefore, already to the family of the Cæsars, and recalled, it was said, in his appearance, the strongly-marked form of his grandmother Octavia—a likeness which, overleaping one generation, reappeared with not unfrequent capriciousness in the next. Even the proud and ambitious mother of the princess was, therefore, readily reconciled to this choice of her future son-in-law, and was said to have expressed her approbation in terms referring with intense but natural coarseness to the physical advantages of the young nobleman, rather than to his character or even his worldly position.

For of the morals of the young man who was soon to stand so near to the throne of the world, little could unfortunately be said that was good; and we learn once more to deplore the tragic fate which sacrifices the children of the rulers of the earth, if no longer as bloody

sacrifices to the gods on high, still even now not unfrequently to the exigencies of state policy. If we were to rely upon the accounts given us by writers of the day, Domitius would appear to have been one of those moral monsters which were at once the offspring and the disgrace of the empire. Even the Romans said of him that if his beard was brazen, they wondered not that his brow should be iron and his heart of lead. His brutality was intolerable, and what his immorality must have been we may imagine from the fact that it was considered too gross for indulgence, even in those days in which virtue was laughed at and modesty counted a folly. The great Augustus had favored him in his youth, and attached him to his grandson as one of those young noblemen who formed the immediate circle around imperial princes, and under the title of the cohort of friends constituted in reality his court. But he soon lost his place, having savagely murdered a freedman at table, merely because the unfortunate man refused to drink at his bidding a quantity of wine which would have infallibly caused his death. Instead of learning prudence from his disgrace, he only became more brutal than ever, and soon caused no small excitement in Rome by driving wantonly in the Appian Road over a poor boy who could not escape him quickly enough. Even his friends dared not excuse him when he attacked a knight on the very Forum, and, having exchanged sharp words with him, wounded him, on that sacred spot, so severely as to deprive him of the sight of an eye. We need not wonder that, like all men in whom Fate seems to contrast external greatness with meanness of heart, he was utterly reckless in money matters; but that he did not hesitate to laugh at those he had cheated, and to deride the poor jockeys who won prizes for him at great races and then could not obtain

from him even the wages that were due them; such features show a hardness of heart and a savageness of disposition which augured badly for the happiness of those that were to be dependent on his bounty or his honor.

In spite of all these defects of character, in spite of the public disgrace that had long been familiarly associated with his name, the highborn nobleman was in great favor at court and looked upon as a suitable husband for the ambitious princess. It is not impossible that the desire to explain the fearful character of his son has led later writers to an effort to trace the germ of that enormity to the father's "dire" disposition, as it was called, and to paint the author of his days in darkest colors. For Tiberius generally chose very carefully for his nieces, and it is as little to be supposed that he should have knowingly surrendered the daughter of the great Germanicus to such a monster of viciousness, as that he should have been ignorant of his true disposition.

The magicians and the astrologers had been duly consulted; for Tiberius, like his predecessors, had "faith in the Chaldeans," and in his youth even took lessons in astrology from a renowned Greek, which made him such an expert in the art that he could himself foretell great and important events. He and his master, who was still with him at Capri, seem, moreover, to have been as admirably matched in worldly wisdom as in the knowledge of heavenly bodies; for we are told that the slave who conducted the teacher into the presence of the future lord of the world over steep and scarcely accessible rocks was instructed, if Tiberius entertained any suspicion of having been trifled with or being deceived, to fling the Greek at once into the sea that rolled and roared below his rock-built residence. When he had announced, with shrewd conjecture, the future greatness of the prince, he

was asked in return if he knew his own fate as well? The astrologer pretended to observe carefully the position of the stars, and then, knowing or guessing shrewdly the treacherous character of him with whom he had to deal, he simulated great surprise and terror, declaring that he saw some mysterious and terrible misfortune awaiting him at that very moment. Tiberius smiled grimly, but believed in him, and after embracing him on the spot, numbered him ever afterward among his most intimate friends. It is not a little curious, moreover, that the sons of both parties continued the same friendly relations, the son of the famous astrologer having foretold the elevation of Nero to the throne of the Cæsars at a time when he had as yet no prospect of succeeding his adoptive father.

The augurs had pronounced favorably on the impending union; the soothsayers had prophesied a brilliant future, and the great colleges of priests had sent their deputies from Rome to lend the sanction of their sacred office to the ceremony. The bridegroom was accompanied by only a few senators and noble knights, for Tiberius allowed but small company in his Caprian villa, and even these had to submit to being searched with insulting thoroughness before they could gain admittance to the imperial presence!

The princess was then fourteen years old, and if we may believe in the authenticity of her bust in the Capitol, her beauty must have been far beyond that even of her much-praised mother. Her eyes are raised on high; is she awaiting an inspiration from the gods? Or does she dream of one of those moments of supreme enjoyment to which she sacrificed all she had and all she was? On the day of the solemn betrothal she was dressed with all the exquisite care which the ladies of that day knew how to bestow on their toilet, but with a simplicity which

heightened the effect of the two or three jewels of immense value with which she fastened the stola. The folds were arranged with great care, and the long train gave additional height to her lofty figure; the golden hair-net, worn on ordinary occasions, was laid aside and a storied edifice of curls rose high over the smooth, broad forehead; while two large pearls, each worth a kingdom, but shining in their subdued splendor unaided by gold, hung from her rosy ears. It had been a subject of deep thought and long debate with her maids whether she should wear that day a coiffure from the raven tresses of a Jewess or the golden curls of a German girl; even bright red masses of hair had been suggested as matching marvelously well the clear, transparent tints of her complexion; but at last she had decided to let her own hair appear, powdered with cunning cosmetics known only to the highest at court, which gave it a brilliant sheen in the light and a varying hue when shaded. Her wondrous beauty appeared to full advantage as she presented herself in calm dignity, and yet thoroughly womanly in her manner, before the haggard form of the emperor, and better still when the great Brazen-Beard stood by her side in all the beauty of his ripe manhood. They were a noble couple to look upon, and strange thoughts no doubt filled the mind of Tiberius as he thought of the days when he also had stood by the side of his Julia, with a heart not yet dried up and robbed of all its rich store of hope and faith. The simple ceremony was then performed, the emperor turned wearily over, and before the shadows had grown long Agrippina was affianced to her husband, who was to enjoy the unenviable honor of passing down to posterity as the father of Nero.



III.

THE SISTER OF AN EMPEROR.

IT was early yet in the year, and the noble plane trees had scarcely put out their full foliage, when there was a crowd of men standing in hushed silence anxiously listening under the terrace of a magnificent villa. A huge wall of stuccoed masonry, clad with a shell of white and variegated marble, rose abruptly out of the fairy-like gardens which surrounded the buildings on all sides, and long lines of beautiful columns, cut from a single block and polished to the brightness of a mirror, stretched out on high as far as the eye could reach. Between them stood statues, an emperor or a gladiator, a deity or a slave—the former in perfect Carrara marble of purest white, the latter portrayed in black stone, with white eyeballs, while parts of the body were carved in yellow marble. Magnificent staircases, adorned with the solid and sumptuous brilliancy of many colored stones, led up to the terrace itself, from which the eye ranged through long—apparently endless—corridors, or dwelt with rapture upon the wide but enchanting view over the deep blue sea and the far-famed shores of Campania. Here the columns, which bore no roof, but only a graceful network of bronze covered with luxuriant vines that afforded grateful shade, were of green marble and gor

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geous porphyry from quarries in distant Asia, while the walls toward the interior, lighted up at times by flitting rays of the setting sun as they flashed and flickered through the scanty foliage, were lined with Phrygian marble, surpassingly beautiful in its transparent milky-white, dappled with violet-colored spots and veins.

All around the main entrance stood a grove of Oriental planes, grand with their massive forms and delightful shade, dear to the Roman by a thousand precious associations. The tree had come to him from the despotic East, which he began to look upon as a model not unworthy of imitation, and it had brought with it a perfume of the veneration it enjoyed from hoary antiquity. Persian monarchs and Grecian heroes had vied with each other in their affection, and no tree on earth had like glowing traditions and fabulous marvels connected with its history. As the indolent Roman luxuriated in its shade and the drowsy voice of the reader reached him from afar off, he saw Marsyas hanging from a plane tree, ready to be flayed by Apollo, or he accompanied the great Agamemnon, as he, with Menelaus, planted a couple of plane trees to speak of their friendship in distant ages. He was with Xerxes, who halted his whole innumerable host before a noble specimen in Lydia, and was so enamored with it that for some days neither the weight of the enterprise, nor interest of honor, nor the cries of his army could persuade him away. The tree was his mistress, his minion, his goddess; and when he was forced at last to part with it, he caused a picture of it to be stamped on a medal of gold which he constantly wore. The groves of the Academe at Athens, he knew, were of plane trees, for did not Socrates use as his favorite oath, By the Plane Tree? All over Rome the noble trees were planted, now singly, now in clusters—the only tree which was ever

transplanted for its shade alone; and the Romans had taken to it with that extravagant enthusiasm which characterized their follies. It was but a few years ago that Cæsar had planted the first in Spain, at Corduba, but soon it was so highly prized that it was irrigated with wine, and now no garden was worth having that contained not its hundreds of noble platanus.

In the centre of the terrace there rise amid a forest of pillars two graceful columns of pink alabaster, now glowing in subdued rosy light, and now diffusing their own delicate blush upon the snowy-white walls behind them. For through them you enter, treading upon a costly mosaic of fabulous value strewn with precious stones, into a semi-circular room with a cupola gorgeous in gilding and glaring colors, but open in the centre, so that the fresh air can enter; and the tops of trees gracefully bending in the evening breeze look in at times as if to bring glad tidings from without. All around stand vessels of gold and electrum chiseled by artists' hands and bearing the illustrious names of their makers; vases of Corinthian metal and of other alloys unknown to the art of our day, and tables inlaid with jewels of matchless beauty. Through an opening on one side you look upon a garden apparently suspended in the air, but still watered by a purling brook and tiny cascades, where daily fresh flowers spread fragrant perfumes, and countless nightingales and well-taught thrushes delight the ear with their unceasing concert. In the centre is the colossal basin, cut out of a single block of red marble, in which swim thousands of rare fishes—not to delight you by their varied forms and graceful motions only, but to be taken out and put into vases of transparent crystal, that they may amuse the guests by the varying hues they assume in the agonies of death. Beneath them, visible through large glass plates,

such as adorned already even less magnificent palaces, and are still found in the ruins of Pompeian baths, the owner keeps his vivarium, a series of enormous cavities cut from the live rock, into which by cunning contrivances and costly canals the tide enters and ebbs from the distant seashore. Here fish of every kind and from every sea are kept to serve the fastidious palate of one of the first of Roman epicures; rocks covered with marine plants are scattered about in apparent confusion, but in reality they are carefully arranged, so as to afford shade and silent retreat to the animals and to imitate the rocky shores of the sea. Immense works have been undertaken, and enormous sums have been spent merely to study the currents of the ocean, the saltness of the water, its temperature and everything that can possibly affect the well-being, and, with it, the flavor and size of the precious lampreys—a kind of sea-eel. The owner loves them, not for the service so much which they render his palate at table, but because he lives with them on terms of closest intimacy; he feeds them with his hands, throwing in fish expressly caught for their benefit; he trains them to know his voice, to learn their names and to come and kiss his hands. They soon become tame enough to let him take them out of the water, show them to his friends, touch them to see if they fatten, and return them to their element adorned with a ring or a necklace, as a token of his special affection. And if they should seem to weary of their food or to sicken, he sends for a slave or two, and has them thrown in, delighting in both the slow death of the victims and the happy effect of the food on the quickly-fattening pets. If one of them dies, he weeps over it as over a lost child; he puts on mourning, and in open senate gives vent to his overwhelming sorrow.

On a couch in the centre of this magnificent room lies

the old emperor, looking even worse in body and mind than when we last saw him at his own villa on the island of Capri. Several years have passed over him, and he has done much and suffered much in the mean time. His health, long since feeble, has at last broken down altogether under incessant dissipation and fearful excitement. Not that he would acknowledge the decline so clearly visible to every one. At the amphitheatre he tries to take his share in the contest or the games, and the effort makes him fall down exhausted; nevertheless, he is well, he is strong; "no physician!" he cries out sneeringly—"after thirty only a fool would employ one." Age, however, overcomes the stubborn will, he bends the head, and—is it possible?—feels remorse. But nobody must suspect it. "Bring the tables back; fill the cups again; the feast has not lasted long enough?" Mortal man shall never know what is going on in that soul and in that body. Did thoughts of the future ever trouble him? "After my death may the earth perish in fire!" he exclaimed, and men shrank with horror and with fear from the wanton indifference, if it was not in reality fiendish exultation. Alas! he had seen men so low before him that he could not in his heart esteem them any longer; he had found even woman possessed of more courage than man, for more than one of the sex had openly expressed their horror of him, although they well knew that death was awaiting them at the next moment. And yet he lived, he acted, nay he died, for those very men whom he despised! He was evidently drawing near his end, and felt his strength giving way and his spirits sinking; but when everything else failed him, his dissimulation survived. He summoned all the strength of will and all the energy of mind which remained to him; he spoke with decision, he looked with eagerness, and even,

at times, assumed an air of gayety. In one aspect only did he betray his weakness; he was weary and restless and could not stay long in any one place. Thus he had left his favorite retreat at Capri, soon after he had accomplished his seventy-seventh year, to pay one more visit to the main land, perhaps to see Rome once more, ere he died. Moving slowly from villa to villa, still sternly refusing to receive the authorities, and harshly ordering the inhabitants of the whole region not to approach anywhere near the imperial cortège, he had reached within seven miles of the city on the Appian Way. Again, however, superstition stepped in between him and the Eternal City, which he was never to see again; an evil omen, like that of the death of a favorite snake on a previous occasion, terrified him and he turned his back finally upon the seven hills. Perhaps he was not less moved to do so by the news that certain high personages, secretly accused of treason, had been set free without being examined—an act of independence on the part of the senate which threw him into violent passion. He hastened back to Capri, his safe retreat, from whence he loved to send his formidable orders; but like Rome, Capri also was never more to gladden his eye. His languid steps were arrested on the way by sickness, and it was with difficulty he could be brought safely to Circeji. Here he recovered for a moment the strength of better days, and with almost fearful resolution used it immediately to disappoint those whom he thought ever on the watch for his death. With grim delight he saw the amazement of the people, staring at him with silent awe, as he unexpectedly appeared first in the camp, where he passed the troops in review, sternly examining their arms and their evolutions, and thence proceeded to the amphitheatre. It was a day of high festivity for the little provincial town, and wild beasts

had been provided in large numbers, mainly to be exhibited in a great show to gratify public curiosity. But they had not counted upon the strange guest the little place was to receive on that occasion, and great was the joy of the people and loud were the shouts that filled the vast space and the long corridors of the immense building, when the emperor gave orders that lions, tigers and ostriches, all should be driven by, beneath his seat on the great wall that divided the arena, to be killed there by the hands of the chief officers and the favorites of the people. And how they marveled and whispered strange tales of witchcraft and unholy sacrifices when they saw the man whom they thought lingering on the very line of life and death, rise with unwonted alacrity and hurl with a strong arm the weighty javelin at a tiger who had been singled out for his size and beauty to become the emperor's victim!

It is true they did not see how he sank back exhausted; for knights and freedmen obsequiously crowded around his couch to congratulate him on his great exploit, and thus concealed him from the multitude. They knew not how he had both strained and overheated himself, so that already anxious eyes were examining him with eager curiosity to mark the signs of approaching death. But he defied them once more; and though scarcely able to step into his litter, he sternly ordered the court to proceed on his way to Misenum, where he might breathe the fresh air of the sea and behold at least, at a distance, his favorite island of Capri. He owned there a villa which had twice become famous in the annals of Rome; first, as having belonged to the great Marius, who had given it in all its simplicity the form of a fortress, and then as having been changed into a temple of luxury by the next purchaser Lucullus. To this villa he removed, hoping

soon to be able to cross over to his retreat, where he would fain have died in the same solitude and seclusion from the great world which he had learned to love during so many years; but his days were numbered. Surrounded by all the voluptuous contrivances which Roman ingenuity, colossal means and the mad brains of a Lucullus had been able to devise, he entered once more upon the full tide of his reckless, sensual life. Though hardly able to eat, his table was covered with all its accustomed splendor; guests were invited and high carouse was held to late hours; entertainments were provided for, games held and Venus and Bacchus received their worship, as if he had been in the full vigor of youth and looked forward to a long life before him. Was it the force of habit which made it impossible for him, even now, to alter his course and to show by greater abstemiousness that he had heeded the solemn warnings of Nature? or was it the fierce resolve to contest the ground with Death itself, inch by inch, and, above all, to gratify no rival or enemy with the opportunity to mark his decline and foretell the day when his reign upon earth should at last be at an end?

Then there was played around the dying emperor a drama which must have had the effect of the most exciting spectacle on the minds of every witness, while it displayed the meanness to which human nature may descend under trying circumstances in almost painful distinctness. The courtiers looked on the face of their bloody master with awe and trepidation. The fearful and unmistakable handwriting of Death was clearly inscribed on every line and lineament; but the eye could yet flash, and every wink of that eye could yet bring death to all who surrounded his couch. Never had his attendants been more obsequious in the fulfillment of all their duties; never had friends and relatives more care-

fully abstained from asking after his health, and spoken more simply of amusements and solemn duties to come, as if the future belonged to their imperial kinsman. All played a part; every one knew this, and yet they tried to conceal it quite as anxiously from each other as from the emperor himself. For the successor had not yet been named, and the danger was great in making the slightest mistake; even those who might be fortunate enough to adore the departing god to the very last moment unpunished and unsuspected, might easily go to worship the wrong heir, and expose themselves thus to the penalties from the living which the dead could no longer inflict. There was Claudius, the helpless, hopeless nephew and adopted son of Tiberius, whose claims to the succession would have been paramount but for his well-known weakness of body and mind, which, unfitting him for the throne, had alone saved his life when all other claimants had fallen victims to their pretensions. There was Caius, the sole survivor of the family of the great Germanicus, barely entered, as pontiff and quæstor, upon the career of highest honors, and a mere stripling yet, but formidable by the power he derived from his able and ambitious sister, Agrippina. It was of him that Tiberius had uttered the off-quoted words, "You leave the setting sun to court the rising," when his wife, in obedience to his own orders, had insinuated herself into the confidence of the young grand-nephew, but seemed to the jealous emperor to have gone too far in the intimacy which he had commanded for his own purposes. Finally, there was another adopted son or grandson, named after himself, Tiberius, whom, with Caius, he had left joint heir of his private property. Either of these three men might be the future emperor. Each one had in his turn been favored and caressed by the politic master of dissimula-

tion, who feared the ambitious hopes and impatient desires of any one legitimate heir, but thought himself safe amid contending rivals. It was wisdom, therefore, and not weakness, which made the failing old man, as it was said, "abandon to fate the decision to which he himself was unequal." But well might the courtiers have been perplexed to know which of these stars looming up on the dark horizon they were to greet as the rising sun, and ludicrous in the extreme must have been to the unconcerned observer the anxious care with which not the princes alone, but their nearest friends and supporters, were receiving each one a share of conciliatory adoration, measured cautiously by the chance which they had in the eyes of the worshiper to approach the vacant throne. Here, again, Agrippina outshone all others by the lofty dignity with which she moved through the excited, whispering crowd, and haughtily refused to listen to compliment or prayer. She calmly assumed it that her brother was to be chief of the state, and no one dared in her presence to breathe a word tending in another direction. Her conduct, if not the natural effect of her lofty ambition, was admirably calculated to influence an uncertain, wavering multitude, and she reaped the well-earned reward in her own time.

For the present, all was excitement and even fear; for the suspicions of the bloodthirsty emperor had been roused, and his rage was still formidable enough to make all men tremble before him. There was at the court then a physician in favor, who, like most of the practitioners of that day, was a Greek by birth and a freed-man in social condition. He was not, in fact, in regular attendance upon the emperor, but only called in to consult with those who filled that high but dangerous office. It was to him that one of the impatient competitors for

the throne addressed himself in his anxiety to learn the truth as to the emperor's real condition. Caius represented to him the anxiety he felt for his uncle's health, and how important it was that he, his nearest kinsman, should know how it stood, in order to provide all professional advice and such friendly assistance as might be required. The cunning Greek, of course, saw at a glance what was wanted, and not daring to offend one who might in a few days have the life of every Roman in his hand, he at once devised his little comedy. A messenger appeared in the midst of the courtiers, by whom he was surrounded as he told them some wondrous Greek fables, and summoned him instantly to the sick bed of a great senator. Of course, he could not leave without the emperor's permission, which was all the more readily granted as the dying man in all probability preferred that so shrewd and experienced an observer should not be present to betray the secret which he was trying to hide with all the little strength remaining to him in his last hours. But as Charides, the physician, bent low to kiss the master's hand, he cunningly contrived to place his finger on the pulse. Tiberius was too great a master in that art not to guess at once the purpose of his treacherous servant; but he knew well that in making known and punishing the offence he would necessarily have to betray his failing health; he smiled with imperturbable courtesy and gave no sign of discovery, except that he ordered the tables, which were just about to be removed, to be filled with new dishes and fresh wines, as if the physician's touch had infused new strength into him and given him an increased capacity of enjoyment. We stand aghast at the wonderful power which this master of all dissemblers had over his gestures and features; and never perhaps was

the magic control of the mind over the body more signally illustrated than when his exhausted frame, a mere wreck and ruin, and his worn-out limbs were made to obey with a last, supreme effort the bidding of his still powerful will. He lay longer than usual at table, and when his guests were departing, he arose and in grim, stern ceremoniousness stood up, defiant and erect, receiving and returning the salutations of every one, and allowing none to depart without a scrupulous allowance of that lofty courtesy for which he had been famous in his younger days.

The cunning physician, however, was not deceived by the emperor's gracious smile or the fearful restraint to which he subjected his poor suffering body. He had felt and counted, with subtle touch, the feeble pulsations at the wrist, and he was so confident of the accuracy of his observation that he turned, before he left, to one of the greatest at court with the assurance that "the emperor had barely a two days' lease of life."

The great news had no sooner become known than courtiers and attendants began to swarm in restless excitement, like the bees in a hive when they have been deprived of their queen and go forth in search of a new ruler. Messengers were immediately sent in all directions to prepare everything for the impending event; the senate at Rome was informed of the necessity of being ready for the choice of a new emperor; despatches were sent to the Prætorian guard and agents departed for the great headquarters of the army in the provinces, to ascertain the opinions and win over the commanders of legions. In the very palace councils were held, and every man of influence was cautiously approached to learn his preference among the three rivals. To the surprise of most men, the choice of all seemed long since to have settled

upon Caius, a mere stripling, and the silent but powerful influence of Agrippina was now suddenly discovered to have smoothed over every obstacle that might stand in the way of her brother. When, therefore, on the thirteenth of March, Tiberius had a fainting fit and lay for some hours in breathless stupor and without motion, crowds of eager courtiers at once surrounded the young prince, each one eager to be the first with his congratulations, and vying with the others in taking for granted the full accomplishment of his wishes. The young man was apparently completely intoxicated with the unwonted flattery, and was just leaving the ante-chamber to don the imperial purple, when suddenly frightened freedmen rushed in with the fearful news that the emperor—Tiberius still—had come to again and demanded the usual cordials to revive his fainting spirits. The blow nearly overcame the rash prince, and he stood there fixed to the spot, with wide-open eyes and speechless, expecting nothing less than to be punished with instant death for his imprudent presumption. When he looked around him he was alone; the frightened crowd had vanished, anxious to hide before the impending storm and fearful of being seen near the man whom, a few moments before, they had been ready to worship with bended knee. A few courtiers only, who had been too wise and too cautious to act before the death of Tiberius had been beyond all doubt ascertained, stood at a distance, smiling with gratified vanity at the discomfiture of the prince and the fright of his friends.

What really happened in the chamber where the terrible struggle between the master of the world and Death itself had been going on so long, no one ever learned with certainty. Some have it that one of the courtiers, the friend of Caius, and a remarkably prompt and resolute

man, no sooner saw Tiberius reviving than he whispered: "Heap more bed-clothes upon him and leave him;" whereupon the grim old man was smothered to death. Others again state that he died from simple exhaustion. He took off, they say, his seal ring as if to give it to some one present, and thus to invest him, according to acknowledged custom, with the imperial dignity; but he could not even yet decide to abandon his power or to determine on whom it should devolve; and so he put the ring once more on his finger and lay for a time without motion; then he suddenly called for his attendants, and finding that he had already been deserted by all who had served him in his lifetime, and that he was about to face the King of Terrors alone and unsupported by earthly friend or heavenly aid, he raised himself in bitter despair from his bed and instantly fell back dead. It seems as if the great enigma of his life, which made him a mystery to his people and a riddle to his friends, extended to his death even, so that the last scene of his life has for ever remained shrouded in darkest gloom and obscurity, and Death came to him, whether in the service of Nature or sent by the hand of treachery, in its most fearful form, with its very sharpest sting.

When the great news reached Rome, it was received with cautious reserve; the report that "the lion was dead" had been heard there before, and fearful penalties had been inflicted upon the credulous listeners, from the abject slave fastened to the infamous cross at the gates of the city, to Herod Agrippa, the royal prince of Judea, who had been loaded with chains and threatened with death. Nor was it yet forgotten how Tiberius himself had sent spies with such news to distant places, in order to ascertain who would rejoice at it most, and then had filled his coffers with their wealth and satiated his insane

thirst of blood with their lives. But when, at last, no doubt could be entertained that a new reign had been inaugurated, the joy of the Romans knew no bounds, and the fate of the emperor, for the first time, assumed an air of touching sadness when compared with that of other Cæsars. For even the most hated among them had some friend or kinsman who wept at their grave; even the accursed tomb of Nero was for many days covered with flowers, and the body of Caligula, burnt in all haste and watched over night by his wife at the risk of her life, was afterward buried by the tender hands of his sisters. Tiberius, on the other hand, received all the pomp and magnificence of an imperial funeral, but not a word of sympathy, not a token of affection, not a sign of respect fell to his share. The people of Rome rose in uncontrollable fury; they demanded that "Tiberius should be thrown into the Tiber;" they prayed to Mother Earth and to the spirits of his ancestors not to receive the departed, and asked that the body should not be brought to Rome, but consumed at the nearest place to his villa, and even there it should not be burnt decently to ashes, but only to be scorched, as was usual in the cheap and hurried obsequies of slaves and criminals.

The senate, however, with the consent of the new master, decreed the highest honors to the departed monarch, and Caius himself took a prominent part in the ceremonies. He immediately sent the commander of his guards, as he with bold policy styled them at once, to order that all the great honors formerly assigned to Augustus—the public funeral, the solemn confirmation of all his acts and even the deification—should be rendered to Tiberius. But when it came to the question of his testament, the new deity received very little respect, and Caius simply announced to the senate that the dying man's dis-

position of his property was the act of an incapable dotard and should be solemnly annulled. Although this testament referred to the emperor's private property only, he felt, and probably had been made to apprehend by the wise foresight of Agrippina, that the co-heirship, which included the younger Tiberius, might easily be claimed for the empire also, and the pretensions of the only grandson of his deceased namesake were serious enough to warrant such fears. Fortunately, Caius had on his side the prestige which still surrounded the family of Germanicus in the hearts of the people. Agrippina knew this strange fondness of a fickle nation well, and skillful agents, carefully chosen among her warmest friends, helped to fan the faint breeze of popularity for the benefit of her brother into a very tempest of enthusiasm. The people responded nobly, and proved that, debased as the Romans had become, the old traditions were not yet entirely dead, and some memory of true greatness and ancient virtue survived still in their hearts. They had always looked upon the race from which Tiberius sprang as incurably proud and hostile to freedom; but upon the descendants of the great Julia as representatives of departed glory and popular rights. The former were sullen in temper and reserved in their manners, the latter affable and of cheerful disposition—a difference by no means unobserved by the populace, and of great influence in times of excitement. How strange that the memory of a woman and the influence of her person should thus have survived after years of violence and bloodshed, and amid all the destruction caused by terrible wars and blasting intrigues! But Tiberius already had often compared in his mind the shouts which greeted Germanicus and the vows that were offered up for his children, with the indifference of the people to himself

when he took his seat in the theatre or the circus. He, whom his biographers even call "the least genial of men," could not but envy those who had only to show their fair forms and beaming countenances to be greeted by the rapturous applause of the multitude. But there was more than personal favor in this unparalleled popularity. In Germanicus, the senate, the army and the people had fancied they saw the image of the lost Marcellus, the last type of a great Roman, while in his wife they hailed not only the genuine descendant of the sacred race of Anchises and Aphrodite, but also the representative of the lofty virtues and bearing of a Cornelia and other matrons of the ancient stock. And these fancies had survived the first generation, and were now transferred to the children, of whom Caius and Agrippina alone were surviving, every other member of the family having been murdered or ignobly married by the merciless jealousy of the departed Cæsar. Hence, the news of the impending struggle between a new Tiberius and the cherished son of their great favorite had no sooner become known than the whole populace of Rome rushed as with one accord to the Curia, where the senate was still hesitating, and bearing the images of the two children on high, broke down the doors, filled the vast space with their numbers, and clamorously demanded that the will should be set aside and Caligula declared sole heir to the empire.

The young prince had in the mean time placed himself at the head of the mournful procession which was to bear the remains of Tiberius to Rome; and who can tell the conflicting feelings with which his heart must have been filled as he went with irksome slowness and full of suspense and uncertainty as to his fate toward the great city? For he knew well that it was a crown or a dungeon

which awaited him at the end of his journey; if the gods favored him and his friends had been successful, the morrow saw him master of the world; if he failed in this, his liberty and his life would unhesitatingly be sacrificed by his more fortunate rival. His sister was more hopeful, perhaps because she had been more active and knew better the temper of the people and the steps taken to turn it in the right channel. Fortunately, the distance was not great and the suspense but short; as they came nearer to Rome, the voice of the people, shouting by the wayside, showed the decision they had made; crowds streamed forth from every town and every village by the wayside, and the funeral procession assumed all the splendor and joyous character of a triumphal pageant. Altars stood decked on both sides of the great road, loaded with burning sacrifices, while the dense smoke of incense rose to the clouds; flowers were strewn before the conqueror of all hearts, and at night innumerable torches blazed up in all directions. Priests and people united in calling down every joy and every blessing on his head, and voices were heard from old and young, addressing him as their pet, their one great favorite, their blessed star from on high.

When he reached Rome, the enthusiasm rose to perfect rapture, and his speech on the Forum, in which he praised the departed and recalled the memory of Augustus and Germanicus, tracing to those sainted heroes his own personal claims to the regard of the people, was received with wild shouts of applause. The more they granted him the greater became his modesty, and every step upward was signalized by increased liberality. When it became known that he had burnt the criminal records and distributed among the Romans the vast treasures of Tiberius, the joy of the people knew no bounds, and the

golden age itself seemed to have returned once more. But what, perhaps, won him more hearts than even his profusion of gifts and the liberality of his new rule, was the piety he showed toward the illustrious family from which he claimed his descent. In spite of the tempestuous weather, which made all Rome crowd the temples to offer up prayers and form solemn vows for his safety, he set sail for the terrible island on which his mother, the noble Agrippina, had been forced to die of starvation, and his brother an ignoble, mysterious death. Returning with the ashes of these august persons, he conveyed them in his own arms to Rome, ascending the river from Ostia in magnificent pomp, and laid them in the imperial mausoleum. Nor was he less anxious to make amends to the living for what they had suffered under the preceding reign. Even the unfortunate Claudius, who had never been allowed to rise above the rank of a knight, was drawn forth from his obscurity and made a consul, while he saluted his formidable rival, Tiberius, on the day on which he was invested with the toga, with the title of Prince of the Roman Youth. Portentous signs accompanied all these acts, and the bright sunshine of heavenly favor fell even upon the humbler members of the imperial family. Thus, it was well noted that when Claudius, after twenty-three years' anxious waiting, had at last received the consular dignity, and showed himself for the first time to the people with all the signs of his new rank—the purple toga, the golden wreath and the white sceptre in his hand—an eagle soared up from the Forum and then gently flew down to rest on his shoulder! The people, ever on the lookout for omens of the kind, and with a strong lingering faith yet in the signs given by birds, immediately foretold a great future to the retiring prince, and received him, when he next presided, as the

representative of his nephew, over the public festivities, with the words: Hail, the emperor's uncle! Hail, Germanicus' brother! Thus their minds were prepared years afterward to see in Claudius a prince pointed out by the gods themselves for high honors and favored by them with special revelations from on high.

But what most struck the minds of the people in the conduct of the new emperor, because it was a measure unheard of in the annals of the empire, was that he claimed high honors even for his sisters, Agrippina and two others who had been married to persons of inferior rank. It was ordered that the sacramental oath with which the citizens swore allegiance to the emperor should contain the words: "I will not hold myself nor my own children dearer than Caius Cæsar *and his sisters*," and that every motion in the senate should end with calling a blessing upon him and them together.

Agrippina was but twenty-one years old when this sudden change in her fortunes raised her to the dizzy height of a place by the side of the throne. She was beyond comparison the most beautiful and the most richly endowed of the three sisters, and fully conscious of the vast power she was likely soon to hold in her hands if she could secure her influence over her brother. But this was not so easy, in spite of her masculine mind and her great superiority in intellect; for she was no favorite with him, and she knew but too well, from the days which they had spent together in lonely exile and atrocious sins at the little court of their grandmother, that he was a man of stubborn will and the wildest fancies. And yet this boy—for such he was, if not in years, in maturity of mind and experience of the world—this boy was now the head of the family, the absolute master over her fate, as he was the master of the whole world, whose maddest

whim had to be obeyed in silent submission by all who wished to live and to breathe upon the earth! But Agrippina was not to be deterred by difficulties like these; if he had absolute power, she also had her power, and her charms were such as had rarely failed to secure her the victory in every struggle in which she had cared to enter. And she did care now to contend, and to contend with the dread emperor himself; for she loved power above all things earthly. Like her mother, the first Agrippina, she had but one great purpose of life, but one aim to which she made all else subservient—to be seated on the imperial throne and to secure the mastery of the world to her offspring. Unlike her mother, however, far stronger of will and wiser in council, she was from the beginning determined to pay every price for the attainment of her end; and thus she sacrificed all her personal feelings, her pride and even the priceless pleasure of sweet revenge; she paid, where treasures and high rank would not suffice, with her charms, and shrank from nothing so she gained the desired end. As long as the strange modesty and exalted morality of the new emperor lasted, all went well with her also, and she began to drink in copious draughts from the full cup of her happiness. She had reached the first step of her strange career, which was to shine in such unearthly splendor and to end in such fearful gloom: she was the sister of an emperor.

The world was breathing freely, and men began once more to think that peace and happiness would reign upon earth, even under the Cæsars. The incredible good-fortune of the young emperor excited the marvel even of Greek philosophers in their calm retreat and far from the lying rumors and the dazzling, blinding splendor of Rome. "He had unmeasured wealth," they said, "and

vast armies on land and on sea; prodigious revenues poured into his coffers from all parts of the world, and his empire had no limits but the Rhine and the Euphrates, beyond which lived only savage and barbarous races. And here, from the rising of the sun until the setting, on the main land and the islands, and even beyond the seas, all was joy. Italy and Rome, Europe and Asia were celebrating one continual feast, for under no emperor had they had so much repose and such peaceful enjoyment of what they possessed. In all the cities nothing was seen but altars, sacrifices and victims, men dressed in white and wreathed with flowers, games, concerts, dances and horse-races. The rich and the poor, the noble and the plebeian, the master and the slave, the creditor and the debtor, all enjoyed themselves in common, as in the days of Saturn."

This lasted seven months.

For on an evil day, exhausted by the excesses of his nights and the excitement of his days, Caligula fell sick, and the world, not knowing to whose hands it might be committed by Fate after his death, gave itself up to wild despair. All Rome was mourning; they spent the night at the palace gates anxiously waiting for news from their beloved master, and during the day they filled every temple and votive building with their offerings and sacrifices, while noble knights and renowned generals offered their own lives to the gods in exchange for that of the monarch. But it was with the sickness of Caligula as with that of a French king of more recent times: on the day on which a whole people gave him the name of Well-Beloved, he ceased to deserve it for ever.

Caligula recovered his health, but he lost his mind. He arose from the sick bed a monster of wickedness, cruelty and voluptuousness, and the horror which his

fearful crimes inspire is heightened by the flashes of wit and ingenuity, by the brilliant thoughts and words of deepest cunning which every now and then broke forth from the dark night of his disturbed brain. But the change was not so sudden as it appeared. He had been subject, from early childhood, to epileptic attacks, and yet even this dire disease, in which many nations thought they saw the direct punishment of the gods, was but one of many discordant and startling facts in his nature. Perhaps the mind was not strong enough for the powerful, sensual body; perhaps it had succumbed to the effect of early excesses and gross neglect. But neither he himself nor his best friends could account for the strange anomalies which he showed in his daily conduct. At one time he would sustain incredible fatigue, and be all the better for it; at other times he could hardly stand up, or he would be seized with sudden faintings; more than once he would acknowledge himself that he had an attack of madness and think even of shutting himself up to take poison. His constitution was naturally powerful, but by some flaw at birth, or by the effects of the disease which he had just endured, it had become defective in a strange manner. Thus he slept but three hours a night, and even then his sleep was interrupted by frightful dreams and apparitions, amid which he would be overheard to hold long colloquies with the great spirit of the ocean; or he would spend whole nights pacing with rapid and unequal stride the long resounding corridors of his palaces, and impatiently shouting for day to release him from his curse and his suffering, and to appear at last at his bidding! Even if his sickness alone should not have disordered his brain, there was enough in his youth and his late elevation to unseat reason. His imagination had ever been uncouth and uncontrolled, and his heart must have been

wearied unto despair by the long dissembling under Tiberius and the perpetual danger to which his life was exposed. No man can, with impunity, wear a mask such as he wore for long years, concealing under the irksome, hateful veil of modesty the deepest villainy. He had heard his mother's sentence that banished her to a desolate island and exposed her to a fearful death with unmoved features; he had seen his brother sent away from court to die in still greater misery, and he had never ceased to smile. Day by day and year by year he had lived, the mere mirror of Tiberius, reflecting faithfully his words and his whims, his dress and his language. "Never was there a better slave," said a contemporary of him, "and never became such a more detestable master." The hypocrisy of a whole life now bore its fruit, and judging the conduct of others by his own, the wretched emperor despised men and could not respect himself.

Then, in the midst of all this horrible loneliness, believing neither in God nor in man, trusting not even his own thoughts and almost left without feeling in his heart, he was suddenly called upon to rule the world!—the whole world, excluding only what had no value in the eyes of a Roman—the barbarians. In the centre of this world Rome with its people, its legions of statues, its vast current of visitors, daily streaming in and out, and its nations of slaves—an army of twenty-five legions, leaving out the auxiliaries furnished by all the great races of the earth; and fleets on every ocean; an income which by means of confiscations was easily made unlimited, besides the hundred millions which Tiberius had left behind him—and better still, a divine right in all the soil of the empire, a sovereign right in all the property of the people—and above all this divinity itself, incense,

altars, worship;—all this belonging to or obeying a poor little human creature, untrained and unprepared to bear the crushing weight of such overwhelming power and majesty! The poor, ill-treated son of Germanicus, trembling before his masters, threatened by his rivals, hardly noticed by his only sister, now of a sudden greeted by the senate, the Prætorians and the people as their absolute master! Feeble reason could endure the shock as little as the weak eyes of the prisoner who, after a life of confinement and darkness, is suddenly set free, can bear the bright light of day. He had probably just sense enough left to feel instinctively the dangers which surrounded him on his throne; for no one had known better than he himself the reckless passions and the daring ambitions which still burnt in the hearts of many great families—the readiness with which every crime was forgiven to him who was successful. The empire with all its riches and its glories was the reward of any one who could drive his dagger into the emperor's heart; and, again, Caligula, who had smothered his sick predecessor, knew best how easy a thing it was to murder a Cæsar. Surely, then, we need not wonder that this life of splendor tempered with daily danger, this absolute mastery over the property and the lives of a world held at the will of the first unscrupulous or designing assassin, was well calculated to set the brain on fire and to appear to a Caligula's mind little better than a brilliant but fearful illusion. Seated on his lofty throne, high above mankind, he had seen too vast a space below him, too many millions at his feet, too immense a power entrusted to his feeble hands, and too fearful an abyss by the side of it all. His head had become confused, his reason had given way, and Caligula was mad.

There was no staff of faith for him to lean on. The

world of his day had given up all the old gods, and the unknown God had not yet been proclaimed. They only knew, in some instinctive, unconscious way, that Olympus had been abandoned, and of all the old deities, grim, inexorable Fate alone remained to rule the fate of mankind. Ask not how they knew it. They could not account for it; how can we? The only record they have left us of their grievous loss is a story oft repeated in their writings.

In the days of Tiberius, it says, a vessel was once passing close by the beautiful island of Paphos; the greater part of the crew were still up, sitting at table and drinking, when all of a sudden a voice was heard from one of the small islands with which the sea is there dotted, calling for Thamus, the man at the helm. The voice was so loud that all listened with amazement. At first Thamus remained silent; but when the summons was repeated a third time, he dared to reply; and then the voice added in a still louder tone: "When you reach the coast of Epirus, proclaim that the great Pan is dead." Upon their arrival in that region, the sailor discharged his commission and from the bow of the vessel cried toward the coast: "The great Pan is dead!" Thereupon he heard, as it were, loud lamentations and cries of surprise from many persons. The crew and the passengers, who were all eye-witnesses of what had happened, carried the news to Rome; Tiberius heard it and believed its truth.

It was true. Religion, the old pantheism, which worshiped everything in nature and idolized all that had been created, was extinct. A new faith had arisen; it had already been preached in the cities and spread through the provinces; it counted already its thousands of faithful believers and its martyrs by hundreds. But the world did not know Him who came to his own, and supersti-

tion, vile, degrading and disgraceful superstition, still ruled in the hearts of men supremely.

Thus, there was nothing for the great helpless emperor to lean on when he felt bewildered and dazzled at his fearful height, and could find neither friendship on earth nor help from above. Besides, we must bear in mind that the bosom friend of his youth had been the grandson of the king of Judea; twice the age of the stripling Caius, but intelligent and ambitious, well versed in men and affairs, Agrippa had acquired unbounded ascendancy over the young prince, then trembling in the uncertainty of his own fortunes, now hoping for supreme power, and now bending in slavish fear before his tyrannical master. The Jewish chief had filled him early with the spirit of Eastern intrigue, and taught him to contrast the empty forms of a republic in Rome with the absolute sway of an Oriental monarch. But he had also infected him with that spirit of thorough skepticism, that tendency to treat all matters, even those of greatest import, with sublime indifference, which made him in later years sneer at the inspired man of Tarsus, who had spoken before him and his sister of a new God with the words: Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian! Instead of giving him a law by which to abide, or a deity which he could adore, the subtle Jew had instilled in his mind the Eastern principle that the ruler of a nation was to the people, in fact, a god upon earth. All these pictures of Oriental splendor, together with the assumption of the divine character, to the utter destruction of all remaining sense of religion, had exalted his mind and inflamed his imagination until he could control them no longer, and seemed ever to tremble on the verge of delirium. People soon began to ask each other—and history still wondering repeats the question—Was he really mad, or did he merely affect

insanity in order to gratify his caprices the more freely and on the largest scale? He repeated often that his life would have been perfectly happy but for one great drawback; it could not boast of any great national calamity! Under Augustus, there had been the terrible disgrace of Roman legions defeated in the forests of Germany; under Tiberius an amphitheatre had fallen in and buried nearly fifty thousand men and women under the ruins; but what had occurred equal to such grand tragedies under his reign? He tried to produce one occasionally by closing all the public granaries and trying to starve a few thousands of the common people; but Rome was too rich and the wealthy came to the aid of the poor before any great numbers had perished.

Then, again, he did all in his power to please and amuse the people; he gave them gladiators, wild beasts, dramas and pantomimes; the circus was full from morning till late in the evening. There was first a chase of tigers and lions, in which more men than brutes were killed; then came the famous Trojan games; after them, races between drivers of chariots, in which no one under the rank of senator was allowed to compete; and after all the rich prizes were distributed, the grateful people would shout, Long life to the god Caius! The patron of clowns, the friend of the drivers in green, the companion of the grooms, with whom he sups pleasantly in the stables, he rewards them liberally and gives them a million at a time; and he forgets no one who serves him in the circus. There is his favorite Incitatus, upon whom he has bestowed a large fortune; he wears cloaks of rich purple and gold and necklaces of precious jewels; he has a palace, slaves and magnificent furniture; he invites his friends to supper and treats them with splendor. If he is tired and wishes to sleep, the soldiers of his guard are

there to watch over his slumbers; they order the whole neighborhood to keep quiet, that no noise disturb him during the night. Incitatus is going to be consul next year—this year he is the emperor's pet horse!

Caligula gave public entertainments in Sicily, in Gaul—wherever the people ask the favor. In Rome, where there are exhibitions every day, they get tired of them; he provides for brilliant festivals at night, and orders the whole city to be illuminated for the purpose. If at times he starves a few thousands, he gives them, at other times, food in abundance; he throws from window and balcony vast quantities of meats, of fruits, birds, silver and gold; occasionally sharp-pointed knives are mixed with the presents; they fly about and maim and kill, and he laughs furiously and enjoys the fun to his heart's content. It is rare that he gets angry; but sometimes the people take their old liberties at the theatre and cry for this or that favor; for the greatest of tyrants cannot entirely suppress all signs of opposition, and when the tribune was silenced the circus spoke. Then he burst out with tears of grief: Would that the Roman people had but one head, to be cut off at a blow! It was at such moments that his large brow rolled itself up into a mass of rugged wrinkles, turning literally black like midnight, while from under the deep shadow his sad and sinister eye shot forth glances tinged with the redness of blood—an expression preserved, so as to fill our hearts with dim dread at this day, in a bust of the emperor carved in black basalt. The black, fire-burnt stone suits marvelously well to convey the implacable hardness of heart, the burning ferocity and the deep viciousness of the mad Cæsar's soul.

Such was the melancholy sight which met the eye of Agrippina, as, in the hour of her greatest joy, and when all her wishes and all her ambition seemed at last to be

gratified, she looked at her brother, the emperor. Ah! did she then think how often the golden apples, shining so brightly at a distance, turn to ashes under our touch? and how more than once yet in her eventful life she was thus to be doomed to disappointment at the very moment when she grasped supreme happiness?

It was near this critical time, when the character of Caligula began first to show signs of such strange changes, and about nine months after his accession to the throne, that Agrippina presented her husband, in her villa, at Antium, with the first and only child she was ever to bear. The first rays of the rising sun—December sun though it was—fell brightly upon the new-born child, even before he was softly laid on the earth, that his father might have the choice, according to ancient Roman custom, of taking him up and thus acknowledging him, or of leaving him there unnoticed, an outcast for life. For the rights of the father were still as absolute as sacred, and even Tiberius had yet exposed an infant daughter because he doubted her legitimacy, and the child had perished at the very gate of his palace, no one daring to rescue the unfortunate victim from horrible death under the father's impassive eye! But the Brazen-Beard was proud of the son that was vouchsafed to him by the gods after nine years' impatient waiting; he took him up, grimly replying, however, to the loud congratulations of eager courtiers, with all the brutality of his fierce temper and in his most contemptuous manner: "What can be brought forth by Agrippina and myself but a monster and a terror to mankind?" Agrippina bore the fearful curse in silence, however her mother's heart must have quailed at the terrible words; she no doubt felt that her husband was a man without power, and she was quite ready to see in the bright rays of the morning sun, which

formed a halo around the infant's head, a good augury and an anticipation of the golden diadem which she then vowed in her heart should once encircle his brow. Even when the astrologers were called in, and foretold, among marvelous prophecies, also the portentous fact that he would be emperor, but slay his mother, she exclaimed, with an ambition almost heroic, "Let him slay me, so he reign!" Terrible words!—words which were to rise before her mind's eye in letters of flaming fire not many years hence, when the emperor and the parricide were to be no longer an idle dream, but a fearful reality.

Nine days afterward, when, after the ancient custom, the boy was to receive, in the presence of his nearest male relatives, his future name, the modest villa at Antium was transformed, as if by magic, into a gorgeous palace adorned with all that Roman luxury and imperial wealth could bring together to do honor to a solemn festival. The halls were filled with statues and busts, and costly vessels and vases of every shape and material were scattered about with lavish profusion. The household gods of the empire and the ancestral images of the two great families, the Julians and the Brazen-Beards, adorned the passages and ante-rooms, and the statue of the august Julia looked down upon that of Germanicus. But what marked the occasion most strikingly was the abundance of flowers which seemed to cover the whole house, from the gates at the entrance to the innermost rooms, with the richest beauties of color and the blandest charms of perfume. On the altars burnt costly incense, and in the beautiful hall, in the very centre of the house, where the open ceiling allowed the smoke free egress, a special altar had been erected, on which were burning the prescribed sacrifices.

When all the invited authorities were assembled, the

imperial family also appeared, and finally the emperor himself, surrounded by his brilliant court. Then the child was brought in, Agrippina herself bearing it aloft in her arms, her features filled with a mother's joy and great pride; and the priests took it from her hands to carry it solemnly around the fire. After this ceremony had been observed, the two purifying elements, fire and water, were carried in like manner around the child, in token that the pure elements thus freed the new man from all impurity he might bring with him from his former estate. Upon this the invited guests crowded around him, offering their presents, from the tiny golden amulet he was to wear around his neck in token of his noble birth, to the vast domains presented to him by imperial sponsors. Vows were sent up to the gods, and prayers especially addressed to that one of the dread *Parcæ* which at that very moment determined the future fate of the unconscious infant. The next thing in order was to give him a name; and the wise, far-sighted mother thought of availing herself of the emperor's presence to gain additional prestige for her son. So she asked Caligula, as a special favor and a brother's gift, to name the infant. Unfortunately, her brother was fond of indulging in the most inappropriate jests on the gravest occasions, and as his restless, roving glance happened to fall just then upon the poor uncle, Claudius, who was reputed little better than half-witted, he thought it a capital joke to wound the feelings of the melancholy prince and at the same time to mortify the soaring ambition of his haughty sister, by crying out, laughingly, "Well, then, let him be called Claudius!" It was thus the boy received the names of Claudius Domitius Brazen-Beard, in spite of the reluctance and the grief of Agrippina, who could not resist, with all her clear-sighted knowledge of the world, the

old superstitions of her race, and fancied that the name of the unfortunate prince, the butt of the whole family, must needs bring a sad future upon the innocent babe. Little did she foresee that of all those names not one would be known to posterity, while her son would owe to the despised Claudius the very crown she coveted for him!

When she returned to Rome, she and her son were received with wild acclamations by the enthusiastic multitude, who loved her for her father's sake, and now saw in the infant by her side a new favor of the gods, and fondly hoped it might be a pledge that the Julian race was not to die out, but perhaps to restore the glory of Rome and the liberties of the people. Agrippina, young, beautiful and brilliant in all the charms that adorn woman, saw her wishes crowned; she was the fairest woman of Rome, the first matron in the empire, the sister of an emperor, and before her prophetic eye there appeared a long vista of still higher powers and even greater honors.



IV.

UPS AND DOWNS.

AVAST arid plain, here darkened by huge whirling clouds of dust, and there by steaming vapors rising from vast pestilential morasses, stretched on both sides of the great Appian Road as far as the eye could reach. At times a pile of buildings, shining brightly with its masses of colored marble, would show where a senator had placed his magnificent villa; then, again, the vast level lay unbroken save by the lonely form of a slave, with a chain at his foot, lazily working the ground to which he belonged; for the noble inheritance of the Sabine people, which had once given ample support to a great and powerful nation, was now handed over to fettered hands, chained feet and faces marked with the initials of the owner or the brand of fearful crimes. The free and cheerful laborer had been driven away to make room for servile, reluctant hinds; the father of a family for the slave of the glebe, who was fastened every night to his couch in the villa dungeons. The whole scene is one of indescribable sadness; the tombs of the dead are more numerous than the houses of the living, and dead silence reigns supreme over the whole forlorn landscape, unless when some plaintive sigh escapes the breast of a laborer in the fields, or cries of anguish are

heard from the subterranean holds of a villa. Slavery and magnificence rule in strange union, and the way to the capital of the world lies through the dread plain of desolation.

Far out on this vast plain, where gentle mountains rise in soft outlines and dark masses of verdure greet the weary eye, the country becomes more cheerful and varied. Towns hang boldly on the sides of lofty masses of rock, and shine with their white marble temples and beautiful villas; smaller houses appear in bold and picturesque places here and there at great heights, and from below the mysterious crater-lakes of Albano and Nemi look up with their deep dark eye in silent solemnity. Glorious avenues of ancient trees lead from town to town and up to Monte Cavo, with its beautiful temple of Jupiter built of white and yellow marble. From the heights, the eye ranges freely over the wide, solitary Campagna; its sterile, burnt soil steaming in the bright sunlight and shining in a thousand colors; it follows eastward instinctively the long lines of magnificent arches, which carry the cool, clear waters of the mountains to the distant city, and sees there a glittering mass of white temples rising in majestic repose, overtopped by the lofty structures on the Seven Hills, while at the utmost end of the western horizon the sea shines like a line of molten silver.

On one of those lovely hills, covered all over with delicious shade, there stood a beautiful villa, with its long rows of marble columns, its grand vestibules and vast halls, where the air blew fresh and cool when below the plain was sweltering in hot sunshine, whilst all around land and sea vied with each other in displaying their richest beauties. But within all was darkness and gloom. In one of the semi-circular halls sat a youth, his face buried in his hands, his hair hanging disheveled around

him and his limbs twitching and jerking in spasmodic contortions. When from time to time he raised his gaunt face, two deep-set, lustreless eyes shone forth with unnatural coldness and the hard-set lips spoke of unbending fierceness within. It was the unfortunate emperor. To him the heavens in all their splendor were but a dark burden; to him the earth, with its countless beauties, only a dismal desert. For she, the matchless beauty, the fairest of the fair, Drusilla, whom he had loved with unholy affection, was no more. She had died in Rome, and the blow had fallen heavily upon him, weakened as he was by his long sickness, and aided still farther in unsettling his tottering reason. His grief had, in fact, for the time, utterly demented him, and in his frenzy he had lost all control over himself. Rome had been ordered to assume the outward signs of deepest mourning, and woe was the unlucky man who failed to comply; he was punished with instant death. The courts of justice were suspended; all business ceased; the shops were closed, and every sign of merriment, even within the family circle, was strictly prohibited; to have dined in company or to have been heard laughing with wife and children was accounted a capital crime. He himself had at last taken refuge in his villa, and there he sat now, giving vent to violent passion or brooding in savage rage over his grievous loss. Then, again, he would suddenly come forth from his retreat with his beard and hair untrimmed, and rush about in headlong roving, along the coast and across to Sicily; but *Ætna* happened to throw out some fire at night, and the frightened *Cæsar* fled instantly from Messina. Then he returned to Rome in order to decree that divine honors should be paid to the departed, after he had found, without difficulty, a worthy senator, who bore one of Rome's most illustrious names, ready to

swear that he had seen her with his own eyes ascend to heaven. Gilded statues of the fair sinner were erected in numerous places, the altars of a thousand cities smoked with sacrifices offered to the new goddess, and women vowed to swear henceforth by no other name. If Caligula was so far constant to her name as never to use any other oath himself than that by her divinity, he knew how to find consolation upon earth. He changed his wives as men change their valets, and he cared little whence they came; nor was he fastidious as to the nature of the charms they possessed. One he chose because he had heard of her beauty; he sent for her to a distant province, bade her leave her husband, and made her his wife for a few days; another he saw as a bride at her wedding-feast; he was pleased with her appearance, and instantly ordered the husband of an hour to betroth her to his master; then, a few days later, repudiated and banished her, but so far from setting her free, he required her to be faithful to him even at a distance, and years after sent her once more into exile for some alleged misconduct—jealous still of a wife who was no longer his own. At another time it was "*les beaux yeux de sa cassette*" which made him take Lollia, the most celebrated beauty of her days, from her home and carry her to his palace as his wife. It was she whom he saw, as Pliny tells us, at a plain citizen's bridal supper, all covered with pearls and emeralds, which shone on her hair and head-dress, her ears, neck and fingers, worth forty millions. They were the treasures of a grandfather, amassed from the spoil of provinces; he was accused of extortion and committed suicide, to save his fortune from confiscation and to enable his granddaughter to blaze by lamplight in the splendor of forty millions! She also had but a short time to enjoy the throne, and was soon

sent back into private life—but without her jewels. The last of the emperor's wives was an enigma to him and to others. As we see gay flirts in society often refuse most desirable offers only to close their brilliant career by the side of some plain, unpretending man, with whom they speedily sink into happy insignificance, so Caligula also was finally victimized by a woman without youth or beauty. The world marveled and whispered much of love-philters and magic incantations, and the emperor himself would often say, "I will have her put to the torture; she must confess how she makes me love her so dearly." She had captivated him at first by the extravagant luxury in which she excelled among the most brilliant ladies at Rome, and the utter recklessness with which she gave herself up to every kind of excitement and dissipation. There was, no doubt, something congenial in the tempers of both, and with her arts and the help of powerful friends she maintained to the end perfect control over her mad husband. Like Cleopatra, in the days of her happiness by Antonius' side, Cæsonia also would ride by Caligula's side through the ranks of the army, a golden helmet with lofty crest on her head, a Greek shield studded with sparkling jewels on her arm, and a gorgeous knightly cloak fluttering gayly in the breeze. The charm by which she held him was rendered still stronger by a daughter which she bore him, which he called after his beloved Drusilla, and whom he swore to be his own beyond all doubt, because she was so savage and cruel already in the first years of her infancy as to attack with her nails the eyes and faces of her little playfellows. Hence he took her in his arms to the temples of the gods, and laying her in the lap of Minerva, appointed the goddess complacently her governess.

It was with such a brother, and at a court where such

empresses gave the tone, that Agrippina spent the first years of her brilliant life at Rome. She was the emperor's sister, and for a time Caligula professed to have great respect for her superior judgment and to return warm affection for the interest she took in his welfare. But her hopes of obtaining genuine influence over him were disappointed; his wayward temper escaped from every hold that she tried to obtain over him, and she soon began to see that it was dangerous, even for the daughter of Germanicus, to attempt interference or to aspire to power against the inclination of a man like her brother. She saw, besides, with grave apprehension, the undisguised ferocity of his character and the increasing madness of his conduct. He ordered his father-in-law and young Tiberius to kill themselves, for such was the fashionable term; his former friend and tutor was in like manner invited to die, and others followed in quick succession. The Roman mind became so used to this suicide upon order that a word, a hint was sufficient; it made the matter much easier to the emperor, and saved the state the costs of a trial, and avoided the necessity for executioners. Death was to the morbid, disordered mind of the Roman no longer a terrible spectre, but a welcome relief from incurable evils and from sufferings that could not be ended otherwise. A Pliny could thus look upon suicide as the one great consolation given to mankind, pitying the gods to whom it was impossible. A Lucan could see in this act of desperation the highest virtue, and paint in eloquent verses the delight of madmen, who having invited each other to the entertainment of a mutual killing, received the blows of the sword with joy and returned them with gratitude. The poor man in his despair, the exile in his misery and the rich man in his satiety—all find in suicide their one unfailing remedy.

The wretched gladiator, carried in a chariot to the circus, puts his head deliberately between the massive spokes of the wheel to court death; the famishing beggar, out of bread, goes to the Fabrician bridge, wraps his head in his last garment and throws himself into the Tiber. The great patrician kills himself to spite the Cæsar whom he hates and fears, and earns the sympathies of a nation. Thus Cremutius, falsely accused under Tiberius, calmly starved himself to death, and all Rome shouted for joy that he had thus cheated his accusers and the emperor himself of their prey. Others die from sheer weariness of life. "To wake up," they say, "and to sleep again, to shiver and to perspire, there is no end to it; it is a circle and the same thing always comes back to us. Night follows day; summer brings autumn, then winter, then spring; always the same! Everything passes away, only to come back again. Never anything new!" They die, not because life is hard, but because they know not what to do with life.

Nowhere did Rome show more clearly her sad decline than in this matter of suicide. Formerly forbidden by an ancient and sacred tradition, condemned by the great philosophers of Greece, anathematized by the poets in the interest of society, punished by the pontifical law of the Romans, which deprived those of the right of burial who had taken their own life, and by the civil law, which confiscated their property for the benefit of the state, suicide had now become the last outlet for human energy, incapable of any other courage—the only remedy which philosophy and religion could suggest for the cure of diseased mankind, bereft alike of all virtue for this life and of all hope for the life to come.

It was this unspeakable degradation of man alone which could suggest to Caligula a new caprice, wilder

and grander than any yet known. He expressed his intention to become a god. "Those," he said, with the method which lurks so frequently under madness—"those who manage oxen, sheep and goats are not oxen, sheep and goats themselves, but men, beings of a superior order. Thus, those who manage all the nations of the earth are not men, but gods." On another occasion he sat at table, surrounded by a company of kings who had come to do homage to great Rome; they discussed among themselves their claims to greatness, when Caligula interrupted them with the Homeric words: "One single master, one single king!" At first he was content to be a demigod only; he appeared as Hercules, with the lion's skin and a club of gold; then he wore the hat of Castor and Pollux, or the vine-covered staff of Bacchus.

Soon, however, his ambition soared higher, and he found Rome ready to fall down and worship him. He had his temple and his golden statue; men swore by him and tried eagerly to be made his priests. Daily, whole hecatombs of the most rare and most exquisite sacrifices were offered to him, such as peacocks and birds from Numidia; for nothing less pleased the delicate taste of the new god. He assumed, one by one, the shapes of all the ancient deities. To-day he was Apollo, with the crown of golden rays on his head, and leading the Graces by the hand; to-morrow he appeared with the winged sandals and the magic wand of Mercury. The whim seizes him and he is Venus; at last he settled down upon Jupiter. As he cannot command the artillery of the heavens, he invents enormous machines, which produce frightful thunders and unceasing lightning; and one day, when real thunder dares to interrupt his amusements, he challenges Jupiter to mortal combat, casts a stone toward heaven and exclaims, "Kill me, or I kill you!"

Great men come from distant lands to seek an audience. They are told the god-emperor is at the Capitol, where he has built a temple for himself, close by the temple of Jupiter. They follow him there with awe and with reverence, and are admitted within the gates. The sight that meets them is a strange one indeed. There, in the centre, rises the colossal statue of the god, recently brought from Greece, and covered with precious cinnabar, in honor of a feast. Around it swarm hosts of volunteer servants, knights and nobles of the land; lictors, with their formidable fasces, stand by the side of the throne, and valets, with retentive memory, bend low before him as they announce the names of the illustrious visitors, while others serve him as watchmen and tell him at stated intervals the hour of the day—the poor god being unable to see his own sun or to go out and look at the dial. Skillful hair-dressers come in to brush and oil his tresses and to change his lofty structure of curls, precisely as the artists on the Forum change the marble wigs with which the statues of the great Romans are adorned. Women hold a brilliant mirror of polished silver before his face while his toilet is made, and painters renew the gilding of his bracelets and the bright colors of his toga and his sandals. When all is ready, proclamation is made and the god is ready to receive the public. Here comes a man and cites Jupiter to appear in court and to testify in his behalf before the judge; then another kneels down and reverently presents his petition; he is followed by an elderly man, who no sooner appears than his whole manner is changed; he falls into a theatrical position, he raises his voice, and behold! he recites his favorite part in some great drama before the patiently listening god. Hissed by an ungrateful public, he has left the world and sworn henceforth to perform only for the great gods! Ladies,

great ladies of rank and fashion, enter next, followed by a whole bevy of merrily chattering slaves, and declare they have conceived an irresistible passion for the Father of Men; they are determined to brave the anger of Juno and eagerly demand some token of heavenly favor.

The ambassadors look with amazement at the novel scene, but suddenly priests and officials appear in gorgeous robes and command silence. When all is hushed, a low, harsh voice is heard from behind a silk curtain; it is the new god communing with old Jupiter. He scolds him, he questions him, and when the Olympian remains obstinately silent, he threatens to send him back to Greece. After a while he is softened; he will not bear malice, and in order to be nearer to his friend and brother-god, he promises to build a bridge from the Capitol to Mount Palatine, which passes over the temple of Augustus, and enables him to go directly from his house to the temple.

These claims of his to be worshiped as a god once led to a curious scene in his palace. There was mortal enmity between the people of Alexandria and the Jews. The former, Greek by race and Pagan by faith, frivolous and fantastic in their worship, like their Athenian brethren, and idolatrous and superstitious, like the builders of their pyramids, had, first of all Roman provincials, adopted the new deity. Perhaps they thought that after all Caligula was not so much worse than their divine bull Apis, or their great god Anubis, who had the head of a dog. But in this city of a thousand deities there lived at that time a large number of wealthy and learned Jews, bitter enemies of all idolatry and Egyptian abominations: Israel, escaping from Pharaoh, had come back once more, not any longer as shepherds in Goshen, but living as opulent bankers and learned scholars in the great cities. In Alexandria especially their wealth and their tenacity had

given them great political weight, and under all the emperors they had succeeded in preserving their synagogues, their laws, their magistrates and privileges. But there was mortal feud between the worshipers of sacred birds and crocodiles and the worshipers of the great Jehovah; between wordly, brilliant, false Alexandria, and strict, stern Jerusalem. The enmity broke out anew when orders came from Rome to erect statues of the new god, Caligula, in the great city; for the Alexandrians eagerly seized upon the welcome occasion to humiliate and mortify the hated Jews; they had several images of the god-emperor made, and put them into the synagogues of the Jews, and when the latter protested, they were denied their old rights of citizenship and banished into a dark, obscure quarter of the city, while those who ventured out were seized by the enraged multitude, ill-treated, beaten, and even burnt at the stake.

The Roman governor laughed at the uproar and rather enjoyed the quarrel. At all events, he refused to interfere, and the Jews determined to appeal to Cæsar; the Alexandrians did the same, and two embassies, headed by eloquent orators, set out for Rome. But when the poor Israelites landed at Puteoli, they heard still sadder news from Jerusalem; Caligula had ordered his own statue to be set up in the temple, in the Holy of Holies, where the sacred name of Jehovah was mysteriously preserved. Their brethren also met them there, as other brethren soon afterward met a greater than they near the same place, and told them with tears and great wailing how "the abomination of desolation" had come upon the temple of the Lord. Until now, the Roman government, in its wise and liberal toleration for the customs of conquered nations, had so far respected the hereditary horror of the Jews for all that looked like idol-worship that even the

victorious legions had taken the emperor's image from their standards when they entered the Holy City. And now the horrible idol was to be erected in the very temple of the Most High. The Jews put on sackcloth and ashes; they fasted and prayed to be spared the intolerable profanation; their workshops were closed and the lands remained untilld. When Petronius, the Roman governor, came to Jerusalem to try what could be done by conciliatory measures, and to persuade by kind words the stubborn Jews to submit to the inevitable, he was met at the gates of the city by an innumerable multitude of men, women and children, all weeping and wailing, with ashes strewn on their heads and their hands bound behind their backs, like condemned criminals. "Will you resist Cæsar?" he asked; "will you begin war? Remember your weakness and the power of Cæsar." "We are not going to fight, but rather than violate our holy laws we are ready to die." And the whole nation fell down before him, with their bosom bared, full of resignation and faith; and the touching spectacle moved the stern Roman commander so deeply that he dared write to Rome, asking for new orders.

Caligula was, however, not the man to yield to such representations; he would not even listen to the prayers of his old friend, King Agrippa. A couple of Egyptian buffoons, who happened just then to be at his court and to amuse him by their indecent tricks, had more influence over him than the wisest of counselors, and he at once ordered his Phœnician artists to make a peculiarly magnificent statue, which he proposed to take himself to Jerusalem and there to erect in the temple, while at the same time these words were to be inscribed over its principal gate: "Temple of the new Jupiter, the illustrious Caius."

There was little hope, therefore, for the unfortunate

delegates of the Jews, and when they humbly asked for an audience, they were informed that the emperor was absent in Campania, visiting his country-houses and restlessly moving from one palace to another. They followed him, unable ever to come up with him, until at last they obtained from him an order to await him in the house of Mæcenæas, which he was adding to an adjoining palace, in order to make of the two magnificent structures a villa fit for a Cæsar. They found the building filled with costly furniture, with gold vases and Greek statues scattered over all the rooms, the halls wide open, and the emperor himself, followed by an immense retinue of stewards, architects and workmen, going over house and gardens to inspect the whole.

At last, in one of the largest apartments, they came upon a strange-looking group of men. There was a comedian in his fantastic costume on one side, and a group of obsequious officials on the other side of a tall, pale and ill-looking man, with a small neck, deep-set hollow eyes and a fixed look, with a huge beard, but scanty hair and a frowning brow; the whole appearance full of threatenings and defyings. This was the emperor. His costume, which he took care should belong to no rank and no country, even defied the usages of his sex. He wore a brilliantly-dyed cloak, adorned with a profusion of jewels, long, wide sleeves, such as women only wore, and his arms were covered with bracelets; a wide-flowing robe of the silk which cost its own weight in gold reached down to his feet, on which he wore women's sandals, embroidered in pearls, and in his hand he held, being Júpiter for the day, the thunder and lightning of the great god.

The poor Jews fell on their faces, exclaiming, "Hail, Augustus and emperor!" But Caligula interrupted them

with the words, "Ha! these then are the enemies of the gods, the men who despise me when all the world adores me, the worshipers of an unknown God!" The Alexandrians, who had taken good care to be present also, took heart at these threats and cried out, "That is not all, O lord; these men even refuse to offer sacrifice for your safety." The Jews protested: "No, my lord, we have sacrificed for you; we have offered hecatombs; we have deluged the altar with the blood of victims; we have done so when you became emperor, when you recovered from that sickness which made the whole earth sad, and when you set out for Germany!" "Yes," replied Caligula, "you did sacrifice; I do not know to what god, but not to me; I owe you small thanks for that."

Every word of the cruel emperor went straight to the hearts of the poor, trembling Jews, whose spokesman states that he was filled with "abysmal terror." Then he left them standing where they were, rushed into another apartment, chatted with his friends, consulted with the steward of the palace, and ordered pictures and statues to be moved from one place to another. The two delegations followed him everywhere; the Alexandrians in triumph, scoffing and scorning; the Jews mournful, their heads bent low and expecting nothing less than death.

All of a sudden the Cæsar stops short, turns toward them, and with a most solemn expression of face, he asks them: "Pray, gentlemen, why don't you eat pork?" The Alexandrians burst out laughing; imperial wit is irresistible. "My lord," say the Jews, "every nation has its laws. We are forbidden to do certain things, so are the Egyptians; there are some people even who eat no lamb." "They are right," says the emperor; "lambs' meat is bad." Then, after having laughed at his own

facetiousness, he continued: "But after all, have you any rights in Alexandria?" The Jews felt that the critical moment had come, and they began to plead their cause in studied terms. Caligula, fearing they might really have good reason to complain of their treatment, turned his back upon them and ran into another room to have the windows closed. The Jews were amazed to see them filled with a transparent stone, admitting the light, but warding off the wind. They had never seen glass before. Then he came back and said in a softer tone, "What can you say?" But when the Jews, with reviving hope, begin their oration, he runs away once more, looks at the paintings and refuses to hear any more. The delegates are in despair; they fold their hands and murmur their prayers. "Go away," says at last Caius. "After all, you are more fools than knaves if you do not know that I am a god!" The poor Jews gave themselves up, but their chief said to them, "We ought to hope now more earnestly than ever; the emperor is so angry with us that God cannot fail to come to our assistance"—beautiful words, which God soon made true, though in a very different sense from that in which they were uttered.

And still the Romans bowed down and worshiped their new god. At first sight there is something inexpressibly shocking to our feelings in the idea of a man being worshiped as a divinity while still living. We turn with disgust from the poor wretch who accepts and enjoys such adoration, while he feels his own weakness, trembles at the thunder in the heavens and quails at a shadow that passes over his mirror-like pillars, thinking it may be that of an assassin. We stand aghast and ashamed at the low level to which the divine part of man may sink, when we see kingdoms and empires bow down before the statue of a monarch, whom the gold of which

they were plundered has raised to the throne of the world, while countless provinces vie with each other for the honor to raise magnificent temples in which they may worship a madman. But we must not forget that this was possible only at a time when, in spite of outward peace and security, the nations of the earth were filled with an indescribable sense of sadness and despair. Under the shadow of the "grand majesty of Roman peace," life and property were protected as they never had been before; but man cannot live by bread alone, and they had nothing else in those days by which to live. We have seen that the old gods were dead, and the new faith was but just beginning to send its first bright rays from the rising in the East; the empire lay still in that deepest darkness which precedes the morning. The liberty of the Roman was gone; the free life of the cities was crushed, and all power on earth was centred in the emperor. Amid the universal ruin, the sweeping destruction of all authority and all sacredness, there was nothing left standing in the world but the majesty of the emperor and the sublime power of his government. Man cannot rest, he cannot be satisfied with the world nor at peace with himself, unless there is something immutable which he can rely upon and look up to amid the troubles and trials of life. Hence, there prevailed in those days an irrepressible longing after the purer past; and men enjoying their royal fortunes in palaces built of costly marble and filled with the treasures of every land, would sigh aloud for the thatched roof of the hut of Romulus and the coarse fare of his warriors. Poets who basked in the sunshine of court favor and lived in magnificent mansions in Rome, or in lovely villas among the Albanian mountains, dwelt with envy upon the simple life of the peasants and sang of their pure and unclouded happiness.

Hence, there was a feverish seeking after new religions in all hearts, from the highest on earth to the untutored slave in his dungeon—a vague, uncontrollable yearning after some faith that might promise a future, a certainty. A kind of hopelessness had taken possession of men, as the old cherished beliefs fell, one by one, before their eyes; and the gods of Egypt and of Greece, of the far East and of the dark North, proved all alike unable to give comfort and peace to the weary nations. The imperial power seemed literally to be the one thing left to worship, and for a time men did worship and idealize it, as they had bowed down to Asiatic superstitions so childish and bizarre that their simpler fathers would have scorned them as unworthy of Romans. What else could they find to revere upon earth? Who else was there to fill the place of the dethroned gods of the nations? It was sad and humiliating, but it was only natural, that, at a time when mankind was almost succumbing under the weight of "thoughts beyond the reaches of their souls," they should have justified slavish submission to a man, and the bowing down in abject adulation before a god, though they knew him to be a man of equal passions with themselves and subject to the same fate as the rest of his kind. It was sadder still that this worship degenerated almost immediately into the most perfect idolatry. Augustus had no sooner been deified than it became sacrilege to offend his memory. To break a statue of his, to dress or undress before his image, to punish a slave near by, to wear his likeness on a ring or even a coin, in improper places,—all these were capital crimes. Next, the portrait of Tiberius, even while he was still living, became as formidable as that of his predecessor. An image of Cæsar in his hand enabled a slave to threaten his master; and on the very threshold of the august senate a woman

persecuted the judge, who had sentenced her, with insults, and resisted an attempt to arrest her by simply holding up before her the emperor's portrait.

They knew not at Rome, amid their desperate efforts to make a reality of a shadow, to convert a man into a god, that a little cloud, not larger than a man's hand, was even then rising on the easternmost confines of the great empire, which was to change the face of the earth and to transform all the endeavors to bring God down to the level of man into a powerful raising of man up to the Most High. Far out, near the deserts of Arabia, not far from the Euphrates, whence the Roman eagles looked beyond the limits of Roman peace, in a small district of the province of Syria, in a land without commerce and subject to constant invasions of ruthless Arabs, far from the great centres of intelligence, from Rome, Athens or Alexandria, far from the direct influence of imperial power and all the leading ideas on which its greatness was resting, there had appeared a handful of humble Jews. They belonged to a despised race among men, and to the lowest among these; for they were not Jews of Alexandria, polished by Greek training, familiar with the philosophy of the ancients, living in intercourse with the great world; they were not even men learned in the law, priests of a privileged caste or Pharisees famous for Hebrew lore. They were Galileans, of a province little esteemed even at Jerusalem, speaking a language full of barbarisms, "unlearned and ignorant men," and unacquainted with that philosophy of Greece which was then held indispensable for any man who desired to be listened to or even respected. They had never read Plato, and for all we know, the annals of the world, the marvels of Grecian intellect and the rising of Roman power, the whole past history of the mind of man, was unknown to

them; they had nothing but a mystic book, commented and darkened by rabbis, doubted and dissected by dissenters, and ruined in its beautiful simplicity by the sophistic readings of the Pharisees. They were men of humble position; a fisherman, a custom-house officer, a few poor sailors from an inland lake; they had but one thing that distinguished them from the mass and raised them above all others—they had been with Jesus.

Even now, while Roman senators, who but yesterday ruled a kingdom, were groveling in the dust before a Caligula, and the temples of every god ever invented by human perversity were filled by anxious, longing souls—even now these poor Jews are going about proclaiming the unknown God, for whom the whole world is yearning. They do not whisper their secret in hidden places; they do not look up old women or weak men, who ever need something new to keep them busy; nor do they keep it as a precious mystery fit only for the few, the chosen and initiated. Far from it! They cry it out from the roofs of the houses, from the porticoes of the temple, from the depths of dungeons; they proclaim it to every Jew in the land, in the synagogues of Asia, Greece and Egypt; they shout it out from every tribune in Greece itself, the mother of philosophy and the ancient gods. They profane with their blasphemy the forum and the basilica, the national assembly and the prætor's tribunal; they profess their new god boldly before the face of the Areopagus in Athens, the great Diana of Ephesus and the dread Cæsar at Rome.

But their voice was feeble as yet and did not go beyond the limits of their audience, as their faith was weak and they dared not at once to hold out the unspeakable happiness and the undying glory of their creed to the Gentiles. Rome had not yet seen the poor prisoner come up

from Puteoli, bringing in his heart words that were an answer to the question which filled all the world then: Who will show us a new god? The city was yet given up to that despair which made men willingly lay down life and seek death, even though they had to pass through the bitter gates of starvation; they were yet ready to make an idol for themselves, not of wood and stone, but of flesh and blood, like unto their own and to bow down and worship.

Not altogether like unto them after all, for Caligula was possessed by a thirst of blood such as is rare among men, and as great a mystery to us as it was to his contemporaries. They asked themselves again and again, Is it madness or the force of habit—the intoxication of absolute power or an innate instinct of cruelty? Certain it is that he loved to see blood flow, and enjoyed to murder others, aside from all feeling of revenge, fear or self-interest, until he came to consider murder really like one of the fine arts. To-day he would order all infirm gladiators to be thrown before his wild beasts, and to-morrow send a proud senator into the arena to fight for his life. At times the mere shedding of blood seemed to satisfy him, as when he killed the gladiator who had fallen before his sword as if overcome by the emperor's skill; or when, dressed in priestly robes and about to slay the victim that was to be sacrificed on the altar, he suddenly turned around and with the axe cut down the priest at his side. At other times there was the refinement of a madman in his murders. He marked with his own hand—enjoying the fun of the measure hugely—on a list of state prisoners the names of those who were to be thrown to the animals of the circus, when other meat was too dear, or he prescribed himself the slow and painful manner in which unfortunate sufferers were to be

killed, that he might enjoy the pleasure of the agony a little longer. The executioner was his unfailing companion, so that at any moment he might be entertained with the cutting off of a head, and the very mistress in his arms was not safe against this insatiate love of murder; for as he caressed her snow-white neck, he chuckled and cried out: "Such a beautiful head! and yet, a word, and it will roll on the floor!"

With this brother Agrippina had been educated and he had been her sole companion, her friend and adviser, while there was no loving father to guide her heart, and no tender mother to instill gentler feelings and higher aspirations into the bosom of the orphaned child. We have dwelt upon his cruelties and his madness, his orgies and his murders, because poor Agrippina had to share them all, to witness their horrors in silence and to take her official part, as the emperor's sister, in all the public acts. The force of habit, no doubt, soon overcame the innate tenderness of a woman's heart; and with no inspired faith to support her, no earthly guide to lead her, need we wonder that she soon learned to look upon men as fit only to be despised, and herself as the sole arbiter of what she might do? Her passions became her only motives, and to attain what she desired all means seemed to her fair and honorable. There was but one religion left to her blasted, desolate heart: it was the love of her babe. To see him great and glorious, to seat him on the throne of the Cæsars and to be able to say to herself and to all her friends and her foes, My son rules the world!—this was the only aim left her upon earth, and to this she devoted her beauty and her strength, and for this she sacrificed her life and her honor. The boast, the pride, the hope were not of mean or vulgar nature; the boon was worth contending for. For even now, with all the

light thrown upon the subject by modern researches and happy discoveries of ancient records, we have but a very imperfect conception of the vast extent of this empire, subject to the rule of a foolish boy to-day, a madman to-morrow, and an ambitious woman like our empress whenever her will was strong enough to grasp the sceptre. The Roman eagles had spread their wings and flown to the uttermost parts of the earth. Far to the inhospitable regions of the North, where snow and ice and the absence of human life alone arrested their flight; far to the East, until the deserts of Arabia made them turn back to happier lands and more profitable conquests. A few years ago a bold Roman had in ten days crossed the mountain-chain of the Atlas and penetrated across vast plains covered with black ashes to the great river Niger. The cohorts of the prefect who ruled over Egypt in the name of Rome had gone up the Nile to the capital of Æthiopia, passing close by the lands made famous again in our day by the sad fate of the Abyssinian monarch and the valor of British troops, and the ambassadors of a black queen, Candace, had thrown themselves as humble petitioners at the feet of Augustus. Another general had gone still farther into the very heart of Africa, perhaps to the long-sought sources of the Nile, and come home to enter Rome in solemn triumph as the conqueror of twenty nations, whose names even were unknown to his master, Tiberius. And where the eagles had not been carried, traders and travelers had gone in search of wealth and wisdom. Roman explorers had ascended the Nile to the regions, unknown in our day, where immense and impenetrable marshes arrested not only the boatman, but even the wanderer on foot. The Fortunate Isles, once the fabled home of the blessed, had been thoroughly explored, and, as in our own age, poesy had given way to

dull prose and the enchanted gardens already held large factories, in which costly purple was produced. Another Roman, the predecessor of our Maury, had discovered the geography of the Eastern Seas and brought the Indies, already accessible by two convenient land routes, still nearer to Rome by his knowledge of the trade winds, heretofore known only to the Arabs. Now a squadron of a hundred and twenty vessels sailed at one time from the Red Sea, following his instructions, and every year a fleet of Roman merchant ships reached India in ninety-four days and returned richly laden with Eastern treasures before the end of the year. The mysteries of the far North had in like manner been dispelled. Great Britain, which had heretofore been looked upon as a world of its own, had been explored under Claudius by vessels which had sailed all around it; Ireland had been discovered, the Orkades conquered, the Ultima Thule—was it Iceland or perhaps even Greenland?—perceived at a distance; and a great poet, inspired probably by traditions handed down from hoary antiquity, had sung of the day, many centuries distant, when the ocean, the bond between lands, would give free passage to bold sailors, reveal new continents and deprive even Thule of its title as the last extremity of the world.

Where Rome did not go for conquest, for merchandise or knowledge, there her name was carried in admiration or terror; and those lands which she declined to visit came in turn to bow their knee and to send their gifts to the great city. The Sahara, which had neither fertile soil nor submissive citizens to offer, sent her lions, her enormous serpents and the wonderful giraffe to adorn the amphitheatre; northern shores, clad in eternal mists, passed precious amber from hand to hand and from nation to nation, until it reached the fair ladies of Rome;

delicate tissues of silk came from distant and unknown regions of the East, and fabulous prices were paid for the rare fabric which was seen only in the emperor's palace and a few houses of the richest on earth. The farthest Indies, inaccessible even by sea, despatched ambassadors of high rank to the court of Augustus, and as Alexander in his Eastern city of Babylon received representatives of French and Spanish nations, so now a Cæsar, staying a while at Taragona, in Spain, gave there audience to envoys who invoked his friendship in behalf of their sovereign, Porus, the master of six hundred monarchs of the far East.

Under a grand portico of marble columns, built expressly for the purpose, and in the very centre of Rome, there was marked on the wall a map of the Roman world; it had been commenced two hundred years before Augustus: it was never finished. As new conquests were made and new nations came in submission to bow before Cæsar, new districts were mapped out on this wonderful chart, the marvel of antiquity. Their outlines were the outlines of the world; beyond them nothing was to be seen but faint markings that spoke of lands shrouded in eternal mists, of nations made in hideous, horrible shape and of regions belonging to the domain of fable and fancy.

Thus Rome was the world of those days and her emperor the master of the world. And such was the mysterious power indwelling in this magic name of Rome that it could continue to exist, to conquer and to rule supremely under the control of a youth without experience, a man without sense or a woman without principle.

This was soon to be proved anew. For of a sudden the erratic emperor set out for distant Gaul to see his

faithful allies, and to a district not far from the scenes where the first years of his life had been spent, when his father, the great Germanicus, was commander-in-chief there of the Roman forces. He even remembers the rebellious legions and the day on which, an infant in his mother's arms, he was surrounded by their furious cries and in imminent danger. He summons before him the veteran soldiers, who nearly twenty-five years ago had been driven by incredible mismanagement to demand their rights at the point of the sword; he has them surrounded by his guards and is about to massacre them all, his sisters Agrippina and Julia being present, when they, driven to bay, rush to their arms, and the frightened emperor abandons his revenge and turns his attention to more congenial pursuits.

He had traveled with a large army of soldiers, and with an almost as large array of gladiators and circus-drivers, of comedians and courtesans; even two kings he had carried with him to lend additional lustre to his campaign. In his suite were his sisters also, with all their attendants, and among them some illustrious personages whom he liked to keep under his own eyes. All of a sudden it occurs to the madman to accuse Agrippina and her sister Julia of a conspiracy against his life; he professes to have discovered their secret correspondence with the commander of the German legions, and ere the world can recover from the unexpected blow, the sentence has gone forth and fearful punishment is inflicted upon all the accused. The general and his friends are sent to execution, the two sisters into banishment. Poor Agrippina, however, although escaping with her life, had to pay by far the most terrible penalty. It was not enough that her whole fortune was confiscated and her jewelry and costly furniture, her household goods and her slaves, nay,

even her freedmen were taken from her, but she was compelled to endure the most refined cruelty of which the ingenuity of her brother was capable. One of the murdered conspirators was said to have been her lover, and Caligula allowed her to gather his ashes in an urn, so as to have them deposited in the vault of his ancient and noble family, the *Æmilians*, at Rome; but he ordered at the same time, with intense savageness, that she should carry the golden urn containing them in her lap all the way from Gaul to distant Rome. Who can imagine the fearful hatred that must have accumulated on that dreary, dreadful journey against the tyrant, the dark plots she may have formed, and the intense thirst of revenge that must have taken possession of the unfortunate woman, wounded in her brightest hopes and disgraced in the eyes of the whole world? And then her journey to the *Ponzas* islands, where so many of her family had suffered in dismal banishment, and where she also was now to linger and to suffer at the pleasure of her inhuman brother! No gay crowd of friends and favorites accompanied her on her way; no escort of imperial guards, with consulars and lictors and all the insignia of her high rank, filled the cities through which she passed with awe and admiration; no sumptuous retinue of countless servants followed on to prepare the comforts of a home and the splendor of a palace wherever she rested; alone and unattended, save by a few slaves, she made her way to the distant islands, brooding over her misfortunes, pressing her wretched child to her bosom and having neither men nor gods to look to for comfort and hope. How the heart must have hardened, crushing in its fearful pangs the last remnant of tender gentleness, as she thus wearily went on her way to her life-long exile, leaving behind her all that was bright and glorious, and seeing before her

nothing but deep, eternal gloom! With what loathing, with what withering scorn she must have looked down upon the motley multitude of comers and goers that met her sad and silent procession, as she traveled down from Rome to the harbor where she was to take ship! There they were, as of old, crowding the highway—merchants hastening down to receive and unload their precious cargoes; sailors rushing up to squander their hard-earned wages; astrologers from the East come up to feed upon the foolish, and cunning Greeks to cheat the clever; Phrygian eunuchs in their barbaric splendor and unnatural beauty, and Syrian dancing-girls with painted turbans and outlandish manners; and now and then between them some grave senator returning to his home in the capital, or a high official traveling in state to a distant province which he went to govern and to plunder. All these were familiar sights, but oh how different was their bearing now from that to which she had been used! Instead of reverent salutations and an eager desire to be noticed by the emperor's sister, she saw now but an anxious avoidance of recognition, a hurried pushing by; and if by chance she met a familiar face, it was but to see it the next moment studiously averted or hid behind the silken curtains of the litter.

For great was the dread of the *Cæsar's* name, and far and near no one dared for a moment to raise the hand against his favorite, or to say a word in behalf of those he had condemned. Modern monarchies, even the most absolute of them, present to us but a shadow of the merciless power of the emperors of those days, which was in truth only the external sign of the terror which the name of Rome inspired. To the ears of the world there was nothing less than magic in that mystic name. For generations no man dared to question it for a moment.

The orders given in Rome went forth, and in the uttermost ends of the earth they were obeyed in silent submission, and as promptly and as faithfully as under the very eyes of the Cæsar. A single officer, bearing the magic name on his tablets, executed the commands of the master. Under Augustus an engineer went forth thus armed, and passing through the vast empire, he defined the corporation lines of every city, measured the fields in the open country, established with precision the nature of every kind of landed property, and left behind him in writing a census of an empire. Another officer, prefect of Syria, went, accompanied by a handful of men, to make a census of the countries over which Herod ruled. He ordered, by the power derived from Rome, that every inhabitant should report himself in his own city, and the first vessel that sailed for Italy carried with it the tables of this census, on which, two hundred years later, Tertullian could point out to the Marcionites the record of the birth of the Son of God in the town of Bethlehem.

It was no wonder then that Agrippina went lonely to her exile and her name was no longer mentioned among men; she could not have been more completely forgotten if she had died. And what was her noble brother doing in the mean time? He had found out a new occupation for the emperor of Rome, and a new way of filling his coffers with almost inexhaustible treasures. As soon as the conspiracy had been officially announced and punishment inflicted, he had conceived the novel plan of disposing at auction of all the confiscated property of his own sisters. But this was not enough; he gave orders that the whole furniture of the imperial palaces at Rome should be sent on, the works of art that had belonged to Augustus and the wardrobe of Livia, the treasures accumulated by two Cæsars, and the very gladiators who had

become the favorites of the public. Soon there were no wagons to be found to carry all these precious things, and no horses to draw the wagons. New orders came from Gaul, and all the hacks and hired carriages in Italy were taken by main force and impressed for the purpose; to supply draft animals the horses and the mules were taken even from the mills in which they did service. Thereupon a greater outcry than before; for now the courts of justice could not go on, as the means were wanting to bring pleaders and witnesses from their homes, and as the mills all over the land were kept standing still, bread began to be wanting. No matter; Cæsar wants money, and the welfare of the state outweighs all other considerations. The famous maxim, *L'état c'est moi*, is far older than the Bourbons.

So all the leading roads from Italy to the Alps were covered with long trains of carts and wagons, laden with curious freight; the passes of the Alps were choked with broken-down vehicles and the Rhine was covered with barges and rafts conveying the furniture of the Cæsars to the emperor's residence. He had given due notice of his purpose, sent out proclamations as eloquent as those of modern auctioneers, describing the precious and rare articles to be sold, and compelled, by force and by favor, the rich provincials to attend, to purchase the marvels of imperial luxury and to humor the whim of their master.

On a high tribune, dressed in a fantastic costume and surrounded by a brilliant crowd of freedmen and shameless beauties, stood the Cæsar himself, holding in his right hand some costly goblet or precious bracelet, once owned by Augustus, praising his merchandise, animating the purchasers, talking away with a glib tongue and hearty enjoyment of the scene, demanding fabulous prices even for trifles, and showing every now and then,

under the mask of facetious appeals, the axe of the executioner as the last argument to be employed against reluctant bidders. Surely comedy more tragic was never enacted on earthly stage! "Are you not ashamed," he would cry out, "to be richer than your emperor? See what I am reduced to! To give up to the first comer the furniture of divine princes! Upon my word, I am grieved at it! . . . You will not give such a trifle for a cup of the god-like Augustus? . . . This ring belonged to Antonius; it was a love-token of the beautiful Cleopatra; buy it for its historical value! . . . Ah, there you are, my friend; you want this little trifle; take it, it is yours at two hundred thousand! . . . You say more—well, at three hundred thousand! And you! oh I see; you have given two thousand for the privilege of supping with Cæsar; why, here are cups and goblets of his enough for you to sup with him every day of your life! . . . Crier, what are you about? Don't you see Aponius, who nods; he accepts my price! Thirteen gladiators for nine millions—a mere trifle for so rich a provincial!" Aponius was asleep and nodding in his slumbers; he woke up with a start and found himself a ruined man. No one could refuse the dread emperor, and many a one left the hall in which the sale was going on, only to return to his house, enter a bath, and open his veins to bleed to death.

At last, Caligula had gold enough for once in his life. It came from all sides; from every province of the great empire; from Gaul not only, but from Egypt even and distant Syria. Everything was sold; men and merchandise, down to the honor of becoming a priest in the temple of the Cæsar-god, which was put up and bought by men like his own uncle Claudius at fabulous prices. Gold had become his passion for the moment; he craved

to see it in heaps, to handle it with his fingers. As his will was law, he had it—a large hall brimful—the sweetest carpet, he called it, for an emperor's foot; he took off his sandals to bathe his feet in it; he laid aside his toga to rest on it, to roll in it. He was happy once more; he felt as if he were rich.

All this time poor Agrippina sat, her heart swelling with silent rage, on her barren island, gazing day by day at the distant shores of Italy. She was not yet twenty-three years old; so young, so thirsting after pleasure, so used to rule a whole world! And now compelled to wander out on the bare rocks, from which she saw nothing but a blank, gloomy surface of turbulent waters, and to think of the short dream of her happiness and her power, followed by so sudden a fall, down to real wretchedness and ineffable sorrow. For even the last consolation she had upon earth—her son, had been taken from her, a mere infant, barely three years old, the last descendant of the great Augustus—he had been sent to the mother of the famous Messalina, the deadly enemy of his own mother, and there confided to the tender care of two slaves, a barber and a dancer, who taught the poor child for two long years the mysteries of their trade and the infamies of their lives. And yet the memory of the poor, helpless child was perhaps the only truly pure and holy thought amid the dark and terrible dreams of the unfortunate mother; her heart, closed to every gentle emotion, every tender affection, had kept this one feeling alive, and to it she would cling among her agonies with all the energy and fire of her passionate temper; but what fearful pain it brought her now, as she thought of the hands to which he was entrusted, the lessons he would learn and the scenes he would witness, and then remembered that it was by her own fault and as a punishment

for her own sins, that the poor innocent babe was exposed to such terrible dangers.

Fortunately, a mind like Agrippina's is not easily subdued, especially as long as youth and health add their aid to its energies. Misfortune could bend her low, but never crush her. Hopes soon came to bring consolation to her heart, and reflection told her, from her own thorough knowledge of courts and of state affairs, that a rule like her brother's could not possibly last long, and that his madness must necessarily lead, sooner or later, to his utter destruction. Then she felt sure her time would come, and oh for the delight, the ecstasy of returning to power, of being the great, the beautiful, the sacred Agrippina once more, and, above all, of taking revenge of her enemies and seeing them crushed by her beauty and her power! She knew that if her barren island, her abject poverty, her perfect isolation left her utterly unable, for the moment, to do anything for herself, she could at least preserve her strength for the future. She resolved, therefore, to live, in order to be able to wait patiently, and not like her mother, who was older and more desperately wounded when she lived an exile in the same desert, indulge in fierce invectives, try a conspiracy or make an effort to escape, which might give the tyrant an excuse for depriving her of the last possession which he had left her from mere caprice—her life. This resolution once formed, she carried it out with the marvelous vigor and persevering steadiness of her lofty character, and learned the hardest of all lessons which active minds have to acquire upon earth, to hold still and patiently to abide their time—the most difficult task laid even upon the Christian of our day in the portentous words: Be still, and know that I am the Lord!

Her expectations were soon fulfilled, for two short

years had scarcely passed when the blow fell that was to set her free once more. Caligula had at last filled the measure of his horrors, and his hour came. Strangely enough, it was not the senate whom he had humbled to the dust, nor the knights of whom he had murdered hundreds, nor even the mass of the people treated by their master like the cattle in the fields, who freed the empire of its disgrace, but a few men from among his friends and personal attendants. Death had become so constant a guest at the emperor's table, and his boon companions, his favorite pets, had so frequently been despatched by the dagger or the sword as he engaged them in pleasant conversation, lay with them at table, or even held them in his arms in loving embrace, that at last they could endure it no longer, and resolved upon killing him in self-defence. Caligula was on the point of departing for Egypt in order to receive the divine honors which the fickle people of Alexandria had decreed to him, and from thence for Judea, where he proposed to erect his own golden statue, to the horror of the chosen people, in their holy temple. Before leaving he gave a grand entertainment to the people in honor of Augustus. The crowd in the vast theatre, which had been specially built for the purpose, was immense and disorderly; for in a freak, such as he loved, above all, to indulge in, he had abolished the former distinctions of place between the privileged classes and the people at large, and senators and gladiators, masters and slaves, men and women, pell-mell, all rushed in tumultuously, and great was the madman's joy as he saw noble knights and grave senators in their purple robes fight for their seats with the rabble. On this day the struggle was peculiarly lively; many were trampled under foot, others crushed in the crowd; so to heighten the confusion he ordered rare

fruits to be thrown among the mass, and enjoyed with boisterous laughter seeing how these haughty Romans wrangled and wrestled with each other for the emperor's favors! Mnester, his favorite dancer, whom he loved to press to his bosom before the assembled multitude, and whom no one had ever dared to interrupt by the slightest noise without being cut down instantly by the master's own hand—the great Mnester then danced. Caligula, whilst looking on, feasted on golden tables placed before him and regaled his attendants with titbits, which he threw at them as men throw food to pet dogs, while a consul, a Roman consul, sat at his feet and continually kissed them to show his veneration. But while he enjoyed the scene and spoke with enthusiasm of the dance he proposed to perform himself in the circus at night, he did not notice the evil omens which afterward filled the mind of men with strange feelings as they remembered them shuddering. The stage had been polluted with blood, which had actually stained the robe of the priest who offered the sacrifices according to sacred custom; the tragedy which was danced, as the Romans used to say, was the same during which Philip of Macedon had been assassinated, and for the evening an Egyptian spectacle was in preparation, called a Picture of Hell.

The emperor was so well pleased with the dance and the dinner, and felt in such excellent humor with himself and the world, that he determined to spend the whole day where he was. Four days he remained in the theatre, eating and drinking continually, and all the time surrounded by the friends and guards who had sworn to kill him, but still lacked the courage! At last, on the fifth day, a tribune of the Prætorian guard, whom he had often insulted and wounded in his most tender feelings, having been specially hurt by an offensive personal remark, de-

termined to wait no longer. He appealed to the conspirators, warning them of their own danger, reproaching them for their want of spirit, and asking them, tauntingly, if they really thought the tyrant was invulnerable. They resolved to make an end of it, and persuaded the emperor to leave the theatre and go to his palace in order to take a bath. The two buildings were connected by covered passages, so that he could conveniently pass from one to the other; and as he was walking down one of these corridors he happened to meet a number of noble youths from Asia, who had been trained to perform a show on the stage, and were to sing a hymn in his honor that very night. He stopped, ordering them rehearse certain parts of the play, but the leader of the band excused himself on the plea of hoarseness. This led to some conversation, which kept him well engaged, and the conspirators made their way close to him while he turned to reply to another tribune, who asked for the watchword of the day. "Jupiter!" he said, and immediately the Prætorian officer, crying out, "Well, then, let Jupiter's wrath fall upon you!" struck him on the throat from behind. The conspirators had taken good care to keep the crowd of courtiers at a distance, so as to be surrounded on all sides by those who were in the secret. A second blow cleft the tyrant's jaw, and as he fell, drawing his limbs together to save his body from mutilation, and screaming, as if in defiance of their purpose, "I live! I live!" they thronged around and over him, and crying "Again! again!" wounded him in thirty places. Still, they did not have it altogether their own way; for as soon as his voice was heard farther down the passage, first the bearers of his litter came up with their poles, and then his German guard with their formidable swords, and, striking wildly around them,

killed large numbers of the bystanders; but not knowing the murderers, slew many innocent witnesses, and even senators, who had taken no part in the affair. The conspirators, however, escaped easily enough from the narrow passages, leaving the body behind them where it fell. His old friend King Agrippa threw a mantle over it, and tried at first to conceal the emperor's death. When this could be done no longer, he took it up and carried it by secret ways to the pleasure-grounds of a distant palace, where his strange, loving wife, Cæsonia, sought it and sat by the bloody corpse, her little daughter at her side, all that long night, mournfully rocking to and fro, thinking of the cruel, savage master whom she yet had loved so tenderly, and keeping dreary watch over his mutilated remains. In the morning furious soldiers found out the place, and seeing her there, loaded her with curses. She merely bared her bosom in answer and begged them to be prompt. When they had slain her, they consumed the body in a hastily-kindled fire; but ere it was burnt to ashes angry crowds disturbed them in their pious office, and, in order to save their lives and yet not to leave the remains of their master to be dishonored, they hurriedly covered them with refuse and rubbish and left the place. Such was the end of the great Cæsar, whom a world had worshiped as a god!

In the mean time, terror and trembling fear had seized upon all Rome. The people, threatened by the infuriated German soldiery, had rushed headlong from the theatre, not knowing whether their emperor was really dead or not, and half fearing that the whole might be a grim comedy ordered by the mad Cæsar to find out who were his true followers and who his enemies. No one knew what was to be done if he should have actually died; not even the conspirators themselves, who thought

of restoring a republican government, and had escaped from the enraged guards into the house of Germanicus. The people became more and more excited, and demanded to know what had been done and by whom. They insisted upon it that a great personage, whom they met on the Forum Asiaticus, should tell them who had done the murder. "Would that the gods had chosen me to do it!" was the bold answer of the brave man; and people and soldiers were startled and quietly went to their houses. But while all was indecision and doubt, Fate had already ordained who was to be the new ruler of Rome.

Among those who had been the immediate attendants of Caligula, as he unconsciously walked down the corridor at the end of which he was to meet his bloody death, was his uncle Claudius, the nephew of the great Augustus and the brother of the brilliant Germanicus, the idol of the Roman people. He had walked before the unfortunate emperor, and when the murderers pressed upon the latter, made his escape into the interior of the palace. Here, in one of the gorgeous reception-halls, called the Hall of Hermes, he determined to await the arrival of Caligula, but when he heard the sudden uproar and saw from the window the populace rush tumultuously in all directions, while the German life-guards, with the cry, "Vengeance for Caius!" massacred high and low, and carried the heads of the slaughtered men on their pikes, he was frightened and hid himself in an upper story, creeping cautiously between the thick curtains which hung down upon either side of a large window. In the mean time, the Prætorian guards had been deliberating in their camp, not regretting Caligula so much as thinking of the effect his death would have on their own prospects. They were told that an effort was made to

restore the republic; and at once they remembered the hard service of their fathers, so different from the easy life which they now led under the emperors. They had heard enough of the stern and unprofitable government of the ancient consuls to dread its return. If they came once more into power, the guards would be sent away from Rome, to make forced marches, to stay in dreary forts, to fight against the barbarous Germans and to die broken and exhausted. They preferred decidedly being the emperor's soldiers—to be well fed, well dressed and caressed. Even while they deliberated they plundered the palace for a pastime; the excitable populace followed their example in pilfering if not in deliberating; and thus it came to pass that one of the robbers, a private in the guards, accidentally stumbled over the concealed prince. He saw the sandaled feet under the curtain, pulled them out, and brought forth something which fell trembling on its knees, asking for mercy. The soldier recognized in the man who was lying almost senseless with terror before him a member of the Cæsar's family; he respected in him the kinsman of his liberal master Caius, prostrated himself before him and greeted him, half in surprise and half in ridicule, with the title of emperor. In the mean time, other Prætorians had come up; the chosen of Gratus—this was the name of the soldier—became the chosen of the whole body of guardsmen; they seized the helpless, frightened old man, and, as he was unable to follow them on foot, they put him into a litter. The bearers, however, became terrified at the strange sight and fled; then the Prætorians themselves, reinforced by large numbers of comrades, also came running up from all sides when they saw what was going on, and carried him in triumph to their camp. The poor prince in the closed litter suffered agony, for he thought he was doomed

to be murdered like his nephew; and the uninformed crowds in the streets, pitying the innocent victim, broke out in loud lamentations, under the impression that the unfortunate old man was carried away to execution. The guards, however, treated him well, and insisted upon his accepting the throne at their hands; he refused, however, persistently, and waited for the action of the senate. A night of wild excitement and utter confusion in Rome, and of fear and anxiety in the camp, was followed by the decisive morning on which, for the first time in Roman history, an emperor purchased his dignity from the Prætorian guard.

The senate had been losing its time in idle deliberations about a restoration of the republic, and helplessly looked for some one to take the lead and assume the responsibility. The decision came from an unexpected quarter. There had been living at the court of the Cæsars for some time a Jew of royal lineage and superior ability, King Herod Agrippa—one of those sovereigns whom the Romans loved to see dancing attendance and paying court to their master. Brought in early youth to the capital, he had been educated with the Cæsar's family; Tiberius had thrown him into prison and condemned him to death; Caius had set him free again, and to console him for his captivity presented him with a chain of gold as heavy as the iron chain which he had worn in his dungeon. It was he, as we have seen, who alone had dared to rescue the mutilated body of his benefactor from further desecration; it was he who came now in all haste to Claudius to reassure him and to persuade him to accept the throne.

He was still in the camp when messengers appeared to invite him to come to the senate, who had been unable to agree among themselves not only as to a successor, but

even as to the question of empire or republic. The clever diplomatist prepares himself like a master in his art for the interview; he has his hair dressed, his beard perfumed, and fresh and bright, like a man who has never left his quiet home, who knows nothing of what is going on, and only desires to be informed of what has become of Claudius and what may be the wish of the fathers, he presents himself before the senate. When they have told him what the difficulty is, he claims the right to speak to them candidly, as one whom they know to be devoted to the dignity of their august body. First of all, he asks them what means they have to assert their authority? The municipal guard, the slaves who may be armed but know nothing of war, and a few devoted companies,—can they hold the field against old soldiers like the Prætorian guards? He suggests an embassy to Claudius, of which he is to form part; they go to the camp and conjure the prince at least not to accept the dignity of emperor except from the senate, but Agrippa obtains a private interview and counsels independence. The soldiers of the army in the mean time have become impatient; they draw their swords, unfurl their banners, and, with their triumphant eagles at their head, they march in close columns over to the camp, there to unite with the guards in proclaiming Claudius emperor. When the senators heard this, they were frightened in their turn, and vied with each other who should be the first in the camp to make friends with those terrible Prætorians. But the soldiers received them badly, and Claudius had much trouble to protect their lives. The guards had made an emperor of their own, and in spite of the senate they wanted to keep their Cæsar; they had naturally no sympathy with these tardy courtiers of their own success. They took Claudius, bearing him on their shoulders, and surround-

ing him with their drawn swords and raised pikes, and thus he entered the palace of his ancestors on Mount Palatine. He ordered the senate to appear before him, and nothing remained for the unfortunate fathers but to obey and pass the formal decree which bestowed the title of imperator upon the chosen of the Prætorian guard.

Thus Claudius became emperor of Rome by the favor of accident and the drawn swords of soldiers; yet he hardly dared believe in the reality of his good fortune or the safety of his person. For a month he did not venture to appear before the senate, powerfully impressed as he had been by the bloody deed which had so suddenly changed the whole tenor of his life; and when at last he gathered courage to assume his place on public occasions as Cæsar, he surrounded himself with precautions such as had been unknown to his predecessors. A number of officers of his guard had orders to keep close to his person, even when he took his seat in the Curia between the two consuls; soldiers surrounded him in the council-hall, in the audience-room and even in his private apartments. The ante-chamber in the imperial palace, heretofore open like all similar rooms in Roman houses, was now hung with curtains, and guards were stationed behind them, who examined all who entered. Not even women and children were exempted from this search after concealed weapons. When he went to the banquet-hall, guardsmen with lances in hand stood at the head and foot of his couch, and instead of the fair slaves in flowing garments and wreathed with flowers who waited ordinarily on the guests, he had soldiers to serve him at table. Even when he condescended to visit favorite friends, their houses had to be searched first, and, if they were sick, the chamber of the patient and his very bedclothes were not exempted.

One of the first acts of the new ruler was the recall of

his two nieces from their exile, and thus Agrippina rose again as suddenly as she had fallen two years ago, exchanging the dreary desert of her barren island for the splendors of the imperial palace, and the solitude of an exile for a host of admirers and flatterers, who quickly surrounded the reigning beauty of the capital, the all-powerful niece of the emperor. All the honors and dignities, of which she had been deprived by her cruel brother, were restored to her; and even the confiscated property was taken from the unlucky possessors, and, increased by liberal additions, returned to the great Augusta.

Agrippina was twenty-five years old when Fortune favored her once more, and brought her back in the full energy of her youth and the prestige of her beauty to the scene on which she had so long ruled supreme and now hoped to achieve even greater successes. With thoughtful reserve she abstained from using the newly-won favor at court for the purpose of gratifying her thirst of revenge, but followed wisely the example set her by the emperor himself, whose policy it was evidently to prevent further dissension and to conciliate the inflamed minds of the Roman people. Naturally kind-hearted and benevolent, he made it one of his first duties to re-establish in public esteem the memory of his ancestors and relatives without making invidious distinctions, and to show how fully he forgave and forgot the ungenerous treatment he had himself received at their hands. Festive games were held to honor some, monuments were erected to others, and solemn decrees issued to recall the great deeds of men, even like Antonius, defeated at Actium. That he suppressed the formidable lists of suspected persons found among the effects of the late emperor was most gratefully appreciated by the masses, while they heartily concurred

in the order that all his statues and images should be removed on the instant.

Agrippina was wise enough not only to join him in his conciliatory policy, but to give a striking evidence of her noble sentiments by an act of great self-control, which it must have cost her, with her passionate, impetuous nature, no small effort to carry out fully. The mutilated body of her cruel brother was still lying, unburnt and unburied, in the gardens of a rich banker's villa, and disturbed, it was reported, by ghastly apparitions the slumbers of the watchmen and the peace of the whole neighborhood. Agrippina availed herself of this circumstance in order to win the hearts of the still numerous friends and adherents of the murdered emperor, by an act of piety toward the memory of the brother by whom she had been so badly used. It is not impossible that her own superstitious feelings confirmed her in this purpose, for the Romans of her day were credulous beyond anything we know in our day, and the belief in spirits and magic influences was common among the highest classes. The palace itself, in which the murder had taken place, was thus believed to have been haunted by fearful apparitions, which only ceased after the magnificent structure had been laid in ashes. Agrippina gave orders that the mutilated body should be exhumed, and after being burnt on a funereal pile of imperial dimensions, the ashes were deposited in the vaults of the Cæsar's with full and imposing ceremonies. The fickle Romans, who had been brutally and cruelly ill-treated by the tyrant, now wept bitter tears at his grave, and hailed with loud acclaims the noble and generous daughter of the beloved Germanicus, whom not so long ago they had suffered to wander alone and forsaken by all into bitter banishment.

As soon as her position was once more secured, she

turned her thoughts to a subject of vital importance to her, ambitious as she was, and determined not to rest till she held the supreme power in her own strong hand. Her husband had died some years ago, and the young widow looked around now among the great men who were fit to share her fortunes. Her desire was especially to obtain in return for her hand such wealth as was then required by all who aspired to high rank and power. She first cast her eyes upon Galba, who subsequently became emperor, but she met with such resistance, first on the part of his wife, and then on that of his family, that the negotiations were soon broken off. A brother-in-law of her first husband was next suggested to her, who combined the rare gifts of consular dignity, brilliant eloquence and enormous wealth in his person. He was, moreover, famous in society as one of the wittiest men of his age, and certain clever sayings of his were quoted long years after his death as among the best things ever produced by Roman wit. His statue was already standing in the Julian Basilica among those of the most eloquent men of imperial Rome. His relations, however, to Agrippina's family had not been pleasant, for, as the husband of the Brazen-Beard's sister, he had been compelled to carry on a long and bitter lawsuit against the latter in order to recover her share of the common inheritance of both. A speech which he had delivered on this occasion was long famous in the literary world on account of its beauty of form and the loftiness of its sentiments. One expression especially was frequently quoted as one of the noblest ever used in forensic eloquence. He had spoken of the noble and illustrious origin of both the contending parties, of the high rank they occupied in society and the universal esteem which they enjoyed, and then added that they who had already every advantage

that life can afford, "both lacked nothing less than that for which they were contending." His wife was unfortunately not his equal. Her sordid avarice was well known all over Rome, and the contrast between her colossal wealth and her miserly manner of life gave rise to countless merciless remarks among the gossips of the city. Thus it was reported that she actually sold her worn-out shoes. "Indeed she does not sell her old shoes," replied the witty husband, when accused of having himself spoken of it; "I never said that; I only said she bought old shoes."

When Agrippina had once determined to bestow her hand and her high rank upon Passienus the orator, she minded little the fact that he happened to be already married. Divorces, which for the first four hundred years of Rome had been practically unknown, though a statute permitting them was in existence from the beginning, had of late become so common that the man who had not married a series of wives, or the woman who had been content with one husband, was a prodigy. In vain had Augustus already passed laws, levied penalties and offered rewards to fathers and honors to women who were legally married; the freedom of celibacy survived after all other freedom had become extinct, and the men and women of Rome enjoyed and applauded the triumph of licentious love. In this instance there was little attachment between the ill-assorted couple. Passienus was quite ready to send the miserly Domitia back to her family, and to offer his hand and his countless millions to the emperor's beautiful niece. That the poor divorced wife remained her deadly enemy for life was a matter of little concern to the haughty lady; the circumstance only gave additional zest to her triumph, and made her enjoy all the more fully the great wealth which she found

at last at her disposal. The marriage was happy as far as the world knew, but it was not destined to be of long duration. The millionaire had made the sad mistake—the only blunder, it was said, of which he was ever guilty—as to name Agrippina and her son Nero in his testament sole heirs of his fortune, and then to linger too long in this life. He was much older than his ambitious wife, and there can be little doubt that at the very time of her marriage with him she was already looking forward to the day when his death would leave her in the undivided enjoyment of his enormous fortune. Now he declined to leave the world and his wife, and, if we believe the *Chronique Scandaleuse* of the time, means were found to aid Nature and to quicken her course. Passienus died, and the most magnificent funeral yet seen in Rome, and held at public expense, did honor to the man who had been a renowned orator, an illustrious statesman, twice consul, and, above all, the husband of the emperor's niece. He must have been as amiable as he was witty—a rare combination, especially at court—and moreover an enthusiastic lover of Nature, for Pliny, who had in his youth known the great man, tells us with warm admiration of the tender affection which Passienus had felt for a beautiful and majestic tree standing in the midst of an ancient beech wood that surrounded a temple of Diana on a hill near Tusculum. Following the example of the Eastern monarch in his love for a noble plane tree, the Roman statesman would lie for hours in calm enjoyment of the balmy shade; then he would rise, carried away by his love for the beautiful structure, with its strong, nervous branches, its glorious masses of foliage and the lovely play of light and shadow under its lofty dome, and kiss the tree, embrace it, and solemnly, as if in reverent ovation, pour generous wine upon its knotty roots. What

an idyl amid the bloody tragedies of imperial Rome! What pure and sweet affection in the heart of a weary man of the world, who had lived for years amid the intrigues of a court, and by the side of a woman the very incarnation of unscrupulous ambition and reckless pride!

12





V.

MESSALINA.

THE history of the world presents to us but a single instance of a heart which, though filled to overflowing with an insatiable thirst of enjoyment and uncontrollable passion, still had room for the cravings of ambition. Agrippina was not weary of life or conscious of declining beauty; she was still young; her charms were as powerful as ever, and enchained high and low, young and old, whenever she pleased to use them for her own purposes; and the earth had no joy, the world no delight, which she could not purchase by her beauty, her riches or her power. And yet she aimed higher. The throne for herself, and, after her, for her son, this was the goal of her ambition, and the time seemed to have come when she must go to work and achieve her destiny.

By one of those strange dispensations of fate, which appeared to the ancients a curious accident, while we look upon it as an instance of special providence, Claudius, the most despised of all the members of the imperial family, had ascended the throne, and now held in his hands the fate of the beautiful woman and of her ill-treated son. She did not for a moment dream of contenting herself with the satisfaction of obtaining a

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controlling influence over him, but, with an ambition almost sublime in its daring and its vastness, she determined to make herself his wife and to seat herself by his side on the throne. Nor did she see any serious obstacle in her way, except one, and this, insuperable apparently, was to her but a zest and a help in deepening the interest and increasing the value of the prize at which she was aiming. The emperor was married. His wife, the famous Messalina, was young and beautiful like Agrippina herself, and her aged husband loved her with intense, passionate adoration. Nothing daunted, nothing fearing, the future empress entered the lists, and the grand struggle between the two rivals, so well matched in transcendent beauty, rare talents and unscrupulous boldness, is one of the most striking scenes in that epoch so full of life and dramatic action.

Poor Claudius, stunted in body and mind, and concealing what powers he really possessed under a grotesque exterior and an almost idiotic indifference, had naturally had but little success in his efforts to obtain a wife. Twice he had been betrothed, but he had been forced to give up one love at the order of Augustus, and lost the second on the very day of his wedding. A third effort, more successful in leading at least to marriage, was deplorable in its results; he had to divorce his faithless wife and to refuse to acknowledge her children as his own. The same misfortune befell the unhappy man in a fourth marriage, and he was now nearly fifty years old when his sensuous nature tempted him to look around for a new wife, and to choose more unfortunately than ever.

Although he plays so pitiable a part in history that his own family looked upon him as almost an idiot, and historians have taken pleasure in recording all kinds of

ludicrous stories and disgraceful charges against him, it cannot be denied that his body was not all ugliness nor his soul all wickedness. His statue at the Vatican represents him by no means of repulsive appearance; his busts bear features marked with high intelligence, and his contemporaries, even while insisting upon his detestable habits, his ill-shapen legs and his tremulous, oversized head, admit that when he was seated his form was not wanting in authority and dignity. He was certainly more of a glutton than frugal Romans of olden times would have liked, but Louis XIV. has shown in later days that a good appetite does not necessarily condemn a monarch to imbecility; Louis XVIII., who resembled his great ancestor in this respect, yet surpassed him in wit; and Frederick the Great, the worthy rival of a Voltaire, died because he would not deny himself his cabbage and his pastry. Much allowance must be made for both the very coarse body in which nature had chosen to place his immortal part, and the wickedly bad education which he had received in his youth. The former gave him an air of stolid heaviness and awkward stupidity; the latter led to his brutal ill-treatment by relatives and courtiers alike, who would pelt him, in the emperor's presence, with olives and dates at table, or, when he fell asleep, put his shoes on his hands, in order to enjoy seeing him rub his face with them when he awoke. Thus neglected by Nature, treated by men with contempt and laughed at by his own family, he finally came to despise himself, or to feign a stupidity which might save him from further persecution, and to drown his silent grief in the pleasures of the table and the forgetfulness of strong drink. The bad effects of such a life were, no doubt, heightened by the diseased system of all the Cæsars. The first of them was epileptic; his successor a confirmed valetudinarian; the

face of Tiberius was disfigured by blains and blotches; Caligula was deadly pale, slept little and suffered from continuous dizziness of the head, while Nero gave unequivocal signs of madness. Claudius was not exempt from this sad fate of the Cæsars; he had a natural tendency to imbecility, but that tendency never entirely triumphed over a certain vigor of the intellect. As his features bore an expression of mournful intelligence, so his face excited a wonder in which ridicule and pity were strangely mixed. It was as if his soul were struggling against its coarse covering, and this effort was betrayed by the melancholy of his eyes. The same cause, no doubt, accounted for his startling absence of mind, which at times gave rise to grave charges of idiocy or incredible callousness.

His special misfortune was, not to be so bad, but so ridiculous. The people would have forgiven him his vices, posterity his nullity, but neither the one nor the other could resist the impression produced by his misfortunes as a husband. The poor man was a scholar, deep in Etruscan antiquities, little fit to engage the love of a beautiful woman; a pedant of deepest dye, who had no time to please his wife or to watch over her fidelity. He was hated by the former and deceived in the latter, and all this without enough suffering on his part to excite pity, or to rescue his fate from the ridicule that seems to be inseparable from old and unattractive men who marry young and beautiful women.

Hence the heart even could not have had anything to do with the readiness of Messalina to accept his hand, for she was barely sixteen, fair and free of fancy, and known as one of the most beautiful women of her age. Her future husband was three times as old, bodily infirm and unfit for society; his future elevation to the

throne was then not thought of by any one; and thus neither vanity nor ambition could have led to her choice. There was but one explanation possible; she wanted a convenient cloak for her vices and her wanton passions, and perhaps, being poor, felt the want of money in a society in which wealth began already to be more highly esteemed than rank or merit. What finally determined her, in all probability, to attach herself to the fortunes of a man like Claudius was the influence of her mother. The latter was the youngest sister of Agrippina's first husband, the father of Nero, and her own elder sister had been repudiated by her husband at the instance of Agrippina. Hence there was mortal feud between the two, and the triumph of coming, by the marriage of her daughter, so much nearer to the throne, and of seeing her finally empress, while her rival sank for a time into obscurity, was too sweet not to be purchased at much expense. The two adversaries, nearly of the same age, fairly matched in beauty and wealth, in birth and position, were not less equal in vice and wickedness, and the violent passions, the shameless profligacy and the infamous celebrity of both were equally well known to the world.

The child of such a mother was naturally prone to become an adept scholar in the school of vice, and thus Messalina's name has come down to us as the byword of reproach to her sex and the representative of all that is fearful in human nature, which presented no limits to her wanton passions. And yet, such was the wondrous charms of her person, such the marvelous power of dissembling which she possessed, that she not only inspired good, honest Claudius with a violent passion, but actually concealed her shocking life from him, and for years made him blind to her vices and credulous of her devotion.

The unexpected favor of Fortune which we have mentioned having suddenly raised her, when she was barely seventeen, to the throne of the world, it became the great task of her life now to maintain herself at that dizzy height, and to defend herself against the bitter envy and the busy intrigues of her rivals. It was then the great duel between the present and the future empress began, which has not its like in the history of Rome. The first thing to be gained was to obtain exclusive control over the emperor, but this was peculiarly difficult, not because he thought of resistance, but because he presented no point which could serve as a hold on him. He had no fixed plans, no firm convictions of his own; he wavered and wandered where decision or action was needed, and the whisper of a friend or a breath of suspicion could undo the work of years and ages. It became necessary to control him through those who ruled over him. Poor Claudius had been so hedged in on all sides by persons of stronger will than his own that even when he had nominally become the master of them all, he looked instinctively for somebody to direct his steps. Such men were, of course, not wanting, and he was soon surrounded by a host of women, freedmen, buffoons and slaves, a whole world of intriguers, who fawned upon him at one moment and frightened him at the next, so that a witty man of his time represented him as in a state of perpetual stupefaction. What he had done as a prudent, thoughtful and even kind-hearted man on the Forum these lackeys of high and low rank made him undo in his palace. If he had appointed one man to office, another man's name was substituted in the official notice, and he dared not remonstrate; his public judgments were reversed in private, and soon honors were distributed, commands given and benefices conferred, not as he

wished, but as those around him decided. A senator was executed in the morning. "Your orders have been obeyed," reports the officer. "But I have given no orders." "Never mind," cry the freedmen around the throne; "the soldiers have done their duty; they would not wait for orders to avenge Cæsar." "Well, then, if it's done, it is all right!"

These freedmen, therefore, had to be won. They were mostly Greek adventurers, whom it had become the fashion to entrust with the service at court and the duties of ministers. The great Polybius had thus become his director of studies and subsequently his historian; Narcissus his secretary, the "master's own master," the "lover of white dogs," as his friends called him; and Pallas his steward; while Felix, the brother of the latter, even commanded an army and a province, where he was forced to hear, perhaps not without emotion, his wicked and adulterous wife denounced to his face by the great Apostle. These freedmen were all-powerful during the thirteen years of Claudius' reign, as he knew nothing of government, having reached the age of fifty without acquiring the slightest knowledge of public affairs, and, contrary to the usage in other cases, had never filled an office, administered a province or commanded an army. He was afraid of the stern Romans, and ashamed to show his inferiority before able men; hence he preferred to employ men who were not even citizens, had nothing they could call their own but what he suffered them to possess, and still were clever enough to carry on the government in a manner by no means discreditable to his name.

It was the misfortune of Messalina to come in contact with these freedmen, who knew no law but the caprice of their master and no principle but that of securing his

favor. To enlist them on her side she amassed money and secured offices; then she lavished the former upon them, and selling the latter, divided with them the proceeds; where more was demanded, she entangled them in her fascinating caresses. This ruined her in the end, for the base-born foreigners were insatiable and had no faith; she lost her influence with Claudius, for which she had paid with her honor and her virtue, and forfeited all sympathy with her fate by this infamous association with wretched freedmen.

For a while, however, all went smoothly and fairly with the beautiful empress. Claudius imagined fondly that he was ruling the empire with the wisdom and energy of an ancient dictator, and believed firmly in the virtue and affection of his wife—an unparalleled example of blindness on one side and of the success of a heinous conspiracy on the other. The birth of a son, whom he called Britannicus, and then of a daughter, bound him still more strongly to his treacherous consort, for he loved the children with touching tenderness. Besides, they stood henceforth between him and dangerous pretenders to the throne. Hence he permitted the mother to accept the title of Augusta, while he declined for himself and his son that of Augustus, and allowed her to be worshiped as a goddess, so that we have her coins yet, on which she appears as Ceres, holding in her right hand her children and in her left the blessed fruits of the field.

In the mean time, however, Claudius had become more and more savagely fond of bloodshed and horrors of every degree, till no one of his friends knew when the caprice might seize the emperor to order his torture or instant murder. He loved to see men fight with wild beasts, and never failed to appear the first at public games; and even when he retired to his breakfast, he seasoned his

gluttonous enjoyment by ordering some awkward servant or unlucky menial to be despatched in his presence. To watch the play on the features of dying men delighted him, and the knives with which he ate were made of the swords of two gladiators who had pierced each other at the same instant. To see a single champion opposed to a gigantic elephant, or to watch a lion eat a man alive, gave him intense pleasure; and from such scenes he turned with renewed zest to gigantic combats, in which hosts of men and herds of beasts were slaughtered. And yet he seems to have been conscious of his own degradation, for he ordered the statue of Augustus to be removed from the circus, because, he said, it was alike unbecoming that it should witness the murder or be veiled for ever.

The man who thus loved to see the shedding of blood and to watch the agonies of the dying, at whose beck hundreds were executed and the noblest gave themselves to instant death, lost naturally all respect for the living, and the mere suggestion of a bystander would lead to an immediate sentence. Messalina, always at hand and always ready to charm the weak old man by her beauty or to frighten him by her dark insinuations, was thus enabled to rid herself of all who threatened to become dangerous rivals. Thus she drove the beautiful Julia, the emperor's own niece, into lifelong exile, because she was jealous of her fascinations; and banished the philosopher Seneca for long years to the rude and pestilential shores of Corsica. Another victim was her own stepfather, Silanus, whom she hated with implacable enmity, as Potiphar's wife hated Joseph, and whose death she accomplished in a remarkable manner. He had been ordered to appear at an appointed hour before the emperor, but early in the morning, Narcissus, who was her ally, burst into Claudius' chamber with affected alarm,

and pretended to have seen in a dream how he had been murdered by Silanus; at the same time Messalina rushed in and declared that she also had been warned in like manner; and when, a moment after, the unfortunate courtier presented himself according to appointment, the frightened emperor had forgotten all about his own order, fancied himself attacked by Silanus and instantly ordered him to be executed!

Messalina, now all-powerful in the palace and true mistress of the empire, disdained from year to year more haughtily to conceal her disgraceful life even under the customary veil. Like all great ladies of Rome, she had her well-known lovers, from the brilliant court physician, who received two thousand pounds for an operation, to the handsome ballet-dancer Mnester, who long refused her favor, and was at last ordered by Claudius himself to do whatever she might command, whereupon the empress honored him with superb bronze statues, which adorned the city in various places. But her passions were not satisfied with dishonoring the emperor's palace; she sought to gratify her desires in the houses of friends and in the company of the lowest, until even the servile senate and the half-indignant, half-amused people thought the cup full and the time come for making an end to such atrocious misdeeds.

It so happened that just at this time Agrippina began to reap the reward of her wise and cautious policy. She was now the only surviving member of the family of the great Germanicus, and, warned by the sad fate of her sister and her cousin, who had ventured to enter the lists against the all-powerful empress, she found it expedient to be perfectly quiet for a time and to wait patiently for the opportune moment. This prudence saved her. She was cunning enough to see that a character like that of

Messalina was not likely to remain long a contented partner of the highest power. Her avarice and her cruelty, her passion for love affairs and her dangerous relations with the treacherous freedmen of Claudius, her almost sublime *abandon* and her youthful recklessness, could not but make her soon forget the consideration she owed to her indulgent husband, and must ere long afford Agrippina an opportunity to avenge the murder of her sister Julia and to gratify at the same time her own burning ambition.

She lived, therefore, unmarried and apparently in strictest seclusion in Rome and at her villas near by, entirely devoted to the education of her son Nero, and yet never losing sight for a moment of public affairs and the secret history of the court. Soon she passed among the people for a martyr; mother and son were both looked upon as injured and ill-treated, and popular sympathy at last became outspoken. When the six hundredth year of Rome's existence was celebrated by magnificent public festivities, Trojan games also were performed in the circus, in which the young sons of the great of the empire appeared on horseback and repeated the heroic deeds of Greeks and Trojans after the record of Homer. The emperor himself presided, and all Rome was present. The son of Claudius and Messalina, though only six years old, appeared among them, but the people hailed with loudest cries and unanimous acclaim the child of Agrippina. They saw in him the only scion of the noble blood of their ill-starred favorite; they loved him for his father's sake; they admired his beauty; they sympathized with him in the dangers and persecutions to which, report said, the enmity of Messalina exposed him daily, and more still in his marvelous hairbreadth escapes. Was it not current among them that Messalina had actually

sent murderers to strangle the boy-prince in his siesta, but that, at the very moment when they entered the room, a snake, watching over the slumbers of the intended victim, had uncoiled itself from under his pillow and hissed with threatening fury at the miscreants, so that they turned and escaped in frightened haste? It is not improbable that the cunning mother, who knew her people thoroughly in all their fickle fancies and subtle superstitions, had herself invented or at least given currency to the pretty story, and, when she found how well it took and how useful it was to her interest, had done all in her power to strengthen the impression. She had the couch searched and found there the skin of a snake, and this was set in a magnificent bracelet with a golden medallion attached, which young Nero had to wear at her command for a long time as an amulet on the right arm. How correctly she counted upon such fanciful belief we may judge from the fact that her son only laid it aside when he and his mother became bitter enemies; but when suffering and sorrow came to him also, and the poisoned dregs in his cup of life had to be drunk, he searched long and anxiously, but in vain, for the much valued token of fortune.

This simple incident, apparently a mere freak of popular favor which greeted Nero, and trifling in itself, was ominous to one who knew the court of Claudius as well as Messalina did; it seems of a sudden to have opened her eyes to the danger threatening her from Agrippina, and to have filled the cup of her deadly enmity to overflowing. She saw, as if by the rending of a veil, Nero, though but ten years old, almost worshiped by the people and beloved by his grand-uncle the emperor. She saw his mother, the only surviving niece of Claudius, enjoying the privilege of free access to him and of his confidence in

state affairs, in which she had ripe and ample experience; powerful in her full beauty, her genius, her exquisite cultivation and her cunning craft; victorious over every man that came within the reach of her blandishments, and unscrupulous in her means and her measures. Not that she foresaw, for a moment, the terrible storm that was even then rising on the horizon and would soon discharge its full fury on her sin-laden head; not that she could have anticipated her own premature death and the guilty glories of her rival. She felt only instinctively that on that day the lists had been opened, the challenge had gone forth and a mortal duel was to be fought, to be witnessed by the world and to be spoken of till eternity. Even at the vast distance that divides us in time and in space, and far more in altered thoughts and changed feelings, from the scene, we stand amazed spectators at a conflict waged by two women of highest rank and brightest talents—an encounter of perfidy and intrigue which convulsed the world and ended in the lasting infamy of the combatants and the wretchedness of the empire.

The empress was nothing daunted when she first prepared for the contest. She had many an advantage on her side. She was fifteen years younger than her adversary, and her beauty glowed in irresistible freshness and power; to this she added her imperial dignity and her absolute control over Claudius. But Agrippina had on her side what fully outweighed these advantages—a character of far superior energy, for although both women were well matched in ambition and unscrupulous daring, Agrippina's will was immeasurably stronger. Her steeled resoluteness knew none of those capricious changes and frequent moments of sudden weakness which overcame at times the younger heart of Messalina, and made her weep at the fortitude of a victim even while she hastened

his death. Messalina was reckless and rash; she was intoxicated with her unfailing good-fortune, her position and power and the confidence in her husband's devotion. And above all, she had one weakness which became the rock on which the full-freighted ship of her triumphs was wrecked: her heart was, in spite of the incredible dissoluteness of her life, still capable of a genuine passion, which, when it took possession of her, made her neglect all warnings, forget every precaution and boldly defy all consequences. Her adversary was cold and heartless, profuse in her expenditures and lavish with her favors only in order to reign, and perfectly calm and collected in every step which she took. Can we wonder with whom the victory finally remained?

It was such a passion which seized Messalina's strange heart just at the time when her suspicions had been aroused and the combat had silently begun. The man for whom she thus unconsciously sacrificed her power, her honor and her life was reputed to be the handsomest man in all Rome. His father had been a friend and lieutenant of the great Germanicus, the favorite of his family, the partner in his triumphs, but also the companion of his tragic end. Like his noble patron, Silius also had fallen the victim of intrigue and envy, and escaped public execution only by suicide. His son had grown up favored by Nature above all the noble youths of his age, petted by the people and quickly rising from honor to honor. Then he had been noticed by Messalina, and, finding favor in her eyes, he had been weak enough to sell his honor and to divorce his wife. His reward was the passionate love of the empress and the nomination as consul—a reward for which he had to pay dearly even while the sunshine lasted and the cup of joy was full; for Messalina knew no bounds to her love and no discre-

tion in her conduct: she visited him constantly, not in secret, but with a large retinue and in public; met him whenever he went out for his own purposes, and thought so little of what was as much due to his safety as to her own honor—to say nothing of that of the emperor, whom she simply forgot or despised—that she bestowed upon him honors and offices, estates and costly presents, until in the end the slaves, the freedmen and the very officers of Claudius were daily seen in attendance at the house of Silius. The beautiful favorite trembled in the midst of his good fortune; he saw the sword of Damocles hang over his head. The dangers of such a liaison, the wrong he committed in accepting such favors, were clear enough to him; but what could he do? If he resisted, his ruin was certain; if he yielded, some door of escape might yet open, and the advantages certainly were great enough to make ample amends for much that he had to endure and to fear.

But Messalina was soon weary of even the little restraint she had thought proper at first to impose upon herself in her relation to Silius. Her love to him was simple madness, and she determined to risk her honor, her imperial dignity and even her life in order that he should be hers entirely and exclusively. As if Fate had really, according to ancient belief, made them mad first before bringing destruction upon them, both conspired to bring about a crime which has no parallel in civilized life and shocked the most sacred forms and feelings of society. Messalina had been faithless to Silius, for her amour, however flagrant its guilt, had lost its main charms as soon as it became public and permanent, and the lover fretted impatiently under the favors she bestowed upon new and unknown rivals. He was mortified and alarmed, and summoned courage to demand the

fulfillment of her promises. In order to win her over, he offered to put Claudius out of the way, to reign in the name of Messalina's son, the last scion of the family of the Cæsars, and to let her retain, in his arms, all the splendor and power which she now enjoyed by the old emperor's side. Messalina's mind was inflamed by the prospect of such a marriage while her husband was still alive, and by the very grandeur of its infamy, which gave the highest flavor to the crime in her disordered imagination. Whether she really persuaded her credulous husband to grant her a secret divorce on the plea that astrologers and soothsayers had warned him against terrible dangers which threatened him through his wife, or whether she openly defied his authority, meaning to have him murdered soon after—she married her lover in open daylight, before all Rome, listening to the solemn words of the diviners, walking in procession to the temples, sacrificing to the gods and reclining at the nuptial board, surrendering herself finally to the embraces of a new husband and the rites of the nuptial-chamber in the face of the empire!

When the news reached the emperor, the sluggishness of his feelings was such that he did not think of any necessity to defend himself, the state and the people with a high hand against the most flagrant outrage known in the history of man. But his masters, the freedmen, had a stronger motive to be shocked and terrified by the astounding news, for they felt that their own lives were in danger when the all-powerful woman rose to the height of such audacious defiance, and when by her side there appeared not, as heretofore, some low-born freedman or an obscure dancer, but a noble patrician, who might well think of seating himself, through her aid, on the throne of the Cæsars. Had she not but a short time before ac-

cused their colleague Polybius, simply because he was a friend of Seneca and of the great Agrippina, and procured his death? They felt that there was danger in delay, and that if they would save their places, their influence, perhaps their very lives, they must lose not a moment to anticipate the daring empress. And what better ally could they seek in such an emergency than the arch-enemy of her whom they wished to ruin—the daughter of Germanicus?

Agrippina, however, was too wise even now to forget the necessity of great prudence in her joy at seeing the hour of her revenge approaching. She received her new friends coolly and cautiously, and although she no doubt gave them good advice and clever suggestions, she took good care not to appear personally in the affair; for she knew full well that there is no character more difficult and dangerous to deal with than that of a weak and impressible man like Claudius, who was quite capable of being still devoted to his worthless consort, and might, at a word from her, deluge the palace with the blood of her adversaries.

Claudius was still engaged at Ostia in reforming the morals of the world and the defects of the alphabet: he had just issued edicts against the manners of women at the theatres, and added three letters of his own invention to those of his forefathers. He built magnificent aqueducts, and ordered by special decree that the inside of wine-casks should hereafter be pitched more carefully; he sent to a German tribe a king whom he had chosen and well trained after the manners of the Romans, and he defined with minuteness the duties of certain receivers of taxes. He was, in fact, too busy in reforming the morals of the empire to find time to watch over the morals of his own household, and whilst all Rome

resounded with the horrible profligacy of his wife, he alone did not know it or pretended ignorance. At this moment he was superintending the unloading of large stores of grain, which had just arrived from the East, and in offering sacrifices to the gods, who had sent propitious winds to save Rome from the dangers of a threatened famine. He celebrated the happy occasion by additional feats of extravagance and gluttony at his meals, seldom rising from table till he had gorged himself to repletion. His banquets were more splendid than ever, and the number of his guests increased so vastly that the tables had to be spread in open halls and ample pleasure-grounds, where his couches were crowded by many hundreds. Nor did he escape the usual evil consequences of gross intemperance, and the pains from which he suffered such anguish that he more than once seriously thought of ending them by suicide were caused by this daily abuse. Whether it was the desire to stimulate his jaded appetite, or an effort to forget what was passing in his own household, he now gratified his senses to the utmost and spent many hours in a state of stupor.

Messalina had remained behind in the city, under the pretext of indisposition, but in reality in order to carry out her darling project. Her place was filled, for the time, by two ladies of high rank, Calpurnia and Cleopatra, whom the aged emperor esteemed highly. These were won over by Agrippina, and made to play the first part in the conspiracy. They managed, in an apparently accidental manner, to announce to Claudius the circumstances of his dishonor; and although he probably knew all about the marriage with Silius, he was startled when they represented the act to him not only as an insult to the husband, but in the graver light of treason against the Cæsar and impiety toward the gods. He had thought to

avert a danger by consenting weakly to lose his wife, and he now learnt that this was likely to be the very peril against which he had been warned by the soothsayers. The chief officers of his court, the knight to whom the all-important duty of supplying Rome with grain had been entrusted ever since the earliest days of Tiberius, and the commander of the imperial guard, all confirmed the assurance of his freedman Narcissus that Messalina had married Silius only for the purpose of placing her husband on the throne and of ridding herself of Claudius. All whom he consulted in his terror urged him to lose no time, as the new husband of the empress might take possession of Rome at any moment, and advised him earnestly to hasten at once to the city and assure himself of the fidelity of the Prætorian guard. The poor, bewildered man, who had never possessed any energy or presence of mind, was thoroughly helpless for the time, and went maundering from one to the other, asking whether he really still was emperor or already a subject of Silius? It was with great difficulty that Narcissus and his friends at last persuaded him to enter his carriage and to move toward Rome, for his heart was torn with contending feelings, and his blind love for his beautiful wife struggled hard with his fears for his throne and his life.

And what was Messalina doing in the mean time? Rejoicing with ecstasy in the success of her bold and defiant enterprise, and utterly reckless of the fearful consequences it might have for her and all she held dear upon earth, she gave herself up, heart and soul, to the intoxication of the moment, and shared the exulting frenzy which was then reigning throughout the land; for everywhere songs were heard mingling with the clash of deafening music and the shouts of excited multitudes celebrating the daring defiance of the adulterous empress! They sang:

" In the vats of Luna
This year the must shall foam
Round the white feet of laughing girls,
Whose sires have marched to Rome."

It was the middle of October, the season of the vintage, which has ever been the merriest time for all Italy. In every villa the grapes were gathered amid a thousand jokes and gibes; the little statues of Bacchus, which had been hung up in early spring to bless the growing plants, were taken down with half-earnest and half-mocking thanks, and the huge baskets carried, full and flowing, to the vats. The slaves, merry already with the sweet wine, could be heard everywhere treading the grapes with naked feet and singing ribald songs, while the overseer was carefully watching that the first flowing off was set aside for the master, apart from the latter draining, after pressing the husks a second time, which was afterward sweetened and mixed. The whole land resounded with the exuberant, roysterous spirit that marked the high and solemn festival; wild license ruled in town and in villa according to immemorial custom, and the traveler saw with alarm the grotesque masses of dancers leering at him by the wayside, or marveled at the uncouth sounds from under the grateful shade of large copses of wood. Even on the larger villas of great lords the mirth was apt to grow fast and furious, and the owners were willing once more to exchange the fresh delights of the country for the heat, the wealth and the roar of Rome.

The same delirious joy which thus reigned throughout the land seemed to have seized Messalina amid her magnificence of sin, and she threw herself with perfect rapture into the flood of feasts, in which she could drown her fears and her remorse. On the very day on which her

enemies accused her in Ostia of high treason and her life was hanging upon a thread, she abandoned herself with mad delight to the gorgeous spectacle of a masquerade. The suburban palace of the bridegroom had become a vineyard; in the gardens were placed innumerable baskets adorned with costly carvings and full of luscious fruit, while everywhere huge vats overflowed with the precious blood of the grapes. Her women, dressed in the skins of fawns, performed wild dances in honor of Bacchus, forming a chorus for the chief personages, who led, in weird beauty, the mad procession of half-drunk bacchanals. First and foremost came the fairest couple that Rome had ever beheld—the lovely young empress and the handsomest man of the empire—walking side by side on high buskins and in magnificent splendor. Messalina represented Ariadne, her hair flowing loosely in golden curls over shoulders and bosom, and her longing, grateful eyes glancing fondly at the Bacchus by her side, who was swinging his thyrsus-staff with careless grace and wound the long vines of ivy that were wreathed on his brow around the neck and arm of his beloved. Flowers seemed to bloom forth as if by magic under the footsteps of the celestial pair; bowers of beautiful foliage with long clusters of ripe grapes encircled them as they advanced in rhythmic dance, and behind them came the tiny god of love with a thousand lovely Amors and hideous satyrs. Thus they went through the cunning mazes of the dance, which was to express the winding ways of the labyrinth, and palace and garden were filled with an intoxicating perfume of more than mortal enjoyment. High and low, old and young, all were seized by the whirlwind of rapturous delight, and those who could not follow the dance sought relief in some unusual exertion. Thus it happened that the imperial court

physician had, in the exuberance of his happiness, climbed up a lofty tree in the park. They asked him with taunting laughs what he saw up there? "A fearful storm coming up from Ostia," was the answer, and the guests, who afterward recalled the portentous words, were doubtful in their minds whether he had really seen the dark thunder-clouds on the far horizon, or whether he had spoken, as often happens, unconsciously, words of prophetic import.

For there was indeed a fearful storm coming up from Ostia, which was soon to discharge its flashes of lightning and its thunderbolts upon the drunken followers of Bacchus in the mad empress' gardens. The friends of Messalina, no longer doubtful as to the true intentions of the enraged husband, had found means to send her warning. Messengers, despatched by various courtiers, arrived in quick succession while the wild orgies were still rising higher and higher, and brought the news that Claudius knew all, and was coming, full of wrath, to take vengeance on the guilty. The frightened guests scattered in a moment as the evil tidings swiftly spread, but before they could sober sufficiently to lay aside their scanty disguise and to reach a safe shelter, they were picked up here and there by detachments of troops who had been sent to surround the palace and the gardens, and now made them exchange the wreaths of ivy for clanking chains, and the delights of the feast for the horrors of dismal dungeons. The lovers also parted in fearful affright. Silius, trying to hide his fears under the appearance of calmness and confidence, went unabashed to the Forum, as if he proposed to attend as usual to his official duties. Messalina fled to her magnificent gardens on the Pincian Hill, which had once belonged to Lucullus, and where now stands the far-famed villa of the Medici.

It was in this most lovely spot of all Rome, amid the beauties of Nature and the masterpieces of Art, that the last tragic scene was enacted which ended a life of unequaled brilliancy without and unfathomed corruption within. There seemed to be an act of retributive justice in the selection of this spot for the purpose. For, in order to obtain these beautiful gardens, which she had long coveted, Messalina had prevailed on the weakness of her imperial lover to put the owner to death. This was the great Asiaticus, a man who showed the strangest mixture of unbridled voluptuousness to which he had sacrificed his fortune, his time and his talents, and of refined philosophy, the very sublimity of epicureanism, so that he ordered in the hour of his death that the funeral pile should be moved aside some distance, lest the smoke of the fire which was to burn his body should injure his beautiful trees. It was here, in the presence of the murdered man, that the beautiful criminal prepared for the crisis.

Whatever passions may have torn her heart—love for the beautiful Silius, rage at the threatened danger, or even fear of the insulted emperor and husband—her head was as cool as ever, and still “magnificent in sin” she only saw her condition in greater clearness by the aid of the lightning flash which had broken in upon her happiness with such fearful suddenness. Relying now, as she had ever done, mainly upon the irresistible charm of her beauty, she resolved to seek and confront her husband, hoping that to be seen by him would be to be forgiven. If her sins rose at this critical moment before her mind’s eye, as they are apt to come up inopportunely at such times, she quickly pushed them aside; and the greatest of all, the fearful wrong she had done the kind old emperor, she was not even conscious of, so strangely

blinded was her eye, so thoroughly stifled the still, small voice of her conscience. To enhance the power of her beauty, she dressed herself in deep mourning with exquisite simplicity, and ordered the tutor of her two children to take them at once to their father’s presence. The only aid she invoked was the most powerful friend she could find in the empire: this was the presiding vestal, whom she besought to ask Claudius, in his capacity as supreme pontiff, to grant her an audience, and then use her influence over him in her behalf. That the old lady should have promised, in her high and peculiarly honored position, to intercede for Messalina, not with the husband, nor with the emperor, but with the sacred head of the church, proves that she either was ignorant of the fearful crime of the empress, or that the latter never really committed the act of which she was accused by her enemies. Then the trembling empress went her way, accompanied only by three of her women, who remained faithful to her in this her hour of sore peril, walking on foot through the whole city, from the temple of Vesta to the gate of Ostia, with an air of distress and deep sorrow around her, on which she had counted for commiseration. But such was the levity of the people, and such the readiness to worship the rising sun and to forget in an instant fallen greatness, that she received not a word nor a gesture of compassion on her long, painful road; and finding at the city gate a common gardener’s cart, which was used to remove offal, she mounted it with sad forebodings and sinking heart and proceeded on the road leading to Ostia.

She had not far to go before she saw at some distance before her the train of the emperor; for Claudius had been following in the wake of his orders, and came but slowly and timidly, as he was, with habitual indecision, not sure yet either of what he was to decide on himself

or how he would be received in Rome. In fact, he was so distrustful of men generally, and had especially so little faith in the commander of his guards, that he was desiring time to prepare his mind for all emergencies, and meditated whether he would enter the city as the emperor of Rome or as the prisoner of his own subject! Fortunately, his favorite, Narcissus, had the decision which was wanting in Claudius; he persuaded him easily, playing on his fears, that in such a crisis the command of the guards was safer in the hands of his freedmen than of an ambitious soldier, and thus at the same time removed all danger from that side and became himself absolute master of the occasion. He not only assumed instantly the command, but pretended that for this purpose it was necessary for him to be in closest intercourse with his master, and took a seat in the emperor's carriage; for he trusted neither the emperor, whose fickle temper and easy pliability he knew but too well, nor the two courtiers whom he had chosen to be his companions, for it was a great game he was playing, and where his life was staked against the charms and the influence of a Messalina it was not safe to trust any one but himself. He was soon made aware of the correctness of his calculations, for the emperor began to waver and to wail. At one moment he would rage at the abominable crimes of his wife, and at the next he would shed tears when he thought of her children, whom he loved so dearly. The two courtiers, also, were far too cautious to take sides as yet, and not knowing what might be the result of the approaching interview, they carefully abstained from uttering an opinion, and contented themselves, in spite of the freedman's urgent entreaties, with an occasional "How shocking!" or "Can it really be so?" Narcissus alone remained cool—so cool that Claudius began to be

more doubtful than ever as to his own position, and asked himself who was the real master of the world just then—Claudius or the freedman by his side?

At last they met—Messalina, more beautiful than ever in her studied simplicity of costume, her noble and delicate features filled with grief at her husband's suspicion, her brilliant eye full of tender supplication and trusting confidence in his mercy; Claudius, hideous in his imbecility, filled with fear for himself and doubt of others, but utterly helpless. As she approached she saw, no doubt, that in his face which made her abandon all hope to justify her misdeeds, and she endeavored to touch the one chord in his heart which she had never yet failed to make vibrate. "Hear the mother of Octavia and Britannicus!" she exclaimed; but the cunning freedman cried even louder in the ear of the bewildered emperor, "Silius!" and spoke to him hurriedly, passionately of the divorce, the marriage and the treason that made the name sting the unfortunate husband to the quick; and then he thrust a roll of papers in his hand—letters written by his faithless wife, and proving beyond all doubt her countless infidelities. The ill-fated man heard not the voice of his stricken wife; he did not see her fair form bending low before him, down to the dust of the crowded road; he had eyes and ears only for her unparalleled crimes. So the carriage passed. Farther on, an effort was made to stop it by the friends of Messalina, who appeared there with the two children of Claudius, but before the latter could decide between the dictates of policy and the yearning of his heart, which was touched by the sight of the little innocent ones, the terrible freedman had ordered them out of the way. As they arrived at the gates of the city another appeal was made. Here stood the great high-priestess of Vesta in her official robes and sur-

rounded by attending vestals; even Narcissus dared not offend the first among all the matrons of Rome, and so she was heard. The poor emperor seemed to be plunged into overwhelming grief, or perhaps it was only one of those unaccountable moments of absence which gave such a fearfully grotesque appearance to the ruler of the world; apparently, he did not hear a word of her request that the accused empress should not be sentenced without being heard in her own defence, and how she even claimed the privilege of her order to save a passing criminal from death. The freedman had again to speak for him, and he courteously but firmly assured the great vestal that his master would hear the accused and allow her full opportunity to defend herself, so that the high-priestess might return to her sacred duties quite reassured as to the fate of the empress. But this was exactly what the plotting freedman intended not to permit, for Messalina was never to see again the face of her weak and kind-hearted husband.

The poor emperor, so powerful in the eyes of the world, so helpless in reality that he could not free himself from the tyranny of a freedman, said not a word; his courtiers pretended to know not what to do or what to say, and Narcissus alone remained master of himself and of the occasion, and acted with unlimited authority. All obeyed him, and Claudius allowed himself to be dragged to the house of Silius and to be shown everything that could excite his indignation and his disgust. There were the exquisite works of art, the priceless treasures, the affectionate gifts which the treacherous wife had removed from the imperial palace in order to adorn the house of her love; there he saw the images of the ancestors of Silius in impudent prominence ranged along the sides of the hall, while those of the Cæsars and other kinsmen

of the emperor were hidden ignominiously behind the upstarts, and among these was pointed out to him especially the statue of the father of Silius, who had actually been condemned as a traitor, while a decree of the senate expressly ordered the destruction of all of his statues. Thus Narcissus fanned the flame, showing him Silius in the light of a rebel against the state as well as a traitor in his own house, defying the authority of the senate and insulting the ancestors of the emperor. From thence Claudius was hurried to the camp of the Prætorians, where all was prepared for the scene to be enacted. The troops were drawn up in order; their minds had been inflamed by rumors of conspiracy and rebellion, and largesses had been promised to their zeal and their promptness in action. It mattered, therefore, little to them that the wretched emperor, thrust upon the tribune, could utter but a few incoherent words prompted by Narcissus. His confusion and his evident misery were perhaps more eloquent than the best of speeches, and they demanded with loud cries the names of the guilty and their immediate punishment. This was exactly what Narcissus had desired. Silius was brought forward in fetters, and a glance at the freedman told him his fate. He died better than he had lived, for he disdained all defence and only asked for instant death. His petition was granted, and he and seven other men, knights of noble families, were executed on the spot, all dying with great courage and a dignity worthy of a better cause. Even the miserable dancer invoked in vain the mercy of the emperor, and showed the fearful scars on his body left by the cruel punishment he had suffered for refusing to accept the favors of the empress. Narcissus knew no pity, and the freedman shared the fate of the nobles.

In the mean time, Messalina had returned to the solitude

of her gardens, tossed to and fro in her mind by conflicting emotions. Now she would try humility, and write down appeals in touching terms of love and gratitude; then again her pride rose high, and she broke forth in fierce invectives against her enemies and her betrayers, whom she threatened to punish fearfully as soon as she should be restored to power. Now her insolence triumphed and now her fears, but at last the excitement gave way and she succumbed, little thinking how near her escape was for a moment; for Claudius had in the mean time returned to his palace, and, in spite of his rage, his grief and his harassing doubts, found heart to bathe, to anoint himself and to go to supper. Then, warmed by copious draughts of wine and generous cheer, he had softened and melted, and in an undertone, as if afraid of being overheard by those who watched every word and every motion, he had ordered that the unfortunate woman, as he called her, should appear on the next day and plead her cause.

Narcissus, promptly informed of the sudden change, knew that if Messalina ever saw the emperor again face to face, his head was gone. He felt that the decisive blow must be struck then, without a moment's loss, or the solitude of the night and the absence of the beloved companion would reawaken his love and defeat the conspiracy. He hastened, therefore, to the ante-chamber, where a detachment of the Prætorian guard was always in waiting, and boldly ordered the officer to go with his men and slay his victim. Such, he said, was the emperor's order. As he was known to be invested for the time with absolute power, the soldiers did not hesitate to obey his command, and hurried, with one of the emperor's freedmen, to the gardens of Lucillus.

The scene that presented itself there to their eyes was

heartrending. Messalina's mother, although long separated from her unfortunate daughter during the days of her splendor and apparent happiness, had come with maternal instinct to stand by her side in her time of misery and despair. The beautiful sinner lay exhausted by the fearful excitement of the day in silent despair at her feet, and listened with shuddering terror to the wise words of her mother. "Life is over," said the latter, "and nothing remains but to leave it decently." Like a true Roman she urged her unfortunate child not to await the arrival of the executioners, but to escape from their brutal hands. Alas! she little knew how vice and immoderate indulgence had corrupted her daughter's heart. Messalina was young and beautiful; she loved life and its pleasures, and had neither the will nor the power to leave it by an act of her own. With weeping eye and wailing voice she embraced the mother's knees, bemoaning her miserable fate, when suddenly thundering blows were heard amid the dead silence of the night, and the murderers rushed in tumultuously. The soldiers confronted her in stern silence, but the wretched freedman abused his momentary power by overwhelming the miserable woman with a flood of vile imprecations. Now only did she fully realize the horror of her fate and the necessity of acting; she seized the dagger offered her by her mother, but her heart was too faint, her hand too feeble, to strike a mortal blow, and the officer's sword had mercifully to end her tragic life.

The body was left on the spot, and the hot blood mingled in fearful retribution with the still fresh spots which that of the murdered Asiaticus had left on the beautiful marbles. The children arrived at the moment and found their mother lying dead in the midst of the dazzling splendor. Octavia sat by, hiding her face from the

ghastly sight, but she never forgot the horrors of that night.

And Claudius, the betrayed husband, the almost reconciled lover? He was still feasting at table when the terrible words fell upon his ear—Messalina is dead! His lips remained silent, his features unmoved. And yet he had loved her with all the tenderness of an affectionate heart, with all the passionate fervor of his declining years. Did he believe that she had ended her life with her own hands, or was his heart hardened and his mind darkened to such a degree that he really felt nothing? So much is certain, if we believe the reports of the day: that he gave no orders nor made any inquiries, but simply directed the cups to be filled, pledged his guests, listened to music and songs, and did the honors of his table with undisturbed calmness and dignity. Nor did he mention her name on the following day, if we do not credit the improbable anecdote that as he sat down to dinner he inquired with apparent ignorance of what had occurred: Why does not the empress come? The senate readily fell in with the line of conduct thus traced for its observance, and ordered Messalina's name to be instantly erased from all monuments and inscriptions. The courtiers forgot, with pliant memory, the unhappy empress, and the empty seat on the throne was ready to receive Agrippina.



VI.

THE WIFE OF AN EMPEROR.

THE throne was ready to receive Agrippina, but what a throne! Great must have been the ambition of her who coveted it, and greater yet her moral courage; for its hangings were dripping with the blood of innocent victims, hideous horrors lurked under every fold and fringe, and the vast halls of the palace in which it stood were peopled with the ghosts of murdered victims, through whose pale ranks alone the way was open to the seat of the Cæsars. In this grand structure on the Palatine mountain, resplendent with gold and filled with countless treasures, every room had its fearful record. Here was the passage in which Caligula, fresh from the play, was cut to pieces; there, lower down, the dungeon where Drusus died, trying in his despair to prolong his wretched life by eating the stuffing of his mattress and loading Tiberius with curses; in that superb hall with its gorgeous hangings, its carpets from Babylon and its marbles from Greece, Britannicus was poisoned at table and died in the presence of his murderous relative; and as you looked out of the window you saw the trees under which the bloody body of the most beautiful woman in Rome, and she an empress, had lain for hours unheeded and unburied. Before that door had been thrown the

emperor's infant child, rejected by him for some foul suspicion and left to die in the sight of all Rome; and through that open colonnade, with its beautiful columns of roseate porphyry, had been carried the countless corpses of men despatched on the instant at the master's bidding! And yet there lived a woman so bold in her aspirations, so determined in her purposes, that although she knew all this, and far more than the world has ever learnt of the terrible secrets of that palace, she vowed in her heart that she would sit on that throne, dwelling in the midst of those horrors, and defying the enmity of men and the wrath of the gods alike!

Agrippina resolved to be the wife of Claudius, and now, that the poor old man had been made a widower—he hardly knew how—she thought the way was clear. She looked upon him as all Rome did then—as a man of no mind and no heart, for, though now seated upon the throne of the Cæsars and master of the world, his had been a sad fate from earliest childhood. At his very birth the poor prince had been looked upon as guilty of a crime which few Romans ever found strength of mind to forgive entirely—he was born with a feeble constitution and distorted frame. The old idea of virtue and manliness being identical was so deeply rooted in the Roman mind that even long after the abandonment of female children, merely on account of their sex, was no longer customary, they still looked upon a sickly, and especially a crippled, child as undeserving of affection and unfit for life. The consequence was, that the poor boy, whom his father disdained to notice and whom his mother looked upon as a thorn in her side and a punishment sent by the gods, was left altogether to the care of domestics, and fell into the hands of an ignorant and brutal servant, whose duties had heretofore lain in the stables. As he

grew up, his mind showed the effects of the ill-usage he had received, and unable to redeem himself in the respect even of his parents by nobler qualities, he became to them and to the few who knew of his existence an object of disgust and annoyance. His childhood and youth passed thus wearily in one long sickness, uncheered by a parent's love or the affectionate care of friends and relations. His proud mother bestowed her caresses rather upon a pet eel in her enchanting villa at Bauli than upon her son, and called him a monster of a man, whom Nature had begun but never completed. She spoke still more harshly of his mind. "How," she said, "can a man be a greater fool than my son Claudius?" His grandmother, the haughty Livia, held him in such disdain that she rarely condescended to speak to him, and sent her orders to him through others or in short and peremptory letters. Even the great Augustus, so enlightened in most respects, and more likely than others of his race to feel sympathy with bodily infirmities, could not overcome the national prejudice, and felt deeply mortified that any one of his blood should be wanting in that noble presence and manly appearance which befitted his lofty station, and belie the spreading fancy that the gods had raised his family high above the lot of common mortals. He was not even aware that the poor, neglected boy had his ambition—that he studied hard, though in secret, and had already commenced those researches which enabled him some years afterward to write his twenty books of Etruscan history. The emperor neglected him altogether; the high places, the priestly offices, even the broad purple border that pointed out the nobleman,—none of these favors, which ordinarily fell to the share of the youngest members of the imperial house, came to cheer poor Claudius. There is something absolutely touching in seeing the ill-treated

prince, with the imperial blood in his veins, go out at night, borne by discreet slaves in a litter, to enjoy the exquisite happiness of wearing the toga of a grown man, which he dared not put on in broad daylight. As he grew up, he became more and more a source of embarrassment to the emperor. "We must take care," wrote Augustus to his mother, "not to let him be seen much in public; they might laugh at him and at us, and we must guard against it that the people should become used to talking and laughing at such things." He even took good care to write these letters half in Greek and half in Latin, for the shrewd monarch knew well the wisdom of "washing the soiled linen in the family," and did not wish the world at large to suspect the skeleton in the cupboard. "He may attend at the feasts of the pontiffs, but his cousin Silanus must sit by him and keep him from saying or doing foolish things; and he cannot be permitted to be present at the circus, for he would there be too conspicuous in the imperial box." He invited him at times to dine with him at the palace, so as to withdraw him, at least occasionally, from the bad company in which he was living, but he found his stammering annoying, his coarse jokes intolerable, and his manners unfit for his private table even. So he quietly laid him aside, bestowing upon him, as the only honor he ever received at his hand, the dignity of augur, as if he considered him too stupid to do anything but to divine the future!

Besides the want of personal strength and beauty, the poor prince lacked a still more important element of success—he had no wealth; if he had but possessed a few millions, no one would have seen his infirmities and his wit would soon have become famous. Augustus left him in his carefully-written last will, in which his affection or esteem was accurately expressed in tens and hundreds of

thousands, the ridiculous sum of forty dollars, and, to add to the bitterness of the insult, Tiberius sent him the same amount in reply to a petition in which Claudius asked for some of the honors and distinctions usually conferred, as a matter of course, upon the imperial princes. Even his humility and patience could not brook such treatment much longer, and when his house was burnt and Tiberius refused to sanction a decree of the senate which ordered it to be rebuilt at public expense, Claudius retired, in silent mortification, to his country-seat, where he surrounded himself with such companions as he could obtain. The men of his own class were too busy in paying their court to those who had power or influence; they had no time for the poor outcast. Left thus alone, living almost in concealment, he devoted himself to study; he became a good Greek scholar, a learned historian, a profound antiquarian, and wrote several works of respectable import. But when he made an effort to read in public new misfortunes befell him; a number of benches broke down under the weight of a corpulent listener, and as he was quite stout himself, the scene appeared so ridiculous to him and the audience that they broke out into joint roars of laughter, and his purpose had to be abandoned. Afterward, he wrote an account of the civil war, but there were so many personal allusions in the work that his mother and grandmother interposed and put their veto upon his enterprise. These literary efforts besides did little to raise him in the estimation of the Romans, who looked upon them, when standing alone, as an occupation unfit for a scion of the Cæsars. The man who did not exercise authority in some way, as commander of an army, as senator of the empire, in some high office, or, at the very least, as head of a family, was in their eyes, not a man, but a nobody—a soft, idle, good-for-nothing

citizen. This was, for generations, the stigma attached to the early Christians, simply because they despised worldly honors and did not love to shed blood. It was the fashion of the day to keep the vices of ancient Rome and to lay aside her virtues; they abandoned the purity of Cæsar only to be more cruel; they were no firmer than Cicero, but without his knowledge and his courtesy; they had lost the courage to shed their own blood for a great and holy cause, but they showed great energy in shedding the blood of others, and the Roman of the empire devoted all his strength and all his manliness to cruelty.

In the eyes of such a world, poor Claudius, good-natured, learned and absent-minded, appeared as a fool and a coward. They told him so, and he did not take the trouble to deny it; he found it even convenient to let the world think what it chose. He preferred his quiet, even life; he had become fond of good eating and drinking, and delighted in the society of his freedmen, with whom he could be perfectly free and easy. What with his books and his buffoons, the pleasures of the table and the gentle excitement of the dice, and the jokes and coarse flatteries of Greek adventurers, he could afford to console himself for the contempt of Rome. Unfortunately, he was not likely, in the intercourse with such men, to learn how to lay aside the natural foibles and the acquired faults which made him so unendurable to his haughty relatives and so ridiculous to outsiders. On the contrary, the slaves and servants, seeing the contempt with which he was treated by his own family, learned quickly to gain a certain ascendancy over him by encouraging him in his sensual pleasures and by playing upon his timidity and abject humility. Thus the unfortunate prince lost the little strength of will with which Nature had originally

endowed him, and became ever after a pliant tool in the hands of others.

Nevertheless, he was not without hope of better days to come. Was he not born on the day that was sacred to Hope and the anniversary of the capture of Alexandria? Had not the soothsayers predicted at his birth that he should ascend the throne of the Cæsars? And although his own sister, when she heard the prophecy, broke forth in pitiful lamentations over the sad fate of the Roman people that was to be ruled by such a man, Claudius cherished the hope and tried to prepare himself for it as well as he could by studies and careful researches. He counted, besides, upon the fact of his being, after all, the only true descendant of the Cæsars still living, and if there was any right to the throne, his was beyond all doubt the strongest. He knew, therefore, fully the grand reward which in all probability was to console him for years of bitter suffering, and his marvelous patience was scarcely altogether the effect of utter callousness. If Caligula could, for a crown, remain for years a perfect hypocrite, and play the devoted slave of the murderer of his mother and his brothers, Claudius might surely endure for a short time contempt and even ill-treatment when he saw as his final reward the rule of the world.

Under Caligula, when ambition and ability were dangerous qualities, Claudius had encouraged the belief in his imbecility, and often owed to his insignificance his safety and his life. The people, in their despair, occasionally remembered the poor descendant of the first Cæsar, and spoke of him with pity for his sufferings or with a latent hope that he might make them a better ruler. Caligula saw himself actually compelled to grant him at least the nominal honor of the consulship, and to allow him at times to appear at the circus or theatre in

the imperial box. But when Claudius, following the example of others, offered a million or two to be made one of the priests of the emperor-god, and then could not pay the whole sum, his property was confiscated and sold at public auction. In fact, he saved his life only by submitting in private to the most savage ill-treatment, confirming by his patient submission the idea of his imbecility. If he came too late to table, the amused guests would spread themselves out on their couches and let him wander awkwardly around in search of a place, or kept him standing altogether; if he fell asleep after dinner, they pelted him with the kernels of dates—imperial fun they thought it—put his sandals on his hands and enjoyed his wonder, when he awoke and rubbed his eyes, that he should have put on such very rough gloves. He was happy if the cruel emperor did not order him to be waked from his slumbers by the whips of his buffoons, and was content to be spared because his nephew could not do without the butt at his table! But, however much of this may have been assumed to protect himself against the ever-watchful jealousy of his fearful nephew, there can be no doubt that the part he played so long and so well became at last a habit, perhaps even a second nature.

When he ascended the throne, he was probably an honest, well-meaning man, who felt utterly unequal to the formidable task which fate had of a sudden placed upon his shoulders. He who had been scorned and scoffed at by the lowest of the emperor's slaves was now called upon to govern an empire, and his mind, which had never risen beyond the mysteries of Etruscan lore, was to solve, unprepared, the great problems of finance and statesmanship. His days, spent so pleasantly among silent books and devoted freedmen, were to be harassed

by appeals from haughty senators, insolent Prætorians and a restless people; his nights, given heretofore to carouses at table and the caresses of countless mistresses, were to be disturbed by the orgies of a profligate wife, and the anguish of being betrayed by her whom he loved, in league with his favorite attendants. And yet he retained his kindness of heart, and even became popular. When a fearful fire broke out in Rome and laid a large portion of the city in ashes, Claudius was seen seated, for two long nights, in a little office with two baskets full of money at his side, encouraging the workmen, chatting with the people, sending for his own slaves to help, and ordering even the soldiers to the assistance of the sufferers. He had another hold on the hearts of the people: he loved gladiators. The first rays of the morning sun saw him take his seat in his box, and when noon came, and the people went home to rest and refresh themselves, he remained at his place in the imperial tribune and amused himself with the rope-dancing and jugglers' tricks which formed a languid interlude between the tragic scenes of bloody combats. When these performances grew too tame and weary, he would often send for a fresh batch of gladiators to fill the hours of suspense; and if, in the course of the regular games, the supply of gladiators for the day was exhausted, he sent for a lot of prisoners, and when these gave out he was good enough to order playfully some of the audience, or even some of his attendants to go down into the arena and fight there for his and the delighted people's amusement. During the performance he was ever ready to bandy jokes with the rabble, to reply to insulting questions and to lower the majesty of the empire to the level of vulgar buffoonery. But his brutal indifference to human suffering was shared by the people; his taste for bloody spectacles fell in mar-

velously well with the barbarous fondness of the masses, and his vulgarity was either looked upon as gracious condescension of a master who held their lives in his hands, or felt to be a tribute paid to the people, who still liked to look upon themselves as the true masters of Rome. At all events, they soon learned to love and to worship him for his very weaknesses; and when one day, during his absence from Rome, the report spread that he had been assassinated, the exasperated populace rose *en masse* and accused the senate, accused even the army, of the murder, and gave them all up to the infernal gods. The frightened authorities had to send orator after orator to the Forum to convince the people that the emperor was alive and would soon come back to the city.

It was very different, however, within the palace. There his goodness was a crime and his fondness for games of no avail. When great questions of state were to be decided his imbecility reappeared. Need we wonder, then, that Claudius, in the utter weariness of his mind and the perplexity of his soul, looked to others for assistance, and sought eagerly for ministers to shape a policy and courtiers to carry it out for their helpless master? It was thus he fell into the hands of women and freedmen, who became the real ruling power behind the throne, and left him little beyond the name of Cæsar. As long as a Messalina was his wife the freedmen had it all to themselves; and a curious class of men they were, these despised and yet all-powerful freedmen, with whom Agrippina now entered into a close league in order to secure to herself the coveted seat on the throne.

These true rulers of the empire had all been originally slaves; but then, in those days, the only persons with whom the Romans were really intimate were their slaves. Their wives were at home spinning wool and nursing

children. They did not sit by the side of their husbands at table, nor go with them to the Forum, nor appear in their company in public. The only place of amusement for women was the Capuan Gate, where they took their walk in the evening: there they might be seen, from the dashing beauty in her gorgeous carriage to the Greek courtesan dressed in silk and gold; from the noble matron in her veil and long dress, whom a black African woman fans gently, to the bold and impudent slave who looks eagerly around for some one to admire her and to give her wealth and liberty. The Roman saw his friends only at meals and on the Forum during the sessions of the senate and the courts, or in the interval between two speeches. But when he was at home, in his bath or his library, and when he went out to the shops or merely to walk, the clever, cunning slave was always by his side, ready for every whim and thankful for every favor of his master; he lay at his feet at dinner to amuse and to flatter him; he listened to his griefs and managed for him his intrigues; he was his only confidant, his true friend. For the Romans accomplished so much in the world partly because of the wealth of noble qualities with which Providence had endowed them, but partly also because they had little to do besides their duties to their patron and their country. Everything else was done by their slaves. The physician who watched over their health, the artist who entertained them in their leisure hours, the sweet singer who soothed their melancholy, and the grammarian who taught their children,—all these were in the house, their servants and their slaves. If the Roman was given to literary pursuits, one of his slaves was his secretary, who read to him, discussed with him matters of science and art, and often rendered him essential assistance in his own labors. Were not the two great poets Terentius and

Plautus themselves but slaves? For everything could be bought in the Forum, even wit and learning. The great Seneca, well versed in all such matters, gives us a curious bit of satire on this subject. He had a friend, he tells us, who was the most stupidly happy man he had ever known. Only one difficulty troubled his otherwise perfect peace: his memory was so defective that he forgot everything, and could often not recall names as familiar as those of Achilles and Ulysses. What he did with other Greek and Trojans no one could tell who had not seen how great politicians would meet their clients on election day with the sweetest of smiles, take them cordially by the hand like dear old friends, and call them all possible names but their own. Nevertheless, he wished to be considered a learned man, and so he bought at enormous prices eleven slaves, of whom one knew all Homer by heart, another all Hesiod, and each of the remaining nine one of the great lyric poets. These he kept standing at the foot of his couch while he was at supper, and they prompted him with quotations as he needed them, now from one and now from another author. But oh the mistakes he made! for his hearing was bad, and often he stopped short in the middle of a verse. Fortunately, he did not mind it much, and soon came to persuade himself that all the knowledge which he thus literally owned was really his. A humorous friend once rallied him on the subject by challenging him to a wrestling match. "How could I," he said; "I have no breath?" "Why not? You have very athletic men among your slaves."

When these useful members of a Roman's family attained the great aim of their life and put on the freedman's hat, while their master presented them with a toga, they generally remained with him, from old attachment

and because it served best their own interests. They became as freedmen more useful than ever to their patron. Holding an inferior position and unable ever to attain to the higher offices of state, they could excite no jealousy, and were therefore safe counselors and reliable friends; bearing the same name and belonging to the vast family of the patron's clients, they added to the crowd of dependants by whom the great Romans loved to see themselves surrounded when they appeared on the Forum or the Field of Mars; and thus abroad and at home the intimacy grew, and the freedman became sooner or later the true confidant and only intimate friend of the Roman.

The freedmen of an emperor held the same position in the palace, only their relations were with the emperor and not with the family. The Cæsars could not yet wear the diadem and shut themselves up, like Eastern kings, in the privacy of their home; the great of the land were still too proud to serve them as the nobles of feudal times served afterward their sovereign, and for generations no free citizen could be found who would have been willing to act as an official at court. Freedmen alone held court charges. Besides, the Cæsars lived altogether in public; such was the return they had to make to the people, which gave them on its side unlimited and almost irresponsible power. They had to appear, day by day, on the Sacred Street, in the circus and the theatre; they must mingle with the crowd, call them, as Claudius did, My Masters, and show in every way their respect for those from whom, nominally at least, all power was believed as yet to proceed. Hence, from the days of Tiberius, there were, besides the officers of the guard, only freedmen to be found at court in all the important offices. They could be treated with confidence, for they had no ambition to

gratify and no dignity to compromise. At first they were merely the emperor's secretaries, treasurers and legal advisers, then they obtained inferior public employments as procurators or prefects in the provinces, and finally, in the degenerate days of the empire, they intruded even into the home government.

It was this class of men who became under Claudius all-powerful and virtually ruled the empire. There was a Pallas, who had already served under the great Antonia, and knew all the dangerous secrets of the court and the imperial family, holding their most important papers in his possession, and exercising through these a powerful control over his masters. He was minister of finances, and, by special order of the weak emperor, relieved of all responsibility for his high office. Content with an income of several millions, he amused himself in his leisure hours with sending orders to the senate and directing decrees to be issued as he wanted them. So great was the prestige attached to his name that when one of his orders excited their special admiration, these haughty senators sent to the former slave a deputation with the offer of an immense sum of money, great national honors, a genealogy in perfect order and a special vote of thanks, moved by a Scipio, because he, the descendant of the kings of Arcadia, had condescended to forget the dignity of his rank and be a minister of the Cæsars. The insolent Greek declined everything but the honors, feeling no ambition, as he said, to emerge from his poverty—a modesty which he could well afford with only three hundred millions in his pockets. There was Narcissus, who had also feathered his nest so well that when Claudius once complained of his financial embarrassment, he was advised to relieve himself henceforth of such trouble by going into partnership with his two

freedmen, Narcissus and Pallas. Being the emperor's private secretary, he wore the insignia of his office—a dagger in his belt—and was proud of being called by flattering courtiers the master's master.

There was Callistus, a freedman, who had been offered in the slave-market "as a slave good to laugh at," who had then served Caligula as secretary and entered into more than one conspiracy against his patron, but by great cunning escaped all evil consequences, and was now as powerful as ever, thanks mainly to the fact that he had always stood by Claudius in the days of his humiliation, and was therefore fairly entitled to share with him in his present splendor. All petitions addressed to the emperor went through his hands, and we can well imagine how the haughty freedman enjoyed seeing his beautiful hall, with its thirty pillars of onyx, crowded by the great and the noble of the empire, who were anxious to catch his patronizing glance.

Felix, the brother of Pallas, is perhaps the best known of this remarkable class of men, because of his prominence in the history of early Christianity. Having obtained the appointment of governor of Judæa, he gave himself up to the most flagrant vices, considering the favor he enjoyed with the emperor as a sufficient excuse for the worst of crimes. The husband of three queens, his pride rose till it could be borne no longer—neither by his masters nor by his subjects—and he fell into disgrace, but not until by his rapacity the great apostle of the Gentiles had been kept a prisoner for two years, and left in custody even after his departure for Rome. That he heard St. Paul's high moral sentiments, so utterly opposed to his unjust and vicious life, not without emotion, is perhaps all the good that history has to tell of this remarkable freedman.

Then there was Polybius, who had assisted the emperor for long years in his Etruscan studies, translated Homer into Latin and Virgil into Greek, and written the history of his beloved master. He alone appeared in public by the side of the Cæsar, and to him Seneca stooped to address a flattering petition in order to obtain through his influence the long-desired recall from his exile. Evidently a man of remarkable tact, he seems to have known his position well and to have determined to let the world know it also. Thus, he was once seated in the emperor's box in the theatre when an actor recited with marked emphasis the words—

"Intolerable is the slave in his good fortune,"

when immediately all eyes were fixed upon the former slave, now so high in favor. But Polybius replied, without a moment's hesitation and with great presence of mind, "And the great poet says also,

'And ruler became he who had been a shepherd of goats.'"

Busy tongues quickly reported the imprudent words to the emperor, who was generally very strict with his freedmen, coupling the report with dark suggestions of a conspiracy, but Claudius rejected the warning with the words, "We do not protect ourselves against a flea as we would do against a wild animal;" and Polybius escaped unharmed.

It was with these freedmen that Agrippina now endeavored to make common cause in order to secure to herself the seat on the emperor's throne for which she had been longing so many years. She found it, however, by no means an easy task to obtain their good-will; for they were shrewd enough to see her boundless ambition, and to feel that if she once obtained the complete control over the emperor which her beauty and her superior

mind were likely to give her, there would soon be an end to their own influence. Poor Claudius himself seems to have been hardly consulted on the subject. He was told he ought to marry, and various eligible matches were pressed upon him in spite of his reluctance; for he had himself told the Prætorian guards that his repeated misfortunes in married life had made him determine hereafter to remain unmarried, and the recent grief at the treachery and the terrible death of Messalina had confirmed him so strongly in this conclusion that he had even added, "May your own hands strike me down if I do not carry out my purpose!" The poor man, barely fifty-eight years old, but broken in mind and body by a life of vicissitudes such as rarely fall to the lot of men born in the purple, and exhausted by constant excess, was, however, not to be allowed his own choice. He was soon to break the promise, to his own utter ruin and that of his whole house, but his faithful guards were at least to be free from all guilt in the terrible calamities which he thus brought upon himself and the Cæsars.

The freedmen, who knew the poor emperor and all his weaknesses better than the members of his own family, came at once to the conclusion that he would be unable to bear a single life. They knew he would want a wife, as gray-haired old servants cannot do without a master; his soul, accustomed from childhood up to obey and follow others, would yearn for the unbroken domestic rule of a mistress in his palace. The three greatest among them looked, therefore, immediately around for some beautiful woman who might be to their master's taste, and yet allow them continued influence over his mind. Nor was female ambition less excited. Several ladies, renowned for their charms, coveted the great prize, each claiming a special right on account of her noble birth, superior beauty or im-

mense wealth; and while the favorite freedmen vied with each other which of them should make the fortune and obtain the good-will of a new empress, the candidates to the vacant throne themselves put forth all their power to secure the sceptre. Poor Claudius was sadly distracted by the jarring counsels of his friends and the bold attacks of ambitious ladies, and at last called his confidential ministers to an audience.

It was a great, a fatal day for Rome when the silken curtains of the vestibule were raised by beautiful slaves in Oriental costume of gorgeous colors to admit, one by one, the most noble Narcissus, who had just sent Messalina, in all the splendor of her beauty and the height of her power, to an ignoble death; the great Pallas, whom the world looked upon as the true ruler of the empire; and Callistus, the cunning, who held himself in discreet reserve to wield all the greater power because less suspected of influence. The guards in their imposing costume, shining with gold and silver, and covered with richly-encrusted medallions of gods and emperors, stood in long rows at the sides, while other slaves, brilliant in their youthful grace and vigor, glided silently to and fro scattering incense and bearing refreshments. A crowd of eager courtiers pressed in behind them, glad by such means to escape the insolence of the doorkeepers and privileged slaves. They were peremptorily stopped, however, at the inner curtains, and only a small number, whom a slight gesture of the minister's hand pointed out to the officer on guard, were admitted into the more private apartments. Here all, from the grave senator in his magnificent robes to the little infant prince who was to be presented to the emperor, were subjected to a minute search, lest under their inner garments some dagger or murderous weapon should be stealthily smuggled into the august presence.

After this humiliating ceremony the three freedmen at last passed silently into the sacred room where they were to meet in council. The hall was crowded with busts and statues; rich fresco paintings covered the walls and costly mosaics formed the floor; immense sideboards stood between the pillars of rare marble and precious porphyry, covered with gold and silver plate, of which each piece represented a fortune, while all around were ranged in grim array the dark old images of the ancestors of Claudius and the former Cæsars, together with the quaint forms of the household gods. Almost lost in this strange and ghostly assembly there sat, half reclining, a venerable old man with snow-white hair, of dignified and imposing appearance. His features were full of intelligence, and his eyes especially of great depth of expression. Behind his couch of ivory, covered with rarest purple, stood a motley crowd of friends—as he persisted in calling his courtiers—of patricians and freedmen. There were ruined nobles and powerful slaves strangely mingling with each other; barbarous Gauls, who had been made senators, and Romans of older blood than the emperor who had given up their rank because of their poverty; astrologers, Jews and Greek philosophers, who were driven once every ten or fifteen years from Italy, and ever came back in larger numbers and with heightened ambition; deputies of powerful cities, ambassadors of distant nations, and even kings from the East and the West, who cast their diadems at the feet of the master who dared not place a crown on his own brow.

As the freedmen enter one by one and offer their pious wishes for the master's welfare, the emperor rises. But alas! all the dignity he had shown when reclining vanishes as if by magic. He comes forward, and his tottering walk, caused by a weakness in his right foot, which

he dragged slowly after the other, and his awkward carriage, destroy in an instant all illusion; he attempts to smile at their extravagant flattery, and he breaks out into a loud, coarse laugh, which resounds far down the long corridors; he says a few words and stammers most painfully, while his shaking head and trembling limbs keep pace with his broken speech. Immediately he was surrounded by the crowd of courtiers; they praised his wisdom, they thanked him for his exceeding goodness; they hoped the gods would let him live for ever, the honor of the country and the blessing of mankind. For a while he bore it all good-naturedly, but at last his patience gave way and he pushed the importunate flatterers back violently; they resisted and he became angry; his features were distorted by passion, white foam came forth from his mouth and his nostrils, and he broke out in abrupt words, broken in upon by fearful oaths and groans as if of intense suffering: "Am I no longer a free man? Do you think me a fool like a Greek philosopher?" His thoughts wander, his lips refuse to form articulate sounds, he tries in vain to aid his words by violent gestures, and at last he sinks exhausted on his couch, closes his eyes and prays to the gods to remove him from "the troubled life of the Cæsars."

As soon as he had become helpless the freedmen had assumed control; at a wink the officers of the guard drew their short heavy swords and brutally drove all, senators and slaves, kings and courtiers, from the hall, until only the three ministers and the emperor were left in the vast apartment. Then began the council. Narcissus, who claims the right of speaking first, as being for the moment the highest in favor, pleads the cause of Pætina, once before the wife of Claudius, but divorced for a slight cause; who, he thinks, being well known to the emperor,

would come into the palace like an old familiar friend, save him the painful necessity of becoming accustomed to a new face and character, and easily win the affections of Messalina's children, who were her near relatives. Callistus objected to this that a divorced wife, long disgraced and thus suddenly restored to favor and power, might be unduly elated by her triumph, and disgust her husband and all the world by her pride and arrogance; so he recommended the beautiful Lolliã, the richest woman in all Rome, used, as Caligula's wife, to do the honors of the imperial palace, and, being childless herself, likely to have no ambition of her own, but to become warmly attached to the emperor's children. Pallas rose last, and with grave solemnity and affectionate tenderness for his beloved master, prayed him to think of one who was as beautiful as the protégée of Narcissus and as rich as Lolliã, and who added to these great advantages the still greater prestige of being able to unite with the Claudians, the emperor's family, the last scion of the sacred Julian family, the grandchild of the illustrious Germanicus—Agrippina. He argued that it might even be dangerous to allow a princess of such exalted rank and surpassing beauty, who was still in the full bloom of her youth and ambitious in the extreme, to marry another man and to transfer to another family the reverence felt for the Cæsars. This suggestion struck Claudius most forcibly, as he dreaded new complications, and apprehended that such a step might produce a serious political danger for himself and his dynasty. But Agrippina's best advocate was, after all, herself. Now, that there was no jealous Messalina watching her husband any longer, the emperor's niece was seen by his side every day, and she knew well how to make the intimacy and affection natural between two persons so nearly

related to each other, useful for her one great purpose. Claudius was still very susceptible, and Agrippina, barely thirty-two years old, possessed all the charms of fully developed beauty. Her tender words and sweet caresses charmed the old man; her flatteries and her winning manners fascinated him and largely aided his "darling child," his "little pet," as he called her, in obtaining the victory over her formidable rivals. She soon gained such an ascendancy over him that she was at once looked upon as empress, and even Narcissus began to see that it would be wiser for him to obtain the support and friendship of Agrippina, whose ambitious and far-seeing plans for her son Nero he knew, than to risk being persecuted by Britannicus, the surviving son of Messalina, in revenge for the injury he had done to his mother. Like a wise courtier, he gave way in time, and enabled Agrippina, long before the weak emperor had avowed his intention to make her his wife, to act as if the prize was already in her hands, and to exercise over him, even in grave affairs of state, all the influence of a wife. Her first step was one characteristic of her marvelous foresight. By making full use of her great beauty, and employing all the power of intrigue and artifice which she had acquired during her active life at court, she succeeded in having the man to whom the emperor's daughter was betrothed accused of atrocious crimes, in order that she might affiance her to her own son Nero. Poor Claudius, who had given his word to the young lover, Silanus—a man of noble birth, illustrious by the triumphal honors which he had already enjoyed, and endeared to the people by his liberality in providing abundant gladiatorial games—was gently forced to break his promise and to disgrace the innocent youth, who was sent into obscurity, while, without asking the consent of the parties most interested, the

nuptials of Octavia with the son of the grim Brazen-Beard were prepared with great splendor.

There was, however, one very serious obstacle yet in the way before Agrippina could accomplish the great purpose of her life and become the wife of an emperor. She was that emperor's niece, and all the religious sentiments which still survived among the people, as well as all the ancient national prejudices which were deeply rooted in their hearts, were violently opposed to the marriage of an uncle with his own brother's child. In fact, no such union had ever occurred yet in the thousand years of Roman history. Though no special law prohibited it, the people looked upon it as equal in wickedness to the greatest of crimes; and Claudius, weak in faith, but strong in superstition, feared not so much the sin itself as the dire consequences which it might have for himself and the empire; he apprehended some public calamity which the gods might inflict upon Rome for the sake of his own wrong-doing. Besides, though he had few moral scruples, he shrank from defying the national sense of delicacy. Soon, however, obsequious courtiers and well-drilled friends of Agrippina found a precedent for such a case in the measures employed by Augustus when he chose to set aside ancient custom and popular prejudices. The ambitious niece had won over one of the great Romans of the day, Vitellius, who was the most perfect model of a courtier ever seen at imperial courts. Under Tiberius already he had shown himself an adept in the noble science of skillful flattery, and compelled a king of Parthia, in abject submission, to do homage, not to Rome, as of old, but to the emperor's portrait on the legionary standards. When Caligula chose to become a god, Vitellius was quickly at hand to offer, the first of all Romans, religious worship to the mad Cæsar.

This prince of flatterers had just returned from Syria, the province he had governed, and on the occasion of his first audience he entered the august presence shading his eyes as if dazzled by divine splendor, walking with measured steps and bent head after the manner of worshipers entering a holy temple, and finally threw himself prostrate at the feet of the divinity, craving as only favor permission to devote his life henceforth to the worship of the new god. On another day, when Caligula asked him, with that bantering irony which threatened certain ruin to whatever answer might be given, if he had not seen him during a recent night in the embraces of the goddess Luna, the admirable courtier escaped the imminent danger by promptly replying, with cast-down eyes and trembling as if in the presence of a vision from on high, That it was the privilege of the gods alone to see one another! He retained his skill under the coarser rule of a Claudius, whose slow mind and vulgar tastes required even more solid offerings of flattery. But Vitellius was never at fault and had his pretty speeches suited for all tastes. Thus, when the aged emperor celebrated the ceremonies of the eight hundredth year of Rome's existence, he addressed him with the truly magnificent hyperbole, "May you often repeat it!" Nor did he confine himself to the worship of the Cæsar; the imperial freedmen, Narcissus and Pallas, found their golden statues placed among the images of the courtier's own family, and when Messalina was high in favor he had petitioned, as the highest honor he could enjoy upon earth, the privilege of pulling off her slippers and of keeping one, which he ever afterward wore between his toga and tunic, and from time to time drew forth in order to cover it with burning kisses. When the drama drew to an end, and Messalina in mourner's garb walked alone on the dusty Appian

Road to meet her cruel husband, he sat by the emperor's side, but now he had forgotten her face, and whispered continually into the Cæsar's ear, "Horrible! horrible! As soon as he saw Agrippina's star rise on the horizon, he was there with his ever-ready worship. It was he who had discovered the unknown crimes of Octavia's betrothed that sent him into exile to make room for Nero; it was he who now undertook, for Agrippina's benefit, to sound the emperor and to prepare the way. He availed himself with great skill of the weak point in Claudius' character, who loved to be considered an enlightened man and a good citizen, by asking him which he preferred—to be ruled by blind prejudice, such as influenced the common people, or by the counsel and authority of the senate? The answer was perfectly in keeping with the character of the man, who never had a will of his own. He declared that he was but one of Rome's citizens, and could not place himself in opposition to the will of the people. "Then repair, I conjure you, at once to the palace and there await my coming," said the intriguing courtier earnestly, and hastened eagerly to the senate, where he asked for an immediate hearing in a matter of supreme importance for the whole country. In a speech not devoid of eloquence, and in which the most telling arguments were brought to bear upon the senate with exquisite tact, he begged them to remember that the office which Claudius held was one of extreme and painful difficulty, and that the cares of a prince who governed the world would be overwhelming if he were not strengthened by domestic comfort. "And where can he find," he continued, "a comfort so fit, so honorable and so consistent with his dignity as in the arms of a wife, who may share with him his prosperity and console him in affliction? To her, and to her alone, he can unburden his

mind with safety; to her he can entrust the care of his children, and in such a tender union, seeking no other pleasure, allured by no luxury or dissipation, he can continue to show that reverence for the laws which has distinguished Claudius from his earliest years." Then he passed rapidly on to the superior fitness of Agrippina for this honorable but responsible station. "Descended from a noble family," he continued, "she is the mother of children, and possesses besides all the virtues and all the graces of her sex. Nor is this all. By the special favor of the gods, the prince has thus an opportunity of taking a widow to his arms without doing injury to any private citizen and without violating the rights of an existing union." The senators were completely won over by this argument. They broke forth in loud praises of a prince who was good enough not to take somebody else's wife, and to be content with the hand of a lady who was actually free to marry. After this the cunning courtier had it all his own way, and yet the main difficulty had still to be approached. "It may be said," he went on, reassured as to the success of his enterprise, "that a marriage between an uncle and his niece is unknown to Roman manners, but no law forbids it here, and foreign nations have no such restriction. By the custom of ancient times, first cousins were perhaps restrained from marrying, but we have changed these old usages. Such marriages are now quite common. Public convenience is, after all, the parent of all civil institutions, and the marriage which to-day seems an innovation will soon be the common practice."

The eloquent advocate of a crime was hardly allowed to finish his address. The senators raised a general shout of assent; they would hear of no discussion, and many even rushed forth to the open square before the temple,

where an immense multitude had in the mean time assembled to hear the result of their deliberation. Their loyalty was of the loudest kind, and they went so far in their patriotism that they declared themselves ready to force the emperor into such a marriage, if he should still hesitate or entertain any scruples as to the legality of the measure. The crowd on the Forum received the news with wild enthusiasm. The goodness of the prince, "who had never yet married another man's wife," was extolled to the skies, and with one accord they rushed to the palace, where Claudius and Agrippina had awaited the issue with no small anxiety. Vitellius appeared at their head, and with a promptness and skill which would have done honor to the banks of the Seine, he said, as spokesman of this accidental gathering, which he happened to find there, that "the people of Rome demanded of their prince compliance with the wishes of the senate." The Cæsar of our day did not bow more submissively to the free will of a people that compelled him to establish the empire than Claudius did as he went, with solemn, serious face, but joyous heart, to the Forum, where he received the boisterous congratulations of the assembled crowd, and from thence to the senate, whom he requested, strict formalist as he was, to pass a special decree which should legalize the marriage in question. The law was enacted, and such masters were the Romans in the art of delicate flattery that a noble knight was found at once ready to overcome all scruples and to show his disregard of natural feeling by breaking through the ancient custom and marrying his niece. The compliment was duly appreciated; the emperor and Agrippina honored the marriage-feast with their presence, and favors and riches were showered upon the courageous couple.

At last, then, the ambition of Agrippina was gratified, and on the following day—for she did not allow her aged lover to lose any time—she was married to him with all the pomp and circumstance of an imperial wedding. She was an emperor's wife! But it was a sad day, after all. The horror of Messalina's murder was still ripe among men, and the short three months that had elapsed since the fearful tragedy had not allowed the shades of the departed to come to rest; for the people reported the gardens still haunted in which the unfortunate empress had been interred, and even the imperial palace was visited by gaunt apparitions of brutal and bloodstained soldiers, and weird wails that resounded at night through the long moonlit corridors. Nor was hers the only corpse over which Agrippina had to step in order to reach the throne, for on the very day of her wedding a new horror filled the hearts of the superstitious with fearful apprehensions. Silanus, whose fair and beloved bride, Octavia, she had taken from him in order to give her to her own son Nero, had languished in exile. Suddenly he reappeared in Rome to take his revenge. He had perhaps remembered the unfortunate man who, just a hundred years before, driven by like injustice from the house of his father, had in his despair stalked gloomily to the hearthstone of his adversary in order to kill himself on that sacred spot, and to establish thus, according to popular belief, an avenging demon in the house of his enemy for ever. Silanus came for a like purpose to the city, and on the very day on which Agrippina entered the palace of the Cæsars to take her seat on the throne of the world, the blood of her victim polluted the sacred altars and cried to heaven for revenge against the ambitious, implacable empress. The deed made a profound impression on the people of Rome. The suicide of a

near relative of the imperial family, of a youth who had but a few weeks before been so closely allied to the emperor's favorite daughter, cast a deep gloom on the festivities at court and filled the hearts of all with sad anticipations for the future. If it had been the purpose of the heartbroken lover to send this poisoned arrow back from the grave, he had fully attained his purpose, and for days a dark pall seemed to hang alike over city and court. At last, Claudius attempted to remove the effects of the sad calamity, and reviving an old, long-forgotten law, which dated back to the earliest days of Rome, he ordered the chief priests of the empire to offer atoning sacrifices in the sacred groves of Diana near Aricia. He succeeded in a way which he had not intended, for the people, who before had murmured and felt shocked at the crimes which the emperor had committed in marrying his own niece, now began to laugh at the notion that while the open wrong was legalized by the senate and approved of by the nation, the secret wickedness of a knight should require the great city to be purified by solemn lustration!





VII.

DEADLY MUSHROOMS.

HIGH up in the Abruzzi, in the very heart of Lower Italy, there lies a dark, mysterious lake, sunk low in the crater of an extinct volcano. On all sides rise high mountains, now clad in dark verdure and casting deep, solemn shadows on the black waters below, and now rising bare and steep in rugged masses, on which large red and yellow patches shine in ever-changing light. Here and there a narrow rift opens for a few yards, and a tiny streamlet falls from on high, trickling slowly and sadly down into the dark, silent basin in which it is buried for ever; and from below there boil up in the very midst of the lake brisk springs in restless bubbles, as if they longed to rise from the volcanic regions beneath to the bright light of day. Only on one side, where you look toward the beautiful bay of Naples, the towering walls open wide and give a full outlet to the mysterious waters of the lake, which everywhere else have to make their way slowly and painfully through minute crevices and tiny openings in the limestone around. Hence, when the waters come down in unusual force from the higher slopes of the Apennines, or when long-continued rains have made the lake to overflow the lips of its crater, a terrible flood rushes down upon fertile valleys and rich fields, carrying death and destruction into a happy land.

DEADLY MUSHROOMS.

Cæsar already had listened to the complaints of the people of this exposed region, doomed year after year to see the fruit of their labor destroyed in a day, their humble huts carried off before their eyes, and with them not unfrequently the helpless father, too old to escape in time, or the luckless children whom they were unable to rescue. But Cæsar had greater things to do than to protect poor peasants and add a few acres of arable land to the estates of a senator; and time failed him for this as for other more serious purposes. The great Augustus also had his attention called to the ill-fated lake, and thought much of the evils that could be averted, the rich farms to be gained and the advantages to be derived from making a small river, the Siris, navigable by the surplus of waters from the lake; but he was afraid of the vast amount of money and labor which such an enterprise would require, and he also abandoned the plan. What wise men had failed to accomplish, the folly of another Cæsar achieved. Claudius conceived the idea of outshining his predecessors by doing what they had given up in dismay; and without taking time to count the cost and to consider the proportion it might bear to the probable gain, he commanded the lake to be drained by breaking a passage through the mountain chain that surrounded it on all sides. The waters were then to be conducted, not to the Adriatic, for which Nature seemed to have intended them, but into the Siris, a small river of Campania. His command was executed, and for eleven years thirty thousand men worked incessantly, leveling the Apennines down to the surface of the lake, cutting a tunnel through other parts and digging a canal three miles long. When the gigantic work was at last completed, the emperor, not a little vain of the exploit, determined to celebrate the event by magnificent festivities on the spot itself. In this also

he proposed to surpass all that had ever been done before on similar occasions, and especially the grand mock sea-fight which Augustus had exhibited in the basin he constructed on the banks of the Tiber. He himself had once before treated his masters, the people of Rome, to a regular siege and the storming of a city in the meadows of the Field of Mars, but they had lacked the one main element of enjoyment which was essential to the brutal people and its morbid emperor—there had been no bloodshed. This was to be corrected now, and an immense fleet was announced to perform a regular sea-fight on the waters of the great lake before they were sent by the emperor's command to flow into the river Garigliano.

The whole population of Rome, nay, of Italy, had been invited to witness the gorgeous spectacle, and for months preparations had been made on a truly gigantic scale. The banks around the lake, measuring nearly thirty miles in circumference, had been lined with enormous rafts of timber, which were crowded with Prætorian guards in their several corps, and built of such solid material that they could bear high redoubts facing the lake, and provided with all the machinery used in throwing masses of stone and other missile weapons. On the beautiful terraces which rose amphitheatrically around the magic scene hundreds of thousands found abundant space to sit at their ease and look down upon the most gorgeous spectacle which Rome in her greatest splendor and highest power has ever been able to exhibit. Below, on the dark surface of the lake, floated in majestic repose two enormous fleets, consisting each of a vast number of galleys, with three and four banks of rowers rising one above the other, and manned with nineteen thousand men. The latter were, moreover, not common marines, but skilled gladiators, with an admixture of condemned

criminals of all ranks, who were to fight for the amusement of the people unto death; hence the vessels near the shore were all well armed, in order to prevent any attempt at escape and to cut off retreat from the murderous combat. Close by, on a promontory jutting boldly out into the lake, stood the imperial pavillion, and under the rich purple hangings two lofty thrones were placed overlooking the waters.

By a refinement of luxury which formed a hideous contrast with the atrocious bloodshed, the court presented a scene of unparalleled splendor. The emperor appeared in the rich robes of a consul, under which he wore a superb coat of mail as imperator, and by his side sat Agrippina in a magnificent costume woven of pure gold thread, without the admixture of any other material, and therefore as valuable as a work of art as it was brilliant in its dazzling lustre. It was evidently a great moment for the ambitious empress when she saw herself thus seated at last on the throne of the world, the cynosure of all eyes, the irresponsible ruler of all whom she beheld. The imperial couple were surrounded by a crowd of courtiers and senators, deputies from abroad and tributary princes in great numbers.

When the two fleets, which represented the famous islands of Sicily and Rhodes, had taken their allotted station, a gigantic Triton of massive silver was seen suddenly to emerge from the centre of the lake, who, by a skillful mechanism, was made to blow his shell. This was the signal for the beginning of the combat, and immediately there rose a vast cry from all the ships—Hail, Cæsar! the dying men salute thee! The unfortunate emperor was for a moment bewildered by the vast acclaim which thus came up from the deep waters before him, and re-echoed in wild and fierce notes all around from the grim rocks and the steep mountain-sides; and rendering even the

grand and terrible scene before him grotesque by his awkwardness, he replied, Hail to you also! and thereupon the slaves and the criminals and the gladiators shouted louder than ever, for they interpreted his ill-chosen answer into an assurance that their lives should be spared. They went therefore skillfully through all the manœuvres of a great naval fight, now advancing and dashing upon each other with apparent fury, and then retreating to escape impending destruction; here two ships would grapple with each other and engage in a sham fight, and there two or three would cut off a hostile galley and drive her to seek shelter with her comrades; but they would not die. This made the brutal emperor furious. He cried out that he would kill them all, guilty or not guilty, in one great massacre by fire and sword, and gave peremptory orders that the fight should begin at once in good earnest. And when the poor victims still hesitated to murder each other in cold blood for the amusement of others, he sprang from his throne and ran like a madman, foaming and fuming, around the lake, commanding them to trifle no longer, and sending his own guards and the flotilla of boats along the shore to dash into the crowd and to cut them to pieces! Who can realize the horrors of that scene, when thousands of men, shut in between high mountains on the waters of a lake that soon began to turn crimson, butchered and slaughtered each other, while those who were spared by their friends fell into the hands of the guards, and those who were not slain on board the ships were mercifully drowned in the water? And there was the great Roman people shouting with wild delight at the terrible scene and eagerly watching the bloody massacre; there was the emperor in perfect ecstasy, encouraging the combatants and enjoying with brutal delight the agonies of countless victims; there

was, alas! the beautiful empress with her brilliant cortège of fair Roman ladies, all gazing eagerly at the bloody scene and feeling their hearts leap high at the grand, magnificent spectacle. But we must bear in mind that eyes accustomed from childhood up to see murder and bloodshed perpetrated on such a scale and for the sole purpose of public amusement, and hearts made to beat in sympathy with hosts of armed men who killed each other at an emperor's bidding, could not well be full of gentler feelings or delight in scenes of purer pleasure and nobler sentiments.

We must remember, too, that the Roman women, going to the amphitheatre, were surrounded there by a multitude full of such fierce brutality and insatiable bloodthirstiness that eighty thousand men and women assembled on an occasion when a favorite gladiator was seen to give way, tremble and ask for mercy, cried out with one voice, in high indignation, Why does he meet the sword so timidly? Why does he not kill boldly? Why does he not die readily? They were astonished that a man should not be willing to die and eager to kill; they looked upon his slowness as an insult to themselves, and urged the officials with their rods and their swords to compel the reluctant victims to make haste and complete their murder. And when an unhappy one lay conquered at the feet of the victor, how they enjoyed the calm indifference with which the conqueror stood, his foot on the other's throat, awaiting the people's sentence, while the prostrate man, lying in the bright-colored, perfumed dust, tried to arrange his limbs as best he might, so as to die according to the rules of his art! We must remember that gentle, modest maidens, when a skillful blow had been struck, would leap up in ecstasy and cry out, He has got it!—that frail, tender-hearted women would forget

their nature and rise against the miserable wretch who craved their mercy, with fury in their eyes and the thumb bent down as a sign for him to die; that vestals themselves, pious and benevolent ladies of noble blood, who could claim the life of the condemned criminal whom accident brought in their way by virtue of their sacred office, often commanded the bodies of slain gladiators to be turned over and pierced anew, lest they should by a lucky accident escape death. It is only by bearing all this in mind that we can understand, after a manner, the character of those times, and learn that the women of the empire cannot and must not be judged by the standard of our day, and that even an Agrippina, in all the enormity of her sin, had no doubt much to plead in extenuation of her crimes.

When all was over, when the waters of the lake and the hearts of the people were alike satiated with the blood that had been shed, a new signal was given and the canal was opened, through which the lake was emptied into the river Siris. But now it appeared that an emperor's order might set men to work and even to slay each other, but could not endow them with skill, for the engineers had made gross mistakes in their plans, and the canal was found to be not deep enough to reach the level of the lake. It became necessary to clear away the ground and to lower the bed of the channel, so that the waters would come down from their level. The work was done with great expedition, everybody who could handle a spade being at once pressed into the service; and in order to entertain the multitude in the mean time, vast bridges and platforms were thrown over the lake in the parts not occupied by the vessels. On this gigantic stage new gladiatorial games were performed, until all was ready once more to give the lake the desired outlet. At

the place where the mountain had been pierced, and over the tunnel itself through which the waters were to pass off, a magnificent structure had been erected, from which the emperor with his court was to witness the cutting of the last dam, to see the waters rush under his feet into their new bed, and then to celebrate the success by a magnificent banquet. But—was it intention or was it accident?—when the dam was pierced, it was found that the tremendous force of the flood had not been duly taken into consideration; the waters rushed forth tumultuously, carrying planks and beams, silken hangings and ivory couches, courtiers and senators, all pell-mell down in their furious current. The emperor was thoroughly frightened; the attendants were bewildered by the roar of the torrent and the crash of the falling timbers, and only the empress, in her marvelous calmness, retained her presence of mind. They had hardly been rescued, and were looking from a safe terrace down upon the scene of desolation where hundreds yet struggled for life with the rushing waters, when she turned upon the freedman, Narcissus, whom she had long hated and wished to remove, and let loose upon him a flood of accusations, on the plea that he alone had had control of the great enterprise. Availing herself of the fright of her weak old husband, and of the vague but grave suspicions which he habitually entertained on such occasions, she represented the unfortunate minister as having ruined the undertaking and caused the terrible disaster, in which even the emperor's life was greatly imperiled, by his avarice and excessive cupidity. Narcissus, however, felt as yet too sure of his master's favor, and possessed too strong a hold on the feeble mind of the latter, to give way at once. He retorted, and a scene of most painful passion followed, in which the freedman and the empress accused each other

of all that had long rested on their mind or could influence Claudius, while the poor emperor sat there utterly helpless, unable to protect his wife against the insults of a former slave, or to secure his faithful friend and minister from the bitter wrath of an infuriated woman. At last they were pacified, but henceforth there was war between Agrippina and Narcissus, and all who knew the characters of the two adversaries were sure that such implacable hatred could end only in the utter destruction of one or the other.

The empress thus found, in the midst of her greatest triumphs, that on the throne as in the peasant's hut, on the seven hills of Rome as in the palace of Grecian heroes, the success obtained by crime can only be maintained by crime, and that this is the meaning of the poet's words:

"The curse of evil deeds is that for ever
New evils breed from every wrong."

She ruled without a rival over Claudius and through him over the world. It was the government of a woman, but it was, we are told even by her enemies, no longer that of a woman of loose and dissolute manners like Messalina, who delighted in mocking the people by a reign of profligacy and vilest crime. Agrippina ruled with a firm hand and maintained her supremacy with the vigor of a manly spirit. She was rigorous in her public conduct, and allowed no irregularity within the imperial palace. Vice was often subservient to her schemes—she had never learnt to look upon it otherwise than as a vile but useful slave, fit to be employed for the highest as well as for the lowest purposes—but it never was her ruling passion, as it had been with Messalina. If she showed too great a love of money, it was for the wants of the throne and not of her person. As vindictive, as cruel and unscrupu-

lous as her shameless predecessor, she was saved by the nobler instincts of her nature and the inborn elevation of her character from all meanness; her crimes even had a certain grandeur and her wickedness a magnificence proportionate to the great empire over which she ruled and the vast distance which divided her from the rest of her race.

Her first great purpose now was to remove every woman that could be in her way at court or interfere with her exclusive control over Claudius. The fearful struggle with Messalina had cost her too many days of anguish and too many sleepless nights—though she had never allowed the world to see that she had any part in it, but had always acted through others—to risk the peace of her life and the realization of her ambitious plans once more in a like conflict. Her most formidable rival had been the rich Lollia, and upon her, therefore, she made the first thunderbolt fall from her Jupiter's hand. At Agrippina's command the poor, ignorant beauty was publicly accused of having employed soothsayers, astrologers and even magicians in order to ascertain what would be the issue of the great struggle for the seat on the throne in which she was so deeply interested. No doubt she had done what all Romans did in those days. She had sought information from a higher source than human wisdom. For in precise proportion as religion had become obsolete, superstition was rampant all through the world. Every man of high standing or of large fortune had his pet astrologer in his house, and if Tiberius himself believed and cherished his Thrasyllus, Lollia might well consult her own soothsayers. Rome was full of Armenian watchers of birds, astrologers from the vast plains of Chaldea, augurs from Phrygia, diviners from distant India, and especially sorceresses from Thracia,

whose skill was far above that of the witch of Endor. They told you to a day when your rich old uncle would die, and made you think of shortening the time a little; they explained to you the precise meaning of the lines in your hand, and turned your mind toward crimes of ambition and marriages with a view to wife-murder. At every street corner venerable men were standing who pointed out to you the marks of the chains they had worn and the scars of terrible wounds they had received. They were martyrs of their noble science, and yet ready to incur new sufferings—for a consideration. During every night grim and gruesome mysteries were performed by which great ends were to be achieved. Chaste young girls came, half veiled, to join in the revolting songs by which the beautiful Adonis was worshiped; elegant Roman youths, who bathed their delicate skin in costly waters and combed their skillfully-dyed hair with golden combs, went to the bloody ceremonies of the goddess Cybele, and placed themselves under the iron gratings through which the warm blood of the victims trickled down on their bare bodies; while feeble women, bred in extreme luxury, broke through the crust of ice on the Tiber, in order to purify themselves in the cold waters, and then, half clothed and trembling with cold and fear, crossed the whole Field of Mars on their bleeding knees to obtain some favor from on high.

Nor was this merely the weakness of women and the folly of the young. Grave old statesmen, the rulers of the world themselves, from Cæsar to Claudius, all believed in the science of the stars and the jargon of the soothsayers, because they believed no longer in the gods. Religion had become worse than superstition even, for it was ridiculous. The sacred chickens were still carefully kept in their cages, and priests appointed to see if they

would eat on the eve of some great enterprise, but they were kept hungry all the time, so that the omens could not fail to be favorable whenever encouragement was desired. Holy priests still examined with curious care the entrails of victims, to read in them the fate of the nation, but philosophers already taught their doubts openly that the gods would take the trouble of changing them at the moment of sacrifice in order to make them prophetic, and sneeringly added that not an old woman believed in them, unless it was the Roman people. Augurs still ascended at night the sacred hill to observe the heavens from their consecrated tent, but they came down next morning and reported that they had seen lightning on the left, without ever having been out of their tent. The priests, whom ancient usage required to give their opinion before a war was commenced, became such an embarrassment to practical soldiers that the senate appointed, at times, generals who were prohibited by special law from consulting them; and in order not to be troubled by evil omens, a great commander always traveled in a litter carefully closed with stout curtains.

No wonder, then, that poor, beautiful Lollia also, repudiated by one emperor and disappointed in another, spent part of her immense wealth in efforts to obtain a knowledge of the future, and kept her magicians in her palace. But the jealousy of the Cæsars had for some time declared it a crime of high treason to make their lives and family affairs the subject of such consultation, and it was easy to make Claudius believe that the divinations had been fraught with danger to his own life. He was at first merely advised to deprive her of her wealth, and with that of the means of carrying on her treasonable plans; but the end was, that she was allowed to retain only a trifling half million, and then had to go into exile.

Agrippina, however, had learned by bitter experience, even on the day of her marriage, that exiles may return from their banishment to work horrible spells to the injury of those they hate, and that death alone could give her complete security against her enemies. It was not long, therefore, before a tribune presented himself before the dangerous lady and brought her the order to kill herself. How sad life must have been in the midst of all the brilliant splendor and the intense excitement of those days, that not only men of strong will and accustomed to face death in many forms, but even frail, feeble women could lay down life with such readiness and depart to an unknown future at a tyrant's bidding! The officer of the guards had been directed to bring back the head of the unfortunate beauty, so as to convince the suspicious empress that her order was faithfully carried out. She was, however, unable to recognize the altered features of her formidable rival, and with amazing impassibility opened with her own hands the firmly-clenched mouth in order to see the pearly teeth for which Lollia had been famous in the days of her glory!

If it was a crime for a beautiful woman to have been the rival of the empress before her marriage, it was at least a misfortune to please Claudius after he had become her husband. This was all the wrong of which another favorite of the emperor, Calpurnia, had ever been guilty; but in an evil hour for her he praised her beauty: Agrippina heard of it, and that was enough to seal her doom. The fair and noble matron, utterly unconscious of having offended the empress, fell into immediate disgrace; but her formidable enemy fortunately came to the conclusion that beauty was, after all, not a very high crime, and therefore contented herself with a sentence of banishment.

Thus the empress triumphed over all her enemies and

rivals. Woe to the beauty who tried to attract her husband's admiring glance! Exile or death was ever at hand to punish the sacrilege. Woe to the senator or knight who did not bow down to the ground before the all-powerful lady! The senate, the courts, the people themselves were ready at a moment's warning to crush the daring criminal; for, with all her haughty pride, her insatiable ambition and her relentless revenge, she pleased the people of Rome by her grandeur. In the midst of a world crouching in abject submission at the foot of the throne, she alone rose still in majestic proportions, and where all were trembling with fear and ready to lay down their lives at the command of a master, she alone stood boldly and fearlessly up, undaunted by a host of enemies and loftily challenging a world in arms. The Romans feared her, but they loved her at the same time: was she not a worthy daughter of great Rome? Hence they received her with wild shouts whenever she appeared in their midst, and what she herself dared not ask of Claudius, that the senate, the Prætorians, the freedmen, the whole nation were ever ready to demand of him in her name. They liked it, besides, that she was not merely the emperor's wife, but the empress—a thing heretofore unknown to the Romans, and without a name in their language. She enjoyed her power—not in secret, like a poor slave or a trembling freedman, but openly, before the eyes of all the world. The pomp and circumstance of imperial rule were a source of true delight to her, as the freedom from all moral restraint had been to Messalina, and the gratification of bitter revenge to others. Hence she was the first to introduce into the imperial palace a strict ceremonial, which had heretofore been avoided from prudent consideration for the lingering love of republican simplicity cherished by great and powerful Romans. But

now a small number of great personages only had the *entrée* at court, and these were compelled to wear a golden image of the emperor in a ring; the latter himself wore only emerald or onyx rings, and began to seal, not as heretofore with antique gems, but with the state seals engraven in gold. Her own image and name soon appeared, the first of all empresses, on the coins of the empire by the side of her husband's, as she herself soon afterward took her seat by his side when he received ambassadors and foreign kings in solemn audience.

Nor did she, in the midst of all her triumphs and whilst a world was lying at her feet, forget for a moment the instability of human affairs, of which she herself had experienced more than one painful proof, and especially the uncertainty of the fate of those who were seated on the thrones of the earth. She carefully accumulated million after million, well knowing the power which wealth gave to the great; she courted with tact and happiest success the all-powerful Prætorian guards who had made her husband emperor, and with rare foresight tried to win over in like manner the soldiers of the line, who might at the next vacancy have it in their power to raise her son to the throne. To conciliate their good-will she appeared in public at the head of a legion in the costume and character of a commander, and claimed the privilege of founding a colony, which had heretofore been granted only to an emperor, because he alone could take the auspices and perform the solemn rites required by ancient laws for such a purpose. It was her boast to have been the first of Roman women who founded a colony of Roman veterans. She selected for that purpose the great camp on the Rhine, where she had been born herself, and where in the first years of her checkered existence she had shared the dangers of her great father and imbibed the firmness and daring deter-

mination of her illustrious mother. The emperor was easily prevailed upon to endow the place with special privileges of various kinds, and soon a motley crowd of Roman emigrants and German settlers, with a floating population of traders from all parts of the world, gave abundant life and increasing prosperity to the well-chosen town. It is strange enough that of all the countless colonies established by the Cæsars, the one that was thus anomalously organized by a woman, and apparently the result of a mere caprice, or at best of a measure by which her popularity was to be enhanced, should have retained the proud title of Colonia, and be known even now as the great city of Cologne.

The boldest and most effective stroke of policy, however, by which Agrippina strengthened her hold on the hearts of the Romans, and at the same time rendered invaluable service to the world at large, was her recall of Seneca. The great philosopher had, as we have seen, fallen a victim to anonymous accusations and court intrigue, and been subjected to solemn trial before the senate. Various charges had been brought against him, and Claudius, then not yet emperor, had spoken in his behalf, demanding that the proposed execution should be changed into exile. As his real crime was nothing more than a historical work in which he had spoken impartially of the great vices of his age, the senators agreed to this suggestion, and Seneca was suddenly sent off, without having time to take leave of his aged mother or to attend to the funeral rites of a beloved son whom he had lost a few days before. He was banished to the dreary island of Corsica, then a land of rocks, which produced neither corn in summer nor fruit in autumn, which had neither bread nor water nor fire, but only exile as its sole gift, and the melancholy victims of exile as its mourn-

ful inhabitants. No sooner, however, had Claudius, dazzled by the beauty and allured by the blandishments of his niece, raised her at last to the proud eminence on which she had so long fixed her wistful gaze, than the victorious empress bethought herself of the banished philosopher. Perhaps it was but natural that he whom Messalina had driven from Rome should be recalled by Agrippina to his family, his honors and the imperial palace. But the great empress saw farther. She counted, and counted justly, upon the favor she would thus win with the people, who loved Seneca for his wit and esteemed him for his wisdom; so that the crafty act of grace brought her at once great reward. But, in furthering her interests for the moment, she secured, moreover, the powerful mind and the rich experience of the great philosopher as allies for her ambitious schemes. These were all connected with the future of her son, whom she was determined to see ere long seated upon the throne of the Cæsars; and for the purpose of helping him to obtain the great prize, and of fitting him for the dangerous elevation, no one was so well qualified in all Rome as Seneca, who combined the rare tact of the courtier with the ripe wisdom of the sage. He was, therefore, no sooner back in Rome than dignities and honors were showered upon him, and among these, first and foremost, the place of tutor to young Nero. The measure received the loud applause of everybody. Thoughtful men praised the prudent mother who confided her son's education to the very first of all Romans in literature and science; shrewd politicians admired the choice of a friend whom gratitude bound to the empress, and whom the sense of former injuries, of all he had suffered through Messalina and Claudius, would predispose to favor her own ambitious view, and to stand by her if ever a conflict should arise

between her own interests and those of the emperor and his son by his former wife. The people at large only saw the noble generosity of the all-powerful empress, who gave back to the Romans their most illustrious writer, and thus proved how ready she was to grant them a favor.

Agrippina, strengthened by her powerful ally and supported by popular favor, lost no time now in proclaiming her purposes more and more freely to the world at large. First, it was the betrothal of her son Domitius to Octavia, the daughter of Claudius, and then his marriage with her, which made him the son-in-law of the emperor and added new splendor to his position. A few months later she obtained his regular adoption by Claudius—an unheard-of act in the illustrious family, which claimed to be descended from the great though somewhat mythic Clausus, the friend of Æneas, and which had until now continued in unbroken succession without ever resorting to the remedy of childless patricians, the adoption of young men from other families.

In the mean time, no opportunity was neglected to win popularity for the boy, who was now barely fifteen years old, and to make the unfortunate emperor aware of the favor which he found in the eyes of the people. Agrippina had not lived so long among the intrigues of the court and the plots of politicians without having mastered the art by which popular demonstrations may be produced and men may be led the way they do not wish to go. Wherever Nero—as he was called since his adoption into the Claudian family, who cherished that old Sabine name, the Brave, bestowed on their ancestors—appeared in public, he was received with loud shouts and noisy applause; in the senate, at the theatre, even in the camp of the Prætorian guards, they greeted him with enthusiasm and hailed him with rapture.

But amid all these triumphs and happy omens for the future, there was still a dark cloud on the horizon. Claudius had a son, Britannicus, the child of her whom, in spite of all her crimes and black ingratitude, he had loved so dearly and so tenderly that even now he could rarely look upon his son's regular features and graceful form without recalling in sorrow and great grief the image of his beautiful mother, Messalina. The observant empress, whom no sigh and no frown of the weak husband escaped, and who read the innermost feelings of his heart with ease, trembled as she became aware of this deep-rooted love; but she was not dismayed for a moment, and only braced her brave heart more firmly for the impending struggle, more determined than ever that her own son should ascend the throne of the Cæsars. With truly marvelous patience and perseverance she lost no opportunity to help him up, step by step, on the perilous ladder that led to the empire of the world. Controlling her violent passions with a moral strength which commands our admiration, however ill-applied it may have been at the time, she kept her great purpose fixedly in view for long years, never swerving aside for personal gratification, never turned from her path by the most formidable obstacles. Patiently she would wait and hope when all others had long since given up in despair, and then, at the precise moment when all seemed ready and the time favorable to her plans, she would fall with lightning speed upon her unsuspecting victim and crush it with overwhelming power. Such had been her policy in her fearful struggle with Messalina—such was her conduct now in her efforts for Nero.

By flatteries and by threats, by direct appeals and by the skillful employment of agents, she induced poor Claudius to grant her son one great honor of the state

after another. To-day he was declared of age long before the time, and clothed with the virile toga, so as to enable him to receive certain high offices given only to men of ripe years. The next day he was designated in advance for the dignity of consul, and a decree was passed by the subservient senate that at twenty he should be qualified to fill the office. An excursion into the provinces was used by the ever-active mother to procure for him the title of imperator, and the celebration of a great festival at Rome to have him solemnly chosen prince of the Roman youth. On the former occasion large sums of money were distributed by the politic empress, who combined the rare talent of amassing large sums with that of spending them wisely, and during the games largesses were in like lavish manner distributed among the people of Rome. The half-grown boy had already been seen in the ranks of the Prætorian guardsmen, joining them in their encampments and drilling with them in their manœuvres. He had risen from rank to rank, and publicly thanked the emperor in open senate after he had been allowed for the first time to march, with shield and spear in his hand, at the head of his company. Agrippina remembered well the lessons taught her by her brave mother, and knew the strong hold which the children of princes by such familiar intercourse can obtain upon an enthusiastic soldiery.

As the son of the new Cæsar in France was not long ago put forward in the strange capacity of honorary president of the World's Exposition, so young Nero appeared on a like occasion with the triumphal ornaments of an imperator, in order to accustom the docile people to his pre-eminence, while the unfortunate son of the emperor was punished for the crime of being in Nero's way by being forced to wear the dress of his boyish days.

The glaring difference struck—as it was intended it should—the spectators, and they read in the difference of costume of the two boys a certain omen of their future fortunes—the premature death of the one and the guilty glories of the other. Upright men felt the wrong inflicted upon the unfortunate son of Messalina; friends and followers of his great father were indignant at his ill-treatment; and a number of officers of the guard resented the insult inflicted upon their friend the emperor through his son; but a word of complaint, a frown of discontent was enough to bring exile upon the unfortunate centurion or courtier. Agrippina's friends were everywhere busy in preparing the way for her ambitious plans, and her spies reported to her promptly every sign of opposition. Whoever was found hostile to her or her son was either sent into the provinces under the pretext of promotion, or accused by some one of the thousands ever ready to swear to anything their patrons required, and rendered harmless by judicial sentence. Their unhappy favorite suffered only more and more for every effort made in his behalf; his faithful servants and devoted attendants were taken from him; his court was neglected and his income curtailed, and even his tutors and teachers were one by one withdrawn. His stepmother alone provided for his wants; her creatures alone surrounded him; and gradually he disappeared from the sight and the memory of the people. It was soon rumored that he was no longer alive, and wild, fearful stories were told of the ill-treatment he had received and of the horror that was said to have made an end to his life. He was, however, still living; only it was the policy of the empress to keep him as much as possible from all contact with his poor father, who, amid his foibles and ridiculous faults, was an affectionate man and fond of being surrounded at table by his

children. Britannicus was a prisoner, though he bore no chains. He knew his position perfectly well, and saw through Agrippina's policy, in spite of the dullness and even lunacy of which he had been accused; he openly laughed at her efforts to appear kind and solicitous for his welfare, and refused persistently to believe in her affection or to accept the petty favors which she from time to time pretended to offer. Whenever the two young men met, sad consequences were sure to follow. Nero, who had inherited the haughty pride and impertinent scorn of the Brazen-Beards, bore himself with all the insolence of an imperial favorite, while Britannicus acted with the quiet dignity of an emperor's son. On one of these occasions the two rival princes had saluted each other ceremoniously, but Nero had been called Domitius or Brazen-Beard, and not Nero. This accident was at once seized upon by the restless empress; she had no sooner heard it than she rushed to the unfortunate father and poured bitter complaints in his ear. "Contempt," she said, "has been publicly thrown on your adoption of Nero. What the senate has decreed, and what the voice of the people has ratified, has been repealed with open defiance in your own palace!" She insisted upon it that not Britannicus, but his governors and tutors, were responsible for this spirit of opposition, and that they ought to be removed, as such teachings might lead to fearful disturbances in the state. Claudius was, as usual, easily alarmed by the prospect of political troubles; the boyish blunder presented itself to his timid mind as a crime, and the best friends of his son were at once put to death or sent into exile. From that day Agrippina was perfectly master of the position; Britannicus was henceforth educated as the son of a humble client, rather than as a noble by birth, still less as heir to the purple; and

wise men foresaw without much difficulty that his fate was sealed.

Nor did the ambitious empress neglect any measure that could lead to an increase of her own power and political influence. Her superior mind found countless admirers, and her genial fascinations won her friends in every rank of society. The senate, moved by some of her agents, passed a decree bestowing upon her the title of *Augusta*—a distinction which had never yet been conferred upon living woman in the history of Rome, and which crowned her personal ambition. Henceforth she claimed equal honor with *Claudius*. When the great British chief, *Caractacus*, was brought in chains to Rome, the curiosity of the people was great to see the brave islander who had for nine years held his own against their invincible legions, and *Claudius* himself was desirous to show honor to the heroic chieftain, knowing full well that by this he only added to the glory of the victory which rendered his reign illustrious. The whole of the *Prætorian* guards were therefore ordered out to receive the conquered hero; the vast plain was covered with an excited multitude, and all Rome went out eager to see the man who had defied the great and powerful empire. First appeared some of his brave followers and a host of slaves and servants, who carried in solemn display the armor and glittering trophies, the ornaments and rich collars which he had gained in countless battles; then followed his brothers, his wife and his tender daughter, breaking forth ever and anon in mournful wailings over their sad fate. At last came the vanquished prince, striding nobly forward; and with face unchanged, not a sign of fear, not a trace of sorrow, not a gesture of supplication appearing, he presented himself with dignity, even amid enemies, before the dread master of the world.

After a few words of proud acknowledgment of his own defeat and the triumph of the Roman arms, he appealed to his generosity, closing with the noble words, "Because you wish to subjugate everybody, do you think nobody wishes to be free?" And yet he received from the emperor a free pardon for himself and his family, granted to him on the spot—a noble act of clemency on the part of *Claudius*, which stood in bright and pleasing contrast with the stern cruelty of his predecessors, and at the same time a measure of great political wisdom; for it was a rare triumph to keep thus as prisoner in Rome the legitimate heir to the British throne, and to have him at hand to be used in any emergency when his influence at home might be called upon to favor the imperial cause in gratitude for the kindness he had received. The poor prisoner died, probably of long-deferred hope, but not to disappear for ever from the pages of history; for *Martial* sang at a later day of his child, *Claudia* the foreigner, the "offspring of the painted Briton," praising her rare beauty and wondrous charms, her winning modesty and brilliant genius. And a greater yet has rendered her name immortal and eternally dear to all simple believers, for if we follow the faith of *Fuller*, *Stillingfleet* and other old church writers, we meet the great warrior's daughter once more in the *Claudia* to whom *St. Paul* sends such affectionate greeting in the last letter to *Timothy*.

Then the emperor bade the pardoned captives to give thanks to his consort also, who shared with him the toils and the honors of the empire; and now followed a scene such as had never yet been witnessed in the Eternal City. Not far from the emperor's throne another like throne had been erected, and there, amidst the banners and ensigns of Roman armies, sat *Agrippina* in imperial state. The royal captive approached, followed by his retinue,

and did equal homage to her as to her husband. The cup of her satisfaction was full to overflowing; she was empress, not in name only but in reality, and ruled supreme in an empire which her grandsire had won and her sire defended; she saw herself the all-powerful consort of one emperor and the not less powerful mother of a coming emperor; and, above all, Rome, the empire, and even foreign princes, willingly acknowledged her as such, and the world was at her feet! And yet we must not forget that all the grandeur with which she received the ambassadors of foreign nations in solemn audience, the honors she exacted and received from the senate and the army, the golden litter, reserved heretofore for priests carrying the divine images, in which she ascended the Capitol,—that all this outward show and pride, all her readiness to grant personal favors and her quickness in punishing her enemies, were but so many measures by which she worked for another. She wished to be great, powerful and sacred only in order to seat her son on the throne. It was for him that she thus so jealously guarded the imperial dignity; it was for his sake that she induced her husband to risk even a revolution of the palace by removing suddenly the commanders of the guards, who were suspected of being still devoted to the memory of Messalina and partisans of her children. To further his future greatness she procured for her friend Burrhus, an independent, honest soldier, the command of the Prætorian camp, where probably the next emperor was again to be chosen, and to secure his succession she spared no means to make friends even at the expense of her honor and her virtue.

It was perhaps this very supremacy, thus held by a woman, which filled the hearts of the Romans with sad forebodings and spread among them a universal feeling

of apprehension. It so happened that this year—the fifth of Claudius' reign—exhibited a number of those strange and fearful incidents which the superstition of that age interpreted as omens of some terrible catastrophe that was to fall upon Rome. It rained blood; children were born with two heads; a swarm of bees settled fearlessly on the Capitol, undisturbed by the wondering crowd that surrounded them; and all of the highest dignitaries of the empire died in one and the same year. There was an earthquake which laid many houses in ruins, and led to crowds of people being killed in the general panic, as the feeble and infirm were ruthlessly trampled under foot. Then the crops failed throughout the provinces, and Rome, which had already for years depended on the winds and the waves, obtaining all her supplies from Egypt and Africa, was suddenly threatened with famine. The populace broke out in open riot; the magazines were plundered, discontent was rife, and the emperor himself, enjoying his favorite task of sitting in judgment on the Forum, was driven tumultuously from the tribunal and escaped only by the opportune arrival of a detachment of guards. The friends and adherents of Britannicus were, of course, not slow to see in these various calamities as many bad omens for the ambitious mother and her rising son—especially when, on the day of his adoption, new portents were noticed and the whole heavens appeared in a blaze of light, and when later, on the day on which he was declared of age, new violent earthquakes filled the minds of the Romans with vague terror. But the great empress, though by no means free from superstition, was determined to see no other signs but those that were favorable to her plans, and her numerous agents, well-paid and liberal in spending her money, soon quieted the excited populace and filled the

minds of the people more and more with the image of Nero. To aid in this effort a suitable occasion was chosen to bring the pupil of the eloquent Seneca in the character of an orator before the people, who still knew how to appreciate eloquence and to criticise statesmen when they spoke from the tribune. The young prince was by no means without talent and ability, and his youthful appearance and winning manners increased the pleasing impression. Seneca had him well prepared, for in those days everybody spoke not only with gravity, but artistically. The Romans addressed each other even in the family with all the solemnity of a public speech. Germanicus died while delivering a solemn speech to his friends and family. A famous orator, weary of life, went to the Forum, mounted the tribune, exposed briefly but eloquently the three reasons he had for ending his life; then he went home and deliberately starved himself to death. It was therefore with all the usual precautions that young Nero was sent to prove himself an orator also before the Roman people. He ascended the tribune with a gravity far beyond his years, and having laid aside the fashionable little cloak then worn by the dandies of his age, he shook out with great care the ample folds of his white toga. Everything was minutely prescribed; the lower fringe fell just below the knee, the upper a little above it, and the number of folds had been carefully counted by the slave presiding over his toilet. Then he intoned with musical precision the *la* of a flute-player, so as not to commence on too high or too low a note, and began with a winning voice his maiden speech. As he warmed up to the subject, one of the folds of the toga slipped gently from his shoulders, as if by accident; when he came to the argument two or three fell at once, giving to his very costume an aggressive air. His arms,

now partly freed, allowed him to add more energetic gestures to the increasing weight of his words. His hands, adorned with the prescribed number of rings, rose high and then fell softly again, as he became vehement in denunciation or insinuating in his persuasion. When he came to the closing sentences his feelings appeared to overcome him. The toga fell on both sides; his costume was wholly forgotten; tears came into his eyes; and the people, though perfectly aware of the artifice, and by long years' experience familiar with the whole little drama, wept with him. Their southern susceptibilities carried them away, and sympathy with the youthful orator added to the force of his master's eloquent words, which he recited to perfection.

The subject, also, had been skillfully chosen by his experienced mentor. The Romans, in the midst of their religious skepticism and philosophic indifference, still cherished a vague reverence for the little town in distant Asia from which they fondly believed their first ancestor, Æneas, the founder of their city, had originally come. They loved to speak of "Holy Ilium" in its hoary antiquity, and to boast of the son of the great goddess, Venus, who had come to Latium and through his son Julius founded the race of Roman emperors, which still bore the name of the latter. The first Cæsar had already felt the happy effect which any favor shown to the ancient city was apt to have on the mind of the proud Romans, and had restored to the citizens of Troy their former immunity from taxes, granted them by Alexander the Great, the enthusiastic admirer of Homer and his heroes. The succeeding Cæsars, even the parsimonious Tiberius, had confirmed these privileges. Young Nero presented himself now before the assembled multitude with the proposition that henceforth the Ilians should be

exempt, not from taxes only, but from all public burdens. Under the inspiration of Seneca he made a touching appeal to the Romans in behalf of the cradle of their ancestors; and they felt the force of his argument all the stronger as they saw in the youthful orator the last male descendant of the race that traced their origin to the deity in whose veins coursed the sacred Julian blood of his illustrious mother. There was little need for his brilliant eloquence, his classic Greek and effective gestures; the cause was won by his appearance; and whilst he thus easily gained the cause of his clients, he earned for himself, though barely sixteen years old, high fame for liberal science and powerful oratory. This success led other cities and provinces to engage his intercession. A second speech procured for the unfortunate city of Bologna a large grant of money from the public treasury to rebuild the portion of the town that had been destroyed by fire; and still another, for the island of Rhodes the restoration of its ancient privileges forfeited of late by domestic sedition. Thus the young prince grew daily in favor with the people. The money he gave to the soldiers, the games to which he invited the people, the courage with which he suppressed a revolt, and the eloquence, borrowed though it was, which obtained favors of every kind for provinces and cities, all combined to present him to the eyes of Rome as the future master, upon whom they looked with hearts full of hope and the expectation of a new era of increased greatness for the empire.

While everything was thus carefully and cunningly prepared for the elevation of Nero to the throne, there occurred the greatest prodigy of all those which had rendered this year so famous in the annals of Rome. Claudius began to open his eyes, and to discern the dangers

that were looming up on the horizon. New portents had filled his mind, like that of all Romans, with the dread of some impending convulsion, and in a moment of drunkenness he was heard to utter the ominous words that by some fatality it was his lot to bear the crimes of all his consorts, but in the end to punish them. This significant speech, revealing with the suddenness of a flash of lightning what was going on in the mind of the emperor, filled Agrippina with consternation, for she knew better than anybody else the weak heart of her husband, and the readiness with which he might be made to turn, at a moment's warning, even against herself, and involve her son and her friends in common and instantaneous ruin. Fully aware, therefore, of the force of those fearful words, she determined to take her measures at once and to strike before the battle had begun in good earnest.

Her first victim was her only surviving rival—a woman of great beauty, though in the autumn of her charms, of high courage and in blood the equal of the empress. By a strange combination of circumstances, this great princess, the mother of Messalina, was still permitted to frequent the court, in spite of the fearful crimes and condign punishment of her daughter, and, by a still stranger union, the mother was now seen in league with the murderer of her own child, Narcissus, the emperor's freedman and favorite, conspiring against her who had succeeded in supplanting her daughter on the throne of the empire. But the enmity of women is stronger than all other affections, and the bond between the unforgiving mother and the powerful minister was of long standing. The former, Lepida, was also the aunt of Nero, and she sought her revenge in endeavoring to divert the childish love of the young prince from his mother to herself—

efforts in which she was but too successful, as the caresses she lavished upon him pleased his warm and impressible temper, and contrasted agreeably with the stern ambition and constant exhortations of the empress. Agrippina, made doubly quick-sighted by maternal love and her ambitious hopes to rule the future emperor, began to tremble for her influence; and thus the world beheld the strange but fearful spectacle of two great and powerful women, equally unscrupulous and void of principle, and equally violent in temper, each contending desperately for the affections of a boy, in order to destroy the other by the power they hoped to wield through the prince. Nero had been educated in his aunt's house, and the love he had felt for her as a child had been craftily nursed by liberal presents and profuse flattery. In his mother's heart, on the contrary, love was mingled with apprehension lest he should escape from her control, and her unbending pride more than once revolted at some trifling act of independence on the part of the boy, which led to stern rebuke and fierce threats, little relished by the spoiled and flattered youth. Every advantage, however, which the aunt gained increased the bitterness of the mother, and when the crisis came she brought to her task the full energy of her powerful will and all the fair and unfair means which she never scrupled to employ when she wished for success. Lepida was, at her instigation, accused of having employed sorcery and incantations for the purpose of murdering the empress and then marrying Claudius; and when this charge, too common perhaps in those days to be looked upon as a great crime, had no effect, Nero himself was compelled to state that by the unchecked insolence of her numerous slaves in Calabria she was seriously endangering the peace of the empire. Such threats never failed to inspire the weak emperor

with fear and suspicion. Treason was a crime he never forgave, and political troubles a difficulty of which he would always try to get rid at any cost. He at once ordered the unfortunate princess to be condemned, and sent her word to kill herself. Thus the genius and good-fortune of Agrippina were once more triumphant.

There remained, however, the ally of Lepida, the all-powerful minister, Narcissus, who had long cherished bitter feelings against the empress, and looked upon her ambitious plans with grave apprehension. The feeling was returned with great force, for Agrippina never forgave nor forgot that the insolent freedman had intrigued against her when Claudius chose a successor for Messalina, and defended her mortal foe, Lepida. Her victory over him on both occasions did not soften her resentment; she knew not what pity meant and exulted in crushing a defeated enemy. Narcissus was no longer the all-powerful favorite of the emperor; increasing years and enfeebled constitution, and the long wear and tear of an overwhelming burden of state affairs, had broken his strength. Besides, he had been outstripped in his career and the race of favor by his old rival, Pallas, now the friend and confidant of the empress, and he felt in his heart that he was not able, singlehanded, to contend against such overwhelming odds. The death of his faithful and influential ally, Nero's aunt, left him without support at court, and he was rendered almost desperate by seeing thus the only barrier removed that had yet stood in the way of the triumphant despotism of Agrippina. He spoke openly of the ruin that threatened him with unfailing certainty, whether Nero or Britannicus succeeded to power. If Nero became emperor, he would care little for those who had overthrown Messalina, and have no motive to defend them against his mother's wrath. If Britannicus should

succeed, he would most assuredly punish the murderers of his mother. He said that nothing retained him at court but his attachment to his old master, to whom he was really devoted in grateful fidelity, and the desire to protect him against the wiles and crimes of a wicked wife. Among these he counted mainly her evident desire to substitute her own son Nero for the son of his master, and he declared bravely that he would risk his life in the effort to prevent the intruder from setting aside the legitimate heir to the throne. The poor old gray-haired man was often seen embracing Britannicus tenderly; he would express his hope to see him grow up to man's estate, and fixing his eyes on the prince, lift up his hands to the gods, devoutly praying that he might live to crush the enemies of his father, even though he himself and all who had conspired against his mother should be doomed to perish at the same time.

It may easily be imagined that at a court where all and everything was instantly reported to the ruling powers such indiscreet words did not fail to reach Agrippina's ear, and to rouse her, if anything yet had been wanting, to a full sense of her danger. But stronger proof was yet to come. The emperor himself showed, not by words uttered in his cups only, but by other and unmistakable signs, that he was fully aware of the little he had gained by a change of wives. The insatiable ambition of Agrippina, her boundless desire to rule, and the absolute control she had gradually assumed over his actions and personal habits even, the haughty pride which in her relations to him had taken the place of former caresses and flattering words, the harshness with which she treated his children for the benefit of her own son,—all these circumstances had long since alienated the emperor from her and made him apprehensive of her power. Nor can

it be assumed that her dangerous intrigues and scandalous intimacy with his freedman, Pallas, can have been hidden from him. Her enmity against his only true friend, Narcissus, was painful in the extreme to him, while he yet had not the strength nor the courage to take his part openly; and the signal favor she showed to Seneca, the mortal enemy of the freedman, made him aware how completely he was in her power and how absolutely she ruled over him and the whole court.

Soon all the world knew that he repented sincerely both of his marriage with Agrippina and of the adoption of Nero. The religious scruples which the obsequiousness of the senate and the skillfully-prepared expression of the popular will had for a time removed, awoke anew, and this as well as the consciousness that, in spite of all his love and tenderness for her, his present wife deceived him as sadly as Messalina, whom he had been forced to sacrifice, made him more and more familiar with the idea of repudiating Agrippina. He knew—for the whole court knew—that the favors he still valued and coveted were granted by her to others, and that there was little real difference between the open profligacy of his former consort and the studiously decorous manner of the empress in public when contrasted with the sinfulness of her private life. At the same time, he felt deeply for the sad fate of his son; he could not look at Britannicus without great inner emotion, and many a time, when he met him by chance, he would embrace him with more warmth and affection than was usual in him, and exclaim, "Grow up, my child, and I will render you an account of all that has been done," adding occasionally the well-known Greek words, referring to the spear of Achilles:

"What has wounded thee shall heal thee also."

He even spoke of anticipating the yet tender age of his darling son on the plea of his precocious size and strength, and to grant him at once the right to wear the virile toga, "so that the Romans might at last have a true and genuine Cæsar."

Agrippina heard and shuddered. She was too intimately acquainted with all the palace intrigues of a long series of years not to know how precarious her position was; and the very ease with which she had succeeded, without once appearing herself in the plot, in overthrowing her beautiful and irresistible rival, Messalina, taught her to guard against being overtaken by the same disastrous fate. Her situation was critical in the extreme. The storm was rising fast and thick which in a moment might sink her ship, so richly freighted with brilliant hopes for the future, and wreck her in sight of the safe harbor, depriving her at one fell blow of the fruit of her lifelong labor and the result of her terrible crimes.

She was determined not to be thus foiled. Even yet she asked nothing for herself, but she would do all, risk all, for her son. To see him on the throne of the Cæsars was the one great aim of her life, and to attain this she was willing to deluge the empire with blood, to shrink from no crime, to dread no penalty on earth, no punishment in Tartarus. She had, by the favor of the gods and the power of her will, removed every obstacle out of his way. There was but one now left—an old man of sixty-four years—unfit in mind, unworthy by his habits, to rule the world. Why should he not give way to her young, her beautiful, darling son, who would make Rome so happy and be himself so great and so glorious? Was she not herself far better qualified to rule than the poor dotard, the drunken butt of his own courtiers, the pliant tool in her hands? And if Nero was still young and

loved pleasure better than the duties of the throne, was she not there, ready to relieve him of all anxiety and to assume the supreme power with a firm hand and a stout heart? Away with all faint-hearted scruples! Claudius must fall, if she was not to fall herself and her child with her. There could be no choice—no hesitation; and the emperor's fate was sealed.

She had no sooner determined to act boldly than the gods themselves seemed to favor her design. The bitterest and most powerful of her enemies, Narcissus, who had followed his master everywhere like a shadow, as if anticipating her murderous designs, was taken seriously ill with the gout, and the watchful empress instantly seized upon the lucky accident to make it subservient to her own purposes. She bribed the great minister's physicians to order their patient at once to the Spas of Sinuessa, a famous watering-place in Campania, where Narcissus was sufficiently far from Rome not to interfere with her plans. She was, at the same time, desirous to prevent him from presenting, if Claudius should suddenly die, a last will which the emperor had just drawn up, and, after being attested by all the high officers of state, entrusted to the faithful minister's hand. Her spies told her that Nero was not mentioned there as successor, and everything depended, therefore, upon his ascending the throne before the wishes of the emperor could be publicly ascertained. Narcissus had no sooner left the city than she made promptly all the necessary preparations for her accursed work. The matter presented, in this case, some peculiar difficulties. She could not venture upon public assassination, for, however feeble in body and mind the old emperor might be, the people loved him yet because of his simple and unassuming manners, and perhaps not less because he shared all the passions and all the vices of the

lowest among them; while the Prætorian guards were personally attached to him, and both people and guards would have avenged his violent death and proclaimed Britannicus emperor. The poor man seemed, moreover, to be, in some dim and indefinable way, conscious of the doom that was hanging over him. At the last meeting of the senate he had, with touching eloquence, besought his two sons to live in peace and concord with each other, and commended them in anxious words to the tender care of the fathers. As he sat for the last time on the tribunal, performing his favorite duty as supreme judge, he had more than once declared that he had reached the end of his earthly career, and insisted upon this conviction in spite of all remonstrances on the part of his friends and flatterers. All this put the empress on her guard, and she saw that it was necessary to give to the emperor's death the most natural appearance, and to gain, immediately after it, sufficient time to secure the succession of her own son. This could only be done by employing poison; but even here the choice was not easy, for a poison which should act too quickly would infallibly betray the author of the crime, and a very slow one might be as dangerous, by causing a delay which would enable Claudius to detect the conspiracy and to secure the right to the throne to Britannicus.

But there was no lack of poisons in Rome. The art of taking life had been carried to a rare degree of perfection, and its professors stood high in favor with old and young. Caligula had himself studied the science of poisoning, and when he died a chest was found filled with a great variety of poisons, with notes on their powers and qualities as ascertained by experiments. Great was also the number of slaves and freedmen, of men and women, who devoted their life to the unholy pursuit and

lived by pandering to the murderous passions of the day. Only a short time before, Claudius himself had ordered the banishment of the most famous of all poisoners in Rome—a hag from Gaul, called Locusta—but her services had been so valuable, and the secrets she knew, having been again and again employed as an “agent of the government”—so important, that the execution of the order was suspended for a time, and she was allowed to stay in the city. Agrippina sent for this woman, and threatening, on one hand, to have her instantly sent to a desert island if she refused, she promised her, on the other hand, her freedom and a liberal reward if she would prepare her a poison which should disorder the mind and destroy life—not of a sudden, but by degrees. The poisoner promised readily to prepare a compound of new and exquisite ingredients, far surpassing all that had ever been known in her art, and presented it promptly, proving its efficacy by giving it, in the presence of the empress, to a slave, who faithfully died in the desired manner. But now another difficulty arose: How could Claudius be induced to take the poison? This was no easy task, for with the frequency of deaths caused by poison the precautions also had increased which the emperor and many of the great took to protect themselves against the ever-threatening danger. The former had followed the example of his predecessors since the days of Augustus, in having an official at his table whose special duty it was first to taste every dish and every beverage which was offered to his master. This obliged him, of course, jealously to watch over the preparation of all he ate and drank, as his own life depended upon his care; and to such importance had this office risen under Claudius that these “tasters” were regularly organized into a corporation, and have left their names on many a column

and arch in the Eternal City. The emperor had, moreover, his own physician, who always sat at his table, ready to render such service as might be required on the instant. Both these men had, therefore, first to be bribed; but, long before Walpole, every man had his price, and their complicity was soon secured. The man who served the emperor's table and tasted the dishes for his master was a eunuch, Halotus; the physician, Xenophon, a Greek from the island of Cos, who claimed to be descended from no less a personage than the great Æsculapius himself, the mythical ancestor of a long line of renowned physicians.

These two guardians of the Cæsar's life once won over, there was no difficulty in administering the poison, for poor Claudius had been a glutton from the days in which he received his training at the hands of a stable-boy, and his elevation to the throne had produced no change in his habits. On the contrary, his friends plead that his bodily infirmities and the exhausting cares of his high station, combined with the fatigue from unceasing private studies, required more food and stronger stimulants in compensation for the great wear and tear of mind and body. At all events, the excesses of former years had become deeply-rooted habits in old age, and he was accustomed to consume almost incredible quantities of food, while he rarely, if ever, returned to his bed otherwise than completely overcome with wine. One of his favorite dishes consisted of mushrooms, and this was chosen for the murderous purpose. The emperor, who never was able to resist an invitation to a house where a famous cook was employed, had promised to dine on a solemn occasion with the college of priests—a class of men famous even in other ages for the judicious appreciation of a good table—and went late one day to the Capitol. The favor-

ite delicacy was duly presented, first to the eye of the emperor, who examined it critically, and then, at least in appearance, carefully tasted by Halotus; but before Claudius had begun to eat, Agrippina presented him from the dish with a peculiarly large and beautiful mushroom, on which the taster had himself dropped the deadly poison furnished by Locusta. The emperor ate it and showed at first no suspicious symptom; still, it struck several persons present that he soon after became very quiet, and drank even more wine than usual, so that he had at last to be raised from his couch, completely overcome, and carried home to his palace. A few moments afterward he was seized with excruciating pains, but from the enormous quantity of wine he had taken, or from the great strength of his constitution, the poison failed to have any effect; an effort of nature followed, and he was greatly relieved.

The empress was nearly overcome with terror. If he should revive her death was certain, and all her friends were involved in the common ruin; for even if she were, by a miracle, to escape the suspicions of her husband, treacherous allies were sure to betray her. When all was at stake, all had to be dared. A slight, almost imperceptible, sign suggested to the physician that the deed must be accomplished or their destruction was certain; and the subtle Greek understood her meaning at a glance. He also knew what was at stake for himself, and that, in such moments, hesitation or half measures bring certain ruin, while bold daring and a quick consummation are sure to earn high reward. The emperor was lying on his bed unconscious, his outer senses closed to the world, and twisting about in fearful convulsions and intolerable pain. Under the pretence of relieving the unfortunate sufferer, Xenophon approached and thrust a feather down his

throat, a common enough proceeding by which the Romans of that day found relief from intemperance in eating. But the tip of the feather had been steeped in deadly poison, and when morning broke the emperor lay still and silent, relieved for ever from all cares and anxieties of this world.

Claudius was dead, but Nero was not yet emperor, and a false step at this critical moment might have caused the loss of all that had been purchased at such fearful cost. But Agrippina did not find her energy or her presence of mind wanting when so much was at stake. She saw that Claudius must live, to the world at least, until her son was firmly seated on the throne. She sent, therefore, immediately the proper officers to convene the senate and to inform the fathers officially of the indisposition of the emperor; others were despatched to the consuls and principal priests, that they might offer up prayers and vows for the life of the Cæsar. The emperor was removed, as if fainting, to an inner chamber and covered with warm blankets; restoratives were applied and physicians called in to prescribe for the patient. Actors and buffoons even were sent for, under the pretence that Claudius had expressed a wish to be amused. While these men performed their tricks and antics before the lifeless body, Agrippina had assembled in an adjoining room the emperor's children—Britannicus and his two sisters, Antonia and Octavia. She held the former clasped to her bosom as if in an excess of grief, calling him her pet and her darling and the image of his dear father. And all this while her heart was beating violently with fear and trembling, and she was waiting anxiously for the hour which her astrologers had told her would alone be favorable to her plans and the succession of Nero. So powerful was the hold which superstition had

on the minds of the strongest of those days and the most reckless among great criminals. Her great fear was that ere the hour came the death of Claudius might be discovered and his son proclaimed emperor. Hence she ordered all the gates and approaches of the palace to be kept strictly closed and placed under the care of her most devoted and reliable friends in the guards, while she herself kept the formidable rival of her son literally in her arms for hours and jealously watched every movement of his sisters. From time to time she ordered bulletins to be issued, stating that the sufferer was reviving, and messages to be sent to the guards and the army that all went well and that the astrologers foretold his speedy recovery. What wonderful power this strange woman must have had over herself to keep up such consummate acting for hours and hours, when every moment was fraught with deadly danger for mother and son alike! Still, she never gave way for an instant until nearly twelve hours had passed, for the Chaldean seers had pronounced the day an ill-fated day, on which but a single hour, at noon, was suitable for the great enterprise. At last the obelisk with the golden ball on the Capitoline Hill showed the noonday hour. The doors of the palace were suddenly thrown open, and Nero, accompanied by Burrhus, the commander-in-chief of the Prætorian guards, who owed his high position to the favor of Agrippina, walked straight to the guard-house at the outer gate. A detachment of troops was stationed there as usual. They were drawn up in line and informed by their chief that Claudius had just died; then, upon his order, they greeted the young prince with acclamations and lifted him on a litter on their shoulders. A few only hesitated, and, remaining faithful even in that hour of joy and uproar, inquired where Britannicus was; but as they saw nobody there to

take the lead or to advise action, they soon fell in and followed the example set by their comrades. Nero was at once hailed as emperor and carried in triumph to the fortified camp of the Prætorians, where he addressed the troops drawn up in line, and promised them the same liberal donation which his adopted father had granted them—about a thousand dollars to every man. They immediately proclaimed him emperor of Rome and carried him in triumph to the senate, where he was accepted as such without hesitation. The consent of the provinces and the legions stationed abroad was soon obtained, and the whole success seemed to have simply depended upon his being the first to claim the imperial honors. Nero alone knew to whom he really owed the throne of the world, and when, late in the evening, the officer of the guard on duty in the imperial palace asked him, according to usage, for the watchword for the night, the new emperor gave, "The best of mothers!"

Agrippina had not been inactive during these hours of triumph. Even whilst Nero was still in the hands of the soldiers, she had already thought of Narcissus, her bitter enemy, who was now at her mercy, and must not live any longer to be the only shadow on her bright page of success. She had, therefore, sent her agents, as soon as Claudius had died, to Sinuessa. The invalid minister received them with perfect composure, and only asked for a short delay before they executed the sentence of death. His request was granted, and he employed the time for a most honorable purpose, which may well reconcile us to much that was mean or distasteful in the life of the freedman. With touching fidelity to his late master, he served him in death as he had done in life, and burnt all the emperor's important papers, which he had in his possession as first secretary. Many of those letters were such

as could have compromised Agrippina and numerous friends of hers most grievously if they had fallen into the hands of her adversaries, and his generosity toward his enemy was therefore as noble as his faithfulness to his old master. Then only he gave himself up to the messengers of the cruel empress. Thus died the man who, once a slave, had risen by his talents and his devotion to be the most powerful man in the empire, the owner of more than twenty millions, the proud patron of cities and sovereign rulers, whom the satirical Romans called *The Master's Master*. Thus died a man who for us has a still higher interest, as among his officials and slaves we find the first, almost imperceptible, germ of the new faith, which amid all the fearful corruption and shameless criminality of imperial Rome was then slowly rising to light—not among the great and the noble, but in the dungeon of the slave and the lonely barracks of the poor. For little, perhaps, did the powerful minister suspect what a glorious treasure he had under his roof in those to whom the apostle Paul could send the comforting words, "Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord."

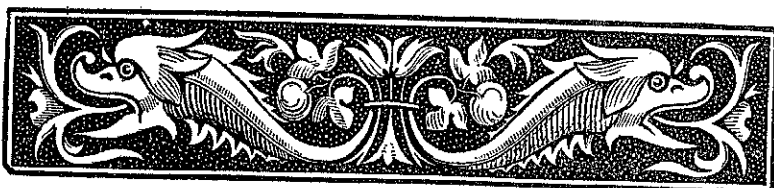
In the mean time, the senate had decreed that Claudius should have a magnificent funeral, a college of numerous priests and an apotheosis. Like all of his predecessors, Claudius also had become a god, though Nero at a later period thought fit to degrade him again, and he remained unnoticed until Vespasian was kind enough to restore him once more to his honors; for the emperors were by no means gods for ever and for aye, and their divinity was subject to strange reverses. A splendid temple was erected, surrounded by one of the finest and grandest porticoes of which imperial Rome could boast, and filling up the whole oblong platform on the Cœlian Hill, be-

hind the Coliseum, which is now occupied by the garden of the Passionists and marked by a group of slender cypresses, rising there to this day like images of the ostentatious grief of Agrippina. Unfortunately, the character of Claudius had not been such as to inspire the Romans with much reverence for his memory, and they hardly respected him more as a god than they had done as an emperor. They laughed heartily at the inhuman banter which spoke of his sudden descent to Olympus by means of delicate mushrooms, and although the first families of Rome vied with each other for the honor of being appointed priests in his temple, they enjoyed none the less readily a brilliant satire written by Seneca. For no sooner had Nero, a boy in years though old enough in vice and wickedness, ceased to sound the praises of his predecessor in a set speech, which his preceptor himself had put into his mouth, than Seneca began with graceless frivolity to make the departed autocrat the laughing-stock of the world and to deride him with remorseless sarcasm. Once, when he wanted to be recalled from his terrible exile, he had gravely pointed him out to the world as a god; now he nicknamed him contemptuously a gourd, and instead of sending him up to Olympus to join the assembled deities, he pretended to have heard of him in the lower world as an overgrown pumpkin. The brilliant and amusing satire, full of original thoughts and ingenious devices, appeared, of course, anonymously, and has hence been often attributed to other writers; but Rome credited him with it and laughed at the strange fantastic vision of judgment, while its author gained new renown and lost nothing in respect. The world seemed to have grown wondrously keen in appreciating satire and sarcasm, and conveniently dull in perceiving ingratitude and falsehood. For here was the strange spectacle

exhibited of a number of murderers, led by an empress, mourning with solemn pomp and impressive splendor the death of their victim—men who had killed a Cæsar by the aid of a horrible hag, raising him temples and worshiping him as a god; the new national deity covered with scorn and derision by his own people, who but just now trembled at his frown, and the Eternal City convulsed with laughter at a man who was the adopted father of the ruler of the empire and the faithful husband of the emperor's mother!

But Agrippina had once more conquered—she was the mother of an emperor!





VIII.

THE MOTHER OF AN EMPEROR.

CLAUDIUS had become emperor by hiding behind a curtain and paying a thousand dollars to every man in the guards, and now Nero was hailed as Cæsar because his mother was a beautiful woman and mushrooms were poisonous. A boy not seventeen years old was thus in a moment endowed with the power of life and death over a hundred millions of intelligent souls, dwelling all around the coasts of the Mediterranean—that all absorbing, unchanging theatre of civilization and history—and with the rule over the whole then known world. This boy, a furious, bloodthirsty madman, was soon to cut off heads at haphazard and to massacre crowds from mere pleasure. He was, nevertheless, to be supported, honored, and even worshiped, by all the pride, energy and intelligence of a vast empire, and his insane rule and insatiable love of murder were to be quietly endured by high and low, wise and simple, for years and years. Well might we wish to be able to follow Apollonius, who came from Asia to Rome in order to see Nero and to learn what kind of a brute a tyrant was.

A strange and curious being he must have been, for he baffled the wisdom and experience of a Seneca; and his own mother, who read every mind and conquered every

heart, failed to obtain the mastery over the boy, her own child! Never, perhaps, in her life had the great empress felt prouder and happier than when she saw at last her ambition crowned and her son seated upon the throne which the proud Claudians had so long withheld from the rightful owners, the descendants of Augustus' daughter, the illustrious Julia. Her only son, the last scion of that noble race of Cæsars, was emperor of Rome and master of the world, and she herself, the mother of that son, was the master spirit behind the throne. For Nero was only seventeen years old. He had shown himself, so far, docile and affectionate, and Agrippina counted upon controlling him easily through her own superior strength of will and through the gratitude which he owed to her who had given him the empire; for he knew that without her counsel and active aid he would still be the neglected prince and in great danger of being banished by the legitimate heir of the throne. The empress had imbrued her hands in blood for his sake. She felt no remorse; at least, neither in her public life nor in her secret memoirs does she ever betray the slightest symptom of regret. The husband who had loved her, the uncle to whom she owed all that she ever achieved, the emperor who had seated her by his side on the throne of the world, lay still and silent in his grave, and Agrippina had no fear of the dead. The people were satisfied with the deep grief she had shown in her bereavement and the magnificent honors which she had lavished upon the departed.

And yet the crime was great, the murder outrageous. Virtue seemed to be utterly lost sight of by her and by the whole nation, and Vice stood forth in dazzling brilliancy and colossal proportions. But when we hear of these fearful enormities we must not forget the stake for

which they were committed, the stage on which they were enacted, and the audience, who were not only the passive spectators, but often the victims of the result. These were grand, on a scale such as the world has never seen elsewhere. The whole earth looked to Rome, and nations were held in breathless suspense while the Prætorian guards were fixing in their camp the price of the purple for contending Cæsars, or while two women, brilliant and bad above all their sex, wrangled and quarreled for the seat on the throne. The reward of the successful rival was nothing less than the possession of the then known world, from the Euphrates to the ocean and from the burning sands of Africa to the Ultima Thule of the ancients. Smaller ambitions were satisfied with the rule over countries as large as the kingdoms of our day, and a civil list unlimited except by the avarice or the rare honesty of a proconsul. These were the mediocrities of the time. Modest men were secondary personages in the great drama. And then the stage on which the fate of the contestants was decided, and with it the fate of the world! The great Forum, with its magnificent temples, resplendent in gold and precious marbles, and its crowds of statues of gods and illustrious men; the free heavens above, from which the immortals themselves were believed to look down upon the Eternal City; and below a seething, surging multitude of passionate men, easily swayed by a well-turned phrase and ready to shed rivers of blood at the nod of a tyrant. On the hallowed rostrum, where the fate of the world had been so often decided, and words had been spoken which still burn in the hearts of countless hearers, the stern Roman in his toga, so simple and yet so grand in its graceful sweep and pleasing folds; behind him, towering high on the eminence, the Capitol, the cynosure of the universe, and by

its side the Tarpeian rock, with its grim precipice and solemn warning. Where all was of such colossal proportions, crime alone could not remain small, and it was but natural that the treason whispered in the long corridors of the imperial palace should swell into portentous thunder ere it reached the Pillars of Hercules, and that the blood shed unnoticed in the streets of Rome should send a shudder through trembling nations.

For all that was done there reached the uttermost ends of the world with unfailing certainty. We rarely remember the vital force of the close connection between the great city and all the vast countries that made the empire. The *Public Acts*, the official journal of the government, was read in all the provinces and by all the armies stationed in distant Scotland or on the banks of the Euphrates. In India and in Spain every man of intelligence knew how many senators had attended the last levee of Agrippina, what great lady had been divorced and why, and the number of lions and of men killed at the last exhibition in the amphitheatre. Travelers, in numbers little short of those abroad in our day, carried the details; for from the Golden Pillar in the heart of Rome, which served as common centre to the world, there stretched forth in all directions a vast network of roads, such as the world has never seen again, which bound all the nations of the earth as closely together as their common allegiance to Rome. For a hundred and fifty miles from the city these magnificent highways were covered with imperishable slabs of stone; from thence those massive roads, which serve even now for trade and commerce and arouse the wonder of modern engineers, carried the traveler to the most distant lands. No obstacle was ever allowed to stop the building of these roads; the right of property gave way to the all-powerful will of the Cæsar,

and Nature herself succumbed under the persistent labor of the Roman workmen. Valleys were filled up and mountains laid low; the road went right through the live rock; it passed on high arches over the gorges of the Pyrenees and crossed broad rivers on immense bridges; for the Roman highway went straight like the eagle to the point which the eye of the engineer had fixed upon as its terminus. Where water-ways offered their service, they were improved and extended, so that armed fleets, descending at intervals the Rhine and the Danube, could carry news from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea.

It was therefore as if the Forum at Rome was in full sight of the whole world, and the actors who performed the great dramas of life on that grandest of stages ever given to any nation on earth felt unconsciously that the eyes of millions were fixed upon their slightest glance and subtlest gesture with all the interest which a question of life and death arouses in dependent races. This gave a depth and a grandeur to all their acts which we look for in vain in our day, when the world is parceled out in countless divisions, and interests are subdivided until they cease to have any serious importance beyond the narrow limits of a province.

Thus Agrippina also, playing for high stakes before such an audience, did not mind committing great crimes, and, unlike the wife of Macbeth, found little difficulty in washing the blood from her hands. Poison was so common a dish on every table since the very first days of the republic that the subject of antidotes had already a literature of its own, and murder lurked avowedly behind every column in the imperial palace. But when the empress undertook to extend the number of her victims, and Rome was threatened with a new deluge of blood, she met with resistance where she had least expected it—in

her own son. She had evidently miscalculated the facility with which she had hoped to bend him to her own will, and learnt with dismay the difference between the prince who aspires to a throne and the emperor who holds the sceptre in his firm grasp—between the youth of seventeen who is only the child of his mother and the Cæsar who is also the master of the world.

Nero was in all probability not a bad, and certainly not a vicious, man by nature. His education had been fair. He had been well trained by his ambitious mother, from whom he had inherited more than ordinary talents and superior intelligence. His later years had brought him under the influence of Seneca's precepts, and although the great philosopher's practice by no means enforced his doctrines, he did no doubt the best that could be done for his imperial pupil. Standing by education, rank and eminent wisdom high above the cringing slave or the flattering freedman to whom other youths of high caste were generally consigned, he tried to allure his pupil into virtue. The means he employed were probably not the best chosen; at all events, they failed in obtaining their end. Seneca had thought it better to indulge Nero in ordinary amusements, if they would keep him from more vicious pursuits and induce him to give reasonable attention to severer studies. It was thus the young prince imbibed his fondness for singing, playing and dancing—amusements in themselves harmless enough, but considered by the Romans as utterly unbecoming a man in high station, and carried to vilest excess in the later years of the emperor. Nor did the philosopher care to quarrel with his pupil's outrageous vanity. But Nero, clothed in purple and the gaudiest trappings, and admired by hosts of sycophants and flatterers, soon came to be imbued with a spirit of intolerable self-conceit, and was

led step by step to the most inordinate desires. His palate was educated before his tongue, and the kitchen was more frequented than the library. He was allowed, when quite young yet, to visit the theatre and the circus, and the scenes he saw there soon hardened his heart and dulled his sense of decency. Here he learnt to delight in watching the torture of animals or the pangs of dying gladiators, and to gaze down calmly upon streams of blood pouring over the arena. What refinement, what delicacy could withstand the influence of such brutalizing sights, such gross and cruel recreations? The licentious actors of pantomimes, of which he soon became passionately fond, and the bloody butchers of the circus, blunted his moral sense quickly and excited the worst passions in his heart.

His master, Seneca, said, "Nothing is so injurious to morals as to go to the theatre." But he did not choose to prevent his pupil from going there, fearful perhaps that he might find even worse amusements elsewhere. Even the dramatic works of those days depended, like the ballet of our day, almost entirely on the skill of the machinist and the brilliancy of the scenery. Infantry and cavalry had to appear in masses on the stage to please the fastidious taste of Roman audiences; bears, lions and elephants took their part in the play. The people only applauded when they saw six hundred mules carrying away the spoils of a conquered city or when three thousand men came forth from the side of a Trojan horse. The actors who knew best how to add indecencies and obscenities to the words of the author pleased the public most. At last their language and their gestures became intolerable, and they were banished from Italy, but Nero had them soon back again. Nor was the pantomime much better, though here a

single man, masked and dancing to the music of a flute and of cymbals, played a whole drama and expressed by his gestures a thousand sentiments and passions. His hands spoke, his steps were eloquent and his dance made the spectators weep bitterly. But these were not the true amusements of the Roman. The true drama at Rome was only to be found where men were seen dying; the true stage was the bloody sand of the Coliseum, and the great comedian of the city was the gladiator.

How they crowded by tens of thousands into the vast space of those amphitheatres which the great men of Rome gave to their fellow-citizens from pride and a desire for popularity! How they shouted with joy when the wild beasts rushed into the arena—to-day six hundred lions at once, to-morrow a herd of giraffes or rhinoceros, at another time elephants without number, and countless crocodiles! There, tied to posts, stand the unfortunate criminals who are to be torn to pieces for the amusement of the multitude, and at yonder door are seen the beast-fighters, free men and slaves, Roman patricians and barbarian prisoners, ready to engage in deadly conflict with the wild animals. The sight is glorious to Roman eyes, and after a while the arena is strewn with corpses of men and brutes, lying pellmell one upon another; the atmosphere is filled with the odor of blood, and groans and cries of pain resound from all sides; but the people are pleased, Nero claps his hands for joy, and listens with amusement to a cry of compassion uttered from the highest benches—for a lot of poor elephants who die very hard!

But the true delight is still to come—the hour when men are to fight against men, and when all the strength, the energy, the courage and the science of man are to be brought into play in order to renew, in the midst of

blessed peace, the fearful horrors of war. The contractor brings in his gladiators, trained for years in his far-famed schools, fed upon the gladiators' paste, which gives them more blood to shed in the arena, and proud of their impending fate. He has bought them, if they were slaves; he has hired them, if they were free; but now, free or slaves, they belong to him unto death. They are bound to expose their lives six times a day; they have solemnly sworn not to yield in the fight nor to think of flight, and to submit to every punishment the contractor may impose, from mere chains to death by the sword. And all this for a sum of money! And who were these gladiators whom Nero admired, whom he treated as friends and loved better than his own kinsmen? The refuse of men, the scum of the populace or foreign slaves? No; they were free Roman citizens, noble knights, illustrious senators, patricians, and—oh, horror!—even matrons. Senators were not ashamed to take up the horrid profession—some to keep themselves from starving after having squandered their estates, and others to curry favor with the emperors; and what Augustus had strictly prohibited, Nero now again allowed, so that at one of his shows hundreds of knights and senators appeared in the arena. That under such an emperor even women engaged in these conflicts we learn from Juvenal, who sings:

"Oh, what a decent sight 'tis to behold
All thy wife's magazine by auction sold!
The belts, the crested plumes, the several suits
Of armor, and the Spanish leather boots!
Yet these are they that cannot bear the heat
Of figured silks and under sarsenet sweat.
Behold the strutting Amazonian!
She stands on guard, with her right foot before;
Her coats tucked up, and all her motions just;
She stamps, and then cries, Ha! at every thrust."

The people watched the performance with critical eye; every agony was examined like the artistic play of a good actor; a fine killing was loudly applauded, and the unfortunate man who fell awkwardly or died in an ungraceful position was severely hissed. The excitement increased as blood flowed more freely; all around the arena, from the purple-covered seats of the great and noble below to the bare marble benches of the common people on high, all is excitement and noise; bets are won and lost; bravoës resound for a happy blow, a large wound, an artistic death. Then follow quarrels; the audience divides; curses and threats begin to fly about, then stones; Nero himself is carried away, and pelts the spectators until their blood begins to flow and mingle with that of the gladiators, and troops have to be sent for to restore order.

This was the only enthusiasm that still animated the Romans, and their emperor led them in this delirium of bloodshed and murder. Who can realize in our day the cry of furious rage uttered by eighty thousand men with one voice as they see a favorite fighter yield, tremble and ask for mercy? Or the contempt with which men and women, and even tender, delicate maidens, turned from the poor criminal who instinctively shuddered and drew back as the bloody sword touched his throat? Claudius, who was far from being peculiarly cruel, had already ordered a gladiator who fell by chance to be killed before his eyes, that he might enjoy his last agony; and what he did with one, Nero did with large numbers at once.

And all these cruel murders, these wholesale butcheries, these conflicts in which men descended to a level with the wild beasts of the forest and the desert, were the real, the main amusement of the Romans and their emperor. They took place in the most magnificent buildings, which

the empire has left to the admiration of posterity, with seats and walls of precious marble, inlaid with bas reliefs and costly mosaics, with statues and busts in countless numbers here and there, and gold and silver profusely displayed in all directions. Songs and symphonies accompanied the cries and groans on the arena, and an orchestra of a thousand instruments mingled its notes with the voices of the excited audience. Huge widths of purple fabrics, embroidered with gold, were fluttering high over the heads of the spectators to protect them against the burning rays of the sun, and long tubes, arranged with infinite skill, poured from time to time streamlets of perfumed waters like fragrant dew over the audience to refresh the air and to correct the bitter smell of blood. At the end of every combat, young and beautiful slaves, dressed in rich and fanciful costume, appeared to rake the bloody sand and to scatter over it perfumed and bright-colored dust. New sights continually fed the hungry eye of the spectator, and when his insatiate desire was for a moment at a loss, he turned to the gorgeous boudoir under one of the arcades, where the *demi-monde* of those days had their special box close to the arena red with blood and the fearful vault in which the bodies of the slain were heaped up in vast numbers. Thus nothing was wanting that could satisfy the unbridled lust of the Roman—from the atrocious murder to the most exquisite refinement of delicacy—from the extreme of magnificence to the lowest depth of vice.

The Roman was mad with his thirst for blood. He called for it on the stage and in the arena, by the side of the funeral pile and on the couch around his private table. And Nero was maddest of all. In him was concentrated the whole fearful nature of the people over whom he ruled. The vastness of the empire was re-

flected, as it were, in the sovereignty of his wickedness. It became a regular pleasure to him to see blood flow, and the lives of men had nothing any more that was sacred in his eyes. This sentiment, to be sure, was not his alone; it was common to all Romans. When Tiberius thought of suppressing Judaism and Egyptian worship in Rome, he sent four thousand freedmen, guilty of belonging to the condemned sects, to Sardinia, and when he was told that the climate would probably be fatal to them, the answer was, "It's a small matter if they perish." And when St. Paul and his companions were sent to Nero, and the vessel in which he and his faithful companions had embarked at Myra was in danger, the soldiers coolly proposed to murder the prisoners, who were only accused, but neither tried nor condemned, as a useful precaution! The emperor himself did not hesitate to experiment upon members of his household when he wished to try newly-invented poisons, and killed others with his own hand to learn certain secrets of magic from their last agony; while the great physician, Celsus, tells us that other sovereigns sent men to his professional brethren to be dissected alive for the benefit of their art.

Rome was truly "the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, bearing a golden cup in her hand full of abominations;" and the insatiable thirst made her, even under Nero yet, "the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." And poor Nero was her son!

He had loved the circus and its games from childhood up. The brute had early awakened in his heart. When too young to go there he would speak of nothing else. As soon as he could obtain permission he went there by stealth. Then, growing older, came the desire to shine

himself before the great public. He practiced first privately in his gardens, probably in those meadows on the banks of the Tiber which had once been the field where Cincinnatus was found ploughing when he was called upon to rule Rome, which had then belonged to his ancestors, the Brazen-Beards, and were now transformed into pastures of wondrous beauty. After many rehearsals, held only before his slaves and the rabble that happened to assemble there, he made his *début* in the great circus, a freedman sitting in the place of the officer who usually gave the signals.

He dreamt also of earning immortal fame as a gladiator, and formed a plan to appear naked in the arena, to encounter a lion there and to stifle him in his arms. But the animal, though starved nearly to death, would not promise to be perfectly harmless, and he abandoned the purpose. Afterward he built a colossal amphitheatre of his own, where he subsequently burnt the poor Christian martyrs, fastened to posts and covered with pitch and tar to light up his insane revels.

Can we wonder, then, that a youth raised in this atmosphere, reeking with blood, whose early training had been entrusted to a barber and a dancer, and who had received his later schooling at the hands of an ambitious, unscrupulous woman, knew neither gratitude nor genuine affection?

He had native cunning enough to grasp the outlines of his perilous position. He knew full well, from the long race of rivalry with Britannicus, that his half-brother was the natural heir to the throne as the eldest scion and legitimate descendant of the Cæsars, while he himself had no title but that of a legal fiction through adoption. Even as he walked across the court of the imperial palace, leaning ostentatiously on the arm of the noble Burrhus,

the commander of the guards, he felt that in thousands of bosoms the eldest born of Claudius had a stronger hold than he, supported as he was by an army. He knew equally well, from his long experience of court life and his early initiation in every kind of intrigue, that the freedmen of Claudius would struggle, to the death, for the influence they had exercised under his weak predecessor. Power is too sweet to be given up in a day, and Pallas especially, with his immense wealth, his mature craft and his intimate acquaintance with all the secret springs of government, would be sure to try all means by which he could retain the reins of supreme control in his hands. Nero hated him bitterly. There was, after all, proud blood in his veins, and the haughtiness of the Brazen-Beards revolted at the presumption of the former slave. He could submit with tolerably good grace to the counsels of a brave and honest soldier like Burrhus, and was quite willing to take the advice of Seneca, his wise and experienced tutor, but he was not to be coaxed by the flatteries of a freedman, much less to be overawed by the assumed superiority of an ex-minister. It was distasteful in the extreme to his pride to be reminded by the great statesman of the signal services which he had rendered Nero and his mother. It is true, Agrippina's marriage with Claudius had been his work; he alone had carried the adoption of her son as future heir of the last emperor; and he still held in his hands the administration of the finances of the immense empire which had furnished the young Cæsar the means to satisfy the demands of the Prætorian guards and to win the good-will of many a faithful commander in the provinces. He was still the powerful politician, before whom the greatest of the land bowed low, and whose hand even the proudest of senators were but too happy to kiss. His arrogance and brutal

insolence, borne patiently during the time when he was the favorite of Claudius and literally held the sceptre in his own hands, became intolerable now that he was no longer all-powerful; and Nero especially bore it only for his mother's sake. But this very consideration was perhaps the strongest cause of dislike: that his noble mother should be the friend of the freedman, that public report should dare to speak even of a closer bond between the two—this excited his deep-felt indignation, and he determined to seize the first opportunity that might offer to dismiss a man whom he looked upon with fear and disgust.

Far more formidable, however, than senate, nobility, or the great minister himself, was his own mother, who had done and sacrificed so much for him that his very gratitude became an intolerable burden to him. He felt that she, who had plotted at the peril of her life against Messalina, murdered her husband and removed every rival from his path without delay or compunction—that she was not likely to abandon the authority she had exercised over his younger years, now that power was all she could still enjoy and all she intended to have. Even as he loved her he began instinctively to fear her. He shuddered at the ocean of crimes into which she had plunged, and trembled still more violently as he remembered that all this had been done for his sake, and that Agrippina would now expect naturally, and not unjustly, her reward at his hands. How could he ever repay the fearful bloody debt? He was still fondly devoted to her, and the very first act of his reign was a demand for new honors and higher distinctions to be bestowed upon his mother. As Livia had found a sad consolation in becoming the high priestess of her deified husband Augustus, so Agrippina obtained the same sacred dignity

in the temple of him whom she had murdered. At every public audience she was seen by the side of the emperor, and two lictors, the emblems of supreme power, were ordered to attend her person.

But she was not a woman to be contented with empty honors and formal emblems. She wanted power, and was determined to be empress—not in name only, but in reality. The senate was first made aware of the power behind the throne. Instead of meeting, as heretofore, in the Curia, the fathers were directed to assemble in the emperor's palace. Here, in the imperial library, adjoining immediately the private apartments of the Cæsar's family, which Augustus had added to the temple of the Capitoline Apollo, and in which he had occasionally asked the senate to meet him, they now held their regular sessions. It was a noble hall of vast proportions, and adorned on all sides with the plastic images of the most renowned orators and writers of Rome. On the side occupied by the senators, a door had been broken through the wall at Agrippina's request, and here, behind a curtain, sat the great empress, able, though unseen, to listen to the discussions and to ascertain the opinions of the still formidable council.

This act, however, and similar efforts, less carefully disguised, to make the world feel her direct control of affairs, roused the jealousy of the great powers of the state and excited grave apprehensions in the mind of the young emperor. The senate and the nobility were quite ready to obey the behests of a young man full of promise and likely to be yielding under wise management—over whom they could hold, in case of opposition, the threat of raising a rival to the throne in the genuine scion of the sacred Claudian blood. The weakness of the ruler's title they hoped would be the security for their pretensions. But Nero knew that when Burrhus and the Prætorian

guard hailed him as imperator, and when the senate meekly acquiesced in their choice, the law and the sword had declared in his favor, and the Romans were little disposed to risk their heads for an idea of legitimacy or a sentiment of compassion. This conviction made Nero self-confident and secure in his position toward the senate, and disregarding the opposition he might possibly meet with on the part of Pallas, his only apprehensions were now in the direction of his mother.

He knew her fierce passion and her inordinate ambition. He saw her determination to rule in person, and yet he shrank from the terrible conflict that must ensue if ever discord should rise between the imperious Augusta and the all-powerful Cæsar. For a time he bore it all quietly. She was carried in the same imperial litter with him, or he walked by her side as she proudly rode aloft, so that the world might see how intimate their relations and how deep his feelings of love and reverence were for his mother. Her head appeared by the side of her son's on the coins of the empire. She sent despatches to foreign courts and tributary cities without consulting him, and received ambassadors in solemn audience. It was easier for him as yet to have somebody else attend to the cares of government while he enjoyed the pleasures of life. He was full of small talents, which Seneca had encouraged him to cultivate, little as they were to his own taste and frivolous as they appeared in the eyes of the sterner Romans. He was passionately fond of music, of the plastic arts, and, above all, of horse-racing. So he spent his time pleasantly in painting a little and chiseling a little. He played on two or three instruments and sang his own songs; he broke his magnificent thorough-breds and drove them with surpassing skill. For as yet he loved the fine arts for their own sake, and had not come

to that period of his sad life when he was to make himself as ridiculous by his bad taste as he was detestable for his vices. Above all, he loved to act and to recite in public. His audiences were attentive, for imperial performers were apt to enforce silence by disagreeable means. But his greatest triumph was in the applause which he earned—earned in the literal sense of the word, for the harvest came only when the seed had been sown and all had been carefully prepared. Nero had a *claque* far superior to any of our day; hence the applause was always well modulated and admirably adapted to each part of his performance. When he spoke of gentler emotions, a low and prolonged noise was heard, produced by striking the hands together, well rounded and forming a hollow. At the salient points he was promptly answered, as it were, by a roll of sudden loud cracks, like the breaking of pots; and at last, when the finishing touch had been given, the Tiles opened upon him with a deep, continuous roar of subdued enthusiasm, sounding like the falling of countless hailstones on the tiles of houses. The theatre was always “well lighted up,” as the expression was in those days, and the *claqueurs* did their duty. Nero organized them himself with great skill and theatrical ability. They were not the poor devils of common theatres, paid with a meal and hired by an ordinary contractor. The emperor's troupe were chosen among the young noblemen of Rome, and they were led by a well-paid official, who bore the honorable name of chief of the orchestra. The choral masses consisted of not less than five thousand plebeians, carefully chosen among the most robust of the populace. They were required to appear in full dress, wearing their hair in long ringlets and a gold ring on their left hand. It must have been an event to hear these five or six thousand pairs of hands applaud like one man

in a vast amphitheatre. Besides, they only gave the signal. The senators and the people, who filled the enormous building from top to bottom, took good care to follow the lead, and that with great energy, for Nero was not disposed to jest on such subjects, and the knight whose enthusiasm was too slow in forthcoming was apt to be invited down into the arena, to see if by fighting a lion or a gladiator he could not perhaps excite more of it in the hearts of the audience.

With such tastes for cheap amusement and such sources of happiness, it seems as if it ought not to have been difficult for Agrippina to continue for years as the regent of the empire, and to enjoy all the substantial charms of power while her son would have been content to revel in his unlimited wealth and the adulation of a world at his feet.

Unfortunately, however, the great empress was not disposed to spare her youthful son by leaving him even a semblance of absolute power. She was too conscious of all that she had done for him and for his elevation to the throne to imagine that he would ever attempt to escape from her control. Strange blindness! She, the most ungrateful of women, believed still in the gratitude of others. She ought to have known that low characters, mean natures, smart and suffer acutely under the burden of obligations. She might have noticed, had she condescended to bestow so much attention upon the mind of her boy-son, that his vanity was excessive, and then her experience of the world would have told her that vain men bear anything rather than the appearance of being ruled by others and the ridicule attached to such weakness. A little delicate flattery might have made him her slave, while her utter indifference to all he might think or wish, and the haughty disdain with which she refused to

leave him even the empty appearance of sovereignty, wounded his petty vanity deeply and made him forget all he owed to his mother.

The senators and courtiers were, of course, not slow in perceiving that the emperor, though not daring to raise the banner of rebellion as yet himself, would not be displeased to see his ambitious mother occasionally reminded of the fact that she was not the Cæsar. The senate summoned courage to pass certain laws which she had deprecated, and great and bitter was her mortification. Then the ministers of the young emperor ventured to make her courteously aware of the respect she owed to their common master. Ambassadors from Armenia had come to Rome in order to invoke Nero's assistance in deciding some great political questions which threatened their kingdom with violent dissensions. Agrippina intended to receive them, seated at the side of her son on the imperial throne. Not taking even the trouble to announce her intention, she simply sent a message that the ceremony should not begin until she had taken her seat on the throne. This was a thing unheard of in the annals of Rome. The whole court was filled with consternation, and grave old statesmen were at a loss how to dissuade the proud empress from compromising in the eyes of the great world the highest authority in the state. Seneca alone, the great courtier, did not lose his head. He whispered a few words in the ear of his pupil, and when Agrippina entered the hall and walked straight up to the dais, Nero quickly descended from the throne, and, courteously and reverently taking her by the hand, led her aside to tell her that a sudden emergency would compel him to postpone the audience to another time. Thus the dignity of the empire was saved under the protecting veil of filial piety. The emperor left the hall without

returning, and from that day the ministers succeeded in arranging matters so that she could take no further part in state affairs.

Thus two powerful parties began gradually to divide the court—both struggling for the control of the young emperor, but the one actuated by higher motives and a desire for the safety of the empire and the peace of the world; the other purely for purposes of selfish success. The former acted under the guidance of Burrhus, the minister of war of the young Cæsar, a man of well-tryed ability in his special department and of unblemished purity in all his relations; and of Seneca, the counselor of his former pupil in matters of state, who wrote his speeches and public decrees, and whom everybody loved on account of his winning manners and noble dignity. It was a strange union, this alliance between men so utterly dissimilar; for, while the soldier was noted for his military bluntness and his strong sense of discipline and decorum, the philosopher played the courtier with great elegance of manners and easy liberality in point of morals. But they were both clear-sighted statesmen, and foresaw the great danger which threatened the empire in the virtual assumption by a woman of the power over life and death, and in her plans of personal vengeance and reckless cruelty; and thus they agreed to use the utmost of their united power to undermine her influence over her son and to reduce her to her natural sphere of action.

The other party consisted of the great empress, with all her magnificent powers of mind and the prestige of her privileges as the mother of the emperor; and of Pallas, her old and faithful friend, the experienced courtier, who still held the keys to the imperial exchequer.

The first year of Nero's reign had passed, and all went well. Abroad, the name of Rome had become more

formidable than ever, and at home Nero had earned the gratitude and the good-will of the people by numerous acts of kindness and mercy, which Seneca knew well how to publish and to glorify by his writings. The young emperor had begun with the rare advantage of having no injuries to avenge and no enmities to prosecute. Everything promised well, and with the exception of a few men, whom no government on earth would ever have satisfied fully, there was probably no serious discontent cherished in a single heart—except one. Agrippina felt that power was slipping from her hands, she hardly knew how, and that, while her son rose daily in favor, her own name was losing more and more of its former prestige. Nero was now nearly nineteen years old—an age at which both Pompey and Cæsar had already commanded large armies in times of great danger and civil war. He began to feel himself master, and the evidences of his popularity with senate and people gave him courage to begin the battle for independence. A report, skillfully spread by his friends, that he was weary of the control of his mother and the presumption of Pallas, and would shortly lay down the sceptre in order to withdraw, as Tiberius once had done, to the island of Rhodes, filled the public mind with consternation, and increased the hatred of the people against the great empress and her unpopular favorite.

The first blow was aimed at Pallas. Rome was amazed to learn, upon awakening one summer morning, that the powerful minister had fallen in disgrace. The report was true. The freedman had been deprived of all his offices and dismissed from court. The act had been all the more marked as the emperor had accompanied it by a witticism which was fully appreciated by the fastidious Romans. It was customary with the

highest public functionaries in Rome, the consuls, to go, at the end of their term of office, accompanied by their friends, to the Forum, and there to affirm with an oath that they had done nothing during their official career against the laws and the constitution. As Pallas, after his dismissal, was going in the midst of his numerous friends and attendants from the emperor's palace toward the Forum, Nero stood at a window and with bitter sarcasm exclaimed, There goes Pallas to swear his oath! The words were felt all the more keenly as they at once alluded to the arrogance of the freedman, whom the laws and the constitution excluded from all public offices, and who had still conducted himself as if he had occupied the very highest charges, and at the same time to the disgraceful manner in which his weak former master, Claudius, had relieved him from all responsibility. For, when assuming the office of finance minister, he had expressly stipulated that he should never be held responsible for any of his official acts or measures, and that whenever he retired his accounts with the state treasury should be considered settled.

Agrippina was so seriously alarmed by the suddenness of the blow, and the light it threw so unexpectedly upon the intentions of her son, that she lost her usual self-control, and forgot the importance of managing his vanity and his pride. Stung to the quick by the insult, she broke out in furious menaces and reproaches. She intimated to him that what she had given she might also take away again, and that a ready instrument was in her hand, the genuine offspring and natural heir of Claudius, whom, by a word of her own and an appeal to the guards, she could at any time seat upon the throne for which he was no longer fitted. And again the unfortunate son had to listen to the recital of the secret horrors

of the palace in which he dwelt—of the blood she had shed for his sake, the iniquity of her marriage, the murder of her husband, and the fearful crimes she had committed—for his sake. She denounced, in bitter terms of reproach and contempt, the emperor's advisers, who presumed, forsooth! to rule the world—the one with his maimed hand, the other with the phrases and flowers of rhetoric. In this strain she raved with fierce vehemence, clenching her hand in stern menace and storming with bitter curses, appealing to the deified Claudius and the shades of all whom she had sent to the dark regions of Hades, to see how their blood had been shed and their life taken from them for the sake of a treacherous and ungrateful son!

These threats sank deep into the heart of the young emperor, and sowed there a seed that was ere long to bear terrible fruit. From that day the name of Britannicus cast its gloomy shadow on his bright path, and he began to feel that the world was henceforth too small to hold them both. But a second scene of similar nature filled the measure of his dread and confirmed him in his first impulses. The two ministers and friends of the emperor had in the mean time thought fit to engage him in a love affair, which they hoped would fill his leisure hours with a harmless occupation, and tend at the same time to wean him from his childish dependence on his mother. He was married, it is true, and his wife, Octavia, was as beautiful as she was virtuous, but the marriage had been formed, when she was only thirteen years old, from purely political motives to advance Nero's interests at a time when he was yet far from the throne; and with all her attractions and merits the poor wife had never been able to win the affections of her boy-husband. A Greek girl was therefore carefully chosen and thrown

in the way of Nero, who failed not, with the ardor of a first illusion, to allow himself to be captivated by her exquisite beauty and high cultivation; for, by a strange act of justice, Greece was even then taking her full revenge on Rome, who had conquered her; and as the emperor was heard incessantly to murmur, "My life and very soul!" in Greek words, so Greek had everywhere driven the language of its conqueror and master from its former homes. On the Forum alone Latin still reigned supreme, and all edicts and decrees were issued in the grandiloquent idiom; but Greek was the language of science, of society and of the family circle. Tiberius might officially censure the unlucky scribe who had by mistake inserted a Greek word in a decree of the senate, but as soon as he returned to his palace or when he dwelt on his beloved Capri, he spoke nothing but Greek with his friends and his freedmen. Claudius might even deprive a man of his citizenship because he could not speak Latin, but he replied to the ambassadors from the East in classic Greek; and wrote his own memoirs by preference in that language. Greek philosophers came over to Rome and willingly imparted their priceless wisdom to others, but the masters who would become their pupils must first learn their idiom. Greek adventurers were the pets and parasites, the flatterers and fools of the great Romans, but their folly, like their philosophy, spoke nothing but Greek. As soon as the senator or noble knight could lay aside his Roman dignity he gave himself up with delight to the graceful, easy life of the Greek. He went to indolent Naples, or he took a villa on the enchanting coast, and there, with no honor to covet, no clients to receive and no bounties to distribute, he became a Greek; he chatted, he laughed and felt truly happy. Here, in view of those lovely islands and that magnifi-

cent sea, he could speak and dress and drink as he chose. Here Greek became his language, the tunic gave freedom to his limbs, the sandal to his feet, and sweet idleness was his sole occupation. Perfectly at his ease, fearing no emperor above him and no betrayer by his side, with Vesuvius in sight and fair Capri in its magic beauty before him, he lived happy and free "like a conquered man," and reveled in being a Greek for a time.

So it was in this court intrigue also a beauty of Greek descent and Greek training that was used by the crafty statesmen to amuse the emperor and keep him from awaking to a full consciousness of his dread power, which enabled him in later years to play football with a great nation. He was still so young and so easily pleased! The secret was for a time kept faithfully, for Nero, to whom soon nothing was to be sacred in heaven and upon earth, actually feared then to let his liaison be known to the world and his mother. Two young friends only were initiated, both of nearly his own age, but the one, Otho, of high and noble descent, the other, Claudius, the son of an imperial freedman. They were both famous in Rome for the elegance of their costume and the freedom of their conduct; they had known the beautiful girl when she was first purchased as a slave, and now rose high in favor with the young emperor as companions in his secret pleasures. Acte was as amiable as she was lovely, very modest and perfectly unpretending; not a breath of suspicion that she had used the favor of her imperial lovers for private purposes was ever whispered, and not a single bad act of hers is on record. She loved the young emperor, who was then in all the freshness of youth and all the rapture of his power. His statue, dressed as a flute-player, which he placed in his bed-chamber so as to be able to admire himself unob-

served, represented a youth of delicate features, graceful figure and the expression of ingenuous modesty! She loved him truly and sincerely, and when he abandoned her, after a rare constancy of four years, retired into seclusion, wholly given up to her grief. She built herself a vault for her own remains, and sank into deep melancholy, from which she never recovered. She was aided, it is true, in the power her charms had over him by the attractions which forbidden fruit has for us all, and by the zest which mystery and secrecy give, especially in younger years, to all such enjoyments. He went so far in his passion for her that he actually thought more than once of raising her to the throne; and it is characteristic of the people over whom he was called upon to rule that when this became known men were found of consular rank ready to swear that she was worthy of Cæsar, being descended from some royal race.

The secret, however, was soon made known to the great empress, who still kept her spies everywhere and lacked not friends in abundance, through whom she heard all that happened in the emperor's palace; and again she forgot her habitual prudence and gave free vent to her indignation. She, the devoted mother, to be set aside for the sake of a wretched freedwoman!—a former slave to become her daughter-in-law! Her whole pride was in arms and her passion aroused to the uttermost. If she had been wise, she would have given her son time to forget his little love affair or to become tired of the pretty Greek; but she demanded her instant dismissal. The effect was naturally only to fan the flame, and the more violently she poured forth her invectives against Acte, the more fuel she added to her lover's passion. Nero yielded nothing and promised nothing, but in his heart he determined from that moment, rather than

to give up his beloved, to cut loose from his mother and to throw himself entirely into the arms of Seneca. He was the more disposed to do this as the wise courtier fully appreciated the delicacy of the position, and was willing to encourage the emperor in his comparatively harmless intrigue. A near relative of his, a knight who held the high and responsible office of commander of the city guards, was found willing to accept and play the part of a lover; he paid constant visits to Acte, and publicly laid at her feet the magnificent presents which Nero secretly wished her to receive.

Now only Agrippina saw that she had gone too far; but, trying to retrace her steps and to make amends for her mistake, she committed another. She had recourse to art, and having found threats and intimidation alike unavailing, she tried flattery, in the hope of thus regaining her former influence. She acknowledged that her severity, though prompted by deep affection, had been carried too far. She offered to become his confidant, and suggested to him the expediency of meeting Acte rather in her own apartments at the imperial palace than at a freedwoman's house. She even placed repeatedly her own colossal resources, which were but little inferior to those of the empire, at his disposal. Her skill in managing others was so great, and the prestige of her maternal authority still so powerful, that the inexperienced emperor was on the point of being won over, taken in by the indulgence she offered and the love she affected. But his counselors were not so easily deceived. They felt instinctively that some danger was threatening; they suspected so sudden a transition, and trembled at the idea of seeing Agrippina once more in the possession of absolute power. They warned, therefore, and conjured the emperor to be on his guard against the crafty cunning of a woman who

was always moved by violent passions, and now so evidently played a false game.

Then the struggle began in good earnest. "No philosophy, my son," Agrippina had said; "it is of no use to an emperor;" and her son, with the keen instinct of the Cæsars, used stronger means than philosophic axioms. "Respect your mother, but be emperor," was Seneca's advice, and Nero here also read easily between the lines the true meaning of the counsel. Both would fain have spoken more freely, but they were afraid. The philosophers allowed Nero to go on the stage and expose himself to ridicule and contempt, and said nothing, trembling lest he should do much worse; and Seneca, who divined in him the hereditary thirst for blood, dedicated to him his essay on clemency, praising him for the blood which he had not shed, for fear lest he should shed it the next day.

There was a like fear yet on the other side, and Nero, so young yet, easily blushing and at times even timid, inexperienced in vice and slow to commit great crimes, hesitated for a while to break openly with a mother whom he had so long obeyed implicitly. But whatever he did to soothe her wrath appeared but weakness to her great pride, and all his efforts only increased her indignation. Thus he had once amused himself with looking through those rooms of the imperial palace in which the splendid wardrobe and crown-jewels of the wives and mothers of the Cæsars were stored away. In order to pay Agrippina some special attention he selected from among the vast stores a peculiarly magnificent robe and certain jewels of great value, and sent them to her as a present. But instead of earning her thanks, he was told that she had construed his well-meant offer into an insult, and spurned the present with the remark that it

was not meant as a kind attention for her toilette, but as an intimation to keep her hands off from the rest, and that her son presumed to divide treasures with his own mother which he owed altogether and alone to her. The words were reported in their bitterest form, perhaps with additions, and Nero was deeply mortified by the return she had made for his kindness.

By such means the great empress herself gradually diminished the fear and respect which her son still felt for her; and the more she relied upon her power to raise up Claudius' son as a rival to her own son, the more Nero began to see the danger to be apprehended from his mother's temper, and to feel that while Britannicus lived his throne and his life were not his own, but in his mother's power. His rival was now approaching his fifteenth birth-day, and had arrived at manhood. Every month increased his chances to head a faction and to claim the throne. It was the month of January, and only a few days were wanting before the young prince was to come of age and to assume the virile toga. Nero's own mother had conjured up this spectre that drove joy from his days and sleep from his nights. How easily might Agrippina choose that very day, the thirteenth of February, to carry out her threat and present the offspring of the Claudian race to the Prætorian guard as their legitimate monarch! As he remembered how the merest accident had raised Claudius to the throne, and how close the race had been between himself and his formidable rival, and then thought of the passionate energy of his mother, he trembled for his throne and became more firmly convinced than ever that Rome could not bear two emperors. By day and by night he heard her clear, ringing voice, saying to him the ominous words, "I have made you emperor," and doubted no longer that in her passion she was capable of every-

thing, and would not hesitate a moment to sacrifice him also if he stood in her way. The danger was increased by the fact that Britannicus, even at that early age, was a young man of fair and vigorous form and great intellectual ability, who knew perfectly that he had both justice and popular favor on his side, and that his right to the throne was held in abeyance only by that strongest of arguments—superior force. If Nero had won the affections of the people by the liberality of his rule during the first year of his reign, by the harmless amusements which he preferred to the murderous tastes of his predecessors and the fine speeches which Seneca wrote for him, Britannicus could count, on the other hand, upon the favor with which his race had ever been regarded by the Roman people, and the sympathy felt for the poor orphan prince whose just claims were so ruthlessly set aside for the benefit of an ambitious woman and her spoiled son.

One of those incidents, apparently trifling, which escape attention at the time when they occur, and often long afterward assume unexpectedly great importance, occurred now to Nero and increased his apprehensions. A few weeks ago, during the Saturnalian festival, which was held in December, a merry supper had assembled around the young emperor's table a number of important personages. It was the custom on such occasions to draw lots for the office of king during the meal, which gave the lucky man the right to impose upon the guests any duty he chose for the amusement of the company. On that night Nero had been favored by the dice, and as king of the feast he had succeeded in adding much to the pleasure of the evening. But of a sudden it occurred to him to use the opportunity for the purpose of mortifying his unfortunate rival, who was then doubly in his power. Britannicus was naturally timid and bashful, and Nero

summoned him, when his turn came, to stand up before the large company and sing a song, expecting that the young prince, unaccustomed as he was to appear in public and to take his share in the excesses usual on such occasions, would commit himself grievously and cause universal laughter. To his surprise, the boy rose without embarrassment and chanted with a sweet melodious voice a lyric poem, in which allusions were made to the sad and sorrowful fate of those who were driven from the throne of their fathers and deprived of their lawful inheritance. The half-tipsy revelers were taken off their guard. The touching sight of the young prince in his noble simplicity pouring forth his artless plaint, and the deep sympathy which his mournful fate could not help arousing in their hearts, made them forget for a moment what they owed to Nero, and they expressed their feelings without disguise. The young emperor found his ill-judged pleasure to turn against himself, and from that moment he looked upon Britannicus with a mingled feeling of fear and hatred. As these recollections now came up vividly before his mind's eye and he coupled the words of his guests with the threats of his mother, he determined in his heart that he must free himself of such a standing menace. "He or I" was the end of all his thoughts, and he resolved to act at once.

There was no difficulty in his way. We have already seen that the life of men was held cheap enough in those days. It was sold to the highest bidder in the open market-place. People were invited to a select supper, where luscious mushrooms helped them pleasantly into another world, or they were politely requested to have their veins opened in a warm bath. A Cæsar or a Messalina would carelessly turn round to the officer of the guard on duty, and say, "Please have that man killed!"

A knight or a freedman would have to take the trouble of calling on Locusta and paying a sum proportionate to the rank of the person that was to be put out of the way. A Nero might have simply ordered an execution; but in those days he was too young and too mindful yet of Seneca's teaching to venture upon such a measure when not even the shadow of a crime could be alleged against the young prince, and an arbitrary order to kill him, unarraigned and unconvicted, would have looked too much like murder. But was not there the cunning poisoner Locusta ever ready to oblige her patrons by some new and exquisite dish? She was still held in custody, probably only in order to be more readily at hand when her services were needed for reasons of state, and kept under guard by an officer of high rank called Pollio. She it was whom Nero selected to become the instrument of his vengeance. Locusta soon furnished what she called a safe and secret means to relieve the poor youth from all trouble and anxiety upon earth, and there was no such difficulty in his case as there had been with his uncle to administer the poison. All of his attendants had been changed long ago; whoever was faithful to him or to the memory of his parents had been sent away, and replaced by men who were entirely devoted to the new government. The very men, therefore, to whose care the ill-fated prince had been entrusted were found ready now to aid in his murder; but the first attempt was unsuccessful. The cunning wretch had probably feared a change of mind in Nero, and purposely made the potion so weak that it was easily discarded and did no injury. The emperor was indignant at her awkwardness, and frightened at the possible consequences and the suspicions to which he might himself be exposed. He loaded the unfortunate officer with reproaches and threatened the poisoner with

instant death. In his fury he ordered the woman to be brought before him, struck her with his own hand, and when she confessed having made the potion so weak in order to turn all suspicion aside from the emperor, he answered her, sneeringly, "Do you think I fear the laws?" He insisted upon being better served the next time, and ordered another preparation, which was to kill instantly, like the blow of a dagger. A room was fitted up close to his private apartments in the imperial palace, and there the horrible woman not only concocted her new mixture, but experimented with it upon a number of animals until she could exhibit to Nero a young pig which, upon merely tasting the poison, rolled over instantly. But even this did not reassure the trembling emperor, who feared a second escape by the awkwardness of the persons who were to present it to Britannicus, and he determined, therefore, that the tragedy should be enacted at his own table. The audacity of such a crime would perhaps be unparalleled in the annals of wickedness if Nero had not been the son of his mother; but it is not impossible that, in planning the murder in this atrocious form, he had in mind the fact that the great empress also had ordered her husband to be poisoned at her table for the very purpose of thus turning suspicion aside. Still, we cannot but marvel at the terrible schooling which the Cæsars must have received as soon as they were seated on the throne, when we see the stripling who had but just blushed at being seen in the embraces of his Greek lady-love, now act with the consummate art of a long-experienced adept in crime.

The suppers of the Cæsars were very unlike the cheerful meals of the Roman who belonged to the happier middle classes. The latter had his one hour of enjoyment during the day when supper came. Then he was

free from all cares; for so religiously was that part of the day set aside for pleasure and enjoyment that even the senate could not entertain a new proposition after four o'clock. He had done his day's work, strengthened his wearied limbs by gymnastic exercises, rested and reinvigorated them by a bath, and came now home, where the well-set table and cheerful guests awaited him, to enjoy the principal meal and to spend the remaining hours of the day in pleasant company. Six or seven friends—for the Roman strictly observed the rule never to have more than the Muses and never less than the Graces—reclined with him on his luxurious couches of purple embroidered with gold, set around a table of precious wood. Everything had been prepared by his well-trained servants: the head steward had ordered the different courses; the servant next in order had artistically set out the dishes and plates; the carver had disposed of the meats and the poultry. Young slaves in short tunics bring in, accompanied by the soft sounds of flutes, the immense silver waiter, on which the dishes of each course are arranged in pleasing symmetry. Children in fantastic costumes fan the air above the heads of his guests with their fly-brushes and colossal fans. Young and beautiful cupbearers, chosen for the perfection of their forms, and dressed in long silken robes, with their soft curls floating down upon the shoulders, pour out rich wines from golden vessels into cups of exquisite workmanship, chiseled and carved by masters of great renown; others sprinkle perfumed waters upon the floor to maintain cheerfulness and gaiety; while on the outer side of the couches philosophers hold their learned discourses, poets recite their latest verses and dancers exhibit their graces. And amidst all these joys and pleasant scenes the master calls out the toasts, counts the emptied cups and crowns his

guests with wreaths of bright flowers. "Let us make haste to live," he says to them; "let us drink and be merry, for death is near; let us crown our heads and drain our cups before we go down to the realms of Pluto!"

The host enjoyed himself, and so did his guests. But what were such simple pleasures to an emperor? Were not his slaves fairer, his plate costlier, his dishes rarer and his wines more fragrant than those of all other mortals? Pleasure alone would not be bought by imperial wealth, and Joy refused to sit at the Cæsar's table. But another guest came, solemnly invited and cordially welcomed; he took his seat by the youngest and fairest, and his name was Murder.

Thus it was on that memorable evening when Nero dined with his noble guests in full state. The court etiquette, which had been growing stricter and stricter every year since the simple days of Augustus, prescribed on such occasions a separate table for the younger members of the imperial family, which was served with old Roman frugality, and at which the children of their patrician playmates sat, while the grown guests reclined on their couches. All necessary measures had been taken to strike the fatal blow, in spite of the precautions by which the princes, like the Cæsar himself, were surrounded on such occasions. Britannicus also had his confidential officer who tasted all he ate and drank, but he had been won over and was made the principal agent in the atrocious murder. A beverage of rare and most luscious ingredients was offered to the young prince after it had been duly tasted before his eyes, but when he put the cup to his lips he found it too hot to be drank; he ordered cold water to be poured into it, and this contained the colorless poison. Even while he was empty-

ing the goblet he was struck down; in a moment his senses abandoned him, and he sank lifeless from his chair without a word or a groan. Horrible fright fell upon those who sat nearest; they rose and fled for their lives; the whole company was seized with fear and consternation; but so well trained were the men who then formed a Cæsar's court, and so intuitively did they surmise what was the true nature of the occurrence, that they remained quietly seated, and, fixing their eyes upon Nero, submissively awaited what explanation he would vouchsafe to give. Nor was he less equal to the occasion, and without rising from his couch he informed them placidly that it was nothing but a fit, such as were apt to befall his brother since his infancy, and that he would soon recover his senses. Then, turning to the table, he ordered more wine to be brought, and, after a short pause, the course of the feast went on as if nothing had happened.

The body of the unfortunate prince had in the mean time been removed to his apartments, and a few hours afterward the remains of the last scion of the great Claudian family were carried in silence and without any kind of pomp or display to the Field of Mars, where the funeral pile was found ready to consume the body—with such coolness and calculating precision had every scene in the bloody tragedy been prepared beforehand. The skin had been discolored in various places by the extreme violence of the poison, and these spots had been carelessly covered with paint to hide the traces of the murder from the eyes of the servants. But as they approached the open field a fierce tempest suddenly broke forth, and the pouring rain washed off the color, so that the livid stains became clearly visible in the bright flashes of lightning and amid the smoke of smouldering torches. The multitude shivered and shuddered at the ghastly sight, in

which they saw the very gods expressing their wrath and revealing the crime that had been committed. The ashes were hastily collected and consigned to the family vault, the mausoleum built by Augustus, and an edict issued by the emperor offering an excuse to the Roman people for the apparent haste in the obsequies on the ground that it was a traditional custom of the Cæsars to remove every evidence of such very painful losses as quickly as possible from public sight, and not to prolong the sorrow by solemn orations and pompous ceremonies. So strangely did the fear of man yet survive in the hearts of those who had long since become deaf to the commands of the gods and the voice of their conscience! The edict concluded with the significant words, "Having lost the support of a dear brother, he depended henceforth altogether for aid and sympathy on their common country, and senate and people, he felt sure, would unite in sustaining a prince who remained now the only branch of a family born to rule the empire of the world." The skill and adroitness with which he thus seized the occasion to recommend himself to the interest and the affections of a people whose sensibilities he had outraged were worthy of the unequaled worldly wisdom of his great tutor, Seneca, who no doubt wrote this proclamation, as he wrote all of Nero's state papers. But he was by no means the only man of high distinction and great renown who thus bargained away his honor and prostituted his fair name. Others also, heretofore looked upon as men of integrity, accepted palaces, country-seats and large domains in return for the services they had rendered on this infamous occasion, and high and low seemed to be equally eager to share in the plunder. Even Locusta received her reward in the shape of large estates, besides perfect impunity for this and all previous crimes; and,

what strikes us perhaps most forcibly as characteristic of the familiarity of those days with murder and all that concerns it, a number of pupils were assigned the horrible woman, to be initiated into the mysteries of poisoning.

But while Nero rejoiced in the success of his fearful crime, and his accomplices reveled in the rich rewards they had reaped, rage and despair filled the heart of the great empress. Better than any one else in the whole empire did she understand the meaning of Nero's allusion to his being the last and only representative of the imperial house; better still did she apprehend the nature of this terrible answer with which he replied to her inconsiderate threats. She had been present at the fatal supper, and who can tell how even her strong and stern heart must have beaten when she saw the scene so like another banquet, held in the same festive hall not quite four months ago, at which she was the main actor and the father of the unfortunate prince the ill-fated victim. Her horror and her dismay at the fearful sight had been so unmistakable, and she had, with all her great self-control and long experience at court, succeeded so imperfectly in mastering her emotion, that everybody was convinced of her innocence; whilst even Nero's unfortunate wife, Octavia, though young yet in years, had already seen enough of tragic scenes to be able to smother her grief and repress her indignation. But her case was very different from that of her mother-in-law; she had little to lose, and to be relieved of obligations to Nero might have appeared to her a mercy rather than a misfortune. But Agrippina, when she saw Britannicus fall down lifeless, felt that with him her last support was taken from her, and discovered at the same time to what extremities her terrible son was ready to proceed in order to secure to himself the undivided power of the Cæsars. She felt

that it would be her turn next, and that it became her, therefore, carefully to look out for the poison or the dagger sent by the son she had borne and for whom she had sacrificed all that is sacred to a woman and dear to a mother.

She felt this all the more strongly as the poor boy had no sooner died than both she and her son became aware that his shadow would rise for ever between them, and that there was to be henceforth no peace for them upon earth. The wretched mother, violent and implacable, had no weapons but intrigue and the frail friendship of a few courtiers. Her frantic and unnatural son met these with curses and bloody murder. One night, as he was whiling away the dreary hours in drunken revels, his favorite, Paris, the famous actor, suddenly appeared in his presence. He came, as he pretended, to disclose a fearful conspiracy, the aim of which was to confer the empire on Plautus, whose near relationship to Augustus—it was the same degree in which Nero stood—made him a dangerous rival for the throne. He denounced Agrippina as the author and promoter of the treasonable plot, and charged her with a design to secure to herself once more the imperial power by a projected marriage with the pretender. There was, of course, no truth in this conspiracy; it was the sorry invention of a revengeful woman, who fancied herself insulted by the haughty dowager-empress. But it terrified Nero. He believed it all, and threatened to have Plautus executed on the spot, and Burrhus dismissed because he owed his high position to Agrippina. The next morning he sent for his mother and subjected her to a close and insulting examination by her own friend, Burrhus. To say that she was indignant, sarcastic, furious, is to say nothing that can describe the intensity of her passion and the rage that filled her bosom. She, the mother who had sacrificed all that

woman can give for her son, to be arraigned as a culprit before the beardless stripling! She, the empress who had sat upon the throne of the world and seen the kings of the earth bow in humble submission before her, to be questioned by a low-born man of her own making! She rose, full of majestic grandeur, to the full height of the occasion, and, having for once truth on her side, she was magnificent in her sublime wrath and her haughty contempt. She did not deign to say a word in her defence; she vouchsafed no explanation; but instead of vindicating herself, she boldly demanded the punishment of her accusers and insisted upon being righted before all the world. Her innocence and her splendid audacity ensured her triumph, and the reconciliation lasted without interruption for full four years. But it was, after all, only apparent peace, and the gulf between the mother and the son widened daily. It was the far-famed Golden Age of Nero's reign, during which brave old Burrhus and the wise Seneca wielded between them the real power of the empire, and gained a fair title to the respect of posterity by their successful administration of public affairs and the careful guidance of their imperial pupil with his hereditary taint of insanity. They worked in rare harmony, and on no point were they more fully agreed than on the necessity of keeping the great empress from all active interference with the government. They found a ready and all-powerful ally in Nero himself, who was quite willing to let others rule for him as long as they left him leisure and ample means to enjoy life, but was exceedingly averse to being brought back to the bondage in which he had been held by his imperious mother. And thus ended another of those gorgeous dreams in which Agrippina had reveled for years—the power she had hoped to wield as the mother of an emperor.



IX.

THE LAST RIVAL.

FOR four years the great empress had been condemned to a life of idleness and insignificance—she whose whole existence was one continuous effort, whose sole happiness consisted in the gratification of her boundless ambition. Who can imagine the bitterness that must have filled her heart to overflowing as she sat day after day in the silent halls that once resounded with glowing admiration and abject worship of the great Augusta; as she heard from afar the cries with which hundreds of thousands saluted her son on his entrance into the theatre or the circus, while not a voice was raised in her behalf; as she saw from her lofty terraces the gorgeous processions passing the Forum to do honor to some new favorite, or read in the imperial journal of kings and princes who had come from the East and the West to do homage to the Eternal City, and not a knee was bent before her who had been seated on the throne of the world? And yet she was only forty years old—still beautiful in form and winning in manner; still full of capacity to enjoy life and its pleasures; still strong enough to rule an empire and to hold the reins of the world in her powerful grasp. A terrible fate, indeed, for a woman who had no consolation to look for from on high, no comfort to hope for in her own family—whose

life's occupation was thus violently and disgracefully taken from her, and taken by her own son, through the very power which she had bestowed upon him when he was helpless and friendless. For four long years she pined thus in perfect solitude, and such utter forgetfulness on the part of the world that her name, once first and foremost among the powers of the earth, does not once appear in the annals of the time during that whole period. Her heart filled with bitterness to overflowing.

But her courage was not broken nor were her hopes abandoned. She regretted nothing of what she had done, and remorse had never yet come to weaken the strength of her indomitable will. She even found a way to pour out the bitterness of her heart, and to avenge herself, in safety and yet most effectively, on those whom she hated as the authors of her misfortunes. She wrote her memoirs. Here she could pour out the full flood of her enmity against the hated Claudians, whom she, the last of the Julian race, could depict in blackest colors and send down to posterity laden with every crime of which they had ever been guilty or even suspected; here she could recount of her greatest and most formidable antagonist, Messalina, all the terrible scenes of degradation and infamy which have since—thanks to her!—made that name a proverb among men; here she could indulge in wicked ribaldry and witty persiflage against poor old Claudius, her ill-matched husband and helpless victim. How she must have enjoyed the means she thus had to take her revenge in ages yet to come on those whom Fate protected for the present against her enmity, and actually to shape the course of history even without being any longer an actor in the great drama of the world! For although her memoirs, like those of Tiberius, have been lost, their influence is felt to this day, as all the great

authors of her own age have more or less drawn their information from her pages and transmitted their contents through their own works to future generations.

When the great empress appeared once more upon the stage of the world she had probably regained, by the prudent reserve of the interval, a part at least of her lost influence. Her relations to her son, it is true, had never again assumed even the appearance of friendship; she was still excluded from the imperial palace and all intimate intercourse with its inmates. Nero came occasionally to pay her a state visit, but this was mainly done to soothe the prejudices of the people, who could never entirely forget their fondness for the daughter of Germanicus, or to perform a ceremonious duty, as when she was solemnly installed in the magnificent palace of Antonia. He appeared on such occasions surrounded with a large retinue of nobles and knights, freedmen and courtiers, and after a short, formal interview took his leave with cold civility. He did not hesitate to let her and the world see that there was no affection for her in his bosom, and that he scarcely felt safe as long as he was in her presence. Nevertheless, she had never yet given up the hope of regaining her power, and the very energy with which she subdued her fiery temper and her terrible passions for so long a time proved that she was only awaiting an opportune moment to renew the struggle. For a long time no chance appeared to assert her claims, no obstacle presented itself worthy of being encountered by the strength and power of an Agrippina. Nero was still living with Octavia, her protégée, and did her such outward honor as prevented the mother from complaining of her son's conduct. The reigning favorite, the graceful Acte, was of such gentle disposition that she could neither harbor revenge nor cherish ambition, and hence she

never interfered with the empress-mother, but showed by all means in her power that she felt deeply grateful for being kindly ignored. The two special friends and advisers of her son were still Seneca and Burrhus, both of whom had received from her large benefits and frequent kindnesses, so that she might well have counted upon their good-will at least, if not upon their gratitude. Burrhus, however, who had quite recently stood her friend in an hour of imminent peril, although a man of straightforward mind, honest and upright, was, like all the Romans of his day and the courtiers of Nero especially, so accustomed to acts of violence and to crime in every form that no sense of justice and no feeling of friendship could well be expected from the hardened soldier. Seneca was a philosopher, but if the poor mother of Nero counted upon his assistance or hoped to obtain good advice from him in an hour of need, she was in sorry hands indeed.

For never has philosopher shown more wisdom in his works with less love of the truth in his conduct. He could write wondrously sweet letters from his desolate exile in Corsica to bereaved friends, and speak very tenderly of his "most sweet boy Marcus, with his merry, lively ways that check all tears, and his pretty talk that charms all listeners." He could speak so eloquently on the Forum or in the temple that he was held in high and honorable repute as an orator, and all Rome looked upon him as the one wise and honestly good man with whom the honor of men and the virtue of women were alike perfectly safe. But he could, when he chose, attune his voice to very different strains, and, while the blood of Nero's murdered kinsman was still fresh in the memory of all men, write an essay on Clemency and speak in it, with the masterly eloquence that was at his command, of its divine nature and ineffable loveliness, which he com-

pared to that of Nature herself on a bright, calm day—and then proclaim Nero, the murderer, the glass of fashion and the mould of form in this sacred virtue. The immortal Augustus, though he forgave his bitterest enemies, he declared was no longer the idol of the Romans, and the gentle forbearance and wise toleration of Tiberius in his earlier years faded into a pale, shadowy light by the side of the brilliant virtues of Nero, the absolute sovereign, whose majestic Peace! sheathed innumerable swords; the peerless ruler, who had never been guilty of open violence or hidden wrong; the matchless prince, whose innocence was unsullied; the beneficent chief, beloved by a grateful people as man had never yet been loved by man. Oh let us remember, before we cast the first stone upon the guilty empress, the character of the men who were her friends, her counselors and her only help in the hour of need, and among these chiefly the master of wisdom, who could thus praise, in the face of a well-informed world, the murderer of the legitimate heir to the empire!

There was outward peace, therefore, between mother and son. But what must have been going on in the hearts of those two fearful beings, placed so near to each other by the bonds of Nature, but divided so far asunder by the dark crimes whose shadows rose ever between them and made them feel that henceforth there was to be no true peace for them on earth? They walked with stately courtesy, side by side, along their lofty, lonely path, high above their fellow-beings, fully conscious in their souls of the bitter end which was coming sooner or later. And at last the terrible battle did come. The friends and advocates of Nero plead his insanity, but what can be said for the empress? Never has woman arisen in like gigantic proportions before the eyes of the

world, stalking impassive and remorseless through oceans of blood, despising the powers of the earth and defying the gods on high, knowing no will but her own, and obeying no law but her lust. Her sufferings were fearful, but her joys also were exalted, and magnificent in her power, she was almost sublime in her sin. Her career is unparalleled in the history of man. Tiberius had murdered her parents and banished herself with her brothers and sisters. Married to a man of infamy, she had rivaled him in crime till she was banished a second time and threatened with death.- The widow of a second husband, whom she had murdered in order to inherit his fortune, she had waded across rivers of blood to the throne of the world, and no sooner made herself the wife of her uncle than she poisoned him for her son's sake. Torn by passions unknown by name even to the majority of men, she had spent her life in a tempest of hatred and vengeance; and when, in her own defence, she had exhausted all resources even to the last, from which the heart of the boldest shrinks with a shudder, she made herself a bulwark of protection and an instrument of power out of her own crimes committed in common with Nero. Proud of her beauty and conscious of her supreme power over others, she walked unconcerned through all those bitter passions which raged around her, sublimely indifferent to the efforts made by her enemies and to the sufferings of her victims, and crushing every rival with the aid of the unfailing magic of her charms or the thunderbolts of the ruler of the world. Friend and foe alike fall around her as they offend her or as she wearies of them. She does not even take the trouble to count the men whom she has commanded to be her lovers or the women who have dared to be her rivals, ere they are sent to the common goal, where all

ended who came within the enchanted circle of the dread empress.

And now she was once more to take the field on the slippery marble floor of the imperial palace against a new adversary that had suddenly arisen against her, and once more the strife between two great and beautiful women was to engage the marveling attention of an empire and to threaten the peace of the world.

There lived then at the court of the emperor a great lady of such surpassing beauty that her fame had gone forth to every land where the name of Rome was held in reverence. The fairest woman of her time, without a rival in the broad empire, she combined with such charms the most winning manners, an irresistible sweetness and a thorough training in every kind of intrigue. In short, as one of her biographers says, except virtue, she possessed all the qualities that can adorn the female character. Her mother had in her time been the reigning beauty of the land, and bequeathed to her with her noble birth all her own charms of manner and all her graces of form. Her conversation enchanted high and low as they came in contact with her. Her mind was highly cultivated, and in wit she was said to be the equal of the ablest men of her time. The possession of immense wealth enabled her to adorn herself with all the exquisite art of her days, and to adapt her surroundings, from the slave at her feet to the palace in which she lived, to the effects she intended to produce. These she knew how to manage with infinite skill, as she showed even in her household life. With all her restless fondness for pleasure, she succeeded marvelously well in retaining soft and winning ways, and in spite of the whirlwind of excitement in which alone she ever felt perfectly happy, her features preserved by some magic gift all their infantine grace and

the delicacy of childhood. Like a careful steward of these noble gifts, and well knowing the greater charm that men find in carefully husbanded attractions, she appeared but rarely in public, and when she went out her face was half veiled. She had been raised as it became the descendant of nobles who had entered Rome in triumph and risen to the lofty rank of consuls, and was named Poppæa Sabina, after her illustrious grandfather. The decline of the family in her youth, owing to political intrigue, had led to her being married, when a mere child, to a simple knight, but soon afterward she became known to a youth of high birth and great expectations—an acquaintance which entirely changed her destiny.

Among the numerous admirers who surrounded this fairest and brightest of Roman beauties none shone more conspicuously by the perfection of his form and the elegance of his manners than young Otho, who was among the fashionable men of the great city what Sabina was among the ladies. Of noble birth and not without fair talents, he was looked upon as the most reckless but most elegant of the dissipated young men who formed the *jeunesse dorée* of Rome, and his reputation for unheard-of extravagance and fabulous exploits procured for him the most enthusiastic admiration from both sexes. Ambitious to be admitted at court, he had not hesitated to profess unbounded admiration for an elderly lady belonging to the intimate circle of Agrippina, and thus, once brought to the notice of the great empress, he had so skillfully mingled his reverence for the Augusta with deep admiration for the still beautiful woman, that she had taken him into favor, and given him, though much older, as a companion to her son Nero. The resemblance of their dispositions soon drew the two profligates more

closely to each other; they became one heart and one soul, as they called it, and no feast could be enjoyed, no happiness be conceived by either, that was not shared by the other. The influence of the elder, Otho, more experienced and more corrupt, was of course in the highest degree pernicious, and the effects of his example were seen in the wild orgies and disgraceful excesses in which the young emperor indulged with his new companion. Dressed in the garb of slaves and followed by a band of rioters, they would rove at night through the streets, visit the worst places, seize the wares and merchandise exposed for sale, and offer violence to all who fell in their way. Men of rank were insulted, and women of the first condition suffered sad indignities. Soon Nero and his friend got into difficulties; they were in their turn attacked and ill-treated; and although an unfortunate senator, who had merely defended his life, not knowing by whom he was assailed, had been coolly ordered to kill himself, this brought no protection against future dangers. Nero now adopted the habit of taking with him a troop of soldiers and a gang of gladiators, who came up sword in hand when matters became serious and rescued the disguised emperor and his friend at the expense of many innocent lives. Other lessons, also, Otho taught his imperial companion, and this with a daring which showed more wit than prudence, and on several occasions made his friends and admirers tremble for the life of the bold favorite. Thus, Nero had at first much to learn of the grand way which men like Otho had to spend immense sums of money merely for the sake of the extravagance itself; and in order to show him how an emperor should manage such matters, he determined to give him a lesson. Nero had obtained a most costly essence, of which every drop represented a small fortune, and thought to honor his fas-

tidious friend by sprinkling it over him gently during supper. The next day the knight invited the emperor to his house, and surprised and mortified him not a little by having gold and silver tubes introduced in his dining-room, from which the same essence rained down upon all the guests in continuous showers!

Such a man was eminently calculated to inflame the imagination and to excite the ambition of a Sabina. Not that for an instant she thought of love for the young nobleman; she made no secret of it, to him as to others, that love with her was not an affair of the heart, and that knowing no affection herself she required none from others. She had not hesitated even to laugh at his premature baldness and the scrupulous care he took to conceal this defect by a most artistic wig which he wore. But what really captivated her was his great reputation as the leader of fashion; his extremely youthful appearance, which he preserved by all the arts that women employ for their complexion, covering his face every night with soothing pastes and removing every suspicion of beard; his far-famed extravagance; and, above all, the favored position which he occupied as the emperor's friend and constant companion. These were points which a coquettish beauty, passionately fond of enjoyment and yet burning at the same time with lofty ambition, knew how to appreciate at their full value. Otho, on the other hand, rich enough to dispense with wealth in his wife, looked upon the possession of the most beautiful and most charming woman of all Rome as the crowning triumph of his vanity. He had already introduced his imperial pupil to the young matron, and felt confirmed in his own predilection by the enthusiastic praises which Nero bestowed upon the famous beauty. The emperor encouraged him to win her at all hazards,

and promised his aid in overcoming the trifling obstacle—that Sabina already had a husband. Perhaps he was not quite unselfish in his advice, for he still stood in too great awe of his mother—who had taken the young empress Octavia under her special protection—openly to engage in a love intrigue, and may have hoped to find more ready access to the irresistible beauty as the wife of his favorite than was possible in her present condition.

A few days afterward Roman society enjoyed a delightful sensation in the report that Sabina had run away from her husband's house, and was under the roof of that inimitable Otho whom no one could resist. The matter was discussed alike by grave senators and statesmen of high rank on the Forum and by the humble customers of every barber's shop; the minutest details soon became known through the slaves of both households, and reached the boudoir of the empress no sooner than the low cook-shops on the banks of the Tiber. Before the week was out the official journal had carried the charming bit of scandal to the Rhine and the Euphrates. In the meantime, a divorce, then as easily obtained in Rome as now in some of the United States, released the faithless wife and she was married to Otho. The busy tongues of the court circle had it that Nero had expected only a mock ceremony, so as to leave the way open for future plans of his own, but that his friend had been too wise or too vain to submit to such ill-treatment. Be this as it may, the report increased his happiness. He was looked up to everywhere as the husband of the beautiful Sabina, or, as the Greek fashion of the day preferred expressing it, as "the happy Paris in possession of fair Helen;" and that the emperor himself should have contended in vain with him for the great prize gave of course additional zest to his triumph.

No sooner, however, had the ambitious beauty attained this first great success than her ambition soared higher, and the daring game which she resolved at once to play was to fascinate the young emperor and to supplant his wife Octavia. Her husband unconsciously became her strongest ally in the unblushing conspiracy, and with poetic justice himself sowed the seed which was to bear the fruit of bitter punishment for his own crime. Partly from exuberant vanity and partly from ardent love, with which he had been inspired by the great charms of his wife, he would not cease praising her in terms of rapturous admiration to the ears of his friend, now boasting of her countless attractions and now extolling the happiness of the fortunate owner of such a priceless treasure. She became the constant theme of his conversation with Nero, and more than once, when rising from the emperor's table, he would exclaim with all the thoughtless warmth of a lover and the indiscretion of a boastful fop, "Now I am going to the arms of her who possesses every charm with which woman was ever endowed, the envy of all who see her and the bliss of the happy mortal to whom alone she belongs." Sabina, at the same time, was not idle, but availing herself of all the fascinations with which Nature had so lavishly endowed her, and making good use of the arts which she had learnt to employ from childhood up, she set to work to win the young emperor's love. He began to visit her at his friend's house, and the inexperienced youth fell a ready victim to the bewitching coquette. Once fairly within reach of her charms—those lustrous violet eyes, every glance of which made their victim a captive for ever, and those curls of marvelous splendor, in every mesh of which lurked an arrow from Cupid's quiver—the hot-blooded youth was soon entirely in her hands. Society at Rome

enjoyed the charming spectacle, and watched with unceasing interest every new wile which the fair Circe employed and every blunder by which the helpless emperor plunged deeper into the labyrinth of his passion. Soon reports reached the world of violent scenes within the sacred precincts of the palace. Now it was Otho who in a fit of jealousy ventured, in spite of positive orders, to appear at court by the side of his wife, and now it was the fair Sabina who had indignantly rejected some offer made her by Nero and warned him even never to come near her again. With inimitable coquetry she suffered him to-day to see beyond all doubt her decided preference for him, and to-morrow she would send back his magnificent gift, decline answering his messages, and even refuse to see him when he came to ask in person for the cause of his sudden disgrace.

By such means she inflamed his passion and obtained perfect dominion over his affections. Her next step was to induce Nero to free her from her bondage to Otho, and here again she displayed the highest skill, the most consummate art. She ruined her husband by praising him until the emperor could not bear to hear his name any more. Otho's house, she said, was a model of splendor and refined elegance—what was Nero's palace? Otho loved the fine arts, surrounded himself with high-bred, well-informed men, and showed in all he did the most polished taste, the most exquisite delicacy. Nero's favorite was Acte, a public dancer, a low-born slave, and such familiarity could breed nothing but coarse manners and low sentiments. How could he hope she would ever prefer another home to such a house as Otho's—another husband to a man of such admirable and attractive qualities? Thus she instilled a growing dislike to her husband in the emperor's mind, and it was not long before

she reaped the fruit of her subtle cunning. In spite of the ardent friendship which had bound the two profligates to each other, Otho was first confined to his house, and then—perhaps in order not to make the scandal too great for Agrippina's ears—sent in honorable exile as governor to distant Spain. There Otho, the first rake of Rome, became of a sudden an excellent officer and a firm and upright magistrate, presenting to the world a most strange combination of vices and virtues, showing himself in private life luxurious, profligate and prone to every vice, while in his public capacity he was prudent, just and temperate in the use of his great power. There is, moreover, something unusually touching in the contrast between the heartless indifference with which the frail, fair woman abandoned her husband, and the faithful love which the stern Roman, amid the cares of ruling a kingdom and waging great wars, preserved for the idol of his heart. More than ten years he lived far from her, only hearing from official sources of her disgrace and her terrible death. Then, by a sudden turn of fortune, he found himself unexpectedly raised to the throne of the Cæsars, and one of his first acts as emperor was to order the restoration of all the statues of Sabina, which after Nero's tragic end had been overthrown with those of the emperor.

Sabina had achieved her great purpose, and now ruled supreme in the heart of Nero. It seemed as if success increased alike her beauty and her ambition. She became daily more irresistible in the power of her charms and blazed forth in a perfect radiance of beauty.

The ample means which were now at her command enabled her to do all that human ingenuity could devise for the increase of her attractions; and yet with all her extravagances and follies she would observe a strict diet

and certain sanitary precautions which she thought needful for the preservation of her beauty. The almost incredible sums of money which she spent for her jewels and her furniture were on everybody's lips, and years after her death men would tell each other with marvel how she had never traveled with less than five hundred asses in her train, because she bathed daily in asses' milk, and then sat upon a golden chair to be perfumed with costly cosmetics from the East, the secret of which had been purchased at fabulous prices. Her complexion, however, repaid the exquisite care she took of it. It was of dazzling brilliancy, and was quoted proverbially as surpassing all that had ever been seen in whiteness and transparency. Her hair, of beautiful light amber color, and as abundant as it was fair, became the envy and the misery of all Roman matrons, who employed in vain the art and the cunning of the countless hair-artists of the city to imitate its magnificent tinge. Nero sang the beauty of her locks in one of his poems, and no one pleased him more and was surer of his rich gifts than he who admired most eloquently the hair of his beloved. Thus only it was possible that the extravagant splendor with which she loved to surround herself—the very mules of her retinue were shod with solid gold—did not impair the effect of her beauty, while on the other hand we may judge of the value which she attached to her charms from the words she uttered on an ill-fated day when her mirror seemed to reflect her image less beautiful than usually: "Rather die than see my beauty pass away!"

But all was not sunshine within Nero's palace, nor was peace reigning in the heart of Sabina. The greater her influence over the emperor became, the deeper the hatred in the soul of Agrippina and the more open and defiant the attitude of the great empress. Agrippina had, of

course, been well informed of every step by which the ambitious beauty had gradually enslaved her son, and she began to feel now that, with such a powerful and unscrupulous adversary as Sabina must needs be, her own fate and the whole future of her life were at stake. She knew full well that Sabina was not the woman to content herself, like Acte, the modest artist, with being the emperor's favorite by the side of his legitimate wife. She had learnt enough of her haughty pride and her insatiable ambition to foresee that Sabina would not rest until she was seated by Nero's side on the throne, and that neither then nor before would she divide her power over his heart with any other woman on earth, though that woman be his own mother. How she now regretted to have introduced the unprincipled Otho to her son's intimacy! Already, when the first fruits of that unwise step had been seen in the wild orgies and reckless extravagances of her son, she had suffered intensely under the publicity of the scandal; for, in spite of all her own sins and excesses, she had still preserved a strong sense of decorum and the old Roman respect for at least external dignity of conduct. And again her mother's love had prevailed over her habitual prudence and made her scold and reproach Nero, until the poor young emperor, unable to meet his stern and magnificent mother with becoming independence, held her in such dread that he actually thought of leaving Rome, laying aside the purple and returning to the enjoyment of private life at Rhodes. What a woman she must have been to make the man quail in her presence and flee from her anger whom the world tremblingly feared as a monster when they did not worship him as a god!

And yet what were all these excesses and scandals to her in comparison to the plan which he now cherished

to repudiate the noble Octavia and to make Sabina his wife? For she made him confess that he loved the splendid beauty above all things on earth and in heaven, that he was weary of the frigid virtue and faultless perfection of the high-born empress, and had determined to rid himself of the burden in order to enjoy perfect happiness. She was as determined that this should not be done. And now began the last of those grand and almost sublime duels which made up the tragic drama of Agrippina's career. Once more it was a battle for life or death, in which one combatant must lose and the other win everything that the world can offer to its most favored children. But the position was changed now in comparison with her great struggle with Messalina. Then she had the advantage which the offensive almost always gives to the attacking party; now she was herself attacked by her bold adversary. From that conflict she had come forth victorious; in this she was destined to succumb. Nor was she quite the same woman any more that she had then been. She was now forty-three years old, and a life so full of deep excitement and wild passion, spent almost continually in fierce struggles or reckless enjoyment, began to have its effects even on her iron constitution. At the very time when her sacrifices and her exertions seemed to justify her in expecting the quiet enjoyment of absolute power through the son whom she had raised to the throne at such fearful cost to herself, she was suddenly summoned to make new efforts, to enter the fatal lists once more, and to risk, in the evening of her life's day, all she had lived for. Nor could she conceal from herself that this was the hardest conflict of all, since her adversary was in almost every respect her superior. Youth, beauty, genius and cold, calculating ambition, were all on the side of her enemy, supported by the em-

peror's growing passion, which could at any moment be fanned into irresistible fury. The poor empress had nothing to count upon but her unbending strength of will, her inexhaustible energy and the prestige of what might yet remain of her former influence over her son, who now feared his mother without loving her any more, and for the moment, at least, saw in her nothing but the one great and formidable obstacle to his happiness.

Nothing daunted by the fearful odds, not despairing of success till the last effort had been made, Agrippina entered the lists, and Sabina soon felt that as long as the great empress lived there was no hope for herself. It is true, she ruled absolutely over her imperial lover, but Agrippina also had still a powerful hold over his mind, and at the first suggestion of removing the only obstacle to their happy union by an act of violence, Nero would probably shrink back and shudder. He was young yet, and his character had not been hardened by years of fearful crime. His mind was still halting between two paths, like Macbeth's, when his wife said to him,

"Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition; but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win; thou'dst have
That which cries: Thus thou must do if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone."

But, like Macbeth's wife, Sabina also understood the art to chastise with the valor of her tongue, to drive away with stinging words of derision whatever feeling was left in his heart, and to wean him step by step from the bonds of filial piety and the habit of obeying his imperious mother. Slowly she sought to familiarize his mind with

the thought of ridding himself of the almost intolerable burden; and the fearful crime, unknown even to the bloodstained annals of his people and his family, which had at first made his blood curdle in his veins, gradually lost its terrors and appeared more and more excusable under the exceptional circumstances in which he imagined himself to be placed. The ancient relations to his mother had been entirely broken off; he felt that he could no longer be controlled by fear, and she soon became aware that an influence such as she formerly had over him, once broken, could never be restored on the same footing. As soon as the courtiers noticed the drift of his thoughts, moreover, and knew that they could with impunity attack Agrippina, they eagerly came to his rescue, and filled his ears with all the atrocious stories which then circulated in Roman society concerning his mother. He learned that there was no crime of which she was not thought guilty, and no excess of which she was believed incapable. Murder and adultery, he was told, were the common instruments of her ambition, and no obstacle to her wishes, however near to her by nature or dear to her heart by friendship and affection, was allowed to obstruct her in her path. Rome was represented to him as indignant and disgusted at her crimes; popular feeling, they said, had risen unanimously against her when she married her uncle, and now the atrocities of her favorites and creatures had filled the measure of universal hatred and loathing. Sabina knew, with infernal cunning, how to fan the flame her unseen hand had kindled, and to excite the impatient son daily more against her to whom he owed life and the throne. She never wearied, now indirectly and now openly, to frighten him with stories of the formidable ambition of his mother, and to mortify him by sneering at his subordinate position.

Then, in a vein of pleasantry, or using all the weapons of wit with masterly tact, she alarmed the pride and jealousy of the unfortunate emperor, calling him, with an air of bitter mockery, a pupil still under guardianship, who had to obey the orders of a woman. "You an emperor!" she would say; "and you are not even a free man yet! If you were really emperor, why should our marriage be postponed from day to day, from month to month? Are the consular honors achieved by my ancestors a bar to my preferment? Am I not handsome enough to be seated by your side? Or are you afraid that when I am empress somebody will be near you who can warn you against the pride and avarice with which your mother insults the senate and rouses the rage of the people against your throne?" Then again she would pretend to be offended, insulted and neglected; she would threaten to follow Otho in his exile and retire with him to some remote corner of the earth, where indeed she might not escape hearing of the disgrace of her beloved Cæsar, but have at least the consolation that she need not witness his misfortunes nor share his affliction.

With such and similar words she gradually excited Nero's impatience and passion till they became almost unbearable. Trifling in themselves and untrue, still, aided by her charms and her tears and skillfully used at the right moment, they did not fail at last to produce a deep impression and to have an enduring effect on the weak and inflamed mind of the emperor. His own heart was unfortunately her warmest ally. The poor empress, on the other hand, had not a friend at court who might have counteracted the artful devices of her adversary. She was no longer the favorite of the people, and in the palace there was no one who would not have delighted in seeing her pride humbled in the dust. Still, nobody

for a moment suspected that Nero would give way to his passion to such an extent as to renounce the ties of natural affection and to imbrue his hands in the blood of his mother. This conviction led even the more cautious statesmen to observe only with a shrug of the shoulders the petty attempts the emperor made to mortify the haughty Augusta, who could not be persuaded to listen to his wishes and to consent to his severing the ties that bound him to Octavia. For a time she bore it all patiently, and yet, with her pride and after having been the absolute master of all Rome, it must have been galling in the extreme to her to become in her old age the helpless victim of any one who, by showing discourtesy to her, might hope to win favor at court. Still, she was not spared when she lived in her beautiful gardens at Rome; annoying lawsuits were brought against her from all sides until she left the city in utter disgust. But no sooner had she retired to one of her favorite villas near Antium than new vexations began to embitter her life even there: large crowds of vulgar people, finding themselves suddenly possessed of a sum of money, hired wagons or boats and singing and shouting passed up and down the roads right under her eyes, or penetrated even into her private grounds, disturbed her slumbers by night and her siesta in the day by their ribald jokes and profane language, and often did not hesitate to sing satirical songs in her hearing. How she longed for the guards and German soldiers who had been attached to her person in former days, and who would have summarily punished the impertinent intruders! But what sharpened the sting was the knowledge that all these insults and outrages were, if not directly ordered, at least silently encouraged by her own son; and again and again she forgot, in the heat of her indignation, when she com-

plained to Nero of these annoyances, the cautious prudence and calm dignity becoming a dowager-empress. Every threat she rashly uttered was carefully gathered up by her watchful enemy and used to terrify Nero, while her passionate violence and haughty language were used to show him how happy he would be if chance, as they called it, should relieve him of so troublesome and dangerous a mother.

At last the intrigues of the beautiful conspirator and the haughty, unbending spirit of the great empress clashed in such a manner as to bring matters to a crisis. A final effort which Agrippina had made to win back the affections of her wayward son had failed, and both mother and son had come to feel that henceforth there was no peace between them possible upon earth. Nero allowed his courtiers to assign the very vilest motives for the signs of tender love with which she had endeavored to gain an entrance into his heart once more, and the empress had left her ungrateful son stung to the quick and clearly foreseeing that there was mortal feud between them. From that day onward, Nero did not see his mother again till the last scene in the great tragedy brought him once more face to face with her—she, for once, innocent and unsuspecting, he with sweet words of affection on his lips and foul murder in his heart.

Agrippina had left Rome and withdrawn to her beautiful villa, convinced that she had no longer the power to influence the heart of her son and to prevent him from accomplishing his purpose. Of poor Octavia, his noble, helpless wife, no one thought amid the excitement. She counted for nothing in the great struggle, and all the world knew that the great empress once fallen, her own days were numbered. Agrippina saw nothing but the hated, fascinating beauty of Sabina—Sabina cared for

nothing but the ruin of Agrippina's power. The fair Circe had the field to herself now, and she took care to lose no time in making Nero more and more familiar with the idea that by some means or other his mother must be gotten out of the way.

It was early spring when his impatience reached its highest point, and with the reawakening of Nature and the tender longing which then seems to pervade the very air, his passion for Sabina became the one absorbing feeling in his heart. He determined that he would delay no longer to make her his own, and woe to those who stood in the way! He had borne long enough with his mother, and if she would not stand aside willingly and give her consent, why the gods had evidently doomed her to destruction. Besides, if he believed his only true friend among all these false, lying people by whom he was daily surrounded, it became a matter of self-defence; for, was it not notorious that Agrippina, in her rage and disappointment, was seriously contemplating to drive him from the throne, perhaps even to deprive him of his life? He determined that she must die.

But how? The tragic death of Britannicus at his own table had made an impression upon the whole world which was far from being forgotten, and nobody would have believed it possible that such an "accident" could occur twice under like circumstances. Everything must be done to avoid publicity and to arrange matters so that not a breath of suspicion could be raised against Nero. Then there arose the question which to choose—poison or the poniard? The former seemed to promise greater secrecy, but who should administer it? Her own servants were too much attached to her to make it safe to tamper with them. A woman who had lived as the great empress had, amid most trying scenes and among men familiar

from childhood up with all forms of murder, would naturally be on her guard, and the world then believed in antidotes by which they thought her safe against all such attacks. The dagger remained, but its work was bloody and could hardly be successfully concealed.

In this embarrassment Nero consulted the two men who were most likely to give him valuable advice—his philosopher and his astrologer. Seneca's advice, however, was either refused or only given under the seal of secrecy. He has paid the penalty for his want of moral courage, for as the world then supposed no intrigue of the palace complete without the aid of the sage, so the world since has stoutly persisted in charging him with counseling the dreadful crime which was soon to be committed. That Nero went from wisdom to folly for advice in his hour of need was perfectly in keeping with the general tendency of the Roman mind in those days. They had no faith, and like "the atheist of H. M. the king of Prussia," they denied the existence of almighty God, but thought Friday an unlucky day. Nor was superstition the foible only of the ignorant and the uneducated. The highest in the land shared the absurdest notions with the people. Julius Cæsar, skeptic everywhere else, after having suffered much from a severe fall, never again stepped into his carriage without pronouncing a mystic word that was to protect him against every danger. In his memoirs he tells us minutely all the portentous signs which foreshadowed his great victory at Pharsala, and he kept with anxious care the little black palm tree which on that famous day had sprouted miraculously through the stone pavement of a temple. Augustus, with all his calm indifference, was sadly afraid of thunder-storms, believed in unlucky days, and openly avowed his conviction that a revolt of the army was the result of his blunder in put-

ting his shoe on the left foot first instead of the right! The great Livia, the mother of heroes and emperors, had an egg chosen by chance and hatched it in order to see what would be the sex and the fate of her own expected child. It gave life to a chicken adorned with a magnificent crest, and she saw in it the sure sign of the future greatness of her son Tiberius. And Tiberius himself, who despised the gods and pitched men like pebbles from the rocks before his villa into the deep waters below for the mere pleasure of seeing them tumble over, would not submit to being shaved when the moon was not in the right quarter, and sent in all haste for a laurel branch when thunder was heard in the heavens. Surely, then, we may pardon Nero if he followed such illustrious examples and sought wisdom where they had hoped to obtain it.

It turned out that sages and quacks were equally good courtiers. Both advised Nero to despatch his mother by poison. He sent for the great Locusta, who still had the pleasantest way in the world to relieve an impatient son of his long-lived parent or a henpecked husband of his clamorous wife. She had amassed a large fortune, had an army of slaves and was on the best terms in the world with the greatest and noblest of Rome; and all this by means of a little sea-hare, from whose shining corpse she knew how to concoct a most subtle poison. At least such was the popular report, for the Romans looked upon the sea-slug with exceeding horror, and believed that the mere sight of the creature caused an attack of sickness, if not death itself, in the beholder. Its scent was said to infect the air to a great distance, and the foolhardy meddler who handled it swelled and possibly burst in consequence. At any rate, his hair fell out and left him disgracefully bald for the rest of his life. The poison itself was re-

puted most subtle and peculiar in its action, killing very slowly and deliberately; not absolutely destroying life until after a certain number of days, when the animal from which it was obtained would be found to have died also. The sea-hare filled the imagination of the Romans for generations, and no man could unexpectedly fall heir to a large fortune or marry a rich widow in those days without having the slug summoned as a witness against him in court. This even happened to famous Apulejus, who employed fishermen to procure him some in order to satisfy his curiosity, and was soon after, when marrying a widow, accused of magic on the score of his familiarity with the terrible creatures. And yet they were in reality utterly harmless.

The grim old hag came to the palace and made her bargain with Nero. Agrippina was three times poisoned, but she refused as often to be killed, and the report gained ground that she possessed such antidotes as made her safe against all attacks of this kind. It was next the turn of some ingenious courtiers, who hoped to earn the emperor's gratitude and world-wide renown by devising a cunningly-contrived ceiling in the empress' bed-room, which at a preconcerted signal was to fall down suddenly and crush the unfortunate princess in her bed. She refused again to be crushed, having obtained information through her well-paid, zealous spies, and was naturally more on her guard than ever.

At last it happened that Nero was present at a great public spectacle, where, among other marvelous contrivances, a vessel appeared on a miniature ocean, and after many curious evolutions suddenly opened at the sides, from which various lions, panthers and other wild animals were discharged, and then closing up again calmly sailed into port. "How would it do to try such

ship," whispered one of the emperor's attendants into his ear. This man was Anicetus, a man of infamy, but of genius. From the rank of a freedman he had gradually risen to be Nero's tutor in the prince's younger years, and had then, by the favor of his pupil, succeeded in mounting from step to step until at this moment he was the admiral in command of the Mediterranean fleet, which was stationed at Misenum. For unknown reasons there had been enmity between him and the empress from the beginning, and when the sight of the naval menagerie suggested the happy thought, he rejoiced at the opportunity of winning at once still higher favor with the emperor and enjoying his revenge on his enemy. He proposed immediately to give directions that such a vessel should be built which would suddenly give way in the open sea and sink Agrippina to the bottom. He added that the ocean was the element of disasters, and if the ship foundered, malice itself could not convert into a crime what would naturally appear to be the effect of adverse winds and boisterous waves. Then, the empress once consigned to the ocean, Nero could easily make such a show of grief by loud lamentations and by erecting a temple and votive altars to her memory that all the world, so far from suspecting him, would admire his filial piety. The words fell upon willing ears, and that night the bloody compact was closed which was to end the marvelous career of the great empress and to brand Nero with the curse of being the murderer of his own mother.





X.

THE MURDER.

IN early spring Nero set out for the coast on his way to Baia, the most brilliant of all watering-places of antiquity, where no frowning senate cast ever a passing shadow on his ceaseless rounds of orgies, and no distant murmur of a restless, almost desperate, people broke upon his revels or his rare hours of rest. The Appian Way on which he left the city was well worthy of an emperor and his greatest splendor, and of Rome in her glory and in her majesty. From a point two miles distant from the city gate, where now the magnificent tomb of a Roman matron rises in lonely grandeur, this Queen of Roads, as it was called, went forth in strange magnificence, mingled with mournful glory, turning neither to the right nor to the left till it reached the town of Albani. And what a crowd there came forth from those never-closed and never-silent gates!

“Cast round thine eyes and see
What conflux issuing forth or entering in:
Prætors, proconsuls to their provinces
Hasting or to return, in robes of state;
Lictors and rods, the ensigns of their power;
Legions and cohorts; turms of horse and wings,
Or embassies from regions far remote,
In various habits; some from farthest South,
Syene, or where the shadow both ways falls,
Meroë, Nilotic isle, and more to West,

THE MURDER.

The realm of Bacchus to the Blackmoor sea;
From the Asian king and Parthian army these;
From India and the golden Chersonese,
And utmost Indian isle, Taprobane,
Dusk faces with white silken turbans wreathed.”

In eloquent contrast with this gorgeous splendor, nothing but tombs greeted the eye of the haughty nobleman and the lowly slave as they went forth on the great Appian. For mile after mile it was lined on either side with lofty tombs or votive edifices to the dead, crowding upon each other in close ranks and to a great depth, and varying, like the motley multitude on the highway, from the diminutive cippus, with its modest inscription and its allegory in high relief, to the lofty mausoleum, which rose in massive grandeur high above the rest, and now gives shelter as a dwelling or protection as a fortress. Only here and there some temple, erected in honor of the humbler gods, would interrupt this wilderness of sepulchres, or some luxurious villa, around which perhaps the ashes of the former owner lay in solemn state, or the gardens of a wealthy senator or patrician. Generally the tombs were adorned with the portraits of the deceased. Here it was a large tablet of dark marble, from which sprang, as it were, in full life-size, the heads of husband and wife, holding each other's hands affectionately as they had gone jointly through life and now lay side by side under the simple monument. The fair features of the woman, young and sweet, contrast strangely with the harder and almost rugged lines in the man's face, but still there is an air of simple happiness and calm serenity about both of them which speaks of virtue and happy union, even amid all the vices and violence of imperial Rome. There it was, a huge structure towering on high, covered with costly carvings, and bearing in our day on its broad sum-

mit a house and a garden. But whether the inscription, in its concise and almost majestic style, bears record of a great nobleman or an unknown woman, mentioned only by her father's and her husband's name, "whose she was," the idea of death is invariably represented as a happy repose after the fatiguing labor of life. There are no skeletons in hideous grotesqueness here, no death's heads and crossbones, but the figure of a woman who has fallen asleep amid flowers, a bird that picks a ripe seed, or a butterfly gently wafted away by the breeze. Perhaps now and then horses are seen falling down at the end of their race, or genii in the position of sleepers or extinguishing their torches; still more rarely the quaint myth of Orcnos, who is braiding a string which an ass devours steadily behind him. Where Apollo and Diana are seen bending their bows and destroying the children of Niobe, an effort is made to express the grief over dear ones whom a contagious disease had carried away, as the people were still prone to ascribe, with Homer, these plagues to the wrath of Apollo and the sufferings of women to the arrows of Diana. Strangely enough, however, no reference was ever made to a future life, and yet the Romans did not doubt the existence of the soul after death. Was it that they never rose to a firm faith in another world, or that their religion had so thoroughly degenerated into superstition that all that was left of a former belief was a presentiment only and a doubt? "If any part of us remains after death," is the constantly returning phrase on epitaphs, and probably expresses fully what was believed and felt by the people. How deep the sadness must have been of those who thus confided the ashes of their dear ones to what was to them literally their last resting-place! and how their hearts must have ached as they passed down the long line of tombs, reading the

names of the great and the good who had "gone for ever!"

Even now there is nothing so sublimely melancholy, so thoroughly appalling as this ancient road. What must it have been in the days when every name by the wayside recalled some illustrious dead or struck the heart with a pang of ineffable grief! Though only speaking of the departed, the scene was far more impressive than those that were enacted on high occasions on the slope of the Capitol or within the gigantic walls of the Colosseum; for here arose around the traveler the great Romans of the republic and of the young empire, with the most solemn and enthralling sense of the power, the vastness and the illustrious fame of great Rome. For were not here the two mounds fondly believed to cover the remains of the glorious Horatii and Curatii, and there the well-known temple erected on the spot from which Hannibal had surveyed and then turned his back on unassailable Rome? And nearer still, close to the walls of the city, as though holding the guardians of her impregnable gates, the tomb of the Scipios, of whom one, the thunderbolt of war, the terror of Carthage, bequeathed his bones to the earth unburnt, even as though "he had been the vilest of slaves."

The stream of travelers on the Appian Road was incessant by day and by night, as the luxurious Roman vastly preferred traveling in darkness, when he was unmolested by the heat of the day, the glare of the sun and the jostling of the restless multitude. From the sea there was always some great chieftain coming up to a triumph, or some governor laden with the plunder and the curses of an Eastern province; some tributary king to do homage to the Mistress of the World, or some humble fisherman, escorted by despised Jewish brethren, bearing the first

rays of Christian light to the Capital of Heathendom, by the temples and the villas, all unconscious of their coming doom, to the gate of Capua.

The most gorgeous spectacle, however, on the whole way, was seen nearer to the city, where it was crowded with the elegant world of Rome and used as a corso. Now a youth of noble blood dashed by, trying the swiftness of his newly-imported horses; and now a famous Amazon appeared, surrounded by a whole host of well-mounted admirers; here an old senator came slowly and solemnly to enjoy the freedom from the dust and the heat of the old city; and there a Cynthia dashed by, handling the reins herself with skillful boldness, and every now and then casting a glance back at her lover's closely-curtained carriage, before which two gigantic Molossus dogs played with deep-mouthed bass. Nor were more serious scenes wanting to enhance by their sombre shadow the brightness of the brilliant scene. A troop of pilgrims moved slowly on foot toward the distant temple of Jupiter on the Albanian mountain, or a bevy of pious women went chattering and chanting on their way to the grove of Diana, to whom they carried precious offerings. Not unfrequently even a funeral passed with loud cries and lamentations through the gay crowd, carrying a body to the immense Appian place of burning, where the middle and lower classes disposed of their dead. Women, dressed in white and bearing on their bare shoulders vases with ointments and baskets with worthless offerings, followed the uncovered bier, while behind them came ghastly freedmen in black, with their hats on to mark their newly-acquired freedom.

Or a still stranger sight might be seen there, such as excited no small curiosity only a few years before. A solemn procession was moving slowly and solemnly out

from the Appian Gate and down the crowded road, while a dense mass of men in all possible costumes was crowding and crushing to see the mysterious spectacle. It is a funeral evidently, for at the head walks a flute-player performing doleful airs, and behind him come a few women in white robes, with countenances oddly divided between sadness and a desire to laugh. What was there to amuse these hired mourners in the sad assemblage? The dancers and mimes who followed after them had no merry-andrew among them, as was generally the case on such occasions; they were as sober and staid as if they had been burying the great Cæsar himself. But what is the matter that no masks follow representing the ancestors or the distinguished relatives of the deceased? Was he so utterly unknown to the world of Rome, so wretchedly alone in the great empire, that neither the images of his fathers nor living kinsmen and friends are grieving for his loss? Here comes the bier, borne on high by persons of some distinction, for they wear purple-striped togas; and we shall see now who the deceased was, as the national custom still leaves his face and form uncovered, open to the eyes of all beholders. Two black men bear it on their shoulders; they are in all probability slaves who have been set free by the liberality of the deceased. But what is this? There is nothing on the couch! And yet there is no mistaking the grieved expression of the multitude that follow; there is genuine sorrow in their faces, and although they all seem to belong to the lower classes of society, they behave with a decorum and a dignity worthy of the highest in the land. Suddenly the appointed speaker raises his voice once more and recites in high-flown language the virtues of the deceased. It was a bird, and on closer inspection the lifeless body of a raven may be discerned on the bier.

It was the famous bird, born on the temple of Castor and Pollux, who had attached himself from the first months of his existence to a poor shoemaker who lived opposite. The latter had fancied he saw in him a trust confided to his care by the gods themselves, especially as ravens, from their power of speaking like human beings, had already in remote antiquity obtained the honor of being regarded as envoys of the great Apollo. He had nursed the young bird and taught him to speak. As it seems to have been dangerous for a bird, if he could speak at all, not to be able to bear witness to the loyal disposition of his owner, he was soon taught to salute the emperor with the usual "Hail, Cæsar!" After a time, the bird, with a spice of independence and originality, used to fly every morning to the Forum and there accost the great Tiberius, and after him Germanicus and Drusus, and then the whole Roman people. When this courteous duty was duly fulfilled to his apparent satisfaction and the intense delight of the never-weary crowds, he would fly back to his owner's shop. This he had continued to do for many years, until he became well known to everybody, and won the admiration and affection of all Rome. There lived, however, next door to his master's house another cobbler, who, either from envy, or, as he said, in a sudden access of rage because the bird had soiled a pair of shoes in his shop, killed the bird. This so roused the fury of the excitable people that the unlucky man was first compelled to leave the part of the town in which he had lived, and was afterward put to death by enraged admirers of the patriotic bird. The raven himself was now on his way to the burning-place on the Appian Road, where a host of people awaited him with wreaths in their hands and unguents and incense, ready to do him honor even after death.

It seemed, however, as if sorrow sought naturally for relief, for just as the last followers of the strange funeral were approaching the burial-place they were attracted by another crowd by the wayside which yelled with delight at some exhibition. The mourners ran across, and no sooner saw what caused the merriment than they also shouted and cheered with perfect fury. It was a small puppet-show, in which a man of daring wit had ventured to ridicule the power that was then ruling supreme upon earth—the Roman people! A huge doll, ticketed "City populace!" was seen hanging in the air on two fishhooks and dangling ludicrously from side to side. The people evidently enjoyed the satire; they were perfectly conscious that they had conquered the world, that they distributed at their pleasure provinces and empires among their favorites, that they imposed their laws upon foreign nations, and were looked upon by millions as a little lower only than the gods themselves; and yet they knew also that their very existence was in the hands of a man whose will was law to the earth and at whose pleasure they lived or died. Him alone they worshiped, for the gods had forsaken them, and faith was no longer to be found in the great city.

Not that priests were wanting, even on the Appian Way, trying to make converts for their new creeds; far from it: the temples of Rome were crowded with gods seeking new worshipers. Here came priests of the Syrian goddess, who had put their idol on an ass and gone through the whole city from street to street and from quarter to quarter out to the great gate, imploring the passers-by to be liberal toward the great Astarte. Here they were met by a number of Galli, priests of Cybele, who, with disheveled hair and hoarse voice, were running madly through the crowds, while their chief, a man of

enormous size, whose howls were heard high above the beat of their gigantic drums, tore his limbs into shreds with sharp knives and marked the faithful on the brow with the blood that was spurting around. Farther on strange, inharmonious sounds of foreign instruments are heard, and now begging monks appear; these are the priests of the Egyptian Isis, with closely-shaven heads and dressed in white, flowing robes of spotless linen. "A god is full of wrath—take care!" they cry at the top of their voice, and the people stop and stand frightened. "Autumn threatens—September is full of evil—take care! Go to Meroë for water—for water from the sacred Nile! Pour it on the floor of the temple of Isis! A hundred eggs for the pontiff of Bellona! Your old robes for the priest of the great Isis! Misfortunes hang on a thread over your head! Your tunics for the servants of the great goddess! Give—give liberally, and peace shall be yours and absolution for a whole year!"

Farther on, poorly sheltered from the burning rays of the sun by the overhanging roof of a gigantic monument, and covered from head to foot with dust, two philosophers are disputing amid the noise of the road and the laughter of the crowd. Both are marked by their soiled tunics and their neglected beards—the strongest signs of contempt for the proprieties of life among the scrupulous Romans. One is a Stoic, with his venerable bald head and his features worn by deep thought and night-long studies. His form is emaciated, for he lives on beans and broth alone, has a holy horror of a soft bed, a sovereign contempt for silver vessels, and swears by the ancient gods. He is altogether old-fashioned, the poor, good fellow, and ridiculous enough to believe yet in a Fate, a country, and even friendship. Thus he has many weak points on which his adversary, a Cynic, can attack

him to advantage. He is simply half naked, with a crust of black bread in his knapsack for all his worldly possessions. He does not argue; he only derides, and with brutal vulgarity makes infinite fun of those old, long-forgotten notions about country, marriage, friendship and all the ties of human life. He triumphs, for he succeeds in making the people laugh. He has them all on his side, for he is one of them. He speaks their language and shares their feelings. He has left the vats of his tanyard or the little shop in his patron's house for the more profitable business of a philosopher. Now the dispute is at an end. He holds his bag open and makes the round. The pennies tumble in merrily, and he thinks of the day when he can once more put his staff aside, cut off his beard and abandon the irksome austerities of his master Diogenes. When he has received the last farthing he looks around; all his hearers have vanished. They have laughed with him at the despised gods and enjoyed his sneers at the superstitious. Where are they now? They have gone into the city to a temple of Isis to purify themselves. They implore the goddess Fever to grant them health; they kneel before the altar of Fear, asking for courage, or they have gone to the synagogue and hear the Ten Commandments read by a learned rabbi. Poor philosopher! They have not been taught much by your triumphant lessons, but they have paid you well. He laughs at them as he has laughed with them, and goes farther down the road to renew the same scene and to gather more pennies.

The noble knight or the great senator, or, greater still, the high dignitary of the empire, came in solemn state down the road on his way to his villa on the coast. His followers were so numerous and his train so enormous that the whole assumed the form and size of a tri-

umphal procession. Numidian horsemen in quaint costumes rode far ahead; then followed a host of runners, who with loud cries and impertinent violence demanded of everybody to give way to their master. They did this all the more energetically as the rank and position of the latter was often measured by the noise which these outriders made and the size of the clouds of dust which they succeeded in raising. Next followed countless mules, bearing in well-balanced panniers costly vessels of crystal and murrha, vases of gold and silver, which artists like Myron and Phidias had deigned to adorn with surpassing skill, and Corinthian bronzes of fabulous value, whose worn handles and peculiar smell announced their highly-prized antiquity. The luggage of the master and his retinue required a large number of pack-horses, and these were followed in their turn by a crowd of cooks and table-servants, with whom the vast number of humbler menials dared not to mingle. Last of all came the master's favorite slaves, beardless and fair and carefully ranged according to their age from the oldest to the youngest, whose delicate features were covered with costly ointments to protect them against the evil effects of the weather.

At last came the carriage of the master himself, drawn by light but active horses from distant Spain, or by thorough-bred mules, covered with richly-embroidered purple trappings and countless chains and plates of embossed bronze. The very bit, frothed with snowy foam, was of gilt silver and lavishly adorned with artistic carvings or inlaid with still more costly materials, such as ivory or electrum, so that many a rich Roman paid for it the price of a large estate. The carriage had no springs, but the traveler was protected against jolts and jars by luxurious cushions. A reader and a writer sat opposite to him—

the one to read or to recite at a sign of his master from some favorite author—the latter instantly to note down on his waxen tablets whatever thought might happen to occur to the traveler. Still, the road seemed interminable to the restless, helpless mind of the exhausted pleasure-seeker, who counted impatiently from behind the curtains of purple silk the milestones by the wayside, and compared their number with the cunningly-contrived mechanism attached to his carriage, which measured the distance by the revolutions of a curious wheel. At times he would look up to see if birds of good omen came in sight, and shrink back horror-struck, in spite of his philosophy or absolute infidelity, if his eye met unfortunately a crow, whom the rattling of his wheels drove, hoarsely crowing, from the left to the right of the road, or, worse still, a black snake slowly crawling across the road on which he was traveling.

The emperor's retinue, grander than all, rapidly reached the Albanian mountains, where on a beautiful slope lay Albanum, a magnificent summer palace of the Cæsars, within whose walls the town of Albano now finds a safe shelter. They crossed the beautiful structure which spanned on mighty foundations and lofty arches the vast gulf that separates the town from Aricia, and then avoiding the pestilential swamps, which here follow inland the outline of the coast, and the weary way on the canal, the emperor exchanged his carriage for an easy litter. He was now carried with elastic step by ever-fresh relays until he reached Norma, crowned with a noble Doric temple, and offering a view down the whole Latin coast, such as God's earth but rarely presents to the grateful eye. But unfortunately, Nero's weary mind left him but little power of enjoyment, and the beauty of the scene, in which land and sea for miles blend harmoniously so as

to produce ever new and ever fair prospects, had few attractions for him. And yet, after having crossed the rivers, which here come dashing down from the heights, adding new splendor to the gorgeous scenery, the sea grew deeper blue with every mile and the islands assumed a richer purple. Now a grim, gray olive wood, and now a dark, luxuriant orange grove, cast deep, sharply-marked shadows over the landscape, whilst the quaint white sails of countless boats flecked the violet sea with their ever-changing sparkle. The fresh breeze from the sea came with reviving breath, and, rippling the waves and fluttering the leaves, gave increased animation to the beautiful scene.

The Romans called this region of marvelous beauty, where fashion and joyous life ruled supremely all the year round, the Eye of Italy, and *Baiæ* was the very apple of the eye. The whole coast from Cape Misenum to that of *Minerva* formed an unbroken line of towns and villages, with their temples and theatres, their baths and their villas of rarest beauty. But of the three bays which here ran up to *Stabiæ*, to *Naples* and to *Baiæ*, the latter was beyond all comparison the fairest, and the very centre of all the gayety and splendor of Roman life. The gently-rising hills which encircle the fair waters with their magic beauty were covered with numerous villas—now airy structures, now massive and castle-like, famous for their surpassing grandeur, but more famous still through the lofty names which they bore. For from some of these a *Marius*, a *Pompey* and *Cæsar* himself had looked down upon the animated scene, and here the eloquent *Cicero* and the much-abused *Lucullus* had lived but a few years ago. Farther down lay the less sumptuous villas which were rented out for the season, mostly half buried in luxurious gardens and groves, which bore

flowers and fruit at every season of the year, and from which here and there a palm tree raised its elegant form to a towering height. Scattered around among them were seen a number of public and private bathing establishments, upon which enormous sums had been lavished, while others of the same kind were built upon costly foundations in the sea itself, and stretched their halls and their gardens far out into the gulf. Nor was the absence of very large buildings, such as suited the capital of the world, a grievance to the eyes of the Roman. He dwelt with all the greater pleasure in villas of smaller size, but resplendent with well-disposed works of art and beautiful in their perfect proportions within and without.

It was toward sunset when the emperor reached the fairy scene, of which the greatest of Roman poets admiringly said that there was no bay on the earth more charming than that of *Baiæ*, and which combines the supreme beauty of heaven, earth and sea as no other portion of our globe. The loungers had gradually left the baths with their cool waters and their pleasant society, and were now bent upon pleasure. The shadier parts of the coast swarmed with boats rocking lazily on the smooth waters, in which now a discreet lover recited some lines from *Ovid's Loves* to win the heart of the glowing beauty by his side, and now an impudent youth set a whole company laughing by repeating a satire of *Varro* or *Horace*. Farther out, gifted sons of the South improvised a song which they adapted to the regular beat of the oars, while here and there loud outbursts of laughter spoke of coarser minds and ruder jests. Still others went as far as the promontory, to *Misenum* with its renowned haven, where the western fleet was stationed, and rowed slowly through the crowd of huge galleys, enjoying the pride

and self-sufficiency with which every Roman looked upon these signs of the greatness and power of his country.

To-day, however, the bay was comparatively quiet, for by the discreet measures of the officials, the great world of *Baiæ* had been invited to frequent mainly the *Corso* of the town, the charming *Lucrine Lake*, so that the emperor could enter unmolested. Here the whole splendor of the watering-place was displayed on that evening. Magnificent galleys with bulwarks of bronze or richest carving, and resplendent all over with a profusion of gilding, dashed like flashing meteors through the quiet waters, the oars moved in harmonious beat handled by unseen rowers, while the silken sails with their purple embroidery and golden fringes hung listlessly from the tall masts. Here a boat appeared as the ship of *Dionysos*. Vines loaded with grapes were entwined around the rigging and the mast, which assumed the shape of a *thyrsus-staff* and ended in a beautiful golden cluster, from which bunches of gay ribbons fluttered gayly in the evening breeze. Wreaths of ivy hung all around the sides of the vessel, and long vines, festooned with streamers of gay color, mingled with the white foam into which the deep blue waters were beaten by a hundred oars. On the deck, upon silk cushions with gold-embroidered edgings and surrounded by a bevy of youthful slaves in brilliant costumes, lay the Roman *Ariadne*, looking, in her matchless beauty and inimitable grace, the very goddess of the fair scene, and utterly unconscious that she deserved by her mode of life to be abandoned herself upon some inaccessible *Naxos*. Near the bow and facing the enchantress, sat a group of flute-players and cithara-girls, who accompanied with their instruments the bacchic songs recited by fair boys at their feet. Amidship, where around the mast the couches for a re-

fection had been laid out in prescribed order, lay the male guests, the followers of the Roman *Dionysos*, who himself sat in their midst, crowned with cooling ivy and ruddy with *Falernian wine*, which sparkled in the golden vessels by his side. An open boat of costly wood, carved with infinite skill and of fabulous value, preceded the galley. In it sat a beauteous boy, representing *Eros*, by the side of a gigantic heap of roses, and strewed them incessantly with full hands over the waters to greet his magnificent mistress. Countless other boats, varying only in form and color, but all to us of incredible splendor, sailed over the placid lake, and a few lost themselves into the dark gloom of the *Avernian Lake*, where the child-like faith of ancient Rome placed the entrance to the lower world. The lofty cypress trees which had formerly darkened its banks with their funereal sadness had recently been removed to give way, together with the old superstition, to more cheerful plantations, but the prestige had not yet been entirely effaced, and the silent, solemn lake was a favorite with the gayest and most reckless of pleasure-seekers, who enjoyed, for a moment, the contrast of its gloom with the bright and brilliant scene outside.

The sun had disappeared behind the lofty cape, and the principal meal of the day gathered families and friends in the regular dining-room, or, as was more frequently the case at *Baiæ*, in one of those half-open halls, which were protected by a high, semi-circular wall from northern winds, while they opened in front upon the enchanting bay, gorgeous in brilliant colors as the sun was setting behind the *Pillars of Hercules* or softened into ineffable beauty by the winsome, mild light of the moon. As the emperor approached his villa, a chorus of confused voices arose far and near, to which the steady, solemn roar of the breakers formed a harmonizing un-

dertone, whilst from across the bay, from near the magnificent marble temple of Serapis, was heard in softened accents the song of a lover, who poured forth his passion at the closed door of a famous beauty, aided by an orchestra of skilled musicians, who accompanied him with subdued notes.

It was early spring when the master of the lords of the world, as the Romans called themselves proudly, thus reached Baïæ, and in a few days the great festival of Minerva was to take place, which lasted five days, and was to be celebrated this year by the full reconciliation of the youthful emperor with his mother. In a letter full of tender expressions of love, and many playful allusions to the happy days that were coming, he had invited her to enjoy with him the festivities of the occasion and to let the world see the harmony which was once more established between them. Forewarned, forearmed, said already a proverb of the ancients; but maternal love, which no sinful passion of her own heart and no ingratitude of those even that were dearest to her, had been able fully to extinguish, closed her eyes to the treachery of her son, and, in spite of warnings and sad forebodings, she accepted the invitation. She could not, she would not believe that the welcome words of her child could be false unto death—that the son who prayed and pressed her to come to him could hide under his affectionate endearments the thought of foul treason.

The letter reached her at her favorite villa near Antium, where she once, barely twenty-three years ago, had given life to Nero, her first and only child. This very fact, so full of sweet memories and of bitter thoughts, no doubt softened her heart and opened its long-closed gates once more to bright hopes for the future. Her talking thrush, which could imitate the human voice, and in whose

random chattering this wise ruler of an empire loved to look with truly amazing credulity for an intelligent meaning, remained silent. Even her snow-white nightingale, for which she had paid the price of a slave,

“That crowded, hurried and precipitated
With fast, thick warbles its delicious notes,”

and which had often told the superstitious owner her impending fate, now refused to sing, as she came down from the noble porch of her villa to the tiny bay sheltered in the midst of the park. There is something inexpressibly mournful in this grand, simple trust with which the mother's heart went forth to greet her repentant son, ready to forget all the bitter lessons of a lifetime, all the wise counsels given by statesmen of long experience, at the mere beck and nod of one whom she knew she must condemn and dread in her mind, and whom yet she could not help loving and believing in her heart. As she set foot on the swift galley that awaited her on the outer roadstead, no evil omen in the air, no warning voice within told her that she was stepping close to the brink of the grave, which was so soon to swallow up all that had been grand and glorious, all that had been weak and wicked, in her checkered life.

When her galley rounded the cape and she looked once more upon that scene of marvelous beauty which Seneca so severely stigmatizes as the “seat of voluptuousness and the harbor of vice,” she was met by him who might well have been described by the great philosopher as the worthy master of such an ill-famed region. But there was nothing in his smiling face and gladdened eye that might have betrayed the workings of his inner heart. He had hastened to surprise and to welcome his mother, and he received her with a hearty pressure of the hand and a long embrace. Then he begged her to follow him

to Bauli, where the empress had a magnificent villa of her own, and as they approached the landing-place a new surprise was waiting to gratify her pride. The emperor pointed out to her amid the host of larger vessels at anchor in the bay, an imperial state-galley, manned with regular sailors of the Roman fleet, and far surpassing all other ships in size and splendor. The empress had formerly, in the days of her supremacy, and for some time even after the ascension of her son, been accustomed to make all her pleasure excursions on board of such a state-galley, but since the day when Nero deprived her of her guard of honor, and she had reluctantly withdrawn to the ranks of private life, she had been deprived of this as well as of all similar distinctions. Now the emperor once more placed this vessel at her disposal, and the proud empress looked upon the offer with no small satisfaction, seeing in it not only a return of her son's affection, but also the promise of renewed power. Her long life at court had taught her to value these apparent trifles more for what they suggested than for their intrinsic value, and she praised above all those distinctions which struck and dazzled the eye of the masses for the sake of their political import.

Nero invited his mother, before he returned to his own villa at Baiæ in order to give her time to rest and to change her dress, to a great supper, which was to take place the same evening in honor of her arrival. The emperor's most intimate friend, Otho, had begged permission to celebrate the reconciliation between mother and son by a brilliant feast, at which they might condescend to be present. He was, of course, in Nero's secret and fully aware of his true sentiments toward Agrippina; but as the empress alone had heretofore protected him in the possession of his dearly beloved Sabina, she naturally

believed him her true and faithful friend. This very trust and confidence, far more creditable again to the heart than to the sagacity of the great empress, was to be used to betray the victim, and emperor and favorite no doubt enjoyed with intense delight the simplicity with which the still trustful mother believed in the devotion and gratitude of Sabina's husband.

She was dressed for the occasion, and ready to go on board her own galley, when a chamberlain announced to her that the vessel had suddenly been rendered unfit for the purpose by an unfortunate collision with some large ships of the imperial fleet, which lay near by at anchor, but that the imperial man-of-war had been made ready to receive her at once. She did not suspect that among the cunningly-contrived measures which were to culminate in the greatest crime of the age, this very accident had been prepared, and that the emperor had been so very attentive in meeting her as she doubled the cape for the very purpose of bringing about the collision. Was it a faint fear in her heart, or was it one of those mysterious warnings which so often seem disregarded by so-called strong minds, that made her hesitate for a moment? Certain it is that vague apprehensions seized her as she stood there, and hesitating whether she should listen to the suggestions of her suspicious mind or follow the impulse of maternal love, she at last refused to go on board the fatal ship, and insisted on being carried to Otho's villa in a litter. Here every apprehension was removed and every doubt at once overcome by the distinction with which she was received and the caresses which were lavished upon her by Nero.

There was the emperor, now twenty-two years old, and still fair enough to affect the woman in dress, voice and gesture whenever he chose to assume the character—a

folly in which he occasionally took a childish pleasure, restrained by no sense of dignity or decency. His health had so far withstood with wondrous power all the excesses in which he indulged, and it was only from over-anxious concern for his voice, which he prized as his most powerful charm, that he wrapped up his throat with infinite care. Dressed with a strange mixture of carelessness and elegance, he wore a long loose robe, but his sandy locks, which he tried in vain to dye a bright auburn, the favorite color of the Romans, were piled up with exquisite care, in tier upon tier, and fell behind the crown upon the shoulders, after the most effeminate fashion of the day. With the pertinacity of near-sighted persons, who owe no consideration to others, he peered into his mother's eyes, as she saluted him, to see if there was any trace of suspicion lurking in them, and then overwhelmed her with tokens of his affection and words of devotion. By his side stood the giver of the feast, the gay and gallant Otho, still the emperor's first friend and constant companion, fascinating his master by his graces and rising in public honors, but hardly yet looking forward to the day when he was to become his successor on the throne. He also exerted himself to the utmost to do reverence to his illustrious guest, and led her himself, with a courtesy even then still rare among the Romans in their intercourse with women, to the seat of honor which Nero had assigned her, saying that it was due to her to whom he owed his life and his throne. But how she trembled with inward rage and felt all her fears and her apprehensions sicken her heart once more when she saw the courtiers make room for Otho's wife, who came forward in all the haughty consciousness of her surpassing beauty! Her face, of perfect regularity and matchless purity of outline, was startling by the apparent

simplicity of its expression and the almost childlike delicacy of her complexion, which was due to the most exquisite care and a thorough knowledge of all the countless cosmetics in use among the great ladies of the empire. But this simplicity vanished, as if by magic, when she raised her magnificent lashes and flashed forth fire from her violet eyes, or when she gently and slowly parted the superbly-arched lips and "coined her face into smiles." As she met the glance of the empress she suddenly blazed forth in a flash of wrath; her features grew rigid and the innocent maid of sixteen just now looked the thoroughbred intriguer of thirty. It was the Fury with the face of a Grace. They spoke not, but saluted each other with solemn defiance; and a grand sight it must have been for the assembled nobles to see the two women who then claimed the empire of the world meet thus face to face. But the ceremonies began, and there was no time to watch the play of features or the exchange of words, for all eyes were fixed with intense interest upon Nero and Agrippina.

The emperor reclined by the side of his mother and devoted himself exclusively to her, now tenderly bending over her, the delighted son who jested and chatted in closest familiarity with the beloved mother—now confidentially whispering into her ear some news of absorbing importance which he, the emperor, alone had obtained. The empress gradually lost all fear, and abandoned herself with intense delight to the charms of the hour. It appeared to her as if the good old times had returned, when Nero was nothing but her devoted son and she the absolute ruler of the world; she fancied she saw the dawn of a new day, which was to bring her once more the power she so fondly loved and the splendor the loss of which had grieved her deeply. The fiery wines, which

she by no means disdained, the warm incense that arose on all sides, the delight in the unaccustomed homage she received and the brilliant dreams that filled her imagination, all contributed to make her forget her sorrows and her fears, and she hardly perceived that the supper was extended far beyond the usual hour of the night. Even the furious high play, the Odd-or-Even of those days, with its almost sublime contrast between the extreme simplicity of the game and the colossal sums that continually changed hands in the twinkling of an eye, could not long divert the attention of the empress, fond as she was of the high-wrought excitement.

The scene around her was the usual one at the end of a supper. Refreshments and relishes were continually brought in by relays of beautiful slaves, but there seemed to be left little capacity to enjoy the rare titbits with which exhausted nature was tempted. Here was a patrician who had on purpose withdrawn for a week before the feast to the quarters of his slaves, and lived on their frugal fare in order to enable him to enjoy to the fullest extent the marvels which he knew Otho would exhibit to do honor to the solemn occasion. Alas! even his capacity had come to an end, and he lay, helpless and listless, on his rose-covered couch, scarcely glancing with heavy eye at the golden trays whose precious contents he could no longer appreciate. There a senator leant heavily over the basin of Corinthian brass which a beautiful youth in brilliant costume held out to him, and tried in vain to tickle his hardened palate with a peacock feather in order to procure relief, and to gain new powers of enjoying the wonderful dishes that were just then brought in with the sound of martial music.

There was something in the air which Agrippina felt but could not explain to herself, and although fearless as

the bravest of Roman warriors and long accustomed to breathe an atmosphere laden with deadly danger, she shuddered inwardly and longed for a chance word that might betray the secret, or a stray glance which her watchful eye could have instantly detected and known full well how to interpret. But nothing appeared that was unusual in the faces of the guests or the conduct of the host. When she intimated a desire that the meal should be ended, her son gave a sign and immediately the attention of the company was attracted by a noise overhead. The ceiling opened, as was the custom at the tables of the great, and a large silver-gilt hoop descended, hung with ointment-bottles of precious metal, silver garlands formed of richly-chiseled leaves and tendrils and jewels of immense value, all of which were quickly distributed among the guests. In the mean time, the dessert had been quietly brought in and served, toothpicks of fragrant pistachio were handed round, and after a few moments given to the praise of the emperor's new pastry-cook, who had surpassed himself on that day, the company broke up. And again Nero was all affection and filial reverence; he himself called his mother's attendants; he went with her some distance down to the shore, and when at last they parted, he kissed first her hands and then her eyes with almost religious reverence, reminding her of the words of Pliny, that there is something sacred dwelling in the eyes, so that in kissing them we fancy we touch the very soul within.

Who can tell, little as we know of the hearts of those who are nearest to us in life, at this distance of time and amid feelings and principles so utterly different from those that reigned in the bosom of a Roman emperor, whether all these bland demonstrations of affection were solely the result of successful hypocrisy? May it not be

that, as he clasped her to his bosom who had given him life, the whole fearful weight of the moment overcame his unnatural deadness to remorse? As he sent his own mother, whose love he had never doubted even when it was fierce and bloody like that of a tigress, out into the dark night to taste of bitter death, he cannot but have felt that the crime was a fearful one, and that vengeance was lurking somewhere on high Olympus among the gods or in that dark, dimly-known future, the world of shadows. The thought that he had burnt his vessels behind him, that the terrible drama must be played out to the end, that to retrace his steps, to revoke his orders, would be to bring sure ruin and death upon himself,—all this must have rushed upon him at that moment, and no doubt overcame him in spite of his habitual callousness. Hence, let us hope, the passionate fervor with which he embraced her; hence the countless kisses with which he covered her bosom and her face; hence the long, lingering looks which he fixed on those noble eyes which he was never to see beam upon him again with maternal pride and supreme affection. “Mother,” he said, “love me and farewell, for in you only I live and through you I reign;” and then he handed her over to the hands of his admiral, Anicetus, who was to escort her to the state-galley, which had followed her like her evil Fate from Bauli to Baïæ.

It was a warm spring night when Agrippina, accompanied only by two attendants, stepped on board the ill-fated craft. The heavens were calm and serene, the stars gave forth their brightest lustre and the sea was smooth as a mirror. Providence itself seemed to have taken care that the horrid crime should not be hid in darkness, for all around the lovely bay the villas were brightly illuminated; the gay company of the baths, turning night into day, were seen on the beach engaged in quiet con-

verse or in open revelry. Boats and ships of every size and every shape, with torches burning on prow and stern, crossed the silvery waters, resplendent with a thousand lights, and music and merry songs resounded in all directions. What a fearful contrast for the guilty conscience between the loud joyousness, breaking forth in light and noise, and the dark crime that was to cast an everlasting pall upon the brilliant scene!

The empress reclined on a couch under the canopy which covered the hind part of the deck near the rudder, to enjoy the cool night air and the gentle breeze, which passed soothingly over her heated brow as the vessel gently glided off from the shore and the strong arms of the rowers began to dash the foam from her shining sides. At a little distance from her stood her chamberlain, listening with friendly interest to the conversation of the two ladies, for Agrippina had bid Acerronia, the only female attendant who was with her on board, to sit down at the foot of her couch, and, opening to her her heart, poured forth words of joy and hope. Both overflowed with delight to see the son awakened to a sense of his duty and the mother restored to his good graces. But in the midst of their grateful joy, while the vessel was silently gliding northward through the dark waters of the gulf, leaving a long brilliant pathway behind—when nothing was heard but the distant notes of happy voices and the low murmur of the mother and her trusty friend—a sudden signal jars upon the stillness. Bolts are withdrawn, blows are given, and with a fearful crash the deck over the empress’ head, loaded with heavy weights of lead, comes down and falls upon the three devoted victims. But Agrippina’s hour had not yet come. Her fortune was to stand once more by her, and her presence of mind was to save her from death in this shape. The unfortunate chamber-

lain was immediately crushed to death, but the pillars of the cabin happened to be too strong, and, bearing up the fallen roof in part, saved Agrippina and her waiting-woman from instant destruction. The scene was one of indescribable confusion. The plan had been that at the moment of the fall of the roof the whole machinery of the treacherous vessel should be set in motion and the crazy craft should instantly go to pieces. The disappointment at the failure caused, of course, great consternation on the part of those to whom the execution of the plot had been entrusted, and increased the confusion. Men were heard scolding, commanding and reproaching each other, and nothing was done. The commander saw at once that the whole plan of giving to the catastrophe the appearance of accidental shipwreck was at an end, and the crew, as far as they were initiated, feared being punished for a failure for which they were hardly responsible, while the chained galley-slaves prepared to meet death with loud cries and fearful curses. The few innocent ones who were free rushed to and fro to save themselves, embarrassing and confounding those who were in the plot, and who endeavored to do at least all in their power to carry out the plan. They tried to make the ship capsize by throwing themselves all on one side, but this also failed, partly because they did not act in concert and with that suddenness which alone could have made the effort succeed, and partly because the uninitiated rushed instinctively to the opposite side, and thus kept the ship from turning over. The empress, in the mean time, had kept her presence of mind; it was by no means the first time in her life that she was in such imminent danger, and she had great confidence in her star and her self-possession. As the ship was slowly sinking she worked her way silently and steadily from under the wreck of the

cabin roof, and determined to let herself glide from the deck down into the quiet waters, hoping soon to be rescued by one of the many boats which were sailing about in all directions. Another circumstance, full of sad pathos, came unexpectedly to her assistance. Acerronia, her friend and faithful servant, lost, amid the horror of the scene and in the anxiety to save her life, all sense of what she owed to her mistress, and called out, aloud, "I am Agrippina, the emperor's mother!" Her hope of being saved by thus imploring the sailors to save the empress was fatal to her: she was believed, and countless blows with oars, with poles and boat-hooks, which soon stretched her out dead on the deck, were the only answer she received to her cries for mercy. Agrippina, from whom the attention of the murderers had been drawn by this tragic episode, kept silent and quietly passed unknown through the excited crowd. She then dropped as noiselessly into the sea, but discovered to her dismay, when she attempted to swim, that she had received a wound on the shoulder which threatened to make all her efforts at escape by swimming of no avail. Nothing daunted, however, she dashed into the sea, and with heroic courage, and struggling with all her power, kept herself above water by picking up some fragments of the wreck and by floating along by their aid in perfect silence. Her strength began to give way, when at last she was noticed and picked up by one of the countless boats which had crowded round the scene of horror. Exhausted and appalled, she still had firmness enough to order the fishermen to whom the boat belonged to row her at once to the Lucrine Lake, and from thence she had herself carried in a litter to her own villa.

There could not be the shadow of a doubt on the mind of the unfortunate empress as to the true nature of the fear-

ful catastrophe from which she had so marvelously escaped. Her own life was too full of every kind of intrigue and every degree of treachery not to suggest to her instantly that the whole was a plan designed to put an end to her life. Slowly and deliberately she went over every detail of the last day since her arrival at Bauli, and unmindful of the pain of her wound, and forcing herself by the sublime strength of her will to keep cool amid all the excitement, she examined, one by one, the events which had been crowded into so small a space. She saw it all now with overwhelming clearness—the false warmth of the emperor's letter and the affected kindness of his reception, the flattery at table and the honors of a state-galley, the treacherous leavetaking and the mysterious vessel breaking down without feeling a breeze or touching a rock, and so near to the shore, and beginning to go to pieces from the deck, exactly like a piece of mechanism contrived for the purpose. She saw it all, and oh how, amid the horrors of that night and the anguish of expectation, her own fearful words at the birth of her murderous son must have blazed forth in burning letters on the tablets of her memory: "Let him slay me, so he reign!"

We cannot even now refuse her our admiration, when we see her, barely escaped from instant death, rise once more superior to all her enemies, and fully equal to the emergency which called upon her to defend her life against an emperor and his whole power. She resolved instantly to meet her treacherous son with his own weapons, and to appear utterly unconscious of any intention to destroy her life. She felt instinctively that here lay the only way to salvation—that thus only could she disarm him and gain time to win him back once more to his allegiance and his affection. With all the energy of her will and all her determination of purpose, she resolved to

cling to this last hope of hers and to stake her life upon its success. She reasoned that perhaps when Nero heard of the failure which saved him from the guilt of murdering his mother, his human feelings, his filial love, might reawaken and induce him to abandon the execution of a crime which the gods themselves had evidently prevented by their direct intervention. She recalled his emotion at their last meeting; she saw the tears glistening in his eyes; she felt his burning kisses on her face; she heard the broken accents of his parting words;—surely this could not all have been hypocrisy; surely some true and natural feeling must have been at work in his heart!

Her resolution once formed, she acted up to it with wonted energy and did not lose a moment. Not a feature betrayed the terrible trial through which she had passed; not a word escaped her to let the frightened servants suspect that she had been at the very gate of Tartarus, and that she even now thought her life in imminent danger. She quieted them all, simply alluding to an accident that had befallen her ship. Then she ordered one of her favorite freedmen to proceed at once to Baiæ and inform her son that, by the favor of the gods and the good auspices of the emperor, she had escaped from a shipwreck. In order to gain time for reflection and to secure to herself at least a few hours of that rest which she knew she should need to be braced for the final struggle, she entreated him not to give way to the impatience he would naturally feel to see her, but to defer his visit until she had had some repose, which was all she now wanted. Not until the messenger had left the villa did the heroic woman have her wound examined. She bore the painful dressing with perfect calmness, and ordered herself the necessary lotions and bandages for the contusions she

had received in her effort to escape. With the same calmness and an intense activity of mind, she next called for the last will of the poor woman who had perished under her name, and ordered an inventory to be made of all her effects.

Nero had remained, in the mean time, in his villa at Baia, tortured by a thousand conflicting thoughts, and anxiously waiting for news from the scene of the fearful crime. The hardest part of the sad tragedy, as far as he was concerned, had been accomplished. He had parted with the mother whom he sent to her death. He could now, with calmness if not with joy, think of the happy results he would derive from the success of his plan. To hear no longer the frequent reminders of all the benefits for which he was indebted to her sagacity and her sacrifices; to be relieved of a dangerous rival for the supreme power in the state, which he was not willing to share with anybody; to remove the last obstacle to his union with the darling of his heart; and to be safe for ever in his person and his throne from the dangerous plots of an ambitious mother, whose superior mind and irresistible energy he had always dreaded,—these were the precious fruits which he hoped to obtain from his conspiracy. The very deed which on the day before had filled him with fear and horror now seemed to him, when done, a wise and a good act. If it were only done at last! How long the messengers were in bringing him the welcome news! He was perfectly sure in his mind of absolute secrecy. The plan had been kept quiet among a few intimate friends, and the night and the sea were silent witnesses. If Agrippina and her two attendants were once resting down below the green waters of the gulf, he could safely appeal to a host of witnesses who had seen the tender affection and filial reverence with which he had parted a

short hour before from his beloved mother. There was nothing strange in such nocturnal excursions, nor were disasters of this kind unusual in a sea liable to sudden gusts of fearful violence, and overcrowded at times with countless vessels not always handled with the greatest skill or caution. Tears should not be wanting nor pitiful complaints. It was not the first time he had mourned in public over his own deeds done in secret, or shed tears over those whom he himself had ordered to death. He would provide a magnificent funeral, resplendent with imperial pomp and rendered still more impressive by his own presence as chief mourner. He would order temples to be built in her honor, statues to be erected in public, and games and festivities to be held to preserve her memory; and he was sure that the fickle people would not take the trouble to weigh carefully the evidence against him, but be biased in their judgment, as the masses always are, by the appearance of deep sorrow and the profusion of his liberality.

Thus he sat, hour after hour, during that dismal night, so bright and brilliant without in God's beautiful Nature, so dark and dire in the murderer's bosom. Now fatigue would overcome him, for he had traveled the day before, he had feasted even beyond his usual extravagance, and worn himself out mentally also in the effort to appear loving and affectionate to his intended victim. Now he would start up again as some sudden noise gave him a sense of relief at the thought that the horrible deed was at length accomplished, and yet trembling at the idea that the curse of a parricide was on his conscience. There was no one with him but his accomplice, Anicetus, who awaited with him in like impatience and anxiety the arrival of the long-delayed message.

At last it came, but how different from what they had

expected! Everything had miscarried. Nero was told in the same breath that Agrippina had escaped, wounded, but with life, that one of her attendants also had survived to be a witness against him, and, worse than all, that his mother was no longer deceived by his caresses.

The news fell upon the emperor like a thunderbolt. He was furious at the disappointment, and yet horror-struck at the unavoidable consequences of the failure. His mother had misjudged him. There was no room in his raging, trembling heart for humanity or tenderness. One thought alone controlled all his feelings, and this was the fear of his mother. He knew her well—her indomitable energy, her promptness in action, her passion of revenge, which would shrink from no treachery, no crime. In the excitement of the moment the apprehension for his own security—for his life—overruled all other thoughts. He saw his infuriated mother already arming her numerous slaves, appealing in piteous tones to the army to protect her against her unnatural son and stir up a fearful rebellion. He heard her open the whole dark transaction to the senate, and carry her complaints to the ear of the people, showing them her wounds and citing the murderer before the tribunal of public opinion. How strangely these two beings, whom Nature had intended to be of one heart and of one mind, misunderstood each other! The mother, animated by hope, had counted upon the revival of better feelings in her son's heart; the son, his judgment held captive by abject fear, had no idea of what passed in Agrippina's bosom, and only saw her breathing revenge against her murderous offspring.

And where could he turn for help? To appeal to her he had not the courage; to appeal to the people he knew would be fruitless. In this fearful embarrassment he sent for his two friends, Seneca and Burrhus—the man of the

mind and the man of the sword—and asked their advice and their assistance. They had not been initiated into the mystery of the fearful crime, but the helpless emperor thought no longer of concealment, and revealed to them everything—the unsuccessful attempt, his fears for his life and his determination to anticipate his dread mother's revenge. They were both men of too much experience in life and knew the heart of their master too well to betray astonishment, but they were silent. They stood thus for some time, uncertain what to advise, with the boy-emperor before them, anxiously trying to read in their faces his own fate. What a moment it must have been in the life of each one of these men, whose future was even now to be decided for ever! Could they have foreseen that ere a few short years had passed away all three, now the masters of the world and holding its fate in their hand, would have died in abject wretchedness—the most fortunate among them by subtle but quick-working poison, the sage by his own hand in lingering, painful death at the bidding of his pupil, and the great emperor himself on the miserable couch of a slave, piteously moaning, like the lowest wretch in all his dominions!

Nero demanded their opinion, and they felt instinctively that an attempt to dissuade him from what he evidently had already determined upon—the death of Agrippina—was futile and fraught with danger for themselves. They could not conceal from themselves, with their knowledge of palace intrigues and of the character of the persons concerned in the tragedy, that matters had come to a point when either the son or the mother must perish; and they were personally interested in not exchanging the government of a young prince, over whom they might hope to have some influence, for the rule of a violent empress, whose passionate character and uncontrollable

determination were well known to both. Seneca still kept silent, but looked at Burrhus. On all other occasions ready to take the lead, he either shrank from the enormous responsibility, or thought that the matter was one belonging of right to the man of deeds rather than to the philosopher. But when the bold, brave soldier also hesitated to advise, he threw in, as it were, the casual question, whether it would be expedient to order the soldiers to complete the business? Then Burrhus, one of the few noble characters of that age, decidedly refused to lend his aid, as commander of the guards, to the crime, stating that the Prætorians were too warmly attached to the whole of the imperial family, and especially too fond of the memory of Germanicus, to be trusted against the daughter of their great favorite. "Let Anicetus," he added, "complete what he has undertaken."

It seems that the unscrupulous freedman had only waited for such summons, for the words were hardly uttered when he cried out, "Be mine the deed!" He knew full well that unless the empress was put out of the way his own head was in imminent danger, for Agrippina would not spare the man who had attempted her life for a day, and Nero, he had learnt by experience, was not the man to protect the life of his best friend upon earth if to sacrifice it could secure him against trouble or annoyance. He repeated, therefore, that he was not only ready but eager to do whatever might be expected of him, and begged of the emperor to be entrusted with the carrying out of his orders. Nero was overjoyed. Like all weak men, he delighted in being relieved of the necessity of making a decision and in seeing others assume the responsibility which was of right his own to bear. He revived at these words, and exclaimed in the joy of his heart that from this day only he should be truly the ruler

of the empire—an honor for which he would owe lifelong gratitude to a freedman! How Seneca and Burrhus must have felt instantly the sting concealed in those words! for they saw no doubt in this exuberant appreciation of the freedman's services the emperor's reproach that they had refused him their assistance in the critical hour, and knew that the tyrant who only values those who serve him blindly would not delay long making them feel his dissatisfaction. They had not had the courage either to defy the gods by committing the crime or to brave the emperor by refusing their assent, and their weakness punished itself immediately. They had spoken their own sentence and paid with their lives for their shortcoming.

In the mean time, Agrippina's messenger, also a freedman, had been announced, and with the readiness which the wicked often seem to owe to the direct inspirations of the evil one, Nero and his accomplice instantly devised a plan to make the unfortunate man the instrument of their purpose. He was admitted to the presence of the emperor, and while he was yet in the act of delivering the words with which he had been charged by Agrippina, the admiral secretly let fall a dagger in such a manner that it came to lie close by his feet. Nero pretended suddenly to perceive it, and to see in it an evidence that the messenger was a hired assassin, who had come at his mother's bidding to murder him in his own palace. The man was at once secured, loaded with chains and dragged to prison, the intention being now to murder the empress, and after her death to declare publicly that she had given herself to death in her despair at hearing of the discovery of her attempted assassination. Thus the infamous conspirators derived from their own feelings at hearing of the unsuccessful shipwreck the idea of charging Agrippina with

suicide. Immediately after securing the freedman, Anicetus summoned a number of marines who were personally devoted to him, and with these he proceeded to the villa of the unfortunate empress.

All these fearful events had taken only a few hours' time, but if these had been crowded with deep emotions and terrible plots in the emperor's villa, they had not passed without producing like startling scenes on the lake and its borders. The shipwreck had, of course, been seen by many, the marvelous escape of the empress had been reported rapidly over the whole densely-crowded region, and the result was a universal immense sensation. The villas, the shores, the boats even, were filled with an excited multitude, eager to learn the truth and ready to carry the news, growing apace with every repetition, from place to place. At first, only the disaster had become known, and not the escape of the empress, and thousands of vessels of all sizes immediately pushed off to render assistance and rowed toward the centre of the lake, vainly searching for a trace of the unfortunate vessel. Crowds rushed from all directions to the shore, filling the piers and moles or standing with eager eye upon the terraces before the brilliantly-lighted villas. The whole shore gleamed and glittered with innumerable torches and resounded with cries and vows and agitated murmurs. Here were heard shrieks and lamentations, there distracting questions and useless answers, and amid the confusion of impatient voices no one heard, no one waited to listen. Some were so excited as to rush into the waters as far as they could wade, and called aloud for help when they found they had lost their footing, or filled the air with cries of dismay and despair as they fancied in their distraction they saw the bodies of the perished float by them in the treacherous light. At

that moment the empress was really beloved by the people. Sad thought that her popularity should never have been greater than when she was thought to have perished!

At last the news came that she had been saved, and the despair of the multitude changed, with the suddenness peculiar to southern temperaments, instantly to immoderate joy. Thousands and thousands rushed in tumultuous uproar toward her villa, forming a vast procession of torchlights and filling the air with cries of rapturous delight. They wanted to see her whom the gods evidently looked upon with an eye of favor; they wished to congratulate her on her almost miraculous escape, and with her to thank the gods for the boon they had afforded to her and through her to a grateful people. But their joyous sympathy was never to reach the ear of the unfortunate empress.

Agrippina had in the mean time spent hours and hours in painful anxiety, and her heart was filled with a grief hardly less poignant than that experienced by her unnatural son. She had lain down on her couch, trying to obtain the rest which she needed so much, and without which she knew she would be unable to face the storm that was brewing. But she courted sleep in vain; repose even would not come to her overwrought mind, and soon her usual fortitude broke down under the overwhelming strain. All the composure she had shown at first disappeared gradually, and she could no longer conceal the anguish of her heart from her attendants. Can we wonder at this when we remember that here was not only the victim waiting for the murderer, but the mother expecting at every moment to receive the death-blow from the hand of her son? And then the fearful suspense, becoming more and more intolerable as the hours passed! Her

messenger must long since have been before Nero—the two villas were at very little distance from each other—and even ere that the news must have reached the emperor; and yet not a soul had come to inquire after her well-being on the part of her son; not one of the courtiers, who only a few hours ago had conjured her to believe in their unbounded devotion, had appeared at her villa; and, above all, her faithful freedman, who was fully aware of the anxiety she endured, did not return to reassure her almost breaking heart! The fearful anticipation of her impending fate began to exhaust her remaining courage, and pangs of dread, undefinable terror, such as she had never felt before in her life, nearly arrested the beating of her heart. The enthusiastic cries of the multitude had reached her from a distance, and given her for a moment new hope and new courage; but now she listened again, and on the shore, where just now all had been tumult and joyous excitement, a dismal silence prevailed, broken at intervals by a sudden uproar that added to the horror of the scene. She felt instinctively that there was a new catastrophe drawing near, and for the first time in her life Agrippina trembled for herself. At that moment of supreme anguish even her iron heart felt the need of sympathy, and she turned round to a slave. The latter was in the act of leaving the room, and the ill-fated empress exclaimed, with ineffable sorrow in her heart, “Do you too desert me?”

The maid, it seems, had not really been so base as to desert her in her hour of greatest need; she had heard an unusual noise at the entrance and risen to ascertain who was there. Alas! it was the murderer come to slay his victim. The empress had hardly uttered the words spoken to the servant when she saw Anicetus rush in, followed by two high officers of the navy. They had

met on the way the excited populace rushing pell-mell toward the villa at Bauli, but the mere appearance and the threatening aspect of the armed force had sufficed to disperse the crowd at once, for the wild sailors were held in even greater awe by the people than the insolent Prætorians. As soon as the admiral had reached the imperial villa, he had ordered a chain of guards to be placed all around it, so as to prevent any one from escaping. Then, as the porter, a poor wretch of a slave, fastened like a dog with a chain to the entrance door, which he never left as long as he lived, but faithful in his miserable state to his great mistress, had refused to open the door, the great gates had been broken down by main force, and the servants who attempted to bar the way to the now furious sailors trampled under foot or sent away to be put in chains. Thus they had at last reached the sleeping-room in which the unfortunate empress now lay alone, all of her female attendants having run away in wild fright at the tumult.

When Agrippina recognized Anicetus, her bitterest enemy, she knew that her fate was sealed; but making one more supreme effort, she raised herself slightly with great dignity and calm countenance. Not for a moment losing her presence of mind, not forgetting the power she had exercised for so many years over all who had come near her, she made a last effort to stay the blow by overawing the murderer. “If you come,” she said to him, with a calmness which must have startled even the brutal sailor, “to inquire after my well-being, you may tell the emperor, my son, that I am well; if you come to murder me, I will not believe that you come from him: the guilt of parricide is unknown to his heart.” But she received no answer; she was to hear the voice of man no more. Even while she was yet speaking the ruffians had closed

around her couch; one of them struck her with a stick, and the commander of the mariners drew his sword. Lying prostrate before them, she quietly said, "Strike the womb that bore a monster!" and received the death-blow.

Thus died by ignoble hands the greatest empress Rome has ever known, fulfilling the fearful prophesy she had uttered in unconscious and insufferable pride at the birth of her son—"Let him slay me, so he reign!"



XI.

THE LAST CÆSAR.

WHEN the sun rose next day, its first rays fell upon the bloody body of the great empress as it still lay where it had fallen the night before. Her slaves had fled in abject terror: her friends were trembling in prison for their own fate. Gradually, however, as the villa was found to be deserted and the troops withdrawn from the neighborhood, a few faithful servants returned to do the last honors to their beloved mistress. Sad honors they were! The all-powerful Augusta, the great niece of the divine Augustus, the daughter of Germanicus, the favorite of the nation, the wife and the mother of emperors, was buried more meanly and wretchedly than the lowest of her waiting-women. There was no costly catafalque of rare work, with gold ornaments and a profusion of precious stones, such as was ordinarily provided for the great of the world; there was no cortège of the senate and the nobles of the land to accompany her to her last resting-place on earth, and no magnificent pile with gorgeous hangings of purple and gold and vast quantities of fragrant spice: the great empress, who had entered the world amid the fierce din of arms in a lonely camp on the distant banks of the Rhine, left it in equally striking contrast with the splendor of her career during life. Her bloody and disfigured limbs were hastily placed

upon one of the dinner-couches that was near at hand; a few slaves carried it weeping and wailing into the garden, and there, under a broad-spreading pine tree, all that was left of the most beautiful woman of her age was laid on a small pile of olive branches and burnt amid the silent sorrow of horror-struck witnesses. But even in that lonely place, abandoned by all the world and forsaken unto death by all whom she had loved upon earth, she was not left at least without one faithful heart that thought gratefully of her kindness and felt deeply for her sad misfortunes. Among the small number of friends who had dared to show her the last token of respect was her freedman Mnester*; he claimed the mournful privilege of lighting with his torch the pile that was to consume her body, and as the light clouds of smoke curled upward and lost themselves on high among the sombre branches, he suddenly drew his sword and plunged it with resolute hand in his heart, unwilling to survive his beloved mistress.

Her ashes were carefully gathered and placed in an open, nameless vault; but as long as her unnatural son survived no hand dared to close her last resting-place and to mark it as her own, nor was there so much as a mound of earth to enclose the place where she lay! It was only many years afterward that a few members of her household ventured to erect a modest monument to her memory close by the road which leads from Bauli to Misenum, and near the villa of Cæsar the Dictator, which from the overhanging eminence commands a beautiful view over the sea and the lovely bays along the coast. Her faithful followers had chosen the place well; the last empress of the Julian race, unable to rest among her illustrious ancestors in the imperial mausoleum at Rome, could thus at least find her last home near the place

where the first Julius, the founder of the greatness of her family, had loved to seek repose from his labors. There, amid the dark and dismal ruins of that Baiæ which was once the pride and glory of the world, and in view of the beautiful gulf, there may be seen even now a smoke-blackened monument on a small mound, which the people around point out with bated breath as "the sepulchre of Agrippina."

And Nero?

When the horrible deed was done, the sense of his guilt fairly overwhelmed him; he was not yet the blood-thirsty tyrant of later days, and his heart had not hardened yet so as to stifle at once the terror he felt at the fearful crime. Not that his conscience rose against him and remorse filled him with shame; the poor boy had long since lost the sense of his responsibility to god or man. But his courage was not equal to the magnitude of his first great crime; he trembled with fear, the excitement mastered his self-possession and he spent the whole night in delirium. Now he would sit silent, his face buried in his hands, unable to think, and cold shudders shaking his body; then he would suddenly start up with vague fear and rush to and fro, wild and distracted. How he sighed for the break of day! And yet, when the golden rays fell upon the heights on the opposite shore, he shrank as if struck anew with the horror that had for a time been shrouded in darkness. As he looked upon the sea, he thought he saw the ill-fated ship, and his mother clinging to its fragments and floating helpless on the waters; when his eye fell upon the shore, he beheld the white pillars shining through the groves, and thought with horror of the place where her mangled limbs were still lying unburied. And thus passed night after night. The unfortunate Cæsar, who disposed at will of the lives of thou-

sands, could not command an hour's comforting rest; he who had heretofore slept in enviable healthfulness now dreamed for the first time in his life. Who can tell the ineffable horrors of a first dream, and such a dream? His terrified ear heard the blast of trumpets that had sounded at her midnight funeral, continuing night after night and re-echoing from hill to hill on the surrounding heights; and his superstitious courtiers soon believed that they also were waked by the threatening summons; then groans and shrieks were heard rising night after night from the place where the ashes of the murdered woman had been concealed, and the affrighted visitors fled in dismay from the haunted scene. The terror extended even to Rome; a sudden pall seemed to have fallen upon the whole population, and where indignation did not dare to speak out, sorrow and deep concern were expressed on every face; the horror of the awful crime went so far to the hearts of some that a new-born infant was found exposed, with a scroll pinned to its lifeless body which said, "This child was abandoned, lest, grown up, he should kill his mother!"

The voice of the people might have been the voice of God, as the proverb has it, but it was not the voice of the senate. The servility of the Romans, rising on this occasion to the highest self-abnegation, and the demoralization of a once great and noble people, as shown in those days, has something inexpressibly sad and humiliating for human pride. The crime made them feel indignant, but it frightened them also. Hence all the glory, all the greatness, all the former virtue of Rome were seen lying prostrate at the feet of Nero, the murderer of his mother! Burrhus, the brave soldier, who had never feared human foe and faced death in a thousand forms, sent his staff and the officers of the Prætorian guards to congratulate

their chief on his escape; they presented themselves early in the morning, seized their Cæsar's hands and praised him for his courage and his resolution! Seneca, the philosopher, who taught men to love Truth and to revere Virtue, wrote an able state paper, in which Nero explained the necessity of the act on the plea of self-defence, and invited the senate to join him in thanks to the gods for the rescue of the empire from the rule of Agrippina. All the towns of fair Campania brought sacrifices, so that the smoke rose from a thousand altars at once, to thank the gods for the emperor's delivery, and sent deputies innumerable to present him with their addresses. The senate, assembled in solemn meeting, invited Nero to return to Rome, and ceremoniously cursed Agrippina at the only time when she was beyond all doubt deserving of pity. And again, out of all these great and noble men, who bore names known over the wide world and had ruled kingdoms and commanded armies, there was but one brave heart that dared to maintain the ancient dignity of his race and the honor of his name. This was Thræsea, a senator who had long borne impatiently the sad degradation of that august body; but now, when the memory of the great empress was to be defamed and the victim of foul murder was to be handed down to posterity as a vile criminal, he could endure it no longer, and left the assembly in silent indignation, "by his virtue provoking future vengeance, yet doing no service to the cause of liberty."

Nero had at first attempted to receive the congratulations of his friends and worshipers at his villa, and with a dejected mien and mournful countenance, as if he were weary of life after so sad a misfortune and inconsolable for the loss of his mother. But he found it soon alike impossible to continue the comedy and to reside any

longer at the place where every feature of the landscape and every sound of Nature reminded him daily of the fearful catastrophe. He went to Naples, and there awaited, not without anxiety, how the people would receive the dread news. To his great relief, public opinion, as far as it reached him, blamed not him, but Seneca. Great delight was expressed at the fact that he, who had reigned so well and so successfully, had escaped the attempted murder, and for a time credit was given to his account, which was carefully repeated at every corner and in every group by the active agents of the high-admiral. The people really felt thankful to him for his politic measures, the recall of many victims of Agrippina's jealousy and the restoration of others to their former high places; and thus he succeeded in blackening the memory of his mother, and at the same time created a belief in his clemency when left to his own inclination. In spite of all these encouraging signs, however, he loitered for some time in Campania, moving restlessly from town to town and from villa to villa, uncertain yet of the reception he might meet with on re-entering Rome. The consciousness of his crime made him timid. He apprehended the senate might not receive him with former submissiveness, and did not know how far he could trust the temper of the fickle Romans. For whatever he may have felt afterward, then the Furies shook their torches in his face and the spectre of his slain mother flitted for ever before his eyes. In vain did he invoke the magic power of the cup to drown his remorse; in vain did he place the beautiful statue now known as the Apollo Belvidere in his villa at Antium to avert the Furies: the torment was there and nevermore ceased to gnaw the heartstrings of the murderer. Little as he hoped or feared from the future, he could not stifle the voice within, which told him—what

all the ancient moralists firmly and fondly believed—that successful crime meets a sure punishment in this world already.

At last his friends and advisers persuaded him to venture boldly back to Rome. Trembling and blushing, he came, but he met a reception far beyond their expectations and his own. Not the senate only and the official authorities, but the whole people turned out to meet him at the gates. The senators appeared in all the pomp and imposing solemnity of their high rank. The corporations of the city, with their banners and sacred images, formed in procession. Vast crowds of married women and maidens on one side, and an immense multitude of children on the other side, arranged according to age, greeted him at various places, while huge tribunes had been erected along the road by which he passed as if in triumphal procession. It is difficult to decide what was more marvelous—the almost incredible servility of a whole nation bowing in abject worship before a blood-stained boy of eighteen, or the barefaced boldness of the emperor, who could thus enter Rome in triumph and ascend the Capitol to render thanks to the gods that he, the murderer of his mother, had escaped from the dagger of the assassin. The greatest of human minds, trained by careful schooling in youth and by high deeds and bitter sufferings in later life, would scarcely have been able to resist the intoxication of such adulation and the confusion of all sense of right and wrong: how could the tainted brains of Nero withstand the effect of such an ovation after such a crime? There seems to have been an unconscious fear of some great calamity ensuing in the mind of the orator who received Nero on the Forum and addressed him with the words, "Thy Gallic provinces implore thee, O Cæsar, to bear thy good fortune with

constancy!" Flushed with the pride of victory over the minds of willing slaves, exulting in the impunity with which he now saw he might commit the greatest of crimes, and feeling himself truly the irresponsible master of the world, Nero from henceforth threw off all restraint, and pursued, driven by the avenging Furies, the career which has made his name a by-word of tyranny and unparalleled cruelty with the whole civilized world.

With the instinctive fear of the Cæsars, which always raged most madly against their own blood, he turned first against the members of his family, so that in a few years he could boast with savage precision that he was literally the last of his race. His fair and virtuous wife, Octavia, was his first victim—she who on the dark background of the bloody days of the empire appears as the one pure and bright form, who won all hearts by her loveliness and was universally revered for her innocence. Her fate, sad beyond all comparison even with the sufferings of her relatives and the tragic end of the great empress, roused the Roman people on one occasion to the most violent outburst of indignation that was ever shown during the whole time of the empire, and filled them at her death with a sympathy which has continued undiminished during the two thousand years that have since elapsed.

When a mere child, the only daughter of Claudius and Messalina had already been promised to a wealthy patrician and kinsman of the Julian family, and when barely seven years old, and whilst still mourning for her mother's fate, she had been betrothed, by the ambitious plans of Agrippina, to her son Nero. At the age of thirteen the marriage with the adoptive brother had been consummated, and a year later the violent death of her father had raised her to the throne of the world. Love and affection

had, of course, nothing to do with her married life. Her heart and her hand had been disposed of by others for purely political purposes, and her soul had been darkened in her youth already by the sad fate of her house. She remembered but too well that it had deprived her, when a mere child, of her parents and her betrothed, and then robbed her, the young, unhappy wife, of her last support and comfort, her brother Britannicus. She could never forget the garden in which she saw her mother's body lying in its blood, nor the couch on which her darling brother fell lifeless. These terrible events, the secret causes of which were no mystery to her, had early matured the empress of barely fourteen. But this precocity, the result of great misfortunes, was no enviable advantage. How well she had learnt, when still a child, the bitter lesson of concealing her grief, her tenderness and all the feelings of her young heart, she showed strikingly at the death of her brother. When they carried him, stricken suddenly dead in the midst of a gay circle, from the dining-hall, she remained seated in silence, and even succeeded in appearing unconcerned and cheerful during the remainder of the feast, although her heart must have been breaking within her with grief and terror. She heard, no doubt, soon from the old faithful servants of her father, who were still around her, who was the author of the terrible murder, and the husband whom she had never loved now became to her an object of fear and loathing.

Nero had shown her, at least in public, all due respect as long as her father, the emperor, was still living. But when, a year after their marriage, Claudius died and he himself became master of the world, he felt relieved from all obligations, and began to hate the bonds imposed upon him by his ambitious mother. He now neglected his

poor wife in such a pointed and almost scandalous manner that even his two principal friends and advisers, Burrhus and Seneca, through whose agency he had been chosen as husband of the emperor's daughter, thought it their duty to make serious representations on the subject. "Octavia will have to content herself by being my wife by brevet," was the ironical answer with which he dismissed his unwelcome counselors, for he feared neither god nor man, and, unable to appreciate his wonderful good fortune, for which Agrippina had paid such a fearful price, he fancied himself firmly and for ever the master of the world. From that time Octavia's life became an unbroken chain of humiliations. He refused to see her except on state occasions, and their union remained childless. She had to see her place usurped by a Greek slave, a woman even in beauty and feminine charms vastly inferior to herself, but openly acknowledged as the emperor's all-powerful favorite. But there was at least no danger in this rivalry, for Acte was as modest as she was fair, and rather grieved for the injustice and the disgrace she was forced to bring upon the unfortunate empress. It was very different when the young Cæsar fell into the hands of the beautiful Sabina, and became so completely her slave that in order to please her and make her his wife, every obstacle had to give way and his own mother had to be murdered. When Agrippina had thus been sacrificed to this unhallowed affection, Octavia was left the last and only obstacle in the way of the ambitious beauty, who was bent upon becoming herself an empress. Efforts were made, one after another, to induce her willingly to abandon the throne and to consent to a separation. But she refused, knowing full well that if she gave up the protection of her high rank, her life was no longer safe for a moment. Fortunately for her, policy required

that the death of Nero's mother should not be too quickly succeeded by the marriage with Sabina, or the people would have readily enough connected the two events with each other and ascribed the fearful murder to its true cause. Octavia's friends, also, and all the surviving adherents of the Claudian family, were strongly opposed to the divorce.

Among the latter the noble Burrhus took the most decided stand. There was something of old Roman virtue left in the stern commander of the Prætorian guards, and his honesty and uprightness amid all the horrors of the court and the demoralization of the people shine brightly forth like a brilliant star glittering alone among a mass of dark clouds. Sparing in words but determined in deeds, the tried old soldier did not fear to speak out boldly whenever he was asked, nor did he ever hesitate to tell the emperor the truth, though it might be at the risk of his life. The latter, young as he was, probably felt that the only man among all his servile courtiers who dared to differ from him in weighty matters, and yet was most faithful of all and ever kept his promise to the letter, was a rare treasure, and so he pardoned him both his candor and his bluntness. When the old general was asked by Nero to say what he really thought of some great state affair after having already given his opinion, he replied, gruffly, "You need not ask me again about a thing on which I have spoken once." And when Nero cautiously introduced the subject of a divorce from Octavia, he gave the bold answer, "If you wish to send her away, you must return to her also the dowry which she has brought you," alluding to the throne, which he virtually owed to her alone as the husband of his predecessor's daughter. Such a man was, of course, a thorn in the side of the young tyrant, who longed to fling him-

self, in insolent security, into every kind of monstrous dissipation, and little fancied the reproving looks of his faithful monitor. When the old soldier, therefore, fell sick, rumors were rife at once that he had been poisoned at the emperor's bidding, and the suspicion was strengthened by the reserve of the sufferer, whom even the repeated visits of Nero could not move to an expression of thanks for this rare mark of favor. He was so reluctant even to speak of his sufferings that when asked by the emperor how he felt, he returned the dry but significative answer, "*I am well.*" A few days later Burrhus was dead, meeting Death as the only power that could relieve him of the sore burden he had to bear upon earth, and Nero was deprived of the last brave and honest adviser who had stood by him in his hours of peril.

The tyrant's passion now raged unrestrained, and the poor child-wife, dangerous as the daughter of Claudius, whose memory became daily dearer to the Romans, and hateful to her husband, whom she reminded of the crimes which had raised him to power, was left without friends and adherents. Her last support at court, Seneca, pleading his age and feeble health, had asked leave to withdraw from Rome, and even offered to surrender his immense riches, which had rendered him obnoxious. Nero was alarmed at such signs of distrust, and refused his permission; but Seneca, unable to flee, sought security in renouncing all influence at court and all outward show of wealth, and pretended to devote himself henceforth exclusively to philosophic abstractions. It was then that Sabina urged the unfortunate son of Agrippina to take the last, the decisive step, and to banish his now utterly helpless and friendless wife. There must have been some of the blood of the Cæsars in her veins, after all, for timid and harmless as she was, she firmly refused to yield of

her own good-will, and resisted even the brutal ill-treatment she received at the hands of her infuriated husband. When neither threats nor violence were found able to break down her passive resistance, still viler means were devised. She was accused of adultery, but her conduct had been so stainless and her character so pure and chaste that even torture could elicit no evidence, and her faithful slaves defied the accusers in open court and on the rack. Spurred on by the fierce ambition of Sabina, Nero at last cast aside all pretexts, and on the sole ground of the want of children he repudiated the poor princess with no more ceremony than was usual among common citizens, and ordered her to be removed from the palace. At first, appearances were kept up, and the palace of Burrhus, to which Nero had fallen heir, and a number of magnificent villas, were assigned her for a residence; but Sabina was not content thus to triumph over her rival; she was determined to enjoy the fruits of her persevering efforts at once. While Octavia was sent, at her special request and as the first favor she asked at the hands of him who was to be more than a lover henceforth, to the interior of Campania, and there guarded by a strong military force, her own wedding was hastened with great despatch. A few days later she had left her palace, and in the presence of all that was great and powerful on earth, with a whole world gazing and marveling at her preternatural beauty, she had placed the airy, golden veil of a bride on her magnificent hair, offered incense at the altars of the gods, poured out the red wine before their images, and then passed in triumphant procession, by the side of her proud husband, through the crowded streets of Rome, amid the shouts and loud acclaims of her friends and followers, but not of the people, for they felt that under all this joy and

splendor death was lurking, and that while the adulteress triumphed the noble wife was doomed.

The criminal couple thought themselves at last on the summit of their wishes, and, released from all restraint, were ready to give themselves up to the full rapture of enjoyment. The senate and the patricians of Rome had submitted in silence to the ill-treatment of their legitimate empress, for they had too much to lose in rank and fortune to dare raise their voice in behalf of oppressed innocence. But the people thought and felt differently; they had no need of caution and possessed no political wisdom; they could be bold because they had nothing to fear, since death itself was not an unwelcome visitor to those who had nothing they valued in life. They raised clamors loud and violent, excited by the unmerited cruelty that pursued the harmless and innocent wife, and popular indignation rose for once so high that the cowardly emperor was frightened and recalled Octavia from exile. The report no sooner became known among the people than shouts of joy were heard on all sides; in large crowds they hastened to the Capitol to express their delight in thanksgivings and burnt-offerings, and to kneel in the temples before the gods whose justice seemed to have abandoned Rome. They overthrew all the statues of Sabina which they met in their way, and carried those of Octavia, wreathed with flowers and garlands, on their shoulders through the streets of the city, to place them on the Forum and in the temples of the national divinities. Everywhere the name of the emperor was cheered with wild enthusiasm; crowds rushed to the imperial palace and filled the air with their shouts of delight and the praise of their Cæsar. They implored him to come forth to receive their congratulations, but instead of the emperor troops suddenly poured forth from the gates; sword in hand

they fell furiously upon the assembled multitudes, and cut down old and young until the square and the streets were cleared. The images of the imperial paramour were replaced and the statues of Octavia removed. The frightened and intimidated people, who had shown for once the better feature of the national character, dared not resist the renowned Prætorians, and soon "peace and order" reigned once more in the quiet streets of the city.

This outbreak of popular sympathy, one of the most energetic ever seen during the time of the empire, showed the guilty emperor the detestation in which his own acts were held, and the attachment to Claudius' daughter which still survived among the people. He did not venture at first to carry his defiance any farther, but, trembling and irresolute, he had not the courage either to retain Sabina in the palace or to restore his wife to her rightful place by his side. But poor Octavia was afar off, in Campania, guarded by armed troops, while the fair Sabina was in Rome and had the emperor's ear. She had hated her formidable rival from the beginning, and seeing now the hold she still had on the masses, since even in her absence her name alone had been strong enough to raise a serious tumult, fear was superadded to hatred and brought to maturity the fell, cruel harshness of her nature. She threw herself at Nero's feet, and with tears and eloquent words besought him to make an end to this intolerable state of uncertainty. With infinite skill she appealed at one time to his wrath and then to his fears, pleading now that the people might readily choose another emperor if they saw him weakly yielding, and now that her own life and that of the children she had borne her husband were no longer safe, since a band of armed clients and slaves of Octavia, assuming the name of the people, could treat her with such indignity

before the emperor's eyes and openly defy his authority and insult his wife.

Nero could not resist her eloquent appeals, supported as they were by his own fears. He felt clearly that Octavia could not remain in her present equivocal position, and that his own safety demanded her destruction. But how could he dare to condemn the innocent child? How could he ever hope to justify such startling injustice? All the charges hitherto made had failed for want of reasonable proof, and the people had steadfastly refused to believe in Octavia's guilt. Another accusation must be found which would amount to something more than a mere palace intrigue; she must be charged with high treason and an attempt against the emperor's throne, if not against his life. But could he hope to find a man at once high enough in rank and public esteem to be believed, and mean enough in his infamy to lend himself as an instrument to such a foul conspiracy?

Alas! Rome was not lacking in mean, great men in those days, when a boy half mad ruled over the empire, and the only faith of the people was a web of vile superstition. Anicetus, the admiral, who had already "relieved" Nero of his mother, was willing to make himself useful once more by relieving his master now of his wife also. The emperor had left the murderer in his important position as commander of the great fleet, stationed near Misenum, but he had not rewarded him yet for the bloody crime done at his bidding; he had even avoided having him near him, for he hated the sight of his accomplice as a living reproach and standing witness against himself. Now, however, he remembered him and summoned him to Rome. It is almost incredible, but he succeeded in inducing him, by extraordinary promises, to confess himself in open court guilty of an amour with

the unfortunate princess! The wretch was, to be sure, placed between the promise of present immunity for the avowed crime, with future brilliant rewards, or immediate death if he refused; and under such pressure consented to do whatever was required. A secret council was at once called together, and in the presence of all the great officers of state the miserable murderer, infamous by nature and hardened by previous crimes, confessed his pretended misdeeds, and added of his own accord new details and still greater outrages. The charge was instantly made out, not only that he and Octavia had been guilty of adultery, but that the high admiral of the fleet had conspired with the empress to dethrone Cæsar; and sentence was given accordingly. In order to save appearances, Anicetus was banished to Sardinia, where he lived in the enjoyment of great wealth and the honors due to his high rank, and quietly died in his bed, while his innocent victim suffered all the indignities and insults that human ingenuity could devise.

An imperial edict made known to the world the result of the pretended investigation, and condemned Octavia for the crime of high treason to lifelong exile. She was sent to the terrible island of Pandataria, where so many unfortunate members of her noble race had languished and suffered till death had broken their chains for ever. The sympathy of the whole people was roused in behalf of the young and virtuous empress, who alone, amid all the dark crimes of the court, had preserved her purity and alone paid the extreme penalty of the law. They naturally compared her fate with that of others. There were many gray-haired men yet living who remembered the cruel banishment of the great empress, whom Tiberius had sent to the islands, and the memory of her sister's sad fate under Claudius was also still fresh in the

minds of many ; but these two princesses had been called upon to suffer when they were advanced in years and mature in character, fully able, therefore, to bear adversity with firmness. Nero's victim, on the contrary, was young, a mere child yet in years and character, and had never known what happiness was. If to some minds the recollection of past happiness is the bitterest sting in present misery, as Dante sings, others find solace and comfort in dwelling upon the happy days that have fallen to their share in former times. Poor Octavia had passed from tender childhood at once into married life, which had been to her a state of unbroken suffering. Her young husband, himself a mere boy, had led her to a house in which her father and her brother had died of poison by the hands of those who were dearest to them among men ; instead of becoming the partner of his joys and the sharer of his sorrows, beloved by her husband and respected as the empress, she had been neglected from the beginning, and seen herself superseded first by a slave, her own servant-maid, and then by the wife of another. Now her misfortunes had culminated in the insult of a false but hideous accusation, which exposed her to public scorn and impending destruction ; for she knew enough of court-life, such as it was under the Cæsars, to feel that her banishment was but the prelude to a still sadder fate ; and as the helpless child was carried away by a host of officers and soldiers, she felt that she was at once bidding farewell to Rome and to life. In her sad exile she was purposely cut off from all comforts of life and still more cruelly denied the peace of the grave. In spite of her miserable experience, she could not yet familiarize herself with the thought that she had already seen all of life ; and when a few days later the actual order came for her execution, the poor child broke forth in loud la-

mentations. Alas ! Sabina knew no mercy, and the ruffian soldiers whom she had sent to carry out her commands had no compassion. They were deaf to her heart-rending despair, for the order had gone forth, in bitter mockery of mercy, that she should be bled to death—an end by no means painless, as is commonly imagined, but, on the contrary, almost agonizing whenever the circulation is languid, as fright and terror are apt to make it under such circumstances. This was most sadly the case here ; the poor, terrified woman had been bound and her veins opened, but she fainted again and again, and the blood refused to flow : at last the assassins carried her into a hot bath, where she was stifled by the hot vapor. Her head was severed from the body and carried to the cruel Sabina, who looked at it with savage satisfaction ; and thus ended the horrible tragedy. And again the senate of Rome ordered sacrifices to be offered to the gods for the escape of their beloved Cæsar from the dangers to which he had been exposed by his poor little wife, and again his atrocious barbarity was praised as an act of supreme wisdom and excellent energy ! Truly, Rome had sunk low when it thus prostrated itself at the feet of Agrippina's son, and worshiped him for the most fearful crimes and the most outrageous atrocities in precisely the same way in which their ancestors had honored their greatest men for acts of heroic valor or sublime virtue !

It has often been asked how the Cæsars could obtain such absolute sway over millions, and how a whole great nation could submit, not willingly only, but cheerfully, to such a fearful yoke. We are inclined to think, strange as it may sound, that emperors like Nero ruled largely by the force of that epicureanism which had become the ruling passion of the great Romans. Horace had

already called himself, quaintly, "A pig from the flock of Epicurus," and since his day the new doctrine had made such progress that it had not only overthrown the ancient religion, but with it destroyed the old morality. It is true that the Romans did not follow the great master's example when he lived on bread and water and the few fruits and vegetables that grew in his garden. But when he taught that it was wise to live far from public affairs and in philosophic indifference, they followed him eagerly and rendered implicit obedience. This led naturally to perfect selfishness, and next to the destruction of the state. For even error is better than indifference; at least, it does man more honor; or, rather, indifference is the gravest of all errors, because he who professes it admits that to him Truth is nowhere, or, if it exist, he thinks it not worth his while to go in search of it. This maxim of Epicurus is the philosophy of cowards; it was the curse of the empire; it may be the bane of the American republic. Whenever a country suffers, whenever great wrongs are committed, the suffering and the wrong are inflicted by the few who are active. The majority, who are truly to blame because they allow the evil to be done, are the careless and indifferent, the unconscious Epicureans. The former may find an excuse in their passions and their fanaticism; the latter have none but their selfishness and the cowardice with which they shrink from the effort of resistance, the evils of civil war or even the slight inconvenience of voting at public elections.

Can we wonder, then, that Nero rapidly became what history calls him without a dissenting voice—a monster? And yet there was no lack of elegance in the man who first considered "murder as one of the fine arts." He had his artistic talents and his innocent ambitions. His madness was so closely allied to genius that the dividing line

can hardly be discerned at the distance at which we live. He had all the refined tastes of his age. As a poet, he invited the first men of talent to his table, each one of whom brought his contribution to these literary soirées or composed them on the spot. These fragments, resembling the *bouts rimés* of the minor French poets of the last century, were woven together, well adorned with happy words and phrases of the emperor, and the whole were then courteously called the Poems of Nero. One of these compositions, the Fall of Troy, it is said, the hapless emperor recited when he saw all Rome in a blaze, and, delighted with the fearful sight, went to his private theatre, put on his stage costume, and, accompanying himself with the harp, sang his verses as a happy allusion to the brilliant catastrophe. As an orator he was but a sad successor to his illustrious models, Cæsar, who was a master of eloquence, and Augustus, who had, at least, a flow of clear and elegant language well suited to the dignity of a monarch. Nero had to rely upon the applause of his *claque*, and the palm of eloquence had to be decreed to him by his orders, and, as a matter of course, without competition. Still, he worked hard, and unable to emulate even poor Claudius in this favorite pastime of the Romans, he was not too proud to recite the orations written for him by Seneca. As a philosopher he preferred the Stoics, and at stated hours, when his convivial joys were finished, the professors of earthly wisdom were admitted. But his greatest delight was to see the followers of different sects quarrel violently about an absurd hypothesis, or to find how venerable sages, renowned for their grave mien and austere appearance, enjoyed with an air of great coyness the pleasures of his court. At other times, and as the whim took him, he was a painter, a sculptor and a musician. How large a part of

his paintings he did himself we know not; happily for Art, they have perished; but the enslaved people compared them with unsparing praise to the master-works of ancient Greece. Music had sunk so low that it had become the handmaid of voluptuousness. The Muse, grave and almost holy in Hellas, had been forced to attune her lyre for the butcheries of gladiators, the somersaults of mountebanks and the orgies of imperial feasts. For the first—let us hope for the only time—in the history of the world, even the one chaste Art had almost been corrupted. Men began to languish at the soft cadences of effeminate notes, and to catch by their aid the graces of wanton deportment, and we wonder to see how small a distance separates at such times the arts from voluptuousness and voluptuousness from murder.

But, above all, Nero excelled as a coachman. At first he drove in his gardens before invited guests. But the people came in crowds to the gates and demanded admittance with furious cries. As at the theatre they refused to see common actors and cried by the hour for Nero, until he appeared, lyre in hand, overcome with bashfulness and stammering from embarrassment, but with his guards at hand ready to cut down on the spot whoever should fail to applaud, so they demanded now that his skill as a charioteer also should not be hid in his private circus; and he yielded. See him now enter in solemn ceremony the Circus Maximus with its two hundred thousand spectators—the senators in their splendor and the priests in their sterner costume on the first seats; above and behind them the knights, the rich freedmen and all who had a right to wear the toga; still higher up, on the free seats, the people in their short tunics, and far above all, near the very crown of the vast building, the ladies in their boxes. A freedman sat in state in the im-

perial tribune to fling the handkerchief into the arena as a signal to begin. The rabble rose in frantic fury to greet their emperor as he darted in and drove his chariot victoriously around the goal, and even the senators clapped their hands obediently, shuddering inwardly at the utter downfall of ancient principles and trembling at every shout for their lives and their fortunes.

While he thus drank in eagerly the applause of the populace, and now allowed the good people of Naples to admire his fine voice and now dined and supped for days and nights in Rome on the public squares, using the great city, as it were, like his private house, while Sabina bore him a daughter at Antium, the favorite birth-place of the Cæsars, and snubbed the senate standing in a body at her doors, ready to thank her for her goodness in making Rome so happy; while at the premature death of the child the empire grieved, and only ceased to mourn when the infant had been duly made a goddess, with her temple and her priests; while prince and people alike lived as if there were no end to pleasure and no penalty for crime,—Rome was burnt. Like the cities of the plain, she was swept away in a sheet of retributive fire, and for days the fearful chastisement went on, the dread writing of the finger of God on the face of the earth. During six days the flames raged amid the masses of wooden lodging-houses which already then abounded in Rome, now shooting up with hungry tongues to lick and devour the noble temples and gorgeous palaces on the Palatine and other hills, now plunging down into the densely-crowded quarters of the common people, but ever rushing in fierce torrents and high billows unchecked on their relentless career. All efforts made to stem the renewed outbursts of the fire were useless; the houseless, helpless masses rushed wildly to and fro amid the horror and con-

fusion of the scene, often seeking vainly to escape from the blaze and the blinding smoke in the narrow, winding streets. In vain did they look up through the sheets of fire and the clouds of smoke to the temples of the gods on high. The countenances of their divine protectors no longer watched, as they had fondly believed in their confused faith, from their lofty stations over the fortunes of their favorites. The unbridled element had attacked them on their own altars and they were crumbling to dust. Ruffians were seen here and there thrusting blazing brands into the buildings, and calling out to those who tried to arrest them, "Do not detain us! we have our orders!" Crowds of people, dragging their dead and wounded after them, took refuge among the monuments and the graves, wherever no roof threatened to crush them under its ruins. Here ancient temples crumbled by the side of famous fanes and illustrious landmarks; there old family mansions sank to the ground never to rise again, and burying beneath them the trophies and records of patrician houses, whose heads were even then as rapidly falling by the sword. And high above this fearful scene of ruin and destruction, from the towers of the villa on the height of the Esquiline, Nero himself watched with fiendish joy this confusion of clamors, these useless struggles and fatal flights, these outcries of robbers and joyous shouts of incendiaries. Had he not improved upon the oft-quoted saying of Tiberius: "After my death perish the world in fire!" by adding to it the words, "Nay, in my lifetime"?

The people, at all events, did not hesitate to believe that he had ordered the city to be fired and forbidden the flames to be extinguished. They knew the savage pleasure he took in the sufferings of others, and reported his delight at "the beauty of the flames." Others had it

that he was tired of old Tarquinian Rome, with its narrow streets lined with huge blocks of lodging-houses and reeking with filth and foul air; that he wanted room for his own dwelling beyond the two hills to which it was confined, and for a city magnificent in symmetry and grandeur and worthy of a Nero. Was he not a very different man from that Augustus whom the vulgar called Great? How could he live any longer in so lowly a building, the small house on the Palatine, built by the first Cæsar, and sufficient for him, but unworthy of his successors? These suspicions were confirmed by the Golden House which he at once began to erect on the enlarged site—a gorgeous palace with gilded roof and sculptured friezes and panels of many-colored marbles without, while within the whole vast edifice was a rich museum of paintings, precious stones and statuary. Before the grand entrance stood the marble statue of the emperor himself, a hundred and twenty feet high; and everything corresponded in vastness of size and luxury of art with this imposing approach.

The Romans, however, could ill brook the contrast between such magnificence and the squalid poverty and wretched discomfort of their own dwellings. Their patience was exhausted by increased taxations. All the treasures of the empire, human and divine, were ruthlessly swept into the gulf of the emperor's profusion. The treasures of cities and allied countries were sacked, the temples of Rome denuded of the offerings of ages, and Greece and Asia were stripped even of the images of their gods. All went to his house, and more than ever Nero treated gods and men alike as mere slaves of his will, and ordered equally in heaven and on earth everything so as to please his personal service and gratification.

What remains of this splendor? As you follow the street in modern Rome which has replaced the old race-course, the great Circus of Nero, you notice on the left hand a low door with a heavy stone frame, consisting of two ancient statues, and above it you read in bad Italian the startling words, "Entrance to the Palace of the Cæsars." You look around and nothing but blank walls and modern houses meet your eye on all sides. A little cord with a hare's foot as a handle hangs by the door. You pull the string, a tiny bell tingles afar off; and after a while the door silently opens. The portress of the Palace of the Cæsars does not like to leave her brazier with the warm coals; but you are welcome to enter. A narrow flight of steps leads you up stairs to a closed door. You ring again, and this time a withered old woman appears, who frightens the escaping chickens back into the room, and puts her work-basket with the socks she is darning upon a superb Corinthian capital that lies on the pavement half overgrown with modern acanthus leaves. She gives you access to a garden, invites you to look around, and leaves you to yourself. You still see nothing to remind you of the Cæsars, until you notice, among the weeds and the cabbages and onions, another flight of steps, which at last leads you up to a level on which stood once the far-famed palace of the emperors. Now only a few gigantic vaults and massive pillars remain, which in olden times bore up the magnificent structure of that vast mass of buildings which culminated in the Golden House of Nero.

The great incendiary could bear the burden of the gigantic crime on his conscience, but he could not endure the suspicions entertained by the people. They were ungrateful enough not to thank him for having rebuilt their city with unheard-of splendor, and for having robbed the

whole world for their benefit. They took the houses he built for them and ate the provisions he furnished at a nominal price. They admired his palace and reveled in his gardens, but they persisted in accusing him of having burnt Rome, and the crime which is least proved of all rendered Nero the most unpopular. In vain does he disinter the oldest rites to purify the city and clear himself of the crime; in vain are the Sibylline books dusted and consulted once more by venerable priests; in vain are sacred vigils held and matrons go in procession to fetch water from the sea with which to sprinkle the statue of Juno. The Romans knew but one way of atoning for a crime, and human blood has been from antiquity the only infallible means of expiation. The same people who boasted that they had abolished human sacrifices all over the earth, nevertheless preserved the custom of averting every great impending danger by burying alive a man and a woman from Gaul or Greece; and Nero, whenever one of those comets appeared in the heavens,

"Which with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs,"

sought, by the advice of his astrologer, for some illustrious victim to be sent to the executioner. So it was now also when his crimes and follies were threatened with retribution: blood must flow to purify Rome, to silence the people and to prove the innocence of Nero!

The victim was at hand.

In the second year of the reign of Claudius, not a quarter of a century ago, a man, a poor Jew called Simon, but known to his brethren also under the name of Cephas, a Rock, had come to Rome. Few had known him, fewer still believed in his peculiar doctrine, an innovation upon Judaism; and when he left again even his identity became doubtful, and men denied that he

had ever been in the Eternal City. But whether through his preaching or other now unknown means, his countrymen had heard of a new Christ, the only true one after so many false ones; a spiritual king who claimed that his kingdom was not of this world, and yet promised greater glory and higher happiness to all who believed in him than any earthly monarch; the one deliverer among the many who had risen and fallen again, who had been actually crucified, dead and buried, and yet, beyond all doubt and cavil, raised from the grave by the hand of the Almighty. Some believed and some scoffed, hence deep dissension among them, and soon violent, turbulent outbreaks. These assumed ere long formidable proportions, for the Jews of Rome were both numerous and powerful. Thousands of Jewish captives, taken in the conquest of Palestine by Pompey, had been carried off into slavery, and after swelling the triumph of the victorious general sold in the Forum. Others had come with their native princes, Herod Agrippa and others, who were treated courteously by the Cæsars, and allowed to keep large retinues of their own followers. The way once opened, the Jews soon flocked to the great city which held out such ample temptations to their restless nature and innate love of lucre. Ere long they filled whole quarters of the city, and eight thousand could at one time unite in a petition addressed to Augustus. In spite of their uncouth appearance, their strange costumes and still stranger usages, they succeeded in making themselves acceptable and even necessary to the great Romans, and in obtaining from the emperors themselves not only the right to the free exercise of their religion, but also numerous other privileges. Their worship filled the minds of the Romans with amazement. There were no images in their temples and their Deity had not even a name! But the very

mysteriousness of their faith, coupled with the earnestness of its devotees, and the faint anticipation of the Divine unity, gladly hailed by the wearied and distressed souls of the pagans, captivated the minds of the unfortunate people, who were looking in all directions for some firm hold on which to lean their helplessly drifting thoughts. Curiosity, interest and awe all combined in strengthening these impressions. Men and women crowded into their synagogues to witness the quaint, simple rites. Scholars and philosophers studied their sacred books and enjoyed the glowing imagery of their poetry. At home, rude captains lowered their eagles before the holy temple, and removed the images of the Cæsars from their standards before entering Jerusalem. In Rome, large numbers claimed the right to be admitted at least to partial communion, and Judaism became a fashionable weakness among the great, as it had long been a prevailing belief among the slaves. Jewish usages and opinions found a home in the emperor's own palace. In the *Columbaria*, the receptacles for the ashes of slaves and freedmen, a large number of Hebrew names are found, which were borne by imperial freedmen under Claudius, and many of them are the same names which are mentioned by St. Paul in his salutations to his fellow-countrymen at Rome. But even the higher classes, far above "Cæsar's household," furnish examples of Jewish tendencies, and both Sabina, who is quoted by Josephus as a "devout woman," and her favorite dancer, are stated to have been Jews in sympathy if not in profession.

Hence, when the divisions about the new doctrine led to a renewal of outbreaks of sullen fierceness among them, their numbers and their influence were such as to make the rising more than ordinarily formidable. Large

crowds paraded the city, shouting the name of a certain Chrestos—a well-known form of the word Christus, the anointed Messiah, and long familiar to the Romans from the many false Christs who had arisen almost year after year to disturb the peace of Judæa under the pretext of a divine manifestation in favor of the kingdom of Jehovah. The emperor Claudius ordered several thousands to be transported, while all the freeborn among them were commanded to quit Italy or to abjure their “profane superstition.” With that marvelous tenacity which the chosen people have now shown for thousands of years in every land, the Jews then also bowed to the storm, but soon returned to their old quarters and renewed their former practices. In the mean time, emissaries of the new faith had reappeared in their midst, and proclaimed once more the strange doctrine that had been preached to them on the first Pentecost after the Messiah’s death, when Jews and proselytes from all quarters of the world had assembled in Jerusalem and heard the apostles speaking miraculously to each in his own language. When a small number of inquirers had adopted the doctrine and were ripe for further instruction in its mysteries, when their hearts had been sufficiently regenerated to feel that love which would make them abandon their proud claim to be the only recipients of such blessings, and to allow salvation and common brotherhood to be proclaimed throughout all the world, then, in the fullness of time, the greatest of their teachers came to proclaim to them the new, the spiritual kingdom of Israel. This was a Jew of Tarsus, a Roman citizen, a man deeply learned in Hebrew lore, to whom the pagan nations gave the Roman name of Paulus, and who, having been accused at home of criminal heresies and rebellious acts, had appealed to the judgment-seat of the emperor. He came

in chains, but under the protection of the government, to be placed before the imperial tribunal. Cæsar, or at least his court, knew him well. The official documents in the imperial archives contained a report which stated that a certain “Chrestos, in the reign of Tiberius, had suffered under Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judæa. By that event the sect of which he was the founder had received a blow which for a time checked the growth of the dangerous superstition; but it had revived soon after and spread with renewed vigor, not only in Judæa, the soil that gave it birth, but even in the city of Rome, the common sink into which everything infamous and abominable flows like a torrent from all quarters of the world.” Other reports had come in from the Jewish king Agrippa, who had been deeply interested in the new doctrine, and from the proconsul of Cyprus, who had actually believed it; thousands of men in Judæa, in Syria, in Greece and even in Illyria, had confessed their faith in this new Christ—Jews, Greeks and Gentiles of every race. Paul was therefore by no means unknown when he was brought to Italy. At Puzzoli, where he landed, kind brethren were in waiting to receive him; others came from Rome on the Appian Way to greet and cheer him. In Rome itself, where the imperial police were little disposed to notice the internal quarrels of troublesome Jews, St. Paul, though brought in under grave charges and as a prisoner, remained free to call together the principal men among the Jews, to receive all who came to hear his strange message, and to preach for two full years in all confidence and liberty. He was in all probability guarded by the Prætorians within the precincts of the vast imperial palace, lodged in a modest house attached to its outer courts and built for the retainers of their noble patron; and enjoyed such general indulgence as led to the impression

that there was intimacy between him and the all-powerful prefect Burrhus. Others thought him favored by Seneca, the minister, in whose writings there certainly appears an almost marvelous sympathy with some points of the Christian faith, such as can hardly be explained without some closer connection between the philosopher and the holy apostle. Whilst, however, St. Paul enjoyed such liberty, and proclaimed to Jew and Gentile the 'gospel of peace, his turbulent countrymen rose in fierce dissension among themselves, and riots and tumults once more disturbed the peace of the capital.

This was the welcome pretext which Nero seized in order to avert the indignation of the Romans from himself. He knew that these Jews were detested for their "strange and mischievous superstition," and generally held "guilty of the most abominable crimes and of hatred toward the whole human race." With his usual savage recklessness he willfully confounded the well-instructed converts, conscientious and peace-loving men of Greek and Roman origin as well as of Jewish blood, with the base and turbulent rabble of the common Jews, who were despised wherever they were not treated with infuriated hatred. Skillfully availing himself of the popular prejudice, which was by no means confined to Rome, but has, as is well known, followed the unfortunate people through all subsequent ages with bitter persecution and unceasing contempt, he let loose upon them the passions of the masses and slew the inoffensive, law-abiding Christian side by side with the seditious, arrogant Hebrew. It is true that the Romans generally did not trouble themselves much with the distinction between the true believers, meek and inoffensive men, and their fanatic brethren, who foretold with arrogant air the speedy downfall of the empire, the triumph of the chosen people, and the su-

preme rule of a monarch of their own race—the long-expected Messiah.

Thus the fearful persecution broke out, and the Christians perished, guilty of having set Rome on fire, according to Nero; or because of their evil deeds in popular opinion, or as hated by all mankind, if we believe the writers of that epoch. They perished by the sword and by fire, in public and in private, singly and in large numbers at once. But the sight of their death was not enough to satisfy the brutal instincts of the Romans, and inventive cruelty sought out new ways of torturing these unfortunate victims of popular hatred and imperial injustice. Effeminate patricians, exhausted by the abuse of the table, the bath and the couch, found new stimulants in the spectacle of suffering virtue, and gloated with horrid fascination over the physical sufferings they wantonly inflicted. The masses, as brutal as their masters, and long accustomed to find their only pleasure in the sight of bloody conflicts and painful agonies, delighted in the new outlet the emperor gave to their restless passions. The Christians bore their sufferings with calm and serene patience, but their very virtue excited the fury of their persecutors to a still higher degree. Seneca tells us, with a strange sympathy for the innocent victims, of the manner in which they perished by sword and by fire, by being thrown before wild beasts, and by having their half-closed wounds opened again and again to see their last drop of blood leave the exhausted body. And amid all these tortures he describes the suffering men and women as calm and smiling, not with a forced smile, but in good faith, patiently glancing at their mutilated limbs and bearing without a complaint their fearful pains. And when he exclaims, "Let those who in their heart have conceived the idea of eternity not be afraid of any threat! Why should they be afraid for

whom death is a hope?" he evidently has the Christians in his mind, as they praised God with their dying lips and felt the love of Christ in their ebbing hearts.

Nero himself surpassed his brutal subjects in the ingenious character of the tortures to which he subjected those "whom the people styled Christians," and in the savage enjoyment which he derived from their sufferings. He ordered them to be wrapped in skins and then to be torn in pieces by dogs, or to be crucified on highways and byways. He lent his own gardens for the spectacle, and gave a chariot race on the occasion, at which he mingled freely with the multitude, wearing the dress of a driver or actually holding the reins! Thus bitter mockery was added to the fearful agony; for when night came they were impaled upon stakes which passed through their throat, covered with rosin, wax and papyrus, and then lighted to serve as torches on both sides of the race-course. And through this avenue of living men on fire the mad Cæsar drove his swift horses, shouting and yelling to his heart's delight, while the eager multitude rushed to see the savage sight and crowded the ghastly avenue. It is to their credit that writers of the day tell us they were incensed and disgusted at seeing these victims, odious though they were in their eyes, suffer such fearful atrocities "merely to glut the ferocity of a single tyrant."

Heaven and hell never stood so close to each other upon earth as here in the pagan Cæsar, drunk with the blood of murdered thousands, rushing madly by the saintly martyrs burning for their Lord—true, faithful lights, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

Walking toward the upper end of the vast square which in our day serves as a noble foreground to the grandest temple that human hands ever raised for the worship of the Almighty, few men ever think that they

are treading the soil which once drank in the blood of the noblest of their brethren, and was strewn with the ashes of Christian martyrs burnt here in fearful cruelty and savage mockery; for here stood the great circus of Caligula and Nero; and the magnificent obelisk in the centre of the square, with its strange, incongruous inscription, once served as goal in the circus, for which purpose Claudius had ordered it to be imported from Egypt. The blood of the martyrs has been here, in the literal sense of the word, the seed of the Church, and from their ashes has sprung the noblest cathedral in all Christendom.

For Nero, however, the reward was near at hand; and if the world had not still been unwilling to see the light that came to it, they could have read in the terrible retribution which fell upon the mad Cæsar the vengeance of the Almighty.

Within, remorse came to gnaw at his heart's strings. He who crowned kings upon earth, and appointed gods or deposed them at will, could not master the fear of his mother's memory. The shade of Agrippina pursued him with the scourge and the torches of the Furies—pursued him through the fairy-like halls of his Golden House—pursued him through distant countries, over land and sea. Wild, weird voices summoned him from his couch to come to judgment, and terrible visions broke in upon his rare hours of sleep. At the gates of Athens the memory of Orestes and the Eumenides rose before him, and he dared not enter the dread city, while the name of stern Lycurgus drove him in like manner from the walls of Sparta. At Delphi he heard the sacred oracle compare him to Alcmeon and Orestes, the murderers of their mothers, and in his wrath he ordered the land of the great deity to be confiscated and the cave to be closed through which

the prophetess received her inspiration. The senate congratulated him on his courage and the world worshiped him with renewed fervor, but when he heard at Eleusis the herald warn off from the sacred mysteries all impious murderers, he shrank away and dared not to insist upon initiation.

He turned his eye toward the East to find help and comfort in the occult sciences known to the cradle of mankind. His friend Tiridates sent him magicians, and he bade them consult the air and the fire, the stars and the sacred lanterns; he sent them for advice to the dead and ordered them to commune with hell. They conjured up for him the spirit of Agrippina; he offered living sacrifices to her, but magic also is but a chimera, and he learns from the Orient, what Rome has ever told him, that his crime is the one unpardonable offence, and that without repentance expiation is impossible in heaven and upon earth.

His life, an unbroken orgy, now became unbearable to him, and his very body was a burden. Where is now the graceful, ingenuous-looking youth who won the love of an Acte and delighted the women of Rome with his beauty? A heavy, awkward man, looking fifty instead of thirty, with ill-shapen limbs and a thick-set neck, a prominent paunch and lean, trembling legs; sea-green eyes, squinting, haggard and drooping; an immense mass of hair raised in several stories and hanging down behind like a modern chignon; slippers on his feet and a thick shawl around his swollen throat; a loose gown of gorgeous material and delicate pattern, but soiled and slatternly,—this woman-man is Nero.

Abroad, the empire was falling to pieces; the barbarians were rising to a consciousness of their power; the officials thought only of plundering their provinces,

and the legions were discontented. From all sides new races appear, eager to attack this vast body politic that can no longer defend itself under such a Cæsar; they crowd and hustle one another against the helpless Colossus; they press steadily, irresistibly forward, and the empire trembles. Revolts and rebellions break out in the northern provinces, and ambitious men dare boldly to stretch out their hand after the diadem. They had discovered, as we are told by Tacitus, "the secret fatal to the empire—that a prince might be made elsewhere than at Rome;" at which place alone it had so long been believed a Cæsar could be chosen. The civil wars commenced, and a rival had been hailed as emperor.

Nero had just returned from Greece, surer than ever of the subserviency of the senate and the affections of the people; confirmed, moreover, in his faith in his own star by the warning of the Delphian Oracle against the Seventy-third Year, which seemed far enough from his present age. He loved Naples as the scene of his first artistic triumphs, and therefore he landed there and entered the capital of Campania once more as a conqueror. The walls of the city were broken down to admit his team of milk-white horses, and the same costly extravagance accompanied his solemn entry into Antium, Albanum, his favorite residence, and finally Rome itself. For the last time he drove in pomp through the great city, in the same chariot in which Augustus had triumphed, arrayed in a purple robe and a mantle blazing with golden stars, wearing on his head the Olympian crown and waving the Pythian in his hand, while his favorite flute-player, a Greek, stood by his side and shared his triumph. The ceremonies of solemn triumph were all performed as if he had achieved some glorious conquest, from the burning of incense and slaying of victims

to the loud and measured acclamations of five thousand picket guardsmen, who marched behind him, representing the soldiers who shared his glory. To hand down the memory of the glorious day, medals were struck, on which the emperor was represented as a flute-player, to the shame and horror of all Romans.

One feature only was omitted in the gorgeous solemnity—the slave who usually stood behind the triumphator to warn him of the uncertainty of his fate. There was no need for it; the warning was written on every face that witnessed the mock ceremony and the gloom that hung over the whole city.

Nero felt it, and withdrew to his favorite villa in Campania. There the first rising murmurs of the tempest reached him, when he heard that one of his generals, Galba, had been proclaimed emperor. All at once it flashed through his mind that his ancestor Augustus was reported to have taken the bold rebel, then a child, playfully by the cheek, saying, "Thou also, my child, shalt one day taste our empire." And with overwhelming force he remembered at the same moment that Galba was seventy-three years old.

The news of the various revolts that had risen, as by a miracle, in so many provinces at once, came to Nero on the nineteenth of March, the anniversary of his mother's violent death, but he still persisted in ignoring the grave importance of the risings, indulged in his customary amusements and refused for a week to pay any attention to the subject. At the end of that time, however, an insult was offered to his personal vanity which stung him to the quick and roused him to action. A proclamation was handed to him, in which one of the pretenders to the throne called him by his family name of Brazen-Beard, instead of Nero; and to heighten the force of the

insult, spoke of him as "a miserable harper." He fell into a furious passion, appealed to the bystanders, "if they had ever heard a better performer," and hurried trembling to Rome. On the way, however, he was once more reassured by a good omen—a rough roadside sculpture, which represented a Roman knight dragging a Gaulish soldier by the head—and he at once interpreted the sight into an augury of his own triumph. This restored him to himself, and with his usual levity he hastily dissolved the council which had assembled upon his arrival, and devoted the day to the examination of a water-organ, on which he proposed, "with Vindex's good leave," to perform in public.

The hour of retribution drew nearer and nearer. Courier after courier dashed into the city, each bringing the news of the defection of more generals and legions, and at last, under these repeated blows, his recklessness gave way. He rose from his meal, upset the table, broke two of his costliest crystal vases, and fainted. When he came to himself again, after having lain for a long time on the ground, speechless and apparently lifeless, he gave way to utter despair. He tore his robe, struck his head and broke forth in miserable wailings. There was no comfort in the words of his courtiers or the faces of his freedmen; and yet, amid all the darkness of that dismal scene and the wretched misery of that puny tyrant, there was at least one faithful friend by his side. This was his nurse, who came in the hour of greatest need to stand by him whom she had tended as an infant and now tried to console in his agony. But even her well-meant endeavors to recall to him the instances of other princes who had been threatened like him and yet escaped, were met with the childish reply that "Never was such ill-fortune as mine; they fell by the sword; I alone must lose the em-

pire while still living." For he had not yet fully awakened to the imminence of the danger. He reveled still in luxurious meals, and even found time and heart to go incognito to the theatre, and to become so deeply interested in the performance as to send a message to a favorite actor. Then again he formed wild plans of overcoming the rebels. He gave orders to summon troops from the still faithful provinces, but they also were found to be already involved in the rebellion. He proposed to land the sailors of the fleet which lay at Ostia and to form them in a legion; he appealed to the rabble, heretofore his warmest friends, to arm themselves in his behalf, and actually dressed up a host of courtesans and dancers as Amazons to form his body-guard for the march. When these measures failed, his ferocity awoke and he threatened to destroy all his enemies by one fell blow—the senate by poison at a great banquet, the rebellious generals by hired assassins, the rising provinces by giving them up for pillage to the army, and the city itself by burning it to the ground, after having let loose the wild beasts confined in the circus. Then again a luxurious dinner softened his wrath and subdued his frenzy a little, and now he formed other equally wild plans. He proposed to proceed unarmed to the rebellious armies, to present himself before them as the incomparable artist of the age, and to touch their hearts by the pathos of his voice and the sweet accents of his music. They would not be able to resist his beauty and his art; they would surrender, he was sure, and as soon as the guilty were pardoned by his unparalleled mercy, he would unite his joy with their joy, and chant, to the accompaniment of hundreds of thousands, his grandest rhymes of victory; "which, by the way," he added, "I must compose at once." Then again he thought of taking refuge in the Orient; for astrologers,

who had foretold him the loss of Rome, had also promised him the empire of Asia. The Jews had flattered him with the idea that he might be destined to become their Messiah, and, more eager than ever for the coming of the true Christ, they had offered him a royal throne in the Holy Land. And if Palestine was not to be his, was he not an artist still, even if he might no longer be emperor? The lyre, the ornament of his greatness, would be his support in misfortune. He would go to Egypt and sing in the streets of Alexandria. "The artist," he said, "finds a home in every land."

Meanwhile, the report of the rebellions in the provinces had been spread in Rome, and the excitement among senators and knights grew apace. Were they really to be delivered of the tyrant at last? Vast masses of excited men, citizens and slaves, surged through the streets, now in ominous silence and now breaking forth in seditious cries. The Prætorian guards were in solemn council, considering the bids that were made for their support. The common people heard suddenly that a vessel which was to have brought corn from Egypt to fill the almost empty storehouses had been found to be loaded with fine sand for the amphitheatre, and the disgust and the fear of a famine fanned their brooding discontent into open rebellion.

Nero was no longer safe in Rome. He also, as has been remarked by a great historian, had his Hundred Days; he had landed in Italy toward the end of February, and it was now the beginning of June. Terrible portents added to the fright of the superstitious tyrant: the Albanian mountains were red with blood which had rained down from heaven; the mausoleum of Augustus had opened of its own accord, and a voice coming forth from it had called upon Nero by name; and he himself

had in a dream seen the statues of the fourteen nations of the empire in Pompey's theatre descend from their pedestals and fall upon him in the arena. Terrified by these omens, and rendered desperate by the sudden isolation which leaves his palace silent and empty, he thinks at last of flight. He sends a trusty freedman to Ostia to secure a galley in which he may escape; he calls upon Locusta for a powerful poison, which he places in a golden casket, and then crosses over from the imperial palace to the Servilian gardens, where he had a beautiful villa. Before retiring he makes one more appeal to the officers and men of his guard to induce them to protect him in his flight; but they all refuse, and one, with the unsparing bluntness of an old Roman soldier, even asks him, impatiently, "Is it, then, so hard to die?" Alas! what was no doubt very simple and easy for a brave soldier was the horror of horrors to a Nero. He falls asleep, overcome with fatigue and excitement—the last sleep he was to taste upon earth: in the middle of the night he suddenly wakes up and looks around him; he is alone! The Prætorians have abandoned him—the sentinels have left their post. He rushes wildly from room to room; he hurries into the street to the houses of his favorites and friends; but every gate is closed to him and his entreaties remain unanswered. When he returns to his sleeping-room all his slaves have fled; his very bed is plundered, and not even the sad consolation of the vial of poison has been left the unfortunate Cæsar. He cries and weeps; he calls for one of the guard on duty or some gladiator of his household to come and make an end to his misery. No voice answers. "What!" he cries out, in the bitterness of his heart, "have I neither friend nor foe left me?" The world had abandoned him!

He thinks of drowning himself in the Tiber, and runs to the banks of the river, but his courage fails him at the last moment, and earth and water alike seemingly refuse to receive his miserable body. He thinks of flight, but what land will offer him an asylum? He knows—for he has made himself most fearful use of the fact—that there is no people on earth who can protect or hide a culprit from the decrees of Roman justice; he knows that the life of the fugitive would be safe only where life is no longer worth having, for Rome was the world.

Where did the empire end? Where was its name and its greatness unknown? Around the city spread the vast circle of her provinces, nations without number with hundreds of large cities, paying duty and obeying her proconsuls. Farther out lay the undefined range of immense territories, whose princes paid her tribute, whose people fought her battles, whose thrones were filled by her favorites. And vaster still and more indefinite was the outermost ring of races whom Rome protected in their trembling security, and who listened with intent eagerness to hear every word that was spoken on the banks of the Tiber. Beyond that nothing but outer darkness, fables and chimeras. If certain races, disgraced by the gods, lived beyond the empire and "the immense majesty of Roman peace," they were forgotten by man, and Rome had no time to count the wandering nations beyond her confines. She could say with justice that every habitable land and every navigable sea obeyed her, and when her armies unexpectedly met the hosts of unknown tribes who asked them who they were, they could answer in the full consciousness of her power and the supremacy of her rule, "We are Romans, the masters of nations!"

Knowing all this, Nero could not for a moment hope to escape the mandate of the new Cæsar; still, clinging

to life with a fear of death utterly foreign to Romans generally, he looked around him for some place of refuge where he might at least prolong his miserable existence for a few days and prepare his mind in calmness for a creditable ending. Phaon, his freedman, offers him his modest villa in the suburbs, about four miles from the heart of the city, and promises to accompany him on his mournful errand. A freedman was the only friend that was left to the mighty Cæsar, and a servant's lowly cottage his only refuge upon earth! Nero was barefooted and in his tunic; he hastily drew around him a worn-out, dark-colored cloak with a hood, bound a handkerchief over his face, and, gliding stealthily out of the house, mounted a horse. In the dim dawn of the morning he left the city, accompanied only by four of his slaves; but—oh horror!—he has no sooner left the gardens than a dull, rumbling noise is heard and the ground trembles under him; an earthquake testifies to the horror of his mother Earth at her bloodstained son, as he fancies in his fright; soon after vivid flashes of lightning blind him and make him tremble before the wrath of the gods. The evil omens multiplied as he advanced, and increased his terror. The road on which he had left the city led him close under the walls of the Prætorian camp, and as he passed he heard them curse his name, and, with shouts for their new master Galba, get under arms for their final march against the imperial palace. He had hardly recovered from the shock when he discerned in the dusk a party of travelers, who came from their villas thus early probably on some law business. One of them, recognizing men coming in the direction from Rome, exclaimed, "Here are some men probably in chase of the tyrant;" and another voice was heard asking, "What news of Nero?" Then a dead body was found lying across the

road; the emperor's horse started so violently at the horrible sight that it nearly dismounted its rider, and compelled him to let go the handkerchief with which he was hiding his face. Just then a Prætorian guardsman passed by on his way to the city and recognized the familiar features; but fortunately for the frightened tyrant he was not aware of the altered state of affairs in the capital, and saluted respectfully. At last the short but memorable ride came to an end at the fourth milestone, where the party alighted, perhaps for the purpose of avoiding any further encounter of the kind and because the freedman's villa was not far off; but there was no road to it from this side, and, quitting the highway, the wretched fugitive, after having turned his horse adrift amid the briars and brambles, painfully made his way toward the back of the house. The space between happened to be an almost impassable canebrake, and it was only with great labor and fatigue that they could cross it by spreading their cloaks upon the soft, yielding surface and stepping upon them as they proceeded slowly. When they finally reached the postern gate of the villa, where there was no regular entrance to the house, the friendly freedman offered to go on and reconnoitre while Nero might hide himself by crouching down in a sand-pit hard by; but the emperor was afraid of being buried alive and refused to go into it, preferring to remain standing beneath the wall, trembling with fear and the cold of the morning. There was a little mud-puddle close by, and Nero, dipping up some water from it in the hollow of his hand, drank it with the words, "This is the famous beverage of Nero!" Then he tried to pull out the thorns and briars with which his cloak was thickly strewn, and when at last a hole had been made in the wall, underground, he crept on all fours through the narrow opening—probably a drain

leading out from the bath-room. Once inside, he took possession of a small sleeping-closet of a slave as the most retired room of the house, least likely to be searched for an emperor, and after having swallowed a little tepid water, without being able to eat the coarse bread that was offered him, he threw himself on the miserable pallet and covered his weary limbs with a coarse rug.

Thus the wretched fugitive had at last reached a quiet place, where he might collect his thoughts and count upon security for a day or two, as no one was likely to suspect his presence in this remote and unknown place. But his anxiety and alarm were not so easily allayed. The mighty emperor of the world did not feel safe under his own servant's roof, and the envied owner of the Golden House hid himself trembling in a slave's miserable crypt. He would fain have fled, but whither could he hope to escape? Still, he was not able to summon courage to meet his fate like a man. In vain did the few faithful friends who nobly stood by him urge him to delay no longer, but to escape by his own hand and while it was yet in his power the insults and sufferings which were surely to be heaped upon him ere long. He wept and wailed in his helpless despair. And again the image of his murdered mother arose before him, and, silently pointing at her ghastly wounds, filled his heart with fright until he shook and trembled like one seized with palsy. Alas! the world had forsaken him, and he had no god on whom he could call for help in his supreme hour. A whole life's crimes and cruelties were fearfully avenged in that short but unspeakable agony.

Amid tears and lamentations he ordered at last a hole to be dug in the ground, and lay down himself to give the right measure. He begged his companions to pick up a number of loose fragments of marble that happened to

be lying about, to line its inside decently, and to bring him, if possible, water and wood, that he might perform the last rites by cleansing his limbs and burning his corpse, sighing and muttering all the while, "Alas, what an artist to perish! what a dire eclipse for musical science to be deprived of such an ornament by violent death!"

While he was thus suffering, not less from real dangers that threatened his life than from his contemptible fear of death, and in vain called upon his friends to relieve him from his terrible fate, a messenger arrived with papers which were sent from Rome to Phaon, the owner of the house. Nero snatched them from the hand of the slave and read that the senate had declared him a public enemy, and that official orders had at once been issued for apprehending him, in order that he might be brought to condign punishment, "according to ancient precedent." Trembling with fear, he asked what that meant, and was told that the culprit was stripped naked, placed with his head between the prongs of a pitchfork and thus beaten with a stick until he died. The poor wretch was horrorstruck at the idea of being exposed to such fearful torture, and he who had exulted in the slow agonies of dying men and burnt his victims before a moderate fire, nearly expired with terror. He drew forth two daggers which he had concealed in his bosom, carefully tried the sharpness of their edges as if he wished to end his life at once, and then quietly laid them down again, saying that the right moment was not yet arrived. Then he called upon Sporus, the infamous partner in all his excesses, whom some caprice or the fear of his own fate had induced to follow him in his flight, to begin singing the usual funereal lamentations and to strike his breast. Another of his companions he besought to set him an example by dying first, and again and again he re-

proached himself for his own lack of courage. Still theatrical and fond of making a display even of his cowardice, he addressed himself, now reproaching his nature for its want of determination, and now calling upon his soul to remember his dignity and to act in a manner worthy of his high station, closing with the idle words, "Fie, fie, Nero! thou wantest courage now; come, wake up, man, and rouse thyself to action!"

Suddenly, in the midst of this sad display of disgusting cowardice and inextinguishable vanity, the tramp of horses was heard and the voices of men were distinguished, who came to seize the emperor alive. He paused in his restless motions, he listened, and ejaculating in Greek a verse from Homer, "The sound of swift-footed steeds falls on my ears," he determined to escape by a death worthy of a Roman from an ignominious life and a lingering torture. He placed a sword against his throat, but even the momentary impulse of courage was not strong enough to enable him to carry out his purpose, and he had to call upon his Greek secretary to drive the weapon home. He was still breathing, and not yet speechless even, when the officer who commanded the party of pursuers entered the closet. He quickly thrust his cloak against the wound to stop the flow of blood, and pretended to have come to the rescue, uttering a few hollow words of encouragement. Nero had still strength enough to reply, "Too late!" and, "Is this your fidelity?" and then he fell back expiring, bearing on his fast-stiffening features a fearful stare, which filled all the beholders with ineffable horror.

It was the day on which his poor child-wife, Octavia, had been brutally murdered at his command, when his body was, at his urgent request before death, burnt hastily and imperfectly, but at least without mutilation.

His remains were buried in the gardens of the Brazen-Beards on the Pincian Hill. His obsequies were performed by two nurses of his infancy, with the aid of the Greek girl Acte, who was faithful to him unto death, and for years unknown hands continued to strew his grave with beautiful flowers.

Thus ended the last of the Cæsars, the son of the Great Empress, closing the sad tragedy of her life with the utter extinction of the Augustan line, and furnishing the most striking instance known to mankind of dramatic vengeance overtaking unequalled crime. As the mother had to see the son to whom she had given life and the throne of the world raise his murderous hand against her and load his conscience with eternal infamy, so the son had to pay in this life already the utmost penalty for his crime, and to drain the cup of suffering to the last drop. The race that had produced the greatest empress the world has ever seen, and the blackest monster ever seated upon a throne, ended thus in a magnificence of woe well proportioned to the gorgeous prosperity and ineffable guilt of their lives.