

THE LIFE OF ANTONINUS HELIOGABALUS

Aelius Lampridius

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I. The life of Elagabalus Antoninus, also called Varius, I should never have put in writing, — hoping that it might not be known that he was emperor of the Romans —, were it not that before him this same imperial office had had a Caligula, a Nero, and a Vitellius. But, just as the selfsame earth bears not only poisons but also grains and other helpful things, not only serpents but flocks as well, so the thoughtful reader may find himself some consolation for these monstrous tyrants by reading of Augustus, Trajan, Vespasian, Hadrian, Pius, Titus and Marcus. At the same time, he will learn of the Romans' discernment, in that these last ruled long and died by natural deaths, whereas the former were murdered, dragged through the streets, officially called tyrants, and no man wishes to mention even their names.

Now when Macrinus had been slain and also his son Diadumenianus, who had been given an equal share of the power and also the name Antoninus, the imperial office was bestowed upon Varius Elagabalus, solely because he was reputed to be the son of Bassianus. As a matter of fact, he was the priest of Elagabalus (sometimes called Jupiter, or the Sun), and had merely assumed the name Antoninus in order to prove his descent or else because he had learned that this name was so dear to mankind that for its sake even the parricide Bassianus had been greatly beloved. Originally, he had the name Varius, but later he was called Elagabalus because he was priest of this god — whom he afterwards brought with him from Syria to Rome, founding a temple for him on the site of an earlier shrine of Orcus. Finally, when he received the imperial power, he took the name Antoninus and was the last of the Antonines to rule the Roman Empire.

II. He was wholly under the control of his mother, Symiamira, so much so, in fact, that he did no public business without her consent, although she lived like a harlot and practised all manner of lewdness in the palace. For that matter, her amour with Antoninus Caracalla was so notorious that Varius, or rather Elagabalus, was commonly supposed to be his son. The name Varius, some say, was given him by his school-fellows because he seemed to be sprung from the seed of "various" men, as would be the case with the son of a harlot. And then, when his reputed father Antoninus was slain by Macrinus' treachery, he sought refuge in the temple of Elagabalus the god, as in a sanctuary, for fear that Macrinus would kill him; for Macrinus and his wasteful and brutal son were wielding the imperial power with the greatest cruelty. But enough concerning his name — though he defiled this venerated name of the Antonines, which you, Most Sacred Constantine, so revere that you have had portrayed in gold both Marcus and Pius together with the Constantii and the Claudii, as though they too were your ancestors, just as you have adopted the virtues of the ancients which are naturally suited to your own character, and pleasing and dear to you as well.

III. But let us return to Varius Antoninus. After obtaining the imperial power he despatched couriers to Rome, and there all classes were filled with enthusiasm, and a great desire for him was aroused in the whole people merely at the mention of the name Antoninus, now restored, as it seemed, not in an empty title (as it had been in the case of Diadumenianus), but actually in the blood — for he had signed himself son of Antoninus Bassianus. He had the prestige, furthermore, which usually comes to a new ruler who has succeeded a tyrant; this is permanent only when the highest virtues are present and has been lost by many a mediocre emperor.

In short, when Elagabalus' message was read in the senate, at once good wishes were uttered for Antoninus and curses on Macrinus and his son, and, in accordance with the general wish and the eager belief of all in his

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paternity, Antoninus was hailed as emperor. Such are the pious hopes of men, who are quick to believe when they wish the thing to come true which their hearts desire.

As soon as he entered the city, however, neglecting all the affairs of the provinces, he established Elagabalus as a god on the Palatine Hill close to the imperial palace; and he built him a temple, to which he desired to transfer the emblem of the Great Mother, the fire of Vesta, the Palladium, the shields of the Salii, and all that the Romans held sacred, purposing that no god might be worshipped at Rome save only Elagabalus. He declared, furthermore, that the religions of the Jews and the Samaritans and the rites of the Christians must also be transferred to this place, in order that the priesthood of Elagabalus might include the mysteries of every form of worship.

IV. Then, when he held his first audience with the senate, he gave orders that his mother should be asked to come into the senate-chamber. On her arrival she was invited to a place on the consuls' bench and there she took part in the drafting — that is to say, she witnessed the drawing up of the senate's decree. And Elagabalus was the only one of all the emperors under whom a woman attended the senate like a man, just as though she belonged to the senatorial order.

He also established a "senaculum," or women's senate, on the Quirinal Hill. Before this time, in fact, a congress of matrons had met here, but only on certain festivals, or whenever a matron was presented with the insignia of a "consular marriage" — bestowed by the early emperors on their kinswomen, particularly on those whose husbands were not nobles, in order that they might not lose their noble rank. But now under the influence of Symiamira absurd decrees were enacted concerning rules to be applied to matrons, namely, what kind of clothing each might wear in public, who was to yield precedence and to whom, who was to advance to kiss another, who might ride in a chariot, on a horse, on a pack-animal, or on an ass, who might drive in a carriage drawn by mules or in one drawn by oxen, who might be carried in a litter, and whether the litter might be made of leather, or of bone, or covered with ivory or with silver, and lastly, who might wear gold or jewels on her shoes.

V. After he had spent the winter in Nicomedia, living in a depraved manner and indulging in unnatural vice with men, the soldiers soon began to regret that they had conspired against Macrinus to make this man emperor, and they turned their thoughts toward his cousin Alexander, who on the murder of Macrinus had been hailed by the senate as Caesar. For who could tolerate an emperor who indulged in unnatural lusts of every kind, when not even a beast of this sort would be tolerated? And even at Rome he did nothing but send out agents to search for those who had particularly large organs and bring them to the palace in order that he might enjoy their vigour. Moreover, he used to have the story of Paris played in his house, and he himself would take the role of Venus, and suddenly drop his clothing to the ground and fall naked on his knees, one hand on his breast, the other before his private parts, his buttocks projecting meanwhile and thrust back in front of his partner in depravity. He would likewise model the expression of his face on that with which Venus is usually painted, and he had his whole body depilated, deeming it to be the chief enjoyment of life to appear fit and worthy to arouse the lusts of the greatest number.

VI. He took money for honours and distinctions and positions of power, selling them in person or through his slaves and those who served his lusts. He made appointments to the senate without regard to age, property, or rank, and solely at the price of money, and he sold the positions of captain and tribune, legate and general, likewise procuratorships and posts in the Palace. The charioteers Protogenes and Cordius, originally his comrades in the chariot-race, he later made his associates in his daily life and actions. Many whose personal appearance pleased him he took from the stage, the Circus, and the arena and brought to the palace. And such was his passion for Hierocles that he kissed him in a place which it is indecent even to mention, declaring that he was celebrating the festival of Flora.

He violated the chastity of a Vestal Virgin, and by removing the holy shrines he profaned the sacred rites of the Roman nation. He also desired to extinguish the everlasting fire. In fact, it was his desire to abolish not only the religious ceremonies of the Romans but also those of the whole world, his one wish being that the god Elagabalus

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should be worshipped everywhere. He even broke into the sanctuary of Vesta, into which only Vestal Virgins and the priests may enter, though himself defiled by every moral stain and in the company of those who had defiled themselves. He also attempted to carry away the sacred shrine, but instead of the true one he seized only an earthenware one, which the Senior Vestal had shown him in an attempt to deceive him, and when he found nothing in it, he threw it down and broke it. The cult, however, did not suffer at his hands, for several shrines had been made, it is said, exactly like the true one, in order that none might ever be able to take this one away. Though this be so, he nevertheless carried away the image which he believed to be the Palladium, and after washing it over with gold he placed it in the temple of his god.

VII. He also adopted the worship of the Great Mother and celebrated the rite of the taurobolium, and he carried off her image and the sacred objects which are kept hidden in a secret place. He would toss his head to and fro among the castrated devotees of the goddess, and he infibulated himself, and did all that the eunuch-priests are wont to do; and the image of the goddess which he carried off he placed in the sanctuary of his god. He also celebrated the rite of Salambo with all the wailing and the frenzy of the Syrian cult -- thereby foreshadowing his own impending doom. In fact, he asserted that all gods were merely the servants of his god, calling some its chamberlains, others its slaves, and others its attendants for diverse purposes. And he planned to carry off from their respective temples the stones which are said to be divine, among them the emblem of Diana, from its holy place at Laodicea, where it had been dedicated by Orestes.

Now Orestes, they say, dedicated not merely one image of Diana in one place, but many and in many places. And after he purified himself at the Three Rivers in the Hebrus region in obedience to a divine response, he founded the city of Oresta -- a city destined to be often stained with human blood. As for this city of Oresta, Hadrian, after he had begun to suffer from madness, ordered that it should be called after his own name -- also acting in obedience to a divine response, for he had been told to steal into the house or into the name of some madman. Thereupon, they say, he recovered from his madness, which had caused him to order the execution of many senators, all of whom, however, were saved by Antoninus; for he won the surname of Pius by leading them into the senate after all supposed that they had been put to death by the Emperor's order.

VIII. Elagabalus also sacrificed human victims, and for this purpose he collected from the whole of Italy children of noble birth and beautiful appearance, whose fathers and mothers were alive, intending, I suppose, that the sorrow, if suffered by two parents, should be all the greater. Finally, he kept about him every kind of magician and had them perform daily sacrifices, himself urging them on and giving thanks to the gods because he found them to be well-disposed to these men; and all the while he would examine the children's vitals and torture the victims after the manner of his own native rites.

When he entered upon his consulship he threw presents to the populace to be scrambled for, no mere pieces of silver and gold, indeed, or confectionery or little animals, but fatted cattle and camels and asses and slaves, declaring that this was an imperial custom.

He made a savage attack on the memory of Macrinus and a still more savage one on that of Diadumenianus because he had received the name Antoninus -- he called him a Pseudo-Antoninus -- and because it was asserted that from a veritable profligate he had become very brave and honourable and dignified and austere. And he even forced certain writers to recount concerning his profligacy some details which were unspeakable, or, more properly, intolerable to relate, considering that this was in a biography of him.

He made a public bath in the imperial palace and at the same time threw open the bath of Plautinus to the populace, that by this means he might get a supply of men with unusually large organs. He also took care to have the whole city and the wharves searched for "onobeli*," as those were called who seemed particularly lusty. [*i.e. like an ass in this respect]

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IX. When he was making plans to take up the war against the Marcomanni, which Marcus Antoninus had fought with great glory, he was told by certain persons that it was by the help of astrologers and magicians that Marcus had made the Marcomanni forever the liegemen and friends of the Roman people, and that it had been done by means of magic rites and a dedication. But when he inquired what this was or where it could be obtained, he could get no response. For it was generally reported that he inquired about this dedication solely for the purpose of destroying it, hoping thereby to bring on the war; for he had been told that there was a prophesy that the Marcomannic war should be ended by an Antoninus — whereas he was called Varius, and Elagabalus and a public laughing-stock, and he was, moreover, a disgrace to the name of Antoninus, on which he had laid violent hands. This report, moreover, was spread by those most of all who were aggrieved that men well equipped for gratifying his lusts and of larger resources were opposed to themselves. And for this reason they even began to plot his death. So much for domestic affairs.

X. As for the soldiers, they could not endure to have such a pest clothed with the name of emperor, and they all expressed their views, first one to another, then in groups, turning their thoughts to Alexander, who previously, at the time when Macrinus was murdered, had been hailed by the senate as Caesar — he was the cousin of this Antoninus, for both were grandsons of Varia, from whom Elagabalus had the name Varius.

During his reign Zoticus had such influence that all the chiefs of the palace-departments treated him as their master's consort. This same Zoticus, furthermore, was the kind to abuse such a degree of intimacy, for under false pretences he sold all Elagabalus' promises and favours, and so, as far as he could, he amassed enormous wealth. To some men he held out threats, and to others promises, lying to them all, and as he came out from the Emperor's presence, he would go up to each and say, "In regard to you I said this," "in regard to you I was told that," and "in regard to you this action will be taken." That is the way of men of this kind, for, once admitted to too close an intimacy with a ruler, they sell information concerning his intentions, whether he be good or bad, and so, through the stupidity or the innocence of an emperor who does not detect their intrigues, batten on the shameless hawking of rumours. With this man Elagabalus went through a nuptial ceremony and consummated a marriage, even having a bridal-matron and exclaiming, "Go to work, Cook!" — and this at a time when Zoticus was ill. After that he would ask philosophers and even men of the greatest dignity whether they, in their youth, had ever experienced what he was experiencing — all without the slightest shame. For indeed he never refrained from filthy conversation and would make indecent signs with his fingers and would show no regard for decency even in public gatherings or in the hearing of the people.

XI. He made his freedmen governors and legates, consuls and generals, and he brought disgrace on all offices of distinction by the appointment of base-born profligates. On one occasion he invited the nobles of the court to a vintage-festival, and when he had seated himself by the baskets of grapes, he began to ask the most dignified of them one by one whether he were responsive to Venus, and when the old men would blush he would cry out, "He is blushing, it's all right!" — regarding their silence and blushes as a confession. He then narrated his own doings without any cloak of shame. But when he saw that the elders blushed and kept silent, because neither their age nor their dignity was in keeping with such topics, he turned to the young men and began to question them about all their experiences. And when they told him what one would expect of their age, he began to be merry, declaring that a vintage celebrated in such a manner was truly bacchanalian. Many relate, furthermore, that he was the first to devise the custom of having slaves make jibes at their masters' expense during a vintage-festival, even in the hearing of their masters, which jibes he had composed himself, most of them in Greek; several of these, indeed, are quoted by Marius Maximus in his Life of Elagabalus. His courtiers, moreover, were men of depraved life, some of them old men looking like philosophers, who would do up their hair in nets, declare that they were living a life of depravity, and boast that they had husbands. Some say, however, that they only made a pretence of this in order that by counterfeiting the Emperor's vices they might stand higher in his favour.

XII. As prefect of the guard he appointed a dancer who had been on the stage at Rome, as prefect of the watch a chariot-driver named Cordius, and as prefect of the grain-supply a barber named Claudius, and to the other posts of distinction he advanced men whose sole recommendation was the enormous size of their privates. As collector

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of the five-per-cent tax on inheritances he appointed a mule driver, a courier, a cook, and a locksmith. When he went to the Camp or the Senate-house he took with him his grandmother, Varia by name, whom I have previously mentioned, in order that through her prestige he might get greater respect — for by himself he got none. And never before this time, as I have already said, did a woman come into the Senate-chamber or receive an invitation to take part in the drafting of a decree and express her opinion in the debate. At his banquets he preferred to have perverts placed next to him and took special delight in touching or fondling them, and whenever he drank one of them was usually selected to hand him the cup.

XIII. Among the base actions of his life of depravity he gave orders that Alexander, whom he had formally adopted, be removed from his presence, saying that he regretted the adoption. Then he commanded the senate to take away from Alexander the name of Caesar. But when this was announced to the senate, there was a profound silence. For Alexander was an excellent youth, as was afterwards shown by the character of his rule, even though, because he was chaste, he was displeasing to his adoptive father — he was also, as some declare, his cousin. Besides, he was loved by the soldiers and acceptable to the senate and the equestrian order. Yet the Emperor's madness went the length of an attempt to carry out the basest design; for he despatched assassins to kill Alexander, and that in the following way: Leaving his mother, grandmother, and cousin in the Palace, he himself withdrew to the Gardens of Spes Vetus on the ground that he was forming designs against some new youth, and there he issued an order to slay Alexander, a most excellent young man and one of whom the state had need. He also sent a written order to the soldiers bidding them take away from Alexander the name of Caesar, and he despatched men to smear mud on the inscriptions on his statues in the Camp, as is usually done to a tyrant. He sent, furthermore, to Alexander's guardians, ordering them, if they hoped for rewards and distinctions, to kill him in any way they wished, either in his bath, or by poison, or with the sword.

XIV. But evil men can accomplish nothing against the upright. For no power could induce any to commit so great a crime, and the weapons which he was making ready for others were turned against himself, and it was by the same violent means that he was directing at others that he himself was put to death.

But immediately after the inscriptions on Alexander's statues were smeared with mud, all the soldiers were fired with anger, and they set out, some for the Palace and some for the gardens where Varius was, with the purpose of protecting Alexander and finally ridding the state of this filthy creature full of murderous intent. And when they had come to the Palace they set a guard about Alexander and his mother and grandmother and then escorted them with the greatest care to the Camp; Symiamira, Elagabalus' mother, followed them on foot, filled with anxiety about her son. Then the soldiers went to the gardens, where they found Varius making preparations for a chariot-race and at the same time eagerly awaiting the news of his cousin's murder. Alarmed by the sudden clatter of the soldiers, he crouched down in a corner and covered himself with the curtain which was at the door of the bed-chamber, sending one of the prefects to the Camp to quiet the soldiers there and the other to placate those who had just entered the gardens. Then Antiochianus, one of the prefects, reminded the soldiers who had come to the gardens of their oath of allegiance and finally persuaded them not to kill the Emperor — for, in fact, only a few had come and the majority had remained with the standard, which the tribune Aristomachus had kept back. So much for what happened in the gardens.

XV. In the Camp, on the other hand, the soldiers replied to the entreaties of the prefect that they would spare Elagabalus' life on the condition that he would send away all his filthy creatures, his chariot-drivers, and his actors, and return to a decent mode of living, dismissing particularly those who, to the general sorrow, possessed the greatest influence over him and sold all his decisions, actual or pretended. He did, finally, dismiss Hierocles, Cordius, and Mirissimus and two other base favourites who were making him even more of a fool than he was naturally. The soldiers, furthermore, charged the prefects not to permit him to continue longer his present mode of living, and also to keep watch over Alexander that no violence might be done him, and at the same time to prevent the Caesar from seeing any of the friends of the Augustus, lest he imitate their baseness. But Elagabalus with earnest entreaties kept demanding back Hierocles, that most shameless of men, and daily increased his plotting against Alexander. Finally, on the Kalends of January, he refused to appear in public with his cousin — for they

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had been designated joint consuls. At last, however, when he was told by his grandmother and mother that the soldiers were threatening that they would kill him unless they saw that harmony was established between himself and his cousin, he put on the bordered toga and at the sixth hour of the day entered the senate, inviting his grandmother to the session and escorting her to a seat. But then he refused to proceed to the Capitolium to assume the vows for the state and conduct the usual ceremonies, and accordingly everything was done by the city-praetor, just as if there were no consuls there.

XVI. Nevertheless he did not give up the murder of his cousin, but first, for fear that if he killed him the senate would only turn to some one else, he gave orders that the senate should at once leave the city. Even all those senators who had no carriages or slaves were ordered to set out at once, some of them being carried by porters, others using animals that chance threw in their way or that they hired for money. And because Sabinus, a man of consular rank, to whom Ulpian dedicated some of his books, remained in the city, the Emperor called a centurion and ordered him to kill him, speaking in a low tone. But the centurion, who was rather deaf, thought that he was being ordered to eject Sabinus from the city and acted accordingly; and so a centurion's infirmity saved Sabinus' life. He dismissed both Ulpian the jurist because he was a righteous man and Silvinus the rhetorician, whom he had appointed tutor to Alexander. Silvinus, in fact, was put to death, but Ulpian was spared.

The soldiers, however, and particularly the members of the guard, either because they knew what evils were in store for Elagabalus, or because they foresaw his hatred for themselves, formed a conspiracy to set the state free. First they attacked the accomplices in his plan of murdering Alexander, killing some by tearing out their vital organs and others by piercing the anus, so that their deaths were as evil as their lives.

XVII. Next they fell upon Elagabalus himself and slew him in a latrine in which he had taken refuge. Then his body was dragged through the streets, and the soldiers further insulted it by thrusting it into a sewer. But since the sewer chanced to be too small to admit the corpse, they attached a weight to it to keep it from floating, and hurled it from the Aemilian Bridge into the Tiber, in order that it might never be buried. The body was also dragged around the Circus before it was thrown into the Tiber.

His name, that is to say the name Antoninus, was erased from the public records by order of the senate, -- though the name Varius Elagabalus was left --, for he had used the name Antoninus without valid claim, wishing to be thought the son of Antoninus. After his death he was dubbed the "Tiberine," the "Dragged," the "Filthy," and many other such names, all of which were to signify what seemed to have been done during his rule. And he was the only one of all the emperors whose body was dragged through the streets, thrust into a sewer, and hurled into the Tiber. This befell him as the result of the general hatred of all, against which particularly emperors must be on their guard, since those who do not win the love of the senate, the people, and the soldiers do not win the right of burial.

No public works of his are in existence, save the temple of the god Elagabalus (called by some the Sun, by others Jupiter), the Amphitheatre as restored after its destruction by fire, and the public bath in the Vicus Sulpicius, begun by Antoninus, the son of Severus. This bath, in fact, had been dedicated by Antoninus Caracalla, who bathed in it himself and opened it to the public, but the portico was left unbuilt, and this was added after his death by this spurious Antoninus, though actually completed by Alexander.

XVIII. He was the last of the Antonines (though many think that later the Gordians had the cognomen Antoninus, whereas they were really called Antonius and not Antoninus), a man so detestable for his life, his character, and his utter depravity that the senate expunged from the records even his name. I myself should not have referred to him as Antoninus save for the sake of identification, which frequently makes it necessary to use even those names which officially have been abolished.

With him also was slain his mother Symiamira, a most depraved woman and one worthy of such a son. And the first measure enacted after the death of Antoninus Elagabalus provided that no woman should ever enter the

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senate, and that whoever should cause a woman to enter, his life should be declared doomed and forfeited to the kingdom of the dead.

Concerning his life many filthy anecdotes have been put in writing, but since they are not worthy of being recorded, I have thought I ought to relate only such deeds as illustrate his extravagance. Some of these, it is said, were done before he ascended the throne, others after he was made emperor; for he himself declared that his models were Apicius among commoners and, among emperors, Otho and Vitellius.

XIX. For example, he was the first commoner to cover his couches with golden coverlets — for this was lawful then by authorization of Marcus Antoninus, who had sold at public auction all the imperial trappings. Also, he gave summer-banquets in various colours, one day a green banquet, another day an iridescent one, and next in order a blue one, varying them continually every day of the summer. Moreover, he was the first to use silver urns and casseroles, and vessels of chased silver, one hundred pounds in weight, some of them spoiled by the lewdest designs. He was also the first to concoct wine seasoned with mastich and with pennyroyal and all such mixtures, which our present luxury retains. And rose-wine, of which he had learned from others, he used to make more fragrant by adding pulverized pine-cone. In fact, all these kinds of cups are not met with in books before the time of Elagabalus. Indeed, for him life was nothing except a search after pleasures. He was the first to make force-meat of fish, or of oysters of various kinds or similar shell-fish, or of lobsters, crayfish, and squills. He used to strew roses and all manner of flowers, such as lilies, violets, hyacinths, and narcissus, over his banqueting-rooms, his couches and his porticoes, and then stroll about in them. He would refuse to swim in a pool that was not perfumed with saffron or some other well-known essence. And he could not rest easily on cushions that were not stuffed with rabbit-fur or feathers from under the wings of partridges, and he used, moreover, to change the pillows frequently.

XX. He often showed contempt for the senate, calling them slaves in togas, while he treated the Roman people as the tiller of a single farm and the equestrian order as nothing at all. He frequently invited the city-prefect to a drinking-bout after a banquet and also summoned the prefects of the guard, sending a master of ceremonies, in case they declined, to compel them to come. And he wished to create a city-prefect for each region of Rome, thus making fourteen for the city; and he would have done it, too, had he lived, for he was always ready to promote men of the basest character and the lowest calling.

He had couches made of solid silver for use in his banqueting-rooms and his bed-chambers. In imitation of Apicius he frequently ate camels-heels and also cocks-combs taken from the living birds, and the tongues of peacocks and nightingales, because he was told that one who ate them was immune from the plague. He served to the palace-attendants, moreover, huge platters heaped up with the viscera of mullets, and flamingo-brains, partridge-eggs, thrush-brains, and the heads of parrots, pheasants, and peacocks. And the beards of the mullets that he ordered to be served were so large that they were brought on, in place of cress or parsley or pickled beans or fenugreek, in well-filled bowls and disk-shaped platters — a particularly amazing performance.

XXI. He fed his dogs on goose-livers. Among his pets he had lions and leopards, which had been rendered harmless and trained by tamers, and these he would suddenly order after the dessert and the after-dessert to get up on the couches, thereby causing an amusing panic, for none knew that the beasts were harmless. He sent grapes from Apamea to his stables for his horses, and he fed parrots and pheasants to his lions and other wild animals. For ten successive days, moreover, he served wild sows' udders with the matrices, at the rate of thirty a day, serving, besides, peas with gold-pieces, lentils with onyx, beans with amber, and rice with pearls; and he also sprinkled pearls on fish and truffles in lieu of pepper. In a banqueting-room with a reversible ceiling he once overwhelmed his parasites with violets and other flowers, so that some of them were actually smothered to death, being unable to crawl out to the top. He flavoured his swimming-pools and bath-tubs with essence of spices or of roses or wormwood. And once he invited the common mob to a drinking-bout, and himself drank with the

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populace, taking so much that on seeing what he alone consumed, people supposed he had been drinking from one of his swimming-pools. As banquet-favors, he gave eunuchs, or four-horse chariots, or horses with saddles, or mules, or litters, or carriages, or a thousand aurei or a hundred pounds of silver.

XXII. At his banquets he would also distribute chances inscribed on spoons, the chance of one person reading "ten camels," of another "ten flies," of another "ten pounds of gold," of another "ten pounds of lead," of another "ten ostriches," of another "ten hens-eggs," so that they were chances indeed and men tried their luck. These he also gave at his games, distributing chances for ten bears or ten dormice, ten lettuces or ten pounds of gold. Indeed he was the first to introduce this practice of giving chances, which we still maintain. And the performers too he invited to what really were chances, giving as prizes a dead dog or a pound of beef, or else a hundred aurei, or a hundred pieces of silver, or a hundred coppers, and so on. All this so pleased the populace that after each occasion they rejoiced that he was emperor.

XXIII. He gave a naval spectacle, it is said, on the Circus-canals, which had been filled with wine, and he sprinkled the people's cloaks with perfume made from the wild grape; also he drove a chariot drawn by four elephants on the Vatican Hill, destroying the tombs which obstructed the way, and he harnessed four camels to a chariot at a private spectacle in the Circus. It is also said that he collected serpents with the aid of priests of the Marsic nation and suddenly let them loose before dawn, when the populace usually assembled for the more frequented games, and many people were injured by their fangs as well as in the general panic. He would wear a tunic made wholly of cloth of gold, or one made of purple, or a Persian one studded with jewels, and at such times he would say that he felt oppressed by the weight of his pleasures. He even wore jewels on his shoes, sometimes engraved ones — a practice which aroused the derision of all, as if, forsooth, the engraving of famous artists could be seen on jewels attached to his feet. He wished to wear also a jeweled diadem in order that his beauty might be increased and his face look more like a woman's; and in his own house he did wear one. He promised a phoenix to some guests, it is said, or in lieu of the bird a thousand pounds of gold, and thus sum he handed out in the imperial residence. He constructed swimming-pools filled with sea-water in places especially far from the coast, and would hand them over to individual friends who swam in them, or at another time he would fill one with fish. One summer he made a mountain of snow in the pleasure-garden attached to his house, having snow carried there for the purpose. When on the sea-coast he never ate fish, but in places most remote from the sea he regularly served all manner of sea-food, and the country-folk in the interior he fed with the milt of lampreys and pikes.

XXIV. The fish that he ate were cooked in a bluish sauce that preserved their natural colour, as though they were still in the sea-water. He supplied swimming-pools that he used for the moment with essence of roses and with the flowers themselves, and when he bathed with all his courtiers he would furnish oil of nard for the hot-rooms; he also furnished balsam-oil for the lamps. He never had intercourse with the same woman twice except with his wife, and he opened brothels in his house for his friends, his clients, and his slaves. He never spent less on a banquet than one hundred thousand sesterces, that is, thirty pounds of silver; and sometimes he even spent as much as three million when all the cost was computed. In fact, he even outdid the banquets of Vitellius and Apicius. He would take fish from his ponds by the ox-load, and then, as he passed through the market, bewail the public poverty. He used to bind his parasites to a water-wheel and, by a turn of the wheel, plunge them into the water and then bring them back to the surface again, calling them meanwhile river-Ixions. He used Lacedaemonian stone and porphyry to pave the open spaces in the Palace, which he called Antonine; this pavement lasted down to within our own memory but was lately torn up and destroyed. And he planned to erect a single column of enormous size, which could be ascended inside, and to place on its summit the god Elagabalus, but he could not find enough stone, even though he planned to bring it from the district of Thebes.

XXV. When his friends became drunk he would often shut them up, and suddenly during the night let in his lions and leopards and bears — all of them harmless — so that his friends on awakening at dawn, or worse, during the night, would find lions and leopards and bears in the room with themselves; and some even died from this cause. Some of his humbler friends he would seat on air-pillows instead of on cushions and let out the air while they

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were dining, so that often the diners were suddenly found under the table. Finally, he was the first to think of placing a semi-circular group on the ground instead of on couches, with the purpose of having the air-pillows loosened by slaves who stood at the feet of the guests and the air thus let out.

When adultery was represented on the stage, he would order what was usually done in pretense to be carried out in fact. He often purchased harlots from all the procurers and then set them free. Once during a private conversation the question arose as to how many ruptured people there were in the city of Rome, and he thereupon issued an order that all should be noted and brought to his baths, and then he bathed with them, some of them being men of distinction. Before a banquet he would frequently watch gladiatorial fights and boxing matches, and he had a couch spread for himself in an upper gallery and during luncheon exhibited criminals in a wild-beast hunt. His parasites would often be served during dessert with food made of wax or wood or ivory, sometimes of earthenware, or at times even of marble or stone; so that all that he ate himself would be served to them too, but different in substance and only to be looked at, and all the while they would merely drink with each course and wash their hands, just as if they really had eaten.

XXVI. He was the first of the Romans, it is said, who wore clothing wholly of silk, although garments partly of silk were in use before his time. Linen that had been washed he would never touch, saying that washed linen was worn only by beggars. He would often appear in public after dinner dressed in a Dalmatian tunic, and then he would call himself Fabius Gurges or Scipio, because he was wearing the same kind of clothing which Fabius and Cornelius wore when in their youth they were brought out in public by their parents in order to improve their manners.

He gather together in a public building all the harlots from the Circus, the theatre, the Stadium and all other places of amusement, and from the public baths, and then delivered a speech to them, as one might to soldiers, calling them "comrades" and discoursing upon various kinds of postures and debaucheries. Afterwards he invited to a similar gathering procurers, catamites collected together from all sides, and lascivious boys and young men. And whereas he had appeared before the harlots in a woman's costume and with protruding bosom, he met the catamites in the garb of a boy who is exposed for prostitution. After his speech he announced a largess of three aurei for each, just as if they were soldiers, and asked them to pray the gods that they might find others to recommend to him.

He used, too, to play jokes on his slaves, even ordering them to bring him a thousand pounds of spiders-webs and offering them a prize; and he collected, it is said, ten thousand pounds, and then remarked that one could realize from that how great a city was Rome. He also used to send to his parasites jars of frogs, scorpions, snakes, and other such reptiles, as their yearly allowance of provisions, and he would shut up a vast number of flies in jars of this sort and call them tamed bees.

XXVII. He often brought four-horse chariots from the Circus into his banqueting-rooms or porticoes while he lunched or dined, compelling his guests to drive, even though they were old men and some of them had held public office. Even when emperor, he would give an order to bring in to him ten thousand mice, a thousand weasels, or a thousand shrew-mice. So skillful were his confectioners and dairymen, that all the various kinds of food that were served by his cooks, either meat-cooks or fruit-cooks, they also would serve up, making them now out of confectionery or again out of milk-products. His parasites he would serve with dinners made of glass, and at times he would send to their table only embroidered napkins with pictures of the viands that were set before himself, as many in number as the courses which he was to have, so that they were served only with representations made by the needle or the loom. Sometimes, however, paintings too were displayed to them, so that they were served with the whole dinner, as it were, but were all the while tormented by hunger. He would also mix jewels with apples and flowers, and he would throw out of the window quite as much food as he served to his friends. He gave an order, too, that an amount of public grain equal to one year's tribute should be given to all the harlots, procurers, and catamites who were within the walls, and promised an equal amount to those without, for, thanks to the foresight of Severus and Trajan, there was in Rome at that time a store of grain equal to

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seven years' tribute.

XXVIII. He would harness four huge dogs to a chariot and drive about within the royal residence, and he did the same thing, before he was made emperor, on his country-estates. He even appeared in public driving four stags of vast size. Once he harnessed lions to his chariot and called himself the Great Mother, and on another occasion, tigers, and called himself Dionysus; and he always appeared in the particular garb in which the deity that he was representing was usually depicted. He kept at Rome tiny Egyptian snakes, called by the natives "good genii," besides hippopotami, a crocodile, and a rhinoceros, and, in fact, everything Egyptian which was of such a kind that it could be supplied. And sometimes at his banquets he served ostriches, saying that the Jews had been commanded to eat them.

It seems indeed a surprising thing that he is said to have done when he invited men of the highest rank to a luncheon and covered a semi-circular couch with saffron-flowers, and then said that he was providing them with the kind of hay that their rank demanded. The occupations of the day he performed at night, and those of the night in the daytime, and he considered it a mark of luxury to wait until a late hour before rising from sleep and beginning to hold levee, and also to remain awake until morning. He received his courtiers every day, and he seldom let any go without a gift, save for those whom he found to be thrifty, for he regarded these as worthless.

XXIX. His chariots were made of jewels and gold, for he scorned those that were merely of silver or ivory or bronze. He would harness women of the greatest beauty to a wheel-barrow in fours, in twos, or in threes or even more, and would drive them about, usually naked himself, as were also the women who were pulling him.

He had the custom, moreover, of asking to a dinner eight bald men, or else eight one-eyed men, or eight men who suffered from gout, or eight deaf men, or eight men of dark complexion, or eight tall men, or, again, eight fat men, his purpose being, in the case of these last, since they could not be accommodated on one couch, to call forth general laughter. He would present to his guests all the silver-plate that he had in the banqueting-room and all the supply of goblets, and he did it very often too. He was the first Roman emperor to serve at a public banquet fish-pickle mixed with water, for previously this had been only a soldier's dish -- a usage which later was promptly restored by Alexander. He would propose to his guests, furthermore, by way of a feat, that they should invent new sauces for giving flavour to the food, and he would offer a very large prize for the man whose invention should please him, even presenting him with a silk garment -- then regarded as a rarity and a mark of honour. On the other hand, if the sauce did not please him, the inventor was ordered to continue eating it until he invented a better one. Of course he always sat among flowers or perfumes of great value, and he loved to hear the prices of the food served at his table exaggerated, asserting it was an appetizer for the banquet.

XXX. He got himself up as a confectioner, a perfumer, a cook, a shop-keeper, or a procurer, and he even practised all these occupations in his own house continually. At one dinner where there were many tables he brought in the heads of six hundred ostriches in order that the brains might be eaten. Occasionally he gave a banquet in which he would serve twenty-two courses of extraordinary viands, and between each course he and his guests would bathe and dally with women, all taking an oath that they were deriving enjoyment. And once he gave a banquet in which one course was served in the house of each guest, and although one lived on the Capitoline Hill, one on the Palatine, one beyond the Rampart, one on the Caelian Hill, and one across the Tiber, nevertheless each course was served in order in one of the houses, and they went about to the homes of all. It was difficult, therefore, to finish the banquet within a whole day, especially as between the courses they bathed and dallied with women. He always served a course of Sybariticum, consisting of oil and fish-pickle, which the men of Sybaris invented in the year in which they all perished. It is further related of him that he constructed baths in many places, bathed in them once, and immediately demolished them, merely in order that he might not derive any advantage from them. And he is said to have done the same with houses, imperial headquarters, and summer-dwellings. However, these and some other things which surpass credence, I believe to have been fabricated by those who wished to vilify Elagabalus in order to curry favour with Alexander.

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XXXI. He purchased, it is said, a very famous and very beautiful harlot for one hundred thousand sesterces, and then kept her untouched, as though she were a virgin. When some one asked him before he was made emperor, "Are you not afraid of becoming poor?" he replied, so they say, "What could be better than that I should be my own heir, and my wife's too?" He had abundant means besides, bequeathed to him by many out of regard for his father. Furthermore, he said that he did not wish to have sons, lest one of them should chance to be thrifty. He would have perfumes from India burned without any coals in order that the fumes might fill his apartments. Even while a commoner he never made a journey with fewer than sixty wagons, though his grandmother Varia used to protest that he would squander all his substance; but after he became emperor he would take with him, it is said, as many as six hundred, asserting that the king of the Persians travelled with ten thousand camels and Nero with five hundred carriages. The reason for all these vehicles was the vast number of his procurers and bawds, harlots, catamites and lusty partners in depravity. In the public baths he always bathed with the women, and he even treated them himself with a depilatory ointment, which he applied also to his own beard, and shameful though it be to say it, in the same place where the women were treated and at the same hour. He shaved his minions' groins, using the razor with his own hand -- with which he would then shave his own beard. He would strew gold and silver dust about a portico and then lament that he could not strew the dust of amber also; and he did this often when he proceeded on foot to his horse or his carriage, as they do today with golden sand.

XXXII. He never put on the same shoes twice and never, it is said, wore the same ring a second time. He often tore up costly garments. Once he took a whale and weighed it and then sent his friends its weight in fish. He sank some heavily laden ships in the harbour and then said that this was a sign of greatness of soul. He used vessels of gold for relieving himself and his urinals were made of murra or onyx. And he is said to have remarked: "If I ever have an heir, I shall appoint a guardian for him, to make him do what I myself have done and intend to do." He was accustomed, furthermore, to have dinners served to him of the following kind: one day he would eat nothing at all but pheasant, serving only pheasant-meat at every course; another day he would serve only chicken, another some kind of fish and again a different kind, again pork, or ostrich, or greens, or fruit, or sweets, or dairy-products. He would often shut up his friends in halting-places for the night with old hags from Ethiopia and compel them to stay there until morning, saying that the most beautiful women were kept in these places. He did this same thing with boys too -- for then, before the time of Philip that is, such a thing was lawful. Sometimes he laughed so loud in the theatre that no one else could be heard by the audience. He could sing and dance, play the pipes, the horn and the pandura, and he also performed on the organ. On one single day, it is said, he visited every prostitute from the Circus, the theatre, the Amphitheatre, and all the public places of Rome, covering his head with a muleteer's cap in order to escape recognition; he did not, however, gratify his passions, but merely gave an aureus to each prostitute, saying as he did so: "Let no one know it, but this is a present from Antoninus."

XXXIII. He invented certain new kinds of vice, even going beyond the perversities used by the debauchees of old, and he was well acquainted with all the arrangements of Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero.

The prophecy had been made to him by some Syrian priests that he would die a violent death. And so he had prepared cords entwined with purple and scarlet silk, in order that, if need arose, he could put an end to his life by the noose. He had gold swords, too, in readiness, with which to stab himself, should any violence impend. He also had poisons ready, in ceraunites and sapphires and emeralds, with which to kill himself if destruction threatened. And he also built a very high tower from which to throw himself down, constructed of boards gilded and jeweled in his own presence, for even his death, he declared, should be costly and marked by luxury, in order that it might be said that no one had ever died in this fashion. But all these preparations availed him nothing, for, as we have said, he was slain by common soldiers, dragged through the streets, contemptuously thrust into sewers, and finally cast into the Tiber.

He was the last of those in public life to bear the name Antoninus, and all knew that in the case of this Antoninus his life was as false as his name.

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XXXIV. It may perhaps seem strange to some, revered Constantine, that such a scourge as I have described should ever have sat on the throne of the emperors, and, moreover, for nearly three years. Such was the lack at that time in the state of any who could remove him from the government of Rome's majesty, whereas a deliverer from the tyrant had not been wanting in the case of Nero, Vitellius, Caligula, and other such emperors. But first of all I ask for pardon for having set down in writing what I have found in various authors, even though I have passed over in silence many vile details and those things which may not even be spoken of without the greatest shame. But whatever I have told you, I have covered up as best I could by the use of veiled terms. Then too I have always believed that we must remember what Your Clemency is wont to say: "It is Fortune that makes a man emperor." There have indeed been unrighteous rulers and even very base ones. But, as Your Piety is wont to declare, men must look to it that those be worthy of the imperial office whom the power of Fate has called to the destiny of being emperor. Furthermore, since this man was the last of the Antonines and never again did one of this name appear in public life as emperor, the following fact must also be mentioned, in order that no confusion may arise when I shall begin to tell of the two Gordians, father and son, who desired to be called after the family of the Antonines: in the first place, they had not the same surname but only the praenomen of the Antonines; in the second, as I find in many books, their name was Antonius, not Antoninus.

XXXV. So much concerning Elagabalus, the details of whose life you have wished me, though unwilling and reluctant, to gather together from Greek and Latin books and to set down in writing and present to you, inasmuch as I have already presented the lives of earlier emperors.

Now I shall begin to write of emperors who followed after. Of these the most righteous and the most worthy of careful narration was Alexander (who was emperor for thirteen years, whereas the others ruled for but six months or at most for one or two years), the most distinguished was Aurelian, but the glory of them all was Claudius, the founder of your family. About this man I fear to tell the truth in writing to Your Clemency, lest I may seem to the malicious to be a flatterer; but yet I shall be delivered from the envy of evil men, inasmuch as I have seen that in the eyes of others also he was most illustrious. To these rulers must be joined Diocletian, father of the golden age, and Maximian, father of the iron, as they commonly say, and all the others down to the time of Your Piety. But as for you, O revered Augustus, you shall receive honour in the many and more eloquent pages of those to whom a more kindly nature has granted this boon. To these emperors we must add Licinius and Maxentius, all whose power has been made subject to your sway, writing of them, however, in such a way that full justice shall be done to their prowess. For I will not, as is the wont of many writers, detract from the greatness of those who have been vanquished, since I perceive that if, in writing of them, I shall tell the whole truth concerning the noble qualities which they possessed, it will but enhance your glory.