

The Lives of the Caesars: Titus

Suetonius

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Translated by J. C. Rolfe.

I. TITUS, of the same surname as his father, was the delight and darling of the human race; such ability had he, by nature, art, or good fortune, to win the affections of all men, and that, too, which is no easy task, while he was emperor; for as a private citizen, and even during his father's rule, he did not escape hatred, much less public criticism. He was born on the third day before the Kalends of January [*December 30, 41 C.E.*], in the year memorable for the death of Gaius, in a mean house near the Septizonium [*Some building of seven stories; the famous Septizonium on the Palatine was the work of Septimius Severus*] and in a very small dark room besides; for it still remains and is on exhibition.

II. He was brought up at court in company with Britannicus and taught the same subjects by the same masters. At that time, so they say, a physiognomist was brought in by Narcissus, the freedman of Claudius, to examine Britannicus, and declared most positively that he would never become emperor; but that Titus, who was standing near by at the time, would surely rule. The boys were so intimate too, that it is believed that when Britannicus drained the fatal draught, Titus, who was reclining at his side, also tasted of the potion and for a long time suffered from an obstinate disorder. Titus did not forget all this, but later set up a golden statue of his friend in the Palace, and dedicated another equestrian statue of ivory and attended it in the processions in the Circus, where it is still carried to this day.

III. Even in boyhood his bodily and mental gifts were conspicuous and they became more and more so as he advanced in years. He had a handsome person, in which there was no less dignity than grace, and was uncommonly strong, although he was not tall of stature and had a rather protruding belly. His memory was extraordinary, and he had an aptitude for almost all the arts, both of war and of peace. Skillful in arms and horsemanship, he made speeches and wrote verses in Latin and Greek with ease and readiness, and even off-hand. He was besides not unacquainted with music, but sang and played the harp agreeably and skillfully. I have heard from many sources that he used also to write shorthand with great speed and would amuse himself by playful contests with his secretaries; also that he could imitate any handwriting that he had ever seen and often declared that he might have been the prince of forgers.

IV. He served as military tribune both in Germania and in Britannia, winning a high reputation for energy and no less for integrity, as is evident from the great number of his statues and busts in both those provinces and from the inscriptions they bear. After his military service he pleaded in the Forum, rather for glory than as a profession, and at the same time took to wife Arrecina Tertulla, whose father, though only a Roman eques, had once been prefect of the Praetorian cohorts; on her death he replaced her by Marcia Furnilla, a lady of a very distinguished family, but divorced her after he had acknowledged a daughter which she bore him. Then, after holding the office of quaestor [*67 C.E.*], as commander of a legion he subjugated the two strong cities of Tarichaeae and Gamala in Judaea, having his horse killed under him in one battle and mounting another, whose rider had fallen fighting by his side.

V. Presently he was sent [*68 C.E.*] to congratulate Galba on becoming ruler of the state, and attracted attention wherever he went, through the belief that he had been sent for to be adopted. But observing that everything was once more in a state of turmoil, he turned back, and visiting the oracle of the Paphian Venus, to consult it about his voyage, he was also encouraged to hope

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for imperial power. Soon realizing his hope [*By the accession of his father Vespasian*] and left behind to complete the conquest of Judaea, in the final attack on Jerusalem he slew twelve of the defenders with as many arrows; and he took the city on his daughter's birthday, so delighting the soldiers and winning their devotion that they hailed him as Emperor and detained him from time to time, when he would leave the province, urging him with prayers and even with threats either to stay or to take them all with him. This aroused the suspicion that he had tried to revolt from his father and make himself King of the East; and he strengthened this suspicion on his way to Alexandria by wearing a diadem at the consecration of the bull Apis in Memphis, an act quite in accord with the usual ceremonial of that ancient religion, but unfavorably interpreted by some. Because of this he hastened to Italia, and putting in at Rhegium and then at Puteoli in a transport ship, he went with all speed from there to Rome, where as if to show that the reports about him were groundless, he surprised his father with the greeting, "I am here, father; I am here."

VI. From that time on he never ceased to act as the emperor's partner and even as his protector. He took part in his father's triumph and was censor [73 C.E.] with him. He was also his colleague in the tribunician power and in seven consulships [70, 72, 74–77, 79 C.E.]. He took upon himself the discharge of almost all duties, personally dictated letters and wrote edicts in his father's name, and even read his speeches in the Senate in lieu of a quaestor. He also assumed the command of the Praetorian Guard, which before that time had never been held except by a Roman eques, and in this office conducted himself in a somewhat arrogant and tyrannical fashion. For whenever he himself regarded anyone with suspicion, he would secretly send some of the Guard to the various theaters and camps, to demand their punishment as if by consent of all who were present; and then he would put them out of the way without delay. Among these was Aulus Caecina, an ex-consul, whom he invited to dinner and then ordered to be stabbed almost before he left the dining-room; but in this case he was led by a pressing danger, having got possession of an autograph copy of an harangue which Caecina had prepared to deliver to the soldiers. Although by such conduct he provided for his safety in the future, he incurred such odium at the time that hardly anyone ever came to the throne with so evil a reputation or so much against the desires of all.

VII. Besides cruelty, he was also suspected of riotous living, since he protracted his revels until the middle of the night with the most prodigal of his friends; likewise of unchastity because of his troops of catamites and eunuchs, and his notorious passion for Queen Berenice, to whom it was even said that he promised marriage. He was suspected of greed as well; for it was well known that in cases which came before his father he put a price on his influence and accepted bribes. In short, people not only thought, but openly declared, that he would be a second Nero. But this reputation turned out to his advantage and gave place to the highest praise, when no fault was discovered in him, but on the contrary the highest virtues. His banquets were pleasant rather than extravagant. He chose as his friends men whom succeeding emperors also retained as indispensable alike to themselves and to the State, and of whose services they made special use. Berenice he sent from Rome at once, against her will and against his own. Some of his most beloved paramours, although they were such skillful dancers that they later became stage favorites, he not only ceased to cherish any longer, but even to witness their public performances. He took away nothing from any citizen. He respected others' property, if anyone ever did; in fact, he would not accept even proper and customary presents. And yet, he was second to none of his predecessors in munificence. At the dedication [80 C.E.] of the amphitheatre and of the baths which were hastily built near it, he gave a most magnificent and costly gladiatorial show. He presented a sham sea-fight too in the old naumachia [*See Aug. xliii. 1*], and in the same place a combat of gladiators exhibiting five thousand wild beasts of every kind in a single day.

VIII. He was most kindly by nature, and whereas in accordance with a custom established by Tiberius, all the Caesars who followed him refused to regard favors granted by previous emperors as valid, unless they had themselves conferred the same ones on the same individuals, Titus was the first to ratify them all in a single edict, without allowing himself to be asked. Moreover, in the

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case of other requests made of him, it was his fixed rule not to let anyone go away without hope. Even when his household officials warned him that he was promising more than he could perform, he said that it was not right for anyone to go away sorrowful from an interview with his emperor. On another occasion, remembering at dinner that he had done nothing for anybody all that day, he gave utterance to that memorable and praiseworthy remark: "Friends, I have lost a day." The whole body of the people in particular he treated with such indulgence on all occasions, that once, at a gladiatorial show, he declared that he would give it, "not after his own inclinations, but those of the spectators"; and what is more, he kept his word. For he refused nothing which anyone asked, and even urged them to ask for what they wished. Furthermore, he openly displayed his partiality for Thracian gladiators and bantered the people about it by words and gestures [*By humorously pretending to wrangle with those who favored other gladiators than the Thracians*], always, however, preserving his dignity, as well as observing justice. Not to omit any act of condescension, he sometimes bathed in the baths which he had built, in company with the common people. There were some dreadful disasters during his reign, such as the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in Campania [79 C.E.], a fire at Rome which continued three days and as many nights [79 C.E.], and a plague the like of which had hardly ever been known before [80 C.E.]. In these many great calamities he showed not merely the concern of an emperor, but even a father's surpassing love, now offering consolation in edicts, and now lending aid so far as his means allowed. He chose commissioners by lot from among the ex-consuls for the relief of Campania; and the property of those who lost their lives by Vesuvius and had no heirs left alive he applied to the rebuilding of the buried cities. During the fire in Rome he made no remark except "I am ruined" [*Implying that it was his personal loss, which he would make good*], and he set aside all the ornaments of his villas for the public buildings and temples, and put several men of the equestrian order in charge of the work, that everything might be done with the greater dispatch. For curing the plague and diminishing the force of the epidemic there was no aid, human or divine, which he did not employ, searching for every kind of sacrifice, and all kinds of medicines. Among the evils of the times were the informers and their instigators, who had enjoyed a long standing licence. After these had been soundly beaten in the Forum with scourges and cudgels, and finally led in procession across the arena of the amphitheatre, he had some of them put up and sold, and others deported to the wildest of the islands. To further discourage for all time any who might think of venturing on similar practices, among other precautions he made it unlawful for anyone to be tried under several laws for the same offence, or for any inquiry to be made as to the legal status of any deceased person after a stated number of years.

IX. Having declared that he would accept the office of pontifex maximus for the purpose of keeping his hands unstained, he was true to his promise; for after that he neither caused nor connived at the death of any man, although he sometimes had no lack of reasons for taking vengeance; but he swore that he would rather be killed than kill. When two men of patrician family were found guilty of aspiring to the throne, he satisfied himself with warning them to abandon their attempt, saying that imperial power was the gift of fate, and promising that if there was anything else they desired, he himself would bestow it. Then he sent his couriers with all speed to the mother of one of them, for she was some distance off, to relieve her anxiety by reporting that her son was safe; and he not only invited the men themselves to dinner among his friends, but on the following day at a gladiatorial show he purposely placed them near him, and when the swords of the contestants were offered him [*The weapons of gladiators were regularly examined by the "editor", or giver of the games, to see if they were sharp enough; cf., Dio, 68.3, who tells a similar story of the Emperor Nerva*], handed them over for their inspection. It is even said that inquiring into the horoscope of each of them, he declared that danger threatened them both, but at some future time and from another, as turned out to be the case. Although his brother never ceased plotting against him, but almost openly stirred up the armies to revolt and meditated flight to them, he had not the heart to put him to death or banish him from the court, or even to hold him in less honor than before. On the contrary, as he had done from the very first day of his

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rule, he continued to declare that he was his partner and successor, and sometimes he privately begged him with tears and prayers to be willing at least to return his affection.

X. In the meantime he was cut off by death, to the loss of mankind rather than to his own. After finishing the public games, at the close of which he wept bitterly in the presence of the people, he went to the Sabine territory somewhat cast down because a victim had escaped as he was sacrificing and because it had thundered from a clear sky. Then at the very first stopping place he was seized with a fever, and as he was being carried on from there in a litter, it is said that he pushed back the curtains, looked up to heaven, and lamented bitterly that his life was being taken from him contrary to his deserts; for he said that there was no act of his life of which he had cause to repent, save one only. What this was he did not himself disclose at the time, nor could anyone easily divine. Some think that he recalled the intimacy which he had with his brother's wife; but Domitia swore most solemnly that this did not exist, although she would not have denied it if it had been in the least true, but on the contrary would have boasted of it, as she was most ready to do of all her scandalous actions.

XI. He died in the same farmhouse as his father [*The old homestead at Cutilae, near Rheate; see Vesp. xxiv. That this continued to be a villa rustica is implied in Vesp. ii.1*], on the Ides of September, two years, two months and twenty days after succeeding Vespasian, in the forty-second year of his age [*September 13, 81 C.E.*]. When his death was made known, the whole populace mourned as they would for a loss in their own families, the Senate hastened to the *Curia* before it was summoned by proclamation, and with the doors still shut, and then with them open, rendered such thanks to him and heaped such praise on him after death as they had never done even when he was alive and present.
