

The Lives of the Caesars: Nero

Suetonius

Table of Contents

<u>The Lives of the Caesars: Nero</u>	1
<u>Suetonius</u>	2

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Translated by J. C. Rolfe.

I. OF the Domitian family two branches have acquired distinction, the Calvini and the Ahenobarbi.

The latter have as the founder of their race and the origin of their surname Lucius Domitius, to whom, as he was returning from the country, there once appeared twin youths of more than mortal majesty, so it is said, and bade him carry to the Senate and People the news of a victory which was as yet unknown. And as a token of their divinity it is said that they stroked his cheeks and turned his black beard to a ruddy hue, like that of bronze. This sign was perpetuated in his descendants, a great part of whom had red beards. After they had attained seven consulships [261, 122, 96, 94, 54, & 32 *B.C.E.*; 32 *C.E.*], a triumph, and two censorships, and were enrolled among the patricians, they all continued to use the same surname. They confined their forenames to Gnaeus and Lucius, and used even these with a noteworthy variation, now conferring each one on three members of the family in succession, and now giving them to individual members in turn. Thus the first, second, and third of the Ahenobarbi, we are told, were called Lucius, the next three in order Gnaeus, while all those that followed were called in turn first Lucius and then Gnaeus. It seems to me worth while to give an account of several members of this family, to show more clearly that though Nero degenerated from the good qualities of his ancestors, he yet reproduced the vices of each of them, as if transmitted to him by natural inheritance.

II. To begin then somewhat far back, his great-grandfather's grandfather, Gnaeus Domitius, when tribune of the commons, was enraged at the pontiffs for choosing another than himself in his father's place among them, and transferred the right of filling vacancies in the priesthoods from the colleges themselves to the Senate. Then, having vanquished the Allobroges and the Arverni in his consulship [122 *B.C.E.*], he rode through the province on an elephant, attended by a throng of soldiers, in a kind of triumphal procession. He it was of whom the orator Licinius Crassus said that it was not surprising that he had a brazen beard, since he had a face of iron and a heart of lead. His son, who was praetor at the time, summoned Gaius Caesar to an investigation before the Senate at the close of his consulship, because it was thought that his administration had been in violation of the auspices and the laws. Afterwards, in his own consulship [64 *B.C.E.*], he tried to deprive Caesar of the command of the armies in Gallia, and being named Caesar's successor by his party, was taken prisoner at Corfinium at the beginning of the civil war. Granted his freedom, he at first gave courage by his presence to the people of Massilia, who were hard pressed by their besiegers, but suddenly abandoned them and at last fell in the battle at Pharsalos. He was a man of no great resolution, though he had a violent temper, and when he once attempted to kill himself in a fit of despair and terror, he so shrank from the thought of death that he changed his mind and vomited up the poison, conferring freedom on his physician, since, knowing his master, he had purposely given him what was not a fatal dose. When Gnaeus Pompeius brought forward the question of the treatment of those who were neutral and sided with neither party, he alone was for regarding them as hostile.

III. He left a son, who was beyond all question better than the rest of the family. He was condemned to death by the Pedian law among those implicated in Caesar's death, though he was guiltless, and accordingly joined Brutus and Cassius, who were his near relatives. After the death of both leaders he retained the fleet of which he had previously been made commander, and even added to it, and it was not until his party had been everywhere routed that he surrendered it to Marcus Antonius, of his own free will and as if it were a great favor. He, too, was the only one of those who were condemned by that same law who was allowed to return to his native land, where he successively held all the highest offices. When the civil strife was subsequently renewed, and he was appointed one of Antony's lieutenants, he did not venture, owing to a sudden attack of illness, to accept the chief command

The Lives of the Caesars: Nero

when it was offered him by those who were ashamed of Cleopatra, nor yet positively to decline it; but he went over to Augustus and a few days later died. Even he did not escape with an unblemished reputation, for Antonius openly declared that he had changed sides from desire for the company of his mistress, Servilia Nais.

IV. He was the father of the Domitius who was later well known from being named in Augustus' will as the purchaser of his goods and chattels, a man no less famous in his youth for his skill in driving than he was later the winning the insignia of a triumph in the war in Germania. But he was haughty, extravagant, and cruel, and when he was only an aedile, forced the censor Lucius Plancus to make way for him on the street. While holding the offices of praetor and consul, he brought Roman equites and matrons on the stage to act a farce. He gave beast-baitings both in the Circus and in all the regions of the city; also a gladiatorial show, but with such inhuman cruelty that Augustus, after his private warning was disregarded, was forced to restrain him by an edict.

V. He had by the elder Antonia a son, Domitius, who became the father of Nero, a man hateful in every walk of life; for when he had gone to the East on the staff of the young Gaius Caesar [*Caligula*], he slew one of his own freedmen for refusing to drink as much as he was ordered, and when he was in consequence dismissed from the number of Gaius' friends, he lived not a whit less lawlessly. On the contrary, in a village on the Appian Way, suddenly whipping up his team, he purposely ran over and killed a boy, and right in the Roman Forum he gouged out the eye of a Roman eques for being too outspoken in chiding him. He was, moreover, so dishonest that he not only cheated some bankers of the prices of wares which he had bought, but in his praetorship he even defrauded the victors in the chariot races of the amount of their prizes. When for this reason he was held up to scorn by the jests of his own sister, and the managers of the troupes made complaint, he issued an edict that the prizes should thereafter be paid on the spot. Just before the death of Tiberius he was also charged with treason, as well as with acts of adultery and with incest with his sister Lepida, but escaped owing to the change of emperors, and died of dropsy at Pyrgi, after acknowledging Nero son of Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus.

VI. Nero was born at Antium nine months after the death of Tiberius, on the eighteenth day before the Kalends of January [*December 15, 37 C.E.*], just as the sun rose, so that he was touched by its rays almost before he could be laid upon the grounds. Many people at once made many direful predictions from his horoscope, and a remark of his father Domitius was also regarded as an omen; for while receiving the congratulations of his friends, he said that "nothing that was not abominable and a public bane could be born of Agrippina and himself." Another manifest indication of Nero's future unhappiness occurred on the day of his purification; for when Gaius Caesar was asked by his sister to give the child whatever name he liked, he looked at his uncle Claudius, who later became emperor and adopted Nero, and said that he gave him his name. This he did, not seriously, but in jest, and Agrippina scorned the proposal, because at that time Claudius was one of the laughing-stocks of the court. At the age of three he lost his father, being left heir to a third of his estate; but even this he did not receive in full, since his fellow heir Gaius seized all the property. Then his mother was banished too, and he was brought up at the house of his aunt Lepida almost in actual want, under two tutors, a dancer and a barber. But when Claudius became emperor, Nero not only recovered his father's property, but was also enriched by an inheritance from his stepfather, Passienus Crispus. When his mother was recalled from banishment and reinstated, he became so prominent through her influence that it leaked out that Messalina, wife of Claudius, had sent emissaries to strangle him as he was taking his noonday nap, regarding him as a rival of Britannicus. An addition to this bit of gossip is, that the would-be assassins were frightened away by a snake which darted out from under his pillow. The only foundation for this tale was, that there was found in his bed near the pillow the slough of a serpent; but nevertheless at his mother's desire he had the skin enclosed in a golden bracelet, and wore it for a long time on his left arm. But when at last the memory of his mother grew hateful to him, he threw it away, and afterwards in the time of his extremity sought it again in vain.

VII. While he was still a young, half-grown boy, he took part in the game of Troy at a performance in the Circus with great self-possession and success. In the eleventh year of his age [*50 C.E.*] he was adopted by Claudius and consigned to the training of Annaeus Seneca, who was then already a senator. They say that on the following night Seneca dreamt that he was teaching Gaius Caesar, and Nero soon proved the dream prophetic by revealing the cruelty of his disposition at the earliest possible opportunity. For merely because his brother Britannicus had, after his adoption, greeted him as usual as Ahenobarbus, he tried to convince his father [*Claudius*] that Britannicus was a changeling. Also, when his aunt Lepida was accused, he publicly gave testimony against her to gratify his mother, who was using every effort to ruin Lepida. At his formal introduction

The Lives of the Caesars: Nero

into public life he announced a largess to the people and a gift of money to the soldiers, ordered a drill of the praetorians and headed them shield in hand; and thereafter returned thanks to his father in the Senate. In the latter's consulship he pleaded the cause of the people of Bononia before him in Latin, and of those of Rhodes and Ilium in Greek. His first appearance as judge was when he was prefect of the city during the Latin festival, when the most celebrated pleaders vied with one another in bringing before him, not trifling and brief cases according to the usual custom, but many of the highest importance, though this had been forbidden by Claudius. Shortly afterwards he took Octavia to wife and gave games and a beast-baiting in the Circus, that health might be vouchsafed Claudius.

VIII. When the death of Claudius [54 C.E.] was made public, Nero, who was seventeen years old, went forth to the watch between the sixth and seventh hour, since no earlier time for the formal beginning of his reign seemed suitable because of bad omens throughout the day. Hailed emperor on the steps of the Palace, he was carried in a litter to the Praetorian camp, and after a brief address to the soldiers was taken from there to the Curia, which he did not leave until evening, of the unbounded honors that were heaped upon him refusing but one, the title of father of his country, and that because of his youth.

IX. Then, beginning with a display of filial piety, he gave Claudius a magnificent funeral, spoke his eulogy, and deified him. He paid the highest honors to the memory of his father Domitius. He left to his mother the management of all public and private business. Indeed, on the first day of his rule he gave to the tribune on guard the watchword "The Best of Mothers," and afterwards he often rode with her through the streets in her litter. He established a colony at Antium, enrolling the veterans of the Praetorian Guard, and joining with them the wealthiest of the chief centurions, whom he compelled to change their residence; and he also made a harbor there at great expense.

X. To make his good intentions still more evident, he declared that he would rule according to the principles of Augustus, and he let slip no opportunity for acts of generosity and mercy, or even for displaying his affability.. The more oppressive sources of revenue he either abolished or moderated. He reduced the rewards paid to informers against violators of the Papian law to one fourth of the former amount. He distributed four hundred sesterces to each man of the people, and granted to the most distinguished of the senators who were without means an annual salary, to some as much as five hundred thousand sesterces; and to the praetorian cohorts he gave a monthly allowance of grain free of cost. When he was asked according to custom to sign the warrant for the execution of a man who had been condemned to death, he said: "How I wish I had never learned to write!" He greeted men of all orders offhand and from memory. When the Senate returned thanks to him, he replied, "When I shall have deserved them." He admitted even the commons to witness his exercises in the Campus, and often declaimed in public. He read his poems too, not only at home but in the theater as well, so greatly to the delight of all that a thanksgiving was voted because of his recital, while that part of his poems was inscribed in letters of gold and dedicated to Jupiter Capitolinus.

XI. He gave many entertainments of different kinds: the Juvenales, chariot races in the Circus, stage-plays, and a gladiatorial show. At the first-mentioned, he had even old men of consular rank and aged matrons take part. For the games in the Circus he assigned places to the equites apart from the rest, and even matched chariots drawn by four camels. At the plays which he gave for the "Eternity of the Empire," which by his order were called the Ludi Maximi, parts were taken by several men and women of both the orders; a well known Roman eques mounted an elephant and rode down a rope; a Roman play of Afranius, too, was staged, entitled "The Fire," and the actors were allowed to carry off the furniture of the burning Curia and keep it. Every day all kinds of presents were thrown to the people; these included a thousand birds of every kind each day, various kinds of food, tickets for grain, clothing, gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, paintings, slaves, beasts of burden, and even trained wild animals; finally, ships, blocks of houses, and farms.

XII. These plays he viewed from the top of the proscenium. At the gladiatorial show, which he gave in a wooden amphitheatre, erected in the district of the Campus Martius within the space of a single year [58 C.E.], he had no one put to death, not even criminals. But he compelled four hundred senators and six hundred Roman equites, some of whom were well-to-do and of unblemished reputation, to fight in the arena. Even those who fought with the wild beasts and performed the various services in the arena were of the same orders. He also exhibited a naval battle in salt water with sea monsters swimming about in it; besides pyrrhic dances by some Greek youths, handing each of them certificates of Roman citizenship at the close of his performance. The pyrrhic

The Lives of the Caesars: Nero

dances represented various scenes. In one, a bull mounted Pasiphae, who was concealed in a wooden image of a heifer; at least many of the spectators thought so. Icarus at his very first attempt fell close by the

imperial couch and bespattered the emperor with his blood; for Nero very seldom presided at the games, but used to view them while reclining on a couch, at first through small openings, and then with the entire balcony uncovered. He was likewise the first to establish at Rome a quinquennial contest in three parts, after the Greek fashion, that is in music, gymnastics, and riding, which he called the "Veronia"; at the same time he dedicated his baths and gymnasiums supplying every member of the senatorial and equestrian orders with oil. To preside over the whole contest he appointed ex-consuls, chosen by lot, who occupied the seats of the praetors. Then he went down into the orchestra among the senators and accepted the prize for Latin oratory and verse, for which all the most eminent men had contended, but which was given to him with their unanimous consent; but when that for lyre-playing was also offered him by the judges, he knelt before it and ordered that it be laid at the feet of Augustus' statue. At the gymnastic contest, which he gave in the Saepta, he shaved his first beard to the accompaniment of a splendid sacrifice of bullocks, put it in a golden box adorned with pearls of great price, and dedicated it in the Capitol. He invited the Vestal Virgins also to witness the contests of the athletes, because at Olympia the priestesses of Ceres were allowed the same privilege.

XIII. I may fairly include among his shows the entrance of Tiridates into the city. He was a king of Armenia, whom Nero induced by great promises to come to Rome; and since he was prevented by bad weather from exhibiting him to the people on the day appointed by proclamation, he produced him at the first favorable opportunity, with the Praetorian cohorts drawn up in full armor about the temples in the Forum, while he himself sat in a curule chair on the rostra in the attire of a triumphing general, surrounded by military ensigns and standards. As the king approached along a sloping platform, the emperor at first let him fall at his feet, but raised him with his right hand and kissed him. Then, while the king made supplication, Nero took the turban from his head and replaced it with a diadem, while a man of praetorian rank translated the words of the suppliant and proclaimed them to the throng. From there the king was taken to the theater [*Of Pompeius Magnus*], and when he had again done obeisance, Nero gave him a seat at his right hand. Because of all this Nero was hailed as Emperor, and after depositing a laurel wreath in the Capitol [*This was usual only when a triumph was celebrated*], he closed the two doors of the temple of Janus, as a sign that no war was left anywhere.

XIV. He held four consulships, the first for two months, the second and the last for six months each, the third for four months [55, 57–58, 60 C.E.]. The second and third were in successive years, while a year intervened between these and each of the others [*He assumed a fifth consulship in 68*].

XV. In the administration of justice he was reluctant to render a decision to those who presented cases, except on the following day and in writing. The procedure was, instead of continuous pleadings, to have each point presented separately by the parties in turn. Furthermore, whenever he withdrew for consultation, he did not discuss any matter with all his advisers in a body, but had each of them give his opinion in written form; these he read silently and in private and then gave a verdict according to his own inclination, as if it were the view of the majority. For a long time he would not admit the sons of freedmen to the Senate and he refused office to those who had been admitted by his predecessors. Candidates who were in excess of the number of vacancies received the command of a legion as compensation for the postponement and delay. He commonly appointed consuls for a period of six months. When one of them died just before the Kalends of January, he appointed no one in his place, expressing his disapproval of the old-time case of Caninius Rebilus, the twenty-four hour consul [*See Jul. lxxvi.2, where, however, the man's name is not mentioned*]. He conferred the triumphal regalia even on men of the rank of quaestor, as well as on some of the equites, and sometimes for other than military services. As regards the speeches which he sent to the Senate on various matters, he passed over the quaestors, whose duty it was to read them [*See Aug. lxxv.2*], and usually had them presented by one of the consuls.

XVI. He devised a new form for the buildings of the city and in front of the houses and apartments he erected porches, from the flat roofs of which fires could be fought [*This was undoubtedly after the great fire*]; and these he put up at his own cost. He had also planned to extend the walls as far as Ostia and to bring the sea from there to Rome by a canal. During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food, the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale. Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given

to a new and mischievous superstition. He put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city [*Because of their disorderly conduct*].

XVII. It was in his reign that a protection against forgers was first devised, by having no tablets signed that were not bored with holes through which a cord was thrice passed [*The tablets consisted of three leaves, two of which were bound together and sealed. The contract was written twice, on the open leaf and on the closed ones. In cases of dispute the seals were broken in the presence of the signers and the two versions compared*]. In the case of wills it was provided that the first two leaves should be presented to the signatories [*As witnesses. The testator afterwards wrote the names of the heirs on these leaves*] with only the name of the testator written upon them, and that no one who wrote a will for another should put down a legacy for himself; further, that clients should pay a fixed and reasonable fee for the services of their advocates [*The Cincian law of 204 B.C.E. forbade fees. Augustus renewed the law in 17 B.C.E. (Dio 54.18). Claudius limited fees to 10,000 sesterces (Tac. Ann. 11.5–6). The Senate again abolished fees at the beginning of Nero's reign (Tac. Ann. 13.5), but Nero apparently revived the law of Claudius, with a provision against the addition of "costs."*], but nothing at all for benches, as which were to be furnished free of charge by the public treasury; finally, as regarded the pleading of cases, that those connected with the treasury should be transferred to the Forum [*Instead of coming before the prefects of the treasury; cf., Claud. ix.2*], and a board of arbiters, and that any appeal from the juries should be made to the Senate.

XVIII. So far from being actuated by any wish or hope of increasing or extending the empire, he even thought of withdrawing the army from Britain and changed his purpose only because he was ashamed to seem to belittle the glory of his father [*That is, his adoptive father Claudius*]. He increased the provinces only by the realm of Pontus, when it was given up by Polemon, and that of Cottius in the Alps on the latter's death.

XIX. He planned but two foreign tours, to Alexandria and Achaia; and he gave up the former on the very day when he was to have started, disturbed by a threatening portent. For as he was making the round of the temples and had sat down in the shrine of Vesta, first the fringe of his garment caught when he attempted to get up, and then such darkness overspread his eyes that he could see nothing. In Achaia he attempted to cut through the Isthmus [*Of Corinth*], and called together the Praetorians and urged them to begin the work; then at a signal given on a trumpet he was first to break ground with a mattock and to carry of a basketful of earth upon his shoulders. He also prepared for an expedition to the Caspian Gates, after enrolling a new legion of raw recruits of Italian births each six feet tall [*Roman measure, a little over 5 ft. 8 in. English*], which he called the "phalanx of Alexander the Great." I have brought together these acts of his, some of which are beyond criticism, while others are even deserving of no slight praise, to separate them from his shameful and criminal deeds, of which I shall proceed now to give an account.

XX. Having gained some knowledge of music in addition to the rest of his early education, as soon as he became emperor he sent for Terpnus, the greatest master of the lyre in those days, and after listening to him sing after dinner for many successive days until late at night, he little by little began to practice himself, neglecting none of the exercises which artists of that kind are in the habit of following, to preserve or strengthen their voices. For he used to lie upon his back and hold a leaden plate on his chest, purge himself by the syringe and by vomiting, and deny himself fruits and all foods injurious to the voice. Finally, encouraged by his progress, although his voice was weak and husky, he began to long to appear on the stage, and every now and then in the presence of his intimate friends he would quote a Greek proverb meaning "Hidden music counts for nothing" [*Cf., Gell. 13.31.3*]. And he made his debut at Neapolis, where he did not cease singing until he had finished the number which he had begun, even though the theater was shaken by a sudden earthquake shock [*It collapsed in consequence, but not until the audience had dispersed; see Tac. Ann. 15.34*]. In the same city he sang frequently and for several successive days. Even when he took a short time to rest his voice, he could not keep out of sight, but went to the theater after bathing, and dined in the orchestra with the people all about him, promising them in Greek that when he had wet his whistle a bit, he would ring out something good and loud. He was greatly taken, too, with the rhythmic applause of some Alexandrians, who had flocked to Neapolis from a fleet that had lately arrived, and summoned more men from Alexandria. Not content with that, he selected some young men of the order of equites and more than five thousand sturdy young plebeians, to be divided into groups and learn the Alexandrian styles of applause (they called them "the bees," "the roof-tiles," and "the bricks") [*The first seems to*

have derived its name from the sound, which was like the humming of bees, the second and third from clapping hands rounded or hollowed, like roof-tiles, or flat, like bricks or flat tiles], and to ply them vigorously whenever he sang. These men were noticeable for their thick hair and fine apparel; their left hands were bare and without rings, and the leaders were paid four hundred thousand sesterces each.

XXI. Considering it of great importance to appear in Rome as well, he repeated the contest of the Neronia before the appointed time, and when there was a general call for his "divine voice," he replied that if any wished to hear him, he would favor them in the gardens; but when the guard of soldiers which was then on duty seconded the entreaties of the people, he gladly agreed to appear at once. So without delay he had his name added to the list of the lyre-players who entered the contest, and casting his own lot into the urn with the rest, he came forward in his turn, attended by the Prefects of the Guard carrying his lyre, and followed by the tribunes of the soldiers and his intimate friends. Having taken his place and finished his preliminary speech [*probably asking for the favorable attention of the audience; cf., Dio, 61.20*], he announced through the ex-consul Cluvius Rufus that "he would sing Niobe"; and he kept at it until late in the afternoon, putting off the award of the prize for that event and postponing the rest of the contest to the next year, to have an excuse for singing oftener. But since even that seemed too long to wait, he did not cease to appear in public from time to time. He even thought of taking part in private performances among the professional actors, when one of the praetors offered him a million sesterces. He also put on the mask and sang tragedies representing gods and heroes and even heroines and goddesses, having the masks fashioned in the likeness of his own features or those of the women of whom he chanced to be enamored. Among other themes he sang "Canace in Labor," "Orestes the Matricide," "The Blinding of Oedipus" and the "Frenzy of Hercules." At the last named performance they say that a young recruit, seeing the emperor in mean attire and bound with chains, as the subject required, rushed forward to lend him aid.

XXII. From his earliest years, he had a special passion for horses and talked constantly about the games in the Circus, though he was forbidden to do so [*By his guardians and teachers*]. Once, when he was lamenting with his fellow pupils the fate of a charioteer of the "Greens," who was dragged by his horses, and his preceptor scolded him, he told a lie and pretended that he was talking of Hector. At the beginning of his reign he used to play every day with ivory chariots on a board, and he came from the country to all the games, even the most insignificant, at first secretly, and then so openly that no one doubted that he would be in Rome on that particular day. He made no secret of his wish to have the number of prizes increased, and in consequence more races were added and the performance was continued to a late hour, while the managers of the troupes no longer thought it worthwhile to produce their drivers at all except for a full day's racing. He soon longed to drive a chariot himself and even to show himself frequently in public; so after a trial exhibition in his gardens before his slaves and the dregs of the populace, he gave all an opportunity of seeing him in the Circus Maximus, one of his freedmen dropping the napkin [*the signal for the start*] from the place usually occupied by the magistrates. Not content with showing his proficiency in these arts at Rome, he went to Achaia, as I have said, influenced especially by the following consideration. The cities in which it was the custom to hold contests in music had adopted the rule of sending all the lyric prizes to him. These he received with the greatest delight, not only giving audience before all others to the envoys who brought them, but even inviting them to his private table. When some of them begged him to sing after dinner and greeted his performance with extravagant applause, he declared that "the Greeks were the only ones who had an ear for music and that they alone were worthy of his efforts." So he took ship without delay and immediately on arriving at Cassiope made a preliminary appearance as a singer at the altar of Jupiter Cassius, and then went the round of all the contests.

XXIII. To make this possible, he gave orders that even those which were widely separated in time should be brought together in a single year, so that some had even to be given twice, and he introduced a musical competition at Olympia also, contrary to custom. To avoid being distracted or hindered in any way while busy with these contests, he replied to his freedman Helius, who reminded him that the affairs of the city required his presence, in these words: "However much it may be your advice and your wish that I should return speedily, yet you ought rather to counsel me and to hope that I may return worthy of Nero." While he was singing no one was allowed to leave the theater even for the most urgent reasons. And so it is said that some women gave birth to children there, while many who were worn out with listening and applauding, secretly leaped from the wall, since the gates at the entrance were closed, or feigned death and were carried out as if for burial. The trepidation and anxiety with which he took part in the contests, his keen rivalry of his opponents and his awe of the judges, can

hardly be credited. As if his rivals were of quite the same station as himself, he used to show respect to them and try to gain their favor, while he slandered them behind their backs, sometimes assailed them with abuse when he met them, and even bribed those who were especially proficient. Before beginning, he would address the judges in the most deferential terms, saying that he had done all that could be done, but the issue was in the hand of Fortuna; they however, being men of wisdom and experience, ought to exclude what was fortuitous. When they bade him take heart, he withdrew with greater confidence, but not even then without anxiety, interpreting the silence and modesty of some as sullenness and ill-nature, and declaring that he had his suspicions of them.

XXIV. In competition he observed the rules most scrupulously, never daring to clear his throat and even wiping the sweat from his brow with his arm [*the use of a handkerchief was not allowed; see also Tac. Ann. 16.4*]. Once, indeed, during the performance of a tragedy, when he had dropped his scepter but quickly recovered it, he was terribly afraid that he might be excluded from the competition because of his slip, and his confidence was restored only when his accompanist [*the "hypocrites" made the gestures and accompanied the tragic actor on the flute, as he spoke his lines*] swore that it had passed unnoticed amid the delight and applause of the people. When the victory was won, he made the announcement himself; and for that reason he always took part in the contests of the heralds. To obliterate the memory of all other victors in the games and leave no trace of them, their statues and busts were all thrown down by his order, dragged off with hooks, and cast into privies. He also drove a chariot in many places, at Olympia even a ten-horse team, although in one of his own poems he had criticized Mithridates for just that thing. But after he had been thrown from the car and put back in it, he was unable to hold out and gave up before the end of the course; but he received the crown just the same. On his departure he presented the entire province with freedom [*That is, with local self-government, not with actual independence*], and at the same time gave the judges Roman citizenship and a large sum of money. These favors he announced in person on the day of the Isthmian Games, standing in the middle of the stadium.

XXV. Returning from Greece, since it was at Neapolis that he had made his first appearance, he entered that city with white horses through a part of the wall which had been thrown down, as is customary with victors in the sacred games. In like manner he entered Antium, then Albanum, and finally Rome; but at Rome he rode in the chariot which Augustus had used in his triumphs in days gone by, and wore a purple robe and a Greek cloak adorned with stars of gold, bearing on his head the Olympic crown and in his right hand the Pythian, while the rest were carried before him with inscriptions telling where he had won them and against what competitors, and giving the titles of the songs or the subject of the plays. His car was followed by his clique as by the escort of a triumphal procession, who shouted that they were the attendants of Augustus and the soldiers of his triumph. Then through the arch of the Circus Maximus, which was thrown down, he made his way across the Velabrum and the Forum to the Palatine and the temple of Apollo. All along the route victims were slain, the streets were sprinkled from time to time with perfume, while birds, ribbons, and sweetmeats were showered upon him. He placed the sacred crowns in his bed chamber around his couches, as well as statues representing him in the guise of a lyre-player; and he had a coin, too, struck with the same device. So far from neglecting or relaxing his practice of the art after this, he never addressed the soldiers except by letter or in a speech delivered by another, to save his voice; and he never did anything for amusement or in earnest without an elocutionist by his side, to warn him to spare his vocal organs and hold a handkerchief to his mouth. To many men he offered his friendship or announced his hostility, according as they had applauded him lavishly or grudgingly.

XXVI. Although at first his acts of wantonness, lust, extravagance, avarice and cruelty were gradual and secret, and might be condoned as follies of youth, yet even then their nature was such that no one doubted that they were defects of his character and not due to his time of life. No sooner was twilight over than he would catch up a cap or a wig and go to the taverns or range about the streets playing pranks, which however were very far from harmless; for he used to beat men as they came home from dinner, stabbing any who resisted him and throwing them into the sewers. He would even break into shops and rob them, setting up a market in the Palace, where he divided the booty which he took, sold it at auction, and then squandered the proceeds. In the strife which resulted he often ran the risk of losing his eyes or even his life, for he was beaten almost to death by a man of the senatorial order whose wife he had maltreated. Warned by this, he never afterwards ventured to appear in public at that hour without having tribunes follow him at a distance and unobserved. Even in the daytime he would be carried privately to the theater in a litter, and from the upper part of the proscenium would watch the brawls of the pantomimic actors and egg them on; and when they came to blows and fought with stones and broken benches, he

himself threw many missiles at the people and even broke a praetor's head.

XXVII. Little by little, however, as his vices grew stronger, he dropped jesting and secrecy and with no attempt at disguise openly broke out into worse crime. He prolonged his revels from midday to midnight, often livening himself by a warm plunge, or, if it were summer, into water cooled with snow. Sometimes, too, he closed the inlets and banqueted in public in the great tank in the Campus Martius, or in the Circus Maximus, waited on by harlots and dancing girls from all over the city. Whenever he drifted down the Tiber to Ostia, or sailed about the Gulf of Baiae, booths were set up at intervals along the banks and shores, fitted out for debauchery, while bartering matrons played the part of inn-keepers and from every hand solicited him to come ashore. He also levied dinners on his friends, one of whom spent four million sesterces for a banquet at which turbans were distributed, and another a considerably larger sum for a rose dinner.

XXVIII. Besides abusing freeborn boys and seducing married women, he debauched the vestal virgin Rubria. The freedwoman Acte he all but made his lawful wife, after bribing some ex-consuls to perjure themselves by swearing that she was of royal birth. He castrated the boy Sporus and actually tried to make a woman of him; and he married him with all the usual ceremonies, including a dowry and a bridal veil, took him to his home attended by a great throng, and treated him as his wife. And the witty jest that someone made is still current, that it would have been well for the world if Nero's father Domitius had had that kind of wife. This Sporus, decked out with the finery of the empresses and riding in a litter, he took with him to the courts and marts of Greece, and later at Rome through the Street of the Images, fondly kissing him from time to time. That he even desired illicit relations with his own mother, and was kept from it by her enemies, who feared that such a relationship might give the reckless and insolent woman too great influence, was notorious, especially after he added to his concubines a courtesan who was said to look very like Agrippina. Even before that, so they say, whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, he had incestuous relations with her, which were betrayed by the stains on his clothing.

XXIX. He so prostituted his own chastity that after defiling almost every part of his body, he at last devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes, and when he had sated his mad lust, was dispatched by his freedman Doryphorus; for he was even married to this man in the same way that he himself had married Sporus, going so far as to imitate the cries and lamentations of a maiden being deflowered. I have heard from some men that it was his unshaken conviction that no man was chaste or pure in any part of his body, but that most of them concealed their vices and cleverly drew a veil over them; and that therefore he pardoned all other faults in those who confessed to him their lewdness.

XXX. He thought that there was no other way of enjoying riches and money than by riotous extravagance, declaring that only stingy and niggardly fellows kept a correct account of what they spent, while fine and genuinely magnificent gentlemen wasted and squandered. Nothing in his uncle Gaius [*Caligula*] so excited his envy and admiration as the fact that he had in so short a time run through the vast wealth which Tiberius had left him. Accordingly, he made presents and wasted money without stint. On Tiridates, though it would seem hardly within belief, he spent eight hundred thousand sesterces a day, and on his departure presented him with more than a hundred millions. He gave the lyre-player Menecrates and the gladiator Spiculus properties and residences equal to those of men who had celebrated triumphs. He enriched the monkey-faced usurer Panerotes with estates in the country and in the city and had him buried with almost regal splendor. He never wore the same garment twice. He played at dice for four hundred thousand sesterces a point. He fished with a golden net drawn by cords woven of purple and scarlet threads. It is said that he never made a journey with less than a thousand carriages, his mules shod with silver and their drivers clad in wool of Canusium, attended by a train of Mazaces [*noted horsemen of Mauretania*], and couriers with bracelets and trappings.

XXXI. There was nothing, however, in which he was more ruinously prodigal than in building. He made a palace extending all the way from the Palatine to the Esquiline, which at first he called the House of Passage, but when it was burned shortly after its completion and rebuilt, the Golden House. Its size and splendor will be sufficiently indicated by the following details. Its vestibule was large enough to contain a colossal statue of the emperor a hundred and twenty feet high; and it was so extensive that it had a triple colonnade a mile long. There was a pond too, like a sea, surrounded with buildings to represent cities, besides tracts of country, varied by tilled fields, vineyards, pastures and woods, with great numbers of wild and domestic animals. In the rest of the house all parts were overlaid with gold and adorned with gems and mother-of-pearl. There were dining-rooms with

fretted ceilings of ivory, whose panels could turn and shower down flowers and were fitted with pipes for sprinkling the guests with perfumes. The main banquet hall was circular and constantly revolved day and night, like the heavens. He had baths supplied with sea water and sulphur water. When the edifice was finished in this style and he dedicated it, he deigned to say nothing more in the way of approval than that he was at last beginning to be housed like a human being. He also began a pool, extending from Misenum to the Lake of Avernus, roofed over and enclosed in colonnades, into which he planned to turn all the hot springs in every part of Baiae; a canal from Avernus all the way to Ostia, to enable the journey to be made by ship yet not by sea; its length was to be a hundred and sixty miles and its breadth sufficient to allow ships with five banks of oars to pass each other. For the execution of these projects he had given orders that the prisoners all over the empire should be transported to Italy, and that those who were convicted even of capital crimes should be punished in no other way than by sentence to this work. He was led to such mad extravagance, in addition to his confidence in the resources of the empire, by the hope of a vast hidden treasure, suddenly inspired by the assurance of a Roman eques, who declared positively that the enormous wealth which Queen Dido had taken with her of old in her flight from Tyre was hidden away in huge caves in Africa and could be recovered with but trifling labor.

XXXII. When this hope proved false, he resorted to false accusations and robbery, being at the end of his resources and so utterly impoverished that he was obliged to postpone and defer even the pay of the soldiers and the rewards due to the veterans. First of all he made a law, that instead of one-half, five-sixths of the property of deceased freedmen should be made over to him, if without good and sufficient reason they bore the name of any family with which he himself was connected; further, that the estates of those who were ungrateful to their emperor should belong to the privy purse, and that the advocates who had written or dictated such wills should not go unpunished. Finally, that any word or deed on which an informer could base an action should be liable to the law against *lese-majesty*. He demanded the return of the rewards which he had given in recognition of the prizes conferred on him by any city in any competition. Having forbidden the use of amethystine or Tyrian purple dyes, he secretly sent a man to sell a few ounces on a market day and then closed the shops of all the dealers. It is even said that when he saw a matron in the audience at one of his recitals clad in the forbidden color he pointed her out to his agents, who dragged her out and stripped her on the spot, not only of her garment, but also of her property. He never appointed anyone to an office without saying: "You know what my needs are," and "Let us see to it that no one possess anything." At last he stripped many temples of their gifts and melted down the images of gold and silver, including those of the Penates, which however Galba soon afterwards restored.

XXXIII. He began his career of parricide and murder with Claudius, for even if he was not the instigator of the emperor's death, he was at least privy to it, as he openly admitted; for he used afterwards to laud mushrooms, the vehicle in which the poison was administered to Claudius, as "the food of the gods, as the Greek proverb has it." At any rate, after Claudius' death he vented on him every kind of insult, in act and word, charging him now with folly and now with cruelty; for it was a favorite joke of his to say that Claudius had ceased "to play the fool among mortals," lengthening the first syllable of the word *morari*, and he disregarded many of his decrees and acts as the work of a madman and a dotard. Finally, he neglected to enclose the place where his body was burned except with a low and mean wall. He attempted the life of Britannicus by poison, not less from jealousy of his voice (for it was more agreeable than his own) than from fear that he might sometime win a higher place than himself in the people's regard because of the memory of his father. He procured the potion from an arch-poisoner, one Locusta, and when the effect was slower than he anticipated, merely physicking Britannicus, he called the woman to him and flogged her with his own hand, charging that she had administered a medicine instead of a poison; and when she said in excuse that she had given a smaller dose to shield him from the odium of the crime, he replied: "It's likely that I am afraid of the Julian law;" and he forced her to mix as swift and instant a potion as she knew how in his own room before his very eyes. Then he tried it on a kid, and as the animal lingered for five hours, had the mixture steeped again and again and threw some of it before a pig. The beast instantly fell dead, whereupon he ordered that the poison be taken to the dining-room and given to Britannicus. The boy dropped dead at the very first taste, but Nero lied to his guests and declared that he was seized with the falling sickness, to which he was subject, and the next day had him hastily and unceremoniously buried in a pouring rain. He rewarded Locusta for her eminent services with a full pardon and large estates in the country, and actually sent her pupils.

The Lives of the Caesars: Nero

XXXIV. His mother offended him by too strict surveillance and criticism of his words and acts, but at first he confined his resentment to frequent endeavors to bring upon her a burden of unpopularity by pretending that he would abdicate the throne and go off to Rhodes. Then depriving her of all her honors and of her guard of Roman and German soldiers, he even forbade her to live with him and drove her from the Palace. After that he passed all bounds in harrying her, bribing men to annoy her with lawsuits while she remained in the city, and after she had retired to the country, to pass her house by land and sea and break her rest with abuse and mockery. At last terrified by her violence and threats, he determined to have her life, and after thrice attempting it by poison and finding that she had made herself immune by antidotes, he tampered with the ceiling of her bedroom, contriving a mechanical device for loosening its panels and dropping them upon her while she slept. When this leaked out through some of those connected with the plot, he devised a collapsible boat to destroy her by shipwreck or by the falling in of its cabin. Then he pretended a reconciliation and invited her in a most cordial letter to come to Baiae and celebrate the feast of Minerva with him. On her arrival, instructing his captains to wreck the galley in which she had come, by running into it as if by accident, he detained her at a banquet, and when she would return to Bauli, offered her his contrivance in place of the craft which had been damaged, escorting her to it in high spirits and even kissing her breasts as they parted. The rest of the night he passed sleepless in intense anxiety, awaiting the outcome of his design. On learning that everything had gone wrong and that she had escaped by swimming, driven to desperation he secretly had a dagger thrown down beside her freedman Lucius Agelmus, when he joyfully brought word that she was safe and sound, and then ordered that the freedman be seized and bound, on the charge of being hired to kill the emperor; that his mother be put to death, and the pretense made that she had escaped the consequences of her detected guilt by suicide. Trustworthy authorities add still more gruesome details: that he hurried off to view the corpse, handled her limbs, criticizing some and commending others, and that becoming thirsty meanwhile, he took drink. Yet he could not either then or ever afterwards endure the stings of conscience though soldiers, Senate and people tried to hearten him with their congratulations; for he often owned that he was hounded by his mother's ghost and by the whips and blazing torches of the Furies. He even had rites performed by the Magi, in the effort to summon her shade and entreat it for forgiveness. Moreover, in his journey through Greece he did not venture to take part in the Eleusinian mysteries, since at the beginning the godless and wicked are warned by the herald's proclamation to go hence. To matricide he added the murder of his aunt. When he once visited her as she was confined to her bed from costiveness, and she, as old ladies will, stroking his downy beard (for he was already well grown) happened to say fondly: "As soon as I receive this [*that is, "when I see you arrived at man's estate."* *The first shaving of the beard by a young Roman was a symbolic act, usually performed at the age of twenty-one with due ceremony. According to Tac. Ann. 14.15, and Dio 61.19, Nero first shaved his beard in 59 C.E., at the age of twenty-one and commemorated the event by establishing the Juvenalia*], I shall gladly die," he turned to those with him and said as if in jest: "I'll take it off at once." Then he bade the doctors give the sick woman an overdose of physic and seized her property before she was cold, suppressing her will, that nothing might escape him.

XXXV. Besides Octavia he later took two wives, Poppaea Sabina, daughter of an ex-quaestor and previously married to a Roman eques, and then Statilia Messalina, daughter of the great-grand-daughter of Taurus, who had been twice consul and awarded a triumph. To possess the latter he slew her husband Atticus Vestinus while he held the office of consul. He soon grew tired of living with Octavia, and when his friends took him to task, replied that "she ought to be content with the insignia of wifehood." Presently, after several vain attempts to strangle her, he divorced her on the ground of barrenness, and when the people took it ill and openly reproached him, he banished her besides; and finally he had her put to death on a charge of adultery that was so shameless and unfounded, that when all who were put to the torture maintained her innocence, he bribed his former preceptor Anicetus to make a pretended confession that he had violated her chastity by a stratagem. He dearly loved Poppaea, whom he married twelve days after his divorce from Octavia, yet he caused her death too, by kicking her when she was pregnant and ill, because she had scolded him for coming home late from the races. By her he had a daughter, Claudia Augusta, but lost her when she was still an infant. Indeed, there is no kind of relationship that he did not violate in his career of crime. He put to death Antonia, daughter of Claudius, for refusing to marry him after Poppaea's death, charging her with an attempt at revolution; and he treated in the same way all others who were in any way connected with him by blood or by marriage. Among these was the young Aulus Plautius, whom he forcibly defiled before his death, saying "Let my mother come now and kiss my successor," openly

charging that Agrippina had loved Plautius and that this had roused him to hopes of the throne. Rufrius Crispinus, a mere boy, his stepson and the child of Poppaea, he ordered to be drowned by the child's own slaves while he was fishing, because it was said that he used to play at being a general and an emperor. He banished his nurse's son Tuscus, because when procurator in Egypt he had bathed in some baths which were built for a visit of Nero. He drove his tutor Seneca to suicide, although when the old man often pleaded to be allowed to retire and offered to give up his estates, he had sworn most solemnly that he did wrong to suspect him and that he would rather die than harm him. He sent poison to Burrus, prefect of the Guard, in place of a throat medicine which he had promised him. The old and wealthy freedmen who had helped him first to his adoption and later to the throne, and aided him by their advice, he killed by poison, administered partly in their food and partly in their drink.

XXXVI. Those outside his family he assailed with no less cruelty. It chanced that a comet [*Tacitus mentions two comets, one in 60 and the other in 64; see Ann. 14.22, 15.47*] had begun to appear on several successive nights, a thing which is commonly believed to portend the death of great rulers. Worried by this, and learning from the astrologer Balbillus that kings usually averted such omens by the death of some distinguished man, thus turning them from themselves upon the heads of the nobles, he resolved on the death of all the eminent men of the State; but the more firmly, and with some semblance of justice, after the discovery of two conspiracies. The earlier and more dangerous of these was that of Piso at Rome; the other was set on foot by Vinicius at Beneventum and detected there. The conspirators made their defense in triple sets of fetters, some voluntarily admitting their guilt, some even making a favor of it, saying that there was no way except by death that they could help a man disgraced by every kind of wickedness. The children of those who were condemned were banished or put to death by poison or starvation; a number are known to have been slain all together at a single meal along with their preceptors and attendants, while others were prevented from earning their daily bread.

XXXVII. After this he showed neither discrimination nor moderation in putting to death whomsoever he pleased on any pretext whatever. To mention but a few instances, Salvidienus Orfitus was charged with having let to certain states as headquarters three shops which formed part of his home near the Forum; Cassius Longinus, a blind jurist, with retaining in the old family tree of his House the mask of Gaius Cassius, the assassin of Julius Caesar; Paetus Thrasea with having a sullen mien, like that of a preceptor. To those who were bidden to die he never granted more than an hour's respite, and to avoid any delay, he brought physicians who were at once to "attend to" such as lingered; for that was the term he used for killing them by opening their veins. It is even believed that it was his wish to throw living men to be torn to pieces and devoured by a monster of Egyptian birth, who would crunch raw flesh and anything else that was given him. Transported and puffed up with such successes, as he considered them, he boasted that no princeps had ever known what power he really had, and he often threw out unmistakable hints that he would not spare even those of the Senate who survived, but would one day blot out the whole order from the State and hand over the rule of the provinces and the command of the armies to the Roman equites and to his freedmen. Certain it is that neither on beginning a journey nor on returning did he kiss any member or even return his greeting; and at the formal opening of the work at the Isthmus the prayer which he uttered in a loud voice before a great throng was that the event might result favorably "for himself and the people of Rome," thus suppressing any mention of the Senate.

XXXVIII. But he showed no greater mercy to the people or the walls of his capital. When someone in a general conversation said: "When I am dead, be earth consumed by fire," he rejoined "Nay, rather while I live," and his action was wholly in accord. For under cover of displeasure at the ugliness of the old buildings and the narrow, crooked streets, he set fire to the city so openly that several ex-consuls did not venture to lay hands on his chamberlains although they caught them on their estates with tow and firebrands, while some granaries near the Golden House, whose room he particularly desired, were demolished by engines of war and then set on fire, because their walls were of stone. For six days and seven nights destruction raged, while the people were driven for shelter to monuments and tombs. At that time, besides an immense number of dwellings, the houses of leaders of old were burned, still adorned with trophies of victory, and the temples of the gods vowed and dedicated by the kings and later in the Punic and Gallic wars, and whatever else interesting and noteworthy had survived from antiquity. Viewing the conflagration from the tower of Maecenas, and exulting, as he said, "with the beauty of the flames," he sang the whole time the "Sack of Ilium," in his regular stage costume. Furthermore, to gain from this calamity too the spoil and booty possible, while promising the removal of the debris and dead bodies free of cost, allowed no one to approach the ruins of his own property; and from the contributions which he not only received,

The Lives of the Caesars: Nero

but even demanded, he nearly bankrupted the provinces and exhausted the resources of individuals

XXXIX. To all the disasters and abuses thus caused by the princeps there were added certain accidents of fortune; a plague which in a single autumn entered thirty thousand deaths in the accounts of Libitina; a disaster in Britain, where two important towns were sacked [*Camulodunum (modern Colchester) and Verulamium (modern St. Albans)*]; according to *Xiphilinus* 80,000 perished] and great members of citizens and allies were butchered; a shameful defeat in the Orient, in consequence of which the legions in Armenia were sent under the yoke and Syria was all but lost. It is surprising and of special note that all this time he bore nothing with more patience than the curses and abuse of the people, and was particularly lenient towards those who assailed him with gibes and lampoons. Of these many were posted or circulated both in Greek and Latin, for example the following:

"Nero, Orestes, Alcmeon their mothers slew."

"A calculation new. Nero his mother slew."

"Who can deny the descent from Aeneas' great line of our Nero?

One his mother took off, the other one took off his sire."

"While our ruler his lyre does twang and the Parthian his bowstring,

Paeon-singer our princeps shall be, and Far-darter our foe."

"Rome is becoming one house; off with you to Veii, Quirites!

If that house does not soon seize upon Veii as well."

He made no effort, however, to find the authors, in fact, when some of them were reported to the Senate by an informer, he forbade their being very severely punished. As he was passing along a public street, the Cynic Isidorus loudly taunted him, "because he was a good singer of the ills of Nauplius, but made ill use of his own goods." Datus also, an actor of Atellan farces, in a song beginning: "Farewell to thee, father; farewell to thee, mother," represented drinking and swimming in pantomime, referring of course to the death of Claudius and Agrippina; and in the final tag, "Orcus guides your steps," he indicated the Senate by a gesture. Nero contented himself with banishing the actor and the philosopher from the city, either because he was impervious to all insults, or to avoid sharpening men's wits by showing his vexation.

XL. After the world had put up with such a ruler for nearly fourteen years, it at last cast him off, and the Gauls took the first step under the lead of Julius Vindex, who at that time governed their province as propraetor. Astrologers had predicted to Nero that he would one day be repudiated, which was the occasion of that well known saying of his: "A humble art affords us daily bread," doubtless uttered to justify him in practicing the art of lyre-playing, as an amusement while emperor, but a necessity for a private citizen. Some of them, however, had promised him the rule of the East, when he was cast off, a few expressly naming the sovereignty of Jerusalem, and several the restitution of all his former fortunes. Inclining rather to this last hope, after losing Armenia and Britain and recovering both, he began to think that he had suffered the misfortunes which fate had in store. And after consulting the oracle at Delphi and being told that he must look out for the seventy-third year, assuming that he would die only at that period, and taking no account of Galba's years, he felt so confident not only of old age, but also of unbroken and unusual good fortune, that when he had lost some articles of great value by shipwreck, he did not hesitate to say among his intimate friends that the fish would bring them back to him. He was at Neapolis when he learned of the uprising of the Gallic provinces, on the anniversary of his mother's murder, and received the news with such calmness and indifference that he incurred the suspicion of actually rejoicing in it, because it gave him an excuse for pillaging those wealthy provinces according to the laws of war. And he at once proceeded to the gymnasium, where he watched the contests of the athletes with rapt interest. At dinner, too, when interrupted by more disturbing letters, he filled up only so far as to threaten vengeance on the rebels. In short, for eight whole days making no attempt to write a reply to anyone, none to give any commission or command, he blotted out the affair with silence.

XLI. At last he was driven by numerous insulting edicts of Vindex, to urge the Senate in a letter to avenge him and the state, alleging a throat trouble as his excuse for not appearing in person. Yet there was nothing which he so much resented as the taunt that he was a wretched lyre-player and that he was addressed as Ahenobarbus instead of Nero. With regard to his family name, which was cast in his teeth as an insult, he declared that he

would resume it and give up that of his adoption. He used no other arguments to show the falsity of the rest of the reproaches than that he was actually taunted with being unskilled in an art to which he had devoted so much attention and in which he had so perfected himself, and he asked various individuals from time to time whether they knew of any artist who was his superior. Finally, beset by message after message, he returned to Rome in a panic; but on the way, when but slightly encouraged by an insignificant omen, for he noticed a monument on which was sculptured the overthrow of a Gallic soldier by a Roman horseman, who was dragging him along by the hairs he leaped for joy at the sight and lifted up his hands to heaven. Not even on his arrival did he personally address the Senate or people, but called some of the leading men to his house and after a hasty consultation spent the rest of the day in exhibiting some water-organs of a new and hitherto unknown form, explaining their several features and lecturing on the theory and complexity of each of them; and he even declared that he would presently produce them all in the theater "with the kind permission of Vindex."

XLII. Thereafter, having learned that Galba also and the Spanish provinces had revolted, he fainted and lay for a long time insensible, without a word and all but dead. When he came to himself, he rent his robe and beat his brow, declaring that it was all over with him; and when his old nurse tried to comfort him by reminding him that similar evils had befallen other princes before him, he declared that unlike all others he was suffering the unheard of and unparalleled fate of losing the supreme power while he still lived. Nevertheless he did not abandon or amend his slothful and luxurious habits; on the contrary, whenever any good news came from the provinces, he not only gave lavish feasts, but even ridiculed the leaders of the revolt in verses set to wanton music, which have since become public, and accompanied them with gestures; then secretly entering the audience room of the theater, he sent word to an actor who was making a hit that he was taking advantage of the emperor's busy days.

XLIII. At the very beginning of the revolt it is believed that he formed many plans of monstrous wickedness but in no way inconsistent with his character: to depose and assassinate the commanders of the armies and the governors of the provinces, on the ground that they were all united in a conspiracy against him; to massacre all the exiles everywhere and all men of Gallic birth in the city: the former, to prevent them from joining the rebels; the latter, as sharing and abetting the designs of their countrymen; to turn over the Gallic provinces to his armies to ravage; to poison the entire Senate at banquets; to set fire to the city, first letting the wild beasts loose, that it might be harder for the people to protect themselves. But he was deterred from these designs, not so much by any compunction, as because he despaired of being able to carry them out, and feeling obliged to take the field, he deposed the consuls before the end of their term and assumed the office alone in place of both of them, alleging that it was fated that the Gallic provinces could not be subdued except by a consul. Having assumed the fasces, he declared as he was leaving the dining room after a banquet, leaning on the shoulders of his comrades, that immediately on setting foot in the province he would go before the soldiers unarmed and do nothing but weep; and having thus led the rebels to change their purpose, he would next day rejoice among his rejoicing subjects and sing paeans of victory, which he ought at that very moment to be composing.

XLIV. In preparing for his campaign his first care was to select wagons to carry his theatrical instruments, to have the hair of his concubines, whom he planned to take with him, trimmed man-fashion, and to equip them with Amazonian axes and shields. Next he summoned the city tribes to enlist, and when no eligible person responded, he levied from their masters a stated number of slaves, accepting only the choicest from each household and not even exempting paymasters and secretaries. He also required all classes to contribute a part of their incomes, and all tenants of private houses and apartments to pay a year's rent at once to the privy purse [*Instead of to their landlords. These people had no rating on the census list and their contribution took this form*]. With great fastidiousness and rigor he demanded newly minted coin, refined silver, and pure gold [*that is, tested by fire; see Pliny, Nat. Hist. 33.59*], so that many openly refused to make any contribution at all, unanimously demanding that he should rather compel the informers to give up whatever rewards had been paid them.

XLV. The bitter feeling against him was increased because he also turned the high cost of grain to his profit [*by using for his own purposes ships which would otherwise have been loaded with grain; but the text and the meaning are uncertain*]; for indeed, it so fell out that while the people were suffering from hunger it was reported that a ship had arrived from Alexandria, bringing sand for the court wrestlers. When he had thus aroused the hatred of all, there was no form of insult to which he was not subjected. A curl [*doubtless an allusion to the long hair which he wore during his Greek trip*] was placed on the head of his statue with the inscription in Greek: "Now there is a real contest [*in contrast with those of the stage*], and you must at last surrender." To the neck of

another statue a sack was tied and with it the words: "I have done what I could, but you have earned the sack" [*the one in which parricides were put; see Aug. xxxiii. 1*]. People wrote on the columns that he had stirred up even the Gauls [*there is obviously a pun on "Galli" (or "Gauls") and "galli" (or "cocks"), and on "cantare" in the sense of "sing" and of "crow"*] by his singing. When night came on, many men pretended to be wrangling with their slaves and kept calling out for a defender [*punning, of course, on Vindex, the leader of the revolt*].

XLVI. In addition, he was frightened by manifest portents from dreams, auspices and omens, both old and new. Although he had never before been in the habit of dreaming, after he had killed his mother it seemed to him that he was steering a ship in his sleep and that the helm was wrenched from his hands; that he was dragged by his wife Octavia into thickest darkness, and that he was now covered with a swarm of winged ants, and now was surrounded by the statues of the nations which had been dedicated in Pompeius Magnus' theater and stopped in his tracks. An Hispanic steed of which he was very fond was changed into the form of an ape in the hinder parts of its body, and its head, which alone remained unaltered, gave forth tuneful neighs. The doors of the Mausoleum flew open of their own accord, and a voice was heard from within summoning him by name. After the Lares had been adorned on the Kalends of January, they fell to the ground in the midst of the preparations for the sacrifice. As he was taking the auspices, Sporus made him a present of a ring with a stone on which was engraved the rape of Proserpina. When the vows were to be taken [*on the first of January, for the prosperity of the emperor and the state*] and a great throng of all classes had assembled, the keys of the Capitol could not be found for a long time. When a speech of his in which he assailed Vindex was being read in the Senate, at the words "the wretches will suffer punishment and will shortly meet the end which they deserve," all who were present cried out with one voice: "You will do it, Augustus" [*of course, used in a double sense*]. It also had not failed of notice that the last piece which he sang in public was "Oedipus in Exile," and that he ended with the line: "Wife, father, mother drive me to my death."

XLVII. When meanwhile word came that the other armies had revolted, he tore to pieces the dispatches which were handed to him as he was dining, tipped over the table, and dashed to the ground two favorite drinking cups, which he called "Homeric," because they were carved with scenes from Homer's poems [*Pliny, Nat. Hist. 37.29 tells us that the cups were of crystal*]. Then taking some poison from Locusta and putting it into a golden box, he crossed over into the Servilian gardens, where he tried to induce the tribunes and centurions of the Guard to accompany him in his flight, first sending his most trustworthy freedmen to Ostia, to get a fleet ready. But when some gave evasive answers and some openly refused, one even cried: "Is it so dreadful a thing then to die?" [*Verg. Aen. 12.646*] Whereupon he turned over various plans in his mind, whether to go as a suppliant to the Parthians or Galba, or to appear to the people on the Rostra, dressed in black, and beg as pathetically as he could for pardon for his past offences; and if he could not soften their hearts, to entreat them at least to allow him the prefecture of Egypt. Afterwards, a speech composed for this purpose was found in his writing desk; but it is thought that he did not dare to deliver it for fear of being torn to pieces before he could reach the Forum. Having therefore put off further consideration to the following day, he awoke about midnight, and finding that the guard of soldiers had left, he sprang from his bed and sent for all his friends. Since no reply came back from anyone, he went himself to their rooms with a few followers. But finding that the doors were closed and that no one replied to him, he returned to his own chamber, from which now the very caretakers had fled, taking with them even the bed-clothing and the box of poison. Then he at once called for the gladiator Spiculus or any other adept at whose hand he might find death, and when no one appeared, he cried "Have I then neither friend nor foe?" and ran out as if to throw himself into the Tiber.

XLVIII. Changing his purpose again, he sought for some retired place, where he could hide and collect his thoughts; and when his freedmen Phaon offered his villa in the suburbs between the Via Nomentana and the Via Salaria near the fourth milestone, just as he was, barefooted and in his tunic, he put on a faded cloak, covered his head, and holding a handkerchief before his face, mounted a horse with only four attendants, one of whom was Sporus. At once he was startled by a shock of earthquake and a flash of lightning full in his face, and he heard the shouts of the soldiers from the camp hard by, as they prophesied destruction for him and success for Galba. He also heard one of the wayfarers whom he met say: "These men are after Nero," and another ask: "Is there anything new in the city about Nero?" Then his horse took fright at the smell of a corpse which had been thrown out into the road, his face was exposed, and a retired soldier of the Guard recognized him and saluted him. When they came to a by-path leading to the villa, they turned the horses loose and he made his way amid bushes and

brambles and along a path through a thicket of reeds to the back wall of the house, with great difficulty and only when a robe was thrown down for him to walk on. Here the aforesaid Phaon urged him to hide for a time in a pit, from which sand had been dug, but he declared that he would not go under ground while still alive, and after waiting for a while until a secret entrance into the villa could be made, he scooped up in his hand some water to drink from a pool close by, saying: "This is Nero's distilled water" [*referring to a drink of his own contrivance, distilled water cooled in snow; cf., Pliny, Nat. Hist. 31.40*]. Then, as his cloak had been torn by the thorns, he pulled out the twigs which had pierced it, and crawling on all fours through a narrow passage that had been dug, he entered the villa and lay down in the first room [*"Cella" implies a small room, for the use of slaves*] he came to, on a couch with a common mattress, over which an old cloak had been thrown. Though suffering from hunger and renewed thirst, he refused some coarse bread which was offered him, but drank a little lukewarm water.

XLIX. At last, while his companions one and all urged him to save himself as soon as possible from the indignities that threatened him, he bade them dig a grave in his presence, proportioned to the size of his own person, collect any bits of marble that could be found, and at the same time bring water and wood for presently disposing of his body [*the water was for washing his corpse and the fire for burning it*]. As each of these things was done, he wept and said again and again: "What an artist the world is losing!" While he hesitated, a letter was brought to Phaon by one of his couriers. Nero snatching it from his hand read that he had been pronounced a public enemy by the Senate, and that they were seeking him to punish him in the ancient fashion [*Cf., Claud. xxxiv.1*], and he asked what manner of punishment that was. When he learned that the criminal was stripped, fastened by the neck in a fork [*two pieces of wood, fastened together in the form of a "V"*], and then beaten to death with rods, in mortal terror he seized two daggers which he had brought with him, and then, after trying the point of each, put them up again, pleading that the fated hour had not yet come. Now he would beg Sporus to begin to lament and wail, and now entreat someone to help him take his life by setting him the example; anon he reproached himself for his cowardice in such words as these: "To live is a scandal and shame—this does not become Nero, does not become him—one should be resolute at such times—come, rouse oneself!" And now the horsemen were at hand who had orders to take him off alive. When he heard them, he quavered: "Hark, now strikes on my ear the trampling of swift-footed coursers!" [*Iliad 10.535*], and drove a dagger into his throat, aided by Epaphroditus, his private secretary [*See Domitian xiv.4*]. He was all but dead when a centurion rushed in, and as he placed a cloak to the wound, pretending that he had come to aid him, Nero merely gasped: "Too late!" and "This is fidelity!" With these words he was gone, with eyes so set and starting from their sockets that all who saw him shuddered with horror. First and beyond all else he had forced from his companions a promise to let no one have his head, but to contrive in some way that he be buried un mutilated. And this was granted by Icelus, Galbas' freedman [*See Galba xiv.2*], who had shortly before been released from the bondage to which he was consigned at the beginning of the revolt.

L. He was buried at a cost of two hundred thousand sesterces and laid out in white robes embroidered with gold, which he had worn on the Kalends of January. His ashes were deposited by his nurses, Egloge and Alexandria, accompanied by his mistress Acte, in the family tomb of the Domitii on the summit of the Hill of Gardens [*the modern Pincio*], which is visible from the Campus Martius. In that monument his sarcophagus of porphyry, with an altar of Luna marble standing above it, is enclosed by a balustrade of Thasian stone.

LI. He was about the average height, his body marked with spots and malodorous, his hair light blond, his features regular rather than attractive, his eyes blue and somewhat weak, his neck over thick, his belly prominent, and his legs very slender. His health was good, for though indulging in every kind of riotous excess, he was ill but three times in all during the fourteen years of his reign, and even then not enough to give up wine or any of his usual habits. He was utterly shameless in the care of his person and in his dress, always having his hair arranged in tiers of curls, and during the trip to Greece also letting it grow long and hang down behind; and he often appeared in public in a dining-robe [*the "synthesina" was a loose robe of bright-colored silk, worn at dinner, during the Saturnalia, and by women at other times. Nero's is described by Dio, 63.13, as "a short, flowered tunic with a muslin collar."*], with a handkerchief bound about his neck, ungirt and unshod [*probably meaning "in slippers"*].

LII. When a boy, he took up almost all the liberal arts; but his mother turned him from philosophy, warning him that it was a drawback to one who was going to rule, while Seneca kept him from reading the early orators, to make his admiration for his teacher endure the longer. Turning therefore to poetry, he wrote verses with eagerness

The Lives of the Caesars: Nero

and without labor, and did not, as some think, publish the work of others as his own. I have had in my possession note-books and papers with some well-known verses of his, written with his own hand and in such wise that it was perfectly evident that they were not copied or taken down from dictation, but worked out exactly as one writes when thinking and creating; so many instances were there of words erased or struck through and written above the lines. He likewise had no slight interest in painting and sculpture.

LIII. But above all he was carried away by a craze for popularity and he was jealous of all who in any way stirred the feeling of the mob. It was the general belief that after his victories on the stage he would at the next lustrum have competed with the athletes at Olympia; for he practiced wrestling constantly, and all over Greece he had always viewed the gymnastic contests after the fashion of the judges, sitting on the ground in the stadium; and if any pairs of contestants withdrew too far from their positions, he would force them forward with his own hand. Since he was acclaimed as the equal of Apollo in music and of the Sun in driving a chariot, he had planned to emulate the exploits of Hercules as well; and they say that a lion had been specially trained for him to kill naked in the arena of the amphitheatre before all the people, with a club or by the clasp of his arms.

LIV. Towards the end of his life, in fact, he had publicly vowed that if he retained his power, he would at the games in celebration of his victory give a performance on the water-organ, the flute, and the bagpipes and that on the last day he would appear as an actor and dance "Vergil's Turnus." Some even assert that he put the actor Paris to death as a dangerous rival.

LV. He had a longing for immortality and undying fame, though it was ill-regulated. With this in view he took their former appellations from many things and numerous places and gave them new ones from his own name. He also called the month of April Neroneus and was minded to name Rome Neropolis.

LVI. He utterly despised all cults, with the sole exception of that of the Syrian Goddess [*Atargatis, the principal deity of Northern Syria, identified with Magna Mater and Caelestis; often mentioned in inscriptions and called by Apul. Metam. 8.25, omnipotens et omniparens*], and even acquired such a contempt for her that he made water on her image, after he was enamored of another, superstition, which was the only one to which he constantly clung. For he had received as a gift from some unknown man of the commons, as a protection against plots, a little image of a girl; and since a conspiracy at once came to light, he continued to venerate it as a powerful divinity and to offer three sacrifices to it every day, encouraging the belief that through its communication he had knowledge of the future. A few months before his death he did attend an inspection of victims, but could not get a favorable omen.

LVII. He met his death in the thirty-second year of his age, on the anniversary of the murder of Octavia, and such was the public rejoicing that the people put on liberty-caps and ran about all over the city. Yet there were some who for a long time decorated his tomb with spring and summer flowers, and now produced his statues on the Rostra in the fringed toga, and now his edicts, as if he were still alive and would shortly return and deal destruction to his enemies. Nay more, Vologaesius, King of the Parthians, when he sent envoys to the Senate to renew his alliance, earnestly begged this too, that honor be paid to the memory of Nero. In fact, twenty years later, when I was a young man, a person of obscure origin appeared, who gave out that he was Nero, and the name was still in such favor with the Parthians, that they supported him vigorously and surrendered him with great reluctance.
