

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

Suetonius

Table of Contents

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

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

Suetonius

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

Translated by J. C. Rolfe.

I. The empire, which for a long time had been unsettled and, as it were, drifting, through the usurpation and violent death of three emperors, was at last taken in hand and given stability by the Flavian family. This house was, it is true, obscure and without family portraits, yet it was one of which our country had no reason whatever to be ashamed, even though it is the general opinion that the penalty which Domitian paid for his avarice and cruelty was fully merited. Titus Flavius Petro, a citizen of Reate and during the civil war a centurion or a volunteer veteran on Pompeius Magnus' side, fled from the field of Pharsalos and went home, where after at last obtaining pardon and an honorable discharge, he carried on the business of a collector of moneys. His son, surnamed Sabinus (although some say that he was a centurion of the first grade, and others that while still in command of a cohort he was retired because of ill health) took no part in military life, but farmed the public tax of a twentieth [*A tax of five per cent on the value of every slave who was set free, paid by the slave himself or by his master*] in Asia. And there existed for some time statues erected in his honor by the cities of Asia, inscribed "To an honest tax-gatherer." Later, he carried on a money-lending business in Helvetia and there he died, survived by his wife, Vespasia Polla, and by two of her children, of whom the elder, Sabinus, rose to the rank of Prefect of Rome, and the younger, Vespasian, even to that of emperor. Polla, who was born of an honorable family at Nursia, had for father Vespasius Pollio, thrice tribune of the soldiers and prefect of the camp [*A position held by tried and skillful officers, especially centurions of the first grade (primipili)*] while her brother became a senator with the rank of praetor. There is, moreover, on the top of a mountain, near the sixth milestone on the road from Nursia to Spoletium, a place called Vespasiae, where many monuments of the Vespasii are to be seen, affording strong proof of the renown and antiquity of the house. I ought to add that some have bandied about the report, that Petro's father came from the region beyond the Po and was a contractor for the day-laborers who come regularly every year from Umbria to the Sabine district, to till the fields; but that he settled in the town of Reate and there married. Personally, I have found no evidence whatever of this, in spite of rather careful investigation.

II. Vespasian was born in the Sabine country, in a small village beyond Reate, called Falacrina, on the evening of the fifteenth day before the Kalends of December, in the consulate of Quintus Sulpicius Camerinus and Gaius Poppaeus Sabinus, five years before the death of Augustus [*November 14, 9 C.E.*]. He was brought up under the care of his paternal grandmother Tertulla on her estates at Cosa. Therefore, even after he became emperor, he used constantly to visit the home of his infancy, where the manor house was kept in its original condition, since he did not wish to miss anything which he was wont to see there; and he was so devoted to his grandmother's memory, that on religious and festival days he always drank from a little silver cup that had belonged to her. After assuming the garb of manhood, he for a long time made no attempt to win the broad stripe of senator, though his brother had gained it, and only his mother could finally induce him to sue for it.

She at length drove him to it, but rather by sarcasm than by entreaties or parental authority, since she constantly taunted him with being his brother's footman [*The "anteambulo" was the client who walked before his patron on the street and compelled people to make way for him*]. He served in Thrakia as tribune of the soldiers; as quaestor was assigned by lot to the province of Crete and Kyrene; became a candidate for the aedileship and then for the praetorship, attaining the former only after one defeat and then barely landing in the sixth place [*38 C.E.*], but the latter on his first canvass and among the foremost [*39 C.E.*]. In his praetorship, to lose no opportunity of winning the favor of Gaius, who was at odds with the Senate [*See Calig. xlviiii-xlix*], he asked for special games because of the emperor's victory in Germanica and recommended, as an additional punishment of

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

the conspirators [*Lepidus and Gaetulicus; see Claud. ix.1*] that they be cast out unburied. He also thanked the emperor before that illustrious body [*The Senate*] because he had deigned to honor him with an invitation to dinner.

III. Meanwhile, he took to wife Flavia Domitilla, formerly the mistress of Statilius Capella, a Roman eques of Sabrata in Africa, a woman originally only of Latin rank, but afterwards declared a freeborn citizen of Rome in a suit before arbiters, brought by her father Flavius Liberalis, a native of Ferentum and merely a quaestor's clerk. By her he had three children, Titus, Domitian, and Domitilla. He outlived his wife and daughter; in fact lost them both before he became emperor. After the death of his wife he resumed his relations with Caenis, freedwoman and amanuensis of Antonia, and formerly his mistress; and even after he became emperor he treated her almost as a lawful wife.

IV. In the reign of Claudius he was sent in command of a legion to Germania, through the influence of Narcissus; from there he was transferred to Britannia [*See Claud. xvii*], where he fought thirty battles with the enemy. He reduced to subjection two powerful nations, more than twenty towns, and the island of Vectis [*The Isle of Wight*], near Britannia, partly under the leadership of Aulus Plautius, the consular governor, and partly under that of Claudius himself. For this he received the triumphal regalia, and shortly after two priesthoods, besides the consulship, which he held for the last two months of the year [*51 C.E.*]. The rest of the time up to his proconsulate he spent in rest and retirement, through fear of Agrippina, who still had a strong influence over her son and hated any friend of Narcissus, even after the latter's death. The chance of the lot then gave him Africa [*63 C.E.*], which he governed with great justice and high honor, save that in a riot at Hadrumetum he was pelted with turnips. Certain it is that he came back none the richer, for his credit was so nearly gone that he mortgaged all his estates to his brother, and had to resort to trading in mules to keep up his position; whence he was commonly known as "the Muleteer." He is also said to have been found guilty of squeezing two hundred thousand sesterces out of a young man for whom he obtained the broad stripe against his father's wish, and to have been severely rebuked in consequence. On the tour through Graecia, among the companions of Nero [*See Nero, xxii*], he bitterly offended the emperor by either going out often while Nero was singing, or falling asleep, if he remained. Being in consequence banished not only from intimacy with the emperor but even from his public receptions, he withdrew to a little out-of-the-way town, until a province and an army were offered him while he was in hiding and in fear of his life. There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judaea to rule the world. This prediction, referring to the emperor of Rome, as afterwards appeared from the event, the people of Judaea took to themselves; accordingly they revolted and after killing their governor, they routed the consular ruler of Syria as well, when he came to the rescue, and took one of his eagles. Since to put down this rebellion required a considerable army with a leader of no little enterprise, yet one to whom so great power could be entrusted without risk, Vespasian was chosen for the task, both as a man of tried energy and as one in no wise to be feared because of the obscurity of his family and name. Therefore there were added to the forces in Judaea two legions with eight divisions of cavalry and ten cohorts. He took his elder son as one of his lieutenants and as soon as he reached his province he attracted the attention of the neighboring provinces also; for he at once reformed the discipline of the army and fought one or two battles with such daring, that in the storming of a fortress he was wounded in the knee with a stone and received several arrows in his shield.

V. While Otho and Vitellius were fighting for the throne after the death of Nero and Galba, he began to cherish the hope of imperial dignity, which he had long since conceived because of the following portents. On the suburban estate of the Flavii an old oak tree, which was sacred to Mars, on each of the three occasions when Vespasia was delivered, suddenly put forth a branch from its trunk, obvious indications of the destiny of each child. The first was slender and quickly withered, and so too the girl that was born died within the year; the second was very strong and long and portended great success, but the third was the image of a tree. Therefore, their father Sabinus, so they say, being further encouraged by an inspection of victims, announced to his mother that a grandson had been born to her who would be a Caesar. But she only laughed, marveling that her son should already be in his dotage, while she was still of strong mind. Later, when Vespasian was aedile, Gaius Caesar, incensed at his neglect of his duty of cleaning the streets, ordered that he be covered with mud, which the soldiers accordingly heaped into the bosom of his fringed toga; this some interpreted as an omen that one day in some civil commotion his country, trampled under foot and forsaken, would come under his protection and as it were

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

into his embrace. Once when he was taking breakfast, a stray dog brought in a human hand from the cross-roads and dropped it under the table [*The hand was typical of power, and "manus" is often used in the sense of "potestas"*]. Again, when he was dining, an ox that was ploughing shook off its yoke, burst into the dining-room, and after scattering the servants, fell at the very feet of Vespasian as he reclined at table, and bowed its neck as if suddenly tired out. A cypress tree, also, on his grandfather's farm was torn up by the roots, without the agency of any violent storm, and thrown down, and on the following day rose again greener and stronger than before. He dreamed in Greece that the beginning of good fortune for himself and his family would come as soon as Nero had a tooth extracted; and on the next day it came to pass that a physician walked into the hall [*Of Nero's lodging*], and showed him a tooth which he had just then taken out. When he consulted the oracle of the god of Carmel in Judaea, the lots were highly encouraging, promising that whatever he planned or wished, however great it might be, would come to pass; and one of his highborn prisoners, Josephus by name, as he was being put in chains, declared most confidently that he would soon be released by the same man, who would then, however, be emperor. Omens were also reported from Rome: Nero in his latter days was admonished in a dream to take the sacred chariot of Jupiter Optimus Maximus from its shrine to the house of Vespasian and from there to the Circus. Not long after this, too, when Galba was on his way to the elections which gave him his second consulship, a statue of the Deified Julius of its own accord turned towards the East; and on the field of Betriacum, before the battle began, two eagles fought in the sight of all, and when one was vanquished a third came from the direction of the rising sun and drove off the victor.

VI. Yet he made no move, although his followers were quite ready and even urgent, until he was roused to it by the accidental support of men unknown to him and at a distance. Two thousand soldiers of the three legions that made up the army in Moesia had been sent to help Otho. When word came to them after they had begun their march that he had been defeated and had taken his own life, they none the less kept on as far as Aquileia, because they did not believe the report. There, taking advantage of the lawless state of the times, they indulged in every kind of pillage; then, fearing that if they went back, they would have to give an account and suffer punishment, they took it into their heads to select and appoint an emperor, saying that they were just as good as the Army of Hispania which had appointed Galba, or the Praetorian Guard which had elected Otho, or the Army of Germania which had chosen Vitellius. Accordingly, the names of all the consular governors who were serving anywhere were taken up, and since objection was made to the rest for one reason or another, while some members of the third legion, which had been transferred from Syria to Moesia just before the death of Nero, highly commended Vespasian, they unanimously agreed on him and forthwith inscribed his name on all their banners. At the time, however, the movement was checked and the soldiers recalled to their allegiance for a season. But when their action became known, Tiberius Alexander, prefect of Egypt, was the first to compel his legions to take the oath for Vespasian on the Kalends of July, the day which was afterwards celebrated as that of his accession; then the army in Judaea swore allegiance to him personally on the fifth day before the Ides of July [*July 11; according to Tac. Hist. 2.79, it was the fifth day before the Nones, July 3*]. The enterprise was greatly forwarded by the circulation of a copy of a letter of the late emperor Otho to Vespasian, whether genuine or forged, urging him with the utmost earnestness to vengeance, and expressing the hope that he would come to the aid of his country; further, by a rumor which spread abroad that Vitellius had planned, after his victory, to change the winter quarters of the legions and to transfer those in Germania to the Orient, to a safer and milder service; and finally, among the governors of provinces, by the support of Licinius Mucianus [*Governor of the neighboring province of Syria*], and among the kings, by that of Vologaesius, the Parthian. The former, laying aside the hostility with which up to that time jealousy had obviously inspired him, promised the Syrian army, and the latter forty thousand bowmen.

VII. Therefore beginning a civil war and sending ahead generals with troops to Italia, he crossed meanwhile to Alexandria, to take possession of the key to Egypt [*The strategic importance of Egypt is shown by Tac. Ann. 2.59; cf. Jul. xxxv.1 (at the end); Aug. xviii.2*]. There he dismissed all his attendants and entered the Temple of Serapis alone, to consult the auspices as to the duration of his power. And when after many propitiary offerings to the god he at length turned about, it seemed to him that his freedman Basilides [*The freedman's name, connected with the Greek "Basileus", or "King", was an additional omen*] offered him sacred boughs, garlands and loaves, as is the custom there; and yet he knew well that no one had let him in, and that for some time he had been hardly able to walk by reason of rheumatism, and was besides far away. And immediately letters came with the news that Vitellius had been routed at Cremona and the emperor himself slain at Rome. Vespasian as yet lacked prestige

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

and a certain divinity, so to speak, since he was an unexpected and still new-made emperor; but these also were given him. A man of the people who was blind, and another who was lame, came to him together as he sat on the tribunal, begging for the help for their disorders which Serapis had promised in a dream; for the god declared that Vespasian would restore the eyes, if he would spit upon them, and give strength to the leg, if he would deign to touch it with his heel. Though he had hardly any faith that this could possibly succeed, and therefore shrank even from making the attempt, he was at last prevailed upon by his friends and tried both things in public before a large crowd; and with success. At this same time, by the direction of certain soothsayers, some vases of antique workmanship were dug up in a consecrated spot at Tegea in Arcadia and on them was an image very like Vespasian.

VIII. Returning to Rome under such auspices and attended by so great renown, after celebrating a triumph over the Jews, he added eight consulships to his former one [70–72, 74–77, 78 C.E.]; he also assumed the censorship, and during the whole period of his rule he considered nothing more essential than first to strengthen the State, which was tottering and almost overthrown, and then to embellish it as well. The soldiery, some emboldened by their victory, and some resenting their humiliating defeat, had abandoned themselves to every form of licence and recklessness; the provinces, too, and the free cities, as well as some of the kingdoms, were in a state of internal dissension. Therefore, he discharged many of the soldiers of Vitellius and punished many; but so far from showing any special indulgence to those who had shared in his victory, he was even tardy in paying them their lawful rewards. To let slip no opportunity of improving military discipline, when a young man reeking with perfumes came to thank him for a commission which had been given him, Vespasian drew back his head in disgust, adding the stern reprimand: "I would rather you had smelt of garlic"; and he revoked the appointment. When the marines who march on foot by turns from Ostia and Puteoli to Rome [*They were stationed at Ostia and Puteoli as a fire brigade (see Claud. xxv.2), and the various divisions were on duty now in one town, now in the other, and again in Rome*], asked that an allowance be made them under the head of shoe money, not content with sending them away without a reply, he ordered that in future they should make the run barefooted; and they have done so ever since. He made provinces of Achaia, Lykia, Rhodes, Byzantium and Samos, taking away their freedom, and likewise of Trachian Cilicia and Commagene, which up to that time had been ruled by kings. He sent additional legions to Cappadocia because of the constant inroads of the barbarians, and gave it a consular governor in place of a Roman eques. As the city was unsightly from fires and fallen buildings, he allowed anyone to take possession of vacant sites and build upon them, in case the owners failed to do so. He began the restoration of the Capitol in person, was the first to lend a hand in clearing away the debris, and carried some of it off on his own head. He undertook to restore the three thousand bronze tablets which were destroyed with the temple, making a thorough search for copies: priceless and most ancient records of the empire, containing the decrees of the Senate and the acts of the People almost from the foundation of the city, regarding alliances, treaties, and special privileges granted to individuals.

IX. He also undertook new works, the Temple of Peace hard by the Forum and one to the Deified Claudius on the Caelian mount, which was begun by Agrippina, but almost utterly destroyed by Nero; also an amphitheatre [*The Colosseum, known as the Flavian amphitheater until the Middle Ages*] in the heart of the city, a plan which he learned that Augustus had cherished. He reformed the two great orders, reduced by a series of murders and sullied by long standing neglect, and added to their numbers, holding a review of the Senate and the equites, expelling those who least deserved the honor and enrolling the most distinguished of the Italians and provincials. Furthermore, to let it be known that the two orders differed from each other not so much in their privileges as in their rank, in the case of an altercation between a senator and a Roman eques, he rendered this decision: "Unseemly language should not be used towards senators, but to return their insults in kind is proper and lawful" [*That is, a citizen could return the abuse of another citizen, regardless of their respective ranks*].

X. Lawsuit upon lawsuit had accumulated in all the courts to an excessive degree, since those of longstanding were left unsettled though the interruption of court business [*During the civil wars*] and new ones had arisen through the disorder of the times. He therefore chose commissioners by lot to restore what had been seized in time of war, and to make special decisions in the Court of the Hundred, reducing the cases to the smallest possible number, since it was clear that the lifetime of the litigants would not suffice for the regular proceedings.

XI. Licentiousness and extravagance had flourished without restraint; hence he induced the Senate to vote that any woman who formed a connection with the slave of another person should herself be treated as a

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

bond-woman; also that those who lend money to minors [*In the legal sense; "filii familiarum" were sons who were still under the control of their fathers, regardless of their age; cf., Tib. xv.2*] should never have a legal right to enforce payment, that is to say, not even after the death of the fathers.

XII. In other matters he was unassuming and lenient from the very beginning of his reign until its end, never trying to conceal his former lowly condition, but often even parading it. Indeed, when certain men tried to trace the origin of the Flavian family to the founders of Reate and a companion of Hercules whose tomb still stands on the Via Salaria, he laughed at them for their pains. So far was he from a desire for pomp and show, that on the day of his triumph, exhausted by the slow and tiresome procession, he did not hesitate to say: "It serves me right for being such a fool as to want a triumph in my old age, as if it were due to my ancestors or had ever been among my own ambitions." He did not even assume the tribunician power at once nor the title of Father of his Country until late. As for the custom of searching those who came to pay their morning calls, he gave that up before the civil war was over.

XIII. He bore the frank language of his friends, the quips of pleaders, and the impudence of the philosophers with the greatest patience. Though Licinius Mucianus, a man of notorious unchastity, presumed upon his services to treat Vespasian with scant respect, he never had the heart to criticize him except privately and then only to the extent of adding to a complaint made to a common friend, the significant words: "I at least am a man." When Salvius Liberalis ventured to say, while defending a rich client, "What is it to Caesar if Hipparchus has a hundred millions," he personally commended him. When the Cynic Demetrius met him abroad after being condemned to banishment, and without deigning to rise in his presence or to salute him, even snarled out some insult, he merely called him "cur."

XIV. He was not inclined to remember or to avenge affronts or enmities, but made a brilliant match for the daughter of his enemy Vitellius, and even provided her with a dowry and a house-keeping outfit. When he was in terror at being forbidden Nero's court, and asked what on earth he was to do or where he was to go, one of the ushers put him out and told him to "go to Morbovia" [*A made-up name from "morbus", or "illness"; the expression is equivalent to "go to the devil."*]; but when the man later begged for forgiveness, Vespasian confined his resentment to words, and those of about the same number and purport. Indeed, so far was he from being led by any suspicion or fear to cause anyone's death, that when his friends warned him that he must keep an eye on Mettius Pompusianus, since it was commonly believed that he had an imperial horoscope, he even made him consul, guaranteeing that he would one day be mindful of the favor.

XV. It cannot readily be shown that any innocent person was punished save in Vespasian's absence and without his knowledge, or at any rate against his will and by misleading him. Although Helvidius Priscus was the only one who greeted him on his return from Syria by his private name of "Vespasian," and moreover in his praetorship left the emperor unhonored and unmentioned in all his edicts, he did not show anger until by the extravagance of his railing Helvidius had all but degraded him. But even in his case, though he did banish him and later order his death, he was most anxious for any means of saving him, and sent messengers to recall those who were to slay him; and he would have saved him, but for a false report that Helvidius had already been done to death. Certainly he never took pleasure in the death of anyone, but even wept and sighed over those who suffered merited punishment.

XVI. The only thing for which he can fairly be censured was his love of money. For not content with reviving the imposts which had been repealed under Galba, he added new and heavy burdens, increasing the amount of tribute paid by the provinces, in some cases actually doubling it, and quite openly carrying on traffic which would be shameful even for a man in private life; for he would buy up certain commodities merely in order to distribute them at a profit. He made no bones of selling offices to candidates and acquittals to men under prosecution, whether innocent or guilty. He is even believed to have had the habit of designedly advancing the most rapacious of his procurators to higher posts, that they might be the richer when he later condemned them; in fact, it was common talk that he used these men as sponges, because he, so to speak, soaked them when they were dry and squeezed them when they were wet. Some say that he was naturally covetous and was taunted with it by an old herdsman of his, who on being forced to pay for the freedom for which he earnestly begged Vespasian when he became emperor cried: "The fox changes his fur, but not his nature." Others, on the contrary, believe that he was driven by necessity to raise money by spoliation and robbery because of the desperate state of the treasury and the privy purse; to which he bore witness at the very beginning of his reign by declaring that forty thousand millions

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

were needed to set the State upright. This latter view seems the more probable, since he made the best use of his gains, ill gotten though they were.

XVII. He was most generous to all classes, making up the requisite estate for senators [*This had been increased to 1,200,000 sesterces by Augustus*], giving needy ex-consuls an annual stipend of five hundred thousand sesterces, restoring to a better condition many cities throughout the empire which had suffered from earthquakes or fires, and in particular encouraging men of talent and the arts.

XVIII. He was the first to establish a regular salary of a hundred thousand sesterces for Latin and Greek teachers of rhetoric, paid from the privy purse. He also presented eminent poets with princely largess and great rewards, and artists, too, such as the restorer of the Venus of Cos [*Doubtless referring to the statue of Venus consecrated by Vespasian in his Temple of Peace, the sculptor of which, according to Pliny, was unknown. The Venus of Cos was the work of Praxiteles*], and of the Colossus [*The colossal statue of Nero; see Nero, xxxi. 1*]. To a mechanical engineer, who promised to transport some heavy columns to the capitol at small expense, he gave no mean reward for his invention, but refused to make use of it, saying: "You must let me feed my poor commons."

XIX. At the plays with which he dedicated the new stage of the theater of Marcellus he revived the old musical entertainments. To Apelles, the tragic actor, he gave four hundred thousand sesterces; to Terpnus and Diodorus, the lyre-players, two hundred thousand each; to several a hundred thousand; while those who received least were paid forty thousands and numerous golden crowns were awarded besides. He gave constant dinner-parties, too, usually formally and sumptuously, to help the marketmen. He gave gifts to women on the Kalends of March [*The Matronalia, or Feast of Married Women; see Hor. Odes, 3.8, 1*], as he did to the men on the Saturnalia. Yet even so he could not be rid of his former ill-repute for covetousness. The Alexandrians persisted in calling him Kybiosactes [*Meaning, "dealer in square pieces of salt fish"*], the surname of one of their kings who was scandalously stingy. Even at his funeral, Favor, a leading actor of mimes, who wore his mask and, according to the usual custom, imitated the actions and words of the deceased during his lifetime, having asked the procurators in a loud voice how much his funeral procession would cost, and hearing the reply "Ten million sesterces," cried out: "Give me a hundred thousand and fling me into the Tiber!"

XX. He was well built, with strong, sturdy limbs, and the expression of one who was straining. Apropos of which a witty fellow, when Vespasian asked him to make a joke on him also, replied rather cleverly: "I will, when you have finished relieving yourself." He enjoyed excellent health, though he did nothing to keep it up except to rub his throat and the other parts of his body a certain number of times in the gymnasium, and to fast one day in every month.

XXI. This was in general his manner of life. While emperor, he always rose very early, in fact before daylight; then after reading his letters and the reports of all the officials, he admitted his friends, and while he was receiving their greetings, he put on his own shoes and dressed himself. After despatching any business that came up, he took time for a drive and then for a nap, lying with one of his concubines, of whom he had taken several after the death of Caenis. After his nap he went to the bath and the dining-room; and it is said that at no time was he more good-natured or indulgent, so that the members of his household eagerly watched for these opportunities of making requests.

XXII. Not only at dinner but on all other occasions he was most affable, and he turned off many matters with a jest; for he was very ready with sharp sayings, albeit of a low and buffoonish kind, so that he did not even refrain from obscene expressions. Yet many of his remarks are still remembered which are full of fine wit, and among them the following. When an ex-consul called Mestrius Florus called his attention to the fact that the proper pronunciation was *plaustra* [*"Plaustra" was the original form of the word for "wagons," but there was also a plebeian form "plostra"; see Hor. Serm. 1.6.42, and cf., Claudius, Clodius*] rather than *plostra*, he greeted him next day as *Flaurus*. When he was importuned by a woman, who said that she was dying with love for him, he took her to his bed and gave her four hundred thousand sesterces for her favors. Being asked by his steward how he would have the sum entered in his accounts, he replied: "To a passion for Vespasian."

XXIII. He also quoted Greek verses with great timeliness, saying of a man of tall stature, and monstrous parts: "Striding along and waving a lance that casts a long shadow," [*Iliad 7.213*], and of the freedman Cerylus, who was very rich, and to cheat the privy purse of its dues at his death had begun to give himself out as freeborn, changing his name to *Laches*: "O Laches, Laches, When you are dead, you'll change your name at once to Cerylus again" [*Menander, Fr. 223.2*]. But he particularly resorted to witticisms about his unseemly means of gain,

The Lives of the Caesars: Vespasianus

seeking to diminish their odium by some jocose saying and to turn them into a jest. Having put off one of his favorite attendants, who asked for a stewardship for a pretended brother, he summoned the candidate himself, and after compelling him to pay him as much money as he had agreed to give his advocate, appointed him to the position without delay. On his attendant's taking up the matter again, he said: "Find yourself another brother; the man that you thought was yours is mine." On a journey, suspecting that his muleteer had got down to shoe the mules merely to make delay and give time for a man with a lawsuit to approach the emperor, he asked how much he was paid for shoeing the mules and insisted on a share of the money. When Titus found fault with him for contriving a tax upon public toilets, he held a piece of money from the first payment to his son's nose, asking whether its odor was offensive to him. When Titus said "No," he replied, "Yet it comes from urine." On the report of a deputation that a colossal statue of great cost had been voted him at public expense, he demanded to have it set up at once, and holding out his open hand, said that the base was ready. He did not cease his jokes even then in apprehension of death and in extreme danger; for when among other portents the Mausoleum [*Of Augustus*] opened on a sudden and a comet appeared in the heavens, he declared that the former applied to Junia Calvina of the family of Augustus, and the latter to the king of the Parthians, who wore his hair long; and as death drew near, he said: "Woe's me. Methinks I'm turning into a god."

XXIV. In his ninth consulship [79 C.E.] he had a slight illness in Campania, and returning at once to the city, he left for Cutilae and the country about Reate, where he spent the summer every year. There, in addition to an increase in his illness, having contracted a bowel complaint by too free use of the cold waters, he nevertheless continued to perform his duties as emperor, even receiving embassies as he lay in bed. Taken on a sudden with such an attack of diarrhoea that he all but swooned, he said: "An emperor ought to die standing," and while he was struggling to get on his feet, he died in the arms of those who tried to help him, on the ninth day before the Kalends of July [*June 23, 79 C.E.*], at the age of sixty-nine years, one month, and seven days.

XXV. All agree that he had so much faith in his own horoscope and those of his family, that even after constant conspiracies were made against him he had the assurance to say to the Senate that either his sons would succeed him or he would have no successor. It is also said that he once dreamed that he saw a balance with its beam on a level placed in the middle of the vestibule of the Palace, in one pan of which stood Claudius and Nero and in the other himself and his sons. And the dream came true, since both houses reigned for the same space of time and the same term of years.
