

### CHAPTER XIII

AUGUSTUS was over seventy years of age. Until recently nobody had thought of him as an old man. But these new public and private calamities made a great change in him. His temper grew uncertain and he found it increasingly difficult to welcome chance visitors with his usual affability or to keep his patience at public banquets. He was even inclined to be short-tempered with Livia. Nevertheless he continued his work conscientiously as ever and even accepted another ten years' instalment of the monarchy. Tiberius and Germanicus when they were in the City undertook many tasks for him that normally he would have undertaken himself, and Livia worked harder than ever. During the Balkan War she had remained at Rome while Augustus was away and, armed with a duplicate seal of his and in close touch with him by dispatch-riders, had managed everything herself. Augustus was becoming more or less reconciled to the prospect of Tiberius's succeeding him. He judged him capable of ruling reasonably well, with Livia's help, and of carrying on his own policies, but he also flattered himself that everyone would miss the Father of the Country when he was dead and would speak of the Augustan Age as they spoke of the Golden Age of King Numa. In spite of his signal services to Rome, Tiberius was personally unpopular and would surely not gain in popularity when he was Emperor. It was a satisfaction to Augustus that Germanicus, being older than Castor, his brother by adoption, was Tiberius's natural successor, and that Germanicus's infant sons, Nero and Drusus, were his own great-grandsons. Though Fate had decreed against his grandsons succeeding

him he would surely one day reign again, as it were, in the persons of his great-grandchildren. For by this time Augustus had forgotten about the Republic, as almost everybody else had, and accepted the view that his forty years of hard and anxious service on Rome's behalf had earned him the right of appointing his Imperial successors, to the third generation, even, if it so pleased him.

When Germanicus was in Dalmatia I did not write to him about Postumus for fear of some agent of Livia's intercepting my letter, but I told him everything as soon as he returned from the war. He was greatly troubled and said that he did not know what to believe. I should explain that Germanicus's way was always to refuse to think evil of any person until positive proof of such evil should be forced on him, and, on the contrary, to credit everyone with the highest motives. This extreme simplicity was generally of service to him. Most people with whom he came in contact were flattered by his high estimate of their moral character and tended in their dealings with him to live up to it. If he were ever to find himself at the mercy of a downright wicked character, this generosity of heart would of course be his undoing; but on the other hand if any man had any good in him Germanicus always seemed to bring it out. So now he told me that he would not willingly believe either Livilla or Æmilia capable of such criminal baseness, though lately, he owned, he had been disappointed in Livilla. He also said that I had not made their possible motives clear except by dragging our grandmother Livia into it, which was plainly ridiculous. Who in his senses, he asked, suddenly indignant, could suspect Livia of inciting them to such evil? One might as easily suspect the Good Goddess of poisoning the City wells. But when I asked in reply whether he really believed Postumus guilty of two attempted rapes on successive nights, both excessively imprudent, or capable of lying to Augustus and us about them even if he had been guilty, he was silent. He had always loved and trusted Postumus. I pursued my advantage and made him swear by the ghost of our dead

father that if ever he found the least piece of evidence to show that Postumus had been unjustly sentenced he would tell Augustus all that he knew about the case and force him to bring Postumus back and punish the liars as they deserved.

In Germany nothing much was happening. Tiberius held the bridges but did not attempt to cross the Rhine, not having confidence yet in his troops, whom he was busy knocking into shape. The Germans did not attempt to cross either. Augustus grew impatient again with Tiberius, and urged him to avenge Varus without further delay and win back the lost Eagles. Tiberius answered that nothing was nearer to his own heart but that his troops were not yet fit to attempt the task. Augustus sent out Germanicus when he had finished his term of magistracy, and Tiberius then had to show some activity: he was not really lazy, or a coward, only extremely cautious. He crossed the Rhine and overran parts of the lost province, but the Germans avoided a pitched battle; and Tiberius and Germanicus, both very careful not to fall into any ambush, did not do much more than burn a few enemy encampments near the Rhine and parade their military strength. There were a few skirmishes in which they came off well—some hundreds of prisoners were taken. They remained in this region until the autumn, when they recrossed the Rhine; and in the next spring the long-delayed triumph over the Dalmatians was celebrated at Rome, to which was added another for this German expedition, just to restore confidence. I must not fail here to award Tiberius credit for a generous action, to which Germanicus persuaded him: after displaying Bato, the captured Dalmatian rebel, in his triumph, he gave him his freedom and a large present of money and settled him comfortably at Ravenna. Bato deserved it: he had once chivalrously allowed Tiberius to escape from a valley where he was trapped with most of his army.

Germanicus was Consul now and Augustus wrote a special letter commending him to the Senate and the Senate to Tiberius. (By thus commending the Senate to Tiberius,

instead of the other way about, Augustus showed both that he intended Tiberius as his Imperial successor, in authority over the Senate, and that he did not wish to utter any eulogy on him as he did on Germanicus.) Agrippina always accompanied Germanicus when he went to the wars, as my mother had accompanied my father. She did this chiefly for love of him but also because she did not want to stay alone in Rome and perhaps be summoned before Augustus on a trumped-up charge of adultery. She could not be sure how she stood with Livia. She was the typical Roman matron of ancient legend—strong, courageous, modest, witty, pious, fertile and chaste. She already had borne four children to Germanicus and was to bear him five more.

Germanicus, though Livia's rule against my presence at her table still held, and though my mother showed no change of heart towards me either, brought me into the company of his noble friends whenever occasion offered. For his sake I was treated with a certain respect; but the family opinion of my capacities was known and Tiberius was understood to share it, so nobody took the trouble to cultivate my acquaintance. On Germanicus's advice I advertised that I would give a reading of my recent historical work and invited a number of prominent literary people to attend it. The book I had chosen to read was one at which I had worked very hard, and one which should have been very interesting to my audience—an account of the formulas used during ritual washing by the Etruscan priests, with a Latin translation in each case which threw light on many of our own lustral rites, the exact significance of which had been obscured by time. Germanicus read it through beforehand and showed it to my mother and Livia, who approved it, and then was generous enough to sit with me through a rehearsal of my reading. He congratulated me both on the work and on my delivery and I think must have spoken about it widely, for the room in which I was to give the reading was packed. Livia was not there, nor Augustus, but my mother attended, and Germanicus himself and Livilla.

I was in high spirits and not nervous at all. Germanicus had suggested that I should fortify myself with a cup of wine beforehand and I thought this good advice. There was a chair put for Augustus in case he should arrive and one for Livia, both very splendid ones—the chairs which were always reserved for them when they visited our house. When everyone had arrived and sat down the doors were shut and I began reading. I was getting along splendidly, conscious that I was not reading too fast or too slow or too loud or too soft, but just right, and that the audience, which had not expected much of me, was interested in spite of itself, when a most unlucky thing happened. A loud knock came at the door and then, when nobody opened it, another. Then there was a great rattle of the handle and in walked the fattest man I had ever seen in my life, dressed in a knight's robe, and carrying in his hand a large embroidered cushion. I stopped reading, because I had come to a difficult and important passage and nobody was listening—all eyes were fixed on the knight. He recognized Livy and greeted him in a sing-song accent, which I learned later was that of Padua, and then made a general salutation to the rest of the company; which caused a lot of titters. He paid no especial attention to Germanicus as Consul or to my mother and myself as hosts. Then he looked round for a seat and saw Augustus's, but it seemed rather too narrow for him so he took possession of Livia's. He put his cushion on it, gathered his gown about his knees and sat down with a grunt. And of course the chair, which was an ancient one from Egypt, part of the spoil of Cleopatra's palace, and of very delicate workmanship, collapsed with a crash.

Everyone except Germanicus and Livy and my mother and the graver members of the audience laughed very loudly; but when the knight had picked himself up and groaned and sworn and rubbed himself and had been escorted from the room by a freedman, there was an attentive silence and I tried to go on again. But I was almost hysterical with laughter. Perhaps it was the wine I had drunk, or perhaps

it was because I had seen the expression on the fellow's face when the chair was giving under him, which nobody else had, because he was in the front row and I was the only person facing him; but at any rate I found concentration on the lustral rites of the Etruscans impossible. At first the audience sympathized with my amusement and even laughed with me, but when, struggling through another paragraph, very badly, I happened with the corner of my eye to see the chair which the knight had broken propped up insecurely on its splintered legs, I broke down again and the audience began to get impatient. To make matters still worse, when I had just fought hard with myself and got into my stride again, to the evident relief of Germanicus, the doors were thrown open and who should come in but Augustus and Livia! They walked grandly between the rows of chairs and Augustus sat down. Livia was about to do the same when she saw that something was amiss. She asked in a loud ringing voice: "Who's been sitting in *my* chair?" Germanicus did his best to explain matters but she decided that she was being insulted. She went out. Augustus, looking uncomfortable, followed. Can anyone blame me for making a mull of the rest of my reading? The cruel god Momus must have been in that chair, for five minutes later the legs slid apart and once more the thing collapsed, a little gold lion's head breaking off from one arm, skidding across the floor and sliding under my right foot, which was slightly raised. I broke down again, choking and wheezing and guffawing.

Germanicus came over to me and implored me to control myself, but I could only pick up the lion's head and point helplessly at the chair. If I ever saw Germanicus annoyed with me it was then. It upset me very much to see him annoyed and sobered me instantly. But I had lost all self-confidence and began to stammer so badly that the reading came to a dismal end. Germanicus did his best by moving a vote of thanks for my interesting paper—regretting that an untoward accident had disturbed me half way through

and that in consequence of the same accident the Father of the Country and the Lady Livia his wife had withdrawn their presences, and hoping that on a more auspicious day in the near future I might give a further reading. There was never so considerate a brother as Germanicus, or so noble a man. But I have not given a single public reading of my works since.

Germanicus came to me one day looking very grave. It was a long time before he could make up his mind to speak, but at last he said: "I was talking to Æmilius this morning and the subject of poor Postumus happened to come up. He introduced it first by asking me what the precise charges against Postumus had been; and said, apparently quite ingenuously, that he understood that Postumus had attempted to violate two noblewomen, but that nobody seemed to know who they were. I looked hard at him when he said this, but could see that he was speaking the truth. So I offered to exchange my knowledge with his, but only if he promised to keep what I told him to himself. When I said that it was his own daughter who had charged Postumus with trying to outrage her, and in his own house, he was astonished and refused to believe it. He got very angry. He said Æmilia's governess had surely been with them all the time. He wanted to go to Æmilia and ask her if the story was true and if so, why this was the first he had heard of it; but I restrained him, reminding him of his promise. I mistrusted Æmilia. Instead I suggested that we should question the governess, but not so as to alarm her. So he sent for her and asked what conversation Æmilia and Postumus had had, during that alarm of thieves, on the last occasion he had dined with them. She looked blank at first but when I asked 'Wasn't it about fruit-trees?' she said, 'Yes, of course, about pests on fruit-trees.' Æmilius then wanted to know whether any other conversation had taken place during his absence and she said that she believed not. She recalled that Postumus had been explaining new Greek methods for dealing with

the pest called 'blackamoor' and that she had been extremely interested because she knew about gardens. No, she said, she had not left the room for a moment. So next I went to Castor and casually introduced the subject of Postumus. You remember that Postumus's estate was confiscated and sold while I was away in Dalmatia and that the proceeds were devoted to the military treasury? Well, I asked him what had happened to certain pieces of plate of mine that Postumus had borrowed from me for a banquet; and he told me how to recover them. Then we discussed his banishment. Castor talked quite freely and I am glad to say that I am now quite satisfied in my mind that he was not in the plot."

"You admit now that it was a plot?" I asked eagerly.

"I'm afraid, after all, that is the only explanation. But Castor himself was innocent, I am convinced. He told me, without being prompted, that on Livilla's suggestion he had teased Postumus in the garden, as Postumus told you he had. He explained that it was only because Postumus had been making sheep's eyes at Livilla and as her husband he did not like it. But he said that he did not regret having done so—though it was perhaps not a joke in the best of taste—because Postumus's attempt to outrage Livilla and his own serious injuries at that madman's hands made any regrets foolish."

"He believed that Postumus tried to outrage Livilla?"

"Yes. I did not undeceive him. I did not want Livilla to know what you and I suspect. Because, if she did, Livia would hear of it."

"Germanicus, you believe now that Livia arranged the whole thing?"

He did not answer.

"You will go to Augustus?"

"I gave you my word. I always keep my word."

"When are you going to him?"

"Now."

What happened at the interview I do not know and shall



never know. But Germanicus seemed much happier that evening at dinner and the manner in which he later evaded my questions suggested that Augustus had believed him and had sworn him to secrecy for the present. It was a long time before I learned as much of the sequel as I can tell now. Augustus wrote to the Corsicans, who had been complaining for some years of private raids on their A.D. 13 coasts, that he would soon come in person to investigate the matter; he would stop on his way to Marseilles where he intended to dedicate a temple. Shortly afterwards he set sail, but broke his journey at Elba for two days. On the first day he ordered Postumus's guards at Planasia to be relieved at once by an entirely new set. This was done. The same night he sailed secretly across to the island in a small fishing-boat, accompanied only by Fabius Maximus, a close friend, and one Clement, who had once been a slave of Postumus's and bore a remarkably close resemblance to his former master. I have heard that Clement was a natural son of Agrippa's. They were lucky enough to meet Postumus as soon as they landed. He had been setting night-lines for fish and had seen the sail of the boat from some distance away in the light of a strong moon; he was alone. Augustus revealed himself, and stretched out his hand crying, "Forgive me, my son!" Postumus took the hand and kissed it. Then the two went apart while Fabius and Clement kept watch. What was said between them nobody knows; but Augustus was weeping when they came back together. Then Postumus and Clement changed clothes and names, Postumus sailing back to Elba with Augustus and Fabius, and Clement taking Postumus's place at Planasia until the word should come for his release, which Augustus said would not be long delayed. Clement was promised his freedom and a large sum of money if he played his part well. He was to feign sick for the next few days and grow his hair and beard long, so that nobody would notice the imposture, especially since that afternoon he had not been seen by the new guard for more than a few minutes.

Livia suspected that Augustus was doing something behind her back. She knew his dislike of the sea and that he never went by ship when he could go by land, even if it meant losing valuable time. It is true that he could not have gone to Corsica except by sea, but the pirates were not a serious menace and he could easily have sent Castor or any one of several other subordinates to investigate the matter on his behalf. So she began to make enquiries and eventually heard that when Augustus stopped at Elba he had ordered Postumus's guards to be changed, and that he and Fabius had gone out catching cuttle-fish the same night in a small boat, accompanied only by a slave.

Fabius had a wife called Marcia who shared all his secrets and Livia, who had paid little attention to her, now began to cultivate her acquaintance. Marcia was a simple woman and easily deceived. When Livia was sure that she was completely in Marcia's confidence she took her aside one day and asked: "Come, my dear, tell me, was Augustus very much affected when he met Postumus again after all those years? He's much more tender-hearted than he makes out." Now, Fabius had told Marcia that the story of the voyage to Planasia was a secret which she must not reveal to anyone in the world, or the consequences might be fatal to him. So she would not answer at first. Livia laughed and said, "Oh, you *are* cautious. You're like that sentry of Tiberius's in Dalmatia who wouldn't let Tiberius himself into the camp one evening when he came back from a ride because he couldn't give the watchword. 'Orders are orders, General,' the idiot said. My dear Marcia, Augustus has no secrets from me, nor I from Augustus. But I commend your prudence." So Marcia apologized and said: "Fabius said he wept and wept." Livia said, "Of course, he did. But Marcia, perhaps it would be wiser not to let Fabius know that we've talked about it—Augustus doesn't like people to know how much he confides in me. I suppose Fabius told you about the slave?"

This was a shot in the dark. The slave may have been

of no importance, but it was a question worth asking. Marcia said: "Yes. Fabius said that he was extraordinarily like Postumus, only a little shorter."

"You don't think the guards will notice the difference?"

"Fabius said he thought they wouldn't. Clement was one of Postumus's household staff, so if he's careful he won't betray himself by ignorance and, as you know, the guard was changed."

So Livia now only had to find out the whereabouts of Postumus, whom she assumed to be hidden somewhere under the name of Clement. She thought that Augustus was planning to restore him to favour and might even pass over Tiberius and appoint him his immediate successor in the monarchy, by way of making amends. She now took Tiberius into her confidence, more or less, and warned him of her suspicions. Trouble had started again in the Balkans and Augustus was proposing to send Tiberius to suppress it before it took a serious turn. Germanicus was in France collecting tribute. Augustus spoke of sending Castor away too, to Germany; and he had been having frequent conversations with Fabius, who Livia concluded was acting as his go-between with Postumus. As soon as the coast was clear Augustus would no doubt suddenly introduce Postumus into the Senate, get the decree against him reversed and have him appointed his colleague in place of Tiberius. With Postumus restored her own life would not be safe: Postumus had accused her of poisoning his father and brothers and Augustus would not be taking him back into favour unless he believed that these accusations were well grounded. She set her most trusted agents to spy on Fabius's movements with a view to tracing a slave called Clement; but they could discover nothing. She decided at any rate to lose no time in removing Fabius. He was waylaid in the street one night on his way to the Palace and stabbed in twelve places: his masked assailants escaped. At the funeral a scandalous thing happened. Marcia threw herself on her husband's corpse and begged his pardon, saying that she alone had been

responsible for his death by her thoughtlessness and disobedience. However, nobody understood what she meant and it was thought that grief had crazed her.

Livia told Tiberius to keep in constant communication with her on his way to the Balkans and to travel as slowly as possible: he might be sent for at any moment. Augustus, who had accompanied him as far as Naples, <sup>A.D. 14</sup> cruising easily along the coast, now fell sick: his stomach was disordered. Livia prepared to nurse him but he thanked her and told her that it was nothing; he could cure himself. He went to his own medicine-cabinet and chose a strong purge, then fasted for a day. He positively forbade her to worry about his health; she had enough cares without that. He laughingly refused to eat anything but bread from the common table and water from the pitcher which she used herself and green figs which he picked from the tree with his own hands. Nothing in his manner to Livia seemed altered, nor was hers altered towards him, but each read the other's mind.

In spite of all precautions his stomach grew worse again. He had to break his journey at Nola; from there Livia sent a message recalling Tiberius. When he arrived Augustus was reported to be sinking and to be earnestly calling for him. He had already taken his farewell of certain ex-Consuls who had hurried from Rome at the news of his illness. He had asked them with a smile whether they thought he had acted well in the farce; which is the question that actors in comedies put to the audience at the conclusion of the piece. And smiling back, though many of them had tears in their eyes, they answered: "No man better, Augustus." "Then send me off with a good clap," he said. Tiberius went to his bedside, where he remained for some three hours, and then emerged to announce in sorrowful tones that the Father of the Country had just passed away, in Livia's arms, with a final loving salutation to himself, to the Senate, and to the people of Rome. He thanked the Gods that he had returned in time to close the eyes of his father and benefactor. As a

matter of fact, Augustus had been dead a whole day but Livia had concealed this, giving out reassuring or discouraging bulletins every few hours. By a strange coincidence he died in the very room in which his father had died, seventy-five years before.

I remember well how the news came to me. It was on the 20th of August. I was sleeping late after working nearly all night on my history; I found it easier in the summer to work by night and sleep by day. I was awakened by the arrival of two old knights who excused themselves for disturbing me but said that the matter was urgent. Augustus was dead and the Noble Order of Knights had met hurriedly and elected me their representative to go to the Senate. I was to ask that they might be honoured by the permission to bring Augustus's dead body back to the City on their shoulders. I was still half-asleep and did not think what I was saying. I shouted, "Poison is Queen, Poison is Queen!" They glanced anxiously and uncomfortably at each other and I recalled myself and apologized, saying that I had been dreaming a fearful dream and was repeating words that I heard in it. I asked them to repeat their message and when they did so thanked them for the honour and undertook to do what was asked of me. It was not altogether an honour, of course, to be singled out as a distinguished knight. Everyone was a knight who was free-born, and had not disgraced himself in any way, and owned property above a certain value; and, with my family connexions, if I had shown even average ability I should by now have been an honoured member of the Senate like my contemporary Castor. I was chosen in fact as being the only member of the Imperial family who still belonged to the lower order, and to avoid jealousy among the other knights. This was the first time that I had ever visited the Senate during a session. I made the plea without stammering or forgetting my words or otherwise disgracing myself.