

CHAPTER XIV

ALTHOUGH it had been clear that Augustus's powers were failing and that he had not many more years to live, Rome could not accustom itself to the idea of his death. It is not an idle comparison to say that the City felt much as a boy feels when he loses his father. Whether the father has been a brave man or a coward, just or unjust, generous or mean, signifies little: he has been that boy's father, and no uncle or elder brother can ever take his place. For Augustus's rule had been a very long one and a man had to be already past middle age to remember back behind it. It was therefore not altogether unnatural that the Senate met to deliberate whether the divine honours which had, even in his lifetime, been paid him by the provinces should now be voted him in the City itself.

Pollio's son, Gallus—hated by Tiberius because he had married Vipsania (Tiberius's first wife, you will recall, whom he had been forced to divorce on Julia's account), and because he had never given a public denial of the rumour which made him the real father of Castor, and because he had a witty tongue—this Gallus was the only senator who had dared to question the propriety of the motion. He rose to ask what divine portent had occurred to suggest that Augustus would be welcomed in the Heavenly Mansions—merely at the recommendation of his mortal friends and admirers?

There followed an uncomfortable silence but at last Tiberius rose slowly and said: "One hundred days ago, it will be recalled, the pediment of my father Augustus's statue was struck by lightning. The first letter of his name was

blotted out, which left the words ÆSAR AUGUSTUS. What is the meaning of the letter C? It is the sign for one hundred. What does ÆSAR mean? I shall tell you. It means God, in the Etruscan tongue. Clearly, in a hundred days from that lightning stroke Augustus is to become a God in Rome. What clearer portent than this can you require?" Though Tiberius took the sole credit for this interpretation it was I who had first given meaning to ÆSAR (the queer word had been much discussed), being the only person at Rome who was acquainted with the Etruscan language. I told my mother about it and she called me a fanciful fool; but she must have been sufficiently impressed to repeat what I said to Tiberius; for I told nobody but her.

Gallus asked why Jove should give his messages in Etruscan rather than in Greek or Latin? Could nobody swear to having observed any other more conclusive omen? It was all very well to decree new gods to ignorant Asiatic provincials, but the honourable House ought to pause before ordering educated citizens to worship one of their own number, however distinguished. It is possible that Gallus would have succeeded in blocking the decree by this appeal to Roman pride and sanity had it not been for a man called Atticus, a senior magistrate. He solemnly rose to say that when Augustus's corpse had been burned on Mars Field he had seen a cloud descending from heaven and the dead man's spirit then ascending on it, precisely in the way in which tradition relates that the spirits of Romulus and Hercules ascended. He would swear by all the Gods that he was testifying the truth.

This speech was greeted with resounding applause and Tiberius triumphantly asked whether Gallus had any further remarks to make. Gallus said that he had. He recalled, he said, another early tradition about the sudden death and disappearance of Romulus, which appeared in the works of even the gravest historians as an alternative to the one quoted by his honourable and veracious friend Atticus: namely, that Romulus was so hated for his tyranny over a free people that

one day, taking advantage of a sudden fog, the Senate murdered him, cut him up and carried the pieces away under their robes.

"But what about Hercules?" someone hurriedly asked.

Gallus said: "Tiberius himself in his eloquent oration at the funeral repudiated the comparison between Augustus and Hercules. His words were: 'Hercules in his childhood dealt only with serpents, and even when a man only with a stag or two, and a wild boar which he killed, and a lion; and even this he did reluctantly and at somebody's command; whereas Augustus fought not with beasts but with men and of his own free-will'—and so forth and so forth. But *my* reason for repudiating the comparison lies in the circumstances of Hercules's death." Then he sat down. The reference was perfectly clear to anybody who considered the matter; for the legend was that Hercules died of poison administered by his wife.

But the motion for Augustus's deification was carried. Shrines were built to him in Rome and the neighbouring cities. An order of priests was formed for administering his rites and Livia, who had at the same time been granted the titles of Julia and Augusta, was made his High Priestess. Atticus was rewarded by Livia with a gift of ten thousand gold pieces, and was appointed one of the new priests of Augustus, being even excused the heavy initiation fee. I was also appointed a priest, but had to pay a higher initiation fee than anyone, because I was Livia's grandson. Nobody dared ask why this vision of Augustus's ascent had only been seen by Atticus. And the joke was that on the night before the funeral Livia had concealed an eagle in a cage at the top of the pyre, which was to be opened as soon as the pyre was lit by someone secretly pulling a string from below. The eagle would then fly up and was intended to be taken for Augustus's spirit. Unfortunately the miracle had not come off. The cage door refused to open. Instead of saying nothing and letting the eagle burn, the officer who was in charge clambered up the pyre and opened the cage door with

his hands. Livia had to say that the eagle had been thus released at her orders, as a symbolic act.

I shall not write more about Augustus's funeral, though a more magnificent one has never been seen at Rome, for I must now begin to omit all things in my story except those of the first importance: I have already filled more than thirteen rolls of the best paper—from the new paper-making factory I have recently equipped—and not reached a third of the way through it. But I must not fail to tell about the contents of Augustus's will, the reading of which was awaited with general interest and impatience. Nobody was more anxious to know what it contained than I was, and I shall explain why.

A month before his death Augustus had suddenly appeared at the door of my study—he had been visiting my mother who was just convalescent after a long illness—and after dismissing his attendants had began to talk to me in a rambling way, not looking directly at me, but behaving as shyly as though he were Claudius and I were Augustus. He picked up a book of my history and read a passage. "Excellent writing!" he said. "And how soon will the work be finished?"

I told him, "In a month or less," and he congratulated me and said that he would then give orders to have a public reading of it at his own expense, inviting his friends to attend. I was perfectly astonished at this but he went on in a friendly way to ask if I would not prefer a professional reciter to do justice to it rather than read myself: he said that public reading of one's own work must always be very embarrassing—even tough old Pollio had confessed that he was always nervous on such occasions. I thanked him most sincerely and heartily and said that a professional would obviously be more suitable, if my work indeed deserved such an honour.

Then he suddenly held out his hand to me: "Claudius, do you bear me any ill-will?"

What could I say to that? Tears came to my eyes and I muttered that I revered him and that he had never done

anything to deserve my ill-will. He said with a sigh: "No, but on the other hand little to earn your love. Wait a few months longer, Claudius, and I hope to be able to earn both your love and your gratitude. Germanicus has told me about you. He says that you are loyal to three things—to your friends, to Rome, and to the truth. I should be very proud if Germanicus thought the same of me."

"Germanicus's love for you falls only a little short of outright worship," I said. "He has often told me so."

His face brightened. "You swear it? I am very happy. So now, Claudius, there's a strong bond between us—the good opinion of Germanicus. And what I came to tell you was this: I have treated you very badly all these years and I'm sincerely sorry and from now on you'll see that things will change." He quoted in Greek: "Who wounded thee, shall make thee whole" and with that he embraced me. As he turned to go he said over his shoulder: "I have just paid a visit to the Vestal Virgins and made some important alterations in a document of mine in their charge: and since you yourself are partly responsible for these I have given your name greater prominence there than it had before. But not a word!"

"You can trust me," I said.

He could only have meant one thing by this: that he had believed Postumus's story as I had reported it to Germanicus and was now restoring him in his will (which was in charge of the Vestals) as his heir; and that I was to benefit too as a reward for my loyalty to him. I did not then, of course, know of Augustus's visit to Planasia but confidently expected that Postumus would be brought back and treated with honour. Well, I was disappointed. Since Augustus had had been so secretive about the new will, which had been witnessed by Fabius Maximus and a few decrepit old priests, it was easy to suppress it in favour of one which had been made six years before at the time of the disinheriting of Postumus. The opening sentence was: "Forasmuch as a sinister fate has bereft me of Gaius and Lucius, my sons, it

is now my will that Tiberius Claudius Nero Cæsar become heir, in the first range, of two-thirds of my estate; and of the remaining third, in the first range also, it is now my will that my beloved wife Livia shall become my heir, if so be that the Senate will graciously permit her to inherit this much (for it is in excess of the statutory allowance for a widow's legacy), making an exception in her case as having deserved so well of the State." In the second range—that is, in the event of the first-mentioned legatees dying or becoming otherwise incapable to inherit—he put such of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren as were members of the Julian house and had incurred no public disgrace; but Postumus had been disinherited, so this meant Germanicus, as Tiberius's adopted son and Agrippina's husband, and Agrippina herself and their children, and Castor, Livilla and their children. In this second range Castor was to inherit a third, and Germanicus and his family two-thirds of the estate. In the third range the will named various senators and distant connections; but as a mark of favour rather than as likely to benefit. Augustus cannot have expected to outlive so many heirs of the first and second ranges. The third range heirs were grouped in three categories: the most favoured ten were set down to be joint-heirs of half the estate, the next most favoured fifty were set down to share a third of the estate, and the third class contained the names of fifty more who were to inherit the remaining sixth. The last name in this last list of the last range was Tiberius Claudius Drusus Nero Germanicus, which meant Clau-Clau-Claudius, or Claudius the Idiot, or as Germanicus's little boys were already learning to call him: "Poor Uncle Claudius"—in fact, myself. There was no mention of Julia or Julilla except a clause forbidding their ashes to be interred in the mausoleum beside his own when they came to die.

Now, although Augustus had in the previous twenty years benefited under the wills of the old friends he had outlived, to the extent of no less than one hundred and forty million gold pieces and had lived a most parsimonious life, he had

spent so much on temples and public works, on doles and entertainments for the populace, on frontier wars (when there was no money left in the military treasury), and on similar State expenses, that of those one hundred and forty millions and a great mass of private treasure besides, accumulated from various sources, a mere fifteen million remained for bequest, much of this not easily realizable in cash. This did not, however, include certain important sums of money, not reckoned in the estate and ready tied up in sacks in the vaults of the Capitol, which had been set aside as particular bequests to confederate kings, to senators and knights, to his soldiers, and to the citizens of Rome. These amounted to two million more. There was also a sum set aside for the expenses of his funeral. Everyone was surprised at the smallness of the estate, and all sorts of ugly rumours went round until Augustus's accounts were produced and it was clear that there was no fraud on the part of the executors. The citizens were most discontented with their meagre bequests, and when a memorial play was exhibited in Augustus's honour at the public expense there was a riot in the theatre: the Senate had so stinted the grant that one of the actors in the play refused to appear for the fee offered him. Of the discontent in the Army I shall tell shortly. But first about Tiberius.

Augustus had made Tiberius his colleague and his heir but could not bequeath him the monarchy, or not in so many words. He could only recommend him to the Senate, to whom all the powers he had exercised now reverted. The Senate did not like Tiberius or wish him to be Emperor, but Germanicus, whom they would have chosen if they had been given the chance, was away. And Tiberius's claims could not be disregarded.

So nobody dared to mention any name but that of Tiberius, and there were no dissentients from the motion, introduced by the Consuls, inviting him to take over Augustus's task where he had laid it down. He gave an evasive answer, emphasizing the immense responsibility

him and his own unaspiring
and Augustus alone had been
and that in his opinion it
Augustus's offices into three parts

our with him pleaded that the triumvirate, or three-men rule, had been tried more than once in the preceding century and that a monarchy had been found the only remedy for the resulting civil wars. A disgraceful scene followed. Senators pretended to weep and lament, and embraced Tiberius's knees, imploring him to do as they asked. Tiberius, to cut this business short, said that he did not wish to shirk any charge laid upon him, but held by his assertion that he was not equal to the whole burden. He was no longer a young man: he was fifty-six years old, and his eyesight was not good. But he would undertake any particular part entrusted to him. All this was done so that nobody would be able to accuse him of seizing power too eagerly: and especially so that Germanicus and Postumus (wherever he happened to be) might be impressed by the strength of his position in the City. For he was afraid of Germanicus, whose popularity with the Army was infinitely greater than his own. He did not believe Germanicus capable of seizing the power for his own selfish ends but thought that if he knew of the suppressed will he might try to restore Postumus to his rightful inheritance and even to make him the third—Tiberius, Germanicus and Postumus—in a new triumvirate. Agrippina was devoted to Postumus, and Germanicus took her advice as consistently as Augustus had taken Livia's. If Germanicus marched on Rome the Senate would go out in a body to welcome him: Tiberius knew that. And, at the worst, by behaving modestly now he would be able to escape with his life and live in honourable retirement.

The Senate realized that Tiberius really wanted what he was so modestly refusing and were about to renew their pleas when Gallus interposed in a practical voice: "Very well

then, Tiberius, which part of the government do you want to be entrusted to you?"

Tiberius was confounded by this awkward and unforeseen question. He was silent for some time and at last said. "The same man cannot both make the division and choose; and even if this were possible it would be immodest for me to choose or reject any particular branch of the administration when, as I have explained, I really want to be excused from the whole of it."

Gallus pressed his advantage: "The only possible division of the Empire would be: first, Rome and all Italy; second, the armies; and third, the provinces. Which of these would you choose?"

When Tiberius was silent Gallus continued: "Good. I know there's no answer. That's why I asked the question. I wanted you to admit by your silence that it was nonsense to speak of splitting into three an administrative system that has been built up and centrally co-ordinated by a single individual. Either we must return to the republican form of government or we must continue with the monarchy. It is wasting the time of the House, which appears to have decided in favour of the monarchy, to go on talking about triumvirates. You have been offered the monarchy. Take it or leave it."

Another senator, a friend of Gallus's, said: "As Protector of the People you have the power of vetoing the motion of the Consuls offering you the monarchy. If you really don't want it you should have used your veto half an hour ago."

So Tiberius was forced to beg the Senate's pardon and to say that the suddenness and unexpectedness of the honour had overcome him: he begged leave to consider his answer a little longer.

The Senate then adjourned, and in succeeding sessions Tiberius gradually allowed himself to be voted, one by one, all Augustus's offices. But he never used the name Augustus, which had been bequeathed him, except when writing letters to foreign kings; and was careful to discourage any tendency

to pay him divine honours. There was another explanation of this cautious behaviour of his, namely that Livia had boasted in public that he was receiving the monarchy as a gift from her hands. She made the boast not only to strengthen her position as Augustus's widow but to warn Tiberius that if her crimes ever came to light he would be regarded as her accomplice, being the person who principally benefited from them. Naturally he wished to appear under no obligation to her but as having had the monarchy forced on him against his will by the Senate.

The Senate were profuse in their flattery of Livia and wanted to confer many unheard-of honours on her. But Livia as a woman could not attend the debates in the Senate and was legally now under Tiberius's guardianship—he had become head of the Julian house. So having himself refused the title "Father of the Country" he had refused, on her behalf, the title "Mother of the Country" which had been offered her, on the ground that modesty would not allow her to accept it. Nevertheless, he was greatly afraid of Livia and at first wholly dependent on her for learning the inner secrets of the Imperial system. It was not merely a matter of understanding the routine. The criminal dossiers of every man of importance in the two Orders and of most of the important women, secret service reports of various sorts, Augustus's private correspondence with confederate kings and their relatives, copies of treasonable letters intercepted but duly forwarded—all these were in Livia's keeping and written in cipher, and Tiberius could not read them without her help. But he also knew that she was extremely dependent on him. There was an understanding between them of guarded co-operation. She even thanked him for refusing the title offered her, saying that he had been right to do so; and in return he promised to have her voted whatever titles she wished as soon as their position seemed secure. As a proof of his good faith he put her own name alongside his own in all letters of State. As a proof of hers she gave him the key of the

common cipher, though not that of the cipher extraordinary, the secret of which, she pretended, had died with Augustus. It was in the cipher extraordinary that the dossiers were written.

Now about Germanicus. When, at Lyons, he heard of Augustus's death and of the terms of his will, and of Tiberius's succession, he felt it his duty to stand loyally by the new regime. He was Tiberius's nephew and adopted son, and though there was not true affection between the two they had been able to work together without friction both at home and on campaign. He did not suspect Tiberius of complicity in the plot that had brought about Postumus's banishment; and he knew nothing of the suppressed will, and further, he still believed Postumus to be on Planasia—for Augustus had told nobody but Fabius either of the visit or of the substitution. He decided, however, to return to Rome as soon as he could and frankly discuss the case of Postumus with Tiberius. He would explain that Augustus had told him privately that he intended to restore Postumus to favour as soon as he had evidence of his innocence to offer the Senate; and that though death had prevented him from putting his intentions into execution, they should be respected. He would insist on Postumus's immediate recall, the restoration of his confiscated estates and his elevation to honourable office; and lastly on Livia's compulsory retirement from State affairs as having unjustly engineered his banishment. But before he could do anything in the matter news came from Mainz of an army mutiny on the Rhine, and then, as he was hurrying to put it down, news of Postumus's death. Postumus, it was reported, had been killed by the captain of the guard, who was under orders from Augustus not to let his grandson survive him. Germanicus was shocked and grieved that Postumus had been executed but had no leisure for the moment to think of anything but the mutiny. You may be sure, though, that it caused poor Claudius the greatest possible grief, for poor Claudius at this time never wanted for leisure. On the

contrary poor Claudius was hard put to it often to find occupation for his mind. Nobody can write history for more than five or six hours a day, especially when there is little hope of anyone ever reading it. So I gave myself up to my misery. How was I to know that it was Clement who had been killed, and that not only was the murder not ordered by Augustus but that Livia and Tiberius were also innocent of it?

For the man really responsible for Clement's murder was an old knight called Crispus, the owner of the Gardens of Sallust and a close friend of Augustus. At Rome, as soon as he heard of Augustus's death, he had not waited to consult Livia and Tiberius at Nola but immediately dispatched the warrant for Postumus's execution to the captain of the guard at Planasia, attaching Tiberius's seal to it. Tiberius had entrusted him with this duplicate seal for the signing of some business papers which he had not been able to deal with before being sent to the Balkans. Crispus knew that Tiberius would be angry or pretend to be angry, but explained to Livia, whose protection he at once claimed, that he had put Postumus out of the way on learning of a plot among some of the Guards officers to send a ship to rescue Julia and Postumus and carry them off to the regiments at Cologne; there Germanicus and Agrippina could hardly fail to welcome and shelter them and the officers would then force Germanicus and Postumus to march on Rome. Tiberius was furious that his name had been used in this way, but Livia made the best of things and pretended that it really *was* Postumus who had been killed. Crispus was not prosecuted and the Senate was unofficially informed that Postumus had died by the orders of his deified grandfather who had wisely foreseen that the savage-tempered young man would attempt to usurp supreme power as soon as news came of his grandfather's death; as indeed he had done. Crispus's motive in having Postumus murdered was not a wish to curry favour with Tiberius and Livia or to prevent civil war. He was revenging an insult. For Crispus, who

was as lazy as he was rich, had once boasted that he had never stood for office, content to be a simple Roman knight. Postumus had replied: "A simple Roman knight, Crispus? Then you had better take a few simple Roman riding-lessons."

Tiberius had not yet heard of the mutiny. He wrote Germanicus a friendly letter condoling with him on the loss of Augustus and saying that Rome now looked to him and his adoptive brother Castor for the defence of the frontiers, himself being now too old for foreign service and required by the Senate to manage affairs at Rome. Writing of Postumus's death, he said that he deplored its violence but could not question the wisdom of Augustus in the matter. He did not mention Crispus. Germanicus could only conclude that Augustus had once more changed his mind about Postumus on the strength of some information of which he himself knew nothing; and was content for awhile to let the matter rest there.