

## CHAPTER XXVIII

OF the last five years of Tiberius's reign the less told the better. I cannot bear to write in detail of Nero, slowly starved to death; or of Agrippina, who was cheered by news of Sejanus's fall, but when she saw that it made matters no better for her refused to eat, and was forcibly fed for awhile, and then at last left to die as she wished; or of Gallus, who died of a consumption; or of Drusus who, removed some time before from his attic in the Palace to a dark cellar, was found dead with his mouth full of the flock from his mattress, which he had been gnawing in his starvation. But I must record at least that Tiberius wrote letters to the Senate rejoicing in the death of Agrippina and Nero—he accused her now of treason and of adultery with Gallus—and regretting, in the case of Gallus, that “the press of public business had constantly postponed his trial so that he had died before his guilt could be proved”. As for Drusus, he wrote that this young man was the lewdest and most treacherous rascal he had ever encountered. He ordered a record to be publicly read, by the Guards' captain who had been in charge of him, of the treasonable remarks which Drusus had uttered while in prison. Never had such a painful document been read in the House before. It was clear from Drusus's remarks that he had been beaten and tortured and insulted by the captain himself, by common soldiers and even by slaves, and that he had very cruelly been given every day less and less food and drink, crumb by crumb, and drop by drop. Tiberius even ordered the captain to read Drusus's dying curse. It was a wild but well-composed imprecation, accusing Tiberius of miserliness, treachery, obscene filthiness

and delight in torture, of murdering Germanicus and Postumus, and of a whole series of other crimes (most of which he had committed but none of which had ever been publicly mentioned before); he prayed the Gods that all the immeasurable suffering and distress that Tiberius had caused others should weigh upon him with increasing strength, waking or sleeping, night and day, for as long as he lived, should overwhelm him in the hour of his death, and should commit him to everlasting torture in the day of infernal Judgement. The senators interrupted the reading with exclamations of pretended horror at Drusus's treason, but these oh, oh's and groans covered their amazement that Tiberius should voluntarily provide such a revelation of his own wickedness. Tiberius was very sorry for himself at the time (I heard afterwards from Caligula), tormented by insomnia and superstitious fears; and actually counted on the Senate's sympathy. He told Caligula with tears in his eyes that the killing of his relatives had been forced on him by their own ambition and by the policy that he had inherited from Augustus (he said Augustus, not Livia) of putting the tranquillity of the realm before private sentiment. Caligula, who had never shown the slightest signs of grief or anger at Tiberius's treatment of his mother or brothers, condoled with the old man; and then quickly began telling him of a new sort of vice that he had heard about recently from some Syrians. Such talk was the only way to cheer Tiberius up when he had attacks of remorse. Lepida, who had betrayed Drusus, did not long survive him. She was accused of adultery with a slave and not being able to deny the charge (for she was found in bed with him) took her own life.

Caligula spent most of his time at Capri but occasionally went to Rome on Tiberius's behalf to keep an eye on Macro. Macro did all Sejanus's work now, and very efficiently, but was sensible enough to let the Senate know that he wanted no honours voted to him and that any senator who proposed any such would soon find himself on trial for his life on some charge of treason, incest or forgery. Tiberius had indicated

Caligula as his successor for several reasons. The first was that Caligula's popularity as Germanicus's son kept the people on their best behaviour for fear that any disturbance on their part would be punished by his death. The next was that Caligula was an excellent servant and one of the few people wicked enough to make Tiberius feel, by comparison, a virtuous man. The third was that he did not believe that Caligula would, as a matter of fact, ever become Emperor. For Thrasyllus, whom he still trusted absolutely (since no event had ever happened contrary to his predictions), had told him "Caligula can no more become Emperor than he could gallop on horseback across yonder bay from Baiæ to Puteoli". Thrasyllus also said, "Ten years from now Tiberius Cæsar will still be Emperor." This was true, as it turned out, but it was another Tiberius Cæsar,

Tiberius knew a great deal, but some things Thrasyllus kept from him. He knew, for instance, the fate of his grandson Gemellus, who was not really his grandson because Castor was not the father, but Sejanus. He said to Caligula one day: "I am making you my principal heir. I am making Gemellus my second heir in case you die before him, but this is only a formality. I know that you'll kill Gemellus; but then, others will kill you." He said this expecting to outlive them both. Then he added, quoting from some Greek tragedian or other: "When I am dead, let Fire the Earth confound."

But Tiberius was not dead yet. The informers were still busy and every year more and more people were executed. There was hardly a senator left who had kept his seat since the days of Augustus. Macro had a far greater appetite for blood and far less compunction in shedding it than Sejanus. Sejanus was at any rate the son of a knight; Macro's father had been born a slave. Among the new victims was Plancina who, now that Livia had died, had nobody to protect her. She was accused once more of poisoning Germanicus; for she was quite wealthy. Tiberius had not allowed her to be prosecuted until Agrippina was dead, because if Agrippina

had heard the news it would have pleased her greatly. I was not sorry when I heard that Plancina's body had been thrown on the Stairs, though she had anticipated execution by suicide.

One day at dinner with Tiberius, Nerva asked Tiberius's pardon, explaining that he was not feeling hungry and wanted no food. Nerva had been in perfect health and spirits all this time and apparently quite contented with his sheltered life at Capri. Tiberius thought at first that Nerva had taken a purge the night before and was resting his stomach; but when he carried his fast through into the second and third day, Tiberius began to fear that he had decided to commit suicide by starvation. He sat down at Nerva's side and begged him to tell him why he was not eating. But all Nerva would do was to apologize again and say that he was not hungry. Tiberius thought that perhaps Nerva was annoyed with him for not having taken his advice sooner about averting the financial crisis. He asked, "Would you eat with a better appetite if I repealed all laws limiting the interest on loans to a figure which you consider too low?"

Nerva said: "No, it isn't that. I'm just not hungry."

The next day Tiberius said to Nerva: "I have written to the Senate. Someone has told me that two or three men actually make a living by acting as professional informers against wrong-doers. It never occurred to me that by rewarding loyalty to the State I should encourage men to tempt their friends into crime and then betray them, but this seems to have happened in more than one instance. I am telling the Senate immediately to execute any person who can be proved to have made a living by such infamous conduct. Perhaps now you'll take something?"

When Nerva thanked him and praised his decision but said that he had still no appetite at all, Tiberius became most depressed. "You'll die if you don't eat, Nerva, and then what will I do? You know how much I value your friendship and your political advice. Please, please eat, I beseech you. If you were to die the world would think that it was

my doing, or at least that you were starving yourself out of hatred for me. Oh, don't die, Nerva! You're my only real friend left."

Nerva said: "It's no use asking me to eat, Cæsar. My stomach would refuse anything I gave it. And surely nobody could possibly say such ill-natured things as you suggest? They know what a wise ruler and kind-hearted man you are and I am sure they have no reason for supposing me ungrateful, have they? If I must die, I must die, and that's all there is to it. Death is the common fate of all and at least I shall have the satisfaction of not out-living you."

Tiberius was not to be convinced, but soon Nerva was too weak to answer his questions: he died on the ninth day.

Thrasyllus died. His death was announced by a lizard. It was a very small lizard and ran across the stone table where Thrasyllus was at breakfast with Tiberius in the sun and straddled across his forefinger. Thrasyllus asked, A.D. 36 "You have come to summon me, brother? I expected you at this very hour." Then turning to Tiberius he said: "My life is at an end, Cæsar, so farewell! I never told you a lie. You told me many. But beware when *your* lizard gives you a warning." He closed his eyes and a few moments later was dead.

Now Tiberius had made a pet of the most extraordinary animal ever seen in Rome. Giraffes excited great admiration when first seen, and so did the rhinoceros, but this, though not so large was far more fabulous. It came from an island beyond India called Java, and it was like a scaly lizard nine feet long with an ugly head and a long darting tongue. When Tiberius first looked at it he said that he would now no longer be sceptical about the monsters said to have been slain by Hercules and Theseus. It was called the Wingless Dragon and Tiberius fed it himself every day with cockroaches and dead mice and such-like vermin. It had a disgusting smell, dirty habits and a vicious temper. The dragon and Tiberius understood each other perfectly. He thought that Thrasyllus meant that the dragon would

bite him one day, so he put it in a cage with bars too small for it to poke its ugly head through.

Tiberius was now seventy-eight years old, and constant use of myrrh and similar aphrodisiacs had made him very feeble; but he dressed sprucely and tried to behave like a man not yet past middle age. He had grown tired of Capri, now that Nerva and Thrasyllus were gone, and early in March the next year determined to defy Fate and visit Rome. He went there by easy <sup>A.D. 37</sup> stages, his last stopping place being a villa on the Appian Road, within sight of the City walls. But the day after he arrived there the dragon gave him the prophesied warning. Tiberius went to feed it at noon and found it lying in the cage, dead, and a huge swarm of large black ants running all over it, trying to pull away bits of soft flesh. He took this as a sign that if he went any further towards the City he would die like the dragon and the crowd would tear his body to pieces. So he hurriedly turned back. He caught a chill by travelling in an east wind, which he made worse by attending some Games exhibited by the soldiers of a garrison town through which he passed. A wild boar was released in the arena and he was asked to throw a javelin at it from his box. He threw one and missed, and was annoyed with himself for missing, and called for another. He had always prided himself on his skill with the javelin and did not want the soldiers to think that old age had beaten him. So he got hot and excited, hurling javelin after javelin, trying to hit the boar from an impossible distance, and finally had to stop from exhaustion. The boar was untouched and Tiberius ordered it to be released as a reward for its skill in avoiding his shots.

The chill settled on his liver, but he continued travelling back to Capri. He reached Misenum: it lies at the nearer end of the bay of Naples. The Western fleet has its headquarters here. Tiberius was annoyed to find the sea so rough that he could not cross. He had a splendid villa, however, on the promontory of Misenum—it had once belonged to

the famous epicure Lucullus. He moved into it with his train. Caligula had accompanied him and so had Macro, and to show that there was nothing seriously amiss with him Tiberius gave a great banquet to all the local officials. The feasting had gone on for some time when Tiberius's private physician asked permission to leave the table and attend to some medical business: certain herbs, you know, have greater virtue when they are picked at midnight or when the moon is in such and such a position, and Tiberius was accustomed to the physician's rising during the meal to see to things of this sort. He took up Tiberius's hand to kiss it, but held it rather longer than necessary. Tiberius thought, quite rightly, that the physician was feeling his pulse to see how weak he was, so he made him sit down again as a punishment and kept the banquet going all night, just to prove that he wasn't ill. The next day Tiberius was in a state of prostration, and the word went round Misenum, and spread from there to Rome, that he was about to die.

Now, Tiberius had told Macro that he wished evidence of treason found against certain leading senators whom he disliked and had given him orders to secure their conviction by whatever means he pleased. Macro wrote them all down as accomplices in a charge that he was preparing against a woman he had a grudge against, the wife of a former agent of Sejanus: she had repelled his advances. They were all accused of adultery with her and of taking Tiberius's name in vain. By browbeating freedmen and torturing slaves Macro got the evidence that was needed—freedmen and slaves had by now all lost the tradition of fidelity towards their masters. The trial began. But the friends of the accused noticed that though Macro himself had conducted the examination of witnesses and the torture of slaves, the usual Imperial letter approving his actions was not laid on the table: so they concluded that perhaps Macro had added one or two private enemies of his own to the list given him by Tiberius. The chief victim of these obviously absurd charges was Arruntius, the oldest and most dignified

member of the Senate. Augustus, a year before his death, had said that he was the only possible choice for Emperor, failing Tiberius; Tiberius had already once tried to convict him of treason, but unsuccessfully. Old Arruntius was the only remaining link with the Augustan age. On the previous occasion sentiment had been so strong against his accusers, though it was believed that they were acting on Tiberius's instigation, that they were themselves tried, convicted of perjury and put to death. It was known now that Macro had recently had a dispute with Arruntius about money, so the trial was adjourned until Tiberius should have confirmed Macro's commission. Tiberius neglected to reply to the Senate's enquiry, so Arruntius and the rest had been in prison for some time. At last Tiberius sent the necessary confirmation, and the day for the new trial was fixed. Arruntius had determined to kill himself before the trial came off so that his estate should not be confiscated and his grandchildren pauperized. He was saying good-bye to a few old friends when the news arrived of Tiberius's severe illness. His friends begged him to postpone suicide until the last moment, because if the news was true he had a very good chance of surviving Tiberius and being pardoned by his successor. Arruntius said: "No, I have lived too long. My life was difficult enough in the days when Tiberius shared his power with Livia. It was well nigh intolerable when he shared it with Sejanus. But Macro has shown himself more of a villain even than Sejanus and, mark my words, Caligula with his Capri education will make a worse Emperor even than Tiberius. I cannot in my old age become the slave of a new master like him." He took a penknife and severed an artery of his wrist. Everyone was greatly shocked, for Caligula was a popular hero, and was expected to be a second and better Augustus. Nobody thought of blaming him for his pretended loyalty to Tiberius: he was on the contrary greatly admired for his cleverness in surviving his brothers and for concealing so well what were supposed to be his real feelings.



Meanwhile, Tiberius's pulse nearly stopped and he lapsed into a coma. The physician told Macro that two days more, at the outside, were all that he had to live. So the whole Court was in a great bustle. Macro and Caligula were in perfect accord. Caligula respected Macro's popularity with the Guards, and Macro respected Caligula's popularity with the nation as a whole: each counted on the other's support. Besides, Macro was indebted to Caligula for his rise to power, and Caligula was carrying on an affair with Macro's wife, which Macro had been good enough to overlook. Tiberius had already commented sourly on Macro's cultivation of Caligula, saying, "You do well to desert the setting for the rising sun." Macro and Caligula began sending off messages to the commanders of different regiments and armies to tell them that the Emperor was sinking fast and had appointed Caligula as his successor: he had given him his signet ring. It was true that Tiberius in a lucid interval had called for Caligula and drawn the ring off his finger. But he had changed his mind and put the ring back on again and then clasped his hands tightly together as if to prevent anyone from robbing him of it. When he relapsed into unconsciousness and gave no further signs of life Caligula had quietly pulled the ring off and was now strutting about, flashing it in the faces of everyone he met and accepting congratulations and homage.

But Tiberius was not yet dead even now. He groaned, stirred, sat up and called for his valets. He was weak because of his long fast, but otherwise quite himself. It was a trick that he had played before, to seem dead and then to come to life again. He called once more. Nobody heard him. The valets were all in the buttery, drinking Caligula's health. But soon an enterprising slave happened to come along to see what he could steal from the death-chamber in their absence. The room was dark and Tiberius frightened him nearly out of his senses by suddenly shouting: "Where in Hell's name are the valets? Didn't they hear me call? I want bread and cheese, an omelette, a couple of beef-cutlets,

and a drink of Chian wine *at once!* And a thousand Furies! Who's stolen my ring?" The slave dashed out of the room and nearly ran into Macro, who was passing. "The Emperor's alive, sir, and calling for food and his ring." The news ran through the Palace and a ludicrous scene followed. The crowd around Caligula scattered in all directions. Cries went up, "Thank God, the news was false. Long live Tiberius!" Caligula was in a miserable state of shame and terror. He pulled the ring off his finger and looked around for somewhere to hide it.

Only Macro kept his head. "It's a nonsensical lie," he shouted. "The slave must have lost his wits. Have him crucified, Caesar! We left the old Emperor dead an hour ago." He whispered something to Caligula, who was seen to nod in grateful relief. Then he hurried into Tiberius's room. Tiberius was on his feet, cursing and groaning and tottering feebly towards the door. Macro picked him up in his arms, threw him back on the bed and smothered him with a pillow. Caligula was standing by.

So Arruntius's fellow-prisoners were released, though most of them later wished that they had followed Arruntius's example. There were, besides, about fifty men and women who had been accused of treason in a separate batch from this. They had no influence in the Senate, being mostly shopkeepers who had balked at paying the "protection money" that Macro's captains now levied on all the City wards. They were tried and condemned and were to be executed on the 16th of March. This was the very day that news came of Tiberius's death, and they and their friends went nearly mad with joy to think that now they would be saved. But Caligula was away at Misenum and could not be appealed to in time and the prison governor was afraid of losing his job if he took the responsibility of postponing the executions. So they were killed and their bodies thrown on the Stairs in the usual way.

This was the signal for an outburst of popular anger against Tiberius. "He stings like a dead wasp," someone

shouted. Crowds gathered at the street corners for solemn commination-services under the ward-masters, beseeching Mother Earth and the Judges of the Dead to grant the corpse and the ghost of that monster no rest or peace until the day of universal dissolution. Tiberius's body was brought to Rome under a strong escort of Guards. Caligula walked in the procession as a mourner and the whole countryside came flocking to meet him, not in mourning for Tiberius but in holiday clothes, weeping with gratitude that Heaven had preserved a son of Germanicus to rule over them. Old country women cried out, "O our sweet darling, Caligula! Our chicken! Our baby! Our star!" A few miles from Rome he rode ahead to make preparations for the solemn entry of the corpse into the City. But when he had passed, a big crowd gathered and barricaded the Appian Road with planks and blocks of building stone. When the outriders of the escort appeared there was booing and groaning and cries of "Into the Tiber with Tiberius!" "Throw him down the Stairs!" "Eternal damnation to Tiberius!" The leader shouted: "Soldiers, we Romans won't allow that evil corpse into the City. It will bring us bad luck. Take it back to Atella and half-burn it in the amphitheatre there!" Half-burning, I should explain, was the usual fate of paupers and unfortunates, and Atella was a town celebrated for a kind of rough country masque or farce which had been performed there at the harvest festival every year from the very earliest times. Tiberius had a villa at Atella and used to attend the festival nearly every year. He had converted the innocent rural bawdry of the masque into a sophisticated vileness. He made the men of Atella build an amphitheatre to present the revised show, which was produced by himself.

Macro ordered his men to charge the barricade, and a number of citizens were killed and wounded, and three or four soldiers were knocked unconscious with paving stones. Caligula prevented further disorders and Tiberius's body was duly burned on Mars Field. Caligula spoke the funeral oration. It was a very formal and ironical one and much

appreciated because there was a good deal in it about Augustus and Germanicus, but very little about Tiberius.

At a banquet that night Caligula told a story which made the whole company weep and gained him great credit. He said that early one morning at Misenum, being as usual sleepless with grief for the fate of his mother and brothers, he had determined, come what might, to be avenged at last on their murderer. He seized the dagger that had been his father's and went boldly into Tiberius's room. The Emperor lay groaning and tossing in nightmare on his bed. Caligula slowly lifted the dagger to strike but a Divine Voice sounded in his ears: "Great-grandson, hold your hand! To kill him would be impious." Caligula answered, "O God Augustus, he killed my mother and my brothers, your descendants. Should I not avenge them even at the price of being shunned by all men as a parricide?" Augustus answered, "Magnanimous son, who are to be Emperor hereafter, there is no need to do what you would do. By My orders the Furies nightly avenge your dear ones, while he dreams." And so he had laid his dagger on the table beside the bed and walked out. Caligula did not explain what had happened next morning when Tiberius woke and saw the dagger on the table; the presumption was that Tiberius had not dared to mention the incident.