

continued and complicated scene of madness and cruelty. "Caligula," says Montesquieu, "was a true sophist in his cruelty: as he was the descendant of both Antony and Augustus, he was wont to say, that he would punish both those who celebrated the anniversary of the battle of Actium, and those who did not." Upon the death of his sister, Drusilla, he punished some for mourning for her, because they ought to have known she was a goddess; and put to death others for not mourning, because she was the sister of the emperor.

In addition to all this, Caligula loaded the provinces with the most excessive taxes; and such was his avarice, that every day some of the citizens fell a sacrifice in the confiscations of their property. It would only create disgust were we to enter into any detail of the complicated and ingenious cruelties and the absurd extravagances of a madman—of the multiplied instances of his folly as well as of his depravity—his ridiculous mock campaigns—the temples he erected in honor of himself, where, in the character of his own priest, he offered sacrifices to himself, sometimes as Jupiter, and sometimes as Juno. One day he chose to be Mercury, the next he was Bacchus or Hercules. At last, in the fourth year of his reign, this monster met with the fate which he deserved, and was assassinated by Chæreas, a tribune of the prætorian guards, in the twenty-ninth year of his age.

The great body of the Roman people and of the senate would now have gladly preferred the restoration of the republic to the continuance of the empire; but the soldiers, who were all powerful, preferred a military government under an emperor, over whom they begun now to discover that they could have unlimited command. At the time when Caligula was put to death, Claudius, his uncle, and the brother of Germanicus, a man whose weak and childish disposition had never cherished an ambitious thought, had concealed himself in a corner of the palace for fear of assassination. A soldier accidentally discovering his retreat, saluted him emperor. Whilst Claudius was tremblingly begging his life to be spared, some others coming up, they put him in a litter and carried him to the camp of the prætorian guards. There, as yet afraid, and uncertain of his fate, he promised to each of the soldiers a large gratification, and received in return their oaths of allegiance. The people approved the choice, and the senate was obliged to confirm it. Thus was the empire *bought for the first time*—a practice which we shall see become in future extremely common.

Claudius at the age of fifty was still a child: his countenance was that of an idiot, and his mind, naturally weak, had never received the smallest tincture of education. He was the son of Octavia, the sister of Augustus; but as he had never been adopted, he did not belong to the family which carried the names of Cæsar and of Augustus. He assumed, however, both; and they were henceforth considered as *titles* annexed to the imperial power—

the reigning emperor being always styled Augustus, and his appointed successor honored with the title of Cæsar.

Claudius knew that, to become popular, he ought to go counter to every measure of his predecessor. He began, therefore, by abolishing most of his laws. He passed an act of oblivion for all former offences against the state, and he appeared for awhile to bend his whole attention to the strict administration of justice and the establishment of good order. He even began to show symptoms of an enterprising disposition, which was quite opposite to all ideas which had been formed of his character from the tenor of his past life; and he undertook to reduce Britain under subjection to the Roman arms, which, in the opinion of Tacitus, Julius Cæsar had rather pointed out than conquered. He accordingly sent thither Plautius, one of his generals, and encouraged by his success, was induced afterwards to go thither in person. But this was entirely an expedition of show and parade. He remained but sixteen days in the island, leaving his lieutenants Plautius and Vespasian to prosecute the war, which continued with various success for many years. The Silures or inhabitants of South Wales, under their king Caradoc or Caractacus, made a most powerful and obstinate resistance. This warlike prince, with great address and military skill, contrived to remove the seat of war into the most inaccessible parts of the country, and for nine years the Romans saw no prospect of reducing this courageous people to subjection. At length, in one unfortunate engagement, the Britons were entirely defeated; the wife and daughter of Caractacus were taken prisoners; and this brave man was afterwards treacherously delivered to the Romans by Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, in whose territories he had sought refuge. He was soon after conducted to Rome, where he displayed that noble spirit which attracted from all who beheld him, at once their respect and admiration. In passing through the streets of that sumptuous capital, and observing the splendor of all the objects around him, "Alas!" exclaimed he, "is it possible that they who possess such magnificence at home should envy Caractacus his poor cottage in Britain?" He appeared undismayed before the tribunal of the emperor, and although he disdained here to sue for pardon or for mercy, yet he was willing for the good of his people to accept of it; and Claudius, it must be acknowledged, treated him with a generous humanity.

The commencement of this reign promised extremely well; but what possible dependence could there be on a man so weak as to be guided by the lowest officers of his court. The servants and the freedmen of Claudius had such an ascendancy over him, that they obtained from him offices of the utmost importance in the empire. The meanest of his domestics were appointed judges in the different tribunals, and governors of the provinces. These dishonorable and avaricious wretches reduced peculation to



a system, and filled every corner of the empire with loud complaints of their rapine and extortion. Messalina, also, the vicious and abandoned wife of Claudius, urged him on to various acts of injustice and cruelty. This woman was infamous for all manner of vices. Her debaucheries, which were quite notorious in Rome, exceed all belief; but, what is the most surprising part of her character, she had the address to pass with Claudius, as a paragon of virtue. She at length, however, proceeded to that height of effrontery, that during a short absence of Claudius she publicly married Caius Silius, and upon the emperor's return, made him, by way of jest, to sign the marriage contract. Narcissus, his freedman, soon made him sensible that the matter was too serious, by informing him that the people no longer looked upon him as emperor: utterly unable to act for himself, he now entreated that Narcissus would take any steps he judged best for his interest; and his favorite, thus invested with authority, immediately secured the prætorian guards, and caused Messalina and Silius her gallant to be put to death. Claudius now, by the advice of his faithful counsellors, his freedmen, married his niece Agrippina, the daughter of Germanicus, a woman equally vicious as Messalina, and more daring in her crimes. Her favorite object was to secure the empire for her son Domitius Ænobarbus; and, to gain the freedmen to her interest, she made no scruple to prostitute herself to them. In the prosecution of her scheme she employed banishment, poison, murder—every different engine of vice and inhumanity. She obliged Octavia, the emperor's daughter, to marry Domitius, whom she now made Claudius adopt, to the prejudice of his son Britannicus; and Domitius was hailed Cæsar, with the titles of *Nero Claudius Cæsar Drusus Germanicus*. She gave him for his preceptor Seneca, the Stoic philosopher, from whose instructions he reaped no other benefit than an ostentatious display of taste and erudition, without possessing any tincture of either. Agrippina, having by these complicated crimes paved the way for the succession of her son to the throne, now thought proper to make way for him by poisoning her husband; and Claudius, after a reign of fourteen years, was thus carried off at the age of sixty-three.

The succession of Nero was immediate. The captain of the prætorian guards presented him to the soldiers; he promised them a considerable donative, and in return was proclaimed emperor—the senate, with their usual passive compliance, confirming the choice. Nero began, like some of his predecessors, upon a good plan, but unfortunately it was not his own. His preceptor, the celebrated Seneca, had acquired such influence over him, that the first few years of his reign promised a revival of the times of Augustus; but his natural disposition could no longer be restrained. With Seneca, who prompted his decrees and kept him within the bounds of moderation, he appeared in public a wise and

amiable prince, yet at this very time it was his favorite amusement to range through the streets of Rome with a band of young debauchees, who indulged themselves in every species of outrage and disorder. His natural disposition first publicly showed itself in an indolent neglect of all the cares of government; and his mother, Agrippina, took advantage of this disposition by ruling every thing as she chose. Seneca warned his pupil of the danger of allowing free course to the views of this ambitious and unprincipled woman, and his first step was to dismiss from the court her chief favorites and confidants. The violence of Agrippina prompted her to seek an outrageous revenge. She proposed to bring Britannicus to the prætorian bands, and to acknowledge before them the crimes she had committed to place Nero on the throne. The emperor prevented the execution of this purpose by poisoning Britannicus, while he sat at supper with himself; but he sought against his mother a more refined vengeance. She was invited to Baiæ, to celebrate the feast of Bacchus. The ship in which she sailed was constructed in such a manner as to burst and fall to pieces at sea; but the machinery failed, and Agrippina came safe ashore. Nero, enraged at the disappointment of his stratagem, ordered one of his freedmen to assassinate her.

As he was now rid of those anxieties which arose from his dread of the designs of Agrippina, and had nothing material to occupy his mind, (for he disdained the proper cares of empire,) he gave a loose to the meanest and most vicious passions. He prompted the young nobility to exhibit themselves as actors upon the stage; he forced the Roman knights to fight, like gladiators, in the arena; and in these disgraceful amusements he bore himself a principal part. Burrhus, the captain of the prætorian guards, a man of talents and of virtue—although at times, he had appeared to show too much compliance with the will of his master—was not, in the opinion of Nero, sufficiently obsequious, and was therefore removed by poison. Upon his death, Seneca, who lost a powerful friend, retired from the court. Nero had no longer any around him but the profligate and abandoned like himself. Poppæa, a woman of great beauty, but abandoned morals, had been seduced from her husband by Otho, who in his turn prostituted her to the emperor, to serve his own purposes of ambition. She soon gained such an ascendancy over Nero, that he was induced to divorce his wife Octavia to make way for her to the throne; and such was, at this time, the infamous servility of the Roman senate, that a panegyric was pronounced in praise of the emperor, and a deputation sent to congratulate him on this auspicious event.

A conspiracy, which was at this time discovered, gave Nero ample scope for the gratification of the natural cruelty of his disposition. The slightest suspicion of guilt was now punished with immediate death. It was a sufficient crime if a man was seen to have saluted a suspected person. Seneca, amongst others, was



accused of having been privy to this conspiracy; and as a mark of the emperor's gratitude for the past services of his preceptor, he was permitted to choose the manner of his death. He chose to expire in a warm bath, after having his veins opened.

Nero, intoxicated with his own accomplishments as a gladiator and combatant in the arena, was not content with the applause of Rome: he determined now to show himself in Greece, where he contended for, and consequently gained, the prize at the Olympic and Pythian games. On his return to the Capitol he celebrated a splendid triumph, where he commanded himself to be hailed by the titles of Hercules and Apollo.

It becomes painful to enumerate a long series of extravagant instances of every variety of vice, and multiplied examples of the most complicated and capricious cruelty. The tyranny of this monster at length found an end. Vindex, an illustrious Gaul, by his interest with his countrymen as proprator, excited them to a general revolt. He offered the empire to Galba, then governor of Spain, who took upon himself the title of Lieutenant of the Senate and People of Rome. The provinces declared in his favor. Rome was divided, and at length the party of Vindex prevailed. Nero, abandoned by his guards, was obliged to conceal himself in the house of one of his freedmen. The senate proclaimed him an enemy to his country, and condemned him to die *more majorum*; that is, to be scourged, thrown from the Tarpeian rock, and then flung into the Tiber. Unable to bear the thoughts of such a death, Nero tried the points of two daggers, but wanted courage to die by his own hand. He entreated the aid of one of his slaves, who was not slow in the performance of that friendly office, and was in this manner put to death, after a reign of fourteen years, in the thirtieth year of his age; a character happily difficult to be paralleled in the annals of human nature.

In the time of the civil wars, the generals of the republic were certain of the obedience of their troops. They were devoted to their chiefs, and although expecting a recompense, they never dared to claim it as their due. Things had now entirely changed. A long state of servitude had annihilated every generous sentiment. Even the names of the ancient Roman families were lost. The soldiers now saw nothing in Rome but a despicable senate, a servile populace, and immense riches—of which last they soon found that they were the supreme disposers. The prætorian guards had now every thing at their command. Galba was of an ancient and illustrious family. He had conducted himself honorably in the government of several of the provinces, but old age had unfortunately turned to avarice a disposition naturally economical, and his manners, rigid from his life and constitution, were now become severe and cruel. He was seventy-three years of age when he was proclaimed emperor. He had scarcely arrived in Italy, when his conduct entirely alienated the affections of the

army to whom he owed his elevation. He disappointed them of the reward they expected, telling them that an emperor should choose his soldiers, and not purchase them. The people too, who, in the time of Nero, had been constantly amused with games and public shows, could not easily brook the loss of their favorite spectacles. In other instances the new emperor scrupled not to add injustice to his imprudence. Without the form of a trial, he stripped many of the richest citizens of their fortunes, on pretence of their having been improperly acquired under Nero.

The army in Germany were the first to evince a spirit of disaffection and mutiny, and openly expressed their desire of electing another emperor. Galba began to feel his own weakness, and to be sensible that his favorite passion had impelled him into a wrong course. He wished to find a support in the abilities and talents of the young Piso, who was distinguished both by his illustrious birth and by his eminent virtues. He adopted him, therefore, as his son, and destined him to be his successor in the empire; but, unfortunately for the public welfare, this measure came too late. Otho, the husband of Poppæa, and the rival of Piso, was of a character as decidedly infamous as the other was truly respectable. He was jealous of the destined honors of Piso, and determined to risk every thing to destroy him. He was immersed in debt, and had no means of escaping ruin but by some desperate attempt. It was to him a matter of indifference, he used to declare, how he died—whether by the sword of the enemy or the hand of the executioner. With this genius, and in such a disposition of mind, it was not surprising that he should harbor schemes of the highest and most daring import. He flattered his partisans by telling them that certain wise astrologers had given him a promise of the empire; and, as the securest engine of policy, he was lavish of his promises to the soldiers. He prevailed upon some of the boldest of the guards to take the active part in accomplishing his designs. On a day appointed, they carried him to the prætorian camp, where he was proclaimed emperor. Galba and Piso were both murdered in attempting to quell the tumult, and their heads were presented to Otho, who, it is said, gave early demonstrations of his sanguinary disposition by the exultation with which he received them. Galba had only reigned for the short space of seven months.

Otho, although he had found it an easy matter to induce the senate to confirm the election of the soldiers, was not without a competitor for the empire. Before the murder of Galba, Vitellius, who commanded in Germany, had been proclaimed emperor by his troops. He had arrived at authority by the same means as Otho, with a character, if possible, yet more deeply infamous. He, possessed himself, no military talents; but this want was supplied by the abilities of his generals, Cæcina and Valens. The art of war, during the long peace which had continued, with little



intermission, since the accession of Augustus, was now, in some measure, lost in Italy. The prætorian guards were lazy, licentious, ignorant of their duty, and completely debauched by the successive donatives of the emperors. It was no wonder that the apprehension of a civil war should have struck terror into the breasts of all who deserved the name of Roman citizens. They had no heroes to look to for their commanders—no troops animated, as formerly, by the love of glory and of their country. There existed, however, many degraded and desperate men, who were pleased with this prospect, in the hopes of profiting by the public ruin: whilst those cowardly minds, which composed the bulk of the citizens, were depressed with fear, or sunk in indolence and dependency.

Vitellius was at first unsuccessful in his pretensions to the empire. Cæcina and Valens did not act in concert; and Otho, had he possessed one spark of Roman spirit, would have found it easy to crush his rival in the beginning. He was resolved, at length, to hazard a decisive battle, but he had not courage to head the troops in person. His army was defeated at Bedriacum, between Mantua and Cremona, where above forty thousand men fell on each side. Otho might still have retrieved matters. Since his accession he had ingratiated himself with the soldiers, who earnestly urged him to continue the war. He had even gained, by an appearance of moderation, some affection from the people; and with these supports he might yet, by one vigorous effort, have foiled his ambitious rival. But despair had taken possession of him: his resolution was fixed, and no persuasion could alter it. For this resolution he assigned those generous motives of preventing the effusion of blood, and preserving the lives of his subjects; for which, unfortunately, the tenor of his former life will hardly permit us to give him credit. It must be owned, however, that his death was heroic. He gave his last orders with the utmost composure, provided as well as he could for the safety of his friends, whom he entreated to make a timely submission to the conqueror; like Cato, went to rest, slept with tranquillity, and, on awakening, fell upon his own sword. He had reigned for three months with considerable moderation, but the known vices of his character gave too much reason to believe that this short period of good administration would have been like the deceitful prelude of Nero.

Rome was now in the hands of a brutal tyrant, who affected no disguise to conceal his natural disposition. Vitellius was abandoned to every species of vicious debauchery. It is sufficient to paint his character to say, that he expressed a most devoted regard for the memory of *Nero*. Fortunately, this reign was not of long continuance.

Vespasian, a man of obscure family, but possessed of strong native talents, had raised himself by servile offices under Caligula

and Claudius, and had at length arrived at the consulship. Under Nero he had obtained the command of the army in the war against the Jews, and had conducted it with equal courage and ability. The legions he commanded in the East taking offence, very naturally, when they perceived their fellow-soldiers disposing of the empire at pleasure, and enjoying in ease all the fruits of this exercise of power, thought it time for themselves, in their turn, to choose an emperor. Vespasian was persuaded by Mucianus, the governor of Syria, to offer himself a candidate, on the usual terms of a large donative. The soldiers proclaimed him, and he was immediately acknowledged over all the East. A great part of Italy submitted to his generals; and Vitellius, within a few months of his succession, saw himself reduced to the alternative of resigning the empire, or of dying like his predecessor. He chose the former, and immediately concluded a shameful treaty with Sabinus, the brother of Vespasian, then prefect of Rome, by which he saved his life; obtaining, in return for his resignation of the empire, the liberty of retiring to Campania, with a considerable yearly pension. This treaty the dastardly emperor read himself to the people, crying all the while like a child. He then submissively prepared to strip himself of all the ensigns of authority. The spirit of the citizens was roused at this self-degradation. They compelled him to return to his palace, and attacked the party of Sabinus, who retired to the Capitol. They burnt down the temple of Jupiter, seized Sabinus, and put him to death at the feet of Vitellius. In the meanwhile Priscus, one of the generals of Vespasian, arriving with his army at the very time when the whole city was employed in the celebration of the Saturnalia, took immediate possession, without any opposition. Neither the consideration of glory nor of safety were sufficient to call off the minds of this miserable and degraded people from their favorite amusements. Vitellius was found concealed in the chamber of a slave. He was brought into the forum with a rope about his neck, loaded with reproaches, and ignominiously put to death, in the eighth month of his reign.

Vespasian was among those few princes whose character has changed for the better on their arrival at empire. Augustus, from a vicious and cruel man, became, if not a virtuous, in many respects an admirable prince. Vespasian had ingratiated himself by the most servile flattery with Caligula and Claudius, and raised himself by degrees from the meanest station to rank and distinction. His character, before he came to the empire, was at the best an equivocal one; but no sooner did he mount the throne, than all these suspicions were at once shown to be unfounded. He gave a general pardon to all who had been found in arms against him. He allowed every citizen, provided he spoke only of his own grievances, to have free access to his person, but declared war against that vile race of pensioned informers, which