

CHAPTER XVI.

TIBERIUS CÆSAR, CALIGULA, AND CLAUDIUS.

FROM 10 B. C. TO A. D. 51.

UNEQUAL DIVISION OF WEALTH.—SLAVERY.—THE JEWS.—TIBERIUS CÆSAR.—DEATH OF CÆSAR AUGUSTUS.—TYRANNY OF TIBERIUS.—HIS RETREAT OF CAPREÆ.—DEATH OF GERMANICUS.—EDICT AGAINST THE PLAY-ACTORS.—TESTIMONY OF TACITUS.—TERRIBLE ACCIDENT.—CALIGULA.—DEATH OF TIBERIUS.—CRUCIFIXION OF OUR SAVIOUR.—REIGN OF CALIGULA.—HIS CRUELTY AND MADNESS.—ASSASSINATION OF CALIGULA.—ACCESSION OF CLAUDIUS.—ANECDOTES.—DEATH OF CLAUDIUS.—ACCESSION OF NERO.—HIS CHARACTER.

THERE has never been any period of the world in which wealth has been so unequally divided, as during the Augustan age of the Roman empire. The great generals and the haughty nobles rioted in princely luxury, exhausting, in their voluptuous pleasures, the revenues of whole provinces. There was an order of Roman citizens, below the nobles, called equites, or knights. The fortune necessary to admit a man into this order, was about sixteen thousand dollars of our money; and yet in the city of Rome, with a population of over four millions, there were but four thousand persons, not nobles, possessed of this sum. An immense number of the population, at but a slight remove above begging, were mainly supported by the bounty, so called, of the emperor; that is, distant provinces were robbed to feed the idle population of Rome, which population was ever eager to rush into the armies of the Cæsars. Consequently, the circling and swooping of the Roman eagles was pretty certain to be seen, wherever plunder was to be found. And no plunder was more eagerly grasped, by the brutal soldiery of pagan Rome, than the matrons and maidens of the conquered nations. But

little more than half a century before the reign of Cæsar Augustus, one of the consuls at Rome, L. Philippus, declared that there was not at that time in the whole commonwealth more than two thousand citizens worth any thing. An amazing statement, which, however it may have been exaggerated, proves the deplorable state of the times.

All the industry and prosperity of the empire were cursed and crushed by slavery. By the opulent families slaves were so generally employed, that there was no encouragement for the free laborer. As the slaves were of the same race with their masters, many of them being men of high culture and genius, they were occupied in the most important vocations. Even architecture, medicine, and the liberal arts and professions were in their hands; and these employments were, consequently, rendered less respectable and less profitable, when pursued by others.

The condition of the slaves, generally, was dreadful. The barbarous wars, ravaging all lands, had glutted the market; and the slaves were so cheap, that there were but feeble motives of self-interest to restrain masters from the inhumanity of wearing out their slaves by neglect and hard usage. According to Plutarch, slaves could often be purchased in the Roman camp for three shillings of our money. In that day there were no newspapers, no established mails for letters, no public means of conveyance for travelers. Many of the Roman roads, however, were excellent, and there were relays of horses to expedite the journeys of government couriers. The eastern and western extremities of the Roman empire, were separated by the formidable barrier of totally different languages, the Latin being the predominant language in the west, the Greek in the east. In the elementary schools at Rome, nothing was taught but reading and arithmetic; and the teachers were men of the humblest station and acquirements. The religion of Rome had but the slightest influence in the control of morals. It was an axiom among the philosophers,

that God could never be the cause of pain or punishment, and, consequently, they had no fear of any divine retribution for whatever crimes. And the silly superstitions of the vulgar, had about as much influence over the habits of life, as the fear of ghosts has at the present day. The writings, the paintings, the statuary, still extant, all attest to the exceeding grossness of manners, and the unmitigated sensuality which then prevailed. The idea even of sympathy and brotherly kindness between man and man, seems hardly to have existed. We turn over page after page of the ancient writers, in the vain endeavor to find any allusion to those virtues. There were no alms-houses, no hospitals, no societies of benevolence. No one raised his voice against the degradation of the lower classes, against slavery, against the crimes of the kidnapper, and the atrocities of the slave market.

The Jews were widely scattered over the eastern provinces of the empire. Their kingdom, in Syria, had first been overrun by the Greeks, then by the Romans. Their native language, as a spoken tongue, was lost; so entirely was it lost, that it had been found necessary to translate their scriptures into Greek. This translation, called the Septuagint, from the number of learned Jews engaged in it, was made, or rather commenced, about 280 years B. C., and contained "The Scriptures" in general use by the Jews at the time of our Saviour, and from which our Saviour quoted in His public and private addresses. Here and there, scattered over the cities and villages of Palestine, were individuals, Romans and others, who, having read these scriptures, had imbibed their ennobling spirit. Enlightened by the revelation of one God, of immortality, of the nature of piety, these "proselytes of the gate" who had yet not become Jews, worshiped the true God, and were thus distinguished, in character and moral conduct, from the pagans around them, and from whom they emerged. They were spoken of by the Jews as "devout" persons, who feared God. Such was the Roman

centurion, Cornelius, and many others spoken of in the New Testament.

Fourteen years before the death of Cæsar Augustus, our Saviour, Jesus, the long-promised Messiah, was born, in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king. Herod was a native of Syria. He had fought under the banners of Brutus and Cassius. After their overthrow he joined Marc Antony, and by him was appointed king of Judea, one of the provinces of Palestine. After the disastrous battle of Actium, Herod paid such successful court to the conqueror, Octavius Cæsar, that he was confirmed in his kingdom. He was a man of distinguished abilities but of ungovernable passions, and execrable and infamous in character. This was the Herod who ordered the assassination of all the babes of Bethlehem, hoping thus to destroy the infant Messiah. He died miserably a few years after the advent of Christ.

It will be remembered that Augustus Cæsar had married, as his third wife, Livia Drusilla, then the wife of Tiberius Nero, a Roman noble and general. Cæsar had, at that time, by his wife Scribonia whom he repudiated for alleged profligacy, a daughter Julia. Livia had also a son Tiberius. Julia and Tiberius, by the marriage of Octavius and Livia, became brother and sister in law. They, however, were subsequently married, and, as Cæsar had no other children, Tiberius was adopted as his heir. Julia was so shamefully and unblushingly profligate, glorying, with more than masculine effrontery, in her amours, that Augustus himself ordered her divorce, and banished her to a small island just off the coast of Campania. Here she was imprisoned and treated with great rigor, her father refusing to forgive her, or even to see her again. None are so merciless towards libertines, as libertines themselves.

Cæsar Augustus was now advancing in life, and, during the last ten years of his reign, associated Tiberius with him in the administration of the empire. As the shades of the

evening of life darkened around Augustus, he displayed with increasing conspicuousness, that gentleness, courteousness, and affability, which had characterized his reign for forty years. He forbade any one to call him "lord" or master. When the people urged him to assume the title of dictator, he cast aside his robe, saying that he had rather they would plunge a dagger into his breast than give him that odious name. He adopted the utmost simplicity in his equipage and his style of living. When a delegation was presented to him, to announce in the name of the senate and the people, the title conferred upon him of "Father of his Country," he was affected even to tears, and replied:

"I have now gained all that I have desired. What is there left for me to pray for, but that I may preserve, to the last day of my life, this same unanimous love of my countrymen."

When seventy-six years of age he accompanied Tiberius on a journey to Beneventum, about one hundred and fifty miles south of Rome. Here he was slightly attacked with illness. Returning slowly, as his disease grew more serious, he stopped at Nola, at the paternal mansion where his father died. Here, at three o'clock in the afternoon of the nineteenth of August, A. D. 13, the emperor, Augustus Cæsar, expired, saying with his last breath:

"Farewell Livia! and ever remember our long union."

It is characteristic of the awful corruption of those times, that no one seems to have been shocked at the supposition that Livia poisoned her husband. Tacitus attempts to explain the motives which might have influenced Livia to this crime. Poisonings and assassinations were so common, that such atrocities seem hardly to have been regarded as a breach of respectable morality, if there were any motive, in the line of expediency, for the deed.

One of the first acts of Tiberius, who now reigned untrammelled, was to assassinate Agrippa, the son of his divorced

wife Julia. Agrippa, utterly debauched, was as bad as his mother. Tiberius said that Augustus had enjoined it upon him, with his dying breath, not to allow Agrippa to live one day after Augustus should breathe his last. Tacitus, however, says:

"It is more probable that Tiberius and Livia, the former from motives of fear, the latter impelled by a step-mother's aversion, expedited the destruction of this young man, the object of their jealousy and hatred."

It is recorded of Augustus Cæsar, that he was in stature a little below the ordinary size, admirably proportioned, with brown hair, slightly curled, and a countenance remarkably genial and mild. He was extremely temperate in eating and drinking, but a seducer and adulterer, a man of groveling sensuality. Gaming was a vice which followed him through all his years. His education was good, and all his intellectual efforts, whether in writing or speaking, highly creditable to him. His public speeches were carefully written, and committed to memory. He never was considered a man of courage even on the field of battle, where, inflamed by the excitement, cowards can easily be brave. He had a constitutional dread of lightning, and when there was a severe storm, would hide himself in the interior of his house. But his reign, as a whole, was so infinitely superior to that of any of his predecessors, that the "Augustan era" of any nation has become a proverbial expression to denote harmony, prosperity, and enlightenment.

The funeral of Augustus was solemnized at Rome with great magnificence. Tiberius pronounced the eulogy in the presence of the assembled senate. Temples were erected for his worship, divine honors decreed to him, and the superstitious people were fully confirmed in the belief of his divinity, as one of the senators, Numerius Atticus, attested on oath that he had seen Augustus ascending to heaven.

Tiberius Cæsar, on his accession to the government of the

Roman empire, was fifty-six years of age. With the exception of the assassination of Agrippa, which Rome seems to have regarded as a mere peccadillo, the commencement of his reign was distinguished by clemency, sagacity, and devotion to the public interests. But soon Tiberius entered a career of cruelty, which has transmitted his name with infamy to the present day.

Retiring from Rome he sought a retreat in Campania, a province composing part of the present kingdom of Naples, and which was then deemed the most mild, salubrious, and fertile spot upon the globe. At a short distance from the shore was the beautiful island of Capreæ. Here Tiberius surrendered himself to the most extravagant luxury, and to every sensual indulgence, heedless of the complaints and the misery of his subjects. Crime created suspicion, and suspicion engendered cruelty. Secret spies were listening at all key-holes, and the most harmless actions were construed into deadly offenses.

The legions on the banks of the Danube had a commander by the name of Germanicus, who was the idol of the soldiery. His troops urged upon him to assume the sovereign power, promising to support him with their swords. Indignantly he repelled the suggestion, punishing as traitors those who were the instigators of the revolt. Nevertheless Tiberius, notwithstanding the loyalty of Germanicus, thus effectually tried, dreading his popularity, ordered him on a distant mission, where he soon perished, if not by poison, administered by command of Tiberius as was supposed, certainly by hardships and exposure, which the emperor had arranged to secure his death. The children of Germanicus were denounced as enemies of the state, and several of them were thrown into prison, where they were starved to death. The wife of Germanicus, thus widowed and childless, was driven into exile. Execution now followed execution. Suspicion doomed multitudes to imprisonment, torture, and death without the formality of trial. When one, to escape this cruel torture of the

rack, committed suicide, Tiberius expressed deep regret that the victim had thus escaped him. When another, in agony insupportable, implored that death might put an end to his sufferings, Tiberius exclaimed, "I am not sufficiently your friend to shorten your torments."

The fear of assassination embittered every hour of this monster's life. The miseries he inflicted upon others rebounded upon himself. Piso, one of the most illustrious of the Roman generals, finding that his own doom was sealed, retired to his chamber and plunged a dagger into his heart. He had but executed the orders which Tiberius had issued, and he was then pursued unrelentingly, that it might be made to appear that Tiberius had not directed but condemned his acts. He left the following touching letter addressed to Tiberius:

"Oppressed by the combination of my enemies, and the odium of falsely imputed crimes; since no place is left here for truth and innocence, I appeal to the immortal gods, that toward you, Cæsar, I have lived with sincere faith, nor toward your mother with less reverence. For my sons I implore her protection and yours. My son Cnæus had no share in the events laid to my charge, of whatever character they were, since during the whole time he abode at Rome. My son Marcus dissuaded me from returning to Syria. Oh that, old as I am, I had yielded to him, rather than he, young as he is, to me! Hence the more earnestly I pray that, innocent as he is, he be not involved in the punishment of my guilt. By my devoted services for five-and-forty years, I entreat you; I who formerly, during my fellowship in the consulship with the deified Augustus, your father, enjoyed his approbation and your friendship; I, who shall never ask your favor hereafter, implore your mercy for my unhappy son."

It is a fact, worthy of record, but not easily explained, that during so corrupt a reign as that of Tiberius, when all manner of licentiousness was practiced with unblushing

effrontery, even Tiberius should have entered a complaint to the senate, against the demoralizing influence of play-actors.

"In many instances," said the emperor, "they seditiously violate the public peace. Many promote debauchery in private families. The Oscan Farce, formerly only the contemptible delight of the vulgar, has risen to such a pitch of depravity, and has exercised such an influence on society that it must be checked by the authority of the senate."

The play-actors, thus denounced as a public nuisance, were expelled from Italy. The senate and the Roman people had become so obsequious, that a proposition was made that a temple should be reared to Tiberius, and that he should be worshiped with divine honors. In the utterance of the following sentiments Tiberius rejected the proposal; showing, in accordance with the declaration of Paul, that there is a law of right and wrong, written upon the human heart, which renders every man, pagan as well as Christian, accountable at God's bar:

"For myself," Tiberius replied, "I solemnly assure you, and I would have posterity remember it, that I am a mortal man; and that I am confined to the functions of human nature, and that if I well fulfill my duties as a sovereign it suffices me. Justice will be rendered to my memory, if I am regarded as worthy of my ancestors, watchful of your interests, unmoved in perils, and fearless of private enmities in defense of the public weal. These are the temples I would raise in your breasts. These are the fairest effigies, and such as will endure.

"As for temples of stone, if the judgment of posterity changes from favor to dislike, they are despised, as no better than sepulchers. Hence it is that I here invoke the gods, that, to the end of my life, they would grant me a spirit undisturbed, and discerning in duties human and divine. And hence, too, I implore our citizens and allies, that, when ever my dissolution comes, they would celebrate my actions

and the odor of my name with praises, and benevolent testimonies of benevolence."

It was nine years after Tiberius commenced his reign that he retired from Rome to the island of Capreae. Tacitus, in allusion to this retirement, says that the probable motive for seeking this retreat was "that he might indulge his cruel and libidinous disposition with greater effect in the secrecy of a retired situation. Some thought that in his old age he was ashamed of his personal appearance, for he was exceedingly emaciated, lank, and stooping, his head bald, his face ulcerous, and thickly patched with plasters." Tacitus states that there was also a report that Tiberius was driven from Rome by the restless spirit of his mother, whom he scorned to admit as a partner in the sovereignty, which she demanded, since through her he had received the sovereignty itself.

For six years Tiberius remained at Capreae. During this time there were many revolts in distant provinces and many conspiracies at home, all of which were put down with a bloody hand. A terrible accident occurred at this time, surpassing anything which has been experienced in modern days. A man by the name of Atillius erected at Fidenæ, a few miles from Rome, as a pecuniary speculation, an immense amphitheater, for gladiatorial exhibitions. As his sole object was to make money, he sordidly built it upon a weak foundation, without sufficient braces, for an edifice so vast and to contain such multitudes. Crowds of all ages and both sexes flocked from Rome to witness these games. The theater was filled to overflowing, and a countless throng surrounded the walls, when they gave way, with an awful crash, some portions bulging out and overwhelming the multitudes swarming around the walls, while other portions tumbled inwards. Thousands were instantly killed, but other thousands crushed and mangled were buried beneath the ruins. Their cries and groans, for many days and nights, filled the air as they were laboriously dug out from the mass of timber and stone. Ac-

ording to Tacitus the carnage resulting from this one accident, was greater than the slaughter at Waterloo. Fifty thousand persons were crushed or maimed by this terrible disaster, which led to an efficient senatorial enactment to prevent a recurrence of such a calamity.

There was at Rome a young man, called Caligula, son of that renowned general, Germanicus, whom Tiberius had so much feared, and whom it is supposed he had caused to be put to death. This young man, utterly dissolute, had played the sycophant with so much address, flattering Tiberius, applauding his voluptuousness and cruelty, and paying him the most servile homage, that he so ingratiated himself in the favor of the tyrant, who had no children, that he adopted him as a son, and took him to share his counsels and his debauchery at Capreae. Of this Caligula a distinguished Roman orator remarked, "Never was there a better slave or a worse master." Tiberius himself said of Caligula, "He has all the vices of Sylla, with none of his virtues."

At length the sands of the tyrant Tiberius were run out, and his death hour tolled. He did everything in his power to drive off reflection, and to deceive himself with hopes of continued life. But the king of terrors was inexorable. Tiberius had left his retreat at Capreae, and was at this time at Misenum, near Naples. As he was reclining upon his couch, death rapidly approaching, his physician felt his pulse, and whispered to others, "His life is ebbing fast; he can not long continue." A fainting fit ensued, which led all to think that he was dead.

The courtiers immediately, mindless of the corpse, surrounded Caligula with congratulations, declaring him the successor. Triumph and joy reigned through the apartments, and Caligula was exultingly receiving the homage ever attendant upon a new reign, when, to the consternation of all, it was announced that Tiberius had revived and was calling for attendants and food. But the wretched old man was

helpless. A few persons entered his chamber, took a pillow, pressed it upon his face; and, after a short and feeble struggle, the smothered monarch lay still in death. Thus expired Tiberius in the seventy-eighth year of his age, and the twenty-second of his reign.

Our Saviour was crucified in the eighteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar. Pontius Pilate was at this time the Roman governor of Judea. Though the Jews were permitted to retain many of their local laws, they were not permitted to inflict the death penalty, without the approval of the Roman governor. Hence the Jews having condemned our Saviour, took Him to Pilate for the confirmation of the sentence. Pilate, deeming the sentence unjust, as he could find no ground even for accusation, and yet not willing to displease his Jewish subjects, referred the case to Herod, son of Herod the Great, who was then tetrarch, or sub-governor of Galilee, the province in Judea in which our Saviour had been arrested, and who with most propriety should take cognizance of the charges against Him. This was the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist at the instigation of his wife Herodias, because John had denounced their incestuous union.

But Herod was unwilling to assume the responsibility of condemning a man to death who was manifestly guiltless, and referred the matter back again to his superior Pilate. The governor, thus forced to action, wickedly surrendered the victim to His persecutors, at the same time declaring that Jesus was innocent of crime, and that all the responsibility of His death must remain upon the heads of His executioners. "His blood be upon us," they exclaimed, "and on our children."

It is related by Justin, and by Tertullian, Eusebius, and others who have perhaps followed his narrative, that Pilate wrote to the emperor Tiberius an account of the crucifixion of our Saviour by the Jews, His subsequent resurrection, and the miracles which He performed, and that Tiberius was so