

impressed by this narration that he reported it to the senate, with a recommendation characteristic of the superstition of the times, that Christ should be recognized as divine, and take His place as one of the crowd of Roman gods. The senate did not accede to his request, but Tiberius issued an edict commanding that Christians should not be molested in their worship.

Caligula commenced his reign with a brief attempt to secure popularity by justice. But not one year had passed away ere he surrendered himself to the uncontrolled dominion of lusts and passions, rendered furious and untameable by years of indulgence. Elated by the accession to sovereign power, Caligula assumed the most arrogant airs, demanded divine honors, and appropriated to himself the names of such divinities as he thought he most resembled. His conduct was often that of an idiotic madman. He erected a temple of gold, and placed in it a statue, dressed daily in similar clothes to those which he that day wore. Crowds were influenced to gather around the statue in worship. The most exquisite delicacies which money could purchase, were offered in sacrifice at his shrine. He even, with sacred rites, ordained his wife and his horse to officiate as priests in the service of the temple, reared for his deification. His extravagance in luxury and personal gratification exceeded all bounds. His baths were composed of the most costly liquids, his service was of gold; and jewels were dissolved in his sauces. His horse, Incitalus, occupied a stable of marble, with a manger of ivory. Gilt oats were presented him to eat, and wine from a golden goblet to drink.

The cruelty of Caligula was equal to his insane folly. Senators were slain at his command, uncondemned and untried. Death, in the most cruel form, was the doom of any one who incurred his suspicion. He fed his wild beasts with the bodies of his victims, tossing them into their dens to be devoured alive. No spectacle was so pleasing to him as the

tortures of the dying. His spirit, demonized by cruelty, was wrought up to such a frenzy, that he was heard to express the wish that all the Roman people had but one neck, that he might dispatch them at a blow. His warlike expeditions to Gaul and Germany were marked by folly which the world had never before seen paralleled. Indeed, if one half is true which history has transmitted to us respecting Caligula, there never was an inmate of a mad house more thoroughly and detestably crazy.

Such a monster, wielding the scepter of omnipotent power, could not live long. As one after another of the members of his court was stricken down, it was plain to the survivors that there was no alternative before them but to kill or be killed. Caligula, having every nerve of suspicion quivering with sensitiveness, suspected a conspiracy for his assassination. A beautiful woman, Quintilia, was arrested, as acquainted with the plot, and put to the rack to extort a confession. Heroically she endured the awful agony, and every joint in her body was dislocated. This act roused the conspirators to the immediate execution of their deed, and Cherea, a Roman senator, as Caligula was going to the bath, plunged a dagger into his heart, exclaiming, "Tyrant, think of this." Thus perished one of the most execrable monsters who ever burdened a throne. At the time of his death Caligula was but twenty-nine years of age, having reigned less than four years. It has been well said of this despot, "Nature seemed to have brought him forth to show what mischief could be effected by the greatest vices, supported by the greatest authority."

The conspiracy, which plunged the dagger into the bosom of Caligula, was but the spasmodic movement of despair. No arrangements whatsoever were made, or even contemplated, for securing a successor, or for continuing the government, and consequently there ensued a singular scene of confusion and anarchy. The conspirators, terrified, and not knowing what destruction, like an avalanche, might fall upon them, fled

into all possible concealments. The worthless sycoplants and partisans of Caligula, anticipating the same doom which had befallen their infamous confederate, also fled in the utmost consternation. Some soldiers, strolling through the deserted palace, found hid, and trembling, behind some rubbish, an uncle of Caligula, named Claudius. He was an unfortunate man, fifty years of age, totally devoid of common sense, having experienced some serious mental injury from the diseases of infancy; and yet he had manifested some ability as a writer. General viciousness was a prominent trait in his character.

The soldiers took the affrighted, half crazed man, and declared him to be emperor. Then, in a body, marching to the senate, by the moral suasion of gleaming swords and sharp pointed spears, they influenced the senate to confirm the appointment. This poor wretch had a wife, Messalina, the renown of whose profligacy has survived the lapse of eighteen centuries. She has attained the preëminence of being regarded the most abandoned woman earth has known. It is recorded that every man, in the household of the emperor, was her paramour. Officers, play-actors, buffoons, slaves, all were alike welcomed by Messalina. Her atrocities were far too shameful to be recorded. The ladies of her court were compelled to practice in her presence the same shameful enormities in which she indulged, and whoever refused, was punished with torture and death. At length one of her paramours, with the connivance of Claudius, openly murdered her. The brutal husband was alike regardless of the infamy of her life, and of the lawless violence which effected her death.

Claudius, afterward, in the midst of his boundless debaucheries, recognized one of his paramours, Agrippina, as his legal wife. She had already given birth to the child subsequently known as the monster Nero. She was the fourth wife of Claudius, two having been divorced and one killed. The question is sometimes asked whether the world, on the whole, is advancing or retrograding in moral character. No man,

who is familiar with the history of the past, will ask that question. England and America, manifold as are the evils in both countries, are as far in advance of ancient Rome, in all that constitutes integrity and virtue, as is the most refined Christian family in advance of the most degraded, godless, and debauched.

Some of the first acts of the reign of Claudius were humane, and seemed intended to promote the public good. But the possession of unlimited power, soon developed the malignity and energy of a demon. Britain was at this time rent with intestine divisions, the barbaric tribes struggling against each other in deadly warfare. There seemed to be no prospect of any end to the strife. Bericus, the leader of one of these tribes, or petty nations, went to Rome and urged the emperor to make a descent upon the island, assuring him that in its present distracted state it could be easily subdued. An army was accordingly dispatched for its conquest. Marching across Gaul, and embarking on board their ships on the shores of the channel, they crossed to the savage island, and after many sanguinary battles with the natives, planted the banners of the empire securely there.

Claudius was greatly elated with this conquest, and repaired in person to Britain that he might receive the homage of his new subjects. This was A. D. 46. After remaining upon the island sixteen days he returned to Rome, where a magnificent triumph awaited him. His achievements were deemed so important, that annual games were instituted in commemoration of them. The conquest, however, was very imperfect, since but a few tribes had been vanquished, and a large portion of the island still remained under the sway of its warring, but independent chieftains. A Roman general, Plautius, and his lieutenant Vespasian, who subsequently rose to great renown, were left to continue the subjugation of the island. Thirty battles were fought before Britain was fairly reduced, A. D. 51, to the form of a Roman province. But still for many

years remote tribes, in their fastnesses, bade defiance to all the armies of Rome.

Carradog, or Caractacus, as he is sometimes called, the king of South Wales, was one of the most valiant and successful of the opponents of the Roman general. But the valor of barbarians was of but little avail against the disciplined legions of the empire. In a decisive battle he was taken prisoner, with his wife and daughter, and, as trophies of the conquest, they were sent to Claudius. When Carradog beheld the splendor of the imperial capital, dazzled by the wealth, power, and gorgeousness which surrounded him, he exclaimed:

"How is it possible that people, in the enjoyment of such magnificence, should envy Carradog a humble cottage in Britain." Agrippina, though from constitutional temperament less sensual, was no less unprincipled than Messalina. She ruled her weak husband with a rod of iron. One day, when intoxicated, he imprudently declared that it was his fate to be tormented with bad wives, and to be their executioner. The hint was sufficient for Agrippina. The emperor was particularly fond of mushrooms. She prepared with her own loving hands a dish for her dear spouse; sprinkled some poison upon the delicious viand; with smiles presented the repast to Claudius, and had the pleasure of seeing him fall in convulsions and die at her feet.

We have mentioned that Agrippina had a son, whose name was Nero. Who his father was, perhaps Agrippina herself could not tell. This lad, Claudius had adopted as his son and heir. Nero was but seventeen years old when his mother poisoned Claudius. He was highly educated, having been trained by the finest teachers the times could furnish. It has been said that the commencement of his reign was marked with clemency and justice; but this period was so exceedingly short as scarcely to deserve notice. Influenced by his mother, all rivals who could endanger his sway, were

speedily put to death, by poison, the dagger, and the mystery of the dungeon. It is reported that the young Nero at first reluctantly consented to these assassinations. But all such scruples soon disappeared.

Nero pronounced the funeral oration of Claudius. It was written, however, by Nero's accomplished teacher, Seneca, and would have been an eloquent performance, had it not been so ridiculously untrue. When Nero touched upon the wisdom, foresight, and magnanimity of the imbecile brute, even the obsequious senate of Rome could not restrain itself, and the young, imperial orator, was astonished by a general burst of derisive laughter.

Nero had early married a lady of illustrious birth, named Octavia, whom he now treated with the grossest neglect, she being supplanted by a beautiful emancipated slave, named Acte, who was purchased in Asia. A very bitter quarrel soon sprang up between Nero and his mother. Agrippina was a woman of much ability. She had accumulated wealth which even rivaled the imperial treasury, and there was a large party ready to espouse her interests in any conflict with her son. Claudius had left a son, Britannicus, fourteen years of age, and a daughter Octavia. Agrippina in her rage threatened to drive Nero from the throne and place Britannicus upon it.