

priests on the citadel,\* it was given to him by his taster, the eunuch Halotus, others that it was given him at a family dinner by Agrippina herself, offering him the drug in a dish of mushrooms, a kind of food to which he was very partial. There are different versions even of the next part of the story. Many claim that immediately after consuming the poison he was rendered speechless and, wracked with pain throughout the night, died just before dawn. Some say that he first lost consciousness, then vomited up from his overflowing stomach all he had consumed but that he was given a second dose of poison. This may have been added to some porridge, with the pretence that he needed food to revive him in his weakened state, or else introduced in a syringe, administered on the grounds that his stomach was overloaded and might be relieved by that form of evacuation as well.

[45] His death was concealed until all arrangements were in place with regard to his successor. And so, as if he were still ill, vows were offered and, to reinforce the illusion, actors were brought in as if to provide the entertainment he was asking for. He died on the third day before the Ides of October, when Asinius Marcellus and Acilius Aviola were consuls, in his own sixty-fourth year and in the fourteenth year of his reign.\* His funeral was celebrated with customary imperial ceremony and he was included among the ranks of the gods. This honour was neglected and then cancelled by Nero but was later restored by Vespasian.\*

[46] The main omens foretelling his death were as follows. A star with a mane appeared, the kind people call a comet. The tomb of his father Drusus was hit by lightning and, in the same year, of all the holders of the different magistracies, a great many died. There are several indications that he himself seemed not unaware that the end of his life was approaching nor concerned to conceal it. For when he appointed the consuls, he made appointments only for the period up until the month he died, and, the last time he attended the senate, he warmly encouraged his children to be reconciled, then with feeling commended each of them, young as they were, to the care of the senators. On the occasion of his last appearance on the tribunal as judge, he pronounced, and repeated his pronouncement, despite the prayers of those who heard him, that he was approaching the end of his mortal life.

## NERO

[1] Of the Domitian family, two branches achieved fame, the Calvini and the Ahenobarbi. The Ahenobarbi have as the founder of their branch and origin of their name Lucius Domitius. Two young men, twins of impressive bearing, are said to have appeared to him once, as he was returning from the countryside, and to have given him orders to announce to the senate and people victory in a battle whose outcome was at that time awaited.\* And, as a sign of their divinity, they are said to have stroked his cheeks, turning his beard, which was black, a red colour like bronze.\* This distinctive feature continued even among his descendants, many of whom had red beards. Between them, they achieved seven consulships, a triumph, two censorships, and promotion to the patricians, all the while continuing to use the same *cognomen*. And they took no other forenames than Gnaeus and Lucius. This usage they practised with remarkable variation, sometimes giving each name to three people in a row and sometimes one name alternating with the other. For we learn that the first three Ahenobarbi were all called Lucius, while the next three were all called Gnaeus, after which they alternated between Lucius and Gnaeus. I have decided to report on a number of members of the family to make clearer how Nero lapsed from the virtues of his ancestors yet reproduced each one's legacy of vice.

[2] To begin a little further back, his great-grandfather's grandfather, Gnaeus Domitius\* was, as tribune, furious with the *pontifices*, because they had co-opted someone other than himself into the place his own father had occupied, and transferred the right of selecting priests from the colleges of priests to the Roman people. When he was consul and had defeated the Allobroges and the Arverni, he travelled through the province seated on an elephant and accompanied by a crowd of soldiers, as if in a triumphal procession.\* The orator Licinius Crassus said against him that it was no wonder he had a beard of bronze when his face was made of iron and his heart of lead. The son of this Ahenobarbus, when he was praetor, called Julius Caesar to a senate inquiry at the end of his consulship, on the grounds that he had conducted himself in office contrary to the auspices and the laws.\* Not long afterwards, when he himself was

consul, he dared to deprive Caesar of the command of the Gallic armies. Then, named as Caesar's successor thanks to the support of a faction, he was taken prisoner at Corfinium\* at the start of the civil war. Released from there, he went to the support of the people of Massilia, who were besieged and struggling, but suddenly abandoned them for no apparent reason and finally met his end fighting at Pharsalus.\* He was an indecisive man, though his temper was savage; having in desperation attempted suicide, he was so overcome by fear of dying that he regretted his decision, vomited up the poison he had taken, and rewarded the slave-doctor with his freedom on the grounds that, knowing his master well, he had been prudent enough to administer an insufficiently powerful dose.\* When Gnaeus Pompey asked for advice on how to deal with persons who had remained neutral and taken neither side during the civil war, he was the only one who thought they should be treated as enemies.

[3] He left a son,\* who, without doubt, was far superior to the rest of the family. He, though he was innocent, had been condemned under the *Pedian law*\* as one of Caesar's assassins, and so joined cause with Brutus and Cassius, being closely related to them. After their deaths he kept the fleet which had been entrusted to him and increased it. Only when his side was utterly defeated everywhere did he hand the fleet over to Mark Antony—on his own initiative and as if he were conferring a great favour. And he alone, of all those who had been condemned by that same law, had his civil rights restored to him and fulfilled the highest offices. When, later, civil war broke out again and he was made a legate by that same Mark Antony, he was offered the supreme command by those of his side who were ashamed of the alliance with Cleopatra but, suffering from a sudden illness, dared neither to accept it nor to turn it down, instead going over to Augustus' side. A few days later he was dead, with his own reputation in doubt, for Antony asserted that he had changed sides through desire to be with his mistress, Servilia Nais.

[4] This Domitius was father of the man who was later well known for being named as executor in Augustus' will. He was no less famous in his youth for his skill in chariot driving than he was to be later for the triumphal ornaments he won in the war against Germany. However, he was an arrogant man, profligate and cruel, who, when he was merely an aedile, forced the censor Lucius Plancus to make way for him on the street. When serving as praetor

and as consul, he organised farces performed in the theatre by Roman knights and matrons. He provided animal shows in the Circus and in all parts of the city, as well as a gladiatorial show of such cruelty that Augustus, having offered him a discreet warning to no effect, was obliged to restrain him by edict.\*

[5] He and the elder Antonia\* were the parents of Nero's father, a man loathsome in every respect. As a young man, on a trip to the east accompanying Gaius Caesar,\* he killed his own freedman, on the grounds that the man would not drink as much as he was ordered, and was himself dismissed from the entourage, yet made no attempt to regulate his lifestyle. Indeed, going through a village on the Appian Way he whipped up his team and knowingly ran over a boy, while at Rome in the middle of the Forum he gouged out the eye of a Roman knight who had been arguing with him too warmly. Moreover, his dishonesty was such that he not only cheated the banker intermediaries of the price of goods he had obtained but, when praetor, he even defrauded the chariot race winners of their prize money. When his own sister's jokes brought him into public disrepute for this and the team managers complained, he issued an edict\* that prizes should subsequently be handed over on the spot. Shortly before Tiberius died, Domitius was accused of treason, adultery, and incest with his sister Lepida but escaped prosecution because of the change of regime. He died at Pyrgi of dropsy, after acknowledging his son Nero, whose mother was Agrippina, Germanicus' daughter.

[6] Nero was born at Antium, nine months after Tiberius died, on the eighteenth day before the Kalends of January,\* just as the sun was rising, so that he was touched by its rays almost before he could be laid on the ground.\* Many people made numerous and sinister predictions about his birth-signs. Among the warnings was even the pronouncement of his father, who responded to his friends' congratulations saying nothing could be born of himself and Agrippina that would not inspire loathing and bring disaster for the state. Another sign of his unhappy future occurred on the day of his purification.\* For the emperor Caligula, when his sister asked him to give whatever name he chose to the child, looking upon his uncle Claudius—by whom, when he was emperor, Nero was later to be adopted—said that they should give the child *his* name.\* However, he did not do this seriously but as a joke and Agrippina turned down the suggestion, for at that time Claudius was a figure of fun at court.

At three years old he lost his father. Heir to a mere third part of the estate, he did not even get that much, for his co-heir, Calpurnia seized everything.\* When soon afterwards his mother was relegated he was left virtually penniless. His aunt Lepida brought him up, placing him in the care of two tutors, one a dancer, the other a barber. However, when Claudius succeeded to the empire, Nero not only got back his father's property but increased his wealth with an inheritance from his stepfather, Crispus Passienus. When his mother was recalled to Rome and re-established, his position was so improved by the favour and influence she exercised that, according to a popular rumour, Claudius' wife Messalina sent some men to strangle him during his siesta, on the grounds that he was a rival to her son, Britannicus. According to the same story, these men encountered a snake emerging from the couch and were so terrified they ran away. The story seems to have arisen because some snake-skins were found in his bed around the pillow. However, at his mother's request, these were set in a gold bracelet and for some time he wore them on his right arm until, tired of being reminded of his mother, he threw it away—though later on he asked in vain to have it back, when his affairs reached their final crisis.

[7] When he was still only a young boy he participated most enthusiastically and successfully in the Troy game at the Circus. In his eleventh year,\* he was adopted by Claudius and handed over for his education to Annaeus Seneca, who was already a senator. People say that on the next night Seneca dreamed that he was teaching Calpurnia\* and soon afterwards Nero provided confirmation of the dream, revealing his monstrous nature at the earliest possible opportunity. For when, after his adoption, his brother Britannicus, through habit, continued to address him as Ahenobarbus, he tried to convince his father\* that Britannicus was not really his child but a substitute. When his aunt Lepida was on trial he publicly gave evidence against her in order to please his mother who was striving to undermine her position.

On the occasion of his first public appearance in the Forum, he promised gifts for the people and money for the soldiers and announced a parade of the praetorian guard, which he himself led, holding his shield before him. Then he spoke in the senate expressing his gratitude to his father. During his father's consulship, he gave speeches in Latin on behalf of the people of Bononia and in

Greek on behalf of the people of Rhodes and of Ilium. For his first appearance as judge, he acted as prefect of the city during the Latin festival,\* when, although Claudius had forbidden it, many of the best known advocates competed to present to him not the usual short and conventional cases but a large number of highly important ones. Not long after this he took Octavia\* as his wife and gave circus games and animal shows as offerings for the health of Claudius.

[8] When the death of Claudius was publicly announced, Nero, who was then seventeen, approached the guards between the sixth and the seventh hour, for in consequence of the terrible omens which had occurred throughout the day, no earlier time had seemed suitable for embarking on his reign. In front of the steps to the Palatine, he was saluted emperor then taken by litter to the praetorian camp, where he addressed the soldiers briefly before returning to the senate house, where he remained until evening. Of all the great honours which were heaped upon him he refused just one—the title 'Father of the Fatherland' which he deemed unsuitable for one of his age.\*

[9] Beginning with a display of filial respect, he provided Claudius with a most magnificent funeral at which he gave the official eulogy and declared him to be a god. He paid the highest honours to the memory of his father Domitius and allowed his mother the greatest influence over all matters private and public. Even on the first day of his reign, he gave as the password to the tribune of the watch 'the best of mothers' and afterwards he often rode about the city with her sharing a litter.\* He made Antium a colony, enlisting veterans of the praetorian guard and, besides them, the richest of the chief centurions through residential transfer. He also had constructed there a port on a most lavish scale.

[10] In order to provide a more certain measure of his disposition, he declared that he would rule according to the prescriptions of Augustus and he let slip no opportunity to demonstrate his generosity, his clemency, or his affability. More onerous taxes he reduced or did away with. He cut to a quarter of their original rate the rewards paid to informers under the Papiian law.\* He gave four hundred sesterces to each man of the people and, in the case of senators of noble family who had lost their ancestral fortunes, he provided annual salaries of as much as five thousand sesterces.\* He also distributed free grain every month to the praetorian cohorts. And when, following usual procedure, he was asked to sign his consent to

the punishment of a man condemned to death, he replied, 'How I wish I had never learned to write!' He used to greet members of all the orders accurately and without prompting.\* To votes of thanks, he replied, 'When I've deserved them.' He permitted even the common people to witness his exercises in the Campus Martius and often declaimed in public. He would recite his poems, not only in his home but also in the theatre, causing such widespread delight that a public thanksgiving\* for his recitation was announced and passages from his composition which had been recited were inscribed in letters of gold and dedicated to Capitoline Jupiter.\*

[11] He provided a great many games\* of different kinds: Youth Games, circus games, theatrical performances and gladiatorial contests. In the Youth Games\* he included old men of consular rank and respectable old women as participants. In the circus games, he assigned separate seating to Roman knights\* and even ran chariots drawn by teams of camels. At the games which, since they were undertaken for the everlasting future of the empire, he wished to be termed 'The Greatest', a significant number of men and women from both the senatorial and the equestrian orders took on the parts of actors.\* A very well-known Roman knight rode down a rope mounted on an elephant. When a play by Afranius\* called 'The Fire' was put on, the actors were allowed to snatch the furnishings of the burning house and keep them for themselves.\* Every day gifts of all kinds were thrown to the crowds: a thousand birds each day of every kind, different sorts of food, tokens to be exchanged for grain, clothes, gold, silver, jewels, pearls, pictures, slaves, working animals and even tame wild ones and finally ships, blocks of apartments, and farmland.

[12] He would watch these games from the top of the proscenium. At the gladiatorial games, which he gave in a wooden amphitheatre constructed in less than a year in the Campus Martius part of the city, he had no one put to death, not even criminals. However, he put on show as fighters four hundred senators and six hundred Roman knights, some of whom were wealthy men of good reputation.\* Even those who fought the wild beasts and served as assistants in the arena were drawn from the senatorial and equestrian orders. He also gave a naval battle on sea water which had monsters swimming in it. He put on shows of young Greeks as Pyrrhic dancers\* and after the games he gave each of them a diploma of Roman citizenship. In one

of these Pyrrhic dances, a bull mounted Pasiphae\* concealed within a wooden model of a heifer in such a way that many of the spectators believed it was no mere show. In another, an Icarus on his first attempt fell immediately to the ground\* right next to the emperor's couch, splashing him with blood. For he would rarely sit in state on these occasions, preferring to recline, at first watching through a small gap in the hangings but later with the whole of the balcony on view. He was also the first to establish at Rome a five-yearly competition, in the Greek manner, made up of three events, musical, gymnastic, and equestrian, which he termed the *Neronia*. He also dedicated his baths and gymnasium,\* distributing gifts of oil to each senator and each knight. He put in charge of the whole competition ex-consuls, chosen by lot, who occupied the seats of the praetors.\* Then he went down into the orchestra, where the senators sit, and accepted the crown he was offered for oratory and verse in Latin.\* All the most distinguished men had competed for it but all agreed it was rightly his. However, when the judges also offered him the crown for lyre-playing, he paid it reverence and gave orders that it should be taken as an offering to the statue of Augustus. At the gymnastic contest, which was held in the *Saepia*, while a magnificent offering of oxen was sacrificed, he placed the first shavings of his beard\* in a golden casket set with the most precious pearls which he dedicated on the Capitol. To the athletic contests he even invited the Vestal Virgins, on the grounds that the priestesses of Ceres were permitted to be spectators at Olympia.\*

[13] I am, I believe, justified in recording among Nero's spectacles the entry of Tiridates into the city.\* The king of Armenia had been induced to come with great promises and, though Nero had dismissed the crowd because of bad weather on the day when his edict had announced he would be showing Tiridates, he did bring him forth at the earliest opportunity. Armed cohorts stood around the temples in the Forum and he himself was seated in a curule chair on the rostra, dressed in the robes of a triumphant general and surrounded by military standards and flags. When Tiridates approached up the sloping platform, Nero first let him fall at his feet but then raised him up with his right hand and kissed him. Next, while the king made the speech of a suppliant (which was translated and relayed to the crowd by a man of praetorian rank), Nero removed from his head the turban and replaced it with a diadem. Then the

king was led from the Forum to the theatre where he again made supplication and Nero placed him in a seat at his own right hand. Acclaimed 'Imperator'\* for this Nero offered laurels on the Capitol\* and closed the gates of the temple of two-headed Janus, to show there were no longer any wars being waged.\*

[14] He held the consulship on four occasions. The first time he held it for two months, the second and fourth for six months, and the third for four months. The second and third were held in successive years, while a year's interval separated these from the first and fourth.\*

[15] When it came to dispensing justice, he was not keen to give replies to those presenting cases unless in written form and on the following day. His method of taking cognizance was to have each party present each point in turn, instead of continuous pleadings. And whenever he withdrew to take advice, he never debated anything openly among all present but would request separate written opinions from each person which he then read silently and in private before announcing whatever verdict he himself preferred as if it were the one generally agreed. He refused for a long time to admit the sons of freedmen into the senate\* and denied offices to others who had been admitted by previous emperors. Candidates for whom there was not yet room in the senate were given charge of legions as compensation for the postponement and delay. He generally appointed people to the consulship for six months at a time. When one of the consuls died just before the last day of December, he appointed no one as substitute, citing with disapproval the old case of Caninus Rebilis and his one-day consulship.\* The triumphal regalia\* he conferred even on men with the rank of quaestor and, in a few cases, on equestrians too, and not always in recognition of military achievement. When he sent speeches on certain matters to the senate, he would often overlook the quaestors (who had responsibility for reading them) and have them delivered by a consul.

[16] He devised a new arrangement for buildings in the city and prescribed that there should be arcades along the front of apartment buildings and houses, whose flat roofs would provide a vantage point for fighting fires.\* And he had these constructed at his own expense. His plan was to extend the city walls as far as Ostia and to have excavated a canal to bring sea water from there to the old city.\*

Under his rule, many practices were reprovved and subject to con-

trols and many new laws were passed.\* A limit was imposed on expenditure. Public feasts were reduced to food handouts. With the exception of beans and vegetables, the sale of hot food in taverns was prohibited\*—previously all kinds of delicacies had been available. Punishments were imposed on the Christians—adherents of a new and dangerous superstition. A ban was placed on the diversions of the charioteers, who for a long time had taken advantage of the freedom they enjoyed to wander about the city playing tricks on people and robbing them. At the same time, the pantomime actors and their associates were outlawed from the city.\*

[17] To counter forgery, a new measure was introduced at that time stipulating that tablets must have holes bored through them and be bound three times before being signed. And it was to be ensured that, in the case of wills, two waxed leaves inscribed with nothing but the testator's name would be presented for signing by the witnesses, and that no one who was writing a will for some one else should include a legacy for himself. It was also provided that litigants should pay a set and fair fee for legal representation, but nothing for the benches which would be provided free by the treasury. And it was prescribed that cases involving the treasury were to be transferred to the Forum\* and a different form of jury, while all appeals from the juries were to be taken to the senate.

[18] Nero was never moved by the slightest desire or hope to extend or add to the empire, and he even considered withdrawing the army from Britain but was dissuaded by the shame which he would have incurred in seeming to detract from the glory won by his own parent.\* He merely made the kingdom of Pontus\* a Roman province, when Polemon ceded control, and similarly, on Cotius' death, the latter's Alpine territory.\*

[19] He undertook only two tours, to Alexandria and to Achaia. But on the very day he had set sail he suspended his Alexandrian trip, disturbed both by religious feeling and by a sense of danger. For when, at the end of a tour of the temples, he had sat down in the Temple of Vesta, first the flap of his toga got caught as he tried to rise and then a great darkness fell, so that he could make nothing out. In Achaia, he undertook to cut a canal through the Isthmus\* and addressed the praetorian soldiers, encouraging them to begin the task. Then when the trumpet sounded the signal, he himself was the first to strike the earth with his mattock and to carry off a basketful

on his shoulders. He also undertook preparations for an expedition to the Caspian Gates,\* with a new legion of conscripts from Italy, all six feet tall, whom he called the phalanx of Alexander the Great.\* These deeds, some of them meriting no reproach, others even deserving some praise, I have gathered together to separate them from the shameful deeds and crimes with which I shall henceforth be concerned.

[20] Amongst the other attainments of his youth, he was also very knowledgeable about music so that, as soon as he became emperor, he summoned Terpnus, the leading lyre-player of the time and as he sat, while the latter sang after dinner day after day late into the night, he began himself to study and practise little by little, omitting none of those exercises by which artists of that kind preserve and strengthen their voices. Rather, he would lie on his back, holding a lead tablet on his chest, and cleanse his system with a syringe and with vomiting, and he would abstain from fruits and other foods harmful to the voice. Finally, pleased by his progress, although his voice was thin and indistinct, he conceived a desire to go on the stage, from time to time repeating to his companions the Greek proverb that hidden music has no admirers.\* Indeed, he made his first appearance in Naples and, though the theatre was shaken by a sudden earthquake, he did not leave off singing until he had come to the end of the song he had begun. In the same city he sang often and over many days. And even when he had taken a short break to rest his voice, he could not bear being apart from his audience. After bathing he went to the theatre, where he took his dinner in the middle of the orchestra, with a great crowd present. Speaking in Greek, he promised that once he'd had a drop to drink, he'd give them some hearty singing. The Alexandrians, who had come in large numbers to Naples with a recent convoy, delighted him with their rhythmic applause and he summoned more from Alexandria. And with no less enthusiasm he selected some youths of the equestrian order and more than five thousand of the strongest young men of the common people from all over, who were divided into groups and taught different methods of applauding—they called them buzzers, hollow tiles and flat tiles—which they were to employ vigorously when he was singing. These men were remarkable for their sleek hair-styles and most refined appearance—and for their left hands,

bare and without rings. Their leaders received four hundred thousand sesterces apiece.

[21] Since he set great store by singing even in Rome, he gave orders for a Neronian competition in advance of the regular date and, when everyone called out for his divine voice, he replied that, for those who wished to come, he would put on a good show in his gardens. However, when the entreaties of the crowd were supported by those even of a guard of soldiers,\* who were then on duty, he willingly promised them he would put on a performance at once. Without delay he gave orders that his name should be included in the list of those who had entered as lyre-players and, along with the rest, he placed his lot in the urn. When his turn came, he made his entrance, accompanied by the prefects of the praetorian guard bearing his lyre, and following them, military tribunes, along with his close friends. When he had taken his position and the introduction was made, he announced, through the ex-consul Cluvius Rufus, that he was going to sing the role of Niobe.\* He then held the stage until the tenth hour, before declaring that the award of the crown and the rest of the competition was to be deferred until the following year, so that there would be more frequent opportunities for singing. And when that seemed too long a delay, he did not hesitate to put on a show in the interim. He even debated whether to take the stage with professional actors in private performances when one of the praetors offered a million sesterces.\* He also wore a mask and sang tragedies in the roles of heroes and gods and even of heroines and goddesses, having the masks made so that their features resembled his own or those of whatever woman he happened to be in love with. Among other parts, he sang those of Canace giving birth, Orestes the matricide, Oedipus blinded, and Hercules insane.\* The story goes that, when he was playing the part of Hercules, a recent recruit who was standing guard by the exit, seeing the emperor laden and bound with chains—as the play required—rushed forward to rescue him.

[22] From his earliest youth he was passionate about horses and was always talking about the games in the circus, although he was told not to. On one occasion, when he and his fellow pupils were bemoaning the fate of the Greens' charioteer, who had been dragged around the arena, and his teacher reproved him, he pretended they had been talking about Hector.\* In the early part of his reign, he used to play every day with ivory chariots on a gaming board and

would leave his country retreat to attend even the most insignificant of circus races, first secretly and then quite openly so that everyone knew he would be there on that day. He did not try to conceal his wish that the number of prizes be increased. In consequence of the greater number of races, the spectacle lasted late into the evening and the faction leaders disdained to bring their adherents unless it was for a whole day's racing. Soon he himself wanted to drive a chariot and even to do so frequently in front of an audience; once he had made his beginning in his own gardens watched by slaves and poor common people, he offered himself as a spectacle to the entire populace in the Circus Maximus, with some freedman giving the starting signal usually provided by magistrates. Not satisfied with giving displays of such talents in Rome, as I have reported,\* his principal motive for going to Greece was the following. Those city states whose custom it was to organize musical competitions decided to award all the prizes for lyre-playing to him. He received these with such pleasure that the messengers who brought them were not only given precedence but were even made welcome at his private supper parties. When some of them requested that he sing after dinner, he accepted with alacrity and declared that only Greeks knew how to listen and that only they were worthy of him and his talents. He did not delay his departure and, as soon as he had crossed to Cassiope,\* he at once embarked on his singing at the altar of Jupiter Cassius and then went off on his tour of all the competitions.

[23] For he had given orders that competitions normally held at quite different times should be made to take place in the space of one year, causing some to be repeated, and he instructed, against all precedent, that a musical competition was to be added to the Olympic games.\* And, so that nothing should distract or detain him while he was engaged in these games, though he was warned by his freedman Helius that affairs in Rome required his presence, he wrote in reply: 'Although you now advise and wish my swift return, you ought rather to counsel and desire that I return worthy of Nero.'

When he was singing, it was not permitted to leave the theatre even for the most pressing of reasons. Thus, it is alleged that women gave birth during his shows and many who were tired of listening and applauding, when the entrance gates were all closed, either jumped furively off the wall or else pretended to be dead and were carried out for burial. You could scarcely believe how nervous and

anxious he was in competitions, or how he competed against his rivals, or how he feared the judges' verdict. He would pay attention to his competitors and seek their favour, as if they were his equals, then cast aspersions on them behind their backs. Some he would insult to their faces. He would even bribe those who were especially talented. Nevertheless, he would address the judges most reverently before he began, assuring them that he had done all that he could but the outcome would be determined by Fate.\* They, as wise and learned men, were to ignore what was fortuitous. And when they encouraged him to take heart, he would withdraw somewhat calmer but not altogether without concern, interpreting the silence and restraint of some as moroseness and ill-nature and saying he could not trust them.

[24] During his competition performance, he followed the rules most strictly, never daring to cough and wiping sweat from his brow with his arm.\* And once when he was performing a tragedy and he dropped his sceptre and picked it up again, he was fearful and anxious that he might be disqualified for this fault and could only be reassured by the accompanist's assurance that no one had noticed it amid the rapturous cheers of the audience. However, it was he himself who proclaimed his own victory. For he was also an entrant in the competition for public heralds. And so that no memory or trace should remain anywhere of any other victor in the sacred games, he gave orders that all their statues and images should be overturned and dragged by a hook to the lavatories where they would be disposed of.\* He also entered the chariot races on many occasions, even driving a ten-horse team at Olympia, although in one of his songs he had criticized this very thing in King Mithridates.\* However, he fell from his chariot and although he resumed his post he was unable to finish, abandoning the race before the end. He received the victory crown, none the less. Then, on his departure, he bestowed freedom\* on the entire province, at the same time giving the judges Roman citizenship and substantial sums of money. He himself announced these benefits, standing in the middle of the stadium on the day of the Isthmian games.

[25] He returned from Greece to Naples and, because this was where he had made his first public appearance on stage,\* he entered drawn by white horses where the wall had been breached—this is the custom for victors in the sacred games. In a similar manner he made

his entries into Antium, then Albanum, and then Rome. In Rome, however, he made use of the very chariot in which Augustus had once conducted his triumphs; wearing a purple robe, picked out with stars of gold, a Greek cloak, and, on his head, the Olympic crown, his right hand holding the Pythian, he was preceded by a procession displaying his other crowns, labelled to indicate whom he had defeated and with which songs or dramas. Following his chariot came the applauders shouting rhythmic praise and proclaiming that they were the Augustiani and the soldiers of his triumph. Then, through the Circus Maximus, where an arch had been pulled down, he made his way via the Velabrum and the Forum to the Palatine and the Temple of Apollo.\* Everywhere he went, sacrificial victims were slain, perfume was sprinkled in all the streets, and countless gifts of songbirds, victor's ribbons, and sweetmeats were made to him. He placed the sacred crowns in his bed-chambers around the couches and did the same with statues of himself in the costume of a lyre-player. He also had coins minted with the same device. And after this, far from restraining or putting aside his passion, he was so keen to preserve his singing voice that he refused ever to address the Roman army, unless by letter or with someone else speaking his words.\* Nor would he undertake any business, serious or frivolous, unless a voice-coach was standing by to give advice, relax his wind-pipe, and apply a towel to his mouth. And many were those who became his friends or enemies, according to whether they had praised him lavishly or sparingly.

[26] At first the signs he showed of insolence, lust, luxury, greed, and cruelty were gradual and covert and could be put down to the errors of youth, but even then it was clear to all that these vices were due not to his age but to his nature.\* As soon as night had fallen, he would throw on a freedman's cap or a wig\* and would go around the cook-shops and wander about the streets looking for amusement—though putting himself at some risk, for he was in the habit of setting upon people returning home from dinner and would hurt anyone who fought back, throwing them into the drains, and he would even storm into the taverns and pillage them, setting up a market in his palace, where the spoils he had acquired were divided up for auction and he squandered the proceeds. And often in the course of these brawls, he would endanger his eyes or even his life. Indeed, he was almost killed by a man of the senatorial class whose wife he had

molested. After that he would never venture forth at that hour without a secret escort of tribunes following at a distance. From time to time also he would have his sedan chair covertly transported to the theatre where, from the upper part of the proscenium, he would look on and incite the pantomime actors as they quarrelled. And when they came to blows and were fighting with stones and bits of the seating, he himself threw many missiles into the crowd and even cracked open a praetor's head. [27] Gradually, however, as his vices took root, he left off jokes and disguises and, taking no care to conceal his actions, moved on to greater misdeeds.

He would draw out his banquets from noon to midnight,\* refreshing himself with warm baths or, in the heat of summer, with ice-cold ones. Sometimes he would even dine in public, having drained the Naumachia or in the Campus Martius or in the Circus Maximus, while around him the prostitutes and singing girls of all the city were plying their trade. Whenever he sailed down the Tiber to Ostia or cruised around the Bay of Baiæ, on the banks and shores taverns were set out and made ready along the way, remarkable for their feasting and their traffic in respectable ladies, who would imitate tavern women and would solicit him from this side and that to summon them.\* He would also invite himself as a dinner-guest to the houses of his friends, one of whom spent four million sesterces on a dinner where people wore turbans, while another spent even more on one accompanied by roses.

[28] Besides his seduction of free-born boys and his relations with married women, he also forced himself on the Vestal Virgin Rubria. He came very close to making the freedwoman Acte his lawful wife, having bribed some men of consular rank to swear falsely that she was descended from kings. He had the testicles cut off a boy named Sporus and attempted to transform him into a woman, marrying him with dowry and bridal veil and all due ceremony, then, accompanied by a great crowd, taking him to his house, where he treated him as his wife. Someone made a rather clever joke which is still told that it would have been a good thing for humanity if Nero's father had taken such a wife. This Sporus, decked out in the ornaments of an empress and carried in a litter, he took with him around the meeting places and markets of Greece and later, at Rome, around the Sigillaria, kissing him from time to time. And all were convinced that he had desired to sleep with his mother but was frightened off by her



detractors, who were concerned lest this ferocious and power-hungry woman acquire greater influence through this kind of favour. This was all the more plausible when afterwards he added to his concubines a prostitute who was famous for her resemblance to Agrippina. People claim that at one time, whenever he travelled in a litter with his mother, his incestuous lusts were betrayed by the stains on his clothing.\*

[29] He prostituted his own body to such a degree that, when virtually every part of his person had been employed in filthy lusts, he devised a new and unprecedented practice as a kind of game, in which, disguised in the pelt of a wild animal, he would rush out of a den and attack the private parts of men and women who had been tied to stakes, and, when he had wearied of playing the beast, he would be 'run through' by his freedman Doryphorus.\* With this man he played the role of bride, as Sporus had done with him, and he even imitated the shouts and cries of virgins being raped. From quite a few sources I have gathered that he was fully convinced that no one was truly chaste or pure in any part of their body but that many chose to conceal their vices and hid them cleverly. And so when any confessed to him their sexual misdeeds, he forgave them all other faults.

[30] He believed that the proper use for riches and wealth was extravagance and that people who kept an account of their expenses were vulgar and miserly, while those who squandered and frittered away their money were refined and truly splendid. He praised and admired his uncle Caligula, above all because, in so brief a period, he had worked his way through the vast fortune left him by Tiberius.\* Accordingly there was no limit to his gift-giving or consumption. On Tiberides—which might seem scarcely credible—he lavished eight hundred thousand sesterces in one day and, when he left, made him a gift of a hundred million.\* On the lyre-player Menecrates and the gladiator Spiculus he bestowed fortunes and homes fit for triumphant generals.\* For the monkey-faced Paneros, a money-lender with extensive property holdings in Rome and in the country, he provided a funeral almost fit for a king. He never wore the same robe twice. When gambling he would lay bets of four hundred thousand sesterces for each point. He went fishing with a net of gold interwoven with purple and scarlet threads. It is said that he always travelled with at least a thousand carriages, the mules shod with

silver and mule-drivers clothed in Canusian wool, and with a train of Mauretanian horsemen and couriers, decked out with bracelets and breast-plates.

[31] There was, however, nothing in which he was more prodigal than in construction, extending from the Palatine as far as the Esquiline the palace which he called first the House of Passage,\* then, after it had been destroyed by fire and rebuilt, the Golden House. It should suffice to relate the following concerning its extent and splendour. There was a vestibule area in which stood a colossal statue, one hundred and twenty feet tall, in the image of the emperor himself.\* So great was its extent that its triple colonnade was a mile in length. There was also a lake, which resembled the sea, surrounded by buildings made to look like cities. Besides this, there were grounds of all kinds, with fields and vineyards, pasture and woodland, and a multitude of all sorts of domestic and wild animals.\* Other areas were all covered in gold and picked out with jewels and mother-of-pearl. The banqueting halls had coffered ceilings fitted with panels of ivory which would revolve, scattering flowers, and pipes which would spray perfume on those beneath. The principal banqueting chamber had a dome which revolved continuously both day and night, like the world itself. There were baths running with sea water and spa water. When the house was brought to completion in this style and he dedicated it, he said nothing more to indicate his approval than to declare that he had at last begun to live like a human being.\*

In addition to this, he began work on a pool stretching from Misenum to Lake Avernus, which was roofed over and surrounded with an arcade, and into this he meant to channel all the hot springs of every part of Baiae; also a canal from Avernus all the way to Ostia, so that one could travel by ship without traversing the sea.\* It was to be one hundred and sixty miles in length and broad enough to accommodate ships with five banks of oars passing one another. In order to complete these works, he gave orders that prisoners everywhere should be transported to Italy and that even those who were found guilty of heinous crimes should have no other punishment than hard labour.

He was spurred on to this frenzy of extravagance, not only by his confidence in the empire's riches, but also by the expectation of vast hidden wealth to which he was suddenly prompted by information

from a Roman knight, who asserted as a fact that a wealth of ancient treasure, which Queen Dido had brought with her when she fled from Tyre, was concealed in huge caverns in Africa and could be extracted with only the smallest trouble.\* [32] However, when this hope was dashed he was penniless and so wretched and desperate that it was necessary to defer and put off payment even of the soldiers' pay and veterans' pensions, so he put his mind to profiting from false accusations and robbery.

First of all he made it law that, instead of one-half, five-sixths of the property of a deceased ex-slave should pass to him, if the person had, without good reason, borne the name of any family to whom he himself was related. He also prescribed that the property of persons who had, in their wills, failed to recognize their obligations to the emperor, should pass to the treasury and that the lawyers who wrote or dictated such wills should not escape punishment either.\* Moreover, he ensured that any word or deed which fell within the scope of the treason law, so long as an informer was not lacking, should be punished.\* He demanded back the gifts he had made in recognition of the crowns he was awarded in competitions by different cities.\* Having banned the use of amethystine and Tyrian purple, he sent a man to sell a small quantity on market day, then closed down all the stalls.\* It is said that once, during one of his performances at the games, he noticed a woman wearing a forbidden colour and pointed her out to his agents, who dragged her out and stripped her on the spot not only of her robe but also of her property. He never gave someone a task without saying: 'You know what I need' or 'The object of the exercise is to leave no one with anything.' Finally, he looted many temples of their ornaments and melted down statues made of gold or silver, amongst them the Roman Penates, which were later restored by Galba.

[33] The murder of family members and general slaughter began with Claudius. For even if he was not responsible for his death he was certainly complicit and did not pretend otherwise, inasmuch as he was afterwards in the habit of praising the kind of mushrooms with which Claudius had ingested the poison as, in the words of a Greek proverb, the food of the gods.\* Certainly, after his death he attacked him with every kind of insulting word and deed, harping sometimes on his stupidity, at others on his cruelty. And he would often joke that Claudius had ceased to 'be a fool' [*morari*] among

mortals, lengthening the first syllable,\* and many of his decrees and pronouncements he disregarded on the grounds that they were the decisions of a raving idiot. Finally, he failed to provide anything but a low and insubstantial wall as the enclosure for the place where Claudius had been cremated.\*

Against Britannicus he employed poison, no less because of the competition he posed in singing (he had a much pleasanter voice), than through fear that one day he would prevail in public favour through memory of his father. He obtained the poison from a certain Lucusta, who was an expert poisoner, and, when it took longer than he expected and Britannicus had merely vomited, he summoned her and beat her with his own hand, claiming that she had given him medicine rather than poison. When she replied that she had used only a small quantity in order to prevent the crime becoming known and making him unpopular, he exclaimed, 'Of course, I'm afraid of the Julian law!'<sup>2</sup>\* and at once forced her into a chamber to concoct a dose in his presence that would have the most rapid and immediate effect. He then tried it on a young goat, whose death throes lasted five hours. And then, having concentrated it further, on a pig. When this animal died instantly, he gave orders that the substance be brought to the dining-room and given to Britannicus as he dined with him. When Britannicus collapsed at the first mouthful, he pretended to his other dining companions that he was suffering from one of his usual epileptic fits. The next day, amid heavy rainstorms, Britannicus was taken out to be disposed of in a summary funeral. Nero rewarded Lucusta for the services she had rendered with immunity from prosecution and an ample estate. He even sent her pupils.

[34] His mother so irritated him by applying sharp scrutiny to his words and deeds and correcting him, that, to begin with, he tried to make her unpopular by threatening to give up the empire and retire to Rhodes because of her.\* Later he stripped her of all honours and powers, depriving her of her guard of Roman and German soldiers and making her move out of the Palatine. Thereafter he let slip no opportunity for harassing her, secretly arranging that people annoy her with lawsuits when she was at Rome, and disturb her when she was resting on her country estates, making her the butt of jokes and abuse, as they travelled past by land and sea. Then, terrified by her violence and threats, he made the decision to do away with her. And

when he had three times made attempts on her life with poison and realized that she had protected herself in advance with antidotes, he prepared to adapt the ceiling of her bedroom, which by a special device would collapse and fall on her at night while she slept. When this plan became known, through the indiscretion of those involved, he devised a collapsible boat, which would suffer either shipwreck or the caving-in of its cabin. Then, in a pretence of reconciliation, he invited her in a letter of great warmth to come to Baiae to celebrate the festival of Minerva\* in his company. He gave his captains the task, on her arrival, of wrecking the boat on which she had come, as if by accident. The banquet was then drawn out until late in the night and, when she wanted to set out for Bauli,\* he offered her, in place of her disabled craft, the specially devised boat, cheerfully escorting her and even kissing her breasts in farewell. The rest of that night he lay awake with great anxiety, awaiting the fulfilment of his plans. But news came that matters had turned out otherwise—she had swum to safety. Not knowing what to do, he secretly dropped a dagger next to Lucius Agernus, Agrippina's freedman, who had joyfully reported her safe and sound, and gave orders that he be arrested and bound, on the grounds that he had been engaged to attack the emperor, while his mother was to be killed to make it look as if she had taken her own life when her criminal plot was discovered. Worse is reported by quite good authorities who claim that the emperor rushed to view his mother's corpse and handled her body, criticizing some parts of it and praising others, in the mean time drinking to quench a sudden thirst. Yet, although he was reassured by the congratulations of the soldiers, the senate, and the people, neither in the immediate aftermath nor ever after could he bear his feelings of guilt, often confessing that he was haunted by his mother's ghost and by the blows and blazing torches of the Furies. Indeed, he even had rituals performed by mystics in an attempt to call up and appease her shade. When he made his journey to Greece, he did not dare to participate in the Eleusian mysteries, where a herald pronounces that criminals and the impious are banned.

To matricide he added the murder of his aunt: when he was visiting her, as she had taken to her bed with a stomach complaint, and she, stroking the downy cheek of her nearly grown-up nephew, as was her habit, said to him affectionately, 'When I have your first beard, I can die happy,'\* he turned to his companions and said,

apparently in jest, he would shave it off at once. He then gave instructions to the doctors to give the sick woman an excessive dose of laxatives and, before she was even dead, took over her property, suppressing her will so that everything would come to him.

[35] Besides Octavia he later married two other wives, Poppaea Sabina, a quaestor's daughter who had previously been married to a Roman knight, and then Statilia Messalina, great-granddaughter of Taurus, who had been consul twice and celebrated a triumph. In order to get possession of her, he put to death her husband Atticus Vestinus actually during his consulship. He quickly tired of Octavia's companionship and, when his friends criticized his behaviour, he replied that she should be content with the insignia of wife.\* Soon, having tried in vain to strangle her on a number of occasions, he divorced her on the grounds that she could not have children, but when the common people did not hesitate to express their disapproval of the divorce in public complaints, he sent her into exile. Then he had her killed on a charge of adultery which was so patently false that everyone denied it during the trial and Nero had to set up his old tutor Amicetus as the witness who was to make up a story and confess that he had raped her through trickery. He had a great passion for Poppaea,\* whom he married on the twelfth day after his divorce from Octavia. Yet he killed her, too, by kicking her when she was pregnant and ill, because she had scolded him when he came home late from the chariot-races. He had a daughter by her, Claudia Augusta, but she died in infancy.

His treatment of every one his relatives was characterized by criminal abuse. When, after Poppaea's death, he wanted to marry Claudius' daughter Antonia, and she refused him, he had her executed for involvement in a plot, and a similar fate afflicted everyone who was related to him by blood or marriage. Among them was the young Aulus Plautius\* whom, before he was put to death, Nero had subjected to oral rape, with the comment: 'Now let my mother go and kiss my successor'—for he alleged that she loved the man and encouraged him to hope for the empire. His stepson Rufrius Crispinus, Poppaea's child, Nero had drowned on a fishing trip at sea by his own slaves, though he was just a boy, on the grounds that he was said to play at being general and emperor. He sent into exile Tuscus, the son of his nurse, because, when he was procurator of Egypt, he had washed himself in the baths built for Nero's visit. He

forced his adviser Seneca to kill himself, even though, when Seneca requested that he be allowed to retire and give up his properties, he had sworn that Seneca's suspicions were unfounded and that he would sooner die than harm him. To his prefect Burrus\* he sent poison in place of the medicine for his mouth which he had promised. As for the imperial freedmen,\* now elderly and rich, who had supported and aided his adoption and his coming to power, he dispatched them with poisoned food in some cases and drink in others.

[36] He was no less cruel outside his household, and made attacks on many who were not his relatives. A comet—which is commonly supposed to portend the death of great rulers—had started appearing on successive nights.\* He was worried by this and when he learned from the astrologer Balbillus that it was the custom among kings to expiate such omens by means of the death of someone important and thus displace the danger from themselves to their nobles, he was bent on death for all the most illustrious—all the more so when two conspiracies were discovered which might serve as an excuse. Of these the first and more important was the Pisonian conspiracy at Rome,\* while the second, that of Vinicius, was hatched and discovered at Beneventum.\* The conspirators made their defence, bound in triple sets of chains; some confessed of their own accord, quite a few boasting that death was the only remedy for one so corrupted by every kind of crime as Nero. The children of the condemned were expelled from the city and died through poison or starvation. It is recorded that some were killed at a single meal, along with their tutors and attendants, while others were prevented from securing daily sustenance.

[37] After this he showed neither discrimination nor restraint in putting to death whoever he wished and for whatever reason. To give just a few examples: the fault of Salvidienus Orfitus\* was that he had let out three apartments in his house near the Forum to serve as offices to some cities; that of Cassius Longinus, the blind jurist, that he kept the image of Gaius Cassius, the assassin of Caesar, in his old family tree;\* and that of Thrasea Paetus, that he had the miserable expression of a teacher.\* To men condemned to die he never allowed more than an hour's respite. And lest there be any delay, he provided doctors who were to 'take care' at once of any laggards. For that was how he described killing them by opening their veins. It is believed

that he even conceived a desire to throw men still living to be torn up and devoured by a fiend from Egypt who would consume raw meat and whatever was given him. Excited and thrilled by these enormities, which he regarded as achievements, he declared that not one of his predecessors had known what he might do. And he often gave clear indications that he would not spare the remaining senators but would dispose of the entire order, sending out Roman knights and freedmen to govern the provinces and command the armies. Certainly, when he arrived in the city or set out on a journey, he would never kiss any of the senate nor even return their greetings. And when he inaugurated the Isthmus project, in the presence of a great crowd, he clearly expressed his wishes that it might turn out well for himself and the Roman people, without mentioning the senate.

[38] Yet he spared neither the people nor the fabric of his ancestral city.\* When someone in general conversation quoted the Greek phrase 'When I am dead, let earth go up in flames', he responded, 'Rather, "while I live"', and acted accordingly. For, as if he were upset by the ugliness of the old buildings and the narrow and twisting streets, he set fire to the city,\* so openly indeed that some ex-consuls, when they came upon his servants equipped with kindling and torches on their property, did not stop them. He greatly desired some land near the Golden House, then occupied by granaries, and had them torn down and burnt using military machinery because their walls were made of stone. For six days and seven nights destruction raged and the people were forced to take shelter in monuments and tombs. During that time, besides the enormous number of apartment blocks, the houses of great generals of old, together with the spoils of battle which still adorned them, the temples of the gods, too, which had been vowed and dedicated by Rome's kings and later in the Punic and Gallic wars, and every other interesting or memorable survival from the olden days went up in flames. Nero watched the fire from the tower of Maecenas,\* delighted with what he termed 'the beauty of the flames' and, dressed in his stage attire, he sang of 'the Fall of Troy'. And lest he should lose any opportunity of securing spoils and booty even from this, he undertook to have the corpses and ruins cleared at his own expense, allowing no one to come near the remains of their own property.\* Not merely receiving contributions but extorting them, he bled dry both the provinces and the fortunes of private individuals.

[39] Besides the terrible evils caused by the emperor, there were others which struck by chance: one autumn there was a plague which added thirty thousand victims to Libitina's portion;\* in Britain, a great disaster struck when two of the foremost towns suffered a massacre of citizens and allies\* and, in the East, humiliation when an army was sent to secure Armenia and had difficulty holding on to the province of Syria.\* Amid these trials it was striking and remarkable that Nero bore nothing with greater patience than people's insults and mockery and indeed he was especially tolerant of those who had attacked him with quips or pasquinades.\* Many of these, such as the following, in both Greek and Latin, were posted up or circulated by word of mouth:

Nero, Orestes, Alcmeon, killed their mothers.\*

A new equation. Nero murdered his own mother.\*

Who disagrees that Nero is of the great line of Aeneas?

One carried off his mother, the other his father.\*

Since our leader strings his lyre, the Parthian his bow,

Ours will be musical Apollo, theirs the great archer.\*

Rome is becoming one house; run off to Veii, citizens!

Unless that house takes over Veii, too.\*

But he made no attempt to seek out the authors and when some were denounced to the senate by informers he instructed that they were not to suffer harsh penalties. Once, when Nero was passing by, Isidorus the Cynic reproved him quite clearly and publicly, saying that 'he sang well of the ills of Nauplius, but used his own goods ill'.\* And the Atellan actor Datus, when he sang the song 'Goodbye father, goodbye mother!' mimed the actions of drinking and swimming, thus seeming to refer to the deaths of Claudius and Agrippina. When he came to the final line:

Orcus guides your steps.\*

he gestured to indicate the senate. The actor and the philosopher Nero merely banished from Rome and Italy, either because he was beyond all insults or to avoid provoking further witticisms by revealing his displeasure.\*

[40] Having endured a ruler of this sort for a little less than fourteen years, the world at last shook him off. The process was begun when the Gauls revolted under Julius Vindex who at that time

governed the province as propraeor.\* Astrologers had predicted for Nero that one day he would be rejected. Hence that famous saying of his, 'My art keeps us going', a comment apparently intended to secure greater tolerance for his study of the art of lyre-playing, as being a diversion for him when emperor but a necessity for him when a private citizen. However, some of them promised him power in the East after his repudiation, several specifying the kingdom of Jerusalem, and a number the restitution of all his earlier powers. Inclined to this hope, when both Britain and Armenia had been lost and then won back, he imagined he had had all his share of ill-fortune. Indeed, when he received an answer from Apollo's Delphic oracle (in response to his inquiries) that he should beware the seventy-third year, believing that he himself would die at that age, he made no connection with the age of Galba\* and anticipated with great confidence not only living to an old age but even perpetual and exceptional good fortune, so that when he lost many precious possessions in a shipwreck he did not hesitate to assure his friends that the fish would bring them back to him. He learned of the Gallic revolt at Naples on the anniversary of his mother's murder, but took the news so calmly and confidently that he gave the impression of being pleased on the grounds that he would have an opportunity, in accordance with the laws of war, to despoil these most wealthy provinces. He went at once to the gymnasium where with the greatest enthusiasm he watched athletes in competition. And when he was interrupted by a more disturbing message while at dinner, he was angered but no more than so as to threaten vengeance on the rebels. For the next eight days he made no attempt to send a reply to anyone or to give any message or instructions and passed over the affair in silence.

[41] Finally, disturbed by the frequent and abusive pronouncements of Vindex, he sent a letter to the senate urging them to take vengeance for himself and the state, and claiming that a throat ailment prevented him from being present in person. But nothing annoyed him more than that Vindex criticized his poor lyre-playing\* and called him *Ahenobarbus* instead of Nero. He declared that he meant to put aside his adoptive name and resume the one he was born with and which had been used as a reproach against him. As for the other charges, the only argument he used to demonstrate their lack of foundation was that he was being accused of ignorance of

the art which he had brought to such a peak of perfection and refinement—and he would repeatedly ask people one by one if they knew of anyone to whom he was inferior. But, as more and more urgent messages arrived, he returned to Rome in great fear—though on the journey his spirits were restored by a trivial and foolish occurrence: he observed a monument inscribed with the image of a Gallic soldier, defeated by a Roman knight and being dragged by his hair, and at this sight he jumped for joy and gave thanks to heaven. Without even then summoning any public gathering of the people or the senate, he called a few of the leading men to his palace and held a brief conference before wasting the rest of the day on some water-organs, of a new and unprecedented kind, which he showed off one by one, discussing the workings and difficulty of each, and promising that he would produce them all in the theatre—with Vindex's permission.

[42] After this, when he learnt that Galba and the Spanish provinces had also revolted,\* he was badly affected and collapsed and for a long time lay half dead, unable to speak. When he came to his senses, he tore his clothes and beat his head, proclaiming that it was all over for him. In response to his nurse who reminded him by way of consolation that other rulers had experienced the same, he replied that his sufferings were unheard of, unprecedented, and worse than all others, for he was losing power while still alive. Yet nevertheless he did not give up or curtail any of his usual luxuries or indulgences but rather, whenever he had some good news from the provinces, he would hold a most lavish dinner and sing obscene songs, mocking the leaders of the rebellion, which he would accompany with gestures (these became publicly known). He would make secret visits to the theatre during the games and, when an actor's performance was a popular success, he sent a message saying the man was taking advantage of the emperor's distraction.

[43] It is thought that in the early days of the revolt he had formed many cruel plans—though nothing inconsistent with his own nature—to send agents to depose and dispatch those who were commanding the armies and provinces on the ground that they were united in a conspiracy; to slaughter all exiles everywhere and all Gauls in Rome, the former in case they should join the rebels and the latter as supporters and co-conspirators of their countrymen; to let the armies lay waste the provinces of Gaul; to murder

the entire senate at poisoned banquets; to set fire to Rome, having let wild animals loose on the people so that they could not properly defend themselves. Then, overcome with fear and not so much regret as despair of ever bringing matters to a close, he came to believe that a military expedition was required and, ousting the consuls before the end of their term, he himself entered upon a sole consulship in their place, on the grounds that fate prescribed that Gaul could be defeated only by consuls. He took up the fasces and, as he left his dining-room after a banquet, leaning on the shoulders of his friends, asserted that, as soon as he had reached his new province, he would appear to the armies without weapons and simply show them his tears, then the next day, when the rebels had been brought to recant, he would, a happy man amongst happy men, sing a victory ode—which he really ought to be composing at that moment.

[44] In preparing for the expedition, his first concern was selecting vehicles for carrying his stage machinery and having the prostitutes, whom he meant to bring with him, shorn in a mannish fashion and equipped with the axes and shields of Amazons.\* Then he urged the city voting tribes to join up and, when no one suitable responded, he obliged masters to provide a certain number of slaves, demanding the very best from each household and not even excepting accountants or secretaries.\* He gave orders that men of every census rating were to hand over a proportion of their wealth and, in addition to this, that tenants of private houses and apartments should present a year's rent to the emperor's fund.\* He was most strict and exacting in his demands for newly minted coins, refined silver, and pure gold, so that many openly refused the entire levy and joined together in calling for him to take back first whatever rewards he had given to the informers.

[45] Resentment increased when he sought to take advantage of the corn-supply system. For it became widely known that at a time of general food shortage, the ship from Alexandria had brought a cargo of sand for the court wrestlers. Thus the hatred of all was aroused against him and there was no insult of which he was not the object. A lock of hair was placed on the head of his statue, with a Greek inscription: 'Now finally there is real competition and you must give in at last.\*' A sack was tied to the neck of another together with the tag 'I did what I could but you deserve the sack.\*' People

wrote on columns that he had even roused the Gauls\* with his singing. And at night quite a few would pretend to fight with their slaves and call repeatedly for a Defender.\*

[46] His fears were also increased by the clear portents which he had received earlier and more recently from dreams, auspices, and omens.\* Though he had never before been in the habit of dreaming, after the murder of his mother he dreamt that he was steering a ship through quiet waters when the helm was snatched from him, that he was being dragged by his wife Octavia into the blackest darkness and covered with a swarm of winged ants, and then that he was surrounded and prevented from moving by the statues of nations which had been dedicated at Pompey's Theatre, and that an Asturian horse, in which he took particular pleasure, had its body transformed, taking on the shape of a monkey, while its head, the only part which was unchanged, gave forth musical whinnies. The doors of the Mausoleum\* opened of their own accord and a voice was heard, calling him by name. On New Year's Day, when the household gods had been decorated they collapsed in the middle of preparations for the sacrifice. As he was taking the auspices, Sporus offered him the gift of a ring, whose stone bore an image of the rape of Proserpina.\* When a large crowd of all the orders had assembled for the ceremony of making vows,\* the keys to the Capitol were only found after much searching. And when a speech, in which he attacked Vindex, asserting that the criminals would pay the penalty and that they would soon meet the end they deserved, was being read to the senate, everyone shouted out, 'It will be you, Emperor!' It had even been noticed that the piece he had most recently performed in public was 'Oedipus in Exile'\* of which the final line was:

Wife, mother, father, goad me to my death.

[47] When news came, while he was having lunch, that the other armies had also rebelled, he tore up the letters brought to him, overturned the table, and hurled to the ground two of his favourite goblets which he called his Homeric, as they were decorated with scenes from Homer's poems. Then, having acquired some poison from Lucusta\* and hidden it in a golden box, he went over to the Servilian gardens where he attempted to persuade the tribunes and centurions of the praetorian guard to join him in escaping with the fleet, which his most trusted freedmen had been sent to Ostia to

make ready. But when some were evasive and others openly refused, one even shouting out 'Is it really so hard to die?\*', he debated various possibilities, whether he should present himself as a suppliant to the Parthians or Galba, or whether he should appear in public on the rostra dressed in black and beseech forgiveness for his past offences, appealing as much as he could to their pity, or, if he could not win them over, whether he should not beg them at least to give him the prefecture of Egypt. Later on, a speech addressing these matters was found in his desk. It is believed he was too frightened to carry out his plan, in case he was torn apart before he could reach the Forum.

Having then put off these deliberations till the following day, he woke up in the middle of the night and, realizing that the guard of soldiers had withdrawn, he leapt out of bed and sent for his friends. When he heard nothing back from any of them, he himself went with a handful of attendants to their sleeping-quarters. The doors were all closed and no one answered. Returning to his bedroom he found that the caretakers, too, had run away, having even dragged off the bedclothes and removed the box of poison. At once he called for Spiculus the gladiator or some other executioner, at whose hands he might obtain death, but could find no one. 'Am I a man without friends or enemies?' he cried, and rushed out as if to throw himself in the Tiber.

[48] Then when he had checked this impulse and conceived a wish for some secret hiding-place where he might collect his spirits, his freedman Phaon suggested his own villa, located between the Salarian Way and the Nomentan Way\* about four miles outside the city. Nero, just as he was, unshod and wearing just a tunic, wrapped himself in a dark-coloured cloak, covered his head, and held a handkerchief to his face, then mounted his horse with only four attendants, one of whom was Sporus. All at once an earth tremor and a flash of lightning in his face filled him with terror and he heard the shouts of soldiers from a camp nearby prophesying doom for himself and success for Galba—and even one of those they met on the road was heard saying, 'These men are after Nero', while another kept asking, 'Is there any news from Rome about Nero?' But when his horse shied at the stench of a dead body someone had thrown onto the road, Nero's face was uncovered and he was recognized and saluted by a man who had served in the praetorians. When they came to the byway they let the horses loose and he made his way with great

difficulty, even when a robe was laid out for him to walk on, through the thickets and brambles along an overgrown path, eventually reaching the back wall of the villa. There the same Phaon urged him to hide for a while in a hole where sand had been dug out, but he replied he would not descend into the earth still living. As he waited for a short time while preparations were made for him to enter the villa unobserved, he scooped up a handful of water to drink from a pool nearby and said, 'This is Nero's essence.'<sup>49</sup> Then, though his cloak had been torn by thorns, he picked the twigs out of it and crawled on all fours through a narrow passage they had dug until he was inside the villa. There in the little room he came to first he lay down on a couch with an ordinary mattress and an old cloak thrown over it. Despite pangs of hunger and renewed thirst, he refused the coarse bread which was offered to him but did drink a small amount of tepid water.

[49] Then, as every one of his attendants urged him to place himself beyond the reach\* of the abuses which were imminent, he gave orders that a trench be made at once, of a size which would accommodate his own body, and that at the same time fragments of marble should be collected, if any could be found, and water and firewood should be brought for the disposal of the corpse—to be, weeping as each instruction was fulfilled and repeating 'What an artist dies with me!' During the delay caused by these preparations, a runner brought a message to Phaon which Nero grabbed, learning from it that he had been judged a public enemy by the senate and was the object of a search, so that he might be punished according to ancestral custom. He asked what manner of punishment this might be and when he discovered it meant that a man was stripped naked, his neck being placed in a fork, then his body beaten until he died, he was overcome with terror and snatched up two daggers which he had brought with him, but, having tried the blade of each one, he put them away again, on the grounds that the fatal hour had not yet arrived. And he would at one moment beseech *Sporus* to commence weeping and lamenting, and at another beg that someone should help him to die by setting an example. At the same time he berated his own procrastination with these words: 'My life is shameful—unbecoming to Nero, unbecoming—in such circumstances, one must be decisive—come, rouse yourself!' At that moment some horsemen drew near, under orders to bring him back living. Aware of

this, he hesitantly said: 'The thunder of swift-footed horses echoes around my ears,'<sup>50</sup> then drove the dagger into his throat with the help of his secretary *Epaphroditus*. Half-conscious, when the centurion burst in and, holding a cloak to his wound, pretended he had come to give assistance, Nero said only 'Too late' and 'This is loyalty'. And with these words he died, his eyes staring widely to the horror and dread of those looking on. The first and most insistent request he had made of his companions was that no one should be able to get possession of his head but that he should in some way be completely consumed by fire. This was allowed by *Icelus*, a freedman of *Galba*, who had just recently been released from the chains with which he had been bound at the start of the revolt.

[50] His funeral cost two hundred thousand sesterces and his body was dressed in the white robes, embroidered with gold, which he had worn for the *Kalends* of January. His nurses, *Egloge* and *Alexandria*, together with his mistress, *Acte*, buried his remains in the ancestral monument of the *Domitii*, which is located on top of the *Hill of Gardens*\* and can be seen from the *Campus Martius*. The monument is made up of a sarcophagus of porphyry, on which is an altar of *Luna* marble, and with an enclosure of *Thasian* stone.

[51] He was of a good height but his body was blotchy and ill-smelling. His hair was fairish, his face handsome rather than attractive, his eyes bluish-grey and dull, his neck thick, his stomach protruding, his legs very thin, his general health good—for despite his luxurious and most excessive way of life, he was only ill three times in fourteen years, and even then not so as to have to abstain from drinking or his other habits. He was so very shameless in his concern for dress and the care of his person that he would always have his curls arranged in a pile on his head and, on his trip to Greece, even had them flowing down behind. He was often to be seen in public dressed in a dinner robe, with a handkerchief around his neck, his tunic unbelted\* and his feet bare.

[52] In his youth he applied himself to almost all the liberal arts. However, his mother dissuaded him from taking up philosophy, warning that it was incompatible with imperial power.\* His teacher, *Seneca*, kept him from getting to know the orators of old, hoping thus to prolong his admiration for himself.\* Hence his inclination towards poetry, which he himself composed so freely and easily that many are of the opinion he passed off someone else's work as his



own.\* I have had access to some notebooks and papers on which were written some of his best-known works in his own hand. These clearly show that his composition was not transcribed or taken from another's dictation but worked out with thought and creativity. For there are many crossings out and insertions and additions in the work.\* He also had a keen interest in painting and sculpture.

[53] Above all, however, he was moved by a passion for popularity and was envious of anyone who in any way inspired the enthusiasm of the common people. It was widely believed that after his victories in the theatre, he would, at the next set of games, compete with the athletes at Olympia, for he was a keen wrestler and had looked on at the athletic contests all over Greece in the same way as the judges, sitting down at the level of the stadium, and if any pairs of wrestlers withdrew too far he would push them forward himself with his own hands. Since he was praised as equal to Apollo in song and the Sun in chariot-racing, it was inevitable that he would also emulate the achievements of Hercules. They say that a lion was trained for him to kill naked in the arena, with the people watching, either by means of a club or with the force of his arms. [54] Near the end of his life, indeed, he publicly made a vow that, if his regime survived, he would perform at the victory games on the water-organ, the flute, and the bagpipes and that on the last day he would appear as an actor and dance the story of Virgil's Turnus. Some people say that he had the actor Paris put to death because he was a dangerous rival.

[55] He had a desire to secure eternal and perpetual fame but his method was ill-advised. For he abolished the old names of many things and places and gave them new ones based on his own, so that he termed the month of April 'Neroneus'\* and he had a plan to give Rome the name of Neropolis.

[56] He had great contempt for all cults with the single exception of that of the Syrian goddess\* and even her he soon so despised that he polluted her with urine, when he became an enthusiast for another superstition—to which alone he remained most faithful. For he had received as a gift from some unknown commoner a small image of a girl which was said to be a protection against plots and, since a plot was immediately uncovered, he persisted in worshipping this image as the greatest of divinities with three sacrifices a day and he wanted it to be believed that it could give signs imparting knowledge of the future. A few months before he died he was

present at an examination of entrails but could not succeed in obtaining a favourable reading.

[57] He met his end in his thirty-second year on the anniversary of Octavia's death, thereby provoking such great public joy that the common people ran throughout the city dressed in liberty caps.\* Yet there were also some who for a long time would decorate his tomb with spring and summer flowers, and would sometimes display on the rostra statues of him dressed in a toga or post his edicts as if he were still alive and would soon return to avenge himself on his enemies. Indeed, even Vologaesus, king of the Parthians, when he sent ambassadors to the senate to renew his alliance, also made an earnest appeal that the memory of Nero should be honoured. Moreover, twenty years later, when I was a young man, there was an individual of unknown origins who boasted that he was Nero, and the name was so popular with the Parthians that they gave him vigorous support and could scarcely be made to surrender him.\*