

ON THE WEAKNESS OF ROMAN EMPIRE.

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'DURING a happy period of more than fourscore years,' says the historian Gibbon, 'the public administration [of the Roman Empire] was conducted by the virtues and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines.' This remarkable series of eminent administrators is generally suggested to a reader's mind, if 'the Good Emperors' be alluded to; but most persons will account Augustus Cæsar eminently good, as also Vespasian. To give prominence to the true causes of Roman weakness, and show that merely good administration could not save the empire from rapid decay, I purpose fully to analyze the two first reigns before passing beyond. They will show the secret springs and germs of all that follow.

Let us omit those deeds of the youthful Augustus—then Octavianus Cæsar—which were most bitterly censured by antiquity. If the facts are truly represented, yet we cannot blame his exasperation at the assassination of Caius Julius, his adopted father, over whose death even Cicero fiercely gloated. In every case his juvenile career is wonderful. Wholly inexperienced, delicate in health, and surrounded by unscrupulous men, who were accustomed to prompt military action in cutting civil knots, he deals with them alternately in war, in peace, and in treaties, with no superiority of military force, yet never makes a single false move. By Marcus Antonius's monstrous follies, he is prodigiously aided; he suffers at most two naval defeats from Sextus Pompeius, yet by his friend Agrippa's talents is even in that war victorious. Fourteen years after his great-uncle's death he is left

the acknowledged chief of the Roman world at the early age of thirty-three. He then had the arduous task of readjusting the whole machine of state, so that in future it might work without convulsion under new and constitutional relations towards a single permanent head. The death of Caius Julius warned him that the Romans would not endure an oriental king. The very word *Rex* suggested to them despotism and tyranny. Studying to legitimate his position by the forms of the Republic and by the sanction of the Senate, he solved his problem with skill so successful as to dazzle alike his contemporaries and later ages. The relief to the empire from internal peace, after nearly thirty years' civil war doubtfully intermitted, was so great as to win for him unmeasured panegyric, and exaggerate the positive merits of his rule: into which, the more closely one looks, the graver appear the weaknesses and the errors.

In the first place, it must be remarked that he was far too anxious for popularity with Roman citizens to keep any due control upon the licence of oppression, which Romans, especially Roman officers, used in the provinces. Under the Republic the licence was notorious. The Senators were oppressive by accepting heavy fees for false judgments, privileges, or extortions, partly under pretence of the public service, partly as hush-money for exemption from false charges. The Knights oppressed as farmers of the taxes, often getting military force from the governor to aid in exactions. The soldiers oppressed by simple terror of the sword. Augustus made no change which should fundamentally remove and

prevent any of these three dire mischiefs. Of the misconduct of individual soldiers the Emperor would rarely hear anything; but how great was their licence we may judge by the frightful case of the British queen, Boadicea, a little later. She rebelled against Rome because her daughters were violated by Roman soldiers, and she herself was scourged—probably for trying to save them. The almost continuous war—chiefly civil—for thirty years before Augustus became monarch, and the ruthless murders of noble Romans in cold blood, cannot have allowed that generation to rise at all above the level of Lucius Sulla's contemporaries. We may therefore be certain that nothing short of stern and resolute justice at Rome could save the unharmed and helpless provinces from the Roman governors and farmers of the revenue *then*, any more than under the Republic. But Augustus had nothing of stern and resolute justice in him. We may believe that Dion is right and Suetonius is wrong concerning his early career, and that from the beginning he abhorred proscription and murder; though, as Maria Theresa in the partition of Poland, he accepted the advantage of crimes which he could not prevent. But the higher his star rose, the more did he covet Roman popularity, alike with the people and with the Senate. He knew that his great uncle, Caius Julius, had risen entirely on his magnificent shows, so he resolved to captivate the people by shows still more magnificent; and to the Senate, whose co-operation he urgently needed to impart a constitutional exterior to his rule, he was most anxious to exhibit himself as a mild, tolerant, and benign prince. In nearly all history we know that the despotic satraps in a great empire can only be prevented from tyranny by the stern severity of a higher despot.

In Persia, ancient or modern, in Turkey again, it is not a gentle or well-intentioned sovereign, but one sternly just, and even capable of cruel retaliations, who best consults the welfare of the subject people. Our own Alfred is praised for bridling his officers by summary severity, not by civil law. Dion (liv. 21) gives in detail a very remarkable story, which shows how slow and reluctant Augustus was to punish a provincial governor appointed by himself. He had made a certain Licinius—who was of Gallic birth, and first a slave, then a freedman in Cæsar's house—a governor in Gallia. This man, not satisfied with ordinary exactions, impudently decreed that the year had fourteen months, and levied fourteen tributes instead of twelve. The Gauls complained; Augustus avowed sympathy, and partial disbelief. He came himself to the province,—to examine into the facts, we must suppose. But Licinius showed his treasures in gold and silver, and declared that he had amassed them for Augustus, in order to weaken the province and hinder its rebelling. The Emperor took the treasure, and the rogue escaped without further punishment.

After the dreadful revolt, which reached from Illyria to the Black Sea, and threatened Italy with invasion, Baton, the Dalmatian leader, to whom, for special mercy to an intercepted Roman army, Tiberius had given honourable terms, was asked publicly by Tiberius why they had revolted, and persevered so obstinately in war. He boldly replied: 'Blame yourselves for it. To guard your herds you send, not dogs nor graziers, but wolves.' Such were the governors, not brought to those provinces by lot from the Senate, but selected for them by Augustus. Yet it is possible that he had little choice; all the military men may have been

equally hard, and softer men might have fared as did Varus in Germany.

The cardinal mischief lay in rapid conquests and annexations. The praise of moderation awarded to Augustus by Tacitus and Suetonius has been wonderfully re-echoed by the moderns, even Gibbon and Sismondi¹ being carried away by the delusion. The area, peopled by brave and stubborn nations, which this prince added to the empire, was enormous; and his ambition aimed at yet more, which, diverted by insurrections, or compelled by defeats, he reluctantly abandoned. He planned to conquer Britain (excited to the scheme, says Dion, by the example of his adopted father the Dictator Cæsar), but was twice arrested by rebellion in the Alps and Pyrenees. He sent expeditions against Arabia Felix and Ethiopia, with miserable result. He temporarily pushed his conquests in Germany up to the Elbe, but by Arminius's insurrection three legions under Varus were destroyed, and the Roman frontier driven back to the Rhine. This great and critical event, which the Germans have been recently celebrating, is hard to parallel in history; but an acute friend of mine compares it to the destruction of the English army in Affghanistân. Tiberius Cæsar, like our Generals Nott and Pollock, was sent, not to reconquer, but to inspire terror; to show that Romans were still superior to Germans, and could not only repel, but invade. Augustus, for the first time, and nearly at the end of his life, learnt the vanity of coveting extended territory. In fact, his numerous wars, says Velleius, 'fatigue the writer.'

To borrow names from modern geography, he conquered Egypt,

Bulgaria, Roumelia, Servia, Bosnia, Illyria, with Dalmatia, Slavonia, Corinthia, Styria, Austria, all Switzerland, Bavaria up to the Danube, and the north coast of Spain with the Pyrenees, besides completing the conquest of France, with Belgium and Holland. M. Crassus (grandson of the Crassus who is infamous for his lawless, self-willed, and calamitous war against the Parthians), when Governor of Macedonia, conquered for Augustus Roumelia and Bulgaria, and first brought the empire into collision with the Sarmatians or roving people, namely, with the tribe called Bastarnæ, who had crossed the Danube into Bulgaria. Through inexperience, the Romans were quite unaware that small nations of industrious agriculturists on the frontier of the empire were their most valuable friends, and, if maintained in freedom, would serve as a shield and buffer against the roving nations, who were incapable of being attacked or pursued; therefore, to push the frontier up to meet them was an insane policy. Yet to nourish the strength and spirit of the mountaineers and agriculturists could not occur to any Roman as wisdom, while the provincials were kept unarmed, spiritless, and enslaved—the *only form of rule which Romans understood*. Crassus tried to maintain his conquests by the characteristic Roman cruelty of cutting off men's right hands; a policy pursued by Scipio Æmilianus and others in Spain. No doubt it inspired terror effectually, yet also intensified hatred. The wild and brave mountain population, subdued by the generals of Augustus in some twenty years by violent and bloody struggles, could only be held down by violence. Hence great standing armies were needed,

¹ Not that Sismondi praises the moderation. Valuable writer as he is, he wants calm judgment. He strangely despises the Emperors for not conquering Germany, and says that the Republic would have done it. Where would he have had conquest stop?

and resolute, severe commanders, called Governors of the provinces. Naturally these were more like wolves than dogs. Nor is it easy to believe that the taxes on the empire at large for these terrible wars and permanent armaments can have failed to be oppressive, however clearly and fairly adjusted in the clever emperor's schedule.

With the Parthian king it was all along easy to preserve peace but for Crassus's escapade. Intervening deserts separated the monarchies, if only Armenia were maintained in independence. Before the battle of Philippi, Brutus and Cassius conceived the bright idea of getting aid for their cause from the Parthian monarch, and sent Quintus Labienus to him as an ambassador. After their defeat and death, Labienus did but bring in the Parthians to conquer provinces from Rome, who for a little moment overran Syria and Asia Minor. Marcus Antonius was already a victim to Cleopatra, to wine, and to every folly of dissipation; but one brave and energetic under-captain, Publius Ventidius, with inadequate forces and at his own initiation, inflicted on the Parthians many defeats, slew their noblest and much-lamented leader, Pacorus, the crown prince, and recovered the provinces—apparently for Antonius, really for Augustus. Thus was the Roman Empire fortunately secured on the side of the east.

But Augustus's great standing armies presently proved a scourge to his successor, and their necessary maintenance was the germ of ruin to the empire. If Augustus was severe in anything it was in military discipline. Idle soldiers, he knew, were a terror to those whom they had to protect and to their own commanders, rather than to the enemy. The formidable masses of men who were placed along the Rhine and Danube were kept at severe work even in time of

peace, and their numbers forbade high pay, even if it had conduced to discipline. After twenty years' service they were nominally dismissed, but liable to be still detained 'under a flag;' at last they might receive a bit of land, after they had lost all taste for peaceful husbandry, if happily free from wounds; many having served thirty years, some even forty. Most of them having had a terrible taste of war in Germany or Pannonia, were already much disposed to discontent; and at Augustus's death his will made them flame out into mutiny. The prince was aware that his power depended on his body-guard, which was quartered privately on the Palatine Hill (says Dion) in small bodies here and there, or many cohorts in Italian towns. He kept them in good humour by pay more than double, with no duty but that of escorting him in Italy, often to pleasant watering-places. They were never assembled into a single mass, so as to see their own strength, nor were subject to any harsh or painful discipline. The Senate well knew that the chief to whom these troops were devoted could in a moment crush any obstinate and hostile individual, even if he bore the title of consul; thus this celebrated body-guard, called the Prætorians, was the firmest bulwark of the throne. Grateful to their fidelity, Augustus bequeathed to every Prætorian soldier 1,000 *nummi* (a sum computed to be rather more than £8 of our money), and to every legionary soldier 300 *nummi*. There was no precedent as yet that could have made them claim a legacy; but this single act of Augustus made it ever after necessary, at each new accession, thus to bribe the armies. In fact, it was a public avowal that no prince could ascend the throne without purchasing the consent of the soldiers. If nothing at all had been bequeathed, no reason appears

why any should have been aggrieved; but when the legions reflected that the Prætorians, who served only sixteen years, and had two denarii a day, were now to receive 1,000 coins for their light services, while the legionaries, who often served twice sixteen years, and had only ten *asses* (i.e. $\frac{1}{8}$ of a denarius) as daily pay, were only to get 300 coins each as their legacy, the smouldering discontent burst into a flame; and first the nearer army of Pannonia, next the more distant Germanic armies along the Rhine, broke into mutiny. Such was the terrible beginning of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar.

This very able and excellent administrator was then fifty-six years old, and every year of his life he had seemed more admirable and more worthy of esteem—worthy perhaps even of love from the wise. Up to that very mature age no tooth of slander, that we know, had nibbled at him, except from the flatterers who wished to ingratiate themselves cheaply with the grandsons of Augustus, by pointing at the experience and high reputation of Tiberius as likely to be dangerous to their imperial hopes. To avoid eclipsing these boys, he had resolutely withdrawn from public life for some years, and retired to Rhodes, in spite of the vehement disapproval of Augustus. Only after the death of Caius and Lucius Cæsar did he come forth again. Then Augustus adopted, first his surviving grandson Postumus Agrippa, next his stepson Tiberius Nero, adding concerning the latter emphatically,² ‘Him I adopt for the public welfare.’ In fact, it soon appeared that Postumus, ‘a savage and wild fellow,’ was quite unfit for office; hence, at Augustus’s suggestion, he was imprisoned in an

island by a decree of the Senate. Tiberius, already invested by the Senate with tribunicial authority, received supreme power, lawfully and constitutionally—not by arms—not seeking it, and with reputation not blameless merely, but pre-eminently high. Nevertheless, because the end of his reign was dreadfully overclouded—scarcely through his own fault, so far as appears, and because his mind was at last overthrown by a belief in a dreadful tissue of guilt among his own family (some of it perhaps fictitious), after-ages have seen his character distorted and stained through this turbid medium. Of all his assailants Tacitus bears the palm of bitter and perpetual snarling and discolouring, and by his splendid style and eminent talents has earned a credit which he does not at all deserve for impartiality.

The miseries of the imperial family were caused entirely by the errors of Augustus, if indeed errors be not far too gentle a word. Unless he is slandered by his biographer, his dealings with the female sex were about as bad as they could be. His first wife, while he was very young, was the daughter of P. Servilius Isauricus; but he got rid of her to marry Clodia, step-daughter of Marcus Antonius, when it was convenient to form with him a close political junction. But before this marriage could be consummated, it became more important to conciliate Sextus Pompeius; therefore he suddenly dropped Clodia, and married a near kinswoman of Sextus, Scribonia, who had already had two consular husbands. His numerous infidelities to her aroused her resentment, which he retaliated by divorcing her (on the pretence of her bad temper), on the very day on which

² Tacitus meanly repeats the gossip of men humiliated by Tiberius’s strict rule, that Augustus adopted Tiberius, only to make the Romans the more regret Augustus’s death: and this passes as history!

she gave birth to Julia, his only child. In fact, he was already in love (if such a man could be in love) with Livia Drusilla, wife of Tiberius Claudius Nero. The husband, either complaisant or terror-stricken, agreed to divorce his wife (then pregnant), and officiate as her 'father' in bestowing her in marriage on the rising prince; and soon after died. Livia certainly proved an excellent wife to Augustus, just the very thing he needed; too good indeed, if we are to believe his panegyrist Suetonius, that she catered to his sensual taste in ways better not specified here. Dropping as possible slander all private and unverified assertions, we find in the abominable divorces and marriages for mere political reasons (all of which are public facts) abundant condemnation of Augustus's conduct as pernicious in the extreme to those nearest to him. In fact, he first gave Julia in marriage to his sister's son young Marcellus, and on Marcellus' death in the next year, married her again to Marcus Agrippa, a man three years older than Augustus, having ordered Agrippa to divorce his wife Marcella, sister to the young Marcellus, and first cousin to Julia. Who can wonder that this unhappy princess shortly became notorious for her numerous amours? She had three sons and two daughters in this marriage, but it must be highly doubtful whether Agrippa was the real father to more than the eldest, Caius. Of the two daughters, one called Julia became as notorious for her profligacy as her mother Julia; the other, Agrippina, according to Tacitus, had one signal virtue, chastity—of course, highly celebrated from the contrast to her sister and mother; but the historian confesses her contumaciousness, pride, and tempestuous spirit. These vices in her were far more fatal to all her kin and to Tiberius than the lax morals of her mother

and sister, who (as may seem) were politically harmless. Agrippa was no sooner dead than Augustus *compelled* Tiberius (such is Suetonius's phrase) to divorce his beloved wife Vipsania, daughter of Agrippa by his first marriage, and granddaughter of T. Pomponius Atticus, the friend of Cicero;—divorce her—at that very time pregnant,—in order to marry the already infamous Julia. Possibly Augustus was then the only man in Rome who knew nothing of his daughter's misconduct. Dion says he already suspected it; Tiberius knew it, but had to submit. Tacitus tells us that 'Julia despised Tiberius as her inferior in rank.' Is it credible that she should have been ignorant that the ancestors of Tiberius led the patricians of Rome when patricianism was at its highest, before the Cæsars were heard of? Did she not know that, on his mother's side also, his ancestors the Livii Salinatores were high in power and esteem in the era when the first Marcellus, ancestor of her first husband, earned his celebrity? At any rate, she could not have been ignorant that her second husband Agrippa (*ignobilis loco*) was far below Tiberius in pretensions to high birth. It may rather seem then, that the spite of the great historian has betrayed him into foolish invention. However, no one has impeached Tiberius's morals under this deplorable infliction; perhaps love and pity for Vipsania shielded him; indeed, Tacitus charges him with hating Asinius Gallus because she was transferred to him as a new husband, an indication that Tiberius could not forget his Vipsania. But now the historians (so-called), who scrape up the vilest scandalous gossip of Rome, would persuade us that the man who passed blameless through such trials and such an atmosphere of wild licentiousness, and was accounted severe in all his

habits, yet, when verging to his seventieth year, gave himself to sensual practices too foul and monstrous to be intelligible to us. When an aged prince, weary of cares and sick of flattery which he despises, goes into complete retirement, it is easy to invent anything of him, since there is no one to contradict secret slander in books unpublished. Be this as it may, Augustus thus ruined his daughter, who in turn could do nothing for her children but fill them with imperial pride. Two of the sons dying, and the third being manifestly incompetent, nothing remained but to take Tiberius as successor. As Velleius observes, choice or election was not needed. His services and high qualities were quite unparalleled. They must be very briefly mentioned here.

His first military expedition, at the age of twenty, was little but a triumphal march, though at the head of a great army, to place a king on the throne of Armenia. No war took place; the Armenians promptly obeyed. But Tiberius gained credit, by recovering from the Parthian king the standards and captives lost by Crassus. Horace celebrates his victories (and those of his brother Drusus) five years later in Switzerland and Bavaria. When revolt arose in Pannonia, and Marcus Agrippa died suddenly, apparently from his exertions in quelling it, Tiberius, now in his thirty-second year, was sent against the insurgents, who were emboldened by the news of Agrippa's death. Only very severe measures could succeed; but he did succeed, and in no long time. Four years later, after his brother's death, he was sent across the Rhine against the Sicambri, and was made consul next year as a special reward. Then came Tiberius's sudden withdrawal into private life.

Next, for the conquest of Germany beyond the Rhine, which

Velleius justly calls *asperrimum et periculosissimum bellum*, he undertook in person all the most arduous tasks, subdued the tribes as far as the Elbe, and explored with his fleet the whole northern shore between the Elbe and the Rhine. When sent to achieve the conquest of Bohemia, where the skilful German king Marobodines had trained a formidable army in Roman discipline, a sudden explosion revealed how much too rapid and violent had been Augustus's annexations. All the brave people who lay along the Danube below Vienna, or occupied the mountainous country from Illyria to the Black Sea, made simultaneous insurrection, even Thracians (Roumelia) assisting it. Suetonius calls this the severest of all foreign wars except the Punic. By an immense pouring in of legions, it was fought out in a third year. Scarcely had Tiberius quenched this fire, when Germany rebelled, crushed Quintilius Varus with the whole Roman army of occupation, and postponed for ever the conquest of Bohemia. Tiberius had thus a new task in Germany. Suetonius is here very full as to his extraordinary precautions and personal simplicity of conduct, equal to that of old plebeian generals or of the Greek Agesilans. In this dangerous service he avoided trusting anything to chance and all needless bloodshed. After two years he brought back his army and fleet without sensible loss. But in performing these great achievements he learned *on the one hand* the absolute necessity of not driving brave nations to despair by the violences of Roman soldiers and governors; *on the other*, that to retain Germany in subjection would cost more in blood and treasure than it was worth: hence he adopted a strict policy of not extending the empire, and as soon as he became emperor proclaimed this as Augustus's sacred admonition to his successors. The differ-

ence was this, that Tiberius adopted the policy from the very beginning of his reign, Augustus only at the very end.

The anxious care of Tiberius to spare the blood of his own soldiers is attested by Velleius too definitely to disbelieve. Horace had called him *sine clade victor*, in his Alpine conquests. When his brother Drusus died in Germany from his horse falling on him, Tiberius walked on foot with the corpse all the way to Rome, says Suetonius. Velleius (ii. 114), an eye-witness and comrade of his wars, narrates his tenderness to the Roman officers. 'Through the whole time of the German and Pannonian wars (says he), none of us, indeed whether of higher or lower rank, was weakly, but his safety and health were supported by Cæsar's care, just as if, instead of being immensely distracted by the weight of multifarious duties, he had been at leisure for this one task. Whoever of us needed it, had an ambulance ready to convey him. Cæsar's own litter was yielded for public use, and I as well as others enjoyed the advantage of it. Moreover, surgeons and special stores of food, and the equipage of the bath imported for him alone, were made to succour the weak health of every one of us.' Somewhat earlier, when Tiberius retired to Rhodes (a conduct which Tacitus shamefully discolours), Suetonius draws a picture of him highly pleasing. Though he already held the 'tribunical authority,' he lived as a private man in a moderate house, without even an official attendant in his walks, and exchanged kindnesses almost on equality with the undistinguished natives (*Græculis*). His kindness to the sick is there also mentioned. While he was at Rhodes, Augustus, in his name, divorced Julia from him, a step which Tiberius had not dared to take himself. He instantly wrote back, entreating 'in frequent let-

ters,' forgiveness for her; and begged that she might be allowed to keep everything that he had ever given her. Yet we are expected to believe that, years later, with no new relations or new offence, he caused her to be starved to death! All deeds of tenderness to the wounded and sick must have sprung in Tiberius from a deep sense of what it was right and prudent to do; for he was reserved, and never studied popularity. Probably, as most of the Claudii, he was proud; certainly he was disdainful of common applause. Such a man could not easily change his whole character after the age of fifty-six.

Living until about fifty without any prospect of succeeding to the principedom, he had seen all public matters with the eyes of a private man and citizen. He understood the hollowness of flattery too well, says Tacitus: true; and he understood equally well the causes of provincial revolts. Hence, to keep down *the imperial expenses* and *the provincial extortions* were the prime efforts of his administration. The former could only be done by avoiding foreign war and superfluous domestic pomp. Expenditure on shows, to gratify the Roman populace, he disapproved; to gladiatorial shows he was averse; in fact, he was too busy with imperial cares to attend any public pageant willingly. Tacitus regards this as morose and unamiable, yet stigmatizes his young son Drusus as 'rejoicing in the shedding of vulgar blood,' because he loved the gladiatorial combats. On every public calamity Tiberius was most generous to open the treasury for the relief of a city, or to remit provincial taxes. He was indignant at the attempts of the nobility to establish themselves as pensioned sinecurists, pleading that their ancestors bore historical names. Tacitus tells at full the case of Hortensius Hortalus, and is marvel-

lously blind to the fact that, by his own showing, the emperor was quite in the right, and his temper the opposite of dissimulation. What, then, was the dissimulation of which so much is made against this prince? Plainly twofold: first, like every wise Cabinet minister, he knew when to be silent about matters of State, and, if insurrections broke out, was in no hurry to publish all that he knew or did not know—a thing which the gossips of Rome took very ill; next, whenever accusation was brought against anyone, whether in the Senate or before a tribunal, he was resolute to show no sign that he wished the accused to be acquitted or to be condemned. His universal doctrine was: *Let the law take its course, without spite and without favour, against high or low.* If forced to speak while a trial was pending, he always so balanced his utterances as to make it impossible to say that he was urging the judges to severity or to mercy. This, forsooth, was guilty dissimulation! No doubt, in the very base moral state of Rome, an inconvenience resulted. When the accused was *notoriously* guilty, accusers made sure that the emperor, though ambiguous, desired his condemnation. Hence they tried to ingratiate themselves with him by superadding accusations of treason to those of extortion, a proceeding over which Tiberius had no control. When guilty persons were thus condemned, they were pitied (says Tacitus) as having been unjustly punished for treason, and *not* for extortion:—as if that were the emperor's guilt. This historian himself, if duly criticized, consistently admits that the constant effort of Tiberius was *not to interfere* with the course of justice, but simply to insist that guilty men should not be sheltered by rank and connection. The result was an extraordinary number of condemnations; but the Senate or the judges—never

Tiberius himself—pronounced sentence. Still, because in this reign so many of the nobility suffered in judicial trials, the prince himself earned deadly hatred from the aristocracy, who remembered in pleasant contrast the laxity of Augustus. Far better than any severity in punishing oppression was Tiberius's conscientious effort to appoint no governor of a province likely to oppress. 'A shepherd ought to shear his flock, not skin it,' was his maxim. When he had found a good governor, he kept him in power year after year, and was heartily glad to need no change. Tacitus derides him for his anxiety in choice and his distrust of his own judgment, and tells us that on some occasions, after nominating a man as governor, he had misgivings or new information, and would not let him leave Rome. The historian imputes it to spite against the aristocracy, that he left one man in power for (say) five years, instead of letting five men enjoy the honour for a year each. That it was more important that the provinces be well governed, than that a number of nobly-born Romans should in turn have the governing, does not seem to cross this writer's mind.

It is pretended that certain senators really planned false accusations secretly with Tiberius: but no proof is ever alleged, and the accusations are often confessed to have been just. Moreover, Tiberius saw through most flatterers and sneaks at a glance, and despised them: only Sejanus was too deep for him. As to flattery, it may be worth while to lay before the reader part of a speech which Tacitus attributes to this prince, on refusing the honour of a temple, which Farther Spain desired to erect to him and to his mother Livia Augusta.

Conscript fathers! that I am mortal and fulfil human duties, and possess quite enough in occupying the post of chief, I both call you to attest, and wish posterity

to remember ; who will bestow enough and more than enough on my memory in believing me to be worthy of my ancestors, provident for your interests, unshaken in danger, and not afraid to incur private odium for the public good. These are my temples in your hearts. These are my statues, most beautiful and durable ; for those which are formed of marble are despised as sepulchres, if the judgment of posterity turns into hatred. Accordingly, I implore the gods to give me to the end of my life a tranquil mind intelligent of human and divine rights. I also entreat our allies and our citizens that, whenever death overtakes me, they will escort my deeds and the repute of my name with praise and kindly remembrances.

Tacitus is not ashamed to add the censures which were thereupon passed in private on Tiberius, as meanspirited, for refusing the honour of divinity.

Immediately on the death of Augustus, as Tacitus tells, Tiberius was unwilling to seem to steal into supreme power by his mother's influence over the declining age of the deceased prince. He was equally resolute not to seize power by military force. That despotism was a thorny couch, he perfectly well knew ; and if he must occupy it, he claimed that the Senate should voluntarily and distinctly confer it on him. Evidently he could not retire into private life, without the certainty of inflicting upon the empire new civil war. In this crisis, Sallustius Crispus sent a centurion to put Postumus Agrippa to death. Tiberius was aghast at the centurion's tidings, and at first avowed that he must bring the matter before the Senate. We cannot know how Sallustius dissuaded him ; for assuredly their private talk was only *guessed* at by contemporaries ; but the argument was obvious. 'Do not blame me. I have saved the empire from a civil war, by sacrificing one worthless life.' A single day revealed the imminence of danger. A slave had devised the plan of carrying off the captive prince to the Germanic

armies, and proclaiming him emperor ; but his ship, a merchant vessel, was slower than the galley which carried the centurion, and Postumus was slain before his champion could reach the island. This same slave, a little later, passed himself off as the deceased prince, and for a moment caused great joy and consternation. When Sallustius could point to this attempt of the slave, as proving the reality of peril, it was morally impossible for Tiberius to take any step. He was profoundly silent *in the Senate* ; but a report went abroad, that he privately alleged Augustus's orders to put Postumus to death. Such are the grounds for calling Tiberius 'the murderer of Agrippa.' Meanwhile, to use Tacitus's indignant phrase, all the high Romans 'were rushing into slavery' (what would he have had them do ?) The consuls, the military chiefs, the Senate, the soldiers, and (he adds) the people, took the oath of allegiance, but Tiberius still assumed no despotic airs in the Senate, but behaved with senatorial modesty. This, which is praised in Trajan and the Antonines, is called 'dissimulation' in Tiberius. So is his careful distinction between his privy purse and the public treasury, at which Tacitus contemptuously scoffs, in the words, '*as if it mattered.*' But Marcus Aurelius was equally punctilious. The news of disaffection in the Germanic and Pannonic armies also impelled Tiberius to rest his power visibly and beyond dispute on the Senate ; and the events proved his wisdom. Dangerous mutinies indeed ensued, which were with difficulty appeased ; after which the Germanic soldiers were eager to atone for their offence by the slaughter of Germans, for which Germanicus (nephew and adoptive son to Tiberius) was only too eager. He made two very cruel and very dreadful campaigns against the

Germans, quite useless, almost gratuitous, causing (no doubt) immense misery to women and children as well as to armed men, but suffered himself from swamp and from the incursions of the German Ocean as much as from barbarian attack. There probably he caught the consumptive disease of which he died. Tiberius, at the earliest moment that he safely could, recalled his nephew from an inhuman and disastrous war. At this also Tacitus snarls, saying that the emperor grudged to his nephew military glory, and feared his ingratiating himself with the legions. Truly he might well fear this concerning Agrippina, wife of Germanicus. But this historian himself avows that the war had no worthy object (*dignum præmium*).

Much as Tiberius shunned war, some guerilla or other was sure to be permanent. Already the provinces had numbers of destitute men, ejected or ruined by taxation, who formed themselves into bands, were reinforced by fugitive slaves, and lived as brigands, to the misery of the little cultivators. Now and then a more ambitious insurrection took place, as that of Florus and Sacrovir in Gallia. The cause (says Tacitus) was 'the enormous indebtedness' of the States. How this arose, we know from Cicero's writings. Suppose a war not very distant: large supplies are demanded, and large moneys. They give up corn, oxen, horses, carts, and what money they have. When more money is required, they have to borrow it of a Roman knight, who brings it for the purpose. The Senate allowed 12 per cent. as normal interest, but the knights struggled for 40 per cent.; and Brutus quarrelled with Cicero, because the latter said that 12 was enough for his agent, and that the provincials had a right to repay the principal of the debt as soon as they had the money in hand. Not many

Roman money-lenders are likely to have been more scrupulous than Brutus, and not many Roman pro-consuls so steadily just as Cicero. A dangerous insurrection flamed out from this cause, Sacrovir and Florus urging, 'There is no end to the claim of *war-money*; the interest demanded is enormous; our governors are proud and cruel; the Roman armies are disaffected; our land abounds in men, but the *Italian fields are empty*, and the town populations unwarlike.'

Augustus well knew how weak, close at home, the empire was, and alike in the Illyrian and in the German insurrection, was in grave alarm lest the enemy should march down into Italy, where little resistance could have been offered them. From the reign of Augustus onward the military policy of Rome was that which Jefferson Davis adopted in the American civil war; he threw the entire strength on to the frontiers, so that the country was like a hollow shell—once break through the outer covering, and you can march across unresisted. Augustus did attempt to remedy the depopulation of the Italian fields by planting settlements of *coloni* from the great cities, chiefly, we suppose, from Rome. The measure for which Tiberius has been much censured perhaps may be accounted for by his unwillingness to let Italy appear defenceless. We, who know how ill the Prætorians behaved two centuries later, blame Tiberius for bringing them into a single camp. But they were not the only army, nor at all the strongest. The troops on the Rhine and Danube were likely to be somewhat less haughty if they knew that Rome had a powerful army, kept in firm discipline; moreover, the Gauls would be less ready to calculate on an easy march into Rome. Also the Prætorian cohorts, quartered on private houses, must have been a great discomfort, or something much

worse; nor could they there be kept in such training as to be ready to meet a formidable enemy. Sejanus is said to have urged Tiberius to bring them together into one camp, by delusive reasonings, really to serve his own ambition; but Tiberius, it may well be believed, knew what he was about. He had then a son alive, at least one grandson, and three adoptive grandsons, sons of Germanicus. To attribute to Sejanus at that time a scheme of aspiring to the chief power is ridiculous. He was a mere knight, and at the utmost could only hope for a secondary post. But his ambition grew as he found the senators more and more to crouch before him; and after Drusus, son of Tiberius, was dead (as his father believed, from various debauchery), when two of the grandsons were disgraced, and a third (Caligula) was evidently unfit for power, then at last the ambition of Sejanus culminated. Public folly assumed that from the first he had planned the whole; so his divorced wife was believed when she declared that Sejanus had corrupted Livilla, wife of Drusus and sister of Germanicus, to poison her husband, who was also her cousin, in order to marry *him*, a Roman knight! Space does not allow discussion here whether the frightful tissue of crime attributed to Sejanus, and to Tiberius on the discovery of his guilt, is true or false. The broad fact is terribly clear that the last years of this able, industrious, and excellently intentioned prince were quite tragical to Rome, but not to the empire. Dion Cassius is probably correct in saying that Tiberius by will made his own grandson, Tiberius Gemellus, his sole heir; but Caligula, whose vices the aged prince knew too well, having secured the support of the Prætorian guards through their commander Macro, boldly claimed the place of prince, and enforced on the Senate to de-

ree that Tiberius *was not in his right mind* when he made a will which raised a youth of eighteen to supreme power. This young Tiberius was presently killed by direct order of Caligula.

Then succeeded three dreadful reigns—of Caligula, the madman; Claudius, the learned glutton; and Nero, the profligate and cruel musician. Claudius was in his best hours wise, like our James I., but he allowed his freedmen to oppress. Under these emperors were thirty-one years of great suffering. But the death of Nero opened a new fountain of woe. The armies of Spain, of Germany, and of Pannonia contended which should give an emperor to Rome. First, the army of Spain and Portugal set Galba on the throne; next, the army of the Rhine defeated Otho (Galba's assassin), and made Vitellius emperor; lastly, the army of Pannonia defeated the Germanic army in the name and interest of Vespasian.

The civil war was in itself a terrible calamity to every place within reach of the legions on march; and when they crowded into Rome, the state of things was frightful. Fighting in the city itself, they burnt down the capital a second time. But calamity spread still wider by the removal of the troops from the defence of the frontiers. The disaffected provincials and the outside barbarians alike saw their opportunity. At this very crisis—a year after the death of Nero—the empire might have fallen for ever, as many Christians ardently expected. Tacitus indeed says of this year (A.D. 69) that to Galba it was the last, and *almost* the last to the Roman Commonwealth. At first a Gaulish province had made insurrection which had been planned with Galba against Nero; but the precipitation of the Roman troops, always glad to fight with rich provincials rather than with poor bar-

barians, crushed the war in the absence of their leader Virginius, who did not mean to fight. Hereby the whole of Gaul was shocked, weakened, and laid open to the Germans, against whom a great war was presently necessary. The Suabians also and Sarmatians attacked the empire, and Illyricum was in commotion. Rome was saved by two events which may appear accidental: first, the Emperor Vitellius, who happened to be in command of the Germanic legions, was a worthless and incompetent sot; next, in the Pannonic army, was a young senator of singular genius, the Garibaldi of the first century, only much wiser. His name was Antonius Primus; he is celebrated by Martial as a purely virtuous man, able in his sixtieth year to look back upon every day of his life with pleasure. He became the darling leader of the Pannonic cohorts, and thoroughly eclipsed the patrician, Vipstanus Messala, a literary friend of Tacitus—whose falsely-coloured notes of this war, we may infer, are the source of error. In Tacitus all Antonius's *deeds* are splendid and praiseworthy, all the *motives* assigned by the historian are despicable and gratuitous. Our historian would have us accept from him the following summary of this remarkable man:—'Guilty at law and condemned for forgery, an able fighter, a ready speaker, skilful to weave mistrust of others, and powerful in disorders and mutinies, ready to plunder and to lavish; in peace the worst of men, in war not despicable.' *Not despicable!* truly not. Being but a 'tribune' in a great army, he declared war for Vespasian against Vitellius, and insisted that they must march *at once* into Italy—not wait until the Moesian and Syrian legions could join them, and avowed that, unless held back by force, he would march with his single cohort against the worthless emperor and

all his Germanic hosts. They shall soon see Italy unlocked, the Vitellians driven in, and will be glad to follow his victorious steps. The army exclaimed, 'This was the man and leader for them;' Vipstanus Messala and the nominal commander-in-chief were swept into his train. He broke into Italy with inferior forces, fought dreadful battles, always victorious, against the celebrated Germanic legions, besieged and took cities, but with immense anxiety restrained the troops from violence; nevertheless, Cremona sustained a dreadful conflagration, from uncertain causes. Finally, he entered Rome in triumph, and proclaimed Vespasian sole emperor. Spain and Gaul at once came over at the news. If this success had been attained only twelve months later, the insurrections and invasions gathering from all sides might have overthrown the empire. When Mucianus, governor of Syria and partizan of Vespasian, reached Rome, angry at the speedy success which he had struggled to delay, he thought it quite necessary to disarm the formidable friend from whom Vespasian was receiving the gift of empire. Antonius proceeded to Vespasian at Alexandria to complain; but finding himself attacked by letters from Mucianus and from numbers of others whose pride his wonderful successes had wounded, and that Vespasian was puzzled and cold, he at once retired into private life, and lived there with dignity and respect, giving no further trouble, and receiving no public honour, though he was the admired favourite of a powerful and victorious army. And this man is called by Tacitus, without a single fact in proof, *pace pessimus*.

Vespasian had next the huge task of restoring order and organizing safety. The Sarmatians called Roxolani had invaded Moesia (Servia or Bulgaria); another Sarmatian tribe, the Jazyges (the eldest

branch of the Magyars), had been conciliated by the Pannonic leaders. A formidable war in Gaul, chiefly against Germanic tribes—Batavians, Treveri, and others—was quelled with difficulty. But when it appeared that civil war was ended, and a single emperor was on the throne; when, moreover, the Roman armies once more assumed the aggressive, the tide was manifestly turned, and the empire was saved. But the warning was, to princes really wise, invaluable; so near did danger come, and so clear were its causes. Vespasian found the treasury emptied, and the provinces largely exhausted. His first business was to recover a sound state of the finances; this apparently was a sufficient task for his ten years' reign. He achieved it by strict parsimony, with new and heavy taxes. He originated public salaries for public teachers—a suggestion of national universities, and perhaps of public education. It does not appear that he introduced any new element of prosperity; but he repaired the waste, the calamities, and the disorders of thirty-two years, yet apparently established in permanence a heavier system of taxation than Augustus instituted. Gibbon, after mentioning 'the arbitrary interpretations, antiquated claims, and insolent vexation of the farmers of the revenue,' adds: 'It is somewhat singular, that in every age the best and wisest of the Roman governors (Emperors) persevered in this pernicious method of collecting the principal branches at least of the excise and customs.'

Vespasian's reign cruelly ruined one province, Judæa, not through his personal iniquity, but from the fatal pressure of misgovernment on an enthusiastically religious people, whose sacred books taught them to expect supernatural help against Pagan oppressors. That Romans who write with virulent hatred of Christians of whom they know no-

thing should abhor the Jews and think no misrule too bad for them, is natural; but that Christians, who revere the Book of Isaiah, should blame the Jews for accepting the only obvious meaning of its splendid prophecies, is wonderful. This remarkable people had begun their dispersion and their martyrdom much earlier; but now their extreme sufferings engendered blind fanaticism, and they perished horribly. How much better for the empire would it have been to re-establish them under some native rule, and to be satisfied with homage and tribute, than with vast effort to kill and scatter them as slaves! Slaves, alas! abounded more and more. Smaller proprietors could not pay the taxes, or could not defend their crops from banditti, and gladly sold their lands. Great estates, which had ruined Italy, proceeded to ruin the provinces. A vast trade, fed by wars, supplied these estates with slaves as cultivators or graziers; nor were the new *coloni* much above serfs. Disintegration and decay went on, even under the best emperors.

The most remarkable proof of this was in the eighty years of *happiness* celebrated by Gibbon. Trajan, says the amiable and learned Crevier, seems to unite all the best qualities of the best princes, and to be at the very head of good governors—'at least, if he had been a little less of a hero.' Hadrian mended this, being very peaceful. He was indefatigable in visiting the provinces; he sustained military discipline, yet avoided war, except another dreadful one against the Jews. Crevier fears that his liberal gifts to certain barbarians were mistaken by them for bribes to avert attack! Titus Antoninus was a model prince, yet, alas! he had war against Germans, Dacians, Jews, Moors, Greeks, Egyptians, and a great British war. When Marcus Aurelius ascended the throne, it needed no great dis-

cernment to see (what Tacitus saw in Trajan's reign)³ that the empire was fatally sinking; nor, if his sweet philosophy had been far wiser, could any skill of administration have saved such an empire. First came on him an outburst of war from Parthia, which lasted four years; and a dreadful plague, said to be imported from Parthia (for nations never will believe that their own vices breed plagues at home); on it followed a great war against the Marcomanni and Quadi, which can scarcely be said to have come to an end when the emperor died at Vienna fourteen years later. Besides, he had wars of which we have little acquaintance, in Egypt, in Spain and Portugal, and with the Gallic Sequani. Against the Germans he had a terrible want of soldiers, partly from the Parthian War, partly from the plague, but chiefly no doubt from the decay of free rustic population. He was glad to put slaves, gladiators, and robbers into the legions, and at length to purchase auxiliary troops of the Germans to fight against Germans! The Roman losses in war were so great that when peace was made, more than a hundred thousand prisoners were delivered up to them. It is impossible to doubt that the 'happy period' of these four excellent emperors was a period of steady decay. Taste, learning, genius declined side by side with free rustics, rural cultivation, and national wealth. City vices played a large part herein.

If the fact be admitted, free criticism of these great men is neither presumptuous nor superfluous. Trajan lost a most splendid opportunity. The provinces no longer resented Roman rule; they now revered the empire; they only resented oppression. For ninety years the Germans had been left in profound peace, and were without a suspicion that the

Romans desired to conquer beyond the Danube or Rhine. 'The Hermunduri' (whose region reached to the Elbe in central Germany, and to the Danube in the south), says Tacitus, 'are faithful to us; therefore to them alone of Germans is commerce granted, not on the bank only, but in intimacy, and in our most splendid colony of the Rhestian province' (Augusta Vindelicorum: Bavarian Augsburg). They cross everywhere without a guard; and while to other nations we show only our arms and our camps, to these we have opened our homes and our villas, and they do not covet them.' It is evident, then, that this tribe stretching to the interior would have firmly allied all Germany to the empire, if a public and fixed policy of alliance on terms of independence had been adopted. Trajan spoiled all this by his vehement coveting to annex Dacia. To chastise its king, Decebalus, just enough to let him feel how heavy a Roman hand could be, was necessary. If, when he implored peace, honourable alliance and independence had been granted, the Marcomanni and Hermunduri in all probability would have been glad of the same high honour and privilege, and the brave Dacians would have kept the frontier of the Dniester safe. All these nations were intelligent and docile, not mere barbarians. But, as Crevier observes, 'the Romans never left the Germans at peace, except when they had another war on hand; but returned to the charge as soon as their hands were free, and it cannot be doubted that Marcus Aurelius aimed to reduce Marcomannia to a Roman province.' This change for the worse was the fruit of Trajan's ambition; war made all internal radical reform impossible. But his aggressions in the East were an error still

³ German. 33. The words are very remarkable.

more obvious. On a trifling pretence, he resolved to annex Armenia to the empire, therefore prepared for war with Parthia. The Parthians apologized for a neglect, and tried to keep peace; but Trajan was resolved on war. He first conquered Armenia, next Mesopotamia. Meanwhile, his lieutenant Cornelius Palma had subdued Stony Arabia, by which the emperor earned frequent revolts and much fighting. He proceeded to subdue Georgia and Mingrelia after his first Parthian war. In a second war he crossed the Tigris and conquered Assyria, also the great cities Ctesiphon and Susa; then sailing down the Tigris, entered the Persian Gulf, and (if we can believe it) coasted round all Arabia until he reached Bab-el-Mandeb, captured Aden, and attacked the coasts of Arabia Felix. Returning safe up the Tigris, he crossed to look at Babylon, and there learnt that his conquests had vanished into thin air. His garrisons had been cut to pieces, and he had to win everything anew. He captured the city of Edessa. Seleucia was won by two of his lieutenants, but he miserably failed against the Assyrian city Atra, narrowly escaped with life, and returned to Syria to die a lingering death. Hadrian is wrongly said to have resigned Trajan's conquests; they were lost before Trajan ceased to breathe. Parthians, Armenians, Assyrians returned to their old princes, and the Roman empire earned nothing but disgrace.

To sum up. Every empire formed by conquest is rotten in the foundation until the violences and injustices of conquest are redressed. Such was pre-eminently the case with the Roman empire, which did

not associate the vanquished as comrades and equals, but trampled them under foot, and (to use Cicero's words) 'laid them beneath the axe edge,' *securibus subjecit*. The evils of such a state can scarcely ever be removed by an executive officer or prince, who is fully occupied by the enormous duties of a wide administration. Either a powerful and sagacious Senate, or a religious legislator, may bring things right; or compulsion from powerful foes, or successful rebellion, may extort new and sound principles. But if none of these things happen, the empire decays from within, as Turkey is decaying now, and as Rome decayed of old. Does anyone ask, How then did the Roman empire endure so long, if it was essentially weak? It is more than four centuries since the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople; and Turkey would seem strong now, if the surrounding European peoples were barbarians, organized in small tribes. Turks are the only cement of the Turkish empire; the vanquished peoples have long lost political cohesion or organization; they have no mutual confidence, nor precedents for union; many of them have been unmanned by long servitude. Romans, or the old families adopted as Romans, were the cement of that empire. The trained armies, however, played the part which the armed Turks play in an unarmed population. Discipline and habitual subservience are great powers. But if the vanquished are forced to unlearn bravery, and the fields are emptied of free rustics, even if increase of wealth follow, the strength of the community is sapped. This was the Roman process from the beginning, and in this it persevered to the end.