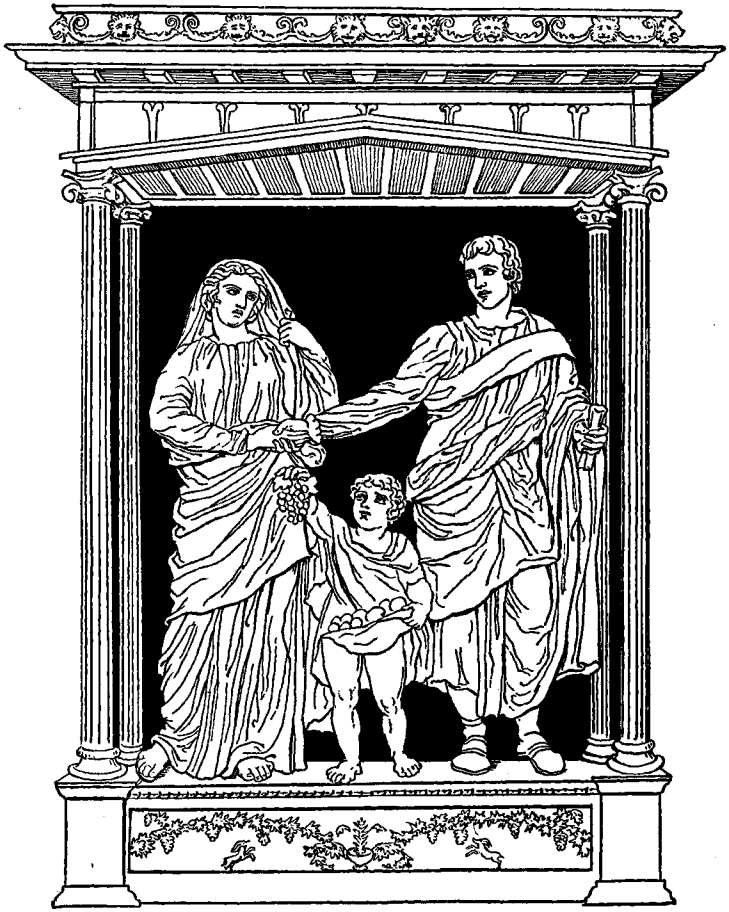
THE BURNING OF ROME



THE MARRIAGE OF CLAUDIA AND PUDENS

THE
BURNING OF ROME

A Story of Nero's Days

BY

ALFRED J. CHURCH

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS
CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

This edition, first published in 2009 by Yesterday's Classics, an imprint of Yesterday's Classics, LLC, is an unabridged republication of the text originally published by Seeley, Service & Company, Limited in 1912. For the complete listing of the books that are published by Yesterday's Classics, please visit www.yesterdaysclassics.com. Yesterday's Classics is the publishing arm of the Baldwin Online Children's Literature Project which presents the complete text of hundreds of classic books for children at www.mainlesson.com.

ISBN-10: 1-59915-072-7

ISBN-13: 978-1-59915-072-7

Yesterday's Classics, LLC
PO Box 3418
Chapel Hill, NC 27515

PREFATORY NOTE

The Claudia of this story may be identified with the British princess whose marriage to a certain Pudens is celebrated by Martial in a pleasant little epigram, and, possibly, with the Claudia whose name occurs among the greetings of St Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy. It would have been interesting to identify her husband with the Pudens whose name stands so near hers in the Epistle, but the difficulties of doing so seem insuperable.

A. C.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE EMPEROR'S PLAN

The reigning successor of the great Augustus, the master of some forty legions, the ruler of the Roman world, was in council. But his council was unlike as possible to the assembly which one might have thought he would have gathered together to deliberate on matters that concerned the happiness, it might almost be said, of mankind. Here were no veteran generals who had guarded the frontiers of the Empire, and seen the barbarians of the East and of the West recoil before the victorious eagles of Rome; no Governor of provinces, skilled in the arts of peace; no financiers, practised in increasing the amount of the revenue without aggravating the burdens that the tax-payers consciously felt; no philosophers to contribute their theoretical wisdom; no men of business to give their master the benefit of their practical advice. Nero had such men at his call, but he preferred, and not perhaps without reason, to confide his schemes to very different advisers. There were three persons in the Imperial Chamber; or four, if we are to reckon the page, a lad of singular beauty of form and feature, but a deaf mute, who stood by the Emperor's couch, clad in a gold-edged scarlet

tunic, and holding an ivory-handled fan of peacock's feathers, which he waved with a gentle motion.

Let me begin my description of the Imperial Cabinet, for such it really was, with a portrait of Nero himself.

The Emperor showed to considerable advantage in the position which he happened to be occupying at the time. The chief defects of his figure, the corpulence which his excessive indulgence in the pleasures of the table had already, in spite of his youth,[1] increased to serious proportions, and the unsightly thinness of his lower limbs, were not brought into prominence. His face, as far as beauty was concerned, was not unworthy of an Emperor, but as the biographer of the Cæsars says, it was "handsome rather than attractive." The features were regular and even beautiful in their outlines, but they wanted, as indeed it could not be but that they should want, the grace and charm in which the beauty of the man's nature shines forth. The complexion, originally fair, was flushed with intemperance. There were signs here and there of what would soon become disfiguring blotches. The large eyes that in childhood and boyhood had been singularly clear and limpid were now somewhat dull and dim. The hair was of the yellow hue that was particularly pleasing to an Italian eye, accustomed, for the most part, to black and the darker shades of brown. Nero was particularly proud of its color, so much so indeed, that, greatly to the disgust of more old-fashioned Romans, he wore it in braids. On the whole his appearance, though not without a certain comeliness and even dignity, was forbidding

[1] Nero was now (A.D. 64) twenty-seven years of age.

and sinister. No one that saw him could give him credit for any kindness of heart or even good nature. His cheeks were heavy, his chin square, his lips curiously thin. Not less repulsive was the short bull neck. At the moment of which I am writing his face wore as pleasing an expression as it was capable of assuming. He was in high spirits and full of a pleased excitement. We shall soon see the cause that had so exhilarated him.

Next to the Emperor, by right of precedence, must naturally come the Empress, for it was to this rank that the adventuress Poppæa had now succeeded in raising herself. Her first husband had been one of the two commanders of the Prætorian Guard; her second, Consul and afterwards Governor of a great province, destined indeed himself to occupy for a few months the Imperial throne; her third was the heir of Augustus and Tiberius, the last of the Julian Cæsars. Older than the Emperor, for she had borne a child to her first husband more than twelve years before, she still preserved the freshness of early youth. Something of this, perhaps, was due to the extreme care which she devoted to her appearance,[2] but more to the expression of innocence and modesty which some strange freak of nature—for never surely did a woman's look more utterly belie her disposition—had given to her countenance. To look at her certainly at that moment, with her golden hair falling in artless ringlets over a forehead smooth as a child's, her delicately arched lips, parted in a smile that just showed a glimpse of pearly teeth, her cheeks just tinged with a faint wild-rose blush, her large, limpid

[2] It is said that she daily bathed in asses' milk

eyes, with just a touch of wonder in their depths, eyes that did not seem to harbour an evil thought, any one might have thought her as good as she was beautiful. Yet she was profligate, unscrupulous, and cruel. Her vices had always been calculating, and when a career had been opened to her ambition she let nothing stand in her way. Nero's mother had perished because she barred the adventuress' road to a throne, and Nero's wife soon shared the fate of his mother.

The third member of the Council was, if it is possible to imagine it, worse than the other two. Nero began his reign amidst the high hopes of his subjects, and for a few weeks, at least, did not disappoint them, and Josephus speaks of Poppæa as a "pious" woman; but we hear nothing about Tigellinus that is not absolutely vile. Born in poverty and obscurity, he had made his way to the bad eminence in which we find him by the worst of arts. A man of mature age, for by this time he must have numbered at least fifty years, he used his greater experience to make the young Emperor even worse than his natural tendencies, and all the evil influences of despotic power, would have made him. And he was what Nero, to do him justice, never was, fiercely resentful of sarcasm and ridicule. Nero suffered the most savage lampoons on his character to be published with impunity, but no one satirized Tigellinus without suffering for his audacity.

The scene of the Council was a pleasant room in the Emperor's seaside villa at Antium. This villa was a favourite residence with him. He had himself been born in it. Here he had welcomed with delight, extravagant,

indeed, but yet not wholly beyond our sympathies, the birth of the daughter whom Poppæa had borne to him in the preceding year; here he had mourned, extravagantly again, but not without some real feeling, for the little one's death. It was at Antium, far from the wild excitement of Rome, that he had what may be called the lucid intervals in his career of frantic crime.

The subject which now engaged his attention, and the attention of his advisers, was one that seemed of a harmless and even a laudable kind. It was nothing less than a magnificent plan for the rebuilding of Rome. All the ill-ventilated, ill-smelling passages; all the narrow, winding streets; all the ill-built and half-ruinous houses; all, in short, that was unsanitary, inconvenient, and unsightly was to be swept away; a new city with broad, regular streets and spacious promenades was to rise in its place. At last the Empire of the world would have a capital worthy of itself. The plan was substantially of Nero's own devising. He had had, indeed, some professional assistance from builders, architects, and others, in drawing out its details, but in its main lines, certainly in its magnificent contempt for the expedient, one might almost say of the possible, it came from his own brain. And he had managed to keep it a secret from both Poppæa and Tigellinus. To them it was a real surprise, and, as they both possessed competent intelligence, however deficient in moral sense, they were able to appreciate its cleverness. Their genuine admiration, which so practised an ear as Nero's easily distinguished from flattery, was exceedingly pleasing to the Emperor.

"Augustus," he said, after enjoying for a time his companions' unfeigned surprise, "said that he found a city of brick and left a city of marble. I mean to be able to boast that I left a new city altogether. Indeed, I feel that nothing short of this is worthy of me, and I thank the gods that have left for me so magnificent an opportunity."

"And this vacant space," asked Tigellinus, after various details had been explained by the Emperor: "What do you mean, Sire, to do with this?"

A huge blank had been left in the middle of the map, covering nearly the whole of the Palatine and Esquiline Hills.

"That is meant to be occupied by my palace and park," said the Emperor.

The Prime Minister, if one may so describe him, could not restrain an involuntary gesture of surprise.

Nero's face darkened with the scowl that never failed to show itself at even the slightest opposition to his will.

"Think you, then," he cried in an angry tone, "that it is too large? The Master of Rome cannot be lodged too well."

Tigellinus felt that it would be safer not to criticise any further. Poppæa, who, to do her justice, was never wanting in courage, now took up the discussion. The objection that she had to make was in keeping with a curious trait in her character. "Pious" she certainly was not, though Josephus saw fit so to describe her,

but she was unquestionably superstitious. The terrors of an unseen world, though they did not keep her back from vice and crime, were still real to her. She did not stick at murder; but nothing would have induced her to pass by a temple without a proper reverence. This feeling quickened her insight into an aspect of the matter which her companion had failed to observe.

"You will buy the houses which you will have to pull down?" she said.

"Certainly," the Emperor replied; "that will be an easy matter."

"But there are buildings which it will not be easy to buy."

The scowl showed itself again on Nero's face.

"Who will refuse to sell when I want to buy?" he cried. "And besides, you may be sure that I shall not stint the price."

"True, Sire, but there are the temples, the chapels; they cannot be bought and sold as if they were private houses."

Nero started up from his couch, and paced the room several times. He could not refuse to see the difficulty. Holy places were not to be bought and pulled down as if they were nothing but so many bricks and stones.

"What say you, Tigellinus?" he cried after a few minutes of silence. "Cannot the Emperor do what he will? Cannot the priests or the augurs, or some one smooth the way? Speak, man!" he went on impatiently, as the minister did not answer at once.

"The gods forbid that I should presume to limit your power!" said Tigellinus. "But yet—may I speak freely?"

"Freely!" cried Nero; "of course. When did I ever resent the truth?"

Tigellinus repressed a smile. His own rise was certainly not due to speaking the truth. He went on:—

"One sacred building, or two, or even three, might be dealt with when some great improvement was in question. That has been done before, and might be done again, but when it comes to a matter of fifty or sixty, or even a hundred,—very likely there are more, for they stand very thick in the old city,—the affair becomes serious. I don't say it would be impossible, but there would be delay, possibly a very long delay. The people feel very strongly on these things. Some of these temples are held in extraordinary reverence, places that you, Sire, may very likely have never heard of, but which are visited by hundreds daily. To sweep them away in any peremptory fashion would be dangerous. There would have to be ceremonies, expiations, and all the thousand things which the priests invent."

"Well," exclaimed the Emperor after a pause, "what is to be done?"

"Sire," replied Tigellinus, "cannot you modify your plan? Much might be done without this wholesale destruction."

"Modify it!" thundered the Emperor. "Certainly not. It shall be all or nothing. Do you think that I am going

to take all this trouble, and accomplish, after all, nothing more than what any ædile could have done?"

He threw himself down on the couch and buried his face in the cushions. The Empress and the Minister watched and waited in serious disquiet. There was no knowing what wild resolve he might take. That he had set his heart to no common degree on this new scheme was evident. In all his life he had never given so much serious thought to any subject as he had to this, and disappointment would probably result in some dangerous outburst. After about half an hour had passed, he started up.

"I have it," he cried; "it shall be done,—the plan, the whole plan."

"Sire, will you deign to tell us what inspiration the gods have given you?" said Tigellinus.

"All in good time," said the Emperor. "When I want your help I will tell you what it is needful for you to know. But now it is time for my harp practice. You will dine with us, Tigellinus, and for pity's sake bring some one who can give us some amusement. Antium is delightful in the daytime, but the evenings! . . ."

"Madam," said Tigellinus, when the Emperor had left the room, "have you any idea what he is thinking of?"

"I have absolutely none," replied Poppæa; "but I fear it may be something very strange. I noticed a dangerous light in his eyes. It has been there often lately. Do you

think," she went on in a low voice, "there is any danger of his going mad? You know about his uncle Caius."[3]

"Don't trouble yourself with such fears," replied Tigellinus. "It is not likely. His mother had the coolest head of any woman that I have ever seen; and his father, whatever he was, was certainly not mad. And now, if you will excuse me, I have some business to attend to."

He saluted the Empress and withdrew. Poppæa, little reassured by his words, remained buried in thought,—thought that was full of disquietude and alarm. She had gained all, and even more than all, that she had aimed at. She shared Nero's throne, not in name only, but in fact. But how dangerous was the height to which she had climbed! A single false step might precipitate her into an abyss which she shuddered to think of. He had spared no one, however near and dear to him. If his mood should change, would he spare her? And his mood might change. At present he loved her as ardently, she thought, as ever. But—for she watched him closely, as a keeper watches a wild beast—she could not help seeing that he was growing more and more restless and irritable. Once he had even lifted his hand against her. It was only a gesture, and checked almost in its beginning, but she could not forget it. "Oh!" she moaned to herself,—for, wicked as she was, she was a woman after all,—"Oh, if only my little darling had lived! Nero loved her so, and she would have softened him. But it was not to be! Why did I allow them to do all these foolish idolatries? And yet, how could I stop it? Still, I am sure that God was angry with me about

[3] The fourth Emperor, commonly called Caligula.

them, and took the child away from me. And now there are these new troubles. I will send another offering to Jerusalem. This time it shall be a whole bunch of grapes for the golden vine."[4]

Poor creature! the thought of a sacrifice of justice and mercy never entered into her soul.

[4] Poppæa's child died before it was four months old. Nero welcomed the birth with extravagant delight. Among the honours with which he celebrated it was the erection of a temple to the goddess of Fertility. Poppæa is known to have had a strong leaning to the Jewish faith, or to speak more exactly, a strong liking for Jewish practices. Hence the curiously inappropriate epithet, which, as has been said, Josephus applies to her.

CHAPTER II

THE HATCHING OF A PLOT

On the very day of the meeting described in my last chapter, a party of six friends was gathered together in the dining-room—I should rather say one of the dining-rooms—of a country house at Tibur. The view commanded by the window of the apartment was singularly lovely. Immediately below, the hillside, richly wooded with elm and chestnut, and here and there a towering pine, sloped down to the lower course of the river Anio. Beyond the river were meadow-lands, green with the unfailing moisture of the soil, and orchards in which the rich fruit was already gathering a golden hue. The magnificent falls of the river were in full view, but not so near as to make the roar of the descending water inconveniently loud. At the moment, the almost level rays of the setting sun illumined with a golden light that was indescribably beautiful the cloud of spray that rose from the pool in which the falling waters were received. It was an effect that was commonly watched with intense interest by visitors to the villa, for, indeed, it was just one of the beauties of nature which a Roman knew how to appreciate. Landscape, especially of the wilder sort, he did not care about; but the loveliness

of a foreground, the greenery of a rich meadow, the deep shade of a wood, the clear water bubbling from a spring or leaping from a rock, these he could admire to the utmost. But on the present occasion the attention of the guests had been otherwise occupied. They had been listening to a recitation from their host. To listen to a recitation was often a price which guests paid for their entertainment, and paid somewhat unwillingly and even ungraciously. Rich dishes and costly wines, the rarest of flowers, and the most precious of perfumes were not very cheaply purchased by two hours of boredom from some dull oration or yet duller poem. There was no such feeling among the guests who were now assembled in this Tibur villa. The entertainment, indeed, had been simple and frugal, such as it befitted a young disciple of the Stoic school to give to a party of like-minded friends. But the intellectual entertainment that followed when the tables were removed[5] had been a treat of the most delightful kind. This may be readily understood when I say that the host of the evening was Lucan, and that he had been reciting from his great poem of the *Pharsalia* the description of the battle from which it took its name. To modern readers of Latin literature who find their standard of excellence in Virgil and Horace, the *Pharsalia* sounds artificial and turgid. But it suited the taste of that age, all the more from the very qualities which make it less acceptable to us. And, beyond all doubt, it lent itself admirably to recitation. A modern reader often thinks it rhetoric

[5] "Removed" is the right word rather than "cleared." The actual tables were taken away. "Table," in Latin, in fact means a "course" of a meal, as well as that on which it was served.

rather than poetry. But the rhetoric was undeniably effective, especially when set off by the author's fiery declamation, and when the recitation came to an end with the well-known lines:—

> "Italian fields of death, the blood-stained wave
> That swept Sicilian shores, and that dark day
> That reddened Actium's rocks, have wrought such woe,
> Philippi's self seems guiltless by compare."[6]

It was followed by a round of genuine, even enthusiastic applause. When the applause had subsided there was an interval of silence that was scarcely less complimentary to the poet. This was broken at last by a remark from Licinius, a young soldier who had lately been serving against the Parthians under the great Corbulo, for many years the indefatigable and invincible guardian of the Eastern frontier of the Empire.

"Lucan," he said, "would you object to repeat a few lines which occurred in your description of the sacrifices on either side before the beginning of the battle? We heard how all the omens were manifestly unfavourable to Pompey, and then there followed something that struck me very much about the prayers and vows of Cæsar."

"I know what you mean," replied the poet; "I will repeat them with pleasure. They run thus:—

[6] A free translation of the last two lines of C. VIII.

> Hesperiæ clades et flebilis unda Pachyni,
> Et Mutina, et Leucas puros fecere Philippos.

" 'But what dark thrones, what Furies of the pit,
Cæsar, didst thou invoke? The wicked hand
That waged with pitiless sword such impious war
Not to the heavens was lifted, but to Gods
That rule the nether world and Powers that veil
Their maddening presence in Eternal night.' "

"Exactly so," said Licinius. "Those were the lines I meant. But will you recite this in public? How will Nero, who, after all, is the heir of Cæsar, and enjoys the harvests reaped at Mutina, and Actium, and Philippi, how will Nero relish such language?"

"He is not likely to hear it. In fact, he has forbidden me to recite. He does not like rivals," he added with an air of indescribable scorn.

"Indeed," said the young soldier; "then you have seen reason to change your opinions. I remember having the great pleasure of hearing you read your first book. I was just about to start to join my legion. It must have been about two years ago. I can't exactly recollect the lines, but you mentioned, I remember, Munda, and Mutina, and Actium, and then went on:—

" 'Yet great the debt our Roman fortunes owe
To civil strife, if this its end, to make
Great Nero lord of men. . . .' "

The other guests grew hot and cold at the more than military frankness with which their companion taxed their host with inconsistency. The inconsistency was notorious enough; but now that the poet had

abandoned his flatteries and definitely ranged himself with the opposition, what need to recall it?

Lucan could not restrain the blush that rose to his cheek, but he was ready with his answer.

"The Nero of to-day is not the Nero of three years ago, for it was then that I wrote those lines."

"Yet even then," whispered another of the guests to his neighbour, "he had murdered his brother and his mother."

A somewhat awkward silence followed. Subrius, a tribune of the Prætorians, broke it by addressing himself to Licinius.

"Licinius," he cried, "tell our friends what you were describing to me the other day."

"You mean," said Licinius, "the ceremony of Tiridates' submission?"

"Exactly," replied Subrius.

"Well," resumed the other, "it was certainly a sight that was well worth seeing. A more magnificent army than the Parthian's never was. How the King could have given in without fighting I cannot imagine, except that Corbulo fairly frightened him. I could hardly have believed that there were so many horse-soldiers in the world. But there they were, squadron after squadron, lancers, and archers, and swordsmen, each tribe with its own device, a serpent, or an eagle, or a star, or the crescent moon, till the eye could hardly reach to the last of them. The legions were ranged on the three sides of a hollow square, with a platform in the centre, and

on the platform an image of the Emperor, seated on a throne of gold."

"A truly Egyptian deity!" muttered the poet to himself.

"King Tiridates," the soldier went on, "after sacrificing, came up, and kneeling on one knee, laid his crown at the feet of the statue."

"Noble sight again!" whispered Lucan to his neighbour. "A man bowing down before a beast."

"And Corbulo?" asked one of the guests, Lateranus by name, who had not hitherto spoken. "How did he bear himself on this occasion?"

"As modestly as the humblest centurion in the army," replied Licinius.

"Yes, it was a glorious triumph for Rome," said Subrius the Prætorian; "but—"

He paused, and looked with a meaning glance at Lateranus.

Lateranus, who was sitting by the side of Lucan (indeed, it was to him that the poet had whispered his irreverent comments on the ceremony by the Euphrates), rose from his seat. The new speaker was a striking figure, if only on account of his huge stature and strength. But he had other claims to distinction; after a foolish and profligate youth, he had begun to take life seriously.

"Will you excuse me?" he said to the host, and walking to the door opened it, examined the passage

that led to it, locked another door at the further end, and then returned to his place.

"Walls have ears," he said, "but these, as far as I can judge, are deaf. We can all keep a secret, my friends?" he went on, looking round at the company.

"To the death, if need be," cried Lucan.

The four other guests murmured assent.

"We may very likely be called upon to make good our words. If any one is of a doubtful mind, let him draw back in time."

"Go on; we are all resolved," was the unanimous answer of the company.

"Did there seem nothing strange to you when our friend Licinius told us of the Parthian king laying his crown at the feet of Nero's statue? What has Nero done that he should receive such gifts? Our armies defend with their bodies the frontiers of Euphrates and the Rhine? They toil through Scythian snows and African sands. And for what? Who reaps the rewards of their valour and their toil? Why, this harp-player, this buffoon, who sets the trivial crowns which reward the victories of the stage above all the glories of Rome. And why? Because, forsooth, he is the grandson of Julia the adulteress! I acknowledge the greatness of Julius, of Augustus, even of Tiberius. It was not unworthy of Romans, if the gods denied them liberty, to be ruled by such men. But Caius the madman, and Claudius the pedant,—did some doubtful drops of Imperial blood entitle them to be masters of the human race? And

Nero, murderer of his brother, his mother, his wife, how much longer is he going to pollute with riot and bloodshed the holy places of Rome? If a Brutus could be found to strike down the great dictator, will no one dare to inflict the vengeance of gods and men on this profligate boy?"

"The man and the sword will not be wanting when the proper time shall come," said Subrius the Prætorian in a tone of grim resolve. "But Rome must have a ruler. When we shall have rid her of this tyrant, who is to succeed?"

"Why not restore the Republic?" cried Lucan. "We have a Senate, we have Consuls, and all the old machinery of the Government of freedom. The great Augustus left these things, it would seem, of set purpose, against the day when they might be wanted again."

"The Republic is impossible," cried Subrius; "even more impossible than it was a hundred years ago. What is the Senate but an assembly of worn-out nobles and cowardly and time-serving capitalists? I know there are exceptions; one of them is here to-night," he went on with a bow to Lateranus; "and there is Thrasea, who, I know, will make one of us, as soon as he knows what we are meditating. But the Senate as a whole is incapable. And the people, where is that to be found? Certainly not in this mob that cares for nothing but its dole of bread, its gladiators, and its chariot-races. No; the Republic is a dream. Rome must have a master. The gods send her one who is righteous as well as strong."

"What say you of Corbulo, Licinius?" asked Sulpicius

Asper, a captain of the Prætorians, who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation. "His record is not altogether spotless. But he is a great soldier, and one might conjure with his name. And then his presence is magnificent, and the people love a stately figure. Do you think that the thought has ever crossed his mind?"

"Corbulo," replied Licinius, "is a soldier, and nothing but a soldier. And he is absolutely devoted to the Emperor. I remember how ill he took it when some one at his table said something that sounded like censure. 'Silence!' he thundered. 'Emperors and gods are above praise and dispraise.' I verily believe that if Nero bade him kill himself he would plunge his sword into his breast without a murmur. No, it is idle to think of Corbulo. In fact he is one of the great difficulties that we should have to reckon with. Happily he is far off, and the business will be done before he hears of it."

"There is Verginius on the Rhine," said Subrius. "What of him?"

"An able man, none abler, if he will only consent."

"And Sulpicius Galba in Spain. What of him?"

"He is half worn-out," said Lateranus; "but he has the advantage of being one of the best born men in Rome. And the old names have not yet lost their power."

"Why not a philosopher?" asked Lucan after a pause. "Plato thought that philosophers were the fittest men to rule the world."

"Are you thinking of your uncle Seneca?" asked Lateranus. "For my part I think that it would be a pity

to take him away from his books; and to speak the truth, if I may do so without offence, Seneca, though he is beyond doubt one of the greatest ornaments of Rome, has not played the part of an Emperor's teacher[7] with such success that we could hope very much from him, were he Emperor himself."

"There are, and indeed must be, objections to every name," said Licinius after a pause. "The soldiers will take it ill if the dignity should go to a civilian; and if the choice falls on a soldier, then all the other soldiers will be jealous. Tell me, Subrius, would you Prætorians be content if the legions were to choose an Emperor?"

Subrius shrugged his shoulders.

"As for the armies of the East," Licinius went on, "I know how fiercely they would resent dictation from the West! Our friend Asper here, who, if I remember right, has been aide-de-camp to Verginius, knows whether the German legions would be more disposed to submit to a mandate from the Euphrates. What say you, Asper?"

Asper could do nothing better than imitate the action of his superior officer.

Licinius went on: "I am a soldier myself, and can therefore speak more freely on this subject. We have to choose between evils. Jealousy between one great army and another can scarcely fail to end in war. The general discontent of all the armies, if a civilian succeeds to the throne, will be less acute, and therefore less dangerous. What say you to Calpurnius Piso?"

[7] Seneca, in conjunction with Burrus, commander of the Prætorians, was tutor to Nero for many years.

"At least," cried Lucan, "he has the merit of not being a philosopher."

There was a general laugh at this sally. Piso was a noted *bon vivant* and man of fashion, and generally as unlike a philosopher in his habits and ways of life as could be conceived.

"Exactly so," said Licinius, undisturbed by the remark; "and this, strange as it may seem, is one of the qualities which commend him to those who look at things as they are, and not as they ought to be. This is not the time for Consuls who leave their ploughs to put on the robes of office. The age is not equal to such simple virtues. It wants magnificence; it demands that its heroes should be well-dressed and drive fine horses and keep up a splendid establishment. It is not averse to a reputation for luxury. Piso has such a reputation, and I must own that it does not do him injustice. But he is a man of honour, and he has some solid and many showy qualities. He has noble birth; a pedigree that shows an ancestor who fought at Cannæ is more than respectable. He is eloquent, he is wealthy, but can give with a liberal hand as well as spend, and he has the gift of winning hearts. And then he is bold. We may look long, my friends, before we find a better man than Piso."

"There is a great deal of truth in what you say; more truth than it is pleasant to acknowledge," said Lateranus. "But we must weigh this matter seriously. Meanwhile, will Piso join us?"

"I feel as certain of it as I could be of any matter not absolutely within my knowledge," replied Licinius.

"Will you authorize me to sound him? Whether he agree or not, I can guarantee his silence."

Many other matters and men were discussed; and before the party separated it was arranged that each of the six friends should choose one person to be enrolled in the undertaking.