

SUETONIUS

THE LIVES OF THE
TWELVE CAESARS

INTRODUCTION BY JOSEPH GAVORSE



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on him which were too great for mortal man: a golden throne in the House and on the judgment seat; a chariot and litter¹ in the procession at the circus; temples, altars, and statues beside those of the Gods; a special priest, an additional college of the Luperi, and the calling of one of the months by his name. In fact, there were no honors which he did not receive or confer at pleasure.

He held his third and fourth consulships in name only, content with the power of the dictatorship conferred on him at the same time as the consulships. Moreover, in both years he substituted two Consuls for himself for the last three months, in the meantime holding no elections except for Tribunes and plebeian Aediles, and appointing Praefects instead of the Praetors, to manage the affairs of the city during his absence. When one of the Consuls suddenly died the day before the Kalends of January, he gave the vacant office for a few hours to a man who asked for it. With the same disregard of law and precedent he named magistrates for several years to come, bestowed the emblems of consular rank on ten ex-Praetors, and admitted to the House men who had been given citizenship, and in some cases even half-civilized Gauls. He assigned the charge of the mint and of the public revenues to his own slaves, and gave the oversight and command of the three legions which he had left at Alexandria to a favorite boy of his called Rufio, son of one of his freedmen.

No less arrogant were his public utterances, which Titus Ampius² records: that the Republic was a name only, without substance or reality; that Sulla did not know his A. B. C. when he laid down his dictatorship; that men ought now to be more circumspect in addressing him, and to regard his word as law. So far did he go in his presumption, that when a soothsayer pronounced to him the direful omen that a victim sacrificed was without a heart, he said: "The more favorable when I please. It ought not to be a miracle if a beast have no heart."

But it was the following action in particular that roused deadly hatred against him. When the Senate approached him

¹ For carrying an image of him among those of the Gods.

² Titus Ampius Balbus, the friend of Cicero and one of the supporters of Pompey whom Caesar pardoned after the civil war.

in a body with many highly honorary decrees, he received them before the temple of Venus Genetrix without rising. Some think that when he attempted to get up, he was held back by Cornelius Balbus; others, that he made no such move at all, but on the contrary frowned angrily on Gaius Trebatius when he suggested that he should rise. This action of his seemed the more intolerable, because when he himself in one of his triumphal processions rode past the benches of the Tribunes, he was so incensed because one of their number, Pontius Aquila by name, did not rise, that he cried: "Come then, Aquila, mighty Tribune, and take from me the Republic," and for several days afterwards, he would promise a favor to no one without adding, "That is, if Pontius Aquila will give me leave."

To an insult which so plainly showed his contempt for the Senate he added an act of even greater insolence. After the sacred rites of the Latin Festival, as he was returning to the city, amid the extravagant and unprecedented demonstrations of the populace, some one in the press placed on his statue a laurel wreath with a white fillet¹ tied to it. When Epidius Marullus and Caesetius Flavus, Tribunes of the Commons, gave orders that the ribbon be removed from the crown and the man taken off to prison, Caesar sharply rebuked and deposed them, either offended that the hint at regal power had been received with so little favor, or, as was said, that he had been robbed of the glory of refusing it. But from that time on he could not rid himself of the odium of having aspired to the title of monarch, although he replied to the Commons, when they hailed him as King, "I am Caesar and not King." At the Lupercalia,² when the Consul Antony several times attempted to place a crown upon his head as he spoke from the rostra, he put it aside and at last sent it to the Capitol, to be offered to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Nay, more, the

¹ Emblematic of royalty.

² An orgiastic festival in February in honor of the Lycaen Pan, identified by the Romans with Faunus. During the solemnity, the Luperi, priests of that god, ran naked in the streets, striking those they met with goat-skin thongs, particularly married women, who were thereby supposed to be rendered fecund.

report had spread in various quarters that he intended to move to Ilium¹ or Alexandria, taking with him the resources of the state, draining Italy by levies, and leaving it and the charge of the city to his friends; also that at the next meeting of the Senate Lucius Cotta would announce as the decision of the Fifteen,² that inasmuch as it was written in the books of fate that the Parthians could be conquered only by a King, Caesar should be given that title.

In order to avoid giving assent to this proposal the conspirators hastened the execution of their designs. Therefore the plots which had previously been formed separately, often by groups of two or three, were united in a general conspiracy, since even the populace no longer were pleased with present conditions, but both secretly and openly rebelled at his tyranny and cried out for defenders of their liberty. On the admission of foreigners to the Senate, a placard was posted: "God bless the Commonwealth! Let no one consent to point out the House to a newly made Senator." The following verses too were repeated everywhere:—

"The Gauls he dragged in triumph through the town
Caesar has brought into the Senate house
And changed their breeches for the purple gown."

When Quintus Maximus, whom he had appointed Consul in his place for three months, was entering the theater, and his Lictor in the usual manner called attention to his arrival, a general shout was raised: "He's no Consul!" After the removal of Caesetius and Marullus from office as Tribunes, they were bound to have not a few votes at the next elections of Consuls. Some wrote on the base of Lucius Brutus's statue, "Oh, that you were still alive"; and on that of Caesar himself:

"Because he drove from Rome the royal race
Brutus was first made Consul in their place.
This man, because he put the Consuls down,
Has been rewarded with a royal crown."

¹ A city where Troy stood.

² The college of fifteen priests who inspected and expounded the Sybilline books.

More than sixty joined the conspiracy against him, led by Gaius Cassius and Marcus and Decimus Brutus. At first they hesitated whether to form two divisions at the elections in the Campus Martius, so that while some hurled him from the bridge¹ as he summoned the tribes to vote, the rest might wait below and slay him; or to set upon him in the Sacred Way or at the entrance to the theater. When, however, a meeting of the Senate was called for the Ides² of March in the Hall of Pompey, they readily gave that time and place the preference.

Now Caesar's approaching murder was foretold to him by unmistakable signs. A few months before, when the settlers assigned to the colony at Capua by the Julian Law were demolishing some tombs of great antiquity, to build country houses, and plied their work with the greater vigor because as they rummaged about they found a quantity of vases of ancient workmanship, there was discovered in a tomb, which was said to be that of Capys, the founder of Capua, a bronze tablet, inscribed with Greek words and characters to this effect: "Whenever the bones of Capys shall be discovered, it will come to pass that a descendant of his shall be slain at the hands of his kindred, and presently avenged at heavy cost to Italy." And let no one think this tale a myth or a lie, for it is vouched for by Cornelius Balbus, an intimate friend of Caesar. Shortly before his death, as he was told, the herds of horses which he had dedicated to the river Rubicon when he crossed it, and had let loose without a keeper, stubbornly refused to graze and wept copiously. Again, when he was offering sacrifice, the soothsayer Spurinna warned him to beware of danger, which would come not later than the Ides of March. On the day before the Ides of that month a little bird called the king-bird flew into the Hall of Pompey with a sprig of laurel, pursued by others of various kinds from the grove hard by, which tore it to pieces in the hall. In fact the very night before his murder he dreamt now that he was flying above the clouds, and now that he was clasping the

¹ A temporary bridge of planks over which the voters passed one by one to cast their ballots.

² The 15th of March, May, July, and October; the 13th of every other month.

hand of Jupiter; and his wife Calpurnia thought that the pediment of their house fell, and that her husband was stabbed in her arms; and on a sudden the door of the room flew open of its own accord.

Both for these reasons and because of poor health he hesitated for a long time whether to stay at home and put off what he had planned to do in the Senate. But at last, urged by Decimus Brutus not to disappoint the full meeting, which had for some time been waiting for him, he went forth almost at the end of the fifth hour.¹ When a note revealing the plot was handed him by some one on the way, he put it with others which he held in his left hand, intending to read them presently. Then, after many victims had been slain, and he could not get favorable omens, he entered the House in defiance of portents, laughing at Spurinna and calling him a false prophet, because the Ides of March were come without bringing him harm. Spurinna replied that they had of a truth come, but they had not gone.

As he took his seat, the conspirators gathered about him as if to pay their respects, and straightway Tillius Cimber, who had assumed the lead, came nearer as though to ask something. When Caesar with a gesture put him off to another time, Cimber caught his toga by both shoulders. As Caesar cried, "Why, this is violence!" one of the Cascas stabbed him from one side just below the throat. Caesar caught Casca's arm and ran it through with his stylus,² but as he tried to leap to his feet, he was stopped by another wound. When he saw that he was beset on every side by drawn daggers, he muffled his head in his robe, and at the same time drew down its lap³ to his feet with his left hand, in order to fall more decently, with the lower part of his body also covered. And in this wise he was stabbed with three and twenty wounds, uttering not a word, but merely a groan at the first stroke, though some have written that when Marcus Brutus rushed at him, he

¹ Eleven in the morning.

² Used for writing on wax tablets. The Romans also wrote on parchment with pens of sharpened reed split at the point. For ink they used the black liquid emitted by the cuttle fish.

³ The part worn over the shoulder or tucked up slack above the waist.

said in Greek, "You too, my child?" All the conspirators made off, and he lay there lifeless for some time, until finally three common slaves put him on a litter and carried him home, with one arm hanging down. And of so many wounds none, in the opinion of the physician Antistius, would have proved mortal except the second one in the breast.

The conspirators had intended after slaying him to drag his body to the Tiber, confiscate his property, and revoke his decrees. But they forebore through fear of Marcus Antonius, the Consul, and Lepidus, the master of horse.

At the request of his father-in-law, Lucius Piso, his will was opened and read in Antony's house. He had made it on the Ides of the preceding September at his villa near Lavicum, and committed it to the care of the chief Vestal Virgin. Quintus Tubero states that from his first consulship until the beginning of the civil war it was his wont to write down Gnaeus Pompeius as his heir, and to read this to the assembled soldiers. In his last will, however, he named three heirs, the grandsons of his sisters, namely: Gaius Octavius,¹ to three-fourths of his estate, and Lucius Pinarius and Quintus Pedius to share the remainder. At the end of the will, too, he adopted Gaius Octavius into his family and gave him his name. Several of his assassins were named among the guardians of his son, in case one should be born to him, and Decimus Brutus even among his heirs in the second degree.² To the people he left his gardens near the Tiber for their common use and three hundred sesterces to each man.³

When the funeral was announced, a pyre was erected in the Campus Martius near the tomb of Julia. On the rostra was placed a gilded shrine, made after the model of the temple of Venus Genetrix. Within was a bier of ivory with coverlets of purple and gold, and at its head a pillar hung with the robe in which he was slain. Since it was clear that the day would not be long enough for those who offered gifts, they were directed

¹ Who became Augustus.

² To inherit a share of his estate in the event of the death of the heirs in the first degree or their refusal to accept the inheritance. It was often no more than a final courtesy.

³ \$12.30.

to bring them to the Campus by whatsoever streets of the city they wished, regardless of any order of precedence.¹ At the funeral games, to rouse pity and indignation at his death, these words from the "Contest for the Arms" of Pacuvius were sung:—

"Saved I these men that they might murder me?"

and words of a like purport from the "Electra" of Atilius. Instead of a eulogy the Consul Antonius caused a herald to recite the decree of the Senate in which it had voted Caesar all divine and human honors at once, and likewise the oath with which they had all pledged themselves to watch over his personal safety; to which he added a very few words of his own. The bier on the rostra was carried to the Forum by magistrates and ex-magistrates. While some were urging that it be burned in the temple of Jupiter of the Capitol, and others in the Hall of Pompey, on a sudden two beings with swords by their sides and brandishing a pair of darts set fire to it with blazing torches, and at once the throng of bystanders heaped upon it dry branches, the judgment seats with the benches, and whatever else could serve as an offering. Then the musicians and actors tore off their robes, which they had taken from the equipment of his triumphs and put on for the occasion, rent them to bits and threw them into the flames, and the veterans of the legions the arms with which they had adorned themselves for the funeral. Many of the women, too, offered up the jewels which they wore and the amulets and robes of their children.

At the height of the public grief a throng of foreigners went about lamenting each after the fashion of his country, above all the Jews,² who even flocked to the place for several successive nights.

The populace, with torches in their hands, ran from the

¹ The usual order on such occasions was: Magistrates and Senators without their badges and robes of dignity; Knights in mourning; soldiers carrying the points of their weapons downwards; commons, marshaled according to tribe.

² Caesar was beloved by the Jews, not only because he had overthrown Pompey, who had violated their Holy of Holies, but because of many acts of kindness besides.

funeral to the houses of Brutus and Cassius and after being repelled with difficulty, they slew Helvius Cinna when they met him, through a mistake in the name, supposing that he was Cornelius Cinna, who had the day before made a bitter indictment of Caesar and for whom they were looking; and they set his head upon a spear and paraded it about the streets. Afterwards they set up in the Forum a solid column of Numidian marble almost twenty feet high, and inscribed upon it, "To the Father of his Country." At the foot of this they continued for a long time to sacrifice, make vows, and settle some of their disputes by an oath in the name of Caesar.

Caesar left in the minds of some of his friends the suspicion that he did not wish to live any longer and had taken no precautions, because of his failing health; and that therefore he neglected the warnings which came to him from portents and from the reports of his friends. Some think that it was because he had full trust in that last decree of the Senators and their oath that he dismissed even the armed bodyguard of Spanish soldiers that formerly attended him. Others, on the contrary, believe that he elected to expose himself once for all to the plots that threatened him on every hand, rather than to be always anxious and on his guard. Some, too, say that he was wont to declare that it was not so much to his own interest as to that of his country that he remain alive. He had long since had his fill of power and glory. But if aught befell him, the commonwealth would have no peace, and, involved in another civil war, would be in a worse state than before.

About one thing almost all are fully agreed, that his death was in many respects such as he would have chosen. For once when he read in Xenophon how Cyrus in his last illness gave directions for his funeral, he expressed his horror of such a lingering kind of end and his wish for one which was swift and sudden. And the day before his murder, in a conversation which arose at a dinner at the house of Marcus Lepidus, as to what manner of death was most to be desired, he had given his preference to one which was sudden and unexpected.

He died in the fifty-sixth year of his age, and was numbered among the Gods, not only by a formal decree, but also in the conviction of the vulgar. For at the first of the games

which his heir Augustus gave in honor of his apotheosis, a comet shone for seven successive days, rising about the eleventh hour,¹ and was believed to be the soul of Caesar, who had been taken to heaven. This is why a star is set upon the crown of his head in his statue.

It was voted that the hall in which he was slain be walled up, that the Ides of March be called the Day of Parricide, and that a meeting of the Senate should never be called on that day.

Hardly any of his assassins survived him for more than three years, or died a natural death. They were all condemned, and they perished in various ways—some by shipwreck, some in battle; and some took their own lives with the self-same dagger with which they had impiously slain Caesar.

¹ About an hour before sunset.

BOOK II

OCTAVIUS AUGUSTUS