

**JACOB  
ABBOTT**



**NERO**

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**Jacob Abbott**

# **Nero**

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ENVIRONS OF ROME.

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## PREFACE.

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In writing the series of historical narratives to which the present work pertains, it has been the object of the author to furnish to the reading community of this country an accurate and faithful account of the lives and actions of the several personages that are made successively the subjects of the volumes, following precisely the story which has come down to us from ancient times. The writer has spared no pains to gain access in all cases to the original sources of information, and has confined himself strictly to them. The reader may, therefore, feel assured in perusing any one of these works, that the interest of it is in no degree indebted to the invention of the author. No incident, however trivial, is ever added to the original account, nor are any words even, in any case, attributed to a speaker without express authority. Whatever of interest, therefore, these stories may

possess, is due solely to the facts themselves which are recorded in them, and to their being brought together in a plain, simple, and connected narrative.

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## ENGRAVINGS.

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**NERO**



## CHAPTER I.

### NERO'S MOTHER.

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### A.D. 37

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In ancient times, when the city of Rome *Roman country* was at the height of its power and *seats*. splendor, it was the custom, as it is in fact now with the inhabitants of wealthy capitals, for the principal families to possess, in addition to their city residences, rural villas for summer retreats, which they built in picturesque situations, at a little distance from the city, sometimes in the interior of the country, and sometimes upon the sea-shore. There were many attractive places of resort of this nature in the neighborhood of Rome. Among them was Antium.

Antium was situated on the sea-coast *Antium*. about thirty miles south of the Tiber. A *Situation of the* bold promontory here projects into the *promontory of* sea, affording from its declivities the most *Antium*. extended and magnificent views on every side. On the north, looking from the promontory of Antium, the eye follows the line of the coast away to the mouth of the Tiber; while, on the south, the view is terminated, at about the same distance, by the promontory of Circe, which is the second cape, or promontory, that marks the shore of Italy in going southward from Rome. Toward the interior, from

Antium, there extends a broad and beautiful plain, bounded by wooded hills toward the shore, and by ranges of mountains in the distance beyond. On the southern side of the cape, and sheltered by it, was a small harbor where vessels from all the neighboring seas had been accustomed to bring in their cargoes, or to seek shelter in storms, from time immemorial. In fact, Antium, in point of antiquity, takes precedence, probably, even of Rome.

The beauty and the salubrity of Antium made it a very attractive place of summer resort for the people of Rome; and in process of time, when the city attained to an advanced stage of opulence and luxury, the Roman noblemen built villas there, choosing situations, in some instances, upon the natural terraces and esplanades of the promontory, which looked off over the sea, and in others cool and secluded retreats in the valleys, on the land. It was in one of these villas that Nero was born.

Nero's father belonged to a family *Account of* which had enjoyed for several generations *Nero's* a considerable degree of distinction *parentage.* among the Roman nobility, though known *Brazenbeard.* by a somewhat whimsical name. The family name was Brazenbeard, or, to speak more exactly, it was Ahenobarbus, which is the Latin equivalent for that word. It is a question somewhat difficult to decide, whether in speaking of Nero's father at the present time, and in the English tongue, we should make use of the actual Latin name, or translate the word and employ the English representative of it; that is, whether we shall call him Ahenobarbus or Brazenbeard. The former seems to be more

in harmony with our ideas of the dignity of Roman history; while the latter, though less elegant, conveys probably to our minds a more exact idea of the import and expression of the name as it sounded in the ears of the Roman community. The name certainly was not an attractive one, though the family had contrived to dignify it some degree by assigning to it a preternatural origin. There was a tradition that in ancient times a prophet appeared to one of the ancestors of the line, and after foretelling certain extraordinary events which were to occur at some future period, stroked down the beard of his auditor with his hand, and changed it to the color of brass, in miraculous attestation of the divine authority of the message. The man received the name of Brazenbeard in consequence, and he and his descendants ever afterward retained it.

The family of the Brazenbeards was one *Nero's father* of high rank and distinction, though at the *Agrippina his* time of Nero's birth it was, like most of the *mother* other prominent Roman families, extremely profligate and corrupt. Nero's father, especially, was a very bad man. He was accused of the very worst of crimes, and he led a life of constant remorse and terror. His wife, Agrippina, Nero's mother, was as wicked as he; and it is said that when the messenger came to him to announce the birth of his child, the hero of this narrative, he uttered some exclamation of ill-humor and contempt, and said that whatever came from him and Agrippina could not but be fraught with ruin to Rome.

The rank and station of Agrippina in *Agrippina's* Roman society was even higher than that *brother* *Caligula*.

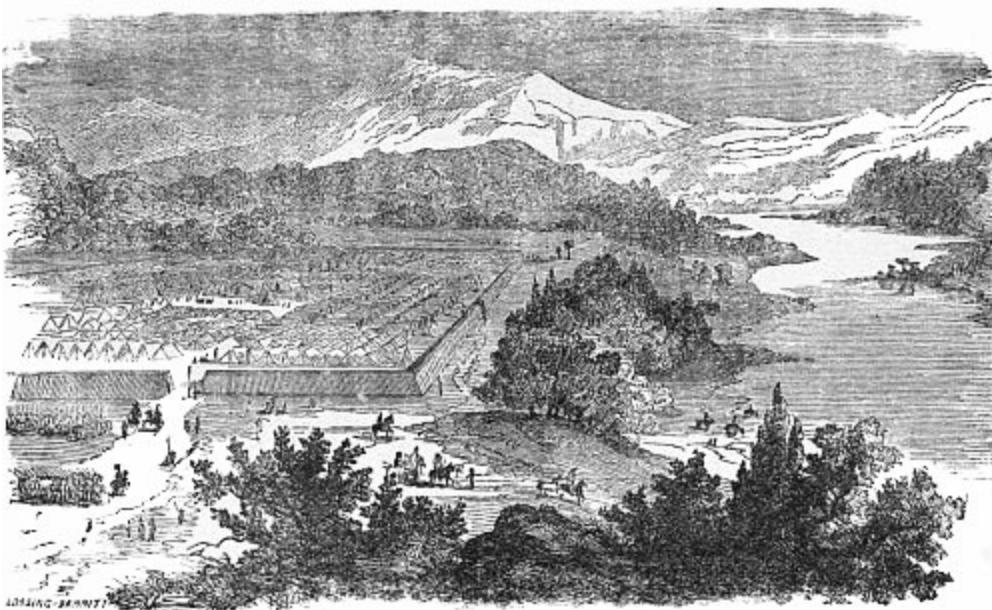
of her husband. She was the sister of the *Roman* emperor. The name of the emperor, her *emperors*. brother, was Caligula. He was the third in the series of Roman emperors, Augustus Cæsar, the successor of Julius Cæsar, having been the first. The term emperor, however, had a very different meaning in those days, from its present import. It seems to denote now a sovereign ruler, who exercises officially a general jurisdiction which extends over the whole government of the state. In the days of the Romans it included, in theory at least, only *military* command. The word was *imperator*, which meant *commander*; and the station which it denoted was simply that of general-in-chief over the military forces of the republic.

In the early periods of the Roman *Regulations in* history, every possible precaution was *respect to the* taken to keep the military power in a *Roman armies*. condition of very strict subordination to the authority of the civil magistrate and of law. Very stringent regulations were adopted to secure this end. No portion of the army, except such small detachments as were required for preserving order within the walls, was allowed to approach the city. Great commanders, in returning from their victorious campaigns, were obliged to halt and encamp at some distance from the gates, and there await the orders of the Roman Senate. The *Senate* was, in theory, the great repository of political power. This Senate was not, however, as the word might seem in modern times to denote, a well-defined and compact body of legislators, designated individually to the office, but rather a class of hereditary

nobles, very numerous, and deriving their power from immemorial usage, and from that strange and unaccountable feeling of deference and awe with which the mass of mankind always look up to an established, and especially an ancient, aristocracy. The Senate were accustomed to convene at stated times, in assemblages which were, sometimes, conducted with a proper degree of formality and order, and sometimes on the other hand, exhibited scenes of great tumult and confusion. Their power, however, whether regularly or irregularly exercised, was supreme. They issued edicts, they enacted laws, they allotted provinces, they made peace, and they declared war. The armies, and the generals who commanded them, were the *agents* employed to do their bidding.

The Roman armies consisted of vast *Description of the Roman* bodies of men which, when not in actual *armies.* service, were established in permanent *Encampments of the legions.* encampments in various parts of the empire, wherever it was deemed necessary that troops should be stationed. These great bodies of troops were the celebrated Roman legions, and they were renowned throughout the world for their discipline, their admirable organization, the celerity of their movements, and for the indomitable courage and energy of the men. Each legion constituted, in fact, a separate and independent community. Its camp was its city. Its general was its king. In time of war it moved, of course, from place to place, as the exigencies of the service required; but in time of peace it established itself with great formality in a spacious and permanent encampment, which was laid out

with great regularity, and fortified with ramparts and fosses. Within the confines of the camp the tents were arranged in rows, with broad spaces for streets between them; and in a central position, before a space which served the purpose of a public square, the rich and ornamented pavilions of the commander and chief, and of the other generals, rose above the rest, like the public edifices of a city. The encampment of a Roman legion was, in fact, an extended and populous city, only that the dwellings consisted of tents instead of being formed of solid and permanent structures of wood or stone.



ENCAMPMENT

OF A ROMAN LEGION.

Their stations.

Useful functions of the Roman armies.

Effects produced.

Mode of producing them.

Ancient narratives.

Roman legions were encamped in this way in various places throughout the empire, wherever the Senate thought proper to station them. There were some in Syria and the

East; some in Italy; some on the banks of the Rhine; and it was through the instrumentality of the vast force thus organized, that the Romans held the whole European world under their sway. The troops were satisfied to yield submission to the orders of their commanders, since they received through them in return, an abundant supply of food and clothing, and lived, ordinarily, lives of ease and indulgence. In consideration of this, they were willing to march from place to place wherever they were ordered, and to fight any enemy when brought into the field. The commanders obtained food and clothing for them by means of the tribute which they exacted from conquered provinces, and from the plunder of sacked cities, in times of actual war. These armies were naturally interested in preserving order and maintaining in general the authority of law, throughout the communities which they controlled; for without law and order the industrial pursuits of men could not go on, and of course they were well aware that if in any country production were to cease, tribute must soon cease too. In reading history we find, indeed, it must be confessed, that a fearful proportion of the narrative which describes the achievements of ancient armies, is occupied with detailing deeds of violence, rapine, and crime; but we must not infer from this that the influence of these vast organizations was wholly evil. Such extended and heterogeneous masses of population as those which were spread over Europe and Asia, in the days of the Romans, could be kept subject to the necessary restraints of social order only by some very powerful instrumentality. The legions organized by the Roman Senate, and stationed here and there throughout the

extended territory, constituted this instrumentality. But still, during far the greater portion of the time the power which a legion wielded was power in repose. It accomplished its end by its simple presence, and by the sentiment of awe which its presence inspired; and the nations and tribes within the circle of its influence lived in peace, and pursued their industrial occupations without molestation, protected by the consciousness which everywhere pervaded the minds of men, that the Roman power was at hand. The legion hovered, as it were, like a dark cloud in their horizon, silent and in repose; but containing, as they well knew, the latent elements of thunder, which might at any time burst upon their heads. Thus, in its ordinary operation, its influence was good. Occasionally and incidentally periods of commotion would occur, when its action was violent, cruel, and mercilessly evil. Unfortunately, however, for the credit of the system in the opinion of mankind in subsequent ages, there was in the good which it effected nothing to narrate; while every deed of violence and crime which was perpetrated by its agency, furnished materials for an entertaining and exciting story. The good which was accomplished extended perhaps through a long, but monotonous period of quiescence and repose. The evil was brief, but was attended with a rapid succession of events, and varied by innumerable incidents; so that the historian was accustomed to pass lightly over the one, with a few indifferent words of cold description, while he employed all the force of his genius in amplifying and adorning the narratives which commemorated the other. Thus, violent and oppressive as the military rulers were, by whom in



ancient times the world was governed, they were less essentially and continuously violent and oppressive than the general tenor of history makes them seem; and their crimes were, in some degree at least, compensated for and redeemed, by the really useful function which they generally fulfilled, of restraining and repressing all disorder and violence except their own.

The Roman legions, in particular, were *The civil* for many centuries kept in tolerable *authorities.* subjection to the civil authorities of the *The progress of* capitol; but they were growing stronger *the military* and stronger all the time, and becoming *power.* more and more conscious of their strength. Every new commander who acquired renown by his victories, added greatly to the importance and influence of the army in its political relations. The great Julius Cæsar, in the course of his foreign conquests, and of his protracted and terrible wars with Pompey, and with his other rivals, made enormous strides in this direction. Every time that he returned to Rome at the head of his victorious legions, he overawed the capitol more and more. Octavius Cæsar, the successor of Julius, known generally in history by the name of Augustus, completed what his uncle had begun. He made the military authority, though still nominally and in form subordinate, in reality paramount and supreme. The Senate, indeed, continued to assemble, and to exercise its usual functions. Consuls and other civil magistrates were chosen, and invested with the insignia of supreme command; and the customary forms and usages of civil administration, in which the subordination of the military to the civil power

was fully recognized, were all continued. Still, the actual authority of the civil government was wholly overawed and overpowered; and the haughty *imperator* dictated to the Senate, and directed the administration, just as he pleased.

It required great genius in the *Disposition of* commanders to bring up the army to this *men to submit* position of ascendancy and power; but *to established* once up, it sustained itself there, without *power*.

the necessity of ability of any kind, or of any lofty qualities whatever, in those subsequently placed at the head. In fact, the reader of history has often occasion to be perfectly amazed at the lengths to which human endurance will go, when a governmental power of any kind is once established, in tolerating imbecility and folly in the individual representatives of it. It seems to be immaterial whether the dominant power assumes the form of a dynasty of kings, a class of hereditary nobles, or a line of military generals. It requires genius and statesmanship to instate it, but, once instated, no degree of stupidity, folly or crime in those who wield it, seems sufficient to exhaust the spirit of submission with which man always bows to established power—a spirit of submission which is so universal, and so patient and enduring, and which so transcends all the bounds of expediency and of reason, as to seem like a blind instinct implanted in the very soul of man by the Author of his being—a constituent and essential part of his nature as a gregarious animal. In fact, without some such instinct, it would seem impossible that those extended communities could be formed and sustained, without which man, if he

could exist at all, could certainly never fully develop his capacities and powers.

However this may be in theory, it is *Great capacity* certain in fact, that the work of bringing up *of the early* the military power of ancient Rome to its *emperors.* condition of supremacy over all the civil *Roman armies.* functions of government, was the work of men of the most exalted capacities and powers. Marius and Sylla, Pompey and Cæsar, Antony and Augustus, evinced, in all their deeds, a high degree of sagacity, energy, and greatness of soul. Mankind, though they may condemn their vices and crimes, will never cease to admire the grandeur of their ambition, and the magnificence, comprehensiveness, and efficiency of their plans of action. The whole known world was the theater of their contests, and the armies which they organized and disciplined, and which they succeeded at length in bringing under the control of one central and consolidated command, formed the most extended and imposing military power that the world had ever seen. It was not only vast in extent, but permanent and self-sustaining in character. A wide and complicated, but most effectual system was adopted for maintaining it. Its discipline was perfect. Its organization was complete. It was equally trained to remain quietly at home in its city-like encampments, in time of peace, or to march, or bivouac, or fight, in time of war. Such a system could be formed only by men possessed of mental powers of the highest character; but, once formed, it could afterward sustain itself; and not only so, but it was found capable of holding up, by its own

inherent power, the most imbecile and incompetent men, as the nominal rulers of it.

Caligula, for example, the brother of Agrippina, and the reigning emperor at the time of Nero's birth, was a man wholly unfit to exercise any high command. He was elevated to the post by the influence of the army, simply because he was the most prominent man among those who had hereditary claims to the succession, and was thus the man whom the army could most easily place in the office of chieftain, and retain most securely there. His life, however, in the lofty station to which accident thus raised him, was one of continual folly, vice and crime. He lived generally at Rome, where he expended the immense revenues that were at his command in the most wanton and senseless extravagance. In the earlier part of his career the object of much of his extravagance was the gratification of the people; but after a time he began to seek only gratifications for himself, and at length he evinced the most wanton spirit of malignity and cruelty toward others. He seemed at last actually to hate the whole human species, and to take pleasure in teasing and tormenting men, whenever an occasion of any kind occurred to afford him the opportunity. They were accustomed in those days to have spectacles and shows in vast amphitheatres which were covered, when the sun was hot, with awnings. Sometimes when an amphitheater was crowded with spectators, and the heat of the sun was unusually powerful, Caligula would order the

*Character of Caligula.*

*His desperate malignity.*

*Examples of his cruelty.*

*Feeding wild beasts with*

*men.*

*Branding.*

awnings to be removed and the doors to be kept closed so as to prevent the egress of the people; and then he would amuse himself with the indications of discomfort and suffering which so crowded a concourse in such an exposure would necessarily exhibit. He kept wild animals for the combats which took place in these amphitheatres, and when it was difficult to procure the flesh of sheep and oxen for them, he would feed them with men, throwing into their dens for this purpose criminals and captives. Some persons who offended him, he ordered to be branded in the face with hot irons, by which means they were not only subjected to cruel torture at the time, but were frightfully disfigured for life. Sometimes when the sons of noble or distinguished men displeased him, or when under the influence of his caprice or malignity he conceived some feeling of hatred toward them, he would order them to be publicly executed, and he would require their parents to be present and witness the scene. At one time after such an execution he required the wretched father of his victim to come and sup with him at his palace; and while at supper he talked with his guest all the time, in a light, and jocular, and mirthful manner, in order to trifle with and insult the mental anguish of the sufferer. At another time when he had commanded a distinguished senator to be present at the execution of his son, the senator said that he would go, in obedience to the emperor's orders, but humbly asked permission to shut his eyes at the moment of the execution, that he might be spared the dreadful anguish of witnessing the dying struggles of his son. The emperor in reply immediately

condemned the father to death for daring to make so audacious a proposal.

Of course the connection of Agrippina, *Agrippina is the mother of Nero, with such a sovereign implicated in a as this, while it gave her a very high social conspiracy. position in the Roman community, could She is banished not contribute much to her happiness. In with her sister fact all who were connected with Caligula to Pontia.* in any way lived in continual terror, for so wanton and capricious was his cruelty, that all who were liable to come under his notice at all were in constant danger. Agrippina herself at one time incurred her brother's displeasure, though she was fortunate enough to escape with her life. Caligula discovered, or pretended to discover, a conspiracy against him, and he accused Agrippina and another of his sisters named Livilla of being implicated in it. Caligula sent a soldier to the leader of the conspiracy to cut off his head, and then he banished his sisters from Rome and shut them up in the island of Pontia, telling them when they went away, to beware, for he had swords for them as well as islands, in case of need.

At length Caligula's terrible tyranny was brought to a sudden end by his assassination; and Agrippina, in consequence of this event was not only released from her thraldom but raised to a still higher eminence than she had enjoyed before. The circumstances connected with these events will be related in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE ASSASSINATION OF CALIGULA.

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### A.D. 40-41

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The emperor Caligula came to his death in the following manner:

Of course his wanton and remorseless *Plots against* tyranny often awakened very deep *Caligula.* feelings of resentment, and very earnest desires for revenge in the hearts of those who suffered by it; but yet so absolute and terrible was his power, that none dared to murmur or complain. The resentment, however, which the cruelty of the emperor awakened, burned the more fiercely for being thus restrained and suppressed, and many covert threats were made, and many secret plots were formed, from time to time, against the tyrant's life.

Among others who cherished such *Cassius* designs, there was a man named Cassius *Chærea.* Chærea, an officer of the army, who, *Chærea's* though not of high rank, was nevertheless *bravery.* a man of considerable distinction. He was *His legion* a captain, or, as it was styled in those *mutinies.* days, a centurion. His command, *Chærea* therefore, was small, but it was in the *escapes the* prætorian cohort, as it was called, a sort of *mutineers.* body-guard of the commander-in-chief, and consequently a

very honorable corps. Chærea was thus a man of considerable distinction on account of the post which he occupied, and his duties, as captain in the life-guards, brought him very frequently into communication with the emperor. He was a man of great personal bravery, too, and was on this account held in high consideration by the army. He had performed an exploit at one time, some years before, in Germany, which had gained him great fame. It was at the time of the death of Augustus, the first emperor. Some of the German legions, and among them one in which Chærea was serving, had seized upon the occasion to revolt. They alledged many and grievous acts of oppression as the grounds of their revolt, and demanded redress for what they had suffered, and security for the future. One of the first measures which they resorted to in the frenzy of the first outbreak of the rebellion, was to seize all the centurions in the camp, and to beat them almost to death. They gave them sixty blows each, one for each of their number, and then turned them, bruised, wounded, and dying, out of the camp. Some they threw into the Rhine. They revenged themselves thus on all the centurions but one. That one was Chærea. Chærea would not suffer himself to be taken by them, but seizing his sword he fought his way through the midst of them, slaying some and driving others before him, and thus made his escape from the camp. This feat gained him great renown.

One might imagine from this account *His* that Chærea was a man of great personal *appearance*. superiority in respect to size and strength, inasmuch as extraordinary muscular power, as well as