

his deeds, being never empty of fear), he relinquished his undertaking, insisting that all his concerns were trivial when compared to his love for his fatherland: he had seen the sorrowful looks of the citizens, he could hear the secret complaints that he would be embarking on so great a journey when they could not endure even his limited excursions, accustomed as they were to being rekindled by the sight of their princeps to counteract the effects of chance events. Therefore, just as in private relationships one's closest connections were the most effective, so it was the Roman people who exerted on him the greatest influence, and he must obey if they kept him back.

Words such as these were welcome to the plebs, with its desire for pleasure and dreading a straitened grain supply (which is its primary concern) if he were absent. The senate and leaders were uncertain whether he should be regarded as more frightening when at a distance or before them. (Subsequently—such is the nature of great fear—they came to believe that that which had happened was worse.) As for the man himself, to acquire credibility that nothing anywhere was as delightful for him, he set up parties in public places and treated the whole City as his own house; and especially celebrated for its luxuriousness and reputation was the banquet prepared by Tigellinus, which I shall record as an example, to avoid the obligation of narrating too often the same prodigality.

It was in Agrippa's pool, then, that he manufactured a pontoon,⁴⁴ on which a party was mounted and moved along by towing from other ships. The ships were picked out in gold and ivory, and their pathic rowers arranged by age and expertise at lust. He had sought birds and wild beasts from far-flung lands, and sea animals all the way from Ocean. On the dykes of the pool stood love-lairs filled with illustrious ladies, and, opposite, whores could be seen with naked bodies. Already the gestures and movements were obscene; and, after darkness had started to come on, every adjacent copse and the surrounding housing resounded with singing and shone with lights. As for the man himself, defiled by acts both permitted and proscribed, he had omitted no outrage in his pursuit of increasingly corrupt behavior—except that after a few days he took one of that herd of perverts (his name was Pythagoras) in the fashion of a solemn espousal to be his husband: there was placed on the Commander a bridal veil, the officials were admitted,⁺ there was a dowry, marriage-bed, and wedding torches. Everything, in short, was observed which even in the case of a female is covered by night.

There followed a disaster—whether by chance or by the princeps's cunning being uncertain (authors have transmitted each alternative), but one more serious and frightening than any which have befallen this City through violent fires. Its beginning arose in that part of the circus which adjoins the Palatine and Caelian Hills, where, among shops in which there was the kind of merchandise by which flames are fed, the fire had no sooner started than gathered strength and, fanned by the wind, took hold along the length of the circus. There were

44. Agrippa's pool is thought to be associated with Agrippa's Baths, close to the Pantheon.

no houses enclosed by fortifications or temples girded by walls, nor did any other form of hindrance lie in its path. In its attack the conflagration—ranging across the level at first, then surging to the heights and contrariwise ravaging the depressions—outstripped all remedies in the speed of its malignancy and with the City being susceptible owing to its confined streets winding this way and that and its irregular blocks, as was the nature of old Rome. In addition, the lamentations of the panic-stricken—of women, those worn out by age or in their raw youth—and individuals who paid heed to themselves or to others, as they dragged the infirm or waited for them, impeded everything, some by dilatoriness, others hurrying.⁴⁵ And often, while they looked back to the rear, they were surrounded on the flanks or in front, or, if they emerged in some nearby area, with the fire having taken hold there too they discovered that even places which they had believed distant from it were in the same predicament. Finally, in two minds as to what they should avoid and what they should make for, they filled the roads or scattered over the fields. Some perished after the loss of all their fortune and even that of their daily livelihood, others from affection for the relatives whom they had been unable to rescue; yet in both cases escape had been open. Nor did anyone dare to fight back the fire, given the frequency of threats from the numbers who prevented quenching it, and because others openly threw torches and shouted that they had authorization—whether to conduct their looting more licentiously or by order.

At the time Nero was at Antium, not returning to the City until the fire neared the house of his by which he had linked the Palatium with Maecenas' Gardens; yet it still could not be stopped from consuming the Palatium and house and everything around about. But, as a relief for the evicted and fugitive people, he opened up the Plain of Mars and the monuments of Agrippa,⁴⁶ in fact even his own gardens, and he set up improvised buildings to receive the destitute multitude; and comestibles were sailed up from Ostia and nearby municipalities, and the price of grain was reduced to three sesterces. All of which, though popular, proved unavailing, because a rumor had spread that at the very time of the City's blaze he had actually mounted his domestic stage and sung of the extirpation of Troy, assimilating present calamities to olden disasters.

Finally on the sixth day, at the foot of the Esquiline, an end was put to the conflagration by the widespread demolition of buildings, so that its relentless violence should encounter an expanse and (as it were) unoccupied sky. But dread had not yet been laid aside, or hope returned to the plebs:† once again the fire raged, more in the open places of the City; and for that reason the wreckage of persons was less, but the shrines of the gods and the porticoes designated as attractions toppled more extensively. And more infamy attached to that particular conflagration because it had erupted from the Aemilian estates of Tigellinus, and

45. The text of this sentence is not certain.

46. Presumably the various buildings northeast of the Pantheon complex (above, 15.37.2n.), between it and the Plain of Agrippa.

Nero seemed to be seeking the glory of founding a new City and calling it after his own nomenclature.⁴⁷

Rome is divided into fourteen districts,⁴⁸ of which only four remained untouched and three were leveled to the ground; in the other seven there survived a few traces of housing, mauled and charred. Of the houses and tenements and temples that were lost, it would not be easy to arrive at the total; but the most olden religious buildings—that which had been consecrated to Luna by Servius Tullius, and the great altar and fane to Praesens Hercules by Arcadian Evander, and the temple of Stator Jupiter vowed by Romulus, and Numa's Regia, and the shrine of Vesta with the Penates of the Roman People—were all burned down; next, there was the wealth acquired in so many victories, and glories of Greek art; then ancient and unspoiled monuments of genius—although older men, despite being surrounded by the great beauty of the resurgent City, remember many things which could not be restored.⁴⁹ (There were those who noted that the start of this conflagration arose on the fourteenth day before the Kalends of Sextilis, on which the Senones too ignited the captured City; others have gone to such trouble as to total the same number of years, months, and days between each of these conflagrations.)⁵⁰

As for Nero, he capitalized on the ruins of his fatherland and constructed a house in which it was not so much jewels and gold that would be a marvel (they were long since familiar as the commonplaces of luxuriousness) as fields and pools and, in the fashion of wildernesses, woods here and open spaces and vistas there—all under the expert engineers Severus and Celer, whose daring genius it was to attempt through technology even what nature had denied, and to sport with the princeps's resources. (They had promised to sink a navigable conduit from Lake Avernus right to the Tiber mouth along the barren shore or through mountain obstacles: that is to say, where no other wet area for generating water is encountered except the Pomptine marshes; the rest is precipitous or parched and, if it could be pierced, the work would be unendurable and the reasons inadequate. Nevertheless Nero, desirous of the incredible as he was, struggled to dig out the ridges closest to Avernus; and there still remain the traces of his thwarted hope.)

As for the parts of the City which survived his house, they were not (as after the Gallic conflagrations) built up without demarcation or at random but with the rows of blocks measured out and wide spaces for roads and the height of buildings curtailed and areas left open and porticoes added (which would pro-

47. "Neropolis," according to Suetonius (*Nero* 55).

48. This division was introduced by Augustus when he reorganized the administration

tect the front of tenements). These porticoes Nero guaranteed to construct with his own money, and he would hand over the cleared areas to their owners. He added rewards in proportion to each person's rank and family resources, and he defined the time within which, on completion of houses or tenements, they were to be acquired. For the reception of rubble he marked out the Ostian marshes, and the ships which had sailed grain up the Tiber were to hurry back laden with rubble; buildings themselves, to a specified extent, should be without beams and consolidated by Gabine or Alban rock, because such stone was impervious to fire; next, there should be guards so that the water supply, which had been intercepted by private individuals taking liberties, would flow more lavishly and in more places for the public benefit; and aids for curbing fires should be kept to the fore by each person; and each building should be enclosed, not by shared partitions, but by its own walls. All of this, welcomed for its practicality, brought luster too to the new City; but there were those who believed that its old design had been more conducive to health, because the narrowness of the streets and the height of the housing were not so easily pierced by the boiling sun; whereas now the open expanses, unprotected by any shade, scorched under the more severe heat.

Such were the provisions made by human plans; next, expiations for the gods were sought and the books of the Sibyl were appealed to, as a result of which supplication was made to Vulcan, Ceres, and Proserpina, and Juno was propitiated by matrons,⁵¹ first on the Capitol and then at the nearest stretch of sea, from which water was drawn to besprinkle the temple and the representation of the goddess; and sittings⁵² and vigils were celebrated by ladies who had husbands. But despite the human help, despite the princeps's lavishments and the appeasements of the gods, there was no getting away from the infamous belief that the conflagration had been ordered. Therefore, to dispel the rumor, Nero supplied defendants and inflicted the choicest punishments on those, resented for their outrages, whom the public called Chrestiani.⁵³ (The source of the name was Christus, on whom, during the command of Tiberius, reprisal had been inflicted by the procurator Pontius Pilatus; and, though the baleful superstition had been stifled for the moment, there was now another outbreak, not only across Judaea, the origin of the malignancy, but also across the City, where everything frightful or shameful, of whatever provenance, converges and is celebrated.)

51. I.e., married women.

52. These were ritual banquets offered to goddesses, who were provided with chairs upon which to sit (see *OCD* 1382 s.v. *sellisternium*).

53. "Chrestiani" is the form of the name which appears first in manuscript M but which the scribe has then changed to "Christiani," no doubt influenced by what T. says in the next sentence. Yet the coexistence of "Chrestiani" and "Christus" is not impossible: T. would be drawing a muted contrast between the common (i.e., pagan) name for the sect, evidently attributed to the Christians through a confusion with the Greek word *chrēstos* ("good," "honorable"), and the true origin of the name. For a succinct discussion of the nomenclature see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford 1997) 333.