

said, that when an opponent of the art urged as an objection the different fates of persons born in two successive instants, Nigidius bade him make two contiguous marks on a potter's wheel, which was revolving rapidly near them. On stopping the wheel, the two marks were found to be really far removed from each other; and Nigidius is said to have received the name of Figulus (the potter), in remembrance of this story. His argument, says St. Augustine, who gives us the narrative, was as fragile as the ware which the wheel manufactured.

As the darkening times of the Roman empire advanced, even the stronger minds seem to have lost the clear energy which was requisite to throw off this delusion. Seneca appears to take the influence of the planets for granted; and even Tacitus¹⁷ seems to hesitate. "For my own part," says he, "I doubt; but certainly the majority of mankind cannot be weaned from the opinion, that, at the birth of each man, his future destiny is fixed; though some things may fall out differently from the predictions, by the ignorance of those who profess the art; and that thus the art is unjustly blamed, confirmed as it is by noted examples in all ages." The occasion which gives rise to these reflections of the historian is the mention of Thrasyllus, the favorite astrologer of the Emperor Tiberius, whose skill is exemplified in the following narrative. Those who were brought to Tiberius on any important matter, were admitted to an interview in an apartment situated on a lofty cliff in the island of Capreae. They reached this place by a narrow path, accompanied by a single freedman of great bodily strength; and on their return, if the emperor had conceived any doubts of their trustworthiness, a single blow buried the secret and its victim in the ocean below. After Thrasyllus had, in this retreat, stated the results of his art as they concerned the emperor, Tiberius asked him whether he had calculated how long he himself had to live. The astrologer examined the aspect of the stars, and while he did this, as the narrative states, showed hesitation, alarm, increasing terror, and at last declared that, "the present hour was for him critical, perhaps fatal." Tiberius embraced him, and told him "he was right in supposing he had been in danger, but that he should escape it;" and made him thenceforth his confidential counsellor.

The belief in the power of astrological prediction which thus obtained dominion over the minds of men of literary cultivation and practical energy, naturally had a more complete sway among the speculative

¹⁷ *Ann.* vi. 22.