

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On\\_the\\_shortness\\_of\\_life/Chapter\\_XVIII](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On_the_shortness_of_life/Chapter_XVIII)

XVIII.4 Recall that keen mind of yours, which is most competent to cope with the greatest subjects, from a service that is indeed honourable but hardly adapted to the happy life, and reflect that in all your training in the liberal studies, extending from your earliest years, you were not aiming at this—that it might be safe to entrust many thousand pecks of corn to your charge; you gave hope of something greater and more lofty. There will be no lack of men of tested worth and painstaking industry. But plodding oxen are much more suited to carrying heavy loads than thoroughbred horses, and who ever hampers the fleetness of such high-born creatures with a heavy pack?

XVIII.5 Reflect, besides, how much worry you have in subjecting yourself to such a great burden; your dealings are with the belly of man. A hungry people neither listens to reason, nor is appeased by justice, nor is bent by any entreaty. Very recently within those few day's after Gaius Caesar died—still grieving most deeply (if the dead have any feeling) because he knew that the Roman people were alive and had enough food left for at any rate seven or eight days while he was building his bridges of boats<sup>1</sup> and playing with the resources of the empire, we were threatened with the worst evil that can befall men even during a siege—the lack of provisions; his imitation of a mad and foreign and misproud king<sup>2</sup> was very nearly at the cost of the city's destruction and famine and the general revolution that follows famine.

XVIII.6 What then must have been the feeling of those who had charge of the corn-market, and had to face stones, the sword, fire—and a Caligula? By the greatest subterfuge they concealed the great evil that lurked in the vitals of the state—with good reason, you may be sure. For certain maladies must be treated while the patient is kept in ignorance; knowledge of their disease has caused the death of many.

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1. Three and a half miles long, reaching from Baiae to the mole of Puteoli (Suetonius, *Calig.* 19).
  2. Xerxes, who laid a bridge over the Hellespont.