

CHAPTER XV

THE Rhine mutiny had broken out in sympathy with a mutiny among the Balkan forces. The soldiers' disappointment with their bequests under Augustus's will—a mere four months' bounty of pay, three gold pieces a man—aggravated certain long-standing grievances; and they reckoned that the insecurity of Tiberius's position would force him to meet any reasonable demands they made, in order to win their favour. These demands included a rise in pay, service limited to sixteen years, and a relaxation of camp discipline. The pay was certainly insufficient: the soldiers had to arm and equip themselves out of it and prices had risen. And certainly the exhaustion of military reserves had kept thousands of soldiers with the Colours who should have been discharged years before, and veterans had been recalled to the Colours who were quite unfit for service. And, certainly too, the detachments formed from recently liberated slaves were such poor fighting material that Tiberius had considered it necessary to tighten up discipline, choosing martinetts for his captains, and giving them instructions to keep the men constantly employed on fatigue duty and to keep the vine-branch saplings—their badges of rank—constantly employed on the men's backs.

When the news of Augustus's death reached the Balkan forces, three regiments were together in a summer camp, and the General gave them a few days' holiday from parades and fatigues. This experience of ease and idleness unsettled them and they refused to obey their captains when called out on parade again. They formulated certain demands. The

General told them that he had no authority to grant these demands and warned them of the danger of a mutinous attitude. They offered him no violence but refused to be awed into obedience and finally obliged him to send his son to Rome to convey their demands to Tiberius. After the son had left the camp on this mission the disorder increased. The less-disciplined men began plundering the camp and the neighbouring villages, and when the General arrested the ring-leaders, the rest broke open the guard-room and released them, finally murdering a captain who tried to oppose them. This captain was nicknamed "Old Give-me-Another" because after breaking one sapling over a man's back he would call for a second and a third. When the General's son arrived at Rome, Tiberius sent Castor to the General's support at the head of two battalions of Guards, a squadron of Guards cavalry and most of the Household Battalion, who were Germans; a staff-officer called Sejanus, the son of the Commander of the Guards and one of Tiberius's few intimates, went with Castor as his lieutenant. Of this Sejanus I shall later have more to write. Castor on arrival addressed the mob of soldiers in a dignified and fearless way and read them a letter from his father, promising to take care of the invincible regiments with whom he had shared the hardships of so many wars, and to negotiate with the Senate about their demands as soon as he had recovered from his grief for Augustus's death. Meanwhile, he wrote, his son had come to them to make whatever immediate concessions might be practicable—the rest must be reserved for the Senate.

The mutineers made one of their captains act as their spokesman and present their demands, for no soldier would risk doing so for fear of being singled out later as a ring-leader. Castor said that he was very sorry, but that the sixteen-year limit of service, the discharge of veterans and the increase of pay to a full silver-piece a day were demands which he had no authority to grant. Only his father and the Senate could make such concessions.

This put the men into an ugly temper. They asked why in Hell's name had he come then if he had no power to do anything for them. His father Tiberius, they said, used always to play the same trick on them when they presented their grievances: he used to shelter behind Augustus and the Senate. What was the Senate, anyhow? A pack of rich good-for-nothing lazy-bones, most of whom would die of fear if they ever caught sight of an enemy shield or saw a sword drawn in anger! They began throwing stones at Castor's staff and the situation became dangerous. But it was saved that night by a fortunate chance. The moon was eclipsed, which affected the army—all soldiers are superstitious—in a surprising way. They took the eclipse for a sign that Heaven was angry with them for their murder of Old Give-me-Another and for their defiance of authority. There were a number of secret loyalists among the mutineers and one of these came to Castor suggesting that he should get hold of others like himself and send them around the tents in parties of two or three to try to bring the disaffected men to their senses. This was done. By morning there was a very different atmosphere in the camp and Castor, though he consented to send the General's son again to Tiberius with the same demands endorsed by himself, arrested the two men who appeared to have started the mutiny and publicly executed them. The rest made no protest and even voluntarily handed over the five murderers of the captain as a proof of their own fidelity. But there was still a firm refusal to attend parades, or do any but the most necessary fatigues until an answer came from Rome. The weather broke and incessant rain flooded the camp and made it impossible for the men to keep communication between tent and tent. This was taken as a fresh warning from Heaven, and before the messenger had time to return the mutiny was at an end, the regiments marching obediently back to winter-quarters under their officers.

But the mutiny on the Rhine was a far more serious affair. Roman Germany was now bounded on the East by the Rhine

and divided into two provinces, the Upper and the Lower. The capital of the Upper Province, which extended up into Switzerland, was Mainz and that of the Lower, which reached North to the Scheldt and Sambre, was Cologne. An army of four regiments manned each of the provinces and Germanicus was Commander-in-Chief. Disorders broke out in a summer camp of the Lower Army. The grievances were the same here as in the Balkan army but the conduct of the mutineers was more violent because of the greater proportion of newly-recruited City freedmen in the ranks. These freedmen were still slaves by nature and accustomed to a far more idle and luxurious life than the free-born citizens, mostly poor peasants, who formed the backbone of the army. They made thoroughly bad soldiers and their badness went unchecked by any regimental *esprit-de-corps*. For these were not the regiments which had been under the command of Germanicus in the recent campaign, they were Tiberius's men.

The General lost his head and was unable to check the insolence of the mutineers who came crowding round him with complaints and threats. His nervousness encouraged them to fall on their most hated captains, about twenty of whom they beat to death with their own vine-saplings, throwing the bodies into the Rhine. The remainder they jeered at and insulted and drove from the camp. Cassius Chærea was the only senior officer who made any attempt to oppose this monstrous and unheard-of behaviour. He was set upon by a large party but instead of running away or begging for mercy rushed straight into the thick of them with his sword drawn, stabbing right and left, and broke through to the sacred tribunal-platform where he knew that no soldier would dare to touch him.

Germanicus had no battalions of Guards to support him but rode at once to the mutinous camp with only a small staff behind him. He did not yet know of the massacre. The men surged about him in a mob, as they had done about their General, but Germanicus calmly refused to say anything to them, until they had formed up decently in companies and

battalions under their proper banners so that he should know whom he was addressing. It seemed a small concession to authority, and they wanted to hear what he had to tell them. Once they were back in military formation a certain sense of discipline returned, and though by the murder of their officers they had put themselves beyond hope of his trust or forgiveness, their hearts suddenly went out to him as a brave and humane and honourable man. One old veteran—there were many there who had been serving in Germany twenty-five and thirty years before this—called out: "How like he is to his father!" And another: "He's got to be cursed good to be as cursed good as him." Germanicus began in a voice of ordinary conversational pitch, to command more attention. He first spoke of the death of Augustus and the great grief it had inspired but assured them that Augustus had left behind him an indestructible work and a successor capable of carrying on the government and commanding the armies in the way that he himself would have wished. "Of my father's glorious victories in Germany you are not unaware. Many of you have shared in them."

"Never was there a better general or a better man," shouted a veteran. "Hurrah for Germanicus, father and son!"

It is a comment on my brother's extreme simplicity that he did not realize the effect his words were having. By his father, he meant Tiberius (who also was often styled Germanicus), but the veterans thought he meant his real father; and by Augustus's successor he meant Tiberius again, but the veterans thought that he meant himself. Unaware of these cross-purposes he went on to speak of the harmony that prevailed in Italy and of the fidelity of the French, from whose territory he had just come, and said that he could not understand the sudden feeling of pessimism that had overcome them. What ailed them? What had they done with their captains and their colonels and their generals? Why weren't these officers on parade? Had they really been expelled from the camp, as he had heard?

"A few of us are still alive and about, Cæsar," someone said, and Cassius came limping through the ranks and saluted Germanicus. "Not many! They pulled me off the tribunal and have kept me tied up in the guardroom without food for the last four days. An old soldier has just been good enough to release me."

"*You, Cassius!* They did that to *you!* The man who brought back the eighty from the Teutoburger Forest? The man who saved the Rhine bridge?"

"Well, at least they spared my life," said Cassius.

Germanicus asked with horror in his voice: "Men, is this true?"

"They brought it on themselves," someone shouted, and then a fearful hubbub arose. Men stripped themselves to the skin to show the clean silver scars of honourable wounds on their breasts and the ragged discoloured marks of flogging on their backs. One decrepit old man broke from the ranks, and running forward pulled his mouth open with his fingers to show his bare gums. Then he shouted, "I can't eat hard tack without teeth, General, and I can't march and fight on slops. I served under your father in his first campaign in the Alps and I'd done six years service even then. I've two grandsons serving in the same company as myself. Give me my discharge, General. I dandled you on my knees when you were a baby! And look, General, I've got a rupture and they expect me to march twenty miles with a hundred pounds' weight on my back."

"Back to the ranks, Pomponius," ordered Germanicus, who recognized the old man and was shocked to find him still under arms. "You forget yourself. I'll look into your case later. For Heaven's sake show a good example to the young soldiers!"

Pomponius saluted and returned to the ranks. Germanicus held up his hand for silence, but the men went on shouting about their pay and the unnecessary fatigues put on them so that they hardly had a moment to themselves from reveille to lights out, and that the only discharge a man got from the

Army now was to drop dead from old age. Germanicus made no attempt to speak until he had complete quiet again. Then he said: "In the name of my father Tiberius I promise you justice. He has your welfare at heart as deeply as I have and whatever can be done for you without danger to the Empire, he will do. I'll answer for that."

"Oh, to hell with Tiberius!" someone shouted, and the cry was picked up on all sides with groans and catcalls. And then suddenly they all began to shout: "Up, Germanicus! You're the Emperor for us. Chuck Tiberius into the Tiber! Up, Germanicus! Germanicus for Emperor! To hell with Tiberius! To hell with that bitch Livia! Up, Germanicus! March on Rome! We're your men! Up, Germanicus, son of Germanicus! Germanicus for Emperor!"

Germanicus was thunderstruck. He shouted: "You're mad, men, to talk like that. What do you think I am? A traitor?"

A veteran shouted: "None of that, General! You said just now that you'd take on Augustus's job. Don't back out!"

Germanicus then realized his mistake, and when the cheers of "Up, Germanicus" continued he jumped off the tribunal and hurried to where his horse was standing tied to a post, intending to mount and gallop wildly away from this accursed camp. But the men drew their swords and barred his way.

Germanicus, beside himself, cried: "Let me pass, or by God, I'll kill myself."

"You're the Emperor for us," they answered. Germanicus drew his sword, but someone caught at his arm. It was clear to any decent man that Germanicus was in earnest, but a good many of the ex-slaves thought that he was just making a hypocritical gesture of modesty and virtue. One of them laughed and called out: "Here, take my sword. It's sharper!" Old Pomponius, who was standing next to this fellow, flared up and struck him on the mouth. Germanicus was hurried away by his friends to the General's tent. The

General was lying in bed half-dead with dismay, hiding his head under a coverlet. It was a long time before he could get up and pay his respects to Germanicus. His life and that of his staff had been saved by his bodyguard, mercenaries from the Swiss border.

A hurried council was held. Cassius told Germanicus that from a conversation which he had overheard while lying in the guardroom the mutineers were about to send a deputation to the regiments in the Upper Province, to secure their co-operation in a general military revolt. There was talk of leaving the Rhine unguarded and marching into France, sacking cities, carrying off the women and setting up an independent military kingdom in the South-West, protected in the rear by the Pyrenees. Rome would be paralysed by this move and they would remain undisturbed long enough to be able to make their kingdom impregnable.

Germanicus decided to go at once to the Upper Province and make the regiments there swear allegiance to Tiberius. These were the troops who had recently served directly under his command and he believed that they would remain loyal if he reached them before the deputation of mutineers. They had the same grievances about pay and service, he was aware, but their captains were a better set of men, chosen by himself for their patience and soldierly qualities rather than for their reputation. But first something had to be done to quiet the mutinous regiments here. There was only one course to take. He committed the first and only crime of his life: he forged a letter purporting to come from Tiberius and had it delivered to him at his tent door the next morning. The courier had been secretly sent out at night with instructions to steal a horse from the horse-lines, ride twenty miles South-West and then gallop back at top speed by another route.

The letter was to the effect that Tiberius had heard that the regiments in Germany had voiced certain legitimate grievances, and was anxious to remove them at once. He would see that Augustus's legacy was promptly paid to them.

and as a mark of his confidence in their loyalty would double it from his own purse. He would negotiate with the Senate about the rise in pay. He would give an immediate and unqualified discharge to all men of twenty years' service and a qualified discharge to all who had completed sixteen years—these would be called on for no military duty whatsoever except garrison duty.

Germanicus was not as clever a liar as his uncle Tiberius or his grandmother Livia or his sister Livilla. The courier's horse was recognized by its owner and so was the courier, one of Germanicus's own grooms. Word went round that the letter was a forgery. But the veterans were in favour of treating it as authentic and asking for the promised discharge and the legacy at once. They did so, and Germanicus replied that the Emperor was a man of his word and that the discharges could be granted that very day. But he asked them to have patience about the legacy, which could only be paid in full when they marched back to winter quarters. There was not sufficient coin in the camp, he said, for every man to have his six gold pieces, but he would see that the General would hand over as much as there was. This quieted them, though opinion had somewhat turned against Germanicus as not being the man they had taken him to be: he was afraid of Tiberius, they said, and not above committing forgery. They sent parties out to look for their captains and undertook to obey orders from their General again. Germanicus had told the General that he would have him impeached before the Senate for cowardice if he did not immediately take himself in hand.

So having seen that the discharges were made in due form and all the available money distributed, Germanicus rode off to the Upper Province. He found the regiments standing-by waiting for news of what was happening in the Lower Province; but not yet in open mutiny, for Silius, their general, was a strong-minded man. Germanicus read them the same forged letter and made them swear allegiance to Tiberius; which they did at once.

There was great emotion at Rome when news arrived of the Rhine mutiny. Tiberius, who had been strongly criticized for sending Castor out to the Balkan mutiny—which had not yet been put down—instead of going there himself, was now booed in the streets and asked why it was that the troops who mutinied were the ones whom he had personally commanded, while the others remained loyal. (For the regiments that Germanicus had commanded in Dalmatia had not mutinied either.) He was called on to go to Germany at once and do his own dirty work on the Rhine instead of leaving it to Germanicus. He therefore told the Senate that he would go to Germany, and began slowly to make preparations, choosing his staff and fitting out a small fleet. But by the time he was ready the approach of winter made navigation dangerous and the news from Germany was more hopeful. So he did not go. He had not intended to go.

Meanwhile, I had had a hasty letter from Germanicus, begging me to raise two hundred thousand gold pieces at once from his estate, but with the greatest secrecy: they were needed for the safety of Rome. He said no more but sent me a signed warrant which enabled me to act for him. I went to his chief-steward, who said that he could only raise half that amount without selling property, and that to sell property would make talk, which was what Germanicus evidently wanted to avoid. So I had to find the rest myself—fifty thousand from my strong-box, which left me with only ten thousand after I had paid my initiation fee to the new priesthood—and another fifty thousand from the sale of some City property which had been left me by my father—luckily I had already had an offer for it—and such of my slaves as I could spare, but only men and women whom I considered not particularly devoted to my service. I sent the money out within two days of getting the letter asking for it. My mother was extremely angry when she heard that the property had been sold, but I was pledged not to tell her why the money was needed, so I said that I had been

playing dice for too high stakes lately and in trying to recoup my heavy losses had lost twice as much again. She believed me, and "gambler" was another stick to beat me with. But the thought that I had not failed Germanicus or Rome was ample compensation for her taunts.

I was gambling a good deal at this time, I must say, but never either lost or gained much. I used to play as a relaxation from my work. After finishing my history of Augustus's religious reforms I wrote a short humorous book about Dice, dedicated to the divinity of Augustus; which was to tease my mother. I quoted a letter that Augustus, who had been very fond of dice, had once written to my father: in which he said how much he had enjoyed their game on the previous night, for my father was the best loser he had ever met. My father, he wrote, always made a great laughing outcry against fate whenever he threw the Dog, but if a fellow-gambler threw Venus he seemed as pleased as if he had thrown her himself. "It is, indeed, a pleasure to win from you, my dear fellow, and to say this is the highest praise I can bestow on a man, for usually I hate winning because of the insight it gives me into the hearts of my supposedly most devoted friends. All but the very best grudge losing to me, because I am the Emperor and, they think, of infinite wealth, and obviously the Gods should not give more to a man who already has too much. It is my policy therefore—perhaps you have noticed it—always to make a mistake in the reckoning after a round of throws. Either I claim less than I have won, as if by mistake, or I pay more than I owe, and hardly anyone but yourself, I find, is honest enough to put me right." (I should have liked to quote a further passage in which there was a reference to Tiberius's bad sportsmanship, but of course I could not.)

In this book I began with a mock-serious enquiry into the antiquity of dice, quoting a number of non-existent authors, and describing various fanciful ways of shaking the dice-cup. But the main subject was, naturally, that of winning and losing and the title was *How To Win At Dice*. Augustus

had written in another letter that the more he tried to lose, the more he seemed to win, and even by cheating himself in the reckoning it was seldom that he rose from the table poorer than he sat down. I quoted an opposite statement attributed by Pollio to my grandfather Antony to the effect that the more he tried to win at dice-play the more he seemed to lose. Putting these statements together I deduced that the fundamental law of dice was that the Gods, unless they had a grudge against him on another score, always let the man win who cared least about winning. The only way to win at dice therefore was to cultivate a genuine desire to lose. Written in a heavy style, parodying that of my bug-bear Cato, it was, I flatter myself, a very funny book, the argument being so perfectly paradoxical. I quoted the old proverb which promises a man a thousand gold pieces every time he meets a stranger riding on a piebald mule, but only on condition that he does not think of the mule's tail until he gets the money. I had hoped that this squib would please people who found my histories indigestible. It did not. It was not read as a humorous work at all. I should have realized that old-fashioned readers who had been brought up on the works of Cato were hardly the sort to enjoy a parody of their hero and that the younger generation, who had not been brought up on Cato, would not recognize it as a parody. The book was therefore dismissed as a fantastically dull and stupid production written in painful seriousness and proving my rumoured mental incapacity beyond further dispute.

But this has been a very ill-judged digression, leaving Germanicus, as it were, waiting anxiously for his money while I write a book about dice. Old Athenodorus would criticize me pretty severely, I think, if he were alive now.