

CHAPTER XVI

GERMANICUS was met at Bonn by a deputation of senators sent by Tiberius. They really came to see whether Germanicus had been either exaggerating or minimizing the seriousness of the mutiny. They also brought a private letter from Tiberius approving the promises made to the men on his behalf with the exception of the doubled bequest, which would now have to be promised to the entire Army, not merely the regiments in Germany. Tiberius congratulated Germanicus on the apparent success of the ruse but deplored the necessity of forgery. He added that whether he fulfilled the promises depended on the behaviour of the men. (By this he did not mean, as Germanicus supposed, that if the men returned to obedience he would fulfil the promises, but exactly the reverse.) Germanicus wrote back at once apologizing for the expense involved in the doubling of the bequest, but explained that the money was being paid from his own purse and the men would not know that it was not Tiberius who was their benefactor: and that in the forged letter he had made it plain that only the German regiments were to benefit, making the payment a reward for their recent successful campaign across the Rhine. As for the other specific promises, the veterans of twenty years service had already been discharged and were only remaining with the Colours until the bounty-money arrived for them.

Germanicus could ill afford this heavy charge on his estate and wrote asking me not to press him for repayment of my fifty thousand for awhile. I answered that it had not been a loan but a gift, which I was proud to have been able to

make. But to return to the order of events. Two of the regiments were in their winter quarters at Bonn when the deputation arrived. Their march back under their General had been a disgraceful display: the bags which had contained the money were tied to long poles and carried mouth-downwards, between the standards. The other two regiments had refused to leave the summer camp until the whole bequest was paid them. The Bonn regiments, the First and Twentieth, suspected that the deputation had been sent to cancel the concessions and began to riot again. Some of them were for marching to their new kingdom at once and at midnight a party broke into Germanicus's quarters where the Eagle of the Twentieth Regiment was kept in a locked shrine and, pulling him out of bed tore the key of the shrine from the thin gold chain which he wore round his neck, unlocked the shrine and seized the Eagle. As they marched shouting down the streets, calling on their comrades to "follow the Eagle" they met the senators of the deputation, who had heard the noise and came running for protection to Germanicus. The soldiers cursed and drew their swords. The senators changed their direction and darted into the headquarters of the First Regiment, where they took sanctuary with its Eagle. But their pursuers were mad with rage and drink and if the Eagle-bearer had not been a man of courage, and a good swordsman too, the leader of the deputation would have had his skull split open—a crime which would have outlawed the regiment beyond pardon and been the signal for civil war throughout the country.

The disorders continued all night, but fortunately without bloodshed except as the result of drunken brawls between rival companies of soldiers. When dawn came Germanicus told the trumpeter to blow the Assembly, and stepped on the tribunal, putting the leader of the senatorial deputation beside him. The men were in a nervous, guilty, irritable mood, but Germanicus's courage fascinated them. He stood up, commanded silence, and then gave a great yawn. He covered his mouth with his hand and apologized, saying that

he had not slept well because of the scuffling of mice in his quarters. The men liked that joke and laughed. He did not laugh with them. "Heaven be praised that dawn is here. Never have I known such an evil night. At one moment I dreamed that the Eagle of The Twentieth flew away. What a delight to see it on parade this morning! There were destructive spirits hovering in the camp, sent beyond doubt by some God whom we have offended. You all felt the madness and it was only by a miracle that you were prevented from committing a crime unparalleled in the history of Rome—the unprovoked murder of an ambassador of your own City who had taken sanctuary from your swords with your own regimental Deities!" He then explained that the deputation had come merely to confirm Tiberius's original promises on behalf of the Senate and to report whether they were being faithfully executed by himself.

"Well, what about it, then? Where's the rest of the bounty?" someone shouted, and the cry was taken up. "We want our bounty." But by a lucky chance the money-wagons were sighted at that moment, driving into camp under convoy of a troop of auxiliary horse. Germanicus took advantage of the situation to send the senators hurriedly back to Rome under escort of these same auxiliaries; then he supervised the distribution of the coin, having difficulty in restraining some of the men from plundering the money intended for the other regiments.

The disorder increased that afternoon; so much gold in the men's purses meant heavy drinking and reckless gambling. Germanicus decided that it was not safe for Agrippina, who was now with him, to remain in the camp. She was pregnant again; and though her young sons, my nephews Nero and Drusus, were here at Rome staying with my mother and myself, she had little Gaius there with her. This pretty child had become the army mascot and someone had made him a miniature soldier-suit, complete with tin breast-plate and sword and helmet and shield. Everyone spoils him. When his mother put on his ordinary clothes and

sandals he used to cry and plead for his sword and his little boots to go visiting the tents. So he was nicknamed Caligula, or Little Boot.

Germanicus insisted on Agrippina's going away, though she swore that she was afraid of nothing and would far rather die with him there than have news from safety of his murder by the mutineers. But he asked her whether she thought that Livia would make a good mother for their orphaned children, and this decided her to do as he wished. With her went several officers' wives, with their children, all weeping and wearing mourning clothes. They passed on foot slowly through the camp, without their usual attendants, like fugitives from a doomed city. A single rough cart, drawn by a mule, was all their transport. Cassius Chærea went with them as guide and sole protector. Caligula rode on Cassius's back as if on a charger, shouting and making the regulation sword-cuts and parries in the air with his sword, as the cavalrymen had taught him. They left the camp very early in the morning and hardly anyone saw them go; for there was no guard at the gate and nobody now took the trouble to blow the reveille, most of the men sleeping like pigs till ten or eleven o'clock. A few old soldiers who woke early from long habit were outside the camp gathering firewood for their breakfasts and called to ask where the ladies were off to. "To Trèves," shouted Cassius. "The Commander-in-Chief is sending his wife and child away to the protection of the uncivilized but loyal French allies of Trèves rather than risk their murder by the famous First Regiment. Tell your comrades that."

The old soldiers hurried back to the camp and one of them, the old man Pomponius, got hold of a trumpet and blew the alarm. The men came tumbling out of their tents half-asleep with their swords in their hands. "What's wrong? What's happened?"

"He's been sent away from us. That's the end of our luck and we'll never see him again."

"Who's that? Who's been sent away?"

"Our boy has. Little Boot. His father says he can't trust the First Regiment with him, so he's sent him away to the damned French allies. God knows what will happen to him there. You know what the French are. His mother's been sent off too. Seven months gone with her latest, and walking on foot, like a slave woman, poor lady. O lads! Germanicus's wife and the daughter of old Agrippa whom we used to call the Soldier's Friend! And our Little Boot."

Soldiers really are an extraordinary race of men, as tough as shield-leather, as superstitious as Egyptians and as sentimental as Sabine grandmothers. Ten minutes later there were about two thousand men besieging Germanicus's tent in a drunken ecstasy of sorrow and repentance and imploring him to let his lady come back with their darling little boy.

Germanicus came out to them with a pale angry face and told them to trouble him no more. They had disgraced themselves and him and the name of Rome and he could never trust them so long as he lived; they had done him no kindness in wresting his sword from him when he was on the point of plunging it into his breast.

"Tell us what to do, General! We'll do anything you say. We swear we'll never mutiny again. Forgive us. We'll follow you to the world's end. But give us back our little playfellow."

Germanicus said: "These are my conditions. Swear allegiance to my father Tiberius, and sort out from among yourselves the men responsible for the death of your captains, the insult to the deputation and the stealing of the Eagle. If you do this you will so far have my forgiveness that I shall let you have your playfellow back. My wife however must not be brought to bed in this camp, until it has been purged of guilt. Her time is near now and I want no evil influence to cloud the life of the child. But I can send her to Cologne instead of Trèves if you do not wish it said that I confided her to the protection of barbarians. My full pardon will only

be given when you have wiped out the memory of your bloody crimes by a bloodier victory over your country's enemies, the Germans."

They swore to abide by his conditions. So he sent a messenger to overtake Agrippina and Cassius; he was to explain matters and fetch Caligula back. The men ran to the tents and called on every loyal comrade to join them and arrest the ringleaders of the mutiny. About a hundred men were seized and frog-marched to the tribunal, about which the remainder of the two regiments formed a hollow square with drawn swords. A colonel made each prisoner in turn mount a rough scaffold which had been put up beside the tribunal, and if the men of his company judged him guilty he was thrown down and beheaded by them. Germanicus said nothing throughout the two hours of this informal trial, sitting with folded arms and an impassive face. All but a few of the prisoners were found guilty.

When the last head had fallen and the bodies had been taken out of camp to be burned, Germanicus called up every captain in turn to the tribunal and asked him to give particulars of his service. If he had a good record and had evidently not been appointed by favouritism Germanicus appealed to the company veterans for their opinion of him. If they gave him a good name and the battalion colonel had nothing against him the man was confirmed in his rank. But if his record was bad or if there were complaints from his company he was degraded, and Germanicus called on the company to choose the best man they had among them to succeed him. Germanicus then thanked the men for their co-operation and called on them to take the oath of allegiance to Tiberius. They took it solemnly; and a moment later a great cheer went up. They saw Germanicus's messenger galloping back; and there was Caligula on the crupper in front of him shouting in his shrill voice and waving his toy sword.

Germanicus embraced the child and said that he had one more thing to add. Fifteen hundred time-expired veterans

had been discharged from the two regiments in accordance with instructions from Tiberius. But if any of them, he said, wanted his full pardon, which their fellows were soon going to earn by crossing the Rhine and avenging Varus's defeat, they could still win it. He would permit the more active men to re-enlist in their old companies; while those who were only fit for garrison duty could enlist in a special force for service in the Tyrol where dangerous raids from Germany had lately been reported. Would you believe it?—every man stepped forward and more than half volunteered for active service across the Rhine. Among these active volunteers was Pomponius, who protested that he was as fit as any man in the army, in spite of his bare gums and his rupture. Germanicus made him his tent-orderly and put his grandsons into the bodyguard. So everything was all right again at Bonn, and Caligula was told by the men that he had put down the mutiny single-handed and that one day he'd be a great emperor and win wonderful victories; which was very bad for the child, who was already, as I say, disgracefully spoilt.

But there remained the two other regiments who were at a place called Xanten to bring to their senses. They had continued to behave mutinously even after the payment of their bounty and their General could do nothing with them. When news came of the change of heart in the Bonn regiments the chief mutineers became seriously alarmed for their own safety and stirred up their comrades to fresh acts of violence and depredation. Germanicus sent their General word that he was coming down the Rhine at once at the head of a powerful force and that if such loyal men as remained under his command did not quickly follow the example of the Bonn regiments and execute the trouble-makers he would put the whole lot to the sword indiscriminately. The General read the letter privately to the standard-bearers, non-commissioned officers and a few trustworthy old soldiers and told them that there was little time for delay; for Germanicus might be on them any moment.

They promised him to do what they could and, letting a few more loyalists into the secret, which was well kept, they rushed into the tents at midnight on a given signal and began to massacre the mutineers. These defended themselves as best they could and killed a number of the loyalists, but they were soon overpowered. Five hundred men were killed or wounded that night. The rest, leaving only sentries in the camp, marched out to meet Germanicus, begging him to lead them at once across the Rhine against the enemy.

Although the campaigning season was nearly at an end, the fine weather still held and Germanicus promised to do what they asked. He threw a pontoon bridge over the river and marched across at the head of twelve thousand Roman infantry, twenty-six battalions of allies and eight squadrons of cavalry. From his agents in enemy territory he knew of a large concentration of the enemy in the villages of Münster, where an annual autumn festival in honour of the German Hercules was being held. News of the mutiny had reached the Germans—the mutineers had actually been in treaty with Hermann and had exchanged presents with him—and they were only waiting for the regiments to march away to their new kingdom in the South-West before crossing the Rhine and marching direct for Italy. Germanicus followed a rarely used forest-route and surprised the Germans completely, catching them at their beer-drinking. (Beer is a fermented drink made from steeped grain and they drink it to extraordinary excess at their feasts.) He divided his forces into four columns and wasted the country on a fifty-mile frontage, burning the villages and slaughtering the inhabitants without respect for age or sex. On his return he found detachments of various neighbouring tribes posted to dispute his passage through the forest; but he advanced in skirmishing order and was pressing the enemy back well when there was a sudden alarm from the Twentieth Regiment, which was acting as rearguard, and Germanicus found that a huge force of Germans under the personal command of Hermann was upon him. Fortunately the trees at this point were not dense

and allowed room for manœuvre. Germanicus rode back to the position of most danger and cried out "Break their line, Twentieth, and everything will be forgiven and forgotten." The Twentieth fought like madmen and threw the Germans back with huge slaughter, pursuing them far into the open country at the back of the wood. Germanicus caught sight of Hermann and challenged him to combat, but Hermann's men were running away: it would have been death for him to have accepted the challenge. He galloped off. Germanicus was as unlucky as our father had been in his pursuit of enemy chieftains; but he won his victories in the same style, and the name "Germanicus" which he had inherited he bore now in his own right. He marched the exultant army back to safety in their camps across the Rhine.

Tiberius never understood Germanicus, nor Germanicus Tiberius. Tiberius, as I have said, was one of the bad Claudians. Yet he was, at times, easily tempted to virtue, and in a noble age might well have passed for a noble character: for he was a man of no mean capacity. But the age was not a noble one and his heart had been hardened, and for that hardening Livia must, you will agree, bear the chief blame. Germanicus, on the other hand, was wholly inclined to virtue and, however evil the age into which he had been born, could never have behaved any differently from the way he did. So it was that when he refused the monarchy offered him by the German regiments, and made them swear allegiance to Tiberius, Tiberius could not make out why he should have done so. He decided that he must be even more subtle than himself and playing some very deep game indeed. The simple explanation, that Germanicus put honour above all other considerations and that he was bound to Tiberius by military allegiance and by having been adopted as his son, never occurred to him. But Germanicus, since he did not suspect Tiberius of complicity in Livia's designs and since Tiberius never offered him any slights or injuries, but on the contrary praised him greatly for his

handling of the mutiny and decreed him a full triumph for his campaign in Münster, believed him to be as honourably-intentioned as himself, only a little simple-minded not to have seen through Livia's designs yet. He determined to have a frank talk with Tiberius as soon as he went home for the triumph. But Varus's death was not yet avenged; it was three years before Germanicus came back. The tone of the letters exchanged between Germanicus and Tiberius during this period was set by Germanicus, who wrote with dutiful affection. Tiberius replied in the same friendly strain because he thought that by so doing he was beating Germanicus at his own clever game. He undertook to repay him the amount of the doubled bequest and to extend the bounty to the Balkan regiments too. As a matter of policy he did pay the Balkan regiments this extra three gold pieces a man—there were threats of another mutiny—but excused himself from repaying Germanicus for a few months on the grounds of financial embarrassment. Naturally Germanicus did not press him for the money and naturally Tiberius never gave it him. Germanicus wrote again to ask me whether he might wait to repay me until Tiberius repaid him, and I wrote back that I really meant the money as a gift.

Shortly after Tiberius's accession I wrote to him and said that I had been studying law and administration—as was the case—for some time, in the hope that I would at last be given an opportunity of serving my country in some responsible capacity. He wrote back to say that it certainly was an anomaly for a man who was the brother of Germanicus and his own nephew to go about as a mere knight, and that since I was now being made a priest of Augustus I must certainly be allowed to wear the dress of a senator: in fact, if I could undertake not to make a fool of myself in it he should ask permission for me to adopt the brocaded gown now worn by Consuls and ex-Consuls. I wrote back at once to say that I would even prefer office without dress to dress without office; but his only answer to this was to send me a present of forty gold pieces "to buy toys with next All Fools' Day".

The Senate did vote me the brocaded gown, and as a mark of honour to Germanicus, who was now in the middle of a new successful campaign in Germany, proposed to decree me a seat in the House among the ex-Consuls. But Tiberius here interposed his veto, telling them that I was in his opinion incapable of delivering a speech on matters of State which would not be a trial of his fellow-members' patience.

There was another decree proposed at the same time, which he also vetoed. The circumstances were as follows: Agrippina had been delivered of her child, a girl called Agrippinilla, at Cologne; and I must say at once that this Agrippinilla turned out one of the very worst of the Claudians—in fact, I may say that she shows signs of out-doing all her ancestors and ancestresses in arrogance and vice. Agrippina was ill for some months after her delivery, and unable to keep Caligula in hand properly, so he was sent away on a visit to Rome as soon as Germanicus began his spring campaign. The child became a sort of national hero. Whenever he went out for a walk with his brothers he was cheered and stared at and made much of. Not yet three years old but marvellously precocious, he was a most difficult case, only pleasant when flattered and only docile when treated firmly. He came to stay with his great-grandmother Livia, but she had no time to look after him properly, and because he was always getting into mischief and quarrelling with his elder brothers, he came from her to live with my mother and me. My mother never flattered him, but neither did she treat him with enough firmness, until one day he spat at her in a fit of temper and she gave him a good spanking. "You horrid old German woman," he said, "I'll burn your German house down!" He used "German" as the worst insult he knew. And that afternoon he sneaked away into a lumber-room, which was next to the slaves' attic and full of old furniture and rubbish, and there set fire to a heap of worn-out straw mattresses. The fire soon swept the whole upper storey, and since it was an old house with dry-rot in the beams and draught-holes in the

flooring there was no putting it out even with an endless bucket-chain to the carp pool. I managed to save all my papers and valuables and some of the furniture, and no lives were lost except two old slaves who were lying sick in bed, but nothing was left of the house except the bare walls and the cellars. Caligula was not punished, because the fire had given him such a great fright. He nearly got caught in it himself, hiding guiltily under his bed until the smoke drove him screaming out.

Well, the Senate wanted to decree that my house should be rebuilt at the expense of the State, on the ground that it had been the home of so many distinguished members of my family: but Tiberius would not allow this. He said that the outbreak of fire had been due to my negligence and that the damage could easily have been confined to the attics if I had acted in a responsible way; and rather than that the State should pay he undertook to rebuild and refurnish the house himself. Loud applause from the House. This was most unjust and dishonest, particularly as he had no intention of keeping his undertaking. I was forced to sell my last important piece of property in Rome, a block of houses near the Cattle Market and a large building site adjoining, to rebuild the house at my own expense. I never told Germanicus that Caligula had been the incendiary, because he would have felt obliged to make good the damage himself; and, I suppose it was, in a way, an accident, because one couldn't hold so young a child responsible.

When Germanicus's men went out to fight the Germans again they had a new addition to that ballad of Augustus's Three Griefs, of which I recall two or three verses and odd lines of others, most of them ridiculous:

Six gold bits a man he left us
For to buy us pork and beans,
For to buy us cheese and cracknels
In the German dry canteens.

and

God Augustus walks in Heaven,
Ghost Marcellus swims in Styx,
Julia's dead and gone to join him—
That's the end of Julia's tricks.

But our Eagles still are straying
And by shame and sorrow stirred
To the tomb of God Augustus
We'll bring back each wandering bird.

There was another which began:

German Hermann lost his sweetheart
And his little pot of beer

but I can't remember the finish, and the verse is not important except as reminding me to tell of Hermann's "sweetheart". She was the daughter of a chieftain called, in German, Siegstoss or something of the sort; but his Roman name was Segestes. He had been to Rome, like Hermann, and enrolled among the Knights, and unlike Hermann had felt morally bound by the oath of friendship he had sworn to Augustus. It was this Segestes who had warned Varus about Hermann and Segimerus and suggested that Varus should arrest them at the banquet to which he had invited them just before his unfortunate expedition started. Segestes had a favourite daughter whom Hermann had carried off and married and Segestes never forgave him for this injury. He could not, however, come out openly on the side of the Romans against Hermann, who was a national hero; all that he had been able to do as yet was to maintain a secret correspondence with Germanicus, giving him intelligence of military movements and constantly assuring him that he had never wavered in his loyalty to Rome and was only waiting for an opportunity to make proof of it. But now he wrote to Germanicus that he was being besieged in his stockaded village by Hermann, who had sworn to give no quarter; and that he could not hold out much longer. Germanicus made

a forced march, defeated the besieging force, which was not numerous—Hermann himself was away, wounded—and rescued Segestes: when he found that he had a valuable prize awaiting him—Hermann's wife who had been visiting her father when the quarrel broke out between him and her husband, and who was far gone in pregnancy. Germanicus treated Segestes and his household very kindly, giving them an estate on the Western side of the Rhine. Hermann, who was enraged at his wife's capture, feared that Germanicus's clemency might induce other German chieftains to make overtures of peace. He built up a strong new confederation of tribes, including some which had always hitherto been friendly to Rome. Germanicus was undaunted. The more Germans he had in the field openly against him, the better he was pleased. He never trusted them as allies.

And before the summer was out he had beaten them in a series of battles, forced Segimerus to surrender and won back the first of the three lost Eagles, that of the Nineteenth Regiment. He also visited the scene of Varus's defeat and gave the bones of his comrades-in-arms a decent burial, laying the first sod of their tomb with his own hands. The General who had behaved so supinely in the mutiny fought bravely at the head of his corps, and on one occasion turned what had seemed a hopeless defeat into a creditable victory. Premature news that this battle was lost and that the conquering Germans were marching towards the Rhine caused such consternation at the nearest bridge that the captain of the guard gave his men orders to retreat across it and then break it down: which would have meant abandoning everyone on the other side to their fate. But Agrippina was there and countermanded the order. She told the men that she was captain of the guard now and would remain so until her husband returned to relieve her of her command. When eventually the victorious troops came marching back she was at her post to welcome them. Her popularity now almost equalled that of her husband. She had organized a hospital for the wounded as Germanicus sent them back after each

battle and had given them the best available medical treatment. Ordinarily, wounded soldiers remained with their units until they either died or recovered. The hospital she paid for out of her own purse.

But I mentioned the death of Julia. When Tiberius became Emperor, Julia's daily supply of food at Reggio was reduced to four ounces of bread a day and one ounce of cheese. She was already in a consumption from the unhealthiness of her quarters and this starvation diet soon carried her off. But there was still no news of Postumus, and Livia, until she was certain of his death, could not be easy in her mind.