

75 AD

GALBA

5 B.C.? - 69 A.D.

Plutarch

translated by John Dryden

Plutarch (46-120) - Greek biographer, historian, and philosopher, sometimes known as the encyclopaedist of antiquity. He is most renowned for his series of character studies, arranged mostly in pairs, known as "Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans" or "Parallel Lives." Galba (75 AD) - A study of the life of the Roman Emperor, Galba.

GALBA

IPHICRATES the Athenian used to say that it is best to have a mercenary soldier fond of money and of pleasures, for thus he will fight the more boldly, to procure the means to gratify his desires. But most have been of opinion, that the body of an army, as well as the natural one, when in its healthy condition, should make no efforts apart, but in compliance with its head. Wherefore they tell us that Paulus Aemilius, on taking command of the forces in Macedonia, and finding them talkative and impertinently busy, as though they were all commanders, issued out his orders that they should have only ready hands and keen swords, and leave the rest to him. And Plato, who can discern use of a good ruler or general if his men are not on their part obedient and conformable (the virtue of obeying, as of ruling, being, in his opinion, one that does not exist without first a noble nature, and then a philosophic education, where the eager and active powers are allayed with the gentler and humaner sentiments), may claim in confirmation of his doctrine sundry mournful instances elsewhere, and, in particular, the events that followed among the Romans upon the death of Nero, in which plain proofs were given that nothing is more terrible than a military force moving about in an empire upon uninstructed and unreasoning impulses. Demades, after the death of Alexander, compared the Macedonian army to the Cyclops after his eye was out, seeing their many disorderly and unsteady motions. But the calamities of the Roman government might be likened to the motions of the giants that assailed heaven, convulsed as it was, and distracted, and from every side recoiling, as it were, upon itself, not so much by the ambition of those who were proclaimed emperors, as by the covetousness and licence of the soldiery, who drove commander after commander out, like nails one upon another.

Dionysius, in raillery, said of the Pheraean who enjoyed the government of Thessaly only ten months, that he had been a tragedy-king, but the Caesars' house in Rome, the Palatium, received in a shorter space of time no less than four emperors, passing, as it were, across the stage, and one making room for another to enter.

This was the only satisfaction of the distressed, that they need not require any other justice on their oppressors, seeing them thus murder each other, and first of all, and that most justly, the one that ensnared them first, and taught them to expect such happy

results from a change of emperors, sullyng a good word by the pay he gave for its being done and turning revolt against Nero into nothing better than treason.

For, as already related, Nymphidius Sabinus, captain of the guards, together with Tigellinus, after Nero's circumstances were now desperate, and it was perceived that he designed to fly into Egypt, persuaded the troops to declare Galba emperor, as if Nero had been already gone, promising to all the court and praetorian soldiers, as they are called, seven thousand five hundred drachmas apiece, and to those in service abroad twelve hundred and fifty drachmas each; so vast a sum for a largess as it was impossible any one could raise, but he must be infinitely more exacting and oppressive than ever Nero was. This quickly brought Nero to his grave, and soon after Galba too; they murdered the first in expectation of the promised gift, and not long after the other because they did not obtain it from him; and then, seeking about to find some one who would purchase at such a rate, they consumed themselves in a succession of treacheries and rebellions before they obtained their demands. But to give a particular relation of all that passed would require a history in full form; I have only to notice what is properly to my purpose, namely, what the Caesars did and suffered.

Sulpicius Galba is owned by all to have been the richest private person that ever came to the imperial seat. And besides the additional honour of being of the Servii, he valued himself more especially for his relationship to Catulus, the most eminent citizen of his time both for virtue and renown, however he may have voluntarily yielded to others as regards power and authority. Galba was also akin to Livia, the wife of Augustus, by whose interest he was preferred to the consulship by the emperor. It is said of him that he commanded the troops well in Germany, and, being made proconsul in Libya, gained a reputation that few ever had. But his quiet manner of living and his sparingness in expenses and his disregard of appearances gave him, when he became emperor, an ill-name for meanness, being, in fact, his worn-out credit for regularity and moderation. He was entrusted by Nero with the government of Spain, before Nero had yet learned to be apprehensive of men of great repute. To the opinion, moreover, entertained of his mild natural temper, his old age added a belief that he would never act incautiously.

There while Nero's iniquitous agents savagely and cruelly harassed the provinces under Nero's authority, he could afford no succour, but merely offer this only ease and consolation, that he

seemed plainly to sympathize, as a fellow-sufferer, with those who were condemned upon suits and sold. And when lampoons were made upon Nero and circulated and sung everywhere about, he neither prohibited them, nor showed any indignation on behalf of the emperor's agents, and for this was the more beloved; as also that he was now well acquainted with them, having been in chief power there eight years at the time when Junius Vindex, general of the forces in Gaul, began his insurrection against Nero. And it is reported that letters came to Galba before it fully broke out into an open rebellion, which he neither seemed to give credit to, nor on the other hand to take means to let Nero know; as other officers did, sending to him the letters which came to them, and so spoiled the design, as much as in them lay, who yet afterwards shared in the conspiracy, and confessed they had been treacherous to themselves as well as him.

At last Vindex, plainly declaring war, wrote to Galba, encouraging him to take the government upon him, and give a head to this strong body, the Gaulish provinces, which could already count a hundred thousand men in arms, and were able to arm a yet greater number if occasion were. Galba laid the matter before his friends, some of whom thought it fit to wait, and see what movement there might be and what inclinations displayed at Rome for the revolution. But Titus Vinius, captain of his praetorian guard, spoke thus: "Galba, what means this inquiry? To question whether we shall continue faithful to Nero is, in itself, to cease to be faithful. Nero is our enemy, and we must by no means decline the help of Vindex: or else we must at once denounce him, and march to attack him, because he wishes you to be the governor of the Romans, rather than Nero their tyrant." Thereupon Galba, by an edict, appointed a day when he would receive manumissions, and general rumour and talk beforehand about his purpose brought together a great crowd of men so ready for a change, that he scarcely appeared, stepping up to the tribunal, but they with one consent saluted him emperor. That title he refused at present to take upon him; but after he had a while inveighed against Nero and bemoaned the loss of the more conspicuous of those that had been destroyed by him, he offered himself and service to his country, not by the titles of Caesar or emperor, but as the lieutenant of the Roman senate and people.

Now that Vindex did wisely in inviting Galba to the empire, Nero himself bore testimony; who, though he seemed to despise Vindex and altogether to slight the Gauls and their concerns, yet when he heard of Galba (as by chance he had just bathed and sat down to

his morning meal), at this news he overturned the table. But the senate having voted Galba an enemy, presently, to make his jest, and likewise to personate a confidence among his friends, "This is a very happy opportunity," he said, "for me, who sadly want such a booty as that of the Gauls, which must all fall in as lawful prize; and Galba's estate I can use or sell at once, he being now an open enemy." And accordingly he had Galba's property exposed to sale, which when Galba heard of, he sequestered all that was Nero's in Spain, and found far readier bidders.

Many now began to revolt from Nero, and pretty nearly all adhered to Galba; only Clodius Macer in Africa, and Virginius Rufus, commander of the German forces in Gaul, followed counsel of their own; yet these two were not of one and the same advice, for Clodius, being sensible of the rapines and murders to which he had been led by cruelty and covetousness, was in perplexity, and felt it was not safe for him either to retain or quit his command. But Virginius, who had the command of the strongest legions, by whom he was many repeated times saluted emperor and pressed to take the title upon him, declared that he neither would assume that honour himself, nor see it given to any other than whom the senate should elect.

These things at first did not a little disturb Galba, but when presently Virginius and Vindex were in a manner forced by their armies, having got the reins, as it were, out of their hands, to a great encounter and battle, in which Vindex, having seen twenty thousand of the Gauls destroyed, died by his own hand, and when the report straight spread abroad, that all desired Virginius, after this great victory, to take the empire upon him, or else they would return to Nero again, Galba, in great alarm at this, wrote to Virginius, exhorting him to join with him for the preservation of the empire and the liberty of the Romans, and so retiring with his friends into Clunia, a town in Spain, he passed away his time, rather repenting his former rashness, and wishing for his wonted ease and privacy, than setting about what was fit to be done.

It was now summer, when on a sudden, a little before dusk, comes a freedman Icelus by name, having arrived in seven days from Rome; and being informed where Galba was reposing himself in private, he went straight on, and pushing by the servants of the chamber, opened the door and entered the room, and told him, that Nero being yet alive but not appearing, first the army, and then the people and senate, declared Galba emperor; not long after, it was reported that Nero was dead; "but I," said he, "not giving credit to common fame, went myself to the body and saw him

lying dead, and only then set out to bring you word." This news at once made Galba great again, and a crowd of people came hastening to the door, all very confident of the truth of his tidings, though the speed of the man was almost incredible. Two days after came Titus Vinius with sundry others from the camp, who gave an account in detail of the orders of the senate, and for this service was considerably advanced. On the freedman, Galba conferred the honour of the gold ring, and Icelus, as he had been before, now taking the name of Marcianus, held the first place of the freedmen.

But at Rome, Nymphidius Sabinus, not gently, and little by little, but at once, and without exception, engrossed all power to himself; Galba, being an old man (seventy-three years of age), would scarcely, he thought, live long enough to be carried in a litter to Rome; and the troops in the city were from old time attached to him, and now bound by the vastness of the promised gift, for which they regarded him as their benefactor, and Galba as their debtor. Thus presuming on his interest, he straightway commanded Tigellinus, who was in joint commission with himself, to lay down his sword; and giving entertainments, he invited the former consuls and commanders, making use of Galba's name for the invitation; but at the same time prepared many in the camp to propose that a request should be sent to Galba that he should appoint Nymphidius sole prefect for life without a colleague. And the modes which the senate took to show him honour and increase his power, styling him their benefactor, and attending daily at his gates, and giving him the compliment of heading with his own name and confirming all their acts, carried him on to a yet greater degree of arrogance, so that in a short time he became an object, not only of dislike, but of terror, to those that sought his favour. When the consuls themselves had despatched their couriers with the decrees of the senate to the emperor, together with the sealed diplomas, which the authorities in all the towns where horses or carriages are changed look at, and on that certificate hasten the courtiers forward with all their means, he was highly displeased that his seal had not been used, and none of his soldiers employed on the errand. Nay, he even deliberated what course to take with the consuls themselves, but upon their submission and apology he was at last pacified. To gratify the people, he did not interfere with their beating to death any that fell into their hands of Nero's party. Amongst others, Spiclus, the gladiator, was killed in the forum by being thrown under Nero's statues, which they dragged about the place over his body. Aponius, one of those who had been concerned in accusations, they knocked to the ground, and drove

carts loaded with stones over him. And many others they tore in pieces, some of them no way guilty, insomuch that Mauriscus, a person of great account and character, told the senate that he feared, in a short time, they might wish for Nero again.

Nymphidius, now advancing towards the consummation of his hopes, did not refuse to let it be said that he was the son of Caius Caesar, Tiberius's successor; who, it is told, was well acquainted with his mother in his early youth, a woman indeed handsome enough, the offspring of Callistus, one of Caesar's freedmen, and a certain sempstress. But it is plain that Caius's familiarity with his mother was of too late date to give him any pretensions, and it was suspected he might, if he pleased, claim a father in Martianus, the gladiator, whom his mother, Nymphidia, took a passion for, being a famous man in his way, whom also he much more resembled. However, though he certainly owned Nymphidia for his mother, he ascribed meantime the downfall of Nero to himself alone, and thought he was not sufficiently rewarded with the honours and riches he enjoyed (nay, though to all was added the company of Sporus, whom he immediately sent for while Nero's body was yet burning on the pile, and treated as his consort with the name of Poppaea), but he must also aspire to the empire. And at Rome he had friends who took measures for him secretly, as well as some women and some members of the senate also, who worked underhand to assist him. And into Spain he despatched one of his friends, named Gellianus, to view the posture of affairs.

But all things succeeded well with Galba after Nero's death; only Virginius Rufus, still standing doubtful, gave him some anxiety, lest he should listen to the suggestions of some who encouraged him to take the government upon him, having, at present, besides the command of a large and warlike army, the new honours of the defeat of Vindex and the subjugation of one considerable part of the Roman empire, namely, the entire Gaul, which had seemed shaking about upon the verge of open revolt. Nor had any man indeed a greater name and reputation than Virginius, who had taken a part of so much consequence in the deliverance of the empire at once from a cruel tyranny and a Gallic war. But he, standing to his first resolves, reserved to the senate the power of electing an emperor. Yet when it was now manifest that Nero was dead, the soldiers pressed him hard to it, and one of the tribunes, entering his tent with his drawn sword, bade him either take the government or that. But after Fabius Valens, having the command of one legion, had first sworn fealty to Galba, and letters from Rome came with tidings of the resolves of the senate, at last with

much ado he persuaded the army to declare Galba emperor. And when Flaccus Hordeonius came by Galba's commission as Galba successor, he handed over to him his forces, and went himself to meet Galba on his way, and having met him turned back to attend him; in all which no apparent displeasure nor yet honour was shown him. Galba's feelings of respect for him prevented the former; the latter was checked by the envy of his friends, and particularly of Titus Vinius, who, acting in the desire of hindering Virginius's promotion, unwittingly aided his happy genius in rescuing him from those hazards and hardships which other commanders were involved in, and securing him the safe enjoyment of a quiet life and peaceable old age.

Near Narbo, a city in Gaul, the deputation of the senate met Galba, and after they had delivered their compliments, begged him to make what haste he could to appear to the people that impatiently expected him. He discoursed with them courteously and unassumingly, and in his entertainment, though Nymphidius had sent him royal furniture and attendance of Nero's, he put all aside, and made use of nothing but his own, for which he was well spoken of, as one who had a great mind, and was superior to little vanities. But in a short time, Vinius, by declaring to him that these noble, unpompous, citizen-like ways were a mere affectation of popularity and a petty bashfulness at assuming his proper greatness, induced him to make use of Nero's supplies, and in his entertainments not to be afraid of a regal sumptuosity. And in more than one way the old man let it gradually appear that he had put himself under Vinius's disposal.

Vinius was a person of an excessive covetousness, and not quite free from blame in respect to women. For being a young man, newly entered into the service under Calvisius Sabinus, upon his first campaign, he brought his commander's wife, a licentious woman, in a soldier's dress, by night into the camp, and was found with her in the very general's quarters, the principia, as the Romans call them. For which insolence Caius Caesar cast him into prison, from whence he was fortunately delivered by Caius's death. Afterwards, being invited by Claudius Caesar to supper, he privily conveyed away a silver cup, which Caesar hearing of, invited him again the next day, and gave order to his servants to set before him no silver plate, but only earthenware. And this offence, through the comic mildness of Caesar's reprimand, was treated rather as a subject of jest than as a crime. But the acts to which now, when Galba was in his hands and his power was so

extensive, his covetous temper led him were the causes, in part, and in part the provocation, of tragical and fatal mischiefs.

Nymphidius became very uneasy upon the return out of Spain of Gellianus whom he had sent to pry into Galba's actions, understanding that Cornelius Laco was appointed commander of the court guards, and that Vinius was the great favourite, and that Gellianus had not been able so much as to come nigh, much less have any opportunity to offer any words in private, so narrowly had he been watched and observed. Nymphidius, therefore, called together the officers of the troops, and declared to them that Galba of himself was a good, well-meaning old man, but did not act by his own counsel, and was ill-guided by Vinius and Laco; and lest, before they were aware, they should engross the authority Tigellinus had with the troops, he proposed to them to send deputies from the camp acquainting him that if he pleased to remove only these two from his counsel and presence, he would be much more welcome to all at his arrival. Wherein, when he saw he did not prevail (it seeming absurd and unmannerly to give rules to an old commander what friends to retain or displace, as if he had been a youth newly taking the reins of authority into his hands), adopting another course, he wrote himself to Galba letters in alarming terms, one while as if the city were unsettled, and had not yet recovered its tranquillity; then that Clodius Macer withheld the corn-ships from Africa; that the legions in Germany began to be mutinous, and that he heard the like of those in Syria and Judaea. But Galba not minding him much or giving credit to his stories, he resolved to make his attempt beforehand, though Clodius Celsus, a native of Antioch, a person of sense, and friendly and faithful to Nymphidius, told him he was wrong, saying he did not believe one single street in Rome would ever give him the title of Caesar. Nevertheless many also derided Galba, amongst the rest Mithridates of Pontus, saying, that as soon as this wrinkled, baldheaded man should be seen publicly at Rome, they would think it an utter disgrace even to have had such a Caesar.

At last it was resolved, about midnight, to bring Nymphidius into the camp, and declare him emperor. But Antonius Honoratus, who was first among the tribunes, summoning together in the evening those under his command, charged himself and them severely with their many and unreasonable turns and alterations, made without any purpose or regard to merit, simply as if some evil genius hurried them from one reason to another. "What though Nero's miscarriages," said he, "gave some colour to your former acts, can you say you have any plea for betraying Galba in the death of a

mother, the blood of a wife, or the degradation of the imperial power upon the stage and amongst players? Neither did we desert Nero for all this, until Nymphidius had persuaded us that he had first left us and fled into Egypt. Shall we, therefore, send Galba after, to appease Nero's shade, and, for the sake of making the son of Nymphidia emperor, take off one of Livia's family, as we have already the son of Agrippina? Rather, doing justice on him, let us revenge Nero's death, and show ourselves true and faithful by preserving Galba." The tribune having ended his harangue, the soldiers assented, and encouraged all they met with to persist in their fidelity to the emperor, and, indeed, brought over the greatest part. But presently hearing a great shout, Nymphidius, imagining, as some say, that the soldiers called for him, or hastening to be in time to check any opposition and gain the doubtful, came on with many lights, carrying in his hand a speech in writing, made by Cingonius Varro, which he had got by heart, to deliver to the soldiers. But seeing the gates of the camp shut up, and large numbers standing armed about the walls, he began to be afraid. Yet drawing nearer he demanded what they meant, and by whose orders they were then in arms; but hearing a general acclamation, all with one consent crying out that Galba was their emperor, advancing towards them, he joined in the cry, and likewise commanded those that followed him to do the same. The guard notwithstanding permitted him to enter the camp only with a few, where he was presently struck with a dart, which Septimius, being before him, received on his shield; others, however, assaulted him with their naked swords, and on his flying, pursued him into a soldier's cabin, where they slew him. And dragging his body thence, they placed a railing about it, and exposed it next day to public view.

When Galba heard of the end which Nymphidius had thus come to, he commanded that all his confederates who had not at once killed themselves should immediately be despatched ; amongst whom were Cingonius, who made his oration, and Mithridates, formerly mentioned. It was, however, regarded as arbitrary and illegal, and though it might be just, yet by no means popular, to take off men of their rank and equality without a hearing. For every one expected another scheme of government, being deceived, as is usual, by the first plausible pretences; and the death of Petronius Turpilianus, who was of consular dignity, and had remained faithful to Nero, was yet more keenly resented. Indeed, the taking off of Macer in Africa by Trebonius, and Fonteius by Valens in Germany, had a fair pretence, they being dreaded as

armed commanders, having their soldiers at their bidding; but why refuse Turpilianus, an old man and unarmed, permission to try to clear himself, if any part of the moderation and equity at first promised were really to come to a performance? Such were the comments to which these actions exposed him. When he came within five-and-twenty furlongs or thereabouts of the city, he happened to light on a disorderly rabble of the seamen, who beset him as he passed. These were they whom Nero made soldiers, forming them into a legion. They so rudely crowded to have their commission confirmed that they did not let Galba either be seen or heard by those that had come out to meet their new emperor; but tumultuously pressed on with loud shouts to have colours to their legion, and quarters assigned them. Galba put them off until another time, which they interpreted as a denial, grew more insolent and mutinous, following and crying out, some with their drawn swords in their hands. Upon seeing which, Galba commanded the horse to ride over them, when they were soon routed, not a man standing his ground, and many of them were slain, both there and in the pursuit; an ill-omen, that Galba should make his first entry through so much blood and among dead bodies. And now he was looked upon with terror and alarm by any one who had entertained contempt of him at the sight of his age and apparent infirmities.

But when he desired presently to let it appear what a change would be made from Nero's profuseness and sumptuousness in giving presents, he much missed his aim, and fell so short of magnificence, that he scarcely came within the limits of decency. When Canus, who was a famous musician, played at supper for him, he expressed his approbation, and bade the bag he brought to him; and taking a few gold pieces, put them in with this remark, that it was out of his own purse, and not on the public account. He ordered the largess which Nero had made to actors and wrestlers and such like to be strictly required again, allowing only the tenth part to be retained; though it turned to very small account, most of those persons expending their daily income as fast as they received it, being rude, improvident livers; upon which he had further inquiry made as to those who had bought or received from them, and called upon these people to refund. The trouble was infinite, the exactions being prosecuted far, touching a great number of persons, bringing disrepute on Galba, and general hatred on Vinius, who made the emperor appear base-hearted and mean to the world, whilst he himself was spending profusely, taking whatever he could get, and selling to any buyer. Hesiod tells us to

drink without stinting of- "The end and the beginning of the cask."
- And Vinius, seeing his patron old and decaying, made the most of what he considered to be at once the first of his fortune and the last of it.

Thus the aged man suffered in two ways, first, through the evil deeds which Vinius did himself, and, next, by his preventing or bringing into disgrace those just acts which he himself designed. Such was the punishing Nero's adherents.

When he destroyed the bad, amongst whom were Helius, Polycletus, Petinus, and Patrobius, the people mightily applauded the act, crying out, as they were dragged through the forum, that it was a goodly sight, grateful to the gods themselves, adding, however, that the gods and men alike demanded justice on Tigellinus, the very tutor and prompter of all the tyranny. This good man, however, had taken his measures beforehand, in the shape of a present and a promise to Vinius. Turpilianus could not be allowed to escape with life, though his one and only crime had been that he had not betrayed or shown hatred to such a ruler as Nero. But he who had made Nero what he became, and afterwards deserted and betrayed him whom he had so corrupted, was allowed to survive as an instance that Vinius could do anything, and an advertisement that those that had money to give him need despair of nothing. The people, however, were so possessed with the desire of seeing Tigellinus dragged to execution, that they never ceased to require it at the theatre, and in the race-course, till they were checked by an edict from the emperor himself, announcing that Tigellinus could not live long, being wasted with a consumption, and requesting them not to seek to make his government appear cruel and tyrannical. So the dissatisfied populace were laughed at, and Tigellinus made a splendid feast, and sacrificed in thanksgiving for his deliverance; and after supper, Vinius, rising from the emperor's table, went to revel with Tigellinus, taking his daughter, a widow, with him; to whom Tigellinus presented his compliments, with a gift of twenty-five myriads of money, and bade the superintendent of his concubines take off a rich necklace from her own neck and tie it about hers, the value of it being estimated at fifteen myriads.

After this, even reasonable acts were censured; as, for example, the treatment of the Gauls who had been in the conspiracy with Vindex. For people looked upon their abatement of tribute and admission to citizenship as a piece, not of clemency on the part of Galba, but of money-making on that of Vinius. And thus the mass of the people began to look with dislike upon the government. The

soldiers were kept on a while in expectation of the promised donative, supposing that if they did not receive the full, yet they should have at least as much as Nero gave them. But when Galba, on hearing they began to complain, declared greatly, and like a general, that he was used to enlist and not to buy his soldiers, when they heard of this, they conceived an implacable hatred against him; for he did not seem to defraud them merely himself in their present expectations, but to give an ill precedent, and instruct his successors to do the like. This heart-burning, however, was as yet at Rome a thing undeclared, and a certain respect for Galba's personal presence somewhat retarded their motions, and took off their edge, and their having no obvious occasion for beginning a revolution curbed and kept under, more or less, their resentments. But those forces that had been formerly under Virginius, and now were under Flaccus in Germany, valuing themselves much upon the battle they had fought with Vindex, and finding now no advantage of it, grew very refractory and intractable towards their officers; and Flaccus they wholly disregarded, being incapacitated in body by unintermitted gout, and, besides, a man of little experience in affairs. So at one of their festivals, when it was customary for the officers of the army to wish all health and happiness to the emperor, the common soldiers began to murmur loudly, and on their officers persisting in the ceremony, responded with the words, "If he deserves it." When some similar insolence was committed by the legions under Vitellius, frequent letters with the information came to Galba from his agents; and taking alarm at this, and fearing that he might be despised not only for his old age, but also for want of issue, he determined to adopt some young man of distinction, and declare him his successor. There was at this time in the city Marcus Otho, a person of fair extraction, but from his childhood one of the few most debauched, voluptuous, and luxurious livers in Rome. And as Homer gives Paris in several places the title of "fair Helen's love," making a woman's name the glory and addition to his, as if he had nothing else to distinguish him, so Otho was renowned in Rome for nothing more than his marriage with Poppaea, whom Nero had a passion for when she was Crispinus's wife. But being as yet respectful to his own wife, and standing in awe of his mother, he engaged Otho underhand to solicit her. For Nero lived familiarly with Otho, whose prodigality won his favour, and he was well pleased when he took the freedom to jest upon him as mean and penurious. Thus when Nero one day perfumed himself with some rich essence and favoured Otho with a sprinkle of it, he, entertaining Nero next day, ordered gold and silver pipes to disperse the like on a sudden freely, like

water, throughout the room. As to Poppaea, he was beforehand with Nero, and first seducing her himself, then, with the hope of Nero's favour, he prevailed with her to part with her husband, and brought her to his own house as his wife, and was not content afterwards to have a share in her, but grudged to have Nero for a claimant, Poppaea herself, they say, being rather pleased than otherwise with this jealousy; she sometimes excluded Nero, even when Otho was not present, either to prevent his getting tired with her, or, as some say, not liking the prospect of an imperial marriage, though willing enough to have the emperor as her lover. So that Otho ran the risk of his life, and strange it was he escaped, when Nero, for this very marriage, killed his wife and sister. But he was beholden to Seneca's friendship, by whose persuasions and entreaty Nero was prevailed with to despatch him as praetor into Lusitania, on the shores of the Ocean; where he behaved himself very agreeably and indulgently to those he had to govern, well knowing this command was but to colour and disguise his banishment.

When Galba revolted from Nero, Otho was the first governor of any of the provinces that came over to him, bringing all the gold and silver he possessed in the shape of cups and tables, to be coined into money, and also what servants he had fitly qualified to wait upon a prince. In all other points, too, he was faithful to him, and gave him sufficient proof that he was inferior to none in managing public business. And he so far ingratiated himself, that he rode in the same carriage with him during the whole journey, several days together. And in this journey and familiar companionship he won over Vinius also, both by his conversation and presents, but especially by conceding to him the first place securing the second, by his interest, for himself. And he had the advantage of him in avoiding all odium and jealousy, assisting all petitioners, without asking for any reward, and appearing courteous and of easy access towards all especially to the military men, for many of whom he obtained commands, some immediately from the emperor, others by Vinius's means, and by the assistance of the two favourite freedmen, Icelus and Asiaticus, these being the men in chief power in the court. As often as he entertained Galba, he gave the cohort on duty, in addition to their pay, a piece of gold for every man there, upon pretence of respect to the emperor, while really he undermined him, and stole away his popularity with the soldiers.

So Galba consulting about a successor, Vinius introduced Otho, yet not even this gratis, but upon promise that he would marry his

daughter if Galba should make him his adopted son and successor to the empire. But Galba, in all his actions, showed clearly that he preferred the public good before his own private interest, not aiming so much to pleasure himself as to advantage the Romans by his selection. Indeed he does not seem to have been so much as inclined to make choice of Otho had it been but to inherit his own private fortune, knowing his extravagant and luxurious character, and that he was already plunged in debt five thousand myriads deep. So he listened to Vinius, and made no reply, but mildly suspended his determination. Only he appointed himself consul, and Vinius his colleague, and it was the general expectation that he would declare his successor at the beginning of the new year. And the soldiers desired nothing more than that Otho should be the person.

But the forces in Germany broke out into their mutiny whilst he was yet deliberating, and anticipated his design. All the soldiers in general felt much resentment against Galba for not having given them their expected largess, but these troops made a pretence of a more particular concern, that Virginius Rufus was cast off dishonourably, and that the bad who had fought with them were well rewarded, while those who had refused to take part with Vindex were punished; and Galba's thanks seemed all to be for him, to whose memory he had done honour after his death with public solemnities as though he had been made emperor by his means only. Whilst these discourses passed openly throughout the army, on the first day of the first month of the year, the Calends, as they call it, of January, Flaccus summoning them to take the usual anniversary oath of fealty to the emperor, they overturned and pulled down Galba's statues, and having sworn in the name of the senate and people of Rome, departed. But the officers now feared anarchy and confusion, as much as rebellion; and one of them came forward and said: "What will become of us, my fellow-soldiers, if we neither set up another general, nor retain the present one? This will be not so much to desert from Galba as to decline all subjection and command. It is useless to try and maintain Flaccus Hordeonius, who is but a mere shadow and image of Galba. But Vitellius, commander of the other Germany, is but one day's march distant, whose father was censor and thrice consul, and in a manner co-emperor with Claudius Caesar; and he himself has the best proof to show of his bounty and largeness of mind, in the poverty with which some reproach him. Him let us make choice of, that all may see we know how to choose an emperor better than either Spaniards or Lusitanians." Which motion whilst some

assented to, and others gainsaid, a certain standard-bearer slipped out and carried the news to Vitellius, who was entertaining much company by night. This taking air, soon passed through the troops, and Fabius Valens, who commanded one legion, riding up next day with a large body of horse, saluted Vitellius emperor. He had hitherto seemed to decline it, professing a dread he had to undertake the weight of the government; but on this day, being fortified, they say, by wine and a plentiful noon-day repast, he began to yield, and submitted to take on him the title of Germanicus they gave him, but desired to be excused as to that of Caesar. And immediately the army under Flaccus also, putting away their fine and popular oaths in the name of the senate, swore obedience to Vitellius as emperor, to observe whatever he commanded.

Thus Vitellius was publicly proclaimed emperor in Germany; which news coming to Galba's ear, he no longer deferred his adoption; yet knowing that some of his friends were using their interest for Dolabella, and the greatest number of them for Otho, neither of whom he approved of, on a sudden, without any one's privity, he sent for Piso, the son of Crassus and Scribonia, whom Nero slew, a young man in general of excellent disposition for virtue, but his most eminent qualities those of steadiness and austere gravity. And so he set out to go to the camp to declare him Caesar and successor to the empire. But at his very first going forth many signs appeared in the heavens, and when he began to make a speech to the soldiers, partly extempore, and partly reading it, the frequent claps of thunder and flashes of lightning, and the violent storm of rain that burst on both the camp and the city, were plain discoveries that the divine powers did not look with favour or satisfaction on this act of adoption that would come to no good result. The soldiers, also, showed symptoms of hidden discontent, and wore sullen looks, no distribution of money being even now made to them. However, those that were present and observed Piso's countenance and voice could not but feel admiration to see him so little overcome by so great a favour, of the magnitude of which at the same time he seemed not at all insensible. Otho's aspect, on the other hand, did not fail to let many marks appear of his bitterness and anger at his disappointment; since to have been the first man thought of for it, and to have come to the very point of being chosen, and now to be put by, was in his feelings a sign of the displeasure and ill-will of Galba towards him. This filled him with fears and apprehensions, and sent him home with a mind full of various passions, whilst he dreaded Piso, hated Galba, and was

full of wrath and indignation against Vinius. And the Chaldeans and soothsayers about him would not permit him to lay aside his hopes or quit his design, chiefly Ptolemaeus, insisting much on a prediction he had made, that Nero should not murder Otho, but he himself should die first, and Otho succeed as emperor; for the first proving true, he thought he could not distrust the rest. But none perhaps stimulated him more than those that professed privately to pity his hard fate and compassionate him for being thus ungratefully dealt with by Galba; especially Nymphidius's and Tigellinus's creatures, who, being now cast off and reduced to low estate, were eager to put themselves upon him, exclaiming at the indignity he had suffered, and provoking him to revenge himself.

Amongst these were Viturius and Barbius, the one an optio, the other a tesserarius (these are men who have the duties of messengers and scouts), with whom Onomastus, one of Otho's freedmen, went to the camp, to tamper with the army, and brought over some with money, others with fair promises, which was no hard matter, they being already corrupted, and only wanting a fair pretence. It had been otherwise more than the work of four days (which elapsed between the adoption and murder), so completely to infect them as to cause a general revolt.

On the sixth day ensuing, the eighteenth, as the Romans call it, before the Calends of February, the murder was done. On that day, in the morning, Galba sacrificed in the Palatium in the presence of his friends, when Umbricius, the priest, taking up the entrails, and speaking not ambiguously, but in plain words, said that there were signs of great troubles ensuing, and dangerous snares laid for the life of the emperor. Thus Otho had even been discovered by the finger of the god; being there just behind Galba, bearing all that was said, and seeing what was pointed out to them by Umbricius. His countenance changed to every colour in his fear, and he was betraying no small discomposure, when Onomastus, his freedman, came up and acquainted him that the master builders had come, and were waiting for him at home. Now that was the signal for Otho to meet the soldiers. Pretending then that he had purchased an old house, and was going to show the defects to those that had sold it to him, he departed; and passing through what is called Tiberius's house, he went on into the forum, near the spot where a golden pillar stands, at which all the several roads through Italy terminate.

Here, it is related, no more than twenty-three received and saluted him emperor; so that, although he was not in mind as in body enervated with soft living and effeminacy, being in his nature bold

and fearless enough in danger, nevertheless, he was afraid to go on. But the soldiers that were present would not suffer him to recede, but came with their swords drawn around his chair, commanding the bearers to take him up, whom he hastened on, saying several times over to himself, "I am a lost man." Several persons overheard the words, who stood by wondering, rather than alarmed, because of the small number that attempted such an enterprise. But as they marched on through the forum, about as many more met him, and here and there three or four at a time joined in. Thus returning towards the camp, with their bare swords in their hands, they saluted him as Caesar; whereupon Martialis, the tribune in charge of the watch, who was, they say, noways privy to it, but was simply surprised at the unexpectedness of the thing, and afraid to refuse, permitted him entrance. And after this, no man made any resistance; for they that knew nothing of the design, being purposely encompassed by the conspirators, as they were straggling here and there, first submitted for fear, and afterwards were persuaded into compliance. Tidings came immediately to Galba in the Palatium, whilst the priests were still present and the sacrifices at hand, so that persons who were most entirely incredulous about such things, and most positive in their neglect of them, were astonished, and began to marvel at the divine event. A multitude of all sorts of people now began to run together out of the forum; Vinius and Laco and some of Galba's freedmen drew their swords and placed themselves beside him; Piso went forth and addressed himself to the guards on duty in the court; and Marius Celsus, a brave man, was despatched to the Illyrian legion, stationed in what is called the Vipsanian chamber, to secure them.

Galba now consulting whether he should go out, Vinius dissuaded him, but Celsus and Laco encouraged him by all means to do so, and sharply reprimanded Vinius. But on a sudden a rumour came hot that Otho was slain in the camp; and presently appeared one Julius Atticus, a man of some distinction in the guards, running up with his drawn sword, crying out that he had slain Caesar's enemy; and pressing through the crowd that stood in his way, he presented himself before Galba with his bloody weapon, who, looking on him, demanded, "Who gave you your orders?" And on his answering that it had been his duty and the obligation of the oath he had taken the people applauded, giving loud acclamations, and Galba got into his chair and was carried out to sacrifice to Jupiter, and so to show himself publicly. But coming into the forum, there met him there, like a turn of wind, the opposite story,

that Otho had made himself master of the camp. And as usual in a crowd of such a size, some called to him to return back, others to move forwards; some encouraged him to be bold and fear nothing, others bade him to be cautious and distrust. And thus whilst his chair was tossed to and fro, as it were on the waves, often tottering, there appeared first horse, and straightway heavy-armed foot coming through Paulus's court, and all with one accord crying out, "Down with this private man." Upon this, the crowd of people set off running, not to fly and disperse, but to possess themselves of the colonnades and elevated places of the forum, as it might be to get places to see a spectacle. And as soon as Atillius Vergilio knocked down one of Galba's statues, this was taken as the declaration of war, and they sent a discharge of darts upon Galba's litter, and missing their aim, came up and attacked him nearer hand with their naked swords. No man resisted or offered to stand up in his defence, save one only, a centurion, Sempronius Densus, the single man among so many thousands that the sun beheld that day act worthily of the Roman empire, who, though he had never received any favour from Galba, yet out of bravery and allegiance endeavoured to defend the litter. First, lifting up his switch of vine, with which the centurions correct the soldiers when disorderly, he called aloud to the aggressors, charging them not to touch their emperor. And when they came upon him hand-to-hand, he drew his sword, and made a defence for a long time, until at last he was cut under the knees and brought to the ground.

Galba's chair was upset at the spot called the Lacus Curtius, where they ran up and struck at him as he lay in his corselet. He, however, offered his throat, bidding them "Strike, if it be for the Romans' good." He received several wounds on his legs and arms, and at last was struck in the throat, as most say, by one Camurius, a soldier of the fifteenth legion. Some name Terentius, others Lecanius; and there are others that say it was Fabius Fabulus, who it is reported cut off the head and carried it away in the skirt of his coat, the baldness making it a difficult thing to take hold of. But those that were with him would not allow him to keep it covered up, but bade him let every one see the brave deed he had done; so that after a while he stuck upon the lance the head of the aged man that had been their grave and temperate ruler, their supreme priest and consul, and, tossing it up in the air, ran like a bacchanal, twirling and flourishing with it, while the blood ran down the spear. But when they brought the head to Otho, "Fellow-soldiers," he cried out, "this is nothing, unless you show me Piso's too," which was presented him not long after. The young man,

retreating upon a wound received, was pursued by one Murcus, and slain at the temple of Vesta. Titus Vinius was also despatched, avowing himself to have been privy to the conspiracy against Galba by calling out that they were killing him contrary to Otho's pleasure. However, they cut off his head, and Laco's too, and brought them to Otho, requesting a boon.

And as Archilochus says- "When six or seven lie breathless on the ground, 'Twas I, 'twas I, say thousands, gave the wound." - Thus many that had no share in the murder wetted their hands and swords in blood, and came and showed them to Otho, presenting memorials suing for a gratuity. Not less than one hundred and twenty were identified afterwards from their written petitions; all of whom Vitellius sought out and put to death. There came also into the camp Marius Celsus, and was accused by many voices of encouraging the soldiers to assist Galba, and was demanded to death by the multitude. Otho had no desire for this, yet, fearing an absolute denial, he professed that he did not wish to take him off so soon, having many matters yet to learn from him; and so committed him safe to the custody of those he most confided in.

Forthwith a senate was convened, and as if they were not the same men, or had other gods to swear by, they took that oath in Otho's name which he himself had taken in Galba's and had broken; and withal conferred on him the titles of Caesar and Augustus; whilst the dead carcasses of the slain lay yet in their consular robes in the market-place. As for their heads, when they could make no other use of them, Vinius's they sold to his daughter for two thousand five hundred drachmas; Piso's was begged by his wife, Verania; Galba's they gave to Patrobius's servants; who when they had it, after all sorts of abuse and indignities, tumbled it into the place where those that suffer death by the emperor's orders are usually cast, called Sessorium. Galba's body was conveyed away by Priscus Helvidius by Otho's permission, and buried in the night by Argius, his freedman.

Thus you have the history of Galba, a person inferior to few Romans, either for birth or riches, rather exceeding all of his time in both, having lived in great honour and reputation in the reigns of five emperors, insomuch that he overthrew Nero rather by his fame and repute in the world than by actual force and power.

Of all the others that joined in Nero's deposition, some were by general consent regarded as unworthy, others had only themselves to vote them deserving of the empire. To him the title was offered, and by him it was accepted; and simply lending his name to

Vindex's attempt, he gave to what had been called rebellion before, the name of a civil war, by the presence of one that was accounted fit to govern. And therefore, as he considered that he had not so much sought the position as the position had sought him, he proposed to command those whom Nymphidius and Tigellinus had wheedled into obedience no otherwise than Scipio formerly and Fabricius and Camillus had commanded the Romans of their times.

But being now overcome with age, he was indeed among the troops and legions an upright ruler upon the antique model; but for the rest, giving himself up to Vinius, Laco, and his freedmen, who make their gain of all things, no otherwise than Nero had done to his insatiate favourites, he left none behind him to wish him still in power, though many to compassionate his death.

THE END