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## The Twelve Caesars

By C. Seutonius Tranquillus

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### Sergius Sulpicius Galba

I. The race of the Caesars became extinct in Nero; an event prognosticated by various signs, two of which were particularly significant. Formerly, when Livia, after her marriage with Augustus, was making a visit to her villa at Veii, an eagle flying by, let drop upon her lap a hen, with a sprig of laurel in her mouth, just as she had seized it. Livia gave orders to have the hen taken care of, and the sprig of laurel set; and the hen reared such a numerous brood of chickens, that the villa, to this day, is called the Villa of the Hens. The laurel groves flourished so much, that the Caesars procured thence the boughs and crowns they bore at their triumphs. It was also their constant custom to plant others on the same spot, immediately after a triumph; and it was observed that, a little before the death of each prince, the tree which had been set by him died away. But in the last year of Nero, the whole plantation of laurels perished to the very roots, and the hens all died. About the same time, the temple of the Caesars being struck with lightning, the heads of all the statues in it fell off at once; and Augustus's sceptre was dashed from his hands.

II. Nero was succeeded by Galba, who was not in the remotest degree allied to the family of the Caesars, but, without doubt, of very noble extraction, being descended from a great and ancient family; for he always used to put amongst his other titles, upon the bases of his statues, his being great-grandson to Q. Catulus Capitolinus. And when he came to be emperor, he set up the images of his ancestors in the hall of the palace; according to the inscriptions on which, he carried up his pedigree on the father's side to Jupiter; and by the mother's to Pasiphae, the wife of Minos.

III. To give even a short account of the whole family, would be tedious. I shall, therefore, only slightly notice that branch of it from which he was descended. Why, or whence, the first of the Sulpicii who had the cognomen of Galba, was so called, is uncertain. Some are of opinion, that it was because he set fire to a city in Spain, after he had a long time attacked it to no purpose, with torches dipped in the gum called Galbanum: others said he was so named, because, in a lingering disease, he made use of it as a remedy, wrapped up in wool: others, on account of his being prodigiously corpulent, such a one being called, in the language of the Gauls, Galba; or, on the contrary, because he was of a slender habit of body, like those insects which breed in a sort of oak, and are called Galbae. Sergius Galba, a person of consular rank, and the most eloquent man of his time, gave a lustre to the family. History relates, that, when he was pro-praetor of Spain, he perfidiously put to the sword thirty thousand Lusitanians, and by that means gave occasion to the war of Viriatus. His grandson being incensed against Julius Caesar, whose lieutenant he had been in Gaul, because he was through him disappointed of the consulship, joined with Cassius and Brutus in the conspiracy against him, for which he was condemned by the Pedian law. From him were descended the grandfather and father of the emperor Galba. The grandfather was more celebrated for his application to study, than for any figure he made in the government. For he rose no higher than the praetorship, but published a large and not uninteresting history. His father attained to the consulship: he was a short man and hump-backed, but a tolerable orator, and an industrious pleader. He was twice married: the

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first of his wives was Mummia Achaica, daughter of Catulus, and great-grand-daughter of Lucius Mummius, who sacked Corinth; and the other, Livia Ocellina, a very rich and beautiful woman, by whom it is supposed he was courted for the nobleness of his descent. They say, that she was farther encouraged to persevere in her advances, by an incident which evinced the great ingenuousness of his disposition. Upon her pressing her suit, he took an opportunity, when they were alone, of stripping off his toga, and showing her the deformity of his person, that he might not be thought to impose upon her. He had by Achaica two sons, Caius and Sergius. The elder of these, Caius, having very much reduced his estate, retired from town, and being prohibited by Tiberius from standing for a pro-consulship in his year, put an end to his own life.

IV. The emperor Sergius Galba was born in the consulship of M. Valerius Messala, and Cn. Lentulus, upon the ninth of the calends of January [24th December], in a villa standing upon a hill, near Terracina, on the left-hand side of the road to Fundi. Being adopted by his step-mother, he assumed the name of Livius, with the cognomen of Ocella, and changed his praenomen; for he afterwards used that of Lucius, instead of Sergius, until he arrived at the imperial dignity. It is well known, that when he came once, amongst other boys of his own age, to pay his respects to Augustus, the latter, pinching his cheek, said to him, "And thou, child, too, wilt taste our imperial dignity." Tiberius, likewise, being told that he would come to be emperor, but at an advanced age, exclaimed, "Let him live, then, since that does not concern me!" When his grandfather was offering sacrifice to avert some ill omen from lightning, the entrails of the victim were snatched out of his hand by an eagle, and carried off into an oak-tree loaded with acorns. Upon this, the soothsayers said, that the family would come to be masters of the empire, but not until many years had elapsed: at which he, smiling, said, "Ay, when a mule comes to bear a foal." When Galba first declared against Nero, nothing gave him so much confidence of success, as a mule's happening at that time to have a foal. And whilst all others were shocked at the occurrence, as a most inauspicious prodigy, he alone regarded it as a most fortunate

omen, calling to mind the sacrifice and saying of his grandfather. When he took upon him the manly habit, he dreamt that the goddess Fortune said to him, "I stand before your door weary; and unless I am speedily admitted, I shall fall into the hands of the first who comes to seize me." On his awaking, when the door of the house was opened, he found a brazen statue of the goddess, above a cubit long, close to the threshold, which he carried with him to Tusculum, where he used to pass the summer season; and having consecrated it in an apartment of his house, he ever after worshipped it with a monthly sacrifice, and an anniversary vigil. Though but a very young man, he kept up an ancient but obsolete custom, and now nowhere observed, except in his own family, which was, to have his freedmen and slaves appear in a body before him twice a day, morning and evening, to offer him their salutations.

V. Amongst other liberal studies, he applied himself to the law. He married Lepida, by whom he had two sons; but the mother and children all dying, he continued a widower; nor could he be prevailed upon to marry again, not even Agrippina herself, at that time left a widow by the death of Domitius, who had employed all her blandishments to allure him to her embraces, while he was a married man; insomuch that Lepida's mother, when in company with several married women, rebuked her for it, and even went so far as to cuff her. Most of all, he courted the empress Livia, by whose favour, while she was living, he made a considerable figure, and narrowly missed being enriched by the will which she left at her death; in which she distinguished him from the rest of the legatees, by a legacy of fifty millions of sesterces. But because the sum was expressed in figures, and not in words at length, it was reduced by her heir, Tiberius, to five hundred thousand: and even this he never received.

VI. Filling the great offices before the age required for it by law, during his praetorship, at the celebration of games in honour of the goddess Flora, he presented the new spectacle of elephants walking upon ropes. He was then governor of the province of Aquitania for near a year, and soon afterwards took the consulship in the usual course, and held it for six months. It so happened that he

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succeeded L. Domitius, the father of Nero, and was succeeded by Salvius Otho, father to the emperor of that name; so that his holding it between the sons of these two men, looked like a presage of his future advancement to the empire. Being appointed by Caius Caesar to supersede Gaetulicus in his command, the day after his joining the legions, he put a stop to their plaudits in a public spectacle, by issuing an order, "That they should keep their hands under their cloaks." Immediately upon which, the following verse became very common in the camp:

Disce, miles, militare: Galba est, non Gaetulicus.  
Learn, soldier, now in arms to use your hands,  
'Tis Galba, not Gaetulicus, commands.

With equal strictness, he would allow of no petitions for leave of absence from the camp. He hardened the soldiers, both old and young, by constant exercise; and having quickly reduced within their own limits the barbarians who had made inroads into Gaul, upon Caius's coming into Germany, he so far recommended himself and his army to that emperor's approbation, that, amongst the innumerable troops drawn from all the provinces of the empire, none met with higher commendation, or greater rewards from him. He likewise distinguished himself by heading an escort, with a shield in his hand, and running at the side of the emperor's chariot twenty miles together.

VII. Upon the news of Caius's death, though many earnestly pressed him to lay hold of that opportunity of seizing the empire, he chose rather to be quiet. On this account, he was in great favour with Claudius, and being received into the number of his friends, stood so high in his good opinion, that the expedition to Britain was for some time suspended, because he was suddenly seized with a slight indisposition. He governed Africa, as pro-consul, for two years; being chosen out of the regular course to restore order in the province, which was in great disorder from civil dissensions, and the alarms of the barbarians. His administration was distinguished by great strictness and equity, even in matters of small importance. A soldier upon some expedition being charged with selling, in a great scarcity of corn, a bushel of wheat, which was all he had left, for a

hundred denarii, he forbade him to be relieved by any body, when he came to be in want himself; and accordingly he died of famine. When sitting in judgment, a cause being brought before him about some beast of burden, the ownership of which was claimed by two persons; the evidence being slight on both sides, and it being difficult to come at the truth, he ordered the beast to be led to a pond at which he had used to be watered, with his head muffled up, and the covering being there removed, that he should be the property of the person whom he followed of his own accord, after drinking.

VIII. For his achievements, both at this time in Africa, and formerly in Germany, he received the triumphal ornaments, and three sacerdotal appointments, one among The Fifteen, another in the college of Titius, and a third amongst the Augustals; and from that time to the middle of Nero's reign, he lived for the most part in retirement. He never went abroad so much as to take the air, without a carriage attending him, in which there was a million of sesterces in gold, ready at hand; until at last, at the time he was living in the town of Fundi, the province of Hispania Tarraconensis was offered him. After his arrival in the province, whilst he was sacrificing in a temple, a boy who attended with a censer, became all on a sudden grey-headed. This incident was regarded by some as a token of an approaching revolution in the government, and that an old man would succeed a young one: that is, that he would succeed Nero. And not long after, a thunderbolt falling into a lake in Cantabria, twelve axes were found in it; a manifest sign of the supreme power.

IX. He governed the province during eight years, his administration being of an uncertain and capricious character. At first he was active, vigorous, and indeed excessively severe, in the punishment of offenders. For, a money-dealer having committed some fraud in the way of his business, he cut off his hands, and nailed them to his counter. Another, who had poisoned an orphan, to whom he was guardian, and next heir to the estate, he crucified. On this delinquent imploring the protection of the law, and crying out that he was a Roman citizen, he affected to afford him some alleviation, and to mitigate his punishment, by a mark of honour, ordered a cross,

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higher than usual, and painted white, to be erected for him. But by degrees he gave himself up to a life of indolence and inactivity, from the fear of giving Nero any occasion of jealousy, and because, as he used to say, "Nobody was obliged to render an account of their leisure hours." He was holding a court of justice on the circuit at New Carthage, when he received intelligence of the insurrection in Gaul; and while the lieutenant of Aquitania was soliciting his assistance, letters were brought from Vindex, requesting him "to assert the rights of mankind, and put himself at their head to relieve them from the tyranny of Nero." Without any long demur, he accepted the invitation, from a mixture of fear and hope. For he had discovered that private orders had been sent by Nero to his procurators in the province to get him dispatched; and he was encouraged to the enterprise, as well by several auspices and omens, as by the prophecy of a young woman of good family. The more so, because the priest of Jupiter at Clunia, admonished by a dream, had discovered in the recesses of the temple some verses similar to those in which she had delivered her prophecy. These had also been uttered by a girl under divine inspiration, about two hundred years before. The import of the verses was, "That in time, Spain should give the world a lord and master."

X. Taking his seat on the tribunal, therefore, as if there was no other business than the manumitting of slaves, he had the effigies of a number of persons who had been condemned and put to death by Nero, set up before him, whilst a noble youth stood by, who had been banished, and whom he had purposely sent for from one of the neighbouring Balearic isles; and lamenting the condition of the times, and being thereupon unanimously saluted by the title of Emperor, he publicly declared himself "only the lieutenant of the senate and people of Rome." Then shutting the courts, he levied legions and auxiliary troops among the provincials, besides his veteran army consisting of one legion, two wings of horse, and three cohorts. Out of the military leaders most distinguished for age and prudence, he formed a kind of senate, with whom to advise upon all matters of importance, as often as occasion should require. He likewise chose several young men of the equestrian order, who were to be allowed the

privilege of wearing the gold ring, and, being called "The Reserve," should mount guard before his bed-chamber, instead of the legionary soldiers. He likewise issued proclamations throughout the provinces of the empire, exhorting all to rise in arms unanimously, and aid the common cause, by all the ways and means in their power. About the same time, in fortifying a town, which he had pitched upon for a military post, a ring was found, of antique workmanship, in the stone of which was engraved the goddess Victory with a trophy. Presently after, a ship of Alexandria arrived at Dertosa, loaded with arms, without any person to steer it, or so much as a single sailor or passenger on board. From this incident, nobody entertained the least doubt but the war upon which they were entering was just and honourable, and favoured likewise by the gods; when all on a sudden the whole design was exposed to failure. One of the two wings of horse, repenting of the violation of their oath to Nero, attempted to desert him upon his approach to the camp, and were with some difficulty kept in their duty. And some slaves who had been presented to him by a freedman of Nero's, on purpose to murder him, had like to have killed him as he went through a narrow passage to the bath. Being overheard to encourage one another not to lose the opportunity, they were called to an account concerning it; and recourse being had to the torture, a confession was extorted from them.

XI. These dangers were followed by the death of Vindex, at which being extremely discouraged, as if fortune had quite forsaken him, he had thoughts of putting an end to his own life; but receiving advice by his messengers from Rome that Nero was slain, and that all had taken an oath to him as emperor, he laid aside the title of lieutenant, and took upon him that of Caesar. Putting himself upon his march in his general's cloak, and a dagger hanging from his neck before his breast, he did not resume the use of the toga, until Nymphidius Sabinus, prefect of the pretorian guards at Rome, with the two lieutenants, Fonteius Capito in Germany, and Claudius Macer in Africa, who opposed his advancement, were all put down.

XII. Rumours of his cruelty and avarice had reached the city before his arrival; such as that he had punished some cities of Spain and Gaul, for not

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joining him readily, by the imposition of heavy taxes, and some by levelling their walls; and had put to death the governors and procurators with their wives and children: likewise that a golden crown, of fifteen pounds weight, taken out of the temple of Jupiter, with which he was presented by the people of Tarracona, he had melted down, and had exacted from them three ounces which were wanting in the weight. This report of him was confirmed and increased, as soon as he entered the town. For some seamen who had been taken from the fleet, and enlisted among the troops by Nero, he obliged to return to their former condition; but they refusing to comply, and obstinately clinging to the more honourable service under their eagles and standards, he not only dispersed them by a body of horse, but likewise decimated them. He also disbanded a cohort of Germans, which had been formed by the preceding emperors, for their body-guard, and upon many occasions found very faithful; and sent them back into their own country, without giving them any gratuity, pretending that they were more inclined to favour the advancement of Cneius Dolabella, near whose gardens they encamped, than his own. The following ridiculous stories were also related of him; but whether with or without foundation, I know not; such as, that when a more sumptuous entertainment than usual was served up, he fetched a deep groan: that when one of the stewards presented him with an account of his expenses, he reached him a dish of legumes from his table as a reward for his care and diligence; and when Canus, the piper, had played much to his satisfaction, he presented him, with his own hand, five denarii taken out of his pocket.

XIII. His arrival, therefore, in town was not very agreeable to the people; and this appeared at the next public spectacle. For when the actors in a farce began a well-known song,

Venit, io, Simus a villa: Lo! Clodpate from his village comes;

all the spectators, with one voice, went on with the rest, repeating and acting the first verse several times over.

XIV. He possessed himself of the imperial power with more favour and authority than he administered it, although he gave many proofs of

his being an excellent prince: but these were not so grateful to the people, as his misconduct was offensive. He was governed by three favourites, who, because they lived in the palace, and were constantly about him, obtained the name of his pedagogues. These were Titus Vinius, who had been his lieutenant in Spain, a man of insatiable avarice; Cornelius Laco, who, from an assessor to the prince, was advanced to be prefect of the pretorian guards, a person of intolerable arrogance, as well as indolence; and his freedman Icelus, dignified a little before with the privilege of wearing the gold ring, and the use of the cognomen Martianus, who became a candidate for the highest honour within the reach of any person of the equestrian order. He resigned himself so implicitly into the power of those three favourites, who governed in every thing according to the capricious impulse of their vices and tempers, and his authority was so much abused by them, that the tenor of his conduct was not very consistent with itself. At one time, he was more rigorous and frugal, at another, more lavish and negligent, than became a prince who had been chosen by the people, and was so far advanced in years. He condemned some men of the first rank in the senatorian and equestrian orders, upon a very slight suspicion, and without trial. He rarely granted the freedom of the city to any one; and the privilege belonging to such as had three children, only to one or two; and that with great difficulty, and only for a limited time. When the judges petitioned to have a sixth decury added to their number, he not only denied them, but abolished the vacation which had been granted them by Claudius for the winter, and the beginning of the year.

XV. It was thought that he likewise intended to reduce the offices held by senators and men of the equestrian order, to a term of two years' continuance; and to bestow them only on those who were unwilling to accept them, and had refused them. All the grants of Nero he recalled, saving only the tenth part of them. For this purpose he gave a commission to fifty Roman knights; with orders, that if players or wrestlers had sold what had been formerly given them, it should be exacted from the purchasers, since the others, having, no doubt, spent the money, were

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not in a condition to pay. But on the other hand, he suffered his attendants and freedmen to sell or give away the revenue of the state, or immunities from taxes, and to punish the innocent, or pardon criminals, at pleasure. Nay, when the Roman people were very clamorous for the punishment of Halotus and Tigellinus, two of the most mischievous amongst all the emissaries of Nero, he protected them, and even bestowed on Halotus one of the best procurations in his disposal. And as to Tigellinus, he even reprimanded the people for their cruelty by a proclamation.

XVI. By this conduct, he incurred the hatred of all orders of the people, but especially of the soldiery. For their commanders having promised them in his name a donative larger than usual, upon their taking the oath to him before his arrival at Rome; he refused to make it good, frequently bragging, "that it was his custom to choose his soldiers, not buy them." Thus the troops became exasperated against him in all quarters. The pretorian guards he alarmed with apprehensions of danger and unworthy treatment; disbanding many of them occasionally as disaffected to his government, and favourers of Nymphidius. But most of all, the army in Upper Germany was incensed against him, as being defrauded of the rewards due to them for the service they had rendered in the insurrection of the Gauls under Vindex. They were, therefore, the first who ventured to break into open mutiny, refusing upon the calends [the 1st] of January, to take any oath of allegiance, except to the senate; and they immediately dispatched deputies to the pretorian troops, to let them know, "they did not like the emperor who had been set up in Spain," and to desire that "they would make choice of another, who might meet with the approbation of all the armies."

XVII. Upon receiving intelligence of this, imagining that he was slighted not so much on account of his age, as for having no children, he immediately singled out of a company of young persons of rank, who came to pay their compliments to him, Piso Frugi Licinianus, a youth of noble descent and great talents, for whom he had before contracted such a regard, that he had appointed him in his will the heir both of his estate and name. Him he now styled his son, and taking him to the camp, adopted him in the presence of the assembled

troops, but without making any mention of a donative. This circumstance afforded the better opportunity to Marcus Salvius Otho of accomplishing his object, six days after the adoption.

XVIII. Many remarkable prodigies had happened from the very beginning of his reign, which forewarned him of his approaching fate. In every town through which he passed in his way from Spain to Rome, victims were slain on the right and left of the roads; and one of these, which was a bull, being maddened with the stroke of the axe, broke the rope with which it was tied, and running straight against his chariot, with his fore-feet elevated, bespattered him with blood. Likewise, as he was alighting, one of the guard, being pushed forward by the crowd, had very nearly wounded him with his lance. And upon his entering the city and, afterwards, the palace, he was welcomed with an earthquake, and a noise like the bellowing of cattle. These signs of ill-fortune were followed by some that were still more apparently such. Out of all his treasures he had selected a necklace of pearls and jewels, to adorn his statue of Fortune at Tuscum. But it suddenly occurring to him that it deserved a more august place, he consecrated it to the Capitoline Venus; and next night, he dreamt that Fortune appeared to him, complaining that she had been defrauded of the present intended her, and threatening to resume what she had given him. Terrified at this denunciation, at break of day he sent forward some persons to Tuscum, to make preparations for a sacrifice which might avert the displeasure of the goddess; and when he himself arrived at the place, he found nothing but some hot embers upon the altar, and an old man in black standing by, holding a little incense in a glass, and some wine in an earthen pot. It was remarked, too, that whilst he was sacrificing upon the calends of January, the chaplet fell from his head, and upon his consulting the pullets for omens, they flew away. Farther, upon the day of his adopting Piso, when he was to harangue the soldiers, the seat which he used upon those occasions, through the neglect of his attendants, was not placed, according to custom, upon his tribunal; and in the senate-house, his curule chair was set with the back forward.

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XIX. The day before he was slain, as he was sacrificing in the morning, the augur warned him from time to time to be upon his guard, for that he was in danger from assassins, and that they were near at hand. Soon after, he was informed, that Otho was in possession of the pretorian camp. And though most of his friends advised him to repair thither immediately, in hopes that he might quell the tumult by his authority and presence, he resolved to do nothing more than keep close within the palace, and secure himself by guards of the legionary soldiers, who were quartered in different parts about the city. He put on a linen coat of mail, however, remarking at the same time, that it would avail him little against the points of so many swords. But being tempted out by false reports, which the conspirators had purposely spread to induce him to venture abroad--some few of those about him too hastily assuring him that the tumult had ceased, the mutineers were apprehended, and the rest coming to congratulate him, resolved to continue firm in their obedience--he went forward to meet them with so much confidence, that upon a soldier's boasting that he had killed Otho, he asked him, "By what authority?" and proceeded as far as the Forum. There the knights, appointed to dispatch him, making their way through the crowd of citizens, upon seeing him at a distance, halted a while; after which, galloping up to him, now abandoned by all his attendants, they put him to death.

XX. Some authors relate, that upon their first approach he cried out, "What do you mean, fellow-soldiers? I am yours, and you are mine," and promised them a donative: but the generality of writers relate, that he offered his throat to them, saying, "Do your work, and strike, since you are resolved upon it." It is remarkable, that not one of those who were at hand, ever made any attempt to assist the emperor; and all who were sent for, disregarded the summons, except a troop of Germans. They, in consideration of his late kindness in showing them particular attention during a sickness which prevailed in the camp, flew to his aid, but came too late; for, being not well acquainted with the town, they had taken a circuitous route. He was slain near the Curtian Lake, and there left, until a common soldier returning from the receipt of his allowance of corn,

throwing down the load which he carried, cut off his head. There being upon it no hair, by which he might hold it, he hid it in the bosom of his dress; but afterwards thrusting his thumb into the mouth, he carried it in that manner to Otho, who gave it to the drudges and slaves who attended the soldiers; and they, fixing it upon the point of a spear, carried it in derision round the camp, crying out as they went along, "You take your fill of joy in your old age." They were irritated to this pitch of rude banter, by a report spread a few days before, that, upon some one's commending his person as still florid and vigorous, he replied,

Eti moi menos empedoi estin. My strength, as yet, has suffered no decay.

A freedman of Petrobius's, who himself had belonged to Nero's family, purchased the head from them at the price of a hundred gold pieces, and threw it into the place where, by Galba's order, his patron had been put to death. At last, after some time, his steward Argius buried it, with the rest of his body, in his own gardens near the Aurelian Way.

XXI. In person he was of a good size, bald before, with blue eyes, and an aquiline nose; and his hands and feet were so distorted with the gout, that he could neither wear a shoe, nor turn over the leaves of a book, or so much as hold it. He had likewise an excrescence in his right side, which hung down to that degree, that it was with difficulty kept up by a bandage.

XXII. He is reported to have been a great eater, and usually took his breakfast in the winter-time before day. At supper, he fed very heartily, giving the fragments which were left, by handfuls, to be distributed amongst the attendants. In his lust, he was more inclined to the male sex, and such of them too as were old. It is said of him, that in Spain, when Icelus, an old catamite of his, brought him the news of Nero's death, he not only kissed him lovingly before company, but begged of him to remove all impediments, and then took him aside into a private apartment.

XXIII. He perished in the seventy-third year of his age, and the seventh month of his reign. The senate, as soon as they could with safety, ordered a statue to be erected for him upon the naval column, in that part of the Forum where he was

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slain. But Vespasian cancelled the decree, upon a suspicion that he had sent assassins from Spain into Judaea to murder him.

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GALBA was, for a private man, the most wealthy of any who had ever aspired to the imperial dignity. He valued himself upon his being descended from the family of the Servii, but still more upon his relation to Quintus Catulus Capitolinus, celebrated for integrity and virtue. He was likewise distantly related to Livia, the wife of Augustus; by whose interest he was preferred from the station which he held in the palace, to the dignity of consul; and who left him a great legacy at her death. His parsimonious way of living, and his aversion to all superfluity or excess, were construed into avarice as soon as he became emperor; whence Plutarch observes, that the pride which he took in his temperance and economy was unseasonable. While he endeavoured to reform the profusion in the public expenditure, which prevailed in the reign of Nero, he ran into the opposite extreme; and it is objected to him by some historians, that he maintained not the imperial dignity in a degree consistent even with decency. He was not sufficiently attentive either to his own security or the tranquillity of the state, when he refused to pay the soldiers the donative which he had promised them. This breach of faith seems to be the only act in his life that affects his integrity; and it contributed more to his ruin than even the odium which he incurred by the open venality and rapaciousness of his favourites, particularly Vinus.

### A. Salvius Otho

I. The ancestors of Otho were originally of the town of Ferentum, of an ancient and honourable family, and, indeed, one of the most considerable in Etruria. His grandfather, M. Salvius Otho (whose father was a Roman knight, but his mother of mean extraction, for it is not certain whether she was free-born), by the favour of Livia Augusta, in whose house he had his education, was made a senator, but never rose higher than the praetorship. His father, Lucius Otho, was by the mother's side nobly descended, allied to several great families, and so dearly beloved by Tiberius, and so much resembled him in his features, that most people believed Tiberius was his father. He

behaved with great strictness and severity, not only in the city offices, but in the pro-consulship of Africa, and some extraordinary commands in the army. He had the courage to punish with death some soldiers in Illyricum, who, in the disturbance attempted by Camillus, upon changing their minds, had put their generals to the sword, as promoters of that insurrection against Claudius. He ordered the execution to take place in the front of the camp, and under his own eyes; though he knew they had been advanced to higher ranks in the army by Claudius, on that very account. By this action he acquired fame, but lessened his favour at court; which, however, he soon recovered, by discovering to Claudius a design upon his life, carried on by a Roman knight, and which he had learnt from some of his slaves. For the senate ordered a statue of him to be erected in the palace; an honour which had been conferred but upon very few before him. And Claudius advanced him to the dignity of a patrician, commending him, at the same time, in the highest terms, and concluding with these words: "A man, than whom I don't so much as wish to have children that should be better." He had two sons by a very noble woman, Albia Terentia, namely; Lucius Titianus, and a younger called Marcus, who had the same cognomen as himself. He had also a daughter, whom he contracted to Drusus, Germanicus's son, before she was of marriageable age.

II. The emperor Otho was born upon the fourth of the calends of May [28th April], in the consulship of Camillus Aruntius and Domitius Aenobarbus. He was from his earliest youth so riotous and wild, that he was often severely scourged by his father. He was said to run about in the night-time, and seize upon any one he met, who was either drunk or too feeble to make resistance, and toss him in a blanket. After his father's death, to make his court the more effectually to a freedwoman about the palace, who was in great favour, he pretended to be in love with her, though she was old, and almost decrepit. Having by her means got into Nero's good graces, he soon became one of the principal favourites, by the congeniality of his disposition to that of the emperor or, as some say, by the reciprocal practice of mutual pollution. He had so great a sway at court, that when a man of consular



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rank was condemned for bribery, having tampered with him for a large sum of money, to procure his pardon; before he had quite effected it, he scrupled not to introduce him into the senate, to return his thanks.

III. Having, by means of this woman, insinuated himself into all the emperor's secrets, he, upon the day designed for the murder of his mother, entertained them both at a very splendid feast, to prevent suspicion. Poppaea Sabina, for whom Nero entertained such a violent passion that he had taken her from her husband and entrusted her to him, he received, and went through the form of marrying her. And not satisfied with obtaining her favours, he loved her so extravagantly, that he could not with patience bear Nero for his rival. It is certainly believed that he not only refused admittance to those who were sent by Nero to fetch her, but that, on one occasion, he shut him out, and kept him standing before the door, mixing prayers and menaces in vain, and demanding back again what was entrusted to his keeping. His pretended marriage, therefore, being dissolved, he was sent lieutenant into Lusitania. This treatment of him was thought sufficiently severe, because harsher proceedings might have brought the whole farce to light, which, notwithstanding, at last came out, and was published to the world in the following distich:--

Cur Otho mentitus sit, quaeritis, exul honore?  
Uxoris moechus caeperat esse suae.

You ask why Otho's banish'd? Know, the cause  
Comes not within the verge of vulgar laws.  
Against all rules of fashionable life, The rogue  
had dared to sleep with his own wife.

He governed the province in quality of quaestor for ten years, with singular moderation and justice.

IV. As soon as an opportunity of revenge offered, he readily joined in Galba's enterprises, and at the same time conceived hopes of obtaining the imperial dignity for himself. To this he was much encouraged by the state of the times, but still more by the assurances given him by Seleucus, the astrologer, who, having formerly told him that he would certainly out-live Nero, came to him at that juncture unexpectedly, promising him again that he should succeed to the empire, and that in a very short time. He, therefore, let slip no opportunity of

making his court to every one about him by all manner of civilities. As often as he entertained Galba at supper, he distributed to every man of the cohort which attended the emperor on guard, a gold piece; endeavouring likewise to oblige the rest of the soldiers in one way or another. Being chosen an arbitrator by one who had a dispute with his neighbour about a piece of land, he bought it, and gave it him; so that now almost every body thought and said, that he was the only man worthy of succeeding to the empire.

V. He entertained hopes of being adopted by Galba, and expected it every day. But finding himself disappointed, by Piso's being preferred before him, he turned his thoughts to obtaining his purpose by the use of violence; and to this he was instigated, as well by the greatness of his debts, as by resentment at Galba's conduct towards him. For he did not conceal his conviction, "that he could not stand his ground unless he became emperor, and that it signified nothing whether he fell by the hands of his enemies in the field, or of his creditors in the Forum." He had a few days before squeezed out of one of the emperor's slaves a million of sesterces for procuring him a stewardship; and this was the whole fund he had for carrying on so great an enterprise. At first the design was entrusted to only five of the guard, but afterwards to ten others, each of the five naming two. They had every one ten thousand sesterces paid down, and were promised fifty thousand more. By these, others were drawn in, but not many; from a confident assurance, that when the matter came to the crisis, they should have enough to join them.

VI. His first intention was, immediately after the departure of Piso, to seize the camp, and fall upon Galba, whilst he was at supper in the palace; but he was restrained by a regard for the cohort at that time on duty, lest he should bring too great an odium upon it; because it happened that the same cohort was on guard before, both when Caius was slain, and Nero deserted. For some time afterwards, he was restrained also by scruples about the omens, and by the advice of Seleucus. Upon the day fixed at last for the enterprise, having given his accomplices notice to wait for him in the Forum near the temple of Saturn, at the gilded mile-stone, he went in the morning to pay

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his respects to Galba; and being received with a kiss as usual, he attended him at sacrifice, and heard the predictions of the augur. A freedman of his, then bringing him word that the architects were come, which was the signal agreed upon, he withdrew, as if it were with a design to view a house upon sale, and went out by a back-door of the palace to the place appointed. Some say he pretended to be seized with an ague fit, and ordered those about him to make that excuse for him, if he was inquired after. Being then quickly concealed in a woman's litter, he made the best of his way for the camp. But the bearers growing tired, he got out, and began to run. His shoe becoming loose, he stopped again, but being immediately raised by his attendants upon their shoulders, and unanimously saluted by the title of EMPEROR, he came amidst auspicious acclamations and drawn swords into the Principia in the camp; all who met him joining in the cavalcade, as if they had been privy to the design. Upon this, sending some soldiers to dispatch Galba and Piso, he said nothing else in his address to the soldiery, to secure their affections, than these few words: "I shall be content with whatever ye think fit to leave me."

VII. Towards the close of the day, he entered the senate, and after he had made a short speech to them, pretending that he had been seized in the streets, and compelled by violence to assume the imperial authority, which he designed to exercise in conjunction with them, he retired to the palace. Besides other compliments which he received from those who flocked about him to congratulate and flatter him, he was called Nero by the mob, and manifested no intention of declining that cognomen. Nay, some authors relate, that he used it in his official acts, and the first letters he sent to the governors of provinces. He suffered all his images and statues to be replaced, and restored his procurators and freedmen to their former posts. And the first writing which he signed as emperor, was a promise of fifty millions of sesterces to finish the Golden-house. He is said to have been greatly frightened that night in his sleep, and to have groaned heavily; and being found, by those who came running in to see what the matter was, lying upon the floor before his bed, he endeavoured by every kind of atonement to

appease the ghost of Galba, by which he had found himself violently tumbled out of bed. The next day, as he was taking the omens, a great storm arising, and sustaining a grievous fall, he muttered to himself from time to time:

Ti gar moi kai makrois aulois; What business have I the loud trumpets to sound!

VIII. About the same time, the armies in Germany took an oath to Vitellius as emperor. Upon receiving this intelligence, he advised the senate to send thither deputies, to inform them, that a prince had been already chosen; and to persuade them to peace and a good understanding. By letters and messages, however, he offered Vitellius to make him his colleague in the empire, and his son-in-law. But a war being now unavoidable, and the generals and troops sent forward by Vitellius, advancing, he had a proof of the attachment and fidelity of the pretorian guards, which had nearly proved fatal to the senatorian order. It had been judged proper that some arms should be given out of the stores, and conveyed to the fleet by the marine troops. While they were employed in fetching these from the camp in the night, some of the guards suspecting treachery, excited a tumult; and suddenly the whole body, without any of their officers at their head, ran to the palace, demanding that the entire senate should be put to the sword; and having repulsed some of the tribunes who endeavoured to stop them, and slain others, they broke, all bloody as they were, into the banquetting room, inquiring for the emperor; nor would they quit the place until they had seen him. He now entered upon his expedition against Vitellius with great alacrity, but too much precipitation, and without any regard to the ominous circumstances which attended it. For the Ancilia had been taken out of the temple of Mars, for the usual procession, but were not yet replaced; during which interval it had of old been looked upon as very unfortunate to engage in any enterprise. He likewise set forward upon the day when the worshippers of the Mother of the gods begin their lamentations and wailing. Besides these, other unlucky omens attended him. For, in a victim offered to Father Dis, he found the signs such as upon all other occasions are regarded as favourable; whereas, in that sacrifice, the contrary intimations are judged the most propitious. At his

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first setting forward, he was stopped by inundations of the Tiber; and at twenty miles' distance from the city, found the road blocked up by the fall of houses.

IX. Though it was the general opinion that it would be proper to protract the war, as the enemy were distressed by famine and the straitness of their quarters, yet he resolved with equal rashness to force them to an engagement as soon as possible; whether from impatience of prolonged anxiety, and in the hope of bringing matters to an issue before the arrival of Vitellius, or because he could not resist the ardour of the troops, who were all clamorous for battle. He was not, however, present at any of those which ensued, but stayed behind at Brixellum. He had the advantage in three slight engagements, near the Alps, about Placentia, and a place called Castor's; but was, by a fraudulent stratagem of the enemy, defeated in the last and greatest battle, at Bedriacum. For, some hopes of a conference being given, and the soldiers being drawn up to hear the conditions of peace declared, very unexpectedly, and amidst their mutual salutations, they were obliged to stand to their arms. Immediately upon this he determined to put an end to his life, more, as many think, and not without reason, out of shame, at persisting in a struggle for the empire to the hazard of the public interest and so many lives, than from despair, or distrust of his troops. For he had still in reserve, and in full force, those whom he had kept about him for a second trial of his fortune, and others were coming up from Dalmatia, Pannonia, and Moesia; nor were the troops lately defeated so far discouraged as not to be ready, even of themselves, to run all risks in order to wipe off their recent disgrace.

X. My father, Suetonius Lenis, was in this battle, being at that time an angusticlavian tribune in the thirteenth legion. He used frequently to say, that Otho, before his advancement to the empire, had such an abhorrence of civil war, that once, upon hearing an account given at table of the death of Cassius and Brutus, he fell into a trembling, and that he never would have interfered with Galba, but that he was confident of succeeding in his enterprise without a war. Moreover, that he was then encouraged to despise life by the example of a common soldier, who bringing news of the defeat

of the army, and finding that he met with no credit, but was railed at for a liar and a coward, as if he had run away from the field of battle, fell upon his sword at the emperor's feet; upon the sight of which, my father said that Otho cried out, "that he would expose to no farther danger such brave men, who had deserved so well at his hands." Advising therefore his brother, his brother's son, and the rest of his friends, to provide for their security in the best manner they could, after he had embraced and kissed them, he sent them away; and then withdrawing into a private room by himself, he wrote a letter of consolation to his sister, containing two sheets. He likewise sent another to Messalina, Nero's widow, whom he had intended to marry, committing to her the care of his relics and memory. He then burnt all the letters which he had by him, to prevent the danger and mischief that might otherwise befall the writers from the conqueror. What ready money he had, he distributed among his domestics.

XI. And now being prepared, and just upon the point of dispatching himself, he was induced to suspend the execution of his purpose by a great tumult which had broken out in the camp. Finding that some of the soldiers who were making off had been seized and detained as deserters, "Let us add," said he, "this night to our life." These were his very words.

He then gave orders that no violence should be offered to any one; and keeping his chamber-door open until late at night, he allowed all who pleased the liberty to come and see him. At last, after quenching his thirst with a draught of cold water, he took up two poniards, and having examined the points of both, put one of them under his pillow, and shutting his chamber-door, slept very soundly, until, awaking about break of day, he stabbed himself under the left pap. Some persons bursting into the room upon his first groan, he at one time covered, and at another exposed his wound to the view of the bystanders, and thus life soon ebbed away. His funeral was hastily performed, according to his own order, in the thirty-eighth year of his age, and ninety-fifth day of his reign.

XII. The person and appearance of Otho no way corresponded to the great spirit he displayed on this occasion; for he is said to have been of low

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stature, splay-footed, and bandy-legged. He was, however, effeminately nice in the care of his person: the hair on his body he plucked out by the roots; and because he was somewhat bald, he wore a kind of peruke, so exactly fitted to his head, that nobody could have known it for such. He used to shave every day, and rub his face with soaked bread; the use of which he began when the down first appeared upon his chin, to prevent his having any beard. It is said likewise that he celebrated publicly the sacred rites of Isis, clad in a linen garment, such as is used by the worshippers of that goddess. These circumstances, I imagine, caused the world to wonder the more that his death was so little in character with his life. Many of the soldiers who were present, kissing and bedewing with their tears his hands and feet as he lay dead, and celebrating him as "a most gallant man, and an incomparable emperor," immediately put an end to their own lives upon the spot, not far from his funeral pile.

Many of those likewise who were at a distance, upon hearing the news of his death, in the anguish of their hearts, began fighting amongst themselves, until they dispatched one another. To conclude: the generality of mankind, though they hated him whilst living, yet highly extolled him after his death; insomuch that it was the common talk and opinion, "that Galba had been driven to destruction by his rival, not so much for the sake of reigning himself, as of restoring Rome to its ancient liberty."

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It is remarkable, in the fortune of this emperor, that he owed both his elevation and catastrophe to the inextricable embarrassments in which he was involved; first, in respect of pecuniary circumstances, and next, of political. He was not, so far as we can learn, a follower of any of the sects of philosophers which justified, and even recommended suicide, in particular cases: yet he perpetrated that act with extraordinary coolness and resolution; and, what is no less remarkable, from the motive, as he avowed, of public expediency only. It was observed of him, for many years after his death, that "none ever died like Otho."