

BELLARIA XCVIII



Modern statue outside the Austrian parliament building

Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56-c. 120)

AGRICOLA

(de uita [et moribus] Iulii Agricolae)

AD 83 The final battle - Agricola vs Calgacus at Mons Graupius

'Mons Graupius is one of the most famous battles of antiquity, yet we have a little idea where it took place [N.W. Scotland?], and its fame rests largely on a speech which was never delivered by a leader [Calgacus] of whom we know nothing' (Woodman).

Calgacus' famous, invented speech in full before the battle (AD 83)



Calgacus in full flow

Our victory will mean freedom for all Britons

30 'When I consider the causes of this war and our present situation, my spirit rises at the thought that this very day, and the unity you show, will bring freedom to all Britain; for united here and untouched by slavery, there is no land behind and the very sea is insecure, threatened as we are by the Roman fleet. So weapons and war, virtues to the strong, are also the best refuge of the coward. Previous battles, fought against Rome with varying success, leave the hope of salvation in our hands, for we the noblest of the Britons, dwelling in its furthest reaches, have never seen the shores of slavery, our eyes untouched by the stain of tyranny.'

30 quotiens causas belli et necessitatem nostram intueor, magnus mihi animus est hodiernum diem consensumque uestrum initium libertatis toti Britanniae fore: nam et uniuersi coistis et seruitutis expertes, et nullae ultra terrae ac ne mare quidem securum inminente nobis classe Romana. ita proelium atque arma, quae fortibus honesta, eadem etiam ignauis tutissima sunt. priores pugnae, quibus aduersus Romanos uaria fortuna certatum est, spem ac subsidium in nostris manibus habebant, quia nobilissimi totius Britanniae eoque in ipsis penetralibus siti nec ulla seruiuentium litora aspicientes, oculos quoque a contactu dominationis inuiolatos habebamus.

Our remoteness has protected us from these arrogant Roman thieves



30 'To this day, on the last frontier of freedom, we have been protected by our very remoteness and obscurity; now the furthest shores of Britain lie exposed, and while the unknown is always magnified, now there are no more tribes, nothing but sea and stone, for these fatal Romans, whose arrogance you will not escape by humility and restraint. Thieves of the world, lacking lands now to devastate, they rove the sea. Those whom neither East nor West can satisfy reveal their greed if their enemies are wealthy, their ambition if they are paupers; alone amongst all men they covet rich and poor alike. Theft, slaughter, rapine they misname empire, they make a desert and call it peace.'

30 *nos terrarum ac libertatis extremos recessus ipse ac sinus famae in hunc diem defendit: nunc terminus Britanniae patet, atque omne ignotum pro magnifico est; sed nulla iam ultra gens, nihil nisi fluctus ac saxa, et infestiores Romani, quorum superbiam frustra per obsequium ac modestiam effugias. raptores orbis, postquam cuncta uastantibus defuere terrae, mare scrutantur: si locuples hostis est, auari, si pauper, ambitiosi, quos non Oriens, non Occidens satiauerit: soli omnium opes atque inopiam pari adfectu concupiscunt. auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*

They carry off everything—family, property—and reduce us to slaves



Wharves in Roman London

31 'Our children and kin are, by nature, the things most dear to us; they are carried off by levy to be slaves in other lands: our wives and sisters, even if they escape the soldiers' lust, are defiled by so called friends and guests. Our goods, our wealth are lost to tribute; our land and harvest to requisitions of grain; life and limb themselves in forging roads through marsh and forest, to the accompaniment of curses and blows. Slaves born to servitude are sold once and for all, and fed by their masters free of cost: Britain pays daily for her own enslavement, and daily nourishes it. And as among household slaves the newcomer is mocked by his fellows, so in this age-old worldwide house of slaves, we the newest and most worthless, are marked for destruction: we lack the fields, the mines, the harbours that we might have been preserved to labour in.'

31 *liberos cuique ac propinquos suos natura carissimos esse uoluit: hi per dilectus alibi seruituri auferuntur; coniuges sororesque etiam si hostilem libidinem effugerunt, nomine amicorum atque hospitem polluuntur. bona fortunaeque in tributum, ager atque annus in frumentum, corpora ipsa ac manus siluis ac paludibus emuniendis inter uerbera et contumelias conteruntur. nata seruituti mancipia semel ueneunt, atque ultro a dominis aluntur: Britannia seruitutem suam cotidie emit, cotidie pascit. ac sicut in familia recentissimus quisque seruorum*

etiam conseruis ludibrio est, sic in hoc orbis terrarum uetere famulatu noui nos et uiles in excidium petimur; neque enim arua nobis aut metalla aut portus sunt, quibus exercendis reseruemur.

They will never pardon us for our bravery: let us remember Boudica



31 'Pride and courage, moreover, in a subject displeases their rulers: our distance from them and obscurity, even as they protect us, make us more suspect. Therefore abandon all hope of pardon, and even now take thought, as to which is dearest, safety or glory. A woman [Boudica] led the Trinovantes to storm a camp and burn a colony, and if success had not lapsed to inactivity, they might have thrown off the yoke: let us, whole and indomitable, bearing our weapons in freedom, not regret, show at the first encounter, what manner of men Caledonia has chosen for her cause.'

31 uirtus porro ac ferocia subiectorum ingrata imperantibus; et longinquitas ac secretum ipsum quo tutius, eo suspectius. ita sublata spe ueniae tandem sumite animum, tam quibus salus quam quibus gloria carissima est. Brigantes femina duce exurere coloniam, expugnare castra, ac nisi felicitas in socordiam uertisset, exuere iugum potuere: nos integri et indomiti, et in libertatem, non in paenitentiam, arma inlaturi, primo statim congressu ostendamus, quos sibi Caledonia uiros seposuerit.

Their army is made up of foreigners with no loyalty to Rome

32 'Think you the Romans, then, are as brave in war as they are lascivious in peace? Our discords and dissensions bring them success, their enemy's errors bring their armies glory. Those armies, recruited from diverse nations, success holds together, defeat will dissolve. Unless you imagine that Gauls and Germans, and even, to their shame, many Britons, who lend themselves to an alien tyranny, its enemies longer than they have been its slaves, are swayed by loyalty and affection. Fear and terror are sorry bonds of love: remove them, and those who cease to fear will begin to hate. Every spur to success is ours: the Romans have no wives here to inspire them, no parents to reproach the deserter, and most have no other than an alien homeland.'

32 *an eandem Romanis in bello uirtutem quam in pace lasciuiam adesse creditis? nostris illi dissensionibus ac discordiis clari uitia hostium in gloriam exercitus sui uertunt; quem contractum ex diuersissimis gentibus ut secundae res tenent, ita aduersae dissoluent: nisi si Gallos et Germanos et (pudet dictu) Britannorum plerosque, licet dominationi alienae sanguinem commodent, diutius tamen hostis quam seruos, fide et adfectu teneri putatis. metus ac terror sunt infirma uincla caritatis; quae ubi remoueris, qui timere desierint, odisse incipient. omnia uictoriae incitamenta pro nobis sunt: nullae Romanos coniuges accendunt, nulli parentes fugam exprobraturi sunt; aut nulla plerisque patria aut alia est.*

You have nothing to fear; many of their soldiers will join our cause



Beginn der christlichen Zeitrechnung.

German tribesmen

32 'Few in numbers; fearful in their ignorance; the very sea, sky and forest, all they see around them, unfamiliar to their eyes, the gods have delivered them into our hands like prisoners in a cage. Let not empty show, the gleam of gold and silver, terrify you: it neither protects them nor wounds you. We shall find helping hands in the enemy's own battle lines. The Britons will acknowledge our cause is theirs, the Gauls will remember their former freedom: as the Usipii recently deserted them, so will the rest of the Germans. There is nothing beyond them to fear; empty forts, veterans' colonies, weak and quarrelsome townships of disaffected founders and unjust rulers. Here is leadership, and an army: there lies tribute, toil in the mines, and all the other ills of servitude, that you can perpetuate for ever, or avenge now, upon this field. Think then of your forefathers, and of your posterity, before you enter into battle.'

32 *paucos numero, trepidos ignorantia, caelum ipsum ac mare et silvas, ignota omnia circumspicientis, clausos quodam modo ac uinctos di nobis tradiderunt. ne terreat uanus aspectus et auri fulgor atque argenti, quod neque tegit neque uulnerat. in ipsa hostium acie inueniemus nostras manus: adgnoscent Britanni suam causam, recordabuntur Galli priorem libertatem, tam deserent illos ceteri Germani quam nuper Usipi reliquerunt. nec quicquam ultra formidinis: uacua castella, senum coloniae, inter male parentis et iniuste imperantis aegra municipia et discordantia. hic dux, hic exercitus: ibi tributa et metalla et ceterae seruientium poenae, quas in aeternum perferre aut statim ulcisci in hoc campo est. proinde ituri in aciem et maiores uestros et posteros cogitate.'*

Agricola replies: this is our final battle for Britain



33 They received his speech with enthusiasm, and as is usual among barbarians, with songs, shouts and discordant cries. And now was seen the assembling of troops and the gleam of arms, as the boldest warriors stepped to the front. As the line was forming, Agricola, who, though his troops were in high spirits and could scarcely be kept within the entrenchments, still thought it right to encourage them, spoke as follows:

‘Comrades, this is the eighth year since, thanks to the greatness and good fortune of Rome and to your own loyalty and energy, you conquered Britain. In our many campaigns and battles, whether courage in meeting the foe, or toil and endurance in struggling, I may say, against nature herself, have been needed, I have ever been well satisfied with my soldiers, and you with your commander. And so you and I have passed beyond the limits reached by former armies or by former

governors, and we now occupy the last confines of Britain, not merely in rumour and report, but with an actual encampment and armed force. Britain has been both discovered and subdued.'

33 *excepere orationem alacres, ut barbaris moris, fremitu cantuque et clamoribus dissonis. iamque agmina et armorum fulgores audentissimi cuiusque prokursu; simul instruebatur acies, cum Agricola quamquam laetum et uix munimentis coercitum militem accendendum adhuc ratus, ita disseruit:*

'septimus annus est, commilitones, ex quo uirtute et auspiciis imperii Romani, fide atque opera uestra Britanniam uicistis. tot expeditionibus, tot proeliis, seu fortitudine aduersus hostis seu patientia ac labore paene aduersus ipsam rerum naturam opus fuit, neque me militum neque uos ducis paenituit. ergo egressi, ego ueterum legatorum, uos priorum exercituum terminos, finem Britanniae non fama nec rumore, sed castris et armis tenemus: inuenta Britannia et subacta.'

Remember what we have achieved to come this far: glory awaits us



33 'Often on the march, when morasses, mountains, and rivers were wearing out your strength, did I hear our bravest men exclaim, "When shall we have the enemy before us?—when shall we fight?" He is now here, driven from his lair, and your wishes and your valour have free scope, and everything favours the conqueror, everything is adverse to the vanquished. For as it is a great and glorious achievement, if we press on, to have accomplished so great a march, to have traversed forests and to have crossed estuaries, so, if we retire, our present most complete success will prove our greatest danger. We have not the same knowledge of the country or the same abundance of supplies, but we have arms in our hands, and in them we have everything. For myself I have long been convinced that neither

for an army nor for a general is retreat safe. Better, too, is an honourable death than a life of shame, and safety and renown are for us to be found together. And it would be no inglorious end to perish on the extreme confines of earth and of nature.'

33 *'equidem saepe in agmine, cum uos paludes montesue et flumina fatigarent, fortissimi cuiusque uoces audiebam: "quando dabitur hostis, quando in manus [ueniet]?" ueniunt, e latebris suis extrusi, et uota uirtusque in aperto, omniaque prona uictoribus atque eadem uictis aduersa. nam ut superasse tantum itineris, euasisse siluas, transisse aestuaria pulchrum ac decorum in frontem, ita fugientibus periculosissima quae hodie prosperrima sunt; neque enim nobis aut locorum eadem notitia aut com meatuum eadem abundantia, sed manus et arma et in his omnia. quod ad me attinet, iam pridem mihi decretum est neque exercitus neque ducis terga tuta esse. proinde et honesta mors turpi uita potior, et incolumitas ac decus eodem loco sita sunt; nec inglorium fuerit in ipso terrarum ac naturae fine cecidisse.'*

They are cowards and runaways



34 'If unknown nations and an untried enemy confronted you, I should urge you on by the example of other armies. As it is, look back upon your former honours, question your own eyes. These are the men who last year under cover of darkness attacked a single legion, whom you routed by a shout. Of all the Britons these are the most confirmed runaways, and this is why they have survived so long. Just as when the huntsman penetrates the forest and the thicket, all the most courageous animals rush out upon him, while the timid and feeble are scared away by the very sound of his approach, so the bravest of the Britons have long since fallen; and the rest are a mere crowd of spiritless cowards.'

34 *'si nouae gentes atque ignota acies constitisset, aliorum exercituum exemplis uos hortarer: nunc uestra decora recensete, uestros oculos interrogate. hi sunt, quos proximo anno unam legionem furto noctis adgressos clamore debellastis; hi ceterorum Britannorum fugacissimi ideoque tam diu superstites. quo modo siluas saltusque penetrantibus fortissimum quodque animal contra ruere, pauida et inertia ipso agminis sono pellebantur, sic acerrimi Britannorum iam pridem ceciderunt, reliquus est numerus ignauorum et metuentium.'*

Now end our campaign in triumph

34 'You have at last found them, not because they have stood their ground, but because they have been overtaken. Their desperate plight, and the extreme terror that paralyses them, have riveted their line to this spot, that you might achieve in it a splendid and memorable victory. Put an end to campaigns; crown your fifty years' service with a glorious day; prove to your country that her armies could never have been fairly charged with protracting a war or with causing a rebellion.'

34 *'quos quod tandem inuenistis, non restiterunt, sed deprehensi sunt; nouissimae res et extremus metus torpore defixere aciem in his uestigiis, in quibus pulchram et spectabilem uictoriam ederetis. transigite cum expeditionibus, imponite quinquaginta annis magnum diem, adprobate rei publicae numquam exercitui imputari potuisse aut moras belli aut causas rebellandi.'*

The Caledonians were routed, but Agricola's victory did not go down well with Domitian.



Domitian's envy of Agricola

39 Domitian greeted this series of events, though Agricola's despatches were free of boastful language, with inner disquiet despite, as was his way, showing visible pleasure: he was conscious of the derision that his recent false triumph (83), celebrated over the Germans, had met with: for which in truth he had rented in the market-place a crowd whose clothes and hair simulated those of captives. Now

here, a real and notable victory, with thousands of enemies slain, was being celebrated to great acclaim.

39 hunc rerum cursum, quamquam nulla uerborum iactantia epistulis Agricolae auctum, ut erat Domitiano moris, fronte laetus, pectore anxius exceptit. inerat conscientia derisui fuisse nuper falsum e Germania triumphum, emptis per commercia, quorum habitus et crinis in captiuorum speciem formarentur: at nunc ueram magnamque uictoriam tot milibus hostium caesis ingenti fama celebrari.

Domitian conceals his hatred

39 That the name of a private individual should be exalted above that of the Leader, was what he most feared: it was useless to silence the forum's eloquence, and the noble arts of peace, if another were to grasp military glory. Moreover, while it was easy to ignore other qualities, those of leadership were an Imperial matter. Troubled by these anxieties, but content to keep them secret, a sign of his murderous intent, he decided to conceal his hatred for the time, until the first glow of fame and the army's plaudits had abated: since Agricola still held Britain.

39 id sibi maxime formidolosum, priuati hominis nomen supra principem attolli: frustra studia fori et ciuiliu artium decus in silentium acta, si militarem gloriam alius occuparet; cetera utcumque facilius dissimulari, ducis boni imperatoriam uirtutem esse. talibus curis exercitus, quodque saeuae cogitationis indicium erat, secreto suo satiatus, optimum in praesentia statuit reponere odium, donec impetus famae et fauor exercitus languesceret: nam etiam tum Agricola Britanniam obtinebat.

Tacitus goes on to say that, despite Agricola's popularity and many requests for him to continue in service to Rome as a provincial governor, he saw which way the wind was blowing and decided it would be prudent to retire. He ends with a magnificent encomium of his father-in-law.

Next week: Tacitus' ethnographical *Germania*.