

Caesar *De Bello Gallico* (Loeb edition; tr. Edwards) Book 1.1-21 (out of 54 sections)

[1] Gaul is a whole divided into three parts, one of which is inhabited by the Belgae, another by the Aquitani, and a third by a people called in their own tongue Celtae, in the Latin Galli. All these are different one from another in language, institutions, and laws. The Galli (Gauls) are separated from the Aquitani by the river Garonne, from the Belgae by the Marne and the Seine. Of all these peoples the Belgae are the most courageous, because they are farthest removed from the culture and the civilization of the Province,¹ and least often visited by merchants introducing the commodities that make for effeminacy; and also because they are nearest to the Germans dwelling beyond the Rhine, with whom they are continually at war. For this cause the Helvetii also excel the rest of the Gauls in valour, because they are struggling in almost daily fights with the Germans, either endeavouring to keep them out of Gallic territory or waging an aggressive warfare in German territory. The separate part of the country which, as has been said, is occupied by the Gauls, starts from the river Rhone, and is bounded by the river Garonne, the Ocean, and the territory of the Belgae; moreover, on the side of the Sequani and the Helvetii, it touches the river Rhine; and its general trend is northward. The Belgae, beginning from the edge of the Gallic territory, reach to the lower part of the river Rhine, bearing towards the north and east. Aquitania, starting from the Garonne, reaches to the Pyrenees and to that part of the Ocean which is by Spain: its bearing is between west and north.

[2] Among the Helvetii the noblest man by far and the most wealthy was Orgetorix. In the consulship¹ of Marcus Messalla and Marcus Piso, his desire for the kingship led him to form a conspiracy of the nobility, and he persuaded the community to march out of their territory in full force, urging that as they excelled all in valour it was easy enough to secure the sovereignty of all Gaul. In this he persuaded them the more easily, because the Helvetii are closely confined by the nature of their territory. On one side there is the river Rhine, exceeding broad and deep, which separates the Helvetian territory from the Germans; on another the Jura range, exceeding high, lying between the Sequani and the Helvetii; on the third, the Lake of Geneva and the river Rhone, which separates the Roman Province from the Helvetii. In such circumstances their range of movement was less extensive, and their chances of waging war on their neighbours were less easy; and on this account they were greatly distressed, for they were men that longed for war. Nay, they could not but consider that the territory they occupied—to an extent of 240 miles long and 180 broad—was all too narrow for their population and for their renown of courage in war.

[3] Swayed by these considerations and stirred by the influence of Orgetorix, they determined to collect what they needed for taking the field, to buy up as large a number as they could of draught-cattle and carts, to sow as much corn as possible so as to have a sufficient supply thereof on the march, and to establish peace and amity with the nearest communities. For the accomplishment of these objects they considered that two years were sufficient, and pledged themselves by an ordinance to take the field in the third year. For the accomplishment of these objects Orgetorix was chosen, and he took upon himself an embassy to the communities. In the course of his travels he persuaded Casticus, of the Sequani, son of Catamantaloedes, who had held for many years the kingship of the Sequani, and had been called by the Senate “the friend of the Roman people,” to seize in his own state the kingship which his father had held before him; and Dumnorix also, of the Aedui, brother of Diviciacus, at that time holding the chieftaincy of the state and a great favourite with the common people, he persuaded to a like endeavour, and gave him his own daughter in marriage. He convinced them that it was easy enough to accomplish such endeavours, because he himself (so he said) was about to secure the

sovereignty of his own state. There was no doubt, he observed, that the Helvetii were the most powerful tribe in all Gaul, and he gave a pledge that he would win them their kingdoms with his own resources and his own army. Swayed by this speech, they gave a mutual pledge, confirming it by oath; and they hoped that when they had seized their kingship they would be able, through the efforts of three most powerful and most steadfast tribes, to master the whole of Gaul.

[4] The design was revealed to the Helvetii by informers. In accordance with their custom they compelled Orgetorix to take his trial in bonds. If he were condemned, the penalty of being burnt alive was the consequence. On the day appointed for his trial Orgetorix gathered from every quarter to the place of judgment all his retainers, to the number of some ten thousand men, and also assembled there all his clients and debtors, of whom he had a great number, and through their means escaped from taking his trial. The state, being incensed at this, essayed to secure its due rights by force of arms, and the magistrates were bringing together a number of men from the country parts, when Orgetorix died, not without suspicion, as the Helvetii think, of suicide.

[5] After his death the Helvetii essayed none the less to accomplish their determination to march forth from their borders. When at length they deemed that they were prepared for that purpose, they set fire to all their strongholds,¹ in number about twelve; their villages, in number about four hundred, and the rest of their private buildings; they burnt up all their corn save that which they were to carry with them, to the intent that by removing all hope of return homeward they might prove the readier to undergo any perils; and they commanded every man to take for himself from home a three months' provision of victuals. They persuaded their neighbours, the Rauraci, the Tulingi, and the Latobrigi, to adopt the same plan, barn up their strongholds and villages, and march out with them; and they received as partners of their alliance the Boii, who had been dwellers beyond the Rhine, but had crossed over into Noricum and attacked Noreia.

[6] There were two routes, and no more, by which they could leave their homeland. One lay through the territory of the Sequani, betwixt the Jura range and the river Rhone, a narrow route and a difficult, where carts could scarce be drawn in single file; with an exceeding high mountain overhanging it, so that a very few men might easily check them. The other route, through the Roman Province, was far more easy and convenient, forasmuch as the Rhone flows between the borders of the Helvetii and the Allobroges (who had lately been brought to peace¹), and is in some places fordable. The last town of the Allobroges, the nearest to the borders of the Helvetii, is Geneva, from which a bridge stretches across to the Helvetii. These supposed that either they would persuade the Allobroges (deeming them not yet well disposed towards the Roman people), or would compel them perforce to suffer a passage through their borders. Having therefore provided all things for their departure, they named a day by which all should assemble upon the bank of the Rhone. The day was the 28th of March, in the consulship² of Lucius Piso and Aulus Gabinius.

[7] When Caesar was informed that they were endeavouring to march through the Roman Province, he made speed to leave Rome, and hastening to Further Gaul by as rapid stages as possible, arrived near Geneva. From the whole Province he requisitioned the largest possible number of troops (there was in Further Gaul no more than a single legion), and ordered the bridge at Geneva to be broken down. When the Helvetii learned of his coming, they sent as deputies to him the noblest men of the state. Nammeius and Verucloetius held the chief place in the deputation, with instructions to say that their purpose was to march through the Province without any mischief, because they had no other route; and they asked that they might have

leave so to do of his good will. Remembering that the consul Lucius Cassius had been slain,¹ and his army routed and sent under the yoke, by the Helvetii, Caesar considered that no concession should be made; nor did he believe that men of unfriendly disposition, if granted an opportunity of marching through the Province, would refrain from outrage and mischief. However, to gain an interval for the assembly of the troops he had levied, he replied to the deputies that he would take a space of time for consideration: if they wished for anything, they were to return on the 13th of April.

[8] In the meanwhile he used the legion which he had with him, and the troops which had concentrated from the Province, to construct a continuous wall, sixteen feet high, and a trench, from the Lake of Geneva, which flows into the river Rhone, to the Jura range, which separates the territory of the Sequani from the Helvetii, a distance of nineteen miles. This work completed, he posted separate garrisons, in entrenched forts, in order that he might more easily be able to stop any attempt of the enemy to cross against his wish. When the day which he had appointed with the deputies arrived, and the deputies returned to him, he said that, following the custom and precedent of the Roman people, he could not grant anyone a passage through the Province; and he made it plain that he would stop any attempt to force the same. Disappointed of this hope, the Helvetii attempted, sometimes by day, more often by night, to break through, either by joining boats together and making a number of rafts, or by fording the Rhone where the depth of the stream was least. But they were checked by the line of the entrenchment and, as the troops concentrated rapidly, by missiles, and so abandoned the attempt.

[9] There remained one other line of route, through the borders of the Sequani, by which they could not march, on account of the narrow ways, without the consent of the Sequani. When they could not of their own motion persuade the Sequani, they sent deputies to Dumnorix the Aeduan, in order that they might attain their object through his intercession. Now Dumnorix had very great weight with the Sequani, for he was both popular and open-handed, and he was friendly to the Helvetii, because from that state he had taken the daughter of Orgetorix to wife; and, spurred by desire of the kingship, he was anxious for a revolution, and eager to have as many states as might be beholden to his own beneficence. Therefore he accepted the business, and prevailed on the Sequani to suffer the Helvetii to pass through their borders, and arranged that they should give hostages each to other—the Sequani, not to prevent the Helvetii from their march; the Helvetii, to pass through without mischief or outrage.

[10] The news was brought back to Caesar that the Helvetii were minded to march through the land of the Sequani and the Aedui into the borders of the Santones, which are not far removed from the borders of the Tolosates, a state in the Province. He perceived that this event would bring great danger upon the Province; for it would have a warlike tribe, unfriendly to the Roman people, as neighbours to a district which was at once unprotected and very rich in corn. For these reasons he set Titus Labienus, lieutenant-general, in command of the fortification which he had made, and himself hurried by forced marches into Italy. There he enrolled two legions, and brought out of winter quarters three that were wintering about Aquileia; and with these five legions made speed to march by the shortest route to Further Gaul, over the Alps. In that region the Ceutrones, the Graioceli, and the Caturiges, seizing points on the higher ground, essayed to stop the march of his army. They were repulsed in several actions; and on the seventh day he moved from Ocelum, the last station of Hither Gaul, into the borders of the Vocontii in Further Gaul. Thence he led his army into the borders of the Allobroges, and from thence into the country of the Segusiavi, the first tribe outside the Province, across the Rhone.

[11] By this time the Helvetii, having brought their own forces through the defiles and through the borders of the Sequani, had reached the borders of the Aedui, and were engaged in laying waste their lands. Unable to defend their persons and their property from the invaders, the Aedui sent deputies to Caesar to ask for aid. These pleaded that the Aedui had always deserved too well of the Roman people to merit the devastation of their lands, the removal of their children into slavery, and the capture of their towns, almost in sight of the Roman army. At the same time the Aedui Ambarri, close allies and kinsmen of the Aedui, informed Caesar that their lands had been laid waste, and that they could not easily safeguard their towns from the violence of the enemy. The Allobroges also, who had villages and settlements across the Rhone, fled to Caesar, affirming that they had nothing left to them save the bare ground. All these events drove Caesar to the decision that he must not wait till the Helvetii, having wasted all the substance of the Roman allies, should penetrate into the land of the Santoni.

[12] There is a river Arar (Saône), which flows through the borders of the Aedui and the Sequani into the Rhone: its sluggishness is beyond belief, for the eye cannot determine in which direction the stream flows. This river the Helvetii proceeded to cross by rafts and boats fastened together. When Caesar's scouts informed him that three-quarters of the Helvetian forces had actually crossed, and that about a quarter remained on the near side of the river Saône, he left camp in the third watch with three legions and came up to the division of the enemy which had not yet crossed. He attacked them unawares when they were heavily loaded, and put a great number of them to the sword; the remainder betook themselves to flight and hid in the nearest woods. The name of the canton was the Tigurine; for the whole state of Helvetia is divided into four cantons. In the recollection of the last generation this canton had marched out alone from its homeland, and had slain the consul Lucius Cassius and sent his army under the yoke. And so, whether by accident or by the purpose of the immortal gods, the section of the Helvetian state which had brought so signal a calamity upon the Roman people was the first to pay the penalty in full. Therein Caesar avenged private as well as national outrages; for in the same battle with Cassius the Tigurini had slain Lucius Piso the general, grandfather of Lucius Piso, Caesar's father-in-law.

[13] This action over, he caused a bridge to be made over the Saône and sent his army across thereby, in order to pursue the remainder of the Helvetian forces. Alarmed at his sudden approach—for they perceived that the business of crossing the river, which they themselves had accomplished with the greatest difficulty in twenty days, had been despatched by Caesar in a single one—the Helvetii sent deputies to him. The leader of the deputation was Divico, who had been commander of the Helvetii in the campaign against Cassius. He treated with Caesar as follows: If the Roman people would make peace with the Helvetii, they would go whither and abide where Caesar should determine and desire; if on the other hand he should continue to visit them with war, he was advised to remember the earlier disaster of the Roman people and the ancient valour of the Helvetii. He had attacked one canton unawares, when those who had crossed the river could not bear assistance to their fellows; but that event must not induce him to rate his own valour highly or to despise them. The Helvetii had learnt from their parents and ancestors to fight their battles with courage, not with cunning nor reliance upon stratagem. Caesar therefore must not allow the place of their conference to derive renown or perpetuate remembrance by a disaster to the Roman people and the destruction of an army.

[14] To these remarks Caesar replied as follows: As he remembered well the events which the Helvetian deputies had mentioned, he had therefore the less need to hesitate; and his indignation was the more vehement in proportion as the Roman people had not deserved the

misfortune. If the Romans had been conscious of some outrage done, it would not have been hard to take precaution; but they had been misled, because they did not understand that they had done anything to cause them apprehension, and they thought that they should not feel apprehension without cause. And even if he were willing to forget an old affront, could he banish the memory of recent outrages—their attempts to march by force against his will through the Province, their ill-treatment of the Aedui, the Ambarri, the Allobroges? Their insolent boast of their own victory, their surprise that their outrages had gone on so long with impunity, pointed the same way;¹ for it was the wont of the immortal gods to grant a temporary prosperity and a longer impunity to make men whom they purposed to punish for their crime smart the more severely from a change of fortune. Yet, for all this, he would make peace with the Helvetii, if they would offer him hostages to show him that they would perform their promises, and if they would give satisfaction to the Aedui in respect of the outrages inflicted on them and their allies, and likewise to the Allobroges. Divico replied: It was the ancestral practice and the regular custom of the Helvetii to receive, not to offer, hostages; the Roman people was witness thereof. With this reply he departed.

[15] Next day the Helvetii moved their camp from that spot. Caesar did likewise, sending forward the whole of his cavalry, four thousand in number, which he had raised from the whole of the Province, from the Aedui, and from their allies, to observe in which direction the enemy were marching. The cavalry, following up the rearguard too eagerly, engaged in a combat on unfavourable ground with the cavalry of the Helvetii, and a few of ours fell. Elated by this engagement, because five hundred of their horsemen had routed so large a host of ours, the Helvetii began on occasion to make a bolder stand, and with their rearguard to provoke the Romans to a fight. Caesar kept his troops from fighting, accounting it sufficient for the present to prevent the enemy from plundering, foraging, and devastation. The march continued for about a fortnight with no more interval than five or six miles a day between the rearguard of the enemy and the vanguard of the Romans.

[16] Meanwhile Caesar was daily pressing the Aedui for the corn that they had promised as a state. For by reason of cold weather (since Gaul, as has been said above, lies under the northern heaven) not only were the corn-crops in the fields unripe, but there was not even a sufficient supply of forage to be had. At the same time he was less able to use the corn-supply that he had brought up the river Saône in boats, because the Helvetii had diverted their march from the Saône, and he did not wish to lose touch with them. The Aedui put him off day after day, declaring that the corn was being collected, was being brought in, was at hand. He perceived that he was being put off too long, and that the day was close upon him whereon it was proper to issue the corn-ration to the troops: accordingly he summoned together the Aeduan chiefs, of whom he had a great number in his camp, among them Diviciacus and Liscus, who had the highest magistracy, called Vergobret¹ by the Aedui: the magistrate is elected annually, and holds the power of life and death over his fellow-countrymen. Caesar called them severely to account because they offered no relief in a time of stress, with the enemy close at hand, when corn could neither be purchased nor taken from the fields. And just because he had undertaken the war largely in response to their entreaties, he complained the more severely of their desertion.

[17] Then, and not till then, the remarks of Caesar induced Liscus to reveal a fact concealed before. There were, he said, certain persons, of paramount influence with the common folk, and of more power in their private capacity than the actual magistrates. These persons, by seditious and insolent language, were intimidating the population against the collection of corn as required, on the plea that it was better for the Aedui, if they could not now enjoy the primacy of

Gaul, to submit to the commands of Gauls rather than of Romans; for they did not doubt that, if the Romans overcame the Helvetii, they meant to deprive the Aedui of liberty, in common with the rest of Gaul. These, again, were the men, who informed the enemy of the Roman plans and all the doings of the camp; nor had he power to restrain them. Nay, more, he perceived with what risk he had acted in informing Caesar, under sheer force of necessity; and for that reason he had held his peace as long as he could.

[18] Caesar felt that Dumnorix, the brother of Diviciacus, was indicated in these remarks of Liscus; but as he would not have those matters threshed out in presence of a company, he speedily dismissed the meeting. He kept Liscus back, and questioned him separately on his statement in the assembly. Liscus now spoke with greater freedom and boldness. Caesar questioned others privately upon the same matters, and found that it was so—that Dumnorix was the man who, unequalled in boldness, and strong in the influence that his generosity gave him over the common folk, desired a revolution. For several years, it was said, he had contracted at a low price for the customs and all the rest of the Aeduan taxes, for the simple reason that when he made a bid none durst bid against him. By this means he had at once increased his own property and acquired ample resources for bribery; he maintained a considerable body of horse permanently at his own charges, and kept them about his person; not only in his own but even in neighbouring states his power was extensive. To secure this power he had given his mother in marriage to the noblest and most powerful man among the Bituriges, he had taken himself a wife from the Helvetii, and had married his half-sister and his female relations to men of other states. This connection made him a zealous supporter of the Helvetii; moreover, he hated Caesar and the Romans on his own account, because their arrival had diminished his power and restored his brother Diviciacus to his ancient place of influence and honour. If anything should happen to the Romans, he entertained the most confident hope of securing the kingship by means of the Helvetii: it was the empire of the Roman people which caused him to despair not only of the kingship, but even of the influence he now possessed. Caesar discovered also in the course of his questioning, as concerning the unsuccessful cavalry engagement of a few days before, that Dumnorix and his horsemen (he was commander of the body of horse sent by the Aedui to the aid of Caesar) had started the retreat, and that by their retreat the remainder of the horse had been stricken with panic.

[19] All this Caesar learnt, and to confirm these suspicions he had indisputable facts. Dumnorix had brought the Helvetii through the borders of the Sequani; he had caused hostages to be given between them; he had done all this not only without orders from his state or from Caesar, but even without the knowledge of either; he was now accused by the magistrate of the Aedui. Caesar deemed all this to be cause enough for him either to punish Dumnorix himself, or to command the state so to do. To all such procedure there was one objection, the knowledge that Diviciacus, the brother of Dumnorix, showed the utmost zeal for the Roman people, the utmost goodwill towards himself, in loyalty, injustice, in prudence alike remarkable; for Caesar apprehended that the punishment of Dumnorix might offend the feelings of Diviciacus. Therefore, before attempting anything in the matter, Caesar ordered Diviciacus to be summoned to his quarters, and, having removed the regular interpreters, conversed with him through the mouth of Gaius Valerius Procillus, a leading man in the Province of Gaul and his own intimate friend, in whom he had the utmost confidence upon all matters. Caesar related the remarks which had been uttered in his presence as concerning Dumnorix at the assembly of the Gauls, and showed what each person had said severally to him upon the same subject. He asked and urged that without offence to the feelings of Diviciacus he might either hear his case himself and pass judgment upon him, or order the state so to do.

[20] With many tears Diviciacus embraced Caesar, and began to beseech him not to pass too severe a judgment upon his brother. "I know," said he, "that the reports are true, and no one is more pained thereat than I, for at a time when I had very great influence in my own state and in the rest of Gaul, and he very little, by reason of his youth, he owed his rise to me; and now he is using his resources and his strength not only to the diminution of my influence, but almost to my destruction. For all that, I feel the force of brotherly love and public opinion. That is to say, if too severe a fate befalls him at your hands, no one, seeing that I hold this place in your friendship, will opine that it has been done without my consent; and this will turn from me the feelings of all Gaul." While he was making this petition at greater length, and with tears, Caesar took him by the hand and consoled him, bidding him end his entreaty, and showing that his influence with Caesar was so great that he excused the injury to Rome and the vexation felt by himself, in consideration for the goodwill and the entreaties of Diviciacus. Then he summoned Dumnorix to his quarters, and in the presence of his brother he pointed out what he had to blame in him; he set forth what he himself perceived, and the complaints of the state; he warned him to avoid all occasions of suspicion for the future, and said that he excused the past in consideration for his brother Diviciacus. He posted sentinels over Dumnorix, so as to know what he did and with whom he spoke.

[21] On the same day his scouts informed him that the enemy had halted close under a height eight miles from the Roman camp. A party was sent to reconnoitre the height, and to see what kind of ascent a detour might afford: the report was that it was easy. Caesar ordered Titus Labienus, lieutenant-general and chief of the staff,¹ to move in the third watch with two legions and the guides who knew the route, and to climb the topmost ridge of the height; and he showed him his own intention. He himself, starting in the fourth watch, marched speedily against the enemy by the same route which they had taken, sending forward the whole of the horse. Publius Considius, reputed a past master in the art of war, who had seen service in the army of Lucius Sulla and afterwards in that of Marcus Crassus, was sent forward with the scouts.