Sallust Jugurthine War 63-65

63. About the same time, as Caius Marius, who happened to be at Utica, was sacrificing to the gods, an augur told him that great and wonderful things were presaged to him; that he might therefore pursue whatever designs he had formed, trusting to the gods for success; and that he might try fortune as often as he pleased, for that all his undertakings would prosper. Previously to this period an ardent longing for the consulship had possessed him; and he had, indeed, every qualification for obtaining it, except antiquity of family; he had industry, integrity, great knowledge of war, and a spirit undaunted in the field; he was temperate in private life, superior to pleasure and riches, and ambitious only of glory. Having been born at Arpinum, and brought up there during his boyhood, he employed himself, as soon as he was of age to bear arms, not in the study of Greek eloquence, nor in learning the refinements of the city, but in military service; and thus, amid the strictest discipline, his excellent genius soon attained full vigor. When he solicited the people, therefore, for the military tribuneship, he was well known by name, though most were strangers to his face, and unanimously elected by the tribes. After this office he attained others in succession, and conducted himself so well in his public duties, that he was always deemed worthy of a higher station than he had reached. Yet, though such had been his character hitherto (for he was afterward carried away by ambition), he had not ventured to stand for the consulship. The people, at that time, still disposed of other civil offices, but the nobility transmitted the consulship from hand to hand among themselves. Nor had any commoner appeared, however famous or distinguished by his achievements, who would not have been thought unworthy of that honor, and, as it were, a disgrace to it.

64. But when Marius found that the words of the augur pointed in the same direction as his own inclinations prompted him, he requested of Metellus leave of absence, that he might offer himself a candidate for the consulship. Metellus, though eminently distinguished by virtue, honor, and other qualities valued by the good, had yet a haughty and disdainful spirit, the common failing of the nobility. He was at first, therefore, astonished at so extraordinary an application, expressed surprise at Marius's views, and advised him, as if in friendship, "not to indulge such unreasonable expectations, or elevate his thoughts above his station; that all things were not to be coveted by all men; that his present condition ought to satisfy him; and, finally, that he should be cautious of asking from the Roman people what they might justly refuse him." Having made these and similar remarks, and finding that the resolution of Marius was not at all affected by them, he told him "that he would grant what he desired as soon as the public business would allow him." On Marius repeating his request several times afterward, he is reported to have said, "that he need not be in a hurry to go, as he
would be soon enough if he became a candidate with his own son.” Metellus’s son was then on service in the camp with his father, and was about twenty years old.

65. There was then in our army a Numidian named Gauda, the son of Mastanabal, and grandson of Masinissa, whom Micipsa, in his will, had appointed next heir to his immediate successors. This man had been debilitated by ill-health, and, from the effect of it, was somewhat impaired in his understanding. He had petitioned Metellus to allow him a seat, like a prince, next to himself, and a troop of horse for a bodyguard; but Metellus had refused him both; the seat, because it was granted only to those whom the Roman people had addressed as kings, and the guard, because it would be an indignity to Roman cavalry to act as guards to a Numidian. While Gauda was discontented at these refusals, Marius paid him a visit, and prompted him, with his assistance, to seek revenge for the affronts put upon him by the general; inflating his mind, which was as weak as his body, with flattering speeches, telling him that he was a prince, a great man, and the grandson of Masinissa; that if Jugurtha were taken or killed, he would immediately become king of Numidia; and that this event might soon happen, if he himself were sent as consul to the war.

Thus partly the influence of Marius himself, and partly the hope of obtaining peace, induced Gauda, as well as most of the Roman knights, both soldiers and merchants, to write to their friends at Rome, in a style of censure, respecting Metellus’s management of the war, and to intimate that Marius should be appointed general. The consulship, accordingly, was solicited for him by numbers of people, with the most honorable demonstrations in his favor. It happened that the people too, at this juncture, having just triumphed over the nobility by the Mamilian law, were eager to raise commoners to office. Hence every thing was favorable to Marius’s views.