

Mythical 60

Chapter 60: Instilling in Liu Bei...

Zhang Fei left with an excited look on his face. Chen Xi knew that this guy would most likely have a big fight in Mount Tai before coming back.

The next day, Liu Bei came again. Seeing Chen Xi leisurely drinking tea in the government hall, Liu Bei felt somewhat helpless. After all this time, Liu Bei no longer worried that Chen Xi would exhaust himself to death. He had come to understand that no matter how troublesome the task, Chen Xi would only frown momentarily before solving it. Liu Bei now believed what Chen Xi had said during their journey—that political strategy was indeed his strong suit.

"Zi Chuan, are you feeling bored again?" Liu Bei asked with a smile. He almost didn't handle any government affairs now, except for the authority to promote or punish his subordinates. Everything else was left for Chen Xi to manage. Liu Bei spent most of his time selecting physically fit refugees to train, and now he had a force of over ten thousand new recruits who, despite being raw, were starting to take shape.

"We're digging canals, wells, repairing roads, and renovating city walls. Finally having tens of thousands of people to command means we can get all these tasks done in one go. It'll save us a lot of trouble in the future," Chen Xi said while pretending to read a scroll. Even though Liu Bei knew his personality, Chen Xi still felt the need to put on a show for his superior.

Jian Yong, who was nearby, couldn't help but laugh at Chen Xi's pretense. The scroll was even upside down, yet he continued to act as if he were reading.

"Zi Long, how is the military farming going? Can it meet Zi Chuan's standards?" Liu Bei asked, still unsure about Zhao Yun's capabilities. After all, it was rare for someone so skilled in martial arts to also excel in governance.

"Among those who can match him in military farming today, there are probably only a handful," Chen Xi said confidently. "And none would definitely outperform him."

Chen Xi wasn't exaggerating. Military farming was a relatively new concept at the time. Although it had been attempted before, the method proposed by Zhao Zhi was essentially a new creation. After Chen Xi

explained Zhao Zhi's military farming decree to Zhao Yun, he let Zhao Yun modify it according to his understanding.

Zhao Yun wasn't lacking in intelligence. Although he had never seen this kind of military farming system before, he could recognize its merits and flaws. Naturally, he analyzed the decree from his perspective. As Zhao Yun himself put it, the decree was indeed a quick way to accumulate national power, but was it too harsh on the common people with its fifty-fifty split?

Chen Xi didn't bother explaining to Zhao Yun that even with a fifty-fifty split, the common people would be better off than before since the intermediary layers were removed. With three-tenths land tax and five-tenths land rent, only two-tenths were left for the farmers, which explained the frequent famines despite the abundance of land in the Han Dynasty.

As for Chen Xi's fifty-fifty split, it was based on an average yield from sampled fields. With no private taxes, Chen Xi guaranteed that even in a minor disaster year, the farmers wouldn't starve. But Zhao Yun stubbornly argued with Chen Xi about this, and since he couldn't win the debate, he angrily went off with his subordinates to collect data. He came back a few days ago, looking sullen.

One had to admit that field investigations were crucial. After studying for half a month, Zhao Yun found out that Chen Xi was right—the fifty-fifty split could indeed get people through a disaster year. Was there any justice in that? If so, why did the Yellow Turban Rebellion occur?

When Zhao Yun returned, he was gripping his spear, looking somber. It seemed like he was ready to poke a few holes in Chen Xi if he lost the debate again. They debated for an hour, from taxation to farming methods, from yield per acre to disaster years. Even Jian Yong was shocked, having never seen Zhao Yun talk so much.

In the end, Chen Xi shrugged and handed over the military farming task to Zhao Yun. He didn't need to review the decree drafts. Zhao Yun could study on his own, do field investigations, and take responsibility for any issues.

Thus, Chen Xi sent Zhao Yun off. Although he could spot many flaws in Zhao Yun's military farming decree, Chen Xi preferred to trust that Zhao Yun would notice those issues over time with more experience and investigations.

Listening to Jian Yong recount the events, Liu Bei sighed. "The Han Dynasty's decrees were not flawed. The problem lies in people exploiting loopholes. The aristocratic families are talented but use their abilities in the wrong direction."

"Any decree will have loopholes; it's just a matter of how many. Rules change with time. What was golden in the past may not fit now. Keeping up with the times is what matters," Chen Xi said helplessly.

Chen Xi realized he needed to instill some new ideas in Liu Bei. If Liu Bei clung to outdated methods, even if he unified the land, he would just become another Emperor Guangwu. Chen Xi wanted Liu Bei to have the ambition and dominance akin to Qin Shi Huang or Emperor Wu of Han, with a drive to conquer and the courage to confront challenges head-on. Even if Liu Bei ended up being seen as a warmonger like Emperor Wu, it would be better than being entangled in the power struggles of aristocrats and royal kin like Emperor Guangwu.

Emperor Wu's campaigns may have caused domestic instability, but the Han family continued to rule for over four centuries. Even during the Three Kingdoms period, the Western Regions and beyond still acknowledged Han sovereignty. The unyielding spirit left by Emperor Wu meant that even during the Han Dynasty's decline, foreign tribes dared not invade.

In contrast, Emperor Guangwu's rise marked the gradual erosion of martial spirit, bowing to aristocrats repeatedly until it became habitual, forgetting the determination to "avenge and restore," and ultimately leading to the downfall of the Han Dynasty.

Frankly, Chen Xi didn't fear another Emperor Wu. Even if his campaigns caused temporary unrest, they ensured long-term stability. Post-Emperor Wu, Han China could enjoy over a century of peace, making any temporary turmoil worthwhile.

Post-Emperor Wu's era saw continued peace until Emperor Xuan, who also followed a path of recovery, leading to another prosperous era. In short, Emperor Wu's policies didn't cause irreparable harm; stability could still be maintained.

Moreover, if another Emperor Wu-like figure emerged periodically, the Han Dynasty could continually rejuvenate itself, metaphorically extracting resources from the entire continent.

Conversely, Emperor Guangwu's approach allowed aristocrats and royal kin to gain power unchecked, ultimately leading to the dynasty's demise. Without a strong leader to suppress these factions, the aristocrats grew increasingly powerful, ultimately leading to the downfall of the Han Dynasty—a true tragedy.

Given this understanding, Chen Xi preferred a militaristic Liu Bei over one who followed Emperor Guangwu's path. At least the former path, though harsh, was sustainable if resources and manpower held out, whereas the latter was a dead end leading to the inevitable rise of aristocratic dominance.

With this mindset, Chen Xi frequently instilled ideas of dominance, kingship, and celestial mandate into Liu Bei whenever he had the chance.