

On Gaius Gracchus

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Gaius Gracchus had his brother's fervor but was said to be more flamboyant than the reserved Tiberius.

[For 132-124 BCE] After Ti. Gracchus was killed, Ap. Claudius, his father-in-law, died and Fulvius Flaccus and Papirius Carbo were selected, together with the younger [Gaius] Gracchus, to divide the land. As those in possession failed to hand in lists of what they held, it was announced that informers should give evidence against them. A large number of perplexing lawsuits sprang up. Where a new field had been purchased next to an old one, or where the land had been divided with allies, the whole section had to be gone over in the surveying of this one field, in order to discover how it had been sold or partitioned. Some owners had not kept their bills of sale or deeds of allotment, and even those that were unearthed were often ambiguous. On the remeasuring of the land, some had to give up orchards and farm buildings for bare fields. Others were moved from tilled to untilled lands or to swamps or ponds. In short, the surveying had been carelessly done when the land was first taken away from the enemy. Since the first proclamation sanctioned anyone's cultivating the unassigned land that wished to, men had been impelled to till the parts lying next to their own land until the boundary line between the two had been lost sight of. The lapse of time had also made many changes. Thus, what injustice had been done by the rich, though great, was not easily discovered. So nothing less than a general commotion followed, everybody being ousted from his own place and set down in somebody else's.

The Italian allies that remonstrated at this disturbance and especially against the lawsuits suddenly brought against them, selected Cornelius Scipio [Aemilianus], the destroyer of Carthage, to protect them from these annoyances. As he had used their powerful aid in war, he did not like to refuse their request. So, coming into the senate, he explained the difficulty in enforcing Gracchus' law, although, for the sake of the plebs, he did not openly attack it. He held that these cases ought not to be judged by the triumvirs, as they did not have the confidence of the disputants, but should be handed over to others. As his point of view seemed just, they let themselves be persuaded, and the consul, Tuditanus, was chosen to sit in these cases. But when he began on the matter he saw its difficulties, and then led the army against the Illyrians as an excuse to get out of acting as judge, and since no one could bring the cases before the triumvirs they fell into abeyance. Hence ill feeling and resentment sprung up against Scipio among the people, because they saw him for whose sake they had often taken sides against the aristocracy and brought upon themselves hostility, twice electing him consul contrary to law, now siding with the Italian allies against them. When Scipio's

foes saw this, they charged that he was intent on annulling the law of Gracchus entirely, and to that end was about to incite armed violence and bloodshed.

When the populace heard these accusations they were much disturbed until Scipio, who had placed near his couch at home one evening a tablet, on which he intended during the night to write the speech he was to deliver before the people, was found dead on his couch without a wound. Whether this was caused by Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, assisted by her daughter, Sempronia, who was the wife of Scipio, but unloved and unaffectionate because she was deformed and childless, to prevent the law of Gracchus being abolished, or whether, as some believed, he committed suicide because he saw clearly that he could not do what he had said he would, is not certain. Some say that slaves, after being exposed to torture, confessed that unknown persons, who were brought through the rear of the house by night, strangled him, and that those who knew about it refrained from telling because the people were still incensed at him and were glad he died. So Scipio perished, and though he had been of enormous service to the Roman state, he was not given the honor of a public funeral. Thus does the irritation of the moment efface the appreciation of past service. This event, important enough in itself, happened as an incident of the undertaking of Gracchus.

Even after this those holding the lands long put off upon various excuses the division of their holdings. Some thought the Italian allies, who objected to it most strenuously, should be admitted to Roman citizenship, in order that, out of thankfulness for so great a favor, they should not longer protest about the land. The Italians were ready to accept this compromise, since they had rather have Roman citizenship than the ownership of these fields. Fulvius Flaccus, at that time both consul and triumvir, did his best to carry it through, but the senate was wroth at the proposition to make their subjects of equal rank with themselves. So the effort was dropped and the people, who had been so long hopeful of obtaining land, began to be discouraged.

[For 124-122 BCE] While they were in this frame of mind, C. Gracchus, who had made himself popular as a triumvir, stood for the tribuneship. He was the younger brother of Ti. Gracchus, the originator of the law. He had kept silent concerning the killing of his brother for some time, but as some of the senate treated him disdainfully, he offered himself as a candidate for the tribuneship, and as soon as he was elected to this high office began to intrigue against the senate. He proposed that a monthly distribution of grain should be made to each citizen at the expense of the state. This had not been the custom prior to this. Thus he put himself at the head of the populace at a bound by one stroke of politics, in which he had the assistance of Fulvius Flaccus. Right after this he was elected

tribune for the next year also, for in cases where there were not enough candidates the law permitted the people to fill out the list from those in office.

In this way C. Gracchus became tribune a second time. After, so to say, buying the plebs, he began to court the equites, who hold the rank midway between the senate and the plebs, by another similar stroke of politics. He handed over the courts of justice, which had become distrusted on account of bribery, from the senators to the equites, upbraiding the senators particularly for the recent instances of Aurelius Cotta, Salinator, and, thirdly, M'. Aquilius (the one that conquered Asia), all shameless bribe-takers, who had been set free by the judges, even though envoys sent to denounce them were still present, going about making disgraceful charges against them. The senate was very much ashamed of such things and agreed to the law and the people passed it. Thus the courts of justice were handed over from the senate to the knights. It is reported that soon after the enactment of this law Gracchus made the remark that he had destroyed the supremacy of the senate once for all, and this remark of his has been corroborated by experience throughout the course of history. The privilege of judging all Romans and Italians, even the senators themselves, in all affairs of property, civil rights and exile, raised the equites like governors over them, and placed the senators on the same plane as subjects. As the equites also voted to support the power of the tribunes in the comitia and received whatever they asked from them in return, they became more and more dangerous opponents to the senators. Thus it soon resulted that the supremacy in the state was reversed, the real mastery going into the hands of the equites and only the honor to the senate. The equites went so far in using their power over the senators as to openly mock them beyond all reason. They, too, imbibed the habit of bribe-taking and, after once tasting such immense acquisitions, they drained the draft even more shamefully and recklessly than the senators had done. They hired informers against the rich and put an end to prosecutions for bribe-taking entirely, partly by united action and partly by actual violence, so that the pursuit of such investigations was done away with entirely. Thus the judiciary law started another factional contest that lasted for a long time and was fully as harmful as the previous ones.

Gracchus constructed long highways over Italy and thus made an army of contractors and workmen dependent on his favor and rendered them subject to his every wish. He proposed the establishment of a number of colonies. He prompted the Latin allies to clamor for all the privileges of Roman citizenship, for the senate could not becomingly deny them to the kinsmen of the Romans. He attempted to give the right to vote to those allies that were not permitted to take part in Roman elections, so as to have their assistance in the passing of measures that he had in mind. The senate was greatly perturbed at this and commanded the consuls to set forth the following proclamation, "No one that does not have the right to vote shall remain in the city or come within forty stadia of it during the time that the voting is taking place upon these laws." The senate also got Livius Drusus—another tribune, to intercede his veto against the measures brought forward by Gracchus without telling the plebs his reasons for so doing; for

a tribune did not have to give his reasons for a veto. In order to curry favor with the plebs they gave Drusus permission to found twelve colonies, and the people were so much taken with this that they began to jeer at the measures that Gracchus proposed.

[For 122-121 BCE] As he had lost the good will of the populace, Gracchus set sail for Africa along with Fulvius Flaccus, who, after his consulship, had been elected tribune through the same causes for which Gracchus had. A colony had been assigned to Africa, because of the reported richness of its soil, and these men had been selected as its founders for the very sake of getting rid of them for awhile, in order that the senate might be untrammelled by demagoguery for a time. They laid out a town for the colony in the same place where Carthage had formerly lain, paying no heed to the fact that Scipio, when he razed it, had consigned it with imprecations to eternal sheep-grazing. They allotted six thousand colonists to this town, as against the smaller number assigned by law in order thus to further conciliate the people. Then, returning to Rome, they solicited the six thousand from all Italy. The managers that had remained in Africa laying out the town sent back word that wolves had dragged out and carried far and wide the boundary marks placed by Gracchus and Fulvius, and the sooth-sayers held this to be a bad omen for the colony. So the senate called together the comitia proposing to repeal the law authorizing the colony. When Gracchus and Fulvius saw that they were about to fail in this affair they became desperate and charged that the senate had lied about the wolves. The rashest of the plebs, with daggers in hand, gathered about them and accompanied them to the assembly where the comitia was to be held in regard to the colony.

The people were already assembled and Fulvius had commenced to address them about the matter when Gracchus reached the Capitol surrounded by a body-guard of his friends. Agitated by his knowledge of the unwonted schemes in hand, he turned away from the meeting place of the comitia, passing into the porch, and walked about, waiting to learn what would take place. Just then a pleb by the name of Antyllus, who was making a sacrifice in the porch, saw him thus troubled in mind, and, grasping him by the hand, because he had either heard or guessed something or was prompted through some impulse to speak to him, begged him to spare his fatherland. Still more agitated and starting as if caught in the act of a crime, Gracchus gave a sharp glance at the man. One of his partisans, without any sign or order being given, gathered from the piercing look itself given by Gracchus to Antyllus, that the moment to strike was at hand, and thought he should render Gracchus a kindness by giving the first blow; so he drew forth his dagger and stabbed Antyllus. An uproar was raised, the dead man being seen in the midst of the throng, and every one outside fled away from the temple, fearful of a similar fate. Gracchus went into the comitia in order to exonerate himself of the act, but no one would even listen to him. Everyone turned away from him as from one tainted with bloodshed. Gracchus and Flaccus were confounded, and having missed the opportunity to carry out their plans, they hurried home along with their adherents. The rest of the great mass of people stayed in the forum during the night, as if some fearful crisis were at hand.

One of the consuls, who was staying in the city, Opimius, ordered an armed guard to be placed at the Capitol at daybreak and dispatched heralds to convene the senate. He stationed himself in the Temple of Castor and Pollux in the middle of the city, and awaited the outcome there.

When these preparations had been made, the senate called Gracchus and Flaccus from their homes to the senate-house to make their defense, but with arms in their hands, they fled to the Aventine hill, hoping that if they could get possession of it first the senate would come to some understanding with them. They ran through the city promising liberty to slaves, but none paid heed to them. Nevertheless, with such troops as they had, they seized and barricaded the Temple of Diana and dispatched Quintus, the son of Flaccus, to the senate, trying to make terms and dwell in peace. The senate sent back word for them to put down their arms, and to come to the senate-house and tell what they desired, or else send no more emissaries. As they sent

Quintus a second time, the consul Opimius seized him, as no longer an envoy after being thus warned, and sent a force in arms against the followers of Gracchus. Gracchus fled to a grove across the river by the wooden bridge, accompanied by one slave, to whom he bared his throat when on the point of being taken. Flaccus sought shelter in the shop of an acquaintance. As those pursuing him did not know what shop he was in they threatened to set fire to the whole line. The man that had given the suppliant refuge was loath to point out his hiding place, but told some one else to do so. Flaccus was caught and slain. The heads of Gracchus and Flaccus were brought to Opimius and he gave an equal weight in gold to the ones presenting them. The mob pillaged their homes. Opimius seized their confederates and threw them into prison, ordering them to be strangled to death. After this a lustration on account of the bloodshed was made by the city and the senate ordered the erection of a temple to Harmony in the forum.