

Speech of Marius Against the Nobility

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After serving for a year under Q. Caecilius Metellus, the consul of 109, in the war against the anti-Roman Numidian usurper Jugurtha (a war that lasted from 112 to 105), the populist Marius went to Rome where he was elected to the consulship (in 108, for 107) and given the command of the army in Numidia. During his absence Metellus made considerable headway in his campaign against Jugurtha who, in spite of his reverses, succeeded in winning Bocchus, the King of Mauritania, over to his side. Before returning to his new duties, Marius denounced the aristocrats.

On arriving at his new post, Marius pushed the campaign against the Numidian with vigor and gained many successes. Bocchus betrayed his ally, Jugurtha, into the hands of Sulla, Marius's quaestor.

Marius who, as I said before, had been made consul with great eagerness on the part of the populace, began, though he had always been hostile to the patricians, to inveigh against them, after the people gave him the province of Numidia, with great frequency and violence; he attacked them sometimes individually and sometimes in a body; he said that he had snatched from them the consulship as spoils from vanquished enemies; and uttered other remarks laudatory to himself and offensive to them. Meanwhile he made the provisions for the war his chief object; he asked for reinforcements for the legions; he sent for auxiliaries from foreign states, kings, and allies; he also enlisted all the bravest men from Latium, most of whom were known to him by actual service, some few only by report and, induced by earnest solicitation, even discharged veterans to accompany him. Nor did the senate, though adverse to him, dare to refuse him anything; the additions to the legions they had voted even with eagerness, because military service was thought to be unpopular with the multitude, and Marius seemed likely to lose either the means of warfare or the favor of the people. But such expectations were entertained in vain, so ardent was the desire of going with Marius that had seized on almost all. Everyone cherished the fancy that he should return home laden with spoil, crowned with victory, or attended with some similar good fortune. Marius himself, too, had excited them in no small degree by a speech; for, when all that he required was granted and he was anxious to commence a levy, he called an assembly of the people as well to encourage them to enlist as to inveigh, according to his practice, against the nobility. He spoke, on the occasion, as follows:

"I am aware, my fellow-citizens, that most men do not appear as candidates before you for an office, and conduct themselves in it when they have obtained it, under the same

character; that they are at first industrious, humble, and modest, but afterwards lead a life of indolence and arrogance. But to me it appears that the contrary should be the case; for as the whole state is of greater consequence than the single office of consulate or praetorship, so its interests ought to be managed with greater solicitude than these magistracies are sought. Nor am I insensible how great a weight of business I am, through your kindness, called upon to sustain. To make preparations for war, and yet to be sparing of the treasury; to press those into the service whom I am unwilling to offend; to direct everything at home and abroad; and to discharge these duties when surrounded by the envious, the hostile, and the factious is more difficult, my fellow-citizens, than is generally imagined: In addition to this, if others fail in their undertakings, their ancient rank, the heroic actions of their ancestors, the power of their relatives and connections, their numerous dependents, are all at hand to support them; but as for me, my whole hopes rest upon myself, which I must sustain by good conduct and integrity; for all other means are unavailing.

"I am sensible, too, my fellow-citizens, that the eyes of all men are turned upon me; that the just and good favor me, as my services are beneficial to the state, but that the nobility seek occasion to attack me. I must therefore use the greater exertion, that you may not be deceived in me, and that their views may be rendered abortive. I have led such a life, indeed, from my boyhood to the present hour, that I am familiar with every kind of toil and danger; and that exertion which, before your kindness to me, I practiced gratuitously. It is not my intention to relax after having received my reward. For those who have pretended to be men of worth only to secure their election, it may be difficult to conduct themselves properly in office; but to me, who have passed my whole life in the most honorable occupations, to act well has from habit become nature.

"You have commanded me to carry on the war against Jugurtha; a commission at which the nobility are highly offended. Consider with yourselves, I pray you, whether it would be a change for the better, if you were to send to this, or to any other such appointment, one of yonder crowd of nobles, a man of ancient family, of innumerable statues, and of no military experience; in order, forsooth, that in so important an office, and being ignorant of everything connected with it, he may exhibit hurry and trepidation, and select one of the people to instruct him in his duty. For so it generally happens, that he whom you have chosen to direct, seeks another to direct him. I know some, my fellow-citizens, who, after they have been elected consuls, have begun to read the acts of their ancestors, and the military precepts of the Greeks; persons who invert the order of things; for though to discharge the duties of the office

is posterior, in point of time, to election, it is, in reality and practical importance, prior to it.

“Compare now, my fellow-citizens, me, who am a new man, with those haughty nobles. What they have but heard or read, I have witnessed or performed. What they have learned from books, I have acquired in the field; and whether deeds or words are of greater estimation, it is for you to consider. They despise my humbleness of birth; I condemn their imbecility. My condition is made an objection to me; their misconduct is a reproach to them. The circumstance of birth, indeed, I consider as one and the same to all; but think that he who best exerts himself is the noblest. And could it be inquired of the fathers, of Albinus and Bestia, whether they would rather be the parents of them or of me, what do you suppose that they would answer, but that they would wish the most deserving to be their offspring? If the patricians justly despise me, let them also despise their own ancestors, whose nobility, like mine, had its origin in merit. They envy me the honor that I have received; let them also envy me the toils, the abstinence, and the perils, by which I obtained that honor. But they, men eaten up with pride, live as if they disdained all the distinctions that you can bestow, and yet sue for those distinctions as if they had lived so as to merit them. Yet those are assuredly deceived who expect to enjoy, at the same time, things so incompatible as the pleasures of indolence and the rewards of honorable exertion.

“When they speak before you, or in the senate, they occupy the greatest part of their orations in extolling their ancestors; for they suppose that, by recounting the heroic deeds of their forefathers, they render themselves more illustrious. But the reverse of this is the case; for the more glorious were the lives of their ancestors, the more scandalous is their own inaction. The truth, indeed, is plainly this, that the glory of ancestors sheds a light on their posterity, which suffers neither their virtues nor their vices to be concealed. Of this light, my fellow-citizens, I have no share; but I have what confers much more distinction, the power of relating my own actions. Consider, then, how unreasonable they are; what they claim to themselves for the merit of others, they will not grant to me for my own; alleging, forsooth, that I have no statues, and that my distinction is newly acquired; but it is surely better to have acquired such distinction myself than to bring disgrace on that received from others.

“I am not ignorant that, if they were inclined to reply to me, they would make an abundant display of eloquent and artful language. Yet, since they attack both you and myself, on occasion of the great favor which you have conferred upon me, I did not think proper to be silent before them, lest anyone should construe my forbearance into a consciousness of demerit. As for myself, indeed, nothing that is said of me, I feel assured, can do me injury; for what is true must of necessity speak in my favor; what is false, my life and character will refute. But since your judgment, in bestowing on me so distinguished an honor and so important a trust, is called in question, consider, I beseech you, again and again, whether you are likely to repent of what you have done. I can not, to raise your confidence in me, boast of the statues, or triumphs, or consulships of my ancestors; but, if it be thought necessary, I can show you spears, a banner, caparisons for horses, and

other military rewards; besides the scars of wounds on my breast. These are my statues; this is my nobility; honors, not left, like theirs, by inheritance, but acquired amidst innumerable toils and dangers.

“My speech, they say, is inelegant; but that I have ever thought of little importance. Worth sufficiently displays itself; it is for my detractors to use studied language, that they may palliate base conduct by plausible words. Nor have I learned Greek; for I had no wish to acquire a tongue that adds nothing to the valor of those who teach it. But I have gained other accomplishments, such as are of the utmost benefit to a state; I have learned to strike down an enemy; to be vigilant at my post; to fear nothing but dishonor; to bear cold and heat with equal endurance; to sleep on the ground; and to sustain at the same time hunger and fatigue. And with such rules of conduct I shall stimulate my soldiers, not treating them with rigor and myself with indulgence, nor making their toils my glory. Such a mode of commanding is at once useful to the state, and becoming to a citizen. For to coerce your troops with severity, while you yourself live at ease, is to be a tyrant, not a general.

“It was by conduct such as this, my fellow-citizens, that your ancestors made themselves and the republic renowned. Our nobility, relying on their forefathers' merits, though totally different from them in conduct, disparage us who emulate their virtues; and demand of you every public honor, as due, not to their personal merit, but to their high rank. Arrogant pretenders, and utterly unreasonable! For though their ancestors left them all that was at their disposal, their riches, their statues, and their glorious names, they left them not, nor could leave them, their virtue; which alone, of all their possessions, could neither be communicated nor received.

“They reproach me as being mean, and of unpolished manners, because, forsooth, I have but little skill in arranging an entertainment, and keep no actor, nor give my cook higher wages than my steward; all which charges I must, indeed, acknowledge to be just; for I learned from my father, and other venerable characters, that vain indulgences belong to women, and labor to men; that glory, rather than wealth, should be the object of the virtuous; and that arms and armor, not household furniture, are marks of honor. But let the nobility, if they please, pursue what is delightful and dear to them; let them devote themselves to licentiousness and luxury; let them pass their age as they have passed their youth, in revelry and feasting, the slaves of gluttony and debauchery; but let them leave the toil and dust of the field, and other such matters, to us, to whom they are more grateful than banquets. This, however, they will not do; for when these most infamous of men have disgraced themselves by every species of turpitude, they proceed to claim the distinctions due to the most honorable. Thus it most unjustly happens that luxury and indolence, the most disgraceful of vices, are harmless to those who indulge in them, and fatal only to the innocent commonwealth.

“As I have now replied to my calumniators, as far as my own character required, though not so fully as their flagitiousness deserved, I shall add a few words on the state of public affairs. In the first place, my fellow-citizens, be of good courage with regard to Numidia; for all that hitherto protected Jugurtha,

avarice, inexperience, and arrogance, you have entirely removed. There is an army in it, too, which is well acquainted with the country, though, assuredly, more brave than fortunate; for a great part of it has been destroyed by the avarice or rashness of its commanders. Such of you, then, as are of military age, co-operate with me, and support the cause of your country; and let no discouragement, from the ill-fortune of others, or the arrogance of the late commanders, affect anyone of you. I myself shall be with you, both on the march and in the battle, both to direct your movements and to share

your dangers. I shall treat you and myself on every occasion alike; and, doubtless, with the aid of the gods, all good things, victory, spoil and glory, are ready to our hands; though, even if they were doubtful or distant, it would still become every able citizen to act in defense of his country. For no man, by slothful timidity, has escaped the lot of mortals; nor has any parent wished for his children that they might live forever, but rather that they might act in life with virtue and honor. I would add more, my fellow-citizens, if words could give courage to the faint-hearted; to the brave I think that I have said enough."