

Drusus and his Enemies

Source: Appian 1.34-35. Translated by Horace White. In *Appian's Roman history: in four volumes*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1913.

The cause of citizenship for the Italians was taken up by the otherwise pro-senate M. Livius Drusus, who was tribune of the plebs in 91 BCE.

While they were thus occupied the so-called Social War, in which many Italian peoples were engaged, broke out.¹ It began unexpectedly, grew rapidly to great proportions and extinguished the Roman sedition for a long time by a new terror. When it was ended it also gave rise to new seditions under more powerful leaders, who did not work by introducing new laws, or by the tricks of the demagogue, but by matching whole armies against each other. I have treated it in this history because it had its origin in the sedition in Rome and resulted in another much worse. It began in this way.

Fulvius Flaccus in his consulship first and foremost openly excited among the Italians the desire for Roman citizenship, so as to be partners in the empire instead of subjects.² When he introduced this idea and strenuously persisted in it, the Senate, for that reason, sent him away to take command in a war, in the course of which his consulship expired; but he obtained the tribuneship after that and contrived to have the younger Gracchus³ for a colleague, with whose co-operation he brought forward other measures in favor of the Italians. When they were both killed, as I have previously related, the Italians were still more excited. They could not bear to be considered subjects instead of equals, or to think that Flaccus and Gracchus should have suffered such calamities while working for their political advantage.

After them the tribune Livius Drusus, a man of most illustrious birth, promised the Italians, at their urgent request, that he would bring forward a new law to give them citizenship. They especially desired this because by that one step they would become rulers instead of subjects. In order to conciliate the plebeians to this measure he led out to Italy and Sicily several colonies which had been voted some time before, but not yet planted. He endeavored to bring together by an agreement the Senate and the equestrian order, who were then in sharp antagonism to each other, in reference to the law courts. As he was not able to restore the courts to the Senate openly, he tried the following artifice to reconcile them. As the senators had been reduced by the seditions to scarcely 300 in number, he brought forward a law that an equal number, chosen according to merit, should be added to their enrolment from the knights, and that the courts of justice should be made up thereafter from the whole number. He added a clause in the

law that they should make investigations about bribery, as accusations of that kind were almost unknown, since the custom of bribe-taking prevailed without restraint.

This was the plan that he contrived for both of them, but it turned out contrary to his expectations, for the senators were indignant that so large a number should be added to their enrolment at one time and be transferred from knighthood to the highest rank. They thought it not unlikely that they would form a faction in the Senate by themselves and contend against the old senators more powerfully than ever. The knights, on the other hand, suspected that, by this doctoring, the courts of justice would be transferred from their order to the Senate exclusively. Having acquired a relish for the great gains and power of the judicial office, this suspicion disturbed them. Most of them, too, fell into doubt and distrust toward each other, discussing which of them seemed more worthy than others to be enrolled among the 300; and envy against their betters filled the breasts of the remainder. Above all the knights were angry at the revival of the charge of bribery, which they thought had been ere this entirely suppressed, so far as they were concerned.

Thus it came to pass that both the Senate and the knights, although opposed to each other, were united in hating Drusus. Only the plebeians were gratified with the colonies. Even the Italians, in whose especial interest Drusus was devising these plans, were apprehensive about the law providing for the colonies, because they thought that the Roman public domain (which was still undivided and which they were cultivating, some by force and others clandestinely) would at once be taken away from them, and that in many cases they might even be disturbed in their private holdings. The Etruscans and the Umbrians had the same fears as the Italians,⁴ and when they were summoned to the city, as was thought, by the consuls, for the ostensible purpose of complaining against the law of Drusus, but actually to kill him, they cried down the law publicly and waited for the day of the comitia. Drusus learned of the plot against him and did not go out frequently, but transacted business from day to day in the atrium of his house, which was poorly lighted. One evening as he was sending the crowd away he exclaimed suddenly that he was wounded, and fell down while uttering the words. A shoemaker's knife was found thrust into his hip.

Thus was Drusus also slain while serving as tribune. The knights, in order to make his policy a ground of vexatious accusation against their enemies, persuaded the tribune Q. Varius to bring forward a law to prosecute those who should, either openly or secretly, aid the Italians to acquire citizenship,

¹ The Social War took place 91–88 BCE.

² M. Fulvius Flaccus, consul 125 BCE.

³ C. Sempronius Gracchus, tribune of the plebs 123 and 122 BCE, killed 121.

⁴ Until the late Republic, the word "Italy" applied only to that part of the peninsula south of Etruria and Umbria.

hoping thus to bring all the senators under an odious indictment, and themselves to sit in judgment on them, and that when they were out of the way they themselves would be more powerful than ever in the government of Rome. When the other tribunes interposed their veto the knights surrounded them with drawn daggers and enacted the measure, whereupon accusers at once brought actions against the most illustrious of the senators. Of these Bestia did not respond, but

went into exile voluntarily rather than surrender himself into the hands of his enemies. After him Cotta went before the court, made an impressive defense of his administration of public affairs, and openly reviled the knights. He, too, departed from the city before the vote of the judges was taken. Mummius, the conqueror of Greece, was basely ensnared by the knights, who promised to acquit him, but condemned him to banishment. He passed the remainder of his life at Delos.