A. H. BEESLY

THE GRACCHI MARIUS AND SULLA

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Epochs of Ancient History

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PREFACE

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It would be scarcely possible for anyone writing on the period embraced in this volume, to perform his task adequately without making himself familiar with Mr. Long's 'History of the Decline of the Roman Republic' and Mommsen's 'History of Rome.' To do over again (as though the work had never been attempted) what has been done once for all accurately and well, would be mere prudery of punctiliousness. But while I acknowledge my debt of gratitude to both these eminent historians, I must add that for the whole period I have carefully examined the original authorities, often coming to conclusions widely differing from those of Mr. Long. And I venture to hope that from the advantage I have had in being able to compare the works of two writers, one of whom has well-nigh exhausted the theories as the other has the facts of the subject, I have succeeded in giving a more consistent and faithful account of the leaders and legislation of the revolutionary era than has hitherto been written. Certainly there could be no more instructive commentary on either history than the study of the other, for each supplements the other and emphasizes its defects. If Mommsen at times pushes conjecture to the verge of invention, as in his account of the junction of the Helvetii and Cimbri, Mr. Long, in his dogged determination

never to swerve from facts to inference, falls into the opposite extreme, resorting to somewhat Cyclopean architecture in his detestation of stucco. But my admiration for his history is but slightly qualified by such considerations, and to any student who may be stimulated by the volumes of this series to acquire what would virtually amount to an acquaintance first-hand with the narratives of ancient writers, I would say 'Read Mr. Long's history.' To do so is to learn not only knowledge but a lesson in historical study generally. For the writings of a man with whom style is not the first object are as refreshing as his scorn for romancing history is wholesome, and the grave irony with which he records its slips amusing.

A.H.B.

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GRACCHI, MARIUS AND SULLA.

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CHAPTER I.

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ANTECEDENTS OF THE REVOLUTION.

During the last half of the second century before Christ Rome was undisputed mistress of the civilised world. A brilliant period of foreign conquest had succeeded the 300 years in which she had overcome her neighbours and made herself supreme in Italy. In 146 B.C. she had given the death-blow to her greatest rival, Carthage, and had annexed Greece. In 140 treachery had rid her of Viriathus, the stubborn guerilla who defied her generals and defeated her armies in Spain. In 133 the terrible fate of Numantia, and in 132 the merciless suppression of the Sicilian slave-revolt, warned all foes of the Republic that the sword, which the incompetence of many generals had made seem duller than of old, was still keen to smite; and except where some slave-bands were in desperate rebellion, and in Pergamus, where a pretender disputed with Rome the legacy of Attalus, every land along the shores of the Mediterranean was subject to or at the mercy of a town not half as large as the London of to-day. Almost exactly a century afterwards the Government under which this gigantic empire had been consolidated was no more.

Foreign wars will have but secondary importance in the following pages. [Sidenote: The history will not be one of military events.] The interest of the narrative centres mainly in home politics; and though the world did not cease to echo to the tramp of conquering legions, and the victorious soldier became a more and more important factor in the State, still military matters no longer, as in the Samnite and Punic wars, absorb the attention, dwarfed as they are by the great social struggle of which the metropolis was the arena. In treating of the first half of those hundred years of revolution, which began with the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus and ended with the battle of Actium, it is mainly the fall of the Republican and the foreshadowing of the Imperial system of government which have to be described. [Sidenote: In order to understand the times of the Gracchi it is necessary to understand the history of the orders at Rome.] But, in order to understand rightly the events of those fifty years, some survey, however brief, of the previous history of the Roman orders is indispensable.

[Sidenote: The patres.] When the mists of legend clear away we see a community which, if we do not take slaves into account, consisted of two parts—the governing body, or patres, to whom alone the term Populus Romanus strictly applied, and who constituted the Roman State, and the governed class, or clientes, who were outside its pale. The word patrician, more familiar to our ear than the substantive from which it is formed, came to imply much more than its original meaning. [Sidenote: The clients.] In its simplest and earliest sense it was applied to a man who was sprung from a Roman marriage, who stood towards his client on much

the same footing which, in the mildest form of slavery, a master occupies towards his slave. As the patronus was to the libertus, when it became customary to liberate slaves, so in some measure were the Fathers to their retainers, the Clients. That the community was originally divided into these two sections is known. What is not known is how, besides this primary division of patres and clientes, there arose a second *political* class in the State, namely the plebs. The client as client had no political existence. [Sidenote: The plebeians.] But as a plebeian he had. Whether the plebs was formed of clients who had been released from their clientship, just as slaves might be manumitted; or of foreigners, as soldiers, traders, or artisans were admitted into the community; or partly of foreigners and partly of clients, the latter being equalised by the patres with the former in self-defence; and whether as a name it dated from or was antecedent to the so-called Tullian organization is uncertain. But we know that in one way or other a second political division in the State arose and that the constitution, of which Servius Tullius was the reputed author, made every freeman in Rome a citizen by giving him a vote in the Comitia Centuriata. Yet though the plebeian was a citizen, and as such acquired 'commercium,' or the right to hold and devise property, it was only after a prolonged struggle that he achieved political equality with the patres. [Sidenote: Gradual acquisition by the plebs of political equality with the patres.] Step by step he wrung from them the rights of intermarriage and of filling offices of state; and the great engine by which this was brought about was the tribunate, the historical importance of which dates from, even though

as a plebeian magistracy it may have existed before, the first secession of the plebs in 494 B.C. [Sidenote: Character of the tribunate.] The tribunate stood towards the freedom of the Roman people in something of the same relation which the press of our time occupies towards modern liberty: for its existence implied free criticism of the executive, and out of free speech grew free action. [Sidenote: The Roman government transformed from oligarchy into a plutocracy.]

Side by side with those external events which made Rome mistress first of her neighbours, then, of Italy, and lastly of the world, there went on a succession of internal changes, which first transformed a pure oligarchy into a plutocracy, and secondly overthrew this modified form of oligarchy, and substituted Caesarism. With the earlier of these changes we are concerned here but little. The political revolution was over when the social revolution which we have to record began. But the roots of the social revolution were of deep growth, and were in fact sometimes identical with those of the political revolution. [Sidenote: Parallel between Roman and English history.] Englishmen can understand such an intermixture the more readily from the analogies, more or less close, which their own history supplies. They have had a monarchy. They have been ruled by an oligarchy, which has first confronted and then coalesced with the moneyed class, and the united orders have been forced to yield theoretical equality to almost the entire nation, while still retaining real authority in their own hands. They have seen a middle class coquetting with a lower class in order to force an upper class to share with it

its privileges, and an upper class resorting in its turn to the same alliance; and they may have noted something more than a superficial resemblance between the tactics of the patres and nobiles of Rome and our own magnates of birth and commerce. Even now they are witnessing the displacement of political by social questions, and, it is to be hoped, the successful solution of problems which in the earlier stages of society have defied the efforts of every statesman. Yet they know that, underlying all the political struggles of their history, questions connected with the rights and interests of rich and poor, capitalist and toiler, land-owner and land-cultivator, have always been silently and sometimes violently agitated. Political emancipation has enabled social discontent to organize itself and find permanent utterance, and we are to-day facing some of the demands to satisfy which the Gracchi sacrificed their lives more than 2,000 years ago. [Sidenote: The struggle between the orders chiefly agrarian.] With us indeed the wages question is of more prominence than the land question, because we are a manufacturing nation; but the principles at stake are much the same. At Rome social agitation was generally agrarian, and the first thing necessary towards understanding the Gracchan revolution is to gain a clear conception of the history of the public land.

[Sidenote: Origin of the Ager Publicus.] The ground round a town like Rome was originally cultivated by the inhabitants, some of whom, as more food and clothing were required, would settle on the soil. From them the ranks of the army were recruited; and, thus doubly oppressed by military service and by the land tax, which had to be paid in

coin, the small husbandman was forced to borrow from some richer man in the town. Hence arose usury, and a class of debtors; and the sum of debt must have been increased as well as the number of the debtors by the very means adopted to relieve it. [Sidenote: Fourfold way of dealing with conquered territory.] When Rome conquered a town she confiscated a portion of its territory, and disposed of it in one of four ways. [Sidenote: Colonies.] 1. After expelling the owners, she sent some of her own citizens to settle upon it. They did not cease to be Romans, and, being in historical times taken almost exclusively from the plebs, must often have been but poorly furnished with the capital necessary for cultivating the ground. [Sidenote: Sale.] 2. She sold it; and, as with us, when a field is sold, a plan is made of its dimensions and boundaries, so plans of the land thus sold were made on tablets of bronze, and kept by the State. [Sidenote: Occupation.] 3. She allowed private persons to 'occupy' it on payment of 'vectigal,' or a portion of the produce; and, though not surrendering the title to the land, permitted the possessors to use it as their private property for purchase, sale, and succession. [Sidenote: Commons.] 4. A portion was kept as common pasture land for those to whom the land had been given or sold, or by whom it was occupied and those who used it paid 'scriptura,' or a tax of so much per head on the beasts, for whose grazing they sent in a return. This irregular system was fruitful in evil. It suited the patres with whom it originated, for they were for a time the sole gainers by it. Without money it must have been hopeless to occupy tracts distant from Rome. The poor man who did so would either

involve himself in debt, or be at the mercy of his richer neighbours, whose flocks would overrun his fields, or who might oust him altogether from them by force, and even seize him himself and enroll him as a slave. The rich man, on the other hand, could use such land for pasture, and leave the care of his flocks and herds to clients and slaves. [Sidenote: This irregular system the germ of latifundia.] So originated those 'latifundia,' or large farms, which greatly contributed to the ruin of Rome and Italy. The tilled land grew less and with it dwindled the free population and the recruiting field for the army. Gangs of slaves became more numerous, and were treated with increased brutality; and as men who do not work for their own money are more profuse in spending it than those who do, the extravagance of the Roman possessors helped to swell the tide of luxury, which rose steadily with foreign conquest, and to create in the capital a class free in name indeed, but more degraded, if less miserable, than the very slaves, who were treated like beasts through Italy. It is not certain whether anyone except a patrician could claim 'occupation' as a right; but, as the possessors could in any case sell the land to plebeians, it fell into the hands of rich men, to whichever class they belonged, both at Rome, and in the Roman colonies, and the Municipia; and as it was never really their property —'dominium'—but the property of the State, it was a constant source of envy and discontent among the poor.

[Sidenote: Why complaints about the Public Land became louder at the close of the second century B.C.] As long as fresh assignations of land and the plantations of colonies went on, this discontent could be kept within bounds. But

for a quarter of a century preceding our period scarcely any fresh acquisitions of land had been made in Italy, and, with no hope of new allotments from the territory of their neighbours, the people began to clamour for the restitution of their own. [Sidenote: Previous agrarian legislation. Spurius Cassius.] The first attempt to wrest public land from possessors had been made long before this by Spurius Cassius; and he had paid for his daring with his life. [Sidenote: The Licinian Law.] More than a century later the Licinian law forbade anyone to hold above 500 'jugera' of public land, for which, moreover, a tenth of the arable and a fifth of the grazing produce was to be paid to the State. The framers of the law are said to have hoped that possessors of more than this amount would shrink from making on oath a false return of the land which they occupied, and that, as they would be liable to penalties for exceeding the prescribed maximum, all land beyond the maximum would be sold at a nominal price (if this interpretation of the [Greek: kat' oligon] of Appian may be hazarded) to the poor. It is probable that they did not quite know what they were aiming at, and certain that they did not foresee the effects of their measure. In a confused way the law may have been meant to comprise sumptuary, political, and agrarian objects. It forbade anyone to keep more than a hundred large or five hundred small beasts on the common pasture-land, and stipulated for the employment of a certain proportion of free labour. The free labourers were to give information of the crops produced, so that the fifths and tenths might be duly paid; and it may have been the breakdown of such an impossible institution which led to the

establishment of the 'publicani.' [Sidenote: Composite nature of the Licinian law.] Nothing, indeed, is more likely than that Licinius and Sextius should have attempted to remedy by one measure the specific grievance of the poor plebeians, the political disabilities of the rich plebeians and the general deterioration of public morals; but, though their motives may have been patriotic, such a measure could no more cure the body politic than a man who has a broken limb, is blind, and in a consumption can be made sound at every point by the heal-all of a quack. Accordingly the Licinian law was soon, except in its political provisions, a dead letter. Licinius was the first man prosecuted for its violation, and the economical desire of the nation became intensified. [Sidenote: The Flaminian law.] In 232 B.C. Flaminius carried a law for the distribution of land taken from the Senones among the plebs. Though the law turned out no possessors, it was opposed by the Senate and nobles. Nor is this surprising, for any law distributing land was both actually and as a precedent a blow to the interests of the class which practised occupation. What is at first sight surprising is that small parcels of land, such as must have been assigned in these distributions, should have been so coveted. [Sidenote: Why small portions of land were so coveted.] The explanation is probably fourfold. Those who clamoured for them were wretched enough to clutch at any change; or did not realise to themselves the dangers and drawbacks of what they desired; or intended at once to sell their land to some richer neighbour; or, lastly, longed to keep a slave or two, just as the primary object of the 'mean white' in America used to be to keep his negro. [Sidenote:

Failure of previous legislation.] On the whole, it is clear that legislation previous to this period had not diminished agrarian grievances, and it is clear also why these grievances were so sorely felt. The general tendency at Rome and throughout Italy was towards a division of society into two classes—the very rich and the very poor, a tendency which increased so fast that not many years later it was said that out of some 400,000 men at Rome only 2,000 could, in spite of the city being notoriously the centre to which the world's wealth gravitated, be called really rich men. To any patriot the progressive extinction of small land-owners must have seemed piteous in itself and menacing to the life of the State. On the other hand, the poor had always one glaring act of robbery to cast in the teeth of the rich. A sanguine tribune might hope permanently to check a growing evil by fresh supplies of free labour. His poor partisan again had a direct pecuniary interest in getting the land. Selfish and philanthropic motives therefore went hand in hand, and in advocating the distribution of land a statesman would be sure of enlisting the sympathies of needy Italians, even more than those of the better-provided-for poor of Rome.

[Sidenote: Roman slavery.] Incidental mention has been made of the condition of the slaves in Italy. It was the sight of the slave-gangs which partly at least roused Tiberius Gracchus to action, and some remarks on Roman slavery follow naturally an enquiry into the nature of the public land. The most terrible characteristic of slavery is that it blights not only the unhappy slaves themselves, but their owners and the land where they live. It is an absolutely

unmitigated evil. As Roman conquests multiplied and luxury increased, enormous fortunes became more common, and the demand for slaves increased also. Ten thousand are said to have been landed and sold at Delos in one day. What proportion the slave population of Italy bore to the free at the time of the Gracchi we cannot say. It has been placed as low as 4 per cent., but the probability is that it was far greater. [Sidenote: Slave labour universally employed.] In trades, mining, grazing, levying of revenue, and every field of speculation, slave-labour was universally employed. If it is certain that even unenfranchised Italians, however poor, could be made to serve in the Roman army, it was a proprietor's direct interest from that point of view to employ slaves, of whose services he could not be deprived.

[Sidenote: Whence the slaves came. Their treatment.] A vast impetus had been given to the slave-trade at the time of the conquest of Macedonia, about thirty-five years before our period. The great slave-producing countries were those bordering on the Mediterranean—Africa, Asia, Spain, &c. An organized system of man-hunting supplied the Roman markets, and slave-dealers were part of the ordinary retinue of a Roman army. When a batch of slaves reached its destination they were kept in a pen till bought. Those bought for domestic service would no doubt be best off, and the cunning, mischievous rogue, the ally of the young against the old master of whom we read in Roman comedy, if he does not come up to our ideal of what a man should be, does not seem to have been physically very wretched. Even here, however, we see how degraded a thing a slave was, and the frequent threats of torture prove how utterly

he was at the mercy of a cruel master's caprice. We know, too, that when a master was arraigned on a criminal charge, the first thing done to prove his guilt was to torture his slaves. But just as in America the popular figure of the oily, lazy, jocular negro, brimming over with grotesque good-humour and screening himself in the weakness of an indulgent master, merely served to brighten a picture of which the horrible plantation system was the dark background; so at Rome no instances of individual indulgence were a set-off against the monstrous barbarities which in the end brought about their own punishment, and the ruin of the Republic. [Sidenote: Dread inspired by the prospect of Roman slavery.] Frequent stories attest the horrors of Roman slavery felt by conquered nations. We read often of individuals, and sometimes of whole towns, committing suicide sooner than fall into the conquerors' hands. Sometimes slaves slew their dealers, sometimes one another. A boy in Spain killed his three sisters and starved himself to avoid slavery. Women killed their children with the same object. If, as it is asserted, the plantation-system was not yet introduced into Italy, such stories, and the desperate out-breaks, and almost incredibly merciless suppression of slave revolts, prove that the condition of the Roman slave was sufficiently miserable. [Sidenote: The horrors of slavery culminated in Sicily.] But doubtless misery reached its climax in Sicily, where that system was in full swing. Slaves not sold for domestic service were there branded and often made to work in chains, the strongest serving as shepherds. Badly fed and clothed, these shepherds plundered whenever they found the chance.

Such brigandage was winked at, and sometimes positively encouraged, by the owners, while the governors shrank from punishing the brigands for fear of offending their masters. As the demand for slaves grew, slave-breeding as well as slave-importation was practised. No doubt there were as various theories as to the most profitable management of slaves then as in America lately. Damophilus had the instincts of a Legree: a Haley and a Cato would have held much the same sentiments as to the rearing of infants. Some masters would breed and rear, and try to get more work from the slave by kindness than harshness. Others would work them off and buy afresh; and as this would be probably the cheapest policy, no doubt it was the prevalent one. And what an appalling vista of dumb suffering do such considerations open to us! Cold, hunger, nakedness, torture, infamy, a foreign country, a strange climate, a life so hard that it made the early death which was almost inevitable a comparative blessing—such was the terrible lot of the Roman slave. At last, almost simultaneously at various places in the Roman dominions, he turned like a beast upon a brutal drover. [Sidenote: Outbreaks in various quarters.] At Rome, at Minturnae, at Sinuessa, at Delos, in Macedonia, and in Sicily insurrections or attempts at insurrections broke out. They were everywhere mercilessly suppressed, and by wholesale torture and crucifixion the conquerors tried to clothe death, their last ally, with terror which even a slave dared not encounter. In the year when Tiberius Gracchus was tribune (and the coincidence is significant), it was found necessary to send a consul to put down the first slave revolt in Sicily. It