

*Alexander, victor tot regum atque populorum, irae succubuit.*¹

Literature 18



Cyparissus and the Stag and Of The Gracchi (1) How Tiberius Gracchus Fought for the Rights of the People, and How he was Slain

1 Greece

Read “Cyparissus and the Stag.” You will find it on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive in Volume 3, Classics, “Legends of Greece and Rome” by G. H. Kupfer, no. 29.

2 Rome

Stories from Roman History Retold by Lena Dalkeith (1906)

“How Tiberius Gracchus Fought for the Rights of the People, and How he was Slain”

Cornelia, daughter of the first great Scipio Africanus, proud mother of the Gracchi, was famous throughout Rome for the beautiful way in which she brought up her children after their father's death.

'She has Greek tutors for her sons, so that they may become learned in all the noble arts,' the patrician mothers would tell each other.

'She will make heroes of them,' said the Roman citizens, who had begun already to love the gentle brave-hearted boys.

¹ Alexander, the conqueror of so many kings and nations, was himself conquered by anger. Seneca.

Tiberius and Caius Gracchus were indeed happy in their childhood. Nobly born, they did not despise the plebeians as did most of the other patricians, for their father, while he lived, and their mother afterwards, taught them to be just and kind and honourable, to love liberty, to hate all tyranny, to think noble thoughts and do noble deeds.

Sometimes, half in fun, half in earnest, Cornelia would say to them:

'My sons, men honour me because I am the daughter of the great Scipio Africanus; will they ever honour me for being the mother of the Gracchi?'

And gravely Tiberius and Caius would answer, 'That time will surely come, O my mother.' Their words came true, as you shall hear.

Tiberius Gracchus was nine years older than his brother, so he it was who first left home to serve in Africa under his brother-in-law, Scipio Aemilianus. Though still very young, he won honour and renown in the war, and after Carthage had been destroyed he went to join the army in Spain. It was on his way there, while riding through Etruria, that he made up his mind to become a defender of the people.

Looking round him he saw many things that made him sad – beautiful cities in ruins, empty houses, lonely farms, no labourers in the fields, miles and miles of untilled land where herds of wild cattle fed, watched by savage shepherd-slaves who gazed sullenly at Gracchus as he passed.

'How is it,' he asked himself; 'that the people are so unhappy now when the Republic is the greatest in the world? Once all this country was covered with busy farms. Each man had his share of land, his own fields, his cattle and free labourers to work for him, and in war-time these brave farmers and labourers could wield the sword as well as the spade. It is they who have made Rome great, and what has Rome given them in return? They have been slain in battle, and the lands which should by right belong to their sons have been bought by rich nobles who have slaves to work for them instead of free men. This must be changed, or Rome will lose all its power. I will make a just law which shall force the patricians to give back to the people their ancient right to the land.'

So when Gracchus returned to Rome he told the citizens of the law he proposed to make, and offered himself as tribune. The news spread far and wide, and poor farmers came from all over the country to give him their votes. The patricians were furious at the thought of having to give up the greater part of their lands, but they could not prevent the people from making Gracchus one of the tribunes of the year.

Soon the great day arrived when the new tribune was to make his first speech and read out his law before the citizens. The Forum was crowded. Gracchus, mounting the Rostra, or platform on which the orators stood, began to speak. He begged the patricians to be generous and give back their lands to the poor people who had none.

'The beasts have their lairs and their dens,' he said, 'but the men who shed their blood for Italy have air and light – nothing more. They wander homeless from place to place with their wives and children seeking for shelter, and they find it not. Being Roman soldiers they are called masters of the world, but they have not a foot of ground which they can call their own.'

How the people cheered and rejoiced! How proud was Cornelia of her noble son! Ah, and how angry were the haughty nobles with this man who dared try and make them give up their lands!

'He will not triumph so easily,' they said in their hearts, for they knew what was about to happen.

Gracchus began to read his law, but before more than a few words had been spoken, Octavius, the tribune, rose from his seat and cried: 'I object!' The people groaned and cried aloud angrily. They knew that no law could be passed unless each of the tribunes gave his consent.

Gracchus, surprised and indignant, ordered all the law-courts to be closed and sealed up the treasury. Again upon another day the citizens met to hear the reading of the law, and again Octavius stood up crying, 'I object!'

You must have guessed by this time that it was the patricians who told him to do this. But Gracchus meant to pass his law in spite of them. The senate would not help him. There was only one thing to do.

He called the people together again, and before them all begged Octavius to change his mind, warning him that unless he did so, he, Gracchus, would be forced to ask the people to take away the power they had given, to thrust him from his seat among the tribunes.

'You are acting against the people,' he told him, 'and are no more deserving the name of tribune.'

Octavius refused, but with tears in his eyes, for Gracchus and he had been play-fellows once. Then he was dragged from his seat by the angry people, and the tribuneship taken away from him.

After this, the law was passed, to the great joy of the plebeians, but the patricians went about clad in mourning robes, bewailing their hard fate. This was not all; they began to plot against Gracchus to take his life when his year as a tribune should be ended. They had to wait until then, for it was against the law to hurt or slay a tribune. He was a defender of the people, and his life was sacred.

Meanwhile the fickle people began to tire of their hero, yet when Gracchus (to save his life) offered himself again as tribune, they were quite willing to accept him. He had promised to make other good laws for them, and this made them look with favour on him again.

'But,' said the patricians, 'no man can be tribune for two years together. It is against the law.' And the senate met in the Temple of Faith to talk over the matter.

Outside the Temple of Jupiter crowded the friends of Gracchus, and soon the tribune himself appeared. As they stood talking together Fulvius Flacchus rushed out from the senate.

'Tiberius Gracchus is sentenced to death,' he cried as he came near, and scarcely had he spoken the fatal words when Publius Nasica, bitter enemy to Gracchus, burst from the temple, followed by many patricians with their slaves and retainers, all armed with clubs and staves.

The people stupidly made way for them, and soon most of the tribune's friends were felled to the ground. Gracchus fled; some one caught his cloak; he let it slip from his shoulders, and ran quickly to the Temple of Jupiter. There priests barred the way. Gracchus turned, tripped, fell. As he struggled to his feet again another tribune, one of his own comrades, slew him with his club. The people had lost their friend and their tribune for ever.

Very bitterly they blamed themselves afterwards for not having saved him as they might so easily have done, and so deep was their remorse, and so fierce their hatred of his murderers, that Publius Nasica had to leave the city, he being the leader of those who had robbed Rome of a hero.

More words for your vocabulary notebook. Remember to keep up your highlighting!

animus life, soul, spirit

Bible example:

*melior est pugillus cum reque quam plena utraque manus cum labore et adflictione **animi***

Proverbs 4:6

Say or chant *animus* through to find the case of *animi*. (Hint it is singular.) Now you will be able to translate the last four words correctly with a bit of easy guess work. It can often be easier to begin translating at the end or in the middle of a sentence. There are two little words for your notebook here: *cum* which means “with” if it is followed by something in the ablative case, as it is here, and “when” in other situations, and *quam* which means “than.” If I tell you that *melior* (which you will meet later on) means “better” you will see that something in the first part of the sentence “is better than” something in the second part. The “better” thing is a *pugillus* (“fistful [related to pugilist – someone who fights with their fists, a boxer] or handful) *cum reque* (rest). *Utraque* (“both”) *manus* (“hands” like “manual”) *plena* (“full” related to “plenty”) gives you “both hands full” – and you know the rest! Look up the verse to see if you were right.

populus people

Bible example:

*formicae **populus** infirmus quae praeparant in messe cibum sibi* Proverbs 30:2

Have you heard of formic acid? <http://www.chm.bris.ac.uk/motm/formic/formich.htm> has all the information. After reading it you will know what creatures *formicae* are. They are a *populus infirmus* which I think you can guess. If you take the last three letters off *praeparant* you will guess what they do to their “food” (*cibum*.) *Messe* means “summer” and so that tells you when they do it. You can guess the *qu* word, I think.