

## From Plutarch's Life of Tiberius Gracchus (chapters 8-9)

Of the land which the Romans gained by conquest from their neighbours, part they sold publicly, and turned the remainder into common; this common land they assigned to such of the citizens as were poor and indigent, for which they were to pay only a small acknowledgment into the public treasury. But when the wealthy men began to offer larger rents, and drive the poorer people out, it was enacted by law that no person whatever should enjoy more than five hundred acres of ground. This act for some time checked the avarice of the richer, and was of great assistance to the poorer people, who retained under it their respective proportions of ground, as they had been formerly rented by them. Afterwards the rich men of the neighbourhood contrived to get these lands again into their possession, under other people's names, and at last would not stick to claim most of them publicly in their own. The poor, who were thus deprived of their farms, were no longer either ready, as they had formerly been, to serve in war or careful in the education of their children; insomuch that in a short time there were comparatively few freemen remaining in all Italy, which swarmed with workhouses full of foreign-born slaves. These the rich men employed in cultivating their ground of which they dispossessed the citizens. Caius Laelius the intimate friend of Scipio, undertook to reform this abuse; but, meeting with opposition from men of authority, and fearing a disturbance, he soon desisted, and received the name of the Wise or the Prudent, both which meanings belong to the Latin word Sapiens.

But Tiberius being elected tribune of the people, entered upon that design without delay, at the instigation, as is most commonly stated, of Diophanes, the rhetorician, and Blossius, the philosopher. Diophanes was a refugee from Mitylene, the other was an Italian, of the city of Cumae, and was educated there under Antipater of Tarsus, who afterwards did him the honour to dedicate some of his philosophical lectures to him.

Some have also charged Cornelia, the mother of Tiberius, with contributing towards it, because she frequently upbraided her sons, that the Romans as yet rather called her the daughter of Scipio, than the mother of the Gracchi. Others again say that Spurius Postumius was the chief occasion. He was a man of the same age with Tiberius, and his rival for reputation as a public speaker; and when Tiberius, at his return from the campaign, found him to have got far beyond him in fame and influence, and to be much looked up to, he thought to outdo him, by attempting a popular enterprise of this difficulty and of such great consequence. But

his brother Caius has left it us in writing, that when Tiberius went through Tuscany to Numantia, and found the country almost depopulated, there being hardly any free husbandmen or shepherds, but for the most part only barbarian, imported slaves, he then first conceived the course of policy which in the sequel proved so fatal to his family. Though it is also most certain that the people themselves chiefly excited his zeal and determination in the prosecution of it, by setting up writings upon the porches, walls, and monuments, calling upon him to reinstate the poor citizens in their former possessions.

However, he did not draw up his law without the advice and assistance of those citizens that were then most eminent for their virtue and authority; amongst whom were Crassus, the high-priest, Mucius Scaevola, the lawyer, who at that time was consul, and Claudius Appius, his father-in-law. Never did any law appear more moderate and gentle, especially being enacted against such great oppression and avarice. For they who ought to have been severely punished for transgressing the former laws, and should at least have lost all their titles to such lands which they had unjustly usurped, were notwithstanding to receive a price for quitting their unlawful claims, and giving up their lands to those fit owners who stood in need of help. But though this reformation was managed with so much tenderness that, all the former transactions being passed over, the people were only thankful to prevent abuses of the like nature for the future, yet, on the other hand, the moneyed men, and those of great estates, were exasperated, through their covetous feelings against the law itself, and against the lawgiver, through anger and party-spirit. They therefore endeavoured to seduce the people, declaring that Tiberius was designing a general redivision of lands, to overthrow the government, and put all things into confusion.

But they had no success. For Tiberius, maintaining an honourable and just cause, and possessed of eloquence sufficient to have made a less creditable action appear plausible, was no safe or easy antagonist, when, with the people crowding around the hustings, he took his place, and spoke in behalf of the poor. "The savage beasts," said he, "in Italy, have their particular dens, they have their places of repose and refuge; but the men who bear arms, and expose their lives for the safety of their country, enjoy in the meantime nothing more in it but the air and light; and, having no houses or settlements of their own, are constrained to wander from place to place with their wives and children." He told them that the commanders were guilty of a ridiculous error, when, at the head of their armies, they exhorted the common soldiers to fight for their sepulchres and altars; when not any amongst so many Romans is possessed of either altar or monument, neither have they any houses of their own, or hearths of their ancestors to defend. They fought indeed and were slain, but it was to maintain the luxury and the wealth of other men. They were styled the masters of the world, but in the meantime had not one foot of ground which they could call their own.

(John Dryden, tr.)

## Sallust Sketches the History of Rome's Decline

### From The Conspiracy of Catiline (chapters 6-13).

The city of Rome, as far as I can make out, was founded and first inhabited by Trojan exiles who, led by Aeneas, were wandering without a settled home, and by rustic natives who lived in a state of anarchy uncontrolled by laws or government. When once they had come to live together in a walled town, despite different origins, languages, and habits of life, they coalesced with amazing ease, and before long what had been a heterogeneous mob of migrants was welded into a united nation.

When however, with the growth of their population, civilization, and territory, it was seen that they had become powerful and prosperous, they had the same experience as most people have who are possessors of this world's goods: their wealth aroused envy. Neighbouring kings and peoples attacked them, and but few of their friends aided them; the rest were scared at the prospect of danger and held aloof. The Romans, however, were alert both at home and abroad. They girded themselves in haste and with mutual encouragement marched forth to meet their foes, protecting by force of arms their liberty, country, and parents. Then, after bravely warding off the dangers that beset them, they lent aid to their allies and friends, and made new friends by a greater readiness to render services than to accept help from others.

Their government was a constitutional monarchy. Picked men, in whom the physical weakness of age was compensated by outstanding wisdom, formed a council of state, and were called 'Fathers', either on account of their age or because their duties resembled those of the father of a family. In course of time the monarchy, which originally had served to safeguard liberty and enhance the prestige of the state, degenerated into an oppressive despotism. Thereupon they instituted a new regime in which authority was divided between two annually elected rulers ; this limitation of their power, it was thought, would prevent their being tempted to abuse it.

It was in this period that individuals were first able to distinguish themselves and display their talents to greater advantage; for kings are more suspicious of good men than of bad, and always fear men of merit. Indeed, it almost passes belief what rapid progress was made by the whole state when once it had gained its liberty; such was the desire for glory that had possessed men's hearts. Young men no sooner reached the age when they were fit for military service than they went to camp and learnt the art of soldiering in the school of laborious experience, taking more delight in costly armour and chargers than in loose women or the pleasures of the table. To such men no toil came amiss, no ground was too steep or rugged, no armed foe formidable ; courage had taught them to overcome all obstacles. To win honour they competed eagerly among themselves, each man seeking the first opportunity to cut down an enemy or scale a rampart before his comrades' eyes. It was by such exploits that they thought a man could win true wealth—good repute and high nobility. Their thirst for glory, and ever more glory, was insatiable ; as for money, their only ambition was to come by it honourably and spend it openhandedly. I could mention places where vast enemy hosts were routed by a handful of Romans, and towns of great natural strength that they took by assault. But I must not digress too far from my proper theme.

There can be no question that Fortune is supreme in all human affairs. It is a capricious power, which makes men's actions famous or leaves them in obscurity without regard to their true worth. I do not doubt, for instance, that the exploits of the Athenians were splendid and impressive ; but I think they are much overrated. It is because she produced historians of genius that the achievement of Athens is so renowned all the world over; for the merit of successful men is rated according to the brilliance of the authors who extol it. The Romans never had this advantage, because at Rome the cleverest men were also the busiest. No one was a thinker without being a man of action as well. Their leading citizens preferred deeds to words, and chose rather to do something that others might justly praise than merely to tell of what others did.

In peace and war, as I have said, virtue was held in high esteem. The closest unity prevailed, and avarice was a thing almost unknown. Justice and righteousness were upheld not so much by law as by natural instinct. They quarrelled and fought with their country's foes; between themselves the citizens contended only for honour. In making offerings to the gods they spared no expense ; at home they lived frugally and never betrayed a friend. By combining boldness in war with fair dealing when peace was restored, they protected themselves and the state. There are convincing proofs of this. In time of war, soldiers were often punished for attacking against orders or for being slow to obey a signal of recall from battle, whereas few ever ventured to desert their standards or to give ground when hard pressed. In peace, they governed by conferring benefits on their subjects, not by intimidation ; and when wronged they would rather pardon than seek vengeance.

Thus by hard work and just dealing the power of the state increased. Mighty kings were vanquished, savage tribes and huge nations were brought to their knees ; and when Carthage, Rome's rival in her quest for empire, had been annihilated, every land and sea lay open to her. It was then that fortune turned unkind and confounded all her enterprises. To the men who had so easily endured toil and peril, anxiety and adversity, the leisure and riches which are generally regarded as so desirable proved a burden and a curse. Growing love of money, and the lust for power which followed it, engendered every kind of evil. Avarice destroyed honour, integrity, and every other virtue, and instead taught men to be proud and cruel, to neglect religion, and to hold nothing too sacred to sell. Ambition tempted many to be false, to have one thought hidden in their hearts, another ready on their tongues, to become a man's friend or enemy not because they judged him worthy or unworthy but because they thought it would pay them, and to put on the semblance of virtues that they had not. At first these vices grew slowly and sometimes met with punishment ; later on, when the disease had spread like a plague, Rome changed: her government, once so just and admirable, became harsh and unendurable.

At first, however, it was not so much avarice as ambition that disturbed men's minds — a fault which after all comes nearer to being a virtue. For distinction, preferment, and power are the desire of good and bad alike — only, the one strives to reach his goal by honourable means, while the other, being destitute of good qualities, falls back on craft and deceit. Avarice is different: it means setting your heart on money, a thing that no wise man ever did. It is a kind of deadly poison, which ruins a man's health and weakens his moral fibre. It knows no bounds

and can never be satisfied: he that has not, wants ; and he that has, wants more. After Sulla had used armed force to make himself dictator, and after a good beginning turned out a bad ruler, there was universal robbery and pillage. One man coveted a house, another an estate ; and the victors behaved without restraint or moderation, committing foul and inhuman outrages against their fellow citizens. To make matters worse, Sulla had sought to secure the loyalty of the army he commanded in Asia by allowing it a degree of luxury and indulgence that would not have been tolerated by his predecessors, and the pleasures they enjoyed during leisure hours in those attractive lands soon enervated the men's warlike spirit. It was there that Roman soldiers first learnt to indulge in wine and women, and to cultivate a taste for statues, pictures, and embossed plate, which they stole from private houses and public buildings, plundering temples and profaning everything sacred and secular alike. When victory was won, as might be expected of such troops, they stripped their enemy bare. Since even philosophers cannot always resist the temptations of success, how should these demoralized men show restraint in their hour of triumph?

As soon as wealth came to be a mark of distinction and an easy way to renown, military commands, and political power, virtue began to decline. Poverty was now looked on as a disgrace and a blameless life as a sign of ill nature. Riches made the younger generation a prey to luxury, avarice, and pride. Squandering with one hand what they grabbed with the other, they set small value on their own property while they coveted that of others. Honour and modesty, all laws divine and human, were alike disregarded in a spirit of recklessness and intemperance. To one familiar with mansions and villas reared aloft on such a scale that they look like so many towns, it is instructive to visit the temples built by our godfearing ancestors. In those days piety was the ornament of shrines; glory, of men's dwellings. When they conquered a foe, they took nothing from him save his power to harm. But their base successors stuck at no crime to rob subject peoples of all that those brave conquerors had left them, as though oppression were the only possible method of ruling an empire. I need not remind you of some enterprises that no one but an eyewitness will believe — how private citizens have often leveled mountains and paved seas for their building operations. Such men, it seems to me, have treated their wealth as a mere plaything: instead of making honourable use of it, they have shamefully misused it on the first wasteful project that occurred to them. Equally strong was their passion for fornication, guzzling, and other forms of sensuality. Men prostituted themselves like women, and women sold their chastity to every comer. To please their palates they ransacked land and sea. They went to bed before they needed sleep, and instead of waiting until they felt hungry, thirsty, cold, or tired, they forestalled their bodies' needs by self-indulgence. Such practices incited young men who had run through their property to have recourse to crime. Because their vicious natures found it hard to forgo sensual pleasures, they resorted more and more recklessly to every means of getting and spending.

(S.A. Handford, tr.)