THE FIRST MUNICIPAL GRAFTERS

THEY ROBBED ROME 2000 YEARS AGO, AND NOW THEIR MARBLE BUSTS—PERHAPS THEIR SPIRITS TOO—HAVE COME TO CALIFORNIA

By H. C. Williams

THE SUNDAY CALL presents its readers with another fragment from the collection of antiques donated by Mrs. Phoebe Hearst to the University of California. This time it is not the ideality of the sculptor but the likenesses of men who were living forces of their time, and as we look upon the faces of Cicero, Caesar, Pompey and Brutus the past they represented rises before us like a dream. This past, too, is of a time strangely like our own, and the most vivid human drama that has come down to us entire is of profound interest to every American who loves the institutions of his country. For the drama opens upon a people living under the most popular constitution ever known. The assembly of citizens was the sovereign authority of the state and the supreme court of appeal. From its foundation Rome was a refuge for the oppressed of the surrounding nations, and its growth for several centuries was the natural aggregation of the Italian peoples under a government where law and social stability had supplanted the despotisms of their many aristocracies and the anarchy of their ceaseless tribal wars.

It was Numa who ranged the working people into trade guilds. These were similar to our trades unions, and their political power from time to time became so much enlarged that in the later days of the republic they had become the principal factor in all the municipal elections, and the quarrels between them and the nobility for supreme power grew more and more bitter as the genius of government degenerated from patriotic legal administration into a mad scramble for the wealth of the earth that conquest poured into Rome. As the plebeians had the numbers they could always control, and the pivotal point of a Roman election, as it has actually become in many of our own cities and notably in San Francisco, was the control of the "labor vote."

But while the plebeians had numbers, as a mass they were poor, and while a mass may have large powers, such may only be exercised through delegates and representatives; and in a condition of society where bribery and corruption in contact with helpless poverty have usurped the sense of civic duty and patriotism, the inevitable result is that the representatives either exercise authority for their own benefit or become the creatures of those who have more power than they or dependents upon those who hold the public purse.

To understand how the once vigorous Roman masses had become both impoverished and venal, it is necessary to go back to the times of the Gracchi, for it was the eldest of the two brothers who began the Roman revolution. It is essential at this point to state that the feudal or communal tenure of land holding gave to the chief merely a life interest in the estate he might inherit, but under him it also gave the same life interest in such part of the same estate that any individual of the clan or gens might have been born into. The long and exhausting wars with Carthage had driven most of the masses into the army, and their work was done by slaves. As these were the personal property of the individual, the nominal head of the estate exercised personal sovereignty over all the land that was worked, and the condition, lasting over a generation, by mere force of custom gave the land holders a sort of personal tenure to the common lands.

Discharged soldiers from the armies congregated in Rome, and such spoils of war as they had taken were soon dissipated. They were citizens in a democratic state, but in their poverty they became the clients of the wealthy, and as such were as completely the tools of their patron as the "rounders" of San Francisco are the tools of Abe Ruef, and were used in a similar way. Many of them belonged to some guild, and these were kept from starvation by the state, which granted them regular rations of corn and other necessities. So between the clients of the state and the clients of the wealthy individuals there was formed a permanent and irresponsible element, clothed with the political power of the Roman franchise, that was always at the disposal of the politician with the longest purse.

Enter the Gracchi

When Tiberius Gracchus saw that the fields of Italy were being tilled by slaves while the capital was swarming with a population without means of support, he felt that unless the evil were cured the decay of the state would certainly follow, and he began an agitation to restore the agrarian law enacted two centuries previously, which forbade any man having such large tracts in his possession. He began an agitation for reform, was elected tribune, and passed an agrarian law. But alienating both the senatorial and middle classes, and the people deserting him when he again offered himself illegally for the tribuneship, he was killed in a riot incited by the aristocratic element.

Ten years later his brother Caius came forward. He had been one of the commissioners of the land law. Forty thousand families had been settled upon the lands, but the displacement of one set of inhabitants for another created as much discontent in one direction as it had alleviated in the other. The commissioners became unpopular and the law was quietly repealed. The people had veered around and gone over to the oligarchy. Caius was feared by them and so vexed with persecutions that he turned against the Senate, which he perceived to be the real source of the evils affecting the commonwealth. The judicial functions of the state had become a senatorial monopoly. The corruption of justice had become notorious. So Caius carried a law in the Assembly disabling Senators from sitting on juries of any kind, and transferring judicial functions to the equites, as the middle class was called. He restored the agrarian law, and another that no Roman citizen, high or low, could be put to death without legal trial. He endeared the laboring classes by enacting laws that public granaries should be maintained at the cost of the state, and that food should be sold at a very low rate to free citizens. This was afterward enlarged to a free gift, and it was the rotten spot that made real reform in Roman popular institutions impossible. The successful general who could keep the granaries full was sure of "popular support."

The vagabond population thus provided with free food and free games in the arena, with nothing to interest it but "politics," had no notion to leave the "snap" for settlements on lands in Spain or Africa, neither would it consent to share its privileges with the citizens of other Italian cities, and sided with the patricians, who shrewdly accepted the precedent established, and at the following election overwhelmingly defeated Caius and his party, and he was killed in a riot, as his brother had been.

Marius was the next great figure in the evolution. He was a plebeian, and a self-made man. He reorganized the army by paying soldiers a regular salary, with clothing and equipment furnished by the state. This separated the army from the civil power, and henceforth Rome was to be governed by any agent the army would obey. Marius as leader of the popular party was seven times elected Consul and the radical democracy had full swing. Of its enactments one was compelling Senators to take an oath to execute their laws under penalty of fine and expulsion. One refused. He was maltreated and expelled from the city.

What follows is a dreary recital of bloody civil wars. Marius as leader of the popular party, and Sulla, leader of the aristocratic party, took turns in making bad worse. The Italian people rose for the privileges of Roman citizens, but were suppressed by a coalition of the Roman masses with the aristocrats, both bent upon maintaining their exclusive privileges. With the Senate in full control, the tribunate was abolished. Marius was exiled, and all law-making power taken from the Assembly. Sulla goes to Asia. The scene changes. The Senate left without an army is confronted by the Italians, who demand their rights, and when they come to Rome to vote are cut down by the thousands. Marius returned from exile at the head of an army. The people are on top again and lay fifty Senators and a thousand knights on the sacrificial altar. The Senate was crushed.

Sulla, victorious in Asia, returned with his army. The younger Marius was in command of the popular forces, but was totally defeated under the walls of Rome and Sulla entered to wreak a terrible vengeance. Lists were made with the names of every Italian and Roman of wealth or influence suspected of sympathy with the popular party. All were killed and their property confiscated. It is at this juncture that Caesar, Pompey and Cicero appear. Rome was at the mercy of the oligarchy. Marius, Cinna and Sulla were dead. The popular party was obliterated.

Caesar, Pompey and Cicero

Caesar was born at Rome in the year 100 B. C. At the age of 16 he married Cornelia, the daughter of Cinna, and both by his connection with Marius and Cinna he became allied to the popular party. Sulla proposed that he divorce Cornelia, break his associations with the democracy and marry some lady he himself would provide. Caesar refused. Sulla tried coercion and deprived Caesar of his priesthood, took his wife's dowry from him and confiscated the estate inherited from his father. This producing no effect, a price was set upon his head and he fled into concealment. The College of Vestal Virgins interceded and his pardon was reluctantly granted.

Pompey had seen service with Marius and Sulla in Africa and was one of the favored lieutenants of Sulla in his campaign against Mithridates, and for his success in pursuing the remnants of the popular army in Sicily and Africa was named Magnus (the Great) by Sulla. The Senate placed him in command of the army after Sulla's death, and as the army had democratic leanings he was drawn toward the popular party, was elected Consul, when he restored the tribunes with their ancient powers. This made him very popular and he was rewarded by being made commander of all the Roman armies, and when he returned from his brilliant campaign in Asia was the first man in the Roman world.

Cicero was born at Arpinum of a family of "country gentlemen." His early training was literary and he was prepared for an advocate. Being compelled by Roman law to enter the army he served under Sulla in the Italian campaign. At the age of 26 he pleaded his first case in prosecuting Verres, who was one of Sulla's lieutenants in Greece and Asia and the greatest freebooter of his age. He had sent six vessel loads of plunder to Rome with which to bribe the Senate. He fled without waiting for trial and died in Marseilles.

Another political figure of the time was Crassus. He was a typical capitalist, the leader of money lenders and the owner of thousands of slaves skilled in the arts, and Plutarch states that the greater part of Rome came into his hands. He was an accomplished orator and wielded great influence with the common people. When candidate for consul he spread them a feast of 10,000 tables and donated grain for three months.

Thus all the figures of this time show political leanings from the institutions Sulla had built up. Pompey, Cicero and Crassus were distrusted by the oligarchy, while Caesar was roundly hated.

Meantime Caesar was coming to the front. He had returned from Spain about the time Pompey had come from the east. He had won reputation in the forum and in the Senate and had warmly advocated the appointment of Pompey to his high commands. He became the idol of the people when as chairman of a committee of investigation he began an inquiry into the doings of Sulla's proscription. Cases of murder and confiscation were brought into court, Caesar complaining and Cicero defending the cause of the informers and assassins and those in the Senate who had inspired them.

The Second Triumvirate

Pompey had now become alienated from the Senate, and, with Caesar and Crassus, formed what is known as the Second Triumvirate. Caesar was to become Consul, Pompey was to retain Italy and Spain, Crassus was to have Asia. As Consul Caesar passed the agrarian law and Pompey's disbanded soldiers and great numbers of poor citizens of Rome and other Italian cities were colonized on the public lands. Crassus went to Asia, where his army was annihilated at Carrhea, near the Euphrates, and himself killed. Caesar proceeded to Gaul, where he remained for ten years. His campaigns are the first of classics. He left Gaul not only subjugated but contented.

The Second Triumvirate had reduced the Senate to a mere municipal body. It was furious but imbecile. It was busy in making edicts for thanksgivings for Caesar's victories, and equally so in hatching dark-lantern conspiracies with Gaulish and German chieftains for Caesar's destruction. Pompey was still faithful to Caesar. Cicero was still making speeches in the Senate lauding the triumvirs and engaging in quiet conspiracies with other Senators for their overthrow.

The Roman Abe Ruef

Clodius was a profligate Roman patrician who had spent a large patrimony in the excesses of his time. He had been courting the people and had received their confidence. His course had offended the Senators, and their persecutions had only made him more popular. Caesar kept him well supplied with money, which he used freely on the hustings and in back room caucuses with the "gang." Caesar and Pompey winked at his methods and supported his policies, and Clodius controlled all the smaller offices, which are so dear to the small politicians of every city. In short, he was the Abe Ruef of Roman politics. Cicero hated him with a venomous hatred and in his speeches accused him of the vilest practices. Cicero at the same time was undermining the influence of Pompey, who, with Caesar, at last concluded to be rid of him, and made Clodius the instrument of his downfall. As the first step he must be made a tribune, but being a patrician he was not eligible, so he abandoned the patrician order, was adopted into a plebeian family, became a common citizen and was then elected to the tribunate. Among his first acts was an inquiry into the illegal execution of the Cataline conspirators. Caesar liked Cicero personally, and probably was anxious to attach him to his policy for his influence with the middle classes, and to save him offered to make him second in command in Gaul. Pompey dissuaded him from accepting. Clodius influenced the assembly to pass a law to the effect that any person who had put a Roman citizen to death without appeal had violated the constitution. Cicero fled to Sicily, his property was confiscated, his country houses destroyed and the site of his palace in Rome dedicated to the goddess of liberty.

Among the acts of Clodius was one taking power from the Sacred College to alter the calendar. Caesar's time in Gaul was for ten years, but by cutting several months from the last year the Senate reduced it to nearly nine. He was then to come home, unattended, and if he wished might stand for the consulate. Pompey had lent him two legions. These he requested Caesar to return, which was promptly done. Pompey, pretending to get ready for a new campaign in Asia, was raising new legions in Italy, which he held in convenient camps within reach of Rome. The Senate, now feeling strong enough, opened upon the regular party with its usual ferocity, and the tribunes were banished and fled to Caesar. Caesar attempted a compromise, and would disband his legions if Pompey would do the same, but Pompey was determined to re-enact the part of Sulla, and refused. The Senators were making up lists of wealthy citizens of Rome and Italy whom they could proscribe, assassinate and confiscate their property. All compromise was disdained. Caesar refused to trust himself in Rome under these conditions, and the Senate retorted by creating him an outlaw and confiscated his estates. Caesar crossed the Rubicon, city after city surrendered to him, and the citizens hailed him as the liberator of Italy. Large numbers of Pompey's soldiers deserted, and Pompey, seeing he would surely be crushed, abandoned Rome with such legions as he could influence and crossed the Adriatic into Thessaly, where he was followed by the disaffected Senators.

Caesar entered Rome, secured the funds in the treasury, which the Senators in their panic had forgotten to remove, and reorganized the administration, restoring the authority of the tribunes and the consular courts. He followed Pompey into Thessaly, and after several months of maneuvering, in which he suffered one defeat, annihilated the army of Pompey at Pharsalia, and Pompey a few weeks later was killed in Egypt, whither he had fled. The remnants of the senatorial party re-formed in North Africa, but were defeated at Thapsus. A year later in a dying effort they reorganized in Spain, but were annihilated by Caesar at Mundi. Caesar was now supreme.

Reorganized by Caesar

He reorganized the state upon the basis of its ancient constitution, engrafting reforms made evident by the century of civil distraction. Cicero, who had followed Pompey to Thessaly unwillingly, returned to Rome after Pharsalia. Caesar was entirely magnanimous. Such of the old senatorial group as would accept he restored to their functions. Many of his political enemies were put into exalted positions, and he seemed actuated with a sincere desire to end the distractions which had rent the commonwealth. The Senate contented itself with passing fulsome resolutions of praise of Caesar. One translated him into a god. Another proposed that every woman in Rome should be placed at his disposal. Another that he be given the crown. Caesar understood that these were intended to make him ridiculous and unpopular. Under its laudations the Senate hid its venom until, seizing upon the name of Brutus to conjure the populace with the ancient story of liberty, the conspiracy was laid for his assassination. Rumors had reached Cicero, and in a great speech, full of adulation of Caesar, he volunteered himself and the rest of the Senate as a body-

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