

THE COLLAPSE OF THE REPUBLICA Prophecy Of Its Collapse By Polybius:

That to all things, then which exist there is ordained decay and change, I think it requires no further arguments to show: for the inexorable course of nature is sufficient to convince us of it.

But in all polities we observe two sources of decay existing from natural causes, the one external, the other internal and self produced. The external admits of no certain or fixed definition, but the internal follows a definite order. What kind of polity, then, comes naturally first, and what second, I have already stated in such a way that those who are capable of taking in the whole drift of my argument can henceforth draw their own conclusions as to the future of the Roman polity. For it is quite clear, in my opinion. When a commonwealth, after warding off many great dangers, has arrived at a high pitch of prosperity and undisputed power, it is evident that, by the lengthened continuance of wealth within it, the manner of life of its citizens will become more extravagant; and that the rivalry for office and in other spheres of activity will become fiercer than it ought to be. And as this state of things goes on more and more, the desire of office and the shame of losing reputation, as well as the ostentation and extravagance of living, will prove the beginning of a deterioration. And of this change the people will be credited with being the authors, when they become convinced that they are being cheated by some from avarice, and are puffed up with flattery by others from love of office. For when that comes about, in their passionate resentment and acting under the dictates of anger, they will refuse to obey any longer or to be content with having equal powers with their leaders, but will demand to have all or far the greatest themselves. And when that comes to pass the constitution will receive a new name, which sounds better than any other in the world, liberty, or democracy; but, in fact, it will become that worst of all governments, mob-rule.

Fulfillment: The End Of Concord: The Gracchi

The Romans, as they subdued the Italian nations successively in war, seized a part of their lands and built towns there, or established their own colonies in those already existing, and used them in place of garrisons. Of the land acquired by war they assigned the cultivated part forthwith to settlers, or leased or sold it. Since they had no leisure as yet to allot the part which then lay desolated by war

(this was generally the greater part), they made proclamation that in the meantime those who were willing to work it might do so for a share of the yearly crops--a tenth of the grain and a fifth of the fruit. From those who kept flocks was required a share of the animals, both oxen and small cattle. They did these things in order to multiply the Italian race, which they considered the most laborious of peoples, so that they might have plenty of allies at home. But the very opposite thing happened; for the rich, getting possession of the greater part of the undistributed lands, and being emboldened by the lapse of time to believe that they would never be dispossessed, and adding to their holdings the small farms of their poor neighbors, partly by purchase and partly by force, came to cultivate vast tracts instead of single estates, using for this purpose slaves as laborers and herdsmen, lest free laborers should be drawn from agriculture into the army. The ownership of slaves itself brought them great gain from the multitude of their progeny, who increased because they were exempt from military service. Thus the powerful ones became enormously rich and the race of slaves multiplied throughout the country, while the Italian people dwindled in numbers and strength, being oppressed by penury, taxes, and military service. If they had any respite from these evils they passed their time in idleness, because the land was held by the rich, who employed slaves instead of freemen as cultivators.

For these reasons the people became troubled lest they should no longer have sufficient allies of the Italian stock, and lest the government itself should be endangered by such a vast number of slaves. Not perceiving any remedy, as it was not easy, nor exactly just, to deprive men of so many possessions they had held so long, including their own trees, buildings, and fixtures, a law was once passed with difficulty at the instance of the tribunes, that nobody should hold more than 500 jugera of this land, or pasture on it more than 100 cattle or 500 sheep. To ensure the observance of this law it was provided also that there should be a certain number of freemen employed on the farms, whose business it should be to watch and report what was going on. Those who held possession of lands under the law were required to take an oath to obey the law, and penalties were fixed for violating it and it was supposed that the remaining land would soon be divided among the poor in small parcels. But there was not the smallest consideration shown for the law or the oaths. The few who seemed to pay some respect to them conveyed their lands to their relations fraudulently, but the greater part disregarded it altogether.

At length Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, an illustrious man, eager for glory, a most powerful speaker, and for these reasons well known to all, delivered an eloquent discourse, while serving as tribune, concerning the Italian race, lamenting that a people so valiant in war, and blood relations to the

Romans, were declining little by little in the pauperism and paucity of numbers without any hope of remedy. He inveighed against the multitude of slaves as useless in war and never faithful to their masters and adduced the recent calamity brought upon the masters by their slaves in Sicily, where the demands of agriculture had greatly increased the number of the latter; recalling also the war waged against them by the Romans, which was neither easy nor short, but long-protracted and full of vicissitudes and dangers. After speaking thus he again brought forward the law, providing that nobody should hold more than 500 jugera of the public domain. But he added a provision to the former law, that the sons of the present occupiers might each hold one-half of that amount, and that the remainder should be divided among the poor by triumvirs, who should be changed annually.

This was extremely disturbing to the rich because, on account of the triumvirs, they could no longer disregard the law as they had done before; nor could they buy the allotments of others because Gracchus had provided against this by forbidding sales. They collected together in groups, and made lamentation, and accused the poor of appropriating the results of their tillage, their vineyards and their dwellings. Some said that they had paid the price of the land to their neighbors. Were they to lose the money with the land? Others said that the graves of their ancestors were in the ground, which had been allotted to them in the division of their fathers' estates. Others said that their wives' dowries had been expended on the estates or that the land had been given to their own daughters as dowry. Money-lenders could show loans made on this security. All kinds of wailing and expressions of indignation were heard at once. On the other side were heard the lamentations of the poor--that they had been reduced from competence to extreme penury and from that to childlessness, because they were unable to raise their offspring. They recounted the military services they had rendered by which this very land had been acquired and were angry that they should be robbed of their share of the common property. They reproached the rich for employing slaves, who were always faithless and ill-tempered and for that reason unserviceable in war, instead of freemen, citizens and soldiers. While these classes were lamenting and indulging in mutual accusations, a great number of others, composed of colonists or inhabitants of the free towns or persons otherwise interested in the lands and who were under like apprehensions, flocked in and took sides with their respective factions. Emboldened by numbers and exasperated against each other they attached themselves to turbulent crowds and waited for the voting on the new law, some trying to prevent its enactment by all means, and other supporting it in every possible way. In addition to personal interest the spirit of rivalry spurred both sides in the preparations they were making against each other for the day of the comitia.

When Gracchus had in his mind in proposing the measure was not wealth, but an increase of efficient population. Inspired

greatly by the usefulness of the work, and believing that nothing more advantageous or admirable could ever happen to Italy, he took no account of the difficulties surrounding it. When the time for voting came he advanced many other arguments at considerable length and also asked them whether it was not just to divide among the common people what belonged to them in common; whether a citizen was not worthy of more consideration at all times than a slave; whether a man who served in the army was not more useful than one who did not; and whether one who had a share in the country was not more likely to be devoted to the public interests. He did not dwell long on this comparison between freemen and slaves, which he considered degrading, but proceeded at once to review of their hopes and fears for the country saying that the Romans had acquired most of their territory by conquest and that they had hopes of occupying the rest of the habitable world, but now the question of greatest hazard was, whether they should gain the rest by having plenty of brave men, or whether, through their weakness and mutual jealousy, their enemies should take away what they already possessed. After exaggerating the glory and riches on the one side and the danger and fear on the other, he admonished the rich to take heed, and said that for the realization of these hopes they ought to bestow this very land as a free gift, if necessary, on men who would rear children, and not by contending about small things, overlook larger ones: especially since they were receiving an ample compensation for labor expended in the undisputed title to 500 jugera each of free land, in a high state of cultivation, without cost, and half as much more for each son of those who had sons. After saying much more to the same purport and exciting the poor, as well as others who were moved by reason rather than by the desire for gain, he ordered the scribe to read the proposed law.

Marcus Octavius, another tribune, who had been induced by those in possession of the lands to interpose his veto (for among the Romans the tribune's veto always prevailed), ordered the scribe to keep silence. Thereupon Gracchus reproached him severely and adjourned the comitia to the following day. Then he stationed a sufficient guard, as if to force Octavius against his will, and ordered the scribe with threats to read the proposed law to the multitude. He began to read, but when Octavius again vetoed he stopped. Then the tribunes fell to wrangling with each other, and a considerable tumult arose among the people. The leading citizens besought the tribunes to submit their controversy to the Senate for decision. Gracchus seized on the suggestion, believing that the law was acceptable to all well-disposed persons, and hastened to the senate-house. There, as he had only a few followers and was upbraided by the rich, he ran back to the forum and said that he would take the vote at the comitia of the following day, both on the law and on the magistracy of Octavius, to determine whether a tribune who was acting contrary to the people's interest could continue to hold his office. And so he did for when Octavius, nothing daunted, again interposed. Gracchus

distributed the pebbles to take a vote on him first. When the first tribe voted to abrogate the magistracy of Octavius, Gracchus turned to him and begged him to desist from this veto. As he would not yield, the votes of the other tribes were taken. There were thirty-five tribes at that time. The seventeen that voted first angrily sustained this motion. If the eighteenth should do the same it would make a majority. Again did Gracchus, in the sight of the people, urgently importune Octavius in his present extreme danger not to prevent this most pious work, so useful to all Italy, and not to frustrate the wishes so earnestly entertained by the people, whose desires he ought rather to share in his character of tribune, and not to risk the loss of his office by public condemnation. After speaking thus he called the gods to witness that he did not willingly do any despite to his colleague. As Octavius was still unyielding he went on taking the vote. Octavius was forthwith reduced to the rank of a private citizen and slunk away unobserved.

Quintus Mummius was chosen tribune in his place, and the agrarian law was enacted. The first triumvirs appointed to divide the land were Gracchus himself, the proposer of the law, his brother of the same name, and his father-in-law, Appius Claudius, since the people still feared that the law might fail of execution unless Gracchus should be put in the lead with his whole family. Gracchus became immensely popular by reason of the law and was escorted home by the multitude as though he were the founder, not of a single city or race, but of all the nations of Italy. After this the victorious party returned to the fields from which they had come to attend to this business. The defeated ones remained in the city and talked the matter over, feeling bitterly, and saying that as soon as Gracchus should become a private citizen he would be sorry that he had done despite to the sacred and inviolable office of tribune, and had opened such a fountain of discord in Italy.

At the advent of summer the notices for the election of tribunes were given, and as the day for voting approached it was very evident that the rich were earnestly promoting the election of those most inimical to Gracchus. The latter, fearing that evil would befall if he should not be reelected for the following year, summoned his friends from the fields to attend the comitia, but as they were occupied with their harvest he was obliged, when the day fixed for the voting drew near, to have recourse to the plebeians of the city. So he went around asking each one separately to elect him tribune for the ensuing year, on account of the danger he had incurred for them. When the voting took place the first two tribes pronounced for Gracchus. The rich objected that it was not lawful for the same man to hold the office twice in succession. The tribune Rubrius, who had been chosen by lot to reside over the comitia, was in doubt about it, and Mummius, who had been chosen in place of Octavius, urged him to turn over the comitia to his charge. This he did, but the remaining tribunes contended

that the presidency should be decided by lot, saying that when Rubrius, who had been chosen in that way, resigned, the casting of lots ought to be done over again for all. As there was much strife over this question, Gracchus, who was getting the worst of it, adjourned the voting to the following day. In utter despair he clothed himself in black, while still in office, and led his son around the forum and introduced him to each man and committed him to their charge, as if he were about to perish at the hands of his enemies.

The poor were moved with deep sorrow, and rightly so, both on their own account (for they believed that they were no longer to live in a free state under equal laws, but were reduced to servitude by the rich), and on account of Gracchus himself, who had incurred such danger and suffering in their behalf. So they all accompanied him with tears to his house in the evening, and bade him be of good courage for the morrow. Gracchus cheered up, assembled his partisans before daybreak, and communicated to them a signal to be displayed in case of a fight. He then took possession of the temple on the Capitoline hill, where the voting was to take place, and occupied the middle of the assembly. As he was obstructed by the other tribunes and by the rich, who would not allow the votes to be taken on this question, he gave the signal. There was a sudden shout from those who saw it, and a resort to violence in consequence. Some of the partisans of Gracchus took position around him like body-guards. Others having girded themselves, seized the fasces and staves in the hands of the lictors and broke them in pieces. They drove the rich out of the assembly with such disorder and wounds that the tribunes fled from their places in terror, and the priests closed the doors of the temple. Many ran away pell-mell and scattered wild rumors. Some said that Gracchus had deposed all the other tribunes, and this was believed because none of them could be seen. Others said that he had declared himself tribune for the ensuing year without an election.

Under these circumstances the Senate assembled at the temple of Fides. It is astonishing to me that they never thought of appointing a dictator in this emergency, although they had often been protected by the government of a single ruler in such times of peril. Although this resource had been found most useful in former times few people remembered it, either then or later. After reaching the decision that they did reach, they marched up to the Capitol. Cornelius Scipio Nasica, the pontifex maximus, leading the way and calling out with a loud voice, "Let those who would save the country follow me." He wound the border of his toga about his head either to induce a greater number to go with him by the singularity of his appearance, or to make for himself, as it were, a helmet as a sign of battle for those who looked on, or in order to conceal from the gods what he was about to do. When he arrived at the temple and advanced against the partisans of Gracchus they yielded to the reputation of a foremost citizen, for they saw the Senate following with

him. The latter wrested clubs out of the hands of the Gracchans themselves, or with fragments of broken benches or other apparatus that had been brought for the use of the assembly, began beating them, and pursued them, and drove them over the precipice. In the tumult many of the Gracchans perished, and Gracchus himself was caught near the temple, and was slain at the door close by the statues of the kings. All the bodies were thrown by night into the Tiber.

So perished on the Capitol, and while still tribune, Gracchus, the son of the Gracchus who was twice consul, and of Cornelia, daughter of the Scipio who subjugated Carthage. He lost his life in consequence of a most excellent design, which, however, he pursued in too violent a manner. This shocking affair, the first that was perpetrated in the public assembly, was seldom without parallels thereafter from time to time. On the subject of the murder of Gracchus the city was divided between sorrow and joy. Some mourned for themselves and for him, and deplored the present condition of things, believing that the commonwelath no longer existed, but had been supplanted by force and violence. Others considered that everything had turned out for them exactly as they wished.

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. . . Gaius Gracchus, who had made himself agreeable to them as a triumvir, offered himself for the tribuneship. He was the younger brother of Tiberius Gracchus, the promotor of the law, and had been silent for some time on the subject of the fate of his brother, but since many of the senators treated him scornfully he announced himself as a candidate for the office of tribune. As soon as he was elected to this distinguished position he began to lay plots against the Senate, and proposed that a monthly distribution of corn should be made to each citizen at the public expense, which had not been customary before. Thus he got the leadership of the people quickly by one measure of policy, in which he had the cooperation of Fulvius Flaccus. Directly after that he was chosen tribune for the following year for in cases where there was not a sufficient number of candidates the law authorized the people to choose from the whole number then in office.

Thus Gaius Gracchus became tribune a second time. Having bought the plebeians, as it were, he began, by another like political manœuvre, to court the equestrian order, who hold the middle place between the Senate and the plebians. He transferred the courts of justice, which had become discredited by reason of bribery, from the senators to the knights, reproaching the former especially with recent examples of Aurelius Cotta, Salinator, and third in the list,

Manius Equilius (the one who subdued Asia), all notorious bribe-takers, who had been acquitted by the judges, although ambassadors sent to complain against them were still present, going around uttering hateful accusations against them. The Senate was extremely ashamed of these things and yielded to the law, and the people ratified it. In this way were the courts of justice transferred from the Senate to the knights. It is said that soon after the passage of this law Gracchus remarked that he had broken the power of the Senate once for all. This saying of Gracchus has been even more confirmed by experience in the course of events. This power of sitting in judgment on all Romans and Italians, including the senators themselves, in all matters as to property, civil rights, and banishment, exalted the knights like rulers over them and put senators on the same level with subjects. Moreover, as the knights voted in the election to sustain the power of the tribunes, and obtained from them whatever they wanted in return, they became more and more formidable to the senators. So it shortly came about that the political mastery was turned upside down, the power being in the hands of the knights, and the honor only remaining with the Senate. The knights went so far that they not only held power over the senators, but they openly flouted them beyond their right. They also became addicted to bribe-taking, and having once tasted these enormous gains, they indulged in them even more basely and immoderately than the senators had done. They suborned accusers against the rich and did away with prosecutions for bribe-taking altogether, partly by concert of action and partly by force and violence, so that the practice of this kind of investigation became entirely obsolete. Thus the judiciary law gave rise to another struggle of factions, which lasted a long time and was not less baneful than the former ones.

Gracchus made long roads throughout Italy and thus put a multitude of contractors and artisans under obligations to him and made them ready to do whatever he wished. He proposed the founding of numerous colonies. He also called on the Latin allies to demand the full rights of Roman citizenship, since the Senate could not with decency refuse this privilege to their blood relations. To the other allies, who were not allowed to vote in Roman elections, he sought to give the right of suffrage, in order to have their help in the enactment of laws which he had in contemplation. The Senate was very much alarmed at this, and it ordered the consuls to give the following public notice, "Nobody who does not possess the right of suffrage shall stay in the city or approach within forty stades of it while voting is going on concerning these laws." The Senate also persuaded Livius Drusus, another tribune, to interpose his veto against the laws proposed by Gracchus, but not to tell the people his reasons for doing so; for a tribune was not required to give reasons for his veto. In order to conciliate the people they gave Drusus the privilege of founding twelve colonies, and the plebeians were so much pleased with this



that they began to scoff at the laws proposed by Gracchus.

Having lost the favor of the rabble, Gracchus sailed for Africa in company with Fulvius Flaccus, who, after his consulship, had been chosen tribune for the same reasons as Gracchus himself. A colony had been voted to Africa on account of its reputed fertility, and these men had been expressly chosen the founders of it in order to get them out of the way for a while, so that the Senate might have a respite from demagogism. They marked out a town for the colony on the place where Carthage had formerly stood, disregarding the fact that Scipio, when he destroyed it, had devoted it with curses to sheep-pasturage forever. They assigned 6000 colonists to this place, instead of the smaller number fixed them by law, in order further to curry favor with the people thereby. When they returned to Rome they invited the 6000 from the whole of Italy. The functionaries who were still in Africa laying out the city wrote home that wolves had pulled up and scattered the boundary marks made by Gracchus and Fulvius, and the soothsayers considered this an ill omen for the colony. So the Senate summoned the comitia, in which it proposed to repeal the law concerning this colony. When Gracchus and Fulvius saw their failure in this matter they were furious and declared that the Senate had lied about the wolves. The boldest of the plebeians joined them, carrying daggers, and proceeded to the Capitol, where the assembly was to be held in reference to the colony.

Now the people were assembled, and Fulvius had begun speaking about the business in hand, when Gracchus arrived at the Capitol attended by a body-guard of his partisans. Disturbed by what he knew about the extraordinary plans on foot he turned aside from the meeting-place of the assembly, passed into the portico, and walked about waiting to see what would happen. Just when a plebeian named Antyllus, who was sacrificing in the portico, saw him in this disturbed state, seized him by the hand, either because he had heard something or suspected something, or was moved to speak to him for some other reason, and asked him to spare his country. Gracchus, still more disturbed, and startled like one detected in a crime, gave the man a piercing look. Then one of his party, although no signal had been displayed or order given, inferred merely from the very sharp glance that Gracchus cast upon Antyllus that the time for action had come, and thought that he should do a favor to Gracchus by striking the first blow. So he drew his dagger and slew Antyllus. A cry was raised, the dead body was seen in the midst of the crowd, and all who were outside fled from the temple in fear of a like fate. Gracchus went into the assembly desiring to exculpate himself of the deed. Nobody would so much as listen to him. All turned away from him as from one stained with blood. Gracchus and Flaccus were nonplused and, having lost the chance of accomplishing what they wished, they hastened home, and their partisans with

them. The rest of the crowd occupied the forum throughout the night as though some calamity were impending. Opimius, one of the consuls, who was staying in the city, ordered an armed force to be stationed at the Capitol at daybreak, and sent heralds to convoke the Senate. He took his own station in the temple of Castor and Pollux in the centre of the city and there awaited events.

When these arrangements had been made the Senate summoned Gracchus and Flaccus from their homes to the senate-house to defend themselves. But they ran out armed toward the Aventine hill, hoping that if they could seize it first the Senate would agree to some terms with them. They ran through the city offering freedom to the slaves, but none listened to them. With such forces as they had, however, they occupied and fortified the temple of Diana, and sent Quintus, the son of Flaccus, to the Senate seeking to come to an arrangement and to live in peace. The Senate replied that they should lay down their arms, come to the senate-house, tell what they wanted, or else send no more messengers. When they sent Quintus a second time the consul Opimius arrested him, as being no longer an ambassador after he had been warned, and at the same time sent an armed force against the Gracchans. Gracchus fled across the river by the Sublician bridge, with one slave, to a grove where he presented his throat to the slave, as he was on the point of being arrested. Flaccus took refuge in the workshop of an acquaintance. As his pursuers did not know which house he was in they threatened to burn the whole row. The man who had given shelter to the suppliant hesitated to point him out, but directed another man to do so. Flaccus was seized and put to death. The heads of Gracchus and Flaccus were carried to Opimius, and he gave their weight in gold to those who brought them. The people plundered their houses. Opimius arrested their fellow-conspirators, cast them into prison, and ordered that they should be strangled. He allowed Quintus, the son of Flaccus, to choose his own mode of death. After this a lustration was performed in behalf of the city for the bloodshed, and the Senate ordered the building of a temple to Concord in the forum.

So the sedition of the younger Gracchus came to an end. Not long afterward a law was enacted to permit the holders to sell the land about which they had quarrelled; for even this had been forbidden by the law of the elder Gracchus. Presently the rich bought the allotments of the poor, or found pretexts for seizing them by force. So the condition of the poor became even worse than it was before. . . .

EXCERPT FROM APPIAN:

ROMAN HISTORY -

*written shortly after event.*