

## LI. THE JEWELS OF CORNELIA.

THE Romans attended the circus so frequently that they daily learned to become more cruel and bloodthirsty; and they were in general very unkind to their slaves. Most of these were ill clad and ill fed, and were made to work very hard. They were severely whipped for every act of disobedience, but they were seldom rewarded or set free.

The Roman citizens themselves, however, could do almost anything they pleased. When brought before a judge for any offense, they were sure of very lenient treatment, while all the slaves, or any who were not Roman citizens, were treated with the greatest severity for the same crimes.

Thus the mere name of Roman citizen was a safeguard, for none dared ill-treat him who bore it. This protection was given even to criminals who were sentenced to death; and while other men could be crucified, a Roman was never made to submit to that disgrace, but was executed by the sword.

With the increase in wealth and luxury, the contrast between the rich and poor classes became more marked than ever. The rich reveled in plenty, while the poor almost starved. Some of the richest Romans of this time are said to have paid their cooks five thousand dollars a year; but none of them thought of the poor, who then had no hospitals, or homes, or charity bureaus to go to when in need of help.

As you have already heard, the plebeians had at last gained complete equality with the patricians, even in regard to the holding of office. The struggle between these two classes was over; and in its stead there had begun a contest between the rich and the poor. Some of the plebeians had become wealthy, and they and the old patricians formed a new class of nobles, who tried to keep all the offices in their hands, and to make themselves still richer.

The land had at first been distributed among all the citizens, but it had now become the property of a few rich men, who had it cultivated by their own slaves, and refused to sell the grain and vegetables at reasonable prices. The result was that many of the poor plebeians, deprived of land, and unable to secure work, crowded into the city. There they would have died of hunger, had not their own magistrates, the tribunes, sometimes dealt out to them daily rations of grain.

This idle and pauper class was growing always larger, and as the people had nothing to do, they were unhappy and ready for mischief. Except for the circus, their only pleasure was to stand along the streets, and watch the religious processions or the triumphs; and the returning generals soon found that the people would not even take the trouble to cheer them as of old, unless they scattered handfuls of small coin as they passed along.

Many years before this, a law had been made forbidding any Roman citizen to own more than a certain amount of land. This law, which is known as the Li-cin´i-an Law, did not please the rich men, so they paid no attention to it. But it was now time that it should be enforced, and that someone should take the part of the oppressed people.

The poor needed a champion who would fight for their rights, and they soon found an excellent one in the brave young Ti-be´ri-us Grac´chus, whom they elected to the office of tribune. This man was clever and fearless, and the people knew that he would do his very best to help them.

Tiberius Gracchus, the champion of the poor, belonged to one of the most noted families of Rome. His father was a noble plebeian, and his mother, Cor-ne´li-a, was the daughter of Scipio Africanus, the great general who had defeated the Carthaginians in the Second Punic War.



The Gracchi.

Cornelia, we are told, was a noble woman and an excellent mother. She brought up her two sons herself, and felt very proud of them. A noble Roman lady once asked her to show her ornaments, after she had displayed her own; and Cornelia called her boys, and said:

“These are my jewels!”

On another occasion, some people were speaking of her father and of all he had done, and were congratulating her upon being the daughter of so great a man. Cornelia replied that she was prouder still of being called the mother of the Grac´chi; that is, of Tiberius and Ca´ius Gracchus.