

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00977-5 - The History of Rome, Volume 4

Theodor Mommsen

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE JOINT RULE OF POMPEIUS AND CÆSAR.

AMONG the democratic chiefs, who from the time of the consulate of Cæsar were recognised officially, so to speak, as the joint rulers of the commonwealth, as the governing "triumvirs," Pompeius in public opinion occupied decidedly the first place. It was he who was called by the Optimates the "private dictator;" it was before him that Cicero prostrated himself in vain; against him were directed the sharpest sarcasms in the placards of Bibulus, and the most envenomed arrows of the conversation in the saloons of the opposition. This was only to be expected. According to the facts before the public Pompeius was indisputably the first general of his time; Cæsar was a dexterous party leader and party orator, of undeniable talents, but as notoriously of unwarlike, and indeed of effeminate, temperament. Such opinions had been long current; it could not be expected of the rabble in high quarters, that they should trouble themselves about the real state of things and abandon platitudes once established, because of some obscure feats of heroism on the Tagus. Cæsar evidently played in the league the mere part of the adjutant, who executed for his chief the work which Flavius, Afranius, and other less capable instruments had attempted and not performed. It seemed as if even his governorship could not alter this state of things. Afranius had only recently occupied a very similar position, without thereby acquiring any special importance; several provinces at once had been of late years repeatedly placed under one governor, and often far more than four legions had been united in one hand; as matters were again quiet beyond the Alps and

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prince Ariovistus was recognised by the Romans as a friend and neighbour, there was no prospect of conducting a war of any moment there. It was natural to compare the position which Pompeius had obtained by the Gabinio-Manilian law with that which Cæsar had obtained by the Vatinian; but the comparison did not turn out to Cæsar's advantage. Pompeius ruled over nearly the whole Roman empire; Cæsar over two provinces. Pompeius had the soldiers and the treasures of the state almost absolutely at his disposal; Cæsar had only the sums assigned to him and an army of 24,000 men. It was left to Pompeius himself to fix the point of time for his retirement; Cæsar's command was secured to him for a long period no doubt, but yet only for a limited term. Pompeius, in fine, had been intrusted with the most important undertakings by sea and land; Cæsar was sent to the north, to watch over the capital from upper Italy and to take care that Pompeius should rule it undisturbed.

Pompeius
and the
capital.

Anarchy.

But when Pompeius was appointed by the coalition to be ruler of the capital, he undertook a task far exceeding his powers. Pompeius understood nothing further of ruling than might be summed up in the word of command. The waves of agitation in the capital were swelled at once by past and by future revolutions; the problem of ruling this city—which in many respects might be compared to the Paris of the nineteenth century—without an armed force was infinitely difficult, and for that stiff and stately pattern-soldier altogether insoluble. Very soon matters reached such a pitch, that friends and foes, both equally inconvenient to him, could for his part do what they pleased; after Cæsar's departure from Rome the coalition still ruled doubtless the destinies of the world, but not the streets of the capital. The senate too, to whom there still belonged a sort of nominal government, allowed things in the capital to follow their natural course; partly because the section of this body controlled by the coalition lacked the instructions of the regents, partly because the angry opposition kept aloof out of indifference or pessimism, but chiefly because the whole aristocratic corporation began to feel at any rate, if not to comprehend, its utter impotence. For the moment therefore there was nowhere at Rome any power of resistance in any sort of government, nowhere a real authority. Men were living in an interregnum between the ruin of the

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aristocratic, and the rise of the military, rule; and, if the Roman commonwealth has presented all the different political functions and organisations more purely and normally than any other in ancient or modern times, it has also exhibited political disorganisation — anarchy — with an unenviable clearness. It is a strange coincidence that in the same years, in which Cæsar was creating beyond the Alps a work to last for ever, there was enacted in Rome one of the most extravagant political farces that was ever produced upon the stage of the world's history. The new regent of the commonwealth did not rule, but shut himself up in his house and sulked in silence. The former half-deposed government likewise did not rule, but sighed, sometimes in private amidst the confidential circles of the villas, sometimes in chorus in the senate house. The portion of the burgesses which had still at heart freedom and order was disgusted with the reign of confusion, but utterly without leaders and helpless it maintained a passive attitude, and not merely avoided all political activity, but kept aloof, as far as possible, from the political Sodom itself. On the other hand the rabble of every sort never had better days, never found a merrier arena. The number of little great men was legion. Demagogism became quite a trade, which accordingly did not lack its professional insignia—the threadbare mantle, the shaggy beard, the long streaming hair, the deep bass voice; and not seldom it was a trade with golden soil. For the standing declamations the tried gargles of the theatrical staff were an article in much request; * Greeks and Jews, freedmen and slaves, were the most regular attenders and the loudest criers in the public assemblies; frequently, even when it came to a vote, only a minority of those voting consisted of burgesses constitutionally entitled to do so. "Next time," it is said in a letter of this period, "we may expect our lackeys to outvote the emancipation-tax." The real powers of the day were the compact and armed hands, the battalions of anarchy raised by adventurers of rank out of gladiatorial slaves and blackguards. Their possessors had from the outset been mostly numbered among the popular party; but since the departure of Cæsar, who alone understood how to impress the democracy, and alone knew how to manage it, all discipline had departed from

* This is the meaning of *cantorum convitiis contiones celebrare* (Cic. *pro Sest.* 55, 118).

The anarchists.

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them and every partisan adopted his politics at his own hand. Even now, no doubt, these men fought with most pleasure under the banner of freedom; but, strictly speaking, they were neither of democratic nor of anti-democratic views, but inscribed on the in itself indispensable banner, as it happened, now the name of the people, anon that of the senate or that of a party chief; Clodius for instance fought or professed to fight in succession for the ruling democracy, for the senate, and for Crassus. The leaders of these bands kept to their colours only so far as they inexorably persecuted their personal enemies—as in the case of Clodius against Cicero and Milo against Clodius—while their partisan position served them merely as a handle in these personal feuds. We might as well seek to set a charivari to music as to write the history of this political witches' revel; nor is it of any moment to enumerate all the deeds of murder, besiegings of houses, acts of incendiarism and other scenes of violence within a great capital, and to reckon up how often the scale was traversed from hissing and shouting to spitting on and trampling down opponents, and thence to throwing stones and drawing swords.

- Clodius. The principal performer in this theatre of political rascality was that Publius Clodius, of whose services, as already mentioned (P. 207), the regents availed themselves against Cato and Cicero. Left to himself, this influential, talented, energetic and—in his trade—really exemplary partisan, pursued during his tribunate of the people (696) an ultra-democratic policy, gave the citizens corn gratis, restricted the right of the censors to stigmatise immoral burgesses, prohibited the magistrates from obstructing the course of the comitial machinery by religious formalities, set aside the limits which had shortly before (690), for the purpose of checking the system of bands, been imposed on the right of association of the lower classes, and re-established the “street-clubs” (*collegia compitalicia*) at that time abolished, which were nothing else than a formal organization—subdivided according to the streets, and with an almost military arrangement—of the whole free or slave proletariat of the capital. If in addition the further law, which Clodius had likewise already projected and purposed to introduce when prætor in 702, should give to freedmen and to slaves living in *de facto* possession of freedom the same political rights with the freeborn, the author of
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- 52.

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all these brave improvements of the constitution might declare his work complete, and as a second Numa of freedom and equality might invite the sweet rabble of the capital to see him celebrate high mass in honour of the arrival of the democratic millennium in the temple of Liberty which he had erected on the site of one of his burnings at the Palatine. Of course these exertions in behalf of freedom did not exclude a traffic in decrees of the burgesses; like Cæsar himself, Cæsar's ape kept governorships and other posts great and small on sale for the benefit of his fellow-citizens, and sold the sovereign rights of the state for the benefit of subject kings and cities.

At all these things Pompeius looked on without stirring. If he did not perceive how seriously he thus compromised himself, his opponent perceived it. Clodius had the hardihood to engage in a dispute with the regent of Rome on a question of little moment, as to the sending back of a captive Armenian prince; and the variance soon became a formal feud, in which the utter helplessness of Pompeius was displayed. The head of the state knew not how to encounter the partisan otherwise than with his own weapons, only wielded with far less dexterity. If he had been tricked by Clodius respecting the Armenian prince, he offended him in turn by releasing Cicero, who was pre-eminently obnoxious to Clodius, from the exile into which Clodius had sent him; and he attained his object so thoroughly, that he converted his opponent into an implacable foe. If Clodius made the streets insecure with his bands, the victorious general likewise set slaves and pugilists to work; in the frays which ensued the general naturally was worsted by the demagogue and defeated in the street, and Gaius Cato was kept almost constantly under siege in his garden by Clodius and his comrades. It is not the least remarkable feature in this remarkable spectacle, that the regent and the rogue amidst their quarrel vied in courting the favour of the fallen government; Pompeius, partly to please the senate, permitted Cicero's recall, Clodius on the other hand declared the Julian laws null and void, and called on Marcus Bibulus publicly to testify to their having been unconstitutionally passed.

Naturally no positive result could issue from this imbroglio of dark passions; its most distinctive character was just its utterly ludicrous want of object. Even a man of Cæsar's genius had to learn by experience that democratic

Quarrel
of Pompeius
with
Clodius.

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agitation was completely worn out, and that even the way to the throne lay no longer through demagogism. It was nothing more than a historical makeshift, if now, in the interregnum between republic and monarchy, some whimsical fellow dressed himself out with the prophet's mantle and staff which Cæsar had long laid aside, and the great ideals of Gaius Gracchus came once more upon the stage distorted into a parody; the so-called party from which this democratic agitation proceeded was so little such in reality, that afterwards it had no part at all allotted to it in the decisive struggle. It cannot even be asserted that by means of this anarchical state of things the desire after a strong government based on military power had been vividly kindled in the minds of those who were indifferent to politics. Even apart from the fact that such neutral burgesses were chiefly to be sought outside of Rome, and thus were not directly affected by the rioting in the capital, those minds which could be at all influenced by such motives had been already by their former experience, and especially by the Catilinarian conspiracy, thoroughly converted to the principle of authority; but those that were really alarmed were affected far more emphatically by a dread of the gigantic crises inseparable from an overthrow of the constitution, than by dread of the mere continuance of the — at bottom withal very superficial— anarchy in the capital. The only result of it which historically deserves notice was the painful position in which Pompeius was placed by the attacks of the Clodians, and which had a material share in determining his further steps.

Pompeius
in relation
to the Gal-
lic victories
of Cæsar.

Little as Pompeius liked and understood taking the initiative, he was yet on this occasion compelled by the change of his position towards both Clodius and Cæsar to depart from his previous inaction. The irksome and disgraceful situation to which Clodius had reduced him, could not but at length arouse even his sluggish nature to hatred and anger. But far more important was the change which took place in his relation to Cæsar. While, of the two confederate regents, Pompeius had utterly failed in the functions which he had undertaken, Cæsar had the skill to turn his official position to an account which left all calculations and all fears far behind. Without much inquiry as to permission, Cæsar had doubled his army by levies in his southern province inhabited in great measure

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by Roman burgesses; had with this army crossed the Alps instead of keeping watch over Rome from Northern Italy; had crushed in the bud a new Cimbrian invasion, and within two years (696, 697) had carried the Roman arms to the Rhine and the Channel. In presence of such facts even the aristocratic tactics of ignoring and disparaging were baffled. He who had often been scoffed at as effeminate was now the idol of the army, the celebrated victory-crowned hero, whose fresh laurels outshone the faded laurels of Pompeius, and to whom even the senate as early as 697 accorded the demonstrations of honour usual after successful campaigns in richer measure than had ever fallen to the share of Pompeius. Pompeius stood towards his former adjutant precisely as after the Gabinio-Manilian laws the latter had stood towards him. Cæsar was now the hero of the day and the master of the most powerful Roman army; Pompeius was an ex-general who had once been famous. It is true that no collision had yet occurred between father-in-law and son-in-law, and their relation was externally undisturbed; but every political alliance is inwardly broken up, when the relative proportions of the power of the parties are materially altered. While the quarrel with Clodius was merely annoying, the change in the position of Cæsar involved a very serious danger for Pompeius; just as Cæsar and his confederates had formerly sought a military support against him, he found himself now compelled to seek a military support against Cæsar, and laying aside his haughty privacy to come forward as a candidate for some extraordinary magistracy, which would enable him to hold his place by the side of the governor of the two Gauls with equal and, if possible, with superior power. His tactics, like his position, were exactly those of Cæsar during the Mithradatic war. To balance the military power of a superior but still remote adversary by the obtaining of a similar command, Pompeius required in the first instance the official machinery of government. A year and a half ago this had been absolutely at his disposal. The regents then ruled the state both by the comitia, which absolutely obeyed them as the masters of the street, and by the senate, which was energetically overawed by Cæsar; as representative of the coalition in Rome and as its acknowledged head, Pompeius would have doubtless obtained from the senate and from the burgesses any decree which he wished, even if

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it were against Cæsar's interest. But by the awkward quarrel with Clodius, Pompeius had lost the command of the streets, and could not expect to carry a proposal in his favour in the popular assembly. Things were not quite so unfavourable for him in the senate; but even there it was doubtful whether Pompeius after that long and fatal inaction still held the reins of the majority firmly enough in hand to procure such a decree as he required.

The republican opposition among the public.
60.

The position of the senate also, or rather of the nobility generally, had meanwhile undergone a change. From the very fact of its complete abasement it drew fresh energy. In the coalition of 694 various things had been revealed, which were by no means ripe for the light. The banishment of Cato and Cicero—which public opinion, however much the regents kept themselves in the background and even professed to lament it, referred with unerring tact to its real authors—and the marriage-relationship formed between Cæsar and Pompeius suggested to men's minds with disagreeable clearness monarchical decrees of banishment and family alliances. The larger public too, which stood more aloof from political events, observed the foundations of the future monarchy coming more and more distinctly into view. From the moment when the public perceived that Cæsar's object was not a modification of the republican constitution, but that the question at stake was the existence or non-existence of the republic, many of the best men, who had hitherto reckoned themselves of the popular party and honoured in Cæsar its head, must infallibly have passed over to the opposite side. It was no longer in the saloons and the country houses of the governing nobility alone that men talked of the "three dynasts," of the "three-headed monster." The dense crowds of people listened to Cæsar's consular orations without a sound of acclamation or approval; not a hand stirred to applaud when the democratic consul entered the theatre. But they hissed when one of the tools of the regent showed himself in public, and even staid men applauded when an actor uttered an anti-monarchic sentence or an allusion against Pompeius. Nay, when Cicero was to be banished, a great number of burgesses—it is said twenty thousand—mostly of the middle classes, put on mourning after the example of the senate. "Nothing is now more popular," it is said in a letter of this period, "than hatred of the popular party." The regents dropped hints, that

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through such opposition the equites might easily lose their new special places in the theatre, and the commons their bread-corn; people were therefore somewhat more guarded perhaps in the expression of their displeasure, but the feeling remained the same. The lever of material interests was applied with better success. Cæsar's gold flowed in streams. Men of seeming riches whose finances were in disorder, influential ladies who were in pecuniary embarrassment, insolvent young nobles, merchants and bankers in difficulties, either went in person to Gaul with the view of drawing from the fountain head, or applied to Cæsar's agents in the capital; and rarely was any man outwardly respectable—Cæsar avoided dealings with vagabonds who were utterly lost—rejected in either quarter. To this fell to be added the enormous buildings which Cæsar caused to be executed on his account in the capital—and by which a countless number of men of all ranks from the consular down to the common porter found opportunity of profiting—as well as the immense sums expended for public amusements. Pompeius did the same on a more limited scale; to him the capital was indebted for the first theatre of stone, and he celebrated its dedication with a magnificence never seen before. Of course such distributions reconciled a number of men who were inclined towards opposition, more especially in the capital, to the new order of things up to a certain extent; but the marrow of the opposition was not to be reached by this system of corruption. Every day more and more clearly showed how deeply the existing constitution had struck root among the people, and how little, in particular, the circles more aloof from direct party agitation, especially the country towns, were inclined towards monarchy or even ready to submit to it.

If Rome had had a representative constitution, the discontent of the burgesses would have found its natural expression in the elections, and have increased by so expressing itself; under the existing circumstances nothing was left for those true to the constitution but to place themselves under the senate, which, degraded as it was, still appeared the representative and champion of the legitimate republic. Thus it happened that the senate, now when it had been overthrown, suddenly found at its disposal an army far more considerable and far more earnestly faithful, than when in its power and splendour it overthrew the Gracchi

Attempts of
the regents
to check it.

Increase in
importance
of the
senate.

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and under the protection of Sulla's sword restored the state. The aristocracy felt this; it began to bestir itself afresh. Just at this time Marcus Cicero, after having bound himself to join the obsequious party in the senate and not only to offer no opposition, but to work with all his might for the regents, had obtained from them permission to return. Although Pompeius in this matter only made an incidental concession to the oligarchy, and intended first of all to play a trick on Clodius, and secondly to acquire in the fluent consular a tool rendered pliant by sufficient blows, the opportunity afforded by Cicero's return was embraced for republican demonstrations, just as his banishment had been a demonstration against the senate. With all possible solemnity, protected moreover against the Clodians by the band of Titus Annius Milo, the two consuls, following out a resolution of the senate, submitted a proposal to the burgesses to permit the return of the consular Cicero, and the senate called on all burgesses true to the constitution not to be absent from the vote. An unusual number of worthy men, especially from the country towns, actually assembled in Rome on the day of voting (4 Aug. 697). The journey of the consular from Brundisium to the capital gave occasion to a series of similar, not less brilliant, manifestations of public feeling. The new alliance between the senate and the burgesses faithful to the constitution was on this occasion as it were publicly proclaimed, and a sort of review of the latter was held, the singularly favourable result of which contributed not a little to revive the sunken courage of the aristocracy. The helplessness of Pompeius in presence of these daring demonstrations as well as the undignified and almost ridiculous position into which he had fallen with reference to Clodius, deprived him and the coalition of their credit; and the section of the senate which adhered to the regents, demoralised by the singular inaptitude of Pompeius and helplessly left to itself, could not prevent the republican-aristocratic party from regaining completely the ascendancy in the corporation. The game of this party really at that time—697—was still by no means desperate for a courageous and dexterous player. It had now—what it had not possessed for a century past—a firm support in the people; if it trusted the people and itself, it might attain its object in the shortest and most honourable way. Why not attack the regents openly and avowedly? Why should not a

57.

57.