

The play opens with the first appearance of young Gracchus in public life to defend Vettius, his brother's friend, who is accused by the patricians. The tragical end of his brother's career; the deep seclusion in which he has nursed his hopes of vengeance and of freedom; give an interest to his sudden start into action, and make him the chief object of the people's hopes. He succeeds; Vettius is acquitted on his plain and manly appeal; and he is marked out for popularity, ingratitude, and a grave. Cornelia immediately sees the fate of her son, but rejoices in the virtue which must undo him, and endeavours to sustain the sinking spirits of his wife Lucinia. Her firmness is soon put to a severe trial, for he is taken by Opimius as his questor, in order to remove him from Rome, and is forced to take a hurried leave of the family in the bosom of which he has passed his life. He serves his office with honour, and, before he is expected, returns to Rome to expose the machinations of his enemies, and for his sudden return is cited before the censors. While Opimius the consul, brave in his absence, is making an harangue against him, he appears, and, having by a simple statement of his services put his enemies to confusion, avows himself candidate for the office of Tribune. He is elected; and Cornelia thus expresses her mingled joy and sadness at the news—

“It would come to this!”
 I knew that it would come to this, Lucinius!
 And I could tell what further it will come to
 If I would! No matter! Two such sons as mine
 Were never made for mothers that have eyes
 Which are afraid of tears—that come to me
 As old acquaintance. I did rear my boys
 Companions for the gods; why wonder I
 If they will go to them ere other men!
 Many a time as they have stood before me,
 Such things as mothers seldom look upon,
 And I have seem'd to feed on them with my eyes,
 My thoughts have ponder'd o'er their bier, where they
 Lay stiff and cold.”

Caius enters with the flush of triumph in his cheek, which “lights him up as he did feel a god,” but which his mother shudders at while she anticipates the time when she shall look upon that cheek and think upon that flush. Lucinia, his wife, tries to go up to him and wish him joy, but is overcome by her feelings, and faints in his arms. The Senate now find it necessary to work directly for his ruin; and Opimius is employed to cajole Livius Drusus, his colleague, to supplant him in the affections of the people. The scene in which the Consul flatters this good easy man into a great opinion of himself, and an entire subservience to the wishes of the Senate, is one of the best in the play, though being very inadequately performed, it produced no effect on the stage. From this interview, the ready dupe goes to the rostrum, proposes to exceed the plans of Gracchus for the welfare of the poor to the Senate's own instance, and steals the voices of the pitiful crowd. Gracchus sees the design, and challenges him as the dupe of the senate; a most animated scene ensues, in which Gracchus calls on his rival to speak out, upbraids him for his treachery, and, on his asserting