

All through Cicero's life and writings you see one leading passion—it was the Roman constitution, the *res publica*, the republic. This he defended from lawlessness on the one hand and from personal tyranny on the other. After rising to the position of consul he soon had a chance to show his hatred of a lawless disregard for the republic. It brought him into great prominence for a while, and won for him unbounded praise, only, however, to bring upon him a bitter crop of trouble in no long time afterwards. This was the conspiracy of Catiline. The feelings of a defeated candidate are not as a rule the most amiable, and Catiline, a man of vicious and desperate character, never forgave the Roman State for leaving him, a man of patrician birth, out in the cold, and choosing in his place a self-made lawyer. Catiline was a man of no ordinary character. Had he been as good as he was brave, as virtuous as he was persevering, he would have filled a noble place in history. But a depraved life and burning hatred made him one of the worst men of antiquity. It is true we have his character as traced chiefly by his deadly enemy, Cicero himself, and therefore we must to some extent make allowances. Still, there can be no doubt that he was a troublesome and bad man. A deep plot was discovered, mainly through the extraordinary vigilance of Cicero, by which Catiline and his friends were to seize the chief power in the State. Cicero was as eloquent in the Senate and before the people regarding this matter as he had been vigilant in dragging it to light. Catiline was himself a member of the Senate, and was present when Cicero spoke of the plot he had discovered, but under the withering denunciations of the great orator his fellow-Senators gradually moved away from where he was sitting, until he was left alone. He then withdrew not

only from the Senate House, but from the city. Many of the leading conspirators were arrested. The Senate did not know what to do with them. Probably many of the members were involved in the conspiracy, and an inquiry would have been awkward. Certain it is no inquiry was made. Cicero thought the time had come for prompt and unusual action, and therefore, without a trial, without a chance to plead their cause, the leading conspirators were put to death, and Cicero was lauded to the skies; he was deemed worthy of divine honours, and was called the saviour of his country. But before long, men began to shake their heads, and the desperate deed was pointed to as a dangerous precedent. A young man of high birth, named Clodius, hated Cicero with a bitter hatred, and, some time after the great orator's consulship was over, he saw a chance to rob him of his honours and to degrade him in the eyes of the people. A more vicious, profligate youth than Clodius did not exist in Rome. He had probably favoured Catiline against Cicero. He now thrust himself into public life, threw up his high place as a patrician, renounced his order, and got himself adopted as a plebeian. This he did in order that he might become tribune of the people. It was a post which no patrician could hold, yet no more important position existed in the Roman State than a tribuneship. It was created at the demand of the people, to save themselves from the tyranny of the upper classes. In the hands of the tribune was placed the deadly power of the veto. No measure could become law, no matter by how large a majority it was passed in the Senate, if the tribune of the people said *veto*. He was like a House of Commons in himself. He could defy consuls and Senate alike. It was the one great power which the common people in the Roman republic