

AT THE CENTRE OF ROME'S LITERARY CIRCLE



Virgil is reciting a poem, perhaps one of the *Georgics*, in which he celebrates the husbandman, or a part of the *Æneid*, written to the glory of Rome, while laurel-crowned Horace awaits a chance to read an ode or two. The bald-headed man at the right is Mæcenas, a lover of the arts and letters and a generous man of wealth, whose name has ever since been used to denote a patron of poets and painters.

magistrates, elected for one year. These were the "consuls." The assembly in which they were chosen (the *comitia centuriata*) was made up of divisions apportioned in such a way that votes of the patricians counted for much more than those of the far more numerous plebeians. The Senate, the most important political body, consisted of 300 men chosen by the consuls from among the patricians. Thus shut out from office and political power, the plebeians were grievously oppressed by their wealthy fellow-citizens.

The Plebeians Leave Rome

To redress their wrongs the plebeians resorted to what might be called a "general strike." In 494 B.C. they marched out of Rome in a body and threatened to make a new city. This so terrified the patricians that they agreed to cancel all debts and release those imprisoned for debt. Furthermore, the plebeians were granted the right to be represented by new officials, called "tribunes," who should have the power to veto the act of any magistrate which bore unjustly on any citizen.

The plebeians soon won recognition for an

assembly of their own (the *concilium plebis*), and forced the appointment of a commission of ten men (*decemvirs*) to put the laws of the state in writing and have them engraved on 12 tablets of bronze (450 B.C.). They gained the right of intermarrying with the patricians, and obtained admission to various public offices.

The chief of these, which were established to relieve the consuls of the growing burdens of administration, were those of *quæstors*, or treasurers' *censors*, who kept the lists of the citizens, assessed taxes, and supervised public morals; and *prætors*, or judges.

The struggle was long drawn out, and it was not until 367 that it was decided that one of the two consuls should be a plebeian. In 350 the plebeians were admitted to the dictatorship, which was an extraordinary magistracy whereby supreme power at critical times was given to one man. (*See Cincinnatus.*)

Officers Eligible for the Senate

Admission to these offices carried with it admission to the Senate, since vacancies were filled from those who had last been elected to public office. The members were appointed

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