Plutarch

Plutarch Selection

For our Plutarch selection, we have chosen the chapter "Tully," a study of Cicero from *The Children's Plutarch: Stories of the Romans*, and included it on the following pages. The book may also be purchased on Amazon.

If your children are 6th grade or older, we recommend spending a full 12-week term studying Cicero with the edited (for length and content) study guide from Ambleside here:

https://amblesideonline.org/plutarch-cicero

You can also purchase the guide by Anne White on Amazon. (This is in place of *The Children's Plutarch*, not in addition to.)

Tully

The Children's Plutarch: Tales of the Romans, by F.J. Gould

"YOU ought to change your name."

"My name is not a bad one!"

"No, but it is an odd one. Who would like to be called 'Vetch'? Vetch is food for cattle."

"Well," replied the man whose name was Vetch, "I will make my name glorious in the history of Rome, though it has a common sound."

In Latin the word for "vetch" is Cicero (Sis-er-o). It was the Roman Cicero, 106-43 B.C., who thus resolved to give glory to his strange name.

For a short time young Cicero had served in the army of Sulla, the Red General. He was not fitted for war. His form was slender, his stomach delicate. He attended the schools where grammar was taught, and also the art of speaking clearly so as to win the attention of listeners. This beautiful art is called elocution. It is the art of the actor and the orator.

Cicero's tongue charmed the Roman people. He was chosen first to one office, then another, and another, until he became consul. At that time a nobleman named Catiline, who had a fierce and reckless temper, collected twenty thousand men, and hoped to destroy the senate and set up a new government in Rome.

The Romans held a merry festival in the month of December, just as we keep Christmas. Some of Catiline's friends had formed a plot to set fire to Rome during the holiday-making. A hundred fellows had agreed each to take his station at a certain part of the city, and apply a torch to some wooden building, and so start a hundred blazes at once. And when the streets roared with red flame, and folk ran here and there in fear, the friends of Catiline would clash their arms, and cry aloud that a new power had risen in Rome, and there would be new governors over the vast empire from Spain to Asia.

But Cicero, the consul, was aware of the horrid plan. His spies brought word of all that went on in dark meeting-places. Five leaders were arrested, and a pile of javelins, swords, and daggers was found in a house, and seized in the name of the senate.

What should be done with the five conspirators? The senators met to consider. Nearly all judged that the plotters ought to die. Young Julius Cæsar rose and said:

"No, let us be merciful. Send these men out of Rome. Keep them prisoners, but spare their lives."

In his own heart he felt that Rome really did need new governors, though he did not think Catiline was the right man. The rich patrician families were no longer able to hold the mastery over the Roman world.

But Cicero was not of Caesar's mind. He had the five rebels brought out, and taken through crowds of people in the Holy Road (Via Sacra) and the forum, and so to the gloomy prison; and there all died at the hands of the executioner. It was now evening, and, as Cicero walked homeward with his lictors, the citizens ran at his side, shouting:

"Tully! Tully! The savior of Rome! The second founder of Rome!"

His full name, you must know, was Marcus Tullius Cicero, and he is often called Tully.

As the darkness deepened lamps and torches were fixed over doorways in all the streets. Many women went to the roofs of the houses and waved lights. Thus Rome was grandly illumined by the lamps of the people, instead of by the fires of Catiline.

The feelings of the citizens of Rome and the folk of Italy were like the ebb and flow of the sea, first rolling this way and then that—first for Cicero, then against him; then for Pompey, then for Cæsar. It was a time of change—a time of war and rumors of war. Cicero was banished from Rome for more than a year, and his houses were burned to the ground. He dwelt in Greece, but kept looking back to Italy with sadness and love. With much joy the people acclaimed him on his return; and, as a mark of honor, he was made governor of the mountainous land of Cilicia, in Asia Minor. And in that business he did right well. He made peace with the foes of Rome by wise dealings and without the spilling of blood. And he behaved justly toward the people of Cilicia. Unlike some other governors, he did not wish to tax the folk for his own gain. The feasts which he gave were paid for out of his own purse. He kept up no vain show. No pompous footman stood at his gates to warn away the citizens who desired to see him; and he rose betimes in the morning, and was ready to speak with all who called at his house. Nor did he put any Cilicians to shame by causing them to be beaten with rods, or to have their clothes rent as a mark of his anger. Thus, when he left that province to go back to Italy, the people were sorry to say farewell.

You know there was a war between Cæsar and Pompey. It was a conflict of lions. But Cicero was no lion. He scarce knew which side to take.

"Shall I join Pompey?" he said to himself. "He is the better man. But Cæsar is a more clever statesman, and perhaps he will win."

So Tully chose the side of Pompey; and when Pompey was beaten, and soon afterward killed on the shore of Egypt, Cicero made his way back to Italy. Cæsar rode on horseback to meet him, and when he saw him, dismounted and ran to him, and embraced him, and talked to him as a friend.

But Cæsar was slain at the foot of Pompey's statue; and now what was to happen to Cicero?

Three men became three masters over Rome—Augustus, Antony, and Lepidus. Each had strong enemies, and they agreed to slay each other's enemies, and so rule in peace. Each wrote out a list of two hundred men whom he wished put to death. On one of their lists was the name of Tullius Cicero.

The dire news reached him that he was doomed, or "proscribed." At once he ordered his slaves to carry him in a travelling-chair, or litter, to the sea. He hastened on board. A fair wind blew. Soon he changed his mind, and ordered that the galley should make for the land. Then he walked with his little company of attendants some twelve or thirteen miles toward Rome, as if he hoped to see Augustus and touch his heart to pity. Again he changed his mind, and embarked on a ship, bidding the sailors voyage with all speed to a point of the coast where he had a beautiful villa. A flight of crows wheeled round the vessel, dismally croaking. When Tully was carried into the villa, and laid upon a couch, hoping to rest, the crows flew about the house, still cawing.

"This is a bad omen," whispered the slaves. "It bodes evil to our master."

They approached him as he lay on the couch.

"We fear this dreadful omen of the birds," they said. "We beg you to leave this ill-omened dwelling." They placed him in the litter, and carried him toward the sea.

A band of soldiers had arrived, and were on the watch to take his life. They came to the house, and heard that he had escaped by the glade which ran through a thick wood. The soldiers ran round another way, and waited at the end of the woodland path.

After a time they saw the litter advancing through the shade of the tall trees. Cicero caught sight of the men in ambush. He knew his hour was come. Silently he put his head out of the litter. The centurion, or captain of the band, beheaded him with a stroke of the sword.

Cicero wrote noble books.

One was on Friendship. A second was on Old Age. A third was on Duties.

He was a Roman, but his thoughts went over the world, and he said to himself that all the people in it were citizens of one earth. And so, in his writings, he speaks of men as "citizens of the world."