Appian Civil Wars (Bellum Civile 1.11.95-101)

[95] After accomplishing these deeds throughout Italy by war, fire, and murder, Sulla's generals visited the several cities and established garrisons at the suspected places. Pompey was despatched to Africa against Carbo and to Sicily against Carbo's friends who had taken refuge there. Sulla himself called the Roman people together in an assembly and made them a speech vaunting his own exploits and making other menacing statements in order to inspire terror. He finished by saying that he would bring about a change which would be beneficial to the public if they would obey him. He would not spare one of his enemies, but would visit them with the utmost severity. He would take vengeance by every means in his power on all prætors, quæstors, military tribunes, and everybody else who had committed any hostile act after the day when the consul Scipio violated the agreement made with him. After saying this he forthwith proscribed about forty senators and 1600 knights.¹ He seems to have been the first one to punish by proscription, to offer prizes to assassins and rewards wards to informers, and to threaten with punishment those who should conceal the proscribed. Shortly afterward he added the names of other senators to the proscription. Some of these, taken unawares, were killed where they were caught, in their houses, in the streets, or in the temples. Others were picked up, carried to Sulla, and thrown down at his feet. Others were dragged through the city and trampled on, none of the spectators daring to utter a word of remonstrance against these horrors. Banishment was inflicted upon some and confiscation upon others. Spies were searching everywhere for those who had fled from the city, and those whom they caught they killed.

[96] There was much killing, banishment, and confiscation also among those Italians who had obeyed Carbo, or Marius, or Norbanus, or their lieutenants. Severe judgments of the courts were rendered against them throughout all Italy on various charges--for exercising military command, for serving in the army, for contributing money, for

¹ Mommsen says that the list of the proscribed reached 4700 names. "This total," he adds, "is given by Valerius Maximus, ix. 2, i. According to Appian (B.C. i. 95) there were proscribed by Sulla nearly 40 senators and 1600 knights; according to Florus (ii. 9, whence Augustine, de Civ. Dei, iii. 28) 2000 senators and knights. According to Plutarch (Sull. 31) 520 names were placed on the list in the first three days; according to Orosius (v. 21) 580 names during the first days. There is no material contradiction between these various reports, for it was not senators and knights alone that were put to death, and the list remained open for months. When Appian, at another passage (i. 103), mentions as put to death or banished by Sulla, 15 consuls, go senators, 2600 knights, he there confounds, as the context shows, the victims of the civil war throughout, with the victims of Sulla. . . . On a comparison of the figures 50 senators and 1000 knights were regarded as victims of Marius, 40 senators 1600 knights as victims of Sulla; this furnishes a standard--at least not altogether arbitrary--for estimating the extent of the mischief on both sides." (Hist. of Rome, iii. 423.)
rendering other service, or even giving counsel against Sulla. Hospitality, private friendship, the borrowing or lending of money, were alike accounted crimes. Now and then one would be arrested for doing a kindness to a suspect, or merely for being his companion on a journey. These accusations abounded mostly against the rich. When charges against individuals failed Sulla took vengeance on whole communities. He punished some of them by demolishing their citadels, or destroying their walls, or by imposing heavy fines and contributions on them. Among most of them he placed colonies of his troops in order to hold Italy under garrisons, sequestrating their lands and houses and dividing them among his soldiers, whom he thus made true to him during his life and even after his death. As they could not be secure in their own holdings unless all of Sulla’s affairs were on a firm foundation, they were his stoutest champions even after he was deceased. While the affairs of Italy were in this state, Pompey sent a force and captured Carbo, who had fled with many persons of distinction from Africa to Sicily and thence to the island of Cosyra. He ordered his officers to kill all of the others without bringing them into his presence; but Carbo, who had been thrice consul, he caused to be brought before his feet in chains, and after making a public harangue at him, killed him and sent his head to Sulla.

[97] When everything had been accomplished against his enemies as he desired, and there was no longer any hostile force except that of Sertorius, who was far distant, Sulla sent Metellus into Spain against him and managed everything in the city to suit himself. There was no longer any occasion for laws, or elections, or for casting lots, because everybody was shivering with fear and in hiding, or dumb. Everything that Sulla had done as consul, or as proconsul, was confirmed and ratified, and his gilded equestrian statue was erected in front of the rostra with the inscription, “Cornelius Sulla, a fortunate commander,” for so his flatterers called him on account of his unbroken success against his enemies. And this flattering title still attaches to him. I have come across a history which relates that Sulla was styled Epaphroditus by a decree of the Senate itself. This does not seem to me to be inappropriate for he was also called Faustus (lucky), which name seems to have very nearly the same signification as Epaphroditus. There was also an oracle given to him somewhere which, in response to his question concerning the future, assured his prosperous career as follows:--

"Believe me, Roman, the Cyprian goddess cares for the race of Æneas and has given it great power. Render yearly gifts to all the immortals, and do not forget them. Convey gifts to Delphi. There is also a place where men go up under snowy Taurus, a wide-reaching city of the Carians, whose inhabitants have named it for Aphrodite. Give the goddess an axe and you shall gain sovereign power."
Whichever decree the Romans voted when they erected the statue, they seem to me to have made the inscription by way of jest or cajolery. However, Sulla sent a golden crown and an axe to Venus with this inscription:

"The dictator Sulla dedicates this to thee, Venus, because in a dream he saw thee in panoply setting the army in order of battle and fighting with the weapons of Mars."

[98] Thus Sulla became king, or tyrant, de facto, not elected, but holding power by force and violence. As, however, he needed some pretence of being elected it was managed in this way. The kings of the Romans in the olden time were chosen for their bravery, and when one of them died the senators held the royal power in succession for five days each, until the people could decide who should be the new king. This five-day ruler was called the Interrex, which means king for the time being. The retiring consuls always presided over the election of their successors in office, and if there chanced to be no consul at such a time an Interrex was appointed for the purpose of holding the consular comitia. Sulla took advantage of this custom. There were no consuls at this time, Carbo having lost his life in Sicily and Marius in Praeneste. So Sulla went out of the city for a time and ordered the Senate to choose an Interrex. They chose Valerius Flaccus, expecting that he would soon hold the consular comitia. But Sulla wrote to Flaccus to bring before the people the proposition that he (Sulla) considered it advisable, under present circumstances, that the city should be governed by a dictator according to a custom that had been abandoned 400 years.² He told them not to appoint the dictator for any definite time, but until the city and Italy and the whole government, so shaken by factions and wars, should be put upon a firm foundation. That this proposal referred to Sulla himself was not at all doubtful. Sulla made no concealment of it. At the conclusion of the letter he declared openly that, in his judgment, he could be serviceable to the city in that capacity.

[99] Such was Sulla’s letter. The Romans were unwilling, but they had no more opportunities for elections according to law, and they considered that this matter was not altogether in their own power. So, in the absence of everything else, they welcomed this pretence of an election as an image and semblance of freedom and chose Sulla their absolute master for as long a time as he pleased. There had been autocratic rule of the dictators before, but it was limited to short periods. But in Sulla’s time it first became unlimited and so an absolute tyranny; yet they added, for propriety’s sake, that they

² This is probably a corruption of the text. The last dictator was appointed in the year 202 B.C., or 120 years before Sulla assumed that office.
chose him dictator for the enactment of such laws as he might deem best and for the regulation of the commonwealth. Thus the Romans, after having government by kings for sixty Olympiads, and a democracy, under consuls chosen yearly, for 100 Olympiads, resorted to kingly government again. This was in the 175th Olympiad according to the Greek calendar, but there were no Olympic games then except races in the stadium, since Sulla had carried away the athletes and all the sights and shows to Rome to celebrate his victories in the Mithridatic and Italian wars, under the pretext that the masses needed a breathing-spell and recreation after their toils.

[100] Nevertheless, as the form of the republic remained he allowed them to appoint consuls. Marcus Tullius and Cornelius Dolabella were chosen. But Sulla, like a reigning sovereign, was dictator over the consuls. Twenty-four axes were borne in front of him, as was customary with dictators, the same number that were borne before the ancient kings, and he had a large body-guard also. He repealed laws and he enacted others. He forbade anybody to hold the office of prætor until after he had held that of quaestor, or to be consul before he had been prætor, and he prohibited any man from holding the same office a second time till after the lapse of ten years. He reduced the tribunician power to such an extent that it seemed to be destroyed. He curtailed it by a law which provided that one holding the office of tribune should never afterward hold any other office; for which reason all men of reputation or family, who formerly contended for this office, shunned it thereafter. I am not able to say positively whether Sulla transferred this office from the people to the Senate, where it is now lodged, or not. To the Senate itself, which had been much thinned by the seditions and wars, he added about 300 members from the best of the knights, taking the vote of the tribes for each one. To the plebeians he added more than 10,000 slaves of proscribed persons, choosing the youngest and strongest, to whom he gave freedom and Roman citizenship, and he called them Corneli after himself. In this way he made sure of having 10,000 men among the plebeians always ready to obey his commands. In order to provide the same kind of safeguard throughout Italy he distributed to the twenty-three legions that had served under him a great deal of land among the communities, as I have already related, some of which was public property and some taken from the communities by way of fine.

[101] So terrible was he and so uncontrollable in anger that he slew in the middle of the forum Q. Lucretius Ofella, the one who had besieged and captured Prænestë and the consul Marius, and had won the final victory for him. He did this because, in spite of the new law, Lucretius persisted, though Sulla opposed and forbade, in being a candidate for the consulship while he was still in the equestrian order and before he had been quaëstor and prætor, presuming on the greatness of his services, according to the former custom, and captivating the populace. Then Sulla assembled the people and
said to them, "Know, citizens, and learn from me, that I caused the death of Lucretius because he disobeyed me." And then he told the following story: "A husbandman was bitten by fleas while ploughing. He stopped his ploughing twice in order to clear them out of his shirt. When they bit him again he burned his shirt, so that he might not be so often interrupted in his work. And I tell you, who have felt my hand twice, to take warning lest the third time fire be brought in requisition." With these words he terrified them and thereafter ruled as he pleased. He had a triumph on account of the Mithridatic war, during which some of the scoffers called his government "the royalty disavowed" because only the name of king was concealed. Others took the contrary view, judging from his acts, and called it "the tyranny confessed."