

I feel, gentlemen, that I have too long been engaged [105] with charges of one type, and perceive that I must beware of surfeiting your ears and minds therewith. I shall therefore pass over many of them; but there is more that I do mean to tell you, to which I implore your renewed attention, gentlemen, in the name of the ever-living gods, the gods of whose solemn claims upon us I have so long been speaking, while I put before you the tale of one deed wrought by Verres that stirred the whole province profoundly. And if I shall seem to begin this tale too far back, and to go too deeply into the religious history involved, forgive me: the importance of the affair forbids my handling with superficial haste so horrible a charge.

XLVIII. It is an ancient belief, gentlemen, established [106] by the oldest Greek books and inscriptions, that the island of Sicily as a whole is sacred to Ceres and Libera. This belief is held by other peoples as well; and the Sicilians themselves are so sure of it that it seems implanted in their minds by nature herself. They hold that these goddesses were born in Sicily: that corn was first brought to light in Sicilian soil; and that Libera, whom they also call Proserpina, was carried off from a wood near Henna, a place which, lying in the midst of the island, is known as the navel of Sicily. Ceres, the tale goes, in her eager search for traces of her lost daughter, lighted her torches at the fires that burst forth from the peak of Aetna, and roamed over all the earth carrying these in her hands. Henna, the traditional scene of the event I [107] speak of, is built on a lofty eminence, the top of which is a table-land, watered by perennial springs, and bounded in every direction by precipitous cliffs, round which are numerous lakes and copses, and flowers in profusion at all seasons: one feels that the landscape of itself confirms the story, familiar to us from childhood, of how the maiden was carried off. There is indeed in the neighbourhood, facing north, a bottomless cave, from which, we are told, father Dis suddenly issued in his chariot; he seized the maiden, carried her away thence with him, and suddenly, not far from Syracuse, plunged underground; at this latter place, all in a moment, a lake appeared, near which the Syracusans to this very day hold an annual festival that is attended by crowds of men and women.

XLIX. The antiquity of this belief that finds in these spots the footprints, one might almost say the cradle, of those divine persons, has engendered throughout Sicily, in individuals and communities, a devotion to Ceres of Henna that is quite astonishing. And indeed, numerous portents give continual testimony to her power and presence; numerous persons in distressing circumstances have continually been vouchsafed her prompt succour; so that men think of her not only as caring for the island but as dwelling in it and guarding it in person. Nor is it the Sicilians only, but other races and peoples [108] too, that have this deep reverence for Ceres of Henna. And if men are eager to take part in the sacred rites^a of the Athenians, whom Ceres is said to have visited in the course of her wanderings, bringing them the gift of corn, think how great her sanctity must be in the eyes of the people among whom she was born and devised that gift originally. We can thus understand what befell in our fathers' days. In the consulship^a of Publius Mucius and Lucius Calpurnius a terrible political crisis had arisen: Tiberius Gracchus had been slain, and prodigies indicated that fearful dangers were threatening us. The Sibylline Books were consulted; and from them it was discovered that "the most ancient Ceres" must be placated. Thereupon, although there was a splendid and beautiful temple of Ceres here in our own city, yet priests of the Roman state, members of the

distinguished body of Decemvirs,^b left Rome to go all the way to Henna: so ancient, so awe-inspiring was that cult, that they were felt, in going thither, to be making their way not to a temple of Ceres but to the presence of Ceres herself.

I will weary you no further with this description; [109] for some time I have had an uneasy feeling that you may think it unsuited to a court of law and to the style in which advocates are accustomed to plead. My charge is this: That this very Ceres, the most ancient and sacred of all, the fountain-head of all the cults of the goddess among all nations and peoples, was stolen by Gaius Verres from her own temple and her own home. Those of you who have visited Henna have seen the marble image of Ceres, and that of Libera in the other shrine. These are works of great size and notable beauty, but not so very old. But there was a bronze one, of moderate size and unique workmanship, in which the torches were shown; this was very old—far the oldest, indeed, of all the treasures in this sanctuary. This Verres stole—and was not satisfied even with taking this. In a wide open space [110] before the shrine of Ceres there are two statues, one of Ceres and the other of Triptolemus,^a both of great size, and very beautiful. Their beauty endangered them, but their size saved them; their demolition and removal seemed likely to be extremely difficult. But in the right hand of the Ceres there stood a large and exquisite statuette of Victory; and this Verres caused to be wrenched away from the statue of Ceres and carried off.

L. And now I ask, what feelings must be aroused in this man by the recollection of his impious deeds, when I myself, who do but tell of them, am not only perturbed in spirit, but feel my very body shake and tremble? I think of that sanctuary, that sacred spot, that solemn worship: before my eyes rises the picture of the day when I visited Henna, my reception by the priests of Ceres wearing their fillets and carrying their sacred boughs,^b my address to the assembled townsfolk, in which my words were heard amid such groans and weeping as showed the whole town to be a prey to the bitterest distress. It was [111] not the cruel exaction of tithes, not the plundering of their goods, not the injustice of the courts, not this man's acts of savage lust, not his violence and his insolent outrages, of which these crushed and tormented folk now complained: it was the sin against the holiness of Ceres, against her ancient worship and venerated sanctuary, that they would see atoned for by the punishment of this utterly unscrupulous and wicked man: all else, they said, they were ready to endure without resentment. So extreme was their distress that one might fancy that the king of the shades had come to Henna once more, and not abducted Proserpina but carried Ceres herself away.

For indeed the town of Henna is thought of as no mere town, but as Ceres' sanctuary: its people believe that Ceres dwells in their midst, and I therefore think of them not as the citizens of a city, but all of them as the priests, all of them as the servants and ministers of Ceres.—And it was from Henna that [112] you dared to remove the image of Ceres? at Henna that you went about to pluck Victory from Ceres' hand, robbing one goddess of another goddess? And this although men whose every tendency was to impiety rather than religion shrank from desecrating, nay, from touching, these holy things. In the consulship of Publius Popilius and Publius Rupilius,^a the place was in the hands of slaves—deserters, savages, public enemies. Yet they were less the slaves of their masters than you the slave of your lusts; less deserters from their masters than you from what is just and legal; less savages by birth and speech than you by disposition and character; less the enemies of

mankind than you of the gods in heaven.—What plea for mercy, then, is left for a man, more degraded than a slave, more reckless than a deserter, more impious than a savage, more cruel than an enemy in war?

LI. Gentlemen, you have heard the statement of [113] Theodorus, Numenius and Nicasio, the representatives of Henna, about the instructions officially given them by their fellow-citizens. They were to approach Verres and request him to restore the images of Ceres and Victory. If successful, then they were to abide by the traditional practice of the people of Henna: devastator of Sicily though Verres was, yet none the less, in accordance with the custom inherited from their forefathers, they were to give no official evidence against him, But if he would not restore the images, then they were to appear at his trial, and to inform the Court of the injuries he had done them, putting his sacrilege in the forefront of their tale of wrong. And for God's sake I beseech you not to treat this tale of wrong with contempt, not to account it a petty and negligible thing. The rights of our wronged allies, the authority of our laws, the reputation and honour of our courts, are here at stake; and these are all very great matters. But greater than all these is this, that the whole province is in the grasp of such religious terror, the minds of the whole population of Sicily are the prey of so fearful a panic, in consequence of this deed of Verres, that every public or private misfortune that befalls them is believed to come about as the result of his crime against heaven. You have listened to the official witnesses from Centuripa, [114] Agyrium, Catina, Aetna, Herbita, and not a few other places, telling how the countryside is a lonely wilderness, how the farmers have fled from their farms, how the whole land has become a neglected and abandoned desert. Though this is the result of many and various wrongs done them by Verres, yet in the belief of these Sicilians the sacrilege committed against Ceres is the chief reason why all the crops and fruits of Ceres in that part of the world have come to nothing. Gentlemen, do you give back to our allies their religious peace of mind—and do you preserve your own; for indeed you have not here a religious faith that is foreign and alien to yourselves; though if it were so, and if you were unwilling to make yourselves responsible for it, you ought none the less to be ready to uphold it by punishing the man who has outraged it. But seeing that in fact it is a faith shared [115] by all peoples alike, and its rites, performed by our forefathers, were introduced and adopted by them from abroad—rites which they decreed should be called “Greek,” as indeed they were: how then can we, if we would, treat them with careless indifference?