

STORIES FROM THUCYDIDES

H. L. HAVELL*

FORMERLY SCHOLAR OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OXFORD

„O my poor Kingdom, sick with civil blows!
SHAKESPEARE, „Henry IV.“

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

CORINTH AND CORCYRA
THE SURPRISE OF PLATAEA
THE PLAGUE AT ATHENS
INVESTMENT OF PLATAEA
NAVAL VICTORIES OF PHORMIO
THE REVOLT OF LESBOS
ESCAPE OF TWO HUNDRED PLATAEANS. FALL OF PLATAEA
CAPTURE OF A HUNDRED AND TWENTY SPARTANS AT SPHACTERIA
CAMPAIGNS OF BRASIDAS IN THRACE
THE HOLLOW PEACE
THE ATHENIANS IN SICILY
EPILOGUE

PROLOGUE

In a former volume we have traced the course of events which ended in the complete overthrow of Xerxes and his great army. Our present task is to describe the chief incidents in the cruel and devastating war, commonly known as the Peloponnesian War, which lasted for twenty-seven years, and finally broke up the Athenian Empire. The cause of that war was the envy and hatred excited in the other states of Greece by the

*PDF created by pdfbooks.co.za

power and greatness of Athens; and in order to make our story intelligible we must indicate briefly the steps by which she rose to that dangerous eminence, and drew upon herself the armed hostility of half the Greek world.

We take up our narrative at the point of time when the Athenians returned to their ruined homes after the defeat of the Persians at Plataea. Of their ancient city nothing remained but a few houses which had served as lodgings for the Persian grandees, and some scattered fragments of the surrounding wall. Their first task was to restore the outer line of defence, and by the advice of Themistocles the new wall took in a much wider circuit than the old rampart which had been destroyed by the Persians. The whole population toiled night and day to raise the bulwark which was to guard their temples and their homes, using as materials the walls of the houses which had been sacked and burnt by the Persians, with whatever remained of public buildings, sacred or profane, and sparing not even the monumental pillars of graves in the urgency of their need.

But jealous eyes were watching them, and busy tongues were wagging against that gallant race of Attica which had been foremost in the common cause against the barbarian invader. "These Athenians are dangerous neighbours," was the cry. "Let us stop them from building their wall, or Athens will become a standing menace to ourselves." Before long these murmurs reached the ears of the Spartans, and they sent envoys to dissuade the Athenians from fortifying their city. Their real purpose was disguised under the mask of anxiety for the general safety of Greece. "It is not expedient," they urged, "that the Persians, when next they come against us, should find fenced cities which they may make their strongholds, as they have lately done in Athens and in Thebes. Cease, therefore, from building this wall, and help us to destroy all such defences, outside of Peloponnesus. If we are attacked again, we will unite our forces within the isthmus, and meet the invader from there."

But Themistocles was not the man to be hoodwinked by the simple cunning of the Spartans. By his advice the Athenians dismissed the envoys, promising to send an embassy to discuss the matter at Sparta. As soon as they were gone, Themistocles caused himself to be appointed as head of the embassy, and set out at once for Sparta, instructing the Athenians to keep his colleagues back until the wall had been raised to a sufficient height for purposes of defence. Arrived at Sparta, he kept himself close in his lodging, and declined all conference with the authorities, alleging that he could do nothing without his colleagues.

Meanwhile the Athenians were making incredible efforts to carry on the work which was essential to their liberty and prosperity. Men, women, and children toiled without intermission, and the wall was rapidly approaching a defensible height. The clamour of their enemies grew

louder and louder, and angry messages reached the Spartans everyday, reproaching them with their supineness and procrastination. Being asked the meaning of these reports, Themistocles professed total ignorance, and bade the Spartans send men to Athens to see for themselves. The Spartans did so, and when the men arrived at Athens the Athenians, who had been privately warned by Themistocles, kept them in custody, as hostages for their own representatives at Sparta. Themistocles had meanwhile been joined by his partners in the embassy, and learning from them that the wall was now of sufficient height, he spoke out plainly, and let the Spartans understand what his true purpose was. "Athens," he said, "is once more a fortified city, and we are able to discuss questions of public or private interest on a footing of equality. When we forsook all, and took to our ships to fight for the common weal, it was done without prompting of yours; and that peril being past, we shall take such measures as concern our safety, without leave asked of you. And in serving ourselves, we are serving you also; for if Athens is not free, how can she give an unbiased vote in questions which concern the general welfare of Greece?"

It was impossible for the Spartans to express open resentment at a plea so moderate and so reasonable. But they were secretly annoyed to find that their malice had been detected and exposed; and by this incident was sown the first seed of ill-will which was afterwards to bear such bitter fruit for Athens and for Greece. For the present, however, the affair was ended, and the first step secured for the Athenians in their career of glory and power.

Themistocles was the first who clearly saw that the future of Athens lay on the sea. But if Athens was to hold and extend her position as the first naval power in Greece, it was above all things necessary that she should have a strong and fortified station for her fleets, her arsenals, and her dockyards. Nature had provided her with what she needed, in the peninsula of Peiraeus, which juts out into the Saronic Gulf, about five miles south-west of the inland town. As soon as the city-wall was completed, fortifications of immense strength were carried round the whole of Peiraeus; and within this vast rampart rose a second city, equal in size to the old one, with streets laid out in straight lines, and filled with the stir and bustle of a maritime population. Three land-locked harbours gave ample room for the fleets of Athens to lie in shelter and safety; and this great sea-port town was afterwards united to the original city by two long walls, which met the sea, one at the north-western corner of Peiraeus, and the other at the south-eastern point of the Bay of Phalerum. Between these, at a later period, a third wall was built, running parallel to the northern wall at a distance of about two hundred feet, and known as the Southern or Middle Wall.

Many years elapsed before these important works were completed; and in the meantime great events had been happening in other parts of the

Greek world, tending more and more to realise the dream of Themistocles, and make his beloved city the undisputed mistress of the sea. After the defeat of the Persian armies and fleets at Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale, much hard work remained to be done, in reducing the outlying cities on the coasts of Thrace and in the eastern corners of the Aegaeon, which held out for the Great King. The Spartans were still nominal leaders of the allied Greek navy; but after a year of service they resigned this position, which they owed to their acknowledged supremacy in land warfare, to the Athenians. They were induced to take this step, partly by their own aversion to foreign enterprises, and partly by the misconduct of their general Pausanias, who had disgusted the allies serving under him in the fleet by his intolerable arrogance and tyranny. The field was thus left open to the Athenians, who willingly assumed the command offered them by the maritime cities of Greece, with the object of prosecuting the war vigorously against Persia. Each city was assessed to furnish a fixed contribution of ships or money, and the sacred island of Delos was appointed as the common treasury and meeting-place of the league. Thus was formed the famous Delian Confederacy, with the avowed purpose of making reprisals on the Great King's territory for the havoc which he had wrought in Greece. For a time all went smoothly, and the various members of the league fought under Athens as her independent allies. But by degrees the Greeks from the islands and coast-lands of Asia began to weary of their arduous duties, and murmured against the Athenians, who proved hard task-masters, and compelled them by force to perform their part in the bargain. One by one the cities revolted from the leadership of Athens, were attacked by her navies, and reduced to the position of subjects and tributaries. Others voluntarily withdrew from all active co-operation in the war, agreeing to pay a fixed annual sum as a substitute for service in the fleet. And before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War the two powerful islands of Lesbos and Chios were the only members of the original league who still retained their independence.

Such were the circumstances which led to the foundation of the Athenian Empire, which grew up, by the force of necessity, out of the decay of a confederacy born of a common need, and organised for the special benefit of the Asiatic Greeks. For the names of the Greek cities on the coasts of Asia Minor still figured in the Persian tribute-lists; and the moment that the grasp of Athens relaxed on the confines of the King's dominions, after the ruinous defeat in Sicily, Persian tax-gatherers came knocking at the gates of Ephesus and Miletus, demanding the arrears of tribute. So urgent was the need supplied by the energy of Athens, and so blind were these Greeks of Asia Minor to their own interests.

The visible sign of this momentous change, by which the Delian Confederacy became merged in the Athenian Empire, was the removal of the treasury from Delos to Athens. The Athenians now undertook the whole administration of the common fund, using the surplus for the

adornment of Athens by magnificent public buildings. This appropriation seems reasonable enough, when we consider that the whole burden of defending the eastern Greeks against Persia, and keeping the barbarian out of Greek waters, now lay upon Athens. This great public duty, which had been thrown upon her by the indifference of Sparta, and the unmanly sloth of her own allies, was faithfully performed; and she might well ask why she should be called upon to lavish the blood of her own citizens for nothing. That Athens should be great, splendid, and powerful, was not only a reward due to her public spirit and devotion to the common cause, but also a guarantee for the general dignity and liberty of Greeks. And we, who have still before us the remnants of her temples and statues, and learn from them what man can accomplish under the inspiration of great ideals, need not scan too closely her claim to appropriate the funds which she employed for so noble a purpose. For this was the great age of Grecian art, the age of Phidias, Polycletus, Myron, and Polygnotus. The greatest of these was Phidias; and in the Parthenon, or Temple of the Virgin Goddess, [Footnote: Athene, the patron goddess of Athens.] built under his direction on the Acropolis at Athens, he has left the most enduring monument of his fame. He also designed the Propylaea, a magnificent columned vestibule, fronting the broad flight of steps which led up to the western entrance of the Acropolis. But the most renowned of his works was the gigantic statue of the Olympian Zeus, wrought in gold and ivory, which was the chief glory of the temple at Olympia. Of this sublime creation, the highest expression of divinity achieved by the ancients, only the fame survives. These triumphs of art were not brought to completion until nearly the close of the period of forty-eight years which separates the Persian from the Peloponnesian War; and it is now necessary to glance backward, and touch briefly on the principal events which occurred after the formation of the Delian Confederacy. The war was carried on with energy against Persia, and hostilities continued at intervals for thirty years after the battle of Plataea. [Footnote: B.C. 479-449.]

The chief leader in these enterprises was the heroic Cimon, leader of the conservative party at Athens, and the great rival of Pericles; and his most brilliant exploit was a crushing defeat inflicted on the Persian army and fleet at the mouth of the river Eurymedon in Pamphylia. But the victorious career of the Athenians received a severe check twelve years later in Egypt, where a large force of ships and men was totally destroyed by the Persian general Megabyzus. The war dragged on for five years longer, and peace was then concluded on terms highly advantageous to the Greeks. Shortly before this, Cimon, who had been the chief promoter of the war, died at Cyprus.

The same years which brought to a successful issue the long struggle with Persia witnessed a renewal of those internal conflicts by which the energies of Greece were finally exhausted, leaving her an easy prey to the arms of Macedon. The guilt of renewing these suicidal quarrels lies with the Spartans, who had long been nursing their

grudge against Athens, and were waiting for the opportunity to inflict on her a fatal blow. Fifteen years [Footnote: B.C. 464.] after the battle of Plataea they seized the occasion when the Athenians were engaged with a large part of their forces in carrying on operations against the revolted island of Thasos to prepare an invasion of Attica. But at the very moment when they were meditating this act of perfidy a double disaster fell upon them at home, demanding all their exertions to save them from ruin. Sparta was levelled to the ground by a terrible earthquake, in which twenty thousand of her citizens perished; and in the midst of the panic caused by this awful calamity the Helots rose in arms against their oppressors, and forming an alliance with the Messenian subjects of Sparta, entrenched themselves in a strong position on Mount Ithome. Here they maintained themselves for two years, defying all the efforts of the Spartans to drive them from their stronghold. In spite of their recent treachery, the Spartans were not ashamed to apply to Athens for help: and chiefly through the influence of Cimon, whose laurels from the Eurymedon were still fresh, four thousand Athenian hoplites [Footnote: Heavy-armed foot-soldiers.] were sent under his command to aid in dislodging the Helots. The Athenians were famous for their skill in attacking fortified places; but on this occasion they were unsuccessful, and the Spartans, whose evil conscience made them prone to suspicion, at once began to doubt the honesty of their intentions, and dismissed them with scant ceremony. This unfriendly act helped to embitter the relations between the two leading cities of Greece; and two years later, when the Messenians were expelled from Ithome, and driven into exile, the Athenians settled them with their families at Naupactus, an important strategic position on the north of the Corinthian Gulf, which has recently fallen into the hands of Athens.

Deeply offended by the affront received at Ithome, the Athenians now formed an alliance with Argos, the ancient rival and bitter enemy of Sparta. Thessaly, connected with Athens by old ties of friendship, joined the league; and Megara, now suffering from the oppressions of Corinth, made a fourth.

Within sight of the shores of Attica lies the island of Aegina, famous in legend as the home of Aeacus, grandfather of Achilles, and distinguished for its school of sculpture, and for its mighty breed of athletes, whose feats are celebrated in the laureate strains of Pindar. The Aeginetans had obtained the first prize for valour displayed in the battle of Salamis, and for many years they had pressed the Athenians hard in the race for maritime supremacy. They were now attacked by an overwhelming Athenian force, and after a stubborn resistance were totally defeated, and compelled to enroll themselves among the subjects of Athens. A still harder fate was reserved for the hapless Dorian islanders in the next generation.

In the following nine years [Footnote: B.C. 456-447.] the power of Athens reached its greatest height, and for a moment it seemed as if

she were destined to extend her empire over the whole mainland of Greece. By the victory of Oenophyta, gained over the Boeotians just before the reduction of Aegina, Athens became mistress of all the central provinces of the Greek peninsula, from the pass of Thermopylae to the gulf of Corinth. The alliance of Megara, lately united by long walls to its harbour of Nisaea, secured her from invasion on the side of Peloponnesus. The great island of Euboea, with its rich pastures and fruitful corn lands, had, since the Persian War, become an Athenian estate, and was jealously guarded as one of her most valuable possessions; and on the sea, from the eastern corner of the Euxine to the strait of Gibraltar, there was none to dispute her sway.

But this rapid ascent was followed by no less speedy a fall, and one act of indiscretion stripped the Athenians of all the advantages which they had acquired on the mainland of Greece. In every city of Greece there were always two parties, the wealthy and noble, called oligarchs, and the demos, or commons; and according as Spartan or Athenian influence was in the ascendant the balance of power in each city wavered between the nobles and the people, the Athenians favouring the Many, the Spartans the Few. Accordingly there was always a party living in exile, and waiting for a turn of affairs which might enable them to return to their city, and wrest the power from that faction which had been the last to triumph. In the cities of Boeotia the leaders of the oligarchs had been driven into banishment after the battle of Oenophyta, and democracies were established under the control of Athens. After nine years of banishment these exiles returned, and the result was an oligarchical reaction in the chief cities of Boeotia. A hastily equipped and ill-organised force was sent out from Athens to put down the authors of the revolution, and in the battle which followed, at Coronea, [Footnote: B.C. 447.] the Athenians sustained a severe defeat, and a large number of their citizens were taken prisoners by the Boeotians. To recover these prisoners the Athenians consented to evacuate Boeotia, and by this surrender they lost their hold on central Greece, as far as Thermopylae.

This heavy blow was followed two years later by the revolt of Megara and Euboea; and in the midst of the alarm thus occasioned, the Athenians heard that a powerful Spartan army was threatening their borders. It was a terrible moment for Athens; but she was saved by the prudence and energy of Pericles, whose influence in her councils was now supreme. By some means or other—as the Spartans asserted, by a heavy bribe—he induced the Spartan king Pleistoanax to draw off his forces; and then crossing over into Euboea, he quickly reduced the whole island to submission, and took severe measures to prevent any outbreak in the future.

The exertions of the Athenians during the last thirty years had been prodigious, and their efforts to found an empire in continental Greece had ended in total failure. Discouraged by their reverses, they concluded a thirty years' truce with the Spartans and their allies,

resigning the last remnant of their recent conquests, and leaving Megara in her old position as a member of the Peloponnesian league under Sparta. The loss of Megara was severely felt, and her conduct in the late troubles was neither forgotten nor forgiven. The Megarians had by their own free choice been admitted into the Athenian alliance, and in an hour of great peril to Athens, without shadow of pretext they had risen in arms against her. It was not long before they had to pay a heavy penalty for their treachery and inconstancy.

The last event which we have to record, before entering into the main current of our narrative, is the secession of Samos, the most important member of the maritime allies of Athens. This wealthy and powerful island had hitherto, with Chios and Lesbos, enjoyed the distinction of serving under Athens as an independent ally. The Athenians, with a view to their own interests, had recently set up a democracy in Samos, which had hitherto been governed by an oligarchy. Incensed by this interference, the Samian nobles, who had been driven into exile, hired a mercenary force, and making a sudden attack from the mainland, overthrew the democracy and raised the standard of revolt. The crisis called for prompt and vigorous action on the part of Athens; for if Samos had been successful in defying her authority, the other members of the league would speedily have followed the example, and the whole fabric of her empire might have been shattered to pieces. Pericles was again equal to the emergency, and by employing the whole naval power of Athens he was able, after a siege of nine months, to reduce the refractory islanders to submission. The Samians were compelled to surrender their fleet, to pull down their walls, to pay a heavy war indemnity, and to give hostages as a security for their good conduct in the future. And henceforward they became subjects and tributaries of Athens.

We have now completed our review of the chief events which occurred between the Persian and Peloponnesian wars. It was a period of rapid development for Athens, of ceaseless activity at home and abroad, of immense progress in all the arts of war and peace. The imperial city had now risen to her full stature, and stood forth, supreme in intellect and in action, the wonder and envy of mankind. Her mighty walls bade defiance to her enemies at home, and she held in her hand the islands and coast-districts of the Aegaeon, where the last murmur of resistance had been quelled. Her recent reverses on the mainland of Greece had left the real sources of her power untouched; and taught her, if she would but take the lesson to heart, the proper limits of her empire. And she had risen to this height, not by the prevailing force of any single mind, but by the united efforts of all her citizens, working together for a whole generation, shunning no sacrifice, and shrinking from no exertion, in their devotion to the common mother of them all. Every Athenian, from the wealthiest noble to the poorest rower in the fleet, felt that he had a stake in the country, which to a Greek meant the city, where he was born. He gave his vote in the Parliament [Footnote: Called the Ecclesia.] of Athens,

and served on the juries chosen by lot from the whole body of the citizens, before whose judgment-seat, unassailable by bribery or intimidation, the mightiest offenders trembled. He was a statesman, a judge, a lawgiver, and a warrior, and he might even hope to climb to the highest place in the State, and rule, like Pericles, as a prince of democracy. Around him rose the temples and statues of the gods, fresh from the chisel of the artist, the visible symbols of Athenian greatness, and of the grand ideals which he served. The masterpieces of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides opened to him the boundless realms of the imagination, taught him grave lessons of moral wisdom, and connected the strenuous present with the heroic past; and the Old Comedy, the most complete embodiment of the very genius of democracy, afforded a feast of wit and fancy for his lighter hours. If he had a taste for higher speculation, he might hear Anaxagoras discoursing on the mysteries of the spiritual world, or Zeno applying his sharp tests for the conviction of human error. And when the assembly was summoned to discuss matters of high imperial policy, he felt all the greatness and majesty of the Athenian state, as he hung entranced on the lips of Pericles.

Such was Athens in her prime, and such were the men who raised her to the lofty eminence which she held among the cities of Greece. But the years which had lifted her to that unparalleled height had raised up a host of enemies against her, and it behoved her to temper ambition with prudence if she would maintain the proud position which she held. The scattered units which composed the Athenian empire were held together by no tie of loyalty or affection to their common mistress, but solely by the dread of her overwhelming naval power. Even in the noblest spirits of ancient Greece, the feeling of patriotism, as we understand it, was feeble and uncertain; when we speak of our _country_, the Greek spoke of his _city_, and his love, his hopes, his highest aspirations, were bounded by the narrow circuit of the walls which contained the tombs of his ancestors and the temples of his gods. This feeling, the most deeply-rooted instinct of Greek political life, had been grievously offended by Athens, when she compelled the islanders of the Aegaeon, and the Greek cities of Asia, to serve in her navies, and pay tribute to her exchequer.

Turning now to the mainland of Greece we find, in most of the leading states, a sentiment of mingled fear and hatred against Athens, which had been steadily increasing in volume in the course of the last thirty years. The haughty Thebans had not forgotten their defeat at Oenophyta, and their nine years of servitude to Athens. Aegina was groaning under her yoke, and threatened with total political extinction. Megara complained that her commerce was ruined by a decree which excluded her merchants from the ports in the Athenian Empire. In the heart of Peloponnesus the Spartans were hatching mischief against their hated rival, who had robbed them of half their dignity as the acknowledged leaders of the Greeks. Corinth, whose commerce was chiefly in the western sea, outside the sphere of Athenian influence,

was disposed to be friendly, and had done the Athenians good service during the revolt of Samos.[Footnote: See below, p. 31.] But five years later [Footnote: B.C. 435.] an event occurred which changed this feeling into bitter hatred against Athens, and drove the Corinthians into the ranks of her most inveterate foes. And it is at this point that we take up the main thread of our story.

STORIES FROM THUCYDIDES

CORINTH AND CORCYRA

I

It was in a remote corner of the Greek world that the trouble began which was destined to breed such mischief and havoc for the whole of Greece. At the beginning of the seventh century before our era the island of Corcyra had been colonised by the Corinthians. The colony grew and flourished, and in its turn founded other settlements on the opposite coasts of Epirus and Illyria. Among these was Epidamnus, called by the Romans Dyrrachium, and in Roman times the ordinary landing-place for travellers from Italy to Greece. After many years of prosperity the resources of Epidamnus were much crippled by internal faction, and by wars with the neighbouring barbarians. Four years before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, the nobles of Epidamnus, who had been expelled in the last revolution, made an alliance with the native tribes of Illyria, and by constant plundering raids reduced the Epidamnians to such straits that they were compelled to apply to Corcyra for help. But the Corcyraeans, whose sympathies were on the side of the banished nobles, refused to interfere.

Epidamnus, as we have seen, was a colony founded by a colony, and according to Greek custom the original settlers had been led by a citizen of Corinth, the mother-city of Corcyra. Seeing, therefore, that they had nothing to hope from the Corcyraeans, the distressed people of Epidamnus began to turn their thoughts towards their ancient metropolis, and considered whether they should appeal to her to save them from ruin. But as this was a step of doubtful propriety, they first consulted the oracle of Delphi, the great authority on questions of international law. Receiving a favourable answer, they sent envoys to Corinth, and offered to surrender their city to the Corinthians, in return for their countenance and protection.

The Corcyraeans had long been in evil odour at Corinth, for they had grown insolent in prosperity, and neglected all the observances which were due from a colony to the mother-city. They were, in fact, superior to the Corinthians in wealth and power, and their fleet, numbering a hundred and twenty triremes, was second only to that of Athens. Corcyra was famous in legend as the seat of the Phaeacians, a heroic sailor race, whose deeds are sung by Homer in the *Odyssey*; and the Corcyraeans regarded themselves as the lawful

inheritors of their fame. For all these reasons they despised the Corinthians, and made no secret of their contempt. Remembering the many occasions on which they had been publicly insulted by Corcyra, the Corinthians lent a favourable ear to the petition of Epidamnus, and determined to appropriate the colony to themselves. Accordingly they invited all who chose to go and settle at Epidamnus, and sent the new colonists under a military escort, with instructions to proceed by land to Apollonia, for fear lest they should be obstructed by the Corcyraean fleet, if they went by sea.

Great was the indignation at Corcyra when the news arrived that her colony had been surrendered to Corinth, and a force of forty ships was sent off in haste, bearing a peremptory demand to the Epidamnians that they should receive back their exiles and send away the new colonists. As the citizens refused to obey their mandate, they prepared to lay siege to the town, which is situated on an isthmus.

When the Corinthians heard of the danger of Epidamnus, they began to make preparations on a much larger scale, collecting a host of new colonists, and a fleet of seventy-five ships to convoy them on their passage to Epidamnus. Apprised of these proceedings, the Corcyraeans sent envoys to Corinth, with a civil remonstrance against the arbitrary interference with their own colony. They were willing, they said, to submit the matter to arbitration, and in the meantime to suspend all hostilities against the revolted city. But the Corinthians paid no attention to their overtures, and all being now ready, the great multitude, drawn from all parts of Greece, set sail for Epidamnus. When they reached Actium, at the mouth of the Ambracian Gulf, they were met by a herald, sent out from Corcyra in a skiff, to forbid their approach. This was a mere manoeuvre, to throw the guilt of commencing hostilities on the Corinthians; and meanwhile the Corcyraeans manned their ships, to the number of eighty, and put out to meet the enemy's fleet. In the sea-fight which followed the Corcyraeans gained a complete victory, and on the same day Epidamnus was compelled to capitulate to the besieging force.

By this victory the Corcyraeans gained complete command of the western or Ionian sea, and for the rest of the summer they sailed from place to place, plundering the allies of Corinth. The Corinthians, however, were not at all disposed to acquiesce in their defeat, and during the whole of the following year they were busy organising a fresh expedition on a vast scale, being resolved at all costs to put down the insolence of Corcyra. These preparations caused no small anxiety to the Corcyraeans. Hitherto they had stood apart, and refused to take any share in the complicated game of Greek politics. The course of affairs during the last forty years had tended more and more to divide the Greek world into two opposite camps, arrayed under the banners of Athens and Sparta. As Dorians, the Corcyraeans would naturally have enrolled themselves among the allies of Sparta,—as islanders and seamen, they might have leaned to the side of Athens: but confident in

their remote situation, and in the power of their fleet, they had chosen to remain neutral. But finding themselves threatened with destruction, they now resolved to abandon their policy of selfish isolation, and sue for admission into the Athenian alliance. Ambassadors were sent to Athens to urge their plea; and the Corinthians, hearing of their intention, sent representatives of their own to oppose the application.

The Athenians were fully alive to the gravity of the question which they were called upon to decide, and after listening to the arguments of the Corcyraean and Corinthian orators, they adjourned the debate until the next day. To Corinth they were bound by old ties of obligation; for on three distinct occasions the Corinthians had done them signal service. More than seventy years before the date which we have reached, the Spartans summoned their allies to consider whether it was expedient to compel the Athenians to receive back the banished tyrant Hippias; and it was chiefly by the eloquence of the Corinthian speaker Sosicles, who drew a vivid picture of the miseries of despotical government, that they were shamed out of their purpose. A few years later, when the Athenians were at war with Aegina, they were aided by twenty Corinthian ships. And quite recently, in the great peril which menaced Athens at the revolt of Samos, Corinth had once more shown herself a friend. At a congress of the Peloponnesian allies, summoned to consider an appeal from the Samians for help, the Corinthians had spoken strongly against interference with the revolted allies of another city. Corinth was a place of old renown, the queen of the Isthmus, a centre of civilisation; whereas Corcyra was a remote island, and her people, though Greeks by descent, were in manners and character more than half barbarians.

But there were two arguments put forward by the Corcyraean orator, which outweighed all other considerations of policy or friendship. The first was addressed to the fears of the Athenians, the second to their ambition. War, he argued, was inevitable, and it was of the utmost importance for Athens to secure the alliance of the Corcyraean fleet, and prevent it from being added to the naval forces of her enemies. And his concluding words struck a note which found a response among the more daring spirits among his hearers, whose thoughts, as it would seem, were already turning to the western colonies of Greece, as a new field of enterprise and conquest. "It will not do," he said, "to be too nice. While you are hesitating, and weighing nice points of international right, you will be outdistanced in the race for power, if you tamely give up a great naval station which holds the key to Italy and Sicily."

Such reasoning, hollow and false as it was, turned the scale in favour of Corcyra, and a defensive alliance was concluded, pledging the Athenians and Corcyraeans to aid each other against any attack on the territory or allies of either state. For the Athenians wished to avoid breaking the Thirty Years' Truce, and therefore refrained from

entering into any agreement which might oblige them to acts of open aggression against Corinth.

There can be little doubt that Pericles, who was mainly responsible for this decision, committed a fatal error in advising the Athenians to take up the cause of Corcyra. By this act Athens incurred the implacable hostility of Corinth, and revived the old grudge which that city had conceived against her when Megara joined the Athenian alliance. In the constantly shifting currents of Greek politics, Athens might well, under wise guidance, have steered her way safely through the perils which surrounded her. The Corinthians had half forgotten their grievance, as is proved by their conduct at the revolt of Samos; and the tone of their representative at the Corcyraean debate is decidedly friendly. The Spartans were sluggish and procrastinating by nature, and required some powerful impulse to induce them to act with vigour; and this impulse was now supplied by Corinth. By accepting, therefore, the alliance of Corcyra, Athens barred the way to all compromise, and gathered into one head all the scattered causes of jealousy and hatred which had been accumulating against her in the last fifty years.

Early in the following year the Corinthian fleet, numbering a hundred and fifty sail, put to sea from Corinth, to renew the war with Corcyra, and a battle was fought off the coast of Epirus. The engagement was long and fierce, and the event was finally decided by a small squadron of Athenian ships, which had been sent with instructions to hinder any attempt of the enemy to land on the island. Seeing that the Corcyraeans were being forced back upon their own coast, the Athenian captains, who had hitherto looked on, and taken no part in the battle, now assumed the offensive, and lent such effectual aid that the Corinthians were held in check until the sudden appearance of twenty additional ships from Athens, which had been sent off immediately after the others, put an end to the action. This timely interference saved Corcyra from ruin; for next day the Corinthians, after a formal remonstrance, set sail for home, taking with them two hundred and fifty prisoners, belonging to the noblest families in Corcyra, whom they kept in safe custody, but treated with great consideration, hoping by means of them at some future time to recover their influence in the island.

II

It was not long before the effects of this impolitic breach with Corinth were sensibly felt by Athens. In the course of the following summer, Potidaea, a Corinthian colony, situated on the borders of Macedon, and included in the Athenian alliance, openly raised the standard of revolt, encouraged by promises from Sparta, and by the presence of a strong body of hoplites, sent for its support from Corinth. Potidaea was presently closely invested by an Athenian army and fleet, and the Corinthians pretended to make this a fresh ground

of complaint, though they had themselves incited the city to throw off its allegiance to Athens.

Feeling that matters were now approaching a crisis, the Spartans summoned a congress of their allies, and invited all who had any grievance against Athens to state their case. Then some spoke of the wrongs of Aegina, formerly not the least among Greek cities, but now so crushed under the yoke of Athens that she had not dared to raise her voice openly against the tyrant-city. The Megarians complained of the restrictions on their commerce, which threatened them with an empty exchequer and a starving population; and others followed in the same strain. When all the rest had spoken, the Corinthian orator, who had reserved his eloquence till the end, came forward and delivered a vehement harangue, containing hardly any specific charge against Athens, but well calculated to inflame the passions and provoke the pride of the Spartans. Though the acknowledged leader of Greece, and champion of her liberties, Sparta, he said, had always been the last to see the dangers which menaced the common country, and the last to take measures for her defence. Spartan apathy and indolence had brought the Greeks to the brink of ruin in the Persian War; and when that danger was passed, the same fatal indifference had enabled Athens to advance step by step on the path of aggrandisement; until now she had grown so strong that the united force of the whole Peloponnesian league would be required to put her down. Why had not the Spartans listened to the warnings which they had heard, when the Athenians were rebuilding their walls? Then they might have stopped the evil at its source, and saved a multitude of cities from slavery and oppression. "Consider," cried the orator, warming to his subject, "what manner of men these Athenians are, and how vast is the difference between them and you. While you are shut up in this inland valley, treading the dull round of mechanical routine, they are continually pushing forward the boundaries of their empire, toiling night and day to make their city great, never satisfied with what they have, always thirsting for more. Cautious, timid, and conservative as you are, hardly to be roused from your sloth by the most imminent perils, how can you hope to curb the flight of Athenian ambition, which knows no limit, and is checked by no reverse?"

"Men of Sparta, I speak as a friend, and you will not take my candour amiss. New times require new manners, and if you would maintain your great position you must move with the march of events, and abandon your old-fashioned ways. Do not mistake stagnation for stability, but learn a lesson even from these hated Athenians, who have risen to their present pitch of greatness by adapting themselves to every new need as it arose.

"You know what you have to do, if you would wipe out the reproach which rests upon you, and keep the respect of your faithful allies. Send an army into Attica, and compel the Athenians to withdraw their forces from Potidaea. And let it be done speedily, for while we are

talking our kinsmen are perishing.”

It happened that an Athenian embassy was present in Sparta, having been sent there on some other business, and not for the purpose of representing Athens at the debate. But when they heard of the outcry which had been raised against their city, the envoys asked permission for one of their number to address the Spartan assembly, wishing to explain the true character and origin of the Athenian Empire, and to warn the Spartans against plunging the whole country into the horrors of civil war. Leave being granted, the Athenian orator entered on his subject by sketching the course of events for the last sixty years. Athens, he said, had twice saved Greece, first at Marathon, and afterwards at Salamis. On the first of these occasions she had stood almost alone against an overwhelming force of Persians; and ten years later, though betrayed by her allies, she had borne the brunt against the navy of Xerxes. Who, then, was worthier than she to hold empire over Greeks? That empire had been forced upon her by the inertness of Sparta, and by the cowardice and sloth of her own allies in the Delian league. The power thus gained had been used with moderation, in marked contrast to the previous tyranny of Persia exercised over the same cities, and the arrogance of Spartan officers when engaged on foreign service. But a light yoke, it would seem, was harder to bear than a heavy one; if Athens had openly oppressed her subjects, she would never have heard a murmur.

Having thus tried to combat the prejudice against Athens, the orator addressed himself directly to the Spartans, and said: "Consider the awful responsibility which you will incur, if you suffer yourselves to be carried away by the invectives of your allies, and drive us against our will to tempt with you the dark uncertainties and perilous issues of war. There is still time for an amicable settlement of our differences: Athens is prepared to make all reasonable concessions, and to submit to arbitration, as the terms of the treaty direct. And if you decline to accept this offer, the guilt of the aggressor will lie with you."

It is remarkable that the speaker, in tracing the later course of Athenian policy, lays no claim to those high motives of patriotism which had inspired his people with sublime self-devotion two generations back. He boldly asserts the principle that it is lawful for the stronger to rule the weaker, and claims merit for Athens in abstaining from excessive abuse of her power. The Athenians, we may believe, had been tainted by the baseness of their confederates. In the early days of the Delian league they had not attempted to educate the Greeks whom they led up to the standard of their own splendid zeal,—or, if the attempt had been made, it was unsuccessful. They had taken upon themselves the whole burden of a great public duty, and standing alone, without moral support from their countrymen, they had gradually fallen away from the pure and lofty virtues of their ancestors. This decay of public morality proceeds with rapid strides

in the years which follow, and we shall presently hear the doctrine that might is right proclaimed with cynical frankness by the lips of an Athenian.

Having heard the complaints of their allies against Athens, and the reply of the Athenian orator, the Spartans ordered all but those of their own race to withdraw, and continued the debate with closed doors. A great majority of the speakers were in favour of declaring immediate war on Athens. But there was one important exception: the aged Archidamus, who for the last fourteen years had been reigning as sole king at Sparta, spoke strongly against the imprudence of assuming the aggressive, before they had made adequate preparations to cope with the offending city. It was an opinion generally held by the war-party that the Athenians would be ready to make any concessions, in order to save the land of Attica from ravage. This, said Archidamus, was a great error; and the event proved that he was right. The Athenians, with their great colonial empire, and complete command of the sea, were quite independent of the products of their own estates in Attica. And many years must elapse before the states of Peloponnesus could train a fleet, and attack them on the sea, where alone they were assailable. It was folly to suppose that such a contest could be decided by a single summer campaign, as was commonly believed by the enemies of Athens. "I fear rather," said the king, with prophetic foresight, "that we shall leave this war as an inheritance to our children; such is the power, and such the pride, of the state with which we have to contend." On the other hand, the Spartans, as champions of the liberties of Greece, must not allow the common oppressors of their countrymen to continue their career of tyranny unchecked. Let them first, however, try what could be effected by negotiation, and in the meantime prepare for war, by building ships, and above all by collecting money, without which all their valour would be useless. Then, if Athens still refused to listen to reason, they might declare war with better hope of success.

The speech of Archidamus shows a true insight into the nature of the crisis which the Spartans were called upon to face, and his views were amply justified by subsequent events. His wise words were no doubt applauded by the older and more sober-minded among his hearers. But there was another and a much more numerous party at that time in Sparta, filled with bitter envy and hatred against Athens. Their passions had been inflamed by the invectives of the Corinthian orator, and without counting the cost they were resolved to try the issues of immediate battle. Their blind rancour found expression in the curt and pithy harangue of Sthenelaidas, one of the five Ephors, a college of magistrates which in recent years had greatly encroached on the authority of the kings. Sthenelaidas spoke with true laconic brevity. "I don't understand," he said, "all the fine talk of these Athenians. They have told us a great deal about their own merits, but have not said a word in answer to the charges brought against them. Even if we accept their own account of themselves, their good conduct in the past

only lends a darker colour to their present crimes. We have one plain duty to perform, and that is to save our faithful allies from ill-treatment. The time for words is past—leave them to the transgressor. Our part is to act, at once, and with all our might, and put down the overwhelming insolence of Athens.”

Then, in his capacity as Ephor, Sthenelaidas, without staying for further argument, forthwith put the question to the Spartan assembly. According to their ordinary procedure, the Spartans gave their votes by cries of "Ay" and "No." But on this occasion Sthenelaidas pretended to be unable to distinguish whether the "Ays" or "Nos" had it, and wishing to encourage the war-party by showing how much they were in the majority, he ordered the house to divide on the question whether the treaty was broken, and whether the Athenians were in the wrong or not. The division was made, and a great majority were in favour of the motion, recording their votes against Athens. The allies were then called in, and informed to the result of the private debate, and a day was named for a general synod of the whole Peloponnesian league, to reconsider the situation and decide whether war was to be declared.

In the interval, before the final assembly of the allies, the Spartans sent to ask the oracle at Delphi whether it was expedient for them to make war; and the answer, according to common report, was that if they fought with all their might they would conquer, and that the god [Footnote: Apollo.] would be on their side. The Corinthians were at the same time carrying on an active canvass against Athens, sending their agents from city to city to blow up the flames of war.

In the autumn of the same year the allies met in full synod at Sparta, and once more the Corinthian speaker led the cry against Athens, and called for a unanimous war-vote, flattering his hearers with hopes of a speedy victory. The Spartans, he said, had at last set a good example to their allies, and shown themselves convinced that imperial cities had imperial obligations, by pronouncing in favour of war. Every member of the league must join heartily in the struggle, whether he belonged to an inland or to a maritime city; for if the seaports were closed by the Athenian fleets, the inland towns would be prevented from exporting their products, and importing what they wanted from abroad. War, then, was in the interest of the whole body of allies. And on the moral side their position was equally sound, for they were only acting on desperate provocation, and the common god of Greece had promised success to their arms. But to deserve that success, all must co-operate heartily, contributing freely from their private purses to raise a fleet which would make them a match for Athens on her own element. And they must watch the course of events with a vigilant eye, and be ready to seize any opportunity which might arise to aim a decisive blow at their common enemy. Let them be warned by the experience of the Ionians, and put out all their strength to save themselves from being swallowed up by the devouring ambition of Athens. Justice, heaven's favour, the good-will of all Greece, were on

their side.

Others spoke to the same effect, and then the representatives of each city were called up in turn to give their vote; and by far the greater number voted for war. But many months elapsed before any overt act of hostility occurred, and the time was occupied in preparations for an invasion of Attica, and in a series of demands sent by Sparta to try the temper of the Athenians, and put them in the wrong, if they refused to comply. The first of these messages was conveyed in mysterious terms, bidding the Athenians "to drive out the curse of the goddess." The meaning of this was as follows: nearly two hundred years before a certain Cylon tried to make himself tyrant of Athens: the attempt was frustrated, and some of his adherents, who had taken refuge in the sacred precinct of Athene, were put to death by the magistrates, after they had surrendered under a solemn promise that their lives should be spared. The illustrious family of the Alcmaeonidae was especially concerned in this act of murder and sacrilege, and the Spartans, in reviving the memory of an ancient crime, were aiming a blow at Pericles, who was descended on his mother's side from the Alcmaeonidae. For the Athenians were highly sensitive in all matters of religion, and it was possible that they might even banish Pericles, if their consciences were suddenly alarmed. And though this was not likely, the Spartans hoped at any rate to lessen his influence, which was adverse to themselves, and fasten on him the odium of being, in some sense, the cause of the war. But their manoeuvre was unsuccessful, and the Athenians retorted by bidding the Spartans drive out the curse of Taenarus, in allusion to the murder of certain Helots who had taken sanctuary in the temple of Poseidon at Taenarus. And they further charged the Spartans to rid themselves of the curse of Athene of the Brazen House. This was a holy place in Sparta, where Pausanias, when convicted of treasonable correspondence with Persia, had sought refuge from the vengeance of the Spartans. He was kept a close prisoner in the temple by the Ephors, who set a watch on him, to prevent him from being supplied with food, and when he was reduced to the last extremity, brought him out to die. But though his death occurred outside the temple, this did not save them from the sin of sacrilege, and a public reprimand by the Delphic God.

The game of diplomatic fencing went on for some time, and envoys were continually passing to and fro between Athens and Sparta. The Athenians were required to raise the siege of Potidaea—to allow the Aeginetans to govern themselves—to rescind the decree against Megara; and when all these demands were met by a firm refusal, the Spartans sent two ambassadors, bearing their ultimatum, which was worded as follows: "The Lacedaemonians wish that there should be peace, and war may be averted if ye will let the Greeks go free." Knowing that the decisive moment had now arrived, the Athenians met together in full assembly, to decide on their final answer. There were many speakers on either side, some arguing for peace, others for war: and then was

heard that majestic voice, which, for more than thirty years, had guided the counsels of Athens—the voice of the Olympian Pericles. He had chosen his line of policy a year before, in the fatal affair of Corcyra, and it was now too late to draw back: peace with honour was no longer possible for Athens. The furious zeal of Corinth had united her enemies against her, and they were bent on her ruin. The demands put forward by Sparta were a mere pretext, and if the Athenians had yielded the smallest point, new concessions would have been required of them, until they were stripped of all that had been won by the strenuous toil and devotion of two generations. "We must listen," said Pericles, in the course of a long speech, "to no proposal from Sparta which is not made as from an equal to an equal. Dictation is not arbitration. If we are to fight at all, the occasion matters little, be it small or great. What right has Sparta to require of us that we should rescind the decree against Megara, when her own laws jealously exclude all strangers from entering her streets? Or why should we relax our hold upon our allies, or break off the relations with them which were sanctioned by the Thirty Years' Truce? No, all this is a mere pretence, and if we are deceived by it, we shall be led on step by step to deeper and still deeper humiliation. It may seem a hard thing to give up the fair land of Attica to pillage and devastation. But think how far greater was the sacrifice made by our grandsires, who refused the fairest offers from Persia, and gave up all they had, rather than betray the common cause. Athens and Attica were then all the country they had, and these lost they had nothing left but their ships, their strong arms, and their stout hearts. In our case, on the other hand, all the essential elements of our power—our city, our fleet, our colonial empire—remain untouched. Shall we, then, sell our honour to save a few vineyards and olive-grounds from temporary damage? That would be a short-sighted policy indeed, and in the end would involve not only dishonour, but the loss of our whole empire. Let us act, then, in the spirit of our fathers, and send away the Spartan ambassadors with the only answer which is consistent with our dignity and our interest."

The reply to the Spartan ultimatum was framed as Pericles had directed, and from this moment all negotiations ceased. And here we close our account of the events which led to the Peloponnesian War.

THE SURPRISE OF PLATAEA

I

On the northern slope of Cithaeron, the mountain range which divides Attica from Boeotia, lies the little town of Plataea. By race and by geographical position the Plataeans were naturally included in the Boeotian confederacy, under the leadership of Thebes. But nearly a century before the time of which we are now speaking they had deserted the Thebans, whose rule was harsh and overbearing, and enrolled themselves among the allies of Athens. On the eve of the battle of

Marathon, they had joined the Athenians with their whole force, a thousand strong, and shared the peril and the honour of that glorious day. Ten years later their city was laid in ruins by the army of Xerxes, at the instigation of the Thebans; and in the following year the great battle which ended the long struggle between Greece and Persia was fought within sight of their shattered walls. In gratitude for this great victory, the confederate Greeks under Pausanias declared that the Plataean territory should be hallowed ground, and swore a solemn oath to maintain the independence of the city. But the Thebans had never forgotten or forgiven the secession of Plataea from the confederacy of which they were the leaders; and seizing the opportunity while the Athenians were occupied with measures for their own safety, they made a treacherous attempt to gain possession of the town.

On a dark and moonless night in the early spring three hundred armed Thebans appeared before the gates of Plataea, which were opened to them by a party of the citizens who favoured their design. Marching in a body to the market-place, they made proclamation by a herald, inviting all who chose to return to their allegiance, and take sides with their lawful leaders, the Thebans. For they wished, if possible, to gain over the place without bloodshed, and before the war had actually broken out; otherwise, they might have to give it up again on the conclusion of peace.

The Plataeans, being wakened out of their first sleep, and thinking that the Thebans were in much greater force than was really the case, at first attempted no resistance, but were disposed to accept the terms offered them. But perceiving by degrees that their enemies were far weaker in numbers than themselves, they changed their minds, and resolved to attack them. For the party which had betrayed the town was but small, and the general body of the citizens detested the thought of falling once more under the supremacy of Thebes. Their measures were taken with great secrecy and despatch: to avoid exciting the suspicions of the Thebans, they broke down the dividing walls of their houses, and passed to and fro unobserved, until they had completed their preparations. To embarrass the movements of the Thebans, they barricaded the streets with waggons, and then, just before daybreak, they poured out of their houses, and fell upon the enemy, who were still stationed in the market-place. Though taken by surprise, the Thebans defended themselves stoutly, and standing shoulder to shoulder repulsed the assault of the Plataeans two or three times. But they were greatly inferior in numbers, wearied by their long vigil, and soaked with the heavy rain which had fallen in the night; the Plataeans returned again and again to the attack, assailing them with furious cries; and the women and slaves who crowded the roofs added to their discomfiture, pelting them with tiles and stones, and stunning their ears with a frightful uproar of yells and shrieks; so that at last their hearts failed them, and breaking their ranks they fled wildly through the streets. Some succeeded in reaching the gate by

which they had entered, but only to find that their escape was cut off in this direction; for one of the Plataeans had closed the gate, using the spike of his javelin to secure the bolt. Others lost their way in the narrow and muddy streets, and wandered up and down until they were slain by the Plataeans. A few contrived to escape by an unguarded postern-gate, having cut through the bolt with an axe given them by a woman. Others, in despair, flung themselves from the walls, and for the most part perished. But a good number, who had kept together, were caught in a trap; for coming to a large building which abutted on the wall, and finding the doors open, they thought that they had reached the town-gate, and rushed headlong in. The pursuers, who were close at their heels, made fast the doors, and then the question arose what they should do with their captives. Some proposed to set fire to the building, and to burn it down, with the Thebans in it; but at last those who were thus taken, and the few who were still straggling in the town, were allowed to surrender at discretion.

Meanwhile a strong reinforcement of Thebans, who had started after the three hundred, were on the way to Plataea; but being delayed by the state of the roads, and the swollen condition of the Asopus, which they had to cross, they arrived too late. Being informed of what had happened, they prepared to plunder the property of the Plataeans outside the walls, and seize any of the citizens who crossed their path, to serve as hostages for their own men in the town. The Plataeans, perceiving their intention, sent a herald to remonstrate, threatening that unless they desisted, all the Theban prisoners should at once be put to death. And they promised further, under an oath, that if the Thebans would withdraw their forces, the captives should be restored—at least this was the account which was afterwards current at Thebes, though the Plataeans denied that they had made any such promise unconditionally, and declared that they had sworn no oath. It seems probable that the Thebans had received some such explicit assurance as they asserted; for, on receiving the answer from Plataea, they marched away without doing any harm. No sooner were they gone than the Plataeans made all haste to get their property within the walls, and then put all their prisoners to death. The day was not far distant when they were bitterly to rue this act of passion, which was not only cruel, but grossly impolitic; for the Thebans thus slain in cold blood, a hundred and eighty in number, would have been invaluable as hostages, whereas the Plataeans had now cut themselves off from all hope of reconciliation with Thebes, and virtually sealed their own fate.

Two messengers had been despatched from Plataea to Athens, one after the first entrance of the Thebans, and the second after their defeat and capture; and the Athenians, on receiving the second message, sent off a herald bidding the Plataeans to wait for further instructions, before taking any steps against the prisoners. When the herald arrived, he found the men already slain, and the Athenians then proceeded to place the town in a state of defence, removing the women

and children and all those who were unfit for military service, to Athens, and leaving a small body of their own citizens to direct operations.

II

The surprise of Plataea was the first open violation of the Thirty Years' Truce, and from this time forward all Greece was involved for many years in civil war. Public opinion was strongly on the side of the Spartans, who stood forward as champions of the liberties of Greece; but there was great enthusiasm on both sides, and the popular imagination was much excited by the approaching struggle between the two imperial cities. Both in Sparta and in Athens there was a younger generation, who had grown up during a long period of peace, and now entered gaily into the contest with all the light-hearted ignorance of youth. Old prophecies current among the people, foretelling a great war of Greeks against Greeks, passed from mouth to mouth, and the professional soothsayers, whose business it was to collect and expound such sayings, found eager hearers. The gods themselves could not be indifferent on the eve of such mighty events, so deeply affecting the destiny of the nation which worshipped them in a thousand temples; and an earthquake, which had recently occurred at Delos, the sacred island of Apollo, where such a visitation had never been known before, was interpreted as a portent of great things to come.

While the Peloponnesians were mustering their forces at the Isthmus, the rural population of Attica were breaking up their homes, and flocking by thousands into the city. A constant stream of waggons passed along the roads, loaded with furniture, household utensils, and even the woodwork of the farm-buildings; and many a little group of women, children, and servants set out on that sorrowful journey, leaving their fields, their gardens, and their vineyards, to be trampled down and laid waste by the ruthless invader. Athens, indeed, was the common mother of them all, their glory, their strength, and their pride; for since the days of Theseus the scattered rural communities of Attica had been united under the Aegis of Athene, and acknowledged Athens as the head and centre of their civic life. But a large proportion of the Athenian citizens still continued to reside in the country, and all their dearest associations were connected with the little spot of earth where they and their fathers were born. Here were the graves of their ancestors, and the temples of the heroes who were the guardian spirits of each little aggregate of families. It was therefore with bitter and resentful feelings that they left these happy scenes behind them, and turned their steps towards the gates of the city, through which many of them were never to pass again. For all of them it was a grievous change from the free and careless life of the country-side to the confined space, polluted air, and jostling multitudes of the town, now crowded to overflowing. Some few found shelter in the houses of friends or relations; but by far the greater number were obliged to encamp in the open spaces of the city, in the

precincts of temples, or in the narrow room between the Long Walls. Even a place beneath the Acropolis, called the Pelasgic Field, was now covered with the huts of the immigrants, though an ancient oracle had forbidden its occupation under a curse. From day to day new crowds kept flocking in, and the later comers were obliged to take up their dwelling in Peiraeus, which was soon almost as much overcrowded as the upper city.

And now the younger generation of Athenians, who had entered so cheerfully into the conflict, were to have their first taste of the grim realities of war. The Peloponnesian army advanced leisurely, and proceeded at first to Oenoe, an outlying fort near the borders of Boeotia; for Archidamus, who held the chief command, still hoped that the Athenians, when they saw the enemy on the confines of Attica, would make some concessions, to save their farms from destruction. For this reason he had long delayed his march from the Isthmus, and now wasted more time in fruitless operations at Oenoe, until the allies began to murmur against him, and suspected him of receiving bribes from the Athenians to spare their lands. At last, being unable to put off the fatal moment any longer, he turned southwards, and after ravaging the plain of Eleusis, advanced to Acharnae, one of the most fertile and prosperous districts of Attica, about seven miles north of Athens. Here the Peloponnesians encamped, and applied themselves systematically to the work of pillage and havoc.

Great was the rage of the Acharnians, a hardy race of farmers and charcoal-burners, when they saw the smoke rising from their ruined homesteads; and their feelings were shared by the general body of the citizens, who had watched the advance of Archidamus from Eleusis, and had now no hope of saving their estates. Little knots of angry disputants were seen in the streets and public places, for the most part clamouring against Pericles, and demanding to be led against the invader, while some few argued for the more prudent course. But Pericles, who knew the fickle temper of the multitude, turned a deaf ear to all this uproar, and steadily refused to summon an assembly, lest some hasty resolution should be passed, which would lead to useless loss of life. In order, however, to relieve the public excitement, he sent out a body of horsemen to skirmish with the enemy, and despatched a fleet of a hundred triremes to ravage the coasts of Peloponnesus.

When the first invasion of Attica was over, two cities, which had been foremost in stirring up war against Athens, were made to feel the full weight of her resentment. The unhappy Aeginetans were expelled from their island, and the land of Aegina was distributed among Athenian citizens. And later in the same summer the Athenians marched in full force into the territory of Megara, which was laid waste from end to end. This proceeding, which afforded a pleasant summer excursion to the Athenians, was repeated annually for the next seven years. The banished Aeginetans found an asylum at Thyrea, a coast district of

eastern Peloponnesus, which was assigned to them by Sparta. And so the first year of the war came to an end; for, except on extraordinary occasions, no military operations were undertaken during the winter.

THE PLAGUE AT ATHENS

I

At the beginning of the next summer the Peloponnesians again entered Attica, and resumed their work of devastation, destroying the young crops, and wrecking whatever had been spared in the previous year. Before they had been many days in Attica, a new and far more terrible visitation came upon the Athenians, threatening them with total extinction as a people. We have seen how the whole upper city, with the space between the Long Walls, and the harbour-town of Peiraeus, was packed with a vast multitude of human beings, penned together, like sheep in a fold. Into these huddled masses now crept a subtle and unseen foe, striking down his victims by hundreds and by thousands. That foe was the Plague, which beginning in Southern Africa, and descending thence to Egypt, reached the southern shores of the Mediterranean, and passed on to Peiraeus, having been carried thither by seamen who trafficked between northern Africa and Greece. From Peiraeus it spread upwards with rapid strides, and before long the whole space within the walls presented the appearance of a vast lazaret-house.

From the description of the symptoms we may conclude that this epidemic was similar to that dreadful scourge of mankind which has been almost conquered by modern science, the small-pox. The patient who had taken the infection was first attacked in the head, with inflammation of the eyes, and violent headache. By degrees the poison worked its way into the whole system, affecting every organ in the body, and appearing on the surface in the shape of small ulcers and boils. One of the most distressing features of the disease was a raging thirst, which could not be appeased by the most copious draughts of water; and the internal heat, which produced this effect, caused also a frightful irritability of the skin, so that the sufferer could not bear the touch of the lightest and most airy fabrics, but lay naked on his bed, in all the deformity of his dire affliction. Of those who recovered, many bore the marks of the sickness to their graves, by the loss of a hand, a foot, or an eye; while others were affected in their minds, remaining in blank oblivion, without power to recognise themselves or their friends. The healing art had made great progress in Greece in the course of the last generation; and in this, as in all else, the Greeks remained the sole teachers of Europe for ages after. But against such a malady as this, the most skilful physicians could do nothing, and those who attempted to exercise their skill caught the plague themselves, and for the most part perished. Still less, as we may well suppose, was the benefit derived from amulets, incantations, inquiries of oracles, or supplications at

temples; and at last, finding no help in god or man, the Athenians gave up the struggle, and resigned themselves to despair.

It is recorded as a curious fact, showing the strange and outlandish character of the pestilence, that the birds and animals which feed on human flesh generally shunned the bodies of those who died of the plague, though they might have eaten their fill, for hundreds were left unburied. The very vultures fled from the infected city, and hardly one was seen as long as the pestilence continued.

The fearful rapidity with which the infection spread caused a panic throughout the city, and even the boldest were not proof against the general terror. If any man felt himself sickening of the plague, he at once gave up all hope, and made no effort to fight against the disease. Few were found brave enough to undertake the duty of nursing the sick, and those who did generally paid for their devotion with their lives. In most cases the patient was left to languish alone, and perished by neglect, while his nearest and dearest avoided his presence, and had grown so callous that they had not a sigh or a tear left for the death of husband, or child, or friend. The few who recovered, now free from risk of mortal infection, did what they could to help their suffering fellow-citizens.

The mischief was aggravated by the overcrowded state of the city, especially among those who had come in from the country, and were living in stifling huts through the intense heat of a southern summer. Here the harvest of death fell thickest, and the corpses lay heaped together, while dying wretches crawled about the public streets, and encumbered the fountain-sides, to which they had dragged themselves in their longing for drink. All sense of public decency, all regard for laws, human or divine, was lost. The temples in which they had made their dwellings were choked with dead, and the sacred duty of burial, to which the conscience of antiquity attached so high an importance, was performed in wild haste and disorder. Sometimes those who were carrying out a corpse found a vacant pile prepared by the relatives of another victim, flung their dead upon it, set fire to the pile, and departed; and sometimes, when a body was already burning, others who were seeking to dispose of a corpse forced their way to the fire, and threw their burden upon it.

In the general relaxation of public morality all the dark passions of human nature, which at ordinary times lurk in secret places, came forth to the light of day, and raged without restraint. Some, who had grown rich in a day by the death of wealthy relatives, resolved to enjoy their possessions, and indulge every appetite, before they were overtaken by the same fate. Others, who had hitherto led good lives, seeing the base and the noble swept away indifferently by the same ruthless power, began to doubt the justice of heaven itself, and rushed into debauch, convinced that conscience and honour were but empty names. For human laws they cared still less, for in the

universal panic there was none to enforce them, and before the voice of public authority could be heard again, both judge and transgressor, as they believed, would be involved in a common doom. All shame and fear were accordingly thrown aside, and those whom the plague had not yet touched seemed possessed by one sole desire—to drown thought and care in an orgy of fierce excess, and then to die.

II

The second invasion of the Peloponnesians was prolonged for forty days, and the whole Attic territory was laid waste. Pericles again refused to venture a pitched battle against them, knowing well that the Athenian army was no match for them in the open field. But a powerful fleet was sent to cruise round Peloponnesus, which inflicted much damage on the coast districts. It was a welcome relief to the Athenians selected for this service to escape for a time from the plague-stricken city; but unhappily they carried the infection with them, and the crews were decimated by the same disease. Nor did the evil stop here: for the same armament being afterwards despatched to Potidaea, to reinforce the blockading army and fleet, caused a virulent outbreak of the plague among the forces stationed there, which up till then had been healthy. After some fruitless operations against the town this second armament was withdrawn, and returned to Athens with the loss of more than a thousand men.

After all these disasters the reaction against Pericles, which had begun with the first invasion of Attica, reached a climax, and on all sides he was loudly decried by the Athenians, as the author of all their miseries. Envoys were sent with overtures of peace to Sparta, and when these returned with no favourable answer, the storm of popular fury grew more violent than ever. Pericles, who knew the temper of his people, and had foreseen that some such outbreak would occur, remained calm and unmoved. But wishing to allay the general excitement, and bring back the citizens to a more reasonable view of their prospects, he summoned an assembly, and addressed the multitude in terms of grave and dignified rebuke. He reminded them that they themselves had voted for war, and remonstrated against the unfairness of making him responsible for their own decision. If war could have been avoided without imperilling the very existence of their city, then that decision was wrong; but if, as was the fact, peace could only have been preserved by ruinous concessions, then his advice had been good, and they had been right in following it. The welfare of the individual citizen depended on the welfare of the community to which he belonged; as long as that was secured, private losses could always be made good, but public disaster meant private ruin. On this principle they had acted two years before, when they determined to reject the demands of Sparta. Why, then, were they now indulging in weak regrets, and turning against him whom they had appointed as their chosen guide and adviser? Was there anything in his character, any fact in his whole life, which justified them in suspecting him of

unworthy motives? Was he the man to lead them astray, in order to save some selfish end—he, the great Pericles, whose loyalty, eloquence, clear-sightedness, and incorruptibility, had been proved in a public career of more than thirty years? If any other course had been open to them, he would have been to blame in counselling war; but the alternative was between that and degradation. The immediate pressure of private calamity was blinding them to the magnitude of the interests at stake—Athens, with all her fond traditions, and all the lustre of her name. That they were sure of victory he had already declared to them on many infallible grounds. But seeing them so sunk in despair, he would speak in a tone of loud assurance, and boldly assert a fact which they seemed to have overlooked. They were lords of the sea, absolute masters, that was to say, of half the world! Let them keep a firm grasp on this empire, and they would soon recover those pretty ornaments of empire—their gardens and their vineyards—which they held so dear: but, that once relinquished, they would lose all. Surely this knowledge should inspire them with a lofty contempt of their foes, a contempt grounded, not on ignorance or shallow enthusiasm, but on rational calculation. They could not now descend from the eminence on which they stood. Athens, who had blazed so long in unrivalled splendour before the eyes of the world, dared not suffer her lustre to be abated: for her, obscurity meant extinction. Let them keep this in mind, and not listen to counsels of seeming prudence and moderation, which were suicidal in a ruling state. All their calamities, except the plague, were the foreseen results of their own decision. Now was the time to display their known courage and patience. Let them think of the glory of Athens, and her imperial fame.

This memorable speech, the last recorded utterance of Pericles, had the desired effect. It was resolved to continue the war, and no further embassies were sent to Sparta. But resentment still smouldered in the hearts of the Athenians against their great statesman. How fearful was the contrast between the high hopes with which they had embarked in this struggle, and the scenes of horror and desolation which lay around them! From the walls they could see their trampled fields, their ravaged plantations, and the blackened ruins of their homes. Within, the pestilence still raged undiminished, and the city was filled with sounds and sights of woe. Under the pressure of these calamities the ascendancy of Pericles went through a brief period of eclipse, and he was condemned to pay a fine. Soon, however, he recovered all his influence, and remained at the head of affairs until his death, which occurred in the autumn of the following year.

Pericles is the representative figure in the golden age of Athenian greatness, the most perfect example of that equable and harmonious development in every faculty of body and mind which was the aim of Greek civic life at its best. As an orator, he was probably never equalled, and the effect of his eloquence has found immortal expression in the lines of his contemporary Eupolis. Persuasion, we

are told, sat enthroned on his lips; like a strong athlete, he overtook and outran all other orators; his words struck home like the lightning, while he held his audience enchained, as by a powerful spell; and among all the masters of eloquence, he was the only one who left his sting behind him. As a statesman, it was his object to admit every freeborn Athenian to a share of public duties and privileges; and for this purpose he introduced the system of payment, which enabled the poorer citizens to perform their part in the service of the state. His military talents, though never employed for conquest or aggression, were of no mean order; and on two occasions of supreme peril to Athens, the revolt of Euboea, and the revolt of Samos, it was his energy and promptitude which saved his city from ruin.

But it is as the head of the great intellectual movement which culminated in this epoch, as the friend of poets, philosophers, and artists, that Pericles has won his most enduring fame. By his liberal and enlightened policy the surplus of the Athenian revenues was devoted to the creation of those wonders of architecture and sculpture, whose fragments still serve as unapproachable models to the mind of modern Europe. And under his rule Athens became the school of Greece, the great centre for every form of intellectual activity, a position which she maintained until the later period of the Roman Empire.

If, however, we would understand the character of Pericles, and the spirit of the age which he represents, we must never forget that this aspect of Athenian greatness, to us by far the most important, was not the aspect which awoke the highest enthusiasm in him and his contemporaries. Those things which have made the name of Athens immortal, her art and her literature, were matters of but secondary importance to the Athenian of that age. He worshipped his city as a beloved mistress, and, like a lover, he delighted to adorn her with outward dignity and splendour. But to lavish all his thought and care on these external embellishments would have been, in his estimation, a senseless waste of his highest faculties, as if a lover should make the robes and jewels of his mistress the objects of his highest adoration. To make Athens the mightiest state in Greece, to build up the fabric of her material greatness—these were the objects for which he was ready to devote the best energies of heart and brain, and if need were, to lay down his life. He might be skilled in every elegant accomplishment, an acute reasoner, an orator, a musician, a poet; and to some extent he was all of these. But before all else he was in the highest sense a practical man, finding in strenuous action his chief glory and pride. And such a man was the last to melt into ecstasies over the high notes of a singer, or dream away his life in the fairyland of poetry.

We have dwelt at some length on the work and character of Pericles, as his death marks a turning point in Athenian history. From that day onward the policy of Athens takes a downward direction, denoting a

corresponding decline in Athenian character and aspiration. Pericles had been able, by his commanding talents and proved integrity, to exercise a salutary check on the restless energies and soaring ambition of his countrymen. He had been a true father and ruler of his people, in evil times and in good, curbing them in the insolence of prosperity, comforting and exalting them in the dark hour of disaster. But the government now passed into the hands of weaker men, who, since they were incapable of leading the people, were compelled to follow it, and to maintain their position by pandering to the worst vices of the Athenian character. Rash where they should have been cautious, yielding where they should have been resolute, they squandered the immense resources of Athens, and led her on, step by step, to humiliation and defeat. The course of our narrative will show how easily the Athenians might have emerged triumphant from the struggle with their enemies, if they had followed the line of conduct marked out by Pericles. They might, indeed, have avoided the occasion of offence which led immediately to the war, and thus have escaped the necessity of fighting altogether; and this, as we have seen, was the one fatal mistake made by Pericles. But, once launched in the conflict, they were sure of an easy victory, if they had only shown a very moderate degree of prudence and self-restraint. And we need not blame the great statesmen too harshly for not foreseeing the wild excesses of folly and extravagance which we shall have to record in the following pages.

INVESTMENT OF PLATAEA

In the third year of the war the usual invasion of Attica was omitted, and the Peloponnesian army under Archidamus marched against Plataea. Having pitched their camp before the walls they prepared to lay waste the territory; but before the work of havoc began, the Plataeans sent envoys to remonstrate. "Unrighteous are your deeds," said the spokesman of the embassy, "ye men of Sparta, and unworthy of the men whose sons ye are. After the victory of Plataea, which ended the struggle against Persia, Pausanias, the chief captain of the confederate Greeks, offered sacrifice and thanksgiving at Plataea to Zeus the Liberator, and swore a solemn oath, both he, and all the Greeks whom he led, to maintain the independence of our city against all who should assail it. This they did as a recompense for our valour and devotion in our country's service. But ye, in direct violation of that oath, have made common cause with our worst enemies, the Thebans, and have come hither to enslave us. In the name of the gods who witnessed that covenant, in the name of every power worshipped alike at Plataea and at Sparta, we adjure you not to commit this sacrilege, but to leave us in peaceful possession of the privileges vouchsafed to us on that memorable day."

Such were the words of the Plataeans, to which Archidamus replied as follows: "Ye say well, men of Plataea, if ye act in the spirit of the compact to which ye have appealed. The oath which Pausanias swore was

taken in defence of the common liberties of Greece. Against those liberties a new enemy has arisen, Athens, who holds half our nation in bondage, and threatens to lay her yoke upon us all. To put down that tyranny has this great coalition been called together, and if ye are true men, ye will enlist in the same cause, and take up arms for the relief of your distressed countrymen. Or at least, if ye cannot do this, then stand apart from this conflict, helping neither one side nor the other; and with this we shall be satisfied."

Having heard the answer of Archidamus, the Plataean envoys went back, and reported his words to their fellow-townsmen. But the Plataeans replied that, without the consent of the Athenians, they dare not accept his proposal, as their wives and children had been removed to Athens. Moreover, they feared that if they remained neutral the Thebans would seize the opportunity to make another attempt on their town. "Well, then," answered Archidamus, "we make you this second offer: Hand over your town and your dwellings to us, the Spartans; keep a strict account of all your trees, [Footnote: Vines and olive-trees] and of all else that can be numbered, and retire yourselves to some safe retreat, as long as the war continues. When it is over, we will restore all your property, and meanwhile keep the land in cultivation, and pay you a fixed rent, such as may suffice you."

The offer was fair, and even generous; but the Plataeans were powerless to act, without the consent of the Athenians, who held their families as hostages. Accordingly they asked for a truce, to enable them to lay the proposal before the authorities at Athens, and this being granted, they sent envoys to Athens, who speedily returned with this answer: "We have never left you at the mercy of your enemies in the past, since ye became our allies, nor will we do so now, but will help you to the best of our power; and we charge you by the oath which your fathers swore not to depart from your allegiance to Athens."

It was a cruel alternative which was offered to the hapless Plataeans: either they must leave their wives and children to the vengeance of Athens, or face the whole power of the confederates, led by Sparta. True to their character, they chose the nobler part, and determined to stand by the Athenian alliance. Henceforth no one was allowed to leave the town, and their final answer was delivered from the walls. They were unable, they said, to accept the terms offered by Archidamus.

On hearing their decision, the Spartan king made a last solemn appeal to the powers who presided over the territory of Plataea, a hallowed precinct, now about to be given up to plunder and ravage: "Ye gods and heroes, who keep the land of Plataea, bear witness that we had just cause from the first for marching hither, since the Plataeans had forsaken the alliance, and that if we do aught against them, we shall still be justified. For we have made them the fairest offers, but they would not be persuaded. Therefore let those with whom the guilt lies be punished, and prosper ye the cause of righteous vengeance."

The siege of Plataea now began in earnest. First the town was surrounded with a palisade, to prevent anyone from escaping, the materials being taken from the plantations in the neighbourhood of the town. Then they raised a mound against the wall, expecting that with so large a force as theirs they would easily carry the place by storm. Timber was brought from Cithaeron, and with this they set up two stout buttresses of cross-beams, at right angles to the town-wall, to serve as a support on either side of the mound. Within this framework they piled up fascines, stones, earth, and whatever else was at hand. The whole army was employed in this task, which was continued for seventy days and nights without intermission, the men working in regular spells.

Meanwhile the Plataeans had not been idle. First they built a wall of bricks and timber opposite to the point where the mound was rising, and resting on the ramparts, in order to raise the height of their defences. The new wall was covered with hides, raw and dressed, to protect the timber and the workmen from being injured by burning arrows. And while this structure was in progress, they made a breach in the old wall, and carted away the earth from the bottom of the mound. To prevent this, the Peloponnesians filled up the space thus caused with heavy masses of clay, rammed tightly into baskets of osier, which made a solid structure, much harder to remove than the loose earth. Then the Plataeans had recourse to another device: marking carefully the position of the mound, they ran a mine from the city under it, and as fast as the earth fell in, they carried it away. This continued for a long time, for the Peloponnesians, who saw their mound rising no higher, for all their labour, but rather growing less, did not guess the cause, but went on heaping up materials, which were swallowed up as fast as they were brought.

Still the Plataeans feared that in spite of these counterworks they would at length be overpowered by numbers, unless they contrived some better means of defence. So they left off building the wall of bricks and timber, and beginning at either end of it, they built a crescent-shaped wall, curving inwards towards the city. Thus the Peloponnesians, if they succeeded in carrying the first wall, would find themselves confronted by a second line of defence, and would have all their work to do over again, besides being exposed to a cross-fire.

While the Plataeans were thus vigorously defending themselves, and before the mound was completed, the Peloponnesians brought siege-engines to bear on the wall, one of which greatly alarmed the besieged garrison, by severely shaking their wall of timber and bricks. But this new mode of attack was frustrated, like the rest, by the ingenuity of the Plataeans, who dropped nooses over the ends of the battering-rams, and drew them up just before the moment of impact. Moreover they suspended heavy beams of wood at intervals along the

wall, each beam hanging by long chains from two cranes which rested on the wall and projected outwards from it; and whenever a ram was being brought up, they drew up the beam at right angles to it, and then, letting go the chains, dropped the ponderous timber, which came crashing down on the ram, and broke off its head.

Thus baffled at every point, the Peloponnesians began to despair of taking the town by assault, and thought that they would be compelled to form a blockade. But before being driven to this costly and tedious operation, they determined to try and set fire to the place, which seemed possible, as it was but small in extent. So they waited till the wind was in the right direction, and then brought vast quantities of faggots, and threw them into the space between the mound and the wall; and this being soon filled up, they piled up more faggots as far as they could reach within the city itself, and then throwing in lighted torches, with brimstone and pitch, they set fire to the whole mass. Then arose a great sheet of flame, such as had never been raised by human hands, though not, of course, to be compared to the vast forest-fires, produced by natural means; yet it was sufficient to cause a panic among the Plataeans, and bring their town to the verge of destruction. The heat was so intense that a whole quarter of the place was cleared of its defenders, and if a wind had arisen to drive the flame inwards, nothing could have saved the whole town from destruction. [Footnote: Thucydides seems to imply that there was a wind, though a slight one.] But fortunately the breeze was but slight, and it is said also that a heavy fall of rain came on, and quenched the conflagration.

Having failed in their last attempt, the Peloponnesians sent away part of their army, and employed those who remained in building a blockading wall round Plataea. The work was completed towards the end of September, and they then disbanded their army, leaving a force sufficient to guard half the wall; for the Thebans, relentless in their zeal against Plataea, took charge of the other half. The number of the besieged was four hundred and eighty, of whom eighty were Athenians, and a hundred and ten women to make bread for the garrison.

NAVAL VICTORIES OF PHORMIO

I

During the last half-century the art of naval warfare had made great progress in Greece. The Greek war-galley, or trireme, a vessel propelled by three banks of oars, had always been furnished with a sharp-pointed prow, for the purpose of ramming an opponent's ship; but many years elapsed before the Greeks attained genuine skill in the use of this formidable weapon. According to the ordinary method of fighting, after the first shock of collision the affair was decided by the hoplites, or heavy-armed infantry, stationed on the decks of the two contending ships; and in this manner was fought the engagement

between the Corcyraean and Corinthian fleets which occurred in the year before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. There the ship was simply a vehicle, which served to bring the antagonists together, and the rest was left to the prowess of the hoplites.

The Athenians were the first to abandon this crude and clumsy style of fighting, and in the course of two generations their seamen had become renowned throughout Greece for the unrivalled skill which they showed in working and manoeuvring the trireme. A few hoplites were still carried, to serve in cases of emergency; but by far the most important part in the encounter was played by the trireme itself, with its long, tapering, sharp-pointed prow. To use this deadly but delicate instrument with effect required great coolness, dexterity, and judgment, on the part of the steersman, and a crew under perfect command. The tactics usually employed were as follows: watching his opportunity, the captain gave the order "full speed ahead!" and darting rapidly through the enemy's line, wheeled suddenly round, and drove the beak of his galley with terrible force against the stern or side of the vessel selected for attack. One blow from the long lance-like point, propelled by the whole weight and impetus of the trireme, was sufficient to sink or disable an enemy's ship, and the attacking galley was then backed away from the wreck, and directed against another victim.

The incessant practice of nearly half a century had enabled the Athenians to attain consummate mastery in this new method of naval warfare; and they were now to give signal proof of their immense superiority over the other maritime powers of Greece.

In the same summer which witnessed the investment of Plataea, the Spartans planned an expedition against Acarnania, the westernmost province of Greece, which they wished to detach from the Athenian alliance. A Spartan officer, named Cnemus, was sent off in advance, with a thousand hoplites, to raise the wild mountain tribes, and led an attack against Stratus, the capital of Acarnania; and in the meantime orders were sent round to equip a numerous fleet, which was to support the operations of Stratus by harassing the coast districts.

The attack on Stratus failed altogether, chiefly in consequence of the impetuosity of the rude mountaineers serving under Cnemus, who advanced unsupported against the town, and meeting with a severe repulse embarrassed the movements of their Greek allies. About the same time the Peloponnesian fleet, consisting of forty-seven ships, was sailing down the Corinthian Gulf to co-operate with Cnemus. It was known that Phormio, the Athenian admiral, was stationed at Naupactus with a squadron of twenty vessels; but the Peloponnesian captains never dreamed that he would venture to attack them with so small a force, and they pursued their voyage along the southern shore of the gulf, without making any preparations for a battle. Phormio, however, had other intentions: keeping close to the opposite shore, he followed

their movements, and allowed them to pass through the narrow strait which divides the inner from the outer gulf, wishing to avoid an engagement until they reached the open water. The Peloponnesians dropped anchor for the night at Patrae in Achaia, and Phormio took up his station at Chalcis, a harbour-town of Aetolia, at the mouth of the Evenus. Being now convinced that Phormio meditated an encounter, for which they had little inclination, the Peloponnesian admirals made an attempt [Footnote: I have adopted the reading of Bloomfield, approved by Classen (4th Edition).] to steal across under cover of darkness. But this manoeuvre was detected, and they found their way barred by the Athenian squadron in the middle of the channel. Being thus driven to bay the Peloponnesians drew up their ships in a circle, with their prows turned outwards, like a flock of sheep assailed by a dog. Within the circle were placed the smaller vessels accompanying the fleet, and five of the swiftest galleys, which were intended to lend assistance against any attack of the enemy.

To keep a large flotilla in such a position, even in a calm sea, where no hostile movement was made against them, would have been a task to try the skill of the most accomplished mariners. But the Peloponnesian crews were untrained, the decks of their ships were crowded with soldiers, and they were hampered by the crowd of smaller craft. Worst of all, they were threatened in every direction by the agile Athenian galleys, which, moving in single file, swept round and round them, approaching closer and closer at every circuit, so that they were penned together in an ever-narrowing space, and in danger of fouling one another. To complete their confusion, the morning breeze began to blow from the gulf; and Phormio, who had been waiting for this, now gave the signal for attack. The Peloponnesians hardly attempted any defence; for the unskilful crews of the galleys could not manage their oars in the rising sea, and the steersmen had consequently no control of their vessels. All their efforts were employed in keeping clear of one another, warding off a collision with long poles, amid a hubbub of curses and abuse. Into this huddled, swaying mass of war-galleys and merchant-craft mingled together now dashed the Athenian triremes, wrecking every vessel which they met. A wild panic ensued among the Peloponnesian crews, and as fast as they could extricate themselves they rowed off and sought shelter in the harbour of Patrae. From here they afterwards sailed to Cyllene, the dockyard of Elis, where they were joined by Cnemus with the troops from Acarnania. Twelve ships fell into the hands of the Athenians, and taking these with them they sailed first to Rhium, a level headland on the Locrian Coast, on which stood a temple of Poseidon. Having left one of the captured ships as a thank-offering to the god of the sea, they made their way back to the original station at Naupactus.

II

The authorities at Sparta were highly indignant at the failure of their expedition in Acarnania, and the defeat of the Peloponnesian

fleet by so inferior a force. For this was their first experience of a sea-fight since the outbreak of the war, and they made no allowance for the want of skill in their own crews, attributing the disaster to mere cowardice. They did not reflect how vast was the difference between raw sailors, lately transferred from the plough to the oar, and the veteran seamen of Athens, trained under a system which had been slowly perfected in the course of half a century. So they sent three commissioners to Cnemus, with peremptory orders to prepare for another sea-fight, and not allow himself to be shut up in harbour by the feeble squadron of Phormio. One of these commissioners was Brasidas, a brilliant young officer, who had gained distinction two years before by saving the harbour-town of Methone, on the coast of Messenia, from being captured by the Athenians. We shall hear much more of him in the sequel.

On the arrival of Brasidas and his colleagues, the ships lying at Cyllene were made ready for immediate service, and orders were sent round to the allied cities for other ships. Phormio also sent an urgent despatch to Athens announcing his victory, and asking for reinforcements; and the Athenians sent twenty triremes to his aid. These vessels, however, arrived too late, for the admiral, acting on instructions from Athens, sailed first to Crete, where he was delayed a long time by contrary winds. Phormio, with his twenty triremes, was therefore compelled to engage the whole Peloponnesian fleet, numbering seventy-seven ships, which had now sailed round from Cyllene, and taken up its station just within the strait, close to the Achaean town of Panormus. A strong force of Peloponnesian soldiers was encamped on the shore, to co-operate with the fleet. Phormio anchored his ships just outside the strait, being resolved, if it were in any way possible, not to fight the Peloponnesians in the narrow waters. As the Peloponnesians, on their side, were equally determined not to be lured out into the open sea, the two fleets remained confronting each other for a whole week, without attempting any aggressive movement. At last the Peloponnesian leaders decided to give battle with Phormio at once, fearing that if they delayed any longer he would be reinforced from Athens.

It was the universal custom of Greek commanders to wind up the courage of their men on the eve of a battle by a short and pithy address, calculated to inspire them with confidence, by giving them a reasonable hope of victory. Such a practice, strange as it may seem to us, was natural among a people whose armies and fleets were recruited from the general body of the citizens, accustomed to free speech in their public assemblies. They were not men of war by profession, trained in habits of blind obedience, but sensitive Greeks, who carried into the camp the noble freedom of civic life, and were not prepared to shed their blood without sufficient cause, and a fair prospect of success.

Seldom was there greater need of this sort of military eloquence than

on the present occasion. On both sides there was much discouragement, and a general reluctance to begin the fight. The Peloponnesians were cowed by their recent defeat, and dreaded the naval skill of the Athenians, which seemed to them almost supernatural; and Phormio's men shrank from an encounter with such enormous odds. Accordingly the Peloponnesian captains on one side, and Phormio on the other, did what they could to argue their crews into a more hopeful frame of mind. The Peloponnesian seamen who had taken part in the first battle were reminded that they had been caught unprepared, and assured that this time every precaution would be taken to prevent a second reverse. They were flattered by the confident assertion that the superior skill of the Athenians was far outweighed by their own superior courage. "Look," said one of the admirals, speaking to his own division, "at this powerful armament, outnumbering the enemy by four to one—look at the army drawn up on the shore, ready to lend aid to any who are hard pressed—and you will see that with such advantages defeat is impossible. Do your duty like men, and expect to be rewarded or punished according to your deserts." Similar addresses, combining encouragement with threats, were heard in the other parts of the fleet.

Among the Athenian sailors there had been much jesting about the land-lubbers of Peloponnesus, and in the first flush of their victory they had been ready to face any odds on the sea. But now, seeing themselves confronted by such overwhelming numbers, they had lost heart for the moment, and were seen standing about in little groups, shaking their heads and whispering fearfully together. It was an anxious moment for Phormio; he knew the immense importance of maintaining, at any cost, the naval reputation of Athens, and if his men went into battle in their present temper, they were certain to suffer a crushing defeat. Determining, therefore, if possible, to allay the panic which was fast spreading throughout the fleet, he summoned the crews into his presence, and harangued them as follows:—

"Comrades, I have called you hither to assure you that you have no cause for alarm. The numbers of the enemy, which seem to you so formidable, should, if properly considered, be a ground of confidence; for this unwieldy armament is a sign that they are thoroughly terrified, and seek safety in a huge crowd of ships. The firmness and discipline which they have acquired by long experience of land warfare will avail them little on the sea. For courage is largely a matter of habit, and the bravest landsman is a mere coward when he is taken away from his own element, and set down on the heaving deck of a war-galley where he can hardly keep his feet. The disorganized multitude with which we shall have to deal is a mere mob, held together by the authority of Sparta, demoralized by their late defeat, and forced to fight against their will. Face them boldly, and our very audacity in assailing such numbers will sink them still deeper into helpless terror, for they will think that we must be invincible, or we should never run such risks. It shall be my business to bring on the

engagement in blue water, where we shall have them at our mercy. Now every man to his station; be prompt, and be silent, and attend to the word of command. Remember your old spirit, and reflect that the honour of Athens is in your hands to-day.”

The great object of the Peloponnesian leaders was to compel Phormio to give battle in the confined space of the strait. With this intention they determined to make a sudden movement towards the northern coast of the gulf, threatening an attack on Naupactus. At daybreak they drew up their ships in four lines, with the coast of Peloponnesus behind them, and with twenty fast-sailing triremes stationed on the right wing, to cut off Phormio’s fleet, if, as they anticipated, he advanced to the defence of Naupactus. Wheeling then to the right, the ships sailed some distance, four abreast, towards the inner gulf; and when they came opposite to Naupactus, they changed their course, and moved in column, with the right wing leading towards the northern shore.

The manoeuvre, so far as concerned its immediate purpose, was completely successful. Phormio, much against his will, was obliged to leave his station outside the strait, and go to the aid of Naupactus, which had been left undefended. Great was the delight of the Peloponnesian captains when they saw the little Athenian squadron creeping close, in single file, along the northern side of the gulf, for they thought that not one of the twenty would escape them. At a given signal, the whole fleet formed into line, resuming its original order, four deep, and bore down upon the Athenians. Eleven of Phormio’s triremes succeeded in clearing the strait, and getting into the open waters in the direction of Naupactus; but the remaining nine were overtaken and driven aground, and their crews, except those who escaped by swimming, were put to the sword. Some of these vessels were towed off as prizes by the Peloponnesians, and one they captured with all her crew. The rest were saved by the valour of the Messenian soldiers, who had followed the movements of Phormio’s vessels along the shore, and now did good service by boarding the stranded triremes, and hauling them to land, after a sharp tussle with the enemy.

Meanwhile the eleven ships which had eluded the attack were hotly pursued by the twenty fast-sailing vessels on the Peloponnesian right wing. All but one got through in safety, and took refuge in the harbour of Naupactus, and drawing up in line, with their prows outwards, prepared to defend themselves if the enemy advanced further against them. But the rearmost vessel was hard pressed by a Leucadian ship, and the rest of the pursuers followed at a considerable distance, singing the paean [Footnote: A song of victory.] as they rowed, and expecting an easy victory. Now, however, occurred one of those sudden turns of fortune so frequent in the course of a sea-fight. The Athenian trireme which had been left far behind in the chase, made a sudden sweep round a merchant-vessel anchored at the mouth of the harbour, struck her pursuer amidships, and sank her.

This splendid feat of seamanship filled the Peloponnesians, who were advancing in disorder, with amazement and terror. On every trireme the cry of "Hold her!" [Footnote: This was done by thrusting the oars, with the blades held flat, deep into the water] was heard, and some of the vessels, losing way suddenly, ran aground on the shallows. The others hung back, waiting until the main body of the fleet should come to their support. Seeing them drifting thus, stupefied and helpless, the Athenians took heart again, and raising a shout rowed swiftly from their station within the harbour, and charged down upon them. The Peloponnesians, after a feeble attempt at resistance, took to flight, heading for their original station on the opposite coast. Six of their vessels were captured, and the Athenians, not content with this, fell upon the main body of the fleet, and recovered their own ships which had been taken in the strait. The victorious crews of Phormio then returned to Naupactus, and set up a trophy at the place where they had been moored when this splendid rally was made, opposite to the temple of Apollo. The Peloponnesians also raised a trophy, to commemorate their first success, and then, fearing the arrival of the fresh ships from Athens, they sailed off to Lechaem, the northern harbour of Corinth.

III

In strange contrast with the disgraceful exhibition of cowardice and incompetence which we have just witnessed, we have now to record a daring attempt, undertaken shortly afterwards, to strike at the very heart of the Athenian power. While the beaten crews of the Peloponnesian fleet were waiting to be paid off at Lechaem, they suddenly received orders to take their oars and rowing-cushions, and proceed to Nisaea, the port of Megara. The plan was to embark them on forty vessels, which were lying in the dockyards, and make a night-attack on Peiraeus. The suggestion came from the Megarians, but in carrying it out the Peloponnesians were probably influenced by the bold and enterprising spirit of Brasidas. And in fact, the meditated descent on Peiraeus was neither so wild nor so rash as it may at first sight appear. For the Athenians, never dreaming that they might be taken by surprise, had not taken the precaution to close the entrance of their harbour, or to station guard-ships for its defence.

Without delay, the officers in charge of the expedition mustered their crews at Nisaea, and embarking by night, got their ships under way. But at the last moment their hearts failed them, and instead of sailing to Peiraeus, they landed on the island of Salamis, and after attacking a sea-side fort, and capturing three triremes which were riding at anchor near it, they spread themselves out, and began ravaging and plundering the country.

Meanwhile fire-signals had been raised, conveying the alarm to Peiraeus and Athens. A wild panic ensued, and a rumour ran through the upper city that the enemy had sailed into Peiraeus, while in the

harbour-town it was generally supposed that Salamis was lost, and Peiraeus on the point of being invaded. The Peloponnesians employed in this adventure afterwards pretended that they had been hindered by contrary winds from carrying out their original design. But this was a mere excuse, and if they had chosen they might have sailed unopposed to Peiraeus, and inflicted terrible injury on Athens. But it was now too late, for the Athenians, as soon as the news was brought, had marched down with their whole military force to Peiraeus, and occupied every assailable point in the harbour, while at the same time every ship in the docks was launched and manned, and sent off in headlong haste to Salamis.

By this time it was broad daylight, and the Peloponnesians, being warned that a rescue was on the way from Peiraeus, made off with their booty, and getting, on board their ships, sailed back to Nisaea. They had the more reason for hastening their departure, as the Megarian ships which had carried them to Salamis, having lain a long while in dry-dock, were leaky and unseaworthy; for the harbour of Megara had for some time past been kept in close blockade by the Athenians.

This memorable incident, following close on the brilliant victories of Phormio, taught the Athenians to take better precautions for the future. Hitherto they would have scoffed at the suggestion that their own arsenals and dockyards were exposed to attack. But now they provided for the safety of Peiraeus by closing the harbours and keeping a vigilant watch. And that terrible night left an impression on their minds which was not soon forgotten.

THE REVOLT OF LESBOS

I

We have already traced the steps by which the various cities composing the Confederacy of Delos gradually became subjects and tributaries of Athens. After this great change was effected, the only members of the original league who retained their independence were the wealthy and powerful communities of Chios and Lesbos. These two islands were allowed to retain undisturbed control of their own affairs, with the sole obligation of sending a fixed quota of ships to serve in the Athenian Navy. It does not appear that the performance of this duty was felt as a grievance, and no act of oppression had been committed by Athens, such as might have provoked her allies in Lesbos or Chios to turn against her. In both islands the general body of the citizens were on the whole friendly to the Athenians, who afforded them an effectual means of protection against the tyranny of the nobles, by summoning high-born offenders to be tried before the Athenian tribunals. [Footnote: The evidence for this statement will be found in Thucydides, viii. 48.] It was therefore not among the people at large, but among the privileged few, that any movement of revolt against Athens was to be expected.

Some years before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War the Lesbian malcontents had solicited the Spartans to help them in throwing off the yoke of Athens. This application, which was probably made at the time of the revolt of Samos, found no favour with Sparta, and nothing further was attempted on that occasion. But in the fourth year of the war alarming rumours were brought to Athens from Tenedos, a small island included in the Athenian alliance, whose inhabitants were jealous of the threatened ascendancy of Lesbos in the eastern districts of the Aegean. There was a design, it was said, among the leading citizens of Mytilene, the principal city of Lesbos, to unite the inhabitants of the island by force under their rule, and renounce their allegiance to Athens. Help was expected from Sparta, and the Boeotians, who were of the same race as the Lesbians, were also in the plot. This statement was confirmed by envoys from Methymna, the second city of Lesbos, which stood apart from the conspiracy, and by certain citizens of Mytilene, who had turned informers from motives of private revenge.

Among the Athenians at this time there was a general feeling of despondency and exhaustion. The full hardship of the war pressed heavily upon them, and their population was thinned by the ravages of the plague. In such a mood the thought of undertaking a campaign against a great island like Lesbos, then at the height of her power, filled them with dismay. Was it possible that a favoured and privileged ally had taken up arms against them in the hour of their distress? It was a slander, they could not, they would not believe it. At any rate, before proceeding to extremities, they would try the effect of a friendly remonstrance. So they sent envoys with a pacific message to the Mytilenaeans, hoping by fair words to deter them from their purpose. In this, however, they were disappointed, and being at last convinced that the Lesbians were on the brink of revolt, they sent off forty triremes without delay, in order, if possible, to catch them unawares. For they had been informed that the Mytilenaeans were about to celebrate the festival of Apollo, in which the whole population took part, outside the city walls; and if the triremes arrived in time, there would be a fine opportunity for a surprise. At the same time they took possession of ten Mytilenaeon triremes, which had been sent to serve in the Athenian fleet, and imprisoned the crews.

But now was seen one of the weaknesses inherent in the nature of the Athenian constitution. These measures could not be taken without public debate in the popular assembly, and such a method of procedure rendered secrecy impossible. The Mytilenaeans received timely warning of their danger, and keeping close within their walls, repaired the weak places in their defences, and set a careful watch. Shortly afterwards the Athenian fleet hove in sight. As the Mytilenaeans refused to obey the summons delivered to them in the name of the imperial people,—that they should raze their walls, and surrender

their ships,—hostilities commenced. But on neither side was much vigour displayed, for the Athenian officers thought themselves too weak to undertake any decisive operations with their present force, and the Mytilenaeans desired to obtain a respite, to enable them to obtain aid from Sparta. Accordingly they asked for an armistice, pretending that they wished to plead their cause by their own representatives before the Athenian assembly; and their request being granted, they sent envoys to Athens, who made a show of carrying on negotiations. And in the meantime a trireme was despatched in all haste to carry their petition to Sparta.

On the return of the Mytilenaeen envoys from Athens, where of course they had accomplished nothing, the siege of Mytilene began in earnest. The city was situated on a promontory facing the Asiatic coast on the south-eastern side of the island, and had two harbours, on its northern and southern side. Both of these harbours were now held in close blockade by the Athenians, who established two camps, one on either side of the town, and patrolled the harbour-mouths with their ships. But on the land side the investment was not yet completed, so that supplies could still be brought into the town from the island. Reinforcements, however, came pouring into the Athenian quarters in answer to a summons sent to the cities of the Athenian alliance, who were the more willing to lend help, as the Lesbians made no vigorous effort in their own defence.

While the prospects of Athens were thus brightening, the Mytilenaeen envoys, after a stormy voyage, arrived at Sparta, and laid their petition before the authorities. It happened that the Olympic festival was close at hand, where representatives would be present from all the cities of the Peloponnesian league; so the envoys received orders to go to Olympia, and state their case in the presence of the Spartan allies. They went, therefore, to Olympia, and when the festival was over, the Mytilenaeen orator addressed the confederates as follows:—

”Before we urge our claim for assistance we wish to combat a prejudice which we know to be general in Greece against those who desert their allies in time of war. For we wish not only to obtain your countenance and support, but also to preserve your respect. To abandon an ally without just cause in a time of peril is justly regarded as an act of treason. But then the alliance must be a fair and equal relation voluntarily assumed on both sides, based on mutual esteem and parity of power. Can anyone assert that our connexion with Athens answers to this description? Have we not seen how the confederacy of maritime cities formed against Persia was gradually converted into an Athenian empire? And though we and the Chians enjoyed nominal independence, we had good reason to fear that this was only a temporary concession, which would be withdrawn as soon as the Athenians felt themselves strong enough to attack us. We were allowed to retain our liberty, partly because they feared our navy, and partly because they wished to make us accomplices in their own aggressions, and lend an appearance

of equity to the acts of violence in which we were compelled to take part. Having swallowed up the smaller states, they were ready to pounce upon us, and were only prevented by the outbreak of the present war. Who, then, can blame us, if we seized the opportunity when they were weakened to repudiate this false alliance, and anticipate the blow which they were preparing for us? Athens, we repeat, has no just title to our allegiance; the bond which held us together was fear on our side and interest on theirs. We are natural enemies; and when your foe is disabled, then is the time to strike.

”Having thus cleared ourselves from the imputation of disloyalty, we will now make plain to you the advantages which you will gain by espousing our cause. If you wish to inflict irreparable injury on Athens, you must promote every hostile movement against her in those regions which contain the sources of her power, that is to say, the islands and coast-lands of the Aegaeon. For if our revolt is successful, others will follow our example, and the Athenians will be stripped of their revenues, the mainstay of their empire. You can lend us aid most effectually by summoning your allies for a second [Footnote: Attica had already been invaded earlier in the summer.] invasion of Attica, and thus preventing the Athenians from sending reinforcements to Lesbos. You have a rare opportunity, for their city is wasted by the plague, and their navies are dispersed on foreign service. Remember, then, your proud position as champions of Greek liberty, and put away the reproach which you have sometimes incurred by leaving the revolted subjects of Athens to fight their battles alone. [Footnote: As in the case of Samos.] For the cause of Lesbos is the cause of all Greece.”

It will be observed that the greater part of this remarkable speech consists of an elaborate endeavour on the part of the Mytilenaeans to justify themselves. The arguments employed were entirely sophistical, for the Lesbians had no real grievance—and the statement that they were in danger of losing their independence was a pure invention. But they spoke to a partial audience, and the Spartans had already prejudged the case in their favour. It was therefore decided to receive them into the Peloponnesian alliance, and orders were issued to the allies to assemble at the Isthmus with two-thirds of their forces for an immediate invasion of Attica. The Spartans, acting with unusual vigour, were the first to appear at the Isthmus, where they made preparations for hauling ships overland from the northern harbour of Corinth, intending to attack Athens by sea and land. But the rest of the confederates came in but slowly, as they were engaged in getting in their harvest, and had little inclination for a second campaign.

The Spartans soon found out that they were mistaken in supposing the energies of Athens to be exhausted. Without moving their fleet from Lesbos, the Athenians manned a hundred triremes, raising the crews from the whole body of the citizens, with the exception of the knights

and the wealthiest class of the Solonian census, and pressing even resident foreigners into the service; and with this imposing force they made an armed demonstration before the eyes of their enemies at the Isthmus, and then, coasting along Peloponnesus, made descents wherever they pleased. This spirited conduct produced the desired effect. For the Spartans, who were still waiting for their allies at the Isthmus, saw themselves baffled in all their calculations, and concluded that they had been misinformed by the Lesbians as to the state of affairs at Athens; and hearing that their own coast-lands were being ravaged by the Athenian fleet, they hastily decamped, and the plan of a second invasion came to nothing.

The summer was now drawing to a close, and as yet no progress had been made with the siege of Mytilene. The town was still blockaded by sea, but the Mytilenaeans had free egress on the land-side, and marched up and down the island, confirming the other towns which had joined in the revolt, and threatening Methymna, which still remained loyal to the Athenian alliance. When the Athenians were informed of this state of things, they sent a thousand hoplites under Paches to reinforce the besieging army; and on their arrival the investment of Mytilene was completed by a wall drawn from sea to sea, and cutting off the town from the rest of the island. The Mytilenaeans now began to despair, for their supplies were failing, and there seemed no hope of relief. But during the winter a ray of hope reached them from outside, and encouraged them to persevere in their resistance. There was a weak point in the Athenian wall, where it closed a ravine; and through this interval a Spartan named Salaethus, who had sailed to Lesbos in a trireme, and crossed the island on foot, succeeded in making his way into the town. Salaethus announced himself as an agent sent from Sparta, to inform the distressed garrison that, as soon as the season permitted, forty triremes would be sent to their assistance, and that Attica would be invaded at the same time, to keep the enemy occupied at home. At this welcome news the hopes of the Mytilenaeans revived, and all thoughts of surrender were laid aside.

II

As soon as spring arrived, the Spartans, true to their promise, sent off forty triremes, commanded by Alcidas, to raise the siege of Mytilene, and marched in full force into Attica, thinking thus to divert the attention of the Athenians, and prevent them from interfering with the voyage of Alcidas. They remained a long time in Attica, waiting for news from their fleet, and employing the time in a systematic ravage of the whole territory. But time passed, and no message arrived from Alcidas, who seemed to have disappeared with all his ships; so that at last, as their expectations were disappointed, and their supplies exhausted, they broke up their army and returned home.

The position of Mytilene was now growing desperate. Nothing more was

heard of the relieving squadron, and the scanty store of provisions was rapidly failing; for, owing to the betrayal of their design, the Mytilenaeans had been hurried into revolt before their preparations were completed, and had had no time to lay up a sufficient stock of food. Salaethus, therefore, determined to make a sudden sally, and break out of the town; and the better to effect this purpose, he furnished the common people, who had hitherto served as light-armed soldiers, with the full equipment of heavy infantry. But this proceeding brought on a catastrophe, for the commons no sooner found themselves in possession of better weapons than they turned upon their masters, and accused them of secreting supplies of corn for their own use. "Bring out your corn," they cried, "and divide it equally, or we will go out and make terms with the Athenians for ourselves." Alarmed at this threat, which if carried out would leave them exposed as the sole objects of Athenian vengeance, the nobles sent a message to Paches, on behalf of the whole city, offering to surrender, on condition that their case should be tried by the tribunals at Athens, and stipulating that, while the decision was pending, no violence should be offered to any of the inhabitants. The proposal was accepted, and Paches marched his forces into the town. In spite of the convention, the leaders of the revolt took sanctuary in the temples, being in dread of summary execution. Paches reassured them, and sent them in safe custody to Tenedos.

We must now turn back a little, and follow the movements of Alcidas. The Spartan admiral, it would seem, had small stomach for the bold adventure on which he was bound—no less than to rob the Athenians of one of their most important possessions, and defy the redoubtable captains of Athens on their own element. After loitering for some time off the coast of Peloponnesus, he sailed on slowly as far as Delos, and then, touching at Icarus, he heard that Mytilene was already taken. Wishing, however, to inform himself with certainty, he pushed on as far as Erythrae, on the mainland of Asia, which he reached seven days after the fall of Mytilene. Being now assured that the report was true, he called a council of war to decide what was to be done. Then a certain Greek of Elis, named Teutiaplus, made a bold suggestion: "Let us," he said, "sail straight to Mytilene, and make an attempt to recapture the town by surprise. Most likely the Athenians, flushed with success, will be taken unawares, and we shall find the harbour open, and the land forces dispersed, and if we make a sudden onfall, under cover of darkness, we shall probably succeed."

The prudent Alcidas found this proposal little to his taste; nor was he better pleased by another plan, put forward by the Lesbian envoys who were returning on board the Peloponnesian fleet, and seconded by a party of exiles from the cities of Ionia. These men tried to persuade Alcidas to establish himself in some city of Asia Minor, and raise a revolt among the allies of Athens in these parts. He had, they said, every prospect of success, for his arrival was welcomed on all sides. Let him seize the opportunity of attacking the Athenians in their most

mortal part, first by withdrawing the tribute of Ionia, and secondly by putting them to the expense of a blockade.

This daring scheme might have led to something important, if the fleet had been commanded by Brasidas. But Alcidas was a man of very different temper, and having arrived too late to save Mytilene, he had now but one thought,—to return to Peloponnesus as fast as he could, and get out of the reach of the terrible Athenian triremes. So he set his fleet in motion, and sailing along the coast in a southerly direction put in at Ephesus. On the voyage he showed himself to be as cruel as he was cowardly, by capturing and putting to death the crews of the vessels which came in his way. These were not a few, for the ships which crossed his path approached fearlessly, under the impression that his fleet was from Athens; for no one dreamed that a Peloponnesian squadron would dare to enter these waters. For this senseless barbarity he was severely rebuked by a deputation of Samian exiles, now living on the mainland, who met him at Ephesus. His was a strange method, they remarked with bitter irony, of helping the Ionians to recover their liberty—to butcher defenceless men, who had done him no harm, but looked to him for rescue from their bondage to Athens! If he continued to behave thus, he would make the name of Sparta detested throughout Ionia. Dull as he was, Alcidas could not but feel the justice of this reprimand, and he let the rest of his prisoners go.

The presence of a Peloponnesian fleet had caused great alarm among the inhabitants of Ionia, and urgent messages came in daily to Paches at Mytilene, summoning him to their aid. For even though Alcidas had declined to take up a permanent station on the coast, as the exiles had suggested, it was apprehended that he would pillage the sea-side towns, which were unfortified, on his homeward voyage. At last two state triremes, the *Paralus* and *Salaminia*, which had been sent on public business from Athens, came into Mytilene with the news that they had sighted the fleet of Alcidas lying at anchor off Clarus. [Footnote: A little town, north-west of Ephesus.] Thereupon Paches put to sea at once, and gave chase. But Alcidas had got wind of his danger, and was already on the high seas, making all speed for Peloponnesus. Paches pursued him as far as Patmos, and then turned back. He would gladly have caught the Peloponnesians in blue water, where he could have sent all their ships to the bottom; but as it was he thought himself fortunate to have escaped the necessity of forming a blockade, as he must have done if he had come up with them near land, and driven them ashore. As for Alcidas, he fled in wild haste, keeping the open sea, being resolved not to touch land, if he could help it, until he reached the shelter of a Peloponnesian harbour.

III

On his return to Lesbos, Paches despatched to Athens the prisoners who had been sent to Tenedos, among whom was the Spartan Salaethus. When

they arrived the Athenians immediately put Salaethus to death, and then met in full assembly to decide on the fate of the rest. They had just been delivered from a fearful danger, and in the natural reaction of vindictive rage which had now set in they came to the horrible resolution of putting all the adult male population of Mytilene to the sword, and selling the women and children as slaves. The Mytilenaeans, they argued, were without excuse: they were not subjects of Athens, who might wish to escape from their burdens, but free and privileged allies. They had treacherously plotted against Athens, when she was sunk deep in calamity, and brought a Peloponnesian fleet within the sacred circle of her empire. For a long time past they had evidently been hatching a vile conspiracy against the very existence of Athens. Having once come to this decision, the Athenians lost no time, but sent off a trireme on the same day, with orders to Paches to carry the decree into effect.

But after a night of cool reflection they began to repent of their haste. It was a cruel and monstrous thing, they now thought, to butcher the population of a whole city, innocent and guilty alike. The Mytilenaeans envoys, who had been sent to Athens on the surrender of the city, perceived that there was a change in the public temper, and acting in concert with influential Athenians who were in their interest, they induced the magistrates to summon a second assembly, and re-open the debate.

It is on this occasion that we first catch sight [Footnote: That is, in the narrative of Thucydides.] of the notorious demagogue Cleon, who for the next six years will be the most prominent figure in Athenian public life. This man belongs to a class of politicians who had begun to exercise great influence on the affairs of Athens after the death of Pericles. That great statesman had really led the people, checking their excesses, setting bounds to their ambition, and guiding all the moods of the stormy democracy. But the demagogues were lowborn upstarts, who, while seeming to lead the people, really followed it, and kept their position by pandering to the worst passions of the multitude. It must, however, be mentioned that the two contemporary writers from whom we draw our materials for the portrait of Cleon, the historian Thucydides and the comic poet Aristophanes, were both violently prejudiced against him. Aristophanes hated him as the representative of the new democracy, which was an object of abhorrence to the great comic genius; and Thucydides, a born aristocrat, of strong oligarchical sympathies, looked with cold scorn and aversion on the coarse mechanic, [Footnote: Cleon was a tanner by trade.] who presumed to usurp the place, and ape the style, of a true leader like Pericles.

In the previous debate Cleon had been the chief promoter of the murderous sentence passed against Mytilene; and when the question was brought forward again, he made a vehement harangue, the substance of which has been preserved by Thucydides. In this speech he appears as a

practised rhetorical bravo, whose one object is to vilify his opponents, and throw contempt on their arguments, by an unscrupulous use of the weapons of ridicule, calumny, and invective. He reproaches the magistrates for convening a second assembly, in a matter which had already been decided; and this was, in fact, strictly speaking, a breach of the constitution. He laughs at the Athenians as weak sentimentalists, always inclined to mercy, even when mercy was suicidal. Of the subject communities he speaks as if they were mere slaves and chattels, outside the pale of humanity, to be kept down with the scourge and the sword. "Let the law prevail," cries this second Draco. "The law is sacred, and must not be moved. You are so clever that you will not live, by fixed rule and order, and you deride the approved principles of political wisdom. Every one of you wants to be a lawgiver, a statesman, and a reformer, and to manage the public affairs in his own way. We, who understand your true interests, are bound to resist this mood of lawless extravagance, and keep you in the right path, whether you will or no."

Then preserving the same tone, as of one who is exposing an outrageous paradox, Cleon proceeds to deal with the actual subject of debate. To massacre a whole population, was, in his view, a commonplace and ordinary proceeding; and, in the present instance, the only course consistent with prudence and common sense. Those who maintained the contrary were either flighty enthusiasts, whose opinion was not worth considering, or venal orators, who had sold their country for a bribe. "Will you suffer yourselves," asked the indignant moralist, "to be blinded by these corrupt advocates, who amuse you with their eloquence, and then pocket the price? But it is your own fault: you have no sense of public responsibility—you are like clever children, playing at a game of politics. While you sit here, listening to your favourite speakers, and sharpening your wits against theirs, your empire is going to ruin. Plain fact is too simple a diet for your pampered appetites; you must have it hashed and served up with a fine flavouring of fancy and wit. In short, you have lost all hold upon reality, you live in an intellectual Utopia, and treat grave matters of public interest as though they were mere themes in a school of declamation."

In drawing this remarkable picture of Athenian character, which, though strangely out of place, really contained a large element of truth, Cleon overreached himself, and was caught in his own snare. It was he, and not his opponents, who was diverting attention from facts, and involving a plain issue in a cloud of wordy rhetoric. He has no arguments, worthy of the name, but tries to carry his case by playing on the passions of the people, and blowing up the flames of their anger, which was beginning to cool. But though the more discerning among his audience must have seen through his sophistries, to a large proportion of his hearers his speech no doubt seemed a masterpiece of eloquence. The Athenians, who, like all people of lively talent, were fond of laughing at themselves, would be especially amused by his

humorous description of their own besetting weakness, their restless vanity, and inordinate love of change.

The chief advocate for mitigating the sentence against Mytilene was a certain Diodotus, who had taken a leading part in the previous debate, and now stood up again to oppose the blood-thirsty counsels of Cleon. The speech of Diodotus is calm, sober, and business-like. After a dignified remonstrance against the vile insinuations of Cleon, by whom all who differed from him were decried as fools or knaves, Diodotus proceeded to argue the question from the point of view of expediency. He was not there, he said, to plead the cause of the Mytilenaeans, or to discuss abstract questions of law and justice. What they had to consider was what course would be most conducive to the interests of Athens. According to Cleon, those interests would be best served by a wholesale massacre of the inhabitants of Mytilene, which would strike terror into the other subjects of Athens, and prevent them from yielding to the same temptation. But, reasoned Diodotus, experience had shown that intending criminals were not deterred from wrongdoing by the increased severity of penal statutes. For a long time lawgivers had framed their codes in this belief, thinking to drive mankind into the path of rectitude by appealing to their terrors. Yet crime had not diminished, but rather increased. And what was true of individuals, was still more true of cities, where each man hoped to be concealed among the crowd of transgressors. Criminals, whether they acted singly, or in large numbers, were only rendered desperate, if all degrees of crime were confounded in one common penalty of death.

Such were the enlightened principles of jurisprudence set forth by an Athenian of the fifth century before Christ—principles which were first recognised in modern Europe within the memory of men still living. Then, bringing his theories to a practical test, he pointed out the gross impolicy of driving a revolted city to desperation, by excluding all rebels from the hope of pardon. This, he said, would be the effect on the subjects of Athens, if they passed the same sentence on the Mytilenaeans, without distinction between the innocent and the guilty. At present the commons in every city were loyal to Athens; and though they might be beguiled or coerced into rebellion, they would, if assured of fair treatment, take the first opportunity of returning to their allegiance, as the commoners of Mytilene had done. "Do not, therefore," concluded Diodotus, "destroy this, the strongest guarantee of your security, but punish the ringleaders of the revolt, after due deliberation, and leave the rest in peace."

The arguments of Diodotus were unanswerable, and it might have been supposed that the Athenians, in their relenting mood, would have carried the amendment by a large majority. But this was not the case. The debate was keenly contested, and when the president called for a show of hands, the more merciful decree was only passed by a few votes. There was no time to be lost, for the first trireme was already a day and a night on her voyage, and the fate of Mytilene hung by a

hair. A second trireme was launched with all speed, and the Mytilenaeans present in Athens promised large rewards to the crew if they arrived in time. With such inducements the rowers toiled day and night, taking their meals, which consisted of barley-meal kneaded with wine and oil, at the oar, and sleeping and rowing by turns. Happily there was no contrary wind to retard their progress, and the crew of the first vessel, bearing that savage mandate, made no efforts to shorten their passage. As it was, they were not an hour too soon: for when they arrived, Paches had already received the decree, and was preparing to carry it out. Thus Mytilene escaped destruction by a hair's-breadth, and Athens was saved from committing a great crime. But even the modified sentence, which was passed directly afterwards on the motion of Cleon, condemning more than a thousand Mytilenaeans to death, was sufficiently ferocious, and was remembered against the tyrant city in the days of her humiliation.

ESCAPE OF TWO HUNDRED PLATAEANS FALL OF PLATAEA

I

The siege of Plataea had now lasted for more than a year, and the brave garrison began to be in sore straits, for their supplies were giving out, and they had no hope of rescue from outside. In this desperate situation they resolved to make an attempt to break through the besieging lines, and make their escape to Athens. All were to take part in the adventure, leaving the Peloponnesians in possession of an empty town. But when the time came for carrying out this bold design, half of the garrison drew back, thinking the risk too great. The other half, numbering about two hundred and twenty, persisted in their purpose, and forthwith fell to work on their preparations. They began by making ladders for scaling the enemy's wall; and in order to ascertain the proper length of the ladders, they counted the courses of bricks in a part of the wall facing the town, which happened to have been left unplastered. Many counted the courses together, and by repeating the process over and over again, and comparing the result, they at last hit upon the right number. When once this was known, they could easily calculate the length of their ladders, for the bricks were all of the same dimensions, and they knew the thickness of a single brick.

The Peloponnesians had built a double line of wall round Plataea, the two lines being separated by a distance of sixteen feet. The whole of the space within this double wall was covered by a flat roof, so as to present the appearance of a single thick wall, with battlements on either side; and this covered space, which was divided into rooms by partition-walls, served as barracks for the besiegers. Along the top were high towers, with intervals of ten battlements between them, and built flush with the wall on both sides, so as to leave no passage, except through the middle of the tower. These served as guard-rooms, where the soldiers on duty took shelter on wet and stormy nights. For

the distance between the towers was very small, and they could rush out and man the walls at a moment's notice.

The Plataeans omitted no precaution which might secure success for their hazardous enterprise. Every man understood exactly the part which he had to play, and knew that his own life, and the lives of his comrades, depended on his courage and coolness. They had chosen their time well, for it was now mid-winter. So they waited for a night of storm and rain, when there was no moon, and sallying forth from the town crossed the inner ditch, and came up to the inner wall, unperceived by the enemy; for the noise of their footsteps was drowned by the roaring of the wind, and they were careful to advance in open order, so as not to be discovered by the clashing of their arms. The whole troop was lightly equipped, and they walked with their right foot unsandalled, to give them a firmer hold on the muddy ground. Choosing one of the spaces between two towers, they adjusted their ladders, and began to ascend the wall. The first to mount were twelve picked men, armed with breastplates and daggers, who as soon as they reached the top, rushed to the towers, six men to each, and having overpowered the guard, stood ready to defend the passage. These were followed by others, armed with javelins, whose shields were handed up to them from below as they ascended, to enable them to climb the more easily. Several of this party had got up in safety, when one of those who were following dislodged a tile as he grasped the battlements. The sound of the falling tile alarmed the guards in the towers, and soon the whole besieging force was in a commotion. But being bewildered by the darkness, and deafened by the tempest which was blowing, they knew not which way to turn, and remained at their quarters, waiting for orders. And at the same time the Plataeans left in the town made a feigned attack on the Peloponnesian wall at the opposite side to divert the attention of the enemy. In the general confusion thus created the besiegers were at a loss what to do, and three hundred of their men, who were kept together for prompt service on any pressing occasion, took up their station before the outer wall, thinking that the Athenians had come to relieve the town. Fire-signals were now kindled by the Peloponnesians, to summon help from Thebes; but the Plataeans were prepared for this also, and they kindled other beacons which had been raised for the purpose on their wall, so as to obscure the meaning of the enemy's signals, and delay the march of the Thebans, until their own comrades had had time to escape.

The way was thus left clear for the gallant two hundred. Those who led the party had secured possession of the passages through the towers, and stood ready to bar the way against all assailants. Others who followed brought ladders, and planting them at the foot of the towers, mounted to the top, and kept off the Peloponnesians, when they attempted to force an entrance, with a shower of javelins. Over the intervening space now swarmed the main body of the Plataeans; and each man, as he got over, halted at the edge of the outer ditch, and kept up a hot fire of javelins and arrows, to cover the retreat of his

comrades, and repel any attack from below. When all the rest had crossed the wall, those who held the towers began to descend; and this was the most perilous part of the adventure, especially for those who came last. All, however, succeeded in joining their comrades by the ditch, and just at this moment the picked troop of three hundred, who carried torches, came upon them. But fortune still favoured the Plataeans; crouching in the deep shadow thrown by the high banks of the ditch, they plied the enemy, who with their blazing torches afforded an easy mark, with darts and arrows. And thus, fighting and retreating at the same time, they made their way gradually across the ditch, but not without a severe struggle, for the water was swollen by the snow which had fallen in the night, and covered with rotten ice. Their best friend was the tempest, which raged with extraordinary violence throughout the night.

When their last man had crossed, the Plataeans went off at a run in the direction of Thebes, being assured that no one would expect them to take the road which led to their worst enemy. And the prudence of this course soon appeared, for looking back they saw the Peloponnesians hurrying with lighted torches along the road to Athens. Then after marching towards Thebes for about a mile, they doubled back, and taking to the mountains soon reached the friendly territory of Attica. They received a kind welcome at Athens, where it was found that out of the original two hundred and twenty, only eight were missing. Seven of these had lost heart at the last moment, and returned to Plataea, where they announced that all the rest of the party had been slain. One only, an archer, was taken prisoner at the outer ditch.

On hearing the report of those who had turned back, the Plataeans applied for a truce to bury their dead; and when their herald came back from his useless errand, they learned to their delight that this gallant enterprise, so ably planned, and so boldly executed, had been crowned with complete success.

II

Well would it have been for the Plataeans who remained in the town if they had stood by their first purpose, and shared the fortunes of their brave comrades. Better far to have died, sword in hand, than to meet the ignoble fate which was now reserved for them. It was in the following summer, two years after the beginning of the siege, that the crisis arrived. The Plataeans had come to the end of their provisions, and were suffering severely from want of food. In this state of weakness they were suddenly attacked by the besiegers, who might easily have carried the town by storm. But the Spartan general wished, if possible, to avoid this, as all places taken by assault would have to be given back to their original owners on the conclusion of peace, whereas those which had voluntarily surrendered might be retained. Accordingly he sent a herald, and summoned the Plataeans to surrender,

promising that they should have a fair trial by Spartan judges; and they, being actually on the point of starvation, accepted the terms offered, and laid down their arms. They were kept in custody and supplied with food until the judges, five in number, arrived from Sparta. On the arrival of the judges no express charge was made against them, but they were called up one by one, and asked this simple question: "Have you done any service to the Spartans or their allies in the course of the present war?"

The Plataeans saw the snare which was set for them, and seeking to evade it they asked permission to plead their cause at length. Leave being given, the Plataean advocate rose to address the court, and made a most moving and eloquent appeal, which well deserves to be reproduced in its main outlines.

"Men of Sparta," began the orator, "we surrendered our city on the faith of your promise that the innocent should be spared, and only the guilty condemned. But we fear that our confidence has been misplaced. That our doom is already pronounced we have but too plain evidence, in your sinister question, in your cold, condemning looks, in the gloomy faces of our enemies, who have poisoned your ears against us. We have but little hope of turning you from your purpose by anything that we can say. Nevertheless we have resolved to speak, lest in the hour of death we should be tormented by the thought that a word might have saved us, and that word remained unspoken.

"In the history of the last fifty years no city in Greece has a fairer record than ours. Though not trained to the sea, we served in the fleet at Artemisium; we fought under Pausanias in the great battle which decided the fate of Greece, and took part beyond our strength in all the trials and perils of our common country. On the gratitude of Sparta we have a special claim, for in the day of her direst extremity, after the earthquake, when the Helots were in arms against her, we sent a third part of our citizens to her aid. Since then we have been found in the ranks of your enemies; but this was your fault, not ours. Who drove us into the arms of Athens, when we were hard pressed by the tyranny of Thebes? We joined the Athenian alliance at your bidding; they defended us against our enemies, and admitted us to the rights of Athenian citizenship. We were bound, therefore, by every tie of honour and duty to stand by them, whether their cause was just or unjust.

"What, then, is the meaning of your question, whether we have done you or your allies any service during this war? If you ask as foes, how can you claim any service? And if you ask as friends, you have done us bitter wrong, by attacking us unprovoked.

"The Thebans seized our city in time of peace, and at a holy season, and we were justified by the laws of nature and of nations in wreaking vengeance upon them. It may seem to your interest to pay court to them

now; but think how different was our conduct from theirs when the Persian was at our doors, threatening slavery to us all. We were among the few who obeyed the call of honour, while Thebes and all the other towns of Boeotia took sides with the Barbarian.

"Hitherto Sparta has been called the glass of honour in Greece. What, then, will men say, if Spartan judges are guilty of blotting Plataea out of the map of Greece, and of the judicial murder of her citizens? Strange, indeed, and terrible has been the fate of our city, both now and in the past. Our fathers were brought to the brink of ruin by their valour and devotion; we, their sons, have just passed through all the horrors of a siege, and now we are forced to plead for our lives. Outcasts from our fatherland, spurned and rejected of all, we are thrown upon your mercy; and much we fear that your hearts are hardened against us.

"We adjure you, then, by the memory of those times, and of the part which we took in the salvation of Greece, not to betray us to our worst enemies, the Thebans. Do not win their gratitude by murder, but ours by mercy. Forget the cold calculations of policy; think of the everlasting infamy of such a deed. Your fathers are buried in our land, and we have been constant in paying all honour and service to their tombs. Will ye give up the land in which they rest to the men [Footnote: The Thebans, who fought on the side of the Persians at Plataea.] who are guilty of their blood? Will ye enslave those fields which saw the triumph of Greek liberty, and dishonour the gods by whose favour the victory was won? By your own renown, by the conscience of Greece, by the memory of your sires, we adjure you, men of Lacedaemon, not to do this deed.

"But it is time to make an end. If we have spoken in vain, and you are resolved on our death, we have still one request. Send us back into our city, and keep us there immured until we have perished of hunger. Any fate is better than falling into the hands of the Thebans, the enemies of Plataea, and of all Greece."

The orator had indeed spoken in vain, or if his words had made any impression on the minds of the judges, it was speedily obliterated by a fierce and bitter tirade which was delivered by a Theban speaker in reply. As soon as he had finished his harangue, the prisoners were called up again in turn, and questioned as before. When each of them had answered, in the only manner possible, he was led away and put to death; and not one of them was spared. The number of those slain was two hundred and twenty-five, and of these twenty-five were Athenians. The city was then levelled to the ground, and the territory left at the disposal of the Thebans. Thus was this brave little community sacrificed to the rancour of Thebes, and the selfish policy of Sparta.

CAPTURE OF A HUNDRED AND TWENTY SPARTANS AT SPHACTERIA

I

The result of six years of desultory fighting had fully justified the forebodings of Archidamus, and the sanguine anticipations of Pericles. In spite of the terrible ravages of the plague, Athens had easily held her own against the whole power of the Peloponnesian league. As yet, however, no decisive advantage had been gained on either side. But in the seventh year of the war an event occurred which would have enabled the Athenians, but for their own folly, to conclude an honourable peace.

The ablest of the Athenian generals at this time was Demosthenes, [Footnote: To be carefully distinguished from the great orator, born about forty years after the date reached in this chapter (425 B.C.).] who in the previous year had greatly distinguished himself by a brilliant campaign in Aetolia. In the following summer he obtained permission to take passage on board a fleet which was bound on a voyage to Corcyra and Sicily. He sailed in a private capacity, but he was authorized to use the ships against the coasts of Peloponnesus, if he saw any opening which might be utilized in the interests of Athens.

On a rocky promontory, at the northern end of the spacious bay of Navarino, lies the little town of Pylos, generally believed to have been the home of the Homeric Nestor. Since the conquest of Messenia by the Spartans, the town had remained in ruins, and the country for some distance round was a desert. The natural advantages of the adjacent coast had already caught the keen eye of Demosthenes, and he had formed the plan of raising a fortified outpost on the spot, to be held by a picked troop of the banished Messenians, and thus planting a thorn in the side of Sparta.

Fortune favoured his design. For on rounding the western headland of Peloponnesus, the fleet encountered a storm, and was compelled to seek shelter at Pylos. Demosthenes now urged the admirals to employ their enforced leisure in fortifying the place. But they repulsed him rudely, and treated his suggestion with contempt. He next tried to interest the inferior officers in his project, but meeting with no better success, he began to fear that this grand opportunity would be thrown away. The discussion, however, had reached the ears of the soldiers, and having nothing else to do, they agreed among themselves to pass the time by building a fort. Choosing a place of great natural strength, where the rocky coast descends abruptly to the open sea, they went to work with a will. As they had no tools for stone-cutting, they picked out the stones, and fitted them together according to their shape; and for want of hods they carried the mortar, wherever it was required, on their backs, stooping forward and clasping their hands together behind them, to prevent it from slipping off. They carried out their self-imposed task with great energy, and after six days of vigorous labour the fort was completed, for the natural

defences of the site were so strong that in most places there was no need of a wall. As the weather was now favourable, the fleet proceeded on its voyage, leaving Demosthenes with five ships to garrison the fort.

The news of the occupation of Pylos soon reached the Spartans, but at first they paid little heed, thinking that they could expel the audacious intruders whenever they chose to exert themselves. Moreover, they were just then engaged in keeping one of those religious festivals of which the Spartan calendar was so full, and a good part of their army was absent in Attica. Agis, however, the Spartan king, and those under him who were commanding in Attica, took a wiser view of the situation, and cutting short their operations they led their forces with all speed back to Sparta. They were the more inclined to do this as the season was yet early, the weather inclement, and, the corn being still green, they wanted means to nourish their troops. Thus the inventive genius of Demosthenes had already proved of signal service to his country; for this was the shortest of all the Peloponnesian invasions, lasting only fifteen days.

On the return of their troops from Attica the Spartans sent a small force to commence the attack on Pylos, and ordered the main body of their army to follow. There was some discontent among those who had already been serving abroad at this second levy, and the full muster of the troops was consequently delayed. In the meantime a message was despatched to a Peloponnesian fleet then sailing to Corcyra, which at this time was in a state of revolution, with orders to return at once, and assist in the campaign against Pylos. Demosthenes was now in imminent danger, being threatened with an immediate assault by sea and land, which he had no adequate means of repelling. Having sent off two of his ships to recall the Athenian squadron from its voyage to Corcyra, he prepared to defend himself, until the arrival of succour, as best he could.

The Peloponnesian fleet was the first to arrive, and the Spartans, who were now present in full force with their allies, determined to make the most of their time. They hoped, by a simultaneous onslaught of their army and fleet, to carry the fort before the Athenian ships had time to return. But in case they should fail in this, they intended to cripple the movements of the relieving squadron, by blocking the entrances to the bay. For the long, narrow island of Sphacteria forms a natural break water, converting the harbour of Navarino into a land-locked basin, with two narrow passages at the northern and southern end. [Footnote: The description of Thucydides does not correspond to the picture of the harbour given in our modern maps. But in the course of twenty centuries great changes may well have occurred.] These inlets the Spartans proposed to close, by anchoring triremes close together, with their prows turned seawards, which they could easily have done, for at the southern entrance there was only room for eight or nine vessels to sail abreast, and at the northern entrance only

room for two. This precaution, however, was never carried out; and the Spartans, as if blinded by fate, adopted another measure, which led to fatal consequences for themselves. Wishing to keep command of every spot of land in the neighbourhood of Pylos, they landed a body of their own men, numbering four hundred and twenty, with the usual proportion of Helots, on the island, and the same time posted troops at every assailable point on the opposite coast.

Thinking now that the little garrison at Pylos, surrounded on all sides by enemies, would fall an easy prey, they sent orders to the fleet to get under way, and prepared to attack the fort on the land side. Meanwhile Demosthenes had not been idle: having drawn his three remaining ships under the shelter of the fort, and protected them in front by a stockade, he armed the crews with such weapons as he had, including a number of wicker-shields, taken from a thirty-oared Messenian galley which had recently come to his assistance with a force of forty hoplites. Then, having posted the greater part of his troops for the defence of his position against the Peloponnesian army, he himself descended with a picked body of sixty hoplites, and took up his station on the rocky shore. For on this side the defences were weakest, as the Athenians, in building the fort, had never anticipated an attack from the sea.

Demosthenes had just time to address a few words of caution and encouragement to his men, assuring them of victory, if they would only stand fast, when the Peloponnesian fleet was seen bearing down upon them; and at the same moment a loud shout from the fort announced that the garrison was already engaged behind them. The assault was fiercest at the point where Demosthenes and his men were stationed, and the Peloponnesians made desperate efforts to effect a landing. But they were embarrassed by the difficult and rocky coast, which only allowed a few ships to approach at a time. As fast as one division was beaten back, another came on, with the white foam spouting round the prows, and the waters roaring and eddying to the strokes of the gigantic oars, while the cliffs resounded with the shouts of their comrades in the ships behind, cheering them on to the attack.

Conspicuous among those who fought on the ships was seen the gallant figure of Brasidas, who exerted himself, by voice and by example, to infuse his own heroic spirit into the rest of the crews and their officers. His ringing tones were heard above the tumult, urging on the captains and steersmen, when they hung back in fear lest their ships should be shattered on the rocks. "Spare not these timbers," he cried, "but let every hull among them go to wreck, rather than suffer the enemy to violate the soil of Lacedaemon. Where is your loyalty to Sparta? Have you forgotten the debt which you owe to her? Have at them, I say, and hurl this fort with its defenders into the sea." Saying this he ordered the master of his own trireme to beach the vessel, and stood ready on the gangway, that he might be the first to leap on shore. But as he attempted to land he was hurled back by the

Athenians, and fell fainting, covered with wounds, on the deck. His shield slipped off his arm, and dropped into the sea, and having been washed ashore, was picked up by the Athenians, who used it to adorn the trophy which they afterwards erected.

After the fall of Brasidas the Peloponnesians still continued their efforts to effect a landing, but they were baffled by the obstinate defence of the Athenians, and the rugged and inhospitable coast. It was a strange reversal of affairs which had been brought about by the fortune of war. On one side were the Spartans, trained to military service on land, but now compelled to serve on board a fleet, in order to obtain a footing on their own territory, and on the other side the Athenians, whose natural element was the sea, drawn up on land to repel a naval attack.

Next day the assault was repeated, but again without success. The Spartans sent for a supply of timber, to construct siege engines, intending to try and batter down the Athenian wall where it overlooked the harbour, as at this point there was a better landing-place for the ships. In this task, however, they were interrupted by the sudden appearance of the Athenian fleet, now numbering fifty vessels, having been reinforced by four Chian ships, and six from Naupactus. Finding the harbour occupied by the Peloponnesians, and the whole coast lined with troops, they retired for the night to the little island of Prote. Next day they weighed anchor early, and dividing their fleet, sailed into the harbour of Navarino by both entrances at once. Though taken by surprise, the Peloponnesians manned their ships, and as fast as they were ready put out to meet them; but before their array was complete they were attacked by the Athenians, who disabled many of their vessels, captured five, and drove the rest ashore. So complete was the rout that the Athenians pursued the flying ships into the very interior of the harbour, and rammed some of them after they had been brought to land. Others they charged while the crews were still getting on board, and began to tow off the disabled hulls. But in the heat of victory the Athenians had pushed their advantage somewhat too far, and they paid for their audacity by the loss of a considerable number of their men. For the Lacedaemonians, in wild dismay at the defeat of their ships, by which their comrades on the island would be cut off from all help, made desperate exertions to save their fleet, wading into the water in their heavy armour, and hauling back the vessels as they were being towed off. In the confined space manoeuvring was impossible, and the sea-fight had now become a furious hand to hand encounter, as between two armies on land. After a prolonged struggle, in which both sides suffered severely, the Spartans succeeded in saving their ships, except those which had been taken at first, and the Athenians then retired to their station.

The result of this battle was to give the Athenians complete command of the sea, for the Peloponnesian fleet was in no condition to renew the engagement. From their camp on the mainland the Spartans could see

the Athenian triremes rowing round and round the island, and keeping vigilant watch, to prevent those who were confined there from escaping. News of the disaster was sent without delay to Sparta, and the magistrates, recognising the gravity of the crisis, proceeded at once to Pylos, wishing to inform themselves on the spot, and then decide what was best to be done. Finding on their arrival that there was no prospect of rescuing their men on the island, they applied to the Athenian commanders for a truce, to enable them to send envoys to Athens, and arrange some terms for the recovery of the imprisoned Spartans. The Athenians consented, and a truce was made on the following conditions: The Spartans were to surrender all their fleet, including any ships of war on the coast of Laconia, to the Athenians, and to refrain from any attack on the fort, until the return of the envoys. The Athenians, on their part, agreed to allow provisions to be sent to the Spartans on the island, all such provision being conveyed thither under their own inspection, and none by stealth. They further agreed to carry the envoys to Athens in one of their own triremes, and to suspend all hostilities until the expiration of the truce. When the envoys returned, the Peloponnesian ships were to be given back.

It was a proud moment for Athens when the Spartan envoys appeared before the assembly, bearing the humble petition from her great enemy. The terms offered by the spokesman of the embassy in the name of Sparta were simple and concise, peace and friendship with Sparta, in return for the men shut up on the island. The rest of his speech was made up of grave moral reflections, such as are generally paraded by those on the losing side. Let the Athenians beware of abusing their advantage; though they had the upper hand to-day, they might be brought to their knees to-morrow. War was a game of hazard, in which the luck was always changing. Now they had an opportunity of concluding an honourable peace, and establishing a lasting claim to the gratitude of Sparta. And if the two leading states of Greece were once united, they could dictate what terms they pleased to the rest.

The notorious selfishness of Spartan policy is glaringly manifested in this speech. In their anxiety to recover their own citizens, the Spartans completely ignored the interests of their allies, and held out the right hand of fellowship to the people whom they had lately branded as the oppressors and spoilers of Greece. The Athenians might well distrust the professions of these perfidious statesmen, who repudiated their sworn obligations with such cynical levity. The Spartans in Sphacteria were already, they thought, prisoners of Athens, to be dealt with as they pleased; and were they to resign this costly prize, in return for a vague promise of friendship from Sparta? Their answer was framed on the advice of Cleon: they could not, they said, enter into any discussion, until the men on the island had surrendered themselves, and been brought to Athens. Then, if the Spartans agreed to restore to the Athenians Nisaea and Pegae, [Footnote: The harbour-towns of Megara.] and some other places which they had held before the Thirty Years' Truce, peace might be made, and

the prisoners restored. The Spartan envoys were somewhat startled by these demands, which involved a gross breach of faith to their own allies; so they affected to ignore the proposal, and suggested a private conference between themselves and select Athenian commissioners. It is not impossible that the terms offered, infamous as they were to Sparta, might have been accepted; but the whole negotiation was frustrated by the violence of Cleon, who, on hearing the suggestion of the envoys, overwhelmed them with abuse, accusing them of double-dealing and bad faith. The envoys were confounded by this specimen of Athenian manners, and seeing that they were wasting their time to no purpose, they turned their backs on the city of free speech.

On their return to Pylos the truce expired, and the Spartans demanded back their ships, but the Athenians refused to restore them, on the ground of some alleged violation of the conditions laid down. Thereupon hostilities were resumed with vigour on both sides. The Spartans made repeated attacks on the fort, and watched for an opportunity of bringing off their men from the island: and the Athenians kept a vigilant guard to prevent their escape. During the day two triremes sailed continually round Sphacteria in opposite directions, and at night their whole fleet, now raised to the number of seventy by the arrival of twenty fresh ships, was moored about the island, except on the exposed side in windy weather.

Before long the Athenians began to feel the difficulties of their position. They were but scantily supplied with food, and had much trouble in obtaining water. The only spring to which they had access, and even that by no means abundant, was in the citadel of Pylos, and most of them were reduced to scraping the shingle, and thus obtaining a meagre supply of brackish water. On land their quarters were straitened and uncomfortable, and they had no proper anchorage for their ships, so that the crews had to go ashore in turns to get their meals. They were greatly disappointed to find their task thus prolonged, for they had supposed that a few days' siege would suffice to starve the imprisoned Spartans into a surrender, as the island was barren and ill-furnished with water. But day followed day, and still they waited in vain for any sign of yielding. For the Spartan magistrates had offered large rewards to anyone who succeeded in conveying wine, meal, or other portable provisions, to the island, and many were tempted to run the risk, especially among the Helots, who were offered their liberty in return for this service. They put out from various points of the mainland, and landed under cover of night on the seaward side of the island, choosing their time when the wind was blowing strong from the sea, which made it impossible for the Athenian triremes to keep their exposed anchorage. The Spartan hoplites stood ready on the rocks to help them; and so long as they could get ashore with their freight, they cared nothing what happened to their boats, for if they were wrecked, the Spartans had pledged themselves for the full value. Others, still bolder, swam, across the

harbour, dragging after them leather bags filled with a mixture of poppy-seed or linseed and honey, [Footnote: Poppy-seed was valued in ancient medicine as an antidote against hunger, and linseed against thirst.] and attached to a cord. These were soon detected; but the other source of supply remained open, and it seemed likely that the siege would be protracted till winter, when it would have to be given up.

The Athenians at home were much concerned when they were informed of this state of affairs, and they began to regret that they had not accepted the terms offered by Sparta. They were suspicious and uneasy, and Cleon, on whose advice they had acted, saw himself in danger of falling a victim to their resentment. But his boundless self-confidence served him well in this crisis. At first he affected to disbelieve the report sent from Pylos, and proposed to send commissioners to inquire into the true state of the case. His motion was carried, and he himself was nominated as one of the commissioners. Cleon was now placed in an awkward position: either he would have to confirm the statement of the messengers from Pylos, and thus make himself ridiculous, or, if he contradicted them, he would be convicted of falsehood. So he turned round again, and advised the Athenians, if they believed the report, to waste no more time, but to order an immediate attack on the island. "If I were general," [Footnote: The chief civil and military magistrate at Athens, corresponding to the Roman consul.] he said, with a meaning glance at Nicias, who was then holding that office, "it would not be long before these Spartans were brought in chains to Athens. The Athenians want a man to lead them."

This Nicias, on whom the demagogue had so scornfully reflected, was a great noble, and the chief political opponent of Cleon. When he heard the boastful words of his rival, it struck Nicias that there was a fine opportunity of bringing him to ruin, by thrusting upon him a command for which he was totally unqualified. Encouraged by the shouts of the multitude, who were crying to Cleon, "Why don't you go and do it?" he rose from his place, and proposed that the tanner should be sent in charge of an expedition to take the men at Sphacteria. At first Cleon agreed to go, thinking that Nicias was jesting; but when he saw that the proposal was made seriously, he began to draw back. "It is your business, not mine," he said to Nicias. "I am not general—you are; why should I do your work for you?" "Never mind the title," answered Nicias; "I resign my office on this occasion to you." The dispute grew hotter and hotter, much to the amusement of the Athenians, who fell readily into the humour of the situation, and loudly applauded the proposal of Nicias. The more Cleon objected, the more they shouted that he should go. Finding that he must make good his words, Cleon at last plucked up a spirit, and accepted the honour thus contemptuously forced upon him. "I am not afraid of the Spartans," he declared valiantly. "Give me the contingent of soldiers from Lemnos and Imbros, the Thracian peltasts, [Footnote: Light-armed

soldiers.] and four hundred archers, and without taking a single Athenian from the city, within three weeks I will either bring those Spartans as prisoners to Athens, or kill them where they are.”

There was some laughter among the Athenians at Cleon’s vain-glorious promise; but the more sober-minded were not displeased at his appointment, expecting that, if he failed, they would be rid of a nuisance; while, if he succeeded, they would gain an immense advantage over their enemies. Such, at least, is the comment of the historian; but he makes no remark on the incredible levity of the Athenians, to whom the gravest interests of state were matter for mirth and pastime; and he has not a word of censure for Nicias and his ”sober-minded” partisans, who, in their eagerness to ruin a political opponent, showed a criminal disregard for the welfare of Athens.

II

When Cleon arrived at Pylos with his forces, he found Demosthenes engaged in active preparations for an attack on the island. For his troops were growing impatient, and clamouring to be led into action, and a happy accident had recently occurred, which greatly increased the prospect of success. Till quite lately Sphacteria had been covered with a dense growth of underwood, and Demosthenes knew by his experience in Aetolia that an attacking force would be at a great disadvantage in marching against an enemy who fought under cover, and knew every inch of the ground. But a party of Athenian soldiers, who had landed on the island to cook their breakfast, accidentally set fire to the brushwood, and a wind springing up, the flames were carried over the greater part of the island, leaving it a blackened waste. Demosthenes now discovered that the besieged Spartans were more numerous than he had supposed, having hitherto believed that their number had been purposely exaggerated, to give an excuse for sending more food; and the main obstacle being now removed, he issued the welcome order to make ready for an immediate assault.

When he received his commission, Cleon had prudently stipulated that Demosthenes should be associated with him in the command. The two ill-assorted colleagues—the turbulent demagogue, and the veteran general—now took counsel together, and after a last fruitless attempt at negotiation, they set sail at night with a force of eight hundred hoplites, and disembarking just before dawn on both sides of the island at once, led their men at a run against the first guard-station of the Spartans. They found the enemy posted in three divisions: the first, consisting of thirty hoplites, formed an advanced guard; some distance behind these, where the ground forms a shallow basin, containing the only spring in the island, was stationed the main body, commanded by Epitadas; and at the extreme north, opposite Pylos, there was a small reserve force, left to guard a sort of natural citadel, which would serve as a last retreat, if Epitadas and his men were overpowered.

The thirty Spartans in the outpost were taken by surprise, and cut down to a man; for though they had seen the Athenian ships putting out, they had no suspicion of what was intended, supposing that they were merely proceeding to their anchorage for the night. At daybreak the rest of the fleet put in at the island, bringing the whole of the forces which Demosthenes had at his disposal, except a few, who were left to garrison the fort at Pylos. They were a motley host, armed for the most part with slings, javelins, and bows, but admirably suited for the work which was to be done. Swarming over the island by hundreds and by thousands they took up their stations on every piece of rising ground, threatening the enemy in front, in the rear, on the right flank, and on the left. The Spartans, in their heavy armour, were helpless against these agile foes, who eluded every attempt to come to close quarters, and kept up a continual shower of arrows, javelins, and stones. Such had been the orders of Demosthenes, which were now carried into effect.

When the Spartans under Eпитadas saw their advanced guard cut up, and the Athenians marching against them, they drew up in order, and tried to come within spear-thrust of the enemy; but they were unable to effect their purpose, for the Athenian hoplites kept their ground, and at the same moment they themselves were assailed on both flanks and in the rear by a cloud of light infantry. It was a kind of warfare to which the Spartans were totally unaccustomed: if they attempted to advance, their nimble assailants drew back, and pursuit was impossible on the rocky and broken ground. For a time the light-armed troops approached them with caution, being somewhat cowed in spirit when brought face to face with the renowned warriors of Sparta, hitherto supposed to be invincible. But seeing how the Spartans were embarrassed, they took courage, and came on in a roaring multitude, surrounding them on all sides, and leaving them not a moment to take breath. The air was darkened by a tempest of missiles; and a fine dust, caused by the ashes of the late fire, rose in choking clouds from the trampling of many feet. Exhausted by their violent exertions, stunned by the uproar, and blinded by the dust, the Spartans began to give ground, and closing their ranks fell back on the stronghold where their reserve was stationed. They were hotly pursued, and some few were cut off in the retreat, but the greater part succeeded in reaching the fort, where they turned at bay, and prepared to defend themselves to the last. Until a late hour in the day the Athenians made vain attempts to dislodge them from their position, which was only assailable in front. At last, when both sides were sorely distressed by the long conflict under a burning sun, an officer who was in command of the Messenian troops came to the generals, and offered, if they would place a few light-armed soldiers at his disposal, to lead them up the precipitous cliffs at the northern end of Sphacteria, and take the Spartans in the rear. Permission being readily granted, he chose his men, and taking care that his movements were not perceived by the enemy, made his way with them along the

perilous and slippery face of the cliffs to the rear of the beleaguered garrison, scaled the steep ascent, and suddenly appearing on the heights, struck terror into the Spartans, and gave fresh courage to their assailants.

The situation of the Spartans was now similar to that of their ancestors when they made their last stand at Thermopylae. They were attacked in front and rear, and hemmed in on both sides by the natural difficulties of the place. In their weak and exhausted condition it would have been an easy task to make an end of them. But the great object of Cleon and Demosthenes was to take them alive. They therefore suspended the attack, and sent a herald, and summoned them to lay down their arms. When they heard the proclamation, most of them lowered their shields, and waved their hands in the air, to show that they had dropped their weapons. The Athenian generals then entered into a parley with Styphon the third in command of the Spartans; for Epitadas, the chief officer, was slain, and Hippagretus, the second, had been left for dead on the field. Styphon requested permission to communicate with the Spartan authorities on the mainland, and ask what he and his comrades were to do; and the Athenian commanders sent one of their own men to carry the message. Having heard his report, the Spartan magistrates sent a herald to see how matters stood; and after more than one messenger had passed to and fro between their camp and the island, they sent their final instructions, conveyed in these words "The Spartans bid you to decide for yourselves, but to do nothing dishonourable."

Fifty years before, these wounded and weary men would have needed no instructions to tell them their duty. According to the ancient tradition of Sparta they had but one course open to them—to die at their posts. But the lapse of time had softened the stern fibre of the Spartan character; and the broken remnant now brought to bay in Sphacteria interpreted the ambiguous mandate in their own favour, and surrendered themselves and their arms.

The number of the prisoners was two hundred and ninety-two, of whom about a hundred and twenty were Spartans of pure descent, several of them belonging to the highest families in Sparta. They were distributed among the captains of the fleet for transportation to Athens. Dating from the first sea-fight, the siege had lasted altogether seventy-two days; and during seven weeks of this period they had subsisted on the casual supplies smuggled over by the blockade-runners from the mainland. Great was the joy at Athens when that costly freight was brought safely into the harbour of Peiraeus; and Cleon, whose bustling energy had really helped to precipitate a crisis, was the hero of the hour. He had promised to settle the business, one way or the other, within twenty days, and this promise, which had been laughed at as a piece of crazy vanity, was fulfilled to the letter. The whole merit of the performance, however, belonged to Demosthenes, who had planned the attack on Sphacteria with admirable

sagacity, and led the operations from first to last.

The surrender of a picked troop of Spartan warriors caused a revolution of feeling throughout Greece. Hitherto it had been assumed as a matter of course that no Spartan soldier, in any circumstances, would yield to an enemy; but now more than a hundred Spartans had preferred life to honour. It was generally believed that the survivors were inferior in valour to those who had fallen; and some time afterwards one of the captives was asked this insulting question by one of the Athenian allies: "Your brave comrades were buried on the field, I suppose?" The Spartan's answer was couched in a riddle: "It would be a mighty clever spindle, [Footnote: Arrow.] which singled out the brave." His meaning was that the stones and arrows had dealt out death among his comrades without distinction.

CAMPAIGNS OF BRASIDAS IN THRACE

I

One advantage which accrued to the Athenians from the possession of the Spartan captives was the immunity from invasion. For if the Spartans prepared to make any movement against Attica, they could bring out their prisoners, and threaten to put them to death. And in other directions the future looked brighter than it had done for many years. They held Pylos, which was garrisoned by Messenian troops, and served as an open door, through which they could carry havoc over the whole western district of Laconia; and the occupation of Cythera, which was effected in the following year, gave them increased facility for harassing the commerce of Sparta, and making descents on her eastern coast.

Elated by these successes, the Athenians determined on a bolder flight, and forgetting the lessons of Pericles, thought of recovering the possessions which they had held on the mainland thirty years before. With this intention they planned an attack, which was to be carried out from three different points at once, on Boeotia. But the whole scheme proved a failure, and led to a severe defeat at Delium; and about the same time news arrived from Thrace which showed that the tide was turning, and should have warned them, if they were wise, to set bounds to their restless ambition.

Brasidas had long since recovered from the wounds received at Pylos. The deep humiliation of Sparta, now reduced to become a suppliant for peace, filled him with shame and sorrow, and in the eighth year of the war he formed the bold design of organizing a campaign against the coast-towns of Thrace, which were among the most important of the Athenian tributaries. Having obtained the necessary commission from Sparta, he collected a force of seventeen hundred heavy-armed infantry, and in the summer following the disaster at Sphacteria, turned his steps northward, and arrived without mishap at the borders

of Thessaly. The Thessalians generally were then on friendly terms with Athens, and, apart from this, the passage of so large a force through their territory caused suspicion and alarm among the inhabitants. But Brasidas was a man of rare gifts: endowed with more than a full share of the typical Spartan virtues, he combined with these a graciousness of manner, and a winning eloquence, which made him an equal of the most accomplished Athenian. He had, moreover, friends among the powerful nobles of Thessaly, who undertook to guide him in safety to the Macedonian frontier. On reaching the river Enipeus, he found his passage barred by a Thessalian force, who seemed resolved to dispute his progress. His courteous demeanour, and fair words, disarmed their hostility, and he was allowed to pass. Fearing, however, a general rising of the natives against him, and urged to despatch by his guides, he pushed on by forced marches, and entering the passes of Olympus, descended into the southern plain of Macedonia, whose king Perdiccas, a shifty and treacherous barbarian, though nominally in alliance with Athens, favoured the enterprise of Brasidas.

Perdiccas had undertaken to provide pay for half the Spartan force, in return for help to be rendered against a rebel chieftain with whom he was at war. But Brasidas, whose main object was to raise a revolt among the Athenian allies, insisted on entering into negotiations with the rebel, and having patched up a truce, conducted his troops to the neighbourhood of Acanthus, a town on the eastern side of the Chalcidian peninsula, where there was a party discontented with the Athenian rule. In all the cities subject to Athens the general mass of the people were found loyal towards her, or, at the worst, disinclined for any change; and Acanthus was no exception. When Brasidas with his little army appeared before the walls the people at first refused him admission. But it was just before the vintage, and their grapes were hanging in ripe clusters, exposed to the hand of the spoiler; and so, to save their vineyards from ravage, they were at last induced to give him a hearing.

It was very important for Brasidas to secure the voluntary adherence of the Acanthians, whose action would have a powerful effect in determining the attitude of the other Chalcidians towards them. Accordingly he exerted all his skill as an orator, which was considerable, to allay their suspicions, and rouse their enthusiasm for the cause which he represented. That cause, he said, was the liberation of Greece from the tyranny of Athens. Let none of them suppose that he had come in the interests of a faction, to enslave the many to the few, or the few to the many. He had bound the authorities of Sparta by the most solemn oaths to respect the constitution of any state which enlisted under their banner. Freedom for Greeks!—that was the watchword which should find a response in every patriotic heart. After this fine burst of sentiment, Brasidas descended to a much lower level, and plainly intimated that if the Acanthians would not join him from these high motives, he would employ coercion, and proceed to

ravage their estates, This last argument was decisive, and in order to save their valuable harvest from destruction, they agreed to admit Brasidas and his army into the town. Shortly afterwards their example was followed by Stagirus, one day to become famous as the birthplace of Aristotle.

It is melancholy to find a man of really pure and generous character like Brasidas lending himself to be the mouthpiece of Spartan hypocrisy. To him the sounding phrases and lofty professions which he uttered may have meant something: but in their essence they were mere hollow cant, intended to divert attention from the true issue, and drag a peaceful and prosperous community into the private quarrels of Sparta. So degraded was now the tone of politics in Greece, even among her best and ablest men.

II

On the banks of the Strymon, just where the river sweeps round in a sharp curve, west and east, the Athenians had founded, six years before the outbreak of the war, the colony of Amphipolis. It was a site which had long been coveted by the leaders of Greek colonial enterprise, being the key to the richest district in Thrace, with unrivalled facilities for commerce, and close to the gold-mines of Mount Pangeus. A previous attempt which was made by the Athenians to occupy the position had ended in ruinous disaster; but nearly thirty years later a second body of emigrants, led by Hagnon from Athens, met with much better success; Amphipolis now grew and prospered, and at the time which we have reached was the most important city in the Athenian empire.

The Amphipolitans had a bitter and jealous enemy in the neighbouring town of Argilus, situated a few miles to the west, on the road to Amphipolis; and ever since the appearance of Brasidas in Thrace the Argilians had been plotting against the tranquillity of their hated rival. Accordingly, when Brasidas, who had planned a surprise on Amphipolis, appeared before their gates, they welcomed him eagerly, and conducted him and his army to the bridge over the Strymon, which crossed the river just outside the southern end of the city wall. The defenders of the bridge, few in number, and taken unawares, were instantly cut to pieces; for Brasidas came upon them before daybreak, and the weather, which was wintry and inclement, favoured his design.

The farms and country-houses of the Amphipolitans, which occupied an extensive district on the eastern side of the city, now lay at the mercy of Brasidas, and after choosing a position for his camp, he began to overrun the country. For those who were responsible for the safety of Amphipolis had taken no precautions, though they knew that this daring and active enemy had been carrying on a campaign for many weeks in the adjacent parts of Thrace. Consequently, a good number of the citizens, who were attending to the business of their estates,

fell into his hands, and it is not improbable that, if he had made a sudden assault on the city, he would have captured it on the same day.

There was a disaffected party in Amphipolis, who had planned the betrayal of the place, acting in concert with Argilus, through the agency of certain Argilian citizens residing in the town. The traitors now proposed that Brasidas and his army should be admitted, but they were overruled by the general voice of the people, and it was agreed that the Athenian Eucles, governor of Amphipolis, should send a message for help to another Athenian officer, who was commissioned to watch the interests of Athens in Thrace. That officer was Thucydides, the historian, from whose work the materials for the present narrative are taken. Thucydides was descended on his mother's side from the royal family of Thrace, [Footnote: Such, at least, is the highly probable conjecture of Classen.] and through this connexion he was the owner of valuable working rights in the gold-mines of Mount Pangaeus, and a man of great power and, influence in these districts. When the message arrived from Amphipolis, he was engaged in some business at Thasos, and postponing all other concerns he collected a small squadron of seven ships and hastened to the rescue with all speed. But Brasidas, who had received intelligence of his movements, was too quick for him. He had valuable hostages in the persons of those Amphipolitans who had been taken outside the walls. The population of Amphipolis consisted almost entirely of men of mixed or foreign descent, who were anxious about their properties, and in fear for their friends, while the few Athenian residents were alarmed for their own safety, having little hope of prompt succour. Taking advantage of this state of public feeling, the politic Spartan issued a proclamation, pledging him to respect the rights and property of all who chose to remain; while those who preferred to withdraw were allowed five days to take away their goods. This tempting offer produced the desired effect. It was in vain that the Athenian governor interposed his authority, and strove to uphold the imperial claims of Athens. The people threatened to rise in mutiny against him, and when the partisans of Brasidas, now grown bold, openly moved a resolution to accept his conditions, the proposal was carried, and the Spartan general marched unopposed into the town.

Late on the same day Thucydides sailed into the harbour of Eion, the port of Amphipolis, and learning that Brasidas was already in possession of the inland city, took all necessary precautions to provide against an immediate attack. He was only just in time; for on the very next day Brasidas carried his troops down the river on a flotilla of boats, and tried to establish himself in a strong position, commanding the mouth of the river, and at the same time sent a storming party to make an assault on the land side. But the attempt was frustrated, and Eion at least was saved to Athens.

The fall of Amphipolis, which occurred shortly after the crushing defeat at Delium, caused great consternation among the Athenians.

Apart from the wound to their pride, they were deprived by this loss of a large portion of their revenue, and cut off from the principal source of their timber supply. And there were still further grounds for alarm. For Amphipolis was now an open door, through which the Spartans could send troops into eastern Thrace, and carry the war to the entrance of the Euxine. For a moment it seemed as if all their fears would be realized. The gentle manners of Brasidas—his fairness, modesty, and strict regard for the rights of all men—had won the hearts of the Athenian allies in Thrace, and secret agents were constantly arriving at his head-quarters on the Strymon, inviting him to come and help them to recover their liberty. He had skilfully appealed to the most deeply-rooted instinct of the Greek, the desire for unfettered action in his own city, free from all interference from outside. This instinct, long held in abeyance, first by the necessity for protection from Persia, and when that danger was removed, by the habits acquired under the mild rule of Athens, was now awakened into new life by the influence of the great warrior and accomplished statesman, whose watchword was "Liberty for Greeks!" The recent reverses of Athens had excited a feeling of contempt among her subjects, and led them greatly to under-estimate her real power; and Brasidas himself, by a not over-scrupulous perversion of facts, had been careful to encourage this belief. All these causes produced a burst of enthusiasm throughout Thrace, and if the Spartans had supported Brasidas with vigour, a general insurrection would have followed among the Athenian allies. But the authorities of Sparta were jealous of their brilliant officer, and their chief anxiety was to recover the prisoners taken at Sphacteria.

In the same winter the indefatigable Spartan effected the capture of Torone, a town situated on the second of the three headlands which project, like the prongs of a fork, from the peninsula of Chalcidice. As in the case of Amphipolis, Torone fell into his hands by treachery; but he had now made good his title as the champion of Greek independence, and early in the following spring the citizens of Scione, on the first or westernmost headland, invited him to come over and take command of their town. On receiving this welcome summons Brasidas lost no time, and crossed over by night in a skiff, which was convoyed by a trireme, so that if any hostile vessel appeared in sight, it might be engaged by the trireme, and leave him free to escape. He reached Scione in safety, and having convened a general assembly of the citizens, addressed them in flattering terms, praising their high courage and patriotic spirit. "You," he said, "have set a noble example to your oppressed brethren: isolated as you are, and cut off from all succour from the mainland, you have defied all perils, and thrown in your lot, for better or for worse, with the friends of liberty. Your gallantry and self-devotion has given you a just claim to the gratitude of Sparta and of all Greece." The revolt of Scione was indeed a daring defiance of the Athenian power, for since the capitulation of Potidaea, which occurred seven years before, the inhabitants had been in the position of islanders, exposed to the

whole maritime power of Athens. For the moment, however, the people were carried away by a transport of enthusiasm, and little dreaming of the terrible vengeance which was to overtake them two years later, they greeted Brasidas as a deliverer, and vied with one another who should honour him most. He was publicly presented with a crown of gold, as the liberator of Greece; and in private houses he was wreathed with garlands, and surrounded with worship, like a victorious athlete.

But a few days before the defection of Scione all the ambitious schemes of Brasidas had been checkmated by the action of his own countrymen at home. For some time past negotiations had been in progress between Athens and Sparta; and since the battle of Delium, and the rapid successes of their great enemy in Thrace, the Athenians had been more disposed to come to terms. In this altered mood they agreed to make a truce for one year with Sparta, which would give time to arrange the conditions of a lasting peace, and leave them at leisure to repair the shattered fabric of their empire. Two commissioners, an Athenian and a Spartan, were at once despatched to announce the conclusion of the truce to Brasidas. They found him at Torone, preparing to set out a second time for the western peninsula, and continue his intrigues against the subjects of Athens. In the interview which followed a dispute arose between Brasidas and the commissioners, as to whether Scione should be admitted into the truce. Brasidas asserted that the city had joined the Spartan alliance before the truce was signed; but the Athenian commissioner loudly protested that the revolt occurred after the conclusion of the truce,—and such, indeed, was the fact. Brasidas, however, was bound in honour to defend the hapless community which had been drawn by his fatal influence into so fearful a peril; and in the existing confusion of the Greek calendar it was not easy to establish a date with perfect exactitude. Accordingly Brasidas refused to surrender Scione to the vengeance of Athens, and placed the town in a state of defence. Not content with this, he extended the same measures of protection to Mende, which revolted after the arrival of the commissioners. This was an open violation of the truce, and the Athenians, in great fury, immediately prepared to send a fleet against these audacious rebels, and passed a savage decree, condemning the whole adult male population of Scione to death.

III

During the following summer Mende was recovered by Nicias for the Athenians, Scione was closely invested, and Perdicas, who had quarrelled with Brasidas, once more became an ally of Athens, and gave proof of his sincerity by preventing the passage of Spartan reinforcements to Thrace. The Athenians were thus left free to turn their attention to Amphipolis, and at the beginning of the tenth year of the war, the truce having now expired, Cleon was sent with a fleet of thirty ships to conduct the siege of this important place. That so

weighty a charge should have been entrusted to hands so incompetent argues a degree of infatuation in the Athenians which is very hard to understand. On his voyage Cleon succeeded in retaking Torone by a sudden assault, and then proceeding northwards dropped anchor at Eion, where he remained inactive, after despatching messengers to Perdiccas, and to a friendly Thracian prince, to ask for reinforcements.

Meanwhile Brasidas, who some time before had returned to Amphipolis, was waiting to strike a blow at his unwarlike enemy. His own troops, though about equal in numbers to the force under Cleon, were far inferior in equipment and discipline; but he counted on some incautious movement on the part of the Athenian general, which would throw the picked infantry of Athens into disorder, and place them at a disadvantage. So he left Clearidas, a young Spartan, whom he had appointed governor of Amphipolis, in charge of the garrison, and taking with him fifteen hundred men occupied a position on the right bank of the river, where the ground rises abruptly to a considerable height, affording a wide view over the city to the country beyond, as far as Eion. From this point, which is called Cerdylum, he could watch the proceedings of the enemy, and still have ample time to rejoin Clearidas in Amphipolis, if, as he expected, Cleon should leave his defences and advance upon the town.

He had not long to wait. The Athenian soldiers stationed at Eion were chafing at their inaction, and mutinous speeches were heard on all sides. What a man was this Cleon, this cowardly braggart, under whom they were to take the field against the most daring and skilful leader in Greece! They had known what to expect from such a general, since the day when they sailed for Thrace. These murmurs reached the ears of Cleon, and he saw that something must be attempted, or his men would be totally demoralized. So he gave the order to march, and led his troops up the ridge of hills which slope down towards Amphipolis on the eastern side, where the town was defended by a single line of wall, reaching from the northern to the southern bend of the river. He was far from supposing that anyone would come out to attack him; he only wanted, he said, to take a good view of the place, and when his reinforcements arrived, he would surround the city on all sides, and carry it by assault. For his wonderful good fortune at Pylos had given him unbounded confidence in his powers as a strategist, and he thought that Amphipolis would prove a second Pylos, forgetting that here he had a Brasidas to deal with, and no Demosthenes to do the work for him. When he reached the top of the ascent, he called a halt, and took a leisurely survey of the wide sweep of country spread below him,—to the north, the broad, marshy waters of Lake Cercynitis, from which the river issues just above the town,—eastwards, the towering summit of Mount Pangaeus,—and on the other side, just beneath his feet, the devoted city, which now seemed cowering, silent and deserted, as if conscious of Cleon's eagle glance. The gates were closed, and not a man was to be seen on the battlements. "What a pity," remarked Cleon, "that we brought no siege-engines with us! We might have battered down

the wall, and marched in at once,—there is none to oppose us.”

So readily did this holiday general fall into the trap which Brasidas, with a just estimate of his capacity, had set for him. As soon as he saw that Cleon had started from Eion, the Spartan general left his post in Cerdylum, and led his men back into Amphipolis. Here he made such a disposition of his forces as to give the place that peaceful and innocent appearance which deceived Cleon’s unpractised eye. Then he took up his station with a picked troop of a hundred and fifty hoplites at the southern gate of Amphipolis, leaving Clearidas in charge of the main body, and awaited a favourable moment to attack.

But these preparations could not be made without exciting some attention among the more experienced of the Athenian officers. They had seen Brasidas entering the city, and observed him offering sacrifice, as for battle, before the temple of Athene; and Cleon, who was standing, lost in his contemplations, some distance in advance of his forces, suddenly received the alarming intelligence that the enemy were on the point of making a sally. ”The whole garrison is in motion,” said the messenger, ”and we have caught sight of the feet of many horses and men under the gates: evidently they mean to attack us.” Thus rudely startled from his meditations, Cleon went to look for himself, and seeing that the messenger had spoken the truth he gave the order for a retreat in the direction of Eion. This movement should have begun from the left wing, but there was some delay in executing the order, and Cleon, who was in a great hurry to reach a place of safety, led the way with his own division, which, being on the right, ought to have closed the retreat. The consequence was that the whole Athenian army was thrown into confusion, and Brasidas, who was watching from his station at the gate, saw by the irregular motion of their spears and helmets that all discipline was at an end. ”Now is our time,” he cried to his men: ”Open the gates! The day is ours.” With these words he rushed out with his troops, and fell upon the Athenian centre; and at the same moment the main body under Clearidas poured out from the northern gate, and attacked them in the rear.

The effect of this sudden assault was to cut the Athenian army in half: the left wing, which was nearest to Eion, fled without striking a blow, but the right made a vigorous resistance, though abandoned by their cowardly general, who was cut down by a Thracian spearman as he tried to make good his escape. A far nobler name was also added to the death-roll of that fatal day: Brasidas, fighting at the head of his troop, received a mortal wound, and was carried, unobserved by the Athenians, into the city. He lived long enough to hear that his men had gained a decisive victory, and then passed away, the purest and the most heroic spirit among all those who played their part in this unhappy war. After his death he received divine honours at Amphipolis, and was worshipped as the second founder of the city.

THE HOLLOW PEACE

I

The negotiations for peace, begun in the previous year; had been interrupted by the brilliant successes of Brasidas, and the factious opposition of Cleon, and after their death the main obstacle to a pacific understanding was removed. The high hopes conceived by the Athenians after the capture of the Spartans at Pylos had been damped by their disastrous defeat at Delium, and by the revolt of their allies in Thrace; and, above all, they were anxious to recover Amphipolis. Still more depressed was the temper of the Spartans. They had entered on the war in a spirit of sanguine confidence, expecting to make an end of the conflict by a single invasion of Attica; and now, after ten years of fighting, their great rival remained almost untouched in the chief sources of her power. Their coasts were exposed to continual ravage by the Athenian fleets, and Pylos was still occupied by their bitter enemies, the Messenians, attracting all the discontented elements in Sparta, and keeping the Helots in a continual ferment. And finally a hundred and twenty of their noblest citizens were immured in the dungeons of Athens, and they were ready to make great sacrifices to procure their release.

Accordingly, in the winter after the battle of Amphipolis, negotiations were resumed, and early in the following spring a treaty of peace was concluded between Athens and Sparta, on the understanding that all places taken by force of arms should be restored, and all prisoners set at liberty. Such was the Peace of Nicias, named after its chief promoter, the former rival of Cleon, and now the leading politician at Athens. It was really a private agreement between Athens and Sparta, for the most important of the Spartan allies, who thought that their interests were neglected, refused to sign the treaty. Alarmed by this, the Spartans immediately concluded a second treaty with Athens, binding both sides to mutual aid and defence, in case their territories were attacked. The prisoners taken at Sphacteria were now restored, but owing to the bungling of Nicias, the Athenians failed to regain Amphipolis.

II

Six years elapsed after the conclusion of the Peace of Nicias, before war was again openly declared; but it was a peace only in name, and was broken by many acts of hostility on both sides. During this period the principal states of Greece were involved in a network of political intrigue, treaty following treaty, and alliance succeeding to alliance, for the most part with no result. To this statement, there is, however, one important exception. A year after the signing of the second treaty between Athens and Sparta, a coalition was formed, including Athens, Elis, and Mantinea, under the leadership of Argos; and in mentioning this event we have to usher on to the stage one of the most extraordinary characters in history. This was Alcibiades, a

young Athenian noble, endowed with every advantage of mind, person, and fortune, whose fatal gifts, and lawless ambition, made him the evil genius of his country. His high birth, his wealth, his wit, and his wonderful beauty, attracted to him a host of flatterers, who fed his vanity with soft adulation, and led him to believe that nothing was too great for such powers as his. Like most of the brilliant young men of his day, he attached himself for a time to the philosopher Socrates, for whom he seems to have felt a warm admiration. But his connexion with that great teacher and thinker, though it served to sharpen his understanding, could not eradicate the effects of evil habit and example. His wilful, selfish, and despotic temper soon broke loose from that salutary restraint, and henceforth we find him pursuing a course of action which brought ruin on his people, and on himself a traitor's death and a dishonoured name.

Much irritation had been caused among the Athenians by the shifting and treacherous conduct of the Spartans, who had failed to redeem their sworn pledges, and had excited great suspicion at Athens by repeated intrigues with Argos, and with their own offended allies of the Peloponnesian League. Alcibiades had a private grudge against the Spartans, to whom he had made overtures of friendship and service at the time when the treaty was under discussion, only to be set aside as a profligate and frivolous youth, unfit to meddle with serious matters of state. He now placed himself at the head of the party hostile to Sparta, and it was not long before he had an opportunity of revenging the insult to his pride. He used all his influence to promote an alliance with Argos, the ancient enemy and rival of Sparta in Peloponnesus; and when envoys arrived from Sparta to remonstrate against this proceeding, and reassure the Athenians as to their intentions, he contrived by a masterpiece of low cunning to cover them with shame and contempt. When the envoys were introduced to the senate they declared that they had come with full powers to settle all differences, and Alcibiades feared that if they made the same statement to the general assembly of the citizens, they might induce the Athenians to renounce their alliance with Argos. So, after the senate had risen, he took the envoys aside, and with an air of great candour and friendliness warned them that they must conceal the extent of their powers when they appeared before the popular assembly. "You do not understand," he said, "how to deal with the mob of Athens; if you show your hand, they will force you into extravagant concessions. Leave the matter to me, and everything will turn out as you wish."

The simple Spartans fell into the snare. They were not at all startled by the proposal that they should eat their own words, for in dishonesty they were not behind Alcibiades himself, though they were no match for him in cunning. Being brought before the people, and asked whether they had come with full powers, they answered bluntly "No!" Great was the amazement at this flat contradiction of the avowal which they had made before the senate, and Alcibiades, giving voice to the general indignation, overwhelmed the astonished envoys with a

torrent of invective and abuse. The Spartans were dumb-founded by his perfidy, and looked helplessly at Nicias, the staunch friend and supporter of Sparta, whom they had forsaken for this shameless young reprobate. Nicias, who of course knew nothing of the trick, was utterly confounded by the double-dealing of the envoys, and could do nothing to relieve their embarrassment. The result was that the envoys were abruptly dismissed, and after a fruitless mission of Nicias to Sparta, which only served to lower his own reputation, the Athenians entered heart and soul into the Argive alliance.

III

We have seen how much the credit of Sparta had been injured in the eyes of Greece by the capture of her chosen warriors at Pylos, and by her subsequent behaviour during the negotiations which led to the peace of Nicias. Spartan valour was seen to be not above reproach, and the Peloponnesian allies had still better reason to complain of the hollowness of Spartan faith. The high reverence which had long been attached to the name of Sparta had given place to something like contempt, and the Eleans, who had an old grudge against her, took advantage of this feeling to exclude her citizens from taking public part in the Olympic festival, which was celebrated with great pomp and splendour in the second year of the peace. And the degradation of the proud Dorian city seemed to be complete, when a Spartan named Lichas, who had entered for the chariot-race under another name, was driven with blows from the racecourse. So deep was the abasement to which the great name of Sparta had now sunk.

The Spartans saw that a vigorous effort must be made, if they would recover their lost ascendancy; and two years later the opportunity occurred for which they were waiting. On the northern side of the Argolic peninsula lies the ancient city of Epidaurus, famous for its rich vineyards, and its great temple of Asclepius, [Footnote: Aesculapius.] the god of healing. For some time past, the Epidaurians, who were in alliance with Sparta, had been involved in a dispute, arising out of some obscure question of ritual, with Argos; and they were now in sore straits, being hard pressed by the whole weight of the Argive power, backed by the new confederacy. This was the pretext needed by the Spartans, and mustering their whole forces they marched, under the command of their king Agis, against Argos.

The Argives had received notice of the advance of Agis, and they immediately marched out to meet him, wishing to engage the Spartans before they had united with their allies from Corinth, Boeotia, and elsewhere, who were assembling in great force at Phlius. The two armies confronted each other for a moment at Methydrium, in Arcadia; but Agis succeeded in avoiding an engagement, and breaking up his camp under cover of darkness pushed on to Phlius. Thereupon the Argives, who were accompanied by their allies from Mantinea and Elis, returned in haste to Argos, and then, marching northwards, took up their

position at Nemea, which commanded the ordinary route from Phlius to the Argive territory. But they were again outmanoeuvred by the skilful dispositions of Agis. Avoiding the road by Nemea, which led through a narrow and dangerous pass, he led his Spartans over the mountains and descended into the plain which surrounds the city of Argos. One contingent of his allies had orders to proceed in the same direction by another mountain-path, while the Boeotians, who numbered no less than ten thousand infantry, and five hundred cavalry, were directed to take the high road by Nemea; for Agis expected that by threatening the cultivated lands around Argos he would draw the Argives from their position, and bring them down in haste to the defence of their estates.

The plan was completely successful. As soon as the Argives learnt that Agis was ravaging their fields they set out with all speed towards Argos, and finding Agis engaged in the work of pillage, they drew up their forces, and offered battle. Their situation was in the highest degree perilous. In front of them, cutting them off from the city of Argos, was the flower of the Spartan army, reinforced by the troops of Tegea and Arcadia; on their right flank the mountain slopes swarmed with the infantry of Corinth and Phlius; and in the rear their retreat was cut off by the thronging masses of Boeotians, who were now pouring along the road from Nemea. They were fairly cut off, and seemed delivered over to destruction; nevertheless, such was the presumptuous confidence which possessed them, that they awaited eagerly the signal for battle, crying out that they had caught the Spartans in a trap.

Fortunately for them there were two men among their leaders who took a wiser view of the position; one of these was Alciphron, an official who represented the interests of Sparta at Argos, [Footnote: The Greek word is *Proxenos*,—a sort of consul.] and the other was Thrasylus, one of the five generals. These two men entered into a parley with Agis, and by promising to satisfy the demands of Sparta induced him to grant a truce. Agis then drew off his forces, and returned by way of Nemea to Sparta; and the allies, much against their will, were compelled to follow his example. Loud were the murmurs among the confederates, and even among the Spartan soldiers, against Agis, who had thrown away this golden opportunity of humbling the pride of Argos, and brought dishonour on one of the finest armies that had ever been led into the field by a Grecian general. Strange to say, the Argives were not less indignant against the two men who had saved them from overwhelming disaster; and Thrasylus, the general, narrowly escaped being stoned to death.

IV

The Argives thought themselves bound to abide by the conditions of the truce, though made without their consent; but shortly after the retreat of Agis, an Athenian force of a thousand hoplites and three hundred cavalry arrived at Argos, and Alcibiades, who was present in

the character of ambassador, strongly urged the renewal of the campaign. His proposal was warmly supported by the Mantineans and Eleans, and they and the Athenians marched forthwith against Orchomenus in Arcadia, which was in alliance with Sparta; and the Argives, who had wavered at first, soon afterwards joined them. Orchomenus was gained over with little trouble, and then the Eleans were eager to proceed against Lepreum, a town in their alliance which had gone over to Sparta. But the Argives, Athenians, and Mantineans, insisted on attacking Tegea, where there was a party opposed to Sparta, by whose means they hoped to bring this powerful city, the ancient rival of Mantinea, to their side. Thereupon the Eleans abandoned the expedition, and went home in a rage, but the rest of the allies took up their quarters at Mantinea, and prepared to make an attack on Tegea.

The Spartans were in high anger against Agis for his unsoldier-like conduct in the recent campaign, and when they heard of the capitulation of Orchomenus their resentment rose to such a pitch that it was proposed to inflict on him a heavy fine, and raze his house to the ground. At his earnest entreaty they consented to reserve the sentence, and give him an opportunity of wiping out the stain on his honour; but as a mark of diminished confidence they appointed ten commissioners, without whose consent he was not allowed to lead an army out of the city.

They had just come to this decision when an urgent message arrived from Tegea, bidding them to bring help with all speed, or the town would be lost. The imminent peril startled the Spartans from their wonted apathy, and they set out at once in full force to the relief of Tegea. On reaching the borders of Arcadia they sent back the elder and younger men, amounting to a sixth part of the army, to serve as a garrison in Sparta; and at the same time couriers were despatched to summon their allies in Arcadia and central Greece. The Arcadians arrived in time to take part in the battle, but the Boeotians, Corinthians, and others, though they hastened to obey the order, were delayed by a long and difficult march, through the hostile territory of Argos.

Passing by Tegea, Agis entered the district of Mantinea, and having pitched his camp began to lay waste the country. Informed of his approach, the Argives and their allies marched out to meet him, and choosing a position on the slope of a hill, defended in front by rugged and broken ground, they drew up in order of battle. The Spartans, incited, doubtless, by the example of their king, who was eager to redeem his reputation, rushed impetuously to the assault; and they were already within a stone's-throw of the enemy when a Spartan veteran cried out to Agis: "Heal not ill with ill!" His meaning was that in Argos Agis had been too cold, and now he was too hot. Agis heard the warning voice, and his own good sense must have shown him how rashly he was acting; accordingly, at the very moment of

encounter, he gave the word to retreat, and fell back to the neighbourhood of Tegea. At this place there was a copious head of water, which, when properly regulated, served to irrigate the fields of Tegea and Mantinea. The disposal of the water-supply was a constant source of dispute between the two rival cities; and Agis now prepared to turn the whole volume of the fountain towards Mantinea, expecting that the Mantineans, when they saw their fields threatened with inundation, would come down into the plain to hinder the mischief.

The Argives and their allies were dumb-founded by the sudden disappearance of the Spartans; and when they had recovered from their astonishment, they waited impatiently for the order to pursue the runaways. As no such order was given, cries of "Treason!" arose in the ranks, and the generals were openly accused of having sold themselves to the enemy. The Spartans, it was asserted, had been allowed to escape, when they were fairly caught under the walls of Argos; and now the confederates had been betrayed a second time by their officers. Amid the general clamour the Argive commanders stood for a moment confounded and amazed; then recovering themselves they gave the word to advance, and led their forces down into the plain. Here they passed the night in the open field, and early next morning they stood to their arms, and prepared for an immediate attack.

Agis was not aware that the Argive generals had taken up a new position, and thinking that the confederates were still stationed on the hill, he gave up his scheme of diverting the water, and directed his march towards the place where he had first encamped. As they proceeded thus in marching order, and quite unprepared for any hostile movement, the Spartans suddenly found themselves face to face with the whole Argive army, drawn up in order of battle. For one instant it seemed as if a panic were about to spread through the Spartan ranks; then their wonderful discipline prevailed, and with all promptitude, but without flurry or confusion, the necessary orders were passed from the King to the commanders of divisions, from these again to the colonels, from the colonels to the captains, and from the captains down to the sergeants, [Footnote: I have thought it best to give the English titles, which of course have only a general correspondence with the Greek Polemarch, Lochagus, etc.] who in their turn had to see that the required movement was executed by the men under their command: for such was the regular gradation of authority and responsibility in the Spartan army. Thanks to this perfect organization, in a very few minutes every man was in his place and ready for battle.

On the left wing of the Spartan army were posted the Sciritae, hardy mountaineers from southern Arcadia; next to them stood the enfranchised Helots, who had served under Brasidas in Thrace, and others of the same race who had received the Spartan citizenship in reward for public service; then came the main body of the Spartans themselves, and after them the rest of the Arcadian allies; while the

right wing was assigned by immemorial privilege to the Tegeans, with whom were a few picked Spartans. The cavalry, never a very strong part of the Spartan army, were posted on either flank.

On the other side the Mantineans held the place of honour on the right wing, because the engagement was fought in their territory; next in order were the Arcadian allies of Argos, and after them, more towards the centre, stood a picked troop of a thousand Argives, trained and equipped at the public expense; then followed the main body of the Argive troops, with the rest of their allies, the Athenians occupying the extreme left. As to the numbers engaged, nothing certain is known.

Some time was lost by the Argive army in delivering the customary harangues addressed by the generals of the several contingents to their men, and this enabled the Spartans to steady their ranks before the fighting began. They, on their side, men of war from their youth, had no need of set speeches to remind them of their duty; but pithy words of exhortation passed from man to man, and high and clear rose their national war-songs, thrilling them with the memories of their heroic past. Then the signal was given on both sides to charge, and the Argives and their allies rushed impetuously to the onset, while the Spartans advanced to meet them with even and deliberate pace, timed to the music of numerous pipers, who were stationed at regular intervals in their ranks.

The regular equipment of the Greek infantry soldier consisted, besides his helmet and body-armor, of shield and lance, and in advancing to battle he had always a tendency to diverge towards the right, from a natural wish to keep his shielded side towards the enemy. This divergence from the forward direction was begun by the man posted on the extreme right; his comrade on the left followed his example, and the deflection was continued along the whole line. The consequence was that when two armies came into action, the left wing on either side was greatly outflanked by the opponents' right; and the battle of Mantinea affords no exception to this rule, for not even Spartan discipline was able to counteract the overpowering instinct of self-preservation. Seeing that his left wing was on the point of being outflanked by the Mantineans, Agis signalled to the Sciritae and Brasideans to draw off in a lateral direction towards the left, in order to present an equal line to the right wing of the enemy. The order was executed, and to fill up the gap thus produced on the left of his own centre, Agis ordered the Spartan officers commanding on his right wing to bring up their men and occupy the vacant space. They, however, flatly refused to obey the order, and consequently the Sciritae and Brasideans were assailed in front and on both flanks by overwhelming numbers, and driven back with great loss to their camp.

So completely were the Spartans out-manoeuvred and worsted in tactics, through the blunders of their general, and the cowardice of his subordinates. But in this terrible crisis they showed what native

valour, aided by life-long discipline, can do. Leaving a victorious enemy in their rear, they advanced without flinching against the opposing centre, where the main body of the Argives were posted, with the troops of Orneae and Cleonaea supporting them on the left. Then it was seen that neither the courage of the Spartans, nor the terror of their name, had diminished with the lapse of time; for when the confederate troops found themselves face to face with the renowned warrior of the Eurotas, they turned and fled, almost without striking a blow, and trampling their comrades under foot, in their haste to avoid the thrust of the Spartan lances. The Athenians on the left wing were now in great danger; for the charge of the troops of Agis had cut them off from the centre, and they were attacked on the other flank by the Tegeans and Spartans. They were saved from immediate destruction by the exertions of their own cavalry, and presently found themselves at liberty to retire from the field; for Agis, having completed the rout of the main body, called off his men, and went to the relief of his own left. The Mantineans and the Argive Thousand made no effort to retrieve the fortunes of the day, but gave way before the first onset of the Spartans, and joined the flight of their comrades. The Mantineans suffered severely in their retreat, but of the Argives only a few were slain.

Such was the battle of Mantinea, which completely restored the military fame of the Spartans, and blotted out the reproach of cowardice and sloth which for some years past had rested on their name.

VI

One incident remains to be recorded, before we proceed to the crowning catastrophe of our great historical drama. The Athenians, it should be observed, were still nominally at peace with Sparta, and if they had been wise they would have taken the opportunity of this respite from hostilities to recover Amphipolis, and consolidate their empire in Thrace. Instead of this, they looked around for fresh conquests, and fixed their eyes on the little island of Melos, belonging to the Cyclad group, which had been colonized in very early times from Sparta.

The Melians had not joined the Confederacy of Delos, and they might therefore be reproached for sharing the protection of Athens without making any return. Beyond this the Athenians had no ground of complaint against them, for they had taken no part in the Peloponnesian War, but had remained quietly at home, occupied with their own affairs. But Athens claimed the haughty title of mistress of the sea, and pretended to regard the neutrality of one insignificant island as an open defiance of her power. Ten years before an Athenian fleet had been sent under Nicias to reduce the refractory Melians to subjection; but the attempt was unsuccessful, and Nicias withdrew, after having ravaged the outlying districts. Being now more at

leisure, the Athenians resolved, in the mere wantonness of power, that Melos should only be suffered to exist as a dependency of Athens, and thirty triremes sailed from the harbour of Peiraeus to carry out the arbitrary decree.

On their arrival at Melos the Athenian admirals sent envoys into the town, to summon the inhabitants to surrender. The envoys were invited to a private conference with the chief men of the island; and between the representatives of Athens and the Melian nobles there ensued an extraordinary dialogue, which is given at great length by the historian, and is commonly known as the Melian Debate. We cannot suppose that the arguments here placed by Thucydides in the mouth of the Athenian speaker were really uttered as set down by that writer. Such a paradox of iniquity, such a shameless insult to the general conscience of humanity, might have been employed by Plato, in exposing the vicious teaching of the Sophists, or by Aristophanes in the full riot of his satire: but the total abnegation of principle here implied could never have been openly avowed by a responsible agent, speaking for the most polished community in Greece. Even the worst criminals seek to give some specious colour to their villainy; and the condemned felon, who will face death without a tremor, shudders at the cry of execration which greets his appearance at the scaffold. So hard it is, even for the most depraved, to stifle the last embers of the moral sense. We cannot suppose, then, that an educated Athenian of the fifth century would publicly have claimed for his state the right of rapine and murder. For this is the line of argument pursued by the representative of Athens in the Melian Debate. The substance of what he says may briefly be stated as follows "You are weak—we are strong; Melos is a paltry island, Athens is queen of the Aegaeon, and the existence of an independent city in these waters is an insult to her empire. Let us waste no time in discussions about abstract law and right. For the mighty there is but one law—to get what they can, and to keep it; and the weak have no rights, except by the sufferance of the strong. This rule of conduct we know to be universal among men, and we believe that the gods themselves are governed by it. [1] To sum up the whole case in one word: you must yield or perish."

[1]

Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,
Yet sprung from high, is of celestial seed;
In God 'tis glory; and when men aspire,
'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire.—DRYDEN.

It was in vain that the unhappy Melians tried to argue the question from a higher standpoint; in vain they warned the Athenians that they themselves might one day stand before the bar of justice, and plead for their existence. They were brought back relentlessly to the grim alternative—submission, or extermination. At length this strange controversy came to an end, and after one final hint, of fearful significance, the Athenian envoys withdrew, leaving the Melians to

consider their answer. The brave islanders were not long in coming to their decision: they would not, they said, consent to enslave a city which had maintained its liberty for seven hundred years; they put their trust in divine justice, and in their kinsmen the Spartans, and were resolved to resist to the last.

On receiving this answer the Athenian commanders at once laid siege to Melos, and the doomed city was soon closely blockaded by sea and land. The Melians made a gallant defence, and twice succeeded in breaking through the lines of the besiegers, and conveying supplies into the town. But presently reinforcements arrived from Athens, and the Melians were confined within their walls. All hope of succour from Sparta had vanished, food began to fail, and treason was at work among the garrison. Thus driven to extremity, the Melians surrendered at discretion. Then the Athenians showed that their threats had not been idly uttered. All the men of military age in Melos were put to death, the women and children were sold into slavery, and the land was distributed among Athenian settlers.

In the fifth year of the war, after the capitulation of Mytilene, a thousand of the inhabitants had been butchered in cold blood; and this sentence, which seems so cruel to us, was regarded by the Athenians as an act of mercy. Six years later, the decree which had originally been passed against Mytilene, was actually executed on Scione, which had revolted at the instigation of Brasidas. In this act of savage retribution, Athens still remained within the limits of Greek international law, which placed the inhabitants of a revolted city at the mercy of their conquerors. But the case of Melos was different, for that island had never been included in the Athenian alliance, and the Melians had done nothing to provoke an attack. Thus the three names, Mytilene, Scione, and Melos, mark an ascending scale of barbarity, culminating in a massacre which, even in the eyes of Greeks, was an atrocious crime. Athens had now offended beyond forgiveness, giving colour to the accusations of her worst enemies, and heaping up vengeance for the days to come.

THE ATHENIANS IN SICILY

I

The Peloponnesian War may be conveniently divided into four chief periods. The first of these periods lasted for ten years, down to the peace of Nicias. The second extends from the peace of Nicias to the massacre of Melos. In the third, the scene of war was shifted from Greece to Sicily, and it was there that the Athenian power really received its death-blow. The fourth and final period begins after the overthrow of the Athenians at Syracuse, and ends, nine years afterwards, with their final defeat at Aegospotami, and the downfall of the Athenian empire.

It is the third of these periods which will occupy our attention for the remainder of the present volume, and as the momentous events which we have to relate occurred entirely in Sicily, it is necessary to say something of the previous history of that great island. The connexion of the Greeks with Sicily begins in the latter half of the eighth century before Christ, when settlers from Chalcis in Euboea founded the city of Naxos on the north-eastern coast, under the shadow of Aetna. Naxos in its turn sent out colonists, who built the cities of Leontini and Catana, the former on an inland site, commanding the great plain which extends southwards from Aetna, the latter on the coast, in a line with the centre of the same plain. These were Ionic colonies, and we may close the list with the name of Messene [Footnote: Originally called Zancle.] founded twenty years later on the Sicilian side of the strait which bears its name.

We have now to enumerate the principal Dorian cities. First among these in time, and by far the first in importance, was Syracuse, founded from Corinth a year after the settlement of Naxos. Between Syracuse and the mother-city there was a close and intimate tie of friendship, which remained unbroken throughout the course of Greek history. The original city was built on the island of Ortygia, but a new town afterwards arose on the low-lying coast of the mainland, and spread northwards till it covered the eastern part of the neighbouring heights. Ortygia was then converted into a peninsula by the construction of a causeway, connecting the new city with the old. Under the despotism of Gelo, who made himself master of the city in the early part of the fifth century, [Footnote: 485 B.C.] Syracuse rose to great power and splendour, and her territory extended over a great part of eastern Sicily. Gelo gained immortal renown by defeating a mighty host of Carthaginians, who invaded Sicily at the time when the confederate cities of old Greece were fighting for their existence against Xerxes and his great armada. After his death the power passed to his brother Hiero, whose victories in the Olympian and Pythian Games are commemorated in the Odes of Pindar. Hiero reigned for twelve years, and was succeeded by his brother Thrasybulus; but a year later the despotism was overthrown, and the government returned to a democracy.

A bare mention must suffice for Gela, founded from Rhodes and Crete nearly half a century after Syracuse, and the more famous Agrigentum, a colony from Gela, and next to Syracuse the greatest city in Sicily. These played no part in the struggle with Athens; but Selinus and Camarina, the two remaining Dorian cities of southern Sicily, will occupy an important place in the following narrative.

Thus the whole coast districts on southern and eastern Sicily were held by opulent and flourishing Greek cities. On the north was Himera, an Ionic colony, and the scene of Gelo's great victory over Carthage; while the western and north-western district was divided between the Phoenicians and the Elymi, a people of unknown origin, whose chief

seats were at Eryx and Egesta. The inland parts were held, in the west, by the Sicans, who are believed to have come from Spain, and in the east by the Sicels, a people of Latin race, who gave their name to the island.

II

Since the fourth year of the Peloponnesian War, Athens had been meddling in the affairs of Sicily, under pretence of aiding the Ionian cities, who dreaded the encroaching ambition of Syracuse. That these fears were not unfounded was proved when, a few years afterwards, the Syracusans expelled the commons of Leontini, and took possession of their territory. The Leontine exiles sought refuge at Athens, but their appeal for help remained for a time unanswered, as the Athenians were then fully occupied in Greece. But six years after the conclusion of the Peace of Nicias, an appeal came to Athens from a remote corner of Sicily, which stimulated the Leontine exiles to fresh efforts, and led to most important results.

Between the Greeks of Selinus and the Elymians of Egesta there was a long-standing quarrel, and in a war which had recently broken out the Egestaeans were reduced to severe straits by the combined forces of Selinus and Syracuse. In their distress they turned to Athens for help, and envoys were sent to plead their cause before the Athenian assembly. In aiding Egesta, argued the envoys, Athens would be serving her own interests; for if the Syracusans were not speedily checked in their aggressions, they would soon make themselves masters of the whole of Sicily, and in that case they could bring such an accession of strength to the enemies of Athens in Greece as to make them irresistible. They had good reason, therefore, to take sides against the enemies of Egesta, and the more so as the Egestaeans promised to defray all the expenses of the war.

The Athenians generally were inclined to take up the quarrel of Egesta, but as a measure of precaution it was decided to send agents of their own to make an inspection on the spot, and see whether the Egestaeans were as wealthy as they pretended. On their return to Athens these men reported that Egesta was possessed of fabulous riches. At every house where they had been entertained, the tables and the sideboards had been one blaze of gold and silver plate. The fact was that the Egestaeans had collected all the gold and silver vessels in the town, and others borrowed from the neighbouring cities, and by passing them on from house to house, wherever these important guests were invited, had contrived to make a great display. As an earnest of all this wealth, the Athenian commissioners brought back with them sixty talents of silver.

The smallness of this sum ought to have been sufficient to arouse the suspicions of the Athenians; but they were willing to be deceived, and they gave ready credence to reports of their commissioners. Voting in

full assembly, they passed a decree that sixty ships should be sent to Sicily, under the command of Nicias, Alcibiades, and Lamachus. The fleet was first to be employed in helping Egesta, and when that contest had been brought to a successful issue the Leontines were to be restored to their homes; finally, the generals were empowered to act as might seem best in the interests of Athens. The real purpose of the enterprise is indicated in the last clause. Vague plans of conquest were floating before the minds of the Athenians, and at a time when their whole energies should have been employed to repair the breaches in their empire, they dreamed of founding a new dominion in the west.

Five days later the assembly met again to vote supplies and discuss any further details which remained to be settled. But Nicias determined to take the opportunity of reopening the whole question, wishing, if possible, to divert his countrymen from their purpose, and put an end to the expedition altogether. It was folly, he argued, to take up the cause of needy foreigners, and drain the resources of Athens for a distant and hazardous enterprise, when their subjects in Thrace were still in open revolt, and their enemies in Greece were on the watch to take them at a disadvantage. If they trusted in the treaty with Sparta, they would soon find how infirm was the ground of their confidence. That treaty had been forced upon the Spartans by their misfortunes, and they would be only too glad to repudiate it, which they could easily do, as many of the conditions were still under dispute. Moreover, the most powerful cities of the Peloponnesian League had refused to sign the treaty, and were ready, at the first hint from Sparta, to renew the war. Athens was beset with perils, which were enough to tax her strength to the utmost: and yet they talked of sailing to Sicily, and raising up a new host of enemies against her! Even if the expedition succeeded, they could never keep their hold on that vast and populous island, while, if it failed, they would be utterly ruined. As to the supposed danger from the ambition of Syracuse, that was mere idle talk. The schemes of conquest, with which the Egestaeans had tried to alarm the Athenians, would keep the Syracusans busy at home, and prevent them from meddling in the affairs of Greece. "Leave the Greeks of Sicily alone," said Nicias with true prophetic insight; "and they will not trouble you. Do not disturb the prestige which belongs to a distant and unfamiliar power. If they once learn to know you, they may learn to despise you."

Then fixing his eyes on Alcibiades, who was sitting surrounded by his own partisans, young profligates like himself, Nicias concluded thus: "There is another danger against which I would warn you, men of Athens—the danger of being led astray by the wild eloquence of unscrupulous politicians, who seek to dazzle you with visions of new empire, that they may rise to high command, and restore their own shattered fortunes. Yes, Athens is to pour out her blood and treasure, to provide young spendthrifts with the means of filling their racing-stables! Against the mad counsels of these desperate men I invoke the

mature prudence of the elder members of this assembly, and call upon them to show by a unanimous vote that neither flattery nor taunts can induce them to sacrifice the true interests of Athens.”

It must have been a severe ordeal for the young Alcibiades to sit and listen to this keen and bitter invective, which set in a glaring light the worst features in his character—his selfish ambition, his shameless life, his total want of principle, his vulgar ostentation. The last quality, so alien from the best traditions of Athenian character, had been conspicuously displayed only a few weeks before at the Olympic festival, where he had entered seven four-horsed cars for the chariot-race, and won the first, second, and fourth prizes. Every word of Nicias went home, galling him in his sorest point—his outrageous vanity; and hardly had the elder statesman concluded his speech, when he sprang to his feet, and burst without preface into a wild harangue, which is a remarkable piece of self-revelation, disclosing with perfect candour the inner motives of the man on whom, more than on any other, the future of Athens depended. He began by defending his barbaric extravagance, recently displayed at Olympia, which, as he pretended to believe, had covered his native city with glory, and spread the fame of Athenian wealth and power from one end of Greece to another. The lavish outlay, and haughty demeanour, which would be justly blamed in a common man, were right and proper in him, one of the elect spirits of the time, inspired with great aims, and treading the summits of public life. He had already shown what he could do in the highest regions of diplomacy, by raising a great coalition in Peloponnesus, which had faced the whole might of Sparta in the field, and struck terror into the enemies of Athens.

After this impudent defence of his own pernicious policy, which had led to the crushing defeat at Mantineia, and thus enabled the Spartans to restore their damaged reputation, Alcibiades proceeded to deal with the question of the day, and exerted all his sophistry to confirm the Athenians in their design of invading Sicily. That island, he asserted, was inhabited by a mixed population with no settled homes, and no common patriotic sentiment; and among these motley elements they would find plenty of adherents. The Sicelioti [Footnote: Greeks of Sicily.] were poorly armed, ill-furnished with heavy infantry, and in constant danger from the hostile Sicels. The risk of attack from the Peloponnesians would not be increased by sending part of the Athenian fleet to Sicily: for Attica was in any case always exposed to invasion, and a sufficient force of ships would be left at home to keep command of the sea.

”We have no excuse, then,” said Alcibiades in conclusion, ”for breaking our word to the Eggestaeans, and drawing back from this enterprise. Both honour and policy are pointing the way to Sicily. An empire like ours is an ever-expanding circle, which lives by growing, and cannot stand still. It is only by getting more, and always more, that we can keep what we have. And let not Nicias succeed in his

attempt to set the old against the young, neither let us believe, like him, that the stability of a state consists in stagnation. It is only by a hearty co-operation of all ages and classes that any state can prosper, and a community which finds no outlet for its energies abroad is soon worn out by discord and faction at home. Above all is this true of us Athenians, to whom ceaseless toil and endeavour is the very element in which we live.”

The advice of Alcibiades, thus tendered in the garb of political wisdom, was of fatal and ruinous tendency, and in direct opposition to the oft-repeated warnings of Pericles. But his speech was exactly suited to the temper of his audience, and most of those who followed him spoke to the same effect, and when the Egestaeans and Leontines renewed their entreaties it became evident that the original motion would be confirmed by a large majority. Nicias, however, resolved to make one more effort, and he came forward to speak again, hoping by a new device to check the torrent of popular enthusiasm. Affecting to regard the matter as settled, he entered into an estimate of the force required for the proposed expedition, prefaced by an alarming picture of the wealth and power of the Sicilian Greeks. To act with effect against such an enemy, they must send, not only an overwhelming naval force, but a numerous body of troops, both cavalry and infantry, and a fleet laden with supplies for many months. They must proceed, in fact, as if they were founding a great city on a hostile soil. On no other condition, added Nicias, would he undertake the command. Nicias had intended, by exaggerating the difficulties of the undertaking, to damp the ardour of the Athenians; but to his utter dismay, these timid counsels were greeted with a great shout of applause. It was supposed that he had changed his opinion, and even the elder men began to think that so prudent a leader, backed by such an armament, could not fail of success. A great wave of excitement swept over the assembly, and the few who still doubted were cowed into silence. When the tumult had subsided, a certain Demostratus, [Footnote: The name is given by Plutarch.] who had spoken strongly in favour of the expedition, addressing Nicias in the name of the assembly, asked him to state plainly what force he required. Thus driven into a corner, Nicias answered, with great reluctance, that the number of triremes must be not less than one hundred, with five thousand heavy-armed infantry, and slingers and bow-men in proportion. This enormous estimate was carried without demur, and by the same vote full powers were conferred on the generals to fix the scale of the armament as they might think best for the interests of Athens.

Thus, by a strange freak of fortune, the Athenians, at the most momentous crisis of their history, were urged along the road to ruin by the most opposite qualities in their leaders, the cold caution of Nicias, and the wild energy of Alcibiades.

III

During the whole of the following spring [Footnote: B.C. 415.] preparations for the invasion of Sicily were actively pushed on, and the whole city was in a bustle and stir of excitement. Athens had recently recovered from the ravages of the plague, and six years of peace had recruited her resources, both in men and money. Since the first outbreak of the war a new generation had grown up, and these young and untried spirits joined, with all the fire of youth, in an enterprise which promised them a boundless field of adventure. Others were attracted by the baser motive of gain, or by mere curiosity, and the love of travel. No thought of danger or hardship, no hint of possible failure, clouded the brilliant prospect; it was a gay holiday excursion, and at the same time a grand scheme of conquest, offering fame to the ambitious, wealth to the needy, and pleasant recreation to all. Thousands flocked eagerly to enter their names for the service, and the only trouble of the recruiting officers was in choosing the stoutest and the best.

The great armament was on the eve of departure, and all hearts were full of joyful anticipation, when an event occurred which suddenly chilled this happy mood, and cast a shadow of evil augury on the whole undertaking. The Athenians of that age, like their descendants nearly five centuries later, [Footnote: See Acts xvii. 22.] were "more god-fearing than other men." They worshipped a multitude of divinities, and their city was thronged with the temples and statues of heroes and gods. Conspicuous among the objects of popular adoration was the god Hermes, who is exhibited by ancient poets and artists as a gracious and lovely youth, the special patron of eloquence and wit, the guardian spirit of travellers and merchants, and the giver of good luck. A familiar feature in the streets and public places of Athens was the bust of Hermes, surmounting a quadrangular stone pillar. Many hundreds of these pillars, which were called Hermae, were scattered about over the whole city, standing before the doors of houses and temples, at cross-ways and places of public resort. Wherever he went, whatever he did, the Athenian felt himself to be in the presence of this genial and friendly power, who attended him, with more than human sympathy, in all his ways.

If such were the feelings of the Athenians towards their favourite deity, what must have been their horror when they awoke one morning to find that all the busts of Hermes, with one or two exceptions, were shattered and mutilated beyond all recognition. The whole population was thunderstruck, and wild rumours ran from mouth to mouth concerning the perpetrators and the motive of this shocking outrage. It was evident that many hands must have been employed on the work of destruction, and those who had so foully insulted the most hallowed affections of their fellow-citizens were believed to be capable of any enormity. It was loudly asserted that a black conspiracy was hatching against the liberties of the people, and that the worst days of the tyranny were about to be revived. For in those days religion and politics were associated with a closeness of intimacy unknown in

modern Europe, and sacrilege might well be regarded as a prelude to treason. Active measures were at once taken to bring the offenders to justice, and great rewards were offered to anyone, whether citizen, slave, or resident foreigner, who gave information concerning this or any similar crime. At first nothing was disclosed as to the mutilation of the Hermae, but other recent acts of profanation were brought to light, and among these was mentioned a derisive parody of the great Eleusinian Mysteries, alleged to have been performed in the house of Alcibiades, and elsewhere. The enemies of Alcibiades, who were both numerous and powerful, eagerly seized this handle against him; but when the matter was debated in the public assembly, it became evident that, if he were brought to trial at once, his present popularity, as chief promoter of the Sicilian expedition, would ensure his acquittal. Seeing, therefore, that their attack had been premature, those who had led the outcry against him now drew back, reserving themselves for a more favourable occasion. Being known as the bitter opponents of Alcibiades, they could not, without exciting grave suspicions, propose the adjournment of his trial; but other speakers, prompted by them, urged on grounds of public expediency that the charges against him should be held in suspense, so as not to delay the departure of the fleet. Alcibiades saw plainly that this manoeuvre was contrived to get him out of the way, to remove his adherents from Athens, and leave his enemies free to pursue their machinations during his absence. But it was in vain that he exposed the malicious motives of the last speakers, and pleaded earnestly for an immediate trial. The Athenians were still possessed by their daring scheme of conquest, and they decreed that Alcibiades should keep his command, and sail at once to Sicily.

IV

At last the great day arrived, and in the first light of a mid-summer dawn, a vast multitude was seen pouring along the broad highway which led, between the Long Walls, from Athens to Peiraeus. The Upper City was almost deserted by its inhabitants, for there was hardly one Athenian who had not some cherished comrade, or some near relation, enrolled for service in Sicily, and the crowd was swelled by thousands of strangers, who came as spectators of that memorable scene. Little now appeared of that sanguine and joyous temper which had prevailed among the Athenians when they first voted for the expedition. Their feelings had lately been fearfully harrowed by the mutilation of the Hermae, and now that the moment of parting was at hand, all the perils and uncertainties of their grand enterprise rose up vividly before them. They were restored, however, to some degree of cheerfulness, when they reached the harbour of Peiraeus, and saw the magnificent fleet riding at anchor. Nearly all the vessels lying in the bay were Athenian; for the main body of the allies, and the commissariat ships, had been ordered to muster at Corcyra. The triremes furnished by Athens numbered a hundred, of which sixty were fully equipped as war-galleys, while forty were employed as transports. These numbers had

been equalled more than once before during the war; but in efficiency, in splendour of appearance, and in the quality of the crews, this was by far the finest fleet that ever sailed from Peiraeus. Only the bare hulls of the ships were provided by the state, and each vessel was assigned to some wealthy citizen, who defrayed all the expense of fitting her for active service. Sometimes the cost of equipping a ship was divided between two or more citizens, and at ordinary times this form of taxation must have been felt by the rich as a heavy burden. But such was the popularity of the Sicilian expedition that the wealthy Athenians who were charged with this duty went far beyond what was required of them, each striving to surpass the others by the superior beauty and speed of his own ship. The crews were all composed of picked men, attracted by the double rate of pay which was furnished from the state exchequer; and in addition to this, the trierarchs [Footnote: Citizens charged with the duty of equipping a trireme.] paid special premiums to the petty officers and to the highest class of rowers. The same spirit of emulation extended to the whole body of Athenians enrolled in the army and fleet; every man felt that whatever he spent on his own personal equipment was spent for the honour and glory of Athens. And the effect produced on the public mind in Greece was, in fact, prodigious: after all the ravages of the plague, and ten years of exhausting warfare, Athens, it seemed, was stronger than ever, and in the mere exuberance of energy was making this imposing display of wealth and power. As to the ostensible object of the expedition—the conquest of Sicily—few doubted that it must follow as a matter of course.

The last farewell had been spoken, the troops were all embarked, and the rowers sat ready at their oars. The trumpet sounded, commanding silence, and the voice of the herald was heard, repeating a solemn prayer, which was taken up by the whole multitude on sea and on shore, while the captains and soldiers poured libations of wine from goblets of silver and gold. When this act of worship was ended, the crews raised the paean, and at a given signal the whole fleet was set in motion, and passed, in single file, out of the harbour. On reaching the open water, they quitted this order, and engaged in a friendly contest of speed as far as Aegina. Then the crews settled down to their work, and the great armament swept on, high in heart and hope, to join the allied contingents, and commissariat fleet, now assembled at Corcyra.

As yet only general rumours of the intended invasion had reached Syracuse, and few of the citizens were aware of the imminent peril in which they stood. Among those who were better informed was Hermocrates, a Syracusan of high rank, who for many years had been the guiding spirit in Sicilian politics. Speaking at a public assembly, about the time when the Athenian fleet sailed from Peiraeus, he urged the necessity of taking prompt measures for placing the city in a thorough state of defence. He had no fear, he said, of the ultimate triumph of Syracuse in the approaching struggle: only let them be on

their guard, and not underrate the power of the enemy whom they would have to face. The words of Hermocrates, who enjoyed a high reputation for valour, patriotism, and sagacity, were not without their effect, and it was resolved that the generals should at once set about organizing the military resources of Syracuse, and providing all things necessary for the public safety. Some steps in this direction they had already taken; and tidings soon arrived at Syracuse which caused them to redouble their exertions.

For in the meantime the Athenians had reached Corcyra, where they held a final review of all their forces. The total number of the triremes was a hundred and thirty-four, and with these sailed a vast fleet of merchant ships, and smaller craft, laden with stores of all kinds, and carrying a whole army of bakers, masons, and carpenters, with the tools of their crafts, and all the engines required for a siege. Besides these, there was a great number of other vessels, small and great, fitted out by private speculators for purposes of trade. The military force was on a corresponding scale, comprising five thousand, one hundred hoplites, of whom fifteen hundred were full Athenian citizens, four hundred and eighty archers, seven hundred slingers from Rhodes, and a hundred and twenty exiles from Megara, equipped as light-armed troops. The force of cavalry was but small, being conveyed in a single transport.

The whole armament now weighed anchor from Corcyra and sailed in three divisions, each commanded by one of the generals, to the opposite coast of Italy. On arriving at Rhegium, an Ionic city on the Italian side of the strait, they received permission to beach their ships, and form a camp outside the walls; and here they waited for the return of three fast-sailing triremes, which had been sent forward from Corcyra to carry the news of their approach to Egesta, and claim the promised subsidy, and at the same time to sound the temper of the Greek cities in Sicily. Before long the ships came back with their report, and the Athenians now learned to their great chagrin that all the fabled wealth of Egesta had dwindled to the paltry sum of thirty talents.

The three generals now held a council of war, to decide on a plan of campaign. It was evident that no help was to be obtained from Egesta, and the attitude of the Rhegini, who declined to enter their alliance, boded ill for the success of the expedition. As their prospects were so discouraging, Nicias proposed to confine their operations within the narrowest limits, to patch up a peace between Selinus and Egesta, to aid the Leontines, if it could be done without risk or expense, and after making a display of the Athenian power, to sail home to Athens. Alcibiades protested strongly against such a course, as disgraceful to Athens, and unworthy of the splendid armament entrusted to their command. Let them try first what could be effected by negotiation with the Greek cities and native tribes of Sicily, and after gaining as many allies as possible in the island, let them proceed to the attack

of Selinus and Syracuse. Lamachus, on the other hand, a plain, downright soldier, was for sailing straight to Syracuse, and striking immediately at the heart of Sicily. The city, he argued, would be found unprepared, and if they acted at once, in the first terror of their presence, they were certain of victory; but if they waited, their men would lose heart, the efficiency of the fleet would be impaired, and the Syracusans would gather strength and courage from the delay.

How true was the forecast of Lamachus was proved by the event; but his bold plan was distasteful alike to the timid temper of Nicias, and to the tortuous, intriguing spirit of Alcibiades. Finding, therefore, that he had no hope of convincing his colleagues, he voted for the middle course, and accordingly the plan of Alcibiades, unquestionably the worst of the three, was adopted.

In pursuance of this fatal policy Alcibiades crossed over to Messene, and tried to win over that city to the side of Athens. Meeting with no success, he returned to Rhegium, and immediately afterwards he and one of his colleagues sailed with a force of sixty triremes to Naxos. Here the Athenians found a hearty welcome, but at Catana, which was then under the influence of Syracuse, their overtures were rejected, so they continued their voyage southwards, and made their camp for the night at the mouth of the river Terias. Starting early next day, they proceeded along the coast, and, crossing the bay of Thapsus, came in sight, for the first time, of their great enemy, Syracuse. The main body of the fleet remained in the offing, but ten triremes were sent forward to reconnoitre the Great Harbour, and get a nearer view of the fortifications. When the little squadron came within hearing of the walls, a herald proclaimed in a loud voice that any of the Leontines now present in Syracuse should leave the city without fear, and come over to their faithful kinsmen and allies, the Athenians. After this futile demonstration, better calculated; to excite laughter than terror, the reconnoitring triremes withdrew, and the whole fleet sailed back in the direction of Rhegium. On their return voyage the Athenians succeeded, by a lucky accident, in gaining the adherence of Catana, which henceforth became the head-quarters of the whole armament. Soon after they had effected this important change of station the Salaminian state trireme arrived with momentous news from Athens. We have seen what a panic of superstitious fear had been caused among the Athenians by the mutilation of the Hermae. Arrested for the moment by the all-absorbing interest of the Sicilian expedition, the excitement broke out with renewed violence after the departure of the fleet. The enemies of Alcibiades saw that the time was now ripe for bringing up against him the charge of violating the mysteries, and pressing for a judgment. A formal indictment was laid before the senate, and it was decided that he should come home and stand his trial. But it was necessary to proceed with caution, for Alcibiades was popular with the troops serving in Sicily; and it was possible that, if any violence were attempted against his person, they

might break out into mutiny. Accordingly the captain of the Salaminian trireme was instructed to treat him with all respect, and allow him to return to Athens in his own vessel. On receiving the summons Alcibiades affected to obey, and set sail from Catana, with the state trireme in attendance. The two ships remained in company as far as Thurii, a Greek town of southern Italy, but there the great criminal disappeared, and after searching for him in vain the officers of the Salaminia were obliged to return to Athens without him. When the news of his flight was brought to Athens, he was arraigned in his absence, and condemned to death. But if his enemies supposed that they had heard the last of Alcibiades, they soon learnt how deeply they were mistaken.

V

The conduct of the campaign in Sicily was thus left in the feeble hands of Nicias; for though Lamachus nominally held an equal command, his poverty and political insignificance prevented him from holding the position to which his military talents entitled him. The few remaining weeks of summer were frittered away in trivial operations on the western coasts of the island, and then the Athenians withdrew into winter quarters at Catana. The predictions of Lamachus now began to be fulfilled: seeing that Nicias, with the vast force at his disposal, attempted nothing against them, the Syracusans began to despise their enemy, and thought of taking the offensive. Horsemen from Syracuse rode repeatedly up to the Athenian outposts at Catana, and tauntingly inquired if the Athenians had come to found a colony in Sicily. At last even Nicias felt that some display of activity was necessary to save himself from contempt. He had learnt from certain Syracusan exiles that there was a convenient place for landing troops, on the low-lying shore where the river Anapus flows into the Great Harbour. Here he determined to make a sudden descent, and in order to avoid disembarking in the face of an enemy, he contrived a stratagem to remove the whole Syracusan force out of reach. A citizen of Catana, who was attached to the Athenian interest, was sent with a message to the Syracusan generals, which held out a tempting prospect of gaining an easy and decisive advantage over the Athenian army. Professing to come from the partisans of Syracuse still remaining in Catana, he promised on their behalf that if the Syracusans made a sudden assault on the Athenian camp, their friends in Catana would simultaneously fall upon the Athenian troops, who were in the habit of deserting their quarters and straggling about the town, and set fire to their ships.

This plausible story found ready credence with the Syracusan generals, and they named a day on which they promised to appear in full force before the walls of Catana. When the time appointed drew near, they marched out with the whole Syracusan army, leaving the city to be garrisoned by their allies, and took up a position within easy reach of Catana. Thereupon Nicias, who was fully informed of their

movements, embarked his troops by night, sailed down the coast past Syracuse, and entering the Great Harbour, came to land near the outlying suburb of Polichne, where stood the great temple of the Olympian Zeus. Here he planted a breastwork of palisades to defend his ships, and drew up his army on ground which offered many obstacles to the advance of the Syracusan cavalry. Then, having broken down the bridge over the Anapus, he waited for the enemy to appear.

Meanwhile the Syracusan generals had marched upon Catana, and finding that they had been duped, returned with all speed to the defence of their own city. After a long and fatiguing march, they came in view of the Athenian position, and drew up their forces for battle. But Nicias declined the challenge, and the day being now far advanced, they fell back and encamped for the night in the open field.

Next morning Nicias, acting with unusual vigour, drew up his army in two equal divisions, and leaving one half to defend the camp, and act as a reserve, with the other he advanced rapidly upon the enemy. The Syracusans, who had perhaps reckoned too much on the known indolence of Nicias, were taken by surprise. Their discipline was lax, and many of them had left their posts, and gone off into the town. Nevertheless, they met the attack with firmness: those who were on the spot hastened to assume their weapons, which they had laid aside, while the stragglers came running back, and took their stand wherever they saw a gap in the ranks. After some preliminary skirmishing between the light-armed troops, the heavy masses of the hoplites came to close quarters, and a fierce hand to hand struggle ensued. While the issue was still uncertain, a violent thunderstorm broke over the contending armies, and struck terror into the Syracusans, who regarded it as an omen of defeat. But the seasoned soldiers of Nicias saw nothing unusual in an autumn tempest, and perceiving the enemy to waver, they pressed their attack, and broke through the opposing lines. The whole Syracusan army now fell back upon Syracuse, but they retired without haste or disorder, and their retreat was covered by a numerous and efficient body of cavalry, so that their total loss amounted only to two hundred and sixty.

The victory thus remained with the Athenians; but the moral advantage was entirely on the side of the Syracusans. With an army composed of raw recruits, they had met the flower of the Athenian forces, trained by years of warfare, and led by experienced generals, in fair fight, and though attacked at a disadvantage, they had fought with spirit, and retreated with coolness and deliberation. They had good reason to be satisfied with the result of their first encounter with the invader, and they might well share the high and confident hopes expressed by their most eminent citizen, Hermocrates. Speaking at a general assembly, immediately after the battle, the great patriot congratulated his countrymen on the courage which they had displayed, and at the same time pointed out the necessity of improving their discipline and military organization. One important reform should be

made at once; the number of the generals, which had hitherto been fifteen, should be greatly reduced, and those appointed to the supreme command should be given absolute power, so that they might act with secrecy and despatch. Further, let the whole adult male population be placed under arms, and kept in constant drill all through the winter. If these measures were vigorously carried out, they might successfully defy the Athenians to do their worst.

Acting on this advice, the Syracusans deposed the existing generals,

and chose Hermocrates, with three others, to fill their place. The reform of the army was at once taken in hand, and ambassadors were sent to Corinth and Sparta to ask for aid. Corinth, as the mother-city of Syracuse, might well respond to the call, and it was hoped that the Spartans would be induced to declare open war on Athens, so as to compel the Athenians to withdraw their forces from Sicily, or at least prevent them from sending reinforcements.

Various defensive works were undertaken by the Syracusans during the winter. The most important of these was a new wall, extending from the northern sea to the Great Harbour, and taking in a wide space of ground, outside the old line of wall, to the west of the city. By thus increasing the area of Syracuse, they made it much more difficult for Nicias to draw his line of blockade, when the siege began in the following spring. They also constructed a fort, with a permanent garrison, to guard the temple of Zeus in the suburb of Polichne, and drove piles into the sea at all the landing-places of the Great Harbour.

Soon after the battle Nicias shifted his winter quarters to Naxos, and learning this the Syracusans marched in full force to Catana, laid waste the territory, and burnt the deserted huts of the Athenians. The insult was tamely endured, and shortly afterwards the ever-active Hermocrates had an opportunity of thwarting the Athenian intrigues among the Greek cities of Sicily. The scene of this diplomatic encounter was Camarina, a Dorian city which had hitherto wavered between its hatred of Syracuse and its fear of Athens. Early in the winter Athenian envoys appeared at Camarina with overtures of alliance, and Hermocrates was sent to represent the interests of Syracuse. Speaking first in the debate, Hermocrates set himself to unmask the designs of the Athenians, who, under the thin pretence of helping the Ionic cities of Sicily, had come (he said) to make a conquest of the whole island. The Ionians of Greece had long groaned under their yoke, and the same fate was in store for the Ionians of Sicily, if they allowed themselves to be beguiled by specious lies.

The plea of friendship and goodwill might pass with the degenerate Greeks of Asia and the Aegaeon, born to be cajoled and enslaved; but the Camariaeans were of the stout Dorian race, the hereditary foes of tyranny, too wise and too brave to lend themselves as tools to a bare-faced scheme of aggression. If not, let them beware: Syracuse was fighting in a righteous cause, and must prevail in the end; help was coming from Peloponnesus, and if the Camariaeans stood aloof, the day would come when they would regret their disloyalty.

There can be no doubt that Hermocrates was right in his view of the motive which brought the Athenians to Sicily, and the arguments of Euphemus, the advocate for Athens, who strove to confute him, will not bear examination. But the people of Camarina were in a difficult position; their city had suffered many things in the past at the hands of Syracuse, and they had reason to fear that her oppressions might be renewed, if she emerged triumphant from the present struggle. On the other hand, if the Athenians were victorious, they might forfeit their independence altogether. In this dilemma they determined to play a waiting game, and when the time came for action, to throw their weight on the winning side. For the present they answered that they chose to remain neutral.

The debate at Camarina, though interesting and instructive from the light which it throws on the passions and motives of the combatants, had little influence on the final issue of the war. But about the same time a scene was being enacted in another part of the Greek world, which led to most momentous consequences. Early in the winter the Syracusan envoys arrived at Corinth, and made an earnest appeal for help. The Corinthians were warmly attached to their famous colony, which had never wavered in its allegiance to the mother-city, and moreover they were the implacable enemies of Athens. They therefore took up the cause of Syracuse with enthusiasm, and they sent the envoys on to Sparta, accompanied by delegates of their own, to urge the immediate resumption of hostilities against Athens, and the sending of prompt aid to Sicily.

At Sparta they found an able and unscrupulous ally, the very last whom they had expected to meet there. This was the outlaw Alcibiades, who, after eluding the vigilance of the Athenian officers at Thurii, had crossed over in a merchant ship to Cyllene, the port of Elis. While staying there, he received an invitation from the Lacedaemonians to proceed to Sparta, and made his way thither, having first stipulated for a safe-conduct; for he dreaded the vengeance of the Spartans, to whom he had done much mischief by raising the coalition which led to the battle of Mantinea. So there he was, the guest of his old enemies, burning with all an exile's hatred, and ready to strike some deadly blow against the city which had cast him out.

At first the Spartans gave but a cool and qualified response to the application of the envoys from Corinth. They were prepared to lend

moral support to the Syracusans, by sending an embassy to encourage them in their resistance, but of more substantial aid they said little or nothing. Now was the time for Alcibiades to play his part. He knew, far better than any of his hearers, all the vulnerable points of Athens, and had no scruple in using his knowledge for her ruin. Having obtained permission from the magistrates, he rose to address the Spartan assembly; and his speech is given at full length by the historian, who was himself an exile at the time, and may possibly have been present [Footnote: The suggestion is made by Grote.] on this important occasion.

The Spartans might smile when they heard this accomplished traitor professing friendship towards themselves, and zeal for their service; they might be disgusted at the flippant sophistries by which he strove to defend his unexampled villainy. But far different feelings must have been awakened, when he went on to unfold the gigantic scheme of conquest, to which, as he pretended, the invasion of Sicily was no more than a prelude. According to this statement, the Athenians intended, after subjugating the Greeks of Sicily, to turn their arms against the Italian Greeks, and finally to attack Carthage. If all these designs were successful, they would build a great number of new ships, taking their materials from the forests of Italy, raise a vast military force, both of Greeks and barbarians, and then return, backed by the whole power of the West, and draw a ring of war round Peloponnesus. With such resources they would be irresistible, and all Greece must inevitably fall under their sway.

"Such," continued Alcibiades, "is the secret history of the Sicilian expedition, which you have heard from the mouth of him who knows it best. Remember, then, that the issue before you concerns not Syracuse only, but Sparta also: for if Syracuse falls—and fall she must, if left without support—all Sicily will be under the heel of Athens; then will come the turn of Italy, and after that you will soon have the enemy at your own doors. Now learn what you must do, if you would avert all the evils which I have foretold. You must send a fleet to Sicily at once, with hoplites who can row the ships themselves, and serve in the army as soon as they land, and with them a Spartan commander, to organize the fighting men of Sicily, and compel those who are hanging back to do their duty. Such a man will be a host in himself, and will infuse new life and energy into the defence. Further, you must establish a fortified camp at Decelea, a position which commands the whole territory of Attica; for by so doing you will reduce Athens to a state of siege, and compel the whole male population to serve on garrison duty; you will deprive the Athenians of their revenues from the silver-mines at Laurium, and you will put new heart into the cities subject to Athens, and encourage them to withhold their tribute. Let these measures be carried out with promptitude and vigour, and you will soon reap your reward, in the humiliation of Athens, and the honour and gratitude of all Greece."

At these words of Alcibiades the sluggish Spartans took fire, and recognizing the importance of his advice they determined to follow the course which he had indicated. Gylippus, a Spartan of high rank, received orders to proceed at once to Syracuse, and assume the control of the war, and the Corinthians were directed to provide ships for the conveyance of troops. But after this brief display of energy the Spartans relapsed into their wonted torpor. Many months elapsed before Gylippus was able to embark for Sicily, and meanwhile important events had been occurring at the seat of war. We return, therefore, to the head-quarters of Nicias, which had once more been removed from Naxos to Catana.

VI

For the next year and a half [Footnote: Spring 414–autumn 413 B.C.] the scene of our narrative lies almost entirely in the immediate neighbourhood of Syracuse, so that it now becomes necessary to describe in some detail the site of that city, and the character of the adjacent country. Mention has already been made of the island of Ortygia, the site of the original colony, connected with the mainland of Sicily by a bridge or causeway. At the southern extremity of Ortygia there is a narrow strip of land, pointing like a finger towards the rocky peninsula of Plemmyrium; and between these two points lies the entrance to a spacious bay, already alluded to under the name of the Great Harbour. At the western end of the bay there is a long stretch of low, marshy ground, intersected by the little rivers Cyana and Anapus, and infested with fever during the heats of summer. On a rising ground, south of the Anapus, stood the suburb of Polichne, with its great temple, sacred to the Olympian Zeus. A little to the north of Ortygia the coast rises abruptly in a bold line of cliffs, facing eastwards, and forming the base of a triangular plateau, which slopes upwards from the sea, and gradually grows narrower until it ends in a point, called the hill of Euryelus. This plateau, which bore the name of Epipolae, is guarded on all its three sides by rocky precipices, only to be ascended at two or three places. Its eastern end, called Atheadina, from the wild pear-trees which once flourished there, was occupied by a new city, now included with Ortygia in the same wall of defence. Here were situated the famous stone-quarries, which afterwards acquired so tragic an interest from the sufferings of the captive Athenians; and southwards from this district the ground shelves gently to the shores of the Little Harbour, a sheltered inlet at the northern end of Ortygia.

At the opening of spring the operations against Syracuse began in good earnest. The first object of Nicias was to obtain possession of the heights of Epipolae, for since the construction of the new Syracusan wall it had become impossible for him to draw his line of blockade from the side of the Great Harbour. His preparations were already far advanced, when the Syracusan generals resolved to anticipate him, by occupying all the approaches to Epipolae. With this intention they

issued an order for a full muster of troops in a meadow by the Anapus, and after a general review and inspection of arms they appointed a picked body of six hundred hoplites to guard the heights of Epipolae, and hold themselves ready for any other pressing service. But the precaution was taken too late. On the night before the review Nicias set sail with his whole army from Catana, and landed at a place called Leon, not more than six or seven furlongs from the northern side of Epipolae. The fleet then took up its station in the sheltered water behind the peninsula of Thapsus, while the land forces, advancing at a run, crossed the level ground, and then, breasting the ascent, gained the summit of Euryelus.

News of their approach presently reached the Syracusans, who were still mustered by the Anapus, and breaking off the review, they marched in haste towards Epipolae, hoping still to dislodge the Athenians from their position. But in their rapid advance over a distance of nearly three miles their ranks became disordered, and their attack was so straggling and ineffectual that they were easily repulsed, and driven back with considerable loss into the town. On the following day Nicias led his troops down the slope, and offered battle before the walls of Syracuse; but the challenge was declined, and the Syracusans remained within their defences, leaving the Athenians in undisputed possession of Epipolae.

After this important success the Athenian generals prepared at once to form the siege of Syracuse. They first constructed a fort at a place called Labdalum, on the northern verge of Epipolae, and near its western extremity, to serve as a safe depository for their baggage and money. Then, taking up a position near the centre of Epipolae, they built a circular wall, covering a considerable space of ground, and defended on the side towards the city by an outer breastwork, a thousand feet long. This enclosure, which was called the Circle, was intended as a shelter for the men employed on construction of the blockading wall, which started from either side of the Circle, and was to be carried north and south until it reached the sea. The work made rapid progress, and greatly alarmed the Syracusans, who saw themselves in danger of being cut off from all hope of succour on the land side. Dismayed by this prospect, they resolved to make one more effort to drive the Athenians from their position, and marching out in full force, offered battle. Advancing in haste and disorder, they would certainly have suffered a crushing defeat, but for the prudent caution of their generals, who were so much impressed by the superior discipline of the Athenians, that they gave the order to retire, and led their troops back into the city, leaving only a detachment of horse to skirmish with the besiegers. But the Athenians had now an efficient force of cavalry, which had been raised by successive reinforcements to the number of six hundred and fifty men; and these, backed by a small force of infantry, soon drove the horsemen of Syracuse from the field.

The Athenians then completed the building of their Circle, and began to lay the materials for the northern line of wall. By the advice of Hermocrates the Syracusans made no further attempt to attack them in full force, but began to build a counterwall, running out from the city in a direction south of the Athenian Circle, so as to cross the line to be followed by the wall of blockade, and prevent it from reaching the Great Harbour. The work proceeded without interruption, for the Athenians were engaged in their building operations north of the Circle, and did not choose to divide their forces. When it was completed, this counterwork consisted of a solid stone wall, crowned with wooden towers, and defended in front by a palisade. The blockade of Syracuse was thus rendered impossible, as long as the defenders could keep possession of their counterwall. But unfortunately the guards left in charge of the new wall soon began to neglect their duty, and erected tents in the shade, where they passed the hot hours of the afternoon, while some even left their posts, and went off to refresh themselves in the city. The Athenian generals did not fail to take advantage of this negligence. Watching their opportunity, when most of the Syracusan guards were reposing under the shelter of the tents, they sent a chosen troop of some three hundred men to make a sudden assault on the counterwall. Then, having divided the main body of the Athenian army between them, they disposed their forces so as to prevent any rescue from the town. One division was drawn up before the principal gate in the new Syracusan wall, while the other proceeded to a postern-gate, at the point where the counterwall started from the city. The combined movement was completely successful; the three hundred carried the stockade and cross-wall by storm, and compelled the defenders to take refuge within the ramparts of Syracuse. The whole Athenian army then marched up to the counterwall and stockade, which they speedily demolished, carrying off the materials for their own use.

Wishing to prevent any second attempt on the part of the Syracusans to cut them off from the southern slope of Epipolae, the Athenian generals now fortified that part of the cliff which looks towards the Great Harbour. By occupying this point they obtained a new centre, commanding the space between the Circle and the southern edge of the cliff, and placing them in communication with the level valley of the Anapus, across which they had to carry their line of blockade. For the present building operations were suspended on the northern side of the Circle, as they wished first of all to complete the investment of Syracuse towards the south.

Perceiving their intention, the Syracusans began a second counterwork, consisting of a stockade and ditch, which started at the point of junction between the old city-wall and the new, and ran across the low swampy ground as far as the Anapus. Thus the Athenians were confronted by a new obstacle, which had to be removed, before they could make any further progress. Acting with energy and decision, they sent orders to the fleet, which was still lying at Thapsus, to sail round into the

Great Harbour; and without waiting for its arrival, before daybreak Lamachus led his troops down the cliff, and advanced against the stockade. His men carried hurdles and planks, to secure their footing in the most treacherous parts of the swamp, and, proceeding thus, in the first light of dawn they came up to the stockade. They found the Syracusans assembled in force to resist them, and an engagement ensued, which speedily ended in favour of the Athenians. The right wing of the Syracusan army fled back into the city, while the left wing retreated towards the suburb of Polichne, hotly pursued by the picked troop [Footnote: P. 203.] of Athenian hoplites, who wished to cut them off before they reached the river. By this rash movement the Athenians came near to forfeiting the advantage which they had gained, and brought upon themselves an irreparable loss. For the Syracusan cavalry turned on their pursuers, and drove them back in disorder upon the Athenian right. The sudden reverse created something like a panic in that part of the line, and Lamachus, who was in command of the left wing, hastened to their relief, and threw himself, with a handful of men, between the Syracusan cavalry and the fugitives. This gallant action turned the tide of battle once more, and gave the Athenians on the right wing time to rally; but Lamachus and his followers, pushing forward too hotly, were attacked by the enemy in a place where their retreat was cut off by a ditch, and slain to a man.

Meanwhile the Syracusans who had fled into the city, observing the temporary defeat of the Athenians, had taken courage again, and they returned to the field, having first sent a detachment to attack the Athenian Circle, where Nicias, who was disabled by sickness, had been left in charge with a small garrison. Thinking to make an easy capture, the party sent on this service ran up the slope of Epipolae, and reached the breastwork of the Circle, which they took and demolished. With the scanty force at his disposal, Nicias had little hope of repelling the attack, so he had recourse to a desperate expedient. He ordered the camp-servants to set fire to a great pile of timber, which was lying, together with a number of siege engines, in front of the wall. They did as he directed, and a great flame arose, which drove back the assailants, and gave warning of his danger to the Athenians in the plain below, where the whole Syracusan army was now in full retreat. Almost at the same moment the Athenian fleet was seen sailing into the Great Harbour, and a strong contingent from the victorious army came swarming up the hill to the rescue. Thereupon the storming party from Syracuse turned and fled back to the city, where they found the streets thronged by their beaten and dispirited comrades.

The result of this battle was to leave the Athenian in undisputed possession of the whole country round Syracuse. Lamachus, indeed, had fallen, and the loss of that daring and active spirit soon made itself severely felt. But for the present the fortunes of Athens were in the ascendant, and everything seemed to promise a speedy triumph. The Syracusans were thoroughly cowed by their defeat, and looked passively

on, while a double wall of blockade crept steadily forwards from the southern edge of Epipolae towards the Great Harbour, where the Athenian fleet had now taken up its permanent station. The native Sicels, who had hitherto held back through fear of Syracuse, now joined the Athenians in great numbers. Even the distant Etruscans, the ancient enemies of Syracuse, sent three war-galleys to take part in the sack of the great Dorian city.

Day by day the spirits of the Syracusans sank lower and lower. They now began to feel the actual pressure of a siege. Months had passed since their envoys had sailed for Greece, and there was still no sign of help from Corinth or Sparta. They had lost all hope of saving themselves by their own unaided efforts, and no course seemed left to them but to make the best terms they could with Nicias. Negotiations were accordingly opened with the Athenian general, but after much discussion no definite result was attained. In this hour of weakness and distress, the Syracusans became divided against themselves, and every man suspected his neighbour of treason. Then they turned upon their generals, who, after holding out such high promises, had brought them to this pass, either by mismanagement, or by deliberate treachery. Hermocrates and his colleagues were deposed from their command, and three other generals succeeded to their place.

In the eyes of all those who were watching the struggle, the fate of Syracuse was sealed; she was destined to fall a prey to the devouring ambition of Athens. But at this very moment a little cloud was approaching from the east, which was fraught with disaster and ruin to the besieging army.

VII

Just at the time when the Syracusans were brought to the brink of despair, Gylippus, after so many months' delay, was on his voyage to Sicily. While lying at Leucas, a Corinthian settlement in the Ionian sea, he received the alarming intelligence that Syracuse was already completely blockaded, and the report was confirmed by every vessel that came in from the west. Deceived by these false rumours, he gave up all hope of saving Sicily, but hoping still to forestall the Athenians in Italy, he put out from Leucas with four ships, and steered a straight course for Tarentum. From this city, which was friendly to Sparta and Syracuse, he started on his mission among the Italian Greeks, and putting in at Locri he heard for the first time that the Athenian wall was still unfinished on the northern side of Epipolae, leaving a wide gap, through which a relieving force might enter the town.

Two courses now lay open to Gylippus. He might sail southwards, and make an attempt to run the blockade of Syracuse—or he might land on the northern coast of Sicily, march across the island, and fight his way into the city through the unwalled interval. In either case, the

enterprise seemed desperate enough. By a very moderate exertion on the part of Nicias, employing only a fraction of the immense force at his disposal, Gylippus might have been destroyed, before he had time to become dangerous. But Nicias was lulled into a fatal confidence. He had heard of the mission of Gylippus, but made no attempt to oppose his voyage to Italy, regarding him as a mere free-booter, unworthy of serious notice. At last, learning that Gylippus was at Locri, he was induced to send out four triremes against him. They were instructed to take station at Rhegium, and cut off the daring intruder as he passed through the strait. But when they reached Rhegium, the wary Spartan was already beyond their reach. He had decided to approach Syracuse by land, and was now far advanced on his voyage to Himera, the only Greek settlement on the north coast of Sicily. Himera, though an Ionic colony, was attached to the Dorian interest, and her citizens gave a hearty welcome to the Spartan deliverer. Before long, a little army of about three thousand men was assembled at Himera, and ready to follow the fortunes of Gylippus. Seven hundred of these were the sailors and marines from his own vessels, armed as hoplites, and the Himeraeans furnished a thousand infantry, light and heavy-armed, and a hundred cavalry. Owing to the recent death of a powerful chieftain, who had been a strong partisan of Athens, the northern Sicels had now changed sides, and they sent a thousand men to serve under the Spartan leader. Small contingents also arrived, in answer to the call of Gylippus, from Gela and Selinus. With this little force, composed of such motley elements, Gylippus started from Himera, and entered on his march for the relief of Syracuse. The fate of Syracuse was already wavering in the balance. As yet no news of approaching succour had reached the beleaguered city, and the Syracusans had abandoned all hope. To save themselves from a worse calamity, they resolved to surrender, and an assembly was summoned to settle the terms of capitulation. But at this very moment a message came to them by sea, which kindled their courage afresh, and banished these counsels of despair. When Gylippus left Leucas, a Corinthian fleet of some fifteen vessels was preparing to sail from that port for Syracuse. One of the ships, commanded by a certain Gongylus, was delayed in the harbour, and started after the rest. But Gongylus, instead of steering the ordinary course, which would have taken him first to Italy, made a bold dash, straight across the sea, and just when the momentous decision was pending, his ship came to anchor in the Little Harbour. Forthwith the joyful tidings spread like wildfire through the city: Gylippus was coming, armed with full authority from Sparta–Corinth had taken up their cause–Syracuse was saved! All thought of surrender was instantly flung away, and news arriving shortly afterwards that Gylippus was near at hand, the whole Syracusan force marched out to meet him, and escorted him triumphantly into the town.

Thus, without a blow being struck, an immense access of strength had been brought to the besieged, and the grand condition of successful resistance, on which Alcibiades had laid such weight, was fulfilled. A Spartan officer of consummate ability was now in Syracuse, and he had

made his way into the city, not alone, not by stealth, but at the head of an army, and before the very eyes of the enemy. Weeks must have elapsed between the departure of Gylippus from Leucas, and his arrival at Syracuse; and during all this time, with one trifling exception, Nicias made no effort to oppose his progress. Prudent men might well have regarded the enterprise of Gylippus as a wild and desperate adventure; and such it must have proved, but for the astounding blindness and apathy of Nicias.

At the time when Gylippus reached Syracuse the Athenian lines of circumvallation were all but completed on the side of the Great Harbour; but a wide interval was still left between the Circle and the northern sea, and it was here that Gylippus had effected an entrance. To keep this space open was a matter of supreme importance, and the scene of action is now shifted again to the northern slope of Epipolae. On the day after his arrival Gylippus succeeded in capturing the Athenian fort at Labdalum, and the command of this position gave increased facilities for the construction of a third counterwall, which was forthwith taken in hand, and carried in the direction of Labdalum, until it crossed the blockading line at its northern end.

If the Syracusans succeeded in completing and holding this counterwork, the blockade of Syracuse would be rendered impossible. Yet for some time Nicias made no attempt to interrupt its progress. As if already convinced of his inferiority in the field, he took steps to keep his communications open by sea, and with this object he employed a part of his forces in fortifying the headland of Plemmyrium, which commanded the entrance to the Great Harbour. Here he built three forts which served as an arsenal for the Athenian stores; and henceforth Plemmyrium became the chief station for his fleet. This removal had a disastrous effect on the Athenian crews; for the place being almost a desert, and the springs distant and scanty, they were compelled to go far from their quarters in search of forage and water, and while thus engaged they were cut off in great numbers by the Syracusan horse, who had been posted at Polichne for this purpose. A rapid demoralization of the crews was the consequence, and desertions became more frequent every day.

Meanwhile the counterwall was advancing steadily up the hill, and every day Gylippus drew up his army, to cover the operations of the workmen. At last he determined to force on an engagement, and in the first encounter the Syracusans, fighting in a confined space, which prevented their cavalry from coming into action, suffered a defeat. In no wise discouraged by this reverse, on the next day they took up a position in the more open ground, and offered battle again. By this time the Syracusan counterwork had almost passed the end of the Athenian wall, and if it were carried a few yards further, the siege of Syracuse would be brought to a standstill. Roused by the imminence of the crisis, Nicias determined to make one more effort to regain his mastery in the field, and led his troops to the attack. The main body

of the hoplites were soon hotly engaged on both sides, and in the midst of the action Gylippus directed his cavalry and light-armed infantry to make a sudden charge on the Athenian left. This movement was executed with so much skill and resolution that the Athenians in that part of the line gave way, and drew after them the rest of their comrades, who broke their ranks, and fled for shelter behind the siege works.

The Syracusans lost no time in turning their victory to account. On the very same night their wall was extended some distance beyond the blockading line, and until this new barrier was overthrown, the investment of Syracuse had now become impossible.

Whichever way he looked, Nicias saw himself menaced with failure and defeat. He had sent twenty ships to intercept the Corinthian squadron on its voyage from Leucas; but the little fleet of rescue succeeded in avoiding the snare, and made its way into the port of Syracuse, thus adding twelve fresh vessels to the defending force. Gylippus himself was marching unhindered up and down the island, passing from city to city, and raising reinforcements of ships and men; and a second embassy had been despatched by the Syracusans, to carry the news of their victory to Corinth and Sparta, and ask for further help. Another ominous sign of coming events was the bustle and activity now visible in the dockyards of Syracuse and the waters of the Little Harbour; for the Syracusans had turned their attention seriously to their fleet, and thought of nothing less than attacking the Athenians on their own element.

These symptoms of renewed confidence and energy were observed by Nicias with growing disquiet. And if he turned his eyes to his own camp, he saw little to relieve his anxiety. For the predictions of Lamachus had been fulfilled to the letter. By his fatal policy of procrastination Nicias had frittered away the resources of the most splendid armament that ever set sail from Peiraeus. His soldiers were infected by the despondency of their leader, and many of them were stricken by the marsh-fever which haunts the unwholesome district of the Anapus. Above all the condition of the fleet showed the lamentable effect of long inaction and delay. All the supplies of the Athenians came to them by sea, and in order to keep their communications open, it was necessary to keep the whole of the fleet on constant duty. In consequence of this, the hulls of the triremes had become sodden with water, which made them leaky, and difficult to row. Moreover the crews, which were largely composed of foreign seamen, had grown restive and mutinous under the severe strain of hardships and privation, so different from the easy and lucrative service in the hope of which they had enlisted. Some took the first opportunity of deserting to the enemy, while others ran away to remote parts of Sicily; and there was no means of filling the places thus left vacant.

Such was the burden of care and apprehension which lay heavy on the

feeble shoulders of the Athenian general. He was naturally a weak man, haunted by superstitious terrors, irresolute, easily cast down; and this infirmity of character was aggravated by a painful and incurable disease. There was no longer any question of laying siege to Syracuse: he himself was now besieged, and it was all he could do to maintain his position within his defences, and keep the sea open for the conveyance of supplies. In this desperate situation he determined to send a written despatch to Athens. We are led to suppose that this was an unusual proceeding, and that news from the seat of war was generally sent by word of mouth. The document is given at full length, with all its grievous confessions of incompetence and failure. After setting forth the facts of the case as stated above, Nicias insists that one of two things must be done: either the army now lying before Syracuse must be recalled to Athens, or the Athenians must send out a second army, equal in strength to the first, and a general to relieve him of his command.

At the conclusion of his despatch Nicias peevishly complains of the exacting temper of the Athenians, and their readiness to blame anyone but themselves if anything untoward occurred. Whatever may be the truth of the general charge, it was most ill-timed and ungrateful in his own case. Towards him, at least, the conduct of his fellow-citizens was marked by an excess of generosity, amounting to actual infatuation. Nothing is more remarkable than the unshaken confidence of the Athenians in their feeble general, after hearing this terrible indictment, drawn up by his own hand. They refused to accept his resignation, and passed a decree that large reinforcements should be sent to Sicily, with Demosthenes and Eurymedon as generals; and in the meantime they appointed Menander and Euthydemus, two officers already serving before Syracuse, to share with Nicias the burden of command. Before the winter was ended Eurymedon started with ten ships for Sicily, to announce that effectual help was coming; while Demosthenes was charged with the duty of enlisting troops and organizing a fleet.

Meanwhile new perils were gathering round the Athenians at home, which should have warned them to abandon their wild plans of conquest, and concentrate all their strength for their own defence. The Spartans had long been restrained by a scruple of conscience from an open declaration of war, wishing to avoid the guilt which is associated with the first act of aggression. Eighteen years before they had refused all offers of arbitration, and deliberately provoked an encounter with Athens, in direct violation of the Thirty Years' Truce, which provided for an amicable settlement of differences; and by so acting they had, as they believed, incurred the anger of heaven, and brought on themselves a long train of disasters. But now the position was reversed: for in the previous year the Athenians had made descents on the coasts of Laconia, and other districts of Peloponnesus; and they had repeatedly turned a deaf ear to the friendly overtures of the Spartans, who proposed to submit all disputed matters to a peaceful tribunal.

Thus relieved of their scruples, the Spartans prepared to renew the war in good earnest, and early in the following spring [Footnote: B.C. 413.] they summoned their allies to the Isthmus, and marched under Agis their king into Attica. After ravaging the plain, they encamped at Decelea, fourteen miles north of Athens, and here they established a fortified post, which was garrisoned by contingents of the Peloponnesian army, serving in regular order. Once more Alcibiades had cause to exult in the success of his malignant counsels, which had sent Gylippus to Syracuse, and had now planted this root of bitter mischief on the very soil of Attica.

While the allies were thus engaged at Decelea, a considerable body of troops had embarked at Taenarum and at Corinth, and sailed to take part in the defence of Syracuse. In Greece, all the old enemies of Athens were arming against her, and beyond the sea her prospects grew darker and darker every day. Yet nothing, it seemed, could break the spell of fatal delusion which rested on the doomed city. While Attica lay in the grip of the enemy, a fleet of sixty-five triremes, carrying a great military force, weighed anchor from Peiraeus, and steered its course, under the command of Demosthenes, for Sicily.

VIII

We must now return to Syracuse, where fortune was preparing a new blow for the ill-fated Athenian army. Gylippus came back from his mission at the beginning of spring, bringing with him the reinforcements which he had gathered from various parts of Sicily. At once resuming the offensive, he planned an attack on the forts recently erected by Nicias at Plemmyrium, and in order to divide the attention of the Athenians, he determined to make a simultaneous movement against them by sea and land. He himself took command of the army, and setting out at night, made his way round to the rear of the Athenian position at Plemmyrium. Meanwhile the Syracusan fleet lay ready in two divisions, one of which, consisting of thirty-five vessels, was moored in the docks, within the Great Harbour, while the other, to the number of forty-five, had its station in the Lesser Harbour. At the hour appointed by Gylippus, just as day was breaking, both squadrons got under weigh, and bore down upon Plemmyrium, from the opposite sides of Ortygia. Though taken by surprise, the Athenians put out in haste with sixty triremes, and a sea-fight ensued, in which the Syracusans for some time had the advantage. By this time Gylippus was at hand with his army, and by a sudden assault on the Athenian forts he made an easy capture of all three; for the greater part of the garrison had flocked down to the sea, to watch the progress of the action in the Great Harbour. Fortunately for these men, who had so grossly neglected their duty, the Athenian fleet had now gained a decisive victory, and they were thus enabled to make their escape by water, and cross over to the camp of Nicias, on the other side of the bay.

By the capture of Plemmyrium a great treasure fell into the hands of the Syracusans. The loss to the Athenians, in money, stores, and men, was serious enough; but further consequences ensued, which were nothing less than disastrous. The enemy now commanded both sides of the entrance to the Great Harbour, and not a ship-load of provisions could reach the Athenian camp without an encounter with the Syracusan triremes. Well might despondency and dismay take possession of the beleaguered army, cramped in their narrow quarters on the swampy flats of the Anapus.

All Sicily, with one or two exceptions, had now declared for Syracuse, and reinforcements came pouring in from every side. Gylippus was resolved, if possible, to destroy the armament of Nicias, before the fresh succours from Athens had time to arrive; and, as before, the attack was to be made simultaneously by sea and land. Since the loss of Plemmyrium, the Athenian fleet had been penned up in the confined space at the head of the Great Harbour. Outside of these narrow limits, the whole coast was in the hands of the enemy, and any Athenian trireme which ventured out into open water ran the risk of being driven on a hostile shore. Unless they chose to incur this great peril, the Athenians would have to fight in close order, with the long, tapering prows of their vessels exposed to collision.

The Syracusans skilfully availed themselves of the advantage thus offered. The impact of prow with prow, which had hitherto been regarded as a disgraceful evidence of bad seamanship, had now become the most effective method of attack; and in order to execute this simple manoeuvre without damage to their own ships, the Syracusans shortened the prows of their triremes, and strengthened them with heavy beams of timber, thus converting them into a broad and solid mass, which could be driven with crushing force against the slender beaks of the Athenian galleys.

When all was ready, Gylippus led out his troops, and assailed the Athenian wall which faced towards Syracuse, and at the same time the garrison stationed at Polichne left their quarters, and made another attack on the opposite side. The assault had already commenced, when the Syracusan fleet, which numbered eighty triremes, was seen advancing towards the inner shore of the bay, where the ships of Nicias lay moored; and the Athenian seamen, who had not expected to be called into action, hastened in some confusion to man their ships, seventy-five of which were presently engaged with the enemy. After a day passed in irregular and desultory fighting, the battle ended slightly in favour of the Syracusans. During the next day the Syracusans remained inactive, and Nicias employed the interval in repairing the ships which had suffered damage, and providing for the defence of his fleet. The Athenian naval station was protected by a row of piles, rammed into the bottom of the sea, forming a semi-circular breastwork, with an opening about two hundred feet wide, where the ships passed in and out. On either side of this entrance

Nicias caused a merchant vessel to be moored, and each vessel was provided with an engine called a dolphin, a heavy mass of lead, suspended from the yard-arm, which could be dropped on the deck of any hostile trireme attempting to pass.

Early on the following morning the Syracusans resumed hostilities both by sea and land, and after several hours of desultory fighting, they drew off their fleet, and sailed back to their station under the walls of the city. The Athenians were well pleased by this sudden relief, and concluding that their work was done for the day, they disembarked at leisure, and began to prepare their midday meal. But before they had time to snatch a mouthful, the whole Syracusan fleet was seen advancing again from the opposite shore, and the hungry and weary Athenian crews were summoned on board to repel a second attack. This crafty manoeuvre was due to a suggestion of Ariston, the most skilful of the Corinthian seamen, by whose advice provisions had been brought down to the beach, so that the Syracusan crews were kept together, and ready to renew the action, after a brief interval for repose and refreshment.

For a little while the two fleets faced each other, without venturing to attack; then the Athenians, who were feverish with hunger and fatigue, could restrain themselves no longer, but with one consent they dashed their oars into the water, and with shouts of mutual encouragement charged down upon the enemy. The Syracusans kept a firm front, and opposing their massive prows to the rash assault, inflicted great damage on the Athenian triremes, many of which were completely wrecked by the shock of the collision. On every side the Athenians were hard beset; the light-armed troops posted on the decks of the Syracusan vessels, plied them with a shower of javelins, while the waters swarmed with a multitude of boats, manned by daring adventurers, who rowed boldly up to the sides of the Athenian triremes, broke the oars, and hurled darts through the port-holes at the rowers. After fighting for some time at a great disadvantage, with exhausted crews, and in a narrow space, where they had no room to manoeuvre, the Athenians were compelled to fall back, and sought refuge behind their palisade.

This important success raised the spirits of the Syracusans higher than ever. They had gained a decisive victory over the greatest naval power in Greece, sunk seven triremes, disabled many more, and slain or taken prisoners a large number of men. Flushed with pride and hope, they immediately began to prepare for a final attack, which was to end in the complete destruction of their enemies both by sea and land. But these high expectations received a sudden check; for on the day after the battle, [Footnote: Or possibly two days.] the watchers on the walls of Syracuse descried a great fleet on the northern horizon. Presently the regular beat of ten thousand oars could be distinctly heard; it grew louder and louder, and as the vanguard came into full view, the alarmed Syracusans recognized the truth. There was no

mistaking the peculiar build and familiar ensigns of the renowned Athenian galleys. This could be no other than the fleet of Demosthenes, arrived just in time to save the shattered armament of Nicias, and once more turn the tide of war against Syracuse. A great multitude rushed to the battlements, and gazed with keen pangs of anxiety as the long line of triremes, seventy-three in number, swept past the walls of Ortygia, rounded the southern point, and crossing the Great Harbour, dropped anchor at the naval station of Nicias. If anyone not concerned in the struggle had been present, he might have admired the grand exhibition of military pomp and power, the perfect trim and condition of the triremes, the precision of the rowing, and the glittering ranks of the hoplites, javelin-men, archers, and slingers, who thronged the decks. But no such feeling could find room in the minds of the Syracusans. After their long trials and sufferings, on the very eve of their crowning triumph, a new host of enemies had sprung up against them, and all their toils were beginning anew.

IX

When Demosthenes arrived at Syracuse, the position of affairs was as follows: the blockading wall of the Athenians still extended in an unbroken line from the circular fort on Epipolae to the camp and naval station of Nicias at the head of the Great Harbour; but the Athenians were cut off from access to the northern slope of Epipolae by the Syracusan counterwall, which had been carried up the whole length of the plateau as far as the hill of Euryelus. Along the northern edge of the cliff the Syracusans had established three fortified camps, where the defenders of the counterwall had their quarters, and on the summit of Euryelus a fort had been erected, which held the key to the whole system of defence.

Demosthenes saw at once that, before any progress could be made with the siege of Syracuse, it was necessary to gain possession of the counterwall, and confine the Syracusans within the limits of their city. The sooner he made the attempt, the greater was his chance of success; for every day wasted would give new confidence to the enemy, and the condition in which he found the troops of Nicias was a visible warning against the fatal consequences of delay. An attack made on the cross-wall from its southern side ended in total failure; his siege-engines were burnt, and the storming-parties repulsed at every point. The only course which remained was to march round to the north-western extremity of the plateau, carry the fort of Euryelus, and assail the Syracusans within their own lines. After consulting with his colleagues, Demosthenes determined to try the hazardous method of a night-attack, hoping thus to take the garrison on Euryelus by surprise. He himself, with Eurymedon and Menander, took the command, and the whole Athenian army was engaged in the adventure, except those who remained behind with Nicias to guard the camp. On a moonlight night in August, at the hour of the first watch, the march began.

Moving cautiously up the valley of the Anapus, they turned the northern end of the hill, and reached the path by which Lamachus had ascended in the spring of the previous year. At first all seemed to promise success to the Athenians unobserved by the enemy, Demosthenes ascended the hill, stormed the fort, and, drove the garrison back on the three fortified camps which flanked the Syracusan counterwall on its northern side. The fugitives raised the alarm, and the call was promptly answered by a picked troop of six hundred hoplites, who were stationed nearest to the point of danger. These men made a gallant stand, but they were overpowered by superior numbers, and thrust back on the main body of the Syracusans, who were now advancing under Gylippus to the rescue. They in their turn were forced to give ground before the impetuous charge of Demosthenes, and a general panic seemed about to spread through the whole Syracusan army. Already the Athenians had begun to throw down the battlements of the counterwall, and if they were allowed to proceed, Syracuse would once more be exposed to imminent danger.

But now occurred one of those sudden turns of fortune which were so common in Greek warfare. As the soldiers of the Athenian van rushed forward too hotly, wishing to complete the rout of the enemy they fell into disorder, and in this condition they were confronted by a stout little troop of Boeotian hoplites, who had found their way to Syracuse earlier in the summer. This unexpected resistance checked the furious onset of the Athenians, and the Boeotians, pursuing their advantage, charged in solid phalanx and put them to flight. Once more the tide of battle had turned against Athens. Restored to confidence by the steady valour of their allies, the Syracusans closed their ranks, and advanced in dense masses up the hill. A scene of indescribable horror and confusion ensued, so that no one was afterwards able to give a clear account of what had happened. On the narrow neck of land which forms the western end of Epipolae two great armies were rushing to the encounter. On one side was the main body of the Athenians, still ignorant of the defeat of their comrades, and hurrying forward to share in the victory. On the other side was the whole host of Syracuse, advancing with deafening shouts to meet them; and in the middle were the men of Demosthenes, flying in headlong rout before the conquering Boeotians. In the uncertain light, the fugitives were at first mistaken for enemies, and many of them perished miserably by the spears of their own countrymen. On came the Syracusans, bearing down all before them; but the Athenians, as they strove to escape, were flung back upon the enemy by fresh bodies of their own men, who were still thronging by thousands up the northern path of Euryelus. All semblance of order was now lost in the Athenian army, which was broken up into detached parties, some flying, some advancing, and shouting their watchword to all whom they met, so as to learn whether they had to do with friend or foe. But the Syracusans soon learnt the watchword, which thus became a means of betraying the Athenians to their own destruction. To add to the confusion, the Dorian allies of Athens raised a paean, or war-song, so similar to that of the

Syracusans, that the Athenians fled at their approach supposing them to be enemies. The grand army of Demosthenes, which had set out with such high hopes, was now no better than a mob of wild and desperate men, friend fighting against friend, and citizen against citizen. At length the whole multitude turned and fled, each man seeking to save himself as best he could. Some, hard pressed by the enemy, flung themselves from the cliffs, and were dashed to pieces on the rocks below; others succeeded in reaching the plain, and found their way back to the camp of Nicias; while not a few lost their way, and wandered about the country until the following day, when they were hunted down and slain by the Syracusan horseman.

Demosthenes had done all that a man could to recover the ground lost by Nicias, and resume the aggressive against Syracuse. His well-laid scheme had ended disastrously, and only one course remained, consistent with public duty and common sense. To waste the blood and treasure of Athens in Sicily any longer would be suicidal folly. The Athenians at home were in a state of siege, and needed every man and every ship for the defence of their own territory, and the maintenance of their empire in Greece. Sickness and despondency had already wrought dire havoc among the troops encamped before Syracuse. To remain was utter ruin, both to themselves and their fellow-citizens. The sea was still open, and the new armament, with what remained of the old, would be strong enough to secure their retreat. Let them embark without delay, turn their backs on the fatal shores of Sicily, and hoist sail for home.

These arguments were urged by Demosthenes with unanswerable force at a private meeting of the generals which was held immediately after the defeat on Epipolae. But unhappily for all those most nearly concerned in the debate, the influence of Nicias was still supreme in the Athenian camp; and to spur that gloomy trifer into decisive action was beyond the power even of Demosthenes. Nicias knew that, if he gave the word to retreat, in a few weeks he would have to stand before the bar of his countrymen, and give an account of the great trust which he had betrayed. It would be better, he thought, to perish under the walls of Syracuse, than to brave that stern tribunal, and read his doom on those angry, accusing faces. And apart from these selfish terrors, he was still in communication with his partisans in Syracuse, who encouraged him to wait for a favourable turn of affairs. Thus fettered to the spot both by his hopes and his fears, he obstinately refused to move.

While Demosthenes argued, and Nicias demurred, Gylippus had not been idle. A day or two after the battle, he once more left Syracuse, and traversed the whole length of the island, collecting troops on his way. At Selinus he was joined by the Peloponnesian and Boeotian soldiers who had sailed from Taenarum early in the spring, and had just reached that port, after a long and adventurous voyage. With this welcome addition to his forces, and thousands more who had answered

his call from all parts of Sicily, he returned to Syracuse, and prepared to put out all his strength in a general assault on the army and fleet of Athens.

The Athenians had not yet abandoned their lines on the southern side of Epipolae, and from this position they watched the arrival of the new army raised by Gylippus, as it defiled down the slope, and poured through the gates of Syracuse to swell the ranks of their enemies. In their own camp the state of things was growing worse every day, and even Nicias now became convinced that to remain any longer would be sheer madness. With the hearty concurrence of his colleagues, he gave his vote for immediate departure, and the order was secretly passed round the camp that every man should hold himself in readiness to go on board, as soon as the signal was given. It was necessary to proceed with caution, for if the enemy were informed of their purpose, they would have to fight their way through the Syracusan fleet. The preparations were accordingly made with as little noise as possible and in a short time all was ready for the voyage. Night sank down on the Athenian camp, but among all that vast multitude no one thought of sleep, for the whole host was waiting in breathless eagerness for the signal to embark. Over the eastern waters the full moon was shining, making a long path of silver and pointing the way to home. But suddenly a dark shadow touched the outer rim of that gleaming disk, and crept stealthily on, until the whole face of the moon was veiled in darkness. A whisper, a murmur, a shudder went round among those anxious watchers, and before the shadow had passed away, ten thousand tongues were eagerly discussing the meaning of that mysterious portent. Most were agreed that it was a warning from heaven, forbidding their departure until the angry powers had been appeased by sacrifice and prayer. In the mind of Nicias, enslaved by the grossest superstition, there was no room for doubt. He was surrounded by prophets, whose advice he sought on every occasion, and guided by them he proclaimed that for thrice nine days, the time required for a complete circuit of the moon, there could be no talk of departing.

But the Athenians were soon engaged in a sterner task than the vain rites of propitiation and penitential observance. The news of their intended retreat, and its untoward interruption, so raised the spirits of the Syracusans, that they resolved to risk another sea-fight, and after some days spent in training their crews, they sailed out with seventy-six ships, and offered battle, and Gylippus at the same time attacked the Athenian lines by land. The Athenians succeeded in repulsing the assault on their walls, but in the encounter between the fleets, though they out-numbered the enemy by ten ships, they suffered a decisive defeat. Eurymedon was slain, and eighteen vessels fell into the hands of the Syracusans, who put all the crews to the sword.

The pride and ambition of the Syracusans now knew no bounds. Relieved from all fear for the safety of their city they began to take a loftier view of the struggle, and to grasp the full compass and

grandeur of the issues involved. It was no mere feud between two rival states, but a great national conflict, which was to end in the downfall of a wide-spread usurpation, and the deliverance of a hundred cities from bondage. The whole naval and military forces of Athens lay crippled and helpless within their grasp; they would shatter to pieces the instrument of tyranny, and win an immortal name as the liberators of all Greece. Their first care was to prevent the escape of the Athenians, and for this purpose they began to close the mouth of the Great Harbour by a line of triremes and vessels of burden, anchored broadside across the channel.

X

The Athenians were thus caught in a trap, and their only hope of saving themselves was to force the barrier of the Great Harbour, and escape by sea, or, failing that, to make their way by land to some friendly city. As a last sad confession of defeat, they withdrew the garrison from their walls on Epipolae, and reduced the dimensions of their camp, confining it to a narrow space of the coast, where the fleet lay moored. Every vessel which could be kept afloat was prepared for action, and when the whole force was mustered, out of two great armaments only a hundred and ten were found fit for service. A small body of troops was left to guard the camp, and all the rest, except such as were totally disabled by sickness, were distributed as fighting-men among the ships. For the countrymen of Phormio had now reverted to the primitive conditions of naval warfare, in which the trireme was a mere vehicle for carrying troops, and not, as in the days of that great captain, the chief weapon of offence. Every foot of standing-room on the decks was occupied by a crowd of hoplites, javelin-men, archers, and slingers, and on their prowess the issue of the battle depended. To lay their vessels aboard the enemy with as little delay as possible, and leave the rest to the soldiers, was now the chief object of the Athenian captains; and the better to effect this, men were stationed on the prows, armed with grappling-irons, to hold the attacking trireme fast, and prevent her from backing away after the first shock of collision.

With hearts full of sad foreboding, the great multitude mustered on the beach, and waited for the word to embark. On a rising ground, fronting the camp, the generals; stood grouped in earnest consultation; then every voice was hushed, as Nicias came forward, and beckoned with his hand, commanding silence. The form of the general was bowed with years, and his face lined with pain and sickness, but in his eye there was an unwonted fire, and his tones rang clear and full, as he reminded his hearers of the great cause for which they were to fight, and the mighty interests which hung in the balance that day. "Men of Athens," he said, "and you, our faithful allies, your lives, your liberty, and the future of all who are dear to you, are in your own hands. If you would ever see home again, you must resolve to conquer fortune, even against her will, like seasoned veterans, inured

to the perils and vicissitudes of war. Hitherto we have generally got the better of the enemy on land and we are now going to fight a land battle on the sea. As soon as you come within reach of a Syracusan vessel, fling your grappling-irons, and hold her fast, until not a man is left alive to defend her deck. This will be the task of the soldiers, whom I need not tell to do their duty. And you, seamen of the Athenian fleet, be not dismayed because we have forsaken our former tactics, but trust to the strong arms of the fighting men. Remember, those of you who are not of Attic descent, how long you have enjoyed the high privileges of Athenian citizens, and the honour reflected on you by your connection with Athens.

”My last word shall be spoken to you, fellow-citizens, Athenians born and bred. You know what you have to expect from the Syracusans, if this last struggle should end in defeat. But consider further what will be the fate of your friends at home. Their docks are empty, their walls are stripped of defenders, and if you fail them, Syracuse will unite with their old enemies, and bear them down. Here, where we stand, are the army, the fleet, the city, and the great name of Athens; go, then, and fight as you never fought before, for never yet had soldier such a prize to win, and such a cause to defend.”

When Nicias had concluded his stirring appeal, the embarkation of the troops began. As the fatal moment drew nearer and nearer, the anxiety and distress of the Athenian general became unbearable. Feeling that he had not said enough, he hurried to and fro, addressing each captain with an agony of supplication, and imploring him by every sacred name,—his wife, his children, his country, and his country’s gods,—to play a man’s part, forgetting all thoughts of self. Having exhausted every topic of entreaty, and seen the last man on board, he turned away, still unsatisfied, and addressed himself to the task of drawing up the troops left under his command for the defence of the camp. These were disposed along the shore in as long a line as possible, that they might encourage those fighting on the sea by their presence, and lend prompt help in case of need. Behind them, every point of outlook was held by a throng of anxious spectators,—the sick, the maimed, and the wounded,—every man who had strength to crawl from his bed, and watch that last desperate struggle for liberty and home.

And now the Athenian admirals, Demosthenes, Menander, and Euthydemus, raised the signal, and the great fight began. The foremost ships succeeded in reaching the mouth of the Great Harbour, and began to break through the barrier, when the whole Syracusan fleet closed in upon them on all sides, and forced them back. Then the battle became general, and soon the two fleets were scattered over the whole surface of the bay in little groups, and each group engaged in a wild and furious melee. There was no attempt to manoeuvre, but ship encountered ship; as accident brought them together, and advanced to the attack, under a shower of javelins and arrows. Then followed the dull crash of

collision, and the fierce rush of the fighting-men, as they endeavoured to board. Here and there could be seen knots of three or four triremes, locked together with shattered hulls and broken oars, while the soldiers on the decks strove for the mastery. Nearly two hundred triremes, and some forty thousand men, were engaged in that tumultuous fight; and the thunder of the oars, the crash of colliding triremes, and the yells of the assailants, raised an uproar so tremendous that it was impossible to hear the voice of command. All order and method was lost, yet still they fought on, the Syracusans with a savage thirst for vengeance, the Athenians with the fury of despair; and for a long time the issue remained doubtful.

All this scene of havoc and carnage was witnessed by the whole population of Syracuse, who thronged the walls, or stood in arms along the shore, and followed every incident with breathless interest. But above all among the Athenians left behind in the camp excitement was strained to the point of anguish. Here the view was more restricted, and each group of spectators had its attention fixed on some one of the many encounters which were raging in different parts of the bay. Some who saw their friends conquering, shouted with joy and triumph; some shrieked in terror, as an Athenian ship went down; and others, when the combat long wavered, rocked their bodies to and fro in an agony of suspense. Thus at the same moment every shifting turn of battle, victory and defeat, panic and rally, flight and pursuit, was mirrored on those pale faces, and echoed in a thousand mingled cries.

But at length these discordant voices were united in one general note of horror, as the whole Athenian fleet, or all that was left of it, was seen making in headlong rout for the upper end of the bay, with the victorious Syracusans pressing hard behind. Then most of those who were watching from the shore were seized with uncontrollable terror, and sought to hide themselves in holes and corners of the camp; while a few, who were more stout-hearted, waded into the water, to save the ships, or rushed to defend the walls on the land side. But for the present the Syracusans were contented with their victory, and after chasing the fugitive triremes as far as their defences, they wheeled and rowed back across the Great Harbour, through floating corpses, and the wrecks of more than seventy vessels. On their arrival at Syracuse they were hailed with such a burst of enthusiasm as had rarely been witnessed in any Greek city. The victory, indeed, had been dearly bought, but it was well worth the cost, and the power of Athens had sustained a blow from which it could never recover. But among all the thronging hosts of Syracuse, who now gave themselves up to revel and rejoicing, there was one man at least who knew that even now the danger was not yet past. Forty thousand Athenian soldiers were still encamped within sight of the walls, and if they were allowed to escape, they might establish themselves in some friendly city, and begin the war again. All this was strongly felt by Hermocrates, and he lost no time in imparting his cares and anxieties to the responsible leaders. The Athenians, he urged, would be almost certain to decamp

during the night: let a strong force be sent out at once from Syracuse, to occupy all the roads, and cut off their retreat. The advice was good, but in the present temper of the army it was felt to be impracticable. The whole city had become a scene of riot and wassail, and if the order were given to march, it was but too evident that not a man would obey. Baffled in this direction, the keen-witted Syracusan hit upon another plan, which he at once proceeded to carry into effect.

Hermocrates was not mistaken in his conjecture. The beaten and dispirited Athenians had now but one thought,—to break up their camp with all despatch, and make their escape by land. They had still sixty triremes left, and Demosthenes proposed to make one more attempt to force the entrance of the Great Harbour; but when his suggestion was made known to the crews, they broke into open mutiny, and flatly refused to go on board. The generals were therefore compelled to adopt the only alternative, and it was resolved to set out on that very night. But Fortune had not yet exhausted her malice against the hapless Athenians. The order to strike camp had been issued, and the soldiers were busy preparing for the march, when a party of horsemen rode up to the Athenian outposts, and hailing the sentinels, said that they had a message to Nicias from his friends in Syracuse. "Tell him," said the spokesman of the party, "That he must not attempt to stir to-night, for all the roads are held by strong detachments of the Syracusans. Let him wait until he has organised his forces, for a hasty and disordered flight is sure to end in disaster."

The message, of course, came from Hermocrates, who had contrived this trick to delay the departure of the Athenians, until time had been gained to occupy the passes on their route. That Nicias should have fallen into the snare is not surprising, but it is less easy to explain how Demosthenes and the other generals came to be deceived by so transparent a fraud. Yet such was in fact the case; the insidious hint was accepted as a piece of friendly advice, and the march was postponed. For a whole day and night the Athenians still lingered on the spot, and thus gave ample time for their enemies to draw the net round them, and block every avenue to safety.

On the third day after the battle, the order was given to march. As the great army formed into column, the full horror of their situation came home to every heart. This, then, was the end of those grand dreams of conquest with which they had sailed to Sicily two years before! On the heights of Epipolae their walls and their fort was still standing, a monument of failure and defeat. Each familiar landmark reminded them of some fallen comrade, or some disastrous incident in the siege. If they glanced towards the Great Harbour, they could see the victorious Syracusans towing off the shattered hull of an Athenian trireme, the last sad remnant of two great armaments. If they turned their thoughts towards Athens and home, they found no comfort there; for their beloved city was beset with enemies, and in

themselves, beaten and broken as they were, lay her chief hope of salvation. The past was all black with calamity, and the future loomed terrible before them, threatening captivity and death; and the present, in that last hour of parting, was full of such sights and sounds of woe as might have stirred pity even in the breasts of their enemies. Around them, the camp was strewn with the unburied corpses of brothers, comrades and sons, and thousands more were tossing on the waves, or flung up on the shores of the bay. And while the neglect of that sacred duty pressed heavily on their conscience, still more harrowing were the cries of the sick and wounded, who clung round their knees, imploring to be taken with them, and when the army began to move followed with tottering steps, until they sank down exhausted, calling down the curse of heaven on the retreating host. Such was the anguish of that moment, that it seemed as if the whole population of some great city had been driven into exile, and was seeking a new home in a distant soil.

In this dire extremity, when the strongest spirits were crushed with misery, one voice was heard, which still spoke of hope. It was the voice of Nicias, who, when all others faltered, rose to a pitch of heroism which he had never shown before. Bowed as he was with care, and wasted by disease, he braced himself with more than human energy, and moved with light step from rank to rank, exhorting that stricken multitude in words of power. "Comrades," he said, "even now there is no need to despair. Others have been saved before now from calamities yet deeper than ours. You see in what state I am, cast down from the summit of human prosperity, and condemned, in my age and weakness, to share the hardships of the humblest soldier among you,—I, who was ever constant in the service of the gods, and punctual in the performance of every social duty. Yet have I not lost faith in the righteousness of heaven, nor should you give up all for lost, if by any act of yours you have fallen under the scourge of divine vengeance. There is mercy, as well as justice, among the gods, and we, in sinking thus low, have become the proper objects of their compassion. Think too what firm ground of confidence we have, in the shields and spears of so many thousand warriors. There is no power in Sicily which can resist us, either to prevent our coming or to shorten our stay. A few days march will bring us to the country of the friendly Sicels, who have already received notice of our approach. Once there, we can defy all attack, and look forward to the time when we shall see our homes again, and raise up the fallen power of Athens."

These and similar exhortations were repeated by Nicias again and again, as the army moved slowly forwards up the valley of the Anapus, keeping a westerly direction, towards the interior of the island. The troops were formed in a hollow oblong, with the baggage animals and camp-followers in the middle, and advanced in two divisions, Nicias leading the van, and Demosthenes bringing up the rear. The vigilance and activity of Nicias never relaxed for a moment. Careless of his

many infirmities and exalted rank, he passed incessantly up and down the column, chiding the stragglers, and attending to the even trim of his lines. On reaching the ford of the Anapus, they put to flight a detachment of the enemy which was stationed there to oppose their passage, and crossing the river, continued their march. But now the real difficulties of the retreat began to appear. The Syracusans had no intention of hazarding a pitched battle, but their horsemen and light infantry hung upon the flanks of the Athenian army, making sudden charges, and keeping up a constant discharge of javelins.

At nightfall the Athenians encamped under the shelter of a hill, some five miles from their starting-point, and setting out at daybreak on the following day, they pushed on with pain and difficulty, harassed at every step by the galling attacks of the Syracusan troops. [Footnote: Thucydides, with characteristic brevity, leaves this to be inferred from the slowness of their progress.] A march of two miles and a half brought them to a village, situated on a level plain, and here they halted, wishing to supply themselves with food, and replenish their water-vessels; for the country which they had now to traverse was a desert, many miles in extent. Directly in their line of route there is a narrow pass, when the road, on entering the hill country, drops sheer down on either side into a deep ravine, and if they could once cross this dangerous point they would be within reach of their allies, the Sicels. But it was too late to proceed further that day, and while they lay encamped in the village, the Syracusans hurried on in advance, and blocked the pass by building a wall across the road. When the Athenians resumed their march next morning, they were fiercely assailed by the enemy's light horse and foot, who disputed every inch of ground, and at last compelled them to fall back on the village where they had encamped the night before. Provisions were now growing scanty, and every attempt to leave their lines in search of plunder and forage was baffled by the Syracusan horse.

On the fourth day they broke up their camp early, and by incessant fighting succeeded in forcing their way as far as the pass. But all further advance was prevented by the wall, and the dense masses of infantry posted behind it. In vain the Athenians flung themselves again and again upon the barrier. The troops stationed on the cliffs above assailed them with a shower of missiles, and the solid phalanx of hoplites repulsed every assault. Convinced at last that they were wasting their strength to no purpose, they desisted, and retiring from the wall halted at some distance for a brief interval of repose. During this pause a storm of rain and thunder broke over their heads; and to the weary and disheartened Athenians it seemed that the very elements were in league with the enemy against them. But they had little time to indulge in these melancholy reflections; for while they were resting, Gylippus stole round to their rear, and prepared to cut off their retreat by building a second wall across the pass. The news of this imminent peril roused the Athenians from their stupor, and they marched back with all speed along the road by which they had

come. A picked body of troops, sent on in advance, scattered the soldiers of Gylippus, and the whole army then emerged from that death-trap, and encamped for the night in the open plain.

The next day was spent in a last desperate effort to reach the hill country. But being now on level ground, they were exposed on all sides to the attacks of the Syracusan horse, who charged them incessantly, and slew their men by hundreds, with hardly any loss to themselves. The hopeless struggle continued until evening, and when the enemy drew off, they left the Athenians not a mile from the place where they had passed the previous night.

The original plan of the Athenian generals had been to penetrate the highlands of Sicily to the west of Syracuse, and then strike across country, until they reached the southern coast, in the direction of Gela or Camarina. [Footnote: I have followed Holm, as cited in Classen's Appendix (Third Edition, 1908).] But after two days' fighting they had utterly failed to force an entrance into the mountains. Many of their soldiers were wounded, the whole army was weakened by famine, and a third attempt, made in such conditions, must inevitably end in utter disaster. They resolved therefore to change their route, and march southwards along the level coast country, until they could reach the interior by following one of the numerous glens which pierce the hills on this side of Sicily. Having come to this decision, they caused a great number of fires to be lighted, and then gave the order for an immediate start, hoping by this means to steal a march on the enemy. This sudden flight through the darkness, in a hostile country, with unknown terrors around them, caused something like a panic in the Athenian army.

Nicias, however, who was still leading the van, contrived to keep his men together, and made good progress; but the division under Demosthenes fell into great disorder, and was left far behind. By daybreak, both divisions [Footnote: See note, p. 242.] were within sight of the sea, and entering the road which runs north and south between Syracuse and Helorus, they continued their march towards the river Cacyparis. Here they intended to turn off into the interior, with the assistance of the Sicels, whom they expected to meet at the river. But when they reached the ford of the Cacyparis, they found, instead of the Sicels, a contingent of Syracusan troops, who were raising a wall and palisade to block the passage. This obstruction was overcome without much difficulty, and the whole Athenian army crossed the river in safety. But the presence of the enemy on this side of Syracuse was sufficient to deter them from taking the inland route by the valley of the Cacyparis, and following the advice of their guides, they kept the main road, and pressed on towards the south.

We must now return for a moment to the Syracusans under Gylippus, who remained in their camp all night, not far from the pass which they had so successfully defended. When they found in the morning that the

Athenians had departed, they were loud in their anger against Gylippus, thinking that he had purposely suffered them to escape. The tracks of so many thousands left no room for doubt as to the direction which the fugitives had taken, and full of rage at the supposed treachery of their leader, the Syracusans set out at once in hot pursuit. About noon, on the sixth day of the retreat, they overtook the division of Demosthenes, which had again lagged behind, and was marching slowly and in disorder separated from the other half of the army by a distance of six miles. Deprived of all hope of succour from his colleague, and hemmed in on all sides by implacable enemies, Demosthenes called a halt, and prepared to make his last stand. But his men, who from the first had held the post of honour and danger, were fearfully reduced in numbers, faint with famine, and exhausted by their long march. Driven to and fro by the incessant charges of the Syracusan cavalry, they could make no effective resistance, and at last they huddled pell-mell into a walled enclosure, planted with olive-trees, and skirted on either side by a road. They were now at the mercy of the Syracusans, who surrounded the enclosure, and plied them with javelins, stones, and arrows. After this butchery had continued for many hours, and the survivors were brought to extremity by wounds, hunger, and thirst, Gylippus sent a herald, who was the bearer of a remarkable message. "Let those of you," he said, "who are natives of the islands subject to Athens, come over to us, and you shall be free men." The offer was addressed to the Greeks from the maritime cities of the Aegaeon, who might be supposed to be serving under compulsion, and it speaks volumes for the loyalty and attachment of these men to Athens that most of them refused to accept their freedom from the hands of her enemies. At length, however, the whole army of Demosthenes, which had now dwindled to six thousand men, was induced to surrender, on condition that none of them should suffer death by violence, by bonds, or by starvation. At the command of their captors they gave up the money which they had with them, and the amount collected was so considerable that it filled the hollows of four shields. When the capitulation was concluded, Demosthenes, who had refused to make any terms for himself, drew his sword, and attempted to take his own life; [Footnote: This interesting fact is recorded by Plutarch and Pausanias, who copied it from the contemporary Syracusan historian, Philistus.] but he was prevented from effecting his purpose, and compelled to take his place in the mournful procession which was now conducted by a strong guard along the road to Syracuse.

Meanwhile the vanguard under Nicias, in total ignorance of the fate which had befallen their comrades, marched steadily forwards, and crossing the river Erineus, encamped for the night on a neighbouring hill. Here they were found next morning by Gylippus and the Syracusans, who informed them that Demosthenes and his men had surrendered, and called upon them to do the same. Doubting their good faith, Nicias obtained a truce, while he sent a horseman to ascertain the facts; and even when he had learnt the truth from his messenger,

he still tried to parley, offering, in the name of the Athenian state, to defray the whole cost of the war, and to give hostages for payment, at the rate of an Athenian citizen for each talent, on condition that he and his men were allowed to go. But the Syracusans were in no mood to listen to such proposals, even if Nicias had spoken with full authority from Athens. Bare life they would grant, but no more, and as the Athenians refused to yield on these terms, they closed in upon them, and the cruel, hopeless struggle began again, and continued until evening. The wretched Athenians lay down supperless to snatch a few hours of rest, intending, when all was quiet, to steal away under cover of darkness. But when they rose at dead of night, and prepared to march, a shout from the Syracusan camp warned them that the enemy were on the alert, and they were compelled to return to their comfortless bivouac. Three hundred, however, persisted in their intention, and forcing their way through the Syracusan lines, gained for themselves a brief respite from capture.

A whole week had now elapsed since the ill-fated army left its quarters on the shores of the Great Harbour, and a few thousand starving and weary men were all that remained of that great host. At dawn on the eighth day Nicias gave the word to march, and they pressed on eagerly towards the Assinarus, a stream of some size, with high and precipitous banks, not more than two miles distant from their last halting-place. They had still some faint hope of making good their escape, if they could but cross the river. So they fought their way onwards, through the swarming ranks of the Syracusans, who closed them in on all sides, and thrust them together into one solid mass. There was life, there was freedom a little way beyond,—or, if that hope proved futile, at any rate there was water; and every fibre in their bodies ached and burned with intolerable thirst. They reached the river; both banks were already lined by the Syracusan horse, who had ridden on before, and stood guarding the ford: but there was no stopping the wild rush of that maddened, desperate multitude. Down the steep bank they plunged, trampling on one another, and flung themselves open-mouthed upon the stream, with one thought, one wish, overpowering every other impulse,—to drink, and then to die. Some fell upon the spears of their comrades, and perished, others slipped on the floating baggage, lost their foothold, and were swept away by the flood. Yet still they poured on, by hundreds and by thousands, drawn by the same longing, and thrust downwards by the weight of those behind, until the whole riverbed was filled with a huddled, surging mob of furious men, who drank, and still drank, or fought with one another to reach the water. All this time an iron storm of missiles rained down upon them from the thronging hosts of their enemies on the banks above, while some, in the midst of their draught, were pierced by the spears of the Peloponnesians, who followed them into the river, and slew them at close quarters. The water grew red with blood, and foul from the trampling of so many feet, but the thirsty multitude still came crowding in, and drank with avidity of the polluted stream.

For a long time the slaughter raged unchecked, and the river-bed was choked with heaps of slain. A few, who escaped from the river, were pursued and cut down by the Syracusan horse. Nicias had held out until the last moment; but when he perceived that all was lost, his men being powerless either to fight or fly, he made his way to Gylippus, and implored him to stop the useless carnage. "I surrender myself," he said, "to you and the Spartans. Do with me as you please, but put an end to this butchery of defenceless men." Gylippus gave the necessary order, and the word was passed round to kill no more, but take captive those who survived. The order was obeyed, though slowly and with reluctance, and the work of capture began. But few of those taken in the river ever found their way into the public gaol, where Demosthenes was now lying, with the six thousand who had surrendered on the day before. For, as there had been no regular capitulation, large numbers of the prisoners were secretly conveyed away by the Syracusans, who afterwards sold them into slavery for their own profit. As for the three hundred who had broken out of camp on the previous night, they were presently brought in by a party of cavalry despatched in pursuit.

When the first transports of joy and triumph were over, an assembly was called to decide on the fate of the two Athenian generals, and of those state prisoners, some seven thousand in number, who were the sole visible remnant of two great armies. Then arose a strange conflict of motives. The first who put forward his claims was Gylippus, to whose genius and energy the victorious issue of the struggle was mainly due. As a reward for his services, he asked that Nicias and Demosthenes should be left to his disposal, for he wished to have the honour of carrying home with him these famous captains, one the greatest friend, the other the greatest enemy of Sparta. But the general voice of the assembly was strongly against him. Nothing but the blood of the two principal offenders could satisfy the vengeance of the Syracusans, and those who had intrigued with Nicias were anxious to put him out of the way, in fear lest he should betray them. Moreover the Corinthian allies of Syracuse, who for some reason had a special grudge against Nicias, demanded his immediate execution. In vain Hermocrates pleaded the cause of mercy, [Footnote: Plutarch, *Nicias*, c. 28.] and urged his fellow-citizens to make a generous use of their victory. Sentence of death was passed, and these two eminent Athenians, so different in character and achievement, were united in their end.

Far worse was the doom pronounced on the six thousand men of Demosthenes, and the thousand more who were brought to Syracuse after the massacre at the Assinarus. They were condemned to confinement in the stone quarries, deep pits surrounded by high walls of cliff, under the south-eastern edge of Epipolae. Penned together in these roofless dungeons, they were exposed to the fierce heat of the sun by day, and to the bitter cold of the autumn nights, and having scarcely room to move, they were unable to preserve common decency, or common cleanliness. Many died of their wounds, or of the diseases engendered

by exposure, and their bodies were left unburied, a sight of horror and a source of infection to the survivors. To these frightful miseries were added a perpetual burning thirst, and the lingering torture of slow starvation, for each man received as his daily allowance a poor half pint of water, and a mere pittance of food, just enough to avoid breaking the letter of the conditions which Demosthenes had made for his troops. In this state they were left without relief for ten long weeks; then all except the Athenians themselves, and their allies from the Greek cities of Sicily and Italy, were taken out and sold as slaves.

EPILOGUE

Such was the end of the Sicilian Expedition, which ultimately decided the issue of the Peloponnesian War. Forsaking the wise counsels of their greatest statesman, and carried away by the mad sophistry of Alcibiades, the Athenians had committed themselves, heart and soul, to a wild game of hazard, in which they had little to win, and everything to lose. By this act of desperate folly they brought on themselves an overwhelming disaster, from which it was impossible for them wholly to recover. With wonderful vitality they rallied from the blow, and struggled on for nine years more, against the whole power of Peloponnesus, and their own revolted allies, backed by the influence and the gold of Persia. They gained great victories, and under prudent leaders they might still have been saved from the worst consequences of their defeat in Sicily. But at every favourable crisis they wantonly flung away the advantage they had gained, and abandoned themselves to blind guides, who led them further and further on the road to ruin.

The history of Thucydides ends abruptly in the twenty-first year of the war, and for an account of the closing scenes we have to go to the pages of Xenophon. It will be convenient, therefore, to bring our narrative to a close at the point which we have reached, for any attempt even to sketch the events of this confused and troubled period would carry us far beyond the limits of the present volume. And so for the present we take leave of the Athenians, in the hour of their decline. Their light is burning dim, and yet darker days are awaiting them in the future. But they are still great and illustrious, as the chief guardians of those spiritual treasures which are our choicest heritage from the past.