

TEN GREAT EVENTS IN HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

DEFENSE OF FREEDOM BY GREEK VALOR.

1. THE great events in history are those where, upon special occasions, a man or a people have made a stand against tyranny, and have preserved or advanced freedom for the people. Sometimes tyranny has taken the form of the oppression of the many by the few in the same nation, and sometimes it has been the oppression of a weak nation by a stronger one. The successful revolt against tyranny, the terrible conflict resulting in the emancipation of a people, has always been the favorite theme of the historian, marking as it does a step in the progress of mankind from a savage to a civilized state.

2. One of the earliest as well as most notable of these conflicts of which we have an authentic account took place in Greece twenty-four hundred years ago, or five hundred years before the Christian era. At that time nearly all of Europe was inhabited by rude barbarous tribes. In all that broad land the arts and sciences which denote civilization had made their appearance only in the small and apparently insignificant peninsula of Greece, lying on the extreme southeast border adjoining Asia.

3. At a period before authentic history begins, it is probable that roving tribes of shepherds from the north

took possession of the hills and valleys of Greece. Shut off on the north by mountain ranges, and on all other sides surrounded by the sea, these tribes were able to maintain a sturdy independence for many hundred years. The numerous harbors and bays which subdivide Greece invited to a maritime life, and at a very early time, the descendants of the original shepherds became skillful navigators and courageous adventurers.

4. The voyages of Æneas and Ulysses in the siege of Troy, and those of Jason in search of the golden fleece, and of Perseus to the court of King Minos, are the mythological accounts, embellished by imagination and distorted by time, of what were real voyages. Crossing the Mediterranean, Grecian adventurers became acquainted with the Egyptians, then the most civilized people of the world; and from Egypt they took back to their native country the germs of the arts and sciences which afterward made Greece so famous.

5. Thence improvements went forward with rapid strides. Hints received from Egypt were reproduced in higher forms. Massive temples became light and airy, rude sculpture became beautiful by conforming to natural forms, and hieroglyphics developed into the letters which Cadmus invented or improved. Schools were established, athletic sports were encouraged, æsthetic taste was developed, until in the arts, in philosophy, in science, and in literature the Greeks took the lead of all peoples.

6. As population increased, colonies went out, settling upon the adjacent coasts of Asia and upon the islands farther west. In Asia the Greek colonists were subject to the Persian Empire, which then extended its rule over all Western Asia, and claimed dominion over Africa and Eastern Europe. The Greeks, fresh from the freedom of their native land, could not patiently endure the extor-

tions of the Persian government, to which their own people submitted without question; hence conflicts arose which finally culminated in Persia taking complete possession of the Asiatic Greek cities.

7. But the ties of kinship were strong, and the people of Greece keenly resented the tyranny which had been exercised over their countrymen, and an irrepressible conflict arose between the two nations. The Persian king, Darius, determined to put an end to all annoyance by invading and subjugating Greece. Before the final march of his army, Darius sent heralds throughout Greece demanding soil and water as an acknowledgment of the supremacy of Persia, but Herodotus says that at Sparta, when this impudent demand was made, the heralds were thrown into wells and told to help themselves to all the earth and water they liked.

8. After a long preparation, in 490 B. C., an army of one hundred thousand men or more, under the command of Artaphernes, convoyed by a formidable fleet, invaded Greece. For a long time it met with little opposition, and city after city submitted to the overwhelming hosts of the Persian king. The approach to Athens was regarded as the final turning point of the war.

9. Artaphernes selected the Plains of Marathon, twenty-two miles to the northeast of Athens, as the place of his final landing. His forces, by the lowest estimate, consisted of one hundred and fifty thousand men, of which ten thousand were cavalry. To these were opposed the army of Athens and its allies, consisting in all of ten thousand men. The battle-ground forms an irregular crescent, six miles long and two broad in its widest part. It is bounded on one side by the sea, and on the other by a rampart of mountains. At the time of the battle the extremities of the plain were flanked by

swamps, diminishing the extent of the front, and hampering the operations of the larger army. The command of the Greek army had been intrusted to ten generals, who ruled successively one day each. Themistocles, one of these generals, resigned his day in favor of Miltiades, and all the others followed his example. And so the battle was set, ten thousand Greeks, under Miltiades, against the overwhelming hosts of the enemy.

10. The Persians, confident in their numbers, erected no intrenchments. They did not dream of an attack from the little band of Greeks. There is evidence to believe that they were dissatisfied with the nature of the battle-field they had chosen, and were upon the point of embarking to land at some point nearer the city. If this was the case, they were very rudely awakened from their dream of security by the movement of the Greeks.

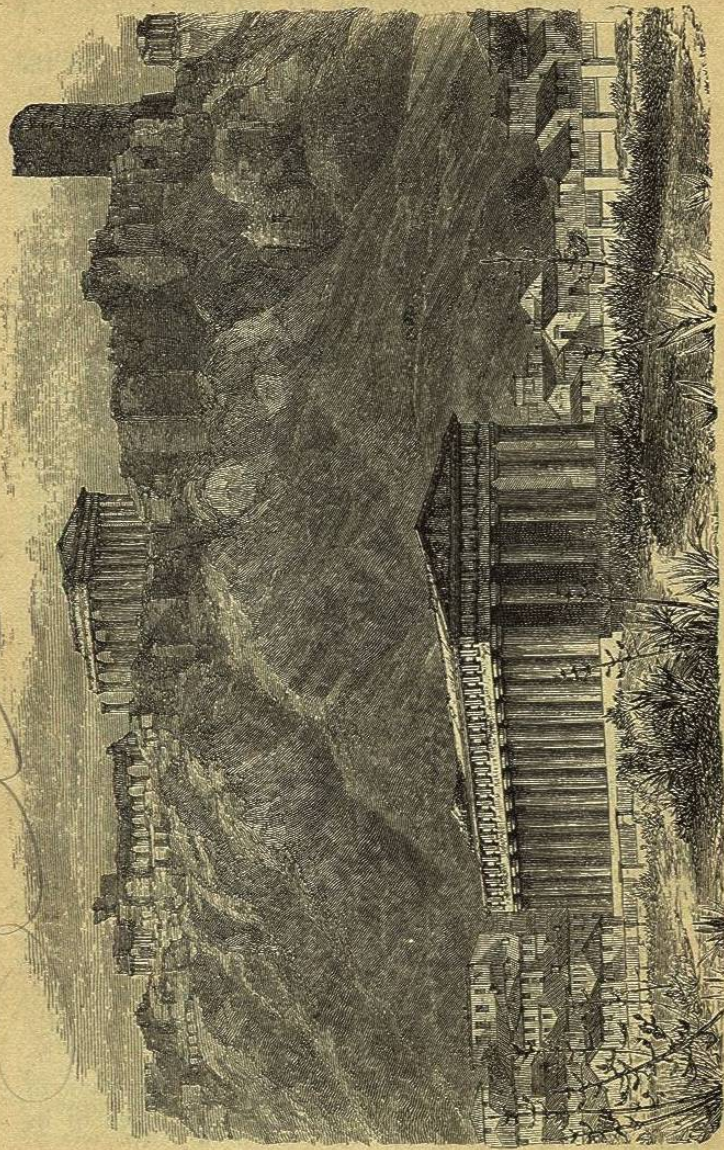
11. On the morning of the tenth day after leaving Athens, Miltiades drew up his army in order of battle. He was obliged to perilously weaken his center in order to confront the whole of the Persian army, so as to avoid the danger of being outflanked and surrounded. The Greeks began the battle by a furious attack along the whole line, endeavoring to close in a hand-to-hand conflict as soon as possible, so as to avoid the deadly arrows of the Persians, and to take the advantage of their heavier arms. The Persians were greatly astonished when they saw this little band rushing against them with such a headlong dash, and thought that the Greeks must have been seized with madness. The Persian general had concentrated his forces at the center, and at this part of the battle-field the fiery onset of Greeks was checked by mere weight of numbers. But at length the mighty Persian force moved irresistibly forward, forcing the Greeks slowly backward, fighting, dying, but never yield-

ing. Soon the Greek army were cut in two, and the Persians marched proudly onward to assured victory.

12. But the battle was not yet over. The genius of Miltiades had anticipated this result. The wings of the Greek army, strengthened at the expense of the center, fell upon the weakened wings of the Persians with irresistible onset. The invaders were forced back step by step, the retreat soon changing into a wild and promiscuous rout, and two thirds of the Persian army ceased to exist as a fighting force. The victorious Greeks now turned their attention to the Persian center, falling upon its flanks with incredible fury. Surrounded on all sides, for a time the Persians maintained their old reputation as valiant soldiers, but nothing could withstand the impetuosity of the Greeks, and soon the whole of the invading hosts were in tumultuous retreat.

13. The victorious Greeks pressed rapidly forward to prevent the foe from embarking, and, if possible, to capture some of the ships. But the Persian archers held the victors in check until the flying soldiery were embarked, and the Greeks obtained possession of only seven vessels. But they were left in undisputed possession of the field of battle, the camp of the enemy, and an immense amount of treasure which had been abandoned in the precipitate flight. Six thousand four hundred Persian dead remained on the plain, while the Greek loss was one hundred and ninety-two.

14. All Athens hastened to welcome the brave soldiery. A Spartan force, on its way to join the Athenians, arrived too late to take part in the battle, and they quietly returned home. As the news spread, loud and frantic rejoicings were heard throughout Greece, and the name of Persia, so long a dread and a menace, lost much of its terrors.



Acropolis at Athens.

15. But the battle of Marathon, and the victory of Miltiades, had a wider significance than could enter into the imaginations of then living man. It was a conflict between the barbarism of Asia and the dawning civilization of Europe, between Oriental despotism and human liberty. The victory rendered normal human growth possible, and, to use the expressive phrase of the modern poet—

“Henceforth to the sunset, unchecked on its way,
Shall liberty follow the march of the day.”

It was not for the Greeks alone, but for all ages and all peoples; and in this Western World, when we celebrate the birth of our own country, we should ever keep in mind the desperate struggle at Marathon, and the valor of Miltiades and his Greek soldiery.

16. But the war was not yet over. A single defeat did not extinguish the hopes of the Persian monarch, nor exhaust the resources of his empire. Herodotus says: “Now Darius was very bitter against the Athenians, and when he heard the tale of the battle of Marathon he was much more wroth, and desired much more eagerly to march against Hellas. Straightway he sent heralds to all the cities, and bade them make ready an army, and to furnish much more than they had done before, both ships, and horses, and corn; and while the heralds were going round, all Asia was shaken for three years; but in the fourth year the Egyptians, who had been made slaves by Cambyses, rebelled against the Persians, and then the king sought only the more vehemently to go both against the Egyptians and against the Greeks. So he named Xerxes, his son, to be king over the Persians after himself, and made ready to march. But in the year after the revolt of Egypt, Darius himself died; nor was he suffered

to punish the Athenians or the Egyptians who had rebelled against him."

17. The death of Darius gave Greece a respite, but the final conflict was only postponed. Xerxes was weak, obstinate, and vain-glorious, but he inherited all his father's hatred of the Greeks, and he resolved upon one supreme effort to reduce them to subjection. For seven years more the whole vast Persian empire resounded with the notes of preparation. In 480 B. C., ten years after the battle of Marathon, everything was in readiness. A formidable fleet had been built and equipped, corn and military stores had been collected to a vast amount, and an army had gathered which, including camp followers, was variously estimated at from three to five millions. A bridge of boats was built across the Hellespont, and the Oriental horde was prepared to ravage the Grecian valleys like a swarm of devouring locusts. A great storm arose and destroyed the bridge, and the Persian despot ordered the Hellespont scourged with whips in token of his displeasure. When the bridge was rebuilt, Xerxes, from a throne erected upon the shore, for seven days and nights, watched his mighty host pass over from Asia into Europe.

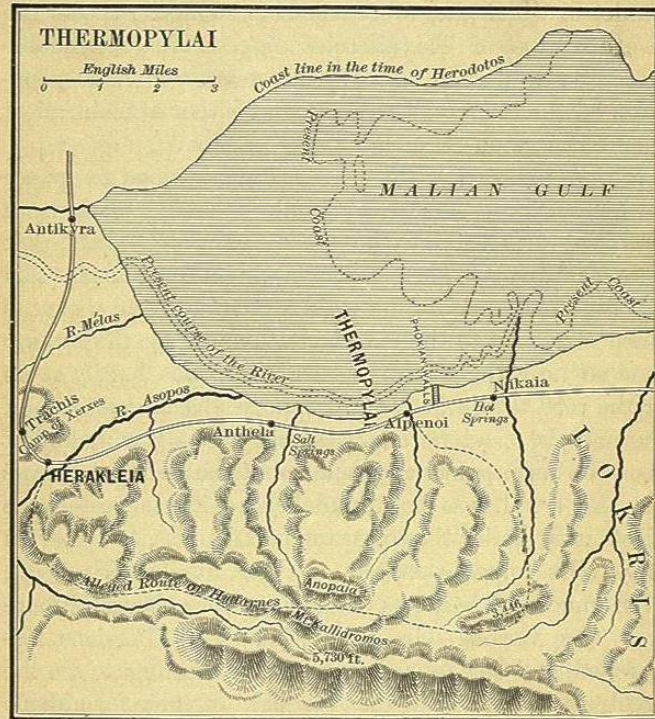
18. In the mean time the Greeks were preparing for the onset. Sparta, true to her military organization, did little but to bring her army to the perfection of discipline, and many of the weaker cities resolved to quietly submit to the invaders. The Athenians alone seemed to have fully understood the gravity of the situation. To them the rage of the Persian king was particularly directed, for the crushing defeat at Marathon, and Athens was more exposed than any other of the Greek cities. During the ten years Athens raised and equipped as large an army as her population would warrant. Every able-

bodied man was enrolled in the ranks. Food and military stores were collected, but the chief means of defense was a novel one, and showed the desperate nature of the conflict in which they were about to engage. Under the wise direction of Themistocles they built a formidable fleet, so large that in case of emergency the whole population of the city could embark, and either remain afloat or take refuge on the neighboring islands.

19. A congress of the cities had determined to oppose the approach of Xerxes at some favorable place by a combined army. At the head of the Maliac gulf there was a narrow pass, through which the Persians had to go, the road running between a mountain and a swamp which stretched to the sea; and at one place the swamp came so near the mountain that there was hardly room for the road to run between. This is the famous pass of Thermopylæ; and here it was that a small army might block the way against any number of the enemy. Across this pass a wall was built, and behind it was posted the Greek army under the command of Leonidas, the Spartan king. His forces consisted of three hundred Spartans, seven hundred Thespians, and about four thousand more from the various Grecian cities. The Persians approached, and for four days waited, expecting to see the Greek army disperse at the very sight of their formidable numbers. But as they were apparently not frightened, on the fifth day the Persians made an attack. For two days the battle continued, inflicting great losses upon the Persians, while the little army of Leonidas, behind their fortifications, was scarcely injured.

20. On the third morning a renegade Greek showed Xerxes a path across the mountains where he could completely turn the Greek position. The Persians were not slow to avail themselves of this intelligence, and toward

the close of the third day Leonidas saw the enemy descending the mountain, ready to surround him and cut



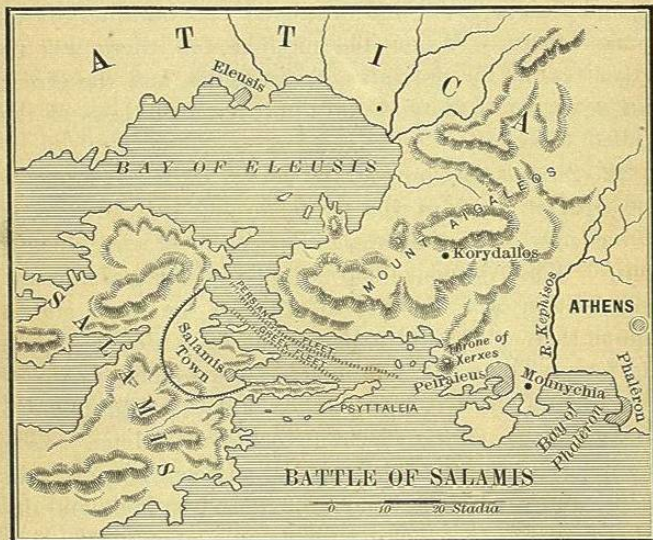
off his retreat. Acting promptly, he ordered his allies to leave the field before it was too late, but he, with his devoted band of three hundred, were to remain, in accordance of a Spartan law which forbade a Spartan soldier ever to retreat from the presence of an enemy. The seven hundred Thespians remained with him, and the whole band was cut down, but not without inflicting fearful loss upon the enemy.

21. While the passage of Thermopylae was disputed, the Greek fleet advanced and took position in the strait of Artemisium, to prevent the Persian fleet from advancing farther into Greek waters. During the battle the fleets were also engaged in an indecisive conflict. A storm, however, arose and destroyed two hundred of the Persian ships. When Thermopylae fell there was no longer reason for defending Artemisium, and the Greek fleet returned to defend the approach to Athens at the strait of Salamis.

22. Athens was now at the mercy of the conqueror. The Spartan army moved off to defend their own city. It was now that the wisdom of Themistocles showed itself. "The Athenians had no hope of being able to defend Athens, and resolved to abandon the town, and to remove their wives and children out of Attica to a place of safety. The whole population, men, women, and children, sorrowfully left their homes, and streamed down to the sea-shore, carrying what they could with them." The fleet took them over to Salamis and adjacent islands; and when Xerxes reached Athens he found it silent and deserted. A few poor or desperate men alone refused to depart, and had posted themselves behind a wooden fortification on the top of the Acropolis, the fortress and sanctuary of Athens. The Persians fired the fortifications, stormed the Acropolis, slaughtered its defenders, and burned every holy place to the ground. Athens and its citadel were in the hands of the barbarians; its inhabitants were scattered, its holy places destroyed. One hope alone remained to the Athenians—the ships which Themistocles had persuaded them to build.

23. The fleet was anchored in the strait of Salamis, and beside the two hundred ships of Athens, it consisted of a large number from other ports of Greece. Among

the Greeks there were divided counsels; some were for giving immediate battle, and some were for flying from the thousand Persian ships now advancing upon them. Themistocles saw that to retreat would be ruin, and he by



stratagem kept every ship in its place. He sent secret word to the Persians that the Greek fleet would soon be in full retreat, and the Persian admiral sent two hundred vessels to blockade the farther extremity of the strait, so that flight was impossible.

24. When everything was in readiness, Xerxes, from a throne built for him on the shore so that he might be a spectator of the fight, gave the signal to advance. At once all the long banks of oars in the thousand ships flashed in the light and dipped in the water. But here, as at Marathon, the way was narrow, and there was no

chance for the display of the full power of the Persian fleet. In a hand-to-hand conflict they stood no chance with the Greeks, and Xerxes, with despair in his heart, saw two hundred of his best ships sunk or captured and many more seriously disabled, while the Greeks had suffered little loss.

25. Themistocles remained all night at his anchorage, ready to renew the conflict on the morrow, but Xerxes, fearful for the fate of his bridge across the Hellespont, ordered the eight hundred remaining ships to sail for its protection, while he and his whole army marched as rapidly as possible for the same point. The number assembled to pass back into Asia was greatly diminished from the hosts which a few months before had so proudly marched to assured victory. Besides those lost in battle, thousands had perished through disease and famine. But the hope of final success was not entirely abandoned, and the Persian general, Mardonius, with three hundred thousand of the best soldiers of the invading army, were left to complete the conquest.

26. With the retreat of Xerxes, the Athenians returned to their city, finding their temples destroyed, and their homes desolated, but they immediately commenced the work of rebuilding, and, amid rejoicings and renewed hopes, the city arose from its ashes. The clash of arms gave place to the din of industry, and the fighting soldier was replaced by the peaceable citizen.

27. In the mean time, Mardonius went into winter quarters in the northern provinces, and during the winter he endeavored to effect by negotiation and bribery what he had failed to accomplish by arms. He succeeded in exciting the jealousy of several of the cities toward each other, so that it was difficult to bring about concert of action, and he succeeded in detaching Thebes entirely

from the confederacy, and arraying it against Athens. The Theban force which joined his army became one of the most formidable foes which the allied Greek had to meet.

28. The negotiations continued through the spring, but as summer approached the army of Mardonius was on the move. Sparta was not ready to meet the invader, and the Athenians once more took refuge on their ships, ten months after their return. Mardonius took possession of the city, and this time effectually destroyed it; but as nothing was to be gained by a further stay, he marched his army to Thebes, which became his headquarters. The Spartans were at length ready to march. They saw their city menaced, and their own safety demanded that the forces of Mardonius should be broken.

29. With the aid of their allies they put into the field an army, the largest that the Greeks ever mustered, variously reported as numbering one hundred thousand to one hundred and ten thousand men. These were under the command of the Spartan king, Pausanias. In September they set out for Thebes, and in a few days came up to the Persian army, which was stationed at Plataea, a short distance from Thebes. Here Mardonius had established a fortified camp to which he might retreat if defeated on the field. For eleven days the two armies confronted each other, neither anxious to strike the first blow. Then the supply of water for the Greek camp gave out, and Pausanias fell back to a better position.

30. This movement threw the Greek army into disorder, and the three main divisions became separated from one another. Perceiving this the next morning, Mardonius hastened with his Persians toward the higher ground, where the Spartan troops might be seen winding along under the hillside, for from the river-banks he could not

catch sight of the Athenians, who were hidden among the low hills which rose from the level plain.

31. The last momentous strife had now begun. It was the custom of the Spartans before beginning a battle to offer sacrifice, and to wait for an omen or sign from heaven on the offering. Even now, when the Persians had advanced to within bow-shot and were pouring flights of arrows upon the Spartans, Pausanias offered sacrifice. But the omens were bad, and forbade any action except in self defence. The Spartans knelt behind their shields, but the arrows pierced them, and the bravest men died sorrowfully, lamenting not for death, but because they died without striking a blow for Sparta. In his distress Pausanias called upon the goddess Hera, and the omens suddenly became favorable, and the Spartans with their Tegean allies threw themselves upon the enemy.

32. But the disparity of forces rendered the attack desperate. Fifty-three thousand Greeks in all were opposed to the overwhelming numbers of Mardonius. The Athenians were engaged elsewhere and could afford no assistance. The Persians had made a palisade of their wicker shields, behind which they could securely and effectually use their bows and arrows. By the first fierce onset of the Greeks this palisade went down, but the Asiatics, laying aside their bows, fought desperately with javelins and daggers. But they had no metal armor to defend them; and the Spartans, with their lances fixed and their shields touching each other, bore down everything before them.

33. The Persians fought with almost Hellenic heroism. Coming to close quarters, they seized the spears of their enemies and broke off their heads. Rushing forward singly or in small groups, they were borne down in the

crush and killed; still they were not dismayed; and the battle raged more fiercely on the spot where Mardonius, on his white horse, fought with the flower of his troops. At length Mardonius was slain, and when his chosen guards had fallen around him, the remainder of the Persians made their way to their fortified camp, and took refuge behind its wooden walls.

34. In the mean time the Athenian army had been confronted by the Persian-Theban allies. Here it was not a conflict between disciplined valor and barbaric hordes, but between Greek and Greek. The battle was long and bloody, but in the end the defenders of Greek liberty were victorious over those who would destroy it. The Theban force was not only defeated but annihilated, and then the Athenians hastened to the support of Pausanias. While the Spartans were the best-drilled soldiery in Greece for the field, they had little skill in siege operations, and the wooden walls of the Persian camp opposed to them an effective barrier.

35. While the Spartan force was engaged in abortive attempts, the Athenians and their allies came up fresh from their victory over the Thebans. Headed by the Tegeans, they burst like a deluge into the encampment, and the Persians, losing all heart, sought wildly to hide themselves like deer flying from lions. Then followed a carnage so fearful that out of two hundred and sixty thousand men not three thousand, it is said, remained alive.

36. Thus ended this formidable invasion, which threatened the very existence of Greece. The great wave of Oriental despotism had spent its force without submerging freedom. Thenceforth the wonderful Greek energy and creative power might be turned away from matters military and expended upon the arts of peace.

37. The Athenians returned to their city and found everything in ruins. Fire and hate had destroyed home and temple alike. All the accumulated wealth of generations was gone. Nothing was left but the indomitable energy which had been tested on so many trying emergencies, and the wonderful skill of eye and hand which came of inherited aptitude and long personal experience. Upon the old site a new city grew in a single generation, marvelous in its splendor of temple and palace, so light and airy, yet so strong and enduring, that after the lapse of twenty-five centuries the marble skeletons, though in ruins, stand, the admiration of all men and of all ages.