

herself is impregnable, and her fleets secure her the dominion of the sea.

430. Athens visited by a pestilence, which sweeps off large numbers of her population.

425. The Athenians gain great advantages over the Spartans at Sphacteria, and by occupying Cythera; but they suffer a severe defeat in Bœotia, and the Spartan general, Brasidas, leads an expedition to the Thracian coasts, and conquers many of the most valuable Athenian possessions in those regions.

421. Nominal truce for thirty years between Athens and Sparta, but hostilities continue on the Thracian coast and in other quarters.

415. The Athenians send an expedition to conquer Sicily.

CHAPTER II.

DEFEAT OF THE ATHENIANS AT SYRACUSE, B. C. 413.

The Romans knew not, and could not know, how deeply the greatness of their own posterity, and the fate of the whole Western world, were involved in the destruction of the fleet of Athens in the harbor of Syracuse. Had that great expedition proved victorious, the energies of Greece during the next eventful century would have found their field in the West no less than in the East; Greece, and not Rome, might have conquered Carthage; Greek instead of Latin might have been at this day the principal element of the language of Spain, of France, and of Italy; and the laws of Athens, rather than of Rome, might be the foundation of the law of the civilized world.—ARNOLD.

Few cities have undergone more memorable sieges during ancient and mediæval times than has the city of Syracuse. Athenian, Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, Saracen, and Norman, have in turns beleaguered her walls; and the resistance which she successfully opposed to some of her early assailants was of the deepest importance, not only to the fortunes of the generations then in being, but to all the subsequent current of human events. To adopt the eloquent expressions of Arnold respecting the check which she gave to the Carthaginian arms, "Syracuse was a breakwater which God's providence raised up to protect the yet immature strength of Rome." And her triumphant repulse of the great Athenian expedition against her was of even more wide-spread and enduring importance. It forms a decisive epoch in the strife for universal empire, in which all the great states of antiquity successively engaged and failed.

The present city of Syracuse is a place of little or no military strength, as the fire of artillery from the neighboring heights would almost completely command it. But in ancient warfare, its posi-

tion, and the care bestowed on its walls, rendered it formidably strong against the means of offense which then were employed by besieging armies.

The ancient city, in its most prosperous times, was chiefly built on the knob of land which projects into the sea on the eastern coast of Sicily, between two bays; one of which, to the north, was called the Bay of Thapsus, while the southern one formed the great harbor of the city of Syracuse itself. A small island, or peninsula (for such it soon was rendered), lies at the south-eastern extremity of this knob of land, stretching almost entirely across the mouth of the great harbor, and rendering it nearly landlocked. This island comprised the original settlement of the first Greek colonists from Corinth, who founded Syracuse two thousand five hundred years ago; and the modern city has shrunk again into these primary limits. But, in the fifth century before our era, the growing wealth and population of the Syracusans had led them to occupy and include within their city walls portion after portion of the main land lying next to the little isle, so that at the time of the Athenian expedition the seaward part of the land between the two bays already spoken of was built over, and fortified from bay to bay, and constituted the larger part of Syracuse.

The landward wall, therefore, of this district of the city, traversed this knob of land, which continues to slope upward from the sea, and which, to the west of the old fortifications (that is toward the interior of Sicily), rises rapidly for a mile or two, but diminishes in width, and finally terminates in a long narrow ridge, between which and Mount Hybla a succession of chasms and uneven low ground extends. On each flank of this ridge the descent is steep and precipitous from its summits to the strips of level land that lie immediately below it, both to the south-west and northwest.

The usual mode of assailing fortified towns in the time of the Peloponnesian war was to build a double wall round them, sufficiently strong to check any sally of the garrison from within, or any attack of a relieving force from without. The interval within the two walls of the circumvallation was roofed over, and formed barracks, in which the besiegers posted themselves, and awaited the effects of want or treachery among the besieged in producing a surrender; and, in every Greek city of those days, as in every Italian republic of the Middle Ages, the rage of domestic sedition between aristocrats and democrats ran high. Rancorous refugees swarmed in the camp of every invading enemy; and every blockaded city was sure to contain within its walls a body of intriguing malcontents, who were eager to purchase a party triumph at the expense of a national disaster. Famine and faction were the allies on whom besiegers relied. The generals of that time trusted to the operation of these sure confederates as soon as they could establish a complete blockade.

They rarely ventured on the attempt to storm any fortified post, for the military engines of antiquity were feeble in breaching masonry before the improvements which the first Dionysius effected in the mechanics of destruction; and the lives of spearmen the boldest and most high-trained would, of course, have been idly spent in charges against unshattered walls.

A city built close to the sea, like Syracuse, was impregnable, save by the combined operations of a superior hostile fleet and a superior hostile army; and Syracuse, from her size, her population, and her military and naval resources, not unnaturally thought herself secure from finding in another Greek city a foe capable of sending a sufficient armament to menace her with capture and subjection. But in the spring of 414 B. C., the Athenian navy was mistress of her harbor and the adjacent seas; an Athenian army had defeated her troops, and cooped them within the town; and from bay to bay a blockading wall was being rapidly carried across the strips of level ground and the high ridge outside the city (then termed *Epipolæ*), which, if completed, would have cut the Syracusans off from all succor from the interior of Sicily, and have left them at the mercy of the Athenian generals. The besiegers' works were, indeed, unfinished; but every day the unfortified interval in their lines grew narrower, and with it diminished all apparent hope of safety for the beleaguered town.

Athens was now staking the flower of her forces, and the accumulated fruits of seventy years of glory, on one bold throw for the dominion of the Western world. As Napoleon from Mount Cœur de Lion pointed to St. Jean d'Acre, and told his staff that the capture of that town would decide his destiny and would change the face of the world, so the Athenian officers, from the heights of *Epipolæ*, must have looked on Syracuse, and felt that with its fall all the known powers of the earth would fall beneath them. They must have felt, also, that Athens, if repulsed there, must pause forever from her career of conquest, and sink from an imperial republic into a ruined and subservient community.

At Marathon, the first in date of the great battles of the world, we beheld Athens struggling for self-preservation against the invading armies of the East. At Syracuse she appears as the ambitious and oppressive invader of others. In her, as in other republics of old and of modern times, the same energy that had inspired the most heroic efforts in defense of the national independence, soon learned to employ itself in daring and unscrupulous schemes of self-aggrandizement at the expense of neighboring nations. In the interval between the Persian and the Peloponnesian wars she had rapidly grown into a conquering and dominant state, the chief of a thousand tributary cities, and the mistress of the largest and best-manned navy that the Mediterranean had yet

beheld. The occupations of her territory by Xerxes and Mardonius, in the second Persian war, had forced her whole population to become mariners; and the glorious results of that struggle confirmed them in their zeal for their country's service at sea. The voluntary suffrage of the Greek cities of the coasts and islands of the *Ægean* first placed Athens at the head of the confederation formed for the further prosecution of the war against Persia. But this titular ascendancy was soon converted by her into practical and arbitrary dominion. She protected them from piracy and the Persian power, which soon fell into decrepitude and decay, but she exacted in return implicit obedience to herself. She claimed and enforced a prerogative of taxing them at her discretion, and proudly refused to be accountable for her mode of expending their supplies. Remonstrance against her assessments was treated as factious disloyalty, and refusal to pay was promptly punished as revolt. Permitting and encouraging her subject allies to furnish all their contingents in money, instead of part consisting of ships and men, the sovereign republic gained the double object of training her own citizens by constant and well-paid service in her fleets, and of seeing her confederates lose their skill and discipline by inaction, and become more and more passive and powerless under her yoke. Their towns were generally dismantled, while the imperial city herself was fortified with the greatest care and sumptuousness; the accumulated revenues from her tributaries serving to strengthen and adorn to the utmost her havens, her docks, her arsenals, her theaters and her shrines, and to array her in that plenitude of architectural magnificence, the ruins of which still attest the intellectual grandeur of the age and people which produced a Pericles to plan and a Phidias to execute.

All republics that acquire supremacy over other nations rule them selfishly and oppressively. There is no exception to this in either ancient or modern times. Carthage, Rome, Venice, Genoa, Florence, Pisa, Holland, and Republican France, all tyrannized over every province and subject state where they gained authority. But none of them openly avowed their system of doing so upon principle with the candor which the Athenian republicans displayed when any remonstrance was made against the severe exactions which they imposed upon their vassal allies. They avowed that their empire was a tyranny, and frankly stated that they solely trusted to force and terror to uphold it. They appealed to what they called "the eternal law of nature, that the weak should be coerced by the strong."* Sometimes they stated, and not without some truth, that the unjust hatred of Sparta against themselves forced them to be unjust to others in self-defense. To be safe, they must be powerful; and to be powerful, they must plunder

* *Ἄξι καθ' ἑστῶτος τοῖς ἡσθεῖς ὑπὸ δυνατωτέρου κατεργεῖσθαι.*
THUC., I., 77.

and coerce their neighbors. They never dreamed of communicating any franchise, or share in office, to their dependents, but jealousy monopolized every post of command, and all political and judicial power; exposing themselves to every risk with unflinching gallantry; embarking readily in every ambitious scheme; and never suffering difficulty or disaster to shake their tenacity of purpose: in the hope of acquiring unbounded empire for their country, and the means of maintaining each of the thirty thousand citizens who made up the sovereign republic, in exclusive devotion to military occupations, and to those brilliant sciences and arts in which Athens already had reached the meridian of intellectual splendor.

Her great political dramatist speaks of the Athenian empire as comprehending a thousand states. The language of the stage must not be taken too literally; but the number of the dependencies of Athens, at the time when the Peloponnesian confederacy attacked her, was undoubtedly very great. With a few trifling exceptions, all the islands of the Ægean, and all the Greek cities, which in that age fringed the coasts of Asia Minor, the Hellespont and Thrace, paid tribute to Athens, and implicitly obeyed her orders. The Ægean Sea was an Attic lake. Westward of Greece, her influence, though strong, was not equally predominant. She had colonies and allies among the wealthy and populous Greek settlements in Sicily and South Italy, but she had no organized system of confederates in those regions; and her galleys brought her no tribute from the Western seas. The extension of her empire over Sicily was the favorite project of her ambitious orators and generals. While her great statesman, Pericles, lived, his commanding genius kept his countrymen under control, and forbade them to risk the fortunes of Athens in distant enterprises, while they had unsubdued and powerful enemies at their own doors. He taught Athens this maxim; but he also taught her to know and to use her own strength, and when Pericles had departed, the bold spirit which he had fostered overleaped the salutary limits which he had prescribed. When her bitterest enemies, the Corinthians, succeeded, in 431 B. C., in inducing Sparta to attack her, and a confederacy was formed of five-sixths of the continental Greeks, all animated by anxious jealousy and bitter hatred of Athens; when armies far superior in numbers and equipment to those which had marched against the Persians were poured into the Athenian territory, and laid it waste to the city walls, the general opinion was that Athens would be reduced, in two or three years at the farthest, to submit to the requisitions of her invaders. But her strong fortifications, by which she was girt and linked to her principal haven, gave her, in those ages, almost all the advantages of an insular position. Pericles had made her trust to her empire of the seas. Every Athenian in those days was a practiced seaman. A state, indeed, whose members, of an age fit for service,

at no time exceeded thirty thousand, and whose territorial extent did not equal half Sussex, could only have acquired such a naval dominion as Athens once held, by devoting, and zealously training, all its sons to service in its fleets. In order to man the numerous galleys which she sent out, she necessarily employed large numbers of hired mariners and slaves at the oar; but the staple of her crews was Athenian, and all posts of command were held by native citizens. It was by reminding them of this, of their long practice in seamanship, and the certain superiority which their discipline gave them over the enemy's marine, that their great minister mainly encouraged them to resist the combined power of Lacedæmon and her allies. He taught them that Athens might thus reap the fruit of her zealous devotion to maritime affairs ever since the invasion of the Medes; "she had not, indeed, perfected herself; but the reward of her superior training was the rule of the sea—a mighty dominion, for it gave her the rule of much fair land beyond its waves, safe from the idle ravages with which the Lacedæmonians might harass Attica, but never could subdue Athens."*

Athens accepted the war with which her enemies threatened her rather than descend from her pride of place; and though the awful visitation of the Plague came upon her, and swept away more of her citizens than the Dorian spear laid low, she held her own gallantly against her enemies. If the Peloponnesian armies in irresistible strength wasted every spring, her cornlands, her vineyards, and her olive groves with fire and sword, she retaliated on their coasts with her fleets; which, if resisted, were only resisted to display the pre-eminent skill and bravery of her seamen. Some of her subject allies revolted, but the revolts were in general sternly and promptly quelled. The genius of one enemy had indeed inflicted blows on her power in Thrace which she was unable to remedy; but he fell in battle in the tenth year of the war, and with the loss of Brasidas the Lacedæmonians seemed to have lost all energy and judgment. Both sides at length grew weary of the war, and in 421 a truce for fifty years was concluded, which, though ill kept, and though many of the confederates of Sparta refused to recognize it, and hostilities still continued in many parts of Greece, protected the Athenian territory from the ravages of enemies, and enabled Athens to accumulate large sums out of the proceeds of her annual revenues. So also, as a few years passed by, the havoc which the pestilence and the sword had made in her population was repaired; and in 415 B. C. Athens was full of bold and restless spirits, who longed for some field of distant enterprise wherein they might signalize themselves and aggrandize the state, and who looked on the alarm of Spartan hostility as a mere old woman's tale. When Sparta had wasted their territory she had

* Thuc., lib. 1., sec. 144.

done her worst; and the fact of its always being in her power to do so seemed a strong reason for seeking to increase the trans-marine dominion of Athens.

The West was now the quarter toward which the thoughts of every aspiring Athenian were directed. From the very beginning of the war Athens had kept up an interest in Sicily, and her squadron had, from time to time, appeared on its coasts and taken part in the dissensions in which the Sicilian Greeks were universally engaged one against each other. There were plausible grounds for a direct quarrel, and an open attack by the Athenians upon Syracuse.

With the capture of Syracuse, all Sicily, it was hoped, would be secured. Carthage and Italy were next to be attacked. With large levies of Iberian mercenaries she then meant to overwhelm her Peloponnesian enemies. The Persian monarchy lay in hopeless imbecility, inviting Greek invasion; nor did the known world contain the power that seemed capable of checking the growing might of Athens, if Syracuse once could be hers.

The national historian of Rome has left us an episode of his great work, a disquisition on the probable effects that would have followed if Alexander the Great had invaded Italy. Posterity has generally regarded that disquisition as proving Livy's patriotism more strongly than his impartiality or acuteness. Yet, right or wrong, the speculations of the Roman writer were directed to the considerations of a very remote possibility. To whatever age Alexander's life might have been prolonged, the East would have furnished full occupation for his martial ambition, as well as for those schemes of commercial grandeur and imperial amalgamation of nations in which the truly great qualities of his mind loved to display themselves. With his death the dismemberment of his empire among his generals was certain, even as the dismemberment of Napoleon's empire among his marshals would certainly have ensued if he had been cut off in the zenith of his power. Rome, also, was far weaker when the Athenians were in Sicily than she was a century afterwards in Alexander's time. There can be little doubt but that Rome would have been blotted out from the independent powers of the West, had she been attacked at the end of the fifth century B.C. by an Athenian army, largely aided by Spanish mercenaries, and flushed with triumphs over Sicily and Africa, instead of the collision between her and Greece having been deferred until the latter had sunk into decrepitude, and the Roman Mars had grown into full vigor.

The armament which the Athenians equipped against Syracuse was in every way worthy of the state which formed such projects of universal empire, and it has been truly termed "the noblest that ever yet had been set forth by a free and civilized commonwealth."* The fleet consisted of one hundred and thirty-four

* Arnold's "History of Rome."

war-galleys, with a multitude of store-ships. A powerful force of the best heavy-armed infantry that Athens and her allies could furnish was sent on board it, together with a smaller number of slingers and bowmen. The quality of the forces was even more remarkable than the number. The zeal of individuals vied with that of the republic in giving every galley the best possible crew, and every troop the most perfect accouterments. And with private as well as public wealth eagerly lavished on all that could give splendor as well as efficiency to the expedition, the fated fleet began its voyage for the Sicilian shores in the summer of 415.

The Syracusans themselves, at the time of the Peloponnesian war, were a bold and turbulent democracy, tyrannizing over the weaker Greek cities in Sicily, and trying to gain in that island the same arbitrary supremacy which Athens maintained along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. In numbers and in spirit they were fully equal to the Athenians, but far inferior to them, in military and naval discipline. When the probability of an Athenian invasion was first publicly discussed at Syracuse, and efforts were made by some of the wiser citizens to improve the state of the national defenses, and prepare for the impending danger, the rumors of coming war and the proposal for preparation were received by the mass of the Syracusans with scornful incredulity. The speech of one of their popular orators is preserved to us in Thucydides,* and many of its topics might, by a slight alteration of names and details, serve admirably for the party among ourselves at present, which opposes the augmentation of our forces, and derides the idea of our being in any peril from the sudden attack of a French expedition. The Syracusan orator told his countrymen to dismiss with scorn the visionary terrors which a set of designing men among themselves strove to excite, in order to get power and influence thrown into their own hands. He told them that Athens knew her own interest too well to think of wantonly provoking their hostility: "*Even if their enemies were to come,*" said he, "*so distant from their resources, and opposed to such a power as ours, their destruction would be easy and inevitable. Their ships will have enough to do to get to our island at all, and to carry such stores of all sorts as will be needed. They cannot therefore carry, besides, an army large enough to cope with such a population as ours. They will have no fortified place from which to commence their operations, but must rest them on no better base than a set of wretched tents, and such means as the necessities of the moment will allow them. But, in truth, I do not believe that they would even be able to effect a disembarkation. Let us, therefore, set at naught these reports as altogether of home manufacture; and be sure if any enemy*

* Lib. vi., sec. 23, *et seq.*, Arnold's edition. I have almost literally transcribed some of the marginal epitomes of the original speech.

does come, the state will know how to defend itself in a manner worthy of the national honor."

Such assertions pleased the Syracusan assembly, and their counterparts find favor now among some portion of the English public. But the invaders of Syracuse came; made good their landing in Sicily; and, if they had promptly attacked the city itself, instead of wasting nearly a year in desultory operations in other parts of Sicily, the Syracusans must have paid the penalty of their self-sufficient carelessness in submission to the Athenian yoke. But, of the three generals who led the Athenian expedition, two only were men of ability, and one was most weak and incompetent.

Fortunately for Syracuse, Alcibiades, the most skilful of the three, was soon deposed from his command by a factious and fanatic vote of his fellow-countrymen, and the other competent one, Lamachus, fell early in a skirmish; while, more fortunately still for her, the feeble and vacillating Nicias remained unrecalled and unhurt, to assume the undivided leadership of the Athenian army and fleet, and to mar, by alternate over-caution and over-carelessness, every chance of success which the early part of the operations offered. Still, even under him, the Athenians nearly won the town. They defeated the raw levies of the Syracusans, cooped them within the walls, and, as before mentioned, almost effected a continuous fortification from bay to bay over Epipolæ, the completion of which would certainly have been followed by a capitulation.

Alcibiades, the most complete example of genius without principle that history produces, the Bolingbroke of antiquity, but with high military talents superadded to diplomatic and oratorical powers, on being summoned home from his command in Sicily to take his trial before the Athenian tribunal, had escaped to Sparta, and had exerted himself there with all the selfish rancor of a renegade to renew the war with Athens, and to send instant assistance to Syracuse.

When we read his words in the pages of Thucydides (who was himself an exile from Athens at this period, and may probably have been at Sparta, and heard Alcibiades speak), we are at a loss whether most to admire or abhor his subtle and traitorous counsels. After an artful exordium, in which he tried to disarm the suspicions which he felt must be entertained of him and to point out to the Spartans how completely his interests and theirs were identified, through hatred of the Athenian democracy, he thus proceeded:

"Hear me, at any rate, on the matters which require your grave attention, and which I, from the personal knowledge that I have of them, can and ought to bring before you. We Athenians sailed to Sicily with the design of subduing, first the Greek cities there, and next those in Italy. Then we intended to make an attempt

on the dominions of Carthage, and on Carthage itself.* If all these projects succeeded (nor did we limit ourselves to them in these quarters), we intended to increase our fleet with the inexhaustible supplies of ship timber which Italy affords, to put in requisition the whole military force of the conquered Greek states, and also to hire large armies of the barbarians, of the Iberians† and others in these regions, who are allowed to make the best possible soldiers. Then, when we had done all this, we intended to assail Peloponnesus with our collected force. Our fleets would blockade you by sea, and desolate your coasts, our armies would be landed at different points and assail your cities. Some of these we expected to storm,‡ and others we meant to take by surrounding them with fortified lines. We thought that it would thus be an easy matter thoroughly to war you down; and then we should become the masters of the whole Greek race. As for expense, we reckoned that each conquered state would give us supplies of money and provisions sufficient to pay for its own conquest, and furnish the means for the conquest of its neighbors.

"Such are the designs of the present Athenian expedition to Sicily, and you have heard them from the lips of the man who, of all men living, is most accurately acquainted with them. The other Athenian generals, who remain with the expedition, will endeavor to carry out these plans. And be sure that without your speedy interference they will all be accomplished. The Sicilian Greeks are deficient in military training; but still, if they could at once be brought to combine in an organized resistance to Athens, they might even now be saved. But as for the Syracusans resisting Athens by themselves, they have already, with the whole strength of their population, fought a battle and been beaten; they cannot face the Athenians at sea; and it is quite impossible for them to hold out against the force of their invaders. And if this city falls into the hands of the Athenians, all Sicily is theirs, and presently Italy also; and the danger, which I warned you of from that quarter, will soon fall upon yourselves. You must, therefore, in Sicily, fight for the safety of Peloponnesus. Send some galleys thither instantly. Put men on board who can work their own way over, and who, as soon as they land, can do duty as

* Arnold, in his notes on this passage, well reminds the reader that Agathocles, with a Greek force far inferior to that of the Athenians at this period, did, some years afterward, very nearly conquer Carthage.

† It will be remembered that Spanish infantry were the staple of the Carthaginian armies. Doubtless Alcibiades and other leading Athenians had made themselves acquainted with the Carthaginian system of carrying on war, and meant to adopt it. With the marvelous powers which Alcibiades possessed of ingratiating himself with the men of every class and every nation, and his high military genius, he would have been as formidable a chief of an army of *condottieri* as Hannibal afterward was.

‡ Alcibiades here alluded to Sparta itself, which was unfortified. His Spartan hearers must have glanced round them at these words with mixed alarm and indignation.