

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR TO THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION

431-415 B.C.

**246. Causes of the War.** — Before the year 431 B.C. a great majority of the states of Greece had been brought under the leadership of Athens or of Sparta. The peace of 445 B.C. was to last thirty years; but scarcely half that period had elapsed when war broke out between the two powers. They were rivals for the leadership of Greece; and the growing power of Athens filled Sparta with jealousy and fear.

The Athenians had trouble also with particular states of the League. The usual relations between Athens and Corinth had been extremely friendly; but since the war with Persia, Peiraeus was monopolizing the commerce of the seas, and Corinth found herself painfully cramped in her trade. Furthermore, Athens was interfering between her and her colony, Corcyra. Corinth and Corcyra had fought for the possession of Ep-i-dam'nus, a joint colony on the mainland. After suffering a severe defeat in battle, Corinth persuaded several of her neighbors to aid in preparing a great armament with which to overwhelm Corcyra. Thereupon the latter sent envoys to Athens to ask an alliance. Corinthian ambassadors also came, and the two parties pleaded their causes before the Athenian assembly. Believing war with Lacedaemon inevitable, Pericles felt that the navy of the Corcyraeans should by all means be secured for Athens. Upon his advice, therefore, it was resolved to make a defensive alliance with them; and a small Athenian fleet was sent to aid them in defending their island against the great Corinthian armament.<sup>1</sup> The Corinthians were justly angry with this interference between themselves and their colonies, es-

<sup>1</sup> In the battle off Syb'o-ta, 432 B.C.

pecially as they had several times prevented Lacedaemon from interfering in Athenian affairs. They asserted that Athens broke the treaty, and now exerted all their energy to stir up Peloponnesse against the offender.

At the same time they were urging Potidaea<sup>1</sup> to revolt. This Corinthian settlement in Chalcidice had grown into a prosperous city, now tributary to Athens. Garrisoned by a force from the mother state, it revolted, whereupon the Athenians laid siege to the place.

The Corinthians alleged that this was another violation of the treaty of 445 B.C. They persuaded the Lacedaemonians to call a congress of the League to consider the various grievances against Athens (432 B.C.). When the deputies gathered, the Lacedaemonians invited them to bring their complaints before the Spartan assembly. Among those who had grievances were the Megarians. Athens had recently passed an act which excluded them from the ports and markets of Attica and of the empire. This, also, the Megarians averred, was a violation of the treaty. Persuaded by these arguments, the Spartan assembly voted that the Athenians had broken the treaty. The Peloponnesian congress ratified the decision, and declared war against Athens.

**247. The Resources of Athens and Sparta.** — The empire of Athens, composed of subject states, was stronger than it had ever been before. Among her independent allies were Chios, Lesbos, Thessaly, and Plataea, besides a few cities in Italy and Sicily. She had thirteen thousand heavy-armed troops, and a larger force for garrison service. There were three hundred triremes of her own, besides those of the allies, and her sailors were the best in the world. She commanded the sea and its resources. The tributes from her subject cities, together with other revenues, amounting in all to about a thousand talents a year, would be nearly enough, in case of siege, to support the whole Attic population on imported food.

All the Peloponnesian states, except Argos and a part of Achaea, were in alliance with Lacedaemon; and outside of Peloponnesse, the Megarians, Boeotians, Locrians, and some others; in Sicily and in Italy most of the Dorian cities sympathized with Sparta. The few

<sup>1</sup> § 128.



commercial states of the League provided ships; the others, land forces only. The League could muster an army of twenty-five thousand heavy-armed men. Though by no means a numerous force, it was the strongest in the world at that time.

**248. The First Three Years of the War** (431-429 B.C.). — In the summer of the first year a Peloponnesian army invaded Attica. The plan of Pericles was to venture no battle on land, but to bring the entire population into the city or behind the Long Walls, and to damage Peloponnesians as much as he could with his fleet. While the invaders were devastating Attica, the Athenians were sailing round Peloponnesians and ravaging the coasts. These operations were repeated nearly every year through the early part of the war. The removal of the country people to Athens was very painful. They were distressed at exchanging the homes and shrines which they loved for the crowded city, where most of them could find no comfortable shelter. And when they saw their houses and orchards ruined by the enemy, they could not help being angry with Pericles. Nevertheless his policy was on the whole successful.

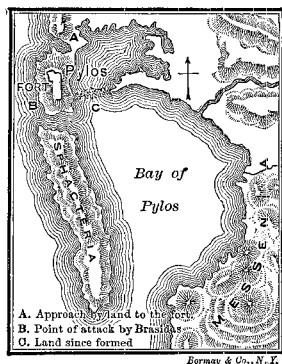
Next year Athens and Peiræus were visited by a plague, which inflicted more terrible damage than the severest defeat in battle would have done. The people suffered because they were crowded together and lacked the comforts of life. Although many nobly risked their lives to attend their friends, the total effect was demoralizing. The Athenians blamed Pericles for both war and plague, and gave vent to their grief and anger by fining him heavily. But soon they repented, and again elected him general with absolute power.

**249. The Death of Pericles; Cleon as Leader** (429 B.C.). — Pericles died of the plague, and the leadership of the state passed into the hands of Cleon, a tanner (429 B.C.). Though no general, he had a remarkable talent for finance, and was an orator of great force. In the main he followed the policy of Pericles. As the surplus in the treasury was soon exhausted by the war, the state levied a direct tax, and Cleon made himself very unpopular with the wealthy by his ruthlessness in collecting it. The more energetic he was in providing ways and means, the more the nobles hated him. They could not endure to see this upstart from the

industrial class at the head of the government, compelling them to pay in taxes the expenses of a war they did not favor.

**250. The Revolt of Lesbos (428-427 B.C.).** — In the year after Cleon had come to the front, the oligarchs of Lesbos induced Mytiléne and nearly all the other cities of the island to revolt. There was danger that all the maritime cities would follow this example. But the Peloponnesians were too slow in sending the promised aid, and the Athenians made desperate efforts to conquer the island. As a last resort (427 B.C.) the oligarchs of Mytilene armed the commons; but the latter promptly surrendered the city to the Athenian

commander. Thereupon he sent the oligarchs, who alone were guilty of revolt, to Athens for trial. The Athenians were angry because the Lesbians had revolted without cause; they feared, too, for the safety of their empire, and indeed for their own lives. With no great difficulty, therefore, Cleon persuaded them to condemn and put to death all the captive oligarchs. Cleon's idea was to make an example of them that other communities might fear to revolt. The punishment, decreed under excitement, was too severe, and out of



keeping with the humane character of the Athenians. In putting down this revolt, they passed the dangerous crisis, and were again undisputed masters of the Aegean Sea.

**251. The Capture of Pylos (425 B.C.).** — The war now began to turn decidedly in favor of Athens. This change was chiefly due to Demosthenes, the ablest commander since the days of Themistocles and Cimon. In 425 B.C., he seized Pylos, on the west coast of Peloponnese, and fortified it. This became a thorn in the side of Sparta, — a refuge for helots and a good basis for ravaging Laconia. It was a promontory with an excellent harbor protected by the island of Sphacteria. Demosthenes held the place against repeated attacks of the Peloponnesians. A select corps of the enemy landed on Sphacteria, and tried to carry his position by

storm. The attempt failed; the besiegers found themselves blockaded by an Athenian fleet; and then, to save the troops on the island, they made a truce with Demosthenes with a view to negotiating for peace. Spartan envoys came to Athens to discuss the terms; but as the demands of Cleon were too great for them to accept, the war continued. Cleon brought reënforcements to Pylos, and wisely placed himself under the command of Demosthenes. The latter captured the troops of Sphacteria and brought them home, two hundred and ninety-two in number (425 B.C.). The victory strengthened the hold of Athens on the empire, and enabled her to raise the tribute to a thousand talents. This measure increased the Athenian resources for war.

**252. Brasidas; Athenian Losses (424-422 B.C.).**—Soon the tide began to turn against Athens. A certain Spartan officer named Bras'i-das discovered the one exposed point of the Athenian empire, — Chalcidice. It was the only part of the empire outside of Attica which the Peloponnesians could reach by land. Brasidas invaded this country with a small force of allies and emancipated helots. An exceptionally able commander and diplomatist, he induced several states of the empire to revolt, among them Am-hip'-o-lis, the most important city in that region. The states which revolted became members of the Peloponnesian League. Cleon, who had been elected general, tried to regain Amphipolis, but was defeated and slain. Brasidas was killed in the same battle. The death of these two men removed the chief obstacles in the way of peace.

**253. The Peace of Nicias (421 B.C.).**—Both Athens and Sparta desired peace. The Athenians were discouraged by Cleon's recent failure. The Lacedaemonians, for their part, were bitterly disappointed in the results of the war. They had hoped to crush the power of Athens in a few years at the most, but had suffered at Pylos the greatest reverse in their history. They were anxious also to recover the prisoners taken at Sphacteria, for many of them were no ordinary troops, but pure Spartans. Nicias, a general of the Athenians, carried on the negotiations as representative of his city, and the treaty accordingly bears his name. It was concluded in 421 B.C. The treaty provided for a return to the relations which

had existed before the war. As the opposing powers seemed evenly balanced, the arrangement was accepted as just. Later events, however, proved that Athens lost greatly by the treaty.

Peace was to last fifty years and was to extend to the allies on both sides. Though the treaty was imperfectly carried out, the two cities did not directly attack each other for seven years, and the Athenians enjoyed the peace while it lasted. They returned to the country, and began again the cultivation of their little farms, pleased to be free from their long confinement behind the walls.

**254. Alcibiades; the Battle of Mantinea (418 B.C.).** — When it became known in Athens that peace with Sparta could not be maintained, the war party again came into power. The principal leader of this party was Al-ci-bi'a-des. He belonged to one of the noblest families of Athens, and was a near kinsman of Pericles. Though still young, he was influential because of his high birth and his fascinating personality. His talents were brilliant in all directions; but he was lawless and violent, and followed no motive but self-interest and self-indulgence. Through his influence Athens allied herself with Argos, Elis, and Man-ti-ne'a against the Lacedaemonians and their allies. The armies of these two unions met in battle at Mantinea in 418 B.C. The Lacedaemonians, who still had the best organization and discipline in Greece, were victorious. This success wiped out the disgrace which had lately come upon them, and enabled them to regain much of their former influence in Peloponnese. Argos and Mantinea now made peace with Lacedaemon apart from Athens.

**255. Slaughter of the Melians (416 B.C.).** — In 416 B.C. Alcibiades persuaded Athens to send a fleet against Me'los, now the only Aegean island outside her empire. It was a colony of Lacedaemon but remained neutral till the Athenians began to attack it. They were acting on the principle that the Aegean Sea was theirs, and all the islands in it. Insisting that the strongest had a right to rule, they tried to justify their own conquests by their mild treatment of subjects. Thus if the Melians should surrender, they would be required merely to pay an annual tribute. But as Melos resisted, the Athenians blockaded the island and starved the inhabitants into surrender. They then killed all the men of military age and

enslaved the women and children. Greek usage made it just for them to annex the island, but the slaughter of the conquered, though common in that age, has proved an indelible stain on the good name of Athens.

### Suggestive Questions

1. Which was the stronger in 431 B.C., Athens or Lacedaemon? Give reasons for your opinion. 2. Which state was chiefly responsible for the war? 3. Was the war unavoidable? 4. Was Pericles' plan of conducting the war justified by the general course of the conflict after his death? 5. Had the Athenians a right to seize Melos? 6. What high ideal did the Spartans abandon at Sphacteria? 7. Describe the location of Mytilene, Sphacteria, Pylos, Cythera, Amphipolis, Mantinea, Elis, and Melos.

### Note-book Topics

I. Cleon's Policy in Relation to the Allies. — Thucydides, iii. 36-40 (speech of Cleon).

II. Alcibiades. — Thucydides (see Index); Plutarch, *Alcibiades*.

III. Terms of the Peace of Nicias. — Thucydides, v. 17-19 (also in Fling, *Source Book*, 207-211).



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