CHAPTER XXII

THE SUPREMACY OF SPARTA

404–371 B.C.

282. The Decarchies. — The overthrow of Athens, at the end of the Peloponnesian War,[1] left Sparta supreme in the east as Syracuse was in the west. At the summit of power stood Lysander, who had done more than any other man to bring eastern Greece under Spartan leadership. He now had an excellent opportunity to improve upon the rule of Athens; but, though a man of rare talents, he lacked the genius for such a task. He could think of nothing beyond the long-established Spartan and Athenian methods of dealing with allies and subjects.

In each newly allied state, accordingly, he set up a decarchy, or board of ten oligarchs, with full control of the government. To support the decarchies, he stationed Lacedaemonian garrisons in most of the cities. The commander, termed "harmost," was usually a man of low birth, servile to Lysander and brutal toward the defenceless people over whom he kept watch. Relying on his support, the oligarchs killed or expelled their political enemies, confiscated property through sheer greed, and mistreated the women and children. While Athens ruled, a man could feel that life, property, and family were safe; but under Sparta the Greeks found themselves degraded to the condition of perioeci.

283. The Thirty at Athens (404–403 B.C.). — At Athens Lysander caused a board of thirty to be established with absolute authority over the state. The guiding spirit of the board was Crit'i-as, a noble of the highest rank. He was cold and calculating, ambitious and unscrupulous; within his short career he developed a strange appetite for blood and plunder.

[1] § 270.

Soon after taking possession of the government, the Thirty began to kill their political opponents. For their own safety, they called in a Lacedaemonian force of seven hundred men, and lodged it in the Acropolis at the expense of the state. Supported by these troops, the Thirty proceeded with their bloody work. As they often murdered men for their property, they preferred wealthy victims. Hundreds fled into exile; but the Spartan ephors, to uphold the Thirty, warned the fugitives away from all parts of Greece. Some of the states sheltered them in defiance of the ephors. Thebes, long the enemy of Athens, became their rallying-place. Their number daily increased, because of the cruelty of the government at home.

284. Democracy restored (403 B.C.). — The crowd of exiles swelled into an army. At the head of seventy patriots, Thrasybulus crossed the border from Thebes, seized Phy'le, a strong fort high up on Mount Par'nes, and held it against an attack of the enemy. With his army increased to a thousand, he soon afterward seized Peiraeus. When the Thirty with their Lacedaemonian garrison and citizen supporters marched down to attack him, the patriots defeated them and killed Critias.

The patriots returned to Athens. They pardoned all for wrongdoing except the Thirty and a few other guilty officials. The Athenians now had enough of oligarchy. Their two recent experiments in that form of constitution — the rule of the Four Hundred and of the Thirty — proved that the government of the so-called "better class" was a delusion and a lie, and that the men who claimed superior privileges on the ground of virtue were in reality cutthroats and robbers. The great mass of people, who had little wealth or education, were far more obedient to law and exercised greater self-control in public life. Henceforth Athens was content with democracy.

285. The Expedition of Cyrus (401 B.C.). — Although the Thirty fell, the Lacedaemonians upheld the decarchies in the other cities of their empire. It was a part of their policy as well to keep on good terms with Cyrus, who had done so much to give them the victory over Athens. On the death of Darius, the late king of Persia, Ar-tax-erx'es, his elder son, succeeded to the throne, while

Cyrus, the younger, still held at Sardis the command of the most desirable part of Asia Minor.[1] Wishing to be king in place of his brother, Cyrus prepared a great force of Asiatic troops and thirteen thousand Greeks. The Lacedaemonians not only favored his enlistment of these mercenaries from Greece, but even sent him seven hundred heavy-armed troops from their own state. With this army the prince marched into the very heart of the Persian empire, and met his brother in battle at Cu-nax'a, near Babylon. Cyrus was killed and his Asiatics retired from the field; but the little Hellenic force was victorious over the immense army of the king.[2]

286. The Return of the "Ten Thousand." — Then the Greeks under a truce began their retreat in a northerly direction. Their generals were entrapped and slain by the Persian commander Tis-sa-pher'nes, a rival of Cyrus. Thus they were left leaderless in the midst of the enemy's country, surrounded by hostile nations, with impassable rivers and snow-covered mountains between them and home, with no guide even to tell them which way to go. While they were in despair, encouragement and good advice came from a young Athenian who had accompanied the expedition. This was Xen'o-phon, a pupil of Socrates the philosopher. Taking courage from his words, they chose new generals, among them Xenophon. Then they set out on their northward march, harassed at every step by the enemy. From Media they entered the Car-du'-chi-an mountains, which were covered with snow and inhabited by fierce barbarians. In passing through this rough country the Greeks suffered every kind of hardship, and were constantly assailed by the natives, who rolled stones down upon them from the heights, or harassed them in the rear, or blocked their advance. Their losses were heavy, and the wonder is that any escaped alive.

Thence they entered Armenia. Their way was now easier; but it was winter, and they still suffered from the cold. The satrap of the country promised them a free passage, but proved treacherous, and the fighting continued. After a long, weary march, full of

[1] § 191.

[2] The lowest estimate of ancient writers is 400,000. Some modern historians consider this number a great exaggeration.

adventures and of narrow escapes, they neared the Black Sea. As the footsore van reached a certain height overlooking the water, it raised a joyful shout, "The Sea! The Sea!" The rest of the soldiers ran quickly up to enjoy the good sight and to share in the cheering. The men embraced one another and their officers with tearful eyes. It seemed like home. They had lost about a third of their number in a journey of perhaps a thousand miles. The thrilling story of the expedition of Cyrus and of the retreat of the "Ten Thousand" is told in the *An-ab'a-sis* of Xenophon. The courage, harmony, and discipline of these mercenaries in the midst of such hardships and dangers prove the high political and moral character of the Greeks. To the world of that time, however, the expedition was chiefly significant as evidence of Persian weakness. The discovery that so small a force could penetrate to the very heart of the empire and return almost unscathed was the first step toward its conquest.

287. **War between Lacedaemon and Persia** (beginning 400 B.C.). — The expedition of Cyrus had two important effects: (1) it brought the Persian power into contempt among the Greeks; and (2) it immediately caused war between Persia and Lacedaemon. For this state, by supporting Cyrus, had incurred the anger of the Persian king. A strong force of Peloponnesians crossed to Asia Minor, and, joining the remnant of the Ten Thousand, began war upon the Persians. In 396 B.C. A-ges-i-la'us, who had recently succeeded to one of the thrones at Sparta, came with a few thousand additional troops and took command in person. The little lame king was gentle and courteous. Faithful in friendship, simple in life, and incorruptible, he was an ideal Spartan. Though forty years of age at his accession, he was wholly without experience in command; but he proved himself an able king and general. With his small army he freed the Greeks of Asia Minor from the Persian yoke.

288. **The Corinthian War** (395–387 B.C.). — The plan of Agesilaus for further conquest was rudely disturbed by trouble at home. Sparta was selfish and tyrannical; the greater allied states, as Thebes and Corinth, wished a share in her supremacy; the lesser communities desired at least their independence. As they were all

disappointed in their hopes, they began to show discontent. In 395 B.C. they provoked Lacedaemon to a war which lasted eight years. This is called the Corinthian War, because the struggle centred chiefly about Corinth and the Isthmus. Athens, Corinth, and several other states took the side of Thebes, while Persia supplied the funds.

In the second year of the war, a combined Greek and Phoenician fleet under Conon,[1] the Athenian admiral, destroyed the fleet of Lacedaemon off Cni'dus. Thus the Spartan naval supremacy fell at a single blow. Conon sailed from island to island, expelling the harmosts and freeing all from Lacedaemonian rule. The next year he anchored his fleet in the harbors of Peiraeus, and with the help of Persia and of the neighbors of Athens he began to rebuild the Long Walls.

Nearer home the Lacedaemonians were scarcely more fortunate. Lysander was killed; it became necessary to recall Agesilaus. But the victories he gained on his return helped Sparta little. One of the most important facts in the history of this war is that the well-trained light troops of Athens were now proving superior to the heavy infantry of Lacedaemon. Near Corinth they attacked a battalion of the Spartan phalanx,[2] six hundred strong, and cut it to pieces. The Lacedaemonians never fully recovered from the blow; the military organization which had always been the foundation of their supremacy in Greece proved defective.

289. The Treaty of Antalcidas (387 B.C.). — They acknowledged their failure in the war by coming to terms with Persia. The king was ready to use his money and influence for the preservation of a peace which should assure him the possession of Asia Minor; and Lacedaemon could do nothing but accept his terms. Accordingly her ambassador, An-tal'ci-das, and the king's legate invited all the Greek states to send deputies to Sardis for the purpose of concluding peace. When they arrived, the Persian legate showed them the king's seal on a document which he held in his hand, and read from it the following terms imposed by Persia upon the Greeks: "King Artaxerxes deems it just that the cities in Asia, with the islands of Cla-zom'e-nae and Cyprus, should belong to himself;

[1] § 269. [2] § 138.

the rest of the Hellenic cities, both small and great, he will leave independent, with the exception of Lem'nos, Im'bros, and Scy'ros, which three are to belong to Athens as of yore. Should any of the parties concerned not accept this peace, I, Artaxerxes, together with those who share my views, will war against the offenders by land and sea, with ships and money."[1] As the Greeks believed it impossible to wage war successfully with both Lacedaemon and Persia they accepted the terms. It was well understood that Lacedaemon was to enforce the treaty for the king; and this position made her again the undisputed head of eastern Greece.

290. The Violence of Sparta. — The Lacedaemonians still ruled according to the policy of Lysander, — a combination of brute force and cunning. It was their aim to weaken the states from which they might expect resistance. In northern Greece they assailed the Chalcidic League, which, though newly formed, had already grown powerful. While at war with this league, they seized the Cadmea — the citadel of Thebes — and occupied it with a garrison in open violation of law (383 B.C.). Even the citizens of Sparta, not to speak of the Greeks in general, were indignant with the officer who had done the violent deed; but Agesilaus excused him on the ground that the act was advantageous to Sparta, thus setting forth the principle that Greece was to be ruled for the benefit merely of the governing city. Though the Lacedaemonians punished the officer, they approved the deed by leaving the garrison in the Cadmea.

291. Tyranny arouses Resistance. — The Lacedaemonians were now at the height of their power. Their city was the acknowledged leader of all eastern Greece, supported by Persia in the east and by Dionysius in the west.[2] But their policy was soon to awaken forces which were to overthrow their supremacy forever. Resistance was first aroused in Thebes, where the oppressor's hand was heaviest. In that city was an oligarchy somewhat like the Thirty at Athens. Supported by the Lacedaemonian garrison, these oligarchs ruled by terrorism, imprisoning some opponents and banishing others. The exiles took refuge in Athens, and there found sympathy. Among the refugees was Pe-lop'i-das, a wealthy

[1] Xenophon, *Hellenica*, v. 1.

[2] § 279.

Theban, full of patriotism and brave to recklessness, — the very man his city needed to save her. Pelopidas had left behind him in Thebes an intimate friend, Ep-am-in-on'das, an orator of remarkable keenness and force, and a philosopher.

The oligarchs thought Epaminondas a harmless dreamer; but while they allowed him to remain unmolested at home, he was attracting into his school the most capable youths of Thebes, and was arousing in them the moral power which was to set his country free. The young Thebans, who delighted in physical training, learned from the philosopher that mere size of muscle was of no advantage, that they should aim rather at agility and endurance. He encouraged them to wrestle with the Lacedaemonian soldiers in the Cadmea, that when the crisis should come, they might meet them without fear.

292. **The Liberation of Thebes** (379 B.C.). — Meantime Pelopidas at Athens was planning to return with the exiles to overthrow the oligarchy. Four years passed in this manner, and it was now the winter of 379 B.C. The Chalcidic League had fallen, resistance to Sparta was becoming every day more hopeless; there was need of haste.

Selecting twelve of the younger men, he set out on the dangerous mission of striking a secret blow for their country. They dressed themselves like huntsmen, and, accompanied by dogs, crossed Mount Parnes toward Thebes in groups of two and three. A snow-storm had just set in when at dark these men, their faces muffled in their cloaks, entered the city by various gates and met another band of conspirators in the house of their leader. On the following night an official who was also in the plot held a banquet, to which he invited all the magistrates except one, who was the head of the oligarchic party.

While these magistrates were carousing, some of the conspirators entered, disguised as women, and killed them. At the same time Pelopidas with two companions went to the house of the remaining magistrate, and after a hard struggle made away with him. The next morning Epaminondas introduced the leaders of the conspiracy to the assembled citizens, who elected them Boeotarchs, or chief magistrates of Boeotia. A democracy was now established,

and the garrison in the Cadmea surrendered with the privilege of departing unharmed. Thebes was again free.

293. **The Athenian Maritime Confederacy** (377 B.C.). — The Athenians, though in sympathy with their neighbor, would gladly have remained neutral, had not Lacedaemon driven them to war by a treacherous attempt to seize Peiraeus. They renewed their alliance with the maritime cities, which had deserted them for Sparta, but were now seeking their protection. The new league was to be a union of the Greeks for the defence of their liberties against Sparta. Each allied state sent a deputy to a congress at Athens. It was agreed that the leading city alone should have no representative in this body in order that the deputies might not be influenced by the presidency, or even by the presence of an Athenian. To be binding, a measure had to receive the approval of both Athens and congress. This arrangement made the leading city equal to all the others combined, but prevented her from acquiring absolute power such as she had exercised over the members of the earlier confederacy. There were still to be contributions of ships and money, but as Athens was no longer in a position to compel the allies to perform their duties, the league remained far weaker than it had been in the preceding century.

294. **The Peace Convention** (371 B.C.). — As the new alliance included Thebes and about seventy other cities, it was more than a match for Peloponnese; but the Thebans finally withdrew from the war, and busied themselves with subduing the Boeotian towns. Left to carry on the struggle alone and displeased with the policy of Thebes, Athens opened negotiations with Lacedaemon. Thereupon a convention of all the Greek states met in Sparta to establish a Hellenic peace. Though the treaty of Antalcidas was renewed, the Persian king could no longer arbitrate among the Greeks — they now felt able to manage their own affairs. It is interesting to see them acting together to establish peace, and endeavoring to form one Hellenic state on the basis of local independence and equal rights. The convention resolved to accept peace on the understanding that every Greek state should be independent and that all fleets and armies should be disbanded.

Though all were ready to make peace on these terms, trouble

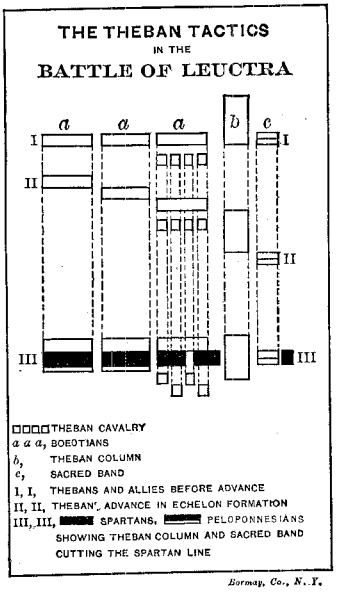
arose in regard to ratifying the treaty. Sparta insisted on signing it in behalf of her allies, but would not grant the same privilege to Thebes. When, accordingly, Agesilaus demanded that the Boeotian towns should be permitted to sign for themselves, Epaminondas, the Theban deputy, declared that his city had as good a right to represent all Boeotia as Sparta to represent all Laconia. His boldness startled the convention. For ages the Greeks had stood in awe of Sparta, and no one had dared question her authority within the borders of Lacedaemon. But the deputy from Thebes was winning his point with the members, when Agesilaus in great rage sprang to his feet and bade him say once for all whether Boeotia should be independent. "Yes, if you will give the same freedom to Laconia," Epaminondas replied. The Spartan king then struck the name of Thebes from the list of states represented in the convention, excluding her thus from the peace.

295. The Battle of Leuctra (371 B.C.). — The treaty was signed, the convention dissolved, the deputies returned home. All eyes turned toward the impending conflict; every one expected to see the city of Epaminondas punished, perhaps destroyed, for the boldness of her leader.

Leuctra was a small town in Boeotia southwest of Thebes. The battle fought there in 371 B.C. was in its political effects the most important in which Greeks only were engaged; to the student of military affairs it is one of the most interesting in history.

As a result of studies in military science, Epaminondas introduced a sweeping revolution in warfare. The Boeotians had always made excellent soldiers, and in the Peloponnesian War they had successfully tried the experiment of massing their men in a heavy phalanx. This solid body of infantry was to be the chief element in the new military system; Epaminondas was to convert the experiences of his countrymen into the most important principle of military science — the principle of concentrating the attack upon a single point of the enemy's line. Opposite to the Peloponnesian right, made up of Lacedaemonians under one of their kings, he massed his left in a column fifty deep and led it to the attack. The enemy, drawn up uniformly twelve deep in the old-fashioned way, could not withstand the terrific shock. The Boeotian centre purposely

advanced more slowly than the column, and the right still more slowly, so that these divisions of the line took only the slightest part in the battle. But the Boeotian horsemen, who were well trained and high-spirited, easily put to rout the inefficient cavalry of the enemy; and the Sacred Band, Epaminondas' school of Theban youths, followed the impetuous Pelopidas in an irresistible charge on the extreme Spartan right. The king was killed, his army thoroughly beaten by a much smaller force, and the supremacy of Sparta was at an end.



296. Estimate of the Spartan Policy and Power. — At the close of the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian Empire had passed under the control of Sparta, which continued to treat it as subject. But the Spartans were less capable of governing an empire than the Athenians had been; they were less intelligent, less just and mild. They had no experience in governing an empire, no knowledge of finance, and no system of administering justice, as had the Athenians. They could only think of controlling their subjects as they did their perioeci, or in the most favored cases, their Peloponnesian allies. Naturally they were guilty of many harsh and tyrannous acts.

Notwithstanding all these facts, we must admit that after Athens had proved her inability to unite Hellas, it was well for Sparta to make the attempt. A great number of liberty-loving states could not possibly be welded into a nation without the use of force and the infliction of some temporary injustice. But the Greeks were learning to coöperate in safeguarding their rights against Sparta, while adapting themselves to her supremacy. In time the system

might have proved as easy and acceptable to the Greeks as it was efficient for protection.

But the number of Spartans had dwindled to a few hundreds, and in military skill they were now surpassed by both Athenians and Thebans. Unable to rule by intelligence and justice, they lacked the strength, too, for keeping the city-states in obedience. The result was the end of their supremacy.

From this point of view, the battle of Leuctra, a triumph of local patriotism, was a great misfortune to Hellas. Had Sparta retained the leadership, she might have preserved the independence of the nation. After her fall no city was strong enough for the task.

Suggestive Questions

1. Write a summary of this chapter like that on p. 250. 2. Compare the rule of Sparta in the fourth century B.C. with that of Athens in the fifth. 3. Compare the condition of Lacedaemon in the fourth century with her condition in the seventh. In this interval what changes had taken place in her constitution and society? 4. Did any good come to Greece from the treaty of Antalcidas? 5. Was the peace convention of 371 B.C. in any respect an improvement on that of 387? 6. Why should Epaminondas and Agesilaus disagree over the method of ratifying the treaty? 7. What were the various effects of the battle of Leuctra?

Note-book Topics

I. The Return of the Ten Thousand. — Xenophon, *Anabasis*, ii–vi.

II. The Battle of Leuctra. — Fling, *Source Book of Greek History*, 269–275.

III. The Internal Condition of Lacedaemon. — Xenophon, *Hellenica*, iii. 3 (conspiracy of Cinadon); *Lacedaemonian Constitution; Agesilaus;* Plutarch, *Lysander; Agesilaus.*

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