

PART I

THE ORATION ON THE CROWN

ARGUMENT

THIS has justly been considered the greatest speech of the greatest orator in the world. It derives an additional interest from the circumstance that it was the last great speech delivered in Athens. The subject matter of it is virtually a justification of the whole public policy and life of Demosthenes; while in point of form it is a defence of Ctesiphon for a decree which he proposed in favour of Demosthenes B.C. 338, not long after the battle of Chæronea.

When the news of that disastrous battle reached Athens, the people were in the utmost consternation. Nothing less was expected than an immediate invasion of Attica by the conqueror; and strong measures were taken, under the advice of Hyperides, to put the city in a posture of defence. One of the most important was the repair of the walls and ramparts. Demosthenes at this time held the office of conservator of walls, having been appointed by his own tribe at the end of the year B.C. 339. The reparation, which had been commenced before, but suspended during the late campaign, was now vigorously prosecuted. He himself superintended the work, and expended on it three talents of his own money, beyond what was allowed out of the public treasury.

The fears of the people were not realised. Philip, while he chastised the Thebans, treated the Athenians with moderation and clemency; restoring their prisoners without ransom, burying their dead upon the field, and sending their bones to Athens. He deprived them indeed of most of their foreign possessions, but even enlarged their domestic territory by the addition of Oropus.

It seemed that the whole foundation upon which the credit and influence of Demosthenes had rested was overthrown. The hopes which he had held out of successful resistance to Philip, of re-establishing Athenian ascendancy, or maintaining the independence of Greece, were now proved to be fallacious. The alliance of Thebes, his last great measure for the protection of Athens, appeared to have been the immediate cause of her defeat and disgrace. The very moderation with which Philip had used his victory looked like a reproach to the orator, who had so often denounced his cruelties before the Athenian assembly, and warned them of his deadly hostility to Athens.

The Macedonian party considered that the time was come for the

humiliation of their adversary. They assailed him with prosecutions. The peace which Athens concluded with Macedonia was the signal for war against Demosthenes. But his enemies were mistaken in their reckoning, when they supposed that the people would feel resentment against him as the author of their misfortunes. The Athenians took a juster and nobler view of the matter; they judged not of his counsels by the result, but by their own intrinsic merit. Demosthenes came clear and triumphant out of every prosecution; and while Lysicles the general was condemned to capital punishment for his misconduct of the war, Demosthenes received from his countrymen a signal proof of their esteem and confidence, being appointed to pronounce the funeral oration in honour of the citizens who had fallen at Chæronea.

About the same time, and not many months after the battle, Ctesiphon introduced a bill to the Council of Five Hundred, proposing to reward Demosthenes for his gifts of money to the public, and for his general integrity and good conduct as a statesman. It is not unlikely that the very object of this measure was to stop the attacks upon Demosthenes, and to give him the opportunity, in case it should be opposed, of justifying the whole course of his political life. With that view was inserted the clause eulogising his general character as a statesman. The Macedonian party naturally regarded this clause as a reflection upon themselves, and a virtual condemnation of the policy which they had for so many years espoused. They felt themselves therefore compelled to make a stand against it; and they resolved upon a course, which was open to them according to the Athenian laws, of indicting Ctesiphon as the author of an illegal measure. His bill, having been approved by the council, and then brought before the popular assembly, was passed in the shape of a decree, by which it was declared to be the will of the council and people of Athens, "that Demosthenes should be presented with a golden crown, and that a proclamation should be made in the theatre, at the great Dionysian festival, at the performance of the new tragedies, announcing that Demosthenes was rewarded by the people with a golden crown for his integrity, for the goodwill which he had invariably displayed towards all the Greeks and towards the people of Athens, and also for his magnanimity, and because he had ever both by word and deed promoted the interests of the people, and been zealous to do all the good in his power." This decree, as the opposite party conceived, was open to three objections, two of which were chiefly of a legal nature; the other, while it equally assumed a legal form, called in question the real merits of Ctesiphon's motion. An indictment, embodying all the objections, was preferred before the archon, the chief magistrate of Athens, to whose cognisance a criminal proceeding of this kind appertained. The prosecutor was Æschines, the second of Athenian orators, the deadly enemy of Demosthenes, who would not only be considered by his party as the fittest person to conduct the cause, but was stimulated to it by every motive of rivalry and revenge. The indictment, after reciting the decree, alleged that it violated the Athenian law in three points, as follows:—

First, because it was unlawful to make false allegations in any of the state documents:

Secondly, because it was unlawful to confer a crown upon any person who had an account to render of his official conduct; and Demosthenes was both a conservator of walls and a treasurer of the theoric fund:

Thirdly, because it was unlawful to proclaim the honour of a crown in the theatre at the Dionysian festival, at the performance of the new

tragedies; the law being, that if the council gave a crown, it should be published in the council-hall; if the people, in the *prytx* at the popular assembly.

The first of these points raised the substantial question at issue—viz. whether the decree of Ctesiphon had stated a falsehood, when it assigned the virtue and patriotism of Demosthenes as reasons for conferring public honour upon him. The other two, while they were mainly of a technical character, were strongly relied on by Æschines as affording him the means of securing a verdict.

Notice of intention to indict had probably been given at the time when the decree was passed. The bill was actually preferred on the sixth of Elaphebolion, B.C. 338, eight months after the battle of Chæronea, and a few days before the Dionysian festival, at which the honour conferred upon Demosthenes was to have been proclaimed. It had this immediate consequence, that the decree of Ctesiphon could not be carried into effect till after the trial; and thus one end, at least, was gained by Æschines and his party,—the satisfaction of having suspended their adversary's triumph. But whether they were deterred by the failure of other prosecutions against Demosthenes, or whether they judged from the temper of the people that they had but little chance of success, the indictment of Ctesiphon was suffered to lie dormant for more than seven years, and was not brought to trial till the year B.C. 330. It may seem strange that the law of Athens should have allowed a criminal prosecution to hang over a man for so long a period; but it must be borne in mind that the proceeding against Ctesiphon not only involved a charge personally affecting him, but had the further, and ostensibly the more important, object of maintaining the purity of the law itself, and preventing an unconstitutional decree from being recorded in the public archives. It is probable, however, that the case would never have been revived, but for the occurrence of political events which seemed to afford a favourable opportunity.

Within two years after his victory at Chæronea, Philip had perished by the hand of an assassin. The hopes that were excited in Greece by the news of his death were quickly dispelled by the vigorous measures of his successor. Notwithstanding the efforts of Demosthenes, it was found impossible to concert any feasible plan for a union of the Greek states against Macedonia. The rash revolt of the Thebans was punished by the extirpation of their city, which struck terror into the very heart of Greece. Athens, suspected of aiding the insurgents, hastened to appease the conqueror by humble submission; and when he insisted on the delivery up of their principal orators, including Demosthenes, it was with difficulty that he was prevailed upon to accept a less severe measure of satisfaction. The debate which took place in the Athenian assembly upon this demand of Alexander, shews that Demosthenes must still have been in high esteem at Athens. The feelings of the people, notwithstanding their fears, were against the delivery of the orators; and Phocion's counsel, urging them to surrender themselves for the public good, was not well received. Alexander in the year following (B.C. 334) passed over into Asia, and commenced his career of conquest. Meanwhile Greece had a breathing time. The states that sighed for freedom looked with anxious expectation for every intelligence from the scene of war, as if all their hopes depended on the fate of one man. The further he penetrated into Asia, the better chance there seemed to be of his being overwhelmed by the force of the Persian empire. While he was yet in

the defiles of Cilicia, it was confidently asserted by Demosthenes at Athens that his army would be trampled under foot by the cavalry of Darius. The battle of Issus belied this prophecy; yet it was still believed that the Persian monarchy had resources in itself sufficient to prevail in the war: and the length of time that Alexander was occupied in Phœnicia and Egypt, whilst Darius was collecting the strength of his empire in the east, seemed to favour these sanguine views.

About the time that Alexander was marching to fight his last and decisive battle against the Persian king in Mesopotamia, Agis, king of Sparta, put himself at the head of a confederacy, which comprised the greater part of the Peloponnesian states, and prepared to throw off the Macedonian yoke. Taking his opportunity, whilst Antipater was engaged in suppressing a Thracian insurrection, he raised his standard in Laconia, and declared war; but, after gaining some successes and laying siege to Megalopolis, which refused to join the league, he was defeated in a hard-fought battle by Antipater, and died fighting with the valour of an ancient Spartan. This was in the beginning of the year B.C. 330. The confederacy was dissolved, and the voice of freedom was again changed to that of submission.

Athens had taken no part in the last movement. The cause of her neutrality is not quite clear, though it is probably to be attributed to a want of proper concert and preparation. Had the Athenians set their forces to assist Agis in Peloponnesus, they would have been exposed to the first attack of the enemy, and the dread of this may have restrained them from rising. A Macedonian garrison was maintained in the Cadmea, which would gain speedy intelligence of any movement on the part of the Athenians, and the people of the Bœotian towns were friendly to Macedonia. It is not quite clear either what part Demosthenes took upon this occasion. Æschines represents him as boasting that he had kindled the flames of war in Peloponnesus; and both Plutarch and Dinarchus intimate that he exerted himself for that purpose: yet Æschines accuses him also of neglecting so good an opportunity for engaging Athens in the contest. Demosthenes may in prudence have abstained from plunging the Athenians into a war, for which he saw they were ill prepared, and at the same time he may have encouraged the Peloponnesians to make an effort of which, in the event of success, his own country would equally have reaped the benefit. So timid a policy he would not certainly have adopted eight years before; but under existing circumstances it could hardly be a reproach to him, especially when he observed the timid and temporising spirit which was gradually gaining ground among his countrymen. Presents of Persian spoil had been sent to Athens, to decorate the Acropolis. Phocion corresponded with Alexander as a friend; and it was generally represented by all who belonged to his party, that resistance to him was hopeless.

If such feelings prevailed to a great extent before the defeat of Agis, they must have been greatly strengthened after that event. Macedonian arms were everywhere triumphant. Alexander had seated himself on the throne of Darius; Antipater, his viceroy, was irresistible in Greece: Macedonian ascendancy, which Demosthenes had exerted himself all his life to oppose, seemed now to be completely secure. Athens was not what she was even at the time of Chæronea. For sixteen years before that disastrous battle, the voice of Demosthenes had been continually resounding in the assembly, instructing, animating, improving, elevating the minds and hearts of his hearers;

exerting such an influence over them, that he may be said to have raised up, by the force of his own eloquence, a new generation of patriots. But in the eight years that followed it was very different: his voice in the cause of freedom and glory had been little heard; and besides that the people were cowed by the events which had occurred, a lethargy had fallen on their spirit, for want of some one to rouse them.

This was the time chosen by Æschines for bringing to an issue the long-suspended cause. The aspect of affairs both at home and abroad seemed favourable to the undertaking; and he summoned up all his force and resolution for the contest. It was to be not only a trial of strength between the contending parties at Athens,—the favourers of Macedonian power, and those that regretted the loss of independence,—but a final and decisive struggle between two rival statesmen, exasperated against each other by a long series of hostilities. It was manifest that Ctesiphon was but the nominal defendant; the real object of attack was Demosthenes, his whole policy and administration. The interest excited was intense, not only at Athens, but throughout all Greece; and an immense concourse of foreigners flocked from all parts to hear the two most celebrated orators in the world. A jury (of not less than five hundred) was impanelled by the archon; and before a dense and breathless audience the pleadings began.

As the speeches of both the orators are preserved to us, we have the means of comparing one with the other, and forming our opinion of their respective merits. The world in general have decided as the people of Athens did, not only upon the oratorical merits of the two rivals, but upon the principal questions at issue between them. The accuser, who thought to brand his opponent with eternal infamy, has only added to the lustre of his rival's renown. Independently of the internal evidence furnished by this and other orations of Demosthenes, which have carried to the hearts of most readers a conviction of his patriotism, we cannot fail to be strongly influenced by the judgment of the Athenians themselves, whom neither their own past misfortunes, nor the terror inspired by the late victory of Antipater, could deter from giving a verdict, by which, while they acquitted Demosthenes from all blame, they in effect declared their approbation of his measures in opposition to Macedonia.

The speech of Æschines betrays a consciousness of weakness in that part of his case where he attacks the political character of his rival. He seems to feel also that he is speaking in opposition to the general feeling of his hearers. His own character as a politician had been so dubious, his conduct so open to suspicion, that while he most bitterly assails his adversary, he is constantly under the necessity of defending himself. On the whole life, public and private, of Demosthenes, he pours a torrent of invective; to this the greater part of his speech is devoted: yet he seems to have been impelled to it rather by hate and revenge than by any calculation of advantage. On the other hand, when he deals with the legal parts of his case, commenting on those specific violations of Athenian law which Ctesiphon's measure was charged with, it is evident that his strength lay there; he handles his subject temperately, skilfully, and carefully, labouring to make every point clear to the jury, and to impress them with the conviction that to uphold the laws was the sure way to maintain constitutional government. On these points he mainly relied, hoping by this means to secure a verdict, which would give him a triumph over his enemy, and carry the general opinion over Greece, that the credit and influence of Demosthenes were extinguished.

24 The Orations of Demosthenes

Demosthenes, feeling his weakness as to the legal questions, dexterously throws them into the middle of his speech, and passes lightly and rapidly over them, while he devotes his greatest efforts to the vindication of his own merits as a patriot and a statesman. Refusing to comply with the insidious demand of Æschines, that he should take the questions in the same order as his accuser, he insists upon his legal right to conduct his defence as he pleases. Opening with a modest exordium, to conciliate the favour of the jury, he launches gradually into the history of his own conduct and measures: presenting first a general view of the condition of Greece when he entered public life, and of the difficulties under which the Athenians laboured in their contest with Philip; then setting forth his own views, plans, and objects, and showing that he had advised a course of action which both the circumstances of the time and the honour of the country required. He apologises for the self-praise mixed up with his speech, on the ground that he was driven to it by his opponent. Entering on the Sacred War, and the peace of B.C. 346, he labours to exculpate himself from all share in the errors then committed, imputing them chiefly to the negligence of the other ambassadors, and to the treachery of Philocrates and Æschines, who, by the false hopes which they excited at Athens, prevented the people from assisting the Phocians. Coming to the events which brought on a renewal of the war, he shows how Philip's ambitious projects and encroachments in every part of Greece made it necessary to oppose him, especially for the Athenians, who were menaced at home as well as abroad by his aggressions in Thrace, Eubœa, and Megara. He pursues these topics until he has carried with him the feelings of his hearers, which must have been strongly on his side when he dilated on the glorious issue of the campaigns in Eubœa and the Propontis, and read to them the decrees of the Byzantines, Perinthians, and Chersonesites, in honour of Athens, all which were due to the vigorous measures of his own administration. Having thus secured the goodwill and sympathy of his judges, he proceeds to discuss the legal charges against Ctesiphon. Dwelling on them but for a short time, he plunges into a personal attack upon Æschines, holding up to ridicule the meanness of his birth and parentage, and retorting on him the same coarse and opprobrious language which had been used towards himself. The bitterness of his invective is only to be excused on the ground of strong provocation, added to an assurance that his more grave charges of corruption and treason were well founded. Those charges, so often advanced before, he here repeats, denouncing more particularly the conduct of Æschines upon his mission to Delphi, B.C. 339, to which the disaster of Chæronea was attributable. The account which Æschines had given of this affair he shows to be false, and enters upon a minute examination of the proceedings which caused Philip to be appointed Amphictyonic general, and to march with an invading army, nominally against the Amphissian Locrians, really against Bœotia and Attica. A graphic description is given of the consternation at Athens on bearing that Philip had seized Elatea. The meeting of the people, the advice of Demosthenes to them, his embassy to Thebes, the success of his negotiations, and the conclusion of the alliance between Thebes and Athens are briefly recounted, Demosthenes forcibly pointing out the advantage of his measures, contending that they were not to be judged by the mere event of the battle, and that it was far more glorious for his country to be defeated in a struggle for the independence of Greece, than it would have been to keep aloof from the contest. Here he makes that

noble adjuration, which has in all ages been admired, appealing to his countrymen by the deeds of their ancestors, of whom they would have acted most unworthily, had they without a struggle abandoned the post of honour bequeathed to them. He himself as a statesman would have deserved execration, had he advised such a course. The failure of their arms was not to be imputed to the minister, who had done all he could to insure their success, but rather to the commanders, or to evil fortune. As Æschines had said so much about the ill fortune which attended him, he draws a comparison between the different fortunes of himself and his rival, first, of their early life and education, next, of their career as public men. Æschines from the beginning had taken a part which put him in opposition to the true interests of Athens, which caused him to rejoice at her disasters, to quail and tremble at her successes. He never came forward to assist her by his counsels when she needed them, but only to censure others who had given their honest advice, because it had not turned out as well as was expected. It was a signal proof of his malignant disposition, that he had expatiated on the late disastrous events as if they were a subject of triumph to him, without shedding a single tear, without any faltering in his voice, without betraying the least emotion or symptom of grief. In reply to the challenge of Æschines, to say for what merit he claimed the reward of a crown, Demosthenes boldly declares, for his incorruptibility, by which he was distinguished not only from Æschines, but from the multitude of venal orators in the Grecian world. Had there been but a few more like himself in other states, Macedonia could never have risen to greatness upon their ruin. He had done all that was possible for a single man; and Athens, while she shared the misfortune of all the Greeks, had the consolation of reflecting that she had striven gallantly and bravely to avert the common calamity. Æschines had lauded the great men of a bygone age, drawing an invidious contrast between Demosthenes and them. This, says Demosthenes, was not a fair way of judging him: he should be tried by reference to his own acts, as compared with those of his contemporaries. Yet even from the former comparison he did not shrink; for he had acted on the same principles as the statesmen of olden time, striving always to maintain the honour and dignity of Athens. Attachment to his country, and earnest anxiety for her welfare, had been his constant and abiding motives of action; throughout his whole life, in the day of power, in the hour of trial and adversity, those feelings had never deserted him: that was the test of a good and honest citizen; by that he ought to be judged.

Such is, in substance, the argument of this celebrated oration, as far as relates to the main question in the cause. The effect produced by the speech upon an Athenian audience can be but faintly imagined by us who read it at this distance of time. Although Athens was not then what she had once been; although she was humbled by defeat, shorn of her honours, stripped of her empire and dependencies, without allies, without resources, without means of resistance to that iron power under which all Greece had succumbed; there was still the remembrance of the past, not yet extinguished by habitual servitude; there were still vague hopes of future deliverance, and a fire of smothered indignation burning in the hearts of the people, ready to burst into a flame at the first favourable opportunity. That such were their feelings is proved by what occurred seven years afterwards upon the death of Alexander; when Athens made one convulsive effort for freedom, ere she finally submitted to her fate. Demosthenes stood

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