

THE ORATION ON THE LIBERTY OF THE RHODIANS

ARGUMENT

THIS Oration was delivered B.C. 351 on the following occasion:

In the island of Rhodes, as in divers other of the Grecian states, there had been many contests between the democratical party and the oligarchical. At the close of the Peloponnesian war it was in the hands of an oligarchy, under the protection of Lacedæmon. About the year 396 Conon, being at the head of a considerable fleet in that part of the Ægean, drove the Peloponnesians from the port of Rhodes, and compelled the islanders to renew their connection with Athens. Democracy was then re-established; but four years afterwards the opposite faction again prevailed, a Spartan fleet made its appearance, the popular leaders and the friends of Athens were banished or put to death. For the next thirty years or more following that event little is known of the Rhodian history. After the destruction of the Spartan navy, Rhodes with most of the Ægean isles returned to the Athenian confederacy, and we may fairly presume that a new democratical revolution was effected in the island during that period. But in the year 358 a rupture of a most serious kind took place between Rhodes and Athens, pregnant with disastrous consequences to both. This was the breaking out of the Social war, the immediate causes of which are obscurely reported to us, though there is sufficient evidence to show that the provocation to revolt proceeded from the misconduct, or at least the imprudence of the Athenians themselves.

We learn from various parts of Demosthenes, especially from the Oration on the Chersonese (p. 178), how the Athenian commanders at this period, sent out with inadequate forces and supplies, were tempted or driven to commit irregularities, amounting often to acts of plunder and violence, in order to maintain their armaments or carry on their wars. Not confining their aggressions to the enemies of Athens, or even to neutrals, they harassed the allies, by extorting from them loans and contributions, and thus brought the name of their country into general odium and discredit. It seems that Chares, having the command of a fleet destined to act against Amphipolis, and conceiving himself to hold large discretionary powers, sailed to Rhodes, and by his vexatious and arbitrary proceedings so irritated the people, that they were ready on the first opportunity to throw off their connection with Athens. The islands of Cos and Chios had been alienated from the Athenians by similar causes, and desired to recover their independence. These three states entered into a league with Byzantium, which in fact had been meditated some years before, and raising a fleet powerful enough to set the Athenians at defiance, commenced the Social war, which, after a three years' continuance, was terminated (as we have seen) by a peace humiliating to Athens, B.C. 355.

In the course of this war the allies received assistance from Mausolus,

king of Caria. He had formed the design of annexing Rhodes to his own dominions, to which it was so conveniently adjacent; but there was little hope of accomplishing this purpose unless he could sever it from the Athenian alliance. The oligarchical party in Rhodes, still watching for a new revolution, were easily brought over to his views; and at the close of the war a Carian garrison was introduced into the island, which established the oligarchy, and in effect brought the island in subjection to a foreign yoke. The Rhodians had no hopes of recovering their liberty; they had lost the protection of a powerful state; while Mausolus could obtain effectual aid from the Persian king, whose vassal he was, and to whom it was important to acquire any of the islands near Asia Minor. Mausolus died in the year B.C. 353, and was succeeded by his queen Artemisia. In her reign the government of Rhodes became oppressive to the people; who at length resolving to throw off their yoke, sent a deputation to Athens, to implore her assistance. These petitioners, who were not very favourably received at Athens, found an advocate in Demosthenes.

It was natural to expect that there would be a strong feeling at Athens against a people who had deeply injured her. A very few years had elapsed since the Social war, and the events were fresh in the memory of all. To overcome this feeling of resentment was the principal difficulty which an advocate of the Rhodian people had to encounter. Demosthenes appeals to the higher and nobler feelings of his countrymen. Motives of honour, generosity and compassion should influence Athenians: it was not worth while to remember the wrongs done them by so insignificant a people as the Rhodian; they should consider only what was due from them to Athens and to Greece. It was their duty as well as their interest to vindicate the liberties of a Greek people under oppression, and more especially to defend the cause of popular government against oligarchs and tyrants. Unless they did so, their own constitution might soon be in danger; for there was a perpetual strife going on between oligarchy and democracy, and, if all other democracies were put down, the Athenian must be assailed at last. It was urged on the other side, that interference with Rhodes might provoke the hostility of the Persian king. Demosthenes contends that the loss of Rhodes, which did not properly belong to him, was not likely to provoke the king; that in the present state of the Persian empire both he and Artemisia would probably remain neutral; but that at all events the Athenians ought to espouse the cause of the Rhodian people, even at the risk of Persian hostility.

I THINK, men of Athens, that on a consultation of such moment you ought to grant liberty of speech to every one of your advisers. For my own part, I have never thought it difficult to make you understand right counsel—for to speak plainly, you seem all to possess the knowledge yourselves—but to persuade you to follow it I have found difficult; for when any measure has been voted and resolved, you are then as far from the performance as you were from the resolution before.

One of the events for which I consider you should be

thankful to the Gods is, that a people, who, to gratify their own insolence, went to war with you not long ago, now place their hopes of safety in you alone. Well may we be rejoiced at the present crisis: for if your measures thereupon be wisely taken, the result will be that the calumnies of those who traduce our country you will practically and with credit and honour refute. The Chians, Byzantines, and Rhodians accused us of a design to oppress them, and therefore combined to make the last war against us. It will turn out that Mausolus, who contrived and instigated these proceedings, pretending to be a friend of the Rhodians, has deprived them of their liberty; the Chians and Byzantines, who called them allies, have not aided them in misfortune; whilst you, whom they dreaded, are the only people who have wrought their deliverance. And, this being seen by all the world, you will cause the people in every state to regard your friendship as the token of their security: nor can there be a greater blessing for you than thus to obtain from all men a voluntary attachment and confidence.

I marvel to see the same persons advising you to oppose the king on behalf of the Egyptians, and afraid of him in the matter of the Rhodian people. All men know that the latter are Greeks, the former a portion of his subjects. And I think some of you remember that, when you were debating about the king's business, I first came forward and advised—nay, I was the only one, or one of two, that gave such counsel—that your prudent course in my opinion was, not to allege your quarrel with the king as the excuse for your arming, but to arm against your existing enemies, and defend yourselves against him also, if he attempted to injure you. Nor did I offer this advice without obtaining your approval; for you agreed with me. Well then: my reasoning of to-day is consistent with the argument on that occasion. For, would the king take me to his counsels, I should advise him as I advise you, in defence of his own possessions, to make war upon any Greeks that opposed him, but not to think of claiming

dominions to which he had no manner of title. If now it be your general determination, Athenians, to surrender to the king all places that he gets possession of, whether by surprise or by deluding certain of the inhabitants, you have determined, in my judgment, unwisely: but if in the cause of justice you esteem it your duty, either to make war, if needful, or to suffer any extremity; in the first place, there will be the less necessity for such trials, in proportion as you are resolved to meet them; and secondly, you will manifest a spirit that becomes you.

That I suggest nothing new, in urging you to liberate the Rhodians—that you will do nothing new, in following my counsel—will appear, if I remind you of certain measures that succeeded. Once, O Athenians, you sent Timotheus out to assist Ariobarzanes,¹ annexing to the decree, “that he was not to infringe your treaty with the king.” Timotheus, seeing that Ariobarzanes had openly revolted from the king, and that Samos was garrisoned by Cyprothemis, under the appointment of Tigranes, the king’s deputy, renounced the intention of assisting Ariobarzanes, but invested the island with his forces and delivered it. And to this day there has been no war against you on that account. Men will not

¹ Ariobarzanes, satrap of Phrygia, was concerned in the rebellion of B.C. 362. It seems that, in soliciting Athenian aid, which he obtained the more easily on account of his connection with the state—he having received the honour of citizenship—Ariobarzanes had concealed the object of his preparations; and therefore the Athenians, in sending Timotheus, took the precaution of restricting his powers in the way mentioned by the orator. Timotheus, in return for some service which he had done, was helped by the satrap to get possession of Sestus and Crithote in the Chersonese. Cornelius Nepos praises the Athenian general, because, instead of getting any private recompense from Ariobarzanes, he had looked only to the advantage of his country; while Agesilaus, who had gone out in the same service, took a pecuniary reward for himself. Timotheus then proceeded to besiege Samos, which was occupied by a Persian garrison, and took it in the course of the following year. Isocrates the orator, who acted as the secretary of Timotheus, was at the siege of Samos, and praises the general for having taken it with little or no cost to Athens.

The occupation of Samos by the Persians was an infringement of the peace of Antalcidas, by the terms of which the Greek islands were to be independent. Therefore the conduct of Timotheus, in wresting Samos from Persia, afforded an apt illustration for the argument of Demosthenes.

fight for aggressive purposes so readily as for defensive. To resist spoliation they strive with all their might; not so to gratify ambition: this they will attempt, if there be none to hinder them; but, if prevented, they regard not their opponents as having done them an injury.

My belief is, that Artemisia would not even oppose this enterprise now if our state were embarked in the measure. Attend a moment and see whether my calculation be right or wrong. I consider—were the king succeeding in all his designs in Egypt, Artemisia would make a strenuous effort to get Rhodes into his power, not from affection to the king, but from a desire, while he tarried in her neighbourhood, to confer an important obligation upon him, so that he might give her the most friendly reception: but since he fares as they report, having miscarried in his attempts, she judges that this island—and so the fact is—would be of no further use to the king at present, but only a fortress to overawe her kingdom and prevent disturbances. Therefore, it seems to me, she would rather you had the island, without her appearing to have surrendered it, than that he should obtain possession. I think, indeed, she will send no succours at all, but, if she do, they will be scanty and feeble. As to the king—what he will do I cannot pretend to know; but this I will maintain, that it is expedient for Athens to have it immediately understood whether he means to claim the Rhodian city or not: for, if he should, you will have to deliberate not on the concerns of Rhodes only, but on those of Athens and all Greece.

Even if the Rhodians, who are now in the government, had held it by themselves, I would not have advised you to espouse their cause; not though they promised to do everything for you. But I see that in the beginning, in order to put down the democracy, they gained over a certain number of citizens, and afterwards banished those very men, when they had accomplished their purpose. I think, therefore, that people who have been false to two parties, would be no

steadier allies to you. And never would I have proffered this counsel had I thought it would benefit the Rhodian people only; for I am not their state-friend, nor is any one of them connected with me by ties of private hospitality. And even if both these causes had existed, I would not have spoken, unless I had considered it for your advantage. Indeed, as far as the Rhodians are concerned, if the advocate for their deliverance may be allowed to say so, I am rejoiced at what has happened—that, after grudging to you the recovery of your rights, they have lost their own liberty; and, when they might have had an alliance on equal terms with Greeks and their betters, they are under subjection to barbarians and slaves, whom they have admitted into their fortresses.¹ I would almost say, that, if you determine to assist them, these events have turned out for their good. For, during prosperity, I doubt whether they would have learned discretion, being Rhodians; but since they are taught by experience that folly is mightily injurious to men, they may possibly perhaps become wiser for the future; and this I think would be no small advantage to them. I say, therefore, you should endeavour to rescue these people, and not harbour resentment, considering that you too have often been deceived by miscreants, but for no such deceit would you allow that you merited punishment yourselves.

Observe also, men of Athens, that you have waged many

¹ Vitruvius relates a stratagem by which Artemisia got complete dominion of Rhodes. The Rhodians had plotted with a party in Halicarnassus to overthrow the Carian government, and sent a fleet with troops to assist in the execution of their design. The troops landed and advanced to the city, where the inhabitants were ranged under the walls as if to give them a friendly reception. But this was done by order of Artemisia, who had discovered the plot and laid an ambush for the Rhodians. They were surrounded and slain. Artemisia took their ships, and put a Carian force on board, which sailing to Rhodes, and being mistaken by the people for their own armament returning, got possession of the Rhodian capital. If the story be well founded the occurrence was probably later than this Oration, which refers to no act of hostility between the Rhodians and the ruler of Caria. It should be noticed that besides the capital city of Rhodes there were other considerable and much more ancient towns in the island, Lindus, Ialysus, and Camirus.

wars both against democracies and against oligarchies—but this indeed you know without my telling—but for what cause you have been at war with either, perhaps not one of you considers. What are the causes? Against democratical states your wars have been either for private grievances, when you could not make public satisfaction, or for territory, or boundaries, or a point of honour, or the leadership: against oligarchies, for none of these matters, but for your constitution and freedom. Therefore I would not hesitate to say, I think it better that all the Greeks should be your enemies with a popular government, than your friends under oligarchal. For with freemen I consider you would have no difficulty in making peace when you chose; but with people under an oligarchy even friendship I hold to be insecure. It is impossible that the few can be attached to the many, the seekers of power to the lovers of constitutional equality.

I marvel none of you conceive—when the Chians and Mitylenæans are governed by oligarchies, when the Rhodians and nearly all people are about being drawn into this slavery—that our constitution is in the same peril: and none consider, it is impossible if all establishments are on the principle of oligarchy, that they will let your democracy alone. They know too well that no other people will bring things back to the state of liberty: therefore they will wish to destroy a government from which they apprehend mischief to themselves. Ordinary doers of wrong you may regard as enemies to the sufferers only; they that subvert constitutions and transform them into oligarchies must be looked upon, I say, as the common enemies to all lovers of freedom. And besides, men of Athens, it is right that you, living under self-government, should show the same feeling for a free people in misfortune that you would expect others to have for you in case of a similar calamity; which I trust may never befall! Though indeed it may be said that the Rhodians have had their deserts, the occasion is not a fit one for triumph: the fortunate should always be seen to interest themselves for the

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