

THE ORATION FOR THE MEGALOPOLITANS

ARGUMENT

MEGALOPOLIS was an Arcadian city near the frontiers of Laconia. It was founded in the year B.C. 371, and, being designed for the metropolis of the whole Arcadian people, who then united themselves into one body, it was built on a scale of magnitude corresponding with that purpose, having a circumference of more than six miles, and received the name of the *great city*. Next to Athens, it is said to have been the most beautiful city in Greece. The population was obtained by migration from the existing Arcadian towns, no less than forty of which were required to contribute to it. Most of these were entirely deserted by their inhabitants, others were reduced to the condition of villages dependent on Megalopolis. A supreme council of ten thousand, taken from the whole Arcadian body, held their public deliberations in the capital. About half a century afterwards, when it was besieged by Polysperchon, there were found to be fifteen thousand citizens capable of bearing arms in its defence.

The chief object of building this metropolis was to establish a permanent union among the Arcadians and preserve their national independence. Before that time, the Arcadians as a body had very little influence in the affairs of Peloponnesus, though they occupied a large portion of its territory. They had generally been in the alliance of Sparta, whose armies they strengthened by a brave and hardy race of soldiers. It was therefore the policy of Sparta to keep them feeble and divided among themselves. In the time of the Peloponnesian war Mantinea, then the principal city of Arcadia, formed a small confederacy among her neighbours, renounced her connection with the Lacedæmonians, and joined an offensive alliance with Athens and Argos. But this was soon put an end to. The Mantineans were compelled, by the success of the Lacedæmonian arms, to abandon their confederacy; and at a later period, B.C. 387, paid dearly for their disaffection to Sparta, by having their city dismantled and being dispersed into villages.

The defeat of the Spartans at Leuctra changed the aspect of affairs in Greece. The prestige of ancient victory was gone; and it was soon found that the vast alliance, of which Sparta had been the head, and which had enabled her for many years to give the law to Greece, would crumble almost entirely away. One of the first effects of this change in Peloponnesus was the rebuilding of Mantinea, which was soon followed by the establishment of Megalopolis. But the heaviest blow to the pride and power of Lacedæmon was the loss of her ancient province of Messenia, which for more than three centuries had been the fairest portion of her domain. Whether the Arcadians could have maintained their independence against Sparta without foreign aid may perhaps be doubted; but this last revolution was wholly due to the arms of Thebes and the genius of Epaminondas.

That general, having assembled a large army in Bœotia, marched

across the isthmus and was joined in Arcadia by his Peloponnesian allies. At the head of an overpowering force he invaded and ravaged Laconia. Troops of divers people—who not many years before had followed the Lacedæmonians in their wars, or would hardly have dared to face them in the field—Thebans, Phocians, Locrians, Eubœans, Thessalians, Acarnanians, Argives, Arcadians, Eleans, marched now almost without opposition to the gates of Sparta; and nothing but the shadow of the Spartan name preserved that haughty capital from destruction. Epaminondas did not venture to make a general assault upon the town, but, after continuing his ravages for some time longer, proceeded to execute his well-laid scheme, which he rightly judged would reduce Sparta to the condition of a second or third-rate power in Greece.

The Messenian population had long been, like the Laconian helots, in a state of vassalage to Sparta, but were ripe for insurrection at any favourable opportunity, as they had proved during the Athenian occupation of Pylus. The march of Epaminondas into Laconia was the signal for a universal rising of that people, who were now again to form a nation, and to build a capital city under the protection of the Theban general. But it was not only the existing inhabitants of the country, by whom this task of reconstituting the nation was to be accomplished; for which, after their long servitude, they might not have been so well fitted by themselves. Messenian exiles from every quarter, and especially those of Naupactus, who had been expelled after the Peloponnesian war, and migrated to Sicily and Africa, were invited to return to their ancient home, and assist in the glorious restoration. It has been mentioned as a remarkable example of the love of country that these exiles, during so long an absence, had jealously preserved their ancestral usages and the purity of their original language. They returned in great numbers and formed the nucleus of a Messenian government. The new city was founded on the site of the ancient Ithome, Epaminondas laying the first stone, and received the name of Messene. This was B.C. 369.

The humiliation of Sparta was now complete. She had no power to disturb the new settlement. She was hemmed in by a chain of enemies, who cut off her communication with Peloponnesus; by the Messenians on the west, the Arcadians and Argives on the north. Her war with Thebes continued for eight more years. The succour of Athens and her few remaining allies saved her from further disasters; and the death of her great enemy, Epaminondas, brought on a general peace, B.C. 361.

From the negotiations of this peace the Lacedæmonians kept aloof, refusing to acknowledge the independence of Messenia, which they regarded as a deep disgrace to themselves. Their spirit, though depressed, was not extinguished; and they only awaited for an opportunity of recovering their lost dominion. Archidamus, son of Agesilaus, who had acquired honour in the late war by the *tearless victory* (in which he defeated the Arcadians and Argives without losing a single Spartan life), kept alive the ambitious hopes of his countrymen, and continually stimulated them to fresh exertions. He was a man of ardent character, to recover Messenia was the principal object of his desire; in which he had even been encouraged by a pamphlet of Isocrates, entitled Archidamus, and still extant. In the course of seven or eight years events occurred which favoured the views of this prince. There had been disturbances in Arcadia. The Sacred war had broken out, in which the principal parties were Phocis and Thebes. An obstinate struggle

was yet going on; neither party had gained any decisive advantage, and both were greatly weakened. The Phocian generals had carried the war into the enemy's country; some of the Bœotian towns had been taken; and the Thebans, distressed at home, and burdened with heavy expenses, seemed no longer in a condition to assist their Peloponnesian allies.

Under these circumstances, about the year 353, Archidamus thought the time had arrived to effect a counter-revolution, which should restore the influence of his country. His real aim was the destruction of Megalopolis and Messene. But to avow this purpose, or attempt to execute it without further pretext than the desire to satisfy Spartan ambition, might have drawn on him the hostility of those states which were unconnected with the Theban alliance. Accordingly, he conceived the idea of announcing a principle, which would secure certain advantages to the states hostile to Thebes, and induce them to concur in his own scheme of aggrandisement. He gave it out that ancient rights ought to be resumed; that Athens should have Oropus, the towns of Thespiæ, Plataea, and Orchomenus should be restored; Elis and Phlius should have certain claims conceded to them. While he published these declarations, he kept in the background that portion of the scheme in which Sparta was interested, viz., the recovery of Messenia and the dissolution of the Arcadian union.

Notwithstanding all the care which Archidamus took to conceal his views, they could not fail to be apparent; and it was soon understood that the warlike preparations in Laconia were designed against Megalopolis. Two embassies were sent at the same time to Athens, one by the Spartans, and one by the Megalopolitans, each to solicit assistance in the approaching war. The Spartan ambassadors reminded the Athenians of their former alliance, and showed what advantage would accrue to them from the plan of Archidamus, by which Thebes their old enemy would be depressed. The Megalopolitan deputies urged the justice of their own cause, and the danger that would result from the revival of Spartan supremacy.

There were many speakers on both sides in the Athenian assembly. Demosthenes espoused the cause of the Megalopolitans, and delivered what Auger pronounces to be one of the most subtle of his orations. He begins by condemning the warmth with which both parties had assailed their adversaries. It became them (he argues), without any feeling or prejudice for or against either of the contending states, to decide the question by reference to justice and the good of Athens. Justice required that no people should be oppressed by another. Their alliance with Sparta had been based on that principle, and they had saved her from ruin; but if Sparta commenced ambitious enterprises inconsistent with the spirit of their alliance, they were justified in breaking it off. It was the interest of Athens that neither Sparta nor Thebes should be too powerful. The dissolution of Megalopolis would lead to the re-conquest of Messenia, and that would destroy the balance of power in Peloponnesus. The advantage offered to Athens might be obtained in a more honourable manner, without sacrificing the Peloponnesians; and as to Thebes, it was better to weaken her by conferring an obligation upon her allies, and attaching them to Athens, than by allowing them to suffer injustice.

It appears to me, O Athenians, that both are in fault, they who have spoken for the Arcadians and they who have spoken

for the Lacedæmonians. For as if they were deputies from either people, not citizens of Athens, to which both direct their embassies, they accuse and attack one another. This might be the duty of the envoys; but to speak independently on the question, and consider your interests dispassionately, was the part of men who presume to offer counsel here. I really think—setting aside the knowledge of their persons and their Attic tongue—many would take them for either Arcadians or Laconians.

I see how vexatious a thing it is to advise for the best. For when you are carried away by delusion, some taking one view and some another, if any man attempts to advise a middle course, and you are too impatient to listen, he will please neither party and fall into disgrace with both. However, if this be my case, I will rather myself be thought a babbler than leave you to be misled by certain people, contrary to my notion of Athenian interests. On other points I will speak, with your permission, afterwards; but will begin with principles admitted by all, and explain what I consider your wisest course.

Well then: no man will deny it to be good for Athens, that both the Lacedæmonians and our Theban neighbours should be weak. But things are in this sort of position, if we may form a conjecture from the statements repeatedly made in our assembly—the Thebans will be weakened by the re-establishment of Orchomenus,¹ Thespiæ, and Plataæ; the

¹ The Bœotian cities were at an early period connected by a federal union, each having an independent government. Thebes was at their head, and received a council of deputies from the league. Every state appointed a Bœotarch, who took his share of military command and some other executive duties. In process of time Thebes asserted an imperial authority over the federal cities, and most of them were compelled to submit. Plataæ espoused the alliance of Athens, and for a long time enjoyed her protection, but in the Peloponnesian war fell a victim to Theban revenge. The exiles returned and rebuilt the city after the peace of Antalcidas, but it was again destroyed by the Thebans B.C. 373. Thespiæ was destroyed about the same time, having long been suspected of disaffection to Thebes and favour to Athens. The Thebans had dismantled its walls in the Peloponnesian war, though the flower of the Thespian youth had fallen in their cause at the battle of Delium. Orchomenus was taken and depopulated by the Thebans

Lacedæmonians will grow powerful again if they subdue Arcadia and take Megalopolis. We must mind, therefore, that we suffer not the one people to wax mighty and formidable, before the other has become weak; that the power of Lacedæmon do not increase (unremarked by us) in a greater degree than it is well for that of Thebes to be reduced. For we shall hardly say this, that we should like to have Lacedæmonians instead of Thebans for our rivals. It is not this we are anxious for, but that neither may have the means of injuring us: so shall we enjoy the best security.

But granting this ought to be so—it were scandalous, forsooth, to take those men for allies, against whom we were arrayed at Mantinea, and then to assist them against the people, with whom we shared the peril of that day. I think so too, but with one addition—"provided the others are willing to act justly." If all will choose to observe peace, we shall not help the Megalopolitans; for there will be no necessity; and thus we shall be in no opposition to our fellows in arms: one people are, as they profess, our allies already, the other will become so now. And what more could we desire? But should they ¹ attempt injustice and determine on war—then—if this be the only question, whether we ought or ought not to abandon Megalopolis to the Lacedæmonians, although it would be unjust, I concede the point; let things take their course, don't oppose your former partners in danger: but if you all know, that after taking that city they will march to attack Messene, let any of the speakers who are now so hard upon the Megalopolitans tell me what in that case he will

B.C. 368. They had resolved on that measure some years before, but were induced by Epaminondas to change their intention. Afterwards, being alarmed by a conspiracy of certain Orchomenian exiles, they fell upon the city, massacred the adult citizens, and sold the women and children for slaves. During the Phocian war, and shortly before or after the date of this Oration, Orchomenus was seized upon by the Phocian general, Onomarchus, and occupied as a fortified post. At the close of that war it was delivered by Philip to the Thebans, who razed it to the ground. After the battle of Chæronea Philip caused all these three cities, Plataea, Thespiæ, and Orchomenus, to be restored.

¹ *I.e.* the Lacedæmonians; whom the orator does not expressly name, because they are uppermost in his mind.

advise us to do. None will declare. However, you all know that you would be obliged to support them, whether these men recommend it or not, both by the oaths that we have sworn to the Messenians,¹ and because it is expedient that their city should be preserved. Reflect therefore in your minds, whether it would be more noble and generous to begin your resistance to Lacedæmonian aggression with the defence of Megalopolis, or with that of Messene. You will now be considered as protectors of the Arcadians, and striving for the maintenance of that peace, for which you exposed yourselves in the battle-field: whereas then it will be manifest to the world that you desire Messene to stand not so much for the sake of justice as for fear of Lacedæmon. Our purposes and our actions should always be just; but we must also be careful that they are attended with advantage.

There is an argument of this kind urged by my opponents, that we should attempt to recover Oropus,² and, if we now

¹ This engagement was probably entered into at the general peace, which was concluded after the battle of Mantinea, and by which the Athenians, as well as other states of Greece, recognised the independence of Messenia. Pausanias mentions that at this time, when the assistance of Athens was prayed for by the Messenians, it was promised in the event of a Spartan invasion.

It is quite clear from the argument of Demosthenes, that the claims of Megalopolis upon the Athenians stood upon a different footing from those of Messene, not being grounded upon any former alliance. Yet in the narrative of Diodorus, XV. 94, we read that the Athenians sent a body of troops under Pammenes to quell an insurrection in Arcadia, which broke out in about a year's time after the peace, and threatened to dissolve the Megalopolitan community; that Pammenes reduced the malcontents to submission, and compelled those who had seceded from Megalopolis, and gone back to their ancient homes, to return to the capital.

² Oropus was on the confines of Attica and Bœotia, on the coast opposite Eretria in Eubœa. It anciently belonged to Athens, but frequently changed masters. In the twentieth year of the Peloponnesian war it was betrayed to the Bœotians and Eretrians. It became independent at the close of the war; but a few years after, the Thebans took advantage of some internal disturbances to seize upon the city, which they removed nearly a mile from the coast, and annexed to the Bœotian confederacy. A new revolution some time after restored it to Athens. But in the year B.C. 366, Themison, ruler of Eretria, got possession of it by the aid of some exiles. The Athenians marched against him, but, the Thebans also making their appearance with an army, they were induced to leave Oropus under Theban protection, until the dispute could be amicably settled. The Thebans, however, kept it in their own

make enemies of the men who would assist us to gain it, we shall have no allies. I also say, we should try to recover Oropus: but, that Lacedæmon will be our enemy, if we join alliance with the Arcadians who wish to be our friends, they of all men, I consider, are not at liberty to assert, who persuaded you to assist the Lacedæmonians in their hour of danger. The men who argue thus actually persuaded you—when all the Peloponnesians came to Athens and desired to march with you against the Lacedæmonians—to reject their overtures (on which account, as a last resource, they applied to Thebes) and to contribute money and risk your lives for the safety of Lacedæmon. You would hardly, I think, have been disposed to save them, had they told you, that after their deliverance, unless you suffered them to have their own way and commit injustice again, they should owe you no thanks for your protection. And indeed, however repugnant it may be to the designs of the Spartans that we should adopt the Arcadian alliance, surely their gratitude, for having been saved by us in a crisis of extreme peril, ought to outweigh their resentment for being checked in their aggression now. How then can they avoid assisting you to gain Oropus, or being thought the basest of mankind? By the gods I cannot see.

I wonder also to hear it argued, that, if we espouse the Arcadian alliance and adopt these measures, our state will be chargeable with inconstancy and bad faith. It seems to me, O Athenians, the reverse. Why? Because no man, I apprehend, will question that, in defending the Lacedæmonians, and the Thebans¹ before them, and lastly the Eubœans,² and making them afterwards her allies, our republic has always had one and the same object. What is that? To protect the injured. If this be so, the inconstancy will not be ours,

hands; and so it remained until after the battle of Chæronea, when Philip gave it up to the Athenians.

¹ He alludes to the war that followed the seizure of the Cadmea, commenced by the invasion of Cleombrotus B.C. 378.

² When the Thebans attempted to get possession of the island.

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