THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

The continued existence of the Athenian Empire started a problem in Greek politics. Which was the stronger, the centralizing forces personified in that empire, or the opposite tendency towards independence in each separate community? It is remarkable that the Athenian democracy, while taking the path of imperialism, at the same time supported the democratic cause in all the states dependent on Athens. She reckoned that the democrats, most of whom belonged to the industrial and trading class, would support the commercial imperialism of Athens, even if injury were done to the political independence of the separate communities. However selfish the policy of Athens might be, yet she made the seas safe for traders and admitted her allies to some share in the advantages of her commercial ascendancy. About 450 B.C. Athens made the use of her silver coins, measures, and weights obligatory in her empire. In this way her dominion became a common trade market.

'Self-determination' and 'a balance of power'—these had once been the watchwords of most Greek cities. Now they were proclaimed chiefly by the adherents of aristocracy—the wealthy landowners and smallholders. Sparta sympathized to a certain extent with this programme: she was prepared to concede to her allies a larger measure of self-government, even in political affairs, than Athens was willing to grant. She supported, therefore, in all ways the aristocratic and oligarchic factions which
existed in every Greek community and even at Athens. She left
no stone unturned, that the conservative policy, which was bit-
terly opposed to Athenian imperialism and sympathized with
the constitution of Sparta, if not with her military league, might
become the policy of as many Greek states as possible.

But the difference between the Spartan attitude and the
Athenian attitude towards these fundamental questions of
Greek politics does not explain why these two powers were
infalibly bound to meet in armed conflict—a contest which
was destined to continue till the strength of the combatants
was utterly exhausted, and to end in the complete triumph
of the separatist tendency. The turn of events in the first half
of the fifth century B.C. was such that the coexistence of a
maritime Athenian Empire and a Spartan league of inland states
enjoying some measure of political independence was perfectly
possible; and this might seem the most reasonable solution of
the difficulty for an indefinite time to come.

The explanation of the conflict is therefore to be found not
merely in the fundamentally different view of politics taken
by two almost equally matched powers in Greece, but also in a
succession of accompanying incidents, which ripened and
hastened on the clash of arms. The growing trade and industry
of Athens and the states in alliance with her, including the is-
lands and Anatolian cities, made the question of the Western
markets, which had not been settled by the wars of 500–450 B.C.,
still more acute. Corinth and Megara would not and could not
put up with the increasing competition of Athens in Italy and
Sicily. The success of Athens in her trade with the West is
proved by this one fact—that from 500 B.C. her pottery drove out,
all over Italy, the product of all other Greek centres of the manu-
facture. If imports from Athens grew thus, the exports from
Italy and Sicily—corn, cattle, and metals—would soon pour ex-
clusively into the Piraeus; and then Athens would have an
ascendancy, not merely commercial but political also, in all the
north and west of the Peloponnese. For those districts could not
support their own population and depended absolutely upon food exported from the West; but this trade would be monopolized by Athens. Sparta also, though not interested in export trade to the West, was menaced by this danger and therefore inclined to listen to the complaints of Megara, Corinth, and Sicyon.

It was a turning-point in the long rivalry, political and economic, between Athens and the Peloponnese, when Athens made up her mind that certain questions concerning Megara and Corecyra were ripe for settlement. Pericles was induced by continual friction with Megara to take the decisive step of declaring a blockade of the city. And at the same time Athens was compelled to take a definite line in the Western question. In 433 B.C. Corecyra, a rich colony of Corinth and the natural bridge between Greece and the West, finding that her commercial interests were constantly at variance with those of her mother city, expressed her readiness to enter into alliance with Athens. To do this was to cut off from Corinth her last chance of stemming the rush of Athenian trade to the West, and to put the control over the western trade-route, which was commanded by the harbours of Corecyra, in the hands of Athens. For the presence of an Athenian fleet in those harbours would hand over to Athens all the Italian and Sicilian trade. She had at this time allies and friends in both countries, few but faithful. Sparta had to decide whether the western waters should be given up to Athens or not. It was almost impossible for Athens to withdraw: to check the expansion of her trade was to endanger the very existence of her empire. And lastly, Athens was aiming at complete control over the Chalcidian peninsula, which involved her in a prolonged contest with Potidaea. Potidaea, an ally of Athens but a colony of Corinth, was unwilling to part with her last scrap of independence and to become a member not of the Athenian confederation but of the Athenian Empire.

Sparta decided for war, though her prospect of victory was not very bright. It was a contest for mastery of the sea and de-
Plate XVIII  WAR IN THE ART OF
THE 5TH CENTURY B.C.

1. Red-figured wine-cup (*kantharos*) painted by Duris. The picture shows the fight between Greeks, led by Heracles, and Amazons. The idea is to represent the victorious fight of Greece against the East. Attic work of about 490–480 B.C. Brussels Museum.

2. Red-figured cup painted by Brygos. The pictures represent the capture of Troy by the Greeks with all its horrors. On one side we see Priam taking refuge at the altar of Apollo, and Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles, using the boy Astyanax to brain him with. On the other side a wild fight is going on. The heroic woman who defends her boy is Andromache. Attic work of about 480 B.C. Paris, Louvre. After Furtwängler-Reichhold.
2. RED-FIGURED CUP. CAPTURE OF TROY
manded, above all, a fleet and money; and she, as an inland and agricultural power, possessed neither. Nor was the Corinthian fleet a match even for the fleet of Corcyra. Athens, on the other hand, had a fleet, a large reserve of money, control of the trade-routes, a great number of men for service in the fleet and army, and considerable wealth amassed by individual citizens. It is no wonder that Pericles insisted upon war. Still, Sparta did not act without definite grounds for her action. Her chief superiority lay in her army. If Athens decided to fight a pitched battle in defence of her territory, which the Greek cities generally did in their wars with one another, Sparta could easily defeat her on land; and such a defeat might naturally lead to disruption of the Athenian confederation and defection of the allies, in other words, to civil war within the empire. It is probable, too, that Sparta disbelieved in the strength of the Athenian democracy: on the eve of the Persian wars she had managed to interfere in the domestic affairs of Athens and had met with support in the city itself.

Beginning in 431 B.C., the war dragged on for twenty-eight years of almost continuous operations. Thucydides, a contemporary and himself an actor in the war—he was at one time in command of an Athenian force—has left us a description of it, which is one of the noblest monuments of the Greek genius in literature and art—a masterpiece both in detail and in its general survey of a period of primary importance. The course of the war is therefore known to us in all its particulars. The general outline is as follows. The first ten years are somewhat monotonous. The Spartan plan was to invade Attica year after year in harvest time, in order to reduce the population to despair and force the Athenians to fight a decisive battle. Sparta also endeavoured, without much success, to sow division among the subjects of the Athenian Empire. The policy of Athens was to abstain from an engagement on Attic soil, and on this account the population was withdrawn into the city. At the same time the Athenians took every means to seize the western sea-
routes, i.e. the route through the Corinthian Gulf and round the Peloponnese. This was not easy, because most Greek cities in Italy and Sicily were hostile; many of them were Dorian colonies, and Syracuse, a purely Dorian colony, was more hostile than others. Further, it was imperatively necessary for Athens to keep full control over the northern and eastern waters; but this again was a difficult and complicated business. To secure the former of these objects it was not enough to hold the entrance of the Corinthian Gulf: it was necessary to have a maritime base and, if possible, more than one, on the coast of the Peloponnese itself.

Athens suffered a heavy blow when, in 430 B.C., at the very beginning of the war, a destructive plague broke out in the city and crippled her just at the very moment when the exercise of her full strength might have decided the war in her favour. The plague also carried off Pericles, whose genius had sketched out the main lines for conducting the war, and who held all the threads of it in his own hands. Yet, in spite of this incautelable calamity, the strength of Athens was so great that the course of events was, in general, favourable to her. But neither side was able to inflict a decisive blow upon the other. The western trade-route remained open, even after Athens had seized two points in or near the Peloponnese—Pylus and Cythera—and actually captured at Pylus a considerable Spartan force. It became clear that to control one end of this route was not enough, and that a powerful base at both ends was indispensable. As it was, the Peloponnese kept up connexion with Italy and Sicily and could not be forced to surrender. It must have surrendered, had it been possible for Athens to stop the importation of food, especially of grain, from Italy and Sicily.

But Sparta's plan of forcing the Athenian army to fight a decisive battle was a failure also. The devastation of Attica was ineffective, for the Athenian fleets retaliated by ravaging the Peloponnesian coast, and her control of the Black Sea route secured to Athens a supply of grain and fish for food and of raw
materials for manufacture. Revolts among the allies were ruthlessly suppressed. The single success of Sparta was the seizure of Amphipolis in Macedonia and of Chalcidice; but these places were not of vital importance to Athens. Meanwhile the strength of both antagonists was beginning to fail, and the peace party in both countries became prominent and importunate. After ten years of war, when Cleon, the chief of the war-like and imperialistic party, was killed in Thrace and predominating influence passed to Nicias, a man of small ability and a lover of peace, Sparta and Athens concluded a peace and even an alliance. This peace, which dates from 421 B.C., is called in history the Peace of Nicias.

Lasting this peace could not be. The Athenians were conscious of their strength and aware that the chance of victory was still, on the whole, on their side. Still the foundations of the Athenian Empire were shaking, and their confederation was threatened with gradual dissolution from within. The Persian spectre again raised its head in the East, and Persian gold found easy access to the pockets of orators who attacked Athens in the allied cities. Nothing but complete success could save Athens: a partial victory was little better than defeat. This point of view was expressed in set terms by Alcibiades, the nephew of Pericles, an able general and dexterous politician, and an incarnation of the virtues and vices which marked Athenian character in her time of empire. The military problem and the political problem were both clear to him. In Greece Sparta was invulnerable. Decisive success was attainable only by complete control at sea; and, for this purpose, it was necessary that the Greeks in Italy and Sicily should be included in the Athenian confederation. Syracuse was the Athens of the West; and it could not be expected that this Dorian rival should enter the alliance of her own free will. One course remained—to compel her to come in. This was the design of Alcibiades. If successful, it would bring speedy and certain victory; and failure was improbable, because no one expected such a step on the part of Athens.
The enterprise was planned and carried out on a great scale. In 415 B.C. a formidable expedition was suddenly sent westwards. The plan of campaign was carefully worked out, and all the threads of it were in the hands of Alcibiades, its author and the leader of the expedition. But at the very start a decisive blow was dealt to their design by the Athenians themselves. His political opponents first prosecuted Alcibiades on a frivolous charge, and then prevented an investigation while he was still on the spot; when he had started, they stirred up the people against him and condemned him in absence. This was a fatal blow to the whole enterprise. He fled to Sparta and revealed to the Spartans all the details of his plan. Nicias, his successor, had no plan of his own and was incompetent to devise one. For all this, the Athenian armament was so powerful that at first the capture of Syracuse seemed possible. But Nicias was slow and made mistake after mistake. Sparta had time to throw reinforcements into Syracuse under a competent general, who had got accurate information from Alcibiades concerning the resources of Athens and the weak points of the expedition. The affair ended with the complete destruction, in 413 B.C., of the Athenian army and navy.

So the stake was lost and the fate of the Athenian Empire settled. The chief assets of Athens, her fleet and her reserve, had perished at Syracuse; for nearly all the reserve had been spent in fitting out the expedition; and it was impossible to replace them. And yet the weakness and poverty of Sparta prolonged the agony for nearly ten years more. For victory Sparta needed a fleet, and for a fleet she needed money; but she and her partisans in Greece, already ruined by the war, could supply neither of these requisites. The Italian and Sicilian Greeks were never inclined to give her active and steady support, and now they were threatened with a fresh attack from Carthage. Persia was the one possible source from which funds might be got for continuing the war. Sparta did not hesitate: she even agreed to hand back the Greeks in Asia Minor to Persian rule. But Persia was slow to act.
Each satrap in Asia Minor had a policy of his own to carry on, so that the affair took time. Also Sparta prolonged the negotiations, because she could not all at once make up her mind to betray the interests of Greece. The proposal was that Persia should send a Phoenician squadron to assist Sparta, and should provide pay for the crews of the Spartan ships.

Of this delay Athens took advantage. The general despair after the Sicilian disaster had enabled the oligarchs to seize control for a few months and to set up the Council of Four Hundred. But the democratic party soon turned them out and adopted as their watchword 'a fight to a finish', whereas the oligarchs were anxious to stop the war as soon as possible. In the restoration of democracy a leading part was played by the fleet; and the fleet also insisted that Alcibiades should be pardoned. The exile had quarrelled with Sparta and fled to Asia Minor, where he was now trying to hinder the negotiations between Sparta and the Persian magnates. Restoration from exile, a fresh outburst of patriotism at Athens, and the hesitations of Sparta, enabled Alcibiades to gain considerable successes during the next four years. In 410 B.C. he won a great naval victory off Cyzicus and began by degrees to bring pressure on the Spartans and Persians. But a trifling failure incurred by one of his subordinates at Notium in 407 B.C. gave a handle to his enemies at Athens, and they contrived to secure his condemnation in absence. He fled to the coast of Asia Minor and watched from there the course of the war. At the same time an energetic satrap made his appearance in Asia Minor, in the person of Cyrus, younger son of Darius II; and Sparta found in Lysander a skilful, brave, and ambitious general, not inferior in his aptitude for war to Alcibiades himself.

After the expulsion of Alcibiades the Athenians made one more great effort. The chief object of the Spartans and Persians was to seize the north-eastern waters and so to deprive Athens of food-supplies from the Black Sea; they had already driven her from the Anatolian coast and some of the chief Aegean islands. An Athenian fleet was now sent to defend the Hellespont and
began with success: the Spartans were defeated at Arginusae in 406 B.C. But the battle was fought during a storm, and many Athenian sailors were drowned. The failure of the generals to rescue their drowning men caused an explosion of anger in the popular assembly at Athens. The generals were deprived of their command, and those of them who had come home were put to death. Such summary justice did not encourage their successors. To this cause among others the Athenians owed their final and decisive defeat, which took place at Aegospotami near the entrance of the Hellespont.

With the fleet the last hope of Athens perished. She was forced to accept the terms of peace dictated by Sparta in 404 B.C. The walls of the Piraeus were levelled, and also the walls connecting the fortifications of the Piraeus with those of Athens; the fleet, with the exception of twelve ships, was destroyed; and Athens was forced to join the Lacedaemonian league, in complete dependence upon Sparta. She continued, however, to exist as an independent state, in spite of the persistence with which Megara and Corinth demanded her complete destruction. Sparta even carried her magnanimous policy so far that she did not require Athens to retain the oligarchical government set up by Lysander, which was carried on by Critias and the rest of the Thirty Tyrants. When Thrasybulus overthrew the Thirty and restored the democracy, this revolution was quietly accepted by the Spartans.

The fundamental question of Greek politics was thus settled, and settled once for all. Local freedom and self-determination for each state had been fought; and the price paid was the collapse of the one attempt to consolidate Greece into a single political unit. It is true that this attempt was based on the ascendency of one state over all the rest. We shall see later that Greece endeavoured to settle the question of national unity by resorting to federation. But by that time the existence of an independent Greek power, based upon an association of free city-states, was altogether out of the question.
GREEK CIVILIZATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FROM 500 TO 400 B.C.

After the defeat of Persia by Athens and Sparta, Athens became the chief political power in the Greek world, especially in central Greece, the islands, and Asia Minor; and to her also fell the leadership in economic development and in culture. In these departments, Sparta had neither the power nor the wish to rival her, and Asia Minor was entirely dependent upon her. The Greeks in Italy and Sicily still kept their economic and cultural importance but such outposts of Hellas had little influence on the life of those Greeks who lived round the Aegean. Athens, on the other hand, had acquired not only great political influence but a still greater moral authority. Greece recognized that Athenian persistence and patriotism had saved her, when the whole nation was threatened with the fate of the Ionian Greeks. For this reason Athens and all her doings were now watched with intense interest by the whole nation.

Life at Athens itself underwent radical changes. The city had become the capital of Hellas, and the citizens were conscious of this. Perhaps the growth of the city itself is the most obvious proof of this change in the position of Athens. In the sixth century B.C. the city, though large, had grown up irregularly; its religious centre was on the Acropolis, which had once been occupied by the fortified palace of the kings and was now consecrated to Athena, the guardian goddess of Athens, and the site of her