

CHAPTER XXI

SICILY: THE TYRANT AND THE LIBERATOR

413-337 B.C.

276. The Carthaginians invade Sicily (409-404 B.C.). — The fall of Athens was a great misfortune to the Greeks of the West as well as to those of the East. For nearly seventy years the terror of her name had kept both the Carthaginians and the Persians at bay; but on the overthrow of her naval supremacy these two great foreign powers again hoped to conquer parts of Hellas. On the invitation of Segesta, which was still threatened by Selinus,¹ Carthage sent over to Sicily a vast fleet conveying an army of a hundred thousand men under King Han'ni-bal, grandson of that Hamilcar who had met his death at Himera. This great armament laid siege to Selinus; on the ninth day it stormed the city and butchered the inhabitants (409 B.C.). Thence Hannibal marched to Himera, where the siege and the massacre were repeated. Three thousand captives were led to the spot where Hamilcar had sacrificed himself,² and there were killed with horrid torture. In this way, Hannibal sought to appease the hungry appetite of his grandfather's ghost.

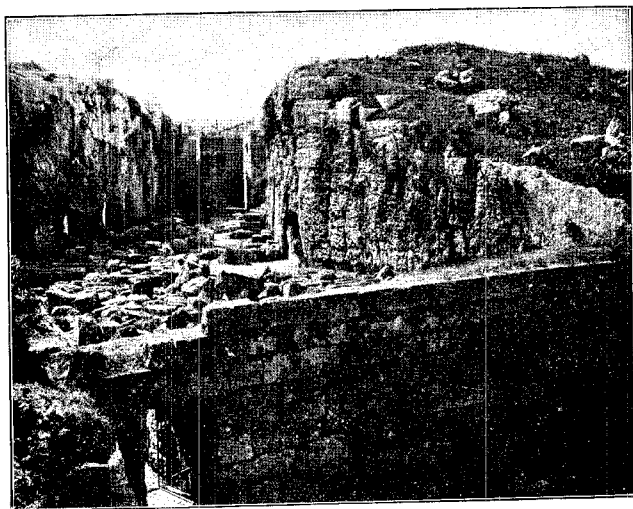
A fresh army of mercenaries next invested Acragas, then the wealthiest and most luxurious city in the Greek world. Though reënforced by their neighbors, the inhabitants finally abandoned their city and settled in Leontini. Himilcon took up his winter quarters in deserted Acragas, and sent much of its wealth, including many works of art, to Carthage (405 B.C.).

Soon afterwards a young officer of Syracuse, named Di-o-nys'i-us, made himself tyrant of his city. He compelled the people of Ge'la and of Cam-a-ri'na to abandon their cities to the invader and to retire to Syracuse. Great was the indignation of all classes against

¹ § 257.

² § 208.

the usurper; but through his mercenaries he maintained himself against every attempt to assassinate or to depose him. In 404 B.C. he concluded a treaty with the Carthaginians, by which he yielded to them the whole island except the Sicels — a native nation in the interior — and the Greeks of the eastern coast. The Cartha-



FORT EURYELUS

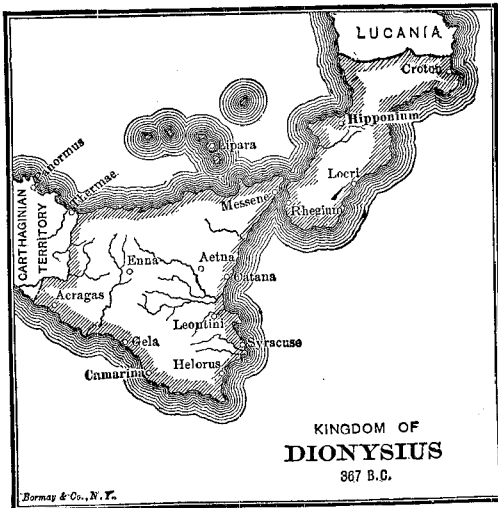
(A corner in the Wall of Dionysius at Syracuse, interior view; from a photograph)

ginians, for their part, acknowledged him as the absolute ruler of Syracuse.

277. **War with Carthage (397-392 B.C.).** — But Dionysius did not intend to yield Sicily forever to the enemy. Seven years he busied himself with increasing his power and with preparing for war on a grand scale. He built an immense wall about Syracuse; he organized an army of eighty thousand infantry; his engineers invented a new instrument, afterward known as the ballista, for throwing large stones against the enemy's walls. In his new fleet were more than three hundred vessels, some of them quinqueremes, — huge galleys with five banks of oars, invented by his shipwrights. Though utterly unscrupulous, though he ground down the rich

with taxes and violated nearly every sentiment dear to the Greek heart, yet he gained a certain degree of popularity by the military preparations which made him appear as a strong champion of Hellas against the barbarian.

He began war upon Carthage in 397 B.C., and with his vast armament nearly swept the Phoenicians from the island; but in



the following year Himilcon, landing in Sicily, regained everything which Carthage had lost, and Messene in addition. Most of the Messenians escaped, but Himilcon compelled his men to burn the woodwork and to grind the stones to powder. The invaders then defeated the fleet of Dionysius and besieged the tyrant in Syracuse by land

and sea. The newly built ramparts saved the city. The siege was raised and the enemy pushed back till he held but the extreme western end of the island. All the rest Dionysius secured by the treaty of 392 B.C.

278. Conquests of Dionysius in Italy (to 287 B.C.); Other Wars. — Meantime Dionysius was conquering the Greeks of southern Italy. In the year 387 B.C. we find his kingdom extending as far as Croton. Some of the conquered people he removed to Syracuse, others he sold into slavery. Everywhere he showed the utmost disregard for sacred places and institutions, but the Greeks were powerless to resist.

In two more wars which he carried on with Carthage, he failed to

dislodge the foreigners from Sicily, but still held the larger part of the island, as well as his Italian possessions. He aided the Lacedaemonians in maintaining their supremacy over eastern Greece,¹ and his power was recognized as the greatest in the Hellenic world.

279. Dionysius in Peace; his Character. — Though engaged in wars to the end, in his later years a desire for peace grew upon him. He was a poet as well as a general. A story is told that Philoxenus, a poet at his court, was imprisoned in a stone quarry as a punishment for criticising the tyrant's verse. When liberated soon afterward and invited to hear another recital, he endured the reading for a few moments, and then cried out, "Take me back to the stone quarry!" A splendid display of horses and chariots, of athletes and actors, which Dionysius made at the Olympic games, in like manner won no applause. The orator Lysias, from Athens, tried to incite the Greeks there assembled to begin war upon the tyrant by plundering his rich tents. The holiness of the festival prevented this outrage, but the reciters of his poems were hissed, and his chariots were overturned in the race. Far from winning the favor and admiration of the Greeks by his exhibit, the tyrant discovered that he was universally hated.

In 367 B.C. Dionysius died, after reigning thirty-eight years. No tyrant could have ruled so long without the possession of strong qualities. The private character of Dionysius was without reproach. On the other hand, he never hesitated at bloodshed, confiscation of property, or anything else which would make him safe. Many spies in his pay watched the movements of those whom he suspected at home and abroad. With all his failings, he performed a service for Greece and for Europe by protecting Hellenic civilization in Italy and Sicily.

280. Civil Strife (367-345); Timoleon the Liberator (345-337 B.C.). — A period of civil strife following the death of Dionysius was at length ended by Timoleon, a general sent out by Corinth. Timoleon was a man of remarkable ability and strength of character. Gradually he overthrew the tyrants who since the death of Dionysius had usurped the power in many Sicilian cities. He then gave the cities good laws and settled governments. On the

¹ § 291.

Cri-mi'sus River he met the vast mercenary force of Carthage which had come to Sicily for the purpose of overwhelming him. As his small army marched up the hill from the top of which the soldiers expected to get their first view of the enemy, their religious fears were aroused at sight of a train of mules laden with parsley, — a plant used for decorating tombs. But with the exclamation that the parsley chaplet was the reward of victory in the Isthmian games, Timoleon seized some of the plant and made a wreath for his head; the officers, then the soldiers, followed his example; and the army swept over the hill like a host of victorious athletes. Throwing his enthusiastic troops upon the Carthaginian centre, which had just crossed the Crimisus, he crushed it with one mighty blow. A sudden storm beat full in the faces of the enemy; thousands were drowned in attempting to recross the swollen stream, and thousands were killed or made captive. The victory was complete (340 B.C.).

When he had liberated all Greek Sicily from Carthage and from tyranny, he joined the cities in a federation, with Syracuse as leader in war. All members of the union were guaranteed their freedom. He next turned his attention to the improvement of the country. As the long anarchy had left large tracts of land uncultivated and without owners, he invited Greeks from other countries to come and settle on the vacant farms. Thousands answered the call; a few peaceful years brought prosperity to fruitful Sicily, and Timoleon lived to see the desolate island bloom again like a garden.

After ruling eight years, he resigned his dictatorship, and passed the remainder of his days a private citizen of Syracuse, honored by all as their liberator. When he died his fellow-citizens established an annual festival in memory of the man "who had suppressed the tyrants, had overthrown the foreigner, had replenished the desolate cities, and had restored to the Sicilians the privilege of living under their own laws."

281. Summary of Sicilian History (413-337 B.C.). — (1) After the ruin of the Athenian armament in Sicily, the Carthaginians invaded the island and destroyed Selinus, Himera, and Acragas. (2) With great difficulty Dionysius, the able tyrant of Syracuse, saved his own city from conquest at their hands, and eventually won back from them the greater part of the

island. (3) Meanwhile he had built a powerful navy and had made Syracuse the most strongly fortified city in Europe. (4) Afterward he extended his kingdom in Italy as far as Croton. (5) His great achievement was the protection of Europe from Carthaginian conquest. (6) After his death came a period of civil strife, in which some cities fell under tyrants, others under the dominion of Carthage. (7) From this condition they were liberated by Timoleon, who combined great ability with patriotism. (8) Thereupon a period of extraordinary prosperity set in.

Suggestive Questions

1. Compare Dionysius I with Pisistratus. 2. Why was Dionysius needed in Sicily? 3. Describe the methods employed by him in obtaining and in keeping the supreme power. 4. What is your estimate of his military ability? 5. From the picture of the ruins of Fort Euryelus (p. 247), what may we infer as to the magnitude of his defences? 6. How did his realm compare in extent and in strength with the Athenian Empire of the fifth century or the Lacedaemonian of the fourth? 7. What do we find to admire in Timoleon?

Note-book Topics

- I. **Dionysius.** — Bury, *History of Greece*, 639-666; Holm, *History of Greece*, ii. 521-525, iii. 130-141.
- II. **Timoleon.** — Plutarch, *Timoleon*; Holm, iii. 401-404; Bury, 673-679; Grote, *History of Greece*, xi. 135-197.

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