

CHAPTER XXIII

THEBES ATTEMPTS TO GAIN THE SUPREMACY

371-362 B.C.

297. The Unfailing Courage of Sparta. — When news of the misfortune reached Sparta, the ephors delivered “the names of the slain to their friends and families, with a word of warning to the women not to make any loud lamentation, but to bear their sorrow in silence; and the next day it was a striking spectacle to see those who had relations among the slain moving to and fro in public with bright and radiant looks, whilst of those whose friends were reported to be living, barely a man was to be seen, and these flitted by with lowered heads and scowling brows, as if in humiliation.”¹

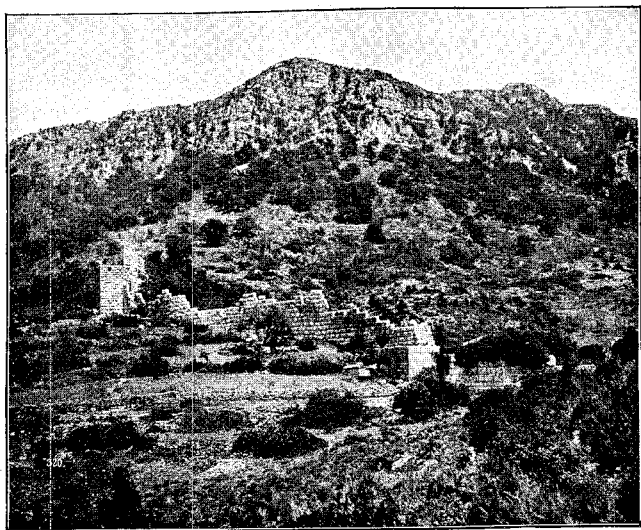
Spartan laws degraded runaways, and deprived them of citizenship and of all other honors; they had to go unwashed and meanly clad, with beards half shaven. Any one who met them in the street was at liberty to beat them, and they dared not resist. On the present occasion Sparta had sent out seven hundred citizens, of whom three hundred had disgraced themselves by surviving defeat. What should be done with them?

As Sparta had only about fifteen hundred citizens remaining, to disfranchise three hundred would be ruinous. Agesilaus, who was requested by the government to settle this serious question, decided to let the law sleep in the present case, to be revived, however, for the future. In this way he piloted his country safely through the crisis.

298. Effects of the Battle on Peloponnese. — In Peloponnese the wildest confusion and anarchy arose. To the friends of Sparta it seemed that the world was falling into chaos, now that she had lost control, while her enemies rejoiced in the freedom assured them by her downfall. The first to profit by the revolution were the

¹ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, vi. 4.

Arcadians, most of whom were still shepherds and peasants, living in villages, and following the Lacedaemonians in war. They now resolved to unite in a permanent league for the defence of their liberties. They then founded a new city, Meg-a-lop'o-lis, to be the seat of government, and a stronghold against Sparta. When the Arcadians were attacked by the Lacedaemonians, Epaminondas came



MOUNT ITHOME AND CITY WALL OF MESSENE

(From a photograph)

to their help at the head of an army of Thebans and their allies — in all, seventy thousand men. With this great host he invaded Laconia, and ravaged it from end to end; for the first time in history, Spartan women saw the smoke from the camp-fires of an enemy.

Unable to capture Sparta, Epaminondas went to Messenia to aid the revolt of that country. With his help the Messenians built and fortified a new city, Messene, near the citadel of Mount Ithome, on a spot made sacred by many a heroic struggle for liberty. Messenia became an independent state. The result was that Lacedaemon, deprived of a third of her territory, sank to the condition of a

second-rate power. Thereafter she would consent to no compact with other Greek states which did not include the recovery of her lost territory. As the Greeks would not grant this condition, they were deprived of Sparta's invaluable aid in future wars for the preservation of their liberty.

299. Theban Relations with Northern Greece, with Persia, and with Athens. — Within the next few years the Thebans extended their influence over Thessaly and Macedon. This was the work of Pelopidas. As the majority of the continental states were allies of the Thebans, they were now the leading power through the entire length of the peninsula.

This interference everywhere disturbed existing arrangements but failed to bring peace; their military strength fell short of their ambition. When it became apparent to the Thebans themselves that they were too weak to maintain order in Hellas, they sent Pelopidas as ambassador to Susa to bring the influence and money of the king to bear once more in favor of peace. Artaxerxes was ready to dictate another treaty; but the Greeks had learned to despise him, and would no longer endure his interference. As this disgraceful business failed, Epaminondas turned resolutely to the almost hopeless task of reducing Greece to order by force of iron. The chief resistance to his plan came now from Athens. The maritime city he had to meet on her own element, as she refused to dismantle her fleet at the command of Persia. Though as well supplied as Attica with coasts, Boeotia had little commerce and no fleet worthy of mention before the time of Epaminondas. But suddenly his state became a naval power, the great tactician stepped into the place of admiral, and an armament went forth to sweep Athens from the sea.

300. The Battle of Mantinea (362 B.C.). — But Epaminondas had no time to complete this task. He had already made three invasions of Peloponnese, and again he found it necessary to march across the Isthmus to restore order. Many allies joined him; Athens and Sparta were his chief enemies. The Theban commander attempted by forced marches to capture Sparta, then Mantinea, in the hope that he might thus establish peace without a battle; but in both attempts he failed.

Then came the conflict at Mantinea. Notwithstanding their tedious journeys, the condition of his troops was excellent; they were full of enthusiasm and had absolute confidence in their commander. "There was no labor which they would shrink from, either by night or by day; there was no danger they would flinch from; and with the scantiest provisions, their discipline never failed them. And so, when he gave them his last orders to prepare for impending battle, they obeyed with alacrity. He spoke the word; the cavalry fell to whitening their helmets, the heavy infantry of the Arcadians began inscribing the club (of Heracles) as a crest on their shields, in imitation of the Thebans, and all were engaged in sharpening their lances and swords and in polishing their heavy shields."¹

Taking the enemy by surprise, Epaminondas repeated the tactics of Leuctra with perfect success. His charging column, now in the form of a wedge, cut through the opposing ranks and shattered the enemy's host.

The great commander fell mortally wounded with a javelin. Carried to the rear, he heard the victorious shouts of the Thebans, but when told that his fellow-generals were both dead, he advised his countrymen to make peace. The surgeon then drew out the javelin point, and Epaminondas died. Pelopidas had recently been slain in battle in Thessaly. The heroes were buried where they fell; and their gravestones in northern and southern Greece stood as monuments of Theban leadership, which ended with their lives.

Pelopidas was bold and chivalrous, a zealous patriot and an able commander. Epaminondas was a great military genius. Personally he was without ambition, content to live as a private citizen, or to serve his state in the lowest offices. Absolutely pure in character, he aimed only to promote the welfare of his city and of Hellas. Though in statesmanship he was as able as any of his time, though his ideals were high and his methods honorable, he failed to discover the evils of the Hellenic state system, much more to remedy them. Fortune was kind to him and to his worthy helper in cutting them off at the height of their renown, — before they could see the failure of their policy and be made responsible for it.

¹ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, vii. 5.

301. Summary of the Attempted Supremacy of Thebes; Estimate of her Policy. — (1) The battle of Leuctra destroyed the Spartan supremacy and made Thebes the foremost military power in Greece. (2) With Theban help Arcadia and Messenia revolted against Sparta, and became independent states. (3) Thebes extended her influence not only over Peloponnese and central Greece, but also over Thessaly and Macedon. (4) Though attempting to take the place of Sparta as the head of Greece, she merely disturbed existing arrangements, and failed altogether to establish peace. (5) Thereupon she called upon the Persian king for aid, but the Greeks now despised his power. (6) In making a new effort to win control of Peloponnese, Thebes fought the battle of Mantinea. (7) The death of Epaminondas in this battle destroyed her last chance of supremacy.

Had Epaminondas lived and succeeded in his plans, there is no reason for believing that he could have benefited Hellas. The Thebans were no better qualified for ruling than the Spartans had been. Their chief fault was their narrowness. Instead of making all the Boeotians Thebans, with full privileges in the leading city, they attempted to subject them to the condition of perioeci; and some towns they even destroyed. Their more remote allies they had no thought of binding to themselves by institutions such as hold the states of our nation together. Peloponnese, united under Lacedaemon, had been the citadel of Hellas, the centre of resistance to foreign aggression; and though Sparta was despotic, the Greek states had been learning of late to guard their liberties against her, while they still looked to her for protection and guidance in time of danger. All this was now changed. When Sparta had fallen, Thebes, taking her place, broke up Peloponnese into warring camps, weakened the only power which was capable of defending Hellas, and spread confusion everywhere. As a result, Greece was in chaos at the time she most needed unity and leadership in order to defend herself against the rising power of Macedon.

Suggestive Questions

1. Were the Athenians wise in joining Lacedaemon against Thebes? Give an account of the previous relations between Athens and Lacedaemon.
2. Why was the foundation of Theban supremacy weak? 3. Compare the policy of Thebes with that of Sparta. Did Thebes introduce any improvement? 4. What was the effect of the Theban policy on Hellas? 5. Could we say that any Greek state was blameworthy for refusing to submit to another? for attempting to gain the supremacy over others?

Note-book Topics

I. **The Battle of Mantinea.** — Fling, *Source Book of Greek History*, 278-285 (Xenophon, *Hellenica*).

II. **Epaminondas.** — Plutarch, *Pelopidas*; Sankey, *Spartan and Theban Supremacies*, chs. xi, xii; Bury, *History of Greece*, 566, 592-626; Holm, *History of Greece*, iii. chs. viii-x; Curtius, *History of Greece*, bk. vi.

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