

Source: The Histories of Polybius by Polybius □ (translated by Evelyn S. Shuckburgh 1889)

BOOK II

1. IN the previous book I have described how the Romans, having subdued all Italy, began to aim at foreign dominion; how they crossed to Sicily, and the reasons of the war which they entered into against the Carthaginians for the possession of that island. Next I stated at what period they began the formation of a navy; and what befell both the one side and the other up to the end of the war; the consequence of which was that the Carthaginians entirely evacuated Sicily, and the Romans took possession of the whole island, except such parts as were still under the rule of Hiero. Following these events I endeavoured to describe how the mutiny of the mercenaries against Carthage, in what is called the Libyan War, burst out; the lengths to which the shocking outrages in it went; its surprises and extraordinary incidents, until its conclusion, and the final triumph of Carthage. I must now relate the events which immediately succeeded these, touching summarily upon each in accordance with my original plan.

Recapitulation of
the subjects
treated in
Book I.

As soon as they had brought the Libyan war to a conclusion the Carthaginian government collected an army and despatched it under the command of Hamilcar to Iberia. This general took over the command of the troops, and with his son Hannibal, then nine years old, crossing by the Pillars of Hercules, set about recovering the Carthaginian possessions in Iberia. He spent nine years in Iberia, and after reducing many Iberian tribes by war or diplomacy to obedience to Carthage he died in a manner worthy of his great achievements; for he lost his life in a battle against the most warlike and powerful tribes, in which he showed a con-

B.C. 238.
Hamilcar and
his son Hannibal
sent to Spain.

B.C. 238-229.

spicuous and even reckless personal gallantry. The Carthaginians appointed his son-in-law Hasdrubal to succeed him, who was at the time in command of the fleet.

2. It was at this same period that the Romans for the first time crossed to Illyricum and that part of Europe with an army. The history of this expedition must not be treated as immaterial; but must be carefully studied by those who wish to understand clearly the story I have undertaken to tell, and to trace the progress and consolidation of the Roman Empire.

Agron, king of the Illyrians, was the son of Pleuratus, and possessed the most powerful force, both by land and sea, of any of the kings who had reigned in Illyria before him. By a bribe received from Demetrius he was induced to promise help to the Medionians, who were at that time being besieged by the Aetolians, who, being unable to persuade the Medionians to join their league, had determined to reduce the city by force. They accordingly levied their full army, pitched their camp under the walls of the city, and kept up a continuous blockade, using every means to force their way in, and every kind of siege-machine. But when the time of the annual election of their Strategus drew near, the besieged being now in great distress, and seeming likely every day to surrender, the existing Strategus made an appeal to the Aetolians. He argued that as he had had during his term of office all the suffering and the danger, it was but fair that when they got possession of the town he should have the apportioning of the spoil, and the privilege of inscribing his name on such arms as should be preserved for dedication. This was resisted by some, and especially by those who were candidates for the office, who urged upon the Assembly not to prejudge this matter, but to leave it open for fortune to determine who was to be invested with this honour; and, finally, the Aetolians decided that whoever was general when the city was taken should share the apportioning of the spoils, and the honour of inscribing the arms, with his predecessor.

3. The decision was come to on the day before the election of a new Strategus, and the transference of the command had,

according to the Aetolian custom, to take place. But on that very night a hundred galleys with five thousand Illyrians on board, sailed up to land near Medion. Having dropped anchor at daybreak, they effected a disembarkation with secrecy and despatch; they then formed in the order customary in their country, and advanced in their several companies against the Aetolian lines. These last were overwhelmed with astonishment at the unexpected nature and boldness of the move; but they had long been inspired with overweening self-confidence, and having full reliance in their own forces were far from being dismayed. They drew up the greater part of their hoplites and cavalry in front of their lines on the level ground, and with a portion of their cavalry and their light infantry they hastened to occupy some rising ground in front of their camp, which nature had made easily defensible. A single charge, however, of the Illyrians, whose numbers and close order gave them irresistible weight, served to dislodge the light-armed troops, and forced the cavalry who were on the ground with them to retire to the hoplites. But the Illyrians, being on the higher ground, and charging down from it upon the Aetolian troops formed up on the plain, routed them without difficulty; the Medionians at the same time making a diversion in their favour by sallying out of the town and charging the Aetolians. Thus, after killing a great number, and taking a still greater number prisoners, and becoming masters also of their arms and baggage, the Illyrians, having carried out the orders of their king, conveyed their baggage and the rest of the booty to their boats, and immediately set sail for their own country.

4. This was a most unexpected relief to the Medionians. They met in public assembly and deliberated on the whole business, and especially as to the inscribing the arms reserved for dedication. They decided, in mockery of the Aetolian decree, that the inscription should contain the name of the Aetolian commander on the day of battle, and of the candidates for succession to his office. And indeed Fortune seems, in what happened to them, to have designed a display of her power to the rest of mankind. The very thing which these men were in momentary expectation of undergoing at the hands of their

The Illyrians
relieve Medion.

enemies, she put it in their power to inflict upon those enemies, and all within a very brief interval. The unexpected disaster of the Aetolians, too, may teach all the world not to calculate on the future as though it were the actually existent, and not to reckon securely on what may still turn out quite otherwise, but to allow a certain margin to the unexpected. And as this is true everywhere and to every man, so is it especially true in war.

When his galleys returned, and he heard from his officers the events of the expedition, King Agron was Death of Agron, who is succeeded by his wife Teuta, B. C. 231. so beside himself with joy at the idea of having conquered the Aetolians, whose confidence in their own prowess had been extreme, that, giving himself over to excessive drinking and other similar indulgences, he was attacked by a pleurisy of which in a few days he died. His wife Teuta succeeded him on the throne; and managed the various details of administration by means of friends whom she could trust. But her woman's head had been turned by the success just related, and she fixed her gaze upon that, and had no eyes for anything going on outside the country. Her first measure was to grant letters of marque to privateers, authorising them to plunder all whom they fell in with; and she next collected a fleet and military force as large as the former one, and despatched them with general instructions to the leaders to regard every land as belonging to an enemy.

5. Their first attack was to be upon the coast of Elis and Teuta's piratical fleet, B.C. 230. Messenia, which had been from time immemorial the scene of the raids of the Illyrians. For owing to the length of their seaboard, and to the fact that their most powerful cities were inland, troops raised to resist them had a great way to go, and were long in coming to the spot where the Illyrian pirates landed; who accordingly overran those districts, and swept them clean without having anything to fear. However, when this fleet was off Phoenice in Epirus they landed to get supplies. There they Takes Phoenice in Epirus. fell in with some Gauls, who to the number of eight hundred were stationed at Phoenice, being in the pay of the Epirotes; and contracted with them to betray the town into their hands. Having made this

bargain, they disembarked and took the town and everything in it at the first blow, the Gauls within the walls acting in collusion with them. When this news was known, the Epirotes raised a general levy and came in haste to the rescue. Arriving in the neighbourhood of Phoenice, they pitched their camp so as to have the river which flows past Phoenice between them and the enemy, tearing up the planks of the bridge over it for security. But news being brought them that Scerdilaidas with five thousand Illyrians was marching overland by way of the pass near Antigoneia, they detached some of their forces to guard that town; while the main body gave themselves over to an unrestrained indulgence in all the luxuries which the country could supply; and among other signs of demoralisation they neglected the necessary precaution of posting sentries and night pickets. The division of their forces, as well as the careless conduct of the remainder, did not escape the observation of the Illyrians; who, sallying out at night, and replacing the planks on the bridge, crossed the river safely, and having secured a strong position, remained there quietly for the rest of the night. At daybreak both armies drew up their forces in front of the town and engaged. In this battle the Epirotes were decidedly worsted: a large number of them fell, still more were taken prisoners, and the rest fled in the direction of the country of the Atintanes.

6. Having met with this reverse, and having lost all the hopes which they had cherished, the Epirotes turned to the despatch of ambassadors to the Aetolians and Achaeans, earnestly begging for their assistance. Moved by pity for their misfortunes, these nations consented; and an army of relief sent out by them arrived at Helicranum. Meanwhile the Illyrians who had occupied Phoenice, having effected a junction with Scerdilaidas, advanced with him to this place, and, taking up a position opposite to this army of relief, wished at first to give it battle. But they were embarrassed by the unfavourable nature of the ground; and just then a despatch was received from Teuta, ordering their instant return, because certain Illyrians had revolted to the Dardani

Accordingly, after merely stopping to plunder Epirus, they made a truce with the inhabitants, by which they undertook to deliver up all freemen, and the city of Phoenice, for a fixed ransom. They then took the slaves they had captured and the rest of their booty to their galleys, and some of them sailed away; while those who were with Scerdilaidas retired by land through the pass at Antigoneia, after inspiring no small or ordinary terror in the minds of the Greeks who lived along the coast. For seeing the most securely placed and powerful city of Epirus thus unexpectedly reduced to slavery, they one and all began henceforth to feel anxious, not merely as in former times for their property in the open country, but for the safety of their own persons and cities.

The Epirotes were thus unexpectedly preserved: but so far from trying to retaliate on those who had wronged them, or expressing gratitude to those who had come to their relief, they sent ambassadors in conjunction with the Acarnanians to Queen Teuta, and made a treaty with the Illyrians, in virtue of which they engaged henceforth to co-operate with them and against the Achaean and Aetolian leagues. All which proceedings showed conclusively the levity of their conduct towards men who had stood their friends, as well as an originally short-sighted policy in regard to their own interests.

7. That men, in the infirmity of human nature, should fall into misfortunes which defy calculation, is the fault not of the sufferers but of Fortune, and of those who do the wrong; but that they should from mere levity, and with their eyes open, thrust themselves upon the most serious disasters is without dispute the fault of the victims themselves. Therefore it is that pity and sympathy and assistance await those whose failure is due to Fortune: reproach and rebuke from all men of sense those who have only their own folly to thank for it.

It is the latter that the Epirotes now richly deserved at the hands of the Greeks. For in the first place, who in his senses, knowing the common report as to the character of the Gauls,

The career of a
body of Gallie
mercenaries,

would not have hesitated to trust to them a city so rich, and offering so many opportunities for treason? And again, who would not have been on his guard against the bad character of this

particular body of them? For they had originally been driven from their native country by an outburst of popular indignation at an act of treachery done by them to their own kinsfolk and relations. Then having been received by the Carthaginians, because of the exigencies of the war in which the latter were engaged, and being drafted into Agrigentum to garrison it (being at Agrigentum, the time more than three thousand strong), they seized the opportunity of a dispute as to pay, arising between the soldiers and their generals, to plunder the city; and again being brought by the Carthaginians into Eryx to perform the same duty, they first endeavoured to betray the city and those who were shut up in it with them to the Romans who were besieging it; and when they failed in that treason, they deserted in a body to the enemy: whose trust they also betrayed by plundering the temple of Aphrodite in Eryx. Thoroughly convinced, therefore, of their abominable character, as soon as they had made peace with Carthage the Romans made it their first business to disarm them, put them on board ship, and forbid them ever to enter any part of Italy. These were the men whom the Epirotes made the protectors of their democracy and the guardians of their laws! To such men as these they entrusted their most wealthy city! How then can it be denied that they were the cause of their own misfortunes?

My object, in commenting on the blind folly of the Epirotes, is to point out that it is never wise to introduce a foreign garrison, especially of barbarians, which is too strong to be controlled.

8. To return to the Illyrians. From time immemorial they had oppressed and pillaged vessels sailing from Italy; and now while their fleet was engaged at Phoenice a considerable number of them, separated from the main body, committed acts of piracy on a number of Italian merchants: some they merely plundered, others they murdered, and a great many they carried off alive into captivity. Now, though complaints against the Illyrians had reached the Roman government in times past, they had always been

Disarmed by the
Romans.

The Romans inter-
fered,
B. C. 230.

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