

Source: The Histories of Polybius by Polybius □
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BOOK VIII

THE NECESSITY OF CAUTION IN DEALING WITH AN ENEMY

1. TIBERIUS a Roman Pro-consul fell into an ambuscade, and, after offering with his attendants a gallant resistance to the enemy, was killed.

Fall of Tiberius
Sempronius

Now in regard to such catastrophes, whether it is right to blame or pardon the sufferers is by no means a safe matter on which to pronounce an opinion; because it has happened to several men, who have been perfectly correct in all their actions, to fall into these misfortunes, equally with those

Gracchus [Cons.
B.C. 215 and 213]
as he was advancing from Lucania to Capua, by the treachery of the Lucanian Flavius, B.C. 212. Livy, 25, 16.

who do not scruple to transgress principles of right confirmed by the consent of mankind. We should not however idly refrain from pronouncing an opinion: but should blame or condone this or that general, after a review of the necessities of the moment and the circumstances of the case. And my observation will be rendered evident

by the following instances. Archidamus, king of the Lacedaemonians, alarmed at the loss of power which he observed in Cleomenes, fled from Sparta; but being not long afterwards persuaded to return, put himself in the power of the latter. The consequence was that he lost his kingdom and his life together,¹ and left a character not to be defended before posterity on the score of prudence; for while affairs remained in the same state, and the ambition and power of Cleomenes remained in exactly the same position, how

Fall of
Archidamus,
B.C. 226-225.

¹ See 5, 37. According to Phylarchus the murder of Archidamus was against the wish of Cleomenes. Plut. *Cleom.* 5.

could he expect to meet any other fate than he did, if he put himself in the hands of the very men from whom he had before barely escaped destruction by flight? Again Pelopidas of Thebes, though acquainted with the unprincipled character of the tyrant Alexander, and though he knew thoroughly well that every tyrant regards the leaders of liberty as his bitterest enemies, first took upon himself to persuade Epaminondas to stand forth as the champion of democracy, not only in Thebes, but in all Greece also; and then, being in Thessaly in arms, for the express purpose of destroying the absolute rule of Alexander, he yet twice ventured to undertake a mission to him. The consequence was that he fell into the hands of his enemies, did great damage to Thebes, and ruined the reputation he had acquired before; and all by putting a rash and ill advised confidence in the very last person in whom he ought to have done so. Very similar to these cases is that of the Roman Consul Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Asina with his fleet surprised and captured at Lipara, B. C. 260. See I, 21.

2. The conclusion, then, is that those who put themselves in the power of the enemy from want of proper precaution deserve blame; but those who use every practicable precaution not so: for to trust absolutely no one is to make all action impossible; but reasonable action, taken after receiving adequate security, cannot be censured. Adequate securities are oaths, children, wives, and, strongest of all, a blameless past. To be betrayed and entrapped by such a security as any of these is a slur, not on the deceived, but on the deceiver. The first object then should be to seek such securities as it is impossible for the recipient of the confidence to evade; but since such are rare, the next best thing will be to take every reasonable precaution one's self: and then, if we meet with any disaster, we shall at least be acquitted of wrong conduct by the lookers on. And this has been the case with many before now: of which the most conspicuous example, and the one nearest to the times on which we are engaged, will be the fate of Achæus. He

omitted no possible precaution for securing his safety, but thought of everything that it was possible for human ingenuity to conceive: and yet he fell into the power of his enemies. In this instance his misfortune procured the pity and pardon of the outside world for the victim, and nothing but disparagement and loathing for the successful perpetrators. . . .

3. It appears to me not to be alien to my general purpose, and the plan which I originally laid down, to recall the attention of my readers to the magnitude of the events, and the persistency of purpose displayed by the two States of Rome and Carthage. For who could think it otherwise than remarkable that these two powers, while engaged in so serious a war for the possession of Italy, and one no less serious for that of Iberia; and being still both of them equally balanced between uncertain hopes and fears for the future of these wars, and confronted at the very time with battles equally formidable to either, should yet not be content with their existing undertakings: but should raise another controversy as to the possession of Sardinia and Sicily; and not content with merely hoping for all these things, should grasp at them with all the resources of their wealth and warlike forces? Indeed the more we examine into details the greater becomes our astonishment. The Romans had two complete armies under the two Consuls on active service in Italy; two in Iberia in which Gnaeus Cornelius commanded the land, Publius Cornelius the naval forces; and naturally the same was the case with the Carthaginians. But besides this, a Roman fleet was anchored off Greece, watching it and the movements of Philip, of which first Marcus Valerius, and afterward Publius Sulpicius was in command. Along with all

Betrayal of
Achaëus by Bolis.
See *infra*, ch. 17-
23.

Sardinia reduced
by T. Manlius
Torquatus,
B.C. 215.
Marcellus took
Leontini,
B.C. 214
(autumn). Livy,
24, 30.

Marcus Valerius
Laevinus
commands a fleet
off Greece,
B.C. 215-214.
Livy, 24, 10.
Publius Sulpicius
Galba Cos. (B.C.
211.) sent to
Macedonia. Livy,
26, 22; 27, 31.
Appius Claudius
Pulcher, Praetor,
sent to Sicily,
B.C. 215.
Livy, 23, 31.
Pro-praetor,
B.C. 214.
Livy 24, 33.

these undertakings Appius with a hundred quinqueremes, Marcus Claudius and Marcus Claudius with an army, were Marcellus, Cos. threatening Sicily; while Hamilcar was doing III., B. C. 214. the same on the side of the Carthaginians.

4. By means of these facts I presume that what I more than once asserted at the beginning of my work is now shown by actual experience to deserve unmixed credit. I mean my assertion, that it is impossible for historians of particular places to get a view of universal history. For how is it possible for a man who has only read a separate history of Sicilian or Spanish affairs to understand and grasp the greatness of the events? Or, what is still more important, in what manner and under what form of polity fortune brought to pass that most surprising of all revolutions that have happened in our time, I mean the reduction of all known parts of the world under one rule and governance, a thing unprecedented in the history of mankind. In what manner the Romans took Syracuse or Iberia may be possibly learned to a certain extent by means of such particular histories; but how they arrived at universal supremacy, and what opposition their grand designs met with in particular places, or what on the other hand contributed to their success, and at what epochs, this it is difficult to take in without the aid of universal history. Nor, again, is it easy to appreciate the greatness of their achievements except by the latter method. For the fact of the Romans having sought to gain Iberia, or at another time Sicily; or having gone on a campaign with military and naval forces, told by itself, would not be anything very wonderful. But if we learn that these were all done at once, and that many more undertakings were in course of accomplishment at the same time,—all at the cost of one government and commonwealth; and if we see what dangers and wars in their own territory were, at the very time, encumbering the men who had all these things on hand: thus, and only thus, will the astonishing nature of the events fully dawn upon us, and obtain the attention which they deserve. So much for those who suppose that by studying an episode they have become acquainted with universal history. . . .

THE SIEGE OF SYRACUSE

Hieronymus succeeded his grandfather, Hiero, in B.C. 216, and was assassinated in Leontini thirteen months afterwards, in B.C. 215. His death, however, did not bring more peaceful relations between Syracuse and Rome, but only gave the Syracusans more able leaders (Livy, 24, 21). After the slaughter of Themistius and Andramodorus, who had been elected on the board of Generals, and the cruel murder of all the royal family, Epicydes and Hippocrates,—Syracusans by descent, but born and brought up at Carthage, and who had been sent to Syracuse on a special mission by Hannibal,—were elected into the vacant places in the board of Generals. They became the leading spirits in the Syracusan government, and for a time kept up an appearance of wishing to come to terms with Rome; and legates were actually sent to Marcellus, at Morgantia (near Catana). But when the Carthaginian fleet arrived at Pachynus, Hippocrates and Epicydes threw off their mask, and declared that the other magistrates were betraying the town to the Romans. This accusation was rendered more specious by the appearance of Appius with a Roman fleet at the mouth of the harbour. A rush was made to the shore by the inhabitants to prevent the Romans landing; and the tumult was with difficulty composed by the wisdom of one of the magistrates, Apollonides, who persuaded the people to vote for the peace with Rome (B.C. 215. Livy, 24, 21-28). But Hippocrates and Epicydes determined not to acknowledge the peace: they therefore provoked the Romans by plundering in or near the Roman pale,¹ and then took refuge in Leontini. Marcellus complained at Syracuse, but was told that Leontini was not within Syracusan jurisdiction. Marcellus, therefore, took Leontini. Hippocrates and Epicydes managed to escape, and by a mixture of force and fraud contrived soon afterwards to force their way into Syracuse, seize and put to death most of the generals, and induce the excited mob, whom they had inspired with the utmost dread of being betrayed to Rome, to elect them

¹ To which proceedings may be referred a sentence of Polybius preserved by Suidas, s.v. *διοσκευασμένην*—"They send out certain Cretans, as though on a raid, giving them a sham despatch to carry." See Livy, 24, 30-31.

sole generals (Livy, 24, 29-32). The Romans at once ordered Syracuse to be besieged, giving out that they were coming not to wage war with the inhabitants, but to deliver them.

5. When Epicydes and Hippocrates had occupied Syracuse, and had alienated the rest of the citizens with themselves from the friendship of Rome, the Romans who had already been informed of the murder of Hieronymus, tyrant of Syracuse, appointed Appius Claudius as Pro-praetor to command a land force, while Marcus Claudius Marcellus commanded the fleet. These officers took up a position not far from Syracuse, and determined to assault the town from the land at Hexapylus, and by sea at what was called Stoa Scytice in Achradina, where the wall has its foundation close down to the sea. Having prepared their wicker pent-houses, and darts, and other siege material, they felt confident that, with so many hands employed, they would in five days get their works in such an advanced state as to give them the advantage over the enemy. But in this they did not take into account the abilities of Archimedes; nor calculate on the truth that, in certain circumstances, the genius of one man is more effective than any numbers whatever.¹ However they now learnt it by experience. The city was strong from the fact of its encircling wall lying along a chain of hills with overhanging brows, the ascent of which was no easy task, even with no one to hinder it, except at certain definite points. Taking advantage of this, Archimedes had constructed such defences both in the town, and at the places where an attack might be made by sea, that the garrison would have everything at hand which they might require at any moment, and be ready to meet without delay whatever the enemy might attempt against them.

6. The attack was begun by Appius bringing his pent-houses, and scaling ladders, and attempting to fix the latter against that part of the wall which abuts on Hexapylus towards the east. At the same time Marcus Claudius Marcellus with sixty quinqueremes was making a descent upon Achradina. Each

¹ Cp. i, 35.

of these vessels were full of men armed with bows and slings and javelins, with which to dislodge those who fought on the battlements. As well as these vessels he had eight quinqueremes in pairs. Each pair had had their oars removed, one on the larboard and the other on the starboard side, and then had been lashed together on the sides thus left bare. On these double vessels, rowed by the outer oars of each of the pair, they brought up under the walls some engines called "Sambucæ," the construction of which was as follows:—A ladder was made four feet broad, and of a height to reach the top of the wall from the place where its foot had to rest; each side of the ladder was protected by a railing, and a covering or pent-house was added overhead. It was then placed so that its foot rested across the sides of the lashed-together vessels, which touched each other with its other extremity protruding a considerable way beyond the prows. On the tops of the masts pulleys were fixed with ropes: and when the engines were about to be used, men standing on the sterns of the vessels drew the ropes tied to the head of the ladder, while others standing on the prows assisted the raising of the machine and kept it steady with long poles. Having then brought the ships close in shore by using the outer oars of both vessels they tried to let the machine down upon the wall. At the head of the ladder was fixed a wooden stage secured on three sides by wicker-shields, upon which stood four men who fought and struggled with those who tried to prevent the Sambuca from being made to rest on the battlements. But when they have fixed it and so got above the level of the top of the wall, the four men unfasten the wicker-shields from either side of the stage, and walk out upon the battlements or towers as the case may be; they are followed by their comrades coming up by the Sambuca, since the ladder's foot is safely secured with ropes and stands upon both the ships. This construction has got the name of "Sambuca," or "Harp," for the natural reason, that when it is raised the combination of the ship and ladder has very much the appearance of such an instrument.

Sambucæ or
Harps.

7. With such contrivances and preparations were the

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