

HISTORY OF GREECE.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

SICILIAN AFFAIRS (*continued*).—FROM THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CARTHAGINIAN ARMY BY PESTILENCE BEFORE SYRACUSE, DOWN TO THE DEATH OF DIONYSIUS THE ELDER. B.C. 394–367.

IN my preceding volume, I have described the first eleven years of the reign of Dionysius called the Elder, as despot at Syracuse, down to his first great war against the Carthaginians; which war ended by a sudden turn of fortune in his favour, at a time when he was hard pressed and actually besieged. The victorious Carthaginian army before Syracuse was utterly ruined by a terrible pestilence, followed by ignominious treason on the part of its commander Imilkon.

Within the space of less than thirty years, we read of four distinct epidemic distempers¹, each of

¹ Diodor. xiii. 86–114; xiv. 70; xv. 24. Another pestilence is alluded to by Diodorus in 368 B.C. (Diodor. xv. 73.)

Mövers notices the intense and frequent sufferings of the ancient Phœnicians, in their own country, from pestilence; and the fearful expiations to which these sufferings gave rise (Die Phönizier, vol. ii. part ii. p. 9).

Frequent occurrence of pestilence among the Carthaginians, not extending to the Greeks in Sicily.

frightful severity, as having afflicted Carthage and her armies in Sicily, without touching either Syracuse or the Sicilian Greeks. Such epidemics were the most irresistible of all enemies to the Carthaginians, and the most effective allies to Dionysius. The second and third—conspicuous among the many fortunate events of his life—occurred at the exact juncture necessary for rescuing him from a tide of superiority in the Carthaginian arms, which seemed in a fair way to overwhelm him completely. Upon what physical conditions the frequent repetition of such a calamity depended, together with the remarkable fact that it was confined to Carthage and her armies—we know partially in respect to the third of the four cases, but not at all in regard to the others.

B.C. 395.

Mutiny among the mercenaries of Dionysius—Aristoteles their commander is sent away to Sparta.

The flight of Imilkon with his Carthaginians from Syracuse left Dionysius and the Syracusans in the full swing of triumph. The conquests made by Imilkon were altogether lost, and the Carthaginian dominion in Sicily was now cut down to that restricted space in the western corner of the island, which it had occupied prior to the invasion of Hannibal in 409 B.C. So prodigious a success probably enabled Dionysius to put down the opposition recently manifested among the Syracusans to the continuance of his rule. We are told that he was greatly embarrassed by his mercenaries; who, having been for some time without pay, manifested such angry discontent as to threaten his downfall. Dionysius seized the person of their commander, the Spartan Aristoteles: upon which the soldiers mutinied and flocked in arms round his residence,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-00960-7 - A History of Greece, Volume 11

George Grote

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAP. LXXXIII.] DISCONTENT OF THE MERCENARIES. 3

demanding in fierce terms both the liberty of their commander and the payment of their arrears. Of these demands, Dionysius eluded the first by saying that he would send away Aristoteles to Sparta, to be tried and dealt with among his own countrymen : as to the second, he pacified the soldiers by assigning to them, in exchange for their pay, the town and territory of Leontini. Willingly accepting this rich bribe, the most fertile soil of the island, the mercenaries quitted Syracuse to the number of 10,000, to take up their residence in the newly assigned town ; while Dionysius hired new mercenaries in their place. To these (including perhaps the Iberians or Spaniards who had recently passed from the Carthaginian service into his) and to the slaves whom he had liberated, he entrusted the maintenance of his dominion¹.

These few facts, which are all that we hear, enable us to see that the relations between Dionysius and the mercenaries by whose means he ruled Syracuse, were troubled and difficult to manage. But they do not explain to us the full cause of such discord. We know that a short time before, Dionysius had rid himself of 1000 obnoxious mercenaries by treacherously betraying them to death in a battle with the Carthaginians. Moreover, he would hardly have seized the person of Aristoteles, and sent him away for trial, if the latter had done nothing more than demand pay really due to his soldiers. It seems probable that the discontent of the mercenaries rested upon deeper causes, perhaps connected with that movement in the Syracusan

Difficulties of Dionysius arising from his mercenaries— heavy burden of paying them.

¹ Diodor. xiv. 78.

mind against Dionysius, manifested openly in the invective of Theodôrus. We should have been glad also to know how Dionysius proposed to pay the new mercenaries, if he had no means of paying the old. The cost of maintaining his standing army, upon whomsoever it fell, must have been burdensome in the extreme. What became of the previous residents and proprietors at Leontini, who must have been dispossessed when this much-coveted site was transferred to the mercenaries? On all these points we are unfortunately left in ignorance.

Dionysius
re-estab-
lishes
Messênê
with new
inhabitants.

Dionysius now set forth towards the north of Sicily to re-establish Messênê; while those other Sicilians, who had been expelled from their abodes by the Carthaginians, got together and returned. In reconstituting Messênê after its demolition by Imilkon, he obtained the means of planting there a population altogether in his interests, suitable to the aggressive designs which he was already contemplating against Rhegium and the other Italian Greeks. He established in it 1000 Lokrians,—4000 persons from another city the name of which we cannot certainly make out¹,—and 600 of the Peloponnesian Messenians. These latter had been expelled by Sparta from Zakynthus and Naupaktus

¹ Diodor. xiv. 78. Διονύσιος δ' εἰς Μεσσηνίην κατέκτισε χιλίους μὲν Λοκροὺς, τετρακισχιλίους δὲ Μεδιμναίους, ἑξακοσίους δὲ τῶν ἐκ Πελοποννήσου Μεσσηνίων, ἕκ τε Ζακύνθου καὶ Ναυπάκτου φευγόντων.

The Medimnæans are completely unknown. Cluverius and Wesseling conjecture *Medmæans*, from Medmæ or Medamæ, noticed by Strabo as a town in the south of Italy. But this supposition cannot be adopted as certain; especially as the total of persons named is so large. The conjecture of Palmerius—*Μηθυμναίους*—has still less to recommend it. See the note of Wesseling.

at the close of the Peloponnesian war, and had taken service in Sicily with Dionysius. Even here, the hatred of Sparta followed them. Her remonstrances against his project of establishing them in a city of consideration bearing their own ancient name, obliged him to withdraw them : upon which he planted them on a portion of the Abakene territory on the northern coast. They gave to their new city the name of Tyndaris, admitted many new residents, and conducted their affairs so prudently, as presently to attain a total of 5000 citizens¹. Neither here, nor at Messênê, do we find any mention made of the re-establishment of those inhabitants who had fled when Imilkon took Messênê, and who formed nearly all the previous population of the city, for very few are mentioned as having been slain. It seems doubtful whether Dionysius readmitted them, when he re-constituted Messênê. Renewing with care the fortifications of the city, which had been demolished by Imilkon, he placed in it some of his mercenaries as garrison².

Dionysius next undertook several expeditions against the Sikels in the interior of the island, who had joined Imilkon in his recent attack upon Syracuse. He conquered several of their towns, and established alliances with two of their most powerful princes, at Agyrion and Kentoripæ. Enna and Kephalaedium were also betrayed to him, as well as the Carthaginian dependency of Solûs. By these proceedings, which appear to have occupied some time, he acquired powerful ascendancy in the central and north-east parts of the island, while his

b.c. 394.
Conquests
of Dionysius
in the
interior of
Sicily.

¹ Diodor. xiv. 78.

² Diodor. xiv. 87.

garrison at Messênê ensured to him the command of the strait between Sicily and Italy¹.

B.C. 394-393.

Alarm at Rhegium — Dionysius attacks the Sikel town of Tauromenium — desperate defence of the Sikels — Dionysius is repulsed and nearly slain.

His acquisition of this important fortified position was well understood to imply ulterior designs against Rhegium and the other Grecian cities in the south of Italy, among whom accordingly a lively alarm prevailed. The numerous exiles whom he had expelled, not merely from Syracuse, but also from Naxus, Katana, and the other conquered towns, having no longer any assured shelter in Sicily, had been forced to cross over into Italy, where they were favourably received both at Kroton and at Rhegium². One of these exiles, Helôris, once the intimate friend of Dionysius, was even appointed general of the forces of Rhegium; forces at that time not only powerful on land, but sustained by a fleet of 70 or 80 triremes³. Under his command, a Rhegine force crossed the strait for the purpose partly of besieging Messênê, partly of establishing the Naxian and Katanean exiles at Mylæ on the northern coast of the island, not far from Messênê. Neither scheme succeeded: Helôris was repulsed from Messênê with loss, while the new settlers at Mylæ were speedily expelled. The command of the strait was thus fully maintained to Dionysius; who, on the point of undertaking an aggressive expedition over to Italy, was delayed only by the necessity of capturing the newly established Sikel town on the hill of Taurus — or Tauromenium. The Sikels defended this

¹ Diodor. xiv. 78. *εις την των Σικελῶν χώραν πλεονάκις στρατεύσας, &c.* Wesseling shows in his note, that these words, and those which follow, must refer to Dionysius.

² Diodor. xiv. 87-103.

³ Diodor. xiv. 8, 87, 106.

position, in itself high and strong, with unexpected valour and obstinacy. It was the spot on which the primitive Grecian colonists who first came to Sicily had originally landed, and from whence therefore the successive Hellenic encroachments upon the pre-established Sikel population had taken their commencement. This fact, well known to both parties, rendered the capture on one side as much a point of honour as the preservation on the other. Dionysius spent months in the siege, even throughout midwinter, while the snow covered this hill-top. He made reiterated assaults, which were always repulsed. At last, on one moonless winter night, he found means to scramble over some almost inaccessible crags to a portion of the town less defended, and to effect a lodgment in one of the two fortified portions into which it was divided. Having taken the first part, he immediately proceeded to attack the second. But the Sikels, resisting with desperate valour, repulsed him and compelled the storming party to flee in disorder, amidst the darkness of night and over the most difficult ground. Six hundred of them were slain on the spot, and scarcely any escaped without throwing away their arms. Even Dionysius himself, being overthrown by the thrust of a spear on his cuirass, was with difficulty picked up and carried off alive; all his arms except the cuirass being left behind. He was obliged to raise the siege, and was long in recovering from his wound: the rather as his eyes also had suffered considerably from the snow¹.

So manifest a reverse, before a town compara- B.C. 393.

¹ Diodor. xiv. 88.

Agrigentum declares against Dionysius —reappearance of the Carthaginian army under Magon.

tively insignificant, lowered his military reputation, and encouraged his enemies throughout the island. The Agrigentines and others, throwing off their dependence upon him, proclaimed themselves autonomous ; banishing those leaders among them who upheld his interest¹. Many of the Sikels also, elate with the success of their countrymen at Tauromenium, declared openly against him ; joining the Carthaginian general Magon, who now, for the first time since the disaster before Syracuse, again exhibited the force of Carthage in the field.

Since the disaster before Syracuse, Magon had remained tranquil in the western or Carthaginian corner of the island, recruiting the strength and courage of his countrymen, and taking unusual pains to conciliate the attachment of the dependent native towns. Reinforced in part by the exiles expelled by Dionysius, he was now in a condition to assume the aggressive, and to espouse the cause of the Sikels after their successful defence of Tauromenium. He even ventured to overrun and ravage the Messenian territory ; but Dionysius, being now recovered from his wound, marched against him, defeated him in a battle near Abakæna, and forced

¹ Diodor. xiv. 88. *μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἀτυχίαν ταύτην, Ἀκραγαντινοὶ καὶ Μεσσηνιοὶ τοὺς τὰ Διονυσίου φρονούντας μεταστησάμενοι, τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἀντίχοντο, καὶ τῆς τοῦ τυράννου συμμαχίας ἀπέστησαν.*

It appears to me that the words *καὶ Μεσσηνιοὶ* in this sentence cannot be correct. The Messenians were a new population just established by Dionysius, and relying upon him for protection against Rhegium : moreover they will appear, during the events immediately succeeding, constantly in conjunction with him, and objects of attack by his enemies.

I cannot but think that Diodorus has here inadvertently placed the word *Μεσσηνιοὶ* instead of a name belonging to some other community —what community, we cannot tell.

him again to retire westward, until fresh troops were sent to him from Carthage¹.

Without pursuing Magon, Dionysius returned to Syracuse, from whence he presently set forth to execute his projects against Rhegium, with a fleet of 100 ships of war. So skilfully did he arrange or mask his movements, that he arrived at night at the gates and under the walls of Rhegium, without the least suspicion on the part of the citizens. Applying combustibles to set fire to the gate (as he had once done successfully at the gate of Achradina²), he at the same time planted his ladders against the walls, and attempted an escalade. Surprised and in small numbers, the citizens began their defence; but the attack was making progress, had not the general Helôris, instead of trying to extinguish the flames, bethought himself of encouraging them by heaping on dry faggots and other matters. The conflagration became so violent, that even the assailants themselves were kept off until time was given for the citizens to mount the walls in force; and the city was saved from capture by burning a portion of it. Disappointed in his hopes, Dionysius was obliged to content himself with ravaging the neighbouring territory; after which, he concluded a truce of one year with the Rhegines, and then returned to Syracuse³.

B.C. 393-392.

Expedition of Dionysius against Rhegium—he falls in surprising the town—he concludes a truce for one year.

This step was probably determined by news of the movements of Magon, who was in the field anew with a mercenary force reckoned at 80,000 men—Libyan, Sardinian, and Italian—obtained

B.C. 392-391.

¹ Diodor. xiv. 90-95.

² Diodor. xiii. 113.

³ Diodor. xiv. 90.

Magon
again takes
the field at
Agyrium—
is repulsed
by Diony-
sius—truce
concluded.

from Carthage, where hope of Sicilian success was again reviving. Magon directed his march through the Sikel population in the centre of the island, receiving the adhesion of many of their various townships. Agyrium, however, the largest and most important of all, resisted him as an enemy. Agyris, the despot of the place, who had conquered much of the neighbouring territory, and had enriched himself by the murder of several opulent proprietors, maintained strict alliance with Dionysius. The latter speedily came to his aid, with a force stated at 20,000 men, Syracusans and mercenaries. Admitted into the city, and co-operating with Agyris, who furnished abundant supplies, he soon reduced the Carthaginians to great straits. Magon was encamped near the river Chrysas, between Agyrium and Morgantinê; in an enemy's country, harassed by natives who perfectly knew the ground, and who cut off in detail all his parties sent out to obtain provisions. The Syracusans, indeed, disliking or mistrusting such tardy methods, impatiently demanded leave to make a vigorous attack: and when Dionysius refused, affirming that with a little patience the enemy must be speedily starved out, they left the camp and returned home. Alarmed at their desertion, he forthwith issued a requisition for a large number of slaves to supply their places. But at this very juncture, there arrived a proposition from the Carthaginians to be allowed to make peace and retire; which Dionysius granted, on condition that they should abandon to him the Sikels and their territory—especially Taumenium. Upon these terms peace was ac-