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F. Hultsch: Volume 1

Edited by Evelyn S. Shuckburgh

Excerpt

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THE HISTORIES OF POLYBIUS

BOOK I

1. HAD the praise of History been passed over by former Chroniclers it would perhaps have been incumbent upon me to urge the choice and special study of records of this sort, as the readiest means men can have of correcting their knowledge of the past. But my predecessors have not been sparing in this respect. They have all begun and ended, so to speak, by enlarging on this theme : asserting again and again that the study of History is in the truest sense an education, and a training for political life ; and that the most instructive, or rather the only, method of learning to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of fortune is to recall the catastrophes of others. It is evident, therefore, that no one need think it his duty to repeat what has been said by many, and said well. Least of all myself: for the surprising nature of the events which I have undertaken to relate is in itself sufficient to challenge and stimulate the attention of every one, old or young, to the study of my work. Can any one be so indifferent or idle as not to care to know by what means, and under what kind of polity, almost the whole inhabited world was conquered and brought under the dominion of the single city of Rome, and that too within a period of not quite fifty-three years? Or who again can be so completely absorbed in other subjects of contemplation or study, as to think any of them superior in importance to the accurate understanding of an event for which the past affords no precedent.

VOL. I

B

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2. We shall best show how marvellous and vast our subject is by comparing the most famous Empires which preceded, and which have been the favourite themes of historians, and measuring them with the superior greatness of Rome. There are but three that deserve even to be so compared and measured: and they are these.

Immensity of the Roman Empire shown by comparison with Persia, Sparta, Macedonia.

1. Persia. The Persians for a certain length of time were possessed of a great empire and dominion. But every time they ventured beyond the limits of Asia, they found not only their empire, but their own existence also in danger.

2. Sparta. B.C. 405-394.

The Lacedaemonians, after contending for supremacy in Greece for many generations, when they did get it, held it without dispute for barely twelve years. The Macedonians obtained dominion in Europe from the lands bordering on the Adriatic to the Danube,—which after all is but a small fraction of this continent,—and, by the destruction of the Persian Empire, they afterwards added to that the dominion of Asia. And yet, though they had the credit of having made themselves masters of a larger number of countries and states than any people had ever done, they still left the greater half of the inhabited world in the hands of others. They never so much as thought of attempting Sicily, Sardinia, or Libya: and as to Europe, to speak the plain truth, they never even knew of the most warlike tribes of the West. The Roman conquest, on the other hand, was not partial. Nearly the whole inhabited world was reduced by them to obedience: and they left behind them an empire not to be paralleled in the past or rivalled in the future. Students will gain from my narrative a clearer view of the whole story, and of the numerous and important advantages which such exact record of events offers.

3. My History begins in the 140th Olympiad. The events from which it starts are these. In Greece, what is called the Social war: the first waged by Philip, son of Demetrius and father of Perseus, in league with the Achaeans against the Aetolians. In Asia, the war for the possession of

B.C. 220-217. The History starts from the 140th Olympiad, when the tendency towards

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Coele-Syria which Antiochus and Ptolemy ^{unity first shows} Philopator carried on against each other. In ^{itself.} Italy, Libya, and their neighbourhood, the conflict between Rome and Carthage, generally called the Hannibalian war. My work thus begins where that of Aratus of Sicyon leaves off. Now up to this time the world's history had been, so to speak, a series of disconnected transactions, as widely separated in their origin and results as in their localities. But from this time forth History becomes a connected whole: the affairs of Italy and Libya are involved with those of Asia and Greece, and the tendency of all is to unity. This is why I have fixed upon this era as the starting-point of my work. For it was their victory over the Carthaginians in this war, and their conviction that thereby the most difficult and most essential step towards universal empire had been taken, which encouraged the Romans for the first time to stretch out their hands upon the rest, and to cross with an army into Greece and Asia.

Now, had the states that were rivals for universal empire been familiarly known to us, no reference perhaps to their previous history would have been necessary, to show the purpose and the forces with which they approached an undertaking of this nature and magnitude. But the fact is that ^{A sketch of their previous history necessary to explain the success of the Romans.} the majority of the Greeks have no knowledge of the previous constitution, power, or achievements either of Rome or Carthage. I therefore concluded that it was necessary to prefix this and the next book to my History. I was anxious that no one, when fairly embarked upon my actual narrative, should feel at a loss, and have to ask what were the designs entertained by the Romans, or the forces and means at their disposal, that they entered upon those undertakings, which did in fact lead to their becoming masters of land and sea everywhere in our part of the world. I wished, on the contrary, that these books of mine, and the prefatory sketch which they contained, might make it clear that the resources they started with justified their original idea, and sufficiently explained their final success in grasping universal empire and dominion.

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4. There is this analogy between the plan of my History and the marvellous spirit of the age with which I have to deal. Just as Fortune made almost all the affairs of the world incline in one direction, and forced them to converge upon one and the same point ; so it is my task as an historian to put before my readers a compendious view of the part played by Fortune in bringing about the general catastrophe. It was this peculiarity which originally challenged my attention, and determined me on undertaking this work. And combined with this was the fact that no writer of our time has undertaken a general history. Had any one done so my ambition in this direction would have been much diminished. But, in point of fact, I notice that by far the greater number of historians concern themselves with isolated wars and the incidents that accompany them : while as to a general and comprehensive scheme of events, their date, origin, and catastrophe, no one as far as I know has undertaken to examine it. I thought it, therefore, distinctly my duty neither to pass by myself, nor allow any one else to pass by, without full study, a characteristic specimen of the dealings of Fortune at once brilliant and instructive in the highest degree. For fruitful as Fortune is in change, and constantly as she is producing dramas in the life of men, yet never assuredly before this did she work such a marvel, or act such a drama, as that which we have witnessed. And of this we cannot obtain a comprehensive view from writers of mere episodes. It would be as absurd to expect to do so as for a man to imagine that he has learnt the shape of the whole world, its entire arrangement and order, because he has visited one after the other the most famous cities in it ; or perhaps merely examined them in separate pictures. That would be indeed absurd : and it has always seemed to me that men, who are persuaded that they get a competent view of universal from episodic history, are very like persons who should see the limbs of some body, which had once been living and beautiful, scattered and remote ; and should imagine that to be quite as good as actually beholding the activity and beauty of the living creature itself. But if some one could there and then

The need of a comprehensive view of history as well as a close study of an epoch.

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reconstruct the animal once more, in the perfection of its beauty and the charm of its vitality, and could display it to the same people, they would beyond doubt confess that they had been far from conceiving the truth, and had been little better than dreamers. For indeed some idea of a whole may be got from a part, but an accurate knowledge and clear comprehension cannot. Wherefore we must conclude that episodal history contributes exceedingly little to the familiar knowledge and secure grasp of universal history. While it is only by the combination and comparison of the separate parts of the whole,—by observing their likeness and their difference,—that a man can attain his object: can obtain a view at once clear and complete; and thus secure both the profit and the delight of History.

5. I shall adopt as the starting-point of this book the first occasion on which the Romans crossed the sea from Italy. This is just where the History of Timaeus left off; and it falls in the 129th Olympiad. I shall accordingly have to describe what the state of their affairs in Italy was, how long that settlement had lasted, and on what resources they reckoned, when they resolved to invade Sicily. For this was the first place outside Italy in which they set foot. The precise cause of their thus crossing I must state without comment; for if I let one cause lead me back to another, my point of departure will always elude my grasp, and I shall never arrive at the view of my subject which I wish to present. As to dates, then, I must fix on some era agreed upon and recognised by all: and as to events, one that admits of distinctly separate treatment; even though I may be obliged to go back some short way in point of time, and take a summary review of the intermediate transactions. For if the facts with which one starts are unknown, or even open to controversy, all that comes after will fail of approval and belief. But opinion being once formed on that point, and a general assent obtained, all the succeeding narrative becomes intelligible.

B.C. 264-261.
I begin my preliminary account in the 129th Olympiad, and with the circumstances which took the Romans to Sicily.

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6. It was in the nineteenth year after the sea-fight at Aegospotami, and the sixteenth before the battle at Leuctra; the year in which the Lacedaemonians made what is called the Peace of Antalcidas with the King of Persia; the year in which the elder Dionysius was besieging Rhegium after beating the Italian Greeks on the River Elleporus; and in which the Gauls took Rome itself by storm and were occupying the whole of it except the Capitol. With these Gauls the Romans made a treaty and settlement which they were content to accept: and having thus become beyond all expectation once more masters of their own country, they made a start in their career of expansion; and in the succeeding period engaged in various wars with their neighbours. First, by dint of valour, and the good fortune which attended them in the field, they mastered all the Latini; then they went to war with the Etruscans; then with the Celts; and next with the Gauls, and Samnites, the Samnites, who lived on the eastern and northern frontiers of Latium. Some time after this the Tarentines insulted the ambassadors of Rome, and, in fear of the consequences, invited and obtained the assistance of Pyrrhus. This happened in the year before the Gauls invaded Greece, some of whom perished near Delphi, while others crossed into Asia. Then it was that the Romans—having reduced the Etruscans and Samnites to obedience, and conquered the Italian Celts in many battles—attempted for the first time the reduction of the rest of Italy. The nations for whose possessions they were about to fight they affected to regard, not in the light of foreigners, but as already for the most part belonging and pertaining to themselves. The experience gained from their contests with the Samnites and the Celts had served as a genuine training in the art of war. Accordingly, they entered upon the war with spirit, drove Pyrrhus from Italy, and then undertook to fight with and subdue those who had taken part with him. They succeeded every-

B.C. 387-386.
The rise of the Roman dominion may be traced from the retirement of the Gauls from the city. From that time one nation after another in Italy fell into their hands.

The Latini.

The Etruscans, Gauls, and Samnites.

Pyrrhus, B.C. 280.

Southern Italy.

Pyrrhus finally quits Italy, B.C. 274.

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where to a marvel, and reduced to obedience all the tribes inhabiting Italy except the Celts; after which they undertook to besiege some of their own citizens, who at that time were occupying Rhegium.

7. For misfortunes befell Messene and Rhegium, the cities built on either side of the Strait, peculiar in their nature and alike in their circumstances.

Not long before the period we are now describing some Campanian mercenaries of Agathocles, having for some time cast greedy eyes upon Messene, owing to its beauty and wealth, no sooner got an opportunity than they made a treacherous attempt upon that city. They

entered the town under guise of friendship, and having once got possession of it, they drove out some of the citizens and put others to the sword. This done, they seized promiscuously the wives and children of the dispossessed citizens, each keeping those which fortune had assigned him at the very moment of the lawless deed. All other property and the land they took possession of by a subsequent division and retained.

The speed with which they became masters of a fair territory and city found ready imitators of their conduct. The people of Rhegium, when Pyrrhus was crossing to Italy, felt a double anxiety. They were dismayed at the thought of his approach, and at the same time were afraid of the Carthaginians as being masters of the sea. They accordingly asked and obtained a force from Rome to guard and support them.

The garrison, four thousand in number, under the command of a Campanian named Decius Jubellius, entered the city, and for a time preserved it, as well as their own faith. But at last, conceiving the idea of imitating the Mamertines, and having at the same time obtained their co-operation, they broke faith with the people of Rhegium, enamoured of the pleasant site of the town and the private wealth of the citizens, and seized the city after having, in imitation of the Mamertines, first driven out some of the people and put others to the sword. Now, though the Romans were much annoyed at this transac-

The story of the Mamertines at Messene, and the Roman garrison at Rhegium, Dio. Cassius *fr.*

1. Messene.

Agathocles died, B.C. 289.

2. Rhegium, Livy Ep. 12.

Pyrrhus in Sicily, B.C. 278-275.

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tion, they could take no active steps, because they were deeply engaged in the wars I have mentioned above. But having got free from them they invested and besieged the troops. They presently took the place and killed the greater number in the assault,—for the men resisted desperately, knowing what must follow,—but took more than three hundred alive. These were sent to Rome, and there the Consuls brought them into the forum, where they were scourged and beheaded according to custom: for they wished as far as they could to vindicate their good faith in the eyes of the allies. The territory and town they at once handed over to the people of Rhegium.

B.C. 271.
C. Quintus
Claudus, L.
Genucius Clep-
sina, Coss.

8. But the Mamertines (for this was the name which the Campanians gave themselves after they became masters of Messene), as long as they enjoyed the alliance of the Roman captors of Rhegium, not only exercised absolute control over their own town and district undisturbed, but about the neighbouring territory also gave no little trouble to the Carthaginians and Syracusans, and levied tribute from many parts of Sicily. But when they were deprived of this support, the captors of Rhegium being now invested and besieged, they were themselves promptly forced back into the town again by the Syracusans, under circumstances which I will now detail.

Not long before this the military forces of the Syracusans had quarrelled with the citizens, and while stationed near Merganè elected commanders from their own body. These were Artemidorus and Hiero, the latter of whom afterwards became King of Syracuse. At this time he was quite a young man, but had a certain natural aptitude for kingcraft and the politic conduct of affairs. Having taken over the command, and having by means of some of his connexions made his way into the city, he got his political opponents into his hands; but conducted the government with such mildness, and in so lofty a spirit, that the Syracusans, though by no means usually acquiescing in the election of officers by the soldiers, did on this occasion

Effect of the fall
of the rebellious
garrison of
Rhegium on the
Mamertines.
The rise of Hiero.
He is elected Gen-
eral by the army.
B.C. 275-274.

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unanimously approve of Hiero as their general. His first step made it evident to close observers that his hopes soared above the position of a mere general.

9. He noticed that among the Syracusans the despatch of troops, and of magistrates in command of them, was always the signal for revolutionary movements of some sort or another. He knew, too, that of all the citizens Leptines enjoyed the highest position and credit, and that among the common people especially he was by far the most influential man existing. He accordingly contracted a relationship by marriage with him, that he might have a representative of his interests left at home at such times as he should be himself bound to go abroad with the troops for a campaign. After marrying the daughter of this man, his next step was in regard to the old mercenaries. He observed that they were disaffected and mutinous: and he accordingly led out an expedition, with the ostensible purpose of attacking the foreigners who were in occupation of Messene. He pitched a camp against the enemy near Centuripa, and drew up his line resting on the River Cyamosorus. But the cavalry and infantry, which consisted of citizens, he kept together under his personal command at some distance, on pretence of intending to attack the enemy on another quarter: the mercenaries he thrust to the front and allowed them to be completely cut to pieces by the foreigners; while he seized the moment of their rout to affect a safe retreat for himself and the citizens into Syracuse. This stroke of policy was skilful and successful. He had got rid of the mutinous and seditious element in the army; and after enlisting on his own account a sufficient body of mercenaries, he thenceforth carried on the business of the government in security. But seeing that the Mamertines were encouraged by their success to greater confidence and recklessness in their Mamertines and excursions, he fully armed and energetically defeats them near drilled the citizen levies, led them out, and engaged the enemy on the Mylaean plain near Mylae, the River Longanus. He inflicted a severe defeat upon them:

Secures support of Leptines by marrying his daughter.

His device for getting rid of mutinous mercenaries.

Fiume Salso.

Hiero next attacks the Mamertines and defeats them near Mylae, B. C. 268.

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took their leaders prisoners : put a complete end to their audacious proceedings : and on his return to Syracuse was himself greeted by all the allies with the title of King.

10. Thus were the Mamertines first deprived of support from Rhegium, and then subjected, from causes which I have just stated, to a complete defeat on their own account. Thereupon some of them betook themselves to the protection of the Carthaginians, and were for putting themselves and

their citadel into their hands ; while others set about sending an embassy to Rome to offer a surrender of their city, and to beg assistance on the ground of the ties of race which united them. The Romans were long in doubt. The inconsistency of sending such aid seemed manifest. A little while ago they had put some of their own citizens to death, with the extreme penalties of the law, for having broken faith with the people

of Rhegium : and now so soon afterwards to assist the Mamertines, who had done precisely the same to Messene as well as Rhegium, involved a breach of equity very hard to justify. But while fully alive to these points, they yet saw that Carthaginian aggrandisement

was not confined to Libya, but had embraced many districts in Iberia as well ; and that Carthage was, besides, mistress of all the islands in the Sardinian and Tyrrhenian seas : they were beginning, therefore, to be exceedingly anxious lest, if the Carthaginians became masters of Sicily also, they should find them very dangerous and formidable neighbours, surrounding them as they would on every side, and occupying a position which commanded all the coasts of Italy. Now it was clear that, if the Mamertines did not obtain the assistance they asked for, the Carthaginians would very soon reduce Sicily. For should they avail themselves of the voluntary offer of Messene and become masters of it, they were certain before long to crush Syracuse also, since they were already lords of nearly the whole of the rest of Sicily. The Romans saw all this, and felt that it was absolutely necessary not to let Messene slip, or allow the Carthaginians to secure what would be like a bridge to enable them to cross into Italy.