

THE BOOK OF CORNELIUS NEPOS

ON THE

GREAT GENERALS OF FOREIGN NATIONS

PREFACE

I DOUBT not, Atticus, that many readers will look upon this kind of writing as trivial and unworthy of the parts played by great men, when they find that I have told who taught Epaminondas music or see it mentioned among his titles to fame that he was a graceful dancer and a skilled performer on the flute.¹ But such critics will for the most part be men unfamiliar with Greek letters, who will think no conduct proper which does not conform to their own habits. If these men can be made to understand that not all peoples look upon the same acts as honourable or base, but that they judge them all in the light of the usage of their forefathers, they will not be surprised that I, in giving an account of the merits of Greeks, have borne in mind the usage of that nation. For example, it was no disgrace to Cimon, an eminent citizen of Athens, to have his own sister to wife,² inasmuch as his countrymen followed that same custom; but according to our standards such a union is considered impious. In Crete it is thought praiseworthy for young men to have had the greatest possible number of love affairs.

PRAEFATIO, 4-8

At Lacedaemon no woman without a husband, however distinguished she may be, refuses to go to a dinner-party as a hired entertainer.¹ Almost everywhere in Greece it was deemed a high honour to be proclaimed victor at Olympia; even to appear on the stage and exhibit oneself to the people was never regarded as shameful by those nations. With us, however, all those acts are classed either as disgraceful, or as low and unworthy of respectable conduct.

On the other hand, many actions are seemly according to our code which the Greeks look upon as shameful. For instance, what Roman would blush to take his wife to a dinner-party? What matron does not frequent the front rooms² of her dwelling and show herself in public? But it is very different in Greece; for there a woman is not admitted to a dinner-party, unless relatives only are present, and she keeps to the more retired part of the house called "the women's apartment," to which no man has access who is not near of kin.

But further enlargement of this topic is impossible, not only because of the extent of my proposed work, but also by my haste to treat the subject that I have chosen. I shall therefore come to the point and shall write in this book of the lives of celebrated commanders.

I. MILTIADES

1. MILTIADES, the Athenian, son of Cimon, because of the antiquity of his family,¹ the fame of his ancestors, and his own unassuming nature, was the most distinguished man of his day. He had reached a time of life when he not only inspired high hopes in his fellow-citizens, but even gave them confidence that he would be the kind of man that they found him on longer acquaintance, when it chanced that the Athenians wished to send a colony to the Chersonesus.² Since the number of eligible citizens was large and many wished to take part in that migration, a deputation from their number was sent to Delphi, to inquire who would be the best leader to choose. For at that time the Thracians were in control of those regions, and a contest with them was inevitable. To the envoys who consulted her the Pythia named Miltiades³ and bade them take him as their commander, declaring that if they did so, their enterprise would be successful.

It was owing to that response of the oracle that Miltiades, accompanied by a carefully selected band, set sail with a fleet for the Chersonesus. Having reached Lemnos⁴ and wishing to bring the

usually vague or ambiguous, like the well-known *aio te, Aeacide, Romanos vincere posse*, given to King Pyrrhus of Epirus.

⁴ Nepos everywhere has the Latin forms of Greek names and uses the Roman names for the Greek gods.

I. MILTIADES, I. 4-II. 4

inhabitants of that island under the sway of the Athenians, he demanded of the Lemnians that they should voluntarily accept that condition. They replied ironically that they would do so, whenever he should set sail from his home and come to Lemnos driven by Aquilo. But that wind, since it blows from the north, is dead ahead for those who sail from Athens. Miltiades, having no time to lose, kept on to his destination and arrived at the Chersonesus.

2. There he soon dispersed the forces of the barbarians, and having gained possession of the entire region that he had in view, he fortified strategic points with strongholds, settled on farms the company which he had brought with him, and enriched them by frequent raids. In that whole enterprise his success was due not less to statesmanship than to good fortune; for when, thanks to the valour of his soldiers, he had vanquished the enemy, he organized the colony with the utmost impartiality and decided to make his own home there. As a matter of fact, he enjoyed the rank of king among the colonists without having that title, an honour which he owed to his justice no less than to his position of authority. Nevertheless, he continued to do his duty by the Athenians, who had sent him to Thrace; and as a result he retained permanent authority, no less with the consent of those who had sent him than of those who had taken part in the expedition.

After the Chersonesus was thus organized, Miltiades returned to Lemnos and demanded the surrender of the city¹ according to the agreement. For they had said that they would give themselves

I. MILTIADES, II. 4-III. 4

up whenever he left his home and came to them before a north wind; but now, as he reminded them, he had his home in the Chersonesus. To the Carians, who at that time dwelt in Lemnos, the situation was an unexpected one; nevertheless, since they were trapped not so much by their promise as by the good fortune of their opponents, they did not dare to resist,¹ but left the island. Miltiades had equal success in bringing the remaining islands known as the Cyclades into the power of the Athenians.²

3. At that same period of time King Darius B.C. 513 decided to lead an army from Asia into Europe and make war on the Scythians. He built a bridge over the river Hister for the transport of his troops and entrusted the guard of that bridge during his absence to men of rank whom he had brought with him from Ionia and Aeolis. To each of those men he had given the permanent rule of a city in the region from which each had come. For in that way he hoped most easily to retain under his sway the Greek-speaking peoples dwelling in Asia, if he entrusted the charge of their towns to friends of his, who would have no hope of safety in case he were overthrown. Among these at that time was Miltiades. He, learning from numerous sources that Darius was meeting with no success and was hard pressed by the Scythians, urged the defenders of the bridge not to lose the opportunity that fortune had given them of freeing Greece. For if Darius and the forces which he had taken with him should perish, not only would Europe be safe, but also the dwellers in Asia who were of Greek descent would be freed from the Persian yoke and menace. That result

I. MILTIADES, III. 4-IV. 2

could easily be accomplished; for the bridge once destroyed, within a few days the king would fall victim either to the enemy's steel or to famine.

That plan met with the approval of a great many, but Histiaeus of Miletus opposed its execution, pointing out that he and his colleagues, who held high command, were not in the same situation as the common people, since their authority was bound up with the sovereignty of Darius; if the king should be killed, their power would be wrested from them and they would be exposed to the vengeance of their fellow-citizens. Therefore he was so far from approving the plan proposed by the rest that he believed nothing to be more to their advantage than the maintenance of the Persian rule. When the opinion of Histiaeus met with general approval, Miltiades, feeling sure that with so many witnesses his proposal would come to the king's ears, left the Chersonesus and returned to Athens.¹ His design, although it failed, is none the less deserving of high praise, since he was more interested in the public freedom than in maintaining his own power.

4. Now Darius, having returned from Europe to Asia and being urged by his friends to reduce Greece to submission, got ready a fleet of five hundred ships and put it under the command of Datis and Artaphernes, giving them in addition two hundred thousand foot and ten thousand horsemen. He alleged as a pretext for his hostility to the Athenians that it was with their help that the Ionians had taken Sardis and slain his garrison.² Those officers of the king, having landed on Euboea, ^{490 B.C.} quickly took Eretria, carried off all the citizens of

I. MILTIADES, IV. 2-V. 3

that place, and sent them to the king in Asia. Then they kept on to Attica and led their forces into the plain of Marathon, which is distant about ten miles from Athens.

The Athenians, though greatly alarmed by this hostile demonstration, so near and so threatening, asked help only from the Lacedaemonians, sending Phidippus, a courier of the class known as "all-day runners,"¹ to report how pressing was their need of aid. But at home they appointed ten generals to command the army, including Miltiades; among these there was great difference of opinion, whether it were better to take refuge within their walls or go to meet the enemy and fight a decisive battle. Miltiades alone persistently urged them to take the field at the earliest possible moment; stating that if they did so, not only would the citizens take heart, when they saw that their courage was not distrusted, but for the same reason the enemy would be slower to act, if they realized that the Athenians dared to engage them with so small a force.

5. In that crisis no city gave help to the Athenians except the Plataeans. They sent a thousand soldiers, whose arrival raised the number of combatants to ten thousand.² It was a band inflamed with a marvellous desire for battle, and their ardour gave Miltiades' advice preference over that of his colleagues. Accordingly, through his influence the Athenians were induced to lead their forces from the city and encamp in a favourable position. Then,

name, is said to have covered the 140 miles between Athens and Sparta in 48 hours.

² This is what Nepos seems to say; but there were 10,000 Athenians and 1000 Plataeans.

I. MILTIADES, v. 3-VI. 3

on the following day, the army was drawn up at the foot of the mountain¹ in a part of the plain that was not wholly open—for there were isolated trees in many places—and they joined battle. The purpose was to protect themselves by the high mountains and at the same time prevent the enemy's cavalry, hampered by the scattered trees, from surrounding them with their superior numbers.

Although Datis saw that the position was not favourable to his men, yet he was eager to engage, trusting to the number of his troops; and the more so because he thought it to his advantage to give battle before the Lacedaemonian reinforcements arrived. Therefore he led out his hundred thousand foot and ten thousand horse and began the battle. In the contest that ensued the Athenians were so superior in valour that they routed a foe of tenfold their own number and filled them with such fear that the Persians fled, not to their camp, but to their ships. A more glorious victory was never before won; for never did so small a band lay low so great a power.

6. It does not seem out of place to tell what reward was given to Miltiades for that victory, in order that it may the more readily be understood that the nature of all states is the same. For just as among the people of Rome distinctions were formerly few and slight and for that reason glorious, while to-day they are lavish and worthless, so we find it to have been at Athens in days gone by. For the sole honour that our Miltiades received for having won freedom for Athens and for all Greece was this: that when the picture of the battle of Marathon was painted in the colonnade called

I. MILTIADES, VI. 3-VII. 5

Poicile,¹ his portrait was given the leading place among the ten generals and he was represented in the act of haranguing the troops and giving the signal for battle. But that same people, after it had gained greater power and was corrupted by the largess of the magistrates,² voted three hundred statues to Demetrius of Phalerum.

7. After that battle the Athenians again 489 B.O. entrusted Miltiades with a fleet of seventy ships, in order to make war on the islands that had given help to the barbarians. While holding that command he compelled many of the islands to return to their allegiance, but with some he had to resort to force. Among the latter the island of Paros was so confident of its strength that it could not be brought to terms by argument. Therefore Miltiades disembarked his troops, invested the city with siege-works, and completely cut off its supplies. Then he set up his mantlets and tortoise-sheds³ and advanced against the walls. He was on the point of taking the town, when a grove, which was some distance off on the mainland but visible from the island, by some chance caught fire one night. When the flames were seen by the besiegers and the townspeople, both parties thought it a signal given by the king's marines. The result was that the Parians were kept from surrendering, while Miltiades, fearing that the king's fleet was approaching, set fire to the works that he had constructed, and returned to Athens with all the ships which he had taken with him, to the great vexation of his fellow-citizens.

In consequence, he was accused of treason, on the ground that, when he might have taken the city, he had been bribed by the king and had left without

I. MILTIADES, VII. 5-VIII. 4

accomplishing his purpose. At the time Miltiades was disabled by wounds which he had suffered in the attack on the town, and since for that reason he could not plead his own cause, his brother Stesagoras spoke in his behalf. When the trial was concluded, Miltiades was not condemned to capital punishment, but to pay a fine, the amount of which was fixed at five hundred talents, the sum which had been spent on the fleet under his command. Since he could not pay the fine at once, he was put in the state prison, and there met his end.¹

8. Although it was the affair of Paros that led to the accusation of Miltiades, there was another reason for his condemnation; for the Athenians, because of the tyranny which Pisistratus had held some years before,² dreaded excessive power in the hands of any citizen. They did not think it possible that Miltiades, who had held so many and such important military commands, would be able to conduct himself as a private citizen, especially since habit seemed to have given him a taste for power. In the Chersonesus, for example, during all the years of his residence there he had enjoyed uninterrupted sovereignty. He had been called tyrant, but he was a just one, since he owed his power, not to force, but to the consent of his subjects, and retained it as a result of his virtue. But all men are called tyrants, and regarded as such, who hold permanent rule in a city which has enjoyed a democratic form of government. But in Miltiades there was not only the greatest kindness, but also such remarkable condescension that no one was so

² Pisistratus and his sons Hippias and Hipparchus were tyrants from 560 to 510 B.C.

II. THEMISTOCLES, I. 1-4

humble as not to be admitted to his presence. He had great influence with all the Greek states, a famous name, and great renown as a soldier. Having in mind these advantages of his, the people preferred that he should suffer, though innocent, rather than that they should continue to be in fear.

II. THEMISTOCLES

1. Themistocles, son of Neocles, the Athenian. This man's faults in early youth gave place to such great merits that no one is ranked above him and few are thought to be his equals. But we must begin our account of his life at the beginning. His father Neocles was of high birth. He married an Acarnanian woman possessing the rights of citizenship, who became the mother of Themistocles. The son displeased his parents by living too lawlessly and neglecting his property, and in consequence was disinherited by his father. But this affront, instead of breaking his spirit, aroused his ambition. For believing that such a disgrace could be wiped out only by the greatest industry, he devoted all his time to public life, doing his best to gain friends and distinction. He took a prominent part in civil suits, and often came forward to speak in the public assembly; no business of importance was transacted without him; he was quick to see what was needed and able to express his views clearly. Furthermore, he was no less active in carrying out his plans than he had been in devising them, because, as Thucydides expresses it, he judged present events with great exactness and divined the future with remarkable skill. As a result he soon became famous.