THE HISTORIES OF POLYBIUS

BOOK X

THE HANNIBALIAN WAR—THE RECOVERY OF TARENTUM

1. THE distance from the strait and town of Rhegium to Tarentum is more than two thousand stades; and that portion of the shore of Italy is entirely destitute of harbours, except those of Tarentum: I mean the coast facing the Sicilian sea, and verging towards Greece, which contains the most populous barbarian tribes as well as the most famous of the Greek cities. For the Bruttii, Lucani, some portions of the Daunii, the Cabalii, and several others, occupy this quarter of Italy. So again this coast is lined by the Greek cities of Rhegium, Caulon, Locri, Croton, Metapontum, and Thurii: so that voyagers from Sicily or from Greece to any one of these cities are compelled to drop anchor in the harbours of Tarentum; and the exchange and commerce with all who occupy this coast of Italy take place in this city. One may judge of the excellence of its situation from the prosperity attained by the people of Croton; who, though only possessing roadsteads suitable for the summer, and enjoying therefore but a short season of mercantile activity, still have acquired great wealth, entirely owing, it seems, to the favourable situation of their town and harbour, which yet cannot be compared with those of Tarentum. For, even at this day, Tarentum is in a most convenient position in respect to the harbours of the Adriatic, and was formerly still more so. Since, from the

B.C. 209, Coss. Q. Fabius Maximus V. Q. Fulvius Flaccus IV.

Iapygian promontory as far as Sipontum, every one coming from the other side and dropping anchor at Italy always crossed to Tarentum, and used that city for his mercantile transactions as an emporium; for the town of Brundisium had not yet been founded in these times.[1] Therefore Fabius regarded the recovery of it as of great importance, and, omitting everything else, turned his whole thoughts to this. . . .

PUBLIUS CORNELIUS SCIPIO AFRICANUS IN SPAIN, B.C. 210-206

A common mistake as to Scipio's character.

2. Being about to narrate the exploits of Publius Scipio in Iberia, and in fact all the achievements in his life, I think it necessary to direct my readers' attention, to begin with, to his moral and mental qualities. For as he is perhaps the most illustrious man of any born before the present generation, everybody seeks to know what kind of man he was, and what advantages from natural ability or experience he enjoyed, to account for a career so crowded with brilliant achievement; and yet is compelled to remain in the dark, or to entertain false opinions, because those who write about him have not kept to the truth. The soundness of this assertion will be rendered evident in the course of my narrative to all who are capable of estimating the noblest and most gallant of his exploits. Now all other writers represent him as a man favoured by fortune, who succeeded in his undertakings contrary to rational expectation, and by the mere force of circumstances. They consider apparently such men to be, so to speak, more god-like and worthy of admiration, than those who act in every case by calculation. They do not seem to be aware of the distinction between credit for good fortune and credit for good conduct in the case of such men; and that the former may be assigned to any one however commonplace, while the latter belongs to those alone who act from prudent calculation and clear intelligence: and it is these last whom we should look upon as the most god-like and god-beloved.

Now it seems to me that in his character and views

[1] The port of Brundisium was known long before. See Herod. 4, 99. The Romans colonised the town in B.C. 244. See Livy, epit. 19.

Publius was very like Lycurgus the legislator of the Lacedaemonians. For we must not suppose that it was from superstition that Lycurgus continually consulted the Pythian priestess in the establishment of the Lacedaemonian constitution; nor that Publius depended on dreams and ominous words for his success in securing empire for his country. But as both saw that the majority of mankind cannot be got to accept contentedly what is new and strange, nor to face dangers with courage, without some hope of divine favour,—Lycurgus, by always supporting his own schemes by an oracular response from the Pythia, secured better acceptation and credit for his ideas; and Publius, by always in like manner instilling into the minds of the vulgar an opinion of his acting on some divine suggestion in the formation of his designs, caused those under his command to confront dangerous services with greater courage and cheerfulness. But that he invariably acted on calculation and with foresight, and that the successful issue of his plans was always in harmony with rational expectation, will be evident by what I am about to relate.

Scipio's use of religion compared with that of Lycurgus.

3. For that he was beneficent and high-minded is acknowledged; but that he was acute, sober-minded, and earnest in pursuit of his aims, no one will admit, except those who have lived with him, and contemplated his character, so to speak, in broad daylight. Of such Gaius Laelius was one. He took part in everything he did or said from boyhood to the day of his death; and he it was who convinced me of this truth: because what he said appeared to me to be likely in in itself, and in harmony with the achievements of that great man. He told me that the first brilliant exploit of Publius was when his father fought the cavalry engagement with Hannibal near the Padus. He was then, as it seems, eighteen years old and on his first campaign. His father had given him a squadron of picked cavalry for his protection; but when in the course of the battle he saw his father surrounded by the enemy, with only two or three horsemen near him, and dangerously wounded, he first tried to cheer on his own squadron to go to his father's assistance, but when he found

Scipio's first exploit, B.C. 218.

them considerably cowed by the numbers of the enemy surrounding them, he appears to have plunged by himself with reckless courage into the midst of the enemy: whereupon, his comrades being forced to charge also, the enemy were everawed and divided their ranks to let them pass; and Publius the elder, being thus unexpectedly saved, was the first to address his son as his preserver in the hearing of the whole army.[1] Having gained an acknowledged reputation for bravery by this exploit, he ever afterwards freely exposed himself to every sort of personal danger, whenever his country rested its hope of safety on him. And this is not the conduct of a general who trusts to luck, but of one who has a clear head.

4. Subsequently, when his elder brother Lucius was a candidate for the Aedileship, which is about the most honourable office open to a "young" man at Rome: it being the custom for two patricians to be appointed, and there being many candidates, for some time he did not venture to stand for the same office as his brother. But as the day of election drew near, judging from the demeanour of the people that his brother would easily obtain the office, and observing that his own popularity with the multitude was very great, he made up his mind that the only hope of his brother's success was that they should combine their candidatures. He therefore resolved to act as follows: His mother was going round to the temples and sacrificing to the gods in behalf of his brother, and was altogether in a state of eager expectation as to the result. She was the only parent whose wishes he had to consult; for his father was then on his voyage to Iberia, having been appointed to command in the war there. He therefore said to her that he had seen the same dream twice: for he thought that he was coming home from the Forum after being elected Aedile with his brother, and that she met them at the door and threw her arms round them and kissed them. His mother with true womanly feeling exclaimed, "Oh, that I might see that day!" He replied, "Do you wish us to try"? Upon her assenting, under the idea that he would not venture, but was only jesting on the spur of the moment (for of course he was quite a young man), he

Elected aedile, end of B.C. 217.

[1] See on 3, 66.

begged her to prepare him at once a white toga, such as it is the custom for candidates for office to wear.

5. His mother thought no more about it: but Publius, having obtained a white toga, went to the Forum before his mother was awake. His boldness, as well as his previous popularity, secured him a brilliant reception from the people; and when he advanced to the spot assigned for candidates, and took his place by the side of his brother, the people not only invested him with the office, but his brother also for his sake; and both brothers returned home Aediles designate. The news having been suddenly brought to their mother, she rushed in the utmost delight to meet them at the door, and kissed the young men in an ecstasy of joy. Accordingly Publius was believed by all who had heard previously about his dream to have held commune with the gods, not merely in his sleep, but rather in a waking vision, and by day. But in point of fact there was no dream at all: Scipio was kind, open-handed, and courteous, and by these means had conciliated the favour of the multitude. But by a dexterous use of the occasion, both with the people and his mother, he obtained his purpose, and moreover got the reputation of acting under divine inspiration. For those persons, who, from dulness or want of experience, or idleness, can never take a clear view of the occasions or causes or connexion of events, are apt to give the gods and chance the credit for what is really effected by sagacity and far-seeing calculation. I have thought it worth while to say thus much, that my readers may not be misled by unfounded gossip to pass over this great man's finest and most splendid qualities, I mean his wealth of resource and untiring diligence; which will become still more apparent when we come to recount his actual achievements.

6. Such was the man who now assembled the soldiers and exhorted them not to be dismayed by the disaster which had befallen them. "For," said he, "Romans have never been beaten by Carthaginians in a trial of valour. It was the result of treachery on the part of the Celtiberians, and of rashness, the two commanders getting cut off from each other owing to their trust in the alliance of these men. But now

Speech of Publius Scipio to the soldiers in Spain, B.C. 210.

these two disadvantages are on the side of the enemy: for they are encamped at a wide distance from each other; and by their tyrannical conduct to their allies have alienated them all, and made them hostile to themselves. The consequence is that some of them are already sending messages to us; while the rest, as soon as they dare, and see that we have crossed the river, will gladly join us; not so much because they have any affection for us, as because they are eager to punish the outrages of the Carthaginians. Most important of all is the fact that the enemy are at variance with each other, and will refuse to fight against us in a body, and by thus engaging in detail will be more easily dealt with by us." Looking to these facts, therefore, he bade them cross the river with confidence, and undertook that he and the other officers would see to the next step to be taken. With these words he left his colleague, Marcus Silanus, with five hundred horse to guard the ford, and to protect the allies on the north of the river, while he himself began taking his army across, without revealing his design to any one. As a matter of fact he had resolved to do nothing of what he gave out publicly, and had made up his mind to make a rapid attack upon the town called Iberian Carthage. This may be looked upon as the first and strongest proof of the judgment which I lately passed upon him. He was now only in his twenty-seventh year: and yet he, in the first place, undertook to accomplish what the magnitude of the previous disasters had made the world look upon as completely hopeless; and, in the second place, having undertaken it, he left on one side the plain and obvious course, and conceived and carried out a plan which was a surprise to the enemy himself. This could only be the result of the closest calculation.

Scipio crosses the Ebro, and swoops down upon New Carthage.

7. The fact is that he had made minute inquiries, before leaving Rome, both about the treason of the Celtiberians, and the separation of the two Roman armies; and had inferred that his father's disaster was entirely attributable to these. He had not therefore shared the popular terror of the Carthaginians, nor allowed himself to be overcome by the general panic.

Scipio's careful inquiries as to the state of things in Spain.

And when he subsequently heard that the allies of Rome north of the Ebro were remaining loyal, while the Carthaginian commanders were quarrelling with each other, and maltreating the natives subject to them, he began to feel very cheerful about his expedition, not from a blind confidence in Fortune, but from deliberate calculation. Accordingly, when he arrived in Iberia, he learnt, by questioning everybody and making inquiries about the enemy from every one, that the forces of the Carthaginians were divided into three. Mago, he was informed, was lingering west of the pillars of Hercules among the Conii; Hasdrubal, the son of Gesco, in Lusitania, near the mouth of the Tagus; while the other Hasdrubal was besieging a certain city of the Caspetani; and none of the three were less than ten days' march from the New Town. Now he calculated that, if he decided to give the enemy battle, it would be risking too much to do so against all three at once, because his predecessors had been beaten, and because the enemy would vastly out-number him; if, on the other hand, he were to march rapidly to engage one of the three, and should then find himself surrounded—which might happen by the one attacked retreating, and the others coming up to his relief,—he dreaded a disaster like that of his uncle Gnaeus and his father Publius.

8. He therefore rejected that idea altogether: but being informed that New Carthage was the most important source of supplies to the enemy and of damage to the Romans in the present war, he had taken the trouble to make minute inquiries about it during the winter from those who were well informed. He learnt that it was nearly the only town in Iberia which possessed a harbour suitable for a fleet and naval force; that it lay very conveniently for the Carthaginians to make the sea passage from Libya; that they in fact had the bulk of their money and war material in it, as well as their hostages from the whole of Iberia; that, most important of all, the number of fighting men garrisoning the citadel only amounted to a thousand,—because no one would ever suppose that, while the Carthaginians commanded nearly the whole of Iberia, any one would conceive the idea of assaulting this

He determines to attempt New Carthage.

town; that the other inhabitants were exceedingly numerous, but all consisted of craftsmen, mechanics, and fisher-folk, as far as possible removed from any knowledge of warfare. All this he regarded as being fatal to the town, in case of the sudden appearance of an enemy. Nor did he moreover fail to acquaint himself with the topography of New Carthage, or the nature of its defences, or the lie of the lagoon: but by means of certain fishermen who had worked there he had ascertained that the lagoon was quite shallow and fordable at most points; and that, generally speaking, the water ebbed every day towards evening sufficiently to secure this. These considerations convinced him that, if he could accomplish his purpose, he would not only damage his opponents, but gain a considerable advantage for himself; and that, if on the other hand he failed in effecting it, he would yet be able to secure the safety of his men owing to his command of the sea, provided he had once made his camp secure,—and this was easy, because of the wide dispersion of the enemy's forces. He had therefore, during his residence in winter quarters, devoted himself to preparing for this operation to the exclusion of every other: and in spite of the magnitude of the idea which he had conceived, and in spite of his youth, he concealed it from all except Gaius Laelius, until he had himself decided to reveal it.

9. But although historians agree in attributing these calculations to him; yet, when they come to narrate their issue, they somehow or another attribute the success obtained not to the man and his foresight, but to the gods and to Fortune, and that, in spite of all probability, and the evidence of those who lived with him; and in spite of the fact that Publius himself in a letter addressed to Philip has distinctly set forth that it was upon the deliberate calculations, which I have just set forth, that he undertook the Iberian campaign generally, and the assault upon New Carthage in particular.

Gaius Laelius proceeds to New Carthage with the fleet,

However that may be, at the time specified he gave secret instructions to Gaius Laelius, who was in command of the fleet, and who, as I have said, was the only man in the secret, to sail to this town; while he himself marched his army at a rapid

pace in the same direction. His force consisted of twenty-five thousand infantry and two thousand five hundred cavalry; and arriving at New Carthage on the seventh day he pitched his camp on the north of the town;[1] defended its rear by a double trench and rampart stretching from sea to sea,[2] while on the side facing the town he made absolutely no defences, for the nature of the ground made him sufficiently secure. Scipio by land. B.C. 209.

But as I am now about to describe the assault and capture of the town, I think I must explain to my readers the lie of the surrounding country, and the position of the town itself.

10. It stands about half-way down the coast of Iberia in a gulf which faces south-west, running about twenty stades inland, and about ten stades broad at its entrance. The whole gulf is made a harbour by the fact that an island[3] lies at its mouth and thus makes the entrance channels on each side of it exceedingly narrow. It breaks the force of the waves also, and the whole gulf has thus smooth water, except when south-west winds setting down the two channels raise a surf: with all other winds it is perfectly calm, from being so nearly landlocked. In the recess of the gulf a mountain juts out in the form of a chersonese, and it is on this mountain that the city stands, surrounded by the sea on the east and south, and on the west by a lagoon extending so far northward that the remaining space to the sea on the other side, to connect it with the continent, is not more than two stades. The city itself has a deep depression in its centre, presenting on its south side a level approach from the sea; while the rest of it is hemmed in by hills, two of them mountainous and rough, three others much lower, but rocky and difficult of ascent; the largest of which lies on the east of the town run- Description of New Carthage.

[1] Dr. Arnold declares it "all but an impossibility that an army should have marched the distance (not less than 325 Roman miles) in a week." Livy (26, 42) accepts the statement without question.

[2] Mr. Strachan-Davidson explains this to mean from the sea to the lake, as Scipio's lines would not have extended right round the lake to the other sea.

[3] Escombrera (Σκομβραρία). I must refer my readers to Mr. Strachan-Davidson's appendix on *The Site of the Spanish Carthage* for a discussion of these details. See above 2, 13; Livy, 26, 42.

ning out into the sea, on which stands a temple of Asclepius. Exactly opposite this lies the western mountain in a closely-corresponding position, on which a palace had been erected at great cost, which it is said was built by Hasdrubal when he was aiming at establishing royal power. The remaining three lesser elevations bound it on the north, of which the westernmost is called the hill of Hephaestus, the next to it that of Aletes,—who is believed to have attained divine honours from having been the discoverer of the silver mines,—and the third is called the hill of Cronus. The lagoon has been connected with the adjoining sea artificially for the sake of the maritime folk; and over the channel thus cut between it and the sea a bridge has been built, for beasts of burden and carts to bring in provisions from the country.

11. Such is the nature of this city's situation. The side of the Roman camp which faced the city therefore was secured, without any artificial means, by the lagoon and the sea. The neck of land lying between these two, and connecting the city with the continent, Scipio did not fence off with a stockade, although it abutted on the middle of his camp,—either for the sake of making an impression upon the enemy, or by way of suiting the arrangement to his own design,—that he might have nothing to hamper the free egress and return of his troops to and from the camp. The circuit of the city wall was not more than twenty stades formerly,—though I am aware that it has been stated at forty stades; but this is false, as I know from personal inspection and not from mere report,—and in our day it has been still farther contracted.

Scipio discloses his intention of assaulting New Carthage.

The fleet arrived to the hour, and Publius then thought it time to summon a meeting of his men and to encourage them to the undertaking by the use of the same arguments by which he had convinced himself, and which I have just now detailed. He pointed out to them that the plan was practicable; and briefly summing up the blow which their success would be to their enemies, and the advantage it would be to themselves, he ended by promising crowns of gold to those who first mounted the walls, and the usual rewards to those who