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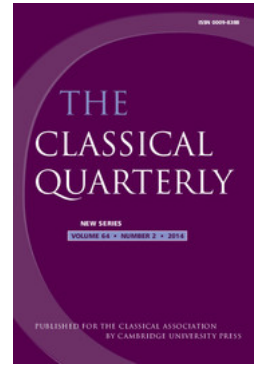
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PERICLES AND CLEON IN THUCYDIDES.¹

NOT the least pleasure in reading a book so vital and imaginative as Mr. Cornford's lies in the vitalising effect it has on the imagination of the reader. The results may or may not be correct: Mr. Cornford may or may not agree with them: but it is perhaps the best of compliments to a writer that he should produce such an effect at all. In the present instance his masterly analysis of the character and significance of Cleon as an actor in Thucydides' historic drama has suggested an interpretation of Pericles' position in the tragedy, which, though somewhat different from Mr. Cornford's own estimate of that great figure, is yet in accordance with his general conception of the work as a whole, designed to show Retribution following on overbearing Ambition and overweening Desire. From the time of Grote this conception has been familiar enough in outline, but Mr. Cornford fills it in with a wonderful richness of detail and illustration, and in particular draws a striking parallel with the vast scheme of Retribution in the *Oresteia*.

But throughout he seems to discredit such a conception of history from the point of view of truth and accuracy. He calls it 'mythical'; 'imaginative' it undoubtedly is; but does imagination always imply inaccuracy? Is it not true as a matter of fact that Athens *was* led to the ruinous war with Sparta by her desire for larger empire and greater wealth? Such questions, already raised by Dr. Postgate in the October number of this Review, must be pressed home. And if Athens was so led, is not this the most important fact in the whole affair? Mr. Cornford would admit that however much the modern way of speaking about 'causes' in history may differ from the Thucydidean, yet the modern historian, as the ancient, must deal at bottom, if he goes to the bottom, with the desires and passions of actual men. Now it seems to me that the modern method runs the risk of obscuring these behind the talk of 'laws' and 'forces,' though such laws are, and are even known to be, nothing but shorthand symbols for them and their results. The Greek way of putting it stands clear of this danger and reaches, as the Greek genius usually did, instinctively to the root of the matter. Solon's 'acute observation of the habits of merchants' (p. 66), viz., 'that they are not accustomed to bring their wares to places where they can get nothing in exchange,' is really far clearer than any statement of ours about the 'necessity that imports should

¹ See *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, F. M. Cornford.

balance exports.' So with the question here. What was the cause of the Peloponnesian war? Mr. Cornford answers in effect: 'Not the alarm of Sparta, and not the policy of Pericles, but simply the trade-necessities of Athens. Megara was the centre of strife, because Megara was on the trade-route to Sicily, and therefore a necessity for Athens.' But why, we ask further, was it a necessity for Athens to take by force what was not hers, however rich and tempting? Has Mr. Cornford any answer to this, the deepest question of all? We believe Thucydides had one. It was a necessity for Athens because she had set her heart on an ideal of culture, leisure, and beauty for herself, based on the wealth and toil of others. And this ideal was the ideal of Pericles. The necessary basis might be kept in the background, but the man who took the tribute of the allies for the building of the Parthenon, the man who went on his way unmoved when the scrupulous cried aloud that Athens was not an adventuress to be tricked out in stolen jewels (*Plut. Per. c. 12*), the man who called Aegina the eyesore of the Peiraeus (*ibid. c. 8*) and never rested till the rich commercial centre was made a tributary, that man knew well enough what he was about, he knew what were the sinews of culture as well as of war, he knew the needs of his State when he laid hands on Megara for her growing population. His own words may furnish illustration. The increase in empire has gone hand in hand with the furnishing of the city (*Thuc. ii. 37. 4*, and again *c. 64. 4*). It is the power of the city that has made it the market for the world's goods (*ii. 38*). It does not seem necessary, therefore, to take the paradoxical view that the statesman's hand was forced in the matter of Megara by the trading mob, and that Aristophanes and Thucydides were misled when they pointed to him as the man 'who drove the Athenians to the war.' Mr. Cornford has really nothing to bring forward in defence of this except that Pericles speaks of the Megarian decree as possibly 'seeming a little thing.' And even if it did seem so to him as well as to his critics (a thing he does not say), that may well have been in view of the many resources in his fertile brain: if he could not have carried his point about Megara then and there, we may be sure he would have found other ways for Athens to strike at foreign wealth.

Undoubtedly such a stroke was justified in his own eyes. Athens was the school of Hellas, and the tributaries should be proud to contribute. Was it justified in the eyes of Thucydides? He lets Pericles state his own case, he gives the Periclean ideal in all its ineffaceable splendour; but, and this is our great contention, he is careful to set down also the violence that the Periclean policy involved, the selfishness and the tyranny, the hatred on the side of the subjects, and the contempt of ordinary morality in the hearts of the sovereigns. Further, he sets side by side, very quietly, but, once we realise it, with startling effect, the two stages of that policy: the first embodied in a man of supreme ability and refinement, the second in a brutal nature, where the evil and the danger, not easily to be discerned before, appear at last in their naked deformity. Cleon is the successor of Pericles, and the succession, once grasped, is significant enough to arouse and alarm the historic conscience. Thucydides, I believe, did not intend

this effect to jump to our eyes from the first. His history, a possession for ever, was to do its full work slowly. Like Plato, he wished not to impose his opinion ready-made upon his readers, but so to present the facts that, after due meditation, the true view should grow up, as it were with its own life, in a mind that was active itself. Hence, as here, he works for the most part indirectly and unobtrusively, refraining too from all comment of his own. Yet his own preliminary statement about the rise of the Athenian empire is very strong, and should not be minimised. Speaking of the revolt of Naxos (i. 98 fin.) he says: 'This was the first allied city that was *enslaved contrary to the terms*, and the rest followed one after another, each in its turn.' (*παρὰ τὸ καθεστηκὸς ἐδουλώθη.*)

Now let us turn to the protagonists themselves. At the outset Pericles is given a curious double introduction, and Cleon has exactly the same. In each case the second introduction is an insistent echo of the first, and yet, far from seeming a mere repetition, it is calculated to strike us as the first direct mention of the man. This is noticed by Mr. Cornford for Cleon (p. 118), and it is just as noteworthy for Pericles. The effect, each time, is gained partly by the lapse of chapters between the two passages, partly by the turn of phrase in the second, and the net result is a singularly deep and clear 'first impression,' made on us, we hardly know how, just as it is made in life.

And these double descriptions, worked out with this subtle care, will be found to correspond in a striking way.

Pericles. (a) (Thuc. i. 127.) Sparta, we are told, tried to undermine the position of '*Pericles, the son of Xanthippus*,' 'because, *being the most powerful man of his time, and the leader of the State*, he opposed the Lacedaemonians at every point, and would not allow the Athenians to give in, but drove them to the war.' (. . . Περικλέα τὸν Ξανθίππου . . . ὃν γὰρ δυνατώτατος τῶν καθ' ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἄγων τὴν πολιτείαν ἠναντιοῦτο πάντα τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις καὶ οὐκ εἶα ὑπέικειν, ἀλλ' ἐς τὸν πόλεμον ὄρμα τοὺς Ἀθηναίους.)

(b) Then, after twelve chapters (i. 139 fin.), and in direct connection with the proposal to rescind the Megarian decree:

'Various speakers came forward and spoke in favour of either view, some advising war, others urging that the decree ought to be rescinded, and not allowed to stand in the way of peace. *And Pericles, the son of Xanthippus, at that time the first man in Athens, the most powerful as a speaker and a leader, stood forward and gave the following advice.*' (*καὶ παριόντες ἄλλοι τε πολλοὶ ἔλεγον, ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα γιγνόμενοι ταῖς γνώμας, . . . καὶ παρελθὼν Περικλῆς ὁ Ξανθίππου, ἀνὴρ κατ' ἐκείνον τὸν χρόνον πρῶτος Ἀθηναίων, λέγειν τε καὶ πράσσειν δυνατώτατος, παρήγει τοιαύδε.*)

Now let us turn to Cleon. The first mention of him is put in direct connection with the proposal to rescind the Mytilenean decree.

Cleon. (a) (iii. 36 fin.) 'Various views were expressed by individual speakers, *and Cleon, the son of Cleainetus* (who had carried his proposal for death in the previous assembly), *always the most violent man in the city, and at that time far the most influential with the democracy, stood forward once more and spoke as follows.*'

(ἄλλαι τε γινώμαι ἀφ' ἐκάστων ἐλέγοντο καὶ Κλέων ὁ Κλεινέτου, ὅσπερ καὶ τὴν προτέραν ἐνενηκῆκει ὥστε ἀποκτείναι, ὧν καὶ ἐς τὰ ἄλλα βιαιότατος τῶν πολιτῶν τῷ τε δήμῳ παρὰ πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανώτατος, παρελθὼν αὐθις ἔλεγε τοιάδε.)

(b) Then, a long while after (iv. 21), in connection with the refusal of the Athenians to make peace after Sphacteria because 'they coveted something more' (Mr. Cornford's version):

'They were urged forward above all by *Cleon, the son of Cleainetus, a man who was the popular leader at that time, and the most influential with the multitude.*' (μάλιστα δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐνήγε Κλέων ὁ Κλεινέτου, ἀνὴρ δημαγωγὸς κατ' ἐκείνους τὸν χρόνον ὧν καὶ τῷ πλήθει πιθανώτατος.)

Once put these passages side by side, and the significant likenesses should not escape attention, nor yet, no doubt, the significant changes:—βιαιότατος and πιθανώτατος for λέγειν καὶ πρᾶσσειν δυνατώτατος, δημαγωγός for ἄγων τὴν πολιτείαν. Cleon has succeeded in a sense to the position of Pericles: how far has he succeeded to his policy? It will also be observed that the first mention of Cleon corresponds most closely with the second mention of Pericles. This, I take it, is because Thucydides wishes to emphasise the parallel between the two assemblies. Each meeting is for reconsideration: Pericles will not allow the rescinding of the harsh decree against Megara: Cleon tries to prevent the cancelling of the barbarous one against Mytilene. Megara is the first great instance of attack on a neighbour city for her wealth: Mytilene the first of murderous cruelty towards a coveted island. It may also be worthy of note that just as Pericles breaks off the negotiations about Megara by extravagant counter-demands which he knows the Spartans will not accept, so Cleon stops the bargainings for peace after Pylos by demanding Troezen, Achaea, and the key-ports of Megara again. Each speaker asserts that to yield on the disputed point will be taken as a fatal sign of weakness: the Peloponnesians will dictate their own terms (i. 140 fin.): the allies will revolt with one accord (iii. 39. 7).

But there are deeper correspondences than these, strange correspondences of spirit, even of phrase, and here the parallels are between the one speech of Cleon and the great three in which Pericles reveals himself.

Both leaders stand up to defy the popular mood. In Cleon's speech 'there is not a touch of the gross or cringing flatterer; it is not the Cleon of Aristophanes. He breaks out at once in violent denunciation of the sovereign people' (Mr. Cornford, p. 114). Does not Thucydides mean us to think of the 'lightnings' of former days wielded by a coarser hand?

The first words of Pericles are these (i. 140):

'I still keep to the opinion I have always held: that we must not yield to the Peloponnesians' (Τῆς μὲν γνώμης . . . ἀεὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ἔχομαι, κτλ.).

This unwavering purpose is then contrasted with the vacillation of others, and both notes are struck again in the closing speech (ii. 61):

'I am the same, and I have not moved: but you have altered, because you

could be convinced when no harm had touched you, but you change your minds when you have to suffer.' (*καὶ ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι κτλ.*)

So we have Cleon's sharp attack in the very front of his speech on the democracy's change of mind in the matter of Mytilene, set in contrast to his own steadfastness (iii. 37 init.); and in iii. 38 init. the Periclean phrase:—

'I am still of the same opinion as I was, and I am amazed at the proposal to reopen the discussion.' (*Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι τῇ γνώμῃ κτλ.*)

And why is Athens not to draw back from war and suffering in the one case, from massacre in the other? Because the empire is in danger, and its wealth is the source of strength. (Pericles: *τὰ τῶν ξυμμάχων, ὅθεν ἰσχύομεν.* i. 143. 6. Cleon: *τῆς προσόδου δι' ἣν ἰσχύομεν.* iii. 39. 8.)

And the bonds of that empire are 'force and fear' (Mr. Cornford, p. 114); not for Pericles, it may well be, the only bonds, as they are for Cleon, but still for him, as for Cleon, indispensable. 'Your empire is a tyranny,' he tells the Athenians in so many words, and Cleon echoes the phrase to the letter. (Pericles: *ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν, ἰ.ε. τὴν ἀρχήν.* ii. 63. Cleon: *τυραννίδα ἔχετε τὴν ἀρχήν.* iii. 37. 2.) The repetition is noticed by Mr. Cornford. 'You have become hated in your empire' (Pericles ii. 63. 1). 'You hold an empire over unwilling subjects' (Cleon iii. 37. 2). Pericles accepts the hatred, one might almost say with complacency, as the lot of all who have ever claimed empire (*ὅσοι ἕτεροι ἐτέρων ἠξίωσαν ἄρχειν* ii. 64. 5.) Cleon complains that the democracy shows its incapacity for that very thing (*ἐτέρων ἄρχειν*) by the mere attempt to rule through a union of hearts (iii. 37). It is utterly foolish, he adds, the hope of extending to others the mutual confidence and security of the daily life at Athens; and surely we ought to recall here the Periclean pride in that same daily trust and freedom. (Pericles: *ἐλευθέρως . . . ἐς τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ὑποψίαν κτλ.* ii. 37. 2. Cleon: *τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν ἀδεές καὶ ἀνεπιβούλευτον πρὸς ἀλλήλους.* iii. 37. 2.)

Once more Cleon scoffs at the trifling sentimental pleasure of yielding to 'rhetorical' appeals for pity compared with the great and solid benefits of power (iii. 40. 2 and 3: *ἐν ᾧ ἡ μὲν πόλις βραχέα ἠσθεῖσα μεγάλα ζημιώσεται*). Pericles lays it down that he is wise 'who chooses envy as the price of greatness' (*ἐπὶ μεγίστοις τὸ ἐπίφθονον λαμβάνει* ii. 64. 6, 7). 'For the hatred does not last long, while the splendour of the present and the glory of the future will remain in the minds of men for ever.' So Plutarch tells us of his offer to bear the expense of decorating the Acropolis on condition that the monuments were inscribed as his. (*Per.* c. 14).

Finally we have from Cleon and Pericles alike, clear, merciless, and bold, the acceptance of an iniquitous basis for their rule with all its consequences.

'The empire may be thought unjust (Pericles ii. 63. 2). The armchair moralist (ii. 64) may blame it, the timid may want to sit at home in quiet and play the honest man, but Athens has gone too far on the path of hatred and of glory to turn back without risk.' What is the cynicism of Cleon but an echo of this?

'Mytilene may have done right to revolt, and the Athenian empire is then unjustifiable ; but if the Athenians claim to keep it, right or wrong, as claim they will, then they must go through with the means, just or unjust : otherwise let them give it all up and play the honest man in safety' (iii. 40. 4). *Mutatis mutandis*, this might be a paraphrase of Pericles down to the bitter sneer at *ἀνδραγαθίζεσθαι*, so pitiful on Pericles' lips after the noble place it took in the speech on the fallen citizens (ii. 42. 4).

The ideal of that speech, it is most true, has nothing corresponding to it in Cleon. Pericles has not only a caution and a sobriety utterly unknown to his successor (and to which Thucydides gives full weight, ii. 65) ; he has also a standard of life for his own city which does much to redeem its narrowness. To the last he is a noble figure : Cleon, at the best, but a vigorous one. He has not succeeded to the Periclean policy in its fulness ; he has only the lust of empire for empire's sake. Yet the selfishness which is the evil seed of lust was already present in Pericles and Periclean Athens, and Thucydides saw it there, just as Aeschylus saw it in the glory of other conquerors and kings (*Ag.* 374 foll., 460 foll., 750 foll.). Of the three figures that dominate the three stages of his history (one might almost say his trilogy)—Pericles, Cleon, and Alcibiades—the first presents the moment when the great house, as yet unshaken, is full of the peril that comes from pride and domination. Thucydides saw this, and what he saw he would not pretend to overlook. So he condemns Pericles, and out of his own mouth, but yet as a great soul condemns, giving full credit to all nobility, yet in no way sparing guilt ; nothing extenuating, yet setting down naught in malice ; silent, generous, and stern ; as Velasquez condemns Pope Innocent and Michael Angelo condemns the Medici.

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