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THE TRUE CAUSE OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR.

IN an article in the *Classical Quarterly* of October, 1911, Mr. Guy Dickins criticized certain views put forward by Mr. Cornford, by the writer of the article on Greek History in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and by myself, on the statements made by Thucydides as to the cause or causes of the Peloponnesian War.

Mr. Dickins makes three statements as to the views which he supposes me to hold. Not one of the three statements is even approximately correct.

The first is as follows (*Classical Quarterly*, p. 238): 'Athens was compelled to interfere in the north-west, owing to the necessity of opening out new sources of corn-supply and of providing for her unemployed.'

This statement is doubly wrong. In the first place, I do not mention the unemployed in this connexion; nor do I anywhere imply that the question of unemployment had anything to do with this phase of Athenian policy. In the second place, I do not speak of any 'necessity' of opening this new [*sic*] source of supply. What I do say is clearly stated in my published volume on *Thucydides* (p. 328): 'But Sicily was an all-important resource to her in case she were cut off at some future time from the Pontus; and her connexion with that region through the narrow waters of the Hellespont and Bosphorus was in the very nature of things most precarious.'

I speak of a possible eventuality, not of a necessity, which is a very different thing.

Secondly, Mr. Dickins credits me with the assertion that 'the inland communities (sc. of Peloponnese) were afraid of a blockade, and the loss of their imported corn.'

I do not speak of a blockade in reference either to the preliminaries of the war, nor yet even in relation to the first few years of the war. It did not form any part of the strategy of Athens as laid down by Pericles. I refer to the words which Thucydides puts into the mouth of the Corinthians in their speech at the Congress at Sparta (Thuc. I. 120), words which threaten plainly a possible stoppage of the sea-route from Sicily by the Athenian alliance with Corcyra.

Thirdly, Mr. Dickins (*Classical Quarterly*, p. 239) professes to quote actual words of mine: "'Thucydides is wrong," says Dr. Grundy, "but excusably so, since he is writing after the end of the war, when the original causes have been obscured by the new developments which arose very soon after the war began."'

It may be surprising to those who have read Mr. Dickins' article, but have not read my book, to learn that these words, though placed within inverted commas, are not to be found in that book. Nor are they a correct expression of any views which I have ever put forward. What I have said is to be found in that part of the book where it might be expected to be found—in that chapter in which I am dealing with the causes of the Ten Years' War (pp. 322, 323).

In that chapter I express myself somewhat cautiously on this thorny question—with far more caution than that with which Mr. Dickins credits me. I felt, and I

also said, that the probability is that Thucydides is right; though I was not prepared at that time to express an opinion as to the exact sense in which we are to understand his assertion. I was not, indeed, called upon to do so, because I was writing the story, not of the whole war, but of the Ten Years' or Archidamian War. But I have since then been carrying on my work on Thucydides; and I am now prepared to state the conclusions to which I have come—conclusions which, as will be seen by those who care to read them, do not imply that Thucydides was mistaken in his judgment on this important question.

Thucydides' conception of the true cause of the war cannot be understood unless and until we appreciate the time at which it was formed. The evidence for the approximate date of its formation is contained in a clear form in his own work.

His statements on the subject are as follows:

In I. 23 (4) (6), after saying that the beginning of the war was due to the breaking of the Thirty Years' Peace, and that he has in the first place written down τὰς αἰτίας καὶ τὰς διαφορὰς in order that no one should ever be at a loss to know how so great a war arose in the Greek world, he proceeds: 'I think that the most real pretext, but that most kept in the background, was that the rising power of Athens alarmed the Lacedaemonians and forced them to go to war.'

I suggest that the historian means that the causes which he is about to relate are merely those of the outbreak of the Ten Years' War, whereas the *uerissima causa* which he mentions is the cause of the war as a whole.

In I. 88 he recurs again to the statement of the *uerissima causa*, and says: 'The Lacedaemonians decided that the Treaty had been broken and that there must be war, not so much because they were persuaded by the speeches of the allies, but because they feared lest the Athenian power should increase, seeing that a large part of Greece was already subject to them.'

He then proceeds to give the history of the early years of the Delian League, with a view to showing how the great power of Athens arose. In I. 97 he gives unexpectedly a second reason for his digression on the period between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, namely that Hellanicus, the one author who had treated of the subject, had done so imperfectly. He then continues his story of the Pentecontaëtia.

Many modern writers of recent years have pointed out the apparent inconsistency of this statement of the *uerissima causa* with the marked reluctance to go to war which Thucydides himself shows the Spartans to have displayed until within a comparatively short time before the war began.

Mr. Dickens explains this away by suggesting a change in party predominance at Sparta, where the 'War Party' got the upper hand of the 'Peace Party.' In the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, where Mr. Dickens states with more detail his views on Spartan history, I shall try to show that this explanation is open to serious objections.

The real question, as it seems to me, is as to the application of the ἀληθεστάτη πρόφασις of Thucydides.

Does he mean to apply it to the Ten Years' War or to the whole twenty-seven years of warfare?

The association of this statement of cause with that story of the Pentecontaëtia, which, as the reference to Hellanicus shows, cannot have been written before 406 B.C., indicates pretty clearly that this conception of cause cannot have come to him until he had conceived the idea of the oneness of the war. It seems to me that it is reasonable to suppose that the two conceptions are logically connected; in fact, that he intended this *uerissima causa* of the first book to be the common causal factor running through the whole period of twenty-seven years.

It is, I think, true to say that the human mind tends to form two different con-

cepts of 'cause.' It may conceive of it in one instance, and with regard to a certain consequent, as a momentary or brief-lived phenomenon producing a certain definite effect. But, on the other hand, it may conceive of it as a prolonged causal factor running through a long series of events, and having its effects mingled with those of other causes of briefer duration.

If we regard history as resembling a woven material in which some of the threads of cause and effect give out sooner than others, then we shall, I think, be able without difficulty to apply this second concept of cause to the history of the Peloponnesian War.

The causes of that war, as stated by Thucydides, are three in number :

1. The affairs of Epidamnus and Potidaea.
2. The Megarian Decree.
3. The fear felt by Sparta at the growing power of Athens.

Modern criticism has added a fourth :

4. The trade question between Corinth and Athens.

No one would deny that causes 1, 2, and 4 were in existence at the beginning of the war.

I have already given reasons for believing that cause 4 was not operative in the wide sense in which some would suppose it to have been (Grundy, *Thucydides*, p. 324).

I have also sought to show that, although there had been a terrible set-back to the political power of Athens in the decade between 454 and 445, yet that between 445 and 431 the growth in the economic power of the State had been such as might easily be translated into politics (*Thuc.* p. 323). Thucydides' language does not imply that that growth had been continuous over a long period of years; and can, in fact, only refer to the fourteen or fifteen years between the Thirty Years' Peace and the outbreak of the war. Therefore the third cause was distinctly operative at the time when the war began.

But the real question is how long these four causes respectively continued to be operative during the twenty-seven years of warfare.

The thread of the first cause gave out in the early years of the Ten Years' War. The same was the case with the second. No one would allege that either of these causes had anything to do with either the Sicilian Expedition or the Ionian War.

Nor had the fourth cause anything to do with either of these wars. The allegation that the Sicilian Expedition was undertaken to promote the trade interests of Athens is entirely unsupported by anything which Thucydides says; and he is, after all, our only first-hand authority for its history. In VI. 6 he says that the desire for the empire of Sicily was the only real motive which the Athenians had in undertaking the expedition. In VI. 24 he speaks of the motives with more detail: 'All alike were seized with a strong desire to sail; the older citizens, under the impression that either they would subdue Sicily, or that, at any rate, so large a force could not meet with great disaster: the younger men, from their longing to see with their own eyes a foreign land, and because they were confident of a safe return: the masses generally and the soldiery owing to the prospect of pay for the present, and of the acquisition of an inexhaustible source of pay for the future.' Not a word of trade motives.

And so the thread of the fourth cause seems to have given out before the Sicilian Expedition began.

But what of the third cause—the ἀληθεστάτη πρόφασις of Thucydides?

It is certainly present, in common with the other causes, at the beginning of the Ten Years' War, though it is perhaps somewhat overshadowed by some of them in the pages of *Thucydides*, not because the author does not sufficiently emphasize it, but because he never lived to recast those parts of the first book in which his original

concepts of cause appeared supported by evidence which is so prominent that it tends to obscure the somewhat slender argument of fact by which, in that book at any rate, he upholds the assertion of his late-formed conception.

The Greek States at home, and Sparta in particular, do not seem, at first at any rate, to have realized the wide-reaching nature of the ambition of Athens in undertaking the expedition to Sicily. Corinth seems to have been the first to do so; and subsequently the revelations of Alcibiades left no doubt in the Spartan mind. The Ionian War was undertaken with the deliberate intention of destroying that empire whose continued existence must ever be a menace to the liberties of the Greek world.

Thus the cause which Thucydides asserts to have been that of the whole war is the only one of the four original causes which runs through the whole period of twenty-seven years. Of course it is more effective at some times than at others in that prolonged period; but it is ever there.

We students of Greek history have been too much inclined to treat Thucydides' statement of cause as if that author had merely meant it to be applicable, or to be especially applicable, to the immediate beginning of the war.

We have criticized Thucydides because we have mistaken an intention which the author did not live to make sufficiently clear.

G. B. GRUNDY.

It is not always easy to condense the arguments of several pages into a few sentences, and no doubt condensation gives a definite and dogmatic shape to a view which is in the original rather more conditional; but I cannot, on reperusal of the passages of which Dr. Grundy complains, find myself guilty of any serious misinterpretation of his argument, at any rate as I understood it. With the first remark I would compare the passage of p. 330 of *Thucydides*. 'The two main factors in the position of the Athenian State were: (1) The necessity of importing corn from abroad; (2) the necessity of providing for the unemployed. Hence, in view of the precarious nature of the connexion with the Pontus, Athens could not see any power in the position of being able to cut her communications with Sicily; nor could she for one moment contemplate the possibility of the destruction of her empire.' The second remark is based on two passages on pp. 325 and 326. One is a paraphrase of the Corinthian argument: 'If you let the Athenians get hold of Corcyra, the route to Sicily, and consequently the Sicilian corn-trade, will be in their hands. Of course, States like Corinth, which actually carry on that trade, will suffer most; but your turn will come when you are unable to obtain through Corinth that corn which you purchase through your manufactured and home-grown commodities.' The other runs thus: 'The attitude of the members of the Peloponnesian League is only explicable on the assumption that the measure which Athens had already meted out to Megara might in the future be meted out to them also.' Practically speaking, Megara was in a state of blockade. The inverted commas of the third remark are intended to indicate not a quotation, but a general statement of Dr. Grundy's position like those applied to Mr. Cornford's view on the preceding sentence. It still represents my impression of Dr. Grundy's arguments—*e.g.*, on pp. 412, 413.

G. DICKINS.