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CRISTOPHANES AND THE WAR PARTY

STUDY IN THE CONTEMPORARY
POLITICS OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR
BY
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A STUDY IN THE CONTEMPORARY
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ARISTOPHANES AND THE WAR PARTY

THERE is no commoner cause of historical misjudgement than the tendency to read the events of the past too exclusively in the light of the present, and so twist the cold and unconscious record into the burning service of controversial politics. And yet history is inevitably to a great extent a work of the imagination. No good historian is content merely to repeat the record of the past. He has to understand it, to see behind it, to find more in it than it actually says. He cannot understand without the use of his constructive imagination, and he cannot imagine effectively without the use of his experience. I believe it is one of the marks of a great historian, such as he in whose honour this annual lecture was established, such as he who now does us the honour of occupying the chair,¹ to

¹ Dr. Mandell Creighton and Lord Bryce.

see both present and past, as it were, with the same unclouded eye ; to realize the past story as if it were now proceeding before him, and to envisage the present much in the same perspective as it will bear when it is as one chapter, or so many pages, in the great volume of the past.

We know in Gibbon's case how much the historian of the Roman Empire learnt from the Captain of the Hampshire Grenadiers. And it would surely be folly to tell a man who had lived through the French or the Russian Revolution to forget his own experience when he came to treat of similar events in history. To do so is to fall into that great delusion that haunts the hopes of so many savants, the delusion of supposing that in these matters man can attain truth by some sure mechanical process without ever committing himself to the fallible engine of his own personality.

Greek History has been, for reasons not difficult to unravel, constantly reinterpreted according to the political experiences and preferences of its writers. Cleon in particular, the most vivid figure of the Peloponnesian War, plays in the history books many varied parts. Heeren and Passow, writing under the influence of the French Revolution,

treat him as a "bloodthirsty sans-culotte" who established a reign of terror. (Busolt, iii. 988 ff.) Mitford, a good English Tory reeling under the horror of the first Reform Bill, took him as a shocking example of what democracy really is and must be. Grote, on the contrary, saw him as a vigorous and much-abused Radical, and justified his war-policy for the sake of his democratic ardour at home. In our own day Mr. Grundy and Mr. Walker somewhat reinforce the position of Mitford, while Mr. Zimmern, following Beloch and Ferrero, sees in Cleon little more than the figurehead of a great social and economic movement. For my own part I would fain go back to the actual language of Thucydides and regard Cleon simply as "the most violent of the citizens, and at that time most persuasive to the multitude." We need bring in no nicknames of modern parties; that phrase tells us essentially what we need to know.

I propose to-day to consider the impression made on Athenian society by that long and tremendous conflict between Athens and Sparta which is called the Peloponnesian War, using the light thrown by our own recent experience. That war was in many respects curiously similar to the present

war. It was, as far as the Hellenic peoples were concerned, a world-war. No part of the Greek race was unaffected. It was the greatest war there had ever been. Arising suddenly among civilized nations, accustomed to comparatively decent and half-hearted wars, it startled the world by its uncompromising ferocity. Again, it was a struggle between Sea-power and Land-power ; though Athens, like ourselves, was far from despicable on land, and Sparta, like Germany, had a formidable fleet to back its land army. It was a struggle between the principles of democracy and military monarchy ; and in consequence throughout the Hellenic world there was a violent dissidence of sympathy, the military and aristocratic parties everywhere being pro-Spartan, and the democratic parties pro-Athenian. From the point of view of military geography, again, the democratic sea-empire of Athens suffered much from its lack of cohesion and its dependence on sea-borne resources, while the military land empire of the Peloponnesians gained from its compact and central position. It would perhaps be fanciful to go further and suggest that the Thracian hordes played something the same part in the mind of the Athenians as the Russians

with some of us. And, when they failed, alas, there was no America to make sure that the right side won!

Again, in the commonplaces of political argument, we find in that part of the Peloponnesian War about which we have adequate information, a division of parties curiously similar to our own. There were no pro-Spartans in Athens, just as there are no pro-Germans in the proper sense of the word with us. There was roughly a Peace by Negotiation party, led by Nicias, and a Knock-out-Blow party, led by Cleon. The latter emphasized the delusiveness of an "inconclusive Peace" and the impossibility of ever trusting the word of a Spartan; the former maintained that a war to the bitter end would only result in the exhaustion of both sets of combatants and the ruin of Greece as a whole. And Providence, unusually indulgent, vouchsafed to both parties the opportunity of proving that they were right. After ten years of war Nicias succeeded in making a Peace treaty, which, however, the firebrands on both sides proceeded at once to violate; war broke out again, as the war party had always said it would, and after continuing altogether twenty-seven years left Athens wrecked and

Sparta bleeding to death, just as the Peace party had always prophesied!

Of course such parallels must only be allowed to amuse our reflections, not to distort our judgements. It would be easy to note a thousand points of difference between the two great contests. But I must notice in closing one last similarity between the atmospheres of the two wars which is profoundly pathetic, if not actually disquieting. The more the cities of Greece were ruined by the havoc of war, the more the lives of men and women were poisoned by the fear and hate and suspicion which it engendered, the more was Athens haunted by shining dreams of the future reconstruction of human life. Not only in the speculations of philosophers like Protagoras and Plato, or town-planners like Hippodamus, but in comedy after comedy of Aristophanes and his compeers—the names are too many to mention—we find plans for a new life; a great dream-city in which the desolate and oppressed come by their own again, where rich and poor, man and woman, Athenian and Spartan are all equal and all at peace, where there are no false accusers and—sometimes—where men have wings. This Utopia begins as a world-city full of glory

and generous hope; it ends, in Plato's *Laws*, as one little hard-living asylum of the righteous on a remote Cretan hill-top, from which all infection of the outer world is rigorously excluded, where no religious heretics may live, where every man is a spiritual soldier, and even every woman must be ready to "fight for her young, as birds do." The great hope had dwindled to be very like despair; and even in that form it was not fulfilled.

The war broke out in 432 B.C. between the Athenian Empire, comprising nearly all the maritime states of Greece, on the one hand, and on the other the Peloponnesian Alliance led by Sparta. The first war lasted till 421; then followed the Peace of Nicias, interrupted by desultory encroachments and conflicts not amounting to open war till 418 when the full flood recommenced and lasted till the destruction of Athens in 404.

I wish to note first a few of the obvious results arising from so long and serious a war. The most obvious was the overcrowding of Athens due to the influx of refugees from the districts exposed to invasion. They lived, says Thucydides, in stuffy huts or slept in temples and public

buildings and the gates of the city wall, as best they could. (*Thucydides* ii. 52.) "You love the people?" says the Sausage-monger in Aristophanes' *Knights* to Cleon, "but here they are for seven years living in casks and holes and gateways. And much you care! You just shut them up and milk them." As every one knows, this overcrowding resulted in the great outbreak of a plague, similar to the Black Death, in 430, a point emphasized by Thucydides but not, if I remember rightly, ever mentioned by Aristophanes. I suppose there are some things which, even to a comic genius, are not funny.

There was great scarcity of food, of oil for lighting, and of charcoal for burning. "No oil left," says a slave in the *Clouds*: "Confound it," answers his master; "why did you light that drunkard of a lamp?" (*Clouds* 56.) "What are you poking the wick for," says an Old Man to his son in the *Wasps*, "when oil is so scarce, silly? Any one can see *you* don't have to pay for it!" (*Wasps* 252 ff.) But food was dearer still. "Good boy," says the same Old Man a little later, "I'll buy you something nice. You would like some knuckle-bones, I suppose?"

BOY. I'd sooner have figs, papa.

OLD MAN. 'Figs? I'd see you all hanged first. Out of this beggarly pay I have to buy meal and wood and some bit of meat or fish for three. And you ask for figs!' And the Boy bursts into tears.

I think the passage in the *Acharnians* where the hero, parodying a scene in a tragedy, threatens to murder a sack of charcoal, and the Chorus of charcoal-burners are broken-hearted at the thought, is perhaps more intelligible to us this winter than it was before the war.

The scarcity of food is dwelt upon again and again. It is treated almost always as a joke, but it is a joke with a grim background. Many places suffered far more than Athens. Melos had been reduced by famine (*Birds* 186.) The much-ravaged Megara, an enemy so contemptibly weak and yet, for geographical reasons, so maddeningly inconvenient to the Athenians, was absolutely starving. Farce comes near to the border of tears in the scene of the *Acharnians* where the Megarian comes to sell his children in a sack, as pigs, and we hear how the fashionable amusement in Megara is to have starving-matches round a fire. (*Acharnians* 750-762.)

In Athens itself prices were high, as we

saw in the scene from the *Wasps*. Everybody was in debt, like Strepsiades in the *Clouds*, like Peithetairos and Euelpides in the *Birds*. The King of the Birds, we hear, "had once been a human being, like you and I; and owed money, like you and me; and was thankful not to pay it, just like you and me." (*Birds* 114ff.) That was one of the reasons why, though Athens was certainly "a great and prosperous city and open to every one to spend money in," the heroes of that play determine to seek another home.

But the liveliest description of the general lack of food is in the *Knights*, in a scene of which the point has often been missed. Cleon is addressing the Council, thundering accusations of conspiracy and "the hidden hand," when the Sausage-monger resolves to interrupt him and bursts—quite illegally—in with the news that a shoal of sprats has come into the Piræus and can be had cheap, extraordinarily cheap. The hungry and anxious faces suddenly clear. They vote a crown to the bringer of good tidings, and prepare to rush off. Cleon, to regain his ascendancy, proposes a vast sacrifice of kids, as a thank-offering. The Sausage-monger at once doubles the number, and

proposes a still further extravagance of public feasting next day if sprats fall to a hundred the obol. The councillors accept the proposal without discussion and stream out. Cleon shrieks for them to wait: a herald has come from the Spartans to propose terms of Peace! At another time that would have held them. But now there are cries of derision. "Peace? Yes, of course. When they know that we have cheap fish in. We don't want Peace! Let the war rip!" Cleon had taught them their lesson only too well. (*Knights* 625-680.)

Another effect of the war was the absence of men of military age from Athens. The place was full of women and *Gerontes*—technically, men over sixty. And the young men were being killed out. That explains such phrases, for example, as the remark that Argos was now powerful because she had plenty of young men. (Contrast *Hdt.* vi. 83.) It explains too why the plots of three of our eleven extant Comedies, and quite a number of those only known from fragments, are based on suppositions of what the women might do if they held together. In the *Lysistrata*—the name means Dismissers of Armies—the heroine, determined on compelling both sides to make Peace, organizes a

general strike of all wives and mistresses, both in Athens and Sparta. They seize the Acropolis, and dress themselves in their most bewitching clothes, but will not say a word to any husband or lover till Peace is made. And when the authorities are summoned to put the revolt down, alas, they amount to nothing but a crowd of scolding old gentlemen. It is much the same in the *Ecclesiazusæ*, or Women in Parliament, only there they pack the Assembly disguised as men, carry a measure transferring the voting power from men to women and then introduce a socialist Utopia. The third woman-play, the *Thesmophoriazusæ*, turns on literature, not on politics.

The evidence is not sufficient to show whether there really was any general movement for Peace among the women, or yet for Socialism. At the present time women probably feel the pinch of scarcity and the difficulties of housekeeping more than men do; and possibly they feel the deaths of the young men more than the old men do. But these are only two factors among an enormous number that are operating.

The third material result which seems worth specially mentioning was the dearth of servants, though this was due to a different

cause from those which produce the same effect among us. It was that the slaves, who of course had no patriotism towards the city of their owners, deserted in vast numbers. At a certain moment we are told that more than 20,000 had escaped from Athens. Life no doubt was extra hard, and escape was easy. The master, if he was under sixty, was apt to be away on duty; and if you once got outside the town into the open country, where the enemy was in force, there was a good chance of not being pursued.

The slaves thus correspond to what is called the "international proletariat," or would correspond if such a class really existed. They were a class without rights, without interests, without preference for one country or one set of masters over another. In modern Europe it seems as a rule to take an extraordinary amount of prolonged misery before an oppressed class loses its national feeling.

Now let us turn from the material effects of the war to a more interesting side of the subject, the effects upon political opinion. I think that on this point, owing to the exceptional vividness and richness of our

sources, quite a good deal can be made out. We have not only the direct narrative of Thucydides, who writes at first hand of what he has himself observed and felt, and several speeches of contemporary orators, concerned with public or private suits. We have also the eleven Comedies of Aristophanes, representing the political opposition, and treating of public affairs with unusual freedom of speech and also, amid the wildest exaggerations, with a singularly acute perception of his opponent's point of view. The Greeks were not politicians and dramatists for nothing.

The first simple fact to realize is that the war was a long, hard, and evenly balanced war. Consequently each side, as usual, thought its own successes much greater than they really were, though of course much less than they ought to be. They could not understand why, considering their own moral and intellectual superiority to the enemy, they did not succeed sooner in completely crushing him. There arose a demand for energy, energy at any price, and then more energy. But why, even with energy, did things continue to go wrong? The mob became hysterical. Evidently there was a hidden hand; there were traitors in our

midst! This was dreadful enough; but the fact that with the utmost vigilance it was impossible to discover any traitors, made it infinitely exasperating. Athens swarmed with informers and false accusers. The Old Comedy is full of hits at these public nuisances, and they have left their mark on the historians and even the non-political writers. References to contemporary affairs are extremely rare in Greek tragedy, but Euripides in the *Ion*, written in 415, alludes passingly to Athens as "a city full of terror." (*Ion* 601.)

In this state of things it became of course extremely difficult, if not dangerous, to work for Peace. Nicias no doubt wished for a peace on reasonable terms, to be followed by an alliance with Sparta and a loyal co-operation between the two chief states of Greece. And there was, as far as we can see, no particular reason to regard Sparta as in any special sense an outcast from Greek civilization, or congenitally incapable of loyal action. But though all our authorities agree in praising both the character and abilities of Nicias, there is a constant complaint of his slowness, his lack of dash, and his reluctance to face, or to encourage, the howls of the patriotic mob. When he was com-

mander-in-chief, Plutarch tells us, he lost popularity by spending all his day working at the Stratêgion, or War Office, and then going straight home, instead of making himself agreeable to the orators and disseminators of news, or making speeches to "ginger" the Assembly.

As an offset to this rather gloomy picture, it is worth noting that Athenian civilization was hard to destroy. There were very few executions of citizens and no judicial murders even when passions ran most fiercely. And *pari passu* there were no assassinations. And though Aristophanes and the other Comedians speak a good deal of the danger they run in attacking Cleon, they seem to have exercised during the first ten years or so of the war a degree of freedom of speech which is almost without a parallel in history. If you can with impunity, in public, refer to the leading statesman of the day as "a whale that keeps a public-house and has a voice like a pig on fire," you are somewhat debarred from denouncing the rigours of the censorship. (*Wasps* 35 ff.) In other Greek states, of which Corcyra is the standing example, there were civil wars, political proscriptions, and massacres. But it took a long time even for a war so deep-rooted and

corrupting as the Peloponnesian to destroy the high civilization that had been built up in the Athens of Pericles. The only really atrocious acts which can be laid to the account of the war party at Athens are acts of ferocity to enemies or quasi-enemies, like the treatment of Megara and Mēlos; monstrous severity to those parts of the Empire which showed disloyalty during the war, like the massacres of Mitylênê and Skiônê; and thirdly, unless I am mistaken, a pretty constant practice of harsh and unscrupulous exploitation of subject-allies, which at times amounted to absolute tyranny and extortion.

After these general considerations, let us proceed to reconstruct the definite political criticism passed by the moderates or "pacifists" on the government of Cleon. Of course such reconstruction is not quite easy. The criticism is hardly ever both directly and seriously expressed. In Thucydides it is serious but seldom direct; it has mostly to be gathered from implications. In the orators it is allusive and powerfully affected by the necessities of the particular cause which the speaker is pleading. In Aristophanes it is abundant and in one sense direct enough to satisfy the most exacting critic; but it is confused first by the wild and farcical

atmosphere of the Old Comedy, which attains its end sometimes by exaggeration and sometimes, on the contrary, by paradox; I mean, by representing a public man in a character exactly the opposite to that for which he is notorious; and secondly, a point which is apt to be forgotten, by the subtle tact with which the poet has always to be handling his audience. To allow for these distorting media is not a question of scientific method; it is a question of familiarity with the subject and the language, of humour and of common sense. And it follows that one's interpretation can never be absolutely certain.

However, to take first the attitude of the Opposition towards the enemy. It is plain enough how the average Athenian citizen under the influence of war-fever regarded him. It was folly to speak of ever making any treaty with a Spartan, "who was no more to be trusted than a hungry wolf with its mouth open." (*Lysistrata* 629.) The Spartans are to blame for everything, everything that has gone wrong; they are creatures "for whom there exists no altar and no honour and no oath!" (*Acharnians* 308, 311.) The clergy, that is to say, the prophets and oracle-

dealers, are represented in Greek Comedy, just as they are later by Erasmus and Voltaire, as more ferocious in their war-passions than the average layman. For example, in the *Peace*, when that buried goddess has been recovered from the bowels of the earth and all the nations are rejoicing, the soothsayer Hierocles comes to interrupt the peace-libations with his oracles: "O miserable creatures and blind, not knowing the mind of the gods! Behold, men have made covenants with angry-eyed apes. Trembling gulls have put their trust in the children of foxes." And again, "Behold, it is not the pleasure of the blessed gods that ye cease from war until the wolf weds the lamb." Again, "Never shall ye make the crab walk straight; never shall ye make the sea-urchin smooth." (*Peace* 1049-1120.)

These prophets are never sympathetically treated by Aristophanes. Sometimes they are simply kicked or beaten at sight. Sometimes they are argued with, as in this scene. "Are we never to stop fighting?" asks the hero of the play. "Are we to draw lots for which goes to the Devil deepest, when we might simply make peace and together be the leaders of Hellas?" And

a little later he retorts on the oracles which Hierocles quotes from the prophet Bakis with a better oracle from Homer: "Without kindred or law or hearthstone is the man who loves war among his people." (*Peace* 1096 ff.)

In the *Acharnians* the hero deliberately undertakes to argue that the Spartans—whom he duly hates, and hopes that an earthquake may destroy them, for he too has had his vineyard ravaged—were, after all, not to blame in everything; on the contrary, they have in some points been treated unjustly. It is a bold undertaking. In very few great wars can it have been possible for a man on the public stage to argue such a thesis on behalf of the enemy; and Dicæopolis has to do it with a block ready for cutting his head off if he does not prove his point. His argument is that the cause of the war was the Athenian's tariff-war against Megara—a small Dorian state under the protection of Sparta. There was a deliberately injurious tariff against Megarian goods; and then, instead of letting the tariff work in the casual happy-go-lucky way that was usual in antiquity, "a lot of wicked little pinch-beck creatures, degraded, falsely stamped and falsely born," made a trade

of informing against Megarian woollen goods. And if ever they saw a pumpkin or a hare or a young pig or a head of garlic or some stray lumps of salt, "that's from Megara!" they shouted, and it was confiscated before nightfall. This led naturally enough to troubles on the frontier. Drunken young Athenians began making outrages across the Megarian border—the current form of outrage was to carry off a female slave; angry young Megarians made reprisals, till

At last in wrath the Olympian Pericles
Broke into thunder, lightning and damnation
On Greece; passed laws written like drinking-songs,
That no Megarian by land or sea
Or sky or market should be left alive!

(The allusion is to a drinking-song beginning "Would that not by land or sea," etc.) The Megarians were reduced to starvation; Sparta, intervening, made a petition on behalf of Megara to have the decree rescinded. They pleaded many times and Athens refused; and then came the rattling of shields. "They ought not to have rattled their shields," you say? Well, what ought they to have done? Suppose a Spartan had sailed out in a skiff and confiscated a puppy-dog belonging to the smallest islander in

your League, would you have sat still? God bless us, no. In a moment you would have had three hundred ships of war on the water," and so on, and so on.

The Chorus who listen to this bold pleading are shaken by it. Half go with the speaker, and half not. (*Acharnians* 496-561.)

Much the same account is given a few years later in the *Peace* (*Peace* 603-656): The hostile tariff against Megara was the first cause of the war; but the speaker here is more interested in what happened after. "Your dependencies, or subject-allies," he says, "saw that you and the Spartans were snarling at each other; so, in fear of the tribute you made them pay, they moved heaven and earth to induce the chief men in Sparta to fight for their independence. And they, like the covetous curs and deceivers of strangers that they are, drove Peace with shame out of the world and grabbed at war." He goes on to show how most of the suffering fell on the tillers of the soil.

I will not discuss the truth of this account further than to observe that to my mind the only question is a question of proportion. The cruel tariff-war against Megara is a *vera causa*. It did exist, and it did act, as such tyrannies always act, as a cause of

war. But how much weight it should be given among all the other causes is a question it would be futile at present to discuss. The object of Pericles' policy was, as far as we can judge, to compel Megara by sheer coercion to join the Athenian alliance, to which it seemed naturally to belong by geography and commercial interest, and give up the Spartan alliance, to which it belonged by race and sympathy.

The next point at issue between Aristophanes and Cleon is an interesting one. It is the treatment of the dependencies. Athens was the head of a great league, originally formed for defence against the Persians, and consisting chiefly of the Ionian islands and maritime states which had been under the Persian yoke. This league of equals had gradually transformed itself into an Empire, in which Athens provided most of the military and naval force and dictated the foreign policy, while the dependencies paid tribute for their protection.

These Ionian cities had been outstripped in power and wealth by Athens and the larger commercial units. But they had a tradition of ancient culture and refinement. Their language was still the authorized dialect of poetry and the higher prose. And,

though most of them were now democratically governed, their old families had still much influence and wealth. Aristophanes, like Sophocles and other Athenian writers, had strong links of sympathy with Ionia. His policy would doubtless have been that of Aristides, whose arrangement of the tribute payable by the dependencies was accepted as a model of justice. The democratic war party took just the opposite view. There were remnants of the old aristocratic families still in the islands; they must be taught a lesson. There was money: it must be extorted to provide pay for the Athenian populace. There was secret disaffection: it must be rooted out. There was occasionally an open rebellion: it must be met by wholesale executions. The islanders were all traitors at heart, and the worst they got was better than their deserts!

In the year 426, just before the earliest of his comedies that has come down to us entire, Aristophanes produced a play of extraordinary daring, called the *Babylonians*, in which he represented all the dependencies as slaves on a treadmill, watched by a flogging gaoler called Demos. One fragment describes soldiers demanding billets. Another shows

some extortioner saying, "We need 200 drachmæ." "How am I to get them?" asks the unhappy islander. "In this quart pot!" is the answer. There is mention of some soldier ordering a yoke of plough-oxen to be killed because he wanted beef. To make the insult to the Athenian Government greater, the play was produced at the Great Dionysia, in the summer, when visitors from the Ionian cities were present in large numbers in Athens. One can imagine their passionate delight at finding such a champion.

It was a little too much. Cleon brought a series of prosecutions against the poet, who remarks in a subsequent play (*Acharnians* 377 ff.) :

And how Cleon made me pay—
 I've not forgotten—for my last year's play!
 Dragged me before the Council, brought his spies
 To slander me, gargled his throat with lies,
 Niagaraed me and sloshed me, till—almost—
 With so much sewage I gave up the ghost!

His spirit was not quenched, however. His next play, the *Acharnians*, was a definite plea for Peace, and his next, the *Knights*, a perfectly exuberant and uncompromising attack on Cleon, now at the very height of his power.

It is noteworthy that in the *Knights*

there is clear evidence of the terror that Cleon inspired. The character who represents him was not made up to look like him, and was not called by his name—at least not till the play was more than half finished, and it was clear how the audience would take it: Furthermore, though I think the most burning cause of quarrel that Aristophanes had against Cleon was his treatment of the dependencies, or allies, these are not once mentioned by name till the last word of the last line of the play, when Cleon is removed from office and borne off to pursue his true vocation of selling cat's meat at the city gates, and exchanging "billingsgate" with the fish-sellers and prostitutes.

Carry him high

That those he wronged may see him, our allies!

There are plenty of general references to extortion, however. Cleon stands on the Council rock watching the sea, like the look-out man watching for herrings or tunnies, ready to harpoon the tribute as it comes. (313.) He knows all the rich and harmless men who have held any office and are consequently open to prosecution and blackmail. (260 ff.) He saves money by not paying the sailors, but letting them live on the islanders in-

stead. (*Knights* 1366 f.; *Acharnians* 161-163.) In any strait he demands war-ships for collecting arrears—there were probably always arrears of tribute due from some place or other—and sends them out to collect—with no questions asked. (1070—1078.) An informer in another play, the *Birds*, mentions with glee his own method, which is to go to an island and summon a rich islander to trial in Athens. Then, in the scarcity of ships, the islander cannot get a passage, while the informer is allowed to go in a man-of-war. The trial is brought on at once and the islander condemned in his absence. (*Birds* 1410-1468.)

Cleon's defence of his own policy is illuminating. The war meant vast expenditure and crippled production. The country population were driven for safety into the towns and ceased to produce wealth, while of course they had to be fed. Wealth and food must be got from somewhere, and Cleon undertook to get it. "When I was on the Council, O Demos," he says, "I produced a huge balance in the treasury. I racked these men and squeezed those and blackmailed the others. I cared not a jot for any private person as long as I could make you happy." As Lysias, the respect-

able democratic orator, puts it, "When the Council has sufficient revenue it commits no offences; but when it is in difficulties it is compelled to accept impeachments and confiscations of property, and to follow the proposals of the most unprincipled speakers." (*Lysias* 30, 22.) Of course the art of popular extortion lies in choosing your victims. Rich Ionians could be robbed without the Athenian mob turning a hair; and when that supply failed it was fairly safe to attack rich Athenians suspected of "moderatism." "What will you do," asks the Sausage-monger of the reformed and converted Demos at the end of the *Knights*, "if some low lawyer argues to the jury that there will be no food for them unless they find the defendant guilty?" "Lift him up and fling him into the Pit," cries the indignant Demos, "with the fattest of the informers as a millstone round his neck." (*Knights* 1358-1363.) Such arguments were heard in the French Revolution, and are mentioned also by *Lysias* (27, 1).

Cleon's policy was to win, to win completely, at any cost and by any means. And, as in the French Revolution, such a policy became more and more repulsive to decent men. Nicias, the leader of Cleon's opponents,

wanted a Peace of Reconciliation, but he seldom faced the Assembly. He was a good soldier, a good organizer, a skilful engineer ; he devoted himself to his military work and increasingly stood out from politics. Our witnesses are unanimous in saying that from the time of Pericles onward there was a rapid and progressive deterioration in the class of man who acquired ascendancy in Athens. In part no doubt this alleged deterioration merely represented a change in social class ; the traders or business men, the " mongers " as Aristophanes derisively calls them, came to the front in place of the landed classes and the families of ancient culture. But I hardly see how we can doubt that there really was a moral and spiritual degradation as well, from Pericles and Cimon to Hyperbolus and his successors.

The *locus classicus* is, of course, the scene in the *Knights* where the Sausage-man or Offal-monger is introduced as the only passable rival for Cleon, the tanner or Leather-monger. In this scene the Paphlagonian slave, i.e. Cleon, has fallen asleep, and two of his fellow-slaves, representing Cleon's honest and disgraced rivals, Nicias and Demosthenes, succeed in stealing a book of oracles which he keeps under his pillow.

The thousand-year-old jests may strike us as sometimes coarse and sometimes frigid; and my translation is a rough one. But there is a passion in the scene that keeps it alive and significant. Demosthenes, I should explain, is a little drunk from the start. (*Knights* 125–225.)

DEMOSTHENES. You gory Paphlagonian, you did well

To keep this close! You feared the oracle
About yourself.

NICIAS. About himself? Eh, what?

DEMOSTHENES. It's written here, man, how he goes
to pot.

NICIAS. How?

DEMOSTHENES. How? This book quite plainly
prophesies

How first a Rope-monger must needs arise
The fortunes of all Athens to control. . . .

NICIAS. Monger the first! What follows in the
roll?

DEMOSTHENES. A Mutton-monger next our lord
shall be. . . .

NICIAS. Monger the second! What's his destiny?

DEMOSTHENES. To reign in pride until some dirtier
soul

Rise than himself. That hour his knell shall toll.
For close behind a Leather-monger steals,
—Our Paphlagonian—snarling at his heels,
Niagara in his lungs, a beast of prey.

NICIAS. The Mutton-monger runs, and fades away
Before him?

DEMOSTHENES. Yes.

NICIAS. And that's the end? The store
Is finished? Oh, for just one monger more!

DEMOSTHENES. There is one more, and one you'd
never guess.

NICIAS. There is! What is he?

DEMOSTHENES. Shall I tell you?

NICIAS. Yes!

DEMOSTHENES. His fall is by an Offal-monger
made.

NICIAS. An offal-monger? Glory, what a trade! . . .
Up, and to work! That monger must be found!

DEMOSTHENES. We'll seek him out. [*They proceed
to go seeking, when they see a man with a pie-
man's tray hanging round his neck, selling offal.*]

NICIAS. See! On this very ground,
By Providence!

DEMOSTHENES. O blessing without end,
O Offal-monger, friend and more than friend!
To us, to Athens, saviour evermore! . . .
This way!

OFFAL-MONGER. What's up? What are you
shouting for?

DEMOSTHENES. Come here: come forward, and be
taught by me
Your splendid fate, your rich felicity!

NICIAS. Here! Take his tray off! Pour into his
head

The blessed oracles and all they have said.
I'll go and keep my eye on Paphlagon. [*Exit NICIAS.*]

DEMOSTHENES. Come, my good man, put all these
gadgets down.

Kiss Earth thy Mother and the gods adore.

OFFAL-MONGER. There. What's it all about?

DEMOSTHENES. O blest and more!

Now nothing but to-morrow, Lord of All!

O Prince of Athens the majestic . . .

OFFAL-MONGER. Look here, gents, can't you let
me wash my stuff

And sell the puddings? I've had mor'n enough.

DEMOSTHENES. Puddings, deluded being? Just
look up.

You see those rows and rows of people?

OFFAL-MONGER. Yup.

DEMOSTHENES. You are their Lord and Master!
You, heaven-sent.

To people, market, harbour, parliament,

To kick the Council, break the High Command,

Send men to gaol, get drunk in the Grand Stand. . . .

OFFAL-MONGER. Not me?

DEMOSTHENES. Yes—and you don't yet
see it—you!

Get up on . . . here, your own old tray will do.

See all the islands dotted round the scene?

OFFAL-MONGER. Yes.

DEMOSTHENES. The great ports, the mercan-
tile marine?

OFFAL-MONGER. Yes.

DEMOSTHENES. Yes! And then the man
denies he's blest!

Now cast one eye towards Carthage in the west,

One round to Caria—take the whole imprint.

OFFAL-MONGER. Shall I be any happier with a
squint?

DEMOSTHENES. Tut tut, man! All you see is
yours to sell.

You shall become, so all the stars foretell,

A great, great man.

OFFAL-MONGER. But do explain: how can

A poor little Offal-monger be a man?

DEMOSTHENES. That's just the reason why you
are bound to grow,
Because you are street-bred, brazen-faced and low.

OFFAL-MONGER. You know, I don't know quite as
I deserve . . .

DEMOSTHENES. You don't know quite? What
means this shaken nerve?
Some secret virtue? No?—Don't say you came
Of honest parents!

OFFAL-MONGER. Honest? Lord, not them!
Both pretty queer!

DEMOSTHENES. Oh, happy man and wife!
To start your son so well for public life.

OFFAL-MONGER. Just think of the eddication I
ain't had,
Bar letters: and I mostly learnt them bad!

DEMOSTHENES. The pity is you learnt such things
at all.

'Tis not for learning now the people call,
Nor thoughtfulness, nor men of generous make.
'Tis brute beasts without conscience. Come and take
The prize that gods and prophets offer you.

.

OFFAL-MONGER. Of course I like them. But I
can't see yet
How ever I shall learn to rule a state.

DEMOSTHENES. Easy as lying! Do as now you do,
Turn every question to a public stew; —
Hash things, and cook things. Win the common herd
By sweet strong sauces in your every word.
For other gifts, you have half the catalogue
Already, for the perfect demagogue,
A blood-shot voice, low breeding, huckster's tricks—
What more can man require for politics?

The prophets and Apollo's word concur.
Up! To all Sleeping Snakes libation pour,
And crown your brow, and fight him!

OFFAL-MONGER. Who will fight
Beside me? All the rich are in a fright
Before him, and the poor folk of the town
Turn green and vomit if they see him frown.

You feel the tone. The bitter contempt, in part the contempt of the beaten aristocrat for the conquering plebeian, of the partisan for his opponent, of the educated man for the uneducated, but in part, I think, genuinely the contempt of the man of honest traditions in manners and morals for the self-seeker with no traditions at all. It recurs again and again, in all mentions of Cleon and his successor Hyperbolus, or their flatterers and hangers-on; priests and prophets, shirkers of military service, rich profiteers with a pull on the government, and above all of course the informers, or false-accusers.

The informers rose into prominence for several causes. First, the war-fever and the spy-mania of the time; next, the general exasperation of nerves, leading to quarrels and litigation; next, the general poverty and the difficulty of earning a living. An informer if he won his case received a large

percentage of the penalty imposed. By the time of the *Birds* (414 B.C.) and the *Ecclesiazusæ* (389 B.C.) Aristophanes implies jestingly that it was the only way left of making a living, and every one was in it. (*Ecclesiazusæ* 562.) In the *Plutus* an informer bursts into tears because, in the New World introduced by the *dénouement* of that play, a good man and a patriot, like himself, is reduced to suffering. "You a good man and a patriot?" "If ever there was one." . . . "Are you a tiller of the soil?" "Do you think I am mad?" "A merchant?" "H'm, that is how I describe myself when I have to sign a paper." "Have you learnt any profession?" "Rather not." "Then how do you live?" "I am a general supervisor of the affairs of the City and of all private persons." "What is your qualification?" "I like it." The informer scores a point later on. "Can't you leave these trials and accusations to the proper officials?" they say to him. "The City appoints paid judges to settle these things." "And who brings the accusation?" says the informer. "Any one who likes." "Just so. I am the person who likes." (*Plutus* 901-919.)

In the *Acharnians* (860-950) when the

Bœotian farmer comes to market with his abundance of good things, there arises a difficulty about any export adequate to repay such imports. He wants something that is abundant in Athens but scarce in Bœotia. Fish and pottery are suggested, but do not satisfy him: when the brilliant idea occurs, Give him a live informer! At this moment an informer enters; his name by the way is Nikarchos, "*Beat-the-Government*"—a name formed like Nikoboulos, "*Beat-the-Council*"—and suggests that if Cleon on the whole encouraged and utilized the false accusers for the purpose of keeping his rivals out of power, they were sometimes too strong for him himself. "He is rather small," says the Bœotian doubtfully. "But every inch of him bad," is the comforting retort. Nicarchus immediately denounces the Bœotian wares as contraband, and finding lamp-wicks among them detects a pro-Spartan plot for setting the docks on fire. He is still speaking when he is seized from behind, tied with ropes, wrapped carefully in matting wrong side up, so as not to break—and carried off.

Besides the *συκοφάνται* and blackmailers, we hear a good deal about *κόλακες*, or flatterers of those in power, and a good

deal about profiteers. There are the Ambassadors and people on government missions with their handsome maintenance allowances, young officers with "cushy jobs" (*Acharnians* 61-90, 135-137, 595-619), the people who profit by confiscations (*Wasps* 663-718), the various trades that gain by war (*Peace* 1210-1255): the armourers, crest-makers, helmet-makers, trumpet-makers; the prophets and priests, who gain by the boom in superstition; the geometers or surveyors, who survey annexed territory (*Birds* 960-1020), together with other colonially-minded profiteers. In the *Peace*, when that goddess is discovered buried out of human sight in a deep pit, all the Greeks start to drag her out, but some hinder more than help. There are soldiers who want promotion, politicians who want to be generals, slaves who want to desert, and of course there are munition-workers. As the work goes on it appears that the Bœotians, who have plenty to eat, are not pulling; the jingo General, Lamachus, is not pulling; the Argives, being neutral, have never pulled at all; they only grinned and got food from both sides; and the unhappy Megarians, though they are doing their best, are too weak with famine to have any effect. Even-

tually all these people are warned off ; so are the chief combatants, the Spartans and Athenians, because they do nothing but quarrel and make accusations against each other. Only the tillers of the soil are left to pull, the peasants and farmers of all nations alike. They are not politicians, and they know what it is to suffer. (*Peace* 441-510.) So the goddess is hoisted up, and the various cities, in spite of their wounds and bandages and black-eyes and crutches, fall to dancing and laughing together for very joy.

It is a permanent count against Cleon that he has repeatedly refused Peace. "Archeptolemus brought us Peace, and you spilt it on the ground. You insulted every embassy from every city that invited us to treat, and kicked them out of town." (*Knights* 795 ff.) "And why?" answers Cleon. "Because I mean to give the Athenian Demos universal Empire over Hellas." "Bosh," answers the Sausage-man: "it is because the whole atmosphere of war suits you! The general darkness and ignorance, the absence of financial control, the nervous terror of the populace, and even their very poverty and hunger, which make them more and more dependent on you."

In the *Peace*, the god Hermes makes a speech to the Athenians. "Whenever the Spartans had a slight advantage," he says (211 ff.), "it was 'Now, by God, we've got the little Attic beasts on the run!' And when you Athenians had the best of it, and the Spartans came with Peace proposals, 'It is a cheat,' you cried. 'Don't trust a word they say. They'll come again later, if we stick to our gains.'" "I recognize the style," says the Athenian who listens. No one in Athens dared to propose Peace. In a whimsical scene at the opening of the *Acharnians* an Archangel or Demi-god walks into the Assembly explaining that he is an Immortal Being, but the authorities will not give him a passport. "Why does he want one?" "The gods have commissioned him to go to Sparta and make Peace." Immediately there is a cry for the Police, and the Archangel is taught that there are certain subjects that even an immortal must not meddle with. (*Acharnians* 45-54.) And yet if Peace is not made—one would imagine that one heard the voice of a present-day Moderate speaking—it means the destruction not of Athens or Sparta alone but of all Hellas. God is sweeping Hellas with the broom of destruction. (*Peace* 59.) The

devil of War has the cities in a mortar and is only looking for a pestle to pound them into dust. (*Peace* 228-287.) By good luck it happens that the Athenian pestle is just broken—Cleon killed in Thrace—and when War looks for the Spartan pestle it is lost too—Brasidas, the Spartan general, also killed. So comes the chance for Peace, and for the policy of Nicias, which comprised an alliance between Athens and Sparta and a pan-hellenic patriotism. It is noticeable in the *Knights* that the pacifist Offal-monger retorts on Cleon the accusation of not possessing an "imperial mind." Cleon, in his war-hysteria, is for making Athens a mean city; making it hated by the allies, hated by the rest of Hellas, thriving on the misfortunes of others, and full of hatred against a great part—not to say the best part—of its own citizens. (*Knights* 817 f.) And when Cleon finally falls the cry is raised "Hellânie Zeu!—Zeus of all Hellas—thine is the prize of victory!" The Offal-monger, like Aristophanes himself, was "a good European."

The Peace of Nicias failed. The impetus of the war was too great. The natural drift of affairs was in Cleon's direction, and

the farther Athens was carried the harder it became for any human wisdom or authority to check the rush of the infuriated herd. And since Nicias was too moderate and high-minded and law-abiding to fight Cleon with his own weapons, he lost hold on the more extreme spirits of his own party; so that at the end of the war the informers had created the very thing they had dreamed about and had turned their own lies into truth. There was at last an actual pro-Spartan group; there were real secret societies, real conspiracies; and a party that was ready to join hands with the enemy in order to be delivered from the corrupted and war-maddened mob that governed them.

One is tempted in a case like this to pass no judgement on men or policies, but merely record the actual course of history and try to understand the conflicting policies and ideals; instead of judgement, taking refuge in the *lacrimæ rerum*—the eternal pity that springs from the eternal tragedy of human endeavour. When the soldiers of Nicias in Sicily, mad with thirst, pressed on to drink the water, thick with blood and mire, of the little stream where the enemy archers shot them down at leisure,

it was not only an army that perished but a nation, and a nation that held the hopes of the world. When we read that immortal praise of Athens which our historian puts into the mouth of Pericles, the city of law and freedom, of simplicity and beauty, the beloved city in whose service men live and die rejoicing as a lover in his mistress, we should notice that the words are spoken in a Funeral Speech. The thing so praised, so beloved, is dead; and the haunting beauty of the words is in part merely the well-known magic of memory and of longing. For Thucydides the dream of a regenerated life for mankind has vanished out of the future, and he rebuilds it in his memory of the past. The Peloponnesian War had ended wrong; and whatever the end might have been, it had already wrecked Hellas.

Our war has at least ended right: and, one may hope, not too late for the recovery of civilization. In spite of the vast material destruction, in spite of the blotting out from the book of life of practically one whole generation of men, in spite of the unmeasured misery which has reigned and reigns still over the greater part of Europe, in spite of

the gigantic difficulties of the task before us; in spite of the great war-harvest of evil and the exhaustion of brain and spirit in most of the victorious nations as well as in the vanquished, our war has ended right; and we have such an opportunity as no generation of mankind has ever had of building out of these ruins a better international life and concomitantly a better life within each nation. I know not which thought is the more solemn, the more awful in its responsibility: the thought of the sacrifice we survivors have asked or exacted from our fellow-men; or the thought of the task that now lies upon us if we are not to make that sacrifice a crime and a mockery. Blood and tears to which we had some right, for we loved those who suffered and they loved us; blood and tears to which we had no right, for those who suffered knew nothing of us, nor we of them; misery of the innocent beyond measure or understanding and hitherto without recompense; that is the price that has been paid, and it lies on us, who live, to see to it that the price is not paid in vain. By some spirit of co-operation instead of strife, by sobriety instead of madness, by resolute sincerity in public and private things, and surely by some self-

consecration to the great hope for which those who loved us gave their lives.

“A City where rich and poor, man and woman, Athenian and Spartan, are all equal and all free; where there are no false accusers—and where men”—or at least the souls of men—“have wings.” That was the old dream that failed. Is it to fail always and for ever?

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