LECTURE ON A MASTER MIND

THUCYDIDES

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IN the first place, my thanks go to the Council of the Academy for the privilege of holding discourse today in the traditional sequence on Master Minds. The Council has also enjoined the subject: Thucydides. A formidable task, and verging on folly, if a man were to have selected it himself. I am fortified by the amiable and indulgent presence of Sir Frank Adcock. He will know how welcome were those chapters in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, v, which appeared in the spring of the year, opportunely, just thirty-three years ago. Our association has not ceased from that time, in one way or another.

Meditating on the passage of time and on human vicissitudes, one will also affirm what we all owe to the learning, the lucidity, and the candour of A. W. Gomme, shown in many papers, and at the end in his admirable *Commentary*. Much erudition has gone to the study of Thucydides; much refined subtlety, and also (that is a tribute to the austere majesty of that author), there has resulted good sense, often, and good manners in controversy. Lessons can always be learned from the expounders of Thucydides, and from his critics, even though one may not always consent to be beguiled into belief.

Sir Frank and I will not expect to be everywhere in agreement. So much the better, and we shall console ourselves, if there be need of consolation, by what the Roman historian said: 'maxima quaeque ambigua.'

Many of the large problems about Thucydides are still in keen dispute. There is no doubt or hesitation about his rank and quality. Yet it is a question, how far a composer of history has to be a powerful 'mind' or an original thinker. Too much of thought might sometimes be a detrimental infusion. A remarkable history of French society was impaired when the author overloaded it with many philosophical disquisitions—I refer to Marcel Proust, regarding him not merely as a novelist.

There are many types and many tribes of historians. Not all

have been blessed with the luck or insight to discover a vocation at an early season as did Saint Simon, who embarked on his *Memoirs* in his twentieth year, and, learning as he went, became an historian. And, as well as fortune to survive, it takes fortitude to persevere in the long task.

Thucydides came to his vocation with signal advantages. First, his time of life. When the war broke out in 431 he was 'of an age to comprehend', so he states (v. 26. 5). His standards tend to be exigent, therefore he was not at this time some mere youth. Let it be assumed that Thucydides was born about the year 460.

His family was among the first at Athens. The father was Olorus, a foreign name. That permits a deduction: Thucydides derived his descent on the maternal side from the family of Miltiades, who married a Thracian princess, the daughter of an Olorus. Therefore, Thucydides is linked to that older Hellas of the aristocratic tyrants and the dynastic families, to the men who were too big for the *polis* of citizens because of their power, their resources, and their fame outside their own cities. The men, it might happen, who are suitable candidates for being thrown out by ostracism.

Next, after birth and station, the education of Thucydides. It falls in a high period of developing intelligence, with the Sophists turning from speculation about the nature of things to the science of Man—and with the Greek tragedians. These are twin components in the art and the make-up of Thucydides. And his experience was unique. He saw the war coming. He was present at Athens in the first seven years and heard the great debates in the Assembly. Then, in 424, a command in the North. One day he came too late, Amphipolis was lost: exile was the penalty.

Twenty years away from Attica until the fall of the city in the year 404, Thucydides acknowledges the advantage. It enabled him to travel and to see the other side. But there is something more, which he has not said: exile may be the making of an historian. That is patent for Herodotus and for Polybius. If a man be not compelled to leave his own country, some other calamity—a disappointment or a grievance—may be beneficial, permitting him to look at things with detachment, if not in estrangement. In Thucydides there is estrangement proclaimed by the creation of a style individual, wilful, elaborate, and non-contemporary. Even did the style not avow it, the author

parades as a thinker with a method all his own. He is proud, imperious, even didactic.

In the first place, hard work and accuracy. 'Most people', he says, 'are hopeless. They don't even know about the history of their own city.' He proceeds to show up the vulgar versions of the Athenians touching the fall of the tyranny. He also refers in two particulars to Herodotus and concludes, 'So little pains do most people take in ascertaining the truth' (i. 20. 3).

Thucydides does not deign to mention his predecessor by name. Nor does he say much about himself: he tends to evade what Gibbon calls 'the odious pronoun'. Nor will he bother to explain all the things that he omits: the trivial, the impermanent, or the personal. There are no women as agents in his writings and no gods: or rather, perhaps, only one woman, the priestess at Argos who accidentally set fire to the Temple of Hera and had to flee. She comes in handy for chronology (ii. 2. 1; v. 133. 3).

Thucydides is rigorous in subordinating the things he deems of slight importance to his own conception, whereas other transactions are selected, enhanced, and invested with exemplary significance. His method was devised for dealing with contemporary history—to make it rational and intelligible. But Thucydides is emboldened to carry it backwards into the remote past, sifting the ancient legends of Hellas and even interrogating Homer. So far, the conscious master of historical method. But, as the recent age can show, experts in this important science are not always adequate when it comes to writing narrative, or building an historical structure.

The historian in classical antiquity is not always tied and restricted by his narration because he has to record events year by year. He has certain devices which are worth looking at. They enable him to escape from the shackles of the annalistic method. Further, they may furnish a clue to his preoccupations, and perhaps to his psychology. These devices are the digression and the speech.

In Thucydides (one suspects) the digression is often there because he wants to correct other people. For example, the matter of the tyranny at Athens comes up again in Book VI. It is dragged in on the thinnest of pretexts (vi. 53. 3); it discloses special interests of the historian and demonstrates his method, down to the citation of two inscriptions, one at Athens, the other at Lampsacus. Book I contains long digressions on the vicissitudes of Themistocles and of Pausanias, which can

be justified in various ways, because Thucydides weaves them in cunningly. None the less, a suspicion arises. Certain items in the adventures of Pausanias and of Themistocles had already passed into legend, or had been uncritically retailed by other people. Thucydides is eager to correct and convince. (As for the Medism of Pausanias, however, he may have been off his guard. He recounts a number of questionable particulars, and even reproduces a letter, 'subsequently discovered', in which the Regent of Sparta offered to take in wedlock a daughter of Xerxes (i. 128. 7). It looks as though Thucydides relied on Spartan informants—who had much to cover up and explain away. Herodotus, that is the irony, is a safer guide about Pausanias.)

Again, in Book III, when discussing a festival at Delos (iii. 104), the historian inserts a long quotation of a dozen lines from the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*. One might be tempted to ask whether Thucydides had not been forming some ideas about the Homeric Question.

However, it is the speeches that serve the especial function. A historian can produce a speech almost anywhere he likes. This is highly relevant for Tacitus, likewise a wilful and autocratic writer. Let us take the example of somebody else: the author of *Acts*. A speech is introduced not at the point where St. Paul was most successful, i.e. at Corinth, but somewhere else—at Athens, before the Areopagus. It is a master stroke for the author of *Acts* to place St. Paul there, at the centre and throne of Greek civilization.

Similarly, Thucydides. He will insert a pair of speeches that lead to no action whatsoever. For example, at Camarina in Sicily, giving the contrasted arguments brought to bear on one of the neutral states (vi. 76–87). Here as elsewhere the historian is eager to expound a general problem that goes beyond the mere time and place.

The speeches emphasize the leading themes in Thucydides' conception of the war. And (as so often in Tacitus) speeches have a structural function. One observes especially the debate about Mytilene, the debate about the Plataeans, or that strange product, the dialogue between Athenian generals and deputies of the island Melos.

But the speeches are closely knit to the narrative, and the guiding intelligence of the historian is present all through, though he refrains from obtruding his own personality and sentiments. He is all the more dangerous and all the more

powerful for that reason. As Hobbes says in the preface to his translation: 'Thucydides is justly accounted the most politic historiographer that ever writ.'

Announcing his programme, Thucydides affirms that in the nature of man similar events are likely to recur and his work will be profitable (i. 22. 4). That is to say, profitable to the comprehension of events as they unfold. Thucydides is not advertising a belief in prophecy; nor does he fancy that you can learn about war and politics solely from books. None the less he would be appealing to the men of understanding, and, though he has not said it, he might have hoped that some of them might learn as well as approve. He proudly describes his work as an achievement for all time. Posterity has been duly impressed. He became a classic, but not in fact of much influence on the writing of history.

In antiquity, historians are generally criticized either for veracity or for style. Veracity was conceded to Thucydides, but a number of people were worried about the style. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing in the time of Caesar Augustus, has various observations. He points out that: 'the style is peculiar indeed, archaic, poetical, contorted. It is a work of elaboration. Thucydides spent a long time on it. He did this thing deliberately' (*De Thuc.* 24). Dionysius does not confine himself to style and language. He takes the historian to task for other reasons (*Ad Pompeium* 3). The choice of the subject is deplorable: instead of the great deeds of the Greeks, he narrates the war which was the beginning of the decline and fall. In the Melian Dialogue he produces arguments which no Athenians ought to have used when speaking to other Greeks. Further, the critic even objects to the chronology.

Let me not dwell on Dionysius, but dismiss him in the words of Hobbes:

> I think there was never written so much absurdity in so few lines. He is contrary to the opinion of all men that ever spake of this subject besides himself, and to common sense. For he makes the scope of history, not profit by writing truth, but in light of the hearer, as if it were a song. And the argument of history, he would not by any means have to contain the calamities and misery of his country; these he would have buried in silence: but only their glorious and splendid actions.

It is a welcome thing that, after much depreciation, perversity, hypercriticism, and flat positivism, men have been

coming back to a friendlier and juster view of the historians of antiquity. Herodotus has benefited, and it was time. One thinks of his accuracy, his candour, his good sense, and his grace. Not to mention the wide compass of the subject and the amount of work that this man had to do.

Detailed scrutiny of Thucydides, however, has discovered a number of blemishes. There are all the things that he omitted. What would scholars not wish to know about the detail of internal politics at Athens, or about the public finances? Again, has he not distorted certain things such as the cause of the Great War, or the strategy of Pericles? Some even doubt whether Thucydides had much understanding of the whole strategy of the War.

There is a graver charge, which has a bearing on the nature of history, and what history ought to be. There are some who will insist that Herodotus in fact is a better historian. I quote Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (1946), 29:

> The style of Thucydides is harsh, artificial, repellent. In reading Thucydides I ask myself, what is the matter with the man that he writes like that? I answer: he has a bad conscience. He is trying to justify himself for writing history at all, by turning it into something that is not history.

What is this something to which Collingwood refers? In particular, I think, the speeches in Thucydides: the main perplexity confronting modern inquiries. Indeed, one of the ancients, a certain Cratippus, said that the orations interfered with the action and were an annoyance to the reader (Dionysius, *De Thuc.* 16).

To be sure, the speeches present certain questionable or vulnerable features. There is the uniformity of style and of argumentation which, says Collingwood, is 'historically speaking an outrage'. Let that pass. There is something worse. Some of the speeches betray foreknowledge of later events. They answer each other, but at a distance of time and of place.

For example, in the first Congress at Sparta before the war, King Archidamus delivers a temporizing speech. He is answered by Corinthian envoys, but not at once. At a second meeting at Sparta they produce an optimistic plan for war. Those arguments of the Corinthians are refuted some months later—by Pericles, in a speech to the Athenians. Furthermore, of some there can never have been accurate record. The supreme instance is that Dialogue at Melos, held in secret conclave.

What then is the character and purpose of these orations? Some, to be sure, are highly individual, as when Alcibiades speaks before the Spartans (vi. 89–92), but most of them are abstract and generalized. They carry the appropriate line of argument in the circumstances. They reveal what mattered in Thucydides' judgement. But how far can authenticity be conceded? And, we might ask, how would Thucydides proceed if he had a genuine and accurate report?

There is a text for guidance from a later age, namely an oration in Tacitus, the Speech of Claudius Caesar about the admission of Gallic chieftains to the Roman Senate (*Ann.* xi. 24). For confrontation stands the authentic document on tablets of bronze found at Lugdunum. It shows how the historian proceeded: ruthless excision, an entirely different style, and the introduction of fresh, and better, arguments. Tacitus also fills out the scene—he produces the objections raised previously and in private by the counsellors of Claudius. That is pure fabrication. There are other choice specimens. A Roman general, Petillius Cerialis, delivers an apologia for Roman rule in Gaul (*Hist.* iv. 73 f.). The theme was congenial to the senatorial historian, and he responded easily: no need to make anxious inquiry for survivors or worry about what in fact was said that day at Augusta Trevirorum.

One might ask, are there not speeches of these two types in Thucydides? One suspects it. One cannot prove it, and Thucydides himself does not say so. He gives a different explanation. He assumed (he says) that the speakers would use 'the expedient arguments', τὰ δέοντα. But he also says he has kept as 'close as possible to the general import of what in fact was said' (i. 22. 1). This seems to me to be a mixed statement. Clarity would have been served if the author had drawn a distinction between the two procedures determined by the quality of his information: speeches for which he had, and for which he had not, an accurate report. One would be happier without that vexatious sentence, and not debarred from deducing the author's intention from his practice. To invoke a principle which might have appealed to Thucydides: do not listen to what people say, observe how they behave. I am therefore much in trouble about this sentence. Is it the statement of a programme which in the sequel he found he could not carry out? Or is the confusion due to rewriting? This I do not know, but I find that I am brought, inevitably, to the question of the date of composition. That cannot be evaded.

Thucydides begins writing, or rather perhaps taking notes, at the very outbreak of the war. The war ended in 421: this was the Ten Years War, or the Archidamian War. But Thucydides in Book V has a kind of second preface. He there explains that he has continued writing the history of warfare—because on a rational computation one must see that there was not just one war, the Ten Years War, but, embracing various operations, a war of twenty-seven years down to the fall of the Imperial City (v. 26. 3). Hence obvious questions. When did the author revise his conception? What had he written before this? Which items in Thucydides have a bearing on the Ten Years War, which items on the Twenty-Seven Years War? This is a tempting inquiry because the work, in its eight books as extant, is patently uneven as well as unfinished.

Book I has a complex structure, with a large number of digressions. A question arises whether the author has here not added things as he wrote during the long war. Historians sometimes do that with the earlier parts of their work.

In Book V certain documents are quoted verbatim. For example, the Peace between Athens and Sparta in 421, also the Alliance (v. 18 f.; 23 f.). We cannot say that the documents are objectionable in themselves. It is not for us to lay down laws for a writer of the fierce idiosyncrasy of Thucydides. But one conceives a doubt when one sees that in each of these documents seventeen names of Spartans occur and seventeen of Athenians, who are witnesses. There are historians who like to sprinkle their narration with personal names for various reasons: zeal for authenticity or the parade of erudition. Thucydides is an economical writer. These names have no meaning whatsoever. Further, he even inserts two documents of armistice and alliance between the Spartans and the Argives in the Dorian dialect (v. 77; 79). These pacts, concluded in the winter of 418/417, were ephemeral, quickly broken by a revolution at Argos, with open war ensuing. Surely the plain answer is that the texts are stop-gaps.

Lastly, Book VIII contains no speeches. It might have seemed that the matter offered good occasions. Was it not time for somebody to deliver an exposition about the internal politics of Athens? Perhaps time for one of those oligarchs, whom Thucydides knew as men of perception and understanding, to expound a thesis. Not oligarchy, to be sure, but the arguments for a moderate and 'mixed' form of government, of the kind indeed that Thucydides himself approves (viii. 97. 2). That was

the scheme and pretext for subverting the rule of the People, the first step towards the establishment of oligarchy. One misses an oration from the alert and ambiguous Theramenes, whose quality in speech and counsel is registered by Thucydides (viii. 68. 4).

The great 'Thucydides problem' has been in existence since the year 1846. It has turned out more complicated than many thought. It might happen that scholars discovered too many early passages for their comfort, or again, too many late passages. Some scholars will have Thucydides writing a substantial amount before the Ten Years War was out. Others maintain that the great part is late in the war, or even subsequent to the year 404. So this question might seem the type and model of a vain speculation. Yet one cannot wholly abate one's curiosity. Given the long years elapsing after 431, would one not suspect some change in the author's views because of the impact of fresh events, or some fruits of his reflection as the years passed? One turns inevitably to the discussion about the cause of the war, which, as Gomme points out, 'would require, as it has taken, almost a book in itself'—therefore not encouraging any brief summary.

Thucydides expounds the causes and irritant causes, for αἰτία can mean both 'cause' and 'grievance'. The one is Corcyra, for the Athenians ally themselves with Corcyra and through that act incur the enmity of Corinth. They are even embroiled in a naval battle between the Corinthians and the Corcyraeans. The other is Potidaea, a Corinthian colony but recognized to be under the dominion of the Athenians. Potidaea revolts; the Corinthians send in volunteers; and the Athenians lay siege to Potidaea. Therefore a state of hostility already exists. These incidents provoke Sparta in the end to defend her ally, and her other allies. They lead to a general war.

Thucydides, introducing these incidents, interpolates a sentence at the outset which has caused no little trouble. It is 'the *truest* explanation of the War'—the ἀληθεστάτη πρόφασις—that 'the growing power of the Athenians frightened the Spartans and compelled them to go to war' (i. 23. 6). As has more than once been observed, this sentence looks like a subsequent insertion. How much later? That is the question. Perhaps it might not matter very much, but it has appeared to many scholars that the author changed his mind about the causes underlying the outbreak of warfare in 431.

Why should Thucydides have made this insertion and not

have thought of stating the thing elsewhere in his narration? It can happen that an historian refrains from mentioning something merely because it is large and obvious to himself. The word πρόφασις which he uses can be a neutral word, 'an explanation', though it often means a 'mere explanation', i.e. a dishonest pretext. He calls his view the 'truest explanation', he means to be emphatic (and he has the phrase again when stating the reason for the Sicilian expedition, vi. 6. 2). That is not all—he goes on to affirm that it was also the explanation about which least was said in public. Which is peculiar, because this 'truest explanation of the War' does crop up explicitly elsewhere in Book I in the narration, and also in speeches (e.g. i. 33. 3; 86. 5). Peculiar, be it conceded: yet not perhaps wholly enigmatic if the qualification be referred to Thucydides' propensity to antithesis, which in this place reflects and conveys the assumption of a contrast between the truth and public avowals.

Scholars have seen an incompatibility between the two causes —Corcyra and Potidaea—and what Thucydides calls his 'truest explanation'. But, on a proper scrutiny, the incompatibility lapses. Perhaps this sentence of Thucydides could be dispensed with. The causes of the clash are patent—Corcyra and Potidaea. Why do those incidents lead to a general war? A big reason is required to explain why Sparta is driven to act, for the Spartans were slow and cautious. They had to be pushed; they had to be convinced that Athens was strong, was growing stronger, and was truculent. They received that evidence from the events—from the alliance with Corcyra which broke the balance of power in Hellas, and from the firm unyielding attitude of the Athenians. The big reason, therefore, holds: it is the Empire of Athens. Not that one has to believe that the Athenians as a people, or their leader Pericles, wanted war if war could be avoided.

This large reason (the growth of the Athenian power, destroying equilibrium in Hellas after the Persian Wars) is a factor which had occurred earlier, thirty years before. It is a mistake to leave from sight what is sometimes called the First Peloponnesian War, which broke out in 460. It arose from friction between Athens and the Peloponnesian allies of Sparta, namely Corinth and Aegina. It was some time before the Spartans intervened. The war lasted a long time with intervals and ended inconclusively, being terminated in 445 on the basis of the *status quo*: that is to say, Sparta and the Peloponnesian League on the one side, the Athenian Empire on the other. Therefore, it can

be argued, this factor, 'the truest explanation' of Thucydides, was operative not only shortly before 431, but thirty years earlier.

There is a puzzle about the First Peloponnesian War. Its nature and genesis, the course it took (extending from Sparta's allies to Sparta) and its outcome are not specifically appealed to by orators in the various speeches in Book I, preceding the outbreak of the war. That is not a little strange, if it be taken that these speakers either used (on a Thucydidean principle) the 'expedient arguments', or used the sort of arguments any ordinary people might employ. Might not the enemies of Athens have adduced the ruthless aggressivity of the Athenians on so many counts? They could have urged that 'the job was left unfinished' when the Spartans invaded Attica in 446, but allowed themselves to be cajoled into peace and an accommodation, leaving the territory of Attica unravaged. Or, on the other side, to encourage the Athenians in prospect of the war, might not Pericles have stated a manifest truth, reminding them that, though the Spartans invaded Attica, they knew very well that they could not break the maritime empire of the Athenians. This puzzle therefore subsists, and may indicate a certain deficiency in some of these speeches.

In other ages, when one great war comes fifteen or thirty years after another, people cannot be prevented from invoking the earlier upheaval. Let me mention only the return of civil war at Rome only thirty years from the Dictatorship of Sulla, or more recent transactions in our own time when people certainly argued from 1914 forward to 1939 and back again.

The empire of the Athenians, I repeat, is the large cause of disturbance in Hellas. Thucydides in the course of Book I was perhaps working back to a more unified conception that would link the two wars. Book I has a complicated structure. It contains separate and sometimes repetitive references back to the aftermath of the Persian Wars. Might the author not have bound the material together and have furnished a preface linking the two wars, with a single basic theme? Emitting this notion, I must confess to due diffidence, for it corresponds more or less with one of the complaints raised by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, namely, that Thucydides began his war at the wrong point with Corcyra and Potidaea.

Thucydides' views may have been changing about some of these matters, but in the essential his thought is coherent. He is moved by the play of power. The great manifestation of power

in his time is, precisely, Athens, and, inseparable from Athens, the figure of Pericles.

Has his preoccupation with Pericles, indeed his affection for Pericles, done him harm as an historian? Some might argue that it has led Thucydides to distort the cause of the war by putting certain incidents in a rigorously subordinate place. For example, a decree passed by the Athenians as an embargo on the trade of Megara, which only turns up at a late stage (i. 139. 1). But the purpose and the date of that decree are not certain. It may, as some assume, presuppose that Pericles was planning an offensive war. It may be, on the contrary, a diplomatic move—and it is important to note that such a trade embargo did not infringe the terms of the Peace of 445. Pericles was very careful in such matters—careful, though some might describe his attitude as provocative. As it turned out, the Spartans later recognized that they had been in the wrong (vii. 18. 2).

Again, the strategy of Pericles. Thucydides is clear and firm on this point: it was purely defensive. Might not Pericles, however, have moved forward to something more aggressive, but for certain accidents, for example, the long and expensive siege of Potidaea and the plague at Athens? Not necessarily, perhaps. Pericles is fighting for the integrity of the Athenian Empire. His purpose is to demonstrate to the Peloponnesians that they cannot destroy a naval empire merely by invading Attica. Thucydides is convinced that he was right, and one cannot help feeling a certain attraction to this view. The historian's own sympathies go out clearly to Pericles.

When were those sympathies acquired? Is he in 431 a relatively young man and a devoted adherent, or does he not become fully converted and captured by Pericles only years afterwards, when it became clear that Pericles had been right and the other people were no good at all, but pernicious (cf. ii. 65. 10 f.)? His admiration for Pericles is tied up with his political and social views. Thucydides declares that Athens under the rule of Pericles was a democracy only in name (ii. 65. 9)—and he (Thucydides) has no liking for the rule of the people. He is contemptuous of the mob. He has harsh words about demagogues, not only about Cleon, more than once, but notably in his sole reference to Hyperbolus. He asserts that the Athenians ostracized him, not because they were afraid of his power and renown, but because he was 'a scoundrel, and a disgrace to the city' (viii. 73. 3). It happens to be known that Hyperbolus fell

victim to a political compact between two other politicians, men of birth and station, the men for whom Thucydides avows not merely sympathy, but admiration. One of them was Nicias, whose military incompetence in Sicily he brings out clearly; yet at the end, in the last emergency, he provides a brief obituary in which he can refer to the ἀρετή of Nicias (vii. 86. 5). I cannot quite attempt to translate that word. The term is also applied to the oligarch Antiphon, who was a powerful thinker and a great speaker (viii. 68. 1).

Shall it then be supposed that Thucydides was an oligarch? If so, what kind of oligarch? Perhaps a lucid and non-practising oligarch. For example, somebody like the author of the treatise on the constitution of Athens which has come down among the works of Xenophon. That author expounds an ironic approbation of the Athenian democracy. A lecture, as it were, to confute and instruct the duller members of his club.

But Thucydides may be something worse than an oligarch: an enthusiast enamoured of intelligence and power, not interested in forms of government. Observe what he says about the tyrants at Athens: 'how excellently they ruled, combining ἀρετή and ξύνεσις' (vi. 54. 5). Ξύνεσις is one of his favourite words, meaning the practical intelligence of a statesman.

Again, he praises the people of Chios for their caution—high praise. He is careful to note that they did not revolt from the Athenians until they were certain of having allies on their side. They did not act until it seemed that the naval power of Athens had been utterly destroyed in Sicily (viii. 24. 5).

Thucydides registers, almost in sorrow, the fact that the excellently tilled lands of these people, unravaged since the Persian Wars, now came to grievous harm. Sympathy, therefore, with the people of Chios, for they had not been inspired by passion or sentiment, but by hard reason: they refused to revolt as long as the Athenian navy was in the neighbourhood. Or again, what Thucydides says of Archelaus, the ruler of Macedon. 'This man constructed roads and built fortresses, and augmented the military power of Macedon. He did more than all the eight who had been kings before him' (ii. 100. 2). Of what manner was this man, and how did he become king? One of the interlocutors in the *Gorgias* of Plato (471 b) comes out with a startling allegation: Archelaus pushed a boy prince down a well. Plato regards Archelaus as the type of bad man. The theme of the *Gorgias* is justice. Socrates is put on exhibit as the true statesman, in contrast to the men who equipped Athens

with navies and arsenals and imperial revenues—and who corrupted the citizens. Plato was repelled by the Athenian politicians of the great age who had thought of power and dominion, not of justice, and he was likewise repelled by the Sophists who tried to argue that might is right.

In the doctrines of Thucydides the Sophists and the Enlightenment have a large part. It is permissible to label as sophistical certain stylistic tricks of the historian deriving from their methods. Parallel also is his antithetic type of mind, his way of stating intellectual theses in their extreme form. Hence some of the speakers are frank and unashamed when they expound the principles of self-interest that guide the conduct of states. The Athenian envoys at Sparta coolly proclaim that it was fear, honour, and advantage that set Athens on the road to empire. Not once, but twice (i. 75. 3; 76. 2). It need not pass belief that those who spoke for an imperial people in its great age were open, overbearing, and even didactic. They had something to be proud of. They scorned understatement and the normal hypocrisies. Thucydides sharpens the reality, but he may not always have distorted it. He goes much farther than this, however, in the Melian Dialogue, that antiphonal sermon on power. When the ingenuous islanders appeal to justice, to the gods, to their tie with Sparta, the Athenians convict them of deficient understanding. Heaven is on the side of force. What the Athenians invoke is an eternal law; they did not invent it, and Sparta cannot help the people of Melos, for Sparta has not command of the sea (v. 105. 2; 109).

Thucydides is a cruel and ruthless writer. Look at what happens to those characters in his History who make appeal to the gods—the unfortunate Plataeans, the people of Melos, or the Athenian general, Nicias, in the retreat from Syracuse. There Nicias asserts a preposterous plea: it is reasonable to expect that the gods will now be merciful, having exhausted their resentment (vii. 77. 4).

Such, in brief, is the extreme doctrine of Thucydides. He is insistent to demonstrate that things must be as they are in the behaviour of states. Intellectually it appears that he approves. But it is an error to assume that he condones the enormities he describes. The author and the man may not be the same person.

This writer cannot have been cherished or forgiven at Athens in the aftermath of defeat. Patriots or the apathetic, democrats or oligarchs, all alike had cause for resentment. And his

testimony on the epoch of splendour and tragedy was an embarrassment when, confidence reviving after no long interval, and ambitions resurgent, but disguised under the blameless plea for partnership in hegemony with Sparta, it was expedient to play down and gloss over the misdeeds of the imperial city. The fluent Isocrates did his artful best. The fate of Melos (so he argued) ought not to be brought up to the discredit of the Athenian Empire, for none of the cities under Athenian protection had been treated in that fashion (*Pan.* 100 f.).

The doctrines so nakedly expounded in the History might have made Thucydides a name of obloquy for ever, had he been assiduously read and studied. Some learned from him, his insistence on warfare and politics was influential (notably with Polybius), but he did not create a school of historiography.

His signal impact was at Rome, and an equivocal glory. Civil war, revolution and despotism, that is the easy explanation. Yet, by paradox, the earliest notoriety of Thucydides emerges in literary polemics in 46 B.C. Sundry younger orators, in revulsion from the bland opulence of Cicero, went in for a plain severe manner. They appealed to Attic models, such as Lysias; and some were imprudent enough to commend Thucydides. Cicero was indignant. A noble historian, he conceded, *sincerus et grandis*, but nobody in his senses would think of imitating the speeches. And Thucydides is a primitive writer: he would have been smoother and riper had he come later in the line of development (*Brutus* 287 f.). In another passage of the same dialogue Cicero, adverting on admirers of Lysias, calls up against them a wonderful and exemplary Roman primitive, 'whom nobody reads', namely Cato (*Brutus* 65 f.).

Sallust took the hint. Devising a new style for history, he exploited Cato to render in Latin the manner of Thucydides, concentrated, archaic, austere. The theme he elected was parallel, the decline and fall of the Roman Republic; he discovered, from his own experience of war and politics, an affinity with the Athenian; and he wrote in estrangement from the existing order. Sallust became canonical, imposing, along with brevity and rapidity, the sombre and subversive habit of discourse. Tacitus, who applied himself with ardour to Sallust, could afford to dispense with the great original, albeit an ancestor in the annals of disillusionment.

In the modern age Thucydides has had to wait centuries for proper recognition. Ought not this powerful thinker to have captivated Machiavelli? The Florentine had read him (in

Valla's Latin translation), but the traces are slight indeed. And, as Machiavelli's century unfolded, various factors told against Thucydides. A record of wars between small states long ago, interspersed with orations before popular assemblies—that was remote and wanting in contemporary interest for the age of the monarchic despotisms. Antiquity had something to offer of close and sinister relevance. Tacitus, in the words of Justus Lipsius, was a 'theatrum hodiernae vitae'. Men turned to Tacitus as a manual for maxims of statecraft.

The decline of Greek studies in the sixteenth century also contributed to the neglect of Thucydides. In the seventeenth, Hobbes is the man. But, apart from Hobbes, it can show only two translations (in the French language) and one edition (in England). However, the place and period of his darkest eclipse was France of the Enlightenment. Not but what, in the passage of time, Thucydides was to find the type and quality of reader for whom his exacting inquiry was designed: the statesman active or in studious retreat. Thus Jefferson, writing to Adams in a rapid and momentous year (1812), commends Thucydides and Tacitus: better than the newspapers.

In the course of the nineteenth century, when the writing of history, now segregated from literature, became an academic profession and aspired to the rank of a science, Thucydides earned merit among the erudite as a precursor in contemporary methods of rigorous authentication; and, at that time, the professors dominating the field of history owed their formation to the traditional discipline of classical studies. None the less, both then and well into the next century, Thucydides was not wholly congenial to the educated public; and leaders of liberal opinion, when they turned to the classics, found other and easier sources of comfort or inspiration: poets, orators, or publicists, not the ferocious and forbidding historian.

Only in recent times and within the memory of people not old has Thucydides come into his own. The actions took a Thucydidean course, one war following another after an interval of fraudulent peace (cf. v. 26. 3); but, on a rational estimate, a single war with the 'truest explanation' valid. And the same pleas or motives recurring: fear and honour, security or aggression.

Who can resist the imperious challenge of Thucydides' diagnosis? He describes in minute detail the plague at Athens and its ravages, to conclude with the repercussion on human behaviour (ii. 53). There was another malady in the cities of

Hellas, which the war fostered, the strife of class against class. What happened at Corcyra is taken by Thucydides as the type and model of the general calamity. War is an instructor in violence (iii. 82. 2). Not only that it wrecks human society. It invades the realm of language and turns words upside down.

Thucydides pounces on pretext and behaviour in men and governments, intent to demolish all comforting illusions. Diagnosis and narration are conducted with supreme literary power. The ancients (and who shall hold them superseded?) assumed that history is close kin to poetry and drama. Thucydides' theme is in itself a tragedy, by the facts—the ruin of an empire.

The author, disposing carefully his material, puts the affair of Melos in high relief: pride and power, to usher in the Sicilian Expedition. Such in fact was the sequence of events. Yet Melos did not lead inevitably to Sicily. That adventure was a mistake, but the thing might have been better managed (cf. ii. 65. 11). And, in the sequel, much could have been retrieved. The Athenians displayed an astonishing power of recuperation. All that was needed was reason and intelligence—and a 'Thucydidean' statesman.

Thucydides insists all the time on reason. His favourite characters are the men he designates as possessing ξύνεσις, as ξυνετοί, or, by a powerful understatement, οὐκ ἀξύνετοι. From first to last, the catalogue is consistent and instructive. It leads off with Theseus, who ordained in the primeval time a central government for Attica (i. 15. 2); and the tyrants suitably take up the theme (vi. 54. 5). The list goes on to embrace Themistocles, the true author of Athenian sea power (i. 74. 1; 138. 2 f.); Archidamus, the King of Sparta, who was against the War (i. 79. 2); the energetic and resourceful Brasidas (iv. 81. 2); Hermocrates the Syracusan, a statesman endowed with courage and experience of warfare (vi. 72. 2). Furthermore, oligarchs as a class are admitted (viii. 68. 4); and Phrynichus on his first entry earns a general and emphaict commendation as οὐκ ἀξύνετος: it was Phrynichus who warned his associates against sundry delusions, such as trusting Alcibiades or hoping for support from the subject cities (viii. 48. 4 ff.).

On cursory inspection one name is missing, that of Pericles. For Thucydides it was idle and superfluous thus to specify that paramount talent. However, Pericles comes in by indirect allusion, in the class of those whom the city would normally select to hold an oration over the fallen in war (ii. 34. 6).

Intelligence is the supreme virtue, but the statesman knows that reason and foresight do not always avail. Pericles, before the War breaks out, utters a clear warning to the Athenians. He reminds them that events can turn out stupidly, just like the designs of men (i. 140. 1). The adverb he uses is ἀμαθῶς. This, I think, has not a passive meaning (that you cannot learn about events) but an active meaning. Pericles is speaking ironically, as befits an intellectual and one of the men of understanding whom Thucydides admired. You cannot teach events. They are stubborn, but reason is all we have.

That is the note on which an address concerning Thucydides may suitably terminate. The historian himself reprobates the practice of discoursing at inordinate length among those who understand.[1]

[1] Thucydides speaks through the mouth of persons he approves, Pericles and Hermocrates. They are against μακρηγορεῖν ἐν εἰδόσιν (ii. 36. 4; iv. 59. 2).

This lecture dispenses with annotation—which, to be adequate, would be oppressive. Necessity can be a benefit. Not all readers are likely to be annoyed; and Thucydidean scholars, to whom my obligations are manifest, will be content to waive, along with the detail of my debts, that testimony of gratitude which I should have been happy to render.