

INQUIRING ABOUT PEISISTRATOS

Inquiring into the condition of the most powerful Greek city-states, Croesus, the wealthy king of Lydia, was informed that one, the Athenian, was in a state of oppression and distraction under Peisistratos, the son of Hippocrates, who was at that time tyrant of Athens.

Hippocrates, when he was a private citizen, is said to have gone once to Olympia to see the Games, when a strange prodigy happened to him; as he was employed in the sacrificing, the large pots which stood near, full of water and the meat of the animals, began to boil without the help of fire, so that the water overflowed the pots. Chilon the Lacedaemonian, who happened to be there and to witness the prodigy, advised Hippocrates, first never to take into his house a wife who could bear him a child; if he already had a wife, then to send her back to her relatives and if he had a son, to disown him. Chilon's advice did not at all please Hippocrates, who disregarded it, and some time later became the father of Peisistratos.

This Peisistratos, at a time when there was political strife between the Athenians, those of the sea-coast party headed by Megacles the son of Alcmaeon, and those of the plain headed by Lycourgos the son of Aristolaides, conceived the idea of making himself tyrant, and with this thought in mind created a third party. Gathering together a band of partisans, and giving himself out for the protector of the highlanders, he devised the following plan.

He wounded himself and his mules, and then drove his chariot into the Athenian market place, pretending to have just escaped an attack of his enemies, who had attempted to assassinate him as he was on his way into his field. He begged the people to assign him a guard to protect his person, reminding them of the glory which he had gained when he led the attack against the Megarians, and took the town of Nisaea (port of Megara), at the same time performing many other notable acts. The Athenians, deceived by his story, selected a group of citizens to serve him as his guard, who were to carry wooden clubs instead of spears, and to follow him wherever he went. This guard together with Peisistratos broke into revolt and seized the acropolis. In this way he acquired the sovereignty of Athens, which he held without disturbing the

previously existing offices or altering any of the laws. He administered the state according to the established usages, and his arrangements were good and wise.

However, after a little time, the partisans of Megacles and those of Lycourgos agreed to forget their differences, and united drove him out. So Peisistratos, having by the means described earlier made himself tyrant of Athens, lost his power again before he had time to take root. No sooner, however, was he departed than the factions which had driven him out started quarrelling again, and at last Megacles, worn down by the strife, sent a herald to Peisistratos, with an offer to re-establish him as a tyrant if he would marry his daughter. Peisistratos accepted the offer, and on these terms an agreement was concluded between the two, after which they proceeded to device a plan for his restoration.

And here the device on which they hit was the silliest that I find on record, more especially considering that the Greeks have been from very ancient times distinguished from the barbarians by superior cleverness and freedom from foolish insensibility, and remembering that the persons on whom this trick was played were not only Greeks but Athenians, who have the credit of surpassing all other Greeks in wisdom. There was in the Paeonian district a woman named Phye, whose height only fell short of four cubits by three fingers' breadth, and who was altogether beautiful. This woman they clothed in complete armour, placed her in a chariot and instructed her on how to stand, in assuming an impressive posture in order to beseem her part, drove her to the city. Heralds had been sent forward to the city, who were instructed to proclaim these: "Citizens of Athens, receive again Peisistratos with friendly minds! Goddess Athena, who of all men honors him the most, herself conducts him back to her own acropolis!" This they proclaimed in all directions, and immediately the rumor spread throughout the country districts that Athena was bringing back her favorite. They of the city also, fully persuaded that the woman was the veritable goddess herself, prostrated themselves before her, and received Peisistratos back.

Peisistratos, having thus recovered the sovereignty, married, according to the agreement, the daughter of

Megacles. As, however, he had already a family of grown up sons, and the Alcmaeonidae were supposed to be under a curse, he determined that there should be no issue of consummating the marriage. His wife at first kept this matter to herself, but after a time, either her mother questioned her, or it may be that she told it of her own accord. At any rate, she informed her mother, and so it reached her father's ears. Megacles, unworthy at receiving an affront from such a quarter, in his anger instantly made up his differences with the opposite faction, on which Peisistratos, aware of what was planning against him, took himself out of the country. Arrived at Eretria, he held a council with his children to decide what was to be done. The opinion of Hippias prevailed, and it was agreed to aim at regaining the tyranny. The first step was to obtain advances of money from such states as were under obligations to them. By these means they collected large sums from several countries, especially from the Thebans, who gave them far more than any of the rest. To be brief, time passed, and all was at length got ready for their return. A band of Argive mercenaries arrived from the Peloponnese, and a certain Naxian named Lygdamis, who volunteered his services, was particularly zealous in the cause, supplying both men and money.

In the eleventh year of their exile the family of Peisistratos set sail from Eretria on their return home. They made the coast of Attica, took over Marathon, were they encamped, and were joined by their partisans from the city and by numbers from the country districts, *who loved tyranny better than freedom*. At Athens, while Peisistratos was obtaining funds, and even after he landed at Marathon, no one paid any attention to his proceedings. When, however, it became known that he had left Marathon, and was marching upon the city, preparations were made for resistance, the whole force of the state was levied, and led against the returning exiles. In the meantime the army of Peisistratos, which had broken up from Marathon, meeting their adversaries near the temple of the Palladian Athena, pitched their camp opposite them. Here a certain foreteller, Amphilytos by name, an Arcanian, moved by a divine impulse, came into the presence of Peisistratos, and approaching him uttered this prophecy in the hexameter measure: *"Now has the cast been made, the net is out-spread in the water;*

through the moon-shiny night the tunnies will enter the meshes!"

Such was the prophecy uttered under a divine inspiration! Peisistratos, apprehending its meaning, declared that he accepted the oracle, and instantly led on his army. The Athenians from the city had just finished their midday meal, after which they had betaken themselves, some to dice, others to sleep, when Peisistratos with his troops fell upon them and put them to the rout. As soon as the flight began, Peisistratos bethought himself of a most wise contrivance, whereby the Athenians might be induced to disperse and not unite in a body anymore. He mounted his sons on horseback and sent them on in front to overtake the fugitives, and exhort them to be of good cheer, and each man to return to his home. The Athenians took the advice, and Peisistratos became for the third time master of Athens.

Upon this he set himself to root his power more firmly, by the aid of a numerous body of mercenaries, and by keeping up a full treasury, partly supplied from native forces, partly from the countries about the river Strymon. He also demanded hostages from many of the Athenians who had remained at home, and not left Athens at his approach; and these he sent to Naxos, which he had conquered by force of arms, and given over into the charge of Lygdamis. Further, he purified the island of Delos, according to the injunctions of an oracle, after the following fashion: all the dead bodies which had been buried within sight of the temple he dug up, and removed to another part of the isle. Thus was the tyranny of Peisistratos established in Athens, many of the Athenians having fallen in the battle, and many others having fled the country together with the Alcmaeonidae. Peisistratos and his sons were the last of the Athenian tyrants; the birth of Democracy was near.

[Excerpt from the history of Herodotos (484-425 B.C.), the first book, entitled "Clio"].