



DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE WORLD

ONE of the world's decisive battles is in progress at this moment. It is the Battle for Britain. More than that: it is a battle between one philosophy and another. "Smile not at the phantasy of one who foresees in the region of reality the same outburst of revolution that has taken place in the region of intellect," said Heine, in 1835. But smile we did. Now, exploding against our growing dream of a new world order, has come the German philosophy of force applied for the sake of force.

"And the hour will come," said Heine. And the hour has come.

Unless the spectre of violence in Europe is an hysterical delusion; unless the muffled voices of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and France, are crying out to us a pack of lies, this is one of the decisive battles of the world.

Sixteen times the world has armed itself to decide some similar conflict. We cannot know what the result of the sixteenth may be. Possibly we do not yet understand fully the results of the battles of the previous twenty-five hundred years. Only this much is clear. In each of them a desire for freedom has clashed against some tyrant greedy to spread his tyranny. In each of them the spirit and morale of free peoples has won through.

Following this article, "The Listener" will publish a series describing the main battles of history separately. Here they are tabulated with a brief summary of the significance of each:

BATTLE OF MARATHON (490 B.C.):

The first of the European tribes or races to establish some semblance of national unity were the Greeks. The old civilisations had been magnificent edifices in their prime, but all had depended upon the personality of despotic rulers. Learning and inquiry had flourished only at the pleasure of the despots. Around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, around the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, unity had been built up; but only at the points of spear and sword. Inevitably, as the emphasis of the different rulers changed or deteriorated, learning was either ignored or twisted to serve the single purpose of increasing power. It degenerated into cults and superstitions.

With the Greeks, learning for the first time became a general currency. The Greek tribes were not always united. Within Greece as we know the boundaries now, there was often dissension, often war. But inside the walls of the rival cities the same spirit of inquiry flourished and nourished itself upon the first forms of the democratic ideal. In Athens it came to its brightest flowering, and to Athens came the task, in 490 B.C., of stemming the aggressions of the Medes and Persians.

Datis landed a great army at Marathon, a plain by the coastline of Greece,

close to Athens. The small Greek army held the heights. It was mainly Athenian, reinforced by a small body of Plataeans. Persuaded by Miltiades, the Greek generals resolved to attack the superior numbers of the Medes. They won, and so began the tradition of European dominance which ever since has made the Dardanelles a boundary between Order and Confusion.

BATTLE OF SYRACUSE (412 B.C.):

Tragically, the lessons learned by the Greeks in their democratic Athens did not profit them in their relations with other countries. Their great energy manifested itself in extensions of their power, and wherever their power was extended they failed to see that force was the wrong method of consolidation. They developed Imperial ambitions. Sicily, the island fortress off the toe of Italy, was to lead the way to conquest of Rome itself, with Carthage to follow. A great naval expedition was fitted out to sail in 415 B.C. The skillful Alcibiades, however, was deposed by factions within the Athenian Army.

He transferred his allegiance to Syracuse, and persuaded Sparta to appoint Gylippus to the Sicilian command. Gylippus secured the support of Corinthians and other Peloponnesian Greeks against the rampant Athenians. They encouraged Syracuse to resist. Nicias, Athenian commander, delayed too long

and was hemmed in by the opposing forces. Athens replied by draining herself of men and ships to press home the enterprise. Demosthenes, Athenian general, almost succeeded; but at the height of the deciding battle, while the Athenians were disorganised by their own headlong success, a small troop of Boetian infantry stood firm against them, provided a rallying point for the Syracusan armies, and turned the day. Athens remained powerful, but her power was diminishing, and the power of Rome and Carthage were rising to that point where, two hundred years later, they would clash in their turn.

BATTLE OF ARBELA (331 B.C.):

When Athens wasted herself against Sicily, Sparta grew to power and fell in her turn to Thebes. Thebes fell with her conquering Epaminondas, and the power of Sparta, Thebes, and Athens was balanced. Rome, meanwhile, was gaining strength in Italy. The northern tribes had invaded Italy and conquered Rome's enemies as well as Rome. But Rome recovered. Concurrently, in Greece, the three leading cities bowed in their turn to Macedon as Philip created the power which Alexander the Great was to use against most of the known world.

Under Alexander the Greeks went East and South. Egypt fell to them and spoke their language. The great library of Alexandria was a product of those times. And where Athens had played her part in stemming the invasion of the Persians, Macedon completed the task by cutting into Persia itself. On his conquering way to India, Alexander met Darius the Persian at Arbela, which was a city near the village of Gaugemela, on the plains between the Tigris and the hills of Kurdistan. Alexander won a great victory, and the power of the Eastern despotisms was finally broken.

BATTLE OF METAURUS (207 B.C.):

Now the European nations were finding their feet. Rome raised herself to an eminence from which she looked jealously across the Mediterranean to Carthage. With the death of Alexander the power of the Macedonian Greeks lost itself in the magnitude of the country over which his surviving generals were

left to rule. The forward drive of Europe centred itself about the Western Mediterranean. By 207 B.C. the rivalry between Rome and Carthage came to a head. Weakened by many defeats, Carthage still contrived to rally herself for a final effort. Hasdrubal, brother to Hannibal, led his army through Spain, across the base of France, and over the Alps into Italy itself. He followed the route made by Hannibal eleven years before. Hannibal was ensconced in Italy. In the south, he had detached Rome's allies, and waited for his chance with a reduced, but veteran force. Hasdrubal might have done the same in the north, but Rome, with her back to the wall, with nearly all her able-bodied citizens in her army, with her last resources assembled for a desperate attempt to win through, did not give him time. Armies were sent to meet Hasdrubal. The Consul Nero stayed south to watch Hannibal. Hasdrubal was successful. The northern armies of Rome fell back before him. But a detachment of Nero's troops intercepted a letter from Hasdrubal to Hannibal, outlining his plan of campaign, and Nero acted upon this knowledge. He kept his northward march a close secret, and the reinforced armies attacked without warning. Hannibal was presented with the head of his brother, chopped off after the battle by the river called the Metauro, and Hannibal's downfall was assured. Rome now had no rival. Even far-away England heard about her strength.

VICTORY OF ARMINIUS (9 A.D.):

In the rise of Eastern Empires, in their defeat while advancing against the West; in the rise of the Athenian Empire, and its defeat while endeavouring to extend itself by force; in the rise of the Empire of Carthage, and its defeat while trying to subdue Rome by force; in these stories you have the precedents which ever since have repeated themselves. Rome, in her turn, spread herself out, became ambitious, and held what she won by force of arms. Rome, in her turn, divided herself at home and wrecked herself away from home against a new spirit rising in the unity of freedom. Under Arminius the scattered Germanic tribes discovered their common interest, united, revolted against the

(continued on next page)