



**HANNIBAL**  
Rome's most formidable foe

(Continued from previous page)

Their city was razed to the ground and the site sown with salt. Out of some 700,000 inhabitants, perhaps 50,000 survived.

Even the Roman Commander, another Scipio, felt the tragedy of such destruction. This is how Appian, the historian, describes his feelings:

"As for Scipio, seeing that City which had flourished for seven hundred years since it was first built, comparable to any Empire whatsoever, for Extent of Dominion by Sea and Land, for its Arms, for its Fleets, for its Elephants, for its Riches, and preferable even to all nations on the earth for generosity and Resolution, since after their Arms and Ships were taken away, they had supported themselves against Famine and War for three years together; seeing it, I say, now absolutely ruined, 'tis said that he shed tears and publicly deplored the hard fortune to his enemies."

A century later another city, this time a Roman city, was founded on its site. Its commerce was even greater than that of the older city. Once again in size and wealth Carthage became the rival of Rome. When Christianity became the recognised religion of the Roman Empire, the influence of Carthage was of the first importance.

#### Schism and the Vandals

The Church in North Africa had its troubles, of which Schism was the greatest. And the curse of Schism was that it created disunity in temporal as well as spiritual affairs, despite all that men like St. Augustine could do to prevent it. And disunity brought its inevitable punishment. In the year 428 A.D. it let in the Vandals, a fair-haired Teutonic people, fierce warriors for whom the now degenerate Romans, who were the ruling caste in Africa, were no match.

Soon after landing in North Africa, the Vandals besieged the City of Hippo Regius (known to us as the Bona, which was taken by the British and Americans soon after their landings in North Africa last November). This was the seat of the great Augustine, who, seeing his beloved earthly city threatened with destruction, was inspired to write his *City of God*, which is indestructible. This grand old man, "the light and pillar of the Catholic Church" (Gibbon's words), "was gently released, in the third month of the siege and in the 76th year of his age, from the actual and impending calamities of his country."

The Vandals went on from victory to victory and infamy to infamy, finally capturing and sacking Carthage itself.

Their leader, Gaiseric, was a barbarian of great ability, long-headed, cunning and treacherous. He saw the advantage of sea power, and set himself to acquire it; and so, "after an interval of six centuries the fleets that issued from the port of Carthage again claimed the Empire of the Mediterranean."

In the year 455 A.D. Gaiseric landed in Italy and sacked Rome itself. For fourteen days and nights Rome and its inhabitants were delivered up, as Gibbon says, to "the licentiousness of the Vandals and Moors whose blind passions revenged the injuries of Carthage." The wheel had come full circle.

But their day, too, came to an end. In the year 535 A.D., Belisarius, the great general of Justinian, the Emperor who ruled at Constantinople, invaded Tunisia, took Carthage, and in a short time made an end of Vandal power. Once again, Carthage became one of the greatest ports in the world, but though its wealth and magnificence remained for a time, its power had gone. It no longer controlled a country. It was only a city.

#### The Arabs

In 642 A.D. came the first invasion of the Arabs. In 669 A.D. the Holy City of Kairouan, through which our own soldiers recently passed, was founded. Second only to Mecca in sanctity, this city deprived Carthage of its remaining importance, because in it the followers of Mahomet had a base which no sea-borne force could reach. By the end of the 7th century Carthage, with the rest of North Africa, was securely in the grasp of the Arabs, and does not come into history again until 1270, when Louis the Ninth of France, known to us as St. Louis, proceeding on the last of the Crusades, made a descent upon Tunis, and attacking the Castle of Carthage, carried it sword in hand. But while the French waited for the arrival of the King of Sicily before undertaking further military operations, disease worked havoc among them, and the King himself succumbed to it less than two months from the time of landing.

#### To-day

This is how a recent writer describes Carthage as he saw it about four years ago:

"The place is a magnificent and level emptiness—void tombs, void stables, void ports, void cisterns and tunnels; level churches and baths and palaces and theatres and amphitheatres. All very beautiful when seen from the Byrsa Hill. Acres of wheat sparkle over the northern district of Megara, where the wealthy Carthaginians had their gardens before the Roman siege-engine arrived. Eastward on the Gulf, the two so-called ports of the Carthaginian Admiralty and Mercantile Marine are charming ornamental ponds. The gorse is a gold leaf on the north-east; anti-aircraft guns are dull pins in the green beside the airfield to the south. Of the greatness of Carthage there is nothing but the soft and smothered evidences of its destruction; three times, by Rome in vengeance, by the Vandals in suspicion, by the Arabs in fecklessness. The lesser towns of ancient Africa have been allowed by history to hold to Heaven some of the ruins of their lesser grandeur. But Carthage, the centre of their being and almost the world's mistress, and even under Rome, rebuilt and re-enriched to become the third city of the Empire, has sunk to a cipher of farmland and summer camp. . . ."

But is that word "cipher" completely apt, after all? What of that "Airfield to the South" of which the writer speaks? Has it not a significance that none can miss? Does it not mean that once again the men who rule at Rome have reason to dread what goes on at Carthage?



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