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THE COMPARISON OF TIMOLEON WITH AEMILIUS PAULUS

by Plutarch

translated by John Dryden

SUCH being the story of these two great men's lives, without doubt in the comparison very little difference will be found between them. They made war with two powerful enemies: the one against the Macedonians, and the other with the Carthaginians; and the success was in both cases glorious. One conquered Macedon from the seventh succeeding heir of Antigonus; the other freed Sicily from usurping tyrants, and restored the island to its former liberty. Unless, indeed, it be made a point of Aemilius's side, that he engaged with Perseus when his forces were entire, and composed of men that had often successfully fought with the Romans; whereas Timoleon found Dionysius in a despairing condition, his affairs being reduced to the last extremity; or, on the contrary, it be urged in favour of Timoleon, that he vanquished several tyrants, and a powerful Carthaginian army, with which an inconsiderable number of men gathered together from all parts, not with such an army as Aemilius had, of well-disciplined soldiers, experienced in war, and accustomed to obey; but with such as through the hopes of gain restored to them, unskilled in fighting and ungovernable. And when actions are equally glorious, and the means to compass them unequal, the greatest esteem is certainly due to that general who conquers with the small power.

Both have the reputation of having behaved themselves with an uncorrupted integrity in all the affairs they managed; but Aemilius had the advantage of being, from his infancy, by the laws and customs of his country brought up to the proper management of public affairs, which Timoleon brought himself to by his own efforts. And this is plain; for at that time all the Romans were uniformly orderly and obedient, respectful to the laws and to their fellow-citizens: whereas it is remarkable that not one of the Greek generals commanding in Sicily could keep himself uncorrupted, except Dion, and of him many entertained a jealousy that he would establish a monarchy there, after the Lacedaemonian manner. Timaeus writes, that the Syracusans sent even Gylippus home dishonourably, and with a reputation lost by the unsatiable covetousness he displayed when he commanded the army. And numerous historians tell us of the wicked and perfidious acts committed by Pharax the Spartan and Callippus the Athenian, with the view of making themselves kings of Sicily. Yet what were these men, and what strength had they, to entertain such a thought? The first of them was a follower of Dionysius, when he was expelled from Syracuse, and the other a hired captain of foot under Dion, and came into Sicily with him. But Timoleon, at the request and prayers of the Syracusans, was sent to be their general, and had no need to seek for power, but had a perfect title, founded on their own offers, to hold it; and yet no sooner had he freed Sicily from her oppressors, but he willingly surrendered it.

It is truly worthy our admiration in Aemilius, that though he conquered so great and so rich a realm as that of Macedon, yet he would not touch, nor see any of the money, nor did he advantage himself one farthing by it, though he was very generous of his own to others. I would not intend any reflection on Timoleon for accepting of a house and handsome estate in the country, which the Syracusans presented him with; there is no dishonour in accepting; but yet there is greater glory in a refusal, and the supremest virtue is shown

in not wanting what it might fairly take. And as that body is, without doubt, the most strong and healthful which can the easiest support extreme cold and excessive heat in the change of seasons, and that the most firm and collected mind which is not puffed up with prosperity nor dejected with adversity; so the virtue of Aemilius was eminently seen in his countenance and behaviour, continuing as noble and lofty upon the loss of two dear sons, as when he achieved his greatest victories and triumphs. But Timoleon, after he had justly punished his brother, a truly heroic action, let his reason yield to a causeless sorrow, and humiliated with grief and remorse, forbore for twenty years to appear in any public place, or meddle with any affairs of the commonwealth. It is truly very commendable to abhor and shun the doing any base action; but to stand in fear of every kind of censure or disrepute may argue a gentle and open-hearted, but not an heroic temper.

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