

75 AD
FABIUS
270-203 B.C.
by Plutarch
translated by John Dryden

FABIUS

HAVING related the memorable actions of Pericles, our history now proceeds to the life of Fabius. A son of Hercules and a nymph, of some woman of that country, who brought him forth on the banks of Tiber, was, it is said, the first Fabius, the founder of the numerous and distinguished family of the name. Others will have it that they were first called Fodii, because the first of the race delighted in digging pitfalls for wild beasts, fodere being still the Latin for to dig, and fossa for a ditch, and that in process of time, by the change of the two letters, they grew to be called Fabii. But be these things true or false, certain it is that this family for a long time yielded a great number of eminent persons. Our Fabius, who was fourth in descent from that Fabius Rullus who first brought the honourable surname of Maximus into his family, was also, by way of personal nickname, called Verrucosus, from a wart on his upper lip; and in his childhood they in like manner named him Ovicula, or The Lamb, on account of his extreme mildness of temper. His slowness in speaking, his long labour and pains in learning, his deliberation in entering into the sports of other children, his easy submission to everybody, as if he had no will of his own, made those who judge superficially of him, the greater number, esteem him insensible and stupid; and few only saw that this tardiness proceeded from stability, and discerned the greatness of his mind, and the lionlikeness of his temper. But as soon as he came into employments, his virtues exerted and showed themselves; his reputed want of energy then was recognized by people in general as a freedom of passion; his slowness in words and actions, the effect of a true prudence; his want of rapidity and his sluggishness, as constancy and firmness.

Living in a great commonwealth, surrounded by many enemies, he saw the wisdom of inuring his body (nature's own weapon) to warlike exercises, and disciplining his tongue for public oratory in a style conformable to his life and character. His eloquence, indeed, had not much of popular ornament, nor empty artifice, but there was in it great weight of sense; it was strong and sententious, much after the way of Thucydides. We have yet extant his funeral oration upon the death of his son, who died consul, which he recited before the people.

He was five times consul, and in his first consulship had the honour of a triumph for the victory he gained over the Ligurians, whom he defeated in a set battle, and drove them to take shelter in the Alps, from whence they never after made any inroad or depredation upon their neighbours. After this, Hannibal came into Italy, who, at his first entrance, having gained a great battle near the river Trebia, traversed all Tuscany with his victorious army, and, desolating the country round about, filled Rome itself with astonishment and terror. Besides the more common signs of thunder and lightning then happening, the report of several unheard of and utterly strange portents much increased the popular consternation. For it was said that some targets sweated blood; that at Antium, when they reaped their corn, many of the ears were filled with blood; that it had rained red-hot stones; that the Falerians had seen the heavens open and several scrolls falling down, in one of which was plainly written,

"Mars himself stirs his arms." But these prodigies had no effect upon the impetuous and fiery temper of the consul Flaminius, whose natural promptness had been much heightened by his late unexpected victory over the Gauls, when he fought them contrary to the order of the senate and the advice of his colleague. Fabius, on the other side, thought it not seasonable to engage with the enemy; not that he much regarded the prodigies, which he thought too strange to be easily understood, though many were alarmed by them; but in regard that the Carthaginians were but few, and in want of money and supplies, he deemed it best not to meet in the field a general whose army had been tried in many encounters, and whose object was a battle, but to send aid to their allies, control the movements of the various subject cities, and let the force and vigour of Hannibal waste away and expire, like a flame, for want of the aliment.

These weighty reasons did not prevail with Flaminius, who protested he would never suffer the advance of the enemy to the city, nor be reduced, like Camillus in former time, to fight for Rome within the walls of Rome. Accordingly he ordered the tribunes to draw out the army into the field; and though he himself, leaping on horseback to go out, was no sooner mounted but the beast, without any apparent cause, fell into so violent a fit of trembling and bounding that he cast his rider headlong on the ground; he was no ways deterred, but proceeded as he had begun, and marched forward up to Hannibal, who was posted near the Lake Thrasymene in Tuscany. At the moment of this engagement, there happened so great an earthquake, that it destroyed several towns, altered the course of rivers, and carried off parts of high cliffs, yet such was the eagerness of the combatants, that they were entirely insensible of it.

In this battle Flaminius fell, after many proofs of his strength and courage, and round about him all the bravest of the army; in the whole, fifteen thousand were killed, and as many made prisoners. Hannibal, desirous to bestow funeral honours upon the body of Flaminius, made diligent search after it, but could not find it among the dead, nor was it ever known what became of it. Upon the former engagement near Trebia, neither the general who wrote, nor the express who told the news, used straightforward and direct terms, nor related it otherwise than as a drawn battle, with equal loss on either side; but on this occasion as soon as Pomponius the praetor had the intelligence, he caused the people to assemble, and, without disguising or dissembling the matter, told them plainly, "We are beaten, O Romans, in a great battle; the consul Flaminius is killed; think, therefore, what is to be done for your safety." Letting loose his news like a gate of wind upon an open sea, he threw the city into utter confusion: in such consternation, their thoughts found no support or stay. The danger at hand at last awakened their judgments into a resolution to choose a dictator, who by the sovereign authority of his office, and by his personal wisdom and courage, might be able to manage the public affairs. Their choice unanimously fell upon Fabius, whose character seemed equal to the greatness of the office; whose age was so far advanced as to give him experience, without taking from him the vigour of action; his body could execute what his soul designed; and his temper was a happy compound of confidence and cautiousness.

Fabius, being thus installed in the office of dictator, in the first place gave the command of the horse to Lucius Minucius; and next asked leave of the senate for himself, that in time of battle he might serve on horseback, which by an ancient law amongst the Romans was forbid to their generals; whether it were, that, placing their greatest strength in their foot, they would have their commanders-in-chief posted amongst them, or else to let them know, that, how great and absolute

soever their authority were, the people and senate were still their masters, of whom they must ask leave. Fabius, however, to make the authority of his charge more observable, and to render the people more submissive and obedient to him, caused himself to be accompanied with the full body of four-and-twenty lictors; and, when the surviving consul came to visit him, sent him word to dismiss his lictors with their fasces, the ensigns of authority, and appear before him as a private person.

The first solemn action of his dictatorship was very fitly a religious one: an admonition to the people, that their late overthrow had not befallen them through want of courage in their soldiers, but through the neglect of divine ceremonies in the general. He therefore exhorted them not to fear the enemy, but by extraordinary honour to propitiate the gods. This he did, not to fill their minds with superstition, but by religious feeling to raise their courage, and lessen their fear of the enemy by inspiring the belief that Heaven was on their side. With this view, the secret prophecies called the Sibylline Books were consulted; sundry predictions found in them were said to refer to the fortunes and events of the time; but none except the consulter was informed. Presenting himself to the people, the dictator made a vow before them to offer in sacrifice the whole product of the next season, all Italy over, of the cows, goats, swine, sheep, both in the mountains and the plains; and to celebrate musical festivities with an expenditure of the precise sum of 333 sestertia and 333 denarii, with one-third of a denarius over. The sum total of which is, in our money, 83,583 drachmas and 2 obols. What the mystery might be in that exact number is not easy to determine, unless it were in honour of the perfection of the number three, as being the first of odd numbers, the first that contains in itself multiplication, with all other properties whatsoever belonging to numbers in general.

In this manner Fabius, having given the people better heart for the future, by making them believe that the gods took their side, for his own part placed his whole confidence in himself, believing that the gods bestowed victory and good fortune by the instrumentality of valour and of prudence; and thus prepared he set forth to oppose Hannibal, not with intention to fight him, but with the purpose of wearing out and wasting the vigour of his arms by lapse of time, of meeting his want of resources by superior means, by large numbers the smallness of his forces. With this design, he always encamped on the highest grounds, where the enemy's horse could have no access to him. Still he kept pace with them; when they marched he followed them; when they encamped he did the same, but at such a distance as not to be compelled to an engagement and always keeping upon the hills, free from the insults of their horse; by which means he gave them no rest, but kept them in a continual alarm.

But this his dilatory way gave occasion in his own camp for suspicion of want of courage; and this opinion prevailed yet more in Hannibal's army. Hannibal was himself the only man who was not deceived, who discerned his skill and detected his tactics, and saw, unless he could by art or force bring him to battle, that the Carthaginians, unable to use the arms in which they were superior, and suffering the continual drain of lives and treasure in which they were inferior, would in the end come to nothing. He resolved, therefore, with all the arts and subtleties of war to break his measures and to bring Fabius to an engagement, like a cunning wrestler, watching every opportunity to get good hold and close with his adversary. He at one time attacked, and sought to distract his attention, tried to draw him off in various directions, and endeavoured in all ways to tempt him from his safe policy. All this artifice, though it had no effect

upon the firm judgment and conviction of the dictator, yet upon the common soldier, and even upon the general of the horse himself, it had too great an operation: Minucius, unseasonably eager for action, bold and confident, humoured the soldiery, and himself contributed to fill them with wild eagerness and empty hopes, which they vented in reproaches upon Fabius, calling him Hannibal's pedagogue, since he did nothing else but follow him up and down and wait upon him. At the same time, they cried up Minucius for the only captain worthy to command the Romans; whose vanity and presumption rose so high in consequence, that he insolently jested at Fabius's encampment upon the mountains, saying that he seated them there as on a theatre, to behold the flames and desolation of their country. And he would sometimes ask the friends of the general, whether it were not his meaning, by thus leading them from mountain to mountain, to carry them at last (having no hopes on earth) up into heaven, or to hide them in the clouds from Hannibal's army? When his friends reported these things to the dictator, persuading him that, to avoid the general obloquy, he should engage the enemy, his answer was, "I should be more faint-hearted than they make me, if, through fear of idle reproaches, I should abandon my own convictions. It is no inglorious thing to have fear for the safety of our country, but to be turned from one's course by men's opinions, by blame, and by misrepresentation, shows a man unfit to hold an office such as this, which, by such conduct, he makes the slaves of those whose errors it is his business to control."

An oversight of Hannibal occurred soon after. Desirous to refresh his horse in some good pasture-grounds, and to draw off his army, he ordered his guides to conduct him to the district of Casinum. They, mistaking his bad pronunciation, led him and his army to the town of Casilinum, on the frontier of Campania which the river Lothronus, called by the Romans Vulturnus, divides in two parts. The country around is enclosed by mountains, with a valley opening towards the sea, in which the river overflowing forms a quantity of marsh land with deep banks of sand, and discharges itself into the sea on a very unsafe and rough shore. While Hannibal was proceeding hither, Fabius, by his knowledge of the roads, succeeded in making his way around before him, and despatched four thousand choice men to seize the exit from it and stop him up, and lodged the rest of his army upon the neighbouring hills, in the most advantageous places; at the same time detaching a party of his lightest armed men to fall upon Hannibal's rear; which they did with such success, that they cut off eight hundred of them, and put the whole army in disorder. Hannibal, finding the error and the danger he was fallen into, immediately crucified the guides; but considered the enemy to be so advantageously posted, that there was no hope of breaking through them; while his soldiers began to be despondent and terrified, and to think themselves surrounded with embarrassments too difficult to be surmounted.

Thus reduced, Hannibal had recourse to stratagem; he caused two thousand head of oxen which he had in his camp to have torches or dry fagots well fastened to their horns, and lighting them in the beginning of the night, ordered the beasts to be driven on towards the heights commanding the passages out of the valley and the enemy's posts; when this was done, he made his army in the dark leisurely march after them. The oxen at first kept a slow orderly pace, and with their lighted heads resembled an army marching by night, astonishing the shepherds and herdsmen of the hills about. But when the fire burnt down the horns of the beasts to the quick, they no longer observed their sober pace, but unruly and wild with their pain, ran dispersed about, tossing their heads and scattering the fire round about them upon each other and setting light as they passed to the trees. This

was a surprising spectacle to the Romans on guard upon the heights. Seeing flames which appeared to come from men advancing with torches, they were possessed with the alarm that the enemy was approaching in various quarters, and that they were being surrounded; and, quitting their post, abandoned the pass, and precipitately retired to their camp on the hills. They were no sooner gone, but the light-armed of Hannibal's men, according to his order, immediately seized the heights, and soon after the whole army, with all the baggage, came up and safely marched through the passes.

Fabius, before the night was over, quickly found out the trick; for some of the beasts fell into his hands; but for fear of an ambush in the dark, he kept his men all night to their arms in the camp. As soon as it was day, he attacked the enemy in the rear, where, after a good deal of skirmishing in the uneven ground, the disorder might have become general, but that Hannibal detached from his van a body of Spaniards, who, of themselves active and nimble, were accustomed to the climbing of mountains. These briskly attacked the Roman troops, who were in heavy armour, killed a good many, and left Fabius no longer in condition to follow the enemy. This action brought the extreme of obloquy and contempt upon the dictator; they said it was now manifest that he was not only inferior to his adversary, as they had always thought, in courage, but even in that conduct, foresight, and generalship, by which he had proposed to bring the war to an end.

And Hannibal, to enhance their anger against him, marched with his army close to the lands and possessions of Fabius, and, giving orders to his soldiers to burn and destroy all the country about, forbade them to do the least damage in the estates of the Roman general, and placed guards for their security. This, when reported at Rome, had the effect with the people which Hannibal desired. Their tribunes raised a thousand stories against him, chiefly at the instigation of Metilius, who, not so much out of hatred to him as out of friendship to Minucius, whose kinsman he was, thought by depressing Fabius to raise his friend. The senate on their part were also offended with him for the bargain he had made with Hannibal about the exchange of prisoners, the conditions of which were that, after exchange made of man for man, if any on either side remained, they should be redeemed at the price of two hundred and fifty drachmas a head. Upon the whole account, there remained two hundred and forty Romans unexchanged, and the senate now not only refused to allow money for the ransoms, but also reproached Fabius for making a contract, contrary to the honour and interest of the commonwealth, for redeeming men whose cowardice had put them in the hands of the enemy. Fabius heard and endured all this with invincible patience; and, having no money by him, and on the other side being resolved to keep his word with Hannibal and not to abandon the captives, he despatched his son to Rome to sell land, and to bring with him the price, sufficient to discharge the ransoms; which was punctually performed by his son and delivery accordingly made to him of the prisoners, amongst whom many, when they were released, made proposals to repay the money; which Fabius in all cases declined.

About this time, he was called to Rome by the priests, to assist, according to the duty of his office, at certain sacrifices, and was thus forced to leave the command of the army with Minucius; but before he parted, not only charged him as his commander-in-chief, but besought and entreated him not to come, in his absence, to a battle with Hannibal. His commands, entreaties, and advice were lost upon Minucius, for his back was no sooner turned but the new general immediately sought occasions to attack the enemy. And notice being

brought him that Hannibal had sent out a great part of his army to forage, he fell upon a detachment of the remainder, doing great execution, and driving them to their very camp, with no little terror to the rest, who apprehended their breaking in upon them; and when Hannibal had recalled his scattered forces to the camp, he, nevertheless, without any loss, made his retreat, a success which aggravated his boldness and presumption, and filled the soldiers with rash confidence. The news spread to Rome, where Fabius, on being told it, said that what he most feared was Minucius's success; but the people, highly elated, hurried to the forum to listen to an address from Metilius the tribune, in which he infinitely extolled the valour of Minucius, and fell bitterly upon Fabius, accusing him for want not merely of courage, but even of loyalty; and not only him, but also many other eminent and considerable persons; saying that it was they that had brought the Carthaginians into Italy, with the design to destroy the liberty of the people; for which end they had at once put the supreme authority into the hands of a single person, who by his slowness and delays might give Hannibal leisure to establish himself in Italy, and the people of Carthage time and opportunity to supply him with fresh succours to complete his conquest.

Fabius came forward with no intention to answer the tribune, but only said, that they should expedite the sacrifices, that so he might speedily return to the army to punish Minucius, who had presumed to fight contrary to his orders; words which immediately possessed the people with the belief that Minucius stood in danger of his life. For it was in the power of the dictator to imprison and to put to death, and they feared that Fabius, of a mild temper in general, would be as hard to be appeased when once irritated, as he was slow to be provoked. Nobody dared to raise his voice in opposition; Metilius alone, whose office of tribune gave him security to say what he pleased (for in the time of a dictatorship that magistratical one preserves his authority), boldly applied himself to the people in the behalf of Minucius; that they should not suffer him to be made a sacrifice to the enmity of Fabius, nor permit him to be destroyed, like the son of Manlius Torquatus, who was beheaded by his father for a victory fought and triumphantly won against order; he exhorted them to take away from Fabius that absolute power of a dictator, and to put it into more worthy hands, better able and more inclined to use it for the public good. These impressions very much prevailed upon the people, though not so far as wholly to dispossess Fabius of the dictatorship. But they decreed that Minucius should have an equal authority with the dictator in the conduct of the war; which was a thing then without precedent, though a little later it was again practised after the disaster at Cannae; when the dictator, Marcus Junius, being with the army, they chose at Rome Fabius Buteo dictator, that he might create new senators, to supply the numerous places of those who were killed. But as soon as, once acting in public, he had filled those vacant places with a sufficient number, he immediately dismissed his lictors, and withdrew from all his attendance, and mingling like a common person with the rest of the people, quietly went about his own affairs in the forum.

The enemies of Fabius thought they had sufficiently humiliated and subdued him by raising Minucius to be his equal in authority; but they mistook the temper of the man, who looked upon their folly as not his loss, but like Diogenes, who, being told that some persons derided him, made answer, "But I am not derided," meaning that only those were really insulted on whom such insults made an impression, so Fabius, with great tranquillity and unconcern, submitted to what happened, and contributed a proof to the argument of the philosophers that a just and good man is not capable of being dishonoured. His only vexation

arose from his fear lest this ill counsel, by supplying opportunities to the diseased military ambition of his subordinate, should damage the public cause. Lest the rashness of Minucius should now at once run headlong into some disaster, he returned back with all privacy and speed to the army; where he found Minucius so elevated with his new dignity, that, a joint-authority not contenting him, he required by turns to have the command of the army every other day. This Fabius rejected, but was contented that the army should be divided; thinking each general singly would better command his part, than partially command the whole. The first and fourth legion he took for his own division, the second and third he delivered to Minucius; so also of the auxiliary forces each had an equal share.

Minucius, thus exalted, could not contain himself from boasting of his success in humiliating the high and powerful office of the dictatorship. Fabius quietly reminded him that it was, in all wisdom, Hannibal, and not Fabius, whom he had to combat; but if he must needs contend with his colleague, it had best be in diligence and care for the preservation of Rome; that it might not be said, a man so favoured by the people served them worse than he who had been ill-treated and disgraced by them.

The young general, despising these admonitions as the false humility of age, immediately removed with the body of his army, and encamped by himself. Hannibal, who was not ignorant of all these passages, lay watching his advantage from them. It happened that between his army and that of Minucius there was a certain eminence, which seemed a very advantageous and not difficult post to encamp upon; the level field around it appeared, from a distance, to be all smooth and even, though it had many inconsiderable ditches and dips in it, not discernible to the eye. Hannibal, had he pleased, could easily have possessed himself of this ground; but he had reserved it for a bait, or train, in proper season, to draw the Romans to an engagement. Now that Minucius and Fabius were divided, he thought the opportunity fair for his purpose; and, therefore, having in the night-time lodged a convenient number of his men in these ditches and hollow places, early in the morning he sent forth a small detachment, who, in the sight of Minucius, proceeded to possess themselves of the rising ground. According to his expectation, Minucius swallowed the bait, and first sends out his light troops, and after them some horse, to dislodge the enemy; and, at last, when he saw Hannibal in person advancing to the assistance of his men, marched down with his whole army drawn up. He engaged with the troops on the eminence, and sustained their missiles; the combat for some time was equal; but as soon as Hannibal perceived that the whole army was now sufficiently advanced within the toils he had set for them, so that their backs were open to his men whom he had posted in the hollows, he gave the signal; upon which they rushed forth from various quarters, and with loud cries furiously attacked Minucius in the rear. The surprise and the slaughter was great, and struck universal alarm and disorder through the whole army. Minucius himself lost all his confidence; he looked from officer to officer, and found all alike unprepared to face the danger, and yielding to a flight, which, however, could not end in safety. The Numidian horsemen were already in full victory riding about the plain, cutting down the fugitives.

Fabius was not ignorant of this danger of his countrymen; he foresaw what would happen from the rashness of Minucius, and the cunning of Hannibal; and, therefore, kept his men to their arms, in readiness to wait the event; nor would he trust to the reports of others, but he himself, in front of his camp, viewed all that passed. When, therefore, he saw the army of Minucius encompassed by the enemy, and that by their countenance and shifting their ground they appeared more

disposed to flight than to resistance, with a great sigh, striking his hand upon his thigh, he said to those about him, "O Hercules! how much sooner than I expected, though later than he seemed to desire, hath Minucius destroyed himself!" He then commanded the ensigns to be led forward, and the army to follow, telling them, "We must make haste to rescue Minucius, who is a valiant man, and a lover of his country; and if he hath been too forward to engage the enemy, at another time we will tell him of it." Thus, at the head of his men, Fabius marched up to the enemy, and first cleared the plain of the Numidians; and next fell upon those who were charging the Romans in the rear, cutting down all that made opposition, and obliging the rest to save themselves by a hasty retreat, lest they should be environed as the Romans had been. Hannibal, seeing so sudden a change of affairs, and Fabius, beyond the force of his age, opening his way through the ranks up the hillside, that he might join Minucius, warily forbore, sounded a retreat, and drew off his men into their camp; while the Romans on their part were no less contented to retire in safety. It is reported that upon this occasion Hannibal said jestingly to his friends: "Did not I tell you, that this cloud which always hovered upon the mountains would, at some time or other, come down with a storm upon us?"

Fabius, after his men had picked up the spoils of the field, retired to his own camp, without saying any harsh or reproachful thing to his colleague; who, also, in his part, gathering his army together, spoke and said to them: "To conduct great matters and never commit a fault is above the force of human nature; but to learn and improve by the faults we have committed, is that which becomes a good and sensible man. Some reasons I may have to accuse fortune, but I have many more to thank her; for in a few hours she hath cured a long mistake, and taught me that I am not the man who should command others, but have need of another to command me; and that we are not to contend for victory over those to whom it is our advantage to yield. Therefore in everything else henceforth the dictator must be your commander; only in showing gratitude towards him I will still be your leader, and always be the first to obey his orders." Having said this, he commanded the Roman eagles to move forward, and all his men to follow him to the camp of Fabius. The soldiers, then, as he entered, stood amazed at the novelty of the sight, and were anxious and doubtful what the meaning might be. When he came near the dictator's tent, Fabius went forth to meet him, on which he at once laid his standards at his feet, calling him with a loud voice his father; while the soldiers with him saluted the soldiers here as their patrons, the term employed by freedmen to those who gave them their liberty. After silence was obtained, Minucius said, "You have this day, O dictator, obtained two victories; one by your valour and conduct over Hannibal, and another by your wisdom and goodness over your colleague; by one victory you preserved, and by the other instructed us; and when we were already suffering one shameful defeat from Hannibal, by another welcome one from you we were restored to honour and safety. I can address you by no nobler name than that of a kind father, though a father's beneficence falls short of that I have received from you. From a father I individually received the gift of life; to you I owe its preservation not for myself only, but for all these who are under me." After this, he threw himself into the arms of the dictator; and in the same manner the soldiers of each army embraced one another with gladness and tears of joy.

Not long after, Fabius laid down the dictatorship, and consuls were again created. Those who immediately succeeded observed the same method in managing the war, and avoided all occasions of fighting Hannibal in a pitched battle; they only succoured their allies, and

preserved the towns from falling off to the enemy. But afterwards, when Terentius Varro, a man of obscure birth, but very popular and bold, had obtained the consulship, he soon made it appear that by his rashness and ignorance he would stake the whole commonwealth on the hazard. For it was his custom to declaim in all assemblies, that, as long as Rome employed generals like Fabius, there never would be an end of the war; vaunting that whenever he should get sight of the enemy, he would that same day free Italy from the strangers. With these promises he so prevailed, that he raised a greater army than had ever yet been sent out of Rome. There were enlisted eighty-eight thousand fighting men; but what gave confidence to the populace, only terrified the wise and experienced, and none more than Fabius; since if so great a body, and the flower of the Roman youth, should be cut off, they could not see any new resource for the safety of Rome. They addressed themselves, therefore, to the other consul, Aemilius Paulus, a man of great experience in war, but unpopular, and fearful also of the people, who once before upon some impeachment had condemned him; so that he needed encouragement to withstand his colleague's temerity. Fabius told him, if he would profitably serve his country, he must no less oppose Varro's ignorant eagerness than Hannibal's conscious readiness, since both alike conspired to decide the fate of Rome by a battle. "It is more reasonable," he said to him, "that you should believe me than Varro, in matters relating to Hannibal, when I tell you that if for this year you abstain from fighting with him, either his army will perish of itself, or else he will be glad to depart of his own will. This evidently appears, inasmuch as, notwithstanding his victories, none of the countries or towns of Italy come in to him, and his army is not now the third part of what it was at first." To this Paulus is said to have replied, "Did I only consider myself, I should rather choose to be exposed to the weapons of Hannibal than once more to the suffrages of my fellow-citizens, who are urgent for what you disapprove; yet since the cause of Rome is at stake, I will rather seek in my conduct to please and obey Fabius than all the world besides."

These good measures were defeated by the importunity of Varro; whom, when they were both come to the army, nothing would content but a separate command, that each consul should have his day; and when his turn came, he posted his army close to Hannibal, at a village called Cannae, by the river Aufidus. It was no sooner day, but he set up the scarlet coat flying over his tent, which was the signal of battle. This boldness of the consul, and the numerousness of his army, double theirs, startled the Carthaginians; but Hannibal commanded them to their arms, and with a small train rode out to take a full prospect of the enemy as they were now forming in their ranks, from a rising ground not far distant. One of his followers, called Gisco, a Carthaginian of equal rank with himself, told him that the numbers of the enemy were astonishing; to which Hannibal replied with a serious countenance, "There is one thing, Gisco, yet more astonishing, which you take no notice of;" and when Gisco inquired what, answered, that "in all those great numbers before us, there is not one man called Gisco." This unexpected jest of their general made all the company laugh, and as they came down from the hill they told it to those whom they met, which caused a general laughter amongst them all, from which they were hardly able to recover themselves. The army, seeing Hannibal's attendants come back from viewing the enemy in such a laughing condition, concluded that it must be profound contempt of the enemy, that made their general at this moment indulge in such hilarity.

According to his usual manner, Hannibal employed stratagems to

advantage himself. In the first place, he so drew up his men that the wind was at their backs, which at that time blew with a perfect storm of violence, and, sweeping over the great plains of sand, carried before it a cloud of dust over the Carthaginian army into the faces of the Romans, which much disturbed them in the fight. In the next place, all his best men he put into his wings; and in the body which was somewhat more advanced than the wings, placed the worst and the weakest of his army. He commanded those in the wings, that, when the enemy had made a thorough charge upon that middle advance body, which he knew would recoil, as not being able to withstand their shock, and when the Romans in their pursuit should be far enough engaged within the two wings, they should, both on the right and the left, charge them in the flank, and endeavour to encompass them. This appears to have been the chief cause of the Roman loss. Pressing upon Hannibal's front, which gave ground, they reduced the form of his army into a perfect half-moon, and gave ample opportunity to the captains of the chosen troops to charge them right and left on their flanks, and to cut off and destroy all who did not fall back before the Carthaginian wings united in their rear. To this general calamity, it is also said, that a strange mistake among the cavalry much contributed. For the horse of Aemilius receiving a hurt and throwing his master, those about him immediately alighted to aid the consul; and the Roman troops, seeing their commanders thus quitting their horses, took it for a sign that they should all dismount and charge the enemy on foot. At the sight of this, Hannibal was heard to say, "This pleases me better than if they had been delivered to me bound hand and foot." For the particulars of this engagement, we refer our reader to those authors who have written at large upon the subject.

The consul Varro, with a thin company, fled to Venusia; Aemilius Paulus, unable any longer to oppose the flight of his men, or the flight of his men, or the pursuit of the enemy, his body all covered with wounds, and his soul no less wounded with grief, sat himself down upon a stone, expecting the kindness of a despatching blow. His face was so disfigured, and all his person so stained with blood, that his very friends and domestics passing by knew him not. At last Cornelius Lentulus, a young man of patrician race, perceiving who he was, alighted from his horse, and, tendering it to him, desired him to get up and save a life so necessary to the safety of the commonwealth, which, at this time, would dearly want so great a captain. But nothing could prevail upon him to accept of the offer; he obliged young Lentulus, with tears in his eyes, to remount his horse; then standing up, he gave him his hand, and commanded him to tell Fabius Maximus that Aemilius Paulus had followed his directions to his very last, and had not in the least deviated from those measures which were agreed between them; but that it was his hard fate to be overpowered by Varro in the first place, and secondly by Hannibal. Having despatched Lentulus with this commission, he marked where the slaughter was greatest, and there threw himself upon the swords of the enemy. In this battle it is reported that fifty thousand Romans were slain, four thousand prisoners taken in the field, and ten thousand in the camp of both consuls.

The friends of Hannibal earnestly persuaded him to follow up his victory, and pursue the flying Romans into the very gates of Rome, assuring him that in five days' time he might sup in the Capitol; nor is it easy to imagine what consideration hindered him from it. It would seem rather than some supernatural or divine intervention caused the hesitation and timidity which he now displayed, and which made Barcas, a Carthaginian, tell him with indignation, "You know, Hannibal, how to gain a victory, but not how to use it." Yet it

produced a marvellous revolution in his affairs; he, who hitherto had not one town, market, or seaport in his possession, who had nothing for the subsistence of his men but what he pillaged from day to day, who had no place of retreat or basis of operation, but was roving, as it were, with a huge troop of banditti, now became master of the best provinces and towns of Italy, and of Capua itself, next to Rome the most flourishing and opulent city, all which came over to him, and submitted to his authority.

It is the saying of Euripides, that "a man is in ill-case when he must try a friend," and so neither, it would seem, is a state in a good one, when it needs an able general. And so it was with the Romans; the counsels and actions of Fabius, which, before the battle, they had branded as cowardice and fear, now, in the other extreme, they accounted to have been more than human wisdom; as though nothing but a divine power of intellect could have seen so far, and foretold contrary to the judgment of all others, a result which, even now it had arrived, was hardly credible. In him, therefore, they placed their whole remaining hopes; his wisdom was the sacred altar and temple to which they fled for refuge, and his counsels, more than anything, preserved them from dispersing and deserting their city, as in the time when the Gauls took possession of Rome. He, whom they esteemed fearful and pusillanimous when they were, as they thought, in a prosperous condition was now the only man, in this general and unbounded dejection and confusion, who showed no fear, but walked the streets with an assured and serene countenance, addressed his fellow-citizens, checked the women's lamentations, and the public gatherings of those who wanted thus to vent their sorrows. He caused the senate to meet, he heartened up the magistrates, and was himself as the soul and life of every office.

He placed guards at the gates of the city to stop the frightened multitude from flying; he regulated and confined their mournings for their slain friends, both as to time and place; ordering that each family should perform such observances within private walls, and that they should continue only the space of one month, and then the whole city should be purified. The feast of Ceres happening to fall within this time, it was decreed that the solemnity should be intermitted, lest the fewness, and the sorrowful countenance of those who should celebrate it, might too much expose to the people the greatness of their loss; besides that, the worship most acceptable to the gods is that which comes from cheerful hearts. But those rites which were proper for appeasing their anger, and procuring auspicious signs and presages, were by the direction of the augurs carefully performed. Fabius Pictor, a near kinsman to Maximus, was sent to consult the oracle of Delphi; and about the same time, two vestals having been detected to have been violated, the one killed herself, and the other, according to custom, was buried alive.

Above all, let us admire the high spirit and equanimity of this Roman commonwealth; that when the consul Varro came beaten and flying home, full of shame and humiliation, after he had so disgracefully and calamitously managed their affairs, yet the whole senate and people went forth to meet him at the gates of the city, and received him with honour and respect. And, silence being commanded, the magistrates and chief of the senate, Fabius amongst them, commended him before the people, because he did not despair of the safety of the commonwealth, after so great a loss, but was come to take the government into his hands, to execute the laws, and aid his fellow-citizens in their prospect of future deliverance.

When word was brought to Rome that Hannibal, after the fight, had marched with his army into other parts of Italy, the hearts of the Romans began to revive, and they proceeded to send out generals and

armies. The most distinguished commands were held by Fabius Maximus and Claudius Marcellus, both generals of great fame, though upon opposite grounds. For Marcellus, as we have set forth in his life, was a man of action and high spirit, ready and bold with his own hand, and, as Homer describes his warriors, fierce, and delighting in fights. Boldness, enterprise, and daring to match those of Hannibal, constituted his tactics, and marked his engagements. But Fabius adhered to his former principles, still persuaded that, by following close and not fighting him, Hannibal and his army would at last be tried out and consumed, like a wrestler in too high condition, whose very excess of strength makes him the more likely suddenly to give way and lose it. Posidonius tells us that the Romans called Marcellus their sword, and Fabius their buckler; and that the vigour of the one, mixed with the steadiness of the other, made a happy compound that proved the salvation of Rome. So that Hannibal found by experience that encountering the one, he met with a rapid, impetuous river, which drove him back, and still made some breach upon him; and by the other, though silently and quietly passing by him, he was insensibly washed away and consumed; and, at last, was brought to this, that he dreaded Marcellus when he was in motion, and Fabius when he sat still. During the whole course of this war, he had still to do with one or both of these generals; for each of them was five times consul, and, as praetors or proconsuls or consuls, they had always a part in the government of the army, till, at last, Marcellus fell into the trap which Hannibal had laid for him, and was killed in his fifth consulship. But all his craft and subtlety were unsuccessful upon Fabius, who only once was in some danger of being caught, when counterfeit letters came to him from the principal inhabitants of Metapontum, with promises to deliver up their town if he would come before it with his army, and intimations that they should expect him. This train had almost drawn him in; he resolved to march to them with part of his army, and was diverted only by consulting the omens of the birds, which he found to be inauspicious; and not long after it was discovered that the letters had been forged by Hannibal, who, for his reception, had laid an ambush to entertain him. This, perhaps, we must rather attribute to the favour of the gods than to the prudence of Fabius.

In preserving the towns and allies from revolt by fair and gentle treatment, and in not using rigour, or showing a suspicion upon every light suggestion, his conduct was remarkable. It is told of him, that being informed of a certain Marsian, eminent for courage and good birth, who had been speaking underhand with some of the soldiers about deserting, Fabius was so far from using severity against him, that he called for him, and told him he was sensible of the neglect that had been shown to his merit and good service, which, he said, was a great fault in the commanders who reward more by favour than by desert; "but henceforth, whenever you are aggrieved," said Fabius, "I shall consider it your fault, if you apply yourself to any one but to me;" and when he had so spoken, he bestowed an excellent horse, and other presents upon him; and, from that time forwards, there was not a faithfuller and more trusty man in the whole army. With good reason he judged, that, if those who have the government of horses and dogs endeavour by gentle usage to cure their angry and untractable tempers, rather than by cruelty and beating, much more should those who have the command of men try to bring them to order and discipline by the mildest and fairest means, and not treat them worse than gardeners do those wild plants, which, with care and attention, lose gradually the savageness of their nature, and bear excellent fruit.

At another time, some of his officers informed him that one of their

men was very often absent from his place, and out at nights; he asked them what kind of man he was; they all answered, that the whole army had not a better man, that he was a native of Lucania, and proceeded to speak of several actions which they had seen him perform. Fabius made strict inquiry, and discovered at last that these frequent excursions which he ventured upon were to visit a young girl, with whom he was in love. Upon which he gave private order to some of his men to find out the woman and secretly convey her into his own tent; and then sent for the Lucanian, and, calling him aside, told him, that he very well knew how often he had been out away from the camp at night, which was a capital transgression against military discipline and the Roman laws, but he knew also how brave he was, and the good services he had done; therefore, in consideration of them, he was willing to forgive him his fault; but to keep him in good order, he was resolved to place one over him to be his keeper, who should be accountable for his good behaviour. Having said this, he produced the woman, and told the soldier, terrified and amazed at the adventure, "This is the person who must answer for you; and by your future behaviour we shall see whether your night rambles were on account of love, or for any other worse design."

Another passage there was, something of the same kind, which gained him possession of Tarentum. There was a young Tarentine in the army that had a sister in Tarentum, then in possession of the enemy, who entirely loved her brother, and wholly depended upon him. He, being informed that a certain Bruttian, whom Hannibal had made a commander of the garrison, was deeply in love with his sister, conceived hopes that he might possibly turn it to the advantage of the Romans. And having first communicated his design to Fabius, he left the army as a deserter in show, and went over to Tarentum. The first days passed, and the Bruttian abstained from visiting the sister; for neither of them knew that the brother had notice of the amour between them. The young Tarentine, however, took an occasion to tell his sister how he had heard that a man of station and authority had made his addresses to her, and desired her, therefore, to tell him who it was; "for," said he, "if he be a man that has bravery and reputation, it matters not what countryman he is, since at this time the sword mingles all nations, and makes them equal; compulsion makes all things honourable; and in a time when right is weak, we may be thankful if might assumes a form of gentleness." Upon this the woman sends for her friend, and makes the brother and him acquainted; and whereas she henceforth showed more countenance to her lover than formerly, in the same degrees that her kindness increased, his friendship, also, with the brother advanced. So that at last our Tarentine thought this Bruttian officer well enough prepared to receive the offers he had to make him, and that it would be easy for a mercenary man, who was in love, to accept, upon the terms proposed, the large rewards promised by Fabius. In conclusion, the bargain was struck, and the promise made of delivering the town. This is the common tradition, though some relate the story otherwise, and say, that this woman, by whom the Bruttian was inveigled to betray the town, was not a native of Tarentum, but a Bruttian born, and was kept by Fabius as his concubine; and being a countrywoman and an acquaintance of the Bruttian governor, he privately sent her to him to corrupt him.

Whilst these matters were thus in process, to draw off Hannibal from scenting the design, Fabius sends orders to the garrison in Rhegium, that they should waste and spoil the Bruttian country, and should also lay siege to Caulonia, and storm the place with all their might. These were a body of eight thousand men, the worst of the Roman army, who had most of them been runaways, and had been brought home by Marcellus

from Sicily, in dishonour, so that the loss of them would not be any great grief to the Romans. Fabius, therefore, threw out these men as a bait for Hannibal, to divert him from Tarentum; who instantly caught at it, and led his forces to Caulonia; in the meantime, Fabius sat down before Tarentum. On the sixth day of the siege, the young Tarentine slips by night out of the town, and, having carefully observed the place where the Bruttian commander, according to agreement, was to admit the Romans, gave an account of the whole matter to Fabius; who thought it not safe to rely wholly upon the plot, but, while proceeding with secrecy to the post, gave order for a general assault to be made on the other side of the town, both by land and sea. This being accordingly executed, while the Tarentines hurried to defend the town on the side attacked, Fabius received the signal from the Bruttian, scaled the walls, and entered the town unopposed.

Here, we must confess, ambition seems to have overcome him. To make it appear to the world that he had taken Tarentum by force and his own prowess, and not by treachery, he commanded his men to kill the Bruttians before all others; yet he did not succeed in establishing the impression he desired, but merely gained the character of perfidy and cruelty. Many of the Tarentines were also killed, and thirty thousand of them were sold for slaves; the army had the plunder of the town, and there was brought into the treasury three thousand talents. Whilst they were carrying off everything else as plunder, the officer who took the inventory asked what should be done with their gods, meaning the pictures and statues; Fabius answered, "Let us leave their angry gods to the Tarentines." Nevertheless, he removed the colossal statue of Hercules, and had it set up in the Capitol, with one of himself on horseback, in brass, near it; proceedings very different from those of Marcellus on a like occasion, and which, indeed, very much set off in the eyes of the world his clemency and humanity, as appears in the account of his life.

Hannibal, it is said, was within five miles of Tarentum, when he was informed that the town was taken. He said openly, "Rome then has also got a Hannibal; as we won Tarentum, so have we lost it." And, in private with some of his confidants, he told them, for the first time, that he always thought it difficult, but now he held it impossible, with the forces he then had, to master Italy.

Upon this success, Fabius had a triumph decreed him at Rome, much more splendid than his first; they looked upon him now as a champion who had learned to cope with his antagonist, and could now easily foil his arts and prove his best skill ineffectual. And, indeed, the army of Hannibal was at this time partly worn away with continual action, and partly weakened and become dissolute with overabundance and luxury. Marcus Livius, who was governor of Tarentum when it was betrayed to Hannibal, and then retired into the citadel, which he kept till the town was retaken, was annoyed at these honours and distinctions, and, on one occasion, openly declared in the senate, that by his resistance, more than by any action of Fabius, Tarentum had been recovered; on which Fabius laughingly replied: "You say very true, for if Marcus Livius had not lost Tarentum, Fabius Maximus had never recovered it." The people, amongst other marks of gratitude, gave his son the consulship of the next year; shortly after whose entrance upon his office, there being some business on foot about provision for the war, his father, either by reason of age and infirmity, or perhaps out of design to try his son, came up to him on horseback. While he was still at a distance, the young consul observed it, and bade one of his lictors command his father to alight, and tell him if he had any business with the consul, he should come on foot. The standers-by seemed offended at the imperiousness of the

son towards a father so venerable for his age and his authority, and turned their eyes in silence towards Fabius. He, however, instantly alighted from his horse, and with open arms came up, almost running, and embraced his son, saying, "Yes, my son, you do well, and understand well what authority you have received, and over whom you are to use it. This was the way by which we and our forefathers advanced the dignity of Rome, preferring ever her honour and service to our own fathers and children."

And, in fact, it is told that the great-grandfather of our Fabius, who was undoubtedly the greatest man of Rome in his time, both in reputation and authority, who had been five times consul, and had been honoured with several triumphs for victories obtained by him, took pleasure in serving as lieutenant under his own son, when he went as consul to his command. And when afterwards his son had a triumph bestowed upon him for his good service, the old man followed, on horseback, his triumphant chariot, as one of his attendants; and made it his glory, that while he really was, and was acknowledged to be, the greatest man in Rome, and held a father's full power over his son, he yet submitted himself to the laws and the magistrate.

But the praises of our Fabius are not bounded here. He afterwards lost his son, and was remarkable for bearing the loss with the moderation becoming a pious father and a wise man, and as it was the custom amongst the Romans, upon the death of any illustrious person, to have a funeral oration recited by some of the nearest relations, he took upon himself that office, and delivered a speech in the forum, which he committed afterwards to writing.

After Cornelius Scipio, who was sent into Spain, had driven the Carthaginians, defeated by him in many battles, out of the country, and had gained over to Rome many towns and nations with large resources, he was received at his coming home with unexampled joy and acclamation of the people; who, to show their gratitude, elected him consul for the year ensuing. Knowing what high expectation they had of him, he thought the occupation of contesting Italy with Hannibal a mere old man's employment, and proposed no less a task to himself than to make Carthage the seat of the war, fill Africa with arms and devastation, and so oblige Hannibal, instead of invading the countries of others, to draw back and defend his own. And to this end he proceeded to exert all the influence he had with the people. Fabius, on the other side, opposed the undertaking with all his might, alarming the city, and telling them that nothing but the temerity of a hot young man could inspire them with such dangerous counsels, and sparing no means, by word or deed, to prevent it. He prevailed with the senate to espouse his sentiments; but the common people thought that he envied the fame of Scipio, and that he was afraid lest this young conqueror should achieve some great and noble exploit, and have the glory, perhaps, of driving Hannibal out of Italy, or even of ending the war, which had for so many years continued and been protracted under his management.

To say the truth, when Fabius first opposed this project of Scipio, he probably did it out of caution and prudence, in consideration only of the public safety, and of the danger which the commonwealth might incur; but when he found Scipio every day increasing in the esteem of the people, rivalry and ambition led him further, and made him violent and personal in his opposition. For he even applied to Crassus, the colleague of Scipio, and urged him not to yield the command to Scipio, but that, if his inclinations were for it, he should himself in person lead the army to Carthage. He also hindered the giving money to Scipio for the war; so that he was forced to raise it upon his own credit and interest from the cities of Etruria, which were extremely attached to him. On the other side,

Crassus would not stir against him, nor remove out of Italy, being, in his own nature, averse to all contention, and also having, by his office of high priest, religious duties to retain him. Fabius, therefore, tried other ways to oppose the design; he impeded the levies, and he declaimed, both in the senate and to the people, that Scipio was not only himself flying from Hannibal, but was also endeavouring to drain Italy of all its forces, and to spirit away the youth of the country to a foreign war, leaving behind them their parents, wives, and children, and the city itself, a defenceless prey to the conquering and undefeated enemy at their doors. With this he so far alarmed the people, that at last they would only allow Scipio for the war the legions which were in Sicily, and three hundred, whom he particularly trusted, of those men who had served with him in Spain. In these transactions, Fabius seems to have followed the dictates of his own wary temper.

But, after that Scipio was gone over into Africa, when news almost immediately came to Rome of wonderful exploits and victories, of which the fame was confirmed by the spoils he sent home; of a Numidian king taken prisoner; of a vast slaughter of their men; of two camps of the enemy burnt and destroyed, and in them a great quantity of arms and horses; and when, hereupon, the Carthaginians were compelled to send envoys to Hannibal to call him home, and leave his idle hopes in Italy, to defend Carthage; when, for such eminent and transcending services, the whole people of Rome cried up and extolled the actions of Scipio; even then, Fabius contended that a successor should be sent in his place, alleging for it only the old reason of the mutability of fortune, as if she would be weary of long favouring the same person. With this language many did begin to feel offended; it seemed to be morosity and ill-will, the pusillanimity of old age, or a fear, that had now become exaggerated, of the skill of Hannibal. Nay, when Hannibal had put his army on shipboard, and taken his leave of Italy, Fabius still could not forbear to oppose and disturb the universal joy of Rome, expressing his fears and apprehensions, telling them that the commonwealth was never in more danger than now, and that Hannibal was a more formidable enemy under the walls of Carthage than ever he had been in Italy; that it would be fatal to Rome whenever Scipio should encounter his victorious army, still warm with the blood of so many Roman generals, dictators, and consuls slain. And the people were, in some degree, startled with these declamations, and were brought to believe that the further off Hannibal was, the nearer was their danger. Scipio, however, shortly afterwards fought Hannibal, and utterly defeated him, humbled the pride of Carthage beneath his feet, gave his countrymen joy and exultation beyond all their hopes, and-

"Long shaken on the seas restored the state."

Fabius Maximus, however, did not live to see the prosperous end of this war, and the final overthrow of Hannibal, nor to rejoice in the re-established happiness and security of the commonwealth; for about the time that Hannibal left Italy, he fell sick and died. At Thebes, Epaminondas died so poor that he was buried at the public charge; one small iron coin was all, it is said, that was found in his house. Fabius did not need this, but the people, as a mark of their affection, defrayed the expenses of his funeral by a private contribution from each citizen of the smallest piece of coin; thus owning him their common father, and making his end no less honourable than his life.

THE END