OUR LITTLE SPARTAN COUSIN OF LONG AGO

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by

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Chartas

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CHAPTER I

A Spartan Company

"A race! a race! Who will plunge first into Eurotas?"

The boy who shouted the challenge stood poised, ready for flight. His head was thrown back, his arms were extended, and one foot, thrust before him, touched the ground lightly.

It was Chartas who called, and at the sound of his voice the whole group of boys, fifteen in number, threw themselves into the same attitude, and, at a word, sped away to the banks of the river. Reaching there, they hastily threw off the one garment which each wore, and plunged into the stream.

"Chartas won!" they cried, as the challenger, whose lithe limbs gave him an advantage in running, splashed first into the water.

"He always wins in running," said Brasidas, "but wait till we wrestle. His speed will not count for so much then."

The splashing water almost drowned Brasidas' words,

for the fifteen boys were swimming, ducking, plunging, and frolicking like a school of young porpoises.

However, Chartas had heard. "Yes," he answered, "I like to show my back in a race. 'Twould be different if 'twere a battle."

"How about your back now?" asked a mischievous boy named Gelon. As he spoke he dived quickly, caught Chartas by the ankles, and tripped him, face forward, into the water.

Chartas quickly recovered himself, dashed after Gelon, and a lively tussle followed. The water flew in all directions, and the other boys, quickly taking sides, began throwing water upon the two wrestlers, dashing it into the face of the one they hoped to see defeated.

The boys were well matched, but the river bottom was slippery, and as Gelon gave a turn to his antagonist's arms his foot slipped and he went down.

"Chartas wins! Chartas wins!" again shouted the boys, as Gelon came up sputtering, and shaking the water from his hair and eyes.

Gelon was not conquered, however, and he dashed once more upon Chartas. But at that moment, above the splashing of the water, and the shouting of the boys, a voice rang out from the river bank. "Back to the gymnasium; 'tis time for your drill!"

The voice was that of their iren, or captain,—a boy himself but little past twenty years,—whose name was Orestes.

Instantly the wrestling stopped, and the boys turned. Not a hand went back for a final splash, for these were Spartan boys, and the first lesson they had learned was *to obey*.

In a moment they had slipped into their chitons, and were hurrying toward the gymnasium.

As they started, Orestes threw his arm across the shoulders of Chartas, and the two followed a little more slowly.

"To-morrow the Assembly meets," said Orestes, "and I shall send you boys foraging. See how well you can acquit yourself, for I want to be proud of you."

"I wish I were old enough to attend the Assembly," said Chartas, "but I know you will tell me what takes place. I should like to listen to the speeches,—but then," he added, "it is rare sport to forage, and I shall do my best."

"I know you will," said Orestes, looking with genuine pride and affection at the younger boy.

When they reached the gymnasium the others were already selecting their quoits for throwing. They paid no heed to the open preference of their captain for Chartas, since every captain of boys in Sparta had his favorite pupil. The captain's favorite was given special training

and special teaching; but he was not saved from hardships or dangers. If he had been, he would, himself, have hated it, and his companions would have held him in contempt. Instead, he was given harder tasks, and was thrown into greater dangers in order that he might gain courage and endurance, and be able to prove himself keen and unafraid. For these were the qualities which made the Spartans the most heroic men of all Greece.

"Now to your places," said Orestes, and, in a moment, the boys were ready for their exercises. There was no donning of gymnasium suits. The chiton was their one garment, worn on all occasions. It was a sleeveless shirt of wool.

Then began the exercise of quoit-throwing, in which each boy sought to send his quoit or discus with the best aim and to the greatest distance.

As one of the boys, named Theognis, took up his quoit, one of the smaller boys darted out of his place.

"Stand back!" shouted Theognis. "Do you want to play the part of Hyacinthus and be struck down?"

The boy retreated, and Theognis threw his quoit.

"Bravo!" cried the boys, for the discus had sped far beyond that of any other thrower.

Theognis threw back his head, as he stood erect. He was shorter than most of his company. He could never

win in a race, and in wrestling he was often thrown; but his discus-throwing was always good, and he was glad to have won this "bravo" from the boys.

As the quoits were put away, Orestes turned suddenly to Theognis and said: "You referred a moment ago to Apollo and Hyancinthus. Tell us the story."

Theognis did not hesitate: "Hyacinthus was loved by the god Apollo, and they were often together. One day as they were playing at a game of quoits, Apollo threw his discus. It slipped from his hand, and, striking Hyacinthus, slew him. Apollo was deeply grieved. He had loved the beautiful boy, and now he was dead, slain by his own hand. But Apollo, god though he was, could not bring him back to life. So, where the blood of Hyacinthus had moistened the earth, he caused a beautiful purple flower to grow, and he named the flower the hyacinth."

"Your tale is as well told as your discus was well thrown," said Orestes, and once more Theognis felt a thrill of pleasure, for praise from one's captain was not easily gained in Sparta.

But though praise was not easily gained, it was a part of each boy's training to answer sudden and unexpected questions and to give his answers as clearly and as briefly as he could. This questioning taught him to think quickly and to express his thoughts readily. And so, though the

Spartan boys were expected to be silent when with the older men, unless they were addressed, they learned to listen well, and to keep their minds alert, for a question might be put to them at the most unexpected moment, and it was a disgrace not to be able to answer quickly, briefly, and well.

CHAPTER II

The Assembly

The streets of Sparta presented a lively scene on the following day

It was the monthly meeting of the Assembly, and every street was filled with a moving throng. Men of all ages were there, for every citizen who was old enough to bear arms could vote. The meeting was held in an open space just west of the city.

Sparta was ruled over by two kings and twenty-eight magistrates, who were called ephors. These thirty men could make plans, and propose changes in the government, but they must tell their plans to the whole people at one of the Assemblies, and let them vote "yes," or "no." In this way Sparta was governed.

Orestes and Procles, another captain of a company of boys, were together.

"The crowd is making way," said Orestes. "Yes," replied Procles, "the kings and ephors are taking their places."

The great gathering of people was made up principally

of the men of Sparta, each dressed in his chiton, over which was draped the himation, or cloak. This cloak consisted of a square piece of cloth, sometimes rounded at the corners. It was thrown over the left arm, brought loosely across the back under the right arm, and the end again thrown back over the left shoulder. Thus the right arm was left free, while the left was covered by the graceful drapery of the himation. Some of the men wore hats with a broad brim, but the greater number had their heads bare. All wore their hair long, and arranged in a knot upon the crown of the head.

Occasionally a young man would be seen with a purple military cloak, adding a brilliant bit of color to the scene. These cloaks were fastened with a clasp upon the right shoulder, where the ends fell apart, again leaving the right arm free and uncovered.

With the exception of these military cloaks, the people were dressed in white, for in Sparta it was said, "deceitful are dyes." The Spartans thought that nothing was so beautiful as the white color of the natural wool, and that dyes robbed the wool of its true beauty.

Occasionally, upon the outskirts of the crowd, or darting through the streets, would be seen a slave from the country, dressed in a leather cap, and a chiton made from skins. The workmen of the city, who had no vote

in the government of Sparta, could readily be told by their simpler dress and their closely cut hair.

Orestes and Procles stood quietly among the men, their arms folded beneath their cloaks, and their eyes cast down. Yet with quick glances they took note of any unusual sights.

"Who is the man in splendid garments, who has his hair parted and fastened with a jeweled ornament?" asked Procles quietly.

"He must be an ambassador—from Athens, perhaps," said Orestes.

"But see the gold and embroidery upon his cloak. I think he must come from beyond Greece," Procles replied.

"Perhaps he will speak, and then we will learn more about him," said Orestes.

Then one of the ephors arose, and the people became quiet. He made a short speech, and ended by proposing the name of a well-known citizen for councillor. Then he asked for the vote of the Assembly. The citizen was well liked, and when the vote was called for, the voices of the people arose in one great shout: "Aye, aye."

Then the man of whom Orestes and Procles had spoken was allowed to address the people. He was an ambassador, as they had guessed, and came from an island to the east of

Greece. He wanted to arrange a treaty between his country and Sparta, but his appearance did not please the Spartans.

"He smells of ointments, and his clothes are far too richly embroidered," growled an old man, who stood near the boys.

"And he would have us Spartans pay for the extravagance which we allow not in our own country," replied the man to whom he had spoken.

There were murmurs of disapproval from the crowd while the ambassador spoke, and when the ephor called for a vote giving consent to the treaty, a few voices answered, but when it was asked whether they should deny the request, a multitude of voices blended like the roar of a mighty sea.

When it had grown quiet again, another of the ephors spoke. He told of a war in which one of their colonies was engaged. "They are losing ground," he said, "and they beg us to send them the statues of the Twin Gods, that they may bring them better fortune, and turn the tide of battle in their favor."

At this some of the people shouted, "Send them! Send them!" Others said, "No, no; it is too great a risk." "The statues might be lost at sea!" exclaimed others. "Let them make statues of their own!" "Why should we send them ours?"

The whole multitude was in an uproar. The angry voices increased; the excitement grew each moment. In vain the ephors tried to quiet the people. Even the kings could not control them. They threw up their arms; they shouted; they surged back and forth.

Suddenly a man vaulted to a place beside the ephors. In his hand he held a cithara, and he began to play. Then, to the accompaniment of his instrument, he sang.

No sound reached the multitude. Only those who looked knew that he was singing. But, one by one, these pointed, or nudged a noisy neighbor, and, little by little, the tumult grew less; the angry voices dropped to a lower key, then ceased altogether, and the throng stood still.

Above the murmur, the voice of the singer began to be heard. Then, as the people grew quiet, his notes rang out clear and true. He sang of patriotism, of heroism, of strength in battle. He sang of the deeds of the gods whom the Spartans worshipped. Then, by degrees, his voice grew less ringing; its tones became solemn and soothing. And the people listened; they forgot their anger and discord, and there was a hush over all the great throng.

When he stopped there was silence. Then a voice arose: "The colonists are of our own people. They, too, were Spartans. Shall we send the images to them?"

And a great shout arose, "Yes, yes. Let the images go."

CHAPTER III

Foraging

The men of Sparta, and the boys from seven years upward, did not eat at home, but at public tables. Their meals were simple, and all fared much the same. Even the kings sat with the citizens and shared the same plain food, which often consisted mainly of black broth and barley bread.

Each citizen of Sparta gave from his own stores a regular quantity of supplies for the tables. He gave barley-meal, wine, cheese, figs, dates, and meat. Extra meat for the tables was sometimes provided by those who went hunting, or from the sacrifices offered at the altars. Then, too, a generous citizen would now and then give white bread, instead of barley bread, or bring birds which he had caught, or offerings of fruit or vegetables when in season.

The food for the boys' tables was simpler and less varied than that for the men's, although plain, simple food was the rule for all.

Very little money was used in Sparta. What they had

was of iron. If a man had corn raised upon his land, he exchanged a part of it for other articles which he needed. The market-place of the city was, for this reason, a place of trade, rather than of buying and selling.

After their breakfast, on the morning of the Assembly, Orestes sent the boys of his company away to get food for their table.

"Go where you like outside the city," he said, "but do not return until you can bring something for the common table. Be soldiers now; be men. Stop not for hunger, or pain, or toil, but secure food, and come not back without it.

If you do your work awkwardly and are caught, you will be flogged. Be off."

It was no new message to the boys. This was a part of their training; a part of their education. They were sent out as soldiers to forage for supplies. They might steal, in fact they must steal, but they must not be caught. Therein lay the disgrace. This was a part of their preparation for warfare. It was a national custom, understood by all; and so, although no man wanted his goods stolen,—and he caught and flogged the offender if he could,—he knew that in taking his goods the boys were not breaking the laws of Sparta, but obeying them.

Thus foraging was, to the boys, an exciting game; a

chance to test their skill, their dexterity, and often their endurance. And the Spartan boy who could endure most was the hero of his fellows.

"Where shall we go?" asked Brasidas of Chartas, as the company of boys broke up into smaller groups.

"To the mountain!" exclaimed Chartas. "A dish of grapes would taste good at our table, and they must be ripe by this time."

"Just the thing!" replied Brasidas. "A mountain climb suits me, and the grapes will, indeed, be good."

The two boys started westward from the city toward the mountain, with its rocky slopes, its forests, and its snow-crowned peaks. The path they took was rugged, and the climbing steep. But they did not hesitate. The difficulties of the way only made their task more exciting, and would win for them greater credit when they returned.

At first they ran along the path, then they clambered up the side of the mountain. In places the rocks were sharp and broken, and in others there were steep, slippery cliffs, but, although their feet were bare, they climbed the steep places, jumped from one broken rock to another, or pulled themselves up the cliffs by their bare hands.

Suddenly Chartas stopped and threw himself upon a flat rock. Lifting his foot, he pulled from it a large thorn.

The blood followed as he did so, but, making no comment, he sped on again after Brasidas.

At last they came to a more open space on the mountainside. "Now," said Brasidas, "we may begin to look for the vines."

"Yes," said Chartas, "now we must separate and keep hidden."

As he said this he turned to the right and made his way cautiously forward, while Brasidas crept along a cliff to his left.

Suddenly Chartas dropped behind a huge rock. Above him a man, dressed in a leather chiton, was crossing the open space. In his hands he carried large vessels for holding water.

"'Tis one of the slaves who cares for a master's vineyard," said Chartas to himself. He turned his head. Beyond him he saw a grove of plane trees, and, listening intently, he heard the splash of water. "He is going to the fountain in the grove," he said. "The vines are in need of water. They must be near."

He waited until the slave disappeared in the grove, then carefully he made his way upward. It had been a hard climb up the mountain, and his foot ached from the long thorn which had been pulled away, but his one

thought was to find the vines, secure the grapes, and make his escape unseen.

He darted forward, now stopping to crouch behind a rock, or to stand close against a tree, while he peered out or listened. Again he darted on; he had seen the vines; they were heavy with purple grapes.

Casting himself among them, he began pulling the clusters. An empty water jar stood near, and hastily he tossed the ripe clusters into it. It was nearly full. He stopped again to listen.

In the distance he heard a slight crackling. It was the sound of footsteps in the grove. The slave was doubtless returning.

Catching up the water jar, he ran farther up the mountain, turned to his right, and stopped again to listen. He could hear the slave, now below him, returning to his vines. Making a circuit, Chartas ran quickly but softly down through the farther side of the grove, and was once more upon the rocky pass which he and Brasidas had climbed.

He stopped for a moment to adjust his jar, for it was large and awkward to carry. At the same moment he heard a shout, then a crashing above him. One thought passed through his mind. The slave had discovered the

loss of the jar, and was looking for him. Just an instant he listened again. The sound was coming nearer.

Like some wild animal of the mountains, Chartas turned and jumped. With his bare feet he leaped from jagged rock to jagged rock, holding tightly to his jar, and balancing himself, he knew not how.

It was not the fear of losing his longed-for grapes; it was not the fear of being beaten: that did not matter, for the pain of that would pass. It was the fear of a flogging before his mates, and before the men of the city—not the *pain* of the flogging, but the disgrace of *having failed*.

This was the fear that made him plunge, barefooted, over jutting rocks; that made him swing over cliffs with one hand, while he clutched his jar with the other.

At last he reached the top of the little path which stretched away to the plain below, where stood the houses of Sparta.

He stopped to catch his breath. What was that? He still was followed! The footsteps were close behind him!

Once more fear lent wings to his feet, nor did he notice that a trace of blood was left wherever his feet touched the ground. He did not even know that his hands, as well as his feet, were bleeding. He was too much of a Spartan to care for that, if only he did not fail. On he sped, like the wind.

At Last He Reached The Top Of The Little Path.

"Chartas, Chartas! What a runner you are! Stop! Let us go on together!"

Chartas turned his head; caught his breath; then dropped upon the ground. It was Brasidas who had chased him down the mountain!

Upon Brasidas' shoulders rested a bag, filled, like his own water jar, with clusters of grapes.