

# A Victor of Salamis

By William Stearns Davis

Author of "The Beauty of the Purple," "God Mills It," etc.

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"A Victor of Salamis" is a story of heroic deeds and equally heroic sacrifice. The principal character is a young Greek, a favorite athlete who later became a famous fighter, and at a critical period saved his country from disaster.

Through the story Mr. Davis gives a vivid and accurate picture of life and manners in Athens at the time of the great struggle with Persia.

## New York Tribune:

"'A Victor of Salamis' is a really moving narrative, with figures of flesh and blood in it and a broad vitality that touches the reader's imagination. The thing is astonishingly human. Mr. Davis has a sympathetic and entirely plausible hero in Glaucon, the Athenian athlete who deserved well of his countrymen, but is treacherously made the object of their scorn. When the last page of the story is reached, the reader congratulates Mr. Davis. . . . He has been well entertained."

## London Daily Chronicle:

"Mr. Davis has written a book which, it is not too much to say, entitles him to a place among novelists not far below Sir Walter Scott. 'A Victor of Salamis' is an historical romance of the first order."

# A VICTOR OF SALAMIS

*A TALE OF THE DAYS OF XERXES, LEONIDAS  
AND THEMISTOCLES*

BY

WILLIAM STEARNS DAVIS

AUTHOR OF "A FRIEND OF CÆSAR," "GOD WILL IT,"  
"BELSHAZZAR," ETC.

" . . . On the ~~Asian~~ <sup>Ægean</sup> shore a city stands,  
Built not ~~where~~ <sup>where</sup> the air and light the soil,  
Athens, the eye of Greece."

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.

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Sixteenth Printing, 1968

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*Printed in the United States of America*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE invasion of Greece by Xerxes, with its battles of Thermopylæ, Salamis, and Plataea, forms one of the most dramatic events in history. Had Athens and Sparta succumbed to this attack of Oriental superstition and despotism, the Parthenon, the Attic Theatre, the Dialogues of Plato, would have been almost as impossible as if Phidias, Sophocles, and the philosophers had never lived. Because this contest and its heroes — Leonidas and Themistocles — cast their abiding shadows across our world of to-day, I have attempted this piece of historical fiction.

Many of the scenes were conceived on the fields of action themselves during a recent visit to Greece, and I have tried to give some glimpse of the natural beauty of "The Land of the Hellene," — a beauty that will remain when Themistocles and his peers fade away still further into the backgrounds of history.

W. S. D.

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## **PROLOGUE**

**THE ISTHMIAN GAMES NEAR CORINTH**





# A VICTOR OF SALAMIS

## CHAPTER I

### GLAUCON THE BEAUTIFUL

THE crier paused for the fifth time. The crowd — knotty Spartans, keen Athenians, perfumed Sicilians — pressed his pulpit closer, elbowing for the place of vantage. Amid a lull in their clamour the crier recommenced.

“And now, men of Hellas, another time hearken. The sixth contestant in the pentathlon, most honourable of the games held at the Isthmus, is Glaucon, son of Conon the Athenian; his grandfather —” a jangling shout drowned him.

“The most beautiful man in Hellas!” “But an effeminate puppy!” “Of the noble house of Alemæon!” “The family’s accursed!” “A great god helps him — even Eros.” “Ay — the fool married for mere love. He needs help. His father disinherited him.”

“Peace, peace,” urged the crier; “I’ll tell all about him, as I have of the others. Know then, my masters, that he loved, and won in marriage, Hermione, daughter of Hermippus of Eleusis. Now Hermippus is Conon’s mortal enemy; therefore in great wrath Conon disinherited his son, — but now, consenting to forgive him if he wins the parsley crown in the pentathlon —”

“A safe promise,” interrupted a Spartan in broadest

Doric; "the pretty boy has no chance against Lycon, our Laconian giant."

"Boaster!" retorted an Athenian. "Did not Glaucon bend open a horseshoe yesterday?"

"Our Moerocles did that," called a Mantinean; whereupon the crier, foregoing his long speech on Glaucon's noble ancestry, began to urge the Athenians to show their confidence by their wagers.

"How much is staked that Glaucon can beat Ctesias of Epidaurus?"

"We don't match our lion against mice!" roared the noisiest Athenian.

"Or Amyntas of Thebes?"

"Not Amyntas! Give us Lycon of Sparta."

"Lycon let it be, — how much is staked and by whom, that Glaucon of Athens, contending for the first time in the great games, defeats Lycon of Sparta, twice victor at Nemea, once at Delphi, and once at Olympia?"

The second rush and outcry put the crier nearly at his wits' end to record the wagers that pelted him, and which testified how much confidence the numerous Athenians had in their unproved champion. The brawl of voices drew newcomers from far and near. The chariot race had just ended in the adjoining hippodrome; and the idle crowd, intent on a new excitement, came surging up like waves. In such a whirlpool of tossing arms and shoving elbows, he who was small of stature and short of breath stood a scanty chance of getting close enough to the crier's stand to have his wager recorded. Such, at least, was the fate of a gray but dignified little man, who struggled vainly — even with risk to his long linen chiton — to reach the front.

"Ugh! ugh! Make way, good people, — Zeus confound you, brute of a Spartan, your big sandals crush my toes

again! Can I never get near enough to place my two minæ on that Glaucon?"

"Keep back, graybeard," snapped the Spartan; "thank the god if you can hold your money and not lose it, when Glaucon's neck is wrung to-morrow." Whereupon he lifted his own voice with, "Thirty drachmæ to place on Lycon, Master Crier! So you have it —"

"And two minæ on Glaucon," piped the little man, peering up with bright, beady eyes; but the crier would never have heard him, save for a sudden ally.

"Who wants to stake on Glaucon?" burst in a hearty young Athenian who had wagered already. "You, worthy sir? Then by Athena's owls they shall hear you! Lend us your elbow, Democrates."

The latter request was to a second young Athenian close by. With his stalwart helpers thrusting at either side, the little man was soon close to the crier.

"Two minæ?" quoth the latter, leaning, "two that Glaucon beats Lycon, and at even odds? But your name, sir —"

The little man straightened proudly.

"Simonides of Ceos."

The crowd drew back by magic. The most bristling Spartan grew respectful. The crier bowed as his ready stylus made the entry.

"Simonides of Ceos, Simonides the most noted poet in Hellas!" cried the first of his two rescuers; "it's a great honour to have served so famous a man. Pray let me take your hand."

"With all the joy in the world." The little poet coloured with delight at the flattery. "You have saved me, I avow, from the forge and anvil of Hephæstus. What a vulgar mob! Do stand apart; then I can try to thank you."

Aided again by his two protectors, Simonides was soon

clear of the whirlpool. Under one of the graceful pines, which girded the long stadium, he recovered breath and looked at leisure upon his new acquaintances. Both were striking men, but in sharp contrast: the taller and darker showed an aquiline visage betraying a strain of non-Grecian blood. His black eyes and large mouth were very merry. He wore his green chiton with a rakishness that proved him anything but a dandy. His companion, addressed as Democrates, slighter, blonder, showed Simonides a handsome and truly Greek profile, set off by a neatly trimmed reddish beard. His purple-edged cloak fell in statuesque folds of the latest mode, his beryl signet-ring, scarlet fillet, and jewelled girdle bespoke wealth and taste. His face, too, might have seemed frank and affable, had not Simonides suddenly recalled an old proverb about mistrusting a man with eyes too close together.

"And now," said the little poet, quite as ready to pay compliments as to take them, "let me thank my noble deliverers, for I am sure two such valorous young men as you must come of the best blood of Attica."

"I am not ashamed of my father, sir," spoke the taller Athenian; "Hellas has not yet forgotten Miltiades, the victor of Marathon."

"Then I clasp the hand of Cimon, the son of the saviour of Hellas." The little poet's eyes danced. "Oh! the pity I was in Thessaly so long, and let you grow up in my absence. A noble son of a noble father! And your friend — did you name him Democrates?"

"I did so."

"Fortunate old rascal I am! For I meet Cimon the son of Miltiades, and Democrates, that young lieutenant of Themistocles who all the world knows is gaining fame already as Nestor and Odysseus, both in one, among the orators of Athens."

"Your compliments exceed all truth," exclaimed the second Athenian, not at all angered by the praise. But Simonides, whose tongue was brisk, ran on with a torrent of flattery and of polite insinuation, until Cimon halted him, with a query.

"Yet why, dear Cean, since, as you say, you only arrived this afternoon at the Isthmus, were you so anxious to stake that money on Glaucon?"

"Why? Because I, like all Greece outside of Sparta, seem to be turning Glaucon-mad. All the way from Thessaly — in Bœotia, in Attica, in Megara — men talked of him, his beauty, his prowess, his quarrel with his father, his marriage with Hermione, the divinest maiden in Athens, and how he has gone to the games to win both the crown and crusty Conon's forgiveness. I tell you, every mule-driver along the way seemed to have staked his obol on him. They praise him as 'fair as Delian Apollo,' 'graceful as young Hermes,' and — here I wonder most, — 'modest as an unwedded girl.'" Simonides drew breath, then faced the others earnestly, "You are Athenians; do you know him?"

"Know him?" Cimon laughed heartily; "have we not left him at the wrestling ground? Was not Democrates his schoolfellow once, his second self to-day? And touching his beauty, his valour, his modesty," the young man's eyes shone with loyal enthusiasm, "do not say 'over-praised' till you have seen him."

Simonides swelled with delight.

"Oh, lucky genius that cast me with you! Take me to him this moment."

"He is so beset with admirers, his trainers are angry already; besides, he is still at the wrestling ground."

"But soon returns to his tents," added Democrates, instantly; "and Simonides — is Simonides. If Themistocles

and Leonidas can see Glaucon, so must the first poet of Hellas."

"O dearest orator," cried the little man, with an arm around his neck, "I begin to love you already. Away this moment, that I may worship your new divinity."

"Come, then," commanded Cimon, leading off with strides so long the bard could hardly follow; "his tent is not distant: you shall see him, though the trainers change to Gorgons."

The "Precinct of Poseidon," the great walled enclosure where were the temples, porticos, and the stadium of the Isthmus, was quickly behind them. They walked eastward along the seashore. The scene about was brisk enough, had they heeded. A dozen chariots passed. Under every tall pine along the way stood merchants' booths, each with a goodly crowd. Now a herd of brown goats came, the offering of a pious Phocian; now a band of Aphrodite's priestesses from Corinth whirled by in no overdecorous dance, to a deafening noise of citharas and castanets. A soft breeze was sending the brown-sailed fisher boats across the heaving bay. Straight before the three spread the white stuccoed houses of Cenchræa, the eastern haven of Corinth; far ahead in smooth semicircle rose the green crests of the Argive mountains, while to their right upreared the steep lonely pyramid of brown rock, Acro-Corinthus, the commanding citadel of the thriving city. But above, beyond these, fairer than them all, spread the clear, sun-shot azure of Hellas, the like whereof is not over any other land, save as that land is girt by the crisp foam of the blue Ægean Sea.

So much for the picture, but Simonides, having seen it often, saw it not at all, but plied the others with questions.

"So this Hermione of his is beautiful?"

"Like Aphrodite rising from the sea foam." The answer

came from Democrates, who seemed to look away, avoiding the poet's keen glance.

"And yet her father gave her to the son of his bitter enemy?"

"Hermippus of Eleusis is sensible. It is a fine thing to have the handsomest man in Hellas for son-in-law."

"And now to the great marvel — did Glaucon truly seek her not for dowry, nor rank, but for sheer love?"

"Marriages for love are in fashion to-day," said Democrates, with a side glance at Cimon, whose sister Elpinice had just made a love match with Callias the Rich, to the scandal of all the prudes in Athens.

"Then I meet marvels even in my old age. Another Odysseus and his Penelope! And he is handsome, valiant, high-minded, with a wife his peer? You raise my hopes too high. They will be dashed."

"They will not," protested Democrates, with every sign of loyalty; "turn here: this lane in the pines leads to his tent. If we have praised too much, doom us to the labours of Tantalus."

But here their progress was stopped. A great knot of people were swarming about a statue under a pine tree, and shrill, angry voices proclaimed not trafficking, but a brawl.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ATHLETE

THERE was ceaseless coming and going outside the Precinct of Poseidon. Following much the same path just taken by Simonides and his new friends, two other men were walking, so deep in talk that they hardly heeded how many made respectful way for them, or how many greeted them. The taller and younger man, to be sure, returned every salute with a graceful flourish of his hands, but in a mechanical way, and with eye fixed on his companion.

The pair were markedly contrasted. The younger was in his early prime, strong, well developed, and daintily dressed. His gestures were quick and eloquent. His brown beard and hair were trimmed short to reveal a clear olive face — hardly regular, but expressive and tinged with an extreme subtilty. When he laughed, in a strange, silent way, it was to reveal fine teeth, while his musical tongue ran on, never waiting for answer.

His comrade, however, answered little. He barely rose to the other's shoulder, but he had the chest and sinews of an ox. Graces there were none. His face was a scarred ravine, half covered by scanty stubble. The forehead was low. The eyes, gray and wise, twinkled from tufted eyebrows. The long gray hair was tied about his forehead in a braid and held by a golden circlet. The "chlamys" around his



hips was purple but dirty. To his companion's glib Attic he returned only Doric monosyllables.

"Thus I have explained: if my plans prosper; if Corcyra and Syracuse send aid; if Xerxes has trouble in provisioning his army, not merely can we resist Persia, but conquer with ease. Am I too sanguine, Leonidas?"

"We shall see."

"No doubt Xerxes will find his fleet untrustworthy. The Egyptian sailors hate the Phoenicians. Therefore we can risk a sea fight."

"No rashness, Themistocles."

"Yes — it is dicing against the Fates, and the stake is the freedom of Hellas. Still a battle must be risked. If we quit ourselves bravely, our names shall be remembered as long as Agamemnon's."

"Or Priam's? — his Troy was sacked."

"And you, my dear king of Sparta, will of course move heaven and earth to have your Ephors and Council somewhat more forward than of late in preparing for war? We all count on you."

"I will try."

"Who can ask more? But now make an end to statecraft. We were speaking about the pentathlon and the chances of —"

Here the same brawling voices that had arrested Simonides broke upon Themistocles and Leonidas also. The cry "A fight!" was producing its inevitable result. Scores of men, and those not the most aristocratic, were running pell-mell whither so many had thronged already. In the confusion scant reverence was paid the king of Sparta and the first statesman of Athens, who were thrust unceremoniously aside and were barely witnesses of what followed.