

75 AD

AGIS

264-241 B.C.

Plutarch

translated by John Dryden

Plutarch (46-120) - Greek biographer, historian, and philosopher, sometimes known as the encyclopaedist of antiquity. He is most renowned for his series of character studies, arranged mostly in pairs, known as "Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans" or "Parallel Lives." Agis (75 AD) - A study of the life of Agis, a Lacedaemonian king.

AGIS

THE fable of Ixion, who, embracing a cloud instead of Juno, begot the Centaurs, has been ingeniously enough supposed to have been invented to represent to us ambitious men, whose minds, doting on glory, which is a mere image of virtue, produce nothing that is genuine or uniform, but only, as might be expected of such a conjunction, misshapen and unnatural actions. Running after their emulations and passions, and carried away by the impulses of the moment, they may say with the herdsmen in the tragedy of Sophocles: "We follow these, though born their rightful lords, And they command us, though they speak no words." - For this is indeed the true condition of men in public life, who, to gain the vain title of being the people's leaders and governors, are content to make themselves the slaves and followers of all the people's humours and caprices. For as the lookout men at the ship's prow, though they see what is ahead before the men at the helm, yet constantly look back to the pilots there, and obey the orders they give; so these men, steered, as I may say, by popular applause, though they bear the name of governors, are in reality the mere underlings of the multitude. The man who is completely wise and virtuous has no need at all of glory, except so far as it disposes and eases his way to action by the greater trust that it procures him. A young man, I grant, may be permitted, while yet eager for distinction, to pride himself a little in his good deeds; for (as Theophrastus says) his virtues, which are yet tender and, as it were, in the blade, cherished and supported by praises, grow stronger, and take the deeper root. But when this passion is exorbitant, it is dangerous in all men, and in those who govern a commonwealth, utterly destructive. For in the possession of large power and authority, it transports men to a degree of madness; so that now they no more think what is good, glorious, but will have those actions only esteemed good that are glorious. As Phocion, therefore, answered King Antipater, who sought his approbation of some unworthy action, "I cannot be your flatterer, and your friend," so these men should answer the people, "I cannot govern and obey you." For it may happen to the commonwealth, as to the serpent in the fable, whose tail, rising in rebellion against the head, complained, as of a great grievance, that it was always forced to follow, and required that it should be permitted by turns to lead the way. And taking the command accordingly, it soon inflicted, by its senseless courses, mischiefs in abundance upon itself, while the head was torn and lacerated with following, contrary to nature, a guide that was deaf and blind. And such we see to have been the lot of many, who, submitting to be guided by the inclinations of an uninformed and unreasoning multitude, could neither stop, nor recover themselves out of the confusion.

This is what has occurred to us to say of that glory which depends on the voice of large numbers, considering the sad effects of it in the misfortunes of Caius and Tiberius Gracchus, men of noble nature, and whose generous natural dispositions were improved by the best of educations, and who came to the administration of affairs with the most laudable intentions; yet they were ruined, I cannot say by an immoderate

desire of glory, but by a more excusable fear of disgrace. For being excessively beloved and favoured by the people, they thought it a discredit to them not to make full repayment, endeavouring by new public acts to outdo the honours they had received, and again, because of these new kindnesses, incurring yet further distinctions; till the people and they, mutually inflamed, and vying thus with each other in honours and benefits, brought things at last to such a pass that they might say that to engage so far was indeed a folly, but to retreat would now be a shame.

This the reader will easily gather from the story. I will now compare with them two Lacedaemonian popular leaders, the kings Agis and Cleomenes. For they, being desirous also to raise the people, and to restore the noble and just form of government, now long fallen into disuse, incurred the hatred of the rich and powerful, who could not endure to be deprived of the selfish enjoyment to which they were accustomed. These were not indeed brothers by nature, as the two Romans, but they had a kind of brotherly resemblance in their actions and designs, which took a rise from such beginnings and occasions as I am now about to relate.

When the love of gold and silver had once gained admittance into the Lacedaemonian commonwealth, it was quickly followed by avarice and baseness of spirit in the pursuit of it, and by luxury, effeminacy, and prodigality in the use.

Then Sparta fell from almost all her former virtue and repute, and so continued till the days of Agis and Leonidas, who both together were kings of the Lacedaemonians.

Agis was of the royal family of Eurypon, son of Eudamidas, and the sixth in descent from Agesilaus, who made the expedition into Asia, and was the greatest man of his time in Greece. Agesilaus left behind him a son called Archidamus, the same who was slain at Mandonium, in Italy, by the Messapians, and who was then succeeded by his eldest son Agis. He being killed by Antipater near Megalopolis, and leaving no issue, was succeeded by his brother Eudamidas; he by a son called Archidamus; and Archidamus by another Eudamidas, the father of this Agis of whom we now treat.

Leonidas, son of Cleonymus, was of the other royal house of the Agiadae, and the eighth in descent from Pausanias, who defeated Mardonius in the battle of Plataea. Pausanias was succeeded by a son called Plistoanax; and he by another Pausanias who was banished, and lived as a private man at Tegea, while his eldest son, Agesipolis, reigned in his place. He, dying without issue, was succeeded by a younger brother, called Cleombrotus, who left two sons; the elder was Agesipolis, who reigned but a short time, and died without issue; the younger, who then became king, was called Cleomenes, and had also two sons, Acrotatus and Cleonymus. The first died before his father, but left a son called Areus, who succeeded, and being slain at Corinth, left the kingdom to his son Acrotatus. This Acrotatus was defeated, and slain near Megalopolis, in a battle against the tyrant Aristodemus; he left his wife big with child, and on her being delivered of a son, Leonidas, son of the above-named Cleonymus, was made his guardian, and as the young king died before becoming a man, he succeeded in the kingdom.

Leonidas was a king not particularly suitable to his people. For though there were at that time at Sparta a general decline in manners, yet a greater revolt from the old habits appeared in him than in others. For having lived a long time among the great lords of Persia, and been a follower of King Seleucus, he unadvisedly thought to imitate, among Greek institutions and in a lawful government, the pride and assumption usual in those courts. Agis, on the contrary, in fineness of nature and elevation of mind, not only far excelled Leonidas, but in a manner all the kings that had reigned since the great Agesilaus. For though he had been bred very tenderly, in abundance and even in luxury, by his mother Agesistrata and his grandmother Archidamia, who were the wealthiest of the Lacedaemonians, yet, before the age of twenty, he renounced all indulgence in pleasures. Withdrawing himself as far as possible from the gaiety and ornament which seemed becoming to the grace of his person, he made it his pride to appear in the coarse Spartan coat. In his meals, his bathings, and in all his exercises, he followed the old Laconian usage, and was often heard to say, he had no desire for the place of king, if he did not hope by means of that authority to restore their ancient laws and discipline.

The Lacedaemonians might date the beginning of their corruption from their conquest of Athens, and the influx of gold and silver among them that thence ensued. Yet, nevertheless, the number of houses which Lycurgus appointed being still maintained, and the law remaining in force by which every one was obliged to leave his lot or portion of land entirely to his son, a kind of order and equality was thereby preserved, which still in some degree sustained the state amidst its errors in other respects. But one Epitadeus happening to be ephor, a man of great influence, and of a willful, violent spirit, on some occasion of a quarrel with his son, proposed a decree, that all men should have liberty to dispose of their land by gift in their lifetime, or by their last will and testament. This being promoted by him to satisfy a passion of revenge, and through covetousness consented to by others, and thus enacted for a law, was the ruin of the best state of the commonwealth. For the rich men without scruple drew the estate into their own hands, excluding the rightful heirs from their succession; and all the wealth being centered upon the few, the generality were poor and miserable. Honorable pursuits, for which there was no longer leisure, were neglected; the state was filled with sordid business, and with hatred and envy of the rich. There did not remain above seven hundred of the old Spartan families, of which, perhaps, one hundred might have estate in land, the rest were destitute alike of wealth and of honour, were tardy and unperforming in the defence of their country against its enemies abroad, and eagerly watched the opportunity for change and revolution at home.

Agis, therefore, believing it a glorious action, as in truth it was, to equalize and repeople the state, began to sound the inclinations of the citizens. He found the young men disposed beyond his expectation; they were eager to enter with him upon the contest in the cause of virtue, and to fling aside, for freedom's sake, their old manner of life, as readily as the wrestler does his garment. But the old men, habituated and more confirmed in their vices, were most of them as alarmed at the very name of Lycurgus,

as a fugitive slave to be brought back before his offended master. These men could not endure to hear Agis continually deploring the present state of Sparta, and wishing she might be restored to her ancient glory.

But on the other side, Lysander, the son of Libys, Mandroclidas, the son of Ecphanes, together with Agesilaus, not only approved his design, but assisted and confirmed him in it. Lysander had a great authority and credit with the people; Mandroclidas was esteemed the ablest Greek of his time to manage an affair and put it in train, and, joined with skill and cunning, had a great degree of boldness.

Agesilaus was the king's uncle, by the mother's side; an eloquent man, but covetous and voluptuous, who was not moved by considerations of public good, but rather seemed to be persuaded in it by his son Hippomedon, whose courage and signal actions in war had gained him a high esteem and great influence among the young men of Sparta, though indeed the true motive was, that he had many debts, and hoped by this means to be freed from them.

As soon as Agis had prevailed with his uncle, he endeavoured by his mediation to gain his mother also, who had many friends and followers, and a number of persons in her debt in the city, and took a considerable part in public affairs. At the first proposal she was very averse, and strongly advised her son not to engage in so difficult and so unprofitable an enterprise. But Agesilaus endeavoured to possess her, that the thing was not so difficult as she imagined, and that it might, in all likelihood, redound to the advantage of her family; while the king, her son, besought her not for money's sake to decline assisting his hopes of glory. He told her he could not pretend to equal other kings in riches, the very followers and menials of the satraps and stewards of Seleucus or Ptolemy abounding more in wealth than all the Spartan kings put together; but if by contempt of wealth and pleasure, by simplicity and magnanimity, he could surpass their luxury and abundance; if he could restore their former equality to the Spartans, then he should be a great king indeed. In conclusion, the mother and the grandmother also were so taken, so carried away with the inspiration, as it were, of the young man's noble and generous ambition, that they not only consented, but were ready on all occasions to spur him on to a perseverance, and not only sent to speak on his behalf with the men with whom they had an interest, but addressed the other women also, knowing well that the Lacedaemonian wives had always a great power with their husbands, who used to impart to them their state affairs with greater freedom than the women would communicate with the men in the private business of their families. Which was indeed one of the greatest obstacles to this design; for the money of Sparta being most of it in the women's hands, it was their interest to oppose it, not only as depriving them of those superfluous trifles, in which, through want of better knowledge and experience, they placed their chief felicity, but also because they knew their riches were the main support of their power and credit.

Those, therefore, who were of this faction had recourse to Leonidas representing to him how it was his part, as the elder and more experienced, to put a stop to the ill-advised projects of a rash young man. Leonidas, though of himself sufficiently inclined to

oppose Agis, durst not openly, for fear of the people, who were manifestly desirous of this change; but underhand he did all he could to discredit and thwart the project, and to prejudice the chief magistrates against him, and on all occasions craftily insinuated that it was at the price of letting him usurp arbitrary power that Agis thus proposed to divide the property of the rich among the poor, and that the object of these measures for cancelling debts and dividing the lands, was not to furnish Sparta with citizens, but purchase him a tyrant's body guard.

Agis, nevertheless, little regarding these rumours, procured Lysander's election as ephor; and then took the first occasion of proposing through him his Rhetra to the council, the chief articles of which were these: That every one should be free from their debts: all the lands to be divided into equal portions, those that lay betwixt the watercourse near Pellene and Mount Taygetus, and as far as the cities of Malea and Sellasia, into four thousand five hundred lots, the remainder into fifteen thousand; these last to be shared out among those of the country people who were fit for service as heavy-armed soldiers, the first among the natural-born Spartans, and their number also should be supplied from any among the country people or strangers who had received the proper breeding of freemen, and were of vigorous body and of age for military service. All these were to be divided into fifteen companies, some of four hundred, and some of two, with a diet and discipline agreeable to the laws of Lysurgus.

This decree being proposed in the council of Elders, met there with opposition; so that Lysander immediately convoked the great assembly of the people, to whom he, Mandroclidas, and Agesilaus made orations exhorting them that they would not suffer the majesty of Sparta to remain abandoned to contempt, to gratify a few rich men, who lorded it over them; but that they should call to mind the oracles in old times which had forewarned them to beware of the love of money, as the great danger and probable ruin of Sparta, and, moreover, those recently brought from the temple of Pasiphae. This was a famous temple and oracle at Thalamae; and this Pasiphae, some say, was one of the daughters of Atlas, who had by Jupiter a son called Ammon; others are of opinion it was Cassandra, the daughter of King Priam, who dying in this place, was called Pasiphae, as the revealer of oracles to all men. Phylarchus says, that this was Daphne, the daughter of Amyclas, who, flying from Apollo, was transformed into a laurel, and honoured by that god with the gift of prophecy. But be it as will, it is certain the people were made to apprehend that this oracle had commanded them to return to their former state of equality settled by Lysurgus. As soon as these had done speaking, Agis stood up, and after a few words, told them he would make the best contribution in his power to the new legislation, which was proposed for their advantage. In the first place, he would divide among them all his patrimony, which was of large extent in tillage and pasture; he would also give six hundred talents in ready money, and his mother, grandmother, and his other friends and relations, who were the richest of the Lacedaemonians, were ready to follow his example.

The people were transported with admiration of the young man's generosity, and with joy that, after three hundred years' interval, at last there had appeared a king worthy of

Sparta. But, on the other side, Leonidas was now more than ever averse, being sensible that he and his friends would be obliged to contribute with their riches, and yet all the honour and obligation would redound to Agis. He asked him then before them all, whether Lycurgus were not in his opinion a wise man, and a lover of his country. Agis answering he was, "And when did Lycurgus," replied Leonidas, "cancel debts, or admit strangers to citizenship,- he who thought the commonwealth not secure unless from time to time the city was cleared of all strangers?" To this Agis replied, "It is no wonder that Leonidas, who was brought up and married abroad, and has children by a wife taken out of a Persian court, should know little of Lycurgus or his laws. Lycurgus took away both debts and loans, by taking away money; and objected indeed to the presence of men who were foreign to the manners and customs of the country, not in any case from an ill-will to their persons, but lest the example of their lives and conduct should infect the city with the love of riches, and of delicate and luxurious habits. For it is well known that he himself gladly kept Terpander, Thales, and Pherecydes though they were strangers, because he perceived they were in their poems and in their philosophy of the same mind with him. And you that are wont to praise Ecprepes, who, being ephor, cut with his hatchet two of the nine strings from the instrument of Phrynis the musician, and to commend those who afterwards imitated him, in cutting the strings of Timotheus's harp, with what face can you blame us for designing to cut off superfluity and luxury and display from the commonwealth? Do you think those men were so concerned only about a lute-string, or intended anything else than to check in music that same excess and extravagance which rule in our present lives and manners, and have disturbed and destroyed all the harmony and order of our city?" From this time forward, as the common people followed Agis, so the rich men adhered to Leonidas. They besought him not to forsake their cause; and with persuasions and entreaties so far prevailed with the council of Elders, whose power consisted in preparing all laws before they were proposed to the people, that the designed Rhetra was rejected, though but by only one vote. Whereupon Lysander, who was still ephor, resolving to be revenged on Leonidas, drew up an information against him, grounded on two old laws: the one forbids any of the blood of Hercules to raise up children by a foreign woman, and the other makes it capital for a Lacedaemonian to leave his country to settle among foreigners. Whilst he set others on to manage this accusation, he with his colleagues went to observe the sign, which was a custom they had, and performed in this manner. Every ninth year, the ephors, choosing a starlight night, when there is neither cloud nor moon, sit down together in quiet and silence, and watch the sky. And if they chance to see the shooting of a star, they presently pronounce their king guilty of some offence against the gods, and thereupon he is immediately suspended from all exercise of regal power, till he is relieved by an oracle from Delphi or Olympia.

Lysander, therefore, assured the people he had seen a star shoot, and at the same time Leonidas was cited to answer for himself. Witnesses were produced to testify he had married an Asian woman, bestowed on him by one of King Seleucus's lieutenants: that he had two children by her, but she so disliked and hated him, that against his wishes, flying from her, he was in a manner forced to return to Sparta, where his predecessor

dying without issue, he took upon him the government. Lysander, not content with this, persuaded also Cleombrotus to lay claim to the kingdom. He was of the royal family, and son-in-law to Leonidas; who, fearing now the event of this process, fled as a suppliant to the temple of Minerva of the Brazen House, together with his daughter, the wife of Cleombrotus; for she in this occasion resolved to leave her husband, and to follow her father. Leonidas being again cited, and not appearing, they pronounced a sentence of deposition against him, and made Cleombrotus king in his place.

Soon after this revolution, Lysander, his year expiring, went out of his office, and new ephors were chosen, who gave Leonidas assurance of safety, and cited Lysander and Mandroclidas to answer for having, contrary to law, cancelled debts, and designed a new division of lands. They, seeing themselves in danger, had recourse to the two kings, and represented to them how necessary it was for their interest and safety to act with united authority, and bid defiance to the ephors. For, indeed, the power of the ephors, they said, was only grounded on the dissensions of the kings, it being their privilege, when the kings differed in opinion, to add their suffrage to whichever they judged to have given the best advice; but when the two kings were unanimous, none ought or durst resist their authority, the magistrate, whose office it was to stand as umpire when they were at variance, had no call to interfere when they were of one mind. Agis and Cleombrotus, thus persuaded, went together with their friends into the market-place, where removing the ephors from their seats, they placed others in their room, of whom Agesilaus was one; proceeding then to arm a company of young men, and releasing many out of prison; so that those of the contrary faction began to be in great fear of their lives; but there was no blood spilt. On the contrary, Agis, having notice that Agesilaus had ordered a company of soldiers to lie in wait for Leonidas, to kill him as he fled to Tegea, immediately sent some of his followers to defend him, and to convey him safely into that city.

Thus far all things proceeded prosperously, none daring to oppose; but through the sordid weakness of one man, these promising beginnings were blasted, and a most noble and truly Spartan purpose overthrown and ruined by the love of money. Agesilaus, as we said, was much in debt, though in possession of one of the largest and best estates in land; and while he gladly joined in this design to be quit of his debts, he was not at all willing to part with his land. Therefore he persuaded Agis, that if both these things should be put in execution at the same time, so great and so sudden an alteration might cause some dangerous commotion; but if debts were in the first place cancelled, the rich men would afterwards more easily be prevailed with to part with their land. Lysander, also, was of the same opinion, being deceived in like manner by the craft of Agesilaus; so that all men were presently commanded to bring in their bonds, or deeds of obligation, by the Lacedaemonians called Claria, into the market-place, where being laid together in a heap they set fire to them. The wealthy, money-lending people, one may easily imagine, beheld it with a heavy heart; but Agesilaus told them scoffingly, his eyes had never seen so bright and so pure a flame.

And now the people pressed earnestly for an immediate division of lands; the kings also had ordered it should be done; but Agesilaus, sometimes pretending one

difficulty, and sometimes another, delayed the execution, till an occasion happened to call Agis to the wars. The Achaeans, in virtue of a defensive treaty of alliance, sent to demand succours, as they expected every day that Aetolians would attempt to enter Peloponnesus, from the territory of Megara. They had sent Aratus, their general, to collect forces to hinder this incursion. Aratus wrote to the ephors, who immediately gave order that Agis should hasten to their assistance with the Lacedaemonian auxiliaries. Agis was extremely pleased to see the zeal and bravery of those who went with him upon this expedition. They were, for the most part young men, and poor; and being just released from their debts and set at liberty, and hoping on their return to receive each man his lot of land, they followed their king with wonderful alacrity. The cities through which they passed were in admiration to see how they marched from one end of Peloponnesus to the other, without the least disorder, and, in a manner, without being heard. It gave the Greeks occasion to discourse with one another, how great might be the temperance and modesty of a Laconian army in old time, under their famous captains: Agesilaus, Lysander, or Leonidas, since they saw such discipline and exact obedience under a leader who perhaps was the youngest man in all the army. They saw also how he was himself content to fare hardly, ready to undergo any labours, and not to be distinguished by pomp or richness of habit or arms from the meanest of his soldiers; and to people in general it was an object of regard and admiration.

But rich men viewed the innovation with dislike and alarm, lest haply the example might spread, and work changes to their prejudice in their own countries as well.

Agis joined Aratus near the city of Corinth, where it was still a matter of debate whether or no it were expedient to give the enemy battle. Agis, on this occasion, showed great forwardness and resolution, yet without temerity or presumption. He declared it was his opinion they ought to fight, thereby to hinder the enemy from passing the gates of Peloponnesus, but nevertheless he would submit to the judgment of Aratus, not only as the elder and more experienced captain, but as he was general of the Achaeans, whose forces he would not pretend to command, but was only come thither to assist them. I am not ignorant that Baton of Sinope relates it in another manner; he says, Aratus would have fought, and that Agis was against it; but it is certain he was mistaken, not having read what Aratus himself wrote in his own justification, that knowing the people had wellnigh got in their harvest, he thought it much better to let the enemy pass than put all to the hazard of a battle. And, therefore, giving thanks to the confederates for their readiness, he dismissed them. And Agis, not without having gained a great deal of honour, returned to Sparta, where he found the people in disorder, and a new revolution imminent, owing to the ill-government of Agesilaus.

For he, being now one of the ephors, and freed from the fear which formerly kept him in some restraint, forbore no kind of oppression which might bring in gain. Among other things, he exacted a thirteenth month's tax, whereas the usual cycle required at this time no such addition to the year. For these and other reasons fearing those whom he injured, and knowing how he was hated by the people, he thought it necessary to

maintain a guard, which always accompanied him to the magistrate's office. And presuming now on his power, he was grown so insolent, that of the two kings, the one he openly contemned, and if he showed any respect towards Agis, would have it thought rather an effect of his near relationship, than any duty or submission to the royal authority. He gave it out also that he was to continue ephor the ensuing year.

His enemies, therefore, alarmed by this report, lost no time in risking an attempt against him; and openly bringing back Leonidas from Tegea, re-established him in the kingdom, to which even the people, highly incensed for having been defrauded in the promised division of lands, willingly consented. Agesilaus himself would hardly have escaped their fury, if his son, Hippomedon, whose manly virtues made him dear to all, had not saved him out of their hands, and then privately conveyed him from the city.

During the commotion, the two kings fled, Agis to the temple of the Brazen House, and Cleombrotus to that of Neptune. For Leonidas was more incensed against his son-in-law; and leaving Agis alone, went with his soldiers to Cleombrotus's sanctuary, and there with great passion reproached him for having, though he was son-in-law, conspired with his enemies, usurped his throne, and forced him from his country. Cleombrotus, having little to say for himself, sat silent. His wife, Chilonis, the daughter of Leonidas, had chosen to follow her father in his sufferings; for when Cleombrotus usurped the kingdom, she forsook him, and wholly devoted herself to comfort her father in his affliction; whilst he still remained in Sparta, she remained also, as a suppliant, with him, and when he fled, she fled with him, bewailing his misfortune, and extremely displeased with Cleombrotus. But now, upon this turn of fortune, she changed in like manner, and was seen sitting now, as a suppliant, with her husband, embracing him with her arms, and having her two little children beside her. All men were full of wonder at the piety and tender affection of the young woman, who pointing to her robes and her hair, both alike neglected and unattended to, said to Leonidas, "I am not brought, my father, to this condition you see me in, on account of the present misfortunes of Cleombrotus; my mourning habit is long since familiar to me. It was put on to condole with you in your banishment; and now you are restored to your country, and to your kingdom, must I still remain in grief and misery? Or would you have me attired in my royal ornaments, that I may rejoice with you, when you have killed, within my arms, the man to whom you gave me for a wife? Either Cleombrotus must appease you by mine and my children's tears, or he must suffer a punishment greater than you propose for his faults, and shall see me, whom he loves so well, die before him. To what end should I live, or how shall I appear among the Spartan women, when it shall so manifestly be seen, that I have not been able to move to compassion either a husband or a father? I was born, it seems, to participate in the ill-fortune and in the disgrace, both as a wife and a daughter, of those nearest and dearest to me. As for Cleombrotus I sufficiently surrendered any honourable plea on his behalf, when I forsook him to follow you; but you yourself offer the fairest excuse for his proceedings, by showing to the world that for the sake of a kingdom it is just to kill a son-in-law, and be regardless of a daughter." Chilonis, having ended this

lamentation, rested her face on her husband's head, and looked round with her weeping and woe-begone eyes upon those who stood before her.

Leonidas, touched with compassion, withdrew a while to advise with his friends; then returning, bade Cleombrotus leave the sanctuary and go into banishment; Chilonis, he said, ought to stay with him it not being just she should forsake a father whose affection had granted to her intercession the life of her husband. But all he could say would not prevail. She rose up immediately, and taking one of her children in her arms, gave the other to her husband; and making her reverence to the altar of the goddess, went out and followed him. So that, in a word, if Cleombrotus were not utterly blinded by ambition, he must surely choose to be banished with so excellent a woman rather than without her to possess a kingdom.

Cleombrotus thus removed, Leonidas proceeded also to displace the ephors, and to choose others in their room; then he began to consider how he might entrap Agis. At first, he endeavoured by fair means to persuade him to leave the sanctuary, and partake with him in the kingdom. The people, he said, would easily pardon the errors of a young man, ambitious of glory, and deceived by the craft of Agesilaus. But finding Agis was suspicious, and not to be prevailed with to quit his sanctuary, he gave up that design; yet what could not then be effected by the dissimulation of an enemy, was soon after brought to pass by the treachery of friends.

Amphares, Damochares, and Arcesilaus often visited Agis, and he was so confident of their fidelity that after a while he was prevailed on to accompany them to the baths, which were not far distant, they constantly returning to see him safe again in the temple. They were all three his familiars; and Amphares had borrowed a great deal of plate and rich household stuff from Agesistrata, and hoped if he could destroy her and the whole family, he might peaceably enjoy those goods. And he, it is said, was the readiest of all to serve the purposes of Leonidas, and being one of the ephors, did all he could to incense the rest of his colleagues against Agis. These men, therefore, finding that Agis would not quit his sanctuary, but on occasion would venture from it to go to the bath, resolved to seize him on the opportunity thus given them. And one day as he was returning, they met and saluted him as formerly, conversing pleasantly by the way, and jesting, as youthful friends might, till coming to the turning of a street which led to the prison, Amphares, by virtue of his office, laid his hand on Agis, and told him, "You must go with me, Agis, before the other ephors, to answer for your misdemeanours." At the same time Damochares, who was a tall, strong man, drew his cloak tight round his neck, and dragged him after by it, whilst the others went behind to thrust him on. So that none of Agis's friend being near to assist him, nor any one by, they easily got him into the prison, where Leonidas was already arrived, with a company of soldiers, who strongly guarded all the avenues; the ephors also came in, with as many of the Elders as they knew to be true to their party, being desirous to proceed with some semblance of justice. And thus they bade him give an account of his actions. To which Agis, smiling at their dissimulation, answered not a word. Amphares told him it was more seasonable to weep, for now the time was come in which he should be punished for his presumption.

Another of the ephors, as though he would be more favourable, and offering as it were an excuse, asked him whether he was not forced to what he did by Agesilaus and Lysander. But Agis answered, he had not been constrained by any man, nor had any other intent in what he did but only to follow the example of Lycurgus, and to govern conformably to his laws. The same ephor asked him whether now at least he did not repent his rashness. To which the young man answered that though he were to suffer the extremest penalty for it, yet he could never repent of so just and so glorious a design. Upon this they passed sentence of death on him, and bade the officers carry him to the Dechas, as it is called, a place in the prison where they strangle malefactors. And when the officers would not venture to lay hands on him, and the very mercenary soldiers declined it, believing it an illegal and a wicked act to lay violent hands on a king, Demochares, threatening and reviling them for it, himself thrust him into the room.

For by this time the news of his being seized had reached many parts of the city, and there was a concourse of people with lights and torches about the prison gates, and in the midst of them the mother and the grandmother of Agis, crying out with a loud voice that their king ought to appear, and to be heard and judged by the people. But this clamour, instead of preventing, hastened his death; his enemies fearing, if the tumult should increase, he might be rescued during the night out of their hands.

Agis, being now at the point to die, perceived one of the officers bitterly bewailing his misfortune; "Weep not, friend," said he, "for me, who die innocent, by the lawless act of wicked men. My condition is much better than theirs." As soon as he had spoken these words, not showing the least sign of fear, he offered his neck to the noose.

Immediately after he was dead, Amphares went out of the prison gate, where he found Agesistrata, who, believing him still the same friend as before, threw herself at his feet. He gently raised her up, and assured her, she need not fear any further violence or danger of death for her son, and that if pleased she might go in and see him. She begged her mother might also have the favour to be admitted, and he replied, nobody should hinder it. When they were entered, he commanded the gate should again be locked, and Archidamia, the grandmother, to be first introduced. She was now grown very old, and had lived all her days in the highest repute among her fellows. As soon as Amphares thought she was despatched, he told Agesistrata she might now go in if she pleased. She entered, and beholding her son's body stretched on the ground, and her mother hanging by the neck, the first thing she did was, with her own hands, to assist the officers in taking down the body; then covering it decently, she laid it out by her son's, whom then embracing and kissing his cheeks, "O my son," said she, "it was thy too great mercy and goodness which brought thee and us to ruin." Amphares, who stood watching behind the door, on hearing this, broke in, and said angrily to her, "Since you approve so well of your son's actions, it is fit you should partake in his reward." She, rising up to offer herself to the noose, said only, "I pray that it may redound to the good of Sparta." The three bodies being now exposed to view, and the fact divulged, no fear was strong enough to hinder the people from expressing their abhorrence of what was done, and their detestation of Leonidas and Amphares, the

contrivers of it. So wicked and barbarous an act had never been committed in Sparta since first the Dorians inhabited Peloponnesus; the very enemies in war, they said, were always cautious in spilling the blood of a Lacedaemonian king, insomuch that in any combat they would decline, and endeavour to avoid them, from feelings of respect and reverence for their station. And certainly we see that in the many battles fought betwixt the Lacedaemonians and the other Greeks, up to the time of Philip of Macedon, not one of their kings was ever killed, except Cleombrotus by a javelin-wound at the battle of Leuctra. I am not ignorant that the Messenians affirm, Theopompus was also slain by their Aristomenes; but the Lacedaemonians deny it, and say he was only wounded.

Be it as it will, it is certain at least that Agis was the first king put to death in Lacedaemon by the ephors, for having undertaken a design noble in itself and worthy of his country, at a time of life when men's errors usually meet with an easy pardon. And if errors he did commit, his enemies certainly had less reason to blame him than had his friends for that gentle and compassionate temper which made him save the life of Leonidas and believe in other men's professions.

THE END