THE SECOND PUNIC WAR (B.C. 218-201)

   **Beginning of the War in Spain**.—The second Punic war was to decide the fate of Rome, and perhaps of Europe. Its real cause was the growing rivalry between the two great powers that were now struggling for supremacy in the western Mediterranean – Carthage and Rome.

   Rome began to be alarmed, as she saw the territory of her rival extending toward the north, especially taking full control of Spain. Then Hannibal, the young son of the great Hamilcar was chosen as commander. This young Carthaginian, who had in his boyhood sworn an eternal hostility to Rome, now felt that his mission was come. He marched from New Carthage and proceeded to attack Saguntum, the ally of Rome; and after a siege of eight months, captured it. The Romans sent an embassy to Carthage to demand the surrender of Hannibal. The story is told that Quintus Fabius, the chief Roman envoy, lifted up a fold of his toga and said to the Carthaginian senate, “Here we bring you peace and war; which do you choose?” “Give us either,” was the reply. “Then I offer you war,” said Fabius. “And this we accept,” shouted the Carthaginians. Thus was begun the most memorable war of ancient times.

   **Hannibal’s Invasion of Italy**.—Even at the beginning of the war Hannibal showed his great genius as a soldier. The Romans formed an excellent plan to send two armies into the enemy’s country—one into Africa under Sempronius, and the other into Spain under P. Cornelius Scipio (*sip'i-o*). But Hannibal, with the instinct of a true soldier, saw that Carthage would be safe if Italy were invaded and Rome threatened. Leaving his brother Hasdrubal to protect Spain, he crossed the Alps with fifty thousand infantry, nine thousand cavalry, and about 40 elephants, which Romans would have never fought before. He finally reached the valley, with only twenty thousand foot and six thousand horse and only 1 elephant and Hannibal himself being blinded in one eye. Even still, his arrival was momentous and he was able to convince many of the Gauls to help in the fight against Rome.

   **Hannibal’s Early Victories**.—When the Romans were aware that Hannibal was really in Italy, they made preparations to meet and to destroy him. Sempronius was recalled with the army originally intended for Africa; and Scipio gathered together the scattered forces in northern Italy and took up his station. The cavalry of the two armies first met in a skirmish and the Romans were defeated, and Scipio himself was severely wounded. The two hostile armies were now separated by the river Trebia. Here again Hannibal showed his great skill as a general. By a feigned attack he drew the Romans over to his own side of the river. He then attacked them in front, upon the flank, and in the rear; and the Roman army was nearly annihilated. The remnant of the army fled to Placentia. This great disaster did not discourage the Romans. They soon raised new armies with which to resist the invaders.

   **Battle of Lake Trasumenus (B.C. 217)**.—In the following spring, the new consul, Flaminius, placed his own army at Arretium, and his colleague’s army at Ariminum, to guard the only roads upon which it seemed possible that Hannibal could move, in order to reach Rome. But Hannibal, instead of going by either of these roads on which he was expected to go, crossed the Apennines and pushed on toward Rome through the marshy regions. He thus got between the Roman armies and the Roman capital. He knew that Flaminius would be obliged to hasten to Rome to protect the city. He also knew by what road Flaminius must go, and he determined to destroy the Roman army on its way. He posted his army on the heights near the northern shore of Lake Trasimene, overlooking an area through which the Roman army must pass. The Romans approached entered it, not suspecting the terrible fate which awaited them. At a given signal, the soldiers of Hannibal rushed to the attack. The Romans were overwhelmed on every side, and those who escaped the fierce Gauls and the dreaded cavalry were buried in the waters of the lake. Fifteen thousand Romans and Italians fell on that fatal field, with Flaminius, their leader. The Roman army was practically destroyed. Northern Italy was now at the mercy of Hannibal, and Rome seemed an easy prey to the victorious Carthaginian.

   **Fabius Maximus, Dictator**.— The times seemed to demand a dictator, and Q. Fabius Maximus was appointed. he was also that ambassador who had offered to Carthage the choice between peace and war. He ordered new armies to be raised, and the city to be put in a state of defense.

   Hannibal did not see fit to attack Rome; but, he hoped to draw the allies of Rome in southern Italy, by showing that they were safe only under his protection. He also wished to provoke Fabius to a pitched battle. But Fabius had learned some lessons from the war; and he adopted the safe policy of harassing the army of Hannibal and of avoiding a general engagement, making sure that they were always on the move but never really won a battle – today this tactic is still called the Fabian strategy. On account of this cautious strategy he was called Fabius Cunctator, or the Delayer.

   **Battle of Cannae (B.C. 216)**.—However, even though very effective, the cautious strategy of Fabius soon became unpopular. Two new consuls were therefore chosen, who were expected to pursue a more vigorous policy. These were Terentius Varro and Aemilius Paullus. Hannibal’s army was now near the little town of Cannae. To this place the consuls led their new forces, consisting of eighty thousand infantry and six thousand cavalry,—the largest army that the Romans had, up to that time, ever gathered on a single battlefield; Hannibal’s army consisted of forty thousand infantry and ten thousand cavalry.

   The Romans drew up their heavy infantry in solid columns, facing to the south, to attack the center of Hannibal’s line. In front of the heavy-armed troops were the light-armed soldiers, to act as skirmishers. On the Roman right, near the river, were two thousand of the Roman cavalry, and on the left wing were four thousand cavalry of the allies. But Hannibal laid his plan not simply to defeat the Roman army, but to draw it into such a position that it could be entirely destroyed. He therefore placed his weakest troops, the Spanish and Gallic infantry, in the center opposite the heavy infantry of the Romans, and pushed them forward in the form of a crescent, with the expectation that they would be driven back and pursued by the Romans. On either flank he placed a body of African troops, his best and most trusted soldiers, drawn back in long, solid columns, so that they could fall upon the Romans when the center had been driven in. On his left wing, next to the river, were placed four thousand Spanish and Gallic cavalry, and on the right wing his superb body of six thousand Numidian cavalry, which was to swing around and attack the Roman army in the rear, when it had become engaged with the African troops upon the right and left.

   The description of this plan is almost a description of the battle itself. When the Romans had pressed back the weak center of Hannibal’s line, they found themselves engulfed in the midst of the Carthaginian forces. Attacked on all sides, the Roman army became a confused mass of struggling men, and the battle became a butchery. The army was annihilated; seventy thousand Roman soldiers are said to have been slain, among whom were eighty senators and the consul Aemilius. The small remnant of survivors fled to the neighboring towns, and Varro, with seventy horsemen, took refuge in the city of Venusia.

   **The Turning of the Tide**.—It was at this point that the fortunes of war began to turn in favor of the Romans. The first ray of hope came from Spain, where it was learned that Hasdrubal – Hannibal’s brother, had been defeated by the Scipios. Then Hannibal’s army met its first repulse in Campania. Moreover, Hannibal’s forces were weakened by the need of protecting his new allies, scattered in various parts of southern Italy. As a last resort, he marched directly to Rome, hoping to compel the Romans to withdraw their armies for the defense of the capital. Although he plundered the towns and ravaged the fields of Latium, and rode about the walls of Rome, the fact that “Hannibal was at the gates,” did not entice the Roman army away from Capua. Rome was well defended, and Hannibal, having no means of besieging the city, withdrew again into the southern part of Italy. Capua – one of Hannibal’s key Italian allies - was soon taken by the Romans; its chief citizens were put to death for their treason, many of the inhabitants were reduced to slavery, and the city itself was put under control. It was apparent that Hannibal could not protect his Italian allies; and his cause seemed doomed to failure, unless he could receive help from his brother Hasdrubal, who was still in Spain.

   **The Scipios in Spain (B.C. 218-212); Battle of the Metaurus (B.C. 207)**.—Hasdrubal had been kept in Spain by the vigorous campaign which the Romans had conducted in that peninsula under the two Scipios. Upon the death of these generals, the young Publius Cornelius Scipio was sent to Spain and earned a great name by his victories. But Hasdrubal was determined to go to the rescue of his brother in Italy. He followed Hannibal’s path over the Hannibal had moved northward into Apulia, and was awaiting news from Hasdrubal. There were now two enemies in Italy, instead of one.
   It was necessary that Hasdrubal should be crushed before Hannibal was informed of his arrival in Italy. The consul Claudius Nero therefore left his main army in Apulia, and with eight thousand picked soldiers hurried to the aid of his colleague in Umbria. The battle which took place was decisive; and really determined the issue of the second Punic war. The army of Hasdrubal was entirely destroyed, and Hasdrubal himself was slain. The first news which Hannibal received of this disaster was from the lifeless lips of his own brother, whose head was thrown by the Romans into the Carthaginian camp. Hannibal saw that the death of his brother was the doom of Carthage; and he sadly exclaimed, “O Carthage, I see thy fate!” Hannibal retired into Bruttium; and the Roman consuls received the first triumph that had been given since the beginning of this disastrous war.

   **The War carried into Africa**.—Scipio now organized his new army, which was made up largely of volunteers, and equipped by patriotic contributions. He embarked from Sicily and landed in Africa. Carthage was convinced that her only hope was in recalling Hannibal to defend his native city. Hannibal left Italy, the field of his brilliant exploits, and landed in Africa. Thus Rome was relieved of her dreaded foe, who had brought her so near to the brink of ruin.

   **Battle of Zama and End of the War (B.C. 201)**.—The two greatest generals then living were now face to face upon the soil of Africa. The final battle of the war was fought (B.C. 202) near Zama. Hannibal fought at a great disadvantage. His own veterans were reduced greatly in number, and the new armies of Carthage could not be depended upon. Scipio changed the order of the legions, leaving spaces in his line, through which the elephants of Hannibal might pass without being opposed – creating the same pincer design that Hannibal himself had used near Cannae. Despite Hannibal’s orders not to take the trap, his army was defeated, and the Carthaginian army was annihilated. It is said that twenty thousand men were slain, and as many more taken prisoners. The great war was now ended, and Scipio imposed the terms of peace (B.C. 201). These terms were as follows: (1) Carthage was to give up the whole of Spain and all the islands between Africa and Italy; (2) Masinissa was recognized as the king of Numidia and the ally of Rome; (3) Carthage was to pay an annual tribute of 200 talents (about $250,000) for fifty years; (4) Carthage agreed not to wage any war without the consent of Rome.

   Rome was thus recognized as the mistress of the western Mediterranean. Carthage, although not reduced to a province, became a dependent state. Rome had, moreover, been brought into hostile relations with Macedonia – a part of Greece who sided with Carthage, which paved the way for Rome’s conquests in the East.