THE YOUNG CARTHAGINIAN

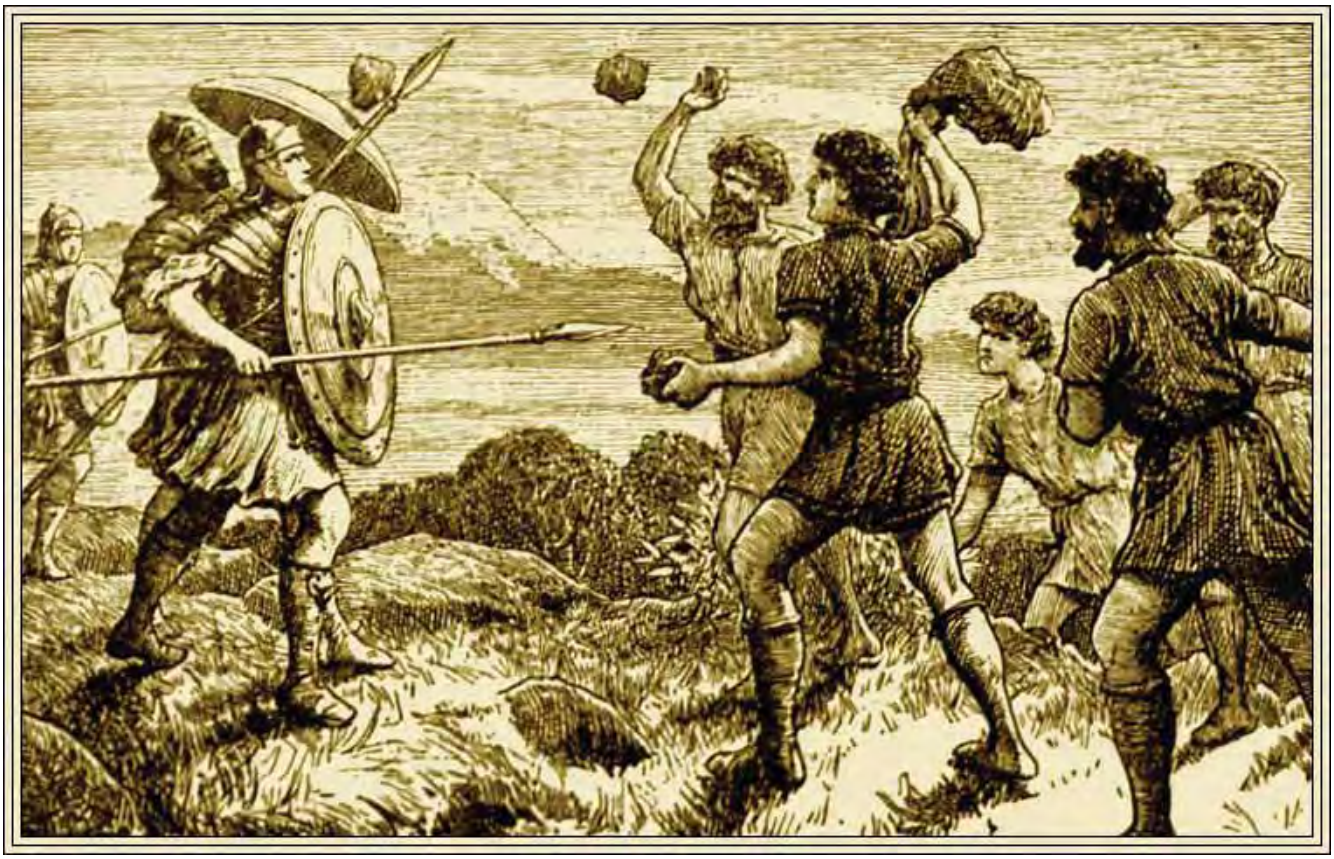
A book review by Karen Moore, Grace Academy of Georgetown

Few ancient wars have captured the fascination of modern generations as have those that marked the struggle between Carthage and Rome. In these wars, two world powers struggled for domination over the Mediterranean World. First, there was Carthage—proud descendant of Phoenicia and a Tyrian queen who ruled the seas. Then came Rome, a *novus ordo seclorum*[1] seemingly poised ready for a destined empire. The heroes of each were found in two noble houses, those of Barca and of Scipio. It seems each generation had its role to play in this monumental contest, and unarguably the greatest match was played out in the Second Punic War. Indeed, no pair of dueling generals has been studied to the extent of Hannibal and the younger Scipio. To this day, those who would pursue the military might study well the lessons these great generals would teach. Posterity has been left with wonderful descriptions of the battles waged and the tactical prowess behind them. The best known accounts are found in the writings of the historians Polybius and Livy.[2] We even catch glimpses of both Roman glory and Punic tension in Vergil's *Aeneid*. The historians, however, tell the tale through a distant third person account—and the account of the victor. How wonderful would it be to find the journals of those men who marched under the standards of one of these empires? How much more intriguing if we could even follow the story of a member of the clan Scipio or clan Barca? Where history has left us bereft, author G.A. Henty has sought to bring illumination.

As a boy of the mid-nineteenth century, Henty was fascinated by the tales of the Second Punic War. Like many of our students, he was afforded the opportunity to study classical history. In these lessons, it was Carthage who captured his sympathies. After the Third Punic War, however, Carthage was razed to the ground and her soil, as legend would have it, was strewn with salt. Carthage was gone. But not for Henty. In *The Young Carthaginian*, Henty has brought Carthage with all her glory, pride, and scandal back to life. After years of studying the ancient records of Polybius and Livy as well as the works of scholars such as Law and Hennebert,[3] Henty has provided young readers with the opportunity to walk the streets of Carthage and follow Hannibal on his campaign across Hispania, through the Alps and into

Karen Moore serves as the director of curriculum and instruction at Grace Academy of Georgetown, a classical Christian school located in the heart of Texas. Karen is the coauthor of the Libellus de Historia History Reader *series and the* Latin Alive! Textbook *series, both published by Classical Academic Press. Karen also maintains a blog site on the study and teaching of Latin at www.latinaliveonline.*

the very heart of Italy. This book is not the third person account of a historian, but the first person account of Malchus, a young Carthaginian noble and a young cousin to the great general Hannibal Barca.



The Young Carthaginian is an excellent work of historical fiction, written for readers young in age or young in heart. Henty has masterfully woven historical persons and events together with fictitious counterparts so well that at times the reader forgets which characters have lived and which merely seem to have done so. The story allows the reader to become immersed in the life of a young Carthaginian, understanding the struggle that Carthage faces in the threat of Rome on the outside, but even more the brutal politics which seem only too certain to destroy her from within. As the story begins we meet Malchus and his father, a general of Carthage and brother to the great Hamilcar Barca, as they prepare for a lion hunt. This hunt is a short diversion at the end of the campaign which they are waging to calm the restless African tribes. They soon return to Carthage successful, but readers will quickly learn that success can be only a momentary illusion. The city is boiling with conspiracies just after the assassination of Hasdrubal, son-in-law of the late Hamilcar Barca and suffette of Carthage. The Barcine party quickly puts forth Hannibal as a candidate for his replacement. Hannibal wins the election, but true lasting success for the Barcine clan and for Carthage rests on Hannibal's campaign against Rome. Hamilcar and Malchus set forth across the Mediterranean to meet Hannibal in Cartagena, and thereby begin a truly epic journey. Along with Malchus, readers witness the battles they have read about in the accounts of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, Books XXI–XXX. Before the march can begin, the local Iberian tribes must be brought into firm submission and there is the little matter of Saguntum, the impetus for war. Along with Malchus, readers climb through the treacherous Pyrenees and the Alps. They will stand above the transalpine landscape

as they listen to Hannibal deliver his moving speech for conquest and vengeance that Livy records. The battles of Trebia, Lake Trasimenus, and the devastation wrought at Cannae are all seen through the eyes of Hannibal's cousin and protégé. And it is through the eyes of this young Carthaginian that we readers learn something more of these Punic Wars than the annals of Livy or Polybius have told us.

Through the beauty and power of a well-wrought narrative, we the readers feel the passions and the tensions that caused two great powers to contend with one another over so many years and through so many wars. This tension is one that readers must truly understand if they would see and feel the passion that Vergil wrought in the *Aeneid*. For many of our students, the *Aeneid* is a work read during an earlier classical humanities study in the school of logic. The reasons this work is set before students at this time may vary, but typically the reading of the *Aeneid* comes before a proper introduction to the relationship of Carthage and Rome. If students do not understand the antagonistic relationship of Carthage and Rome, how can they understand the star-crossed love affair of Dido and Aeneas? How can they appreciate the cruel irony of Juno's deal with Venus? How can they feel the pathos of Dido as she cries, "*Exoriare ex nostris ossibus ultor!*" (Aeneid IV.625)?[4] And yet, it is unimaginable to ask students of this age to wade through Livy's record of the war with Hannibal. Those who guide young readers through the *Aeneid* would do well to consider first a journey with Henty through the Second Punic War. Those who look to have students read Livy in later years would do well to warm their minds with an engaging introduction in earlier years, for Henty's inviting story will invoke a sense of wonder and empathy for the noble city that once was Carthage. At the same time a sense of despair and disgust at what the noble city hides will affirm her end. Henty's treatment of heroes and battles will leave students desiring to read for themselves ancient historical accounts. And perhaps, though Carthage is now but salty dust, something of the spirit of a once mighty and noble Carthage will have survived also in a certain young Carthaginian.

NOTES

1. *Novus ordo seclorum* [a new order of the ages] is a reference made by Vergil in his Fourth Eclogue to the new order, a golden age that the empire of Rome will bring to the world.

2. *The Histories* by Polybius and *Ab Urbe Condita* by Titus Livius Patavinus (Livy).

3. *On the Passage of Hannibal over the Alps* by W.J. Law and *Histoire d'Annibal* by Colonel M. Hennebert.

4. *Exoriare ex nostris ossibus ultor!* [an avenger shall arise from our bones] is Dido's chilling prophecy that Hannibal will avenge her ill-treatment at the hands of Rome's ancestor.