

Sicily. An entirely unforeseen occurrence precipitated matters. Freebooters, calling themselves the Mamertines, had captured the city of Messina, put all the male inhabitants to death, and seized their wives and property. Carthage aided the Mamertines against Pyrrhus, but now the latter were attacked by Hiero, king of Syracuse, and reduced to the last extremity. They saw that they must either call upon Carthage for help or summon the Romans to their assistance. The majority decided to seek succor from Rome. The Romans, after long deliberation, decided to comply with their request, though perfectly aware that this was tantamount to a declaration of war against Carthage. In the meantime the Carthaginians appeared, concluded a treaty of peace between the Mamertines and Hiero and obtained possession of the former city. The Roman Consul, however, nothing daunted, resolved to attack Messina, although warned off by the Carthaginians who sent back to Rome the ships they captured from him. War was declared and Hamilcar, the Carthaginian general, harassed the Romans by land and by sea. The world now beheld an astonishing sight, the Romans built a fleet to contend with the mistress of the seas. By an almost incredible energy and an indomitable spirit, the Romans constructed ships, and led their raw sailors against the veteran seamen of Carthage. Carthage despised the Roman sailors, but to her cost. Upon the very first encounter she suffered an inglorious defeat. The war continued with varying success, Rome lost three fleets, but Roman patriotism came to the rescue, private citizens presented two hundred vessels to the government. Carthage was taken by surprise and her fleets entirely destroyed; she staggered under this blow and was forced to sign a treaty whereby both nations agreed to respect each other's rights. Carthage was to pay a tribute to Rome and to evacuate Sicily. No sooner had Carthage emerged from this war than she was plunged into all the horrors of a revolt of her mercenary soldiers. Rome seized this opportunity to commit a most perfidious deed, one of the blackest in the annals of mankind. For whilst Carthage was engaged in this life and death struggle, Rome ungenerously seized the Carthaginian colony of Sardinia, and when

Carthage demanded reparation for this treacherous act, she imposed a new tribute upon the Carthaginians, thereby adding insult to injury. Meanwhile an event of great moment had taken place, a son, Hannibal had been born to Hamilcar who caused him when in his tender years to take an oath and swear undying hatred to the Romans. How well this was observed the future will show.

During the lull in the war, Rome extended her conquests towards the north of Italy, whilst the Carthaginians, hitherto attracted to Spain by the gold and silver mines, were now led thither by Hamilcar, who saw that if Carthage was to be saved, it must be from without, consequently he sought money, soldiers, and a field of action in the fabulously rich peninsula of Spain. By the occupation of Spain he hoped to restore the balance of power which had been rudely shaken by the loss of Sardinia and Sicily. Upon his death, Hannibal, one of the world's greatest heroes, took his place. Hannibal shook Rome to the very foundation and brought her to the verge of destruction. His keen intuitive foresight told him that the Carthaginian people must be united, that their government must be made more democratic. He endeavored to reform it, but it was too late; the people had become slaves to the system of corruption whereby they had been so long pampered; they had degenerated into a lawless mob, ever ready to sell their noble birth-right for a mess of pottage. Far more penetrating than the government, he saw that to cope successfully with Rome, Carthage must attack her in Italy, on her own soil. Towards this end he directed all his efforts, but received only a half-hearted support from the Carthaginian authorities. It was indeed a contest between Hannibal on one side and the mighty power of Rome on the other. He commanded an army of mercenaries whose god was mammon, who were altogether devoid of that spirit of patriotism which arouses men to great deeds and urges them to avenge the insult offered to fatherland. He found them disorganized, dissatisfied, and in a state of mutiny, but he was a born leader of men; his personal magnetism drew all to his side, and his fatherly care of his soldiers won their gratitude, love, and devotion. Hannibal, convinced of the fidelity of his soldiers, took Sagun-