Greece learned too late the art of combining for self-defence. In the war against the vast power of Persia, Athens stood almost alone. What aid she got from the rest of Greece was given grudgingly. Themistocles had to gain the aid of the Grecian fleet at Salamis by a trick. Philip of Macedonia conquered Greece by dividing it and fighting it piecemeal. Only after the close of the Macedonian power and the beginning of that of Rome did Greece begin to learn the art of unity, and then the lesson came too late. The Achaean League, which combined the nations of the Peloponnesus into a federal republic, was in its early days kept busy in forcing its members to remain true to their pledge. If it had survived for a century it would probably have brought all Greece into the League, and have produced a nation capable of self-defence. But Rome already had her hand on the throat of Greece, and political wisdom came to that land too late to avail.

We have come, indeed, to the end of the story of Grecian liberty. Twice Greece rose in arms against the power of Rome, but in the end she fell hopelessly into the fetters forged for the world by that lord of conquest. Of the celebrated cities of Greece two had already fallen. Thebes had been swept from the face of the earth in the wind of Alexander's wrath. Sparta had been reduced to a feeble village by the anger of Philopoemen. Corinth, now the largest and richest city of Greece, was to be razed to the ground for daring to defy Rome; and Athens was to be plundered and humiliated by a conquering Roman army.

It will not take long to tell how all this came about. The story is a short one, but full of vital consequences. Philopoemen, the great general of the Achaean League, died of poison 183 B.C. In the same year died in exile Hannibal, the greatest foe Rome ever knew, and Scipio, one of its ablest generals. Rome was already master of Greece. But the Roman senate feared trouble from the growth of the Achaean League, and, to weaken it, took a thousand of its noblest citizens, under various charges, and sent them as hostages to Rome. Among them was the celebrated historian Polybius, who wrote the history of Hannibal's wars.

These exiles were not brought to trial on the weak charges made against them, but they were detained in Italy for seventeen years. By the end of that time many of them had died, and Rome at last did what it was not in the habit of doing, it took pity on those who were left and let them return home.

Roman pity in this case proved disastrous to Greece. Many of the exiles were exasperated by their treatment, and were no sooner at home than they began to stir up the people to revolt. Polybius held them back for a time, but during his absence the spirit of sedition grew. It was intensified by the action of Rome, which, to weaken Greece, resolved to dissolve the Achaean League, or to take from it its strongest cities. Roman ambassadors carried this edict to Corinth, the great city of the League. When their errand became known the people rose in riot, insulted the ambassadors, and vowed that they were not and would not be the slaves of Rome.

If they had shown the strength and spirit to sustain their vow they might have had some warrant for it. But the fanatics who stirred the country to revolt against the advice of its wisest citizens proved incapable in war. Their army was
finally put to rout in the year 146 B.C. by a Roman army under the leadership of Lucius Mummius, consul of Rome.

This Roman victory was won in the vicinity of Corinth. The routed army did not seek to defend itself in that city, but fled past its open gates, and left it to the mercy of the Roman general. The gates still stood open. No defence was made. But Mummius, fearing some trick, waited a day or two before entering. On doing so he found the city nearly deserted. The bulk of the population had fled. The greatest and richest city which Greece then possessed had fallen without a blow struck in its defence.

Yet Mummius chose to consider it as a city taken by storm. All the men who remained were put to the sword; the women and children were kept to be sold as slaves; the town was mercilessly plundered of its wealth and treasures of art.

But this degree of vengeance did not satisfy Rome. Her ambassadors had been insulted,—by a mob, it is true; but in those days the law-abiding had often to suffer for the deeds of the mob. The Achaean League, with Corinth at its head, had dared to resist the might and majesty of Rome. A lesson must be given that would not be easily forgotten. Corinth must be utterly destroyed.

Such was the deliberate decision of the Roman senate; such the order sent to Mummius. At his command the plundering of the city was completed. It was fabulously rich in works of art. Many of these were sent to Rome. Many of them were destroyed. The Romans were ignorant of their value. Their leader himself was as incompetent and ignorant as any Roman general could well be. He had but one thought, to obey the orders of the senate. The plundered city was thereupon set on fire and burned to the ground, its walls were pulled down, the spot where it had stood was cursed, its territory was declared the property of the Roman people. No more complete destruction of a city had ever taken place. A century afterwards Corinth was rebuilt by order of Julius Caesar, but it never became again the Corinth of old.

As for the destruction of works of priceless value, it was pitiable. When Polybius returned and saw the ruins, he found common soldiers playing dice on paintings of the most celebrated artists of Greece. Mummius, who was as honest as he was dull-witted, strictly obeyed orders in sending the choicest of the spoil to Rome, and made himself forever famous as a marvel of stupidity by a remark to those who were charged with the conveyance of some of the noblest of Grecian statues.

"Take good care that you do not lose these on the way," he said; "for if you do you shall be made to replace them by others of equal value."

Rome could conquer the world, but honest Mummius had set a task which Rome throughout its whole history was not able to perform.

Thus ended the death-struggle of Greece. The chiefs of the party of revolt were put to death; the inhabitants of Corinth who had fled were taken and sold as slaves. The walls of all the cities which had resisted Rome were levelled to the ground. An annual tribute was laid on them by the conquerors. Self-government was left to the states of Greece, but they were deprived of their old privilege of making war.

Yet Greece might have flourished under the new conditions, for peace heals the wounds made by war, had its states not been too much weakened by their previous conflicts, and had not a new war arisen just when they were beginning to enjoy some of the fruits of peace.

This war, which broke out sixty years later, had its origin in Asia. Mithridates the Great, king of Pontus, had made himself master of all Asia Minor, where he ordered that all the Romans found should be killed. It is said that eighty thousand were slaughtered. Then he sent an army into Greece, under his general Archelaus, and there found the people ready and willing to join him, in the hope of gaining their freedom by his aid. Rome just then seemed weak, and they deemed it a good season to rebel.

Archelaus took possession of Athens and the Piraeus, from which all the friends of Rome were driven into exile.
Meanwhile, Rome was distracted by the struggle between the two great leaders Marius and Sulla. But leaving Rome to take care of itself, Sulla marched an army against Mithridates, entered Greece, and laid siege to Athens.

This was in the year 87 B.C. The siege that followed was a long one. Archelaus lay in Piraeus, with abundance of food, and had command of the sea. But the long walls that led to Athens had long since vanished. Food could not be conveyed from the port to the city, as of old. Hunger came to the aid of Rome. Resistance having almost ceased, Sulla broke into the famous old city March 1, 86 B.C., and gave it up to rapine and pillage by his soldiers.

Yet Athens was not destroyed as Corinth had been. Sulla had some respect for art and antiquity, and carefully preserved the old monuments of the city, while such of its people as had not been massacred were restored to their civil rights as subjects of Rome. Soon the Asiatics were driven from Greece and Roman dominion was once more restored. Thus ended the last struggle for liberty in Greece. Nineteen hundred years were to pass away before another blow for freedom would be struck on Grecian soil.

(The end)
Charles Morris's short story: Death-Struggle Of Greece

By Charles Morris