

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**ATHENS: ITS RISE AND
FALL, COMPLETE**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Athens: Its Rise and Fall, Complete

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Athens: Its Rise and Fall, Complete

DEDICATION

TO HENRY FYNES CLINTON, ESQ., etc., etc. AUTHOR OF “THE FASTI HELLENICI.”

My Dear Sir,

I am not more sensible of the distinction conferred upon me when you allowed me to inscribe this history with your name, than pleased with an occasion to express my gratitude for the assistance I have derived throughout the progress of my labours from that memorable work, in which you have upheld the celebrity of English learning, and afforded so imperishable a contribution to our knowledge of the Ancient World. To all who in history look for the true connexion between causes and effects, chronology is not a dry and mechanical compilation of barren dates, but the explanation of events and the philosophy of facts. And the publication of the Fasti Hellenici has thrown upon those times, in which an accurate chronological system can best repair what is deficient, and best elucidate what is obscure in the scanty authorities bequeathed to us, all the light of a profound and disciplined intellect, applying the acutest comprehension to the richest erudition, and arriving at its conclusions according to the true spirit of inductive reasoning, which proportions the completeness of the final discovery to the caution of the intermediate process. My obligations to that learning and to those gifts which you have exhibited to the world are shared by all who, in England or in Europe, study the history or cultivate the literature of Greece. But, in the patient kindness with which you have permitted me to consult you during the tedious passage of these volumes through the press—in the careful advice—in the generous encouragement—which have so often smoothed the path and animated the progress—there are obligations peculiar to myself; and in those obligations there is so much that honours me, that, were I to enlarge upon them more, the world might mistake an acknowledgment for a boast.

With the highest consideration and esteem,

Believe me, my dear sir,

Most sincerely and gratefully yours,

EDWARD LYTTON BULWER

London, March, 1837.

ADVERTISEMENT

The work, a portion of which is now presented to the reader, has occupied me many years—though often interrupted in its progress, either by more active employment, or by literary undertakings of a character more seductive. These volumes were not only written, but actually in the hands of the publisher before the appearance, and even, I believe, before the announcement of the first volume of Mr. Thirlwall's History of Greece, or I might have declined going over any portion of the ground cultivated by that distinguished scholar 1. As it is, however, the plan I have pursued differs materially from that of Mr. Thirlwall, and I trust that the soil is sufficiently fertile to yield a harvest to either labourer.

Since it is the letters, yet more than the arms or the institutions of Athens, which have rendered her illustrious, it is my object to combine an elaborate view of her literature with a complete and impartial account of her political transactions. The two volumes now published bring the reader, in the one branch of my subject, to the supreme administration of Pericles; in the other, to a critical analysis of the tragedies of Sophocles. Two additional volumes will, I trust, be sufficient to accomplish my task, and close the records of Athens at that period when, with the accession of Augustus, the annals of the world are merged into the chronicle of the Roman empire. In these latter volumes it is my intention to complete the history of the Athenian drama—to include a survey of the Athenian philosophy—to describe the manners, habits, and social life of the people, and to conclude the whole with such a review of the facts and events narrated as may constitute, perhaps, an unprejudiced and intelligible explanation of the causes of the rise and fall of Athens.

As the history of the Greek republics has been too often corruptly pressed into the service of heated political partisans, may I be pardoned the precaution of observing that, whatever my own political code, as applied to England, I have nowhere sought knowingly to pervert the lessons of a past nor analogous time to fugitive interests and party purposes. Whether led sometimes to censure, or more often to vindicate the Athenian people, I am not conscious of any other desire than that of strict, faithful, impartial justice. Restlessly to seek among the ancient institutions for illustrations (rarely apposite) of the modern, is, indeed, to desert the character of a judge for that of an advocate, and to undertake the task of the historian with the ambition of the pamphleteer. Though designing this work not for colleges and cloisters, but for the general and miscellaneous public, it is nevertheless impossible to pass over in silence some matters which, if apparently trifling in themselves, have acquired dignity, and even interest, from brilliant speculations or celebrated disputes. In the history of Greece (and Athenian history necessarily includes nearly all that is valuable in the annals of the whole Hellenic race) the reader must submit to pass through much that is minute, much that is wearisome, if he desire to arrive at last at definite knowledge and comprehensive views. In order, however, to interrupt as little as possible the recital of events, I have endeavoured to confine to the earlier portion of the work such details of an antiquarian or speculative nature as, while they may afford to the general reader, not, indeed, a minute analysis, but perhaps a sufficient notion of the scholastic inquiries which have engaged the attention of some of the subtlest minds of Germany and England, may also prepare him the better to comprehend the peculiar character and circumstances of the people to whose history he is introduced: and it may be well to warn the more impatient that it is not till the second book (vol. i., p. 181) that disquisition is abandoned for narrative. There yet remain various points on which special comment would be incompatible with connected and popular history, but on which I propose to enlarge in a series of supplementary notes, to be appended to the concluding volume. These notes will also comprise criticisms and specimens of Greek writers not so intimately connected with the progress of Athenian literature as to demand lengthened and elaborate notice in the body of the work. Thus, when it is completed, it is my hope that this book will combine, with a full and complete history of Athens, political and moral, a more ample and comprehensive view of the treasures of the Greek

literature than has yet been afforded to the English public. I have ventured on these remarks because I thought it due to the reader, no less than to myself, to explain the plan and outline of a design at present only partially developed.

London, March, 1837.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

Situation and Soil of Attica.—The Pelasgians its earliest Inhabitants.—Their Race and Language akin to the Grecian.—Their varying Civilization and Architectural Remains.—Cecrops.—Were the earliest Civilizers of Greece foreigners or Greeks?—The Foundation of Athens.—The Improvements attributed to Cecrops.—The Religion of the Greeks cannot be reduced to a simple System.—Its Influence upon their Character and Morals, Arts and Poetry.—The Origin of Slavery and Aristocracy.

I. To vindicate the memory of the Athenian people, without disguising the errors of Athenian institutions;—and, in narrating alike the triumphs and the reverses—the grandeur and the decay—of the most eminent of ancient states, to record the causes of her imperishable influence on mankind, not alone in political change or the fortunes of fluctuating war, but in the arts, the letters, and the social habits, which are equal elements in the history of a people;—this is the object that I set before me;—not unreconciled to the toil of years, if, serving to divest of some party errors, and to diffuse through a wider circle such knowledge as is yet bequeathed to us of a time and land, fertile in august examples and in solemn warnings—consecrated by undying names and memorable deeds.

II. In that part of earth termed by the Greeks Hellas, and by the Romans Graecia [2](#), a small tract of land known by the name of Attica, extends into the Aegaeon Sea—the southeast peninsula of Greece. In its greatest length it is about sixty, in its greatest breadth about twenty-four, geographical miles. In shape it is a rude triangle,—on two sides flows the sea—on the third, the mountain range of Parnes and Cithaeron divides the Attic from the Boeotian territory. It is intersected by frequent but not lofty hills, and, compared with the rest of Greece, its soil, though propitious to the growth of the olive, is not fertile or abundant. In spite of painful and elaborate culture, the traces of which are yet visible, it never produced a sufficiency of corn to supply its population; and this, the comparative sterility of the land, may be ranked among the causes which conduced to the greatness of the people. The principal mountains of Attica are, the Cape of Sunium, Hymettus, renowned for its honey, and Pentelicus for its marble; the principal streams which water the valleys are the capricious and uncertain rivulets of Cephissus and Ilissus [3](#),—streams breaking into lesser brooks, deliciously pure and clear. The air is serene—the climate healthful—the seasons temperate. Along the hills yet breathe the wild thyme, and the odorous plants which, everywhere prodigal in Greece, are more especially fragrant in that lucid sky;—and still the atmosphere colours with peculiar and various taints the marble of the existent temples and the face of the mountain landscapes.

III. I reject at once all attempt to penetrate an unfathomable obscurity for an idle object. I do not pause to inquire whether, after the destruction of Babel, Javan was the first settler in Attica, nor is it reserved for my labours to decide the solemn controversy whether Ogyges was the contemporary of Jacob or of Moses. Neither shall I suffer myself to be seduced into any lengthened consideration of those disputes, so curious and so inconclusive, relative to the origin of the Pelasgi (according to Herodotus the earliest inhabitants of Attica), which have vainly agitated the learned. It may amuse the antiquary to weigh gravely the several doubts as to the derivation of their name from Pelasgus or from Peleg—to connect the scattered fragments of tradition—and to interpret either into history or mythology the language of fabulous genealogies. But our subtlest hypotheses can erect only a fabric of doubt, which, while it is tempting to assault, it is useless to defend. All that it seems to me necessary to say of the Pelasgi is as follows:—They are the earliest race which appear to have exercised a dominant power in Greece. Their kings can be traced by tradition to a time long prior to the recorded genealogy of any other tribe, and Inachus, the father of the Pelasgian Phoroneus, is but another name for the

remotest era to which Grecian chronology can ascend [4](#). Whether the Pelasgi were anciently a foreign or a Grecian tribe, has been a subject of constant and celebrated discussion. Herodotus, speaking of some settlements held to be Pelasgic, and existing in his time, terms their language “barbarous;” but Mueller, nor with argument insufficient, considers that the expression of the historian would apply only to a peculiar dialect; and the hypothesis is sustained by another passage in Herodotus, in which he applies to certain Ionian dialects the same term as that with which he stigmatizes the language of the Pelasgic settlements. In corroboration of Mueller’s opinion we may also observe, that the “barbarous-tongued” is an epithet applied by Homer to the Carians, and is rightly construed by the ancient critics as denoting a dialect mingled and unpolished, certainly not foreign. Nor when the Agamemnon of Sophocles upbraids Teucer with “his barbarous tongue,” [6](#) would any scholar suppose that Teucer is upbraided with not speaking Greek; he is upbraided with speaking Greek inelegantly and rudely. It is clear that they who continued with the least adulteration a language in its earliest form, would seem to utter a strange and unfamiliar jargon to ears accustomed to its more modern construction. And, no doubt, could we meet with a tribe retaining the English of the thirteenth century, the language of our ancestors would be to most of us unintelligible, and seem to many of us foreign. But, however the phrase of Herodotus be interpreted, it would still be exceedingly doubtful whether the settlements he refers to were really and originally Pelasgic, and still more doubtful whether, if Pelasgia they had continued unalloyed and uncorrupted their ancestral language. I do not, therefore, attach any importance to the expression of Herodotus. I incline, on the contrary, to believe, with the more eminent of English scholars, that the language of the Pelasgi contained at least the elements of that which we acknowledge as the Greek;—and from many arguments I select the following:

1st. Because, in the states which we know to have been peopled by the Pelasgi (as Arcadia and Attica), and whence the population were not expelled by new tribes, the language appears no less Greek than that of those states from which the Pelasgi were the earliest driven. Had they spoken a totally different tongue from later settlers, I conceive that some unequivocal vestiges of the difference would have been visible even to the historical times.

2dly. Because the Hellenes are described as few at first—their progress is slow—they subdue, but they do not extirpate; in such conquests—the conquests of the few settled among the many—the language of the many continues to the last; that of the few would influence, enrich, or corrupt, but never destroy it.

3dly. Because, whatever of the Grecian language pervades the Latin [7](#), we can only ascribe to the Pelasgic colonizers of Italy. In this, all ancient writers, Greek and Latin, are agreed. The few words transmitted to us as Pelasgic betray the Grecian features, and the Lamina Borgiana (now in the Borgian collection of Naples, and discovered in 1783) has an inscription relative to the Siculi or Sicani, a people expelled from their Italian settlements before any received date of the Trojan war, of which the character is Pelasgic—the language Greek.

IV. Of the moral state of the Pelasgi our accounts are imperfect and contradictory. They were not a petty horde, but a vast race, doubtless divided, like every migratory people, into numerous tribes, differing in rank, in civilization [8](#), and in many peculiarities of character. The Pelasgi in one country might appear as herdsmen or as savages; in another, in the same age, they might appear collected into cities and cultivating the arts. The history of the East informs us with what astonishing rapidity a wandering tribe, once settled, grew into fame and power; the camp of to-day—the city of to-morrow—and the “dwellers in the wilderness setting up the towers and the palaces thereof.” [9](#) Thus, while in Greece this mysterious people are often represented as the aboriginal race, receiving from Phoenician and Egyptian settlers the primitive blessings of social life, in Italy we behold them the improvers in agriculture [10](#) and first teachers of letters. [11](#)

Even so early as the traditional appearance of Cecrops among the savages of Attica, the Pelasgians in Arcadia had probably advanced from the pastoral to the civil life; and this, indeed, is the date assigned by Pausanias to the foundation of that ancestral Lycosura, in whose rude remains

(by the living fountain and the waving oaks of the modern Diaphorte) the antiquary yet traces the fortifications of “the first city which the sun beheld.” ¹² It is in their buildings that the Pelasgi have left the most indisputable record of their name. Their handwriting is yet upon their walls! A restless and various people—overrunning the whole of Greece, found northward in Dacia, Illyria, and the country of the Getae, colonizing the coasts of Ionia, and long the master-race of the fairest lands of Italy,—they have passed away amid the revolutions of the elder earth, their ancestry and their descendants alike unknown;—yet not indeed the last, if my conclusions are rightly drawn: if the primitive population of Greece— themselves Greek—founding the language, and kindred with the blood, of the later and more illustrious Hellenes—they still made the great bulk of the people in the various states, and through their most dazzling age: Enslaved in Laconia—but free in Athens—it was their posterity that fought the Mede at Marathon and Plataea,—whom Miltiades led,—for whom Solon legislated,—for whom Plato thought,— whom Demosthenes harangued. Not less in Italy than in Greece the parents of an imperishable tongue, and, in part, the progenitors of a glorious race, we may still find the dim track of their existence wherever the classic civilization flourished,—the classic genius breathed. If in the Latin, if in the Grecian tongue, are yet the indelible traces of the language of the Pelasgi, the literature of the ancient, almost of the modern world, is their true descendant!

V. Despite a vague belief (referred to by Plato) of a remote and perished era of civilization, the most popular tradition asserts the Pelasgic inhabitants of Attica to have been sunk into the deepest ignorance of the elements of social life, when, either from Sais, an Egyptian city, as is commonly supposed, or from Sais a province in Upper Egypt, an Egyptian characterized to posterity by the name of Cecrops is said to have passed into Attica with a band of adventurous emigrants.

The tradition of this Egyptian immigration into Attica was long implicitly received. Recently the bold skepticism of German scholars —always erudite—if sometimes rash—has sufficed to convince us of the danger we incur in drawing historical conclusions from times to which no historical researches can ascend. The proofs upon which rest the reputed arrival of Egyptian colonizers, under Cecrops, in Attica, have been shown to be slender—the authorities for the assertion to be comparatively modern—the arguments against the probability of such an immigration in such an age, to be at least plausible and important. Not satisfied, however, with reducing to the uncertainty of conjecture what incautiously had been acknowledged as fact, the assailants of the Egyptian origin of Cecrops presume too much upon their victory, when they demand us to accept as a counter fact, what can be, after all, but a counter conjecture. To me, impartially weighing the arguments and assertions on either side, the popular tradition of Cecrops and his colony appears one that can neither be tacitly accepted as history, nor contemptuously dismissed as invention. It would be, however, a frivolous dispute, whether Cecrops were Egyptian or Attican, since no erudition can ascertain that Cecrops ever existed, were it not connected with a controversy of some philosophical importance, viz., whether the early civilizers of Greece were foreigners or Greeks, and whether the Egyptians more especially assisted to instruct the ancestors of a race that have become the teachers and models of the world, in the elements of religion, of polity, and the arts.

Without entering into vain and futile reasonings, derived from the scattered passages of some early writers, from the ambiguous silence of others—and, above all, from the dreams of etymological analogy or mythological fable, I believe the earliest civilizers of Greece to have been foreign settlers; deducing my belief from the observations of common sense rather than from obscure and unsatisfactory research. I believe it,

First—Because, what is more probable than that at very early periods the more advanced nations of the East obtained communication with the Grecian continent and isles? What more probable than that the maritime and roving Phoenicians entered the seas of Greece, and were tempted by the plains, which promised abundance, and the mountains, which afforded a fastness? Possessed of a superior civilization to the hordes they found, they would meet rather with veneration than

resistance, and thus a settlement would be obtained by an inconsiderable number, more in right of intelligence than of conquest.

But, though this may be conceded with respect to the Phoenicians, it is asserted that the Egyptians at least were not a maritime or colonizing people: and we are gravely assured, that in those distant times no Egyptian vessel had entered the Grecian seas. But of the remotest ages of Egyptian civilization we know but little. On their earliest monuments (now their books!) we find depicted naval as well as military battles, in which the vessels are evidently those employed at sea. According to their own traditions, they colonized in a remote age. They themselves laid claim to Danaus: and the mythus of the expedition of Osiris is not improbably construed into a figurative representation of the spread of Egyptian civilization by the means of colonies. Besides, Egypt was subjected to more than one revolution, by which a large portion of her population was expelled the land, and scattered over the neighbouring regions [13](#). And even granting that Egyptians fitted out no maritime expedition—they could easily have transplanted themselves in Phoenician vessels, or Grecian rafts—from Asia into Greece. Nor can we forget that Egypt [14](#) for a time was the habitation, and Thebes the dominion, of the Phoenicians, and that hence, perhaps, the origin of the dispute whether certain of the first foreign civilizers of Greece were Phoenicians or Egyptians: The settlers might come from Egypt, and be by extraction Phoenicians: or Egyptian emigrators might well have accompanied the Phoenician. [15](#)

2dly. By the evidence of all history, savage tribes appear to owe their first enlightenment to foreigners: to be civilized, they conquer or are conquered—visit or are visited. For a fact which contains so striking a mystery, I do not attempt to account. I find in the history of every other part of the world, that it is by the colonizer or the conqueror that a tribe neither colonizing nor conquering is redeemed from a savage state, and I do not reject so probable an hypothesis for Greece.

3dly. I look to the various arguments of a local or special nature, by which these general probabilities may be supported, and I find them unusually strong: I cast my eyes on the map of Greece, and I see that it is almost invariably on the eastern side that these eastern colonies are said to have been founded: I turn to chronology, and I find the revolutions in the East coincide in point of accredited date with the traditional immigrations into Greece: I look to the history of the Greeks, and I find the Greeks themselves (a people above all others vain of aboriginal descent, and contemptuous of foreign races) agreed in according a general belief to the accounts of their obligations to foreign settlers; and therefore (without additional but doubtful arguments from any imaginary traces of Eastern, Egyptian, Phoenician rites and fables in the religion or the legends of Greece in her remoter age) I see sufficient ground for inclining to the less modern, but mere popular belief, which ascribes a foreign extraction to the early civilizers of Greece: nor am I convinced by the reasonings of those who exclude the Egyptians from the list of these primitive benefactors.

It being conceded that no hypothesis is more probable than that the earliest civilizers of Greece were foreign, and might be Egyptian, I do not recognise sufficient authority for rejecting the Attic traditions claiming Egyptian civilizers for the Attic soil, in arguments, whether grounded upon the fact that such traditions, unreferred to by the more ancient, were collected by the more modern, of Grecian writers—or upon plausible surmises as to the habits of the Egyptians in that early age. Whether Cecrops were the first—whether he were even one—of these civilizers, is a dispute unworthy of philosophical inquirers [16](#). But as to the time of Cecrops are referred, both by those who contend for his Egyptian, and those who assert his Attic origin, certain advances from barbarism, and certain innovations in custom, which would have been natural to a foreigner, and almost miraculous in a native, I doubt whether it would not be our wiser and more cautious policy to leave undisturbed a long accredited conjecture, rather than to subscribe to arguments which, however startling and ingenious, not only substitute no unanswerable hypothesis, but conduce to no important result. [17](#)

VI. If Cecrops were really the leader of an Egyptian colony, it is more than probable that he obtained the possession of Attica by other means than those of force. To savage and barbarous tribes, the first appearance of men, whose mechanical inventions, whose superior knowledge of the arts of

life—nay, whose exterior advantages of garb and mien [18](#) indicate intellectual eminence, till then neither known nor imagined, presents a something preternatural and divine. The imagination of the wild inhabitants is seduced, their superstitions aroused, and they yield to a teacher—not succumb to an invader. It was probably thus, then, that Cecrops with his colonists would have occupied the Attic plain—conciliated rather than subdued the inhabitants, and united in himself the twofold authority exercised by primeval chiefs—the dignity of the legislator, and the sanctity of the priest. It is evident that none of the foreign settlers brought with them a numerous band. The traditions speak of them with gratitude as civiliziers, not with hatred as conquerors. And they did not leave any traces in the establishment of their language:—a proof of the paucity of their numbers, and the gentle nature of their influence—the Phoenician Cadmus, the Egyptian Cecrops, the Phrygian Pelops, introduced no separate and alien tongue. Assisting to civilize the Greeks, they then became Greeks; their posterity merged and lost amid the native population.

VII. Perhaps, in all countries, the first step to social improvement is in the institution of marriage, and the second is the formation of cities. As Menes in Egypt, as Fohi in China, so Cecrops at Athens is said first to have reduced into sacred limits the irregular intercourse of the sexes [19](#), and reclaimed his barbarous subjects from a wandering and unprovidential life, subsisting on the spontaneous produce of no abundant soil. High above the plain, and fronting the sea, which, about three miles distant on that side, sweeps into a bay peculiarly adapted for the maritime enterprises of an earlier age, we still behold a cragged and nearly perpendicular rock. In length its superficies is about eight hundred, in breadth about four hundred, feet [20](#). Below, on either side, flow the immortal streams of the Ilissus and Cephissus. From its summit you may survey, here, the mountains of Hymettus, Pentelicus, and, far away, “the silver-bearing Laurium;” below, the wide plain of Attica, broken by rocky hills—there, the islands of Salamis and Aegina, with the opposite shores of Argolis, rising above the waters of the Saronic Bay. On this rock the supposed Egyptian is said to have built a fortress, and founded a city [21](#); the fortress was in later times styled the Acropolis, and the place itself, when the buildings of Athens spread far and wide beneath its base, was still designated polis, or the CITY. By degrees we are told that he extended, from this impregnable castle and its adjacent plain, the limit of his realm, until it included the whole of Attica, and perhaps Boeotia [22](#). It is also related that he established eleven other towns or hamlets, and divided his people into twelve tribes, to each of which one of the towns was apportioned—a fortress against foreign invasion, and a court of justice in civil disputes.

If we may trust to the glimmering light which, resting for a moment, uncertain and confused, upon the reign of Cecrops, is swallowed up in all the darkness of fable during those of his reputed successors,—it is to this apocryphal personage that we must refer the elements both of agriculture and law. He is said to have instructed the Athenians to till the land, and to watch the produce of the seasons; to have imported from Egypt the olive-tree, for which the Attic soil was afterward so celebrated, and even to have navigated to Sicily and to Africa for supplies of corn. That such advances from a primitive and savage state were not made in a single generation, is sufficiently clear. With more probability, Cecrops is reputed to have imposed upon the ignorance of his subjects and the license of his followers the curb of impartial law, and to have founded a tribunal of justice (doubtless the sole one for all disputes), in which after times imagined to trace the origin of the solemn Areopagus.

VIII. Passing from these doubtful speculations on the detailed improvements effected by Cecrops in the social life of the Attic people, I shall enter now into some examination of two subjects far more important. The first is the religion of the Athenians in common with the rest of Greece; and the second the origin of the institution of slavery.

The origin of religion in all countries is an inquiry of the deepest interest and of the vaguest result. For, the desire of the pious to trace throughout all creeds the principles of the one they themselves profess—the vanity of the learned to display a various and recondite erudition—the passion of the ingenious to harmonize conflicting traditions—and the ambition of every speculator to

say something new upon an ancient but inexhaustible subject, so far from enlightening, only perplex our conjectures. Scarcely is the theory of to-day established, than the theory of to-morrow is invented to oppose it. With one the religion of the Greeks is but a type of the mysteries of the Jews, the event of the deluge, and the preservation of the ark; with another it is as entirely an incorporation of the metaphysical solemnities of the Egyptian;—now it is the crafty device of priests, now the wise invention of sages. It is not too much to say, that after the profoundest labours and the most plausible conjectures of modern times, we remain yet more uncertain and confused than we were before. It is the dark boast of every pagan mythology, as one of the eldest of the pagan deities, that “none among mortals hath lifted up its veil!”

After, then, some brief and preliminary remarks, tending to such hypotheses as appear to me most probable and simple, I shall hasten from unprofitable researches into the Unknown, to useful deductions from what is given to our survey—in a word, from the origin of the Grecian religion to its influence and its effects; the first is the province of the antiquary and the speculator; the last of the historian and the practical philosopher.

IX. When Herodotus informs us that Egypt imparted to Greece the names of almost all her deities, and that his researches convinced him that they were of barbarous origin, he exempts from the list of the Egyptian deities, Neptune, the Dioscuri, Juno, Vesta, Themis, the Graces, and the Nereids [23](#). From Africa, according to Herodotus, came Neptune, from the Pelasgi the rest of the deities disclaimed by Egypt. According to the same authority, the Pelasgi learned not their deities, but the names of their deities (and those at a later period), from the Egyptians [24](#). But the Pelasgi were the first known inhabitants of Greece—the first known inhabitants of Greece had therefore their especial deities, before any communication with Egypt. For the rest we must accept the account of the simple and credulous Herodotus with considerable caution and reserve. Nothing is more natural—perhaps more certain—than that every tribe [25](#), even of utter savages, will invent some deities of their own; and as these deities will as naturally be taken from external objects, common to all mankind, such as the sun or the moon, the waters or the earth, and honoured with attributes formed from passions and impressions no less universal;—so the deities of every tribe will have something kindred to each other, though the tribes themselves may never have come into contact or communication.

The mythology of the early Greeks may perhaps be derived from the following principal sources:—First, the worship of natural objects;—and of divinities so formed, the most unequivocally national will obviously be those most associated with their mode of life and the influences of their climate. When the savage first intrusts the seed to the bosom of the earth—when, through a strange and unaccountable process, he beholds what he buried in one season spring forth the harvest of the next—the EARTH itself, the mysterious garner, the benign, but sometimes the capricious reproducer of the treasures committed to its charge—becomes the object of the wonder, the hope, and the fear, which are the natural origin of adoration and prayer. Again, when he discovers the influence of the heaven upon the growth of his labour—when, taught by experience, he acknowledges its power to blast or to mellow—then, by the same process of ideas, the HEAVEN also assumes the character of divinity, and becomes a new agent, whose wrath is to be propitiated, whose favour is to be won. What common sense thus suggests to us, our researches confirm, and we find accordingly that the Earth and the Heaven are the earliest deities of the agricultural Pelasgi. As the Nile to the fields of the Egyptian — earth and heaven to the culture of the Greek. The effects of the SUN upon human labour and human enjoyment are so sensible to the simplest understanding, that we cannot wonder to find that glorious luminary among the most popular deities of ancient nations. Why search through the East to account for its worship in Greece? More easy to suppose that the inhabitants of a land, whom the sun so especially favoured— saw and blessed it, for it was good, than, amid innumerable contradictions and extravagant assumptions, to decide upon that remoter shore, whence was transplanted a deity, whose effects were so benignant, whose worship was so natural, to the Greeks. And in the more plain belief we are also borne out by the more sound inductions of learning. For it is noticeable that neither

the moon nor the stars—favourite divinities with those who enjoyed the serene nights, or inhabited the broad plains of the East—were (though probably admitted among the Pelasgic deities) honoured with that intense and reverent worship which attended them in Asia and in Egypt. To the Pelasgi, not yet arrived at the intellectual stage of philosophical contemplation, the most sensible objects of influence would be the most earnestly adored. What the stars were to the East, their own beautiful Aurora, awaking them to the delight of their genial and temperate climate, was to the early Greeks.

Of deities, thus created from external objects, some will rise out (if I may use the expression) of natural accident and local circumstance. An earthquake will connect a deity with the earth—an inundation with the river or the sea. The Grecian soil bears the marks of maritime revolution; many of the tribes were settled along the coast, and perhaps had already adventured their rafts upon the main. A deity of the sea (without any necessary revelation from Africa) is, therefore, among the earliest of the Grecian gods. The attributes of each deity will be formed from the pursuits and occupations of the worshippers—sanguinary with the warlike—gentle with the peaceful. The pastoral Pelasgi of Arcadia honoured the pastoral Pan for ages before he was received by their Pelasgic brotherhood of Attica. And the agricultural Demeter or Ceres will be recognised among many tribes of the agricultural Pelasgi, which no Egyptian is reputed, even by tradition [26](#), to have visited.

The origin of prayer is in the sense of dependance, and in the instinct of self-preservation or self-interest. The first objects of prayer to the infant man will be those on which by his localities he believes himself to be most dependant for whatever blessing his mode of life inclines him the most to covet, or from which may come whatever peril his instinct will teach him the most to deprecate and fear. It is this obvious truth which destroys all the erudite systems that would refer the different creeds of the heathen to some single origin. Till the earth be the same in each region—till the same circumstances surround every tribe—different impressions, in nations yet unconverted and uncivilized, produce different deities. Nature suggests a God, and man invests him with attributes. Nature and man, the same as a whole, vary in details; the one does not everywhere suggest the same notions—the other cannot everywhere imagine the same attributes. As with other tribes, so with the Pelasgi or primitive Greeks, their early gods were the creatures of their own early impressions.

As one source of religion was in external objects, so another is to be found in internal sensations and emotions. The passions are so powerful in their effects upon individuals and nations, that we can be little surprised to find those effects attributed to the instigation and influence of a supernatural being. Love is individualized and personified in nearly all mythologies; and LOVE therefore ranks among the earliest of the Grecian gods. Fear or terror, whose influence is often so strange, sudden, and unaccountable—seizing even the bravest—spreading through numbers with all the speed of an electric sympathy—and deciding in a moment the destiny of an army or the ruin of a tribe—is another of those passions, easily supposed the afflatus of some preternatural power, and easily, therefore, susceptible of personification. And the pride of men, more especially if habitually courageous and warlike, will gladly yield to the credulities which shelter a degrading and unwonted infirmity beneath the agency of a superior being. TERROR, therefore, received a shape and found an altar probably as early at least as the heroic age. According to Plutarch, Theseus sacrificed to Terror previous to his battle with the Amazons;—an idle tale, it is true, but proving, perhaps, the antiquity of a tradition. As society advanced from barbarism arose more intellectual creations—as cities were built, and as in the constant flux and reflux of martial tribes cities were overthrown, the elements of the social state grew into personification, to which influence was attributed and reverence paid. Thus were fixed into divinity and shape, ORDER, PEACE, JUSTICE, and the stern and gloomy ORCOS [27](#), witness of the oath, avenger of the perjury.

This, the second source of religion, though more subtle and refined in its creations, had still its origin in the same human causes as the first, viz., anticipation of good and apprehension of evil. Of deities so created, many, however, were the inventions of poets— (poetic metaphor is a fruitful mother of mythological fable)—many also were the graceful refinements of a subsequent age. But

some (and nearly all those I have enumerated) may be traced to the earliest period to which such researches can ascend. It is obvious that the eldest would be connected with the passions—the more modern with the intellect.

It seems to me apparent that almost simultaneously with deities of these two classes would arise the greater and more influential class of personal divinities which gradually expanded into the heroic dynasty of Olympus. The associations which one tribe, or one generation, united with the heaven, the earth, or the sun, another might obviously connect, or confuse, with a spirit or genius inhabiting or influencing the element or physical object which excited their anxiety or awe: And, this creation effected—so what one tribe or generation might ascribe to the single personification of a passion, a faculty, or a moral and social principle, another would just as naturally refer to a personal and more complex deity:—that which in one instance would form the very nature of a superior being, in the other would form only an attribute—swell the power and amplify the character of a Jupiter, a Mars, a Venus, or a Pan. It is in the nature of man, that personal divinities once created and adored, should present more vivid and forcible images to his fancy than abstract personifications of physical objects and moral impressions. Thus, deities of this class would gradually rise into pre-eminence and popularity above those more vague and incorporeal—and (though I guard myself from absolutely solving in this manner the enigma of ancient theogonies) the family of Jupiter could scarcely fail to possess themselves of the shadowy thrones of the ancestral Earth and the primeval Heaven.

A third source of the Grecian, as of all mythologies, was in the worship of men who had actually existed, or been supposed to exist. For in this respect errors might creep into the calendar of heroes, as they did into the calendar of saints (the hero-worship of the moderns), which has canonized many names to which it is impossible to find the owners. This was probably the latest, but perhaps in after-times the most influential and popular addition to the aboriginal faith. The worship of dead men once established, it was natural to a people so habituated to incorporate and familiarize religious impressions—to imagine that even their primary gods, first formed from natural impressions (and, still more, those deities they had borrowed from stranger creeds)—should have walked the earth. And thus among the multitude in the philosophical ages, even the loftiest of the Olympian dwellers were vaguely supposed to have known humanity;—their immortality but the apotheosis of the benefactor or the hero.

X. The Pelasgi, then, had their native or aboriginal deities (differing in number and in attributes with each different tribe), and with them rests the foundation of the Greek mythology. They required no Egyptian wisdom to lead them to believe in superior powers. Nature was their primeval teacher. But as intercourse was opened with the East from the opposite Asia—with the North from the neighbouring Thrace, new deities were transplanted and old deities received additional attributes and distinctions, according as the fancy of the stranger found them assimilate to the divinities he had been accustomed to adore. It seems to me, that in Saturn we may trace the popular Phoenician deity—in the Thracian Mars, the fierce war-god of the North. But we can scarcely be too cautious how far we allow ourselves to be influenced by resemblance, however strong, between a Grecian and an alien deity. Such a resemblance may not only be formed by comparatively modern innovations, but may either be resolved to that general likeness which one polytheism will ever bear towards another, or arise from the adoption of new attributes and strange traditions;—so that the deity itself may be homesprung and indigenous, while bewildering the inquirer with considerable similitude to other gods, from whose believers the native worship merely received an epithet, a ceremony, a symbol, or a fable. And this necessity of caution is peculiarly borne out by the contradictions which each scholar enamoured of a system gives to the labours of the speculator who preceded him. What one research would discover to be Egyptian, another asserts to be Phoenician; a third brings from the North; a fourth from the Hebrews; and a fifth, with yet wilder imagination, from the far and then unpenetrated caves and woods of India. Accept common sense as our guide, and the contradictions are less irreconcilable—the mystery less obscure. In a deity essentially Greek, a Phoenician colonist may discover something

familiar, and claim an ancestral god. He imparts to the native deity some Phoenician features—an Egyptian or an Asiatic succeeds him—discovers a similar likeness—introduces similar innovations. The lively Greek receives—amalgamates—appropriates all: but the aboriginal deity is not the less Greek. Each speculator may be equally right in establishing a partial resemblance, precisely because all speculators are wrong in asserting a perfect identity.

It follows as a corollary from the above reasonings, that the religion of Greece was much less uniform than is popularly imagined; 1st, because each separate state or canton had its own peculiar deity; 2dly, because, in the foreign communication of new gods, each stranger would especially import the deity that at home he had more especially adored. Hence to every state its tutelary god—the founder of its greatness, the guardian of its renown. Even in the petty and limited territory of Attica, each tribe, independent of the public worship, had its peculiar deities, honoured by peculiar rites.

The deity said to be introduced by Cecrops is Neith, or more properly Naith [28](#)—the goddess of Sais, in whom we are told to recognise the Athene, or Minerva of the Greeks. I pass over as palpably absurd any analogy of names by which the letters that compose the word Keith are inverted to the word Athene. The identity of the two goddesses must rest upon far stronger proof. But, in order to obtain this proof, we must know with some precision the nature and attributes of the divinity of Sais—a problem which no learning appears to me satisfactorily to have solved. It would be a strong, and, I think, a convincing argument, that Athene is of foreign origin, could we be certain that her attributes, so eminently intellectual, so thoroughly out of harmony with the barbarism of the early Greeks, were accorded to her at the commencement of her worship. But the remotest traditions (such as her contest with Neptune for the possession of the soil), if we take the more simple interpretation, seem to prove her to have been originally an agricultural deity, the creation of which would have been natural enough to the agricultural Pelasgi;—while her supposed invention of some of the simplest and most elementary arts are sufficiently congenial to the notions of an unpolished and infant era of society. Nor at a long subsequent period is there much resemblance between the formal and elderly goddess of Daedalian sculpture and the glorious and august Glaucopis of Homer—the maiden of celestial beauty as of unrivalled wisdom. I grant that the variety of her attributes renders it more than probable that Athene was greatly indebted, perhaps to the “Divine Intelligence,” personified in the Egyptian Naith—perhaps also, as Herodotus asserts, to the warlike deity of Libya—nor less, it may be, to the Onca of the Phoenicians [29](#), from whom in learning certain of the arts, the Greeks might simultaneously learn the name and worship of the Phoenician deity, presiding over such inventions. Still an aboriginal deity was probably the nucleus, round which gradually gathered various and motley attributes. And certain it is, that as soon as the whole creation rose into distinct life, the stately and virgin goddess towers, aloof and alone, the most national, the most majestic of the Grecian deities—rising above all comparison with those who may have assisted to decorate and robe her, embodying in a single form the very genius, multiform, yet individual as it was, of the Grecian people—and becoming among all the deities of the heathen heaven what the Athens she protected became upon the earth.

XI. It may be said of the Greeks, that there never was a people who so completely nationalized all that they borrowed from a foreign source. And whatever, whether in a remoter or more recent age, it might have appropriated from the creed of Isis and Osiris, one cause alone would have sufficed to efface from the Grecian the peculiar character of the Egyptian mythology.

The religion of Egypt, as a science, was symbolical—it denoted elementary principles of philosophy; its gods were enigmas. It has been asserted (on very insufficient data) that in the earliest ages of the world, one god, of whom the sun was either the emblem or the actual object of worship, was adored universally throughout the East, and that polytheism was created by personifying the properties and attributes of the single deity: “there being one God,” says Aristotle, finely, “called by many names, from the various effects which his various power produces.” [30](#) But I am far from believing that a symbolical religion is ever the earliest author of polytheism; for a symbolical religion belongs to a later period of civilization, when some men are set apart in indolence to cultivate their

imagination, in order to beguile or to instruct the reason of the rest. Priests are the first philosophers—a symbolical religion the first philosophy. But faith precedes philosophy. I doubt not, therefore, that polytheism existed in the East before that age when the priests of Chaldea and of Egypt invested it with a sublimer character by summoning to the aid of invention a wild and speculative wisdom—by representing under corporeal tokens the revolutions of the earth, the seasons, and the stars, and creating new (or more probably adapting old and sensual) superstitions, as the grosser and more external types of a philosophical creed [31](#). But a symbolical worship—the creation of a separate and established order of priests—never is, and never can be, the religion professed, loved, and guarded by a people. The multitude demand something positive and real for their belief—they cannot worship a delusion—their reverence would be benumbed on the instant if they could be made to comprehend that the god to whom they sacrificed was no actual power able to effect evil and good, but the type of a particular season of the year, or an unwholesome principle in the air. Hence, in the Egyptian religion, there was one creed for the vulgar and another for the priests. Again, to invent and to perpetuate a symbolical religion (which is, in fact, an hereditary school of metaphysics) requires men set apart for the purpose, whose leisure tempts them to invention, whose interest prompts them to imposture. A symbolical religion is a proof of a certain refinement in civilization—the refinement of sages in the midst of a subservient people; and it absorbs to itself those meditative and imaginative minds which, did it not exist, would be devoted to philosophy. Now, even allowing full belief to the legends which bring the Egyptian colonists into Greece, it is probable that few among them were acquainted with the secrets of the symbolical mythology they introduced. Nor, if they were so, is it likely that they would have communicated to a strange and a barbarous population the profound and latent mysteries shrouded from the great majority of Egyptians themselves. Thus, whatever the Egyptian colonizers might have imported of a typical religion, the abstruser meaning would become, either at once or gradually, lost. Nor can we—until the recent age of sophists and refiners—clearly ascertain any period in which did not exist the indelible distinction between the Grecian and Egyptian mythology: viz.—that the first was actual, real, corporeal, household; the second vague, shadowy, and symbolical. This might not have been the case had there been established in the Grecian, as in the Egyptian cities, distinct and separate colleges of priests, having in their own hands the sole care of the religion, and forming a privileged and exclusive body of the state. But among the Greeks (and this should be constantly borne in mind) there never was, at any known historical period, a distinct caste of priests [32](#). We may perceive, indeed, that the early colonizers commenced with approaches to that principle, but it was not prosecuted farther. There were sacred families in Athens from which certain priesthoods were to be filled—but even these personages were not otherwise distinguished; they performed all the usual offices of a citizen, and were not united together by any exclusiveness of privilege or spirit of party. Among the Egyptian adventurers there were probably none fitted by previous education for the sacred office; and the chief who had obtained the dominion might entertain no irresistible affection for a caste which in his own land he had seen dictating to the monarch and interfering with the government. [33](#)

Thus, among the early Greeks, we find the chiefs themselves were contented to offer the sacrifice and utter the prayer; and though there were indeed appointed and special priests, they held no imperious or commanding authority. The Areopagus at Athens had the care of religion, but the Areopagites were not priests. This absence of a priestly caste had considerable effect upon the flexible and familiar nature of the Grecian creed, because there were none professionally interested in guarding the purity of the religion, in preserving to what it had borrowed, symbolical allusions, and in forbidding the admixture of new gods and heterogeneous creeds. The more popular a religion, the more it seeks corporeal representations, and avoids the dim and frigid shadows of a metaphysical belief. [34](#)

The romantic fables connected with the Grecian mythology were, some home-sprung, some relating to native heroes, and incorporating native legends, but they were also, in great measure,

literal interpretations of symbolical types and of metaphorical expressions, or erroneous perversions of words in other tongues. The craving desire to account for natural phenomena, common to mankind—the wish to appropriate to native heroes the wild tales of mariners and strangers natural to a vain and a curious people—the additions which every legend would receive in its progress from tribe to tribe—and the constant embellishments the most homely inventions would obtain from the competition of rival poets, rapidly served to swell and enrich these primary treasures of Grecian lore—to deduce a history from an allegory—to establish a creed in a romance. Thus the early mythology of Greece is to be properly considered in its simple and outward interpretations. The Greeks, as yet in their social infancy, regarded the legends of their faith as a child reads a fairy tale, credulous of all that is supernatural in the agency—unconscious of all that may be philosophical in the moral.

It is true, indeed, that dim associations of a religion, sabaeen and elementary, such as that of the Pelasgi (but not therefore foreign and philosophical), with a religion physical and popular, are, here and there, to be faintly traced among the eldest of the Grecian authors. We may see that in Jupiter they represented the ether, and in Apollo, and sometimes even in Hercules, the sun. But these authors, while, perhaps unconsciously, they hinted at the symbolical, fixed, by the vitality and nature of their descriptions, the actual images of the gods and, reversing the order of things, Homer created Jupiter! [35](#)

But most of the subtle and typical interpretations of the Grecian mythology known to us at present were derived from the philosophy of a later age. The explanations of religious fables—such, for instance, as the chaining of Saturn by Jupiter, and the rape of Proserpine by Pluto, in which Saturn is made to signify the revolution of the seasons, chained to the courses of the stars, to prevent too immoderate a speed, and the rape of Proserpine is refined into an allegory that denotes the seeds of corn that the sovereign principle of the earth receives and sepulchres [36](#);—the moral or physical explanation of legends like these was, I say, the work of the few, reduced to system either from foreign communication or acute invention. For a symbolical religion, created by the priests of one age, is reinstated or remodelled after its corruption by the philosophers of another.

XII. We may here pause a moment to inquire whence the Greeks derived the most lovely and fascinating of their mythological creations—those lesser and more terrestrial beings—the spirits of the mountain, the waters, and the grove.

Throughout the East, from the remotest era, we find that mountains were nature's temples. The sanctity of high places is constantly recorded in the scriptural writings. The Chaldaean, the Egyptian, and the Persian, equally believed that on the summit of mountains they approached themselves nearer to the oracles of heaven. But the fountain, the cavern, and the grove, were no less holy than the mountain-top in the eyes of the first religionists of the East. Streams and fountains were dedicated to the Sun, and their exhalations were supposed to inspire with prophecy, and to breathe of the god. The gloom of caverns, naturally the brooding-place of awe, was deemed a fitting scene for diviner revelations—it inspired unearthly contemplation and mystic revery. Zoroaster is supposed by Porphyry (well versed in all Pagan lore, though frequently misunderstanding its proper character) to have first inculcated the worship of caverns [37](#); and there the early priests held a temple, and primeval philosophy its retreat [38](#). Groves, especially those in high places, or in the neighbourhood of exhaling streams, were also appropriate to worship, and conducive to the dreams of an excited and credulous imagination; and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, burnt incense, not only on the hills, but “under every green tree.” [39](#)

These places, then—the mountain, the forest, the stream, and the cavern, were equally objects of sanctity and awe among the ancient nations.

But we need not necessarily suppose that a superstition so universal was borrowed, and not conceived, by the early Greeks. The same causes which had made them worship the earth and the sea, extended their faith to the rivers and the mountains, which in a spirit of natural and simple poetry they called “the children” of those elementary deities. The very soil of Greece, broken up and diversified

by so many inequalities, stamped with volcanic features, profuse in streams and mephitic fountains, contributed to render the feeling of local divinity prevalent and intense. Each petty canton had its own Nile, whose influence upon fertility and culture was sufficient to become worthy to propitiate, and therefore to personify. Had Greece been united under one monarchy, and characterized by one common monotony of soil, a single river, a single mountain, alone might have been deemed divine. It was the number of its tribes—it was the variety of its natural features, which produced the affluence and prodigality of its mythological creations. Nor can we omit from the causes of the teeming, vivid, and universal superstition of Greece, the accidents of earthquake and inundation, to which the land appears early and often to have been exposed. To the activity and caprice of nature—to the frequent operation of causes, unrecognised, unforeseen, unguessed, the Greeks owed much of their disposition to recur to mysterious and superior agencies—and that wonderful poetry of faith which delighted to associate the visible with the unseen. The peculiar character not only of a people, but of its earlier poets—not only of its soil, but of its air and heaven, colours the superstition it creates: and most of the terrestrial demons which the gloomier North clothed with terror and endowed with malice, took from the benignant genius and the enchanting climes of Greece the gentlest offices and the fairest forms;—yet even in Greece itself not universal in their character, but rather the faithful reflections of the character of each class of worshippers: thus the graces [40](#), whose “eyes” in the minstrelsey of Hesiod “distilled care-beguiling love,” in Lacedaemon were the nymphs of discipline and war!

In quitting this subject, be one remark permitted in digression: the local causes which contributed to superstition might conduct in after times to science. If the Nature that was so constantly in strange and fitful action, drove the Greeks in their social infancy to seek agents for the action and vents for their awe, so, as they advanced to maturer intellect, it was in Nature herself that they sought the causes of effects that appeared at first preternatural. And, in either stage, their curiosity and interest aroused by the phenomena around them—the credulous inventions of ignorance gave way to the eager explanations of philosophy. Often, in the superstition of one age, lies the germe that ripens into the inquiry of the next.

XIII. Pass we now to some examination of the general articles of faith among the Greeks; their sacrifices and rites of worship.

In all the more celebrated nations of the ancient world, we find established those twin elements of belief by which religion harmonizes and directs the social relations of life, viz., a faith in a future state, and in the providence of superior powers, who, surveying as judges the affairs of earth, punish the wicked and reward the good [41](#). It has been plausibly conjectured that the fables of Elysium, the slow Cocytus, and the gloomy Hades, were either invented or allegorized from the names of Egyptian places. Diodorus assures us that by the vast catacombs of Egypt, the dismal mansions of the dead—were the temple and stream, both called Cocytus, the foul canal of Acheron, and the Elysian plains [42](#); and, according to the same equivocal authority, the body of the dead was wafted across the waters by a pilot, termed Charon in the Egyptian tongue. But, previous to the embarkation, appointed judges on the margin of the Acheron listened to whatever accusations were preferred by the living against the deceased, and if convinced of his misdeeds, deprived him of the rites of sepulture. Hence it was supposed that Orpheus transplanted into Greece the fable of the infernal regions. But there is good reason to look on this tale with distrust, and to believe that the doctrine of a future state was known to the Greeks without any tuition from Egypt;—while it is certain that the main moral of the Egyptian ceremony, viz., the judgment of the dead, was not familiar to the early doctrine of the Greeks. They did not believe that the good were rewarded and the bad punished in that dreary future, which they embodied in their notions of the kingdom of the shades. [43](#)

XIV. Less in the Grecian deities than in the customs in their honour, may we perceive certain traces of oriental superstition. We recognise the usages of the elder creeds in the chosen sites of their temples—the habitual ceremonies of their worship. It was to the east that the supplicator turned his face, and he was sprinkled, as a necessary purification, with the holy water often alluded to by sacred

writers as well as profane—a typical rite entailed from Paganism on the greater proportion of existing Christendom. Nor was any oblation duly prepared until it was mingled with salt—that homely and immemorial offering, ordained not only by the priests of the heathen idols, but also prescribed by Moses to the covenant of the Hebrew God. [44](#)

XV. We now come to those sacred festivals in celebration of religious mysteries, which inspire modern times with so earnest an interest. Perhaps no subject connected with the religion of the ancients has been cultivated with more laborious erudition, attended with more barren result. And with equal truth and wit, the acute and searching Lobeck has compared the schools of Warburton and St. Croix to the Sabines, who possessed the faculty of dreaming what they wished. According to an ancient and still popular account, the dark enigmas of Eleusis were borrowed from Egypt;—the drama of the Anaglyph [45](#). But, in answer to this theory, we must observe, that even if really, at their commencement, the strange and solemn rites which they are asserted to have been—mystical ceremonies grow so naturally out of the connexion between the awful and the unknown—were found so generally among the savages of the ancient world—howsoever dispersed—and still so frequently meet the traveller on shores to which it is indeed a wild speculation to assert that the oriental wisdom ever wandered, that it is more likely that they were the offspring of the native ignorance [46](#), than the sublime importation of a symbolical philosophy utterly ungenial to the tribes to which it was communicated, and the times to which the institution is referred. And though I would assign to the Eleusinian Mysteries a much earlier date than Lobeck is inclined to affix [47](#), I search in vain for a more probable supposition of the causes of their origin than that which he suggests, and which I now place before the reader. We have seen that each Grecian state had its peculiar and favourite deities, propitiated by varying ceremonies. The early Greeks imagined that their gods might be won from them by the more earnest prayers and the more splendid offerings of their neighbours; the Homeric heroes found their claim for divine protection on the number of the offerings they have rendered to the deity they implore. And how far the jealous desire to retain to themselves the favour of tutelary gods was entertained by the Greeks, may be illustrated by the instances specially alluding to the low and whispered voice in which prayers were addressed to the superior powers, lest the enemy should hear the address, and vie with interested emulation for the celestial favour. The Eleusinians, in frequent hostilities with their neighbours, the Athenians, might very reasonably therefore exclude the latter from the ceremonies instituted in honour of their guardian divinities, Demeter and Persephone (i. e., Ceres and Proserpine). And we may here add, that secrecy once established, the rites might at a very early period obtain, and perhaps deserve, an enigmatic and mystic character. But when, after a signal defeat of the Eleusinians, the two states were incorporated, the union was confirmed by a joint participation in the ceremony [48](#) to which a political cause would thus give a more formal and solemn dignity. This account of the origin of the Eleusinian Mysteries is not indeed capable of demonstration, but it seems to me at least the most probable in itself, and the most conformable to the habits of the Greeks, as to those of all early nations.

Certain it is that for a long time the celebration of the Eleusinian ceremonies was confined to these two neighbouring states, until, as various causes contributed to unite the whole of Greece in a common religion and a common name, admission was granted all Greeks of all ranks, male and female,—provided they had committed no inexpiable offence, performed the previous ceremonies required, and were introduced by an Athenian citizen.

With the growing flame and splendour of Athens, this institution rose into celebrity and magnificence, until it appears to have become the most impressive spectacle of the heathen world. It is evident that a people so imitative would reject no innovations or additions that could increase the interest or the solemnity of exhibition; and still less such as might come (through whatsoever channel) from that antique and imposing Egypt, which excited so much of their veneration and wonder. Nor do I think it possible to account for the great similarity attested by Herodotus and others, between the mysteries of Isis and those of Ceres, as well as for the resemblance in less celebrated

ceremonies between the rites of Egypt and of Greece, without granting at once, that mediately, or even immediately, the superstitious of the former exercised great influence upon, and imparted many features to, those of the latter. But the age in which this religious communication principally commenced has been a matter of graver dispute than the question merits. A few solitary and scattered travellers and strangers may probably have given rise to it at a very remote period; but, upon the whole, it appears to me that, with certain modifications, we must agree with Lobeck, and the more rational schools of inquiry, that it was principally in the interval between the Homeric age and the Persian war that mysticism passed into religion—that superstition assumed the attributes of a science—and that lustrations, auguries, orgies, obtained method and system from the exuberant genius of poetical fanaticism.

That in these august mysteries, doctrines contrary to the popular religion were propounded, is a theory that has, I think, been thoroughly overturned. The exhibition of ancient statues, relics, and symbols, concealed from daily adoration (as in the Catholic festivals of this day), probably, made a main duty of the Hierophant. But in a ceremony in honour of Ceres, the blessings of agriculture, and its connexion with civilization, were also very naturally dramatized. The visit of the goddess to the Infernal Regions might form an imposing part of the spectacle: spectral images—alternations of light and darkness—all the apparitions and effects that are said to have imparted so much awe to the mysteries, may well have harmonized with, not contravened, the popular belief. And there is no reason to suppose that the explanations given by the priests did more than account for mythological stories, agreeably to the spirit and form of the received mythology, or deduce moral maxims from the representation, as hackneyed, as simple, and as ancient, as the generality of moral aphorisms are. But, as the intellectual progress of the audience advanced, philosophers, skeptical of the popular religion, delighted to draw from such imposing representations a thousand theories and morals utterly unknown to the vulgar; and the fancies and refinements of later schoolmen have thus been mistaken for the notions of an early age and a promiscuous multitude. The single fact (so often insisted upon), that all Greeks were admissible, is sufficient alone to prove that no secrets incompatible with the common faith, or very important in themselves, could either have been propounded by the priests or received by the audience. And it may be further observed, in corroboration of so self-evident a truth, that it was held an impiety to the popular faith to reject the initiation of the mysteries—and that some of the very writers, most superstitious with respect to the one, attach the most solemnity to the ceremonies of the other.

XVI. Sanchoniathon wrote a work, now lost, on the worship of the serpent. This most ancient superstition, found invariably in Egypt and the East, is also to be traced through many of the legends and many of the ceremonies of the Greeks. The serpent was a frequent emblem of various gods—it was often kept about the temples—it was introduced in the mysteries—it was everywhere considered sacred. Singular enough, by the way, that while with us the symbol of the evil spirit, the serpent was generally in the East considered a benefactor. In India, the serpent with a thousand heads; in Egypt, the serpent crowned with the lotos-leaf, is a benign and paternal deity. It was not uncommon for fable to assert that the first civilizers of earth were half man, half serpent. Thus was Fohi of China [49](#) represented, and thus Cecrops of Athens.

XVII. But the most remarkable feature of the superstition of Greece was her sacred oracles. And these again bring our inquiries back to Egypt. Herodotus informs us that the oracle of Dodona was by far the most ancient in Greece [50](#), and he then proceeds to inform us of its origin, which he traces to Thebes in Egypt. But here we are beset by contradictions: Herodotus, on the authority of the Egyptian priests, ascribes the origin of the Dodona and Lybian oracles to two priestesses of the Theban Jupiter—stolen by Phoenician pirates—one of whom, sold into Greece, established at Dodona an oracle similar to that which she had served at Thebes. But in previous passages Herodotus informs us, 1st, that in Egypt, no priestesses served the temples of any deity, male or female; and 2dly, that when the Egyptians imparted to the Pelasgi the names of their divinities, the Pelasgi consulted

the oracle of Dodona on the propriety of adopting them; so that that oracle existed before even the first and fundamental revelations of Egyptian religion. It seems to me, therefore, a supposition that demands less hardy assumption, and is equally conformable with the universal superstitions of mankind (since similar attempts at divination are to be found among so many nations similarly barbarous) to believe that the oracle arose from the impressions of the Pelasgi [51](#) and the natural phenomena of the spot; though at a subsequent period the manner of the divination was very probably imitated from that adopted by the Theban oracle. And in examining the place it indeed seems as if Nature herself had been the Egyptian priestess! Through a mighty grove of oaks there ran a stream, whose waters supplied a fountain that might well appear, to ignorant wonder, endowed with preternatural properties. At a certain hour of noon it was dry, and at midnight full. Such springs have usually been deemed oracular, not only in the East, but in almost every section of the globe.

At first, by the murmuring of waters, and afterward by noises among the trees, the sacred impostors interpreted the voice of the god. It is an old truth, that mystery is always imposing and often convenient. To plain questions were given dark answers, which might admit of interpretation according to the event. The importance attached to the oracle, the respect paid to the priest, and the presents heaped on the altar, indicated to craft and ambition a profitable profession. And that profession became doubly alluring to its members, because it proffered to the priests an authority in serving the oracles which they could not obtain in the general religion of the people. Oracles increased then, at first slowly, and afterward rapidly, until they grew so numerous that the single district of Boeotia contained no less than twenty-five. The oracle of Dodona long, however, maintained its pre-eminence over the rest, and was only at last eclipsed by that of Delphi [52](#), where strong and intoxicating exhalations from a neighbouring stream were supposed to confer prophetic phrensy. Experience augmented the sagacity of the oracles, and the priests, no doubt, intimately acquainted with all the affairs of the states around, and viewing the living contests of action with the coolness of spectators, were often enabled to give shrewd and sensible admonitions,—so that the forethought of wisdom passed for the prescience of divinity. Hence the greater part of their predictions were eminently successful; and when the reverse occurred, the fault was laid on the blind misconstruction of the human applicant. Thus no great design was executed, no city founded, no colony planted, no war undertaken, without the advice of an oracle. In the famine, the pestilence, and the battle, the divine voice was the assuager of terror and the inspirer of hope. All the instincts of our frailer nature, ever yearning for some support that is not of the world, were enlisted in behalf of a superstition which proffered solutions to doubt, and remedies to distress.

Besides this general cause for the influence of oracles, there was another cause calculated to give to the oracles of Greece a marked and popular pre-eminence over those in Egypt. A country divided into several small, free, and warlike states, would be more frequently in want of the divine advice, than one united under a single monarchy, or submitted to the rigid austerity of castes and priestcraft; and in which the inhabitants felt for political affairs all the languid indifference habitual to the subjects of a despotic government. Half a century might pass in Egypt without any political event that would send anxious thousands to the oracle; but in the wonderful ferment, activity, and restlessness of the numerous Grecian towns, every month, every week, there was some project or some feud for which the advice of a divinity was desired. Hence it was chiefly to a political cause that the immortal oracle of Delphi owed its pre-eminent importance. The Dorian worshippers of Apollo (long attached to that oracle, then comparatively obscure), passing from its neighbourhood and befriended by its predictions, obtained the mastership of the Peloponnesus;— their success was the triumph of the oracle. The Dorian Sparta (long the most powerful of the Grecian states), inviolably faithful to the Delphian god, upheld his authority, and spread the fame of his decrees. But in the more polished and enlightened times, the reputation of the oracle gradually decayed; it shone the brightest before and during the Persian war;—the appropriate light of an age of chivalry fading slowly as philosophy arose!

XVIII. But the practice of divination did not limit itself to these more solemn sources—its enthusiasm was contagious—its assistance was ever at hand [53](#). Enthusiasm operated on the humblest individuals. One person imagined himself possessed by a spirit actually passing into his soul—another merely inspired by the divine breath—a third was cast into supernatural ecstasies, in which he beheld the shadow of events, or the visions of a god—a threefold species of divine possession, which we may still find recognised by the fanatics of a graver faith! Nor did this suffice: a world of omens surrounded every man. There were not only signs and warnings in the winds, the earthquake, the eclipse of the sun or moon, the meteor, or the thunderbolt—but dreams also were reduced to a science [54](#); the entrails of victims were auguries of evil or of good; the flights of birds, the motions of serpents, the clustering of bees, had their mystic and boding interpretations. Even hasty words, an accident, a fall on the earth, a sneeze (for which we still invoke the ancient blessing), every singular or unwonted event, might become portentous, and were often rendered lucky or unlucky according to the dexterity or disposition of the person to whom they occurred.

And although in later times much of this more frivolous superstition passed away—although Theophrastus speaks of such lesser omens with the same witty disdain as that with which the Spectator ridicules our fears at the upsetting of a salt-cellar, or the appearance of a winding-sheet in a candle,—yet, in the more interesting period of Greece, these popular credulities were not disdained by the nobler or wiser few, and to the last they retained that influence upon the mass which they lost with individuals. And it is only by constantly remembering this universal atmosphere of religion, that we can imbue ourselves with a correct understanding of the character of the Greeks in their most Grecian age. Their faith was with them ever—in sorrow or in joy—at the funeral or the feast—in their uprisings and their downittings—abroad and at home—at the hearth and in the market-place—in the camp or at the altar. Morning and night all the greater tribes of the elder world offered their supplications on high: and Plato has touchingly insisted on this sacred uniformity of custom, when he tells us that at the rising of the moon and at the dawning of the sun, you may behold Greeks and barbarians—all the nations of the earth—bowing in homage to the gods.

XIX. To sum up, the above remarks conduce to these principal conclusions; First, that the Grecian mythology cannot be moulded into any of the capricious and fantastic systems of erudite ingenuity: as a whole, no mythology can be considered more strikingly original, not only because its foundations appear indigenous, and based upon the character and impressions of the people—not only because at no one period, from the earliest even to the latest date, whatever occasional resemblances may exist, can any identify be established between its most popular and essential creations, and those of any other faith; but because, even all that it borrowed it rapidly remodelled and naturalized, growing yet more individual from its very complexity, yet more original from the plagiarisms which it embraced; Secondly, that it differed in many details in the different states, but under the development of a general intercourse, assisted by a common language, the plastic and tolerant genius of the people harmonized all discords—until (catholic in its fundamental principles) her religion united the whole of Greece in indissoluble bonds of faith and poetry—of daily customs and venerable traditions; Thirdly, that the influence of other creeds, though by no means unimportant in amplifying the character, and adding to the list of the primitive deities, appears far more evident in the ceremonies and usages than the personal creations of the faith. We may be reasonably skeptical as to what Herodotus heard of the origin of rites or gods from Egyptian priests; but there is no reason to disbelieve the testimony of his experience, when he asserts, that the forms and solemnities of one worship closely resemble those of another; the imitation of a foreign ceremony is perfectly compatible with the aboriginal invention of a national god. For the rest, I think it might be (and by many scholars appears to me to have been) abundantly shown, that the Phoenician influences upon the early mythology of the Greeks were far greater than the Egyptian, though by degrees, and long after the heroic age, the latter became more eagerly adopted and more superficially apparent.

In quitting this part of our subject, let it be observed, as an additional illustration of the remarkable nationality of the Grecian mythology, that our best light to the manners of the Homeric men, is in the study of the Homeric gods. In Homer we behold the mythology of an era, for analogy to which we search in vain the records of the East—that mythology is inseparably connected with the constitution of limited monarchies,—with the manners of an heroic age:—the power of the sovereign of the aristocracy of heaven is the power of a Grecian king over a Grecian state:—the social life of the gods is the life most coveted by the Grecian heroes;—the uncertain attributes of the deities, rather physical or intellectual than moral—strength and beauty, sagacity mixed with cunning—valour with ferocity—inclination to war, yet faculties for the inventions of peace; such were the attributes most honoured among men, in the progressive, but still uncivilized age which makes the interval so pre-eminently Grecian— between the mythical and historic times. Vain and impotent are all attempts to identify that religion of Achaian warriors with the religion of oriental priests. It was indeed symbolical—but of the character of its believers; typical—but of the restless, yet poetical, daring, yet graceful temperament, which afterward conducted to great achievements and imperishable arts: the coming events of glory cast their shadows before, in fable.

XX. There now opens to us a far more important inquiry than that into the origin and form of the religion of the Greeks; namely, the influences of that religion itself upon their character—their morals—their social and intellectual tendencies.

The more we can approach the Deity to ourselves—the more we can invest him with human attributes—the more we can connect him with the affairs and sympathies of earth, the greater will be his influence upon our conduct—the more fondly we shall contemplate his attributes, the more timidly we shall shrink from his vigilance, the more anxiously we shall strive for his approval. When Epicurus allowed the gods to exist, but imagined them wholly indifferent to the concerns of men, contemplating only their own happiness, and regardless alike of our virtues or our crimes;—with that doctrine he robbed man of the divinity, as effectually as if he had denied his existence. The fear of the gods could not be before the eyes of votaries who believed that the gods were utterly careless of their conduct; and not only the awful control of religion was removed from their passions, but the more beautiful part of its influence, resulting not from terror but from hope, was equally blasted and destroyed: For if the fear of the divine power serves to restrain the less noble natures, so, on the other hand, with such as are more elevated and generous, there is no pleasure like the belief that we are regarded with approbation and love by a Being of ineffable majesty and goodness—who compassionates our misfortunes—who rewards our struggles with ourselves. It is this hope which gives us a pride in our own natures, and which not only restrains us from vice, but inspires us with an emulation to arouse within us all that is great and virtuous, in order the more to deserve his love, and feel the image of divinity reflected upon the soul. It is for this reason that we are not contented to leave the character of a God uncertain and unguessed, shrouded in the darkness of his own infinite power; we clothe him with the attributes of human excellence, carried only to an extent beyond humanity; and cannot conceive a deity not possessed of the qualities—such as justice, wisdom, and benevolence—which are most venerated among mankind. But if we believe that he has passed to earth—that he has borne our shape, that he has known our sorrows—the connexion becomes yet more intimate and close; we feel as if he could comprehend us better, and compassionate more benignly our infirmities and our griefs. The Christ that has walked the earth, and suffered on the cross, can be more readily pictured to our imagination, and is more familiarly before us, than the Dread Eternal One, who hath the heaven for his throne, and the earth only for his footstool [55](#). And it is this very humanness of connexion, so to speak, between man and the Saviour, which gives to the Christian religion, rightly embraced, its peculiar sentiment of gentleness and of love.

But somewhat of this connexion, though in a more corrupt degree, marked also the religion of the Greeks; they too believed (at least the multitude) that most of the deities had appeared on earth, and been the actual dispensers of the great benefits of social life. Transferred to heaven, they

could more readily understand that those divinities regarded with interest the nations to which they had been made visible, and exercised a permanent influence over the earth, which had been for a while their home.

Retaining the faith that the deities had visited the world, the Greeks did not however implicitly believe the fables which degraded them by our weaknesses and vices. They had, as it were—and this seems not to have been rightly understood by the moderns—two popular mythologies—the first consecrated to poetry, and the second to actual life. If a man were told to imitate the gods, it was by the virtues of justice, temperance, and benevolence [56](#); and had he obeyed the mandate by emulating the intrigues of Jupiter, or the homicides of Mars, he would have been told by the more enlightened that those stories were the inventions of the poets; and by the more credulous that gods might be emancipated from laws, but men were bound by them—“*Superis sea jura*” [57](#)—their own laws to the gods! It is true, then, that those fables were preserved—were held in popular respect, but the reverence they excited among the Greeks was due to a poetry which flattered their national pride and enchained their taste, and not to the serious doctrines of their religion. Constantly bearing this distinction in mind, we shall gain considerable insight, not only into their religion, but into seeming contradictions in their literary history. They allowed Aristophanes to picture Bacchus as a buffoon, and Hercules as a glutton, in the same age in which they persecuted Socrates for neglect of the sacred mysteries and contempt of the national gods. To that part of their religion which belonged to the poets they permitted the fullest license; but to the graver portion of religion—to the existence of the gods—to a belief in their collective excellence, and providence, and power—to the sanctity of asylums—to the obligation of oaths—they showed the most jealous and inviolable respect. The religion of the Greeks, then, was a great support and sanction to their morals; it inculcated truth, mercy, justice, the virtues most necessary to mankind, and stimulated to them by the rigid and popular belief that excellence was approved and guilt was condemned by the superior powers [58](#). And in that beautiful process by which the common sense of mankind rectifies the errors of imagination—those fables which subsequent philosophers rightly deemed dishonourable to the gods, and which the superficial survey of modern historians has deemed necessarily prejudicial to morals—had no unworthy effect upon the estimate taken by the Greeks whether of human actions or of heavenly natures.

XXI. For a considerable period the Greeks did not carry the notion of divine punishment beyond the grave, except in relation to those audacious criminals who had blasphemed or denied the gods; it was by punishments in this world that the guilty were afflicted. And this doctrine, if less sublime than that of eternal condemnation, was, I apprehend, on regarding the principles of human nature, equally effective in restraining crime: for our human and short-sighted minds are often affected by punishments, in proportion as they are human and speedy. A penance in the future world is less fearful and distinct, especially to the young and the passionate, than an unavoidable retribution in this. Man, too fondly or too vainly, hopes, by penitence at the close of life, to redeem the faults of the commencement, and punishment deferred loses more than half its terrors, and nearly all its certainty.

As long as the Greeks were left solely to their mythology, their views of a future state were melancholy and confused. Death was an evil, not a release. Even in their Elysium, their favourite heroes seem to enjoy but a frigid and unenviable immortality. Yet this saddening prospect of the grave rather served to exhilarate life, and stimulate to glory:—“*Make the most of existence,*” say their early poets, “*for soon comes the dreary Hades!*” And placed beneath a delightful climate, and endowed with a vivacious and cheerful temperament, they yielded readily to the precept. Their religion was eminently glad and joyous; even the stern Spartans lost their austerity in their sacred rites, simple and manly though they were—and the gayer Athenians passed existence in an almost perpetual circle of festivals and holydays.

This uncertainty of posthumous happiness contributed also to the desire of earthly fame. For below at least, their heroes taught them, immortality was not impossible. Bounded by impenetrable shadows to this world, they coveted all that in this world was most to be desired [59](#). A short life is

acceptable to Achilles, not if it lead to Elysium, but if it be accompanied with glory. By degrees, however, prospects of a future state, nobler and more august, were opened by their philosophers to the hopes of the Greeks. Thales was asserted to be the first Greek who maintained the immortality of the soul, and that sublime doctrine was thus rather established by the philosopher than the priest. [60](#)

XXII. Besides the direct tenets of religion, the mysteries of the Greeks exercised an influence on their morals, which, though greatly exaggerated by modern speculators, was, upon the whole, beneficial, though not from the reasons that have been assigned. As they grew up into their ripened and mature importance—their ceremonial, rather than their doctrine, served to deepen and diffuse a reverence for religious things. Whatever the licentiousness of other mysteries (especially in Italy), the Eleusinian rites long retained their renown for purity and decorum; they were jealously watched by the Athenian magistracy, and one of the early Athenian laws enacted that the senate should assemble the day after their celebration to inquire into any abuse that might have sullied their sacred character. Nor is it, perhaps, without justice in the later times, that Isocrates lauds their effect on morality, and Cicero their influence on civilization and the knowledge of social principles. The lustrations and purifications, at whatever period their sanctity was generally acknowledged, could scarcely fail of salutary effects. They were supposed to absolve the culprit from former crimes, and restore him, a new man, to the bosom of society. This principle is a great agent of morality, and was felt as such in the earlier era of Christianity: no corrupter is so deadly as despair; to reconcile a criminal with self-esteem is to readmit him, as it were, to virtue.

Even the fundamental error of the religion in point of doctrine, viz., its polytheism, had one redeeming consequence in the toleration which it served to maintain—the grave evils which spring up from the fierce antagonism of religious opinions, were, save in a few solitary and dubious instances, unknown to the Greeks. And this general toleration, assisted yet more by the absence of a separate caste of priests, tended to lead to philosophy through the open and unchallenged portals of religion. Speculations on the gods connected themselves with bold inquiries into nature. Thought let loose in the wide space of creation—no obstacle to its wanderings—no monopoly of its commerce—achieved, after many a wild and fruitless voyage, discoveries unknown to the past—of imperishable importance to the future. The intellectual adventurers of Greece planted the first flag upon the shores of philosophy; for the competition of errors is necessary to the elucidation of truths; and the imagination indicates the soil which the reason is destined to culture and possess.

XXIII. While such was the influence of their religion on the morals and the philosophy of the Greeks, what was its effect upon their national genius?

We must again remember that the Greeks were the only nation among the more intellectual of that day, who stripped their deities of symbolical attributes, and did not aspire to invent for gods shapes differing (save in loftier beauty) from the aspect and form of man. And thus at once was opened to them the realm of sculpture. The people of the East, sometimes indeed depicting their deities in human forms, did not hesitate to change them into monsters, if the addition of another leg or another arm, a dog's head or a serpent's tail, could better express the emblem they represented. They perverted their images into allegorical deformities; and receded from the beautiful in proportion as they indulged their false conceptions of the sublime. Besides, a painter or a sculptor must have a clear idea presented to him, to be long cherished and often revolved, if we desire to call forth all the inspiration of which his genius may be capable; but how could the eastern artist form a clear idea of an image that should represent the sun entering Aries, or the productive principle of nature? Such creations could not fail of becoming stiff or extravagant, deformed or grotesque. But to the Greek, a god was something like the most majestic or the most beautiful of his own species. He studied the human shape for his conceptions of the divine. Intent upon the natural, he ascended to the ideal. [61](#)

If such the effect of the Grecian religion upon sculpture, similar and equal its influence upon poetry. The earliest verses of the Greeks appear to have been of a religious, though I see no sufficient reason for asserting that they were therefore of a typical and mystic, character. However that be,

the narrative succeeding to the sacred poetry materialized all it touched. The shadows of Olympus received the breath of Homer, and the gods grew at once life-like and palpable to men. The traditions which connected the deities with humanity—the genius which divested them of allegory—gave at once to the epic and the tragic poet the supernatural world. The inhabitants of heaven itself became individualized—bore each a separate character—could be rendered distinct, dramatic, as the creatures of daily life. Thus—an advantage which no moderns ever have possessed—with all the ineffable grandeur of deities was combined all the familiar interest of mortals; and the poet, by preserving the characteristics allotted to each god, might make us feel the associations and sympathies of earth, even when he bore us aloft to the unknown Olympus, or plunged below amid the shades of Orcus.

The numerous fables mixed with the Grecian creed, sufficiently venerable, as we have seen, not to be disdained, but not so sacred as to be forbidden, were another advantage to the poet. For the traditions of a nation are its poetry! And if we moderns, in the German forest, or the Scottish highlands, or the green English fields, yet find inspiration in the notions of fiend, and sprite, and fairy, not acknowledged by our religion, not appended as an apocryphal adjunct to our belief, how much more were those fables adapted to poetry, which borrowed not indeed an absolute faith, but a certain shadow, a certain reverence and mystery, from religion! Hence we find that the greatest works of imagination which the Greeks have left us, whether of Homer, of Aeschylus, or of Sophocles, are deeply indebted to their mythological legends. The Grecian poetry, like the Grecian religion, was at once half human, half divine—majestic, vast, august—household, homely, and familiar. If we might borrow an illustration from the philosophy of Democritus, its earthlier dreams and divinations were indeed the impressions of mighty and spectral images inhabiting the air. [62](#)

XXIV. Of the religion of Greece, of its rites and ceremonies, and of its influence upon the moral and intellectual faculties—this—already, I fear, somewhat too prolixly told—is all that at present I deem it necessary to say. [63](#)

We have now to consider the origin of slavery in Greece, an inquiry almost equally important to our accurate knowledge of her polity and manners.

XXV. Wherever we look—to whatsoever period of history—conquest, or the settlement of more enlightened colonizers amid a barbarous tribe, seems the origin of slavery—modified according to the spirit of the times, the humanity of the victor, or the policy of the lawgiver. The aboriginals of Greece were probably its earliest slaves [64](#),—yet the aboriginals might be also its earliest lords. Suppose a certain tribe to overrun a certain country—conquer and possess it: new settlers are almost sure to be less numerous than the inhabitants they subdue; in proportion as they are the less powerful in number are they likely to be the more severe in authority: they will take away the arms of the vanquished—suppress the right of meetings—make stern and terrible examples against insurgents—and, in a word, quell by the moral constraint of law those whom it would be difficult to control merely by, physical force;—the rigidity of the law being in ratio to the deficiency of the force. In times semi-civilized, and even comparatively enlightened, conquerors have little respect for the conquered—an immense and insurmountable distinction is at once made between the natives and their lords. All ancient nations seem to have considered that the right of conquest gave a right to the lands of the conquered country. William dividing England among his Normans is but an imitator of every successful invader of ancient times. The new-comers having gained the land of a subdued people, that people, in order to subsist, must become the serfs of the land [65](#). The more formidable warriors are mostly slain, or exiled, or conciliated by some remains of authority and possessions; the multitude remain the labourers of the soil, and slight alterations of law will imperceptibly convert the labourer into the slave. The earliest slaves appear chiefly to have been the agricultural population. If the possession of the government were acquired by colonizers [66](#),—not so much by the force of arms as by the influence of superior arts—the colonizers would in some instances still establish servitude for the multitude, though not under so harsh a name. The laws they would frame for an uncultured and

wretched population, would distinguish between the colonizers and the aboriginals (excepting perhaps only the native chiefs, accustomed arbitrarily to command, though not systematically to enslave the rest). The laws for the aboriginal population would still be an improvement on their previous savage and irregulated state—and generations might pass before they would attain a character of severity, or before they made the final and ineffaceable distinction between the freeman and the slave. The perturbed restlessness and constant migration of tribes in Greece, recorded both by tradition and by history, would consequently tend at a very remote period to the institution and diffusion of slavery and the Pelasgi of one tribe would become the masters of the Pelasgi of another. There is, therefore, no necessity to look out of Greece for the establishment of servitude in that country by conquest and war. But the peaceful colonization of foreign settlers would (as we have seen) lead to it by slower and more gentle degrees. And the piracies of the Phoenicians, which embraced the human species as an article of their market, would be an example, more prevalent and constant than their own, to the piracies of the early Greeks. The custom of servitude, thus commenced, is soon fed by new sources. Prisoners of war are enslaved, or, at the will of the victor, exchanged as an article of commerce. Before the interchange of money, we have numerous instances of the barter of prisoners for food and arms. And as money became the medium of trade, so slaves became a regular article of sale and purchase. Hence the origin of the slave-market. Luxury increasing slaves were purchased not merely for the purposes of labour, but of pleasure. The accomplished musician of the beautiful virgin was an article of taste or a victim of passion. Thus, what it was the tendency of barbarism to originate, it became the tendency of civilization to increase.

Slavery, then, originated first in conquest and war, piracy, or colonization: secondly, in purchase. There were two other and subordinate sources of the institution—the first was crime, the second poverty. If a free citizen committed a heinous offence, he could be degraded into a slave—if he were unable to pay his debts, the creditor could claim his person. Incarceration is merely a remnant and substitute of servitude. The two latter sources failed as nations became more free. But in Attica it was not till the time of Solon, several centuries after the institution of slavery at Athens, that the right of the creditor to the personal services of the debtor was formally abolished.

A view of the moral effects of slavery—of the condition of the slaves at Athens—of the advantages of the system and its evils—of the light in which it was regarded by the ancients themselves, other and more fitting opportunities will present to us.

XXVI. The introduction of an hereditary aristocracy into a particular country, as yet uncivilized, is often simultaneous with that of slavery. A tribe of warriors possess and subdue a territory;—they share its soil with the chief in proportion to their connexion with his person, or their military services and repute—each becomes the lord of lands and slaves—each has privileges above the herd of the conquered population. Suppose again, that the dominion is acquired by colonizers rather than conquerors; the colonizers, superior in civilization to the natives,—and regarded by the latter with reverence and awe, would become at once a privileged and noble order. Hence, from either source, an aristocracy permanent and hereditary [67](#). If founded on conquest, in proportion to the number of the victors, is that aristocracy more or less oligarchical. The extreme paucity of force with which the Dorians conquered their neighbours, was one of the main causes why the governments they established were rigidly oligarchical.

XXVII. Proceeding onward, we find that in this aristocracy, are preserved the seeds of liberty and the germe of republicanism. These conquerors, like our feudal barons, being sharers of the profit of the conquest and the glory of the enterprise, by no means allow undivided and absolute authority to their chiefs. Governed by separate laws— distinguished by separate privileges from the subdued community, they are proud of their own freedom, the more it is contrasted with the servitude of the population: they preserve liberty for themselves— they resist the undue assumptions of the king [68](#)—and keep alive that spirit and knowledge of freedom which in after times (as their numbers increase, and they become a people, distinct still from the aboriginal natives, who continue slaves)

are transfused from the nobles to the multitude. In proportion as the new race are warlike will their unconscious spirit be that of republicanism; the connexion between martial and republican tendencies was especially recognised by all ancient writers: and the warlike habits of the Hellenes were the cradle of their political institutions. Thus, in conquest (or sometimes in immigration) we may trace the origin of an aristocracy [69](#), as of slavery, and thus, by a deeper inquiry, we may find also that the slavery of a population and the freedom of a state have their date, though dim and undeveloped, in the same epoch.

XXVIII. I have thought that the supposed Egyptian colonization of Attica under Cecrops afforded the best occasion to treat of the above matters, not so much in reference to Cecrops himself as to the migration of Eastern and Egyptian adventurers. Of such migrations the dates may be uncertain—of such adventurers the names may be unknown. But it seems to me impossible to deny the fact of foreign settlements in Greece, in her remoter and more barbarous era, though we may dispute as to the precise amount of the influence they exercised, and the exact nature of the rites and customs they established.

A belief in the early connexion between the Egyptians and Athenians, encouraged by the artful vanity of the one, was welcomed by the lively credulity of the other. Many ages after the reputed sway of the mythical Cecrops, it was fondly imagined that traces of their origin from the solemn Egypt [70](#) were yet visible among the graceful and versatile people, whose character was as various, yet as individualized, as their religion—who, viewed in whatsoever aspect of their intellectual history, may appear constantly differing, yet remain invariably Athenian. Whether clamouring in the Agora—whether loitering in the Academe—whether sacrificing to Hercules in the temple—whether laughing at Hercules on the stage—whether with Miltiades arming against the Mede—whether with Demosthenes declaiming against the Macedonian—still unmistakable, unexampled, original, and alone—in their strength or their weakness, their wisdom or their foibles their turbulent action, their cultivated repose.

CHAPTER II

The unimportant consequences to be deduced from the admission that Cecrops might be Egyptian.—Attic Kings before Theseus.—The Hellenes.—Their Genealogy.—Ionians and Achaeans Pelasgic.—Contrast between Dorians and Ionians.—Amphictyonic League.

I. In allowing that there does not appear sufficient evidence to induce us to reject the tale of the Egyptian origin of Cecrops, it will be already observed, that I attach no great importance to the dispute: and I am not inclined reverently to regard the innumerable theories that have been built on so uncertain a foundation. An Egyptian may have migrated to Attica, but Egyptian influence in Attica was faint and evanescent;—arrived at the first dawn of historical fact, it is with difficulty that we discover the most dubious and shadowy vestiges of its existence. Neither Cecrops nor any other Egyptian in those ages is recorded to have founded a dynasty in Attica—it is clear that none established a different language—and all the boasted analogies of religion fade, on a close examination, into an occasional resemblance between the symbols and attributes of Egyptian and Grecian deities, or a similarity in mystic ceremonies and solemn institutions, which, for the most part, was almost indisputably formed by intercourse between Greece and Egypt in a far later age. Taking the earliest epoch at which history opens, and comparing the whole character of the Athenian people—moral, social, religious, and political—with that of any Egyptian population, it is not possible to select a more startling contrast, or one in which national character seems more indelibly formed by the early and habitual adoption of utterly opposite principles of thought and action. [71](#)

I said that Cecrops founded no dynasty: the same traditions that bring him from Egypt give him Cranaus, a native, for his successor. The darkness of fable closes over the interval between the reign of Cranaus and the time of Theseus: if tradition be any guide whatsoever, the history of that period was the history of the human race—it was the gradual passage of men from a barbarous state to the dawn of civilization—and the national myths only gather in wild and beautiful fictions round every landmark in their slow and encumbered progress.

It would be very possible, by a little ingenious application of the various fables transmitted to us, to construct a history of imagined conquests and invented revolutions; and thus to win the unmerited praise of throwing a new light upon those remote ages. But when fable is our only basis—no fabric we erect, however imposing in itself, can be rightly entitled to the name of history. And, as in certain ancient chronicles it is recorded merely of undistinguished monarchs that they “lived and died,” so such an assertion is precisely that which it would be the most presumptuous to make respecting the shadowy kings who, whether in Eusebius or the Parian marble, give dates and chronicles to the legendary gloom which preceded the heroic age.

The principal event recorded in these early times, for which there seems some foundation, is a war between Erechtheus of Athens and the Eleusinians;—the last assisted or headed by the Thracian Eumolpus. Erechtheus is said to have fallen a victim in this contest. But a treaty afterward concluded with the Eleusinians confirmed the ascendancy of Athens, and, possibly, by a religious ceremonial, laid the foundation of the Eleusinian mysteries. In this contest is introduced a very doubtful personage, under the appellation of Ion (to whom I shall afterward recur), who appears on the side of the Athenians, and who may be allowed to have exercised a certain influence over them, whether in religious rites or political institutions, though he neither attained to the throne, nor seems to have exceeded the peaceful authority of an ally. Upon the dim and confused traditions relative to Ion, the wildest and most luxuriant speculations have been grafted—prolix to notice, unnecessary to contradict.

II. During this period there occurred—not rapidly, but slowly—the most important revolution of early Greece, viz., the spread of that tribe termed the Hellenes, who gradually established their

predominance throughout the land, impressed indelible traces on the national character, and finally converted their own into the national name.

I have already expressed my belief that the Pelasgi were not a barbarous race, speaking a barbarous tongue, but that they were akin to the Hellenes, who spoke the Grecian language, and are considered the proper Grecian family. Even the dubious record of genealogy (which, if fabulous in itself, often under the names of individuals typifies the affinity of tribes) makes the Hellenes kindred to the Pelasgi. Deucalion, the founder of the Hellenes, was of Pelasgic origin—son of Prometheus, and nephew of Atlas, king of the Pelasgic Arcadia.

However this may be, we find the Hellenes driven from Phocis, their earliest recorded seat, by a flood in the time of Deucalion. Migrating into Thessaly, they expelled the Pelasgi; and afterward spreading themselves through Greece, they attained a general ascendancy over the earlier habitants, enslaving, doubtless, the bulk of the population among which they formed a settlement, but ejecting numbers of the more resolute or the more noble families, and causing those celebrated migrations by which the Pelasgi carried their name and arts into Italy, as well as into Crete and various other isles. On the continent of Greece, when the revolution became complete, the Pelasgi appear to have retained only Arcadia, the greater part of Thessaly [72](#), the land of Dodona, and Attica.

There is no reason to suppose the Hellenes more enlightened and civilized than the Pelasgi; but they seem, if only by the record of their conquests, to have been a more stern, warlike, and adventurous branch of the Grecian family. I conclude them, in fact, to have been that part of the Pelasgic race who the longest retained the fierce and vigorous character of a mountain tribe, and who found the nations they invaded in that imperfect period of civilization which is so favourable to the designs of a conqueror—when the first warlike nature of a predatory tribe is indeed abandoned—but before the discipline, order, and providence of a social community are acquired. Like the Saxons into Britain, the Hellenes were invited [73](#) by the different Pelasgic chiefs as auxiliaries, and remained as conquerors. But in other respects they rather resembled the more knightly and energetic race by whom in Britain the Saxon dynasty was overturned:—the Hellenes were the Normans of antiquity. It is impossible to decide the exact date when the Hellenes obtained the general ascendancy or when the Greeks received from that Thessalian tribe their common appellation. The Greeks were not termed Hellenes in the time in which the Iliad was composed—they were so termed in the time of Hesiod. But even in the Iliad, the word Panhellenes, applied to the Greeks, testifies the progress of the revolution [74](#), and in the Odyssey, the Hellenic name is no longer limited to the dominion of Achilles.

III. The Hellenic nation became popularly subdivided into four principal families, viz., the Dorians, the Aeolians, the Ionians, and Achaeans, of which I consider the former two alone genuinely Hellenic. The fable which makes Dorus, Aeolus, and Xuthus, the sons of Helen, declares that while Dorus was sent forth to conquer other lands, Aeolus succeeded to the domain of Phthiotis, and records no conquests of his own; but attributes to his sons the origin of most of the principal families of Greece. If rightly construed, this account would denote that the Aeolians remained for a generation at least subsequent to the first migration of the Dorians, in their Thessalian territories; and thence splitting into various hordes, descended as warriors and invaders upon the different states of Greece. They appear to have attached themselves to maritime situations, and the wealth of their early settlements is the theme of many a legend. The opulence of Orchomenus is compared by Homer to that of Egyptian Thebes. And in the time of the Trojan war, Corinth was already termed “the wealthy.” By degrees the Aeolians became in a great measure blended and intermingled with the Dorians. Yet so intimately connected are the Hellenes and Pelasgi, that even these, the lineal descendants of Helen through the eldest branch, are no less confounded with the Pelasgic than the Dorian race. Strabo and Pausanias alike affirm the Aeolians to be Pelasgic, and in the Aeolic dialect we approach to the Pelasgic tongue.

The Dorians, first appearing in Phthiotis, are found two generations afterward in the mountainous district of Histiaeotis, comprising within their territory, according to Herodotus, the

immemorial Vale of Tempe. Neighboured by warlike hordes, more especially the heroic Lapithae, with whom their earliest legends record fierce and continued war, this mountain tribe took from nature and from circumstance their hardy and martial character. Unable to establish secure settlements in the fertile Thessalian plains, and ranging to the defiles through which the romantic Peneus winds into the sea, several of the tribe migrated early into Crete, where, though forming only a part of the population of the isle, they are supposed by some to have established the Doric constitution and customs, which in their later settlements served them for a model. Other migrations marked their progress to the foot of Mount Pindus; thence to Dryopis, afterward called Doris; and from Dryopis to the Peloponnesus; which celebrated migration, under the name of the “Return of the Heraclidae,” I shall hereafter more especially describe. I have said that genealogy attributes the origin of the Dorians and that of the Aeolians to Dorus and Aeolus, sons of Helen. This connects them with the Hellenes and with each other. The adventures of Xuthus, the third son of Helen, are not recorded by the legends of Thessaly, and he seems merely a fictitious creation, invented to bring into affinity with the Hellenes the families, properly Pelasgic, of the Achaeans and Ionians. It is by writers comparatively recent that we are told that Xuthus was driven from Thessaly by his brothers—that he took refuge in Attica, and on the plains of Marathon built four towns—Oenoe, Marathon, Probalinthus, and Tricorythus [75](#), and that he wedded Creusa, daughter of Erechtheus, king of Attica, and that by her he had two sons, Achaeus and Ion. By some we are told that Achaeus, entering the eastern side of Peloponnesus, founded a dominion in Laconia and Argolis; by others, on the contrary, that he conducted a band, partly Athenian, into Thessaly, and recovered the domains of which his father had been despoiled [76](#). Both these accounts of Achaeus, as the representative of the Achaeans, are correct in this, that the Achaeans, had two settlements from remote periods—the one in the south of Thessaly—the other in the Peloponnesus.

The Achaeans were long the most eminent of the Grecian tribes. Possessed of nearly the whole of the Peloponnesus, except, by a singular chance, that part which afterward bore their name, they boasted the warlike fame of the opulent Menelaus and the haughty Agamemnon, the king of men. The dominant tribe of the heroic age, the Achaeans form the kindred link between the several epochs of the Pelasgic and Hellenic sway—their character indeed Hellenic, but their descent apparently Pelasgic. Dionysius of Halicarnassus derives them from Pelasgus himself, and they existed as Achaeans before the Hellenic Xuthus was even born. The legend which makes Achaeus the brother of Ion, tends likewise to prove, that if the Ionians were originally Pelasgic, so also were the Achaeans. Let us then come to Ion.

Although Ion is said to have given the name of Ionians to the Atticans, yet long before his time the Iaones were among the ancient inhabitants of the country; and Herodotus (the best authority on the subject) declares that the Ionians were Pelasgic and indigenous. There is not sufficient reason to suppose, therefore, that they were Hellenic conquerors or Hellenic settlers. They appear, on the contrary, to have been one of the aboriginal tribes of Attica:—a part of them proceeded into the Peloponnesus (typified under the migration thither of Xuthus), and these again returning (as typified by the arrival of Ion at Athens), in conjunction with such of their fraternity as had remained in their native settlement, became the most powerful and renowned of the several divisions of the Attic population. Their intercourse with the Peloponnesians would lead the Ionians to establish some of the political institutions and religious rites they had become acquainted with in their migration; and thus may we most probably account for the introduction of the worship of Apollo into Attica, and for that peaceful political influence which the mythical Ion is said to have exercised over his countrymen.

At all events, we cannot trace, any distinct and satisfactory connexion between this, the most intellectual and brilliant tribe of the Grecian family, and that roving and fortunate Thessalian horde to which the Hellenes gave the general name, and of which the Dorians were the fittest representative and the most powerful section. Nor, despite the bold assumptions of Mueller, is there any evidence of a Hellenic conquest in Attica. [77](#)

And that land which, according to tradition and to history, was the early refuge of exiles, derived from the admission and intercourse of strangers and immigrants those social and political improvements which in other states have been wrought by conquest.

IV. After the Dorians obtained possession of the Peloponnesus, the whole face of Greece was gradually changed. The return of the Heraclidae was the true consummation of the Hellenic revolution. The tribes hitherto migratory became fixed in the settlements they acquired. The Dorians rose to the rank of the most powerful race of Greece: and the Ionians, their sole rivals, possessed only on the continent the narrow soil of Attica, though their colonies covered the fertile coast of Asia Minor. Greece thus reduced to two main tribes, the Doric and the Ionian, historians have justly and generally concurred in noticing between them the strongest and most marked distinctions,—the Dorians grave, inflexible, austere,—the Ionians lively, versatile, prone to change. The very dialect of the one was more harsh and masculine than that of the other; and the music, the dances of the Dorians, bore the impress of their severe simplicity. The sentiment of veneration which pervaded their national character taught the Dorians not only, on the one hand, the firmest allegiance to the rites of religion—and a patriarchal respect for age—but, on the other hand, a blind and superstitious attachment to institutions merely on account of their antiquity—and an almost servile regard for birth, producing rather the feelings of clanship than the sympathy of citizens. We shall see hereafter, that while Athens established republics, Sparta planted oligarchies. The Dorians were proud of independence, but it was the independence of nobles rather than of a people. Their severity preserved them long from innovation—no less by what was vicious in its excess than by what was wise in its principle. With many great and heroic qualities, they were yet harsh to enemies—cruel to dependants—selfish to allies. Their whole policy was to preserve themselves as they were; if they knew not the rash excesses, neither were they impelled by the generous emotions, which belong to men whose constant aspirations are to be better and to be greater;—they did not desire to be better or to be greater; their only wish was not to be different. They sought in the future nothing but the continuance of the past; and to that past they bound themselves with customs and laws of iron. The respect in which they held their women, as well as their disdain of pleasure, preserved them in some measure from the licentiousness common to states in which women are despised; but the respect had little of the delicacy and sentiment of individual attachment—attachment was chiefly for their own sex [78](#). The Ionians, on the contrary, were susceptible, flexible, and more characterized by the generosity of modern knighthood than the sternness of ancient heroism. Them, not the past, but the future, charmed. Ever eager to advance, they were impatient even of the good, from desire of the better. Once urged to democracy— democracy fixed their character, as oligarchy fixed the Spartan. For, to change is the ambition of a democracy—to conserve of an oligarchy. The taste, love, and intuition of the beautiful stamped the Greeks above all nations, and the Ionians above all the Greeks. It was not only that the Ionians were more inventive than their neighbours, but that whatever was beautiful in invention they at once seized and appropriated. Restless, inquisitive, ardent, they attempted all things, and perfected art—searched into all things, and consummated philosophy.

The Ionic character existed everywhere among Ionians, but the Doric was not equally preserved among the Dorians. The reason is evident. The essence of the Ionian character consisted in the spirit of change—that of the Dorian in resistance to innovation. When any Doric state abandoned its hereditary customs and institutions, it soon lost the Doric character—became lax, effeminate, luxurious—a corruption of the character of the Ionians; but no change could assimilate the Ionian to the Doric; for they belonged to different eras of civilization—the Doric to the elder, the Ionian to the more advanced. The two races of Scotland have become more alike than heretofore; but it is by making the highlander resemble the lowlander—and not by converting the lowland citizen into the mountain Gael. The habits of commerce, the substitution of democratic for oligarchic institutions, were sufficient to alter the whole character of the Dorians. The voluptuous Corinth—the trading Aegina (Doric states)—infinitely more resembled Athens than Sparta.

It is, then, to Sparta, that in the historical times we must look chiefly for the representative of the Doric tribe, in its proper and elementary features; and there, pure, vigorous, and concentrated, the Doric character presents a perpetual contrast to the Athenian. This contrast continued so long as either nation retained a character to itself;—and (no matter what the pretences of hostility) was the real and inevitable cause of that enmity between Athens and Sparta, the results of which fixed the destiny of Greece.

Yet were the contests of that enmity less the contests between opposing tribes than between those opposing principles which every nation may be said to nurse within itself; viz., the principle to change, and the principle to preserve; the principle to popularize, and the principle to limit the governing power; here the genius of an oligarchy, there of a people; here adherence to the past, there desire of the future. Each principle produced its excesses, and furnishes a salutary warning. The feuds of Sparta and Athens may be regarded as historical allegories, clothing the moral struggles, which, with all their perils and all their fluctuations, will last to the end of time.

V. This period is also celebrated for the supposed foundation of that assembly of the Grecian states, called the Amphictyonic Confederacy. Genealogy attributes its origin to a son of Deucalion, called Amphictyon. [79](#)

This fable would intimate a Hellenic origin, since Deucalion is the fabled founder of the Hellenes; but out of twelve tribes which composed the confederacy, only three were Hellenic, and the rest Pelasgic. But with the increasing influence of the Dorian oracle of Delphi, with which it was connected, it became gradually considered a Hellenic institution. It is not possible to decipher the first intention of this league. The meeting was held at two places, near Anthela, in the pass of Thermopylae, and Delphi; at the latter place in the spring, at the former in the autumn. If tradition imputed to Amphictyon the origin of the council, it ascribed to Acrisius, king of Argos [80](#), the formation of its proper power and laws. He is said to have founded one of the assemblies, either that in Delphi or Thermopylae (accounts vary), and to have combined the two, increased the number of the members, and extended the privileges of the body. We can only interpret this legend by the probable supposition, that the date of holding the same assembly at two different places, at different seasons of the year, marks the epoch of some important conjunction of various tribes, and, it may be, of deities hitherto distinct. It might be an attempt to associate the Hellenes with the Pelasgi, in the early and unsettled power of the former race: and this supposition is rendered the more plausible by the evident union of the worship of the Dorian Apollo at Delphi with that of the Pelasgian Ceres at Thermopylae [81](#). The constitution of the league was this— each city belonging to an Amphictyonic state sent usually two deputies—the one called Pylagoras, the other Hieromnemon. The functions of the two deputies seem to have differed, and those of the latter to have related more particularly to whatsoever appertained to religion. On extraordinary occasions more than one pylagoras was deputed—Athens at one time sent no less than three. But the number of deputies sent did not alter the number of votes in the council. Each city had two votes and no more, no matter how many delegates it employed.

All the deputies assembled,—solemn sacrifices were offered at Delphi to Apollo, Diana, Latona, and Minerva; at Thermopylae to Ceres. An oath was then administered, the form of which is preserved to us by Aeschines.

“I swear,” runs the oath, “never to subvert any Amphictyonic city— never to stop the courses of its waters in peace or in war. Those who attempt such outrages I will oppose by arms; and the cities that so offend I will destroy. If any ravages be committed in the territory of the god, if any connive at such a crime, if any conceive a design hostile to the temple, against them will I use my hands, my feet, my whole power and strength, so that the offenders may be brought to punishment.”

Fearful and solemn imprecations on any violation of this engagement followed the oath.

These ceremonies performed, one of the hieromnemons [82](#) presided over the council; to him were intrusted the collecting the votes, the reporting the resolutions, and the power of summoning the general assembly, which was a convention separate from the council, held only on extraordinary

occasions, and composed of residents and strangers, whom the solemnity of the meeting congregated in the neighbourhood.

VI. Throughout the historical times we can trace in this league no attempt to combine against the aggression of foreign states, except for the purposes of preserving the sanctity of the temple. The functions of the league were limited to the Amphictyonic tribes and whether or not its early, and undefined, and obscure purpose, was to check wars among the confederate tribes, it could not attain even that object. Its offices were almost wholly confined to religion. The league never interfered when one Amphictyonic state exercised the worst severities against the other, curbing neither the ambition of the Athenian fleet nor the cruelties of the Spartan sword. But, upon all matters relative to religion, especially to the worship of Apollo, the assembly maintained an authority in theory supreme—in practice, equivocal and capricious.

As a political institution, the league contained one vice which could not fail to destroy its power. Each city in the twelve Amphictyonic tribes, the most unimportant as the most powerful, had the same number of votes. This rendered it against the interest of the greater states (on whom its consideration necessarily depended) to cement or increase its political influence and thus it was quietly left to its natural tendency to sacred purposes. Like all institutions which bestow upon man the proper prerogative of God, and affect authority over religious and not civil opinions, the Amphictyonic council was not very efficient in good: even in its punishment of sacrilege, it was only dignified and powerful whenever the interests of the Delphic temple were at stake. Its most celebrated interference was with the town of Crissa, against which the Amphictyons decreed war B. C. 505; the territory of Crissa was then dedicated to the god of the temple.

VII. But if not efficient in good, the Amphictyonic council was not active in evil. Many causes conspired to prevent the worst excesses to which religious domination is prone,—and this cause in particular. It was not composed of a separate, interested, and permanent class, but of citizens annually chosen from every state, who had a much greater interest in the welfare of their own state than in the increased authority of the Amphictyonic council [83](#). They were priests but for an occasion—they were citizens by profession. The jealousies of the various states, the constant change in the delegates, prevented that energy and oneness necessary to any settled design of ecclesiastical ambition. Hence, the real influence of the Amphictyonic council was by no means commensurate with its grave renown; and when, in the time of Philip, it became an important political agent, it was only as the corrupt and servile tool of that able monarch. Still it long continued, under the panoply of a great religious name, to preserve the aspect of dignity and power, until, at the time of Constantine, it fell amid the ruins of the faith it had aspired to protect. The creed that became the successor of the religion of Delphi found a mightier Amphictyonic assembly in the conclaves of Rome. The papal institution possessed precisely those qualities for directing the energies of states, for dictating to the ambition of kings, for obtaining temporal authority under spiritual pretexts—which were wanting to the pagan.

CHAPTER III

The Heroic Age.—Theseus.—His legislative Influence upon Athens.—Qualities of the Greek Heroes.—Effect of a Traditional Age upon the Character of a People.

I. As one who has been journeying through the dark [84](#) begins at length to perceive the night breaking away in mist and shadow, so that the forms of things, yet uncertain and undefined, assume an exaggerated and gigantic outline, half lost amid the clouds,—so now, through the obscurity of fable, we descry the dim and mighty outline of the HEROIC AGE. The careful and skeptical Thucydides has left us, in the commencement of his immortal history, a masterly portraiture of the manners of those times in which individual prowess elevates the possessor to the rank of a demigod; times of unsettled law and indistinct control;—of adventure—of excitement;—of daring qualities and lofty crime. We recognise in the picture features familiar to the North: the roving warriors and the pirate kings who scoured the seas, descended upon unguarded coasts, and deemed the exercise of plunder a profession of honour, remind us of the exploits of the Scandinavian Her-Kongr, and the boding banners of the Dane. The seas of Greece tempted to piratical adventures: their numerous isles, their winding bays, and wood-clad shores, proffered ample enterprise to the bold— ample booty to the rapacious; the voyages were short for the inexperienced, the refuges numerous for the defeated. In early ages, valour is the true virtue—it dignifies the pursuits in which it is engaged, and the profession of a pirate was long deemed as honourable in the Aegean as among the bold rovers of the Scandinavian race [85](#). If the coast was thus exposed to constant incursion and alarm, neither were the interior recesses of the country more protected from the violence of marauders. The various tribes that passed into Greece, to colonize or conquer, dislodged from their settlements many of the inhabitants, who, retreating up the country, maintained themselves by plunder, or avenged themselves by outrage. The many crags and mountains, the caverns and the woods, which diversify the beautiful land of Greece, afforded their natural fortresses to these barbarous hordes. The chief who had committed a murder, or aspired unsuccessfully to an unsteady throne, betook himself, with his friends, to some convenient fastness, made a descent on the surrounding villages, and bore off the women or the herds, as lust or want excited to the enterprise. No home was safe, no journey free from peril, and the Greeks passed their lives in armour. Thus, gradually, the profession and system of robbery spread itself throughout Greece, until the evil became insufferable—until the public opinion of all the states and tribes, in which society had established laws, was enlisted against the freebooter—until it grew an object of ambition to rid the neighbourhood of a scourge—and the success of the attempt made the glory of the adventurer. Then naturally arose the race of heroes—men who volunteered to seek the robber in his hold—and, by the gratitude of a later age, the courage of the knight-errant was rewarded with the sanctity of the demigod. At that time, too, internal circumstances in the different states— whether from the predominance of, or the resistance to, the warlike Hellenes, had gradually conspired to raise a military and fierce aristocracy above the rest of the population; and as arms became the instruments of renown and power, so the wildest feats would lead to the most extended fame.

II. The woods and mountains of Greece were not then cleared of the first rude aboriginals of nature—wild beasts lurked within its caverns;—wolves abounded everywhere—herds of wild bulls, the large horns of which Herodotus names with admiration, were common; and even the lion himself, so late as the invasion of Xerxes, was found in wide districts from the Thracian Abdera to the Acarnanian Achelous. Thus, the feats of the early heroes appear to have been mainly directed against the freebooter or the wild beast; and among the triumphs of Hercules are recorded the extermination of the Lydian robbers, the death of Cacus, and the conquest of the lion of Nemea and the boar of Erymanthus.

Hercules himself shines conspicuously forth the great model of these useful adventurers. There is no doubt that a prince [86](#), so named, actually existed in Greece; and under the title of the Theban

Hercules, is to be carefully distinguished, both from the god of Egypt and the peaceful Hercules of Phoenicia [87](#), whose worship was not unknown to the Greeks previous to the labours of his namesake. As the name of Hercules was given to the Theban hero (originally called Alcaeus), in consequence of his exploits, it may be that his countrymen recognised in his character or his history something analogous to the traditional accounts of the Eastern god. It was the custom of the early Greeks to attribute to one man the actions which he performed in concert with others, and the reputation of Hercules was doubtless acquired no less as the leader of an army than by the achievements of his personal prowess. His fame and his success excited the emulation of his contemporaries, and pre-eminent among these ranks the Athenian Theseus.

III. In the romance which Plutarch has bequeathed to us, under the title of a “History of Theseus,” we seem to read the legends of our own fabulous days of chivalry. The adventures of an Amadis or a Palmerin are not more knightly nor more extravagant.

According to Plutarch, Aegeus, king of Athens, having no children, went to Delphi to consult the oracle how that misfortune might be repaired. He was commanded not to approach any woman till he returned to Athens; but the answer was couched in mystic and allegorical terms, and the good king was rather puzzled than enlightened by the reply. He betook himself therefore to Troezen, a small town in Peloponnesus, founded by Pittheus, of the race of Pelops, a man eminent in that day for wisdom and sagacity. He communicated to him the oracle, and besought his interpretation. Something there was in the divine answer which induced Pittheus to draw the Athenian king into an illicit intercourse with his own daughter, Aethra. The princess became with child; and, before his departure from Troezen, Aegeus deposited a sword and a pair of sandals in a cavity concealed by a huge stone [88](#), and left injunctions with Aethra that, should the fruit of their intercourse prove a male child, and able, when grown up, to remove the stone, she should send him privately to Athens with the sword and sandals in proof of his birth; for Aegeus had a brother named Pallas, who, having a large family of sons, naturally expected, from the failure of the direct line, to possess himself or his children of the Athenian throne; and the king feared, should the secret of his intercourse with Aethra be discovered before the expected child had arrived to sufficient strength to protect himself, that either by treason or assassination the sons of Pallas would despoil the rightful heir of his claim to the royal honours. Aethra gave birth to Theseus, and Pittheus concealed the dishonour of his family by asserting that Neptune, the god most honoured at Troezen, had condescended to be the father of the child:—the gods were very convenient personages in those days. As the boy grew up, he evinced equal strength of body and nobleness of mind; and at length the time arrived when Aethra communicated to him the secret of his birth, and led him to the stone which concealed the tokens of his origin. He easily removed it, and repaired by land to Athens.

At that time, as I have before stated, Greece was overrun by robbers: Hercules had suppressed them for awhile; but the Theban hero was now at the feet of the Lydian Omphale, and the freebooters had reappeared along the mountainous recesses of the Peloponnesus; the journey by land was therefore not only longer, but far more perilous, than a voyage by sea, and Pittheus earnestly besought his grandson to prefer the latter. But it was the peril of the way that made its charm in the eyes of the young hero, and the fame of Hercules had long inspired his dreams by night [89](#), and his thoughts by day. With his father’s sword, then, he repaired to Athens. Strange and wild were the adventures that befell him. In Epidauria he was attacked by a celebrated robber, whom he slew, and whose club he retained as his favourite weapon. In the Isthmus, Sinnis, another bandit, who had been accustomed to destroy the unfortunate travellers who fell in his way by binding them to the boughs of two pine trees (so that when the trees, released, swung back to their natural position, the victim was torn asunder, limb by limb), was punished by the same death he had devised for others; and here occurs one of those anecdotes illustrative of the romance of the period, and singularly analogous to the chivalry of Northern fable, which taught deference to women, and rewarded by the smiles of the fair the exploits of the bold. Sinnis, “the pine bender,” had a daughter remarkable for beauty, who concealed herself

amid the shrubs and rushes in terror of the victor. Theseus discovered her, praying, says Plutarch, in childish innocence or folly, to the plants and bushes, and promising, if they would shelter her, never to destroy or burn them. A graceful legend, that reminds us of the rich inventions of Spenser. But Theseus, with all gentle words and soothing vows, allured the maiden from her retreat, and succeeded at last in obtaining her love and its rewards.

Continued adventures—the conquest of Phaea, a wild sow (or a female robber, so styled from the brutality of her life)—the robber Sciron cast headlong from a precipice—Procrustes stretched on his own bed—attested the courage and fortune of the wanderer, and at length he arrived at the banks of the Cephissus. Here he was saluted by some of the Phytalidae, a sacred family descended from Phytalus, the beloved of Ceres, and was duly purified from the blood of the savages he had slain. Athens was the first place at which he was hospitably entertained. He arrived at an opportune moment; the Colchian Medea, of evil and magic fame, had fled from Corinth and taken refuge with Aegeus, whose affections she had ensnared. By her art she promised him children to supply his failing line, and she gave full trial to the experiment by establishing herself the partner of the royal couch. But it was not likely that the numerous sons of Pallas would regard this connexion with indifference, and faction and feud reigned throughout the city. Medea discovered the secret of the birth of Theseus; and, resolved by poison to rid herself of one who would naturally interfere with her designs on Aegeus, she took advantage of the fear and jealousies of the old king, and persuaded him to become her accomplice in the premeditated crime. A banquet, according to the wont of those hospitable times, was given to the stranger. The king was at the board, the cup of poison at hand, when Theseus, wishing to prepare his father for the welcome news he had to divulge, drew the sword or cutlass which Aegeus had made the token of his birth, and prepared to carve with it the meat that was set before him. The sword caught the eye of the king—he dashed the poison to the ground, and after a few eager and rapid questions, recognised his son in his intended victim. The people were assembled—Theseus was acknowledged by the king, and received with joy by the multitude, who had already heard of the feats of the hero. The traditionary place where the poison fell was still shown in the time of Plutarch. The sons of Pallas ill brooked the arrival and acknowledgment of this unexpected heir to the throne. They armed themselves and their followers, and prepared for war. But one half of their troops, concealed in ambush, were cut off by Theseus (instructed in their movements by the treachery of a herald), and the other half, thus reduced, were obliged to disperse. So Theseus remained the undisputed heir to the Athenian throne.

IV. It would be vain for the historian, but delightful for the poet, to follow at length this romantic hero through all his reputed enterprises. I can only rapidly sketch the more remarkable. I pass, then, over the tale how he captured alive the wild bull of Marathon, and come at once to that expedition to Crete, which is indissolubly intertwined with immortal features of love and poetry. It is related that Androgeus, a son of Minos, the celebrated King of Crete, and by his valour worthy of such a sire, had been murdered in Attica; some suppose by the jealousies of Aegeus, who appears to have had a singular distrust of all distinguished strangers. Minos retaliated by a war which wasted Attica, and was assisted in its ravages by the pestilence and the famine. The oracle of Apollo, which often laudably reconciled the quarrels of princes, terminated the contest by enjoining the Athenians to appease the just indignation of Minos. They despatched, therefore, ambassadors to Crete, and consented, in token of submission, to send every ninth year a tribute of seven virgins and seven young men. The little intercourse that then existed between states, conjoined with the indignant grief of the parents at the loss of their children, exaggerated the evil of the tribute. The hostages were said by the Athenians to be exposed in an intricate labyrinth, and devoured by a monster, the creature of unnatural intercourse, half man half bull; but the Cretans, certainly the best authority in the matter, stripped the account of the fable, and declared that the labyrinth was only a prison in which the youths and maidens were confined on their arrival—that Minos instituted games in honour of Androgeus, and that the Athenian captives were the prize of the victors. The first victor was the chief of the Cretan army, named

Taurus, and he, being fierce and unmerciful, treated the slaves he thus acquired with considerable cruelty. Hence the origin of the labyrinth and the Minotaur. And Plutarch, giving this explanation of the Cretans, cites Aristotle to prove that the youths thus sent were not put to death by Minos, but retained in servile employments, and that their descendants afterward passed into Thrace, and were called Bottiaean. We must suppose, therefore, in consonance not only with these accounts, but the manners of the age, that the tribute was merely a token of submission, and the objects of it merely considered as slaves. [90](#)

Of Minos himself all accounts are uncertain. There seems no sufficient ground to doubt, indeed, his existence, nor the extended power which, during his reign, Crete obtained in Greece. It is most probable that it was under Phoenician influence that Crete obtained its maritime renown; but there is no reason to suppose Minos himself Phoenician.

After the return of Theseus, the time came when the tribute to Crete was again to be rendered. The people murmured their dissatisfaction. "It was the guilt of Aegeus," said they, "which caused the wrath of Minos, yet Aegeus alone escaped its penalty; their lawful children were sacrificed to the Cretan barbarity, but the doubtful and illegitimate stranger, whom Aegeus had adopted, went safe and free." Theseus generously appeased these popular tumults: he insisted on being himself included in the seven.

V. Twice before had this human tribute been sent to Crete; and in token of the miserable and desperate fate which, according to vulgar belief, awaited the victims, a black sail had been fastened to the ship.

But this time, Aegeus, inspired by the cheerful confidence of his son, gave the pilot a white sail, which he was to hoist, if, on his return, he bore back Theseus in safety: if not, the black was once more to be the herald of an unhappier fate. It is probable that Theseus did not esteem this among the most dangerous of his adventures. At the court of the wise Pittheus, or in the course of his travels, he had doubtless heard enough of the character of Minos, the greatest and most sagacious monarch of his time, to be convinced that the son of the Athenian king would have little to fear from his severity. He arrived at Crete, and obtained the love of Ariadne, the daughter of Minos. Now follows a variety of contradictory accounts, the most probable and least poetical of which are given by Plutarch; but as he concludes them all by the remark that none are of certainty, it is a needless task to repeat them: it suffices to relate, that either with or without the consent of Minos, Theseus departed from Crete, in company with Ariadne, and that by one means or the other he thenceforth freed the Athenians from the payment of the accustomed tribute. As it is obvious that with the petty force with which, by all accounts, he sailed to Crete, he could not have conquered the powerful Minos in his own city, so it is reasonable to conclude, as one of the traditions hath it, that the king consented to his alliance with his daughter, and, in consequence of that marriage, waived all farther claim to the tribute of the Athenians. [91](#)

Equal obscurity veils the fate of the loving Ariadne; but the supposition which seems least objectionable is, that Theseus was driven by storm either on Cyprus or Naxos, and Ariadne being then with child, and rendered ill by the violence of the waves, was left on shore by her lover while he returned to take charge of his vessel; that she died in childbed, and that Theseus, on his return, was greatly afflicted, and instituted an annual festival in her honour. While we adopt the story most probable in itself, and most honourable to the character of the Athenian hero, we cannot regret the various romance which is interwoven with the tale of the unfortunate Cretan, since it has given us some of the most beautiful inventions of poetry;—the Labyrinth love-lighted by Ariadne—the Cretan maid deserted by the stranger with whom she fled—left forlorn and alone on the Naxian shore—and consoled by Bacchus and his satyr horde.

VI. Before he arrived at Athens, Theseus rested at Delos, where he is said to have instituted games, and to have originated the custom of crowning the victor with the palm. Meanwhile Aegeus waited the return of his son. On the Cecropian rock that yet fronts the sea, he watched the coming

of the vessel and the waving of the white sail: the masts appeared—the ship approached—the white sail was not visible: in the joy and the impatience of the homeward crew, the pilot had forgotten to hoist the appointed signal, and the old man in despair threw himself from the rock and was dashed to pieces. Theseus received the news of his father's death with sorrow and lamentation. His triumph and return were recorded by periodical festivals, in which the fate of Aegeus was typically alluded to, and the vessel of thirty oars with which he had sailed to Crete was preserved by the Athenians to the times of Demetrius the Phalerean—so often new-pieced and repaired, that it furnished a favourite thesis to philosophical disputants, whether it was or was not the same vessel which Theseus had employed.

VII. Possessed of the supreme power, Theseus now bent his genius to the task of legislation, and in this part of his life we tread upon firmer ground, because the most judicious of the ancient historians [92](#) expressly attributes to the son of Aegeus those enactments which so mainly contributed to consolidate the strength and union of the Athenian people.

Although Cecrops is said to have brought the tribes of Attica under one government, yet it will be remembered that he had divided the territory into twelve districts, with a fortress or capital to each. By degrees these several districts had become more and more distinct from each other, and in many cases of emergency it was difficult to obtain a general assembly or a general concurrence of the people; nay, differences had often sprung up between the tribes, which had been adjusted, not as among common citizens, by law, but as among jealous enemies, by arms and bloodshed. It was the master policy of Theseus to unite these petty commonwealths in one state. He applied in person, and by all the arte of persuasion, to each tribe: the poor he found ready enough to listen to an invitation which promised them the shelter of a city, and the protection of a single government from the outrage of many tyrants: the rich and the powerful were more jealous of their independent, scattered, and, as it were, feudal life. But these he sought to conciliate by promises that could not but flatter that very prejudice of liberty which naturally at first induced them to oppose his designs. He pledged his faith to a constitution which should leave the power in the hands of the many. He himself, as monarch, desired only the command in war, and in peace the guardianship of laws he was equally bound to obey. Some were induced by his persuasions, others by the fear of his power, until at length he obtained his object. By common consent he dissolved the towns'—corporations and councils in each separate town, and built in Athens one common prytaneum or council-hall, existent still in the time of Plutarch. He united the scattered streets and houses of the citadel, and the new town that had grown up along the plain, by the common name of “Athens,” and instituted the festival of the Panathenaea, in honour of the guardian goddess of the city, and as a memorial of the confederacy. Adhering then to his promises, he set strict and narrow limits to the regal power, created, under the name of eupatrids or well-born, an hereditary nobility, and divided into two orders (the husbandmen and mechanics) the remainder of the people. The care of religion, the explanation of the laws, and the situations of magistrates, were the privilege of the nobles. He thus laid the foundation of a free, though aristocratic constitution—according to Aristotle, the first who surrendered the absolute sway of royalty, and receiving from the rhetorical Isocrates the praise that it was a contest which should give most, the people of power, or the king of freedom. As an extensive population was necessary to a powerful state, so Theseus invited to Athens all strangers willing to share in the benefits of its protection, granting them equal security of life and law; and he set a demarcation to the territory of the state by the boundary of a pillar erected in the Isthmus, dividing Ionia from Peloponnesus. The Isthmian games in honour of Neptune were also the invention of Theseus.

VIII. Such are the accounts of the legislative enactments of Theseus. But of these we must reject much. We may believe from the account of Thucydides that jealousies among some Attic towns—which might either possess, or pretend to, an independence never completely annihilated by Cecrops and his successors, and which the settlement of foreigners of various tribes and habits would have served to increase—were so far terminated as to induce submission to the acknowledged supremacy of Athens as the Attic capital; and that the right of justice, and even of legislation, which

had before been the prerogative of each separate town (to the evident weakening of the supreme and regal authority), was now concentrated in the common council-house of Athens. To Athens, as to a capital, the eupatrids of Attica would repair as a general residence ⁹³. The city increased in population and importance, and from this period Thucydides dates the enlargement of the ancient city, by the addition of the Lower Town. That Theseus voluntarily lessened the royal power, it is not necessary to believe. In the heroic age a warlike race had sprung up, whom no Grecian monarch appears to have attempted to govern arbitrarily in peace, though they yielded implicitly to his authority in war. Himself on a newly-won and uncertain throne, it was the necessity as well as the policy of Theseus to conciliate the most powerful of his subjects. It may also be conceded, that he more strictly defined the distinctions between the nobles and the remaining classes, whether yeomen or husbandmen, mechanics or strangers; and it is recorded that the honours and the business of legislation were the province of the eupatrids. It is possible that the people might be occasionally convened—but it is clear that they had little, if any, share in the government of the state. But the mere establishment and confirmation of a powerful aristocracy, and the mere collection of the population into a capital, were sufficient to prepare the way for far more democratic institutions than Theseus himself contemplated or designed. For centuries afterward an oligarchy ruled in Athens; but, free itself, that oligarchy preserved in its monopoly the principles of liberty, expanding in their influence with the progress of society. The democracy of Athens was not an ancient, yet not a sudden, constitution. It developed itself slowly, unconsciously, continuously—passing the allotted orbit of royalty, oligarchy, aristocracy, timocracy, tyranny, till at length it arrived at its dazzling zenith, blazed—waned—and disappeared.

After the successful issue of his legislative attempts, we next hear of Theseus less as the monarch of history than as the hero of song. On these later traditions, which belong to fable, it is not necessary to dwell. Our own *Coeur de Lion* suggests no improbable resemblance to a spirit cast in times yet more wild and enterprising, and without seeking interpretations, after the fashion of allegory or system, of each legend, it is the most simple hypothesis, that Theseus really departed in quest of adventure from a dominion that afforded no scope for a desultory and eager ambition; and that something of truth lurks beneath many of the rich embellishments which his wanderings and exploits received from the exuberant poetry and the rude credibility of the age. During his absence, Menestheus, of the royal race of Attica, who, Plutarch simply tells us, was the first of mankind that undertook the profession of a demagogue, ingratiated himself with the people, or rather with the nobles. The absence of a king is always the nurse of seditions, and Menestheus succeeded in raising so powerful a faction against the hero, that on his return Theseus was unable to preserve himself in the government, and, pouring forth a solemn curse on the Athenians, departed to Scyros, where he either fell by accident from a precipice, or was thrown down by the king. His death at first was but little regarded; in after-times, to appease his ghost and expiate his curse, divine honours were awarded to his memory; and in the most polished age of his descendants, his supposed remains, indicated by an eagle in the skeleton of a man of giant stature, with a lance of brass and a sword by his side, were brought to Athens in the galley of Cimon, hailed by the shouts of a joyous multitude, “as if the living Theseus were come again.”

X. I have not altogether discarded, while I have abridged, the legends relating to a hero who undoubtedly exercised considerable influence over his country and his time, because in those legends we trace, better than we could do by dull interpretations equally unsatisfactory though more prosaic, the effigy of the heroic age—not unillustrative of the poetry and the romance which at once formed and indicated important features in the character of the Athenians. Much of the national spirit of every people, even in its most civilized epochs, is to be traced to the influence of that age which may be called the heroic. The wild adventurers of the early Greece tended to humanize even in their excesses. It is true that there are many instances of their sternness, ferocity, and revenge;—they were insolent from the consciousness of surpassing strength;—often cruel from that contempt of life common to the warlike. But the darker side of their character is far less commonly presented to us than the brighter

—they seem to have been alive to generous emotions more readily than any other race so warlike in an age so rude—their affections were fervid as their hatreds—their friendships more remarkable than their feuds. Even their ferocity was not, as with the Scandinavian heroes, a virtue and a boast—their public opinion honoured the compassionate and the clement. Thus Hercules is said first to have introduced the custom of surrendering to the enemy the corpses of their slain; and mildness, justice, and courtesy are no less his attributes than invincible strength and undaunted courage. Traversing various lands, these paladins of an elder chivalry acquired an experience of different governments and customs, which assisted on their return to polish and refine the admiring tribes which their achievements had adorned. Like the knights of a Northern mythus, their duty was to punish the oppressor and redress the wronged, and they thus fixed in the wild elements of unsettled opinion a recognised standard of generosity and of justice. Their deeds became the theme of the poets, who sought to embellish their virtues and extenuate their offences. Thus, certain models, not indeed wholly pure or excellent, but bright with many of those qualities which ennoble a national character, were set before the emulation of the aspiring and the young:—and the traditional fame of a Hercules or a Theseus assisted to inspire the souls of those who, ages afterward, broke the Mede at Marathon, and arrested the Persian might in the Pass of Thermopylae. For, as the spirit of a poet has its influence on the destiny and character of nations, so TIME itself hath his own poetry, preceding and calling forth the poetry of the human genius, and breathing inspirations, imaginative and imperishable, from the great deeds and gigantic images of an ancestral and traditionary age.

CHAPTER IV

The Successors of Theseus.—The Fate of Codrus.—The Emigration of Nileus.—The Archons.—Draco.

I. The reputed period of the Trojan war follows close on the age of Hercules and Theseus; and Menestheus, who succeeded the latter hero on the throne of Athens, led his countrymen to the immortal war. Plutarch and succeeding historians have not failed to notice the expression of Homer, in which he applies the word *demus* or “people” to the Athenians, as a proof of the popular government established in that state. But while the line has been considered an interpolation, as late at least as the time of Solon, we may observe that it was never used by Homer in the popular and political sense it afterward received. And he applies it not only to the state of Athens, but to that of Ithaca, certainly no democracy. [94](#)

The demagogue king appears to have been a man of much warlike renown and skill, and is mentioned as the first who marshalled an army in rank and file. Returning from Troy, he died in the Isle of Melos, and was succeeded by Demophon, one of the sons of Theseus, who had also fought with the Grecian army in the Trojan siege. In his time a dispute between the Athenians and Argives was referred to fifty arbiters of each nation, called Ephetae, the origin of the court so styled, and afterward re-established with new powers by Draco.

To Demophon succeeded his son Oxyntes, and to Oxyntes, Aphidas, murdered by his bastard brother Thymaetes. Thymaetes was the last of the race of Theseus who reigned in Athens. A dispute arose between the Boeotians and the Athenians respecting the confines of their several territories; it was proposed to decide the difference by a single combat between Thymaetes and the King of the Boeotians. Thymaetes declined the contest. A Messenian exile, named Melanthus, accepted it, slew his antagonist by a stratagem, and, deposing the cowardly Athenian, obtained the sovereignty of Athens. With Melanthus, who was of the race of Nestor, passed into Athens two nobles of the same house, Paeon and Alcmaeon, who were the founders of the Paeonids and Alcmaeonids, two powerful families, whose names often occur in the subsequent history of Athens, and who, if they did not create a new order of nobility, at least sought to confine to their own families the chief privileges of that which was established.

II. Melanthus was succeeded by his son Codrus, a man whose fame finds more competitors in Roman than Grecian history. During his reign the Dorians invaded Attica. They were assured of success by the Delphian oracle, on condition that they did not slay the Athenian king. Informed of the response, Codrus disguised himself as a peasant, and, repairing to the hostile force, sought a quarrel with some of the soldiers, and was slain by them not far from the banks of the Ilissus [95](#). The Athenians sent to demand the body of their king; and the Dorians, no longer hoping of success, since the condition of the oracle was thus violated, broke up their encampment and relinquished their design. Some of the Dorians had already by night secretly entered the city and concealed themselves within its walls; but, as the day dawned, and they found themselves abandoned by their associates and surrounded by the foe, they fled to the Areopagus and the altars of the Furies; the refuge was deemed inviolable, and the Dorians were dismissed unscathed—a proof of the awe already attached to the rites of sanctuary [96](#). Still, however, this invasion was attended with the success of what might have been the principal object of the invaders. Megara [97](#), which had hitherto been associated with Attica, was now seized by the Dorians, and became afterward a colony of Corinth. This gallant but petty state had considerable influence on some of the earlier events of Athenian history.

III. Codrus was the last of the Athenian kings. The Athenians affected the motives of reverence to his memory as an excuse for forbidding to the illustrious martyr the chance of an unworthy successor. But the aristocratic constitution had been morally strengthened by the extinction of the race of Theseus and the jealousy of a foreign line; and the abolition of the monarchy was rather

caused by the ambition of the nobles than the popular veneration for the patriotism of Codrus. The name of king was changed into that of archon (magistrate or governor); the succession was still made hereditary, but the power of the ruler was placed under new limits, and he was obliged to render to the people, or rather to the eupatrids, an account of his government whenever they deemed it advisable to demand it.

IV. Medon, the son of Codrus, was the first of these perpetual archons. In that age bodily strength was still deemed an essential virtue in a chief; and Nileus, a younger brother of Medon, attempted to depose the archon on no other pretence than that of his lameness.

A large portion of the people took advantage of the quarrel between the brothers to assert that they would have no king but Jupiter. At length Medon had recourse to the oracle, which decided in his favour; and Nileus, with all the younger sons of Codrus, and accompanied by a numerous force, departed from Athens, and colonized that part of Asia Minor celebrated in history under the name of Ionia. The rise, power, and influence of these Asiatic colonies we shall find a more convenient opportunity to notice. Medon's reign, thus freed from the more stirring spirits of his time, appears to have been prosperous and popular; it was an era in the ancient world, when the lameness of a ruler was discovered to be unconnected with his intellect! Then follows a long train of archons—peaceable and obscure. During a period estimated at three hundred years, the Athenians performed little that has descended to posterity—brief notices of petty skirmishes, and trivial dissensions with their neighbours, alone diversify that great interval. Meanwhile, the Ionian colonies rise rapidly into eminence and power. At length, on the death of Alcmaeon—the thirteenth and last perpetual archon—a new and more popular change was introduced into the government. The sway of the archon was limited to ten years. This change slowly prepared the way to changes still more important. Hitherto the office had been confined to the two Neleid houses of Codrus and Alcmaeon;—in the archonship of Hippomenes it was thrown open to other distinguished families; and at length, on the death of Eryxias, the last of the race of Codrus, the failure of that ancient house in its direct line (indirectly it still continued, and the blood of Codrus flowed through the veins of Solon) probably gave excuse and occasion for abolishing the investment of the supreme power in one magistrate; nine were appointed, each with the title of archon (though the name was more emphatically given to the chief of the number), and each with separate functions. This institution continued to the last days of Athenian freedom. This change took place in the 24th Olympiad.

V. In the 39th Olympiad, Draco, being chief archon, was deputed to institute new laws in B. C. 621. He was a man concerning whom history is singularly brief; we know only that he was of a virtuous and austere renown—that he wrote a great number of verses, as little durable as his laws [98](#). As for the latter—when we learn that they were stern and bloody beyond precedent—we have little difficulty in believing that they were inefficient.

VI. I have hastened over this ambiguous and uninteresting period with a rapidity I trust all but antiquaries will forgive. Hitherto we have been in the land of shadow—we approach the light. The empty names of apocryphal beings which we have enumerated are for the most part as spectres, so dimly seen as to be probably delusions—invoked to please a fanciful curiosity, but without an object to satisfy the reason or excuse the apparition. If I am blamed for not imitating those who have sought, by weaving together disconnected hints and subtle conjectures, to make a history from legends, to overturn what has been popularly believed, by systems equally contradictory, though more learnedly fabricated;—if I am told that I might have made the chronicle thus briefly given extend to a greater space, and sparkle with more novel speculation, I answer that I am writing the history of men and not of names—to the people and not to scholars—and that no researches however elaborate, no conjectures however ingenious, could draw any real or solid moral from records which leave us ignorant both of the characters of men and the causes of events. What matters who was Ion, or whence the first worship of Apollo? what matter revolutions or dynasties, ten or twelve centuries

before Athens emerged from a deserved obscurity?—they had no influence upon her after greatness; enigmas impossible to solve—if solved, but scholastic frivolities.

Fortunately, as we desire the history of a people, so it is when the Athenians become a people, that we pass at once from tradition into history.

I pause to take a brief survey of the condition of the rest of Greece prior to the age of Solon.

CHAPTER V

A General Survey of Greece and the East previous to the time of Solon.—The Grecian Colonies.—The Isles.—Brief account of the States on the Continent.—Elis and the Olympic Games.

I. On the north, Greece is separated from Macedonia by the Cambunian mountains; on the west spreads the Ionian, on the south and east the Aegean Sea. Its greatest length is two hundred and twenty geographical miles; its greatest width one hundred and forty. No contrast can be more startling than the speck of earth which Greece occupies in the map of the world, compared to the space claimed by the Grecian influences in the history of the human mind. In that contrast itself is the moral which Greece has left us—nor can volumes more emphatically describe the triumph of the Intellectual over the Material. But as nations, resembling individuals, do not become illustrious from their mere physical proportions; as in both, renown has its moral sources; so, in examining the causes which conduced to the eminence of Greece, we cease to wonder at the insignificance of its territories or the splendour of its fame. Even in geographical circumstance Nature had endowed the country of the Hellenes with gifts which amply atoned the narrow girth of its confines. The most southern part of the continent of Europe, it contained within itself all the advantages of sea and land; its soil, though unequal in its product, is for the most part fertile and abundant; it is intersected by numerous streams, and protected by chains of mountains; its plains and valleys are adapted to every product most necessary to the support of the human species; and the sun that mellows the fruits of nature is sufficiently tempered not to relax the energies of man. Bordered on three sides by the sea, its broad and winding extent of coast early conduced to the spirit of enterprise; and, by innumerable bays and harbours, proffered every allurements to that desire of gain which is the parent of commerce and the basis of civilization. At the period in which Greece rose to eminence it was in the very centre of the most advanced and flourishing states of Europe and of Asia. The attention of its earlier adventurers was directed not only to the shores of Italy, but to the gorgeous cities of the East, and the wise and hoary institutions of Egypt. If from other nations they borrowed less than has been popularly supposed, the very intercourse with those nations alone sufficed to impel and develop the faculties of an imitative and youthful people;—while, as the spirit of liberty broke out in all the Grecian states, producing a restless competition both among the citizens in each city and the cities one with another, no energy was allowed to sleep until the operations of an intellect, perpetually roused and never crippled, carried the universal civilization to its height. Nature herself set the boundaries of the river and the mountain to the confines of the several states—the smallness of each concentrated power into a focus—the number of all heightened emulation to a fever. The Greek cities had therefore, above all other nations, the advantage of a perpetual collision of mind—a perpetual intercourse with numerous neighbours, with whom intellect was ever at work—with whom experiment knew no rest. Greece, taken collectively, was the only free country (with the exception of Phoenician states and colonies perhaps equally civilized) in the midst of enlightened despotisms; and in the ancient world, despotism invented and sheltered the arts which liberty refined and perfected [99](#): Thus considered, her greatness ceases to be a marvel—the very narrowness of her dominions was a principal cause of it—and to the most favourable circumstances of nature were added circumstances the most favourable of time.

If, previous to the age of Solon, we survey the histories of Asia, we find that quarter of the globe subjected to great and terrible revolutions, which confined and curbed the power of its various despotisms. Its empires for the most part built up by the successful invasions of Nomad tribes, contained in their very vastness the elements of dissolution. The Assyrian Nineveh had been conquered by the Babylonians and the Medes (B. C. 606); and Babylon, under the new Chaldaean dynasty, was attaining the dominant power of western Asia. The Median monarchy was scarce recovering from the pressure of barbarian foes, and Cyrus had not as yet arisen to establish the throne of Persia. In Asia Minor, it is true, the Lydian empire had attained to great wealth and luxury, and

was the most formidable enemy of the Asiatic Greeks, yet it served to civilize them even while it awed. The commercial and enterprising Phoenicians, now foreboding the march of the Babylonian king, who had “taken counsel against Tyre, the crowning city, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth,” at all times were precluded from the desire of conquest by their divided states [100](#), formidable neighbours, and trading habits.

In Egypt a great change had operated upon the ancient character; the splendid dynasty of the Pharaohs was no more. The empire, rent into an oligarchy of twelve princes, had been again united under the sceptre of one by the swords of Grecian mercenaries (B. C. 616); and Neco, the son of the usurper—a man of mighty intellect and vast designs—while he had already adulterated the old Egyptian customs with the spirit of Phoenician and Greek adventure, found his field of action only in the East (defeats Josiah B. C. 609). As yet, then, no foreign enemy had disturbed the early rise of the several states of Greece; they were suffered to form their individual demarcations tranquilly and indelibly; and to progress to that point between social amenities and chivalric hardihood, when, while war is the most sternly encountered, it the most rapidly enlightens. The peace that follows the first war of a half-civilized nation is usually the great era of its intellectual eminence.

II. At this time the colonies in Asia Minor were far advanced in civilization beyond the Grecian continent. Along the western coast of that delicious district—on a shore more fertile, under a heaven more bright, than those of the parent states—the Aeolians, Ionians, and Dorians, in a remoter age, had planted settlements and founded cities (probably commenced under Penthilus, son of Orestes, about B. C. 1068). The Aeolian colonies (the result of the Dorian immigrations) [101](#) occupied the coasts of commenced Mysia and Caria—on the mainland twelve cities—the most renowned of which were Cyme and Smyrna; and the islands of the Heccatonnesi, Tenedos, and Lesbos, the last illustrious above the rest, and consecrated by the muses of Sappho and Alcaeus. They had also settlements about Mount Ida. Their various towns were independent of each other; but Mitylene, in the Isle of Lesbos, was regarded as their common capital. The trade of Mitylene was extensive—its navy formidable.

The Ionian colonies (probably commenced about 988 B. C.), founded subsequently to the Aeolian, but also (though less immediately) a consequence of the Dorian revolution, were peopled not only by Ionians, but by various nations, led by the sons of Codrus. In the islands of Samos and Chios, on the southern coast of Lydia, where Caria stretches to the north, they established their voluptuous settlements known by the name “Ionia.” Theirs were the cities of Myus, and Priene, Colophon, Ephesus, Lebedus, Teos, Clazomene, Erythrae, Phocae, and Miletus:—in the islands of Samos and Chios were two cities of the same name as the isles themselves. The chief of the Ionian cities at the time on which we enter, and second perhaps in trade and in civilization to none but the great Phoenician states, was the celebrated Miletus—founded first by the Carians—exalted to her renown by the Ionians (Naval dominion of Miletus commenced B. C. 750). Her streets were the mart of the world; along the Euxine and the Palus Maeotis, her ships rode in the harbours of a hundred of her colonies. Here broke the first light of the Greek philosophy. But if inferior to this, their imperial city, each of the Ionian towns had its title to renown. Here flourished already music, and art, and song. The trade of Phocae extended to the coasts of Italy and Gaul. Ephesus had not yet risen to its meridian—it was the successor of Miletus and Phocaea. These Ionian states, each independent of the other, were united by a common sanctuary—the Panionium (Temple of Neptune), which might be seen far off on the headland of that Mycale afterward the witness of one of the proudest feats of Grecian valour. Long free, Ionia became tributary to the Lydian kings, and afterward to the great Persian monarchy.

In the islands of Cos and Rhodes, and on the southern shores of Caria, spread the Dorian colonies—planted subsequently to the Ionian by gradual immigrations. If in importance and wealth the Aeolian were inferior to the Ionian colonies, so were the Dorian colonies to the Aeolian. Six cities (Ialysus, Camirus, and Lindus, in Rhodes; in Cos, a city called from the island; Cnidus and

Halicarnassus, on the mainland) were united, like the Ionians, by a common sanctuary—the Temple of Apollo Triopius.

Besides these colonies—the Black Sea, the Palus Maeotis, the Propontis, the coasts of Lower Italy, the eastern and southern shores of Sicily [102](#), Syracuse, the mightiest of Grecian offspring, and the daughter of Corinth,—the African Cyrene,—not enumerating settlements more probably referable to a later date, attested the active spirit and extended navigation of early Greece.

The effect of so vast and flourishing a colonization was necessarily prodigious upon the moral and intellectual spirit of the mother land. The seeds scattered over the earth bore their harvests to her garner.

III. Among the Grecian isles, the glory of Minos had long passed from Crete (about 800 B. C.). The monarchical form of government had yielded to the republican, but in its worst shape—the oligarchic. But the old Cretan institutions still lingered in the habits of private life;—while the jealousies and commotions of its several cities, each independent, exhausted within itself those powers which, properly concentrated and wisely directed, might have placed Crete at the head of Greece.

Cyprus, equally favoured by situation with Crete, and civilized by the constant influence of the Phoenicians, once its masters, was attached to its independence, but not addicted to warlike enterprise. It was, like Crete, an instance of a state which seemed unconscious of the facilities for command and power which it had received from nature. The Island of Corcyra (a Corinthian colony) had not yet arrived at its day of power. This was reserved for that period when, after the Persian war, it exchanged an oligarchic for a democratic action, which wore away, indeed, the greatness of the country in its struggles for supremacy, obstinately and fatally resisted by the antagonist principle.

Of the Cyclades—those beautiful daughters of Crete—Delos, sacred to Apollo, and possessed principally by the Ionians, was the most eminent. But Paros boasted not only its marble quarries, but the valour of its inhabitants, and the vehement song of Archilochus.

Euboea, neighbouring Attica, possessed two chief cities, Eretria and Chalcis, governed apparently by timocracies, and frequently at war with each other. Though of importance as connected with the subsequent history of Athens, and though the colonization of Chalcis was considerable, the fame of Euboea was scarcely proportioned to its extent as one of the largest islands of the Aegean; and was far outshone by the small and rocky Aegina—the rival of Athens, and at this time her superior in maritime power and commercial enterprise. Colonized by Epidaurus, Aegina soon became independent; but the violence of party, and the power of the oligarchy, while feeding its energies, prepared its downfall.

IV. As I profess only to delineate in this work the rise and fall of the Athenians, so I shall not deem it at present necessary to do more than glance at the condition of the continent of Greece previous to the time of Solon. Sparta alone will demand a more attentive survey.

Taking our station on the citadel of Athens, we behold, far projecting into the sea, the neighbouring country of Megaris, with Megara for its city. It was originally governed by twelve kings; the last, Hyperion, being assassinated, its affairs were administered by magistrates, and it was one of the earliest of the countries of Greece which adopted republican institutions. Nevertheless, during the reigns of the earlier kings of Attica, it was tributary to them [103](#). We have seen how the Dorians subsequently wrested it from the Athenians [104](#); and it underwent long and frequent warfare for the preservation of its independence from the Dorians of Corinth. About the year 640, a powerful citizen named Theagenes wrested the supreme power from the stern aristocracy which the Dorian conquest had bequeathed, though the yoke of Corinth was shaken off. The tyrant—for such was the appellation given to a successful usurper—was subsequently deposed, and the democratic government restored; and although that democracy was one of the most turbulent in Greece, it did not prevent this little state from ranking among the most brilliant actors in the Persian war.

V. Between Attica and Megaris we survey the Isle of Salamis—the right to which we shall find contested both by Athens and the Megarians.

VI. Turning our eyes now to the land, we may behold, bordering Attica—from which a mountainous tract divides it—the mythological Boeotia, the domain of the Phoenician Cadmus, and the birthplace of Polynices and Oedipus. Here rise the immemorial mountains of Helicon and Cithaeron—the haunt of the muses; here Pentheus fell beneath the raging bands of the Bacchanals, and Actaeon endured the wrath of the Goddess of the Woods; here rose the walls of Thebes to the harmony of Amphion’s lyre—and still, in the time of Pausanias, the Thebans showed, to the admiration of the traveller, the place where Cadmus sowed the dragon-seed—the images of the witches sent by Juno to lengthen the pains of Alcmena—the wooden statue wrought by Daedalus—and the chambers of Harmonia and of Semele. No land was more sanctified by all the golden legends of poetry—and of all Greece no people was less alive to the poetical inspiration. Devoted, for the most part, to pastoral pursuits, the Boeotians were ridiculed by their lively neighbours for an inert and sluggish disposition—a reproach which neither the song of Hesiod and Pindar, nor the glories of Thebes and Plataea, were sufficient to repel. As early as the twelfth century (B. C.) royalty was abolished in Boeotia—its territory was divided into several independent states, of which Thebes was the principal, and Plataea and Cheronaea among the next in importance. Each had its own peculiar government; and, before the Persian war, oligarchies had obtained the ascendancy in these several states. They were united in a league, of which Thebes was the head; but the ambition and power of that city kept the rest in perpetual jealousy, and weakened, by a common fear and ill-smothered dissensions, a country otherwise, from the size of its territories [105](#) and the number of its inhabitants, calculated to be the principal power of Greece. Its affairs were administered by eleven magistrates, or boeotarchs, elected by four assemblies held in the four districts into which Boeotia was divided.

VII. Beyond Boeotia lies Phocis, originally colonized, according to the popular tradition, by Phocus from Corinth. Shortly after the Dorian irruption, monarchy was abolished and republican institutions substituted. In Phocis were more than twenty states independent of the general Phocian government, but united in a congress held at stated times on the road between Daulis and Delphi. Phocis contained also the city of Crissa, with its harbour and the surrounding territory inhabited by a fierce and piratical population, and the sacred city of Delphi, on the southwest of Parnassus.

VIII. Of the oracle of Delphi I have before spoken—it remains only now to point out to the reader the great political cause of its rise into importance. It had been long established, but without any brilliant celebrity, when happened that Dorian revolution which is called the “Return of the Heraclidae.” The Dorian conquerors had early steered their course by the advice of the Delphian oracle, which appeared artfully to favour their pretensions, and which, adjoining the province of Doris, had imposed upon them the awe, and perhaps felt for them the benevolence, of a sacred neighbour. Their ultimate triumph not only gave a striking and supreme repute to the oracle, but secured the protection and respect of a race now become the most powerful of Greece. From that time no Dorian city ever undertook an enterprise without consulting the Pythian voice; the example became general, and the shrine of the deity was enriched by offerings not only from the piety of Greece, but the credulous awe of barbarian kings. Perhaps, though its wealth was afterward greater, its authority was never so unquestioned as for a period dating from about a century preceding the laws of Solon to the end of the Persian war. Delphi was wholly an independent state, administered by a rigid aristocracy [106](#); and though protected by the Amphictyonic council, received from its power none of those haughty admonitions with which the defenders of a modern church have often insulted their charge. The temple was so enriched by jewels, statues, and vessels of gold, that at the time of the invasion of Xerxes its wealth was said to equal in value the whole of the Persian armament and so wonderful was its magnificence, that it appeared more like the Olympus of the gods than a human temple in their honour. On the ancient Delphi stands now the monastery of Kastri. But still you discover the terraces once crowded by fans—still, amid gloomy chasms, bubbles the Castalian spring—and yet permitted to the pilgrim’s gaze is the rocky bath of the Pythia, and the lofty halls of the Corycian Cave.

IX. Beyond Phocis lies the country of the Locrians, divided into three tribes independent of each other—the Locri Ozolae, the Locri Opuntii, the Locri Epicnemidii. The Locrians (undistinguished in history) changed in early times royal for aristocratic institutions.

The nurse of the Dorian race—the small province of Doris—borders the Locrian territory to the south of Mount Oeta; while to the west of Locris spreads the mountainous Aetolia, ranging northward from Pindus to the Ambracian Bay. Aetolia gave to the heroic age the names of Meleager and Diomed, but subsequently fell into complete obscurity. The inhabitants were rude and savage, divided into tribes, nor emerged into importance until the latest era of the Grecian history. The political constitution of Aetolia, in the time referred to, is unknown.

X. Acarnania, the most western country of central Greece, appears little less obscure at this period than Aetolia, on which it borders; with Aetolia it arose into eminence in the Macedonian epoch of Greek history.

XI. Northern Greece contains two countries—Thessaly and Epirus.

In Thessaly was situated the long and lofty mountain of the divine Olympus, and to the more southern extreme rose Pindus and Oeta. Its inhabitants were wild and hardy, and it produced the most celebrated breed of horses in Greece. It was from Thessaly that the Hellenes commenced their progress over Greece—it was in the kingdoms of Thessaly that the race of Achilles held their sway; but its later history was not calculated to revive the fame of the Homeric hero; it appears to have shared but little of the republican spirit of the more famous states of Greece. Divided into four districts (Thessalotis, Pelasgiotis, Phthiotis, and Hestiaeotis), the various states of Thessaly were governed either by hereditary princes or nobles of vast possessions. An immense population of serfs, or penestae, contributed to render the chiefs of Thessaly powerful in war and magnificent in peace. Their common country fell into insignificance from the want of a people—but their several courts were splendid from the wealth of a nobility.

XII. Epirus was of somewhat less extent than Thessaly, and far less fertile; it was inhabited by various tribes, some Greek, some barbarian, the chief of which was the Molossi, governed by kings who boasted their descent from Achilles. Epirus has little importance or interest in history until the sun of Athens had set, during the ascendancy of the Macedonian kings. It contained the independent state of Ambracia, peopled from Corinth, and governed by republican institutions. Here also were the sacred oaks of the oracular Dodona.

XIII. We now come to the states of the Peloponnesus, which contained eight countries.

Beyond Megaris lay the territory of Corinth: its broad bay adapted it for commerce, of which it availed itself early; even in the time of Homer it was noted for its wealth. It was subdued by the Dorians, and for five generations the royal power rested with the descendants of Aletes [107](#), of the family of the Heraclidae. By a revolution, the causes of which are unknown to us, the kingdom then passed to Bacchis, the founder of an illustrious race (the Bacchiadae), who reigned first as kings, and subsequently as yearly magistrates, under the name of Prytanen. In the latter period the Bacchiadae were certainly not a single family, but a privileged class—they intermarried only with each other,—the administrative powers were strictly confined to them—and their policy, if exclusive, seems to have been vigorous and brilliant. This government was destroyed, as under its sway the people increased in wealth and importance; a popular movement, headed by Cypselus, a man of birth and fortune, replaced an able oligarchy by an abler demagogue (B. C. 655). Cypselus was succeeded by the celebrated Periander (B. C. 625), a man, whose vices were perhaps exaggerated, whose genius was indisputable. Under his nephew Psammetichus, Corinth afterward regained its freedom. The Corinthians, in spite of every change in the population, retained their luxury to the last, and the epistles of Alciphron, in the second century after Christ, note the ostentation of the few and the poverty of the many. At the time now referred to, Corinth—the Genoa of Greece—was high in civilization, possessed of a considerable naval power, and in art and commerce was the sole rival on the Grecian continent to the graceful genius and extensive trade of the Ionian colonies.

XIV. Stretching from Corinth along the coast opposite Attica, we behold the ancient Argolis. Its three principal cities were Argos, Mycenae, and Epidaurus. Mycenae, at the time of the Trojan war, was the most powerful of the states of Greece; and Argos, next to Sicyori, was reputed the most ancient. Argolis suffered from the Dorian revolution, and shortly afterward the regal power, gradually diminishing, lapsed into republicanism [108](#). Argolis contained various independent states—one to every principal city.

XV. On the other side of Corinth, almost opposite Argolis, we find the petty state of Sicyon. This was the most ancient of the Grecian states, and was conjoined to the kingdom of Agamemnon at the Trojan war. At first it was possessed by Ionians, expelled subsequently by the Dorians, and not long after seems to have lapsed into a democratic republic. A man of low birth, Orthagoras, obtained the tyranny, and it continued in his family for a century, the longest tyranny in Greece, because the gentlest. Sicyon was of no marked influence at the period we are about to enter, though governed by an able tyrant, Clisthenes, whose policy it was to break the Dorian nobility, while uniting, as in a common interest, popular laws and regal authority.

XVI. Beyond Sicyon we arrive at Achaia. We have already seen that this district was formerly possessed by the Ionians, who were expelled by some of the Achaeans who escaped the Dorian yoke. Governed first by a king, it was afterward divided into twelve republics, leagued together. It was long before Achaia appeared on that heated stage of action, which allured the more restless spirits of Athens and Lacedaemon.

XVII. We now pause at Elis, which had also felt the revolution of the Heraclidae, and was possessed by their comrades the Aetolians.

The state of Elis underwent the general change from monarchy to republicanism; but republicanism in its most aristocratic form;—growing more popular at the period of the Persian wars, but, without the convulsions which usually mark the progress of democracy. The magistrates of the commonwealth were the superintendents of the Sacred Games. And here, diversifying this rapid, but perhaps to the general reader somewhat tedious survey of the political and geographical aspect of the states of Greece, we will take this occasion to examine the nature and the influence of those celebrated contests, which gave to Elis its true title to immortality.

XVIII. The origin of the Olympic Games is lost in darkness. The legends which attribute their first foundation to the times of demigods and heroes, are so far consonant with truth, that exhibitions of physical strength made the favourite diversion of that wild and barbarous age which is consecrated to the heroic. It is easy to perceive that the origin of athletic games preceded the date of civilization; that, associated with occasions of festival, they, like festivals, assumed a sacred character, and that, whether first instituted in honour of a funeral, or in celebration of a victory, or in reverence to a god, —religion combined with policy to transmit an inspiring custom to a more polished posterity. And though we cannot literally give credit to the tradition which assigns the restoration of these games to Lycurgus, in concert with Iphitus, king of Elis, and Cleosthenes of Pisa, we may suppose at least that to Elis, to Pisa, and to Sparta, the institution was indebted for its revival.

The Dorian Oracle of Delphi gave its sanction to a ceremony, the restoration of which was intended to impose a check upon the wars and disorders of the Peloponnesus. Thus authorized, the festival was solemnized at the temple of Jupiter, at Olympia, near Pisa, a town in Elis. It was held every fifth year; it lasted four days. It consisted in the celebration of games in honour of Jupiter and Hercules. The interval between each festival was called, an Olympiad. After the fiftieth Olympiad (B. C. 580), the whole management of the games, and the choice of the judges, were monopolized by the Eleans. Previous to each festival, officers, deputed by the Eleans, proclaimed a sacred truce. Whatever hostilities were existent in Greece, terminated for the time; sufficient interval was allowed to attend and to return from the games. [109](#)

During this period the sacred territory of Elis was regarded as under the protection of the gods—none might traverse it armed. The Eleans arrogated indeed the right of a constant sanctity to

perpetual peace; and the right, though sometimes invaded, seems generally to have been conceded. The people of this territory became, as it were, the guardians of a sanctuary; they interfered little in the turbulent commotions of the rest of Greece; they did not fortify their capital; and, the wealthiest people of the Peloponnesus, they enjoyed their opulence in tranquillity;—their holy character contenting their ambition. And a wonderful thing it was in the midst of those warlike, stirring, restless tribes—that solitary land, with its plane grove bordering the Alpheus, adorned with innumerable and hallowed monuments and statues—unvisited by foreign wars and civil commotion—a whole state one temple!

At first only the foot-race was exhibited; afterward were added wrestling, leaping, quoiting, darting, boxing, a more complicated species of foot-race (the *Diaulus* and *Dolichus*), and the chariot and horse-races. The Pentathlon was a contest of five gymnastic exercises combined. The chariot-races [110](#) preceded those of the riding horses, as in Grecian war the use of chariots preceded the more scientific employment of cavalry, and were the most attractive and splendid part of the exhibition. Sometimes there were no less than forty chariots on the ground. The rarity of horses, and the expense of their training, confined, without any law to that effect, the chariot-race to the highborn and the wealthy. It was consistent with the vain Alcibiades to decline the gymnastic contests in which his physical endowments might have ensured him success, because his competitors were not the equals to the long-descended heir of the *Alcmaeonidae*. In the equestrian contests his success was unprecedented. He brought seven chariots into the field, and bore off at the same time the first, second, and fourth prize [111](#). Although women [112](#), with the exception of the priestesses of the neighbouring fane of *Ceres*, were not permitted to witness the engagements, they were yet allowed to contend by proxy in the chariot-races; and the ladies of Macedon especially availed themselves of the privilege. No sanguinary contest with weapons, no gratuitous ferocities, no struggle between man and beast (the graceless butcheries of Rome), polluted the festival dedicated to the Olympian god. Even boxing with the *cestus* was less esteemed than the other athletic exercises, and was excluded from the games exhibited by Alexander in his Asiatic invasions [113](#). Neither did any of those haughty assumptions of lineage or knightly blood, which characterize the feudal tournament, distinguish between Greek and Greek. The equestrian contests were indeed, from their expense, limited to the opulent, but the others were impartially free to the poor as to the rich, the peasant as the noble,—the Greeks forbade monopoly in glory. But although thus open to all Greeks, the stadium was impenetrably closed to barbarians. Taken from his plough, the boor obtained the garland for which the monarchs of the East were held unworthy to contend, and to which the kings of the neighbouring Macedon were forbidden to aspire till their Hellenic descent had been clearly proved [114](#). Thus periodically were the several states reminded of their common race, and thus the national name and character were solemnly preserved: yet, like the *Amphictyonic* league, while the Olympic festival served to maintain the great distinction between foreigners and Greeks, it had but little influence in preventing the hostile contests of Greeks themselves. The very emulation between the several states stimulated their jealousy of each other: and still, if the Greeks found their countrymen in Greeks they found also in Greeks their rivals.

We can scarcely conceive the vast importance attached to victory in these games [115](#); it not only immortalized the winner, it shed glory upon his tribe. It is curious to see the different honours characteristically assigned to the conqueror in different states. If Athenian, he was entitled to a place by the magistrates in the *Prytaneum*; if a Spartan, to a prominent station in the field. To conquer at Elis was renown for life, “no less illustrious to a Greek than consulship to a Roman!” [116](#) The haughtiest nobles, the wealthiest princes, the most successful generals, contended for the prize [117](#). And the prize (after the seventh Olympiad) was a wreath of the wild olive!

Numerous other and similar games were established throughout Greece. Of these, next to the Olympic, the most celebrated, and the only national ones, were the *Pythian* at Delphi, the *Nemean* in Argolis, the *Isthmian* in Corinth; yet elsewhere the prize was of value; at all the national ones it was but

a garland—a type of the eternal truth, that praise is the only guerdon of renown. The olive-crown was nothing!—the shouts of assembled Greece—the showers of herbs and flowers—the banquet set apart for the victor—the odes of imperishable poets—the public register which transmitted to posterity his name—the privilege of a statue in the Altis—the return home through a breach in the walls (denoting by a noble metaphor, “that a city which boasts such men has slight need of walls” [118](#)), the first seat in all public spectacles; the fame, in short, extended to his native city—bequeathed to his children—confirmed by the universal voice wherever the Greek civilization spread; this was the true olive-crown to the Olympic conqueror!

No other clime can furnish a likeness to these festivals: born of a savage time, they retained the vigorous character of an age of heroes, but they took every adjunct from the arts and the graces of civilization. To the sacred ground flocked all the power, and the rank, and the wealth, and the intellect, of Greece. To that gorgeous spectacle came men inspired by a nobler ambition than that of the arena. Here the poet and the musician could summon an audience to their art. If to them it was not a field for emulation [119](#), it was at least a theatre of display.

XIX. The uses of these games were threefold;—1st, The uniting all Greeks by one sentiment of national pride, and the memory of a common race; 2dly, The inculcation of hardy discipline—of physical education throughout every state, by teaching that the body had its honours as well as the intellect—a theory conducive to health in peace—and in those ages when men fought hand to hand, and individual strength and skill were the nerves of the army, to success in war; but, 3dly, and principally, its uses were in sustaining and feeding as a passion, as a motive, as an irresistible incentive—the desire of glory! That desire spread through all classes—it animated all tribes—it taught that true rewards are not in gold and gems, but in men’s opinions. The ambition of the Altis established fame as a common principle of action. What chivalry did for the few, the Olympic contests effected for the many—they made a knighthood of a people.

If, warmed for a moment from the gravity of the historic muse, we might conjure up the picture of this festival, we would invoke the imagination of the reader to that sacred ground decorated with the profusest triumphs of Grecian art—all Greece assembled from her continent, her colonies, her isles—war suspended—a Sabbath of solemnity and rejoicing—the Spartan no longer grave, the Athenian forgetful of the forum—the highborn Thessalian, the gay Corinthian—the lively gestures of the Asiatic Ionian;—suffering the various events of various times to confound themselves in one recollection of the past, he may see every eye turned from the combatants to one majestic figure—hear every lip murmuring a single name [120](#)—glorious in greater fields: Olympia itself is forgotten. Who is the spectacle of the day? Themistocles, the conqueror of Salamis, and the saviour of Greece! Again—the huzzas of countless thousands following the chariot-wheels of the competitors—whose name is shouted forth, the victor without a rival!—it is Alcibiades, the destroyer of Athens! Turn to the temple of the Olympian god, pass the brazen gates, proceed through the columned aisles [121](#), what arrests the awe and wonder of the crowd! Seated on a throne of ebon and of ivory, of gold and gems—the olive-crown on his head, in his right hand the statue of Victory, in his left; wrought of all metals, the cloud-compelling sceptre, behold the colossal masterpiece of Phidias, the Homeric dream embodied [122](#)—the majesty of the Olympian Jove! Enter the banquet-room of the conquerors—to whose verse, hymned in a solemn and mighty chorus, bends the listening Spartan—it is the verse of the Dorian Pindar! In that motley and glittering space (the fair of Olympia, the mart of every commerce, the focus of all intellect), join the throng, earnest and breathless, gathered round that sunburnt traveller;—now drinking in the wild account of Babylonian gardens, or of temples whose awful deity no lip may name—now, with clinched hands and glowing cheeks, tracking the march of Xerxes along exhausted rivers, and over bridges that spanned the sea—what moves, what hushes that mighty audience? It is Herodotus reading his history! [123](#)

Let us resume our survey.

XX. Midland, in the Peloponnesus, lies the pastoral Arcady. Besides the rivers of Alpheus and Erymanthus, it is watered by the gloomy stream of Styx; and its western part, intersected by innumerable brooks, is the land of Pan. Its inhabitants were long devoted to the pursuits of the herdsman and the shepherd, and its ancient government was apparently monarchical. The Dorian irruption spared this land of poetical tradition, which the oracle of Delphi took under no unsuitable protection, and it remained the eldest and most unviolated sanctuary of the old Pelasgic name. But not very long after the return of the Heraclidae, we find the last king stoned by his subjects, and democratic institutions established. It was then parcelled out into small states, of which Tegea and Mantinea were the chief.

XXI. Messenia, a fertile and level district, which lies to the west of Sparta, underwent many struggles with the latter power; and this part of its history, which is full of interest, the reader will find briefly narrated in that of the Spartans, by whom it was finally subdued. Being then incorporated with that country, we cannot, at the period of history we are about to enter, consider Messenia as a separate and independent state. [124](#)

And now, completing the survey of the Peloponnesus, we rest at Laconia, the country of the Spartans.

CHAPTER VI

Return of the Heraclidae.—The Spartan Constitution and Habits.—The first and second Messenian War.

I. We have already seen, that while the Dorians remained in Thessaly, the Achaeans possessed the greater part of the Peloponnesus. But, under the title of the Return of the Heraclidae (or the descendants of Hercules), an important and lasting revolution established the Dorians in the kingdoms of Agamemnon and Menelaus. The true nature of this revolution has only been rendered more obscure by modern ingenuity, which has abandoned the popular accounts for suppositions still more improbable and romantic. The popular accounts run thus:—Persecuted by Eurystheus, king of Argos, the sons of Hercules, with their friends and followers, are compelled to take refuge in Attica. Assisted by the Athenians, they defeat and slay Eurystheus, and regain the Peloponnesus. A pestilence, regarded as an ominous messenger from offended heaven, drives them again into Attica. An oracle declares that they shall succeed after the third fruit by the narrow passage at sea. Wrongly interpreting the oracle, in the third year they make for the Corinthian Isthmus. At the entrance of the Peloponnesus they are met by the assembled arms of the Achaeans, Ionians, and Arcadians. Hyllus, the eldest son of Hercules, proposes the issue of a single combat. Echemus, king of Tegea, is selected by the Peloponnesians. He meets and slays Hyllus, and the Heraclidae engage not to renew the invasion for one hundred years. Nevertheless, Cleodaeus, the son, and Aristomachus, the grandson, of Hyllus, successively attempt to renew the enterprise, and in vain. The three sons of Aristomachus (Aristodemus, Temenus, and Cresphontes), receive from Apollo himself the rightful interpretation of the oracle. It was by the Straits of Rhium, across a channel which rendered the distance between the opposing shores only five stadia, that they were ordained to pass; and by the Return of the third fruit, the third generation was denoted. The time had now arrived:—with the assistance of the Dorians, the Aetolians, and the Locrians, the descendants of Hercules crossed the strait, and established their settlement in Peloponnesus (B. C. 1048).

II. Whether in the previous expeditions the Dorians had assisted the Heraclidae, is a matter of dispute—it is not a matter of importance. Whether these Heraclidae were really descendants of the Achaean prince, and the rightful heritors of a Peloponnesian throne, is a point equally contested and equally frivolous. It is probable enough that the bold and warlike tribe of Thessaly might have been easily allured, by the pretext of reinstating the true royal line, into an enterprise which might plant them in safer and more wide domains, and that while the prince got the throne, the confederates obtained the country [125](#). All of consequence to establish is, that the Dorians shared in the expedition, which was successful—that by time and valour they obtained nearly the whole of the Peloponnesus—that they transplanted the Doric character and institutions to their new possessions, and that the Return of the Heraclidae is, in fact, the popular name for the conquest of the Dorians. Whatever distinction existed between the Achaean Heraclidae and the Doric race, had probably been much effaced during the long absence of the former among foreign tribes, and after their establishment in the Peloponnesus it soon became entirely lost. But still the legend that assigned the blood of Hercules to the royalty of Sparta received early and implicit credence, and Cleomenes, king of that state, some centuries afterward, declared himself not Doric, but Achaean.

Of the time employed in consummating the conquest of the invaders we are unable to determine—but, by degrees, Sparta, Argos, Corinth, and Messene, became possessed by the Dorians; the Aetolian confederates obtained Elis. Some of the Achaeans expelled the Ionians from the territory they held in the Peloponnesus, and gave to it the name it afterward retained, of Achaia. The expelled Ionians took refuge with the Athenians, their kindred race.

The fated house of Pelops swept away by this irruption, Sparta fell to the lot of Procles and Eurysthenes [126](#), sons of Aristodemus, fifth in descent from Hercules; between these princes the royal

power was divided, so that the constitution always acknowledged two kings—one from each of the Heracleid families. The elder house was called the Agids, or descendants of Agis, son of Eurysthenes; the latter, the Euryontids, from Eurypon, descendant of Procles. Although Sparta, under the new dynasty, appears to have soon arrogated the pre-eminence over the other states of the Peloponnesus, it was long before she achieved the conquest even of the cities in her immediate neighbourhood. The Achaeans retained the possession of Amyclae, built upon a steep rock, and less than three miles from Sparta, for more than two centuries and a half after the first invasion of the Dorians. And here the Achaeans guarded the venerable tombs of Cassandra and Agamemnon.

III. The consequences of the Dorian invasion, if slowly developed, were great and lasting. That revolution not only changed the character of the Peloponnesus—it not only called into existence the iron race of Sparta—but the migrations which it caused made the origin of the Grecian colonies in Asia Minor. It developed also those seeds of latent republicanism which belonged to the Dorian aristocracies, and which finally supplanted the monarchical government—through nearly the whole of civilized Greece. The revolution once peacefully consummated, migrations no longer disturbed to any extent the continent of Greece, and the various tribes became settled in their historic homes.

IV. The history of Sparta, till the time of Lycurgus, is that of a state maintaining itself with difficulty amid surrounding and hostile neighbours; the power of the chiefs diminished the authority of the kings; and while all without was danger, all within was turbulence. Still the very evils to which the Spartans were subjected—their paucity of numbers—their dissensions with their neighbours—their pent up and encompassed situation in their mountainous confines—even the preponderating power of the warlike chiefs, among whom the unequal divisions of property produced constant feuds—served to keep alive the elements of the great Doric character; and left it the task of the first legislative genius rather to restore and to harmonize, than to invent and create.

As I am writing the history, not of Greece, but of Athens, I do not consider it necessary that I should detail the legendary life of Lycurgus. Modern writers have doubted his existence, but without sufficient reason:—such assaults on our belief are but the amusements of skepticism. All the popular accounts of Lycurgus agree in this—that he was the uncle of the king (Charilaus, an infant), and held the rank of protector—that unable successfully to confront a powerful faction raised against him, he left Sparta and travelled into Crete, where all the ancient Doric laws and manners were yet preserved, vigorous and unadulterated. There studying the institutions of Minos, he beheld the model for those of Sparta. Thence he is said to have passed into Asia Minor, and to have been the first who collected and transported to Greece the poems of Homer [127](#), hitherto only partially known in that country. According to some writers, he travelled also into Egypt; and could we credit one authority, which does not satisfy even the credulous Plutarch, he penetrated into Spain and Libya, and held converse with the Gymnosophists of India.

Returned to Sparta, after many solicitations, he found the state in disorder: no definite constitution appears to have existed; no laws were written. The division of the regal authority between two kings must have produced jealousy—and jealousy, faction. And the power so divided weakened the monarchic energy without adding to the liberties of the people. A turbulent nobility—rude, haughty mountain chiefs—made the only part of the community that could benefit by the weakness of the crown, and feuds among themselves prevented their power from becoming the regular and organized authority of a government [128](#). Such disorders induced prince and people to desire a reform; the interference of Lycurgus was solicited; his rank and his travels gave him importance; and he had the wisdom to increase it by obtaining from Delphi (the object of the implicit reverence of the Dorians) an oracle in his favour.

Thus called upon and thus encouraged, Lycurgus commenced his task. I enter not into the discussion whether he framed an entirely new constitution, or whether he restored the spirit of one common to his race and not unfamiliar to Sparta. Common sense seems to me sufficient to assure us of the latter. Let those who please believe that one man, without the intervention of arms—not

as a conqueror, but a friend—could succeed in establishing a constitution, resting not upon laws, but manners—not upon force, but usage—utterly hostile to all the tastes, desires, and affections of human nature: moulding every the minutest detail of social life into one system—that system offering no temptation to sense, to ambition, to the desire of pleasure, or the love of gain, or the propensity to ease—but painful, hard, steril, and unjoyous;—let those who please believe that a system so created could at once be received, be popularly embraced, and last uninterrupted, unbroken, and without exciting even the desire of change for four hundred years, without having had any previous foundation in the habits of a people—without being previously rooted by time, custom, superstition, and character into their breasts. For my part, I know that all history furnishes no other such example; and I believe that no man was ever so miraculously endowed with the power to conquer nature. [129](#)

But we have not the smallest reason, the slightest excuse, for so pliant a credulity. We look to Crete, in which, previous to Lycurgus, the Dorians had established their laws and customs, and we see at once the resemblance to the leading features of the institutions of Lycurgus; we come with Aristotle to the natural conclusion, that what was familiar to the Dorian Crete was not unknown to the Dorian Sparta, and that Lycurgus did not innovate, but restore and develop, the laws and the manners which, under domestic dissensions, might have undergone a temporary and superficial change, but which were deeply implanted in the national character and the Doric habits. That the regulations of Lycurgus were not regarded as peculiar to Sparta, but as the most perfect development of the Dorian constitution, we learn from Pindar [130](#), when he tells us that “the descendants of Pamphylus and of the Heraclidae wish always to retain the Doric institutions of Aegimius.” Thus regarded, the legislation of Lycurgus loses its miraculous and improbable character, while we still acknowledge Lycurgus himself as a great and profound statesman, adopting the only theory by which reform can be permanently wrought, and suiting the spirit of his laws to the spirit of the people they were to govern. When we know that his laws were not written, that he preferred engraving them only on the hearts of his countrymen, we know at once that he must have legislated in strict conformity to their early prepossessions and favourite notions. That the laws were unwritten would alone be a proof how little he introduced of what was alien and unknown.

V. I proceed to give a brief, but I trust a sufficient outline, of the Spartan constitution, social and political, without entering into prolix and frivolous discussions as to what was effected or restored by Lycurgus—what by a later policy.

There was at Sparta a public assembly of the people (called alia), as common to other Doric states, which usually met every full moon—upon great occasions more often. The decision of peace and war—the final ratification of all treaties with foreign powers—the appointment to the office of counsellor, and other important dignities—the imposition of new laws—a disputed succession to the throne,—were among those matters which required the assent of the people. Thus there was the show and semblance of a democracy, but we shall find that the intention and origin of the constitution were far from democratic. “If the people should opine perversely, the elders and the princes shall dissent.” Such was an addition to the Rhetra of Lycurgus. The popular assembly ratified laws, but it could propose none—it could not even alter or amend the decrees that were laid before it. It appears that only the princes, the magistrates, and foreign ambassadors had the privilege to address it.

The main business of the state was prepared by the Gerusia, or council of elders, a senate consisting of thirty members, inclusive of the two kings, who had each but a simple vote in the assembly. This council was in its outline like the assemblies common to every Dorian state. Each senator was required to have reached the age of sixty; he was chosen by the popular assembly, not by vote, but by acclamation. The mode of election was curious. The candidates presented themselves successively before the assembly, while certain judges were enclosed in an adjacent room where they could hear the clamour of the people without seeing the person, of the candidate. On him whom they adjudged to have been most applauded the election fell. A mode of election open to every species of fraud, and justly condemned by Aristotle as frivolous and puerile [131](#). Once elected, the senator

retained his dignity for life: he was even removed from all responsibility to the people. That Mueller should consider this an admirable institution, “a splendid monument of early Grecian customs,” seems to me not a little extraordinary. I can conceive no elective council less practically good than one to which election is for life, and in which power is irresponsible. That the institution was felt to be faulty is apparent, not because it was abolished, but because its more important functions became gradually invaded and superseded by a third legislative power, of which I shall speak presently.

The original duties of the Gerusia were to prepare the decrees and business to be submitted to the people; they had the power of inflicting death or degradation without written laws, they interpreted custom, and were intended to preserve and transmit it. The power of the kings may be divided into two heads—power at home—power abroad: power as a prince—power as a general. In the first it was limited and inconsiderable. Although the kings presided over a separate tribunal, the cases brought before their court related only to repairs of roads, to the superintendence of the intercourse with other states, and to questions of inheritance and adoption.

When present at the council they officiated as presidents, but without any power of dictation; and, if absent, their place seems easily to have been supplied. They united the priestly with the regal character; and to the descendants of a demigod a certain sanctity was attached, visible in the ceremonies both at demise and at the accession to the throne, which appeared to Herodotus to savour rather of Oriental than Hellenic origin. But the respect which the Spartan monarch received neither endowed him with luxury nor exempted him from control. He was undistinguished by his garb—his mode of life, from the rest of the citizens. He was subjected to other authorities, could be reprimanded, fined, suspended, exiled, put to death. If he went as ambassador to foreign states, spies were not unfrequently sent with him, and colleagues the most avowedly hostile to his person associated in the mission. Thus curbed and thus confined was his authority at home, and his prerogative as a king. But by law he was the leader of the Spartan armies. He assumed the command—he crossed the boundaries, and the limited magistrate became at once an imperial despot! [132](#) No man could question—no law circumscribed his power. He raised armies, collected money in foreign states, and condemned to death without even the formality of a trial. Nothing, in short, curbed his authority, save his responsibility on return. He might be a tyrant as a general; but he was to account for the tyranny when he relapsed into a king. But this distinction was one of the wisest parts of the Spartan system; for war requires in a leader all the license of a despot; and triumph, decision, and energy can only be secured by the unfettered exercise of a single will. Nor did early Rome owe the extent of her conquests to any cause more effective than the unlicensed discretion reposed by the senate in the general. [133](#)

VI. We have now to examine the most active and efficient part of the government, viz., the Institution of the Ephors. Like the other components of the Spartan constitution, the name and the office of ephor were familiar to other states in the great Dorian family; but in Sparta the institution soon assumed peculiar features, or rather, while the inherent principles of the monarchy and the gerusia remained stationary, those of the ephors became expanded and developed. It is clear that the later authority of the ephors was never designed by Lycurgus or the earlier legislators. It is entirely at variance with the confined aristocracy which was the aim of the Spartan, and of nearly every genuine Doric [134](#) constitution. It made a democracy as it were by stealth. This powerful body consisted of five persons, chosen annually by the people. In fact, they may be called the representatives of the popular will—the committee, as it were, of the popular council. Their original power seems to have been imperfectly designed; it soon became extensive and encroaching. At first the ephoralty was a tribunal for civil, as the gerusia was for criminal, causes; it exercised a jurisdiction over the Helots and Perioeci, over the public market, and the public revenue. But its character consisted in this:—it was strictly a popular body, chosen by the people for the maintenance of their interests. Agreeably to this character, it soon appears arrogating the privilege of instituting an inquiry into the conduct of all officials except the counsellors. Every eighth year, selecting a dark night when the moon withheld her light, the ephors watched the aspect of the heavens, and if any shooting star were visible in the

expanse, the kings were adjudged to have offended the Deity and were suspended from their office until acquitted of their guilt by the oracle of Delphi or the priests at Olympia. Nor was this prerogative of adjudging the descendants of Hercules confined to a superstitious practice: they summoned the king before them, no less than the meanest of the magistrates, to account for imputed crimes. In a court composed of the counsellors (or gerusia), and various other magistrates, they appeared at once as accusers and judges; and, dispensing with appeal to a popular assembly, subjected even royalty to a trial of life and death. Before the Persian war they sat in judgment on the King Cleomenes for an accusation of bribery;—just after the Persian war, they resolved upon the execution of the Regent Pausanias. In lesser offences they acted without the formality of this council, and fined or reprimanded their kings for the affability of their manners, or the size [135](#) of their wives. Over education—over social habits—over the regulations relative to ambassadors and strangers—over even the marshalling of armies and the number of troops, they extended their inquisitorial jurisdiction. They became, in fact, the actual government of the state.

It is easy to perceive that it was in the nature of things that the institution of the ephors should thus encroach until it became the prevalent power. Its influence was the result of the vicious constitution of the gerusia, or council. Had that assembly been properly constituted, there would have been no occasion for the ephors. The gerusia was evidently meant, by the policy of Lycurgus, and by its popular mode of election, for the only representative assembly. But the absurdity of election for life, with irresponsible powers, was sufficient to limit its acceptance among the people. Of two assemblies—the ephors and the gerusia—we see the one elected annually, the other for life—the one responsible to the people, the other not—the one composed of men, busy, stirring, ambitious, in the vigour of life—the other of veterans, past the ordinary stimulus of exertion, and regarding the dignity of office rather as the reward of a life than the opening to ambition. Of two such assemblies it is easy to foretell which would lose, and which would augment, authority. It is also easy to see, that as the ephors increased in importance, they, and not the gerusia, would become the check to the kingly authority. To whom was the king accountable? To the people:—the ephors were the people’s representatives! This part of the Spartan constitution has not, I think, been sufficiently considered in what seems to me its true light; namely, that of a representative government. The ephoralty was the focus of the popular power. Like an American Congress or an English House of Commons, it prevented the action of the people by acting in behalf of the people. To representatives annually chosen, the multitude cheerfully left the management of their interests [136](#). Thus it was true that the ephors prevented the encroachments of the popular assembly;—but how? by encroaching themselves, and in the name of the people! When we are told that Sparta was free from those democratic innovations constant in Ionian states, we are not told truly. The Spartan populace was constantly innovating, not openly, as in the noisy Agora of Athens, but silently and ceaselessly, through their delegated ephors. And these dread and tyrant FIVE—an oligarchy constructed upon principles the most liberal—went on increasing their authority, as civilization, itself increasing, rendered the public business more extensive and multifarious, until they at length became the agents of that fate which makes the principle of change at once the vital and the consuming element of states. The ephors gradually destroyed the constitution of Sparta; but, without the ephors, it may be reasonably doubted whether the constitution would have survived half as long. Aristotle (whose mighty intellect is never more luminously displayed than when adjudging the practical workings of various forms of government) paints the evils of the ephoral magistrature, but acknowledges that it gave strength and durability to the state. “For,” [137](#) he says, “the people were contented on account of their ephors, who were chosen from the whole body.” He might have added, that men so chosen, rarely too selected from the chiefs, but often from the lower ranks, were the ablest and most active of the community, and that the fewness of their numbers gave energy and unity to their councils. Had the other part of the Spartan constitution (absurdly panegyricized) been so formed as to harmonize with, even in checking, the power of the ephors; and, above all, had it not been for the lamentable errors of a social system,

which, by seeking to exclude the desire of gain, created a terrible reaction, and made the Spartan magistrature the most venal and corrupt in Greece—the ephors might have sufficed to develop all the best principles of government. For they went nearly to recognise the soundest philosophy of the representative system, being the smallest number of representatives chosen, without restriction, from the greatest number of electors, for short periods, and under strong responsibilities. [138](#)

I pass now to the social system of the Spartans.

VII. If we consider the situation of the Spartans at the time of Lycurgus, and during a long subsequent period, we see at once that to enable them to live at all, they must be accustomed to the life of a camp;—they were a little colony of soldiers, supporting themselves, hand and foot, in a hostile country, over a population that detested them. In such a situation certain qualities were not praiseworthy alone—they were necessary. To be always prepared for a foe—to be constitutionally averse to indolence—to be brave, temperate, and hardy, were the only means by which to escape the sword of the Messenian and to master the hatred of the Helot. Sentinels they were, and they required the virtues of sentinels: fortunately, these necessary qualities were inherent in the bold mountain tribes that had long roved among the crags of Thessaly, and wrestled for life with the martial Lapithae. But it now remained to mould these qualities into a system, and to educate each individual in the habits which could best preserve the community. Accordingly the child was reared, from the earliest age, to a life of hardship, discipline, and privation; he was starved into abstinence;—he was beaten into fortitude;—he was punished without offence, that he might be trained to bear without a groan;—the older he grew, till he reached manhood, the severer the discipline he underwent. The intellectual education was little attended to: for what had sentinels to do with the sciences or the arts? But the youth was taught acuteness, promptness, and discernment—for such are qualities essential to the soldier. He was stimulated to condense his thoughts, and to be ready in reply; to say little, and to the point. An aphorism bounded his philosophy. Such an education produced its results in an athletic frame, in simple and hardy habits—in indomitable patience—in quick sagacity. But there were other qualities necessary to the position of the Spartan, and those scarce so praiseworthy—viz., craft and simulation. He was one of a scanty, if a valiant, race. No single citizen could be spared the state: it was often better to dupe than to fight an enemy. Accordingly, the boy was trained to cunning as to courage. He was driven by hunger, or the orders of the leader over him, to obtain his food, in house or in field, by stealth;—if undiscovered, he was applauded; if detected, punished. Two main-springs of action were constructed within him—the dread of shame and the love of country. These were motives, it is true, common to all the Grecian states, but they seem to have been especially powerful in Sparta. But the last produced its abuse in one of the worst vices of the national character. The absorbing love for his native Sparta rendered the citizen singularly selfish towards other states, even kindred to that which he belonged to. Fearless as a Spartan,—when Sparta was unmenaced he was lukewarm as a Greek. And this exaggerated yet sectarian patriotism, almost peculiar to Sparta, was centred, not only in the safety and greatness of the state, but in the inalienable preservation of its institutions;—a feeling carefully sustained by a policy exceedingly jealous of strangers [139](#). Spartans were not permitted to travel. Foreigners were but rarely permitted a residence within the city: and the Spartan dislike to Athens arose rather from fear of the contamination of her principles than from envy at the lustre of her fame. When we find (as our history proceeds) the Spartans dismissing their Athenian ally from the siege of Ithome, we recognise their jealousy of the innovating character of their brilliant neighbour;—they feared the infection of the democracy of the Agora. This attachment to one exclusive system of government characterized all the foreign policy of Sparta, and crippled the national sense by the narrowest bigotry and the obtusest prejudice. Wherever she conquered, she enforced her own constitution, no matter how inimical to the habits of the people, never dreaming that what was good for Sparta might be bad for any other state. Thus, when she imposed the Thirty Tyrants on Athens, she sought, in fact, to establish her own gerusia; and, no doubt, she imagined it would become, not a curse, but a blessing to a people accustomed to the wildest freedom of a

popular assembly. Though herself, through the tyranny of the ephors, the unconscious puppet of the democratic action, she recoiled from all other and more open forms of democracy as from a pestilence. The simple habits of the Spartan life assisted to confirm the Spartan prejudices. A dinner, a fine house, these sturdy Dorians regarded as a pitiable sign of folly. They had no respect for any other cultivation of the mind than that which produced bold men and short sentences. Them, nor the science of Aristotle, nor the dreams of Plato were fitted to delight. Music and dancing were indeed cultivated among them, and with success and skill; but the music and the dance were always of one kind—it was a crime to vary an air [140](#) or invent a measure. A martial, haughty, and superstitious tribe can scarcely fail to be attached to poetry,—war is ever the inspiration of song,—and the eve of battle to a Spartan was the season of sacrifice to the Muses. The poetical temperament seems to have been common among this singular people. But the dread of innovation, when carried to excess, has even worse effect upon literary genius than legislative science; and though Sparta produced a few poets gifted, doubtless, with the skill to charm the audience they addressed, not a single one of the number has bequeathed to us any other memorial than his name. Greece, which preserved, as in a common treasury, whatever was approved by her unerring taste, her wonderful appreciation of the beautiful, regarded the Spartan poetry with an indifference which convinces us of its want of value. Thebes, and not Sparta, has transmitted to us the Dorian spirit in its noblest shape: and in Pindar we find how lofty the verse that was inspired by its pride, its daring, and its sublime reverence for glory and the gods. As for commerce, manufactures, agriculture,—the manual arts—such peaceful occupations were beneath the dignity of a Spartan—they were strictly prohibited by law as by pride, and were left to the Perioeci or the Helots.

VIII. It was evidently necessary to this little colony to be united. Nothing unites men more than living together in common. The *syssitia*, or public tables, an institution which was common in Crete, in Corinth [141](#), and in Megara, effected this object in a mode agreeable to the Dorian manners. The society at each table was composed of men belonging to the same tribe or clan. New members could only be elected by consent of the rest. Each head of a family in Sparta paid for his own admission and that of the other members of his house. Men only belonged to them. The youths and boys had their own separate table. The young children, however, sat with their parents on low stools, and received a half share. Women were excluded. Despite the celebrated black broth, the table seems to have been sufficiently, if not elegantly, furnished. And the second course, consisting of voluntary gifts, which was supplied by the poorer members from the produce of the chase—by the wealthier from their flocks, orchards, poultry, etc., furnished what by Spartans were considered dainties. Conversation was familiar, and even jocose, and relieved by songs. Thus the public tables (which even the kings were ordinarily obliged to attend) were rendered agreeable and inviting by the attractions of intimate friendship and unrestrained intercourse.

IX. The obscurest question relative to the Spartan system is that connected with property. It was evidently the intention of Lycurgus or the earlier legislators to render all the divisions of land and wealth as equal as possible. But no law can effect what society forbids. The equality of one generation cannot be transmitted to another. It may be easy to prevent a great accumulation of wealth, but what can prevent poverty? While the acquisition of lands by purchase was forbidden, no check was imposed on its acquisition by gift or testament; and in the time of Aristotle land had become the monopoly of the few. Sparta, like other states, had consequently her inequalities—her comparative rich and her positive poor—from an early period in her known history. As land descended to women, so marriages alone established great disparities of property. “Were the whole territory,” says Aristotle, “divided into five portions, two would belong to the women.” The regulation by which the man who could not pay his quota to the *syssitia* was excluded from the public tables, proves that it was not an uncommon occurrence to be so excluded; and indeed that exclusion grew at last so common, that the public tables became an aristocratic instead of a democratic institution. Aristotle, in later times, makes it an objection to the ephoral government that poor men were chosen ephors, and that their venality arose

from their indigence—a moral proof that poverty in Sparta must have been more common than has generally been supposed [142](#);—men of property would not have chosen their judges and dictators in paupers. Land was held and cultivated by the Helots, who paid a certain fixed proportion of the produce to their masters. It is said that Lycurgus forbade the use of gold and silver, and ordained an iron coinage; but gold and silver were at that time unknown as coins in Sparta, and iron was a common medium of exchange throughout Greece. The interdiction of the precious metals was therefore of later origin. It seems to have only related to private Spartans. For those who, not being Spartans of the city—that is to say, for the Laconians or Perioeci—engaged in commerce, the interdiction could not have existed. A more pernicious regulation it is impossible to conceive. While it effectually served to cramp the effects of emulation—to stint the arts—to limit industry and enterprise—it produced the direct object it was intended to prevent;—it infected the whole state with the desire of gold—it forbade wealth to be spent, in order that wealth might be hoarded; every man seems to have desired gold precisely because he could make very little use of it! From the king to the Helot [143](#), the spirit of covetousness spread like a disease. No state in Greece was so open to bribery—no magistracy so corrupt as the ephors. Sparta became a nation of misers precisely because it could not become a nation of spendthrifts. Such are the results which man produces when his legislation deposes nature!

X. In their domestic life the Spartans, like the rest of the Greeks, had but little pleasure in the society of their wives. At first the young husband only visited his bride by stealth—to be seen in company with her was a disgrace. But the women enjoyed a much greater freedom and received a higher respect in Sparta than elsewhere; the soft Asiatic distinctions in dignity between the respective sexes did not reach the hardy mountaineers of Lacedaemon; the wife was the mother of men! Brought up in robust habits, accustomed to athletic exercises, her person exposed in public processions and dances, which, but for the custom that made decorous even indecency itself, would have been indeed licentious, the Spartan maiden, strong, hardy, and half a partaker in the ceremonies of public life, shared the habits, aided the emulation, imbibed the patriotism, of her future consort. And, by her sympathy with his habits and pursuits, she obtained an influence and ascendancy over him which was unknown in the rest of Greece. Dignified on public occasions, the Spartan matron was deemed, however, a virago in private life; and she who had no sorrow for a slaughtered son, had very little deference for a living husband. Her obedience to her spouse appears to have been the most cheerfully rendered upon those delicate emergencies when the service of the state required her submission to the embraces of another! [144](#)

XI. We now come to the most melancholy and gloomy part of the Spartan system—the condition of the Helots.

The whole fabric of the Spartan character rested upon slavery. If it were beneath a Spartan to labour—to maintain himself—to cultivate land—to build a house—to exercise an art;—to do aught else than to fight an enemy—to choose an ephor—to pass from the chase or the palaestra to the public tables—to live a hero in war—an aristocrat in peace,—it was clearly a supreme necessity to his very existence as a citizen, and even as a human being, that there should be a subordinate class of persons employed in the occupations rejected by himself, and engaged in providing for the wants of this privileged citizen. Without Helots the Spartan was the most helpless of human beings. Slavery taken from the Spartan state, the state would fall at once! It is no wonder, therefore, that this institution should have been guarded with an extraordinary jealousy—nor that extraordinary jealousy should have produced extraordinary harshness. It is exactly in proportion to the fear of losing power that men are generally tyrannical in the exercise of it. Nor is it from cruelty of disposition, but from the anxious curse of living among men whom social circumstances make his enemies because his slaves, that a despot usually grows ferocious, and that the urgings of suspicion create the reign of terror. Besides the political necessity of a strict and unrelaxed slavery, a Spartan would also be callous to the sufferings, from his contempt for the degradation, of the slave; as he despised the employments abandoned to the Helot, even so would he despise the wretch that exercised them. Thus the motives

that render power most intolerant combined in the Spartan in his relations to the Helot—viz., 1st, necessity for his services, lost perhaps if the curb were ever relaxed—2dly, consummate contempt for the individual he debased. The habit of tyranny makes tyranny necessary. When the slave has been long maddened by your yoke, if you lighten it for a moment he rebels. He has become your deadliest foe, and self-preservation renders it necessary that him whom you provoke to vengeance you should crush to impotence. The longer, therefore, the Spartan government endured, the more cruel became the condition of the Helots. Not in Sparta were those fine distinctions of rank which exist where slavery is unknown, binding class with class by ties of mutual sympathy and dependance—so that Poverty itself may be a benefactor to Destitution. Even among the poor the Helot had no brotherhood! he was as necessary to the meanest as to the highest Spartan—his wrongs gave its very existence to the commonwealth. We cannot, then, wonder at the extreme barbarity with which the Spartans treated this miserable race; and we can even find something of excuse for a cruelty which became at last the instinct of self-preservation. Revolt and massacre were perpetually before a Spartan's eyes; and what man will be gentle and unsuspecting to those who wait only the moment to murder him?

XII. The origin of the Helot race is not clearly ascertained: the popular notion that they were the descendants of the inhabitants of Helos, a maritime town subdued by the Spartans, and that they were degraded to servitude after a revolt, is by no means a conclusive account. Whether, as Mueller suggests, they were the original slave population of the Achaeans, or whether, as the ancient authorities held, they were such of the Achaeans themselves as had most obstinately resisted the Spartan sword, and had at last surrendered without conditions, is a matter it is now impossible to determine. For my own part, I incline to the former supposition, partly because of the wide distinction between the enslaved Helots and the (merely) inferior Perioeci, who were certainly Achaeans; a distinction which I do not think the different manner in which the two classes were originally subdued would suffice to account for; partly because I doubt whether the handful of Dorians who first fixed their dangerous settlement in Laconia could have effectually subjugated the Helots, if the latter had not previously been inured to slavery. The objection to this hypothesis—that the Helots could scarcely have so hated the Spartans if they had merely changed masters, does not appear to me very cogent. Under the mild and paternal chiefs of the Homeric age [145](#), they might have been subjected to a much gentler servitude. Accustomed to the manners and habits of their Achaean lords, they might have half forgotten their condition; and though governed by Spartans in the same external relations, it was in a very different spirit. The sovereign contempt with which the Spartans regarded the Helots, they would scarcely have felt for a tribe distinguished from the more honoured Perioeci only by a sterner valour and a greater regard for freedom; while that contempt is easily accounted for, if its objects were the previously subdued population of a country the Spartans themselves subdued.

The Helots were considered the property of the state—but they were intrusted and leased, as it were, to individuals; they were bound to the soil; even the state did not arrogate the power of selling them out of the country; they paid to their masters a rent in corn—the surplus profits were their own. It was easier for a Helot than for a Spartan to acquire riches—but riches were yet more useless to him. Some of the Helots attended their masters at the public tables, and others were employed in all public works: they served in the field as light-armed troops: they were occasionally emancipated, but there were several intermediate grades between the Helot and the freeman; their nominal duties were gentle indeed when compared with the spirit in which they were regarded and the treatment they received. That much exaggeration respecting the barbarity of their masters existed is probable enough; but the exaggeration itself, among writers accustomed to the institution of slavery elsewhere, and by no means addicted to an overstrained humanity, is a proof of the manner in which the treatment of the Helots was viewed by the more gentle slave-masters of the rest of Greece. They were branded with ineffaceable dishonour: no Helot might sing a Spartan song; if he but touched what belonged to a Spartan it was profaned—he was the Pariah of Greece. The ephors—the popular magistrates—the guardians of freedom—are reported by Aristotle to have entered office in making a formal

declaration of war against the Helots—probably but an idle ceremony of disdain and insult. We cannot believe with Plutarch, that the infamous cryptia was instituted for the purpose he assigns—viz., that it was an ambushade of the Spartan youths, who dispersed themselves through the country, and by night murdered whomsoever of the Helots they could meet. But it is certain that a select portion of the younger Spartans ranged the country yearly, armed with daggers, and that with the object of attaining familiarity with military hardships was associated that of strict, stern, and secret surveillance over the Helot population. No Helot, perhaps, was murdered from mere wantonness; but who does not see how many would necessarily have been butchered at the slightest suspicion of disaffection, or for the faintest utility of example? These miserable men were the objects of compassion to all Greece. “It was the common opinion,” says Aelian, “that the earthquake in Sparta was a judgment from the gods upon the Spartan inhumanity to the Helots.” And perhaps in all history (not even excepting that awful calmness with which the Italian historians narrate the cruelties of a Paduan tyrant or a Venetian oligarchy) there is no record of crime more thrilling than that dark and terrible passage in Thucydides which relates how two thousand Helots, the best and bravest of their tribe, were selected as for reward and freedom, how they were led to the temples in thanksgiving to the gods—and how they disappeared, their fate notorious—the manner of it a mystery!

XIII. Besides the Helots, the Spartans exercised an authority over the intermediate class called the Perioeci. These were indubitably the old Achaean race, who had been reduced, not to slavery, but to dependance. They retained possession of their own towns, estimated in number, after the entire conquest of Messenia, at one hundred. They had their own different grades and classes, as the Saxons retained theirs after the conquest of the Normans. Among these were the traders and manufacturers of Laconia; and thus whatever art attained of excellence in the dominions of Sparta was not Spartan but Achaean. They served in the army, sometimes as heavy-armed, sometimes as light-armed soldiery, according to their rank or callings; and one of the Perioeci obtained the command at sea. They appear, indeed, to have been universally acknowledged throughout Greece as free citizens, yet dependant subjects. But the Spartans jealously and sternly maintained the distinction between exemption from the servitude of a Helot, and participation in the rights of a Dorian: the Helot lost his personal liberty—the Perioecus his political.

XIV. The free or purely Spartan population (as not improbably with every Doric state) was divided into three generic tribes—the Hyllean, the Dymanatan, and the Pamphylian: of these the Hyllean (the reputed descendants of the son of Hercules) gave to Sparta both her kings. Besides these tribes of blood or race, there were also five local tribes, which formed the constituency of the ephors, and thirty subdivisions called obes—according to which the more aristocratic offices appear to have been elected. There were also recognised in the Spartan constitution two distinct classes—the Equals and the Inferiors. Though these were hereditary divisions, merit might promote a member of the last—demerit degrade a member of the first. The Inferiors, though not boasting the nobility of the Equals, often possessed men equally honoured and powerful: as among the commoners of England are sometimes found persons of higher birth and more important station than among the peers—(a term somewhat synonymous with that of Equal.) But the higher class enjoyed certain privileges which we can but obscurely trace [146](#). Forming an assembly among themselves, it may be that they alone elected to the senate; and perhaps they were also distinguished by some peculiarities of education—an assertion made by Mr. Mueller, but not to my mind sufficiently established. With respect to the origin of this distinction between the Inferiors and the Equals, my own belief is, that it took place at some period (possibly during the Messenian wars) when the necessities of a failing population induced the Spartans to increase their number by the admixture either of strangers, but (as that hypothesis is scarce agreeable to Spartan manners) more probably of the Perioeci; the new citizens would thus be the Inferiors. Among the Greek settlements in Italy, it was by no means uncommon for a colony, once sufficiently established, only to admit new settlers even from the parent state upon inferior terms; and in like manner in Venice arose the distinction between the gentlemen and the citizens; for when

to that sea-girt state many flocked for security and refuge, it seemed but just to give to the prior inhabitants the distinction of hosts, and to consider the immigrants as guests;—to the first a share in the administration and a superior dignity—to the last only shelter and repose.

XV. Such are the general outlines of the state and constitution of Sparta—the firmest aristocracy that perhaps ever existed, for it was an aristocracy on the widest base. If some Spartans were noble, every Spartan boasted himself gentle. His birth forbade him to work, and his only profession was the sword. The difference between the meanest Spartan and his king was not so great as that between a Spartan and a Perioecus. Not only the servitude of the Helots, but the subjection of the Perioeci, perpetually nourished the pride of the superior race; and to be born a Spartan was to be born to power. The sense of superiority and the habit of command impart a certain elevation to the manner and the bearing. There was probably more of dignity in the poorest Spartan citizen than in the wealthiest noble of Corinth—the most voluptuous courtier of Syracuse. And thus the reserve, the decorum, the stately simplicity of the Spartan mien could not but impose upon the imagination of the other Greeks, and obtain the credit for correspondent qualities which did not always exist beneath that lofty exterior. To lively nations, affected by externals, there was much in that sedate majesty of demeanour; to gallant nations, much in that heroic valour; to superstitious nations, much in that proverbial regard to religious rites, which characterized the Spartan race. Declaimers on luxury admired their simplicity—the sufferers from innovation, their adherence to ancient manners. Many a victim of the turbulence of party in Athens sighed for the repose of the Lacedaemonian city; and as we always exaggerate the particular evils we endure, and admire most blindly the circumstances most opposite to those by which we are affected, so it was often the fashion of more intellectual states to extol the institutions of which they saw only from afar and through a glass the apparent benefits, without examining the concomitant defects. An Athenian might laud the Spartan austerity, as Tacitus might laud the German barbarism; it was the panegyric of rhetoric and satire, of wounded patriotism or disappointed ambition. Although the ephors made the government really and latently democratic, yet the concentration of its action made it seemingly oligarchic; and in its secrecy, caution, vigilance, and energy, it exhibited the best of the oligarchic features. Whatever was democratic by law was counteracted in its results by all that was aristocratic in custom. It was a state of political freedom, but of social despotism. This rigidity of ancient usages was binding long after its utility was past. For what was admirable at one time became pernicious at another; what protected the infant state from dissension, stunted all luxuriance of intellect in the more matured community. It is in vain that modern writers have attempted to deny this fact—the proof is before us. By her valour Sparta was long the most eminent state of the most intellectual of all countries; and when we ask what she has bequeathed to mankind—what she has left us in rivalry to that Athens, whose poetry yet animates, whose philosophy yet guides, whose arts yet inspire the world—we find only the names of two or three minor poets, whose works have perished, and some half a dozen pages of pithy aphorisms and pointed repartees!

XVI. My object in the above sketch has been to give a general outline of the Spartan character and the Spartan system during the earlier and more brilliant era of Athenian history, without entering into unnecessary conjectures as to the precise period of each law and each change. The social and political state of Sparta became fixed by her conquest of Messenia. It is not within the plan of my undertaking to retail at length the legendary and for the most part fabulous accounts of the first and second Messenian wars. The first was dignified by the fate of the Messenian hero Aristodemus, and the fall of the rocky fortress of Ithome; its result was the conquest of Messenia (probably begun 743 B. C., ended 723); the inhabitants were compelled to an oath of submission, and to surrender to Sparta half their agricultural produce. After the first Messenian war, Tarentum was founded by a Spartan colony, composed, it is said, of youths [147](#), the offspring of Spartan women and Laconian men, who were dissatisfied with their exclusion from citizenship, and by whom the state was menaced with a formidable conspiracy shared by the Helots. Meanwhile, the Messenians, if conquered, were

not subdued. Years rolled away, and time had effaced the remembrance of the past sufferings, but not of the ancient [148](#) liberties.

It was among the youth of Messenia that the hope of the national deliverance was the most intensely cherished. At length, in Andania, the revolt broke forth. A young man, pre-eminent above the rest for birth, for valour, and for genius, was the head and the soul of the enterprise (probably B. C. 679). His name was Aristomenes. Forming secret alliances with the Argives and Arcadians, he at length ventured to raise his standard, and encountered at Dera, on their own domains, the Spartan force. The issue of the battle was indecisive; still, however, it seems to have seriously aroused the fears of Sparta: no further hostilities took place till the following year; the oracle at Delphi was solemnly consulted, and the god ordained the Spartans to seek their adviser in an Athenian. They sent to Athens and obtained Tyrtæus. A popular but fabulous account [149](#) describes him as a lame teacher of grammar, and of no previous repute. His songs and his exhortations are said to have produced almost miraculous effects. I omit the romantic adventures of the hero Aristomenes, though it may be doubted whether all Grecian history can furnish passages that surpass the poetry of his reputed life. I leave the reader to learn elsewhere how he hung at night a shield in the temple of Chalcioecus, in the very city of the foe, with the inscription, that Aristomenes dedicated to the goddess that shield from the spoils of the Spartans—how he penetrated the secret recesses of Trophonius—how he was deterred from entering Sparta by the spectres of Helen and the Dioscuri—how, taken prisoner in an attempt to seize the women of Aegila, he was released by the love of the priestess of Ceres—how, again made captive, and cast into a deep pit with fifty of his men, he escaped by seizing hold of a fox (attracted thither by the dead bodies), and suffering himself to be drawn by her through dark and scarce pervious places to a hole that led to the upper air. These adventures, and others equally romantic, I must leave to the genius of more credulous historians.

All that seems to me worthy of belief is, that after stern but unavailing struggles, the Messenians abandoned Andania, and took their last desperate station at Ira, a mountain at whose feet flows the river Neda, separating Messenia from Triphylia. Here, fortified alike by art and nature, they sustained a siege of eleven years. But with the eleventh the term of their resistance was completed. The slave of a Spartan of rank had succeeded in engaging the affections of a Messenian woman who dwelt without the walls of the mountain fortress. One night the guilty pair were at the house of the adulteress—the husband abruptly returned—the slave was concealed, and overheard that, in consequence of a violent and sudden storm, the Messenian guard had deserted the citadel, not fearing attack from the foe on so tempestuous a night, and not anticipating the inspection of Aristomenes, who at that time was suffering from a wound. The slave overheard—escaped—reached the Spartan camp—apprized his master Emperamus (who, in the absence of the kings, headed the troops) of the desertion of the guard:—an assault was agreed on: despite the darkness of the night, despite the violence of the rain, the Spartans marched on:—scaled the fortifications:—were within the walls. The fulfilment of dark prophecies had already portended the fate of the besieged; and now the very howling of the dogs in a strange and unwonted manner was deemed a prodigy. Alarmed, aroused, the Messenians betook themselves to the nearest weapons within their reach. Aristomenes, his son Gorgus, Theoclus, the guardian prophet of his tribe (whose valour was equal to his science), were among the first to perceive the danger. Night passed in tumult and disorder. Day dawned, but rather to terrify than encourage—the storm increased—the thunder burst—the lightning glared. What dismayed the besieged encouraged the besiegers. Still, with all the fury of despair, the Messenians fought on: the very women took part in the contest; death was preferable, even in their eyes, to slavery and dishonour. But the Spartans were far superior in number, and, by continual reliefs, the fresh succeeded to the weary. In arms for three days and three nights without respite, worn out with watching, with the rage of the elements, with cold, with hunger, and with thirst, no hope remained for the Messenians: the bold prophet declared to Aristomenes that the gods had decreed the fall of Messene, that the warning oracles were fulfilled. “Preserve,” he cried, “what remain of your forces

—save yourselves. Me the gods impel to fall with my country!” Thus saying, the soothsayer rushed on the enemy, and fell at last covered with wounds and satiated with the slaughter himself had made. Aristomenes called the Messenians round him; the women and the children were placed in the centre of the band, guarded by his own son and that of the prophet. Heading the troop himself, he rushed on the foe, and by his gestures and the shaking of his spear announced his intention to force a passage, and effect escape. Unwilling yet more to exasperate men urged to despair, the Spartans made way for the rest of the besieged. So fell Ira! (probably B. C. 662). [150](#) The brave Messenians escaped to Mount Lyceum in Arcadia, and afterward the greater part, invited by Anaxilaus, their own countryman, prince of the Dorian colony at Rhegium in Italy, conquered with him the Zanclaeans of Sicily, and named the conquered town Messene. It still preserves the name [151](#). But Aristomenes, retaining indomitable hatred to Sparta, refused to join the colony. Yet hoping a day of retribution, he went to Delphi. What counsel he there received is unrecorded. But the deity ordained to Damagetes, prince of Jalysus in Rhodes, to marry the daughter of the best man of Greece. Such a man the prince esteemed the hero of the Messenians, and wedded the third daughter of Aristomenes. Still bent on designs against the destroyers of his country, the patriot warrior repaired to Rhodes, where death delivered the Spartans from the terror of his revenge. A monument was raised to his memory, and that memory, distinguished by public honours, long made the boast of the Messenians, whether those in distant exile, or those subjected to the Spartan yoke. Thus ended the second Messenian war. Such of the Messenians as had not abandoned their country were reduced to Helotism. The Spartan territory extended, and the Spartan power secured, that haughty state rose slowly to pre-eminence over the rest of Greece; and preserved, amid the advancing civilization and refinement of her neighbours, the stern and awing likeness of the heroic age:—In the mountains of the Peloponnesus, the polished and luxurious Greeks beheld, retained from change as by a spell, the iron images of their Homeric ancestry!

CHAPTER VII

Governments in Greece

I. The return of the Heraclidae occasioned consequences of which the most important were the least immediate. Whenever the Dorians forced a settlement, they dislodged such of the previous inhabitants as refused to succumb. Driven elsewhere to seek a home, the exiles found it often in yet fairer climes, and along more fertile soils. The example of these involuntary migrators became imitated wherever discontent prevailed or population was redundant: and hence, as I have already recorded, first arose those numerous colonies, which along the Asiatic shores, in the Grecian isles, on the plains of Italy, and even in Libya and in Egypt, were destined to give, as it were, a second youth to the parent states.

II. The ancient Greek constitution was that of an aristocracy, with a prince at the head. Suppose a certain number of men, thus governed, to be expelled their native soil, united by a common danger and common suffering, to land on a foreign shore, to fix themselves with pain and labour in a new settlement—it is quite clear that a popular principle would insensibly have entered the forms of the constitution they transplanted. In the first place, the power of the prince would be more circumscribed—in the next place, the free spirit of the aristocracy would be more diffused: the first, because the authority of the chief would rarely be derived from royal ancestry, or hallowed by prescriptive privilege; in most cases he was but a noble, selected from the ranks, and crippled by the jealousies, of his order: the second, because all who shared in the enterprise would in one respect rise at once to an aristocracy—they would be distinguished from the population of the state they colonized. Misfortune, sympathy, and change would also contribute to sweep away many demarcations; and authority was transmuted from a birthright into a trust, the moment it was withdrawn from the shelter of ancient custom, and made the gift of the living rather than a heritage from the dead. It was probable, too, that many of such colonies were founded by men, among whom was but little disparity of rank: this would be especially the case with those which were the overflow of a redundant population; the great and the wealthy are never redundant!—the mass would thus ordinarily be composed of the discontented and the poor, and even where the aristocratic leaven was most strong, it was still the aristocracy of some defeated and humbled faction. So that in the average equality of the emigrators were the seeds of a new constitution; and if they transplanted the form of monarchy, it already contained the genius of republicanism. Hence, colonies in the ancient, as in the modern world, advanced by giant strides towards popular principles. Maintaining a constant intercourse with their father-land, their own constitutions became familiar and tempting to the population of the countries they had abandoned; and much of whatsoever advantages were derived from the soil they selected, and the commerce they found within their reach, was readily attributed only to their more popular constitutions; as, at this day, we find American prosperity held out to our example, not as the result of local circumstances, but as the creature of political institutions.

One principal cause of the republican forms of government that began (as, after the Dorian migration, the different tribes became settled in those seats by which they are historically known) to spread throughout Greece, was, therefore, the establishment of colonies retaining constant intercourse with the parent states. A second cause is to be found in the elements of the previous constitutions of the Grecian states themselves, and the political principles which existed universally, even in the heroic ages: so that, in fact, the change from monarchy to republicanism was much less violent than at the first glance it would seem to our modern notions. The ancient kings, as described by Homer, possessed but a limited authority, like that of the Spartan kings—extensive in war, narrow in peace. It was evidently considered that the source of their authority was in the people. No notion seems to have

been more universal among the Greeks than that it was for the community that all power was to be exercised. In Homer's time popular assemblies existed, and claimed the right of conferring privileges on rank. The nobles were ever jealous of the prerogative of the prince, and ever encroaching on his accidental weakness. In his sickness, his age, or his absence, the power of the state seems to have been wrested from his hands—the prey of the chiefs, or the dispute of contending factions. Nor was there in Greece that chivalric fealty to a person which characterizes the North. From the earliest times it was not the MONARCH, that called forth the virtue of devotion, and inspired the enthusiasm of loyalty. Thus, in the limited prerogative of royalty, in the jealousy of the chiefs, in the right of popular assemblies, and, above all, in the silent and unconscious spirit of political theory, we may recognise in the early monarchies of Greece the germs of their inevitable dissolution. Another cause was in that singular separation of tribes, speaking a common language, and belonging to a common race, which characterized the Greeks. Instead of overrunning a territory in one vast irruption, each section seized a small district, built a city, and formed an independent people. Thus, in fact, the Hellenic governments were not those of a country, but of a town; and the words “state” and “city” were synonymous [152](#). Municipal constitutions, in their very nature, are ever more or less republican; and, as in the Italian states, the corporation had only to shake off some power unconnected with, or hostile to it, to rise into a republic. To this it may be added, that the true republican spirit is more easily established among mountain tribes imperfectly civilized, and yet fresh from the wildness of the natural life, than among old states, where luxury leaves indeed the desire, but has enervated the power of liberty, “as the marble from the quarry may be more readily wrought into the statue, than that on which the hand of the workman has already been employed.” [153](#)

III. If the change from monarchy to republicanism was not very violent in itself, it appears to have been yet more smoothed away by gradual preparations. Monarchy was not abolished, it declined. The direct line was broken, or some other excuse occurred for exchanging an hereditary for an elective monarchy; then the period of power became shortened, and from monarchy for life it was monarchy only for a certain number of years: in most cases the name too (and how much is there in names!) was changed, and the title of ruler or magistrate substituted for that of king.

Thus, by no sudden leap of mind, by no vehement and short-lived revolutions, but gradually, insensibly, and permanently, monarchy ceased—a fashion, as it were, worn out and obsolete—and republicanism succeeded. But this republicanism at first was probably in no instance purely democratic. It was the chiefs who were the visible agents in the encroachments on the monarchic power—it was an aristocracy that succeeded monarchy. Sometimes this aristocracy was exceedingly limited in number, or the governing power was usurped by a particular faction or pre-eminent families; then it was called an OLIGARCHY. And this form of aristocracy appears generally to have been the most immediate successor to royalty. “The first polity,” says Aristotle [154](#), “that was established in Greece after the lapse of monarchies, was that of the members of the military class, and those wholly horsemen,” “such republics, though called democracies, had a strong tendency to oligarchy, and even to royalty.” [155](#) But the spirit of change still progressed: whether they were few or many, the aristocratic governors could not fail to open the door to further innovations. For, if many, they were subjected to dissensions among themselves—if few, they created odium in all who were excluded from power. Thus fell the oligarchies of Marseilles, Ister, and Heraclea. In the one case they were weakened by their own jealousies, in the other by the jealousies of their rivals. The progress of civilization and the growing habits of commerce gradually introduced a medium between the populace and the chiefs. The MIDDLE CLASS slowly rose, and with it rose the desire of extended liberties and equal laws. [156](#)

IV. Now then appeared the class of DEMAGOGUES. The people had been accustomed to change. They had been led against monarchy, and found they had only resigned the one master to obtain the many:—A demagogue arose, sometimes one of their own order, more often a dissatisfied, ambitious, or impoverished noble. For they who have wasted their patrimony, as the Stagirite

shrewdly observes, are great promoters of innovation! Party ran high—the state became divided—passions were aroused—and the popular leader became the popular idol. His life was probably often in danger from the resentment of the nobles, and it was always easy to assert that it was so endangered.—He obtained a guard to protect him, conciliated the soldiers, seized the citadel, and rose at once from the head of the populace to the ruler of the state. Such was the common history of the tyrants of Greece, who never supplanted the kingly sway (unless in the earlier ages, when, born to a limited monarchy, they extended their privileges beyond the law, as Pheidon of Argos), but nearly always aristocracies or oligarchies [157](#). I need scarcely observe that the word “tyrant” was of very different signification in ancient times from that which it bears at present. It more nearly corresponded to our word “usurper,” and denoted one who, by illegitimate means, whether of art or force, had usurped the supreme authority. A tyrant might be mild or cruel, the father of the people, or their oppressor; he still preserved the name, and it was transmitted to his children. The merits of this race of rulers, and the unconscious benefits they produced, have not been justly appreciated, either by ancient or modern historians. Without her tyrants, Greece might never have established her democracies. As may be readily supposed, the man who, against powerful enemies, often from a low origin and with impoverished fortunes, had succeeded in ascending a throne, was usually possessed of no ordinary abilities. It was almost vitally necessary for him to devote those abilities to the cause and interests of the people. Their favour had alone raised him—numerous foes still surrounded him—it was on the people alone that he could depend.

The wiser and more celebrated tyrants were characterized by an extreme modesty of deportment—they assumed no extraordinary pomp, no lofty titles—they left untouched, or rendered yet more popular, the outward forms and institutions of the government—they were not exacting in taxation—they affected to link themselves with the lowest orders, and their ascendancy was usually productive of immediate benefit to the working classes, whom they employed in new fortifications or new public buildings; dazzling the citizens by a splendour that seemed less the ostentation of an individual than the prosperity of a state. But the aristocracy still remained their enemies, and it was against them, not against the people, that they directed their acute sagacities and unsparing energies. Every more politic tyrant was a Louis the Eleventh, weakening the nobles, creating a middle class. He effected his former object by violent and unscrupulous means. He swept away by death or banishment all who opposed his authority or excited his fears. He thus left nothing between the state and a democracy but himself; himself removed, democracy ensued naturally and of course. There are times in the history of all nations when liberty is best promoted—when civilization is most rapidly expedited—when the arts are most luxuriantly nourished by a strict concentration of power in the hands of an individual—and when the despot is but the representative of the popular will [158](#). At such times did the tyrannies in Greece mostly flourish, and they may almost be said to cease with the necessity which called them forth. The energy of these masters of a revolution opened the intercourse with other states; their interests extended commerce; their policy broke up the sullen barriers of oligarchical prejudice and custom; their fears found perpetual vent for the industry of a population whom they dreaded to leave in indolence; their genius appreciated the arts—their vanity fostered them. Thus they interrupted the course of liberty only to improve, to concentrate, to advance its results. Their dynasty never lasted long; the oldest tyranny in Greece endured but a hundred years [159](#)—so enduring only from its mildness. The son of the tyrant rarely inherited his father’s sagacity and talents: he sought to strengthen his power by severity; discontent ensued, and his fall was sudden and complete. Usually, then, such of the aristocracy as had been banished were recalled, but not invested with their former privileges. The constitution became more or less democratic. It is true that Sparta, who lent her powerful aid in destroying tyrannies, aimed at replacing them by oligarchies—but the effort seldom produced a permanent result: the more the aristocracy was narrowed, the more certain was its fall. If the middle class were powerful—if commerce thrived in the state—the former aristocracy of birth was soon succeeded by an aristocracy of property (called a timocracy), and this

was in its nature certain of democratic advances. The moment you widen the suffrage, you may date the commencement of universal suffrage. He who enjoys certain advantages from the possession of ten acres, will excite a party against him in those who have nine; and the arguments that had been used for the franchise of the one are equally valid for the franchise of the other. Limitations of power by property are barriers against a tide which perpetually advances. Timocracy, therefore, almost invariably paved the way to democracy. But still the old aristocratic faction, constantly invaded, remained powerful, stubborn, and resisting, and there was scarcely a state in Greece that did not contain the two parties which we find to-day in England, and in all free states—the party of the movement to the future, and the party of recurrence to the past; I say the past, for in politics there is no present! Wherever party exists, if the one desire fresh innovations, so the other secretly wishes not to preserve what remains, but to restore what has been. This fact it is necessary always to bear in mind in examining the political contests of the Athenians. For in most of their domestic convulsions we find the cause in the efforts of the anti-popular party less to resist new encroachments than to revive departed institutions. But though in most of the Grecian states were two distinct orders, and the Eupatrids, or “Well-born,” were a class distinct from, and superior to, that of the commonalty, we should err in supposing that the separate orders made the great political divisions. As in England the more ancient of the nobles are often found in the popular ranks, so in the Grecian states many of the Eupatrids headed the democratic party. And this division among themselves, while it weakened the power of the well-born, contributed to prevent any deadly or ferocious revolutions: for it served greatly to soften the excesses of the predominant faction, and every collision found mediators between the contending parties in some who were at once friends of the people and members of the nobility. Nor should it be forgotten that the triumph of the popular party was always more moderate than that of the antagonist faction—as the history of Athens will hereafter prove.

V. The legal constitutions of Greece were four—Monarchy, Oligarchy, Aristocracy, and Democracy; the illegal, was Tyranny in a twofold shape, viz., whether it consisted in an usurped monarchy or an usurped oligarchy. Thus the oligarchy of the Thirty in Athens was no less a tyranny than the single government of Pisistratus. Even democracy had its illegal or corrupt form—in OCHLOCRACY or mob rule; for democracy did not signify the rule of the lower orders alone, but of all the people—the highest as the lowest. If the highest became by law excluded—if the populace confined the legislative and executive authorities to their own order—then democracy, or the government of a whole people, virtually ceased, and became the government of a part of the people—a form equally unjust and illegitimate—equally an abuse in itself, whether the dominant and exclusive portion were the nobles or the mechanics. Thus in modern yet analogous history, when the middle class of Florence expelled the nobles from any share of the government, they established a monopoly under the name of liberty; and the resistance of the nobles was the lawful struggle of patriots and of freemen for an inalienable privilege and a natural right.

VI. We should remove some very important prejudices from our minds, if we could once subscribe to a fact plain in itself, but which the contests of modern party have utterly obscured—that in the mere forms of their government, the Greek republics cannot fairly be pressed into the service of those who in existing times would attest the evils, or proclaim the benefits, of constitutions purely democratic. In the first place, they were not democracies, even in their most democratic shape:—the vast majority of the working classes were the enslaved population. And, therefore, to increase the popular tendencies of the republic was, in fact, only to increase the liberties of the few. We may fairly doubt whether the worst evils of the ancient republics, in the separation of ranks, and the war between rich and poor, were not the necessary results of slavery. We may doubt, with equal probability, whether much of the lofty spirit, and the universal passion for public affairs, whence emanated the enterprise, the competition, the patriotism, and the glory of the ancient cities, could have existed without a subordinate race to carry on the drudgeries of daily life. It is clear, also, that much of the intellectual greatness of the several states arose from the exceeding smallness of their territories—the

concentration of internal power, and the perpetual emulation with neighbouring and kindred states nearly equal in civilization; it is clear, too, that much of the vicious parts of their character, and yet much of their more brilliant, arose from the absence of the PRESS. Their intellectual state was that of men talked to, not written to. Their imagination was perpetually called forth—their deliberative reason rarely;—they were the fitting audience for an orator, whose art is effective in proportion to the impulse and the passion of those he addresses. Nor must it be forgotten that the representative system, which is the proper conductor of the democratic action, if not wholly unknown to the Greeks [160](#), and if unconsciously practised in the Spartan ephoralty, was at least never existent in the more democratic states. And assemblies of the whole people are compatible only with those small nations of which the city is the country. Thus, it would be impossible for us to propose the abstract constitution of any ancient state as a warning or an example to modern countries which possess territories large in extent—which subsist without a slave population—which substitute representative councils for popular assemblies—and which direct the intellectual tastes and political habits of a people, not by oratory and conversation, but through the more calm and dispassionate medium of the press. This principle settled, it may perhaps be generally conceded, that on comparing the democracies of Greece with all other contemporary forms of government, we find them the most favourable to mental cultivation—not more exposed than others to internal revolutions—usually, in fact, more durable,—more mild and civilized in their laws—and that the worst tyranny of the Demus, whether at home or abroad, never equalled that of an oligarchy or a single ruler. That in which the ancient republics are properly models to us, consists not in the form, but the spirit of their legislation. They teach us that patriotism is most promoted by bringing all classes into public and constant intercourse—that intellect is most luxuriant wherever the competition is widest and most unfettered—and that legislators can create no rewards and invent no penalties equal to those which are silently engendered by society itself—while it maintains, elaborated into a system, the desire of glory and the dread of shame.

CHAPTER VIII

Brief Survey of Arts, Letters, and Philosophy in Greece, prior to the Legislation of Solon.

I. Before concluding this introductory portion of my work, it will be necessary to take a brief survey of the intellectual state of Greece prior to that wonderful era of Athenian greatness which commenced with the laws of Solon. At this period the continental states of Greece had produced little in that literature which is now the heirloom of the world. Whether under her monarchy, or the oligarchical constitution that succeeded it, the depressed and languid genius of Athens had given no earnest of the triumphs she was afterward destined to accomplish. Her literature began, though it cannot be said to have ceased, with her democracy. The solitary and doubtful claim of the birth—but not the song—of Tyrtaeus (fl. B. C. 683), is the highest literary honour to which the earlier age of Attica can pretend; and many of the Dorian states—even Sparta itself—appear to have been more prolific in poets than the city of Aeschylus and Sophocles. But throughout all Greece, from the earliest time, was a general passion for poetry, however fugitive the poets. The poems of Homer are the most ancient of profane writings—but the poems of Homer themselves attest that they had many, nor ignoble, precursors. Not only do they attest it in their very excellence—not only in their reference to other poets—but in the general manner of life attributed to chiefs and heroes. The lyre and the song afford the favourite entertainment at the banquet [161](#). And Achilles, in the interval of his indignant repose, exchanges the deadly sword for the “silver harp,”

“And sings
The immortal deeds of heroes and of kings.” [162](#)

II. Ample tradition and the internal evidence of the Homeric poems prove the Iliad at least to have been the composition of an Asiatic Greek; and though the time in which he flourished is yet warmly debated, the most plausible chronology places him about the time of the Ionic migration, or somewhat less than two hundred years after the Trojan war. The following lines in the speech of Juno in the fourth book of the Iliad are supposed by some [163](#) to allude to the return of the Heraclidae and the Dorian conquests in the Peloponnesus:—

“Three towns are Juno’s on the Grecian plains,
More dear than all th’ extended earth contains—
Mycenae, Argos, and the Spartan Wall—
These mayst thou raze, nor I forbid their fall;
‘Tis not in me the vengeance to remove;
The crime’s sufficient that they share my love.” [164](#)

And it certainly does seem to me that in a reference so distinct to the three great Peloponnesian cities which the Dorians invaded and possessed, Homer makes as broad an allusion to the conquests of the Heraclidae, not only as would be consistent with the pride of an Ionic Greek in attesting the triumphs of the national Dorian foe, but as the nature of a theme cast in a distant period, and remarkably removed, in its general conduct, from the historical detail of subsequent events, would warrant to the poet [165](#). And here I may observe, that if the date thus assigned to Homer be correct, the very subject of the Iliad might have been suggested by the consequences of the Dorian irruption. Homer relates,

“Achilles’ wrath, to Greece the direful spring
Of woes unnumbered.”

But Achilles is the native hero of that Thessalian district, which was the earliest settlement of the Dorian family. Agamemnon, whose injuries he resents, is the monarch of the great Achaean race, whose dynasty and dominion the Dorians are destined to overthrow. It is true that at the time of the Trojan war the Dorians had migrated from Phthiotis to Phocis—it is true that Achilles was not of Dorian extraction; still there would be an interest attached to the singular coincidence of place; as, though the English are no descendants from the Britons, we yet associate the British history with our own: hence it seems to me, though I believe the conjecture is new, that it is not the whole Trojan war, but that episode in the Trojan war (otherwise unimportant) illustrated by the wrath of Achilles, which awakens the inspiration of the poet. In fact, if under the exordium of the Iliad there lurk no typical signification, the exordium is scarce appropriate to the subject. For the wrath of Achilles did not bring upon the Greeks woes more mighty than the ordinary course of war would have destined them to endure. But if the Grecian audience (exiles, and the posterity of exiles), to whom, on Asiatic shores, Homer recited his poem, associated the hereditary feud of Achilles and Agamemnon with the strife between the ancient warriors of Phthiotis and Achaia; then, indeed, the opening lines assume a solemn and prophetic significance, and their effect must have been electrical upon a people ever disposed to trace in the myths of their ancestry the legacies of a dark and ominous fatality, by which each present suffering was made the inevitable result of an immemorial cause. [166](#)

III. The ancients unanimously believed the Iliad the production of a single poet; in recent times a contrary opinion has been started; and in Germany, at this moment, the most fashionable belief is, that that wonderful poem was but a collection of rhapsodies by various poets, arranged and organized by Pisistratus and the poets of his day; a theory a scholar may support, but which no poet could ever have invented! For this proposition the principal reasons alleged are these:—It is asserted as an “indisputable fact,” “that the art of writing, and the use of manageable writing materials, were entirely, or all but entirely, unknown in Greece and its islands at the supposed date of the composition of the Iliad and Odyssey; that, if so, these poems could not have been committed to writing during the time of such their composition; that, in a question of comparative probabilities like this, it is a much grosser improbability that even the single Iliad, amounting, after all curtailments and expungings, to upwards of 15,000 hexameter lines, should have been actually conceived and perfected in the brain of one man, with no other help but his own or others’ memory, than that it should in fact be the result of the labours of several distinct authors; that if the Odyssey be counted, the improbability is doubled; that if we add, upon the authority of Thucydides and Aristotle, the Hymns and Margites, not to say the *Batrachomyomachia*, that which was improbable becomes morally impossible! that all that has been so often said as to the fact of as many verses or more having been committed to memory, is beside the point in question, which is not whether 15,000 or 30,000 lines may not be learned by heart from print or manuscript, but whether one man can originally compose a poem of that length, which, rightly or not, shall be thought to be a perfect model of symmetry and consistency of parts, without the aid of writing materials;—that, admitting the superior probability of such an achievement in a primitive age, we know nothing actually similar or analogous to it; and that it so transcends the common limits of intellectual power, as at the least to merit, with as much justice as the opposite opinion, the character of improbability.” [167](#)

And upon such arguments the identity of Homer is to be destroyed! Let us pursue them seriatim.

1st. “The art and the use of manageable writing materials were entirely, or all but entirely, unknown in Greece and its islands at the supposed date of the composition of the Iliad and Odyssey.”

The whole argument against the unity of Homer rests upon this assertion; and yet this assertion it is impossible to prove! It is allowed, on the contrary, that alphabetical characters were introduced in Greece by Cadmus—nay, inscriptions believed by the best antiquaries to bear date before the Trojan war are found even among the Pelasgi of Italy. Dionysius informs us that the Pelasgi first introduced letters into Italy. But in answer to this, it is said that letters were used only for inscriptions on stone

or wood, and not for the preservation of writings so voluminous. If this were the case, I scarcely see why the Greeks should have professed so grateful a reminiscence of the gift of Cadmus, the mere inscription of a few words on stone would not be so very popular or beneficial an invention! But the Phoenicians had constant intercourse with the Egyptians and Hebrews; among both those nations the art and materials of writing were known. The Phoenicians, far more enterprising than either, must have been fully acquainted with their means of written communication—and indeed we are assured that they were so. Now, if a Phoenician had imparted so much of the art to Greece as the knowledge of a written alphabet, is it probable that he would have suffered the communication to cease there! The Phoenicians were a commercial people—their colonies in Greece were for commercial purposes,—would they have wilfully and voluntarily neglected the most convenient mode of commercial correspondence?—importing just enough of the art to suffice for inscriptions of no use but to the natives, would they have stopped short precisely at that point when the art became useful to themselves? And in vindicating that most able people from so wilful a folly, have we no authority in history as well as common sense? We have the authority of Herodotus! When he informs us that the Phoenicians communicated letters to the Ionians, he adds, that by a very ancient custom the Ionians called their books *diptherae*, or skins, because, at a time when the plant of the bibles or papyrus was scarce [168](#), they used instead of it the skins of goats and sheep—a custom he himself witnessed among barbarous nations. Were such materials used only for inscriptions relative to a religious dedication, or a political compact? NO; for then, wood or stone—the temple or the pillar—would have been the material for the inscription,—they must, then, have been used for a more literary purpose; and verse was the first form of literature. I grant that prior, and indeed long subsequent to the time of Homer, the art of writing (as with us in the dark ages) would be very partially known—that in many parts of Greece, especially European Greece, it might scarcely ever be used but for brief inscriptions. But that is nothing to the purpose;—if known at all—to any Ionian trader—even to any neighbouring Asiatic—even to any Phoenician settler—there is every reason to suppose that Homer himself, or a contemporary disciple and reciter of his verses, would have learned both the art and the use of the materials which could best have ensured the fame of the poet, or assisted the memory of the reciter. And, though Plutarch in himself alone is no authority, he is not to be rejected as a corroborative testimony when he informs us that Lycurgus collected and transcribed the poems of Homer; and that writing was then known in Greece is evident by the very ordinance of Lycurgus that his laws should not be written. But Lycurgus is made by Apollodorus contemporary with Homer himself; and this belief appears, to receive the sanction of the most laborious and profound of modern chronologers [169](#). I might adduce various other arguments in support of those I have already advanced; but I have said enough already to show that it is not an “indisputable fact” that Homer could not have been acquainted with writing materials; and that the whole battery erected to demolish the fame of the greatest of human geniuses has been built upon a most uncertain and unsteady foundation. It may be impossible to prove that Homer’s poems were written, but it is equally impossible to prove that they were not—and if it were necessary for the identity of Homer that his poems should have been written, that necessity would have been one of the strongest proofs, not that Homer did not exist, but that writing did!

But let us now suppose it proved that writing materials for a literary purpose were unknown, and examine the assertions built upon that hypothesis.

2d. “That if these poems could not have been committed to writing during the time of their composition, it is a much grosser improbability that even the single *Iliad*, amounting, after all curtailments and expungings, to upwards of 15,000 hexameter lines, should have been actually conceived and perfected in the brain of one man, with no other help but his own or others’ memory, than that it should, in fact, be the result of the labours of several distinct authors.”

I deny this altogether. “The improbability” might be “grosser” if the *Iliad* had been composed in a day! But if, as any man of common sense would acknowledge, it was composed in parts or “fyttes” of

moderate length at a time, no extraordinary power of memory, or tension of thought, would have been required by the poet. Such parts, once recited and admired, became known and learned by a hundred professional bards, and were thus orally published, as it were, in detached sections, years perhaps before the work was completed. All that is said, therefore, about the difficulty of composing so long a poem without writing materials is but a jargon of words. Suppose no writing materials existed, yet, as soon as portions of a few hundred lines at a time were committed to the memory of other minstrels, the author would, in those minstrels, have living books whereby to refresh his memory, and could even, by their help, polish and amend what was already composed. It would not then have been necessary for the poet himself perfectly and verbally to remember the whole work. He had his tablets of reference in the hearts and lips of others, and even, if it were necessary that he himself should retain the entire composition, the constant habit of recital, the constant exercise of memory, would render such a task by no means impracticable or unprecedented. As for the unity of the poem, thus composed, it would have been, as it is, the unity, not of technical rules and pedantic criticism, but the unity of interest, character, imagery, and thought—a unity which required no written references to maintain it, but which was the essential quality of one master-mind, and ought to be, to all plain men, an irrefragable proof that one mind alone conceived and executed the work.

IV. So much for the alleged improbability of one author for the Iliad. But with what face can these critics talk of “probability,” when, in order to get rid of one Homer, they ask us to believe in twenty! Can our wildest imagination form more monstrous hypotheses than these, viz.—that several poets, all possessed of the very highest order of genius (never before or since surpassed), lived in the same age—that that genius was so exactly similar in each, that we cannot detect in the thoughts, the imagery, the conception and treatment of character, human and divine, as manifest in each, the least variety in these wonderful minds—that out of the immense store of their national legends, they all agreed in selecting one subject, the war of Troy—that of that subject they all agreed in selecting only one portion of time, from the insult of Achilles to the redemption of the body of Hector—that their different mosaics so nicely fitted one into the other, that by the mere skill of an able editor they were joined into a whole, so symmetrical that the acutest ingenuity of ancient Greece could never discover the imposture [170](#)—and that, of all these poets, so miraculous in their genius, no single name, save that of Homer, was recorded by the general people to whom they sung, or claimed by the peculiar tribe whose literature they ought to have immortalized? If everything else were wanting to prove the unity of Homer, this prodigious extravagance of assumption, into which a denial of that unity has driven men of no common learning and intellect, would be sufficient to establish it.

3d. “That if the Odyssey be counted, the improbability is doubled; that if we add, upon the authority of Thucydides and Aristotle, the Hymns and Margites, not to say the *Batrachomyomachia*, that which was improbable becomes morally impossible.”

Were these last-mentioned poems Homer’s, there would yet be nothing improbable in the invention and composition of minor poems without writing materials; and the fact of his having composed one long poem, throws no difficulty in the way of his composing short ones. We have already seen that the author need not himself have remembered them all his life. But this argument is not honest, for the critics who have produced it agree in the same breath, when it suits their purpose, that the Hymns, etc., are not Homer’s—and in this I concur with their, and the almost universal, opinion.

The remaining part of the analysis of the hostile argument has already been disposed of in connexion with the first proposition.

It now remains to say a few words upon the authorship of the Odyssey.

V. The question, whether or not the two epics of the Iliad and Odyssey were the works of the same poet, is a very different one from that which we have just discussed. Distinct and separate, indeed, are the inquiries whether Greece might produce, at certain intervals of time, two great epic poets, selecting opposite subjects—and whether Greece produced a score or two of great poets,

from whose desultory remains the mighty whole of the Iliad was arranged. Even the ancients of the Alexandrine school did not attribute the Odyssey to the author of the Iliad. The theme selected—the manners described—the mythological spirit—are all widely different in the two works, and one is evidently of more recent composition than the other. But, for my own part, I do not think it has been yet clearly established that all these acknowledged differences are incompatible with the same authorship. If the Iliad were written in youth, the travels of the poet, the change of mind produced by years and experience, the facility with which an ancient Greek changed or remodelled his pliant mythology, the rapidity with which (in the quick development of civilization in Greece) important changes in society and manners were wrought, might all concur in producing, from the mature age of the poet, a poem very different to that which he composed in youth. And the various undetected interpolations and alterations supposed to be foisted into the Odyssey may have originated such detailed points of difference as present the graver obstacles to this conjecture. Regarding the Iliad and Odyssey as wholes, they are so analogous in all the highest and rarest attributes of genius, that it is almost as impossible to imagine two Homers as it is two Shakspeares. Nor is there such a contrast between the Iliad and the Odyssey as there is between any one play of Shakspeare's and another [171](#). Still, I should warn the general reader, that the utmost opposition that can reasonably and effectually be made to those who assign to different authors these several epics, limits itself rather to doubt than to denial.

VI. It is needless to criticise these immortal masterpieces; not that criticism upon them is yet exhausted—not that a most useful, and even novel analysis of their merits and character may not yet be performed, nor that the most striking and brilliant proofs of the unity of each poem, separately considered, may not be established by one who shall, with fitting powers, undertake the delightful task of deducing the individuality of the poet from the individualizing character of his creations, and the peculiar attributes of his genius. With human works, as with the divine, the main proof of the unity of the author is in his fidelity to himself:—Not then as a superfluous, but as far too lengthened and episodical a labour, if worthily performed, do I forego at present a critical survey of the two poems popularly ascribed to Homer.

The early genius of Greece devoted itself largely to subjects similar to those which employed the Homeric muse. At a later period—probably dating at the Alexandrian age—a vast collection of ancient poems was arranged into what is termed the “Epic Cycle;” these commenced at the Theogony, and concluded with the adventures of Telemachus. Though no longer extant, the Cyclic poems enjoyed considerable longevity. The greater part were composed between the years 775 B. C. and 566 B. C. They were extant in the time of Proclus, A. D. 450; the eldest, therefore, endured at least twelve, the most recent ten centuries;—save a few scattered lines, their titles alone remain, solitary tokens, yet floating above the dark oblivion which has swept over the epics of thirty bards! But, by the common assent, alike of the critics and the multitude, none of these approached the remote age, still less the transcendent merits, of the Homeric poems.

VII. But, of earlier date than these disciples of Homer, is a poetry of a class fundamentally distinct from the Homeric, viz., the collection attributed to Hesiod. Of one of these only, a rustic and homely poem called “Works and Days,” was Hesiod considered the author by his immediate countrymen (the Boeotians of Helicon); but the more general belief assigned to the fertility of his genius a variety of other works, some of which, if we may judge by the titles, aimed at a loftier vein [172](#). And were he only the author of the “Works and Days”—a poem of very insignificant merit [173](#)—it would be scarcely possible to account for the high estimation in which Hesiod was held by the Greeks, often compared, and sometimes preferred, to the mighty and majestic Homer. We must either, then, consider Hesiod as the author of many writings superior perhaps to what we now possess, or, as is more plausibly and popularly supposed by modern critics, the representative and type, as it were, of a great school of national poetry. And it has been acutely suggested that, viewing the pastoral and lowly occupation he declares himself to pursue [174](#), combined with the subjects of his

muse, and the place of his birth, we may believe the name of Hesiod to have been the representative of the poetry, not of the victor lords, but of the conquered people, expressive of their pursuits, and illustrative of their religion. This will account for the marked and marvellous difference between the martial and aristocratic strain of Homer and the peaceful and rustic verse of Hesiod [175](#), as well as for the distinction no less visible between the stirring mythology of the one and the thoughtful theogony of the other. If this hypothesis be accepted, the Hesiodic era might very probably have commenced before the Homeric (although what is now ascribed to Hesiod is evidently of later date than the Iliad and the Odyssey). And Hesiod is to Homer what the Pelasgic genius was to the Hellenic. [176](#)

VIII. It will be obvious to all who study what I may call the natural history of poetry, that short hymns or songs must long have preceded the gigantic compositions of Homer. Linus and Thamyris, and, more disputably, Orpheus, are recorded to have been the precursors of Homer, though the poems ascribed to them (some of which still remain) were of much later date. Almost coeval with the Grecian gods were doubtless religious hymns in their honour. And the germe of the great lyrical poetry that we now possess was, in the rude chants of the warlike Dorians, to that Apollo who was no less the Inspirer than the Protector. The religion of the Greeks preserved and dignified the poetry it created; and the bard, “beloved by gods as men,” became invested, as well with a sacred character as a popular fame. Beneath that cheerful and familiar mythology, even the comic genius sheltered its license, and found its subjects. Not only do the earliest of the comic dramatists seem to have sought in mythic fables their characters and plots, but, far before the DRAMA itself arose in any of the Grecian states, comic recital prepared the way for comic representation. In the eighth book of the Odyssey, the splendid Alcinous and the pious Ulysses listen with delight to the story, even broadly ludicrous, how Vulcan nets and exposes Venus and her war-god lover—

“All heaven beholds imprisoned as they lie,
And unextinguished laughter shakes the sky.”

And this singular and well-known effusion shows, not only how grave and reverent an example Epicharmus had for his own audacious portraiture of the infirmities of the Olympian family, but how immemorially and how deeply fixed in the popular spirit was the disposition to draw from the same source the elements of humour and of awe.

But, however ancient the lyrical poetry of Greece, its masterpieces of art were composed long subsequent to the Homeric poems; and, no doubt, greatly influenced by acquaintance with those fountains of universal inspiration. I think it might be shown that lyrical poetry developed itself, in its more elaborate form, earliest in those places where the poems of Homer are most likely to have been familiarly known.

The peculiar character of the Greek lyrical poetry can only be understood by remembering its inseparable connexion with music; and the general application of both, not only to religious but political purposes. The Dorian states regarded the lyre and the song as powerful instruments upon the education, the manners, and the national character of their citizens. With them these arts were watched and regulated by the law, and the poet acquired something of the social rank, and aimed at much of the moral design, of a statesman and a legislator: while, in the Ionian states, the wonderful stir and agitation, the changes and experiments in government, the rapid growth of luxury, commerce, and civilization, afforded to a poetry which was not, as with us, considered a detached, unsocial, and solitary art, but which was associated with every event of actual life—occasions of vast variety—themes of universal animation. The eloquence of poetry will always be more exciting in its appeals—the love for poetry always more diffused throughout a people, in proportion as it is less written than recited. How few, even at this day, will read a poem!— what crowds will listen to a song! Recitation transfers the stage of effect from the closet to the multitude—the public becomes an audience, the poet an orator. And when we remember that the poetry, thus created, embodying the most vivid,

popular, animated subjects of interest, was united with all the pomp of festival and show—all the grandest, the most elaborate, and artful effects of music—we may understand why the true genius of lyrical composition has passed for ever away from the modern world.

As early as between 708 and 665 B. C., Archilochus brought to perfection a poetry worthy of loftier passions than those which mostly animated his headstrong and angry genius. In 625 (thirty-one years before the legislation of Solon) flourished Arion, the Lesbian, who, at Corinth, carried, to extraordinary perfection the heroic adaptation of song to choral music. In 611 flourished the Sicilian, Stersichorus —no unworthy rival of Arion; while simultaneously, in strains less national and Grecian, and more resembling the inspiration of modern minstrels, Alcaeus vented his burning and bitter spirit; —and Sappho (whose chaste and tender muse it was reserved for the chivalry of a northern student, five-and-twenty centuries after the hand was cold and the tongue was mute, to vindicate from the longest-continued calumny that genius ever endured) [177](#) gave to the most ardent of human passions the most delicate colouring of female sentiment. Perhaps, of all that Greece has bequeathed to us, nothing is so perfect in its concentration of real feeling as the fragments of Sappho. In one poem of a few lines—nor that, alas! transmitted to us complete—she has given a picture of the effect of love upon one who loves, to which volumes of the most eloquent description could scarcely add a single new touch of natural pathos—so subtle is it, yet so simple. I cannot pass over in silence the fragments of Mimnermus (fl. B. C. 630)—they seem of an order so little akin to the usual character of Grecian poetry; there is in them a thoughtful though gloomy sadness, that belongs rather to the deep northern imagination than the brilliant fancies of the west; their melancholy is mixed with something half intellectual—half voluptuous—indicative of the mournful but interesting wisdom of satiety. Mimnermus is a principal model of the Latin elegiac writers—and Propertius compares his love verses with those of Homer. Mimnermus did not invent the elegiac form (for it was first applied to warlike inspiration by another Ionian poet, Callinus); but he seems the founder of what we now call the elegiac spirit in its association of the sentiment of melancholy with the passion of love.

IX. While such was the state of POETRY in Greece—torpid in the Ionian Athens, but already prodigal in her kindred states of Asia and the Isles; gravely honoured, rather than produced, in Sparta;— splendidly welcomed, rather than home-born, in Corinth;—the Asiatic colonies must also claim the honour of the advance of the sister arts. But in architecture the Dorian states of European Greece, Sicyon, Aegina, and the luxurious Corinth, were no unworthy competitors with Ionia.

In the heroic times, the Homeric poems, especially the Odyssey, attest the refinement and skill to which many of the imitative arts of Grecian civilization had attained. In embroidery, the high-born occupation of Helen and Penelope, were attempted the most complex and difficult designs; and it is hard to suppose that these subjects could have been wrought upon garments with sufficient fidelity to warrant the praise of a poet who evidently wrote from experience of what he had seen, if the art of DRAWING had not been also carried to some excellence—although to PAINTING itself the poet makes none but dubious and obscure allusions. Still, if, on the one hand [178](#), in embroidery, and upon arms (as the shield of Achilles), delineation in its more complex and minute form was attempted, —and if, on the other hand, the use of colours was known (which it was, as applied not only to garments but to ivory), it could not have been long before two such kindred elements of the same art were united. Although it is contended by many that rude stones or beams were the earliest objects of Grecian worship, and though it is certain that in several places such emblems of the Deity preceded the worship of images, yet to the superstitious art of the rude Pelasgi in their earliest age, uncouth and half-formed statues of Hermes are attributed, and the idol is commemorated by traditions almost as antique as those which attest the sanctity of the fetiche [179](#). In the Homeric age, SCULPTURE in metals, and on a large scale, was certainly known. By the door of Alcinous, the king of an island in the Ionian Sea, stand rows of dogs in gold and silver—in his hall, upon pedestals, are golden statues of boys holding torches; and that such sculpture was even then dedicated to the gods is apparent by a well-known passage in the earlier poem of the Iliad; which represents Theano, the Trojan priestess

of Minerva, placing the offering of Hecuba upon the knees of the statue of the goddess. How far, however, such statues could be called works of art, or how far they were wrought by native Greeks, it is impossible to determine [180](#). Certain it is that the memorable and gigantic advance in the art of SCULPTURE was not made till about the 50th Olympiad (B. C. 580), when Dipaenus and Scyllis first obtained celebrity in works in marble (wood and metals were the earliest materials of sculpture). The great improvements in the art seem to have been coeval with the substitution of the naked for the draped figure. Beauty, and ease, and grace, and power, were the result of the anatomical study of the human form. ARCHITECTURE has bequeathed to us, in the Pelasgic and Cyclopean remains, sufficient to indicate the massive strength it early acquired in parts of Greece. In the Homeric times, the intercourse with Asia had already given something of lightness to the elder forms. Columns are constantly introduced into the palaces of the chiefs, profuse metallic ornaments decorate the walls; and the Homeric palaces, with their cornices gayly inwrought with blue—their pillars of silver on bases of brass, rising amid vines and fruit-trees,—even allowing for all the exaggerations of the poet,—dazzle the imagination with much of the gaudiness and glitter of an oriental city [181](#). At this period Athens receives from Homer the epithet of “broad-streeted:” and it is by no means improbable that the city of the Attic king might have presented to a traveller, in the time of Homer, a more pleasing general appearance than in its age of fame, when, after the Persian devastations, its stately temples rose above narrow and irregular streets, and the jealous effects of democracy forbade to the mansions of individual nobles that striking pre-eminence over the houses of the commonalty which would naturally mark the distinction of wealth and rank, in a monarchical, or even an oligarchical government.

X. About the time on which we now enter, the extensive commerce and free institutions of the Ionian colonies had carried all the arts just referred to far beyond the Homeric time. And, in addition to the activity and development of the intellect in all its faculties which progressed with the extensive trade and colonization of Miletus (operating upon the sensitive, inquiring, and poetical temperament of the Ionian population), a singular event, which suddenly opened to Greece familiar intercourse with the arts and lore of Egypt, gave considerable impetus to the whole Grecian MIND.

In our previous brief survey of the state of the Oriental world, we have seen that Egypt, having been rent into twelve principalities, had been again united under a single monarch. The ambitious and fortunate Psammetichus was enabled, by the swords of some Ionian and Carian adventurers (who, bound on a voyage of plunder, had been driven upon the Egyptian shores), not only to regain his own dominion, from which he had been expelled by the jealousy of his comrades, but to acquire the sole sovereignty of Egypt (B. C. 670). In gratitude for their services, Psammetichus conferred upon his wild allies certain lands at the Pelusian mouth of the Nile, and obliged some Egyptian children to learn the Grecian language;—from these children descended a class of interpreters, that long afterward established the facilities of familiar intercourse between Greece and Egypt. Whatever, before that time, might have been the migrations of Egyptians into Greece, these were the first Greeks whom the Egyptians received among themselves. Thence poured into Greece, in one full and continuous stream, the Egyptian influences, hitherto partial and unfrequent. [182](#)

In the same reign, according to Strabo, the Asiatic Greeks obtained a settlement at Naucratis, the ancient emporium of Egypt; and the communication, once begun, rapidly increased, until in the subsequent time of Amasis (B. C. 569) we find the Ionians, the Dorians, the Aeolians of Asia, and even the people of Aegina and Samos [183](#), building temples and offering worship amid the jealous and mystic priestcrafts of the Nile. This familiar and advantageous intercourse with a people whom the Greeks themselves considered the wisest on the earth, exercised speedy and powerful effect upon their religion and their art. In the first it operated immediately upon their modes of divination and their mystic rites—in the last, the influence was less direct. It is true that they probably learned from the Egyptians many technical rules in painting and in sculpture; they learned how to cut the marble and to blend the colours, but their own genius taught them how to animate the block and vivify the

image. We have seen already, that before this event, art had attained to a certain eminence among the Greeks—fortunately, therefore, what they now acquired was not the foundation of their lore. Grafted on a Grecian stock, every shoot bore Grecian fruit: and what was borrowed from mechanism was reproduced in beauty [184](#). As with the arts, so with the SCIENCES; we have reason to doubt whether the Egyptian sages, whose minds were swathed and bandaged in the cerements of hereditary rules, never to swell out of the slavery of castes, had any very sound and enlightened philosophy to communicate: their wisdom was probably exaggerated by the lively and credulous Greeks, awed by the mysticism of the priests, the grandeur of the cities, the very rigidity, so novel to them, of imposing and antique custom. What, then, was the real benefit of the intercourse? Not so much in satisfying as in arousing and stimulating the curiosity of knowledge. Egypt, to the Greeks, was as America to Europe—the Egyptians taught them little, but Egypt much. And that what the Egyptians did directly communicate was rather the material for improvement than the improvement itself, this one gift is an individual example and a general type;—the Egyptians imparted to the Greeks the use of the papyrus—the most easy and popular material for writing; we are thus indebted to Egypt for a contrivance that has done much to preserve to us—much, perhaps, to create for us—a Plato and an Aristotle; but for the thoughts of Aristotle and Plato we are indebted to Greece alone:—the material Egyptian—the manufacture Greek.

XI. The use of the papyrus had undoubtedly much effect upon the formation of prose composition in Greece, but it was by no means an instantaneous one. At the period on which we now enter (about B. C. 600), the first recorded prose Grecian writer had not composed his works. The wide interval between prose in its commencement and poetry in its perfection is peculiarly Grecian; many causes conspired to produce it, but the principal one was, that works, if written, being not the less composed to be recited, not read—were composed to interest and delight, rather than formally to instruct. Poetry was, therefore, so obviously the best means to secure the end of the author, that we cannot wonder to find that channel of appeal universally chosen; the facility with which the language formed itself into verse, and the license that appears to have been granted to the gravest to assume a poetical diction without attempting the poetical spirit, allowed even legislators and moralists to promulgate precepts and sentences in the rhythm of a Homer and a Hesiod. And since laws were not written before the time of Draco, it was doubly necessary that they should be cast in that fashion by which words are most durably impressed on the memory of the multitude. Even on Solon's first appearance in public life, when he inspires the Athenians to prosecute the war with Megara, he addresses the passions of the crowd, not by an oration, but a poem; and in a subsequent period, when prose composition had become familiar, it was still in verse that Hipparchus communicated his moral apothegms. The origin of prose in Greece is, therefore, doubly interesting as an epoch, not only in the intellectual, but also in the social state. It is clear that it would not commence until a reading public was created; and until, amid the poetical many, had sprung up the grave and studious few. Accordingly, philosophy, orally delivered, preceded prose composition—and Thales taught before Pherecydes wrote [185](#). To the superficial it may seem surprising that literature, as distinct from poetry, should commence with the most subtle and laborious direction of the human intellect: yet so it was, not only in Greece, but almost universally. In nearly all countries, speculative conjecture or inquiry is the first successor to poetry. In India, in China, in the East, some dim philosophy is the characteristic of the earliest works—sometimes inculcating maxims of morality—sometimes allegorically shadowing forth, sometimes even plainly expressing, the opinions of the author on the mysteries of life—of nature—of the creation. Even with the moderns, the dawn of letters broke on the torpor of the dark ages of the North in speculative disquisition; the Arabian and the Aristotelian subtleties engaged the attention of the earliest cultivators of modern prose (as separated from poetic fiction), and the first instinct of the awakened reason was to grope through the misty twilight after TRUTH. Philosophy precedes even history; men were desirous of solving the enigmas of the world, before they disentangled from tradition the chronicles of its former habitants.

If we examine the ways of an infant we shall cease to wonder at those of an infant civilization. Long before we can engage the curiosity of the child in the History of England—long before we can induce him to listen with pleasure to our stories even of Poitiers and Cressy—and (a fortiori) long before he can be taught an interest in Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights, he will of his own accord question us of the phenomena of nature—inquire how he himself came into the world—delight to learn something of the God we tell him to adore—and find in the rainbow and the thunder, in the meteor and the star, a thousand subjects of eager curiosity and reverent wonder. The why perpetually torments him;—every child is born a philosopher!—the child is the analogy of a people yet in childhood. [186](#)

XII. It may follow as a corollary from this problem, that the Greeks of themselves arrived at the stage of philosophical inquiry without any very important and direct assistance from the lore of Egypt and the East. That lore, indeed, awakened the desire, but it did not guide the spirit of speculative research. And the main cause why philosophy at once assumed with the Greeks a character distinct from that of the Oriental world, I have already intimated [187](#), in the absence of a segregated and privileged religious caste. Philosophy thus fell into the hands of sages, not of priests. And whatever the Ionian states (the cradle of Grecian wisdom) received from Egypt or the East, they received to reproduce in new and luxuriant prodigality. The Ionian sages took from an elder wisdom not dogmas never to be questioned, but suggestions carefully to be examined. It thus fortunately happened that the deeper and maturer philosophy of Greece proper had a kind of intermedium between the systems of other nations and its own. The Eastern knowledge was borne to Europe through the Greek channels of Asiatic colonies, and became Hellenized as it passed. Thus, what was a certainty in the East, became a proposition in Ionia, and ultimately a doubt, at Athens. In Greece, indeed, as everywhere, religion was connected with the first researches of philosophy. From the fear of the gods, to question of the nature of the gods, is an easy transition. The abundance and variety of popular superstitions served but to stimulate curiosity as to their origin; and since in Egypt the sole philosophers were the priests, a Greek could scarcely converse with an Egyptian on the articles of his religion without discussing also the principles of his philosophy. Whatever opinions the Greek might then form and promulge, being sheltered beneath no jealous and prescriptive priestcraft, all had unfettered right to canvass and dispute them, till by little and little discussion ripened into science.

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