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A SURVEY
OF
GREEK CIVILIZATION





LION GATE AT MYCENÆ. (See page 22.)

A SURVEY
OF
GREEK CIVILIZATION

BY

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PRÉFACE.

THERE is, I think, a strong tendency in the present day to pursue the threads of knowledge separately. It is on the whole a wholesome tendency, though it sacrifices breadth and variety of acquisition to thoroughness in each department. A herd of specialists is rising up, each master of his own subject, but absolutely ignorant and careless of all that is going on around him in kindred studies. The man who has turned his mind to various pursuits, and has endeavoured to embrace in his view many fields of research, is even looked upon with suspicion, instead of respect, and presumed to be inaccurate in each of the particular fields which occupy so many special students exclusively.

I fear that this separation is being carried out beyond its legitimate or useful degree even in the separation of secular and religious subjects, of intellectual and moral studies. To take the most signal example: In the Roman Catholic Church it is an avowed principle that theology is the only necessary science for the education of a priest, that this theology, far from being enlightened, is likely to be endangered by secular knowledge. On the other hand, the scientist generally stands aloof from theology, and too often expresses his contempt for it as a non-progressive science, or if he be of a better moral fibre, and acknowledges the weight and importance of religion, he is ready to accept, as a mere layman, what his pastor or other clerical adviser may teach.

The result is a loss of breadth on the theological side,

a loss of seriousness (in the moral sense) on the scientific side. In both there is the increasing tendency to thrust aside or forget the great unifying principle of all our life and knowledge—that all our thought, all our science, all our history, all our speculation of every kind, nay, even all the vast complex of worlds in which myriads of other beings may be prosecuting similar inquiries—these are the product or the outcome of the design of one Almighty God, who has created the world according to his infinite wisdom, and rules it according to his infinite goodness. A recognition of this great fact on our part is the proper link or common ground of all the various and minute special researches we may make into the laws of the universe, or the history of any part of it. Nay, more, it is the proper defence, the only defence we can make, if we are checked by the warning that in the few years vouchsafed to us on this earth we have no right to spend one moment of our precious time upon things of no eternal import; that the study of religion and our future condition under the providence of God is our only proper employment. We can reply in the most thorough earnest that the exclusive study of what we have separated and called moral or religious science is not the best way to promote that very science. The most remarkable illustrations, the most powerful vindications of God's providence, are found in probing the secrets of the laws of nature, the varieties in the course of human history. Here we may see working in practice what we learn from our theology in theory, and if in our feebleness and blindness we are unable to accommodate all the phenomena of science or of history to these laws, surely the worst way out of the difficulty is to ignore it, to shut our eyes to the facts, instead of using them to correct or enlarge our theory.

It is for these reasons that what may be called the Chautauqua idea of starting from the knowledge and love of God as a great first principle, and passing from it into the broadest and most various survey of human knowledge as such, is not only the highest, but the only true method of general education. But it is part and parcel of this method that the student need not perpetually be reminded of it. He must have his hours of special and absorbing study when he is engrossed in the special branch he has in hand, and when he need not, and cannot, be constantly dwelling upon the great idea which underlies all his life and work. Just as a diligent man of business, whose faith and trust in God are strong and clear, must nevertheless plunge into daily affairs and do worldly work which absorbs him for hours in the day, while the thought of God retires into the depths of his soul—the silent influence which, without being constantly recalled into consciousness, nevertheless orders his thoughts and protects him from temptations to fraud or selfishness—so the student of this history or any other branch of knowledge ought to pursue it with all his heart and search it out as such, secure if he reverts to the first basis of all knowledge and concludes that all the phenomena he has examined are instances of laws established by the great Creator of the world. For the God revealed to us is no oriental despot, who is content to see his slaves perpetually occupied in watching and praising their master, thus neglecting all other duties. He has rather set them to gain more knowledge with the talents intrusted to them, to push their way into the secrets of his wisdom with all the diligence, all the accuracy, all the devotion to this work of which they are capable; and if such a servant, intent upon his lawful work, fails to look up and

see that the Master is present, may not such a fault be pardoned by him who has ordained that labour is honourable and zeal a moral duty? "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might."

These considerations justify a very common feeling among literary men, who do not regard the question before us so seriously. Even in works of fiction, they say, it is a defect and an injury to the intentions of the teacher if his moral be drawn too plainly; if he not only shows his characters and their adventures to the reader, but also tells him what lessons that reader is expected to draw from the narrative. The greatest moral teachers even in fiction are those who give us the truest and most striking pictures of human life and have left all moral inferences to work their own way with the reader. Such is the subtle but powerful teaching in Æschylus, Shakespeare, Scott, in fiction, and in true history there is no more signal example than the Gospel narratives of our Lord's passion, where not a single reflection or advice from the writer mars the dignity and the pathos of the narrative.

The same great principle may be applied in smaller and less important work. It is on the whole better for me to draw a picture of Greek civilization as it was, and, as it aspired to be, without laying stress, during our progress, on the contrasts of the culture of intellect without moral forces to balance it, to that which has received the powerful support of Christianity. It is not easy even to guess what changes this great moral force would have made in Greek culture had it been applied during its most brilliant days. Christianity has hitherto been powerless to affect some brilliant societies, though it has worked a great reformation in the world. The Italian states in the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth

centuries were torn by all the vices and crimes which Thucydides describes as rife in the warring Greek republics. Machiavelli's idea of politics seems to have advanced in no way upon Aristotle's, from a moral point of view. Nay, even in the present day, on the very skirts of civilization and in countries once endowed with humanity and culture, there are atrocities committed such as we might only expect from the savages of Central Africa. In the very centre, in the very forefront of civilization do we not see greed, ambition, international jealousy urging neighbour nations to cast aside every moral, every Christian consideration, and to draw the sword in support of national objects, which every honest man in either nation would disavow as base and unworthy in any private transaction? So far one might be tempted to say that the teaching of Christianity has made, alas! but little difference.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that, in this century at least, there is a moderation in the practice of war among Christian nations, which did not exist in old Greek days. Not that there were then wanting men quite modern in their humanity; but the average has been raised; the opinion of the majority, of common men and women, is more humane since the preaching of the Gospel. On the other hand, it is quite possible that an earlier diffusion of Christianity might have stopped the great artistic development which has left so many permanent traces upon our life. Polytheism, with Greeks living under it, produced far finer results in art than Christianity, with Italians striving to glorify it on canvas and in stone. At all events, we should never have learned what was possible for the human intellect apart from revelation, and what flaws and faults adhere to the highest manifestations of that intellect, had we not be-

fore us the example of both the greatness and the smallness of Greek civilization.

But it is indeed an idle speculation to consider what would or would not have happened had God ordered the world's history otherwise than he has done. One weighty utterance is sufficient for us: "*When the fulness of time was come* God sent forth His Son." If, therefore, the world required preparation for that cardinal turning point, if a certain condition of ripeness was required for the proper acceptance of the Gospel by man, then the history which I have written in this volume is probably a most vital and important step in that preparation, perhaps hardly less important than that Law "which was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." For that Law affected only the chosen people, whereas Hellenic culture affected the world.

The reader will find this topic discussed in my final chapter, so that I need not enlarge upon it here. It is enough to remind him that he is not about to study a work of mere secular import, and only of use or interest to a worldly man; the whole of these rich and varied antecedents to the establishment of that Christian culture which is the highest ideal we possess of life upon this earth are well worth the study of every intelligent man and woman. To such it is not only a privilege, but a duty, "to search all things, to try all things," in order that they may "hold fast that which is good."

*Trinity College, Dublin,
March, 1896.*

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER.	PAGE.
I. INTRODUCTORY	13
II. THE HOMERIC AGE	41
III. THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT IN GREECE, 700-500 B. C.	68
IV. THE PASSAGE FROM SPORADIC TO SYSTEMATIC CULTURE. THE GREAT STRUGGLE WITH THE EAST	106
V. THE LIFE OF THE NATION FROM THE DEFEAT OF THE PERSIANS (479 B. C.) TILL THE FALL OF IMPERIAL ATHENS (404 B. C.)	133
VI. THE FOURTH CENTURY B. C.	165
VII. THE FOURTH CENTURY B. C. (<i>Continued</i>)	205
VIII. THE TIME OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND HIS EARLY SUCCESSORS	223
IX. THE HELLENISTIC WORLD, 250-150 B. C.	254
X. GREEK CULTURE UNDER THE ROMANS .	292
POSTSCRIPT	332

ILLUSTRATIONS.

LION GATE AT MYCENÆ	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
	PAGE.
BEE-HIVE TOMB EXCAVATED BY MRS. SCHLIEMANN . . .	36
TEMPLE AT PÆSTUM	85
THESEUS WITH THE MARATHONIAN BULL	129
TANAGRA FIGURINES	186
SCULPTURE OF THE PERIOD OF PHIDIAS	207
SCULPTURE ON THE SARCOPHAGUS OF A SIDONIAN KING	238
GOLD CUP FROM MYCENÆ	285
GENERAL VIEW OF OLYMPIA	304
OLYMPIA AFTER EXCAVATIONS	327

INDEX.

- Acaemanian League, 224.
 Achæan League, 115, 224, 296, 307.
 Achæans, 71.
 Acropolis, 84, 146, 291.
 Adaptability of the Greeks, 221.
 Æschines, 192-195.
 Æschylus, 122, 123-128, 210.
 Ætolian League, 224, 296.
 Afterglow of Greek literature, 308.
 Agamemnon, 22, 33.
 "Agamemnon," the, 124, 126.
 Agesilaus, 168.
 Alcæus, 72, 89, 102.
 Alcman, 78, 79, 83.
 Alcmeonidæ, 118.
 Alexander the Great, 223, 226-231, 233,
 241, 242-245.
 Alexandria, 280-283, 286-288.
 Alexandrian art, 287.
 Alexandrian literature, 284-286.
 Amphictyonic Synod, 192, 193, 194.
 Amphisians, 193.
 Amyclæ, 30.
 Anaxagoras, 211.
 "Anthology," 189, 311.
 Antigonus Gonatas, 247, 257.
 Antioch, 280-282.
 Antiphon, 139.
 Apelles, 235.
 Apollonius Rhodius, 286.
 Aratus, copied by Virgil, 212.
 Arcadia, 79, 174.
 Arcadian League, 115.
 Archilochus, 42, 88.
 Architecture, 130.
 Argos, 31, 70, 77.
 Aristarchus, 284, 294.
 Aristides, 132.
 Aristophanes, 151, 165-167, 178, 266.
 Aristotle, 33, 201-204, 226, 227.
 Arsinoë, 244-245.
 Art, 13, 65, 72, 84-86.
 Artabazus, 122.
 Aspasia, 177.
 Athens, 84, 174.
 Attalids, 288-289, 290, 291.
 Attica, soil of, 116.
 Autonomy, struggle for, 149.
 "Bee-hive" tombs, 30.
 Bishop Berkeley's style, 211.
 Bœotia, 95, 115.
 Browning's translations of Euripides,
 159.
 Brutus, 300-301.
 Burial, 39.
 Byzantium, 106.
 Cadmus, 32.
 "Cassandra" of Lycophron, 286.
 Chæronea, 195.
 Chæronea, lion of, 196.
 "Characters" of Theophrastus, 266.
 Chrysippus, 256, 258.
 Cleanthes, 256, 257.
 Clisthenes, 118.
 "Common" dialect, the, 234, 309.
 "Constitution of Athens," the, 96, 134.
 Corcyra, massacres at, 154.
 Cos, 273.
 Cremation, 38.
 Cruelty to slaves, 215.
 Cult of the emperors, 244, 303.
 Cyrus, 169.
 Darius Ochus, 187, 225.
 Death, Athenian attitude to, 162-163.
 Delphic oracle, mistake of, 120.
 Demetrius, 247.
 Demetrius, deification of, 244.
 Democritus, 211.
 Demon theory, 325.
 Demosthenes, 175, 188-190, 196, 197,
 199, 230.
 Dicæarchus, 267.
 Dio Chrysostom, 311, 315-321.
 Diodorus, 302.
 Diogenes the Cynic, 257.
 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 311-313.

- Dorian invasion, 70.
 Dörpfeld, Professor, 26, 27, 86, 143.
 Draco, 97.
 Eastern influences, 110.
 Egypt conquered by the Romans, 299.
 Egyptian influences, 71.
 Empedocles, 211.
 Epaminondas, 168, 170, 173, 225.
 Epicurean philosophy, 261-263.
 Epicurus, 261, 267.
 Erechtheum, 148.
 "Ethics" of Aristotle, 203.
 Euclid's "Elements," 286.
 Eumenes of Cardia, 239.
 Euripides, 143, 157-159, 211.
 Exposure of infants, 218, 269-270.
 Extortion by Roman governors, 299.
 Field sports, 172.
 Gelon, 112.
Glaukopis Athene, 34.
 Gold currency, 240.
 Græcomania among the Romans, 298, 302.
 Grote, 16, 68, 233.
 Gyges of Lydia, 69.
 Hegemony, Greek dislike of, 224.
 Hellenic unity, 75.
 Hermes of Olympia, the, 184.
 Herondas, "Mimiambics" of, 275-276.
 Hesiod, 17, 59-63, 116.
 Hipparchus, 117.
 Hippias of Elis, 68.
 Hissarlik, 23, 25, 29.
 Homer, 15-17, 24, 180.
 Homeric Age, 41-67.
 Horace, 89.
 Hospitality, 52-53.
 Ictinus, 135, 147, 208.
 Idealism of the Greek genius, 213.
 Idols at Troy, 34.
 Iliad, 17, 24, 42-44.
 "Ilios," Schliemann's, 26.
 "In Memoriam," the, 163.
 Intellectual average high, 128.
 Interest, rate of, 201.
 Ionic architecture, 209.
 Isocrates, 181, 182, 183, 217.
 Jealousies, commercial, 107.
 Leuctra, 173.
 Lion Gate at Mycenæ, 22.
 Locrians, 192, 193.
 Longinus's "On the Sublime," 312.
 Long wall, the, 146.
 Lucretius, 211, 262.
 Lycurgus, 80-81.
 Lydian monarchy, 72-73.
 Lyric poets, 88, 101.
 Lysander, 157, 215, 241.
 Lysias, 198.
 Lysippus, 235.
 Macedonian conquest, significance of, 239.
 Marathon, 121.
 Marathon, lion of, 196.
 Medes, 73.
 Mehemet Ali, 100.
 Melians, oppression of, 154-156.
 Menander, 264, 267, 271.
 Menelaus, court of, 54.
 Menidi, 29, 41.
 Mercenary soldiers, 72, 187, 232, 248.
 Meter of Homeric poems, 46.
 Middle Comedy, 266.
 Monarchies, hereditary, 33.
 Monetary problems, 200.
 Mummius, 298.
 Music, 128.
 Mycenæ, 24-25, 27, 29, 34.
 "Mycenæ," Schliemann's, 26.
 Mythology, 18-19.
 Naucratis, 71.
 Navy, Athenian, 136.
 New Comedy, 264-266, 268-272.
 New Testament Greek, 309.
 Nike of Samothrace, the, 220, 247.
 "Nine Wells," the, 86, 117.
 Odeum, 146.
 Odyssey, 42, 63.
 Olympiads, 69.
 Olympias, 245.
 Olympieion, 117.
 Oratory, power of, 132.
 Orchomenus, 22, 30, 115.
 Ostrich egg at Mycenæ, 31.
 Pæstum, temple at, 131.
 Pantheism, 105, 258-259.
 Parmenides, 211.
 Parrhasius, 183.
 Parthenon, 14, 130, 143, 146, 147.
 Pausanias, 308.
 Pelopids, 30.
 Peloponnesian War, 151-154.

- Pergamene art, 289.
 Pergamum, 26, 288, 289-290, 291.
 Perianther, 99-100.
 Pericles, 142, 144-146.
 Perseids, 30.
 Persia, 187.
 Persian aristocracy, 111.
 Persian War, effects of, 134.
 Pheidon of Argos, 69, 113.
 Phœnician traders, 33, 69.
 Phidias, 147, 206, 210.
 Philip of Macedon, 183, 188, 190-192, 195, 225.
 Philodemus of Gadara, 302.
 Philosophy a necessity for Greeks, 104.
 Phocion, judicial murder of, 249-252.
 Pindar, 91-95, 115, 123.
 Pisistratids, 86.
 Pisistratus, 98, 100.
 Plato, 175-180, 211-212.
 Plautus, 268.
 Plutarch, 82, 220, 321-328.
 "Politics" of Aristotle, 203.
 Polybius, 294-298, 321.
 Polygamy of kings of Macedon, 191.
 Polytheism, 105.
 Praxiteles, 184.
 "Prometheus," interpretations of, 125-126.
 Prose, development of, 137-138.
 Ptolemies, the, 307.
 Ptolemy II., 245, 255.
 Pyrrho the Sceptic, 262.
 Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, 248, 254, 255.
 Religion, character of, 105.
 Renaissance, Italian, 13.
 Rhodes, 273, 277-280.
 Roman attitude to Greek art, 221;
 conquest of Egypt, 299; conquest of
 Greece, 297; conquest of Spain, 299;
 imitation of the Greeks, 305; soldiers
 not mercenaries, 255; speculators,
 300.
Rotundas, 184.
 Sack of Corinth, 297.
 St. Paul, 139, 258, 309-310.
 Sappho, 89, 102.
 Sarcophagus of Sidon, 208, 235-237.
 Saul, 257.
 Schliemann, Dr., 23, 25-27.
 Scopas, 184.
 Sculpture, 128-130, 206.
 Sicily, 108, 112.
 Simonides, 93-94.
 Siphnians, treasury of, 95.
 Scepticism, 262.
 Slavery, 150, 219.
 Socrates, 157, 160-162, 164.
 Solon, 96-98, 118.
 Sophocles, 142, 210.
 Sophron, 276.
 Sparta, 78, 82, 114, 167.
 Spartan aristocracy, 80-81, 110; con-
 stitution, 82; mercenaries, 232; su-
 premacy, 112.
 Spartans, 113-114.
 Spata, 29, 41.
 Stoicism, 258-260.
 Strabo, 302.
 Tanagra figurines, 185-187.
 Terence, 268.
 Theban insurrection, 229.
 Thebes, 170, 174, 229.
 Themistocles, 121, 122, 132.
 Theocritus, 274, 275, 286.
 Theology in Homer, 17, 47.
 Theoric Fund, 189-190.
 Thucydides, 139, 140-142, 151, 210, 215.
 Tiryns, 22, 24, 25, 26.
 Tombs, evidence from, 35.
 Trade, 48, 64, 240, 314.
 Treasure-house of Atreus, 37.
 Troy, 22-23, 25-26.
 Tyrants, 99, 117.
 Tyrtaeus, 97, 112, 113.
 Vaphio, 41, 78.
 Venus of Melos, 208, 220, 293.
 Wolf's "Prolegomena," 67.
 Women, position of, 54-56, 217-218, 329.
 Xenophon, 113, 165, 168-173.
 Xerxes, 121.
 Zeno, 256, 257.
 Zeuxis, 183.

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