

A DEFENCE OF CLASSICAL EDUCATION

BY

R. W. LIVINGSTONE

FELLOW AND ASSISTANT TUTOR OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1916

CHAPTER III

THE CASE FOR THE CLASSICS : GREEK

To know himself a man must know the capabilities and performances of the human spirit ; and the value of the humanities, of *Altertumswissenschaft*, the science of antiquity, is, that it affords for this purpose an unsurpassed source of light and stimulus. Whoever seeks help for knowing himself from knowing the capabilities and performances of the human spirit, will nowhere find a more fruitful object of study than in the achievements of Greece in literature and the arts.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

GREECE and her foundations are
Built below the tide of war,
Based on the crystalline sea
Of thought and its eternity. SHELLEY.

In our last chapter we saw that an education based on physical science, whether regarded as a training of the mind or as an introduction to life, would leave serious gaps, which only the humanities can fill ; and though people sometimes write and speak as if this were not so, no one who has thought

about education would deny it. We now pass to a much more difficult and disputed point—Why should the classics have a place in our education? Why should they be taught to any except a few specialists, who happen to be interested in them? Why should they hold their present position in our public schools? Why should they not be entirely replaced by our own and other modern languages, literatures and history? With these questions we shall be occupied for the rest of the book.

Some people would explain our classical system as a survival, an anachronism. In the Middle Ages, from which our education dates, “Latin was made the groundwork of education ; not for the beauty of its classical literature, not because the study of a dead language was the best mental gymnastic . . . but because it was the language of educated men throughout Western Europe, employed for public business, literature, philosophy and science, above all . . . essential to the unity of the Western Church.”¹ Greek on the other hand took place at its side as offering the fifteenth century, not only finer prose and poetry, but also better text-books in philosophy and science

¹ *Essays on a Liberal Education*, p. 7.

than any contemporary literature. The needs, it is argued, which brought Greek and Latin into our curriculum have disappeared or are met in other ways; but the classics still occupy their places by *vis inertiae* and the favour of a supine nation that has never troubled to dislodge them.

This is on the whole a true account of the origin of our classical education; though it cannot explain why W. von Humboldt, founding in 1810 A.D. the education which was to regenerate Germany, made Greek a compulsory subject in secondary education, or why the modern world still retains Plato and Aristotle and the masters of Greek literature, though it no longer approaches science through Greek researches or medicine through Hippocrates and Galen. But it assumes too easily that the classics are superseded or rivalled, and that is just what has to be proved. Those who think to discredit Latin and Greek by references to the needs which brought them into education, are making the familiar confusion between origin and validity. A habit or institution may originate in a certain need, and yet be valuable for other reasons when that particular need has passed away. The stars were originally observed because people hoped to read in them human destinies; yet no

one would discard astronomy because it has developed out of a superstition. The characteristic forms of Greek architecture which still meet us in our streets, were devised to meet the difficulties of building in wood ; yet no one would suggest that they should have been abandoned, when the progress of architecture made them no longer strictly necessary. The classics may have taken their place in education because they were once the only keys to knowledge ; but it does not follow that they should be condemned because they are no longer required for this particular purpose. Still, it is a paradox that the twentieth century should study literatures 2000 years old ; it is a paradox that does not stand by itself, for the Bible is as old as Latin and Greek, and yet we study it ; but its defenders are bound to justify it, and shew reason when they maintain, "No man having drunk old wine desireth new ; for he saith, The old is better." What are our reasons?

It is not true that we only study Latin because men spoke it in the Middle Ages, and Greek because there was a time when the fullest knowledge of various sciences was contained in Greek books. But it is true that the history of Greece

and Rome is the history of the origins of the modern world and that this is one of the reasons why we study them. We live in the West; our ideals are not those of an Indian or a Chinese; our energies are otherwise directed. We admire activity where they seek calm: we believe in knowledge where they rest on hoary tradition: we respect energy, they dignity; we have a vocabulary of ideals—progress, democracy, originality, empire—which repel or leave them indifferent. Whence came this Western attitude so foreign to the East? What fixed this deep gulf to divide humanity? Who created the spiritual atmosphere which we breathe? If we wish to press the questions, we are thrown back on the history of our origins, on the makers of Europe.

Here we are soon reduced to a few elements. No doubt the web is more complicated than we suspect, the colours that cross and recross it are really past counting. But for practical purposes we may say that there are four main threads in the fabric of Modern Europe. We can trace back our descent, and with it many of our traditions and some of our institutions, to Teuton or Celt. Yet the limits of our inheritance from them grow clear

when we remember that they adopted a civilisation from elsewhere rather than developed one of their own. We can trace back our religious ideas to Judaea: yet these, in their origin Oriental, have been deeply dyed with colours more Western. And if we take our religion from the Jew, what other features of our civilisation come from him? The aims and occupations of our daily life, our political catchwords, our intellectual ideals are not Jewish. Science, art, culture were ideas strange to the Jews of Palestine, and have no part in the history of their nation, while it remained a nation. Our political terms, aristocracy, democracy, imperialism, the very word politics itself, take us back by their derivation to the language of some race, more interested in these questions than the descendants of Shem. We must turn elsewhere than to Judaea for something which can properly be called a civilisation. It needs little seeking. Always on the horizon, for any European who chooses to look back, stand two gigantic figures, the Roman and the Greek, whose achievements have haunted and fascinated the world, from Alaric's Goths lingering spell-bound in Italy down to Renaissance scholars, down to Winckelmann and Goethe, down to our own day. We cannot

escape from the consuls and senate and empire of Rome—from the buildings and sculpture of Periclean Athens, from the writings of Plato and Aristotle, from the museum of Alexandria—in a word, from Greece or Rome. Certainly if we are curious to explain our characters by heredity, we cannot ignore our spiritual ancestors.

Imagine for a moment that we had never heard the names of Greece and Rome. What should we lose by our ignorance? Those of us who read poetry would find much that was unintelligible in English authors, in all English poets, I think, without exception, from Chaucer to Rupert Brook. We should not know in *Julius Caesar* what the tribunes or the Capitol were, or how Brutus and Antony came to be the heroes of Shakespeare; we should wonder what we were missing when Tragedy

In sceptred pall came sweeping by,
Presenting Thebes, or Pelops' line,
Or the tale of Troy divine.

We should not know what sort of thing was that Greek urn which moved Keats to song. We should see that our poets had had the entry to a world from which we were excluded, a world of some strange charm and beauty, for they moved

in it as happily and as delightfully as in their own. Then, again, the key to much of our own language would have disappeared. Most of its vocabulary would be mere sounds to us, calling up certain ideas, but leaving us quite ignorant how the words came to have their particular meaning ; and this would be so, not only with words like *subliminal*, *hypochondriac*, *acolyte*, *centripetal*, *exogamy*, but with quite common expressions, *angel*, *planet*, *revolution*, *Bible*, *conscience*, etc. Further, the technical terminology of medicine, botany and many other sciences would be a meaningless jargon.

More serious would be the descent of darkness on the origins of nearly all our civilisation. We should be different from Indians or Chinese, but we should not know why ; certain words would be continually on our lips, certain ideals constantly before our eyes, but we should not know whence they had come. *Politics*, *astronomy*, *magnanimity*, *Caesarism*, *empire*, *municipality*, *federalism*, *drama*, *history*, *religion*, *urbanity*, *metaphysics*, *anatomy*, *scepticism*, *rationalism*, and a thousand others—we should know what these words meant to us, but we should be ignorant who first had used them, who invented *democracy*, the name and the thing, and what success its

inventors had with their experiment, who first called the study of human destiny philosophy, and along what paths of thought his 'love of wisdom' took him. Equally dark would be the origin of many of our institutions, including much in our legal system, and of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, meteorology, medicine and other sciences (the names of nearly all the sciences betray their descent). We should not know from what seed of original inspiration had come the architectural style of most of our public buildings and many of our churches. Much in Christianity itself would be obscure; even a doctrine so central as that of the Word, in the opening chapter of S. John's Gospel, would have lost its explanation, if we had never heard of Greece. The rustic who walks along a Roman road or finds in his field the *tessellae* of a Roman pavement, has no idea how they came to be there; and we, like him, though in more important matters, should live ignorant of the rock whence we were hewn and the pit whence we were digged.

This is one reason for studying the classics, and a great scholar like Wilamowitz-Moellendorff bases his defence of them upon it. A man can hardly be said to be educated, who knows nothing

of his spiritual ancestors, and he shews a curious indifference of mind if he is content to remain so. But there are more practical grounds than these. We may infer them by noticing the character of ages when the world has lived in ignorance of the past ; they have been marked by mental lethargy and superstitious conservatism, whereas the epochs in which men have looked back to their origins have been ages of change, progress, vigorous life. The Renaissance was a study of origins ; so was the Reformation ; so were most renewals of art from Cinque Cento architecture to pre-Raphaelitism ; Winckelmann and Goethe turned back to Greece ; Strauss and Baur sought, not very happily, after primitive Christianity. A man who knows the origins of the world in which he lives, looks at it with more understanding, walks in it with securer and more certain steps ; he is less intimidated by words, for he knows their history, less inclined to either excessive respect or contempt for existing institutions, for he sees how they came to be there. He understands the world better, as parents understand a child whom they have known from its cradle better than a stranger understands him, and he is more confident and capable in handling it. When Darwin went back to origins

in the history of natural creation, he taught us that the nature of things could not be understood without knowing their history. We should be forgetting his lesson, and wilfully blinding ourselves, if we turned our backs on the origins of modern Europe.

Still, this is not the strongest argument for the classics ; it is possible to live ignorant of the book of our history and to guess from its later chapters what we have never read ; though such guesswork may lead to errors and misconstructions. If the classics are to stand, they must do so on their own merits ; the final answer to anyone who asks why we read them must be : Look at Greek literature and Roman civilisation : listen to what the great moderns have said about them. Hear Goethe : "Of all peoples the Greeks have dreamt the dream of life best."¹ Hear Coleridge : "The Greeks were the masters of all grace, elegance, proportion, fancy, dignity, majesty, of whatever, in short, is capable of being conveyed by defined forms of thought." Hear Shelley : "Although the scheme of Athenian society was deformed by many imperfections which the poetry existing in

¹ *Maxims and Reflections*, tr. Bailey Saunders, p. 99.

chivalry and Christianity has erased from the habits and institutions of modern Europe ; yet never at any other period has so much energy, beauty, and virtue been developed ; never was blind strength and stubborn form so disciplined and rendered subject to the will of man, or that will less repugnant to the dictates of the beautiful and the true, as during the century which preceded the death of Socrates. Of no other epoch in the history of our species have we records and fragments stamped so visibly with the image of the divinity in man.”¹ Hear Matthew Arnold : “ I fearlessly assert that *Hermann and Dorothea*, *Childe Harold*, *Jocelyn*, *The Excursion* leave the reader cold in comparison with the effect produced upon him by the latter books of the *Iliad*, by the *Oresteia*, or by the episode of Dido. And why is this? Simply because in the three latter cases the action is greater, the personages nobler, the situation more intense : and this is the true basis of the interest in a poetical work, and this alone.” And again : “ Shakespeare has not the severe and scrupulous self-restraint of the ancients, partly, no doubt, because he had a far less cultivated and exacting audience : he has indeed a far wider range than

¹ *A Defence of Poetry.*

they had, a far richer fertility of thought: in this respect he rises above them: in his strong conception of his subject, in the genuine way in which he is penetrated with it, he resembles them, and is unlike the moderns: but in the accurate limitation of it, the conscientious rejection of superfluities, the simple and rigorous development of it from the first line of his work to the last, he falls below them and comes nearer to the moderns. In his chief works, besides what he has of his own, he has the elementary soundness of the ancients; he has their important action and their large and broad manner; but he has not their purity of method. He is therefore a less safe model; for what he has of his own is personal, and inseparable from his own rich nature; it may be imitated and exaggerated, it cannot be learned or applied as an art; he is above all suggestive: more valuable therefore to young writers, as men than as artists. But clearness of arrangement, rigour of development, simplicity of style—these may to a certain extent be learned: and these may, I am convinced, be learned best from the ancients, who, although infinitely less suggestive than Shakespeare, are thus, to the artist, more instructive.”¹

¹ *Preface to Poems.*

Unfortunately the testimonies of these prophets will be mere words to anyone who does not know Greek or Latin, or who has been taught them badly. A Chinaman, ignorant of the West, would not be illuminated if we spoke to him of the glories of English literature or the importance of the French Revolution. We may praise the Greeks endlessly ; we may urge the strength of their literature where our own is weak, and speak of its unflinching perfection of form, its habit of never wasting words, its directness, naturalness, freedom from affectation and sentimentality and bad taste ; we may urge that the study of such models will save us from the faults to which we are very liable ; but it will all mean very little to those who do not know the classics already.

How are we to bring their excellence home to the doubter? Best perhaps, by asking him, before he judges, to read the first half of the sixth book of Plato's *Republic*, and the *Phaedo* from chapter 56 to the end, the sixth and seventh books of Thucydides, the *Oresteia* in Morshead's translation, and Prof. Murray's versions of the *Medea*, *Iphigeneia*, *Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*. He will then learn, even through the medium of English, the kind of thing Greek literature is, its sincerity

and simplicity, its power of taking us past all veils and external trappings to the very heart of humanity, its conciseness and habit of packing masterpieces into a few pages.

Or we may give an idea of the quality of the classics by speaking of letters, such as most schoolmasters and College tutors have received since the War began from many parts of the front. This from a cellar in Ypres: "I am most genuinely looking forward to the time, about five weeks hence, when we are due to go back to St. Omer, where I am getting —— to send me out a selection which I hope will include Homer, some Vergil, Lucretius v.

*(Noctivagaeque faces coeli flammaeque volantes
Et rapidi fremitus et murmura magna minarum*

just hits off trench life and great guns firing), some Robert Browning, *King Lear*, Lucas' *Open Road* and the *Agamemnon*." Or this from Gallipoli (the writer is a history scholar who dropped his classics when he went up to Oxford): "I wish I could describe to you either dawn or sunset here. All the Greek epithets in Homer, like 'wine-dark' and 'rosy-fingered,' mean here all they say. If I return home safely, I will read Homer again for the sheer pleasure of realising all that his adjectives

mean." Or this, written before the battle of Loos: "Thucydides is a gentleman whose truth I never appreciated so thoroughly before. In his description of the last great effort of the Athenians to break into Syracuse he tells how the officers lectured and encouraged their men right up to the last moment, always remembering another last word of counsel, and wishing to say more, yet feeling all the time that however much they said it would still be inadequate. Just the same with us now. We've all lectured our platoons, but something still keeps turning up, and after all we can only play an infinitesimal part in Armageddon! Well, we're parading in a minute."¹

But there are two ways of appreciating the significance of the classics, which anyone can take. For the first it is necessary to be in London in time of peace, for the second to be able and willing to read.

First, go into the British Museum and walk through the Greek Sculpture rooms; look at their greatest glory, the sculptures from the Parthenon frieze, and ask whether these have not, beyond most things, the quality which Goethe attributed

¹ From a letter by Lieut. Windle, quoted in the *Times History of the War*, pt. 75.

to the Homeric hymns: "Even to this day they have the power of freeing us, at any rate for a moment, from the frightful burden which the tradition of several thousand years has rolled upon us."¹ Before you leave them, note the technique of the drapery; and, as you leave, glance at the portrait busts of the Roman Emperors. Then go to Parliament Square, where the nineteenth century has placed its great statesmen, men certainly not less remarkable than Vespasian or Trajan or Verus; observe their inanimate faces, their inert pose, and the leaden droop of their clumsily modelled dress. Then ask whether the civilisations which produced the dead artists of Greece and Rome do not excite wonder and curiosity, and offer something as unique in its way as Shakespeare or any light of the modern world.

But if we are not in London, there is another easy way of awakening our imaginations to the significance, at least of Greece. Suppose some one told us that in a small country called Greece there was a city not so big as Portsmouth, whose independence passed away in the fourth century before Christ, and which after that date had no political influence on the world; yet that the

¹*o.c.* p. 162.

Roman Empire, which extended from the Euphrates to the Clyde, from the Elbe to Assouan, enthusiastically adopted the civilisation of this small country, regarded its capital as the intellectual centre of the world, placed the education of the young Roman in Greek hands, took its philosophy of life from Greece, depended on Greek sculptors and painters for its art, learnt from Greek models to write poetry, history, oratory and every branch of literature without exception, while the greatest of Roman men of letters wrote: "Athens, the mother of civilisation, learning, agriculture, religion, justice, law."¹ Suppose, further, we knew that when the civilisation of Rome withered in a winter of barbarism, the re-discovery of Greek classical literature brought the world that sudden, joyous, brilliant springtime called the Renaissance, of which we are now in the full summer and from which our modern politics, letters, art, thought, science are directly derived. Suppose we noted that not only in the fourteenth century, but at all times, the study of Greece had created a sudden intoxication of the human spirit; should we not be curious as to the civilisation which had such a unique influence? Should we not see in it a

¹ Cicero, *Pro Flacco*, § 62.

unique intellectual ferment, and suspect that its prominence in education was due to this power?

What is the secret of the classics? We shall perhaps learn it if we ask the ages or individuals to whom Greece came as a revelation, what they saw in her. Take the Makers of the Renaissance first. They were born in an age ignorant, superstitious, fanatical, when learning was scholastic and Latin barbarous, when thought struggled feebly against the engulfing darkness and ecclesiastical tyranny kept a jealous eye on free speech and speculation, when literature knew but one splendid and solitary luminary, and art some minor and fitful lights. Suddenly as they hungrily deciphered their Latin and Greek manuscripts, a new life was revealed to them. Here were men who could write poetry, history, speeches, philosophy with a grace, ease and power such as they had never seen; who were politicians, soldiers, athletes, thinkers, poets; who lived a many-sided, many-coloured life unfettered by church or state; who boldly discussed without fear of priest or pope all things in heaven and earth, followed after wisdom and seemed to find it, yet so that the search took them not into a dusty desert of scholasticism, but into

fields of beauty and delight. They opened Thucydides and read: "Our constitution is named a democracy because it is in the hands not of the few but of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes, and our public opinion welcomes and honours talent in every branch of achievement, not for any sectional reason but on grounds of excellence alone. And as we give free play to all in our public life, so we carry the same spirit into our daily relations with one another. We have no black looks or angry words for our neighbour if he enjoys himself in his own way, and we abstain from the little acts of churlishness which, though they leave no mark, yet cause annoyance to whoso notes them. Open and friendly in our private intercourse, in our public acts we keep strictly within the control of law. We acknowledge the restraint of reverence; we are obedient to whomsoever is set in authority and to the laws, more especially to those which offer protection to the oppressed and those unwritten ordinances whose transgression brings admitted shame. Yet ours is no workaday city only. No other provides so many recreations for the spirit—contests and sacrifices all the year round, and beauty in our public buildings to cheer the heart

and delight the eye day by day.”¹ Surely these were men and this was a life for men to lead: and by these Greek patterns and this vision of Greece the life of the world was renewed.

Five hundred years have passed: what has Greece to teach to us? The fetters that bind us are not ecclesiastical. We are let and hindered by the common infirmity of all men, dullness of imagination; and further by the peculiar vices of our age, materialism, commercialism, the narrowness, ugliness, rush, luxury and economic pressure of life; and to us in our way as to the men of the Renaissance in theirs, there is a healing efficacy in the life of these

Little towns by river or sea-shore,
Or mountain built with peaceful citadel,

where there were no advertisements or cinemas or electric trams, little smoke and only human noises, whose greatest luxury was fish and whose life was of a fullness denied to or refused by most of us.

I have a letter from a working-man who had come across a book on the Greeks and who writes: “I believe that it is this great Hellenic spirit consciously and unconsciously seeking expression which is the cause of the great industrial

¹ii. 37 f., tr. Zimmern.

unrest of this and other lands ; we are not covetous for the rich man's gold or land, only in so far as we realise that they are the economic bases of life, and it is life that we want, full, rich, free and many-sided. The book enabled me to do that which unaided I could not do, viz. get to the marrow of Greek life, which to me is the only life." I have printed the letter as it stands ; we may agree or not with the speaker's views, but the striking thing is that Greece suggests these thoughts, and means all this to a Welsh ironfounder in the twentieth century, who happens to come across a book on her. There we have an exact repetition of what happened in the fourteenth century. The Briton sees in Athens a picture of the Ideal State, as the Renaissance saw in it a picture of the Ideal Man, and thereby witnesses to its continuing power to be a pillar of fire in the dark journey of humanity.

The older the world grows, the more heavily the burdens of wealth and knowledge and complex civilisation weigh it down, the more eagerly it will look back to the many-coloured, many-sided life which humanity once led in Athens. "There it would have been possible to find the same man, at different times sitting at a cobbler's bench, listening to the *Bacchae*, voting in the Assembly, a

worshipper in the temples, a soldier on campaign, a juror in the courts. We cannot indeed revive that Greek world in which poets were soldiers, and politicians generals, and every man a member of Parliament, nor should we wish to do so. But we can try to catch a portion of its spirit. This existence, whatever its faults may have been, had not the grinding specialism of the modern world. Here no one was absorbed by his trade or livelihood; but a man remained in the first place a human being, and exercised the gifts, and experienced the enjoyments, proper to human nature. The artisan did not become a machine, or the labourer a drudge. The soldier, the merchant, the man of letters did not slip into narrow professionalism. The historian derived his knowledge of politics and war from hours spent in the assembly and the camp. The poet and the philosopher had been in touch with that human nature on which they moralized and wrote.”¹ That spectacle, that ideal only grows more fascinating and salutary with time.

But it is not on the picture of a civilisation, the pattern of a complete man, which Greece

¹ Livingstone, *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to us*, p. 178 f.

offers, that I wish to dwell. That is an argument, like the argument from Greek literature, too big to be compressed into a chapter ; and at the end some one might say : " We are not men of the fourteenth century, we have riches of our own to go to ; and if the spectacle of a full, rich life is what we want, Shakespeare and English literature can do for us what the classics did for them." Instead, I will deal with a quality of Greece which is easier to put on paper, which no one has possessed quite like her, which is the heart of her achievement, and the secret of her fermenting power ; a quality, too, which is indispensable to the modern world. It is that creative intelligence, which was earlier spoken of as Greece's chief contribution to the world.

Survey for a moment the achievement of Greece. While human intelligence was hibernating in Egypt and Assyria, ridden by a priestly or military or dynastic caste, while the brains of Carthage went to commerce and money-making, Greece, with no precedent to guide, no surrounding culture to support her, produced an epic, which as pure literature, and as a picture of heroic human life, has never been surpassed, and so started on that career of intellectual activity, of which tragedy,

comedy, history, oratory, Platonism, Stoicism, Epicureanism and a dozen other philosophies were the fruits. Less familiar to us and hardly less remarkable are the achievements, which may be read in Professor Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* and Susemihl's history of Alexandrian literature. From the small cities on the Aegean coasts came the idea of giving a rational account of the universe, its shape, composition and behaviour, and with the idea, guesses, often wild, as was to be expected, but which contain the seeds of modern thought. Thus Anaximander (550 B.C.) divined that the earth hung in space, the Pythagoreans, that it was a sphere and turned on its own axis. Thus the same Anaximander anticipated the evolution of species; "he says that originally man was made out of animals of a different species, because all other animals are quickly able to feed themselves, while man alone needs nursing; so in view of his nature he could never have survived at first."¹ These are three specimens of the many brilliant guesses of Ionian philosophy. The medical writings of Hippocrates (460 B.C.) and his school are more truly scientific, resting as they do on careful observation. "The two treatises 'On fractures,'

¹ *Doxographi Graeci*, p. 579.

and 'On dislocations' are hardly surpassed in some ways by the writings of the present mechanical age."¹

But the true age of Greek science is the Alexandrian Epoch, when Aristotle had shewn the way to specialisation, and each branch of knowledge flowered by itself. It was an age of erudition like our own, and such nicknames as Chalcenterus (Brazen Guts) and Polyhistor bear witness to its laborious learning. Records, decrees, laws, inscriptions were collected; learned men wrote monographs on games, sacrifices, feasts and every other conceivable subject; they published chronologies, local histories, guides to famous places like the Acropolis, Delphi, Troy, books of travel in India and elsewhere, surveys (there was one of the mountains of the Peloponnese), biographies of famous artists, musicians, men of letters and of action. The literature on Alexander alone was enormous, compiled by writers who, like modern war correspondents, accompanied him on his campaigns, or by those who stayed at home, and built their works on original documents and historical research. Then there were philological works, critical editions of the classics and commentaries

¹ *Encycl. Britannica*, vol. xxvi. p. 126 (article on "Surgery").

on them, literary histories, studies of the Greek dialects, grammatical treatises. Besides these, there were more scientific works, books on the theory of music and rhythm, on pure and applied mathematics. We can read in third century Greek the axioms, postulates and propositions of our boyhood. Greek astronomers like Hipparchus, Eratosthenes, Eudoxus of Cnidus, and Aristarchus of Samos, named the heavenly bodies, explained their movements, devised methods of measuring their distance and started the heliocentric theory. Eratosthenes compiled the first map on mathematical principles, and marked the earth out with lines of latitude and longitude. Archimedes developed and applied the theory of mechanics. There were books on every subject that could be studied; Varro in the last century B.C. had fifty Greek works on agriculture before him when he wrote his *De Re Rustica*.

Most of this mass of learning has gone, but had the catalogue of an Alexandrian bookseller survived, we should have seen headings like those in a modern publisher's circular, and realised that the mental activity of that age ran in channels similar to our own. The achievement was wonderful, but time quickly antiquates knowledge, and, but for

the light its survival would have thrown on antiquity, we have not lost much. (In two thousand years would the disappearance of all modern writings that are not great literature be much missed except by archaeologists?) We can still read in the original the description of Archimedes' giant ship which carried about 800 persons, and the ingenious inventions of Heron of Alexandria, his automatic penny-in-the-slot machine for water, his odometer for measuring distances, his fire-engine, his hydraulic organ, his method of moving a ball by steam (anticipating the principle of the steam-engine), his optical devices for shewing ghosts on the stage. Less interesting, but more remarkable are the essay of Archimedes on Number and the theoretical parts of Heron's treatise on Pneumatics, which shew his grasp of scientific method (the sixteenth century took from the latter the saying that Nature abhors a vacuum). They bring home to us one of the great puzzles in the history of civilisation, why, with all that they did, the Greeks did not do a little more, and anticipate the evolution of science which began fifteen centuries later. Their interest to us is in the witness they bear to the Greek's intellectual activity and precocious gift for Science. Later ages under Greek

inspiration have gone further in exploring the continent of knowledge, but the Greeks were the first to lift up their eyes to the mountain ranges, and conceive the audacious thought that they might be crossed. And it is a higher mark of genius to originate the idea of knowing, than, when originated, to carry it out.¹

Even with the coming of the Roman Empire this *élan vital* is not exhausted. Not content with having given a civilisation, a literature and a philosophy to Rome, they create mysticism, and the theory, and practice in literature, of Art for Art's sake; then, retiring before barbarian invasions, brood drowsily in Constantinople over the achievements of the past, till, with their rediscovery by the West, Art, Letters and Thought revive again and

Magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo—
The world's great age begins anew.

And note that all this is Greek work. England, France, Germany and other nations have contributed essential elements to modern civilisation.

¹ For Greek mathematics, see Gow, *Short History of Greek Mathematics*.

Iwan Müller's *Handbuch*, v. i., gives a sketch (badly written) of Greek science, and references to modern books on it. Wilamowitz's *Griechisches Lesebuch* contains extracts from Heron

But the civilisation of the past was the work of one tiny race ; Assyria, Egypt, and the surrounding nations contribute nothing to it. Rome herself, on the intellectual side, contributes only when she is fertilised by Greece.

The secret of this colossal achievement is simple. Greece is the ferment of the intelligence, quickening, permeating all media with life. The Greek genius is the triumph of creative intelligence. In saying this we run a risk, for we evoke an unattractive and misleading picture. Reason to the Englishman suggests something bloodless and wizened, generally embodied in strange and unfamiliar language. We think of Hume or Mill or Henry Sidgwick, of pages of abstract reasoning, colourless and correct, of austere but somewhat arid virtue. Or we think of our modern 'intellectual' writers, acute, critical, cold and often brutal : of plays, from which we rise with thought sharpened, experience widened, and a chilly feeling, as if the theatre had been not a playhouse but an operating room. Greek intellect, at least and others, with useful notes and diagrams. The *Pneumatics* has been translated into English by Woodcroft. The account of Archimedes' ship, with its gymnasium, temple, bath, gardens and fish tanks, reads like a description of a modern liner (Athenaeus, v. c. 40 f.).

in the great writers, is not of this sort. Unlike so many moderns, their thinkers are neither dull nor ugly nor brutal. They were saved from such things partly by something in their blood, a love of τὸ καλόν, partly by their share in public affairs, which brought into their writings the breath of real life and kept them from being mere study work, partly by a sense of civic devotion, which gave their thinking a practical purpose and turned the thinker into a marching apostle of truth. Theirs is intellect of the kind we know in Shakespeare or Milton or Burke. Milton, who knew the hard words the world uses about intellect and its true nature, wrote of it:

How charming is divine philosophy!
Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets.

And he describes its nature and aims: "The end, then, of learning, is, to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him, as we may the nearest, by possessing our souls of true virtue." That is the creative intelligence which the Greeks so supremely possessed.

Listen to a Greek's description of it at the close of a choric song in praise of Athens:

And Cephisus, the fair-flowing river—
 The Cyprian dipping her hand
 Hath drawn of his dew, and the shiver
 Of her touch is as joy in the land.
 For her breathing in fragrance is written,
 And in music her path as she goes,
 And the cloud of her hair it is litten
 With stars of the wind-woven rose.
 So fareth she ever and ever,
 And forth of her bosom is blown,
 As dews on the winds of the river,
 An hunger of passions unknown,
 Strong Loves of all God-like endeavour,
 Whom Wisdom shall throne on her throne.¹

It is on the closing words of this that I wish to dwell: τῇ σοφίᾳ παρέδρους ἔρωτας, παντοίας ἀρετῆς ξυνεργούς — Passions that work every kind of Excellence, throned at the side of Wisdom. Read with careful attention, these seven words reveal a philosophy of life and the genius of a nation; and though the language is strange, the ideal is as noble and living as any ever conceived by human mind. The spirit which Aphrodite, 'the Cyprian,' was to bring to these Athenians was threefold, a

¹ Euripides, *Medea*, ll. 835-845, tr. Murray.

spirit of wisdom, of passion, and of excellence, excellence springing out of wisdom and by its beauty exciting passionate desire. The three sides of human nature were expressed in it—the intellectual, the emotional, the moral. It was not cold intellect, for the Greek word *ἔρως* is the passion of a lover ; it was not narrow, for it pervaded all life, and embraced ‘every kind of excellence’ ; it was not mere emotion, or mere morality, for it was ‘throned by Wisdom,’ aided, disciplined and crowned by the intelligence. That is Greek Reason at its best, not a mere intellectualism watching the world from a study, with keen, dispassionate eyes, but an ardent desire, reaching out into all provinces of life, and seeking to reshape them in accordance with itself.

There is no word for this quality. Reason to our ears, though not to Milton’s, would suggest something purely intellectual. Philosophy, ‘the love of wisdom,’ has the thought ; but the word has lost its original meaning, and philosophy for us is something technical and remote from life. Some writers have called it the artistic temperament,¹ and this description, not entirely satisfac-

¹ Chamberlain, *Foundations of the sixteenth Century*, tr. Lees, p. 15 ff.

tory, reminds us of its connections and lineage ; for it is the base of poetry as well as of philosophy and science. It is reason joined with vision, not mere intelligence, but creative intelligence ; and it is the highest of intellectual qualities. Reason without vision is cold, creeping, inadequate ; vision without reason may be fantastic, unreal, either ineffective or dangerous. But the greatest men are neither mere thinkers nor mere dreamers. They are neither like Hume and Locke, nor like Blake and Shelley. In them vision and reason blend ; they dream, but reason controls and orders their vision. They think, but vision reveals to their thought the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. With it they soar like eagles ; without it they would be wing-clipped fowls with their eyes bent on the farmyard. "Every great poet has been a philosopher, every philosopher of genius, a poet,"¹ and in philosophers here must be reckoned the great men of science.

For a large part of its life the world has always depended on this spirit, but no age more than our own. Yet no race has possessed it so fully as the Greeks. It is their secret. They lived in times

¹ Chamberlain, *Foundations of the sixteenth Century*, tr. Lces, p. 25.

when superstition was rife, and the human mind was a tangled jungle ; yet no body of men have ever looked at life with eyes so unbiased and frank. Reading Socrates or Aristotle, you feel that they cared for nothing but truth ; they have no trace of theological or antitheological prejudice, of personal ambition or spite. They are not intent to foist any views of their own on the world, they are simply concerned to know, profoundly interested in life, and in forming a just and worthy idea of it. They are academic in the good sense of the word. And yet they are not mere intellectuals. Vision, imagination, suffuses their reason, and makes them artists and thinkers in one. The quality is inborn in the Greeks, as individualism is inborn in the Anglo-Saxon, and is exhibited by all their great men. Reason seems to be in their blood. It is as much a mark of Homer and Aeschylus as of Socrates. They became poets or thinkers as the artistic instinct or the reason predominated in each individual, but in all the *fond* was the same. They saw 'life steadily, and saw it whole.' They possessed 'the top of sovereignty'

To bear all naked truths
And to envisage circumstance all calm.

Remembering then that Greek Reason is of this kind, not the mere black and white work of logic, but the coloured art of creative intelligence, let us glance at some examples of it.

Greek literature is full of the key thoughts on which our intellectual life depends. And by this I mean something more than acute and striking sayings such as: "Happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*) does not reside in flocks or money; the soul is that spirit's (*δαίμονος*) home." "Virtue is not justice, but the absence of even a wish to be unjust" (Democritus). "A fool is imposed on by every idea." "It is hard to fight passion (*θυμός*); it will sell its life for its desire" (Heraclitus). "The advantage in being a philosopher is that if all laws disappeared, the philosopher would live as he did before" (Aristippus). "Men who spend their time in chopping logic (*διαλεκτική*) are like those who eat crabs, and for little nourishment have to contend with a great quantity of shell" (Bion). "Goodness in the true sense, is not possible without moral insight (*φρόνησις*), nor moral insight without goodness." "Wealth lies less in our possessions than in the use we make of them." "To seek utility everywhere is most unsuitable to lofty and free natures." "We should be educated

from youth to feel pleasure and pain at the right things ; this is the true education" (Aristotle). "We would not have our politicians grow up amid images of moral deformity, as in some noxious pasture, and there browse and feed upon many a baneful herb and flower day by day, little by little, until they silently gather a festering mass of corruption in their own soul. Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of beauty and grace ; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in every thing ; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a pure region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason" (Plato. Contrast this ideal with modern practice as revealed in advertisements and cinema posters).

Such sayings abound in Greek, and the chief difficulty is to stop quoting, but they are also common in other literatures, more common than the key thoughts spoken of above. We could find the same kind of thing in Pascal, Montaigne, Vauvenargues, Amiel ; though it would be difficult anywhere to match the beauty and depth of the

quotation from Plato. But I am here concerned with something more definitely intellectual than the power of making acute observations, something that betrays an even rarer quality of mind, something that we should not find, I think, in the French writers quoted above—a disinterested desire for knowledge, an instinct and aptitude for finding the rational explanation of things. This quality was otherwise almost unknown in antiquity, and it is not very common to-day. But the Greeks wanted to know things, not for money (they were always a poor people), nor for fame (unlike the Romans, they never talk about it), but simply in order to know. They were interested in *ἱστορία*, 'inquiry,' as they called it, and the monument of this interest is the creation of science and thought.

The New Testament is full of simple phrases, clear as profound springs, which reveal deep beyond deep of religious truth as we gaze into them. "Whoso will save his life, shall lose it." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God." "Who-soever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." "Though I bestow all my goods to

feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." These are seeds in whose tiny compass the promise and potentiality of ages of endless growth are concealed. What the Bible is in the world of religion, that Greek literature is in the world of thought, so simple, so memorable, so clear, so illuminating, so instinct with the spirit of reason, so able "mettre la vérité dans un beau jour." We find in it the seminal principles of most of our modern thought stated with the profundity, and often the conciseness, of a New Testament text.

The Greeks were the first to call the universe a *κόσμος*, an 'order,' and so declare their conception of it as something ruled by law. *διδόναι λόγον*, 'to give a rational account of things,' they invented both the phrase and the momentous and enterprising idea. They knew the origin of all thought—scientific or philosophic—*μάλα φιλοσόφου τοῦτο τὸ πάθος, τὸ θαυμάζειν· οὐ γὰρ ἄλλη ἀρχὴ φιλοσοφίας ἢ αὕτη*.¹ "The feeling of wonder marks the true philosopher, for this is the only source of philosophy"; and they knew its spirit. "I am one of those who are very willing to be refuted

¹ Plato, *Theaet.* 155.

if I say anything which is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute: for I hold that this is the greater gain of the two, just as the gain is greater of being cured of a very great evil than of curing some one else.”¹ And again: “I pray God to grant that my words may endure, in so far as they have been spoken rightly; if unintentionally I have said anything wrong, I pray that he will impose on me the just punishment of him who errs; and the just punishment is that he should be set right.”² If Socrates was not a man of science himself, he knew the spirit by which science lives. They knew the conditions of science and philosophy; they must *σώζειν τὰ φαινόμενα*, ‘keep the phenomena safe,’ as they picturesquely said—a hypothesis must explain the facts without doing violence to them. Concisely and quaintly they defined the method of science. Plato explains that mere right opinion without knowledge is helpless; the man who has it is “like a blind man, who manages to keep in the right road”;³ and “true opinions while they abide with us are beautiful and fruitful, but they run away out of the human soul and therefore are not of much value until they

¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 458.

² *Id. Critias*, 106.

³ *Id. Republic*, 506.

are tied up by the 'tie of the cause.'"¹ The tie of the cause, that is the piece of string with which Science still walks the world and turns opinions into knowledge, connecting isolated phenomena by discovering their cause. And they were equally interested in themselves. ἐδιζήσαμην ἑμαυτόν, said Heraclitus, 'I inquired into myself,' and the phrase opens up the endless branching avenues of philosophy. They had indeed a nobler and wider conception of philosophy than we, with whom philosophy—'the love of wisdom,' and science—'knowledge,' disown their names and are each consigned to a single province of their true kingdom and made jealous members of a loose federation. When they spoke of philosophy they had in their mind the whole range of knowledge from the knowledge of God to that of nature, for they saw the universe as a whole, and regarding it all as the kingdom of man, rejected the narrow specialism of our philosophers and scientists, each shut, like an anchorite, in his small, private cell. Listen to Aristotle on physical science; men of science might take the words as a motto, for never has the study of nature been more nobly praised or more widely conceived.

¹ *Id. Meno*, 98.

“Doubtless,” he says, “the glory of the heavenly bodies fills us with more delight than we get from the contemplation of these lowly things (*i.e.* the facts of zoology); for the sun and stars are born not, neither do they decay, but are eternal and divine. But the heavens are high and afar off, and of celestial things the knowledge that our senses give us is scanty and dim. On the other hand, the living creatures are nigh at hand, and of each and all of them we may gain ample and certain knowledge if we so desire. If a statue please us, shall not the living fill us with delight, all the more if in the spirit of philosophy we search for causes and recognise the evidences of design. Then will Nature’s purpose and her deep-seated laws be everywhere revealed, all tending in her multitudinous work to one form or another of the Beautiful.”¹

The spirit revealed by these quotations is not common even with us. It looks at life unblinded by pre-conceptions, by sentiment, by regard for what other people think, have thought, or will think. Now turn from its isolated utterances to

¹ *De Part. Animalium*, i. 5. The translation is taken from Prof. D’A. Thompson’s delightful Herbert Spencer lecture on “Aristotle as a Biologist.”

its action on life. It was applied to theology, and within less than a hundred years of the time when poets believed that the Father of Heaven tried to eat his own children, that one of them, after deposing him, reigned in his place, bullying his fellow-gods and taking the form of various animals in order to seduce the daughters of men, Plato was writing: "Evil cannot reside in heaven, so it is compelled to haunt mortal nature and our earthly home. Therefore we must try and escape from earth to heaven as quickly as we can: and this escape is to become like God, as far as lies in our power; and to become like him is to become good and holy *and at the same time wise* (notice this characteristically Greek addition). . . . God is nowhere and in no way unrighteous, he is supremely righteous; and there is nothing more like him than those of us who become truly righteous."¹ Those who know the *Republic* will remember how Plato, by patient argument and laborious logic, proves the absurdity of the old stories and arrives at this conclusion; thus reaching in the Greek way, by following his reason, what Hebrew prophets reached by a leap of the mind in a moment of revealing vision. Think, by

¹ *Theaet.* 176.

contrast, how many centuries it took Europe to put the dark stories of the Old Testament in their proper place. The same spirit was applied to politics, and democracy came into being, and her charter was written in words which no subsequent age need ever rewrite ; in the speech which contains it Pericles claims as a peculiar quality of the Athenians, that they were never afraid of thought, but made it the basis of all they did.

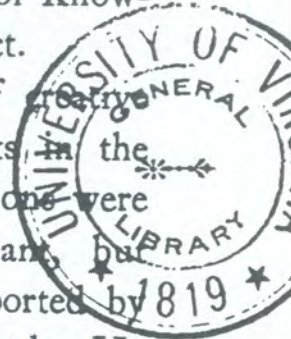
The same spirit of creative intelligence was applied to the art of writing, and, though they had no specimens of prose, Greek or foreign, to guide them, within a hundred years of their first attempts, they not only wrote far better than we do (in the mere art of writing, Greece has never been surpassed), but they had discovered the essential principles of prose style, and had begun to discuss what rhythms were suitable to it. (Till Professor Saintsbury wrote his *History of English Prose Rhythm*, we had not conceived that there was such a problem at all.) The same spirit was applied to history, and Thucydides wrote that account of the Peloponnesian War which caused Macaulay to say : "I finished Thucydides after reading him with inexpressible interest and ad-

miration. He is the greatest historian that ever lived." ¹

It was applied to morals, and the Greek cast of mind can be seen in the notion of Socrates that virtue was knowledge, that you could become a good man as you could become a good pilot or carpenter, by learning the business of using your brains. If we are aware that goodness requires also qualities of will which Socrates overlooked, still, let us respect the bold challenge to the reign of mere tradition and custom which his theory made, and remembering that our belief in education rests partly on something not unlike it, let us pass to Aristotle's criticism of Socrates and his monumental analysis of the contribution of Knowledge, Will and Habit to human conduct.

At first, as was natural, this spirit of creative intelligence produced its greatest results in the realm of man, and its scientific speculations were guesses, always ingenious, often brilliant, but unconfirmed by experiment, and unsupported by evidence. With Aristotle this changed. He conceived the notion of mapping out the field of

¹ Trevelyan, *Life of Macaulay*, p. 689: the date is Feb. 27, 1835; a year later Macaulay pencils in his edition of Thucydides, "I am still of the same mind."



knowledge, assigning each subject to its proper science, and founding his conclusions on masses of ascertained and sifted fact. (His own work on politics was based on the study of 158 constitutions.) In this way he was the founder of the modern scientific method, and the precursor of that first great attempt to *know the world*, which the Alexandrians made in the third and second centuries B.C., and which our nineteenth century resumed with more knowledge and more instruments to use it, but not with more eagerness, laboriousness, or energy.

Here we have one reason why Greece has acted as a ferment, a stimulant, to ages and individuals who rediscover her, from the Renaissance to our own day. It is not surprising. Some ages, from historical circumstances, and all people individually, from the necessities of education, are brought up to certain habits and institutions. Then they come across thought, and the chains of their servitude fall away, they are free from the rule of use and wont. The world is no longer a cage where they are born to captivity, but a house which they can remodel and rebuild. The phrases and forms of society are seen not to

be adamant or iron ; they have in their hands a power which can reduce all things to their constituent elements, separate the rotten from the sound, and, if they wish, create the world anew. This power is thought, the great solvent, the great creator. And because Greece is thought incarnate Sir Henry Maine could say, that nothing *moved* in the world which is not Greek (he had forgotten that there was such a place as Palestine), and the Socialist Hoffmann in the Prussian Lower House in 1916. could say, less picturesquely but more truly, "all modern European nations still suck their nourishment from things Greek."¹

But it is said : We grant that the Greeks were a great people : still after all they were often wrong ; it was not their fault but that of their age. A modern text-book is a safer guide than Plato or Aristotle, for it can contain their wisdom and avoid their errors. We respect their performance and recognise that it was wonderful for their time ; but it is absurd to use them when we can get modern books, as it would be to use a velocipede in the age of the motor car. "Hellas," as Sir H. H. Johnston says, "once held high the lamp by the light of which humanity endeavours

¹ Quoted in the *New Statesman*, Ap. 22, 1916.

to peer into the mystery of the universe. Let us by all means be grateful historically, but all these facts could be stated in a few hours' reading or lecturing. The philosophy of Plato—a thinker who knew nothing of the earth but a small bright patch round the Eastern Mediterranean, who knew nothing of Japan and China, India, America, or the British Isles, nothing of the true relations between the earth and the sun, nothing as to the main facts of astronomy, physiology, psychology, human anatomy, and the laws of nature in general—is scarcely worth our attention to-day except as an interesting point in the progress of human thought. Can we seriously go to Aristotle for accurate zoology, or even to Thucydides and Xenophon for accurate history?"¹

This criticism is plausible: but a very little thought will reveal its hollowness. Apply a similar argument to the Bible; and we may find ourselves rejecting Isaiah and S. Paul as thinkers who knew nothing of the earth but a small bright

¹ *Nineteenth Century*, July 1916. The doubts raised, as to Sir H. Johnston's competence to speak on this subject, by his extraordinary idea that we cannot "go to Thucydides and Xenophon for accurate history," are not quieted by his assurance that he is "personally greatly interested in Hellenistic (*sic?*) studies."

patch round the Eastern Mediterranean, and who knew far less of the main facts of astronomy, etc., than Plato, and are therefore, on Sir H. Johnston's principles, 'scarcely worth our attention.' Apply it to Chaucer and Shakespeare: they too will be blotted out for their ignorance of natural science, and their scanty acquaintance with geography. The fallacy is obvious. It is quite true that the scientific books of yesterday are obsolete to-day, because they deal with a subject where knowledge is continually advancing, and our opinions change with its advance. It would therefore be absurd to use the *Historia Animalium* as a text-book in zoology; no schoolboy or undergraduate reads it, nor has it ever been proposed that they should. But it is different with books whose greatness lies in their ideas, or their attitude to life, or their picture of human nature. Man changes little with the centuries; he eats and drinks, marries and is given in marriage, as in the days of Noah, as in the days of the Son of Man. In himself and in the states he founds, much the same problems and crises arise in all ages, for they grow out of an unchanging human nature, of which the writers of the Bible, and Aristotle, and Shakespeare knew as much, to put it mildly, as

the cleverest writer of to-day. Look back at the quotations on page 90 f.; have the discovery of the Antipodes or the advances of science antiquated them?

Sir H. Johnston's fallacy springs from the idea that education is acquisition of knowledge; and no one has more concisely stated the objection to this than a Greek thinker of the sixth century B.C. *πολυμαθία νόον οὐ διδάσκει*, said Heraclitus, "masses of knowledge do not instruct a mind." If the sole object of education was to impart facts, then a modern text-book on morals might be more useful than Aristotle, though its moral teaching would probably be feebler, and though it might possibly contain more cardinal errors. But, while education must impart the knowledge necessary for the conduct of life, its prime end is not *πολυμαθία* but the development of *νοῦς*, the training of an inquisitive, acute, industrious, patient, truth-loving mind, which knows what facts are essential and what are unimportant, when a thing is proved, and when it is not. When this has been done, we have something which knows how to collect facts, and when collected, how to use them. Without it we are like men who try to carpenter before they have

got tools. It is not developed by studying textbooks, but by living with the great men who have had a portion of this spirit, and who inspire it. It is the prophet's mantle, which only the prophet can bestow. In education, as in life, the deepest impressions are made on us by contact with great personalities.

Anyone who looks back on his school-days, recalls a long succession of teachers. Some were full of knowledge, some were able to impart it; some were neither. But few really influenced us, and those, most people would say, were the men with personality. We remember them, for they gave us not knowledge, but something rarer, more fertile, more unforgettable—a way of looking at life. If we could have our education over again, we should ignore the others and go back to them, for they are the real educators. Facts we can pick up for ourselves, but an outlook on life, a spirit in which to interpret and face it, cannot be had from manuals, but only from living personalities or from books into which such personalities have passed. That is why, as any teacher knows, it is far more profitable for a student, say of philosophy, to read, for instance, Kant, with all Kant's obscurity, errors, and preposterous language, than to read a modern

book on him, which has eliminated the errors, and purified the language, but in which the personal touch of the master is no longer felt. In the one case he has met and known a genius, in the other he has not. That is why the Greeks maintain a hold on education. With a clearness of thought and expression, very foreign to Kant, they offer us many things—unsurpassed achievements in art and literature, the example of a rich, complete life, the spectacle of reason incarnate, reason in religion, politics, philosophy, history, letters, life. They knew less than we, but they had more of the spirit which begets knowledge; otherwise they could not have brought, as they did, light out of darkness. And what is equally important, they present knowledge not as a dull necessity, but as an ideal, beautiful, imaginative, passionate quest. If we want *νοῦς* rather than *πολυμαθία*, where shall we find it purer than in them?

Let us evoke the most famous of them; for in popular thought Socrates is generally so regarded; and certainly to know nothing of him is to ignore a man who is in the world of thought almost what Christ is in the world of religion. The scene is a market-place, and an elderly man is the centre of

a group, chiefly young and well-to-do. The conversation shifts over a wide field, from the belief in immortality to the qualities of a good general, or the means of making men patriotic, but it tends to come back to a discussion of general ideas—what are righteousness, justice, temperance, courage, love? And it is always conducted by question and answer, Socrates leading his audience round to the conclusion which reflection shows them to hold. It is a method which he calls, from his mother's profession, intellectual midwifery. At this moment Socrates is talking to a rather pompous priest, who is arguing that 'religion' compels him to prosecute his father for leaving a murderer bound hand and foot to die in a ditch from neglect. "And what is religion, Euthyphro?" Socrates says. Then follow various definitions, as Euthyphro is driven from position to position by the searching enquiries of his friend. "It is doing what I do, prosecuting anyone guilty of murder or similar crimes." "It is what is dear to the gods." "It is attention to the gods, serving and ministering to them as our servants minister to us." But one by one the definitions, as Euthyphro says, "on whatever ground they are rested, seem to turn round and walk away from us" before that remorseless

dialectic. After all, how many people could give a satisfactory account of what 'religion' really is?

Why is this little society so important in the history of thought? Why is it possible to compare the influence of Socrates in his own particular sphere with that of Christ in religion—Socrates who spent his life in trying to discover, by question and answer, the real meaning of justice, virtue, courage and other abstract terms?

Partly it is the personality of this Greek who charged himself with the mission of preaching virtue to men and the duty of 'improving their souls,' who spent his life in giving his message, refused to modify it when it was unpopular, and for its sake went so willingly to death; partly it is the message itself, partly the manner in which it was delivered.

One great danger of the modern world is our susceptibility to the general ideas that float around us, thick as bacilli, in the air, that pass our lips so often, and are so influential in our lives, that we use so readily without ever having analysed what we really mean by them. We are hardly conscious of this danger, though the example of a great nation on the Continent, besotted and maddened by false ideas, might have brought it home to us.

Yet every newspaper besets us with such conceptions, recommending, dissuading, praising, vilifying ; novels, poems, essays, politicians, preachers, economists, educationalists, advertisers, reformers of every kind press their special notions upon us ; and it is equally difficult to accept or reject them. Fifth century Athens suffered a similar invasion of idea bacilli, and Socrates, who first fully divined their significance and danger, was also the first to devise a treatment for the disease, a habit of scepticism, in the original and proper meaning of the word, of reasonable and not captious criticism. His remedy has never been superseded or improved upon ; it remains our only resource to-day, when we are attacked. How salutary a presence he would be in our midst : how many questions he would put to modern Europe ! He would ask the Sinn Feiners what they meant by nationalism, and the Chambers of Commerce what 'education' is, and the *Daily Herald* what 'socialism' and 'democracy' are, and the signatories of the science manifesto whether, when they spoke of 'science,' they meant 'physical science' or 'scientific method.' He would try to discover the exact ideas in men's minds when they talked of Progress, Freedom, Religion, Efficiency and other familiar phrases, and

to see how far these ideas were intelligible and consistent. And he might well find with our politicians, poets and working men, as he found in Athens, that they often "believed themselves to be wise in things in which they were not wise."¹

Note too something more about his method. General ideas do not go unquestioned among us; the *Daily Mail* replies to the *Daily News*, the *Times* to the *Kölnische Zeitung*, Sir E. Ray Lankester to the upholders of the classics, our party politicians to one another. But the methods of Socrates are not those of our party politicians or journalists. For one thing he dislikes long speeches. ("Protagoras," he says to one of these disputants, "I have a wretched memory, and when anyone makes a long speech to me I never remember what he is talking about."²) He professes to be unable to follow dogmatic persons who "slip away from the point, and instead of answering make a speech at such length that most of the hearers forget the subject at issue."³ (This would be a not unfair description of many leading articles and political harangues.) His own method is question and answer, moving slowly from point to point, leaving

¹ Plato, *Apol.* 22. ² *Id.* *Protag.* 334. ³ *Ib.* 336.

no inch of ground unexamined, and in consequence running far less risk of overlooking truth than the writer or speaker who discharges his views on the public without fear that they will be scrutinised in detail. He is the father of cross-examination. And who doubts that the method of Socrates and not of the leader-writer is most likely to guide us to truth, if we really wish to find it?

Then, and here again he differs from some politicians and journalists, he is never rude and never loses his temper. He is the first and most perfect model of a type that has never been common in the world, the courteous controversialist. One day when he was arguing with a sophist who had maintained that Might is Right, his opponent, instead of answering, said: "Tell me, Socrates, have you a nurse? Because she lets you snivel instead of wiping your nose when it wants it"; and then, after a long speech, broke off the argument. To which Socrates' only reply is: "Really, my dear Thrasymachus, you have involved us in a big argument: and are you going off without having sufficiently instructed us and ascertained for yourself whether your views are right or not?"¹ And Thrasymachus, for mere shame, has

¹ *Republic*, 343, 344.

to stay while the enquiry proceeds. In all the recorded conversation of Socrates there is not a word of discourtesy or bitterness, nothing that could muddy the wells of discussion by introducing personal feeling, for he knew that wounded pride and petty irritation, even more than real division of opinion, separated men and prevented them from finding the common truth. Not many controversialists remember that.

And this brings us to a further point. It may be urged that there is something negative and sterile in this Socratic spirit, that it is too critical and analytic; that it has the fault of pulling popular ideas to pieces and leaving nothing in their place; that it sweeps and garnishes the house of the human mind, but leaves it empty for seven devils worse than before to enter in and dwell there.

This is a just attack on the critical spirit, but not on Socrates, who added to a hatred of lies a passion for knowledge. Anyone with a spark of intellectual interest will find it fascinating even now to ask what 'justice' or 'liberty' or 'friendship' are, and how far good conduct depends on knowledge; though in such enquiries we are sailing over charted seas and following the courses of

many predecessors. But how far greater was the delight to the companions of Socrates in days when the questions had never been asked before, setting out like Elizabethan adventurers over unknown waters on the most romantic of all quests, to discover the New World of moral and intellectual ideas. We catch something of their excitement in the words of Phaedrus: "What is the secret of good style?" says Socrates; "shall we ask Lysias and others?"—"Shall we ask?" he replies. "Why, what should one live for, Socrates, unless it be such pleasures?"¹

Words like these remind us that Socrates was no mere cold critic; and still more striking testimony is borne by a brilliant, volatile politician of the day, who goes on, after some comments, in the candid Greek way, on the unattractiveness of Socrates' appearance: "mere fragments of you and your words, even at second hand, and however imperfectly repeated, amaze and possess the soul of anyone who hears them. . . . I have heard Pericles and other great orators, and I thought that they spoke well, but I never had any similar feeling; my soul was not stirred by them, nor was I angry at the thought of my own slavish

¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 258.

state. But this Marsyas has often brought me to such a pass, that I have felt as if I could hardly endure the life which I am leading; and I am conscious that if I did not shut my ears against him, and fly as from the voice of a siren, my fate would be like that of others—he would transfix me and I should grow old sitting at his feet. For he makes me confess that I ought not to live as I do, neglecting the wants of my own soul. And he is the only person who ever made me ashamed, which you might think not to be in my nature, and there is no one else who does the same. For I know that I cannot answer him or say that I ought not to do as he bids, but when I leave his presence the love of popularity gets the better of me. And therefore I run away and fly from him, and when I see him I am ashamed of what I have confessed to him. Many a time have I wished that he were dead, and yet I know that I should be much more sorry than glad if he were to die.”¹

Socrates made Alcibiades confess that “I ought not to live as I do, neglecting the needs of my soul.” In the heart of this ironic critic of current ideas, this courteous disputant, this cautious searcher

Plato, *Symposium*, 215 f., tr. Jowett.

after truth burns the same spiritual passion which consumed Isaiah or S. Paul. Only, as a Greek, he approaches his goal through the intellect, as they approached it on a tide of religious emotion. To know him is to know the greatest incarnation in history of the spirit of thought, keen-eyed, patient, ardent, moralised; and if we consider how often in the twentieth century we fail to think out the underlying principles of our beliefs or actions, how often we are victimised by unanalysed ideas, how indifferent we are to knowledge, how careless of truth, how ready to lose our temper and say things which turn discussions into partisan quarrels—then we shall see how much we have still to learn from Socrates.

Let us take another example, earlier in time than Socrates, less famous than he, but full of the same spirit. A man, apparently in perfect health, falls to the ground with a sharp cry, and lies there rigid and pale. Then he flushes dark red, his fingers twitch open and clasp again; convulsions shake his arms and legs and face, his teeth close with a snap and foam trickles through them, he perspires profusely. In a few minutes he begins to come to himself, and then falls into

a deep sleep. There is no visible explanation of these sudden fits ; they may be rare and have no permanent effect, they may be frequent and pass into a darker eclipse of the reason. We recognise the symptoms of epilepsy, but if we had lived before the conception of science and of natural law had dawned, when all unusual things seemed magical, would it be surprising if we had thought them uncanny and supernatural? We know that the Jews as late as our own era supposed epileptics to be "possessed with a devil." Now hear a Greek of the fifth century on the subject. He is attacking the prevalent view that this is a 'sacred disease,' sent by god and to be cured by incantations: "I, however, do not consider that the body of man is polluted by god, the most perishable by the most holy of things ; for even if it were defiled, or in any way affected by something else, it would be likely to be purified and sanctified rather than polluted by god. . . . This disease seems to me to be no more divine than the rest ; but it is as natural as all other diseases, and has a cause for all its symptoms ; . . . it has the same origin as all other diseases, and is curable just as they are, except where from length of time it is confirmed, and has become too strong for the

remedies administered. In origin it is hereditary like all other diseases. For if a phlegmatic person be born of a phlegmatic, and a bilious of a bilious, and a phthisical of a phthisical, and a hypochondriac of a hypochondriac, what is to hinder it from happening that where the father and mother were subject to this disease, certain of their offspring should be subject also? Another great proof that it is in no way more divine than any other disease is, that it occurs in those who are of a phlegmatic constitution, but does not attack the bilious. Yet, if it were more divine than the others, this disease ought to attack all alike, and make no distinction between the bilious and the phlegmatic. The brain is the cause of this complaint, as it is of all the other chief diseases, and in what manner I will now plainly declare. . . ." And again: "This so-called Sacred Disease arises from the same cause as the others, namely, those things which enter and quit the body, such as cold, the sun and the winds, which are ever changing and never at rest. And these things are divine, so that there is no necessity for making a distinction, and holding this disease to be more divine than others, but all are divine, and all human; each has its own peculiar nature and power, and none is beyond our

control or skill. And most of them are curable by the same forces as produced them.”¹

I have only quoted a small fragment from his essay, and given no idea of his minute enumeration of the symptoms, and the acute argument by which he supports his views ; but is not his attitude cool, lucid, reasonable, observant, inspired by the very soul of science? Could the twentieth century, however it modified his conclusions, improve his spirit and method? And is there not something unique in the race which 400 years before Christ thus turned the light of reason into the black darkness of mystery that surrounded man?

“The clear recognition of disease as being . . . a process governed by what we should now call natural laws . . . led to habits of minute observation and accurate interpretation of symptoms, in which the Hippocratic school was unrivalled in antiquity, and has been the model of all succeeding ages, so that even in these days . . . the true method of clinical medicine may be said to be the method of Hippocrates.”² Here is an extract

¹ Hippocrates, *περὶ ἰερῆς νοσήσου* (ed. Littré, vi. pp. 362 f. and 394). In parts I have used the Sydenham Society translation.

² Sir T. C. Allbutt, Article on “Medicine,” p. 42, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

which shews not only his acute observation, but also his literary gift: "But such persons as are used to the disease, know beforehand when they are about to be seized, and flee from men; if their own house be at hand, they run home, but if not, to a lonely place, where as few persons as possible will see them when they fall, and they immediately cover themselves up. This they do from shame of the affection, and not from fear or from religious reasons, as most people suppose. Little children at first fall down wherever they may happen to be, because they are not used to the disease. But when they have been often seized, and feel its approach beforehand, they run to their mothers or to any other person they know, from terror and dread of the affection; for they do not know yet what it is to be ashamed."¹ Could anything be more moving than this? It is like an extract rather from a tragedy than a medical treatise.

To the same Hippocrates is attributed the noble physician's oath which, with small changes, is still used in some of our medical schools: "I swear by Apollo the physician, and by Asclepius, and Health, and All-Heal, and I call all gods and

¹ *περὶ ἰερῆς νόσου* (ed. Littré, vi. p. 328).

goddesses to witness that, according to my ability and judgment, I will keep this Oath and this Bond—to reckon him who taught me this Art equally dear to me as my parents, to share my substance with him, and in the hour of his need impart what he requires, to look upon his offspring in the same footing as my own brothers, and to teach them this art if they wish to learn it, without fee or stipulation. . . . I will follow the system of regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous. I will give no deadly medicine if asked, nor suggest any such plan ; so too, I will not produce abortion. With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practise my Art. . . . Into whatever houses I enter I will go into them for the benefit of the sick, and will abstain from every voluntary act of mischief and corruption. . . . Whatever in my professional practice or outside it in the life of the world I see or hear, which ought not to be spoken of abroad, I will not divulge, considering that such things should be kept secret. While I continue to keep this Oath unviolated, may I be allowed to enjoy life and the practice of the art, respected by all men, in all times. But should I

trespass and violate this Oath, may the reverse be my lot."¹ It is with men like the writer of this that we shall live if we study Greek ; can we wish for or find better company in the world of the intellect?

We shall come back to the Greeks later ; meanwhile we have glanced at some of the arguments for their place in education. We have seen that modern Europe is rooted in the culture of the classical world ; that in studying this we become at the same time acquainted with a superb literature and a brilliant national life, and that, in particular, we are immersing ourselves in that spirit of free enquiry and rational explanation which is the oxygen in the air of the modern world, and yet never has been purer and more concentrated than in Greece. Perhaps too much stress has been laid on this point and too little said of Greek literature. But the outside world, while willing to admit the merits of the latter, is apt to think, illogically enough, that otherwise Greece is out of date. I have tried to show how false this view is, how living is her spirit, and how potent those

¹ Ed. Littré, vol. iv. p. 628 f. Sydenham Society translation, with some changes.

'rigorous teachers,' of whom Matthew Arnold writes, that they

Seized my youth,
And purged its faith and trimmed its fire,
Showed me the high white star of Truth,
There bade me gaze, and there aspire.

Of course it is quite possible to dispense with the Greeks. It is quite possible to go through life without reading Shakespeare. It is possible even to go through it without reading the Bible; there have been great religious books since it was written, and great saints who have caught and in some measure reproduced its spirit. Yet the knowledge of all of them would not really replace the great fount and original of our religion. Something the same may be said of Greek literature, which is the Bible of the world of thought.¹

¹ A fuller discussion of our debt to the Greeks will be found in my book, *The Greek Genius and its Meaning to us*.

74
115