THE TRUE BOOK ABOUT
ANCIENT GREECE
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THE TRUE BOOK ABOUT ANCIENT GREECE

by

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Illustrated by

N. G. WILSON

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DEDICATION

"Athens with heaven's blue in your hair,
Eternal city of deathless story,
Mother of beauties beyond compare,
Guardian of Hellas—be yours the glory."

Pindar.
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Chapter One

MYCENAE AND THE WORLD OF HOMER

Ancient Greece! Probably those words call up to most of us some sort of picture of that far distant age of myth and legend when the Heroes in their shining bronze armour fought before Troy. Perhaps we think first of Hector and Achilles doing battle on the plain while beautiful Helen looks on from the walls of Troy with old King Priam and the Trojan elders; or it may be of Jason and the Argonauts sailing over the blue sea from the shores of Greece in search of the Golden Fleece; or of Heracles the strong man performing his labours, ridding the land of the Lion of Nemea or the nine-headed snake of Lerna for his master the King of rich Mycenae; of Theseus following the clue through the labyrinth at Knossos in Crete; or of Odysseus the wanderer landing at last on his little rocky island of Ithaca where Penelope had waited so long for his return.

Of course Greece has other meanings for us as we grow older and come to realize that we owe nearly all our civilization—our arts, our sciences and our forms of government—to this same beautiful country. And if we are lucky enough to visit it, we find our dreams not merely come true but far surpassed by the breath-taking loveliness of this land of enchantment: the country which, moreover,
can boast the oldest written documents in Europe and the second oldest language in the world that is still spoken.

To the ancient Greeks themselves, in the days when they were writing their epics and poems, plays and histories, or building their temples and carving their statues, the stories of their own early days were thought of as perfectly sound history. Homer, who wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—the epic of the Trojan War, and the epic of Odysseus the Wanderer—was the first historian, as well as the first and greatest of poets; and he was drawing the material for his poems from the true story of those ancient days, the Age of the Heroes which everyone in Greece seemed to know naturally: he did not even need to describe the Fall of Troy at the end of the *Iliad*—everyone knew about the Wooden Horse in which the heroes were brought into the doomed city.

In time people ceased to believe in the gods and goddesses of old Greece, and did not agree with Homer that Aphrodite had carried Paris out of the battle to save him from Menelaus: that was, of course, the charming and imaginative way in which the poet covered the fact that Paris had escaped hastily when he found that he was getting the worst of it. But the story was still thought to be true, just as Macbeth's doings are true, even though he may never have seen the visions shown him by the Three Witches.

In later times still, however, when history became more and more of an exact science, people thought that Homer and the rest were just poets and story-tellers who invented the whole Trojan War and all the other tales, and fitted them into the sort of myths and fairy tales which seem to be common to nearly all the races of the world as they emerge out of the darkness of their early days.
A hundred years ago you would hardly have found anyone who believed even that Troy had ever existed, except as an unimportant village long after Homer’s day; or that there could possibly have been a great King of Mycenae like Agamemnon in about 1200 B.C., overlord of half Greece, living in a world not very different from the Heroic Age described by Homer. There happened, however, to be a German boy called Heinrich Schliemann who fell in love with the Greek legends and insisted from the first that Homer had written about real people and real places. Though he began life as a grocer’s apprentice, Schliemann made his fortune during the Crimean War, and being good at languages learnt Greek as soon as he no longer needed to work. Then he set out for Greece to prove his belief in the reality of Homer’s world.

At first he only looked for the sites of Troy and Mycenae, to decide where they really had been. But in 1870 he began to dig at a little village in Turkey called Hisarlik which he had decided from his careful study of the Iliad must be where Troy once stood. And sure enough, after two years’ work he dug down to a prehistoric city which had been destroyed by fire, and found a treasure of gold jewellery which he felt sure must have belonged to King Priam.

Not being able to dig further at Troy, Schliemann next set to work at Mycenae, which was not so hard to find since a few remains still showed above the ground, such as the top of the gateway into the citadel with its great triangular carving of two lions who gave their name to the gate. Again he was lucky beyond his wildest dreams, for he began to dig just inside the Lion Gate, which happened to be the exact site of the ancient burial place of the early kings of Mycenae.
First he came to a circular wall of upright stones, and digging inside them found five deep “shaft” graves, at the bottom of each of which lay the bones of a Mycenaean king with a gold mask over his face and such a treasure of gold and decorated weapons and pottery as had never been seen before.

“I have looked upon the face of Agamemnon”, he telegraphed to the king of Greece; and although he had actually uncovered a generation of kings a century or two earlier than Agamemnon, (it was perhaps Perseus whose grave he had found), he had certainly proved that Homer wrote about a real period in Greek history of which nothing had been known until then except in the old legends which nobody believed to have even a foundation of fact.

In the Iliad there is a list of the kings and princes of Greece who came to help Agamemnon in the war, and most of their towns are mentioned together with the number of ships that each overlord was able to collect. For a long time scholars had thought that the “Catalogue of Ships” was made up and added to the poem well after Homer’s day. But now they began to look for the sites of the places mentioned in it, and to dig for remains; and in most cases they found ruins of palaces or citadels, tombs or houses all belonging to the civilization which Schliemann had discovered at Mycenae.

Although he did not send a very great number of ships, King Idomeneus of Crete seemed to be one of the most important of Agamemnon’s vassals or allies, and in 1900 the English archaeologist, Sir Arthur Evans, began looking for his capital city at Knossos—and found it almost immediately.

But, like Schliemann, he found more than he expected.
The Lion Gate at Mycenae
Knossos, and the other sites in Crete, turned out to belong to a much older civilization still. The earliest palaces at Knossos and Phaistos appeared to have been built as early as 2200 B.C., and traces of this Cretan civilization— or "Minoan", as Evans named it, after Minos the famous King of Crete in the old legends—were discovered not only all over the island, but in many parts of Greece as well, and in the other islands of the Aegean from Thasos at the north to Cyprus at the south.

The Minoan civilization was wonderfully highly developed. The ruins of Knossos show staircases and corridors, big rooms grouped round the staircases, many store-rooms with the great jars for oil or honey still in place. On the walls are brightly-coloured frescoes, many showing the boy and girl athletes practising the dangerous "Bull Dance" in which one catches the bull by his long horns, turns a somersault over his back and lands behind him where another dancer catches and steadies him—or her, for the girls seem to have been as daring and adept in this sport as the young men.

The story of the youths and maidens of Athens who were sent as tribute to King Minos of Crete and were thrown to the Minotaur—a monster half bull and half man—seems to have begun in a misunderstanding, or misremembering of the Bull Dance. And the story of Theseus may be true also: for the palace and citadel at Knossos with its stairs and passages and rooms makes an absolute maze even now. Our word "labyrinth" comes from the maze-like palace of Knossos, though it really means "the place of the axes", as the "labrys" or double-headed axe "<>" seems to have been a sacred Minoan sign and is found in all their buildings, and even, unexpectedly, at Stonehenge which may in consequence
have been designed by a wandering Minoan or Mycenaean architect.

Besides all the luxuries shown by the great palace with its cool rooms and courtyards, and its bathrooms with a drainage system almost as advanced as ours is today, the Minoans knew how to write. Though it seems that they got very little further than the same sort of picture-writing or “hieroglyphics” used by the ancient Egyptians. Some of their accounts, preserved on clay tablets, have been discovered in Crete, but no one has so far been able to read them or find what language the Minoans spoke.

Besides the few hieroglyphic tablets and a rather larger number written in a later development of hieroglyphics called “Linear A”, Evans discovered a great many tablets, mostly of a slightly later date, written in “Linear B” which was obviously a real kind of writing and a great advance on the picture-writing. This could not be read either; and the obvious greatness of the Minoan civilisation caused Evans and most other scholars to think that Greece and the islands were all part of the Minoan Empire, that Mycenae was merely a colony, and that even Agamemnon was not really a Greek or at least was partly a Cretan.

When, however, in 1939 another palace was discovered by believing the Iliad; in Greece this time, at Pylos where in the story old King Nestor lived in great state and importance; and when almost the first things unearthed were large collections of clay tablets written in “Linear B”, some scholars began to wonder if the great Minoan theory could really be true.

In 1952 the most exciting and important discovery since Schliemann’s was made by a young English architect called Michael Ventris. He managed to read the “Linear
B” tablets and discovered that they were all written in Greek, in a very early form even older than Homer’s, and that the letters (of which there are nearly ninety) represented syllables and not just the consonants and vowels of our modern alphabets. Thus the spice which we still call “coriander” and which comes from the Greek “korianna” or “koriandron” was written “ko-ri-ya-da-na”

KO - RI - YA - DA - NA

(κορίανδρον = “koriandron”; i.e. “coriander”)

in Mycenaean “Linear B” script.

This wonderful and tantalizing discovery changed the whole picture of ancient Greece of the period before the Trojan War, and told us much about the inhabitants of Mycenae and Pylos, though there is much more that we long to know. For the tablets do not contain history or literature: they are the lists and account-books kept year by year in the palaces: lists of stores, of flocks, of weapons, even of slaves and servants. And they were not meant to last, and were only dried in the sun and apparently melted down and used again every year or so. The ones which have survived have done so only by an odd chance: in each case the palace in which they were discovered was destroyed by fire—and the fire baked them hard, just as a clay pot is baked in an oven.

Nevertheless a lot has been learnt from the tablets and from the remains of pottery and other things dug up
by the archaeologists, who have discovered the dates at which all these different objects were made, and so when the places where they were found were in use.

Much in the early days is very dark: but we can feel fairly sure that not long after 2000 B.C. there were people in Greece speaking an early form of Greek. Probably the Minoans planted colonies in Greece, and certainly they influenced these early Greeks, but they do not seem to have changed their language or made them into another race even as much as the Normans did when they conquered Saxon England. Indeed, it turned out the other way round in the end.

About 1700 B.C. a tremendous earthquake destroyed Knossos and many other places in Crete; and though they were rebuilt, the Minoans seem never to have been as powerful again. During the next few hundred years Mycenae rose to be the chief power, and the people from the mainland of Greece came to Crete and conquered it. This is why the “Linear B” tablets at Knossos, written about 1400 B.C., are all in Greek, though the script may have been developed by Cretans from the writing of their own Minoan language in the more clumsy and inconvenient “Linear A”.

Shortly before 1400 the Cretans seem to have revolted against their Greek overlords, and perhaps even defeated the king of Athens, though his was only a minor Mycenaean power. This is where the story of Theseus comes in: for an expedition set out from Greece, reconquered Crete and burnt the palace of Knossos (thus preserving the oldest “Linear B” tablets), and there was no more tribute of youths and maidens, or of anything else, paid by Athens to Knossos. After this Crete behaved itself, and Idomeneus was a faithful vassal of King Agamemnon,
though he was not able to send a great many ships to the Trojan War.

Greece* at this time was ruled by a large number of kings, or warrior chieftains, the "Heroes" of the later legends. Each king had his castle or citadel and in time built bigger and stronger walls round it. Mycenae seems to have been the most important of all these "citadel-centres", certainly in the southern half of Greece which is called the Peloponnesus and is almost divided from the rest by the Gulf of Corinth; and the king of Mycenae was overlord of the neighbouring "citadel-centres" and probably head of a league including many other kingdoms such as Pylos, just as Agamemnon was in the Iliad.

In Mycenae, the greatest of the "citadel centres", we have the best preserved example of the buildings of that early age of Greece; and with it goes a little subject citadel not many miles away called Tiryns. Once again chance has favoured us, for Mycenae was little more than a village in later times with only a minor temple and a few flimsy buildings built on it; and Tiryns was even less used, perhaps only for wooden huts and a small Byzantine church.

By 1500 B.C. Mycenae was inhabited by a rich and cultured race who buried their dead in little tombs cut out of the rock and placed with them well-made and decorated earthenware jars, gold jewellery, swords with gold and ivory handles, and even amethyst beads with skilfully engraved portraits on them and carved lamps or jugs of rock crystal. After them came the even more beautiful

* "Greece" was not, of course, its name. What the Mycenaean called it is unknown, but Homer calls the people of Greece generally "Archaeans". The later Greeks called the country "Hellas" and themselves "Hellenes". "Greece" is the Roman name for the country and comes to us through Latin writers.
gold work found by Schliemann in the grave circle beside the citadel; and soon after this, about 1330 B.C., a great king, perhaps Perseus, built the first wall round the citadel.

About a hundred years later, when Atreus the father of Agamemnon must have been king, the great wall round the whole citadel was built, with the Lion Gate in it, and a palace on top of the hill. The walls were made of such big stones so cunningly fitted together that in later years the Greeks felt that only giants could have done such work, and invented the legend of the one-eyed Cyclopes: and walls of this kind are still called "Cyclopean".

In the time of Atreus the tombs became very much grander, and his own still survives to be a wonder of the ancient world. It is called a "tholos" tomb, built in the shape of a beehive and sunk into the hill-side with a low mound over the top of it. The entrance is at the side, a road going into the hill between stone walls until we reach the doorway which has a huge lintel of a single stone like the Lion Gate, only the triangular carving above it is now missing.

Inside, the great round room is built of perfectly fitted blocks of stone, rising straight up and then closing in, course above course to the peaked top covered finally with a single slab. At one side another little room is cut out of the solid rock, and there the body was laid with its gold mask, its treasures and its jars of offerings, and walled in. As long as there was flesh on the bones the Mycenaeans believed that the spirit was still on its way to the Kingdom of the Dead; but when there were only dry bones left the long pilgrimage was over, and the next generation would sweep them carelessly into a corner and make use of the grave again.

The most beautiful objects found in the old Mycenaean
graves include bronze daggers or short swords inlaid in precious metals with vivid little scenes of Mycenaean warriors with their big figure-of-eight shields attacking lions with long spears; or gold cups engraved in high relief with rather Minoan scenes of catching wild bulls in nets.

Beyond the palace at Mycenae with its superb view over the plain of Argos and down to the sea, with the great mountains hemming in the distance, an extra bit of wall was built out in the early days of Agamemnon to include the water supply of the citadel. This is also an astonishing piece of work: steps leading down into the hill to an underground spring and a cistern to store the water.

From this rich and wonderful citadel—"golden Mycenae", as Homer calls it—Agamemnon set out with his vassals from Tiryns and Argos and Lerna and Asine, the little citadels below him in the plain, and his subject kings, or allies—"spear-friends"—from all over Greece and the islands, to attack the great citadel of Troy in north-west Asia Minor, not long after 1200 B.C.

Whether the war really started because Paris the prince of Troy stole away Helen the wife of Menelaus king of Sparta, Agamemnon's brother, we cannot be certain. The main cause for the war was rivalry over the trade from the Black Sea: for Troy guarded the entrance to it, and in Priam's day had become just such a "citadel centre" in that district as Mycenae was in the Peloponnesus.

The ruins show that Troy was destroyed at about the right time, and that it was left desolate by its conquerors, unlike most other sites which were usually rebuilt to make homes for their conquerors. The lower parts of the strong walls and towers have now been uncovered, and we can realize how great an enterprise their conquest must have
been to Mycenaean warriors driving in chariots and armed only with weapons made of bronze.

We can understand suddenly as we see how the wall begins with a slant of rough stone and then goes up perpendicularly with closely set, well-cut blocks how Patroclus ran up the wall for a little way, but then could go no farther, nor find any hold for his fingers.... It is hard not to believe that Achilles and Hector fought their last battle in front of those walls, while beautiful Helen looked down from them, and poor Andromache shrieked and fainted as Achilles came round the corner there by the Skaian Gate with her husband’s body tied to the back of his chariot.
Chapter Two

THE TWILIGHT AGE

It must have seemed strange to many of us when reading the old Greek myths and legends that they all stop short quite firmly after the fall of Troy. We know all about the wanderings and return of Odysseus, of Agamemnon’s dreadful fate when he came home to Mycenae, and of how, after many years on the way, Menelaus and Helen returned to Sparta and lived happily ever afterwards.

Their children—Telemachus, Orestes and Electra, Hermione and Nicostratus—were all born before the Heroes set out for Troy, and are grown up, and about to marry and have children of their own when the stories end. And the stories all end about ten years after the fall of Troy, which is where the Odyssey leaves Odysseus and Penelope happily united once more. We are nowhere told about the later adventures of Telemachus and Orestes, and Nicostratus is not even mentioned after the Trojan War.

But there is just one more generation referred to briefly in the legends. It was when Tisamenus, the son of Orestes and Hermione, was king of Mycenae (and when Alcmaeon, great-grandson of old Nestor, was king of Pylos) that the great-grandsons of Heracles invaded and conquered the Peloponnesus with the help of the Dorians,
a Greek people from the north of Greece. This invasion put an end to the Age of Heroes and began a period of several hundred years of a "Dark Age" rather like that following the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Roman Britain after our legendary age ended with the death of King Arthur.

Legend is usually based on history, but we need outside proofs to tell us how much is truth and how much mere story-telling: and now the reading of the "Linear B" tablets and the researches of archaeologists have told us that here again the stories which were so often held to be mere inventions are based on very definite history.

"Thus the watchers are guarding the coast... command of Ke-wo-no: thirty men of Olympia, etc." and "Rowers to go to Pleuron: five from Rhion," etc—read two of the Pylos tablets, while military lists are frequent. In the legends the Dorians come across the Gulf of Corinth from a place just near Pleuron and land on the south side at Rhion.

Excavation shows that Pylos was conquered and destroyed by fire shortly before 1100 B.C., and Mycenae perhaps a few years later, after repulsing a first attack in which many houses outside the citadel were destroyed. The conquering Dorians did not always settle on the old sites: Mycenae, for example, became the merest village while Argos a few miles away soon grew to be the chief town of the district—and so Mycenae, which ceased to be inhabited at all about A.D. 300, has kept its treasures and proved easy for the archaeologists to dig up and explore.

Thebes, on the other hand, has always been a city, and boasts itself the oldest inhabited town in Europe. For it was founded by Minoan colonists (Cadmus in the legend came
to Greece in search of Europa whom the Bull carried over the sea: he was called a "Phoenician", but in early Greek that really meant a "Red Man", and the frescoes at Knossos always paint their men red); it became a Mycenaean citadel, but had ceased to be important before the Dorian invasion (the legends of Adrastus from Mycenae leading the "Seven Against Thebes" may contain more history than we know); the Dorians continued to use it, and it becomes very important again in later Greek history. But it can hardly be excavated at all—for the Romans used it, and the medieval invaders of Greece; the Turks made it an important city, and it is still an important town in modern Greece after four thousand years.

Recently, when a few houses were pulled down to make room for a modern building, the archaeologists were allowed to dig into the site first, and found remains from all periods right back to the Mycenaean and Minoan.

Almost as old as Thebes, and still the chief city in Greece, is Athens. This was only a late and unimportant Mycenaean citadel, though about 1400 B.C. it may have produced a king, surviving in legend as Theseus, who led the attack on Crete in which the last palace of Knossos was destroyed. It does not seem to be a very important place in the Iliad, though its king, Menestheus, was an ally of Agamemnon and came to Troy with fifty ships—far more than the more famous hero Ajax brought from nearby Salamis, and comparing well with the eighty ships contributed by Diomedes of Argos to the hundred which Agamemnon himself supplied.

The citadel of Athens, the Acropolis, is built on one of the best natural sites in all Greece, better even than Mycenae. Out of the level plain a few miles from the sea
Greek emigrants sailed across the Ægean
rises a great rock a hundred and fifty feet high, like a long table nine hundred feet long and five hundred wide, almost flat on top, and with sheer sides nearly all round. It narrows at the western end and a steep rocky slope leads down to a lower, smaller outcrop of rock called the Hill of Ares. At the north-west corner, half-way down the steep hill-side, a fountain of water gushes out.

The Greeks of the Mycenaean Age built Cyclopaean walls round the Athenian Acropolis, with covered steps down to the fountain like those to the spring and cistern at Mycenae—and here alone they seem to have kept the Dorians out. In consequence displaced persons from all over southern Greece fled for protection to Athens; and during the century or two after the fall of Mycenae expedition after expedition set out to found new homes for themselves.

Most of these Greek emigrants went towards the east and settled in the islands of the Aegean—from Lesbos and Chios towards the north, to Cos and Thera and Rhodes in the south; but some went in the other direction and founded Greek colonies in Sicily and in southern Italy, while later still emigrants from the island of Thera built the great city of Cyrene in North Africa.

Although the Dorian invasion was not like a conquest by barbarians, the Dorian Greeks seem to have been far less civilized than the Mycenaean, and they definitely put an end to the way of life in what came to be called the Heroic Age. But as Greece finally settled down again, and new states began to be formed in place of the old ones, the memory of the Mycenaean days began to be woven into the stories of great heroes of the past and handed down and treasured by their descendants.

We cannot be sure that the Mycenaean wrote poetry;
but we can be almost certain that they had minstrels who sang or chanted at their feasts long lays about the deeds of kings a generation or two earlier—and indeed of the living kings themselves. When that old world came to an end, or continued only in a very much smaller way, the songs were treasured and retold, handed down from minstrel to minstrel—and altered, lengthened and improved in the process.

When the Greeks set out to found their colonies in Sicily, Asia Minor or the islands, they took their songs with them, and these became more and more important as a link not only with the great days of old, but with their lovely homeland of Hellas. For all the Greeks in their new cities and states round the Aegean Sea were eager and proud to call themselves Hellenes—true Greeks—who, wherever they lived, belonged to one people and spoke the one language, and were quite different from the “lesser breeds” among whom they settled. They called all non-Greeks “Barbarians”—meaning only to imitate in the name the strange speech of their eastern neighbours whose odd, un-Greek languages were so hard to understand.

The great civilization of Mycenaean Greece grew up again out of the ruins, though much of it was changed to outward view: but the golden age of the past was treasured in a way which does not seem to have been paralleled anywhere else. Where there are no books the minstrels have an astonishing power of memory, and they could store away thousands and thousands of lines of “epic” verse in their minds, and hand them down largely unchanged.

And this seems to have gone on for several hundreds of years, right through the twilight age of ancient Greece about which we know so little. For at the end of it, about 800 B.C., the first and one of the greatest surviving poets
of the world, used the cream of this rich store of lay and legend to write the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

By this time the Greeks all over the Greek-speaking world knew the legends of their own Heroic Age in full, rich detail. Minstrels had sung for generations the full tale of the siege and sack of Troy, and the adventures of the Heroes on their homeward voyages. The last great event before the Dorian invasion became the greatest and most famous happening in that lost world, and all the earlier stories were joined on to it and so drew much nearer to it than the original events could really have been. And so (setting aside the myths of the gods and the making of the world) the whole Mycenaean Age was crushed together into a few generations—and seemed all the brighter and more vivid for that.

But the Greeks knew the story so well that Homer could choose only a few months out of the ten years of the Trojan War for his *Iliad* and know that everyone who heard his epic knew just what had happened before the Wrath of Achilles and just what was going to happen after the Funeral of Hector.

Homer was not just one of the many, many minstrels, however: he was the very great poet who invented the long epic in place of the heroic lays or detached songs about special incidents and individual heroes. Of course he used any of the old lays which he needed, probably even adapting bits of them to fit into his epic: but he was making a new work of literature; rather in the same way that Shakespeare made his own new play of *King Lear* based on an inferior old play called *King Leir and his Three Daughters*.

Exactly when the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were made is not quite certain; but it may have been a little before the ordinary Greek alphabetical writing came into use so that
Homer, according to tradition
the poems were preserved for a generation or two by oral memory before being written down; but we can be reasonably sure that they preserve the actual words of the poet without much alteration.

These two supreme poems preserve the real flavour of the Mycenaean Age for us: even the language has a touch of Mycenaean Greek about it—to the Greeks of the Classical Age it sounded as archaic as the language of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* does to us; while excavations and the reading of "Linear B" show more and more surely how much had been handed on accurately—even if Homer did not always understand the details of custom or costume which had come down to him.

The Greeks themselves recognized his greatness at once, and the two poems stood for them far above all later literature, and achieved their place right from the start. When lesser poets began to imitate them shortly after 700 B.C. they were content to weave epic narratives to fill in the Tale of Troy round the *Iliad*: one early poem described the Fall of Troy, and another the events leading up to the Wrath of Achilles, while another told of the Returns of all the Heroes—except Odysseus. Unfortunately none of them has survived; but no one ever thought of them as other than second-rate imitations.

By the time Homer composed his epics things had changed very much in Greece, and even more in the Greek colonies, from the days when Agamemnon ruled over golden Mycenae. After the Dorian invasion there came a long period of considerable disorder as the old kings of the "citadel-centres" were killed or driven out, and the new rulers conquered small kingdoms for themselves and then tried to extend their realms. As time went on, they were joined by the smaller towns or villages
The King was banished or killed
round about—sometimes by conquest, but often by alliances which in fact formed single states out of groups of villages.

At first there was still a king in the chief town, ruling or trying to rule over the villages as well; but gradually he lost power as the heads of the villages became more and more important in the government of the state. Usually the time came when the king was banished or killed, and the heads of villages (more like the barons of our own Middle Ages) took his place—or usurped his power, rather as our barons did when they made King John sign the Magna Charta.

So most of the Greek states passed from "monarchy", the rule of one, to "aristocracy", the rule of the barons. But the next change was not far away, and was brought about largely by the sudden increase of trade with the flourishing new Greek colonies, and then with foreign lands such as Egypt. Partly, too, it was due to the increase of agriculture; and this again was made possible by the security given by the armies which each state was able to raise and train. The armies now depended on the ordinary soldiers with small round shields and stabbing spears, who replaced the warlords of Mycenaean days with their chariots and throwing spears and huge, unwieldy shields.

All this led on naturally to the third change in the government of the Greek states, and aristocracy gave way to democracy—rule by the people, just as it has done in most countries today.

The political adventures of ancient Greece were very like the adventures of Europe during the last few hundred years, but on a much smaller scale. To a great extent it was the country itself that made Greece what it was—just as it may have been its astonishing beauty which gave the
Greeks their amazing artistic sense. For Greece is cut up and divided into small areas by the high, rugged chains of mountains, the gulfs and bays and big promontories, and the separate areas of rich and fertile land cut off completely from one another by these natural barriers.

The Peloponnesus, for example, has the big triangular plain of Argos cut off by mountains from the rest of the peninsula; to the north and north-west come Achaea and Elis on the Gulf of Corinth, cut off by mountains from the south; and to the south of these mountains are the two biggest and most fertile districts of all, the great plains of Lacedaemon and Messene divided from one another by the towering ridge of Mount Taygetos, but joined at the south where the mountain range ends before the sea coast.

In the valley of "hollow Lacedaemon" arose one of the first and quite the strangest of the new "city-states" which grew up with the return of peace and the spread of trade and agriculture after the Dorians had settled down. Its chief city was Sparta, and when the Spartans had conquered Messene and added it to their own country, they ruled well over half the Peloponnesus.

Unlike most of the Greek city-states, Sparta hated change. It did not even give up having a king: but it had two kings (which prevented either from becoming too powerful)—perhaps as a result of an early amalgamation between two neighbouring cities. It also had an aristocracy from whom the Council was chosen; but it was a democracy as well, since all the free citizens assembled from time to time to vote on what the Council suggested.

On its first emergence from the twilight of history Sparta showed every sign of developing into a centre of true Greek culture, producing exquisite decorated pottery,
and even one great lyric poet. Alcman (who lived round about 630 B.C.) a few fragments of whose verse still remain—such as:

"Maidens with voices like honey for sweetness, that breathe desire,
Would that I were a sea-bird with limbs that could never tire,
Over the foam-flowers flying with halcyons ever on wing,
Keeping a careless heart, a sea-blue bird of the spring."

But something went wrong at Sparta, and it developed into a completely military state. This was partly due to its conquest of the neighbouring fertile country whose people were not allowed to become true Spartans. Instead, they were called Helots, and were not much better than slaves, tilling the ground for the "true" Spartans and handing most of the produce over to them, and fighting in the ranks when Sparta went to war.

The Helots were always ready to revolt, so on their account Sparta must always be ready to quell a revolution. But because they did not have to work, since the Helots supported them, the Spartans could give all their time to military training. It seems to have been this vicious circle that made the Spartans what they were.

When the system was fully developed, Sparta became a permanent military academy, with no other object in life but physical fitness, endurance, courage and skill in battle. Every baby was examined by the experts to see if it was likely to grow into a sturdy soldier or a healthy mother—and if not, it was thrown out to die on Mount

* H. C. Beeching's translation.
Taygetos. At the age of seven a boy was taken away from home completely and put into the military school under state officers whose one job was to see that he was brought up to endure hardships, obey strict discipline and more or less worship the Spartan State.

The boys went barefoot, wore a single garment winter and summer, slept on piles of rushes which they had to break by hand down by the Eurotas river, and from the start had to cook their own food, which was scanty and plain. In consequence they were usually hungry, and were encouraged to steal to make up for their short rations: if they were caught, they were punished severely—not for stealing, but for being found out.

One boy, so the story runs, stole a fox cub and hid it under his tunic: the fox began to bite him, but the boy made no sign until the fox bit so deep that at last he fell down and died. The boys were taught to endure pain by severe floggings for shirking any hardship or even showing signs of weariness in the gymnasium; and at festival times they were flogged as a kind of religious sacrifice in the Temple of Artemis Orthia, and vied with one another in allowing themselves to be whipped, even to death, without uttering a sound.

At the age of twenty the young men began their full military service and were expected to marry. But they lived in barracks, only visiting their wives for short spaces after dark, and had neither seen their wives (for no lights were allowed in Sparta—so that Spartans should be better able to march by night) nor enjoyed any family life until they became “men” at the age of thirty. Only at thirty, after their ten years of military training, did the Spartans attain to full citizenship or take part in the government of Sparta.
But they still continued to have their meals with their fellow-soldiers in the barracks, and seem only to have retired at the age of sixty.

The Spartan girls were trained only a little less strictly than the boys, and took part in most of the same gymnastics and games. As soon as they were twenty they were dished out in an arbitrary fashion to husbands whom they never saw knowingly until they had been married for ten years, and began their one duty in life, to be the mothers of sturdy Spartans whom they were ready and eager to lose for the good of the state.

"Return carrying your shield—or carried dead upon it!" cried the Spartan wives and mothers as the men marched out to war. For war was a Spartan's real job in life, and he looked forward to it eagerly, and was given practice by an annual raid on the more dangerous Helots. He was also encouraged during the course of a war by being allowed better and more pleasant food than in peacetime, less strict discipline, gayer clothes and the right to curl his hair before battle: "A large head of hair adds beauty to a good face," said Lycurgus the great Spartan law-giver, "and it adds terror to an ugly one."

The Spartans built no walls round their cities, for Lycurgus also said that "A wall of men is a better fortification than a wall of stone," and except when conquering their neighbours such as the Messenians, or helping allies in different parts of Greece they did not go out to look for wars. But none the less they were fighting men before everything else, and admired by the rest of Greece only for the strictness of their discipline and the orderliness of their public and private lives. But nothing was allowed in the state that did not have a positive usefulness towards the production of good soldiers. Even speech was rationed,
and what had to be said must be said as shortly and concisely as possible: "Laconia" is the name of the district in Greece where Sparta stood, and the word "laconic" comes from it.

No wonder art and literature soon disappeared in Sparta and was never revived. Even in the Second Messenian War in 620 B.C. when the Spartans felt that they still needed a poet to encourage them with battle songs they had to send to Athens for one. His name was Tyrtaeus, and a few of his stirring odes and elegies on the greatness and valour of Sparta still survive—though sometimes he seems to show a touch of the Athenian sense of humour which the Spartans lacked:

"Forward! Forward, sons of sires
Moulded in the Spartan fires!
Let the left hand grasp the shield,
In the right your spear you wield.
Think not you may die today—
Thought was never Sparta's way!"
Chapter Three

THE RISE OF ATHENS

It would not be possible to follow the fortunes of all the Greek states and islands and colonies as they emerged out of the Dorian twilight and followed their several fortunes into the Golden Age of Greece and out again under the iron rule of Rome and into a darker age than ever followed that of the Heroes of Mycenae.

One could linger over the island of Lesbos and tell of the poetess Sappho and the poet Alcaeus who wrote some of the most perfect of Greek love poems; over the Greek cities in Sicily such as Poseidonia (now called by its Latin name of Paestum) where some of the earliest and finest of Greek temples still stand, or Himera home of two more poets, Stesichorus and Ibycus; over city-states in Greece itself such as Corinth on the Isthmus, an early city which soon grew rich by trade and was always filled with foreign sailors and famous for the fastness and gaiety of its life; or over many and many a small city which, after various fortunes of its own was taken by force or treaty into the bigger city-states such as Sparta, Thebes, Corinth, Argos and Athens.

Several little cities retained a freedom of a sort in unusual ways. There was Delphi, for example, which grew up on a foothill of Mount Parnassus at the north of
the Corinthian Gulf in one of the loveliest spots in Greece. Legend told how the god Apollo came there in the early days of the world and slew the monstrous serpent Python, a child of Earth; Mother Earth cried out in fury at this, and so Apollo decreed that Delphi should become a sacred spot where his priestess, to be called the Pythoness, should breathe up the fumes from Python’s underground den and give the truest oracles concerning the future of any in the world.

It was right that Delphi should have his Oracle, the Greeks added, because it was also the exact centre of the world: for Zeus, king of the gods, had loosed two eagles at the same moment from either end of the world, and they met exactly over Delphi: the stone marking the spot may be seen there to this day.

So Delphi became sacred: temples were built, and little treasuries where the various cities could store their treasures in safety; a sacred way up the hill-side for the processions and for those who came from all over the Greek world to consult the Oracle; and a theatre for the plays sacred to Dionysus, besides a stadium for the Pythian Games.

From the earliest times athletic contests were treated by the Greeks almost as religious ceremonies; even as early as Homer’s day games were held at the funeral of Patroclus in honour of that dead hero. There were also legends of gods or heroes who had founded sacred Games at various spots for various reasons. The first and most famous of all these was at Olympia in Elis near the north-west coast of the Peloponnesus where Heracles was said to have been the founder and the first victor. “He selected for so great a festival the most beautiful of places,” says an old Greek historian, “which was the plain lying along the banks of
the Alpheius river, where he dedicated these Games to Zeus the Father. And he stipulated that the prize in them should be only a crown of olive leaves, since he himself had laboured for mankind without receiving any reward of value."

The festival, which was held once in every four years, lasted for five days, the first and last being given up to religious ceremonies and a feast. On the second day there were chariot-races and horse-races, and the "pentathlon" which was for the "all-round" athlete who had to show his prowess in running, jumping, discus and javelin throwing, and wrestling; the third day was given up to contests among the boys; and on the fourth day came men's foot-races, wrestling, boxing, pancratium (wrestling and boxing combined), and a race in full armour.

The Olympic Games were so famous that the Greeks dated all events from them, beginning in 776 B.C. the date of the First Olympiad when the festival was revived by Iphitus, King of Elis; and they were so sacred that whatever war might be going on between the Greek states, hostilities ceased while the Games were on, and no one would dream of raising a hand against the enemy if they met at Olympia—or indeed at the other Games at Delphi, Nemea or on the Isthmus.

The Games were open to all Hellenes from all over the Greek world, and they helped to foster a feeling of unity, just as it did to have one language and one religion, to share the same legends and literature, and to have much the same feelings about beauty and orderliness and moderation—the things which separated the Greek from the Barbarian.

But the tragedy of ancient Greece is that even this sense of basic unity and the great tradition of Hellenism did not prevent the Greek states from quarrelling and fighting among themselves; and in a smaller way the same characteristic kept many of the city-states in a constant
political ferment and in the end brought about their downfall. But before the collapse there came the true Golden Age of Greece, and the real centre of this was in Athens.

How Athens, the old Mycenaean citadel, fared during the twilight centuries after the Dorian invasion can be little more than guessed at, with the aid of the latest excavations in the old market-place at the foot of the Acropolis. The arts and cultures seem never quite to have died out, however dim the twilight; but little else can be known.

The emergence into history during the seventh century was similar to that of Sparta and many another city-state. Kings went out of fashion, and the rule of the nobles followed: but already a certain amount of political freedom was known, since the three chief officials of the state were elected annually. These were the Archon, or Chief Justice; the Polemarch, or commander-in-chief of the army, and the Basileus ("King", but only in name) who managed the State Religion and was President of the Council. The people themselves were divided roughly into the nobles, the farmers and the artisans, all of whom had a right to a place in the Public Assembly; but there were also the "freemen" who were not "citizens", which included the farm-labourers and the workmen employed by the skilled artisans.

This state of things worked well at the beginning of the century, but towards the end it was becoming less and less fair or suitable. For Athens was growing richer in several ways: all the country round about, with its farm lands and olive groves, was added to the state, and its inhabitants became full Athenians and were not kept out or treated as the Helots were in Sparta. Then, when money
was invented (it began in Greece on the island of Aegina within sight of Athens) trade became easier, and the Athenians made haste to quarry silver out of nearby Mount Laurion and strike coins of their own. With this new wealth ships were built and trading ventures sent out: and the merchants and sailors became wealthy and began to demand a share in the government of Athens.

Many other states at about this time were seized and ruled by “Tyrants”—kings who became so by force and not by right of birth, but still members of the old ruling families and not merely upstart dictators with a craving for power and nothing else.

In Athens, where the glorification of “freedom” became almost a phobia, the people looked at these Tyrants of neighbouring states such as Megara and Corinth with horror, and vowed that they would never allow such a thing to happen. But as their nobles grew wealthier and the labourers poorer and poorer until many of them were almost slaves, revolution seemed at hand. Nevertheless when a certain Cylon tried to seize power about 632 B.C. and promised to help the labourers if they would make him Tyrant of Athens, he found very few to help him, was besieged in the Acropolis and, when he escaped, was banished.

But Cylon’s rebellion showed how serious the situation was, and about ten years later the nobles decided that something must be done about it, and appointed an expert lawyer called Draco to overhaul the Athenian laws and write them down so that at least everyone should know what could and could not be done. This was some help, though Draco’s laws proved to be so severe, with the death penalty for the smallest thefts, that the orator Demades described them as “written not in ink but in
blood”. But something even more drastic was needed, for the nobles’ estates were growing bigger and bigger, since the law allowed them to seize the small farmer’s land if he could not pay his debts, and the small farmer himself if he could not pay his taxes; and very soon the law itself was being perverted in favour of the rich and the powerful.

Once again the Athenians showed their moderation by appointing an arbitrator to settle the dispute between rich and poor, and their good sense by choosing as their new law-giver the wise and cultured Solon, of noble birth but a successful merchant, a man whose honour and fairness both parties felt that they could trust.

Solon became Archon about 593 B.C., with the extra title of “Nomothetes” or “Law-giver”; and his integrity is shown by the fact that at the end of the usual year of office he refused to be elected again but went away from Athens for many years, travelling in the East.

What he did for Athens, generally speaking, was to make it far more of a democracy, and lay the foundations for the full democracy which was to come later. His first act was to cancel all debts and set free all the debtors, annulling the laws which had brought free Athenians into such straits, limiting the amount of land that could be owned by one person, and forbidding the export of any fruits of the earth except olive oil.

He did a great deal to improve trade, gave political rights to the labourers and sailors, increased the number of archons, of councillors and of course the Assembly of all free citizens. The councillors represented a new body which he created to prepare the business to be set before the Assembly, and there were forty of them; they and the nine archons were chosen by casting lots out of a far
Solon caused all the laws to be written out.
larger number elected by the people themselves. The casting of lots formed a kind of divine election, since the gods were left to decide on whom the lots should fall.

Solon caused all the laws to be written out and placed in a public place so that everyone could read them, and he also wrote elegiac poems about his reforms, of which only a few fragments remain. But his memory was always held in high honour by the Greeks, and such wise sayings of his as “Moderation in all things” and “Know thyself” were treasured and repeated like holy texts.

Although Solon’s social reforms were of tremendous help to the Athenians, he did not manage to solve their political difficulties in a way that would please all parties, and the nobles and more wealthy landowners continued in their attempts to regain the powers which they had lost. They were not able to enslave the lowland farmers again, but they seem to have begun oppressing the shepherds and herdsmen up on the hills, and these found a champion in a young cousin of Solon’s called Pisistratus who had won fame by capturing the island of Salamis from the Megarians and adding it to the Athenian state.

Pisistratus claimed to be descended from Nestor the king of Pylos of whom Homer had sung, and he certainly came from an old and aristocratic Athenian family. Taking advantage of the political troubles of the time, Pisistratus cheated the Assembly into giving him a bodyguard of fifty men armed with clubs to protect him against the enemies of the common people who, he said, had attacked and beaten him. Having this guard he found it easy to add his friends and supporters to it, to seize the Acropolis, and to make himself Tyrant of Athens in 560 B.C.

Largely owing to the hatred which the Greeks in general
and the Athenians in particular always felt for any single ruler, the name "tyrant" has to come to mean a cruel and arbitrary king; but in fact it meant only a king who was head of the state without legal or hereditary right—and the "tyranny" of Pisistratus was the best thing that could possibly have happened to Athens at that moment. For he turned out to be a good and just ruler who kept carefully to all Solon’s laws (except with regard to his own position), killed none of his enemies and made no attempt to enrich himself or his family.

He was twice expelled from Athens by revolts which broke out against him, but on each occasion confusion and almost civil war followed and he was able to win back his position; once by another trick, and once with the aid of foreign troops, and died peacefully in old age in 527 B.C.

Under his cultured and enlightened rule Athens prospered as never before. Abroad, colonies were founded on either side of the entrance to the Black Sea, and a new rich trade opened up in consequence; at home olive trees were planted on the hill-sides and agriculture prospered so much that the land tax could be reduced from a tenth to a twentieth; and the silver mines at Laurion were worked more effectively and money coined to enrich the whole state. In "foreign" politics Pisistratus made sure that peace was preserved with even such enemy states as Megara (once Salamis had become Athenian) and friendships made with Argos and Sparta, and even Corinth, the greatest rival of Athens in foreign ventures, apart from the island state of Aegina.

On the religious side, Pisistratus purified the island of Delos where, according to the myths, Apollo and Artemis had been born, and made of it a sacred shrine and a place of pilgrimage for all true Hellenes. On it no one else was
allowed to be born, or to die; and anyone showing signs of doing either of these impious things was transported hastily to a tiny rocky islet a little way from the sacred shore.

In Athens he built a temple on the Acropolis in honour of Athena, using marble for the first time in Greek history, and improved if he did not start the great Festival of Athena, making a law that the works of Homer which were recited on this occasion should be recited whole and in the right order, instead of in chunks chosen haphazardly, by the reciters or “rhapsodists”.

Besides starting an enormous temple to Zeus, the King of the gods, Pisistratus built a smaller one at the foot of the Acropolis to Dionysus, the god who had taught mortals to crush the grapes which grow so lavishly in many parts of Greece, and make wine to gladden the hearts of men and inspire them to song and dance. In honour of Dionysus at his annual feast a chorus now danced and sang round his altar, clad in goat-skins to suggest his mythical followers the wild and uncouth Satyrs. At first they sang a hymn in his honour called a dithyramb; but soon the leader of the chorus (who was also the composer of the song) would separate himself from the rest and speak with them as if he were a character in the myth or legend which the song was telling. And before very long this “tragos-ode”, or goat-song, grew by way of the Satyr play into Tragedy.

When Pisistratus died, he was succeeded by his eldest son Hippias who was nearly as wise and good a ruler as his father, and who was assisted by his brother Hipparchus who was an even greater patron of the arts. During this shorter period of peace and contentment the most eminent poets of the day came to Athens, such as Simonides who
wrote long odes for the choruses to chant or recite, Lasus, the earliest expert on music, and Anacreon famous for such gay drinking songs as:

"I like not the man who in drinking is fain
To tell of his prowess and boast of men slain.
Give me rather the drinker whose words are inclined
To the lasses he loved—and who proved not unkind."

After fourteen years an unfortunate quarrel over a purely private matter led two angry young men called Harmodius and Aristogiton to make a plot to kill both Hipparchus and Hippias. They managed to murder Hipparchus, but were caught and killed by the indignant people before they could reach his brother.

The result on Hippias was, however, most unfortunate. Not knowing how trivial the cause and how small the plot had been, he became frightened and his precautions and suspicions warped his nature and turned him into a cruel despot, and also led him to make friends with Darius, the barbarian king of Persia, who was already preparing to add Greece to his empire.

Now there was some excuse for a rebellion, and it found a clever and, as it turned out, an honest leader in another noble called Cleisthenes, a distant relation of Pisistratus since he too claimed descent from Nestor of Pylos.

Knowing that he had little chance of a successful rebellion without help, Cleisthenes went to work cunningly. At this time the old wooden temple of Apollo at Delphi had been burnt down, and all true Hellenes were asked to subscribe to a new one. Athens sent her share, and Cleisthenes was chosen to superintend the building of the
fine stone temple of which the imposing remains can still be seen today. But Cleisthenes himself paid for the pediments to be carved out of marble instead of stone—and so won the gratitude of the Pythoness that whenever Spartan envoys came to ask any question of the Oracle, the only answer they got was “Free Athens first.”

The Spartans were soon ready to listen to Cleisthenes, and King Cleomenes set out with an army and besieged Hippias in the Acropolis. When they managed to catch his children, Hippias surrendered to save their lives, and he and they were banished from Athens for ever.

In after years when Cleisthenes had become a national hero for freeing Athens and making it even more of a democracy, the Athenians, hating to admit that they really owed their freedom to a Spartan conquest, made heroes of the two worthless assassins Harmodius and Aristogiton instead, insisting that they had really brought about the revolution by killing one of the tyrants.

But Sparta already had another reason to be annoyed with Athens. Cleomenes helped Cleisthenes on the understanding that he was to become a tyrant himself, or at least head a party of noble rulers or “oligarchy”. Cleisthenes, however, not only restored the democracy which Solon had started, but made Athens even more democratic than before, increasing the Council, giving the vote to all the citizens who had not yet got it, even those who lived as much as fifty miles away from the city, and dividing the people up so cunningly into ten Tribes that the old parties of the Plain, the Hills, and the Coast who had always been rivals, simply ceased to exist, since there were now an equal number of each in every Tribe.

King Cleomenes set out from Sparta with a small army in a great rage to turn out Cleisthenes and set up a friend
of his as tyrant. But he did not understand free Athens. All the people rose as one man, chased him and his soldiers into the Acropolis and besieged them there so fiercely that, Spartans though they were, they were forced to surrender after three days, and were seen off the Athenian premises, politely but firmly—friends still, but friends who had poked their noses into a family affair which was no concern of theirs.

And indeed Sparta and Athens were soon to have need of one another. For Hippias the exiled tyrant was making trouble at the court of King Darius, and the great Persian invasion of Greece was at hand.
Chapter Four

THE PERSIAN INVASION

The first great historian, Herodotus, tells a story which the Athenians loved to repeat as an example of the difference between a Greek and a Barbarian. When Solon the Athenian law-giver was on his travels after his great year as Archon at Athens, he came to the court of Croesus, King of Lydia. This was the land which we now call Turkey-in-Asia; and Ionia, the coastal strip on the east of the Aegean where the early Greek cities and settlements and colonies were, paid at least a token of fealty to Lydia.

King Croesus, though born a Barbarian, admired the Greek civilization, learnt all that he could from it, seldom interfered with Ionia, and gave special honour to the gods of Greece. Nevertheless, he was not merely a king but an oriental despot who would not hesitate to kill, torture or enslave in a way that even the worst Greek tyrant would never have done.

However he was a man of considerable culture and he was delighted to welcome Solon, the famous Wise Man of Greece, at his court. Croesus was the richest man in the world, and for days and days he showed off his wealth to Solon and boasted about his unlimited power and his great good fortune. At last he said:
Croesus was the richest man in the world
“And now, Solon, whom do you think is the happiest man you have ever met?”

Solon considered for a moment, and then told Croesus about a poor Greek peasant whom he had once known, and who had been a model of every virtue, and lived and died in absolute contentment.

Rather put out by this, Croesus said: “Solon, this may be true. But tell me, who is the second happiest man you have ever met?”

Solon then mentioned another obscure Athenian, and Croesus exclaimed impatiently:

“Surely you mean to add ‘except for Croesus!’ For I must be the happiest man in the world, since I have everything I could wish for, and absolute power.”

“Call no man happy until he is dead,” said Solon solemnly, greatly shocked at Croesus’s attitude: for to the Greeks such boasting was impious and sure to bring “hubris”, the just punishment for pride, upon the boaster.

The years went by, and a new and far greater empire arose in the East, the empire of the Persians, under the Great King Cyrus, who conquered Asia Minor from the Caspian Sea to Afghanistan, and from the Black Sea to Egypt. Cyrus decided that he must add Lydia to his empire, and sent to Croesus demanding “earth and water”, the sign of subjection to the Persian rule.

Much troubled whether to fight or not, Croesus sent to the Oracle at Delphi to ask advice, and received the answer: “If you fight Cyrus you will destroy a mighty empire”. Croesus went to war immediately, sure of his success: but it was his own mighty empire which he destroyed, for Cyrus defeated him utterly, captured him and, being more of a barbarian than Croesus, condemned him to be burnt to death on a great pile of wood.
As the torches were being put to the pyre, Croesus remembered the words of the Athenian law-giver, and cried out: “Oh, Solon, Solon, Solon!” Cyrus, who was watching, was interested in this strange name, and asked Croesus what he meant. Croesus then told Cyrus what Solon had said, and the Great King remembered that he too was mortal, had Croesus taken from the pyre before the flames reached him, and not only set him free but made him his friend and counsellor.

Not long after this, when Cyrus was dead and his son-in-law Darius had become the Great King, the Persians invaded Ionia and captured all the Greek cities. Some of these sent in desperation to Greece for help. One of the early envoys brought with him a map of the world, perhaps the first ever made, for maps had just been invented by the Greek scientist Anaximander of Miletus in Ionia, and showed it to Cleomenes, King of Sparta, suggesting that the great Spartan army should try to conquer Persia. The ignorant king was impressed, thinking Persia must be a very small country. But when the envoy told him that the capital of the country was three months’ journey from the coast, Cleomenes drove him away immediately, saying that no Spartan had ever been more than a day’s journey away from the sea—and implying that such a thing was impossible anyhow.

The envoy was more fortunate in Athens, and the Athenians sent twenty ships to the aid of Ionia, and the little city of Eretria in nearby Euboea sent several more. The Ionians were successful for a while, and even destroyed the chief city in Lydia. But when the Persian army arrived, the Greeks had no chance and were soon defeated.

Athens and Eretria had dared to burn one of the Great King’s cities, however, and Darius set out with an army
and a large fleet to punish them. With him came old Hippias, the son of Pisistratus, who promised to help in the capture of his fatherland if Darius would make him Tyrant of Athens once more. The Persians began by attacking Eretria, which they captured without much difficulty, levelled the city with the ground, and carried away most of its population as slaves. Then they crossed over the straits to Attica and anchored in the Bay of Marathon, landing their army on the shore there, about twenty miles from Athens.

No preparations had been made to meet them, though the Athenians now belonged to the Peloponnesian League of which Sparta was the head, and so could ask for Spartan help if they were attacked. As soon as they heard of the coming of the Persians they sent their fastest runner, a young man called Pheidippides, to beg the Spartans to send an army at once.

Off went Pheidippides, up hill and down dale, and reached Sparta 225 miles away on the evening of the second day after leaving Athens. The Spartans said they were ready and eager to come—but added that, for religious reasons, they could not possibly set out until after the full moon. This would give the Persians plenty of time to destroy Athens twice over, so Pheidippides turned round and ran back to Athens. As he ran over high Mount Parthenion which separates Lacedaemon from Argolis, he thought the great god Pan appeared to him, the goat-legged god of ancient Arcadia, the kindly protector of shepherds and lover of all wild creatures, and cried: "Pheidippides! Pheidippides! Why do the Athenians forget me and neglect my worship? I am their friend, and will help them!"

Back in Athens, Pheidippides told of his strange vision,
and the Athenians vowed to make a shrine to Pan on the slope of the Acropolis—a shrine which you may see to this day. He also told them of the Spartan message; and so the army of 9,000, with 1,000 allies from the friendly city of Plataea on the mountain slope above Thebes, set out on the twenty-two mile march to Marathon, and camped on a little hill above the plain.

Down on the flat ground between them and the sea, a mile or so away, the huge Persian army was waiting, for it had not yet tried to march through the mountain passes to Athens. So the Athenians, with Callimachus as commander-in-chief, and Miltiades as his most experienced general, camped on a convenient hill-top, and guarded the two roads to Athens, hoping that the Persians would do nothing before the Spartans arrived.

But the Persian commander would not wait. He ordered some of his army, and all his cavalry, to re-embark so that the ships could sail round the rocky promontory to attack Athens from the sea, and his main army to wipe out the Greeks on their hill-top and march overland to arrive at Athens at the same time.

As the Persian army of 20,000 moved forwards, Callimachus, who had been persuaded by Miltiades to fight there and then instead of hastening back to protect Athens, led out his army against them. With great military skill he massed his men on the two wings, with only a thin line in the centre, and then gave the order to charge down the long slope to the plain where the Persians drew up to await them.

Down came the Greeks and crashed into the Persians whose line, as Callimachus knew, was thickest in the centre and thinnest on the wings. The Persian centre broke through the Greeks, but the Greek wings routed the
Persian wings, then closed up, turned round and routed the Persian centre which was now cut off from the sea.

Then a complete panic seized the Persians (with their usual moderation the Athenians said afterwards that this “panic” was the help which Pan had promised, since any sudden, unreasoning terror was held, as the word suggests, to be sent by him), and those who could scrambled on to their ships and put to sea.

But they left behind them 6,400 dead to the mere 192 lost by the Greeks; and, most important of all, they left the knowledge that the almost fabulous Great King with his countless thousands of barbarian bondsmen was no match for the free and equal citizens of Greece each fighting for his own city and the honour of his gods.

Meanwhile Pheidippides was sent at top speed with the news, running the first “Marathon Race” by the longer, flatter road (26 miles) and going so fast in his excitement that he could only cry out: “Rejoice, for we conquer!” before falling dead in the market-place of Athens.

Leaving only a small guard to look after the spoils and bury the dead in the great mound which may still be seen at Marathon, the army hastened back by the other road, and were waiting on the sea-shore of Phaleron Bay just near Athens when the Persian fleet arrived. This was more than the Persians had bargained for, and when the Spartan army of 2,000 appeared marching along the coast road from Corinth, they turned tail and went back to Asia.

Greece was saved for the time being, and Athens in a spirit of thankfulness as well as triumph built a new monument at Delphi and began a new temple on the Acropolis in honour of their guardian-goddess Athena—not forgetting the new shrine to Pan. They also commis-
"Rejoice, for we conquer"
sioned the poet Simonides to write a verse inscription (he apologized in another poem for apparent boastfulness, but pointed out that Truth was also a goddess), which ran:

“At Marathon the Athenians saved this land,
Bidding the might and wealth of Persia stand."

It was ten years before the Persians tried to wipe out their disgrace at Marathon, and not all the Greeks realized from the start that the greatest part of the invasion was still to come. Only in Athens was the threat taken seriously and then only because the city was lucky in having an Archon called Themistocles who had enough imagination to see what was good for Athens, enough powers of oratory to sway the Assembly,—and enough courage and devotion to act in an emergency on his own initiative by whatever means seemed possible.

It was he who realized at once that Athens must become a sea-power and build a big fleet, and he spoke so persuasively in the Assembly that the Athenians voted for the latest supply of silver from Laurion to be spent on this instead of being divided among the citizens.

By the end of 481 B.C. news came to Greece that the great invasion was about to begin. Xerxes, the new Great King, son of Darius, had reached the Hellespont with an army of nearly 200,000 men and a fleet of about 800 ships; there he built a bridge of boats for the army to cross over into Europe. A storm wrecked the first bridge, and Xerxes in the true Barbarian style had all the engineers beheaded and commanded the sea itself to be scourged with rods—an act of pride and impiety which the Greeks felt sure would bring “hubris” upon him.

Realizing at last the real gravity of the situation Sparta
and Athens called a conference of all true Hellenes on the Isthmus of Corinth. Most of the city-states as far north as Thebes sank their private quarrels and sent representatives, and even Athens and Aegina made friends for the duration.

Sparta, as the great military power in Greece, was put in charge of the army, and King Leonidas became commander-in-chief. Athens ought to have commanded the navy, since far the largest number of ships belonged to her; but when some of her rivals objected, she willingly agreed to a Spartan admiral so as to avoid any chance of a quarrel.

Meanwhile Xerxes crossed slowly over the Hellespont, and moved with his vast army round the coast of Greece, keeping near the sea-shore all the way so that his fleet could accompany him, both as a food supply and an escape in case of necessity. The Greek plan was to defend one of the passes through the mountains in northern Greece, attacking the fleet at the same time. But the selfish and narrow-minded Spartans were really only interested in protecting the Peloponnesus, and were alarmed at the thought of being even so far away from home as Thessaly. They made excuses, until all the passes north of Thermopylae had been taken by the Persians, and worked hard at building a wall across the Isthmus of Corinth to protect their own precious homeland.

The Phocians and Locrians, whose homes were just south of the next mountain range, would have been overrun if the Persians came further, and as they were members of the Hellenic League, Athens insisted that they must be defended and the Pass of Thermopylae held by a big army.

So reluctantly Leonidas moved north with an army of
7,000, only 300 of whom were true Spartans, well-supported by the smaller city-states—even Mycenae, now little more than a village, sending 80 men. The rest of the Spartans begged to be excused just then, and put forward a series of previous engagements of a religious nature, beginning with the Olympic Games and ending with a private festival of their own.

The Athenians, however, sailed round the coast to keep in touch with Leonidas, and, urged by Themistocles, engaged with the Persian fleet at Artemisium, and fought a small battle in which they came off well, which was followed by a storm in which a number of the Persian ships were wrecked.

At Thermopylae the army drew up to defend the Pass, which was a narrow strip with the sea on one side and sheer cliffs on the other. Had the full Greek army been there the Persians might well have suffered a severe defeat, particularly with their navy in a precarious position. As it was, the Spartans, brave indeed when the time for action came, prepared to conquer or die; and the story runs that spies sent by Xerxes returned to report in awe to their master that the little band of doomed men were sitting round their cooking fires singing the battle songs of Tyrtaeus and combing their hair—which they were only allowed to wear long in time of war.

Next day the hosts of Persia rolled down upon them, discharging clouds of arrows so dense that they hid the sun: "All the better," remarked one of the Spartans, "I prefer fighting in the shade!" Again and again the Persians were beaten back; but at last a traitor showed the Persians a secret way over the mountains and the brave army was taken in the rear. Most of the forces moved out, hoping to surround the new body of Persians: but they
were far outnumbered, and were forced to retreat in the
direction of Thebes, which lay between them and Athens.

Leonidas with his Spartans scorned to fly, even if it
had been possible. He drew up his remaining men on a
little mound in the middle of the Pass, and although he
himself was killed early in the action, the Spartans fought
on until the last man fell where he stood. They had been
told to defend Thermopylae to the death, and they
obeyed orders:

"Go, tell the men of Sparta, passer-by,
That here, obedient to their word, we lie—"

wrote Simonides on the stone set up to their memory in
the Pass.

Though the Persians had suffered a slight reverse at
Artemisium, and only won through Thermopylae with
difficulty, neither battle made much difference to their vast
forces, and soon they were moving on again relentlessly
in the direction of Athens.

Sparta refused point-blank to attempt another land
battle north of the Isthmus, and Thebes which stood next
in the conqueror’s path hastily made peace with Xerxes.
But Athens stood firm, and Themistocles called an
Assembly to tell the people how the case stood. Having
read to them the latest Oracle from Delphi which bade
the Athenians “trust to their wooden walls” he pointed
out that this could mean nothing but their ships, and he
spoke so eloquently of the great mission of Athens that the
people decided one and all to follow his advice.

This was to take the terrible step of evacuating Athens
and the whole of Attica and trusting entirely to the fleet.
Accordingly some of the women and children were sent to
Aegina, and the rest to the island of Salamis, divided from Attica by a channel only a mile or so wide, and at its other end from Megara by about the same distance, while the fleet took up its position in the bay.

Xerxes marched down into Attica, while his fleet sailed into Phaleron Bay. But he found the land deserted, except for a small band of men who trusted to the old wooden walls of the Acropolis instead of to the Athenian navy. It took the Persians a fortnight to capture it, setting the walls on fire with burning arrows and scrambling up the steep rocks under cover of night. Once it was taken, they killed all the defenders, plundered the temples and levelled them with the ground. Then they moved out towards Salamis.

Once again the Spartans, with their one-track minds, insisted on falling back to the Isthmus, which meant giving up Salamis, Aegina and Megara to the Persians. Even the fleet was commanded by a Spartan; but Themistocles stood up to the Spartans: “We fight in the Bay of Salamis,” he said, “it is a much better place for our small fleet to engage the huge fleet of the Persians. If you insist on retiring to the Isthmus, you retire alone. We cannot fight the Persians alone—but neither can you. If you desert us now, I lead all the Athenians beyond the seas to find new homes in some western land.”

Themistocles had not won his way even now, though the Spartan admiral agreed to keep the fleet at Salamis, even though the army was on its way to the Isthmus. Xerxes was determined to smash the Greeks once and for all by sea, and as soon as he saw where the ships were, he moved his fleet into position right across the entrance to the Bay, between the corner of Salamis and the tip of Mount Aegaleos on the mainland between Salamis and Athens. The Spartan commanders and their friends took fright at
once, and called another council which would obviously decide to bolt for Corinth round the other side of the island of Salamis.

In desperation Themistocles fell back on cunning. He sent Sicinnus, who was tutor to his sons and utterly faithful to him with a false message to Xerxes: "Oh King, the Greeks are preparing to slip away round the island by night: stop that, and attack in the morning, and the victory will be yours. The Spartans are trying to betray us, and when the battle begins we of Athens will turn against them and fight on your side."

Xerxes believed this message, sent 200 Egyptian ships to guard the straits between Megara and the other end of Salamis, and prepared for battle, landing a large body of men on a little rocky island between Salamis and Mount Aegaleos to kill any Greeks who swam to it when their ships were sunk.

Meanwhile Themistocles returned quietly to the council, having slipped out unsuspected to send Sicinnus, and although he was overruled and the Spartan admiral decided to lead a retreat to the Isthmus during the night, his confidence that he had really got his own way was confirmed by the sudden arrival of Aristides with more of the allies from Aegina who announced that they were already hemmed in by the Persians.

Morning of September 20, 480 B.C. dawned, and Xerxes the Great King sat down on his throne on Mount Aegaleos to watch the battle, with his army drawn up on the shore below him. Into the narrow straits with the little rocky islet in the middle sailed the vast Persian fleet, and the Greeks swerved into them from an inlet in the coast of Salamis, smashed the left wing, and threw the rest into hopeless disorder. All through the day the Greeks rammed
ship after ship of the Persians, the Athenians doing the
greatest damage, though the Aeginetans gave a very good
account of themselves and scattered the Phoenician ships
on which Xerxes built especial hopes.

Towards the evening Aristides, seeing how the battle was
going, brought a body of Athenian foot-soldiers over to the
little rocky islet, slew all the Persians who were on it, and
killed or captured any who swam to it from the sunken
ships.

As the sun went down Xerxes saw that his great fleet
was defeated, destroyed and scattered. Rising from his
throne he cried: “My men have become women!” rent
his robe, and fled away into the darkness.

The great battle was won, and the Persians in full
retreat. Themistocles urged the combined fleet to sail after
them and destroy the bridge of boats over the Hellespont,
but the Spartans were horrified at the thought of going so
far from home, and refused to follow his counsel. Their new
king Cleombrotus, however, agreed to lead the allied
land forces after the fleeing Persians; but unfortunately an
eclipse of the sun occurred just as he was performing a
sacrifice to the gods, and he took this as a warning of ill-
omen and retired to the Isthmus.

Xerxes fled home to Persia with the remains of his
fleet, knowing well that the Greek cities of Ionia would
now revolt, but he left behind an army quite big enough to
conquer Greece even after Salamis. This army settled at
Thebes, and tried to make peace with the Athenians who,
as the Persian general Mardonius well knew, were fed up
with the Spartans. But the Athenians replied proudly:
“Tell Mardonius that so long as the sun moves in its
present course we will never make peace with Xerxes.”

Although reassured by this message, the Spartans were
so afraid that the Athenians might make a separate peace, which would mean their doom, that in the following year they sent out a force of 5,000 Spartans with 10,000 followers to join the 8,000 Athenians, making up a united Greek force of nearly 100,000 under the new Spartan general Pausanias.

He led his huge army over Mount Cithaeron and down the long slope towards Thebes as far as the little city of Plataea. Here the force of over 120,000 picked Persians, with forced allies from Thebes, met them, and by the skilful generalship of Pausanias were utterly defeated.

The Persian Invasion was at an end: "hubris" had befallen the insolent Persian King who scourged the Hellespont and destroyed sacred shrines and temples; Greece, and with her Europe, was saved from becoming the slave to an Eastern Power; and Hellenism had triumphed over Barbarism.

Brave though the Spartans had been throughout the war, it was Athens that had shone brightest and made the greatest sacrifices for Greece. Yet when in 472 B.C., not seven years after the end of the war, the great poet-dramatist Aeschylus who had fought in the Athenian ranks both at Marathon and Salamis wrote his play The Persians, the greatest historical drama ever written by a contemporary, he told it as the tragedy of Xerxes whose pride had been overtaken by "hubris", whose vast forces had been destroyed by the decree of Zeus, Father of gods and men; though he gives the most superb account of the Battle of Salamis, he never mentions one Greek by name from start to finish of the play. Nor does he speak one word of pride for the Athenian victory, or one word of triumph over the defeated Persians: for the Athenians were but the sword in the hand of Right which smote
“Those godless, those of pride infatuate,
Who made of Greece their prey, not held it shame
To rob her gods and give her shrines to flame.

Zeus sitteth Judge above us. His it is
To check the uncurbed dreams of men, and weight
Is in his arm to bend the crooked straight.”*

*Aeschylus, *Persai*, 472. B.C. (Translation by Gilbert Murray).*
Chapter Five

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ATHENS

The Persians were driven from Greece, but Persia was by no means conquered, and Xerxes might well come again. The islands of the Aegean, and the city-states of Ionia had freed themselves from the Persian rule, but the Persian power was still on their doorsteps ready to snap them up again one by one.

Throughout the war Sparta, the great military state, had been at the head of the Greek forces; but the Spartans had already shown that they were selfish and narrow-minded, with no feeling of loyalty to the Greek world as a whole, or even to Greece itself. They would not send their armies far from home: indeed they dared not send their whole army even out of the Peloponnesus, for their Helot slaves and their Messenian servants would rise in revolt the moment they got the chance. Even when a Spartan leader went abroad in command of an allied fleet he showed the weakness of character which the Spartan way of life produced.

Pausanias, who had led the Greeks so brilliantly at the great battle of Plataea, was then sent in command of the allied fleet to liberate first Cyprus, and then Byzantium on the Bosphorus from the Persians. He did well at first, but in Byzantium gave way to Persian bribes and flattery, and
was soon plotting with the enemies of Greece to betray Sparta if he were made absolute monarch. The Athenians heard of this and sent Cimon, the son of Miltiades to take over his place as admiral and continue freeing the islands and helping the Ionian cities, which he did so well that he ended by winning another great battle against the Persians at Eurymedon on the mainland of Asia Minor near Cyprus in 468 B.C.

Pausanias returned to Sparta, and denied the charges of treachery. But one of his faithful servants noticed that none of his fellows who had been sent with letters to Persia ever returned. So when he was given a letter to take he opened it—and found in it, as well as plans for betraying Sparta, instructions to kill the messenger in case anyone should discover where he had been. The servant showed the letter to the Spartan Ephors, and Pausanias fled to the Temple of Athena to escape immediate execution. No one could touch him there: but the angry Spartans built up the doors so that he could not get out, and there he starved to death.

After this Athens took charge of the fleet, and indeed of the whole conduct of war with Persia. A great alliance was formed called the Confederacy of Delos which most of the islands and the cities of Ionia joined, and several states on the mainland as well. Each member was supposed to send ships and men to serve under the Athenians; but if they preferred they could send money to pay for the ships and for the services of the Athenians as their protectors. Aristides the Just, an Athenian who was famous for his honesty, was asked to decide exactly how much tribute each member state should pay; and very soon nearly all of them sent money to the treasury at Delos instead of ships.

As time went on what had begun as a league of free
states became more or less an Athenian empire, with Athens as their centre to guard them from invasion and to protect and foster their trade.

Sparta, of course, became more and more jealous and suspicious of Athens, and during the years after the defeat of the Persians there was more than one minor war between the two states. During one of these the Athenians brought the treasures of the Delian Confederacy to Athens for safety; and on one occasion they tried to call another meeting of all true Hellenes to see whether some sort of United States of Hellas could not be arranged. But it seems that the Greeks were unable to sacrifice their personal liberty, except in moments of extreme danger such as the coming of Xerxes: the grand scheme came to nothing, and Athens settled down to do her best to be “the Guardian of Hellas”, as the Theban poet Pindar had called her.

Athens had now become a complete democracy. Any citizen could hold any position in the state, and as he was now paid for his services poverty was no longer a bar. This brought both strength and weakness: strength in the wonderful feeling of freedom and self-ownership which made the Athenians eager to turn their city into the most beautiful and glorious in all the world; but weakness in the superstitious ignorance and selfishness of so many of the citizens who could be persuaded to do anything by a clever orator.

Fortunately at this supreme moment in her history Pericles, one of the greatest men of ancient Greece, was there to be the guide and inspiration of Athens, and to rule her for thirty years by his sheer greatness and eloquence which made the people re-elect him year after year—merely as one of the Ten Generals, but then to
follow his advice in far, far more than mere military matters.

The most spectacular achievement of the days when Pericles was leading the Athenians, much of which remains to this day, was his building programme. He began with the defences of Athens, high walls round the Acropolis to increase the size of its flat top, and also walls to join Athens to its port the Piraeus five miles away, and a new city there (laid out in squares by Hippodamus, the first town-planner,) with a fine harbour.

But when Athens was safely walled, Pericles turned his attention to the temples of the gods, which the impious Persians had levelled with the ground. First made was a huge bronze statue of the goddess Athena, patron goddess of Athens, standing so high that her helmet and the tip of her spear flashing in the sunlight could be seen far out at sea. Pheidias, the most famous of all Greek sculptors made it: but now, alas, only late copies, miniatures in marble, remain for us to see.

Next came the great Temple of Athena Parthenos, Athena the Maiden Goddess, which we know still as the Parthenon, one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, and of breath-taking loveliness even now as it stands in ruins—columns and architraves glowing honey-gold in the glorious clear light of Greece against the deep blue of the sky and the fleecy whiteness of the clouds.

A Greek temple, unlike a church, was made to show all its beauty from outside: the shrine was poorly lit—though the Parthenon contained another superb statue by Pheidias, also long since vanished, since it was made of wood covered with gold (for the robes) and ivory (for the flesh).
Pericles, one of the greatest men of Ancient Greece
In the earliest days a temple was built of wood: an oblong building with pillars all round it made of tree-trunks with the bark still on; the roof beams sticking out at the sides and sawn off roughly; the gaps between the beam-ends filled in with square boards carved or painted.

Even the Parthenon follows this crude original as closely as possible: for the traditional form was sacred. But all there is built of the golden off-white marble that seems to absorb the sunlight, which was quarried in nearby Mount Pentelicon. The columns (eight at front and back, seventeen on each side) replace the tree-trunks, with the fluting to represent the bark and the capitals at the top in place of where the first branches begin to bulge from the trunk. Where the rough beam-ends would have come are the triglyphs, projecting stones with two straight grooves in each; and between them in place of the boards to block the holes are the metopes, ninety-two in all, carved with figures in high relief, almost standing out by themselves, of the legendary battle between the Athenians of Theseus's day and the wild Centaurs, half-man, half-horse—the struggle of civilization against barbarism, as in the Persian War.

In the triangular spaces at either end, beneath the roof and above the architrave (the great "beam" from side to side) were the two pediments—groups of huge detached statues. One represented the birth of Athena, full grown and fully armed, from the head of Zeus—the great artistic creation born complete from the brain of the creator; and the other the story of how Athena and Poseidon, god of the sea, competed for the patronship of Athens: from the rock which Poseidon struck with his trident the sea-water gushed and from it sprang a great horse—his gift to man; but Athena touched the earth with her
spear and up grew the first olive tree, far the more precious gift to the Athenians.

Lastly, all round the top of the outer wall of the shrine, behind the columns which formed an aisle or “peristyle”, was the frieze in low relief, 524 feet in length, showing the great procession of the Athenians to lay their offering of an embroidered robe on the knees of Athena in the Parthenon—only here she is presented on her throne in Olympus with all the other gods and goddesses beside her. Pheidias made the frieze, and much of it survives to this day, tragically broken and battered, some still in place, but most of it looking sad and lost in the grey light of the British Museum.

In the Parthenon there is not one straight line, though all appears to be straight. For Ictinus the master architect who made it knew that in so huge a building (228 feet long, 101 broad and 65 high) all truly straight lines would appear to sag. So the platform on which the temple stands rises a little in the middle, yet appears absolutely horizontal—until you lie down at one end and find that you cannot see the feet of the people at the other. Every column bulges just a little, and they all slope inwards—but so slightly that if prolonged they would only meet at a point two miles up.

Having designed the Parthenon and seen the building well under way, Ictinus left his second-in-command Callicrates to see the work completed, and went to design another beautiful temple, of which even more remains standing today. This time it was among the lonely hills of Arcadia in the middle of the Peloponnesus six miles from the nearest town and so solitary that even today no road leads to Bassai where the temple of Apollo stands—to the glory of the god alone.
In Athens Pericles continued to employ the greatest architects and sculptors, and the Athenian craftsmen to do their utmost for the glory of the gods and of their city. On the Acropolis not far from the Parthenon still stands the Erechtheum, dedicated jointly to Athena and Poseidon and covering the salt-spring where he struck the rock and the aged trunk of the first olive tree, famous for the Porch of the Caryatides which in place of pillars has six beautiful statues of the Maidens of Athena supporting the roof on their heads.

On a spur of rock by the entrance to the Acropolis a little shrine was also built to Athena as Our Lady of Victory—also called Wingless Victory, since victory had come to Athens and would not fly away—with a miniature frieze in which for once the Athenians allowed themselves to show the incidents of the Persian War.

The many-pillared entrance way to the Acropolis (the Propylaea) was begun, too, though never finished; and down on a little knoll overlooking the Agora or market-place a temple to Hephaestus, the god of the craftsmen, was built, the only Greek temple to remain undamaged to this day.

The wonderful buildings of the Age of Pericles are the outward and visible sign of the sudden flowering of the Greek genius. Pericles planned them as the great memorial to the overthrow of Persia and the freedom of the Hellenic world: but the sudden joyous burst into freedom inspired the architects and sculptors to make their works the wonders of beauty and construction that they are. The same Greek spirit suddenly let loose and exultant in its freedom showed itself in other ways without number, then and in the century or two following, wonders in themselves and the basis of our civilization today, in science as well as in art.
Many things which we take for granted were discovered, experimented with, and reduced to order by the ancient Greeks. Politics and the methods of government, for example, all of which had been tried in Athens and about which Plato and Aristotle wrote in works which are still today the basis of a politician’s education.

Mathematics too were explored and reduced to order by the Greeks. Pythagoras and others discovered and proved various rules in geometry, which Euclid worked over and reduced to a system in a book of theorems which was still the textbook used in schools at the beginning of the present century: you will find old people even now calling geometry “Euclid” for this reason.

In astronomy and natural science the Greeks led the way also. Thales in 585 B.C. was the first man to predict an eclipse accurately. Pythagoras (576-497 B.C.) had already realized that the Earth was a sphere, and Aristarchus of Samos (living about 320 B.C.) suggested that the Earth and the planets revolve round the sun, while Eratosthenes about fifty years later calculated the diameter of the Earth to within fifty miles of the actual figure.

Archimedes his contemporary discovered and brought to book the whole science of hydro-statics, beginning with the famous “Principle of Archimedes” that a body immersed in water displaces the same volume as itself—which he discovered one day while getting into his bath, and ran naked through the streets of Syracuse to his study shouting “Eureka! Eureka! I’ve got it! I’ve got it!” Diophantus (about A.D. 250) wrote the first book of Algebra, while Hero of Alexandria invented or discovered, though he may not always have made, siphons, fire-engines, water-organs, the penny-in-the-slot machine—and the steam engine.
The greatest doctor of antiquity, Hippocrates of Kos (born 460 B.C.) wrote books on medicine which were in use almost as long as Euclid’s Geometry; natural history was studied by Aristotle and others, while a work on grammar by Dionysius of Thrace kept them company through the centuries.

The legacy of Greece which has not been superseded even today is the literature which also found its finest period in the Golden Age after the Battle of Marathon. The lyric poets had been feeling their way even in the previous century, and Sappho and Simonides seem to have reached heights hard to surpass; but the Theban poet Pindar surpassed them and all other poets in beauty of phrase and metrical skill in the long series of Odes which he wrote for the winners at the four great Pan-Hellenic Festivals at Olympia, Delphi, Nemea and the Isthmus. At moments he is a truly great poet, and always a superb craftsman: but we cannot help feeling that he was hindered by his subject matter, or that he did not dare to let himself go and write about deeper and more universal themes. Perhaps this was understandable, since Thebes had fought on the Persian side at Plataea, and Pindar in his poetry escapes whenever possible into a past which in his beautiful lines seems almost too good to be true.

At Athens poetry reached its greatest heights in the theatre. The plays were a religious ceremony organized by the state: at least the state built the theatres and wealthy citizens volunteered, or were appointed to pay for the Chorus for one dramatist each at one festival. The theatres were at first built of wood; but after an accident in the big one at Athens stone theatres were built instead, and several of these in various parts of Greece remain almost perfect to this day. To begin with there was no stage, only
the circular “orchestra” with an altar in the middle, which may have started from the village threshing-floor on which the end of the harvest was celebrated with dance and song. The audience sat on their stone seats in a semi-circle round just over two sides of the orchestra, seat behind seat, usually built on or cut into a suitable hill-side: the Theatre of Dionysus at Athens held about 15,000 spec-

Plan of the theatre at Epidaurus

tators, while the most perfect Greek theatre remaining today, that at Epidaurus in Argolis, seats 17,000, while Megalopolis and Argos, of which but little remains now, could hold as many as 20,000.

Judging from the nearly perfect theatre at Epidaurus, the ancient Greek knew more about the art of acoustics than we do even today. Sitting in the very back seat, so far away that an actor in the orchestra looks like a midget,
you can hear every word he says, even when he speaks in an ordinary clear voice as when lecturing; and when he drops a coin on the "thymele", the little round altar-stone in the centre, you can hear it ring clearly: and there is no suspicion of an echo.

It was only in Roman times that the actors wore high boots to make themselves look bigger; but from the earliest days the Greek actors wore masks. This was partly to show which character was which; in so vast a theatre you cannot tell at a distance, when you cannot see the lips moving, which character is speaking. It was also due to the fact that the actors always doubled or trebled their parts in each play—one man appearing as the Watchman, Cassandra, and Aegisthus in the Agamemnon, for example.

Over this the Greeks were strangely conservative. As tragedy grew out of the dance and song of the Chorus, the dramatic side developed slowly. The Suppliants by Aeschylus, the earliest play in all literature (written about 490 B.C.) has really only one actor, but three choruses of fifty, each with its Leader who can speak separately to King Danaus.

For some time the only actor was indeed the poet himself; but this soon ceased to be so, and when Aeschylus wrote his last plays there were three actors. By this time (and perhaps almost from the start) there were three plays, linked together almost like three acts, but there was also the Satyr play which followed each trilogy, the survival of the beginning of tragedy—an almost burlesque drama with a chorus of the wild, cowardly, drunken Satyrs butting unexpectedly into one of the ancient stories. Although the writers after Aeschylus still entered three tragedies and a Satyr play for the dramatic competitions, there was seldom any connection between the plays,
which became longer as the acted portion grew more and more important and the chorus shrank until it almost disappeared in tragedy and quite in comedy.

The Athenians in the time of Pericles went to the theatre both as a religious duty and for the pleasure and entertainment of it. They went free, or for a purely nominal charge which the State would pay if it caused any hardship. The first day of the festival—the Great Dionysia, which was held each year at the beginning of April—was given over to religious ceremonies, and most of the second to the contests of the choruses (five of boys and five of men), with a "revel" for light relief in the evening.

The next four days were taken up with the plays themselves, and the 15,000 members of the audience (and probably many more sitting or standing on the hill-side above) made their way to the theatre as soon as it was light and saw four and sometimes five plays each day. The four plays were the three tragedies and one Satyr play written by the same dramatist; and there were two other sets of plays by two more dramatists on the following days. If there was a fifth play it was a comedy by another dramatist; but if there were four days for the plays the comedies would all be given on the last day, and there would be five of them. At the end the ten judges would award first, second and third prizes to the dramatists and to the choruses; and also prizes for the comedies.

If the plays were successful at Athens, they would be acted in other theatres in the country round about; and in time the great plays of the Age of Pericles were revived not only all over Greece, but at Greek theatres built in Asia Minor, Sicily and even North Africa.

Of these great tragedies written between 500 and 400 B.C. we have thirty-two remaining complete, and frag-
ments of many more; also one complete Satyr play, and another of which more than half survives: and some of these plays are still among the greatest and most moving ever written. Very nearly all the Greek tragedians used for their subject stories out of the myths and legends of the Heroic Age; the audience knew what was going to happen, but not how the dramatist would treat the well-known story, or how he would move them to pity, and exaltation—to “purge the emotions” and leave them in a good frame of mind, which they thought to be the duty of a good tragedy.

If you were an Athenian going to the theatre in 458 B.C. you would find as the winning entry the three connected plays by Aeschylus, called together The Oresteia. The first, Agamemnon, told how the great King came home from Troy after the ten years of siege, bringing the Princess Cassandra as his slave; how his wife, Queen Clytemnestra, who had grown to hate him and had fallen in love with his cousin Aegisthus, murdered him as soon as he went into his palace at Mycenae, and murdered Cassandra too—the prophetess who knows that she is going to her death. It was a terrible crime for Clytemnestra to commit, even though she had an excuse: for Agamemnon had sacrificed their daughter Iphigeneia so that the gods might let the fleet set sail to Troy—yet you saw that “hubris” was sure to come to Agamemnon by his pride on his return to Mycenae, and the way he walked into his palace over rich robes of purple flung on the ground, just as if he were the Great King of the Barbarians of Persia, and not a Greek.

The next play, The Choephoroi (named after its chorus of women carrying drink-offerings to the tomb of Agamemnon), showed Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, coming to Mycenae in disguise to avenge
his father by command of the god Apollo; how he was urged and helped to this terrible deed by his sister Electra; and how in the end he did kill Aegisthus, and also his mother Clytemnestra—which was a shocking crime, whatever she had done, which he knew would be avenged by the dreadful powers called the Furies, the avengers of blood, who would drive him mad and pursue him from land to land.

The last play *The Eumenides* (another name for the Furies) showed that Apollo had laid his dreadful command on Orestes for a good reason, that through his suffering a blessing should come upon mankind. In a terrifying scene Orestes has reached Apollo’s shrine at Delph, and the god tells him to go to Athens; he sets out, pursued by the Furies, and in Athens the Court of the Areopagus tries his case, and half the judges find him guilty and half find him innocent. Then the goddess Athena appears and casts her vote for mercy, telling the judges that ever after if they are equally divided the divine vote will rest on the side of mercy—and urging the Areopagus henceforth to try cases fairly and be a model of justice to the whole world. *The Oresteia* was followed by a Satyr play called *Proteus*, but that unfortunately is lost.

Going again to the Great Dionysia some twenty years later, the Athenian might find the second great dramatist Sophocles winning the prize with three separate tragedies and one Satyr play. One of the tragedies would be *Antigone*, the Princess of Thebes, whose two brothers quarrelled over who should be king, made war and killed each other. Their uncle Creon became king, but showed himself even more deserving of “hubris” by commanding that no one should bury the dead body of the brother who had invaded Thebes: not to bury the dead body of a
relative was, to the Greeks, one of the worst sins that could be committed, for the spirit of the dead could not then enter the Land of Hades. But Antigone disobeys the royal order, though she knows the punishment, and buries her brother. Proud Creon condemns her to death, refusing to honour the gods and obey their commands, and "hubris" begins to work at once. For his son Haemon was in love with Antigone, and hearing what has happened to her he breaks into the tomb where she has been walled up alive, only to find that she has hanged herself to escape the slow death by starvation; and in his grief he falls on his sword and kills himself. Creon, meanwhile, has been brought to his senses by the words of the blind prophet Tiresias, rushes to the tomb to let Antigone out, only to find the two lovers dead; and returns to his palace, where his wife is dead also through grief for her son.

Perhaps, after the two other tragedies, would have come the Satyr play called *The Searchers*, showing how, when Apollo lost his herd of cattle very strangely, he asked the boastful, cowardly Satyrs to find them for him. They promised to get them back, however fierce the robbers were who had stolen them, but having followed their trail to a cave in the hill-side, ran away in terror at the sound of a strange new musical instrument called the lyre which had been invented by the young god Hermes—who had also stolen the cattle although

"It is but six days since his mother bare
The wondrous child, and yet he grows so fast
Each day, that childhood is already past
And he begins to blossom into youth."

Later still, during the great war with Sparta, when
only three days could be given to the dramatic festival instead of four, the Athenian playgoer might have found the problem plays of Euripides winning the prize. Such a tragedy as Medea (431 B.C.) in which Jason the Argonaut, who was saved in Colchis by the Barbarian witch-maiden Medea who helped him to steal the Golden Fleece because she had fallen in love with him, tries to get rid of her to marry a true Greek princess and settle down to become king of Corinth. According to Greek law, he was not married to Medea, and she had shown what a complete barbarian she was by murdering her own brother during the escape from Colchis, and then murdering Jason’s uncle who had sent him to fetch the Fleece. But Medea had done all for love of Jason and their two children; and when he insisted on deserting her, she sent a magic robe to the Princess which caught fire as soon as she put it on, killing her and her father the king. Then she killed her own two children, because she knew that this would give Jason more pain than anything else, and escaped to the king of Athens whom she had cheated into promising to protect her whatever happened.

Euripides is most interested in the characters of Jason and Medea (particularly in her) and he teaches no great lesson as Aeschylus would have done, nor shows what happens through disobeying the gods which was the message of Sophocles; instead he treats his characters as ordinary human beings, and tries simply to be fair to both of them, neither blaming nor excusing what they do.

In a lighter mood, the fourth play that day, instead of being a Satyr play, might have been a tragedy that ends happily—which Euripides sometimes presented instead. Perhaps the beautiful Alcestis, the queen who, when Death came for her husband Admetus exchanged herself for
him. Admetus was filled with grief: but even so, when his old friend Heracles turned up unexpectedly he did not tell him that Alcestis had just died, but welcomed him and made him comfortable—for to the Greeks hospitality was one of the greatest virtues, and the sacred duty of all good men. When he learnt what his friend had done in spite of his terrible loss, Heracles the strongest man in the world went to the tomb, wrestled with Death and won back Alcestis, so that all ends happily for the "house that loves the stranger".

"Oh, a House that loves the stranger,
   And a House for ever free!
And Apollo, the Song-changer,
   Was a herdsman in thy fee;
   Yea, a-piping he was found,
   Where the upland valleys wound,
To the kine from out the manger
   And the sheep from off the lea,
   And love was upon Othrys at the sound."*

Utterly different would have been the fare set before an Athenian on the fourth day of the dramatic contests (or on each afternoon had it been the shortened festival during the Peloponnesian War) when the comedies were acted. The "comos ode" of early days was the "village song", full of crude and boisterous humour, rather drunken if celebrating the broaching of last year’s wine in the spring; and full of relief and a release of tension if held when the harvest was safely in at the end of the summer.

The comedies which grew out of these country proceedings, though they became exquisite works of poetic

A Greek comedy at Epidaurus
literature, still retained many strange remnants of their origin. None of the earlier ones have survived, but there are several by the one great writer of "Old Comedy", Aristophanes, which appeared during the war with Sparta, the earliest in 425 B.C. There is usually very little story in them, but a great deal of fun: we have nothing really like them now, but pantomime would be the nearest approach.

Besides the typical comic characters, real people were introduced and made fun of: for in Athens everybody knew everyone else, and the ideal of freedom was so great that it even extended to making fun of politicians and generals during a war—particularly if you were a comic poet who did not agree with their policy. In one play by Aristophanes the great philosopher Socrates appeared in a peculiarly odd mask and costume, and the real Socrates stood up in the audience just to show visitors that he was not quite as ugly as the poet made out.

Even the gods came in for some burlesque treatment, and one of the funniest plays by Aristophanes, called The Frogs (the comedies were called after the characters of the chorus, who usually wore grotesque masks and costumes, The Clouds, The Birds, The Wasps and so on) begins with Dionysus himself. The god for whom the plays were performed decided that as Sophocles and Euripides had just died and there were no dramatists as good, he must go down to the Land of the Dead and bring one back. He and his comic slave set out, not knowing the way, and the first traveller they meet is a dead man being carried to his funeral. They stop him and ask him to carry their luggage for them: "Strike me living if I do!" exclaims the corpse, who has sat up when Dionysus speaks to him, and he lies down again angrily. So they go on their amusing way,
Dionysus dressed up as Heracles to impress the people of the underworld, and the play ends with a new sort of dramatic contest: Aeschylus and Euripides solemnly weighing their best lines of poetry against each other.

In another comedy, called this time after its heroine Lysistrata, the women of Athens decide that the war has gone on long enough, and decide to stop it, with the help of the women of Sparta, who quite agree. So they capture the Acropolis and shut themselves up in it, refusing to come out until the men make peace, and leaving them meanwhile to do all the housework, look after the children, and get more and more lonely and uncomfortable without their wives. In another, The Birds, two clever Athenians show the Birds how to build a city called Cloud-Cuckoo-Land midway between Heaven and Earth: as this keeps the rain and sun from mankind, and the “smoke-of sacrifice” from rising up to the gods, the Birds very soon become rulers of the universe—with many amusing results.

Although Aristophanes made fun of the gods in plays like The Birds and The Frogs, and Euripides criticized some of the myths about them in several of his tragedies, the Greeks were really very religious. The more thoughtful amongst them seem to have kept the myths rather apart from their real feelings about the gods, and even to have realized that there was only one God, who may have been Zeus or some Power greater still. This is what the great philosopher Socrates thought, and Plato who wrote both about Socrates’s teaching, and about his own interpretation of Life and of the Divine Mystery. But otherwise the gods represented the great powers of nature, given beautiful forms and mysterious stories, and carved in stone or sung about in exquisite verses.

For the great thing about the ancient Greeks was their
eagerness and ready enjoyment of all good and beautiful things given to them by God—or “the gods”—and all the mystery and wonder on every side. How did the corn grow freshly out of the earth each year and give them a new harvest? That was the work of God—or of a goddess called Demeter whose daughter Persephone had been taken down under the earth but restored to the sunlight again. So each year the Athenians went on pilgrimage to her shrine twelve miles away at Eleusis and celebrated her rites, learning there the Sacred Mysteries of life and death—and probably of life after death as shown by the mysterious Zagreus, the son of the maiden Persephone who was torn to pieces by the powers of evil, but came to life again.

Wine was a good and wonderful gift, almost as mysterious as corn, and out of that wonder was born Dionysus. And in the same way when the new and overpowering experience of falling in love came to a Greek, he knew that Aphrodite had visited him; and when suddenly the words of his poem fell just into shape and clothed a new thought for the first time he knew by the feeling of awe and exaltation which comes over the Maker at such a moment that “Apollo the song-changer” had drawn near to him.
Chapter Six

THE GREAT WAR WITH SPARTA

When Apollo came visiting the poet or the writer of inspired prose he was attended by the Nine Muses who presided each over a different branch of the literary art; and the first of them was Clio, the Muse of History.

As in the case of so many other things the Greeks were the first historians. The earliest whose work survives is Herodotus whose history (finished in 430 B.C.) tells the story of the war with Persia in a delightfully rambling way, filled out with good stories and travellers' tales many of which could not possibly have happened.

History was still a matter of charming story-telling and anecdote for Herodotus; but by the time his appeared another historian was beginning to collect material for the history of the war with Sparta which had just broken out, and which he did not live to complete. This, the first historian in the true sense, was Thucydides an Athenian who took part in the early years of the war, was exiled for failing to relieve the city of Amphipolis in time, but continued to collect material with tremendous care, going quietly, as a private person, from place to place on both sides, and seems to have been present at many of the actions which he described. "The first History, in the true sense of the word," writes a great modern historian,
“sprang full-grown into life, like Athena from the brain of Zeus; and it is still without a rival.”

If it were not for the superb writing of Thucydides, the Peloponnesian War would seem only a sad and sordid quarrel: as he tells it the story becomes a deep and terrible tragedy, the downfall of Athens from the glorious days of Pericles, through the growing shame of deceit and cruelty and hysteria caused by the long war, to the hopelessness and disappointment of the end.

It was all simply a matter of jealousy. Athens with her great city of beautiful buildings and wonderful achievements, and with her growing empire, was envied and feared by Sparta and her allies, and particularly by Corinth the sea-power whose place Athens was taking in foreign influence and trade.

The war was bound to come, and when a quarrel between Athens and Corinth resulted in some Athenian ships and troops capturing the city of Potidaea which was friendly to the Corinthians the Spartans took this as an excuse, blamed Athens for breaking the peace treaty, and declared war.

Pericles was still as popular as ever with the Athenians, and they agreed to follow his advice and not try to fight the Spartans and their allies if they invaded Attica, only if they attacked the city itself. For the great strength of Athens lay in her fleet which could attack and detach distant allies of the Spartans, harry the coast towns, and stop all foreign trade with her enemies. By doing this, and not attempting to fight the much stronger army of the Spartan League when it laid waste Attica, Pericles intended to exhaust them, wear them down, and finally use up all their money reserves: for Sparta was relatively poor, but Athens had collected a great amount of treasure.

Had Pericles lived, and had his plan been followed,
Athens would probably have won the war in a few years. But unfortunately on the second occasion when the Spartans devastated Attica and the Athenians withdrew for shelter behind their walls, a terrible plague broke out of which vast numbers died: Pericles lost two of his sons, was himself ill, and died shortly afterwards.

There was no one to take his place and a democracy such as Athens was lost without someone as great to replace him. Anyone could be elected chief general, and very soon the cruel and coarse Cleon, a leather merchant (Aristophanes calls him “the sausage-seller”) with no background, no culture, and cunning instead of political wisdom, won to the top.

Athens began to make mistakes and to fall away from the fine traditions which had been built up under Pericles. The first mistake was partly due to the plague, for the Athenians failed to send help to their loyal allies the people of the little city of Plataea which had been attacked and besieged by the Spartans with the help of the Thebans, who were on the Spartan side. The siege lasted for two years, so Athens could easily have come to their rescue, but seemed to have forgotten all about Plataea. In the end the more daring Plataeans escaped over the walls built by the besiegers one dark night when a storm was raging. The rest were forced to yield, to the number of 200 Plataean soldiers and 25 Athenians, and the Spartans killed them all.

As Athens seemed to be having the worst of it, one of her friends and allies, the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos revolted against her. The Athenians were horrified at such treachery and sent an army which at length captured the city and everyone in it surrendered. When the news came to Athens Cleon got up in the Assembly of all the citizens and proposed that as a well
deserved punishment and as an example to any other city which might think of turning traitor that every man of Mytilene should be put to death and the women and children sold as slaves.

Cleon, the newly elected and popular "man of the people", managed to sway the Assembly so that the majority agreed to his horrible suggestion, and a ship was sent at once to the Athenian general at Mytilene to carry out the sentence. But during the night the Athenians began to realize the cruelty of what they had done, and next morning a special Assembly was called. Cleon repeated his arguments for ruling by fear; but a certain Diodotus spoke so well from the point of view of mercy that when a new vote was taken well over half were on the side of a more merciful treatment of the traitors. So another ship was sent, to row night and day in hope of overtaking the previous ship which had nearly twenty-four hours start; the Mytilenean envoys who went with this ship supplied the rowers with barley-meal kneaded with wine and oil, feeding them as they rowed, and urging them to greater exertions by offers of rich rewards if they arrived in time.

But the death-ship got there first, and the Athenian general was actually holding the decree in his hand and instructing his soldiers to carry out the terrible orders contained in it, when the rescue-ship arrived—and the Mytileneans were saved.

So the dreary war went on, year after year; Athens gaining or losing allies and tributaries, Sparta winning a small battle here and there, and laying waste Attica each spring. Cleon was the most popular leader in Athens, but another general called Nicias won many followers and was head of the party which wanted peace with Sparta.

One of the most thrilling incidents of the war came in
the seventh year (425 B.C.) when a party of Athenians landed on the little rocky island of Pylos which belonged to the Spartans. They did this to shelter from a storm in the harbour behind it which is now called the Bay of Navarino (where the famous battle was fought over two thousand years later which freed modern Greece from the Turks). While they were waiting there an Athenian general called Demosthenes suggested that the men should build a fort, which they did without tools, fitting together loose stones and carrying the mortar on their backs. When at last the storm ended, the fleet sailed away; but Demosthenes insisted on staying behind with a garrison of five ships and their crews.

The Spartans very soon arrived to drive these bold Athenians out of their island, and when they found that it was going to be a long business they landed 420 Spartans, each with a Helot in attendance, on the nearby island of Sphacteria in case the Athenian fleet should return and capture it. Demosthenes managed to send two ships after the main fleet, which turned and came back to his rescue, defeating the Spartan ships in the Bay and turning the siege of the Athenians on Pylos into a siege of the Spartans on Sphacteria. The Spartans soon called a truce and sent ambassadors to Athens; but as no peace terms could be settled, the siege went on.

But it was not as easy a matter as the Athenians expected, for the Spartans on the mainland managed to get supplies across to their party on the island, partly with the aid of night-swimmers, and partly when rough seas prevented the fleet from patrolling properly.

At Athens the people became annoyed that nothing was done, and sorry that Sparta's excellent terms had been refused. They blamed Cleon, but he got up in the Assembly and said that any decent general would sail to the island
and capture the Spartans: "If I were commander," he ended boastfully, "I'd go and do it myself!" This was meant as an insult to his hated rival the real general Nicias whom he hoped might be banished for negligence: but the effect was not at all what he expected. Up rose Nicias at once: "As general of the Athenians," he said quietly, "I give you full permission to take what forces you like and make the attempt," At first Cleon thought that he was joking; but when he realized that he was serious, he grew frightened and tried to back out.

The Assembly, however, insisted on keeping him to his word; and the more he tried to escape, the more eagerly they voted for him to go. At last, realizing that there was no escape, he began blustering again that he would take only a small force of lightly-armed troops and bring back all the surviving Spartans as prisoners within twenty days.

"The Athenians," says Thucydides who was probably present at the time (this was the year before his failure to save Amphipolis), "could not help laughing at his foolish words; but the more sensible members of his audience comforted themselves with the thought that they would either get rid of Cleon, which they rather hoped, or else capture the Spartans on Sphacteria."

Cleon wisely chose Demosthenes as his assistant, and happened to arrive as this skilled general was planning an attack on the island; for the trees and bushes on it had just been burnt down by chance, which made it much easier to see the Spartans and avoid being ambushed by them. So the Athenian forces landed and advanced along the island from the south, driving back the Spartans in front of them since they could not stand against the archers whom Cleon had brought with him, and were blinded by the clouds of dust rising from the charred wood and
Up the steep hill behind the Spartan encampment
blowing towards them. They retreated to their fort at the top of the island and defied the Athenians to break into it. But one of their Messenian thralls came to Demosthenes and offered to show him a way up the steep hill behind the Spartan encampment; a small band scrambled up a path so steep that the defenders had neglected to guard it, and appeared suddenly above the fort. After this the Spartans surrendered—and Cleon went proudly back to Athens with the 292 survivors of the original 420.

This defeat lowered the prestige of Sparta tremendously, for no one in Greece believed that the Spartans would ever yield themselves prisoners, and not die to the last man like the brave followers of Leonidas at Thermopylae. It also had the advantage of giving Athens important hostages: by threatening to bring out the prisoners and kill them they prevented the Spartans from making their yearly expedition into Attica to ravage and destroy.

The Spartans were indeed anxious to make peace and save the prisoners; but their terms did not suit the Athenians, and there was trouble too with the Corinthians who hated Athens even more than Sparta did, and the war dragged on, now one side and now the other gaining minor victories. The Athenians captured several towns in Megaris, the state between them and Corinth, but lost two battles against the Thebans. In the north of Greece they lost the city of Amphipolis which surrendered to Brasidas, the cleverest of the Spartan generals, a few hours before Thucydides arrived with his fleet from the island of Thasos to relieve it. Thucydides was banished for negligence, and we are probably the gainers by his loss, since he had now plenty of time to study the war as an outsider and write his superb history of it.

Amphipolis was felt to be so important that in 422 B.C.
an Athenian force was sent to retake it, contrary to the counsel of Nicias who was all for a good peace with Sparta. However he was overruled and the Athenians foolishly chose Cleon as general. The army was completely routed and Cleon was shot down as he turned to fly. By chance the brave Spartan general Brasidas was also killed in the battle so that the Athenian defeat was not followed up, and a year later Nicias was able to make peace with Sparta.

The average Athenian was filled with delight and relief at the ending of the war, and Aristophanes wrote one of his lightest and most amusing comedies, *Peace* to celebrate it. But unfortunately the peace was not of a very genuine kind. Athens certainly formed a "defensive alliance" with Sparta, but she did the same with Argos; and when Argos and Sparta went to war against each other, Athenians found themselves fighting Spartans again—though without technically breaking the peace. The Spartans won a decisive victory at the Battle of Mantinea (418 B.C.)—and Argos joined Sparta and deserted its alliance with Athens.

Owing to the feeling that Athens was becoming less powerful, several more of the members of her empire revolted or tried to revolt. Among them was the island of Melos, not actually a member of the Athenian League and in fact so averse to Athenian domination that the Melians went so far as to send money to Sparta. With no more excuse than this, the Athenian democracy sent out a young general of great ability but few morals and no honesty, called Alcibiades, who when the city surrendered, had all the men of military age put to death, and the rest of the population sold into slavery—just as Cleon had wanted to do at Mytilene, and had succeeded in doing at Scione.

But the pride and folly which had been gaining sway over Athens since the death of Pericles were now ready, as
Thucydides points out, to bring the inevitable "hubris" upon her. With comparative peace in Greece itself, though there was a "state of war" between Athens and Corinth, the plea from the Greek city of Segesta in Sicily for help against the main Corinthian ally in that island, the maritime city-state of Syracuse, led the Athenians to the rash project of winning all Sicily to be their ally, if not their tributary.

Nicias advised against the scheme, which Alcibiades and the younger Athenians were all for; but the democracy voted for the expedition—and then showed even greater folly in placing Nicias at the head of it, with Alcibiades as his second-in-command. Nicias was a good, able and honest man, but knew little about military matters, was afraid of taking risks and, with his lack of background and education, hated responsibility and lost his head in a crisis. The reckless Alcibiades was far better suited to be in command of such an expedition, and might well have taken charge of it whatever Nicias might actually be called: but over him the Athenian democracy made its third, and in many ways, its worst mistake.

Just before the fleet was due to sail the Athenians woke one morning to find that the statues of Hermes which stood outside many temples and houses in the city had been mutilated during the night. This was terrible sacrilege, and a shocking omen for the Sicilian expedition, and the enemies of Alcibiades at once blamed him as the author of this outrage, since he was known to be irreligious, and had even mocked at the Eleusinian Mysteries. Actually the culprits were probably Corinthian spies anxious to upset the superstitious Athenians: in this they succeeded so well that no one seems to have thought of the obvious explanation.

Alcibiades denied the charge, and demanded an
immediate trial. But his enemies managed to put off the trial until his return, and the whole incident seemed to be forgotten in the excitement of the sailing of the biggest force ever sent out by Athens, numbering over 30,000 men. Not long after the fleet reached Sicily, however, the Athenians got excited again about the various sacrileges which Alcibiades was said to have committed, and sent a ship to arrest him and bring him back to Athens. By this stupid action they did more than lose their best general and leave the incompetent Nicias in charge; for Alcibiades escaped, went straight to Sparta, and began betraying his country and showing her enemies how to ruin the Sicilian Expedition—all this he did hoping to become by these means Tyrant of Athens.

In spite of all the mistakes made by the democracy, the Athenians nearly captured Syracuse. But Nicias delayed and shilly-shallyed too long: a clever Spartan general arrived at the head of a Corinthian fleet, and the end of the whole tragic business was the utter defeat of the Athenians, the capture or destruction of all their ships, and the slaughter of nearly all their men. Some were spared, but these were made slaves by the Sicilians, and only a very few won home to Athens—those, it is said, who were able to recite speeches or choruses from the plays of Euripides to their masters, who, in many cases, were themselves Greeks and had still the true Hellenic love of beautiful poetry.

The terrible disaster in Sicily was really a fatal blow to Athens. More and more of her allies deserted her, and she was not even able to pay much for more ships since, on the suggestion of Alcibiades, the Spartans invaded Attica again and built a fort at Decelea, only about twelve miles from the city. The strong garrison in this prevented the
Athenians from working the silver mines at Laurion, and also did their best to prevent the farmers from cultivating the land. In Asia Minor the Persians became active again and Alcibiades actually persuaded the Spartans to form an alliance with the enemies of all Greece to overthrow the cities in Ionia which were allies of Athens.

Not long after this, however, Alcibiades quarrelled with the Spartans and managed to win the friendship of the Athenian fleet which was at Samos. This came about because there had been a political revolution in Athens and a party of oligarchs had seized power and were trying to put an end to the democracy. But the sailors in the fleet were all staunchly democratic and hated the thought of oligarchy, the “rule by the few”. Alcibiades, though he had told the Spartans that “all democracy is folly”, now became an ardent democrat, and in command of the Athenian fleet won a smashing victory over the Spartans and was welcomed back to Athens.

The Athenians as usual failed to follow up their victory, and when Alcibiades did set out against the Spartan general Lysander he was defeated, and at once deprived of his command. Lysander was now receiving help from the Persians to conquer the cities of Ionia, which gave Athens time for one last effort. New ships were built, all slaves promised freedom if they would serve on them, and a last victory was won off the island of Arginusai near Lesbos. But most of the successful generals were condemned to death on their return to Athens by the hysterical Assembly for negligence in rescuing the crews of the ships which were sunk in the battle or in the storm which followed it.

Conon the new Athenian general led his fleet in the summer of 405 B.C. to attack the Spartans under Lysander
who were beseiging Lampsacus on the east of the Hellespont to the north of Troy. Lysander refused to sail out of the harbour with his fleet, and Conon anchored at Aegospotami, the "Goat-rivers", on the other side of the straits. Each morning he sailed out, daring the Spartans to battle; when ignored by Lysander, he would take his fleet back and wait for the next day. The Athenian crews grew more and more careless, and Conon made little attempt to keep discipline: Alcibiades, who had retired to a castle nearby, came one day and warned Conon—only to be sent about his business with jeers and insults.

Then one afternoon the Spartans attacked suddenly and unexpectedly, to find most of the Athenians taking things easily on the shore. There was hardly even a battle. Twenty ships got away, but the rest, over 160, were captured by Lysander with three or four thousand Athenians—who were all put to death.

Very soon the news reached Athens: "On that night," says the historian Xenophon who carried on the history from where Thucydides ended, "no man slept; not merely from grief at what had happened, but from fear of what was about to happen."

There was good reason for this. The Spartans and their allies arrived by land and sea, and Athens was forced to surrender. The Corinthians wanted to level the city with the ground, kill all the men and sell the women and children as slaves; but Sparta remembered what Greece owed to the Athenians at Marathon and Salamis. She confiscated all the remaining ships and all the foreign possessions, and ordered the Long Walls between Athens and the harbour of the Piraeus to be pulled down; but would not allow any vengeance to be taken, and permitted the city to remain free.
Chapter Seven
SOLDIERS AND PHILOSOPHERS

The great days of Athens were over, but she was by no means done for, and very soon began to recover from her defeat and humiliation—though not without pain and grief.

Sparta, always an enemy to democracy, encouraged an oligarchy to be set up in the conquered city, and a band of unscrupulous men called the Thirty, headed by a tyrant called Critias, seized power and began killing their enemies without trial, and even killing the richer citizens so as to take their property. Very soon a civil war broke out; both sides asked help from Sparta, and the oligarchs were thrown out, Critias being killed by the Athenians.

After nearly a year of this violence and lawlessness no one in Athens doubted any more that, however imperfect, a democracy was far the best kind of government so far invented, and no more attempts were made to overthrow it. Indeed the Athenians grew sensible about their politics, realized that the state is made for the individual not the individual for the state, and were content, so long as they were competently governed, to give their best energies to more productive pursuits.

Although their empire had gone, the Athenians found that their commerce had not. Soon they were building
ships and trading as before; and though they never became as wealthy as they had been, there was plenty of food and all that was needed for the simple life which most Greeks found sufficient. They did not embark on any more wars of conquest, for they had learnt to be less ambitious; but war by no means ceased, and they even found themselves fighting Sparta again not many years after the end of the Peloponnesian War.

For Sparta, which had gone to war to save the Greek states, cities and islands from losing their freedom as parts of the Athenian Empire, tried to build up a Spartan Empire after the defeat of Athens—but failed badly. Their own navy was destroyed by a Persian fleet headed by Conon the Athenian whom they had beaten at the Battle of Aegospotami; and their attempts to conquer cities in northern Greece were unsuccessful. Athens was able to build up the Long Walls again and win back some of what she had lost.

Another great change which came about after the Peloponnesian War was that the Athenian citizens no longer needed to be their own soldiers. Until then all young citizens were liable to be called up for military service, and indeed all adult members of the community in times of necessity: it seems natural to find Aeschylus fighting at Marathon and Salamis when the freedom of all Greece was at stake, but rather surprising to find Sophocles, Euripides and the philosopher Socrates fighting in the ranks during the Peloponnesian War.

But in the struggle a great many Greeks had become exiles or “displaced persons”, and after the war a great many more (mainly Athenians) found themselves out of work. So they became professional soldiers, ready to fight for whoever would pay them; and in time all that Athens
needed to do was to hire as many of these mercenaries as were wanted—or as she could afford. It also followed that professional generals were needed, since regular soldiers soon turn war into an art, and they had to be chosen for their skill and not at the whim of the people: no more generals like Cleon the sausage-seller were elected.

The earliest, and the most famous of the Greek mercenary armies was hired by Cyrus the Prince of Persia, who thought that he ought to have succeeded to the throne instead of his brother Artaxerxes. The general of the Greeks was a Spartan named Clearchus, and only he knew the object of the expedition. They set out from Asia Minor, with the rest of Cyrus's vast army, and only when they had marched for thousands of miles did they learn that they were going to Babylon: few Greeks would have dared to journey so far knowingly, for in Greece one is never far from the sea—and Babylon was three months' journey from it.

At last they drew near, and at the village of Cunaxa a great battle was fought in which the Greeks were victorious, but the Persian wing of the army was driven back, and Cyrus himself was slain. All his followers immediately fled, and the Ten Thousand Greeks were stranded in the middle of Asia, surrounded by foes. There was no chance of going back the way they had come, for this lay across a desert, and they had no provisions. But they knew that if they marched north for long enough they would reach the Black Sea one day.

They were encouraged to set out by the Persian satrap (or "governor") Tissaphernes, who had been a friend of Cyrus and had helped the Spartans in the Peloponnesian War. But after they had marched a little way Tissaphernes lured Clearchus and the other four generals to his tent and
The Battle of Cunaxa
had them all captured and sent to Artaxerxes, who promptly executed them. The Ten Thousand were now in desperate straits, without even a leader: but a young Athenian of good family, who had been a friend of Socrates quietly took charge of them, encouraged them and was ready to lead them on their journey of nearly a thousand miles. This was Xenophon, the historian, who afterwards wrote an account of the whole expedition and the long march to the north—one of the most exciting true stories in Greek literature.

At first they were attacked and harassed by Tissaphernes and the Persians; and then by the wild tribes through whose mountainous lands they were forced to journey. But at last after many months "they came", says Xenophon, writing in the third person, "to Mount Theches, and when the vanguard reached the summit a great cry arose. When Xenophon and those with him in the rear heard it, they thought that an enemy was attacking in front; but when the cry increased as fresh men came continually up to the summit, Xenophon thought it must be something more serious, and galloped forward to the front with his cavalry. When he drew near, he heard what the cry was—Θάλασσα! Thalassa! The Sea! The Sea!"

From Trapezus near where they reached the Black Sea the way home was easy for Xenophon and his army, for there was a Greek settlement there. But the fame of the March of the Ten Thousand spread rapidly through Greece, and all Hellenes were stirred with pride at the exploit of true Hellenes in the midst of a mighty nation of Barbarians; and from that day on the name of Persia no longer held any terrors for them.

The name of Sparta was also ceasing to carry its old meaning of invincible courage. A new power was rising in
Greece, that of Thebes, and the time was near when Athens would be coming to the aid of Sparta in an attempt to save the Peloponnesus from Theban domination. To begin with Thebes, though a regular enemy of Athens, had helped the Athenians against the tyranny of the Thirty and given refuge a to all who fled from them. Later, too, Athens came to the assistance of Thebes when it was invaded by Lysander and the Spartans; Lysander was killed, and the Spartans retreated beyond the Isthmus of Corinth: it was after this victory that the Long Walls were rebuilt between Athens and the Piraeus.

Peace was made in 386 B.C.—called “The King’s Peace” because Artaxerxes acted as arbiter. But Sparta was still breathing vengeance against Thebes, and with the aid of traitors in the city captured the citadel during the Feast of the Thesmophoria when there were only women in the acropolis. All of Thebes and the country round about was forced to surrender, and the Spartans set up a Council to rule just as cruel and grasping as the Thirty had been at Athens, with a guard of 1,500 Spartan soldiers to protect them.

Now fugitives began arriving at Athens, and were welcomed as kindly as the Athenian fugitives from the Thirty had been at Thebes, and soon a plot was formed to set free their city and kill the hated oligarchs who were ruling it. Seven brave men headed by Pelopidas stole into the city disguised as huntsmen and were hidden by a friend who was in the plot. Then Phyllidas, who was secretly on the side of freedom, though he pretended to be a friend of the oligarchs, gave a great dinner to the leaders of the Council, promising them such a feast as they had never before enjoyed and the love of the most beautiful women in Thebes.
The banquet was all that had been promised, and when the guests were properly drunk Archias the leader of the Council demanded to see the women.

"As soon as the attendants have been dismissed," answered Phyllidas. While this was being done, a messenger came in and handed a letter to Archias, who put it under the cushion on his couch exclaiming: "Pleasure tonight and business tomorrow!" (Next day the letter was found to contain a full account of the conspiracy). Then the seven beautiful women came in and sat down, one beside each of the leaders of the Council. All were wearing long veils, and as each raised her veil with her left hand, she drew a dagger with her right and plunged it into the heart of the oligarch who sat beside her. Then they flung off their disguises and revealed themselves as Pelopidas and his six companions.

They went straight to the houses of the leaders who had not been at the banquet and killed the rest of them. Then they went to find Epaminondas, leader of the democratic party in Thebes and best friend of Pelopidas, and he welcomed them and as soon as it was light called an Assembly of all the citizens who at once declared Thebes a democracy, with Pelopidas as one of their rulers and Epaminondas as their general, and moved to attack the Spartan garrison in the citadel. A party of Athenian volunteers arrived to help the revolutionaries, and to everyone's amazement the Spartans surrendered at once on condition their lives were spared.

With Epaminondas at their head, the Thebans became more and more powerful, and in time tried to become the leading state in Greece, if not its overlord. He defeated the Spartans at the Battle of Leuctra (371 B.C.) and drove them back into the Peloponnesus. As a result of this several
smaller cities in Arcadia, north of Sparta, set themselves up as independent states, with the new city of Megalopolis as the head of their league; and when Sparta tried to reconquer them, Epaminondas came to their aid with the Theban army, defeated the Spartans again and marched to within sight of Sparta. He also helped Messenia to throw off the Spartan rule, and after four hundred years of slavery to become a free and independent state once more. The Messenians built magnificent walls round their town (the ruins of which are still most imposing) and defied the Spartans, who never again managed to regain any power over them.

Athens sent help to Sparta, and so did Dionysius the Tyrant of Syracuse in Sicily, and in consequence Epaminondas was not able to conquer it completely; but its population dwindled, the Spartans forgot many of their old virtues and the few ruling families became sunk in luxury. Sparta was never again of any importance.

Thebes, however, did not long remain the strongest state in Greece; for Epaminondas, though a great general was a bad ruler. When he was killed in his last battle with the Spartans in 362 B.C., Thebes was at her highest peak; but soon afterwards her subject and allied states began to quarrel with her and among themselves and soon she sank back into the second rank, of little more importance than Corinth or than conquered Sparta.

During all this time Athens had been regaining and indeed surpassing her former importance; but not now as an imperial state and scarcely even as the political leader of Greece. Even in the Golden Age, Pericles had said that "Athens is the school of Hellas" by reason of her supremacy in poetry, in architecture and in most of the other arts, besides leading political thought in the best period
of her democracy. Now the great orator and writer Isocrates could say: "Athens has so distanced the rest of the world in power of thought and speech that her disciples have become the teachers of all other men. She has brought it to pass that the name of Hellene should be thought no longer a matter of race but a matter of intelligence; and should be given to those who participate in our culture rather than to the sharers of our common origin."

Even during the war literature had flourished, with Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes writing their plays right to the end of it, and Thucydides preparing his history. With the defeat of Athens and her slow recovery the life and spirit seemed to go out of tragedy, but the art of prose writing grew and reached its height. For prose came to take the place of verse: had Euripides lived fifty years later he might not have written plays, he would have been a philosopher and written treatises and essays like Plato.

The leader of the new movement was one of the most remarkable characters whom ancient Greece ever produced, the philosopher Socrates. He was born as early as 469 B.C., and was a sculptor by trade, and a brave soldier when called-up to fight in the war against Sparta. But during the middle and later part of his life he gave his whole time to teaching, gathering round him a group of younger men whom he taught to think and reason clearly and fearlessly, and to set honour and goodness and kindness before everything else. Among his disciples, which also included Xenophon the historian, the most famous was Plato, perhaps the greatest of all Greek philosophers; for he committed his thoughts to writing, while Socrates wrote nothing except a few minor poems of which only four odd lines have survived.
"Judge not of virtue by a lawyer's wit" is perhaps the best of them.

But the teachings of Socrates survive in the writings of Plato who wrote a number of dialogues in which Socrates is the main speaker, and though Plato puts the words into his mouth there is no reason to doubt that he had heard at least the substance of them from Socrates himself, and was reporting him accurately. It is hard to describe the greatness of Socrates or to explain why he was of such importance not only to Greece but to our own civilization today. He taught men for the first time how to think and reason for themselves; how to make a statement and then argue for and against it by reason and logic alone, to decide if it were true or false.

Socrates feared nobody and nothing: he would criticize all things in his search for truth, for the reason why men behaved as they did and how, logically, they should behave. He pointed out several unreasonable customs in the Athenian democracy, such as choosing magistrates by casting lots rather than by finding out who were most suitable to be elected; and he did not hesitate to argue about the gods of Olympus or to point out the folly of many Athenian superstitions. But he believed in the Divine Power, even if his reason could not accept most of the myths, and he always maintained that he was inspired by a power given of God and which must be obeyed no matter what the consequences were to himself.

This intellectual honesty brought about his death at last, though not until he was seventy years old. In the early days of the new democracy after the fall of the Thirty he was arrested and tried for not believing in the gods, and for leading young men astray by his teaching. But the real reason was the fear that he was a danger to the democracy,
which was so precious a treasure after the terrible rule of the Thirty tyrants: for the new leaders of the state knew how strong an influence Socrates had over the more intelligent Athenians, and he could not deny that Critias, the vilest of the Thirty, had been his friend and pupil, as well as the shameless and sacrilegious turncoat Alcibiades.

He was given fair warning of what was about to happen, for those in authority did not wish his death but only his exile, and expected him to seek safety in flight. But Socrates remained calmly in Athens to take his trial: for indeed he was an old man, and life was not worth living away from his friends and disciples. So he was tried and condemned to death by a majority of 60 out of 500. According to the law he could propose a lighter sentence, such as exile, and his judges could decide on one of the two. He might have saved his life by suggesting a reasonable penalty, but he merely proposed a ridiculously small fine, and so the sentence of death was passed.

He remained in prison thirty days before it was carried out, for the sacred ship sent each year to Delos had just set sail, and no criminal could be executed until it returned. His friends planned an escape for him, which no one would have tried to hinder, but he argued with them that if you dwell in a state and enjoy the benefits of its laws, you must also obey them: he had been justly tried and justly condemned, according to the laws of Athens, and it would be illegal and therefore wrong for him to escape.

So he remained in prison arguing as eagerly as ever with his friends; Plato gives a wonderful account of the last of these discussions which concerned the immortality of the soul, and tells how when the executioner arrived with the fatal cup of hemlock Socrates took it without the slightest sign of fear or sorrow: "I am persuaded that it is better
Socrates (from a bust in the British Museum)
for me to die now, and to be released from trouble," he said. Then he drank it as if it had been a bowl of wine and lay down calmly on the bed while the poison did its work, continuing to talk quietly to his friends.

"Crito," he said to one of them at length, "I owe a cock to Asclepius: do not forget to pay it for me." This was the usual offering made to the god of healing after recovering from an illness, which was what Socrates was doing—the fever called Life. "It shall be done," answered Crito. "Is there anything else that you wish?" But he made no answer, only shivered once, and lay back dead.

"Such was the end," wrote Plato, "of our friend, a man, I think, who was the wisest and justest, and the best man that I have ever known."

Although Athens thus killed her most famous son, his death was due to a great extent to the troubled times—and to his own insistence on remaining to receive the death penalty. But as democratic Athens grew more secure his followers, headed by Plato, came in time to be held in great honour, and were visited by those eager to learn from all over the Greek world. When Plato wrote his Republic, pointing out how he considered the ideal state should be governed, and many mistakes the Athenian democracy had made, there was no attempt to prosecute him—and indeed the Athenians were becoming more interested in the theory rather than in the practice of politics.

But at the beginning of the fourth century (Socrates died in 399 B.C.) it is easy to understand why the Old Comedy, which criticized the government and made fun of the popular leaders, ceased to be written. Aristophanes was forced to content himself with plays turning on literary criticism, like The Frogs, or on general topics like the rights of women—in his Women in Parliament (The
Ecclesiazusai), while his last play, Plutus, is a simply constructed story of how Plutus, the blind god of wealth, is found by a poor Athenian, taken to have his eyesight cured by Asclepius, and of all the amusing and unexpected things which happen when Plutus can see and so give wealth only to those who deserve it.

By this time the Chorus has ceased to be a part of the play, for in 388 B.C. Athens was too poor to afford the old fully-trained choruses: there are now only songs between the acts. And just as comedies were beginning to have more carefully made plots, so it was with tragedy: some of the plays by Euripides even cease to have tragic endings and become almost thrillers instead—Ion turns on the adventures of a young man who was exposed as a baby (unwanted children in the ancient world were left out on the mountain side to die, or to be picked up and adopted by childless couples) when he grows up and tries to find his real parents. Helena is just an escape story telling how Helen of Troy was rescued from the King of Egypt who wanted to marry her, by her real love Menelaus who was supposed to be dead and came in disguise to bring the news.

The next step was to invent stories about ordinary people of the day, instead of using the heroes and heroines of the myths and legends, to whom the sort of adventures which befell Ion or Helen could happen—letting them happen, in fact, to the kind of characters whom Aristophanes was using in his later plays such as Plutus. There were the cross old man, the comic slave, the old woman pretending to be young and trying to marry the young hero, and many more already waiting; and it was only necessary to give the young hero a situation in ordinary life similar to that which Menelaus had found in Egypt,
with the cross old man's daughter to win instead of Helen, while he himself turned out to be a rich man's son (like Ion), for a new kind of play to spring into life almost by itself.

The most famous writer of this "New Comedy" was Menander, an Athenian who wrote nearly a hundred plays which proved the most popular in all Greek drama for many centuries, were copied by the Romans and formed the basis of our own theatre. In spite of his fame ("Menander? Real life? Which of you has been copying the other?" was the high compliment of one Greek critic), not one of Menander's plays survived, and only famous quotations were known, such as "Those whom the gods love die young" and St. Paul's "Evil communications corrupt good manners".

But a manuscript of one complete play was discovered in Egypt a few years ago and has just been published for the first time. This is called Dyscolos, which may be translated The Angry Man, and surprisingly begins with the god Pan appearing from his shrine near Athens to tell the audience about Knemon the cross old man whom he decides to punish for the sake of his daughter who has no chance of finding a husband since her father hates all mankind. Pan says that he will bring her a handsome young man and see to it that all comes right in the end; and after this he goes back into his shrine and the real play begins—in which he does not appear again.

The play goes on to show how Sostratus and the girl fall in love, and what a dreadful time he has trying to see her and trying to persuade Knemon to allow the marriage. At last Knemon falls down a well and is rescued by Sostratus. After this he is forced to let the marriage take place, and decides that he will really be better off when he
has got rid of his daughter and can become a hermit. However he is allowed no peace, but is caught up in the preparations for the wedding, the servant and the cook force him to put on a wreath and join in the dance—which he does not find as unpleasant as he expected; and the play ends with the cook turning to the audience, as if to the rest of the merrymakers at the feast, to cry:

“And all of you, take part in our rejoicing;
The battle’s won—the old man’s seen the light.
Youths, maidens, fathers, your applause is due;
And Victory, friend of laughter, be ours too.”

After which it is pleasant to know that Menander did win the first prize with his play at the festival for which it was first entered in 317 B.C.

It is also interesting, now that we can at last read a complete play of Menander’s, to see how from the kinds of plots and characters which he invented grew the early Greek novels of which half a dozen survive. These were written several hundred years later, and are all love stories, but stories of plot and adventure too; the most famous, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, is a much overrated “pastoral” about shepherds and shepherdesses; but the best of them, *Clitophon and Leucippe* by Achilles Tatius, and the earliest, *Chaereas and Callirhoe* by Chariton (about A.D. 150), are thrilling adventure stories full of suspense and excitement and might almost have been written by some such modern master of romance as Rider Haggard.
Chapter Eight

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

During the years when the older Greek cities were continuing to quarrel among themselves, and Athens was trying to live more or less in peace and taking more interest in philosophy and rhetoric than in gaining political victories, a new power was rising in the north of Greece.

Macedonia was in some ways a left-over from the Homeric Age, for it was still ruled by kings who succeeded by right of birth—even if there was officially an election when each king died. But the king was an absolute monarch (though he had an Assembly to advise him) and ruled in rather primitive state with his band of nobles to make up his court.

Although states like Athens and Sparta and Thebes considered the Macedonians “outsiders”, they were genuine Hellenes, and as time went on they became anxious to be acknowledged as such and to share in the culture of the Hellenic world. Their kings were always eager to welcome any great thinker or writer of southern Greece who cared to visit them, and Euripides passed the last few years of his life in Macedonia and wrote one of his latest and finest plays The Bacchae for performance there.
But it was in the middle of the following century that Macedonia rose to become the chief power in Greece, under a great and far-sighted king called Philip (reigned 359-336 B.C.). He began by bringing Macedonia up to date, subdued and brought under control the wild tribes of Thrace and the other countries at the north of Greece, and founded the city of Philippi to be near the great gold mines of Mount Pangaeus from which he drew the necessary wealth to pay for his great schemes.

Then he began to interfere very cunningly in the affairs of southern Greece, and was soon in control of the country as far south as Thermopylae, and had several allies even in the Peloponnesus. He was particularly anxious to make friends with Athens which he looked upon with great reverence as the centre of Hellenic civilization and culture.

Athens was still too poor to embark on a big war, and most of the Athenians had quite given up any desire to own an empire or possess more than a big enough navy to guard their trading interests, particularly the corn supplies from the Black Sea ports on which they depended. They were anxious to remain at peace, and to continue as the most important state in Greece by virtue not of arms but of culture and literary achievements.

Unfortunately one of their greatest advances in literature at the time was in the art of rhetoric—the art of using language in the best possible way to persuade or influence others. Young men came from all over Greece to learn rhetoric at Athens, for in the Greek democracies the most useful asset for any citizen was to be able to speak well and persuasively in public: whether in philosophical argument such as that in which Socrates and Plato delighted, or in the law-courts where any citizen might suddenly be called upon to defend himself, or in the
public assembly where a clever orator might guide the policy of his city.

The first and wisest of these rhetoricians was Isocrates who was born during the lifetime of Pericles and died at the age of ninety-eight after Philip had conquered all Greece at the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. He did not practice as an orator, but wrote what might be described as political pamphlets; in them he enlarged on the folly of the Greek cities fighting one another, and urged them to unite and found some sort of Greek nation.

But the greatest orator of all was Demosthenes who practised not only the art of rhetoric but the art of public-speaking; and his superb orations still survive to be read and admired. But they are admirable only for their superb style: Demosthenes dreamed of the glories of a past age and was quite out of touch with the present state of Greece or what was best or even possible for the Athenians.

So he delivered oration after oration urging the Athenians to fight against the horrible Barbarian of Macedonia who was trying to enslave their glorious city; and when a more sensible orator called Aeschines tried to point out the untruth and stupidity of what Demosthenes was saying, his rival sued him on a false charge of taking bribes to betray Athens to Philip, and spoke so well that he very nearly succeeded in having Aeschines condemned. Then he urged the Athenians to make an alliance with the Thebans and go to war against the great hordes which Philip was leading down into southern Greece. They were, as usual, swayed by the skilful rhetoric of Demosthenes, and marched against the Macedonians, who defeated them utterly at Chaeronea not far from Thebes.

To show his reverence and respect for Athens, Philip set free all his prisoners without ransom, did not invade
Attica, and sent his son Alexander as an ambassador. Peace was concluded and when, having subdued the Peloponnesus (including Sparta—which he also spared the indignity of conquest) Philip proposed a great war of Greece against Persia, Athens promised both men and ships, like a dutiful vassal of the Overlord of all Hellas.

Unfortunately Philip was murdered just then in a private quarrel: but his son Alexander was ready to carry on his work, and was soon to prove himself far greater than his father, and one of the greatest and most inspired leaders of all time.

Like his father Alexander was anxious to prove that he was more Greek than the Greeks of the older states, and thought of himself as carrying the message of Hellenism throughout the known world and beyond. He had as his tutor the greatest “all-round” scholar and thinker of the Classical Age—perhaps of any age—Aristotle; and he lived up to his teachings. But he was also the supreme example of the Greek ideal of physical fitness: while he was still under Aristotle’s tutelage he “broke” and rode the noble wild horse Bucephalus which no one else at the Macedonian court dared approach.

On Philip’s death, the states subject to Macedonia showed signs of rebelling. In southern Greece Thebes led the way, and Demosthenes persuaded the Athenians to support them, though fortunately no definite action had been taken before Alexander arrived unexpectedly with his superbly trained army and destroyed Thebes. Demosthenes had sworn to the Athenians that Alexander was dead: for the young king had first to conquer the Thracians who had at once revolted. To do this he had to cross the mountains by a pass where the Thracians were waiting at the top of a hill with numbers of heavy wooden
war-chariots which they were prepared to push on to the steep slope to rush down and crash into the invaders. But Alexander instructed his men to fall on their knees and hold their shields overlapping like tiles on a roof: they did this, and the chariots rattled over their heads and not a man was hurt.

The Athenians waited in consternation for Alexander’s attack. But instead, after granting freedom to all the cities which Thebes had enslaved, he merely sent to Athens demanding that Demosthenes and a few other agitators should be given up to him. “Would you give up your sheep-dogs to the wolf?” cried Demosthenes when Alexander’s message was delivered to the Assembly. But the Athenians were not to be swayed by his rhetoric this time, and would have surrendered him had not Alexander with his usual generosity said that he trusted them to pass judgment on their own offenders. Apparently Demosthenes managed once again to talk himself out of any punishment.

A far more eccentric Athenian whom Alexander met while settling the affairs of Greece was Diogenes the philosopher who had been noted for his luxury and extravagance until he had been converted—after which he lived in a tub (actually a big earthenware jar) and made cynical remarks such as blaming astronomers for looking at the stars and falling over the stones in front of them. “I am Alexander the Great,” said the young conqueror as he paused in front of the philosopher’s strange abode. “I am Diogenes the Cynic,” was the answer. “Is there anything in the world I can do for you?” asked the master of millions. “Yes,” answered the philosopher, “you’re keeping the sun off me, you can stand out of the way.” Diogenes took no more notice of his famous visitor, who
remarked as he turned away: "If I were not Alexander, I wish I were Diogenes!"

However, he was Alexander, and he felt that his mission in life was to conquer Persia and avenge on the Great King of the day, another Darius, the invasion of Greece and destruction of Athens by Xerxes and the earlier Darius. This was to be the end of the great war between Europe and Asia of which the Siege of Troy had been the first great event—and he, Alexander, the descendant of Achilles, was to achieve it.

With an army of 30,000 foot soldiers and 5,000 cavalry he crossed the Hellespont, and having paid his respects to the tomb of Achilles at Troy, he marched against the Persians and defeated them at the Battle of the Granicus. Then he moved down the coast of Asia Minor, freeing the Greek cities which had once been Ionia, before turning inland to receive submission from city after city until he came to Gordion.

Here Gordius the first king had, in legendary times, tied up the cart in which he had come to the city with a knot made in the traces of cornel bark that concealed the ends and was so cunningly fastened that no one could undo it. He had also uttered a prophecy that whoever untied it should rule over all Asia, which Alexander was particularly anxious to fulfil. But after a few moments he saw that he could not possibly untie it, so he drew his sword and divided it at a blow.

Having cut the Gordian knot, Alexander led his army down to the coast at Issus in the corner of the Mediterranean near Cyprus where Darius himself was waiting with the main Persian army. Alexander attacked so furiously and with such skill that after a while Darius took fright and fled from the battle. When they saw their
king running away the Persians turned and fled also, and
Alexander gained another great victory.

Instead of following Darius, he marched south through
Syria and Palestine and besieged Tyre, the most important
port in the Persian Empire. Tyre was built on a rocky
island a quarter of a mile from the coast, and Alexander
had few ships, since the Athenians had listened to Demos-
thenes and not sent their fleet to help him. But he set to
work with tremendous energy, built a causeway from the
mainland to the island and mounted his siege engines
(catapults had been invented early in the century by
Dionysius the Greek Tyrant of Syracuse) to batter a hole
in the walls. In another place his ships hauled up rocks
out of the sea with big windlasses so that they could get
near enough to scale the wall. At last a section was torn
down and the Greek forces led by Alexander himself
poured through the gap and took the city.

After this there was no more to fear from the sea-power
of Persia and her subjects the Phoenicians whose navy
Alexander made his own. He then proceeded through
Palestine on his triumphant way and came to Egypt where
the Persian satrap surrendered without striking a blow,
and the native Egyptians welcomed him as a deliverer.
For Alexander made a point of honouring the gods of any
country which he conquered, recognizing, like Herodotus,
"Behind all creeds the Spirit that is One", and was quite
ready to sacrifice to that manifestation of God which in
Egypt was represented by Isis, and to treat with due
respect the holy bull Apis, holder of the spirit of Osiris—
unlike the Persians who had drowned the Apis-bull and
told the Egyptians to worship a jackass instead.

Alexander remained in Egypt for some time, and
founded there the great city of Alexandria which was soon
to become the centre of the Greek world. Then, having gathered reinforcements for his army, he set out in the direction of Babylon hearing that Darius had collected another vast host for a final battle.

Alexander reached the Euphrates in August 331 B.C., crossed it by a bridge of boats, without the Persians knowing in time to attack (he had an excellent secret service run by the Jews whom he treated particularly kindly) and found them waiting for him on the Plain of Gaugamela in a carefully prepared position with an open space in front which they had cleared of bushes and rocks so that their cavalry and chariots (with scythes on their wheels) could charge the Greeks more easily.

"Why not attack at night?" suggested Alexander's general Parmenio anxiously.

"I do not steal victory," answered Alexander, and made his own preparations for the battle with great care and detailed instructions.

When day came Alexander did not wait for the Persians to begin the battle, but charged at the head of his cavalry, swerving to the right in an attempt to get round the enemy or draw them from the battlefield which they had cleared so carefully. Seeing this Darius ordered his scythed chariots to advance. But Alexander had arranged his troops with them in view: as they rushed towards the Greeks they were met by volleys of arrows; then the ranks opened to let them through, and the lightly-armed hillsmen fell upon them, catching the horses by their reins, leaping into the chariots and flinging the drivers under their own scythes.

As the Persian army rolled on behind the chariots, Alexander swerved in with his cavalry and cut them in two, while his special regiment of heavily armed Mace-
donians charged so fiercely in the direction of the Great King himself who was stationed in the middle of the Persian lines that, fearing death or capture, Darius turned his chariot and again fled from the field. After this the heart was out of the Persians, before long they too turned and ran.

Alexander hastened on to Babylon, expecting that he would have to lay siege to its great walls. But the satrap who held it for Darius opened the gates to the conqueror, and then marched out to receive him, led by the priests of Bel who hailed him as a deliverer: for the Persians had once been the conquerors, and had made a mock of the gods of Babylon also, being themselves fire-worshippers.

The Persians made their last stand in a pass known as the Persian Gates which a brief attack showed Alexander that it was impossible to take. But his spies stood him in good stead, and showed him a difficult and dangerous path over the mountains. Although the path was covered in snow and ran along the edge of alarming chasms, Alexander led most of his force, including the cavalry by this seemingly impossible way, having instructed the remainder under one of his generals to attack the pass from the front as soon as he heard the Macedonian trumpets sounding from behind the Persian lines.

All turned out exactly as he had planned. The Persian sentinels ran for their lives when they saw Alexander coming, and did not even warn the main army, which was taken completely by surprise, attacked from both sides at once, and almost completely destroyed. Alexander then proceeded to the palace which had belonged to Xerxes, removed all the treasure stored in it, and destroyed it by fire as the just punishment for the destruction of Athens a century and a half before.

He then followed the fleeing Darius, and came up with
him near the south end of the Caspian Sea; but only to find him dying by the roadside having been stabbed by one of his own satraps called Bessus. Alexander was only able to raise the dying King’s head on his own knee and hold a cup of water to his lips while he assured him that not only should he have royal burial, but that his family should be treated as became their lofty rank.

Later he captured Bessus, chained him naked by the roadside while the whole army marched by (the lowest shame to which a Persian could be subjected) and then had him executed in the cruel eastern fashion.

Alexander was now lord of Asia Minor as far as the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, which was as far as any Greek knowledge of geography extended. When he set out again on his famous march to India he went as much as an explorer as a conqueror—and more than both as a missionary to carry the message of Hellenism to the world’s very end. Yet he did not try to make all his new subjects and allies into imitation Greeks: herein lay the greatness which sets him apart from all other conquerors. His dream was to unite East and West, to break down the division between Greek and Barbarian, and let each share of the best things which the other had to offer. “East is East and West is West—and never the twain shall meet”: but if Alexander the Great had lived long enough that line might never have been written.

When Persia and Babylonia had been settled under firm and just rule, without departing too far from their own ways of life, Alexander marched on towards the East, conquered the wild tribes of Afghanistan, and came down through the Khyber Pass into India. Only one king offered him serious resistance, and that was Porus who ruled the land between the Indus and the Sutlej rivers, and now
advanced against him with an army of thirty or forty thousand including a great array of elephants which struck terror into the Greek cavalry.

Porus tried to prevent Alexander from crossing the Hydaspes River (now called the Jhelum); but Alexander pretended every night that he was about to cross, sounding trumpets and flashing lights by the river so that the Indians stood to arms night after night in vain. When they were off their guard, Alexander made the usual row in the usual place on a stormy night, but actually crossed with most of his army about sixteen miles farther up stream, quite unseen by the Indians.

By daylight he engaged the great army which Porus had drawn up with the elephants in front and the cavalry at either side. With the aid of speed and skill Alexander attacked once again on a slant, swung right round the Indian army and charged in from behind. His archers concentrated on the elephants who were driven mad by the pain of the arrows and rushed hither and thither bringing havoc to their own side. Porus, unlike Darius, did not fly but continued fighting on his elephant in the fore front of the battle until all was lost and he himself wounded. Then he turned slowly away and rode from the field. But Alexander sent messengers after him, and he returned to speak with his conqueror.

Riding out to meet him, Alexander was impressed by the handsome and dignified old man, and asked how he wished to be treated.

"Like a king," answered Porus simply.

"For my own sake I will certainly do that," said Alexander. "But ask something for yourself."

"What you promise contains all that I could ask," answered Porus.
Alexander lived up to these kingly sentiments. He not only gave Porus back his kingdom (to be held in tribute to Macedonia) but enlarged its boundaries and left him to keep the peace on this the eastern border of his empire.

For Alexander could go no farther. He wished to cross India, having heard from Porus of the River Ganges which flowed out on the other side—where he believed the world’s end must be—but his Greek followers refused to go farther and begged with tears to be taken home.

So Alexander turned regretfully back to Babylon, exploring the coast regions on the way and subduing many wild tribes. On reaching the centre of his empire he set to work on his great scheme for fusing East and West together, training Indian and Persian troops in the Greek manner, founding cities with mixed inhabitants, and encouraging his Macedonians to marry Persian wives, as he himself did.

But he was planning new conquests and had all his forces assembled to march against Arabia, when he fell ill of a fever. Soon the rumour got about that he was dead, and his faithful Macedonians rushed to the palace in despair. He was too ill to speak to them, but at his wish they filed past his bed while he recognized and greeted each with a glance.

He died next day, June 13th, 323 B.C., in the thirty-third year of his age. “Twelve years had sufficed him to conquer western Asia, and to leave an impress upon it which centuries would not obliterate.” Although his empire fell to pieces after his death, that wonderful brief life had not been lived in vain: for his greatest conquests were conquests of the mind. He had taken Hellenism from the little Greek states which were showing themselves so
unworthy of their great heritage, and given it to the world.

Alexander had left Athens, the shrine of Hellenic culture, to pursue her own way, and as soon as the news came of his death they showed how unworthy they were of his trust. Urged on by Demosthenes, the Athenians declared war on Macedonia, and marched north, being joined by several other states on the way, seized the Pass of Thermopylae and besieged Antipater the Regent of Macedonia in the hill city of Lamia nearby.

But soon reinforcements relieved him and he went north to collect a sufficient army to deal with the revolt. The Greeks had no chance against him, for as usual the various states engaged could not agree among themselves, and even the Athenians had no competent general.

Antipater marched south in the summer of 322 B.C., and state after state submitted. As he was preparing to invade Attica, having few of Alexander’s scruples, the Athenians sent envoys to beg for peace and forgiveness. Antipater spared Athens on certain conditions: the first of these was a Macedonian garrison in the fortress of the Piraeus to keep order in future. The second was to put an end to the futile democracy which any clever orator had been able to sway; it was replaced by a limited democracy of less than half the citizens—householders with a high enough income to have a real stake in the community who would not use their votes rashly or be influenced by promises which could not possibly be carried out.

It was the next best thing to Plato's suggestion for his ideal republic of a class of Guardians who were trained to govern both by upbringing and heredity—an ideal which would probably not have worked, since it could not have made sure that all the Guardians acted in perfect honour,
The death of Demosthenes
and could not prevent a genius rising and taking complete power, whether for good or ill.

The third condition was that Demosthenes and two others should be given up to justice. The other two fled to the island of Aegina but were captured and executed; Demosthenes sought sanctuary in the Temple of Poseidon. Soldiers were sent to arrest him under the leadership of Archias who had once been an actor at Athens, and whom Demosthenes knew well. He could not be seized in the holy place, so Archias promised that if he came out and gave himself up he would not be harmed.

“Archias,” answered Demosthenes, “you never moved me by your acting, and your promises sound just as insincere.”

This annoyed Archias, who had always been very proud of his acting, and he began to threaten terrible punishments.

“Ah,” said Demosthenes, “you are no longer acting a part: you are speaking like a Macedonian. So stand there while I write a letter of farewell to my family, and then you may take me where you will.”

This seemed fair enough, and Archias stood waiting while Demosthenes wrote the letter, biting the handle of his pen as was his custom.

“Now!” said Demosthenes suddenly. “Lead me out of the temple while I am still alive, for this is a sacred place.”

Archias ran forward as Demosthenes rose to his feet, but before he could reach him he staggered and fell dead in front of the altar. For the pen had been hollow and filled with poison which Demosthenes, knowing that he was doomed to a cruel death, had sucked out and swallowed while pretending to write his last letter.
Chapter Nine

FROM THEN TILL NOW

Although it is usual to end histories of ancient Greece with the death of Alexander the Great—and space makes it necessary to end this history there also—neither Greece nor its history came to a sudden stop. But in the ancient world the centre of importance was shifting, and Athens was never again to play an important part in the world.

Alexander's empire soon broke up into separate kingdoms under his generals and their descendants. Ptolemy reigned in Egypt, and under him and his successors Alexandria soon became the literary centre of the world, as well as one of the greatest and wealthiest of its cities.

The literature of Alexandria, though written in the purest Classical Greek, never reached the heights attained by Athens in her Golden Age—or by the Mycenaean leftover which produced Homer. Artificial epics were written in conscious imitation of Homer, and at their best these are very good, surpassed only by Virgil in Rome and our own Milton. Perhaps the finest is the story of the Argonauts written by Apollonius of Rhodes, who did not try too hard to imitate Homer, and developed the character of Medea to make a love-story in a way that Homer would never
have done. It was at Alexandria, too, that most of the Greek novels were written, and some at least of the pastoral poems of Theocritus of Syracuse who, however, knew his shepherds and shepherdesses as real people on the pleasant flower-carpeted hill-sides of Sicily.

Alexandria went in for scholarship and literary criticism too, and collected the most famous library of the ancient world, consisting of 90,000 works in 400,000 volumes. This was destroyed during the Arab invasion in A.D. 651, but remains of the old papyrus volumes still turn up from time to time in Egypt: Menander’s Dyscolos is part of one of them.

In Greece itself the old city-states continued to exist under Macedonian rule, and from time to time there were rebellions and one city or another broke free for shorter or longer times. In 279 B.C. the Greeks showed something of their old spirit. A horde of Celtic barbarians, the Gauls, poured down from the north to the number of nearly 200,000, and began to overrun Greece.

Once again the city-states forgot their differences and remembered that they were Hellenes first of all. Headed by the Athenians (but with no allies from the Peloponnesus) they held the Pass of Thermopylae for as long as possible, and when that was taken retreated to defend Delphi. The Oracle very wisely told the country people to leave their food and wine behind in their houses when they fled to the walls of Delphi for protection; and the Gauls overate themselves and drank all that they could lay hands on. When they were in a bad condition for fighting the Greek army attacked them, they were seized with a sudden panic and having slaughtered a great number of each other they fled northwards and finally crossed into Asia Minor where Galatia was named after them.
Another kingdom carved out of Alexander's empire, that of Syria, came to be ruled by Antiochus who, about 200 B.C. tried to "liberate" Greece from the Macedonians so that he himself could rule it and the better defy the Romans who by now were rising to power. Some cities sided with him, but the Romans came to the aid of the rest, turned back Antiochus at Thermopylae in 191 B.C. and drove him out of Greece, to defeat him at the Battle of Magnesia the following year.

Greece came under Roman control, though still left to manage her own affairs. But another rebellion in 146 B.C. ended in the complete destruction of Corinth, and Greece became shortly afterwards a Roman province.

Under her new masters she was well ruled and honourably treated, for the Romans acknowledged their debt to Greece, and many of them felt towards Athens almost as Alexander had done.

In about the year A.D. 100 Pliny, the famous Roman letter-writer, instructs a friend who is about to become the Roman governor of Greece: "Reflect that you are sent into the Province of Achaea, into that true, pure and ancient Greece in which culture, learning, even agriculture itself, according to common opinion, had their origin; that you are sent to regulate the State of Free Cities—that is, men who are most properly free, who have preserved their natural rights by their virtue, by merit, friendship and the ties of religion. Revere the gods of the country, and the presence of those deities. Reverence its ancient glory, that venerable age which is to be honoured in men and in cities is also sacred. Give due honour to their antiquity, their heroic actions, and even to their legends. Take nothing from the dignity, the freedom, even the vanity of any person there. Remember it is the land which sent us our
Constitution—it is not like other Provinces which received our laws by force of conquest; no, it gave us its laws at our own request. Remember that it is Athens to which you are going.

By this time Athens had become more of a university than a state, for like most Greek cities it grew smaller and poorer, while its citizens went abroad to seek their fortunes. But as such it was still sought by those who would learn philosophy and rhetoric, and the old plays were still revived in the theatre, while the Roman millionaire Herodes Atticus built a new odeon for song recitals and spoken verse.

St. Paul came to Athens on one of his missionary journeys and spoke on the Areopagus to the learned men of the city and all those who would listen to the supreme message which he brought to them. But the spiritual pride and independence of the Athenians was still strong in them, and the descendants of the great seekers after truth turned away the greatest Truth of all when it was brought to them.

Only in Corinth, newly founded by the Romans, did St. Paul make converts, and in Philippi and Thessalonica, at the very north of Greece. But the country as a whole clung stubbornly to its argumentive philosophies and its outworn religion. In the year A.D. 360, however, when Julian, the last Roman Emperor to struggle against Christianity and attempt to revive the old religion, sent to Delphi for a message of encouragement the last recorded utterance of the thousand year old Oracle was one of farewell:

“Say to the king that the beautiful fane hath fallen asunder,
Phoebus no more hath a sheltering roof nor a sacred cell,
And the holy laurels are broken and wasted, and hushed is the wonder
Of water that spake as it flowed from the deeps of the Delphian well.”*

The old religion died out slowly in the lonelier parts of Greece, though the later Romans did their best to destroy not only it but the Greek language also and as much as possible of the old stories and traditions. But the priests of the Greek Church refused to obey these Roman commands and kept the old language alive among the people, and with great skill converted the worship of many gods into the reverence that it was correct to give to the Saints in general and to your particular Patron Saint in particular. It was not by chance that St. Demetrius (of whom nothing definite is known) received special honour at Eleusis when the worship of Demeter came to an end. But the Olympic Games were suppressed by royal command in A.D. 394, and the schools of philosophy at Athens were closed in A.D. 529.

In the seventh century, however, when Constantinople (the old Byzantium) became the centre of what was left of the Roman Empire, Greek became the official language again, and Byzantine scholars did their best to collect and edit the old Greek authors. In Constantinople the old Hellenism made its last stand right through the Dark Ages; Greek literature was read and appreciated, and continued to be written. Many theological and historical works appeared, but also novels in verse or prose, and even short epics and narrative poems on purely pagan

subjects: as late as A.D. 1150 Joannes Tzetzes wrote an epic *Iliaca* about the fall of Troy, while Cometas called wistfully to a lost age:

"Dear Pan, abide with me
Thy pipe upon thy lips,
For Echo o'er the shining lea
Still to thy music trips."

But Greece itself was suffering invasion and conquest. The Byzantine army drove out the Bulgarian invaders, and the Emperor Basil II was able to give thanks for the victory in 1018 in the church into which the Parthenon had been converted.

In the following century, however, the Normans who had conquered Sicily, began to invade Greece; and a crusading army attacked Constantinople and broke up the Byzantine Empire.

These Frankish conquerors overran Greece and built castles at many strong points, such as the old Acropolis at Corinth, another at Argos, on the hill of Mistra above Sparta, and at Monemvasia, "the Gibraltar of Greece", the great trading point which gave its name to the Greek wine which the French could only pronounce as "Malvoisie" and the English as "Malmsey". The Duke of Athens, the Prince of Morea (the Frankish name for the Peloponnesus) and the Lord of Corinth ruled their little kingdoms well and fairly, according to the feudal system of their day, and their subjects grew rich and prosperous, were protected from invaders and pirates, and were allowed to live their own lives, provided they paid their taxes.

The Byzantine emperors regained control over much of Greece by the end of the fourteenth century, and made the
Frankish town of Mistra the capital of the Morea: much of it stands to this day, with its castle on the hill and several beautiful churches containing superb mosaics and wall-paintings.

But in 1453 the Turks conquered Constantinople and overran all Greece. The last of the Byzantines fled to the west, carrying precious manuscripts of the ancient Greek authors into Italy and other countries, to help the Renaissance, the “Re-birth” of classical learning, which produced the great flowering of literature in Italy, France and England, following the intoxication of the sudden and wonderful rediscovery of the Classics and of the old Hellenic culture.

Greece itself sank into slavery under the Turks, though the language and traditions were kept alive by the clergy whom the Turkish rulers made no attempt to persecute. Turkish wars with the Venetians had little effect on the Greeks themselves, though some damage was done—amongst other things the blowing up of the Parthenon in 1687 when the Turks were using it as a store for gunpowder, into which the Venetian admiral Morosini landed a shell which caused it to explode.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Turkish rule was growing weak and inefficient, and the Greeks were preparing themselves for independence. They had never sunk into barbarism, for the energetic clergy continued to educate them to a reasonably high level, and now they were founding schools and academies.

In 1821 the War of Independence broke out, the Greeks receiving help from England, France and Russia, and the final victory at Navarino (20 October 1827) made it possible for Greece to become a nation once more.

Her recovery from centuries of barbarous domination
has been slow, and the ancient Greek characteristic of political excitability which played havoc with the old city-states still lingers on. But modern Greece is again a nation of sea-farers and a centre of freedom. In this century she has become a great and prosperous country, building cities, turning again to learning and literature, and now fully conscious of the glories of her heritage: both the legacy of her history and literature out of which grew our Western civilization, and the visible memorials of those ancient days and deeds—from the cyclopaean walls of Mycenae to the gleaming columns of the Parthenon set against the eternal beauty of the hills and valleys of Greece.
"A book that is shut is but a block"

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