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Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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THE GHOST DANCE: ECSTASY (After Mooney)

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GREEK LITERATURE AND THE MODERN WORLD

BY C. F. CASTLE

WHEN there is so much literature in the world it is desirable to study the best. It will hardly be questioned that there is no greater, more varied, or delightful literature than Greek. No other literature except English will compare with it. Some of the most learned Englishmen frankly admit that Greek is still the best literature. At any rate, it must be given the second place, if not the first.

Certainly the Homeric poems are unsurpassed in the field of epic poetry. To be sure, there is other Greek epic poetry, and great epic poetry in other languages, but it is unequal to the Homeric poetry in the simple, natural, rapid, graceful, noble. The Greeks developed and perfected this variety of literature. Virgil and Milton owe much to Homer. The elements of many other branches of literature are found in Homer: for example, love songs, marriage songs, vintage songs, oratory of all kinds, dirges, comic and tragic scenes, dialogue which is the essence of drama. So dramatic is the Iliad that it seems strange that tragedy and comedy were not developed sooner. But eventually the Greeks developed and perfected the drama, as well as the theater, and over forty Greek plays are still extant—the greatest drama till Shakespeare. Even to-day plays of the ancient Greeks are reproduced in American colleges, universities, and theatres. In translation, at least, many know something of the grandeur of Aeschylus, the charm of the artistic and graceful Sophocles, and the human Euripides, the poet of the common people.

In his comedies Aristophanes caricatured distinguished people and events of his day, to the delight of the men of the street. Political policies and radical ideas and their authors he ridiculed

much as comic papers do to-day. He even made sport of women's rights, and declared communism to be impractical. These topics were discussed in his day.

The Romans borrowed the Greek plays and imitated them. The French and Germans used them, with modifications to suit their ideas and time. Even Shakespeare is indebted to the Greek drama, especially to Euripides and his successors.

All kinds of oratory, of which the elements were found in the Homeric poems, were brought to perfection by the Greeks, culminating in the world's greatest orator, Demosthenes. The greatest of these masterpieces of oratory are still the prized possession of learning—especially for those who can read them in the original Greek.

There were songs in the Homeric poems. With the development of music and the use of the lyre of seven strings, the composition of these songs became an art, and lyric poetry was created. Famous authors of lyric poems arose. Songs were *sung* to the lyre, as distinguished from the epic or *spoken* poetry of Homer and other epic poets. As Hume says: "The number of varieties of Grecian song recorded under distinct titles amounts to upwards of fifty." The names of the Greek lyric poets are too numerous to mention; but Pindar was the greatest of them among men, and Sappho, the greatest woman poet that ever lived, was a singer of lyric songs, especially love songs. The meters of Horace's odes are those of the Greeks. Lyric poets ever since have imitated the Greeks more or less. As in epic poetry, so in lyric, the Greeks have never been excelled, and a large number of their lyric poems are still extant.

Literary history began with Herodotus, and his history of the world is still more interesting than that of Wells. Thucydides was the first great scientific historian, a model in speech and methods for all subsequent historians. Roosevelt loved to read his history while on vacations. Isocrates was a teacher who wrote remarkable political essays, and to him Cicero and other writers of fine prose are indebted.

Plato and Aristotle were philosophers who remain unequalled even at this late day. In his dialogues Plato developed the ideas of his master Socrates, who was devoted to the State and desired to make its citizens better by educating them so that they could distinguish between right and wrong. In the famous "Republic",

Plato's ideal State is described. Those who have never read the "Republic" will be astonished at the ideas there advocated—communism, for example, and more radical in some respects than that advocated by modern communists, though he realized before his death that it was impractical. He also suggested eugenics.

Though not a writer, Socrates was the greatest of the Greeks, and Plato's account of his trial, condemnation, and death is one of the most sublime scenes ever described. It still forms one of the most precious possessions of humanity.

Aristotle was a voluminous writer, as well as a profound thinker. He was called the wisest man, because his books on so many different subjects constituted a library of universal knowledge in which one could find anything known, as in a modern encyclopaedia, so varied were his studies. Whether poetry, politics, metaphysics, plants and animals, or the science of correct thinking were the subject under discussion, Aristotle was the final authority in antiquity. He was referred to, in medieval times, to settle all sorts of questions, as the Homeric poems among the ancient Greeks were constantly cited, as a sort of Greek Bible, as the final word in disputes. His most valuable achievement, even to this day, is that he was the father of logic, a subject still taught largely as he worked the science out.

There remains one branch of literature in which the superiority of Greek genius has never been challenged: bucolic or pastoral poetry. In this field a Sicilian Greek, Theocritus, so excelled that all others who have attempted this kind of poetry since his day have simply been imitators of him, or imitators of his imitators. After a thousand years in which the deeds of feudal lords and ladies, kings, queens and aristocrats had been extolled in literature, comic scenes of rural life were charmingly and humorously treated in his idyls (little pictures) by the last brilliant literary genius of the ancient Greeks—Theocritus. Thus in a blaze of glory expired the literary genius of the Greeks. His idyls are brief songs designed to please, comedy of country life, in monologue or dialogue, in which some herdsman watches his flocks of sheep or goats as he reclines on some sloping hill beneath a shade tree and looks down into the Sicilian sea; and sings of the dusky maid who has challenged him to prove his love for her by bringing to her a red apple from the top of the highest apple tree she can point out. Or perhaps she spurns his advances, saying "Begone! Away from

me! Being a herdsman, do you wish to kiss a city girl? Don't you, even in a dream, wish to kiss my beautiful lips? How you look! How you talk? Your lips are dirty! Your hands are black! Away from me! Don't soil me!"

Theocritus went to Alexandria and was the court poet at the palace of one of the Ptolemies, king of Egypt. In an idyl of some length he describes two ladies, representatives of the "four hundred" in Alexandria (one may say) as they make their toilet and chatter in a city home in that metropolis of the ancient world. They leave the house and go through the crowded street, pushed by the throngs of people and nearly run over by the king's war horses as they make their way to the royal palace. Reaching it at last they squeeze through the crowd and enter the palace, admire the embroideries they see there, and finally listen to a famous singer, whom the queen has engaged to sing for her guests a song of Venus and Adonis. Thus we have a fine picture of life in Alexandria. Though the idyls of Theocritus are over two thousand years old, they are still as delightful and interesting as ever. A prominent professor of Greek in an Eastern college once said that when he failed to interest his classes in other Greek literature he always succeeded in interesting them when he put them to reading Theocritus.

What can be more practical for study than the best that man has felt or thought, as recorded in literature, if Socrates is right in saying that one should not care for his own things before caring for himself, how he should be as good and prudent as possible?

But it will be objected at once that students of Greek get mostly grammar and language, and scarcely a taste of literature, when they study Greek. The charge used to be true many years ago, but is no longer so in the best institutions. Grammar is no longer the end to be sought, but only the means to the end, which is reading and appreciating the literature. After six or eight weeks of preparation in the rudiments of the language, Xenophon or Homer may be read, and are read with pleasure. Vocabulary is most needed, and the teacher will help the student to acquire that, avoiding needless linguistic and grammatical lore, and selecting for translation the most interesting parts of the authors read. Besides, much more of the author selected is now read than used to be; not simply scraps, but large portions,

some carefully, and larger portions cursorily at sight, if not otherwise. Vocabulary is acquired by the reading of more of the author, and he is understood better. The way to an appreciation of Greek is by reading much of it. This is now the practice.

Moreover, solely from the standpoint of language, the Greek language is unsurpassed in precision, exactness, diversity, and beauty of expression. That is what makes it valuable as a language study. "People object to Greek, not because it is Greek, but because it is hard," as President Hadley once said. But if it is hard at the beginning, it is more worth while when one reaches the literature, and the increase in interest in what is read more than pays for the extra labor. Greek is a nice instrument—"the most beautiful instrument of speech that man has ever possessed," as Professor Breasted has said—and must be handled nicely. As a disciplinary study it is not excelled. Generations of scholars prove it. But, it will be objected, discipline can be obtained in other language. To be sure, one can get discipline in many ways. It is desirable, however, to study a language belonging to our own family. To know ourselves, we need to know our ancestors, whether of family, or those from whom we have inherited much, as the Greeks.

The Greeks were the most highly intellectual people the world has ever known. Things of the mind interested them most. Their highest endeavor was not business, nor the accumulation of goods, but superiority in beautiful expression, in mental equipment, in exquisite form. Education meant training in music, physical exercise, and especially mental equipment; ability to think and to find out the truth, rather than special training for an occupation. Socrates "went down town" to meet people with whom he could talk in his search for the truth, as Herodotus traveled not simply to see the world and record what *he* saw but to talk with people who had seen more of the world than he had. Socrates compares mental training to the bodily in the Memorabilia: those who do not exercise or train the mind become like the athletes who neglect their bodily training.

While it is true that life is richer, broader, more abundant to-day because we know more than the Greek did; yet in the training and culture of the intellect a higher plane has never been reached. Their chief delights were in the exercise of the

intellect and stirring the emotions; things of the head and heart rather than of the hand. They were our intellectual and spiritual ancestors; we ought to know them.

It is true that they were great athletes. Even in the *Odyssey* it is said that "there is no greater glory of a man, as long as he lives, than what he does with his hands and his feet"—referring to athletic performances. This statement seems to be true still in college life, but the Greeks did not consider athletics to be the chief thing in life. The emphasis was put on mind, spirit, and emotions.

The Greek genius is evident and generally known nowhere else so well as in architecture, sculpture, and art. But the reason for this superiority should not be overlooked; they sought beauty and symmetry and did not overdo. And when they made something that seemed to them to be perfect, they clung to it. Indebted to the older civilizations for models, they did not borrow and use them slavishly, but modified and improved them. That was genius, and partly explains why it appears that the Greeks originated so many things. The world still builds buildings after Greek models.

Sculpture made great progress in Greek hands. At first they wrought majestic superhuman gods, and human beings were not ordinary men and women as wrought by Phidias. But after him, Praxiteles, whose work was never excelled, made gods who seemed more like mortals in size and appearance. His *Hermes* is perhaps the most celebrated piece of Greek sculpture.

There was a famous porch called the "Painted Porch," on the wall of which was a painting of the battle of Marathon. But later painters painted on wooden tablets and sold the paintings as we do canvas ones to-day. The Greeks devised perspective, and learned how to paint light and shadow. Most of the Greek paintings have perished, but copies have been preserved, painted on the walls of fine houses as interior decorations, or wrought in the floor as mosaics. There were fine portraits of great people of the later Greek age, some examples of which have survived along with mummies in Egypt.

Few appreciate the importance of what the Greek achieved in science; from the measuring of land in Egypt was developed that branch of mathematics known as geometry. The Egyptians were taxed according to the amount of land they possessed;

and when the Nile river washed away some of a man's land, what was left had to be measured (surveyed, we should say) in order to determine what the man's tax should be.

From Chaldean astrology the Greeks derived astronomy. The Babylonians tried to divine the future from the heavenly bodies, especially from the planets identified with their gods and named after them. They observed the movements of these great planets, which were supposed to control the fortunes of men, for the purpose of predicting what the future of a child would be, judging from the "lucky" or "unlucky" star under which it was born. These celestial observations resulted in their knowing that the planets moved and that the sun was eclipsed at periodic intervals. Since records of these eclipses were kept, they could calculate when another eclipse would occur. From a study of the list of eclipses, Thales, a famous Ionian Greek, predicted an eclipse of the sun for the year 585 B. C. It happened as he predicted, and he has received the credit of predicting the first eclipse. But he deserves more credit because he told the world that the movements of the heavenly bodies are due to fixed laws, and that the gods do not have anything to do with it; in other words, that the planets are not gods at all. So began the science of astronomy.

The Pythagorean proposition in geometry takes its name from a Greek, Pythagoras, who worked it out; and Euclid later compiled the first elementary geometry, which was still used in some countries as a text-book until very recent times. The earth was discovered to be a sphere, having its own motion, not flat as generally supposed; and still later Eratosthenes, a great astronomer of Alexandria by an interesting process (see Brewster) computed the size of the earth and determined its diameter to be within fifty miles of what it is known to be to-day.

Phoenician letters used by Phoenician traders as price marks on their goods, as some merchants use letters to mark the prices of their goods to-day, were a matter of great curiosity to the Greeks. Homer called them "baleful tokens." The Greeks wanted to know what they meant, and finally discovered their meaning. They were all consonants. The Ionian Greeks applied them to the Greek language, used some of the letters as vowels, and gave us the alphabet we have to-day. In fact, the alphabets of the whole civilized world originated in the Phoenician alphabet

as modified by the Greeks. This one achievement of the Greeks should be enough to induce many to know more about this remarkable people and to read their writings.

The Ionian physicists explained things as composed of atoms (a Greek word) which cohere. Matter cannot be destroyed, but is dissolved into its elements, atoms. The atoms which compose a thing pass into other things. Air is a substance. Things are born or grow out of other things. They were evolutionists. Life comes from life. Had the Greeks heard of Adam and Eve and the story of the creation of Eve, it would have seemed to them more credible that Eve was a little girl once and grew up to be a woman, rather than that Adam was given an anaesthetic, that a surgical operation was performed on him, a rib extracted, and made into a woman. They believed that human beings like animals are born and grow, and are not "made". To Anaxagoras, who believed that mind ruled the world, it would have seemed natural for Divine Intelligence to have used Nature's way of producing woman. He declared that the sun was not a god, as the people believed, but a red-hot mass of stone or metal, larger than the Peloponnesus. He was on the right track. When Herodotus saw sea-shells in the hills high above the sea level, he inferred correctly that there had been sea water once where those shells were. He was a geologist in embryo, as it were.

The beginnings of geography also are found in Herodotus. He gives us the first account we have of the whole world as known in his day. The works of an earlier writer, Hecataeus, are lost, except fragments or citations from him found in Herodotus. However, there were maps of the world drawn by others. Asia and Lybia (Africa) were the civilized parts of the world; Europe was barbarian, except Greece. All modern ethnologists have to go to Herodotus for their earliest information.

Though science was just in its beginnings and had made comparatively little progress as yet, the Greeks started aright. Their method was that of induction, now used everywhere—first getting the facts and then co-ordinating them and drawing the proper inferences. Socrates used the method of induction, and more than anybody else seems to deserve most credit for the beginning of modern laboratory methods. A little knowledge of Greek helps greatly to the understanding of the names used by scientists; for example, in geology, geography, botany, physics,

etc. (In fact, the names of the four sciences just cited are all derived from Greek words.)

Our earliest recorded knowledge of the world at large is found in Herodotus. His story is fascinating—more interesting than most modern fiction because mostly true and told in an easy, charming style. He thinks he lives on a flat world. It is the hottest time in the day when the sun comes up in the far East, just over the edge of the world, because the sun is so near; as the sun gets farther up in the sky and goes farther West the heat is less, and it gets quite cool at evening when the sun sets—correct reasoning from wrong premises! The world that he knows lies about the Mediterranean Sea. His account of the ancient civilizations—Egypt, Babylon, Lydia—and the ancient Barbarism—Scythia, now called Russia—is invaluable.

He is interested in people, their customs, religion, temples, great works, means of transportation, wars, their great men, their heroic deeds, their women and children. Kind hearted man that he was, anything concerning humanity was his chief interest. But like a modern reporter, nothing of interest escapes him, especially a good story. So it happens that he is still the world's best story-teller. He is also the historian of the wars between the Greeks and the Persians, and is generally thought of as historian. But nothing eludes his eagle eye. He brings together things new and old, near and remote, great and small, and weaves them together into a panorama of moving pictures in his great story of the conflict of the East and West, despotism against liberty, which results in the first great victory for democracy, won by intelligence and freedom against ignorance and tyranny—a victory for the modern world. As biographer, his stories of the lives of Croesus, Cyrus the Great, Cambyses, and Darius are thrilling in interest.

The spirit of ancient Greece was more like ours than that of the Dark Ages that intervened. Their government was the most successful attempt at democracy till our own—a government of towns, or city states, reminding one of their successors, the town meetings of New England. They loved freedom and free speech. They spoke their thoughts fearlessly and criticized anything they wished, even their gods, which they inherited or made. There was no priestcraft or caste spirit to hinder. In their tragedies and comedies political policies might be advocated and were advo-

cated. Thus the drama became a sort of free press for the promotion of political propaganda, especially in war times. Athens was like the United States also in being the asylum for the oppressed of other States; to it they fled for protection in time of persecution. Moreover, the people of Athens were cosmopolitan in origin, though they claimed to be sprung from the earth itself. Their statesmen invited distinguished foreigners to Athens. They came and plied their trades.

The overthrow of democracy in Athens proved the danger of ignorance in a democracy. War had reduced the number of citizens. Aliens had got too much influence, and demagogues swayed the people. The democracy was overthrown by a packed assembly and the rule of thirty tyrants was established. They seized the rich, plundered and murdered them, and drove out the patriots. Though the patriotic party was restored to the rule after a few months, the end of democratic rule came two generations later, because the people had lost their patriotism, cared only for pleasure, and would not pay taxes or fight for their liberties when threatened by Philip. They did not realize that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty" and refused to do their part. Democracy always fails when the rulers (or citizens) fail to do their part. This is the lesson that Greek history teaches.

Our civilization and that of all modern Europe began with Greece; that of Rome also. "The student of Greek need not know Latin, but the student of Latin must know Greek to reach the beginnings and source of Latin literature and civilization." Greece is the connecting link between modern civilization and the ancient civilizations that preceded that of Greece. Through Greece have been transmitted to us the best things of those ancient civilizations in modified or perfected form.

The Greeks owed much to the Aegeans who were in Greece when the barbarous Greeks came from the North into the land now called Greece; but they improved upon what they received, especially Aegean art, and made it their own. The Aegean writing cannot yet be read, but the remains of their wonderful civilization are found in Crete and may be studied. When their writing is deciphered we may know more about the ancient Aegeans

We have seen that the alphabet was developed by the Ionians

from the Phoenician. Greece received pen, ink, and paper from Egypt, from which land our calendar is derived. But the Babylonians are responsible for the twenty-four hours in the day, sixty seconds in a minute, sixty minutes in an hour, and six sixties (360 degrees) in a circle, since the unit of sixty was the basis of the Babylonian system of numerals. Even the American Eagle was in origin Babylonian. Greece received iron from the Hittites.

In some particulars the ancient world seems very modern. It has been said: "There is nothing new under the sun." But very many new ideas must be attributed to the Greeks, who by the use of their *mind* achieved more than any other ancient people; the only way in which the human race really has made progress. Truly the creations of the human mind are well worth study. Nowhere else were so many found in antiquity as among the Greeks. No other ancient nation was so modern—so like ourselves. Their works, especially their writings, are thought-stimulating, because they were thinking along the lines of modern thought; socialism, communism, etc. In the politics of Athens we see the political bosses and methods of our own cities—packed assemblies and demagoguism. Why go back then? Because what happened to them might happen again!

Greek development is a finished evolution, complete in itself: kings, feudal lords, tyrants, democracy, demagogues, and the end of democracy. The evolution may be traced from first to last and lessons learned for all time.

The ability to translate a Greek poem or passage of Greek literature is an accomplishment worth while. It may be compared to learning to play a musical instrument. Most of those who have this accomplishment do not expect to earn their living by means of it, but play for the entertainment of others or themselves. So others sing, or recite selections of literature, or paint. All these accomplishments add to human happiness, regardless of pecuniary considerations.

But someone will say that Greek is not practical. The practical studies are those which will enable one to get the most out of life, or put the most into it, not necessarily those which will enable one to get the most of this world's goods. Man can not live by bread alone. The practical studies will not be the same for all. Some will find their happiness in the acquisition of

wealth, but it is ephemeral and transitory. Political honors and social conquest may be the goal of others. But how uncertain and vexatious they are! Athletic prowess brings renown, but only for a season. The achievements of the mind and experiences of the soul cannot be taken away from one, and they are recorded in literature. The friendship of books is a friendship that will never prove false. The treasuring up in the mind of the world's best thoughts and feelings has been a never failing source of happiness to many. And among the best thoughts of the world are to be found those of the ancient Greeks. To many—not to all—they will ever be a source of delight, and to such they are eminently practical, if one should strive after that which is highest and best.

But some will say: "I will get my knowledge of Greek literature from translations." Many of them are good, but after all they are not the real thing, only chromos of the real pictures. Niagara may be seen in pictures or photographs and described in books, but these things are not equal to a few moments of looking at the magnificent falls. Nothing can be substituted for this seeing for yourself. Many are compelled to read about foreign countries and cities, but this will never satisfy as travel will. An engineer lamented to me that he could not read Greek. He said that we have to go to the Greeks for architecture and sculpture, and he thought it must be fine to read Greek for oneself. Life for each of us is what we make of it—what we get out of it. Happiness is not something to be looked forward to when our college career is over and when we have settled down in the world. Happiness comes to-day and day by day, if it comes at all.

For the history of the scientific method we have to go to the Greeks. They began scientific research and investigation. The method of induction originated with Socrates. He got his information by questioning people, and then reached the conclusion that he was wiser than other people because while they thought that they knew, he knew that he didn't know anything.

The Greek ideal in literature, art, and life was moderation—"nothing too much." The reason why their art and literature still last is because they followed this principle of the golden mean. Exaggeration, eccentricity, in American life to-day show the lack of observation of the Greek principle under *äyar* (noth-

ing too much.) What a display newly-attained wealth makes of itself sometimes! Our religious sects each stress something special. Our political parties exaggerate. We are flighty—jump from one extreme to another in fashions. One year it is hair and dress both bobbed. Next it may be long hair and trailing robes. When the Greeks got the right thing they stuck to it. When Demosthenes worked out a good sentence or phrase, he used it again and again, because it could not be improved. We need this restraining principle of the Greeks.

It is the childhood of the world that we see in Greek literature. Homeric people are big children. They burst into tears or laughter—both gods and men. Herodotus views the world with the interest and enthusiasm of a child who is seeing the world for the first time. There is a freshness about Greek literature that is charming—not the artificiality of a decadent literature or people.

The Greek idea of education was mental equipment or fitting people for citizenship, whereas our idea of education nowadays is fitting for some specialty or for teaching, or something of that sort. If one has mental equipment and a broad view, then one can adjust oneself to something special. The tendency to-day is too much to narrow specialization. One needs to know the principles of many branches of knowledge to be broad minded. Those who do not know what they want to do in life may find out by sampling many different branches of study. Then they can make their choice and specialize the rest of their days.

Greek literature is a wonderful field of human experience, which helps us in dealing with human nature to-day. Euripides says that experience teaches us all that we know; but reading is a short cut to experience. Science helps to get a living; humanistic studies, like Greek, teach us how to live. "Study Greek for the fun of it" is the reason a fine student once gave as his reason for the study of Greek. He took for his major subject what he liked, for minor what he disliked.

Who should study Greek? Not every college student. None should be compelled to study it. Many who are not studying it, but "fussing with bottles" in some laboratory, might find work more congenial in Greek. There should be some persons in every community engaged in studying Greek, so as to keep up the knowledge of our great heritage and debt to Greece, and hand

it down to their children. What Greece did for humanity should never be forgotten. There were earlier civilizations, but they were not of literary people like the Greeks. The commercial nations like Babylon, Phoenicia, and Egypt, accomplished much civilization, but their literature is of slight importance compared with that of the Greeks. The Babylonians, to be sure, had the first code of laws, very valuable and interesting in those early days. But for literature of great value we have to go to the Greeks or the Hebrews.

Literature flourishes only where there is freedom of the individual to use his time and talent as he desires, unrestrained by slavery, priestcraft, or caste spirit, and where the people are interested in the creations of the human mind. The progress of humanity depends on the mind untrammelled and free to think. That is why Greece outstripped all other nations in progress. This we Americans should never forget. And to be sure of not forgetting it, many of us should study Greek.

Further, those who wish the "best foundation for culture and for any active career to-day" should not omit Greek. Those who do omit to study it may reach a certain degree of excellence in their careers, but not the greatest. Those who wish to scale the top of the ladder must pay the price, and then they are more likely to gain the honor and satisfaction they seek.