

A WORD ABOUT GREEK WOMEN.

BY HESTER DONALDSON JENKINS.

TO one who has loved Greek art or literature or philosophy (and who has not been thrall'd by these?) there abides a fascination in the very word "Greek" and a charm in the land of Greece which even her genuine beauty alone could not evoke. So when I found myself teaching Greek girls among the other nationalities in Constantinople College, listening to their Greek tongue, looking on their occasionally classic features, and speaking their beautiful classic names, my heart was thrilled. Then, too, my first friends among the students were two Greek girls. One of them was extremely pretty, with a soft beauty that befitted an Ismene or some other lovely, unheroic classic figure. She had curly brown hair, with bronze lights in it, soft regular features, a delicate skin with now and then a lovely pink color, and a pretty habit of twining ivy or violets in her hair. All of our girls loved flowers and wore them in their hair, but the ivy seemed a peculiarly Greek decoration. Shortly before I arrived in Constantinople, the Greek students had given a modern Greek play in which were a number of songs, and I well remember how charmed I was when in the quiet scented evening the girls wandered about the garden, their arms intertwined, singing together these part songs.

The modern Greeks are not pure blooded in their descent from the ancients. Albanian, Slavic and other intermixture of blood has changed them considerably, so that to many visitors to their country they seem utterly unlike the Greeks of Periclean Athens or the Isles of Greece. But perhaps their heritage counts for more than at first glance we see. The language, corrupt, simplified and modernized, yet is the child of the ancient tongue, and all students learn the old Greek, and feel it as few of us westerners can. It is a musical language that they speak now, full of soft dentals and labials. In appearance, too, the classical heritage often manifests itself. I re-

member one girl who as an attendant in a Greek play was so like an early Greek statue in her classical robes that it was positively startling, while three or four of our students were of an Hellenic beauty. As a class the women are strong-featured rather than pretty, with pale or dark complexions wholly without color, with dark, generally curly hair, rather short figures, and small hands and feet. The men look very much like Frenchmen. Although the Christian name Mary in its diminutive Marica is perhaps the commonest Greek name, the classical names are much in vogue. These are pronounced with full vowel and the stress on the penult, a pronunciation which came to sound much more beautiful to me than ours. Thus Antigone is Anti-gó-ne; Andromache, Andro-mách-e; Eurydice, Evry-thé-ke; Iphigenia, Iphe-gá-nia. Sometimes the names associated in our minds with goddesses and poets seem ridiculously misapplied, as when a mother calls her fat, gurgling baby Demosthé-nes, or one discovers that Aphro-dé-te is an old hag. It was very interesting in the history classes to see the pride which the Greek students felt towards the history of ancient Greece, regarding it as their own. I have seen a Greek girl, in the presence of Armenians and Turks, swell visibly over some fine accomplishment of Athenian or Spartan.

One taste inherited from the ancients is a love of the drama. A group of commonplace Greek girls would be transformed by the performance of "Electra" or "Iphigenia." They have great dramatic ability and render a classical play with a nobility, beauty and fire that is amazing. I have never seen a dramatic performance anywhere that has moved me more or seemed more highly and seriously beautiful than "Antigone," given by the Greek Society of Constantinople College. In the other college plays, French and English, the Greek girls always took a prominent part. A year or two ago "As You Like It" was given out of doors on the beautiful new grounds of the college. Oriental girls are always unconscious in their acting, an English or American girl in the cast being noticeably self-conscious beside them. On this occasion there was a long stretch of sward to cross before the actors reached the stage, and the charm and unconsciousness with which they walked over the lawn was beautiful. The part of Rosalind was taken by a Greek named Marianthe. She was tall and slender, pale-skinned and auburn-haired, a lovely figure, and acted with grace and simplicity. A group of young American men who saw the play went home together in a boat, and one of them afterwards told me, "We men were not noisy, as fellows usually are after an entertainment, but

we all sat quietly in the boat saying little; when we got to the quay we found that we had all fallen in love with Marianne.

The Greek people are divided geographically among Greece, the Greek Islands, and Turkey, those of the last named being largely descendants of the Byzantines who ruled the empire before the Turks conquered it. They are not generally a peasant people like the Bulgarians, but a race of traders, merchants and professional men. They are a people of clever brains, and gravitate naturally towards the cities and schools. Of course there are some farmers and peasants living the primitive life of centuries ago. I remember a peasant woman in a village near Delphi, dressed in bloomers, with a kerchief on her braided hair, working hard in her dark hut and filling up her spare time with spinning on a hand loom, twisting between her hard thumb and finger the wool that dropped from the spindle.

If one wishes to see the Greek peasant to advantage, he should go to Megara on Easter Tuesday, for on that holy day the peasants gather from a great distance, clad in gala dress, and join in folk dances. The dress of the women consists of a long, heavy, hand-woven cotton gown, embroidered many inches deep in black and white or in bright colors. Over it is worn a jacket of broadcloth or flannel, embroidered in gold and colors. A kerchief on the hair, strings of beads about the throat, and red, tasseled shoes complete the costume. When a girl baby is born, the peasant mother commences to embroider her gala gown, which is ready for her when she is full grown. The Greek man wears generally the full white pleated skirt, red, turned-up shoes, embroidered jacket and modified fez, and is most picturesque, especially if he have fierce mustachios with his ballet costume. The folk dance, the Hora, is danced in a circle or long line, and is lively, full of stamping and leaping.

Independent Greece is scarcely a century old. Before 1826 it was a province of Turkey, a bare land harassed by brigands and guerillas, with miserable villages at intervals. Now it is a country of some cultivation and a fair number of comfortable towns and cities. The harbors of Patras and Pireus are bustling ports, and Athens is a beautiful, well-kept city. In building it the planners did not ignore the classical traditions, but followed Doric and Ionic styles in many of the public buildings, so the University Street is a boulevard fronted with some fine, classical buildings, and the Via Cephissa is a charming road lined with porticoed houses in a beautiful classical style. The royal palaces of Athens are very plain and the hotels modern. It is of course a modern town, with public

gardens, shops, wide streets, medieval churches and comfortable residences. It suggests prosperity and progress. We once had a Greek student who had spent her life in a Turkish village. She loved Constantinople, but friends thought she should visit the Greek city. When she returned from a brief visit to Athens, we asked her eagerly about her impressions, the Acropolis, the ruins, the surrounding mountains. But she shook her head. They were beautiful, but she could scarcely notice them in face of her first modern city. It was a revelation to her to see clean streets, sidewalks, lighting at night, and people in the streets as though it were day, handsome houses and shops filled with beautiful things. One hears a good deal about the dissensions in Greek politics, and the financial instability of the country, but despite some drawbacks Greece has accomplished a great deal and has developed surprisingly. The Greeks have shown themselves eager to adopt western civilization and have made most creditable progress.

Greek students differ greatly in quality. We have had a number of girls who were in college because they were sent there by their parents, whose interests were mainly in fashion and society, and who did careless, poor work. These were mainly from rich families. On the other hand, some of our most brilliant students were Greeks, who always stood high, and with scarcely any effort easily outdistanced their classmates. I also recall two or three hard working, ambitious Greeks who obtained excellent marks by sheer industry. In my composition classes were two Greek girls, Euphrosy'-ne or Phroso as we called her, and Chrysanthe, who wrote English with remarkable ability. They both had large vocabularies, notably large in the classical words, and brilliant powers of observation and description, and their lively sense of humor made their compositions very good reading. The Greek girls who were good students excelled in philosophy and literature and in some kinds of science as well as in language work, but rare is the Oriental girl who applies herself to mathematics with any satisfaction. Both Phroso and Chrysanthe could versify amusingly in English and French.

A good many of the Greek graduates of Constantinople become teachers, and an increasingly large number are taking up nursing as a profession. The college is putting domestic science and nursing into the program to satisfy the growing desire of the Oriental women for self-support. Some years ago, before it could offer any such course, but when it inspired its graduates with a desire to work, one of its girls, Cleonike Clonari, went to Boston to study nursing. While in a hospital there she was noted by a Greek traveler who

eventually got her to come back to Athens as head of the Children's Hospital; and she has done a splendid work there, winning recognition from the queen and from the medical profession. Women in Athens have graduated from the Athenian University and have taken an important part in the educational work of the country. I know a number of very highly cultured Greek ladies, among whom was Princess Mavrocordato, wife of the then Greek minister to the Porte. She read and spoke English and French like a native, keeping up with both of those literatures, and was in touch with educational, political and literary movements throughout Europe. Among educated Greeks, French influence is great. Many Greek families speak French almost exclusively, read French novels to excess, have their clothes made in French establishments, dance French dances, name their daughters Helène and Madeleine and Marie, and send them to French Catholic schools. We feel that a wholesome American and English influence is very desirable for this class.

A Greek girl's marriage is a careful business arrangement made by her guardians; and woe unto the girl with no dowry! She may be as lovely as Helen and as faithful as Penelope and the best of housewives, but without a little dot that can go into her husband's business she can not hope to marry. Sometimes a girl is bargained for and sent to a distant husband, in which case the happiness of her marriage is very problematical. If she does not marry, a Greek girl of the lower class may become cook, or housemaid, or if better educated she may become a dressmaker, milliner, governess, companion, or school teacher, musician, or even a member of some "learned profession." I know one woman physician in Athens who has a fine practice as well as a city appointment. Greeks have most of the dressmaking and millinery establishments in Constantinople, owing to their natural taste. They also furnish a very large number of the servants of the city. These servants are often as independent as ours in America. One girl of a rich Greek family told me that their housemaid was leaving them, not because she had insufficient wages or over much work, but because, so she claimed, she didn't hear enough music in the house! There comes to my mind in contrast to this incident, a beautiful story of faithfulness in service. In a Greek household there was a maid Daphne, who was the special maid of the daughter of the house. When the latter married Daphne went with her to the new establishment. Children were born to the mother, and Daphne loved and tended them all. Then the mistress decided that the maid should marry, so she got her an

outfit of linen and arranged for a suitable husband. Just before the marriage was to take place, the husband of the mistress died, leaving his widow with small means and three children. Daphne immediately threw over her own prospects, and declaring she would never leave her beloved mistress, settled down to live the life of the latter in perfect devotion. When I knew her she was a middle-aged woman, doing the work of the family and seldom meeting the guests, but to the mistress a dearly loved friend and to the children a second mother.

The Greeks have a good many interesting religious and social customs. Let me tell you of a visit I made to a Greek bride at the New Year's season. Elisávet lived in a village on the Marmora, a suburb of Constantinople. Her husband had a comfortable two-story house set in a pretty, flower-filled garden. The house was furnished in characteristic fashion. There were thick, bright rugs on all the floors, a brown porcelain stove in the living room, and a shining copper brazier in the parlor, while the bed-rooms were not heated. Long divans or benches covered with rugs and cushions ran along the sides of the rooms. The parlor contained some gay plush furniture and was adorned with pictures and wax flowers. There were pots of growing flowers in the sunny windows. The last day of the year we spent largely in making the great New Year's cake, which every Greek family makes of flour and milk, honey and nuts and other ingredients. When one huge cake and many smaller ones had been mixed, it was all sent to the public oven to be baked. It is considered a suitable attention to send small cakes or pieces of cake to one's friends and neighbors, so a rapid exchange is carried on late in the day, each person giving and receiving cake made according to the same recipe, and baked in the same oven! In the cake that is reserved for home consumption a coin is placed that will bring luck to the one who finds it in his piece.

Our New Year's feast was a fine one, for my host was an epicure. We had fruits from Smyrna, mullet stuffed with pine nuts and raisins, sweets and pickles from Cæsarea, and a sort of Greek cocktail, and finally the cake. How we commended the cake, the first the bride had ever made, and how eagerly we looked for the silver piaster that was to bring luck, and how pleased we felt when the beaming bridegroom found it in his piece! It was a merry occasion, the more so because of the New Year's gifts, for it is at New Year's rather than Christmas that the Greeks exchange presents. The bride was gladdened by a diamond brooch, the host's

brother received a watch chain, and the maid was suitably remembered by both master and mistress.

While we were still at the table we heard singing outside, and my host said, "Here come the lanterns of St. Nicholas." So we went to the window and looked out on the boys carrying paper lanterns representing houses or boats or churches, while the boys sang a doleful song about St. Nicholas and waited for coppers. The expansive groom gave them several pennies, and they moved on to the next house. We saw a good many lantern-bearers that evening.

In the morning we arose early, for the bride and groom must attend the first mass of the year together. Elisávet wore her diamond brooch and her best furs, and the groom was resplendent in new clothes and a bright tie. After the mass came a most curious ceremony known as "swimming for the cross," a ceremony that takes place all along the shores of the Marmora and Bosphorus wherever there is a Greek orthodox church, and doubtless all over the Greek country. It was about seven o'clock of a January morning when we made our way to the seashore, following the congregation of the church we had just attended. We took good places on the long dock whence we could see both water and shore. On the shore, sitting in some boats, were six or eight brawny Greek youths, naked but for swimming trunks and sweaters thrown over their shoulders. They were shivering in the frosty air, or sparring with one another to keep up their circulation. Presently down the street came a procession of priests, their robes and long black hair fluttering in the keen winter wind, holding aloft a banner and a huge metal cross. These priests embarked in a little boat and pushed into the water. The waiting boys threw off their wraps and stood tensely waiting. At a given moment a gun was fired from the little boat, and a tall priest, standing upright, hurled the cross into the water. Instantly the boys were off, each swimming at his topmost speed towards the priests' boat. Their muscles swelled and rippled, as they spurted through the waves, and plunged into the deep water. Suddenly a shout went up as one of the divers emerged holding high the cross. That day the successful swimmer was the hero of his village; he could eat or drink freely at any restaurant or wine shop. He took up a collection of silver coin wherever he went, and the water from his wet garments was wrung out and saved to be used as holy water by the priests. The Greek ceremonies for Holy Week and Easter in Athens are one of my interesting memories, but an account of them would take us too far from the subject to be related here.

There is a strong strain of sentimentality in Greek girls. They

take ardent fancies to each other and to teachers, and revel in emotionality. When I entered Constantinople College, I found the sub-freshman class in English reading Irving's *Sketch Book*. After we had finished the better known sketches, I turned to "Rural Funerals." To my dismay several girls wept in the class, and one of them said to me with pride, "I have a right to cry, my little brother died." So when they requested to read next, "The Broken Heart" I sternly declined and sought a less lachrymose subject. In cases of illness and death they regard it as a sign of respect and proper feeling to make a great outcry, sometimes throwing themselves on the floor and screaming. A Christian funeral is rather a dreadful thing to see in the Orient. The corpse is carried through the streets in an uncovered box, the dead face staring at the sky, and one may even encounter the gruesome sight of a dead girl sitting upright in her chair on her way to the grave. Forty days after the funeral there is a second service of commemoration with a visit to the grave, and all the family and friends tear open their wounds afresh, weeping and exclaiming, "Oh, but she was a lovely girl, such a girl! How can we live without her! Oh Electra!" until we wonder how they stand it at all. I say, a Christian funeral is a dreadful thing, for a Moslem funeral is much quieter and more restrained than a Greek or Armenian funeral, and the Moslems say that one who believes in immortality should not grieve actively. Of course they are not able to live up to this ideal, but the fact that it is an ideal shames the Christians, whose faith in a future life seems less real. The Moslem, naturally, does not wear mourning, but the Oriental Christians not only shroud themselves in waves of crape, but tie up their picture frames and their plush furniture and their mirrors in black, making their houses places of dread. Little girls losing relatives whom they have never known are put into dead black, and for months and even years after a death a family lives in an atmosphere of crape.

In connection with death a curious custom has sprung up of concealing a death from a relative until a convenient season. Let me give some instances of this. Dora, one of our students, lost her father who had lived in Russia. His death was in the paper, so that the other girls saw it, but they did not tell her. Her mother had written her that her father was ill, but when he died she wrote Dora that he had recovered. Dora was relieved, but when she never heard from him she began to be anxious again. She moved about among girls, many of whom were in black, her pink dress looking odd to us who knew, and her little face growing more and more strained. At

length school was over, and she was told that her parents had come for her. An uncle called at the college for her. She cried, "My father! I fear he is dead!" But he replied soothingly, "No indeed, he is at the boat." So she went to the boat with him, where she saw her mother in deep mourning and learned the truth. This custom worked badly, for whenever a girl did not hear from her family for some time she was sure some one was dead; but we could never make the families see the unwisdom of it. One amusing incident connected with this custom was the speech of a Greek serving woman to her mistress, "My husband is so thoughtful; he is at Erenkeuy, my old home, and he writes me that there have been a great many deaths there this winter, but he will not tell me who they are for fear of worrying me." The most cruel case I ever knew was of an old woman who was allowed to sell her few goods and go to America to live with a son who had been dead some months. We once had a Greek teacher who was living a strange lie. Her sister had left home because of illness and had gone to visit a married sister, at whose house she died. The mother had a weak heart, and the daughters thought it would kill her to know of Sappho's death. So they told her Sappho was getting better, and every week the married sister wrote to her in Sappho's name. Our teacher wore mourning when in college, but every night on her way home she went into a neighbor's house and put on colors to appear before her mother. I asked her how long she expected to keep up the deceit and she replied, her plain face lighting with a loving look, "As long as Mama lives, for she could not bear to know."

Greek women are interesting and lovable, and knowing them was one of the pleasures of living in the Orient.