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Evelyn S. Shuckburgh

Excerpt

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE GREEKS.

CHAPTER I.

THEHELLENES IN GREECE.

GREEK History is not the history of a united people, living in a well-defined country, with a common capital.

There were many things indeed more or less common to all Greeks—descent, language, customs, views of religion; but there were other things that kept them apart: and during all the time in which we shall here study their history we shall find them split up into many separate groups and States. Even in the divisions marked on the map with a common name, such as Thessaly, Boeotia, Phocis, Arcadia, there were often several cities with a small territory that were, or wished to be, quite independent of each other. Moreover, the Greeks sent colonies in every direction to many other countries and islands, and wherever a colony went, it became a separate and independent State. The people were still Greeks and proud of being so, but they did not own any great central authority, and they each developed in a way peculiar to themselves. A history of the Greeks, therefore, is a history not of one, but of many States, which have differences as well as similarities, both of which we ought to observe.

1. The Greeks as a Nation.

The words Greek and Greeks are not those used by the people themselves. They called themselves Hellenes and their land Hellas. There is nothing like the word 'Greek' in Homer except Graea (Γραία), a town in Boeotia. When the name Hellas

2. What the Greeks called themselves.

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got thoroughly into use, which was not till comparatively late in the history of the people, it was taken to include any part of the world where Hellenes lived, at any rate where they lived in great numbers. Thus Herodotus speaks of Sicily and Asia Minor as Hellas: and, though it sometimes means only what we call Greece, that is, Greece on the continent of Europe and the adjacent islands, it often also means what we should rather express by the phrase 'Hellenic world.' The Romans called the people and country *Graeci* and *Graecia*, apparently from a tribe in Epirus, with which they were early acquainted, and we, with most of the rest of Europe, have taken the words from them.

I said that the names of Hellas and Hellenes were adopted comparatively late in the history of Greece. The earliest written testimony we have is the poetry of Homer. In this 'Hellas' and 'Hellenes' only occur as the names of a small territory and tribe in Thessaly, and are not general names for Greece and the Greeks. As far as there is any such general name it is Achaeans ('Αχαιοί), Argives ('Αργεῖοι), or Danaoi (Δαναοί). The last died out, except in poetry, and the two former were afterwards confined to parts of Greece. In what seems the next oldest poetry after Homer—that of Hesiod—the words Hellas and Hellenes begin to be used. We, however, cannot be certain of the dates of either Homer or Hesiod (assuming them both to be names of real persons), and we must be content to say that at any rate by 800 B.C. Greece was commonly called Hellas, and the Greeks Hellenes, and that they called all other people barbarians (βάρβαροι). It is not likely that the Achaeans, Argives and Danaoi were of a race widely different from each other, or from the people who were strong enough to give the name of Hellenes to all alike. They may perhaps represent earlier migrations from the same stock. But even before them we hear of other nations living in Greece,—Leleges, Minyae, Pelasgoi. We know too little of these to decide what their relation to

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the Hellenes was, or how far they remained to influence and modify the Hellenes on their arrival in Greece. The Leleges, sometimes identified with the Carians, are heard of chiefly in connexion with the Islands; but both Herodotus and Thucydides looked upon the Pelasgoi as the prevailing race in Greece before the Hellenes. Their name is found in Homer in the appellation Pelasgic Argos for Thessaly, in Pelasgic Zeus as the title of the God of the ancient oracle of Dodona, in the name of one of the rulers of Larissa in Thessaly, as forming one body of the allies of Troy, and again as inhabiting Crete. They are also connected with Athens, where the remains of an ancient fortification of the Acropolis was in historical times called the Pelasgicon. Some believed that all Ionians, as well as the original inhabitants of Athens, were Pelasgoi, and remains of them were supposed to be found in many parts of Greece, especially in the islands of Lemnos and Imbros. According to report they were a peaceful agricultural folk and skilful builders. But records of them are so vague and uncertain, that we can only here note the tradition of a time when others than the Hellenes lived in Greece.

Accepting the fact of the Hellenes inhabiting Greece, we must next notice that they are divided into three great races or families, Dorians, Aeolians, and Ionians. Greek mythology accounted for this by saying that the common ancestor Hellen had three sons, Dorus, Aeolus, and Xuthus, and that Xuthus had two sons, Ion and Achaeus, from whom they respectively were descended—thus making the Achaioi a fourth branch of the Hellenic family. Whether these three divisions of the Hellenic people represent three waves of invasion we cannot tell. All we can do in regard to them is to point out where they were chiefly found living in historical times. The Dorians—numerically inferior to the Aeolians—occupied, besides many Islands, a district in the South of Asia Minor, and another in

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central Greece, and afterwards forced their way into Peloponnese, from which they sent out numerous colonies in many directions. The Aeolians spread themselves at first more widely in Greece. Beside a considerable district in the North of Asia Minor and the large island of Lesbos, they occupied the whole of central Greece and Thessaly (though from the last they seem to have been subsequently driven), parts of Peloponnese, and many islands. Their colonies, however, were mostly confined to the shores of the Pontus and its minor seas; they took little share in the colonisation of the West. The Ionians, who for some reason were at one time regarded as inferior to the other two, seem to have settled first in the North of the Peloponnese, whence they passed to Attica, Euboea, and to many of the Cyclades. Whether the Ionians of southern Asia Minor were a migration from Attica, or an independent settlement, was always a disputed point. In the sending out of colonies they were not behind the Dorians.

The first great movement among the Hellenes in Greece proper, of which we have any tradition, was that of the Dorians. In historical times they were found living in the islands of Aegina, Crete, Melos, Thera, Rhodes and Cos, with two cities on the mainland opposite to Cos, Cnidus and Halicarnassus. But in Greece proper they occupied Megara, Corinth, and the greater part of Peloponnese—Argolis, Laconia, and Messenia. Their presence in Peloponnese was accounted for mythologically by the legend of the return of the Heracleidae, the sons of Heracles, who, having been expelled from Mycenae and Tiryns by the tyrant Eurystheus, effected their return by aid of the Dorians, and divided the country between them. This also explained the fact that the kings of Sparta and Argolis, who claimed to be descendants of the Heracleidae, were not Dorians, but Achaeans. Putting aside mythology, it is certain that at some time or other subsequent to

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the Homeric poems the Dorians did occupy these parts of Peloponnese. The ancient Achæan inhabitants either retreated to the northern district of Peloponnese, which retained their name, or remained in their old homes as freemen without political rights and were called perioeci (περιόικοι), or as serfs bound to the soil and called helots (εἰλωταί), according perhaps as they submitted easily or made an obstinate resistance to the invaders. The old kingdoms of which we hear in Homer disappeared, and two strong Dorian States—Laconia and Argolis—took their place; while Messenia soon had to submit to the supremacy of Laconia. The Arcadians inhabiting the mountainous district in the centre managed to maintain their freedom and nationality. The people of Elis also, connected with the Aetolians on the opposite side of the Gulf of Corinth, held their own, and presently came to occupy a privileged position as possessing Olympia, the common meeting-ground of all Hellenes at the great Olympic festival.

We know of no great movement in central Greece like that of the Dorian invasion of Peloponnese. Yet Thucydides tells us that changes of inhabitants had been frequent, especially where there was good soil, as in Boeotia and Thessaly, to attract invaders. Thus Thessaly is not a name known in Homer, who only mentions certain towns and districts in it. Since his time the Thessaloi must have come to overpower its Aeolian inhabitants and give it a name. Phœnicians seem to have occupied Thebes in Boeotia: and Locris is a name unknown to Homer. But Phocis and Aetolia had never been invaded in sufficient force to effect a change of name; and Attica, owing to its poor soil, and to its lying off the highway from the north, was believed to have been subject to less change of inhabitants than any other part of Greece. The people boasted of being natives of the soil (*αὐτόχθονες*), though according to one story they were once called Kranaoi, not Atticoi; and according to another, certain Ionians—driven from the Peloponnese by the

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north of the
Peloponnese.

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Dorians—took refuge there, and so affected the people that Athens came to be regarded as the Mother City of all the Ionians. In the North and North-West the countries known afterwards as Macedonia and Epirus were mostly barbarous—though there was probably a mixture of Hellenes to be found in them—and did not till much later affect the course of Greek History : but south of Epirus the town and district of Ambracia (as well as the island of Leucadia) were colonised by Corinth in the middle of the 7th century B.C.

The Hellenic families also occupied very early the Islands and the coast of Asia Minor. In the Ionian or Western sea the islands did not generally become Hellenic till the colonising age began. Thus Corcyra was colonised by the Corinthians, Zakyntus by the Achaeans. But the largest of the group, Cephallenia, seems to have had an Hellenic people long before this age and not to have been ever colonised in the ordinary way. To the South of the Peloponnese Cythera became Dorian with Laconia. In the Aegean the Cyclades—the islands round Delos as a centre—were very early occupied mostly by Ionians, though some few were Dorian, as Melos and some small neighbouring islands. The islands near the coast of Attica, especially the greater part of the long island of Euboea, were Ionian. Of the other islands Crete and Rhodes (with some smaller neighbours) were Dorian ; but Samos and Chios, as well as the Northern group—Thasos, Samothrace, Lemnos, Melos—were Ionian ; while Lesbos and the islets round it were Aeolian. The same distribution of the three Hellenic families is found on the coast of Asia Minor, where the Aeolians settled on the North, the Ionians in the centre, the Dorians in the South. The farther extension of the Hellenes we shall have to note when we study Greek colonisation. Here it is only necessary to remark that though the Hellenes settled in these parts of the continent and islands, there were in most of them remains of a more ancient race of inhabitants,

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who can never be wholly disregarded in studying the history and character of each district and its people.

We have said that Greek history is mainly a history of separate States, jealous of their autonomy, and often bitterly opposed to each other, and yet with certain ties uniting them as against the rest of the world. Let us see first what were the

8. Causes which tended to separate Greek States.

causes making for disunion. Among the most decisive was the nature of the country. Greece in Europe is a small country about the size of Portugal, but owing to the irregularity of its coast line it has a seaboard greater than almost any other. The country again is mountainous, and the mountains generally come close down to the sea: therefore there are no navigable rivers. The obvious results of this are, first the division of the country into districts separated by ridges which make communication difficult, and for parts of the year often almost impossible; secondly the placing of most important towns within reach of the sea, and causing the people to become a seafaring folk, whose interests are in foreign traffic rather than in commerce with other towns, as it might have been, if they had had between them the easy connexion offered by rivers. Thus the map will shew you that the central district of the Peloponnese, Arcadia, is the core of a range of mountains which spreads like a fan over the rest of the land, dividing it into its separate districts. In Greece north of the Isthmus Attica is divided from Boeotia by the range of Cithaeron and Mt. Parnes; the range of Mt. Oeta forms a barrier to the North of Boeotia; while the plains of Thessaly are enclosed, as by a wall, by the ranges of Pindus and Othrys on the West and South, and the Cambunian Mountains and Olympus on the North. Something also must be put down to the genius of the people, fostered indeed by their geographical position, but also naturally imbued with a taste and ability for politics, only to be fully gratified in small States where all could take part in directing the government.

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But while these causes made for separation, there were others that tended towards union. The first of these was the communion of blood and language, of which all Greeks were proud as marking them off from all other nations. With this common nationality they connected certain principles, such as the respect for the laws of hospitality, the observance of particular customs in war, especially in regard to the burial of the slain and the respect due to sacred places. If these principles were sometimes violated, yet they were—they thought—more generally observed by Greeks than by other nations. Again, religion formed a bond of union. Each State indeed had its own special object of worship, some god or goddess whom it particularly revered as the guardian of the city (*πολιούχος*), and a hero or deified man—founder or benefactor—whose chapel or *heroum* was regarded as the special feature of the country. Still the great Gods were recognised everywhere and their shrines respected, and in the eyes of all Zeus was the supreme god, the father of men and gods. Connected with this unity of blood and religion was the institution of the four great games—Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean—in which the first condition of admission to compete was Hellenic birth. They were the occasion also of the meeting of Greeks from all parts. Proclamations and notices affecting all Greeks alike were published at these assemblies. At the Olympic festival a truce from war was proclaimed, and all Greeks could feel for a time that they were one people. Closely connected also with religion were the local Amphictyonies,—combinations of certain States to maintain some temple and join in worship at it. The chief of these was the Amphictyonic assembly, which met once a year at Delphi, and once at Thermopylae, consisting of deputies—called Pylagorae—from States belonging to the Aeolian, Dorian, Ionian, and other tribes. Their main object was the protection of the great temple at Delphi; but the council or congress also laid

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down certain principles of what we might call international law in regard to the carrying on of war, which all pledged themselves to maintain,—thus in a manner making a large part of Greece into one nation for certain purposes. Similar in their effects were other religious assemblies, such as the yearly meeting of deputies from various States at Delos, once the great meeting ground of the Ionian States. Even after the Panionia was transferred to Ephesus, the Delian festival still remained an occasion for meeting to a large number of States. Lastly we shall often have occasion to remark the influence of the Oracle of Delphi. It was open to all comers, and professed at any rate to be impartial and above all local and separate interests. For a time perhaps it really was so, and did something to promote a national or Panhellenic spirit.

As Greece consisted of many separate States, so was there a great variety in the forms of government prevailing in them. They may however be classed under four general heads,—three acknowledged as regular and constitutional, one regarded as irregular. The three first are (1) the rule of a constitutional king, or *basileus* (*βασιλεία*), with fixed prerogatives, (2) Oligarchy (*ὀλιγαρχία*), the rule of the few, in which a privileged class possessed the chief political rights, (3) Democracy (*δημοκρατία*), where all the freemen of a State had equal rights and an equal voice in passing decrees or making laws. (4) The fourth or irregular government was that of a despot or tyrant (*τύραννος*). By this word was meant any ruler who usurped or in any way placed himself above the laws in a State, which had once enjoyed a constitution. It did not make any difference whether he ruled well or ill; his possession of absolute power was in spite of the laws, and he was a ‘tyrant.’

10. Forms of government in Greece.

The first of these forms of government—the limited monarchy—was the oldest. None other seems recognised in Homer, where the *basileus* represents the people before gods and men; performs religious rites, holds the levy in war, and

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protects private rights in time of peace, giving out rules or dooms (*θέμιστες*) on his own authority, not by fixed law or *nomos* (*νόμος*)—a word which does not occur in Homer. He is not absolute, but is assisted by a *boulè* or council of elders, and sometimes refers questions to a public assembly or *agora*. In historical times however this form of government had almost disappeared. The name remained in Sparta and Argos, and in semi-hellenic countries, but in Sparta at any rate the office, though still surviving, had lost much of its importance and a real oligarchy existed. In Argos the name disappeared before the middle of the 5th century B.C., and was replaced by a democracy. Oligarchical governments continued to exist in Corinth and to a certain extent in Athens and other places for some time, and wherever Sparta had influence she endeavoured to promote them, but the tendency in these and most other parts of Greece from the 6th century onwards was in the direction of democracy. Tyrannies were spasmodic and short-lived. A great many of the States at one time or another in their history went through a period of subjection to Tyrants, who generally gained their position by taking the side of the people against the oligarchical nobles. But they seldom managed to maintain themselves beyond the second generation. What had been gained by the energy of the father, was generally lost by the weakness or the insolence of the sons, corrupted by the temptations of absolute power.

Greek religion arose from the observation of the great forces of nature, and the awe inspired by them in the minds of men. Thus the first thing that must strike human consciousness is the bright open sky; Zeus therefore, personifying this, is the first of gods, and his brethren are the representatives of the other elements—Poseidon of water, Demeter of earth, Aïdes god of the unseen underworld. Though the names and attributes of the gods of Greece may sometimes be traced to different sources—to Egypt, Phoenicia, Thrace—yet by the time that

11. Greek Religion.