

EVERYDAY LIFE IN  
ANCIENT GREECE



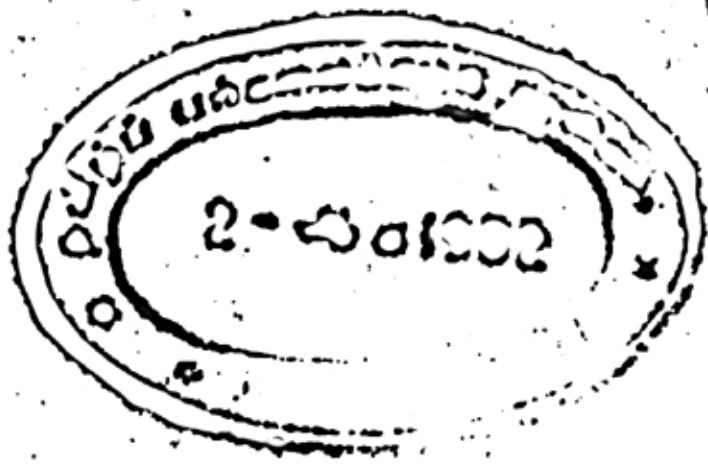
C. E. ROBINSON

(1) What are cosmic rays (3) . Piccard: 1951  
(2) The tubes of the sky.

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# EVERYDAY LIFE IN ANCIENT GREECE

BY

C. E. ROBINSON

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*Intermediate.*

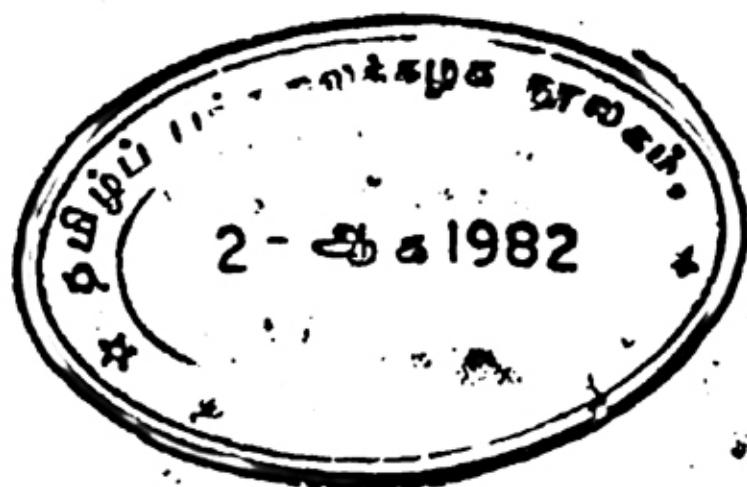
*St. Joseph's*

OXFORD  
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS  
LONDON: HUMPHREY MILFORD

*A Parallel Volume*

EVERYDAY LIFE IN ROME

By H. A. TREBLE and K. M. KING. Pp. 160  
with many illustrations



7820

FIRST PUBLISHED 1933  
REPRINTED, 1934, 1936  
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

## PREFACE

THERE is a story told of a certain English poet, who, as an undergraduate at Oxford, was compelled to undergo an examination in Divinity. His upbringing had not included a study of the Bible; and his preparation for the examination had been woefully inadequate. When, therefore, he was asked to translate from the Greek Testament the passage describing the shipwreck of St. Paul, he read it for the first time. After he had translated a few verses with tolerable success, one of the examiners announced that that would do. 'No, sir, it will not do,' was the surprising answer, 'I want to know what happened to the beggar.' Its irreverence and impudence apart, nothing could have been more admirable than that rejoinder. It was wholly in keeping with the spirit of the Greeks; and it is to be hoped that this book will be read, and the study of Greek civilization further pursued by those who read it, with the same vigorous zest for inquiry.

C. E. R.

Sept. 1933.

K. Subramanian  
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## LIST OF DATES

- c. 2300-1600 B.C. Civilization developed in Peloponnese, &c., under Cretan influence.
- c. 1600-1250 B.C. Golden Age of Mycenaean civilization.
- c. 1250 Greek-speaking Achaeans begin to arrive from north.
- c. 1180. Trojan War. [Israelites enter Canaan.]
- c. 1100-1000. Invasion of Dorian Greeks from north, and migrations to coast of Asia Minor.
- c. 900. Homeric Poems written down. [Solomon King in Israel.]
- c. 800 onwards. Formation of Greek City-states; and plantation of numerous 'colonies' on Aegean coasts, south Italy, Sicily, &c.
- c. 750. [Foundation of Rome.]
- c. 720. Sparta's conquest of Messenia.
- c. 650-630. Revolt of Messenia followed by Lycurgan Reform.
- 550-500. Sparta wins supremacy of Peloponnese.
586. [Fall of Jerusalem. Jews go into exile in Babylonia.]
- 570-510. Athens under 'tyranny' of Pisistratus and his sons.
508. Athens becomes a democracy. [Rome becomes a republic.]
490. First Persian Invasion defeated at Marathon.
- 480-479. Second Persian Invasion by Xerxes, battles of Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea.
- 479-454. Delian Confederacy develops into Athenian Empire.
438. Completion of Parthenon.
- 431-421. First Phase of Peloponnesian War (Pylos, &c.).
- 415-413. Athenian Expedition against Syracuse.
- 413-404. Second phase of Peloponnesian War (Aegospotami 405) and Fall of Athens.
390. [The Gauls sack Rome.]
338. Athens and Thebes defeated at Chaeronea by Philip of Macedon.
- 334-325. Alexander of Macedon conquers the East.
323. Death of Alexander.



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*K. Chidambaram*

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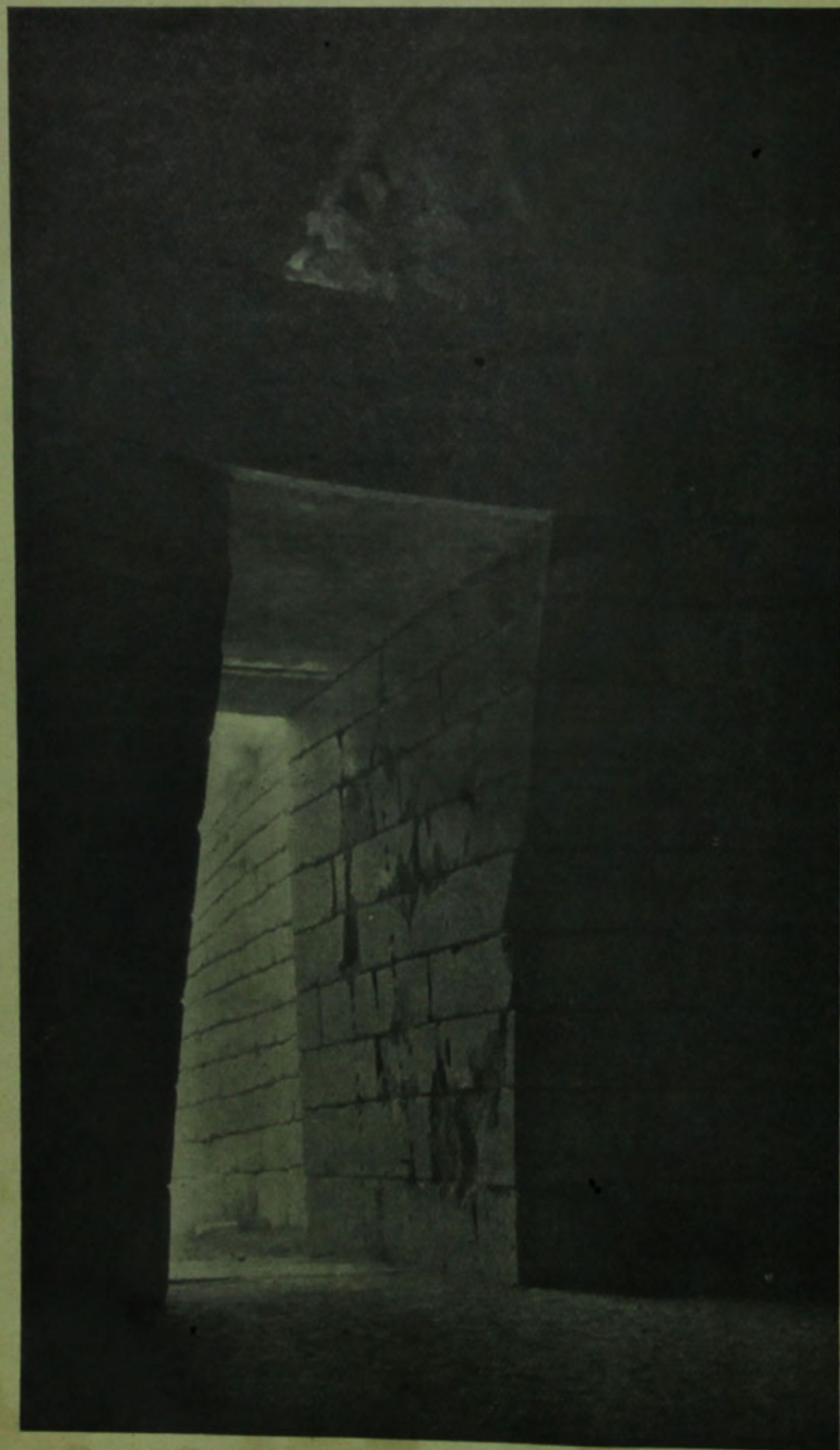
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THE CHAMBER OF ATREUS AT MYCENAE  
A building erected by the Greeks of the Homeric age.

## LIFE IN THE HEROIC AGE

ONE reason why we are still interested in the ancient Greeks is that they have left behind them a literature of unrivalled beauty and wisdom. To produce a great literature a great language is needed; and the Greeks were fortunate in possessing a language at once so flexible and so musical that it could express every shade of meaning and emotion as perhaps no other language has ever done. In this language of theirs the Greeks, then, composed masterpieces of poetry, drama, philosophy, rhetoric, and history which can still stir the wonder and the imagination of mankind. Only those who can read them in the original can appreciate their full beauty and depth; but even through English translations it is possible to learn something of what the Greeks thought and felt and what manner of lives they led.

Side by side with their writings, moreover, they left behind them other products of their artistic genius—stately temples, graceful sculptured statues, delicate painted pottery, and metal ornaments. These, too, we can use to supplement the knowledge which comes to us from written records.

Such knowledge as we possess of the earliest phase of Greek history is drawn from both sources. Some time in the thirteenth century before Christ a tribe of Greek-speaking<sup>1</sup> folk who called themselves Achaeans came down from eastern Europe into the peninsula which we now call Greece. This peninsula they found inhabited by an ancient people who had already reached a high state of civilization, closely connected with the still more ancient civilization of the adjacent island of Crete. They found lordly castles built on hill-tops and surrounded by massive walls of

<sup>1</sup> The Greeks called themselves 'Hellenes'. The name Greek was applied to them first by the inhabitants of Italy.

huge 'Cyclopean' boulders; and somehow or other—probably not by warlike capture—they succeeded in making these fortresses their own. Examples of such fortresses may still be seen at Tiryns and Mycenae in the Argive Plain; and from the



FIG. 1. MAP TO ILLUSTRATE GREECE IN HOMERIC TIMES

remains of their palaces which archaeologists have unearthed we are able to learn something of the splendid style in which the Achaean princes lived. But they were a restless folk; and not long content with a life of prosperous peace, they took ship

#### SUBTERRANEAN GALLERY, TIRYNS (*see opposite*)

This gallery is constructed in the thickness of the walls, which at their base (below the ground-level of the citadel) are a dozen yards in width. The masonry consists of huge 'Cyclopean' boulders skilfully piled to form a rude pointed vault. Side openings off the gallery lead into store-chambers.

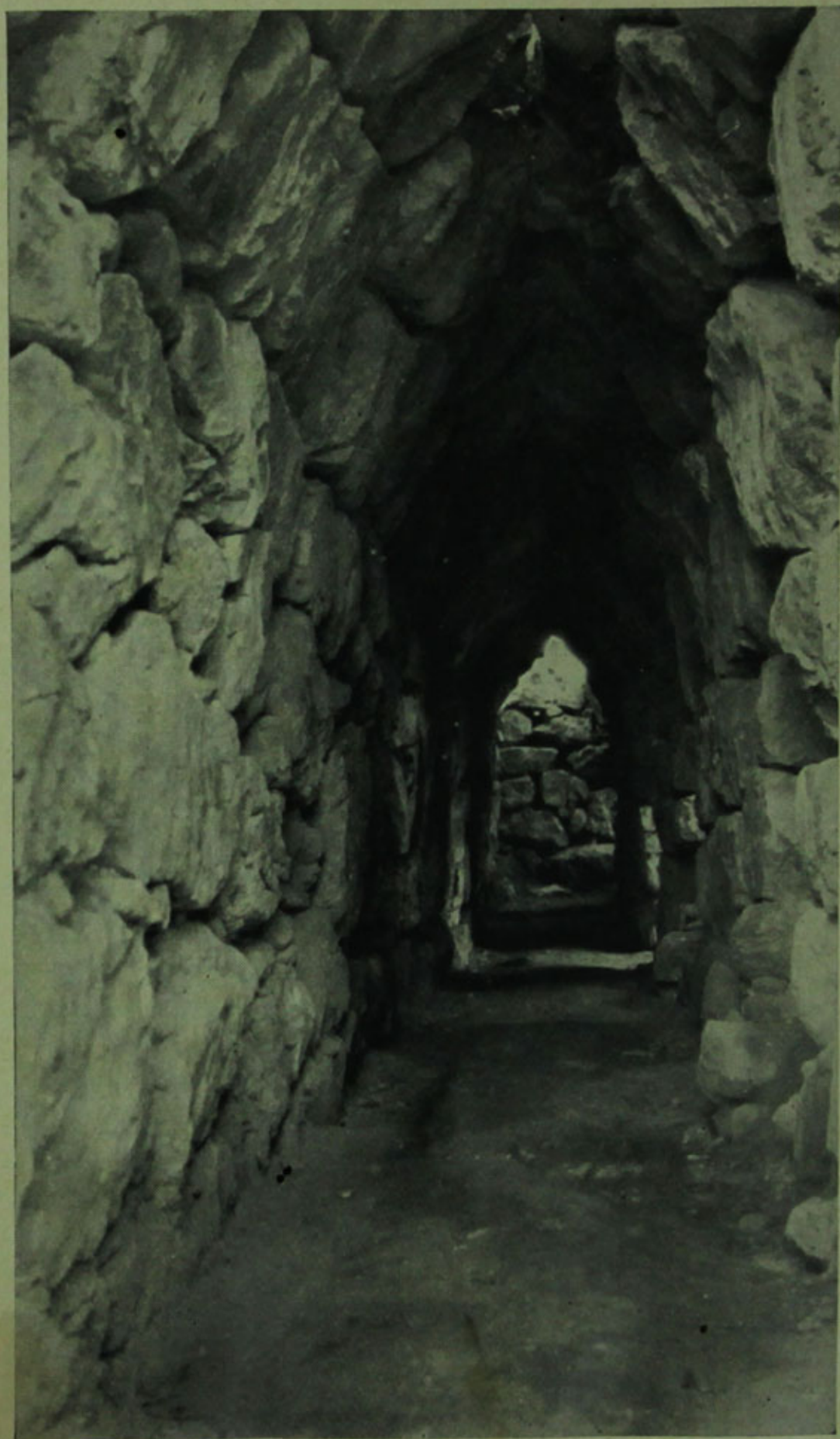


FIG. 2. SUBTERRANEAN GALLERY, TIRYNS

and crossed the sea in search of plunder. The most famous of their expeditions was against the city of Troy, which lay on the north-west corner of Asia Minor hard by the Dardanelles. Concerning this and other exploits their minstrels\* composed songs, and the songs were treasured, being handed down, as we may guess, from minstrel father to minstrel son. By and by the Greeks learnt the art of writing from Phoenician merchants; and about 900 B.C. a certain poet called Homer—a blind old bard, so later tradition said—strung many of these songs together to form two great poems called the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the most thrilling and beautiful tales that were ever told in verse.<sup>1</sup> It is from these two poems, as well as from the remains which archaeologists have dug up, that we know how the Greeks lived in this early age before the dawn of history proper.

The Achaean princes kept great style. Their palaces, indeed, as may be seen at Mycenae and Tiryns, were simply planned. A spacious hall or 'Megaron' was their living-room, with a central hearth surrounded by four pillars which propped the roof, the smoke escaping through a vent-hole overhead. Here, too, the men slept, while the womenfolk retired to quarters of their own. Outside the ante-chamber of the hall lay an open courtyard, surrounded by a penthouse or veranda where slaves

<sup>1</sup> The *Iliad* relates a series of episodes in the great Trojan War, culminating in the story of the mortal combat in which the Greek Achilles slew the Trojan champion Hector and dragged the corpse at his chariot-tail around the city walls. The *Odyssey* tells of the homeward voyage of the Greek Odysseus (called Ulysses by the Romans) to his native town on the island of Ithaca, where he found his faithful wife Penelope hard pressed and his substance wasted by a crowd of insolent suitors, among whom he entered in the guise of a poor beggar, but presently seizing a bow, disclosed himself and shot them down in his own halls.

---

#### A 'HOMERIC' CUP, (see opposite)

One of two gold cups found at Vaphio. The scene is a bull-hunt; a girl has locked arms and legs round the bull's horns while, beneath, a cow-boy has apparently been tossed.





FIG. 3. A 'HOMERIC' CUP

~~and even guests might be set to sleep.~~ Besides other rooms and store chambers there was usually a bath-room; for the Achaeans were a cleanly folk and always after travel or fighting would take their first opportunity of a good wash. But though simple in structure, their palaces were handsomely adorned. In one has been found the remains of a beautiful patterned frieze of alabaster inlaid with blue glass. One may guess that even in the fairy-tale description which Homer gives of the palace of King Alcinous some of the detail has been drawn from actual life. *'Brazen were the walls on this side and on that, and round about them ran a frieze of blue; and golden were the doors which enclosed that goodly house, with door posts of silver on a threshold of bronze and a silver lintel above, and on either side stood golden dogs and silver to guard the house of great-hearted Alcinous. Within were seats set in array along the wall, and thereupon were spread delicate coverlets fine woven, the women's handiwork. Moreover there were youths fashioned in gold, standing on firm-set bases with flaming torches in their hands, giving light through the night to feasters in the palace.'*

The craftsmen of those days, we know, were extremely skilful, and worked in rich materials. Gold is constantly mentioned. As in the days of King Solomon, silver was 'little accounted of'. Bronze was the favourite metal; and iron was as yet a rarity. A famous pair of drinking-cups has been discovered, both of beaten gold; and on one the scene of a bull-hunt, on the other a herd of oxen are depicted with a skill which beggars fancy. Homer, too, tells of a shield, manufactured for Achilles, on which were graven or inlaid all manner of scenes taken from daily life. It is from these scenes, as he describes them, that we can gain perhaps the best picture of how the Achaeans lived.

Agriculture was naturally one of the chief means of livelihood. The staple products of the soil were corn, wine, and oil which was pressed from olive-berries and served the ancients in place

of butter for cooking and of soap for washing. Ploughing was done with teams of oxen or mules. Here is the picture which we get from Achilles' shield:

*And thereafter on the shield  
He set a tender fallow-field;  
Passing rich the tillage was  
And three times worked and wide,  
And in it wheeling up and down  
A-many ploughmen plied  
Their teams; and when anon they drew  
Unto the fallow's end,  
Then came a man to meet them there  
And gave into their hand  
Wine in a goblet honey-sweet;  
So turned they up the furrow  
And were full fain to come again  
To the end of the deep fallow.*

Next the harvesting:

*And next a lord's domain deep-soiled  
He set thereon and in it toiled  
Hireling reapers; in their hands  
Sharp sickles they were plying.  
And down the furrow fell the swathes,  
Some well in order lying  
And some the binders bound with straw;  
For binders there were three,  
And boys behind them plucked and bore.  
By armfuls for to give them store  
And the work went on unceasingly.  
And thzreamong the overlord  
In silence, hand on stave,  
Was standing by the furrow's edge  
And the heart in him was blithe.*

Far more than on agriculture, however, the Achaeans depended for their livelihood on the pasturage of flocks and herds. They kept goats, sheep, and swine; but their most prized possession was the ox, an animal doubly useful for ploughing as well as for food. In this primitive age when coined money was not yet invented, they even measured values by so many head of oxen; and many female names, such as Alphisiboea 'the winner of oxen', disclose the fact that at the time of the child's birth the anxious father had looked forward to his daughter's marriage-day when she would bring him some return for the cost of her upbringing. On Achilles' shield the oxen are not forgotten:

*A herd of straight-horned kine anon  
 He did fashion thereupon;  
 Of gold and tin were the kine chased  
 And with lowing loud they paced  
 From the midden to the mead  
 By rippling river and waving reed.  
 And golden-wrought beside the kine  
 Went drovers four, and with them nine  
 Fleet-footed hounds were following;  
 But among the cows ahead  
 Two lions terrible and dread  
 A mighty bull held bellowing.  
 Loud roared he, as they dragged him down  
 And the young swains and dogs made haste  
 To aid him; but they two had torn  
 The hide of the great bull to taste  
 The entrails and black blood. In vain  
 The drovers urged the swift dogs on;  
 But they in fear shrank back again  
 And cowering there gave tongue.*

Olive-picking was a humdrum task; but the vintage was a fit theme for poetry.



FIG. 4. OLIVE TREES

## LIFE IN THE HEROIC AGE

*And a vineyard cluster-laden  
 Next he fashioned fair and golden;  
 Black hung the bunches, standing high  
 On silver poles continuously.  
 And around, a ditch of azure  
 And a pale he drave of tin;  
 And up it ran a single path,  
 By the which to gather in  
 The vintage would the pickers pass.  
 Merry hearted lad and lass  
 In baskets bore the honeyed fruit;  
 Among them on a shrilling lute  
 A boy made witching melody  
 And chanted sweet in piping voice  
 The Linus Song: so tripped they on  
 With music and with merry noise.*

All this makes a happy and pleasant picture of peaceful country life. But the Achaeans were no stay-at-homes. The love of excitement was strong in them, and in part it was satisfied by the pleasures of the chase. The Homeric poems are full of allusions to hunting—hares and deer and wild boars; there were even frequent encounters with lions. But this was not enough for their restless spirit. Greece is a sea-girt country with many creeks and inlets offering good harbourage, and innumerable scattered islands through which ships might thread their way with security in summer. So the Achaeans, and the other Greeks after them, took readily to the sea. Launching their gaily painted galleys 'of the scarlet cheek' and 'sitting well in order on the thwarts' they would 'smite the grey sea with their oars' and so fare forth on their adventures. Many went in quest of trade, penetrating distant corners of the Mediterranean waters. Traffic with Egypt and the Levant was common; and Phoenician merchantmen brought to Greek shores many valuables and luxuries from the East.

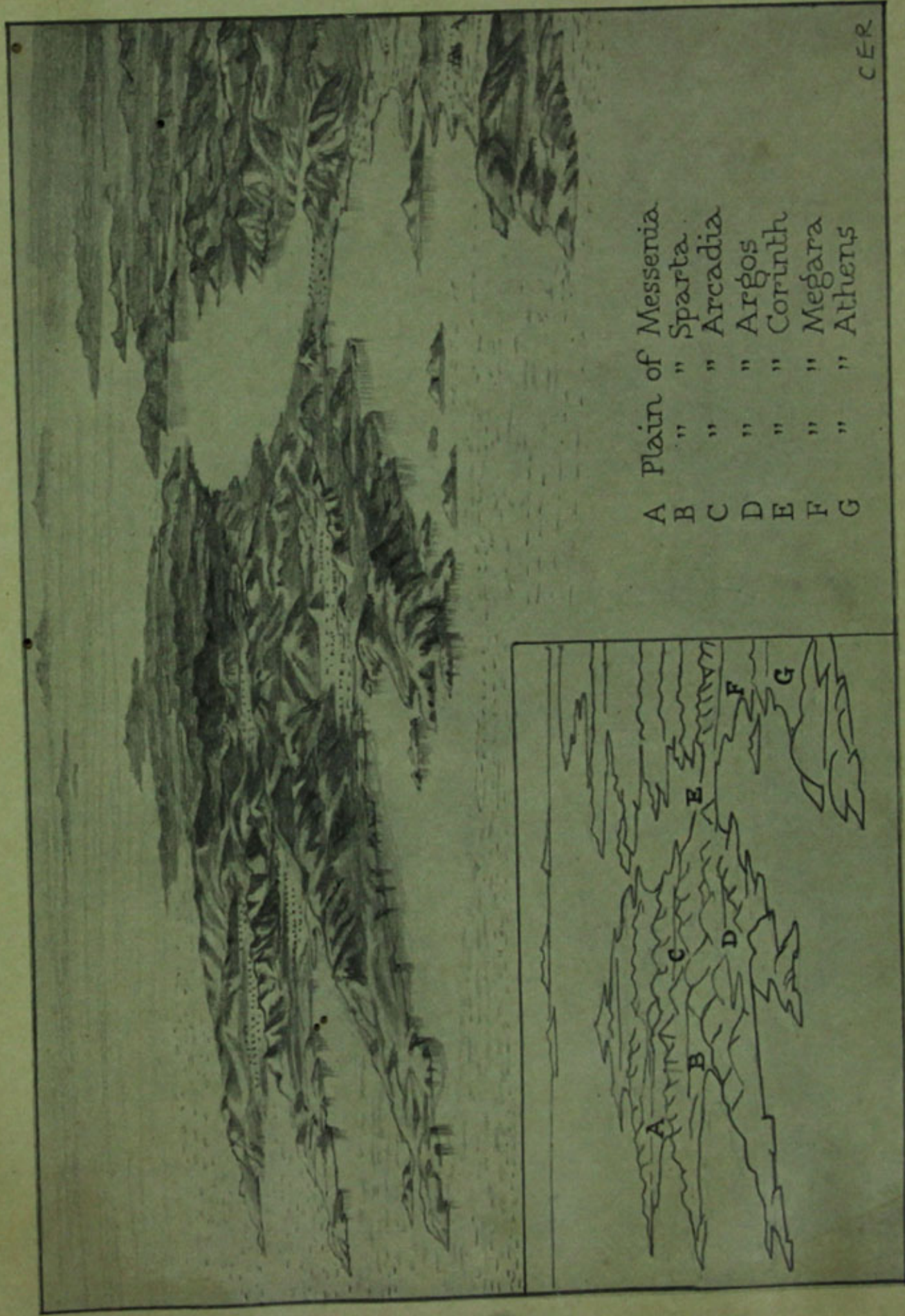


FIG. 5. A rough bird's-eye view of Greece from the south-east. Note the level plains nestling between the mountain chains and the numerous inlets and islands.

But more often the Greeks themselves would sail in search of plunder. Here is a tale from Homer—the tale of an imaginary adventurer, but none the less true to fact. *'Labour of the field I never loved, nor home-keeping thrift, but galleys with their oars were dear to me and wars and trim spears and darts. Nine times had I been a leader of men and of swift-faring ships against a strange folk and wealth fell ever to my hand. Then the people called on me to lead the ships to Troy and there we sons of the Achaeans warred nine years and in the tenth year sacked the city and fared home. One month alone I abode with my children and my gentle wife and then my spirit bade me fit out our ships and sail to Egypt with my goodly company. On the fifth day we came to the fair flowing river Aegyptus and I bade my companions abide there with the ships and guard them and sent forth scouts to spy upon the land. But my men in their folly fell to wasting the fields of the Egyptians and haled off their wives and children and put their men to the sword. Whereat the battle cry was raised within the city and the folk came forth and slew many of us and others they led up with them alive to work for them in durance.'* It reads like the description of some Viking raid.

The Achaeans then were great warriors, and of their method of fighting something must needs be said. Some used the bow; some even hurled great boulders so heavy that 'not two men could lift them nowadays'. But the spear was the favourite weapon. Armour consisted of bronze helmet with 'waving horse-hair plume'; a leather or metal cuirass; bronze greaves for the legs; and a shield formed of a huge ox-hide stretched on wooden struts and strengthened with boss or layers of bronze. With this weighty accoutrement the warrior was ill able to travel afoot to the battle-field; so he drove in a chariot—horses were used in harness, but never ridden at this date—then leaving his squire to handle the steeds, dismounted and engaged some hostile champion in single combat. The two crouched behind their enveloping shields, from cover of which



they launched their 'ashen spears' till one or other was wounded. The issue of the battle was usually decided by such single combats. The common folk were only lightly armed and could make no stand against the prowess of the champions, before



FIG. 6. An ancient ship taken from an early ivory-carving and similar to ships described in Homer. In the centre two men haul at the mainsail which is furled to a yard-arm. The rowers sit each behind his shield. In prow and stern are short decks; from one a man is fishing; from the other the captain says good-bye to his wife. The steersman, seated astern, wields two paddles.

whom they were as chaff before the wind. Here is Homer's picture of Achilles' passage through the mêlée:

*As down the hollow of the glen  
Fierce fire its havoc plays,  
When drought is on the mountain  
And the deep woods are ablaze,  
And a wind blows which catcheth up  
And hunts the flame all ways;  
So all ways ravening with his spear,  
As he had been a god's own peer,  
He hunted and he slew them there,  
Till earth ran black where the blood was.  
And, as when broad-browed bulls are yoked*

## LIFE IN THE HEROIC AGE

*White barley for to tread,  
 Upon a threshing-floor well-lain  
 And 'neath the feet of lowing kine  
 Is lightly sifted out the grain,  
 So by high-souled Achilles sped  
 The hoovèd horses trod the shield  
 And trampled on the dead.  
 Below upon the axle-tree  
 And above about the rail  
 The chariot dripped with a bloody froth,  
 It spurted from the horses' hoof,  
 It spurted from the wheel;  
 So did the son of Peleus ride  
 For winning of the battle's pride;  
 And in the carnage deep he dyed  
 His hands invincible.*

As in war, so in peace, the common folk counted for little. This was what we call a 'patriarchal' age—that is, the political power in the community lay in the hands of the 'fathers' or heads of families. The chief or prince, as 'father' of the tribe, commanded its host in war, sacrificed to the gods for its common welfare, and sat in judgement upon disputes among its members. Often he called the other leading men or elders into consultation. Homer gives us a picture of these elders met together in the market-place to settle a blood-feud.

*In the mart the folk were thrōnging  
 Where had arisen strife,  
 Two men striving for the ransom  
 Upon a dead man's life;  
 And one averred that all was quit  
 To the folk attesting it;  
 But one that he had gotten naught,  
 And both before a justice sought*

*Trial of their suit; and loud  
 The backers cried for either side  
 But heralds stayed the crowd.  
 On smooth stones in a holy ring  
 The elders sat, and in their hands  
 Heralds of the lusty voice  
 Had set the sacred wands,  
 Wherewith stood they forth in turn  
 Each to say his say  
 And sooth it is that in the midst  
 Two golden talents lay  
 To give to him among them all  
 Who should judge of it most right.*

It is of the life of these chiefs and leaders that the Homeric poems for the most part tell. Occasionally we get a glimpse of the life of the lesser folk. The *Odyssey*, in particular, relates many incidents which throw a light on their condition. It tells of beggars who haunt the courts of the rich, of a Phoenician slave-woman who was beguiled by the trinkets of a Levantine pedlar into eloping on his ship, of men kidnapped from their homes and sold into bondage. Of one slave, the faithful swineherd of Odysseus, we have a delightful account, showing the friendliest relations between servant and master. Yet the picture is by no means too rosy. These men knew the hardships and hazards of life, the bitter nip of the night frost and the high-handed treatment of a haughty chief.

The style and habits of the chiefs recall our own medieval barons. Their life was a full and pleasant one. They were great eaters, feasting liberally on beef and pork, while slaves carved and handed round the bread in baskets. Their wine was a rich syrup which they mixed in a bowl with water before it was ladled out to the diners. Minstrels were frequently in attendance. At the feast in Alcinous' house, when the meal was over, a minstrel struck up with his harp and sang of the great deeds

of famous men. 'A goodly thing it is', Odysseus said, 'to listen to a singer such as this, like to the very gods in voice.'

Another favourite pastime was the dance. A floor of beaten earth was specially prepared for it. Here is Homer's description of a typical scene:

*Young squires and maids of costly dower  
Danced hand in hand upon the floor,  
These in lissom kirtles dight  
Those in tunics woven light,  
Whereon oil of olive glowed;  
Each maiden had a lovely crown  
And the young men swords of gold  
From silver baldrics hanging down;  
And whiles they tripped on cunning feet  
Deft moving in a reel,  
As when some potter at his bench  
Makes trial of a wheel,  
Fitting it between his hands,  
Whether it run true;  
And then anon in double file  
They danced it to and fro,  
And round about that lovely choir  
Was set a goodly throng.  
Full joyful were the folk to see  
The pleasant sight; and thereamong  
A holy minstrel played his harp  
And, as he led the tune,  
Two tumblers went between the ranks  
A-twirling up and down.*

---

A HOMERIC RECITER (see opposite)

This figure (taken from a jar the shape of which is indicated on the right) represents a man, dressed in a 'himation', from whose mouth proceed the words 'So it befell once in Tiryns'.

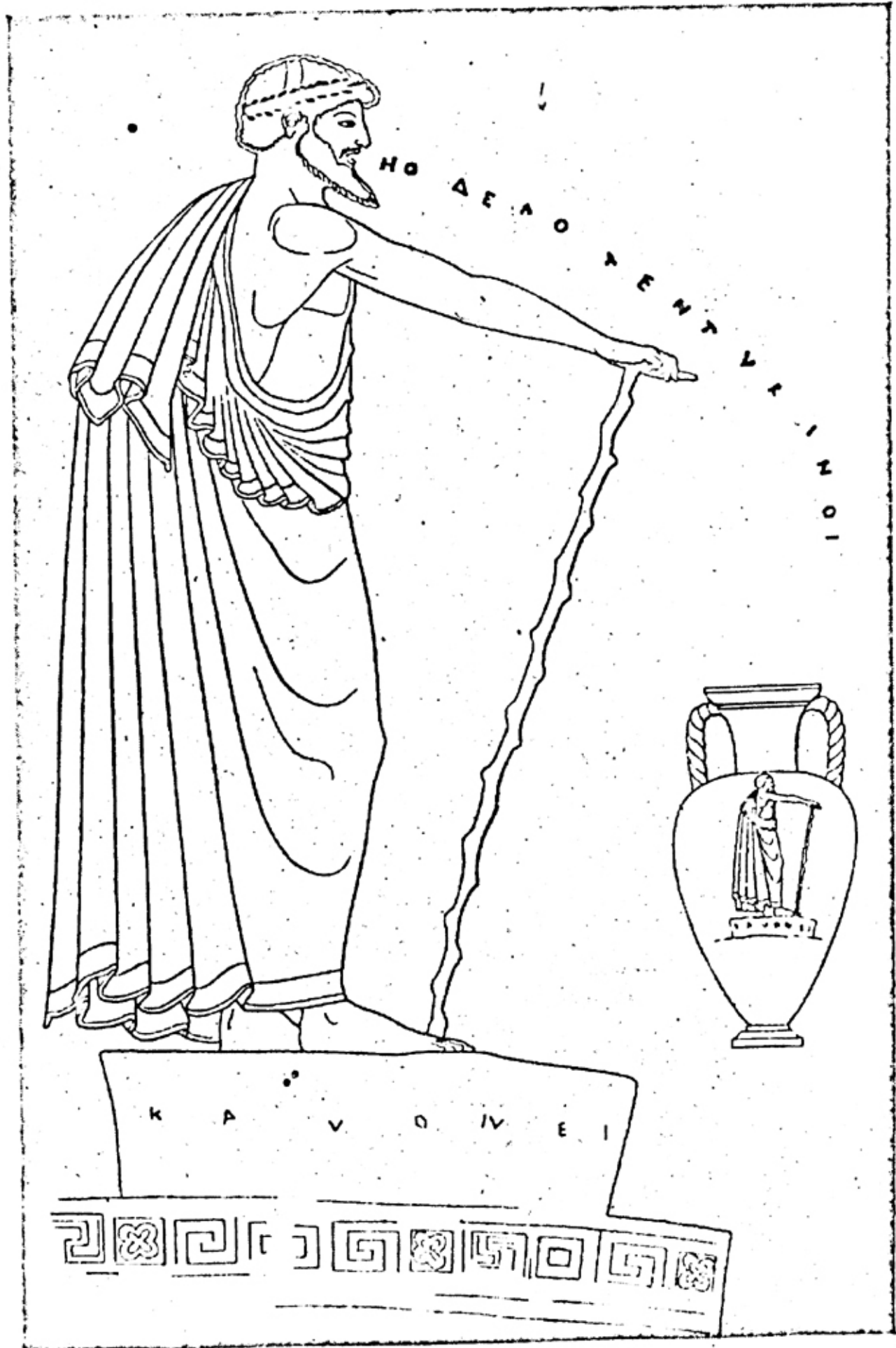


FIG. 7. A HOMERIC RECITER

Sometimes the dancers played a game of ball in time to the tune. Athletic exercises of a more strenuous sort were also very popular. For the Greeks were at all times great lovers of sports. At the close of Alcinous' banquet, the young men competed in running, wrestling, boxing, jumping, and weight-throwing; and Odysseus, middle aged as he was, astonished the company by throwing a monster stone 'far beyond all the other marks'.

In many of their activities the womenfolk mixed freely among the men. True, they kept their separate quarters in the house, and did not, as a rule, appear at the banquets of the males; but on the whole nothing is more remarkable than the independence of the wives and daughters of the Homeric chieftains as compared with the less enviable condition of the women of later times. The poems are full of beautiful feminine characters, such as Hector's wife Andromache, the faithful Penelope who waited twenty years for her husband's home-coming, the lovely Helen whose elopement to Troy was the prime cause of the Greeks' expedition, or the maiden Nausicaa who befriended Odysseus when washed ashore after a shipwreck.

Nothing in the Homeric poems is more remarkable than the delicacy and courtesy of the manners of this people. Young men invariably rise from their seats when an older man enters the room. Towards strangers they show an unfailing courtesy, rebuking such louts as think a foreigner fair game for insolence. The same behaviour is still to be found among the peasant folk of any European countryside, where the vulgarity of town-civilization has not yet made its way. These virtues are, it seems, common to all who live very close to nature; and certainly the Homeric folk were nothing if not natural. Their emotions were strong and honest; their loves and hates passionate. Achilles declares that, on slaying his mortal foe Hector, he could almost find it in his heart to carve and eat him raw. Women, hearing of their husbands' deaths, give themselves up to wild lament. Odysseus, when at last he meets his son after

long absence, sheds tears till the going down of the sun. Yet a fine restraint is also observable in this passionate race; and perhaps this quality in them will be best understood if we close by saying a word concerning their religious beliefs.

The ancient religion of the land before the coming of the Greeks had been a gloomy worship of dark, mysterious powers which dwelt in the recesses of the Underworld and were bestial in form and cruel in temper. To placate them men made offerings of bowls of blood or even, in their despair, of human victims; and all know the story of the hideous Minotaur, half bull, half man, who lurked in the famous Labyrinth at Crete and fed on the bodies of hapless youths and maids. This sinister creed the Greeks, when they entered the land, seem in part to have adopted; for legend told how even Agamemnon, who led their host to Troy, sacrificed his own daughter Iphigeneia to win divine favour for the voyage. But, as time went on, these foul superstitions were suppressed and the creed, which the Greeks brought with them, triumphed. It was a far happier, sunnier creed. Its gods were not mysterious hobgoblins or monstrosities, but reasonable beings of human form and with the minds and passions of men. They dwelt, so it was thought, above the clouds on Mount Olympus, whose snow-capped peak rose sparkling beyond the plains of northern Thessaly. Each among them, too, had some favourite shrine in various parts of Greece: Athena at Athens, Apollo at Delphi, Zeus at Olympia. At such shrines, and at many an improvised altar too, was offered sacrifice of the thigh-bones of oxen wrapped in fat, and in many other ways. The purpose of such sacrifice was not merely to placate the gods' wrath, but to invoke their assistance in the various operations of men's daily life. Each deity had his special function. Zeus the sky-god and the wielder of the thunderbolt ruled over all Olympus and presided over the destinies of men, weighing in his golden balances their lots of life and death. Poseidon was the god of the sea and the saviour of mariners

Athena was the patroness of handicrafts; Ares the lord of war, and Apollo of healing. What therefore is specially to be noted is that the Greeks' notion of the gods was not vague and mysterious, but reasonable and clear-cut. Olympus, so to speak, was highly organized; and this sense of system was typical of the race. They liked to see everything well ordered, and they applied their *minds*, as few peoples have ever done, to the manifold problems of life. So, hot blooded and passionate as they were, they did not let their feelings run away with them. They sought to curb and direct them by the guiding restraints of reason. Above all, they disliked excess; and, if one were to choose any one of their many proverbs as peculiarly suitable for their national motto, it would be the two words inscribed over Apollo's shrine at Delphi—*Mēden agān*, 'Nothing too much'. On that principle their whole civilization was based.

But the Greeks had far to travel before they reached full civilization. For about 1100 the Heroic Age, of which we have been speaking, came abruptly to an end. In the wake of the Achaeans came other migratory tribes of Greek-speaking peoples. They were called the Dorians and, unlike their Achaean predecessors, they were too rough and barbarous to appreciate the culture which they found in the lands they conquered. They sacked the lordly palaces of Tiryns and Mycenae. All the arts and riches laboriously built up through many centuries were thus suddenly swept away; and a Dark Age followed. But the germ of the Greek genius was working. Order was at last evolved out of chaos; and after four or five centuries of semi-barbarism a new and even more brilliant culture was to blossom forth among the city-states of what we call historic Greece.



## II

## THE CITY-STATE

THE landscape of Greece was worthy of its people. Modern travellers who journey thither intending to visit its museums and admire its temples find themselves to their own surprise entranced by the natural beauty of its scenery. Everywhere are mountains—more naked and barren perhaps than in antiquity, since pine forests and oak coppices were used up long ago for ships' timbers and other purposes—yet even in the old days the fine sharp outline of the hills must have stood out strong and clear in the crystal atmosphere of Mediterranean sunshine. Shallow scrub covers their lower slopes; and among the scrub lies such a litter of boulders and loose shale that some agility is needed in picking one's way among them, and paths normally follow the course of some dry ravine or torrent-bed. Between the ranges of these hills lie narrow level strips of fertile plain-land, brilliant in spring-time with the emerald green of young corn crops in vivid contrast to the shimmering grey of the extensive olive orchards. Towards the foot of the plain the vista between the pale blue mountains broadens out, disclosing a horizon of the deep blue sea, calm as a lake in summer, sparkling with the 'myriad laughter' of tiny dancing wavelets and strewn with the grey shapes of countless rocky islets.<sup>1</sup>

It was in such plains—and there are many—that the Greeks, when first they arrived out of the north, settled down to make their homes. For some centuries they lived, as they had settled, in scattered villages or groups of villages, each under its local chief. Then bit by bit the groups began to league themselves together, for common religious celebrations, a common market, and common defence; but, most important of all, for common government. Thus in each plain there came to be formed a

<sup>1</sup> See bird's-eye view on p. 21.

separate political community; and the need arising for some political centre, its members chose some convenient hill-top which would serve equally for fortress and for capital. The name which the Greeks gave to such a fortress-capital was Polis or City; and the community of plain-dwellers who united in a common allegiance to this central Polis<sup>1</sup> is known as a City-State.

Now these city-states were something entirely novel in the history of the world. Other ancient peoples—the inhabitants of Mesopotamia,<sup>2</sup> for example, or the Egyptians—dwelt in plains of enormous area and their millions were content to obey the despotic rule of hereditary kings. Not so the Greeks; for their city-states were so diminutive and the citizens lived so close to the centre of government that they soon grew dissatisfied with the blundering of their monarchs. So one after another these monarchies were suppressed; and the members of each city-state undertook the adventurous task of governing themselves. To find oneself master of one's own destiny is a thrilling experience, as every young man knows when he emerges from the restraints of school or home; and the Greeks, enjoying the taste of political responsibility, were fiercely proud of their freedom. They were fired by an intensity of local patriotism which is difficult for us to imagine. To say that they loved their Polis is far short of the mark. She was all in all to them; and to be banished from her confines was a calamity almost worse than death itself. They were prepared to die for her; and wars

<sup>1</sup> It is easy to see how much Greek ideas of government have influenced later ages; for many of our words such as 'Politics', 'Politician', &c., are derived from this old Greek word for the state.

<sup>2</sup> The recently discovered civilization of the Sumerians, however, affords a parallel to the city-state.

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#### ARCADIA (*see opposite*)

Typical mountain scenery showing the boulder-strown hill-side, olive-trees, and in the foreground the ruins of a temple.



FIG. 8. ARCADIA

between city-state and city-state were unhappily so frequent and so bitter that the common unity of the Greek race as a whole was often lost completely from sight; and in the end the country was ruined by long-drawn internal strife. Such was the heavy price which Greece was forced to pay for this division into small political units—the largest of which did not exceed the area of a middle-sized English county. Yet the division was worth while; for only on so small a scale could the experiment of self-government have been attempted; and it produced, as we shall see, the most astonishing results.

By the end of the seventh century B.C. there had been formed many scores of such diminutive city-states not merely on the Greek mainland itself, but on the Aegean Islands and along the western coast of Asia Minor. Nor was this all; for the growth of population induced many states to send out colonists; and thus sprang up on the surrounding coasts of Sicily, Italy, and elsewhere a further crop of similar communities, almost completely independent of the mother-state who sent them out, and governing themselves according to the selfsame methods as they had known at home.

At first it was not *all* the inhabitants of a city-state who could claim a share of political privilege. The conditions of life were still mainly agricultural; many of the folk were little better than serfs; and the larger landowners monopolized political power, making the laws, delivering judgement on disputes, and deciding the issues of peace and war. Self-government therefore meant government by the wealthier class only. Oligarchy or the Rule of the Few is the name given to such government; and at the close of the seventh century oligarchies were general among the city-states of Greece.

Henceforward it will be well to concentrate our attention on two of these states, Sparta and Athens. About these far more is known; and the contrast between their political institutions adds special point to their choice.

## LIFE AT SPARTA

## I. THE LYCURGAN SYSTEM

AMONG the many city-states of Greece one of the most interesting was Sparta. This state had been formed in the beautiful valley of Lacedaemon in the south of the Peloponnese. It is a pleasant land, rich with trees and crops, well watered by the river Eurotas and other streams which flow down from the great mountain Taygetus upon its western side. The tribe of conquering Dorians, who had occupied it, had enslaved the original inhabitants, making them till the soil as serfs or Helots. By and by they crossed Mount Taygetus and, conquering the adjacent plain of Messenia, made serfs of its inhabitants too. Now the Spartans themselves were not very numerous, not more than a few thousand at most; and the serfs or Helots outnumbered them by ten or twenty to one. This was a dangerous situation; and about the middle of the seventh century the Helots suddenly rose in revolt. By a tremendous effort the Spartans at length wore the rebels down. But they had learnt their lesson. They were determined never to risk a repetition of the awful crisis. So a couple of generations later they undertook a complete re-organization of their national life.<sup>1</sup>

The authorship of this celebrated reform was attributed by tradition to a certain Lycurgus; and, though of Lycurgus himself we have no reliable information, the character and

<sup>1</sup> The constitution of Sparta comprised all three political elements which were present in the primitive community of Homeric times. These were: two hereditary *Kings* whose functions were eventually confined to commanding the army in war; a *Council of Elders* called the *Gerousia*: an *Assembly of Citizens* who were allowed little real voice in policy, their verdict being ascertained by the crude method of seeing whether 'Ayes' or 'Noes' shouted the louder. Besides these three, however, and, as time went on, developing more importance than them all, was a body of five *Ephors* who were annually elected and who in reality directed the affairs of the state.

object of the reform is well known to us. It sought by an iron discipline to train the entire body of Spartan citizens into an efficient garrison for the suppression of the serfs.

The Lycurgan system began with the upbringing of the young. At birth a male Spartan was inspected by the elders. If weakly, they ordered him to be exposed on the mountain-side and left to die. If likely to grow up to be a serviceable soldier, he was permitted to live and left for the first seven years in the charge of his mother. The women of Sparta were famous for their stalwart limbs and stout hearts. Where public interests were concerned, they did not flinch from any sacrifice. 'Return *with* your shield or *on* it' was the advice they gave when their sons went forth to war, implying that to be borne home wounded was preferable to the loss of shield in ignominious flight. Some mothers were even known to kill their sons for cowardice. Compared with the women of the rest of Greece, they enjoyed considerable independence; and as nurses they were everywhere much in request.

At seven home-life ended, and the boy was drafted into a sort of boarding-school with sixty or more others. The superintendent was an older man with a youth of twenty to assist him, to say nothing of attendants called 'Floggers'. Some of the leading boys were given the position of prefects and allowed to 'fag' the rest. All lived and fed together in a common mess; and it was a part of their training that the boys should supplement their scanty rations by stealing off the neighbouring farms. This practice was intended to develop resourcefulness and courage; and there is a famous story of a lad who, being caught in the act of stealing a tame fox, hid the animal under his cloak

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#### VALE OF SPARTA (*see opposite*)

Above the plain rich with fruit-trees and tillage rise the cliffs and snowclad peaks of Mount Taygetus, across which lies the mountain track to the Messenian Plain.

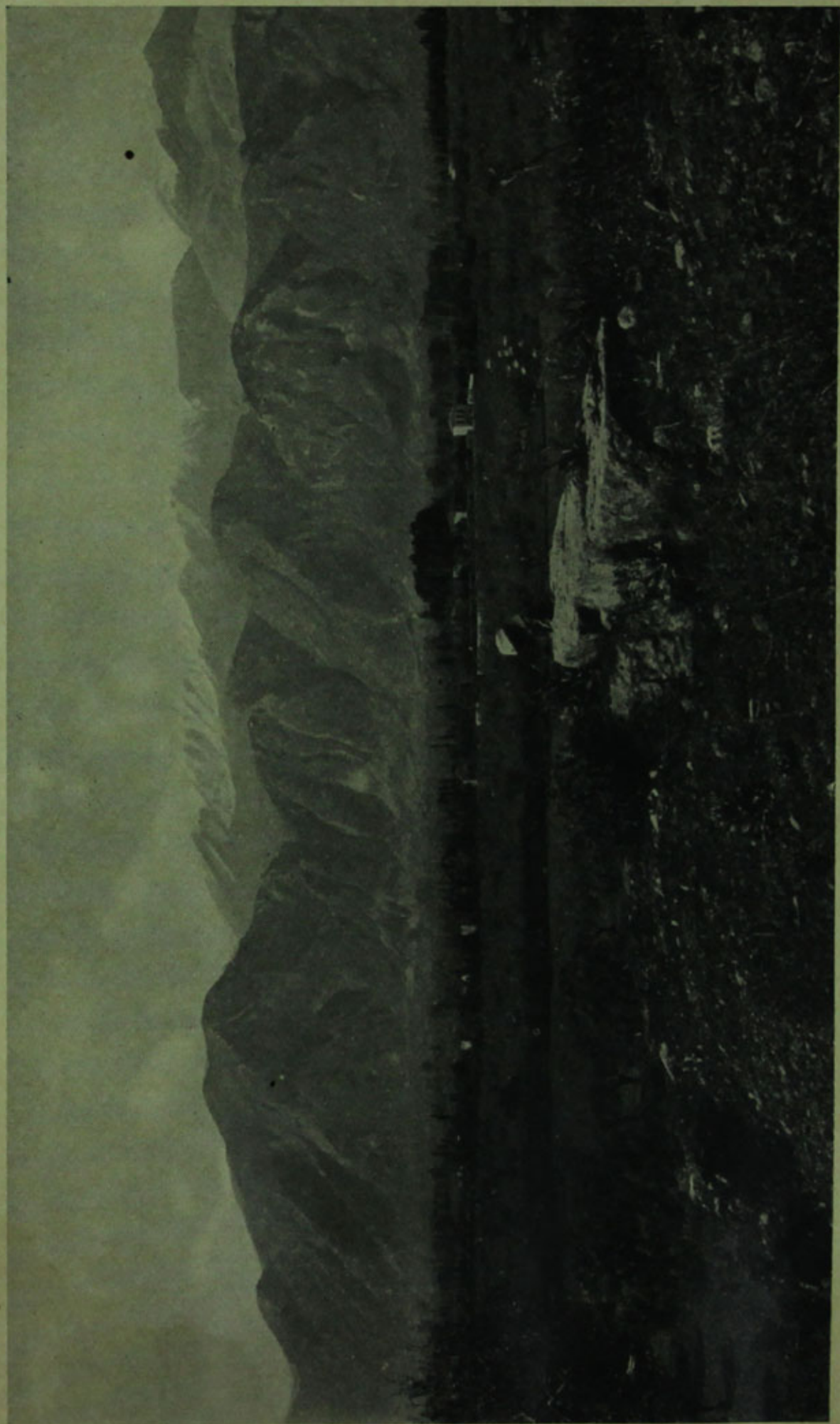


FIG. 9. VALE OF SPARTA

and allowed it to lacerate his vitals rather than accept the disgrace of exposure.

Toughness was, indeed, the principal quality which the Lyncurgan system aimed at producing. The boys went barefoot, wore but a single garment, and lay on a bed of thistledown and reeds. They swam in the Eurotas, one of the few strong-flowing rivers of Greece, drawing its waters from the snow-capped peaks of Mount Taygetus which towers above the Vale of Lacedaemon. All manner of sports were practised, running, wrestling, quoit-throwing, and above all dancing, which resembled what we should call musical drill. There were games specially devised to promote pugnacity. In one the lads were divided into two teams or packs; and one team being posted on an island surrounded by streams, it was the business of the other team to expel them by main force, kicking, biting, scratching and even tearing at each others' eyes.

As for school-lessons, as we ourselves know them, there were very few. It is doubtful how far the majority were even taught to read or write. Memory was trained by learning the laws of the state by heart; and most could recite some Homer and the favourite songs of their patriot-poet Tyrtaeus. Rhetoric, or the art of public speaking<sup>1</sup> which other Greeks so much admired, the Spartans despised and mistrusted. They even affected a deliberate curtness of speech of which many examples might be given. 'Breakfast here, supper in Hades', said one of their generals when his army was hopelessly entrapped. Once a foreign ambassador, who came to Sparta seeking assistance, addressed a long harangue to the councillors, who at its conclusion remarked that they had forgotten the first half and could not follow the second. Next day he took the hint and, producing a sack, simply said 'Sack wants flour'. 'You might have left out "sack"' was the answer. As this story shows, these taciturn folk were

<sup>1</sup> Here again our own word 'rhetoric' is derived from the Greek word *rhētor*, a public speaker.





FIG. 10. MUSICAL DRILL (A PYRRHIC DANCE)

not without a certain shrewdness and a dry sense of humour; and even to-day we sometimes speak of a terse, pithy saying as 'laconic', that is like 'Lacedaemonian' speech. But their woful illiteracy stunted their development. They produced no art and no literature of real merit. They were incapable of large views; and though Sparta might have played a glorious part as the leader of the whole Greek race, her history is one long tale of lost opportunities.

At the same time we must remember that the Spartans' over-emphasis on physical exercise had a definite purpose—the making of good soldiers. No sport likely to overdevelop the wrong muscles or otherwise injure the growth of the body was permitted; and for this reason boxing was banned. Once every ten days the boys underwent an official inspection. Their physique was superb. It is unlikely that there was ever a finer race.

Boyhood over, a citizen's first taste of practical duties began and it was a grim one. At eighteen he was drafted into the Secret Corps or *Crypteia*; and for two years it was his business to go forth among the Helot population of the countryside and, searching out the more dangerous characters among them, to make away with these in as secret a manner as possible. Once as many as two thousand Helots were thus dispatched at a single time and nobody knew how.

Manhood brought no release from the stern discipline of the Lycurgan system. Communal life was in fact the keynote of the Spartans' whole existence. Though hard, it had many compensations. Drill was a regular part of their daily routine; but, like all true soldiers, they enjoyed the zest of team-work and organized co-operation. They liked to feel themselves, as rowers do, a part of an efficient machine; and the spirit of comradeship, which this engendered, was not confined to the parade-ground. It entered into every department of their daily habits. All full-grown citizens lived, like the boys, a barrack-life



FIG. 11. A RUNNER

This man is in the attitude of starting for the 'Hoplite Race'; on his head is a helmet the crest of which is missing; as also is the shield that should be on his arm.

in messes called Syssitia. Their quarters were kept deliberately simple. No decoration was permitted, the law forbidding the use of any tool except the axe. Clothing too was of the simplest; and the foul condition of a Spartan's garments was notorious. They were far from being a cleanly race. In the messes the fare consisted chiefly of pork, cheese, figs, bread, and wine. Spartan broth was famous for its nastiness, so that one stranger declared on tasting it that he now understood why no Spartan feared death. Hunting might add to the menu; but normally each individual member was required to make a monthly contribution of food to the common table. This was provided by the Helots from his farm. No citizen ever worked the land himself.

Even trading was forbidden him, but was left to a class, neither citizens nor serfs, who lived in districts more or less distant from the capital. Thus the amassing of wealth was deliberately discouraged; for it was held that, so long as the citizens possessed no personal interests, they would remain the more devoted servants of the common weal. Money-making indeed was rendered almost impossible, since the only coinage recognized at Sparta was a currency of heavy iron spits. A sum sufficient to purchase a slave would have filled a good-sized wagon!

So stern was the discipline that little scope was left for personal responsibility; and, just as the boys had always a grown man hanging round their heels to keep them out of mischief, so even the Spartan commanders-in-chief were often hampered by the presence of government spies. The result was unfortunate; for when Spartans went abroad and passed beyond the control of the home authorities, they often took to drink and self-indulgence. For they had never learned the true habit of self-mastery for lack of genuine opportunity at home. Nevertheless so long as they were in guiding-strings, they remained the most devoted servants of the state, and their iron discipline

made them magnificent soldiers. Their abundant leisure too allowed daily opportunity for drill; and to appreciate the importance of such training in the military history of Greece, it will be well to say something here about Greek methods of fighting.

## II. METHODS OF GREEK WARFARE

Since Homeric times these methods had undergone a change. Combats between single champions had gone out of fashion. They were replaced by the charge of a well-ordered battle-line of heavy-armed warriors or hoplites. These fought at close quarters, using not the old missile javelin, but a six-foot thrusting lance.<sup>1</sup> Their defensive equipment, on the other hand, was much the same as before—a helmet, cuirass, greaves, and a large oval shield which covered the whole body from chin to knee. Thus equipped, they presented to the enemy a front well protected from head to foot. The battle-line or phalanx was formed of a solid rectangle of such hoplites, ranged eight ranks deep as a rule and marching side by side in such close formation that each man was partially covered by his neighbour's shield. So long as the line held firm, its front was almost impenetrable. The two opposed armies, charging against each other to the tune of the pipe, met with a crash which on one occasion, we are told, could be heard at some miles' distance. There then ensued a struggle that more than anything else resembled a football scrum, in which the combatants stood upright and, pushing with their shields and thrusting with their spears, strove to heave their opponents back. So long as the shield-line held, it was difficult even for spears to penetrate the hoplite's armour; but once it broke it was a different matter. Taken in flank or rear, his cuirass offered no adequate protection to the lower portions of his body; and if he fled, casting his cumbrous shield aside, he could be hunted down and dispatched

<sup>1</sup> A short sword was also carried at the side for use at close quarters.

with ease. For this reason the casualties of a defeated army were often out of all proportion to the victors' losses.

For armies thus heavily accoutred and closely marshalled, the first essential was smooth ground for manœuvre. On the broken boulder-strewn hill-side the hoplite would flounder hopelessly. So most battles were fought on the plain; and it was only on occasions when some wild mountain tribe was the enemy that light-armed troops, armed with bows and slings, played a really important part.<sup>1</sup> Cavalry, too, were little used; for the plains of southern Greece were too small to afford easy manœuvre, and only in the wide plains of Thessaly in the north did horse-breeding and horsemanship attain much vogue.

The Greeks clung to the traditional methods of fighting almost as though to the rules of a game. Occasionally, it is true, the rules were broken, and with surprising success. Once a Spartan general, instead of accepting the enemy's challenge when they drew up in regular battle-order, deliberately waited until the 'fall-out' order was given, and then fell on them seated at dinner and wiped them all out. Sometimes an enemy would refuse battle altogether and skulk behind his town-walls (for all cities were fortified except Sparta, where the constant presence of the Helots would have made even such a precaution useless). In these circumstances the invader might attempt (though this was rare) to force an entrance to the city. Sometimes battering-rams were employed to breach the walls. We hear, too, of an ingenious engine consisting of a nozzle attached to a furnace through which flames were blown by bellows on to the inflammable parts of the defences. Sometimes, too, a mound was piled against the wall to facilitate an entry; and the defenders, to meet this, would tunnel underground, drawing the earth

<sup>1</sup> In the fourth century B.C., when other states besides the Spartans began to train professional armies, light-armed troops were drilled in tactics which proved highly successful against the hitherto invincible hoplites. Another equally successful innovation was the massing of the hoplite ranks to a depth of twenty or even fifty deep against the normal eight.



FIG. 12. A HOPLITE

The spear from his right hand is missing; otherwise his armour is complete—crested helmet with cheek-pieces, metal cuirass to waist, greaves on lower legs, and shield covering upper legs and body.

away below as fast as more earth was piled above. Failing success by such methods, the besiegers might settle down to a regular blockade, building a wall completely round the city to check sorties and cut off supplies. It was not unusual to add a second wall outside the first to counter any attempt at relief; and the space between the two walls might be roofed over to afford comfortable quarters if the siege ran on through winter.

Normally, however, an invading army would endeavour to provoke a reluctant enemy to battle by ravaging his lands, destroying crops, felling trees, and setting farms ablaze. In days when most states were self-supporting, a people's harvest was its most vulnerable point. This fact, moreover, had its effect on the attackers too. For they equally depended on getting in their crops; and, as open warfare was unfashionable in winter months, the spring-time campaigns were for the most part brief, the soldier-citizens being impatient to get back home for their reaping in May or June. For in nearly all the states of Greece the army was composed of men called up from plough or workshop when the outbreak of a war demanded it. The Spartans alone possessed a standing army of what may be called professional soldiers; and the fact that they spent their lives in the continual practice of arms gave them an immense superiority over the half-trained militia of their neighbours. For under the conditions of warfare which we have described above it is obvious that victory was bound to go to the army best drilled to keep its ranks and move in perfect unison.

So for two centuries and more the Spartans proved victorious on nearly every battle-field; and as a result they gained the supremacy over almost all the states of the Peloponnese. Not indeed that they were popular. Their dour, brutal character and their selfish inability to understand the feelings of other folk gave them an ill name for high-handed tyranny. On the other hand, no true Greek could withhold his admiration for their superb physical development, their dogged courage, and their



self-sacrificing devotion to their own country's cause. So even beyond the Peloponnese the Spartans were respected as well as feared; and happily, when it came to the test, they were found ready to use their supremacy for more worthy ends than selfish aggrandizement. At a moment of awful peril, when the whole country was threatened by a barbarian invader, they came forward as champions of the Greek national cause.

In 480 B.C. Xerxes, King of Persia, led an enormous expedition into Greece with intent to add the country to his already vast domains.

All the country north of the Isthmus was overrun. Then two decisive battles were fought. First, in the Straits of Salamis the ships of the Greeks, and especially of the Athenians, utterly defeated the great Persian fleet. Xerxes fled for home; but he left a land-army to complete the subjugation of the northern half of the peninsula. In 479 a Greek host, led by the Spartans, overwhelmed this army at Plataea in Boeotia. It was an amazing triumph, for Persia was the strongest power in the world. The Greeks were uplifted by a new sense of their national greatness. They realized more than ever before the true value of liberty. The prestige of Sparta had never stood so high.

#### IV

#### THE RISE OF ATHENS

*economic and political changes*  
 WHILE the Spartans were making good their domination of the Peloponnese, Athens had been striking out along different lines. At first she was a purely agricultural state, poor and insignificant. Then during the sixth century B.C. industries had been started, especially the manufacture of pottery for export. Foreign traders had come to settle. A promising trade had been begun; and shortly before the Persian invasion the discovery of rich silver ore in south-east Attica had been utilized to build the

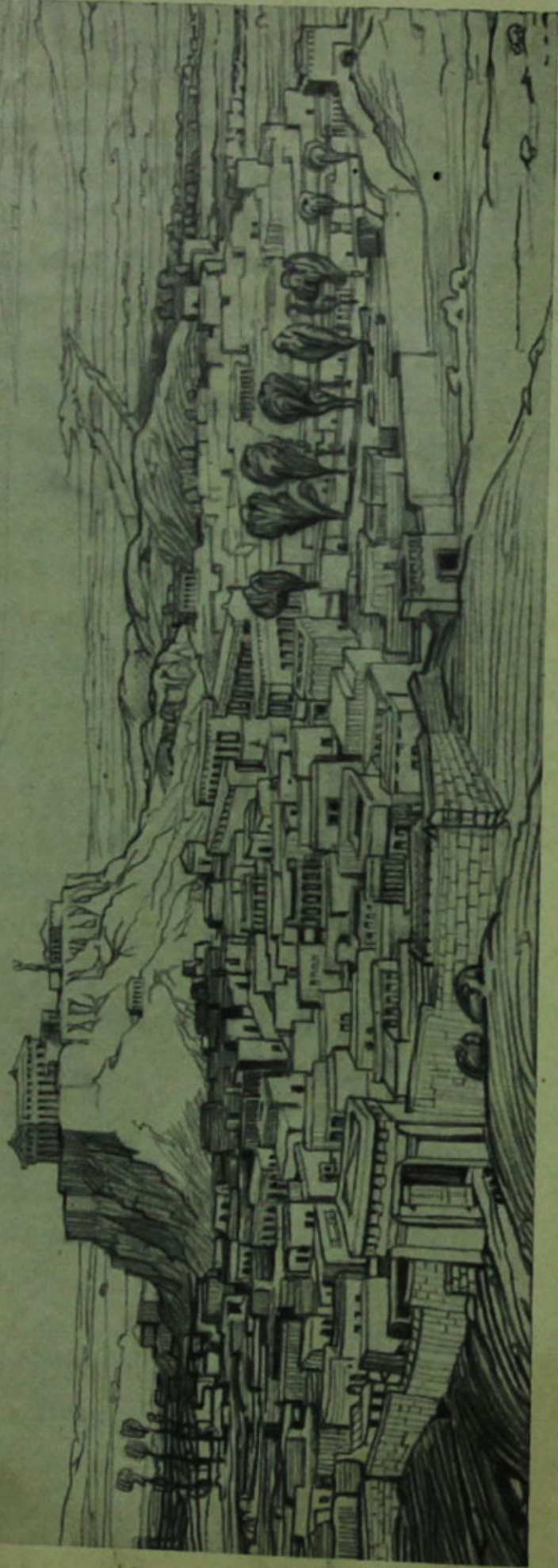


Fig. 13. Bird's-eye view of Ancient Athens from N.E.

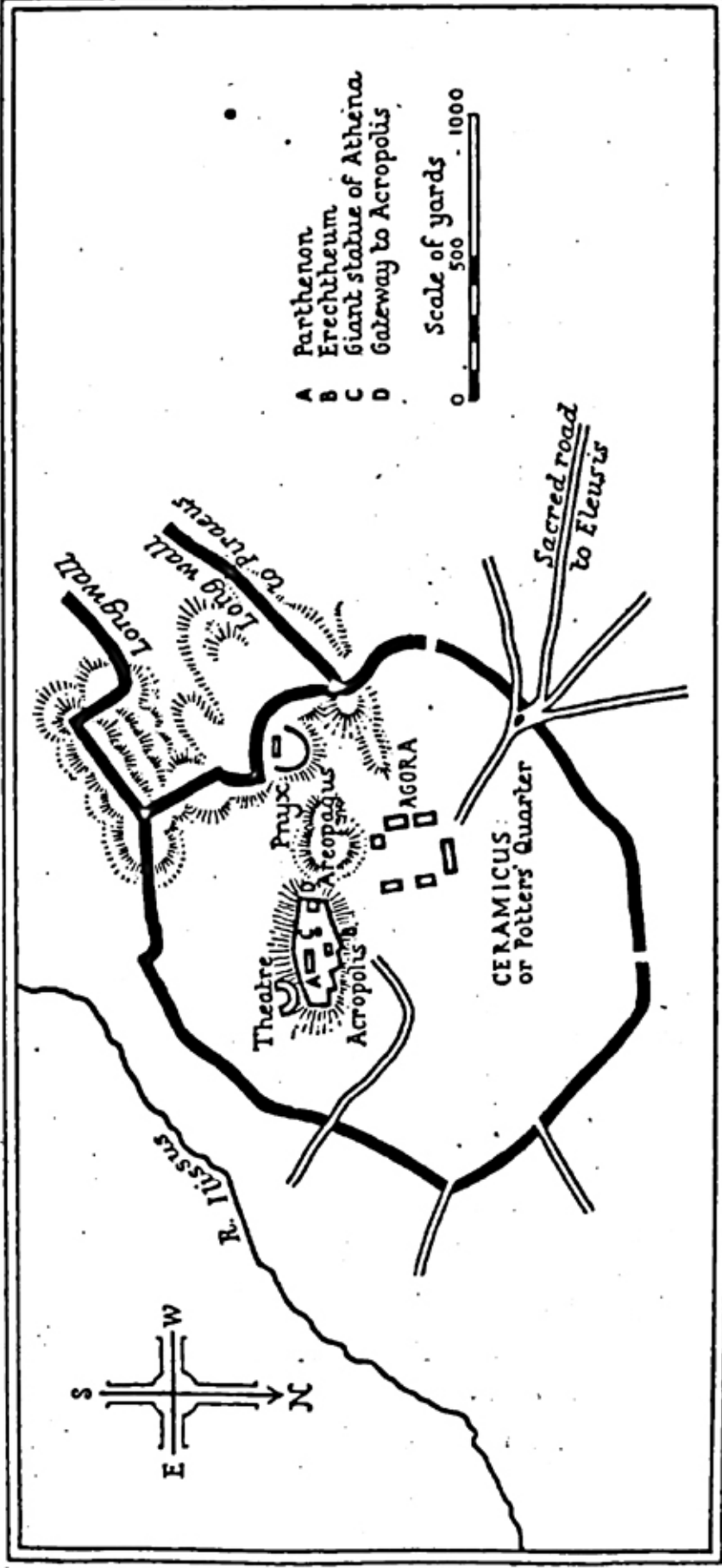


FIG. 14. PLAN OF ATHENS  
VIEW OF ATHENS SEEN FROM N.E. (see opposite)

On the distant sea-horizon lies the Island of Aegina and beyond it the mountains of the Peloponnese. On the sea-coast to the right lies the Piraeus harbour with the line of the Long Walls leading to it. On the Acropolis may be seen (A) the Parthenon, (B) to the right front of the Parthenon another smaller temple, the Erechtheum, (C) to the right of the Erechtheum the colossal bronze statue of Athena, (D) to the right of this the Entrance Gate or Propylaea. The spur at the foot of the right or western end of the Acropolis is the Areopagus or Hill of Ares; and on the low hills to the right of this again is the Pnyx or open-air theatre of debate. [N.B. The dramatic theatre of Dionysus is out of sight on the farther slope of the Acropolis facing the sea.] In the town itself the market-place lies at the foot of the Acropolis and Areopagus; from the market-place an avenue of trees leads to the Dipylon Gate through which ran the Sacred road to Eleusis.

powerful fleet which helped to win the Battle of Salamis. Along with this economic development, too, had come an important political change. Artisans and traders are usually less conservative than agricultural peasants; and the growing population of Athens had asserted their independence against the nobility of landowners. They had established a real democracy in which the Many, not the Few, were to control the government.

This change, together with the national enthusiasm at the victory over Persia, bred a new spirit of enterprise and adventure in the Athenians. Soon this new spirit found scope. Across the Aegean many Greek towns and islands of the Asia Minor coast had recently fallen under Persian rule. Seeing the Persians defeated in Greece, these towns were eager to throw off the hated yoke: and they appealed to Sparta for aid. Sparta with characteristic caution hung back. But Athens accepted the role of leadership and threw all her energy into the crusade of liberation. Under the protection of her fleet was formed a confederacy of Greek maritime states. It had its centre at Delos and was called the Delian League. Its efforts were successful; and the Persians' attempts to recover their hold were frustrated. Then, feeling secure once more, many members of the League felt that its purpose was finished. But Athens thought otherwise; and one by one, as they tried to break away, she overcame them and reduced them to a state of subjection to herself. So Athens from being the leader of a voluntary confederacy became the mistress of an empire.

The final step in the transformation was taken when in 454 the common fund of the League was moved from the Treasury at Delos to the Acropolis or Citadel of Athens. The author of this high-handed act was Pericles, the great statesman who in the middle of the fifth century attained a commanding position in Athenian politics. Though constitutionally elected to office year by year, he made himself by sheer force of character the virtual dictator of Athens and for thirty years he maintained his unique authority as the leader and guide of her young democracy.

Under Pericles' administration the power of the city went from strength to strength. The subjects of her Empire were ruled with a firm hand. The fund formed from the tax which they still paid into her treasury accumulated steadily. Throughout the Aegean trade flourished under the protection of her all-powerful fleet. The population multiplied. Foreigners came to settle; and the city grew rich as no other Greek city had been rich before. Above all, the artistic and literary genius of its members was developed to a pitch unrivalled in the history of the world. For Pericles was an enthusiastic patron of the arts. He built temples which were supreme masterpieces of architecture. He gathered round him a company of sculptors, poets, historians, and thinkers whose names must rank among the greatest of all time. In a word, he made Athens, as he himself boasted, an 'education to Greece'.

In culture, therefore, as in power, Athens now far outshone her sister-states of Greece; and partly for this reason, partly because from such portions of her literature as still survive we can know more of her than of the other states, it will be well henceforward to concentrate almost exclusively upon the various aspects of Athenian life. Broadly speaking, though other states lagged far behind the brilliance of Athens' democracy, we may take what is said about her ways and customs as more or less typical of the rest.

## V.

## ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

## I. POLITICS

IN these days of huge national states whose population is numbered by the million and of empires which extend over many continents, it is very difficult to form a clear idea of what democracy meant in a Greek city-state. We call England a democracy; but in point of fact the political activities and

interests of the average Englishman are very limited. He casts a vote at parliamentary elections once in every five years. Perhaps he reads the newspaper summaries of parliamentary debates at times of particular crisis. It is hard, in short, for the average

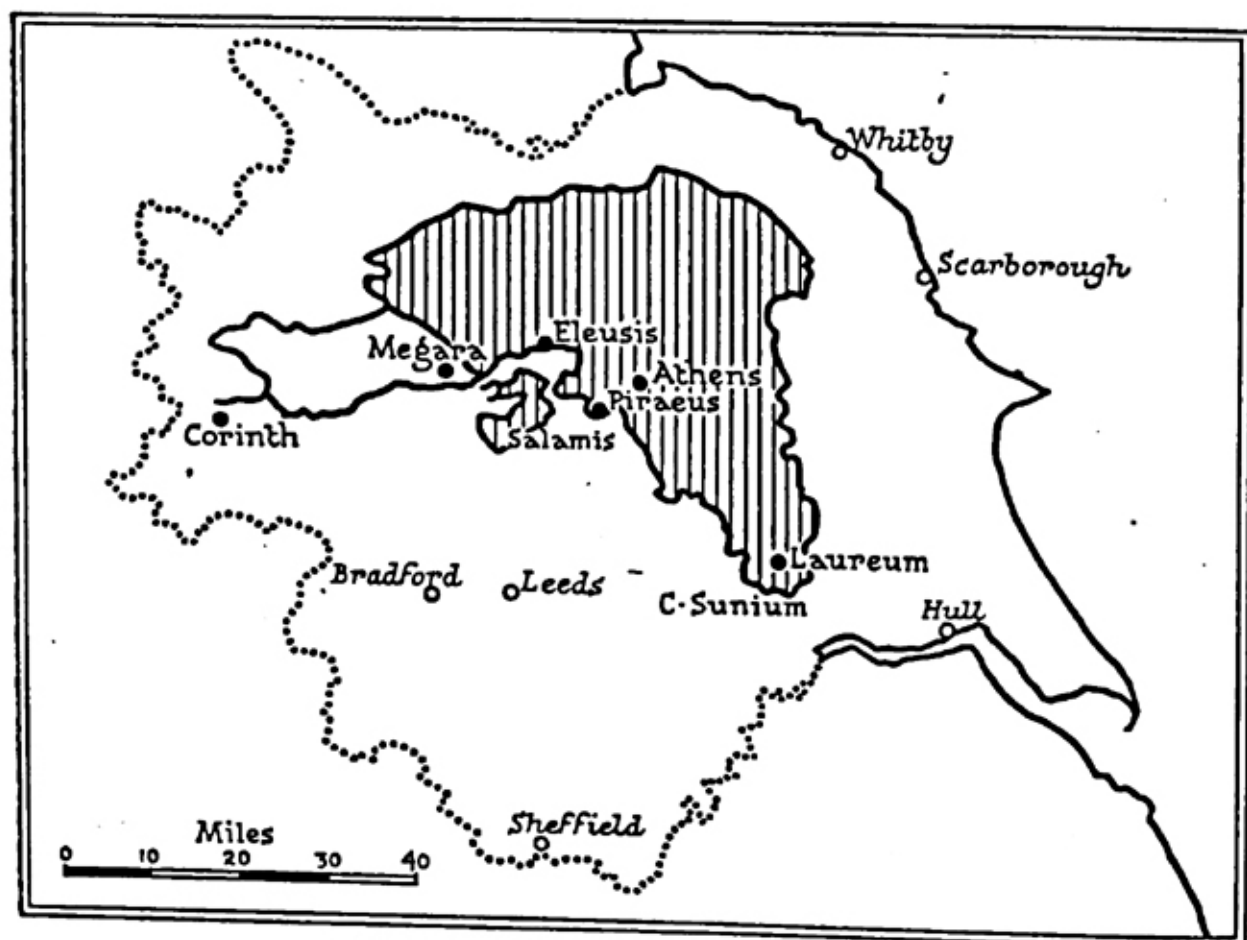


FIG. 15. MAP OF ATTICA, PLACED FOR COMPARISON IN YORKSHIRE

man to believe that he has very much to do with what goes on at Westminster.

But in Athens it was far otherwise. There any decision that was taken was apt to have an instantaneous and profound effect on the citizen's daily life; and, what was more important still, every citizen had a direct share in the making of those decisions. For every adult male—unless he were a slave or a foreigner residing in Athens—was entitled to vote in the general Assembly or Ecclesia; and in all matters of importance the Assembly of citizens had the final say. It is as though the management of a

school was controlled not by the head master or a body of governors, but by a Debating Society consisting of the pupils themselves. We can easily picture with what interest and enthusiasm such a Debating Society's meetings and proceedings would be followed by every member of the school.

So, when an Assembly met at Athens (as it did at stated intervals), a considerable proportion of the citizens would be there. Outlying farmers might find it difficult to attend: but residents in the capital were expected to be present; and loungers were swept out of the market-place by a rope well drenched in vermilion. A stain of red on a man's cloak meant a fine; for the Athenians did not hold with the shirking of public duties.

The meeting took place soon after dawn, and was held in a sort of rude open-air theatre upon a sloping hill-side called the Pnyx. A herald ordained silence. Prayers were offered by a priest and a black pig was sacrificed. For superstition still played a large part even in political ceremonies; and if an earthquake shock were felt or a drop of rain fell, the bad omen was considered sufficient cause for adjourning the meeting. A committee of the Council (of which more shall be said) presided over the debate, and when they had taken their places business began.

'Who wishes to speak?' cried the herald; and whoever was for addressing the meeting mounted a platform hewn from the rock. Speeches were followed with eager attention, the audience shouting applause or boeing and hissing in displeasure. The officials of the state took, of course, a leading part in the debates. After Pericles' death demagogues arose—men of low birth and still lower principles who appealed to the worst instincts of the mob. One named Cleon was notorious for his vulgar and violent behaviour on the platform. He ranted, strode about, waved his arms, bared his leg and slapped his thigh in a most undignified manner. From the historian Thucydides we have a vivid picture of this man's first political triumph. Athens was at war with

Sparta at the time; and her fleet had succeeded in isolating a detachment of enemy troops on the island of Sphacteria. But her commanders had utterly failed to push home their advantage. *'Cleon sarcastically declared that, if the generals were good for anything, they might easily capture the men and that, were he himself a general, he would certainly do so. . . . Nicias (who was one of the generals) replied that, so far as they were concerned, he might take what forces he wanted and make the attempt. Fancying Nicias' offer to be mere pretence, Cleon at first was quite willing to go, but when he perceived that it was made in good earnest, he tried to back out, saying that Nicias and not he was general. . . . But the more Cleon declined the proffered command, so much the more did the mob, as their manner is, urge Nicias to resign and shout to Cleon to sail. At length, not knowing how to escape from his own rash words, Cleon undertook the expedition and pledged his word that within twenty days he would either bring back the Spartans prisoner or kill them on the spot. . . . His vain boast moved the Athenians to laughter; but the wiser sort reflected with glee that of two good things one was certain—either there would be an end of Cleon, which they greatly preferred, or else he would put the Spartans into their hands.'*

Actually Cleon made good his astonishing boast. But demagogues were not always as shrewd or so successful as he; and Athens paid dearly for the readiness of the mob to throw over the more trusty commanders at the bidding of low-mouthed agitators.<sup>1</sup>

Attendance at Assembly was only one side of a citizen's political activities. In many other ways he might take a part in the government of his country. For in another respect an Athenian's notion of politics was very different from our own. Nowadays, for the most part, we are ruled by officials paid and retained by the state—civil servants, judges, tax-collectors,

<sup>1</sup> Voting was sometimes ascertained by a deliberate count, but usually by a show of hands.