





## PART II

### HELLAS

#### CHAPTER VI

##### THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

**70. Hellas and the Hellenes.** — In our study of the Orientals it has been necessary to make frequent reference to their relations with the Greeks. This is the name by which the Romans knew these people, and it is the one we commonly use. They, however, called themselves *Hel-le'nes*. We do not know what the word means, but they tried to explain it by inventing the myth of their descent from *Hel'len* as a common ancestor. To them *Hel'las* was the country possessed by themselves wherever it might be — including not only the old homeland, but also the numerous colonies. There is no difficulty about using "*Hellenes*" and "*Greeks*," "*Hellenic*" and "*Greek*" as equivalent terms. "*Greece*," on the other hand, now generally refers to the peninsula occupied by the modern state of Greece. To avoid confusion it will retain this meaning in the present volume, and will thus be distinguished from the broader term "*Hellas*."<sup>1</sup>

**71. Mountains.** — Greece, the oldest home of the Hellenes, is the small peninsula which extends from southeastern Europe into the Mediterranean sea. In travelling through Greece or in looking at a map of it, we notice that the country is mountainous. The *Cam-bu'ni-an* chain stretches along the northern border. Its highest point is Mount *O-lym'pus*, near the sea, the loftiest peak on the peninsula. The Greeks imagined it the abode of Zeus and of the other great gods. Near *Olympus*, in the range which extends

<sup>1</sup> Should we use "*Greece*" synonymously with "*Hellas*," as is often done by historians, it would be necessary constantly to distinguish between "*Greece proper*" and "*Greece in the larger sense*."



THE VALE OF TEMPE  
(Thessaly; from a photograph)



along the east coast of Thessaly, is Mount Os'sa. Far to the west of this coast chain is the range of Mount Pin'dus. It extends south from the Cambunian mountains, and divides the northern part of Greece into two nearly equal districts. As we proceed southward the country grows more rugged. The central section is a mass of mountain ranges separated by narrow valleys and little plains. The loftiest peak of this region is Mount Par-nas'sus, near the centre of the peninsula.

Pel-o-pon-nese' (or Pel-o-pon-ne'sus), the most southerly section of Greece, is only a little less rugged. In the northern central part is the highland of Arcadia. From this highland mountain chains radiate in all directions. To the south runs the Ta-yg'e-tus range, dividing southern Peloponnese into two districts. This range is celebrated for its iron mines.

**72. Rivers and Lakes.**—In so small a country as Greece the streams are necessarily small and short. The volume of water is still further diminished by the dryness of the climate. The so-called rivers of Greece are therefore little more than brooks. Some are torrents in the rainy season of winter, but entirely dry in summer. All the streams carry down a great quantity of soil, which they deposit in their lower course. The little plains at their mouths are alluvial — composed of soil thus deposited. In this respect they resemble the valleys of the Nile and Euphrates. The greatest plain of the kind is in Thessaly, northern Greece. The river which has formed it is the Pe-ne'us, the largest stream in Greece. Sometimes the brooks of a region, instead of uniting in a river, flow into a land-locked basin. In this way a lake is formed, generally with an underground outlet.

Another feature of Greece is the great number of gulfs and bays which indent the coasts. No other country has so great a coast-line in proportion to its area.

**73. Climate and Products.**—The greatest length of the Greek peninsula is about two hundred and fifty miles, and its greatest breadth is a hundred and eighty; it is about the size of the state of Maine. And yet within these narrow limits the climate, ranging from temperate to semi-tropical, fosters a great variety of products. The whole country was once well-wooded, though most of

it now is nearly treeless. Hence in ancient times the soil was moister and more productive. In the forests of the north are nearly all kinds of European trees, including the beech, oak, plane, and chestnut. Southern Thessaly produces rice and cotton; olives and figs flourish in Attica; and in Peloponnese lemons, oranges, and date-palms thrive. Grape-vines grow everywhere. Though wheat can be grown in the few fertile lowlands, most of the ground is too stony and sterile for anything but pasturage, or at best for barley. Among the domestic animals were hogs, sheep, and goats. Oxen and donkeys were the work animals. Horses were used by the cavalry, and in peace were the luxury of the rich.

The most common metal products were iron, silver, and copper. The best iron mines were in the Taygetus Mountains. Silver was mined in Attica and copper in the neighboring island of Euboea. There were gold mines in Thrace near the Greek border, and in the adjacent island of Tha'sos. Though the supply of metals was small, the Hellenes had exhaustless quarries of limestone and marble. The best white marble came from Mount Pen-tel'i-cus in Attica, and from the island of Pa'ros in the Aegean Sea. There were also blue, black, and red marbles. In brief, no country in the world was, or is now, so abundantly supplied with building stone as Greece.

**74. Northern Greece.** — Looking more carefully at the map, we find the peninsula divided by arms of the sea into three regions, northern Greece, central Greece, and Peloponnese. Northern Greece comprises two countries — E-pe'i-rus and Thes'sa-ly — separated by the high Pindus range. Epeirus is largely a highland crossed from north to south by mountain chains.

Unlike Epeirus, Thessaly is a plain, the largest in Greece. It is surrounded by mountains. On the north the Cambunian range rises like a huge wall to defend Greece against the attack of foreigners. Between Olympus and Ossa is the beautiful Vale of Tem'pe, rich in foliage, the main pass into Greece from the country on the north.

In ancient times Thessaly furnished excellent pasturage. The great lords of the country accordingly reared herds of horses, that they might be able in war to lead hundreds of mounted servants

to battle. In time cities grew up in the plain; but both E-peí'rots and Thessalians preferred country life; they had little trade or skilled industry; in education and in the refinements of life they lagged behind the commercial states of Greece.

**75. Central Greece: (1) the Less Civilized Countries.** — South of Thessaly and Epeirus is central Greece, a long, narrow region extending east and west. It is more mountainous than northern Greece, and is well supplied with harbors along the immense stretch of coast. Ae-to'li-a and Lo'cris are especially rugged lands, whose inhabitants long remained barbarous. After the commercial cities of eastern and southern Greece had reached the height of their civilization, the Aetolians and Locrians still carried weapons in their daily life; they robbed or murdered all whom they found weak or defenceless. Some of them spoke a language strange to the other Greeks, and ate raw meat. West of Aetolia is A-car-na'-ni-a, a land of lakes and harbors, but with high, steep shores. The colonists who came hither in early time from the eastern coast taught the natives useful arts. Hence this country made greater progress in civilization than did Aetolia or Locris. Pho'cis, which divides Locris into two sections, lies partly in the rugged district about Mount Parnassus. Below the mountain on the south, in the city of Del'phi, was the celebrated oracle of Apollo.

The Phocians, too, were more civilized than the Aetolians or the Locrians. In the valleys and plains were thrifty lords and busy peasants; on the mountain sides the shepherd pastured his flocks.

**76. Central Greece: (2) the More Civilized Countries.** — East of Phocis is Boe-o'ti-a. A great part of this country is a basin, whose waters collect into Lake Co-pa'is. The land about the lake is flat and very productive; its moisture fills the air with fog. Some witty neighbors of the Boeotians remarked that the dull sky and excessive beef-eating made these people stupid; but in fact they were second in intelligence and in enterprise among the states of central Greece.

Mount Ci-thae'ron separates Boeotia from At'ti-ca, a peninsula which forms the eastern end of central Greece. In the northeast of Attica, overlooking the plain of Ma'ra-thon, is Mount Pentelicus, full of brilliant white marble; and south of Pentelicus is the range

of Hy-met'tus, still renowned for its honey-bees. The central region is a plain about two small streams,—the Cephissus and the Ilissus, which unite before reaching the sea. A third plain lies round the city of E-leu'sis on the northwest coast. Attica is for the most part a rugged country with a thin, stony soil. It is favored, however, with a long coast-line, which invites to commerce. In intelligence and in artistic taste the inhabitants excelled all other



VALLEY OF THE STYX IN ARCADIA

(From a photograph)

Greeks. Athens, the capital, became in time the foremost city of the world in civilization.

The traveller who journeys by land from Athens to Peloponnese passes through Meg'a-ris, a little country which lies in the broader part of the Isthmus of Corinth. As the soil is even more barren than that of Attica, the people supported themselves by rearing sheep and by making coarse woollens and heavy pottery for exportation. With a harbor on each side of the Isthmus they were well equipped for commerce; and their leading city, Megara, became for a time a great centre of trade.



**77. Peloponnese:** (1) **the Less Civilized Countries.** — Peloponnese — “Isle of Pe’lops,” a mythical hero — is a massive peninsula with a great gulf on the east coast and two on the south. The central region is Ar-ca’di-a, “the Switzerland of Greece,” a plateau above which tower lofty mountain ranges. Among the mountains are fruitful plains and valleys, each of which was the domain of a tribe or a city. The Arcadians lived in the simple, homely style of mountaineers. Master and slaves ate their pork and barley cake together, and mixed their wine in a common bowl. Hardy and warlike, the Arcadian freemen were equally ready to fight for their homes and to serve foreign states for pay.

The northern slope of the plateau, with a narrow border of coast plain, is A-chae’a. Divided among twelve independent cities, this country remained unimportant till late in history. E’lis comprised the western slope and the broad rich plain along the coast. Its most notable city was O-lym’pi-a, where the Greeks celebrated the greatest of their national festivals, and athletes from all Hellas contended in the games. The site is now strewn with the ruins of temples.

**78. Peloponnese:** (2) **the More Civilized Countries.** — Corinth, near the Isthmus, was one of the greatest commercial cities of Hellas. Her lofty citadel commanded the Isthmus, and by means of her three harbors, two on the Sa-ron’ic Gulf and one on the Corinthian, she could trade equally well with the East and with the West. Though she had a large navy, her narrow territory prevented her from becoming a great power. Ar’go-lis was chiefly the mountainous peninsula on the east of Peloponnese. The principal cities were along the valley which reaches northward from the head of the Ar-gol’ic Gulf. One was My-ce’nae, in early time the seat of a powerful kingdom. It declined, however, and Argos took its place as the head of Argolis. For ages it has been in ruins.

The great rival of Argos was Sparta, chief city of La-co’ni-a. In the beginning this country occupied the fertile basin of the Eu-ro’tas River. The people of the country had for centuries the best-equipped and best-disciplined army in the world. In time of danger, therefore, all the Hellenes looked to them for protection. Sparta, “low-lying among the caverned hills,” was but a

group of villages. Unlike most Greek cities, it was wholly without fortifications; the ranks of brave warriors were its walls.

West of Laconia is the hilly but fruitful country of Mes-se'ni-a. Near its centre is Mount I-tho'me, whose summit furnished an excellent site for a fortress.

**79. The Islands; the Aegean Region.** — East of the peninsula is the Ae-ge'an Sea. It lies between Greece and Asia Minor, and is dotted over with islands, standing singly or in groups. Thasos has been mentioned for its gold and Euboea for its copper. The latter is a long island nearly parallel to the coast of central Greece. The group of the Cyc'la-des is but a continuation of Euboea and Attica. The most celebrated among them are De'los, the mythical birthplace of Apollo, and Pa'ros, already mentioned for its beautiful marbles. Near the coast of Asia Minor are Les'bos, famed for lyric poetry, Chi'os and Sa'mos, seats of early industry, and Rhodes, which the Phoenicians had colonized.<sup>1</sup> Greatest and most important of all the islands is Crete, south of the Cyclades and on the sea route between Greece and Egypt. Other islands will be mentioned in our further study of Greek history. It is important for our purpose to glance at the coast of Asia Minor which borders the Aegean. It abounds in small but fertile plains, and is as well supplied with harbors as the opposite shore of Greece.

The Aegean Sea does not separate, it unites the two coasts; and the islands are stepping-stones, so to speak, from one to the other. Mariners in the smallest barks could pass without danger, without losing sight of land, across the entire breadth of the sea. Indeed, from the mountains of southern Euboea the Greeks could look quite across to the hills of Chios. With the gentle winds that blew steadily in the summer season, it was easier to travel by sea than by land. Naturally, then, the people of the Aegean region — the islands and the two coasts — interchanged products and ideas, and thus advanced equally in culture. The great fact in our study of this region is that it was the earliest home of European civilization, and that it, rather than the peninsula, was the very heart of Hellas.

<sup>1</sup> § 49.

**80. The Effect of the Country upon the People.** — In its mountainous character Greece contrasts with the valleys of the Nile and the Euphrates. It is somewhat like Syria, but more split up by ranges. A majority of the Greeks were mountaineers. In the mountains a man can make a living for himself and his family by hunting, keeping stock, and tilling a small patch of soil, without the aid or coöperation of neighbors or with little need of government. He is therefore free; and the kind of life he lives makes him strong and brave. Such men, when fighting for their freedom, are almost unconquerable. This was the character which the Greeks developed in their mountains.

The nature of the country, too, had a political effect. The people of each valley or narrow plain, surrounded by high ranges and seeing little of their neighbors, were content to live alone in the enjoyment of complete independence. In other words, the mountains prevented the growth of large states.

Another controlling feature of the country was its openness to the sea through the excellent gulfs and harbors. From almost any point in the peninsula, the Greek, even with his slow way of traveling, could reach an arm of the sea in a single day. This circumstance naturally attracted him to a seafaring life. The stony soil could not support a dense population; and the vast mountains on the north kept the Greeks from pushing out into central Europe. All these features of their situation combined to make them a commercial and colonizing folk. We have seen how easy was navigation in the Aegean, and how a chain of islands reached far out in the direction of Africa and Egypt. In brief, the nearness of the Aegean area to the Orient and its openness in that direction made it the first region of the West to be visited by Eastern ships—hence the birthplace of European civilization.

Most important of all was the effect of these physical surroundings on the mind. The poor soil compelled the Greeks to form economical habits of life, so that moderation controlled their thought as well as their action. They became the best-balanced people the world has known. The mild climate and gentle changes of season rendered them happy. The bracing air stimulated clear thinking. The bare, sharply pointed mountains awakened in the

soul that love of intellectual beauty which lifts the Greeks above all other peoples. Finally the diversity of climate, soil, and products combined with other favoring influences to create a nation famous for its men of genius in literature, science, art, and statesmanship.

### Suggestive Questions

1. What effect had the mountains of Greece on her history? 2. Which coast of Greece is most abundantly supplied with harbors? What was the effect of this condition? 3. How was Greece influenced by her nearness to the Orient? Why was the nearness of one country to another more important in ancient times than it is now? 4. Mention all the reasons why Greece was the first country of Europe to become civilized. 5. Compare and contrast the physical features of Greece with those of Egypt, Babylonia, and Syria. Which of these countries seems best adapted to producing a high type of character? 6. From the account given in this chapter, what parts of Greece seem most attractive? What parts were most favorable to progress? 7. Compare and contrast Greece in climate, soil, and products with the state in which you live.

### Topics for Reading

- I. *Excursions in Attica*. — Mahaffy, *Rambles and Studies in Greece*. chs. vi, vii; Richardson, *Vacation Days in Greece*, 111-118.
- II. *Thermopylae*. — Richardson, 79-89.
- III. *Thessaly*. — Richardson, 90-103.
- IV. *The Coasts*. — Mahaffy, ch. i.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



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