CHAPTER XXVI

THE MATURITY OF THE GREEK MIND: FROM POETRY TO PROSE

404–322 B.C.

324. Growth of the Greek Mind. — It is occasionally helpful to compare the life of a nation with that of a man. The age considered in the present chapter was like that of an individual at maturity; the imagination had declined somewhat, and the reason was supreme. In this period men thought more keenly and deeply than at any other time in ancient history. As we pass from the fifth to the fourth century, accordingly, we find the form of literature changing from poetry to prose. The former is the language of the imagination; the latter of the reason. All the best poetry of the Greeks was produced before the beginning of the fourth century; and, with the exception of history, all their best prose after that date.[1] There are three great departments of Greek prose: history, oratory, and philosophy.

325. History: Xenophon. — The principal historian of this age whose works have survived to our time is Xenophon. He was an Athenian who got his education in the school of Socrates, and then went with Cyrus on his Asiatic expedition.[2] In style he is less charming than Herodotus and in thought less deep than Thucydides. His *Anabasis*, already mentioned, not only narrates a great event in an interesting way, but also tells us much of the character of the Greeks and of their military organization and tactics. His *Memoirs of Socrates* gives us the character and teachings of that philosopher from the standpoint of a plain, practical man. The *Hel-len'i-ca*, a continuation of the history of Thucydides, covers

[1] This is only an approximate date. The productivity of Aristophanes continued somewhat longer; and on the other hand Antiphon, an eminent Attic orator, lived somewhat earlier.

[2] § 285.

the period from 411 B.C. to the battle of Mantinea. Although excessively favorable to Sparta, it is our only continuous story of the period treated, and hence is very valuable. He wrote on a variety of other subjects, as hunting, housekeeping, the Athenian revenues, and the Lacedaemonian constitution. His works are a storehouse of knowledge of the times in which he lived. A soldier of fortune and a practical man of the world, Xenophon shared in the humanity and in the breadth of sympathy of his age.

326. Oratory: Lysias, Isocrates, and Demosthenes. — The other great departments of prose — oratory and philosophy — reached the height of their development. Oratory flourished in all democratic states, which required the citizens to express their opinions on public affairs. There was at Athens no real lawyer class, because the laws were so simple that every one could understand them; but the oration which the private citizen committed to memory and delivered in the law court was usually composed for him by a professional speech writer. The most eminent of this class in the early part of the fourth century B.C. was Lysias, an alien. Robbed of his fortune by the Thirty, he turned to speech writing as a profession. Many of his orations have come down to us; they serve at once as models of the purest and simplest prose, and as a direct source of information on the public and private life of the author's time.

Isocrates, "the old man eloquent," was one of the best educated and most liberal-minded men of his age. For many years he conducted a school in Athens in which young men could gain a well-rounded education and at the same time prepare themselves for life, especially for statesmanship.

While teaching, Isocrates wrote orations, which, as they were to be read rather than delivered, should properly be termed essays. His literary style lacked freshness and vigor, but was the perfection of grace. His language was melodious, his words were chosen with the finest sense of the appropriate and arranged with the most delicate taste. He brought to perfection the period — the completely rounded thought expressed in a symmetrical sentence. Nearly all the later prose of Greece, and afterward of Rome, shows his influence.

Of Demosthenes, the world's most eminent orator, some account

has already been given.[1] With the possible exception of Plato, he was the greatest master of Greek prose. His orations are "marvellous works of art," inspired by an intense love for Athens. The question as to the greatness of his statesmanship must be decided according to the point of view taken. He stood for local freedom; Philip and Alexander embodied the imperial idea. Sooner or later the empire, as constituted in ancient times, was sure to hamper the freedom of the cities and grind to dust the civilization of the world. This was the final effect of the Roman empire. In resisting the first encroachments of imperialism on local freedom, Demosthenes showed himself, therefore, a far-sighted statesman. But the whole tendency of our own time is toward the building up of immense states and empires. We are satisfied with these conditions because they bring us certain great advantages, and because under the present system we enjoy all the liberty we seem to need. We can easily understand, therefore, that many writers of the present day accuse Demosthenes of an utter lack of statesmanship, saying that he was all wrong and that Philip and Alexander were absolutely right in the conflict of principles. But should the governments of our modern empires so change as to repress our local and personal freedom as did the ancient, thinking men would again go back to Demosthenes for inspiration and guidance in a new fight for independence.

327. **Philosophy: Plato.** — The greatest philosopher of the age — and one of the most eminent of the world — was Plato. After the death of his master, Socrates, he travelled to various parts of Greece, and even to Egypt. On his return to Athens he began teaching in the Academy,[2] which gave its name to his school. Plato is chiefly noted for his theory of ideas. According to his view, ideas are the sole realities; they are eternal and unchangeable, and exist only in heaven; the things which we see in this world are mere shadows of those heavenly forms.

While engaged in teaching Plato composed his *Dialogues*, which

[1] § 307.

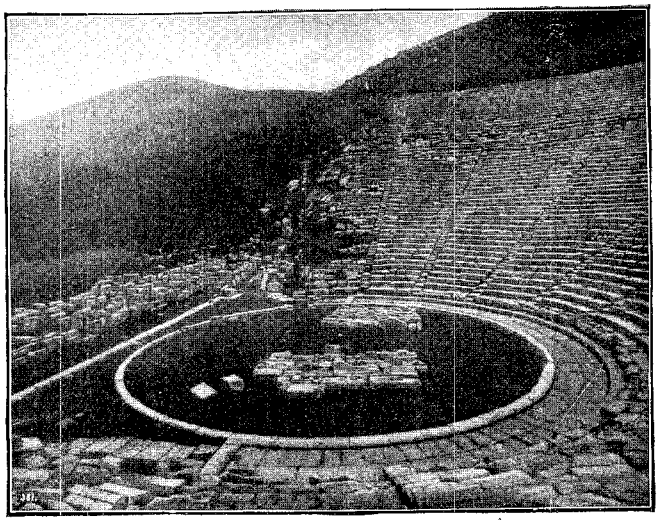
[2] The Academy, a public garden in the neighborhood of Athens, was founded by Hipparchus, son of Pisistratus, and afterward adorned by Cimon. It was a pleasant place for recreation.

explain his views. The greatest *Dialogue* is the *Republic*, a discussion of the ideal state. Plato thought there should be three classes in the state: the philosophers, who should rule; the warriors, who should guard the state, as the Spartans in Lacedaemon; and the common people, who by their labor should support the higher classes. He believed, too, that there should be no family or private property, because these institutions fostered selfishness. Though his ideal state was neither practicable nor on the whole good, one can hardly read the *Republic* without being lifted by it to a higher moral plane. The author insisted that justice should rule. The Hellenes, he taught, should live together as members of one family; they should not injure one another by devastating fields, burning houses, and enslaving captives. All his teachings were pure and ennobling: "My counsel is that we hold fast ever to the heavenly way and follow justice and virtue always, considering that the soul is immortal and able to endure every sort of good and every sort of evil. Thus we shall live dear to one another and to the gods, both while remaining here, and when, like conquerors in the games who go round to gather gifts, we receive our reward. And it shall be well with us both in this life and in the pilgrimage of a thousand years which we have been describing."

328. **Aristotle.** — Aristotle, the last great philosopher of the classic age of Hellas, studied twenty years under Plato, who used to call him "the intellect of the school." Afterward he became the teacher of Alexander; but when the king set out for Asia, the philosopher returned to Athens to found a school of his own.[1] Although nearly every page of his writing shows the influence of his master, the two men were wholly unlike. Plato was a highly imaginative poet; Aristotle was the embodiment of pure, keen, sober reason. His style is dry and clear. With a wonderful genius for system, it was his achievement to sum up and to transmit to future ages all the science and philosophy of Hellas. His works cover accordingly the natural sciences, physics, metaphysics, logic, ethics, politics, and the constitutional history of many states. They did

[1] His school was called peripatetic, from a Greek word which signifies "to walk," either because of the covered walks in the Lyceum, where he taught, or from his habit of walking while he discussed philosophic subjects.

not become generally known till early in the first century B.C., but from that time for more than a thousand years their author ruled, like an absolute monarch, over the thought of the civilized world. Christian theology owes its form to him. The subtle though narrow thinkers of the Middle Ages worked strictly along the lines he had drawn; and even to-day the soundness and thoroughness of his

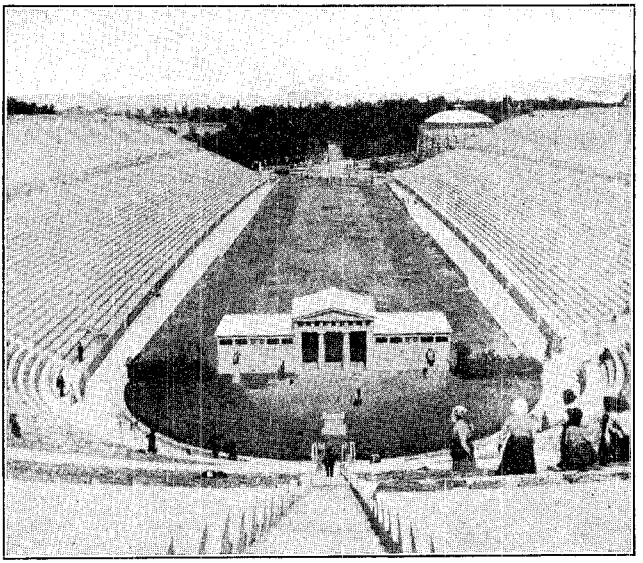


THEATRE AT EPIDAURUS
(From a photograph)

Logic, Ethics, and Politics cannot be surpassed. The present systematic grouping of our knowledge in the various sciences we owe chiefly to him.

329. **Architecture: the Theatre and the Stadium.** — The Greek play was performed in the open air. Originally the people sat on the hillside so that all could see. At the foot of the hill was the orchestra — "dancing place" — for the chorus and the actors. In the centre of the orchestra was placed an altar to Dionysus, the patron god of the drama. On the opposite side of the orchestra from the audience stood the booth (Greek *skenê*, "scene") in which

the chorus and actors changed dress. From these elements the theatre gradually developed. At Athens in the age of Pericles rows of wooden seats stood on the hillside for the accommodation of the spectators. About a hundred years later marble seats were substituted. Meanwhile the actors' booth developed into a "scene"



THE NEW STADIUM AT ATHENS

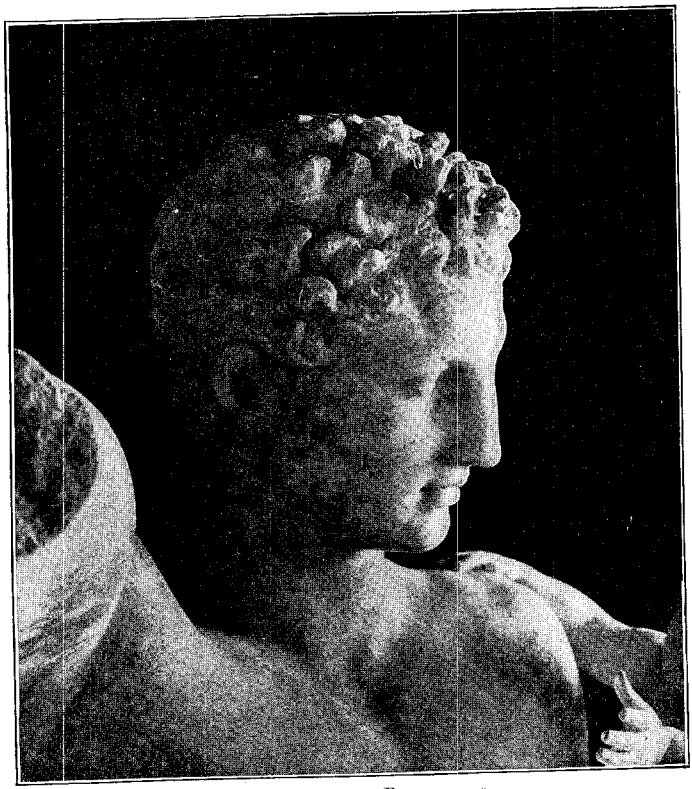
(The building in the interior was erected as a "scene" (palace front) for the presentation of the *Antigone* of Sophocles. From a photograph by Dr. A. S. Cooley)

in the modern sense. Generally it represented the front of a palace. All the stone theatres of Greece belong to the fourth century B.C., or to still later time. That at Epidaurus, in Argolis, is the best preserved, and for that reason an illustration of it is given here.

The stadium was for athletic contests, especially for races. The most famous was at Olympia, where the great national games were held. That of Athens was built about the same time as the stone theatre. It was in a valley just outside of the city. About three centuries later, marble seats were put in; and recently it has been

rebuilt of the same material. The present seating capacity is fifty thousand.

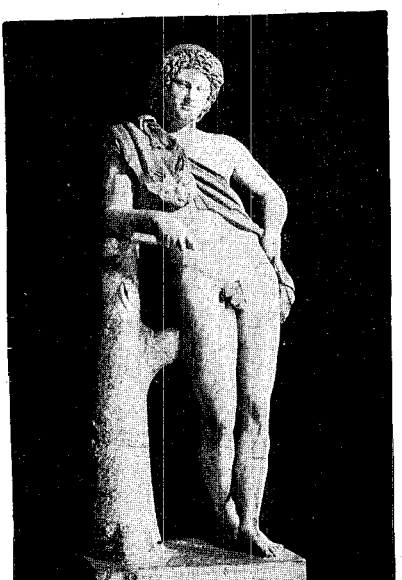
330. **Sculpture: Praxiteles and Lysippus.** — The sculpture of the fourth century lost much of the severe dignity and self-restraint



THE HERMES OF PRAXITELES
(Museum, Olympia)

it had possessed in the Periclean age; but it gained individuality, gracefulness, and feeling. Greater pains were taken in working out the minute details. These artistic changes are but an expression of the general change that had come over the whole life and

genius of Hellas. Next to Phidias, Praxiteles, who lived in the fourth century, B.C., was the most famous sculptor of Greece. In the Capitoline Museum at Rome is a copy of his satyr, which Hawthorne has described in his *Marble Faun:* "The whole statue, unlike anything else that ever was wrought in that severe material of



SATYR OF PRAXITELES

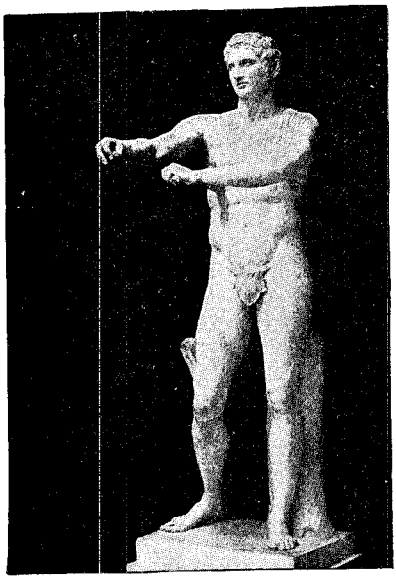
(Copy; Capitoline Museum, Rome)

DORIPHOROS (SPEAR-BEARER) OF POLYCLEITUS

(Copy; Vatican Museum, Rome)

marble, conveys the idea of an amiable and sensual creature — easy, mirthful, apt for jollity, yet not incapable of being touched with pathos." We admire especially in it the graceful curves of the body which Praxiteles was the first to produce successfully. We find them in all his statues. Then, too, he was the first to make the tree trunk or other support of the statue an addition to its beauty. The surface of the body he worked out with greater delicacy and

naturalness than any other artist has ever been able to attain. This quality can be seen only in a genuine work of his — the Hermes, discovered some years ago at Olympia. The remarkable finish of the skin is shown by the illustration. The statue combines power with delicacy of modelling. The face is intellectual. But this Hermes does not seem like a god; he is rather the ideal Greek of the age.



APOXYOMENOS OF LYSIPPUS
(Copy; Vatican Museum, Rome)

Lysippus was a contemporary of Alexander and is said to have been the only sculptor privileged to make portraits of the great conqueror. This fact marks him as a master of portrait sculpture. A prodigious worker, he made in his lifetime fifteen hundred statues, all in bronze. They have disappeared; but of one of them we have a marble copy, the Ap-ox-y-om'e-nos — an athlete working on his right arm with a flesh-scraper. Down to this time Polycleitus of Argos had set the style for the making of statues.[1] His figures were somewhat flat or square, still slightly influenced by the archaic block forms. Their whole appearance was heavy. Breaking loose from the old rule, Lysippus made the head smaller and the body slimmer. Thus his figures appear lighter and more lifelike. Whereas the statues of Polycleitus were to be seen mainly from the front, those of Lysippus were perfectly round, equally symmetrical from every point of view. His controlling motive was to represent the body, not as it actually was, but as it appeared to the eye. In some ways therefore his work seems a great

[1] § 238.

advance beyond that of earlier artists. He was the last great sculptor of the classical age of Hellas.

Suggestive Questions

1. Write a summary of this chapter like that on p. 285. 2. In what respects is a nation like an individual? In what respects is it different? 3. Why was nearly all the best Greek poetry composed before 400 B.C.? 4. Compare Xenophon with Herodotus and Thucydides. 5. Who was the most distinguished Attic orator before Demosthenes? What were his characteristics? 6. From the illustration on p. 290 describe the Greek theatre. What were the seats made of? Point out the orchestra; what is its form? Where should the "scene" be? 7. Describe the stadium (p. 291). 8. Why should modern Greece rebuild the stadium? 9. Compare the Apoxyomenos of Lysippus with the Doriphoros of Polycleitus. Which is the more graceful? Do you find anything admirable in the earlier work which is lacking in the latter?

Note-book Topics

I. **Xenophon.** — Murray, *Ancient Greek Literature*, ch. xv; Fowler, *Ancient Greek Literature*, ch. xxv; Mahaffy, *Progress of Hellenism in Alexander's Empire*, ch. i.

II. **Fourth-Century Sculpture.** — Tarbell, *History of Greek Art*, ch. ix; Gardner, *Handbook of Greek Sculpture*, ch. iv; Fowler and Wheeler, *Greek Archaeology* (see Lysippus, Praxiteles, and Scopas in Index).

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