THE GREEK RENAISSANCE

P. N. URE

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PREFACE

THE object of this little volume is to indicate the scope and character of what the Greeks achieved in the first two centuries of their recorded history. With this end in view it deals with as many sides as possible of ancient Greek achievement, with art and industry, literature and science, no less than with politics and economics; but in each case the endeavour has been not to summarise the subject, but to write an introduction that will give the reader who is not familiar with Greek history some opportunity of seeing whether it might not be worth his while to follow up further the particular topic with which it deals.

Books that will help him to do so are mentioned in the course of the work. My obligations are for the most part acknowledged in the sections where they have been incurred, but I should like here to express my indebted-

ness to two of my colleagues, my wife and Mr. E. R. Dodds, who have been constantly ready with help and suggestions.

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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
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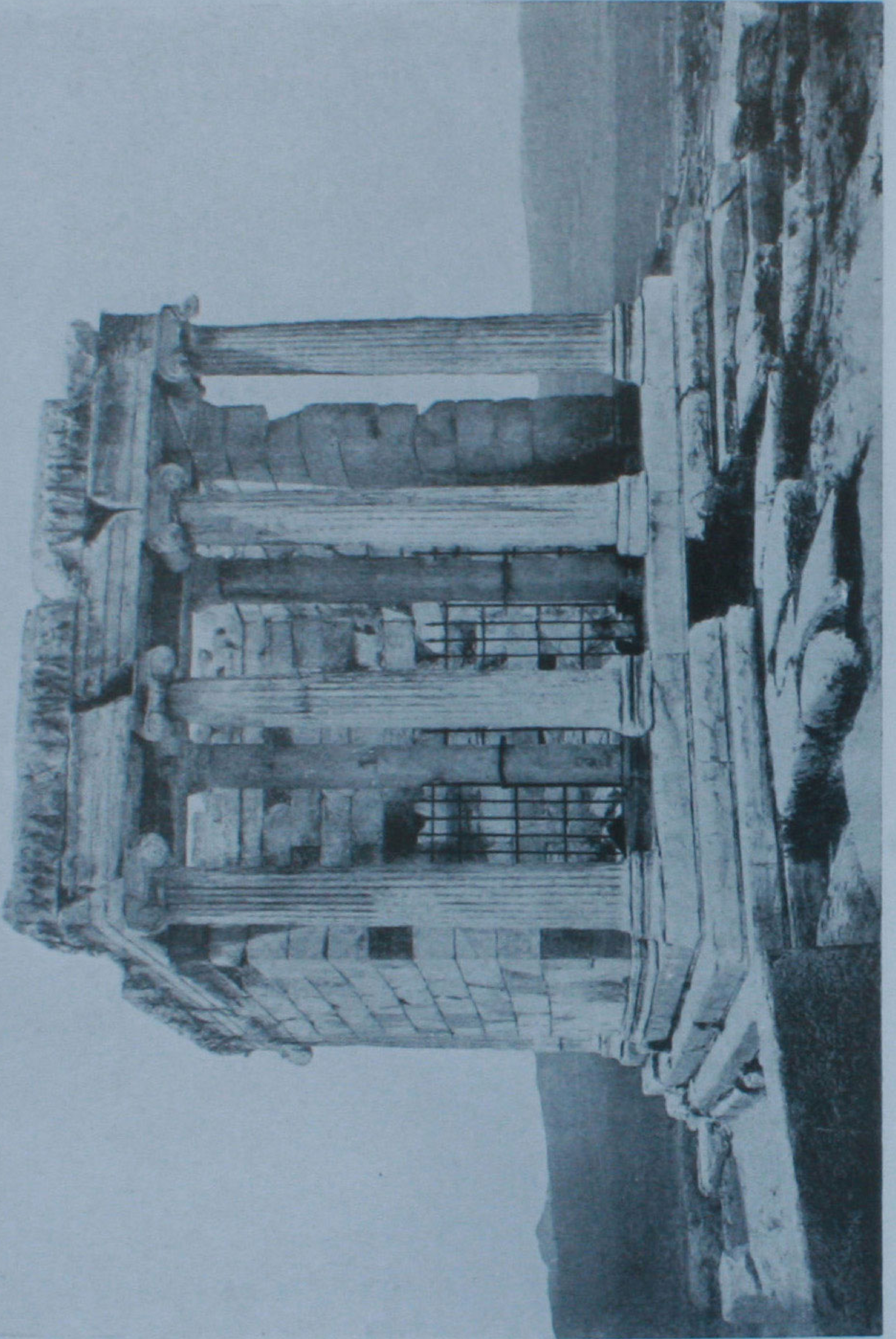

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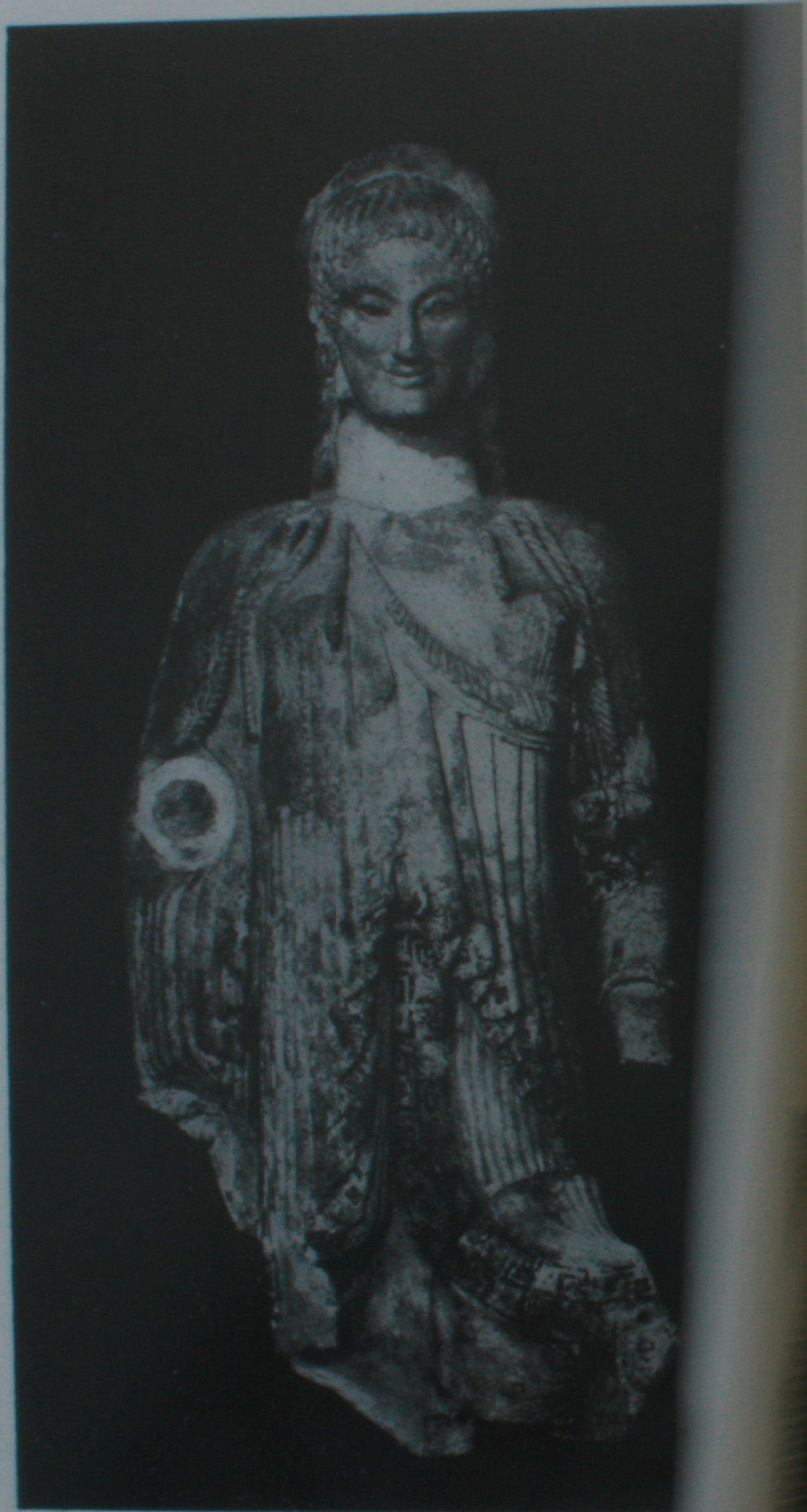

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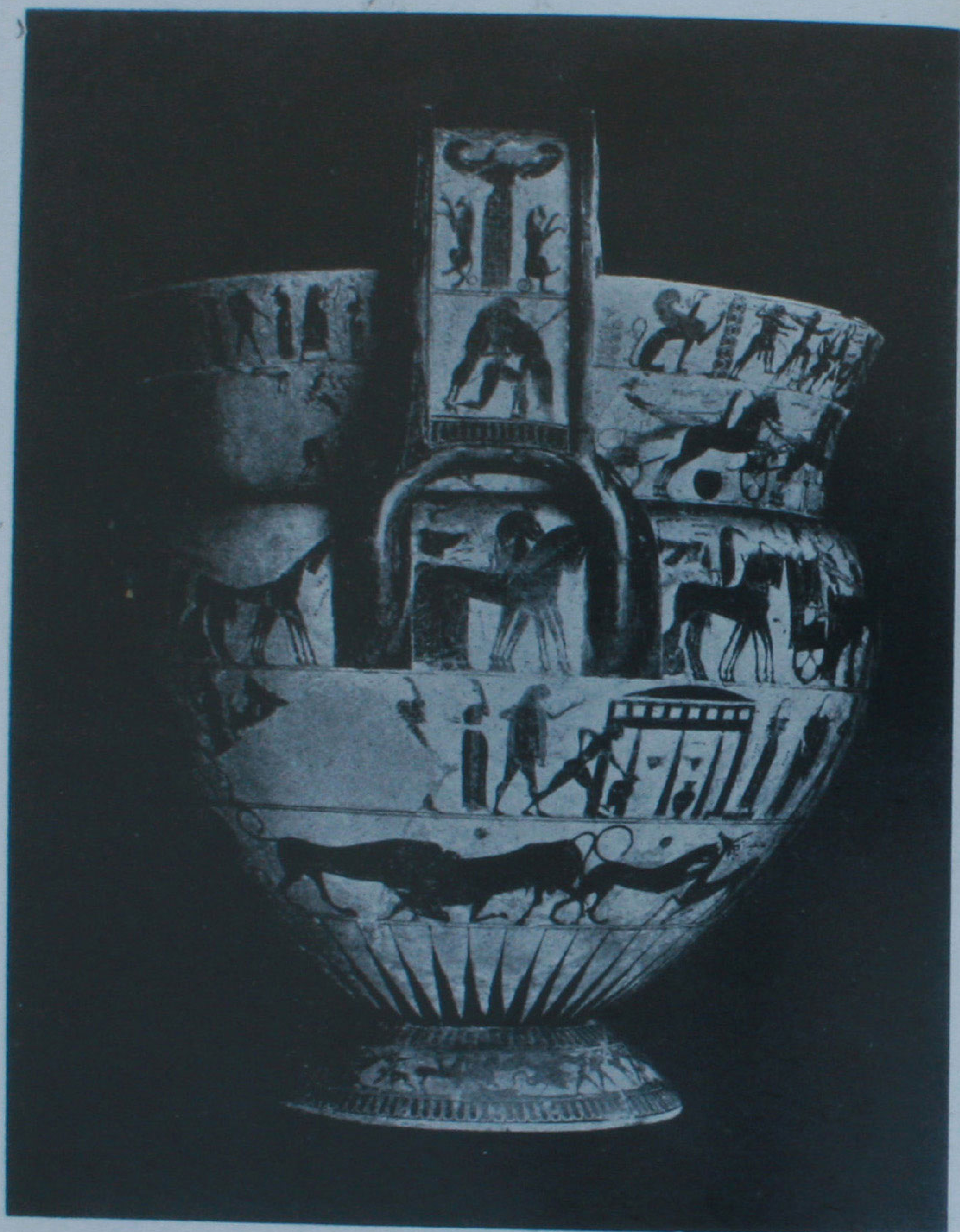

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THE GREEK RENAISSANCE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

GREECE AND HER FORERUNNERS

THE study of history has been profoundly influenced by the great scientific movement of the last few generations. On the whole this influence has been good. It has taught the historian how to use his material and, what is more important still, where to look for it. It has put an end to the catastrophic history in which a succession of picturesque figures hanging loose in space and time deal with a series of disconnected military and political crises that arise out of nothing and lead nowhere except to dungeons and palaces and scaffolds and thrones. But this advance has not been made without certain attendant losses. The evolution dogma which has been the inspiration of so much modern scientific

work, particularly in the sciences most allied to history, has sometimes been applied to history itself with unfortunate results. The golden age has been shifted from the past to the future, and our respect for the past has naturally suffered. Furthermore, in abandoning the catastrophic view of history there has been a very natural tendency to forget that there are a number of well-marked epochs even in the comparatively recent history of the human race. Inspired by the discovery that we have in some ways got far beyond any previous age, we have been tempted to imagine that we are completely emancipated from the past, and that it is not only possible but desirable to fix our eyes exclusively on the future. Because Hippocrates is now out of date as a manual for medical students it does not follow that the study of Greek is a cancer in our educational system, or even that it might not be fatal for us to cease to study the history of the past.

Fortunately such false impressions, which at first were only intensified by the absurd conservatism of classical scholars, are now being rapidly dispelled. History and pre-history are linking up with such sciences as geology at the one end and economics at the other and finding their rightful place in the general intellectual movement of the period. Taken

in its broadest sense history is perhaps destined to be the most important science of the immediate future. Already it is of all subjects the most widely studied. It is the one subject in which our knowledge is brought more or less up to date in periodicals that appear not yearly or monthly or weekly, but twice a day, and that too in the whole of the civilised world. The urgency for a better study of modern history will not now be disputed anywhere. Governments are, indeed, constantly placing difficulties in the way of this particular study, but even those who daily suppress historical truth in detail are loud on the need of publishing it as a whole. Only, where is an educated democracy to begin the study of the conditions in which it finds itself? To-day is not to be entirely explained by yesterday, or even by last year. Simply in order to realise our bondage to the present—and till the bondage has been recognised there is little hope of escaping from it—we are driven quickly back into the past. And science itself shows us that we must be prepared to go back a long way. To those who approach history from the point of view of modern geology and anthropology a thousand years may well be but as yesterday; possibly they will be found to be earlier phases of the present day.

We have, in fact, to go back more than twice that period to reach the age when modern civilisation took its essential form and features. It was probably in the Greek world of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. that all the main streams of modern thought and energy first took shape. All our knowledge of earlier civilisations points to fundamental differences between them and our own. It is among the Greeks of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. that we first find men who intellectually and politically share our outlook in a way that is becoming more and more striking the more the world emancipates itself from the mediævalism that it is in the process of casting off.

The civilisation that developed so remarkably in the age that we are about to consider does not appear to have been the result of a long period of evolution. It was a rapid and almost sudden renaissance. The remarkable ancient civilisation that had its centre in Crete, after lasting for at least as long as from the Norman Conquest to the present day, had come to a sudden end at some time near the close of the second millennium B.C.: the still more ancient civilisation of Egypt had collapsed at about the same time. Only in Mesopotamia had there been no such catastrophe. To understand the movements of the seventh-century renais-

sance it is necessary to have some idea of these earlier civilisations and of the dark ages that followed their eclipse. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Crete. Chapter two will deal somewhat less hastily with the dark age of the first three centuries of the first millennium, which bring us down to the period with which we are immediately concerned.

Egypt.—The great achievements of Egypt belong to the early dynastic period (about 3400–2500 B.C.). Already in the days of the earliest pharaohs the floods of the Nile were under human control, and Egypt was a land of expert engineers and agriculturalists. The pyramids were mainly built by the kings of the third to sixth dynasties (about 3000–2500 B.C.), and as works of mechanical skill they still excite wonder. Some of the masterpieces of Egyptian sculpture and painting belong to this same early period. The statues are often life-like portraits. There are kings and nobles, overseers and scribes, who died in Egypt more than forty-five centuries ago, but whose features are as well known to us as if we had their photographs. Some of the paintings and relief sculptures of birds and animals might well be used as illustrations in modern

works on natural history. Politically the whole country enjoyed the full benefits of orderly government, and perhaps we people of the twentieth century A.D., who are attempting to introduce law and order into the relationships of the warring states of the world, can particularly well appreciate the achievements of these statesmen of five thousand years ago, who first established law and order among the warring tribes and interests of a single great country. Most important of all, this early age of Egypt evolved a system of writing and developed the habit of keeping records. The museum of Palermo in Sicily possesses fragments of an Egyptian chronicle composed early in the third millennium B.C. and dealing with the kings of the first five dynasties.

Those of us who are not Egyptologists are probably inclined to exaggerate the sameness of the monuments of ancient Egypt and of the products of its art and industries. But making all allowance for misleading perspective and imperfect knowledge, there is probably a great deal of truth in this first impression of extreme conservatism. The things which Egypt appears never to have attempted are sometimes as striking as those which she achieved. If the pyramids bear witness to extraordinary mechanical skill they are monuments also of

the most absolute autocracy. Ancient Egypt often enjoyed a strong government, but never anything resembling freedom. When the central government weakened it meant merely a multiplication of autocrats and a corresponding diminution of material prosperity. The political system was early sheltered by religion and remained so till the end. But most serious of all was the limitation in intellectual outlook, which was early fastened on the Egyptians by their peculiar religious beliefs. Egypt is the land above all others where the works of man are least liable to decay. The results of this on Egyptian thought were most unfortunate. It caused it to be side-tracked into speculations upon crudely material forms of personal immortality. In the land of pyramids and mummies there was little that could inspire or foster anything at all resembling modern developments either political or intellectual. Somewhere about the time when Cretan civilisation was overthrown in the Ægean, Egypt was affected in a similar way and relapsed into a state of semi-feudal anarchy from which it only emerged in the seventh century B.C., when a strong central government was re-established by a new dynasty, the twenty-sixth, that had its home at Sais in the Delta at no great distance from the Mediterranean.

Saite Egypt shared in the great renaissance of the period, and there will be occasion to revert to it in a later chapter.

MESOPOTAMIA.—The Garden of Eden has long been recognised as one of the regions where the human race first began to lead a civilised life, but it is only within the last few generations that archæology has given us a fairly clear notion of its historical significance. As early as 3800 B.C. there was in the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates a great kingdom ruled over by a certain Sargon of Accad whose subjects made a serious study of astronomy, carved gems with considerable skill, and used a system of writing, of which we still have specimens, written in arrow-headed characters on tablets of clay. There is no need here to follow the various changes in dynasty and seat of power that occurred in the three thousand years following, during which Mesopotamia was dominated by a succession of great centralised states. As a typical specimen of one of these rulers we may take Khammurabi, the Amraphel of Genesis,[1] who was king of Babylon about 2340 B.C. Khammurabi issued a code of laws of which a copy was recently discovered.[2]

[1] Gen. xiv. 9.

[2] C. H. W. Johns, *The Oldest Code of Laws in the World*, from which the extracts above are taken.

These laws throw much light on the life of the period and show that society was fairly complex and highly organised. There are elaborate provisions as to the liabilities of market gardeners who cultivate plots of land on lease, of doctors negligent or even unfortunate in treating their patients, of contractors who put up jerry-built houses and the like. A few samples will best show the character of the code.

> If a man has given a field to a gardener to plant a garden and the gardener has planted the garden, four years he shall rear the garden, in the fifth the owner of the garden and the gardener shall share equally, the owner of the garden shall cut off his share and take it.
>
> If the gardener has not included all the field in the planting, has left a waste place, he shall set the waste place in the share that he takes.
>
> If the doctor has treated a gentleman for a severe wound with a lancet of bronze and has caused the gentleman to die, or has opened an abscess of the eye for a gentleman with the bronze lancet and has caused the loss of the gentleman's eye, one shall cut off his hands.
>
> If a doctor has treated the severe wound

> of a slave of a poor man with a bronze lancet and has caused his death, he shall render slave for slave.
>
> If a builder has built a house for a man and has not made strong the work and the house he built has fallen and he has caused the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death.
>
> If he has caused the son of the owner of the house to die, one shall put to death the son of the builder.

The picture suggested by these laws is one of justice untempered by mercy, and this impression is probably correct. When a king of Babylon wished to commemorate the reduction of a rebel or enemy town, he had his achievements carved in sculptures that showed his defeated enemies writhing on the tops of poles on which they had been impaled. Technically these sculptures are remarkable achievements. Huge figures were carved in the hardest stone, and they adorned massive palaces built of similar material. But for the most part the art of Nineveh and Babylon is inhuman and repellant. Its typical product is the winged bull whose human head with its Semitic nose and long and elaborately curled beard gives perhaps the best representation of combined

strength, cruelty, and pride that any artist has so far achieved.

It would be unfair to suppose that nothing flourished between the banks of the two great rivers besides militarism, commercialism, and a purely vindictive form of justice. It seems as though those qualities can never be rampant without provoking some sort of passionate reaction. But however that may be, in the region of ideas the Greeks of the seventh century B.C. do not seem to have owed much to the great empires of the East. What they did probably owe to them was much of their technical and mechanical skill and their introduction to such practical sciences as astronomy. How Greece of the seventh and sixth centuries came into contact with Assyria and Babylonia will best be explained in the third chapter, when we come to consider the relations of the Asiatic Greeks to the Lydia of King Gyges, who for part at any rate of his reign acknowledged himself the vassal of the great king of Assyria.

CRETE.—Till the beginning of the present century only two great early civilisations were known, those, namely, that have just been touched on, both of which arose on the banks of great rivers and had their character largely determined by that fact. It is thanks to the

excavations of Sir Arthur Evans at Cnossus, followed by those of other archæologists, mainly British, American, Italian, and Greek, that we now have some idea of the remarkable civilisation that sprang up almost as early in the island of Crete and spread from there over many of the Greek islands, much of the mainland of Greece, as far West as South Italy and Sicily, and as far East as Philistia. In the days of the earliest Egyptian dynasties Crete was hardly abreast of Egypt, though Egyptian influence was already felt in the island and the art of writing was already known. But by the time of the eleventh and twelfth Egyptian dynasties, which correspond roughly with the middle period (Middle Minoan) of the three into which Evans has divided this early Cretan history, Crete had attained a culture that will compare with that of Egypt itself. Palaces were built of the most solid and finely wrought masonry, metals and precious stones were worked with great skill, while the pottery of the period has never been surpassed for fineness and delicacy. The third of Evans' epochs (Late Minoan) corresponds roughly with the eighteenth to twentieth dynasties in Egypt. In the first part of this period Crete made still further progress. Her palaces show a drainage system that would meet the requirements of a modern sanitary

inspector; her frescoes, reliefs in plaster, vase paintings and the like are works of real art. But about the year 1400 B.C. the prosperity of Crete began to decline. The great palaces were destroyed, and though they were again occupied it was not on the same scale, and after a few centuries of decline the great Cretan civilisation came to an end.

These recent Cretan discoveries have enabled us to place in their proper historical setting the remarkable remains at such places as Mycenæ and Tiryns on the mainland of Greece, the cities whose excavation by Schliemann in the 'eighties of the last century first revealed to the modern world the existence of a great prehistoric civilisation in the area of the Ægean Sea. The most striking of these remains are the buildings. At Tiryns there is a citadel wall built of enormous stones which in parts of the wall are roughly squared, in other and earlier parts left nearly in their natural shape with only the surface roughly worked into an approximate plane. These walls imply an extremely skilful band of builders and masons. At one part a gallery has been constructed within the thickness of the walls with a roof that has the appearance though not the construction of a Gothic arch. At Mycenæ also the citadel walls are still standing. They are

built of squared stones several feet in height and broad and deep in proportion. The main entrance is by the famous lion gate, which has a lintel composed of one enormous block of stone surmounted by a triangular slab on which is carved in relief a pair of lions grouped heraldically on either side of a sacred pillar. But even more impressive than the walls of the city are the tombs of the dead. These beehive tombs, as they are generally called, consist of a subterranean chamber shaped much like the old-fashioned beehive, but sometimes nearly fifty feet in height and wrought of beautifully squared stones some feet in dimension either way. They are built in the side of a hill and approached by passages of similar masonry which lead to a spacious doorway that is often like the lion gateway built of enormous stones. The lintel of the largest measures some twenty-seven feet wide by fifteen deep and three thick.

In and around these dwellings of the living and the dead there have been found vast numbers of small objects in stone, metal and other materials wrought with the highest skill; for example, precious stones elaborately carved, gold ornaments with embossed decoration, daggers with hunting scenes inlaid in the blade. The walls themselves sometimes show remains of frescoes painted with considerable skill. The

mass of pottery found on the sites is overwhelming. After repeated excavations and explorations, conducted with increasing care, it is still possible to pick up on a site during a casual visit pocketfuls of potsherds showing the typical "Mycenæan" decoration. Pottery, frescoes, and the other finds all show that the great days of Mycenæ and Tiryns correspond to the "Late Minoan" period of Cretan history. Of other Mycenæan sites on the Greek mainland the most interesting historically is Thebes, where some ten years ago the Greek archæologist Keramopoullos discovered remains of a palace with frescoed walls and painted pottery in the "Late Minoan" style. The Thebans of this early period buried their distinguished dead in beehive tombs like those at Mycenæ itself.

Schliemann was inspired to explore Mycenæ by reading in his youth, when he was a grocer's assistant in Germany, the two great Homeric epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey. These two poems are the key to a proper understanding of the relationship of Mycenæan civilisation to the renaissance of the seventh century, and before proceeding further it will be well to summarise their contents and character.

At the opening of the Iliad a great Greek expedition has for nine years been besieging the city of Troy in the north-west corner of

Asia Minor, near the southern entrance to the Dardanelles. A council of war is being held. The debate leads to a violent quarrel between Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief, and Achilles, the strongest and bravest of his lieutenants, who finally refuses to have anything more to do with the fighting, and retires to his quarters among his followers, the Myrmidons, where he waits to see Agamemnon mismanage the campaign without him. His hopes are not disappointed. The Greeks are driven back to their ships and would have come to disaster if Achilles had not been influenced by his great friend Patroclus and allowed him to lead out the Myrmidon forces to help the other Greeks. Achilles has sworn to take no further part himself, but he allows his friend to wear his armour, and Patroclus "went forth like to the god of war, but it was for him the beginning of evil." He is killed by Hector, the Trojan commander. Then Achilles in fury forgets his oath and marches out and kills Hector in battle. "So the Trojans busied themselves with the burying of Hector, tamer of horses," with which statement the poem closes.

In the Odyssey Troy has already fallen. The poem recounts the subsequent adventures and wanderings of the Greek hero Odysseus

(Latin Ulysses) on his way home and after his arrival there. On his journey home he was carried out of his way far into the west and encountered Circe, the witch who turned her victims into beasts; Polyphemus, the one-eyed savage who eat up most of Odysseus' crew and came very near to making a meal of the hero himself; the Sirens who, with their beautiful singing, lure men to shipwreck, and various other perils of a similar kind. Finally, after ten years of wanderings he arrives alone in his native island of Ithaca, where he finds all the eligible young men in the island, and some too of maturer years, living in his house and wasting his substance till his wife Penelope shall decide which of them she intends to marry. Disguising himself as a beggar he manages to get them together unarmed in a single room, where he shoots them all down with a bow. Next he proceeds to hang a few of Penelope's maids who had abetted the wicked suitors, after which he makes himself known to Penelope and the tale is practically at an end.

The excavations of the last half century have revolutionised our views as to the historical background of the Homeric poems. For Mr. Gladstone Homer pictured the youthful prime of the pagan world, and his epics are a sort of secular Old Testament which might fairly claim

a place side by side with the Jewish writings in the normal liberal education. Schliemann and Evans have taught us that this Garden of Eden outlook is entirely mistaken. The Homeric poems come at the end, not the beginning, of a long period of civilisation. In fact, they are our main source of information as to how the great Cretan-Mycenæan civilisation came to an end. The yellow-haired, beef-eating heroes of Homer, whose favourite title of honour is "sacker of cities," are now generally recognised as leaders of Northern tribes forcing their way southward to a place in the sun much as was done fifteen centuries later by the Goths, Huns, and Vandals who overthrew the empire of Rome. It was an age of sieges, of which the most important appear to have been that of Troy and the two sieges in two successive generations of the great mainland city of Thebes. The epic which told of the Theban exploits has been lost, but the legends are preserved in later writers, and it would seem that the first floods of invasion swept past the great city, which fell at last to forces that attacked it from the south.

Of any great struggle in Crete itself legend says nothing, but this silence agrees with the archæological evidence. To the present day the walls of Tiryns, Mycenæ and other main-

land sites of this ancient culture impress by their extraordinary massiveness and strength. If little sign of such walls is left at Thebes it is that, unlike so many Mycenæan sites, it has been thickly populated all through classical and mediæval times. Keramopoullos has carried on his digging under considerable difficulties owing to the buildings that still occupy the site. But in Crete the great Minoan sites are all unwalled. Crete relied on the power of its navy, and the struggle with the invader was probably settled before he reached the island. Only one legend bears directly on the dissolution of the Cretan power. In the days of Minos, a name which appears to cover all the kings of prehistoric Crete, the people of Athens had to send yearly to the island a contingent of young men and women to feed the Minotaur, a bull-headed monster who probably played an important part in the Cretan religion. But when Prince Theseus was of age to be one of these victims he volunteered to be sent, and on his arrival killed the Minotaur, rescued his fellow-captives, and brought them safely back to Athens, after which the Athenians ceased to pay tribute to the Cretan power. Another legend about Theseus and Minos tells how the Cretan king cast into the sea a ring which the prince of Athens went down and secured for

himself. Whether or no in this last legend the ring of Minos is like the ring with which the doge of Venice used to wed the ocean, and the Theseus exploit means that the Athenians wrested from the Cretans the control of the sea,[1] Theseus is certainly a half-historical figure like our own Arthur who, when the Roman empire is breaking up, refuses any longer to pay tribute to the great lords of Rome.

The parallel is, indeed, suggestive in more ways than one. Just as Arthur, the half Romanised rebel from decaying Rome, spends most of his time in trying to put down the robber barons of his own realm and to maintain an order that is passing away, so we find Theseus engaged in a whole series of campaigns against the robber chiefs who infested Attica. It would, of course, be foolish to look for much historical truth in legends such as those of Theseus and Arthur. But their similarity is of some significance. They arose independently under similar circumstances and tend to make us realise that even in the most destructive periods there are conservative forces at work. We know that much of Rome survived the dark age which began in the fifth century of the present era. How much precisely Classical Greece owed to the civilisations from whose

[1] This explanation is due to the French scholar, S. Reinach.

wreck she rose is harder to determine, principally because we have nothing from Crete or even from Egypt or Babylon that can be remotely compared with the literature that has come down to us from ancient Rome. But even with this limitation it must profoundly alter our conception of Classical Greek civilisation when we realise that the darkness out of which it emerged was not the darkness of primal chaos but a temporary eclipse. Indeed, enough is known of this dark period to make it possible and desirable to devote to it the whole of the following chapter.[1]

[1] For a particularly vivid picture of the break up of the old Cretan civilisation see Gilbert Murray's *Rise of the Epic*, a book to which the account here given is much indebted.

CHAPTER II

THE DARK AGE IN GREECE

ACCORDING to the writers of the four gospels mastery of mind tends to manifest itself in mastery over matter, and history supports this view. In our own country, for instance, the Roman period has left impressive monuments like the walls of Silchester or Caerwent, the great wall from Newcastle to Carlisle, and the vast masses of small objects of excellent workmanship that are found all over the country. The mediæval period again has left its monument almost in every village. But the Angles and Saxons and all the other destroyers of cities who forced Roman Britain back to barbarism were equally unconstructive in all directions. Some fairly well made iron weapons, a few objects of personal adornment for the great chiefs of the period, and a certain amount of astonishingly incompetent coarse pottery is all that the whole long period of the Saxon conquest has left behind it. The same is true of the dark age that came on Greece after

the great war lords from the North had overthrown the Mycenæan civilisation. It has left us no great buildings like the palaces and gates and tombs of Cnossus and Mycenæ or the temples of Classical Greece. In fact, it has left us no buildings at all nor any other monuments wrought in stone. Like our own Saxon period it is known mainly from its metal work and pottery. Both these are technically competent. The potter of this period could throw a vase several feet high, excellently proportioned and strongly made. Such vases were placed over the graves of great nobles at this period in lieu of tombstones, and a fine series of them may now be seen in the National Museum at Athens.[1] But the decoration of these vases is childish. The human figure is rendered by a combination of triangles and straight lines. For ornament there is nothing but zigzags, meanders, concentric circles, and the like; and the whole effect is so linear and angular that the name geometric is commonly given to this whole class of vases, a specimen of which is figured below, Plate VIII (a).

The remains are what might be expected from the period, which was one of wanderings as

[1] Some good examples are also to be seen in the Louvre at Paris.

well as wars. Odysseus is the prototype of many chieftains who roamed over the whole Greek world in search of adventure and plunder, and a whole cycle of lost epics celebrated the doings of these adventurers. It was quite good manners to ask a sailor whether he was a merchant or a pirate. Such an age does not foster architecture or any of the more monumental arts. There is no point in a nomad erecting a settled abiding place either for himself or his gods. Even if he has the skill he will hardly have the desire. The potter, on the other hand, may be the more in demand from the lack of most of the conveniences of material civilisation. "Potter falls out with potter" is how the one writer of this period tells us that two of a trade never agree.

But the most important industry for a military race is the working of metals and the making of weapons, and in this the men of the Dark Ages excelled their predecessors. The civilised inhabitants of Cnossus and Mycenæ were skilful goldsmiths and coppersmiths, but iron appears to have been practically unknown to them till the arrival of the destroyers of cities, who threw the whole Ægean region back into barbarism. The early history of iron is obscure. Partly this is due to difficulties in interpreting the literary evidence. Copper is

certainly the older metal, and all smiths were originally coppersmiths. When iron first entered the Greek area it seems fairly certain that the smiths who now worked both copper and iron, and perhaps mainly the latter, still called themselves coppersmiths, much as in England we still call pennies coppers though they are made of bronze, and the French call all money silver though they long ago began coining in gold. When therefore we find Homer speaking normally of coppersmiths and arms of copper we cannot be sure that he means what he says. This would be the case even if the word iron never occurred in his poems, which in fact it occasionally does. Archæologically, again, the evidence may be misleading, since iron rusts away so much more easily than the softer metals. If all our evidence came from carefully conducted excavations this would not so much matter, for though iron disintegrates it does not so often completely disappear. Unfortunately much of our archæological material comes from chance finds or from digs carelessly conducted. We must be cautious, therefore, in advancing negative evidence as to the exclusive use of copper in any age.[1] But the material

[1] Some years ago when excavating a Greek grave of the sixth century B.C. the writer found a small iron vessel with bronze handles and a bronze stand: the handles and stand

available for writing the history of the metals in the Minoan period is now considerable, and it may be fairly claimed for it that it establishes the Minoan period as essentially an age of bronze, and that the end of it coincides with the appearance of iron in the Ægean area. The coincidence was no accident. It was the hard iron swords of the sackers of cities that decided the issue between Cretan culture and Northern barbarism. So early in the world's history do we find civilisation suffering a disastrous set-back through the discovery of some new powerful weapon of offence.

Modern archæologists are not the first to have seen that this post-Cretan age of darkness was an age of iron replacing an age of bronze and gold. It is so described by a Greek who actually lived during that period and whose works have fortunately come down to us. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to giving some account of this remarkable writer. His name was Hesiod, and he lived in Bœotia, close under Mount Helicon at a place called Ascra, a miserable hamlet, to use his own words, "bad in winter, sultry in summer, and good at no time." The poet was not a Bœotian by

were in excellent condition, but the vessel was reduced to a mass of small corroded fragments that were only found by careful search.

descent. His father had come over from Cyme in North-West Asia Minor, one of the Greek settlements established on that coast in the generations following the siege of Troy, and not so very far from Troy itself. He left Cyme, "crossing a great stretch of sea" to the Greek mainland, and "fled not from riches and substance, but from wretched poverty, which Zeus lays on men." Hesiod himself was not a wanderer. He tells us that he had no skill in seafaring nor in ships, and that he had never sailed by ship over the wide sea, but only from Aulis in Bœotia, the starting place of the Trojan expedition, to the island of Eubœa opposite, to the games of wise Amphidamas. "And there," he writes, "I boast that I gained the victory with song and carried off a tripod with handles which I dedicated to the muses of Helicon in the place where they first set me in the way of clear song."

Three poems have come down to us under Hesiod's name. The "Shield of Heracles," 480 lines long, is a descriptive piece in the heroic vein of the Homeric epic. Perhaps it was with some such composition that the poet won the prize at the games of the wise Amphidamas. It need not here detain us. A second poem, the "Theogony," just over 1000 lines in length, is, as its title implies, a book of the

pedigrees of the numerous Greek divinities. Such a celestial birthday book is always interesting. The "Theogony" enables us to form some notion of the religious background of Hesiod's days, just as legends of the saints supplement the picture of our own Middle Ages that is to be drawn from the rolls and charters of the period. In a later chapter we shall have to revert to the "Theogony" and the attacks that were made on it in the sixth century B.C. by reason of its low and obsolescent moral tone. Space forbids us to discuss it here.

The third of these poems, and that which most concerns us here, is named the "Works and Days." Its theme is farming and how and when the farmer should perform his various tasks. It is addressed to the poet's brother Perses, who appears to have been rather a waster, and the treatment is discursive. But the work is meant to be a practical manual, quite as much as the similarly discursive treatises on similar subjects written by William Cobbett, who too sometimes addresses to a relative advice and instruction intended for the public at large. Even the metrical form of the "Works and Days" was not without its practical usefulness in times when most possible students of the manual were unable to read and had to learn their handbook off by heart. The poet

begins by impressing on his brother the law of God that man must work. This leads him to explain why the world is such a hard place to live in, and why evil must be accepted as an inevitable fact. "Full is the earth of evils, full the sea." The reason is to be found in the law of deterioration, which for Hesiod was as absolute a dogma as the law of progress was in Europe for the century just past. Mankind for Hesiod had passed through successive ages of gold, silver, and bronze, and was now living in the age of iron. In the paradise of the golden age "men lived like gods without sorrow . . . and dwelt in ease and peace upon their lands with many good things, rich in flocks: and when they died it was as though they were overcome with sleep." The next age, that of silver, was "less noble by far." The men of this age took one hundred years to grow up and then soon died, destroyed by Zeus, "because they could not keep from wronging one another, nor would they sacrifice on the holy altars of the blessed ones as it is right for men to do wherever they dwell." Third comes the age of bronze. The men of the bronze age were "terrible and strong: they loved the woeful works of the war god: they ate no bread, but were hard of heart like adamant, fearful men. . . . Their armour was

of bronze and their houses of bronze, and of bronze were their implements: there was no black iron. These were destroyed by their own hands." Between this bronze age and the age of iron that would naturally follow the poet inserts an age of heroes, "the race before our own," "nobler and more righteous than the age of bronze." "Grim war and dread battle destroyed a part of these, some at seven gated Thebes and some at Troy."

Finally we have the iron age, the poet's own age, when "men never rest from labour and sorrow by day and from perishing by night." "Would," says the poet, "that I were not among the men of this generation, but had either died before or been born afterwards." Even this last wish is a lapse into unwarranted optimism, since on the whole things seem to be going from bad to worse. "Might," he prophesies of the coming generation, "shall be their right; and one man shall sack another's city . . . bitter sorrows shall be left for mortal men, and there will be no help against evil."

Such is the historical outlook of the "Works and Days." The picture is not in the main fanciful. The poet was right in asserting that as far as the memory of his age and country went back the state of things had been invariably getting worse, sometimes by a steady

process of deterioration, as depicted in the transition from the age of gold to that of silver, sometimes catastrophically, as in the age of bronze. The only exception is the age of heroes, and even that is only an apparent one, for the age of heroes interrupts the metallic sequence and is probably an alternative version of the age of bronze, treated more historically and written from a standpoint that could see nothing disastrous to Ægean culture in the downfall of two of its chief centres, Troy and Thebes.

Even the names given by Hesiod to his four ages are now seen to have been based on and suggested by a profound historical fact. Silver began to be worked much later than gold, and though bronze was also worked much earlier than silver, Hesiod is right in the dating of his bronze age if, as his account implies, he means an age of violence earlier than the age of the great invasions by the men with the swords of iron.

It is not surprising that Hesiod should have preserved for us such traditions as were still in his days surviving concerning the great vanished past. His father's home at Cyme was not fifty miles distant from the Troad, and his own home in Bœotia was near the great city of Thebes. Thebes played no great part

in the renaissance of the seventh century B.C.; but, as we have noticed already, she had been one of the greatest centres of the old civilisation, and legend made her the place where mainland Greeks first learned to write.

What gives the "Works and Days" its unique value is the picture that it draws for us of the age in which it was written. The picture is, of course, incomplete. The book is a manual for farmers and not a history. But the very fact that Hesiod had no intention of writing contemporary history perhaps increases the historical value of what he says about his own age. His directions for wood-cutting, plough-making, sowing, reaping, threshing, and the like are detailed and precise, and this means that they give us a fair notion of the technical skill commanded by the people of his age. Incidentally they often throw an interesting light on the general life of the period. When, for instance, the ploughman is told to begin operations by going into the forest and looking about for a suitable tree for cutting down and shaping into a plough, we see at once that he lived in an age that had no conception of the division of labour, and we are not surprised a little further on to find the farmer told how to weave the cloth for his winter clothes. The market town which bulks so largely in the life

of the modern farmer and was equally important in the Italy of the days of Virgil does not exist for Hesiod. The only common centre for the whole district appears to be the court of the chief. The poet is very insistent on the danger of spending too much time in these courts either as a litigant or as a mere spectator of cases in which neighbours were concerned. Nearer home the smithy is the great temptation. It seems to have had all the seductiveness of the village inn, and the farmer is warned to pass it by "in winter time when cold keeps men from field work; for then an industrious man can greatly prosper his home." The social instinct receives little sympathy anywhere in the whole poem. "Let a brisk fellow of forty follow (the oxen) with a loaf of four quarters and eight slices for his dinner, one who will attend to his work . . . for a man less staid gets disturbed, hankering after his fellows." There is here and there a curious lack of the feeling of social obligation. "So soon as you have safely stored all your stuff indoors I bid you put your bondman out of doors and look out for a servant girl with no children, for a servant with a child to nurse is troublesome." This dislike of "encumbrances" goes, as so often, with indulgence in a primitive form of parasitic luxury. The North wind that pierces

the farmer and his beasts "does not blow through the tender maiden who stays indoors with her dear mother and washes her soft body and anoints herself with oil and lies down in an inner room within the house." Economically the state of things is equally primitive. As there is no division of labour it naturally follows that there can be no co-operative undertakings, nor anything to check man's primal acquisitiveness. "It is better to have your stuff at home, for whatever is abroad may mean loss." Logically enough the poet preaches the practices of the French peasant proprietor: "There should be an only son . . . for so wealth will increase in the home." Generosity is a mistake. "Give to one who gives, but do not give to one who does not give."

The wisdom of which specimens have just been quoted was probably inherited by the poet. It is of the sort that men must have learned right at the beginning of the Dark Ages. There are, however, other passages of the poem where Hesiod seems to be dealing with the problems and aspirations of his own age, when life though still hard was becoming more settled. Such are, for instance, the numerous passages where he dwells on the need for peace and expresses his hatred of war and violence. "Cease altogether to think of

violence. For the son of Cronus has ordained this law for men, that fishes and beasts and winged fowl should devour one another, for justice is not in them. But to mankind he gave justice." The problem of strife caused Hesiod much thought: his conclusion was this, that there are two kinds of strife: "one fosters evil war and battle, being cruel; her no man loves, but perforce, through the will of the deathless gods, men pay harsh strife due honour . . . but the other is far kinder to men. She stirs up even the shiftless to toil, for a man grows eager to work when he considers his neighbour, a rich man who hastens to plough and plant, and neighbour vies with his neighbour as he hurries after wealth." This idea of setting against the strife of war the rivalries of industrial competition recalls the common language of a much more recent period of darkness. Already in the days of Hesiod the peaceful form of strife had its cruel side and could practise its cruelty in the name of religion: "sacrifice to the gods and propitiate them . . . that they may be gracious to you . . . and so you may buy another's holding and not another yours."

Another sign of the times in which Hesiod lived is to be found in his bitter attacks on the princes who ruled the land, "bribe swallowing

lords . . . fools who know not how much more the half is than the whole." "The people pay for the mad folly of their princes who evilly minded pervert judgment." Historians have long noticed how different this language is from that of Homer, whose princes rule by divine right and whose only agitator is soundly beaten amidst universal laughter and approval. To some extent, no doubt, the difference between the two poets is due to the different audiences for whom they wrote, but this difference of audience is itself a sign of the times. Literature has ceased to be inspired exclusively by princely patrons. But it is highly probable that the princes themselves had changed in character, and that the change had been all for the worse. The more or less benevolent military autocrat had been succeeded by the greedy landlord with the law courts behind him to help him in his exactions. Hesiod has no alternative government to propose, but he tells the princes very plainly that they are bleeding their subjects to economic ruin, and that the ruin of the subject will mean the ruin of the master.

But perhaps the most characteristic of all the precepts of Hesiod are his repeated exhortations to work. Work is for Hesiod the law of life. "Both gods and men are angry with the man who lives idle, for in nature he is like the

stingless drones who waste the labour of the bees, eating without working." . . . "Work is no disgrace ; it is idleness that is a disgrace." The law of labour is of divine origin : "the gods keep hidden from men the means of life. Else would you easily do work enough in a day to supply you for a full year even without working." In preaching the dignity of labour, as in protesting against despotism and violence, Hesiod is deliberately breaking with the age of feudalism in which he lived and heralding the age of renewed enlightenment that led to the great renaissance.[1]

[1] In quoting from the "Works and Days" use has been made of the excellent translation by H. Evelyn White, published in the Loeb Classical Library. Considering the shortness of the poem detailed references have not been given.

CHAPTER III

GREECE AND HER NEIGHBOURS AT THE END OF THE DARK AGES

HESIOD shows sufficiently that the Greeks of his age were ready for a new order of things. But the influence that inspired and moulded the new age that begins early in the seventh century B.C. did not come from Bœotia or from any of the old seats of civilisation on the Greek mainland. The new light came mainly from the East, and to understand how it reached the Greeks it is necessary to have some notion of their geographical distribution at this period and of the races with whom they were brought in contact.

Ancient Greece was not a country as we understand it. There was no state or organisation that could speak in the name of the whole nation. The political unit was the city. Each city had its own government, its own laws, its own army, and, when metal coins began to be issued, its own coinage struck on its own

particular metrical system. Social customs differed widely from city to city, and in religion though all the Greeks acknowledged up to a point the godhead of all the Greek gods, in practice each city had its own particular patron on whom it concentrated its devotions and whom it worshipped in its own particular way. The growth of these small city states is to be explained by the physical geography of the country. The southern parts of the Balkan peninsula, which from the days of Homer onwards have been the central home of the Greeks, are largely wild mountainous regions, where human settlement on any scale has always been impossible. From the very nature of the land the population has always been concentrated in the small plains that are found here and there, principally in the eastern part of the country. Each of these plains is a separate and, from the landward point of view, a self-contained entity. As a rule they are bounded on one side by the sea and on the rest by high and barren mountains. The sea connects them with the outer world, the mountains cut them off from it.

When the country began to be overrun by the invading Achæans and Dorians and the other hordes of sackers of cities who brought the Mycenæan civilisation to an end, the old

inhabitants took to their ships and fled over the seas and there established fresh city states like those that they had left. Soon the earlier of these invaders, crowded out by later hordes that followed them from the North, took ship in like manner and founded similar settlements overseas. Since most of the cities on the Greek mainland look east and the eastward route across the Ægean archipelago has far fewer terrors than the voyage across the less known open seas towards the West, these earliest emigrants fled eastward, with the result that the whole of the west coast of Asia Minor was soon fringed with Greek cities. In the South, opposite the island of Rhodes, there was a group of cities founded by the Dorians, one of the latest races to pour southwards into Greece after the downfall of Mycenæ. In the North, spreading southwards from the Troad, was a group of cities of Æolian race, a name which implies that they were of mixed ancestry. Between them lay the largest group, belonging to the ancient Ionian race. The land they occupied was known as Ionia. We shall have frequent occasions to refer to the name in the succeeding pages.

Before the end of the Dark Ages the whole western coast of Asia Minor had been completely settled by these various Greeks and the

stream of emigration had turned west, principally to Sicily and South Italy. In Sicily Greek settlers of various races founded cities on the most important sites all round the coast, except in the extreme west, where the Carthaginians had anticipated them. In Italy they settled in a similar way all round the coast from Cumæ close by Naples on the west coast to Brindisi on the east. So completely was this southern part of Italy dominated by the Greek settlers that it got to be known as Greater Greece. The beginning of this westward movement goes back to days before Hesiod, who tells us how Agrios and Latinos and Telegonos, sons of Odysseus and Circe, "ruled over the famous Etruscans very far off in a recess of the holy islands." But the great period of colonisation in these distant western regions begins in the second half of the eighth century B.C. and continues through the seventh century into the sixth. In the course of it Greek settlers penetrated even farther west and founded Marseilles and other cities on the south coast of France and one or two settlements of less importance on the east coast of Spain, two of which, Rhode and Emporiæ, still preserve their Greek names in the forms Rosas and Ampurias.

To complete the picture of the Greek world at this time mention should be made of the group of cities that was founded on the African coast due south of Greece in the latter part of the seventh century, of which the most famous was Cyrene, of the cities founded by Chalcis in the great three-pronged peninsula that lies to the south and east of Salonika, and of the colonies planted mainly by Megara and Miletus on the Sea of Marmora and the straits at either end of it and the Black Sea. Of these one of the earliest and most important was Byzantium, now known as Constantinople.

The Greeks who founded these colonies were plainly a nation of sailors. This is implied even in Hesiod. Personally, as we have seen already, he intensely disliked the sea. " For my part I do not praise it, for my heart does not like it " is what he says about spring voyages and obviously felt about seafaring at all times of the year. Nobody, he practically says, would ever become a sailor unless he either had a " misguided heart " or wished " to escape from debt and joyless hunger." But all the same he proceeds to give directions as to sea voyaging that assume it to be the normal alternative to agriculture.

This constant association with the sea is one

of the determining factors in Greek history. The sea itself played an enormous part in educating the Greeks and in moulding their outlook. But besides doing that it brought them into contact with a variety of foreign races. It was this familiarity with a large number of widely differing foreign races that made the Greeks at the same time so very conscious of their nationality and (except, of course, in periods of war) comparatively free from the intense provincialism that is so distressing a feature of much modern nationalism. Before proceeding further it will be well, therefore, to give some brief account of these various foreign influences.

Some of these foreigners were still in a fairly primitive state, notably the Scythians, who occupied the lands just north of the Black Sea, and the Thracians to the south-west of them, who occupied the country behind the north coast of the Sea of Marmora and the region westwards towards Macedonia. The Scythians were in race, too, very different from the Greeks, and may have had a Mongolian strain. Elsewhere, as in North Africa, Macedonia, Sicily, and South Italy the natives were probably more advanced in culture and more akin in race. The Macedonians appear to have been closely related to some of the tribes who had forced

their way down into Greece in the Dark Ages. Others, however, of the tribes in these parts must have belonged to the original small dark-haired type that alone seems able to maintain its own permanently in those southern lands, and to the same Mediterranean race belonged the peoples whom the Greeks found occupying the Cyrenaica in North Africa, the race which has survived Greek, Punic, Roman, Vandal, Arab, and Italian invasions, and is now known as Berber.

Only one fully civilised race met the Greeks in any of the regions just mentioned: but that was one that for some centuries had been playing an important part in the development of Greece. This race was the Punic or Phœnician, which occupied the principal sites in the west corner of Sicily. The Phœnicians had been before the Greeks in the Far West and, in fact, over the whole area of the Mediterranean. In Homer articles of luxury come mainly from their great city of Sidon on the Syrian coast, and tradition dated the foundation of Carthage by the people of Tyre, the neighbour of Sidon, somewhere in the middle of the ninth century B.C. or even earlier. It was from Carthage, which lay only some hundred miles south-west of the western end of Sicily, that the Phœnicians had settled in the island. Like some other great

branches of the Semite stock the Phœnicians seem to have been transmitters rather than creators, but in this middleman capacity they did much for the early Greeks. To the south of their home in the land of Canaan lay Egypt, to the east lay Mesopotamia, and the people of the Phœnician trading cities felt the power and influence of both these states. Thus in the Far West the Greeks found themselves in close touch with the people who for centuries had been their chief means of communication with the old civilisations of the East. In later ages, from the fifth century onwards, Greeks and Canaanites were deadly enemies in Sicily, and this fact has rather obscured the friendly relations that at first existed. There is little doubt that one of the most notable of the earliest Greek rulers of whom we hear in Sicily was much devoted to the worship of the Canaanitish god Moloch. That at least seems the only explanation of his unhappy habit of roasting human victims alive in a brazen bull, a proceeding quite familiar in Syria as an act of religious devotion, but altogether alien to Greek feeling and practice. It would be unfair to Phalaris, the ruler in question, to suppose that when he borrowed this practice from his Phœnician neighbours he was not indebted to them in other ways as well.

But the neighbours who most influenced the Greeks of our period are those whom they found as a result of their settlement of Asia Minor, and about these it will be necessary to speak in rather more detail. The powers in question are Lydia and Egypt, and it will be convenient to deal first with Lydia. Lydia only comes into prominence about the year 700 B.C. Its rise thus coincides with the beginnings of the Greek renaissance, and the two events were probably not unconnected. It may help us to understand the connection if for a moment we revert to an earlier period.

In the days of the siege of Troy and of the Greek settlement of the western coast of Asia Minor the greatest and most civilised power in the peninsula was that of the Hittites. Remains of this rather elusive people have been found between Sardis and the sea, but the sites where they can be traced grow increasingly numerous as we proceed eastward, and the centre of their power lay right at the other end of the peninsula. It extended southward into Syria, and thus came into contact with Egypt, and eastward up to the Euphrates, where it touched the great power of Mesopotamia. The remains, and particularly the inscriptions, still unfortunately undeciphered, show the influence of these two main centres of earliest civilisation.