Greek art on Greek soil

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CHAPTER I.

THE LAND OF GREECE.

John Winckelmann, who stood in a rank with Lessing and Goethe, and who still remains the subtlest critic of art, in his "History of Ancient Art" that was written a hundred and thirty years ago, made some capital errors in his estimate of Greek sculpture, setting up statues which belonged to Greek art in its decline, as if they were perfect works. In this he was excusable, and excusable also for not recognizing the supreme merit of Pheidias, because Greece in his time was comparatively unvisited by scholars and artists; though, by a fortunate chance, a French artist, Jean Jacques Carrey, had been in Athens previous to the destruction of the Parthenon in 1687. He made sketches in red chalk of the sculptures on the pediments of the Parthenon, that are now invaluable as enabling us to define and posit these groups, and especially those that were afterwards destroyed. But Winckelmann drew his knowledge of Greek art from Rome, from art-collections in Italy and Germany, and he made a skillful use of the materials that these afforded him; yet he would have infinitely enlarged his aesthetic and critical vision, had he seen the Acropolis. Other German writers since Winckelmann have taken advantage of a better acquaintance with Greece itself, and do not greatly err in this matter; and it is one of the excellencies of the most recent of them and, perhaps, of the highest living authority in this department of knowl-
edge, Furtwaengler, that he made a careful study of Greek sculpture on Greek soil, in the environment of place and scene in which this art was created.

In the field of painting, who, we would ask, could sympathetically know Giotto's frescoes in the upper church of Assissi, or the religious pictures of the Umbrian school, who had not first made a pilgrimage to that Umbrian land, which was the home of early Italian painting, and where the hills over which St. Francis walked still glow and palpitate with the life of religious poetry and the spirit of monkish meditative art?

In this, then, and the succeeding chapter, I would say in a plain, straightforward way, something of the land of Greece and of the people who live there; for the people who live on the soil, and the very earth, the sun and atmosphere, the geography, the language, the racial derivations and peculiarities, the political events which have occurred, tell us of those influences, subtle though they be, which originate and color a nation's art, while, of course, there ever remains the unknown factor of genius.

The best-hated man in Greece since he published his book in 1847, has been the German author, Dr. Philip Fallmerayer, who, in his "History of the Morea during the Middle Ages," declared and proved to his own satisfaction that modern Greeks, established in their national existence in 1832, are not Greeks, are not lineal descendants of the old Hellenic race, but Slavs. This has awaked a tempest of criticism and aroused the wrath of the modern Greeks against the writer. His undeniably learned reasonings have been met and mostly done away by the labors of more accurate investigators, who have shown
that modern Greeks, with a confessedly large admixture of alien blood, may claim the name of Greeks. These scholars maintain that the Greek germ not only exists undestroyed and indestructible, but that the Greek element has absorbed other races, and that Greeks of the present day may be held to be "a modification of the ancient Achaian, Dorian, Ionic and Etolian, in a word Hellenic populations, though greatly affected by the changes wrought through war and conquest."

I speak now of the Hellenes, not of the prehistoric people who inhabited Greece, and no Greek scholar would or could affirm who these were, be they called Aryans, Pelasgians, or Hittites; and speculation seems now to run to the theory that they sprang from European centers and themselves emigrated into Asia, and made and mixed with the Aryan stock. Who, truly, were "the brass-greaved Achaians" whom Homer calls Greeks, and makes splendid as the rulers of Mycenae, Argos and Sparta? Agamemnon and Menelaos arose from Greek soil and represented a veritable Greek civilization, or one on Greek earth, existing before Homer and from which he drew; and the Achaians, who were pre-Dorians, are held to be one of the four original Greek races—but these are vexed questions about which scholars are disputing.

The two racial factors in Greek art, were, originally, the Dorians and Ionians, the one bringing strength and the other beauty into Greek art; but since those vastly early days, Macedonians, Gauls, Romans, Goths, Normans, Venetians, Slavs and Turks have swept over Greece and left their stamp on the people, but none of them have utterly stamped out and destroyed the primitive race. It is true that in the bloody wars of the Diadochoi, successors of Alexander,
Greece was fearfully depopulated, and down to this day it has not recovered its former population, but the Greek is a tenacious race like the Hebrew and other strong races that have influenced the world, and the survival of race is one of the best established laws of ethnic science; and so true is this in relation to Greece, that Professor Jebb says: "The central fact of Greek history, from the earliest age down to the present day, is the unbroken life of the Greek nationality."

There are said to be at present chiefly three races, or classes, of people, who inhabit Greece, clearly distinguishable from one another, the Wallachians, Albanians and Greeks, the last being the germinal or unifying one, which is especially the case in the central regions of Phocis and Boeotia about Mt. Parnassos, where ten old Hellenic names of towns and villages are found for one that is Slavic, or foreign.

The first of these, the Wallachians, who are affiliated in their Thracian ancestry to the Greeks, came into Greece from the southern slopes of the Carpathian mountains, in several streams of invasion in the Middle Ages, sometimes securing permanent foothold and being sometimes driven out by succeeding invaders; and they are now represented by the nomad population of the regions about the foot of Mt. Olympos in northern Greece, largely shepherds with no very settled place of abode; and the traveler meets them on the sterile hills and in the narrow valleys, clad in sheepskins, stalwart but savage-looking men, driving their flocks to pick up the scanty pasturage.

The second class, the Albanians, form a more marked and diffused element, comprising as they do the land-possessors, agriculturists and soldiers, the bone and muscle of the state, who came also from the
north, descendants of the ancient Illyrians, mountain-
eers of those rugged countries of Albania and Epirus
who, in unsettled times, swarmed into Greece, mean-
ing to stay there, and who, though not exactly Greeks,
are more closely allied to them than the Wallachians
in speech, blood and traditions, and have become
Greeks and formed the most vigorous fighting element
in the war of Independence, and would do so in any
other war that should arise. They brought new blood
into the degenerate Greek race. You see these strid-
ing with haughty carriage about the streets of Athens,
dressed in their jaunty red caps with long tassels,
snowy fustanellas, embroidered jackets, close-fitting
white leggings splaying over the foot, and large shoes
upturned at the toes, with a tuft of wool at the ex-
tremity, an armory of silver-mounted pistols and dag-
gers in their belts, and swinging big rosaries, which,
like their petticoats, are not quite in keeping with
their martial character. They are handsome fellows.
"The mountains are his palaces," the Palikari says,
and when he comes straight down from them he is as
ragged, lean and wolfish as we imagine Walter Scott's
highlanders to have been when they strolled into the
streets of Perth; but the Albanian grows into an
orderly soldier, farmer and citizen. He is a stay-at-
home man, who gets all he can and keeps all he gets.

The third class are, in some of their traits, more
properly, Greeks, who, in Athens especially, and some-
times with good cause, boast of their pure blood; for
Athens and Attica were more exempt from the Slavic
invasions that occurred between the 6th and 14th cen-
turies, than other provinces. They are, morally and
intellectually, children of Odysseus, man of many de-
vices and who saw many cities; they are the traders,
merchants, sailors, commercial travelers, shop-keepers,
stock-brokers, money-changers, dragomen, rich men (if there be such), as well as intermeddlers in all arts, students, artists, professional men, and, above all, politicians. They have the versatility of the Greek character, and I shall have occasion to speak of yet another simpler type who possess still stronger claims to pure Greek blood.

It is a weighty argument in favor of the theory of Hellenistic survival, or the continuous nationality of the Greeks, that they speak Greek, as they have always done. Latin continued to be spoken in Italy till the middle of the 13th century A.D., and this was in a few exceptional Italian provinces; and yet Greek has been the language of Greece from the earliest days until now, and even Romba, the vernacular language, comes, in some respects, nearer to classic Greek than Italian does to Latin, although greatly barbarized. In construction, and very widely in pronunciation, modern Greek departs from classic Greek, the moods, case-endings and inflections being swept away, so that the resemblance between the two is, in many instances, wholly artificial, but it is nevertheless, at base, Greek, with the same alphabet and forms. It is a debased idiom from a similar root, so that it may be built up again into the same language. It is, in fact, as it has been called, Neo-Hellenic. It grew out of loose conversational usages of the earlier language, but not until the fifteenth or sixteenth century did the popular spoken tongue become fully developed, while the literary language remained unchanged to the time of the taking of Constantinople; and even the Phanariot and literary language continued the same. In Greek schools now the grammar of classic Greek is used, and children are taught to read Xenophon and other classic authors.
The better the people the better the Greek they speak; while the written tongue, the language of books and periodicals, even of newspapers is, approximately, the same with that of Homer. Corruptions, of course, have come in, but even as far back as Alexander's day, the Attic dialect had undergone great changes.

With the unification and improvement of the language thus constantly going on, a Greek scholar would have no difficulty in learning to read modern Greek books and newspapers. Two or three months' study at Athens with this object in view, would make him master of the written tongue. Foreign phrases have been introduced to describe foreign and new things, and many dialects have poured in, as in the Greek-speaking population of Constantinople the Turkish, and in the Ionian isles the Cypriote and Italian, and in Athens the Albanian, French, German, Italian, English and a medley of other dialects, but the living language which you hear in street, marketplace, shop, house and senate-chamber, on the dock and road, is sonorous Greek. You may, indeed, hear "mitéra" for "μητέρα," and "γινακά" for "γυνακά," but this is not such a very wide difference. The streets of Athens have the names of Hermes, Æolus, Athence, Lysocrates, Piraeus. The land is classified in nomarchies bearing the old familiar titles of Attica, Bœotia, Phthiotis, Phocis, Akarnania, and so on. It is Greece. You are at home with its spirit, and are not shocked in your classic associations, as you would be, probably, in Syria, in your religious feelings. You take your Plato and walk in the locality of the Akademe, meeting, it may be, some Greek acquaintance with a name quite familiar in the "Dialogues," and with a salutation of the still beautiful χαρέ. You ride or drive a few miles to the north, over the plain of
Attica, until you come to the deme of Pæania (still so called), under the shadow of Mt. Pentelikon, and there you are at the birthplace of Demosthenes, where his paternal acres lay, for which, when a young man, he contested in the courts, and brought himself before the public eye. In half an hour's stroll outside of Athens, you seat yourself to take breakfast on the stoop of a little vine-trellised coffee-house (καφετιά) in a grove of olive trees, where Sophocles' villa, in its olive grove, stood. You say to your guide δος, φερε, δαξε—give, bring, show. The railway, indeed, that you get aboard, is the σιδηρόδρομος, the steel-way, and, if an American, you may hear America called Βασιλείαν η γη—the land of Washington. Greek was never a dead, but has been a debased, language, a prince in beggar's clothes. A century, or nearly a century ago, since the Greeks have waked up to something like new intellectual life, the question of a common language began to be mooted, and this served to bring the scattered elements of the Greek race together; and I draw from a little book by a native Greek Professor, the fact, that three views are held on this question. Opinions, in a word, have formed themselves into three parties: 1. those who contend that the common language of modern Greeks has been settled by the Greek people as they commonly employ it, the popular tongue spoken by Greek-speaking people, not only in Greece but in Constantinople and the Turkish empire, and all over the Levant. 2. They who think that the vulgar tongue is too poor (it certainly did have a marked decline in the Byzantine and Middle Age periods, and through the period of Turkish domination) and that classic Greek should be restored as the common language. 3. They who also think the vulgar tongue to be inadequate for the scientific development of the
nation, on account of its want of regularity in grammatical properties; but as the complete restoration of classic Greek is impracticable in all relations and wants of modern life, a middle theory should be adopted, viz: that a common language be formed which does not depart substantially from the vernacular, or so far as to be unintelligible to the people, but that it should be corrected on the model of ancient Greek, and enriched by its wealth and power as a language. This is the opinion of the most thoughtful, and is the prevalent one at Athens, tending to banish vulgarisms, barbarisms and local dialects, such as the Wallachian, Roumanian, Cypriote and Constantinopolitan, to give a philosophic base to grammar and style, and to strengthen and elevate the language; and, as has been said, the best people now speak the best Greek, above all write it, so that the written language more and more approaches the ancient; and there is a strong tendency, partly pedantic and partly genuine, to restore classic Greek in all its purity. But everything one wants to say on everyday matters of business, travel, literature, politics, art, poetry, from Homer to telegraphs and telephones, can be said in modern Greek; and, at all events, it is Greek that is spoken in Greece, however diversely it sounds from the classic tongue. While Latin has ceased to be a spoken language, Greek is a living one, and it is an almost miraculous fact that this should be so, considering the great changes and upheavals that have occurred. Professor Jebb, from whom I before quoted, says: "It has been the unique destiny of the Greek language to have had from prehistoric times down to our own, an unbroken life. Not one link is wanting in this chain which binds the new Greece to the old."

In addition to language, the Greek people are inspired
by the old names, traditions and monuments. They live among them. They are proud of them. If they do not know as well as a learned archaeologist does, what a classic ruin is, they are to a degree reverent of it. They point it out and talk about it as something that belongs to their land, even the most ignorant among them. A Greek workman, when I happened to remark of a rich altar of Pan standing near the theatre of Dionysos, that it should be protected, said, "Yes, sir, that is true; Mr. Pan was a much respected gentleman, and ought to be better treated." He was right, for the ground in front of the theatre was in a neglected state, and I have been pleased since to see that it has been decided to fence it in and further protect this Dionysiac precinct. The Greek, peasant and learned, is aware of the importance of such monuments, and is in dead earnest when he execrates the Turk for maltreating and destroying ancient works of art. He knows his unique heritage, and the fact of the genuine interest taken by the Greek government in archaeological research for the last forty years (the National Archæologic Society was founded in 1858), and the brilliant results of this society's labors, prove it. The modern Greek has his eyes open, and, like the Japanese, is keenly sympathetic to old traditions and new ideas. He is sensitive and acute, and if he would discuss politics less at the café, and work more on the field, he would be a worthy sort of man as he is a shrewd one.

I am but one witness, and inclined, like other witnesses, to build large theories from a small number of observations, but I confess to a prejudice in favor of Greeks, and of a nation bearing their name and speaking their tongue. I desire (letting their boastfulness, dirt, fleas, sour wine and such small things go) to be