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Modern Greece 1944

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THE MODERN GREEKS

A rocky land, but a good mother of men

Homer



O flower of a whole race,
In youth's divine shadow

SHKELIANOS;

Young Lapith, from pediment showing the Battle of the
Lapithæ and the Centaurs ; and peasant girl at Hypani

THE MODERN GREEKS

by

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CONTENTS

I MODERN AND ANCIENT GREECE

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Greece To-day | 1 |
| 2 | The Greeks in History | 5 |

II GETTING TO KNOW GREECE

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Modern Greece a Young Scute | 11 |
| 2 | p h o l e r e m s | 12 |
| 3 | The Honesty of the Greek* | 13 |
| 4 | " To Tell or to Hear Some New Thing " | |
| 5 | Uphill Courses in Greece | 19 |
| 6 | The Greeks at War | 20 |

III MODERN GREEK CIVILIZATION

- | | | |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Western Civilization in Greece | 25 |
| 2 | I h e Greek Tradition | 28 |
| 3 | The Christian Year | 32 |
| 4 | Two Modern Greek Myths | 36 |
| 5 | The Church Militant | 38 |

IV SOME GREEK HAIADS

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|----|
| 1 | Niko Tsaras | 44 |
| 2 | Dukos | 45 |
| 3 | Dianvaiuo. | 47 |
| 4 | Steryos | 48 |

V THE MODERN GREEK CHARACTER

- | | | |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Intelligence and Honour | 50 |
| 2 | " Every Greek a Would-be Captain | 51 |
| 3 | Business Capacity | 52 |
| 4 | The Summing-up | 53 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Young Lapith, from pediment showing the Battle of the Lapithae and the Centaurs ; and peasant girl at Hypati	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Athens : The Acropolis	6
Athens : The Modern City.	7
The Pontikonisi	12
Sponge-fishing caique near Satnos.	13
Village politics under a plane-tree at Mctsovo	20
Arched bridge on River Pencilos ; Mountain transport with Xenophon, a guide of Mctsovo	21
Women of Dodona spinning with the <i>Rocca</i>	24
Peasant from Lyanocladi, and statue of Zeus from Ar- te-nusion	25
Monastery of St. Stephen ; Byzantine Church at Mistra	40
St. Demetrios Church, Salonika	41

THE MODERN GREEKS

CHAPTER ONE

MODERN AND ANCIENT GREECE

The Isles of Greece, the islet of Greece !
Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the art* of war and peace,
Where Heim rose, and Phorbus sprung I
Eternal summer gilds them yet.
But all, except their tun, is set.

BYKUN : Don *juan*. Canto III

i GREECE TO-DAY

IT is a strange fact that Byron, who died for Greece, and who did so much to win the sympathy of Europe for Greece in her struggle for freedom, should be largely responsible for the common underestimation of Greece by modern Europe. The haunting and beautiful "Isles of Greece," probably the best known piece in the entire body of his poetry, has unfortunately done much to popularize the idea that modern Greeks are a lesser race than their famous ancestors.

At the present day there are a few travellers, especially British and American archaeologists, who know their Greeks better than that ; and to them must now be added the thousands of officers and men of the British and Imperial forces who learned to know the Greeks at first hand during their heroic fight against Italy and Germany. But it still remains true that the reborn Greek nation of the years since 1821 is little known in

the West, and that the fiction of a great gulf between the ancient and modern Greek race and character is still believed.

Now this is not solely the fault of Byron. Not only did all that he wrote refer to Greece in captivity, before the War of Independence ; but also Byron did not even take the responsibility for the sentiments of the poem. Thousands of its readers do not know that what they are reading is an extract from *Don Juan*, purporting to be the words of a Greek poet trying to stir his countrymen to revolt from slavery.

It is the purpose of these pages to give to English-speaking people a truer picture of this gallant and intelligent nation.

Naturally, German propaganda has, for its own purposes, exploited the fiction of a " degenerate " Greek people. What is surprising is the fact that Greeks, even cultured and scholarly Greeks, often hold the same erroneous opinion. But the fundamental reason for such apparent perversity is not really discreditable. The Greek is above all things highly intelligent. He is also, therefore, sensitive and self-conscious; and only too conscious—be he saint or sinner, priest or peasant, sailor or philosopher—of his own human weaknesses. He practises, instinctively and not by training, the old maxim of the Delphic Oracle, " KNOW THYSELF." The Greeks are least of all men given to a comfortable self-satisfaction or to the conscious or unconscious hypocrisy that glosses over faults. This was why ancient Athens let so strong a social critic as Socrates live till he was seventy. This candour, this impatience of legal fictions or of the second best, is a fundamental reason, in the ancient world, at once for the splendour of Greek philosophy and for the relative failure of Greek political life. And being such

a man, the modern Greek looks round at the achievements of Britain, France, Germany, the United States, the Soviet Union, and jumps at once to the candid but hasty conclusion that if ancient Hellas once led the Western world, while modern Hellas follows it, it must be because he is not such a man as his remote ancestors were.

The present writer was once a victim of this fallacy—before he had lived in Greece. He has now formed a different view; certainly not quickly or from superficial prejudice. His prejudice, formed in the West, was all against the modern Greeks as compared with the ancient. He was prepared to like them certainly, and only too well prepared to patronize. It was only through personal contact on many journeys that he learned how much there is to love in them; and not until that desperate autumn of 1940 that he learned how much there is to admire.

Even at this day, then, when Greece has displayed a courage, a chivalry, and an idealism (to say nothing of a military and naval skill) rare in any age in the history of the world, one still hears from time to time—from Greeks more often than from foreigners, nowadays—that old baseless disparagement of the modern Greek character. As lately as 1941, the following dialogue was heard in Cairo.

Greek (summing up a discussion) :

" Ah, we are not like the heroes of old, to-day."

Englishman : " It amazes me to hear you say that after the campaign in Albania. I should have said even before the war, myself, that you were exactly like them."

G. : " Yes, our soldiers and sailors certainly were magnificent. But we have such great faults. Look at our rivalries. Our trouble is that every Greek wants to be a *kapetanois*."

E. : " There is nothing new in that. Haven't you read your Thucydides ? "

G. : " Well ... yes ... but still, with all their divisions, the ancient Greeks invented Greek civilization. *They* built the Parthenon."

" Yes," said the Englishman, " and when modern Greece has had five hundred years of free development, it will be time enough for posterity to judge what *you* can do."

Why, then, it will be asked at the outset, docs not Greece play as prominent a part in the modern as in the ancient world ?

The reason is simple. It is a difference, not of race—Greece, like Britain, seems to be able to swallow any number of fair- and square-headed invaders and reproduce, after a few centuries of miscegenation, the old original long-headed type—but of opportunity. There is first the difficulty of its surface : it is one of the most mountainous countries of the world, and this means hampered communications and restricted productivity. Second, there is the difficulty—the tragedy of Greece, in history—diat she lies for ever between larger neighbours. That well-marked region of peninsulas and islands, outside of which the Greek will always be in a foreign land—that little world of the Aegean, with less land than sea—lies between the great land masses of Italy, the European mainland, and Asia Minor, the homes of her invaders in every age : the Persian and the Roman of old, the Ottoman Empire, and the Italians of Mussolini ; and at intervals the barbarians of the north playing a still more disastrous role. The Greek world has produced three brilliant and utterly different civilizations: the Minoan, the classical, and the Byzantine ; and each one,

after centuries of great beauty), has been submerged by foreign invaders. After such submergence, civilization cannot arise again to its full stature in less than two or three centuries; and modern Greece, as a free nation, is still but little over one hundred years old. There is, as I hope to show, every reason to believe that the Greek people is to-day as vigorous and intelligent as ever. Posterity will yet see works of modern Greeks that will rival those of the ancients and of the Byzantines : let them only recover from the horrors of the war, **and** enjoy five hundred years of freedom.

The Greek miracle of the years 700 to 200 B.C. **was** the response of the vigorous Aegean people to a special opportunity. Then, indeed, Greece played a unique part in the progress of mankind. As a modern writer has put it, whatever later poets may do for us, no-one can deprive Homer of his privilege of being the first. The same applies to the whole achievement of ancient Greek science and philosophy.

2 THE GREEKS IN HISTORY

The opportunity that produced the Greek miracle was this :

In the Bronze Age, before 1500 B.C., the Aegean people in Crete and on the neighbouring coasts and islands produced a many-sided art that compares favourably with that of the greatest periods, and an almost over-civilized city life. This civilization was contemporary with the greatest days of the Pharaohs in Egypt; and it declined and fell at the same time.

The causes of its fall seem to have been inevitable, given human nature as it is. A highly organized court **and state**, unknown in the world before, gave princes

the tempting chance to tyrannize, like King Minos in the legend, who is supposed to have had seven Athenian youths and seven maidens sent every ninth year to be devoured by the Minotaur ; and at last subjects and outlying cities rebelled. According to the legends, Minos was murdered, his fleet burnt on an expedition to far-off Sicily, and his great palace sacked and destroyed by fire. Then, once the strong central organization was shattered, the wealth of the civilized world was a temptation to the greed of the outer barbarians. The centuries from 1400 to 1000 B.C. were an exciting but disastrous age of tumults and wars, the Heroic age of Homer and the *Iliad*—the Tale of Troy. Amid wars and their accompaniment of famine and pestilence, the great trading cities were devastated and left desolate, and the population declined (there is even a reference in the Greek epic to wars arising because there were too many people in the world). At the same time, virile races from farther north were moving in upon that sunny and already storied world : strong mountaineers from Albania, and especially the Greek " heroes " from Thessaly or beyond, whose ancestors like those of the Celts, Germans, Latins, and the races who introduced the other Aryan languages, had probably come from north of the Black Sea.

It was a fierce age, in which only the fit survived, and at the end of it the Aegean peoples, if reduced in numbers, had been yet further tempered in quality, by the admixture of these strong invading strains. Dorians from Albania and Aryan-speaking Hellenes from the north-east. They had become the ancient Greeks of the Heroic Age-

Moreover, the times were propitious. From 1000 till after 700 B.C., Greece had nothing to fear from any

foreign invader. The great Bronze Age civilizations of Babylonia, Egypt, and Asia Minor had declined at the same time as that of the Aegean ; and they took longer to recover. This was what gave the little states of Greece (and of Palestine, in the same age) their chance to give to the world treasures such as the great conquering empires had never conceived.

Further, the ancient Greeks, rebuilding civilization in the Aegean, inherited at least something from the past : an efficient mixed farming, and a technique of metal working and of building in stone.

Their rulers, the Homeric Heroes, marauding chieftains though they were, had at least broken free from the traditional superstitions, the magics and taboos, in which the peasants believed -as indeed peasants, the backbone of humanity, still do over most of the earth's surface. The early Greek chieftains had learned during the great wars to rely on their own hands and their own brains. As better days returned, their descendants turned the same vigorous brains to an examination of the world around them. They took over the ancient Egyptian rules for practical land measurement, and made of it geometry—the first system of mathematics. On the basis of travellers' tales brought home by their merchants, explorers, and colonists, they wrote manuals of geography and nude primitive maps. They speculated about evolution, astronomy, the nature of God. . . .

Indeed, already during the great wars those old cattle-raiders and pirate chiefs had acquired a keen sense of the nobility that human life can have, and the tragedy of its waste ; that sense of pity, and of the beauty of enduring courage, that is distilled for ever in the first great European poem—the narrative of an episode in a war—Homer's *Iliad*.

From Homer almost the whole of the poetry *of* later Greece and of Western civilization in general is directly descended.

In the end, as the world knows, the ancient Greek civilization declined. This was partly due to disunion : those brilliant little city-states loved their own local freedom too well to submit easily to any League or central government (and the Disunited States of modern Europe are hardly in a position to blame them). But fundamentally, ancient Greece was destroyed by attacks from the outside, from the great land masses that surround her seas. The Greeks of the Asia Minor coast were overwhelmed, after a heroic struggle of six years, by the Persian Empire ; they were rescued later by Athens, but never really recovered. The Greeks of the mainland were subdued by the military skill and brilliant, treacherous diplomacy of Philip the Macedonian, the father of Alexander. The Greek cities in Sicily suffered terribly in repeated wars with the Phoenicians of Carthage and their armies of hired barbarians. Finally both Greece and Macedonia were utterly subdued, and the cities robbed even of *their* most cherished works of art, by Rome, after a series of wars in which the decisive factor was not so much the great tactical skill of the Romans, as the vastly superior manpower of united Italy.

Very different was the position of Byron's Greece. After centuries under the Turks, a conqueror of overwhelming power, the Greeks had been reduced to an almost entirely peasant people, who were saved from complete reduction to illiterate peasantry only by the Church, the Greek colonies in European capitals, and the abiding passion for education which preserved some schools in Greece even in the darkest days,

)

Modern Greece therefore started with every disadvantage. Even the timber and mineral wealth of ancient Greece had been largely exhausted. That in 120 years from its liberation—after a struggle in which almost every corner of the land was devastated—Greece has become again the home of a vigorous and progressive nation of eight millions is a feat of which the descendants of the ancient heroes may be justly proud.

HELLAS—1821

(Shelley's prophecy—written in the first year of the Greek War of Independence)

Semichorus

Through the sunset of hope,
 Like the shapes of a dream,
 What paradise islands of glory gleam
 Beneath heaven's cope.
 Their shadows more clear float by—
 The sound of their oceans, the light of their sky,
 The music and fragrance their solitudes breathe,
 Bunt like morning on dream* or like heaven on death,
 Through the walls of our prison ;
 And Greece, which was dead, is arisen !

Chorus

The world's great age begins anew,
 The golden years return.
 The earth doth like a snake renew
 Her winter weeds our worn :
 Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
 Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

A brighter Hellas rears its mountains
 From waves serene far ;
 A new Peneus rolls his fountains
 Against the morning star ;
 Where fairer Terns bloom, there sleep
 Young Cyclads on a sunnier deep.

THE MODERN GREEKS

A loftier Argo cleaves the main.
Fraught with a larer prize ;
Another Orpheus sings again,
And loves, and weeps, and dies;
A new Ulysses leaves once more
Calypso for his native shore.

Oh ! write no more the Tale of Troy,
If earth Death's scroll must be !
Nor mix with Laian rage the joy
Which dawns upon the free.
Although a subtler Sphinx renew
Riddles of death Theoes never knew.

Another Athens shall arise.
And to remoter rime
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The splendour of its prime ;
And leave, if' nought so bright may live.
All earth can take or heaven can give.

Final chorus from *Hellas*

CHAPTER TWO

GETTING TO KNOW GREECE

i MODERN GREECE A YOUNG STATE

IT is surprising, then, that the gallant and supremely intelligent people of modern Greece should so often share in this opinion of ignorant foreigners. The men who, in little over a hundred years of freedom, have built up the gracious city of modern Athens; the men who, ill-armed and thinly clad, drove back the armies of Fascist Italy in the winter mountain campaign, pressing on their offensive in conditions of a bitterness perhaps unparalleled in the whole of military history ; these men need not be afraid of " odious comparisons " with any human beings, past or present, of their own or any other race. If modern Greek architecture is derivative, that is to be expected ; for modern Greece is very young among civilized societies. The Parthenon was the work of a city-state at least six centuries old. Modern America is still evolving its characteristic styles ; and modern Greece as a state (though, of course, there is true continuity in all Greek history) is younger than the United States. Already in Athens the white Pentelic marble is being put to not ignoble use. Modern Greeks should have patience for at least a few hundred years, before they despair of their architects and builders !

What is true of architecture is as true of literature and the other activities of civilized life. Meanwhile modern Greece has a character with its own living charm, which is in almost every respect the character of the ancient and abiding Aegean folk, little influenced by the intru-

sions and admixture of Slav, Albanian, Frank, or Turk. (It may be noted, however, that the peasant dress in every part of Greece has come from Albania, as has also the uniform of the Evzones, the Greek "Black Watch.")

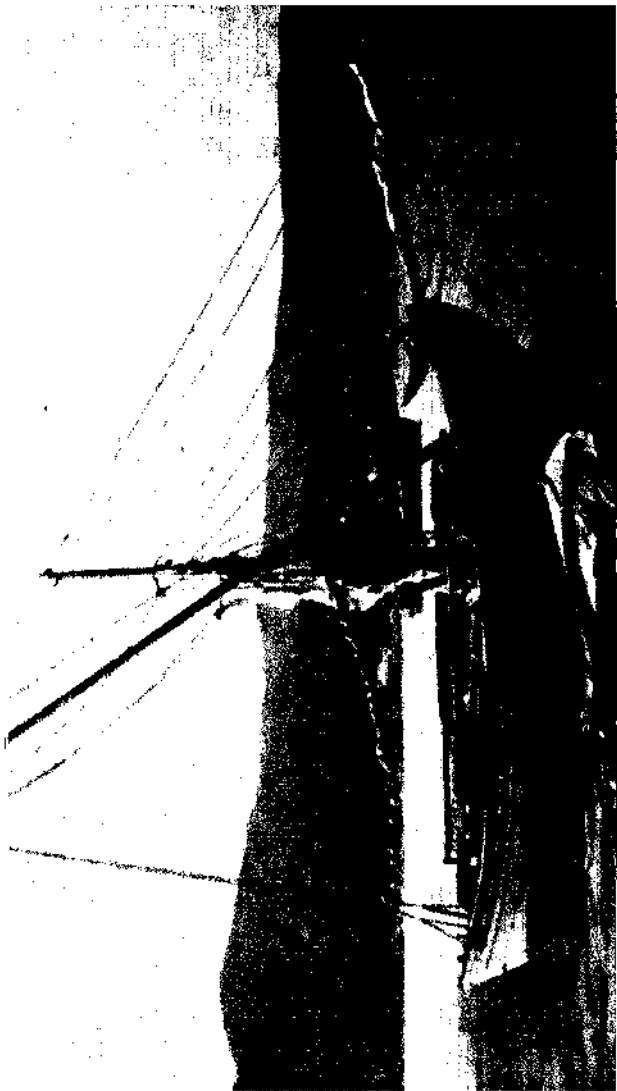
Let us then tell something of this vigorous modern people to a world that still knows them too little, or too often knows them only through the "cash nexus" of business dealings; which is a bad way to know most people.

2 PHILOXENIA

One of the first things that will warm the heart of the traveller in Greece, as soon as he is able to leave the region of conducted tours and the few internationalized luxury hotels (of which there were two in Athens and one in Salonika), is the extraordinary warmth and friendliness with which the stranger—especially, dare we say, if he belongs to one of the English-speaking nations—is welcomed everywhere in the Greek countryside. It is no accident that the Greek word *philoxenia* has a wider meaning than its Western equivalent "hospitality"; it covers also those manifestations of "friendliness to the stranger" which can be almost embarrassing, as when a peasant from whom you have asked the way proposes to leave his work for three hours (work that will have to be done sometime) in order to come with you the whole way over a mountain pass to make sure you do not go wrong, or invites you to deposit your rucksack on his donkey, when homeward bound to the village to which you are going, walks with you several miles himself when he would otherwise have ridden, and declines the slightest suggestion of any form of payment with a courtliness that makes you feel that you have been guilty of a vulgarity in offering it. Again, there



The Pontikonisi : Odysseus' ship turned to stone by the wrath of Poseidon



Sponge-fishing caïque near Samos

arc many countrysides in the world where it is the thing to walk into the village inn, stand a drink to whoever may be there and discuss the crops, the village, and the world in general; but I know nowhere—not even in countries much richer than Greece—where the villager is so likely to stand *you* a drink and be quite shocked if you should try to return the compliment. Casual stranger though you may be, you arc in some sort the guest of the village as long as you arc there.

It is just one of the tilings that nuke Greece the ideal holiday country—Greece especially, one may say, off the beaten track and away from the internationalized tourist resorts—this *philoxenia*, a sentiment compounded between true Christian kindness and a wholly honourable desire to show off one's own home town or village to the stranger to the best advantage. One finds in literal fact, from Athens to the remotest shepherd's hamlet, what one read of in Homer as characteristic of fairy princes in the Heroic Age: the hospitality that welcomes alike the total stranger and the son of an old friend. One finds also what amuses the English reader of Greek tragedy—the torrent of questions that welcomes each new arrival on the scene : Where do you come from ? Where arc you going to ? What is your name ? How old arc you ? What is your profession ? Why have you come here ? Arc you married ? How many children nave you ? And what do you think of the political situation

τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν ; πόθι τοι πόλις ἡδέ τοκῆς ;
ὅπποιης τ' ἐπι νῆος ἀφίκεο ; πῶς δέ σε ναῦται
ἤγαγον εἰς Ἰθάκην ;

" Who arc you, stranger, and from where ? Your father, who was he ? Your family ? And on what ship came you to Ithaki ? "

Asteri, where the forest-guard lives with his family above Kaisaruni.

In the minds of all those hosts of Westerners who first visited the Aegean to look at ancient remains, and then came under the fascination of the living Greece, the memory of Greek places, Greek history, the sea, the sun, and the mountains, is interwoven for ever with their memories of the Greek welcome to the stranger. The one springs out of the other, like the scent of thyme out of the scrub on a sun-baked Greek hillside, under the feet of the passer-by.

Nor is Greek friendliness a fair-weather plant that withers at the first cold wind of adversity. The writer of this said his last good-bye—his latest *au revoir*—to Athens when we were in retreat before the attack, on an exhausted country, of the German army supported by the full might of the Luftwaffe. In those last days we were much touched by the fact that not our friends only but the most casual acquaintances wait out of their way to be particularly friendly. There was not a word of complaint or criticism, not a suggestion that we had "let them down" because Britain had not been able to send them more support.

What we saw then in Athens was seen under more tragic conditions by thousands of British, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers, now safe and sound, who owe their lives to the help, food, and guidance given them by Greek soldiers, policemen, peasants, fishermen, often at great personal risk, and in the hour of defeat.

THE HONESTY OF THE Can-its

After what we have written of them, one is almost ashamed to add that Greeks are honest. And yet perhaps

The reserved Englishman, in particular, discovers only by degrees—and the discovery is extremely good for him—that this sort of thing in another country is not impertinence but polite interest.

I cannot think of these things separately : of legendary and ancient Greece apart from the loyal and valiant Greet people whom we know ; or of the beauty of Greece, its seas and mountains, woods and flowers, apart from Grecian friendliness. Things stick in the memory. A little old abbot in the rugged hills of Chios, *Χίω ἐνι παιπαλοῖσση*, who regaled us with bread and cheese, nuts and honey—a wonderfully sustaining diet for mountain walking—and took us out to see the tower where they fought off the Turks, and the best place from which to see the view—the rugged valley full of the shimmering green of the pines, beyond the grey of the monastery's olive trees ; the blaze of sun over all ; and the valley opening beyond, down to the white walls of Chios and the sapphire blue of the sea. Another abbot, in the Pcloponncsos, tall, stately, hawk-faced and white-bearded, a one-time army officer, later a judge and man of affairs, who produced bread and fruit for us and apologized (yes, *apologized*) for having no wine, since the monastery had finished what it produced and would be Living spartanly till the next vintage time. Resinated wine with the country police at a tiny tavern near the magnificent ancient fortress of Aigosthena, with the waves of the Corinthian gulf dashing against the steep pebble beach ten yards away. Hymettos in January ; a flurry of snow outside, where tiny purple crocuses were in flower among the cold stones, between the little rock-rooted trees ; and inside, the glow of a fire of pine-logs casting its red light on Greek and English faces and on the low stone dome of the *djaki*, in the tiny ruined monastery of

Asteri, where the forest-guard lives with his family above Kaisariani.

In the minds of all those hosts of Westerners who first visited the Aegean to look at ancient remains, and then came under the fascination of the living Greece, the memory of Greek places, Greek history, the sea, the sun, and the mountains, is interwoven for ever with their memories of the Greek welcome to the stranger. The one springs out of the other, like the scent of thyme out of the scrub on a sun-baked Greek hillside, under the feet of the passer-by.

Nor is Greek friendliness a fair-weather plant that withers at the first cold wind of adversity. The writer of this said his last good-bye—his latest *au revoir*—to Athens when we were in full retreat before the attack, on an exhausted country, of the German army supported by the full might of the Luftwaffe. In those last days we were much touched by the fact that not our friends only but the most casual acquaintances went out of their way to be particularly friendly. There was not a word of complaint or criticism, not a suggestion that we had "let them down" because Britain had not been able to send them more support.

What we saw then in Athens was seen under more tragic conditions by thousands of British, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers, now safe and sound, who owe their lives to the help, food, and guidance given them by Greek soldiers, policemen, peasants, fishermen, often at great personal risk, and in the hour of defeat.

3 THE HONESTY OF THE GREEKS

After what we have written of them, one is almost ashamed to add that Greeks are honest. And yet perhaps

it still needs saying for those who do not know, that the Greeks in general are one of the most honest among the peoples of the world.

The poorest peasants are among the most scrupulously honourable in this respect.

If you leave your loose property about in a Greek village, not only will you not lose it (as you richly deserve to, and would in most countries) but the poorest countryman will often take considerable trouble to restore it to its undeserving owner. The same thing can happen in the great cities, though in most countries of the world the standard of honesty is less high in the towns than out of them. Some years ago it happened that a certain foreign lady lost her note-case, containing a considerable sum of money, in Athens. The note-case contained no indication of her name or address. Ten days later she was in a large shop, where she had been only once before in her life; and a girl assistant took her note-case out of a drawer and said, "We have been hoping you would call again; you left this on the counter last time you were here."

As with little things so with great. It is an insufficiently known fact of modern Greek history that there has not been one great political leader since 1821—and Venizelos, Tricoupis, Deliyianes are only three among the many famous Greek prime ministers—who has noticeably enriched himself as the result of his political career.

What can one do for such a people? Little enough. But one can at least insist, in season and out of season, on these facts and refuse to let Greece be slandered by the casual view of a tourist who condemns a whole people because he has been overcharged by a Piraeus car-driver or has been weak-minded enough to pay 80 drachmas for a small box of Turkish delight. It is not understood in the West, and needs constant explaining, that for a boatman

to ask ten times the usual fare for taking your luggage ashore is not dishonesty but simply business, and that it is " up to " the traveller—admittedly it is difficult if you are a total stranger to the country—not to be a sucker!¹ The same applies to every other transaction from hiring a mule to letting out an important army contract. It is the old legal principle, *caveat emptor*. (We still after all employ in the West the same tug-of-war method for arriving at the truth in a law-court.) It is " up to " the buyer of goods or services to see that his contract is (a) satisfactory and (b) complete and unambiguous. The Greek will not break his word ; but if you have made a contract that is wide open to evasion, that is your look-out. The cups of coffee that stand between two Greeks as they sit bargaining—as likely as not with a group of friends looking on, taking a keen sporting interest in the battle of wills and wits—arc the symbol of the fact that bargaining is not enmity.

Two things that the Westerner learns if he lives long enough in Greece are first, that the reason why Greece has never suffered from Anti-Semitism is that the Greek, alone among Europeans, can beat the Jew in business acumen any day of the week ; and second, that in Greece, to ask more for your goods or services than the least you are prepared to accept is an honourable method of business (whereas in the West it is considered rather discreditable—and sail is very often done).

4 " TO TELL OK TO HEAR SOME NEW THING "

Indeed the virtues of modern Greece run quite astonishingly true to the ancient type—the Odysseian type : intelligent and quick-witted beyond almost any other people; great travellers, yet also great lovers of home

(hundreds of Greek towns and villages are embellished by the schools or public buildings presented by some son of the place, out of the fortune made in Alexandria or London or New York) ; keen at a bargain, but generous in giving ; and preserving always that passionate interest in the latest news that has been their characteristic since remote ages B.C.

" You know. Mother, people always like the latest song," says Telemathos in the *Odyssey*. The songs gave the latest war-stones in that age.

" The Athenians, and all the Greeks," writes the companion of St. Paul, " are concerned over nothing else but to tell or to hear some new thing.**

" And *you*—" shouts Demosthenes, in his tirade against the appeasement party at Athens, " while Hitler¹ is eating up one country after another, can find nothing better to do than stooze about asking each other if there is any news this morning ! "

It is strange to think that the Greece of Pericles, Herodotus, Aristophanes, and Demosthenes never had something so thoroughly in the great Greek tradition as a newspaper.

It is that same insatiable interest in the world around him that prompts the Greek's catechism of the stranger, and that makes every Greek a keen critic alike of himself, his neighbours, and the contemporary state of the world in general, especially its politics. " Every Greek is a politician it is often said in mockery—especially by Greeks. What is much more remarkable is usually omitted : that is, what a very shrewd and well-informed critic of politics he often is—even to the monk in his mountain eyrie and the peasants and muleteers of the remotest villages. I walked in Greece shortly before the

war. In every village the question (of course after the still more enthralling catechism *all* about the stranger's personal affairs) was " Will there be war e " and " What do you think of Tsambrlain ? " And I have to confess that Greek peasants had summed up for themselves to what end the " appeasement " policy would surely lead, at a time when educated men among my own countrymen were still living in a fool's paradise.

5 UPHHI COURSES IN GREECE

So we learned to respect the Greeks, both for their wits and for their physical toughness. long before the drama of the Albanian War. It was a paunchy middle-aged cab-driver of Yannina who opened our eyes most widely on the point of physical toughness. We had covenanted with him to drive us to the beginning of the hills on the way to Dodona and show us the path. We supposed that this meant that he would point out the beginning of the path and then sit in his cab or in the near-by *taverna* till we came back. Not at all. As we bumped over the fields he jumped off the box and walked alongside, eating a slice of bread and some spring onions; we realized afterwards that this was his lunch, and that he was taking it now in order not to delay us later. He need not have worried. He then proceeded to come with us (after unsaddling his horse) the whole way to Dodona, talking all the while, with a wealth of gesture to assist our limited Greek, about the strategy and tactics of the Greek advance over those hills to the capture of Yannina in 1912, in which Mitso himself had borne his part. . . . And with all this talk he also set a pace up a steep hill path (pausing once to stone off most efficiently a formidable-looking Eptrote sheepdog) that left us proud Westerners very glad, when

we reached the chapel of St. Nicolas on the top of the col, to lie down and take a leisurely time over our own lunch, for the sake of the breather.

It was a hot April day and Mitso was wearing thin town shoes and several long-sleeved pull-overs. He was fat, and he perspired profusely. But he went on setting a pace, both mere and back, which held us fully occupied keeping up with him "for the honour of the flag." He then, underestimating our knowledge of "popular" Greek (or *Romaic*), told his friends in the tavern at Rhap-sista, when we were having a drink on our way home, that we moved very slowly. . . .

I wonder where old Mitso is now. And young Miltiades Kondodemos from the restaurant in the high street in Delphi, who showed us the same turn of speed, up Parnassos to the Korykian cave? . . . It was thus that we discovered that whereas Switzers and Yorkshircmcn—sufficiently virile stocks, in al) conscience—consider it appropriate to walk up a steep hill slowly, the Greeks prefer to charge up it as if it were perfectly flat; and without stopping for breath either.

That was all before the war, of course, But we remarked to each other even then, that if this was the form shown by ordinary Greek civilians in no particular training, it would be a pretty athletic man who could keep up with a regiment of Evzones when they were in a hurry.

6 THE GREEKS AT WAR

And the war came, and only then did we, who had long found so much to love in Greece, discover also how much there is to admire.

Greeks watched with stunned amazement the fall of France—France which had been for them the chief

fountain-head of Western civilization throughout the nineteenth century, France with her imposing military power. They watched with the first glimmer of hope reborn the British decision to fight on, and the Battle of Britain ; and then came their own trial : the peremptory demand to occupy strategic points in Greece, from a nation with five times Greece's population and infinitely greater industrial and financial resources.

Remember, it was long before Wavell's victories, the fall of Italy's East African Empire and the exposure of Fascist bombast and futility. But as one man, Greeks of every class and political party applauded their dictator's famous " NO. "

It was a privilege to be in Athens in those days.

Modern Greek history, since Byron wrote his beautiful but despairing lament for Greece in captivity, has seen many examples of desperate heroism by ordinary Greek *men* and women—not Spartans with a lifelong training in military virtue—almost surpassing that of the great story of Thermopylae : the defence, to the death, of Mcsolonghi; the islanders of Psara who blew up their fort and themselves along with their assailants ; the Cretans who did the same thing at the monastery of Arkadia not yet eighty years ago ; the grim endurance of the Pcloponnesians under the three-years' ravaging of their country by Ibrahim. The Greeks of 1940 were worthy of their fathers.

The Greeks are a highly strung, emotional people : they have no English stolidity about them. Their courage is of a different kind, born of their intelligence, born of sheer calculation ; the heroism of men and women who see clearly into what trials their ideals are leading them, and have decided that submission would be worse ; agreeing with Socrates, that there are some things that

the man who is worth anything cannot stoop to, even to save his life.

It was thrilling in those days to see in the streets of Athens the grey-haired captains and subalterns with medal ribbons of the Balkan Wars, and beside them Allied troops with the Victory Medal that millions wear in Britain and the British Empire, Serbia, the United States, France. . . . It was one of those Greeks (he described himself as an accidental hang-over out of the previous epoch, a kind of walking anachronism) who said to us: "We may be driven back—we may lose Yannina—we may be driven right into the hills—but we shall not stop fighting. You will see."

We saw indeed.

What needs repeating after this lapse of time is that what journalists wrote about the heroism of the Greek campaign in Albania is not mere journalism. It is true. The winter of 1940-41 was a particularly severe one, and the sufferings of the troops (uniformed and shod, most of them, for fighting in an Aegean summer) were extreme. It may be doubted whether any army has ever, under conditions so severe, not merely held mountain positions, but continued to press an offensive.

And gradually we began to realize what few had expected except the Greek General Staff, that the Greeks were not being forced back from Yanntna, but, on the contrary, were repulsing the enemy and passing over to the offensive. Semi-humorous stories began to circulate like that of the two battalions of Evzones—the famous kilted Greek highland regiments—who were loosed in what was supposed to be a purely local counter-attack, and who had captured two complete mountains before their officers could catch up with them and tell them to stop. With pride we read of the thrilling and dramatic

battle of the Pindus. The Italians had an excellent plan : to thrust a picked Alpine division, heavily supported and even provisioned from the air, up the long gorge of the Ados in the heart of the mountains, and so reach, at Metsovo, the great Greek lateral road that runs east and west, from Yamuna into Thessaly. Their attack *on* Greece was treacherous and sudden, and the Greek army was not mobilized. The march of the Julia division would have succeeded but for the marching powers of the Greek troops and the magnificent support given to them by the Epirote country folk. As the Alpim pushed up the valley, the light Greek covering force falling back before them while imposing the maximum of delay, other Greek detachments—still not many in all—moved up by mule track and goat track, covering the difficult country at astonishing speed in fearful weather conditions of sleet and driving rain. There were *no* aircraft to drop supplies for *them* ; but Greece has her own ways of maintaining her troops. As the light columns pushed on, the whole mountain countryside moved in support of them ; peasants driving up their own sheep and goats for the army to eat, bringing fresh mules; at last, where even mules could not go, women and old men forcing their way up the hills, staggering under the weight of the ammunition boxes; until when the Italians had all but reached the head of the defile, where it spreads out to the wide moors north of Metsovo, they found themselves hemmed in, harassed in flank and rear and from the high crags above, where they had *never* dreamed any guns could go. . . . Outmarched and outfought, the picked Alpini fell back with heavy losses out of Greek territory.

Then came the grim, methodical, technically brilliant Greek counter-offensive. For all their air superiority

and modern weapons, the Italians could not hold even strong positions. In two months they had lost Koritsa, Argyrokastro, the port of Santi Quaranta, nearly a third of Albania. Winter set in, the grimmest winter of ice and snow that those grim mountains had known in living memory, and the Greeks in their light uniforms suffered terribly from frost-bite, and later, since all supplies had to come by snowbound mountain paths, from scarcity of food. Even so the advance did not halt until, well into the new year, it came to a pause before the fearsome barrier of the gorge of Tepeleni.

The last act of the Albanian War came as the days lengthened. Heavily reinforced, the Italians flung division after division against a bare twenty miles of the Greek central front. . . . They did not recapture a single village of note. Both in defence and in attack the Greek army had fairly and squarely beaten the Italian, until the German intervention, the deadly thrust through Bulgaria and Macedonia, and air superiority rendered all such skill and gallantry for the moment vain.



Women of Dodona spinning with the Roca



Peasant from Lyankoladi, and statue of Zeus from Artemision

CHAPTER THREE

MODERN GREEK CIVILIZATION

i WESTERN CIVILIZATION IN GREECE

ALONG with their superb bravery in the Albanian campaign, the Greeks also showed great technical skill. British officers who were with them bear witness to their amazing quickness in mastering the intricacies of new types of weapon—such as British anti-tank guns—when these arrived. The same was true of their navy, whose operations both during and since the Albanian campaign have been worthy of the long Greek sea tradition ; especially, perhaps, the operations of their submarines, precisely the arm of the service where technical skill is most essential.

Greeks have, in short, shown as great skill in any form of technique, whether scientific or artistic, as the best men of any nation. (The national poverty making new cars a luxury, Greek technical resource makes the best of the old, and thus Greeks daily manage to drive over farm tracks between mountain villages, automobiles with such a long and glorious history that few Western engineers could keep them serviceable even for running on the flat.)

Yet it is precisely in the arts of peace that Greeks, those true children of Socrates, are most critical of their own country's achievements.

To an unbiased eye, on the other hand, the civilization of modern Greece has interest and character—a specifically *Greek* character : it is the civilization of a young nation, full of hope for the future.

The civilization of present-day Greece (taking the word in its widest sense, to cover both material and spiritual achievement) has two sides to it. It is both new and old. It descends on the one hand from the modern Western tradition of Europe and America; and on this side it is very young. It is amazing to think of Byron, after the fall of Napoleon, finding in Greece conditions of medieval orientalism, and hobnobbing at Yannina with that picturesque and typical old medieval ruffian, Ali Pasha. Greece is in fact a younger member of the same generation of states as the United States of America. (Kalvos, the young Greek poet, leaving Paris to join in the all but hopeless struggle, wrote a farewell letter to the aged Lafayette.) Not until the bitter struggle for independence had been fought could Greeks have freely, in Greece, the Western education which they deserved; though the active Greek colonics in Europe—for instance, in London, Paris, and Vienna—kept their nation in touch with the West, and though something was done for Greeks, even under the Sultans, by such schools as those of eighteenth-century Chios and of the Pclion country above Volos, and by such men as the martyred teacher Rhegas of Pherai. Even in the darkest hour the passion for education, for the soundest available knowledge, which was a leading characteristic of ancient Greece, still lived. There is something very touching, and most characteristic of his great nation, in the figure of old Kolokotrones, the mountaineer and Prince of guerilla leaders, sitting himself on the school Bench, when peace came at last, in the schools that were to give young folk in new Athens the learning that he himself had never had.

Since then Greece has progressed with American swiftness, delayed only by the tact that Greece has not

America's wealth of virgin soil and minerals. Athens in 1830 was a malarious village, which, even such as it was, had been almost totally destroyed in the long and terrible war. Undismayed, Greeks determined to build there a new and noble Athens for their capital.* In 1837 Athens University was founded. By 1940 Athens and Piraeus had a population of close on a million. Almost every remotest island and mountain village has now its modern school building—often built by the munificence of a local man who has "nude good" abroad. Communications by road, rail, and steamer were continually and rapidly improving; malaria and deforestation were being fought; admirable modern hospitals cared for rich and poor in sickness; mineral wealth not worked out by the ancients was discovered and exploited; great dams were built and others projected to make use of a mountain country's water power. In the field of spiritual values, modern poetry, especially French and English, must have found almost as many readers, in proportion to population, in Athens as at home; and Greece has herself produced a relatively enormous output of good nineteenth and twentieth-century poetry, though it is still too early to say which poets, among so many with pleasant and distinctive voices, will become immortal.

Abroad, Greek commerce has expanded vastly, especially along the great trade arteries of the British Empire. Such names, too, as those of Benaki and Eumorphopoulos remind us what art lovers owe to modern as well as to ancient wealthy and cultivated Greeks.

In face of this body of achievement, one may reasonably feel impatient when people (even Greeks) say, "Ah, what is modern Greece, compared to Great Britain—Russia—the United States?" The answer is, "A very

new and very promising national state " ; and when one considers what the world has owed to ancient Greece, to Palestine, to Tudor England (with under five million people), or to the city-states of pre-unified Italy, one feels that if ever the world measures the value of civilizations by acreage or census returns alone, the human outlook will be dark indeed.

2 THE GREEK TRADITION

Greek self-criticism is on firmer ground when it complains that all this modern civilization is derivative from the West and not original, not specifically Greek. This is true, but it is nothing to be depressed about. , There are three comments to be made. First, in the whole scientific and technical side of life, modern culture is one, anyhow ; individuals and learned societies of all nations contribute to a common fund, a common tradition, and the existence of a special, provincial, nationalistically self-conscious science is (*pace* the Germans) neither possible nor desirable. The only " national " contributions will be those where a particular nation has made special efforts to deal with a local problem, such as mountain transport or malaria.

Second, the same is true to a certain extent of European art and literature, and has been since the Roman Empire was established.

Third, much of what is most virile and genuine in contemporary Greek art and letters does already smack of the soil, and takes its rise from that side of modern Greek culture which is immemorially old.

By this I do not mean the classical. Classical history is as remote from modern Greece as Stonehenge from modern England, and there is no more sense in building

an imitation Parthenon as a residence than an imitation Gothic cathedral (as was done by some English Romantics). I mean the still living Greek Christian or Byzantine tradition, in virtue of which the Greeks preserved their spiritual identity as a nation, even under four hundred years of completely alien rule ; preserving not only their religion, but also, in the life of the countryside, a peasant life with a beauty of its own which is entirely Greek.

Indeed, it is a strange tiling that Byron, of all men, should so have emphasized the quite imaginary difference between the ancient and the modern Greek character, even through the mouth of *one* of his personages. Perhaps he was too much of an eighteenth-century aristocrat and (as a disciple of Pope) not enough of a Romantic to see the Homeric qualities of the life of those Greek warriors whom he knew, and whose praise is sung in the Greek ballads ; by turns *Armatoli* or *Kleftes* (" Militiamen " or " Brigands ") to the government, according to the changes of fortune and local politics. If the *Kleftes* were fierce, so were the Homeric heroes. If the heroes had also a chivalrous side, so had the *Kleftes*. In both there was the same love of finery in dress and weapons. If the *Kleftes* had not the same stoical brand of steadfastness as the Spartans (or the soldiers of 1940), neither had the heroes, whom Homer presents as very individualistic fighters. When quarrels between *Greek* chieftains threatened the success of *the* enterprise on which they were engaged, Byron need not have thought this a sign of degeneracy. Trouble of the same kind is shown well under way between Achilles and Agamemnon, in the first few pages of the first and greatest work of ancient Greek poetry. The *Kleftes*, like the heroes, inspired poetry of a very high degree of excellence, pathos, and sincerity ; and if the *Kleftic* Ballads are

minor work compared to Homer—comparable rather to the Border Ballads of Britain—even then their achievement is high for the unwritten literature of a people depressed so long under a foreign yoke.

What is true of the warriors and their ballads is true also of the traditional Romaic love poems and dirges, the finest of which have nothing to fear from comparison with Theokritos or the very best of the Greek Anthology; and the lovely dances of men or maidens, which were the foundation of so much that was fairest in the classical culture, survived, and survive to-day, in the Greek countryside.

Two small but interesting examples may be mentioned of the creativeness still characteristic of the Greek genius :

First, Greece has its jazz, subject to the same rules, or revelling in the same anarchy, as the American article that has overrun Western Europe. But Greek jazz, unlike any other that I know, has a character of its own, a Greek character. It is more tuneful, it has often something plaintive in it, it has not lost touch (and is all the better for the contact) with the plangent, minor-key, half-oriental folk music that you may still hear in taverns in the streets of Athens, or in the depths of the country, in mountain valleys or overlooking the sea.

And second, in modern Athens may be found a truly fascinating new emanation of the Greek genius in art. The great iron grills that form the main doors of modern blocks of flats (and the same may be seen of modern window grills and balcony railings) are, in Athens, of aidless variety, but nearly always of a quite fascinating beauty. Sometimes the iron bars curve with the gentle curves of a plant, the spiral tendrils of a climbing vine or the gloriously simple lines of a madonna lily. Sometimes they are severe, plain, and geometric—concentric

rectangles, interlocking squares. Almost invariably the shape is as pure and satisfactory as any work of the stone-masons of the fifth century B.c. And these grills are forged *and designed* as a rule by men like those ancient stone-cutters who fluted the pillars of the Parthenon ; not artists who sign their work or expect their names to be known, but plain master-craftsmen in little blacksmiths* establishments anywhere in the Adiens area, from Piraeus to Amarusi (many of them having been expelled from Asia Minor in 1922, as a result of the Gracco-Turkish War). Their work, notably to be seen *in* the modern streets of Kolonaki, is as satisfactory as much that is pointed out by guides in the Byzantine churches or the famous museums. May it still be there when we return—not carried away by the invaders to be melted into tanks and lorries for an evil cause.

What is most to be feared for Greek culture is that under the influence of our modern standardized and industrialized material civilization, city life in Greece, as in other countries—Britain, unfortunately, as much as any—may lose touch with what is old, beautiful, and characteristic, in the essentially rural life of the past. " Look unto the pit whence ye are digged, and *the* hole of the rock whence ye are hewn" Modern Greek writing is, we may repeat, most virile and of greatest merit, as a rule, when—however experimental it may very properly be, and however much it may reasonably look towards the West—it has its feet firmly on the soil of Hellas and its own recent and living past. It is not too late. In Greece, industrialization is newer and, as yet, weaker than in the West, nearly every Athenian still seems to have a native village somewhere, and above all, the national religion remains vigorous and is still truly national.

3 THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

It has often been said that it was the Church that saved the Creek nation from extinction during the supremacy of the Ottoman Empire. On this account, many free-thinkers in Greece who are Greek patriots continue to go to church, at least at the great festivals. Actually, as we have seen, there is more in the survival of Greece than that : in the narrative ballads, the demotic poetry of love and death, and the folk-dances, the peasants (and the Armatoli and Kleftes who sprang from them) preserved a folk-literature, a folk-music, a folk-culture that were purely secular. Nevertheless, the Church did play a very great part in the survival of Greece. With the inspiration of the New Testament in the original words (little as some of it is " understood of the people ") and still more with its colourful and dramatic festivals, the Church in Greece is as strong a factor in national life as in any other country in the world. And in nothing is the abiding continuity of the Greek genius more clearly seen.

Just as the vivid imagination *of* the Greek people, inspired by their country setting, gave rise to the whole beauty and fascination of ancient Greek civilization, besides the mythology that fills and colours classical poetry and art, so, now that Greece is Christian (and there is *no* more fervent Christian body than the Greek Church), the Greek imagination has produced a folk religion no less picturesque than that of ancient Hellas. Based, as always in a poor country, on its foundation of hard and unremitting work, the farmer's year, and to a less extent that of townsmen and sailors, is brightened and diversified by a cycle of religious festivals no less varied than of old. The Christmas festival with its torchlight

priests and of the nearest worshipper, everyone in the packed church holds forward the candle that he or she has been carrying, and each as his own is lit passes on the fire to those waiting behind. In a matter of minutes, from the sanctuary a sea of flame broadens and Sows to the farthest walls even of a large church; the outward and visible sign of the Resurrection. *The* worshippers carrying the Holy Fire with them pour out from the church now brilliantly lighted. So begins a day of joyfulness and feasting. Almost every household—all but the very poorest—has its paschal lamb, the first meat that the devout have eaten for fifty days. Eggs, painted a bright vermilion, are given as presents—Greece, like other countries, using the symbolism of new life breaking the shell—and on this day the ordinary greeting between friends as they meet for the first time is changed to the words " Christ is risen " with the answer " He is risen indeed."

It would take too long to describe exhaustively the dramatic ceremonial of this and other festivals of the Greek Christian year. August the 15th—the Falling Asleep of the Blessed Virgin—is the day when pilgrims from every quarter flock to Tenos, the Greek Lourdes, to visit the healing image once brought to Athens in haste by a ship of the Royal Navy to the sick bed of the King, a day that is now remembered for a deed of which more hereafter. The New Year is the feast of St Basil. A special loaf, the Basil-cake, is eaten, and early in the morning there is a household ritual " for luck." A pomegranate is brought into the chief room of the house and thrown on the floor," with force " (as we were instructed in Athens by our maid, a strapping young island girl). If it bursts well, that is a good sign for the coming year.... We entrusted the responsibility of officiating to the girl,

and the results ought, at least, to have been most satisfactory—I believe there were pomegranate seeds on all four walls of the room !

There are other rituals and practices not specifically Christian. For instance, the May wreath of flowers that every Greek hangs, on May Day, over his front door (or over the balcony railings of a modern flat) and that hangs, even when withered, till its successor comes, is the lineal descendant of the *Eiresionc* that is the subject of jokes in Aristophanes. On the Feast of St. John the Baptist (or as Greeks more charmingly call him, the Forerunner) boys and young men leap through the flames of bonfires; and in Macedonia it was found in 1940 that certain villagers still practised, in secret, for fear the Church might not approve, the rite of walking bare-foot (and unharmed) over glowing charcoal, a rite still observed in India and the East Indies, and described in ancient times in Asia Minor.

Most interesting of all, in Thrace, Thessaly, and elsewhere, there is still enacted at ploughing time a kind of ritual drama culminating in a "sacred marriage," the very ritual that must have been enacted long ago in honour of the vegetation-gods, and for the fertility of the fields, and that is believed to have formed the origin of Greek classical comedy and tragedy.

Sometimes again, it seems that Christianity has consecrated a ritual out of the old religion. What feast of the Sea-God lies behind the blessing of the waters at Piraeus now associated with the Epiphany? And the autumn feast of St Dionysios (Dionysius the Areopagite, St. Denys of France, the first Athenian Christian, and patron-saint of the city), celebrated in Athens with solemn processions in which State functionaries join, coinciding as it does with the vintage season, does it not appear in

certain villages of Attica to have inherited something of the old character of the Dionysia in honour of Dionysos, Lord of the Vine ?

4 Two MODERN GREEK MYTHS

Nor does the modern Greek peasant fall short of his ancient ancestors in the talent for inventing legends, as two examples out of many will serve to show. Both these stories have the purpose of accounting for things seen, as well as for giving amusement to children. Incidentally such inventions should serve as a caution to that school of ancient historians (the present writer used to belong to it) which tries to distil history out of rather similar material—the fairy-tales invented by ancient Greeks to account for the remains (walls, tombs, buried treasure and other such antiquities) left over from the still remoter past of the Bronze Age.

THE LION OF LIOPESI

A few miles east of Athens, behind Hymettos, in the plain called the " Midlands " of Attica, an ancient stone lion lies in the middle of a field. He was probably first set up—*couthant*, his head turned sideways—to mark the tomb of some great man of ancient times. And up above, among the rocks on the back of Hymettos, there is a cave.

The sculpture is not good enough to have been removed to the National Museum, but it is good enough to inspire the ever-keen Greek imagination. Here is the story about it still told in the nearby village of Liopesi, where they make very good wine, and where the village inn is called after Demosthenes, the orator, who was born there about 380 B. C

" Once upon a time yonder cave that 'you see up there was inhabited by a terrible lion, that used to hold up the whole countryside round about here. Everybody was terrified of it, and if ever any brave men tried to kill it, it killed them. At last they round that they could buy it off if every so often they gave it the most beautiful young girl in the village. It liked beautiful young girls best. So they regularly collected the maidens of the village and chose out the prettiest and tied her up and left her out for the monster. And this went on for some time. But at last there was an old woman whose daughter was chosen, who thought the people had not prayed hard enough ; so she went out into the fields at night where her daughter was tied to a tree, and she saw the lion coming and she prayed hard to the All-Holy Lady.¹ And suddenly the lion sat down and turned quite stiff; and it felt itself dying and stiffening, and it thought of its cave where it had left its little ones, and it just had strength to turn its head round towards the mountain before it was all turned to stone.

" And if you look in the fields over there you will find the lion still there, turned into stone, and with its head turned round in the direction of the mountain where its den used to be.*

It is all very Greek—especially that touch of Homeric pathos at the end where we are given a glimpse of the family affections of the lion !

The other story was heard at Delphi in the last century, when Western archaeologists were hunting for the ruins of the famous sanctuary, then hidden from sight under the houses of the village of Kastri.² (Kastri, by the way—

¹ The Panaghu—The Virgin Mary

² Cf. A. Thumb's *Demotic Greek*

like the English names ending in *caster* and *Chester*—is a name given to scores of villages, not by any means all old castles or citadels ; given indeed to almost any village where ancient walls were conspicuously to be seen.) It is in a way not so much a story as an attempt, in a really quite scientific spirit worthy of any wise men between Hesiod and Thales, to account for the queer habits of the *Milords*—meaning here not genuine British lords on the grand tour, like Byron, but merely the presumably wealthy strangers who paid gangs of workmen to turn over what to the peasant were quite uninteresting old stones.

THE MILORDS

" The *Milords* are not Christians. They never go to the church, and you never see them make the sign of the Cross. They are the descendants of the old pagans who built the old temples in Greece. When Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary came into our country the pagans fled, took their treasures with them, and went to the West; and that is why now those countries are rich and this one is poor. But they buried a few of their treasures and sometimes people find them still. And that is why they come back here again, and worship these old stones."

5 THE CHURCH MILITANT

Character, ritual, legend—nothing could be more striking than the filial likeness of modern to ancient Greece. But it is after all in religion, expressing as it does the whole spirit of a society, that the soul of modern Greece is best revealed.

It is not only in its festivals that Greek Christianity is picturesque. The saints are just as vividly conceived in

their functions for every day. St. Nicolas is the patron saint of travellers, which is why you so often find his chapel at the top of a mountain pass. The high peaks are sacred to St Elias, because Elijah ascended to heaven from one of them, which is why so many mountain-tops are called after him, to the confusion of inexperienced wayfarers. St. George, the Greek national saint, is a soldier's saint, as befits one who in life was a Roman officer ; but perhaps a still greater patron of Greek soldiers is St Demetrios—depicted on ikons as a lancer riding down an enemy, like St. George with the dragon. He is reputed to have saved the city of his great church at Salonika, and to have appeared before Greek armies both in the Middle Ages and to-day—the last occasion was in the Balkan Wars of 1912-13, when he was seen riding at the head of the Greek armies against the Bulgarians. Then there is St Michael; and the two Saint Theodores, or the Holy Horsemen, always depicted together on ikons in the same attitude as St. Demetrios. . . . Altogether modern Greece, so peaceful, and so desperately heroic when roused, is better equipped with war-saints than the ancient Greece with war-gods. . . . The ancient thoroughly Nordic Ares—depicted as bully, coward, and adulterer—was already pretty unpopular even in Homer.

It is deeply moving, this implicit sincerity of the religious feeling of plain Greek men. Western cynics might doubt it; but not anyone who has been among Greeks, in these last bitter years. I was in northern Greece in 1939, when the Italians (after pitching a yarn to the rulers of the *Times* and the British Foreign Office which kept them happy until after the Easter holidays) suddenly seized Albania. Greece was, for obvious secular reasons, deeply moved. But quite apart from that sentiment,

which was perfectly candidly expressed, there was another, keenly felt Speaker after speaker—for every Greek was embarrassingly eager to know what the British stranger thought of " Tiambclain " and of the European situation generally—would end, after the political discussion, by adding in deeply shocked tones, " And what a wicked tiling to do, to start their military aggressions on Good Friday ! " At Christmas 1941 I was in Jerusalem. That also was a moving experience. The place was swarming with young men, from Poland, Yugoslavia, Fighting France, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Rhodesia, India, Britain; soldiers, sailors, airmen ; and they all seemed to be making the pilgrimage to Bethlehem. One seemed to have got involved in a crusade. Indeed, one had. Among all these contingents, the Greeks were as numerous as any. I heard several talcs of adventure there. . . . And it transpired that a thing which hundreds of Greek soldiers who found themselves in Palestine had done was to make up a party, collect a charabanc and some venerable spectacled and grey-bearded old Papas, and go down to the Jordan to be re-baptized there.

How Herodotos would have sympathized with that spirit !

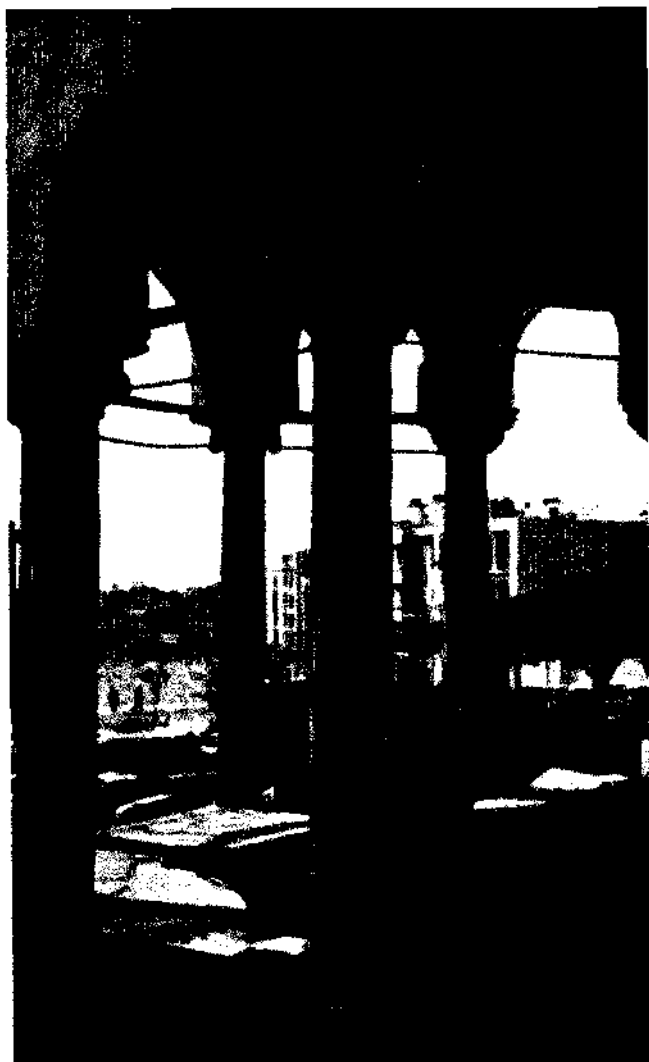
The years since 1939—a heroic age for Greece—would have been a testing time for the faith of any nation. That of Greece ran true to type. The nation that had been shocked by the Easter-ride rape of defenceless Albania, was stirred to its depths by the still more wanton crime of 15th August 1940, The sinking of the cruiser *Helle* as she stood by, festively " dressed " with flags and bunting, at the great festival of Our Lady of Tenos, was a piece of insane terrorism whose motives, since the perpetrators have not yet been brought under appropriate medical



Monastery of St. Stephen: a "hanging" monastery built on a rock in Thessaly, the chasm behind spanned by a drawbridge



Byzantine Church at Mistra



St. Demetrios Church, Salonika

attention, have never been really elucidated. Perhaps after all it was simply intended to weaken the small Greek navy by the loss of a useful ship. If it was intended as a contribution to the terrorizing of Greece into submission, it was an astonishing miscalculation. But by its effect in stimulating anti-Italian feeling, already built up by such acts as the retention of the Dodecanese or the bombardment of the open city of Corfu in 1923, and in assuring Greeks of the divine favour against a murderous and blasphemous foe, the atrocity probably cost Italy more in extra losses in Albania than half-a-dozen *Helles* could have been worth. It is characteristic that though the Greek Government, frantically pursuing its policy of "appeasement," described the sinking as the work of a submarine of "unknown nationality," and suppressed the fact that the fragments of torpedoes in the hands of Greek experts (as shown by the embossed lettering on them) were unmistakably Italian, not a soul in the length and breadth of Greece for one moment doubted the nationality of the criminals.

In these conditions Greece faced the war in the autumn of 1940 in a mood of religious exaltation. Visions and prophecies were everywhere—as in the days of Thucydides and Herodotus. St Barbara is the patron saint of artillerymen—presumably because, having been imprisoned in a tower, she is favourably disposed towards men who knock such edifices down—and on St. Barbara's day the Greek artillery carried out several highly successful shoots and generally enjoyed itself. St. Barbara was said even to have appeared on that day to the advancing infantry, with her raiment shot full of holes, but herself unharmed. The little port of the Forty Saints, south of Valona, had been rechristened by the Italians Porto Edda, "after THAT Edda" said the Greeks darkly;

and the report went round that the Forty Martyrs of the little town, thus deprived of their honour, had prayed God that their town might be reft from the Italians on the fortieth day of the campaign. And it was so. Above all, throughout the campaign it was the Pahaghia, the " All-Holy Lady," whose omnipresence was felt; on war-posters at Athens, in visions among the hard-pressed soldiers at the front. I am not going to involve myself in a metaphysical discussion on the significance or the words " objective " and " subjective " ; but it is mere matter of history to say that the Virgin, whose banner at the great monastery near Kalavryta, now sacked by the Germans, had been the first banner of the great insurrection, was seen by many of the soldiers who fought and died in the bitter autumn of 1940, among the mountains of Albania.

POSTSCRIPT

CHRISTMAS 1942. And here is one more story of the Greek saints at war.

In the third century A.D. a Greek Christian named Menas died as a martyr at Kotyacion in Asia Minor. Later, after Christianity had become the established faith, his corpse was transferred by pious hands to Egypt and became the centre of devotion of a band of monks in the Western Desert. Miracles were reported from his shrine. His fame spread. There are churches of St. Menas in many parts of Greece and in the Aegean Islands.

Meanwhile Islam spread its moonlight over the East. The monasteries of the Egyptian desert fell into decay. But Menas was not forgotten by the Greek Church; and Greek churchmen and soldiers did not fail to notice that the farthest south-eastward drive of the new self-

proclaimed anti-Christ was halted before Alexandria on St. Menas' Day, 1942 ; a line from which it was finally thrown back in a battle in which the First Greek Brigade of the Middle East Forces took its part along with the British, Imperial, and Allied contingents; a battle-line running hard by the tomb and chapel of St. Menas at El Alamcin.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOME GREEK BALLADS

I NIKO TSARAS

A FEW examples will give an idea of the most interesting group of Greek folk-poems, the Kleftic Ballads. These are the literature of Greek warriors under the Ottoman Empire ; men now in, now out of favour with the Government; now Armatoli, local militia, now Kleftes, " bandits " in the style of the old Robin Hood of England, devout, chivalrous, and regarded by the people as protectors of the oppressed. Most of the ballads date from the 18th century, are anonymous, and have 15-syllable lines, rhymed or unrhymed. They sing the prowess of the hero, bewail his death, and comfort his wife or mother; and they express a great love of nature.

Here is a spirited tale from the Parnassos region, of a swift revenge on some local chiefs who had meditated handing over the famous Klefte Niko Tsaras to the ruling Pasha. The metre is the same as that of the original. I have tried to translate the poem into something like the dialect of our own poetic form that so strikingly resembles the "*Kleftika*" the Lowland Scots of the old Border ballads.

The employment of the little bird which brings news to Niko Tsaras (like the " three birds " of our second ballad) is one of the traditional tricks of the ballad-maker's trade. The *Kleftika* are full of repeated conventional phrases and lines, like all traditional poetry ; like our Border ballads, and like that supreme achievement of the genre—ballad poetry transmuted to a royal grandeur—which is the poetry of Homer.

NIKO TSARAS

" Pass on, O Niko, on your way ; gac on, gac up the glen ;
Ye will na pass a second time ; ye will na come agen.'

" O little bird, how ken ye this, how tell sic tales to me "
" From Shepherds' Toun as I cam down, I marked what I did see.
The chieftains of Livadhia, I heard what they did say :
' O Niko, Niko Tiaras' son's a man that we maun slay.' "

O he's a flow'r amang the hills a cypress in the plain,
A tow'r that on the wild sea shore defies the roaring main.

So Niko heard the news of it, and ill it seemed him then.
He ca'ed to him his foster-son, he tra'ed to a' his men :
" Now belt and buckle and sword, my lads, and busk ye
with your guns
And we'll gae sack Livadhia, that breeds sic dastard sons."
They started sync, they marched apace, and tac the toun they came.
They bound the chiefs, they've burnt the toun, they left it a' in flame.
Their captives tae the hills they druve, a hard ana weary way ;
And thus unto the dastard chiefs the outlaws bauld wad say :
*' An' was it Niko Tsaras' son tae death ye wad hae hurled f—
A rose among the flow'r of men, and famed in a' the world ! "

2 DIAKOS

When the great insurrection of 1821 took place the Kleftes and Armatoli were in the thickest of the fray, under such leaders as Odysseus in Central Greece and Kolokotroncs in the south. Under Odysseus rose to fame one of the purest patriots of the whole war, the young Athanasios Diakos, who left the cloister where he was training for the priesthood, and won renown by a whirlwind campaign between Livadhia and Thebes. Diakos' last battle was a heroic defence, when deserted by many of his men (they were not trained soldiers, and the enemy was in overwhelming force), of the narrow

way leading into Central Greece from the north, against a powerful Turkish relieving army coming to the rescue of their friends in the south.

In April 1941 a British officer accompanied by a Greek N.C.O. was driving northward past the Pass of Thermopylae and the Alamana Bridge over the Spercheios.

"Do you know what happened here?" asked the Greek.

"No," said the officer, feeling that he would like to hear the great story of Leonidas from a Greek soldier, on the spot and at such a time.

"This," said the Greek, "is where Diakos, one of our heroes, held up the whole Turkish army with a handful of men."¹

DIAKOS

Three birds at 00 Diakos' camp betwixt the dawn and noon :
 One looks towards Livadhia, one looks towards Zetotin.
 The handsomest spoke drearily (he was as black as black could be) :
 Is it Kalyvas marching there Is it young Soldier John ! "
 "'Tis not Kalyvas marching there ; it is not Soldier John.
 But Omer Vrionas there, with all his host comes on."

Diakos heard the bruit of it, and til it seemed him then.
 He shouted loud, he called to him the chief of all his men.
 "Gather the lads," Diakos said, "and marshal all my bands.
 Deal out the powder without stint, and shot to fill two hands :
 We'll hold the Alamana Bridge—be swif—far down below.
 Where we have nude good stone redoubts and cover from the foe."

They took their long guns in their hands, they took their swords
 so fine,
 And at the Alamana Bridge they manned the battle line.
 "Courage, my lads," Diakos cried, "nor fear the invaders' band ;
 Think of the old Hellenic name, the Grecian *fame*, and stand."

But they were sore afraid ; they fled, they scattered up the glen.
 And brave Diakos faced the fire with eighteen valiant men.

¹ Stanley Caon Greece *Against the Axis* (HmuA Hamifaao)

Three hours 'gainst eighteen thousand Turks Diakos made his stand :
 He fired until the musket bum and splintered in his hand.
 He drew the good sword by his side and at the for he flew :
 Seven captains fell before his blade ; past count, the foes he slew ;
 Then snapped the good sword at the hut, down fell the broken blade,
 And he was prisoner ta'en alas, alive, but undismayed.
 A thousand guards before him marched, two thousand more behind ;
 And Omer Bey, beside the way, spoke hun with accent kind :
 " Diakos, friend, now change your faith, and live, a Turk, with me,
 And leave the Church, and in the Mosque with Moslems bend the
 knee."
 But brave Diakoi shook his head and angered made reply :
 " Not so : a Grecian I was born ; a Grecian I will die.
 But ah "—he said—" how fair a time death chooses for my doom,
 In Spring, when all the woods are green and all the world in bloom."

Diakos was impaled at Zetoun (Lamia) as a rebel, and died still mocking his enemies, as other versions of the ballad tell

Diakos' last fight ended in defeat, but his heroism, like that of Leonidas, and like that of the Greeks of 1941, was not wasted. By this and other " delaying actions " Omer Bey's army suffered not only heavy losses, but irreparable delay. It halted at last and drew back to Thessaly, having failed to save the hard-pressed Turks of the south.

3 DIAMANTO

In lighter vein is the charming story of the maid-at-arms, Diamanto the chaste and fair, a figure reminiscent of the Amazon girls who still exist in Albania.

THE MAID AT ARMS

O who has seen fish climb a hill, or corn grow in the sea !
 O who has seen a maiden fair in warrior's finery t
 —Bur Diamanto ten long years among the warriors stayed.
 Soldier or bandit, and none guessed or knew her for a maid.

But one fair morn of festival, a summer's holy-day.
 The outlaws bold at swordsmanship and hurling stones did play.
 They fenced, they ran, great stones they threw, and as they sported
 there.
 The brooch upon her shoulder burst and showed her breast so fair.

Then shone the sun, the silver moon, as after dark eclipse !
 And one young outlaw saw and gazed wi* laughter on his lips.
 " What ails you now, you outlaw boy, to stare so hard at me "

" O the golden sun, the silver moon unclouded I did see !
 For I did see your breast so fair, your breast as white as snow."

" O keep my secret, outlaw boy, that nobody may know !
 —I'll take you for my squire-at-arms, I'll give you wealth untold,
 I'll give to you my gun so fine, all damascened in gold."

" I willna be your squire-at-arms, I want no wealth untold ;
 I willna take your gun so fine, all damascened with gold ;
 But I would have ye as my wife, the damsel I hae found *—

With that she seized him by the hair and hurled him on the ground.
 " O maiden fair, let go my hair and take me by the hand !
 I'll work for you, your squire so true, and always by you stand."

4 STERYOS

And last, this: a short song from Thessaly, which expresses the thoughts alike of the old Kleftes and of the men who in Greece and Serbia have not submitted to-day.
 (The repeated " bow the knee " is in the original)

STERYOS

The foe has won the mountain pass, they hold the valet so fair.
 But Steryos lives; though Pashas rage, For them he will not care.
 " While snows are white on mountain height, while flowers are fair
 on lea,
 While springs outflow grey rocks below, we will not bow the knee.

Come ! we will bide where wild things hide, where lain the hunted
fox,

In mountain glens, in stony dens beneath the cloven rocks.

Our homes of old the invaders hold, our friends must bow the knee :

But we for home the hills will roam, through wildest glens go we

—Than in their feasts, with hunted beasts we have preferred to be."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MODERN GREEK CHARACTER

An hour of liberty is better than forty years of captivity.—*From a long by Reghas Feraeos, which every Greek child learns as soon as he knows his alphabet.*

I INTELLIGENCE AND HONOUR

IT is misleading to attribute a particular character to any nation unless one remembers that there is always a greater difference between individuals within a nation than between nations as types. And yet one docs here and there find a man who can be spoken of as a typical Englishman, a typical Scot, a typical German. With this apology, then, let me try to generalize about my friends the Greeks, who are as highly individual as any nation in the world.

The root of the whole Greek character, it seems to me, is its intelligence. From that comes its sensitiveness and keen sense of honour. The Greek conceives the idea of himself as he wishes to be and to be regarded, more clearly than most men, and would rather die than be disgraced or seen falling short of that ideal. Hence the magnificent Greek virtues, the heroism and hospitality, the generosity in giving—the millionaire gives a hospital, the poor man shares his last loaf—which are conspicuous in Greek life. Sometimes the sense of honour is even so sensitive as to be a weakness. In the oldest Greek legends no men or women ever kill themselves to escape even the most crushing misfortunes: that is not the Greek way. But there is one suicide even in Homer, treated again in Sophocks' great play: that of Ajax,

who falls on his sword to escape from the disgrace after a temporary failure of reason. And the failure of reason itself is due to the gnawing resentment that Ajax feels at being passed over for an honour that he feels to be his due.

To resort to suicide is perhaps always a weakness; but that of Ajax is at least the infirmity of a noble mind, Ajax the gallant soldier who will not survive his disgrace is a typical Greek, no less so than Odysseus his successful rival, who appears in the play as the man of practical everyday intelligence, a brave soldier too, though not so picturesque as the other; by no means the debased Odysseus of some other plays. On the contrary, he does all he can to save Ajax, who in his temporary insanity had tried to murder him, from his purpose of suicide.

Ajax is undoubtedly a typical Greek. So is Achilles in Homer, the pattern of gallantry and of loyal friendship, who quarrels with his commander not over any material matter, but because he has been wronged in his honour.

a " EVERY GREEK A WOULD-BE CAPTAIN "

This brings us to the eternal Greek self-criticism that " every Greek is a would-be captain," and that " wherever there are six Greeks there are seven political parties."

To begin with, the fact that Greeks do criticize themselves so severely is itself a product of a virtue—their Socratic candour—and of the eternally questing Greek intelligence. But there is truth in their criticism. A Greek newspaper in Cairo said, " We are so interested in our neighbour's doings that we are prepared to let our own dinner spoil in **the** oven while we snoop to

see what next door is having." Ancient Greeks used to make very much the same joke.

And so with "every Greek a *kapetanios*" It arises from the Greek virtues : nearly every Greek, being highly intelligent, has really thought about and has a reasoned opinion on most political questions. Conscquently at a Greek political conference, nearly everyone has an opinion of his own and has something to say. Naturally it is more difficult to obtain agreement than among a slower-witted, more phlegmatic people. Naturally also, having a high ideal of himself, many a Greek thinks himself competent to lead. On that account it is more difficult to produce stable parliamentary government among the lively, politically-minded Greeks than among the more stolid English, who arc content to elect somebody to look after their politics and than let him alone for five years. On that account, too, the frequency with which Greek democracies, ancient and modern, have given place to military dictatorship, or as the ancients called it, tyranny. Hence also, what Greeks criticize among themselves, the fierce feuds that often divide even a small Greek society. Being so sensitive, the Greek is quicker to take offence, and finds it more difficult to apologize for an error or to withdraw a hasty statement than more cold-blooded people. It is a pity ; but it is emphatically not a trait peculiar to modern Greece. The history of Thucydides, the often amusing law-court cases of Demosthenes, are full of exactly the same thing.

3 BUSINESS CAPACITY

Other Greek traits—the thriftiness and hard work, which, with his intelligence, make the Greek abroad so successful a man of business—are characteristic of any

virile stock inhabiting a country where hard work is needed, John Buchan found in South Africa among the back-veldt Boers exactly the same traits, a thrift, industry, keenness on a bargain and magnificient generosity in receiving the stranger, which reminded him of his own people in the Scottish lowlands. One might add that the interest in theological discussion is another point in common between Scots, Boers, and medieval and modern Greeks.

There is a saying in some Mediterranean Quarters that the sea-gulls do not bother to follow Scottish or Greek ships. Indeed, to say that the Greeks are Scots without puritanism would not be a bad short description to give to anyone who did not know them.

Being so reasonable and thinking a person, the Greek is also little given to crimes of violence. When a Greek is a rascal (and there is no nation in the world without its share of rascality), it is sharp practice in business, giving his wits a chance and quite possibly keeping within the law all the time, that is more his line. It is safer for a girl to walk from one village to the next in the remotest parts of Greece than in most of Italy. And it is notable that among the thousands of poor men from Greece who have sought and made their fortunes in America, not one has become famous in the ranks of the gangsters. (On the subject of the ethnology of gangsters, incidentally, such names as those of "Dutch" Schultz, Dillinger, and Capone tell their own tale.)

4 THE SUMMING-UP

From a very varied experience of Greeks, in Athens and in their remotest provinces, on land and sea, in peace and war, in prosperity and adversity, I would

assert that—contrary to everything that I had ever been given to expect—the Greeks of to-day are perhaps the world's most striking example of racial continuity. Through all foreign domination by Roman, Frank, or Turk, through all foreign immigrations of Turks, Franks, Catalans, and Slavs, the original Greek type, physical and mental, maintains and reasserts itself. I know of only one great difference between the behaviour of the ancient Greeks of the great age and that of their descendants; and that was revealed during the Greek successes in the fighting in Albania. It cannot be too often told that in that winter campaign the Greeks brought in thousands of Italian wounded, many of whom had to be rescued among the mountains in conditions that would have made a newspaper story if the rescue had been that of one man in time of peace. Carried first for hours on men's backs over slippery and dangerous paths, then on some of the Greek army's limited and rapidly wasting stock of mules, until they could be brought to a lorry road and at last to railhead, thousand* of these lads survive to-day to bear witness to how Greeks treat their enemies. And this was in circumstances in which any army could have justifiably reported that it was not feasible to rescue these men from among the mountains in the prevailing conditions of cold and snow. Considering that these were men of the nation lately guilty of a treacherous and unprovoked attack on Greece in defiance of its own recent pledge of friendship, compatriots of the men who oppressed the Greeks of Rhodes and the twelve Islands, bombarded Corfu in time of peace, sank the *Helle* at Tenos, bullied and threatened Greece whenever they dared, one could not find in history a finer example of practical Christianity. But it is in character with the Greeks of to-day. To them

the wounded Italian was no longer a representative of Fascist bullying but simply a wounded boy. They took as much trouble to save their enemies as though it had been a question of men from the next village.

The world needs its Greeks ; and from the men who have built up modern Greece in 120 years, who won the Albanian campaign, and who treated helpless enemies with a chivalry rare in any age, there is no limit to what future ages may expect.

*By the length of thy stride,
By the sweep of thy blade,
By the countenance stern,
I know thee, proud maid.*

*The honours of the Hellenes
Have hallowed the tale :
As of old thou art standing :
Hail, Liberty, hail!*

*Withdrawn into darkness.
Shy, bitter, in pain.
The call wast thou waiting
To come forth again . . .*

*But now we have risen !
Hark, hark to the ay
Of thy Hellenes determined
To conquer or die.*

*From the Greek National Anthem
translated by Compton Mackenzie*

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