



PEEPS AT MANY LANDS ANCIENT GREECE

J A M E S B A I K I E



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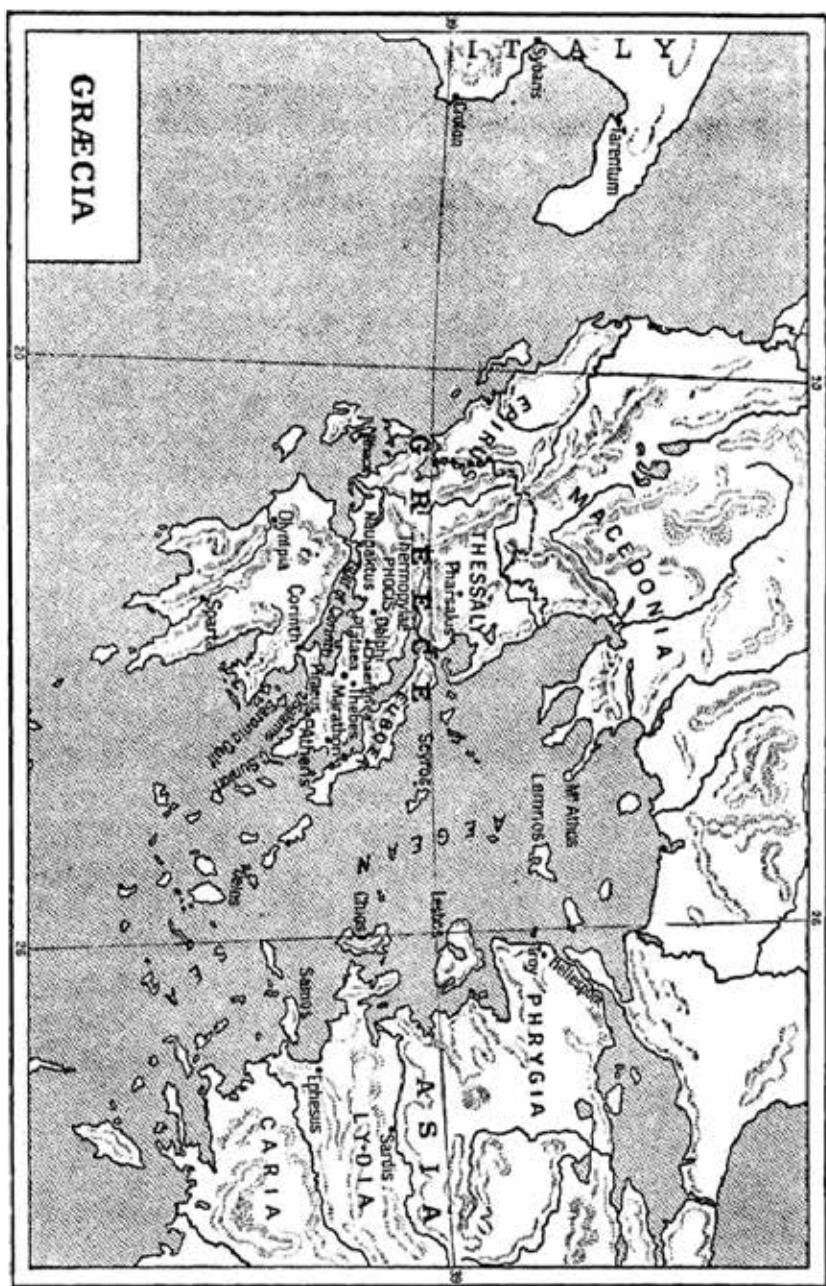
by

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SKETCH MAP OF ANCIENT GREECE

CHAPTER I

THE TORCH-BEARERS

AMONG all the peoples of the ancient world, there have been three, who, as it were, have been chosen by Providence to hold high the torch of Knowledge, that all other nations might see its light, and follow where the torch-bearers led.

Of these three, one, in the beginning, was a little knot of men who, according to their own ancient stories, had come from a far country to the pleasant land of Italy. There, after many wanderings and adventures, they founded, on the banks of the River Tiber, a city which grew to be the great and famous city of Rome, and which came at last to hold empire for many a day over almost all the world, as men knew it in those far-off times. To Rome it was given to hold high the torch of the knowledge of Law. For the Romans' watchwords were ever Order and Obedience, and what they themselves had learned in long ages of storm and stress they imposed upon all the nations that came under their sway, so that the Law of Rome ruled the actions of all civilized men in Europe for hundreds of years. And, ever since, the laws which the Romans framed for their own guidance have

been the model after which the nations have shaped the varying codes of law under which they live.

The second of the three was a race of mingled blood which rose to greatness among the fertile valleys that lie between the mountains and the far-stretching gulfs and bays of the fair land of Greece. For among the ancient race of dark-haired Southerners who dwelt in Greece and its isles before the dawn of history, there came troops of big, fair-haired men from the North, Achæans, Dorians, and the like. Swarm after swarm they came during many years, conquering the gentler Southerners, and then settling down among them, and mingling with them in marriage, till, from this union of North and South, there arose a new race, with the strength and courage of the North, and the swift wit and love of beauty of the South, so that the men of Hellas, as Greece was called in the old days, were the cleverest, the most inquiring, and the most artistic of all the races of that old world.

To Greece it was given to hold high the torch of Wisdom—the wisdom that deals with all things of the mind, and with all beauty of the earth and man. Never, in that ancient world, never, perhaps, in all the world's history, has there been a race that has bred so many deep thinkers, so many seekers after the truths of nature, so many great singers and dramatists, above all so many great artists in sculpture and painting as this little people of Hellas. In the van of all the companies of great men from among all the peoples, who through the ages have sought after wisdom and beauty, you shall always find a Greek holding up his light for the rest to follow. Wherever men inquire

into the mysteries of the human mind and life, they are following in the footsteps of Greek leaders. Wherever, in poem or in tragedy, they try to sing the greatness or the sorrow of mankind, it is a Greek who has struck the first note. Wherever they seek, in sculpture or in painting, to express the beauty and wonder of life, they are following those great Greek artists who first gave to the world the idea of beauty, serene, balanced, perfect, and whose wonderful works have never, in many respects, been surpassed, nor will be.

The third of the torch-bearers was a little race of wholly Eastern blood. Long-time thralls in the land of Egypt, slaves of that mighty ancient civilization at whose relics we still marvel, they were freed at last, and found a home in the little, rugged, unattractive hill-country of Palestine—a land that was little more than the bridge between the two great empires of Assyria and the Nile. There for a little while they held a troubled sovereignty, and then for many generations were bowed under the yoke of greater nations; and there they gradually wrought out the great task which it was given them to do in the history of the world.

The Roman's task was a great one—to give Law to the world. The Greek's was greater still—to give Wisdom and Beauty. But greatest of all was the task of the Hebrew; for to him it was ordained that he should be the torch-bearer of the knowledge of God, and teach to the world the truth of things eternal. He was to have none of the power of Rome; he was never to know the Greek thirst for wisdom; he scorned and abhorred the Greek

craving for earthly beauty. But he held before men's eyes a greater light than either, and rose to thoughts about God far nobler, truer, purer, than ever were reached by Roman law-giver or Greek philosopher, so that the world sees God to-day by the light that first dawned among a handful of Hebrew serfs, grew to its morning brightness in a third-rate Oriental kingdom, and reached its meridian glory in the life and teaching of a Jewish carpenter.

Now of Rome and the Romans I have written somewhat already in one of these little books; and perhaps I may tell you some day, in another, of Palestine and the Hebrews. Meanwhile my task is to tell you what may be told in a little space of the second of these Torch-Bearers of the World—of the beautiful little land of Hellas, which we call Greece, and of that wonderful race of men who called themselves Hellenes, and are called by us Greeks, the splendour of whose genius flamed at its highest for little more than two centuries, yet has lightened all the world ever since with its glory.

If you look at the map of Europe, you will see that the Continent throws out southwards into the sea three great projections or peninsulas, and that these three peninsulas are all separated from the lands to the north of them by great mountain ranges. Westernmost of the three is the land which the ancients knew as the Iberian Peninsula, and which we call Spain and Portugal. Midmost, projecting like a big boot-leg into the Mediterranean, is Italy. Easternmost comes Greece, not so clean-cut as the other two, nor so separate from the mass of Europe to the north, lying quite close to Asia Minor, to which it

is almost joined by a group of little islands dotted over the Aegean Sea.

These three peninsulas have all played a great part in the history of the world; Spain and Portugal, perhaps, not quite so great a part as the other two, though we must not forget what the world owes to the famous navigators and explorers of these lands. Their mountain walls to the north kept them free for a long time from the assaults of the fierce and rude tribes of Northern Europe, and allowed them to develop their own life. Their easy access to the sea was always tempting them to adventure and conquest. And of the three peninsulas it was the smallest and most easterly where European men first wakened to civilized life, and first began to shape the world to its present form.

Greece, it has been said, "hangs like a jewel on a pendant from the south of Europe into the Mediterranean Sea." The central jewel of the pendant is surrounded by a cluster of lesser brilliants, "the isles of Greece," of which Byron sang so beautifully. The northern part of it, where, below the Balkan Mountains, the jewel joins the necklace, though far larger than the southern part, has always been less important, at least in the times of which I am writing. Macedonia, Epirus, and Thessaly were never more than half Greek in those early days. The real Greece of which we must think is the little country lying south of all these, below the Othrys Mountains. Look at it on the map, and read the names of the states that are gathered there—Boeotia, Argolis, Achaia, Laconia, Attica; or better still, read the names of the cities—Thebes,

Argos, Delphi, Olympia, Corinth, Sparta, and, above all, Athens. Everything that is great and glorious in ancient Greek story rises to your mind as you read them, and stirs your blood like a bugle-call.

Now, still keeping your eye on the map, I want you to notice some other things about this real Greece. See how thoroughly the country, small as it is already, is broken up by arms of the sea. Greece has a very long coastline for its size, because of the long gulfs and bays that reach into the very heart of the country. The sea that is thus brought everywhere almost to the gates of her cities is a sunny, sheltered, inviting sea—the very thing to tempt the inexperienced early sailors of Europe to adventure. Nearly all its best harbours look east, and that was an important matter in those days, because it was the lands of the East, Babylonia and Egypt, that first were civilized, and so were most worth trading with, and because Greece was linked to the East, as I have said, by its cluster of beautiful islands. You can sail from Greece to Asia without ever being out of sight of land; and that was no small matter to these early navigators, who had no compass or chart to guide them. Greece, then, is to be an adventurous, exploring, colonizing land, and all her early story, at all events, will be connected with those mysterious Eastern lands, with Troy, and Egyptian Thebes, and with all that shore of Asia Minor, where her colonies, from Trebizond to Cyprus, were strewn so thickly.

Next, notice how much the land is split up, not only by the sea, but by ranges of mountains as well. There are no great far-stretching plains in Greece, except in the

northern parts, which scarcely count in our story. Greece is a country of little plains and valleys, divided from one another by big ranges of wild mountains; or rather, let us say, it is a country of big mountain ranges, with little plains and valleys nestling among them. Now, what happens in other countries like that—in the highlands of Scotland, for instance, or in Switzerland? Why, that instead of a real nation, one over all the land, you get a clan or a canton in each valley, akin in race, no doubt, to its neighbour over the hill, but quite separate from it in interest—with its own trade, its own culture, its own army or navy, perhaps its own capital city, if it is big enough—and, above all, its own pride. That is exactly what you get in Greece. Though all Greeks were proud to call themselves Hellenes, there never was in Greek history such a thing as a united Greek nation.

Even when they had to fight for their very lives against the giant power of Persia, the Greeks could not really unite. Thebes held aloof, Corinth held aloof. Athens and Sparta had to bear all the burden; and Sparta was furiously jealous of Athens all the time, and played her ally some very shabby tricks. The curse of Greece was that all these little clans of the country were always quarrelling with one another, till at last the great quarrel, which we call the Peloponnesian War, came between Athens and Sparta, wrecked Athens, and almost equally ruined Sparta. If the Greeks had been one, as the Romans were one, they might have conquered the world by arms as well as by thought and art; but it was not to be. Nature



THE BATTLE-FIELD OF MARATHON FROM MOUNT PENTELIKON

said No! and the Greeks, great as they were, were not great enough to say Yes! in spite of Nature.

One more point remains. What a little land it is! Yes, a very little land, if you count greatness by size. Great and famous history was made there in very small space, and by a very small nation. Athens, at her greatest period, held perhaps 30,000 free citizens, though she had a much larger subject population. Sparta probably never had more than 10,000, for she kept her citizenship very strictly guarded. The whole yearly revenue of the little empire which Athens ruled for a while was only about £100,000! We, who spend in a few months as many millions as Athens spent thousands in a year, may wonder and smile at the idea of such a little state calling itself an empire and aspiring to greatness. But out of that little income Athens built the

Parthenon, to say nothing of other buildings, only less beautiful than that unrivalled temple. The Greek army at Marathon strikes us as ridiculously small, and the whole Greek fleet at Salamis could be sunk in an hour or two by the smallest of our light cruisers; but that army and fleet beat back all the power of a mighty empire. For size is not greatness. Greece bred in her little towns some of the greatest men that the world has ever known; and we, who also live in a little country, ought to be glad to remember that it has been the little countries which have done the most for the world.

CHAPTER II

WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG

NOW of the early days of this fair land of Greece, and of the men who lived there in the morning of all things, when the world was young, the Greeks of later times had many stories, and strange, to tell. Such were the tales of how Jason and the Minuai sailed from Iolcos, in the wondrous ship Argo, to seek the Golden Fleece that hung in Colchis, in the realms of King Aietes; and of how Herakles, the great son of Zeus the Father-God, freed the world from many a pest, slaying the lion of Nemea, and the Lernæan Hydra, and dragging up from Hades the three-headed dog Cerberus, keeper of the gate in the kingdom of the dead; and of how Perseus, the brave son of Danaë the Princess of the Brazen Tower, slew the Gorgon whose dreadful face turned to stone all who beheld it, and how he saved the Princess Andromeda from the sea-monster—and many other such like stories.

No other race has ever had so many or so beautiful romances of its early days. Yet even till within the memory of men who still live, it was deemed that these tales were but wild romances, dream-children of the brains of ancient poets, and with naught, or little, of



JASON, MEDEA, AND ORPHEUS WITH THE GOLDEN FLEECE

truth in them. But now we grow more cautious in our judgments, and believe rather that, however many the false wonders that have been added to the stories, there lay behind each tale some real truth of some great deed that was wrought in ancient days, and not seldom some priceless knowledge as to the men who lived in these far-off times.

In especial there were several stories which told how, long before history, as we speak of history, began, there ruled in the great island of Crete a mighty king named Minos. He was a Sea-King, a Viking of the Southern seas, as were our forefathers of the Northern, and his war-fleet of black galleys gave him wide dominion over all the lands of the AEgean. Ruthless he was, and cruel, and men said that in his great palace at Knossos he had made a maze, that was called the Labyrinth, and that in the inmost recesses of this maze there dwelt a strange monster, half-man, half-bull, called the Minotaur, which is the Bull of Minos. To this monster, they said, there were cast, every ninth year, seven youths and seven maidens, who were sent as tribute from the city of Athens, which Minos had conquered. And these, thus cast to the loathly brute, were by him slain and devoured.

They said, moreover, that the young prince Theseus, son of Ageus, King of Athens, coming to Knossos with the tribute of youths and maidens, slew the Minotaur, being befriended by the Princess Ariadne, daughter of King Minos, who had fallen in love with his boldness and his beauty. For she brought to him in his dungeon a sword wherewith to slay the monster, and a clue of cord

by which he might thread his way through the mazy paths of the Labyrinth; and when he had done his work, and freed the world of the vile creature, Ariadne fled with him and his companions in their black ship. And in after days Theseus was Lord of Athens, and fought with the women-warriors, the Amazons, and wedded their Queen Hippolyta, and was the friend of Herakles the great hero.

Yet other stories the Greeks had of this great King Minos. They told how he was favoured of the great god Zeus, and talked with him face to face in a cave on the Sacred Mount of Crete; and how his wondrous artificer Dædalus, first of great inventors, was imprisoned by the King in his anger, and escaped with his son Icarus by making wings for the twain of them, with which they flew over the sea. But Icarus soared too near the sun, and its heat melted the wax wherewith his wings were fastened, so that he fell into the sea, and was drowned. And when Minos learned of the escape of his captive, he manned his great fleet and went in chase of him even to Italy; and there the great king perished miserably by guile and treachery.

Now some part of these ancient stories we may lay aside at once—I mean the marvels and the monsters that we read of in them. For these, we know, are of the same family as the giants and dragons of our own fairy-tales. Wonders grew around the original story as the years went on, the fancy of one story-teller after another adding always a fresh touch to the marvel, or a fresh horror to the monster. But the core of the whole has been proved,



DAEDALUS AND ICARUS

and that not many years ago, to be simple truth; for an English scholar and explorer, Sir Arthur Evans, has found on the summit of a little hill in Crete the remains of the ancient palace of this grim King Minos, and the open-air theatre where his captives made sport for him, and the dungeons where they were confined. And he has found that the great sport of the Cretans was to witness a game, if it can be called a game, in which youths and maidens grappled with a bull, and leaped over his head, catching him by the horns as he strove to gore them. In Greece also another scholar, Dr. Schliemann, has found the graves of men of kindred race to these Cretan Sea-Kings, who dwelt in great fortresses of piled stone, and possessed rich treasures of wrought gold and ivory and bronze.

And altogether we have learned that long before the true Greeks of history appeared, there lived in the Greek islands and on the mainland, in such cities as Mycenæ and Tiryns, a race of men of whom these ancient stories were told. They were a people small of stature and dark of hair and colour, quick of brain, skilled in building and painting and in the craft of the potter, but, above all, daring and skilful seamen, who sailed east and west through all the Mediterranean, and left their colonies on many a far-off shore. These men used weapons and tools of bronze; they marched to battle lightly armed, wearing no mail, but only a loin-cloth on their bodies, covering themselves with a great shield made of wicker and leather, and shaped like a figure 8; and they were skilful with the sling and the bow.

Then there began to come down out of the North, from the forests and mountains of Central Europe, swarms of big long-haired northern men. The first-comers were, perhaps, the Achæans, as they called themselves—Homer's "long-haired Achæans," who fought at Troy; then came Thessalians, and, last of all, Dorians. Mighty fighters they were, and especially the Dorians, but their main advantage over the dark Southerners against whom they fought lay in their weapons. For the Northmen were cased from head to foot in bronze harness—a helmet with a nodding horse-hair crest, a hauberk covering the body, greaves to protect the legs, and a round buckler with a central boss; and their swords and spear-heads, instead of being made of the softer bronze, like those of their opponents, were of iron.

With such advantages, little wonder that they pushed the Southerners before them. The old strongholds of the Sea-Kings were overthrown, and the newcomers settled down in the lands they had won. Yet there were parts of the country into which the invaders did not penetrate, or from which they were thrown back. The Arcadians told how, when the Dorians came against them, it was agreed to decide the ownership of the land, not by a battle between the two hosts, but by a single combat between the Arcadian champion, Echemus, and Hyllus, the leader of the Dorians. Echemus proved victor in the fight, and the Dorians duly observed the bargain and retreated. The men of Athens, too, and their brother-Ionians who lived on the western coast of Asia Minor, claimed to have

kept themselves free from aught but a slight mixture of northern blood.

Now when the Northerners had made their conquest, they settled down in the land, and that happened, which ever happens in such cases; they wedded wives of the dark southern race, and their sons and daughters were a new people, with something in them of both North and South. The North gave strength, warlike spirit, cleanness of living, and the love of music; the South gave wit and quickness, the passionate love of beauty, the love of the sea, and that yearning after the unknown which makes adventurers and explorers. And when these two sets of gifts had been thoroughly mingled and fused in the new race, there arose for a while in Greece a people such as the world had never seen before—a people bold in arms, pure, on the whole, in conduct, daring in exploration, eager in the search after truth, and with such an instinctive love for and taste in all things beautiful, that their work has remained ever since a standard by which beauty in art is measured, and most other races seem mere clumsy-fingered bunglers beside them.

Where the Northern part of the mixture was strongest, as with the Spartans, who claimed to be pure Dorians, there was more of the warlike, and less of the artistic, so that the Spartans were the foremost soldiers of Greece, but did almost nothing for art or letters. Where the Southern element prevailed, as with the Athenians, there was a keener love of the sea, so that the Athenian was a notable fighter in sea-battles, but less so in warfare on the land, and a natural quickness of intelligence, and a passionate

love of art that have never been excelled by any people. Roughly, you may say that the Spartan was the soldier, the Athenian the sailor, trader, thinker, and artist of Greece; and the other clans of the land, Thebans, Argives, Arcadians, and the rest, inclined in the one direction or in the other according as they had more or less of Northern or Southern blood in their veins.

Now when these Achæans from the north had been some while settled in Greece, and were masters of the old cities and strongholds where the Southern race had once held sway, and while yet the Dorians had not come, or were but beginning to come, into the land, it fell out that there arose a great quarrel between the Achæans and their neighbours who dwelt on the other shore of the Agean Sea, in the land that was then called the Lesser Phrygia, and in the famous city of Ilion, or Troy, where King Priam ruled. For Paris, the son of Priam, had come as a guest to Menelaos, King of Sparta, and had carried away the king's wife Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. Therefore the Achæans took up the quarrel of Menelaos, and gathered a great fleet and army, led by Agamemnon, King of Mycenæ, and brother of Menelaos, and by Achilles, Odysseus, Ajax, Diomedes, and many other famous chiefs.

For ten years they beleaguered Troy, and many were the victories and defeats that fell to the one side or the other in the course of the war. No man on the side of the Greeks was so noble or so knightly as the gallant Hector, who led the men of Troy, though Achilles was the mightier man-at-arms. At last, when Hector had been

slain by Achilles, and Achilles himself had fallen to the arrow of Paris, Troy was captured by the stratagem of the Wooden Horse, of which you have all heard. But the capture of the city did not end the troubles of the Achæans who had warred against it; for misfortune followed them on their homeward journey, and but few of them reached their native land in peace. To the wisest of all the Greeks, Odysseus, the chief of the little island of Ithaca, the gods appointed ten more years of wandering and adventure, so that when at last he returned to Ithaca and to his wife Penelope, who had waited faithfully for him so long, there was not one of his comrades remaining to him.

And long years after all these things had happened, there arose in Greece, some say in Chios, one of the Grecian islands, a great poet named Homer, one of the greatest of those who have sung songs such as the world will never let die; and he sang in immortal verse the tale of the Siege of Troy, the valour of Hector, and the wrath of Achilles. And his song has come down to us, and it is called the "Iliad," because it tells of the war against Ilion. Thereafter he sang another famous song, which tells of the adventures of the wise Odysseus, as he returned from the Trojan War. And that song is called the "Odyssey." These were the first of all the great poems that the world has known, nor have any greater songs ever been sung than these, whose maker is but a dim shadowy figure standing amidst the morning mists of the dawn of history. Some day you will read them for yourselves, and learn how great was the nation which, even in its childhood, could breed such men.