

**FOUR STAGES OF GREEK  
RELIGION; STUDIES BASED ON A  
COURSE OF LECTURES  
DELIVERED IN APRIL 1912 AT  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY**

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Four stages of Greek religion; studies based on a course of lectures delivered in April 1912 at Columbia University by Gilbert Murray

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**GILBERT MURRAY**

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FOUR STAGES OF  
GREEK RELIGION

*COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LECTURES*

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# FOUR STAGES OF GREEK RELIGION

STUDIES BASED ON A COURSE OF LECTURES  
DELIVERED IN APRIL 1912  
AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

BY

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## PREFACE

THIS small book has taken a long time in growing. Though the first two essays were only put in writing this year for a course of lectures which I had the honour of delivering at Columbia University, the third, which was also used at Columbia, had in its main features appeared in the *Hibbert Journal* in 1910, the fourth in part in the *English Review* in 1908; the translation of Sallustius was made in 1907 for use with a small class at Oxford. Much of the material is much older in conception, and all has been reconsidered. I must thank the editors of both the above-named periodicals for their kind permission to reprint.

I think it was the writings of my friend Mr. Andrew Lang that first awoke me, in my undergraduate days, to the importance of anthropology and primitive religion to a Greek scholar. Certainly I began then to feel that the great works of the ancient Greek imagination are penetrated habitually by religious conceptions and postulates which literary scholars like myself had not observed or understood. In the meantime the situation has changed. Greek religion is being studied right and left, and has revealed itself

as a surprisingly rich and attractive, though somewhat controversial, subject. It used to be a deserted territory; now it is at least a battle-ground. If ever the present differences resolved themselves into a simple fight with shillelachs between the scholars and the anthropologists, I should without doubt wield my reluctant weapon on the side of the scholars. Scholarship is the rarer, harder, less popular and perhaps the more permanently valuable work, and it certainly stands more in need of defence at the moment. But in the meantime I can hardly understand how the purest of 'pure scholars' can fail to feel his knowledge enriched by the savants who have compelled us to dig below the surface of our classical tradition and to realize the imaginative and historical problems which so often lie concealed beneath the smooth security of a verbal 'construc'. My own essays do not for a moment claim to speak with authority on a subject which is still changing and showing new facets year by year. They only claim to represent the way of regarding certain large issues of Greek Religion which has gradually taken shape, and has proved practically helpful and consistent with facts, in the mind of a very constant, though unsystematic, reader of many various periods of Greek literature.

In the first essay my debt to Miss Harrison is great and obvious. My statement of one or two points is



probably different from hers, but in the main I follow her lead. And in either case I cannot adequately describe the advantage I have derived from many years of frequent discussion and comparison of results with a Hellenist whose learning and originality of mind are only equalled by her vivid generosity towards her fellow-workers.

The second may also be said to have grown out of Miss Harrison's writings. She has by now made the title of 'Olympian' almost a term of reproach, and thrown down so many a scornful challenge to the canonical gods of Greece, that I have ventured on this attempt to explain their historical origin and plead for their religious value. When the essay was already written I read Mr. Chadwick's impressive book on *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge, 1912), and was delighted to find in an author whose standpoint and equipment are so different from mine so much that confirmed or clarified my own view.

The title of the third essay I owe to a conversation with Professor J. B. Bury. We were discussing the change that took place in Greek thought between, say, Plato and the Neo-Platonists, or even between Aristotle and Posidonius, and which is seen at its highest power in the Gnostics. I had been calling it a rise of asceticism, or mysticism, or religious passion, or the like, when my friend corrected me. 'It is not

a rise; it is a fall or failure of something, a sort of failure of nerve.'—We are treading here upon somewhat firmer ground than in the first two essays. The field for mere conjecture is less: we are supported more continuously by explicit documents. Yet the subject is a very difficult one owing to the scattered and chaotic nature of the sources, and even where we get away from fragments and reconstructions and reach definite treatises with or without authors' names, I cannot pretend to feel anything like the same clearness about the true meaning of a passage in Philo or the *Corpus Hermeticum* that one normally feels in a writer of the classical period. Consequently in this essay I think I have hugged my modern authorities rather close, and seldom expressed an opinion for which I could not find some fairly authoritative backing, my debt being particularly great to Reitzenstein, Bousset, and the brilliant *Hellenistisch-Römische Kultur* of P. Wendland. I must also thank my old pupil, Mr. Edwyn Bevan, who was kind enough to read this book in proof, for some valuable criticisms. The subject is one of such extraordinary interest that I offer no apology for calling further attention to it.

A word or two about the last brief revival of the ancient religion under 'Julian the Apostate' forms the natural close to this series of studies. But here our material, both historical and literary, is so abundant

that I have followed a different method. After a short historical introduction I have translated in full a very curious and little-known ancient text, which may be said to constitute something like an authoritative Pagan creed. Some readers may regret that I do not give the Greek as well as the English. I am reluctant, however, to publish a text which I have not examined in the MSS., and I feel also that, while an edition of Sallustius is rather urgently needed, it ought to be an edition with a full commentary.

I was first led to these studies by the wish to fill up certain puzzling blanks of ignorance in my own mind, and doubtless the little book bears marks of this origin. It aims largely at the filling of interstices. It avoids the great illuminated places, and gives its mind to the stretches of intervening twilight. It deals little with the harvest of flowers or fruit, but watches the inconspicuous seasons when the soil is beginning to stir, the seeds are falling or ripening.

G. M.