

**ANCIENT CLASSICS FOR
ENGLISH READERS. THE
GREEK ANTHOLOGY**

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Ancient Classics for English Readers. The Greek Anthology by Lucas Collins

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EDITED BY THE

REV. W. LUCAS COLLINS, M.A.

THE

GREEK ANTHOLOGY

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THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Collection, or rather the Collections, of small poems known as the Greek "Anthology," have long been an object of great interest to scholars. They have been much studied and repeatedly edited. The individual poems, or selections from them, have been often translated and often imitated. They employed the best care of the great printer, Henry Stephens. They were favourite subjects of study with Erasmus, and his friend Sir Thomas More. The greater part of them were excellently translated into Latin verse by Hugo Grotius, a man sometimes overrated and sometimes underrated, but undoubtedly eminent in various departments of learning—as a scholar, a jurist, and a theologian. The poet Gray, a critic of nice and fastidious taste, made them the object of particular attention, and enriched an interleaved copy of Stephens's Anthology with copious notes, parallel pas-

sages, and conjectural emendations, besides transfusing several of the epigrams into Latin verse. They beguiled some of the weary hours which Johnson felt heavy on his hands in his last illness, and they helped to cheer the melancholy and morbid life which was the lot of the amiable Cowper.

It is true that, amidst the general chorus of approbation which they have excited, a few *anserine* discords have occasionally been heard. Chesterfield, in his famous Letters, thus peremptorily denounces them to his son: "I hope you will keep company with Horace and Cicero among the Romans, and Homer and Xenophon among the Greeks, and that you have got out of the worst company in the world—the Greek epigrams. Martial has wit, and is worth looking into sometimes; but I recommend the Greek epigrams to your supreme contempt." But whatever we may think of his lordship in respect of knowledge of life and worldly wisdom, we are not disposed to bow to his authority in literature any more than in morals.

The supposed insipidity of Greek epigrams had been a well-known subject of jest in Paris in the century preceding Chesterfield's time. Racan, the French poet, was shown by a lady some epigrams of her own composition. He pronounced them *bad*, because they wanted point. She replied that that was of no consequence, as they were epigrams *à la Grecque*. They met at dinner soon afterwards, where the soup served up was not very palatable, and the lady observed to Racan that it was abominable. He replied: "Madoiselle, it is *soupe à la Grecque*," which expression

having got abroad became a favourite mode of designating an indifferent soup.* A French poet, or indeed a French man of fashion generally, was likely enough to miss in the Greek compositions the piquancy for which his own literature is so remarkable, and Chesterfield's school of taste was eminently French. But Menage himself, who tells the story given above, but who was a good scholar, and a considerable wit, appreciated highly the Greek epigrams, and composed a good many Greek imitations of them.

Men of the greatest learning and best taste have, since Chesterfield's time and down to our own day, given a very different verdict from his opinion, and, we may say, have done so unanimously. We find, no doubt, in the Anthology, that admixture of good, bad, and indifferent which Martial pronounces to be unavoidable in all similar collections; but to prefer Martial to his Greek prototypes, or rather predecessors, as Chesterfield does, would now be universally held to be blind and tasteless criticism. We feel assured that, even under the disadvantages arising from their wearing an English dress, the specimens given in this volume will justify to its readers the high estimate of the Anthology which has so completely gained the ascendant among men of true discernment.

Until the beginning of the seventeenth century the only "Greek Anthology" considered to be extant in anything like a complete state was the collection made

* Menagiana, 165.

by Maximus Planudes, a monk of Constantinople, who flourished about the middle or in the earlier half of the fourteenth century. Planudes was considered to have compiled this collection from an Anthology, or, as it was called, a "Cycle," of epigrams, put together by Agathias—surnamed, from his study of law, Scholasticus—a well-known though heavy historian, who was a native of Myrinè, and lived in the time of Justinian, in the sixth century after Christ. Planudes's collection was distributed into seven books, under different heads, according to the subjects treated of.

It was about the year 1606 that the great scholar Salmasius, then a youth of eighteen, discovered in the library of the Palatinate at Heidelberg another MS. of a Greek Anthology, compiled by Constantinus Cephalas, of whom not even the name had been previously heard. Cephalas appears to have lived about the beginning of the tenth century, and thus, in point of chronology, occupies an intermediate position between Agathias and Planudes. The latter collector, as seems now to be probable, employed himself chiefly in abridging and rearranging the work of Cephalas, which is generally the more copious of the two, though not on all subjects. Planudes has been somewhat harshly assailed as not merely destitute of taste, but as having expurgated lines and even stanzas in the original poems, and either omitted them altogether or replaced them with phraseology of his own. We are not willing, however, to cancel or much diminish the debt which we undoubtedly owe him; and there are not a few epigrams suppressed by him which have since come

to light, and which had better never have been published or never written. His Anthology, until Salmasius's discovery, was the only considerable repertory of this kind of literature, and was a source of inexhaustible interest, amusement, and instruction to many generations of scholars. Planudes, though his taste may have been defective, was a man of learning as well as of worth. He translated into Greek Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and other Latin works; and it seems now to be proved that he was not the author of a foolish life of *Æsop* that was long ascribed to him.

It is remarkable that while the Palatine Anthology had been discovered by Salmasius so early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, and the discovery made generally known, and although it was the declared intention of Salmasius to publish it immediately, a number of circumstances interfered for a long time to prevent that step being taken; and it was only about the end of the last or the beginning of the present century, at an interval of nearly two hundred years, that it was given to the world by Brunck and by Jacobs. The MS. had in the mean time gone through a variety of adventures, having been removed to the Vatican in 1623 with the rest of the Palatine library, thereafter transferred to Paris in 1797, and in 1815 finally restored to Heidelberg, where we suppose it now lies, if none of the recent German arrangements have led to a change.

Partial transcripts of it had in the mean time been made, but the final publication of the Palatine manuscript, and the attention and careful study which it called

forth from German scholars, who generally do thoroughly whatever they undertake, threw a great deal of additional light on this branch of literature. These studies, pursued with much ardour by various scholars, have in a special manner brought into conspicuous notice the name of Meleager, the first and most considerable of the *flower-gatherers*, for such is the English equivalent for the word "anthologist." He was a Syrian, and flourished in the early part of the century preceding the commencement of our era. He collected the fragments of Greek poetry and genius which before his time were either intrusted to the memories of men, engraven on marbles or other solid structures, or dispersed in miscellaneous works as fugitive pieces. These he named his "Garland," and prefixed to it, as a preface or *proœmium*, a set of verses extending to nearly 60 lines, in which he characterises each or the principal part of the writers included in his collection by a flower or plant emblematical of his or her peculiar genius. But Meleager was not merely a collector, he was also a composer, of epigrams, and his compositions may take a high place in comparison with the average or all but the best of those inserted in his "Garland." His character seems to have been a remarkable one, not free from great faults, ardent in his passions, and acute in his susceptibilities, but with a high idea of the dignity of the poet's art, and a lively and just appreciation of the Beautiful. Another collector after Meleager was Philippus of Thessalonica, who lived in the time of Trajan, and who also contributed some original epigrams and prefixed a proem to his collection. Finally, there