

THE ODES OF PINDAR

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The Odes of Pindar by F. A. Paley

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OF PINDAR**

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THE
ODES OF PINDAR,

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH PROSE,
WITH
BRIEF EXPLANATORY NOTES AND A PREFACE.

BY
F. A. PALEY, M.A.,
EDITOR AND TRANSLATOR OF "AESCHYLUS," ETC., ETC.



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P R E F A C E.

THE translations of Pindar's *Epinicia* now published have been made at different times, and for the most part have been long lying by, through want of leisure on my part to revise them finally for the press. In the course of reading Pindar for many years past with pupils, I have often been compelled to complain of the unsatisfactory renderings which are given in commentaries; and so, with at least a strong desire to do better, I have been in the habit of attempting occasionally the careful and close translation of an entire ode. By such experiments from time to time repeated the work has grown up, as it were, from small beginnings. I think an accurate translation of an author so very difficult as Pindar will be of use to students; and I do not know that, under the circumstances mentioned above, it is necessary to add a word on the question how far translations are or are not serviceable to the cause of sound scholarship. Pindar may be called in some

respects an exceptional poet. Partly from the difficulty and somewhat archaic character of the Greek, partly from his highly figurative and "flowery" style, but chiefly from the nature of his subject, which is not human nature but human glory, he is not very extensively read in this country, nor perhaps by any but by students of the higher class; and with them he is not commonly a great favourite. The fact is, that Pindar, to use a hackneyed phrase, must be known to be appreciated. And to know him well must be the work and the study of years. And yet, as the earliest *genuine* Greek poet of antiquity—which, with the grave doubts that hang over the composition of the Homeric and the greater part at least of the Hesiodic poems,¹ I think he may fairly be called—he well deserves to hold a foremost place in our *curriculum* of classical studies.

Any one who attempts to render Pindar, with tolerable closeness, into readable English, will soon find that he has undertaken an extremely difficult, not to say a formidable task. It would be hard to conceive any two forms of literature more widely different than the chivalrous, sententious, highly florid style of the Greek lyric poet, and

¹ There is, at all events, less reason to suspect the "cooking" process in the Odes of Pindar than in any other poet of antiquity. But there is great probability, I fear, that in the form in which we have them, the works attributed to Homer and Hesiod are but compilations and adaptations of earlier compositions.

the average prose-writings of our own times and country. If we try to translate a dozen lines of Pindar very literally, and word for word, we shall too often obtain a result that reads very like downright nonsense. If we aim at a style and diction somewhat antiquated, and borrow the vocabulary of Spenser or the old English ballads, we fall into a forced artificial mannerism which, simply because it is unreal, savours strongly of quaintness, pedantry, and affectation. If we endeavour to represent the author's mind and meaning in the plain and clear terms which are the vehicle of modern thought, we run the serious risk of violating the very genius and essence of lyric poetry, and bringing it down almost to the level of ordinary dinner-table talk. Though well aware of the stupendous descent that must in this case be made, I have nevertheless preferred to make the attempt, and have endeavoured to represent Pindar's mind and meaning, and the connexion of thought, in plain unvarnished Saxon English. In doing this, I have tried to give a tolerably literal, but not servile version, *i.e.*, a version only so far free as to allow of Greek being exchanged for English idioms. For a translation which reproduces all the idioms of the original is but a travestie; it has no right to be called a translation (or *transference*) at all.¹

¹ If the necessities of the case have caused me apparently to pass

I have ventured to call Pindar the most genuine of the early Greek poets; and in the sense, that his extant works have come down to us on the whole less tampered with and less modernised than any others, I think this is true. In reading Pindar, we feel a well-founded confidence that we have before us the very words of one who lived at a known time and place. In Pindar too we have a poet *sui generis*. Standing widely apart from,—we can hardly say between,—the epic on one side and the dramatic on the other,—the lyric poetry of Pindar has the impress of a peculiar and quite unique genius. Chivalrous, if somewhat wanting in pathos, sententious rather than philosophical, jealous of his own fame though genial to others, patriotic without being illiberal, and combining real piety and trust in a divine superintendence with an unquestioning credulity in the wildest legends,¹ he is totally absorbed in

over some of those nicer shades of meaning which the Greek language can so well express, I must beg the student not too hastily to conclude that I was therefore ignorant of them. Sometimes they cannot be rendered without clumsy verbiage.

¹ "Strange it may seem to us, that with all these clear perceptions the poet should yet retain in his teaching the wildest fictions of Hellenic theology. But these traditions, we must always remember, formed in those days an essential part of all poetic lore. Trained to receive them from its earliest years, a pious, reverential mind like Pindar's would be slow indeed to reject them wholly; rather he would try to mould and blend them into something at least which resembled consistence with the higher truths of his discernment. For a man so loyal and generous, scepticism on points like these was a feeling all but impossible. Indeed that his worship of the gods was as genuine in practice as in theory, we know from the records of an ancient and credible historian." (The "Nemean Odes of Pindar," by the Rev. Arthur Holmes, 1867.)