

**SHELBURNE
ESSAYS,
FIFTH SERIES**

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Shelburne essays, fifth series by Paul Elmer More

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PAUL ELMER MORE

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Shelburne Essays

FIFTH SERIES

By Paul Elmer More

In libris quaero quid sit hominum vita.



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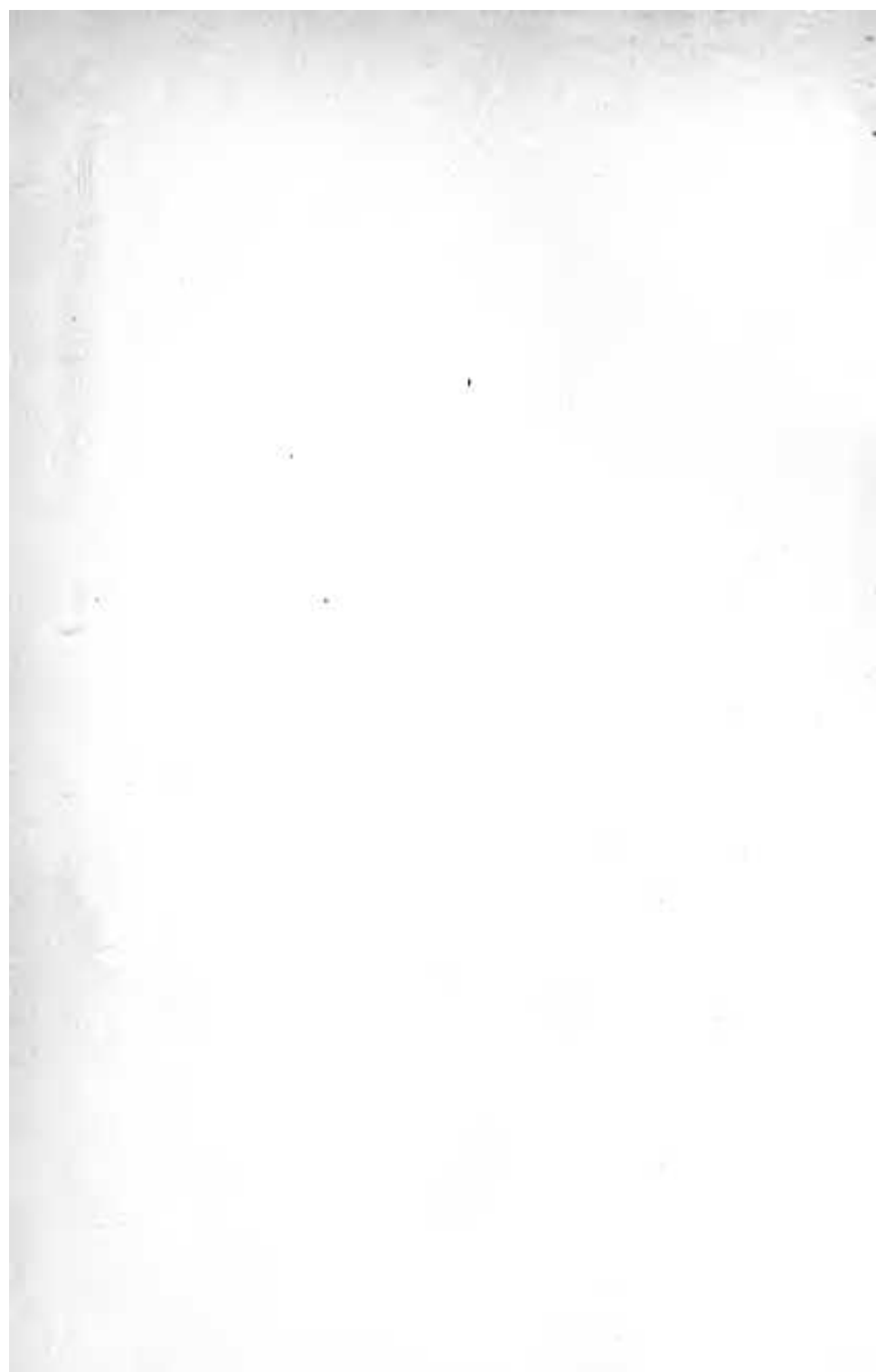
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SHELBURNE ESSAYS

FIFTH SERIES

THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY

It is true, as others have already pointed out, that Dr. Mackail in reëditing his volume of *Select Epigrams*¹ has failed to take advantage of the labours of certain German scholars during the intervening sixteen years,² and has thus missed the proper historical perspective in his Introduction. And this is regrettable, since such omissions leave the reader with a feeling of uneasiness even where the purpose of a book makes the neglected points of slight significance. As a matter of fact, Dr. Mackail's volume is one of the few really excellent works of English (or, one may add, Continental) scholarship dealing with

¹ *Select Epigrams from the Greek Anthology*, edited with revised text, translation, introduction, and notes, by J. W. Mackail, professor of poetry in the University of Oxford. New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906. The first edition appeared in 1890.

² The most important work has been done by R. Reitzenstein, whose *Epigramm und Skolion* (Giessen, 1893) I have drawn upon in this essay.

the classics as a human production. Here in brief compass, and with suitable aids to comprehension, one has the substance of a whole fascinating literature. Just to have rendered the epigrams so closely, yet with such unflinching charm, was a notable achievement. Still more signal is the accuracy with which he has selected what was essential in the great bulk of traditional matter, so as to leave in the end the impression of something closed and complete in itself. Exigencies of modern taste compelled him to omit the more characteristic epigrams of Strato's *Musa Puerilis*, as well as the too passionate and luxuriant numbers of Rufinus, which might seem to form an integral part of the Anthology; but a little reflection will show that these ardours of the flesh are almost as foreign to the heart of that literature as would be the more classical elevation of mind. If he has erred, it has been in the pardonable direction of hospitality. It would be hard to blame the maker of any anthology for including the perfect epitaphs of Simonides, and one can understand the temptation which led him to increase the number of these in his new edition. Yet I am not sure whether the artistic harmony of the book is not a little marred by such lines as these *On the Defenders of Tegea*:

Through these men's valour the smoke of the burning
of wide-floored Tegea went not up to heaven, who chose
to leave the city glad and free to their children, and
themselves to die in the forefront of battle;

whether, if anything were to be added to the section of *Epitaphs*, that town of Arcady could not have furnished a more fitting example in the verses by its poetess, Anyte :

No bridal chamber for thee, nor pride of marriage—
but above this marble tomb thy mother has raised a vir-
gin figure, having thy stature and form, O Thersis ; so
can she speak to thee, even dead.

For it cannot be stated too strongly that the real Anthology is something far removed from the heroic poetry of Greece, something in which the note of the fifth century sounds as a sharp intrusion. Echoes of the older poets there are, of course—Homeric epithets and clear reminiscences of Lesbos and Teos. And, strange as it may seem, Plato on one of his sides comes closer to the spirit of the Anthology than does any other of the great writers, so that the transition from the opening scenes of the *Phædrus* to some of the epigrams in Dr. Mackail's section of *Nature* demands but a slight readjustment of the mind. Thus, when Socrates and his ardent young friend come to the plane-tree overhanging the Ilissus, they sit down to talk, and Socrates says :

A fair and shady resting-place, full of summer sounds
and scents. There is the lofty and spreading plane-tree,
and the agnus castus high and clustering, in the fullest
blossom and the greatest fragrance ; and the stream which
flows beneath the plane-tree is deliciously cold to the
feet. Judging from the ornaments and images, this
must be a spot sacred to Achelous and the Nymphs ;