

THE RETREAT OF THE TEN THOUSAND

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BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

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Translator of 'Myths of Hellas'

WITH A PREFACE BY H. G. DAKYNS, M.A.

Translator of 'The Works of Xenophon'



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PREFACE

MISS YOUNGHUSBAND kindly insists that I should write a preface to her new volume, and I cannot refuse. It contains a translation by her hand from the German of Professor C. Witt's version of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand.

Such a book ought, I think, no less than its predecessors *The Myths of Hellas*, *The Tale of Troy*, and *The Wanderings of Ulysses*, to become a favourite with those youthful readers, to whom it is primarily addressed. Indeed, considering the nature of the history, older persons may perhaps find an interest in it.

The original Greek narrative, on which Professor Witt has based his version, is, of course, the well-known *Anabasis* of Xenophon, which is one of the most fascinating books in the world. And I agree with the translator in hoping that some of those who read the story for the first time in English will be led to study Greek sufficiently to read it again and again in the language of Xenophon himself.

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That remarkable personage, who in spite of his Spartan leanings was a thorough Athenian at heart—found himself on a sudden called upon to play the part of a leader: and played it to perfection. But if he deserved well of his countrymen and fellow soldiers by his service in the field, he has deserved still better of all later generations by the vigour, not of his sword, but of his pen.

Perhaps we owe it to his Socratic training that whilst the memories were still fresh he sat down to describe the exploits of the Ten Thousand in a style admirably suited to the narrative; and produced a masterpiece. I do not think there is a dull page in the book.

The incidents, albeit they took place in the broad noonday of Grecian history, are as thrilling as any tale told by the poets in the divine dawn of the highly gifted Hellenic race. The men themselves who play so noble a part are evidently true descendants of the Homeric heroes. If they have fits of black despondency—the cloud is soon dispelled when there is need for action, and by a sense of their own dignity. The spirit of their forefathers, who fought and won at Marathon and Salamis and Platææ, has entered into them. They enter the lists of battle with the same gaiety. They confront death with similar equanimity. Buoyancy is the distinctive note of the *Anabasis*.

But there is another side to the matter. These Xenophontine soldiers are also true *enfants du siècle*. They bear the impress of their own half century markedly : and it was an age not by any means entirely heroic. It had its painful and prosaic side.

‘Nothing,’ a famous Frenchman, M. Henri Taine, has remarked in one of his essays entitled *Xénophon*, ‘is more singular than this Greek army—which is a kind of roving commonwealth, deliberating and acting, fighting and voting : an epitome of Athens set adrift in the centre of Asia : there are the same sacrifices, the same assemblies, the same party strifes, the same outbursts of violence ; to-day at peace and to-morrow at war ; now on land and again on shipboard ; every successive incident serves but to evoke the energy and awaken the poetry latent in their souls.’

How does this happen ? It is due, I think, to the Ten Thousand to admit : It was so, because in spite of personal defects they were true to themselves. ‘The Greeks,’ as the aged Egyptian priest exclaimed to Solon, in another context, ‘are always children.’

This something childlike—this glory had not as yet in the year 400 B.C. faded into the light of common day. But as M. Taine adds concerning the writing itself, ‘The beauty of style transcends even the interest of the story,’ and we may well imagine that a less capable

writer than Xenophon (Sophænetus for instance) would have robbed the narrative and the actors alike of half their splendour.

And what of Xenophon himself? There is much to be said on that topic. But it is 'another story.' In this he must speak for himself.

H. G. DAKYNS.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

IN translating Professor Witt's version of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand, I have ventured to divide the chapters, and also to re-arrange in some cases the grouping of sentences and paragraphs, for the sake of greater clearness. The figures given for numbers, distances and sums of money, are the same as in Mr. Dakyns' translation of the works of Xenophon. Here and there too I have modified or omitted or added a phrase, as for instance in substituting, on the first page, Alfred the Great for Karl der Grosse, as an example more familiar to English readers; and in adding to the description of Persepolis one or two details to explain the illustrations. But in the main I have endeavoured to reproduce accurately Professor Witt's text in simple English, without either addition or omission.

The illustrations are mostly taken (by permission) from MM. Perrot and Chipiez's 'Histoire de l'Art dans l'Antiquité.' Some few are from Baumeister's Dictionary.