

# **ESSAYS ON GREEK LITERATURE**

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Essays on Greek literature by Robert Yelverton Tyrrell

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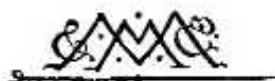
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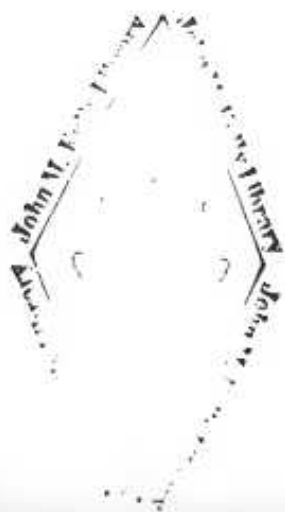
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ON  
GREEK LITERATURE

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## PREFACE

It will be seen that none of the five Essays here brought together has been written within the last five years, while the earliest of them was published more than twenty years ago. For permission to republish the first four my thanks are due to the well-known courtesy of the proprietor of the 'Quarterly Review.' The fifth is reprinted by the kind permission of the 'International Quarterly,' Messrs. Duffield & Co., Publishers, New York.

I harboured for many years the project of producing these five Essays on Greece together with others on Latin and English Literature; but I have been advised on good authority that such a collection would be incongruous and unacceptable. I had thought of endeavouring to bring the studies more up-to-date; but in some cases there seemed little to add, and in others such an attempt would have run counter to the original design.

In reference to the first Essay I venture to think that Professor Bury's arguments against the nomic basis of Pindar's 'Odes of Victory,' though brilliant like all the work of that most versatile and eminent scholar, are not convincing. The Essay has to a great extent dealt with them in anticipation; while



the Editors who see in the Poems an elaborate system of 'responsions' have hardly succeeded in recommending their views to students of Pindar.

In the essay on Sophocles, pp. 60-63, the question is discussed whether Haemon did really spit in his father's face, and whether he was justified in so doing—whether *πτύσας προσώπῳ* ('Ant.' 1232) means 'spitting in his face' or 'with loathing in his looks,' as the scholiast explains the words, followed by nearly all Editors, but not by Jebb. It is interesting to observe that Aristotle in referring to this very passage ('Poet.' 1454a) has not a word to say about Haemon's 'splendida bilis,' but condemns as inartistic the abortive lunge which Haemon made at his father before he plunged the cross-handled sword in his own body. Nowadays the abortive lunge would be accepted as a good piece of business, the spitting would be (as we have seen) condemned by nearly all modern critics. The passage in the 'Poetics' in Butcher's admirable translation runs thus:—

'Of all these ways, to be about to act, knowing the consequences, and then not to act, is the worst. It is shocking without being tragic, for no disaster follows. It is therefore never or very rarely found in poetry. One instance, however, is in the "Antigone," where Haemon intends to kill Creon.'

In impugning the Aristotelean authorship of the treatise on the 'Constitution of Athens' I am aware that I am putting myself in opposition to the majority of English scholars, but I have not found in the champions of the Aristotelean origin, even in the exhaustive and most scholarly edition by Dr. Sandys, any answer to my arguments or any

solution of the difficulties which I have pointed out, founded on the style and diction of the tract as well as on the non-recognition of this specific treatise by Plutarch and subsequent writers. On the Continent the belief in the authenticity of the 'Constitution of Athens' is by no means so general as in England. The following extract from the Preface of the brilliant edition of H. van Herwerden and J. van Leeuwen (1891), Englished from his very elegant Latin, expresses the views of some scholars in Great Britain and of many on the Continent:—

'The importance of the Treatise on the 'Constitution of Athens,' long lost but recently edited by Kenyon from Papyri in the British Museum, depends in a very large measure on the crucial question whether it is really the work of Aristotle, to whom it is ascribed by antiquity as far as we know, as well as by the majority (apparently) of modern critics since its recent discovery; or whether, like so many other works ascribed to the great Stagirite, it falsely claims the sanction of his commanding name. The latter view was held by Valentine Rose, even when the work was known to us only in fragments; and, now that we have it in its entirety (or nearly so, for it is defective at the beginning and at the end), the same judgment has been pronounced and fortified with strong arguments by such critics as Fr. Cauer, J. van Leeuwen, H. Droysen, Fr. Ruehl, J. Schwarcz. But, even though by further research of the learned world it should be proved well nigh to demonstration that the recently discovered 'Constitution of Athens' is wholly unworthy of the Arch-Philosopher, even though this should be established beyond all doubt,

no judicious reader will readily deny that the new Treatise is from many points of view a boon to students of the History and Antiquities of Athens and of Greek literature as a whole.'

The judgment of such scholars as Herwerden and those whom he cites must not be lightly set aside. But we cannot accept his statement as to the belief of the ancient world in the authenticity of the tract. We know that they recognised *a Treatise* on the Constitution of Athens by Aristotle; but we submit that there is abundant evidence that it was not the Treatise now before us.

Allusion is made in the paper on Plutarch to the surviving traces of the hedge-schoolmaster among the Irish peasantry. The blurred fashion in which the heroes of Greek mythology are fused with vague memories of biblical personages is well indicated in the familiar Irish song which celebrates

'Homer, Plutarch, and Nebuchadnezzar,  
All standing naked in the open air.'

It is hoped that the volume may commend itself to such readers as may take an interest in critical questions and may desire to have before them in a concise form the most interesting portions of the more recent finds, 'The Constitution of Athens' and the 'Poems of Bacchylides.' All the translations from the latter were published before the appearance of Jebb's monumental edition.