

**THE PLEA OF
PAN, PP. 1-189**

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The Plea of Pan, pp. 1-189 by Henry W. Nevinson

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BY

HENRY W. NEVINSON

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DEDICATED TO
THE EARTH-MOTHER

*To Earth, who bore the dragon broods,
Spanning beside the unnavigated waves
Devouring lizards with bats' wings ;
Who housed a terror deep in woods,
And down the gulf of fiery caves
Wrought mammoths and plate-armoured things ;*

*Who glories in the tiger's might,
And feeds the snake, sin's counterpart ;
Who drinks the blood of clanging wars,
And bears through the silences of night
The melody of a lover's heart
Among the unchanged, untrodden stars.*

I

A NEW PHEIDIPPIDES

IT happened once that I was in Greece at a time when the country was not so familiar to us as it became during the Turkish invasion. In spite of its beauty and associations, it was not a very attractive place to the average Englishman. There was good bathing in the *Ægean*, and pretty fair climbing on Olympus, but no fishing to speak of, and hardly any sport at all. The Duke of Sparta had some moderate shooting in Elis. There was talk of boars and wolves upon Cithæron still, but I could not get a sight of any. The brigands were very nearly exterminated, and in fact I saw no game, beyond a few hares at Sunium, and some snipe on the *Alpheus*. Plenty of eagles, of

course; and at Mycenæ I watched a Greek native practising at one with an old muzzle-loader; but the real local sport is to fire pistols into old temple columns at twelve paces. For there are any number of ruins and things about, though to the ordinary Englishman they are rather like our grandmothers' love-scenes—pretty in their day, but no special concern of ours.

And yet, as I dawdled through the country on one pony or another, I saw a few queer things, and perhaps the queerest of all was a god. Of course there was nothing remarkable in the mere fact of encountering such a being; many people have seen a god before now, and there was no reason why I should not see one, too, if he happened to be about. But the peculiarity of the event lay in the god's personality. He was not much to look at, poor old boy, but a rare fellow to talk, and he said some unusual things, which I

cannot remember completely ; for indeed he was not talking actually to me, but to a fellow named Gordon, whom I had met the evening before at a little town high up in the mountains in Arcadia. I took him for a don at first, because he was so detestably polite, and kept calling my pony a mule, and knew his way about Greece without a 'Baedeker.' We slept in one room on a fairly clean rug, and he woke me at half-past four, and from the window I saw Erymanthus, a long range of square-topped mountains, just beginning to look grey with their snows against the sky of night. In Greece they save you a lot of time by not giving you anything to wash in. So, before five we were out in the dirty street with two little ponies and a guide. We were going to see a famous old temple, and the country round was certainly very beautiful. The stony track went straight into the hills directly we left the little

town, and we crossed two high passes, and made our way through uninhabited valleys, and round the heads of water-courses, and through woods of a bushy kind of fir, and over stretches of green, covered with all manner of flowers and shrubs, where some early nightingales were trying to get their notes in tune, and hoopoes went flitting about like woodpeckers pretending to be butterflies. After some three hours' climbing we came to the top of the highest spur from the central range, and there, just in front of us, two or three hundred yards down, we saw the grey columns of the temple itself. Nearly all are still standing, and I think nearly every one would have thought them rather fine, all alone out there in the hills. We lay down on a lot of thyme and other plants close outside the temple, having a view of the sea in two places, on each side the Messenian promontory; and, far away in the south, the mountains

of Taygetus, down by Sparta, ran up into sharp peaks like the Alps, covered with snow. The guide sat behind us with the ponies, and began playing with his string of beads—the only intellectual exercise of a modern Greek. Then I asked Gordon if he wouldn't tell me something about the temple.

'I know nothing particular about it,' he said; 'not half so much as "Baedeker."'

So I told him not to pretend to be a worse prig than heaven made him. And I thought I heard some one laugh behind us, but I could only see the Greek staring sleepily at his beads.

'Well,' said Gordon, 'the temple was built as a thankoffering to Apollo the Giver of Health, and was designed by the same architect as the temple of Apollo's sister at Athens. It stands on the site of an old shrine of Pan, who, of course, was worshipped in all this pastoral district.'