

**GREEK WIT: A COLLECTION
OF SMART SAYINGS AND
ANECDOTES, TRANSLATED
FROM GREEK PROSE WRITERS**

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Greek Wit: A Collection of Smart Sayings and Anecdotes, Translated from Greek Prose Writers
by F. A. Paley

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F. A. PALEY

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L. Frank.
Paris. Oct 27th 1883.

GREEK WIT.

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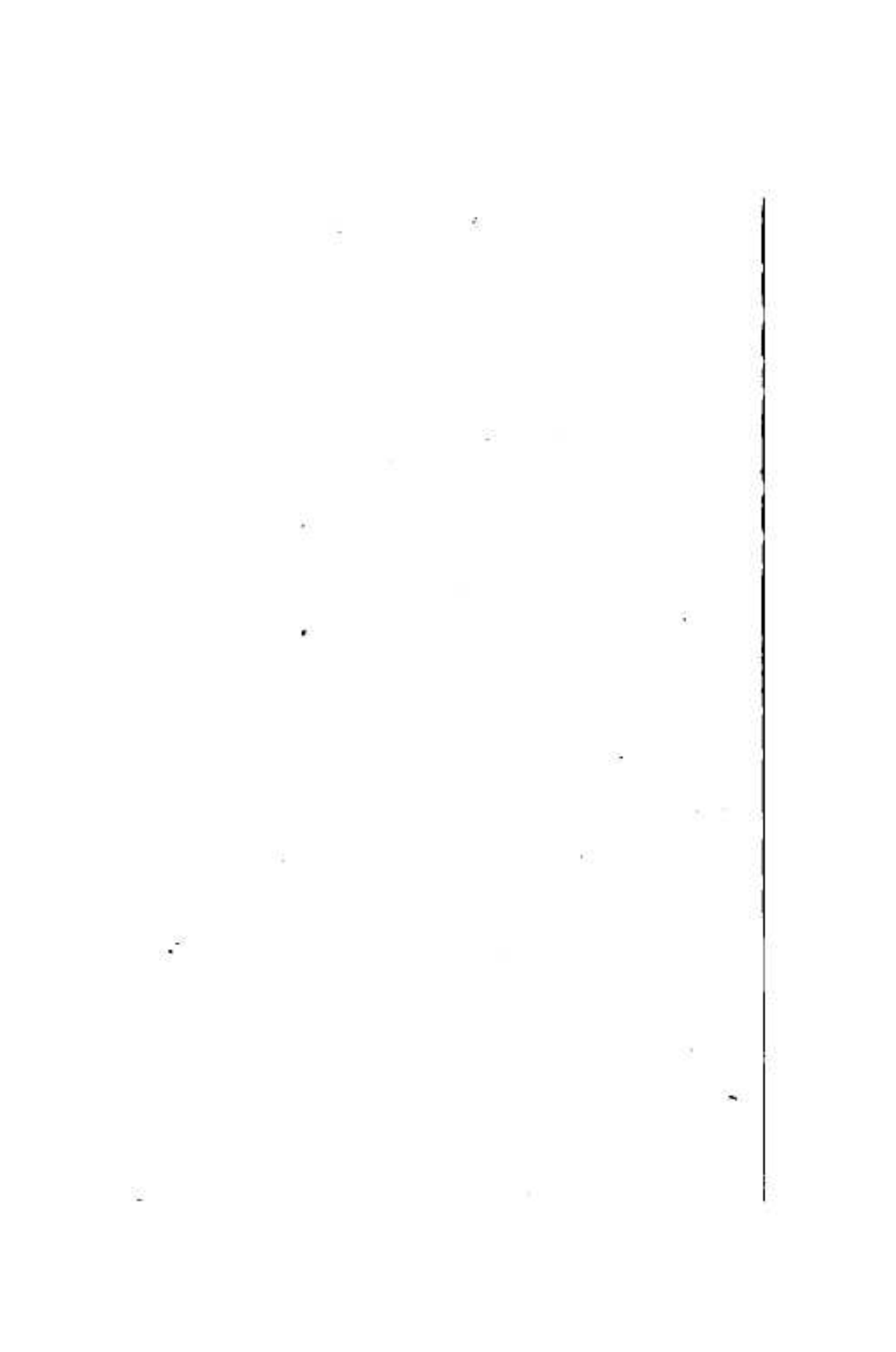
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NOTICE.

MY little volume of "Greek Wit," though it has been received with mixed praise and blame, yet has met with sufficient success to justify the Publishers in issuing a second series, which was conditionally promised, and which, it is believed, will be found on the whole to contain a better collection of "Sayings" than the former volume.

The truth seems to be, that some who had expected, from the title, a "funny" book—a mere collection of light jokes—were a little disappointed. I had taken care to point out the difference between *fun* and *wit*, and had also noticed the apparent want of capacity in some persons for really appreciating either the one or the other. To such, of course, books of this kind will always seem more or less dull. There are others who can see the wit or the point of a few anecdotes, but not of the majority. Not unnaturally, both these regard the selection as

“rather a poor one on the whole ;” and they think, no doubt (and rightly, according to their own standard), that a good many might be struck out altogether, and that better, *i. e.*, some others more amusing to them, could easily be substituted.

Two things are to be considered in estimating Greek wit ; first, that it comes to us under some disadvantage in translation ; secondly, that what was wit to a Greek has not necessarily the same degree of cleverness or originality to us ; and therefore it is apt to seem what is called “poor wit.” The collection of nearly 800 sayings and anecdotes in this little work—and to get together so many from the voluminous extant writings of the Greeks was impossible without much labour—contains an immense amount of practical good sense and of real wisdom, often very interesting from its identity with and its anticipation of our recognized code of justice and morality. It is therefore quite as much for their wisdom as for their wit—albeit the words are etymologically the same—that these sayings have a claim to be appreciated. There is much in them that is well fitted for quotation even in the pulpit and in the senate.

I believe by far the larger part of the contents of these two volumes is quite unknown to ordinary readers, whose acquaintance with Greek literature seldom exceeds the limits of school or university reading. From Plutarch and Lucian alone an ample gleanings is still to be made, and there are several authors from whom nothing has here been taken. I think I could engage to select materials even for a third series, if I had the time to ransack all the works of the later Greek writers. But such a work, if worth performing, must be left to others.

A very considerable portion of the anecdotes in the present volume are taken from Diogenes Laertius, whose "*Lives of the Philosophers*," in ten books, are less read than they deserve to be. Athenæus and Stobæus have pretty largely contributed; Plutarch's "*Lives*" have also been read through with the same object in view, but to the exclusion of sayings of illustrious Romans, as not strictly falling under the title of "*Greek Wit*." The extensive and very varied "*Opera Moralia*" of Plutarch would doubtless have furnished a good number of stories; but the task of going through them for this purpose alone was