

**THE EXTANT ODES OF PINDAR;
TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND
SHORT NOTES**

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Ernest Myers

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BY

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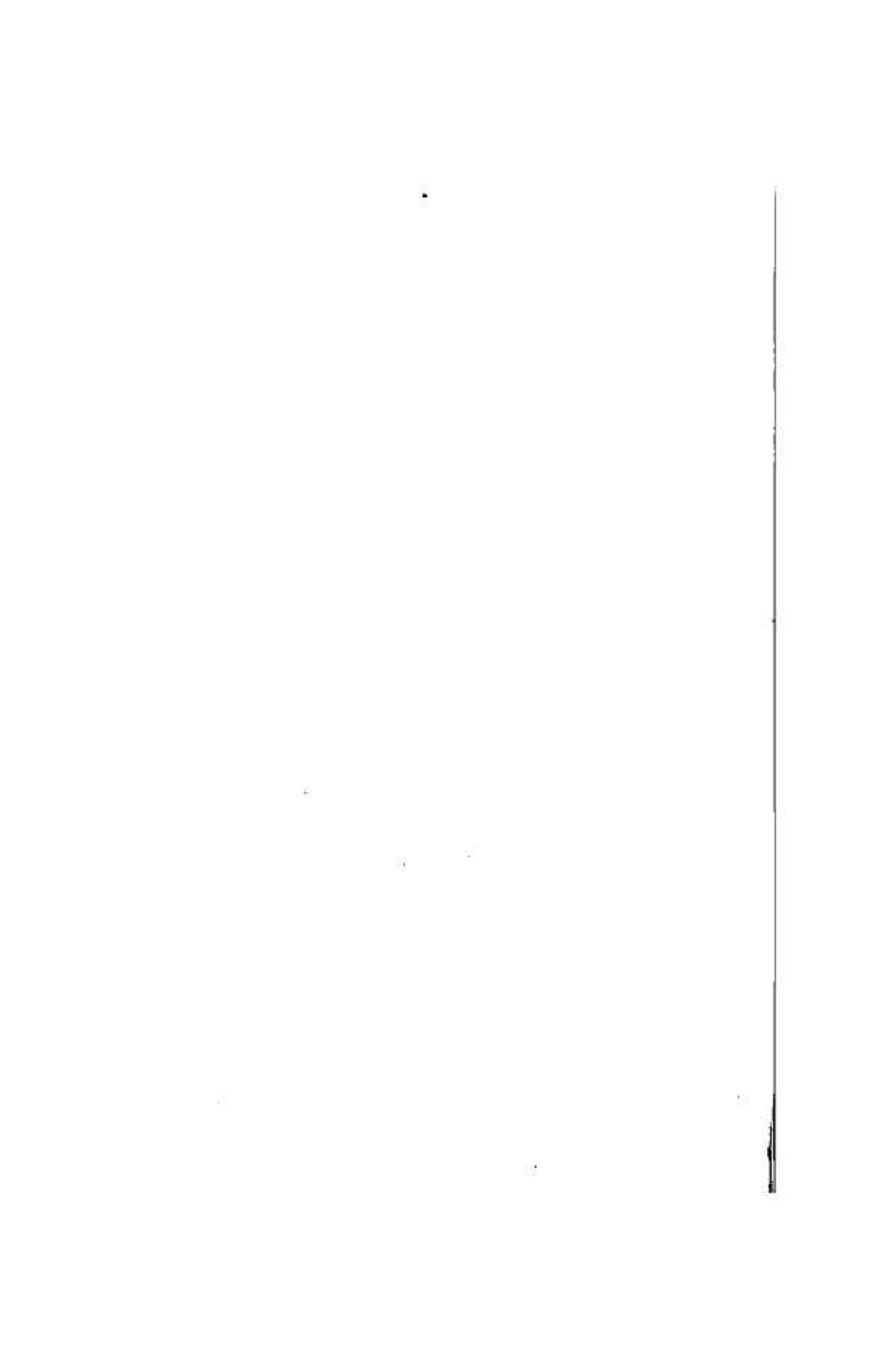
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SON OF THE LIGHTNING, FAIR AND FIERY STAR,
STRONG-WINGED IMPERIAL PINDAR, VOICE DIVINE,
LET THESE DEEP DRAUGHTS OF THY ENCHANTED WINE
LIFT ME WITH THEE IN SOARINGS HIGH AND FAR
PROUDER THAN PEGASEÏN, OR THE CAR
WHEREIN APOLLO RAPT THE HUNTRESS MAID.
SO LET ME RANGE MINE HOUR, TOO SOON TO FADE
INTO STRANGE PRESENCE OF THE THINGS THAT ARE.
YET KNOW THAT EVEN AMID THIS JARRING NOISE
OF HATES, LOVES, CREEDS, TOGETHER HEAPED AND HURLED,
SOME ECHO FAINT OF GRACE AND GRANDEUR STIRS
FROM THY SWEET HELLAS, HOME OF NOBLE JOYS.
FIRST FRUIT AND BEST OF ALL OUR WESTERN WORLD;
WHATEVER WE HOLD OF BEAUTY, HALF IS HERS.



INTRODUCTION.

PROBABLY no poet of importance equal or approaching to that of Pindar finds so few and so infrequent readers. The causes are not far to seek: in the first and most obvious place comes the great difficulty of his language, in the second the frequent obscurity of his thought, resulting mainly from his exceeding allusiveness and his abrupt transitions, and in the third place that amount of monotony which must of necessity attach to a series of poems provided for a succession of similar occasions.

It is as an attempt towards obviating the first of these hindrances to the study of Pindar, the difficulty of his language, that this translation is of course especially intended. To whom and in what cases are translations of poets useful? To a perfect scholar in the original tongue they are superfluous, to one wholly ignorant of it they are apt to be (unless here and there to a Keats) meaningless, flat, and puzzling. There remains the third class of those who have a certain amount of knowledge of a language, but not enough to enable them to read unassisted its more difficult books without an expenditure of time and trouble which is virtually prohibitive. It is to this class that a translation ought, it would seem, chiefly to address itself. An intelligent person of cultivated literary taste, and able to read the easier books in an acquired language, will feel himself indebted to a hand which unlocks for him the inner chambers of a temple in whose outer courts he had already delighted to wander. Without therefore saying that the merely 'English reader' may never derive pleasure and instruction from a translation of a foreign poet, for to this rule our current version of the Hebrew psalmists and prophets furnish one marked exception at least—still, it is probably to what may be called the half-learned class that the translator must preeminently look to find an audience.

The other causes of Pindar's unpopularity to which reference was made above, the obscurity of his thought and the monotony of his subjects, will in great measure disappear by means of attentive study of the poems themselves, and of other sources from which may be gathered an understanding of the region of thought and feeling in which they move. In proportion to our familiarity not only with Hellenic mythology and history, but with Hellenic life and habits of thought generally, will be our readiness and facility in seizing the drift and import of what Pindar says, in divining what has passed through his mind: and in his case perhaps even more than in the case of other poets, this facility will increase indefinitely with our increasing acquaintance with his works and with the light thrown on each part of them by the rest¹.

The monotony of the odes, though to some extent unquestionably and unavoidably real, is to some extent also superficial and in appearance only. The family of the victor, or his country, some incident of his past, some possibility of his future life, suggest in each case some different legendary matter, some different way of treating it, some different application of it, general or particular, or both. Out of such resources Pindar is inexhaustible in building up in subtly varying forms the splendid structure of his song.

Yet doubtless the drawbacks in reading Pindar, though they may be largely reduced, will always in some degree exist: we shall always wish that he was easier to construe, that his allusions to things unfamiliar and sometimes undiscoverable to us were less frequent, that family pride had not made it customary for him to spend so many lines on an enumeration of prizes won elsewhere and at other times by the victor of the occasion or by his kin. Such drawbacks can only fall into insignificance when eclipsed by consideration of the far more than counterbalancing attractions of the poems, of their unique and surpassing interest, poetical, historical, and moral.

¹ The importance and interest to a student in Hellenic literature of a collateral study of whatever remains to us of Hellenic plastic art—statues, vases, gems, and coins—can hardly be too strongly insisted on.

Of Pindar as a poet it is hard indeed to speak adequately, and almost as hard to speak briefly, for a discussion of his poetical characteristics once begun may wander far before even a small part has been said of what might be. To say that to his poetry in supreme degree belong the qualities of force, of vividness, of intoxicating splendour, of the majesty of a lofty style, the expression of a high personality, of a mastery of rhythm and metre and imaginative diction, of an intensely Hellenic spirit modified by an unmistakable individuality, above all of a pre-eminent rapidity as of an eagle's flight or of very lightning—to say all this would be to suggest some of the most obvious features of these wonderful odes; and each of these qualities, and many more requiring exacter delineation, might be illustrated with numberless instances which even in the faint image of a translation would furnish ample testimony². But as this introduction is intended for those who purpose reading Pindar's poetry, or at any rate the present translation of it, for themselves, I will leave it to them to discover for themselves the qualities which have given Pindar his high place among poets, and will pass on to suggest briefly his claims to interest us by reason of his place in the history of human action and human thought.

We know very little of Pindar's life. He was born in or about the year B.C. 522, at the village of Kynoskephalai near Thebes. He was thus a citizen of Thebes and seems to have always had his home there. But he travelled among other states, many of which have been glorified by his art. For his praise of Athens, 'bulwark of Hellas,' the city which at Artemision 'laid the foundation of freedom,' the Thebans are said to have fined him; but the generous Athenians paid the fine, made him their Proxenos, and erected his statue at the public cost. For the magnificent Sicilian princes, Hieron of Syracuse and Theron of Akragas, not unlike the Medici in the position they held, Pindar wrote five of the longest of his extant odes, and probably visited them in Sicily. But he would not quit his home to be an orna-

² In Mr. J. A. Symonds' 'Studies of the Greek Poets' there is an essay on Pindar which dwells with much appreciative eloquence upon the poet's literary characteristics.