

STREAMS OF HISTORY
ANCIENT GREECE

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ANCIENT GREECE**

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF GREECE

Earlier in our history work we studied the geography of four countries. Two of them—Egypt and Babylon—were large and in rich valleys; the other two—Palestine and Phœnicia—were small, had rather thin soil, were cut up by hills and mountains, and had no great rivers in them.

In the two great river countries, the people could sail up the rivers, which ran from one end of the country to the other, and then float back on the current. By this means everybody in the country came to know one another somewhat, and to have much the same ways of thinking and living; and so it was easy for them also to have just one ruler, or king.

But in the small countries we studied,—Palestine and Phœnicia,—which were so cut up by rugged mountains, and had no great rivers running through them, we found it was hard for the people to have just one person to rule them. They were much more likely to break up into small groups of people, each having its own customs and ways of life as well as its own ruler. It was so most of the time in Palestine, and almost always so in Phœnicia, except that sometimes a great king, like Hiram, might rule in Tyre, and

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have a loose control over the other great cities in the country.

Now all these people whom we have been studying about,—the Babylonians, the Egyptians, and the Jews,—when they grew rich, traded what they had to sell to the Phœnicians; and the Phœnicians, brave people that they were, went out all over the Mediterranean and traded with all the peoples living on its borders,—not only taking them wheat, barley, dyes and fruits, but also taking many beautiful and useful things, such as tools and vessels for farm and household. They also taught them the alphabet, which the Eastern countries had worked out by patient thought and labor of several thousand years.

One of the very first countries to which the Phœnicians came, in going westward, was the land of the Greeks. It would take them but five or six days to go from their own country to Greece in one of the boats which we studied about in the first volume of this series, and not even so long as that for them to reach one of the many beautiful green islands which lay between their country and Greece.

Now, since we are about to study the Greek people, I want you to see something of the country in which they lived.

If we could have taken one of those triremes with a Phœnician trader and gone with him on a trading trip to Greece, we would have first noticed, as we came within forty or fifty or seventy-five miles of the country, a great many islands out in the sea, looking just like stepping-stones to tempt people into the

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Greek coast, and to tempt the Greek people, who lived on the coast, out to trade with the people around; and as we went on up to the coast of Greece, we would see ever so many arms of the sea creeping far up into the country, making excellent landing places for boats,—just the kind of places to get easily what the people had to sell, and to trade off to them the things in the boat. And it was a fact also that the many islands, scattered out in the sea right in the face of Greece, had nearly every one of them good harbors. It was also true that the arms of the sea ran far up into the mainland of Greece, making, all told, so many excellent harbors, that the peoples around the Mediterranean easily learned to trade with Greece. And the Greeks, on the other hand, became active and daring, and traveled much around the Mediterranean, trading with everybody and planting colonies wherever a favorable trading spot was found.

But another most striking thing we would have noticed as we approached the country on the boat, would have been that Greece looked like a mountain rising straight out of the blue Mediterranean. When we were far off, it would have looked like one solid mountain; but as we came nearer, say eight or ten miles away, we should have thought Greece was nothing but mountain peaks and crags.

The fact is, it was somewhat more than mountain peaks, but not so very much more. To begin with, the whole country was somewhat smaller than Indiana. It was a part of Europe, but its size on the map as compared to the rest of Europe was about the size of the little finger nail as compared to the size of the palm

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of the hand; and as compared with the size of Asia, it would compare about as the size of Rhode Island would with the whole of North America.

But now as to the mountains. There is almost in the center of Greece a high mountain called Parnassus. It is a beautiful mountain, and persons can climb it. We will imagine ourselves on top of it, to get a look over Greece. In every direction we would look, we would see mountains; and not very regular ones, either, but often knotted and twisted ones running in all directions, and of every shape; then, again, in another direction would be a long ridge of mountains like a backbone, and running off from it ever so many spurs, like ribs. As we stood on top of Parnassus and looked around, it would seem like a vast, wild, rugged country. The cliffs and crags would be steep and barren; there would be but few roads leading over them on account of their steepness.

But as we looked down toward the feet of these rugged cliffs, we would see scattered all about among them little plains and upland hollows. The very largest of the plains would be perhaps as large as a good-sized county; then some would be as large as a township; others would be smaller, not larger than a good-sized farm; and some would be mere tiny patches in a hollow between two mountains, perhaps not larger than a good-sized field.

Now one thing that came about from having Greece cut up into so many pieces, and with such high mountain walls around them, was that hundreds of little cities, or villages, as we would often call them, grew

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up all over the country, each having its own customs and ways of living, and each its own form of government. You see the mountains were so high and so steep, and so few paths or roads lead from one side to the other, that the people living on the two sides could not become well acquainted with each other. They grew up not caring much for any Greek people except those living in their own little valley. When they did meet others, it would be to fight them for some little trouble or other which might arise, or simply because they were jealous of their growth. If you would imagine each one of the principal cities of your own state ruling itself entirely, and making all its laws, and fighting the other cities much of the time, it would be much like it was in Greece.

Another thing which made this trouble all the worse was the rivers. Greece had no large river running all through it from end to end, like the Nile in Egypt or the Mississippi in our own country. There were several small rivers in the country, but the mountains were so steep and so near the shore that it made the rivers very rapid, short and often rocky. There was not a single river in all Greece upon which one could travel with a boat. In winter and spring, when it rained and the snow melted off the mountains, the rivers would plunge down the mountain side and with terrible strength overflow the meadows (no wonder the Greeks made their river-gods having bodies of strong beasts); then in the summer time they would be entirely dry. Thus the rivers did not make natural roadways from one part of the country to another; and this helped, like the mountains, to keep the people separ-

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ated, and caused each small group to build up a little city-state by itself and to care very little for any of the other city-states. For these reasons you can partly see why it was not easy for Greece, in all the thousand years her little snarling city-states were growing up, to have just one united state and one ruler over them all, as we have in the United States.

But there was another thing about this rugged country of which I have been telling you, that was much to the advantage of the Greeks. It helped them to defend their country from enemies. There were very few passes in the mountains, and often the mountains would come right down to the water's edge and against those arms of the sea I told you about, so that there would just be room for a wagon to crawl between the sea and the steep cliff. Now, if enemies tried to come from the north down into the country and capture the Greeks, a few brave men could so completely guard these passes that they could keep back a whole army. In one of these passes Leonidas, the Spartan king, and his brave handful of men guarded the pass of Thermopylæ and kept back for several days the whole Persian army of hundreds of thousands of men.

If the Greeks had not been so selfish and had been willing to help one another when the enemies tried to get into their country to conquer them, they could have so completely stopped up these passes and narrow paths as to make it almost impossible for an enemy to conquer them. It was a pity the Greeks never could learn to work together—not even in time of greatest danger.

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There were several other ways in which the mountains had an influence on the lives of the Greeks: in the first place, they made the soil often rather stony and thin, for fully five-sixths of the country was so barren and rocky that it was fit only for pasture; and although there were rich spots in places, yet what the Greeks got from the soil they had to work for; this made them self-reliant, hardy and full of health, and this was good for them. It is not necessarily the country where the soil is exceedingly rich and people have to work but little for a living that has the strongest and wisest men.

Then another way the mountains influenced the people, was in their religion. Some of the peaks were high and covered almost all year with snow. This was especially true of Mt. Olympus, up in the northeastern part of Greece. On the top of this snow-capped, cloud-capped mountain, to which they could not climb, the Greeks imagined their chief gods and goddesses lived. Far up in the snows and clouds they had their homes, and only occasionally came down from the top to mingle with the people below. These mountains were clothed at their feet and far up their sides with groves of beech, ash, pine and oak. The Greeks imagined also that far above in their upland hollows in the forests, in caverns and in quiet places of retreat, many gods and goddesses dwelt. In these groves and grottoes priestesses lived, and listened to the murmuring leaves of the oaks or breathed in the vapors which came from the cavern, and thus tried to find out the way the gods wished them to act. These places where they would go to consult their gods were called *oracles*.

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A very famous one, where Zeus was consulted, was at Dodona in an oak grove in Epirus, in northwestern Greece, but the most famous in all Greece was the Oracle of Delphi, up on the slope of a mountain adjoining Mt. Parnassus, in a cavern from which a vapor came. There was a steep cliff immediately above, and a great chasm below. Here the richest temple of all Greece was built by the money paid by those who came to consult the oracle and worship Apollo.

The mountains also furnish fine stone for building, especially a blue and green stone called porphyry; and a very beautiful marble, which they used for making statues, as fine as the world has ever seen. There were silver, iron and copper in the mountains, and these helped in their commerce by giving them something of which to coin money, and likewise something to sell. They also furnished them material for making useful tools for farm and household.

In the forests of the mountains, plains and fields, were many animals, both tame and wild, which were used for food. The wild boar, deer, wolf and bear for large game, and the quails, hares, thrushes, partridges, pigeons, for small, gave food for the table and enabled the Greeks to enjoy the delights of hunting.

The temperature of Greece was neither very cold nor very hot; the atmosphere was dry and bright; the breezes came in everywhere from the mountains and the sea, to cool and refresh; for there was no spot in all Greece more than fifteen miles from a mountain or forty miles from the sea: all this tended to make the Greek quick and energetic. In such a climate he could

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work, take gymnastic exercises,—often without any clothing, and never with much,—participate with delight in the festivals to the gods, and enjoy the chase in the forest and field.

Thus we see that notwithstanding the Greek lived in a little country, cut up by mountains very greatly, and with rather a thin soil, yet take it all in all—mountain, wood, cliff, rock, sea, river, sky, island and ocean, all beautifully combined—it was a delightful and invigorating earth and sky which surrounded him, and stimulated him to produce the rarest grace and beauty in art ever produced by any people in the world. And in the festivals which he enjoyed, with music, song and dance; in the worship of the gods and goddesses; in stately processions; and in their games which gathered together all that would delight both body and mind, they lived almost as if their life was one continual holiday. The Greek's ideal was a beautiful soul in a beautiful body. His beautiful country no doubt greatly aided and stimulated him, as we have seen, to think much about and to work out this ideal.