PLATO AND PLATONISM

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184. +Transliteration: homoion homoiô. Pater’s translation: "like to like." Variants of the phrase occur in many of Plato’s dialogues; see, for example, Parmenides 132d.

185. +Transliteration: hopê an ho logos, hôsper pneuma, pherê, tautê iteon. Pater’s translation: "we must just go where the argument carries us, as a vessel runs before the wind." Plato, Republic 394d.

187. +Transliteration: epistêmê. Liddell and Scott definition "1. knowledge, understanding, skill, experience, wisdom; 2. scientific knowledge."

189. +Transliteration: Kindyneuei. Pater’s translation: "it may chance to be."

190. +Transliteration: theôria. Liddell and Scott definition: "a looking at, viewing, beholding . . . contemplation, reflection." Pater defines it in Platonic terms as "immediate intuition." For example, Plato, Republic 486a.

190. +Transliteration: apokamnôn. Liddell and Scott definition: "grow[ing] quite weary." See, for example, Plato, Protagoras 333b.


195. +Transliteration: kosmos. Liddell and Scott definition: "I. 1. order; 2. good order, good behaviour, decency; 3. a set form or order: of states, government; 4. the mode or fashion of a thing; II. an ornament. . .; III. the world or universe, from its perfect

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CHAPTER 8: LACEDAEMON

[197] AMONG the Greeks, philosophy has flourished longest, and is still most abundant, at Crete and Lacedaemon; and there there are more teachers of philosophy than anywhere else in the world. But the Lacedaemonians deny this, and pretend to be unlearned people, lest it should become manifest that it is through philosophy they are supreme in Greece; that they may be thought to owe their supremacy to their fighting and manly spirit, for they think that if the means of their superiority were made known all the Greeks would practise this. But now, by keeping it a secret, they have succeeded in misleading the Laconisers in the various cities of Greece; and in imitation of them these people buffet themselves, and practise gymnastics, and put on boxing-gloves, and wear short cloaks, as if it were by such things that the Lacedaemonians excel all other Greeks. But the Lacedaemonians, when they wish to have intercourse with their philosophers without reserve, and are weary of going to them by stealth, make legal proclamation that those Laconisers should depart, with any other aliens who may be sojourning among them, and thereupon betake themselves to their sophists unobserved by strangers. And you may know that what I say is true, and that the Lacedaemonians are better instructed than all other people in philosophy and the art of discussion in this way. If any one will converse with even the most insignificant of the Lacedaemonians, he may find him indeed in the greater part of what he says seemingly but a poor creature; but then at some chance point in the conversation he will throw in some brief compact saying, worthy of remark, like a clever archer, so that his interlocutor shall seem no better than a child. Of [198] this fact some both of those now living and of the ancients have been aware, and that to Laconise consists in the study of philosophy far rather than in the pursuit of gymnastic, for they saw that to utter such sayings as those was only possible for a perfectly educated man. Of these was Thales of Miletus, Pittacus of Mytilene, Bias the Prienean, and our own Solon, Cleobulus the Lindian, and Myson of Chen, and the seventh among them was called Chilon, a Lacedaemonian. These were all zealous lovers and disciples of the culture of the Lacedaemonians. And any one may understand that their philosophy was something of this kind, short rememberable sayings uttered by each of them. They met together and offered these in common, as the first fruits of philosophy, to Apollo in his temple at Delphi, and they wrote upon the walls these sayings known and read of all men: Gnōthi sauton and Mēden agan. Protagoras, 343.+ 

Of course there is something in that of the romance to which the genius of Plato readily inclined him; something also of the Platonic humour or
irony, which suggests, for example, to Meno, so anxious to be
instructed in the theory of virtue, that the philosophic temper must be
departed from Attica, its natural home, to Thessaly—to the rude
northern capital whence that ingenuous youth was freshly arrived.

Partly romantic, partly humorous, in his Lacon-
ism, Plato is however

quite serious in locating a certain spirit at Lacedaemon of which his
own ideal Republic would have been the completer development; while the
picture he draws of it presents many a detail taken straight from
Lacedaemon as it really was, as if by an admiring visitor, who had in
person paced the streets of the Dorian metropolis it was so difficult
for any [199] alien to enter. What was actually known of that stern
place, of the Lacedaemonians at home, at school, had charmed into
fancies about it other philosophic theorists; Xenophon for instance,
who had little or nothing of romantic tendency about them.

And there was another sort of romancing also, quite opposite to this of
Plato, concerning the hard ways among themselves of those
Lacedaemonians who were so invincible in the field. "The
Lacedaemonians," says Pausanias, "appear to have admired least of all
people poetry and the praise which it bestows." "At Lacedaemon there
is more philosophy than anywhere else in the world," is what Plato, or
the Platonic Socrates, had said. Yet, on the contrary, there were some
who alleged that true Lacedaemonians—Lacedaemonian nobles—for their
protection against the "effeminacies" of culture, were denied all
knowledge of reading and writing. But then we know that written books
are properly a mere assistant, sometimes, as Plato himself suggests, a
treachery assistant, to memory; those conservative Lacedaemonians
being, so to speak, the people of memory pre-eminently, and very
appropriately, for, whether or not they were taught to read and write,
they were acknowledged adepts in the Pythagorean philosophy, a
philosophy which attributes to memory so preponderating a function in
the mental life. "Writing," says K. O. M"uller in his laborious, [200]
yet, in spite of its air of coldness, passably romantic work on The
Dorians—an author whose quiet enthusiasm for his subject resulted
indeed in a patient scholarship which well befits it: "Writing,” he
says, "was not essential in a nation where laws, hymns, and the praises
of illustrious men—that is, jurisprudence and history—were taught in
their schools of music.” Music, which is or ought to be, as we know,
according to those Pythagorean doctrines, itself the essence of all
things, was everywhere in the Perfect City of Plato; and among the
Lacedaemonians also, who may be thought to have come within measurable
distance of that Perfect City, though with no conscious theories about
it, music (mousikê)+ in the larger sense of the word, was everywhere,
not to alleviate only but actually to promote and inform, to be the
very substance of their so strenuous and taxing habit of life. What
was this "music," this service or culture of the Muses, this harmony,
partly moral, doubtless, but also throughout a matter of elaborate
movement of the voice, of musical instruments, of all beside that could
in any way be associated to such things—this music, for the
maintenance, the perpetual sense of which those vigorous souls were
ready to sacrifice so many opportunities, privileges, enjoyments of a
different sort, so much of their ease, of themselves, of one another?

Platonism is a highly conscious reassertion [201] of one of the two
constituent elements in the Hellenic genius, of the spirit of the
highlands namely in which the early Dorian forefathers of the
Lacedaemonians had secreted their peculiar disposition, in contrast
with the mobile, the marine and fluid temper of the littoral Ionian
people. The Republic of Plato is an embodiment of that Platonic
reassertion or preference, of Platonism, as the principle of a society,
ideal enough indeed, yet in various degrees practicable. It is not
understood by Plato to be an erection de novo, and therefore only on
paper. Its foundations might be laid in certain practicable changes to
be enforced in the old schools, in a certain reformed music which must
be taught there, and would float thence into the existing homes of
Greece, under the shadow of its old temples, the sanction of its old
religion, its old memories, the old names of things. Given the central
idea, with its essentially renovating power, the well-worn elements of
society as it is would rebuild themselves, and a new colour come
gradually over all things as the proper expression of a certain new
mind in them.

And in fact such embodiments of the specially Hellenic element in
Hellenism, compacted in the natural course of political development,
there had been, though in a less ideal form, in those many Dorian
constitutions to which Aristotle refers. To Lacedaemon, in The
Republic itself, admiring allusions abound, covert, yet bold [202]
enough, if we remember the existing rivalry between Athens and her
neighbour; and it becomes therefore a help in the study of Plato's
political ideal to approach as near as we may to that earlier actual
embodiment of its principles, which is also very interesting in itself.
The Platonic City of the Perfect would not have been cut clean away
from the old roots of national life: would have had many links with the
beautiful and venerable Greek cities of past and present. The ideal,
poetic or romantic as it might seem, would but have begun where they
had left off, where Lacedaemon, in particular, had left off. Let us
then, by way of realising the better the physiognomy of Plato's
theoretic building, suppose some contemporary student of The Republic,
a pupil, say! in the Athenian Academy, determined to gaze on the actual
face of what has so strong a family likeness to it. Stimulated by his
master's unconcealed Laconism, his approval of contemporary Lacedaemon,
he is at the pains to journey thither, and make personal inspection of
a place, in Plato's general commendations of which he may suspect some
humour or irony, but which has unmistakably lent many a detail to his ideal Republic, on paper, or in thought.

He would have found it, this youthful Anacharsis, hard to get there, partly through the nature of the country, in part because the people of Lacedaemon (it was a point of system with them, as we heard just now) were suspicious of [203] foreigners. Romantic dealers in political theory at Athens were safe in saying pretty much what they pleased about its domestic doings. Still, not so far away, made, not in idea and by the movements of an abstract argument, the mere strokes of a philosophic pen, but solidified by constancy of character, fortified anew on emergency by heroic deeds, for itself, for the whole of Greece, though with such persistent hold throughout on an idea, or system of ideas, that it might seem actually to have come ready-made from the mind of some half-divine Lycurgus, or through him from Apollo himself, creator of that music of which it was an example:–there, in the hidden valley of the Eurotas, it was to be found, as a visible centre of actual human life, the place which was alleged to have come, harsh paradox as it might sound to Athenian ears, within measurable distance of civic perfection, of the political and social ideal.

Our youthful academic adventurer then, making his way along those difficult roads, between the ridges of the Eastern Acadian Mountains, and emerging at last into “hollow” Laconia, would have found himself in a country carefully made the most of by the labour of serfs; a land of slavery, far more relentlessly organised according to law than anywhere else in Greece, where, in truth, for the most part slavery was a kind of accident. But whatever rigours these slaves of Laconia were otherwise subjected to, they [204] enjoyed certainly that kind of well-being which does come of organisation, from the order and regularity of system, living under central military authority, and bound themselves to military service; to furnish (as under later feudal institutions) so many efficient men-at-arms on demand, and maintain themselves in readiness for war as they laboured in those distantly-scattered farms, seldom visited by their true masters from Lacedaemon, whither year by year they sent in kind their heavy tribute of oil, barley and wine. The very genius of conservatism here enthroned, secured, we may be sure, to this old-fashioned country life something of the personal dignity, of the enjoyments also, natural to it; somewhat livelier religious feasts, for example, than their lords allowed themselves. Stray echoes of their boisterous plebeian mirth on such occasions have reached us in Greek literature.

But if the traveller had penetrated a little more closely he would have been told certain startling stories, with at least a basis of truth in them, even as regards the age of Plato. These slaves were Greeks: no rude Scythians, nor crouching, decrepit Asiatics, like ordinary prisoners of war, the sort of slaves you could buy, but genuine Greeks, speaking their native tongue, if with less of muscular tension and energy, yet probably with pleasanter voice and accent than their
essentially highland masters. Physically they throng, under something of the same discipline which had made those masters the masters also of all Greece. They saw them now and then—their younger lords, brought, under strict tutelage, on those long hunting expeditions, one of their so rare enjoyment, prescribed for them, as was believed, by the founder of their polity. But sometimes (here was the report which made one shudder even in broad daylight, in those seemingly reposeful places) sometimes those young nobles of Lacedaemon reached them on a different kind of pursuit: came by night, secretly, though by no means contrarily to the laws of a state crafty as it was determined, to murder them at home, or a certain moiety of them; one here or there perhaps who, with good Achæan blood in his veins, and under a wholesome mode of life, was grown too tall, or too handsome, or too fruitful a father, to feel quite like a slave. Under a sort of slavery that makes him strong and beautiful, where personal beauty was so greatly prized, his masters are in fact jealous of him.

But masters thus hard to others, these Lacedaemonians, as we know, were the reverse of indulgent to themselves. While, as a matter of theory, power and privilege belonged exclusively to the old, to the seniors (hoi gerontes, hè gerousia) + ruling by a council wherein no question might be discussed, one might only deliver one’s Aye! or No! Lacedaemon was in truth before all things an organised place of discipline, an organised [206] opportunity also, for youth, for the sort of youth that knew how to command by serving—a constant exhibition of youthful courage, youthful self-respect, yet above all of true youthful docility; youth thus committing itself absolutely, soul and body, to a corporate sentiment in its very sports. There was a third sort of regulation visits the lads of Lacedaemon were driven to pay to those country places, the vales, the uplands, when, to brace youthful stomachs and develope resource, they came at stated intervals as a kind of mendicants or thieves, feet and head uncovered through frost and heat, to steal their sustenance, under penalties if detected—"a survival," as anthropologists would doubtless prove, pointing out collateral illustrations of the same, from a world of purely animal courage and keenness. Whips and rods used in a kind of monitorial system by themselves had a great part in the education of these young aristocrats, and, as pain surely must do, pain not of bodily disease or wretched accidents, but as it were by dignified rules of art, seem to have refined them, to have made them observant of the minutest direction in those musical exercises, wherein eye and ear and voice and foot all alike combined. There could be nothing paraleipomenon,+ as Plato says, no "oversights," here. No! every one, at every moment, quite at his best; and, observe especially, with no superfluities; seeing that when we have to do with music of any kind, with matters of art, in stone, in words, [207] in the actions of life, all superfluities are in very truth "superfluities of naughtiness," such as annihilate music.

The country through which our young traveller from his laxer school of
Athens seeks his way to Lacedaemon, this land of a noble slavery, so peacefully occupied but for those irregular nocturnal terrors, was perhaps the loveliest in Greece, with that peculiarly blent loveliness, in which, as at Florence, the expression of a luxurious lowland is duly checked by the severity of its mountain barriers. It was a type of the Dorian purpose in life—sternness, like sea-water infused into wine, overtaking a matter naturally rich, at the moment when fulness may lose its savour and expression. Amid the corn and oleanders—corn "so tall, close, and luxuriant," as the modern traveller there still finds—it was visible at last, Lacedaemon, koîle Spartê,+ "hollow Sparta," under the sheltering walls of Taygetus, the broken and rugged forms of which were attributed to earthquake, but without proper walls of its own. In that natural fastness, or trap, or falcon's nest, it had no need of them, the falcon of the land, with the hamlets (polichnia)+ a hundred and more, dispersed over it, in jealously enforced seclusion from one another.

From the first he notes "the antiquated appearance" of Lacedaemon, by no means a "growing" place, always rebuilding, remodelling itself, after the newest fashion, with shapeless suburbs [208] stretching farther and farther on every side of it, grown too large perhaps, as Plato threatens, to be a body, a corporate unity, at all: not that, but still, and to the last, itself only a great village, a solemn, ancient, mountain village. Even here of course there had been movement, some sort of progress, if so it is to be called, linking limb to limb; but long ago. Originally a union, after the manner of early Rome, of perhaps three or four neighbouring villages which had never lost their physiognomy, like Rome it occupied a group of irregular heights, the outermost roots of Taygetus, on the bank of a river or mountain torrent, impetuous enough in winter, a series of wide shallows and deep pools in the blazing summer. It was every day however, all the year round, that Lacedaemonian youth plunged itself in the Eurotas. Hence, from this circumstance of the union there of originally disparate parts, the picturesque and expressive irregularity, had they had time to think it such, of the "city" properly so termed, the one open place or street, High Street, or Corso—Aphetais by name, lined, irregularly again, with various religious and other monuments. It radiated on all sides into a mazy coil, an ambush, of narrow crooked lanes, up and down, in which attack and defence would necessarily be a matter of hand-to-hand fighting. In the outskirts lay the citizens' houses, roomier far than those of Athens, with spacious, walled courts, almost in the country. Here, in contrast [209] to the homes of Athens, the legitimate wife had a real dignity, the unmarried woman a singular freedom. There were no door-knockers: you shouted at the outer gate to be let in. Between the high walls lanes passed into country roads, sacred ways to ancient sacro-sanct localities, Therapnae, Amyclae, on this side or that, under the shade of mighty plane-trees.

Plato, as you may remember, gives a hint that, like all other visible things, the very trees—how they grow—exercise an aesthetic influence
on character. The diligent legislator therefore would have his preferences, even in this matter of the trees under which the citizens of the Perfect City might sit down to rest. What trees? you wonder. The olive? the laurel, as if wrought in grandiose metal? the cypress? that came to a wonderful height in Dorian Crete: the oak? we think it very expressive of strenuous national character. Well! certainly the plane-tree for one, characteristic tree of Lacedaemon then and now; a very tranquil and tranquillising object, spreading its level or gravely curved masses on the air as regally as the tree of Lebanon itself. A vast grove of such was the distinguishing mark of Lacedaemon in any distant view of it; that, and, as at Athens, a colossal image, older than the days of Phidias—the Demos of Lacedaemon, it would seem, towering visibly above the people it protected. Below those mighty trees, on an island in their national river, [210] were the "playing-fields," where Lacedaemonian youth after sacrifice in the Ephebeum delighted others rather than itself (no "shirking" was allowed) with a sort of football, under rigorous self-imposed rules—tearing, biting—a sport, rougher even than our own, et même très dangereux, as our Attic neighbours, the French, say of the English game.

They were orderly enough perforce, the boys, the young men, within the city—seen, but not heard, except under regulations, when they made the best music in the world. Our visitor from Athens when he saw those youthful soldiers, or military students, as Xenophon in his pretty treatise on the polity of Lacedaemon describes, walking with downcast eyes, their hands meekly hidden in their cloaks, might have thought them young monks, had he known of such.

A little mountain town, however ambitious, however successful in its ambition, would hardly be expected to compete with Athens, or Corinth, itself a Dorian state, in art-production, yet had not only its characteristic preferences in this matter, in plastic and literary art, but had also many venerable and beautiful buildings to show. The Athenian visitor, who is standing now in the central space of Lacedaemon, notes here, as being a trait also of the "Perfect City" of academic theory, that precisely because these people find themselves very susceptible to the [211] influences of form and colour and sound, to external aesthetic influence, but have withal a special purpose, a certain strongly conceived disciplinary or ethic ideal, that therefore a peculiar humour prevails among them, a self-denying humour, in regard to these things. Those ancient Pelopid princes, from whom the hereditary kings of historic Lacedaemon, come back from exile into their old home, claim to be descended, had had their palaces, with a certain Homeric, Asiatic splendour, of wrought metal and the like; considerable relics of which still remained, but as public or sacred property now. At the time when Plato's scholar stands before them, the houses of these later historic kings—two kings, as you remember, always reigning together, in some not quite clearly evolved differentiation of the temporal and spiritual functions—were plain enough; the royal doors, when beggar or courtier approached them, no
daintier than Lycurgus had prescribed for all true Lacedaemonian citizens; rude, strange things to look at, fashioned only, like the ceilings within, with axe and saw, of old mountain oak or pine from those great Taygetan forests, whence came also the abundant iron, which this stern people of iron and steel had super-induced on that earlier dreamy age of silver and gold--steel, however, admirably tempered and wrought in its application to military use, and much sought after throughout Greece.

Layer upon layer, the relics of those earlier generations, a whole succession of remarkable races, lay beneath the strenuous footsteps of the present occupants, as there was old poetic legend in the depths of their seemingly so practical or prosaic souls. Nor beneath their feet only: the relics of their worship, their sanctuaries, their tombs, their very houses, were part of the scenery of actual life. Our young Platonic visitor from Athens, climbing through those narrow winding lanes, and standing at length on the open platform of the Apbetais, finds himself surrounded by treasures, modest treasures of ancient architecture, dotted irregularly here and there about him, as if with conscious design upon picturesque effect, such irregularities sometimes carrying in them the secret of expression, an accent. Old Alcman for one had been alive to the poetical opportunities of the place; boasts that he belongs to Lacedaemon, "abounding in sacred tripods"; that it was here the Heliconian Muses had revealed themselves to him. If the private abodes even of royalty were rude it was only that the splendour of places dedicated to religion and the state might the more abound. Most splendid of them all, the Stoa Poekile, a cloister or portico with painted walls, to which the spoils of the Persian war had been devoted, ranged its pillars of white marble on one side of the central space: on the other, connecting those high memories with the task of the living, lay the Choros, where, at the Gymnopaedia, the Spartan youth danced in honour of Apollo.

[213] Scattered up and down among the monuments of victory in battle were the heroa, tombs or chapels of the heroes who had purchased it with their blood—Pausanias, Leonidas, brought home from Thermopylae forty years after his death. "A pillar too," says Pausanias, "is erected here, on which the paternal names are inscribed of those who at Thermopylae sustained the attack of the Medes." Here in truth all deities put on a martial habit—Aphrodite, the Muses, Eros himself, Athene Chalcioecus, Athene of the Brazen House, an antique temple towering above the rest, built from the spoils of some victory long since forgotten. The name of the artist who made the image of the tutelary goddess was remembered in the annals of early Greek art, Gitiades, a native of Lacedaemon. He had composed a hymn also in her praise. Could we have seen the place he had restored rather than constructed, with its covering of mythological reliefs in brass or bronze, perhaps Homer's descriptions of a seemingly impossible sort of metallic architecture would have been less taxing to his reader's imagination. Those who in other places had lost their taste amid the
facile splendours of a later day, might here go to school again.

Throughout Greece, in fact, it was the Doric style which came to prevail as the religious or hieratic manner, never to be surpassed for that purpose, as the Gothic style seems likely to do with us. Though it is not exclusively the invention of Dorian men, yet, says Muller, "the Dorian character created the Doric architecture," and he notes in it, especially, the severity of the perfectly straight, smartly tapering line of its column; the bold projection of the capital; the alternation of long unornamented plain surfaces with narrower bands of decorated work; the profound shadows; the expression of security, of harmony, infused throughout; the magnificent pediment crowning the whole, like the cornice of mountain wall beyond, around, and above it. Standing there in the Aphetais, amid these venerable works of art, the visitor could not forget the natural architecture about him. As the Dorian genius had differentiated itself from the common Hellenic type in the heart of the mountains of Epirus, so here at last, in its final and most characteristic home, it was still surrounded by them:–ophrya te kai koilainetai.+

We know, some of us, what such mountain neighbourhood means. The wholesome vigour, the clearness and purity they maintain in matters such as air, light, water; how their presence multiplies the contrasts, the element of light and shadow, in things; the untouched perfection of the minuter ornament, flower or crystal, they permit one sparingly; their reproachful aloofness, though so close to us, keeping sensitive minds at least in a sort of moral alliance with their remoter solitudes. "The whole life of the Lacedaemonian community," says Muller, [215] "had a secluded, impenetrable, and secret character." You couldn't really know it unless you were of it.

A system which conceived the whole of life as matter of attention, patience, a fidelity to detail, like that of good soldiers and musicians, could not but tell also on the merest handicrafts, constituting them in the fullest sense of a craft. If the money of Sparta was, or had recently been, of cumbrous iron, that was because its trade had a sufficient variety of stock to be mainly by barter, and we may suppose the market (into which, like our own academic youth at Oxford, young Spartans were forbidden to go) full enough of business—many a busy workshop in those winding lanes. The lower arts certainly no true Spartan might practise; but even Helots, artisan Helots, would have more than was usual elsewhere of that sharpened intelligence and the disciplined hand in such labour which really dignify those who follow it. In Athens itself certain Lacedaemonian commodities were much in demand, things of military service or for every-day use, turned out with flawless adaptation to their purpose.

The Helots, then, to whom this business exclusively belonged, a race of slaves, distinguishable however from the slaves or serfs who tilled the land, handing on their mastery in those matters in a kind of guild,
father to son, through old-established families of flute-players, wine-mixers, bakers, and the like, thus left their hereditary lords, Les Gens Fleur-de-lisés (to borrow an expression from French feudalism) in unbroken leisure, to perfect themselves for the proper functions of gentlemen–scholé,+ leisure, in the two senses of the word, which in truth involve one another–their whole time free, to be told out in austere schools. Long easeful nights, with more than enough to eat and drink, the "illiberal" pleasures of appetite, as Aristotle and Plato agree in thinking them, are of course the appropriate reward or remedy of those who work painfully with their hands, and seem to have been freely conceded to those Helots, who by concession of the State, from first to last their legal owner, were in domestic service, and sometimes much petted in the house, though by no means freely conceded to the "golden youth" of Lacedaemon–youth of gold, or gilded steel. The traditional Helot, drunk perforce to disgust his young master with the coarseness of vice, is probably a fable; and there are other stories full of a touching spirit of natural service, of submissiveness, of an instinctively loyal admiration for the brilliant qualities of one trained perhaps to despise him, by which the servitor must have become, in his measure, actually a sharer in them. Just here, for once, we see that slavish ethos,+ the servile range of sentiment, which ought to accompany the condition of slavery, if it be indeed, as Aristotle supposes, one of the [217] natural relationships between man and man, idealised, or aesthetically right, pleasant and proper; the aretē,+ or "best possible condition," of the young servitor as such, including a sort of bodily worship, and a willingness to share the keen discipline which had developed the so attractive gallantry of his youthful lords.

A great wave, successive waves, of invasion, sufficiently remote to have lost already all historic truth of detail, had left them–these Helots, and the Perioeci, in the country round about–thus to serve among their own kinsmen, though so close to them in lineage, so much on a level with their masters in essential physical qualities that to the last they could never be entirely subdued in spirit. Patient modern research, following the track of a deep-rooted national tradition veiled in the mythological figments which centre in what is called "The Return of the Heraclidae," reveals those northern immigrants or invaders, at various points on their way, dominant all along it, from a certain deep vale in the heart of the mountains of Epirus southwards, gradually through zone after zone of more temperate lowland, to reach their perfection, highlanders from first to last, in this mountain "hollow" of Lacedaemon. They claim supremacy, not as Dorian invaders, but as kinsmen of the old Achaean princes of the land; yet it was to the fact of conquest, to the necessity of [218] maintaining a position so strained, like that, as Aristotle expressly pointed out, of a beleaguered encampment in an enemy’s territory, that the singular institutions of Lacedaemon, the half-military, half-monastic spirit, which prevailed in this so gravely beautiful place, had been originally due. But observe!–Its moral and political system, in which that
slavery was so significant a factor, its discipline, its aesthetic and
other scruples, its peculiar moral ethos, having long before our
Platonic student comes thither attained its original and proper ends,
survived,—there is the point! survived as an end in itself, as a
matter of sentiment, of public and perhaps still more of personal
pride, though of the finer, the very finest sort, in one word as an
ideal. Pericles, as you remember, in his famous vindication of the
Athenian system, makes his hearers understand that the ends of the
Lacedaemonian people might have been attained with less self-sacrifice
than theirs. But still, there it remained, hē diaita Dörikē—the
genuine Laconism of the Lacedaemonians themselves, their traditional
conception of life, with its earnestness, its precision and strength,
its loyalty to its own type, its impasioned completeness; a spectacle,
aesthetically, at least, very interesting, like some perfect instrument
shaping to what they visibly were, the most beautiful of all people, in
Greece, in the world.

Gymnastic, "bodily exercise," of course, does not always and
necessarily effect the like of that. A certain perfectly preserved old
Roman mosaic pavement in the Lateran Museum, presents a terribly fresh
picture of the results of another sort of "training," the monstrous
development by a cruel art, by exercise, of this or that muscle,
changing boy or man into a merely mechanic instrument with which his
breeders might make money by amusing the Roman people. Victor Hugo’s
odious dream of L’homme qui rit, must have had something of a prototype
among those old Roman gladiators. The Lacedaemonians, says Xenophon on
the other hand, homoioς apo te tōn skelōn kai apo cheirōn kai apo
trachēlou gymnazontai.+ Here too, that is to say, they aimed at, they
found, proportion, Pythagorean symmetry or music, and bold as they
could be in their exercises (it was a Lacedaemonian who, at Olympia,
for the first time threw aside the heavy girdle and ran naked to the
goal) forbade all that was likely to disfigure the body. Though we
must not suppose all ties of nature rent asunder, nor all connexion
between parents and children in those genial, retired houses at an end
in very early life, it was yet a strictly public education which began
with them betimes, and with a very clearly defined programme,
conservative of ancient traditional and unwritten rules, an
aristocratic education for the few, the liberales—"liberals," as we
may say, in that the proper sense of the word. It made them, in[220]
very deed, the lords, the masters, of those they were meant by-and-by
to rule; masters, of their very souls, of their imagination, enforcing
on them an ideal, by a sort of spiritual authority, thus backing, or
backed by, a very effective organisation of "the power of the sword."
In speaking of Lacedaemon, you see, it comes naturally to speak out of
proportion, it might seem, of its youth, and of the education of its
youth. But in fact if you enter into the spirit of Lacedaemonian
youth, you may conceive Lacedaemonian manhood for yourselves. You
divine already what the boy, the youth, so late in obtaining his
majority, in becoming a man, came to be in the action of life, and on
the battle-field. "In a Doric state," says Müller, "education was, on
the whole, a matter of more importance than government.”

A young Lacedaemonian, then, of the privileged class left his home, his tender nurses in those large, quiet old suburban houses early, for a public school, a schooling all the stricter as years went on, to be followed, even so, by a peculiar kind of barrack-life, the temper of which, a sort of military monasticism (it must be repeated) would beset him to the end. Though in the gymnasia of Lacedaemon no idle by-standers, no—well! Platonic loungers after truth or what not—were permitted, yet we are told, neither there nor in Sparta generally, neither there nor anywhere else, were the boys permitted to be alone. If a certain love of reserve, of seclusion, characterised the Spartan citizen as such, it was perhaps the cicatrice of that wrench from a soft home into the imperative, inevitable gaze of his fellows, broad, searching, minute, his regret for, his desire to regain, moral and mental even more than physical ease. And his education continued late; he could seldom think of marriage till the age of thirty. Ethically it aimed at the reality, aesthetically at the expression, of reserved power, and from the first set its subject on the thought of his personal dignity, of self-command, in the artistic way of a good musician, a good soldier. It is noted that "the general accent of the Doric dialect has itself the character not of question or entreaty, but of command or dictation." The place of deference, of obedience, was large in the education of Lacedaemonian youth; and they never complained. It involved however for the most part, as with ourselves, the government of youth by itself; an implicit subordination of the younger to the older, in many degrees. Quite early in life, at school, they found that superiors and inferiors, homoioi and hypomeiones, there really were; and their education proceeded with systematic boldness on that fact. Eirēn, melleirēn, sideunēs, and the like—words, titles, which indicate an unflinching elaboration of the attitudes of youthful subordination and command with responsibility—remain as a part of what we might call their "public-school slang." They ate together "in their divisions" (agelai) on much the same fare every day at a sort of messes; not reclined, like Ionians or Asiatics, but like heroes, the princely males, in Homer, sitting upright on their wooden benches; were "inspected" frequently, and by free use of vivâ voce examination "became adepts in presence of mind," in mental readiness and vigour, in the brief mode of speech Plato commends, which took and has kept its name from them; with no warm baths allowed; a daily plunge in their river required. Yes! The beauty of these most beautiful of all people was a male beauty, far remote from feminine tenderness; had the expression of a certain ascēsis in it; was like un-sweetened wine. In comparison with it, beauty of another type might seem to be wanting in edge or accent.

And they could be silent. Of the positive uses of the negation of speech, like genuine scholars of Pythagoras, the Lacedaemonians were well aware, gaining strength and intensity by repression. Long spaces of enforced silence had doubtless something to do with that expressive
brevity of utterance, which could be also, when they cared, so
inexpressive of what their intentions really were—something to do with
the habit of mind to which such speaking would come naturally. In
contrast with the ceaseless prattle of Athens, Lacedaemonian assemblies
lasted as short a time as possible, all standing. A Lacedaemonian
ambassador being asked in whose name he was come, replies: "In the name of the State, if I succeed; if I fail, in my
own." What they lost in extension they gained in depth.

Had our traveller been tempted to ask a young Lacedaemonian to return
his visit at Athens, permission would have been refused him. He
belonged to a community bent above all things on keeping indelibly its
own proper colour. Its more strictly mental education centered, in
fact, upon a faithful training of the memory, again in the spirit of
Pythagoras, in regard to what seemed best worth remembering. Hard and
practical as Lacedaemonians might seem, they lived nevertheless very
much by imagination; and to train the memory, to preoccupy their minds
with the past, as in our own classic or historic culture of youth, was
in reality to develop a vigorous imagination. In music (mousikê)+ as
they conceived it, there would be no strictly selfish reading, writing
or listening; and if there was little a Lacedaemonian lad had to read
or write at all, he had much to learn, like a true conservative, by
heart: those unwritten laws of which the Council of Elders was the
authorised depository, and on which the whole public procedure of the
state depended; the archaic forms of religious worship; the names of
their kings, of victors in their games or in battle; the brief record
of great events; the oracles they had received; the rheâtrai, from [224]
Lycurgus downwards, composed in metrical Lacedaemonian Greek; their
history and law, in short, actually set to music, by Terpander and
others, as was said. What the Lacedaemonian learned by heart he was
for the most part to sing, and we catch a glimpse, an echo, of their
boys in school chanting; one of the things in old Greece one would have
liked best to see and hear—youthful beauty and strength in perfect
service—a manifestation of the true and genuine Hellenism, though it
may make one think of the novices at school in some Gothic cloister, of
our own old English schools, nay, of the young Lacedaemonian’s cousins
at Sion, singing there the law and its praises.

The Platonic student of the ways of the Lacedaemonians observes then,
is interested in observing, that their education, which indeed makes no
sharp distinction between mental and bodily exercise, results as it had
begun in "music"—ends with body, mind, memory above all, at their
coldest, on great show-days, in the dance. Austere, self-denying
Lacedaemon had in fact one of the largest theatres in Greece, in part
scooped out boldly on the hill-side, built partly of enormous blocks of
stone, the foundations of which may still be seen. We read what Plato
says in The Republic of "imitations," of the imitative arts, imitation
reaching of course its largest development on the stage, and are
perhaps surprised at the importance he assigns, in every department of
[225] human culture, to a matter of that kind. But here as elsewhere
to see was to understand. We should have understood Plato’s drift in
his long criticism and defence of imitative art, his careful system of
rules concerning it, could we have seen the famous dramatic
Lacedaemonian dancing. They danced a theme, a subject. A complex and
elaborate art this must necessarily have been, but, as we may gather,
as concise, direct, economically expressive, in all its varied sound
and motion, as those swift, lightly girt, impromptu Lacedaemonian
sayings. With no movement of voice or hand or foot, paraleipomenon,+ unconsidered, as Plato forbids, it was the perfect flower of their
correction, of that minute patience and care which ends in a perfect
expressiveness; not a note, a glance, a touch, but told obediently in
the promotion of a firmly grasped mental conception, as in that perfect
poetry or sculpture or painting, in which “the finger of the master is
on every part of his work.” We have nothing really like it, and to
comprehend it must remember that, though it took place in part at least
on the stage of a theatre—was in fact a ballet-dance, it had also the
character both of a liturgical service and of a military inspection;
and yet, in spite of its severity of rule, was a natural expression of
the delight of all who took part in it.

So perfect a spectacle the gods themselves might be thought pleased to
witness; were in consequence presented with it as an important
element in the religious worship of the Lacedaemonians, in whose life
religion had even a larger part than with the other Greeks,
conspicuously religious, deisidaimones,+ involved in religion or
superstition, as the Greeks generally were. More closely even than
their so scrupulous neighbours they associated the state, its acts and
officers, with a religious sanction, religious usages, theories,
traditions. While the responsibilities of secular government lay upon
the Ephors, those mysteriously dual, at first sight useless, and yet so
sanctimoniously observed kings, “of the house of Heracles,” with
something of the splendour of the old Achaean or Homeric kings, in life
as also in death, the splendid funerals, the passionate archaic laments
which then followed them, were in fact of spiritual or priestly rank,
the living and active centre of a poetic religious system, binding them
“in a beneficent connexion” to the past, and in the present with
special closeness to the oracle of Delphi.

Of that catholic or general centre of Greek religion the Lacedaemonians
were the hereditary and privileged guardians, as also the peculiar
people of Apollo, the god of Delphi; but, observe! of Apollo in a
peculiar development of his deity. In the dramatic business of
Lacedaemon, centering in these almost liturgical dances, there was
little comic acting. The fondness of the slaves for buffoonery and
loud [227] laughter, was to their master, who had no taste for the
like, a reassuring note of his superiority. He therefore indulged them
in it on occasion, and you might fancy that the religion of a people so
strenuous, ever so full of their dignity, must have been a religion of
gloom. It was otherwise. The Lacedaemonians, like those monastic
persons of whom they so often remind one, as a matter of fact however
surprising, were a very cheerful people; and the religion of which they
had so much, deeply imbued everywhere with an optimism as of hopeful
youth, encouraged that disposition, was above all a religion of sanity.
The observant Platonic visitor might have taken note that something of
that purgation of religious thought and sentiment, of its expression in
literature, recommended in Plato’s Republic, had been already quietly
effected here, towards the establishment of a kind of cheerful daylight
in men’s tempers.

In furtherance then of such a religion of sanity, of that harmony of
functions, which is the Aristotelian definition of health, Apollo,
sanest of the national gods, became also the tribal or home god of
Lacedaemon. That common Greek worship of Apollo they made especially
their own, but (just here is the noticeable point) with a marked
preference for the human element in him, for the mental powers of his
being over those elemental or physical forces of production, which he
also mystically represents, and which resulted sometimes in an
orgiastic, an unintellectual, or even an immoral service. He remains
youthful and unmarried. In congruity with this, it is observed that,
in a quasi-Roman worship, abstract qualities and relationships, ideals,
become subsidiary objects of religious consideration around him, such
as sleep, death, fear, fortune, laughter even. Nay, other gods also
are, so to speak, Apollinised, adapted to the Apolline presence;
Aphrodite armed, Enyalius in fetters, perhaps that he may never depart
thence. Amateurs everywhere of the virile element in life, the
Lacedaemonians, in truth, impart to all things an intellectual
character. Adding a vigorous logic to seemingly animal instincts, for
them courage itself becomes, as for the strictly philosophic mind at
Athens, with Plato and Aristotle, an intellectual condition, a form of
right knowledge.

Such assertion of the consciously human interest in a religion based
originally on a preoccupation with the unconscious forces of nature,
was exemplified in the great religious festival of Lacedaemon. As a
spectator of the Hyacinthia, our Platonic student would have found
himself one of a large body of strangers, gathered together from
Lacedaemon and its dependent towns and villages, within the ancient
precincts of Amyclae, at the season between spring and summer when
under the first fierce heat of the year the abundant hyacinths fade
from the fields. Blue flowers, [229] you remember, are the rarest, to
many eyes the loveliest; and the Lacedaemonians with their guests were
met together to celebrate the death of the hapless lad who had lent his
name to them, Hyacinthus, son of Apollo, or son of an ancient mortal
king who had reigned in this very place; in either case, greatly
beloved of the god, who had slain him by sad accident as they played at
quoits together delightfully, to his immense sorrow. That Boreas (the
north-wind) had maliciously miscarried the discus, is a circumstance we
hardly need to remind us that we have here, of course, only one of many
transparent, unmistakable, parables or symbols of the great solar
change, so sudden in the south, like the story of Proserpine, Adonis,
and the like. But here, more completely perhaps than in any other of those stories, the primary elemental sense had obscured itself behind its really tragic analogue in human life, behind the figure of the dying youth. We know little of the details of the feast; incidentally, that Apollo was vested on the occasion in a purple robe, brought in ceremony from Lacedaemon, woven there, Pausanias tells us, in a certain house called from that circumstance Chiton.† You may remember how sparing these Lacedaemonians were of such dyed raiment, of any but the natural and virgin colouring of the fleece; that purple or red, however, was the colour of their royal funerals, as indeed Amyclae itself was famous for purple stuffs—Amyclaeae vestes. As the general order of the feast, we discern clearly a single day of somewhat shrill gaiety, between two days of significant mourning after the manner of All Souls' Day, directed from mimic grief for a mythic object, to a really sorrowful commemoration by the whole Lacedaemonian people—each separate family for its own deceased members.

It was so again with those other youthful demi-gods, the Dioscuri, themselves also, in old heroic time, resident in this venerable place: Amyclaei fratres, fraternal leaders of the Lacedaemonian people. Their statues at this date were numerous in Laconia, or the docona, primitive symbols of them, those two upright beams of wood, carried to battle before the two kings, until it happened that through their secret enmity a certain battle was lost, after which one king only proceeded to the field, and one part only of that token of fraternity, the other remaining at Sparta. Well! they were two stars, you know, at their original birth in men's minds, Gemini, virginal fresh stars of dawn, rising and setting alternately—those two half-earthly, half-celestial brothers, one of whom, Polydeuces, was immortal. The other, Castor, the younger, subject to old age and death, had fallen in battle, was found breathing his last. Polydeuces thereupon, at his own prayer, was permitted to die: with undying fraternal affection, had forgone one moiety of his privilege, and lay in the grave for a day in his brother's stead, but shone out again on the morrow; the brothers thus ever coming and going, interchangeably, but both alike gifted now with immortal youth.

In their origin, then, very obviously elemental deities, they were thus become almost wholly humanised, fraternised with the Lacedaemonian people, their closest friends of the whole celestial company, visitors, as fond legend told, at their very hearths, found warming themselves in the half-light at their rude fire-sides. Themselves thus visible on occasion, at all times in devout art, they were the starry patrons of all that youth was proud of, delighted in, horsemanship, games, battle; and always with that profound fraternal sentiment. Brothers, comrades, who could not live without each other, they were the most fitting patrons of a place in which friendship, comradeship, like theirs, came to so much. Lovers of youth they remained, those enstarred types of it, arrested thus at that moment of miraculous good fortune as a consecration of the clean, youthful friendship, "passing even the love
of woman,” which, by system, and under the sanction of their founder’s name, elaborated into a kind of art, became an elementary part of education. A part of their duty and discipline, it was also their great solace and encouragement. The beloved and the lover, side by side through their long days of eager labour, and above all on the battlefield, became respectively, aitês, the hearer, and eispînas, the inspirer; the elder inspiring the younger with his own strength and noble taste in things.

What, it has been asked, what was there to occupy persons of the privileged class in Lacedaemon from morning to night, thus cut off as they were from politics and business, and many of the common interests of men’s lives? Our Platonic visitor would have asked rather, Why this strenuous task-work, day after day; why this loyalty to a system, so costly to you individually, though it may be thought to have survived its original purpose; this laborious, endless, education, which does not propose to give you anything very useful or enjoyable in itself? An intelligent young Spartan might have replied: “To the end that I myself may be a perfect work of art, issuing thus into the eyes of all Greece.” He might have observed—we may safely observe for him—that the institutions of his country, whose he was, had a beauty in themselves, as we may observe also of some at least of our own institutions, educational or religious: that they bring out, for instance, the lights and shadows of human character, and relieve the present by maintaining in it an ideal sense of the past. He might have added that he had his friendships to solace him; and to encourage him, the sense of honour.

Honour, friendship, loyalty to the ideal of the past, himself as a work of art! There was much of course in his answer. Yet still, after all, to understand, to be capable of, such motives, was itself but a result of that exacting discipline of character we are trying to account for; and the question still recurs, To what purpose? Why, with no prospect of Israel’s reward, are you as scrupulous, minute, self-taxing, as he? A tincture of asceticism in the Lacedaemonian rule may remind us again of the monasticism of the Middle Ages. But then, monastic severity was for the purging of a troubled conscience, or for the hope of an immense prize, neither of which conditions is to be supposed here. In fact the surprise of Saint Paul, as a practical man, at the slightness of the reward for which a Greek spent himself, natural as it is about all pagan perfection, is especially applicable about these Lacedaemonians, who indeed had actually invented that so “corruptible” and essentially worthless parsley crown in place of the more tangible prizes of an earlier age. Strange people! Where, precisely, may be the spring of action in you, who are so severe to yourselves; you who, in the words of Plato’s supposed objector that the rulers of the ideal state are not to be envied, have nothing you can really call your own, but are like hired servants in your own houses,—qui manducatis panem doloris?+
Another day-dream, you may say, about those obscure ancient people, it was ever so difficult really to know, who had hidden their actual life with so much success; but certainly a quite natural dream upon the paradoxical things we are told of them, on good authority. It is because they make us ask that question; puzzle us by a paradoxical idealism in life; are thus distinguished from their neighbours; that, like some of our old English places of education, though we might not care to live always at school there, it is good to visit them on occasion; as some philosophic Athenians, as we have now seen, loved to do, at least in thought.