



Literature Primers

*Edited by* JOHN RICHARD GREEN, M.A.

G R E E K  
L I T E R A T U R E

BY

R. C. JEBB, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

NEW YORK ∴ CINCINNATI ∴ CHICAGO  
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

## **PRIMER SERIES.**

### **SCIENCE PRIMERS.**

HUXLEY'S INTRODUCTORY VOLUME.  
ROSCOE'S CHEMISTRY.  
STEWART'S PHYSICS.  
GEIKIE'S GEOLOGY.  
LOCKYER'S ASTRONOMY.  
HOOKER'S BOTANY  
FOSTER AND TRACY'S PHYSIOLOGY AND  
HYGIENE.  
GEIKIE'S PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY.  
HUNTER'S HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY.  
LUPTON'S SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURE.  
JEVONS'S LOGIC.  
SPENCER'S INVENTIONAL GEOMETRY.  
JEVONS'S POLITICAL ECONOMY.  
TAYLOR'S PIANOFORTE PLAYING.  
PATTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE  
UNITED STATES.

### **HISTORY PRIMERS.**

WENDEL'S HISTORY OF EGYPT.  
FREEMAN'S HISTORY OF EUROPE.  
FYFFE'S HISTORY OF GREECE.  
CREIGHTON'S HISTORY OF ROME.  
MAHAFFY'S OLD GREEK LIFE.  
WILKINS'S ROMAN ANTIQUITIES.  
TIGHE'S ROMAN CONSTITUTION.  
ADAMS'S MEDIÆVAL CIVILIZATION.  
YONGE'S HISTORY OF FRANCE.  
GROVE'S GEOGRAPHY.

### **LITERATURE PRIMERS.**

BROOKE'S ENGLISH LITERATURE.  
WATKINS'S AMERICAN LITERATURE.  
DOWDEN'S SHAKSPERE.  
ALDEN'S STUDIES IN BRYANT.  
MORRIS'S ENGLISH GRAMMAR.  
MORRIS AND BOWEN'S ENGLISH GRAM-  
MAR EXERCISES.  
NICHOL'S ENGLISH COMPOSITION.  
PEILE'S PHILOLOGY.  
JEBB'S GREEK LITERATURE.  
GLADSTONE'S HOMER.  
TOZER'S CLASSICAL GEOGRAPHY.

# CONTENTS.

## PART I. THE EARLY LITERATURE:

TO 475 B.C.

### CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

### CHAPTER II.

EPIC POETRY.

### CHAPTER III.

ELEGIAC AND IAMBIC POETRY. LYRIC POETRY.

## PART II. THE ATTIC LITERATURE:

475—300 B.C.

### CHAPTER I.

THE DRAMA.

### CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNINGS OF PROSE. HISTORY.

### CHAPTER III.

ORATORY. PHILOSOPHICAL PROSE.

## PART III. THE LITERATURE OF THE DECADENCE:

300 B.C.—529 A.D.

### CHAPTER I.

FROM ALEXANDER TO AUGUSTUS: 300—30 B.C.

### CHAPTER II.

FROM AUGUSTUS TO JUSTINIAN: 30 B.C.—529 A.D.



# PRIMER

OF

## GREEK LITERATURE.

### PART I. THE EARLY LITERATURE.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### INTRODUCTION.

I. A PRIMER of Greek Literature should aim at being useful, not only to students of Greek, but also to those who do not know Greek, and who will never read a Greek book except in a translation. The civilised world is agreed in holding the great literature of old Greece to be one of the most precious things that have come down from the past, and all educated people, whether they know Greek or not, may naturally wish to know something about the contents of Greek literature. This sketch is intended to serve as a framework into which those who read any of the Greek books, whether in the original or in English, may fit what they read. The unity of Greek Literature is not the unity of a library but the unity of a living body. In this, more perhaps than in any other literature, we shall fail really to understand any one part unless we see clearly what it has to do with the rest. But first—Can we point to any broad characteristics which at once give Greek literature a worth and interest of its own for modern life?



## 2. The rational energy of the Greeks.

—The Greeks were not the first people who found out how to till the earth well, or to fashion metals, or to grow rich by war or commerce, or to build splendid houses and temples. But they were the first people who tried to make reason the guide of their social life. One proof of this is found in the very existence of the Greek cities. While other men were living in tribes or under despotic kings, the Greeks had already gathered themselves together in cities,—societies ruled, not by force, but by the persuasions of equal law. Another proof of it is found in the Greek books. There we find writers of all sorts, poets and historians and philosophers, habitually striving to get at the reasons of things. On this side, Greek literature has an interest such as belongs to no other literature. It shows us how men first set about systematic thinking. It shows us how some questions which have been solved since, and others which are being discussed still, appeared to the people who first seriously tried to answer them.

3. The bearing of Greek thought on modern life.—But the Greek books are not merely interesting as showing the methods and aims of early thinkers. They contain results, too, which have had the deepest and widest influence on the whole of modern life, in religion, in morality, in science, in politics, in literature. The thoughts of the great Greek thinkers have been bearing fruit in the world ever since they were first uttered. In some special sciences, the work done by the Greeks remains a basis of study to this day, as in Ethics and in Logic and in Geometry. It is in Greek historians and Greek orators that we read some of the political lessons most directly useful for our own time. Neither the history of Christian doctrine, nor the outer history of the Christian Church, can be fully understood without reference to the character and work of the Greek mind. Under the

influence of Christianity, two principal elements have entered into the spiritual life of the modern world: one of these has been Hebrew; the other has been Greek.

4. **Originality of Greek Literature.**—The chief types of poetry, such as the epic, lyric, dramatic,—the chief types of prose, such as the historical, philosophical, oratorical—are so much a matter of course now that we are apt to think of them as existing in the nature of things. But some of them did not exist at all, and others existed only in rude germs, when the Greek genius began its work. One after another, as the need of expression in each kind was felt, each of these types was perfected by the creative force of that Greek genius. In Greek literature, then, we have not merely a literature very interesting in itself: we have the fountain-head of all Western literature. The influence of Rome on modern literature has in some cases been more direct than that of Greece. But if the influence is tracked to its spring, any broad stream of it will carry us back to a Greek source.

5. **Form.**—The Greeks were a physically beautiful race, with great quickness and fineness of perception, which made them feel at once when anything was exaggerated or absurd, or, as we say, in bad taste. One of their favourite maxims was, ‘Do nothing too much.’ They were naturally obedient in all things to a sense of fitness and measure,—what they called *kairos*, a word which means literally ‘precision,’ the instinct of drawing the line, as it were, at the right place. So when they built a temple, this instinct kept them from making one part of it too large in proportion to another, or from adding ornament in the wrong place: and this is the reason why such a building as the Parthenon at Athens, with its noble simplicity and symmetry, is so perfect of its kind. Or if a Greek made a statue, not only did he make the limbs and features on just the right scale for each other, but he



refrained from trying to make the stone express more than it fitly could, or do duty for a picture. In the same way, when they wrote books, the Greeks were guided by their sense of fitness. They felt that it was out of proportion, and therefore ugly, if the words were grander or rarer than the thoughts, and that a style which might be fitting in one kind of composition would be out of place in another. Above all, the Greeks felt that a writer ought to be *clear*, and that any elaborate putting together of words which does not make the thought clear is worse even than misplaced finery. So, in the best work of Greek writers, we generally find these two things. First, the style is of the right kind for the subject; in poetry, for instance, the epic style is kept distinct from the lyric; historical prose is not written like oratory. Secondly, the writer tries to be clear. He chooses the words for the thoughts, he does not enslave the thoughts to the words.

6. **Greek Literature and the Study of Language.**—The Greeks excelled, as we have seen, in an instinct for beauty, and in the power of creating beautiful forms: and, of all the beautiful things which they created, their own language was the first and the most wonderful. The Greek mind was very bright and keen, and was accustomed to feeling fine distinctions and light shades of meaning. And so the Greeks gradually moulded their language so that it could express these fine distinctions and light shades by very simple means, and yet with perfect accuracy. By using one turn of phrase instead of another which would have been equally correct, or with the help of those little words called ‘particles’ which answered to the play of feature or tone of voice in talking, or even by a slight change in the order of the sentence, a Greek could mark with delicate precision the meaning which he meant to convey. This peculiar power which the language acquired of being easily *bent* into

the exact shape of the thought entitles Greek to be called the most *flexible* of languages. Grammars give classified examples of this flexibility. But as the fields are better for a botanist than the best collection of dried flowers, so we must go to the Greek books if we would see the language in the fulness of its elastic life. No one who is a stranger to Greek literature has seen how perfect an instrument it is possible for human speech to be.

7. **General Course of Greek Literature.**—Greek has lived on from the days before Homer into our own, one and the same language always, in spite of small changes,—still giving new proofs of its flexibility in the ease with which it finds terse expression for modern ideas. And this undying language has never ceased to have a literature; a rude and scanty literature, indeed, it was during one part of its modern course, yet even then lit up now and again by the enthusiasm of Greek scholars for the old Greek genius. This long and still vigorous life has had three great stages:—1. The **Old Literature**, from Homer to 529 A.D., when the Schools of heathen Philosophy were closed by the edict of the Emperor Justinian: 2. The **Middle** or Byzantine Literature, from 529 A.D. to the capture of Constantinople by the Turks (1453 A.D.): 3. The **Modern Literature**, of which the first beginning may be taken from the satirical poetry, in the popular dialect, of the monk Theodorus Prodromus (1143—1180 A.D.) in the reign of the Emperor Manuel Comnenus. At the end of the last century, the Greek patriot and scholar Koraes helped, by his example, to purify the literary dialect from many corrupt forms and foreign words.

8. **The Old Literature.**—We have to do here with the Old Literature only. It may be sub-divided into the Early Literature; the Attic Literature; and the Literature of the Decadence.

1. The **Early literature** begins with Homer

and extends down to about 475 B.C. Epic poetry flourishes. Elegiac, Iambic and Lyric Poetry arise. Prose writing, though in a rude form, begins among the Ionian Greeks of Asia Minor.

II. The **Attic Literature** flourishes from about 475 to 300 B.C. Dramatic Poetry reaches its perfection at Athens, both in Tragedy and in Comedy: and the Athenians also perfect a Prose Literature in history, oratory, and philosophical dialogue. The Greek genius has now finished its work of creating beautiful forms: and it has now lost the mainspring of its old energy, political freedom. We pass from the age of *creative* art in verse and prose to the age of *learned* work in letters and science.

III. The **Literature of the Decadence** has two chief periods.

I. The *Alexandrian* period, from 300 B.C. till Greece became subject to Rome in 146 B.C.

II. The *Graeco-Roman* period, from 146 B.C. till the Schools of heathen Philosophy were closed in 529 A.D.

9. **Natural Growth of Greek Literature.**—The great literature of Greece was not artificial, but grew naturally out of Greek life. As the year brings violets before roses and ripens one fruit earlier than another, so the golden time of the Greek genius has its seasons, in which first one sort of growth, and then another, blossoms, flowers and fades. A literature which copies foreign models may begin with any kind of verse or prose, and may have several different kinds in vigour at once. But the Greeks had no models. They invented the styles of poetry and prose which they perfected, one after another. The process of invention went step by step with the development of their mental and social life. Each great branch of the Greek race, as its natural turn came, did that special part in the work which it was fittest to do.

10. The three great branches were the **Aeolian**,

the **Dorian** and the **Ionian**. At the time when literary history begins, the chief seats of the **Aeolians** were Thessaly, Boeotia, Aetolia, and Acarnania; in the Peloponnesus, Arcadia, Elis and Achaia; the N.W. coasts of Asia Minor, and the island of Lesbos; and great colonies, such as Croton, in Magna Graecia on the S.E. coast of Italy. The **Dorians** held Argolis, Messenia and Laconia in the Peloponnesus; Corinth and Megara; settlements on the S.W. coasts of Asia Minor; the islands of Crete and Rhodes; Syracuse and other colonies on the E. and S. coasts of Sicily; Tarentum and other colonies in Magna Graecia. The Attic part of the **Ionian** stock possessed Attica and Euboea; Ionians were settled on the W. coast of Asia Minor, between the Aeolians on the north and the Dorians on the south; in the islands of Samos and Chios, and in most of the Aegean islets; and in widely spread colonies, including cities in Italy, Sicily, and on the Euxine.

II. Each of these three branches used its own modification of the Greek language, and this modification was called its **dialect**. The **Aeolic dialect**, suited to a quick, tripping utterance, was truer than any other to the oldest *forms* of the language; but it always remained comparatively poor and rude for literary purposes; and even the Aeolic of Lesbos, where the dialect had been cultivated in poetry, could be described by Athenians of Plato's time as 'a barbarian idiom.' Greek is distinguished among Indo-European languages by the completeness and nicety of its *vowel-system*; and one main distinction between the Greek dialects consisted in their treatment of the vowels. In Aeolic, the *o* and *u* sounds prevailed. The **Doric dialect** best preserved the oldest *sounds* of the language; it was a highland dialect, the terse and sinewy speech of a steadfast race, whose grave earnestness was joined to a certain dry humour. In Doric, the broad *α* sound prevailed.



The **Ionic dialect** was the smooth, harmonious language of an ease-loving people, gifted with bright and versatile intelligence, educated to the contemplative enjoyment of natural beauty by the climate and scenery of the Aegean coasts and islands, and familiarised with elegant luxury by intercourse with Asiatics and Phoenicians. It was characterised by dislike of all rough combinations, by partiality for the liquid meeting of vowels, and especially by love of the soft *e* sound.

12. The **Attic dialect** was a modified form of the Ionic, representing a happy medium between the too enervated Ionic and the somewhat harsh Doric. In its mature phase, it was the artistic creation of Attic Tragedy, influenced both by the epic language of the Homeric poems and by the choral poetry of the Dorians. Between 475 and 300 B.C. Attic became established as the standard dialect of Greek literature. But the separate life of the Greek cities, the physical partition of Greece Proper by mountain-barriers and far-reaching arms of the sea, and the variety of climate both in Greece and in the scattered Greek settlements, favoured the preservation of the dialects down to late times. All the dialects were successively brought into play by the literary development.

13. First, the **Ionians** in the colonies of Asia Minor,—with their keen feeling for grace of form, their genial sympathy with everything bright and joyous in nature, their delight in adventure, and their pliant, musical language, so well fitted for fluent, eager narrative,—wove the warlike stories of heroes and gods into Epic Poetry. Theirs, too, was Elegiac Poetry, the first slight deviation from the Epic. Then the **Aeolians** of Lesbos, proud, chivalrous, imaginative, sensuous, brought forth the Lyric Song of personal passion in war or love, with that union of fiery strength and tenderness which marked the Aeolic speech. The **Dorians** of the Peloponnesus and of



the colonies in Sicily and Southern Italy created the Choral Lyric Poetry, to be used at the festivals of cities or princes, or in the worship of the gods: poetry in which the simple and earnest religious faith of the Dorians, their intensely conservative pride in the traditions and institutions of the Dorian State, and their love for the usages of Dorian home-life, were uttered in the broad, massive harmonies of the Dorian speech. Lastly, the most gifted branch of the Ionians, the **Attic** people, with their happy balance of qualities, blended together elements of all the earlier kinds in the most complex and artistic form of all, the Drama; and, as the Greek mind and culture reached their full ripeness, raised Greek Prose from its rude beginnings in Ionia to the varied forms of a mature Prose Literature. The Attic work, both in verse and prose, had a universal stamp: it came from the centre of the Greek spirit, and appealed to all the Greeks.

14. In the earlier poetry and prose, **the dialect employed is determined chiefly by the species of the composition**, rather than by the birthplace of the composer. The epic poets of Ionia gradually formed a diction of their own, Ionic in its general character, but not such Ionic as was commonly spoken. **This epic language of Ionia** came to be borrowed more or less by all poets, whether Ionian by birth or not, who put tales about heroes into verse. Thus it is used, though with some alloy from their native dialects, by the Aeolian epic poet Hesiod and by the Dorian elegiac poet Theognis. And, since this Ionian epic dialect had thus established itself as the proper dialect for *story*, it was used by the earliest writers, philosophers or historians, who set forth their thoughts in prose; as by the historian Herodotus, the native of a Dorian city. **The pure Ionic dialect** was that in which Iambic poetry was first composed; and hence we find some pure Ionic forms retained in the iambic verse of Attic Tragedy. **The Doric**

**dialect**, again, belonged especially to Choral Lyric poetry; it is therefore blended with the epic idiom, and with his own Aeolic, by Pindar; and it enters into the choral songs of Attic Tragedy. **Aeolic** was the chosen dialect of love-songs, and it is used for this strain by the Dorian poet Theocritus. A poet could vary his dialect to suit different kinds of composition. Theocritus wrote his pastoral poems in Doric; the Attic Tyrtaeus used the Ionian epic dialect for his elegies, but wove Doric forms into his marching-songs. Thus, by a division of labour among the dialects, the literature gradually brought out all the faculties of the language, giving free play to each in the way that nature seemed to have marked out for it.

15. **The art of writing.**—There can be no literature, in any proper sense of the word, without writing. For literature implies fixed form: and, though memory may do great feats, a merely oral tradition cannot guarantee fixed form. The Greeks got their alphabet from the Phoenicians, and at first called the letters ‘Phoenician signs.’ Now the Greeks had dealings with Phoenician merchants while Sidon was still a great commercial and naval power,—at least as early as 1100 B.C., probably earlier. It seems unlikely that the Greeks, with their bright wits, their quickness in taking hints, and their love of story, should have allowed many centuries to go by before they caught up this art of writing from the Phoenicians, whose shrewdness they keenly appreciated, whose fabrics and works in metal they prized so much, and who were their rivals in trade. The historian Herodotus, about 440 B.C., assumes as a matter of course that the art of writing had been perfectly familiar to the Greeks for many centuries before his time. Herodotus was not a critical antiquarian; but he knew Greek life, he had studied its records, he was an accomplished man and a great traveller: and

he would scarcely have taken the very old use of writing for granted, as he everywhere does, if this was not, at least, the general belief of well-informed Greeks in his time. Extant evidence makes it probable that the Greeks knew the art of writing before the forms of the language had been fixed as we find them in the oldest literature. We have, however, no definite allusion to, or example of, writing in Greece that can be put earlier than about 700 B.C.

16. It was only very slowly that a reading public came into existence. Priests and poets were the first who made much use of the art of writing. The temple at Delphi was probably one of its earliest centres. At Athens, in the time of the Peloponnesian War (431—404 B.C.), there were book-shops in the market-place (the quarter was called the 'book-mart'), and there was an export trade in books. As the manuscripts were copied by slaves, whose labour cost little, these written rolls were tolerably cheap. The temples, and a few students or great men, possessed large collections of volumes<sup>1</sup>. But the first public library of

<sup>1</sup> Among the oldest Greek manuscripts now extant are some Egyptian papyri, part of them as old perhaps as 160 B.C., including fragments of Homer's *Iliad* and of the orator Hype-reides, and some rolls from Herculaneum (a town which was destroyed in 79 A.D.), containing writings of the Epicurean philosopher Philodêmus, a contemporary of Cicero. A parchment at Milan, with fragments of the *Iliad*, is of the 4th or 5th century A.D. The 'Sinaitic' ms. of the New Testament is of the 5th century or earlier: the Vatican ms. is of the 4th. With these and one or two more exceptions, we have no Greek manuscript older than the 9th century A.D. A few of the best, such as the Venice ms. of the *Iliad* and the Paris ms. of Demosthenes, belong to the 10th century; or, as the Florentine ms. of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and the Ravenna ms. of Aristophanes, to the 11th century. From the 12th century onwards the mss. are more abundant. The first book printed in Greek type was the Greek grammar of Constantine Lascaris (Milan, 1476): the first Greek author, Aesop's Fables (Milan, 1479). Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were first printed at Florence in 1488. By 1550 most of the Greek classics had been printed, chiefly by the Aldi at Venice, Junta at Florence, and Stephanus at Paris.



Greek books was that founded by Ptolemy I. (306—285 B.C.) at Alexandria.

17. **The Greek Poetry before Homer — at first religious.**—Greek literature begins, for us, with the two Homeric poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But these are not at all like the simple ballad-poetry of other countries. They are works of highly finished art, which could not possibly have been produced until the poetical art had been practised for a long time. We have no remains, however, of Greek poetry before Homer. We can only make out some of the general forms that it must have taken. It is as if English literature began suddenly in the fourteenth century with Chaucer, and nothing was known of Beowulf or Cædmon or the old religious poetry except from a few bare names. The most certain fact about the earliest Greek poetry is that it was closely connected with Greek religion.

18. There was a time when our far-off ancestors, the forefathers of Persians and Hindoos, Greeks and Italians, Celts and Teutons and Slavs, lived together in Central Asia, and worshipped the visible agencies or forms of Nature, such as the Sun, the Dawn, the Earth. Then they came to think of these powers as persons, with human bodies and minds. The Sun became a god who drives his fiery chariot through the heavens; the Dawn, a goddess who lays a rosy finger on the gloom; Earth came to be called the Mother of the gods. But this change did not come all at once. There was a time when they had begun to speak of the natural powers as persons, and yet had not forgotten that they were really natural powers, and that the personal names were merely signs. There are traces of this phase in the Vedas, or sacred Hymns of the Indian Brahmans, which are older than the Homeric poems, and nearer to the spirit of the ancient religion as it existed before Greeks and Indians had parted from the common stock in Central