

Thrice did the Persian press his slavish yoke upon Athens' sons; but as many times was it hurled back, either at the pass of Thermopylæ or on the plain of Marathon. It has been said that the political institutions of Greece were borrowed from the tyrants of the east. It can not be. Hark! listen to the dignified ambassadors from foreign courts, to the challenge for war as received in the agora. Listen if you will, to the debates of Pericles and then observe the intelligent vote of every patriotic citizen. Here is a principle, a mighty achievement that Athens did not borrow from the Chaldean astrologer, nor learn from the Egyptian Ptolemy. It was here that man first burst the bonds of tyranny, and made the power of persuasion to eclipse the power of a despot's will. Here he proved to the world that disputes could be settled without bloodshed, and that such a virtue existed as constitutional morality.

The democracy of Athens chained the tyranny of the east, and gave to Europe her brilliant career of political liberty. It wrought the gifts of man to a higher pitch, and raised a greater number of human beings to a higher level than any other form of government that has existed before or since. Under its stimulating influence the personal genius of mankind awoke, and that great truth so dear to the heart of every American, arose from the walls of Athens, that in the rights of the state all men are born free and equal.

Rome may receive the honor as the source of modern legislation. But what was Rome until she had grafted into her institutions some of the principles of Athenian democracy? Rebellions and revolutions mark the pages of her history until she became the student of Greece. From that time Rome was imperial Rome. The student became the tutor, and Rome mastered the world. If this be the truth, the effects of Athenian legislation have come down to us neither modified nor tarnished, but teeming with great proofs of its utility, and its blessings.

It was the Greek that first proved to the world that man could govern himself. It was his government that stamped upon the principles of Roman legislation the very sentiment that the American Constitution contains to-day. Everywhere the great influence that Greece has had upon modern civilization is discernible. Art, Literature, Philosophy and Politics, all as elements of modern civilization, have had their origin and high degree of perfection in the little state of Greece. And yet with this truth before us we find men, even in this enlightened age, who ridicule the student for dipping deeply into her history, the acknowledged secret of our present prosperity. But strike, if you will, from the face of modern civilization the effects of Greek institutions and what have you left but the rude customs of the feudal ages. Away, then, with him who would hurl upon us, the degeneracy of the tenth century. Away with that educator who would ignore the beauty of her silvery tongue. Ruin to that statesman who is too selfish to learn from the precepts that lie beneath the surface!

Greece has perished; but the glimmering light of her civilization, like the sun beyond the mountain crest, throws back its golden rays to illuminate the gloomy way of modern civilization.

The classic traveller weeps for the lost verses of Pindar and Homer, that aroused the Grecian hosts to battle for their liberties. He may weep for the lost philosophical discourses of Socrates and the oratory of Demosthenes, for they are gone never to be recovered. The classic sighs at Mycenæ when he discovers that the Lion Gateway and a few vestiges of crumbling masonry are all that remain of "Agamemnon, King of Men." He mourns on the banks of the Alpheus when he finds but little trace of the temple of Olympian Jove and the structures of Phidias. But why mourn for these? they are gone.

O Athens! thou wert great. Thy glittering splendor was thy destruction. The echoes of thy silvery tongue sang thy funeral dirge!

C. E. S.