

THE GREEK PEASANT.
Daily Chronicle 19/4/97
"Tales from the Isles of Greece: Being Sketches of Modern Greek Peasant Life." Translated from the Greek of Argyris Ephtaliotis by W. H. D. Rouse. (London: J. M. Dent and Co. 2s. 6d. net.)

Apart from its literary interest, which is by no means small, this book is important at the present moment, by reason of its subject-matter. Here we have the Greek peasantry, the backbone of the Greek nation, presented in quite dispassionate, realistic fashion, by a Greek—a Greek, be it noted, writing not as an advocate, with a view to influencing the opinion of Western Europe, but writing solely as an observer, for his own Grecian public. The book is thus a revelation, by one who knows it from the inside, of the character of the folk against whose national welfare the Powers are just now plotting, to the advantage of the Sultan. Its literary interest, as we have mentioned, is by no means small; the tales, as tales, are fresh and vivid and moving; the author's manner is charmingly simple and personal. But the human and ethical interest which his testimony derives from the immediate posture of affairs gives it a very exceptional and actual value.

To summarise in a sentence the impression of the Greek peasant with which M. Ephtaliotis leaves us, we can only say that he strikes us as a surprisingly delightful creature. We were prepared beforehand to like him, but M. Ephtaliotis makes us love him. He is so genial, so merry, so shrewd, and withal, in the best sense of the word, so *naif*. His nature has absorbed something of the keenness of his own sea-breeze. He is, first and foremost, hospitable. The chance traveller, descending upon him to ask a supper and a lodging for the night, is invariably greeted with a hearty "You are welcome." That is the usage, says M. Ephtaliotis, "for every stranger, even if they have never set eyes on him before." And he adds, "True good breeding sheds its fragrance everywhere among these hills." Your peasant host meets you at his outer gate and leads you across his courtyard straightway into his "inner house, the house proper, a sort of holy of holies."

In the lower portion of this Inner House, besides the shrine for the icon (where must be placed all the patron saints of the village and of the family), all the household treasures are hung on the walls and put on the shelves by way of ornament: large round trays, dishes, pots and pans, all of copper, all burnished and brightened. Then there are the plates and the glasses; and last of all (if they have nothing else) they arrange rows of quinces, pomegranates, melons, and other kinds of fruit. But the finest of the fruit you will see hanging in nets from the roof, which is black, and sometimes (with the roof-tree) tricked out in patterns of red. . . . The floor of this room is spread with carpets in the winter time. For seats the wall is lined with chests, containing the family heir-looms and the bride's dowry hidden within them. The fireplace in the corner no one ever kindles nowadays; all we have now is a chafing dish. . . . Over the fireplace are shelves, one above another, holding the best china, and at the end of the lowest shelf a censor for the family shrine. There is no light save what comes from the lamp hanging in the fireplace and the taper lit in front of the icons.

Directly after your arrival you are conducted to a bedroom, where the son of the family pours water upon your hands; and then you return to the "inner house," to make the acquaintance of your hostess, a black-eyed dame, who wears "a little fez, and twined about it a kerchief covered with gold coins," wide trousers, a light pelisse over her shoulders, and a Byzantine necklace round her neck. She presents you with a tray of sweetmeats, "of which you take one spoonful, wishing the lady health in a set formula, to which she replies." Traditional ceremony being thus satisfied, you sit down, and for a half-hour or so indulge in the pleasures of conversation, your host showing the friendliest curiosity to "know who you are, where you live, your income, whether you have a wife—if not, why not—all about you, in short; and equally ready to tell of himself," as Mr. Rouse explains in his introduction. Meanwhile the women, children, and servants listen deferentially from a distance. And then comes the supper. Pillows are ranged round a table inlaid with mother-of-pearl, each of the company receives a long embroidered napkin, grace is said, the sign of the cross is made, and you fall to. The meal ends with mastic in little bottles, with grapes and figs or melons. Finally you wash your hands, and the table is removed. The women fetch their needlework, but the men go on talking till bed-time, your host telling you the legends of the country-side, singing you its songs perhaps, and recounting the adventures he has had in his boat among the islands, for he is almost sure to be a skipper or a fisher. In the morning you breakfast upon preserved fruit, with coffee; and when you say farewell even the very poor will refuse to bear of payment.

The above is a bare glimpse of one side of the Greek peasant's character, as it is revealed in this book. Another side, the heroic side, the national side, with its pride of ancient lineage, its aspiration for a new greatness, is shown in the last three tales in the volume, tales of the War of Independence. "If there's only one drop of the old blood left, it will grow to a deluge, and overflow the land," prophesied Father Paisios, an aged monk, who could never forget Pelopidas and Timoleon. And the next year the War of Independence began, and the old blood grew to a deluge, and overflowed the land. But when, during that war, the Turk suddenly appeared, marching upon a defenceless village, what did the women of the village do? They ran into the sea, "straight into the sea, into the deep water," preferring death by drowning to the tender mercies of the Turk. Is the incident not suggestive? We are the Turk's allies and when he marches upon an undefended Christian village the Christian women run into the deep sea to escape his tender mercies!

tion. *Mauch Scandinavian* 13/4/97
If ever the time was ripe for the publication of stories dealing with modern Greek life, it is now, when the world is agog to know something of the inner life of the people which occupies so prominent a place in the eyes of Europe. And a good deal of information can undoubtedly be extracted from *Tales from the Isles of Greece*, translated from modern Greek by W. H. D. Rouse (J. M. Dent and Co., 8vo, pp. xv. 231, 2s. 6d.). It is a simple-hearted, superstitious folk that is revealed to us in these tales. The limit of their ambition is to make their way in life, and that object is always to be effected by travelling in the more civilised parts of Europe. We must confess that the stories in themselves are somewhat wanting in interest and sometimes in point, but it is always pleasant to read naïve descriptions of uncorrupted peasant life, and some of the types presented to us are original and interesting.

"Biterary world"
23/10/97

The short stories translated from the Greek, and dealing with the life of the Greek peasants, which comes to us under the title of *Tales from the Isles of Greece*, by Argyris Ephtaliotis, translated by W. H. D. Rouse (J. M. Dent and Co. 2s. 6d.), are not without that kind of charm never absent from entire simplicity. There is about them a rustic flavour and an intimacy that saves them from being commonplace, albeit some, indeed most of them, are thin enough. 'Secret Love' is a touching episode—the pathetic everywhere predominates—although one cannot help thinking it has not been made the most of. 'Love in the Train,' too, possesses more than ordinary interest, dialogue of the eyes that it is. But in general, it seems to us, the author has dwelt on description at too great a length at the expense of conversation.

CURRENT LITERATURE.

Tales from the Isles of Greece: being Sketches of Modern Greek Peasant Life. Translated from the Greek of Argyris Ephtaliotis by W. H. D. Rouse. (J. M. Dent and Co.)—These tales and sketches,—more of them probably sketches than tales,—are very interesting to the English reader who wishes to frame some conception of the rural life of the people who are now playing so important a part in the South-East corner of Europe. Englishmen know a great deal too little of that rural life, and too often gather their conceptions of the Greeks from the crafty traders of the principal ports in the Mediterranean, who are no more of the type of the people at large than the salesmen of Wapping are of the type of Englishmen at large. Mr. Rouse's translation appears to us to be very good. It is both pleasant and has a flavour of vernacular speech about it which gives a good conception of popular thought and feeling. Any one who will read either "Marinos Kontaros" or "Angelica," or "Uncle Yannis and his Donkey," will understand the rural Greek life better, and appreciate it more heartily, for what he has read. Some of the sketches are extraordinarily slight, but all of them seem to contribute something to our knowledge of the true peasant life of the Greek islands.

Spectator
24/10/97

TALES OF THE ISLES OF GREECE
Sketches of Modern Greek Life. By ARGYRIS EPHTALIOTIS. Translated from Modern Greek by W. H. D. ROUSE. Crown 8vo, 2s. 6d. net.

"The simple truth and vigour of his touch are manifest in the translation, and one is not surprised to hear that these tales and sketches of the peasantry of the Greek islands have attracted notice and admiration in their native country."
—*Scotsman*.
T. P. O'CONNOR, in the *Weekly Sun* (The Book of the Week):—"May it stir many hearts to the prayer that before many years no Christian man or woman on the face of the earth will live under a ruler where such atrocities are possible."

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