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THE NOONDAY

THERSITES and some other people have reminded us that even in the society that Homer described lay the germs of Greek democracy. Through the dark period that follows Homer we have seen that the factors working for democracy continued inevitably, and when we next gain any clear sight of the Greek world the stage is set for the gradual ascendancy of Demos. For three centuries at any rate the Greek had the world to himself in a sense. Eastward it is true that there were great empires, but they were content with the East, and Egypt was Egypt, little concerned with any foreigners but such as might come by way of Gaza or, perhaps, from Central Africa. There grew up a powerful kingdom in Asia Minor between 700 and 550 B. C. whose kings from Gyges to Croesus perfectly understood the importance of the Aegaeon shore to them and the value of its ports, and were not slow to grasp and to use the peculiarities of the Greek temper and the type of life it favoured and produced. But the Lydians only touched Asia. If they were a menace to Miletus, her eighty colonies were quite out of reach of Gyges or Croesus. If the restoration of a miscopied line be right, Archilochus says "he laments the woes of the Thasians, not of the Magnesians" who had suffered from Cimmerian invaders;¹ the mainland and the islands were different stories. Herodotus² has a tale of a wise Greek counselling

¹ Strabo, C 647.

² Herodotus, i, 27.

Croesus not to meddle with ships. It took the Lydians a good century to master the Greeks of the Asian mainland. Nowhere else did the Greeks have to face any similar power. The world was all before them where to choose. They might have to fight the local barbarian tribesmen or wandering pirates, or, Westward, stray companies of Phoenicians or Etruscans; there were the natural risks of storm and season, famine or sickness; but nowhere was there any conceivable political risk for the continuance of the happy Greek plan of each city being an independent state. It was bred in the bone of every Greek that his own city and his fellow citizens were separate from all others, in the very nature of things "citizens of themselves," *αὐτοπολιῖται*. Nowhere in Europe was there, or could there be, anything like Lydia, nor on the Black Sea either. Scythians or Italians or the odd savages of the Cyrenaica, they were all loose-hung tribes without walls or Greek arms or any power of combination or cohesion. The Greek city-state was the natural order. Travellers, indeed, told tales of great and ordered Empires in the Orient; and Xenophanes (as I remember from my Latin grammar) said that the moon was inhabited.

The Lydians knew better; they lived next door to a great monarchy, the Median, and they were careful. But when the Medes went down before the Persians, and Persians clashed with Lydians, the Greeks did not understand the situation. "Medism" had been a phase of Greek patriotism; the better the Medes did, the worse for the Lydians and the better for the Greeks. Cyrus seemed likely to worry the Lydians, so much the better; but when Cyrus suggested that the Greeks should surrender to him while Lydia lay between, it was nonsense. Only Miletus had the foresight to trim sufficiently. As for the rest the

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inevitable overtook them; "they showed themselves gallant fighters, each man for his own land, and there, when they were worsted and taken, they remained, each lot in their land and did what they were told."¹ *ἕκαστος, ἕκαστοι* says the historian of those battles about 540 B.C., and till Persia fell before Alexander the Great it was the same story. The danger lay in every generation in the same fact of single cities, furious for independence of everybody at all costs, facing a united Empire of the Persians. And you will note that when the battle of Arbela abolished the Persian danger forever, the Macedonian king was already master of the Greek democracies. But in those two hundred years of struggle you might almost say the world was made.

"We Cretans, stranger," says a man in Plato's *Laws* (707), "are in the habit of saying that the battle of Salamis was the salvation of Hellas." "Why, yes," says the Athenian, "and that is an opinion which is widely spread both among Hellenes and barbarians. But Megillus and I say, rather, that the battle of Marathon was the beginning and the battle of Plataea the completion of the great deliverance, and that these battles, made the Hellenes better; whereas the sea-fights of Salamis and Artemisium—for I may as well put them both together—made them no better, if I may so say without offence about the battles which helped to save us." So writes the great Athenian thinker. Fifty years or so earlier the historian put it the other way round, when he spoke of Salamis—"here I am constrained perforce to declare an opinion which will be displeasing to most; but I will not refrain from uttering what seems to me to be true. . . . To say that the Athenians were the saviours of Hellas is to hit the truth." So says

¹ Herodotus, i, 169.

Herodotus;¹ and, whatever contemporary or later Greeks said, posterity agrees with Herodotus. Greece was saved by Athens, by her navy, and by her great democrat or demagogue Themistocles. But you will notice the controversy; was it the fleet or the army, the sea-captain or the soldier, the Athenian or the Spartan, that saved Greece? The world says it was the fleet and the great democracy; and in truth it was.

The whole experience was staggering and shattering. The Greeks could not believe that Persia was a danger, though they knew it all the time. "We all know," says the envoy of Corinth to the Spartans "that the Persian made his way from the ends of the earth against Peloponnesus before you encountered him in a worthy manner."² The Athenians saw better; they joined in the Ionian Revolt that occupied Persia for five years; they built a fleet; they saw what was to be done and they did it. They beat the Persian back and then they formed a Confederacy to keep him in his place; and as long as that Confederacy lasted, he came no more to Greece but left the Greek lands and the Greek seas alone. But it was a frightful series of new experiences for the Greek city-states. Their world was completely overturned. They had lived at a distance, safe from despotism, and they found they were not safe. They had trusted to their isolation, and it was only by abandoning it that they had survived. Think of it! To save their states they had had to sacrifice the very principle of their being—

Et propter vitam vivendi perdere causas.

There was no gainsaying that; it was the confederated fleet that won the battle; it was not council nor assembly, it

¹ Herodotus, vii, 139.

² Thucydides, i, 69.

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was one man who had forced the battle. Confederation—the single brain in control—these are not democracy, these are not city government, *autopolitanism*. The war was won, but the cause might still seem lost. There was no going back to the scattered world of stray city-states; the Athenian Confederacy and the Persian Empire were the alternatives—one or the other; however much you disliked both, you must choose between them. There was just one loop-hole; Sparta by an off-chance might help you to secure autonomy; but it was not the old thing, it was “autonomy convenient to Sparta”. Every city now will conform to one of the two types, Athens or Sparta; that is not quite freedom. But there the facts were.

Every way the world was changed. Westward the course of Empire makes its way. In commerce as well, the centre of gravity shifted. Miletus was destroyed; the Asiatic Greek cities that survived were at long war with their hinterland; the commercial significance of the West rose now, never to decline again. Athens was in the centre of the world, and the world was demonstrably one world, not the old collection of odd and dislocated spots where you could live alone; you would never live alone or be let alone again. Syracuse, Carthage, the Black Sea, Egypt, Susa—it is all one world; even Corcyra was in it, in spite of the Corcyraean fancy for being neutrals, standing outside the world. Industrial conditions changed, too. We have seen the city—one city after another—grow at the expense of the countryside; now Athens grows at the expense of them all, captures trade, commerce, industry and empire, and has to adjust herself to her new needs. She did it by putting all her free men into her fleets and carrying on her industries with slave-labour and foreigners. The country folk moved into the city after the Persian destruction of the farms, and

though the farms rose again and Acharnae had its population of farmers and charcoal burners, true sons of the "men who fought at Marathon," it was the men who fought at Salamis and their kind who ruled hereafter. Agriculture remained about as primitive as ever; industries and standards of wealth changed. Athens is the metropolis (so to say) of a whole world of traders, merchants, industrialists and sailors. They had saved the Greek race and its cities from the Persian, and few are so altruistic after a great victory as while the issue is in doubt. "The *demos*," says Aristotle,¹ "was the cause of the victory in the Persian War, and it began to get a notion of itself (its head was turned) and it followed worthless demagogues, whom the better class opposed."

In the former period we saw how intellectual quickening, coming with material prosperity, reacted upon social and political life. We have to take pains at this stage, and even do violence to ourselves, not to digress, for we have reached the great age of Greece, perhaps the moment when the human mind reached its most fruitful. We run over the names of the great poets, historians and philosophers; it is hard to exaggerate what they have done for the world, and for us ourselves; but they do not exhaust their age. Athens, and perhaps in measure all Greece, is full of the sense of power. Power is felt all round; they have mastered the seas, learned the secrets of the stars, made homes all round the Mediterranean. They have overcome distance and difficulty, beaten the savage from his shore and built their walls. The Persian has come and they have defeated the greatest force the world had ever known—they had never imagined there could be so great a world-empire, and the Greek has proved himself better than it in sheer fighting

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, ii, 12, 5.

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strength and in soundness of judgment. They have won liberty and will keep it; and music, sculpture, poetry, medicine, philosophy—in all these things they eclipse the utmost man had been able to imagine—a wild boast, but plain truth to this day. What cannot the Greek race do? If posterity rejoin, that it could not govern itself or others, that it could not recognize the rights of others, that it could not get over its distinction between Greek and barbarian, that it surrendered at last to the individual—what does it signify? That remained to be seen.

I have used plurals in all this. But Pindar's phrase is truer, and he uses the singular—*ἄπαν δ' εὐρόντος ἔργον*¹.

“Of an inventor cometh every work.”

Deep in your hearts of old was flung the seed;

But every act is his that made it spring.

The grace of Dionysus with its meed,

The ox of dithyramb—whence came this thing?

Who bitted first the steed?

The corporate mind is a modern figment. The society is indeed the nidus, but it never made even a ballad, let alone the *Agamemnon*. That was the work of Aeschylus, son of Euphorion; and Plato wrote the *Phaedrus*, Aristophanes the *Frogs*. Every great Athenian was individual; perhaps, if so crude an antithesis may be forgiven, every individual in Athens was great, or could be if he liked. Has not the great Funeral Speech of Pericles been called the glorification of the Athenian amateur? As we saw, Aristotle touched off mankind and the Greek mind in that sentence of his: “All claim political ability and think they are quite competent to fill most offices.”² Greek history is made by individuals. History, said Aristotle in a caustic phrase, is what Alcibiades did. Marcus is the typical Roman name,

¹ Pindar, *Olympian*, 13, 18. Translation of Cyril Maine, slightly altered.

² Aristotle, *Politics*, iv, 4, 18.

for Rome made her place by average men of an amazing average ability, not by the wonderful series that Greece knew of dazzling personalities. But average men combine better than the dazzling; they think more sanely of themselves and of others, and they build better empires. But is not our theme democracy, and not brilliant individuals or great empires? It is indeed, but the greatest democracy of the ancient world thought of all three, the individual, empire and the democratic ideal; and it forces every one who studies it to think of all three at once. Any other way of looking at Athens leads to error.

Government by the people, the development of the individual, and empire—"putting it in a word," said Pericles, "I say that our whole city is an education of Greece". I have sometimes heard it suggested that America is a democracy, but it is only too plain that the word has changed its meaning. I hear of a President of the United States; there was none in Athens; and of the President's cabinet; again there was none in Athens. I hear of a Supreme Court, and of judges there, who can overturn the laws and frustrate beyond recall the will of the American people. That humiliation never overtook the Athenian people, for they were their own Supreme Court. If they had no Jefferson, neither had they a Marshall. America lacks the two essential qualities of a democracy; the people there neither make the laws nor interpret them. There is no Assembly in America. It is in vain to tell me that you have improved on ancient democracy; the Athenians would not allow you the boast; that Geography prohibits democratic government—"so much the worse for you," they would rejoin; that with primaries and party managers you do just as well—they would assure you they knew better, they had known party managers, too. They might not admit Benjamin Ide

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Wheeler's indictment of Pericles as a "boss". I know that genial scholar and his humour, and I think he would join with me in saying that American democracy and Athenian are two different things.

Then let us look at Athenian democracy as we find it, and without losing ourselves in minutiae of regulations, let us ask what it did. Briefly, it managed the affairs of a great city without a town council and the policy of an empire without cabinet or minister, embassy or public office. If you say, was there not a Council? there was a Council, but its functions were of the slightest; the sovereign authority was the Assembly, the Council were elected by lot to get the agenda in order, and sat in relays a tenth of the year each. The Assembly is summoned and it meets—but stay! let me take an actual case, where the full awkwardness of the procedure and the fundamental weakness of the system appear.

In 339 Philip suddenly slipped through Thermopylae and occupied Elateia, master of the crucial pass. "It was evening," says Demosthenes, "and someone had come to the Prytaneis with the news that Elateia had been taken. Upon this they rose from supper without delay; some of them drove the occupants out of the booths in the marketplace and set fire to the wicker work"—this seems odd, but the Prytaneis were a sort of acting committee of the Council, and probably the bonfire was a well-understood summons to an emergency meeting—"others sent for the generals"—these were military generals, emphatically *not* elected by lot; military command only the very extremest democrats supposed they could handle, and nobody as a rule believed them; no! where life is concerned, you want an expert leader. So the generals were summoned "and the trumpeter; and the city was full of commotion. On the morrow at break of day, the Prytaneis summoned the Council to the Council

Chamber, while you made your way to the Assembly, and before the Council had transacted its business and passed its draft resolutions"—this sounds like policy; you will see how little there was—before anything was ready, "the whole people was seated on the hillside (on the Pnyx, the usual place of Assembly). And now when the Council had arrived, and the Prytaneis had reported the intelligence which they had received, and had brought forward the messenger and he had made his statement, the herald proceeded to ask, 'Who wishes to speak?' But no one came forward. The herald repeated the question, many times; still no one rose, The generals were all present, and all the orators, and the voice of their Country was calling for someone to speak for her deliverance." If it had been for a mere well-wisher to come forward, everybody would have stepped up; or if for the wealthiest, the Three Hundred might have put forward a man. "But that crisis and that day," says Demosthenes, "called for one who had followed the course of events closely from the first and had come to a true conclusion as to the motive and the aim of Philip in so acting. For no one, who was unacquainted with these, and had not scrutinized them from an early period, was any the more likely, for all his wealth and loyalty, to know what should be done, or to be able to advise you."¹

Picture the scene. An emergency, a national crisis, an assembly, but no President or Prime Minister, no ministry or cabinet, absolutely nobody who was responsible for anything except the masses of the people seated, open-mouthed and anxious on the hillside.²

This was in 339 B.C., one hundred and forty years after

¹ Demosthenes, *On the Crown*, 169-172, translation of Mr. Pickard, Cambridge, abridged and altered a little.

² Polybius, vi, 44, says the Athenian *demos* was normally rather like a ship without a captain.

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the defeat of the Persian invaders; and for those hundred and forty years—with two short and miserable interruptions of a few months each—this miraculous people, sitting on the Pnyx, had never been so lost. They were not quite lost then, for Demosthenes goes on to say quite candidly that he was there with the requisite knowledge of Philip's aims, and with a plan to counter them, but he had not pushed forward. The herald called in vain again and again. Nobody spoke; nobody was responsible. That had been the invariable risk for those hundred and forty years, and for thirty before them, and this miraculous people had survived, they had a fairly well-managed city for those days and the Greek world, and for seventy of the hundred and forty years they had guided the destinies of a great Confederacy—of an Empire that comprised two hundred and fifty cities dotted about the Aegæan and the neighbouring seas. Nobody technically responsible on any occasion, but invariably somebody “who had followed the course of events closely from the first and had come,” if not “to a true conclusion”, at least to some conclusion which commended itself to his fellow-citizens and kept the city and the Empire going.¹ Mistakes were made—horrible and disastrous mistakes, as we know; cruel and wicked propositions were brought forward and carried; but the wonder is not that such things occurred—they are always liable to occur in human assemblies, senates and parliaments—but that they occurred so seldom, that so few mistakes were made, and that such steady statemanship and wisdom ruled. The more you turn it over in mind, the more wonderful it grows. And it has been called mob-government.

“This mob,” wrote E. A. Freeman,² “made peace and

¹ On the great achievements of the Athenian Empire see the summaries of Isocrates, *Panegyric*, 106; *Areopagiticus*, 80.

² *Historical Essays*, i, p. 131.

war; it appointed generals and gave them instructions; it gave audience to foreign ambassadors and discussed their proposals; it appointed its own ambassadors and gave them instructions for foreign powers. If comparative secrecy was ever needed in a diplomatic transaction, the larger mob which counted its thousands handed over its powers to the smaller mob of five hundred which formed the Senate," the Council as we called it. Freeman states his conclusion that "this mob, clothed with executive functions, made one of the best governments which the world ever saw. It did not work impossibilities; it did not change earth into paradise or men into angels; . . . surely that government must be called a good one which is a marked improvement upon every government which has gone before it."

If this sound like panegyric, though I think it is sober sense and historical truth, let us hear the other side for a moment and then try to come closer again to facts. Here is what the Persian prince says in Herodotus¹ about Democracy. "Nothing can be more foolish and violent than a useless mob; to save ourselves from the *Hybris* of a despot by changing it for the *Hybris* of an unbridled Demos—that were unbearable indeed. Whatever the despot does, he does with knowledge; but the people have not even that; how can they have knowledge, who have neither learned nor for themselves seen what is best, but ever rush headlong and drive blindly onward, like a river in spate? Let those stand for democracy who wish ill to Persia; but let us choose a company of the best men and invest these with the power." How often we hear such sentiments, and how wise it seems—you will read something very like it in many places of Plato—to entrust all to the best men. But I have yet a sentence to quote that immediately follows: "let us invest

¹ Herodotus, iii, 81.

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these," he said, "with the power. For we ourselves shall be of that company." That sentence always seems to be at least subaudite somehow in such sentiments of wisdom.

Now look back at the facts of Athens. *Hybris*, unbridled Demos, pushing, blind, senseless, like a river in spate—and yet for seventy years an Empire is maintained, governed not ideally but not so ill, protected from the national enemy; Persia is kept off the seas and in proper humility at home; piracy is suppressed; trade and commerce flourish; and the most miraculous period of spiritual and intellectual grandeur the world has seen coincides in date and place with the rule of the Athenian Assembly. The Elizabethan Age should remind us that the highest life and national decline do not go together; and this is, so to put it, the Elizabethan Age of antiquity—I would even venture to say of the world. The human mind flags under bad government; to thrive it needs faith in the men around, hope for the future, the sense of power; and all these things were found by genius under the rule of Demos. Empire and genius are no anagram of degeneracy, in any language. Let us take our three points of faith, hope and the sense of power in turn.

Pericles bids Athenians be "lovers" of Athens, in the most passionate sense of the word. In England and other old countries men smile gently at the American belief in Democracy, and in America. Perhaps it is a young trait, but it is very Greek, very Athenian. The Athenian believed in Athens. I once heard the suggestion made by a scholar that "all Athenian trials were parodies." He was thinking probably of the fourth century; and perhaps epigrammatists always outrun the evidence. Freeman, more gravely and quietly, says that in Athens was the first instance the world ever saw of the substitution of law for force. Mrs. Trollope was impressed in her day by the lack of

dignity in American law courts as compared with English; perhaps in some ways Athenian law courts were still less dignified, and now and then justice was still more precarious in them. But from Solon's day onward the Athenians had cherished the ideal of equal law for all citizens—an ideal never yet attained by man, but it is something to cherish it, and the hardest critics of Demos would in quiet moments admit that Demos was not a bad fellow at heart. As Herodotus shows us, barbarian justice was spasmodic and too Oriental by half, picturesque rather than calculable or uniform. When the Persian King, for instance, had the skin of a corrupt judge removed from him, dressed and made up into a cushion for the judgment seat, to which post he appointed the deceased judge's son, the royal intention may win admiration; but the method adopted to keep justice pure somehow seems ill-suited to become a universal practice, effective as it may for once have been. Whatever Attic pleaders wanted an Athenian court to do, and however chary they were of fatiguing their five hundred judges with technicalities, they always talked to them of law and had laws read to them. And however impulsive and emotional those popular courts might be, they really meant to be law-abiding and they were. Athenians did not carry arms in ordinary life—for the best of reasons; they did not need them. The exiled king Demaratus, told Xerxes that "over the Spartans is a master, to wit Law, whom they fear much more even than thy men fear thee." ¹ In Athens, as Pericles says, "while we are unconstrained in our private intercourse, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; we are prevented from doing wrong by respect for authority and for the laws, having an especial regard to those which are ordained for the protection of the injured,

¹ Herodotus, vii, 104.

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and to those unwritten laws the breaking of which brings admitted shame.”¹

In Athens more than in any other place I have read of, or so far have visited, there is what we may call an equation between city and citizen. The citizen is the city; *L'état, c'est moi*, each one of them can say. He does not break the laws, because he makes the laws; they are the expression of his own will; they suit him admirably. They suit him only too well, growls the contemporary critic; they fit him like a glove. We saw the caustic sentence of Aristotle that the real difference between oligarchy and democracy is wealth or poverty. In Athens, says Pericles, “as for poverty, a man is not barred from a public career by obscurity of rank, if he but has it in him to do the state a service.”² “You will find united in the same persons an interest at once in private and in public affairs, and in others of us who give attention chiefly to business you will find no lack of insight into political matters.” Which is saying politely that an artisan can be a citizen, and a good one with a real insight into political issues; and that, we saw before, some people doubted. He continues, “For we alone regard a man who takes no interest in public affairs, not as a harmless but as a useless character; and we Athenians are able to judge at all events if we cannot originate. We do not look on discussion as a hindrance to action; the real impediment to action is the want of that knowledge which discussion should give beforehand. We have a peculiar power of thinking before we act and then of acting, though other men are courageous from ignorance, but hesitate upon reflection.” The spirit of Democracy then, as we find it in Athens, is belief in men. It may be said that this was also

¹ Thucydides, ii, 37.

² Thucydides, ii, 37.

the faith of Jefferson, and that it underlies the American belief in popular government. So far there is coincidence. But Pericles seems to lay more stress than is suggested by the words of some other democratic leaders or by their conduct upon the duty as well as the right of the citizen to govern and to think out each situation in full, beside cherishing his faith in his fellow-citizens and the general scheme of government. No scheme of government is of much use unless it is maintained by people who think, and whatever records of insufficient thought can be brought by Thucydides against the Athenian people¹ the long story of the hundred and seventy years surely suggests that real thinking was done.

The great period of Athenian democracy is above all things one of hope. We have seen a century of American and European life buoyed up and carried on by a belief, with curiously little of intellectual guarantee or of historical evidence behind it, that human progress is certain and inevitable; everything must come out right in the best possible of all universes. This was supplemented at one time by a fifth in the quick perfectibility of man. Wordsworth, in speaking of the French Revolution, strikes the note that rings through this age of Greece—

Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again² —

when those, who had eyes to see,

saw in rudest men
Self-sacrifice the firmest; generous love,
And continence of mind and sense of right.³

¹ Cf. Thucydides, iv, 65.

² *Prelude*, vi, 339.

³ *Prelude*, ix, 386.

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How like it sounds to Pericles—"man and his noble nature . . . capable of clear truth . . . a people uprisen fresh as the morning star." No wonder then

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven.

If you doubt my comparison, I suggest that you read some books of Xenophon's *Hellenica*, that you look at Plato's portrait of the Democratic Man (which is coming in the next lecture), that you study till you catch the note of it the gloomy half century between the fall of Athens and the rise of Philip, and then turn back to any of the great authors of the fifth century. Their note is hope. There was sorrow and shame and disappointment in Athens even then, or Euripides could not have written as he did. But faith and hope and the sense of power are in all their writings—in Pindar's, too; though he was no Athenian and no democrat, he was a contemporary and lived in thoughts of victory; in Plato's, though he had seen Democracy break down. This mood makes the mind of that world—experimental, buoyant, creative. You cannot dis sever that from the society in which it springs; Democracy was the nidus, the atmosphere—but no metaphor will quite serve.

I have hinted, perhaps too daringly, that there was a difference between the Jeffersonian and the Periclean man. I will not risk here and now a discussion of Jefferson, who may not be wholly responsible for the use and misuse his admirers make of his ideas. It seems written in humanity that the man who borrows ideas must spoil them, except in rare cases. But Pericles emphasizes, at least in the speech as Thucydides gives it, that it is not the crude raw product of humanity that makes the Athenian citizen. His ideal, the Athenian ideal, is much more like Nestle's summary *die*

Ausbildung und Geltendmachung der Individualität—the development and making available of individuality.¹ We saw that Solon seems to have realized that the chief asset of Athens was the individual. Here the belief meets us again. The Athenian is no plaster-of-Paris man, nor cast-iron either, the exact equivalent of every other good Athenian, as every Spartan was of every other stupid Spartan. Athens was not reproducing a pattern; she was not copying the ways of her neighbours, she was giving them an ideal;² and it remains an ideal for us all to this day. You in America, we in England, conform too much to type. Athens is the school of Hellas *because* “each individual amongst us can in his own person, with the utmost versatility and grace, prove himself self-sufficient in the most varied forms of activity.”³ A French critic has spoken of the *unity* of the age of Pericles, an American of the *integrity* of the Elizabethan Age. I take it they mean the same thing. The Elizabethan could sail a ship, he could beat the Spaniard in a naval action or a theological argument, he could turn a sonnet to his mistress’ eyebrow or a compliment to the Queen,—soldier, sailor, courtier, poet, Protestant, he was all of these, he was a man, an integer. Most of us are fractions of a man—decimals, I fear, at that; we do one thing and do it in a lame way because we do it in a dull spirit of unawareness, irresponsive to the world’s wonder and variety. Not so the Greek, nor the Athenian! “You Greeks are always children—young in your souls,” says Plato’s old Egyptian. The world was an integer, not a mess of segments, for them, a whole to be grasped and understood; life was an integer, to be lived, not bisected. It was to be given to Athens in all its fullest development—

¹ Nestle, *Euripides*, p. 194.

² Thucydides, ii, 37.

³ Thucydides, ii, 41.

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tragic drama or comedy, sculpture, political sense, commercial shrewdness, humanism, while you lived; and if, as Pericles says, the hour came when you should lay it down for your country, it was a sacrifice indeed, of something complete and whole and beautiful, and you made that sacrifice in death for the Athens of your love as gladly as you lived for her. "The value of such a spirit is not to be expressed in words," says Pericles, "the whole world is the sepulchre of famous men. The love of honour is ever young".¹ "And now," he concludes in the quiet Greek style, "when you have duly lamented, each man his own dead, you may depart."

So the great speech was made, and the listeners departed; and life and the historian, each in their relentless way, carry on the story: for the next chapter tells of the Plague; and soon after Pericles died and Thucydides paused to write a splendid characterization. Many have concluded from it that the historian was a follower of Pericles. All literature, it has been suggested, is autobiography, and perhaps it is; but in literature at least the greatest individuality is often the least obtrusive. Thucydides had a contemporary who has made his contributions to the history of their country, and M. Langlois couples Aristophanes with Demosthenes as a pair of striking examples of the power that great writers have of paralyzing critics and obscuring facts. Now the outstanding thing about Aristophanes is his humour; and while you can generally see what a wit is aiming at, or whom he is aiming at, for it is part of his business that you should—you can never be quite certain what a man of humour really means, or how much of it he means, or where he is looking. Is Aristophanes laughing at Cleon—or at you with your mouth open to catch Cleon's

¹ Phrases from Thucydides, ii, 43, 44.

every word—or at Democracy? Cleon thought the poet was laughing at him, and readers of the plays think Cleon had some grounds for the belief. Others fancy that the business of Aristophanes was comedy and not crusade; but in a humourist it is so hard to distinguish them. What was Cervantes smiling at—Spain or chivalry or himself? But, you interject, I am digressing. What I really wanted to say was this, that when you are dealing with genius of the highest order, whether it be that of historian or humourist, you have to reckon on the detachment of genius—its power, as we might say rather carelessly, of entering in and keeping out, and doing both at once. Some critics think Thucydides was cool in his enthusiasm for Democracy and was not to the end of his life an out-and-out adherent of Pericles. It would be hard to be that when you survive your hero thirty years and perhaps had the gift of cool vision from when first you were “of an age to remark”. But I need not discuss the politics of Thucydides, and I may have said enough for the moment of Aristophanes. Humour is perhaps not wanted in the study of Democracy.

But I wish to quote one or two contemporaries who were neither men of humour nor men of genius. Cleon was a good practical politician, a vulgar, friendly, reliable democrat, whom people had no difficulty in understanding—perhaps honest, too, or (as an old friend in Canada described himself to me) “half-honest”. No man, at any rate, according to Aristophanes and others whose love for Democracy was less ambiguous, was more eminently than Cleon a product of Democracy—a genuine “favourite son”. Let me quote Cleon, and as I do, picture him yourselves as Plutarch shows him, striding about the platform, waving his arms and his clothing, and shouting—

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And a voice he had like the roar of a stream
That has whelped Destruction and Death.¹

"Many and many a time in the past," he shouts,² "I have realized that a democracy cannot rule other men, but more than ever to-day". The cause of this outburst is that it is proposed to rescind a proposal he had made and the people had carried, to kill all the men of the revolted Mitylene and sell the women and children for slaves. It is true that the Athenians did rescind the decree; but they had passed it, and Cleon, "the most violent of the citizens and at that time exercising the greatest influence over them", had proposed it. Let us have a few more sentences of him then; they will tell us something of the mind of the times.

"You must remember that your empire is a tyranny exercised over unwilling subjects who keep plotting against you. . . . But quite the most alarming thing is, if nothing we have resolved upon shall be settled once for all. We forget that a state in which the laws, though imperfect, are unalterable is better off than one in which the laws are good but powerless. Dullness and modesty are a more useful combination than cleverness and licence; and the simpler sort for the most part make better citizens than the clever people. The latter want to be thought wiser than the laws. Do not be misled by those three most fatal things for an Empire—pity, delight in eloquence, or 'sweet reasonableness'³ . . . Punish them as they deserve and give your other allies a plain example—that whoever revolts, the punishment is death."

Cleon did not carry the vote that day in 427 B.C.; but let me show the price of empire by another quotation de-

¹ Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 1034.

² Thucydides, iii, 37.

³ I have used Matthew Arnold's translation of *epieikeia*; perhaps Cleon would have wished a more forcible or caustic rendering.

scribing the day in 404 B.C. when the news came to Athens that her last fleet was captured—"Wailing came up from the Peiraeus between the Long Walls to the city, every man telling the next. That night no man slept, wailing not only for the lost but for themselves still more, and thinking that they, too, must suffer what they had done to the Melians, and the people of Histiaea, of Scione, of Torone, of Aegina, and many others of the Greeks."¹

So while we reckon the gain to mankind from the Athenian Democracy, we must not forget what the Athenian Empire cost.

There was another figure in Athens who led the Demos, a far more brilliant creature, the ward of Pericles himself. He tells the Spartans what he thought of Democracy; and, though he is of course putting his best foot foremost in an audience hostile both to Athens and to Democracy, his speech is given by Thucydides, who seems to have been in close touch with him in days of exile, and perhaps heard him in Sparta. There are, as the old Greek commentator phrased it, Alcibiadisms in the speech.² "Any power," he says, "adverse to despotism is called Democracy, and my family have always retained the leadership of the people because we have been the persistent enemies of tyrants. Living, too, under a popular government, how could we avoid in a great degree conforming to circumstances? However, we did our best to observe political moderation amid the prevailing licence. But there were others, as there always have been, who led the crowd into more evil ways; and it was these who drove me out. We were leaders of the whole people, and deemed it right to help to preserve that form of government, under which the state had grown

¹ Xenophon, *Hellenica*, ii, 2, 3.

² Thucydides, vi, 89.

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great, and which had come down to us. As for Democracy, like all sensible men, we knew it only too well, and I better than anybody else, who have so good a right to revile it. But about admitted folly, there is nothing new to say."

Admitted folly—incapable of ruling an Empire—so sons of Athens in her great day could speak. If we are to discount it somewhat as quotation, and to refrain from taking Aristophanes too seriously, there is yet a witness who gives his own testimony. Nothing is known of him apart from his pamphlet, which was of old attributed to Xenophon. But the style is not Xenophon's, and the little tract is generally put about the year 424 B.C. The author seems unaware that in 411 and 404 attempts were made, and miscarried horribly in murder and failure, to have an un-democratic Athens, and he seems to be weighing what chance of success such an attempt might have. He is not a great writer, nor a great thinker, nor a great man, but he is cool, definite and very intelligible. Some might even call him cynical, if the word meant anything by now. However this is his line.

He cannot and will not praise the Athenians for choosing Democracy—where the base do better than the good; but, once granting they have chosen it, he allows they are consistent; and what the outside Greeks count mistakes are not mistakes at all but quite effective policy. It is not quite unjust either that the vulgar should have predominance over the well-born and the rich; it was they after all who made the city great—bos'ns, look-out men, shipwrights, and the like, and not hoplites and gentlemen. So there is sense in their absorbing office, where there is a salary and no military risk to their persons. Athens allows the base and needy to rule, of course, for that is Democracy; the more there are of them, the better for Democracy; poverty,

disorder, ignorance, want of culture make the Demos, and everywhere people of birth and culture are against them. So in public discussion, they know the man of character, the sensible man, will no doubt talk sense but will be hostile; and they naturally prefer an ignorant rascal of their own kind who will stand by them. They don't want a well-governed city, but a democratic one, governed the way they prefer. Good government involves able men making the laws, and would stop madmen leading the Assembly; it would mean simply slavery for them. And they dress and look just like slaves; so you cannot punch a slave in the streets; he might only too probably be a citizen.

They make the rich pay, too—for choruses in the drama, triremes and so on; they see that the poor get the wages as dancers and sailors of course. They are apt to deprive the good of civic rights and property, and condemn them to exile and death, and to uphold the bad. In their treatment of their allies they look after themselves pretty shrewdly. All suits are tried in Athens—that means business, fees for jurymen, harbour dues, rent of lodgings, hire of animals and slaves, and general importance for every potential jurymen. In the law courts their concern is not justice but interest. They favour the bad in every allied city; the good would not help them. So they keep the allies as slaves of Demos. They quite understand the advantages of an Empire and of a navy to control it. Sea power means food for them, and luxuries, too, and wealth—and a conglomerate sort of language made of all kinds of dialects. They would be wholly secure if Attica were an island; but after all an invader wastes the lands of the well-to-do; there is nothing of theirs he can burn. They are rather afraid of the oligarchs making common cause with an invader, which could not happen of course, if Attica were an island. Another advantage of

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Democracy is that they can always repudiate an engagement made with a foreign power; they can throw over their representatives; there is always some handle somewhere. If anything miscarries, they blame their opponents. After all it is only natural for people to look after themselves, and they do, and very effectually too, and I don't blame them. From their own point of view they manage admirably; and there is no hope of change. You could think of improvements in the constitution, no doubt; but to introduce them and still have it Democracy—that is the difficulty. Nor are there many persons unjustly disfranchised—only a few; and it will need more than a few to attack the democracy in Athens. So change is improbable.

The most brilliant people of antiquity did not lack the gift of self-criticism. We have seen in outline what the Athenians themselves had to say about their government. Thucydides and Xenophon, Plato and Aristophanes, cannot be accused of concealing their people's blunders or its crimes. The oligarch whom we have been quoting certainly does not over-glorify the great features of Athens. We can see quite plainly the ugly side of Democracy, as Aristotle saw it and revealed it—hysteria, judicial murder, extravagance, legal pillage of the rich, contempt for the foreigner, *Hybris* in short—but these are not peculiar to ancient Democracy, or to the Greeks. Sparta governed the world under her hegemony every whit as badly as Athens did, and moreover sold Greek cities to the Persian. Let us sum up what Athenian Democracy was and what it did. It was a government of citizens met in an Assembly, where, without Presidents, ministers or ambassadors or representatives, they themselves governed. They created a beautiful city and a law-abiding people; they united the Greek world or large part of it; they defeated the Persian Empire

in all its greatness and drove the Persian from the sea. They made an atmosphere where genius could grow, where it could be as happy perhaps as genius ever can, and where it flowered and bore the strange fruit that has enriched the world forever. Whate'er we know of beauty, half is hers, —the political temper, and the scientific,—philosophy, sculpture and poetry—Athens gave us in that period, a century or so at longest, while Democracy flourished.