

Preface

This little book, differing as it does in purpose from most school editions, requires a word of preface. Its aim is to stimulate the imagination and strengthen the love of literature rather than to train the mind in verbal accuracy or educate it by the mastery of difficulties. The myths from the Odes form the bulk of the Selections, and the book may serve as a brief change from ordinary form-work, but the end proposed will not, I think, be gained unless the verse is read rapidly and without much labour; it may then be read again according to the maxim [Greek text]. But, as Pindar is a difficult author both in language and connexion of thought, I have considered it essential to give much help. With his difficulties smoothed away this poet is well fitted by his heroic theme and splendid vigour to excite the imagination of boys of any literary bent. The photographs of famous statues which adorn the book are not directly illustrative of the text, but may help readers better to realize Pindar's world, and the

'Land of lost gods and god-like men.'

SHERBORNE, January, 1904.

Introduction – Pindar

Pindar was born near Thebes about 522 BC and he lived to be nearly eighty years old. He was in his prime when the invasion of Xerxes took place, in which Thebes played so inglorious a part. The poet cannot but rejoice that the barbarian was repulsed, but his attitude to his own city-state is never disloyal to her. He calls Thebes affectionately [Greek text], bulwark of Hellas. The poet is in truth Pan-Hellenic. His odes bestow praise on Athens, Lacedaemon, Aegina, Argos, Rhodes, Cyrene, Syracuse, Acragas impartially. Moreover, he himself visited most of these cities, if not all of them. In race he was an aristocrat of the noble family of Aegeidae, of which there were branches both at Thebes and Sparta, and in his poetry he speaks as an aristocrat, giving counsel to Hieron of Syracuse in words of proud equality as his peer.

Of the many subjects of Pindar's muse the Epinicia have alone come down to us entire, perhaps because they are Pindar's best work. He was intensely religious, rejecting the old mythology where it seemed to dishonour the gods, and the composition of these odes seems to have suited exactly his priestly-aristocratic temperament. The games are religious festivals under the direct care of Zeus and Apollo; the victors are generally men of noble family, so that the poet can speak of the deeds of their ancestors as well as of their own, and in the great games are also the moral elements – [Greek text] - the 'Willingness to spend toil and money for honour,' and the splendour which Pindar loves.

The myths, which form so large a part of this book, are usually, though not always, the most interesting part of every ode. The odes themselves were sung either in procession to the temple of the god, or in front of, or some times within, the victor's home. They were accompanied by the lyre or flute or both, sung by a carefully trained chorus and performed also with rhythmic movement of feet. The division of the odes into strophe, antistrophe (lit. turning of the chorus to one side, and the return), serves to recall this movement or sacred dance. The prize of victory at the Pan-Hellenic games (Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, Isthmian) was a simple wreath of olive, bay, or parsley, but more solid honours awaited the victor on his return to his native city, and of these the epinician ode, composed by some famous poet like Pindar, formed a part.

Pindar's dialect is the main Epic as his vocabulary is Epic, but frequent Doric and Aeolic forms are found. On the other hand, some of the commonest Epic inflexions are not found, e.g. the infinitive in [Greek text]. His metrical schemes are difficult, and no explanation of them can be usefully attempted here.

Pindar's reputation in his own country was a splendid one, as is shown by the legends about his birth, and by such customs as the nightly cry of the priest at Delphi, 'Let Pindar the poet go in to the supper of the gods.' With cultivated Romans like Horace and Quintilian, it was not less splendid. Cp. The odes of Horace 'Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari,' and Quintilian's 'Novem lyricorum longe Pindarus princeps.' Among our own poets, Milton and Gray at least have formed the same lofty estimate.

The characteristic qualities of Pindar's poetry are swiftness, elevation, energy, splendour. It has sometimes the defects of its qualities. The swiftness becomes obscurity, the splendour turgidity, the elevation sententiousness. His defects, however, whatever they may be, will hardly appear in this volume of Selections.