

ON THE ORIGIN OF A WRITTEN GREEK LITERATURE.

IT is difficult for us, who live in a reading age, and have so long been familiar with rapid and easy methods of writing and printing, to realise the idea of a highly civilised community which could not, or did not, read and write. Nevertheless, there are very good reasons for believing that such a state of society is not only possible, but that it actually did exist. 'There was,' says Mr. Grote, 'in early Greece a time when no reading class existed.' Even the more educated, who could read public records and inscriptions, may have had no practice at all in writing. We are too apt to determine these questions by a reference to our own standards. But a few generations ago men got on pretty well in our own country without steam-engines, railways, or the penny post, all which we have come to regard as social necessities. And when anything has become, in the present state of affairs, a *necessity*, we are apt to forget the difference of circumstances, in great measure, perhaps, created by it, under which we have learnt to view it as such. We can hardly comprehend how, some thirty years ago, all the despatches and all the passenger traffic between London and Edinburgh were carried in half-a-dozen coaches a day, going ten miles an hour. That is because the present enormous traffic itself has been created by the improved facilities for it. Everybody reads now because there are penny papers and an abundance of cheap periodicals; and so again, it is the supply which has given such an immense impulse to the desire to avail ourselves of it. In other words, supply and demand always mutually act and react upon each other.

It is quite conceivable then that even in very civilised and intellectual nations painting or sculpture for the eye and oral recitation for the ear might have sufficed for a long time both for the recording of facts and for the communicating of ideas. In this sense, a *literature* (though the term itself would be an anomaly) may have existed without the use of writing. For instance, the facts of history may have been handed down by tradition and taught by lectures. Compositions both in prose and verse could be learnt by heart and recited without ever having been written down at all. The art of speaking must have long preceded the art of writing, and it may even have flourished the more from the absence of the latter. Thus in Homer we find Nestor and Ulysses famed for their eloquence, though no hint of writing or of reading is anywhere to be found in the Homeric poems. It is even probable that the high development of oratory and of sculpture at Athens in the time of Pericles was mainly due to the want of a current or circulated literature, which deficiency was supplied by a corresponding proficiency in the sister arts. Human

intellect is sure to find its expression in one way if it cannot in another. In the middle ages, Bible History was taught by stained glass windows and frescoed walls, just because there were no printed Bibles or Prayerbooks. And Dr. Maitland in his 'Dark Ages' remarks on the extraordinary knowledge of Scripture which gives a tone and a character to all the writings and records of a period when some would have us believe that the Bible was 'unknown.' So with the early Greeks,—where men could not write or read in private, they talked and listened in public. The modes of instruction differed from ours, but the instruction was there, and the result was the same,—making due allowance for the difference in the aggregate of human knowledge,—a general intelligence and a power and habit of thought, with a feeling for the harmonious and the beautiful, and a sound judgment in social and political questions. Our ideas of the most necessary elements of education are combined in the convenient monosyllables *read* and *write*; and we joke about 'the three R's' when we add a small modicum of knowledge in figures. Without such rudiments, a person now becomes a boor and a churl. But it was not so always. Perhaps indeed this thought suggests a psychological reason why the general decline of art should be so nearly coincident throughout Europe with the general use of printing, or what is called 'the revival of letters.' This was a new method by which genius found utterance, and it drew men's attention away from other and older methods. There would not have been a Pheidias if there had been a printing-press in the Athenian Acropolis. There would have been no Greek Plays if there had been Daily Newspapers to discuss the current topics of the period. From this habit of realising descriptions not from written accounts but from painted or sculptured forms, we often find the Greeks comparing living objects to statuary, as when a female form is described by the phrase 'beautiful as a statue,' 'looking as though in a picture,' and a man's character as 'unskilfully painted,' for 'unfavourably presented to one's notice.' So also those versed in ancient lore are spoken of as 'possessing the forms painted by older hands.'¹ The astonishing number of still-extant Greek vases going back many centuries before the Christian era, and containing a whole mythology in their designs, is sufficient to prove the proposition, that painting rather than writing was the vehicle of ideas to the ancient Greeks.

There are, as I hope to show, grounds for believing that although they early possessed the Semitic alphabet, they made no great use of it for a long time except for the writing or inscribing names, laws, treaties, decrees, or other short records public or domestic. All these uses are widely different from the transcription of current literature, and great confusion has been made in this respect by those who think

¹ Aesch. *Agam.* 241, 774. Eur. *Hec.* 559. *Hippol.* 451. In the latter passage γράφας is sometimes, but very erroneously, interpreted 'writings.'

the antiquity of *writing* in itself proves the antiquity of *copying books*.

I call attention to a most singular, significant, and important fact, which, so far as I am aware, has never been noticed. It is this: that the Greek language, so copious, so expressive, not only has no proper verbs equivalent to the Roman *legere* and *scribere*,² but it has no terms at all for any one of the implements or materials so familiar to us in connection with writing (pen, ink, paper, book, library, copy, transcript, &c.) till a comparatively late period of the language. The only exception is, that one or two words expressing 'tablets,'—probably of wood overlaid with wax,—are found in the earlier writers of the Periclean era. But it is abundantly clear that the use of letters for literary purposes was regarded as quite subordinate, and solely as an 'aid to memory,' in which sense it is often spoken of. Thus, Prometheus is said to have communicated to man 'the putting together of letters, as a means for making an artificial memory the recorder of all things;' and there is a well-known myth in the 'Phaedrus' of Plato, in which the Egyptian god Theuth or Thoth is said to have given letters 'to assist memory,' to which it is objected by the then King of Egypt, that this new art will make men forget rather than remember, 'because, from trusting to external signs, and from the non-practice of memory, they will cease to recal facts from their own minds.'³ We have early mention also of inscriptions on bronze plates;⁴ but the word for 'book' (which is our word 'Bible') does not occur at all till near the time of Plato, or shortly before B.C. 400. The first mention of it, I think, is in the 'Birds' of Aristophanes⁵ (B.C. 415), and here it only means a collection of written oracles, which, perhaps, were among the first records that began to be written down.⁶ Speaking generally, it is quite extraordinary how very scanty are the notices of writing, or of any of its kindred operations or materials, throughout the earlier Greek Literature. Even in the Dialogues of Plato, though we know written books were then fully introduced, there is a total silence as to how and on what they were written.

But here comes the difficulty, from which we must try to find an escape. There *is* a Greek Literature, and a very copious one. We

² The Greek equivalent to *legere* means 'to speak,' and that to *scribere* means properly 'to draw' or 'paint,'—primarily, as in Homer, 'to scratch or mark a surface.' It came to be used in the sense of 'writing' because it was at first (as we see in the earliest vases) an adjunct to descriptive painting. The Greeks had two verbs which indirectly express 'reading,'—but they are clumsy shifts, unworthy of so complete a language, the one meaning *recognoscere*, the other *sibi colligere*, 'to have something put before one in a collective form.' The earliest passage in which 'reading a written name' occurs, is Pindar, *Ol.* x. 1-3. After the age of Pericles, the verb 'to write' was used commonly enough in our literary sense.

³ Aesch. *Prom.* 460. Plat. *Phaedr.* p. 274, chap. lix.

⁴ Sophocles, *Trach.* 683.

⁵ V. 974. In Herod. i. 123 and iii. 128, βιβλίον means 'a small piece of byblus,' as χρυσίον means 'a gold coin,' a bit of χρυσός.

⁶ See Soph. *Trach.* 1167.

have the long histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, to say nothing of Homer and Hesiod and a great number of Greek Plays. It is evident that these, or most of these (allowing that epic poems *may* have been orally handed down) must have been written. How can we reconcile this fact, which may be regarded as certain, with the scanty notices of writing itself? This consideration should make us somewhat timid in pressing 'negative evidence' too far.

This is, indeed, a most important and difficult inquiry. To answer it fully and properly would require a long investigation; but the results may be stated in brief. We have no proof whatever that the papyrus, though so early known and used as a writing-material by the Egyptians, was so employed by the Greeks. There is much more reason to think that the authors of works laboriously wrote them on strips of wood (probably on a surface prepared with wax), and kept from contact, when laid upon each other, by raised margins like our school-slates. These would be very durable, though not perhaps very portable; and yet, they would not of necessity be much larger or heavier than the ponderous folios which were issued by printers only two centuries ago.

Such books were not meant in the first instance for transcription. It may be greatly doubted, for example, if it would have been *possible* to procure, for money, a copy of Herodotus or Thucydides in the lifetime of the authors. The autograph copies were used only for 'readings;' and when we are told that Herodotus read his History at the Olympian Games, and that Thucydides, when a boy, heard it, and burst into tears,⁷ there is nothing in the anecdotes beyond what is extremely probable. For these 'Displays,' as the Greek rhetoricians called them, or 'Readings' and 'Recitations' (as we call them after the Roman custom), were the only way by which the contents of such works could become known, as transcription for general circulation was evidently impossible, and as there were (so far as we know) no 'Readers,' as a class, so there could be no 'Writers' or transcribers by profession.

I must guard myself here by stating that I am not now making a rash or dogmatic assertion. I am only expressing the view which my researches into this question have led me to accept as on the whole the most probable view. It does not in the least follow that because the art of writing was known, and because the proper materials for it may have early existed, that therefore they were made available for the copying of books. What we should call 'spouting,' or the sensational oral delivery of poetry or prose—more often from memory than from written copies—was the Greek method of gaining attention to literary compositions, and so we find the art of the Rhap-

⁷ Life of Thucydides by Marcellinus. This is quite compatible with what Thucydides says of his own history in i. 22, that it was not composed to vie with others in attracting an *audience for the time*, or merely to be 'pleasing to hear' (ἐς ἀκρόασιν), but to keep and lay by as a possession for all time.

sodist flourished even in the times of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes. It seems to be commonly assumed, but wholly without proof, that the earlier Greeks had some writing-material equivalent to our paper or parchment. It is no use to indulge in mere assertion, and say that 'Papyrus, with the Egyptian trade open now for over a century and a half, *must have been* cheap and plentiful in Greece and Sicily.'⁸ Why, then, is it *never* mentioned as a writing-material? There is indeed one verse in Aeschylus⁹ in which he speaks of certain commands not being 'sealed down in folds of byblus,' after the manner of an official missive, but delivered *viva voce*: but the genuineness of the verse cannot, even for metrical reasons, be trusted, and the context tends to show it is a later interpolation. Anyhow, it is evident, from the mention of *sealing*, that letter-writing, and not the copying of literature, must be alluded to. Still the line is one of the greatest importance to the determination of this question; for, if papyrus was used for letter-writing, it could also have been used for copying books.

Herodotus does indeed tell us¹⁰ that the Ionians used prepared skins for writing on, and this is probably the origin of parchment.¹¹ Yet no notice of it anywhere occurs beyond the brief statement he makes to this effect. There is nowhere the slightest indication that either papyrus or parchment was ever used for the transcription of literary works.

What, then, did they use? For, even if Homer and Hesiod and the rhapsodists who represented them, made no written copies (which, in itself, they either may or may not have done), it cannot be doubted that the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles were written down from the first; and being so written, they must have been preserved (and all the more carefully because they were unique autograph copies) either in temples, or treasuries, or among the State archives, till the times of the Alexandrine school of learning, when *for the first time* the use of papyrus and the practice of transcription became common; and from them have come down to us the copies we still possess in a more or less corrupt state of the texts.¹²

Nothing could be more convenient than light strips or tablets of wood, called by the Greeks δέλτοι and πίνακες. Each would represent a page; and for the purposes of a note-book, or of transmission under seal, they could easily have been used like the Roman *pugillares*. That the surface was covered with a thin layer of wax is probable from many considerations. In the first place it is a material very cheap, very plentiful, very easily impressed or oblite-

⁸ Dr. Hayman in the *Journal of Philology*, viii. p. 138.

⁹ *Suppl.* 947.

¹⁰ Book v. 58.

¹¹ Corrupted from *Pergamena*, from its manufacture at Pergamos in Asia Minor.

¹² Diogenes Laertius tells us that Xenophon stole and published (as he also himself continued) the History of Thucydides. This anecdote, if true, shows that the book had not been published or circulated (Laert. ii. 6, § 13).

rated,¹³ and very durable. We have a vast number of ancient deeds, and the waxen seals still appended to them remain in good preservation after the lapse of six or seven centuries. There are incidental notices of these waxed tablets being used in the Athenian law-courts for indictments and other purposes. So in the 'Clouds' there is a joke about melting the letters of a writ in the sunshine,¹⁴ and in the 'Wasps' we read of an old jurymen having his finger-nail full of wax from scratching a line on a tablet. It is therefore highly probable that a stiff and not a flexible material was at first used for writing; in other words, the school-slate preceded the use of the copy-book; and the 'black board' of the lecturer is still a witness to the ancient custom. It is the origin too of the diptychs and triptychs that came into use over the altars of churches, not, at first, for paintings, but for lists of written names.

The examples of Egypt and Assyria, not to mention some other countries, as Lycia, Phoenicia, and Etruria, tend to show that the earliest form of writing was scratching stone or clay,—a process essentially different from the use of the pen. The form of the arrow-headed character is thought to show that clay-cylinders, impressed by an angular piece of wood or metal, were used before the inscriptions were cut in stone, which must have been very early, though not so early as Egyptian hieroglyphics on granite. Assyrian inscriptions on slabs considerably exceed 1,000 years B.C. The Greeks too made inscriptions on stone pillars (*στήλαι*) as early as Solon or Pisistratus, perhaps,—very short and badly executed, so far as we can now judge from the ungainly shapes of the letters and the non-division of words. The early 'lettering' of the Greek vases, of about the same period, belongs to the department of painting rather than of writing proper; and it hardly extended, for two or three centuries, beyond single words. As a rule, ancient sites, e.g. those called 'Cyclopiæ,' are wholly destitute of inscriptions; we might as well expect to find letters on a block at Stonehenge as on a polygonal or squared stone at Mycenæ. Even the scratches on the clay balls (whorls) found by Schliemann at Hissarlik have no claim at all to be considered as writing. Nor have any Hebrew inscriptions of any antiquity (apart from the Moabitic stone,¹⁵ with its Assyrian and Egyptian affinities of form and material) ever come to light in any of the explorations at Jerusalem or in Palestine. The sole exception to the absence of ancient writing other than that on stone, seems to be certain papyri found in Egyptian tombs, which are said to claim a very high antiquity.

¹³ The word used by Euripides for altering words in a *δέλτος* is *συγγεῖν*, implying melting the surface, or obliterating words with the blunt end of a *stilus*. *Iph. Aul.* 37. The prepared wax was called *μάλθη* or *μάλθα* (Jul. Pollux, *Onom.* x. 58). See Herod. vii. 239.

¹⁴ Aristoph. *Nub.* 772,—a passage very remarkable for the early mention of a glass lens and its use for drawing the sun rays into a focus.

¹⁵ I observe that the supposed date of this stone, B.C. 896, is now seriously questioned, and the date placed as late as B.C. 260 (*Athenæum*, Dec. 6, 1879).

But because the Egyptians had the papyrus and wrote upon it, it must not be assumed, as it too often is, contrary to all evidence, that the early Greeks used it too, and wrote copies of Homer upon it even in the time of Solon. A stone-cutter with his chisel is a *widely* different person from a student with his pen. It is curious to find written words described as composed of 'shapes' rather than of letters. Thus, in the 'Theseus' of Euripides,¹⁶ a countryman (illiterate, of course) describes the letters composing the name as so many combinations of lines, circles, and zig-zags, just as if the letter A were described to us by a country bumpkin as 'two sticks set aslant with a bar across them.'¹⁷ There was a legend that Palamedes 'invented writing' in the time of the Trojan War; and in allusion to this we have a droll scene in Aristophanes, where Mnesilochus, a relative of Euripides, while in prison cuts a rude inscription on pieces of wood, and throws them out to inform his friends of his trouble.

The custom of sending written messages must have prevailed early; and we may safely place letter-writing before book-writing. The *scytale* was one of the earliest contrivances, and it was a very ingenious one. Two persons privately kept staves or batons of precisely the same diameter, so that a strip of bark or skin wrapped round, and written on lengthwise, would be intelligible only by precisely the same arrangement of the lines, since the order of the words would become disjointed on a stick of any other diameter.

There is hardly any allusion to 'books' earlier than the writings of Plato. And it is very remarkable that they are spoken of as a *novelty* and a development in the 'Frogs' of Aristophanes (B.C. 404), where it is said¹⁸ 'that everyone now *has a book* and learns wisdom out of it.'

We must next inquire how far the preceding remarks agree with the opinions ordinarily held by scholars. And this inquiry will show, I think, how erroneous, or, at least, how baseless, are many of the current opinions on the subject.

Mr. Grote¹⁹ writes as follows: 'The interval between Archilochus and Solon (660-580 B.C.) seems, as has been remarked in my former volume, to be the period in which writing first came to be applied to Greek poems,—to the Homeric poems among the number; and shortly after the end of that period, commences the era of compositions without metre or prose. The philosopher Pherecydes of Syros, about 550 B.C., is called by some the earliest prose-writer. But no prose-writer for a considerable time afterwards acquired any celebrity,—seemingly none earlier than Hecataeus of Miletus, about 510-490 B.C.—prose being a subordinate and ineffective species of

¹⁶ *Frag.* 385, Dind.

¹⁷ Athenaeus, who quotes this in Book x., gives other examples of similar *descriptive* accounts given by those who could not read.

¹⁸ V. III 13.

¹⁹ *Hist. of Greece*, Part ii. chap. xxix. (vol. iv. p. 24).

composition, not always even perspicuous, and requiring no small practice before the power was acquired of rendering it interesting.' He adds (p. 25), 'The acquisition of prose-writing, commencing as it does about the age of Peisistratus, is not less remarkable as an evidence of past, than as a means of future, progress.'

In accordance with the view of an early written literature here laid down (as if it were a plain and acknowledged matter of fact) we read, in the Dictionaries of Biography, of Cadmus of Miletus, Charon of Lampsacus, Pherecydes, Hecataeus, Acusilaus, Hellanicus, all of whom are stated to have lived earlier than B.C. 500. When, however, we look into the authorities for these alleged composers of written prose works, we find only Strabo, Plutarch, Diodorus, Pliny, and others who lived *six centuries later*, appealed to in proof of the assertion. With the exception of Acusilaus who is *once* quoted by Plato, Hellanicus *once* by Thucydides, and Hecataeus, three or four times by Herodotus, we find no reason to believe that their *written* works, if they then existed, were known to or made use of by the historians of the very next century. Therefore, if their works really existed in MS., they were either unknown or inaccessible to the writers who next succeeded them, or these latter were (which is very improbable) so careless that they did not consult works known to have been written on the very subjects they undertook to record. We must fall back on the supposition, that if there really were written copies, either the authors of them had scarcely any literary reputation, or they reserved their own properties to be used for 'Readings' or as repertories from which oral instruction might be obtained, but not either for lending or for circulation. And such a view is, without doubt, in itself neither absurd nor impossible. It will make the limited existence of written literary works at least conceivable at that early period.

But the difficulty does not stop here. We find in the early Greek writers, e.g. in Herodotus, mention made of three distinct kinds of literary persons, those 'versed in history' (called *λόγιοι*),²⁰ 'composers of stories,' and 'writers of stories.' The last term is the *latest* of the three, a fact significant in itself. There must have been separate professions corresponding to these several terms. The oldest are the *λόγιοι*, whom we find mentioned in Pindar along with the 'Bards' (*ᾄδοι*), and several times, e.g. in the opening chapter, by Herodotus. We cannot doubt that they were a class of men who were authorities in history, such as 'history' then was, i.e. in the main mere mythology. Oral anecdotes of marvellous exploits or adventures, clan-stories of prowess, and all that we express by the

²⁰ In ii. 77 he expressly speaks of the *memory* of these men,—a fact that alone proves the absence of teaching from books. They probably consulted such inscriptions as existed, and made themselves acquainted with oracles, records of temples and prytanea (town-halls), and they may have made written notes of them. Granting even this as possible or probable, we are still far from the era of a Written Literature in circulation.

terms *tales* and *anecdotes*, were called *λόγοι* by the early Greeks. Such stories were told by Patroclus to amuse the wounded Eurypylus in his tent, while soothing the pain of his wound.²¹ And we know from Aristophanes²² that droll stories of Aesop's were orally recited at the dinner-table. Hence he is called by Herodotus, in common with Hecataeus of Miletus, *λογοποιός*, 'a story-maker.' Dr. Hayman is not justified in saying²³ that 'prose-writer is undoubtedly the sense in which Herodotus applies *λογοποιός* to Hecataeus.' We read in the 'Phaedrus'²⁴ that Lysias was *taunted* with being a 'speech-writer,' *λογογράφος*, the alleged reason being that 'the more influential men in the states feel scruple at *writing* their essays or speeches, and so leaving records of themselves in writing, lest posterity should stigmatise them as *Sophists*.' This also furnishes us with a reason for a repeated boast of Socrates, that he should leave behind him no offspring of his mind, viz. no books or written treatises. He appears to be satirising a practice which was beginning to come in vogue.

There is certainly no proof at all that Herodotus refers to Hecataeus *as a writer*. It is perfectly possible, and on the whole highly probable, that the stories, the histories, or the philosophic teachings of the earlier Greeks were a purely oral literature. They were put into writing eventually from the dictation of their pupils and followers; and thus it happens that in after times the *writings* of Heraclitus, Anaximander, Thales, and the early philosophers generally, as well as those of the historians preceding Herodotus, are referred to.²⁵ There is not the slightest ground for believing, while there are many grounds for doubting, that there was any *written* Iliad and Odyssey till the age of 'books,' which is that of Plato. Hence, to suppose that such long poems *could* have come down to us, by oral recitation alone, from a period five or six centuries earlier than that, and unmixed with the countless verses which in the times of the Tragic poets composed the 'Tale of Troy,' is nothing less than a literary delusion, cherished because it is popular, but opposed to every principle of fair logical inference from facts.

Books were no sooner introduced than they became both popular and cheap. Treatises on eloquence, as those by Tisias and Corax mentioned in the Phaedrus,²⁶ the stories of Aesop, and the philosophical dogmas of Anaxagoras,²⁷ could be bought at Athens in the time of Plato for a very small sum. But Thucydides, with the exception of a

²¹ *Iliad* xxi.

²² *Vesp.* 1258.

²³ P. 138, in *Journal of Philology* viii.

²⁴ P. 257. C.

²⁵ It is very significant, that Parmenides and Empedocles wrote philosophy *in verse*, which was so much easier to remember than precepts in prose.

²⁶ P. 273. A. A phrase was soon introduced, 'You are not up in your Aesop,' &c., expressed by the word *οὐ πεπάρηκας*, the original of our term 'trite.'

²⁷ Plat. *Apol.* p. 26. E; *Phaedo*, p. 97. C. Eupolis in Meineke's *Fragm. Com. Gr.* vol. ii. p. 550.

single reference by name to the 'Attic History' of Hellanicus, and Herodotus, who quotes only the statements of Hecataeus in three or four passages (and both writers in evident disparagement of their authorities), are unable to appeal to any current written literature. Thucydides is evidently glancing at Hellanicus when he alludes (i. 21) to 'writers of stories who compose rather to please the ear than with a view to truth.' He does not seem to have known Herodotus at all; his appeal is only to hearsay and memory. The following passages in the Introduction to his History are well deserving of impartial consideration. It will be observed, that in his sketch of the early history of Greece from the time of the Trojan War, he adduces no single fact on the authority of any one except 'Homer,' and he nowhere shows the least consciousness that the Persian wars and passages in the early history of Sparta had been written by Herodotus. Thus he says (i. 1. § 2), 'The events before them (viz. before the Peloponnesian and the Persian wars), and those yet earlier, it was impossible to make out clearly through the length of time.' Again (ch. 9. § 2), 'Such, according to my research, is the history of early Greece, though it is difficult to put full trust in it by all the chain of evidence I could collect, because men receive from each other *hearsay accounts of the past*, even when their own country is concerned, without any more inquiry than if it were not.'

'Many other matters, even contemporary events, and not beginning to be forgotten through time, the other Hellenic peoples have a wrong notion about' (*ib.* § 4).

'Still, from the evidences I have mentioned, one would not be far wrong in accepting as facts what I have mentioned, that is, if he does not trust the exaggerations of poets nor the attractive rather than truthful narratives of story-writers,²⁸ which have become little better than fables through time, but takes my statements as made with sufficient certainty considering the length of time that has elapsed.'

Thus we see this great writer, impressed with the deficiency of any authentic history, either obliged or contented to fall back on *inferences, memory, hearsay*.²⁹ If he had known of the large amount of Spartan traditions recorded in the sixth book of Herodotus, he could hardly have used the language he employs in i. ch. 9, 'Now those affirm, who have received the clearest accounts about the Peloponnesus *by memory* from their predecessors,' &c.

Herodotus himself commences his history with these notable words. 'This is the setting forth' (literally, 'a showing to the eye') 'of the history (or research) of Herodotus, in order that events which have taken place may not vanish from mankind by time,³⁰ and that

²⁸ He undoubtedly means Hellanicus by the indefinite *λογογράφοι*. He is comparing his own narrative of *facts*, as carefully observed and recorded by himself with the only existing Attic history that was known, by recitations from it, to his countrymen.

²⁹ *τεκμήρια, μνήμη, ἀκοή*.

³⁰ The word he uses was applied to the fading colour of dyes, or of blood.

deeds great and worthy of admiration may not come to be without renown,' i.e. lose their credit, as they would in the course of ages if they were narrated only to present hearers, and not recorded in writing. These are precisely the words of an author who is congratulating himself on having achieved something more than had yet been done for the recording of history. The only meaning we can fairly attach to his phrase, 'become evanescent by time,' is this,—that he can fix them in writing, and so make them permanent. But if others had done so, and if Hecataeus 'the story-maker' had left a written work, to which Herodotus had access, how very much out of place the declaration on his part would have been. Now, though Hecataeus is referred to a few times,³¹ there is nowhere the slightest reference to any *written* book of his. On the whole then, it is probable, or not improbable, that tales told *orally* (after a fashion analogous to the rhapsodists) on the authority of Hecataeus and Aesop and other composers or compilers, were the only prose literature current in the time of Herodotus. And thus we understand why Thucydides says more than once that *his* work was not meant to 'tickle the ear.'

There is a passage in Pindar (Olymp. vi. 90) on which, as bearing on this subject, a discussion was raised by me some years ago. A messenger who conveys an ode, with instructions for the performance of it, is compared to a *scytala*, or written scroll. Now, if he carried with him the ode *in writing*, the comparison is obviously out of place. But, if he learnt the ode by heart (Pindar retaining the autograph copy written on wooden tablets), the oral message is very well compared to a written missive.

Another passage, about which I had some controversy in one of the leading Reviews, is that in v. 52 of the 'Frogs' of Aristophanes, Dionysus is there made to say, after an allusion to the sea-fight off Arginusae, 'As I was reading to myself the "Andromeda" on the ship, a sudden desire caused my heart to beat.' Does this mean, 'as he was reading the play of Euripides from a MS. copy' (as one might now read a book or a paper on board a steamer), or 'as he was reading the *name* ANDROMEDA' painted on the stern or prow (Pollux, i. 86) of his own or another vessel?

No doubt, this is rather a nice point. Conceding, as I have done, that the use of 'Books' is mentioned *as a novelty*, in this very play, my argument is not seriously affected whichever interpretation we adopt. I think, however, that this carrying about literary MSS. for casual perusal is so alien to everything we know about the Greek habits of the period, that the other explanation must be the true one. The Andromeda was a ship that had distinguished itself in the sea-fight, and when Dionysus saw the name upon it, it reminded him of the play of Euripides of the same name.

I think I have shown good reasons for holding Mr. Grote's statements to be, at least, unsupported by evidence, when he affirms³² that

³¹ See, for instance, Book ii. 143, v. 36, vi. 137.

³² *Hist. of Greece*, ii. pp. 148-9,

'there is ground for assurance that Greek poems first began to be written before the time of Solon' (B.C. 600), and that 'the period which may with the greatest probability be fixed upon as having first witnessed the formation even of the narrowest reading class in Greece is from B.C. 660 to B.C. 630.' He thence jumps to the conclusion (which I think contrary to all evidence) that 'manuscripts of the Homeric poems and the other old epics—the Thebais and the Cypria as well as the Iliad and the Odyssey—began to be compiled towards the middle of the seventh century B.C., and the opening of Egypt to Grecian commerce, which took place about the same period, would furnish increased facilities for obtaining the requisite papyrus to write upon' (p. 150).

Mr. Grote could hardly have been aware of the very significant fact I have pointed out, viz., the total absence from the Greek vocabulary of all words and terms connected with pen-and-ink writing, till a comparatively late period. If he had been aware of it, he would have stated with less confidence that the 'first positive ground which authorises us to presume the existence of a manuscript of Homer, is the famous ordinance of Solon with regard to the rhapsodes at the Panathenaea.'³³ Dr. Hayman, who adopts Mr. Grote's conclusions, founds it on the same weak argument, viz. the requirements of lyric poetry, which (he says) could not have floated over the precarious stage of their unwritten existence if it had lasted more than one or two generations.' But these songs were used socially, and could be recited or sung or played to music by memory alone; nor is there the least necessity for inferring that 'that first (or unwritten) stage was a very short one,' or that 'unless fixed at once by MS. they must have died an early death.'³⁴

A great deal has been said by many learned men on the early use of writing for the purposes of inscriptions and dedicatory offerings, but no one as yet has sufficiently discriminated the use of letters for public or state purposes, and the use of them for book-writing. No doubt, there are notices of writing in several passages of Herodotus; but they are all notices of quite a different sort from that of copying volumes of prose or poetry. There are many, very many, specimens of early handwriting on extant Greek vases; but they are confined to single names in explanation of the subjects; the forms, too, of the letters are quite unsuited to their use for book-writing, and the absence of all mention of writing-material (except *tablets*) is against Mr. Grote's theory³⁵ of 'both readers and manuscripts having attained a certain recognised authority before the time of Solon.'

It may be argued, that mere negative evidence is not to be pushed too far. But then why, if there was a written literature in his time,

³³ P. 144. His argument is founded on an erroneous interpretation of a phrase which he thought meant 'by prompting from a MS.,' but which really means 'in successive parts.'

³⁴ *Journal of Philology*, viii. p. 134.

³⁵ Vol. ii. p. 150. It is fair to add that F. A. Wolf (*Proleg. ad Hom.* ch. xvii. § 70) avows the same opinion.

does Thucydides appeal to *memory* and *hearsay*? Why is there no mention of 'books' up to a certain date, and then a *common* mention of them? I have looked through all the extant Greek plays, tragedies and comedies, and their numerous extant fragments, with a special view to this question, which I have had before me for years. It is not till nearly B.C. 400,—that is, two centuries later than the date assigned by Mr. Grote,—that I find any mention of books, or writing-masters (*grammatistae*), or booksellers.³⁶ And as Thucydides never once quotes Herodotus, or Plato Thucydides—though he does *once* refer (Sympos. p. 178. C.) to Acusilaus—the paucity of written books (if they existed at all except as the private property of the authors) must be inferred, and the supposed MSS. of the Iliad and Odyssey before the age of Solon must be relegated to the category of the barest possibilities.

The close connection of the word *βιβλίον* or *βυβλίον* with the name of the papyrus-plant, *byblus*, may be thought to prove that its use as a writing-material must have been early known to the Greeks. 'Papyrus' (says Dr. Hayman, already quoted) 'must have been cheap and plentiful in Greece and Sicily.' Pliny however says that papyrus was not used (he must mean, by the Greeks) for paper before the time of Alexander the Great. The use of it in Egypt for hieratic writing may have been so far a secret, that the method of preparing it remained for a long time unknown to the Greeks. At all events, we cannot show that they ever employed it in early times for any documentary purposes. It may have been too brittle, or suited only to a very dry climate; we are on a subject on which we have no evidence at all, and therefore conjectures in one direction are as permissible as on the other.³⁷

One point in this controversy is undeniable; that the *δέλτος* (which probably consisted of two or three thin plates of wood) was used for ordinary written messages or communications long before 'books,' properly so called, came into use. Euripides³⁸ calls a *δέλτος* 'a fir tablet,' *πέύκη*, and it probably differed only from the *πίναξ*, *tabula*, in being smaller and more suited for transmission when tied up and sealed. There is nothing however in the use of these implements to suggest to our minds the notion of a reading or literary class who had libraries or collections of books at their command. I am myself of opinion that nothing deserving the name of a library was known to the Greeks till the era of the great Alexandrine School under the Ptolemies, and I have no belief in an oft-told story, that Peisistratus collected a library for the Athenians.

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³⁶ A few faint indications of being taught to read occur a little earlier, as when the sausage-seller in the *Knights* of Aristophanes ('Cavaliers' would be a better rendering of the title) says he knows his letters very little, and that little very badly.

³⁷ The word *χάρτης*, *charta*, occurs in one passage of *Plato Comicus*, circ. B.C. 425.

³⁸ *Iph. Aul.* 39.