

**GREEK WIT; A COLLECTION
OF SMART SAYINGS AND
ANECDOTES, FIRST AND
SECOND SERIES**

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Greek wit; a collection of smart sayings and anecdotes, first and second series by F. A. Paley

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GREEK WIT

A COLLECTION OF
SMART SAYINGS AND ANECDOTES
TRANSLATED FROM GREEK
PROSE WRITERS

BY

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EDITOR OF MARTIAL'S EPIGRAMS ETC

FIRST SERIES

Second Edition

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NOTICE.

THE reader will understand that this collection of Anecdotes is made according to no order, and with no classification in respect of subject or date. They are taken just as they were noted down in the course of reading. It is to be observed also, that in no instance is a *literal* translation given. It has been thought advisable in many cases even to abbreviate, that the point of each may be conveyed in as few words as possible. For the purpose intended—to amuse, perhaps to instruct—nothing would have been gained by any affectation of minute accuracy, or by any method or system of arrangement.

It is believed that most of these "Sayings" are not commonly known, nearly all of them being taken from writers little read in the schools. The series might be extended almost indefinitely. Should this little work meet with any success, Part II. will follow at no long interval.

Few English words are more difficult to define than *Wit*. In its origin meaning merely *shrewdness* and *intelligence*, it has no connection, except incidentally, with *joke* and *fun*. We laugh at the latter, we admire the former. True wit is more often allied to satire, and the objects of witticisms, we know, are but too apt to be offended. Wit may be simply didactic, and (as in most of the anecdotes in this little book) convey great truths in terse or homely sayings, or in friendly banterings; but its natural bent is mostly displayed in cutting remarks. Hence we are wont to call wit "incisive," and to talk of its point, its edge, its keenness, &c. The greatest wits of antiquity were the poets Aristophanes and Martial. Alas! that their morality was not equal to their genius, or rather, that their genius should have been perverted to the making light of immorality! Among our national celebrities, Dean Swift, Sheridan, and Sydney Smith stand unrivalled. Wit is a peculiar phase of cleverness, possessed by few, but one that is greatly appreciated by all who are not themselves dunces.

LONDON, *September*, 1880.

GREEK WIT.

1.

ONE day, when snow was falling, the King of the Scythians asked a man, who was braving it unclad, whether he felt cold? The man asked in return, whether his majesty felt cold in his face? "Certainly not," said the king. "Then," replied the man, "neither do I feel the cold, for *I am all face.*" AELIAN, *Var. Hist.* vii. 6.

2.

Xantippe, the wife of Socrates, being reluctant to put on her husband's mantle to go and see a procession, was thus rebuked by him: "What you are going for is not to see, but to be seen."

Ibid. 10.

3.

A vain old envoy from Keos came to Sparta with his hair dyed, being ashamed to appear aged. Introduced to the assembly, he delivered his message. Upon which Archidamus, the Spartan king,

GREEK WIT.

rose and said, "How can there be anything sound in the words of a man who goes about with a lie on his head as well as in his heart?"

ÆLIAN, *Var. Hist.* vii. 20.

4.

The elder Dionysius, in reproaching his son and heir for some act of debauchery, asked, if he ever knew *him*, the father, do the like? "You," replied the youth, "had not a father who was a king." "And you," rejoined the other, "will never have a son a king, if you don't leave off acting thus."

PLUTARCH, *Reg. et Imp. Apoph.*
Dion. Sen. 3.

5.

The same Dionysius, imposing taxes on the people of Syracuse, and observing that they had recourse to tears and entreaties, and protestations that they had no money, made the assessment twice and even thrice. But when he heard that they publicly laughed and jeered at him, he said, "Stop! They have no money now; they are beginning to despise me." *Ibid.* 5.

6.

A certain stranger came to tell Dionysius that he could instruct him privately how he might be forewarned of conspiracies against him. When introduced, he said, "Give me two hundred pounds, that you may *appear* to have had information of the secret signs." Dionysius at once gave the amount asked, that the people might suppose he had been told something important; and he thought the device a clever one.

PLUTARCH, *Reg. et Imp. Apoph.*

Dion. Sen. 8.

7.

A talkative man was trimming the beard of King Archelaus, and asked, "How shall I cut it?" "In silence," replied the king. *Ibid. Arch.* 2.

8.

Some one having thrown water over Archelaus, his friends tried to exasperate him against the man. "It was not I," said the king, "whom he threw water at, but the person he supposed I was."

Ibid. Arch. 5.

9.

When many great successes in a single day were

reported to Philip of Macedon, he exclaimed, "O Fortune, do me some little harm as a set-off to so much good!" PLUTARCH, *ut sup. Phil.* 3.

10.

Philip, in passing sentence on two rogues, ordered one of them to leave Macedonia with all speed, and the other to try and catch him.

Ibid. 12.

11.

When about to encamp on a beautiful spot, and being told there was no fodder for the cattle, Philip exclaimed, "What a life is ours, if we are bound to live for the convenience of asses!"

Ibid. 13.

12.

Being desirous to occupy a strong position, which the scouts reported to be almost impregnable, he asked, "Is there not even a pathway to it wide enough for an ass laden with gold?"

Ibid. 14.

13.

Some Olynthians complaining that Philip's courtiers were denouncing them as *traitors*, he remarked, "they were rude and illiterate for calling a spade a spade."

Ibid. 15.