



History of the Literature of Ancient Greece: All Volumes

J.W. Donaldson

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IN undertaking to write a history of Grecian literature, it is not our intention to enumerate the names of those many hundred authors whose works, accumulated in the Alexandrine Library, are reported, after passing through many other perils, to have finally been burnt by the Khalif Omar—an event from which the cause of civilization has not, perhaps, suffered so much as many have thought; inasmuch as the inheritance of so vast a collection of writings from antiquity would, by engrossing all the leisure and attention of the moderns, have diminished their zeal and their opportunities for original productions. Nor will it be necessary to carry our younger readers (for whose use this work is chiefly designed) into the controversies of the philosophical schools, the theories of grammarians and critics, or the successive hypotheses of natural philosophy among the Greeks—in short, into those departments of literature which are the province of the learned by profession, and whose influence is confined to them alone. Our object is to consider Grecian literature as a main constituent of the character of the Grecian people, and to show how those illustrious compositions, which we still justly admire as the classical writings of the Greeks, naturally sprang from the taste and genius of the Greek races, and the constitution of civil and domestic society as established among them. For this purpose our inquiries may be divided into three principal heads:— 1. The development of Grecian poetry and prose before the rise of the Athenian literature; 2. The flourishing era of poetry and eloquence at Athens; and, 3. The history of Greek literature in the long period after Alexander; which last, although it produced a much larger number of writings than the former periods, need not, consistently with the object of the present work, be treated at great length, as literature had in this age fallen into the hands of the learned few, and had lost its living influence on the general mass of the community.

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