

## HELLAS, A LYRICAL DRAMA.

THE years 1820-21 are noteworthy in the history of Southern Europe for frequent struggles on behalf of liberty. In Spain, after several uprisings, the "free constitution," which had been set up during the Napoleonic wars, was restored. At Naples, the people excited by the success of the Spaniards, forced from the king a promise to grant them a measure of constitutional liberty. Sicily also revolted, and after a short but bloody campaign was declared free. Similar uprisings took place in Genoa and Piedmont. All these events Shelley regarded with the deepest interest. In his *Ode to Liberty* he had told of his delight when freedom gleamed.

"From heart to heart, from tower to tower, o'er Spain,  
Scattering contagious fire into the sky."

In the *Ode to Naples* he had sung of his hopes for the complete emancipation of all Italy. But to Shelley there was a dearer country than Italy or Spain. Greece he loved of all lands best. "But for Greece," he writes, "we might still have been savages or idolaters; or what is worse, might have arrived at such a stagnant and miserable state of social institutions, as China and Japan possess." So it was with no ordinary interest, on the first of April, 1821, he learned from his friend Prince Mavrocordato, that the freedom of Greece had been proclaimed. During the summer he eagerly followed the newspaper reports of the war, and in the early autumn his sympathy with "the sacred cause" found expression in the lyrical drama, *Hellas*.

The poem opens with a series of lyrics chanted in the Sultan's seraglio by a chorus of captive Greek women. When the singing ceases the Sultan Mahmud, who had been sleeping, awakes in fear from a dream that Constantinople has fallen. But his friend Hassan reassures him, and tells him of an ancient Jew, gifted with the power of interpreting dreams, and seeing into the future. This sage the Sultan wishes to meet.

Again the chorus appear and sing—this time an *Ode on the Immortality of Man and the Victories of Christ*. Of this remarkable lyric, to which reference will be made again, the first stanza runs as follows: