There may however be some who, while admitting that mere lapse of time need not have extinguished ancient Hellenic ideas, will be disposed to question the likelihood, even the possibility, of their transmission on racial grounds. The belief in the evil eye and the practice of sympathetic magic were once, they may say, the common property of the whole uncivilized world; and though the inhabitants of modern Greece have inherited these old superstitions and usages, there is nothing to show from what ancestry they have received the inheritance. The population, it may be argued, has changed, the Greeks of to-day are not Hellenes; their blood has been contaminated by foreign admixture, and with this admixture may have come external traditions; has not Fallmerayer stoutly maintained that the modern inhabitants of Greece have practically no claim to the name of Hellenes, but come of a stock Slavonic in the main, though cross-bred with the offscourings of many peoples?

The historical facts from which Fallmerayer argued are not to be slighted. It is well established that, from the middle of the sixth century onwards, successive hordes of Slavonic invaders swept over Greece, driving such of the native population as escaped destruction into the more mountainous or remote districts; that is in the middle of the eighth century, when the numbers of the Greek population had been further reduced by the great pestilence of 746, ‘the whole country’, to use the exact phrase of Constantine Porphyrogenitus [De Themat., II. 25], became Slavonic and was occupied by foreigners; that the Slavonic supremacy lasted until the end of the tenth century; that thereafter a gradual fusion of the remnants of the Greek population with their conquerors began, but proceeded so slowly that at the beginning of the thirteenth century the ‘Franks’, as the warriors of Western Christendom were popularly called, found Slavonic tribes in Elis and Laconia quite detached from the rest of the population, acknowledging indeed the supremacy of the Byzantine government, but still employing their own language and their own laws; and finally that the amalgamation of the two races was not complete even by the middle of the fifteenth century, for the Turks at their conquest of Greece found several tribes of the Peloponnese, especially in the neighborhood of Mount Taygetus, still speaking a Slavonic tongue.

If then, as is now generally admitted, Fallmerayer’s conclusions were somewhat exaggerated, it remains none the less an historical fact that there is a very large admixture of Slavonic blood in the veins of the present inhabitants of Greece. The truth of this is moreover enforced by the physical characteristics of the people as a whole. Travellers conversant alike with Slavs and with modern Greeks have affirmed to me their impression that there is a close physical resemblance between the two races; and while I have not the experience of Slavonic races which would permit me to judge of this resemblance for myself, it certainly offers the best explanation of my own observations with regard to the variations of physical type in different parts of the Greek world.

In the islands of the Aegean and in the promontory of Maina, to which the Slavs never penetrated, the ancient Hellenic types are far commoner than in the rest of the Peloponnese or in Northern Greece. Not a little of the charm of Tenos or Myconos or Seyros lies in the fact that the grand and
impassive beauty of the earlier Greek sculpture may still be seen in the living figure and faces of men and women; and if anyone would see in the flesh the burly, black-bearded type idealized in a Heracles, he need but go to the south of the Peloponnese, and among the Maniotes he will soon be satisfied; for there he will find not merely an occasional example, as of reversion to the ancestral type, but a whole tribe of swarthy, stalwart warriors, whose aspect seems to justify their claim that in proud, though poverty-stricken, isolation they have kept their native peninsula free from alien aggression, and the old Laconian blood still pure in their veins. The ordinary Greek of the mainland, on the other hand, is usually of a mongrel and unattractive appearance; and in view of the marked difference of the type in regions untouched by the Slavs, I cannot but impute his lack of beauty to his largely Slavonic ancestry.

Yet even in the centre of the Peloponnese where the Slavonic influence has probably been strongest, the pure Greek type I not wholly extinct. I remember a young man who acted as ostler and waiter and in all other capacities at a small kahn o on the road from Tripolitza to Sparta, who would not have been despised as a model by Praxiteles; and elsewhere too, I have seen statuesque forms and classic features, less perfect indeed than this, but yet proclaiming beyond question an Hellenic lineage; so that I should hesitate to say that in any part of Greece the population is as purely Slavonic as in Maina or many of the islands it is purely Greek.

But, as I think, the exact proportion of Slavonic and of Hellenic blood in the veins of the modern Greeks is not a matter of supreme importance. Even if their outward appearance were universally and completely Slavonic, I would still maintain that they deserve the name of Greeks. Though their lineage were wholly Slavonic, their nationality, I claim, would still be Hellenic. For the nationality of a people, like the personality of an individual, is something which eludes definition but which embraces the mental and the moral as well as the physical. A man’s personality is not to be determined by knowledge of his family and his physiognomy alone; and similarly racial descent and physical type are not the sole indices of nationality. Even if a purely Slavonic ancestry had dowered the inhabitants of Greece with a purely Slavonic appearance, yet, if their thoughts and speech and acts were, as they are, Greek, I would still venture to call them Greek in nationality. Ce n’est que la peau dont l’Ethiope ne change pas.

But the people of modern Greece do not actually present so extreme a case of acquired nationality. They are partly Greek in race: and if it should appear that they are wholly Greek in nationality, the explanation must simply be that the character, no less than the language, of their Hellenic ancestors was superior in vitality to that of the Slavs who intermingled with them, and alone has been transmitted to the modern Greek people.

What, then, is the national character at the present day?

The first feature of it which casual conversation with any Greek will soon bring into view, is that narrow patriotism which was so remarkable a trait in the Greeks of old times. If he be asked what is his native land (πατρίδα), his answer will be, not Greece nor any of the larger divisions of it, but the particular town or hamlet in which he happened to be born: and if in later life he change his place of abode, though he live in his new home ten or twenty years, he will regard himself and be regarded by the native-born inhabitants as a foreigner (ξένος). Or again, if a man obtain work for a short rime in another part of the country, or if a girl marry an inhabitant half a dozen miles from her own, the departure is mourned with some of those plaintive songs of exile in which the popular muse delights. Nor are there lacking historical cases in which this narrow love of country has produced something more than fond lamentations; the boast of the Maniotes that they have never acknowledged alien masters is in the main a true boast, and it was pure patriotism which nerved them in their long struggle with the Turks for the possession of their rugged, barren, storm-lashed home. It was patriotism too, narrow and proud, that both sustained the heroic outlaws of Souli in their defiance of Ottoman armies, and also – because they disdained alliance with their Greek neighbours – contributed to their final downfall.
But so tenacious and indomitable a courage is in modern, as it was in ancient, Greece, the exception rather than the rule. The men of Maina and of Souli are comparable to the Spartans: but in no period of Greek history has steadfast bravery been commonly displayed. Yet, in spite of the humiliating experiences of the late Greek-Turkish war, the Greek people should not be judged devoid of courage. But theirs is a courage which comes of impulse rather than of self-command; a courage which might prompt a charge as brilliant as that of Marathon, but could not cheerfully face the hardships of a campaign.

It must be acknowledged also that the rank and file are in general more admirable than their officers. The bravery of the men, impulsive and short-lived though it be, is inspired by a real devotion of themselves to a cause; whereas among the officers self-seeking and even self-saving are conspicuous faults. Even the really courageous leaders seldom have a single eye to the success of their arms. Their plans are marred by petty jealousies. The same rivalries for the supreme command which embarrassed the Greeks of old in defending their liberty against Persia, were repeated in the struggles of the last century to throw off the Turkish yoke. And if in both cases the Greeks were successful, in neither was victory due to the unity and harmony of their leaders, but rather to that passionate hatred of the barbarians which stirred the people as a whole.

Indeed, not only in war but in all conditions of life, any personal eminence or distinction has been apt to turn the head of a Greek. ‘The abundant enjoyment of power or wealth,’ said the ancients not without knowledge of the national character, ‘begets lawlessness and arrogance’; and in a humbler phrase the modern proverb sums up the same qualities of the race – καλός δούλος, κακός αφέντης, ‘a good servant and a bad master’. The honour of being returned to the Greek Parliament upsets the mental balance of a large number of deputies. Without any more important knowledge of politics than can be obtained from second-rate newspapers, they believe themselves called and qualified to lead each his own party, with the result – so it is commonly said – that no government since the first institution of parliament has ever had an assured majority in the House, and on an average there have been more than one dissolution a year. The modern parliament is as unstable an institution as the ancient ecclesia of Athens when there was no longer a Pericles to control it, and its demagogues are as numerous.

Even the petty eminences of a village schoolmaster proves to be too giddy a pinnacle for many. Such an one thinks it necessary to support his position – which owing to the Greek love of education is more highly respected perhaps than in other countries – by a pretence of universal knowledge and a pedantry as lamentable as it is ludicrous. I remember a gentleman who boasted the title of Professor of Ancient Greek History in the gymnasium or secondary school of a certain town, who called to me one day as I was passing a café where he and some of his friends were sitting, and said that they were having a pleasant little discussion about the first Triumvirate, and had recalled the names of Cicero and Caesar, but could not at the moment remember the third party. Could I help them? I hesitated a moment and then resolved to risk it and suggest, what was at least alliterative if not accurate, the name of Cato. ‘Of course,’ he answered, ‘how these things do slip one’s memory sometimes!’ Yet this Professor posed as an authority on many subjects outside his own province of learning, and frequently when I met him would insist on talking dog-Latin with an Italian pronunciation, a medium in which I found it difficult to converse.

In this readiness to discourse on any and every subject and to display attainments in and out of season, he and the class of which he is typical are the living images of the less respectable of the ancient Sophists. And in pedantry of language too they fairly rival their famous prototypes. The movement in favour of an artificial revival of ancient Greek has already been of long duration, and has had a detrimental effect upon the modern language. The vulgar tongue has a melodious charm, while many classical words, in the modern pronunciation, are extremely harsh and uncouth. The object of the movement is to secure an uniform ‘pure’ speech, as they call it, approximate to that of Plato or of Xenophon; and the method adopted is to mix up Homeric and other words of antiquarian celebrity with literal renderings of modern French idioms, inserting datives, infinitives and other obsolete forms at discretion. To aid in this movement is the task and the delight of the
schoolmasters: and such is their devotion to this linguistic sophistry, that they are not dismayed even by the ambiguity arising from the use of ancient forms indistinguishable in modern speech. The two old words ημέτερος and υμέτερος have now no difference in sound: yet the schoolmaster uses them and inculcates the use of them, with the lamentable result that the children are not taught to distinguish meum and tuum even in speech.

And here again the character of the modern Greek reflects that of his ancestors. Honesty and truthfulness are not the national virtues. To lie, or even to steal, is accounted morally venial and intellectually admirable. It is a proof of superior mother-wit, than which no quality is more valued in the business of everyday life. Almost the only things in Greece which have fixed prices are tobacco, newspapers and railways-tickets. The hire of a mule, the cost of a bunch of grapes, the price of meat, the remuneration for a vote at the elections – such matters as these are subject of long and vivacious bargaining, and if the money does not change hands on the spot, the bargain may be smilingly repudiated and an attempt made, on any pretext which suggests itself, to extort more.

Yet there is a certain charm in all this; for, if a man get his own price, it is not so much the amount of his profit which pleases him as his success in winning it; and if he fail, he takes a smaller sum with perfect good humour and increased respect for the man who has outwitted him. Anyone may be honest; but to be εξυπνος, as they say, shrewd, wide-awake – this is Greek and admirable.

The contrast of an Aristides with a Themistocles is the natural expression of Greek thought. Moral uprightness and mental brilliance are not to be expected of one and the same man; and for the most part the Greeks now as in old time praise others for their justice and pride themselves on their cunning. The acme of cleverness is touched by him who can both profit by dishonesty and maintain a reputation for sincerity.

But while the truthfulness and fair dealing are certainly rare, there is one relation in which the most scrupulous fidelity is unfailingly shown. The obligations of hospitality are everywhere sacred. The security and the comfort of the guest are not in name only but in actual fact the first consideration of his host. However unscrupulous a Greek may be in his ordinary dealings he never, I believe, harbours for one moment the idea of making profit out of the stranger who seeks the shelter of his roof. For hospitality in Greece, it must be remembered, means not the entertainment of friends and acquaintances who are welcome for their own sake or from whom a return in kind may be expected, but φιλοξενία, a generous and friendly welcome to a stranger unknown yesterday and vanished again to-morrow. To each unbidden chance-comer the door is always open. For lodging he may chance to have an incense-reeking room where the family icons hang, or a corner of a cottage-floor barricaded against the poultry and other inmates; for food, hot viands rich in circumambient oil, or three-month-old rye bread softened in a cup of water; but among rich and poor alike he is certain of the best which there is to give. Even where there are inns available, the stranger will constantly find that the first native of the place to whom he puts the Aristophanic enquiry όπου κόρεις ολίγιστοι [Arist., Frogs, 114] – which inn is of least entomological interest – will constitute himself not guide but host and will place the resources of his own house freely at the service of the chance-found visitor.

The reception accorded by Eumaeus to Odysseus, in its revelation of human, and also of canine, character, differs in no respect from that which may await any traveller at the present day. As Odysseus approached the swineherd’s hut, ‘suddenly the yelping dogs espied him, and with loud barking rushed upon him, but Odysseus guilefully sat down and let fall his staff from his hand.’ Such is the opening of the scene; and many, I suppose, must have wondered, as they read it, wherein consisted Odysseus’ guilefulness. A shepherd of Northern Arcadia resolved me that riddle. I had been attacked on a mountain-path by two or three of his dogs – like unto wild beasts, as Homer has it [Hom., Od, XIV. 29-31] – and the combat may have lasted some few minutes when the shepherd thought fit to intervene. Sheep-dogs are of course valued in proportion to their ferocity towards any person or animal approaching the flock, and a taste of blood now and again is said to keep them on their mettle. Fortunately matters had not reached that point; but none the less I
suggested to the man that he might have bestirred himself sooner. ‘Oh’, he replied, ‘if you are really in difficulties, you should sit down; and when I showed some surprise, he explained that anyone who is attacked by sheepdogs has only to sit down and let go his walking-stick or gun or other offensive weapon, and the dogs, understanding that a truce has been called, will sit down, round him and maintain, so to speak, a peaceful blockade. On subsequent occasions I tested the shepherd’s counsel, beginning prudently with one dog only and, as I gained assurance, raising the number: it is uncomfortable to remain sitting with a blood-thirsty Molossian hound at one’s back, ready to resume hostilities if any suspicious movement is made; but I must own that, in my own fairly wide experience, Greek dogs, as they are sans peur in combat, are also sans reproche in observing a truce. The traveller may fare worse than by following the example of guileful Odysseus.

But if the scene of the encounter be not a mountain-path but the approach to some cottage, the dogs’ master will, like Eumaeus, hasten to intervene, ‘chiding them and driving them this way and that with a shower of stones’ – for the Greek dog does not heed mere words – and again like Eumaeus will assure his visitor that he himself would have been ‘covered with shame’ [Il. 38] if the dogs had done his guest any hurt. Then he will conduct his guest into his cottage and bid him take his fill of bread and wine before he tells whence he is come and how he has fared [Il. 45-7]: for Greek hospitality spares the guest the fatigue of talking until he is refreshed. The visitor therefore sits at his ease, silent and patient, while his host catches and kills some beast or fowl as he may possess, cuts up the flesh in small pieces, threads these on a spit, and holds them over the embers of his fire till they are ready to serve up [Il. 72-7]: similarly in Homeric fashion, he mixes wine and water; and then, all the preparations being now complete, he urges his guest to the meal. [Il. 79-80]

Thus the hospitality of to-day, in its details no less than in its spirit, recalls the hospitality of the Homeric age. The supreme virtue of the ancient Greek remains the supreme virtue of the modern, and a familiarity with the manners of the present day alone might suffice to explain why Paris who stole another man’s wife was execrable but Admetus who let his own wife die for him who yet wins admiration. The one broke the laws of hospitality; the other, by hiding his loss and entertaining his guest, upheld them.

A comparative estimate, such as I have essayed, of the characters of Greeks of old and Greeks of to-day is perhaps evidence of a somewhat intangible nature to those who are not personally intimate with the people: but no foreigner, even though he were totally ignorant of the modern language, could chance upon one of the many festivals of the country without remaking that there, in humbler form, are re-enacted many of the scenes of ancient days. The πανηγύρια, as they call these festivals, diminutives, both in name and in form, of the ancient πανηγύρεις, present the same medley of religion, art, trading, athletics, and amusement which constituted the Olympian games. The occasion is most commonly some saint’s day, and a church or a sacred spring (άγιασμα) the centre of the gathering. Art is represented by the contests of local poets or wits in improvising topical and other verses, and occasionally there is present one of the old-fashioned rhapsodes, whose number is fast diminishing, to recite to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument still called the κιθάρα the glorious feats of some patriotic-outlaw (κλέφτης) in defiance of the Turks. Then there are the pedlars and hucksters strolling to and fro or seated at their stalls, and ever crying their wares – fruit, sausages, confectionary of strange hues and stranger taste, beads, knives, cheap icons ranging from likenesses of patron-saints to gaudy views of hell, and all manner of tin-foil trinkets representing ships, cattle, and parts of the human body for dedication in the church. Then in some open space there will be a gathering of young men, running, wrestling, hurling the stone; yonder others, and with them the girls, indulge in the favourite recreation of Greece, those graceful dances, of which the best-known, the συρτός and probably others too, are a legacy from dancers of old time. It is impossible to be a spectator of such scenes without recognizing that here, in embryonic form, are then festivals of which the famous gatherings of Olympia and Nemea, Delphi and the Isthmus, were the full development.
And it may well happen too that the observant onlooker will descry also the rudiments of ancient drama. Often, as is natural in so mountainous and rugged a country, the only level dancing-place which a village possesses is a stone-paved threshing-floor hewn out of the hill-side. Hither on any festal occasion, be it a saint’s-day or one of the celebrations which naturally follow the ingathering of harvest or vintage, the dancers betake themselves. Here too a small booth or tent, still called σκηνή, is often rigged up, to which they can retire for rest or refreshment, while on the slopes above are ranged the spectators. The circular threshing-floor is the orchestra, the hill-side provides its tiers of seats, the dancers, who always sing while they dance, are the chorus; add only the village musician twanging a sorry lyre, and in the intervals of dancing an old-fashioned rhapsode reciting some story of bygone days, or, it may be, two village wits contending in improvised pleasantry, and the rudiments of ancient Tragedy or Comedy are complete.

Other illustrations might easily be amassed. On March 1st the boys of Greece still parade the village-streets with a painted wooden swallow set on a flower-decked pole, and sing substantially the same ‘swallow-song’ (χελιδόνισμα) as was sung in old time in Rhodes. On May 1st the girls make wreaths of flowers and corn which, like ancient εἰρεσίωνη, must be left hanging over the door of the house till next year’s wreaths take their place. The fisherman still ties his oar to a single thole with a piece of rope or a thong of leather, as did the mariners of Homer’s age.[Cf. Hom., Od. 4.782]. The farmer still drives his furrows with a Hesiodic plough.

Such are a few of the survivals which bear witness to the genuinely Hellenic nationality of the inhabitants of modern Greece: and last, but not least, there is the language, which, albeit no index of race, is most cogent evidence of tradition. To the action of thought upon language there corresponds a certain reaction of language upon thought: it is impossible to speak a tongue which contains, let us say, the word νεράϊδα (modern Greek for a ‘nymph’) without possessing also an idea of the being whom that word denotes. Therefore even if the whole population of Greece were demonstrably of Slavonic race, the fact that it now speaks Greek would go far to support its claim o Hellenic nationality: for its adoption of the Greek language would imply its assimilation of Greek thought.

But quite apart from this evidence of custom and language, the occasional perpetuation of the ancient Greek physical type and the general survival of the ancient Greek character plainly forbid so extreme a supposition as that of Fallmerayer: no traveller familiar with the modern Greek peasantry could entertain for a moment the idea that at any period the whole of Greece became Slavonicized, but whatever might be the historical arguments for such a theory, would reject it, on the evidence of his own eyes, as ludicrously exaggerated. Fusion of race, no doubt, there has been; but in that fusion the Hellenic element must have been the most vital and persistent; for is the present population of Greece is of mixed descent, in its traditions at least it is almost purely Hellenic.