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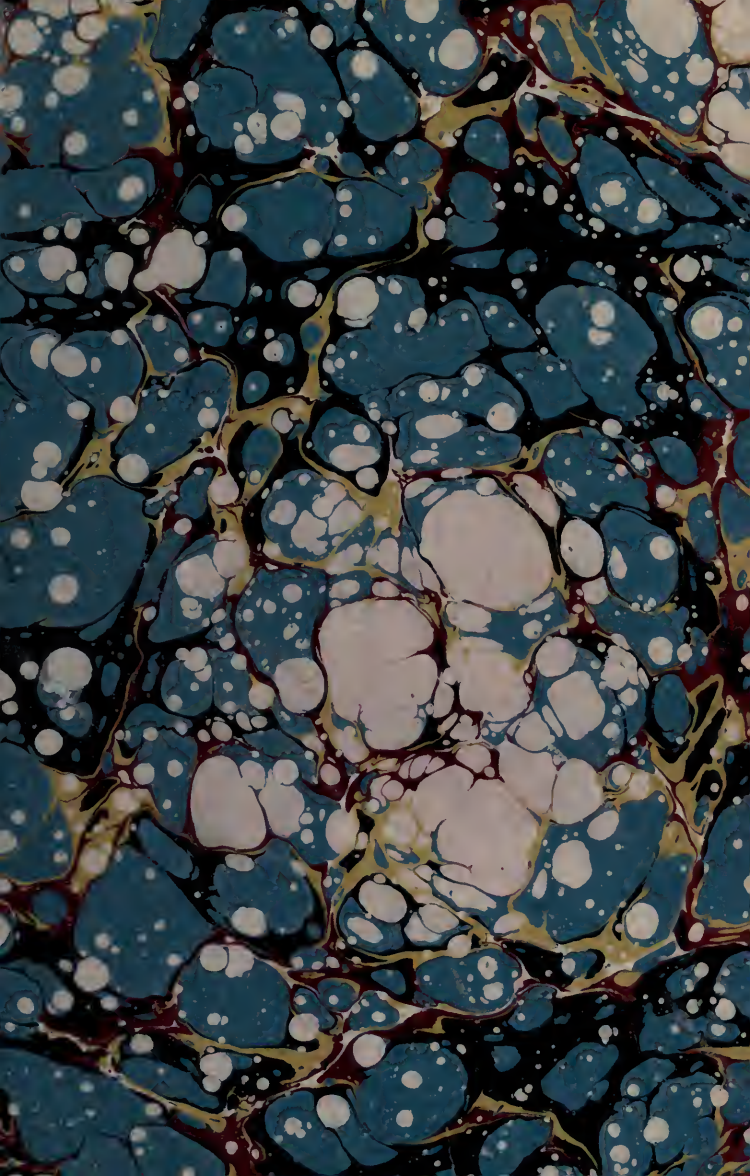
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Robert H. Humphreys.





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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE writer desires to express his acknowledgments to Mr Robert Browning, for his kind permission to make use of his 'Balaustion' in the account given of "Alcestis;" to Mrs Augusta Webster, for a similar favour in the case of the "Medea;" and to Mr Maurice Purcell Fitzgerald, in that of the "Hippolytus." The translations which they have respectively allowed him to use are recorded in footnotes, as well as those which are taken from the versions of Greek tragic poets by the late Deans Milman and Alford. Where the translated passages are not attributed to an author, they are taken from Potter, in the absence of better renderings. He wishes also to commemorate his obligations to Mr F. A. Paley for the frequent and valuable assistance afforded by his Prefaces and Notes to the Plays of

Euripides. It may be hoped that, with his edition of the Athenian poet, a new epoch begins for the estimation of him by classical as well as English readers. Mr Paley evidently regards Euripides in a very similar light to that taken of him by Ben Jonson—that “he is sometimes peccant, as he is most times perfect.”

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EURIPIDES.

CHAPTER I.

ATHENS IN THE DAYS OF EURIPIDES.

“ Behold

Where on the Ægean shore a city stands,
Built nobly, pure the air and light the soil,
Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts
And eloquence, native to famous wits
Or hospitable.”—Par. Regained.

THE greater poets of all times and countries, no less than historians and philosophers, admit of being contemplated under a twofold aspect—literary and historical. Under the former, we may mark how they acted upon their age; under the latter, how far they reflected it. Of the form and spirit of their generation, they are the representatives to later ages—throwing light on its history, on the state of its language and cultivation, and in return receiving light from those sources. Euripides was no exception to this general law: he materially affected the time he lived in; he derived from the circumstances in which his lot was cast many of the features that distinguish him from

Æschylus and Sophocles. As a citizen, he differed from them almost as widely as if he had not been born in their days ; and still more widely did he stand apart from them in the practice and theory of dramatic composition. Accordingly, a few remarks on Athens in the time of Euripides may not be an inappropriate prelude to an account of his life and writings.

The Athens in which the boyhood of Euripides was spent was little more than an ordinary town, the capital of a district about the size of an average English county. Pisistratus and his sons had begun to adorn the city with some temples, and at least erected a portion of the Dionysiac theatre ; but it is doubtful whether this commencement, or anticipation of the structures of Pericles, was not either destroyed or seriously injured by the Persian invader. Before that calamity had aroused the spirit of her citizens, Athens was indeed little more than a cluster of villages surrounded by a common wall. A wooden rampart was the only defence of the citadel. No fortifications connected the city with its harbours, two of which were still open roads. Even the Pisistratids appear not to have ventured on building for themselves stately mansions, or to have called in the art of painters or sculptors to adorn Athens itself. They did not possess the funds that Cimon and Pericles commanded for great public works. They presided over a jealous people by force of arms, and dreaded provoking it by offensive displays either of wealth or power. Not until the democracy was satisfied with its representatives, and proud of its land and its capital, was it possible to

indulge in lavish expenditure, or to win for Athens the titles of "the eye of Greece" and "the violet Queen."

The period that elapsed between the first and second invasion by the Persians was fraught with too much anxiety to admit of beautifying the city: all that could be done was to supply at least one tenable outwork, and that some miles distant from Athens itself. It was the wisdom of Themistocles to discern that the very existence of his country, if it were not to become a Persian satrapy, depended on ships and not on walls. To insure the security and efficiency of the fleet, a fortified harbour was indispensable. The mud-built or wooden cottages, the narrow and crooked streets of the capital, must be abandoned to the Mede; and such treasure as was then available be employed on the port and docks of Peiræus.

The victories that finally expelled the Persian from Hellenic ground were consummated in B.C. 466 by the battles at the Eurymedon, "when Cimon triumphed both by land and sea." Athens, after the retreat of Mardonius, was little better than a ruinous heap. The fire-worshippers had done their worst on her temples; had levelled her streets, torn down her feeble walls, and trampled under foot with their horsemen and archers the gardens and olive-yards that environed her. The first care of the Athenians was to restore the city, after a desolation more complete than even that with which Brennus visited Rome; for the banner of the Gauls never waved over the Capitol, whereas the wrath of Xerxes was poured especially on the Athenian Acropolis. Nor was it enough to rebuild

the walls : it was necessary to protect the city in future from enemies near at hand ; from the never-friendly Thebans ; from the Dorians of Peloponnesus, whose fears and jealousy had been awakened by the prowess, so unlooked for by them, of their Ionian ally. The long walls had to be constructed—the harbours of Munychium and Phalerus connected with Peiræus, and riveted by strong links to Athens itself. Before such works could be finished, there can have been neither means, motives, nor leisure for embellishing the capital of Attica. Earlier than 472 B.C., in which year the common treasury of the Allies was transferred from Delos to Athens, Polycletus, Phidias, Zeuxis, and their compeers can hardly have been employed on their immortal labours. The new Athens accordingly grew up under his eyes, and that at a period of life when curiosity is most alert, and memory most tenacious. It was his privilege to watch the growth of temple and hall, colonnade and theatre, gymnasium and court of law, which the people, now a sovereign one, demanded, and their leaders willingly supplied. The poet, most susceptible, as his plays often show him to have been, of the arts allied to his own, beheld in all the freshness of their youth the Painted Porch, adorned by Micon, Polygnetus, and Pantænus, with cartoons of Athenian triumphs and heroes—the ivory and gold statue of Pallas Athene, the tutelary goddess—the Virgin's House, the Parthenon—the Portico, a work of Mnesides—the Propylæa, leading up to “the roof and crown” of Athens—the Acropolis—and other sacred and secular monuments for

which the spoils of the Persian or the tribute of the Allies furnished means. Nor were these unrivalled works, some of which he may have seen on the easel of Zeuxis or in the studio of Phidias, the only features of the time likely to nurture his imagination, or give it the bias towards an expanding future so apparent in his writings. For him the narrow and often gloomy region of legends, national or Achæan, faded before the bright and picturesque glories of the hour. In his time the boundaries of the Grecian world were enlarged. Strangers, attracted to the new centre of Hellas* by business or pleasure, now flocked to Athens from Ægean islands, from the coasts and cities of Western Asia and the Euxine, from the Greek colonies of Sicily, Cyrene, and southern Italy, from Massilia on the Celtic border, from Tartessus near the bourne of the habitable world, from the semi-barbarous Cyprus, and from the cradles of civilisation, Egypt and Phœnicia. For now was there room in Athens for all cunning workers in marble or metal, for those who dealt in Tyrian purple or unguents of Smyrna, or brought bars of silver and golden ingots from Iberian mines; room also for armourers and dockyard men in Athenian ports, where—

“Boiled

Through wintry months tenacious pitch to smear

* “Hellas,” although a word unknown in the time of Euripides, and indeed of much later date, is used, here and elsewhere, in these pages, as a convenient and comprehensive term for Greece and its numerous offsets from the Euxine Sea to the Gulf of Marseilles.

Their unsound vessels ; when the inclement time
 Seafaring men restrains, and in that while
 His bark one builds anew, another stops
 The ribs of his that hath made many a voyage.
 One hammers at the prow, one at the poop ;
 This shapeth oars, that other cables twirls,
 The mizzen one repairs and mainsail rent." *

Artists, too, who wrought neither with brush nor chisel, were drawn to Athens by the magnet of public or private demand—poets eager to celebrate her glories, and contend for lyric or dramatic prizes ; philosophers no less eager to broach new theories in morals, or to teach new devices in rhetoric and logic. It was a new world in comparison with the severe and simple Marathonian time in which Æschylus was trained ; and, like most new worlds, it was worse in some things, better in others—removed further from gods and god-like heroes, approaching nearer to man, his sorrows and joys ; less awful and august, more humane and civilised. And the change is visible in the worst no less than in the best plays of Euripides, and one to be borne in mind by all who would judge of them fairly.

Pass over a few years of the poet's life, and we come to a period when this scene of political, artistic, and social activity is at first clouded over, and in the end rent and dislimned. Among other effects of the Peloponnesian war, one was, that a stop was put to public buildings and the costly arts by which they are adorned : while those that, like the Erectheium, were unfinished

* Dante, 'Divine Comedy,' Cant. xxi., Cary's translation. The poet is speaking of Venice, but his verses are applicable to the earlier Queen of the Seas.

at the outbreak of that war, were left incomplete. But the drama did not suffer with other branches of art. Sophocles, Euripides, and a numerous band of competitors, yearly strove for the crown, and the decorations of the stage were even costlier than ever. The suspension of public works, however, was a trifle in comparison with the corruption of morals at Athens—an effect of the war, and of the great plague especially, which there is the authority of Thucydides for stating. But our business now is not with the Athenian people so much as with the stage in the time of Euripides, particularly with a view to the character of the audience.

Attica was a land favorable to varieties of labour and cultivation. At the present moment its light and dry soil produces little corn ; but want of capital and industry, not the soil, is to blame. Cereals, indeed, were never its principal produce, though small and well-tilled farms, such as are seen in Belgium and Lombardy, abounded. Rather was it a land of olives and figs, of vines and honey. Sheep and goats, particularly the latter, were kept in large flocks on the mountain slopes : even such delicacies as hams of bear and wild boar were not inaccessible to the hunter on Mount Parnes. The seas swarmed with fish, and inexhaustible were the marble quarries of Mount Pentelicus, while the silver mines of Laurium supplied the public treasury with the purest coinage in Greece. These various products of the soil furnished its occupiers with as varied occupations ; and again we have the testimony of Thucydides, that Athenians in general were fond of country pursuits, and before the

Peloponnesian war preferred their fields, villages, and small towns to the attractions of the city. The statement of the historian is confirmed by the great comic poet of the time. Aristophanes, with a wholesome hatred of unjust and unnecessary wars, frequently sets before the spectators how much the worse they were for dwelling within walls, and for leaving their olive-yards and vineyards, their meadows and cornland, where informers ceased from troubling, and booted and bearded soldiers were at rest.

The enforced removal of the country population into the capital can hardly have failed to produce a change, and that not a salutary one, in the character of the Athenians, even if the pestilence had not sapped the foundations of morals by loosening domestic ties, by rendering the sick and even the strong reckless of the morrow, and thousands at once irreligious and superstitious. Such levity and despair as were exhibited by the Parisians under the Reign of Terror, prevailed in Athens during the worst days of the plague. Even the general breaking up of homes, and the want of customary occupations, had evil results for the peasant turned townsman. For some hundreds of farmers and labourers the small towns and hill-forts of the country may have afforded shelter during the almost yearly inroads of the Peloponnesian host; yet the bulk of the rural population was compelled to move, with such goods and chattels as were portable, into the narrow space of the city—the Long Walls or the harbours; where, if they did not suffer from want of food, they were indifferently lodged. War is ever “work of waste

and ruin." If the land were tilled at all, the green corn was taken by the enemy for horse-fodder; fruit-trees were cut down for fuel or fencing of camps; villages and homesteads, when no longer wanted by the Dorian invader, were wantonly destroyed. In place of the rich tillage, woodland, or pasturage which greeted the eyes of spectators from the walls or the citadel, there presented itself a wide and various scene of desolation. All that an Athenian, during many weeks in the year, could call his own, was the sea. He yearned for his bee-hives, his garden, his oil-vats and wine-press, his fig-trees, his sheep and kine. A sorry exchange was it for him, his wife and children! Even his recreations were lost to him. He missed the chat of the market-place and the rural holiday. The city fountains did not compensate to him for the clear stream he had left behind; and his imprisonment was the more irksome because the hated Dorian was trampling on the graves of his kindred. Small comfort to him was such employment as the city supplied or demanded of him. Hard-handed ploughmen or vine-dressers were made to stand sentinels on the walls, or clapped on board a ship of war; or they sweltered in the law courts as jurymen, or listened ignorantly or apathetically to brawling orators in the assembly. He who, until that annual flight of locusts came to plague the land, had been a busy man, was now often an idle one; and weary is a life of enforced leisure. Possibly also he and the town-bred Athenians may not always have been on the best terms. Great mockers, unless they are much belied, were those town-folks. His clouted shoon and

ill-fitting tunic may have cost the peasant, or even the country gentleman, uncomfortable hours, and perhaps led him to break the heads of city wits, or to get his own head broken by them. Town amusements were never much to his liking. The music, vocal and instrumental, which he would hear at the Odeum—the Athenian opera-house—might be all very fine; but, for his part, give him the pipe and tabor, the ballads and minstrels, of his deserted village. Then as to the play-house: the performances there were not to his taste. A farce at a wake, acted on boards and tressels, a well-known hymn sung to the rural deities, pleased him far more than comedies of which he did not catch the drift, or tragedies that scared him by their furies and ghosts, and perhaps gave him bad dreams. The sudden infusion of a new element into the mass of a people cannot fail to affect it materially, whether for good or ill; and such a wholesale migration as this reacted on the townsmen themselves. Some civic virtues they might easily exchange for some rural vices. Cooped as the Athenians, urban and rustic, were within the walls, ill-housed, and often idle, with few if any sanitary or police regulations, we need not history to inform us that Athens came forth from the pestilence the worse in some respects for its visitation.

And besides these changes from without, others of a less palpable but more subtle kind were, in the age of Euripides, affecting the national character, and with it also the spirit, and in a measure the form, of the national drama. “It was a period of great intellectual activity; and the simple course of education under

which the conquerors of Salamis and Marathon had been reared no longer satisfied the wants of the noble, wealthy, and aspiring part of the Athenian youth. Their learning had not gone beyond the rudiments of music, and such a knowledge of their own language as enabled them to enjoy the works of their writers, and to express their own thoughts with ease and propriety; and they bestowed at least as much care on the training of the body as on the cultivation of the mind. But in the next generation the speculations of the Ionian and Eleatic schools began to attract attention at Athens: the presence of several celebrated philosophers, and the example of Pericles, made them familiar to a gradually widening circle; and they furnished occasion for the discussion of a variety of questions intimately connected with subjects of the highest practical moment.* The latter half of Euripides's life was passed, as we may judge even from the sober Xenophon, as well as from the witty Aristophanes, among a generation of remarkable loquacity, in which the young aspired to know a little of every subject, thought themselves fit to hold the state-rudder, and justified in looking down upon their less learned or more modest elders. Every young man, indeed, who aspired to become a statesman, must be an adept in rhetorical arts, since no one could pretend to pilot the ship who could not persuade, or at least cajole, his fellow-citizens. If, on the other hand, he wished to be a public lecturer—that is to say, a philosopher—plain Pythagorean rules for the conduct of life, or Solon's

* Bishop Thirlwall's *Hist. of Greece*, iv. 268.

elegiac maxims, no longer sufficed. Such old truisms would not bring him a single pupil or hearer. He must be able, and was always ready, to probe the very foundations of truth and law ; to argue on any subject ; to change his opinions as often as it suited himself ;—in short, to be supreme in talk, however shallow he might be in knowledge. To what extent Euripides fell in with the new philosophy will be considered in another chapter.

Let not, however, the English reader suppose that young Athens had it all its own way ; that the ancient spirit was quite dead ; or that philosophy was merely a game of riddles, and ethics little better than the discovery that there is “neither transgression nor sin.” Had it been so, Plato, in the next generation, would have addressed empty benches in his Academy ; and at a still later period, Demosthenes have failed to inspire his hearers with either that deliberate valour or that spirit of self-sacrifice which they displayed in their struggles with “the man of Macedon.” In spite of some grave defects or some superficial blemishes, the Athens that crowned or refused to crown Euripides was the home of a noble and generous people, easily led astray, but still willing to return to the right path ; not impatient of reproof, and sincere, if somewhat sudden, in its repentance. Her citizens were a strange mixture of refinement and coarseness, of intelligence and ignorance. For intellect and taste, no city, ancient or modern, has ever made for its members so varied and sumptuous a provision as she afforded to her children, her friends, and the

stranger within her gates. In the days of Euripides, a resident in Athens might in one week assist at a solemn religious festival; at the performance of plays that for more than two thousand years were unsurpassed; might listen in the Odeum to music worthy of the verse to which it was wedded; might watch in the Great Harbour the war-galleys making ready for the next foray on the Lacedæmonian coast, or the heavy-armed infantry training for their next encounter with Spartan or Theban phalanx. In the intervals of these mimic or serious spectacles, he could study the works of the most consummate artists the earth has ever produced; gaze in the gymnasium on living beauty, grace, and strength; or, if meditatively given, could hear Prodicus and Protagoras in their lecture-rooms, or Socrates in the market-place, discoursing upon "divine philosophy." If he were in any way remarkable for worth or ability, the saloons of Pericles, Nicias, or Glaucon were not closed against him by any idle ceremonies of good introductions, fine clothes, or long pedigrees. Athens, it is well said by Milton, was "native or hospitable to famous wits." And though he had not "three white luces on his coat," nor any coat of arms at all, he was "a gentleman born." His heraldry was the belief that before a Dorian set foot in Peloponnesus, or a tribe of Persian mountaineers had vanquished the Assyrian or the Mede, his forefathers had established themselves in Attica, and taken part in the Trojan war. All other Greek communities, with the single exception of the Arcadians and Achæans—poor bucolical folks then, but destined

a century later to hold a prominent place in Greece—were in comparison with the Athenian the creatures of yesterday. One Attic king had been the friend of Hercules, and so was coeval with the Argonauts: and even Theseus had his royal predecessors. And if the Athenian studied the national chronicles, or listened by the winter fireside to the stories of old times, he did not blush for his progenitors. They had ever been redressers of wrongs, harbourers of the exile, hospitable to the stranger; and their virtues supplied Euripides with themes for several of his plays.

The poet, who had watched the growth of his native city, witnessed also the rapid extension of its empire. When Euripides was in his boyhood, Athens was but a secondary power in Hellas;—inferior to Corinth in wealth and commercial enterprise; to Sparta in war and the number of its allies. In his twenty-sixth year—the year in which he exhibited his first play—Athens had become the head of a league far more powerful than the confederacy which the “king of men” led to the siege of Troy. She stepped into the place which the proud, selfish, and custom-bound Spartan had abandoned. An active democracy eclipsed a sullen and ceremonious oligarchy; and although the Dorian in the end prevailed, it was partly owing to Persian gold that he did so, and partly because the Ionian city had squandered her strength, as France so often has done, in unjustifiable and prodigal wars. At all times, and especially while the “breed of noble blood” flowed in her veins—while to be just as Aristides, chivalrous as Cimon, temperate in the execution of high office as

Pericles, continued to be accounted virtues—Athens held, and deserved to hold, her supremacy. Proud, and justly so, were her sons of their beautiful city. The tribute paid to her by the allies for protecting them from the Persian was fairly expended upon the maintenance of the fleet and the encouragement of art. Her citizens were, and felt themselves to be, in the van of Greek cultivation. They hailed with applause the praises addressed to them by the dramatic poets—and the praises were no idle flattery. Was it not a truth that, had it not been for the Athenians, northern Greece would have given earth and water to the Persian envoys, and Peloponnesus have selfishly abandoned the sea to the Phœnician galleys? True also, that but for the Athenians, “dusk faces with white silken turbans wreathed” might have been seen in the citadels of Corinth and Thebes? Of a city that had so well deserved of every state, insular or on the mainland, where Greek was spoken, the most appropriate ornaments were the triumphs of the artist. Rightfully proud were the Athenians of their beautiful city; as rightfully employed were the pens of poets in giving these monuments perpetual fame.

With history, direct or indirect, before us, it may be possible to describe, or at least divine, the spectacle presented at the Dionysiac theatre when Sophocles or Euripides brought out a new play. The audience consisted of nearly as many elements as, centuries later, were to crowd and elbow one another in the vast space of the Roman Colosseum. The lowest and best seats, those nearest the orchestra, were reserved for

men of mark and dignity, for the judges who would award the prizes, for sage, grave members of the Areopagus, for archons in office, or for those who had already held office, for soldiers "famoused in fight," for ambassadors from Greek or foreign lands, for all who had some claim to precedence from their rank or their services to the commonwealth. Women were admitted to the tragedies at least, boys as well as men to all performances; even slaves were permitted to be present. The women, by Greek usage secluded at home, were probably assigned a particular apartment in the play-house; the boys were perhaps of use, as often as an unpopular competitor for the crown tried his fortune once more; and possibly Euripides may have occasionally regretted the presence of these youthful censors. No registered citizen could plead poverty as a reason for not witnessing these theatrical contests; if he had not money in his purse, the state paid for his ticket of admission. To foreigners were commonly allotted the back seats; but so many mechanical devices were employed for the conveyance of sound, that unless a sitter in the gallery were hard of hearing, he could probably catch every line of the choral chant or the recitative of the dialogue. Nor might short-sighted people be quite forlorn; he was pitiable indeed who could not discern, vast as was the space between himself and the stage, the colossal actors mounted on their high boots, and raised by their tall head-dress above ordinary mortal stature. A purblind stranger might perchance regret that he could not distinguish in the stalls bald-headed Nicias from the long-haired Alci-

biades; and that although Socrates was certainly in the house he could not identify him among a batch of ugly fellows, with whom, he was told, the celebrated street-preacher was sitting.

The gallery in which foreigners sat is perhaps the most interesting feature of the audience to English readers—interesting, because it represented the various members of the Athenian empire, as well as of the Hellenic race. A merchant whose warehouse was near the Pillars of Hercules, would find himself seated beside one who had brought a cargo of wheat from Sinope, on the Euxine Sea. A hybrid—half-Greek, half-Egyptian—of Canopus, would have on his right hand a tent-maker from Tarsus, on his left a Thessalian bullock-drover. The “broad Scotch” of the Greeks—the Dorian *patois*—would be spoken by a group of spectators in front of him; while a softer dialect than even the Attic, pure Ionic, was used by a party of islanders behind him. “What gorgeously-attired personage is that on your left?” “A Tyrian merchant, rich enough to buy up any street in Athens—a prince in his own city, a suitor here. He has come on law business; and although at home he struts like any peacock, here he is obliged to salute any ragged rascal in the streets who may be a juror when his cause is heard. To my certain knowledge, the great emerald column in the temple of Melcarth, at Tyre, is mortgaged to him.” “And who is that queerly-dressed man a little beyond the Tyrian? By his garb and short petticoat I should take him for a Scythian policeman,* but he has not the

* Scythian bowmen were the *gendarmes* of Athens.

yellow hair and blue eyes of those gentry." "That, sir, is a Gaul from Massilia; he is on his road to Bithynia, where the satrap Pharnabazus, I think his name is, is offering good pay to western soldiers—and where there is gold there also is sure to be a Gaul. The fellow speaks Greek fairly well, for he was for some time in a Massilian counting-house, his mother being a Greek woman." We should tire our readers' patience long before we exhausted the portraits of sitters in the strangers' gallery in the Dionysiac theatre; and it is only due to the Athenian portion of the audience to turn for a few moments to them.

Samuel Johnson could not conceive there could be "livers out of" London; or that a people ignorant of printing could be other than barbarous. Had he been as well acquainted with Greek as he was with some portions of Latin literature, he might have found cause for altering his opinion. The Athenians were not in general book-learned, but such knowledge as can be obtained by the eye and the ear they possessed abundantly; and the thirty thousand registered citizens, to say nothing of resident aliens, were better informed than an equal number of average Londoners are at the present time. In the rows of the theatre, as on the benches of the Pnyx,* might be seen men who, if judged by their apparel, would have been set down for paupers, if not street-Arabs; and yet these shabby folk were able to correct orators who mis-

* The Pnyx was the place where the people of Athens assembled to hear political debates—in fact, their House of Parliament.

pronounced a word, singers when out of tune, and actors who tripped in their delivery of dialogue. Their moral sense, indeed, was not on a level with their taste and shrewd understandings: yet we shall have to record more than one instance of their calling Euripides to account for opinions which they deemed unwholesome, or for innovations which they regarded as needless departures from established custom. It may be doubted whether they were a very patient audience. They seem to have had little scruple in expressing their approbation or disapprobation, as well of the poet as the actor; and their mode of doing so was sometimes very rough, inasmuch as, besides hissing and hooting at them strenuously, they pelted bad or unpopular actors with stones.

The varied appearance of the spectators on the higher benches did not extend to the lower ones, which the citizens proper occupied. Fops and dandies there were in the wealthy classes, and especially among the immediate followers of Alcibiades, or those who aped their extravagances. But generally no democrat brooked in a brother democrat display or singularity. A house better than ordinary, or fine raiment, were considered marks of an oligarchic disposition; and the owner of such gauds, if he aspired to public office, was pretty sure to have them cast in his teeth at the hustings. But sobriety in raiment, in dwelling, or equipage, did not abate the vivacious spirit of the Ionians of the west. When offended or wearied by a play, they employed all the artillery of displeasure against the spectators as well as the per-

formers. Sometimes an unpopular citizen attracted notice; and then the wit at his expense flowed fast and furious, as it occasionally does now from a Dublin gallery. Were there a hole in his coat, it was likely to be mentioned with "additional particulars:" if he had ever gone through the bankruptcy court, it was not forgotten: swindling or perjury were joyfully commemorated: still more so any current rumours about poisoning a wife, a rich uncle, troublesome stepsons, wards, mothers-in-law, and other family inconveniences.

Such were the audiences who sat in judgment on the great drama of the ancient world. It may be probably conjectured that Euripides found more favour with the resident aliens and the visitors from foreign parts than with the born citizens. To these, his somewhat arbitrary treatment of old legends—his familiar dealing with, or perhaps humanising of, the Hellenic deities, his softening of the terrors of destiny, his modification of the songs and functions of the Chorus, and other deviations from the ancient severity of dramatic art—would give little, if any, offence. For such spectators the dooms hanging over Argive or Theban royal houses would have but little interest. Their forefathers had taken no part in the quarrel between Eteocles and Polynices, cared little for the authority of the Areopagus, had local deities and myths of their own, among whom were not reckoned Pallas Athene, Apollo, or the Virgin Huntress. To the foreigner, that triumphal song, the "Persians" of Æschylus, and his "Prometheus," were perhaps

more welcome than his Orestean trilogy. The fables of these plays were common and catholic to the whole Hellenic world. The friend and protector of mankind, the long-suffering Titan, touched chords in the heart of a Greek spectator, whether he drank the water of the Meander or that of the fountain of Arethusa. The flight of Xerxes and the humiliation of the Mede were the story of his own deliverance from the dread or oppression of the great king. Even the tragi-comedy of Euripides might be more agreeable to him than the sombre grandeur of Æschylus, or the serene and perfect art of Sophocles.

But to the purely Athenian portion the innovations of Euripides were less acceptable. If we are to judge by the number of prizes he gained, at no period of his career was he so popular as Sophocles. He was rather a favourite with a party than with the Athenian public. In some respects the restless democracy was very conservative in its taste. The deeds of its forefathers it associated with Achæan legends: the gods of the commonwealth, although it laughed heartily at them when travestied by the comic poets, still were held to be the rightful tenants of Olympus; whereas the Euripidean deities were either ordinary men and women, or "airy nothings," without any "local habitation." Marriage-vows, again, were not very strictly kept by Athenian husbands, yet they did not approve of questionable connections, and thought that Euripides abused poetic licence when he made use of them in his dramas. Moreover, there may have been

something in his habits unpalatable to them : he lived apart ; conversed with few ; cared not for news ; held strange opinions, as will be seen presently, about women and slaves, wits and politicians ; was no "masker or reveller;" and, in short, took no pains to make himself publicly or privately agreeable. Englishmen are devout worshippers of public opinion, as it is conveyed through the press. Athenians, without a press, were quite as subservient to their leaders in opinion. They liked not eccentricity, or even the show of pride. In a few cases, indeed, they condoned apparent neglect : Pericles, who rarely went among them unless weighty matters were in hand, they pardoned for his good services to democracy ; the grave and tristful visage of Demosthenes, who was rarely seen to smile, they overlooked in consideration of his stirring appeals to their patriotic feelings ; but they could not pardon a man who sought fame, if not money, by his plays, for being uncivil to playgoers. And little civility they got from him, beyond a few compliments to their sires or their city.

A very heterogeneous mass were these unofficial judges of dramatic poets. Between twenty and thirty thousand spectators could be assembled in the theatre of Bacchus. Beyond the seats occupied by privileged persons, and below those allotted to strangers, sat the sovereign people. The war party and the peace party were not separated by barriers. Aristophanes might be next to Lamachus, and the tanner Anytus next to barefooted Socrates. Government contractors, enriched by the war, were mixed up with farmers who

were ruined by it. The man who could calculate an eclipse was wedged in with people who thought that the sun or moon when obscured was bewitched; Strep-siades's pleasure might be spoilt by the near neighbourhood of his creditors; and Euelpides, who dropped on his knees on seeing a kite, be close to Diagoras the Melian, who knelt not even to Jupiter.

The social, intellectual, and perhaps also the moral changes, which affected Athenians during the long life of Euripides, may be partly gathered from the Greek orators, as well as from the satirical comedians. Isocrates, referring to "the good old times"—often, as respects superior virtue or wisdom, a counterpart of the "oldest inhabitant"—and comparing his own generation with that of Marathon and Salamis, points out the causes of backsliding. "Then," says the orator, "our young men did not waste their days in the gambling-house, nor with music girls, nor in the assemblies, in which whole days are now consumed. Then did they shun the Agora, or if they passed through its haunts, it was with modest and timorous forbearance; then to contradict an elder was a greater offence than nowadays to offend a parent; then not even a servant would have been seen to eat or drink within a tavern." It was this golden or this dreamland age for which Aristophanes sighs in his comedy of "The Clouds," deploring the degeneracy of the young men in his time, when sophists were in the room of statesmen, and the gymnasium was empty and the law courts were filled. Into the mouth of old Athens, addressing the young one, are put the following verses:—

“ Oh listen to me, and so shall you be stout-hearted and
fresh as a daisy ;
Not ready to chatter on every matter, nor bent over books
till you're hazy :
No splitter of straws, no dab at the laws, making black seem
white so cunning ;
But wandering down outside the town, and over the green
meadow running,
Ride, wrestle, and play with your fellows so gay, like so
many birds of a feather,
All breathing of youth, good-humour, and truth, in the time
of the jolly spring-weather,
In the jolly spring-time, when the poplar and lime dishevel
their tresses together.” *

Such were Athens, its people, and its theatre, when Euripides was boy and man : we now proceed to inquire what manner of person he was himself.

* The extract from the Areopagitic oration of Isocrates is taken from Bulwer's 'Athens—its Rise and Fall,' vol. ii. ch. 5, p. 577; the translation of Aristophanes from a most wise and beautiful little book, entitled 'Euphranor, a Dialogue on Youth' (1851).

CHAPTER II.

LIFE OF EURIPIDES.

“How about Euripides?
He that was born upon the battle-day:
Might you know any of his verses too?”
—BROWNING: “Balaustion’s Adventure.”

THE received date of the birth of Euripides is the year 480 B.C. He was accordingly forty-five years junior to Æschylus, and fifteen years younger than Sophocles. This difference in their respective ages is not unimportant as regards their very different views of dramatic art. His birthplace was the island of Salamis, where his mother, with other Athenian women, and with men too old, or children too young, for the defence of their native city, was taking refuge, and he came into the world on the day of the great sea-fight that has immortalised its name. Of his father Mnesarchus little is known; but it may be supposed he was a person of good station and property, since he could afford his son a liberal and expensive education, such as at that time was within reach of only wealthy families. His mother Clito, thanks to the poet’s enemies, is better known to us. Probably she was not of

the same social grade as her husband ; a "metic" perhaps, or half-caste, with pure Athenian blood on one side only. But that Clito was ever a herb-woman, kept a greengrocer's stall, or hawked fruit and flowers about the streets, is doubtless a tale devised by her son's ill-wishers. Demosthenes, the orator's father, was a master cutler, and, as his son's suit against his knavish guardians shows, drove a brisk trade in swords, spear-heads, knives, and shears ; but it does not therefore follow that either the orator or his sire hammered on the anvil or blew the bellows themselves.* In democratic Athens there was at all times a prejudice in favour of high birth, and one of the most effective arrows in Demosthenes's quiver against Æschines was, that his rival had once been a player, that his father was a low fellow, and his mother a dancer, a fortune-teller, and an altogether disreputable person. Clito and her husband very possibly owned some garden-ground near Athens, and its produce may have for a time supplied a convenient addition to their income. The Persians can hardly have been twice quartered on Attic soil without affecting seriously the rents or dividends of its owners, and thus the parents of Euripides may have been glad to sell their vegetables.† To represent Clito as

* "Bleared with the glowing mass, the luckless sire
From anvils, sledges, bellows, tongs, and fire,
From tempering swords, his own more safe employ,
To study rhetoric sent his hopeful boy."

—Juvenal, Sat. x., Gifford.

† One account reverses the story : according to it, Clito was "a person of quality," and Mnesarchus not a gentleman but a shopkeeper, or at least "in business."

vending her own wares was an irresistible temptation to comic dramatists, indifferent whom they used for mirth and laughter; whether it were a Pericles or a Cleon.

Like many fathers before him and since, Mnesarchus was puzzled about his son's proper calling in life; and so, as modern parents often consult some sound divine about the choice of a school for their lads, he took counsel of those who understood what the stars or birds of the air forebode as to the destiny of mortals. But either there was a mistake in casting the boy's nativity, or else the birds lied; for both they and the stars advised Mnesarchus to train up his child in the way of boxing and wrestling. So far this muscular education was successful; it enabled the young Euripides to gain a prize or two in the ring, but at local matches only, for though entered for the Olympian games, he was not allowed to put on either the gloves or the belt. There was some informality—he was too young or too old—and he was struck from the lists. It is remarkable, in connection with this period of his life—at the time of his rejection by the Olympic managers he is said to have been about seventeen years of age—that, in his plays, Euripides has never a good word for prophets and soothsayers; while, as for athletes, he denounces them as the most useless and brutal of men. His aversion to them may have arisen from these youthful misadventures. His proper vocation was yet to seek; and until he found it, he seems to have been rather devious in his pursuits, since, among other arts, he studied that of painting, and

practised it with some success, a picture by him being, long after his decease, exhibited at Megara, either as a creditable performance or a curiosity. The painter may have been of service to the poet; his dramas, especially the lyrical portions of them, display much fondness for words expressing colour. Painting was perhaps as useful an ally to the Greek poet, as skill in music was to Milton in the construction of his verse. The real business of Euripides turned out to be the cultivation of his mind, and not of his muscles. His lines were set in the (to him) always pleasant places of poetry and philosophy; his wrestling powers were to be exercised in combats with dramatic rivals, and still more hostile critics. And this was perhaps what the stars really said, only the stupid soothsayers did not read them aright. Such people have more than once brought those who consult them into trouble, as poor king Cræsus, long before Euripides was born, found to his cost. The instructors of Euripides in philosophy were Anaxagoras for physical and Protagoras for moral science. Prodicus gave him lectures in rhetoric, and the studies of his youth were confirmed, expanded, or corrected in his manhood by the good sense of Socrates, who, besides being a guide and philosopher, was also his friend. An education of this kind implies that either Mnesarchus was a man of fortune, or that his son early came into one, inasmuch as the Greek sophistical lecturers were quite as costly as many English private tutors are now. We do not know their actual terms, but we do know that they were beyond the reach of ordinary incomes. "Think," says Hippias to Soc-

rates, "of the sums of money which Protagoras and Prodicus collected from Greece. If you knew how much I had made myself, you would be surprised. From one town, and that a very small one, I carried off more than 150 minæ (£609), which I took home and gave to my father, to the extreme astonishment of himself and his fellow-townsmen." It is also a token of Euripides being well provided with money, that he collected a library—large enough to excite observation at the time, and to be recorded afterwards. Forming a library in any age, heathen or Christian, is an expensive taste; and, on the whole, printed books are cheaper than those transcribed by the hand. Grecian sheepskin or good Egyptian paper (papyrus) was a costly luxury.

In his twenty-sixth year Euripides presented himself for the first time among the candidates for the dramatic crown. In that year (455 B.C.) death removed one formidable rival from his path, since in it *Æschylus* expired. Of the three tragedies produced by him on this his first trial, one was entitled, "The Daughters of Pelias,"* and a few lines of it which have been preserved show that it turned upon some

* Among the few fragments preserved of this play are four lines, apparently indicating that *Medea* was devising mischief to somebody—perhaps putting on the copper or sharpening a knife for the behoof of Pelias. Whatever it was, she is asking advice, and her monitor gives it like a person of good sense:—

"A good device; yet to my counsel list:
 Whilst thou art young, think as becomes thy years:
 Maidenly manners maidens best become.
 But when some worthy man has thee espoused,
 Leave plots to him; they suit not with thy sex."

adventures of Medea—a theme that a few years after he was to handle with signal success. The third prize was awarded to him—no mean distinction for a novice. But not until Euripides was just forty years old did he obtain the first prize; and the name of this successful trilogy is not preserved. Prominent as the “Medea” now stands among his works, the trilogy of which it formed a part gained only the third prize. Six years after the production of the “Medea,” Aristophanes opened upon its author his double battery of sarcasm and parody, not indeed against the “Medea,” but against a companion drama, now lost, the “Philoctetes.”* It is difficult to perceive any possible link between the Colchian princess and the possessor of the bow and arrows of Hercules; we may therefore infer that the group to which these two plays belonged was made up of fables unconnected with each other—a departure from earlier practice that did not originate with Euripides, though he is sometimes taxed with it.

He was twice married; his first wife was Choerilla, a daughter of the Mnesilochus who appears in Aristophanes’s comedy of the “Thesmophoriazusæ;” by her he had three sons: his second was Melitto. According to some accounts he was a bigamist; in

* Of this “Philoctetes” there is a very fair account—by no means a common piece of luck with Euripides—by Dion Chrysostom, Oration lii. Dion compares the “Philoctetes” of Æschylus (lost) and that of Sophocles (extant) with the Euripidean drama; and he shows that each of these pieces has its several merits.

Athens, however, bigamy, though uncommon, was not a punishable offence.* There was some scandal about one or other or both of these ladies; probably, if there were any ground for it, it applied to Melitto, since Euripides lived for many years with Chœrilla upon, so far as is known, ordinary connubial terms. Athens, however, it must be recollected, in justice to both ladies, was a very gossiping city; nothing (we have it on the authority of St Paul, seconded by that of Demosthenes) pleased them so much as to tell and to hear news, and any news about Euripides was certain of welcome to those who had laughed at the representation of him in the "Acharnians." If it be fair to draw inferences from the wedded happiness of "the laureate fraternity of poets," it might appear that Euripides would have fared better had he remained a bachelor. Dante complains that Gemma, his wife, held him in subjection; Shakespeare was not quite comfortable, it would seem, at home; Milton's start in married life was unlucky; Wycherley and Addison were fearfully henpecked. If Christian husbands

* Hume, in his 19th Essay, writes:—"I have somewhere read that the republic of Athens, having lost many of its citizens by war and pestilence, allowed every man to marry two wives, in order the sooner to repair the waste which had been made by these calamities. The poet Euripides happened to be coupled to two noisy vixens, who so plagued him with their jealousies and quarrels that he became ever after a professed woman-hater; and is the only theatrical writer, perhaps the only poet, that ever entertained an aversion to the sex." The "good David," though sceptical enough on some subjects, was rather credulous on the score of anecdotes of this sort.

fared so ill, it may have been worse with a heathen poet, at a time and in a country where a man's lawful wife was scarcely more than his cook and house-keeper.

There is no trace of Euripides having, at any period of his life, taken part in public affairs. He seems never to have been archon, or general, as Sophocles was, or priest, or ambassador, or foreman of a jury. Doubtless he paid some rates or taxes in his parish (*deme*), Phylæ of the Cecropid tribe. He was commonly accounted a morose and sulky fellow; and since he shunned general society, he was naturally charged with keeping low company.* He was indeed—far more than was usual in his time, and among a people passing most of their days in public—"a literary man," preferring solitude and his library to the hubbub of the market-place, or the crowding and noise of popular assemblies. According to a story preserved by a Roman anecdotist, Euripides pursued his studies in a grim and gloomy fashion. One Philochorus professed to have seen a "grotto shagged with horrid thorn," † in which he composed his tragedies. He is said never to

* The spirits in Hades, that in "The Frogs" rejoice in the rhetorical tricks ascribed to Euripides, are supposed, while on earth, to have inhabited the bodies of cut-purses, highwaymen, burglars, and parricides—such "minions of the moon" being, in Aristophanes's opinion, the pupils of sophistical tutors; or, at least, their notions of property and filial piety, he thinks, were probable results of their education. There was a time when to be a Hobbist or a Benthamite was thought to tend to similar aberrations from virtue.

† Ben Jonson, certainly not an unsocial man (witness the

have laughed, rarely to have even smiled, and to have worn habitually a sorrowful visage. If it were so, Euripides was such a man as the vivacious Gratiano disliked, and even suspected :—

“Why should a man whose blood is warm within
 Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster ?
 Sleep when he wakes, and creep into the jaundice
 By being peevish ?”

And Cæsar perhaps might have thought him dangerous, though we have no reason for supposing Euripides “lean and hungry,” as Cassius was, but, on the contrary, as will appear, a well-favoured, though a grave and silent man. Perhaps Euripides’s horoscope may have resembled that of the good knight of Norwich : “I was born,” says Sir Thomas Browne, “in the planetary hour of Saturn, and I think I have a piece of that leaden planet in me. I am no way facetious, nor disposed for the mirth and *galliardise* of company.”

The ‘Spectator’ remarks that “a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure till he knows whether the writer of it be a black or a fair man, of a mild or choleric disposition, married or a bachelor, with other particulars of the like nature that conduce very much to the right understanding of an author.” There are things said at the Mermaid, his butt of sack, his ‘Tribe of Ben’), describes himself in these lines :—

“I, that spend half my nights and all my days
 Here in a *cell* to get a dark pale face,
 To come forth worth the ivy and the bays,” &c.

Did we know as little of the English as we do of the Greek poet, here would be ground enough for a legend of a “grotto.”

means for "gratifying this curiosity, which is so natural to a reader;" for, thanks to some scholiast or painstaking collector of the curiosities of literature, there exists a brief life of Euripides containing some account of his personal appearance. He is said to have worn a bushy beard, and to have had freckles on his face. This, indeed, is not much; yet it is somewhat for us to learn—a scrap redeemed from the wallet that Time bears on his back. On the same authority we may fairly assume, that when a beardless youth, and perhaps unfreckled, he was noted for fair visage, and that he was "a gentleman born." He was a torch-bearer at the festival of Apollo of Zoster, a village on the coast of Attica.* Now none but handsome and well-born youth were chosen for that office. It is to be hoped that many of our readers are acquainted with Charles Lamb's righteous indignation at the conduct of the "wretched Malone," the Shakespearian editor and commentator, in covering with white paint the portrait-bust of Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, "which, in rude but lively fashion, depicted him to the very colour of the cheek, the eye, the eyebrow, hair, the very dress he used to wear—the only

* The festival was held at Delphi, and probably, therefore, Euripides was conveyed thither in the galley (*paralus*) which annually carried offerings to Apollo's shrine. The young men, clad in Theraic garments, danced round the altar. May not this visit to Delphi have been the germ of the poet's beautiful drama, "Ion"? In any case the report of it shows that no ignobility of birth was attached to the name of Euripides by those who circulated it; and among them was Theophrastus, who indeed wrote long afterwards, but yet weighed his facts.

authentic testimony we have, however imperfect, of these curious parts and parcels of him." If we balance in each case probable facts against equally probable traditions, we may conclude Euripides to be known to us almost as well as Shakespeare, owing to this good Dryasdust, the Greek biographer, who disdains not to chronicle even "freckles."

But it is impossible to believe Euripides to have been a mere recluse. His vocation as a writer for the stage must have brought him into contact with many persons connected with the theatre—with the archon who assigned him a chorus, with the actors, singers, and musicians who performed in his plays, and with the judges who awarded the prizes. Yet if we ask what company he kept, we pause for a reply, and do not get one. We know that he was a friend of Socrates, who never missed attending on the "first night" of a play by Euripides. We know also that every man's house and many men's tables were open to the Silenus-like son of Sophroniscus. We can tell the names of the guests at Plato's and at Xenophon's banquets. Socrates of course is at both, and that of Plato is held at the house of Agathon, Euripides's intimate friend. Some kind of acquaintance, perhaps not exactly friendship, existed between Alcibiades and Euripides, who once celebrated in verse a chariot-victory of that brilliant but dangerous citizen's at the Olympic games. Neither at Plato's nor Xenophon's feast, however, is Euripides present. Nor is it likely that travelling into foreign parts was among the causes for his absence on such festive occasions, since, until in

his later years he quitted Athens, there is no trace of his leaving Attica, except the single fact of an inscription in the island of Icarus ascribed to him. This, however, is no evidence at all of his being from home, since a waxen tablet or a snip of papyrus could have conveyed the inscription, while Euripides remained in his grotto or his library, wrapt in contemplation on his next new play, or striving to solve hard sayings of Prodicus or Protagoras.

Once, indeed, we find him at home. It was in his house that Protagoras is said to have read one of the works by which that philosopher incurred a charge of atheism; and this worshipful society, once bruited abroad, was not likely to be overlooked by the pious writers of comedy. Often, indeed, does Athens, at the period of the Peloponnesian war, present an image of Paris in the last century. There the Church was despised, and yet stanchly supported by men of notoriously evil life; in Athens, divinities, whom the people worshipped superstitiously, if not devoutly, when the theatre was closed, were butts for the people's mirth and laughter when it was open. We have a record of only the two banquets of this time already mentioned. Could we have a report of a "*petit souper d'Alcibiades*," it might very likely remind us of those *symposiums* where the head of the Church, Leo the Tenth, encouraged his parasites and buffoons to debate on the greatest mysteries of religion; or the still better known conversations that took place at the supper-table of Baron Holbach. Had we any such report of the *petits soupers* at Athens, possibly

some resemblance might be found between Protagoras and D'Alembert, or between the brilliant, versatile, and unprincipled Philip of Orleans and Alcibiades. With Alcibiades there was certainly some party or friendly relation with Euripides; but it is vain to speculate on its nature. Whatever it was, it would do the tragic poet no good with Aristophanes; and if the story be true that Alcibiades and his associates marred the first and hindered the second representation of "The Clouds," the baffled and irritated satirist may have suspected Euripides of having a hand in his failure, and for that, and perhaps other weightier reasons, have put him down in his black book.

Certain it is that Aristophanes regarded Euripides with a feeling seemingly compounded of fear and contempt—of contempt for him as a scenic artist, and fear of him as a corrupter of youth. Yet it is difficult to detect the cause for such hostility; political motives can hardly have been at the root of it. Did Aristophanes detest the war with Peloponnesus, and yearn for the return of peace? so did Euripides. Did he regard the middle class of citizens as the pith and marrow of the commonwealth? Euripides thought so too. The husbandman who tilled his little plot of ground they both set above the shopkeeper, who applauded the demagogue of the hour, and spent, or more properly idled away, half his time on the stone benches of the Pnyx. Did the comic writer love Athens in his heart of hearts, though he often told her from the stage that she was a dolt and a dupe? the tragic writer loved her no less, and paid her compli-

ments sometimes not to the advantage of a play or a trilogy. Did the one look upon orators with an unfavourable eye? so did the other; while both agreed that nobility of birth and depth of purse did not necessarily constitute the best citizen. Yet, in spite of so much harmony in their opinions, there were differences that could not be bridged over; there was repugnance that defied reconciliation, and views of Athens as it had been, and Athens as it was then, which kept them in the compass of one town as far apart as if rivers and mountains, clime or race, had sundered them.

The enmity of Aristophanes increased with the years, and did not relax with the death of Euripides. The first known attack upon him was made in his comedy of "The Acharnians" or "The Charcoal-Burners." The last was made two years after "sad Electra's poet" had been struck down by a yet more "insatiate archer" than Aristophanes himself. The spirit that breathes in "The Acharnians" reappears, but with increased bitterness, in "The Frogs," and to sharp censure on Euripidean art is added still sharper on Euripidean theology. Some modern writers on the subject of the Greek drama have contemplated Euripides through the eyes of his great satirist. They might, perhaps, have done better to consider, before following their witty leader, whether he was guiding them in the right road; whether the comic writer's objections rested on patriotic or moral, or on party or personal grounds. Aristophanes was a stubborn reactionist: the men of Marathon and Plateæ, of

Salamis and Mycale, he held to be the type of good Athenians. The new schools appeared to him in the same light as Greek philosophy in general appeared to the sturdy old Sabine Cato—schools of impudence and lying. Pericles himself he seems never to have really liked, but set him below Myronides and Thucydides, men of the good old time, for the return of which, as all reactionists must ever do, he yearned in vain. Euripides, on the other hand, was a man of the new time, perhaps a little beyond as well as of it. More cheerful views of humanity, ampler range of inquiry, greater freedom of thought, supplanted in his mind the gloomy superstition or the slavish faith of a past generation, with whom an eclipse was a token of the wrath of the gods, and by whom the sun was thought to be no bigger than a heavy-armed soldier's buckler. "Between the pass and fell incensed points" of two such opposites there could be nothing but collision; and the tragic poet laboured under this serious disadvantage, that *he* could not bring his antagonist on the stage.

Yet the most ardent admirer of Euripides is compelled to allow that this indefatigable writer of plays and laborious student can hardly be ranked among successful poets. "It has been observed," says an eminent judge of Greek literature, "that the success of Euripides, if it is measured by the prizes which he is said to have gained, would not seem to have been very great; and perhaps there may be reason to suspect that he owed much of the applause which he obtained in his lifetime to the favour of a party, which

was strong rather in rank and fortune than in numbers,—the same which is said to have been headed by Alcibiades.”—“It is not quite certain that, even in the latter part of his career, Euripides was so popular as Sophocles. In answer to a question of Socrates, in a conversation with Xenophon, probably heard during the latter part of the Peloponnesian war, Sophocles is mentioned as indisputably the most admirable in his art.”* If, according to this very probable suggestion, Euripides were the poet of the few and not of the Athenians in general, his frequent failure to win the ivy wreath may easily be explained. Democracy, though in all times it delights in clubs, is very jealous of coteries, especially if composed of men well-to-do in the world, or of men noted for their learning or refinement, and particularly jealous would all old-fashioned Cecropids be of a club in which Alcibiades was chairman. If, however, the wayward Phidippides† of the comedy may sometimes have hindered the poet’s success in a theatrical contest, he may as probably have atoned for this grievance at home by obtaining for him a better reception abroad. “There were dwellers out of” Attica, without going to the realm of the Birds to find them. And among the dependencies of Athens, in the tributary islands and among the Greeks of the Lesser Asia, where Alcibiades had much influence, he may have been an efficient patron of the often, at home, mortified dramatist.

* Thirlwall’s *Hist. of Greece*, iv. 273.

† Phidippides, in “*The Clouds*” of Aristophanes, is reputed to be a caricature of Alcibiades.

An historian, who wrote centuries after Euripides had passed beyond these and other vexations, cannot conceal his surprise that one Xenocles should have been the successful competitor in a contest with the son of Mnesarchus. He fairly calls the judges and spectators on the occasion a parcel of fools—dunderheads unworthy to bear the name of Athenian. But in missing the first or even the second crown, Euripides only fared alike with Æschylus and Sophocles; and that, with such samples of the two latter as have come to our hands, is a much more remarkable circumstance than the one it puzzled Arrian to account for.* What dramatic giants must they have been who strove for the mastery with the old Marathonian soldier, and with the Shakespeare of the Grecian world! Perhaps another cause occasionally cost Euripides the crown. He, like Ben Jonson, was at times perverse in the choice or in the treatment of his subjects. Even from the satire of Aristophanes it is plain that he had an unlucky propensity to tread on debatable, and even dangerous, ground. By his innovations in legendary stories, by occasionally tampering with criminal passion, by perhaps carrying to excess his fondness for mere stage effect, he perplexed or offended his audience, not inclined to accept as an apology for the exhibition of wicked characters his plea that in the end they were all well punished for their sins.† Even his constant applause from the benches, Socrates, had, it is said, once to implore him to cut out from a play certain offensive lines; and a story preserved by a

* Various Histories, v.

† Valerius Maximus.

Roman anecdotist shows that occasionally he was obliged to come on the stage himself, and crave the spectators to keep their seats until the end of the performance.* It seems that Euripides could give a tart reply to his audience when their opinions happened to differ from his own; for when the whole house demanded that an offensive passage or sentiment in a tragedy should be struck out, he said, "Good people, it is *my* business to teach you, and not to be taught by you." How the "good people" took this curt rebuff is not recorded; but if they damned his play, he at least did not, as Ben Jonson did, sulk for a few years and leave the "loathèd stage" in dudgeon, after venting his wrath on the public by an abusive ode and some stinging epigrams. On the contrary, Euripides went on preparing plays for the greater and lesser seasons of the theatrical period, until he left Athens and his enemies therein—for ever.

Amid frequent disappointments, and smarting under the lash of the comic poets—for we may be sure that where an Aristophanes led the way, others, however inferior to him, would follow eagerly—Euripides at a moment of universal dismay perhaps enjoyed some personal consolation. The mighty host which Athens had sent to Syracuse had been nearly annihilated. Of forty thousand citizens or allies that had gone forth, ten thousand only survived. Of her vast armament—*vast* if we bear in mind that her free population fell below that of many English fourth-rate cities—not a war-galley, not a transport-ship returned to Peiræus: of

* Valerius Maximus.

her soldiers, a handful only found refuge in a friendly Sicilian town. The last months of autumn in 413 B.C. were months of national consternation and household grief. Not long since we were reading of the general aspect of mourning for the slain at Berlin and other German cities. The mourning in Athens was of a deeper dye, since it was accompanied by dismay, if not despair, for the immediate future. Syracuse had been to Athens what Moscow was for Napoleon. Yet early perhaps in the next year there reached the "violet Queen" at first rumours, then credible reports, and at last the glad assurance, that any Athenian prisoner who could recite scenes or passages from the dramas of Euripides was taken out of the dreary stone-quarries of Syracuse, was kindly entreated in Sicilian homes, was nursed if sick or wounded, and if not presently restored to freedom (for such self-denial the captors prized their captives too highly), yet treated not as a slave, but as a welcome and honoured guest. Some indeed—how few or how many cannot be told—were suffered to return to Attica; and of these—poor gleanings after a bloody reaping—some can hardly have failed to go to the house of their deliverer, and with faltering voice and tearful eyes implored the gods, since *they* could not, to reward him. "Little thought we," they may be imagined to have said to him, "when we saw represented in your 'Trojan Women' the desolation of a hostile city, troops of warriors dragged in chains to the black ships of the Achæans, tender and delicate princesses told off to their allotted owners; or again, in your 'Suppliants,'

the wives of the slain weeping for their husbands denied burial ; or that bloody meadow before the seven-gated Thebes strewn with the dead in your 'Phœnicians'—little then thought we that these mimic shows were but shadows of what we beheld on the banks of the Asinarus on that dreary October morning, when, faint and worn by our night-march, and maddened by thirst, captain and soldier, hoplite and peltast, we rushed into its stream, careless of the archers that lined its banks, and hardly recking of the iron sleet that struck down our best and bravest. By the magic of your song, though 'sung in a strange land,' we poor survivors were rescued and redeemed from graves and the prison-house, from hunger and nakedness, from the burning sun and the sharp night-frosts of autumn, and from what was as hard to bear, the scoffs of the insolent foe gazing down upon us from morn to eve, and aggravating by brutal taunts and ribald jests the pains of the living and the terrors of the dying." If the character of Euripides may be inferred from his writings, the most pathetic of Greek tragic poets—he who sympathised with the slave, he who so tenderly depicted women—wept at such moments with those who were weeping before him, and was cheered by these proofs that he had not written or lived in vain.

The "Orestes" was the last play exhibited at Athens by Euripides ; and he must have quitted that city shortly afterwards, if he was in exile for two years. He was a self-banished man ; at least no cause is assigned for his departure. Of the three great dramatic

poets whose works have in part been preserved, one only died in his birthplace. Æschylus quitted Athens in dudgeon at a charge of sacrilege, and Euripides ended his days at a foreign court. After a short sojourn in Magnesia, he went to Pella, the capital of the then small, and in the eyes of republican Greeks unimportant, kingdom of Macedonia. He was invited to it by the reigning sovereign, Archelaus, who in his way was a sort of Lorenzo de' Medici, attracting to his court artists, poets, and philosophers, and corresponding with them when at a distance. Among those whom he invited was Socrates; but he, who cared for neither money nor goods, and who spoke his mind pretty freely at all times and to all people, declined going to Pella, thinking perhaps that he would make an indifferent courtier, and knowing that despots have (as well as long hands) their caprices. Archelaus—the Macedonian kings always affected to be zealously Hellenic—established a periodical Olympic festival in honour of Jupiter and the Muses, and perhaps spoke Greek as his native tongue, and with as good accent as Frederick the Great is said to have spoken French. At Pella Euripides met with a reception that may have led him to regret his not sooner quitting litigious and scurrilous Athens, where housewives abominated his name and doubtless pitied Chœrilla and Melitto, and where orthodox temple-goers were scandalised by his theological opinions. Lucian mentions a report that the poet held some public office in Macedonia, which, seeing that he never meddled with even parish business at home, is scarcely probable. As little likely is it that

he turned flatterer of kings in his later days. We can as soon believe that the grim Dante became a parasite at the court of Can Grande della Scala. Aristotle, indeed, a more trustworthy authority than Lucian, tells the following story:—Decamnichus, a young Macedonian, and a favourite of the king, gave deep offence to Euripides by remarks on his bad breath. Complaint being made, the indiscreet youth was handed over to the incensed poet, with the royal permission to flog him; and soundly flogged he seems to have been, since Decamnichus bore his chastisement in mind for six years, and then relieved his feelings by encouraging some friends or acquaintances, Euripides being out of reach, to murder Archelaus.*

At the Macedonian court Euripides was not the only Athenian guest. His friend Agathon, flying perhaps from duns, critics, or public informers, found a royal city a pleasanter residence than a democratic one. There, was the celebrated musical composer, Timotheus, whom, when he was lissed at the Odeum some years before, Euripides is said to have consoled by predicting that "he would soon have the audience at his feet"—a prophecy that was fully realised. His presence at Pella may have been convenient to Euripides, who was then employed in putting the last touches to, if not actually composing, two of his finest plays—"The Bacchanals" and the "Iphigenia at Aulis." There, too, was Chœrilus, an epic poet, who celebrated in Homeric verse the wars of the Greeks with Darius and Xerxes. The society at King Archelaus's table,

* Aristotle, Politics, v. 10, sec. 20.

so richly furnished with celebrities, very probably resembled the better-known assemblages at Sans Souci ; but we do not read that the Macedonian prince put on his crown, as Frederick the Great did his cocked-hat, when his guests, *Bacchi pleni*, were becoming personal, or trespassing on the royal preserve of politics.

Euripides did not long enjoy "retired leisure." He died at Pella in the 76th year of his age, in the year 406 B. C., having, as is supposed, quitted Athens in 408. But his enemies, so far as it lay with them, did not permit him to depart in peace, or even in reputable fashion. One report, current indeed long after his decease, makes him to have been torn to pieces by mastiffs set upon him by two rival poets, Arrhidæus and Cratenas ; another, that he was killed by women when on his way to keep an assignation. This bit of scandal is probably an echo of his ill-repute at home as a woman-hater ; and the story of the mastiffs may be a disguise of the fact that he was "cut up" by Macedonian theatrical critics. Yet one who had been handled as he was by Aristophanes and survived, might well have set at nought all dogs, biped or quadruped : and as to nocturnal trysts, they are seldom proposed, or at least kept, by gentlemen over threescore and ten.*

* This story of dogs and angry women is indeed noticed in some verses ascribed to Sophocles, who, as Schlegel says, uttered "some cutting sayings against Euripides." To readers interested in the matter, it may be convenient to be told that it is mentioned by Athenæus, book xiii. p. 557. Against Sophocles, if the gossip collected by Plutarch is accepted, there were also some "sayings" of a similar kind, and far less creditable to him.

Far more pleasant is it to know that Sophocles was deeply affected by his death, and in the next play he produced forbade the actors to wear crowns or their usual gorgeous dresses. The Athenians were prone to unavailing regret. Often they would say in their haste, "We are betrayed," and banish or put to death men who had served them well. Socrates had not been dead many years, before, with "woe that too late repented," they acknowledged having condemned a just man, and turned rabidly on his accusers for misleading them. And so, when Euripides was no more, they sent envoys to Pella to bring home his remains. But his host Archelaus would not part with them, and buried them with much pomp and circumstance; and his countrymen were fain to content themselves with a cenotaph on the road from Peiræus to the city, and with a bust or statue of the poet, which they placed in the Dionysiac theatre. They,

"Slowly wise and meanly just,
• To buried merit raised the tardy bust;"

and they were not the first, nor will they be the last, of nations, to imagine posthumous homage compensation for years of detraction. Books or furniture that had belonged to Euripides were much sought for and highly prized by their possessors; and Dionysius of Syracuse, himself a dramatic poet, and not an unsuccessful one, purchased at a high price his tablets and pen, and dedicated them in the Temple of the Muses in his own capital. "They kept his bones in Arqua;" and there was seemingly, for centuries after

he was quietly inurned, a deep interest, and even a tender sentiment, attached to his tomb. It was situated near the confluence of two rivers, where there appears to have been a house or caravansary, at which travellers refreshed themselves, attracted by the purity of the air. Of the rivers, one was noted for the unwholesome character of its water.* From another account it may be inferred that the tomb was much visited, even if pilgrimages were not made to it.†

On his cenotaph was graven the following inscription:—

“To Hellas’ bard all Hellas gives a tomb :
 On Macedon’s far shores his relics sleep :
 Athens, the pride of Greece, was erst his home,
 Whom now all praise and all in common weep.” ‡

These lines, attributed to Thucydides the historian, or to Timotheus the musician, are difficult to reconcile with the caricature-portraits of him by Aristophanes ; yet are consistent with the opinion that it was the conservative party in Athens, and not Athenians generally, that were hostile to him in life, or to the memory of—

“Our Euripides, the human,
 With his droppings of warm tears,
 And his touches of things common,
 Till they rose to touch the spheres.” §

In one thing he was happier than Sophocles—“op-

* Vitruvius, viii. c. 3, ‘Mortifera.’

† Ammianus, xxvii. c. 4.

‡ Translated by Mr Paley.

§ Browning, ‘Balaustion.’

portunitate mortis"—in the priority of his death; since he lived not, as his great rival did, long enough to hear of the sentence passed on the victorious generals at Arginusæ, of the capture of the Athenian fleet at the Goat River, and of the utter, hopeless, irretrievable ruin of the city he had celebrated so often in immortal verse, admonished so wisely, and loved so well.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCENIC PHILOSOPHER.

“In all his pieces there is the sweet human voice, the fluttering human heart.”—KENELM DIGBY.

WHETHER it were devised by friend or foe, the title of “Scenic Philosopher” for Euripides was given by one who had read his writings attentively.* His early studies, his intercourse with Socrates and other philosophers of the time, encouraged in so contemplative a mind as his habits of speculation on human and divine nature, and on such physical science as then existed. And as regarded dramatic composition, he was the first to bring philosophy on the stage. The sublime and gloomy genius of Æschylus was far more active than contemplative. His sentences are masses of concrete thought, when he descends from mere passion or imagination. Such inquiries as occupied Euripides appeared to him, as they did to Aristophanes, profane, or at the best idle, curiosity.

* It appears as an accepted title in Vitruvius’s work on Architecture, book viii.

To Æschylus, the new rulers of Olympus, and the Titans they supplanted, were persons as real as Miltiades or Themistocles. To him, Olympus was but a yet more august court of Areopagus, and Fates and Furies were dread realities, not metaphysical abstractions. Sophocles lived for art: in his devotion to it, and in the unruffled calmness of his temper, he was an Hellenic Goethe; one, the central fire of whose genius, while it glowed under all he wrote, rarely disturbed the equanimity of his spirit. Moral or theological problems vexed him not. He cared not for the physics of Anaxagoras. Protagoras's sceptical disquisitions touched him no nearer than Galileo's discoveries touched Shakespeare, or Hume's Essays Samuel Johnson. The Jupiter of Sophocles was the Jupiter of Phidias; his Pallas Athene, the living counterpart of her image on the Acropolis. In abstaining from such questions, he and Æschylus were perhaps wiser than Euripides—considered as an artist—was in his fondness for them. Had Shakespeare been deeply versed in Roger Bacon's works, or in those of Aquinas, his plays would not have been better, and might have been worse, for such physical or metaphysical studies. Entertainments of the stage are meant for the many rather than for the few; and subjects that the many, if they listen to them at all, can scarcely fail to misinterpret, it is safer, as well as more artistic, to avoid.

There were, however, at the time when Euripides was writing for the theatre, especially after he had passed middle age, changes silently at work in Athens

that rendered contact between poets and philosophers almost unavoidable. The rapid growth of speculative and rhetorical studies in the age, and perhaps with the sanction, of Pericles, has already been noticed. The understanding, hardly affected by the simple training of the young in the *Æschylean* period, had become, fifty years later, the primary aim of liberal education. He who could recite the whole *Iliad* or *Odyssey* was now looked upon, when compared with an acute rhetorician, as little better than a busy idler—all very well, perhaps, for enlivening the guests at a formal supper, or entertaining a loitering group in the streets. Even fools have sometimes portentous memories, but no fool could handle adroitly the weapons of a sound logician. Man was born to be something better than a parrot; he was meant to cultivate and to use “discourse of reason.” To argue logically upon almost any premises,—to have words at command, to be ready in reply, fertile in objection, averse from granting propositions, to possess much general knowledge, were accomplishments which no well-educated young Athenian, aspiring to make a figure in public, could do without. The imaginative epoch of *Æschylus* was departing, the scientific epoch of Aristotle was approaching, and the analytical stamp of Euripides’s mind, great as its poetical force was, complied with those tendencies of the time.

In thus reflecting the spirit of the age, Euripides only did what others before him had done, and what great poets will ever continue to do:—

“In ancient days the name
Of poet and of prophet was the same:”

the genuine poet being always in advance of his fellow-men, and therefore frequently misunderstood or undervalued by them. The era of Dante is as deeply stamped, both on his prose and verse, as if he had designed to portray it. He belonged partly to a period that was passing away, and partly to one that was near at hand. Trained in the lore of the schoolmen, he has something in common with Duns Scotus and the Master of Sentences; while by his homage to Virgil and Statius, he anticipated in his tastes the revival of classical literature. Milton, affected by the influence of Jonson and Fletcher, composed in his youth a masque and songs of Arcady; in his mature manhood, the serious and severe Independent is manifest in all he wrote. Schiller is the herald of a revolutionary period, impatient of and discontented with the present. Pope, in his moral essays and satires, represents a time when sense and decorum ranked among the cardinal virtues, and when loftier and more robust forms of imagination or faith were accounted extravagances. To this general law Euripides was no exception. He went before them, and so was misinterpreted by many among whom he lived. Within half a century after his death, his name stood foremost on the roll of Greek dramatic poets. If not a deeper, a more genial spirit—a spirit we constantly meet with in Euripidean plays—had superseded the grim theology of the Marathonian period; stage-poetry was indeed shorn of some of its grandeur, but it gained, in recompense for what it lost, profounder human feelings.

That the Athenian theatre was not only a national

but a religious institution, and to what extent and in what particulars it was so, has already been told in the volume of this series assigned to Æschylus. There had been, however, after the Persian had been humbled and Hellas secured and exalted, a silent change in the faith of the Athenian people, as well as in their mental training. As years rolled on over their renovated city, though the forms of their myths and legends were retained, living belief in them was on the wane. They were accepted as respectable traditions, and when they recorded the brave deeds of their forefathers, were jealously cherished, but no longer regarded with awe, or exempted from innovation. In the time of Euripides, there had appeared an historian, or perhaps more properly a chronicler—a man of much faith and honest piety, and yet one who scrupled not to canvass the credibility of tale and tradition, and sometimes even to find a secular explanation for spiritual doctrines. Herodotus, as well as Euripides, was under the influence of the age, though he usually apologises for his doubts. Yet doubt he did. The Father of History, no less than the pupil of Anaxagoras, disbelieved in the baneful effects of an eclipse, and had, for his time, very fair notions of geography; and if he thought that the gods envy human greatness, and sooner or later punish the pride of man, his faith, as contrasted with that of Phrynicus and Æschylus, was feeble, and his view of Destiny and the Benign Deities savoured more of habit than earnest conviction. In such matters the beginning of distrust is the dawn of a rationalistic epoch. The ancient faith of the

Athenians in the names and acts of their founders is on a par with that in the once accredited tale of Brutus and other Trojans settling in Britain; or of Joseph of Arimathea planting the first shoot of the holy thorn at Glastonbury. Joseph and Brutus, like Cecrops and Erectheus, have vanished from history, and nothing except the genius of a poet could recall from the shades and clothe with living interest King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Readers will perhaps pardon a short digression, if it tend to throw light on the dramatic art of Euripides, when contrasted with that of Æschylus; or rather, on a change that took place in the taste of their respective audiences.

The story of Orestes, in the handling of which Æschylus and Sophocles stand farthest apart from Euripides, is chosen as perhaps the most striking instance of the struggle between old faith and new rationalism, as exhibited in the Athenian drama. To the elder of these poets the symbolisms of the legend were perfectly clear. Apollo, a purifying and avenging god, prescribes the duty and the mode of retribution, and protects the avengers of blood. After the command has been issued to visit the death of Agamemnon on his murderers, Pylades, in the legend, though almost a mute person in the drama, is Apollo's principal agent in nerving Orestes to the execution of his dreadful task. Pylades was a Crisean by descent. Now, from the Homeric hymn to Apollo, it appears that the original Pythian temple was in the domain of the town of Crisa. At Crisa Orestes dwelt as an exile;

and it is from that town that, accompanied by his monitor, the destined avenger set forth on his errand to Mycenæ. The near connection between Pylades and Apollo is implied also in the belief that he was the founder of the Amphictyonic Council which was held at Delphi. In the "Eumenides" he does not appear; his function ceased when, in the "Libation Bearers," Clytemnestra and her paramour had paid the penalty of their crime: but in the latter play, it is the reproach of Pylades which screws to the sticking-point the failing courage of Orestes.

Sophocles had studied the same old legend. In his "Electra," the bearer of the false intelligence that Orestes has been killed in the chariot-race at the Pythian games reports himself as sent by Phanoteus, the Phocian, a friend of Clytemnestra, and so a likely person to apprise her that she need no longer live in dread of her son. Now this Phanoteus is no other than a foe, though a brother, of Crisus, the father of Strophius, and grandfather of Pylades. Like Orosmanes and Ahriman, the brothers—Strophius and Phanoteus—dwelt in hostile regions: the former in the bright and cheerful city of Crisa, where the sun-god had his first temple; the latter in another Crisa, a dark and dreary spot, where Apollo's enemies, giants or gigantic warriors—Tityus, Autolycus, Phorbas, and the Phlegyans—had their abode. Agamemnon's children accordingly look to Strophius for the coming avenger; Ægisthus and Clytemnestra to Phanoteus for timely warning of his approach.*

* These remarks on the symbolism in the Orestean legend are

It is not necessary to probe further the original legend. Enough has been shown to prove that Æschylus and Sophocles wove into their Orestean story portions of it, and therefore thought it suitable for their tragedies. Euripides, on the contrary, seems to have quite neglected it. He makes, indeed, Pylades a Delphian, but by banishing him from his country, after the work of retribution is complete, he severs the links of the symbolic story.

Is there any improbability in supposing Euripides, a man of the new era, to have viewed the grim though picturesque stories of the old and waning times as inconsistent with the bright, free, and intelligent Athens in which he dwelt? The pupil of Anaxagoras and Prodicus might well regard a people as little beyond the verge of barbarism for whom the priest was the philosopher, whose heroes yet strove with wild beasts, who trembled at the phenomena of nature, and among whom ignorance generally prevailed. And among such a people it was that the legends were created and cherished. Imagination was strong, while reason was weak; but did it therefore follow that men capable of reason should always remain children? Perhaps some insight into the feelings of Euripides on theological questions may be gleaned from the story of Socrates, who, while scrupulously worshipping the gods of the state, made no secret that he regarded them as little more than masks — nay, often as unworthy disguises — of the taken, greatly abridged, from K. O. Müller's "Essay on the 'Eumenides' of Æschylus," p. 131, English translation.

divine nature. For the opinions of the philosopher, the reader is referred to the volume of this series in which the writings of Xenophon are treated of. There is, however, a remarkable passage in Plato's dialogue entitled 'Phædo,' in which Socrates enumerates as one among the boons death will confer on him, the privilege he will have, when he has shaken off this mortal coil, of knowing better the great gods, and of seeing them with a clearness of vision unattainable by mortals on earth. Euripides, on his side, may have held it to be part of a poet's high position to hint, if not to expound formally to his hearers, that the deities whom the tragedians represented as severe, revengeful, and relentless beings, were merciful as well as just,—that the humanity of Prometheus was at least as divine as the tyranny of Jupiter, or the feuds and caprices of Apollo and Artemis. It was, perchance, among the offences given by Euripides to the comic poets, that his spiritual and intangible god could not, like Neptune, Iris, Hercules, or Bacchus, be parodied by them on the stage. The idols of the temple were by the vulgar esteemed true portraits of the beings whom they affected to revere, but at whom they were always ready to laugh. Neptune and Hercules, in the comedy of the "Birds" of Aristophanes, might be bribed by savoury meats, or hide themselves under an umbrella; but the "great gods" whom the pious Socrates yearned to behold were beyond the reach, and perhaps the comprehension, of the satirist.

We can afford only to hint that the poet's religious opinions, so far as they can be gathered from his

writings, may easily have been misconstrued by men of the time, who appear to have had other motives also for disliking him. The singularity of his habits may have been one reason for their distaste of his opinions. If, as is possible, he belonged to none of the political factions of his time—neither a Cleonite, nor a partisan of Nicias, nor a hanger-on of the gracious-mannered and giddy Alcibiades—here may have been a rock of offence. “Depend upon it, my Phidippides, no man of such odd ways as the son of Mnesarchus can be sound in morals or politics. Folks that shut themselves up have something in them wrong requiring seclusion.” Perhaps a brief inquiry into his views on some matters may help to a better understanding of his opinions generally. Was he a bad citizen, as many reputed him to be? Was he a woman-hater to the extent he is accused of being, and beyond the provocation given by his wives? What were his notions about the condition and treatment of slaves? Can we discover from his writings how he thought or voted in politics? Was he an idle dreamer? Was he a home-bred Diagoras of Melos, only less respectable, because less courageous, than that open scoffer? Bad taste he may have had, but it does not follow that he was therefore a bad man.

The charge of being a bad citizen scarcely accords with the political opinions of Euripides, so far as they can be inferred from his plays. A similar accusation has been brought against Plato; and both the one and the other may have proceeded from similar causes. Neither

the poet nor the philosopher took part in public affairs, or held, so far as we know, office under the state. By the speech-loving Athenians, for whom the law courts and the assembly of the people were theatres open all the year round, this was regarded as an odious singularity, if not a grave neglect of civic duty. Socrates, meditative as he was, could strike a good blow in the field when required, and filled an office under the thirty tyrants with credit to himself. Euripides and Plato may fairly have thought the public had advisers enough and to spare—that a good citizen could serve his country with his pen or his lectures as effectively as by becoming one of the clamorous demagogues who grew under every hedge. It will hardly be denied that the patriarch of the Academy strengthened the foundations or enlarged the boundaries of moral science. Is the poet quite disentitled to a similar concession? Has any stage-poet, if we except Shakespeare, supplied moralists and philosophers with more grave or shrewd maxims than he has done? Has any ancient poet taken wider or more liberal views of humanity?

Again, the scenic philosopher was reputed unsound in his theology; and this, no doubt, is an offence in every well-regulated community. Without going beyond the bounds of England, we find that it was no want of will on the part of their opponents that saved Chillingworth, Hobbes, or even John Locke, from something akin to the cup of hemlock tendered to Socrates. Many thousands of honest English householders accounted Milton a heretic, a traitor, and a man of evil life and conversation. To allow our view

of his character to be biassed by a person's opinions is not a discovery of modern times. It was by no means prudent for any one residing in Athens to be wiser than his neighbours in physical science, or to speak or write of the gods otherwise than custom sanctioned. The most orthodox of spectators at the theatre was justly shocked by being told, that the gods he had no scruples about laughing at in the "Frogs" or "Birds" of Aristophanes, were really little more than men's inventions—caricatures rather than portraits of the deity as contemplated by the philosopher. Why could not these dreamers be content with the gods that satisfied Solon the wise, or Aristides the just? And under every class of these offences Euripides seems to have come. He was neither a useful citizen nor a sound believer; he meddled with matters too high for him; the heresies he had imbibed in youth from Anaxagoras clung to him in riper years; and, like his tutor, he deserved a decree of exile at least. He was a proud fellow, and thought himself too clever or too good for mixed society. He read much—he talked little; and was that proper conduct in an Athenian? In an evil hour came the Sophists to Athens, and it was with Sophists alone that Euripides delighted to consort. So reasoned the vulgar, after the wisdom that was in them, and so they will reason unto the end of time. There can, however, be no doubt that Euripides in his heart despised the popular religion. He could not accept traditional belief: his masters in philosophy had trained him to think for himself; and with his strong sympathy for his fellow-men, he strove,

ineffectually indeed, to deliver them, as he had been delivered himself, from the bondage of custom, from apathy or ignorance. Compelled, by the laws that regulated scenic exhibitions, to deal with the gods as the state prescribed, or the multitude required, he could only insinuate, not openly proclaim, his opinions, either on politics or religion. Yet if unsocial, he was not timid, and it is really with extraordinary boldness that he attacks soothsayers in his plays. He puts into the mouth of the ingenuous Achilles—then a youth whose heart had not been hardened by war—the following attack on Calchas the seer :—

“ His lustral lavers and his salted cakes
With sorrow shall the prophet Calchas bear :
Away ! The prophet !—what is he ? a man
Who speaks ’mongst many falsehoods but few truths,
Whene’er chance leads him to speak true ; when false,
The prophet is no more.”

In the “*Electra*,” Orestes says that he believes Apollo will justify his oracle, but that he deems lightly of human—that is, of professional—prophecies. Perhaps his dislike of prophets may have received new edge and impulse from the mischief done by them in encouraging by their idle predictions the Athenians to undertake the expedition to Sicily. And a time was at hand when the dupes of the soothsayers viewed their pretensions with as small favour as Euripides himself did. Deep was the wrath in the woe-stricken city, when the worst reports of the destruction of their fleet and army at Syracuse were confirmed by eye-

witnesses, against the orators who had advised, and the oracle-mongers and prophets who had guaranteed, the success of that disastrous expedition.*

There was, indeed, much in the Homeric theology that, however well suited to the artist, was intolerable to the philosopher. The gods themselves were criminals, and Euripides made no secret that he thought them so. "He could not," says K. O. Müller, "bring his philosophical convictions into harmony with the contents of the old legends, nor could he pass over their incongruities." Yet far advanced as he was beyond his time, the time itself was not quite unprogressive. Æschylus, who belonged to an earlier generation, and Sophocles, who avoided every disturbing force as perilous to the composure of art, accepted the Homeric deities as they found them. Nevertheless faith in them was in the sear and yellow leaf, and the reverence that should accompany old age was nearly worn out. The court of Areopagus in Athens was, without any similar external violence, sharing the fate of our High Commission Court in the seventeenth century. It no longer took cognisance of every slight offence against religion; it consulted its own safety by letting the gods, in many instances, look after their own affairs. Euripides was at the most a pantheist. He believed in the unity of God, in His providence, His omnipotence, His justice, His care for human beings. Supreme mind or intelligence was his Jupiter—the destroyer of the Typhon, unreasoning faith, his Apollo. Aristophanes, who professed to believe, and

* Thucydides, viii. c. 1.

not Euripides, who professed to doubt, was the real scoffer.

There is space for only a few samples of the moral opinions of Euripides. Shakespeare's reputation with posterity might have fared very scurvily had there been a great comic poet among his detractors, opposed to him in theology or politics, or jealous of the company kept by him at the Mermaid. Only impute to the author personally the sentiments he ascribes to Iago, Iachimo, Richard of Gloucester, Edmund in "Lear," or Lady Macbeth,—refer to certain things connected with his marriage or his poaching,—and the purest in morals as well as the loftiest in thought of our own scenic poets would have made as poor a figure as Euripides did in his time, whether it were on the grounds of his creed, his civic character, or his private life and conversation. "Envie," says Chaucer, in his 'Legende of Good Women,'

"Is lavender to the court alway,
For she ne parteth neither night ne day
Out of the house of Cæsar ;"

and the envy of one generation becomes with the credulous the fact of another. "In the first place," as Mr Paley most justly observes, "many of his sentiments which may be said to wear an equivocal complexion, as the famous one,—

"If the tongue swore, the heart abides unsworn,"—

have been misconstrued as undermining the very foundations of honour and virtue. They are assumed to be

general statements, whereas they really have only a special reference to existing circumstances, or are at least susceptible of important modifications." The same may be said of a verse of Euripides that Julius Cæsar was fond of quoting ;—

" If ever to do ill be good, 'tis for a crown ;
For *that* 'tis lawful to push right aside :
In other things let virtue be the guide."

But the Roman perverted to his own ends a sentiment well suited to the character—a false and violent one—of the speaker, Eteocles.*

Some injury has been done to Euripides by the abundance of fragments from his plays that are preserved. Undoubtedly many of these "wear an equivocal complexion,"—as, for example—

" What *must* be done by mortals *may* be done ;"

or—

" Nor shameful aught unless one deem it so ;"

but we know not the speakers of the words, nor the circumstances under which they were spoken.

What are the proofs of an often-repeated assertion that Euripides was a sensual poet? On the score of indecency the comic poets are rather damaging witnesses—to themselves. Have the Germans, have we ourselves, no poets infinitely more culpable in this respect than Euripides? A very third-rate contributor to the English drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would the Greek poet have been, had he written nothing worse than we find

* Phœnician Women, v. 573.

in his extant plays or the fragments of his lost ones. And on this delicate question we have a most unexceptionable witness in his favour—no less a person than the decent and pious Aristophanes himself! The “Phædras” and “Sthenebœas” of Euripides, we are told by him, were dangerous to morals.* Yet in another of his comedies he says that in consequence of Euripides’s plays women mended their manners.† Here, with a vengeance, has “a Daniel come to judgment!”—the woman-hater, it seems, had been preaching with some success to a female congregation. The purity of the poet’s morals, so far as they can be inferred from his writings, is displayed in his Hippolytus, in the chaste Parthenopæus in the “Suppliant Women,” in the Achilles of his “Iphigenia,” and above all, in the character of the boy Ion. “Consecrated to Apollo, and devoting himself wholly to the service of the altar, he speaks of his patron god in language that would not dishonour a better cause. One cannot help feeling that the poet must have been at heart a good man who could make a virtuous asceticism appear in so amiable a light.”‡

“Let me tell you,” says Councillor Pleydell, “that Glossin would have made a very pretty lawyer, had he not been so inclined to the knavish side of his profession.” It cannot be denied that Euripides has some tendency of the sort. He employs frequently, and seemingly without much compunction, the arts of falsehood and deceit. The tricksters in his tragedy

* “Frogs,” 1049. † “Thesmoph.” 398.

‡ Paley, Preface to Euripides.

are the forerunners of the tricksters of the New Comedy — the “fallax servus” of the Menandrian drama. But as respects truth, in the modern import of the word, the morality of the ancients was not that of the moderns. The latter profess to abhor a lie ; the former—more prudently and consistently perhaps—made no professions at all on the subject. The crafty Ulysses, rather than the bold Achilles, is the type of an Achæan ; Themistocles, far more than Aristides, that of an Athenian Greek. Euripides, who represents men as they are, and not as they ought to be, did not disdain to employ in his plays this common feature of his age and nation, but in none of them has he depicted such a thorough-going scoundrel as the Sophoclean Ulysses in the “*Philoctetes*.”

In what sense of the word was Euripides a hater of women—for that he occasionally spoke ill of them is beyond doubt? His character is indeed a difficult one to interpret—on the surface full of inconsistencies ; and seeing these only, it is easy to understand why he was less revered than Æschylus, less esteemed or beloved than Sophocles. Below the surface, however, it is possible to discover a certain unity of purpose in him, and it is traceable in his sentiments on the female sex. First, let the position of women among the Greeks in general be remembered. They lived in almost Oriental seclusion. What was expected from a good wife is shown in a very instructive passage of Xenophon’s treatise, ‘*The Economist or Householder*.’

Ischomachus, the principal speaker in the dialogue, describes how he had “trained his wife, at the time he

espoused her, an inexperienced girl of fourteen, to the duties of her position. The account that ensues of the functions of an Athenian married lady would be applicable, if we except the greater restriction on her personal liberty, to a hired housekeeper of the present day. Her business is to nurse her children, to maintain discipline among her slaves ; to be diligent herself at her web, in the management of her kitchen, larder, and bakehouse, and in her care of the furniture, wardrobe, and household property of all kinds ; to select a well-qualified stewardess to act under herself, but to allow no undue confidence in her to interfere with her own habits of personal superintendence ; to remain continually within doors ; she will find abundance of exercise in her walks to and from different parts of the premises, in dusting clothes and carpets, and baking bread or pastry." "From all this it appears, that what are now considered essential qualifications in a married lady of the upper class—presiding at her husband's table, receiving his guests, or enlivening by her conversation his hours of domestic retirement—entered as little into the philosopher's estimate of a model wife as into that of his countrymen at large. Like Pericles, Socrates"—and, we may add, Euripides—"could appreciate female accomplishments in an Aspasia or a Theodota,"* but hardly looked for them in wives so trained and employed as was that of Ischomachus.

If Euripides were generally a woman-hater, he was at least not always consistent in his aversion. No one of the Athenian stage-poets has written more to the

* Colonel Mure's *Hist. of Greek Literature*, v. 463.

credit of good women, or more delicately or tenderly delineated female characters. For this assertion it is sufficient to cite Polyxena in his "Hecuba," Macaria in "The Children of Hercules," Evadne in "The Suppliant Women," the sisterly devotion of Electra in his "Orestes," Iphigenia in both of the plays bearing her name, and the sublime self-sacrifice of the noble and loving Alcestis. Even Hecuba and Jocasta are braver and wiser than the men about them, and these old, afflicted, and discrowned queens have neither youth nor personal charms to recommend them. Phædra he represents not as a vicious woman, but as the helpless victim of an irate deity; while in the "Medea" the fierce and revengeful heroine has all our sympathy, while Jason has all our contempt.*

And if Euripides were reprehensible for his opinions on women, what shall we say of his antagonist Aristophanes? Had the wives and daughters of Athens no cause of complaint against their caricaturist? If the pictures drawn of them in his "Lysistrata" and "Thesmophoriazusæ" be not wholly fanciful, what woman sketched by Euripides would not be too good for such profligate companions? The female characters

* Adolph Schöll, the author of an excellent Life of Sophocles, reminds his readers that the very female characters which Euripides is sometimes taxed with selecting, because they were particularly wicked, for his themes, were brought on the stage by Sophocles in dramas now lost—*e. g.*, Phædra, Sthenobæa, Ino, Medea often, Ærope, Althæa, Eriphyle, &c. &c.; and he notices also that Euripides, in many of his dramas, atoned, if there was any occasion to do so, for his portraits of the bad, by his numerous delineations of good women.

of Sophocles are perhaps worthier of admiration than those of his rival ; but the pencil that traced Antigone, Deianara, and Tecmessa, drew ideal heroines : that of Euripides painted human beings, creatures with strong passions, yet stronger affections, with a deep sense of duty, of religion, as in the instances of Theonoe in his "Helen," of Andromache, and Antigone,—women who may be esteemed or loved, women who walk the earth, sharing heroically, sympathising tenderly with, the sorrows and sufferings of their partners in affliction. The zealous champion of the gods of the state was, we have seen, an arch-scoffer at all loftier forms of belief ; the satiric pen that wrote down Euripides as a hater of women was held by the arch-libeller of their sex.*

Nor was the humanity of the poet less conspicuous in his feelings towards slaves. And again we have to notice something inconsistent with his supposed

* Might not our Fletcher be fairly taxed with woman-hating by readers who pick out such passages only as suit their own views, or ascribe to the author himself the opinions he puts into the mouths of his *dramatis personæ* ? The Greek poet has not written anything half so injurious to women as the following lines from the "Night-Walker," act ii. sc. 4 :—

Oh ! I hate
 Their noise, and do abhor the whole sex heartily.
 They are all walking devils, harpies. I will study
 A week together, how to rail sufficiently
 Upon 'em all ; and that I may be furnish't,
 Thou shalt buy all the railing books and ballads
 That malice has invented against women.
 I will study nothing else, and practise 'em,
 Till I grow fat with curses."

austere disposition. We have no reason for thinking that the lot of home-bred or purchased slaves was particularly hard in Athens; certainly they had there less rigorous masters than the Spartans or Romans were. But there can be little doubt of the contempt with which non-Hellenic races were viewed by Greeks in general, or of the broad line they drew between themselves and barbarians. Even in Attica, the happiness or misery of a bondman must have depended in great measure upon the disposition of his owner. He might be half starved or cruelly flogged—but no law protected him: overworked, without comment from the neighbours; tortured, if his evidence were required in a court of justice; cashiered, when his services were rendered useless by age or infirmity. Euripides, if his writings be in accordance with his practice, anticipated the humane sentiments of Seneca and the younger Pliny in his consideration for this, at the best, unhappy order of men. He did not regard it as the mark of an unsound mind to look on a slave as a human being. He introduces him in his plays as a faithful nurse, or an honest and attached herdsman, shepherd, or household servant. He endows him with good abilities, and at times shrewd and ready wit, with kindly affection to his fellows, and love and loyalty to his masters. He even goes almost to an extreme in putting into his mouth saws, maxims, and opinions meet for a philosopher. He perceived, and he strove to make others perceive, that servitude does not necessarily extinguish virtue or good sense. He left it to the comic poets to exhibit the slave as necessarily

a cheating, lying, and sensual varlet. He may have imbibed from his friend Socrates some of his humane notions on women or slaves, or he may have forestalled them ; or, which is quite as possible, have reflected in his dramas a liberal feature of the time fostered alike by the poet and the philosopher.

The feelings of slaves towards a kind and gracious mistress are thus described in the "Alcestis." She, immediately after bidding the last farewell to her children, takes leave of her servants :—

"All of the household servants wept as well,
 Moved to compassion for their mistress : she
 Extended her right hand to all and each,
 And there was no one of such low degree
 She spoke not to, nor had an answer from."—(B.)

And again, in the same play, the slave appointed to wait on Hercules thus expresses himself :—

"Neither was it mine
 To follow in procession, nor stretch forth
 Hand, wave my lady dear a last farewell,
 Lamenting who to me and all of us
 Domestics was a mother : myriad harms
 She used to ward away from every one,
 And mollify her husband's ireful mood."—(B.)

The messenger, a slave, in the "Orestes," thus recounts to Electra his loyalty to her family :—

"Hither I from the country came, and entered
 The gates, solicitous to hear the doom
 Of thee and of Orestes ; for thy sire
 I ever loved, and in thy house was nurtured.

True, I am poor, yet not the less am loyal
To those who have been kind to me of yore."

—(Alford.)

Connected perhaps with his sympathy with women and an oppressed class of men is his practice of bringing on the scene young children. He puts them in situations that cannot fail to have touched the hearts of a susceptible people. In the "Iphigenia in Aulis," the infant Orestes is employed to work on Agamemnon's parental love. The little sons of Alcestis add to the pathos of her parting words. In the "Trojan Women," a drama of weeping and lamentation nearly "all compact," the fate of Astyanax is the most touching incident. In the "Andromache," the little Molossus is held up by his great-grandsire Peleus in order that he may loosen the cords by which his mother's hands are bound. Maternal love adds a human element to the wild and whirling passion of Medea. Racine, who profoundly studied Euripides, did not neglect this device for producing emotion. In his "Andromaque," Astyanax is made to contribute to the pity of the scene, although the etiquette of the French stage did not permit of his appearing on it. Did this innovation—if it were one—take its rise from a practice not uncommon in the law courts, for defendants to appeal to the mercy of the jurors by exhibiting their wives and children? Whether the courts borrowed it from the theatre, or the theatre from the courts, such a display, however foreign to our notions of the sobriety of justice, indicates a kind, if not an equi-

table, feeling in the audience, and one which the advocate of the slave would share with them.

We must now dismiss the scenic philosopher, trusting that some of the facts, if not the arguments, adduced on his behalf, may prevail with English readers so far as to lead them to take a more favourable view of his character than has been given in some ancient or modern accounts of it. Had he been less philosophic, he would probably have been more successful at the time, and less obvious to critical shafts then and afterwards. Yet that so many of his works should have been preserved, can scarcely have been a mere accident. Some attraction or charm there was in them that touched the heart of Hellas from its eastern to its western border, and so held above water a fourth at least of his writings, when the deluge of barbarism or bigotry swept away so many thousands of Greek dramas, and among them some that had borne off the crown from Æschylus or Sophocles. "Sunt lacrimæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt." The very tenderness of Euripides, though taxed with effeminacy or degradation of art by critics of the Aristophanic school, may have had its influence in the salvage of seventeen plays and fragments of others, exceeding in number the sum of those of both his extant compeers.

Having passed in review the times, the life, and other circumstances relating to Euripides, we may now pass on to a survey of his dramas.

CHAPTER IV.

ALCESTIS. — MEDEA.

“She came forth in her bridal robes arrayed,
And 'midst the graceful statues, round the hall
Shedding the calm of their celestial mien,
Stood, pale, yet proudly beautiful, as they :
Flowers in her bosom, and the star-like gleam
Of jewels trembling from her braided hair,
And *death* upon her brow.”

—FELICIA HEMANS.

PARTLY on account of its being the fourth play in the order of representation, as well as from a supposed comic vein in the character of Hercules, the “Alcestis” has been considered as a satiric after-piece, or at least a substitute for that appendage to the tragic trilogy. But no reader of this domestic play, whether in the original or translation, will find mirth or satirical banter in it. The happy ending may entitle it to be regarded as a comedy in the modern sense of the term, although until the very last scene it draws so deeply on one main element of tragedy, pity. At most, the “Alcestis” is what the French term *comédie larmoyante*. No one of the extant dramas of Euripides, as

a whole, is so pathetic. The reader feels now, as the spectators doubtless felt at its representation, that it is not because of the rank of the sufferers we sympathise with them. It is not Admetus the king, but Admetus the husband, whom we commiserate: that she is a queen adds nothing to our admiration of the tender and self-devoting Alcestis. Among the faults found with this drama is one that sounds strangely to modern ears. It wrought, say the objectors, upon the feelings of spectators by an exhibition of woe beneath the dignity of the sufferers, who are therefore degraded by the pity excited on their behalf. This seems "hedging kings" with a most preposterous "divinity,"—setting them apart from common humanity by making them void of human affections. If to touch an audience through the medium of household sorrows were a blot in Greek tragedy, it will scarcely be accounted a blemish by modern readers.

The story of the "Alcestis" is founded upon some legend or tradition of northern Greece, probably brought thither from the East. The Fates have marked Admetus, king of Pheræ, in Thessaly, for death. Apollo has prevailed upon the grim sisters to grant him a reprieve on one condition—that he finds a substitute. In the first instance he applies to his father and mother, aged people, but they decline being vicariously sacrificed. His wife Alcestis alone will give her life for his ransom. Apollo does Admetus this good turn because he has himself, when condemned by Jupiter to serve in a mortal's house, been kindly treated by the Pheræan king. When the play opens,

the doom of Alcestis is at hand. She is sick unto death; and Death himself, an impersonation similar to that of Madness in the "Mad Hercules," is at the palace gate awaiting his prey. The grisly fiend, suspecting that Apollo intends a second time to defraud him of his dues by interposing for Alcestis as he had done for Admetus, is in no gracious mood; but the god assures him that his interest with the Fates is exhausted. The following scenes are occupied with the parting of the victim from her husband, her children, and her household, and a faithful servant describes the profound grief of them all. In the midst of tears and wailings, and just after death has claimed his own, an unlooked-for guest arrives. Hercules, most stalwart of mortals, but not yet a demigod, enters. He is on his road to Thessaly, sent on one more perilous errand by his enemy Eurystheus. He is struck by the signs of general woe in the household. He proposes to pass on to another friend of his in Pheræ, but Admetus will not hear of what he regards a breach of hospitable duties, and gives orders to a servant to take Hercules to a distant chamber, and there set meat and drink before him. The guest, much perplexed by all he sees, but foiled in his inquiries, and led to suppose that some female relative of Admetus is dead, goes to his dinner, prepared to enjoy it, although, under the circumstances, it must be a solitary meal. Unaware of the real state of things, he greatly scandalises his attendant by his appetite, and still more by breaking out into snatches of convivial songs. "Of all the gormandising and unfeeling ruffians

I ever met with," says the slave in waiting, "this fellow is the worst. He eats like a half-famished wolf, drinks in proportion, calls for more than is set before him, and sings, or rather howls, his ribald songs out of all tune,—

“ ‘While we o’ the household mourned our mistress —
mourned,

That is to say, in silence—never showed
The eyes, which we kept wetting, to the guest—
For there Admetus was imperative.
And so, here am I helping to make at home
A guest, some fellow ripe for wickedness,
Robber or pirate, while she goes her way
Out of her house.

Never yet

Received I worse guest than this present one.’”—(B.)

“Nor content with being voracious and dainty, he drinks till the wine fires his brain.”

Hercules marks the rueful visage of his attendant, and thinking that Admetus has bidden him be as cheerful as usual, the family affliction being only a slight one, rates him roundly for his woe-begone looks :

“ *Hercules*. Why look’st so solemn and so thought-absorbed ?

To guests, a servant should not sour-faced be,
But do the honours with a mind urbane.
Whilst thou, contrariwise, beholding here
Arrive thy master’s comrade, hast for him
A churlish visage, all one beetle-brow—
Having regard to grief that’s out of door !
Come hither, and so get to grow more wise.

Things mortal—know'st the nature that they have?
 No, I imagine! whence could knowledge spring?
 Give ear to me then! For all flesh to die
 Is nature's due; nor is there any one
 Of mortals with assurance he shall last
 The coming morrow."—(B.)

And so on the old but ever-appropriate text, "Thou knowest that to die is common;" and the oft-renewed question, "Why seems it then particular to thee?" Hercules proceeds moralising—"philosophising even in his drink," as an old scholiast remarks. The pith, indeed, of Hercules's counsel is "Drink, man, and put a garland on thy head."

When, however, the attendant says—

"Ah! thou know'st nought o' the woe within these walls:"

the guest's curiosity is aroused. Can Admetus have deceived me? is it, then, not a distant kinswoman whom they are burying? have I been turning a house of mourning into a house of feasting? Tell me, good fellow, what has really chanced. The servant replies:

"Thou can'st not at a fit reception-time:
 With sorrow here beforehand; and thou seest
 Shorn hair, black robes.

Hercules. But who is it that's dead?
 Some child gone? or the aged sire, perhaps?

Servant. Admetus' wife, then, she has perished, guest.

Hercules. How say'st? and did ye house me all the same?

Servant. Ay: for he had thee in that reverence,
 He dared not turn thee from the door away.

Hercules. O hapless, and bereft of what a mate!
 All of us now are dead, not she alone;

Where is he gone to bury her? where am I
To go and find her?

Servant. By the road that leads
Straight to Larissa, thou wilt see the tomb
Out of the suburb, a carved sepulchre.”—(B.)

But as soon as Hercules extracts from the servant the real cause of the family grief, all levity departs from him. He is almost wroth with his friend for such overstrained delicacy, and hurries out to render him such “yeoman’s service” as no one except the strongest of mankind can perform. Alcestis has been laid in her grave; the mourners have all come back to the palace; and Death, easy in his mind as to Apollo, and secure, as he deems himself, from interruption, is making ready for a ghoulish feast on her corpse. But he has reckoned without the guest. He finds himself in the dilemma of foregoing his prey or being strangled, and he permits his irresistible antagonist to restore the self-devoted wife to the arms of her disconsolate and even more astonished husband.*

With the instinct of a great artist, Euripides centralises the interest of the action in Alcestis alone; and in order to show how perfect the sacrifice is, he endows the victim with every noble, tender, and loving

* Never has rationalising of old-world stories made a bolder stride than in the case of this play. Late Greek writers ascribe the decease of Alcestis to her having nursed her husband through a fever. She takes it herself, and is laid out for dead, when a physician, sharper-sighted than the rest of the faculty at the time, discovers that the vital spark is not extinct, and cheats death of his foe by remedies unluckily not mentioned for the benefit of posterity.

quality of woman. She stands as far apart from and above the other characters in the play as Una does in the first book of the 'Faery Queen.' For the Greek stage she is what Portia and Cordelia are for the English. If less heroic than Antigone or Electra, she is more human; the strength which opposition to harsh laws or thirst for "great revenge" lent to them, to her is supplied by the might of wifely love. Possibly it was this sublime tenderness that kept the memory of Alcestis green through ages in which the manuscripts of Euripidean dramas were lying among the rolls of Byzantine libraries, or the dust and worms of the monasteries of the West. Chaucer, in his 'Court of Love,' calls her the "Quenè's floure;" and in his 'Legende of Good Women' she is "under Venus lady and quene:"—

"And from afer came walking in the Mede
 The God of Love, and in his hand a quene,
 And she was clad in real * habit grene:
 A fret of golde she haddè next her heer,
 And upon that a white corowne she bere
 With flourès smale.'

With equally happy art—indeed, after Shakespeare's manner with his female personages—we are not formally told of her goodness; but we know from those around her that the loving wife is also a loving mother, a kind and liberal mistress. Even the sorrow of the Chorus is significant: it is composed not of susceptible women, but of ancient men—past the age in which the affections are active, and when the lengthen-

* Royal.

ing shadows on the dial often render the old less sensible of others' woe. And this tribute from the elders of the neighbourhood completes the circle of grief on the removal of Alcestis from all she had loved—from the cheering sunlight, the lucid streams, the green pastures, which from the palace windows had so often gladdened her eyes.

Next to Alcestis in interest is her deliverer. Without Hercules the play would, like "The Trojan Women," have been too "infected with grief." Almost from the moment of his entrance a ray of hope begins to streak the gloom, and this an Athenian spectator would feel more immediately than an English reader. The theatrical as well as the legendary Hercules, if not a comic, was at least a cheery, personage. On his right arm victory rested. He was no stranger to the Phereans. His deeds were sung at festivals, and told by the hearth in winter. The very armour he wore was a trophy: the lion's skin he had won in fight with a king of beasts: with his club he had slain the wild boar who had gored other mighty hunters: he had wrestled with and prevailed over the giants of the earth: he was as generous and genial as he was valiant and strong: none but the proud and cruel fear him: he has ever kind words for women and children: his presence, when he is off duty, is a holiday: he may sing out of tune, yet his laugh is music to the ear.

The other *dramatis personæ* are kept, perhaps purposely, in the background. Admetus makes almost as poor a figure in this play as Jason does in the

“Medea.” Self-preservation is the leading feature in his character. He loves Alcestis much, but he loves himself more. He cannot look his situation in the face. For some time he has known his wife’s promise to die for him, but, until the hour of its fulfilment is striking, he is too weak to realise the import of her pledge. He lays flattering unction on his soul—perhaps somewhat in this wise: “My wife, as well as myself, must one day die: perchance the Fates may not be in haste for either of us—may even, with Apollo to friend us, renew the bond.” When the inexorable missive comes for her, he is indeed deeply cast down: yet even then there is not a spark of manliness in him. Provided the Fates got one victim, they might not have been particular as to which of the twain was “nominated in the bond.” But no—for him there is a saving clause in it, and he will not forego the benefit of it. He will do everything but the one thing it is in his power to do, to prove his conjugal affection. There shall be no more mirth or feasting in his dominions; the sound of tabret and harp shall never more be heard in his dwelling; black shall be his only wear; no second wife shall occupy the room of his first; had he the lute of Orpheus, he would go down to Pluto’s gloomy realm, and bring her to upper air. He “doth profess too much:” he lacks the heroic spirit that dwelt in Polyxena, Macaria, and Iphigenia. Some excuse for one so weak as Admetus may perhaps be found in the view of death, or life after death, taken by the Greeks generally. Even their Elysian fields were inhabited by melancholy spectres. For with

them, to die either was to be annihilated or to pass a monotonous existence without fear but also without hope. In the one case Wordsworth's lines are applicable to them as well as to "Lucy:"—

"No motion has she now, no force:
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks and stones and trees."

They held with Claudio that

"The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death."*

Or they would say with the great Achilles in the Shades, when Ulysses congratulated him on being so honoured among dead heroes:—

"Renowned Ulysses, think not death a theme
Of consolation: I had rather live,
The servile hind for hire, and eat the bread
Of some man scantily himself sustained,
Than sovereign empire hold o'er all the Shades."†

There may be an approach to comedy in the scene between Admetus and his father Pheres. The son asks his grey-haired sire, who brings gifts to the funeral, "if he is not ashamed of himself for cumbering the ground so long? Why did he not, an old fellow and a useless, take the place of poor Alcestis?" Pheres replies, and with some show of reason, "If you were

* "Measure for Measure."

† Odyssey, xi. (Cowper.)

so fond of your late wife as you pretend to be, why did you not go when you were summoned? for remember it was not I but you on whom the citation of the Fates was originally served. For my part, I had a great regard for my daughter-in-law—she was a most exemplary young woman; but as for taking her place, I crave to be excused. I am an old man, it is true; still I am remarkably well for my years: and as for cumbering the ground, I hope to do so a little while longer. You may have been a tender husband and a faithful, and I daresay will be a good father, and not vex the two poor orphans with a stepmother—at least, just at present: but I must say your language to myself is very uncivil, not to say unfilial.” The timid or selfish nature of Admetus is reflected in that of his sire: it is easy to conceive the son another Pheres, when years shall have grizzled his beard.

The reluctance of Admetus, in the final scene, to take Alcestis back again, when “brought to him from the grave,” has been regarded as a comic situation; but it is by no means certain either that Euripides intended it for one, or that the spectators so interpreted it. The revived wife is a mute person, and her still disconsolate husband, who has so lately sworn never again to marry, believes for a few minutes that Hercules has indelicately, though with the best intentions, brought him a new partner. The real drift of this incident depends very much on the view of the deliverer taken commonly by an Athenian audience. Setting aside the use made of Hercules by the comic poets, we may

inquire how painters represented him. He is delineated on vases either as doing valiant deeds with his club or by his fatal arrows, or as indulging himself with the wine-cup. In one instance his weapons have been stolen from him by the God of Love, and he himself is running after a girl who has carried off his pitcher. The tragedians also do not treat him with much ceremony in their dramas: he was only a Bœotian hero, and so they took liberties with him.

This choral song, the last in the play, comes immediately before the reappearance of Hercules with the rescued Alcestis :—

“ I too have been borne along
 Through the airy realms of song.
 Searched I have historic page,
 Yet ne'er found in any age
 Power that with thine can vie,
 Masterless Necessity.
 Thee nor Orpheus' mystic scrolls
 Graved by him on Thracian pine,
 Thee nor Phœbus' art controls,
 Æsculapian art divine.
 Of the Powers thou alone
 Altar hast not, image, throne :
 Sacrifices wilt thou none.—
 Pains too sharp for mortal state
 Lay not on me, mighty Fate.
 Jove doth aye thy hests fulfil,
 His to work and thine to will.
 Hardest iron delved from mine
 Thou canst break and bend and twine :
 Harsh in purpose, heart of stone,
 Mercy is to thee unknown.

Thee, Admetus, in the bands
 Of her stern unyielding hands
 Hath she taken ; but resign
 Thy life to her—it is not thine
 By thy weeping to restore
 Those who look on light no more.
 Even the bright sons of heaven
 To dimness and to death are given.
 She was loved when she was here ;
 And in death we hold her dear :
 Let not her hallowed tomb be past
 As where the common dead are cast ;
 Let her have honour with the blest
 Who dwell above ; her place of rest
 When the traveller passeth by,
 Let him say, ‘ Within doth lie
 She who dared for love to die.
 Thou who now in bliss dost dwell,
 Hail, blest soul, and speed us well ! ’ * †

MEDEA.

To combine in the same chapter Alcestis with Medea, may appear like yoking the lamb with the lion ; and so it would be, were the Colchian princess the mere fury for which she is often taken. But Euripides had too deeply studied human character not to be aware that in nature there are no monsters—none at least fit for the ends of dramatic poetry ; and

* Partly translated by the late Dean Alford. Gray, in his fine ode, “ Daughter of Jove, relentless power,” had this choral song before him, as well as the verses of Horace which he proposed to imitate.

accordingly his Medea, though deeply wronged, is yet a woman who loved not wisely but too well. Even Lady Macbeth, though far more criminal than the heroine of this tragedy, since she had no wrongs to avenge, but sins for ambition's sake alone, is not entirely devoid of human feeling. With similar truth, both of art and observation, the Greek poet gives Medea a woman's heart even in the moments when she is meditating on her fell purpose.

Aristotle's judgment that Euripides, although he does not manage everything for the best in his plots or his representations of life, is the most pathetic of dramatic poets, is especially true of this tragedy. The hold that it has in every age retained upon spectators as well as readers, is a proof of the subject being chosen well. It was translated or adapted by Roman dramatists; it was revived in the early days of the modern theatre in Europe; it is still, wedded to immortal music, attractive; and no one who has seen the part of Medea performed by Pasta or Grisi will question its effect on an audience.

On the stage Medea appears under some disadvantage. The worse elements of her nature are there active; the better appear only now and then. She is placed in the situation described by Shakespeare:—

“ Between the acting of a dreadful thing
 And the first motion, all the interim is
 Like a phantasma or a hideous dream :
 The genius, and the mortal instruments
 Are then in council ; and the state of man,

Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection."

—"Julius Cæsar."

This is the condition of Medea from her first appearance on the scene to the last; the "little kingdom" of her being is rent in twain by her injuries, her threatened banishment, her helplessness among strangers and foes, her jealousy, her contempt for the mean-spirited Jason, her contempt even for herself. That she, the wise, the potent enchantress, should have been caught by his superficial beauty, and not read from the first his real character—are all elements of the insurrection in her nature. We behold only the deeply-wronged wife and mother—we do not realise her as she was a few years earlier, before the spoiler came to Colchis, a timid, trusting, and loving maiden, who set her life on one cast. Her picture, as drawn by an epic poet from whom Virgil found much to borrow, may put before us Medea as she was before the ship *Argo*—"built in the eclipse and rigged with curses dark"—passed between the blue *Symplegades*, and first broke the silence of the *Hellespontic sea*. She is thus described after her first interview with Jason:—

"And thus Medea slowly seemed to part,
Love's cares still brooding in her troubled heart;
And imaged still before her wondering eyes,
His living, breathing self appears to rise—
His very garb: and thus he spake, thus sate,
Thus, ah, too soon! he glided from the gate.
Sure ne'er her loving eyes beheld his peer,
And still his honied words are melting on her ear."

A little further on we have this description of her :—

“ She said, she rose ;
 Her maiden chamber’s solitary floor
 With trembling steps she trod : she reached the door,
 Fain to her sister’s neighbouring bower to haste ;
 And yet the threshold hardly had she passed,
 Sudden her failing feet are checked by shame,
 And long she lingered there, then back she came.
 Oft as desire would drive her forth again,
 So oft does maiden bashfulness restrain.
 Thrice she essayed to go, thrice stopped, then prone
 In anguish on her couch behold her thrown.” *

Such was Medea a few years only—if there be such a thing as dramatic time—before the tragedy begins. Her children are very young. Jason and herself appear to have not been long at Corinth, and so she must be regarded as still in the bloom of her youth and beauty, and not a hot-tempered lady of uncertain age. The desertion of her by her husband has accordingly the less excuse.

There is no prologue to this play, for the opening speech of the nurse—nurses on the Greek stage perform very similar functions to those of the indispensable *confidantes* of the classic drama of France—cannot be considered as such. This old servant does not go much into family history ; indeed, a barbaric woman—for such Medea is—was supposed by the pedigree-loving Greeks to have no ancestors worth mentioning. She merely lets the audience know the very critical position of affairs between Jason and his wife. The nurse

* Dean Milman’s ‘Translations from Valerius Flaccus.’

perceives that nothing but evil can come out of this second marriage—is sure that Medea is plotting some terrible revenge—and tells an old servant of Jason's her own terrors and her mistress's sad condition. He, on his part, brings her news. Medea must quit Corinth on that very day, and take her two sons with her; their father has consented to their banishment, and Creon, king of Corinth, cannot rest until the Colchian witch is over the border. The fears of the nurse harp on the children. She bids them go into the house, and begs Jason's servant,—

“To the utmost, keep them by themselves,
Nor bring them near their sorrow-frenzied mother.
For late I saw her with the roused bull's glare
View them as though she'd at them, and I trow
That she'll not bate her wrath till it have swooped
Upon some prey.”*

Her just fears are confirmed by the exclamations of her mistress, speaking from within:—

“Ah me! ah me!
I have endured, sad woman, endured
A burden for great laments. Cursed sons
Of a loathed mother, die, ye and your sire,
And let all our house wane away.”

The nurse remains on the stage when the Chorus of Corinthian women enter and comment on the “wild and whirling words” they have overheard:—

* All the translations are taken from Mrs Augusta Webster's version, *poetical* as well as “literal,” of the “Medea.”

“I heard the voice, nay, heard the shriek
Of the hapless Colchian dame.
Is she not calmed? Old matron, speak;
For through the double portals came
A voice of wail and woe.”

The nurse tells them that Medea “in no way is calmed,” and again from within is heard the plaint of the unhappy and indignant princess:—

“Woe! woe!
Oh lightning from heaven, dart through my head!
For what is my gain to live any more?”

The Chorus express their sympathy, but the assurance they give that “Zeus will judge on her side” is not satisfactory to her perturbed spirit. Yielding to the wish of these sympathising friends, Medea at length comes forth from the inner chamber, and, considering her circumstances, makes a more temperate address to the Chorus than, after hearing her exclamations behind the scenes, they might have expected. She expatiates on the hardship of being a woman, and, after some remarks on the few prizes and many blanks in the lottery of marriage, she begs them to befriend her so far at least as to keep her counsel if she communicates her purpose at any time to them. This they promise to do, and tell her that, so far as regards her husband, she has good right to avenge herself on him—a sentiment that, if the Athenian ladies were permitted to applaud in the theatre, was probably greeted with much clapping of hands.

King Creon now comes on to tell Medea officially

what the old servant has already intimated to the nurse.
 "Thou sullen-browed woman," he says,

"Medea, I command that from this realm
 Thou go an exile, taking thy two sons ;
 And linger not, for mine is the decree,
 Nor will I enter in my house again
 Till I have driven thee past the land's last bounds."

This decision of Creon cuts up, root and branch, all Medea's projects for revenging herself on Jason, his father-in-law, and his new wife. "Now," she says,

"My enemies crowd on all sail,
 And there is now no haven from despair."

She speaks softly to the king, even kneels to him, to turn away his wrath. But Creon is too much in dread of her devices to revoke his sentence of banishment. All he will concede is for her and her sons to depart to-morrow instead of to-day. That morrow, Medea may have said to herself, you shall never see. She has gained time for compassing her revenge.

In her next speech she lets the Chorus into her secret so far as to make them sure there will be bloody work in the palace before the sun sets. "Fool that he is!" she says; "he has left me now only one thing to find—a city of refuge, a host who will shelter me after I have done the deed, since in this day three of my foes shall perish by dagger or by drug,—

"The father and the girl and he my husband.

For never, by my Queen, whom I revere
 Beyond all else, and chose unto my aid,

By Hecatè, who dwells on my hearth's shrine,
Shall any wring my heart and still be glad."

A noble and appropriate chorus follows this magnificent speech of Medea's. There is room only for the first strophe, in which the women hail the good time coming:—

"The hallowed rivers backward stream
Against their founts: right crooks awry
With all things else: man's every scheme
Is treachery.
Even with gods faith finds no place.
But fame turns too: our life shall have renown:
Honour shall come to woman's race,
And envious fame no more weigh women down."

Jason now enters: he comes with the intention of remonstrating with Medea about her indiscreet demeanour towards Creon and the royal house; tells her that, but for her abominable temper and rash tongue, she might have remained on good terms with himself and all in Corinth: she has to thank herself alone for the decree of banishment. For his part, he has done all in his power to avert her doom; and even now, though she is for ever calling him "the worst of men," he will not let her go forth penniless; she shall have a handsome provision for herself and children, for, he adds,—

"Many hardships
Do wait on exile, and, though thou dost hate me,
I am not able to desire thy harm."

Unless Euripides meant to represent Jason as a fool,

as well as base and ungrateful, he could hardly have devised for him a less discreet or a more irritating speech than this. Medea now turns from red heat to white; recapitulates Jason's obligations to herself, the services she has done him, the crimes she has committed for him, and casts to the winds all his shallow, hypocritical pretences of having done his best for her and their sons. We imagine that no one will feel any pity for Jason, or deny that he richly deserved the words that, like "iron sleet of arrowy shower," fall, in this scene, upon his head,—terrible, yet just, as the fulminations hurled against Austria's Duke by Lady Constance in "King John :"—

"Thou slave, thou wretch, thou coward,
Thou little valiant, great in villany !
Thou ever strong upon the stronger side !
Thou fortune's champion—thou art perjured too,
And sooth'st up greatness. Thou cold-blooded slave !"

Jason keeps up, like Joseph Surface, his fair speeches to the last, and this connubial dialogue closes characteristically on either side :—

"*Jason.* Then do I call the gods to witness this,
How I desire to serve thee and thy sons ;
Yet thou'lt not like good gifts, but wantonly
Dost spurn thy friends, therefore shalt mourn the more.

"*Medea.* Begone, for longing after thy new bride
Seizes thee, so much tarrying from her home :
Take her, for it is like—yea, and possessed
By a god I will declare it—thou dost wed
With such a wedding as thou'lt wish undone."

After a brief but very beautiful song, in which the

Chorus celebrates the power and deprecates the wrath of Venus, and deploras the exile's lot, the real *Deus ex machinâ* of this tragedy presents himself—not hovering in the air, nor gorgeous in apparel, nor a god or the son of a god, but a rather commonplace, prosy gentleman, Ægeus, king of Athens, on his way home from Delphi. Of him no more need be said than that, by promising by his gods to shelter Medea, and yield her up to none, he removes the one difficulty in her way which still perplexed her. Now at last she is armed at all points—she has an assured home and protector, time to strike down every foe, weapons they cannot guard against, and means to escape if pursued.

Her wronged children shall be the instrument of her vengeance. As to Jason himself, she has changed her purpose; he shall not have the privilege of dying, for she can make life to him more wretched than many deaths. She summons him again to her presence; pretends to regret her late hot words; will even conciliate his new wife with such gifts as none but kings' daughters can bestow. Her conditions are, that if the robe and crown be accepted by Glaucè, the children shall not quit the realm. Jason, thinking that Medea is now in her right mind, assents to both proposals, and goes out to prepare his new wife for the presents. The Chorus, who are in the secret, apprise the audience that these gauds are far deadlier than were Bellerophon's letters:—

“By the grace and the perfect gleaming won,
She will place the gold-wrought crown on her head;

She will robe herself in the robe : and anon
She will deck her a bride among the dead."

The gifts are envenomed. Glauçè and Creon, wrapt in a sheet of phosphoric flame, expire in torments. Jason is a widowed bridegroom ; all Corinth is aroused to take vengeance on the barbaric sorceress. Surely this must be the end of the tragedy. No ; "bad begins, but worse remains behind." One more blow remains to be dealt. Jason is wifeless, he shall be childless too, before Medea speeds in her dragon-borne car—the chariot of the Sun, her grandsire—to hospitable Athens.

Never, perhaps, has a more terrible scene been exhibited on any stage than this final one of Medea. To it may be applied the words spoken of another spectacle of "woe and wonder :"—

"This quarry cries on havock ! O, proud death !
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes, at a shot,
So bloodily hast struck."

—"Hamlet."

Jason, who has been witnessing the charred remains of Glauçè and Creon, rushes on the stage to arrest their murderess. He cries frantically :—

"Hath she gone away in flight ?
For now must she or hide beneath the earth,
Or lift herself with wings into wide air,
Not to pay forfeit to the royal house."

But "one woe doth tread upon another's heels."
"Seeks she to kill me too ?" he demands of the Chorus.
"Nay," they reply, "you know not the worst :"—

“The boys have perished by their mother’s hand :
Open these gates, thou’lt see thy murdered sons.

Jason. Undo the bolt on the instant, servants there ;
Loose the clamps, that I may see my grief and bane,
May see them dead, and guerdon her with death.”

He sees them dead, indeed, but may “not kiss the dear lips of his boys ;” “may not touch his children’s soft flesh.” Medea hovers over the palace, taunts him with her wrongs, mocks at his new-born love for the children he had consented to banish, and triumphs alike over her living and her dead foes :—

“’Twas not for thee, having spurned my love,
To lead a merry life, flouting at me,
Nor for the princess ; neither was it his
Who gave her thee to wed, Creon, unscathed
To cast me out of his realm. And now,
If it so like thee, call me lioness,
And Scylla, dweller on Tursenian plains ;
For as right bade me, have I clutched thy heart.”

The story of Medea, unconnected as it is with any workings of destiny or fatal necessity—such as humbled the pride of Theban and Argive Houses—has been taxed with a want of proper tragical grandeur, as if a picture of human passion were less fit for the drama than one of the strife between Fate and Free-will.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO IPHIGENIAS.

“ I was cut off from hope in that sad place,
Which yet to name my spirit loathes and fears :
My father held his hand upon his face ;
I, blinded with my tears,
Still strove to speak : my voice was thick with sighs,
As in a dream. Dimly I could descry
The stern black-bearded kings with wolfish eyes
Waiting to see me die.”

—TENNYSON : “ A Dream of Fair Women.”

ABOUT the fate of Iphigenia many stories were current in Greece, and the version of it adopted by Euripides is one among several instances of the freedom which he permitted himself in dealing with old legends. Æschylus in his “ Agamemnon” and Sophocles in his “ Electra” make her to have been really sacrificed at Aulis. Euripides chose a milder and perhaps later form of the story ; and if we have the conclusion of the drama as he wrote it, Diana, at the last moment, rescues the maiden, and substitutes in her place on the altar—a fawn. To this change his own humane disposition may have led him, although he had in earlier

plays not scrupled to immolate Polyxena and Macaria. Perhaps in the case of Iphigenia consistency required of him to save her, since in the play, of which the scene is laid at Tauri, the princess is alive twenty years after her appearance at Aulis. Pausanias, as diligent a collector of legendary lore as Sir Walter Scott himself, says that a virgin was offered up at Aulis to appease the wrath of the divine huntress, and that her name was Iphigenia. This victim, however, was not a daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, but of Theseus and Helen, whom her mother, through fear of Menelaus, did not dare to own. In the Iliad, that common source of the stage-poets when they dealt with the tale of Troy, nothing is said about substitute or sacrifice, nor about Iphigenia's ministering to Diana at Tauri. On the contrary,* the Homeric Iphianassa—for that is her epic name—is safe and well with her mother and sisters at Argos, and ten years after her supposed death or escape is offered by Agamemnon as a bride to Achilles.

The "Iphigenia in Aulis," in its relation to the Grecian world, possessed, we may fairly surmise, universal interest. For an audience composed, as that in the Dionysiac theatre was, of Athenians, allies, and strangers, there were associations with the first

* "In his house

He hath three daughters : thou may'st home conduct
 To Pthia her whom thou shalt most approve.
 Chrysothemis shall be thy bride, or else
 Laodice, or, if she please thee more,
Iphianassa."

—Iliad, ix. (Cowper.)

general armament of the Greeks against foreigners, with which a modern reader can but imperfectly sympathise. Priam, Paris, Hector, Agamemnon, Achilles, Helen, and Iphigenia had indeed, centuries before, vanished into the shadow-land of Hades, and the quiet sheep fed or the tortoise crawled over the mounds where Troy once stood. Yet if the city built by Gods now excited neither wrath nor dread in Greece, Persia and the great King, though no longer objects of alarm, were not beyond the limits of Hellenic anxiety or vigilance, and were still able to vex Athens by their "mines of Ophir," as once they had made her desolate by their Median archers and the swarthy chivalry of Susa. To Greece and the islands, the dwellers beyond Mount Taurus represented the ancient foe whom it had taken their ancestors ten years to vanquish; and scenic reminiscences of their first conflict with an eastern adversary were still welcome to the third and fourth generation of spectators, whose sires had fought beside Miltiades and Cimon.*

The opening scene of the "Iphigenia in Aulis" has, for picturesqueness, rarely if ever been surpassed. The centre of the stage is occupied by the tent of Agamemnon: supposing ourselves among the audience, we see on the left hand of it the white tents and beyond them the black ships of the Achæans; on the right, the road to the open country by which Iphigenia and her

* When Agesilaus, king of Sparta, was about to pass into Asia, as commander of the Greek army, he offered sacrifice to Diana at Aulis, so lively an impression still remained of the rash vow of "the king of men."

mother Clytemnestra will soon arrive. The time is night, the "brave o'erhanging firmament" is studded with stars. The only sounds audible are the tramp of sentinels, and the challenge of the watch : the camp is wrapt in deep slumber :—

"Not the sound
Of birds is heard, nor of the sea ; the winds
Are hushed in silence."

"The king of men" is much agitated by some secret grief. By the light of a "blazing lamp" he is writing a letter :—

"The writing he does blot ; then seal,
And open it again ; then on the floor
Casts it in grief : the warm tear from his eyes
Fast flowing, in his thoughts distracted near,
Even, it may seem, to madness."

The cause for the perturbation of his spirit is this : the Grecian fleet has been detained at Aulis by thwarting winds, and Calchas, the seer, has declared that Agamemnon's daughter must be sacrificed to Diana, irate with him because he has shot, while hunting, one of her sacred deer. Unwittingly the Grecian commander has, in order to conciliate her, vowed that he will offer to her the most beautiful creature that the year of his child's birth has produced. He has been persuaded by his brother Menelaus to summon Iphigenia to Aulis, on the pretext of giving her in marriage to Achilles. He has sent a letter to Argos, directing Clytemnestra to bring the maiden to the camp without delay. Soon, however, the father recoils from this deceit,

and he prepares a second letter, annulling the former one, and enjoining his wife to remain at home. This he commits to the hands of an old servant of Clytemnestra's, with injunctions to make all speed with it to Argos ; but just as the messenger is passing the borders of the camp, he is seized by Menelaus, who breaks the seal, reads the missive, and hurries to upbraid his brother with treachery to himself and the general cause of Hellas. A sharp debate ensues between the brothers—one twitting the other with bad faith ; the other taxing the husband of Helen with want of proper feeling for his niece and himself, and chiding him for taking such pains to get back that worthless runaway, his wife. "If I," he says,

"Before ill judging, have with sobered thought
 My purpose changed, must I be therefore judged
 Reft of my sense ? Thou rather, who hast lost
 A wife that brings thee shame, yet dost with warmth
 Wish to regain her, may the favouring Gods
 Grant thee such luck. But I will not slay
 My children.
 My nights, my days, would pass away in tears,
 Did I with outrage and injustice wrong
 Those who derive their life from me."

The brothers part in high dudgeon, Agamemnon remaining on the stage ; and to him a messenger enters, bearing the unwelcome tidings that Clytemnestra, Iphigenia, and the infant Orestes, will soon make glad his eyes, after their long separation. They are close to the camp, though they have not yet entered it, for—

“Wearied with this length of way, beside
A beauteous-flowing fountain they repose,
Themselves refreshing, and their steeds unyoked
Crop the fresh herbage of the verdant mead.”

“Thou hast my thanks—go in,” says the now utterly wretched father to the messenger, and then tells in soliloquy his woes to the audience. He is caught in inextricable toils. Shall he cause the assembled host to rise and mutiny, or shall he keep his rash vow, and sacrifice his darling to the irate goddess—“what ruin hath the son of Priam brought on me and my house!”

It is now early morning, and the camp is astir, and a murmur, gradually getting louder, is heard. The chieftains and the soldiers are greeting the queen of Argos and Mycenæ, her fair daughter, and her infant son. But before they enter, Menelaus has hurried back, and is reconciled to his royal brother. The younger king tells his liege lord that speedy repentance has followed on the heels of his late hasty passion. He has been moved by the tears of the distracted father: he yields to the arguments used by him:—

“When from thine eye I saw thee drop the tear,
I pitied thee and wept myself: what I said then
I now unsay, no more unkind to thee.
Now feel I as thou feelest—nay, exhort thee
To spare thy child; for what hath she to do,
Thy virgin daughter, with my erring wife?
Break up the army, let the troops depart.
Within this breast there beats a loving heart.
Love or ambition shall not us divide,
Though they part brethren oft.”

A second choral song follows this reconciliation scene; and then the chariot that has brought Clytemnestra and her young children appears on the right hand of the royal tent. She is welcomed by the Chorus, and assisted by them to alight. In Clytemnestra, Euripides shows how delicately he can delineate female characters, and how happily he has seized the opportunity for exhibiting the Lady Macbeth or Lucrezia Borgia of the Greek stage as a loving wife and mother. The seeds of evil passions were dormant in her nature, but until she was deeply wronged they bore not fruit. Clytemnestra in this play is a fond mother, a trusting wife, a very woman, even shy, unpretending, unversed in courts or camps. To the Chorus, after acknowledging their "courtesy and gentleness of speech," she says:—

" I hope that I am come
 To happy nuptials, leading her a bride.
 But from the chariot take the dowry-gifts,
 Brought with me for the virgin : to the house
 Bear them with careful hands. My daughter, leave
 The chariot now, and place upon the ground
 Thy delicate foot. Kind women, in your arms
 Receive her—she is tender ; prithee too,
 Lend me a hand, that I may leave this seat
 In seemly fashion. Some stand by the yoke,
 Fronting the horses ; they are quick of eye,
 And hard to rule when startled. Now receive
 This child, an infant still. Dost sleep, my boy ?
 The rolling of the car hath wearied thee :
 Yet wake to see thy sister made a bride ;
 A noble youth, the bridegroom, Thetis' son,
 And he will wed into a noble house."

She enters without pomp or circumstance, with only an attendant or two. Knowing his name, she displays no further curiosity about the supposed bridegroom: whatever her husband has designed must, she thinks, be good. She, a half-divine princess of the race of Tantalus, the sister of Helen and of the great Twin-Brethren, the consort of "the king of men," is nevertheless an uninstructed Grecian housewife. She knows nothing of the genealogy of Achilles, at least on the father's side. She has never heard of the Myrmidons: she knows not where Pthia may be: she asks what mortal or what goddess became the wife of Peleus; and when told that she is the sea-nymph Thetis, who but for a warning oracle would have been the spouse of Jupiter, she wonders where the rites of Hymen were celebrated, on firm land or in some ocean cave. The childlike amazement and delight of Iphigenia also are drawn by a master's hand. Not Thecla, when first entering Wallenstein's palace and seeing the royal state by which her father was surrounded; not Miranda, gazing for the first time upon "the brave new world,"* are more delicate creations of poetic fancy than Iphigenia.

Bearing in mind what the representation of strong emotions can be on the modern stage, where the face and limbs of the actors are free to exhibit the varying moods of a tragic character, it is most difficult, or

* "Oh wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beautiful mankind is! Oh, brave new world

That has such people in it!"

—"Tempest," act v. sc. 1.

rather impossible, to understand how passion or pathos could be interpreted by men so encumbered as the actors were on the ancient stage by their masks, their high boots, and their cumbersome robes. And as the scene in which Agamemnon receives the newly-arrived Clytemnestra and his daughter is a mixed one,—joy simulated, fear and grief suppressed, on *his* part—happiness in the unlooked-for meeting with a husband and father, and hope for the approaching nuptials, on *theirs*,—it is impossible to conceive how it can have been adequately represented. The painter who drew Agamemnon at Diana's altar veiling his face that he might not look on his victim, had at least an opportunity for conveying the presence of grief “too deep for tears.” But how could the father's emotions in this scene have been imparted to an audience? The Greek actor differed little from a statue except in the possession of voice, and in a certain, though a limited, range of expressive gesture. That these imperfect means, as they appear to us, sufficed for an intelligent and susceptible audience, there is no reason to doubt; and we must content ourselves with the assurance that the performer and the mechanist supplied all that was then needed for the full expression of terror and pity.

The character of Achilles is delineated with great skill and felicity. The hero of the Iliad is a most dramatic portraiture of one who has, in spite of his pride and wilfulness, many compensating virtues. If his passions are strong, so are his affections: if he is im-

placable to mailed foes, he is generous and even tender to weeping Priam : he knows that he bears a doomed life if he tarries on Trojan ground, yet though highly provoked by Agamemnon, he abides constant to the oath he had taken as one of the suitors of Helen. But the Achilles of the "Iphigenia," although a peerless soldier, the Paladin of the Achæan host—a Greek Bayard, "sans peur et sans reproche"—is a modest, nay, even a shy stripling, blushing like a girl when he comes suddenly into the presence of his destined bride and her mother : not easily moved, yet perplexed and indignant in the extreme when he discovers that his name has been used as a lure, and full of pity for, and prompt to aid, the unhappy victims of a cruel and unnatural plot. Achilles, indeed, in the hands of Euripides, is an anticipation of the Knight in the Canterbury Tales :—

“ And though that he was worthy, he was wys :
 And of his port as meke as is a mayde :
 He never yit no vilonye ne sayde,
 In al his lyf unto no manner wight :
 He was a verry perfit gentil knight.”

No chance of extricating himself from the dreadful consequences of his summons to Clytemnestra remains for Agamemnon, except the very slender one of persuading her to return alone to Argos. This she stoutly, and, in her ignorance of his secret motive, reasonably refuses to do. A sharp connubial encounter ensues, in which Agamemnon does not get the best of it. A

very short extract only can be afforded to their controversy. After asking sundry pertinent questions about the young bridegroom and the marriage ceremony—in which the speakers are at cross-purposes, Clytemnestra meaning the wedding, while Agamemnon's replies covertly allude to the sacrifice—he astonishes her by a most unexpected demand upon her obedience! “Obey you!” she exclaims; “you have long trained me to do so, but in what am I now to show my obedience?”

Agam. To Argos go, thy charge the virgins there.

Clyt. And leave my daughter? Who shall raise the torch?

Agam. The light to deck the nuptials I will hold.

Clyt. Custom forbids; nor wouldst thou deem it seemly.

Agam. Nor decent that thou mix with banded troops.

Clyt. But decent that the mother give the daughter.

Agam. Let me persuade thee.

Clyt. By the potent Queen,
Goddess of Argos, no. Of things abroad
Take thou the charge: within the house my care
Shall deck the virgin's nuptials, as is meet."

Agamemnon, now at his wits' end, says he will go and consult Calchas, and hear from him whether anything can be done to set him right with Diana.

Matters are hurrying to a crisis. Achilles enters, after the choral song has ceased, thinking to find Agamemnon, and then to inform him that the Myrmidons are on the very edge of mutiny, and that he cannot hold them in much longer. He says:—

“ With impatient instance oft
They urge me : ‘ Why, Achilles, stay we here ?
What tedious length of time is yet to pass,
To Ilium ere we sail ? Wouldst thou do aught,
Do it, or lead us home : nor here await
The sons of Atreus and their long delays.’ ”

Instead of his commander-in-chief he finds Clytemnestra, who greatly scandalises him by offering her hand to her destined son-in-law. She, on her part, is surprised at a modesty so uncommon in young men. The old slave, the same whom Menelaus so roughly handles at the opening of the drama, now comes forward and unfolds the mystery. Clytemnestra sues to the captain of the Myrmidons for protection against the cruel “ black-bearded kings : ” he is highly incensed at having been made a cat’s-paw of by Agamemnon, Calchas the seer, and the crafty Ulysses, and promises to do all in his power to rescue Iphigenia from her fearful doom, even at any risk to himself from his impatient soldiers.

Agamemnon now reappears. Ignorant that his wife is now furnished with all the facts he had withheld, he is greatly discomfited by her upbraiding him with his weak and wicked consent to the sacrifice of Iphigenia. After threatening him with her vengeance—a threat she some years later fulfilled—she descends to entreaties, and prays him to spare their child. And now comes the most affecting scene of the tragedy. Iphigenia, aware that she is not the destined bride but the chosen victim, implores her father to change his purpose ; and the more to prevail with him, brings in her arms her

infant brother, Orestes, to move him to spare her. Agamemnon, however, declares, he is so compromised with the Greeks that he cannot recede. His own life will be in danger from the infuriated host, if he any longer withholds the appointed victim. Again Achilles rushes on with the news that his soldiers have sworn to kill him, if for the sake of a young maiden he any longer detains them at Aulis. And now the daughter of a line of heroes shows herself heroic. She will be the victim whom the goddess demands. Troy shall fall : Greece shall triumph : in place of marriage and happy years, she will die for the common weal. Her father shall be glorious to all ages : she will be content with the renown of saving Hellas. With much compunction, and with some hesitation on the part of the chivalrous Achilles, all now accept the stern necessity. In solemn procession, and with a funeral chant sung by the victim and the Chorus, she goes to the altar of Diana. The end of the tragedy, as we have it, is probably spurious, so far as the substitution of the fawn is concerned. The real conclusion seems to have been the appearance of the goddess over the tent of Agamemnon, to inform the weeping mother that her daughter is not dead, but borne away to a remote land, the Tauric Chersonese. They are parted for ever, yet there may be consolation in knowing Iphigenia has not descended to the gloomy Hades, "the bourne from which no traveller returns."

Mr Paley remarks, with his unfailling insight into the pith and marrow of the Grecian drama, that "Aristotle cites the character of Iphigenia at Aulis as an

example of want of consistency or uniformity ; since she first supplicates for life, and afterwards consents to die. It is difficult to attribute much weight to the criticism, though it comes with the sanction of a great name. The part of Iphigenia throughout appears singularly natural. Her first impulse is to live ; but when she clearly perceives how much depends on her voluntary death, and how Achilles, her champion, is compromised by his dangerous resolve to save her—lastly, how the Greeks are bent on the expedition, from motives of national honour—she yields herself up a willing victim. It would be quite as reasonable to object to Menelaus's sudden change of purpose, from demanding the death of the maid, to the refusing to consent to it."

IPHIGENIA AT TAURI.

Twenty years have passed since the concluding scene of "Iphigenia in Aulis" before the opening of this drama. Ten years were spent in the siege of Troy, another ten in the return of the surviving heroes to their homes. From the moment when the young daughter of Agamemnon is borne away from the altar at Aulis, she has been devoted to the service of Diana at Tauri—a goddess who, like the ferocious deities of the Mexicans, delighted in the savour of human blood. From that moment, also, Iphigenia has remained ignorant of the great events that have taken place since her rescue. She knows not that Troy has fallen ; that her father has been murdered and avenged ;

that her brother Orestes and her sister Electra yet live, but under the ban of gods and men; or that Helen, the "direful spring" of so many woes to Greece, is once more queen at Sparta. Little chance, indeed, was there of her getting news of her country or kindred in the inhospitable country to which she had been brought. The land where Tauri* stood was shunned by all Greeks, for the welcome awaiting them there was death on the altar of the goddess, to whom men of their race were the most acceptable of victims.

But the end of her long exile and the hour assigned for her restoration to home and kindred were at hand. A Greek vessel arrives at this remote and barbarous region; and two strangers, immediately after the priestess of Diana has spoken a kind of prologue, come upon the stage, and cautiously, as persons afraid of being seen, survey the temple. Though they have had foul weather and rough seas, they are not shipwrecked, but have come with a special object to this perilous land. That object is apparently of the most desperate kind, for the strangers are not only Greeks, but have come, in obedience to an oracle, to carry off and transport to Attica the tutelary goddess of Tauri. In the prologue the audience is prepared to recognise in the two persons on the stage Orestes and his friend Pylades; for Iphigenia relates a dream she has had on the previous night, but which she misinterprets. She believes it to mean that Orestes, whom she had left an infant at Aulis, is dead, and proposes to offer

* The action of the play is fixed at the now historic Balaclava, in the Crimea.

libations to his shade. Orestes and his friend, having satisfied themselves that this is the temple whence the image, by force or fraud, must be taken away, retire and give place to the Chorus, not indeed without some misgivings on the part of Orestes as to the possibility of executing their enjoined task. "The walls are high," he says—"the doors are barred with brass; even if we can climb the one and force the other, how shall we escape the watchful eyes of those who guard the shrine or dwell in the city? If detected, we shall be put to death:—

"Shall we, then, ere we die, by flight regain
The ship, in which we hither ploughed the sea?"

"Of flight we must not think," rejoins Pylades; "the god's command must be obeyed. But we have seen enough of the temple for the present; and now let us retire to some cave where

"We may lie concealed
At distance from our ship, lest some, whose eyes
May note it, bear the tidings to the king,
And we be seized by force."

What Pylades had dreaded happens. The Chorus, as soon as their song, in which Iphigenia takes a part, is ended, say to her,—

"Leaving the sea-washed shore an herdsman comes,
Speeding with some fresh tidings."

The herdsman's report of what he has seen is most strange and exciting to the hearers of it. He opens

it with apprising the priestess that she must get all things ready for a sacrifice, for

“ Two youths, swift rowing 'twixt the dashing rocks
Of our wild sea, are landed on the beach,
A grateful offering at Diana's shrine.

“ At first one of my comrades took them, as they sat in the cavern, for two deities ; but another said, they are wrecked mariners : and he was in the right, as soon it proved ; for one of the twain was suddenly seized with madness, while the other soothed him in his frenzy,—

“ Wiped off the foam, took of his person care,
And spread his fine robe over him.

“ The mad one had assailed our herds, mistaking them, it seems, for certain Furies that hunt him ; whereupon we, seeing the havoc he was making, blew our horns, called the neighbours to our aid, and at last, after a desperate resistance from these strange visitors, we captured them both,—

“ And bore them to the monarch of this land :
He viewed them, and without delay to thee
Sent them, devoted to the cleansing vase
And to the altar.”

Hitherto the hand of Iphigenia is unspotted by the blood of human victims. The prisoners are the first Greeks who have landed on this fatal coast. She is still under the influence of her dream. Her conviction that Orestes is dead, her remembrance of the wrong done to her at Aulis, combine to harden her

against the prisoners before they are presented to her. When, however, she has seen and interrogated them as to their nation and whence they come, her mood changes. Her ignorance of what has taken place since she left Argos is now dispersed. Not only does she learn that the Greeks have taken Troy and returned to their homes, but also that Orestes is living. He evades, indeed, her questions as to himself; he will not disclose his name and parentage, and is unaware that his sister stands before him. "Argives both are ye?" she says, "then one of you shall be spared, and he shall take a letter from me to my brother." Then follows the celebrated contest between the pair of friends as to which of them shall do her commission. The deeply affecting character of this scene was felt in all lands where the tragedy was represented. "What shouts, what excitement," says Lælius, "pervaded the theatre at the representation of my friend Pacuvius's new play, when the contest took place between Orestes and Pylades, each claiming the privilege of dying for the other!"* Then comes the recognition between the long-parted brother and sister. Iphigenia will not trust to mere oral communication. She will write as well as give a verbal message. She reads the letter to the captives. She takes this precaution for two reasons:—

"If thou preserve
This letter, *that*, though silent, will declare
My purport; if it perish in the sea,
Saving thyself my words too shalt thou save."

* Cicero on Friendship, c. 7.

Brother and sister are now made manifest to each other. The priestess is the long-lost Iphigenia: the stranger is the brother whom she had held an infant in her arms, and whom she was mourning as dead. The method by which Æschylus and Sophocles bring about the discovery is consistent with their sublimer genius; that which Euripides adopts is equally consonant with his more human temperament, no less than with his views of dramatic art.

The deliverance of the friends and the priestess is still hard to accomplish; they are begirt with peril. Iphigenia knows too well the religious rigour of the Taurian king. Thoas is a devout worshipper of Diana; is an inexorable foe to Greeks. His subjects and his guards are equally hostile towards strangers and loyal to their goddess. If they cannot escape, the intruders will be immolated, and the priestess be a third victim on the blood-stained altar. And now Iphigenia proves that she is Greek to the core. She can plot craftily: she will even hazard the wrath of a deity by a timely fraud. King Thoas, little more than a simple country gentleman, dividing his time between field-sports and ceremonies sacred or civil, is no match for three wily Greeks. "The statue of Diana," she tells him, "must be taken down to the beach and purified by the sea; the two strangers, before they are sacrificed, must undergo lustration." "Take the caitiffs by all means," he says, "to the shore. A guard must attend you, for they are stalwart knaves; one of them has murdered his mother, and the other prompted and abetted him in that foul

“ Haste then, O king,
Take chains and gyves with thee ; for if the flood
Subside not to a calm, there is no hope
Of safety for the strangers.”

Thoas needs no prompter. He calls to the people of Tauri to avenge this insult to their goddess :—

“ Harness your steeds at once : will you not fly
Along the shore, to seize whate'er this ship
Of Greece casts forth, and, for your goddess roused,
Hunt down these impious men ? Will you not launch
Instant your swift-oared barks by seas, on land
To catch them, from the rugged rock to hurl
Their bodies, or impale them on the stake ?”

To the Chorus he hints that, inasmuch as they have known all along and concealed the dark designs of the recreant priestess and her two confederates in this sacrilegious crime, he will, at more leisure, “ devise brave punishments ” for them.

The capture of the fugitives is unavoidable ; and if they are once more in his grasp, the pious and wrathful king will leave no member of Agamemnon's family alive except the sad and solitary Electra. Euripides now settles the matter by his usual device, an intervening deity. Pallas Athene appears above the temple of Diana, and apprises Thoas that it is her pleasure that both the priestess and the image shall be carried to Greece by Orestes, where the worship of the Taurian Artemis, purged of its sanguinary rites, shall be established at Halæ and Brauron in Attica. Thoas is satisfied. Agamemnon's children are free to depart ; and

Pylades, as a reward for his long-enduring friendship, is to marry Electra.

Should this drama, in virtue of its happy conclusion, be accounted, along with the "Alcestis" and the "Helen" of Euripides, a tragi-comedy? In one respect the "Iphigenia at Tauri" stands apart from these plays. In the former, there is something approaching to the comic in the person of Hercules; in the latter, something even risible in the garb of Menelaus, and in his conversation with the old woman who is hall-porter in the palace of Theoclymenus. The drama, however, that has now been examined, is from its beginning to its end full of action, excitement, suspense, dread, and uncertainty. The doom of a race, as well as individuals, is at stake; and the prospect of the principal characters is gloomy in the extreme, until their rescue by a deity delivers them from further suffering. Both "Iphigenias" derive much of their attractions for all times and ages from the deeply domestic tenor of the story. "How many 'Iphigenias' have been written!" said Goethe. "Yet they are all different, for each writer manages the subject after his own fashion."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BACCHANALS.

“Over wide streams and mountains great we went,
And, save when Bacchus kept his ivy-tent,
Onward the tiger and the leopard pants
 With Asian elephants :
We follow Bacchus ! Bacchus on the wing,
 A-conquering !
Bacchus, young Bacchus ! good or ill betide,
We dance before him thorough kingdoms wide :
Come hither, lady fair, and joinèd be
 To our wild minstrelsy.”

—KEATS : “Endymion.”

THIS is the only extant Greek tragedy connected with the wanderings and worship of the wine-god, at whose festivals the Greek theatres were open, and from song and dance in whose honour the drama of Greece derived its origin. The subject, when Euripides took it up, was not new to the stage. Among the dramas ascribed to Thespis, one was entitled “Pentheus ;” and another by him, “The Bachelors,” may have treated of Lycurgus, also a vehement opposer of Bacchic rites. Æschylus exhibited two trilogies, in which Pentheus and Lycurgus were the principal characters. The serene

muse of Sophocles appears to have avoided such exciting themes.

“The Bacchanals” was not brought out in the lifetime of Euripides. It was exhibited by a younger man of the same name, his son or his nephew. If it were, as it is supposed to have been, the work of one far advanced in years, it displays no trace of declining powers, and, in that respect, is on a par with the Sophoclean “*Œdipus at Colonus*.” From its scenes and subject it was probably composed after Euripides had quitted Athens; and there may have been reasons for his writing this tragedy at Pella, as a compliment to his host and patron Archelaus. The play, indeed, was well suited to the genius of the land, and the people before whom it was represented. Northern Greece, Macedonia, and the adjoining districts, were devout worshippers of Bacchus, both in faith and practice. Alexander’s “captains and colonels and knights at arms” astonished the more sober Asiatics by their capacity for deep potations. The women of Thrace, Thessaly, and Macedonia, when the purple vintage was garnered, and the vats overflowed with red juice, celebrated harvest-home by putting on ivy-chaplets and tunics made of lion or deer skins, by brandishing the thyrsus, and by wild and violent dances. Olympias, the mother of Alexander, was a Bacchantè, and at certain seasons of the year whirled around the altars of the god, with snakes depending from her girdle and her hair. In this picturesque, if rather savage dress, she is said to have won the heart of King Philip, himself a most loyal subject of the jovial deity.

The poet of "The Bacchanals," now a voluntary exile at Pella, seems to have reinvigorated himself under a new sky, and to exult in his freedom. He had gone from a land tamed and domesticated by the hand of man, to a land in which nature was still imperfectly subdued. In the place of vineyards, oliveyards, and gardens, forests and mountains greeted his eyes. Broad rivers were in the room of the narrow and uncertain streams that watered Attica. The snows on Mount Parnes disappeared when the sun rode in Cancer; but they never departed from the sides and summits of Ossa and Olympus. There is a *Salvator-like* grandeur in the scenery described in "The Bacchanals." The action of the play lies indeed in Bœotia; but, instead of loamy fields and sluggish rivers, we are placed among rocks where the eagle builds her eyrie, or among forests tenanted by the wolf and bear.

The religious elements in "The Bacchanals" are worth noticing, since they differ widely from those commonly found in other plays of its author. The presiding god is a terrible as well as a powerful being. He admits of no half-service; he cannot abide sceptics; he makes short work with opponents. All such free and easy dealing with the gods as are met with in "The Phrenzy of Hercules" or the "Electra" disappears. Perhaps the Macedonians were not sufficiently civilised to relish tampering with old beliefs. There may also have been a change in the feelings of the aged poet himself. He may have said to himself, "What has it profited me to have so long striven to make others see

more clearly? Would it not have been wiser to do as my friend Sophocles has ever done, and view both gods and social relations with the eyes of the vulgar?" Unimpaired as his mental force must have been for him to write such a tragedy as "The Bacchanals," his bodily strength may have been touched by years. We are not told whether either of his wives accompanied him to Pella; if neither of them were with him, there was the less occasion for philosophy. Whatever the cause may have been, there is more faith than doubt or speculation to be found in this tragedy.

The action of "The Bacchanals" is laid in a remote age, and there is an Oriental quite as much as a Greek savour in the poetry. Cadmus, who has ceded the Theban sceptre to his grandson Pentheus, was by birth a Phœnician, not a Bœotian. He lived before the Greek Argo had rushed through the blue Symplegades to the Colchian strand. He is beyond recorded time; he "antiquates" common "antiquity." His intercourse with the gods has been intimate but not happy. Jupiter had taken a fancy to his sister Europa, and to one of his daughters—and by her, Semele, he is, though long unaware of it, grandfather to Bacchus.

When the play opens, all Thebes—its male population, at least—is perplexed in the extreme. The women are all gone mad: they are off to the mountains, and many of them have taken their children with them; for their customary suits they have donned fawn-skins; they brandish poles wreathed with ivy: shouting and singing, dancing and leaping, they scour the plains,

climb the hills, and scare the fox and the wild cat from their holes. From this sudden mania neither age nor rank is free: sober housewives are themselves doing what a few days before they would have blushed to see done by others. Even the Queen Agavè and her attendant ladies are swept into the vortex, and prance like so many peasant girls at a wake.

The cause of this strange and unseemly revel is the appearance in Bœotia of a young man of handsome presence, with flowing locks like grape-bunches, and a delicate yet somewhat ruddy visage. His errand to Thebes is a strange one. He pretends to be a native of that city; he points to a charred mound of earth as his mother's grave, and, wondrous to relate, since he first visited it, the blackened turf is covered and canopied over with a luxuriant vine! He began by claiming near kinship with the royal house of Cadmus; and because the female members scoffed at his pretensions, he drives them insane. His retinue are as strange as his errand. It is composed of dark-eyed swarthy women, such as might be seen in the streets of Tyre and Sidon celebrating the feast of Astartè with dance and song. The dull, yet by no means sober, Bœotians cannot tell what to make of these eccentric visitors. Some think that the magistrates—the Bœotarchs—should clap them into the town jail: but how to catch, and, when caught, how to keep, these wild damsels, is the difficulty; for they are as slippery to handle as the eels in Lake Copais, and as fierce as the lynxes that swarm on Mount Cithæron. Never had Thebes, since Amphion had drawn the stones of

its walls together by his minstrelsy, been in such perturbation.

Who the young stranger with grape-bunch locks is, the audience are told by himself in the prologue. He is what he pretends to be, the son of Jupiter and Semele. He has travelled far before he came to Thebes to establish his rites and claim his kindred. "I have left," he says,

"The golden Lydian shores,
The Phrygian and the Persian sun-seared plains,
And Bactria's walls ; the Medes' wild wintry land
Have passed, and Araby the blest ; and all
Of Asia that along the salt-sea coast
Lifts up her high-towered cities, where the Greeks,
With the Barbarians mingled, dwell in peace." *

Hitherto, wherever I have come, mankind has acknowledged me a god : the first opposition I have met with is in this, the first Hellenic town I have entered :—

"But here, where least beseemed, my mother's sisters
Vowed Dionysus was no son of Jove ;
That Semele, by mortal paramour won,
Belied great Jove as author of her sin ;
'Twas but old Cadmus' craft : hence Jove in wrath
Struck dead the bold usurper of his bed."

In requital for such usage, he has goaded all the women of Thebes into frenzy :—

"There's not a woman of old Cadmus' race
But I have maddened from her quiet house ;

* The translated passages are all taken from Dean Milman's version of this drama.

Unseemly mingled with the sons of Thebes,
On the roofless rocks 'neath the pale pines they sit."

Cadmus the king, and Tiresias the seer, well knowing that Bacchus is really what he assumes to be—after a little hesitation about their novel attire in fawn-skins, their ivy-crown, and thyrsus, determine to join the Bacchanal rout; and Tiresias, as the king's ghostly confessor, preaches to him the following doctrine, sound indeed in itself, but uncommón in Euripidean drama :—

"No wile, no paltering with the deities.
The ancestral faith, coeval with our race,
No subtle reasoning, if it soar aloft,
Even to the height of wisdom, can o'erthrow."

Their purpose, however, to speed at once to the mountains, is stayed by the entrance of Pentheus, who has been absent from home, but has come back, in hot haste, on hearing of these strange and evil doings in his city. He will crush, he will stamp out, this pestilent new religion—a religion having in it quite as much of Venus as of Bacchus. Gyves and the prison-house shall be the portion of these wild women; and as for that wizard from the land of Lydia,—

"If I catch him 'neath this roof, I'll silence
The beatings of his thyrsus, stay his locks'
Wild tossing, from his body severing his head."

As for his grandsire, and the "blind prophet" his companion, he cannot marvel enough at their folly; nay, wroth as he is, he can scarcely help laughing at their

fawn-skin robes. "However," he proceeds, "I know which of you two fatuous old men is most in fault, and I will take such order with him as shall spoil his prophecies for some time to come :—

"Some one go ;
The seats from which he spies the flight of birds,
False augur, with the iron forks o'erthrow,
Scattering in wild confusion all abroad,
And cast his chaplets to the winds and storms."

The elders implore him to cease from his blasphemies : and Cadmus, rather prudently than honestly, counsels him to profess faith in the new deity, if for no other reason, yet for the credit of the family :—

"Even if, as thou declar'st, he were no God,
Call thou him God. It were a splendid falsehood
If Semele be thought t' have borne a God."

But Pentheus spurns this accommodating advice, and Cadmus and Tiresias wend their way to the Bacchanal camp on the mountains. The Chorus takes up the charge of blasphemy, and hints at the end awaiting the impious king :—

"Of tongue unbridled, without awe,
Of madness spurning holy law,
Sorrow is the heaven-doomed close :
But the life of calm repose,
And modest reverence, holds her state,
Unbroken by disturbing fate ;
And knits whole houses in the tie
Of sweet domestic harmony.
Beyond the range of mortal eyes
'Tis not wisdom to be wise."

The wish of Pentheus to have in his power the deluder of the Theban women is soon gratified. Bacchus, in a comely human form, is brought manacled before him. The king, thinking that now he cannot escape, leisurely contemplates the prisoner, and is greatly struck by his appearance :—

“ There’s beauty, stranger ! woman-witching beauty
 (Therefore thou art in Thebes) in thy soft form ;
 Thy fine bright hair, not coarse like the hard athletes,
 Is mantling o’er thy cheek warm with desire ;
 And carefully thou hast cherished thy white skin ;
 Not in the sun’s soft beams, but in cool shade,
 Wooing soft Aphroditè with thy loveliness.”

Then follows a close examination of the fair-visaged sorcerer about his race, his orgies, and his purpose in coming to Thebes, and at the end of it he is sent off to the “royal stable,”—

“ That he may sit in midnight gloom profound :
 There lead thy dance ! But those thou hast hither led,
 Thy guilt’s accomplices, we’ll sell for slaves ;
 Or, silencing their noise and beating drums,
 As handmaids to the distaff set them down.”

Bacchus does not long remain in the dark stable. He appears, “a god-confest,” to his worshippers, who are prostrate on the ground, alarmed by the destruction of the palace of Pentheus. They ask how he obtained his freedom ; he replies :—

“ Myself, myself delivered—with ease and effort slight.
Cho. Thy hands, had he not bound them, in halters
 strong and tight ?

Bac. 'Twas even then I mocked him, he thought me
in his chain ;
He touched me not, nor reached me, his idle thoughts
were vain."

Unharméd, unshackled, he again stands before the incensed king. A messenger now arrives—a herdsman from the mountains—who reports that the Bacchanals have broken prison, have defied all attempts to recapture them, are again engaged in their revelries, and have ravaged all the villages and herds that came in their way from the plain to the hill-country. The drama now takes a new turn. Pentheus, his madness fast coming on, admits his late prisoner into his counsels. He will go and witness with his own eyes these hateful orgies : he cannot trust his officers to deal with them. "These women," he says, "without force of arms, I'll bring them in. Give me mine armour." Bacchus offers to be his guide, but tells him that his armour will betray him to the women. He must attire himself in Bacchanalian costume :—

"*Pen.* Lead on and swiftly. Let no time be lost.

Bac. But first enwrap thee in these linen robes.

Pen. What, will he of a man make me a woman?

Bac. Lest they should kill thee, seeing thee as a man."

Here is the true irony of tragedy. Pentheus, who has derided his grandsire and the holy prophet for their unseemly attire and senile folly,—Pentheus, who has threatened to behead the Lydian wizard, and had imprisoned his attendants, is himself persuaded by the god he so abhors to put on the garb of a Bacchanal,

and in that guise to pass through the streets of Thebes. His eagerness to behold the Bacchantes makes him insensible to the indignity of the situation. He asks—

“What is the second portion of my dress ?

Bac. Robes to thy feet, a bonnet on thy head ;
A fawn-skin and a thyrsus in thy hand.”

He takes for his guide to the mountains the handsome stranger whom he had so recently ordered to sit in darkness and prepare for death : he is even obsequious to him :—

“So let us on : I must go forth in arms,
Or follow the advice thou givest me.”

Bacchus calls to his train, and gives his instructions to them how to deal with their prey, when they have him in the toils :—

“Women ! this man is in our net ; he goes
To find his just doom 'mid the Bacchanals.
Vengeance is ours. Bereave him first of sense ;
Yet be his phrenzy slight. In his right mind
He never had put on a woman's dress ;
But now, thus shaken in his mind, he'll wear it.
A laughing-stock I'll make him for all Thebes,
Led in a woman's dress through the wide city.”

The Chorus respond to the summons of their divine leader in passionate and jubilant strains, and anticipate the doom of their persecuting foe :—

“Slow come, but come at length,
In their majestic strength,
Faithful and true, the avenging deities :

And chastening human folly
 And the mad pride unholy,
 Of those who to the gods bow not their knees.
 For hidden still and mute,
 As glides their printless foot,
 Th' impious on their winding path they hound,
 For it is ill to know,
 Beyond the law's inexorable bound."

Mania now seizes on Pentheus ; two suns he seems to see : a double Thebes : his guide appears to him a horned bull : he recognises among the Bacchic revellers Ino his kinswoman, and Agavè his mother.

The decorum of the Greek stage, or perhaps its imperfect means for representing groups and rapid action, precluded poets generally from bringing before an audience the catastrophe of tragic dramas. Accordingly, we do not see, but are told, by the usual messenger on such occasions, of the miserable end of the proud and impious Theban king. When Bacchus and his victim have climbed one of the spurs of Mount Cithæron, they come

"To a rock-walled glen, watered by a streamlet,
 And shadowed o'er with pines : the Mœnads there
 Sat, all their hands busy with pleasant toil.
 And some the leafy thyrsus, that its ivy
 Had dropped away, were garlanding anew :
 Like fillies some, unharnessed from the yoke,
 Chanted alternate all the Bacchic hymn."

But Pentheus cannot, from the level on which he has halted, see the whole Bacchante troop : he desires to mount on a bank or a tall tree, in order that

"Clearly he may behold their deeds of shame."

Then says the messenger,—

“A wonder then I saw that stranger do.”

“He bent the stem of a tall ash-tree, and dragged it to earth till it was bent like a bow. He seated Pentheus on a bough, and then let it rise up again, steadily and gently, so that my master should not fall as it mounted. Raised to this giddy height, 'tis true, he saw the women, but they too saw him, and speedily brought him down to the ground on which they were standing. But before they did so, the stranger had vanished, and a voice was heard from the heavens proclaiming in clear ringing tones :—

“Behold ! I bring,
O maidens, him that you and me, our rites,
Our orgies laughed to scorn. Deal now with him
E'en as you list, and take a full revenge.”

The presence of the god, though unseen, was announced by a column of bright flame reddening the sky, and an awful stillness fell on Cithæron and its dark pine-groves. A second shout proclaimed the deity, and the daughters of Cadmus sprang to their feet and rushed forth with the speed of doves on the wing. Down the torrent's bed, down from crag to crag they leaped—“mad with the god.” Agavè led on her kin, and at first assailed the seat of Pentheus with idle weapons :—

“First heavy stones they hurled at him,
Climbing a rock in front : the branches of the ash
Darted at some : and some, like javelins,
Sent their sharp thyrsi shrilling through the air,

Pentheus their mark ; but yet they struck him not,
His height still baffling all their eager wrath."

At length Agavè cried to her train, "Tear down the tree, and then we'll grasp the *beast*"—for her too had the god made blind—"that rides thereon." A thousand hands uprooted the tree, and Pentheus fell to the ground, well knowing that his end was near. It was his mother's hand that seized him first. In vain, dashing off his bonnet, he cried,—

"I am thy child, thine own, my mother."

She knew him not, and

"Caught him in her arms, seized his right hand,
And, with her feet set on his shrinking side,
Tore out the shoulder."

"Ino, Autonoe, and all the rest dismembered him ; one bore away an arm, one a still sandalled foot : others rent open his sides : none went without some spoil of him whom, possessed by Bacchus, they deemed a lion's cub. With these bloody trophies of their prey they are now marching to Thebes : for my part, I fled at the sight of this dark tragedy."

The procession of the Bacchantes to the "seven-gated city" is ushered in by a choral song :—

"Dance and sing
In Bacchic ring ;
Shout, shout the fate, the fate of gloom
Of Pentheus, from the dragon born ;
He the woman's garb hath worn,
Following the bull, the harbinger that led him to his doom.

O ye Theban Bacchanals !
 Attune ye now the hymn victorious,
 The hymn all-glorious,
 To the tear, and to the groan :
 O game of glory !
 To bathe the hands besprent and gory
 In the blood of her own son."

Believing that she is bringing a lion's head to affix to the walls of the temple, she bears in her arms that of Pentheus, and in concert with the Chorus celebrates in song her ghastly triumph :—

" *Agavè.* O ye Asian Bacchanals !
Chorus. Who is she on us who calls ?
Agavè. From the mountains, lo ! we bear
 To the palace gate
 Our new-slain quarry fair.
Chorus. I see, I see, and on thy joy I wait.
Agavè. Without a net, without a snare,
 The lion's cub, I took him there."

But Cadmus soon undeceives her. He has been to Cithæron to collect the remains of his grandson which the Bacchanals had left behind ; and Agavè, restored to her senses, discerns in her gory burden the head of Pentheus her son. At the close of this fearful story Bacchus appears and informs Cadmus of his doom :—

" Thou, father of this earth-born race,
 A dragon shalt become ; thy wife shall take
 A brutish form at last."

However, after cycles of time have gone by, Cadmus and his wife Harmonia shall resume their human forms, and be borne by Mars to the Isles of the Blest.

That a tragedy in some respects so un-Hellenic and so Oriental in its character should have been well known and highly estimated in the East, is not to be wondered at. Perhaps not the least memorable application of "The Bacchanals" to new circumstances is that mentioned by Plutarch in his 'Life of Crassus.' Great joy was there in the camp of Surenas, the Parthian general, one summer evening, for Crassus the Roman proconsul and the greater part of his army had been slain or taken prisoners, and the residue of the broken legions was hurrying back to the western bank of the Euphrates. Crassus himself lay a headless corpse. To gratify his victorious soldiers, Surenas exhibited a burlesque of a Roman triumph. Himself and his staff feasted in the commander's tent. To the door of the banquetting-hall the head of the Roman general was borne by a Greek actor from Tralles, who introduced it with some appropriate verses from "The Bacchanals" of Euripides. The bloody trophy was thrown at the feet of Surenas and his guests, and the player, seizing it in his hands, enacted the last scene—the frenzy of Agavè and the mutilation of Pentheus.

CHAPTER VII.

ION. — HIPPOLYTUS.

“ ‘Sweet is the holiness of youth’—so felt
Time-honoured Chaucer, when he framed that lay
By which the Prioress beguiled the way,
And many a Pilgrim’s rugged heart did melt.”

—WORDSWORTH.

So long as the Athenians were a second-rate power in Greece they were content with a military adventurer for the founder of the Ionian race. In a war between Athens and Eubœa, one Xuthus had done them good service; his recompense for it was the hand of the Eretheid princess Creusa, and the issue of the marriage was Ion, from whom the Athenians claimed, remotely, to descend. But when, after the decline of Argos, they had risen to a level with Corinth and Sparta, they aspired to the honour of a divine ancestry on the spear-side, as well as that of a royal one on the spindle. A wandering soldier no longer sufficed: the son of Creusa must not be born in mortal wedlock, but derive his origin from a god. And what deity—in this matter the virgin Pallas Athene was out of the question—was so

fitted by his various gifts to be the forefather of so accomplished a people as the patron of music, poetry, medicine, and prophecy? To set before his fellow-citizens, as well as the strangers and allies who sat in the Dionysiac theatre, the pedigree of the Ionians, and consequently of the Athenians also, Euripides probably composed his "Ion."

Creusa is the daughter of Erectheus, an old autochthonic king of Athens. She has borne a son to Apollo; but through fear of her parents was compelled to leave him, immediately after his birth, in a cave under the Acropolis. The divine father, however, does not abandon the infant, but employs Mercury to transport him to Delphi, and to deposit him on the steps of the temple, where he knows the babe will be cared for. One of the vestals—apparently even then middle-aged, since she is old in the play—finds Ion, and fulfils his sire's expectations. She has, indeed, her own thoughts on the matter, but keeps them to herself until a convenient season comes for disclosing them. In the Delphian temple the foundling receives an education resembling that of the infant Samuel. He thus describes his functions:—

"My task, which from my early infancy
Hath been my charge, is with these laurel boughs
And sacred wreaths to cleanse the vestibule
Of Phœbus, on the pavements moistening dews
To rain, and with my bow to chase the birds
Which would defile the hallowed ornaments.
A mother's fondness and a father's care
I never knew; the temple of the god
Claims then my service, for it nurtured me"

He receives the strangers who come to consult the oracle or to see the wonders of the shrine, and shows himself, by turns, an expert ritualist or a polite *cicerone*. Centuries later, Ion would have had his place among the youthful ascetics who, by the beauty of their lives, and sometimes of their persons also, adorned the church and edified or rebuked the world. But this early Basil or Gregory of Delphi had other work destined for him than serving at the altar or waiting on pilgrims. He will have to go out of "religion" into the haunts of men: the privilege of celibacy is denied him; his ephod he must exchange for a breastplate, his laurel wreath for a plumed helmet. The name of Ion is due to an illustrious race.

Of all extant Greek dramas, this beautiful one, though easy for readers to understand, is the most complex in its action, and possibly may have kept the original spectators of it, in spite of the information given by Mercury in the prologue, in suspense up to its very last scene. In fact, the principal characters are all at cross-purposes. Creusa has come to Delphi on the pretext that a friend of hers is anxious to learn what has become of a son whom she has borne to Apollo—her own story transferred to another. Her husband Xuthus is there to ask advice from the neighbouring oracle of Trophonius by what means Creusa and himself may cease to be childless. While he goes on his errand, his wife encounters Ion in the fore-court of the temple, and their conversation begins with the following words:—

“*Ion.* Lady, whoe’er thou art, that liberal air
Speaks an exalted mind : there is a grace,
A dignity in those of noble birth,
That marks their high rank. Yet I marvel much
That from thy closed lids the trickling tear
Watered thy beauteous cheeks, soon as thine eye
Beheld this chaste oracular seat of Phœbus.
What brings this sorrow, lady? All besides,
Viewing the temple of the god, are struck
With joy; thy melting eye o’erflows with tears.

Creusa. Not without reason, stranger, art thou seized
With wonder at my tears; this sacred dome
Wakens the sad remembrance of things past.”

In a long dialogue she communicates to her unknown son part of her own story, and by casting some reflections on the god for his conduct to her supposed friend, incurs a rebuke from the fair young acolyte. The Chorus remarks that mankind are very unlucky—they rarely get what they wish for:—

“ One single blessing
By any one through life is scarcely found.”

And *Creusa*, not at all abashed by *Ion*’s remonstrance, proceeds to complain of *Apollo*’s conduct towards herself and their son.

Xuthus now returns from the *Trophonian* crypt with good news for his wife and himself. *Trophonius*, indeed, being a very subordinate deity, “held it unmeet to forestall the answer of a superior one;” “but,” says *Xuthus*,—

“ One thing he told me,
That childless I should not return, nor thou,
Home from the oracle;”

and then goes into the adytum to learn his fortune.

Ion again expresses his surprise at the strange lady's shrewish, and indeed as he thinks it, rather impious, language; but says, "What is the daughter of Erechtheus to me? let me to my task." He admits, however (infected apparently by Creusa's boldness), that his patron has acted unhandsomely to some virgin or other:

"Becoming thus

By stealth a father, leaving then his children
To die, regardless of them."

Xuthus reappears, with this command from the Pythoness: "The first male stranger whom you meet, address as your son." Of course the stranger is Ion; but being greeted with the words, "Health to my son!" by one whom he has never before set eyes on, he is far more offended than pleased by this unlooked-for salutation; and, not at all unreasonably, all things considered, he recoils, when Xuthus proceeds to embrace him, and asks—

"Art thou, stranger,

Well in thy wits; or hath the god's displeasure
Bereft thee of thy reason?"

He, a minister of the temple, objects to being thus claimed as so near of kin by a man whose business there he has yet to learn: he says, "Hands off, friend—they'll mar the garlands of the god;" and adds, "If you keep not your distance, you shall have my arrow in your heart:"—

"I am not fond of curing wayward strangers
And mad men."

“If you kill me,” replies Xuthus, “you will kill your father.” “You my father!” cries Ion; “how so? It makes me laugh to hear you.” A strict examination of the father by the son ensues; and at last, neither of the disputants being very critical, and both very devout, the sudden relationship is accepted with full faith by both, and they tenderly embrace each other. Xuthus then imparts to Ion his purpose of taking him to Athens, but of concealing their position for a while. His wife, he argues, may not be greatly pleased at being so suddenly provided with a ready-made son and heir. She comes of a royal house, and so is particular on the score of “blue blood.” The youngster, if adopted, will inherit her property. The discovery of him may be all very well for her husband, who, having once been a wanderer, may, for all she knows, have a son in many towns, Greek or barbaric. But how will this treasure-trove remove from herself the reproach of barrenness? There is, too, such a thing as *pre-nuptial* as well as *post-nuptial* jealousy; and though so comely, gracious, and religious a youth cannot fail, after a time, to ingratiate himself even with a step-mother, there may be much domestic controversy before so desirable a consummation is possible. Xuthus then informs Ion that he intends to celebrate this joyful event by a sacrifice to Apollo, and by a general feast to the Delphians:—

“At my table

Will I receive thee as a welcome guest,
And cheer thee with the banquet, then conduct thee
To Athens with me as a visitant.”

On leaving the stage he tells the Chorus, who, of course, have heard the real story, to keep what they know to themselves. If they let his wife into the secret they shall surely die; and, inasmuch as they are Athenian women, Xuthus has the right to threaten, as well as the means to keep his promise. For one who has seen so much of the world, it argues much simplicity in Xuthus to have imagined that even the fear of death will insure silence in some people. Creusa is very soon made aware by her female attendants of her husband's scheme for deceiving her, and she behaves exactly as he had foreseen she would. She re-enters, accompanied by an aged servant of her house: when the Chorus enlighten her on every point except one—the name of Ion's mother; and “the venerable man” is exactly the instrument needed by an indignant woman, for

“It is the curse of kings to be attended
By slaves that take their humours for a warrant
To break within the bloody house of life.”*

“We,” says the prompter of evil, “by thy husband are betrayed.” This comes of unequal marriages. Of him we know as little as of his new-found bantling:—

“Xuthus
Came to the city and thy royal house,
And wedded thee, all thy inheritance
Receiving. By some other woman now
Discovered to have children privately—
How privately I'll tell thee—when he saw

* “King John,” act iv. sc. 2.

Thou hadst no child, it pleased him not to bear
 A fate like thine ; but by some favourite slave,
 His paramour by stealth, he hath a son.
 Him to some Delphian gave he, distant far,
 To educate, who, to this sacred house
 Consigned, as secret here, received his nurture.
 He, knowing this, and that his son advanced
 To manhood was, urged thee to come hither,
 Pleading thy barrenness. 'Twas not the god,
 But Xuthus, who deceived thee, and long since
 Devised this wily plan to rear his son.
 Failing, he could on Phœbus fix the blame,
 Succeeding, would adroitly choose the time
 To make him ruler of thy rightful land."

The servant—loyal to his mistress as Evan dhu Maccombich was to Fergus MacIvor, equally ready to die for her, or to do murder to avenge her imagined wrongs—devises a plot that would have been quite successful had not Apollo been on the watch. Creusa is in possession of a deadly poison—"two drops of blood that from the Gorgon fell"—given to her father Erectheus by Pallas. One heals disease, the other works certain and swift death. The princess proposes to poison her stepson when he is beneath her roof. "I like not that," says the servant. "There you will be the first to be suspected ; a stepdame's hate is proverbial." To this Creusa agrees, and, anticipating the old vassal's thought, she herself prescribes the mode of destroying the son of Xuthus :—

"This shalt thou do : this little golden casket
 Take from my hand. Bear it beneath thy vest.
 Then, supper ended, when they 'gin to pour

Libations to the gods, do thou infuse
 The drop in the youth's goblet. Take good heed
 That none observe thee. Drug his cup alone
 Who thinks to lord it o'er my house. If once
 It pass his lips, his foot shall never reach
 Athens' fair city; death awaits him here."

After a choral ode has been sung, a breathless attendant rushes in and demands where Creusa is. The plot has failed; the old man has been arrested; he has confessed the deed; and the rulers of Delphi are in hot pursuit of his accomplice, that she may die overwhelmed with stones. "How were our dark devices brought to light?" the Chorus inquires. Then, as usual on the Greek stage, and also in the French classical drama, a long narrative instructs the spectators of what has taken place. Up to a certain point all went well. Ion's chalice was drugged fur- tively. The destined victim poured his libation, and was just about to drink, when some one chanced to utter a word of ill omen, and so Ion poured his wine on the floor, and bade the other guests do the like. The cups are now replenished; but in the pause that ensued between the first and second filling of them, a troop of doves, such as haunt the dome of the temple, came fluttering in, and drank from the wine-pools on the ground. The spilt wine was harmless to all save one. That one drank of the deadly draught poured out by Ion:—

"Straight, convulsive shiverings seized
 Her beauteous plumes, around in giddy rings
 She whirled, and in a strange and mournful note

Seemed to lament : amazement seized the guests,
Seeing the poor bird's pangs : her breast heaved thick,
And, stretching out her scarlet legs, she died."

Creusa now hurries in : she has been doomed to death by the Pythian Council, and her executioner is to be Ion himself : she clasps the altar of Apollo, but that sanctuary will not avail her, for has she not attempted the life of one of the god's ministers ? In reply to her appeals for life, Ion says :—

"The good,
Oppressed by wrongs, should at those hallowed seats
Find refuge : ill becomes it that th' unjust
And just alike should seek protection there."

But now the old prophetess, who had years before preserved the infant Ion, having learnt that he is soon to leave the Delphian shrine, produces the swaddling-clothes, the ornaments, and the basket, in which his mother had clad and laid him in the cave under the Acropolis. They may help him, she thinks, some day, to discover the secret of his birth. While her son is examining these tokens, Creusa sees them too, and claims them as the work of her own hands. As Ion unfolds, one by one, the tiny robes, she names, without first seeing them, the subjects which were embroidered on each of them. The recognition is complete. Creusa embraces her long-lost son, and now hesitates not to acknowledge that Apollo is his father. If any doubt remained even on the part of Xuthus, who indeed is not an eyewitness of the discovery, it is dispersed by the speech of Minerva. She ex-

plains the reasons for concealment hitherto, and the cause for disclosure now: bids Creusa take her son to the land of Cecrops, and there seat him on the throne of his grandsire Erectheus. She concludes with a prediction of the fortunes of the Ionian race, and of the Dorians, who are to descend from Dorus, a son she is to bear to Xuthus. And thus Apollo is absolved from wrong, and Creusa rejoices in the prospect of becoming the mother of two Greek nations, and these the rival leaders of the Hellenic world.

Should this exquisitely beautiful play be ranked among tragedies or comedies? Neither title exactly suits it. Rather is it a melodrama. And but for a few ceremonies inherent in or necessary to the Greek stage, might it not be almost accounted the work of a modern poet? The complexity of the fable, the rapid transitions in the action, the picturesque beauty of the scenes, and the domestic nature of the emotions it excites, have a far less classic than romantic stamp. For the long speech of the attendant who describes the manner in which the plot against the life of the hero is baffled, substitute a representation on the stage of the banquet—cancel the prologue spoken by Mercury, and the winding-up scene in which Minerva appears—and then, even without omitting the Chorus, there will remain a mixed drama which neither Calderon nor Shakespeare might have disdained to own. Perhaps the modern air that we attribute to it may have been among the reasons for the comparative neglect of the “*Ion*” by the ancient critics—nay even, it might seem, by those who witnessed the performance of it. But neither the date of

its production nor the trilogy of which it formed a part is known. It may be, as regards "its general composition, more pleasing than powerful." We agree, however, entirely with Mr Paley, when he says: "none of his plays so clearly show the fine mind of Euripides, or impress us with a more favourable idea of his virtuous and human character."

HIPPOLYTUS.

The play which has just been surveyed is of a religious character, and the "Hippolytus" is coupled with it, because, although dealing with human passion far more than the "Ion," the principal character in it is also that of a devotee. However philosophical or sceptical Euripides may have been in his theological opinions, no one of the Greek dramatic poets surpassed him in the delineation of piety and reverence for the gods; and he seems to have delighted especially in portraying the effect of such feelings upon pure and youthful minds. If, indeed, fear rather than love of the gods be essential to devotion, then Æschylus must be accounted a far more pious writer than Euripides. The Calvinists of criticism will naturally prefer gloom and terror, inexorable Fates and all-powerful Furies, to the humane, benign, and rational sentiments which consist with the attributes of mercy and justice. We neither expect nor desire to reconcile these opposite factions further than may be necessary for a statement of the claims of the younger poet to a fair hearing.

“Ion” and “Hippolytus” are each of them examples of youthful virtue: the latter has, or at least displays, the more enthusiastic temperament, which, however, is drawn out from him by the greater severity of his lot. Yet we can easily conceive the votary of the chaste Diana passing through life quite as contentedly in her service as Ion would have passed his days as a minister of Apollo. It was the hard destiny of the son of Theseus to have incurred the heavy displeasure of one goddess through his earnest devotion to another. The life-battle he has to fight is indeed really a contest between two rival divinities; and were second titles possible in Greek plays, this affecting and noble tragedy might be entitled “Hippolytus, or the Contest between Venus and Diana.”

As the plot of the “Hippolytus” is, through the “Phédre” of Racine, probably better known to English readers than the more complicated fable of the “Ion,” it may be sufficient to state it briefly, and to direct attention rather to the characters than the story. The hero is the son of Theseus, king of Athens, by the Amazonian Hippolyta, whom Shakespeare has sketched in his “Midsummer Night’s Dream.” His boyish years have been passed at Troezen with his grandfather, the pure-minded Pittheus. While under his roof, Hippolytus devotes himself to the worship of Diana: like her he delights in the chase; like her also he shuns the snares of love or the chains of wedlock. Excelling in all manly exercises, and adorned with every virtue, he unhappily not merely neglects Venus, but irritates her by open expressions of contempt for

herself and her rites : and he owes to this pride or exclusive zeal the hideous ruin which engulfs him. The offended goddess sets forth in the prologue her determination to destroy Diana's favourite, and gives her reasons for it. She says :—

“ Those that reverence my powers I favour,
But I confound all who think scorn of me.
For even divinity is fashioned thus—
It joys in mortal honours.”

“ He may consort with the huntress, he may follow his swift dogs, he may shun fellowship with men, as much as he likes—of his tastes I reckon not : what I cannot overlook is his personally offensive conduct to myself, ‘ a goddess not inglorious,’ and accounted by mortals generally as not the least potent of Olympians. The means of revenge are not far to seek. Phædra, his young and beauteous stepmother, is pining for love of him, and through her unhappy passion he shall be struck : “ with her I have no quarrel,” says the goddess—

“ Yet let her perish :
I have not for her life that tenderness
As not to wreak just vengeance on my foes.”

The prologue ended, Venus disappears, and Hippolytus and his retinue of huntsmen enter, singing a hymn to Diana. When it is finished, he thus addresses the goddess—an invocation which has been thus beautifully paraphrased :—

“ Thou maid of maids, Diana, the goddess whom he fears,
Unto thee Hippolytus this flowery chaplet bears ;

From meadows where no shepherd his flock a-field e'er
drove,

From where no woodman's hatchet hath woke the echoing
grove,

Where o'er the unshorn meadow the wild bee passes free,

Where by her river-haunts dwells virgin Modesty ;

Where he who knoweth nothing of the wisdom of the
schools

Beareth in a virgin heart the fairest of all rules ;

To him 'tis given all freely to cull those self-sown flowers,

But evil men must touch not pure Nature's sacred
bowers.

This to his virgin mistress a virgin hand doth bear—

A wreath of unsoiled flowers to deck her golden hair.

For such alone of mortals can unto her draw nigh,

And with that guardian Goddess hold solemn converse
high.

He ever hears the voice of his own virgin Queen,

He hears what others hear not, and sees her though
unseen ;

He holds his virgin purpose in freedom unbeguiled,

To age and death advancing in innocence a child." *

—(Isaac Williams.)

Hippolytus is warned by his henchman that he is incurring danger by his total neglect of Venus ; but he replies only by a rather contumelious remark that " I salute her from afar ;" " some with this god and some with that have dealings ;" and then the master and his men depart to a banquet. We pass onward to Phædra's entrance, which is announced by her ancient nurse, much such an accommodating personage as the

* With this exception, all the translated passages in this chapter are taken from Mr Maurice Purcell Fitzgerald's admirable version of "The Crowned Hippolytus."

nurse in "Romeo and Juliet," although far more mischievous. She describes the strange malady of her mistress, and her own weary watching by the sufferer's couch. Phædra breaks out into frenzied song :—

"Lift up my body,
 Straighten my head,
 Hold up the hands
 And arms of the dead ;
 The joints of my limbs are loosened,
 The veil on my brow is like lead.
 Take it off, take it off, let the clustering curls
 On my shoulders be spread."

She pants for cooling streams and the whispering sound of shadowing poplars, and longs to stretch her limbs in repose on the verdurous meadow. Next comes an access of fever, and she breaks forth into wilder strains :—

"Send me, send me to the mountain : I will wander to
 the wood,
 Where the dogs amid the pine-copse track and tear the
 wild beast's brood ;
 I will hang upon his traces where the dappled roebuck
 bounds :
 I yearn, by all the gods, I yearn to halloo to the hounds,
 To poise the lance of Thessaly above my yellow hair,
 And to loose my hand and lightly launch the barbed point
 through air."

After more wild song and as wild speeches to the nurse, her secret is at length drawn from her ; and that faithful but unscrupulous attendant reveals it,

under an oath of secrecy, to Hippolytus. Diana's worshipper, shocked at the disclosure, discourses on the profligacy of women in general, and determines to absent himself for a while until Theseus returns to Troezen, with the intention, as Phædra and her nurse believe, of disclosing to his father his wife's infidelity. Overwhelmed by shame and despair, Phædra hangs herself, but suspends from her neck a letter in which she accuses Hippolytus of making dishonourable proposals to her. Theseus, on his return from an oracle he had been consulting, finds his wife a lifeless corpse, and believes in his son's guilt. Him he curses as a base hypocrite, who, affecting to worship the chaste goddess, has attempted to commit a crime that even Venus would scarcely sanction. His supposed father Neptune, in an evil moment, had once given Theseus three fatal curses, one of which he now hurls at his innocent son. Hippolytus now turns his back for ever on his father's house: weeping, and attended by his weeping friends, he drives slowly and sadly along the sea-beach. The curse comes upon him in the form of a monster sent by Neptune. A messenger brings the tidings to Theseus. "There came," he says, "when we had passed the frontier of this realm of Troezen,—

“ A sound, as if some bolt from Zeus
Made thunder from the bowels of the earth—
A heavy hollow boom, hideous to hear.
A sudden fear fell on our youthful hearts
Whence came this awful voice: till with fixed gaze
Watching the sea-beat ridges, we beheld

A mighty billow lifted to the skies ;
 And with the billow, at the third great sweep
 Of mountain surge, the sea gave up a bull,
 Monster of aspect fierce, whose bellowings
 Filled all the earth, that echoed back the roar
 In tones that made us shudder."

The terrified horses become unmanageable ; and
 though

"Our lord, in all their ways long conversant,
 Grasped at their reins, and, throwing back his weight,
 Pulled hard, as pulls a sailor at the oar ;
 They, with set jaws gripping the tempered bits,
 Whirl along heedless of the master's hand,"—

until Hippolytus is dragged and dashed against the
 rocks, and lies a broken and bleeding body from
 which the spirit is rapidly fleeing. He is borne into
 his father's presence, torn, mangled, and bleeding, to
 die. But Theseus, still crediting Phædra's false letter,
 rejoices in his son's fate, although he alone believes
 him guilty. The messenger, indeed, bluntly tells the
 king that he is deceived :—

"Yet to one thing I never will give credence,
 That this thy son has done a deed of baseness,—
 Not should the whole of womankind go hang,
 And score the pines of Ida with their letters,
 Because I know—I know that he is noble."

Diana, it may seem to the reader, is far from being
 a help to her devoted friend and worshipper in his
 time of trouble. The cause she assigns for her ina-
 bility to save him gives a curious insight into the

comity of the ancient gods. She tells Theseus that his sin is rank, yet not quite unpardonable :—

“ For Cypris willed that these things should be so
 To glut her rage ; and this with gods is law,
 That none against another’s will resists
 Or offers hindrance, but we stand aloof.
 Else be assured, had not the fear of Zeus
 Deterred me, I had not so sunk in shame
 As to let die the dearest unto me
 Of mortal men.”

She then shows to Theseus how widely he has erred. Next follows a most affecting scene of reconciliation between the distracted father and his dying son. Diana soothes the last moments of Hippolytus by a promise that he shall be worshipped with highest honours at Troezen :—

“ For girls unwed, before their marriage-day,
 Shall offer their shorn tresses at thy shrine,
 And dower thee through long ages with rich tears ;
 And many a maid shall raise the tuneful hymn
 In praise of thee, and ne’er shall Phædra’s love
 Perish in silence and be left unsung.”

The “ Hippolytus ” was produced in B.C. 428. In the previous year Pericles died of the plague, which for some months longer continued to rage in Athens. To the pestilence and the death of the greatest of Attic statesmen there are palpable allusions in this tragedy, which to contemporary spectators cannot fail to have been deeply affecting. The nurse of Phædra bewails her lot as an attendant on a suffering mistress :—

“ Alas for mortal woes !
Alas for fell disease !
Better be sick than be the sick one’s nurse ;
Sickness is sickness, nothing worse ;
Nursing is sorrow in double kind,
Sorrow of toiling hands, sorrow of troubled mind.
Our troubles know no healing.”

And the final stave of the choral song unmistakably refers to Pericles :—

“ Upon all in the city alike
This sudden sorrow will strike.
There will be much shedding of tears.
When evil assails the great
Many bewail his fate ;
Grief for him grows with the years.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PHŒNICIAN WOMEN.—THE SUPPLIANTS.—THE CHILDREN OF HERCULES.—THE PHRENZY OF HERCULES.

“Both tugging to be victors, breast to breast,
Yet neither conqueror nor conquerèd ;
So is the equal poise of this fell war.”

—“Henry VI.,” 3d Part.

EVEN did space permit, it is unnecessary to dwell minutely upon several of the plays of Euripides. The seven extant dramas of Æschylus and the same number of those of Sophocles deserved and admitted of analysis, and already seven pieces of their rival's have passed under review. Of the ten which remain, some were occasional plays ; others have apparently no connection with one another, even did we happen to know the trilogy to which they belonged. Of these, some would seem to have been composed for a special purpose—either local, as complimentary to Athens, or political, with a view to the affairs of Greece when they were produced. For English readers they retain little interest ; yet although their merits as dramas are slight, they, like all the author's writings, contain

some admirable poetry, or some effective scenes and situations.

In the "Phœnician Women," Euripides displays some of his greatest defects in the construction of a tragedy, and some of his most conspicuous beauties as a pathetic and picturesque writer. As to its plot, it is cumbrous; and, what is still worse, he competes in it with the "Antigone" of Sophocles and the "Seven against Thebes" of Æschylus. Jocasta, who in "Edipus the King" destroys herself, is alive again in this drama. The brothers, whose rivalry and death by each other's hand were familiar to all, repeat their duel, and the devotion of Antigone to her blind father and her younger brother is brought or rather crammed into it at the end. We have, in fact, almost a trilogy pressed into a single member of it, and in consequence the "Phœnician Women" is, with the exception of the "Edipus at Colonus," the longest of extant Greek tragedies. Euripides forgot the sound advice given by the poetess Corinna to her youthful rival, Pindar. He had been, she thought, too profuse in his mythological stories, and therefore advised him for the future "to sow with the hand and not with the sack."

As the story of the "Phœnician Women" has in the main been already told in the volume of this series devoted to Æschylus, and also as many English readers are acquainted with the "Frères Ennemis" of Racine, it is not perhaps necessary to detail again the tale of Eteocles and Polynices. It will suffice to present a portion of one or two scenes, so as to give some idea of the pure ore that lies embedded in this tragical

conglomerate. The scene in which the old servant of the royal house leads Antigone to a tower whence she gazes upon the Argive host encamped around Thebes, even though it is borrowed from that book of the Iliad in which Helen surveys from the walls of Troy the Achæan chieftains, exhibits a master's hand. The servant can point out to his young mistress the leaders of the Argives, and describe the blazonry of their shields, because he has been in their camp, when he took to Polynices the offer of a truce. After carefully exploring the ground to make sure that no Theban is in sight, whose gaze might light on the maiden, he says to her :—

“ Come then, ascend this height, let thy foot tread
 These stairs of ancient cedar, thence survey
 The plains beneath : see what an host of foes
 At Dirce's fount encamp, and stretch along
 The valley where Ismenus rolls his stream.”

Antigone, at her first view from the palace-roof, exclaims :—

“ Awful Diana, virgin goddess, see
 The field all brass glares like the lightning's blaze.”

The old man then points out to her the captains of the numerous host which Polynices has led thither to assert his rights. Among other heroes, he singles out one as likely to interest his young mistress. “ Seest thou,” he says,

“ That chief now passing o'er the stream
 Of Dirce ?

Antig. Different he, of different guise
His arms. Who is the warrior ?

Phor. Tydeus he,
The son of Œneus.

Antig. What ! the prince who made
The sister of my brother's bride his choice ?”

The young and graceful Parthenopæus, the proud boaster Capaneus, and Hippomedon, that “haughty king,” are pointed out ; but Antigone casts only a passing glance on these, and yearns to behold her brother. “Where is my Polynices, tell me ?” “He is standing there near the tomb of Niobe,” is the reply. “I see him, but indistinctly,” says the princess ; “I see the semblance of his form :”—

“O could I, like a rible-moving cloud,
Fly through the air, borne on the wingèd winds,
Fly to my brother : I would throw my arms
Round his dear neck, unhappy youth, so long
An exile. Mark him, good old man, O mark
How graceful in his golden arms he stands,
And glitters like the bright sun's orient rays.

Serv. The truce will bring him hither : in this house
His presence soon will fill thy soul with joy.”

Although not among the leading characters, Menœceus, the son of Creon, Jocasta's brother, is a most interesting one. The prophet Tiresias has declared that Thebes must be taken by the Seven, unless this youth will die for the people. In deep distress Creon implores his son to quit this fatal land. Menœceus, “with an honest fraud,” deceiving his father, freely gives his life. He says :—

“ Were it not base
 While those, whom no compulsion of the gods,
 No oracle demands, fight for their country,
 Should I betray my father, brother, city,
 And like a craven yield to abject fear ?
 No—by Jove’s throne among the golden stars—
 No, by the blood-stained Mars, I’ll take my stand
 Upon the highest battlement of Thebes,
 And from it, as the prophet’s voice gave warning,
 I’ll plunge into the dragon’s gloomy cave,
 And free this suffering land.”

The interview between the brothers is too long for extract, and would be marred by compression. One of the sentiments, however, expressed by the fierce and unjust Eteocles, is so truly in Shakespeare’s vein, that we cannot pass it over. The usurping Theban king says :—

“ For honour I would mount above the stars,
 Above the sun’s high course, or sink beneath
 Earth’s deepest centre, might I so obtain
 This idol of my soul, this worshipt power
 Of regal state ; and to another never
 Would I resign her ; but myself engross
 The splendid honour : it were base indeed
 To barter for low rank a kingly crown.
 And shame it were that he who comes in arms,
 Spreading o’er this brave realm the waste of war,
 Should his rude will enjoy : all Thebes would blush
 At my dishonour, did I, craven-like,
 Shrink from the Argive spear, and to his hand
 Resign my rightful sceptre.”

Hotspur speaks much in the same strain of “honour :”—

“By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon;
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drownèd honour by the locks;
So he, that doth redeem her thence, might wear
Without co-rival all her dignities.”

By the voluntary death of Meneceus victory is on the Theban side. The description of the battle is among the most striking of dramatic war-scenes. A messenger then enters with further tidings. He tells Jocasta that her sons have agreed to spare further shedding of blood, and to decide their quarrel by single combat. Here is a new woe added to the many calamities of the house of Laius. Jocasta hurries to prevent this unnatural duel, but arrives too late. A second messenger then describes the deadly strife in which the brothers have fallen, and also Jocasta's death by her own hands. The bodies of the two fratricides are brought on the stage, and a funeral wail is sung by Antigone and the Chorus. For her a new tragedy is commencing. Reft of her mother, her betrothed Meneceus, and her brothers, she is forbidden by Creon, now become regent of Thebes, to perform the last functions for her dear Polynices. The tragedy concludes with her declaration that man may make cruel laws, and forbid the rites of sepulture, but she will obey a higher law, that of nature, and do meet honour to the dead. That no circumstance of sorrow may be wanting to Antigone's lot, blind, old, dis-crowned Œdipus is sentenced to banishment for

ever from his late kingdom. His sons unrighteously deposed him ; he rashly cursed them in his ire : the curse has been fatal to his whole house, and now falls on his own head. He who, by baffling the Sphinx, won a kingdom, goes forth from it a beggar to eat the bitter bread of exile. With him goes his daughter, the one steadfast star left to guide him on his dark way. The shade of Læius is at length appeased : the sceptre has for ever departed from the house of Labdacus.

“The Suppliants” is, as regards the time of action, a sequel to “The Phœnicians” and “The Seven against Thebes” of Æschylus. Creon persists in denying the rites of sepulture to the fallen Argive chieftains. The commander of that disastrous expedition, Adrastus, now the sole survivor of the seven, hurries to Eleusis on the Athenian border, accompanied by the widows and sons of the slain, and takes refuge at the altar of Demeter. A passage from “The Two Noble Kinsmen” of Fletcher explains far better than the prologue of the Greek tragedy does the errand of the Suppliants :—

“ We are six queens, whose sovereigns fell before
 The wrath of cruel Creon : who endure
 The beaks of ravens, talons of the kites,
 And pecks of crows, in the foul fields of Thebes :
 He will not suffer us to burn their bones,
 To urn their ashes, nor to take th’ offence
 Of mortal loathsomeness from the blest eye
 Of holy Phœbus, but infects the winds
 With stench of our slain lords. Oh, pity, Duke !
 Thou purger of the earth, draw thy feared sword
 That does good turns to the world : give us the bones

Of our dead kings, that we may chapel them,
And of thy boundless goodness take some note
That for our crownèd heads we have no roof
Save this, which is the lion's and the bear's,
And vault for everything."

Through the mediation of Æthra, mother of Theseus, king of Athens, the Suppliants are enabled to bring their wrongs before him. Theseus at first is unwilling to espouse their cause: to do so will embroil Athens in a war with Thebes. He is by no means a cheerful giver of aid: revolving in his soul "the various turns of chance below," he expatiates on the uncertainty of human greatness, and hints that Adrastus himself is an instance of the folly of interfering with other people's business. But Æthra, whose woman's nature is deeply moved by the tears of the widowed queens, will hear of no denial; and Theseus at last, though reluctantly, promises to take up their cause. Just as he is despatching a herald to Creon to demand the bodies of the slain, a Theban messenger comes with a peremptory mandate from Creon that Adrastus and his companions be delivered up. It must be owned that, at this juncture, Theseus is rather a proser. Forgetting the urgency of the case—that dogs and vultures may already be preying on the dead—he discourses on the comparative merits of aristocratic and popular government, and on the sin of refusing burial even to enemies. Theseus in the end consents to do what, to be done well, ought to be done quickly. He sends back the Theban herald, after rating him soundly, with a stern response to his master. He follows at

the herald's heels, defeats Creon, and brings back to Eleusis the bodies of the Argive princes. The Chorus enters in procession, chanting a dirge. Adrastus speaks the funeral oration. The dead are then placed on a pyre, and when it is kindled, Evadne, wife of the boaster Capaneus, leaps on his pile. Finally, a deity appears as mediator. Minerva ratifies a treaty between Argos and Athens, and predicts that, at no distant day, the now worsted Argos will, in its turn, humble the pride of Thebes.

In this tragedy there is a monotony of woe, not relieved, as in the case of "The Trojan Women" of Euripides, by a series of beautiful choral odes and picturesque situations. The red flames of the six funeral pyres, indeed, must have been effective; and a second Chorus of youths, the orphaned sons of the chieftains, have deepened the pathos excited by the suppliant queens. By it the dramatist employed two of his favourite modes of touching the spectators—the aid of women and the introduction of children. Perhaps he had witnessed that sad and solemn spectacle at which Pericles pronounced the encomium over the firstlings of the slain in the Peloponnesian war, and so transferred to a mimic scene the reality of a people's mourning.

"The Children of Hercules" need not detain us long, its drift being very similar to that of the tragedy of "The Suppliants." Apparently it was written at a time when Argos was recovering some of her earlier importance among Dorian states, owing to the strain put upon the resources of Sparta by the length of her

war with Athens. The Argives, it might be feared, were inclined to throw their weight into the scale of Thebes and Lacedæmon, and stood in need of some timely advice. The children of Hercules, hunted by their enemies, and driven to take sanctuary at Marathon, where the scene of action is laid, were sheltered by Athens, and from these fugitives the Argives of the time of Euripides were supposed to descend. Let Argos now bear in mind this good service : let her remember also the many and grievous wrongs done to her by the cruel and faithless Spartans. If Thebes and the Argive government enabled Sparta to enfeeble Athens, and so disturb the balance of power in Greece, who would be the gainer by such league? Who the loser would be it was not difficult to foresee. When was Sparta, in her prosperity, ever faithful to her allies, or even commonly just? What had Thebes ever done for Argos to make alliance with her desirable? Who had been the real benefactors of the Argive people, their kinsfolk in blood, or the Ionians of Attica? With Athens to aid her, she might regain the position she once held among the Dorian race : but if Athens fell she would be as the Messenians were now, little more than an appanage of the kings or ephors of her powerful neighbour.

Passing over this play as historically rather than dramatically interesting to modern readers, we come now to "The Phrenzy of Hercules," which for some fine scenes in it, and some very curious Euripidean theology, deserves attention. It presents no tokens of having

been a hurried or occasional composition. Amphitryon, who delivers the prologue, is, with Megara, the wife of Hercules, and her sons, cruelly treated by Lycus, king, or more properly the usurping tyrant, of Thebes. He, an adventurer from Eubœa, had slain Creon, lord of that city; and to insure himself on his throne, has ordered Megara, Creon's daughter, and her children by Hercules, for execution. Her husband is at the time detained in Hades, whither he has gone on a very hazardous expedition, and his family despair of his return. Lycus, his "wish being father to the thought," is of the same opinion; but fearing that the young Heracleids may some day requite him for the murder of their grandfather Creon, he resolves, like Macbeth, to put his mind at ease by despatching all "Banquo's issue." But on this point both the tyrant and his victims are mistaken, for just as Amphitryon, Megara, and the children, are being led forth to death, Hercules returns, rescues his family, and delivers Thebes from its Eubœan intruder.

The taint of blood, however, is on the redresser of wrongs, and from it he must be purified by sacrifice to the gods. And now a worse foe to Hercules than Lycus had been assails him. Juno, whose ire against Jupiter's and Alcmena's son is as unappeasable as her hatred towards Paris and Troy, is not pleased with the turn matters are taking. It has been of no avail to send the object of her spleen to bring up Cerberus from below. Pluto has not, as she hoped her grimy brother-in-law would have done, clapped him into prison, nor Charon refused him homeward passage over the Styx.

In the "Alcestis" we have had an impersonation of Death; in the drama now before us there is one of Madness (Lyssa), a daughter of Night, who bears the goddess's instructions to render Hercules a maniac. For this errand Madness has no relish: she is more scrupulous than the Queen of Gods. "It is shameful," she says, "to persecute one who has served mankind so well—destroying beasts of prey, and executing justice on many notorious thieves and cut-throats." But Iris, one of the Olympian couriers, tells Lyssa, whom she accompanies, that "Juno is not a person to be trifled with; that unless mortals in future be permitted to beard divinities, Hercules must be made to feel the full weight of celestial wrath. If a god or a goddess be out of temper, even the best and most valiant of men must smart." Reluctantly Lyssa complies with the divine hest. Hercules, while engaged in the expiatory sacrifice, goes suddenly distraught: conceiving them to be foes, he murders his wife and their three sons, narrowly misses sending his earthly father, Amphitryon, to the Shades, and is exhibited, after an interval filled up with a Choric song, bound, as a dangerous lunatic, with cords to a pillar. The bleeding corpses of his household lie before him. Restored to his right mind, he is appalled by his own deed. Theseus, whom Hercules has just before released from durance in Pluto's realm, comes on and offers to his deliverer ghostly consolation. The pair of friends depart for Athens, where the maniac shall be purged of his offence to heaven. Only in the city of the Virgin-goddess can rest and absolution be accorded to him.

In "The Suppliants" we have some insight into the political opinions of its author. In "The Phrenzy of Hercules" there is a glimpse of his theology. Very early in this drama are religious sentiments, not, indeed, of a very consistent nature, introduced. Amphitryon, for example, when his prospects are most gloomy, taxes Jupiter with unfair dealing towards his copartner in marriage, to his daughter-in-law Megara, and to his grandsons. But when Lycus has been slain, then the Chorus proclaims that a signal instance of divine justice has been shown. When Hercules regains his senses, Theseus labours to put his soul at ease by the following arguments :—

"This ruin from none other god proceeds
 Than from the wife of Jove. Well thou dost know
 To counsel others is an easier task
 Than to bear ills : yet none of mortal men
 Escape unhurt by fortune ; not the gods,
 Unless the stories of the bards be false.
 Have they not formed connubial ties, to which
 No law assents ? Have they not galled with chains
 Their fathers through ambition ? Yet they hold
 Their mansions on Olympus, and their wrongs
 With patience bear. What wilt thou say, if thou,
 A mortal born, too proudly shouldst contend
 'Gainst adverse fortune ?"

To which Hercules replies :—

"Ah me ! all this is foreign to my ills.
 I deem not of the gods, as having formed
 Connubial ties to which no law assents,
 Nor as opprest with chains : disgraceful this
 I hold, nor ever will believe that one

Lords it o'er others : of no foreign aid
The God, who is indeed a God, hath need :
These are the idle fables of your bards."

However, he consents to go with Theseus to Athens, and will not add the guilt of suicide to that of homicide.

This play seems at no time to have been a favourite with either spectators or readers. For the former, this dose of Anaxagorean philosophy may have been too strong : for the latter, the piece may have seemed to follow "a course too bloody." Yet among the tragic spectacles on the Athenian stage, that of Hercules bound to a column, with the remains of his wife and children before him, and the terror-stricken looks of Amphytrion and his attendants, was surely one of the most affecting.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TALE OF TROY: HECUBA—THE TROJAN WOMEN.

“ High barrows, without marble, or a name,
A vast untilled and mountain-skirted plain,
And Ida in the distance, still the same,
And old Scamander (if 'tis he) remain ;
The situation seems still formed for fame—
A hundred thousand men might fight again
With ease ; but where I sought for Ilion's walls,
The quiet sheep feeds, and the tortoise crawls.’
—“ Don Juan,” Cant. iv.

ON subjects connected with the Tale of Troy, ten dramas by Euripides, if the “ Rhesus ” be counted among them, are extant, and these represent a small portion only of the themes he drew from the perennial supply of the Homeric poems. The ancient epic, like the modern novel, although widely differing from tragedy in its form and substance, abounds in dramatic material. Many plays, indeed, by Euripides and other dramatic poets of the time, were derived from the Cyclic poets, who either continued the Iliad, and brought the story down to the fall of Troy, or took episodes in it as the groundwork of their dramas. Whether coming from

the main stream or from its branches, the result was the same; and the heroes who espoused the cause of Menelaus were most of them suited for transplantation to the theatre.

Two of the ten plays which have Troy for their subject, directly or indirectly, have been noticed in a previous chapter; another, the "Cyclops," will be examined presently. The "Rhesus," being of uncertain authorship, will be passed over. Of the seven that remain, only a brief sketch can be given. The Two Iphigenias, indeed, might alone suffice to show how well fitted for the genius of their poet was the Lay of Achilles or the Wanderings of Ulysses.

The fire that consumed Priam's capital is still smouldering when the action of the "Hecuba" and the "Trojan Women" begins. The scene of the former of these two tragedies is placed in the Thracian Chersonesus—now the Crimea. The Chorus is composed of Trojan captive women, a few days before the subjects, now the fellow-prisoners, of their queen. In the centre of the stage stands Agamemnon's tent, in a compartment of which Hecuba and her attendants are lodged. The prologue is spoken by her youngest son Polydorus, whom she supposes to be living, but who has been foully murdered by his guardian Polymnestor, the Thracian king. His ghost hovers over the tent, and after informing the audience of the manner of his death, he vanishes just as his aged mother enters on the stage. One more woe is soon imparted to Hecuba by the Chorus. The shade of Achilles has appeared in glittering armour on his tomb, and demanded a

victim. Again the Greek ships are delayed ; again a virgin must be sacrificed before their anchors can be weighed. The young life of Iphigenia was required before the host could leave Aulis ; and now the blood of Polyxena, Priam's youngest daughter, must be shed before the Grecian prows can be turned homewards.

The sacrifice of the daughter is over, when the fate of her son is reported to the miserable mother. An old attendant has been sent to fetch water from the sea, with which Hecuba will bathe—"not for the bridal bed, but for the tomb"—the dead body of Polyxena. The corpse of Polydorus is found by the attendant cast on the sea-beach by the wave. The sum of her woes is now complete. Her other sons have fallen in the war ; no daughter remains to her except the prophetess Cassandra, who is herself the bondwoman of Agamemnon ; and now her last stay is rudely torn from her—her youngest born, her Benjamin, lies dead on the sands. One hope alone remains for her to cherish—the hope of revenge on the murderer of her boy ; and it is speedily gratified. The treacherous guardian comes to the Grecian camp, is inveigled by Hecuba into the tent, and thence thrust forth eyeless and with bleeding visage, by the infuriated mother and her attendants. This, "if not victory, is at least revenge."

The merits of this tragedy have been much canvassed. The plot has been pronounced monstrous, overcharged with woe, and, besides, unskilfully split into two unconnected portions. The immolation of Polyxena and the murder of Polydorus have, it is alleged, no neces-

sary connection with each other. There might have been two plays made out of this single one—the first concluding with the death of the daughter, the second with the vengeance taken for the son. It may be so ; but was that the view of the story taken by Euripides ? May he not have said to objectors, the continuity of my play lies not where you look for it, but in the character of the person from whom it is named ? The double murder of her children is a mere incident in the action ; the unity is to be found in her strong will. Old, feeble, and helpless as she is, the mind of the ex-queen of Troy is never clouded. Suffering even lends her new force to act ; the deeper her woe the more clearly she perceives that all help is vain if it come not from her own dauntless spirit. It is the tragedy of Hecuba, not of Polyxena or Polydorus.

English readers may find an excuse, if one be needed, of which ancient objectors could not avail themselves. For is not the Hecuba of Euripides near of kin, as a dramatic character, to the Queen Margaret of Shakespeare ? Her also accumulated woes strengthen even when they seem to crush. She also is made childless ; she, like her Greek prototype, is a widow and dis-crowned. Yet with what vigour and what disdain does she to the last look down upon her Ulysses, the crafty Duke of Gloucester, and her Agamemnon, the voluptuous Edward ! The description of Polyxena's sacrifice is among the most beautiful and pathetic pictures in the Athenian drama. The herald reports to Hecuba how bravely her daughter has met her doom :—

“The assembled host of Greece before the tomb
 Stood in full ranks at this sad sacrifice—
 Achilles’ son, holding the virgin’s hand
 On the mound’s summit : near to him I stood ;
 Of chosen youths an honourable train
 Were ready there her strugglings to restrain.”

When silence has been proclaimed through the host,
 and libations poured to the shade of Achilles, Pyrrhus
 spoke these words :—

“O son of Peleus, O my father,
 Accept my offering, soothing to the dead ;
 Drink this pure crimson stream of virgin-blood,
 Loose all our cables, fill our sails, and grant
 Swift passage homeward to the Grecian host.”

The people joined in the prayer : Pyrrhus drew from
 its scabbard his golden sword, and

“At his nod
 The noble youths stepped forth to hold the maiden,
 Which she perceiving, with these words addressed them :
 ‘Willing I die ; let no hand touch me ; boldly
 To the uplifted sword I hold my neck.
 You give me to the gods, then give me free.’
 Loud the applause, then Agamemnon cried :
 ‘Let no man touch her :’ and the youths drew back.
 Soon as she heard the royal words, she clasped
 Her robe, and from her shoulder rent it down,
 And bared her snow-white bosom, beauteous
 Beyond the deftest sculptor’s nicest art.
 Then bending to the earth her knee, she said—
 Ear never yet has heard more mournful words—
 ‘If ’tis thy will, young man, to strike this breast,
 Strike ; or my throat dost thou prefer, behold
 It stretched to meet thy sword.’”

Even the "rugged Pyrrhus" is touched with pity,
pauses, and at last reluctantly,

"Deep in her bosom plunged the shining steel.
Her life-blood gushed in streams : yet e'en in death,
Studious of modesty, her beauteous limbs
She covered with her robe."

THE TROJAN WOMEN.

The action of this play takes place a few days before that of the "Hecuba." It is not, properly speaking, a drama, for it has scarcely any fable. "It is," says Dean Milman, "a series of pathetic speeches and exquisite odes on the fall of Troy. What can be more admirable, in the midst of all these speeches of woe and sorrow, than the wild outburst of Cassandra into a bridal song, instead of, as Shakespeare describes her, 'shrilling her dolours forth'!"

"A light ! a light ! rise up, be swift :
I seize, I worship, and I lift
The bridal torches' festal rays,
Till all the burning fane's ablaze !
Hymen, Hymenean king !
Look there ! look there ! what blessings wait
Upon the bridegroom's nuptial state !
And I, how blest, who proudly ride
Through Argos' streets, a queenly bride !
Go thou, my mother ! go !
With many a gushing tear
And frantic shriek of woe.
Wail for thy sire, thy country dear !

I the while, in bridal glee
 Lift the glowing, glittering fire.
 Hymen ! Hymen ! all to thee
 Flames the torch and rings the lyre.
 Bless, O Hecatè, the rite ;
 Send thy soft and holy light
 To the virgin's nuptial bed.
 Lightly lift the airy tread !
 Evan ! Evan ! dance along.
 Holy are the dance and song ;
 Meetest they to celebrate
 My father Priam's blissful fate.
 Beauteous-vested maids of Troy,
 Sing my song of nuptial joy !
 Sing the fated husband led
 To my virgin bridal bed."*

In another choral song, the rejoicing of Troy, at the very moment when the Greeks, coming out from their ambush in the wooden horse, were stealthily creeping to unbar the gates and admit the host from without, is described :—

" Shouted all the people loud
 On the rock-built height that stood—
 ' Come,' they sang, as on they prest,
 ' Come, from all our toil released,
 Lead the blest image to the shrine
 Of her the Jove-born Trojan maid-divine.

O'er the toil, the triumph, spread
 Silent night her curtained shade,
 But Lybian fifes still sweetly rang,
 And many a Phrygian air they sang,

* Dean Milman—"Fragments from the Greek Tragedians," from which volume the following translations are taken.

And maidens danced with lightsome feet
 To the jocund measures sweet,
 And every home was blazing bright,
 As the glowing festal light
 Its rich and ruddy splendour streamed,
 Where high and full the mantling wine-cup beamed.

All at once the cry of slaughter,
 Through the startled city ran ;
 The cowering infants on their mother's breasts
 Folded their trembling hands within her vests ;
 Forth stalked the ambushed Mars, and his fell work began."

"Sad," said the aged Manoah in 'Samson Agonistes,'—

"Sad, but thou knowest to Israelites not saddest,
 The desolation of a hostile city,"

and probably Athenians, who had laid waste many cities, were not displeased by a representation of the destruction of Troy. With great skill, indeed, Euripides has shown that the victors are scarcely less deserving of pity than the vanquished. In every Grecian state during the ten years' siege—and what was true of the Trojan was true also of the Peloponnesian war—many had been made widows and orphans. While the Achæan kings and heroes were encamped on the Trojan strand, their wives have been false to them, usurpers have occupied their thrones, or suitors to their queens have been faring sumptuously at their cost. The prophecies of Cassandra point to further calamities. A bloody bath awaits Agamemnon ; some, like Idomeneus and Diomedes, must take refuge on alien shores ;

thwarting winds and stormy seas will keep for many years from their kingdoms Ulysses and Menelaus ; the greater Ajax has been struck by mania, and falls by his own hand ; and Ajax Teucer will soon be transfixed by a thunderbolt launched by the outraged Minerva. As in several Euripidean tragedies, women play an important part in this one. The daughters of Priam and their attendants are distributed among the black-bearded Achæan captains—Cassandra is allotted to the “king of men ;” Andromache to Pyrrhus, the son of him who slew her husband ; her son Astyanax, lest he prove a second Hector, and avenge his father’s death on Argos or Sparta, is hurled from a tower ; and Hecuba is assigned to Ulysses, whose wiles, quite as much as his compeers’ weapons, have caused the taking of Troy. As in the “Suppliant Women,” fire is employed to render the final scene effective. All of Troy that escaped on the night when it was stormed is now given over to the flames. The tragedy closes with the fall of column and roof, of temple and palace, into a fiery abyss, and by the red light of the conflagration the Trojan women are led off to the Grecian galleys.

Passing over the “Electra,” that the Tale of Troy may not weary English readers, and also because what is good and what is bad in it* would require comment for which there is not room, the “Orestes” comes next in order in this batch of Euripidean tragedies. “The scenes of this drama,” says one who had good right to

* “Magnæ virtutes nec minora vitia” would be an appropriate motto for the “Electra” of Euripides.

speak on the subject of Greek Plays,* “afford one of the most beautiful exhibitions of the domestic affections which even the dramas of Euripides can furnish. To the English reader it may be necessary to say, that the situation at the opening of the drama is that of a brother attended only by his sister during the demoniacal possession of a suffering conscience (or, in the mythology of the play, haunted by Furies), and in circumstances of immediate danger from enemies, and of desertion or cold regard from nominal friends.” As to the Furies, Longinus says that “the poet himself sees them, and what his imagination conceives, he almost compels his audience to see also.” We do not know how the spectators welcomed this tragedy when it was performed; but in later times no one of all the Attic tragedies was so much approved as this one. It is more frequently cited than all the plays of Æschylus and Sophocles put together. The depth of its domestic pathos touched the Grecian world, however it may have affected a Dionysiac audience.

As in the “Libation Bearers” of Æschylus, Orestes has no sooner avenged the most foul and unnatural murder of his father than mania seizes him. When the first scene opens, he is lying haggard, blood-besprent, unshorn, unkempt, and in sordid garments, on a couch, beside which, for six days and six nights, his sister Electra has kept watch. During all that time he has not tasted food: in his lucid intervals he is feeble and fever-stricken; at others he sees in pursuit of him his mother’s vengeful Furies. Menelaus, his uncle,

* De Quincey.

has recently returned from Troy, accompanied by his wife, Helen, and their daughter, Hermione. Here for the wretched maniac appears to be a gleam of hope: for surely one so near of kin cannot fail to aid him against the citizens of Argos who are calling for his death, or at least perpetual banishment as a matricide, taken red-handed. Helen and Electra, after some difference on the subject, agree that Hermione shall go with offerings to Clytemnestra's grave. The Chorus, composed of Argive women, sing round the sick man's bed. Their theme is the alternate ravings and rational moods of Orestes, nor do they omit to celebrate the awful power of the Furies. And now Menelaus enters, but it soon appears that his nephew will have little help from him. He discovers that Orestes and Electra are to be tried on the capital charge of murder on that very day, by the assembled Argive people. The unhappy culprit pleads strongly for his sister and himself, and their just claim for the aid and protection of the Spartan king. A new enemy now appears. Old Tyndareus, the father of Helen and Clytemnestra, arrives, and by his arguments against Orestes, decides his wavering son-in-law to remain neuter in the controversy. By craft and shifts alone will Menelaus take the part of the brother and sister. On his part the enraged Tyndareus will do all he can to procure their condemnation. Pylades, their only friend, urges Orestes to present himself to the assembly, plead his own cause, and if possible, by his eloquence, work on the feelings of his judges. He attends, but fails in obtaining a milder sentence than death—the only concession is, that Elec-

tra and her brother may put themselves to death, and so avoid the indignity, prince and princess as they are, of dying by the hands of a public executioner or an infuriated mob. The condemned pair take a final farewell, when Pylades suggests a mode of revenge on Menelaus. "Helen," he says, "is now within the palace: slay her, and revenge yourselves on your cold-hearted and selfish kinsman. Fear not her guards; they are only a few cowardly and feeble eunuchs." To this proposal Electra adds a most practical amendment. "Killing Helen will avail little: seize Hermione—she is now returning from Clytemnestra's tomb—and hold her as a hostage. Sooner than have his daughter and only child perish, Menelaus will befriend you." They combine both plans: Helen shall be slain; Hermione shall be seized upon. The former escapes their hands: just as the sword is at her throat she vanishes into thin air, and, being of divine origin, henceforth will share the immortality of her brothers, Castor and Pollux. The palace doors are barred against Menelaus, now returned from the assembly; but he beholds Orestes and Pylades, with Hermione between them, on the roof. Her they will slay, and make the palace itself her and their funeral pyre. This is indeed a dead lock. But Apollo appears with Helen floating in the air. By his mandate the crime of blood is cancelled: all shall live; and the remaining years of Orestes, Electra, and Pylades, pass unclouded by woe.

In the "Andromache" Orestes appears once more, but not as a leading character. He might, indeed, were

it not for his relatives Menelaus and Hermione, have been another person so named, since of the hero of so many Greek dramas there is scarcely a trace left, except a disposition to do murder. Most people, after shedding so much human blood as he has done, would be contented with living thenceforward at peace with all men—even his rivals in love. But, on the contrary, this Argive prince contrives in the “*Andromache*” to put out of his way Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, for no better reason than that of coveting Hermione, the Phthian king’s wife, and his own first cousin. We know not whether Apollo grew weary of cleansing of crime; yet to plot and execute a capital offence in the god’s own temple at Delphi can hardly have been other than a severe trial of even divine patience.

As this play appears to have obtained the second prize at the time of its representation, besides furnishing the modern stage with more than one tragedy on the subject, it must be credited with a fair amount of interest for spectators. Yet it may be doubted whether it be equally attractive to readers. All that is material to be known of the plot may be gathered from its representatives—the “*Andromaque*” of Racine, and the “*Distrest Mother*” of Ambrose Philips. The following scene, the most effective as well as touching in this somewhat complicated drama, may afford a sample—and it is a favourable one—of the original.

The heroine from whom the play takes its title is in the power of her enemies, Hermione, wife of Neoptolemus, and her father Menelaus. Bound with cords,

and liberal matron of the *Odyssey*, the mistress of all hearts of the *Iliad*, had hitherto been scurvily treated by our poet. His apology to her memory in the play bearing her name is curious. The purport of it is to show that there had been a fearful mistake made all along by the Greeks. The good-for-nothing Helen, for whom they shed so much blood, was a phantasm, a double, a prank of mischievous deities. The real Helen never went near Ilion,—never injured any one, not even her husband,—but passed the score of years between the visit of Paris to Sparta and the fall of that city in a respectable grass-widowhood under the roof of a pious king and a holy prophetess in Egypt. Here was a delightful discovery! A great capital had been sacked and burnt to the ground; a whole nation removed from its place; Greece nearly ruined; thousands of valiant knights hurried to Hades; hundreds of dainty and delicate women told off, like so many sheep, to new owners; the very gods themselves set together by the ears;—and all for nothing—for a shadow that dislimned into thin air the instant it was no longer wanted for troubling and bewildering mankind!

It has been doubted whether there be a comic element in the “*Alcestis* ;” it is far easier to detect one in the “*Helen*.” Menelaus has lost his ship, and gets to land by clinging to its keel. He knows not on what coast he has been wrecked; but wherever it may be, he is not fit to present himself to any respectable person. He says,—

“ I have nor food nor raiment, proof of this
Are these poor coverings ; all my former robes
The sea has swallowed.”

He is scolded by an old woman, the portress of King Theoclymenus's palace, who, seeing his tattered garments, takes him for a rogue and vagabond, and when told by him that he is a Greek, says, “ The worse welcome ; I am charged by my master to let none of that race approach his door.” The trick by which Helen and himself try to make their escape from the island of Pharos nearly resembles the one we have already met with in the “ Iphigenia at Tauri,”—better executed, indeed, and more favoured by wind and wave, for in this play the flight is effected. The Chorus, however, who have been aiding the fugitives in the plot by secrecy, like the Chorus in the “ Iphigenia,” incur the wrath of the king ; and as for his sister, the pious and prophetic Theonoè, she has been the chief abettor, and shall pay for her deceit with her life. Theoclymenus, indeed, is even more wroth than the Iphigenian Thoas on a similar occasion, and perhaps justly ; for whereas the Tauric king was only incensed because the image of his goddess was stolen, Theoclymenus is a lover of Helen, whom for years he had been eager to make his wife. This makes a material difference between the two cases. It might have been possible to obtain a new image of Diana, and induce the goddess to consecrate it properly ; but in all the world there was only one Helen.

The character of the priestess Theonoè bears some

resemblance to that of Ion. Like him, she is truly pure-minded and devout: like him, also, her ministrations at the altar is a labour of love. Deeply religious, she is also tender and sympathising with another's woe; and so soon as she is convinced that the beautiful Greek who has so long taken sanctuary at the tomb of Proteus is the lawful wife of the shipwrecked stranger, she favours their escape. She says,—

“To piety my nature and my will
Incline: myself I reverence, nor will stain
My father's glory; neither will I grant
That to my brother which will mark my name
With infamy: for Justice in my heart
Has raised her ample shrine; for Nereus
This I hold, and Menelaus will strive to save.”

It has already been observed that the “Ion” displays the sympathy of the poet with virtue and piety in man: the character of Theonoe shows that the supposed misogynist was equally impressed with, as well as able to delineate, purity and piety in woman.

CHAPTER X.

THE CYCLOPS.

“This is as strange a thing as e'er I looked on.
He is as disproportioned in his manners
As in his shape.”

—“*Tempest.*”

WE can hardly be grateful enough for the care or caprice of the grammarian or the collector of old plays who has preserved for us one sample of the Greek satyric drama. Some uncertainty still exists about the precise nature of this curious appendage to the tragic Trilogy; but without such aid as we get from the “Cyclops” of Euripides, we should depend on fragments or guess-work, if not be quite in the dark. Even with this single plank from the general wreck of these after-pieces before us, we look at the species through a veil. The severe and solemn Æschylus is recorded to have been a successful composer of such light and cheerful pieces; but this bit of information by no means helps to clear up doubts. Sweetness may have come out of the strong, but of what kind was Æschylean mirth, or even relaxation from gravity?

The decorous Sophocles is reported to have enacted the part of Nausicaa, and played at ball with the hand-maidens of the princess in a satyric story evidently taken from one of the most beautiful scenes in the *Odyssey*. But how the serene and majestic artist managed to comport himself under such circumstances we have still to wonder. All we know for certain about the Greek fourth play is, that it was intended to soothe and calm down the feelings of the spectators after they had been strained and agitated by the prophetic swan-song of Cassandra, by the wail of Jason for his murdered children, by the scene in which Orestes flies from the Furies, or that wherein the noble Antigone and the loving Hæmon are clasped together in their death-embrace.

Such relaxation of excited feeling was in the true spirit of Greek art in its best days, which required even in the hurricane of tragic passion a moderating element, and the means of returning to composure. Let not, however, the English reader imagine that, although the satyric drama was designed to send home the audience in a tranquil and even cheerful mood, it bore any resemblance to farce, much less to burlesque. Welcome as parodies of scenes or verses from "the lofty grave tragedians" were to Athenian ears, skilful as the comic writers were in such travesties, a Greek audience in the time of Euripides would have hurled sticks, stones, and hard-shelled fruit at the buffoons who committed such profanation. "Hamlet," if performed at Athens, would not have been followed by "a popular farce"! Perhaps there is no better definition of the satyric

drama than this—and it is one of ancient date—it was “a sportive tragedy.” It was not written by comic, but always by tragic poets : it was in some measure a performance of “state and ancientry.” Seldom, if ever, was it acted apart from tragedy. It may have been a shadow or reminiscence of the primeval age of stage-plays, when the actors were all strollers and the theatre was a cart. Prone to change in their favour or affection to their rulers—ostracising or crowning them as the whim of the moment suggested—the Athenians were very conservative in their opinions on art, and so may have chosen to retain a sample of the rude entertainments of Thespis, even in the “most high and palmy state” of the tragic drama. The satyric *dramatis personæ* were grave and dignified personages,—demigods and heroes, kings and prophets, councillors and warriors,—who spoke a dialogue, as Ulysses does in the “Cyclops,” only a little less grave than that of the preceding tragedies, perchance a little more ironical than the buskin would have allowed. To make wild laughter was the function of the comedian ; to excite cheerfulness rather than mirth was probably the function of these appendages.

In a city where the Homeric poems were sung or said in the streets, the story of Ulysses and the Cyclops was as familiar to the ears of gentle and simple as “household words.” The plot of it and some of the humour are Homer’s. But the one-eyed giant of the Odyssey is a solitary bachelor, and the Chorus of Satyrs, indispensable for the piece, was a later invention. In Homeric days, Sicily and southern Italy

were the wonder-land of the eastern Greeks. Like Prospero's island, they were thought to harbour very strange beasts. In Sicily dwelt a band of gigantic brethren, who lived, while they had nothing better to eat, on the milk, cheese, and mutton supplied by their flocks, but who were always glad to mend their fare by devouring strangers unlucky enough to come into their neighbourhood. This ill luck befell Ulysses and his ship's crew—sole survivors of the Ithacan flotilla—on their return from Troy. Contrary winds had driven them far from their course: want of water compelled them to land on the Sicilian shore. In quest of spring or brook, they go to the cavern of the Cyclops. He, fortunately for them, is not just then at home; but his servants, Silenus and the Satyrs, are within, and after a short parley with their unexpected visitors, they consent to supply their need, and even to sell the Greek captain some of their master's goods, tempted by the quite irresistible bribe of a flask of excellent wine. It may be as well to say at once what had brought such strange domestics into the Cyclops' country, and thus the reader will see why they were so glad to taste wine again, and why they acted dishonestly in selling the lambs and kids. The Satyrs had lost their lord and master Bacchus, who had been carried off by Tyrrhenian pirates. So they left their homes in Arcadian highland or Thesalian woods, and went to sea in quest of him, lovers of the wine-cask as they were. Probably these hairy and unkempt folks were imperfectly versed in navigation, or they may have had a drunken steersman, or the winds may have been as perverse as they were to

Ulysses. In one respect, either their hideousness or their years—Silenus, at least, was advanced in life—may have befriended them, for Polyphemus does not eat them raw or broiled on the embers, but keeps them in his cave for the service of his dairy and his kine. At last Polyphemus enters; and now we can imagine some excitement on the part of the junior Athenians, sedate smiles on that of their elders, and even a scream or two from the place where the women were packed together. No known art or device, we may be sure, was neglected by the managers in making up the giant for his part. If Ulysses were of the usual stature of Greek performers, Polyphemus must have worn far higher soles and loftier head-gear than the Ithacan king. The monster must have been at least by “the altitude of a chopine” taller than his guest. A yawning mask doubtless aggravated the terror of his visage; his voice must have been like that of an irate bull; and his single eye as big as an ordinary-sized plate, and red as a live coal. The Satyrs may have reminded their beholders of the well-known features of Socrates; nor could the philosopher have been justly angry at a resemblance that he himself had pointed out. Polyphemus is too stupid to be either “witty in himself or a cause of wit in others;” accordingly, such comic business as there is in the piece devolves on Silenus and his companions, who relieve gigantic dullness by quips and cranks, much as the celebrated Jack relieves the stolidity of Blunderbore by some friendly conversation before he rips him up.

The Cyclops had been absent on *Ætna*, hunting with

his dogs. Like King Lear on his return from the chase, he calls out lustily for his dinner, after a previous inquiry about his lambs, ewes, and cheese-baskets. He discerns that something unusual has taken place during his absence, and threatens to beat Silenus until he rains tears, unless he answers promptly. Next his eye lights on the strangers, and also on something still more irritating to him as a grazier:—

“What is this crowd I see beside the stalls?
 Outlaws or thieves? for near my cavern-home
 I see my young lambs coupled two by two
 With willow-bands: mixed with my cheeses lie
 Their implements; and this old fellow here
 Has his bald head broken with stripes.” *

The shrewd but perfidious Silenus has inflicted these stripes on himself in order to make his story of being robbed credible to his master—a device of a similar kind to that which Bardolph says caused him to blush.

“*Sil.* Ah me!
 I have been beaten till I burn with fever.
Cyc. By whom? who laid his fist upon your head?
Sil. Those men, because I would not suffer them
 To steal your goods.
Cyc. Did not the rascals know
 I am a god, sprung from the race of heaven?
Sil. I told them so, but they bore off your things,
 And ate the cheese in spite of all I said,
 And carried out the lambs.”

And inasmuch as this capital felony was, he alleged,

* Shelley's translation of the “Cyclops” has been followed in each extract from the piece.

accompanied by threats of personal violence to Polyphemus himself, he not unreasonably flies into a terrible passion, and hastens to enforce Cyclopiian law on the spoilers of his goods :—

“*Cycl.* In truth? nay, haste, and place in order quickly

The cooking-knives, and heap upon the hearth,
And kindle it, a great fagot of wood ;
As soon as they are slaughtered they shall fill
My belly, broiling warm from the live coals,
Or boiled and seethed within the bubbling caldron.
I am quite sick of the wild mountain-game,
Of stags and lions I have gorged enough,
And I grow hungry for the flesh of men.”

In vain Ulysses assures Polyphemus that he has never laid hands on Silenus ; that he purchased the lambs for wine, honestly as he thought, and that the lying old Satyr’s nose will vouch for the exchange and barter. All was done

“By mutual compact, without force ;
There is no word of truth in all he says,
For silyly he was selling all your store.”

But as well might a poacher accused of snaring hares or trapping foxes have pleaded innocence before that worshipful justice Squire Western, as Ulysses expect his plain tale to put down the evidence, confirmed by the very hard swearing, of Silenus. The Chorus, indeed, following its proper function of mediator between “contending opposites,” assures the Cyclops that the stranger tells the simple truth, and that they saw Silenus giving the lambs to him.

“You lie!” exclaims the giant; “this old fellow is juster than Rhadamanthus: I believe his story.” Now, for a few minutes, curiosity prevails over hunger for the flesh of men, and Polyphemus inquires about the race, adventures, life, and conversation of the intruders on his cavern. Ulysses, carefully concealing his real name, gives the required information. He is one of the chiefs who have taken Troy: he is on his return home to Ithaca: not choice, but tempests, have brought him to this land. “Moreover,” he adds, “if you kill and eat me or my comrades, you will be very ungrateful. We are all pious worshippers of your ‘great father’ Neptune. We have built him many temples in Greece. Much have we endured by war and land and sea, and it will be very hard on us, after escaping so many perils, to be now roasted or boiled for a supper to Neptune’s son.”

The reply of Polyphemus is just what might have been looked for from such a sensual barbarian. It is unfilial, and even blasphemous. “A fig,” he cries, “for your temples and their gods. The wise man knows of nothing worth worshipping except wealth.”

“All other things are a pretence and boast.
 What are my father’s ocean promontories,
 The sacred rocks whereon he dwells, to me?
 Strangers, I laugh to scorn Jove’s thunderbolt:
 I know not that his strength is more than mine;
 As to the rest I care not.”

“Jupiter may send snow or rain or wind as he list. I have a weather-proof cave, plenty of fuel and milk;

my larder is ever provided with a haunch of lion or a fat calf; and so that I have a good crop of grass in yonder meadows, I and my cattle care alike for your Jupiter." And then he winds up with a declaration of his purpose to have a good dinner:—

“I well know
The wise man's only Jupiter is this,
To eat and drink during his little day,
And give himself no care. And as for those
Who complicate with laws the life of man,
I freely give them tears for their reward.
I will not cheat my soul of its delight,
Or hesitate in dining upon you.”

Clearly, after hearing these hospitable intentions, Ulysses will need all the cunning for which he was famed. “This,” he thinks, “is by far the worst scrape I ever was in. Very near was I to death when I entered Troy town as a spy, and when I cajoled Queen Hecuba to let me out of it. I just missed being transfixed by Philoctetes in Lemnos by one of his poisoned arrows, when Machaon, that skilful surgeon, was many leagues away from me, and when, even if he had been at hand, he could not perhaps have counteracted the old centaur's venom. ‘About my brain,’ I must not faint, but contrive to foil this brute's designs. If I cannot, better had it been for me to have died by the hand of the mad Ajax, for then I should have been decently buried by the Greeks, and Penelope have known what became of me; whereas, if I am to go down this monster's ‘insatiate maw,’ she may go

on for ten years more weeping and weaving, and after all be forced to marry one of her suitors. Now, if ever, Pallas Athenè befriend me."

The stage is cleared, and the Chorus sing appropriate but not cheerful stanzas, with reference to present circumstances :—

"The Cyclops Ætnean is cruel and bold,
He murders the strangers
That sit on his hearth,
And dreads no avengers
To rise from the earth.

He roasts the men before they are cold,
He snatches them broiling from the coal,
And from the caldron pulls them whole,
And minces their flesh and gnaws their bone
With his cursed teeth till all be gone."

Ulysses re-enters; he has been surveying the Cyclopien larder and kitchen, and is as terrified by the sight of their contents as Fatima was when she rushed out of Bluebeard's chamber of horrors. He has seen Polyphemus providing for his own comforts. He kindles a huge fire,—

"Casting on the broad hearth
The knotty limbs of an enormous oak,
Three waggon-loads at least."

He spreads upon the ground a couch of pine-leaves :
he milks his cows,—

"And fills a bowl
Three cubits wide and four in depth, as much
As would contain three amphoræ, and bound it
With ivy."

He puts on the fire a pot to boil, and makes red-hot the points of sundry spits, and, when all is ready, he seizes two of the Ithacans,—

“ And killed them in a measured kind of manner ;
For he flung one against the brazen rivets
Of the huge caldron, and caught the other
By the foot’s tendon, and knocked out his brains
Upon the sharp edge of the craggy stone.”

One he boiled, the other he roasted, while Ulysses,

“ With the tears raining from his eyes,
Stood near the Cyclops, ministering to him.”

But while waiting at table, a happy thought presents itself to Ulysses. “ If I can but make him drunk enough, then I can deal with him.” He plies him well with Maronian wine at dinner ; but Polyphemus is as yet “ na that fou ” to fall into the trap. He is still sober enough to remember that his brother-giants may relish a cheerful glass no less than himself. They inhabit a village on *Ætna* not far off, and he will go and invite them to share his Bacchic drink. The Chorus advise Ulysses to walk with him, and pitch him over a precipice, as he is somewhat unsteady on his legs. “ That will never do,” responds the sagacious Ithacan. “ I have a far more subtle device. I will appeal to his appetite : tell him how unwise it were to summon partners for his revelry. Why not prolong his pleasure by keeping this particular Maronian for his own sole use ? ” The Cyclops presently returns, singing—

“ Ha ! ha ! I am full of wine,
Heavy with the joy divine,

With the young feast oversated ;
 Like a merchant's vessel freighted
 To the water's edge, my crop
 Is laden to the gullet's top.
 The fresh meadow-grass of spring
 Tempts me forth thus wandering
 To my brothers on the mountains,
 Who shall share the wine's sweet fountains.
 Bring the cask, O stranger, bring !”

He is diverted from his purpose by Ulysses ; and for once Silenus acts a friendly part to him by asking his master, “ What need have you of pot-companions ? stay at home.” Indeed the advice proceeds from a design to filch some of the wine himself—an impossibility if the cask is borne off to the village, where there will be so many eyes—single ones indeed—upon him. So it is agreed that the giant-brothers be kept in the dark, and quaff their bowls of milk, while Polyphemus drinks deep potations of Maron alone. The Greek stranger has now so ingratiated himself with his savage host, that the latter condescends to ask his name, and to promise to eat him last, in token of his gratitude for his drink and good counsel. “ My name,” says Ulysses, “ is Nobody.” With this information the Sicilian Caliban is content ; and with the exception that Silenus teases him by putting the flagon out of his reach, with the above-mentioned felonious intent, all goes merry as a marriage-bell. Ulysses, now again cup-bearer, plies him so well, that the “ poor monster ” sees visions—

“ The throne of Jove,
 And the clear congregation of the Gods ”—

and in the end drops off into slumber profound as Christopher Sly's.

Now comes the dramatic retribution. The trunk of an olive-tree has been sharpened to a point, is heated in the fire, and thrust by Ulysses and his surviving companions into the eye of the insensible giant. The Chorus, indeed, had promised to lend a hand in this operation, for they are anxious to be off in quest of their liege-lord Bacchus. But their courage fails them at the proper moment—some have sprained ankles, others have dust in their eyes, others weakness of spine. All they can or will do—and this service is truly operatic in its kind—is to sing a cheerful and encouraging accompaniment to the boring-out of the eye:—

“Hasten and thrust,
 And parch up to dust,
 The eye of the beast
 Who feeds on his guest ;
 Burn and blind
 The Ætnean hind ;
 Scoop and draw,
 But beware lest he claw
 Your limbs near his maw.”

The last scene of the “Cyclops” has to the reader an appearance of being either imperfectly preserved or originally hurried over. It may be that, not having the action before us, we miss some connecting dumb-show. In the *Odyssey* the escape of Ulysses and his crew is effected with much difficulty, and great risk to their chief: in this satyric play they get out of the

cave quickly as well as safely, though its owner says that—

“ Standing at the outlet,
He'll bar the way and catch them as they pass : ”

but either they creep under his huge legs, like so many Gullivers in Brobdingnag, or he is a very inefficient doorkeeper—drink and pain seemingly having rendered him as incapable of hearing as of sight. Indeed Polyphemus, blind and despairing, is the only sufferer in this flight of the Ithacans. In striking at them he beats the air, or cracks his skull against the rocky wall. The Chorus taunt and misguide him. “ Are these villains on my right hand ? ” “ No, on your left, ”—whereupon he dashes at vacancy, and cries, “ O woe on woe, I have broken my head ! ” “ Did you fall into the fire when drunk ? ” ask the mocking Chorus, who had been witnesses of the whole transaction. “ 'Twas Nobody destroyed me. ” “ Then no one is to blame. ” “ I tell you, varlets as you are, Nobody blinded me. ” “ Then you are not blind. ” “ Where is that accursed Nobody ? ” “ Nowhere, Cyclops. ” But at last the secret comes out. “ Detested wretch, where are you ? ” roars the baffled monster. The wretch replies :—

“ Far from you,

I keep with care this body of Ulysses.

Cycl. What do you say ? You proffer a new name !

Ulys. My father named me so : and I have taken

A full revenge for your unnatural feast :

I should have done ill to burn down Troy, .

And not revenged the murder of my comrades.

Cycl. Ai, Ai! the ancient oracle is accomplished;
 It said that I should have my eyesight blinded
 By you coming from Troy, yet it foretold
 That you should pay the penalty for this,
 By wandering long over the homeless sea."

The humour of this after-piece may not seem to English readers of the first quality, and the quibble on *Nobody* and *Nowhere* to be far beneath the level of the *jeu de mots* in modern burlesque. But let them not therefore look down on Ancient Classics. Rome was not built in a day. Life is short, but the art of Punning is long. Even Aristophanes came not up to the mark of Thomas Hood. The world, it must be remembered, was comparatively young when Euripides wrote his "Cyclops"—much younger when Homer told the tale of Polyphemus and Ulysses. Moreover, a bucolical monster was not a person to throw away the cream of jests upon. Probably he never quite comprehended the point of *Nobody*, though in after-hours, and in the tedium of blindness, disabled from hunting the lion and the bear of Mount *Ætna*, he must have often pondered on his unlucky encounter with a crafty Greek. Also it should be borne in mind that the real fun and frolic of the Athenians was reserved for the comic drama. There, indeed, it was as extravagant, satirical, and even boisterous as we can imagine, or spectators could desire. Possibly Euripides, grave, taciturn, and tender in his disposition, was not the best representative of this species of drama. That there was in him some latent humour, some disposition to slide out of the tragic into the comic vein, has already been

observed in the sketch of his "Alcestis." With all its shortcomings, the "Cyclops" is the sole contemporary clue we have to the nature of the fourth member of the usual batch of plays, and so, with Sancho, we must "be thankful for it, and not look the gift horse too closely in the mouth."

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NOTE.

IN 'The Knights,' 'The Acharnians,' 'The Birds,' and 'The Frogs,' most of the translated extracts are taken, by permission, from the admirable version of those comedies by the late Mr Hookham Frere, and are marked (F.) For all translations not so marked the present writer is responsible.

ARISTOPHANES.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

It has been observed already,* in speaking of these "ancient" classical authors, that some of them, in their tone and spirit, have much more in common with modern literature than with their great predecessors who wrote in the same language, and whose volumes stand ranged upon the same shelves. This may be remarked with especial truth of these Comedies of Aristophanes. A national comedy which has any pretension at all to literary merit—which is anything more than mere coarse buffoonery—must, in its very nature, be of later growth than epic or lyric poetry, tragedy, or historic narrative. It assumes a fuller intellectual life, a higher civilisation, and a keener taste in the people who demand it and appreciate it. And Athenian comedy, as we have it repre-

* Introd. to 'Cicero' (A. C.)

sented in the plays of Aristophanes, implies all these in a very high degree on the part of the audience to whom it was presented. It flourished in those glorious days of Athens which not long preceded her political decline,—when the faculties of her citizens were strung to full pitch, when there was much wealth and much leisure, when the arts were highly cultivated and education widely spread, and the refinements and the vices which follow such a state of things presented an ample field for the play of wit and fancy, the *badinage* of the humorist, or the more trenchant weapons of satire.

But although this Athenian comedy is, in one sense, so very modern in its spirit, we must not place it in comparison with that which we call comedy now. It was something quite different from that form of drama which, with its elaborate and artistic plot, its lively incidents, and brilliant dialogue, has taken possession under the same name of the modern stage. It is difficult to compare it to any one form of modern literature, dramatic or other. It perhaps most resembled what we now call burlesque; but it had also very much in it of broad farce and comic opera, and something also (in the hits at the fashions and follies of the day with which it abounded) of the modern pantomime. But it was something more, and more important to the Athenian public, than any or all of these could have been. Almost always more or less political, and sometimes intensely personal, and always with some purpose more or less important underlying its wildest vagaries and coarsest buffooneries, it

supplied the place of the political journal, the literary review, the popular caricature, and the party pamphlet, of our own times. It combined the attractions and the influence of all these; for its grotesque masks and elaborate "spectacle" addressed the eye as strongly as the author's keenest witticisms did the ear of his audience. Some weak resemblance of it might have been found, in modern times, in that curious outdoor drama, the *Policinella* of the Neapolitans: something of the same wild buffoonery overlying the same caustic satire on the prominent events and persons of the day, and even something of the same popular influence.* The comic dramatist who produced his annual budget of lampoon and parody has also been compared, not inaptly, to the "*Terræ Filius*" of our universities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; that curious shadow of the old pagan saturnalia, when once in the year some clever and reckless graduate claimed prescriptive right to launch the shafts of his wit against proctors, doctors, heads of houses, and dignities in general—too often without much more regard to decency than his Athenian prototype. The Paris '*Charivari*' and the London '*Punch*,' in their best days, had perhaps more of the tone of Aristophanes about them than any other modern literary production; for Rabelais, who resembled the Athenian dramatist

* "Here, in his native tongue and among his own countrymen, *Punch* is a person of real power: he dresses up and retails all the drolleries of the day; he is the channel and sometimes the source of the passing opinions; he could gain a mob, or keep the whole kingdom in good humour."—Forsyth's *Italy*, ii. 35.

in many of his worst characteristics as well as his best, can scarcely be called modern, and has few readers. The 'Age' and the 'Satirist' newspapers, to those who remember them during their brief day of existence, may well represent Athenian comedy in its worst and most repulsive features—its scurrilous personalities and disregard of decency.

It may be remembered by the readers of these volumes that the dramatic representations at Athens took place only at the Dionysia, or Great Festivals of Bacchus, which were held three times a-year, and that each play was brought out by its author in competition for the prize of tragedy or comedy which was then awarded to the successful exhibitors by the public voice, and which was the object of intense ambition.* This will in some degree account for the character of Attic comedy. It was an appeal to the audience,—not only to their appreciation of wit and humour, but also to their sympathies, social and political, their passions, and their prejudices. Therefore it was so often bitterly personal and so hotly political. The public demand was always for something "sensational" in these respects, and the authors took care to comply with it. And therefore, also, we find introduced so frequently confidential appeals to the audience themselves, not only in those addresses (called the *parabasis*) in which the author is allowed to speak in his own proper person through the mouth of the Chorus, but also on the part of the individual characters during the action of the play. They enlist the spectators

* See 'Æschylus' (A. C.), chap. i.

themselves among the *dramatis personæ*,—not a very artistic proceeding, but no doubt popular and very tempting. It has been adopted by modern dramatists, even by so high an authority as Molière,* and notoriously by farce-writers of more recent date.

But there could be no greater mistake than to suppose that the audience before whom these plays of Aristophanes were represented were impressible only by these lower influences. It has just been said that education at Athens was widely spread. Readers, indeed, might not be many, when books were necessarily so few; but the education which was received by the masses through their constant attendance at the theatre, the public deliberative assembly, and the law-courts, was quite as effective in sharpening their intelligence and their memory. Fully to realise to ourselves what Greek intellect was in the bright days of Athens, and to understand how well that city deserved her claim to be the intellectual “eye of Greece,” we should not appeal to the works of her great poets, her historians, or her orators, which may be assumed (though scarcely in the case of the tragedians) to have depended for their due appreciation upon the finer tastes of the few: we must turn to these comedies, addressed directly to an audience in which, although those finer tastes were not unrepresent-

* The appeal which Harpagon makes to the audience to help him to discover the thief who has stolen his money (‘*L’Avare*,’ act iv. sc. 7) is an exact parallel with that of the two slaves in ‘*The Knights*’ (see p. 18), and again in ‘*The Wasps*,’ when they come forward and consult them confidentially in their difficulties.

sented, the verdict of what we should call the "masses" was essential to the author's success. There is abundant evidence in these pieces—it is impressed upon the reader disagreeably in every one of them—that, willingly or unwillingly, the writer pandered to the vulgar taste, and degraded his Muse to the level of the streets in order to catch this popular favour; though not without occasional protests in his own defence against such perversion of his art—protests which we must fear were only half sincere. But there is evidence quite as conclusive that the intellectual calibre, and even the literary taste, of this audience was of a far higher character than that of the modern pit and gallery. The dramatist not only assumes on their behalf a familiarity with all the best scenes and points in the dramas of the great tragedians—which, in the case of such inveterate play-goers as the Athenians were, is not so very surprising—and an acquaintance with the political questions and the public celebrities of the day which possibly might be found, in this age when every man is becoming a politician, amongst a Paris or a London theatrical auditory; but he also expects to find, and evidently did find, an acquaintance with, and an appreciation of, poetry generally, a comprehension of at least the salient points of different systems of philosophy, and an ability to seize at once and appropriate all the finer points of allusion, of parody, and of satire. Aristophanes is quite aware of the weaknesses and the wilfulness of this many-headed multitude, whom he satirises so unsparingly to their faces; but he had

good right to say of them, as he does in his 'Knights,' that they were an audience with whom he might make sure at least of being understood,—“For our friends here are sharp enough.”*

It is to be regretted that the Comedies of Aristophanes are now less read at our universities than they were some years ago. If one great object of the study of the classics is to gain an accurate acquaintance with one of the most brilliant and interesting epochs in the history of the world, no pages will supply a more important contribution to this knowledge than those of the great Athenian humorist. He lays the flesh and blood, the features and the colouring, upon the skeleton which the historian gives us. His portraits of political and historical celebrities must of course be accepted with caution, as the works of a professional caricaturist; but, like all good caricatures, they preserve some striking characteristics of the men which find no place in their historical portraits, and they let us know what was said and thought of them by irreverent contemporaries. It is in these comedies that we have the Athenians at home; and although modern writers of Athenian history have laid them largely under contribution in the way of reference and illustration, nothing will fill in the outline of the Athens of Cleon and Alcibiades and Socrates so vividly as the careful study of one of these remarkable dramas in the Greek original. One is inclined to place more faith than is usually due to anecdotes of the kind in that which is told of Plato, that when the elder Dionysius, tyrant of

* The Knights, l. 233.

Syracuse, wrote to him to request information as to the state of things at Athens, the philosopher sent him a copy of Aristophanes's 'Clouds,' as the best and most trustworthy picture of that marvellous republic.

Of the writers of the "Old" Athenian comedy (so termed to distinguished it from the "New," which was of a different character, and more like our own), Aristophanes is the only one whose works have come down to us. He had some elder contemporaries who were formidable and often successful rivals with him in the popular favour, but of their plays nothing now remains but a few titles and fragments of plots preserved by other writers. Of one of them, Cratinus, who died a few years after Aristophanes began to write for the stage, the younger author makes some not unkindly mention more than once, though he had been beaten by him somewhat unexpectedly upon the old man's last appearance, after some interval of silence, in the dramatic arena. It is curious to learn that in this his last production the veteran satirist found a subject in himself. The critics and the public had accused him (not unjustly, if we may trust Aristophanes here) of having grown too fond of wine, and of dulling his faculties by this indulgence. His reply was this comedy, which he called 'The Bottle.' He himself was the hero of the piece, and was represented as having deserted his lawful wife, the Comic Muse, for the charms of this new mistress. But in the catastrophe he was reformed and reconciled to the worthier lady; and the theatrical critics—perhaps out of sympathy with their old favourite—awarded him the first

prize, though Aristophanes had brought forward in the competition of that year what he esteemed one of his masterpieces.*

The extreme licence of personal attack which was accorded by general consent to the writers of comedy, so that any man whose character and habits were at all before the public might find himself at any moment held up to popular ridicule upon the stage, will be the subject of remark hereafter. It must have been very unpleasant and embarrassing, one must suppose, to the individuals thus marked out; but the sacredness of private life and character was something unknown to an Athenian, and he would not be nearly so sensitive on these points as ourselves. The very fact that this licence was allowed to exist so long is some proof that it was on the whole not unfairly exercised. The satiric writer must have felt that his popularity depended upon his aiming his blows only where the popular feeling held them to be well deserved; and there are some follies and vices which this kind of castigation can best reach, and cases of public shamelessness or corruption which, under a lax code of morality, can only be fitly punished by public ridicule. When, towards the close of the great struggle between Athens and Sparta, the executive powers of the State had been usurped by the oligarchy of the "Four Hundred," a law was passed to prohibit, under strong penalties, the introduction of real persons into these satiric dramas: but the check thus put to the right of popular criticism upon public men and measures was

* The Clouds.

only a token of the decline of Athenian liberty. The free speech of comedy was in that commonwealth what the freedom of the press is in our own; and, in both cases, the risk of its occasional abuse was not so dangerous as its suppression.

Something must be said of the personal history of our author himself, though such biographical account of him as we have is more or less apocryphal. He was no doubt a free citizen of Athens, because when the great popular demagogue Cleon, whom he had so bitterly satirised on the stage, took his revenge by an attempt to prove the contrary in a court of law, he failed in his purpose. Aristophanes was also probably a man of some wealth, since he had property, as he tells us in one of his plays, in the island of Ægina. In politics and in social questions he was a staunch Conservative; proud of the old days of Athenian greatness, jealous of the new habits and fashions which he thought tended to enervate the youth of the state, and the new systems of philosophy which were sapping the foundations of morality and honesty. His conservatism tended perhaps to the extreme, or at least takes that appearance in the exaggeration natural to the comic satirist; for he certainly appears occasionally as the champion of a pre-scientific age, when gymnastics held a higher place in education than philosophy, and when the stout Athenian who manned the galleys at Salamis thought he knew enough if he "knew how to ask for barley-cake, and shout his yo-heave-oh!"*

* The Frogs, l. 1073.

be an Athenian : he hated the mob-orators of his time, not only for their principles but for their vulgar origin, with an intensity which he did not care to disguise, and which, had not his wit and his boldness made him a popular favourite, rather in spite of his opinions than because of them, would have brought him into even more trouble than it actually did. He began to write for the stage at a very early age—so early, that he was not allowed by law to produce his two first pieces (now unfortunately lost) in his own name. Some of the old commentators would have us believe that he wrote his first comedy when he was only eighteen, but this, from internal evidence, seems improbable ; he must have been five or six years older. He supplied the dramatic festivals with comedies, more or less successful, for at least thirty-seven years (from B.C. 427 to 390) ; but of the forty plays which he is known to have produced we have only eleven, and some of them in a more or less imperfect form. For the preservation of these, according to ancient tradition, we are indebted to one who might have seemed a very unlikely patron for this kind of pagan literature—no other than St John Chrysostom. That worthy father of the Church is said to have slept with a manuscript of Aristophanes under his pillow ; it is at least certain that he had studied his plays and admired them, since he has not unfrequently imitated their language in his own writings.

Some enthusiastic admirers of Aristophanes would have us regard him not only as a brilliant humorist, but as a high moral teacher, concealing a grand design under the mask of a buffoon. They seem to think

that he was impelled to write comedy chiefly by a patriotic zeal for the welfare of Athens, and a desire to save his countrymen from corrupting influences. This is surely going too far. His comedies have a political cast, mainly because at Athens every man was a politician; and no doubt the opinions which he advocates are those which he honestly entertained. But he would probably have been content himself with the reputation of being what he was,—a brilliant and successful writer for the stage; a vigorous satirist, who lashed vice by preference, but had also a jest ready against ungainly virtue; a professional humorist who looked upon most things on their ludicrous side; who desired to be honest and manly in his vocation, and, above all things, not to be dull.

It may be right to say a word here, very briefly, as to the coarseness of the great comedian. It need not be said that it will find no place in these pages. He has been censured and apologised for on this ground, over and over again. Defended, strictly speaking, he cannot be. His personal exculpation must always rest upon the fact, that the wildest licence in which he indulged was not only recognised as permissible, but actually enjoined as part of the ceremonial at these festivals of Bacchus: that it was not only in accordance with public taste, but was consecrated (if terms may be so abused) as a part of the national religion. Such was the curse which always accompanied the nature-worship of Paganism, and infected of necessity its literature. But the coarseness of Aristophanes is not corrupting. There is nothing immoral in his

plots, nothing really dangerous in his broadest humour. Compared with some of our old English dramatists, he is morality itself. And when we remember the plots of some French and English plays which now attract fashionable audiences, and the character of some modern French and English novels not unfrequently found upon drawing-room tables, the least that can be said is, that we had better not cast stones at Aristophanes.

CHAPTER II.

THE KNIGHTS.

THE two first comedies which Aristophanes brought out — ‘The Revellers’ and ‘The Babylonians’ — are both unfortunately lost to us. The third was ‘The Acharnians,’ followed in the next year by ‘The Knights.’ It may be convenient, for some reasons, to begin our acquaintance with the author in this latter play, because it is that into which he seems to have thrown most of his personality as well as the whole force of his satiric powers. There was a reason for this. In its composition he had not only in view his fame as a dramatic writer, or the advocacy of a political principle, but also a direct personal object.

It is now the eighth year of the Peloponnesian War, in which all Greece is ranged on the side of the two great contending powers, Athens and Sparta. The great Pericles—to whose fatal policy, as Aristophanes held, its long continuance has been due—has been six years dead. His place in the commonwealth has been taken by men of inferior mark. And the man who is now most in popular favour, the head of the demo-

cratic interest, now completely in the ascendant, is the poet's great enemy, Cleon: an able but unscrupulous man, of low origin, loud and violent, an able speaker and energetic politician. Historians are at variance as to his real claim to honesty and patriotism, and it remains a question never likely to be set at rest. It would be manifestly unfair to decide it solely on the evidence of his satirical enemy. He and his policy had been fiercely attacked in the first comedy produced by Aristophanes—'The Babylonians,' of which only the merest fragment has come down to us. But we know that in it the poet had satirised the abuses prevalent in the Athenian government, and their insolence to their subject-allies, under the disguise of an imaginary empire, the scene of which he laid in Babylon. Cleon had revenged himself upon his satirist by overwhelming him with abuse in the public assembly, and by making a formal accusation against him of having slandered the state in the presence of foreigners and aliens, and thus brought ridicule and contempt upon the commonwealth of Athens. In the drama now before us, the author is not only satirising the political weakness of his countrymen; he is fulfilling the threat which he had held out the year before in his 'Acharnians,'—that he would "cut up Cleon the tanner into shoe-leather for the Knights,"—and concentrating the whole force of his wit, in the most unscrupulous and merciless fashion, against his personal enemy. In this bitterness of spirit the play stands in strong contrast with the good-humoured burlesque of 'The Acharnians' and 'The Peace,' or, indeed, with any

other of the author's productions which have reached us.

This play follows the fashion of the Athenian stage in taking its name from the Chorus, who are in this case composed of THE KNIGHTS—the class of citizens ranking next to the highest at Athens. A more appropriate title, if the title is meant to indicate the subject, would be that which Mr Mitchell gives it in his translation—‘The Demagogues.’ The principal character in the piece is “Demus”—*i.e.*, People: an impersonation of that many-headed monster the Commons of Athens, the classical prototype of Swift's John Bull; and the satire is directed against the facility with which he allows himself to be gulled and managed by those who are nominally his servants but really his masters—those noisy and corrupt demagogues (and one in particular, just at present) who rule him for their own selfish ends.

The characters represented are only five. “People” is a rich householder—selfish, superstitious, and sensual—who employs a kind of major-domo to look after his business and manage his slaves. He has had several in succession, from time to time. The present man is known in the household as “The Paphlagonian,” or sometimes as “The Tanner”—for the poet does not venture to do more than thus indicate Cleon by names which refer either to some asserted barbarian blood in his family, or to the occupation followed by his father. He is an unprincipled, lying rascal; a slave himself, fawning and obsequious to his master, while cheating him abominably—insolent and bullying towards the fellow-slaves who are under his command. Two of

these are Nicias and Demosthenes—the first of them holding the chief naval command at this time, with Demosthenes as one of his vice-admirals. These characters bear the real names in most of the manuscripts, though they are never so addressed in the dialogue; but they would be readily known to the audience by the masks in which the actors performed the parts. But in the case of Cleon, no artist was found bold enough to risk his powerful vengeance by caricaturing his features, and no actor dared to represent him on the stage. Aristophanes is said to have played the part himself, with his face, in the absence of a mask, smeared with wine-lees, after the primitive fashion, when “comedy” was nothing more than a village revel in celebration of the vintage. Such a disguise, moreover, served excellently well, as he declared, to imitate the purple and bloated visage of the demagogue. The remaining character is that of “The Black-pudding-Seller,” whose business in the piece will be better understood as it proceeds. The whole action takes place without change of scene (excepting the final tableau) in the open air, in front of Demus’s house, the entrance to which is in the centre of the proscenium.

The two slaves, Nicias and Demosthenes, come out rubbing their shoulders. They have just had a lashing from the major-domo. After mutual condolences, and complaints of their hard lot, they agree to sit down together and howl in concert—to the last new fashionable tune—

“Ȫ oh, Ȫ oh,—Ȫ oh, Ȫ oh,—Ȫ oh, Ȫ oh!”

Perhaps the burlesque of the two well-known commanders bemoaning themselves in this parody of popular music does not imply more childishness on the part of an Athenian audience than the nigger choruses and comic operas of our own day. But, as Demosthenes, the stronger character of the pair, observes at last—"crying's no good." They must find some remedy. And there is one which occurs to him,—an effectual one—but of which the very name is terrible, and not safely to be uttered. It lies in a word that may be fatal to a slave, and is always of ill omen to Athenian ears. At last, after a fashion quite untranslatable, they contrive to say it between them—"Run away." The idea seems excellent, and Demosthenes proposes that they should take the audience into their confidence, which accordingly they do,—begging them to give some token of encouragement if the plot and the dialogue so far please them:—

"*Dem. (to the audience.)* Well, come now! I'll tell ye about it—Here are we,

A couple of servants—with a master at home
 Next door to the hustings. He's a man in years,
 A kind of a bean-fed,* husky, testy character,
 Choleric and brutal at times, and partly deaf.
 It's near about a month now, that he went
 And bought a slave out of a tanner's yard,
 A Paphlagonian born, and brought him home,—
 As wicked a slanderous wretch as ever lived.
 This fellow, the Paphlagonian, has found out

* Alluding to the passion of the Athenian citizens for the law-courts, in which the verdict was given by depositing in the ballot-boxes a black or white bean or pebble.

The blind side of our master's understanding,
With fawning and wheedling in this kind of way :
' Would not you please go to the bath, sir ? surely
It's not worth while to attend the courts to-day.'
And—' Would not you please to take a little refreshment ?
And there's that nice hot broth—and here's the threepence
You left behind you—and would not you order supper ?'
Moreover, when we get things out of compliment
As a present for our master, he contrives
To snatch 'em and serve 'em up before our faces.
I'd made a Spartan cake at Pylos lately,
And mixed and kneaded it well, and watched the baking ;
But he stole round before me and served it up : *
And he never allows us to come near our master
To speak a word ; but stands behind his back

* This affair at Pylos is so repeatedly alluded to in this comedy, that at the risk of telling what to many readers is a well-known story, some explanation must be given here. About six months before this performance took place, a detachment of four hundred Spartans, who had been landed on the little island of Sphacteria, which closes in the Bay of Pylos (the modern Navarino), had been cut off by an Athenian squadron under Eurymedon and Demosthenes, and were closely blockaded there, in the hope of starving them into surrender. The Spartans offered terms of peace, for the men were all citizens of Sparta itself, and their loss would have been a calamity to the state. The proposal was refused by the triumphant Athenians ; but afterwards the blockade was not maintained effectively, and the capitulation became doubtful. At this juncture, Cleon came forward in the Assembly, and boasted loudly that, if the command were given to him, he would bring the men prisoners to Athens within twenty days. He was taken at his word ; and possibly to his own surprise, and certainly to the dismay of his political opponents, he made his boast good. The constant sneers at this exploit on the part of Cleon's enemies seem to prove that it was not the mere piece of good luck which they represented it.

At meal times, with a monstrous leathern fly-flap,
Slapping and whisking it round, and rapping us off.

Sometimes the old man falls into moods and fancies,
Searching the prophecies till he gets bewildered,
And then the Paphlagonian plies him up,
Driving him mad with oracles and predictions.
And that's his harvest. Then he slanders us,
And gets us beaten and lashed, and goes his rounds
Bullying in this way, to squeeze presents from us :
' You saw what a lashing Hylas got just now ;
You'd best make friends with me, if you love your lives.'
Why then, we give him a trifle, or, if we don't,
We pay for it ; for the old fellow knocks us down,
And kicks us on the ground."—(F.)

But, after all, what shall they do?—" Die at once," says the despondent Nicias—" drink bull's blood, like Themistocles." " Drink a cup of good wine, rather," says his jovial comrade. And he sends Nicias to purloin some, while their hated taskmaster is asleep. Warming his wits under its influence, Demosthenes is inspired with new counsels. The oracles which this Paphlagonian keeps by him, and by means of which he strengthens his influence over their master, must be got hold of. And Nicias—the weaker spirit—is again sent by his comrade upon the perilous service of stealing them from their owner's possession while he is still snoring.* He succeeds in his errand, and Demosthenes

* " A general feature of human nature, nowhere more observable than among boys at school, where the poor timid soul is always despatched upon the most perilous expeditions. Nicias is the fag—Demosthenes the big boy."—Frere.

The influence of oracles on the public mind at Athens during the Peloponnesian War is notorious matter of history.

(who has paid great attention to the wine-jar meanwhile) takes the scrolls from his hands and proceeds to unroll and read them, his comrade watching him with a face of superstitious eagerness. The oracles contain a prophetic history of Athens under its successive demagogues. First there should rise to power a hemp-seller, secondly a cattle-jobber, thirdly a dealer in hides—this Paphlagonian, who now holds rule in Demus's household. But he is to fall before a greater that is to come—one who plies a marvellous trade. Nicias is all impatience to know who and what this saviour of society is to be. Demosthenes, in a mysterious whisper, tells him the coming man is—a Black-pudding-seller!

“Black-pudding-seller! marvellous, indeed!

Great Neptune, what an art!—but where to find him?”

Why, most opportunely, here he comes! He is seen mounting the steps which are supposed to lead from the city, with his tray of wares suspended from his neck. The two slaves make a rush for him, salute him with the profoundest reverence, take his tray off carefully, and bid him fall down and thank the gods for his good fortune.

“*Black-P.-Seller.* Hallo! what is it?

Demosth.

O thrice blest of mortals!

Who art nought to-day, but shall be first to-morrow!

Hail, Chief that shall be of our glorious Athens!

B.-P.-S. Prithée, good friend, let me go wash my tripes, and sell my sausages—you make a fool of me.

Dem. Tripes, quotha! tripes? Ha-ha!—Look yonder, man—(*pointing to the audience.*)

You see these close-packed ranks of heads?

B.-P.-S.

I see.

Dem. Of all these men you shall be sovereign chief,
Of the Forum, and the Harbours, and the Courts,
Shall trample on the Senate, flout the generals,
Bind, chain, imprison, play what pranks you will.

B.-P.-S. What,—I?

Dem. Yes—you. But you've not yet seen all ;
Here—mount upon your dresser there—look out !

*(Black-Pudding-Seller gets upon the dresser, from
which he is supposed to see all the dependencies
of Athens, and looks stupidly round him.)*

You see the islands all in a circle round you ?

B.-P.-S. I see.

Dem. What, all the sea-ports, and the shipping ?

B.-P.-S. I see, I tell ye.

Dem. Then, what luck is yours !

But cast your right eye now towards Caria—there—
And fix your left on Carthage,—both at once.

B.-P.-S. Be blest if I shan't squint—if that's good luck."

The Black-pudding-man is modest, and doubts his own qualifications for all this preferment. Demosthenes assures him that he is the very man that is wanted. "A rascal—bred in the forum,—and with plenty of brass;" what could they wish for more? Still, the other fears he is "not strong enough for the place." Demosthenes begins to be alarmed: modesty is a very bad symptom in a candidate for preferment; he is afraid, after all, that the man has some hidden good qualities which will disqualify him for high office. Possibly, he suggests, there is some gentle blood in the family? No, the other assures him: all his ancestors have been born blackguards like himself, so far as he knows. But he has had no education—he can but

barely spell. The only objection, Demosthenes declares, is that he has learnt even so much as that.

“ The only harm is, you can spell at all ;
 Our leaders of the people are no longer
 Your men of education and good fame ;
 We choose the illiterate and the blackguards, always.”

Demosthenes proceeds to tell him of a prophecy, found amongst the stolen scrolls, in which, after the enigmatical fashion of such literature, it is foretold that the great tanner-eagle shall be overcome by the cunning serpent that drinks blood. The tanner-eagle is plainly none other than this Paphlagonian hide-seller ; and as to his antagonist, what can be plainer ? It is the resemblance of Macedon to Monmouth. “ A serpent is long, and so is a black-pudding ; and both drink blood.” So Demosthenes crowns the new-found hero with a garland, and they proceed to finish the flagon of wine to the health of the conqueror in the strife that is to come. Nor will allies be wanting :—

“ Our Knights—good men and true, a thousand strong,—
 Who hate the wretch, shall back you in this contest ;
 And every citizen of name and fame,
 And each kind critic in this goodly audience,
 And I myself, and the just gods besides.
 Nay, never fear ; you shall not see his features ;
 For very cowardice, the mask-makers
 Flatly refused to mould them. Ne'ertheless,
 He will be known,—our friends have ready wits.”

At this moment the dreaded personage comes out from the house in a fury. The Black-pudding-man takes to flight at once, leaving his stock-in-trade behind him, but is hauled back by Demosthenes, who

loudly summons the "Knights" to come to the rescue,—and with the usual rhythmical movement, and rapid chant, the Chorus of Knights sweep up through the orchestra.

"Close around him and confound him, the confounder of us all!

Pelt him, pummel him, and maul him,—rummage, ransack, overhaul him!

Overbear him, and out-bawl him; bear him down, and bring him under!

Bellow like a burst of thunder—robber, harpy, sink of plunder!

Rogue and villain! rogue and cheat! rogue and villain!
I repeat.

Oftener than I can repeat it has the rogue and villain cheated.

Close upon him left and right—spit upon him, spurn and smite;

Spit upon him as you see: spurn and spit at him, like me."
—(F.)

They surround and hustle the representative of Cleon, who calls in vain for his partisans to come to his assistance. The Black-pudding man takes courage, and comes to the front; and a duel in the choicest Athenian Billingsgate takes place, in which the current truths or slanders of the day are paraded, no doubt much to the amusement of an Athenian audience—hardly so to the English reader. The new champion shows himself at least the equal of his antagonist in this kind of warfare, and the Chorus are delighted. "There is something hotter, after all, than fire—a more consummate blackguard has been found than Cleon!" From words the battle proceeds to blows, and the Paphlagonian retires discomfited, threatening

his antagonist with future vengeance, and challenging him to meet him straightway before the Senate.*

The Chorus fill up the interval of the action by an address to the audience ; in which, speaking on the author's behalf, they apologise on the ground of modesty for his not having produced his previous comedies in his own name and on his own responsibility, and make a complaint—common to authors in all ages—of the ingratitude of the public to its popular favourites of the hour. Thence the chant passes into an ode to Neptune, the tutelary god of a nation of seamen, and to Pallas Athene, who gives her name to the city. And between the pauses of the song they rehearse, in a kind of recitative, the praises of the good old days of Athens.

“ Let us praise our famous fathers, let their glory be recorded,

On Minerva's mighty mantle consecrated and embroidered.
That with many a naval action, and with infantry by land,
Still contending, never ending, strove for empire and command.

When they met the foe, disdaining to compute a poor account

Of the number of their armies, of their muster and amount :
But when'er at wrestling matches they were worsted in
the fray,

Wiped their shoulders from the dust, denied the fall, and
fought away.

Then the generals never claimed precedence, or a separate
seat,

Like the present mighty captains, or the public wine or
meat.

* The Senate was an elective Upper Chamber, in which all “ bills ” were brought in and discussed, before they were put to the vote in the General Assembly.

As for us, the sole pretension suited to our birth and years,
Is with resolute intention, as determined volunteers,
To defend our fields and altars, as our fathers did before ;
Claiming as a recompense this easy boon, and nothing
more :

When our trials with peace are ended, not to view us with
malignity,

When we're curried, sleek and pampered, prancing in our
pride and dignity." *—(F.)

* This Chorus has been imitated, in the true Aristophanic
vein, by Mr Trevelyan, in his 'Ladies in Parliament :—

" We much revere our sires, who were a mighty race of men ;
For every glass of port we drink, they nothing thought of ten.
They dwelt above the foulest drains : they breathed the closest air :
They had their yearly twinge of gout, and little seemed to care.
They set those meddling people down for Jacobins or fools,
Who talked of public libraries and grants to normal schools ;
Since common folks who read and write, and like their betters
speak,

Want something more than pipes and beer, and sermons once a-week.
And therefore both by land and sea their match they rarely met,
But made the name of Britain great, and ran her deep in debt.
They seldom stopped to count the foe, nor sum the moneys spent,
But clenched their teeth, and straight ahead with sword and musket
went.

And, though they thought if trade were free that England ne'er
would thrive,

They freely gave their blood for Moore, and Wellington, and Clive.
And though they burned their coal at home, nor fetched their ice
from Wenham,

They played the man before Quebec, and stormed the lines at Blen-
heim.

When sailors lived on mouldy bread, and lumps of rusty pork,
No Frenchman dared his nose to show between the Downs and
Cork ;

But now that Jack gets beef and greens, and next his skin wears
flannel,

The 'Standard' says, we've not a ship in plight to keep the Chan-
nel."

From these praises of themselves—the Knights—they pass on, in pleasant banter, to the praises of their horses,—who, as the song declares, took a very active part in the late expedition against Corinth, in which the cavalry, conveyed in horse-transports, had done excellent service.

“ Let us sing the mighty deeds of our illustrious noble steeds :

They deserve a celebration for their service heretofore,—
Charges and attacks,—exploits enacted in the days of yore :
These, however, strike me less, as having been performed
ashore.

But the wonder was to see them, when they fairly went
aboard,

With canteens, and bread, and onions, victualled and completely stored,

Then they fixed and dipped their oars, beginning all to
shout and neigh,

Just the same as human creatures,—‘ Pull away, boys !
pull away !

Bear a hand there, Roan and Sorrel ! Have a care there,
Black and Bay !’

Then they leapt ashore at Corinth ; and the lustier younger
sort

Strolled about to pick up litter, for their solace and disport :
And devoured the crabs of Corinth, as a substitute for
clover,

So that a poetic *Crabbe** exclaimed in anguish—‘ All is
over !

What awaits us, mighty Neptune, if we cannot hope to
keep

From pursuit and persecution in the land or in the deep ?’ ”

—(F.)

* Karkinos (*Crab*) was an indifferent tragedian of the day, some of whose lines are here parodied.

As the song ends, their champion returns triumphant from his encounter with Cleon in the Senate. The Knights receive him with enthusiasm, and he tells for their gratification the story of his victory, which he ascribes to the influence of the great powers of Humbug and Knavery, Impudence and Bluster, whom he had piously invoked at the outset. He had distracted the attention of the senators from his rival's harangue by announcing to them the arrival of a vast shoal of anchovies, of which every man was eager to secure his share. In vain had Cleon tried to create a diversion in his own favour by the announcement that a herald had arrived from Sparta to treat of peace. "Peace, indeed, when anchovies are so cheap!—never." Then rushing into the market, he had bought up the whole stock-in-trade of coriander-seed and wild onions—seasoning for the anchovies—and presented them with a little all round. This won their hearts completely. "In short," says this practical politician, "I bought the whole Senate for sixpennyworth of coriander-seed!" A tolerably severe satire upon the highest deliberative assembly at Athens.

But Cleon is not conquered yet. Rushing on the stage in a storm of fury, he vows he will drag his rival before PEOPLE himself. There no one will have any chance against him; for he knows the old gentleman's humour exactly, and feeds him with the nice soft pap which he likes. "Ay," says the other—"and, like the nurses, you swallow three mouthfuls for every one you give him." He is perfectly willing to submit

their respective claims to the master whose stewardship they are contending for. So both knock loudly at Demus's door; and the impersonation of the great Athenian Commons comes out — not in very good case as regards dress and personal comforts, as may be gathered from the dialogue which follows; his majordomo has not taken over-good care of him, after all.

The rival claimants seize him affectionately by either arm, and profess their attachment; while he eyes them both with a divided favour, like Captain Macheath in our comic opera. "I love you," says the Paphlagonian: "I love you better," says the other. "Remember, I brought you the Spartans from Pylos."* "A pretty service," says the Black-pudding-man,— "just like the mess of meat once I stole which another man had cooked." "Call a public assembly, and decide the matter, then," says Cleon. "No — not in the assembly — not in the Pnyx," begs the other; "Demus is an excellent fellow at home, but once set him down at a public meeting, and he goes wild!"

To the Pnyx, however, Demus vows they must all go; and to that place the scene changes. There the contest is renewed: but the interest of the political satire with which it abounds has passed away, in great measure, with the occasion. Some passages in this battle of words are more generally intelligible, as depending less upon local colour, but they are not such good specimens of the satirist's powers. The new aspirant

* See note, p. 19.

to office is shocked to find that Demus is left to sit unprotected on the cold rock (on which the Pnyx was built), and produces a little padded cushion of his own manufacture—a delicate attention with which the old gentleman is charmed. “What a noble idea!” he cries: “Do tell me your name and family—you must surely come of the patriot stock of Harmodius, the great deliverer of Athens!” Then his zealous friend notices the condition of his feet, which are actually peeping through his sandals, and indignantly denounces the selfishness of his present steward:—

“Tell me whether

You, that pretend yourself his friend, with all your wealth
in leather,
Ever supplied a single hide to mend his reverend, battered
Old buskins?

Dem. No, not he, by Jove; look at them, burst and
tattered!

B.-P.-S. That shows the man! now, spick and span,
behold my noble largess!

A lovely pair, bought for your wear, at my own cost and
charges,

Dem. I see your mind is well inclined, with views and
temper suiting,
To place the state of things—and toes—upon a proper
footing.

B.-P.-S. But there now, see—this winter he might pass
without his clothing;

The season’s cold—he’s chilly and old—but still you think
of nothing;

Whilst I, to show my love, bestow this waistcoat as a pre-
sent,

Comely and new, with sleeves thereto, of flannel, warm and
pleasant.

Dem. How strange it is! Themistocles was reckoned
mighty clever ;
With all his wit he could not hit on such a project ever ;
Such a device ! so warm ! so nice ! in short it equals
fairly
His famous wall, with port and all, that he contrived so
rarely."—(F.)

Not to be outdone in such attentions, Cleon offers his cloak, to keep his master from the cold ; but Demus, who is already turning his fickle affections towards his new flatterer, rejects it—it stinks so abominably of leather. "That's it," says the other ; "he wants to poison you ; he tried it once before !"

The old gentleman has made up his mind that the new claimant is his best friend, and desires the Paphlagonian to give up his seal of office. The discarded minister begs that at least his employer will listen to some new oracles which he has to communicate. They promise that he shall be sovereign of all Greece, and sit crowned with roses. The new man declares that he has oracles too—plenty of them ; and they promise that he shall rule not Greece alone, but Thrace, and wear a golden crown and robe of spangles. So both rush off to fetch their documents, while the Chorus break into a chant of triumph, as they prognosticate the fall of the great Demagogue before the antagonist who thus beats him at his own weapons.

The rivals return, laden with rolls of prophecy. Cleon declares he has a trunkful more at home ; the Black-pudding-man has a garret and two outhouses full of them. They proceed to read the most absurd

parodies on this favourite enigmatical literature. Here is one which Cleon produces :—

“ Son of Erectheus, mark and ponder well
 This holy warning from Apollo’s cell ;
 It bids thee cherish him, the sacred whelp,
 Who for thy sake doth bite and bark and yelp.”

Demus shakes his head with an air of puzzled wisdom ; he cannot make it out at all. “ What has Erectheus to do with a whelp ? ” “ That’s me,” says Cleon ; “ I watch and bark for you. I’m Tear’em, and you must make much of me.” * “ Not at all,” says his rival ; “ the whelp has been eating some of that oracle, as he does everything else. It’s a defective copy ; I’ve got the complete text here : ”—

“ Son of Erectheus, ’ware the gap-toothed dog,
 The crafty mongrel that purloins thy prog ;
 Fawning at meals, and filching scraps away,
 The whiles you gape and stare another way ;
 He prowls by night and pilfers many a prize
 Amidst the sculleries and the—colonies.”—(F.)

“ That’s much more intelligible,” remarks the master. Cleon produces another, about a lion, who is to be carefully preserved “ with a wooden wall and iron fortifications : ”—“ and I’m the lion.” “ I can give the interpretation of that,” says the other ; “ the wood and iron are the stocks that you are to put this fellow in.” “ That part of the oracle,” says Demus,

* The speech of a late member for Sheffield—much missed in the House, and whom it would be most unfair to compare with Cleon—will occur to many readers : “ I’m Tear’em.”

“at any rate, is very likely to come true.” And again he declares that his mind is made up; he shall make a change in his establishment forthwith. Once more Cleon begs a respite, until his master sees what nice messes he will bring him. The other assures him he has far better viands, all ready hot; and the sensual old Demus, licking his lips, will wait until he has made trial of both. While they are gone to fetch the dainties, the Chorus rallies him upon his being so open to the practices of his flatterers:—

CHORUS.

“Worthy Demus, your estate
 Is a glorious thing, we own;
 The haughtiest of the proud and great
 Watch and tremble at your frown;
 Like a sovereign or a chief,
 But so easy of belief,
 Every fawning rogue and thief
 Finds you ready to his hand;
 Flatterers you cannot withstand;
 To them your confidence is lent,
 With opinions always bent
 To what your last advisers say,
 Your noble mind is gone astray.

DEMUS.

But though you see me dote and dream,
 Never think me what I seem;
 For my confidential slave
 I prefer a pilfering knave;
 And when he's pampered and full-blown,
 I snatch him up and dash him down.

Hark me—when I seem to doze,
 When my wearied eyelids close,
 Then they think their tricks are hid ;
 But beneath the drooping lid
 Still I keep a corner left,
 Tracing every secret theft :
 I shall match them by-and-by,
 All the rogues you think so sly.”—(F.)

The two candidates for office now run in from different directions, meeting and nearly upsetting each other, laden with trays of delicacies to tempt the master's appetite.

“ *Dem.* Well, truly, indeed, I shall be feasted rarely ;
 My courtiers and admirers will quite spoil me.

Cleon. There, I'm the first, ye see, to bring ye a chair.

B.-P.-S. But a table—here, I've brought it first and foremost.

Cleon. See here, this little half-meal cake from Pylos,
 Made from the flour of victory and success.

B.-P.-S. But here's a cake ! see here ! which the heavenly goddess

Patted and flatted herself, with her ivory hand,
 For your own eating.

Dem. Wonderful, mighty goddess !

What an awfully large hand she must have had !”—(F.)

Ragouts, pancakes, fritters, wine, rich cake, hare-pie, are all tendered him in succession. This last is brought by Cleon ; but the other cunningly directs his attention to some foreign envoys, whom he declares he sees coming with bags of gold ; and while Cleon runs to pounce upon the money, he gets possession of the pie, and presents it as his own offering—“ Just as you did the prisoners from Pylos, you know.” Demus

eats in turn of all the good things, and grows quite bewildered as to his choice between two such admirable purveyors. He cannot see on which side his best interests lie, and at last appeals helplessly to the audience to advise him. The Black-pudding-man proposes that as a test of the honesty of their service, he should search the lockers of each of them. His own proves to be empty; he has given all he had. But in the Paphlagonian's are found concealed all manner of good things, especially a huge cake, from which it appears he had cut off but a miserable slice for his master. This decides the question: Cleon is peremptorily desired to surrender his office at once. He makes a last struggle, and a scene ensues which reads like an antedated parody on the last meeting of Macbeth and Macduff. He holds an oracle which forewarns him of the only man who can overthrow his power. Where was his antagonist educated, and how?—"By the cuffs and blows of the scullions in the kitchen." What did his next master teach him!—"To steal, and then swear he did not." Cleon's mind misgives him. What is his trade, and where does he practise it? And when he learns that his rival sells black-puddings at the city gates, he knows that all is over—Birnam Wood is come to Dunsinane. He wildly tears his hair, and takes his farewell in the most approved vein of tragedy.

“O me! the oracles of heaven are sped!
Bear me within, unhappy! O farewell
Mine olive crown! Against my will I leave thee,
A trophy for another's brow to wear;

Perchance to prove more fortunate than me ;
But greater rascal he can never be." *

Here the action of the drama might have ended ; but the dramatist had not yet driven his moral home. He had to show what Athens might yet be if she could get rid of the incubus of her demagogues. A choral ode is introduced—quite independent, as is so often the case, of the subject of the comedy—chiefly perhaps, in this case, in order to give opportunity for what we must conclude was a change of scene. The doors in the flat, as we should call it, are thrown open, and disclose to view the citadel of Athens. There, seated on a throne, no longer in his shabby clothes, but in a magnificent robe, and glorious in renewed youth, sits Demus, such as he was in the days of Miltiades and Aristides. His new minister has a secret like Medea's, and has boiled him young again. "The good old times are come again," as he declares, thanks to his liberator. There shall be no more ruling by favour and corruption ; right shall be might, and he will listen to no more flatterers. To crown the whole, his new minister leads forth Peace—beautiful Peace, *in propria persona*, hitherto hid away a close prisoner in the house of the Paphlagonian—and presents her to Demus in all her charms. And with this grand tableau the drama closes ; it is not difficult

* A parody on the touching farewell of Alcestis to her nuptial chamber, in the tragedy of Euripides :—

"Farewell ! and she who takes my place—may she
Be happier !—truer wife she cannot be."

to imagine, without being an Athenian, amid what thunders of applause. If the satire had been bitter and trenchant as to the faults and follies of the present—that unfortunate tense of existence, social and political, which appears never to satisfy men in any age of the world—this brilliant reminiscence of the glories of the past, and anticipation of a still more glorious future, was enough to condone for the poet the broadest licence which he had taken. Not indeed that any such apology was required. There was probably not a man among the audience—not a man in the state, except Cleon himself—who would not enjoy the wit far more than he resented its home application. That such a masterpiece was awarded the first prize of comedy by acclamation we should hardly doubt, even if we were not distinctly so informed. Those who know the facile temper of the multitude—and it may be said, perhaps, especially of the Athenian multitude—will understand, almost equally as a matter of course, that the political result was simply nothing. As Mr Mitchell briefly but admirably sums it up—“The piece was applauded in the most enthusiastic manner, the satire on the sovereign multitude was forgiven, and—Cleon remained in as great favour as ever.”*

* Preface to *The Knights*.

CHAPTER III.

COMEDIES OF THE WAR : THE ACHARNIANS—THE PEACE—LYSISTRATA.

THE momentous period in the history of Greece during which Aristophanes began to write, forms the groundwork, more or less, of so many of his Comedies, that it is impossible to understand them, far less to appreciate their point, without some acquaintance with its leading events. All men's thoughts were occupied by the great contest for supremacy between the rival states of Athens and Sparta, known as the Peloponnesian War. It is not necessary here to enter into details ; but the position of the Athenians during the earlier years of the struggle must be briefly described. Their strength lay chiefly in their fleet ; in the other arms of war they were confessedly no match for Sparta and her confederate allies. The heavy-armed Spartan infantry, like the black Spanish bands of the fifteenth century, was almost irresistible in the field. Year after year the invaders marched through the Isthmus into Attica, or were landed in strong detachments on different points of the coast, while the powerful Bœo-

tian cavalry swept all the champaign, burning the towns and villages, cutting down the crops, destroying vines and olive-groves,—carrying this work of devastation almost up to the very walls of Athens. For no serious attempt was made to resist these periodical invasions. The strategy of the Athenians was much the same as it had been when the Persian hosts swept down upon them fifty years before. Again they withdrew themselves and all their movable property within the city walls, and allowed the invaders to overrun the country with impunity. Their flocks and herds were removed into the islands on the coasts, where, so long as Athens was mistress of the sea, they would be in comparative safety. It was a heavy demand upon their patriotism; but, as before, they submitted to it, trusting that the trial would be but brief, and nerved to it by the stirring words of their great leader Pericles. The ruinous sacrifice, and even the personal suffering, involved in this forced migration of a rural population into a city wholly inadequate to accommodate them, may easily be imagined, even if it had not been forcibly described by the great historian of those times. Some carried with them the timber framework of their houses, and set it up in such vacant spaces as they could find. Others built for themselves little “chambers on the wall,” or occupied the outer courts of the temples, or were content with booths and tents set up under the Long Walls which connected the city with the harbour of Piræus. Some—if our comic satirist is to be trusted—were even fain to sleep in tubs and hen-coops. Provisions grew dear and

scarce. Pestilence broke out in the overcrowded city; and in the second and third years of the war, the Great Plague carried off, out of their comparatively small population, above 10,000 of all ranks. The lands were either left unsown, or sown only to be ravaged before harvest-time by the enemy. No wonder that, as year after year passed, and brought no respite from suffering to the harassed citizens, they began to ask each other how long this was to last, and whether even national honour was worth purchasing at this heavy cost. Even the hard-won victories and the successful blows struck by their admirals at various points on their enemies' coasts failed to reconcile the less warlike spirits to the continuance of the struggle. Popular orators like Cleon, fiery captains like Alcibiades, still carried the majority with them when they called for new levies and prophesied a triumphant issue; but there was a party at Athens, not so loud but still very audible, who said that such men had personal ambitions of their own to serve, and who had begun to sigh for "peace at any price."

But it needed a pressure of calamity far greater than the present to keep a good citizen of Athens away from the theatre. If the times were gloomy, so much the more need of a little honest diversion. And if the war party were too strong for him to resist in the public assembly, at least he could have his laugh out against them when caricatured on the stage. It has been already shown that the comic drama was to the Athenians what a free press is to modern commonwealths. As the government of France under Louis

XIV. was said to have been "a despotism tempered by epigrams," so the power of the popular leaders over the democracy of Athens found a wholesome check in the free speech—not to say the licence—accorded to the comedian. Sentiments which it might have been dangerous to express in the public assembly were enunciated in the most plain-spoken language by the actor in the new burlesque. The bolder the attack was, and the harder the hitting, the more the audience were pleased. Nor was it at all necessary, in order to the spectator's keen enjoyment of the piece, that he should agree with its politics. Many an admirer of the war policy of Lamachus laughed heartily enough, we may be sure, at his presentment on the stage in the caricature of military costume in which the actor dressed the part: just as many a modern Englishman has enjoyed the political caricatures of "H. B.," or the cartoons in 'Punch,' not a whit the less because the satire was pointed against the recognised leaders of his own party. It is probable that Aristophanes was himself earnestly opposed to the continuance of the war, and spoke his own sentiments on this point by the mouth of his characters; but the prevalent disgust at the hardships of this long-continued siege—for such it practically was—would in any case be a tempting subject for the professed writer of burlesques; and the caricature of a leading politician, if cleverly drawn, is always a success for the author. To win the verdict of popular applause, which was the great aim of an Athenian play-writer, he must above all things hit the popular taste.

The Peloponnesian War lasted for twenty-nine years—during most of the time for which our dramatist held possession of the stage. Nearly all his comedies which have come down to us abound, as we should naturally expect, in allusions to the one absorbing interest of the day. But three of them—‘The Acharnians,’ ‘The Peace,’ and ‘Lysistrata,’—are founded entirely on what was the great public question of the day—How long was this grinding war to continue? when should Athens see again the blessings of peace? Treated in various grotesque and amusing forms, one serious and important political moral underlies them all.

THE ACHARNIANS.

‘The Acharnians’ might indeed have fairly claimed the first place here, on the ground that it was the earliest in date of the eleven comedies of Aristophanes which have been preserved to us. Independently of its great literary merits, it would have a special interest of its own, as being the most ancient specimen of comedy of any kind which has reached us. It was first acted at the great Lenæan festival held annually in honour of Bacchus, in February of the year 425 B.C., when the war had already lasted between six and seven years. It took its name from Acharnæ, one of the “demes,” or country boroughs of Attica, about seven miles north of Athens; and the Chorus in the play is supposed to consist of old men belonging to the district. Acharnæ was the largest, the most fertile, and the most populous of all the demes, supplying a contingent of 3000 heavy-armed soldiers to the Athenian army. It lay right in the

invader's path in his march from the Spartan frontier upon the city of Athens: and when, in the first year of the war, the Spartan forces bivouacked in its corn-fields and olive-grounds, and set fire to its homesteads, the smoke of their burning and the camp of the destroying enemy could be seen from the city walls. The effect was nearly being that which the Spartan king Archidamus had desired. The Athenians—and more especially the men of Acharnæ, now cooped within the fortifications of the capital—clamoured loudly to be led out to battle; and it needed all the influence of Pericles to restrain them from risking an engagement in which he knew they would be no match for the invaders. The Acharnians, therefore, had their national hostility to the Spartans yet more embittered by their own private sufferings. Yet it was not unnatural that a sober-minded and peaceful yeoman of the district, remembering what his native canton had suffered and was likely to suffer again, should strongly object to the continuance of a war carried on at such a cost. His zeal for the national glory of Athens and his indignation against her enemies might be strong: but the love of home and property is a large component in most men's patriotism. He was an Athenian by all means—but an Acharnian first.

Such a man is Dicæopolis, the hero of this burlesque. He has been too long cooped up in Athens, while his patrimony is being ruined: and in the first scene he comes up to the Pnyx—the place where the public assembly was held—grumbling at things in general, and the war in particular. The members of the Committee on Public Affairs come, as usual, very late to

business—every one, in this city life, is so lazy, as the Acharnian declares : but when business does begin, an incident occurs which interests him very much indeed. One Amphitheus—a personage who claims to be immortal by virtue of divine origin—announces that he has obtained, perhaps on that ground, special permission from the gods to negotiate a peace with Sparta. But there is one serious obstacle ; nothing can be done in this world, even by demigods, without money, and he would have the Committee supply him with enough for his long journey. Such an outrageous request is only answered on the part of the authorities by a call for “Police !” and the applicant, in spite of the remonstrances of Dicaeopolis at such unworthy treatment of a public benefactor, is summarily hustled out of court. Dicaeopolis, however, follows him, and giving him eight shillings—or thereabouts—to defray his expenses on the road, bids him haste to Sparta and bring back with him, if possible, a private treaty of peace—for himself, his wife and children, and maid-servant. Meanwhile the “House” is occupied with the reception of certain High Commissioners who have returned from different foreign embassies. Some have been to ask help from Persia, and have brought back with them “the Great King’s Eye, Sham-artabas” (Dicaeopolis is inclined to look upon him as a sham altogether)—who is, in fact, all eye, as far as the mask-maker’s art can make him so. He talks a jargon even more unintelligible than modern diplomatic communications, which the envoys explain to mean that the king will send the Athenians a sub-

sidy of gold, but which Dicæopolis interprets in quite a contrary sense. Others have come back from a mission to Thrace, and have brought with them a sample of the warlike auxiliaries which Sitalces, prince of that country (who had a sort of Athenomania), is going to send to their aid—at two shillings a-day; some ragamuffin tribe whose appearance on the stage was no doubt highly ludicrous, and whose character is somewhat like that of Falstaff's recruits, or Bombastes Furioso's "brave army," since their first exploit is to steal Dicæopolis's luncheon: a palpable warning against putting trust in foreign hirelings.

Within a space of time so brief as to be conceivable upon the stage only, Amphitheus has returned from Sparta, to the great joy of Dicæopolis. His mission has been successful. But he is quite out of breath; for the Acharnians, finding out what his business is, have hunted and pelted him up to the very walls of Athens. "Peace, indeed! a pretty fellow you are, to negotiate a peace with our enemies after all our vines and corn-fields have been destroyed!" He has escaped them, however, for the present, and has brought back with him three samples of Treaties—in three separate wine-skins. The contents are of various growth and quality.*

"*Dic.* You've brought the Treaties?

Amph.

Ay, three samples of them;

This here is a five years' growth—taste it and try.

* Half the joke is irreparably lost in English. The Greek word for "treaty" or "truce" meant literally the "libation" of wine with which the terms were ratified.

Dic. (tastes, and spits it out). Don't like it.

Amph. Eh ?

Dic. Don't like it—it won't do ;

There's an uncommon ugly twang of pitch,

A touch of naval armament about it.

Amph. Well, here's a ten years' growth may suit you better.

Dic. (tastes again). No, neither of them ; there is a sort of sourness

Here in this last,—a taste of acid embassies,

And vapid allies turning to vinegar.

Amph. But here's a truce of thirty years entire, Warranted sound.

Dic. (smacking his lips and then hugging the jar). O Bacchus and the Bacchanals !

This is your sort ! here's nectar and ambrosia !

Here's nothing about providing three days' rations ; *

It says, ' Do what you please, go where you will ;'

I choose it, and adopt it, and embrace it,

For sacrifice, and for my private drinking.

In spite of all the Acharnians, I'm determined

To remove out of the reach of wars and mischief,

And keep the Feast of Bacchus on my farm."—(F.)

He leaves the stage on these festive thoughts intent. The scene changes to the open country in the district of Acharnæ, and here what we must consider as the second act of the play begins. The Chorus of ancient villagers—robust old fellows, "tough as oak, men who have fought at Marathon" in their day—rush in, in chase of the negotiators of this hateful treaty. Moving backwards and forwards with quick step in measured time across the wide orchestra (which, it must

* Which each soldier was required to take with him on the march.

be remembered, was their proper domain), they chant a strain of which the rhythm, at least, is fairly preserved in Mr Frere's translation :—

“ Follow faster, all together ! search, inquire of every one.
Speak—inform us—have you seen him ? whither is the
rascal run ?

'Tis a point of public service that the traitor should be
caught

In the fact, seized and arrested with the treaties he has
brought.”

Then they separate into two bodies, mutually urging each other to the pursuit, and leave the scene in different directions as Dicæopolis reappears. He is come to hold a private festival on his own account to Bacchus, in thanksgiving for the Peace which he, at all events, is to enjoy from henceforward. But he will have everything done in regular order, so far as his resources admit, with all the pomp and solemnity of a public festival. His daughter is to act as “ Canephora,” or basket-bearer, carrying the sacred emblems of the god—a privilege which the fairest and noblest maidens of Athens were proud to claim—and her mother exhorts her to move and behave herself like a lady,—if on this occasion only. Their single slave is to follow behind with other mystic emblems. But a spectacle is nothing, as Dicæopolis feels, without spectators ; so he bids his wife go indoors, and mount upon the house-top to see the procession pass. Next to a caricature of their great men, an Athenian audience enjoyed a caricature of their religion. They had this much of excuse, that Paganism was full of tempting themes for

burlesque, of which their comic dramatists liberally availed themselves. But in truth there is a temptation to burlesque and parody presented by all religions, more or less, on their external side. Romanism and Puritanism have met with very similar treatment amongst ourselves; and one has only to refer to the old miracle-plays, and such celebrations as the Fête d'Ane, to be convinced how closely in such matters jest and earnest lie side by side.

But the festivities are very soon interrupted. The Acharnians have scented their prey at last, and rush in upon the celebrant with a shower of stones. Dicæopolis begs to know what crime he has committed. They soon let him know it: he has presumed to separate his private interest from the public cause, and to make a private treaty with the detested Spartans. They will listen to no explanation:—

“Don't imagine to cajole us with your argument and fetches!

You confess you've made a peace with these abominable wretches?

Dic. Well—the very Spartans even—I've my doubts and scruples whether

They've been totally to blame, in every instance, altogether.

Cho. Not to blame in every instance?—villain, vagabond! how dare ye?

Talking treason to our faces, to suppose that we shall spare ye?

Dic. Not so totally to blame; and I will show that, here and there,

The treatment they received from us has not been absolutely fair.

Cho. What a scandal ! what an insult ! what an outrage
on the state !

Are ye come to plead before us as the Spartans' advocate ?”

—(F.)

Well,—yes, he is, if they will only listen to him ; and so confident is he of the justice of his views, that he undertakes to plead his cause with his head laid upon a chopping-block, with full permission to his opponents to cut it off at once if he fails to convince them. Even this scanty grace the indignant Acharnians are unwilling to allow him, until he fortunately lays his hand upon an important hostage, whose life shall, he declares, be forfeited the moment they proceed to violence. He produces what looks like a cradle, and might contain a baby. It is really nothing more or less than a basket of charcoal—the local product and staple merchandise of Acharnæ. “Lo,” says he to his irate antagonists, throwing himself into a tragic attitude and brandishing a dagger—“Lo, I will stab your darling to the heart !” The joke seems so very feeble in itself, that it is necessary to bear in mind that a well-known “situation” in a lost tragedy of Euripides (Telephus), which would have been fresh in the memory of an audience of such inveterate play-goers, is here burlesqued for their amusement. The threat brings the Acharnians to terms at once ; they lay down their stones, and prepare to listen to argument, even in apology for the detested Spartans. The chopping-block is brought out ; but before Dicæopolis begins to plead, he remembers that he is not provided with one very important requisite for a prisoner on

trial for his life. He ought to be clothed in "a most pathetic and heart-rending dress"—to move the compassion of his judges. Will they allow him just to step over the way and borrow one from that great tragedian Euripides, who keeps a whole wardrobe of pathetic costumes for his great characters? They give him leave; and as Euripides—most conveniently for dramatic purposes—appears to live close by, Dicæopolis proceeds at once to knock at the door of his lodging, and a servant answers from within. The humour of the scene which follows must have been irresistible to an audience who were familiar with every one of the characters mentioned, and who enjoyed the caricature none the less because they had, no doubt, applauded the tragic original.

"*Servant.* Who's there ?

Dic. Euripides within ?

Serv. Within, yet not within. You comprehend me ?

Dic. Within and not within ! why, what d'ye mean ?

Serv. I speak correctly, old sire ! his outward man
Is in the garret writing tragedy ;
While his essential being is abroad,
Pursuing whimsies in the world of fancy.

Dic. O happy Euripides, with such a servant,
So clever and accomplished !—Call him out.

Serv. It's quite impossible.

Dic. But it must be done.
Positively and absolutely I must see him ;
Or I must stand here rapping at the door.
Euripides ! Euripides ! come down,
If ever you came down in all your life !
'Tis I—'tis Dicæopolis from Chollidæ.

Eur. I'm not at leisure to come down.

Dic. Perhaps—

But here's the scene-shifter can wheel you round.

Eur. It cannot be.

Dic. But, however, notwithstanding.

Eur. Well, there then, I'm wheeled round ; for I had
not time

For coming down.

Dic. Euripides, I say !

Eur. What say ye ?

Dic. Euripides ! Euripides !

Good lawk, you're there ! up-stairs ! you write up-stairs,

Instead of the ground-floor ? always up-stairs ?

Well now, that's odd ! But, dear Euripides,

If you had but a suit of rags that you could lend me !

You're he that brings out cripples in your tragedies,

A'nt ye ? * You're the new Poet, he that writes

Those characters of beggars and blind people ?

Well, dear Euripides, if could you but lend me

A suit of tatters from a cast-off tragedy !

For mercy's sake, for I'm obliged to make

A speech in my own defence before the Chorus,

A long pathetic speech, this very day ;

And if it fails, the doom of death betides me.

Eur. Say, what d'ye seek ? is it the woful garb

In which the wretched aged Æneus acted ?

Dic. No, 'twas a wretcheder man than Æneus, much.

Eur. Was it blind Phœnix ?

Dic. No, not Phœnix ; no,

A fellow a great deal wretcheder than Phœnix."—(F.)

After some further suggestions on the part of Euripides of other tragic characters, whose piteous

* Telephus, Philoctetes, Bellerophon, and probably other tragedy heroes, were all represented by Euripides as lame. But no one could possibly have made greater capital out of the physical sufferings of Philoctetes from his lame foot than the author's favourite Sophocles.

“get-up” might excite the compassion of audience or judges, it turns out that the costume on which the applicant has set his heart is that in which Telephus the Mysian, in the tragedy which bears his name, pleads before Achilles, to beg that warrior to heal, as his touch alone could do, the wound which he had made. The whole scene should be read, if not in the original, then in Mr Frere’s admirable translation. Dicæopolis begs Euripides to lend him certain other valuable stage properties, one after the other: a beggar’s staff,—a little shabby basket,—a broken-lipped pitcher. The tragedian grows out of patience at last at this wholesale plagiarism of his dramatic repertory:—

“*Eur.* Fellow, you’ll plunder me a whole tragedy! Take it, and go.

Dic. Yes; I forsoqth, I’m going.
But how shall I contrive? There’s something more
That makes or mars my fortune utterly;
Yet give them, and bid me go, my dear Euripides;
A little bundle of leaves to line my basket.

Eur. For mercy’s sake! . . . But take them.—There they go!
My tragedies and all! ruined and robbed!

Dic. No more; I mean to trouble you no more.
Yes, I retire; in truth I feel myself
Importunate, intruding on the presence
Of chiefs and princes, odious and unwelcome.
But out, alas! that I should so forget
The very point on which my fortune turns;
I wish I may be hanged, my dear Euripides,
If ever I trouble you for anything,
Except one little, little, little boon,—
A single lettuce from your mother’s stall.”—(F.)

This parting shot at the tragedian’s family antecedents

(for his mother was said to have been a herb-woman) is quite in the style of Athenian wit, which was nothing if not personal. Euripides very naturally orders the door to be shut in the face of this uncivil intruder, —who has got all he wanted, however. Clad in the appropriate costume, he lays his head on the chopping-block, while one of the Chorus stands over him with an axe; and in this ludicrous position makes one of those addresses to the audience which were usual in these comedies, in which the poet assumes for the moment his own character, and takes the house into his personal confidence. As he has already told Euripides,—

“For I must wear a beggar’s garb to-day,
Yet be myself in spite of my disguise,
That the audience all may know me.”

He will venture upon a little plain-speaking to his fellow-Athenians, upon a very delicate subject, as he is well aware. But at this January festival, unlike the greater one in March, no foreigners were likely to be present, so that all that was said might be considered as between friends.

“The words I speak are bold, but just and true.
Cleon, at least, cannot accuse me now,
That I defame the city before strangers.
For this is the Lenæan festival,
And here we meet, all by ourselves alone;
No deputies are arrived as yet with tribute,
No strangers or allies; but here we sit,
A chosen sample, clean as sifted corn,
With our own denizens as a kind of chaff.
First, I detest the Spartans most extremely;
And wish that Neptune, the Tænarian deity,

Would bury them and their houses with his earthquakes.
 For I've had losses—losses, let me tell ye,
 Like other people : vines cut down and ruined.
 But, among friends (for only friends are here),
 Why should we blame the Spartans for all this ?
 For people of ours, some people of our own,—
 Some people from amongst us here, I mean ;
 But not The PEOPLE—pray remember that—
 I never said The PEOPLE—but a pack
 Of paltry people, mere pretended citizens,
 Base counterfeits, went laying informations,
 And making confiscation of the jerkins
 Imported here from Megara ; pigs, moreover,
 Pumpkins, and pecks of salt, and ropes of onions,
 Were voted to be merchandise from Megara,
 Denounced, and seized, and sold upon the spot.”—(F.)

He goes on to mention other aggressions on the part of his own countrymen—to wit, the carrying off from Megara a young woman, no great loss to any community in point of personal character, but still a Megarian—aggressions not of much importance in themselves, but such as he feels sure no high-spirited nation could be expected to put up with :—

“ Just make it your own case ; suppose the Spartans
 Had manned a boat, and landed on your islands,
 And stolen a pug puppy-dog from Seriphos ”—

why, as he says, the whole nation would have flown to arms at once to avenge the insult.

At this point he is interrupted. One party of the Acharnians are for making short work with such a blasphemer. But the other Semi-chorus vow that he says nothing but the truth, and dare them to lay hands

upon him. A struggle ensues, and the war faction call aloud for Lamachus—the “Great Captain” of the day. And that general, being ready within call (as every one is who is required for stage purposes), makes his appearance in grand military costume, with an enormous crest towering over his helmet, and a gorgon’s head of gigantic dimensions upon his shield. He speaks in heroics, as befits him :—

“ Whence falls that sound of battle on mine ear ?
 Who needs my help ? for Lamachus is here !
 Whose summons bids me to the field repair,
 And wakes my slumbering gorgon from her lair ? ”

Dicæopolis is paralysed at the terrible vision, and humbly begs pardon of the hero for what he has said. Lamachus bids him repeat his words :—

“ *Dic.* I—I can’t remember—I’m so terrified.
 The terror of that crest quite turned me dizzy :
 Do take the hobgoblin away from me, I beseech you.*

Lam. (*takes off his helmet.*) There then.

Dic. Now turn it upside down.

Lam. See, there.

Dic. Now give me one of the feathers.”—(F.)

And, to the general’s great disgust, he pretends to use it to tickle his throat. He is so terribly frightened he

* Of course every Athenian would be amused by the parody of the well-remembered scene in the Iliad :—

“ The babe clung crying to his nurse’s breast,
 Scared at the dazzling helm and nodding crest.
 With secret pleasure each fond parent smiled,
 And Hector hastened to relieve his child ;
 The glittering terrors from his brow unbound,
 And placed the beaming helmet on the ground.”

must be sick. Lamachus draws his sword, and makes at the scoffer; but in the tussle the general (to the great amusement, no doubt, of the audience) gets the worst of it. He indignantly demands to know who this vulgar fellow is, who has no respect for dignities:—

“*Dic.* I’ll tell ye—an honest man; that’s what I am.
A citizen that has served his time in the army,
As a foot-soldier, fairly; not like you,
Pilfering and drawing pay with a pack of foreigners.”

—(F.)

He appeals to his audience—did any of them ever get sent out as High Commissioners, with large salaries, like Lamachus? Not one of them. The whole administration of the Athenian war office is nothing but rank jobbery. The general, finding the argument taking a rather personal and unpleasant turn, goes off, with loud threats of what he will do to the Spartans; and Dicæopolis, assuming his own acquittal by the Achæarnians, proclaims, on the strength of his private treaty of peace, a free and open market on his farm for Megarians and Thebans, and all the Peloponnesian Greeks.

An interval between what we should call the acts of the play is filled up by a “*Parabasis*,” as it was termed—a chant in which the Chorus pleads the author’s cause with the audience. By his comedy of ‘The Babylonians,’ produced the year before, he had drawn upon him, as has been already said, the wrath of Cleon and his party, and they had even gone so far as to bring an indictment against him for treason against the state. And he now, by the mouth of the Chorus,

makes a kind of half-apology for his former boldness, and assures the spectators that he has never been really disloyal to Athens. As to Cleon the tanner—he will “cut him into shoe-soles for the Knights;” and we have already seen how he kept his word.

When the regular action of the comedy is resumed, Dicæopolis has opened his free market. The first who comes to take advantage of it is an unfortunate Megarian, who has been reduced to poverty by the war. His native district, lying midway between the two powerful neighbours, had in its perplexity taken what they thought the strongest side, had put an Athenian garrison to the sword, and had suffered terribly from the vengeance of the Athenians in consequence. They had been excluded, on pain of death, from all ports and markets within the Athenian rule, and twice in every year orders were given to march into their territory and destroy their crops. The misery to which the wretched inhabitants were thus reduced is described with a grim humour. The Megarian, having nothing else left to dispose of, has brought his two little daughters to market for sale.

“*Meg.* Ah, there’s the Athenian market! heaven bless it, I say; the welcomest sight to a Megarian. I’ve looked for it, and longed for it, like a child For its own mother. You, my daughters dear, Disastrous offspring of a dismal sire, List to my words, and let them sink impressed Upon your empty stomachs; now’s the time That you must seek a livelihood for yourselves, Therefore resolve at once, and answer me; Will you be sold abroad, or starve at home?”

Daughters (both together). Let us be sold, papa! Let us be sold!

Meg. I say so too; but who do ye think will purchase Such useless, mischievous commodities? However, I have a notion of my own, A true Megarian scheme; I mean to sell ye Disguised as pigs, with artificial pettitoes. Here, take them, and put them on. Remember now, Show yourselves off; do credit to your breeding, Like decent pigs; or else, by Mercury, If I'm obliged to take you back to Megara, There you shall starve, far worse than heretofore. This pair of masks too—fasten 'em on your faces, And crawl into the sack there on the ground. Mind ye, remember—you must squeak and whine.”—(F.)

After some jokes upon the subject, not over-refined, Dicæopolis becomes the purchaser of the pair for a peck of salt and a rope of onions. He is sending the Megarian home rejoicing, and wishing that he could make as good a bargain for his wife and his mother as well, when that curse of the Athenian commonwealth, an informer, comes upon the scene. He at once denounces the pigs as contraband; but Dicæopolis calls the constables to remove him—he will have no informers in his market. The next visitor is a Theban, a hearty, good-humoured yeoman, but who disgusts Dicæopolis by bringing with him two or three pipers, whom the master of the market bids hold their noise and be off; Bœotian music, we are to understand, being always excruciating to the fine Athenian ear. The new-comer has brought with him, to barter for Athenian produce, fish, wild-fowl, and game of all kinds, including grasshoppers, hedgehogs, weasels, and

—writing-tables. But what attracts the attention of Dicaëpolis most is some splendid Copaic eels.* He has not seen their sweet faces, he vows, for six years or more — never since this cursed war began. He selects the finest, and calls at once for brazier and bellows to cook it. The Bœotian naturally asks to be paid for this pick of his basket; but Dicaëpolis explains to him that he takes it by the landlord's right, as "market-toll." For the rest of the lot, however, he shall have payment in Athenian wares. "What will he take?—sprats? crockery?" Nay, they have plenty of these things at home, says the Theban; he would prefer some sort of article that is plentiful in Attica and scarce at Thebes. A bright idea strikes Dicaëpolis at once:—

"*Dic.* Ah! now I have it! take an Informer home with
ye—

Pack him like crockery—and tie him fast.

Bœot. By the Twin Gods, I will! I'll make a show of him
For a tricky ape. 'Twill pay me well, I warrant."

Apropos to the notion, an informer makes his appearance, and Dicaëpolis stealthily points him out to the Bœotian. "He's small," remarks the latter, in depreciation. "Yes," replies the Athenian; "but every inch of him is thoroughly bad." As the man, intent on his

* Their reputation has continued down to modern days. "I was able to partake of some fine eels of an extraordinary size, which had been sent to us by the Greek primates of the city. They were caught in the Lake Copais, which, as in ancient times, still supplies the country round with game and wild-fowl."—Hughes's *Travels in Greece*, i. 33. (Note to Walsh's *Aristophanes*.)

vocation, is investigating the stranger's goods, and calling witnesses to this breach of the law, Dicæopolis gives the signal, and in a trice he is seized, tied up with ropes and straw like a large jar, and after a few hearty kicks—administered to him just to see whether he rings sound or not—this choice specimen of Athenian produce is hoisted on the shoulders of a slave, and carried off as a curiosity to Thebes.

The concluding scene brings out in strong contrast the delights of peace and the miseries of war. General Lamachus has heard of the new market, and cannot resist the temptation to taste once more some of its now contraband luxuries. He sends a slave to buy for him a three-shilling eel. But no eel shall the man of war get from Dicæopolis—no, not if he would give his gorgon-faced shield for it; and the messenger has to return to his master empty. A farmer who has lost his oxen in one of the raids made by the enemy, and has heard of the private supply of Peace which is in the possession of Dicæopolis, comes to buy a small measure of it for himself, even if not of the strongest quality—the “five-years’ sort” would do. But he asks in vain. Next arrives a messenger from a newly-married bridegroom, who has a natural dislike under the circumstances to go on military service. Would Dicæopolis oblige him with a little of this blessed balsam, so that he may stay at home this one campaign?

“*Dic.*

Take it away;

I would not part with a particle of my balsam
For all the world; not for a thousand drachmas.
But that young woman there—who’s she?

Mess. The bridesmaid,
With a particular message from the bride,
Wishing to speak a word in private with you.

Dic. Well, what have ye got to say ? let's hear it all.
Come—step this way—no, nearer—in a whisper—
Nearer, I say—Come then, now, tell me about it.

*(After listening with comic attention to a
supposed whisper.)*

O, bless me ! what a capital, comical,
Extraordinary string of female reasons
For keeping a young bridegroom safe at home !
Well, we'll indulge her, since she's only a woman ;
She's not obliged to serve ; bring out the balsam !
Come, where's your "little vial ?"—(F.)

While Dicaëpolis is continuing his culinary preparations for the banquet which is to close the festival—preparations in which the old gentlemen of the Chorus, in spite of their objections to the truce, take a very lively interest—a messenger comes in hot haste to summon Lamachus. The Bœotians are meditating an attack on the frontier, hoping to take the Athenians at disadvantage at this time of national holiday. It is snowing hard ; but the orders of the commanders-in-chief are imperative, and Lamachus must go to the front. And at this moment comes another messenger to call Dicaëpolis to the banquet, which stays only for him. A long antithetic dialogue follows, pleasant, it must be supposed, to Athenian ears, who delighted in such word-fencing, tiresome to English readers. Lamachus orders out his knapsack ; Dicaëpolis bids his slave bring his dinner-service. The general, cursing all commanders-in-chief, calls for his plume ; the Acharnian for roast pigeons. Lamachus calls for his spear ;

Dicæopolis for the meat-spit. The hero whirls his gorgon shield round; the other mimics the performance with a large cheese-cake. Losing patience at last, partly through envy of such good fare, and partly at the mocking tone of the other, Lamachus threatens him with his weapon; Dicæopolis defends himself with the spit, like Bailie Nicol Jarvie with his hot poker; and so, after this passage of broad farce, the scene closes—the general shouldering his knapsack and marching off into the snow-storm, while the other packs up his contribution to the public supper, at which he hastens to take his place.

A brief interval, filled by a choral ode, allows time enough in dramatic imagination for Lamachus's expedition and for Dicæopolis's feast. A messenger from the army rushes in hot haste upon the stage, and knocks loudly at the door of the former. "Hot-water, lint, plaister, splints!" The general has been wounded. In leaping a ditch he has sprained his ankle and broken his head; and here he comes. As the discomfited warrior limps in on the one side, groaning and complaining, Dicæopolis, with a train of joyous revellers, enters on the other. He does not spare his jests and mockeries upon the other's miserable condition; and the piece closes with a tableau sufficiently suggestive of the advantages of peace over war—the general, supported by his attendants, having his wounds dressed, and roaring with pain, occupying one side of the stage; while the Acharnian revellers, crowned with garlands, shout their joyous drinking-songs to Bacchus on the other.

THE PEACE.

'The Peace' was brought out four years after 'The Acharnians,' when the war had already lasted ten years. This was not long before the conclusion of that treaty between the two great contending powers which men hoped was to hold good for fifty years, known as the Peace of Nicias. The leading idea of the plot is the same as in the previous comedy; the intense longing, on the part of the more domestic and less ambitious citizens, for relief from the prolonged miseries of the war.

Trygæus,—whose name suggests the lost merriment of the vintage,—finding no help in men, has resolved to undertake an expedition in his own person, to heaven, to expostulate with Jupiter for allowing this wretched state of things to go on. With this object in view (after some previous attempts with a ladder, which, owing to the want of anything like a *point d'appui*, have naturally resulted in some awkward falls), he has fed and trained a dung-beetle, which is to carry him up to the Olympian throne; there being an ancient fable to the effect that the creature had once upon a time made his way there in pursuit of his enemy the eagle.* It is a burlesque

* The old commentators assign the story to Æsop. The eagle had eaten the beetle's young ones; the beetle, in revenge, rolled the eagle's eggs out of her nest: so often, that the latter made complaint to her patron Jupiter, who gave her leave to lay her eggs in his bosom. The beetle flew up to heaven, and buzzed about the god's head, who jumped up in a hurry to catch his tormentor, quite forgetting his duty as nurse, and so the eggs fell out and were broken.

upon the aerial journey of Bellerophon on Pegasus, as represented in one of the popular tragedies of Euripides ; and Trygæus addresses his strange steed as his "little Pegasus" accordingly. Mounted in this strange fashion, to the great alarm of his two daughters, he makes his appearance on the stage, and is raised bodily through the air, with many soothing speeches to the beetle, and a private "aside" to the machinist of the theatre to take great care of him, lest like his predecessor Bellerophon he should fall down and break his leg, and so furnish Euripides with another crippled hero for a tragedy. By some change of scenery he is next represented as having reached the door of Jupiter's palace, where Mercury, as the servant in waiting, comes out to answer his knock.

Mercury (looks round and sniffs). What's this I smell
—a mortal? (*Sees Trygæus on his beetle.*) O,
great Hercules!

What horrible beast is this?

Tryg. A beetle-horse.

Merc. O you abominable, impudent, shameless beast!
You cursed, cursed, thrice accursed sinner!
How came you up here? what business have you here?
O you abomination of abominations,
Speak—what's your name? D'ye hear?

Tryg. Abomination.

Merc. What place d'ye come from?

Tryg. From Abomination.

Merc. (rather puzzled). Eh?—what's your father's name?

Tryg. Abomination.

Merc. (in a fury). Look here now,—by the Earth, you
die this minute,

Unless you tell me your accursed name.

Tryg. Well—I'm Trygæus of Athmon ; I can prune
A vine with any man—that's all. I'm no informer,
I do assure you ; I hate law like poison.

Merc. And what have you come here for ?

Tryg. (*pulling something out of a bag*). Well, you see,
I've brought you this beefsteak.

Merc. (*softening his tone considerably*). Oh, well—
poor fellow !
But how did you come ?

Tryg. Aha, my cunning friend !
I'm not such an abomination, after all !
But come, call Jupiter for me, if you please.

Merc. Ha, ha ! you can't see him, nor any of the gods ;
They're all of them gone from home—went yesterday.

Tryg. Why, where on earth are they gone to ?

Merc. Earth, indeed !

Tryg. Well, then, but where ?

Merc. They're gone a long way off
Into the furthest corner of the heavens.

Tryg. And why are you left here, pray, by yourself ?

Merc. Oh, I'm taking care of the pots and pans, and such-
like.

Tryg. What made them all leave home so suddenly ?

Merc. Disgusted with you Greeks. They've given you up
To War, to do exactly what he likes with :
They've left him here to manage all their business,
And gone themselves as far aloft as possible,
That they may no more see you cutting throats,
And may be no more bothered with your prayers.

Tryg. What makes them treat us in this fashion—tell me ?

Merc. Because you would have war, when they so often
Offered you peace. Whenever those fools the Spartans
Met with some small success, then it was always—
“By the Twin Gods, Athens shall catch it now !”
And then, when you Athenians got the best of it,
And Sparta sent proposals for a peace,

You would say always—"Oh, they're cheating us!
 We won't be taken in—not we, by Pallas!
 No, by great Jupiter! they'll come again
 With better terms, if we keep hold of Pylos."

Tryg. That is uncommonly like what we *did* say.

No doubt it was: Aristophanes is writing history here with quite as much accuracy as most historians. Mercury goes on to explain to his visitor that the Greeks are never likely to see Peace again: War has cast her into a deep pit (which he points out), and heaped great stones upon her: and he has now got an enormous mortar, in which he proposes to pound all the cities of Greece, if he can only find a pestle big enough for his purpose. "But hark!" says Mercury—"I do believe he's coming out! I must be off." And while the god escapes, and Trygæus hides himself in affright from the terrible presence, War, a grim giant in full panoply, and wearing, no doubt, the most truculent-looking mask which the theatrical artist could furnish, comes upon the scene, followed by his man Tumult, who lugs a huge mortar with him. Into this vessel War proceeds to throw various ingredients, which represent the several towns and states which were the principal sufferers in the late campaigns: leeks for Prasiæ, garlic for Megara, cheese for Sicily. When he goes on to add some Attic honey to his olio, Trygæus can scarcely restrain himself from giving vent aloud to the remonstrance which he utters in an "aside"—not to use so terribly expensive an article. Tumult is forthwith despatched (with a cuff on the head for his slowness) to fetch a pestle of sufficient weight for his

master's purpose. He goes to Athens first; but their great war-pestle has just been lost—Cleon, the mainstay of the war party, has been killed in battle at Amphipolis, in Thrace. The messenger is next despatched to Sparta, but returns with no better success: the Spartans had lent their pestle to the Thracians, and Brasidas had fallen, with the Athenian general, in that same battle at Amphipolis. Trygæus, who all this while has been trembling in his hiding-place, begins to take heart, while War retires with his slave to manufacture a new pestle for himself. Now, in his absence, is the great opportunity to rescue Peace from her imprisonment. Trygæus shouts to all good Greeks, especially the farmers, the tradesmen, and the working classes, to come to his aid; and a motley Chorus, equipped with shovels, ropes, and crow-bars, appear in answer to his call. They give him a good deal of annoyance, however, because, true to their stage business as Chorus, instead of setting to work at once they will waste the precious minutes in dancing and singing,—a most incongruous proceeding, as he observes, when everything depends upon speed and silence; an amusing sarcasm from a writer of what we may call operatic burlesque upon the conventional absurdities which are even more patent in our modern serious opera than in Athenian comedy. At last they go to work in earnest, and succeed in bribing Mercury, who returns when War is out of the way, to help them. But to get Peace out of the pit requires, as Trygæus tells them, “a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether.” And first the Bœotians will not pull, and then the

Argives, and then the Megarians; and Lamachus, the impersonation of the war party at Athens here as in 'The Acharnians,' gets in the way, and has to be removed; until at last the "country party"—the husbandmen—lay hold with a will, and Peace, with her companions "Plenty" and "Holiday," represented also by two beautiful women, is drawn up from the pit, and hailed with great joy by Trygæus and the Chorus. But Peace, for a while, stands silent and indignant in the midst of their congratulations. She will not open her lips, says Mercury, in the presence of this audience. She has confided the reason to him in a whisper—for she never speaks throughout the play: she is angry at having been thrice rejected by vote in the Athenian assembly when she offered herself to them after the affair of Pylos. But she is soon so far appeased, that with her two fair companions she accompanies Trygæus to earth. The beetle remains behind—having received an appointment to run under Jupiter's chariot and carry the lightning.

The last act—which, as is commonly the case with these comedies, is quite supplementary to what we moderns should call the catastrophe of the piece—takes place in front of Trygæus's country house, where he celebrates his nuptials with the fair Opóra (Plenty), whom Mercury has presented to him as the reward of his good service. The festival held on the occasion is represented on the stage with a detail which was probably not tedious to an Athenian audience. All who ply peaceful arts and trades are freely welcomed to it; while those who make their gain by war—the sooth-

sayer who promulgates his warlike oracles to delude men's minds, the trumpeter, the armourer, and the singer of war-songs—are all dismissed by the triumphant vine-dresser with ignominy and contempt.

One little point in this play is worth notice, as a trait of generous temper on the part of the dramatist. Cleon, his great personal enemy, was now dead. He has not been able to restrain himself from aiming a blow at him even now, as one of those whom he looks upon, justly or unjustly, as the authors of the miseries of Greece. But he holds his hand half-way. When Mercury is descanting upon some of these evils which went near to the ruin of Athens, he is made to say that “the Tanner”—*i. e.*, Cleon—was the cause of them. Trygæus interrupts him,—

Hold—say not so, good master Mercury ;
 Let that man rest below, where now he lies.
 He is no longer of our world, but yours.

This forbearance towards his dead enemy is turned off, it is true, with a jest to the effect that anything bad which Mercury could say of him now would be a reproach to that ghostly company of which the god had especial charge ; but even under the sarcasm we may willingly think there lies a recognition of the great principle, that the faults of the dead should be buried with them.

LYSISTRATA.

The comedy of ‘Lysistrata,’ which was produced some ten years later, deals with the same subject from quite a different point of view. The war has now

lasted twenty-one years. The women of Athens have grown hopeless of any termination of it so long as the management of affairs is left in the hands of the men, and impatient of the privations which its continuance involves. They determine, under the leading of the clever Lysistrata,* wife to one of the magistrates, to take the question into their own hands. They resolve upon a voluntary separation from their husbands—a practical divorce *a mensa et thoro*—until peace with Sparta shall be proclaimed. The meeting of these fair conspirators is called very early in the morning, while the husbands (at least such few of them as the campaign has left at home) are in bed and asleep. By a liberal stage licence, the women of Sparta (who talk a very broad Doric), of Corinth, and Bœotia, and, in fact, the female representatives generally of all Greece, attend the gathering, in spite of distance and of the existence of the war. All take an oath to observe this self-denying ordinance strictly—not without an amusing amount of reluctance on the part of some weaker spirits, which is at last overcome by the firm example of a Spartan lady. It is resolved that a body of the elder matrons shall seize the Acropolis, and make themselves masters of the public treasury. These form one of the two Choruses in the play, the other being composed of the old men of Athens. The latter proceed (with a good deal of comic difficulty, owing to the steepness of the ascent and their shortness of breath) to attack the Acropolis,

* Her name, like most of those used in these comedies, is significant. It means, "Dissolver of the Army."

armed with torches and fagots and pans of charcoal, with which they hope to smoke out the occupants. But the women have provided themselves with buckets of water, which they empty on the heads of their assailants, who soon retire discomfited to call the police. But the police are in their turn repulsed by these resolute insurgents, whom they do not exactly know how to deal with. At last a member of the Public Committee comes forward to parley, and a dialogue takes place between him and Lysistrata. Why, he asks, have they thus taken possession of the citadel? They have resolved henceforth to manage the public revenues themselves, is the reply, and not allow them to be applied to carrying on this ruinous war. That is no business for women, argues the magistrate. "Why not?" says Lysistrata; "the wives have long had the management of the private purses of the husbands, to the great advantage of both." In short, the women have made up their minds to have their voice no longer ignored, as hitherto, in questions of peace and war. Their remonstrances have always been met with the taunt that "war is the business of men;" and to any question they have ventured to ask their husbands on such points, the answer has always been the old cry—old as the days of Homer—"Go spin, you jade, go spin!"* But they will put up with it no longer. As they have always had wit

* Hom. Iliad, vi. 490. Hector to Andromache:—

"No more—but hasten to thy tasks at home;
There guide the spindle and direct the loom."

—POPE.

enough to clear the tangled threads in their work, so they have no doubt of settling all these difficulties and complications in international disputes, if it is left to them. But what concern, her opponent asks, can women have with war, who contribute nothing to its dangers and hardships? "Contribute, indeed!" says the lady—"we contribute the sons who carry it on." And she throws down to her adversary her hood, her basket, and her spindle, and bids him "go home and card wool,"—it is all such old men are fit for; henceforth the proverb (of the men's making) shall be reversed,— "War shall be the care of the women." The magistrate retires, not having got the best of it, very naturally, in an encounter of words; and the Chorus of elders raise the cry—well known as a popular partisan-cry at Athens, and sure to call forth a hearty laugh in such juxtaposition—that the women are designing to "set up a Tyranny!"

But poor Lysistrata soon has her troubles. Her unworthy recruits are fast deserting her. They are going off to their husbands in the most sneaking manner—creeping out through the little hole under the citadel which led to the celebrated cave of Pan, and letting themselves down from the walls by ropes at the risk of breaking their necks. Those who are caught all have excellent excuses. One has some fleeces of fine Milesian wool at home which *must* be seen to,—she is sure the moths are eating them. Another has urgent occasion for the doctor; a third cannot sleep alone for fear of the owls—of which, as every one knows, there were really a great many at

Athens. The husbands, too, are getting uncomfortable without their housekeepers; there is no one to cook their victuals; and one poor soul comes and humbly entreats his wife at least to come home to wash and dress the baby.

It is becoming plain that either the war or the wives' resolution will soon give way, when there arrives an embassy from Sparta. *They* cannot stand this general strike of the wives. They are agreed already with their enemies the Athenians on one point—as to the women—that the old Greek comedian's * proverb, which we have borrowed and translated freely, is true,—

There is no living with 'em—or without 'em.

They are come to offer terms of peace. When two parties are already of one mind, as Lysistrata observes, they are not long in coming to an understanding. A treaty is made on the spot, with remarkably few preliminaries. The Spartan ambassadors are carried off at once to an entertainment in the Acropolis under the presidency of Lysistrata; and the Athenians find, as is so often the case when those who have been the bitterest opponents become better acquainted, that the Spartans are excellent fellows in their cups—nay, positively entertaining, as one of the plenipotentiaries who returns from the banquet declares; which last would be quite a new characteristic, to the ears of an

* Susarion. So also the Roman censor, Metellus Numidicus: "It is not possible to live with them in any comfort—or to live without them at all."—Aul. Gellius, i. 6.

Athenian audience, of their slow and steady neighbours. So charmed are the Chorus with the effect of a little wholesome conviviality upon national temper, that they deliver it as their decided opinion that in future all embassies to foreign states should be fairly drunk before they set out. When men are sober, they are critical and suspicious, and put a wrong interpretation on things, and stand upon their dignity; but under the genial influence of good liquor there is a disposition to make everything pleasant. And so, with two choric hymns, chanted by Spartans and Athenians in turn—so bright and graceful that they would seem out of place in such wild company, but that we know the poet meant them to herald the joy with which a real Peace would be welcomed—this broad extravaganza ends.

For the humour is indeed of the broadest, in some passages, even for Aristophanes. But in spite of coarse language, it has been justly said by modern critics in the poet's defence, that the moral of the piece is honest and true. The longing for that domestic happiness which has been interrupted and shattered by twenty years of incessant war, is a far more wholesome sentiment, in its nature and effects, than very much of modern sentiment which passes under finer names.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLOUDS.

THE satire in this, one of the best-known of Aristophanes's comedies, is directed against the new schools of philosophy which had been lately developed in Athens, and which reckoned among their disciples not only the more intellectual of the rising generation, but also a good many idle young men of the richer classes, who were attracted by the novelty of the tenets which were there propounded, the eloquence of the teachers, and the richness of illustration and brilliant repartee which were remarkable features in their method. There were several reasons which would make this new learning unpopular, whatever its real merits might have been. These men controverted popular opinions, and assumed to know more than other people—which was an offence to the dignity of the great Athenian commons. The lecturers themselves were nearly all of them foreigners—Thrasymachus from Chalcedon, Gorgias from Leontini in Sicily, Protagoras from Abdera in Thrace. These, with many others of less note, had brought their

talents to Athens as the great intellectual mart, where such ware was understood, and was sure to find its price, both in renown and in the grosser and more literal sense. Besides, they sneered (so it was said) at the national religion; and the national religion, especially to the lower ranks of citizens, meant holidays, and public feasts, and processions, and a good deal of licence and privilege which was very much valued. There were reasons, too, why the poet himself should be very willing to exercise his wit at the expense of the philosophers: to his conservative mind these outlandish teachers, with their wild speculations and doctrine of free thought, and generally aggressive attitude towards the established order of things, were especially objectionable.

The term "Sophist," though in its original and wider sense it was applied to the professors of philosophy generally, had come to mean, in the popular language of Athens, those who, for pay, undertook to teach a method of rhetoric and argument by which a man might prove anything whatever. It is against these public lecturers, who either taught or were commonly believed to teach this perversion of the great science of dialectics, that Aristophanes brings the whole weight of his biting humour to bear in 'The Clouds.' This is no place to inquire how far the accusation brought against them was or was not a fair one, or whether that abuse of their powers which was the disgrace of a few may not have been attributed by unjust clamour to a whole class of public teachers in which they were but the exceptions. It is possible to

believe not only, with Mr Grote, that the Sophists "bear the penalty of their name in its modern sense," but also that in their own day they bore the penalty of superior ability and intelligence in becoming the objects of dislike, and therefore of misrepresentation, and yet to understand how they may have afforded very fair material for the professional satirist. The art of public speaking, which these professors taught, is a powerful engine, which in unscrupulous hands may do as much to mislead as to instruct. That the love of disputation and the consciousness of power will tempt a clever man to maintain a paradox, and discomfit an opponent by what he knows to be a fallacy—that a keen intellect will delight in questioning an established belief—and that the shallow self-sufficiency of younger disciples will push any doctrine to its wildest extremes,—are moral facts for whose confirmation we have no need to go to ancient history. And we are not to suppose that either the poet or his audience intended the fun of the piece to be taken as serious evidence either of the opinions or the practice of any school whatever.

But the question which has, with much more reason, exercised the ingenuity of able critics, is the choice which Aristophanes has made of Socrates as the representative of this sophistical philosophy, and his motive in holding him up to ridicule, as he here does, by name. For Socrates, it is generally allowed, was the opponent of these Sophists, or at least of those objectionable doctrines which they were said to teach. But there were some very important points—and those

such as would come most under public observation—in which he, as a philosophical teacher, bore a broad resemblance to them. The whole character of this new intellectual movement in Greece was negative and critical, professing to aim rather at detecting error than establishing certainty. To this the method of Socrates formed no exception. His favourite assertion, that he himself knew nothing for certain, expressed this in the strongest form. And if the reproach brought against the Sophists was that they loved argument too much for argument's sake, and thought more of confounding an opponent than of demonstrating a truth, we have only to read some of the dialogues in which Socrates bears a part, as we have them recorded by his friends and pupils, to see that he at least supplied abundant ground to an ordinary hearer to say the same of him. He could scarcely have realised to the public of his own day the definition which Schiller gives of the true philosopher—"One who loves truth better than his system." Xenophon tells us that in argument he did what he liked with his opponents; and Plato has compared him to the mythical giant Antæus, who insisted that every stranger whom he met should try a fall with him.

It is of the very essence, again, of caricature to take gravity and wisdom for its subject. And caricature on the Athenian stage knew no limits in this. Nothing was sacred for the comic dramatist and his Chorus. The national gods, the great religious mysteries, the mighty Athenian people itself, were all made to put on the comic mask, and figure in the wild procession. Why

should the philosophers escape? The higher the ground upon which Socrates stood, the more tempting mark did he present. Lucian understood perfectly the kind of taste to which a writer of comedy must appeal at Athens, when, in his own defence for having made sport of the philosophers, he says: "For such is the temper of the multitude, they delight in listening to banter and abuse, especially when what is solemn and dignified is made the subject of it." *

But besides this, the author who was to write a new burlesque for the Athenians, and had resolved to take as his theme these modern vagaries of speculative philosophy, wanted a central figure for his piece. So in 'The Acharnians' he takes Lamachus, a well-known general of the day, to represent the passion for war which he there holds up to ridicule, and dresses him up with gorgon-faced shield and tremendous crest, in parody of military splendour: though we have no reason whatever to suppose that he had any private grudge against the man, or that Lamachus was more responsible for the war than others. Here the representative figure must be a philosopher, and well known. Whether his opinions were very accurately represented or not, probably neither the dramatist nor his audience would very much care. Who so convenient for his purpose as the well-known and remarkable teacher whose grotesque person must have struck every passer-by in the public streets, whose face, with its flat nose, lobster-like eyes, and thick lips, seemed a ready-made comic mask, and

* Lucian, Dial. 'Piscator.'

whose round and protuberant body made his very friends liken him to the figures of Silenus,—who went about barefooted, unwashed, and in shabby clothes, and would sometimes stand for half an hour in a public thoroughfare as it were wrapt in a dream? There is surely no need to imagine that the comic dramatist had any personal grudge against the philosopher, or any special horror of his particular teaching. Such an artist could hardly have helped caricaturing him, if he had been his personal friend.

The opening scene in this comedy is an interior. It represents a room in the house of Strepsiades, a well-to-do citizen, in which he and his son Pheidippides are discovered occupying two pallet-beds. The household slaves are supposed to be sleeping in an outer room, the door of which is open. So much of the antecedents of the drama as is required to be known in order to its ready comprehension come out at once in the soliloquy of the anxious father.

Str. (yawning in his bed). O—h !

Great Jove, how terribly long the nights are now !

Interminable ! will it never be day, I wonder ?

I'm sure I heard the cock crow long ago.

These slaves are snoring still, the rascals. Ah !

It was not so in the old times of peace.

Curse the war, I say, both for other reasons,

And specially that I daren't punish my own slaves.*

And there's that hopeful son of mine can sleep

Sound as a top, the whole night long, rolled up

Like a great sausage there, in five thick blankets.

Well—I suppose I'd as well put my head

* For fear lest they should desert at once to the enemy.

Under the clothes, and try to get a snooze.—

I can't—I *can't* get to sleep! There are things biting me—

I mean the bills, the stable expenses, and the debts
Run up for me by that precious son of mine.

And he—oh, he lives like a gentleman,
Keeps his fine horses, drives his curricule—
Is dreaming of them now, no doubt—while I lie vexing,
Knowing next month those notes of hand come due,
With interest mounting up. (*Calls to his slave without.*)

Boy! light a lamp;

Bring me my pocket-book, that I may see

How my accounts stand, and just cast them up.

(*Slave brings a lamp, and holds it while Strepsiadés sits up and looks over his account-book.*)

Let's see now. First, here's Prusias, fifty pounds.

Now, what's that for? When did I borrow that?

Ah! when I bought that grey. Oh dear, oh dear!

I shall grow grey enough, if this goes on.

Ph. (*talking in his sleep*). That's not fair, Philo! keep your own side of the course!

Str. Ay, there he goes! that's what is ruining me;
He's always racing, even in his dreams.

Ph. (*still asleep*). How many times round do the war-chariots go?

Str. You make your old father's head go round, you do.
But let me see—what stands here next to Prusias?—
Twelve pounds to Amyntias,—for a car and wheels.

Ph. There—give that horse a roll, and take him home.

Str. You'll roll me out of house and home, young man!
I've judgment debts against me, and the rest of them
Swear they'll proceed.

Ph. (*awaking*). Good heavens! my dear father,
What makes you groan and toss so all night long?

Str. There's a sheriff's officer at me—in the bed-clothes.

Ph. Lie quiet, sir, do pray, and let me sleep.

Str. Sleep, if you like ; but these debts, I can tell you,
 Will fall on your own head some day, young man.
 Heugh ! may those match-makers come to an evil end
 Who drew me into marrying your good mother !
 There I was living a quiet life in the country,—
 Shaved once a-week, may-be, wore my old clothes—
 Full of my sheep, and goats, and bees, and vineyards,
 And I must marry the fine niece of Megacles.
 The son of Megacles ! an awkward country fellow
 Marry a fine town belle, all airs and graces !
 A pretty pair we were to come together—
 I smelling of the vineyard and the sheep-shearing,
 She with her scents, and essences, and cosmetics,
 And all the devilries of modern fashion.
 Not a bad housekeeper though—I will say that—
 For she kept open house. “Madam,” said I,
 Showing her one day my old coat with a hole in’t,
 By way of parable,—“this can’t last long.”

Slave (examining the lamp, which is going out). This
 lamp has got no oil in it.

Str. Deuce take you,
 Why did you light that thirsty beast of a lamp ?
 Come here, and you shall catch it.

Slave. Catch it,—why ?

Str. (boxes his ears). For putting such a thick wick in,
 to be sure.—

Well,—in due time this boy of ours was born
 To me and my grand lady. First of all,
 We got to loggerheads about his name ;
 She would have something that had got a *horse* in it,—
 Xanthippus—or Charippus—or Philippides ;*
 I was for his grandfather’s name—Pheidonides.
 Well, for some time we squabbled ; then at last

* Names thus compounded with ‘*ippos*’ (‘horse’) were much affected by the Athenian aristocracy. ‘*Pheidōn*,’ on the other hand, in the proposed name Pheidōnides, means ‘economical.’

We came to a compromise upon Pheid—ippides.
 This boy—she'd take him in her lap and fondle him,
 And say, "Ah! when it grows up to be a man,
 It shall drive horses, like its uncle Megacles,
 And wear a red cloak, it shall." Then I would say,
 "He shall wear a good sheep-skin coat, like his own
 father,
 And drive his goats to market from the farm."
 But there—he never would listen to me for a moment;
 He's had a horse-fever always—to my ruin.

He has thought of a scheme, however, if he can but
 get his son to fall in with it, by which they may both
 be relieved from the pressure of these debts. So he
 awakes young Pheidippides, and takes him into his
 counsels. They both walk to the front; the scene
 shuts, and they are outside the house. The father
 points to another building at the wing.

That's the great Thinking-School of our new philosophers;
 There live the men who teach that heaven around us
 Is a vast oven, and we the charcoal in it.*
 And they teach too—for a consideration, mind—
 To plead a cause and win it, right or wrong.

Ph. (carelessly). Who are these fellows?

Str. I don't quite remember
 The name they call themselves, it's such a long one;
 Very hard thinkers—but they're first-rate men.

Ph. Faugh! vulgar fellows—I know 'em. Dirty vaga-
 bonds,
 Like Socrates there and Chærephon—a low set.

Str. Pray hold your tongue—don't show your ignorance.
 But, if you care at all for your old father,
 Be one of them, now, do, and cut the turf.

* A caricature of the doctrine of Heraclitus, that Heat was
 the great principle of all things.

Ph. Not I, by Bacchus! not if you would give me
That team of Arabs that Leogoras drives.

Str. (*coaxingly*). Do, my dear boy, I beg you—go and
be taught.

Ph. And what shall I learn there?

Str. Learn? (*Confidentially*.) Why, they do say
That these men have the secret of both Arguments,
The honest Argument (if there be such a thing) and the
other;

Now this last—this false Argument, you understand—
Will make the veriest rascal win his cause.

So, if you'll go and learn for us this glorious art,
The debts I owe for you will all be cleared;

For I shan't pay a single man a farthing.

Ph. (*after a little hesitation*). No—I can't do it. Study-
ing hard, you see,

Spoils the complexion. How could I show my face
Among the Knights, looking a beast, like those fellows?

Str. Then, sir, henceforth I swear, so help me Ceres,
I won't maintain you—you, nor your bays, nor your
chestnuts.

Go to the dogs—or anywhere—out of my house!

Ph. Well, sir, I'm going. I know my uncle Megacles
Won't see me without a horse—so I don't mind.

Indignant as he is with his son, the father is deter-
mined not to lose the chance which this new science
offers him of getting rid of his creditors. If his son
will not learn, he will take lessons himself, old as he
is; and with this resolve he knocks at the door of this
“Thinking-School,” the house of Socrates. One of
the students comes to answer his summons—in no
very good humour, for the loudness and suddenness of
Strepsiades's knock has destroyed in embryo a thought
which he was breeding. Still, as the old gentleman

seems an earnest disciple, he condescends to expatiate to him on the subject of some of the great master's subtle speculations ; subtle in the extreme, not to say childish, but yet not very unfair caricatures of some which we find attributed to Socrates in the ' Dialogues ' of Plato. Charmed with what he hears, the new scholar begs to be at once introduced. The back scene opens, and discovers the students engaged in their various investigations, with Socrates himself suspended in a kind of basket, deeply engaged in thought. The extraordinary attitude of one class of learners arrests the attention of the visitor especially :—

Str. What *are* those doing—stooping so very oddly ?

Student. They probe the secrets that lie deep as Tartarus.

Str. But why—excuse me, but—their hinder quarters—Why are they stuck so oddly up in the air ?

Stud. The other end is studying astronomy Quite independently. (*To the students, whose attention is, of course, diverted to the visitor.*) Go in, if you please ! Suppose HE comes, and catches us all idling !

But Strepsiades begs to ask a few more questions. These mathematical instruments,—what are they for ?

Stud. Oh, that's geometry.

Str. And what's the use of it ?

Stud. For measuring the Earth.

Str. You mean the grants We make in the colonies to Athenian citizens ?

Stud. No—all the Earth.

Str. A capital idea !

Divide it all ?—I call that true democracy.

Stud. See, here's an outline-map of the whole world ; And here lies Athens.

Str. Athens! nay, go to—
It cannot be—I see no law-courts sitting.

Stud. 'Tis Attica, I assure you, none the less.

Str. And where's my parish, then—and my fellow-townsmen?

Stud. Oh, they're all there.—And here's Eubœa, you see, That long strip there, stretched out along the coast.

Str. Ay—we and Pericles stretched that—pretty tight.*
But where's Lacedæmon, now?

Stud. Why, there, of course.

Str. How close to Athens! Pray, with all your thinking, Can't ye contrive to get it further off?

Stud. (*shaking his head*). That we can't do, by Jove!

Str. Then worse luck for ye.—
But who hangs dangling in the basket yonder?

Stud. HIMSELF.

Str. And who's Himself?

Stud. Why, Socrates.

Str. Ho, Socrates!—Call him, you fellow—call loud.

Stud. Call him yourself—I've got no time for calling.
(*Exit indoors.*)

Str. Ho, Socrates! sweet, darling Socrates!

Soc. Why callest thou me, poor creature of a day?

Str. First tell me, pray, what *are* you doing up there?

Soc. I walk in air, and contemplate the sun.

Str. Oh, *that's* the way that you despise the gods—
You get so near them on your perch there—eh?

Soc. I never could have found out things divine,
Had I not hung my mind up thus, and mixed
My subtle intellect with its kindred air.
Had I regarded such things from below,

* Eubœa had revolted from its allegiance to Athens some years before this war. Pericles had swept the island with an overwhelming force, banished the chiefs of the oligarchical party, and distributed their lands amongst colonists from Athens.

I had learnt nothing. For the earth absorbs
 Into itself the moisture of the brain.—
 It is the very same case with water-cresses.

Str. Dear me ! so water-cresses grow by thinking !

He begs Socrates to come down and help him in his difficulties. He is very anxious to learn this new Argument—that “which pays no bills.” Socrates offers to introduce him to the Clouds, the new goddesses of philosophers—“great divinities to idle men ;” and Strepsiades—first begging to be allowed to wrap his cloak round his head for fear of rain, having left home in his hurry without a hat—sits down to await their arrival.

(SOCRATES *chants.*)

Come, holy Clouds, whom the wise revere,
 Descend in the sight of your votaries here !
 Whether ye rest on the heights of Olympus,
 whereon the sacred snow lies ever,
 Or in coral groves of your father Ocean
 ye weave with the Nymphs the dance together,
 Or draw aloft in your golden vessels
 the holy waters of ancient Nile,
 Or haunt the banks of the lake Mæotis,
 or clothe the Mimas' steeps the while,—
 Hear our prayer, O gentle goddesses,
 take the gifts your suppliants bring,
 Smile propitious on these our offerings,
 list to the mystic chant we sing !

It is not very easy to comprehend the mode in which the succeeding scene was managed, but the appliances of the Athenian stage were no doubt quite equal to presenting it very effectively. The vast amphitheatre in which these performances took place, open to the sky, and

from which actors and audience commanded a view of the hills round Athens, and of the "illimitable air" and "cloudless heaven" which Socrates apostrophises in his invocation to the goddesses, would add greatly to the effect of the beautiful choric songs which follow. But, on the other hand, it presents difficulties to any arrangement for the actual descent of the Clouds upon the stage. Probably their first chorus is sung behind the scenes, and they are invisible,—present to the imagination only of the audience, until they enter the orchestra in palpable human shape. Theories and guesses on these points are, after all, but waste of ingenuity. The beauty of the lines which herald their entrance (which can receive but scant justice in a translation) is one of the many instances in which the poet rises above the satirist.

(CHORUS OF CLOUDS, *in the distance, accompanied by the low rolling of thunder.**)

Eternal clouds !

Rise we to mortal view,

Embodied in bright shapes of dewy sheen,

Leaving the depths serene

Where our loud-sounding Father Ocean dwells,

For the wood-crownèd summits of the hills :

Thence shall our glance command

The beetling crags which sentinel the land,

* The Greek commentators inform us very particularly by what appliances thunder was imitated on the Athenian stage ; either "by rolling leather bags full of pebbles down sheets of brass," or by "pouring them into a huge brazen caldron." (See note to Walsh's Aristoph., p. 302.) But Greek commentators are not to be depended upon in such matters.

The teeming earth,
 The crops we bring to birth ;
 Thence shall we hear
 The music of the ever-flowing streams,
 The low deep thunders of the booming sea.
 Lo, the bright Eye of Day unwearied beams !
 Shedding our veil of storms
 From our immortal forms,
 We scan with keen-eyed gaze this nether sphere.

Socrates falls to the ground in adoration of his beloved deities ; and Strepsiades follows his example, in great terror at the thunder, with all the buffoonish exaggeration which would delight an Athenian audience.

(CHORUS OF CLOUDS, *nearer.*)

Sisters who bring the showers,
 Let us arise and greet
 This glorious land, for Pallas' dwelling meet,
 Rich in brave men, beloved of Cecrops old ;
 Where Faith and Reverence reign,
 Where comes no foot profane,
 When for the mystic rites the Holy Doors unfold.
 There gifts are duly paid
 To the great gods, and pious prayers are said ;
 Tall temples rise, and statues heavenly fair.
 There, at each holy tide,
 With coronals and song,
 The glad processions to the altars throng ;
 There, in the jocund spring,
 Great Bacchus, festive king,
 With dance and tuneful flute his Chorus leads along.

And now, while Socrates directs the attention of his pupil towards Mount Parnes, from whose heights he

sces (and the imagination of the audience is not slow to follow him) the ethereal goddesses descending towards the earth, the Chorus in bodily form enter the orchestra, to the sound of slow music—four-and-twenty nymphs in light cloud-like drapery. They promise, at the request of their great worshipper Socrates, to instruct his pupil in the mysterious science which is to free him from the importunity of his creditors. For these, says the philosopher, are your only true deities—Chaos, and the Clouds, and the Tongue. As to Jupiter, whom Strepsiades just ventures to mention, he is quite an exploded idea in these modern times; the great ruler of the universe is Vortex.* The machinery of the world goes on by a perpetual whirl. Socrates will, with the help of the Clouds, instruct him in all these new tenets. There is one point, however, upon which he wishes first to be satisfied—has he a good memory?

Str. 'Tis of two sorts, by Jove! remarkably good,
If a man owes me anything; of my own debts,
I'm shocked to say, I'm terribly forgetful.

Soc. Have you good natural gifts in the way of speaking?

Str. Speaking, — not much; cheating's my strongest point.

He appears to the philosopher not so very unpromising a pupil, and the pair retire into the "Thinking-shop," to begin their studies, while the Chorus make their usual address to the audience in the poet's name,

* A doctrine taught by the philosopher Anaxagoras, whose lectures Socrates is said to have attended.

touching chiefly upon topics of the day which have lost their interest for us moderns.

But the next act of the comedy brings in Socrates, swearing by all his new divinities that he never met with so utterly hopeless a pupil, in the whole course of his experience, as this very late learner, who has no one qualification for a sophist except his want of honesty. He puts him through a quibbling catechism on the stage about measures, and rhythms, and grammar, all which he declares are necessary preliminaries to the grand science which Strepsiades desires to learn, although the latter very naïvely remonstrates against this superfluous education: he wants to learn neither music nor grammar, but simply how to defeat his creditors. At last his instructor gets out of patience, and kicks him off the philosophical premises as a hopeless dunce. By the advice of the Clouds the rejected candidate goes in search of his son, to attempt once more to persuade him to enter the schools, and learn the art which has proved too difficult for his father's duller faculties.

One step, indeed, the old gentleman has made in his education; he swears no more by Jupiter, and rebukes his son, when he does so, for entertaining such very old-world superstitions; somewhat to the astonishment of that elegant young gentleman, whose opinions (if he has any on such subjects) are not so far advanced in the way of scepticism. The latter is, however, at last persuaded to become his father's substitute as the pupil of Socrates, though not without a warning on the young man's part that he may one day come to rue it. On this head the father has no misgivings, but

introduces him to the philosopher triumphantly as a scholar who is sure to do him credit—he was always a remarkable child :—

He was so very clever always, naturally ;
 When he was but so high, now, he'd build mud houses,
 Cut out a boat, make a cart of an old shoe,
 And frogs out of pomegranate-stones—quite wonderful !*

And Socrates, after a sneer at the young gentleman's fashionable lisp, admits him as a pupil, and undertakes to instruct him in this "new way of paying old debts."

The choral ode which must have divided this scene from the next is lost. The dialogue which follows, somewhat abruptly as we now have the play, is but another version of the well-known "Choice of Hercules" between Virtue and Vice, by the sophist Prodicus—known probably to the audience of the day as well as to ourselves. The Two Arguments, the Just and the Unjust, now appear upon the stage in character ; one in the grave dress of an elder citizen, the other as a young philosopher of the day.† It is very probable that they wore masks which would be recognised by the audience as caricatures of real persons ; it has been suggested,

* A hit, no doubt, at theories of education which were in fashion then, and which have been revived in modern days. Plato, in his treatise on Legislation, advises that the child who is intended for an architect should be encouraged to build toy-houses, the future farmer to make little gardens, &c.—(De Leg., i. 643.)

† Some of the old commentators say that the disputants were brought upon the stage in the guise of game-cocks ; but there are no allusions in the dialogue to justify such an interpretation of the scene.

of Æschylus and Euripides, or of Thrasymachus the sophist, and of Aristophanes himself. What is certain is, that they represent the old and new style of training and education: and they set forth the claims of their respective systems in a long discussion, in which each abuses the other with the utmost licence of Athenian comedy. Yet there are passages of great simplicity and beauty here and there, in the speeches of the worthier claimant. The Unjust Argument, confident in the popularity of his system and his powers of argument, permits his rival to set his claims before the audience first. He proceeds to speak of the days when justice, temperance, and modesty were in fashion; when the Athenian youth were a hardy and a healthy race, not languid and effeminate as now; and he calls upon young Pheidippides to choose for himself the principles and the training which "had made the men of Marathon:"—

Cast in thy lot, O youth, with me, and choose the better
paths—

So shalt thou hate the Forum's prate, and shun the lazy
baths;

Be shamed for what is truly shame, and blush when shame
is said,

And rise up from thy seat in hall before the hoary head;

Be duteous to thy parents, to no base act inclined,

But keep fair Honour's image deep within thine heart
enshrined;

And speak no rude irreverent word against the father's
years,

Whose strong hand led thine infant steps, and dried thy
childhood's tears.

But the arguments of the evil counsellor are many and

plausible. What good, he argues, have men ever gained by justice, continence, and moderation? For one poor instance which his opponent can adduce of virtue being rewarded upon earth, the fluent sophist quotes a dozen against him of those who have made their gain by the opposite qualities. Honesty is *not* the best policy among mortals; and most assuredly the moral virtues receive no countenance from the example of the gods. Sophistical as the argument is, and utterly unfair as we know it to be if intended to represent the real teaching of Socrates, the satirist seems to have been fully justified in his representation so far as some of the popular lecturers of the day were concerned. The arguments which Plato, in his 'Republic,' has put into the mouth of the sophist Thrasymachus—that justice is really only the good of *others*, while injustice is more profitable to a man's self—that those who abuse injustice do so "from the fear of suffering it, not from the fear of doing it"—that justice is merely "an obedience yielded by the weak to the orders of the strong,"—do but express in grave philosophical language the same principles which Aristophanes here exaggerates in the person of his devil's advocate.* This latter winds up the controversy by plying his antagonist with a few categorical questions, quite in the style of Socrates:—

* See Plato's Republic, Book I. Of course it must be remembered that we have here only the representation of Thrasymachus's teaching as given by an opponent. As Mr Grote fairly remarks: "How far the real Thrasymachus may have argued in the slashing and offensive style here described, we have no means of deciding."—Grote's Plato, i. 145.

Unjust A. Come now,—from what class do our lawyers spring?

Just A. Well—from the blackguards.

Unj. A. I believe you. Tell me

Again, what are our tragic poets?

Just A. Blackguards.

Unj. A. Good; and our public orators?

Just A. Blackguards all.

Unj. A. D'ye see now, how absurd and utterly worthless Your arguments have been? And now look round—
(*turning to the audience*)

Which class amongst our friends here seems most numerous?

Just A. I'm looking.

Unj. A. Well;—now tell me what you see.

Just A. (*after gravely and attentively examining the rows of spectators*). The blackguards have it, by a large majority.

There's one, I know—and yonder there's another—
And there, again, that fellow with long hair.

And amidst the roars of delighted laughter with which the Athenian “gallery” would be sure to receive this sally of buffoonery, the advocate of justice and morality declares that he throws up his brief, and joins the ranks of the dissolute majority.

The creditors of Strepsiades have not been quiescent meanwhile. We find him, in the next scene, calculating with dismay that it wants but five days to the end of the month, when debts and interest must be paid, or legal proceedings will be taken. He is come to the School, to inquire how his son gets on with his studies. Socrates assures him that his education is quite complete; that he is now furnished with a mode of argument which will win any lawsuit, and get him off

scot-free of all liabilities, even in the teeth of a thousand witnesses who could prove the debt. He presents the youth to his father, who is charmed at first sight with the change in his complexion, which has now the genuine disputatious tint. He looks, as Strepsiades declares, "all negations and contradictions," and has the true Attic expression in his face. The father takes him home rejoicing, and awaits confidently the summons of his creditors.

The devices with which the claimants are put off by the new learning of Pheidippides, turn so entirely on the technical expressions of Athenian law, that they have little interest for an English reader. Suffice it to say that the unfortunate tradesmen with whom this young gentleman has run up bills for his horses and chariots do not seem likely to get their money. But the training which he has received in the "Thinking-shop" has some other domestic results which the father did not anticipate. He proceeds, on some slight quarrel (principally because he will quote Euripides, whom his father abominates), to cudgel the old gentleman, and further undertakes to justify his conduct on the plea that when he was a child his father had often cudgelled *him*.

Strep. Ay, but I did it for your good.

Pheid.

No doubt ;

And pray am I not also right to show

Goodwill to you—if beating means goodwill ?

Why should your back escape the rod, I ask you,

Any more than mine did ? was not I, forsooth,

Born like yourself a free Athenian ?

Perhaps you will say, beating's the rule for children ;
 I answer, that an old man's twice a child ;
 And it is fair the old should have to howl
 More than poor children, when they get into mischief,
 Because there's ten times less excuse for the old ones.

Strep. There never was a law to beat one's father.

Pheid. Law ? pray who made the law ? a man, I suppose,
 Like you or me, and so persuaded others :
 Why have not I as good a right as he had
 To start a law for future generations
 That sons should beat their fathers in return ?
 We shall be liberal, too, if all the stripes
 You laid upon us before the law was made
 We make you a present of, and don't repay them.
 Look at young cocks, and all the other creatures,—
 They fight their fathers ; and what difference is there
 'Twixt them and us—save that they don't make laws ?

The unlucky father finds himself quite unprepared with any reply to these ingenious arguments. Too late he begins to see that this new liberal education has its inconvenient side. He protests it would have been better for him to allow his son to go on driving four-in-hand to his heart's content, than to become so subtle a philosopher. The only comfort which the young student offers him is the assurance that he is quite as ready to beat his mother, if occasion should arise ; but it is much to the credit of domestic relations at Athens that, although the old gentleman has complained of his wife, in the earlier part of the play, as having been the cause of all his present difficulties, he shows no desire to accept this kind of consolation. He curses Socrates, and appeals to the Clouds, who, he complains, have terribly misled him. The Chorus

reply with truth that the fault was his own ; he had sought to be instructed in the school of Injustice, and the teaching has recoiled deservedly on his own head. But he has his revenge. Summoning his slaves, he bids them bring ladders and mattocks, and storm the stronghold of these charlatans and atheists. He mounts the roof himself, torch in hand, and proceeds to set fire to the timbers. When the students rush to the window in dismay to ask what he means by it, he tells them mockingly he is only

Holding a subtle disputation with the rafters.

Socrates is at length aroused from his lucubrations, and inquires what he is doing up there. Strepsiades retorts upon him his own explanation of his position in the hanging basket—

I walk in air, and contemplate the sun.

And the piece concludes with a grand tableau of the Thinking-school in flames, and Socrates and his pupils shrieking half-smothered from the windows.

The comedy, as has been said above,* was not so far successful as to obtain for its author either the first or second place in the award of the judges ; Cratinus being placed first with his comedy of 'The Bottle'—the child of his old age—and Ameipsias second. It has been thought necessary to account for this on other grounds than the respective merits of the three pieces ; though, as we are not in possession of the text of either of the others, we have no means of ascertaining how far the

* See p. 8.

award was or was not an honest one. It has been suggested by some critics, that 'The Clouds' was *too* clever for the audience, who preferred a coarser article; and indeed (unless the two gamecocks were produced upon the stage) the jests are more intellectual than practical, and the comic "business" has little of that uproarious fun with which some of the other plays abound. The author himself, as would appear from some expressions put into the mouth of the Chorus in his subsequent comedy of 'The Wasps,' was of opinion that his finer fancies had been in this case thrown away upon an unsympathetic public. Another explanation which has been given is, that the glaring injustice with which the character of Socrates is treated was resented by the audience—a supposition which carries with it a compliment to their principles which it is very doubtful whether they deserved, and which the author himself would have been very slow to pay them. There is a story that the result was brought about by the influence of Alcibiades, who had been already severely satirised in the poet's comedy of 'The Revellers,' and who felt that the character of Pheidippides—his extravagance and love of horses, his connection by his mother's side with the great house of Megacles, his relation to Socrates as pupil, and even the lisping pronunciation which his teacher notices*—were all intended to be caricatures of himself, which seems by no means improbable; and that he and friends accordingly exerted themselves to prevent the poet's success.

* See p. 92.

It is not probable that the broader caricature of the great philosopher, any more than that of Cleon in 'The Knights,' had any special effect upon the popularity of its object. The story told by Ælian, that the subsequent condemnation of Socrates was due in great measure to the prejudice raised against him by this comedy, has been long refuted by the observation that it at least did not take place until more than twenty years after the performance. A traditionary anecdote of a very different kind, though resting upon not much better authority, has more of probability about it,—that the philosopher himself, having been made aware of what was in store for him, took his place among the audience at the representation, and laughed as heartily as any of them: nay, that he even rose and mounted upon a bench, in order that the strangers in the house to whom his person was previously unknown might see how admirable a counterpart the stage Socrates was of the original.

CHAPTER V.

THE WASPS.

THIS comedy, which was produced by its author the year after the performance of 'The Clouds,' may be taken as in some sort a companion picture to that piece. Here the satire is directed against the passion of the Athenians for the excitement of the law-courts, as in the former its object was the new philosophy. And as the younger generation—the modern school of thought—were there the subjects of the caricature, so here the older citizens, who took their seats in court as jurymen day by day, to the neglect of their private affairs and the encouragement of a litigious disposition, appear in their turn in the mirror which the satirist holds up. It is calculated that in the ten courts at Athens, when all were open, there might sometimes be required as many as six thousand jurymen, and there was never any difficulty in obtaining them. It was not the mere temptation of the "threepence," more or less, to which each jurymen was entitled as compensation for his loss of time, which drew so many to the courts, however convenient it might be for the purposes of

burlesque to assume that it was so. No doubt the pay was an object to some of the poorer citizens ; and so far the influence of such a regulation was bad, inasmuch as it led to the juries being too often struck from an inferior class, less independent and less intelligent. Nor need we be so uncharitable as the historian Mitford, and calculate that “ besides the pay, which was small, there was the hope of bribes, which might be large.” It is not probable that bribery could often be applied to so numerous a body. But the sense of dignity and personal importance which attaches to the right of giving a judicial decision, and the interest and excitement which are aroused by legal or criminal questions, especially in those who have to investigate them, are feelings perfectly well understood in our days, as well as in those of Aristophanes. Such feelings are not only natural, but have their use, more especially when the cause to be decided is, as it so often was at Athens, of a public character. Plato considered that a citizen who took no interest in these duties made himself a kind of alien in the state, and we Englishmen hold very much the same doctrine. But the passion for hearing and deciding questions, judicial or political, was carried to great excess among the Athenians at this date. Their own historians and orators are full of references to this national peculiarity, and Aristophanes is not the only satirist who has taken advantage of it. Lucian, in one of his very amusing dialogues, represents Menippus as looking down from the moon upon the earth below, and watching the various pursuits of the inhabitants. The northern

hordes are fighting, the Egyptian is ploughing, the Phœnician is carrying his merchandise over the sea, the Spartan is undergoing corporal discipline, and the Athenian is "sitting in the jury-box." *

This is perhaps the least amusing of all Aristophanes's productions to a modern reader, although it was adopted by Racine as the basis of his only comedy, "Les Plaideurs." There are but two characters in it of any importance to the action, a father and son. Philocleon, † the father, is strongly possessed with this mania for the courts. His family cannot keep him at home. He neglects his person, hardly sleeps at night for thinking of his duties in the courts, and is off before daylight in the morning to secure a good seat; he even declares the cock must have been bribed, by some profligates who have reason to dread the terrors of the law, not to crow loud enough to awake him. He keeps in his house "a whole beach" of little round pebbles, that he may always have one ready for giving his vote; and goes about holding his three fingers pinched together as if he had got one between them ready to slip into the ballot-box. In vain has his son remonstrated, and had him washed and dressed, and sent for the physicians, and even the priests, to try to rid him of his malady. And now, as a last resource, they have been obliged to lock him up, and set a

* Dialog. Icaro-Menippus.

† The names in the Greek are significant. "Philocleon" means "friend of Cleon" (who represents litigation, as he does most other things which are bad, in the view of Aristophanes); "Bdelycleon," the name of the son, means "hater of Cleon."

watch upon the house. His contrivances to escape are in the very wildest vein of extravaganza. He tries to get out through the chimney, and pretends he's "only the smoke;" and they all rush to put a cover on the chimney-top, and a great stone on it. He escapes through a hole in the tiles and sits on the roof, pretending to be "only a sparrow;" and they have to set a net to catch him. His son—a young gentleman of the more modern school—and the two slaves who are set to watch him day and night, have a very trying time of it.

The second scene introduces the Chorus of the play, consisting of Philocleon's fellow-jurymen. The time is early daybreak, and they are already on their way to the courts, preceded by two or three boys with torches. Their appearance is of the strangest,—they are the "Wasps" who give the name to the piece. A mask resembling a wasp's head, a black and yellow body, and some comic appendage in their rear to represent a sting,—were, we may presume, the costume provided by the stage manager. The poet probably intended to represent the acrimonious temper which delighted in the prosecution of individuals without much reference to their actual guilt, and the malevolence which often instigated the accusation. But he allows them to give, on their own behalf, another and more honourable explanation of their name, which, though it occurs later in the play, may find its place here. It is the old story, which the dramatist knew his audience were never tired of hearing:—

If any of this good company should note our strange
 array—
 The wasp-like waists and cross-barred suits that we have
 donned to-day—
 And if he asks what means this sting we brandish, as you
 see,
 Him will we undertake to teach, dull scholar though he be
 All we who wear this tail-piece claim true Athenian birth
 The rightful Aborigines, solé sons of Mother earth ;*
 A lusty race, who struck good blows for Athens in the fight,
 What time as the Barbarian came on us like the night.
 With torch and brand the Persian horde swept on from
 east to west,
 To storm the hives that we had stored, and smoke us from
 our nest :
 Then we laid our hand to spear and targe, and met him on
 his path ;
 Shoulder to shoulder, close we stood, and bit our lips for
 wrath.
 So fast and thick the arrows flew, that none might see the
 heaven,
 But the gods were on our side that day, and we bore them
 back at even.
 High o'er our heads, an omen good, we saw the owlet wheel,
 And the Persian trousers in their backs felt the good Attic
 steel.
 Still as they fled we followed close, a swarm of vengeful
 foes,
 And stung them where we chanced to light, on cheek, and
 lip, and nose.
 So to this day, barbarians say, when whispered far or near,
 More than all else the Attic WASP is still a name of fear.

* The Athenians affected to wear a golden grasshopper in their hair, as being "sprung from the soil."

The party are come, as usual, to summon their trusty comrade Philocleon to go with them to the courts. What makes him so late this morning? He was never wont to be the last on these occasions. They knock at the door, and call him loudly by name. He puts his head out of the window, and begging them not to make such a noise for fear they should awake his guard, explains to them his unfortunate case. He will try to let himself down to the street by a rope, if they will catch him,—and if he should fall and break his neck, they must promise to bury him with all professional honours “within the bar.” But he is discovered in the attempt by one of the watchful slaves, and thrust back again.

Then the leader of the Chorus, a veteran Wasp who has seen service, cheers on his troops to the attack of the fortress in which their comrade is so unjustifiably confined. He reminds them of the exploits of their youth :—

Forward, good friends—advance ! Quick march !—Now,
Comias, why so slow, man ?

There was a day when I may say you and I gave way to
no man ;

Then you were as tough as dog’s hide—now Charínades
moves faster !

Ha ! Strymodórus ! in the Courts ’twere hard to find your
master !

Where’s Chabes ? and Euérgides ?—do any of ye know ?—
Alack ! alack ! for the young blood that warmed us long
ago !

Dost mind when at Byzantium we two kept watch together,
And walked our rounds at night, old boy, in that tre-
mendous weather ?

And how we stole the kneading-trough from that old baker's wife,
Split it, and fried our rations with it?—Ha, ha!—Ay,
that was life!

Shakspeare had assuredly never read 'The Wasps;' but the mixture of the farcical with the pathetic which always accompanies the garrulous reminiscences of old age, and which Aristophanes introduces frequently in his comedies, is common to both these keen observers. In the comrades of the old Athenian's youth we seem to recognise Master Shallow's *quondam* contemporaries: "There was I, and little John Doit of Staffordshire, and black George Barr, and Francis Pickbone, and Will Squele, a Cotswold man,—you had not four such swinge-bucklers in all the Inns of Court again. . . . O the mad days that I have spent! and to see how many of my old acquaintance are dead!"*

A battle-royal takes place on the stage; the Wasps, with their formidable stings, trying to storm the house, while the son and his retainers defend their position with clubs and other weapons, and especially by raising a dense smoke, which is known to be very effective against such an enemy.

The Wasps are driven back, and the old gentleman and his son agree upon a compromise. Bdelycleon promises, on condition that his father will no longer attend the public trials, to establish a little private tribunal for him at home. He shall there take cognisance of all domestic offences; with this great advantage, that if it rains or snows he can hold his courts with-

* K. Henry IV., Pt. ii., act iii. sc. 2.

out being obliged to turn out of doors. And—a point on which the old gentleman makes very particular inquiries—his fee shall be paid him every day as usual. On these terms, with the approval of the Chorus, the domestic truce is concluded.

It seems doubtful, however, whether the household will supply sufficient business for the court. They are thinking of beginning with an unlucky Thracian slave-girl who has burnt a sauce-pan, when most opportunely one of the other slaves rushes on the stage in hot pursuit of the house-dog Labes, who has run off with a piece of Sicilian cheese.* The son determines to bring this as the first case before his father, and a mock trial ensues, in which all the appliances and forms of a regular court of justice are absurdly travestied. Another dog appears in the character of prosecutor, and he is allowed to bring the accusation forward through Xanthias, one of the slaves. The indictment is drawn in due form, and the counsel for the prosecution urges in aggravation that the prisoner had refused to give the other dog, his client, a share of it. Philocleon, with a contempt for the ordinary formalities of law which would greatly shock the modern profession, is very much disposed to convict the delinquent Labes at once, on the evidence of his own senses: he stinks of cheese disgustingly, in the very nostrils of the court, at this present moment. But his son recalls him to a sense of the proprieties,

* There is a political allusion here to the conduct of Laches, (whose name is slightly modified), an Athenian admiral accused at the time of taking bribes in Sicily.

and undertakes to be counsel for the defence. He calls as witnesses the cheese-grater, the brazier, and other utensils, to prove that a good deal of the said cheese had been used in the kitchen. He lays stress also on poor Labes's previous good character as a house-dog; and pleads that, even if he has pilfered in this instance, it is entirely owing to "a defective education." The whole scene reads very much like a chapter out of one of those modern volumes of clever nursery tales, which are almost too clever for the children for whom they are professedly intended. The Athenian audience did in fact resemble children in many points—only children of the cleverest kind. The advocate winds up with one of those visible appeals *ad misericordiam* which were common at the Athenian as subsequently at the Roman bar, and which even Cicero did not disdain to make use of—the production of the unhappy family of the prisoner. The puppies are brought into court, and set up such a lamentable yelping that Philocleon desires they may be removed at once.* He shows, as his son thinks, some tokens of relenting towards the prisoner. He moves towards the ballot-boxes, and asks which is the one for the condemning

* This scene has been borrowed by Racine (*Les Plaideurs*, act iii. sc. 3.) The French dramatist has added, as to the behaviour of the puppies in court, a touch of his own which is very Aristophanic indeed. Ben Jonson has also adapted the idea in his play of 'The Staple of News' (act v. sc. 2), where he makes the miser Pennyboy sit in judgment on his two dogs. It is somewhat surprising that two such authors should have considered an incident which, after all, is not so very humorous, worth making prize of.

votes. The son shows him the wrong one, and into that he drops his vote. He has acquitted the dog by mistake, and faints away when he finds out what he has done—he has never given a vote for acquittal before in his life, and cannot forgive himself. And with this double stroke at the bitter spirit of an Athenian jury and at the ballot-box, the action of the comedy, according to our notions of dramatic fitness, might very properly end.

So strongly does one of the ablest English writers upon Aristophanes, Mr Mitchell, feel this, that in his translation he here divides the comedy, and places the remaining portion in a sequel, to which he gives the title of “The Dicast turned Gentleman.” Philocleon has been persuaded by his son to renounce his old habits of life, and to become more fashionable in his dress and conversation; but the new pursuits to which he betakes himself are scarcely so respectable as his old ones. His son, after a few lessons on modern conversation and deportment, takes him out to a dinner-party, where he insults the guests, beats the servants, and from which he returns in the last scene very far from sober, and not in the best possible company. He is followed by some half-dozen complainants, male and female, whom he has cudgelled in the streets on his way home; and when they threaten to “take the law” of him, he laughs uproariously at the old-fashioned notion. Law-courts, he assures them, are quite obsolete. In vain his son remonstrates with him upon his outrageous proceedings; he bids the “old lawyer,” as he calls him, get out of his way. So that we have

here the counterpart to the conclusion of 'The Clouds:' as, in the former play, young Pheidippides gives up the turf, at his father's request, only to become a word-splitting philosopher and an undutiful son; so here the father is weaned from the law-courts, and persuaded to mix in more refined society, only to turn out a "grey iniquity" like Falstaff. The moral, if there be one, is somewhat hard to find. It may possibly be contained in a few words of the Chorus, which speak of the difficulty and the danger of a sudden change in all the habits of a man's life. Or is it necessary always for the writer of burlesques, any more than for the poet, to supply his audience with any moral at all? Might it not be quite enough to have raised a laugh at the absurd termination of the son's attempt to reform the father, and the tendency of all new converts to run into extremes?

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRDS.

'THE Birds' of Aristophanes, though one of the longest of his comedies, and one which evidently stood high in the estimation of the author himself, has comparatively little interest for a modern reader. Either the burlesque reads to us, as most modern burlesques assuredly would, comparatively poor and spiritless without the important adjuncts of music, scenery, dresses, and what we call the "spectacle" generally, which we know to have been in this instance on the most magnificent scale; or the points in the satire are so entirely Athenian, and directed to the passing topics of the day, that the wit of the allusions is now lost to us. Probably there is also a deeper political meaning under what appears otherwise a mere fantastical trifling; and this is the opinion of some of the best modern critics. It may be, as Süvern thinks, that the great Sicilian expedition, and the ambitious project of Alcibiades for extending the Athenian empire, form the real point of the play; easily enough apprehended by contemporaries, but become obscure

to us. This is no place to discuss a question upon which even professed scholars are not agreed ; but all these causes may contribute to make us incompetent judges of the effect of the play upon those who saw it acted. It failed, however, to secure the first prize that year: the author was again beaten by Ameipsias—a specimen of whose comedies one would much like to see.

Two citizens of Athens, Peisthetærus and Euelpides—names which we may, perhaps, imperfectly translate into “Plausible” and “Hopeful”—disgusted at the state of things in Athens both politically and socially, have set out in search of some hitherto undiscovered country where there shall be no lawsuits and no informers. They have hired as guides a raven and a jackdaw—who give a good deal of trouble on the road by biting and scratching—and are at last led by them to the palace of the King of the Birds, formerly King Tereus of Thrace, but changed, according to the mythologists, into the Hoopoe, whose magnificent crest is a very fit emblem of his royalty. His wife is Procne—“the Nightingale”—daughter of a mythical king of Attica, so that, in fact, he may be considered as a national kinsman. The royal porter, the Trochilus, is not very willing to admit the visitors, looking upon them as no better than a couple of bird-catchers; but the Bird-king himself receives them, when informed of their errand, with great courtesy, though he does not see how he can help them. But can they possibly want a finer city than Athens? No—but some place more quiet and comfortable. But why, he asks, should they apply to him?

“ Because you were a man, the same as us ;
 And found yourself in debt, the same as us ;
 And did not like to pay, the same as us ;
 And after that you changed into a bird,
 And ever since have flown and wandered far
 Over the land and seas, and have acquired
 All knowledge that a bird or man can learn.”—(F.)

The adventurers do not learn much, however, from the Hoopoe. But an original idea strikes Peisthetærus—why not build a city up here, in the region of the Birds, the mid atmosphere between earth and heaven? If the Hoopoe and his subjects will but follow his advice, they will thus hold the balance of power in the universe.

“ From that position you'll command mankind,
 And keep them in utter thorough subjugation,—
 Just as you do the grasshoppers and locusts ;
 And if the gods offend you, you'll blockade them,
 And starve them to surrender.”—(F.)

The king summons a public meeting of his subjects to consider the proposal of their human visitors ; and no doubt the appearance of the Chorus in their grotesque masks and elaborate costumes, representing twenty-four birds of various species, from the flamingo to the woodpecker, would be hailed with great delight by an Athenian audience, who in these matters were very much like grown-up children. The music appears to have been of a very original character, and more elaborate than usual ; and the part of the Nightingale, with solos on the flute behind the scenes, is said to have been taken by a female performer of great ability, a

public favourite who had just returned to Athens after a long absence. But the mere words of a comic extravaganza, whether Greek or English, without the accompaniments, on which so much depends, are little better than the dry skeleton of the piece, and can convey but a very inadequate idea of its attractions when fittingly "mounted" on the stage. This is notably the case with this production of our author, which, from its whole character, must have depended very much upon the completeness of such accessories for its success.

The Birds are at first inclined to receive their human visitors as hereditary and notorious enemies. "Men were deceivers ever," is their song, in so many words; and it requires all the king's influence to keep them from attacking them and killing them at once. At length they agree to a parley, and Peisthetærus begins by paying some ingenious compliments to the high respectability and antiquity of the feathered race. Was not the cock once king of the Persians? is he not still called the "Persian bird"? and still even to this day, the moment he crows, do not all men everywhere jump out of bed and go to their work? And was not the cuckoo king of Egypt; and still when they hear him cry "cuckoo!" do not all the Egyptians go into the harvest-fields? Do not kings bear eagles and doves now on their sceptres, in token of the true sovereignty of the Birds? Is not Jupiter represented always with his eagle, Minerva with her owl, Apollo with his hawk? But now,—he goes on to say—"men hunt you, and trap you, and set you out for sale, and,

not content with simply roasting you, they actually pour scalding sauce over you,—oil, and vinegar, and grated cheese,—spoilng your naturally exquisite flavour.” But, if they will be advised by him, they will bear it no longer. If men will still prefer the gods to the birds, then let the rooks and sparrows flock down and eat up all the seed-wheat—and let foolish mortals see what Ceres can then do for them in the way of supplies. And let the crows peck out the eyes of the sheep and oxen; and let them see whether Apollo (who calls himself a physician, and takes care to get his fees as such) will be able to heal them. [Euelpides here puts in a word—he hopes they will allow him first to sell a pair of oxen he has at home.] And indeed the Birds will make much better gods, and more economical: there will be no need of costly marble temples, and expensive journeys to such places as Ammon and Delphi; an oak-tree or an olive-grove will answer all purposes of bird-worship.

He then propounds his great scheme for building a bird-city in mid-air. The idea is favourably entertained, and the two featherless bipeds are equipped (by means of some potent herb known to the Bird-king) with a pair of wings apiece, to make them presentable in society, before they are introduced at the royal table. The metamorphosis causes some amusement, and the two human travellers are not complimentary as to each other’s appearance in these new appendages; Peisthetærus declaring that his friend reminds him of nothing so much as “a goose on a

cheap sign-board," while the other retorts by comparing him to "a plucked blackbird." *

The Choral song that follows is one of the gems of that elegance of fancy and diction which, here and there, in the plays of Aristophanes, almost startle us by contrast with the broad farce which forms their staple, and show that the author possessed the powers of a true poet as well as of a clever satirist.

"Ye children of man ! whose life is a span,
 Protracted with sorrow from day to day,
 Naked and featherless, feeble and querulous,
 Sickly calamitous creatures of clay !
 Attend to the words of the sovereign birds,
 Immortal, illustrious lords of the air,
 Who survey from on high, with a merciful eye,
 Your struggles of misery, labour, and care.
 Whence you may learn and clearly discern
 Such truths as attract your inquisitive turn ;
 Which is busied of late with a mighty debate,

* If the reader would like to see how thoroughly this kind of humour is in the spirit of modern burlesque, he cannot do better than glance at Mr Planché's "Birds of Aristophanes," produced at the Haymarket in 1846. This is his free version of the passage just noticed—('Tomostyleron' and 'Jackanoxides' are the two adventurers of the Greek comedy) :—

"*King of Birds.* And what bird will you be—a popinjay ?

Tom. No, no ; they pop at him. (*To Jack.*) What kind would you be ?

King (aside). The bird you're most akin to is a booby.

Jack. For fear of accidents, some fowl I'd be,
 That folks don't shoot or eat.

Tom. Humph ! let me see—

There may be one I never heard the name of.

King (aside). You can't be anything they won't make game of."

A profound speculation about the creation,
 And organical life, and chaotical strife,
 With various notions of heavenly motions,
 And rivers and oceans, and valleys and mountains,
 And sources of fountains, and meteors on high,
 And stars in the sky. . . . We propose by-and-by
 (If you'll listen and hear) to make it all clear."—(F.)

There follows here some fantastical cosmogony, showing how all things had their origin from a mystic egg, laid by Night, from which sprang the golden-winged Eros—Love, the great principle of life, whose offspring were the Birds.

“Our antiquity proved, it remains to be shown
 That Love is our author and master alone ;
 Like him we can ramble and gambol and fly
 O'er ocean and earth, and aloft to the sky :
 And all the world over, we're friends to the lover,
 And where other means fail, we are found to prevail,
 When a peacock or pheasant is sent as a present.

All lessons of primary daily concern
 You have learnt from the birds, and continue to learn,
 Your best benefactors and early instructors ;
 We give you the warning of seasons returning ;
 When the cranes are arranged, and muster afloat
 In the middle air, with a creaking note,
 Steering away to the Lybian sands,
 Then careful farmers sow their lands ;
 The crazy vessel is hauled ashore,
 The sail, the ropes, the rudder, and oar
 Are all unshipped, and housed in store.
 The shepherd is warned, by the kite reappearing,
 To muster his flock, and be ready for shearing.
 You quit your old cloak at the swallow's behest,
 In assurance of summer, and purchase a vest.

For Delphi, for Ammon, Dodona, in fine
 For every oracular temple and shrine,
 The birds are a substitute equal and fair,
 For on us you depend, and to us you repair
 For counsel and aid when a marriage is made,
 A purchase, a bargain, a venture in trade :
 Unlucky or lucky, whatever has struck ye—
 An ox or an ass that may happen to pass,
 A voice in the street, or a slave that you meet,
 A name or a word by chance overheard—
 If you deem it an omen, you call it a *bird*;
 And if birds are your omens, it clearly will follow
 That birds are a proper prophetic Apollo.”—(F.)

The Birds proceed at once to build their new city. Peisthetærus prefers helping with his head rather than his hands, but he orders off his simple-minded companion to assist them in the work.

Peis. Come now, go aloft, my boy, and tend the
 masons ;
 Find them good stones ; strip to it, like a man,
 And mix the mortar ; carry up the hod—
 And tumble down the ladder, for a change.
 Set guards over the wall ; take care of fire ;
 Go your rounds with the bell as city watchman—
 And go to sleep on your post—as I know you will.

Euelp. (*sulkily*). And you stay here and be hanged, if
 you like—there, now !

Peis. (*winking at the King*). Go ! there’s a good fellow,
 go ! upon my word,
 They couldn’t possibly get on without you.

The building is completed, by the joint exertions of the Birds, in a shorter time than even the enthusiastic speculations of Peisthetærus had calculated :—

“*Messenger.* There came a body' of thirty thousand
cranes

(I won't be positive, there might be more)
With stones from Africa in their craws and gizzards,
Which the stone-curlews and stone-chatterers
Worked into shape and finished. The sand-martins
And mudlarks too were busy in their department,
Mixing the mortar ; while the water-birds,
As fast as it was wanted, brought the water,
To temper and work it.

Peis. (in a fidget). But who served the masons ?
Who did you get to carry it ?

Mess. To carry it ?
Of course the *carrion* crows and carrier-pigeons.” *—(F.)

The geese with their flat feet trod the mortar, and the pelicans with their saw-bills were the carpenters. The name fixed upon for this new metropolis is “Cloud-Cuckoo-Town”—the first recorded “castle in the air.” It must be the place, Euelpides thinks, where some of those great estates lie which he has heard certain friends of his in Athens boast of. It appears to be indeed a very unsubstantial kind of settlement ; for Iris, the messenger of the Immortals, who has been despatched from heaven to inquire after the arrears of sacrifice, quite unaware of its existence and its purpose, dashes through the airy blockade immediately after its building. She is pursued, however, by a detachment of light cavalry—hawks, falcons, and eagles—and brought upon the stage as prisoner, in a state of great wrath at

* The play on the names is, of course, not the same in the Greek as in the English. Mr Frere has perhaps managed it as well as it could be done.

the indignity put upon her,—wrath which is by no means mollified by the sarcasms of Peisthetærus on the flaunting style and very pronounced colours of her costume as goddess of the Rainbow.

The men seem well inclined to the new ruling powers, and many apply at once to be furnished with wings. But the state of things in the celestial regions soon gets so intolerable, owing to the stoppage of all communication with earth and its good things, that certain barbarian deities, the gods of Thrace, who are—as an Athenian audience would readily understand—of a very carnal and ill-mannered type, break out into open rebellion, and threaten mutiny against the supremacy of Jupiter, unless he can come to some terms with this new intermediate power. Information of this movement is brought by Prometheus—here, as in the tragedians, the friend of man and the enemy of Jupiter—who comes secretly to Peisthetærus (getting under an umbrella, that Jupiter may not see him) and advises him on no account to come to any terms with that potentate which do not include the transfer into his possession of the fair *Basileia* (sovereignty), who rules the household of Olympus, and is the impersonation of all good things that can be desired. In due time an embassy from the gods in general arrives at the new city, sent to treat with the Birds. The Commissioners are three: Neptune, Hercules (whose appetite for good things was notorious, and who would be a principal sufferer by the cutting off the supplies), and a Thracian god—a Triballian—who talks very bad Greek indeed, and who has succeeded in some way in getting

himself named on the embassy, to the considerable disgust of Neptune, who has much trouble in making him look at all respectable and presentable.

“*Nep.* There’s Nephelococcugia ! that’s the town,
The point we’re bound to with our embassy.

(*Turning to the Triballian.*)

But you ! what a figure have ye made yourself !
What a way to wear a mantle ! slouching off
From the left shoulder ! Hitch it round, I tell ye,
On the right side. For shame—come—so ; that’s better ;
These folds, too, bundled up ; there, throw them round
Even and easy,—so. Why, you’re a savage,
A natural-born savage.—Oh, democracy !
What will it bring us to, when such a ruffian
Is voted into an embassy !

Trib. (*to Neptune, who is pulling his dress about.*) Come,
hands off,
Hands off !

Nep. Keep quiet, I tell ye, and hold your tongue,
For a very beast ! in all my life in heaven,
I never saw such another. Hercules,
I say, what shall we do ? What should you think ?

Her. What would I do ? what do I think ? I’ve told
you
Already—I think to throttle him—the fellow,
Whoever he is, that’s keeping us blockaded.

Nep. Yes, my good friend ; but we were sent, you know,
To treat for a peace. Our embassy is for peace.

Her. That makes no difference ; or if it does,
It makes me long to throttle him all the more.”—(F.)

Hercules, ravenous as he always is, and having been kept for some time on very short commons, is won over by the rich odour of some cookery in which he

finds Peisthetærus, now governor of the new state, employed on their arrival. He is surprised to discover that the *roti* consists of birds, until it is explained to him that they are aristocrat birds, who have, in modern phrase, been guilty of conspiring against democracy. This brief but bitter satire upon this Bird-Utopia is thrown in as it were by the way, quite casually; but one wonders how the audience received it. Hercules determines to make peace on any terms; and when Neptune seems inclined to stand upon the dignity of his order, and taunts his brother god with being too ready to sacrifice his father's rights, he draws the Triballian aside, and threatens him roundly with a good thrashing if he does not give his vote the right way. Having secured his majority of votes by this powerful argument—a kind of argument by no means peculiar to aerial controversies, but familiar alike to despots and demagogues in all times—Hercules concludes on behalf of the gods the truce with the Birds. Jupiter agrees to resign his sceptre to them, on condition that there is no further embargo on the sacrifices, and to give up to Peisthetærus the beautiful Basileia; and in the closing scene she appears in person, decked as a bride, riding in procession by the side of Peisthetærus, while the Chorus chant a half-burlesque epithalamium. “Plausible” has won the sovereignty, but of a very unsubstantial kingdom—if that be the moral of the play.

Süvern contends, in his very ingenious Essay on this comedy, that the fantastic project in which the Birds are persuaded by Peisthetærus to engage is in-

tended to represent the ultimate designs of Alcibiades in urging the expedition of the Athenians to Sicily,—no less than the subjugation of Italy, Carthage, and Libya, and obtaining the sovereignty of the Mediterranean: by which the Spartans (the gods of the comedy) would be cut off from intercourse with the smaller states, here represented by the men. He considers that in *Peisthetærus* we have Alcibiades, compounded with some traits of the sophist Gorgias, whose pupil he is said to have been. Iris's threat of the wrath of her father Jupiter—which certainly is more seriously worded than the general tone of the play—he takes to be a prognostication of the unhappy termination of the expedition, a feeling shared by many at Athens; while in the transfer of *Basileia*—all the real power—to *Peisthetærus*, and not to the Birds, he foreshadows the probable results of the personal ambition of Alcibiades. Such an explanation receives support from many other passages in the comedy, and is worked out by the writer with great pains and ability.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FROGS.

THE point of the satire in this comedy is chiefly critical, and directed against the tragedian Euripides, upon whom Aristophanes is never weary of showering his ridicule. There must have been something more in this than the mere desire to raise a laugh by a burlesque of a popular tragedian, or the satisfaction of a purely literary dislike. It is probable, as has been suggested, that our conservative and aristocratic author looked upon Euripides as a dangerous innovator in philosophy as well as in literature; one of the "new school" at Athens, whom he was so fond of contrasting with the "men of Marathon."

Bacchus, the patron of the drama, has become disgusted with its present state. He finds worse writers now in possession of the stage than Euripides; and he has resolved upon undertaking a journey to Tartarus, to bring him back to earth again. He would prefer Sophocles; but to get away from the dominions of Pluto requires a good deal of scheming and stratagem: and Sophocles is such a good easy man that he is pro-

bably contented where he is, while the other is such a clever, contriving fellow, that he will be sure to find some plan for his own escape. Remembering the success of Hercules on a similar expedition to the lower regions, Bacchus has determined to adopt the club and the lion's skin, in order to be taken for that hero. Followed by his slave Xanthias—who comes in riding upon an ass (a kind of classical Sancho Panza), and carrying his master's luggage—he calls upon Hercules on his way, in order to gather from him some information as to his route,—which is the best road to take, what there is worth seeing there, and especially what inns he can recommend, where the beds are reasonably clean, and free from those disagreeable bedfellows with which the Athenians of old seem to have been quite as well acquainted as any modern Londoner.

Hercules laughs to himself at the figure which his brother deity cuts in a costume so unsuited to his habits and character, and answers him in a tone of banter. Bacchus wants to know the shortest and most convenient road to the regions of the dead.

“ *Her.* Well,—which shall I tell ye first, now? Let me see—

There's a good convenient road by the Rope and Noose—
The Hanging Road.

Bac. No, that's too close and stifling.

Her. Then there's an easy, fair, well-beaten track,
As you go by the Pestle and Mortar.

Bac. What, the Hemlock?

Her. To be sure.

Bac. That's much too cold,—it will never do.
They tell me it strikes a chill to the legs and feet.

Her. Should you like a speedy, rapid, downhill road ?

Bac. Indeed I should, for I'm a sorry traveller.

Her. Go to the Keranicus, then.

Bac. What then ?

Her. Get up to the very top of the tower—

Bac. What then ?

Her. Stand there and watch when the Race of the Torch begins ;

And mind, when you hear the people cry ' Start, start ! ' Then start at once with 'em.

Bac. Me ? Start ? Where from ?

Her. From the top of the tower to the bottom.

Bac. No, not I.

It's enough to dash my brains out ! I'll not go Such a road upon any account."—(F.)

Bacchus gets the needful information at last, and sets out on his journey—not without some remonstrance from his slave as to the weight of the luggage he has to carry. Surely, Xanthias says, there must be some dead people going that way on their own account, in a conveyance, who would carry it for a trifle ? His master gives him leave to make such an arrangement if he can—and as a bier is borne across the stage, Xanthias stops it, and tries to make a bargain with the occupant. The dead man asks eighteenpence ; Xanthias offers him a shilling ; the other replies that he " would rather come to life again," and bids his bearers " move on."

There must have been some kind of change of scene, to enable the travellers to arrive at the passage of the Styx, where Charon's ferry-boat is in waiting. He plies his trade exactly after the fashion of a modern omnibus-conductor. " Any one for Lethe, Tænarus,

the Dogs, or No-man's-Land?" "You're sure you're going straight to Hell?" asks the cautious traveller. "Certainly—to oblige you." So Bacchus steps into the boat, begging Charon to be very careful, for it seems very small and crank, as Hercules had warned him. But Charon carries no slaves—Xanthias must run round and meet them on the other side. The god takes his place at the oar, at the ferryman's bidding (but in very awkward "form," as a modern oarsman would term it), to work his passage across: and an invisible Chorus of Frogs, who give their name to the piece—the "Swans of the Marsh," as Charon calls them—chant their discordant music, in which, nevertheless, occur some very graceful lines, to the time of the stroke. It must be remembered that the oldest temple of Bacchus—the Lenæan—was known as that "In the Marsh," and it was there that the festival was held at which this piece was brought forward.

The chant of the Frogs dies away in the distance, and the scene changes to the other side of the infernal lake, where Xanthias was to await the arrival of his master. It does not seem likely that any means could have been adopted for darkening a stage which was nearly five hundred feet broad, and open to the sky: but it is plain that much of the humour of the following scene depends upon its being supposed to take place more or less in the dark. Probably the darkness was conventional, and only by grace of the audience—as indeed must be the case to some extent even in a modern theatre.

[*Enter Bacchus, on one side of the stage.*]

B. Hoy! Xanthias!—Where's Xanthias?—I say, Xanthias!

[*Enter Xanthias, on the other side.*]

X. Hallo!

B. Come here, sir,—quick!

X. Here I am, master!

B. What kind of a place is it, out yonder?

X. Dirt and darkness.

B. Did you see any of those perjurers and assassins
He told us of?

X. Aye,—lots. (*Looking round at the audience.*)
I see 'em now—don't you?

B. (*looking round*). To be sure I do, by Neptune! now
I see 'em!—

What shall we do?

X. Go forward, I should say;
This is the place where lie those evil beasts—
The monsters that he talked of.

B. Oh! confound him!
He was romancing—trying to frighten me,
Knowing how bold I was—jealous, that's the fact:
Never was such a braggart as that Hercules!
I only wish I *could* fall in with something—
Some brave adventure, worthy of my visit.

X. Stop!—there!—by Jove, I heard a roar out yonder!

B. (*nervously*). Where, where?

X. Behind us.

B. (*pushing himself in front of Xanthias*). Go behind,
sir, will you?

X. No—it's in front.

B. (*getting behind Xanthias again*). Why don't you go
in front, then?

X. Great Jupiter! I see an awful beast!

B. What like?

X. Oh—horrible! like everything!

Now it's a bull—and now a stag—and now
A beautiful woman!

B. (jumping from behind X., and pushing him back).

Where?—Let me go first!

X. It's not a woman now—it's a great dog!

B. (in great terror, getting behind X. again). Oh!—it's
the Empusa!*

X. (getting frightened). It's got eyes like fire,
And its face all of a blaze!

B. And one brass leg?

X. Lawk-a-mercy, yes!—and a cloven foot on the other
—It has indeed!

B. (looking round in terror). Where can I get to—tell
me?

X. Where can I go? (*runs into a corner.*)

*B. (makes as if he would run into the arms of the Priest
of Bacchus, who had a seat of honour in the front
row.)*

Good priest, protect me!—take me home to supper!†

X. (from his corner). We're lost—we're lost! O Her-
cules, dear master!

B. (in a frightened whisper). Don't call me by that name,
you fool—don't, don't!

X. Well,—Bacchus, must I say?

B. No-o!—that's worse still!

X. (to something in the distance). Avaunt, there! go
thy ways! (*Joyfully.*) Here, master! here!

B. What is it?

X. Hurrah! take heart! we've had the great-
est luck—

We can say now, in our great poet's words,—

* A sort of Night-hag belonging to Hecate, which assumed various shapes to terrify belated travellers at cross-roads.

† The priests of Bacchus had probably (and very naturally) a reputation as *bons vivants*. At all events, they gave a sumptuous official entertainment at these dramatic festivals.

“After a storm there comes a calm.”—It’s gone!

B. Upon your oath?

X. Upon my oath.

B. You swear it?

X. I swear it.

B. Swear again.

X. I swear—by Jupiter.

But now the sound of flutes is heard in the distance, and with music and torches, a festive procession enters the orchestra. A parody of the great Eleusinian mysteries (for even these were lawful game to the comedy-writer) introduces the true Chorus of this play, consisting of the ‘Initiated,’ who chant an ode, half serious half burlesque, in honour of Bacchus and Ceres. They direct the travellers to the gates of Pluto’s palace, which are close at hand. Bacchus eyes the awful portal for some time before he ventures to lift the knocker, and is very anxious to announce himself in the most polite fashion. “How do people knock at doors in these parts, I wonder?”

“*Æac.* (*from within, with the voice of a royal and infernal porter*). Who’s there?

Bac. (*with a forced voice*). ’Tis I,—the valiant Hercules.

Æac. (*coming out*). Thou brutal, abominable, detestable,

Vile, villanous, infamous, nefarious scoundrel!
 How durst thou, villain as thou wert, to seize
 Our watchdog Cerberus, whom I kept and tended,
 Hurrying him off half-strangled in your grasp?
 But now, be sure, we have you safe and fast,
 Miscreant and villain! Thee the Stygian cliffs
 With stern adamantine durance, and the rocks

Of inaccessible Acheron, red with gore,
 Environ and beleaguer, and the watch
 And swift pursuit of the hideous hounds of hell,
 And the horrible Hydra with her hundred heads,
 Whose furious ravening fangs shall rend and tear thee."

—(F.)

Before the terrible porter has ended his threats, Bacchus has dropped to the ground from sheer terror. "Hallo!" says Xanthias, "what's the matter?" "I've had an accident," says his master, recovering himself when he sees that Æacus is gone. But finding that the rôle of Hercules has so many unforeseen responsibilities, he begs Xanthias to change dresses and characters,—to relieve him of the club and lion's skin, while he takes his turn with the bundles. No sooner has the change been effected, than a waiting-woman of Queen Proserpine makes her appearance—she has been sent to invite Hercules to supper. She addresses herself, of course, to Xanthias :—

"Dear Hercules! so you're come at last! come in!
 For the goddess, as soon as she heard of it, set to work
 Baking peck-loaves, and frying stacks of pancakes,
 And making messes of frumenty: there's an ox,
 Besides, she has roasted whole, with a relishing stuffing."

—(F.)

There is the best of wine, besides, awaiting him—and such lovely singers and dancers!

Xanthias, after some modest refusals, allows himself to be persuaded, and prepares to follow his fair guide, bidding his master look after the luggage. But Bacchus prefers on this occasion to play the part of Hercules himself, and insists on each resuming their

original characters,—the slave warning him that he may come to rue it yet. The warning soon comes true. Before he can get to the palace, he is seized upon by a brace of infernal landladies, at whose establishments Hercules, on his previous visit, has left some little bills unpaid. “Hallo!” says one lady, “here’s the fellow that ate me up sixteen loaves!” “And me a score of fried cutlets at three-halfpence apiece,” says the other, “And all my garlic!” “And my pickled fish, and the new cream-cheeses, which he swallowed rush-baskets and all! and then, when I asked for payment, he only grinned and roared at me like a bull, and threatened me with his sword.” “Just like him!” says Xanthias. After abusing poor Bacchus, and shaking their fists in his face, they go off to fetch some of the infernal lawyers; and Bacchus once more begs Xanthias to stand his friend, and play Hercules again,—he shall really be Hercules for the future,—the part suits him infinitely better. The slave consents, and again they change dresses, when Æacus comes in with the Plutonian police. He points out to them the representative of Hercules—“Handcuff me this fellow that stole the dog!” But Xanthias is not easily handcuffed; he stands on his defence; protests that “he wishes he may die if he was ever that way before;”—he “never touched a hair of the dog’s tail.” If Æacus won’t believe him, there stands his slave—he may take and torture him, after the usual fashion, and see whether he can extract any evidence of guilt. This seems so fair a proposal that Æacus at once agrees to it.

“*Æac. (to Bac.)* Come, you—put down your bundles,
and make ready.
And mind—let me hear no lies.

Bac. I’ll tell you what—
I’d advise people not to torture me ;
I give you notice—I’m a deity ;
So mind now—you’ll have nobody to blame
But your own self.

Æac. What’s that you’re saying there ?

Bac. Why, that I’m Bacchus, Jupiter’s own son ;
That fellow there’s a slave (*pointing to Xanthias*).

Æac. (to Xanthias). Do you hear ?

Xan. I hear him :
A reason the more to give him a good beating ;
If he’s immortal, he need never mind it.”—(F.)

Æacus proceeds to test their divinity, by administering a lash to each of them in turn ; but they endure the ordeal so successfully, that at last he gives it up in despair.

“By the Holy Goddess, I’m completely puzzled !
I must take you before Proserpine and Pluto—
Being gods themselves, they’re likeliest to know.

Bac. Why, that’s a lucky thought !—I only wish
It had happened to occur before you beat us.”—(F.)

There is an interval of choral song, with a political bearing, during which we are to suppose that Bacchus is being entertained at the infernal court, while Xanthias improves his acquaintance with *Æacus* in the servants’ hall, or whatever might be the equivalent in Pluto’s establishment. The conversation between the two is highly confidential. “Your master seems quite the gentleman,” says *Æacus*. “Oh ! quite,” says Xan-

thias"—he does nothing but game and drink." They find that life "below stairs" is very much the same in Tartarus as it is in the upper regions; and both agree that what they enjoy most is listening at the door, and discussing their masters' secrets with their own friends afterwards. While the two retainers are engaged in this interesting conversation, a noise outside attracts the new-comer's attention. "Oh," says Æacus, "it's only Æschylus and Euripides quarrelling. There's a tremendous rivalry going on just now among these dead people." He explains to his guest that special rank and precedence, with a seat at the royal table, is accorded in the Shades to the artist or professor who stands first in his own line. Æschylus had held the chair of tragedy until Euripides appeared below: but now this latter has made a party in his own favour—"chiefly of rogues and vagabonds"—and has laid claim to the chair. Æschylus has his friends among the respectable men; but respectable men are as scarce in the Shades—"as they are in this present company," observes Æacus, with a wave of his hand towards the audience.* So Pluto (who appears a very affable and good-humoured monarch) has determined that there shall be a public

* We find something of this professional *badinage* to the audience in Shakspeare's "Hamlet" (act v. sc. i.) :—

Ham. Marry, why was he sent into England?

1st Grave-d. Why, because he was mad: he shall recover his wits there; or if he do not, 'tis no great matter there.

Ham. Why?

1st Gr. 'Twill not be seen in him there—there the men are as mad as he.

trial and discussion of their respective merits. Sophocles has put in no claim on his own behalf. The tribute which his brother dramatist here pays him is very graceful: "The first moment that he came, he went up straight to Æschylus and saluted him, and kissed his cheek, and took his hand quite kindly, and Æschylus edged a little from his seat, to give him room."

But—if Euripides is elected against Æschylus, Sophocles will challenge his right. The difficulty is to find competent judges. Æschylus has declined to leave the decision to the Athenians—he has no confidence in their honesty or their taste. [A bold stroke of personal satire, we might think, from a candidate for the dramatic crown of the festival, as against those whose verdict he was awaiting; the author was perhaps still smarting (as Brunck suggests) from the reception his "Clouds" had met with: but he knew his public—it was just the thing an Athenian audience would enjoy.] It had been already proposed to get Bacchus, as the great patron of the drama, to sit as judge in this controversy, so that his present visit has been most opportune; and whichever of the rival poets he places first, Pluto promises to allow his guest to take back to earth with him.

The contest between the rival dramatists takes place upon the stage, in full court, with Bacchus presiding, and the Chorus encouraging the competitors. It is extended to some length, but must have been full of interest to a play-loving audience, thoroughly familiar with the tragedies of both authors. Some of the points

we can even now quite appreciate. *Æschylus*, in the hands of *Aristophanes*, does not spare his competitor.

“A wretch that has corrupted everything—
Our music with his melodies from Crete,
Our morals with incestuous tragedies.

I wish the place of trial had been elsewhere—
I stand at disadvantage here.

Bac.

As how ?

Æs. Because my poems live on earth above,
And his died with him, and descended here,
And are at hand as ready witnesses.”—(F.)

Euripides retorts upon his rival the use of “break-neck words, which it is not easy to find the meaning of”—a charge which some modern schoolboys would be quite ready to support. The two poets proceed, at the request of the arbitrator, each to recite passages from their tragedies for the other to criticise: and if we suppose, as we have every right to do, that the voice and gestures of some well-known popular tragedian were cleverly mimicked at the same time, we should then have an entertainment of a very similar kind to that which *Foot* and *Matthews*, and in later days *Robson*, afforded to an English audience by their remarkable imitations.

After various trials of skill, a huge pair of scales is produced, and the verses of each candidate are weighed, as a test of their comparative value. Still *Bacchus* cannot decide. At last he puts to each a political question—perhaps *the* question of the day—which has formed the subject of pointed allusion more than once in the course of the play.

Alcibiades, long the popular favourite, has recently been banished, and is now living privately in Thrace;—shall he be recalled? Both answer enigmatically; but the advice of the elder poet plainly tends to the policy of recall, which was no doubt the prevailing inclination of the Athenians. In vain does Euripides remind Bacchus that he had come there purposely to bring him back, and had pledged his word to do so. The god quotes against him a well-known verse from his own tragedy of ‘Hippolytus,’ with the sophistry of which his critics were never tired of taunting him—

It was my *tongue* that swore.

And Æschylus, crowned by his decision as the First of Tragedians, is led off in triumphal procession in the suite of the god of the drama, with Pluto’s hearty approbation. He leaves his chair in the Shades to Sophocles,—with strict injunctions to keep Euripides out of it.

This very lively comedy, the humour of which is still so intelligible, seems to have supplied the original idea for those modern burlesques upon the Olympian and Tartarian deities which were at one time so popular. For some reason it was not brought out in the author’s own name; but it gained the first prize, and was acted a second time, probably in the same year—an honour, strange to say, very unusual at Athens.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WOMEN'S FESTIVAL.—THE ECCLESIAZUSÆ.

THE 'Thesmophoriazusæ,' as this piece is called in the Greek, is a comedy in which, as in the 'Lysistrata,' the fair sex play the chief part, although its whole point lies in a satire (though scarcely so severe as that in 'The Frogs') upon Euripides, whom our author was never tired of holding up to ridicule. The secret history of this literary quarrel we shall never know; if indeed there was really any quarrel which could have a history, and if the unceasing jests which Aristophanes dealt out in this and other comedies against his brother dramatist were not mainly prompted by the fact that his tragedies were highly popular, universally known and quoted, and therefore an excellent subject for the caricature and parody which were the essence of this style of comedy. It has been remarked that the conservative principles of the comic author are supposed to have been scandalised by the new-fashioned ideas of the tragedian: but the shafts of his ridicule are directed much more frequently against the plots and

versification of Euripides's plays than against his philosophy.*

The 'Thesmophoria,' or great feast of Ceres and Proserpine, from which this comedy takes its name, was exclusively a women's festival, and none of the other sex were allowed to be present at its celebration. Euripides had the reputation among his contemporaries of being a woman-hater, and he had undoubtedly said bitter things of them in many of his tragedies.† But to those who remember his characters of Iphigenia, and Theonœ, and the incomparable Alcestis, the reproach may well seem much too general. However, in this comedy the women of Athens are supposed to have resolved upon his condign punishment; and at this next festival they are to sit in solemn conclave, to determine the mode in which it is to be carried out. Euripides has heard of it, and is in great dismay. He goes, in the opening scene, accompanied by his father-in-law Mnesilochus, to his friend and fellow-dramatist Agathon, to beg him to go to the festival disguised in woman's clothes, and there plead his cause for him. He would do it himself, but that he is so well known, and has such a huge rough beard, while Agathon is

* See, however, on this question, 'Euripides' (Anc. Cl.), p. 37, &c.

† Perhaps his most bitter words are those addressed to Phædra by Bellerophon, in the lost tragedy of that name,—

"O thou most vile! thou—*woman!*—For what word
That lips could frame could carry more reproach?"

But we must not forget Shakspeare's—"Frailty, thy name is woman!" or judge the poet too harshly by a passionate expression put into the mouth of one of his characters.

really very lady-like in appearance. In fact, he is used to the thing; for he always wears female attire when he has to write the female parts in his tragedies—it assists the imagination: as Richardson is said not to have felt equal to the composition of a letter to one of his lady-correspondents unless he sat down in full dress. Agathon contents himself, by way of reply, with asking his petitioner whether he ever wrote this line in a certain tragedy, in which a son requests his father to be so good as to suffer death in his stead—

Thou lovest thy life,—why not thy father too?

And when Euripides cannot deny the quotation from his 'Alcestis,' his friend recommends him not to expect other people to run risks to get *him* out of trouble.

Upon this, Mnesilochus takes pity upon his son-in-law, and consents to undertake the necessary disguise, though it will require very close shaving—an operation which Euripides immediately sets to work to perform upon the stage, while Agathon supplies him with the necessary garments. Euripides promises that, should his advocate get into any difficulties, he will do his best to extricate him by some of those subtle devices for which his tragedies are so celebrated. He offers to pledge himself by an oath to this effect; but Mnesilochus begs it may be a mental oath only—reminding him of that unfortunate line of his which we have already found Bacchus quoting against him in 'The Frogs'—

It was my tongue that swore, and not my mind.

The scene is changed to the temple of Ceres, where

the women hold solemn debate upon the crimes of the poet. He has vilely slandered the sex, and made them objects of ridicule and suspicion. One of their number puts in a claim of special damages against him; she had maintained herself and "five small children" by making wreaths for the temples, until this Euripides began to teach people that "there were no gods," and so ruined her trade. The disguised Mnesilochus rises to defend his relative. But the apology which the author puts into his mouth is conceived in the bitterest spirit of satire. He shows that the tragedian, far from having slandered the ladies, has really dealt with them most leniently. True, he has said some severe things of them, but nothing to what he *might* have said. And he proceeds to relate some very scurrilous anecdotes, to show that the sex is really much worse than the poet has represented it. He is repeatedly interrupted, in spite of his protests in behalf of that freedom of speech which is the admitted right of every Athenian woman. How was it, asks one of the audience, that Euripides never once took the good Penelope as the subject of a tragedy, when he was always so ready to paint characters like Helen and Phædra? Mnesilochus answers that it was because there are no wives like Penelope nowadays, but plenty of wives like Phædra.

His audience are naturally astonished and indignant at this unexpected attack from one of their own number. Who is this audacious woman, this traitress to her sex? No one knows her, of course: and it is whispered that there is a man among them in disguise.

There is a terrible uproar in the meeting, and the intruder, after a sharp cross-examination by a shrewish dame, is soon detected. To save himself from the vengeance of the exasperated women, he flies for refuge to the altar, snatching a baby from one of their number, and (like Dicaëpolis in 'The Acharnians') * threatens to kill it at once unless they let him go. But the women who have no babies display a good deal of indifference to his threats, and vow they will burn him, then and there, whatever happens to the unfortunate hostage. Mnesilochus proceeds to strip it, when, lo ! it turns out to be nothing more or less than a wine-skin in baby's clothes. He will cut its throat, nevertheless. The foster-mother is almost as much distressed as if it were a real child.

Woman. Hold, I beseech you ! Never be so cruel !
Do what you will with me, but spare my darling.

Mnes. I know you love it—it's a woman's weakness—
But, none the less, its blood must flow to-day.

Wom. O my poor child !—Bring us a bowl, dear Mania !
If it must die, do let us catch its blood.

Mnes. Well—hold it under. I'll oblige you. (*Slits the
wine-skin, and drinks off the contents.*) There !
And here's the skin of the victim—for the priestess.

Mnesilochus is detained in custody until the constables can be sent for. In this strait he naturally looks to Euripides, on whose account he has got into

* The "situation" seems to have been a favourite one. It may be remembered in Kotzebue's play, which Sheridan turned into 'Pizarro,' in the scene where Rolla carries off Cora's child.

trouble, to come and help him according to promise. And from this point the whole action of the piece becomes the broadest burlesque upon the tragedies of that author, which only an Athenian audience, to whom every scene and almost every line was familiar, could fully appreciate. Indeed no comedy of Aristophanes illustrates so strongly what the character of this audience was, and how, with all their love for coarseness and buffoonery, the poet saw in the masses who filled that vast amphitheatre a literary "public" the like of which was never seen before or since.

How then is the prisoner to communicate his situation to Euripides? He will do what that poet makes his own "Palamedes" do in the tragedy—write a message containing his sad story upon the oars, and throw them out. But there are no oars likely to be found in the temple. He substitutes some little images of the gods, which are at hand, and throws them off the stage—a double blow at the alleged profanity of the tragedian and at his far-fetched devices.

The interval is filled up by a song from the Chorus of Women, the first part of which is light and playful enough, and so thoroughly modern in its tone that it does not lose much in a free translation:—

They're always abusing the women,
 As a terrible plague to men :
 They say we're the root of all evil,
 And repeat it again and again ;
 Of war, and quarrels, and bloodshed,
 All mischief, be what it may :
 And pray, then, why do you marry us,
 If we're all the plagues you say ?

And why do you take such care of us,
 And keep us so safe at home,
 And are never easy a moment,
 If ever we chance to roam ?
 When you ought to be thanking heaven
 That your Plague is out of the way—
 You all keep fussing and fretting—
 “Where *is* my Plague to-day ?”
 If a Plague peeps out of the window,
 Up go the eyes of the men ;
 If she hides, then they all keep staring
 Until she looks out again.

But Euripides, supposed (with a good deal of theatrical licence) to have been summoned by the message so oddly despatched, does not appear to his rescue. “It must be because he is so ashamed of his Palamedes,” says Mnesilochus—“I’ll try some device from another of his tragedies—I’ll be Helen, that’s his last—I’ve got the woman’s dress on, all ready.” And he proceeds to quote, from the tragedy of that name, her invocation to her husband Menelaus to come to her aid. This second appeal is successful ; the poet enters, dressed in that character ; and a long dialogue takes place between the two, partly in quotation and partly in parody of the words of the play,—to the considerable mystification of the assembled women. But it is in vain that the representative of Menelaus tries to take his Helen “back with him to Sparta.” The police arrive, and Mnesilochus is put in the stocks. And there he remains, though various devices from other tragedies, which give occasion for abundant parody, are tried to rescue him : forming a scene which, supposing

again that the peculiar style of well-known actors was cleverly imitated, must lose nearly all its humour when read instead of being heard and seen. But the Athenian police show themselves as insensible to theatrical appeals and poetic quotations as their London representatives would probably be. At last Euripides offers terms of peace to the offended ladies: he will never abuse them in future, if they will only let his friend off now. They agree, so far as they are concerned; but the prisoner is now in the hands of the law, and Euripides must deal with the law's representatives for his release. It is effected by the commonplace expedient of bribing the constable on duty; and so the burlesque ends,—somewhat feebly, according to our modern requirements.

THE ECCLESIAZUSÆ.

“The Female Parliament,” as the name of this comedy may be freely rendered, was not produced until nineteen years after the play last noticed, but may be classed with it as being also in great measure levelled against the sex. It is a broad but very amusing satire upon those ideal republics, founded upon communistic principles, of which Plato's well-known treatise is the best example. His ‘Republic’ had been written, and probably delivered in the form of oral lectures at Athens, only two or three years before, and had no doubt excited a considerable sensation. But many of its most startling principles had long ago been ventilated in the Schools; and their authorship has been

commonly attributed, as was also the art of "making the worse cause appear the better," with very much besides of the sophistical teaching of the day, to Protagoras of Abdera.

The women have determined, under the leadership of a clever lady named Praxagora, to reform the constitution of Athens. For this purpose they will dress like men—beards included—and occupy the seats in the Pnyx, so as to be able to command a majority of votes in the next public Assembly, the parliament of Athens. Praxagora is strongly of opinion, with the modern Mrs Poyser, that on the point of speaking, at all events, the women have great natural advantages over the men; that "when they have anything to say, they can mostly find words to say it in." They hold a midnight meeting for the purpose of rehearsing their intended speeches, and getting accustomed to their new clothes. Two or three of the most ambitious orators unfortunately break down at the very outset, much to their leader's disgust, by addressing the Assembly as "ladies," and swearing female oaths, and using many other unparliamentary expressions quite unbecoming their masculine attire. Praxagora herself, however, makes a speech which is very generally admired. She complains of the mismanagement hitherto of public affairs, and asserts that the only hope of salvation for the state is to put the government into the hands of the women; arguing, like Lysistrata in the other comedy, that those who have so long managed the domestic establishment successfully are best fitted to undertake the same duties on a larger scale. The women, too, are shown

by their advocate to be highly conservative, and therefore safe guardians of the public interests :—

They roast and boil after the good old fashion,
 They keep the holidays that were kept of old,
 They make their cheesecakes by the old receipts,
 They keep a private bottle, like their mothers,
 They plague their husbands—as they always did.

Even in the management of a campaign, they will be found more prudent and more competent than the men :—

Being mothers, they'll be chary of the blood
 Of their own sons, our soldiers ; being mothers,
 They will take care their children do not starve
 When they're on service ; and, for ways and means,
 Trust us, there's nothing cleverer than a woman.
 And as for diplomacy, they'll be hard indeed
 To cheat—they know too many tricks themselves.

Her speech is unanimously applauded ; she is elected lady-president on the spot, by public acclamation, and the Chorus of ladies march off towards the Pnyx to secure their places, like the old gentleman in 'The Wasps,' ready for daybreak.

In the next scene, two of the husbands enter in great perplexity, one wrapped in his wife's dressing-gown, and the other with only his under-garment on, and without his shoes. They both want to go to the Assembly, but cannot find their clothes. While they are wondering what in the world their wives can have done with them, and what is become of the ladies themselves, a third neighbour, Chremes, comes in. He has

been to the Assembly ; but even he was too late to get the threepence which was allowed out of the public treasury to all who took their seat in good time, and which all Athenian citizens, if we may trust their satirist, were so ludicrously eager to secure. The place was quite full already, and of strange faces too. And a handsome fair-faced youth (Praxagora in disguise, we are to understand) had got up, and amid the loud cheers of those unknown voters had proposed and carried a resolution, that the government of the state should be placed in the hands of a committee of ladies,—an experiment which had found favour also with others, chiefly because it was “the only change which had not as yet been tried at Athens.” His two neighbours are somewhat confounded at his news, but congratulate themselves on the fact that the wives will now, at all events, have to see to the maintenance of the children, and that “the gods sometimes bring good out of evil.”

The women return, and get home as quickly as they can to change their costume, so that the trick by which the passing of this new decree has been secured may not be detected. Praxagora succeeds in persuading her husband that she had been sent for in a hurry to attend a sick neighbour, and only borrowed his coat to put on “because the night was so cold,” and his strong shoes and staff, in order that any evil-disposed person might take her for a man as she tramped along, and so not interfere with her. She at first affects not to have heard of the reform which has been just carried, but when her husband explains it, declares it will make Athens a paradise. Then she confesses to him that

she has herself been chosen, in full assembly, "Generalissima of the state." She puts the question, however, just as we have all seen it put by a modern actress, — "Will this house agree to it?" And if Praxagora was at all attractively got up, we may be sure it was carried by acclamation in the affirmative. Then, in the first place, there shall be no more poverty; there shall be community of goods, and so there shall be no lawsuits, and no gambling, and no informers. Moreover, there shall be community of wives,—and all the ugly women shall have the first choice of husbands. So she goes off to her public duties, to see that these resolutions are carried out forthwith; the good citizen begging leave to follow close at her side, so that all who see him may say, "What a fine fellow is our Generalissima's husband!"

The scene changes to another street in Athens, where the citizens are bringing out all their property, to be carried into the market-place and inventoried for the common stock. Citizen A. dances with delight as he marshals his dilapidated chattels into a mock procession—from the meal-sieve, which he kisses, it looks so pretty with its powdered hair, to the iron pot which looks as black "as if Lysimachus" (some well-known fop of the day, possibly present among the audience) "had been boiling his hair-dye in it." This patriot, at least, has not much to lose, and hopes he may have something to gain, under these female communists. But his neighbour, who is better off, is in no such hurry. The Athenians, as he remarks, are always making new laws and abrogating them; what has been passed

to-day very likely will be repealed to-morrow. Besides, it is a good old national habit to *take*, not to *give*. He will wait a while before he gives in any inventory of his possessions.

But at this point comes the city-beadle (an appointment now held, of course, by a lady) with a summons to a banquet provided for all citizens out of the public funds: and amongst the items in the bill of fare is one dish whose name is composed of seventy-seven syllables—which Aristophanes gives us, but which the reader shall be spared. Citizen B. at once delivers it as his opinion that “every man of proper feeling should support the constitution to the utmost of his ability,” and hurries to take his place at the feast. There are some difficulties caused, very naturally, by the new communistic regulations as to providing for the old and ugly women, but with these we need not deal. The piece ends with an invitation, issued by direction of Praxagora through her lady-chamberlain, to the public generally, spectators included, to join the national banquet which is to inaugurate the new order of things. The “tag,” as we should call it in our modern theatrical slang, spoken from what in a Greek theatre was equivalent to the footlights in a London one, by the leader of the Chorus of ladies, neatly requests, on the author’s behalf, the favourable decision of judges and spectators:—

One little hint to our good critics here
I humbly offer; to the wise among you,
Remember the wise lessons of our play,
And choose me for my wisdom. You, again,

Who love to laugh, think of our merry jests,
And choose me for my wit. And so, an't please you,
I bid you all to choose me for the crown.
And let not this be counted to my loss—
That 'twas my lot to be presented first :
But judge me by my merits, and your oaths ; .
And do not take those vile coquettes for tutors,
Who keep their best smiles for their latest suitors.

It is plain from the whole character of this play, as well as from the 'Lysistrata' and the 'Women's Festival,' that whatever reason the Athenian women might have had for complaining of their treatment at the hands of Euripides, they had little cause to congratulate themselves upon such an ally as Aristophanes. The whip of the tragic poet was as balm compared with the scorpions of the satirist. But it must be borne in mind, in estimating these unsparing jests upon the sex which we find in his comedies, as well as the coarseness which too often disfigures them—though it is but a poor apology for either—that it is very doubtful whether it was the habit for women to attend the dramatic performances. Their presence was certainly exceptional, and confined probably under any circumstances to the less public festivals, and to the exhibitions of tragedy. But women had few acknowledged rights among the polished Athenians. They laughed to scorn the notion of the ruder but more chivalric Spartan, who saluted his wife as his "lady," and their great philosopher Aristotle reproached the nation who could use such a term as being no better than "women - servers." These "women's rights" have

been a fertile source of jest and satire in all times, our own included ; but there is a wide interval in tone and feeling between the Athenian poet's Choruses of women, and the graceful picture, satire though it be, drawn by the English Laureate, of the

“Six hundred maidens clad in purest white
Before two streams of light from wall to wall.” *

* Tennyson's 'Princess.'

CHAPTER IX.

PLUTUS.

THE comedy which takes its name from the god of riches is a lively satire on the avarice and corruption which was a notorious feature of Athenian society, as it has been of other states, modern as well as ancient, when luxury and self-indulgence have created those artificial wants which are the danger of civilisation. The literal points of the satire are, of course, distinctly Athenian; but the moral is of no exclusive date or locality.

Chremylus—a country gentleman, or rather yeoman, living somewhere close to the city of Athens—has found, in his experience of life, that mere virtue and honesty are *not* the best policy; at any rate, not the policy which pays. He has made a visit, therefore, to the oracle of Apollo, to consult that authority as to how he shall bring up his only son; whether he shall train him in the honest and simple courses which were those of his forefathers, or have him initiated in the wicked but more profitable ways of the world, as the world is now. He is, in fact, the Strepsiades of

‘The Clouds,’ only that he is a more unwilling disciple in the new school of unrighteousness. The answer given him by the god is, that he must accost the first person he meets on quitting the temple, and persuade or compel him to accompany him home to his house.

Chremylus appears on the stage accompanied by his slave Cario,—a clever rascal, the earliest classical type which has come down to us of the Davus with whom we become so familiar in Roman comedy, and the Leporello and Scapin, and their numerous progeny of lying valets and sharp servants, impudent but useful, who occupy the modern stage. They have encountered the stranger, and are following him; he is in rags, and he turns out to be blind. With some difficulty, and not without threats of beating, they get him to disclose his name: it is Plutus, the god of wealth himself. But how, then, in the name of wonder, does he appear in this wretched plight? He has just escaped, he tells them, from the house of a miser (who is satirised by name, with all the liberty of a satirist to whom actions for libel were unknown), where he has had a miserable time of it. And how, they ask, came he to be blind?

Pl. Jove wrought me this, out of ill-will to men.
 For in my younger days I threatened still
 I would betake me to the good and wise
 And upright only; so he made me blind,
 That I should not discern them from the knaves.
 Such grudge bears he to worth and honesty.

Chr. Yet surely 'tis the worthy and the honest
 Alone who pay him sacrifice?

Pl.

I know 'tis so.

Chr. Go to, now, friend : suppose you had your sight
As heretofore—say, wouldst thenceforth avoid
All knaves and rascals ?

Pl. Yea, I swear I would.

Chr. And seek the honest ?

Pl. Ay, and gladly too,
For 'tis a long time since I saw their faces.

Chr. No marvel—I have eyes, and cannot see them.

Plutus is very unwilling to accompany his new friend home, though Chremylus assures him that he is a man of unusual probity. "All men say that," is the god's reply ; "but the moment they get hold of *me*, their probity goes to the winds." Besides, he is afraid of Jove. Chremylus cries out against him for a coward. Would the sovereignty of Jove be worth three farthings' purchase, but for him ? What do men offer prayer and sacrifice to Jove himself for, but for money ? Money is the true ruler, alike of gods and men. "I myself," puts in Cario, "should not now be another gentleman's property, as I am, but for the fact of my master here having a little more money than I had." All arts and handicrafts, all inventions good or evil, have this one source—both master and man (for Cario is very forward in giving his opinion) agree in protesting ; while the god listens to what he declares is, to his simpler mind, a new revelation :—

Car. Is't not your fault the Persian grows so proud ?

Chr. Do not men go to Parliament through you ?

Car. Who swells the navy estimates, but you ?

Chr. Who subsidises foreigners, but you ?

Car. For want of you our friend there goes to jail.

Chr. Why are bad novels written, but for you ?

Car. That league with Egypt, was it not through you ?

Chr. And Lais loves that lout—and all for you !

Car. And our new admiral's tower—

Chr. (*impatently to Cario*). May fall, I trust,
Upon your noisy head !—But in brief, my friend,
Are not all things that are done done for you ?
For, good or bad, you are alone the cause.
Ay, and in war, that side is safe to win
Into whose scale you throw the golden weight.

Pl. Am I indeed so potent as all this ?

Chr. Yea, by great heaven, and very much more than this,
Since none hath ever had his fill of you :

Of all things else there comes satiety ;

We tire of Love—

Car. Of loaves—

Chr. Of music—

Car. Sweetmeats—

Chr. Of honour—

Car. Cheesecakes—

Chr. Valour—

Car. Of dried figs—

Chr. Ambition—

Car. Biscuit—

Chr. High command—

Car. Pea-soup.

Chr. Of you alone is no man filled too full.

Still Plutus follows his guides unwillingly. His experiences as the guest of men have not hitherto been pleasant :—

Pl. If I perchance took lodging with a miser,
He digs me a hole i' the earth, and buries me ;
And if some honest friend shall come to him,
And ask the loan of me, by way of help,

He swears him out he never saw my face.
 Or, if I quarter with your man of pleasure,
 He wastes me on his dice and courtesans,
 And forthwith turns me naked on the street.

Chr. Because you never had the luck, as yet,
 To light upon a moderate man—like me.
 I love economy, look ye—no man more ;
 Then again, I know how to spend, in season.
 But let's indoors : I long to introduce
 My wife, and only son, whom I do love
 Best in this world—next to yourself, I should say.

So Plutus goes home with his new host, and Cario is forthwith sent to call together the friends and acquaintances of his master from the neighbouring farms to rejoice with them at the arrival of this blessed guest. These form the Chorus of the comedy. They enter with dance and song, and are welcomed heartily by Chremylus, with some apology for taking them away from their business,—but the occasion is exceptional. They protest against any apology being required. If they can bear the crush and wrangle of the law-courts, day after day, for their poor dole of three-pence as jurymen, they are not going to let Plutus slip through their hands for a trifle. Following more leisurely in the rear of the common rush,—perhaps as a person of more importance,—comes in a neighbour, Blepsidemus, whose name and character is something equivalent to that of “Mr Facing-both-ways” in Bunyan’s allegory. He has heard that Chremylus has become suddenly rich, and is most of all surprised that in such an event he should think of sending for his old friends,—a very unusual proceeding, as he observes,

in modern society. Chremylus, however, informs his friend that the report is true ; at least, that he is in a fair way to become rich, but that there is, as yet, some little risk in the matter :—

If all go right, I'm a made man for ever ;
But,—if we slip—we're ruined past redemption.

Blepsidemus thinks he sees the state of the case. This sudden wealth, this fear of possible disaster,—the man has robbed a temple, or something of that kind, it is evident ; and he tells him so. In vain does Chremylus protest his innocence. Blepsidemus will not believe him, and regards him with pious horror :—

Alack ! that in this world there is no honesty,
But every man is a mere slave to pelf !

Chr. Heaven help the man !—has he gone mad on a sudden ?

Bl. (*looking at Chremylus, and half aside*). What a sad change from his old honest ways !

Chr. You've lost your wits, sirrah, by all that's good !

Bl. And his eyes quail—he dares not meet my look—
For damning guilt stands written in his face !

Chr. Ha ! now I see ! you take me for a thief,
And would go shares, then, would ye ?

Bl. (*eagerly*). Shares ? in what ?

Chr. Stuff ! don't be a fool ! 'tis quite another matter.

Bl. (*in a whisper*). Not a mere larceny then, but—robbery ?

Chr. (*getting angry*). I say, no.

Bl. (*confidentially*). Hark ye, old friend—for a mere trifle, look you,
I'll undertake, before this gets abroad,
To hush it up,—I'll bribe the prosecutors.

Chremylus has great difficulty in making his con-

scientific friend understand the real position—that he has Wealth in person come to be his guest, and means to keep him, if possible. But the god is blind at present, and the first thing to be done is to get him restored to sight. “Blind! is he really?” says Blepsidemus; “then no wonder he never found his way to my house!” They agree that the best means to effect a cure is to make him pass the night in the temple of *Æsculapius*; and this they are proceeding to arrange, when they are interrupted by the appearance of a very ill-looking lady. It is Poverty, who comes to put a stop, if it may be, to a revolution which threatens to banish her altogether from Athens. Chremylus fails to recognise her, in spite of a long practical acquaintanceship. Blepsidemus at first thinks she must be one of the Furies out of the tragedy repertory, by her grim visage and squalid habit. But the moment he learns who his friend’s visitor really is, he takes to flight at once—as is the way of the world—scared at her very appearance. He is persuaded, however, to return and listen to what the goddess has to say. She proceeds to explain the great mistake that will be made for the true interest of the citizens, if she be really banished from the city. For she it is who is their real benefactor, as she assures them, and not Wealth. All the real blessings of mankind come from the hand of Poverty. This Chremylus will by no means admit. It is possible that Wealth may have done some harm heretofore by inadvertence; but if this blessed guest can once recover his sight, then will he for the future visit only the upright and the virtu-

ous ; and so will all men—as soon as virtue and honesty become the only introduction to Wealth—be very sure to practise them. Poverty continues to argue the point in the presence of the Chorus of rustic neighbours, who now come on the stage, and naturally take a very warm interest in the question. She contends that were it not for the stimulus which she continually applies, the work of the world would stand still. No man would learn or exercise any trade or calling. There would be neither smith, nor shipwright, nor tailor, nor shoemaker, nor wheelwright—nay, there would be none either to plough or sow, if all alike were rich. “Nonsense,” interposes Chremylus, “the slaves would do it.” But there would be no slaves, the goddess reminds him, if there were no Poverty. It is Wealth, on the other hand, that gives men the gout, makes them corpulent and thick-legged, wheezy and pursy ; “while I,” says Poverty, “make them strong and wiry, with waists like wasps—ay, and with stings for their enemies.” “Look at your popular leaders” (for the satirist never spares the demagogues)—“so long as they continue poor, they are honest enough ; but when once they have grown rich at the public expense, they betray the public interest.” Chremylus confesses that here, at least, she speaks no more than the truth. But if such are the advantages which Poverty brings, he has a very natural question to ask—

How comes it then that all men flee thy face ?

Pov. Because I make men better.

But her pleading is in vain. “Away with your

rhetoric," says Chremylus; "our ears are deaf to all such arguments." He uses almost the very words of Sir Hudibras—

"He who complies against his will,
Is of his own opinion still." *

And an unanimous sentence of expulsion is passed against the unpopular deity, while Plutus is sent, under the escort of Cario, with bed and bedding, to take up his quarters for the night in the temple of *Æsculapius*, there to invoke the healing power which can restore his sight.

An interval of time unusually long for the Athenian drama is supposed to elapse between this and what we may call the second act of the comedy—the break in the action having been most probably marked by a chant from the Chorus, which has not, however, come down to us in the manuscripts. The scene reopens with the return of Cario from the temple on the morning following.

The resort to *Æsculapius* has been entirely successful. But Aristophanes does not miss the opportunity of sharp satire upon the gross materialities of the popular creed and the tricks of priestcraft. Cario informs his mistress and the Chorus, who come to inquire the result, that the god has performed the cure in person—going round the beds of the patients, who lay there awaiting his visit, for all the world like a modern hospital surgeon, making his diagnosis of each

* "I'll not be convinced, even if you convince me," are his words.

case, with an assistant following him with pestle and mortar and portable medicine-chest. Plutus had been cured almost instantaneously—quicker, as the narrator impudently tells his mistress, than she could toss off half-a-dozen glasses of wine. But one Neocles, who had come there on the same errand (though, blind as he was, observes Cario, not the sharpest-sighted of them all could match him in stealing), fares very differently at the hands of the god of medicine; for Æsculapius applies to his eyes a lotion of garlic and vinegar, which makes him roar with pain, and leaves him blinder than ever. Another secret of the temple, too, the cunning varlet has seen, while he was pretending to be asleep like the rest. He saw the priests go round quietly, after the lamps were put out, and eat all the cakes and fruit brought by the patients as offerings to the god. He took the liberty, he says—"thinking it must be a very holy practice"—of following their example, and so got possession of a pudding which an old lady, one of the patients, had placed carefully by her bedside for her supper, and on which he had set his heart when first he saw it. His mistress is shocked at such profanity.

Unhallowed varlet! didst not fear the god?

Cario. Marry did I, and sorely—lest his godship
Should get the start of me, and grab the dish.
But the old lady, when she heard me coming,
Put her hand out; and so I gave a hiss,
And bit her gently; 'twas the Holy Snake,
She thought, and pulled her hand in, and lay still.

But the mistress of the house is too delighted with

the good news which Cario has brought to chide him very severely for his irreverence. She orders her maids at once to prepare a banquet for the return of this blessed guest, who presently reappears, attended by Chremylus and a troop of friends. Plutus salutes his new home in a burlesque of the high vein of tragedy :—

All hail ! thou first, O bright and blessed sun,
 And thou, fair plain, where awful Pallas dwells,
 And this Cecropian land, henceforth mine home !
 I blush to mind me of my past estate—
 Of the vile herd with whom I long consorted ;
 While those who had been worthy of my friendship
 I, poor blind wretch ! unwittingly passed by.
 But now the wrong I did will I undo,
 And show henceforth to all mankind, that sore
 Against my will I kept bad company.

[Enter Chremylus, surrounded and followed by a crowd of congratulating friends, whom he thrusts aside right and left.]

Chr. To the devil with you all—d'ye hear, good people !
 Why, what a plague friends are on these occasions !
 One hatches them in swarms, when one gets money.
 They nudge my sides, and pat me on the back,
 And smother me with tokens of affection ;
 Men bow to me I never saw before ;
 And all the pompous dawdlers in the Square
 Find me the very centre of attraction !

Even his wife is unusually affectionate ; and the welcome guest is ushered into the house with choral dance and song—highly burlesque, no doubt ; but both are lost to us, and such losses are not always to be regretted.

The scene which follows introduces Cario in a state of great contentment with the new order of things. It is possible that, as in 'The Knights,' there was an entire change of scenery as well as of dresses at this point of the performance; that the ancient country grange has been transmuted into a grand modern mansion, with all the appliances of wealth and luxury. At all events, Cario (who from a rustic slave has now become quite a "gentleman's gentleman") informs the Chorus, who listen to him open-mouthed, that such has been the result of entertaining Plutus.

Cario (stroking himself). Oh what a blessed thing, good friends, is riches!

And with no toil or trouble of our own!

Lo, there is store of all good things within,

Yea, heaped upon us—yet we've cheated no one!

Our meal-chest's brimming with the finest boltings,

The cellar's stocked with wine—of such a bouquet!

And every pot and pan in the house is heaped

With gold and silver—it's a sight to see!

The well runs oil—the very mustard-pot

Has nothing but myrrh in it, and you can't get up

Into the garret, it's so full of figs.

The crockery's bronze, the wooden bowls are silver,

And the oven's made of ivory. In the kitchen,

We play at pitch-and-toss with golden pieces;

And scent ourselves (so delicate are we grown) with—garlic.*

* This is a good instance of those jokes "contrary to expectation" (as the Greek term has it) which are very common in these comedies, but which can very seldom be reproduced, for more reasons than one, in an English version. Of course the audience were led to expect something more fragrant than "garlic." We are accustomed to something of the same kind in the puns which frequently conclude a line in our modern

As to my master, he's within there, sacrificing
A hog and a goat and a ram, full drest, good soul !
But the smoke drove me out—(*affectedly*)—I cannot stand it.
I'm rather sensitive, and smoke hurts my eyelids.

The happy results of the new administration are further shown in the cases of some other characters who now come upon the scene. An Honest Man, who has spent his fortune on his friends and met with nothing but ingratitude in return, now finds his wealth suddenly restored to him, and comes to dedicate to the god who has been his benefactor the threadbare cloak and worn-out shoes which he had been lately reduced to wear. A public Informer—that hateful character whom the comic dramatist was never tired of holding up to the execration of his audience—has now found his business fail him, and threatens that, if there be any law or justice left in Athens, this god who leaves the poor knaves to starve shall be made blind again. Cario—quite in the spirit of the clown in a modern pantomime—strips him of his fine clothes, puts the honest man's ragged cloak on him instead, hangs the old shoes round his neck, and kicks him off the stage, howling out that he will surely “lay an information.” An old lady who has lost her young lover, as soon as under the new dispensation she lost the charms of her money, in vain appeals to Chremylus, as having influence with this reformed government, to obtain her some burlesques. In neither case, perhaps, is the wit of the highest order.

Mr Walsh, in the preface to his ‘Aristophanes’ (p. viii), illustrates not inaptly this style of jest by a comparison with Goldsmith's “Elegy on the Glory of her sex, Mrs Mary Blaize.”

measure of justice. Not only the world of men, but the world of gods, is out of joint. In the last scene, Mercury knocks at the door of Chremylus. He has brought a terrible message from Jupiter. He orders Cario to bring out the whole family—"master, mistress, children, slaves—and the dog—and himself—and the pig," and the rest of the brutes, that they may all be thrown together into the Barathrum—the punishment inflicted on malefactors of the deepest dye. Cario answers the Olympian messenger with a courtesy as scant as his own; under the new *régime*, he and his master are become very independent of Jupiter. "You'd be none the worse for a slice off your tongue, young fellow," says the mortal servant to him of Olympus; "why, what's the matter?" "Matter enough," answers Mercury:—

Why, ye have wrought the very vilest deed ;
 Since Plutus yondér got his sight again,
 No man doth offer frankincense or bays,
 Or honey-cake or victim or aught else,
 To us poor gods.

Car. Nay, nor will offer, now ;
 Ye took poor care of us when we *were* pious.

Mer. As for the other gods, I care not much ;
 But 'tis myself I pity.

Car. You're right there.

Mer. Why, in the good old times, from every shop
 I got good things,—rich wine-cakes, honey, figs,
 Fit for a god like Mercury to eat ;
 But now I lie and sleep to cheat my hunger.

Car. It serves you right ; you never did much good.

Mer. Oh for those noble cheesecakes, rich and brown !

Car. 'Tis no use calling—cheesecakes an't in season.

Mer. O those brave gammons that I once enjoyed !

Car. Don't gammon me—be off with you to—heaven !

Mercury begs him at last, for old acquaintance' sake, and in remembrance of the many little scrapes which his pilfering propensities would have brought him into with his master, but that he, the god of craft, helped him out of them,—to have a little fellow-feeling for a servant out of place and thrown upon his own finding. Is there no place for him in Chremylus's household ? What ? says Cario ; would he leave Olympus and take service with mortals ? Certainly he would—the living and the perquisites are so much better. Would he turn deserter ? asks the other (deserter being a word of abomination to Greek ears). The god replies in words which seem to be a quotation or a parody from some of the tragic poets—

That soil is fatherland which feeds us best.

The dialogue which follows is an amusing play upon the various offices assigned to Mercury, who was a veritable Jack-of-all-trades in the popular theology. The humour is very much lost in any English version, however free :—

Car. What place would suit you, now, suppose we hired you ?

Mer. I'll turn my hand to anything you please ; You know I'm called the "Turner."

Car. Yes, but now Luck's on our side, we want no turns at present.

Mer. I'll make your bargains for you.

Car. Thankye, no—
Now we've grown rich, we don't much care for bargains.

Mer. But I can cheat—

Car. On no account—for shame !

We well-to-do folks all go in for honesty.

Mer. Let me be Guide, then.

Car. Nay, our godship here

Has got his sight again, and needs no guiding.

Mer. Well, Master of the revels ? don't say no—

Wealth must have pleasures,—music, and all that.

Car. (*ironically turning to the audience*). Why, what a lucky thing it is to be Jack-of-all-trades !

Here's a young man, now, who's sure to make a living !

(*To Mercury.*) Well—go and wash these tripes,—be quick—
let's see

What sort of training servants get in heaven.

If the gods are suffering from this social revolution in the world below, still more lamentable are its effects upon the staff of officials maintained in their temples. The priest of Jupiter the Protector—one of the most important ecclesiastical functionaries in Athens—enters in great distress.

Priest. Be good enough to tell me, where is Chremylus ?

Chr. (*coming out*). What is it, my good sir ?

Priest. What is it ?—ruin !

Why, since this Plutus has begun to see,

I'm dying of starvation. Positively,

I haven't a crust to eat ! I, my dear sir,

The Priest of the Protector ! think of that !

Chr. Dear me ! and what's the reason, may I ask ?

Priest. Why, because everybody now is rich :

Before, if times *were* bad, there still would come

Some merchant-captain home from time to time,

And bring us thank-offerings for escape from wreck ;

Some lucky rogue, perhaps, who had got a verdict ;

Or some good man held a family sacrifice,

And asked the priest, of course. But now no soul
Pays either vows or sacrifice, or comes
To the temple—save to shoot their rubbish there.

Car. (half aside). You take your tithe of that, I warrant
me.

Chremylus, whose good fortune in entertaining such a desirable guest has put him into good-humour with all the world, comforts the despairing official. The true Father Protector—the deity whom all men acknowledge—is here, he tells him, in the house. They mean to set him up permanently at Athens, in his proper place—the Public Treasury. And he shall be the minister of the new worship, if he likes to quit the service of Jupiter. The priest gladly consents, and an extempore procession is at once formed upon the stage, into which the old lady who has lost her lover is pressed, and persuaded to carry a slop-pail upon her head, to represent the maidens who, on such occasions, bore the lustral waters for the inauguration. Cario and the Chorus bring up the rear in an antic dance, and they proceed to establish at Athens, with all due formalities, the worship of Wealth alone.

This play, as we now have it (for it had been brought out in a different form twenty years before), shows evident signs of a transition in the character of Athenian comedy. It is less extravagant, and more domestic, and so far approaches more nearly to what is called the “New” Comedy, of which we know little except from a few fragmentary remains and from its Roman adapters, but of which our modern drama is the result. Possibly, now that the great war was over,

and the spirit as well as the power of Athens was somewhat broken, Aristophanes no longer felt that deep personal interest in politics which has left such a mark on all his earlier pieces. Another reason for the change, independent of the public taste, seems to have been the growing parsimony in the expenditure of public money on such performances. Critics have detected, in the character of the Chorus of 'The Ecclesiazusæ,' exhibited five years previously, in which the masks and dresses for a body of old women could have involved but little expense in comparison with the elaborate mounting of such plays as 'The Birds' and 'Wasps,' an accommodation to this new spirit of economy; and the same remark has been made as to the poverty of the musical portion of the play. The same may be said of the Chorus of rustics in this latter drama. 'Plutus' was the last comedy put upon the stage by Aristophanes himself, though two pieces which he had composed, of which we know little more than the titles, were exhibited in his name, after his death, by his son. They appear to have approached still more nearly, in their plot and general character, to our modern notions of a comedy than even 'Plutus.' Whether the author made any important alterations in this second edition of the play is not known; but in its present state, the piece seems to want something of his old dash and vigour. He was getting an old man; and probably some young aspirants to dramatic fame remarked upon his failing powers in somewhat the same terms as those in which, thirty-seven years before, he had spoken of his elder rival Cratinus—

“The keys work loose, the strings are slack, the melodies a jar.”*

If so, Aristophanes never challenged and won the dramatic crown again, as Cratinus had done, to confound his younger critics. The curtain was soon about to fall for him altogether. He died a year or two afterwards.

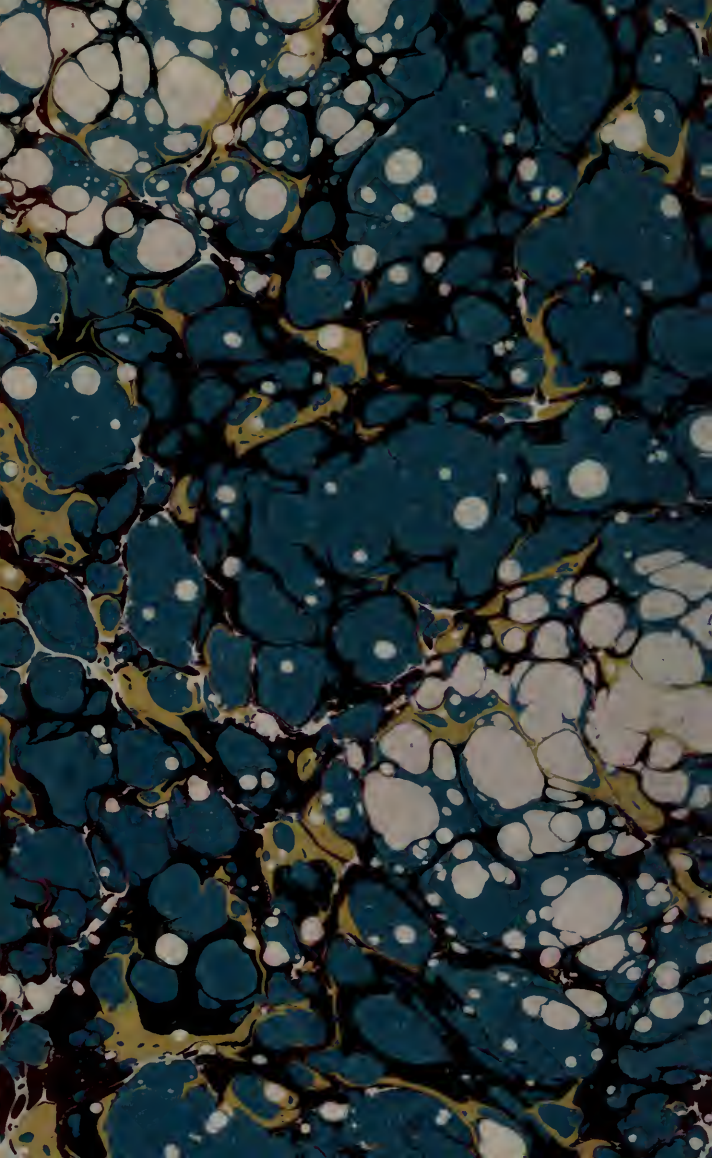
* The Knights, l. 532.

END OF ARISTOPHANES.





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