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THE RIDDLE

OF THE

BACCHAE

THE LAST STAGE OF EURIPIDES'
RELIGIOUS VIEWS

BY

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οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει, ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.—HERACLITUS

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IOHANNIS STRACHAN
MEMORIAE



PREFACE.

THE theory of the *Bacchae* which is advanced in the following pages first occurred to me in 1901, when writing an essay on the well-worn subject *Iniuriane Euripides deorum contemptor habeatur*, which was proposed for discussion to candidates for the Members' Latin Essay Prize at Cambridge in that year. I was then struck by what still appears to me the great *crux* of the play,—the fact that Euripides tells the story of the palace-miracle in such a manner that it becomes incredible. The explanation of the whole drama which I offer may possibly strike the reader as more incredible still, but it is the only method I can imagine of accounting for the way in which the miracle is presented, and for those other features in the play which are left unexplained, I think, by any other theory. If an easier solution of these difficulties can be suggested I shall be quite ready to discard my own. Meanwhile I must confess I am surprised that the numerous and accomplished scholars who have edited or discussed the *Bacchae* have almost unanimously remained silent on a matter of such importance. Dr. Wecklein, so far as I know, is the only commentator who has given any indication that there is a difficulty at all. Under these circumstances, I feel much diffidence in stating a theory which I fear implies that the large number of learned and able scholars who have given attention to the play have failed to notice what is *prima facie* a piece of incompetence impossible to anyone who claims to be taken seriously as a dramatist, or at any rate have allowed its significance completely to escape them. But a prolonged study of the play has only confirmed me in the belief that this passage supplies us with a clue to the

real trend of the plot and so to the writer's purpose in devising it; and therefore I am bound to give my own opinion.

I have endeavoured to read all the important books on the subject of this play and of Euripides' work as a whole; and though I have found the monographs and articles so numerous and in many cases so inaccessible that I have not been able to consult them all, I hope that no theory or suggestion of importance has escaped me. In the following *Note* I have given a list of the works which I have found most useful. The editions which I have consulted most frequently are those of Dr. Sandys, Prof. Tyrrell, and Dr. Wecklein, which are indispensable. Dr. Verrall's works, *Euripides the Rationalist* and *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides*, though they contain practically nothing about the *Bacchae*, are full of inspiration for the student, and appear to me to set him at exactly the right point of view.

It is my pleasant duty to thank those to whom I am indebted for help and suggestions. Prof. Henry Jackson has favoured me with advice which his ripe scholarship and great experience render especially valuable. Prof. R. S. Conway has very kindly found time to read the book through in proof, and has made many most useful suggestions. Mr. R. T. Jenkins, of Brecon County School, has given me substantial help in preparing the Bibliography, and has most kindly undertaken the trouble of making the Index and the Table of Contents. To Mr. S. Waterlow and Mr. H. O. Meredith (the former till recently, and the latter still, a member of the staff of this University) I owe many thanks for reading the essay through when in a more succinct form, and for several important comments. Mr. C. W. E. Leigh, Librarian of the University, has, by the kindness with which he has put his wide knowledge of bibliography at

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my service, enabled me to make Appendix IV. much more complete than it could otherwise have been. My wife has afforded me invaluable assistance in many ways.

Lastly, I am much indebted, both directly and indirectly, to the late Dr. J. Strachan, for many years Professor of Greek at Manchester, who not only afforded me the opportunity of consulting many pamphlets which would else have been inaccessible to me, but also gave me the greatest encouragement by his own example and by his kindly interest in my work. It is with a deep sense of personal loss that I dedicate this book to the memory of a good friend and a single-hearted scholar.

G. NORWOOD.

Heaton Chapel, Stockport,
December 3rd, 1907.

NOTE.

THE following is an alphabetical list of the works which I have found especially useful. A complete list of the writings (known to me) on Euripides in general and on the *Bacchae* in particular will be found in Appendix IV.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

'We mortal millions live *alone*.'—M. ARNOLD.

ONE important problem connected with Euripides still awaits a full solution—that of his religion. His precise position in the history of Greek literature and in that of the drama generally, his views on contemporary politics, and his attitude towards the purely intellectual tendencies of his own time, are now understood with some completeness. But the poet's opinions with regard to religion, the subject which for many reasons was unquestionably the most important for every Greek tragedian, continue to be the subject of controversy. It is in this respect that the *Bacchae* is of vital importance to a true comprehension of Euripides. Magnificent as the play undoubtedly is as a production of literary art, and largely as the reputation of Euripides rests upon it, it is still true that the author of *Medea*, *Ion*, *Hippolytus*, and *Iphigeneia in Tauris* would be scarcely less honoured than he is if the *Bacchae* had perished. But his greatness as a thinker and as a teacher of his countrymen depends, it is hardly too much to say, more on this one drama than on all his other extant works taken together. It is his last and most complete exposition of the religious beliefs over which he had been pondering for half a century, and which had at length reached full maturity. Every Euripidean student must make it his aim to understand the *Bacchae*. But the dramatist has taken care that his true meaning shall not lie on the surface. Like Plato, he has consistently adhered to the principle that the real literary artist will never say in so many words what his "message" is,

regarding it as infinitely more valuable that his reader should win his way to full intellectual sympathy with his teacher through his own efforts, and so assuring himself that his only disciples should be those whom he could welcome. Hence it is not altogether astonishing that even after centuries of careful study the opinions of scholars as to the import of the play should still differ so widely. It is comparatively easy to form a broad theory of the poet's views from a study of the whole body of his works, for one may without difficulty think one sees general tendencies and main outlines, in view of which one may feel justified in neglecting perhaps a large number of scattered evidences pointing the other way. This method is much less specious in regard to a single tragedy.

But indeed the whole question of the religion of Euripides is not more fascinating than difficult. If the student is anxious, not so much to make a consistent theory which will satisfy his own notion of what a good playwright would do, what a typical Greek would think and so forth, as really to discover whether Euripides had a definite system of ideas on religion, and then to find out precisely what those ideas were, he may well come to the conclusion that he must give up the *Bacchae* in despair. No play, even of Euripides, is quite so puzzling to one who wishes to know, not only details like the position of Mt. Nysa and the way in which a Greek artisan made a wheel, but also what reason Euripides had for writing the play at all. Moreover, the problem by no means ends here. Too much stress cannot be laid on the enormous difficulty of finding out the religious opinions of anyone. Concerning religion, it is apparently impossible to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In these matters a man who is abnormally intelligent and candid may by good fortune know fully what he himself does (a person with a bad habit so frequently

supposes each indulgence of it to be one more accidental breach of a good one); but it may be doubted whether he ever knows fully what he himself believes. Still less does he publish it to others. If he attempts to do so his account is only his summary of what he thinks he believes—his opinion about his own opinions. Nor does it at all follow because he speaks as openly as he can that his fellows understand him in the same sense. Inevitably they read his account in the light of their own beliefs and prejudices, and the result is merely that they form their own opinion of his expressed opinion about his real opinion. To come back to our present question, we must frankly confess that to understand Euripides' own mind and its working in general is as impossible as to tell what song the sirens sang—it is not beyond all conjecture, doubtless; but by what means can we assure ourselves that the conjecture is right?

This powerlessness of criticism really to lay bare the mind of genius is constantly felt. But may we, granting it, still hope to understand what a writer chooses to tell us, even if we cannot get behind his pen? Undoubtedly in many cases we may, but nothing is better known about Euripides than that his writings are full of "inconsistencies," that is, of things which we, for our part, find ourselves unable to co-ordinate. And in the *Bacchae* this famous "inconsistency" is a leading characteristic; that is, it contains more instruction for us than perhaps any other of his dramas, because there is more food for thought. Nowhere does the poet express so much sympathy with, and enthusiasm for, the popular religion, yet (as we shall find) it is impossible to believe that he acquiesces in it as popularly understood. Accordingly, in view of what has just been said concerning the difficulty of such investigation, it is pardonable that a modern reader should give up the hope of comprehending the play as a whole, unless by accident (for accident it would be) there should occur in the play some un-

mistakable clue to the poet's genuine opinion which happened by good fortune to be as intelligible to us as it was to his contemporaries. Many clues there no doubt exist which would have been manifest to an Athenian, but which mean nothing to us. But it is surely possible that some of these indications should happen to be comprehensible to us also. That at least one such indication of the greatest importance does occur in the play it is the chief object of the present essay to point out. But for this it would be necessary to consent to the most popular view, which asserts (with a degree of definiteness which depends upon the particular exponent) that Euripides was still hostile to the orthodox beliefs, but had a good deal of sympathy for them,—at any rate for the religion of marvels and ecstasy which was attached to the name of Dionysus. It will be necessary later to mention the very different verdicts which have been passed upon this play, and to point out that this variety seems to lead us to the conclusion that Euripides had no definite idea at all, that the dramatist did not write a drama. At present it is important to remember that such unsatisfactory vagueness need not necessarily be regarded with impatience, for it may well be that assertions more definite would be only the more untrue; and more particularly it is important for anyone who imagines that he can show reasons for upholding a more definite theory to remember how unsafe it is to assume that what is conclusive for us would have been conclusive for a Greek. Were we able to argue that what is true for us must have been true for him, that would only prove how little he can teach us. If we can find nothing that astonishes us in Hellenic literature (nothing, that is, which so many would disallow for that reason alone) we may as well never read it. Add to which that this natural obstacle to a full understanding is reinforced by the accident that such large masses of this literature are no longer

extant. Under the circumstances we can do little more than note what the Greeks actually say. Any superstructure of theory and generalisation must be raised with the most timid circumspection. The realisation of this fact has of course been forced upon later generations of students by the manner in which scientific examination of ancient literature and of other ancient documents has shown how far wrong the greatest scholars have gone owing to rash deduction. Yet that spirit which made Dr. Johnson declare that the Athenians were barbarous because they had few books is not quite dead; indeed, it cannot be expected that it will ever disappear, for, try as we will, we can never divest ourselves entirely of our own environment and methods of thought. Meanwhile attention may fruitfully be given to the study of what ancient writers do really say, and also to what they do not say.

These then are the great obstacles which prevent us from adequately appreciating this poet, that he writes primarily of religion, and that he is a Greek.¹ But other obstacles have to be faced also. Rarely does Truth keep those who seek after her more sternly at arm's length. The same fact which draws us to study Euripides is also that which threatens to nullify our efforts—he was a great man. Whatever may be the true definition of greatness, this much is certain, that a great man is always doing and saying what we should least have expected—Napoleon re-building Milan Cathedral; Clive forging the name of a distinguished colleague; Frederick the Great writing French verse. Can we assume that because Euripides says one thing in one play he cannot therefore mean what he says in another

1. It is hardly necessary to remind the reader of Prof. Mackail's most illuminating remarks on the gulf between the Hellenic and the Western spirit in his address *On the place of Greek and Latin in Human Life*, published in the *Proceedings of the Classical Association of England and Wales* for 1904 (pp. 11—22).

because the two statements seem to us inconsistent? May not some deeper analysis account for both passages? Nor must it be forgotten that a dramatist is not often allowed to speak his own mind through the words of his characters, whatever effect he produces by the whole play. Finally, as has been so often pointed out, Euripides lived in a period of transition. It is true that one sometimes receives the impression that every writer lived in a period of transition, and indeed to prove that all epochs of history merit this adjective would not be above the capacities of the most inexperienced dealer in paradox. But no one can read the history of that time without seeing that the life of the dramatist did really fall in a period at which new forces and fresh ideas were coming to maturity, while the old had by no means lost all their power. It was inevitable that a writer in so public a position as that held by a writer for the Athenian stage should reproduce in his work the sharp collision which was taking place between the old and the new in art, politics, social theory, and religion. Whether this conflict entered so deeply into his mind that he never came to any complete and satisfying belief of his own on these matters is yet another difficulty for the student of his work.

It is fitting that a reference to the numerous difficulties which obstruct the way to a correct explanation of this poem should be prefixed to a study which claims to offer such an explanation. Only the conviction that he can adduce new evidence, or rather evidence which has been overlooked, evidence so irresistibly strong that it is impossible to believe (even allowing to the full all the differences of time, temperament, and civilisation which separate us from the writer) that Euripides or any other playwright, ancient or modern, would have allowed it to form a feature in his drama without being both perfectly conscious of its presence and willing that it should receive full weight in the minds of those who were to

consider his work—only the conviction that such evidence may be adduced could warrant anyone in claiming adequately to solve a difficulty which has never yet received any but a partial solution.

The plan of the following discussion will be this. First, I shall sketch what I regard as Euripides' religious beliefs (as seen in his plays) and also his peculiar method of expressing them, in order to show in what frame of mind he was likely to handle the religion of Dionysus. Secondly, I shall indicate those difficulties in the *Bacchae* itself which have already caused perplexity to readers, and endeavour to appraise their importance. Thirdly, I shall state that outstanding difficulty to which I have already made reference; I shall attempt to show that if we give its proper weight to the remarkable passage in which it occurs we must prepare ourselves for an opinion about Dionysus very different from that which is a result of a superficial reading of the play. Fourthly, we shall revise our reading of Dionysus' character in the light, not only of the damaging passage we have already scrutinised, but also of his own words and actions. Fifthly, this revision will lead us to examine the character of Pentheus and the precise nature of the opposition which he offers to the new teaching. Sixthly, I shall point out a number of fresh difficulties in the play, less striking than the one mentioned above, but yet important enough and numerous enough to convince us that a totally new explanation of the whole work is at any rate desirable. Seventhly, I shall propound a theory which I think answers not only the new questions which I have raised, but also those which have often been asked already. Finally, I shall point out the special difficulties which my own theory involves in its turn, and attempt to show that they constitute no real objection to its acceptance.

CHAPTER II.

THE ATTITUDE OF EURIPIDES TOWARDS THE POPULAR RELIGION.

‘When half-gods go, the Gods arrive.’—EMERSON.

IT is not my purpose here to discuss fully the famous question of Euripides’ connexion with the popular beliefs about the gods. I wish only to indicate in outline what I myself believe to have been his leading principle of thought on the question and also the main conclusion to which he came, and then to discuss the way in which he chose to express his convictions.

The poet does not give us a series of *dicta* as to the truth of each detail of the current theology as it comes to the front in his plays, but adopts a certain principle of judgment, a principle which was the result of several kinds of influence. His mind was formed by the study of earlier Greek literature, by the teaching of philosophers and sophists, by the lessons to be drawn from earlier and still more from contemporary history, by the observation of religious beliefs (whether national cults or popular superstitions) and of the effects which those beliefs had apparently produced on the religious and social life of Hellas. He became convinced that the moral standard had deteriorated owing to belief in stories which asserted the imperfections of the gods. The mere notion of criticism of divine beings by comparing them to an abstract ideal of justice and honour shows what developments had taken place since Homeric times. This is the importance of the famous line *εἰ θεοί τι δρῶσιν αἰσχρόν, οὐκ εἰσὶν θεοί*;¹ the enlightened Greek

1. *Bellerophon*, fr. 17 (Dindorf).

will no longer look to the gods as the source of right, but will criticise them from the point of view to which he has attained by strenuous thinking and by experience of life.¹

Now the very form which this criticism takes shows that we are not driven to conclude that the poet was an atheist.² That unfortunate term is frequently applied by the uncritical and thoughtless to anyone who deviates from orthodoxy, and even when speaking of ancient Greece we cannot allow that a man deserved such a title merely because he scouted the current mythology. It is well known that Euripides was taking up no novel position; views like his had already been voiced by Xenophanes, to mention only one name of many. It is too often supposed that he was definitely accused of atheism in his own lifetime; much stress has been laid on a very droll but misleading passage in Aristophanes: ³

νῦν δ' οὗτος ἐν ταῖσιν τραγωδίαις ποιῶν
τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀνεπέπεικεν οὐκ εἶναι θεούς.

These famous lines occur, not in a dignified attack put into the mouth of an Aeschylus, but in a speech made against the poet in the ladies' indignation meeting by an ignorant woman who complains that more than fifty per cent. of her business as a florist has gone since Euripides persuaded "the menfolks" (τοὺς ἄνδρας, not "mankind") that there are no gods. She is throwing the blame of her ill-fortune upon the common scapegoat and hashing

1. Cp. J. Berlage, *De Euripide Philosopho* (p. 109); 'Notandum est illud ἐπὶ κρατεῖς ἀρετὰς δίδωκε (*Ion* 439 sq.). Supra enim vidimus in religione Graeca deis propter ipsam potestatem licuisse *contemnere* virtutem; secundum Euripidem vero naturae divinae proprium est virtus.'

2. Th. Rumpel entitles his vigorous and interesting pamphlet *De Euripidis Atheismo* (Halle, 1839). He does not, however, seem to regard the poet as an atheist, but dilates on his phenomenal instability of mind, which led him at last to a sort of eclectic mysticism.

3. *Thesm*, vv. 450, sq.

up a charge which she does not understand. The accusation in her mouth is on a level with the exquisite *οὐτος ὀψωνεῖν ἔοιχ' ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ τυραννίδι*.¹ As a matter of fact Diagoras the Melian was the only man of whom the word *ἄθεος* was used. But Euripides did criticise the Olympian hierarchy and made no secret of it. That was enough, no doubt, to scandalise the orthodox, but few of them were likely to regard the criticism of which the poet generally delivered himself as an attack upon the very existence of the gods. He himself might feel that to say "Athena is a bad goddess" was tantamount to saying "there is no goddess Athena," but most of his hearers would only think he had insulted Athena, and would be shocked or diverted according to their own turn of mind. Only the higher spirits on both sides would see the gravity of the position to which such criticism led. And however that might be, Euripides, where he is talking of divinity in general (*θεός* or *τὸ θεῖον*), adopts as a rule a tone of reverence.² Moreover, even with regard to the ordinary Olympians, he has much in common with the older poets. He saw that in the mass of legend there was much that was morally pernicious and intellectually confusing; he sets himself to show that the gods *as depicted in myth* are no fit rulers and guides for enlightened men. But he is not alone in seeing this. The only difference between him and Aeschylus himself on this point is that the younger man saw no alternative to throwing over the traditional religion and attacking it from outside as foolish and demoralising, while the elder

1. *Vespae*, v. 493.

2. Pohle (*De rebus divinis quid senserit Euripides*, p. 14) says that in Euripides *θεοί* and *θεός* have the same meaning. I believe this to be a mistake. *θεός* (except of course where there is clear reference to some individual god just named) is the same as *τὸ θεῖον*. *θεοί*, on the other hand, means the ordinary Olympians, and is *not* used in the sense of *τὸ θεῖον*. The only exceptions to this latter statement (I think) are fr. 1009 (Dindorf), the authorship of which is not certain, and *Peliades* fr. 3 (Dindorf), written nearly thirty years before his earliest surviving play.

attempted to reform it from inside and reconstructed it so as to agree with his own ideals. In this respect Euripides compares very favourably with Aeschylus in sincerity and insight; the *Ion* shows as much respect for genuine religion as the prologue of the *Eumenides*, and much less disingenuousness.¹

So much for his negative belief. On the positive side he held the familiar doctrine that there is a single Power which rules all things, absolutely wise and absolutely omnipotent, not a blind unswerving law of nature, but a moral force which is the ultimate cause of existing things and of all events. This idea varies with him in definiteness from time to time; now it is doubtfully identified with Zeus himself, now it is emptied so completely of personal characteristics that it is merely the endless concatenation of effect and cause working in accordance with justice. For it can never be known. What is important is to realise that the world is ruled according to righteousness and that the cause never fails of its effect. The *ταραγμός* of things is an illusion. But to claim that we know this God or Law is folly; of what it does we dimly see a part; its nature is veiled, though men have thought they saw it under various forms:

ὦ γῆς ὄχημα, καὶ πὶ γῆς ἔχων ἔδραν,
 ὅστις ποτ' εἰ σύ, δυστόπαστος εἰδέναι,
 Ζεὺς, εἴτ' ἀνάγκη φύσεος, εἴτε νοῦς βροτῶν,
 προσηυξάμην σέ· πάντα γὰρ δι' ἀψόφου
 βαίνων κελεύθου κατὰ δίκην τὰ θηήτ' ἄγεις.²

Clearly it was necessary to determine what relation there existed between this Deity and the personal gods of the state religion, or, more exactly, between belief in the former and belief in the latter. Now that the Olympians (as worshipped by the mass of men) were real persons Euripides did not believe, and so as a rule contents

1. On the prologue of the *Eumenides*, see Dr. Verrall's important discussion in *Euripides the Rationalist* (pp. 222—4).

2. *Troades*, vv. 884—8. See p. 12, note 1.

himself with disproving their existence by implicit condemnation of the stories which are the sole basis of the popular belief in them; but at a later stage he lays more emphasis on the fact that they are not so much non-existent as personifications of those natural forces or products which are useful or otherwise important to mankind. It will be noticed later how much is made of this in the *Bacchae* and how necessary it is to see that Euripides was aware of the creation of deities by personification if we are to comprehend that play. At present one or two quotations will be enough to show that he fully understood the principle that any person or thing which is valuable or important to men, or even anything which can do what they cannot do, may be deified by them. In the *Troades* Helen attempts to justify herself to her husband by the plea that it was Aphrodite who helped Paris to lure her away from Sparta. Hecuba answers this excuse with admirable precision and lucidity:

ἦν οὐμὸς υἱὸς κάλλος ἐκπρεπέστατος,
ὁ σὸς δ' ἰδὼν νιν νοῦς ἐποιήθη Κύπρις.¹

Still stranger perhaps is *Helena* 560: θεὸς γὰρ καὶ τὸ γιγνώσκειν φίλους. Emotions of the mind, again, and objects of desire or fear are freely spoken of as θεός; and in the *Bacchae* we actually read of "Our Lady Earthquake"! ²

Yet Euripides had not only to face the problems of religion; he had also to consider how his function as the spokesman of the nation at the Dionysiac festivals could be reconciled with the heretical position which in his own mind he felt bound to take up. If he was to teach his

1. *Troades*, 987, sq. (Cp. Vergil, *Aen* ix. 184, sq.; *Dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt* | *Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit dira cupido?*). This passage, with vv. 884—8, and the fragment quoted above from the *Bellerophon*, give the basis of Euripides' opinion on religion, genuine or 'popular.'

2. ἔνοσι πότνια (v. 585). πότνια is generally used of goddesses or ladies of rank, and where it is applied to things (which is not often there is probably always personification.

countrymen what he thought best, he would be flying straight in the face of the spirit of worship which brought them in crowds to the theatre of Dionysus, and on a matter of practical fact his career as a reformer and leader would be cut short at a very early date. It was not to be expected that Athenians would tolerate blasphemous doubts in a play intended as an act of worship. In view then of his duties and of his fears he adopted the middle course of treating the Olympians with outward respect while he made it clear from the upshot of the whole play, from the manner in which those divine beings talked on his stage or were talked about, from the incongruous or even damaging turn given to a sentence here and there, that he regarded such "gods" as no gods at all. That is to say, his including Athena, Apollo, and the rest in his *dramatis personae* is no proof that he considered them admirable or even credible.¹

Without discussing here precisely how little Euripides cares for his deities of the stage, or how unimportant they are to the plot, we may profitably ask why it was that the poet should confine himself in his choice of dramatic subjects to legends in which he did not believe. Why did he not save himself and his audience the trouble of pretending to take these cardboard gods seriously, and devote himself to dramatising some event in the historical

1. Needless to say, this statement is not new. The view here adopted has been expressed by many writers, though with different degrees of definiteness and elaboration; for example by J. Berlage (*De Euripide Philosopho*, p. 40), Nestle (*Euripides, der Dichter der griechischen Aufklärung*, p. 6), Patin (*Euripide II*, pp. 241, sq.), Pohle (*De rebus divinis quid senserit Euripides*, p. 5), E. Roux (*Du merveilleux dans la tragédie grecque*, p. 46), Verrall (*Euripides the Rationalist* p. 138, etc.). It is opposed by Hartung (*Euripides Restitutus II*, pp. 16, sq.) and by F. Kraus (*Euripides, ein bekehrter Rationalist?* pp. 44, 46). Dr. Verrall's well-known and epoch-making work contains the fullest and most definite theory on this subject. He believes that the orthodox prologues and epilogues are absolutely insincere, and that these and other similar parts of Euripides' plays are consciously intended by the writer as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the traditional belief. A discussion of Dr. Verrall's views and his application of them will be found in Appendix III.

truth, or at any rate the rational probability, of which he could believe? He was the poet of the new age; he made innovations in metre, diction, music, and other departments of his work. Why did he not innovate in the sources from which he drew his plots?

The one answer usually given is that all tragedies were written for the national festivals of Dionysus, and that both the nature of these occasions and the traditions of dramatic writing were too strong to suffer any dramatist, however original, to throw aside the myths and to seek for subjects elsewhere. Does this mean that the pressure was so strong that it was impossible for the very idea of such innovation to enter Euripides' mind, or simply that he felt he was bound by tradition not to take so revolutionary a step? In either case the answer is no answer at all. In the first place, it is not true that literary tradition was undeviating in its allegiance to myth and myth alone, as such famous examples as Phrynichus' *Taking of Miletus* and the *Persae* of Aeschylus abundantly prove. What was there to prevent Euripides from utilising the conduct of the Lacedaemonians after the capture of Plataea if he wished to damage Sparta, instead of the legendary incidents in Phthia from which he drew the plot of the *Andromache*? Was it not possible to find some sufficiently objectionable contemporary ephor without going to the trouble of vilifying the amiable Menelaus in order to convince Athenians that Spartans were unscrupulous and bloodthirsty? It may be said of course, and with perfect justice, that Aeschylus took special care that the *Persae* should form no vulgar encomium of the mere physical triumph of Athens, but should set that triumph in an ideally religious light,¹ whereas the younger playwright must have felt that he could not give history this lofty treatment. True; but as loftiness is equally absent from his treatment of myth, such an argument does not help

1. Cp. Patin, *Eschyle*, pp. 210—215.

us to see why he chose myth rather than history. Moreover, this feat which we are told was too much for the enterprise of Euripides—this frank desertion of the legends—seems to have had no terrors for his less distinguished contemporary Agathon, who, as is well known, wrote a tragedy in which both the names and the incidents were invented by himself.¹ Aristotle, to whom we owe our knowledge of this, tells us also that “there are *some tragedies* in which there are only one or two well-known names, the rest being fictitious. . . . We must not, therefore, at all costs keep to the received legends, which are the usual subjects of Tragedy. Indeed it would be absurd to attempt it; for even familiar subjects are familiar only to a few, and yet give pleasure to all.”² Surely then it cannot have been impossible for Euripides to adopt a plan which was occasionally followed both before and during his own time, and which the sound sense of Aristotle regards as obvious. Again, he is in reality far from adhering to the myths as related by tradition. He is for ever remodelling them and introducing new features; for example, the whole plot of the *Helena*. Nor can it be reasonably asserted that these developments are due to the fact that his predecessors had exhausted the possibilities of the more celebrated stories, for he frequently treated those which had been already handled with conspicuous success. In the *Electra* and the *Bacchae* he covers the same ground as Aeschylus in the *Choephoroe* and the *Pentheus*, and instances might be multiplied. Lastly, it is worth mentioning (though suggestions of this kind are, it is true, unsafe when not supported by other considerations) that since every dramatist by the nature of his work necessarily alters his materials to some extent, at the very least unconsciously moulding it to suit his own point of view, and

1, Aristotle, *Poetic* ix, 7.

2, Mr. Butcher's translation (2nd edition). The italics are of course my own.

since Euripides in particular was constantly testing the possibilities of his art, he can hardly have failed to consider whether he might not use imaginary plots which should express his meaning more unmistakably. For, in plays such as these, it may be contended, he could have paid the same lip-service to the gods without being trammelled by objectionable stories about them.

It must be agreed, then, that no valid reason has been shown why he should confine himself to tales which were a hindrance and not a help to him. The truth is that they were no hindrance at all. It is hasty in the extreme to assume that because he did not believe in the myths he thought them as uninteresting as demoralising. On the contrary, his aims and his methods of work were such that even if it had not been the custom to use them as a source of dramatic plots, he would almost certainly have gone out of his way to do so. The reason for this is of vital importance. Euripides was no mere journalist. He never unsettled the minds of his countrymen simply to secure a sensational effect, to impress them with the brilliance of a play as a *tour de force* of destructive criticism, to make them recognise how stupid they had been to believe nonsense. It was not for this that he went on year after year surrendering the ivy-wreath to poets like Xenocles and Nicomachus. He saw what too many able and convinced opponents of established religions have failed to see, that to assume the absolute erroneousness of any genuine religious belief is foolish and uncritical. Creeds which have dominated nations for centuries cannot be nothing more than puerile absurdities,¹ and the man who attempts to introduce a more rational spirit by derision of a primitive faith will make little impression. All thoughtful men will see that there must have been an element of truth

1. "All the conceptions that races of men have ever held, either about themselves or their deities, have had a source in the permanent useful instincts of human nature, are capable of explanation, and of historical justification; that is to say, of the kind of justification which is, in

even in barbarous superstition. It is a signal proof of the sincerity and greatness of Euripides that he takes such pains to show his readers and hearers, not only that the myths are untrue—any Pheidippides could have done as much—but also the manner in which they originally obtained credence. His great aim was not (finally) to disturb his countrymen's religious notions, but to replace them by better ones on a surer foundation. He wished them not only to laugh at the legends, but to throw them aside—by no means the same thing—and so gives much attention to the manner in which such stories gained currency in the first instance. This is the true reason for the adherence of Euripides to the myths as subjects of tragedy. He takes them as they stand and shows that the intelligence of mankind has outgrown them, in spite of the many noble and beautiful features which they possess. And, feeling that the only way to lead his hearers beyond them is to demonstrate the manner in which they imposed themselves on human credulity, he takes care to give them at any rate a momentary plausibility even in his own destructive work. Herein, too, lies the secret of much of his famous inconsistency—his peculiar object made it necessary for him to tell the old stories about gods and heroes *so that they might seem probable and yet not be believed*. A less sincere and skilful controversialist would have made them so ridiculous, so unthinkable, that by trying to prove too much he would have proved too little for the Athenian whose father had gone into action at Salamis under the leadership of the Aeacidae, and had been urged on to the salvation of Greece by an unearthly summons.¹

itself and of its own force, the most instant destruction to what has grown to be an anachronism." Mr. John Morley, from whom this passage (*Miscellanies*, i, p. 240, Macmillan) is taken, points out that Byron, in *Cain*, failed to grasp this principle, which was, I think, remarkably clear to Euripides, at any rate in the *Bacchae*.

1. Herodotus, vii, 84.

CHAPTER III.

TRADITIONAL DIFFICULTIES IN THE *BACCHAE*.

Παρά τῶν συνηδρευκότων ἤδη τῷ λόγῳ σοφῶν τοσαῦτα παρειλήφαμεν.

—ARISTOTLE, *Met.* 987a.

WE are now in a position to confine our attention to the *Bacchae* itself, and it will be convenient to commence by enumerating and discussing the stumbling-blocks which have been found by the majority of modern readers in the course of an attempt to understand the idea which was at the back of Euripides' mind. In the first place, we come to what strikes us as the vindictive and ungodlike character of Dionysus.¹ In our own day we can hardly avoid comparing the rejected god, who comes to his own and whose own receive him not, who shows a strange reticence when brought before his powerful and scoffing accuser, with another Captive² in a position much like his, and the comparison is entirely to the disadvantage of Dionysus. But even according to our

1. Decharme (*Euripide et l'esprit de son théâtre*, p. 405): "La divinité du prologue se présente comme l'ennemie implacable et même odieuse des êtres humaines qui vont nous intéresser." Nestle (*Euripides, Einl.*, p. v.) quotes J. Burckhardt (*Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, 2nd edition, ii, p. 114), who calls Dionysus "ein Wesen welches den Augen eines anderen Zeitalters einige wahrhaft höllische Züge verrät," and Jacobs (*Nachträge zu Sulz*, v, p. 390), who says: "Nichts ist niedriger und ungotlicher als die Rolle, welche Dionysus, um den Pentheus zu strafen, in den Bacchen spielt." Mr. W. H. S. Jones (*The moral standpoint of Euripides*, p. 7) says roundly "Dionysus is a fiend." On the other hand Dr. Verrall couples Dionysus with the Athena of Aeschylus and the Athena of Sophocles (*Euripides the Rationalist*, p. 100).

2. Cp. the remark of Goethe, quoted by G. H. Meyer (*De Euripidis Bacchabus*, p. 22). "Das Stück gäbe die fruchtbarste Vergleichung einer modernen dramatischen Darstellbarkeit der leidenden Gottheit in Christus mit der antiken eines ähnlichen Leidens, um daraus desto mächtiger hervorzugehn, in Dionysus."

more ordinary standards of mere fair play the god stands condemned. He finds himself, with all his divine knowledge and power, pitted against a mortal, and with merciless rancour he uses his advantages to entrap his enemy. This is the ingenious malice of a fiend, not the radiant epiphany of a god. If only we had been spared the revolting treachery by which the catastrophe is brought about, we might, even in spite of our human sympathies, have acquiesced in it. But this is not the place to consider fully the manner of Dionysus' vengeance, and indeed most readers probably object more to his having been so intent on vengeance at all. Herein we are misled by our notions of "sport" and fair play, which were almost unknown to the Greeks. If one could show that Bacchus is acting in an unjust manner, that is to say, that he is exacting more than what is strictly his due—and more will be said on this point later—then one would be at liberty to suppose Greek feeling hostile to him, but only if so. We naturally feel a revulsion in favour of "the man who is down," whether he is right or wrong, and herein lies a standing problem for the playwright and the novelist. They have to work the downfall of the villain and yet see to it that he does not win the full amount of sympathy which his mere overthrow by itself is calculated to excite.¹ It is by no means certain that we should applaud the *dénouement* of *Macbeth* as sincerely as we do, if the tyrant had met his death by the hand of Malcolm and not by that of Macduff. The murder of Duncan, as presented, leaves us as nearly in sympathy with the murderer as is possible, while the butchery in Fife is accompanied by every circumstance of brutality. When the end comes, our sympathy with the dauntless lonely

1. This is one reason for the dramatic weakness of melodrama. The writer dares not allow his villain a single good point. Not only is he bad in connexion with the special issue which is the pivot of the play, but on every point of morals he is a monster *totus teres atque rotundus*. More than this, he is 'bad' in every other obvious manner; in particular his politics (where mentioned) are shockingly unpopular.

king is swallowed up in our still more intimate and powerful sympathy with the avenger. No such paradoxical complication of feeling appears to have troubled the Greeks, and their writers accordingly have not scrupled on occasion to go to lengths which appal and puzzle the modern mind. Homer, the most perfect among ancient poets, the most sure in taste, and the most "modern" amidst his archaism, shall give us examples. Who has failed to admire the great culmination of the *Iliad*, when Hector and Achilles are at last face to face, and not only the Greek and Trojan armies, but even the universe itself, seems to stand still and look breathlessly for the issue of that human conflict? And who, reading on, has not been shocked to the soul by the conduct of the "great-hearted Achaeans"?

ἄλλοι δὲ περίδρομον νῆες Ἀχαιῶν
οἳ καὶ θηήσαντο φῦν καὶ εἶδος ἀγητῶν
"Ἐκτορος, οὐδ' ἄρα οἳ τις ἀνουτητί γε παρέστη."¹

We may find a deed of infamy to match this at the end of the *Odyssey*, where Telemachus hangs up the wicked handmaidens "like a string of thrushes" outside his palace.² We could willingly blot out these ugly things from the pages of a great poet, but there they are, and there they must for ever remain as one more witness to the truth that every genius, however great and apparently limitless, must of necessity have some horizon, and can never travel altogether out of sight of the conditions of his time and country. But the question is, not "are these things revolting to us?" but "would these things be felt by a Greek audience to be so natural that a Greek poet could risk depicting them?" The answer to this last query is certainly "yes." Agamemnon's warriors had for years dreaded Hector; for many days

1. *Il.* xxii, 369—371.

2. *Od.* xxiii, 457—473. Dr. Gilbert Murray's interesting remark on this passage (*The rise of the Greek epic*, pp. 118sq.) does not, I think, invalidate the quite general statement I am making here.

preceding the final combat he had been the scourge of their host, firing their ships and butchering their bravest. And now that he is dead the resentment of these half-savage men shows itself in insults even more childish than ferocious. All is quite natural, and therefore not unfit to be recorded. This plain straightforward support of the obvious side in a quarrel is seen all through Greek literature; *δράσαντι παθεῖν* is the grim keynote of popular sentiment no less than of legislation. We are not meant to pity Clytaemnestra in the *Choephoroe* or Eurystheus in the *Heracleidae*. At any rate, if the audience ever do feel sympathy with the "villain" of the play, which is doubtful, it never amounts to a revulsion of feeling in his favour. As was hinted before, something is to be said later about the peculiarities of the revenge of Dionysus, its causes, its methods, and its victims, especially about the justice of regarding Pentheus as the "villain" of the play. But my only contention here is that, strictly *prima facie*, there is nothing in the mere fact that Bacchus plots and executes a vengeance to cause a suspicion that an Athenian audience would have been alienated from him. That he would alienate an English audience cannot prove that Euripides meant to make him detestable. Could he live again he might point to the doom of Pharaoh.

A second objection which has been ventilated is the nature of the first part of the second episode—the dialogue between Cadmus and Teiresias which precedes the entrance of Pentheus. The scene is felt to be undramatic, because it damages what is generally taken to be the effect of the play. There are three features which cause surprise: the comic tone, the reason given by Cadmus for supporting the new religion, and the attitude taken by Teiresias. Let us begin with the comic element.

At the outset it is fair to ask whether we are necessarily

to regard the scene as comic. Not everything which makes us laugh would have amused Greeks. We are bound to consider whether Euripides did not mean this combination of senile feebleness with a fixed purpose of attending the very energetic proceedings of the Maenads not as grotesque, but as a tribute to the all-compelling power of the new divinity. One of the old men takes up precisely this latter position :¹

ἐρεῖ τις ὡς τὸ γῆρας οὐκ αἰσχύνομαι,
 μέλλων χορεύειν κρᾶτα κισσώσας ἐμόν.
 οὐ γὰρ διήρηχ' ὁ θεὸς εἶτε τὸν νέον
 χρήξει χορεύειν εἶτε τὸν γεραίτερον,
 ἀλλ' ἐξ' ἀπάντων βούλεται τιμὰς ἔχειν
 κοινὰς, δι' ἀριθμῶν δ' οὐδὲν αὔξεσθαι θέλει.

F. Kraus, who is an uncompromising champion of the view that Euripides is entirely on the side of Dionysus and is doing his best to recommend the Dionysiac religion, insists that an Athenian audience would find nothing to raise a smile in the decorous enthusiasm of Cadmus and Teiresias. He thinks that the stage was surrounded by such a halo of religion that irreverent thoughts could not arise.² Pater,³ on the other hand, whose sympathy with Greek feeling is unsurpassed, regards the passage as "humorous" and "grotesque" and as exciting "the laughter of the audience." Moreover, Pentheus himself, though in a towering passion, and

1. Vv. 204—9. I quote the text throughout from Wecklein.

2. "Der Grieche, für den ja die Schaubühne mit einer Art von religiösem Nimbus umgeben war, hatte in seiner Seele gewiss keinen Raum für den Gedanken, dass Kadmos und Teiresias durch eine solche Vermummung ihre grauen Haare entkehrten; vielmehr erblickte er in ihrem Benehmen nur eine doppelt bewundernswerte manifestation der Macht des Dionysos" (p. 5). If the halo had survived the *Ion* and the *Helena* it must have been solid indeed. Later (p. 7) Kraus makes a remark which, if true, is of great value: "Euripides hat sich an keiner Stelle über den Dionysoskult lustig gemacht; wenn er es aber gewollt hätte, wäre hier (in the conversation between T. and C.) die beste Gelegenheit dazu gewesen."

3. *Greek Studies*, pp. 62-3.

though most scholars agree in thinking him more fool than knave, finds the situation diverting in the extreme.¹

It cannot, I think, be successfully denied that the scene is to be regarded as comic. We laugh, and the Greeks must have laughed still more heartily, at the figure cut by Dionysus in the *Frogs* when he appears disguised as his brother Heracles; and I cannot see why the same kind of masquerade should fail of the same effect because there are fifteen *choreutae* instead of twenty-four and the actors declaim more regular iambs.

But this is precisely the sort of case in which one must bear in mind the principle stated earlier in this essay. Have we a right to assume that because we should regard a dramatist, who raised a laugh at the expense of religion, no friend to it, Euripides must have been an enemy to the Dionysiac worship because of this scene? Destructive criticism cannot be friendly, but banter is surely compatible with respect. It is only when a religion is not interwoven with the life of a people that they can contrive to keep merriment out of it. Men with sound hearts and minds must laugh, and if their religion pervades their existence, laughter must find a place in their religion. Hence the grotesque features of mediæval ecclesiastical art and the satyric play in the Greek tetralogy, even in the tetralogy which contained the *Oresteia*; to the same spirit are due the comedies—parts of which are more farce than comedy—of Hroswitha, the nun of Gandersheim. If it cannot be shown that Euripides makes any more serious attack upon Dionysus and his teaching we may well believe that he cherished little enmity towards it.

The second strange feature of the scene is the reason which Cadmus gives for his support of Dionysus. At his first entry on the stage he says :

1. πολλὸς γέλως (v. 250). F. Kraus, it is true, makes a valiant attempt to get over this obstacle to his theory, but without success.

ἦκω δ' ἔτοιμος τήνδ' ἔχων σκευὴν θεοῦ·
 δεῖ γάρ νιν ὄντα παῖδα θυγατρὸς ἐξ ἐμῆς
 [Διόνυσον ὅς πέφηνεν ἀνθρώποις θεός]
 ὅσον καθ' ἡμᾶς δυνατόν αὐξέσθαι μέγαν.¹

Then, after Pentheus has come back and has bitterly reproached his grandfather and the aged priest with what he calls their folly, Cadmus, in his reply, puts the following remarkable case for the new religion :

κεῖ μὴ γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ θεὸς οὗτος, ὡς σὺ φῆς,
 παρὰ σοὶ λεγέσθω· καὶ καταψεύδου καλῶς
 ὡς ἔστι, Σεμέλη θ' ἵνα δοκῆ θεὸν τεκεῖν,
 ἡμῖν τε τιμὴ παντὶ τῷ γένει προσῆ.²

This is the only "reason" which Cadmus himself offers for Pentheus' consideration. It is true that he begins by endorsing all the other arguments which Teiresias has been able to muster. What these are and what they are worth shall be discussed elsewhere³—but all he can suggest himself are the baldest considerations of vulgar expediency. To do him justice, he tries to drive his words home by appealing to his grandson's personal interests :

ὄρᾶς τὸν Ἀκτέωνος ἄθλιον μόνον,
 ὃν ὠμόσιτοι σκύλακες ἄς ἐθρέψατο
 διεσπάσαντο, κρείσσον' ἐν κυναγίαις
 Ἀρτέμιδος εἶναι κομπάσαντ' ἐν ὀργάσιν.
 ὃ μὴ πάθῃς σὺ, δευρὸ σου στέψω κἀρα
 κισσῶ· μεθ' ἡμῶν τῷ θεῷ τιμὴν δίδου.⁴

That is, "Don't you think we had better say Dionysus is a god, whether it is true or not? You may find your life in danger if you refuse." An excellent method, surely, of persuading a high-spirited and obstinate young king! And when this edifying preachment is prefaced by the familiar reproof, "Ah, you are young and

1. Vv. 180—3.

2. Vv. 333—6. The lines are suspected by Nauck.

3. See pp. 278q., 568q., 758qq.

4. Vv. 337—342.

foolish,"¹ a reproof which invariably and naturally confirms a young offender in his error, it is not surprising that Pentheus answers with haughty intolerance, and bids the old men take themselves off. But Cadmus' tactlessness and ignorance of his grandson's character do not concern us here. We have to consider whether such arguments for the Dionysiac religion are meant by the poet as damaging or not to the cause which they are intended to support. Kraus² with some ingenuity suggests that Cadmus "sees clearly that the whole speech of Teiresias has made not the slightest impression upon Pentheus. . . . Accordingly he leaves his own standpoint for an instant and descends to Pentheus' base manner of thought. . . . Cadmus, while he talks thus, does not entertain even a momentary doubt of the divinity of Dionysus." There are three objections to this plausible supposition. In the first place, Pentheus does not think basely.³ In the second, Cadmus has made the same remark, though in a milder form, before Pentheus has made his appearance. And in the third, Cadmus does not evince any great feeling for the majesty and mystery of the new religion. "Here I am, ready with the trappings of the god. . . . I will not slacken my efforts, day or night, as I smite the ground with the thyrsus. . . . I suppose we shall drive to the mountain? . . . Is no one else coming? . . . I, a mortal, have no contempt for the gods." Such are his remarks to Teiresias, and they evince no lofty conception of the god. The salient difference between him and his grandson on this point is that while Pentheus knows his own ignorance of the real nature of the Dionysiac religion, Cadmus does not know his own ignorance. On the whole, we are probably to regard this feature of the

1. V. 332, *vûn γὰρ πέτη τε καὶ φρονῶν οὐδὲν φρονεῖς*.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

3. Pentheus' character and attitude towards the new worship demand detailed attention and can be more conveniently discussed later (Chap. VI).

first episode—the unworthy reason which is Cadmus' chief incentive to honour Bacchus—not indeed as directly damaging to the religion itself, but as putting one of its supporters in a bad light, and thereby to some degree discrediting the teaching which has produced no better effect upon him.¹

The third difficulty in this part of the play is the position taken up by the prophet Teiresias. Early in the scene he utters the famous words :

οὐδὲν σοφιζόμεσθα τοῖσι δαίμοσι·
πατέριους παραδοχάς, ἅς θ' ὀμήλικας χρόνῳ
κεκτῆμεθ', οὐδεὶς αὐτὰ καταβαλεῖ λόγος,
οὐδ' εἰ δι' ἄκρων τὸ σοφὸν ἤρρηται φρενῶν.²

It has been pointed out often enough that these lines do not suit the situation at all.³ How Teiresias can talk of his fathers having bequeathed to him a religion the god of which is the grandson of the friend to whom he is speaking, how he can give the name of a heritage "coeval with time" to the cult of him whom he himself calls "this new divinity," it is difficult to guess. The only obvious escape from the incongruity—so complete that we are justified in assuming that it would have struck every Greek—is to suppose that Euripides is speaking here for himself and using the prophet as his mouthpiece. This tragic analogue to the parabasis of comedy is of course frequent in Euripides. But I do not think it has been pointed out that even by taking

1. The doubt concerning the true reading makes no difference to the import of Cadmus' appeal. The MSS. read ὡς ἔστι Σεμέλης, which is retained by a few scholars, including Hermann, while the majority accept Tyrwhitt's emendation, followed above. In any case the preceding sentence (κεῖ μὴ . . . λεγέσθω) must mean that Cadmus wishes Pentheus to recognize Dionysus as a god whether he is so or not.

2. Vv. 300—4.

3. For example by Patin (*Euripide*, ii, p. 241) and by Weil (*Le Drame antique*, p. 110). Dr. Gilbert Murray says (*Euripides*, pp. 169, sq.): "Teiresias seems to be not a spokesman of the poet's own views—far from it—but a type of the more cultured sort of Dionysiac priest." I understand this to mean that Euripides is referring to his own time, but not to his own opinions.

the passage in this way we have not left perplexity behind us. It is indeed appropriate for the dramatist, speaking for himself, to call the Dionysiac worship a "heritage handed down by our forefathers," but it is still not appropriate for him, even in his own day, to call those doctrines "coeval with time" precisely when he is dealing with the period at which they were first promulgated in Greece.

In the next place, Teiresias, after formally renouncing the pride of human wisdom and, as it appears, rationalism generally, proceeds, as soon as an opponent attacks him, to give explanations as rationalistic as any brought forward by Euhemerus. Dionysus, he says, is a blessing to man, for he has discovered the liquor which frees unhappy man from sorrow, and—mark how he continues—

*οὗτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται, θεὸς γεγώς,
ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.¹*

How hopelessly inappropriate such a remark is here! "He, a god himself, is poured forth in libations to the gods." It would be perfectly suitable to a man who is explaining the bearings of a religion, the origin of which has been forgotten. One can imagine such a person very sensibly and accurately laying down the principle that a natural product found beneficial by men is by them in their delight thought divine, personified, and

1. It is true that some editors understand *σπένδεται* not as passive, but as middle. Dr. Sandys says the word is "used in a double sense, being grammatically applicable in the middle voice to the God himself, who 'makes peace with' the other Gods; but also involving a reference to his gift of wine which 'is poured out' in libations." F. Kraus (p. 8) says: "Ich fasse die Worte *θεοῖσι σπένδεται* nicht passivisch, sondern medial: er, der Gott, trifft zu Gunsten der menschen gleichsam ein Abkommen mit den Göttern, indem er jenem den Wein schenkt, durch dessen Spendung sie die Götter ihren Bitten geneigt machen." But Wecklein, E. Bruhn, Paley, and apparently Prof. Tyrrell, take the voice as passive. The only meaning of the middle would be, as Dr. Sandys shows, "makes a peace with," that is, "becomes reconciled to," which even if true, would not be relevant here. The only other possible meaning for the middle with the dat. is apparently (see L. and S., *s.v.*) "procure a truce for"—that is, here, "procure a truce on behalf of the gods," which is certainly not meant.

worshipped as a god. The deity really *is* the wine which he is supposed to give. This is the last word of scientific rationalism. But now imagine such a statement used by anybody as an argument in favour of the religion of a god whom he claims as a real person—the grandson of his friend! *Quodcumque ostendis mihi sic incredulus odi.* Even the Cyclops knows better than this; οὐ τοὺς θεοὺς χρῆ σῶμ' ἔχειν ἐν δέρμασιν, as he says.¹ We may conceive of some genial old Athenian using such an "argument" half in jest to an abstainer like the κρονοχυτρολήραιος Nicias, but how does it help Teiresias' case? Considering the circumstances under which the lines are uttered, they are intelligible only as an argument *against* the godhead of the person Dionysus.²

Such are in brief the difficulties usually found in the first episode. We come now to a smaller point—the punishment of Cadmus, which has, however, caused readers little perplexity because, though they sympathise with him, they see a sound reason for his condemnation in the cynical argument he has brought forward for honouring Dionysus.³ But if this is the cause of his condemnation it is strange that he does not recognise it himself even at the end of the play, where he is full of grief for the misery of his daughters (and lays the nature of their offence clearly before them), and full, too, of unhappy thoughts about the wretched prospect which

1. *Cyclops*, 527.

2. I have not mentioned the much better-known case of rationalization in Teiresias' speech—his vindication of the story about the double birth of Bacchus—because I think a good case has been made out by those who regard both Pentheus' reference to the story (vv. 242—7) and the prophet's answer (vv. 286—297) as spurious. Wecklein points out that both these passages break the continuity of the speeches in which they occur (see, however, Dr. Sandys' masterly note on the second passage). I cannot regard it as certain that the lines are not by Euripides, but I feel that vv. 242—7 are not at all suitable to Pentheus' character as seen everywhere else. Vv. 246—7 are certainly not genuine, I think.

3. Dr. Sandys (*Introd.*, p. lxiii) Prof. Tyrrell (*Introd.*, p. lv) and Kraus (p. 27) find the reason in the guilt of Pentheus. This is what Euripides himself says (vv. 1302—5), or makes Cadmus say, but I cannot see how either the poet or the scholars make out their case.

lies before himself. Nor does Dionysus himself, though quite ready to reproach Agaue with her misdoings, find anything to say against Cadmus. The only comment he offers anywhere on his grandfather's conduct is at the very beginning of the play,¹ and there he commends him for the affectionate care which he has devoted to his unhappy daughter's memory long years before her vindication. It is possible to suspect that Euripides introduces the fate of Cadmus so as to mention a curious story which would interest a section of his audience. This explanation, if explanation it can be called, would, of course, be very damaging to his reputation as a playwright. It is monstrous to bring in elements which are not merely otiose, but injurious, merely to please the gallery. Such an idea is only possible if one applies very strenuously indeed Dr. Verrall's theory that the epilogue, like the prologue, of an Euripidean play is not meant seriously.

We have next to deal with the slight, but puzzling, difficulty involved in the attitude of Pentheus towards the companions of Dionysus. The matter is in itself of little importance, but, as it affords valuable evidence as to the real nature of the king's conduct, it merits careful notice. "How is it consistent," one asks, "that Pentheus should pursue with vindictive energy the Bacchantes who are revelling upon Cithaeron, and should yet suffer the Asiatic women to chant their songs in honour of the god at his very palace-gates?"² The inconsistency is emphasised by Pentheus himself, who in one place³ threatens to check the chorus and enslave them. The customary answer, if one is attempted, is that we *must* have a chorus in the *ὀρχήστρα*, and so they *must* not be stopped by Pentheus, whatever the cost to dramatic

1. Vv. 10, 11 (*αἰνῶ δὲ Κάδμον, κτέ*). It is true that in his speech at the end of the play there is a lacuna which cuts off the beginning of his address to Cadmus, but if the restoration of the lost lines is to be relied on, he gives no good reason for his grandfather's fate.

2. Cp. Patin (*Euripide* ii, p. 252).

3. Vv. 511, *sqq.*

probability. But this is no answer at all. If it is really natural that the prince should stop them, why construct a plot which involves so manifest an absurdity? Weakness of plot is almost always a sign of youth or inexperience in the dramatist, and it is hard to believe that, after seeing and writing plays for half a century, Euripides was still so unskilful as to find no other way. He could, for example, in the last resort, have fallen back on the obvious "Chorus of Theban elders." There is not so much to trouble us in the non-fulfilment of the one threat to which I have alluded—it could easily have been forgotten in the midst of the exciting scenes which immediately follow—as in the mere fact that the continued presence of the women is allowed at all. What are the possible reasons for his acquiescence? Surely two—that he does not wish to stop them, or that he cannot. Now it is plain that no lack of power stays his arm. He has already imprisoned certain of the Maenads who are at large upon the hills,¹ and, when he gives the word, his retainers do not shrink from binding Dionysus himself. The only remaining alternative is to suppose that he has no wish to oppose the Chorus. We have before us indeed the one strong statement already mentioned:

*τάσδε δ' ὡς ἄγων πάρει
κακῶν συνεργοὺς ἢ διεμπολήσομεν,
ἢ χεῖρα δούπου τοῦδε καὶ βύρσης κτύπου
παύσας ἐφ' ἰστοῖς δμωίδας κεκτῆσομαι.*

This menace stands alone, and may (when we consider that it does so) reasonably be put down to Pentheus' rage against the stranger himself, which has now reached its climax. He is so infuriated, that, for a moment, he falls upon women with whom he has no quarrel. He has said nothing against them till now (not even when they rebuked him boldly for his first hostile

1. Vv. 226, 7.

speech against their leader), and when this fit of rage has passed he says nothing more. Yet he shows the greatest rage against the Theban women on Cithaeron. Why? The only possible explanation is that there is some radical difference between the two troops of women in the eyes of Pentheus. If we look ever so closely, we shall find only two differences. Firstly, the Chorus are Asiatics, the Theban women subjects of Pentheus; secondly, what is still more important, the Chorus are merely singing and dancing in honour of Dionysus, while the Maenads on the mountains (so it has been reported to the king) are actually indulging in drunkenness and in all manner of unwomanly excesses "honouring Aphrodite before Bacchus."¹ This consideration would lead us to a correct view of the attitude of Pentheus, which must for the present be postponed; all that we need to point out here is that it is the great difference between the two classes of Dionysus' followers which explains, and fully explains, the temperate way in which the king tolerates the presence of the Chorus at his gates, and that therefore there is no dramatic impropriety in his doing so.²

The last difficulty I shall mention in this chapter is formed by an inconsistency in the utterances of the Chorus.

In vv. 402 *sqq.*, daunted by the opposition with which they are meeting in Thebes, they sing :

ἰκοίμαν ποτὶ Κύπρον,
 νᾶσον τὰς Ἀφροδίτας,
 ἐν ᾗ θελξίφρονες νέμον—
 ται θνατοῖσιν Ἔρωτες,
 Πάφον ἂν ἐκατόστομοι

1. V. 225.

2. Patin (*Euripide* ii, p. 243) points out that there is a marked difference between the two companies of women, but he does not draw any conclusions from the fact. The difference he notes is that the chorus experience only the salutary influence of the god, whereas the Theban women are led into terrible excesses. But this difference does not become clear till late in the play.

Βωκάρου ποταμοῦ ῥοαί
 καρπίζουσιν ἄνομβροι.
 οὐ θ' ἄ καλλιστενομένα
 Πιερία μούσειος ἔδρα,
 σεμνὰ κλιτὺς Ὀλύμπου·
 ἐκεῖσ' ἄγε μ', ὦ Βρόμιε Βρόμιε,
 πρόβακχ' εὔιε δαίμον.
 ἐκεῖ Χάριτες, ἐκεῖ δὲ Πόθος·
 ἐκεῖ δὲ Βάκχαις θέμις ὀργιάζειν.

The difficulty about these lines is clearly expressed by Prof. Tyrrell:¹ "If then the Chorus aspire to visit the favourite seats of the worship of Aphrodite—and it is idle to attempt to explain otherwise the collocation of Cyprus, Paphos, and the Delta—they plead guilty to the very charge which Pentheus here brought against them, that the worship of Dionysus is but a cloak for unchastity

πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δὴ Μαινάδας θυοσκοοῦς
 τὴν δ' Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ' ἄγειν τοῦ Βακχίου."

Dr. Verrall, in order to do away with this, suggests² that the first seven lines of the passage (*ἰκοίμαν . . . ἄνομβροι*) are not meant by the Bacchantes as an expression of their own longing, but are attributed by them to the *κακόβουλοι φῶτες* mentioned at the close of the preceding antistrophe. They quote this depraved desire only to repudiate it, and then declare that their own heart longs for Pieria and the solemn slopes of Olympus.

This brilliant suggestion would remove the inconsistency complained of, but it is not easy to accept it. Would an Athenian audience have readily understood that *ἰκοίμαν κτέ.* is a quotation? Surely the poet (if he had meant this) would have made his meaning clearer by inserting some connecting words, *λέγουσιν γὰρ ἐκείνοι* for example. The same objection applies lower down in the strophe. At *οὐ θ' ἄ καλλιστενομένα* lucidity demands that the transition

1. *Preface* to his second edition, p. x.

2. *Classical Review*, viii, pp. 85—9.

from wishes that they repudiate to wishes that they cherish should be sharply indicated, which is by no means the case as the text stands. The fact is that one need not be anxious to remove at all costs a passage which testifies to what was, after all, a by-word in Greece. The Bacchic orgies were generally associated with immorality in the Greek mind, and the plot of the *Ion*, of course, is founded partly on this association. True, it is fair to ask whether Euripides, notwithstanding, does not intend to paint a nobler picture of Bacchanalianism in this particular play. Perhaps he does—this question of course brings up the whole question of his object in writing the *Bacchae*—but we must notice that though the charge of immorality is insisted on by Pentheus, none of the various apologists for the new religion, neither Teiresias, nor Cadmus, nor the Chorus, nor Dionysus himself, are able, or at any rate willing, to refute it. The way in which they meet the charge is notable for evasiveness; indeed they appear to own the truth of it, but to lay the blame on the inherent weakness of those who yield to temptation.¹ That there is a temptation seems confessed. The upshot of the matter is that Euripides regards the Dionysiac worship as being to some degree responsible for immorality.

Finally, this is perhaps the best place for the statement of a feature in the drama which cannot properly be called a difficulty, as it seems to have perplexed no one, but which is nevertheless strange (though parallels for it can be easily found elsewhere in Euripides) and important. Like Teiresias, the Chorus gives utterance to sentiments which are not suitable to their position.² True piety, they say, consists in clinging simply and unquestioningly to the old beliefs and the old ways; when once a man has

1. Cp. vv. 314—8, 488, 683—8 (which simply shows that nothing blameworthy was happening at the time).

2. Cp. Dr. Sandys, *Introd.*, pp. lxxiii, *sq.*

lost his grasp of them he is tossed helplessly upon a sea of doubts and spiritual dangers: "This is my accepted creed, to use the customs and habits of the simpler folk." ¹ τί ταῦτα πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον; or at any rate the Dionysus whom the Bacchantes know? Such pathetic heart-weary lines are touching when uttered by a speaker to whom they are appropriate, but how do they sound when sung to the timbrel by a revel-rout of Asiatic women, who have danced their way across half a continent in the train of a youthful leader whose gospel is exuberant gaiety, and vigorous, nay frantic, *joie de vivre*? Whenever a poet goes out of his way to put into the mouth of a character words not appropriate to him or not natural under his circumstances, we are at liberty to suppose that such speeches voice the writer's own sentiments. It is agreed on all hands,² and rightly, that this praise of a peaceful mind comes from the very heart of the aged poet himself.

We have now passed in review the stumbling-blocks which have been more or less often noticed in the *Bacchae*. As will have been seen, I do not think their collective force very strong. Those which appear most damaging to the view that Euripides is hostile to Dionysus and his orgies lose most of their weight when the great difference between the modern and the Athenian standpoint is considered. If they are carefully studied, and if no fresh argument can be adduced, one can scarcely fail to agree that Euripides believed in the godhead of Dionysus and in the sacredness of his worship. Still there should be mentioned one or two opinions in virtue of which the holders of them have apparently thought that they could believe all we read in the *Bacchae* and yet ignore Dionysus' claims to divinity. One idea is that he has superhuman power indeed, but that

1. Vv. 430, *sq.*

2. Cp. Prof. Tyrrell, *Introd.*, p. xxxviii, Dr. Sandys (as above), Kraus (p. 31).

he is a fiend, not a god.¹ But there is no evidence in the play for regarding him as an ἀλάστωρ, nor does it seem likely that the friend of Socrates and follower of Anaxagoras can have believed the world to be governed by evil powers.² E. Roux,³ on the other hand, while asserting that Euripides does not believe in the existence of the gods, and making no exception of our play, still accepts the prodigies which are worked by and in the name of Dionysus, though, it is true, he calls them childish. That some of the miracles are on the level of conjuring tricks is true, but if we believe they really happened, how can we think that a Greek would deny the divinity of the being who could bring them about, unless we are to suppose him modern enough to share Matthew Arnold's opinion⁴ that a power of working miracles is no proof of godhead?

And, it may be asked with plausibility, how could the poet fail to believe in a god who is actually brought upon the stage and takes an exceedingly important share

1. See note 1 on p. 18, and cp. Eur, *El.* 979, *sq.* :

OP. ἄρ' αὐτ' ἀλάστωρ εἶπ', ἀπεικασθεῖς θεῶ;

HL. ἰρὸν καθίζων τρίποδ'; ἐγὼ μὲν οὐ δοκῶ.

2. Cp. Dr. Verrall's remarks on Apollo in the *Ion* (*Euripides the Rationalist*, p. 140): "The question of his existence is not, strictly speaking, affected by his moral character. It is theoretically possible to take Euripides as holding . . . the view that there really was a person of superhuman intelligence who, knowing both past and future, did veritably make revelations through the Delphian prophetess, and also further that this superhuman person had a moral character deserving hatred and contempt, that he was in short a 'devil' . . . I do not think, indeed, that those who are acquainted with the condition of Greek thought and controversy in the fifth century before Christ will hold it probable that Euripides meant this. Such a view was not then in the field. . . . Nor, as could easily be shown, does such a view suit with the rationalistic and vaguely monotheistic tendency of Euripides' speculation in general."

3. *Du merveilleux dans la tragédie grecque* (p. 46): "Non content d'exclure les dieux de la scène de ce monde [he has just referred to *Phoen.* 531 and *Troades* 983, *sqq.*], Euripide infère qu'ils n'existent pas," and (p. 69) "Les Bacchantes sont semées de prodiges que nous renverrions aux contes des fées, tant il nous semblent puérils!"

4. *Literature and Dogma*, v, § 4.

in the action, unlike most Euripidean gods in this? If, as I have said, no new arguments can be stated, the result of our investigation must probably be that we are to accept Dionysus as a god, a god to be worshipped, and to put up with some inconsistencies which we cannot explain.

But such new arguments it is my purpose to lay before the reader. I think it can be shown that features in the *Bacchae* of far-reaching importance have been almost completely overlooked and utterly misunderstood. A consideration of these would lead to a new interpretation of the play and would incidentally throw light on the greatness of Euripides as a religious thinker and teacher.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PALACE-MIRACLE.

Oportet ut is qui audiat cogitet plura quam uideat—CICERO.

It is now time to mention certain difficulties in the ordinary acceptation of the *Bacchae* which have never yet been considered at all, or at any rate have never received anything like adequate attention. The words "ordinary acceptation" need explaining; for, as far as the purport of the play is concerned, there has been great diversity of opinion. By the ordinary acceptation, then, I mean the way in which all readers have tacitly agreed to accept and believe the statements made by the several characters concerning each other and concerning the action, as the bedrock of criticism and the source from which any theory of the play must inevitably take its rise.

This certainly seems a most reasonable and sensible position, and it is of course generally adopted in the criticism of all purely literary art; for any given work the facts are taken to be as the novelist or playwright has stated them. What would be thought of a critic who should take upon himself to deny that Lear was the father of Regan and Goneril, and on that assumption should base a new reading of their conduct? What an outburst of derision would salute anyone who "discovered" that Penelope was after all the wife of Antinous! In dealing with fiction, it would be said, or with work which has any of the characteristics of fiction, we cannot get behind the author; it is monstrous, for example, to spoil the great picture of the combat between Achilles and Hector by untimely reference to the fact that there was a precipice in the way which made it

impossible for the Trojan to flee thrice round the walls of the city. The general truth of this principle cannot be contested, and indeed an appeal will be made to it later in the present essay.¹ But it should be remembered that Euripides is a writer who, more perhaps than any other, more even than Plato, produces his effects by indirect means, by the accumulation of innuendoes which force the reader to a conclusion not definitely formulated in words. Like the Delphic oracle on which he made such incessant and merciless warfare, he "neither reveals nor conceals, but indicates."² Therefore, though I by no means wish to deny the validity of that most elementary principle of criticism to which I have just referred, if we are to accept it as true of Euripides, I think—it is only verbally a paradox—that we must regard what he does *not* say as a part of what he *does* say; that is, we must regard *significant* omissions as positive evidence of his meaning. There is no need to labour the point. The difficulty will be how to determine what omissions are significant and what are merely accidental or admitted by the author for reasons purely technical. As a matter of fact, if we accept as trustworthy everything which the characters in this play tell us has happened, we shall find ourselves entangled in difficulties from which no obliquity of critical vision, no vagueness of commentary can possibly extricate us. Let us begin, then, by taking for granted that the "ordinary acceptation" is correct, that Euripides, whatever hints he gives as to the character of the being who dominates the play, does intend to assert his godhead and to honour him; and let us see what becomes of this assumption.

We will consider first what seems the most triumphant vindication of the godhead of the "Lydian"—the overthrow of the palace of Pentheus. The

1. See pp. 49, *sq.*

2. Heraclitus, fr. xi (Bywater): 'Ο ἄναξ, οὐδὲ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς, οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει, ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.

emissaries of the King have captured the stranger and have brought him before their master, who gives orders that he is to be imprisoned in the royal stables. The scene is then left vacant except for the presence of the Chorus, who after a time are seized with uncontrollable excitement and cry aloud that the palace is falling in ruins. A pause follows, and Bacchus comes out again to tell his supporters what has happened. He gives an account of certain events inside the palace which have resulted in the discomfiture of Pentheus, and then goes on (vv. 632—4):

πρὸς δὲ τοῖσδ' αὐτῷ τὰδ' ἄλλα Βάκχιος λυμαίνεται·
 δώματ' ἔρρηξεν χαμᾶζε· συντεθράνωται δ' ἅπαν
 πικροτάτους ἰδόντι δεσμούς τοὺς ἐμούς.

This is a lie. The palace does not fall down, cannot fall down, and is not believed to fall down by anyone, except indeed the deluded Maenads. I do not only mean that it was a practical impossibility on the Athenian stage to represent such a change in the scenery. Whether this was possible or not is the least part of the matter. What is really appalling in the hardihood of which it shows the poet to have been capable—the aged poet who, we are told, was so broken in spirit by age and struggle that in his last years he went back on the convictions of a lifetime—is this, that *the whole subsequent action of the play* most peremptorily forbids us to imagine, by any sort of obedience to convention or by any other kind of self-deception whatsoever, that the palace has really fallen down. If this is a fact, it is infinitely the most important fact in the play, and it is necessary for that reason to examine the matter as narrowly as possible.

In the first place, it is certain, from the mere exigencies of the ancient stage, that this “miracle” cannot have been properly represented before the eyes of the

audience. Paley indeed says:¹ "The addition of *τᾶδε* clearly shows that this was a real stage effect; and it is precisely like the overturning of the Trojan citadel at the conclusion of the *Troades*." As a matter of fact the very words used in the *Troades*² prove that that catastrophe at any rate appealed only to the ear. G. H. Meyer³ is still more explicit: "quum in *σκηῆ* *λάϊνα* *κίσιν* *ἔμβολα* vere exstructa essent, haec, quum delaberentur, ad veri similitudinem propius accesserint, quam hodie fit, natura tulit." There is, one admits, something attractive in so robust a faith. But there is no evidence that realism had made such strides in Euripides' day that stones were carted on to the stage, and there built up to make a real house. Even if it were so, the case is made no better, as a little consideration will show. Later scholars have been more cautious, since any sufficient movement of the background of the stage seems to have been out of the question.⁴ The only expedient known to the theatre and available in this case was the use of the *βροντεῖον*—the thunder-machine—which does not affect the present argument. It is plain then that the miracle does not "happen," in the stage-management sense of the word. That is to say, in a drama the professed object of which is the glorification of a god, a god whose divinity the author (apparently) chooses to prove by his power of working miracles, the only miracle of the whole number which is supposed to be shown to the audience is *not* shown to the audience. To call this clumsiness on the part of the poet is *litotes* with a vengeance. At precisely that point where he has the best chance of convincing the sceptical among his auditors that Bacchus is a worker of miracles, he throws the chance away. It is of no use to attempt a defence by saying that his not making the

1. In a note on v. 591.

2. Vv. 1325, *sq.*: *ἐκλύετε, κτύπον.*

3. *De Eur. Bacch.*, p. 37 (note 2).

4. Cp. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre* (2nd ed., pp. 222—6). The possibility and relevance of a partial effect are considered later.

most of his opportunity is no fault of his—that he cannot be blamed for not having modern machinery at his command. If he had not, he had no right to allow the plot to work up to a point at which such machinery is absolutely necessary to save the situation from absurdity. Why could he not, to take an obvious instance, lay the scene of his play on Cithaeron and allow a messenger to report the downfall of the palace?¹

Is it possible to suppose, however, that, by a convention of the theatre, poet and audience agreed to let this absurdity pass? I cannot think so. It is undeniable, of course, that when once we enter upon the question of conventions in art and of the degree to which they are tolerable, we are treading upon very slippery ground. Conventions, which in one age are so necessary and so universally accepted that they are never noticed, seem to men of another day incredibly stupid and unnatural. No modern reader can have failed to be struck by the curiously unreasonable rules—so they appear to us—to which Greek tragedy as a whole conforms. The presence of the Chorus, however inconvenient, during the whole of the action; violent deaths not allowed upon the stage itself; the great length of time (often several hours) supposed to elapse while the Chorus sings an ode which only requires a few minutes—these are some of the things which seem at times to deprive Greek tragedy of all interest and of all life. The explanation of course is that all dramatic writing, however some of its exponents may compass sea and land to achieve realism, is idealistic. It would be no difficult task to show that the most “realistic” modern play is as full of “unreality” as any ancient play that can be instanced. The successive scenes in a play of Ibsen or Mr. G. B. Shaw follow one another in an order devised by the dramatist

1. There is nothing to show that the fragment of Æschylus' play on this subject—*ἐνθουσιᾷ δὴ δῶμα, βακχεύει στέγη* did not occur in a messenger's *ῥήσις*.

so that some idea or series of ideas may be presented lucidly and with cogent effect; they certainly do not reflect the actual course of events, in which ceaseless interruptions and irrelevances obscure more or less completely the lesson which the playwright desires to inculcate. In this most important respect all dramatists stand in the same position—they use the facts of life as a material for artistic treatment. It is necessary that they should select and combine, and such selection and combination must be carried out in accordance with a preconceived theory or idea in the writer's mind. All drama then is essentially idealistic, or unreal if one prefers so to call it, for there is an universally accepted convention that the dramatist must present us not (as it were) with a photograph of life, but with a picture of it. The grouping and the colour-scheme must be his own, and these will depend on his own idea of the meaning of certain events. And when once this convention of subjectivity has been accepted, we are no longer able to call one form of drama more "real" than another. Euripides is not the only Greek writer who regarded spiritual issues as more "real" than material events and uttered conversations. Thucydides probably felt that his "Melian dialogue" was more "real" than his narrative of Sphacteria or Syracuse. The ancient and the modern drama then are both open to the charge—if charge it can be called—of conventionality. But whereas the modern instinctively seeks to imitate life, the ancient instinctively seeks to interpret life. The ancient dramatist is not so much concerned with what happens to persons as with what happens to ideas. Hence come most of what we, with our new standards, call the unrealities of Greek tragedy. There are different planes of reality, and Greek writers have generally studied things on a plane different from that which (to us) is more obviously valid.

This digression is meant to show that I feel how dangerous it is to call anything in an ancient play

absurd because utterly unlike anything which playwrights or playgoers would tolerate in our day. My own conviction, I confess, is that an Athenian audience would not have tolerated the present alleged convention any more than an English audience would tolerate it. But let us for the moment grant freely that after all Euripides did mean what I have ventured to call an absurdity—that he did wish us to pretend that Pentheus' house lies in ruins though no such thing happened on the stage. Then what becomes of the subsequent action of the play? Now, whatever a convention is or is not, it is certainly an agreement, a bargain; that is, it must be observed by all parties. And the more unreal, the more essentially unnatural, such a bargain is, the more rigorously must it be preserved. Natural things may be allowed to look after themselves; unnatural things may not. Take the well-known case of the modern "death" on the stage. The actor is not dead; but has he a right to get up again after a few moments and proceed to take a further part in the action? And would it be an appropriate defence to affirm with much gravity that since he is not dead there is no reason why he should not act? Such a jumble of the actual truth of the case and the conventional temporary truth of the theatre would be not merely inartistic—it would be barely sane. It would resemble nothing so much as the game of croquet in *Alice in Wonderland*. Yet this is strictly analogous to what is involved in the supposition that Pentheus' palace has fallen to the ground. It lies in ruins, Dionysus says, yet the prince a moment after comes out of the door, and says not a word about the disaster. He and the stranger subsequently go back inside the heap of ruins to prepare for their journey to Cithaeron, and come out again once more without the slightest reference to the "miracle," having apparently suffered no inconvenience from the fact that the place is no longer habitable. Surely this is enough, but it is

not all. Besides the silence of Pentheus, who was within the palace when it "fell," there are other Thebans, we remember, who come upon the scene in the second half of the play. Any spectator of stalwart brain who continues to believe that the house is down though it is not, and though the owner of it has no suspicions, waits anxiously to see what these other Thebans will say about it. Quite possibly the news has not spread, and the first knowledge of the event will probably come to them through the eyes. Greek tragedy of course had a special phrase for just this situation.¹ We expect the Messenger to enter with the speech he has prepared for Pentheus and then to break off staring in amazement at the palace (still rearing its unabashed columns to heaven), exclaiming :

ἔα· τί χρῆμα; δῶμ' ὄρω καταρριφέν,
τὸ πᾶν δ' ἔρειπίοισι πληθύνει πέδον.
ᾠναξ, τί τοῦτο; μῶν θεοῖσιν ἐσφάλῃς
ἔχθιστα δράσας Βάκχιον δ' ὑτιμάσας;

or words to that effect. But he says nothing of the kind. The First Messenger, it seems, shares the madness of Pentheus; imagine the mental confusion of our too credulous spectator! To cut the matter short, neither the First Messenger, nor the Second Messenger, nor Cadmus,² nor Agaue (either in her delusion³ or after her recovery) make any mention whatsoever of the fact that the royal palace of Thebes lies in ruins at their feet. For every actor concerned the palace is still as it was at the beginning; the case is strictly analogous to that of

1. The newcomer enters and begins his speech without at first noticing the signs of some startling event which has just happened. Then he stops, exclaims ἔα· τί χρῆμα; and proceeds to inquire into the meaning of what has just caught his eye. A good example is afforded by the conduct of Hippolytus when he meets his father in the presence of Phaedra's corpse.

2. No one will say, I think, that *διολέσαι δόμους* (v. 1304) is an exception. It can mean nothing but "destroy my family." See the context.

3. The poet even goes so far as to let her refer to the triglyphs of the mansion (vv. 1212—5 and vv. 1239—40) while in her ecstatic condition.

the dead man who rises to his feet and takes a further part in the action. Even supposing—though it is not for an instant conceivable—that the stress of other happenings prevents all these persons from noticing so unusual and startling an occurrence (even when they at length find time to moralise on the power of Dionysus) how can it be possible for Pentheus and the stranger to walk in and out of the building when it is in such a condition? To believe in this “miracle” would be no yielding to convention on the part of the audience; it would be sheer lunacy. The poet has forced us not to believe in it.

This is surely bewildering enough for a believer—it *ought* not to escape the notice of a reader; it *cannot* have escaped an eye-witness.¹ I must own candidly that it is quite beyond my own comprehension that this tremendous piece of blasphemy (for so it must have appeared to many) has passed unnoticed by modern readers.² It is true indeed that many have suspected that all is not well—how could they fail to do so?—but

1. For an example of the acuteness with which the working of the plot was followed by the audience cp. Aristotle (*Poetic* xviii, 1) σημείον δὲ τοῦτον [the precept that the poet should have the action clearly arranged before his mind's eye] ὁ ἐπειμᾶτο Καρκίνω· ὁ γὰρ Ἀμφιάραος ἐξ ἱεροῦ ἀνγεί, ὃ μὴ ὄρωντα [τὸν θεατὴν] ἐλάνθανεν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῆς σκηνῆς ἐξέπεσεν, δυσχεραίνοντων τοῦτο τῶν θεατῶν. That Euripides avoided precisely this kind of fault is affirmed by Dio Chrysostom (lii §11), who speaks of his σύνεσις καὶ περὶ πάντα ἐπιμέλεια ὥστε μῆτε ἀπίθανόν τι καὶ παρημελημένον εἶσαι μῆτε ἀπλῶς τοῖς πράγμασι χρῆσθαι.

2. Wecklein alone, so far as I can gather, has made anything like an adequate remark on the subject. In his note on v. 591 he says: “Der Zuschauer glaubt dem Chor was er sagt; an eine weitere Darstellung des Vorgangs ist nicht zu denken. Die Dekoration bleibt unverändert. Höchstens hört man Krachen und Fallen von Gebälk u.dgl.” The German scholar recognizes, then, as others have apparently recognized, that the overthrow is not shown; and he adds that the audience believe in it because the Chorus describes it. But he does not seem to notice that this belief is shattered by what follows. Schoenborne (*Die Skene der Hellenen*, p. 168, quoted by J. Daehn, *De rebus scenicis in Eur. Bacch.*, p. 54) says too: “Dem Palaste des Pentheus geschieht nichts, er bleibt unversehrt, man geht auch ferner in ihm hinein und kommt aus

the importance of the point has never, to the best of my knowledge, been pointed out at all. But many appear to have had misgivings, and we may formulate their hints into a few palliative theories, which have, however, never been expressed as such. First comes Wecklein's theory,¹ with which I suppose a large number of readers have tacitly agreed, that the downfall of the house is not represented on the stage, but that the audience believe what the Chorus say about it. This explanation I have already discussed, as being what would naturally occur at first to anyone who noticed the difficulty. Secondly, it has been implied that the palace is shaken, but does not fall.² This idea has received a good deal of support, and would be perfectly unobjectionable but for the obstinate lucidity with which the poet himself shatters such a theory with the words (v. 633) *δῶματ' ἔρρηξεν χαμᾶζε*—"he hath flung the dwelling to the ground." For once the wily prophet has left no loophole. If only he had used language less unmistakable! Thirdly, it has been held that only a part of the palace is destroyed.³ It is

1. See note 2 on p. 45.

2. Dr. Gilbert Murray, in his translation, gives as a stage-direction: "An earthquake suddenly shakes the pillars of the castle." Walter Pater says: "The pillars of the palace are seen waving to and fro. . . . Dionysus is seen stepping out from among the tottering masses of the mimic palace." Daehn (p. 56) though he maintains that there was no change in the scenery, concedes "cum peripetasmatis exornatio scenica ostenderetur, haud ita difficile fuisse aedes repraesentare labantes et iam iam ruituras." Milton conjectured *διάτρομα* for *διάδρομα* in v. 592.

3. Schöne (*Einkl.*, p. 18) says: "Die Abtheilung des Pallastes, welche die Wohnung des Pentheus bildet, in Trümmern zusammenstürzt." The idea that the *Erdbeben* has such delicate moral discrimination that it destroys the suite of rooms occupied by the guilty Pentheus, and spares those used by the comparatively innocent Agaue and Cadmus, is exquisite indeed.

ihm, (z. B. 914) und dass er fortbesteht, setzt auch 1214 und 1239 voraus." Daehn himself takes refuge in supposing v. 632 (*δῶματ' . . . ἄπαν*) to be spurious, and says (p. 56): "Scaenae mutationem in nostra fabula contendo fuisse nullam." E. Bruhn, in his edition of the play (Berlin, 1901) says (*Einkl.* p. 9, note): "Das Haus . . . konnte nicht einstürzen, da es nachher ganz unbefangen wieder benutzt wird." But none of these scholars seem to notice how terribly damaging this is to Dionysus and his claims.

certainly tempting to suppose, for instance, that the earthquake forced a passage for the god; in that case the damage to the house might possibly escape the notice of those who subsequently come on the scene. But here again Dionysus is our enemy. He will not have it so: δάματ' ἔρρηξεν χαμάζε, συντεθράνωται δ' ἅπαν—"he hath flung the dwelling to the ground, and it hath fallen in *complete* ruin." Both ἅπαν and συντεθράνωται (which Hesychius explains by συμπέπτωκε) are surely fatal to this view. Fourthly, it has been held that it is not the palace, but merely the stable-dungeon, which suffers collapse.¹ It is of course true that Pentheus orders his retainers to imprison Dionysus, not in the house proper, but in the stables. But it is plain from the evidence of the words used in the play itself (as apparently from all references to the miracle in ancient literature) that the palace itself is affected by the ἔνοσις. Observe the terms in which the falling building is spoken of by Dionysus or the Chorus: τὰ Πενθέως μέλαθρα, λάϊνα κίοσιν ἔμβολα, δῶμα Πενθέως, the second of which phrases is explained by Dr. Sandys as referring "to the marble entablature in general, including the architrave or ἐπιστύλιον." The expressions used make it certain that the royal dwelling itself is meant. To decorate an outbuilding or stable with marble entablatures and columns would be as eccentric as to hang pictures in a coal-cellar. All other mention points in the same direction. Horace, for instance, speaks of *tecta Penthei disiecta non leni ruina*,² and the writer of the longer Greek argument unequivocally says ὁ δὲ σεισμὸν ποιήσας κατέστρεψε τὰ βασιλεια.

This marvel of the sudden might of the god manifesting itself against the palace of his enemy, a story with which

1. So I understand Prof. Tyrrell's note on v. 636: "The great objection to Bothe's conjecture . . . is that Dionysus had not been in the house of Pentheus at all, but in the ἵππικαὶ φάτναι, which must have been separate from the house, as the whole passage shows." Daehn (p. 40) does not think that the stable was shown at all.

2. *Odes* II., xix., 14.

every one in the audience is familiar, and for which they are all looking, does not happen and cannot happen. It is an appalling practical joke, a colossal *παρὰ προσδοκίαν*. But it is also far more. It is an object-lesson in the history of religion, a searchlight directed full upon the mists of error. For we have had more to lead us to expect the miracle than the mere voice of tradition. The Chorus have just completed their ode when the cry of Dionysus is heard from within proclaiming the presence of the son of Zeus and Semele. The women greet the voice with awe and delight, and cry aloud that the palace is swaying to its fall. Then the prophet is heard again calling upon the blazing lightning to burn the halls of Pentheus, and the affrighted Chorus proclaim that fire is rising round the tomb of Semele.¹ And so the spectacle presented to us is that of the Maenads writhing in an ecstasy of fantastic terror before the palace which stands all unaffected by their ravings, and inside we hear the impostor shrieking his commands, apparently to the deaf stone and the unresponsive fires beneath the earth, in reality to the Asiatic maidens and to the deluded monarch in the house. Euripides has wished to show us unmistakably that the legend is false. But to ignore the alleged miracle, simply to omit it from his play, would have been to leave his audience in doubt as to his opinions on the matter. Instead of doing so, by a master-stroke of his art, he has shown us the thing *not happening*. Why?

1. The question of the mystic light produced by Dionysus has not been discussed here because it is not a "difficulty," but it is probably on the same level as the overthrow of the palace; the difference is that there is not the same evidence against it. See below, pp. 104, 5.

CHAPTER V.

THE PART PLAYED BY DIONYSUS IN THE *BACCHAE*.

'All the lilies he gathers have death or madness at the root.'

—J. CROWNE, *The English Friar*, iv, 1.

WHATEVER may be the reason for this presentation of a sham miracle, whatever lesson Euripides may have intended to teach by his novel method of handling the legend, certain facts of high value at once emerge. At a later stage in the discussion we shall see that a right comprehension of the "miracle" is the key to the *Bacchae* and to the nature of the poet's matured opinion about the popular gods. At present it is enough to notice the immediate deductions which, are (i.) that the Bacchic *marvels* are shams, and (ii.) that Dionysus is a conscious impostor as regards the miraculous destruction of the house. So much we are at full liberty to deduce.

These damaging facts make it imperative to examine the god's position and conduct afresh. Here it is necessary to bear in mind the principle discussed above,¹ that in dealing with fiction or with work which has some of the characteristics of fiction we are not entitled to go behind the author's "facts." We must believe that things are as he says they are. To take a strong instance, it would be of no use to attempt to show that Shakespeare does not mean us to regard Falstaff as a witty man by unearthing the original person from whom he took the first idea of Falstaff and demonstrating that the original person had no spark of wit or humour in his composition. Such things have never caused the most scrupulous reader any difficulty. But the case before us is not so

1. See p. 37.

easy. What do we mean by work which has some of the characteristics of fiction? We are thinking specially of tragedy, but historical tragedy (to which the *Bacchae* in a sense belongs) must follow truth with some closeness, and the question is, what degree of closeness has the reader a right to expect? The most famous historical play of Greece is a document for the history of Xerxes' invasion, and it has been well observed in general that there are certain landmarks in myth which it was impossible to remove.¹ At the same time it cannot be denied that Euripides did introduce serious modifications.² The upshot of this is that we have to decide whether any feature in the legend concerned with this play was sufficiently essential to the legend for us to *assume* that Euripides meant it to be taken as part of his representation of the legend. There is one such feature, and one only, in regard to which this assumption is not unsafe—the establishment in Thebes of the Bacchic religion, the existence of which in Boeotia was a matter of contemporary fact. But we have no right, especially when we have had so remarkable an instance of the way in which Euripides handles the details of his story, to assume that the *manner* of that establishment of the Dionysiac religion was in the poet's eyes as glorious or as creditable as it was traditionally assumed to have been.

The god himself speaks the prologue and tells his reasons for his visit to Boeotia (vv. 26—42) :

πρώτας δὲ Θήβας τῆσδε γῆς Ἑλληνίδος
 ἀνωλόλυξα, νεβρίδ' ἐξάψας χρὸς
 θύρσον τε δούς ἐς χεῖρα, κίσσινον βελος,
 ἐπεὶ μ' ἀδελφαὶ μητρός, ἄς ἤκιστα χρῆν,

1. "Euripide, après Eschyle et d'après lui, composa sa tragédie sur des données de leur nature invariables, en quelque sorte inviolables, soustraites à la libre disposition de l'écrivain, comme aussi au contrôle de la critique." (Patin *Euripide*, ii. p. 240.)

2. "Pour créer de situations nouvelles, pour amener des coups de théâtre, il traite arbitrairement les légendes, il les combine ou les modifie à sa guise. Evidemment la matière tragique a devenue pour lui chose indifférente, ou peu s'en faut." (Croiset, *Hist de la litt. grecque*, iii, p. 322.)

Διόνυσον οὐκ ἔφασκον ἐκφῶναι Διός. . . .
 δεῖ γὰρ πόλιν τήνδ' ἐκμαθεῖν, κεί μὴ θέλει,
 ἀτέλεστον οὔσαν τῶν ἐμῶν βακχευμάτων,
 Σεμέλης τε μητρὸς ἀπολογήσασθαι μ' ὑπερ
 φάνεντα θνητοῖς δαίμον' ὃν τίκτει Δί.

So that his reason for entering Greece in general is to spread his own worship; his special inducement to come to Thebes first and to show forth his power there is to avenge himself for the insult offered to his mother (and by implication to himself) by her family. The epilogue lays still more stress upon his personal indignation at the affront to his own divinity: *καὶ γὰρ πρὸς ὑμῶν θεὸς γεγῶς ὑβριζόμεν*. It is plain that he is introducing his regular orgies into Thebes and that he is doing so by way of vengeance; the orgies *are* the punishment—witness the simple but significant *ἐπεὶ* (v. 26). It may indeed be asserted that Agaue and sisters do not experience the ordinary Bacchic possession, that Dionysus is the power, not only of beneficial ecstasy, but also of deluding and fatal madness.¹ This is plausible, but an examination of the way in which the revels are described should remove any doubt that they are normal. A wonderful testimony to the sacredness of the Bacchic rites, truly! The inference is unmistakable that, whatever may be the result usually or normally, the orgies could be terrible methods of vengeance and bloodshed. Indeed, the whole tragedy is, from one point of view, a commentary on this fearful text, and the facts of the case most plainly give the lie to the ecstatic odes of the Chorus which celebrate the tranquillity of life conferred upon the worshippers of the god. His aim is to force men's recognition of the holiness of an influence which at the very same moment he is using to make a mother murder her only son! The attainment of either of his two objects is only possible at the price of failure to secure the other. Surely a strange predicament for a god! He cannot obtain

1. Cp. Patin, *Euripide*, ii. p. 243.

both of his ends, and he does not. His vengeance he does gain, but it is such a visitation that his victims and his followers¹ alike can see in it triumphant cleverness and power far more easily than divine greatness. The other purpose is not really effected. Acknowledgment and obedience are paid to him at the end, it is true. It may have been possible for an Artemis or an Ares to be satisfied with the homage of the cowed and the praises of the broken-hearted; for the cold, serene Olympians of an elder generation such forced respect may have seemed enough. For Dionysus it is not enough. He is half human; in him the sufferings and the hopes of men find their consecration and their sanction. His religion is that of quietness of intellect joined to exaltation of the spirit. At his coming "the whole land shall dance and sing"; "the ground gushes with milk and wine and nectar of the bee, and there is a savour as of Syrian frankincense." No; deities who claim worship by reason of their power only, or their wisdom only, or of any other right than his, may accept praises from unhappy lips; but how can he whose gospel is joy have established his kingdom securely when every worshipper is racked by agony of soul as he bows before the triumphant god? One would have suspected an enthusiastic procession of citizens, like the *προπομποί* of the *Eumenides*, but all is gloomy silence, broken only by despairing or rebellious mutterings such as Agaue's

ὄργας πρέπει θεοὺς οὐχ ὁμοιοῦσθαι βροτοῖς,

the only reply to which is the miserable evasion

παλαὶ τὰδε Ζεὺς οὐμὸς ἐπέειπεν πατήρ,²

1. See Dr. Gilbert Murray's *Introductory Essay*, pp. lv, sq. He says that this is "the most significant point against Dionysus." One wonders what the later relations are between the god and the Chorus. If, as Dr. Murray says (p. 184): "Dionysus rises upon the cloud and disappears," the women are left leaderless hundreds of miles from their homes. One hopes that they are not left to the mercies of loyal Thebans like the Second Messenger.

2. Vv. 1348, 9. Zeus is precisely the person who ought "long ago" to have come forward and vindicated Semele. In this affair he acts much like the Apollo of the *Ion*, who is beyond all ordinary powers of vituperation.

or by open repudiation of the hateful religion, which obtains no answer at all. Indeed the last speech of the agonised mother is the best comment on the action of the *Bacchae* taken as a whole :

ἔλθοιμι δ' ὄπου
μήτε Κιθαιρῶν ἔμ' ἴδοι μιὰρὸς
μήτε Κιθαιρῶν ὄσσοισιν ἐγώ,
μήθ' ὄθι θύρσου μνήμ' ἀνάκειται·
Βάκχαις δ' ἄλλαισι μέλοιεν.

These words are the very last in the play, except for the conventional "tag" *πολλὰ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων κτέ.* Euripides goes near, very near indeed, to denying that the religion of Dionysus was ever permanently established in Thebes at all. And it can at least be said with perfect truth that Bacchus only establishes it by means which rob it of its special significance and value. All sentiment is turned against him by his unjust and savage vengeance, and the three¹ princesses who have headed the outburst of enthusiasm in his favour turn bitterly from him and leave the city and his religion together.²

For his revenge is unjust and savage. We are in danger of forgetting that the death of Pentheus is a punishment, not of the king's own contumacy, but of the insult to which the daughters of Cadmus have subjected Dionysus many years before. The god expresses his intention of avenging himself on the princesses at the very beginning of the play, and the method which he eventually adopts is to cause Agaue to slay her own son. To be sure, he does at once accuse the latter of a sin against himself—that of refusing to acknowledge his divinity :

ὄς θεομαχεῖ τὸ κατ' ἐμέ, καὶ σπονδῶν ἄπο
ὠθεῖ μ', ἐν εὐχαῖς τ' οὐδαμοῦ μνεῖαν ἔχει.

1. Though neither Ino nor Autonoe come upon the stage, the poet makes it clear (see vv. 1259—62, 1324, 1353, 1373, 1381—2) that they share Agaue's position in the last scene.

2. Here again Euripides alters a detail of the legend to suit his present purpose. In his *Ino*, Ino disappeared and lived on Parnassus as a priestess of Bacchus. See Hartung, *Eur. restitutus*, pp. 453—464. A Delphic oracle speaks of *Μαινάδες αἱ γενεῆς Εἰνούς ἀπο Καδμηεῖς*. See Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena*, pp. 397—8.

This is, on the face of it, a falsehood, as Bacchus has only just proclaimed himself in Thebes. Cadmus and Teiresias, in the very next scene, are shown going off for their first visit to the revels, and plainly feeling very awkward in their new costume. And Pentheus has been away from the country just at the time when others had an opportunity of hearing the first teaching of the Stranger. All that he has done is to arrest some of the Theban women. Even if the murder had been intended as a reply to the king's action in imprisoning the Stranger, it would have been out of all proportion, particularly when his identity with the god is kept a close secret. But we are distinctly given to understand by many passages (particularly in the epilogue) that the fatal deed is the consequence of the conduct of Agaue and her sisters. The position of Pentheus, then, resembles that of Phaedra in the *Hippolytus*—he is a mere pawn in the game; through him the god is striking at his mother. We are impelled to examine more closely the crime of the mother, to see how its atrocity justifies such a requital. She and the other princesses have denied the divinity of Bacchus: so we are told on the authority of the god himself. But the credit of the god is by this time considerably impaired, and we ask for corroboration. What opportunity have they ever had of denying or affirming his divinity, apart from the present occasion, when they are his most enthusiastic supporters? Even before his time of birth had come Semele perished by fire, and the infant was snatched up by his father Zeus and hidden in his thigh. "On the second birth of the infant god his father sent him, by the hands of Hermes, to the nymphs of Nysa, who brought him up in a cave among the dells of that mountain."¹ In early manhood he made his appearance in Asia and began his career of conquest. Now, what opportunity had the sisters of Semele ever had of discussing Dionysus himself at all? They

1. Dr. Sandys, *Introd.*, p. x.

had never even seen him, as is clear from the circumstances just recounted. Presumably they never knew that the child had survived the death of his mother. Obviously, all that they could have said, when they became aware of their sister's condition, was that she had united herself with a mortal, and not with Zeus, as she declared. It is scarcely possible that they really said: "Your child is not a god." The most they could have said was what we are in fact told¹ that they did say: "Your lover is not Zeus, but an ordinary man." The result for Dionysus is, perhaps, ultimately the same in both cases, but their remarks are, at the worst, a very indirect way of "insulting" him, and when we notice that as soon as he gives anything like proofs of godhead, they unhesitatingly acknowledge him,² we must own that he is most discontented and exacting. It should be observed, too, that Semele herself could not have expected that her baby would be a god. In the ordinary course he would only have been a demigod, like Heracles and so many others.³ The fact that he became a full god (if the expression may be allowed) was owing, I suppose, to what was after all an accident—his birth from the body of Zeus himself. In short, Pentheus is butchered to wound Agaue, and Agaue is to be wounded for the most obscure, petty, and foolish reason conceivable.

So much for the justice and humanity of the revenge; let us consider what discretion it shows. No means less creditable to the god could be imagined, if he was to work the death of Pentheus at all. The obvious method would have been to conceive the king as aware of his prisoner's

1. Vv. 28, 9.

2. That this acknowledgement is due probably to an exercise of the god's power is not to the point. By exercising that power he took from them the opportunity of judging his claims, which, perhaps, they might then have rejected. The point is that on his return they do *not* reject him.

3. He was generally so regarded. Cp. Lucian, *Zeus Tragoedus* §21: οὐδείς ἀνθρώπος πάρεστι τῷ ξυλλόγῳ ἕξω Ἡρακλείου καὶ Διονύσου καὶ Γανυμήδους, τῶν παρεγγράπτων τούτων.

identity and yet persisting in his opposition. Moreover, the most creditable method of killing him would have been to allow him to try his full strength against the god and be defeated in a pitched battle. Such a conflict does not take place, but it is remarkable that the mention of armed force runs through the earlier part of the play.¹ In the prologue Bacchus all but declares that a battle will take place, and the mention of bloodshed crops up again and again. But it comes to nothing at all, and indeed seems only introduced to lay special stress on the fact that this obvious method of settling the dispute is *not* adopted, while a far more discreditable device is substituted for it. The words in the opening speech (vv. 50—52) :

ἦν δὲ Θηβαίων πόλις
ὀργῆ σὺν ὄπλοις ἐξ ὄρους Βάκχας ἄγειν
ζητῆ, ξυνάψω Μαινάσι στρατηλατῶν

are so very explicit as almost to warrant us in accusing Dionysus of uttering false prophecies.

Indeed the whole speech is strange. Not only is he wrong in his expectations of a battle, but he also entirely omits to mention that particular outrage committed by Pentheus which in hostility corresponds to the armed expedition looked for—the imprisonment in the stable. The normal course would have been to say : “ And if Pentheus dares to lay hands on me and to cast me into his prison, I will thrust my dungeon walls asunder, and will threaten his palace with unearthly fire.” Teiresias, who is certainly an authority on the subject, tells us that Bacchus is a diviner and can teach his devotees the secrets of the future :

μάντις δ' ὁ δαίμων ὄδε· τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον
καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει·
ὅταν γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἐς τὸ σῶμ' ἔλθῃ πολὺς,
λέγειν τὸ μέλλον τοὺς μεμνηότας ποιεῖ.²

But how can he make his votaries know and foretell the future when he neither knows nor foretells it himself?

1. *E.g.*, vv. 780, *sqq.*, 797, *sqq.*, 837.

2. Vv. 298, *sqq.*

That he cannot, we see from his ignorance as to the form which the King's hostility will take, and another example will be noticed presently. What of his followers? Unhappy souls! Could they have foreseen what that very day had in store for them Dionysus would have rued his gift. The only prophecy made by any of them is that of Teiresias himself, who hints darkly at the doom of Pentheus, and expressly says (vv. 368—9) that, in so speaking, he is *not* inspired by *μαντική*!

The other mistake of Dionysus is not at the time more noticeable, but is connected with a fact of the greatest importance. When telling us of the antagonism of Pentheus he says that he will "show him his godhead" (v. 47: *ὡν εἶνεκ' αὐτῷ θεός γεγώς ἐνδείξομαι*). This, again, is not fulfilled.¹ Pentheus perishes as he has lived, knowing nothing of the stranger's claim to be Dionysus himself, and with no conviction of his errors brought home to him. Had Euripides meant his hearers to regard him as glorifying Dionysus, he would have made the king recognise in his last moments who it was whom he had opposed and derided, just as Hippolytus says, before he dies: *ὦμοι· φρονῶ δὴ δαίμον' ἢ μ' ἀπόλεσεν*.² The victory won by the god over his chief enemy is not spiritual but physical.³ The prologue, then, the great opportunity which the god has of putting his case before the audience is full of disingenuousness or something even worse. And throughout the play we have a picture, drawn with surpassing skill, of a person in whom spiritual exaltation is strangely blended with falsehood, cruelty, and treachery, but little indeed to confirm the adoring eulogies of the Chorus.

1. Unless, indeed, one chooses to take *ἐνδείξομαι* in the sense of our colloquial "I'll show him!"

2. *Hipp.*, v. 1451.

3. I owe this point to Schöne, who writes (*Einkl.*, p. 25): "Seine Vernichtung ist nicht tragisch genug, denn sie ist nur eine äusserliche, durch die Gewalt des Gottes herbeigeführte, nicht zugleich seiner innerliche Besiegung seiner irrthümlichen Ueberzeugung." But Schöne, I think, nowhere points out the falsity of Dionysus' statement that Pentheus will know who has conquered him.

CHAPTER VI.

PENTHEUS.

Ἐν δὲ τῷ ποιούτῳ τὸν νέον, τὸ λεγόμενον, τίνα οἶε καρδίαν ἴσχειν;
—PLATO, *Rep.*, 492c.

As a consequence of the opinion which we have formed of the sham miracle and the light thrown on the weaknesses of the god, the reader is at liberty—nay, it is his duty—narrowly to scrutinise the rest of the play once more. He will not indeed discover any such audacious *tour de force* as that which has been pointed out in the last chapter but one, and perhaps nothing so damaging to Dionysus as the evidence against his claims and powers which has just been brought forward in addition to the imposture connected with the palace “miracle,” but he will find more than enough of sufficient weight to give him pause. These hints vary in calibre from facts which, each by itself, are sufficient to discredit utterly either the orthodoxy of the writer or his ability as a playwright, to side-glances which are only enough to make the reader uncomfortable. Let us begin with the character and position of Pentheus.

If Euripides was a genuine adherent both of the Dionysiac cult and of its divine promulgator, in what light, we ask ourselves, was he most likely to present the prince who sets himself to suppress that cult and to punish its followers? Clearly (if we have not made some mistake) Pentheus should be a regular stage tyrant, own brother to Lycus in the *Hercules*, and a worthy successor to Lycurgus¹ of Thrace in his brutal hostility to the new religion and its founder. Accordingly later

1. Cp. *Iliad*, vi, 129—137, *Antigone*, vv, 955—965.

writers and modern scholars have as a rule joined in vituperating the frantic atheism, the ferocity, the brutality, the blindness and stupidity which Pentheus shows.¹ Dionysus must be right, and therefore Pentheus must be wrong. And if we desire support for this opinion we have, to be sure, only to look at the play and see what Dionysus and his supporters say of him. The god himself complains that Pentheus denies his godhead,² and the same accusation is repeated by Pentheus' own mother,³ at any rate while she is still possessed by the Bacchic frenzy. Teiresias tells him that he is mad⁴ and a fool,⁵ and the Chorus speak of the king in words which their counterparts in later times might use of Antichrist.⁶ It is true enough that if we

1. Cp. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, xlv—xlvi *passim*, especially xlv, 130—183; Dr. Gilbert Murray (*Introductory Essay*, p. lvii): "we have the ordinary hot-tempered and narrowly practical tyrant—not very carefully studied, by the way, and apparently not very interesting to the poet"; Prof. Tyrrell (p. lii): "Pentheus is not merely the personification of brutal obstinacy, nor is he the champion of a principle or the exponent of an idea; the real basis of his character is ὕβρις"; Kraus (p. 28, note): "Er ist wie Bruhn (S. 18) richtig bermerkt, nicht auf Wege des Denkens zur Leugnung der Göttlichkeit des Dionysos gekommen, sondern als tyrannischer und eigensinniger Mensch"; Wecklein (p. 11): "Ein eigenwilliger und stolzer Selbstherrscher, welcher der Macht der Idee die rohe Gewalt gegenüberstellt"; Schöne (*Einkl.*, p. 15): "Er leugnet die Wahrheit der Geburt des Dionysos und somit seine Göttlichkeit, er versagt ihm daher die dem Gotte gebührenden Ehren und verbietet die Anerkennung und Einführung seines Dienstes in Theben." Nestle (p. 196) calls Pentheus "ein . . . brutaler Kämpfer gegen göttliche Macht." Cp. also the remark of Goethe quoted by Meyer (*De Eurip, Bacch.*, p. 22): "Kann man die Macht der Gottheit und die Verblendung der Menschen geistreicher darstellen als es hier geschehen ist?"

2. V. 45: ὃς θεομαχεῖ τὸ κατ' ἐμέ, κτέ.

3. vv. 1255, 6: ἀλλὰ θεομαχεῖν μόνον | οἷός τ' ἐκείνος. Ovid, too, calls him (*Met.* iii, 514) *contemptor superum*; ἤμελλον.

4. V. 326: μαίνη γὰρ ὡς ἄλγιστα.

5. V. 369: μῶρα γὰρ μῶρος λέγει.

6. Vv. 537—544:

[οἶαν οἶαν ὄργαν]
ἀναφαίνει χθόνιον
γένος ἐκφύς τε δράκοντός
ποτε Πενθεύς, ὃν Ἐχίων

listen to his enemies we shall regard Pentheus either as a deliberate villain or as a deluded simpleton. But unless we are prepared to go to the Theban for the character of Dionysus—in which case we shall think the latter an effeminate libertine and a *colporteur* of degrading superstitions—we cannot justly condemn the Theban on the authority of Dionysus. It is our business to look at what Pentheus really does and says before we judge him.

He comes upon the stage early in the play and tells us that he has heard of the immoral and lawless proceedings of the Theban women upon Cithaeron, that he intends summarily to stop this, and that in part he has already done so. This is his first, and indeed almost his only, offence, and there is nothing whatever objectionable in his attitude. He does not condemn the new religion out of his own mental arrogance, but on the strength of the reports which have been laid before him, and we are told no reason for assuming that his informants are not reliable. At the most, we can only blame him for hastiness in believing other people's testimony. But we may fairly suppose him imbued (by a common and natural anachronism) with the prejudices of a later age, which uttered no uncertain voice concerning the Bacchic damsels at "the central shrine of Phoebus," and regarded Delphi as a nest of impurity.¹ There was no case in which reports so sinister could be taken on trust with less blame to the fairmindedness of the hearer. And when he is persuaded by Dionysus to

1. Cp. *Ion*, vv. 533, 4, and v. 940 of this play (which I think is in point).

ἔφύτευσε χθόνιος,
 ἀγριωπὸν τέρας, οὐ φῶ—
 τα βρότειον, φόνιον δ' ὄσ—
 τε γίγαντ' ἀντίπαλον θεοῖς.

It is probably this passage which suggested to Nonnus the almost more than hellish character which he ascribes to Pentheus.

go and see for himself what the Bacchic revels really are,¹ he is torn to pieces for his pains, much as Bellerophon was blasted by a thunderbolt when he attempted to scale the heavens in his search for Zeus. Once given this belief that the revels have an evil effect on women, Pentheus' line of action becomes not merely blameless, but praiseworthy. As head of the State it is his duty, as well as his right, to check this spreading scandal. When we remember, moreover, that his own mother is one of the participants in these irregularities, we cannot wonder at the angry disgust and hatred which he expresses whenever he mentions the Stranger. His other action—the arrest and imprisonment of Dionysus himself—is also quite justifiable.² It is very well for the latter and his supporters to use invidious terms, such as *θεομαχείν*, and so forth, but the fact remains that the obvious opinion about this "Lydian" is that he was—exactly what he himself claimed to be, only the *προφήτης* of the god. Now, if Pentheus is justified in suspecting and banning the rites, he is surely blameless in imprisoning their apostle. And that is for the moment the conclusion of the matter, for there is no *prima facie* evidence that the Lydian is a god incarnate; *prima facie* appearances are all the other way. The wildest and most enthusiastic devotees of the new god never for an

1. Bruhn (*Einkl.*, p. 10) believes that this is due to a prurience of which he sees a hint in earlier remarks of Pentheus about the supposed misconduct of the Bacchantes. This idea he derives, he says, from Wilamowitz himself; but I do not think that it can be accepted. It is true that vv. 957-8 offer some apparent support for it, but by this time the Theban's mind is quite unhinged. He has already proposed to uproot Cithaeron and to carry it on his shoulders.

2. The most typically "tyrannical" action which Pentheus commits is that of ordering the destruction of Teiresias' divining seat (vv. 346-351). This action, it should be remarked, is not an act of disrespect to Apollo. It is caused entirely by the king's rage against the prophet, whom he regards as a self-seeking impostor. Euripides consistently speaks of *μαντική* as a fraud (the only exception, I think, is in the famous speech of Theseus in the *Supplikes*, vv. 211-213), but this view does not necessarily mean that the gods with whom the diviner claims relations do not exist. Pentheus seems to adopt just this attitude. The incident shows his hot temper, but not his godlessness.

instant suppose that their deity stands before them. Even when he cries aloud from inside the palace that he is the son of Zeus, they do not identify the person thus speaking with the leader whom they know.

But this brings us to the head and front of the king's offending. The popular notion about him appears to be that he deliberately sets his face against a religion of joy and simplicity, that his sombre and sour mind hates the "sweetness and light" brought by the god of the grape, that, like the toad in the fable, he tries to quench this light with his own envy-begotten venom. Such a character might utter the words of Loveless in Vanbrugh's *Relapse*¹:

I'll take my place amongst 'em,
 They shall hem me in,
 Sing praises to their god, and drink his glory :
 Turn wild enthusiasts for his sake,
 And beasts to do him honour :
 Whilst I, a stubborn atheist,
 Sullenly look on,
 Without one reverend glass to his divinity.

It is alleged that he is the hardened enemy of the god Dionysus himself, that he denies the existence of any such god and punishes his subjects and the *προφήτης* for believing in him and honouring him. This is the really important charge, and it is not true. Pentheus never discusses theology at all, unless it be in the passage² where he throws discredit upon the story of the double birth—lines which are open to grave suspicion textually. Apart from this possible exception, he never expresses an opinion on the purely religious or theoretical aspects of the dispute.

Here we touch upon a point of considerable importance

1. I. i. (Ward's edition, vol. i, p. 19).

2. Vv. 242—5.

which is too often overlooked. Though it is true that he expresses no opinion, it is wrong to add that the cause is his indifference to religion, his narrowness and lowness of mind.¹ On the contrary, he is anxious to learn all he can about the new doctrines and the new god. When the Stranger is brought into his presence he drops his personal quarrel almost at once, and shows the keenest curiosity and interest in the Bacchic religion. "What is the manner of your revels?" "What good do they bring to those who sacrifice?" "And didst thou see the god face to face? In what guise was he?" These questions, which, one would think, give Dionysus a rare opportunity of winning over his chief opponent and so securing the support of the State for his doctrines, are punctuated by his sneers and evasions. The result might have been foreseen; indeed it was probably both foreseen and intended. Pentheus relapses into his old position, that of the statesman whose business is not theology but the preservation of order. He remembers what he had forgotten—his intention of imprisoning Dionysus. The Bacchant is stripped of the marks of his sacred office, while the dispute continues, sinking at last to the level of a wrangle between an angry police-magistrate and a saucy prisoner who sees that his chance of acquittal has gone. At the end of this conversation, of which the Stranger by no means gets the best,² he is hustled off into the palace. All this goes to show, not that Pentheus denies the existence of the god, but that he knows little about him, and, moreover, that he

1. "Minder interessant ist die Charakteristik des Pentheus. Er ist ein kalter Verstandesmensch und seichter Freigeist, ein gottloser Rationalist, ein Erdgeborener, wie irgendwo Plato sagt, der nur das begreift, was er mit Händen greifen kann," etc. (Wecklein, *Einkl.*, p. 11).

2. One touch is very amusing. At v. 506 the Stranger loses his temper altogether. He cannot endure that this Boeotian, so ignorant of religion and mysteries, should bandy words with him, and so taunts him with his ignorance of metaphysics: οὐκ οἶσθ' ὃ τι ζῆς οἶδ' ὄργης ἔθ' ὄστυς εἶ. Pentheus (of course) misunderstands, and answers Πενθεύς, Ἀγαυῆς παῖς, πατρὸς δ' Ἐχίονος, as if filling up a census-paper—a stroke worthy of Aristophanes.

has strong doubt of the " Lydian's " right to put himself forward as the god's representative. The way in which he talks in the first episode is hardly what one would expect of a person who denies Bacchus altogether. The expression *πλασται βακχείαι* (v. 218) suggests that there *are* genuine Bacchic rites, which the Theban Maenads are only imitating for their own ends; and precisely the same idea is given by the words (vv. 224-5):

*πρόφασιν μὲν ὡς δὴ Μαινάδας θουοσκόους,¹
τὴν δ' Ἀφροδίτην πρόσθ' ἄγειν τοῦ Βακχίου,*

and by the expression *Μαινάδων νόθων* (v. 1060).¹ Pentheus does *not* object on principle to the worship of the god Dionysus (of whom he owns that he knows nothing), but as king of a great city and as a man of deeply-rooted moral instincts, he does most strongly object to such irregular and, as he believes, wicked conduct on the part of Theban ladies of high position. " I will tolerate any creed," he seems to say, " so long as I am allowed to supervise conduct." And who shall go about to challenge so sane a position? It is this attitude which accounts for his seeming inconsistency² in arresting the Theban Bacchae and yet ignoring the Chorus, who have confined themselves to singing the praises of their god and have committed no offence against social order.

Again, if he is to fill the part of the traditional tyrant, he should alienate our sympathy and respect, both of which he retains to the end, and never more than at the end. The Second Messenger, who is to all appearance an ordinary Theban, speaks of the dead prince in terms of deep regret, and his remarks are all the more striking when we consider the precise place in which they occur. He enters hurriedly in the usual way, but instead of

1. It is true that he also says *τὸν νεωστὶ δαίμονα | Διόνυσον, ὅστις ἔστι, τιμώσας χοροῖς*, but this does not exclude the belief that the women have only been tricked into thinking that the orgies they are taught are those of Dionysus. Here, as elsewhere, he shows (cp. *ὅστις ἔστι*) that he simply does not know anything about Dionysus.

2. See pp. 29-31.

following the almost invariable custom of plunging into his long speech at the earliest possible moment, he pauses to discuss the matter with the Chorus, not for long, it is true, but for very much longer than is at all usual at such a juncture in Greek tragedy. There is a slight gap in his lines, but three distinct times he expresses deep sorrow for the fate of his master. So much for the feeling of the Theban commons towards the "tyrant." How do his family take his loss? No doubt Agaue's anguish is no testimony; the closeness of her relationship to the dead and the manner in which his destruction has been brought about would have made her say what she does were he twice a villain. A more conclusive witness than this is afforded by the touching address of the bereaved Cadmus to his grandson's corpse :

"Aye, no man-child was ever mine;
 And now the first fruit of the flesh of thee,
 Sad woman, foully here and frightfully
 Lies murdered! Whom the house looked up unto,
 O child, my daughter's child! who heldest true
 My castle walls; and to the folk a name
 Of fear thou wast; and no man sought to shame
 My grey beard, when they knew that thou wast there,
 Else had they swift reward!—And now I fare
 Forth in dishonour, outcast, I the great
 Cadmus, who sowed the seed-rows of this State
 Of Thebes, and reaped the harvest wonderful."¹

This pathetic tribute at once puts out of court any notion of the typical tyrant. On the contrary, from this passage and from the rest of the play, we are led to regard Pentheus as a just and patriotic prince, hasty-tempered only against the unjust, violent to none but disturbers of the public peace. He is not without

1. Vv. 1305—1315 (Dr. Gilbert Murray's translation).

faults, but they are the weaknesses of immature¹ greatness, not the vices of hardened godlessness; his character is not lacking in courage, sympathy, or common-sense, but uncertain in the application of these qualities. Time would have mellowed him into a second Theseus, but alas! in this case the mills of the gods do not grind slowly, and the injured deity is less patient than his votary Cadmus.

Pentheus, in short, far from being the villain of the play, is the finest character in it.² Neither the worldly politic Cadmus, whose very enthusiasm is regulated by official precept, and whom death alone can teach to know his grandson's worth, nor the coldly theological Teiresias with his formal pronouncements on orthodoxy, nor the mysterious, smiling, heartless Stranger can compare in nobility with this youthful prince, warm-hearted, generous, hasty in defence of his friends and of his opinions alike,³ who sees his dominions invaded by a wild un-Greek religion of more than dubious morality, and who alone of thousands⁴ sets himself in dauntless

1. Pentheus can hardly be more than twenty years of age. Cp. vv. 1185—7.

2. Though, as was said before, most scholars have regarded Pentheus as brutal and godless, several have held another position. Dr. Sandys (*Introd.*, p. lxii), after speaking of his "headstrong impulse and arrogant bluster" goes on to mention as "a redeeming point in his character" that "he is jealous for their honour [that of the Theban Bacchantes] and sensitive of the scandal involved in such a departure from the ordinary decorum of their secluded lives." Meyer (p. 55) speaks of his "veri honestique studium." Weil (p. 108) says: "Penthée a beau être traité par les bacchantes d'insensé contempteur des dieux, de rebelle impie, semblable aux géants ennemis de l'Olympe, il n'en est pas moins présenté comme un prince ferme et sensé." Schöne (*Einl.*, p. 24), though regarding Pentheus as swayed by passion and arrogance, remarks: "Pentheus bei bloss äusserlicher Auffassung der Sache sich wohl befugt fühlen konnte, der Neuerung mit aller Kraft entgegenzutreten."

3. Cp. vv. 1310—2, 239—241.

4. Cp. vv. 961—3. It is true that in vv. 780—5 he gives orders for the mustering of the army, intending to take the field against the Maenads. He does not actually carry out his purpose, of course, and it is far from certain that he would have found a single hoplite waiting for him at the Electran Gates had he gone thither. It is remarkable how studiously the men of Thebes are kept in the background all through the play, but I think we are to understand that in the course of it they see

opposition to what he regards as a danger to his people. Its power he cannot but feel, whether it be the inspiration of Heaven as the Asiatic women exclaim, or the clever invention of some aspiring impostor as the prosaic Cadmus hints, or the fiendish influence of a malignant magician as the young king's own heart dimly imagines. To him, as to so many others, is offered the soul-testing choice between isolation and acquiescence, between loyalty to his own convictions and a squalid acceptance of the popular—*οἶκει μεθ' ἡμῶν, μὴ θύραζε τῶν νόμων*—and the choice is offered through the lips of his oldest friend and counsellor, to whom, moreover, he owes the throne which makes decision so necessary and so terrible a task. Arrogant he is, and impulsive, but most would rather lie beside his mangled body at the end than share the thoughts of the believers who stand around it.

fit to accept the new religion with inert acquiescence. In the *Classical Review* (Dec. 1905) I have given reasons for my belief that vv. 775—7 :

ταρβῶ μὲν εἰπεῖν τοὺς λόγους ἐλευθέρους
 πρὸς τὸν τύραννον, ἀλλ' ὅμως εἰρήσεται·
 Διόνυσος ἦσσαν οὐδενὸς θεῶν ἔφν,

are spoken by some Theban (not by the Chorus) and mark the fact that the citizens are now inclined as a body to accept Dionysus. Cp. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (*Einleitung in der griechische Tragödie*, p. 59) : "Das gefolge des gottes selbst ist bei Euripides durchaus weiblich; die männer dienen ihm auch, aber sie handeln nicht und sind eigentlich nur in der theorie vorhanden."

CHAPTER VII.

NEW MINOR DIFFICULTIES.

"Ἄλλως τε γὰρ ἄπιστον τὸ βουκόλων γένος, καὶ νῦν πλέον, ὅτε τοῦ καταστέλλοντος τὴν γνώμην πρὸς τὸ σωφρονέστερον ἄρχοντος ἀμοιροῦσιν.

HELIODORUS, *Æthiopica* II, xvii.

SUCH then are the three great objections to the theory which was provisionally accepted at an earlier stage—the theory that the poet honours Dionysus as a god and condemns the opposition with which he meets. Firstly, that the great vindication offered to the audience is an imposture; secondly, that Dionysus possesses, no doubt, some remarkable qualities, but so far from being godlike, is treacherous and cruel, an impostor and a liar; thirdly, that Pentheus, so far from being presented in a sinister light, is, on the whole, a noble character. I shall proceed with the plan of indicating difficulties which have, apparently, not yet been pointed out (though they may often have been felt)—difficulties which are sure to vitiate any answer propounded on the strength of a reading of the play which ignores them. In the present chapter a number of less striking, though important, points will be discussed.

(1) Though the destruction of Pentheus' house is perhaps the only "miracle" actually put upon the stage, there are of course many other marvels which are only reported, all of which redound to the credit of Dionysus as a divine wonder-worker. Patin,¹ indeed, goes so far as to say that "this felicitous expression of the marvellous is at once the excuse and the principal merit of the piece." These miracles are to be found mostly in the celebrated speech of the First Messenger. The narrative contains a beautiful description of the scene on Cithaeron at early dawn; of the Maenads as they awake from their

1. *Euripide* ii, p. 243.

pure slumbers and prepare themselves for a renewal of their revels; of the miraculous streams of wine, milk, and honey which the power of their god causes to gush from the soil or from the thyrsus; of the attempt made by the narrator and his fellow-herdsmen to seize Agaue and bring her back to the King; of the discomfiture of these men and the destruction of their herds, which are torn in pieces by the Bacchantes; finally, of the onslaught made by the women upon the villages in the foot-hills of Cithaeron and of the strange things which they do there. "Swooping down like a host of foes they scattered everything up and down. They snatched babes from the houses, and whatsoever they laid upon their shoulders clung there without bonds, and fell not to the dark earth, whether bronze or iron. On their tresses they did carry fire and it did not scathe them. Then did the villagers, thus pillaged by the Bacchantes, rush to arms in anger. Thereupon, my lord, was there a fearsome sight, for the spear they wielded drew no blood, but the Bacchantes, hurling the thyrsus, wounded them, yea, and turned them to flight—women worsting men!—aided surely by some god."¹

1. Vv. 754—764. No doubt it is of this passage in particular that Roux is thinking when he calls the miracles "puerile" (*Du merveilleux dans la tragédie grecque*, p. 69). As for the victory of the Maenads, it was no uncommon thing, as is well known, for the thyrsus to have a spear-point hidden in the ivy (cp. Lucian, *Dionysus*, §4). The feats mentioned in the passage translated above are undoubtedly mere grotesque unmeaning tricks, like those of a conjuror, rather than miracles. Dr. Murray's graceful translation has more dignity than the original:

They caught up little children from their homes,
High on their shoulders, babes unheld, that swayed
And laughed and fell not; all a wreck they made;
Yea, bronze and iron did shatter, and in play
Struck hither and thither, yet no wound had they;
Caught fire from out the hearths, yea, carried hot
Flames in their tresses and were scorched not!

I have no wish to vulgarize the passage, but what happened strikes me as a kind of harlequinade. The Bacchantes rush into the village to give the people a fright. They raid the kitchen, pretend to steal the baby, and overturn the furniture. They seize the pots and pans and play tricks with them. Such clowning is one side, the comic side, of the Dionysiac ecstasy, and Euripides was sane enough to see it.

This account has not, indeed, all the importance to which, on a first reading, its abundant miracles would seem to entitle it, for after the fiasco of Pentheus' palace on the stage itself, we are quite at liberty to give scant credence to marvels which are only reported. Even if this *ῥῆσις* were convincing in itself, it would be deprived beforehand of three-parts of its cogency by the wretched *εἰρησέ* which it follows. But it cannot stand even on its own merits.

It must have struck many readers that the three lines delivered by this man (vv. 660-662) are verbose, pompous, and almost entirely irrelevant :¹

Πενθεῦ κρατύνων τῆσδε Θεβαίας χθονός,
ἦκω Κιθαιρῶν' ἐκλιπῶν, ἴν' οὔποτε
λευκῆς ἀνείσαν χιόνος εὐαγείς βολαί.

In this he is unlike other Messengers in Euripides, including the Second Messenger of this very play. The fact has escaped comment, no doubt partly because it is in any case trifling, partly because it leads apparently nowhere. In reality these lines are not without value, as they let us see with what kind of person we have to deal. This method has analogies with that irritating custom followed by Ben Jonson and the comic dramatists of the Restoration, of giving the characters names describing their salient "humour," and so saving the audience the trouble of finding out at whom they are to laugh. Euripides has his names fixed for him by tradition, and as he cannot call the man "Brainless Manywords, a foolish neatherd," he produces the same effect by the empty bombast which he puts into his mouth. And we are not long in finding out that the peasant is an utter dullard. In the midst of his glib recital of the miracles wrought by the Bacchantes in procuring their morning meal, he comments thus (vv. 712-3) :

1. And probably not even true. Cp. Dr. Sandys' quotation from Col. Mure on v. 662.

ᾧσσι' εἰ παρῆσθα, τὸν θεὸν τὸν νῦν ψέγεις
εὐχαΐσιν ἂν μετῆλθες, εἰσορῶν τάδε.

And yet, by his own account, at least one of those who were present was so unimpressed that he at once proposed to interrupt the revels by seizing a leader of the Bacchantes. Incidentally, we hear that even among the ordinary rustics there was much difference of opinion about the revels. Finally, the *πλάνης κατ' ἄστει* gains his point, and even the Messenger himself joins in the impious attempt!¹ If even superstitious rustics were so little impressed by wonders which this man would have us believe they were actually witnessing, what effect can the poet have expected the mere recital of them to have upon his own more cultivated and critical audience?

But before he reaches this point he gives us a description of the women on Cithaeron as he first saw them (vv. 683-8):

ἠῆδον δὲ πᾶσαι σώμασιν παρειμέναι,
αἱ μὲν πρὸς ἐλάτης νῶτ' ἐρεισάσαι φόβην,
αἱ δ' ἐν δρυὸς φύλλοισι πρὸς πέδιφ κᾶρα
εἰκῆ βαλοῦσαι σωφρόνως, οὐχ ὡς σὺ φῆς
ῥῆνωμένας κρατῆρι καὶ λωτοῦ ψόψῳ
θηρᾶν καθ' ἕλην Κύπριν ἡρημωμένην.

/φ

It is plain from his description that the word *σωφρόνως* can only refer to the absence of men from among the Bacchantes. It would be impossible for him to tell whether they were or were not in a sleep of intoxication,

1. The parallel in the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* (vv. 260 sqq.) is worth noticing. Orestes and Pylades are hiding in a cave, when they are discovered by some herdsmen. The first to see them thinks them *δαίμονες*. Then another, who is *θεοσεβής*, utters a solemn prayer to the new-comers, addressing them pompously by the names of various sea-gods. "But another, a lawless, reckless fool, laughed at the prayer, and said that these were shipwrecked sailors hiding in the cave . . . since they had heard that here we offer strangers as a sacrifice." This "fool" persuades his fellows to seize the Greeks and take them to be killed. Clearly in the *Iphigeneia* the *μάταιος*, who is exactly like the *πλάνης κατ' ἄστει* in the *Bacchae*, in the end has the laugh of his credulous companions. It would be bold to assume that Euripides in the latter play intends a definite reference to the earlier (though the plot of the *Helena* is alluded to at the end of the *Electra*), but the parallel is in any case instructive.

which latter possibility is (to say the least) not excluded by the words *παρειμέναι* and *εἰκῆ*. But he is so stupid that, when he has refuted one of two charges which happen to be somewhat closely connected with one another, he thinks he has refuted them both. The matter is not in itself one of any great moment, but it serves to show, what Euripides was deeply concerned in showing, that the Messenger has no idea of what is evidence and what is not.

To make it more certain still that he is untrustworthy, he relates as if he has been an eye-witness¹ things which he can only know by hearsay. He and his companions have run off and left their herds to their fate. The Maenads, after tearing these animals to pieces, rush off "with the speed of birds" to Hysiae and Erythrae, where they do more marvels. It is next to impossible that the herdsmen follow them in their career, and he nowhere asserts that they did; yet his words afford no hint that he did not personally view their feats (such as they were) in these villages. On the contrary, he implies that he has seen everything. Had he been a trustworthy man, like the Messenger in the *Heracleidae*, he would have said, like him:

τὰπὸ τοῦδ' ἦδη κλύων
λέγοιμ' ἂν ἄλλων, δεῦρο δ' αὐτὸς εἰσιδῶν.²

What, then is the value of his report as a testimony to the new religion? All he can say is that he did not see the Bacchantes intoxicated or guilty of other misconduct,³ and that they performed two series of marvels. One of these he has probably learnt only

1. Cp. v. 706: οὐπερ τὸ δεινὸν ἦν θέαμ' ἰδεῖν.

2. *Heracleidae*, vv. 847, 8.

3. But the last words of his speech are significant (vv. 773-4):

οἶνον δὲ μηκέτ' ὄντος οὐκ ἔστιν Κύπρις
οὐδ' ἄλλο τερπνὸν οὐδὲν ἀνθρώποις ἔτι.

I should be the last to judge the Dionysiac religion by what a man like this says of it, but it is most inopportune that he should talk so in Pentheus' hearing. The other friends of Dionysus, of course, most carefully avoid this argument.

by hearsay, and in any case they have as little bearing on religion as any surprising trick ever exhibited. The other marvels, those which he saw, produced a dubious effect even on superstitious peasants, and they belong, moreover, to precisely that type of "miracle" which can most easily be performed by a quite human ingenuity.¹

The value, then, of this magnificently-worded² narrative is simply that we are shown how easily stupidity and superstition combined can construct a superficially convincing tale out of very poor materials; the story is another lesson in the history of myth. Accordingly it constitutes what I am at present calling a "difficulty," because instead of giving support to the Dionysiac religion it tends strongly to throw discredit upon it.

(ii.) The next point, though only a hint contained in a line or two, has much importance. Pentheus has been persuaded by the Stranger to give up his plan of using force and to go to Cithaeron disguised as a Maenad, in order to see for himself what their orgies are. He comes out of the palace and we hear in his first words the symptoms of his rising madness (vv. 918-922):

1. A bottle of milk or wine buried in the soil would be quite enough *σκευή* in this case. Cp. Dr. Sandys' note (*Introd.*, p. xvii): "At the festivals of Dionysus these marvellous streams may have been produced by mechanical means, as suggested by Hero *de automatis*, p. 247, ed. 1693, *ἐκ μὲν τοῦ θύρσου τοῦ Διονύσου ἦτοι γάλα ἢ ὕδωρ ἐκπιτυσθήσεται. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ σκύφους οἶνος ἐκχυθήσεται ἐπὶ τὸν ὑποκείμενον πανθήρισκον κ.τ.λ.*"

2. The inconsistency involved in giving such praise to the style of an account the narrator of which I have treated as contemptible, is really illusory. We may say of all the three tragedians that their characters, whether educated or ignorant, speak too much in the same fashion; and even Euripides, who pays, on the whole, more attention than his predecessors to propriety in sketching his less important persons, is open to reproach in this connexion. Of Greek tragedy, as a whole, it may be said, parodying the lines of Scott:

Groom *talks* like noble, squire like knight,

As fearlessly and well.

Herein it compares unfavourably with the Elizabethan drama, in which convention gives prose to less dignified characters, and with the Sanskrit drama, in which the speakers use different dialects according to their sex or rank.

καὶ μὴν ὄραν μοι δύο μὲν ἡλίους δοκῶ,
 δισσὰς δὲ Θήβας καὶ πόλισμ' ἐπτάστομον·
 καὶ ταῦρος ἡμῖν πρόσθεν ἡγείσθαι δοκεῖς
 καὶ σὺ κέρατα κρατὶ προσπεφυκέναι.
 ἀλλ' ἢ ποτ' ἦσθα θήρ; τεταύρωσαι γὰρ οὖν.

One at first supposes that Dionysus has made a change in his head-dress while behind the scenes.¹ But the reference to his appearance is joined to mention of other things which must be due to the king's hallucination—the two suns and the double city. It would not be natural to combine a real effect with two imaginary effects. But the question is settled by the silence of the Chorus. One of Dionysus' most famous shapes was, of course, that of the bull-headed god; *φάνηθι ταῦρος* cry the Maenads at a crisis in the play,² and here we have Bacchus appearing to his new "convert" with a bull's horns. If this had been a "real" effect, that is, if the actor had changed his head-dress, there can be no doubt that the Chorus would have saluted their god (no longer merely their leader) with joy and amazement. As they say nothing at all, it is certain that the horns are a delusion of Pentheus. The sacred mystery of the bull-god is put on a level with the "seeing double" which is a notorious sign of intoxication!³ The inference seems irresistible that such notions of the attributes of Bacchus have no better foundation than the tipsy visions with which they are here associated.

(iii.) There are certain passages in which a disconcerting prominence is given to the *intrusive* character of the new worship. Dionysus, of course, came much later into Greek religion than the other Olympians,⁴ and his

1. Thus Schöne (*Einl.*, p. 19) says: "Wahrscheinlich stellte sich Dionysos jetzt in seiner Eigenschaft als ταυροκέρωσ θεός dar, mit zwei Hörnchen über der Stirn; dies täuschte den Pentheus."

2. V. 1017.

3. It is somewhat surprising that of all the scholars who have attempted to interpret or emend vv. 1157-8 (*νάρθηκά τε πιστόν Ἄιδαν ἔλαβεν εὐθυρσον*) no one has attempted to explain *πιστόν* as *potabilem*, implying that Pentheus is confused by wine administered to him by Dionysus while inside the palace.

4. See Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena*, ch. viii. Cp. Herodotus ii, 145.

cult was militant, not gradually asserting itself by gentle influences, but conquering opposition, both physical and spiritual, at almost every step. But we should not have expected a poet who glorifies the god to lay stress on the fact that there was at first no place for him among the earlier deities. Yet not only are we told (vv. 298-9) that one of his prerogatives was *μαντική*, hitherto the monopoly of Apollo among the Olympians, but emphasis is laid on the encroachment (vv. 306-7)—*ἔτ' αὐτὸν ὄψει κάπῃ Δελφίσι πετραις*, where *καί* is very pointed. Why is not this antagonism kept studiously in the background? Aeschylus, in a passage¹ which is devoted to an elaborate catalogue of the deities connected with Delphi, instinctively does his best to whittle away the importance of this invasion of Dionysus, so inconvenient to his school of religious thought; *Βρόμιος δ' ἔχει τὸν χῶρον, οὐδ' ἀμνημονῶ*, says he, as if by an afterthought. Euripides does no such thing; he flaunts the difficulty in our faces. And to complete the mockery this suicidal theology is put into the mouth of a *μάντις*, a priest of Apollo, of all persons in the world, who is praised² for his loyalty to the god of Delphi! And even the formidable Ares has to surrender a part of his prerogative.³ This statement also is put into the mouth of Teiresias. Once more, when Pentheus, in his infatuation, thinks he can move mountains and offers to uproot Cithaeron, Dionysus rejoins ironically:

*μὴ σὺ γε τὰ Νυμφῶν διολέσῃς ἰδρύματα
καὶ Πανὸς ἔδρας, ἐνθ' ἔχει σπρίγματα.*⁴

Now, Dionysus is the god of the forces of Nature, of primitive life in all its spontaneity. So were Pan and the Nymphs, whose cult therefore the Bacchic religion tended in a degree to supersede. Mention of Pan is as *mal à propos* here as that of Apollo earlier in the play,

1. The prologue of the *Eumenides*. See Dr. Verrall (*Euripides the Rationalist*, pp. 222-4).

2. Vv. 328-9.

3. Vv. 302-4.

4. Vv. 951-2.

and to make the "Lydian" tender on behalf of his predecessors¹ is comic in the extreme.

(iv.) The claim just mentioned, that Dionysus is a war-god, brings us to our fourth point. His followers and he frequently had to fight pitched battles—so ran popular report. But in the masterly scene which follows the First Messenger's speech we find him anxiously avoiding an appeal to arms. Pentheus, on hearing of the triumph of the Maenads over the villagers, breaks out into violent anger and excitement (vv. 778-786):

ἤδη τόδ' ἐγγύς ὥστε πῦρ ὑφάπτεται
 ὑβρισφα Βακχῶν, ψόγος ἐς Ἑλληνας μέγας.
 ἀλλ' οὐκ ὀκνεῖν δεῖ· στείχ' ἐπ' Ἡλέκτρας ἰὼν
 πύλας· κέλευε πάντας ἀσπιδηφόρους
 ἵππων τ' ἀπαντᾶν ταχυπόδων ἐπεμβάτας
 πέλτας θ' ὅσοι πάλλουσι καὶ τόξων χερί
 ψάλλουσι νευράς, ὡς ἐπιστρατεύσομεν
 Βάκχαισιν· οὐ γὰρ ἀλλ' ὑπερβάλλει τάδε,
 εἰ πρὸς γυναικῶν πεισόμεσθ' ἂ πάσχομεν.

This finely vigorous speech, one would suppose, gives our young Ares his opportunity. What could be better than to take up this challenge, to allow his antagonist to lead out every available fighting man in Thebes and then vanquish him at the head of a female host? Moreover, the Maenads have succeeded very well in a kind of preliminary campaign, even when lacking their leader's help. But no; Dionysus will have none of it, though in the prologue he has expected war and has viewed the prospect of it with no expressed dissatisfaction. Pentheus insists, and the other continues to shirk the contest, from which he only saves himself by throwing a magical infatuation upon the king, who gradually

1. It is of course asserted by Herodotus (ii, 145) that Pan was a god far younger than Dionysus, but clearly in this place Euripides chooses to regard him as established and revered before the time of Dionysus' invasion. It is hardly necessary to point out that what is said in this essay about Dionysus and other gods is not to be judged in the light of modern knowledge of Greek religion, but by what Euripides himself knows and says on these matters. Probably no Greek knew half the *facts* about the origin and nature of his own religion which have been discovered by modern research.

loses his will-power and is brought to consent to Dionysus' proposal that he should go alone and unarmed¹ to the mountains. Why is this? That it is not his purpose to spare Pentheus we know, and though he affects to shrink from needless waste of Theban blood (v. 837) this tenderness is not in agreement with his general character, seeing that women under his influence have already attacked and wounded unoffending villagers. Besides, the manner in which Pentheus is actually put to death is no more to the credit of the god than his fall in such an open conflict would have been; much less, in fact, for his end excites pity and indignation on all hands. The only explanation left is the damning admission that Dionysus is afraid of the result of a battle. Whether it is moral or physical courage which he lacks is not plain, but the play contains what look like indications that he is not physically brave. There is a curious tone noticeable in his words at the end of the scene between him and the Chorus after the alleged miracle of the palace. He has been blustering and boasting until his ear catches the sound of footsteps inside the door. Pentheus is coming out. Hereupon we see an immediate change of manner—the Exarch is almost modest in his language, and *τί ποτ' ἄρ' ἐκ τούτων ἐρεῖ;* is ludicrously commonplace and inadequate to the supposed terrors of the past quarter of an hour. The hero of the "miracle" is flurried, not to say frightened, as may be seen from the lame and confused manner² in which he answers the King's stern questioning.³

1. The instruction which Dionysus gives to Pentheus, that he should disguise himself as a Maenad, is probably owing chiefly to his desire that the prince shall have no weapon when he is set upon. To tell him openly that he must not take his sword would excite suspicion, but the assumption of female attire would have the same result.

2. Notice the fumbling repetition of *πόδα* in v. 647, and the rough metre of v. 649.

3. It is true that in allowing himself to be arrested in the first instance Dionysus shows undoubted courage, but since then he has apparently lost nerve. Pentheus, as he tells us, has drawn his sword and flourished it recklessly. He realizes now that the king is not to be trifled with.

(v.) The last point is concerned with the narrative of the Second Messenger, who describes the death of Pentheus. This man is some degrees more trustworthy than his predecessor; at any rate, when he is not sure of a thing he has the candour to confess it.¹ When once the king has been seated on the tree, we are told that the Stranger was no longer to be seen, but a voice—"presumably that of Dionysus"—called aloud from the sky to the Maenads to take vengeance upon the watcher. He continues (vv. 1086-8):

αἱ δ' ὡσὶν ἤχην οὐ σαφῶς δεδεγμέναι
ἔστησαν ὀρθὰ καὶ διήνεγκαν κόρας,
ὁ δ' αὖθις ἐπεκέλευσεν.

Thus the Messenger reports in full the words of the Voice, but the women to whom they are addressed do not hear distinctly. How is this? We are reduced to choose between two suppositions: (i.) that the Messenger draws upon his imagination, and makes a mere noise, such as thunder, into articulate speech²; (ii.) that the Stranger had not gone to Heaven at all, but had slipped away into the wood, which, being *δυσεύρετος*,³ would easily conceal him. In the latter case the Messenger would be much nearer to him than the Bacchantes, and so would naturally hear more distinctly. The first alternative is most unlikely, for when the Voice speaks again the Maenads act according to the command which the Messenger says he heard at first. This second narrative, then, which is supposed to record the final triumph of Dionysus, and which, though it is not (like

1. Cp. vv. 1078-9: ἐκ δ' αἰθέρος φωνή τις, ὡς μὲν εἰκάσαι | Διόνυσος, ἀνεβόησεν.

2. Cp. *St. John* xii., 29: "Some said, It thundered. Others said, An angel spake unto him."

3. V. 1221.

the first) studded with miracles, has yet wonders of its own,¹ shows us the god compelled, in no dignified fashion, to repeat his command—the command for which we have so long been waiting—and concealing himself at the critical moment of his victory.

1. These are discussed in Appendix II. They need not detain us now, as we have at present no definite reason not to credit them, so that they are not "difficulties" in the sense in which the word is used in this and the preceding chapters.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EXPLANATION.

Thus of the great community of nature
 A denizen I lived; and oft in hymns
 And rapturous thought even with the gods conversed,
 That not disdain sometimes the walks of man.

THOMSON, *Agamemnon*.

Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum! Such is the evil pass to which we are brought by the assumption, not merely that Euripides glorifies the god, but even that he accepts Dionysus as a god at all. Everything which we know of the poet, of his work, of contemporary thought, and of contemporary opinion about his relations with literature, philosophy, and religion, forbids us to suppose that he believed in a god like the being whom we have seen portrayed in the *Bacchae*—a cruel schemer, an unbalanced enthusiast, a discredited exponent of doctrines the valuable part of which he flings away in order to secure at any cost a reluctant acceptance of their lower and more barbarous side. Euripides did not believe in the divinity of the mysterious being whose personality dominates the play. But this purely negative position is by no means all; it is only the beginning of what Euripides thinks and wishes his countrymen to think. As much as this has been advanced before, but never with heartiness, and has met with little support; for it is, indeed, difficult to understand what is involved in this negative position, unless we can discover what Euripides thought the Stranger *was*, as well as what he thought he was *not*. For it is impossible to rest satisfied with the view that he did not believe in Dionysus (whoever he was) at all, since—to revert to an argument

already mentioned—what are we in that case to make of the fact that he appears upon the stage?

Hence, perhaps, the almost total absence of *scholia*. Hence, certainly, the dissatisfaction felt by those who attempt to explain the *Bacchae*. The solutions which have been offered have been set out with doubts and reservations; naturally, for wherever we turn we seem to see arguments on both sides placed in perplexing proximity. On the one hand, therefore, we have the supposition¹ that the poet is frankly going back on the opinions of a lifetime and is recanting in favour of the popular faith; on the other, the theory² that the *Bacchae* is a polemic against that faith. Some³ have confined themselves to commenting on the inconsistency or vagueness of Euripides. In view of this variety of explanations, there is an ever-present temptation to shelve the religious aspect of the play altogether, and to fix one's attention upon the poetic beauties which, as is agreed by almost all, are here found in an abundance unparalleled in the poet's work. But, alluring as such a temptation is, criticism can never be allowed to stop short at this point. No writer in the later years of the fifth century could treat of a religious theme with no sense of the life-and-death struggle going on between rationalism and the old myths. Euripides, above all, was impelled by the bent of his mind to take account of this conflict and most certainly did so, as ancient testimony very abundantly proves; and it follows that we cannot call our judgments in any sense final till they have estimated his attitude towards that traditional religion an important phase of which is the very stuff of the *Bacchae*. One begins, then, with the assumption: "the poet either did or did not credit the existence of the god Dionysus." Then one party says: "He did not

1. Supported by Nägelsbach, Paley, Pehle, Wecklein, Bernhardt, K. O. Müller, Berlage, and Gomperz.

2. Held by Roux, Patin, Bruhn, and Decharme.

3. *E.g.*, Rumpel, Janske, and Campbell.

credit it, we suppose, but in that case why bring him on to the stage and permit the Chorus to praise him so heartily?" Another party says: "He did credit it, we suppose, but what madness to make him hateful and his opponent worthy of admiration and pity!" That is, in each of these two cases there is an irresistible argument *pro* and an insurmountable objection *contra*; a final theory of the poet's main purpose seems as far away as ever. But the original supposition does not exhaust all the possibilities. There is a third alternative, to which the preceding discussion has been more and more unmistakably leading us. Euripides did believe in the existence of the person whom he puts on his stage, *but not in his godhead*.

It has been far too hastily assumed that "the person put upon the stage," as I have called him for clearness' sake, is to be identified with the god Dionysus whom the Chorus worship and whom the dramatist's contemporaries worshipped. This, I think, is the secret of all the confusion. The god has by some readers been reproached with crimes and blunders which the Stranger saw fit to perpetrate; by others the Stranger has been pardoned for those same crimes and blunders on the strength of the glories of the god of whom he was only the servant—and a very unsatisfactory servant too. We have to bear in mind what Pentheus insisted on bearing in mind, that it is the *Stranger's* character, actions, and claims, which are our chief interest on the first appearance of the Dionysiac worship at Thebes. (What the *god* is, and whether he is a being worthy of veneration, are questions quite distinct from those which concern his representative; they are secondary questions, moreover, which, it is true, Euripides does discuss, but which, with the state of contemporary opinion in his eye, he regards as of less importance).¹ Now the Stranger does, to be sure, lay claim to godhead in most emphatic

1. See below, pp. 109—113.

language¹ (when the two hard-headed characters of the play—Pentheus and Teiresias—are absent), but it is surely great complaisance to believe him. We have the best reasons for refusing to do so when he makes claims much less difficult to allow; why should we take his word for an amazing assertion which is not only not supported by the irresistible proofs which alone could make it credible, but which is contradicted over and over again by the facts of the play? We are not to identify the "Lydian" with Dionysus the god, for Euripides has made the identification impossible. This is, I think, the key to the whole mystery; and, amazing as the theory appears to be at first sight, it enables us to form a far better explanation of the play and its difficulties than would otherwise be conceivable. That it raises other difficulties I do not deny, but they are of far less magnitude than those which it removes, and can be more conveniently discussed when the ground has been cleared. Meanwhile, one question presses for an answer. If the "Lydian" is not Dionysus, who is he?

We shall find a clue to his real character most easily by examining once more the scene which we have shown to contain the greatest difficulty in the drama—the greatest difficulty, that is, on any ordinary view of it. Euripides is by no means the only author whose "obscure" passages are the most valuable guides to his meaning. It is time to attempt an explanation of the fraudulent character with which Euripides invests the palace-miracle. What are the circumstances? The Stranger is imprisoned somewhere in the building, and the Chorus are left alone before it. Suddenly the captive calls aloud from within, and the women in terror exclaim that the house of Pentheus is falling asunder. After a time the Stranger comes out, and in the course of conversation reminds them that the palace has collapsed in utter ruin. But the spectators see that it is all

1. In the prologue and the epilogue.

imposture. It is quite certain that nothing of the kind occurs, yet the Chorus think so, and Dionysus¹ says so. How can this be? Mere persuasion may induce a man to embrace an opinion which is contrary to his better judgment, but what kind of persuasion is it that convinces him in spite of the evidence of his eyes? Only one—*hypnotism*, or what less scientific ages would call magic.² Dionysus is a magician—"a foreign wizard skilled in spells," as Pentheus quite accurately calls him—and he works his "miracles" by hypnotising his victims or companions into thinking that they see them. This hypothesis, and this alone, will solve the riddle of the sham miracle which is his leading proof of the divine power which he claims to possess. In this connexion we ought to examine more closely than has been usual the scene which immediately follows the reappearance of Dionysus from the palace.³ The "god," of course, is still acting, and tells his tale with fluency. But the manner of the Chorus is striking. Besides the predominant tone of relief and excitement, there is a peculiar air about what they say, which implies that they have been separated from their leader for a very long time. It is true that there is no direct statement to that effect, but to me the tone of vv. 608-9 :

ὦ φάος μέγιστον ἡμῖν εὐίου βακχεύματος,
ὡς ἐσεῖδον ἀσμένη σε, μονάδ' ἔχουσ' ἐρημίαν,

1. I shall continue to call him so for the sake of convenience. There will not be much to say about the god himself.

2. The lack of precision in this statement must extend in some degree to a large part of the discussion which now follows. It should be understood that in claiming certain powers for Dionysus I am not thinking of what hypnotism can really do, but of what Euripides probably thought it could do—a widely different thing. His knowledge of such powers would be very vague; and he would be almost certain to confuse the hypnotism known to modern science with the magic of fable, to which popular belief has always attributed practically unlimited powers.

3. Dr. Murray's remark (p. 172) on this passage is noteworthy: "This scene in longer metre always strikes me as a little unlike the style of Euripides, and inferior. It may mark one of the parts left unfinished by the poet, and written in by his son. But it may be that I have not understood it." I would suggest that the apparent inferiority is due to the fact that the scene is, and is meant to be, full of *unreality*.

is very strange unless we adopt such a view. Some thought of the kind appears to underlie Paley's otherwise thought of the kind appears to underlie Paley's otherwise unintelligible note on *μονάδα*: "They had not only been on the wild mountains, *ἐρημία*, but deprived of their leader, *μονοθεΐσαι*." Now they have not been parted from Dionysus for more than an exceedingly short interval,¹ but if they have been in a condition (as I am urging) in which they have taken no account of time, the same effect will have been produced on their minds. A person who has dozed for a few minutes generally thinks that far more time has elapsed than is really the case.

But whatever may be thought of this supposition from vv. 608—9, there is no room at all for doubt that the Chorus in their now normal state know nothing of the "miracle" which they have themselves acclaimed a few minutes ago. Their manner is exactly that of persons who have seen and heard nothing at all since Pentheus and Dionysus and the attendants left the scene. They make no mention of the fall of the house, nor of the presence of the god himself (as distinguished from their leader) within it—an event which they have just received with frantic delight. Moreover, they ask their friend how he has escaped from the power of Pentheus. Of course, they could not know the actual manner of his release; but, if they knew that the god himself had been present in such might as to overthrow the house, surely they would not stop to inquire into the less striking matter, which might have been effected in a dozen ways. In a case like this the greater marvel naturally swallows up the less. The truth is that for the moment the destruction of the palace and the presence of the god have vanished from their minds with the

1. It is quite true that a choric ode has been sung during this interval, and that these odes are supposed by convention to fill any amount of time required by the alleged synchronous action. But we are not to imagine an extraordinarily long time unless this is demanded by the events afterwards reported. Now the events which take place during the singing of the present ode probably demand no more time than would be needed to sing it.

cessation of the hypnotic trance which created them. All the Bacchantes know is that their leader has come back, and they eagerly ask him to tell them all about it. Then, by a brief but explicit reference, both to the collapse of the building and to the appearance of the god, he brings back the delusion to their minds; in this way it will become a permanent memory and form one more weapon against unbelievers. "This is the way," Euripides says in effect, "in which belief in personal gods first springs up. Specially susceptible persons are by more or less discreditable devices induced to believe that they have seen gods or have been spectators of miracles wrought by them, and these persons spread the story." It may be asked, in passing, how it is that if the Stranger really wishes to inculcate belief in the "miracle" he does not throw the magic influence upon the Thebans who come upon the stage later, and whose complete silence about it we have regarded as one great argument against its credibility. In the first place, the Chorus have been habitually under the magic influence, and it is therefore easier (one may naturally suppose) for the prophet to cause them to believe in so astonishing a fraud than it would be to convince the others, who are strange to it. Moreover,—and this is perhaps the more convincing suggestion, for it is indisputably true,—if the poet wishes, as he does wish, to convince the audience beyond the faintest doubt that the palace has not fallen, it is necessary, under the circumstances, for him to introduce someone who ought to see the ruinous condition of the house and who yet manifestly does *not* see it. Otherwise, the audience might imagine that, since all the persons of the play "see" the "miracle," they are by a stage convention supposed to see it too.¹

1. The first draft of this essay was written before the publication of Dr. Verrall's masterly *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides*. My theory of the nature of the palace-'miracle' has obvious analogies with Dr. Verrall's handling of the apparition of Iris and Madness in the *Hercules Furens*. See further Appendix III.

In fact, this is an excellent example of the poet's method of dealing with the religious legends. He takes care to make the supposed marvel as probable as is consistent with an irresistibly cogent demonstration that it never happened.¹

This self-styled god, according to the view of Euripides, is simply a human being with an abnormally complex character, amazing abilities, and a colossal ambition. He is, as he and his supporters claim, the son of Semele. What happened at Thebes before the arrival of the young prophet from the East, and most of what happened between that event and the return of Pentheus, is only vaguely adumbrated by the dramatist, but from the little he says directly and from the notion which we have formed of his theory about Dionysus, we can gather as much as is necessary to understand the play. Semele had consented to an illicit union with some unknown lover, and though the unhappy princess endeavoured to cover her fault by declaring (whether she believed her own story or not we cannot tell) that her lover was no other than Zeus himself, she lost the affection and sympathy of all her family, excepting only her kindly father. Cadmus had accepted her story, or affected to do so, led perhaps as much by a weak vanity² as by tenderness for his daughter's feelings. Uncharitable persons, indeed, went so far as to say that the tale of the Thunderer's fatal love was his invention alone.³ Before the birth of her child Semele was killed by lightning, and the terrible manner of her death afforded some support both to those who accused her of insulting Zeus by her claims and to those who believed that the unbearable splendour of the god had blasted the mortal woman in his embrace. The child was born before his time, and was sent away secretly by his

1. See pp. 16, *sq.*

2. Cp. vv. 181 *sqq.*, 333—6.

3. Cp. vv. 28—31.

grandfather to be reared in those eastern regions from which he had himself come long years before.¹ In the East the infant Dionysus had been bred and had grown to manhood amidst Oriental surroundings, and in an atmosphere so unlike that of Hellenic life that, though by some means (what they are we do not know, but they are not beyond conjecture) he is fully aware both of his parentage and of the stories about it, he only fitfully remembers that he is by birth a Greek.² Nature has herself endowed him with that strange power of fascinating and influencing others which was so important an ingredient in the success of men like Julius Caesar and Bonaparte, and which enabled men like Sertorius and Abd-el-Kader to postpone so long the inevitable moment of yielding to overwhelming odds. But not nature alone is responsible for this strange being. Possessed by a yearning for communion with the Divine, possessed also by a restless ambition of gaining the applause and veneration of the whole human race, he has spent his early years in fathoming the deepest secrets of the East, has learned all that the religious teachers of that home of religion could impart, and has acquired in perfection (if he does not naturally possess) that mysterious influence which we now call hypnotism, in our own day so often scoffed at, so often made the subject of the cheapest charlatanry, yet perforce acknowledged though little understood.

It is not hard to see how much light this theory of the antecedents and character of the young prophet throws upon the difficulties of the *Bacchae*, and, still more, how much fresh interest is added for us to this most weird

1. Cadmus' Eastern origin is mentioned in vv. 170 *sq.*, and 1025.

2. This knowledge comes out in a single flash, by a splendid stroke of dramatic art, at a crisis in the play. When Dionysus comes forth from the palace, and sees the Maenads prostrated in abject dread before it, his Greek contempt for such hysterical terror leaps to his lips, and he addresses them with curt disdain as "barbarians" (*βάρβαροι γυναῖκες* v. 604). Dr. Murray's translation of the phrase ("Ye Damsels of the Morning Hills") obscures this brusqueness.

and fascinating of our poet's productions. Never did Euripides show so clearly his breadth of range or how little he accepted those traditional boundaries between Greek and Barbarian which his most enlightened contemporaries made it a point of unvarying custom, almost of religion, to observe, as when he portrayed with marvellous delicacy of feeling this wondrous youth, so beautiful, so inspiring, so fierce and cruel. We may imagine how the mind of the poet—old in years but younger than ever in vigour of conception and fresh vividness of thought—dwelt upon the legend of Dionysus till he realised by the perfect sympathy of genius how the youth had been moulded by his own fiery impulses and by the religious atmosphere of the East. The region which in this play is most closely and most frequently connected with his earlier years is Asia Minor, but he himself at the outset¹ enumerates in glowing language all the lands of south-western Asia as the scene of his wanderings. The general voice of tradition more explicitly points to India as the theatre of his earliest triumphs, and truly he was such an one as only India could breed. We, too, can picture him spending his days in the schools where Pythagoras and Heraclitus would have been humble scholars, or listening to the discourse of priests and saints whose zeal for their hoary religion had brought them across mighty streams and illimitable plains, preaching as they went the grim and shadowy doctrines which for millenniums have held spellbound the reverent mind of Hindostan; then at night wandering along the banks of the holy Ganges meditating upon the Heaven from which it flows and the Heaven which is its destination. Learned in all the wisdom and the most occult science known to the philosophers of the East, saturated to his being's core with the misty and grandiose polytheism of that land of marvels, Dionysus had learnt by sure, though slow, degrees (for revelations

1. Vv. 13—19.

come not always in one blinding flash), that he was a part of the nature which surrounded him. Deep within his own soul he felt that he was brother to all creatures beneath the sky, that the life which animated the tree and the breeze murmuring amongst its leaves was the same as that which stirred his own heart. He could have echoed, with no sense of degradation, rather with a feeling of intoxicating rapture, those words of the ancient Hebrew who styled himself "a brother to jackals and a companion to ostriches," who was even "in league with the stones of the field."¹ Hence little by little he became unconsciously the first adherent of a new religion, in one sense the deepest and the truest, because the simplest, religion of all, and yet containing, by reason of its very simplicity, the possibility of evil misinterpretation—the worship of Nature. This youthful prophet had in his single heart the first stirrings of that elemental sympathy with Nature which has been in turn the profoundest thought of philosophers and the loftiest inspiration of poets. But the goddess has many voices, and according as we listen to this or that we may rise to kinship with the Divine or sink by morbid self-abasement to depths of which the beasts are incapable. For Nature is the converse of Themis in this, that under one name she is many. It was inevitable that a man young and excitable, with all an Oriental's tendency to material voluptuousness and exquisite cruelty interweaving itself everywhere with the loftiest spirituality, should have been capable of becoming what we see in Dionysus when confronted by coldness and opposition.

But before the day of hardening conflict and dubious victory which awaited him in the distant country of his birth, his life was one ecstasy of closer and closer communion with the heart of things. At last came an experience which seemed to bid him lay aside his life of dreaming and enter on a new exercise of his splendid powers. He discovered the wondrous properties of the

1. *Job xxx, 29; v, 23.*

grape. The mental exaltation which its juice could impart seemed to him the key to deeper life, to break down the barrier between mortal man, imprisoned within himself, and that ocean of existence perfect mingling with which was perfect joy and peace unutterable. By means of this, it seemed to him, might all men win that life of bliss to which he himself, for all his knowledge and for all his yearning, had hitherto but imperfectly attained. Such thoughts as these, stimulating almost to delirium the mind which mystic rapture and ecstatic impulse had prepared for their complete reception, wrought upon Dionysus till he dreamed himself more than man. He fancied that that absorption of the human spirit into the soul of Nature for which he longed so passionately had in his case already been effected. Then there arose in his mind the memory of that old half-forgotten tale of Semele's union with Zeus. Surely this was the confirmation of his own brooding dream! He had found himself at last—no longer the base-born wanderer, half-Greek, half-barbarian, but Dionysus the divine, sprung from the king of gods, revealer to men of the innermost secret of life and giver of that which was the means to its realisation.

Thus, when he has arrived at manhood, we find him roaming over Asia at the head of his band of votaries, male¹ and female, preaching everywhere the religion that happiness lies in the joy of realised kinship with all living things, and especially with the unfettered innocent life of the wild creatures of mountain and forest. His teaching appealed to feelings rooted very deeply in the Eastern mind. *πᾶς ἀναχορεύει βαρβάρων τὰδ' ὄργια*,² for the Asiatics were more prone to spiritual intoxication than others farther West. They had a keener sense of the infinite

1. Though of course in the *Bacchae* the train of Dionysus consists entirely of women, this is an exception. See Miss Harrison, *Prolegomena*, ch. viii, especially p. 380 ("with him are always his revel rout of Satyrs and of Maenads").

2. V. 482.

charm and majesty of Nature than was innate in the Greeks. With him wandered his thiasus, his train of chosen ones, whom he had first and most deeply initiated into his new worship. Their life was his life, but whom did they adore? Not the real giver of the grape and revealer of the secrets of religion, not the teacher whom they saw and followed, though his mere knowledge of human nature and his depth of spirituality, not to speak of his matchless power to sway men's minds by personal charm and magical skill, might of themselves be supposed evidence of more than human greatness. Dionysus did not command them to worship him face to face. Instead of himself he proposed for their veneration that which had first inspired his own soul, the life of Nature, of which he called himself—as indeed he was—merely the privileged hierophant. But he spoke to his companions of that great Abstraction under the names of mysterious persons—of Cybele,¹ the earth-mother, and of Dionysus the joyous young wine-god, son of Zeus and Theban Semele. Whether through a desire of maintaining around his godhead a halo of remoteness and awe, or through uneasy misgivings that his own absorption into divinity was not yet complete, he never declared his own identity with the personal god whom he proclaimed. Never for one moment did he reveal to them that he himself was the only person to receive their adoration—that behind him there was only the Manifold Mystery itself. Thus the brooding and capricious being enjoyed their worship as though behind a veil.

Revered, then, as a prophet by the region of his upbringing and even by the whole of south-western Asia, he turned his thoughts at length towards his native country. He determined to extend his new worship to Greece, to return to Thebes, to proclaim the godhead of Semele's child, and so to restore his despised mother to honour as the favoured one of Zeus. But he

1. Vv. 72—82, 120—134.

was bringing his wild revels to a people whose religious feeling and habits of thought were unlike anything he had yet encountered, and whose less excitable spirit had produced at least one man who was to check his progress and create obstacles which were new to him—obstacles which were fated to reveal the baser feelings which found a place in his nature, but which unbroken success had hitherto allowed to slumber. Unfortunately for his chances of initial success, though it was his natural choice, he made his entry into Greece at the most difficult point; Thebes was the object of his first attack. The hard-headed unimaginative Boeotian farmers were a bye-word in Hellas for their slowness of mind. For generations they had worshipped their own gods in their own way, more in the fashion of Jacob than of Abraham. Their royal house claimed to be born of earth, and the character of the people was good warrant for the fable. It is true that in the poetry of the Boeotian Hesiod there lay the germs of Orphic mysticism, but it needed centuries of thought and external stimulus to bring the plant to fruition; and meanwhile we learn from the same writings that the life of the common folk was dreary and sordid, their very religion prosaic, superstitious, unaspiring. It was among such a people that the young apostle was to bring a cult native and appropriate to races altogether different, to the land where the tropical sun had fired the blood and exalted the spirits of mankind, where to an emotional spirit existence was an intense fierce rapture, where the popular religion of marvels and the metaphysics of philosophers, sworn foes elsewhere, had called a long truce and had united in one religion which could, by whatever varying methods of interpretation, command the hearts of the populace and the intellectual adherence of the cultured.¹ How was this oil and water to mix? It was not simply the enormous and ever-present difficulty which has to be faced by all religious propagandists, the

1. See E. W. Hopkins, *The Religions of India*, chapter xi.

question, namely, how they are to win numerical success and popularity without sacrificing precisely those elements in their doctrines which they hold most precious; that is, how they are, in their quest for converts, to keep uninjured the beliefs which (if they embody a religion at all) must probably contain features strange and even repugnant to the mass of men. Dionysus could not have escaped this even if he had never re-crossed the Indus. Already he must have suspected that he had to choose between a secret whispered to a few and a vapid sentimentalism shared by millions. Signs are not lacking, indeed, that, like others, he made an attempt to combine the two. This must have been an obstacle which he met everywhere, the obstacle which religious fervour can as a rule surmount only when aided by the abilities of the statesman. But in Boeotia the difficulties were still more patent. No mere modification of doctrine, it might seem, but a radical change, was necessary to win the hearts of the majority. How could the small freeholder of Tanagra, whose greatest care was for his crops and whose sincerest prayer was that the Athenians might keep south of Cithaeron, be brought to give his soul to bathing in the inner beauties of Nature and to worship the man who was their hierophant? If anyone will try to imagine Auguste Comte at the head of a company of disciples making a similar attempt among the negroes of the West Indies, he will find a case presenting equal difficulties under circumstances widely dissimilar. Nor would the great Frenchman have found himself much nearer to attracting his humble auditors to a celebration of the feast of Charlemagne by claiming to be a son of Toussaint l'Ouverture.

But these peculiar difficulties and dangers brought out in the youthful Stranger qualities which had hitherto been dormant. Henceforth he shows himself, not only an inspiring leader, but also a finished and unscrupulous

diplomatist. The Hindoo has usually preferred craft to force, and Dionysus was in spirit a Hindoo. Moreover, even if he had wished to spread his religion by the sword he could not at this stage have made the attempt with any respectable prospect of success. In spite of his boastful soliloquies,¹ he was aware that the fury of a few hundred hysterical females would be of no use when faced by the cavalry and hoplites of Thebes.² Setting himself to gain a clear knowledge of his position, he soon learned that the peculiarities of the national character in general were not to be his only care; he had also to contend with the established religion and the hostility of the king, Pentheus. His first move was a master-stroke, and chance gave it complete success. The king happened,³ by one of those accidents which decide the course of history, to be at the moment absent from the city, and his grandfather, Cadmus, was at the head of affairs. A plotter less adroit than the newcomer might have formed the design of revealing his own identity as the son of Semele to the aged prince and of trusting to the latter's affection and pride to instal him at once in popular esteem. But how far could Dionysus venture to trust Cadmus' belief in his own tale about Zeus and Semele? Besides, not only was the old man passionately attached to Pentheus, but he was also growing somewhat senile, and—most important of all—he was strongly under the influence of the elderly priest of *Apollo*, Teiresias. With the instinct of a consummate intriguer, Dionysus at once perceived that it was with the latter that he must deal at first. To get the old prophet, the confidant of Cadmus and the religious dictator of the country, on his side would be to half-conquer at one blow two of the greatest difficulties which barred the

1. Vv. 50—52.

2. See the conversation between Dionysus and Pentheus, vv. 778—846.

3. V. 215, *ἐκδημος ὃν μὲν τῆσδ' ἐτύγχανον χθονός*. If Pentheus had been on the spot when Dionysus appeared, Euripides seems to think, the future of the new religion would have been different.

road. Accordingly, the first thing which the Stranger did (how, when, or where, we do not know, nor does it greatly matter) was to obtain an interview with Teiresias. What happened on that momentous occasion we can guess. We may conceive how the priest, with all his prejudices against a young man and a barbarian, gradually thawed in the presence of this fascinating youth who talked so persuasively and about whose individuality there was a nameless and irresistible charm. Nor is it impossible that the hypnotic power of which he was a master was here brought into play. We may imagine how his insinuating tongue would put his claims in the most attractive light and convince Teiresias, even against his will, that the thing was of God.

“You object,” we can hear him say, “that my religion is unnecessary and even pernicious to you Greeks. Unnecessary, because you already have a god of divination and a god of Nature. But is there not room for us beside Apollo and Pan? Dionysus is content to receive a second place, if only they will allow him a foothold. Moreover, we bring you something which is new in Greece. In the East Dionysus has discovered a plant the fruit of which yields a draught worthy of gods.¹ The juice of the grape is the cure for all evils of the mind and heart; it will refresh the body of the tired labourer and sink the wearied mind of the bereaved in sleep and forgetfulness.² Surely this is a boon which merits both acceptance and recognition! Then, again, you say that the religion which I teach will prove pernicious because it will unsettle the minds of your citizens and make them unfit for the sober life of every day. Not so; the best way of making sure that sobriety shall be the rule is to allow irresponsible license now and then. You yourself, Teiresias, must be aware that

1. Cp. Dr. Sandys' *Introd.*, p. xiii.

2. Vv. 378—385. Nonnus (xlv, 356—360) goes so far as to say that Dionysus healed the grief of Agaue herself with drugged wine.

the sluggish brains of your Boeotians would be all the better for an admixture of the enthusiasm which you call barbarian.¹ As for the god in whose name I bring these orgies into Greece, he is no Oriental like his followers. Smile if you will at the story which tells of the love of Semele and Zeus, but know that Semele's child did not perish, but was saved and born in due time as a divine creature who has been raised to the height of godhead by the sacredness of his parentage and by his own benefits to mankind. Whether you believe this or not, is, however, not the chief point to be considered. That divine power of some kind supports me you cannot doubt, and I call upon you to bring your countrymen over to my side."

"So much for the public aspects of my claim; now consider your own position. You, as priest of the established faith of the country and occupying a place of unique prestige among your fellow-citizens, have fears, doubtless, that the ascendancy of a new worship will damage your influence. You feel that your interests, if not your religion, must place you in opposition to me as the exponent of a new doctrine. You may give such fears to the winds. Already I have told you that the worship of Dionysus shall fall into line with that of Apollo.² You shall be priest of the combined religions, and need dread no rivalry which I shall offer. Who I am you do not know, and at present need not inquire, but I shall certainly not fix my dwelling in Thebes; what ambitions I have are centred elsewhere. You shall remain in undisputed control of the religious life of the country. Let Dionysus be once established at Delphi and you will have a double power behind you to strengthen your position. Let me tell you, too, that it needs such strengthening. You are not so safe as you would fain believe. Pentheus is jealous of your power in the state and of your influence over Cadmus;³ your

1. V. 196.

2. Vv. 298—301, 306—9.

3. Vv. 255, 345.

religious pretensions he views with contempt. I am convinced that if he were sure of popular support he would show as much hostility to Apollo himself as you say he will show to Dionysus.¹ You and I are both in danger from the same person; why not join forces with me? Your credit with the people and with Cadmus, allied to my own powers—powers the extent of which you do not at present guess—ought surely to be enough to crush this young meddler. Now is the moment to strike. He is away from Thebes. All that is left of the royal family is Cadmus and his three daughters. From neither party have we anything to fear. Women fall most easily under my own influence; these royal sisters shall be my first converts. And you, for your part, can answer for Cadmus. If you will take advice from me, you will work on his affections—they are his weak side.² He still feels deeply the wretched end of his other unfortunate daughter. Tell him that the story to which he gave his own sanction many years ago has suddenly received full and startling confirmation—that the son whom Semele bore to Zeus is the same person as the god whom I proclaim. The story was certainly wild in the first place, and the confirmation of it might be regarded as a coincidence too amazing and too overwhelming to be credited, but, if you knew our Eastern religions as well as I do, you would be acquainted with many quite as strange which have won universal credence. Your old friend will, it is likely, believe you, if only to glorify his family.³ Together we will set up my new religion and you will gain immensely in various ways.⁴ When Pentheus returns, he will find us firmly established, and if he attempts to resist, between us we will grind him to powder.”

With arguments of this kind we may suppose the

1. Vv. 346—351.

2. Cp. vv. 1305—1324.

3. Cp. vv. 333—6.

4. Cp. vv. 255—7.

Stranger to have prevailed with Teiresias. In the play itself we find that the old man has taken his stand decisively with the party to which we should have thought him most strongly opposed, and the support thus given was as important as Dionysus had expected. Indeed, the interview between these two master-spirits, in whose hands Cadmus, Pentheus, and Agaue are little more than puppets, though it has happened before the play begins, is more momentous than anything actually represented on the stage. The *Bacchae* belongs to a class of drama of which *Andromache* in ancient literature and *Rosmersholm* in modern literature afford striking examples—the class of play in which anterior events are not merely the faint prelude of present events, but in which present events are to be looked upon as in their nature supplementary, the necessary outcome of energies which have already done strange and vigorous execution. A great drama could have been written by Euripides on the events which happened between the return of Dionysus and the return of Pentheus. That some such interview as I have sketched, or at any rate some such drama in the mind of Teiresias, really took place, cannot be doubted. In support of the assertion that the priest was first of all won over by Dionysus and was initiated into many of that strange being's secrets, I offer the following considerations. Is it not in the highest degree unlikely that any new worship would be welcomed spontaneously by the high priest of the established religion of the country, a man whom his age, his profession, and his rank, not to mention his religious beliefs, would naturally make him the last convert instead of the first? Can anyone imagine Joanna Southcote enlisting an Archbishop of Canterbury among her earliest adherents? Again, all through that episode of the *Bacchae* in which he appears, Teiresias seems to be very much more familiar with Dionysus, his doctrines, and his claims, than Cadmus. Many of his remarks are

most mysterious, and have given great trouble to commentators; and where any meaning has been got out of them it is curiously in accord with the explanation now offered.¹ We should notice, also, the word *ἐξαιτώμεθα* in v. 360, which implies that the prophet is on friendly terms with Dionysus. Pentheus, in ordering the destruction of Teiresias' mantic seat, gives him fresh cause to acquiesce in the plot against his life.

The occasion is important also as marking the point at which Dionysus takes his downward step. It is here that he allows the baser sort of ambition to overpower the more spiritual. Hitherto it has been his object to teach men a religion which shall purify and bless their lives, and though success in this mission means incidentally a vast accession of personal dignity and power, no decisive test has yet been applied to show which he values most. But when he is confronted by determined opposition on the part of the king and inert indifference on the part of the men of Thebes, the less noble side of his nature at once and by instinct asserts itself. Rather than be true to his religion of joy and tranquillity, rather than depart quietly from the city which gives him so cold a welcome and leave it to come to a sense of what it has rejected, he determines to secure recognition of whatever kind and at whatever cost. In order that his religion may be received, he gives the lie to its great claim, that it brings happiness and peace. His own religious feeling has, after all, more of sensuous enthusiasm than of spirituality. Once entered on the

1. On vv. 326-7:

*μαίνει γὰρ ὡς ἄγνωστα, κοῦτε φαρμάκοις
ἄκη λάβοις ἄν οὔτ' ἄνευ τούτων νόσου* (Wecklein),

Dr. Sandys (retaining *νοσεῖς*) remarks: "The prophet hints (but not too darkly) that Pentheus is under a spell which is leading him to a doom beyond all remedy." Prof. Tyrrell (who also reads *νοσεῖς*) says: "The poet wishes to hint that Teiresias knows the snare into which Pentheus is being led by the pretended bacchant; and believes that his mind is already under the influence of the supernatural infatuation."

path of a vulgar rivalry with Pentheus for the support of Thebes, he sticks at nothing, and does not even give his opponent an opportunity of examining and accepting the new religion. If Pentheus, under the circumstances of the play, had accepted it, his acceptance would have been a mere swallowing at one gulp a whole body of teaching which the teacher himself had only gradually formulated. But though "high failure overleaps the bound of low successes," the low successes are not difficult for a man like Dionysus to win if he wishes for them. The large measure of success with which the coalition at once met is a high testimony to his astuteness. Cadmus was gained over by the priest, and Agaue, Ino, and Autonoe by Dionysus. At first there was one difficulty—a failure which was most dangerous to the whole enterprise. All the women of Thebes had followed the princesses to Cithaeron, but not a single Theban citizen had given his unequivocal adherence. With the caution characteristic of those who have something to lose they kept sedulously aloof from the innovation. But it was not long before the series of miracles which Dionysus pretended to perform forced their sluggish brains to regard him as divine. Before Pentheus determined to march in force to the mountains the prevailing feeling among his male subjects was dread of the new teacher.¹ Meanwhile such a considerable measure of success was encouraging in the extreme. Favoured by the king's absence, the plotters had produced a disruption in Theban society. All the women, young and old, had deserted their homes and most urgent family cares² to revel upon Cithaeron.

Such is the posture of affairs when Pentheus crosses the border on his return home. He has no sooner set foot upon Theban ground than he is apprised by some of his anxious and faithful subjects of what has passed in

1. Cp. the speeches of the servant and of the two messengers, *passim*.

2. Cp. vv. 699—702, 117—9.

his absence. Immediately he makes up his mind and acts with promptness. Orders are given to lay hands upon as many of the Theban bacchantes as his subordinates can find and to commit them to prison. Meanwhile he himself hastens to the capital at the head of his bodyguard and makes for the palace, where a still greater annoyance is awaiting him. In front of the gates he sees his grandfather, the sower of the dragon's teeth and the instructor of Greece, fantastically attired in garments of an Asiatic character. By the side of Cadmus the prince sees his own *bête noire* Teiresias in similar dress. The mortifying picture is no doubt completed by a glimpse of amused *ὀπαδοί* in the background. Pentheus takes Cadmus rigorously to task, as any other man would do in such a situation, and bitterly reproaches the prophet with leading his companion astray and espousing the new religion with the most interested motives. Both the elderly culprits reply, and their speeches are very characteristic. Eloquent and pointed to the highest degree as almost all speeches are in Euripides, they show how completely the two old Thebans have been over-persuaded by their new friend Dionysus, and at the same time how far they are from accepting his teaching in the same spirit as that in which it is accepted by the Asiatic Maenads.¹ Pentheus declines to argue, but indignantly refuses to "crown himself with ivy," and gives orders that the divining seat and wreaths of Teiresias be scattered to the winds. This development, which, as a matter of words, occupies a very trifling space, is one of the masterly touches of the play. It shows us Pentheus at his worst, hasty and intolerant, that proper subject of tragedy, the good man ruined by one flaw of character. It shows us, too, how Teiresias, at the precise moment when he is wavering most, receives by the malevolence of fate the impulse necessary to confirm him in his hostility. Pentheus

1. Cp. Dr. Verrall, *Classical Review* IX, pp. 225—8.

then allows the two to depart for the mountains, and proceeds to command the arrest of Dionysus himself, who is soon brought before him. The interview between the two men is depicted with a skill which is beyond all praise. What would even Sophocles or Plato have made of the simple theme offered by the contrast of two young Greeks differing widely in character and upbringing? Only Aeschylus could have equalled this splendid achievement, and even he, one thinks, could not have given the scene all the subtlety of character-drawing and all the pathos which lies in the misinterpretation which can fill two great spirits with mutual hostility. On one side is the youthful King, fearless, obstinate, and straightforward, nerved by an overwhelming sense of the responsibilities imposed by his high office. His family affections are strong, and his patriotism, whether of country or of blood, though parochial, is all the more intense. He upholds conventions, not because he cannot see beyond them, but because he feels their utility for those who cannot. On the other side stands the romantic figure of Dionysus, in every way a contrast to his opponent—in religion a mystic, in character given to schemes and stratagems, careless of the ordinary interests and duties of conventional life, presenting that strange but not rare combination of dreamy spirituality in theory with fearful possibilities of fiendish cruelty in practice. The great struggle has now come to a head between the normal and the extraordinary, the prosaic and the imaginative, the moral and the unmoral. The conflict is terrible, and though only one is defeated, neither comes out of it unscathed. Dionysus has been godlike, no doubt, in the serene sagacity which he has shown in dealing with Teiresias, Cadmus, and the royal sisters. But he is now confronted with an opponent more worthy of his steel, one moreover whose power is so great and whose suspicions are so strong that he must either be crushed at once or acknowledged as the victor.

Realising all that depends on the interview, Dionysus loses the loftiness which has characterised him hitherto. If his wish really is to bring joy and peace to Thebes, now is his opportunity. The only vigorous opposition which is being offered is that of Pentheus himself. Now is the time to reveal himself, or, at the least, to teach the king how great and noble is the new religion. But Dionysus has been incensed by the attitude already taken up by his opponent. Forgetting that the latter has had no opportunity of learning anything about his teaching except that it has resulted in disturbing the peace of the country, he gives way to his own excitable and arrogant temper, and chooses to regard the king as a deliberate enemy to him and his religion. His only replies to Pentheus' questions—suspicious indeed and haughty, but evincing a real wish to know more about the new god—are flippant and insulting evasions. The king finally loses patience, strips Dionysus of his flowing hair and thyrsus, and commits him to prison. The prophet is borne away into the palace to be imprisoned in the stable,¹ after which the famous "miracle" occurs. He throws the Maenads into a hypnotic trance, in which they think they see the palace falling into ruins, and calls aloud for fire to appear and burn the building. From the tomb of Semele a flame appears to burst and play round the sacred

1. Pentheus says (vv. 509, *sq.*): *χώρει καθείρξαι' αὐτὸν ἰππικαῖς πέλας φάτνασιν.* Prof. Kerr translates this simply and accurately: "Go—near the horse-stalls make him prisoner." Dr. Murray translates

Away, and tie him where the steeds are tied;
Aye, let him lie in the manger!

I cannot refrain from entering, with genuine reluctance, a protest against certain features in Dr. Murray's justly-celebrated translation of the *Bacchae*. I recognize, in agreement with his hosts of readers and admirers, the brilliant poetic power and finished scholarship which every page of his work exhibits. But I do protest against the way in which, as it seems to me, he consistently forces the language of Euripides up to an expression of greater spirituality than the poet himself has generally chosen to put into his words. Especially does Dr. Murray continually use phraseology which implies a close and almost entirely unwarranted comparison between Dionysus and Christ.

enclosure. This appearance probably exists only in the imaginations of the spellbound women, or some flame may in fact have arisen. We are expressly reminded¹ by the poet himself that the fire of Zeus still lives amid the wreck of Semele's house, immortal as the spite of Hera—in other words, that the region is volcanic.

But the Chorus are not the only victims of Dionysus' mysterious power; Pentheus has now fallen under the influence. Nothing in Greek tragedy, except perhaps the awful δ οὔτος οὔτος Οἰδίπους² is more full of the power to thrill the heart with simple words, as the way in which Dionysus describes his unearthly conquest: *πλησίον δ' ἐγὼ παρὼν ἡσυχος θάσσω ἐλευσσον*³—"and I, sitting close by him in quietness, looked upon him." He succeeds in convincing Pentheus that the house is on fire. The king rages about the palace, and even attempts the life of his prisoner, who only escapes by raising a phantom before the madman's eyes. He comes out again triumphant, and now that his enemy has once been reduced to subjection by his magic, he knows that it will not be hard to overcome him again when necessary. Just as the wizard ends his narrative, the king is heard coming out. Dionysus is at first somewhat unnerved; he has no liking for the cold steel, and Pentheus has already alarmed him by frantically brandishing his sword.⁴ This is a critical moment for the Dionysiac religion, but, fortunately, Pentheus has almost returned to his normal frame of mind, and Dionysus is reassured. Then comes the speech of the First Messenger. We now enter upon the two wonderful scenes in which the king is gradually robbed of his will and self-respect. Just as he in the last scene had stripped his prisoner one

1. Vv. 8, 9.

2. *Oed. Col.* vv. 1627-8.

3. Vv. 621-2.

4. It would seem that Pentheus proves a troublesome subject for the hypnotist. In this first case he is roused to homicidal fury, an effect on which Dionysus can hardly have counted.

by one of the external emblems which he wore as priest of Bacchus, so here the former captive tears from his pitiable conqueror every shred of dignity and manliness. The sight would be revolting in any hands save those of a master, but Euripides has treated it with a surpassing strength and delicacy remarkable even for him. At first Pentheus resists and determines to bring back his subjects by force of arms. Gradually his resolution is weakened by the persuasions of his enemy. But, just as his breakdown seems complete, he reasserts himself by a last supreme effort. He drops his feeble wandering tone, and exclaims, like Macbeth at bay: "Bring me my arms!"¹ Dionysus has no resource left but an open assertion of his power on a plane where his opponent cannot meet him. He pauses, and again fixes the magic influence upon him.² Finally, Pentheus is brought to disguise himself as a Bacchante and to go to Cithaeron accompanied only by Dionysus and a single attendant. It is this man who subsequently returns and relates in a touching narrative³ the betrayal and death of his master.

It was not now a difficult matter. The king had, as was feared, set himself sternly against the Bacchus-Teiresias coalition, and it had come to a life-and-death struggle between the two parties. Danger for Dionysus there certainly had been, but now all was easy, provided that one had got rid of all conscience and scruple, even of all considerations of expediency. In his eagerness to avenge the insult of his imprisonment he determines to

1. V. 809.

2. This occurs at vv. 810, *sq.*: *ἄ. βούλει σφ' ἐν ὄρεσι συγκαθημένως ἰδεῖν*; where the pause after *ἄ* is probably filled by an almost visible exertion of mesmeric power.

3. This narrative contains an account of three miracles: (i) Dionysus' feat in bending down the fir-tree, of which the messenger uses the expression (v. 1069) *ἔργματ' οὐχὶ θνητὰ δρῶν*, (ii) the *φῶς σεμνοῦ πυρός* which at the word of Dionysus rises from earth to heaven, (iii) the super-human strength shown by the Maenads in tearing Pentheus to pieces (cp. vv. 1127, 8, and Dr. Sandys' note on the latter verse). These miracles are examined in Appendix II.

make the mother of his foe the foremost among his murderers,¹ though she is also the foremost of Dionysus' own supporters. At a word from their leader the Maenads, headed by the three princesses, throw themselves upon the king and destroy him. The horror-stricken Messenger rushes back to Thebes, Teiresias discreetly absents himself, and Cadmus comes back alone, or accompanied only by the corpse and its bearers. We are now nearing the end. Agaue returns and discovers the full horror of what she has done. Cadmus remembers the story told him by Teiresias, that Dionysus is the divine son of Semele, and vainly endeavours to console his daughter and himself by a supposition that this is the vengeance of the slighted god. But it is of no avail; the suggestion may satisfy the mind, but it cannot heal the heart, and the stricken mother, so far from worshipping Dionysus, turns from him and goes into exile, bitterly execrating the religion which has been her undoing.²

1. This simple supposition explains Dionysus' success in "prophesying" on this occasion. As I have pointed out above, he is less reliable in regard to matters over which he has no control.

2. In this chapter I have not made any use of a famous passage in Horace which at first sight appears strongly to corroborate my theory (*Ep.* I, xvi, 73, *sqq.*):

Vir bonus et sapiens audebit dicere: 'Pentheu,
Rector Thebarum, quid me perferre patique
Indignum coges?' 'Adimam bona.' 'Nempe pecus, rem,
Lectos, argentum. Tollas licet.' 'In manicis et
Compedibus saevo te sub custode tenebo.'
'Ipse deus, simul atque uolam, me soluet.' Opinor
Hoc sentit 'Moriar.' Mors ultima linea rerum est.

Much of this has an obvious resemblance to the first conversation between Dionysus and Pentheus. If Horace is really copying the passage in the *Bacchae* and applies the word *uir* to Dionysus, the inference seems inevitable that he does not regard that person as divine. But I cannot venture to bring Horace in as a witness for my theory, as I do not understand what is the precise connexion between the two passages, which of course do not by any means completely agree in detail. Prof. Tyrrell says that Horace "fancifully supposes the bacchant to refer to Death the deliverer." Surely this is an inadequate statement. Horace is either committing an egregious blunder, due to gross carelessness or forgetfulness, or presenting a view of Dionysus utterly different from the traditional view. If the latter supposition is correct, one still does not see why he mentions *pecus* and the rest; if the former, one can draw no inference from what he says.

CHAPTER IX.

EURIPIDES' OPINION OF THE BACCHIC DEITY AND OF HIS RELIGION.

Within the infant rind of this weak flower
 Poison hath residence and medicine power :
 For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part ;
 Being tasted, slays all senses with the heart.
 Two such opposèd kings encamp them still
 In men as well as herbs—grace and rude will ;
 And where the worser is predominant,
 Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

SHAKESPEARE : *Romeo and Juliet*.

SUCH is the action of the play when re-read in the light of the indications which Euripides gives as to its meaning, and such are the character and claims of its most striking personage. He is simply a man of extraordinary gifts, endowed by nature and by training with a vast power of influencing others, who has set his heart upon forcing his beliefs on a people to whom they are unsuited; beliefs, moreover, which in their primitive and aggressive form appear as rivals to religions already established, and so tend merely to confuse the popular mind. In the first instance, right and truth are mostly on his side, but when opposed he becomes unscrupulous and revengeful, employing his matchless resources, not in the furtherance of religion, but as a weapon against a conscientious opponent. It is clear that Euripides regards a man like Dionysus as a terrible danger, and he shows in the *Bacchæ* how such a being may, by his own faults of character, prevent men from accepting even the good elements which have a place in his doctrine, and may without any worthy result bring about a temporary disruption of society and lacerate in vain those spiritual souls who should be the religious leaders

of their fellows. It is, of course, necessary to discuss the difficulties to which this new theory gives rise, but at present it is perhaps best to proceed without delay to two most pressing questions. In the first place, if the Stranger is not the god of the Dionysiac religion, as we have seen, what opinion does Euripides hold concerning that god? Does he exist at all, or is he merely a fabrication of the prophet himself? And if he exists, what is his nature? In the second place, does Euripides, while believing that the teacher is an impostor, nevertheless recognise anything valuable in the teaching?

To the first question, I think, Euripides does not (in his own mind) attach so much importance as to the second, but he supplies an answer, admirably clear, temperate, and rational. He puts it into the mouth of Teiresias (vv. 274-9):

δύο γάρ, ὦ νεανία,
 τὰ πρῶτ' ἐν ἀνθρώποισι· Δημήτηρ θεά·
 γῆ δ' ἐστίν· ὄνομα δ' ὀπότερον βούλει κάλει·
 αὕτη μὲν ἐν ξηροῖσιν ἐκτρέφει βροτούς·
 ὅς δ' ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὰντίπαλον, ὁ Σεμέλης γόνος,
 βότρυος ὑγρὸν πῶμ' εἶρε κείσηνέγκατο
 θνητοῖς, ὃ παύει τοὺς ταλαιπῶρους βροτούς
 λύπης, ὅταν πλησθῶσιν ἀμπέλου ρόης,
 ὕπνον τε λήθην τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν κακῶν
 δίδωσιν, οὐδ' ἔστ' ἄλλο φάρμακον πόνων.
 οὔτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς,
 ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν.

Euripides here gives clear expression to the belief that there is no personal god Dionysus *as accepted by popular tradition*. What does exist and is profitable to men is the natural principle of life inherent in things, supporting and renewing itself without end. These two complementary principles of nature which he names here can be considered under various aspects: The physicist calls them the dry and the moist, the popular religion Demeter and Dionysus, the rationalist bread and wine, or, more fundamentally, earth and water. The possibility of these

different points of view is not seen for the first time in the *Bacchae*, but one of the features which make the play especially important as a testimony to the history of Euripides' religious opinions is the certainty with which the matter is here grasped, the total absence of dogmatism as to which view is the right one. The point is that these natural principles are the basis of material life, and are therefore worshipful. The principle τὸ ὑγρόν exists, that is plain. Now are we at liberty to go further, to assert that the principle is personified in a god? Euripides does not know, but what he does know, and takes the greatest pains to demonstrate, is this. It is a mischievous delusion to fancy that, by telling ourselves that the great natural powers are embodied in persons, we are any nearer to understanding them. What is the use, for example, of saying that a storm is caused by Poseidon, when, if we are asked who Poseidon is, we can only answer that he is the god who raises storms? It is true that popular religion did not stop here, but then so much the worse. Popular religion would of course not merely reply that Poseidon was the god who raises storms—an answer which, though utterly useless, would not at any rate contain much chance of religious error. Men would say he was the brother of Zeus, and add as many details as they could remember of his works, his feats of brutal strength, his sordid and cruel amours. This is to connect the most awful things in the known universe with what is lowest in human nature. And it is against this that Euripides directs his efforts. Since we do not know anything about the alleged persons as persons, he does not care whether one worships natural powers as impersonal or as personal. That the question is, strictly *prima facie*, unimportant, he shows by the turn of his phrases in the lines quoted above. Of "Demeter the goddess" he says: "She is also earth; call her by whichever name of the two pleaseth thee." And in precisely the same way, after speaking of Dionysus

as if he were a person, he goes on to use language which is only appropriate to him when regarded as a synonym for wine. But what he does care about is the way in which men assume that they *can* know the nature and doings of the supposed persons and then believe immoral stories about them.

Herein may be discerned some support for the theory of Berlage,¹ who believes that there are three stages in the development of the poet's religious opinions. For a long time, says the Dutch scholar, Euripides acquiesced in the popular creed. Next, having formed a lofty conception of the divine nature, he began to abuse the popular gods. Finally, being unable to solve the riddle of the divine nature, he ceased his attacks. This theory has usually been rejected, and on good grounds, but the position which is now being maintained gives a good deal of support to Berlage's third stage. I think that the leading difference between the *Bacchae* and the other plays is this. In his earlier work Euripides made it his chief aim to overthrow belief in the popular gods because the accounts given of them were demoralising. His secondary aim (so far as theology is concerned) was to elevate τὸ θεῖον while crushing the personal deities, such as Apollo and Athena—τὸ θεῖον being an abstract principle which I have endeavoured to describe earlier in this essay.² In the *Bacchae* (so far as it is concerned with formal theology) these two objects have changed their relative importance. The main purpose is to elevate τὸ θεῖον and the worshipfulness of those great bases of life which are in the material world what τὸ θεῖον is in the spiritual world. He is here less concerned with the existence or non-existence of those persons—Zeus,

1. *De Euripide Philosopho*, Leyden, 1888. Though Berlage's main thesis can hardly be accepted, his book is admirably full, clear, and well-written, and in perhaps the best treatise in existence on this aspect of Euripides' work.

2. See p. 11.

Demeter, and Dionysus ¹—in which the *forces* τὸ θεῖον, τὸ ξηρόν, and τὸ ὑγρόν respectively are supposed to be embodied. He is much more indifferent to the truth of the supposition, considered as an abstract theory, than he was formerly. But as a matter of experience, the supposition produced immoral effects, and hence his insistent though indirect opposition during most of his life to the supposition itself. That this opposition is less prominent in our play is no doubt the cause of the theory that Euripides is recanting. He is not recanting, but is putting in the foreground a portion of his belief to which he has hitherto given only a secondary importance. And it is characteristic of his method that he selects a story which on the surface is most repugnant to his own conception of the divine nature. His idea of the manner in which the mistaken stories of tradition have originated, convincing as it is, may be false, but it is greatly to the credit of his insight and knowledge of human nature. He would never have given his assent to the theory expounded in a famous fragment of Critias, which has found distinguished support in later ages, that religion was the invention of certain clever persons who saw no other way of forcing men to act justly. He knew that religion is commonly the outcome of a devouring and fearless enthusiasm, not of calculation. If the Bacchic religion was first taught by an impostor, he can have been only half an impostor, whose diviner part was obscured by his baser feelings. Euripides shows through what complications of superstition, charlatanry, ambition, and noble thought the confused and confusing legend arose; in the midst of the chaos of human pride, self-seeking, and religious error he sets, with abrupt emphasis, a clear statement of the truth; and in his lyrics he raises pure

1. I need not remind the reader that what is said here has nothing to do with the Dionysus of popular belief (the person whom Euripides supposes to have undoubtedly existed as a *man* of strange character and powers) but concerns the alleged god, of whom all that is "known" is that he is the principle of τὸ ὑγρόν personified.

and glorious hymns¹ to the mysterious deity whom myth and folly have veiled so thickly and so long.

The other point which must be considered in this connexion is Euripides' opinion with regard to the teaching introduced by "Dionysus" the prophet—a matter more interesting to the majority of modern readers and probably more interesting to the poet himself, who, like his contemporary and friend Socrates, was more eager to arrive at a true theory, at any rate an approximately true and consistent theory, of human life, than at the ultimate verities which might indeed be supposed the final sanction of such a theory, but which could never be more than the subject of conjecture in the intellectual sphere and of mysticism in the religious. He has a great deal to say about the doctrines connected with the Bacchic worship—much more than he usually allows himself to say on such points. Stories of the strange parentage of the god, an anecdote about one of the musical instruments used by his followers, excited prayers to Justice and Frenzy for the destruction of Pentheus, musings upon the true happiness which is to be found only in tranquillity of soul and the firm rejection of fretful questionings, agitated appeals to the city of Thebes and the streams of Boeotia to welcome Dionysus, praise and proclamation of the belief that ancient and popular religion is the best, a magnificently vivid portrayal of the ecstasy which is conferred by the secret revels upon the hillside and in the dim forest—all these are to be found mingled together in the lyric portions of the *Bacchae*. There can be few readers who have not felt that some of this must be real for the man who wrote it. Whatever difficulties there may be in the way of accepting the choral odes as an expression of Euripides' matured opinions, it is hard to believe that the sentiments are all assumed. It may be confessed at once that these odes do in fact contain elements foreign to the poet's beliefs and

1. *e.g.*, vv. 386—394, 882—890.

intellect, but that is a poor reason for an offhand assumption that in a body of work which is apparently not consistent there is nothing which he regards as valuable, that all these lyrics are composed simply to fit the character of the Chorus. There probably never was anyone whom they would fit. It is our business to see whether what strike us as inconsistencies can or cannot be harmonised; if they can be harmonised, to consider whether the teaching of the lyrics as a whole can be accepted in view of the purpose of the play as revealed elsewhere in it¹; if they cannot be harmonised, to ask ourselves what part of them expresses the opinion of the writer himself.

There is one great inconsistency. As has been pointed out more than once, the same Asiatic women who extol the happiness of quietness and trust are also those who exhibit headlong fury against Pentheus, who cry in anguish to Heaven for his blood, and whose joy is found in the wildest impulses of the Bacchic orgies. Mere peaceful worship of their god is not really to their mind, else they would hardly chafe so wearily at their sojourn in Thebes. They long to be in some other land, where their debauches of quasi-religious hysteria may pass unchecked :

*ἰκοίμαν ποτὶ Κύπρον,
νᾶσον τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας,
ἐν ᾗ θελξίφρονες νέμον-
ται θνατοῖσιν Ἐρωτες. . . .
ἐκεῖ Χάριτες, ἐκεῖ δὲ Πόθος·
ἐκεῖ δὲ Βάκχαις θέμις ὀργιάζειν.²*

They thirst for the blood of goats slain in the chase, to tear and devour their raw flesh : ἀγρεύων αἷμα τραγοκτόνου, ὠμοφάγον χάριν.³ Is this the haven won by the blessed one who

1. For it will scarcely be maintained that, to speak generally and from a view of all the poet's extant plays, the choruses are of as much weight in determining his opinion as the "episodes."

2. Vv. 402—415. See pp. 31—3.

3. Vv. 137, 8.

has overpassed the toils of life?¹ Is this the *βίος ἡσυχίας*?² Are these two feelings consistent? "No," it may be replied; "tearing animals to pieces and devouring their raw flesh and their blood is not the rule of a peaceful life. But though these two things (frenzy and tranquillity) are not the same, it does not follow that they exclude one another. They are mutually complementary." The argument would follow some such line as this: that the calm and the wild side of the Chorus correspond to Nature in her gentle and her stern moods; that as she is not only reposeful but also "red in tooth and claw," so her worshippers must on occasion revel in blood; that, moreover, it is only by exhausting all the turmoil and excess to which frenzy can prompt that men may reach a peace which lies beyond the fear of perturbation. But these suggestions, like the answers which one might easily extemporise, can receive no more respect than any other verbal dexterity. Such word-theories, if we may use the term, are easy to evolve in a time like our own, when the air is full of catch-phrases and valueless syntheses. How does the suggestion outlined here square with what we know of Euripides' mind from the rest of his work, from other parts of this very play? He shows us himself how a wild surrender to the new religion, so far from leading to peace of soul, blasts the happiness of all those characters in the play who make such a surrender. The Bacchic possession, of its own force and nature, reduces Agaue to such helplessness that she flings herself on her own undoing. That is for her the upshot; she sees it,³ and Euripides places her words of bitter hopelessness at the very end of his work. The only words which follow hers are those of the Chorus: "For what was unexpected hath Heaven found a way." Unexpected, indeed, for persons like the

1. Vv. 902—5.

2. Vv. 389, *sq.*

3. Vv. 1383—7.

speakers, but surely no strange thing for Greeks, whose faith was set on mental and moral equipoise. This Dionysiac intoxication can be regarded as complementary to the praise of tranquillity if it can be shown that tranquillity *also* leads to misery and lifelong regret, or that the Maenads did in truth seek to imitate all Nature's moods instead of merely worshipping her. The first position is not attractive and can be taken up by no one who sees a difference between tranquillity and supine indolence. The second is more specious, as in primitive religion the worshipper often shows his adoration by reproducing the effects of that which he worships. But that the Bacchantes do so is nowhere affirmed by Euripides or (I believe) any other writer.

The fiercer, more barbaric, side of the spirit embodied in the Chorus cannot, then, be regarded as possessing the poet's allegiance. This does not mean that he has no sympathy with it. It is not meant by him as teaching for his countrymen, as the whole trend of the play shows; but, on the other hand, it is no mere piece of clever verse-writing, composed because it was expected in a drama of the sort, like a masque inserted in an Elizabethan play. It is a part of the whole, which would suffer seriously by its omission. Euripides understands the essence of these half-savage orgies, and sets himself to portray them and to put their spirit into words. He understands so well that while writing he becomes a Bacchante himself for a space. A comparison of the marvellous passage¹ beginning ἀπ' ἐν παννυχίοις χοροῖς, I will not say with Pope's juvenile pastorals or with the nectar of Vergil's *Eclogues*, but even with the *Idylls* of Theocritus himself, flawlessly perfect as they are in their own degree, will show how intimate and complete is the sympathy of Euripides as a poet with a sentiment which as a thinker and a teacher he

1. Vv. 862—876.

unhesitatingly and crushingly condemns.¹ Better than any other, Greek or Roman, he would have understood Vergil's haunting and untranslatable phrase, *diuini gloria ruris*. This part of his work is the most charming and unforgettable of all for modern readers, especially for the countrymen of Keats, whose most famous line reads like a translation of the Greek's simpler words, ὅτι καλὸν φίλον αἰεί. It can only be disregarded, and for a moment, by one who seeks to know the deliberate and matured opinion of Euripides on the Dionysiac teaching. Such an one must own that this side of it was repugnant to his intellect, and must turn to the other side, the praise of the happiness which comes, as he says, to him who is initiated, who leads a holy life, who turns away from presumptuous questionings about what is above human reach and rests prudently content with the beliefs of "the simpler folk."

Does the poet mean this, then, for an expression of his own creed, or is it, too, to be regarded merely as written to suit the situation of those who utter it? There are two reasons for rejecting the latter hypothesis. In the first place these statements do *not* suit the temperament of the Chorus, as has been shown already. In the second place, the doctrines which are advanced and praised in these lyrics are repeatedly spoken of as ancient, fixed by custom, traditional, and so forth.² Such epithets, of course, are not appropriate to a religion which is being promulgated for the first time, but they

1. Cp. Decharme (p. 90) : " Dans les *Bacchantes*, le poète, comme il lui arrive quelquefois, a donc fait plaider à ses personnages deux causes contradictoires : celle du mysticisme et celle de la raison. C'est la cause du mysticisme qui est le plus longuement et le plus fortement développée. La religion de Bacchus offrait à Euripide une source de beautés originales où il ne pouvait manquer de puiser : il est donc entré aussi avant que possible, avec une rare souplesse et une entière liberté, dans l'esprit des adorateurs du dieu. Mais si chez lui le poète s'est passionné pour la religion dionysiaque, le philosophe a dû secrètement partager les sentiments de Penthée. En tout cas, il a nullement démontré qu'Euripide ait songé, sur le déclin de sa vie, à faire profession de mysticisme bacchique."

2. Vv. 70, 1 ; 430, 1 ; 890—6 ; 1010, 1.

are appropriate to that religion when regarded as belonging to the poet's own days. It is obvious that any statements which are put into a character's mouth and which are yet quite unsuitable to his temperament or situation must be not only statements of the author's own views, but must also be meant to be recognised as such by his hearers and readers.¹ It may therefore be regarded as certain that this note in the odes is the genuine voice of Euripides. It is satisfactory to find at last, amid so much that is of doubtful meaning and so much of which the dramatist does not approve, something which is really his personal belief. But is it very enlightening? Have we found any great secret? Reverence, moderation, and quietness of heart is the foundation of happiness, he says. But if men did not know this already, it was not the early teachers of Greece who were to blame. Such maxims as these occur over and over again in Homer and Hesiod; they were summarised for the edification of the whole Hellenic world in the *μηδὲν ἄγαν* and the *γνώθι σεαυτὸν* which the Seven Sages inscribed upon the temple at Delphi; and the most Pan-Hellenic poet of all, Pindar, reverts unceasingly to the same text, to which every tale of heroic prowess and perseverance leads back at last: "Gaze not upon what is afar off." Has the most restless mind of that restless age nothing more to say than what was a commonplace to his forefathers? Is this all?

It is by no means all. Euripides in this his last expression of belief takes care to arouse our curiosity. These passages are no bald aphorisms without any setting, like maxims printed on a card and hung upon a wall. They are charged with subtle meaning by the context in which they are placed. For example, he goes out of his way several times to remind us that these

1. Mr. W. H. S. Jones (*The Moral Standpoint of Euripides*, p. 12), attributes this rule to Decharme, *Euripide*, (pp. 25—8), but it had been propounded before, e.g., by Bayle (whom D. quotes), and by Weil and Mahaffy; it is surely obvious.

doctrines are the "regular" or "customary" doctrines; νόμος and its cognates occur often in these parts of the odes. This is exceedingly strange in a man like Euripides, a man of the sturdiest independence of thought, who insisted on re-examining all notions abroad in his time, of however long standing. Such thinkers, even when they accept current ideas, do so only on the authority of their own conscience and intellect, and the reasons which impel them to acceptance are frequently such as to fill the ordinary believer with scandalised amazement. But in this case the thinker, it appears, accepts the normal, not for the abnormal but for the normal reason; to wit, that everyone else accepts it. This is doubly strange. But scarcely has the reader grasped it when he notices that it is not true. If Euripides acquiesces blindly in the current opinion, how is it that he devotes this very play to a demonstration of the falsity of the received notion concerning the introduction of the Dionysiac religion into Greece, and throws grave doubt upon the personal existence of one of the national gods? Is he mocking us for the hundredth time? Is he professing absolute faith in the wisdom of common humanity and in the same breath destroying one of the most striking results of it?

The explanation is that while Euripides looks with suspicion upon the opinion of the "simpler folk" with regard to matters metaphysical or strictly theological, such as the nature of the gods, he has no such misgivings in the sphere of conduct and the exigencies of practical life. He does not trust the intellect of the masses, but he has confidence in their heart. The general conscience is for him the supreme guide in ethics.¹ It is true that he does not, and cannot, mean

1. "The instincts of simple, guileless persons (liable to be counted stupid by the unwary) are sometimes of prophetic nature, and spring from the deep places of this universe."—Carlyle, *Frederick*, IV, 390 (quoted by Mr. Morley, *Miscellanies*, I, p. 193, Macmillan).

that he counsels men to follow the belief of the "simpler folk" in everything; but he does see great value in one element. This element he finds in that Bacchic religion which in part he condemns. Though he disapproves of what are on the surface the most distinctive features of that religion, the miraculous birth of the god, and the over-wrought frenzy, the unsocial excesses to which a mistaken literalness leads those who seek to worship Nature, he is far from wishing to destroy the whole body of teaching. In fact, the *νόμιμον ἀεὶ φύσει τε πεφυκός*¹, the ancestral and natural faith in which he believes, is the gentler, more Hellenic part of this strange non-Hellenic cult, that part which laid hold of the intellect as well as of the heart of Greece, and became in time the spirit which inspired the Eleusinian and Orphic Mysteries. Probably the purified and elevating doctrines which the poet's contemporaries learned at the celebration of the various mysteries, Orphic or other, were refinements which were only latent in the earliest manifestations of orgiastic worship, manifestations crude and barbarous, often ferocious. Much as Greece borrowed from other nations, its genius was so peculiar and so strong that what it borrowed it transformed and made its own. Thus the savage element in Bacchism was gradually purged away, this purification being attributed to a single person—Orpheus, a priest of the god, after whom the more humane religion was called Orphism. This sweetening and purifying came about slowly, but Euripides chooses (for reasons of dramatic convenience, if for no other) to permit the two voices in which the spirit of Bacchus found utterance to raise themselves in alternation throughout his lyrics. Perhaps in reality neither the first prophet nor his followers can have been what the poet's fancy conceived them as being; perhaps the thiasus was a crew of half-crazy savages, shrieking incoherent praises of the god

1. V. 896.

who gave them the raw quivering flesh of newly-slain beasts for food and mingled their wine with blood; perhaps the leader himself was but a dervish, maddened by the beauty and wonder which sent bewildering rays of light through his brooding soul. It was a far cry from these strange and terrifying figures to those other initiated ones who sing the beautiful stanzas, almost monastic in tone, which good fortune has preserved for us from the lost *Cretans* of our poet. But Euripides in the *Bacchae* has given us neither the one presentment nor the other. He has set both before us combined in a picture, which, incredible in itself, yet presents us with both sides of the great religion, the lower and the higher, the Oriental and the Hellenic.¹

Hence the way in which Dionysus' name is joined to that of Demeter—the chief deity worshipped at Eleusis—in a passage² of the play which we have already found full of significance: "Young man, the chiefest things in human life are two—Demeter and Dionysus." But it was not the primitive Dionysus (whose *τριετηρίδες* were never brought into Attica³) who was worshipped together with Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis, but Iacchus, the milder Dionysus. And though the Asiatic women never call their god by this name, the Greek Maenads in their morning hymn invoke him by it.⁴ Hence also, perhaps, the reference to Orpheus⁵—a reference most damaging to Dionysus from one point of view, since it was to his orgies that the musician owed his death, but appropriate enough if we suppose that Euripides is thinking not so much of the primitive form of Bacchism, but of its later, higher manifestation of Orphism.

It is clear also from the tone of these passages that

1. Cp. Dr. Gilbert Murray (*Euripides, Introduction*, p. lix), and Dr. Verrall (*Classical Review*, ix, pp. 225—8).

2. Vv. 274—280.

3. Dr. Sandys, *Introduction*, p. xvii.

4. Vv. 725, 6.

5. Vv. 561—4.

he is attacking some distinctive feature of contemporary thought, and it has often been said¹ that this feature is not that of the philosophers, properly so called, but that of the sophists. Such an expression as τὸ σοφὸν δ' οὐ σοφία² does, no doubt, lend some apparent support to this distinction, but it would be very difficult to make out a good case for it. The sentence just quoted, for example, continues with the words τό τε μὴ θνητὰ φρονεῖν, a censure which would apply to the activities of Anaxagoras, and (in later times) to Aristotle's remarkable χρῆ ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν³ quite as much as to the πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπος of Protagoras, to which old-fashioned Athenians might demur as making man the equal of God. The philosophers and sophists did not occupy entirely different ground; the average man would have found it hard to point to any tangible distinction between Socrates, to whom Plato owes something more than the germ of most of his theories, and the ordinary sophist, unless it were that Socrates dressed badly and received no money from his friends. In any case Euripides was the last man to throw himself into a controversy like that between sophist and philosopher; and it is to be doubted whether there was any intellectual current of his time of which he does not make some use in his writings. To quote an important and very pertinent example, the assertion to which we have repeatedly alluded—that Demeter and Dionysus are principles of life personified—had already been made more definitely still by Prodicus, one of the

1. *E.g.*, by Prof. Tyrrell (*Introduction*, p. xli): "The rationalism which he condemns in the Bacchae is the rationalism of the Sophistic standpoint"; Bernhardt (*Grundriss der griech. Litt.*, p. 479): "Vielmehr bestreitet er mit Entschiedenheit den Anhang der Sophisten, den Atheismus und das vernünftelnde Prinzip (τὸ σοφόν)." Cp. also Decharme (*Euripide*, p. 111): "C'est donc sans doute l'ambitieuse imprudence de la science qu'il condamne en quelques endroits"; Lobeck (*Aglaophamus*, p. 623): "Fabula, Bacchae, dithyrambi quam tragoediae similior, totaque ita comparata, ut contra illius temporis Rationalistas scripta videatur."

2. V. 395.

3. *Ethics*, 1177b.

most eminent sophists of the day.¹ It is unsafe to affirm anything more definite than this, that the poet is setting himself against dilettantism in matters where dilettantism is fatal. A restless spirit of inquiry into the credentials of traditional ideas, on whatever subject, had long been general in the more cultivated communities of Greece. Nothing, however venerable, could escape a close and often hostile scrutiny. In this movement Euripides himself had taken a leading part, and he was just as ready in his latest years to fight for the same cause as he had been when young. But he was at odds with those who made a potent medicine their daily beverage, who puzzled others and dazzled themselves with their gibes and paradoxes—those young wits of whom Aristophanes says that “the fashionable give-me-a-definition look comes out on you for all the world like a rash.”² This itch to upset established notions for amusement, which the comic poet regards as a sort of intellectual measles, was general among the educated youths of Athens in the last decades of the fifth century. Lads whose intelligence and eagerness were keen out of all proportion to their knowledge and strength of intellect were wasting their energies and time in annoying their elders and unsettling themselves when they should have been modestly gaining experience, using their ears and eyes instead of their tongues. Bred in an age of political and social unrest, they were cynics before they had been enthusiasts. That this was no illusion of old-fashioned prejudice is shown by the attitude taken on the matter by two men of genius who were themselves largely the product of the same spirit. The remark of Aristotle is celebrated, that young men are not fit to study political science,³ and Plato (not to

1. Cp. Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* ix 18, 51.

2. *Clouds*, 1073, 4 :

καὶ τοῦτο τοῦπιχώριον
ἀτεχνῶς ἐπανθεί, τὸ τί λέγεις σύ;

3. *Ethics*, 1095a.

mention the passages¹ in which he comments, with severity as well as humour, on the conduct of the "puppies" takes care, when elaborating his scheme of education in the *Republic*, to postpone to years of maturity² the study of first principles, which he only allows to those who have passed a series of rigorous tests. Euripides, too, found sooner or later that it was as important to restrain, even to disown, disciples who made his principles an excuse for their own folly and discontent, as to insist on the principles themselves.

This is the truth about his alleged recantation. He has not altered his opinions to any important degree, nor has he changed his mind about what he wishes his hearers to learn from him. The only change, as was said before, lies in the relative importance which he attaches to different parts of his teaching. To this must be added the fact that the untoward effects which are so often mingled with success had already appeared, and he felt it his duty at the moment to combat them. Theory is for most men less important than practice, and for the ordinary Athenian the best thing now was to renounce that persistent questioning and unsettlement which had become the bane as well as the glory of Athens, and to rest content with that ethical wisdom handed down from the past (which had evolved sound and well-tested rules of life as well as mistaken legends about the gods) and now promulgated with a more definite and more spiritual meaning by Orphic teacher and by Eleusinian hierophant.³ For the highest minds, investigation into

1. *E.g. Rep.*, 539B.

2. At the age of fifty those who have passed every test are at last (πρὸς τέλος ἡδὴ ἀκτέον) to apply themselves to the contemplation of τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτό. (*Rep.*, 540A).

3. Dr. Farnell, it is true, says (*Cults of the Greek States* iii, p. 191) : "We know nothing positively of any higher moral teaching in these [the Eleusinian] mysteries; we have no record and no claim put forth." But he himself quotes the famous passage in the *Frogs* (450 sqq.) :

the ultimate sanction of such popular morality was both necessary and salutary, for Euripides would have applauded the theory of δημοτικὴ ἀρετὴ advanced in the *Phaedo*¹; but with ordinary men theoretical unsettlement too often means practical degeneration. "Therefore," he says in effect, "let me advise my countrymen to leave their interminable discussions and to pay more attention to conduct. Of the personal existence of gods like Apollo and Aphrodite I have the greatest doubt, and I have made it my business to show all Athens that, whether these deities exist or not, the current stories about them are false and pernicious. But such work as I have done is, after all, only a means to an end. Let us, by all means, free our minds from those superstitions which vitiate our feeling of right and wrong, but let us not stop at that. Let us, after destroying our false ideals, take to ourselves true ideals. And, for my own part, the best advice which I can give you at the end of my life is that we should cease to ask questions to which the greatest of us can give only vague and conjectural answers, and live quietly content with what can satisfy our real needs—that 'wisdom old as time' which provides a sound and consistent morality."

1. See Mr. Archer-Hind's Appendix to his edition of the *Phaedo*

μόνοις γὰρ ἡμῖν ἥλιος καὶ φέγγος ἰλαρόν ἐστιν
 ὅσοι μεμνήμεθ' εὐ-
 σεβῆ τε διίγομεν
 τρόπον περὶ τοὺς ξένους
 καὶ τοὺς ἰδιώτας,

and other passages of like import.

CHAPTER X.

OBJECTIONS TO THE NEW THEORY.

'Et in multis aliis quaestionibus et profecto in hac, quae versatur in exponendis poetae ingenio et cogitationibus, oportet nos aliqua nescire.'

—J. BERLAGE, *De Euripide Philosopho*, p. 135.

THE last stage of our inquiry now lies before us. Does this new explanation involve us in any new difficulties, and if so, are they weighty enough to throw doubt on that explanation, when it has on its side, as we have seen, the fact that it gives clearness and consistency to what seems on any other view so incoherent? At present I am conscious of three or four objections, which have no doubt occurred to the reader. These I will discuss as impartially as I can.

To take the slightest first, one may reasonably remark¹ that hypnotic influence has never been known to exist in so powerful a degree as to enable the person who wields it to work the wonders which I have laid at its door. For instance, is it possible for Dionysus, while within the palace and for the moment out of touch with his followers, to be able in an instant to influence them to such a degree that they believe that the house is falling in ruins though not a stone is displaced? I have already pointed out that what we have to deal with is not hypnotism *per se*, but hypnotism as Euripides conceived it; I venture to repeat the remark here because it is so important to bear it in mind if we are to get a definite view of the situation as it presented itself to him. He had, I imagine, heard amazing reports of the magical powers possessed by Oriental

1. I do not know enough about hypnotism to say whether the remark would be true or not.

wizards, and believed that the miracles and influence of Dionysus were due to the same cause.

The supposition made in the last sentence brings us to a second and more serious objection. What right have we to assume that the Greeks, and Euripides in particular, were not only acquainted with hypnotism or magic in general, but had heard so much of what wizards were able to perform by their arts that the poet could feel no misgivings in presenting his audience with a feat so definite and striking? It is certainly not within the scope of my own knowledge or ability to give this question any adequate treatment, and I shall perforce content myself with indicating certain considerations which tend to show that it is far from impossible that stories about magical feats of this kind were current in Greece. In the first place, that a mysterious power to influence the minds of others resided in certain persons was a quite familiar idea. Athena in the *Odyssey* is as much enchantress as goddess, changing the outward form of a man and the features of a landscape so that they are unrecognisable to those who should know them well. And though the magic of that poem is material, affecting the appearance of things, but not the mind of man,¹ yet the popular belief in love-charms is to be found not only in poetry like that of Theocritus, who was later in time than Euripides, but also in his contemporary Sophocles, the plot of whose *Trachiniae* is based upon the power which such a charm is supposed to possess over the mind of Heracles. In the *Bacchae* itself it has sometimes been noticed that the sway which the will of Dionysus gradually wins over that of Pentheus has all the appearance of hypnotism.² This part of my

1. Cp. *Od.* x, 239, sq. :

οἱ δὲ συνῶν μὲν ἔχον κεφαλὰς φωνήν τε τρίχας τε
καὶ δέμας, αὐτὰρ νοῦς ἔεν ἔμπεδος ὡς τὸ πάρος περ.

2. Thus Dr. Gilbert Murray (*Hist. of Gk. Literature*, p. 271) remarks: "In a scene of weird power and audacity he slowly controls—one would fain say 'hypnotises'—Pentheus." Cp. also Ap. Rhod., iv 1659—1681.

assumption, then—the assumption that the Greeks were familiar with a supernatural power of mind over mind which was not the irresistible sovereignty of the divine over the human, but rather an ascendancy of will gained after struggle—will hardly be controverted. But I am postulating more than this. My theory implies that a certain form of hypnotic delusion analogous to what we should now call conjuring was familiar enough to the minds of his contemporaries for Euripides to venture on a dramatic representation of such a delusion. It is here that the evidence is weak. But Lucian provides us with a good parallel in his *Dialogues of the Sea*. One of these sketches consists of a conversation between Menelaus and Proteus, just after the old sea-god has baffled the inquirer in his usual manner, by changing into various elusive shapes. The first part of it runs as follows:—“*Menelaus*: Well, Proteus, your turning into water is not beyond belief, since the sea is your element; and you do not exhaust my credulity when you change into a tree. Even your appearance as a lion is not too much for my faith. But the idea that you who live in the sea can change into fire altogether amazes me. I can't believe it. *Proteus*: Don't be amazed, Menelaus. It really is a fact. *Menelaus*: Yes, I saw it with my own eyes. But, to be candid, my opinion is that *you throw a magic spell over the operation and cheat the eyes of the onlooker, while you yourself go through none of these transformations.*”¹ The supposed metamorphoses

1. *Dialogi Marini*, iv, §1:

MEN. Ἄλλ' ὕδωρ μὲν σε γίγνεσθαι, ὦ Πρωτεύ, οὐκ ἀπίθανον, ἐνάλιόν γε ὄντα, καὶ δένδρον, ἔτι φορητόν, καὶ ἐς λέοντα δὲ ὅποτε ἀλλαγείης, ὅμως οὐδὲ τοῦτο ἔξω πίστεως· εἰ δὲ καὶ πῦρ γίγνεσθαι δυνατὸν ἐν θαλάττῃ οἰκοῦντα, τοῦτο πάνν θαυμάζω καὶ ἀπιστῶ.

ΠΡΩΤ. Μὴ θαυμάσης, ὦ Μενέλαε· γίγνομαι γάρ.

MEN. Εἶδον καὶ αὐτός· ἀλλὰ μοι δοκεῖς—εἰρήσεται γὰρ πρὸς σέ—γοητείαν τινὰ προσάγειν τῷ πράγματι καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐξαπατᾶν τῶν ὁρώντων αὐτὸς οὐδὲν τοιοῦτο γιγνόμενος.

in Proteus exist merely in the mind of those who question him. He stands unchanged before them, precisely as the palace of Pentheus stands unchanged before the Chorus while the terrifying vision dances before their mind's eye. The words italicised in the quotation just given would, without any change, serve as an exact description of many of the so-called conjuring feats with which Hindoo magicians at the present day astound the European; and the art has been studied in the East for centuries. In the Sanskrit drama magic plays a very important part. Indeed it so happens that part of the palace-"miracle" (as I understand it) is closely paralleled by an incident in a Sanskrit play,¹ where a king is induced by magic to suppose that his house is on fire. This drama, it appears, belongs to the seventh century after Christ, and it would be most interesting to know whether it owes anything in this particular to the *Bacchae*. Nothing in the history of Hellenic civilisation is better known than that the victories of Alexander spread the knowledge of Greek literature among the inhabitants of South-western Asia, and the celebrated story related by Plutarch² shows that the *Bacchae* itself, in later times, but still centuries before the date of the *Ratnavali*, was as familiar to the half-savage soldiery of Parthia as to the *litterati* of Athens.

To return to the main point, it would not be easy to set limits to the degree in which Eastern thought influenced Greece even before the Macedonian conquest. The share which Oriental cults had in the development of Greek religion is well known, and if the West accepted the teaching of the East in a matter so intimate and important, it can hardly have been ignorant of the science and other intellectual attainments which Asiatics

1. The *Ratnavali* (cp. Macdonell, *Sanskrit Literature*, p. 362). I owe this information to the kindness of the late Prof. J. Strachan.

2. *Life of Crassus*, 32, 33.

had made their own. Moreover, the fact that the Greeks had no special name for hypnotism is no proof that they had no knowledge of it. They were familiar enough with the idea of supernatural possession, and the strange delusions to which ecstatic frenzy could lead; and in the age preceding that of Plato and Aristotle, when no systematic attention had been given to the phenomena of psychology, nothing would be more natural than to call a new power like this by the name of something which had no more than a superficial resemblance to it. Those vague expressions, γόης, μανία, οὐκ εἶδ' φρονεῖν, and the like, may often be meant to signify the influence which we are discussing.

A third objection might be grounded, not on the improbability of any particular detail, but on the extravagantly high demands which Euripides (according to this reading of the play) makes upon the acumen of his auditors. 'Are we really to believe,' it might be asked with a great appearance of justice, 'not only that Euripides, when praising a god and his religion, means really to praise some other god and a different religion, not only that the chief character in the play is at the best an unbalanced enthusiast and at the worst a fanatical impostor, but also that an ordinary Athenian audience, coming into the theatre with no suspicion of the enormous tax shortly to be put upon its mental agility, would be able at once to grasp the real inner meaning of the poet and to disregard those frequent utterances in the play which look like guiding beacons, but which, you tell us, are nothing but *ignes fatui*?' For myself, I cannot think that any theory of a Euripidean play ought to be rejected merely on the ground of complexity or subtlety. Elements perplexing in themselves and (to our eyes) inconsistent with one another are so frequently found within the limits of a single drama, that at the outset of our search we ought to assume as an axiom, not grudgingly allow as a possible hypothesis, that the true explanation of the whole will appear far-fetched

and artificial. If the solution is an easy one, why do we not see it as we go along instead of wondering, as we do or ought to do, "why does he mention this?" and "why does he express it in this odd fashion?" If we except the *Eumenides*, there is no play of the two earlier tragedians which is as difficult for modern readers as the majority of those of Euripides, and we must expect our answers to be difficult in proportion. Nor need we assume that the audience could understand, or was expected to understand, the full meaning of a work like the *Bacchae* at one sitting. The author was well aware that many members of it would not understand it if they saw the play performed every day of their lives. Others would see at once that the palace-'miracle' was the key to the whole drama, and these would desire, and obtain, the opportunity of studying the play in detail afterwards, by means of conversation with other cultivated auditors and by the examination of written copies.¹

The fact is that complexity in his work was necessary to a writer who followed such methods as his. It was his business, as was said before, in most of his plays, not merely to disprove the legends, but to give them, as the phrase goes, a fair chance; the result is that the legend appears at first sight to be true. Add to this that in the *Bacchae* he does in a way believe in the story—that is, he sees great value in the doctrines which are attached to it,—and he thinks that the story itself, when stripped of its miraculous elements, contains an account of facts. With one hand he pulls down the structure of fable, and with the other he unearths a treasure from the midst of the ruins. And all this has to be expressed in a most exacting and, to all seeming, most inappropriate form; not an elaborate didactic poem like that of Lucretius, but a series of dialogues—in

1. Dr. Verrall (*Euripides the Rationalist*, pp. 102—5) has expounded this point with admirable force.

which the chief parts are taken by two young men, one an unscrupulous ambitious propagandist, the other a misinformed, hot-headed prince, and two old men, the younger a cold-hearted ecclesiastic, the elder a dotard with no more brains than principle—mingled with lyrics sung by a company of women who could not in real life have known anything about the philosophic bases of religion and who greet the first signs of opposition with a prayer for the speedy and bloody vengeance of Heaven upon the heretic. Such were the conditions under which Euripides wrote the *Bacchae*. Small wonder that to modern readers it is difficult to understand what he meant! Beside such complex and subtle work as this, modern drama is apt to appear a mass of sterile banality, void of profundity and intellectual stimulus alike, plodding along through tiresome preachments on the author's favourite problem, be it love, crime, social questions, or what not, to a conclusion painfully obvious before the play has well begun, and supplying by "under-plots" or "comic scenes" that entertainment which the main thread of the drama is unable to afford. It would, of course, be monstrous to judge English drama by the faults of a great body of mediocre plays and Greek drama by one of its very best specimens, but it is nevertheless a fact that modern readers most frequently fail to appreciate ancient tragedy through an inability to detect the variety of issues and the delicacy with which they are handled. This is due partly to the real, though disguised, simplicity of plot which is a feature of English drama taken as a whole, partly to the real, though disguised, complexity of Greek drama. It is the fashion to talk of the latter as "simple," "uniform," and so forth, because it deals with a single action. This may be justifiable as a matter of technical definition, but it is an entire mistake to suppose that a play must necessarily be simple in any ordinary sense, merely because it deals with one action. To

suppose that an action, because it is "one" is sure to be simple and straightforward, and to offer no opportunities for the clashing of character and the most perplexing interlacement of moral issues is to labour under a delusion which one would think a day's life on this planet would be sufficient to dispel. Euripides himself was one of those who saw most clearly all the variety which might be concealed under an appearance of unity, and his expression of it is an outstanding feature of his work.¹

1. There are two other difficulties which I have not solved and which I have not even mentioned in Chapters III and VII, as I am not at all sure that we are to regard them as having any special significance. The first is the reiterated mention of Actaeon and of the place of his death (vv. 337—340, 455, 1227, 1291). Very likely this is natural. Actaeon was killed for insulting Artemis just as Pentheus is said to insult Dionysus. (According to Patin this play contains the only passage in which this reason for Actaeon's death is given, the ordinary account of course being that he by chance saw Artemis bathing.) At the same time, I have a suspicion that Euripides has some special purpose in continually referring to Pentheus' kinsman. If so, this purpose escapes me. The second is the constant use of the word *ἄγρα* and its cognates in the scene between Agaue and the Chorus. Here again the word is appropriate enough, but one may suspect that it has some special importance. See Mr. Bather's curious explanation (*Journal of Hellenic Studies*, xiv).

APPENDIX I.

SUPPOSED PARALLELS TO THE PALACE-MIRACLE.

IN his important note on v. 591, Dr. Wecklein adduces from other plays of Euripides certain parallels to the downfall of Pentheus' house: "In ähnlicher Weise sieht der Chor den Palast einstürzen *Herc.* 905, die stadt Troja in Brand stehen *Tro.* 1295 ff. Vgl. auch *Hec.* 823, 1040 ff." Do the cases quoted tell against the theory advanced in this essay? That is to say, is there any instance in which the Chorus or characters affirm (in accordance with the demands of the plot) that the house or other building is falling down, in language which makes it certain that the audience are supposed to see the thing happening, while as a matter of fact they do *not* see it happening because of either or both of the two reasons mentioned earlier—namely (i.) that the conditions of the Attic theatre render what is described impossible as a matter of stage-management; (ii.) that the subsequent action of the play renders it inconceivable? If there is such a parallel, and if no explanation (corresponding to the hypnotic influence which I postulate in the *Bacchae*) can be offered, the inference will be that an Athenian audience would put up with what is to us an astounding lack of verisimilitude, and that therefore we are not at liberty to found any novel theory on the case in the *Bacchae*.

Let us commence with the *Hecuba*, to which Wecklein refers only as a less close parallel. v. 823—*καπνὸν δὲ πόλεως τόνδ' ὑπερθρόσκονθ' ὀρώ*—is clearly of no great importance. *τόνδε* no doubt implies that the audience see the smoke. But this has no particular connexion with the later

action, and the resources of the stage were quite equal to so simple an effect, which occurs also in the *Orestes*, the *Troades*, the *Bacchae* itself,¹ and the *Clouds*. The second passage from the *Hecuba* (1040 sqq.) is that in which Polymestor, after having been blinded by the Trojan women in their hut, forces his way out in pursuit of them. The words which imply any kind of visible stage effect are Polymestor's

ἀλλ' οὔτι μὴ φύγητε λαιψηρῶ ποδι·
βάλλων γὰρ οἴκων τῶνδ' ἀναρρήξω μυχούς.
ἰδοῦ, βαρείας χειρὸς ὀρμάται βέλος,

and Hecuba's ἄρασσε, φείδου μηδέν, ἐκβάλλων πύλας. This would be perfectly well represented by a beating upon the door before the Thracian comes back upon the stage (precisely as in *Orestes* 1366-7), after which he bursts the door violently open.

The passage from the *Troades* is referred to by Paley also, and has been discussed already (p. 40).

But the parallel from the *Hercules Furens* is by far the most important. At first sight indeed the analogy asserted by Wecklein seems perfect. The Chorus cry aloud (vv. 904-5): ἰδοῦ ἰδοῦ, θύελλα σειεί δῶμα, συμπίπτει στέγη, and says that the son of Zeus (Heracles) is sending μελάθρων τάραγμα ταρτάρειον upon the palace. The servant who comes from within talks of a broken column lying among the ruins.² All this reads precisely like the account in the *Bacchae*. Moreover, as in the latter play, so in the *Hercules*, a new-comer (Theseus) arrives and does *not* indicate by any words he utters that he can see the ruins. This unquestionably looks like an exact parallel, and there is no room for a theory of

1. Where smoke rises from the tomb of Semele (vv. 7, 8).

2. Vv. 1006-8:

πίτνει δ' ἐς πέδον πρὸς κίονα
νώτον πατάξας, ὃς πεσήμασι στέγης
διχορραγῆς ἔκειτο κρηπίδων ἐπι.

hypnotic influence. If the two cases are really similar, the inference is that the Athenians would put up with what a modern audience would regard as an unpardonable blunder of stage-craft, that if they would do so in one play they would do so in another, that therefore we have no right to introduce so strange a supposition to account for the blunder in the *Bacchae* as that which we have introduced, and that therefore again our whole theory falls to pieces.

But the two instances are not really alike. It is true that the Chorus in the *Hercules*, as in the later play, cry out that the house is falling. But this need not mean that the whole house is actually seen to fall; let us read on. In both plays a more detailed description is given by a person who has been inside the building, and here a difference is immediately discerned. Whereas Dionysus goes out of his way to tell the Chorus that the *whole* house has been flung *to the ground*, the Messenger in the *Hercules* makes it plain that when madness first comes upon the hero he is in the courtyard, and that Megara in her terror retreats into her apartments; Heracles follows and breaks down the gateway which leads from the courtyard into the *γυναικωνίτις*. The Chorus (as do the audience, no doubt) hear the noise and see some of the pinnacles or roof falling in, but there is nothing at all to show that the whole house, including the front (visible to the audience) collapses. The column to which Heracles is bound in his stupor is part of this inner gateway or of the colonnade of the courtyard, and the *στέγη* which has fallen is the *γυναικωνίτις*. This is made plain by the fact that, when it is necessary to show the hero sleeping amid the corpses and the ruins, the *ἐκκύκλημα* has to be used.¹ That Theseus makes no mention of the damage

1. Vv. 1029, sq.:

ἴδεσθε, διάνδιχα κληῖθρα
κλίνεται ὑψιπέλων δόμων.

done to the building is accounted for, partly by its being only partial, but especially by the fact that something far more startling lies before him—the dead bodies of Megara and her three sons. Finally, there is nothing in the later action of the play which is, or should be, rendered impossible by what has happened to the house, as the collapse of Pentheus' palace ought to make it impossible for him and Dionysus to walk in and out of it.

APPENDIX II.

THE MIRACLES IN THE SECOND MESSENGER'S SPEECH.

THESE miracles are three in number.¹ If my theory is correct, I should be able to show that it is possible to account for them without assuming the godhead of Dionysus. I own frankly that these marvels do seem to me somewhat more credible than the others, in view of the explicit and straightforward way in which they are related. But, in the first place, so overwhelming does the evidence against the divinity of the Stranger supplied by the play as a whole appear to me, that I cannot think these three marvels (even if we allow them the greatest weight possible) sufficient to counterbalance it. In the second place, I think it can be shown that they afford no certain evidence of superhuman power. They shall now be discussed in detail.

As for the first miracle, Dionysus' feat in bending down the fir-tree—of which the Messenger uses the expression *ἔργματ' οὐχὶ θνητὰ δρῶν* (v. 1069)—it is surely most important to ask: what was the size of the tree? In v. 1064 we find *ἐλάτης οὐράνιον ἄκρον κλάδον*—it was a very lofty tree; in v. 1071 it is called a *βλάστημα*, which implies that it was a young and small one. If the latter description is the more correct, the "miracle" is at most a feat of unusual strength. If, on the other hand, the tree was a full-grown one, it would certainly be a proof of superhuman strength to bend it down. But it is surely as miraculous a circumstance (unless there is some peculiarity in the

1. See p. 106, note 3.

situation) that Dionysus is able to reach the *top* of it (*ἄκρον κλάδων*). It is difficult to picture his appearance as he did so, and the Messenger seems to see nothing remarkable in this part of his conduct. As a matter of fact there is nothing to prevent our supposing that the roots of the tree are at the bottom of the glen, while the topmost branches shoot up beside the crag (overlooking the glen), on which the three men are standing.¹ Dionysus then takes hold of a branch, bends it down (with an effort, as Dr. Sandys says), and seats Pentheus upon it. This is no miracle; the Messenger calls it a "superhuman deed" because he is dazed and terrified by the death of his master into a belief in the godhead of his destroyer and is now disposed (like the Chorus) to see it in all he does.

The other two miracles are not so perplexing. As for the unearthly light (not to mention the fact that a sudden beam of sunlight flooding the shady glen at the moment of Dionysus' terrible outcry would be enough to impress the startled Theban), the hypnotic or magic influence which made Pentheus wrongly suppose his palace on fire is enough to account for it. The third is the superhuman strength shown by Agaue and her companions in tearing Pentheus to pieces. Apparently such an action is beyond human power,² but to those who are ignorant of anatomy it does not seem impossible to the strength of madness. The First Messenger tells³

1. I understand the circumstances to be as follows. The Maenads are in a rocky glen, on both sides of which are cliffs (*ἄγκος ἀμφίκρημνον* v. 1051). Pentheus and his companions come to the *next* valley (called *ποιηρὸν νόπος* in v. 1048), and the king attempts in vain, from the cliff which separates this from the glen occupied by the Maenads, to see what the latter are doing. The point is that the men are not on the same level as the women—that the *ποιηρὸν νόπος* is not the same as the *ἄγκος ἀμφίκρημνον*. The first is a "grassy valley"; the second is described as a torrent-bed filled with boulders (*διὰ δὲ χειμάρρον νόπης ἀγμῶν τ' ἐπήδων*, vv. 1093, 4).

2. See Dr. Sandys' note on v. 1128.

3. Vv. 734—747.

of similar acts of destruction without attributing them to that divine agency which he sees elsewhere. The words of the Second Messenger imply that the power of the god made *easy* (εὐμάρειαν ἐπέδιδον, v. 1128) that which would have been merely difficult without its help. As in the case of the tree-“miracle” he is ready to see divine might in all the circumstances of the king's death. The only thing, I imagine, which Euripides sees in the matter is the power of the madness which blinds Agaue and her followers; there is nothing to show that he regards this act of violence as possessing any marvellous features of its own.

APPENDIX III.

DR. VERRALL'S WORK ON EURIPIDES.

IT will be obvious to anyone who has read the preceding pages that they are strongly influenced by the writings of Dr. Verrall. Though it has not been possible or necessary in this essay to make any use of that scholar's most definite and important thesis,¹ my idea of Euripides' intellectual nature and of his method of work is derived very largely from him. Accordingly I am glad of an opportunity of remarking on certain outstanding features of his two celebrated works, *Euripides the Rationalist* (containing essays on *Alcestis*, *Ion*, *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and *Phoenissae*) and *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides* (*Andromache*, *Helena*, *Hercules Furens* and *Orestes*), which are epoch-making for the study of Euripides, and indeed of Greek tragedy as a whole. It should be premised that though Dr. Verrall has published² some most interesting remarks on certain aspects of the play (such as the difference between the point of view of Teiresias and that of the Chorus), he has not yet given us his opinion of the *Bacchae* as a whole, and even appears at times deliberately to avoid discussing this peculiar play, which does indeed stand apart from the others. That Dr. Verrall's methods do not apply to it, however, I should be the last to deny,

1. Namely, that the prologue and epilogue of an Euripidean play are meant as *reductiones ad absurdum* and are of no real help, rather a hindrance, to a comprehension of the play proper. I do, indeed, think that what Dionysus says in those parts of the *Bacchae* about his godhead is untrue, but I regard them as belonging to the same plane as the rest of the play, and as completing the picture of Dionysus.

2. In a review of Pater's *Greek Studies* (*Classical Review*, ix, pp. 225—8).

and I shall have something to say about the light thrown on it by various remarks of his in the two books I have mentioned. An essay on the whole play by Dr. Verrall would be indeed illuminating.

What strikes the reader most in these two works is not any one theory or detail of interpretation, however ingeniously and brilliantly put forward (though such are to be found in abundance), but the spirit in which the writer approaches the work of which he treats. He is perpetually conscious that Euripides was regarded as a great dramatist by that people which not only evolved drama for itself and for most of the nations of Europe, but also was in general the most cultivated and intellectually keen people known to history. He is conscious, too, that modern readers are debarred from a proper appreciation of the poet, not only by vast differences of temperament and habits of life, but also by the narrow limits of the knowledge about him and his work which is now possible to us. Accordingly, he is always reminding us how much we must leave to our imagination, how zealously we must follow up hints and clues which to us naturally appear trifling, and how essential it is that we should divest ourselves as far as possible of modern ideas and put ourselves into the position of a fifth-century Athenian. It would be impertinent in me to praise the astonishing brilliance and the well-nigh miraculous ingenuity with which Dr. Verrall has advanced and supported his views, but at least it may be said that the enthusiasm for his subject which he feels and which he makes so contagious is of good omen for the future study of Euripides. It is not too much to say that, even if all the tangible results at which he arrives were erroneous, his works would still be invaluable to the student who wishes to enter into sympathy with the dramatist. So much for the spirit of these essays; I shall now confine myself in the main to mentioning details the correctness of which I venture to doubt.

The first and most important essay in *Euripides the Rationalist* is that on the *Alcestis*. One of the things which Dr. Verrall regards as most striking is that the dead queen should be buried in such haste. The normal course among the Athenians was the same as that now followed—to allow a few days to elapse between the death and the funeral. Instead of doing so Admetus, as soon as the breath is out of his wife's body, proceeds to give orders for the obsequies. Dr. Verrall supposes this to be due to a desire for privacy natural in Admetus under the peculiar circumstances. Since Alcestis has died in his stead he feels that the lamentations with which her friends and his subjects would follow the bier would be as many taunts and reproaches levelled at his own head. Therefore he hurries on the proceedings, so that no one except his own friends have an opportunity of attending. But is it not more likely that the irregularity is due to the reasons which have determined Alcestis to accept her death? When the day of Admetus' doom arrives, she sinks and breathes her last—that is, she dies for him as she promised. That she should die on the proper day ought in itself to be enough, but how could the mind of a man oppressed by both fear and superstition be quite certain that it was? Might he not suspect that "death" was not complete till the body as well as the signs of life had disappeared, that the dreadful beings who had looked upon him as their own might not be satisfied unless on the fixed day they seized upon the flesh and blood of his substitute as well as upon her vital faculties? Nothing could be more natural than such a fancy in times when the tie between body and soul was conceived as irresistibly strong, or rather when the connexion of the two had as yet received no sort of explanation at all, likely or unlikely, and was the subject of the vaguest and most inconsistent thinking. Admetus, it would seem, takes it for granted that, at whatever cost to decency and his own feelings, the sacrifice must be

completed by an immediate funeral, or it will have been offered in vain.¹ Of course, this explanation of the matter, if true, does not invalidate Dr. Verrall's theory of the play in general.

In the *Ion*, it will be remembered, Creüsa's identity as the mother of Ion is established by the way in which she is able to describe to the lad the articles which were found with him when, as an infant, he was discovered upon the steps of the temple at Delphi. Dr. Verrall (pp. 148—153) denies the validity of this proof, which relates to three objects : a wreath of olive still unwithered, the pattern of a shawl, and a child's necklace. I cannot think that he has succeeded in destroying the value of all these evidences, on the strength of the text. It is true that the wreath might easily be forged, as he says; and as for the baby-necklace which Creüsa put upon the child, she has given its fellow to the old slave who has been apprehended by the Delphians earlier in the play, and we are told no reason for supposing that the article produced by Ion is not the latter. But it is not so easy to explain away the third piece of evidence. Creüsa, when asked what was the pattern of the shawl, answers readily and gives a description which could hardly apply to anything else :

Γοργῶ μὲν ἐν μέσοισιν ἡτρίοις πέπλων.
κεκρασπέδωται δ' ὄφρ' αἰγίδος τρόπον.

At this Ion holds up the shawl exclaiming :

τόδ' ἔσθ' ὕφασμα· θέσφαθ' ὡς εὐρίσκομεν.

Granting to the full that these words are not perfectly clear (and when Euripides is obscure he is to be watched most narrowly), yet I think we must own that Creüsa passes the test. Her son is satisfied, for he goes on :

1. Dr. E. W. Hayley in his edition of the play (Boston, 1898; pp. xxxi, sq.) takes much the same view.

ἔστιν τι πρὸς τῶδ', ἢ μόνω τῶδ' εὐτυχεῖς; yet even if we agree with Dr. Verrall that Ion characterises this correct answer as a "lucky guess" (not perhaps a perfectly just translation), it is strange that when Euripides is treating of a matter which tends to prove the story told by Hermes¹ about his conveying the infant from Athens to Delphi—a story on which Dr. Verrall thinks it is the poet's business to throw doubt—he should do so in such an uncertain manner. It is quite possible that when acted the imposture was plain to the spectators, and, in any case, there is no manner of doubt that the *Ion* is a most damaging and astonishingly audacious attack on Apollo. But one feels that, so far as the text is concerned, Dr. Verrall is pushing subtlety too far. This applies, I think, also to his remarks (p. 190) on the etymology of the name Thoas which Euripides gives in the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*.

In his essay on the last-named play he quotes (pp. 198–9) Lucian (*Zeus Tragoedus*, § 41) in support of his theory. Timocles the Stoic has quoted Euripides as evidence for the existence of the gods, and he is refuted by the Epicurean Damis in the following words (I quote from Dr. Verrall's translation): "Friend Timocles, you are a most respectable philosopher; but if your conviction about the gods is based upon such tragedy as that, you must choose between believing either that at the time it was written [the actors] Polus, Aristodemus and Satyrus were gods, or that there was divinity in the actual masks . . . and other apparatus employed by them for the scenic pomp. . . . For where Euripides is expressing his own thoughts, unconstrained by the exigence of the performances, you may hear him say frankly this:

'See'st thou aloft yon infinite of air,
Which keeps the earth in liquid arms embraced?
That, that is "Zeus," believe me, that is God.'

1. In the prologue.

Or, again, this :

‘Zeus . . . whatsoe’er he be; I know of him
But tales.’

And so on elsewhere.” I cannot see that this passage, on which Dr. Verrall sets the greatest value, helps us very appreciably. All it proves is that Euripides often wrote as if he believed in the gods, and at other times apparently scouted their existence. But so much is obvious at the first glance to any reader, and has always been recognised. It does not show what Dr. Verrall is concerned to show—that Euripides habitually writes his orthodox passages in such a way that they constitute a *reductio ad absurdum*, or that the two kinds of statement are not of equal value, though the speaker in Lucian naturally elects to assume that they are not.¹

The *Helena* is the second play treated in *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides*. Dr. Verrall regards it as intentionally playful throughout, a burlesque of the poet’s own *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and written originally, not for the Dionysiac festival, but for a private representation at the house of a lady friend of the poet, situated on the little island of Helene, off the east coast of Attica. He gives life and plausibility to this theory by delightfully precise details about this lady and about her family history, details unearthed in a highly ingenious manner from the play itself and from the *Thesmophoriazusae*, in which, to be sure, Aristophanes parodies part of the *Helena*. But the whole theory seems built on too weak a foundation, on details in the play (that is) which strike us as silly or as overstrained, and on the light tone which pervades the work. This

1. It is worth while pointing out that Damis speaks of “the tragedians” (*τραγωδοποιοί*) not of “the tragedian” (*sc.* Euripides). He appears to mean simply that what a playwright chooses to put into the mouth of his characters is not necessarily to be taken as evidence of his personal belief—a very sound but scarcely novel view.

lightness, it is true, is strange, but it should be remembered that Euripides was treating a romantic, not a tragic, subject, one, moreover, which (so far as appears) had never before been handled by a playwright, and in which fancy might properly play a part, for the whole plot rests on a kind of fairy-story. But the almost total absence of tragic grimness has induced Dr. Verrall to regard the whole as an intentional burlesque (relieved, it is true, by a few serious passages) of the poet's own *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and when he is confronted with the hideous massacre of scores of Egyptian sailors at the close of the play, he is reduced to getting rid of the awkward detail by a *tour de force*. One of the Egyptians, suspecting treachery on the part of Menelaus, cries out (vv. 1589—1591):

δόλιος ἢ ναυκληρία·
 πάλιν πλέωμεν ἀξίαν· κέλευε σύ,
 σὺ δὲ στρέφ' οἴακα.

The word ἀξίαν makes no sense, and various emendations are proposed.¹ Dr. Verrall would read Ἀξίαν, and supposes Axia to be the name of the house (or hamlet near the house) at which the play was acted in the first instance. This sudden throwing aside of the imaginary circumstances would remind the audience that the whole thing was a piece of fun, and so would prevent any painful shudder at the massacre. This is the climax to exceptionally large demands on one's credulity. It is difficult to understand how the essayist has persuaded himself that a play of which he himself says (p. 88): "Everything is irregular and just wrong . . . the pathos smiles, the motives flag, the machinery halts, and the situations just never come off" (all of which flaws,

1. The most convincing of these is that of Prof. Henry Jackson (*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, Feb. 22, 1900), who would read in v. 1590 (combining the suggestions of two other scholars) *παλιν πλέωμεν· δεξιὰν κέλευε σύ*, that is, "boatswain, pipe to the right!" I owe my knowledge of this emendation to the kindness of Prof. Jackson.

he says, are in this case intentional) should have been offered by Euripides for presentation at the State festival and should have obtained a chorus when offered. One is tempted to suspect that this attractive and elaborate theory is due to a perception of the general inferiority of the tragic power exhibited, combined with the assumption that Euripides could not produce poor work. The application of considerations like these to Shakespeare is a familiar phenomenon; the only difference is that in Shakespeare's case the bad passage is condemned as spurious, whereas in Euripides it is extolled as revealing still more secluded recesses of dramatic subtlety. Surely it is more likely that the poet is here attempting a somewhat different kind of play, and has only partially succeeded.

The *Hercules Furens* is remarkable as affording, with the *Bacchae* (and the *Rhesus*, if genuine), the most damaging *prima facie* evidence against Dr. Verrall's theory. He maintains that Euripides' method in general was to keep whatever gods appeared in his play outside the main stream of action, to confine them to the prologue and epilogue, and by doing so to make it plain to acute hearers that he regards these two portions of the play as of little serious value; while in the main body of the play there is no alleged evidence for the existence and power of the traditional gods which is left unrefuted. Of the supernatural personages in the *Alcestis* he says¹ that they "are neither mixed with the others on the same plane of action, nor indicated as moving on a line of their own which intersects, as it were, the line of humanity at certain points, so that perception is then mutual between the two classes of being." This important remark applies, of course, to most plays of Euripides now extant. The great apparent exception is the *Bacchae*, which I think I have shown to be no real exception. Less remarkable in this

1. *Euripides the Rationalist*, p. 96.

way, but still most important, is the *Hercules Furens*. In the first place, we have divine persons (Iris and Madness) who appear in the very heart of the play and who do ostensibly rule the second stage of the action. In the second place, we find references to feats performed by Heracles, and to other circumstances connected with him, which supply evidence for his divine parentage and which—here is the striking feature—are put into his own mouth and into that of at least one other person in the play—a person who must be regarded as a first-hand witness of the matter discussed (if it happened at all) and who is clearly a man of sane and normal intelligence.

Let us first examine the apparition of Iris and Madness. They do not, as is usual, hold their conversation in the prologue, unseen and unheard by the mortals of the play. They enter in the middle of it and are both seen and heard by the aged Thebans who constitute the Chorus. They have been sent by Hera, the implacable foe of Heracles, to fill his mind with madness in the hour of his victory over Lycus and so to cause him to slay his wife and children. Dr. Verrall points out that the description of the slaughter when it occurs contains no reference to the intervention of Madness, who is, however, seen entering the house to throw herself upon the hero. He also reminds us that the Chorus make no allusion whatever to the matter after the Messenger has come to them, "and this through a series of situations such that reticence, if the thing were in their consciousness, would be inconceivable."¹ Dr. Verrall's explanation is that this apparition is unreal, a dream in the mind of a member of the Chorus, and that the figures of Iris and her companion are shown to the audience for no other reason than that only so can they be aware of the precise nature of a

1. *Essays on Four Plays of Euripides*, p. 169.

dream the details of which the dreamer himself does not recall when he awakes.

This explanation appears to me as convincing as it is bold. The only criticism one can make is that though a spectator could see most easily from the action that the aged men are asleep, the whole scene would be puzzling to a reader. It is strange that Euripides did not insert in the words of the play something to enlighten those who should have nothing else to assist them.¹ But this is a detail, and it might be plausibly answered that all those to whom the poet addressed himself would either have seen the play acted or be able to apply to others who had seen it. My main reason for quoting Dr. Verrall's theory on this point is that it affords the strongest support to the explanation (at which I had independently arrived) of the palace-"miracle" in the *Bacchae*. It will be noticed that the "dream" (if it can be so called) in the *Bacchae* is less perplexing to the spectator than the dream in the *Hercules*; for in the *Hercules* the supernatural beings in whom he is *not* to believe are brought on the stage before his eyes, whereas in the *Bacchae* the supernatural event in which he is *not* to believe is not enacted, even for any temporary purpose of stage-craft.

The other peculiarity noticed above—the fact that apparently reliable persons mention events in which it seems certain that Euripides cannot have himself believed—is more difficult of explanation. Both Heracles and Theseus make remarks which have generally been understood to refer to a superhuman exploit of the former—his descent into Hades, his coming back thence alive and safe himself, and his bringing with him Theseus, who had been imprisoned there alive by Pluto. Heracles' utterances on this subject and his references

1. It is true that Dr. Verrall (p. 170) says: "Every sentence points to the same inference." But the words he quotes (δ λευκὰ γήρῃ σώματα and ἀνακαλείς με τίνα βοάν;) are not adequate to the purpose, though σώματα does suggest that the Chorus are lying upon the ground.

to his divine parentage and to the hatred of Hera are waved aside by Dr. Verrall as the wild fancies of a madman. Needless to say, the drama itself shows us the hero suffering in very truth from insanity, which produces other delusions of the kind suggested. Just as he imagines that he is in the palace of Eurystheus at Mycenae, while in reality he is still at Thebes, so Dr. Verrall thinks that his descent to Hades is a delusion, and that we are no more bound to believe in it than in the fictitious conquest of Mycenae. And, as a matter of fact, Heracles does exhibit a vacillation of opinion, now reviling Hera and now denying the truth of all such "miserable tales," most appropriate to a person of strong sense subject to recurrent fits of insanity. We are therefore at liberty to regard his story as in itself untrustworthy. But, unfortunately for this view, Theseus supports the story, or appears to support it, and Theseus is evidently meant by the poet as the one normal person of the play. Here Dr. Verrall, if one may so speak, only gets off by the skin of his teeth. He examines the passages in which the Athenian king refers to the adventure in which he and his unhappy friend took part, and points out that he speaks of its nature and of the place where it occurred in this language :

τίνων δ' ἀμοιβὰς ὦν ὑπῆρξεν Ἡρακλῆς
σώσας με νέρθεν ἦλθον.¹

ὄτ' ἐξέσωσάς μ' ἐς φάος νεκρῶν πάρα.²

κἀγὼ χάριν σοὶ τῆς ἐμῆς σωτηρίας
τήνδ' ἀντιδώσω.³

HP. σὺ ποῖος ἦσθα νέρθεν ἐν κακοῖσιν ὦν;
ΘΗ. ὡς ἐς τὸ λῆμα παντὸς ἦν ἦσσω ἀνὴρ.⁴

1. Vv. 1169, *sq.*

2. V. 1222.

3. Vv. 1336.

4. Vv. 1415.

That is, by chance or design, Theseus never says explicitly: "I was in Hades, and you came down thither and rescued me." It is possible of course that as Dr. Verrall says,¹ "various incidents may be imagined, possible and not improbable in themselves, which would satisfy this language. For example, the two friends might visit a mine or a cave together, and be imprisoned with the victims of a fatal accident." Such words as *νέρθειν*, *νεκρῶν πάρα*, and the like, may unquestionably refer to something of this kind. But in this case, too, we may ask the question which Dr. Verrall would ask of those who accept the other view—why is Theseus not more explicit? Why does he not throw in by the way some definite allusion to the locality (for example) of the accident in the mine? So that the absence of precision in his language proves nothing for the one explanation any more than for the other; or rather it is (so far as it goes) in favour of the customary assumption, for it is surely more natural that a man, who had gone through so unparalleled and so appalling an experience as imprisonment in Hell and forcible rescue from the infernal dungeon at the hands of a demigod, should shrink from any direct reference to it which is not absolutely necessary, than that he should show the same reticence about an ordinary accident. One feels that Dr. Verrall is on very thin ice indeed, and though I cannot offer any better explanation (for Euripides did undoubtedly as a rule disbelieve such stories as this), the allusions to the adventure, if examined with an open mind, read like the writing of a man who is taking the story as he finds it, but who, for reasons easy to conjecture, expatiates upon it as little as possible.

It now only remains to discuss certain more general questions. Dr. Verrall, alluding to his own method of interpreting the poet, says:² "The works of Euripides,

1. p. 185.

2. *Euripides the Rationalist*, Introduction, p. ix.

almost all of them, depend for their interpretation on a certain broad conventional principle, probably not ever applicable to many writings except his, and applicable to no others now extant." I cannot help thinking this a rash pronouncement. The practical compromise between acquiescence in theological tradition and a powerful spirit of scepticism which his theory finds in this body of plays is due to certain circumstances under which their author wrote; and whenever and wherever such conditions are reproduced, then and there we may look for similar work. The conditions are: first, an age in which men of original thought have largely outgrown the traditional creed but have not yet thrown altogether on one side the forms in which that creed has embodied itself; second, a strong attachment on the part of the masses to both creed and forms; and, third, what is far less common than the two former conditions, a necessity, or a convention resembling necessity in its strength, that a dramatist should treat of the very subjects in connexion with which thought is undergoing the transition just mentioned. Have these conditions never been in simultaneous operation except at Athens and in Euripides' day? And is the fact, that no author except Euripides has been pointed to as a proper subject for the interpretation advanced by Dr. Verrall, a proof that no such author has existed? If it has taken modern Europe four centuries to discover this fundamental principle of criticism in the case of a writer who, when the extent and the duration of his fame are considered, stands (excluding of course the writers of sacred literature) next to Homer, Aristotle, and Vergil, we can suppose that it may be applicable to many writers who have received less attention. I will venture to point out what, with reservations,¹ may be regarded as a parallel

1. For instance, it may be thought that the effect to which I am about to refer is due only to Marlowe's often chaotic manner of constructing his plots.

offered by our own dramatic literature—Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. The case is interesting, not only because it exhibits analogies with Euripides' work, but because it clearly raises a question perhaps applicable to the latter.

The English play provides, in the position, the method, and the subject of the playwright, a marked analogy to the position, the method, and the subject of the Greek dramatist. The poet is a man of lofty genius and audacious speculation, in his own day definitely accused of atheism because he thought more freely and deeply on all matters (including religion) than the mass of his contemporaries.¹ The subject, again, is one on which few men whose views were more liberal than was fashionable would venture to speak with perfect freedom. A Jew might hope for anything but justice; Protestants and Romanists found that they had at any rate one tenet in common—a hearty detestation of the Hebrews. Shylock stands as a witness to all time of the treatment meted out to them; in spite of his splendid appeal to the common instincts of humanity he is regarded and treated as an outcast; and it is most significant that his villainy in regard to the compact with Antonio makes no difference at all to the abhorrence in which he is held. He is hated, not for his character, but for his blood and religion. Such was the attitude of England towards the Jew, and no dramatist, necessarily dependent upon popular support for a hearing if not for a livelihood, could openly go counter to it. But Marlowe was no friend to Christianity, regarded merely as a sect at loggerheads with Judaism, and he could well sympathise with any member of a down-trodden race, particularly if he were of that large elemental type of character so dear to the delineator of Faust and Tamburlaine.

1. There is a strong resemblance between the Note of Richard Baines on Marlowe's "Damnable Opinions and Judgment of Relygion," and the crude popular calumnies on Euripides, of which we catch something more than the echo in Aristophanes.

Nothing would be more congenial to him than to depict the lonely Hebrew struggling against all the perils and snares which political tyranny, religious rancour, and treacherous spite could devise against him, and in face of all odds triumphing at last. And through almost all the play that is precisely what we find. There is, it is true, a certain measure of crude, grim "horror-mongering" inserted for the delight of the mob (analogous to the clown-scenes familiar in Shakespeare and to those which strike us so oddly in Marlowe's own *Doctor Faustus*), but, apart from this, the play is an admirable portrayal of one man, the incarnation of the spirit of resistance, who by sheer strength of persistent will and cunning overcomes all obstacles, with the same astuteness and hardihood discovering the treachery of his faithless servant and laying the tyrant of Malta at his feet. So far we have just the work which we should expect from such a man writing on such a theme; but, as in the case of Euripides, so here, the prejudices of the populace levy their accustomed tax. When Barabas has become lord of Malta and has humiliated all his foes, the real Marlowe ceases writing and bigotry takes up the pen. At the very end Barabas conceives the idea of destroying the Turkish general and his troops, who have helped him to take the last step of his upward climb. When the treacherous train is laid, the Jew is caught in his own trap and dies in agony amid the jeers of Christian and Ottoman. Thus the actual formal end of the play shows us Barabas dead and disgraced, while the Christian governor of Malta (an exceedingly poor creature) lives and enjoys his former power. Whether in Marlowe or Euripides, this hasty adjustment of things to suit a prejudiced audience deceives, or should deceive, no one. No great dramatist should allow himself this kind of death-bed repentance, and no great dramatist, we may affirm, does allow it as an essential and serious part of a play.

There is but one point still to be raised, a point which inevitably suggests itself in connexion with Marlowe, and which may concern our estimate of Euripides also. Dr. Verrall, in maintaining that Euripides was at heart a friend to rationalism and a foe to myth, and that his orthodox utterances are a concession to pious prejudice, is going no farther than many scholars have gone before him. What is novel in his work is the uncompromising vigour with which he applies his theory, and also his belief that Euripides himself is perfectly conscious of the incompatibility of the two kinds of opinion to which he gives voice, that he deliberately constructs his prologues and epilogues so that the more closely they are examined the more absurd they appear, and that it is with him a device carefully conceived and consciously executed to fasten these parts of the play on to his serious work. Another view is possible, and the comparison with Marlowe suggests it, for it is quite a tenable position that the Englishman was not completely aware of the incongruities in his tragedy, that he partook in an imperfect degree of the prejudices which filled entirely the mind of the average person in his own day, and that so his play exhibits inconsistencies because the mind from which it sprang was occupied by mutually hostile sentiments which turn by turn asserted dominion over it. In the same way one might suppose that Euripides began to write on a religious theme with no intention of playing it false, but as he proceeded insensibly remodelled the story according to the turn of his own speculative rationalistic mind, and in the end produced a drama containing discords of which he was even then only half conscious and which he had never intended to produce at all. This is a question which it is important to answer, as it involves the right of Euripides to be counted a great artist rather than what we may call an inspired journalist. Probably no proof can be adduced which makes the matter absolutely certain.

The only way is to consider whether the discrepancy between prologue and epilogue on the one hand and the main body of the play on the other is so palpable that we may be sure it was manifest to the man who wrote the whole. In the case of the *Ion*, at any rate, there is absolutely no room for doubt; Euripides must have been fully conscious of a discrepancy which stares everyone in the face. It is then unquestionable that the deliberate adoption of the device we are discussing was the fact in at least one instance; and it is legitimate to postulate it in cases (such as the *Orestes* and the *Electra*) which are not so strong as the *Ion*, but which leave no room for serious doubt. But it is not altogether certain that all prologues and epilogues which bring gods upon the stage (those of the *Hippolytus* and of the *Troades* for instance) are meant to be regarded as shams. We should do well to hesitate, as does Dr. Verrall himself¹ in the case of the *Hippolytus*, before we apply his theory to all such passages.

1. *Essays on four plays of Euripides*, p. 167, note 2.

APPENDIX IV.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WRITINGS ON EURIPIDES.

THE following list contains the names of all editions, essays, translations, and articles on Euripides and his writings of which I have any knowledge. A perfect bibliography would not only include all the published literature of the subject, but would also indicate the nature of the various writings and give some estimate of their importance. For two good reasons I have not attempted this. I have no doubt that the list is not complete, and I have not examined anything like the whole number of the works which I mention. I have judged it best, therefore, simply to set them out according to the alphabetical order of the writers' names. My only reason for printing the list is that (so far as I know) no complete bibliography of works on Euripides is in existence. Till it appears (and it is much needed) the present rough enumeration may be of some use. All works are included which deal in any way with the poet and his dramas, except that I have, as a rule, omitted those which, confining themselves to individual plays, do not touch on the *Bacchae*.

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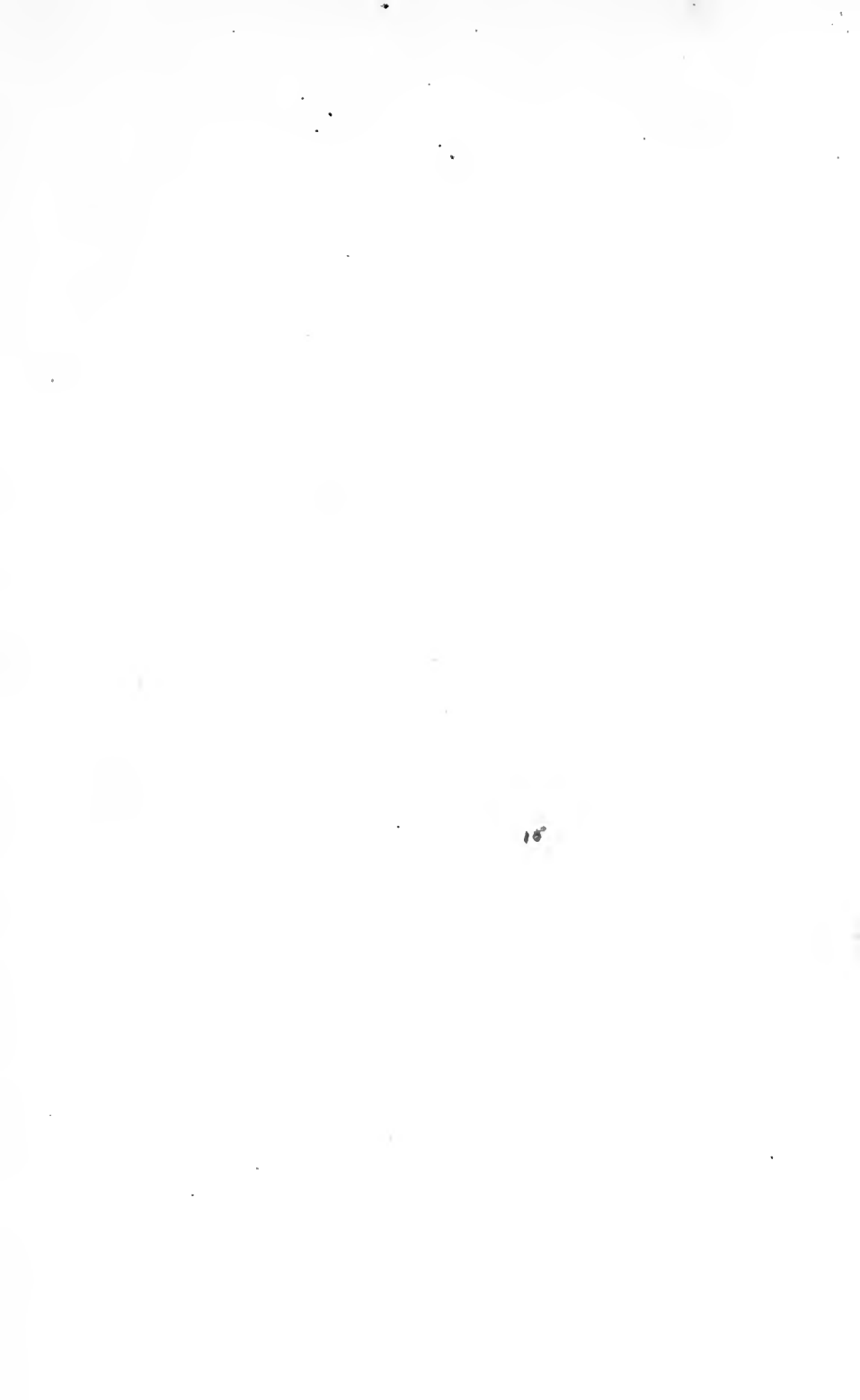
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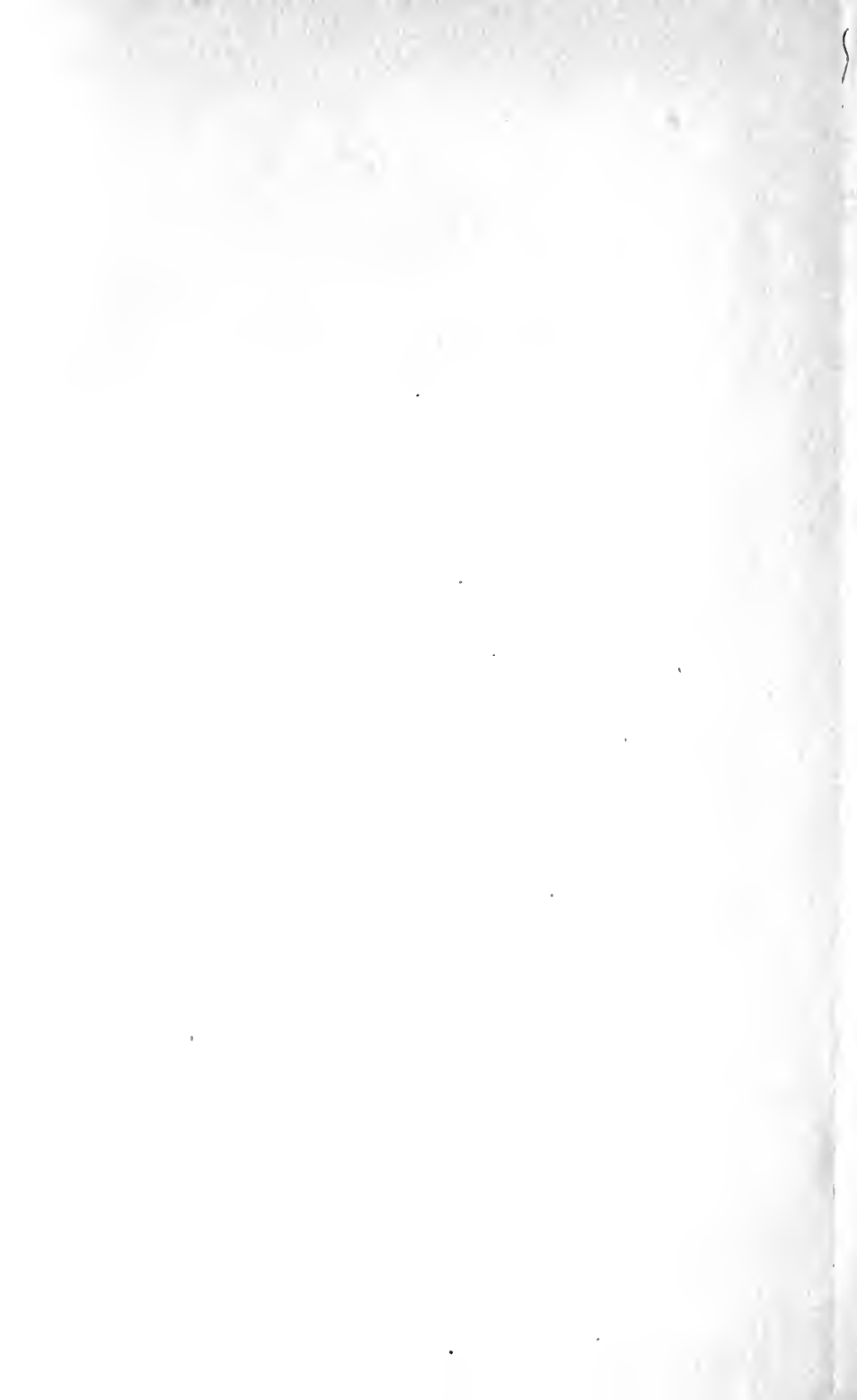
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