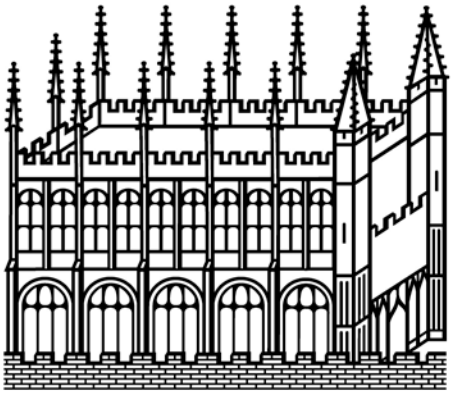

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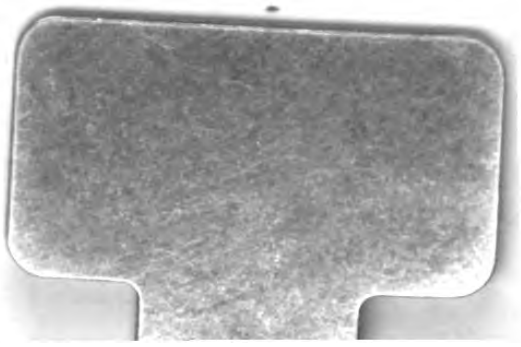

Classical Writers.

Edited by JOHN RICHARD GREEN.

EURIPIDES.

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EURIPIDES.

CHAPTER I.

HIS AGE AND SURROUNDINGS.

1. Nothing is more disappointing to the student of the literature of Greece than the obscurity which clouds the life of almost all her greatest authors. Except in those few cases where our Greek books imply an autobiography by their very contents, such as the fragments of Solon, the *Anabasis* of Xenophon, or the speeches of Demosthenes, we are thrown back upon notices exceedingly scanty and exceedingly untrustworthy. We may therefore best learn to know the real author, apart from vulgar gossip or trivial anecdote, by studying the age in which he lived and the society in which he moved. Every Greek poet (I might indeed say every poet) is strictly the child of his day, the exponent of a national want, the preacher of a national aspiration, at once the outcome and the leader of a literary public, or at least of a public which craves after spiritual sustenance. From Homer to Menander this feature marks social life in Greece, and makes the history of Greek literature pre-eminently the history of the Hellenic people.*

* We have nothing analogous, in modern days, to this intimate connection of poet and public, except the relation of the daily press to the people in England, where it is hard to say, in any single case, whether the public leads the papers, or the reverse, action and reaction being constant and immediate.

But in no case are these considerations more important than in that of Euripides, the poet who has bequeathed to us the largest and most varied materials to estimate his age; while on the other hand, his age—the age of Thucydides and of Aristophanes, of Pericles and of Alkibiades, of Phidias, and of Alkamenes—is the best known and most brilliant epoch in Athenian history. He was indeed no public man, but a confirmed student, a lover of books and of solitude; but yet certainly the personal friend of Pericles and Socrates, his elder and younger contemporaries, the hearer of Anaxagoras and Prodicus; if not the active promoter, at least the close observer of all that was great and brilliant in Athens, then the Hellas of Hellas, the inmost and purest shrine of all the national culture. We will therefore introduce the poet by a short survey of the society in which he lived, and the conditions under which he pursued his art. For those who desire to know more of this inexhaustible subject, —the Periclean age—there is a whole library of fuller books in various languages.*

2. The life of Euripides reached from the battle of Salamis almost to that of Ægospotami; his boyhood therefore was in that very obscure period which precedes the blaze of light shed by Pericles and his contemporaries on the full-grown Athenian empire. Except Thucydides' valuable summary at the opening of his *History*, and Plutarch's *Life of Kimon*, we have no account of the means by which Athens attained her greatness. But we know that an extraordinary and feverish activity inspired every Athenian, high and low, to build up the imperial sway of his native city. The wise reforms of Cleisthenes had given each citizen an interest in the constitution and a voice in the management of public affairs. The common calamities of poverty and exile, the common glories of victory, especially of naval victory, in which the poorest classes had the main share, welded together all ranks

* Viz. Watkiss Lloyd, *The Age of Pericles*; Filleul, *L'Age de Pericles*; Oncken, *Athen und Hellas*; and many others.

and fired all hearts with a common patriotism. And for the first decade, at least, men were content to let internal politics alone, and pursue the foreign policy of which Kimon was the most eminent instrument. It was in fact a democracy still managed by aristocrats, in whom the people saw their natural leaders, and whose social prestige ensured them the suffrages of the lower classes.

But before the poet was come to years of discretion, Pericles had inaugurated a new internal policy, in opposition to Kimon. He was no less an aristocrat; nay, he was the lineal descendant of the old tyrants, who had educated Athens in letters, while they retarded her political development. But, like the old Whig nobility of England, he led the Liberal party against the Tories under Kimon. Hence came constitutional conflicts of great bitterness, terminating in the victory of the popular party and the administration of Pericles. The old aristocratic party, however, remained still a considerable power—an opposition not always constitutional, and always a danger to the Athenian demos, until the Revolution of 411 and the Tyranny of the Thirty forced all its leaders into plain treason towards the State. Then the restored democracy so secured itself that we hear of its opponents as a party no more. But in Pericles' earlier days, we must conceive the Athenians as well versed in constitutional discussions, as perpetually debating the limits and value of an aristocracy, the sovereign rights of the people, the responsibility of magistrates; while no less important questions of foreign policy, of the rights of subjects, of the administration of finance, were brought before the mind of every citizen.

3. Thus the political education which is obtained by the public discussion of constitutional questions, and by that alone, was certainly one of the leading attributes of Athenian society as Euripides grew up. We endeavour nowadays to attain this diffusion of political sense by a public press; but I need hardly remind anyone who has even once joined in a formal

debate on any such question, how infinitely better a man is educated by one debate than by a thousand leading articles or reports. We may therefore subscribe to Mr. Freeman's statement—that the average Athenian citizen, who performed the duties of jury-man in the imperial courts, who judged the greater disputes of all the subjects, and who listened regularly to the debates in the Assembly, was better educated in politics than the average members of our House of Commons.

4. On the other hand, it is by no means so certain that the social growth of Athens profited absolutely by this great development of energy and of political insight. There was, of course, a general increase of intelligence, of knowledge about the outlying parts of the Greek world, of intercourse with men from foreign cities, particularly, moreover, of talking power, transferred from public debate to private conversation; all these advances were indisputable. But it is not so clear that the social intercourse did not become too serious a mental exercise, especially when the country life of the old Attic gentry decayed, and Athens began to absorb all the life and intellect of the people. The picture we have of Kimon at the supper-table, singing his song among the guests in his turn, and narrating his military experiences, is somewhat different from the ideal talk set down for us by later authors, in which we miss the ease and freedom and want of purpose which characterise the social intercourse of the sporting aristocrat. So also the influence of the gentler sex must have been waning rapidly, when power passed from the Alcmæonids to the charcoal burners of Acharnæ or the sailors of the Piræus. The lady of the old country seats in Attica was a very different power from the immured upper servant we find in the plays of Aristophanes and the dialogues of Xenophon.

We may best describe the life of the Periclean citizen in Euripides' youth by comparing it to the life of a London man, who, though married and having children,

goes early to his business, and spends his afternoon and evening in the club or the House of Commons, only returning to dine or to sleep at home. The Attic boys were sent to day-schools, and attended by old slaves, who were unfit for harder work. The girls were brought up in seclusion as strict as that of a convent. In no case does the Athenian citizen seem to have had time or inclination to educate them himself.

5. There was, moreover, an immense population of slaves, which did all menial work, and made the life of even poorer people a life free from drudgery, with a certain sense of power and superiority foreign to modern democratic society. The great majority of these slaves were not Hellenes, but from the wilds of Thrace and the effete populations of Asia Minor. The Athenians regarded them as the American planters in our day regarded their negroes. But as in the States the frequent case of slaves almost purely European was the weak point of the system, and that which gave the orator and the novelist their chief ground of attack, so the existence of Greek slaves, chiefly prisoners of war who could procure no ransom, was felt a hardship and a misfortune by those who reflected on the improvement of society. Nothing was further from the Greek democrat than to assert by proclamation or otherwise the equality of men. Even the Greek theorists who propounded socialist and communist schemes, propounded them on the aristocratic basis of a select society of privileged equals, served by subjects and slaves. Nevertheless the social discomfort of a wife who was no companion, and of slaves who were not loyal, led to the practical conclusion that the one ought to be educated and the others conciliated, and we hear that before the end of the Periclean period the condition of slaves at Athens was so much better than elsewhere as to suggest the sneer that you might mistake them for freemen in the streets, for they dressed no worse, and the laws forbade you to strike any but your own.

6. The emancipation of women—a far more difficult advance—was evidently in the mind of Pericles, who himself violated social propriety, not merely by having Aspasia at the head of his house, but apparently by permitting her to receive company and discuss social and moral questions with intellectual men. But this example, and the constant teaching of Socrates in the same direction, were unable to overcome the strong conservative feeling of Attic society, that such a change must be subversive of morals and of home life. Thus it remained an unsettled conflict—one of those problems of the day—in which the theorists are unanswerable in argument, but yet powerless to move the inertness of the public, or retort the ridicule to which their novelties expose them.

7. But these social questions were only the consequence of far deeper and wider problems, which stirred in the minds of men as soon as an assured empire gave them time and ambition for reflection. Moral and social philosophy (apart from the early proverbial or *gnomic* form) does not strike root until men have somewhat exhausted the rich virgin soil of speculation with larger and vaguer inquiries into the origin of things, the texture of matter and mind, and the nature of their first cause. Theology and metaphysic always precede ethics and sociology as sciences. Early thinkers assume the nature of man as obvious, and desire to probe the secrets of the universe. Thus we have in Greece, beginning earlier than the Periclean epoch, a series of great names in the history of philosophy — Pythagoras, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras—whose speculations on Being and Becoming, on Permanence and Change, on the elements of matter and the laws of their composition, have afforded even to modern German metaphysicians all the best hints for their systems.

These physical and metaphysical philosophers, from Thales onward, all agreed in one important feature —they were thoroughly secular in spirit, and carried on their inquiries without the restraint or justification

of religious orthodoxy. Of course their conclusions drifted away from ordinary mythology. When the Attic public heard that Anaxagoras, the friend of Pericles, reduced Helios, the blessed Sun, to a mass of red-hot metal, and set up as the prime mover of matter a vague Intelligence, instead of the national Zeus, they were inexpressibly shocked. Yet Anaxagoras had never placed himself in declared opposition to orthodoxy. He probably thought out his system, and taught his pupils without alluding to it.

8. The work of popularising the theories of the philosophers, and of working out the formal side of knowledge, was taken up by a class of men who, though claiming to be philosophers, were very different from the solitary thinkers just named—I mean the much-decried much-vindicated sophists. The leaders of these—Gorgias, Protagoras, and Prodicus—are represented, even by the bitter enemies of their class, as both able and respectable, undertaking the task of general higher education, and fulfilling through the Greek cities exactly the office of the universities in England. They taught general culture, and, above all, the art of expressing oneself fluently on the topics of the day, as well as the stricter art of disputation, or of maintaining one's ground against an adversary. They of course professed to know all the deeper philosophy of their age, and were ready to talk hard metaphysics with those who challenged them; but their main occupation was with the formal side of knowledge, with our faculty of knowing rather than with the things known by it. Hence they studied accuracy of expression and subtlety of reasoning. They sowed the seeds of that chaste and strict prose style which has modelled all the literature of Europe. They studied rhetoric, and with it the practical sides of politics and of ethics which came into ordinary life. Of course the really eminent sophists excited a herd of imitators, who did not maintain the reserve and respect towards traditional beliefs which characterised Gorgias and Prodicus. These inferior men led the way

to scepticism in religion and in morals; they preached the supremacy of intellect, the absolute right of private judgment, the new epoch of enlightenment, when logical proofs were to displace moral convictions; and for the moment it seemed as if all society must be set loose from its old and hallowed beliefs, and sent adrift upon a sea of negative arguments and sceptical surmises.

9. Presently, however, the Athenians righted themselves. The encyclopædic pretences of the sophists gave way before the attacks of specialists in science, specialists in philosophy, and specialists in rhetoric. The misfortunes of the State produced a strong reaction towards orthodoxy, and to this reaction Socrates fell a victim. But this came in the next generation. In the Periclean age we must conceive the deeper minds as unsettled by the speculations of philosophy, while the more superficial were attracted by the flippant scepticism of the lower sophists. There was, of course, a large body of vulgar orthodoxy that worshipped the national gods, that consulted oracles and prophets, that believed in dreams and omens. Even Pericles seems to have traded upon this orthodoxy. But the pride of intellect, the love of reasoning everything out, the desire of superiority in debate, were so prominent a feature in society as to spoil conversation, and generally to turn a dinner-party into a debating club. The only author of this period who knows how to compose an easy and natural dialogue is the Ionic Herodotus. Even the early Attic prose of Gorgias was full of artificial graces—he was a sort of Watteau in oratory.

10. But men soon began to seek for clearness and strength in this as in the other arts which had made earlier and more rapid progress. It was indeed in these other arts—architecture, sculpture, probably painting and music also—that the most sceptical might find large and satisfactory results. They were not cultivated by amateurs but by professional artists, whose whole life was devoted to the study of their art. Ictinus and Mnesicles, the builders of the giant

Parthenon, and the no less splendid Propylæa, astonish all modern architects by the deep scientific knowledge implied in these structures. Phidias distinctly contributed to the support of dying paganism by the majesty of his Olympian Zeus. These men brought their arts from clumsiness of proportion, from the stereotyped curls and smile, into the simplicity and majesty which we may worship, not only at Athens, but in the ruins of Bassæ, or in the wondrous pediment of Alkamenes, lately drawn from oblivion under the sands of Olympia. A great enthusiasm for art seized on the public mind at Athens. Men of after days knew not whether to wonder most at the feverish hurry or the eternal solidity with which these great monuments were built. No contractor, with all the resources of modern mechanics, would undertake to rebuild the Parthenon, with new material, on its site in the time taken for its original construction. Every year saw some statue produced which all the sculptors, from the next generation to this day, cannot rival in all these centuries of time. If ever a people were educated, or could be educated to perfect taste and refinement by contemplating ideal beauty in art, the Periclean Athenians enjoyed that unique privilege. It was, in fact, so essential a part of their life that the authors of that time only mention it in passing allusions.

11. In literature their condition was hardly less favourable. The common use of writing was so lately diffused, and the materials so limited, that they were not flooded, as we are, with spring tides of common and worthless books. But still they were able to procure, and they were taught at school, the poems of Homer and the other early epics, the greatest of the lyric and elegiac poets, and of late years the masterpieces of Æschylus and Phrynichus. It was such an education as Englishmen might have obtained in poetry in the end of the 17th century, if Shakspere had taken the place of the Bible, with Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton as familiar to men as nursery rhymes to our children. But we

can find no parallel to the splendid education of the stage, which all the adult population derived from the growing and now paramount tragedy. All the deepest questions of religion and of morals were brought home to men's minds in a manner infinitely more striking than the best and ablest preaching in our Christian pulpits. Indeed there was more poetry of the first order already extant than any average man could master, and that too of every vein and temper, from the ideal pictures of Homer and the soaring flights of Pindar to the mean limping of the plebeian Hipponax and the unsavoury confessions of the ribald Archilochus.

12. This was the sort of society into which Euripides was born, and in which he spent his life. It was a society in many respects intensely modern, with its religious and philosophical scepticism, its publicity of debate, its rational inquiry, its advanced democracy. There was great simplicity of dress and frugality of life, combined with a splendid extravagance in public works and national undertakings. There was a good deal of coarseness and rudeness of manners, combined with a keen appreciation of artistic genius in conception and of beauty in form and colour. There was a great deal of wit and smartness, combined with a tedious taste for disputation and for verbal subtleties. There was a great deal of hard and vulgar selfishness, combined with enthusiastic patriotism and devotion to public interests. There was a great deal of intelligence and enlightenment without any large diffusion of learning; much intimacy with the national literature without many collections of books. And, if the forms of the men and women were not, as I believe, of any remarkable beauty (like those of the Spartans), yet artists had found an ideal canon of perfection unparalleled, save in rare exceptions, throughout the annals of the human race.

These are the more important general features of Periclean society at Athens, which clothe the mere dates of the poet's life and of his works with all their interest and proper meaning.

But as general readers cannot be expected to have the facts of Greek history fresh in their minds, I here append a chronicle of the principal events in the poet's life, and his chief contemporaries. By this means, at least a skeleton of the period will be conveyed, and old scholars will easily recall through it their former studies. There is, indeed, a great deal of uncertainty about many of the sculptors and painters, of whom we seldom know more than the vague *floruit* from such people as Pliny. But in every case we can fairly determine the artists' generation, and tell that they were contemporaries of our poet, even when we cannot affirm that they influenced his rising genius.

CHRONOLOGY OF EURIPIDES' LIFE AND TIMES.

OL.	B.C.	POLITICAL CHRONICLE.	LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CHRONICLE.
	480		Pindar 38 years old.
75.1		Battle of Thermopylæ.	Pherecydes the historian "flourished."
		Battle of Salamis (20th September).	Æschylus and Anaxagoras at Athens.
		Victory of Gelon and Theron over the Carthaginians.	Birth of Euripides. [But the Parian marble consistently asserts him to have been born 485 B.C.]
	479		
75.2		Battle of Platæa.	
		Battle of Mycale.	Birth of Antiphon the orator.
		Commencement of the Ionic Confederacy.	
		Conquest of Sestos.	Birth of Chœrilus of Samos.
	478	The re-building of Athens and fortifying of the Piræus.	The sculptors Ageladas of Argos, Canachus and Aristokles of Sicyon, Callon and Onatas of Ægina, had already developed sculpture, and were probably old.
75.3		Reforms of Aristides.	Calamis rising ; also Pythagoras of Rhegium, the sculptor.
	477		Epicharmus' *Islands*.
75.4		Conquest of Cyprus by the Greeks.	
	476	Conquest of Byzantium. Transference of the Hegemony to Athens.	Pindar's 14th Olympic Ode.
76.1		Hiero, tyrant of Gela and Syracuse. Founding of Ætna.	Epicharmos, Sophron, Æschylus, Pindar, and Simonides at Syracuse ; also Korax the rhetor.

			Phrynichus the tragedian gains the prize, Themistocles being *choregus*.
76.2	475	Organising of the Delian Confederacy.	Simonides, aged 80, wins a lyric prize.
76.3	474	Prosecution of king Pausanias.	Pindar's 7th Pythian Ode.
76.4	473		The *Persæ* of Æschylus.
77.1	472		Pindar's 2nd and 12th Olympic Odes.
	471		Birth of Thucydides the historian. Timocreon the Rhodian "flourished."
77.2		Banishment of Themistocles.	
77.3	470	Kimon becomes the leading statesman at Athens.	Pindar's 1st Pythian Ode.
77.4	469	Archidamos succeeds Leotychides at Sparta.	Polygnotus the painter, and Bakchylides the lyric poet, eminent.
	468	[The alleged late destruction of Mycenæ by Argos in 468 B.C. is to be rejected, though generally asserted by late writers.]	Birth of Socrates. First tragic victory of Sophocles, probably with the *Triptolemus*.
78.1	467	Death of Pausanias. Flight of Themistocles. Death of Aristides.	Birth of Andokides. Death of Simonides, aged 90.
78.2		Pericles begins to assume importance.	Panyasis (epic poet and uncle of Herodotus), eminent.
78.3	466	Democracy restored at Syracuse.	[The alleged appearance of the atheist Diagoras of Melos, at this time, is to be rejected, and placed about 50 years later.]
	465	Death of Xerxes.	
78.4		Kimon's victory at the Eurymedon.	

CHRONOLOGY—(continued).

OL.	B.C.	POLITICAL CHRONICLE.	LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CHRONICLE.
79.1	464	Revolt of Thasos. Earthquake at Sparta, and revolt of the Helots. Third Messenian War (464-56).	Pindar's 13th Olympic Ode. Zeno of Elea "flourished."
79.3	462	Subjugation of Thasos.	Pindar's 4th and 5th Pythian Odes.
79.4	461	The Attic army sent back by Sparta. Breach between Sparta and Athens. Alliance of Athens and Argos.	
80.1	460	Death of Themistocles. Revolt of Egypt under Inaros. Ephialtes' attack on the Areopagus.	Birth of Democritus, and of Hippocrates the physician. Pindar's 8th Olympic Ode.
80.2	459	Banishment of Kimon. Megara joins the Attic Confederacy.	Gorgias now eminent.
80.3	458	The Athenians (under Myronides) victorious over the Corinthians.	Æschylus wins the first prize with his *Oresteian* trilogy and the *Proteus*.
80.4	457	Victory of the Spartans over Athens at Tanegra. Murder of Ephialtes.	Death of Panyasis.

81.1	456	Victory of Athens over Thebes at Œnophyta. Democracy in Bœotia. Ægina subdued. End of the Messenian War by capture of Ithome. Settlement of the Messenians at Naupactus. Destruction of the Athenian force in Egypt.	Death of Æschylus (aged 69). Empedokles and Parmenides prominent. Myron the sculptor, rising.
81.2	455		Death of Æschylus at Gela. Euripides brings out his first play (the *Peliades*), but only gains third prize.
81.3	454	Return of Kimon. Transference of the Federal Treasury to Athens, and first assessment of tribute by the Logistæ.	Parmenides and Zeno at Athens.
82.1	* 452	Colonisation of the Thracian Chersonese from Athens.	Pindar's 4th and 5th Olympic Odes.
82.2	451	Five years' truce between Athens and Sparta.	Empedokles at Akragas. Ion of Chios begins to bring out tragedies.
82.3	450	Thirty years' peace between Argos and Sparta.	Anaxagoras leaves Athens (first time).
82.4	449	Athenian expedition and victory at Cyprus. Death of Kimon.	
83.1	448	Attack of the Phocians on Delphi.	Cratinus' *Archilochi*.
83.2	447	Defeat of the Athenians at Coronea. Return and second expulsion of the Sybarites by Kiston.	Achæus exhibits tragedies.
	446	Attic expedition under Lampon to restore the Sybarites.	Pindar's 8th Pythian Ode.

CHRONOLOGY—(continued).

OL.	B.C.	POLITICAL CHRONICLE.	LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CHRONICLE.
83.3		Revolt of Eubœa and Megara from Athens. Subjugation and occupation of Eubœa by Athenians.	Herodotus at Athens. Phidias already prominent, also Alkamenes and Pæonius.
	445	Thirty years' peace between Sparta and Athens. Embassy of Kallias to Susa, and alleged peace of Kimon.	
83.4			Protagoras, Empedocles, and
	444	Banishment of Thucydides son of Melesias.	Melissus (the disciple of Parmenides) prominent.
84.1			Completion of the Odeum.
	443	Founding of Thurii.	Herodotus and Lysias (?) go to Thurii. Hippodamus of Miletus, architect,
84.2			and
	*		Sophocles' *Antigone* (?).
	441		Euripides gains the first prize in tragedy (plays unknown).
84.4			The painter Agatharchus eminent.
	440	Revolt of Samos, and expedition of Pericles.	Sophocles at Samos.
85.1		Death of the Sicilian prince, Duketios.	Decree to limit licence in comedy.
	439	Subjugation of Samos and Byzantium.	
85.2			Death of Pindar.

	438		Completion of the Parthenon. Euripides' *Alcestis*.
85.3			Sophocles appointed Strategus.
			The prohibitions against comedy repealed.
	437	Foundation of Amphipolis.	Commencement of the Propylæa by Mnesicles.
85.4			Law restraining comedy.
	436		Pheidias at Olympia.
86.1			Birth of Isocrates.
	*		Cratinus gains a victory in comedy.
	434	Quarrel of Corinth and Corcyra about Epidamnos.	
86.3			
	433		
86.4		Alliances of Corcyra and Rhegium with Athens.	Meton invents a sun-clock, and reforms the calendar at Athens.
	432	The Chalcidice revolts from Athens.	Anaxagoras prosecuted for impiety.
87.1		Siege of Potidæa by Phormion.	
		Preparations for war between Athens and Sparta.	Death of Phidias.
		Attacks on Pericles.	
	431	Peloponnesian War.	Anaxagoras leaves Athens.
		Attacks on Pericles' friends and party.	Hippocrates prominent.
87.2		First invasion of Attica by Peloponnesians.	Euripides' *Medea* (third prize).
			Pericles' funeral oration.
	430	The plague at Athens.	
		Second invasion.	Attacks of Hermippus (the comic poet) on Pericles.
87.3		Deposing and reinstatement of Pericles.	
		Athenian mission to Susa.	

CHRONOLOGY—(continued).

OL.	B.C.	POLITICAL CHRONICLE.	LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CHRONICLE.
	429	Capture of Potidæa.	Birth of Plato and probably of Xenophon.
87.4		Death of Pericles.	Eupolis begins to exhibit comedies.
	428	Expeditions of Phormion to Acarnania.	Death of Anaxagoras (aged 72).
		Revolt of Mitylene.	Euripides' *Hippolytus* (first prize).
		Third invasion of Attica.	
88.1		Appeal of the Mitylenæans at Olympia.	
		Escape of 220 Platæans from their besiegement.	
	427	Death of Archidamos.	Aristophanes' *Daitaleis* (second prize).
		Fourth invasion of Attica.	
		Surrender of Mitylene.	Embassy of Gorgias from Leontini to Athens.
88.2		Surrender of Platæa, and massacre of the inhabitants.	
		Civil war in Corcyra.	
		Renewed pestilence at Athens.	
	426		Aristophanes' *Babylonians*.
88.3		Demosthenes in Acarnania.	Zeuxis eminent.
		Lustration of Delos.	
	425		
		Eurymedon and Sophocles bring a fleet into Sicilian waters.	Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (first prize).
		Demosthenes cuts off the Spartans at Sphakteria by defeating their fleet at Pylos.	About this time the *Hecuba*.
		Fifth invasion of Attica.	

88.4		Capture of the Spartans at Sphakteria. Raising of the Attic tribute. Massacres at Corcyra. Operations of the Attic fleet in Sicily.	
	424	Nikias ravages the Laconian coast.	Aristophanes' *Knights* (first prize).
89.1		Attack on Bœotia. Defeat of the Athenians at Delium. Brasidas in the Chalcidice. He takes Amphipolis, but Thucydides saves Eion.	Polycleitus famous.
	423	Continued campaign by Brasidas.	Aristophanes' *Clouds* (first ed.) defeated by Cratinus' *Wine Flask*.
89.2			
	422	Phæax sent as ambassador from Athens to Sicily.	Aristophanes' *Wasps* (first prize).
89.3		Campaign of Cleon to Thrace. His defeat and death by Brasidas, who is also killed. Proposals of peace.	Death of Cratinus. Second ed. of Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Parrhasius, painter.
	421	Peace of Nikias.	Aristophanes' *Peace*.
89.4		The Athenians capture Skione.	Eupolis active as a comic writer.
	420	Anti-Laconian alliance in Peloponnesus. Activity of Alkibiades.	
90.1		Sparta excluded from Olympic games. Victories of Alkibiades at Olympia.	Euripides' *Supplices*.
	419	War between Argos and Epidaurus.	About this time the *Ion* and *Andromache*.
90.2			Timanthes, painter.
	418	Campaign of Agis against Argos. Birth of Epaminondas.	
90.3		Agis conquers the allies at the battle of Mantinea. Treaty between Argos and Sparta.	Perhaps the *Heraclidæ* appeared at this time.

CHRONOLOGY—(*continued*).

OL.	B.C.	POLITICAL CHRONICLE.	LITERARY AND ARTISTIC CHRONICLE.
	417	Banishment of Hyperbolus by the last ostracism.	
90.4		War in the Chalcidice.	
	416		Agathon gains a tragic prize.
91.1		Embassy of the Egestæans to Athens.	
		Capture of Melos.	
			Eupolis' *Baptæ*.
	415	Mutilation of the Hermæ.	Euripides' *Troades* (second prize) defeated by Xenocles.
		Departure of the fleet for Sicily.	Andocides imprisoned.
91.2		Alkibiades recalled.	The law of Syracosios against libelling on the stage.
		The Athenians visit the harbour of Syracuse and winter at Naxos.	
		Alkibiades flees to Sparta.	
	414	Gylippus goes to Syracuse, which is closely beseiged.	Aristophanes' *Birds* (second prize).
91.3		Nikias writes for reinforcements.	
	413	Sixth invasion of Attica.	
		Agis fortifies Dekeleia.	Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* about this time.
		Massacre of children at Mycalessus.	
91.4		Demosthenes arrives at Syracuse with reinforcements (August).	
		Complete destruction of the Athenian force at Syracuse (September).	
		Archelaus king of Macedon.	Greek poets and artists invited to Pella by Archelaus.

	412	War on the coast of Ionia.	Euripides' *Andromeda* and *Helena*.
92.1		Peisander and the Attic oligarchs in the camp at Samos.	Aristophanes' *Lysistrate*.
	411	Antiphon and Theramenes bring about the revolution of the 400 at Athens.	Lysias returns to Athens.
		Resistance of the army at Samos.	Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusæ*.
92.2		Deposition of the 400, and constitutional changes.	Execution of the orator Antiphon. [Here the history of Thucydides breaks off.]
		Alkibiades recalled.	
		Defeat of Mindarus by Thrasybulus.	
	410	Victory of the Athenians at Kyzikus.	Prosecution of Diagoras of Melos for impiety. [Perhaps a few years sooner, but certainly not in 468 B.C., as Suidas states, and Clinton supports.]
		Kleophon prominent.	
		Evagoras king of Cyprus.	
92.3		Campaigns of Alkibiades in the Hellespont.	
	409	Re-establishment of the tribute.	
		The younger Cyrus comes to Asia Minor.	Aristophanes' *Plutus*.
92.4		Alkibiades returns in state to Athens.	Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.
	408	Lysander appointed Spartan admiral.	Euripides' *Orestes*, possibly also *Electra*.
93.1			
	407	Antiochus defeated at Notium.	Composition of Euripides' *Bacchæ* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*.
		Konon replaces Alkibiades as Athenian admiral.	
93.2			
	406	Kallikratidas, Spartan admiral, blockades Konon at Mitylene.	Euripides dies at Pella.
93.3		Victory of Athenians at Arginusæ and death of Kallikratidas.	
		Kleophon defeats the Spartan proposals for peace.	Death of Sophocles.

CHAPTER II.

THE POET'S LIFE AND STUDIES.

13. Euripides was born in the year of the battle of Salamis (480 B.C.), and apparently on the island, among the refugees. Later legends fixed the day of the battle as his birthday, with that love of coincidences and curious accidents which often takes far larger liberties with chronology. In after days the poet is said to have frequented his native island, and to have written his tragedies in a secluded spot, looking out upon the sea—from which he borrows so many striking metaphors—and within sight of the myriad traffic which passed in and out of the Piræus. His father Mnesarchus, or Mnesarchides,* was said to have once lived in Bœotia, apparently as an Attic citizen abroad; afterwards in the deme called Phlyia. Some of the Greek *Lives* of the poet call Mnesarchides a petty trader, and his wife Kleito a seller of pot-herbs; evidently a repetition of the random scandal of the comic poets, whose constant attacks on Kleito seem to rest on some anecdote, or coincidence of name now lost to us. The ample means and liberal education of the poet, as well as his holding of certain sinecure priestly offices, rather incline us to believe that his parents were of the better classes. He is said to have been trained with success by his father for athletic contests, a pursuit which is alluded to with contempt and aversion in his tragedies; so that he may have been

* I incline to the form Mnesarchides, as a son of Euripides was called by that name, no doubt after his grandfather.

set to it against his will, and may have had closer experience than most men of the habits and the character of professional athletes.* There were also shown at Megara pictures ascribed to him, so that he certainly possessed the reputation of large and varied culture. The caricature of Aristophanes describes him as a recluse student, occupied with metaphysical speculations; and his collection of books was early celebrated. He was certainly the friend, possibly the pupil, of Anaxagoras (to whom he alludes pathetically in his *Alcestis*, v. 904), probably, too, of Protagoras and of Prodicus. He is mentioned in maturer life as a friend and the favourite tragic poet of Socrates. Thus we find him distinctly one of the new school, early breaking loose from traditional orthodoxy, and taking no part in public affairs; but devoting all his life, from the age of twenty-five, to the composition of plays, in which he shadowed out his studies in theology, in metaphysics, and in the changing moods of human nature. He was certainly a prolific and a very popular poet; but though he must have contended about twenty times with groups of four plays on each occasion, he only won the prize four times during his life, and once with plays brought out shortly after his death. When he produced his first play, Æschylus was just dead, and though Sophocles was in the zenith of his fame, and the delight of all Athens, men must have looked anxiously for the appearance of a new poet, who would succeed to the place left vacant by the veteran dramatist. To such Euripides must have been indeed disappointing. His last plays came out about the time of Sophocles' death, when men despaired of seeing any worthy heir of either in tragedy, for the younger generation had tried in vain to rival these poets even in their old age, as Aristophanes plainly informs us. Thus our poet's life extended from the noon to the sunset of Greek

* Cf. especially the fragments of his *Autolycus*, in which this feeling is very strongly expressed, no doubt *in character*, but probably in accordance also with the poet's own sentiments.

tragedy—his posthumous plays were the rich afterglow when that glorious day was gone.

14. He was twice married, and it was said unhappily; first to Chœrile, who was the mother of his three sons—Mnesarchides, a merchant; Mnesilochus, an actor; and the younger Euripides, who produced his father's last plays and composed tragedies of his own. The comic poets do not scruple to reflect upon the unfaithfulness of his wives, from which they deduce the inference that he hated and traduced the sex in his plays. Late in life he removed to the court of Archelaus, king of Macedon, where he was received with the highest honours, and where he wrote some plays (the *Bacchæ* and the *Archelaus*) on local Thracian and Macedonian legends. He is said to have died, at the age of seventy-four, from the effects of wounds by dogs which were maliciously set upon him. A pompous tomb was erected to him in Macedonia. His cenotaph at Athens contained the following inscription, which was alleged (I know not why) to be the composition of Thucydides:

> Μνῆμα μὲν Ἑλλὰς ἅπασ' Εὐριπίδου, ὀστέα δ' ἴσχει
> Γῆ Μακέδων τῇ γὰρ δέξατο τέρμα βίου.
> Πατρὶς δ' Ἑλλάδος Ἑλλὰς Ἀθῆναι, πλεῖστα δὲ Μούσας
> Τέρψας ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ τὸν ἔπαινον ἔχει.

We willingly believe the story that the aged Sophocles showed deep sorrow at the death of the rival from whom he learned so much; but, by way of painful contrast, we find Aristophanes composing upon the death of Euripides his bitter and unsparing onslaught in the *Frogs*. For at this time, as we shall see in the sequel, the play-going world at Athens was rapidly veering round in favour of the much-abused and oft-slighted poet; and Aristophanes must have felt, with disappointment, that the matchless brilliancy of his satire was, after all, powerless against the spirit of the times and the genius of his opponent.

15. Late and doubtful authorities speak of Euripides as of gloomy and morose temper, vexed with domestic

troubles, harassed by adverse criticism, cut to the heart by the miseries which befell his unhappy city in her protracted wars.

But, far deeper than these personal griefs, there lay upon his spirit the constant melancholy of unsolved doubts, of unsettled problems, of seeking for the light in vain, and of hoping against hope for the moral reformation of mankind. Hence our beautiful extant busts and statue represent him worthily as the "poet of the world's grief"—gentle, subdued, and full of sorrowing sympathy. Nor is there any authentic portrait left us from the great days of Athens so interesting or so thoroughly cosmopolitan as that of the poet Euripides.

16. Innumerable attempts have been made to gather from his writings an estimate of his politics, his social principles, and his religion. The ancients have here led the way, and, considering the dramatic poet always as a moral teacher, have assumed that the declarations of the poet's characters were meant to convey his own opinions. But such an inference must be thoroughly unsafe in the case of an essentially dramatic author, who paints upon the stage, not only the violence of human passion, but the conflicts of hostile principles—the mixed good and evil in every aspect of human society. There are, indeed, very few broad assertions on social questions in his plays which cannot be contradicted by assertions in other plays or in altered situations. Even the Athenian public seem to have forgotten that a dramatic poet must speak in character. Thus Plutarch tells us about the *Ixion*, that the audience cried out against a passage in which wealth was praised above virtue, and that the piece would have been hissed down had not the poet rushed on the scene and bid them have patience to see the punishment consequent on such principles. Whether the story be true or false of the Attic audience, it is certainly applicable to the narrow and stupid criticisms of later writers. For example, had the famous line in the

Hippolytus: "My tongue has sworn, but my heart is free," which so many authors quote with reprobation, been preserved to us by itself, without the context of the play, none of us could have guessed that Hippolytus, who utters it, actually loses his life rather than break the very oath in question, though at the first moment of anger he indignantly repudiates it as extorted from him by fraud. Thus, again, the many slanderous attacks upon the female sex spoken by angry or disappointed characters, which are commonly regarded as decisive proofs of the poet's hatred of women, fade out in a wider and truer estimate before the splendour of the leading female characters throughout his plays.

17. It is therefore an inquiry of no little difficulty, though of engrossing interest, to gather the poet's mind and views from these conflicting evidences. There are, perhaps, two sources a little more trustworthy than the rest, and on which I suggest that any estimate should be based: (1) The soliloquies so frequent in Euripides' plays, when the actor turns aside from the immediate subject of the play to reflect upon the broader question it suggests.* We are the more likely here to find a Greek dramatist's mind, seeing that in earlier times he had himself been an actor and appeared in person; even in Euripides' day the chief actor seems to have stood in intimate personal relations with his author. There are also (2) The opening strophe and antistrophe of many choral odes, which are general and even irrelevant in import, though the ode reverts afterwards to the subject in hand.

These, then, are the safest materials for such a purpose. It is, moreover, likely that the dramatic poets of that day had some special means of indicating their own sentiments when they occurred in a play; though not so clearly as the comic poets in

* Let the reader examine the soliloquy of the nurse in *Medea*, v. 190 sq.; of Iphis in the *Supplices*, 1080 sq.; of Orestes in the *Electra*, 367 sq.; as specimens. I quote throughout from Dindorf's *Poetæ Scenici*.

their *parabasis*. For we find even the comic poets, who had this recognised vehicle, often passing out of the character of the actor into personal relations with the audience. But if such helps existed for the Attic public, they are lost for us. This much is certain, that, like Racine in the seventeenth century,* so the Greek dramatists of the Periclean age regarded themselves as essentially moral teachers; nay, almost as a sort of established clergy. It was the recognition of this claim by the Attic public which created Euripides' greatest difficulties when he endeavoured to rise above traditional dogma and conventional morals into speculations on divine philosophy and burning pictures of intense passion.

18. As to the poet's studies and the materials he had before him, we may notice, first, that though deeply learned in epic lore, and familiar with every obscure legend of the Trojan and Theban cycle,† he seems (like Sophocles) to have avoided direct contact with Homer in his *tragedies*, and even in his language there are few

* Cf. the Preface to his *Phèdre:* "Au reste, je n'ose encore assurer que cette pièce soit en effet la meilleure de mes tragédies; je laisse et aux lecteurs et au temps à décider de son véritable prix. Ce que je puis assurer c'est que je n'en ai point fait où la vertu soit plus mise en jour que dans celle-ci. Les moindres fautes y sont sévèrement punies: la seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même: les faiblesses de l'amour y passent pour les vraies faiblesses: les passions n'y sont présentées aux yeux que pour montrer tout le désordre dont elles sont cause; et le vice y est peint partout avec des couleurs qui en font connaître et haïr la difformité. C'est là proprement le but que tout homme qui travaille pour le public se doit proposer; et c'est ce que les premiers poètes tragiques avaient en vue sur toute chose." Milton, in his preface to the *Samson Agonistes*, though he does not go so far, censures the English dramatists for abandoning the classical models, by which he considers that they have lost the countenance of the serious portion of society.

† Of his eighteen extant plays, eight—*Iphigenia in Aulis* [*Rhesus*], *Hecuba*, *Troades*, *Helena*, *Electra*, *Orestes*, *Andromache*, *Iphigenia among the Tauri*—are on the Trojan cycle and the fortunes of the houses of Agamemnon and of Priam. Three—*Phœnissæ*, *Supplices*, *Raging Hercules*—are connected with Thebes.

Homeric reminiscences. That he knew the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* well is certain, both from his extant *Cyclops* and from the profound veneration expressed by Plato for our Homer as the originator and forerunner of tragedy. Now Plato was a younger contemporary of Euripides, certainly old enough to have witnessed the production of all his later plays.*

But it was doubtless with Homer as with Æschylus in the mind of the poet; they were the representatives of the old school; on the one hand, of shallow and immoral polytheism; on the other, of harsh and rough obscurity. The one failed in depth of thought and seriousness of aim, the other in clearness of style and smoothness of expression. But Homer he passes by with simple neglect; in more than one passage he reflects upon the dramatic faults of Æschylus. Nevertheless, in his first studies he must have made this great poet his model, for Sophocles was only beginning his splendid career. Afterwards the continual rivalry with this most successful of all tragic poets, the darling of Athens, the most consummate artist of his day, must have powerfully affected him. The two poets, indeed, differed widely in their conception of the drama; when they treated the same subjects (as they often did), they appealed to different interests, and seem never to have copied, seldom to have criticised, one another. But we find that Euripides, the more conscious and theoretical artist, showed the stronger character, even in his art; for the latest extant drama of Sophocles (the *Philoctetes*) shows a striking likeness to the plays of Euripides, while the reverse is anything but true; the latest plays of Euripides (the *Bacchæ* and *Aulid Iphigenia*) show no traces of an increased influence from the side of Sophocles.

19. Yet, broadly speaking, it is plain that our poet

* I had not mentioned this but for the persistent arguments of Mr. Paley, that our Homer was not composed till the Periclean age, and was not popularly known till after the days of Euripides.

was no originator in the external appliances, or even in the general internal plan, of the Greek drama. His great predecessors had introduced him to the muse of tragedy, as it were, dwelling in a splendid temple, and honoured with an established worship.

The great stone theatre of Dionysus had long replaced the old wooden seats, and if the marble chairs, and sculptured front of the stage, which we can now admire at Athens, were not added till the days of the orator Lycurgus, we may yet be sure that the theatre of Sophocles, in which Pericles sat, was not wanting in splendour. Even the illusion of scenes in perspective was attempted by the genius of the painter Agatharchus about the time when Euripides began his poetical career. Thus, though the absence of actresses and the stiff conventional costume of the puffed and padded-out actors must have been a serious hindrance to the subtler graces of acting, the dramatic poets were provided with scenery and accompaniments quite adequate to stimulate their imagination, and yet not so perfect as to provide them with splendid stage effects as a cloak for dramatic feebleness. In all probability, they were more adequate to their purpose than the theatres for which Shakspere composed his plays.

The alterations Euripides attempted were indeed very serious, but not such as would strike the observation of the vulgar. The outer dress, the stage arrangements, the chorus of Greek tragedy, he left as he found them.* But the deeper student who penetrated beneath the surface found that the whole edifice was renewed within, as in the so-called restorations of our day, though the outer shell is ingeniously propped up and appears undisturbed.

20. It was not otherwise with his treatment of religion. A deep study of the Orphic books and of the Mysteries, a close friendship with Anaxagoras, the

* For the external appliances of the Greek stage and the form of Greek plays, I must refer the reader to the *Primer of Greek Literature*, in this series.

daily contact with the fashionable sophists — this schooling had shown him all the flaws of the common creeds, had furnished him with keen weapons to assail them, nay, had supplied the basis of a larger and purer faith, in which one great Intelligence controlled all matter, and supplanted the crowd of conflicting gods by physical agencies. Yet though all these things are constantly suggested in his plays, he never breaks outright with orthodoxy. He brings the gods upon his stage as frequently as his rivals did, he makes them intervene in human affairs, nor does he always purify the myths by justifying or modifying the divine interferences. He even declares, in more than one weighty passage, the idleness of theological speculation, and the duty of a modest submission to the received faith. The only declared atheist in his extant plays is the brutal and ignorant Cyclops, whose coarse and sensual unbelief is surely intended for a keen satire on such vulgarity in speculation.

21. Thus again in morals, all the violences of passion, all the coldness of self-love, seem palliated, nay, even justified by the cruelty and ruthlessness of Fate, which smites down the just and spares the unjust, which refuses a reward to self-sacrifice and devotion, which indulges the spendthrift and the libertine at the world's cost and damage. Nevertheless, though the gods seem unjust, if we accept their rule, and though there is no sanction or reward for good if we abolish their empire, yet the poet holds a deep moral conviction that all will yet be well, and that the delays in divine justice are no warrant for its denial.

These reservations are, indeed, but rare streaks of light amid the storms of passion and the gloom of doubt which occupy his stage. He felt that the great world problems needed some new solution; that the nature of man did not correspond with his supposed destiny; that in the decay of society and of morals, by reason of long and barbarous wars, the optimists were playing the game into their adversaries' hands, and that scepticism or nihilism was the natural consequence of an enforced

acceptance of worn-out dogmas. But though he seems to hold that some solution was possible—and a solution not of despair, but of hope—he never attempts to offer more rich materials for its attainment. Like the Platonic Socrates in the pursuit of morals, who often discussed all the sides of a question and then stopped without a result, so in his tragedies Euripides seeks to give a complete panorama of all the varieties of human character and of human passion, of human misery and human wickedness, of human devotion and human valour; and from these to suggest all the helps and all the difficulties in forming a new religion, a new society, and a remodelled state. But he never even hints at the reconstruction of the State, though such dreams were common in his day; he seems an advocate for gradual reform, and for the bringing out of the purer elements into better prominence; yet, as I have said, it is not the remedy but the diagnosis which engrosses him. Like some of the greatest physicians of our day, he is more intent on describing the disease than on curing the patient.

22. Side by side with these profound views of life we find another aspect of the poet's mind: the desire to please his audience by all the arts which ordinary playwrights adopt—pathetic situations, striking scenery, ingenious plot, and patriotic commonplace. Nor is there any evidence that he did this against his better judgment, or with any sense that he was lowering a high and solemn calling. The latest novelties in music, the sentimental melodies in the style of Timotheus, were constantly introduced in his monodies, to the great disgust of the older classical school. Whole plays were devoted to tearful situations, where the luxury of pity was indulged without teaching the higher lessons of awe and of indignation. Again, long scenes were occupied with rhetorical argument, in which the actors became pleaders in court, and discussed point after point with pertinacious subtlety, a feature not censured by any ancient critic, and to be found even

in Sophocles, but to us a very jarring interruption in many a splendid scene. Lastly, among the ephemeral features—or at least the features which are not for all time—is an almost vulgar patriotism, which makes the national heroes paragons of perfection, the action of Athens the noble feature of the play, and the heroes of Sparta or of Thebes mean and disgusting. One whole play, the *Andromache*, is thus devoted to blackening the characters of Hermione and Menelaus, and of their country—a cheap highroad to popularity with an audience at bitter enmity and in deadly conflict with Sparta.

23. These curious anomalies and contradictions make Euripides the most difficult of all the ancients to understand. It is very easy to draw distinct sketches of his life and art, which without being untrue are yet broadly inconsistent. We may follow the reckless and brilliant vituperation of Aristophanes, sometimes among many brazen falsehoods hitting the truth with perfect aim; or we may follow the enthusiastic admiration of the genteel comedy in the next century, which regarded him as very perfection. We may side with August Schlegel, who anxiously detracts from Euripides lest the *Iphigenia* of Goethe might suffer by comparison; or with Hartung, who finds in him every moral, social, and civic virtue which is drawn in any of his characters. But we must combine all these portraits with all their contradictions, to obtain an adequate idea of that infinitely various, unequal, suggestive mind, which was at the same time practically shrewd and mystically vague, clear in expression but doubtful in thought, morose in intercourse and yet a profound lover of mankind, drawing ideal women and yet perpetually sneering at the sex, doubting the gods and yet reverencing their providence, above his age and yet not above it, stooping to the interests of the moment and yet missing the reward of momentary fame, despairing of future life and yet revolving problems which owe all their interest to the very fact that they are perpetual.

24. Such being our poet's character and aims, there seems no ground to wonder at the apparently curious combination in his long career of great, general, and immediate popularity, with few definite victories. He was precisely that sort of broad-minded sympathetic thinker who refuses to adopt the views of any party, but holds sometimes with the one and sometimes with the other. Thus in matters of education and of general enlightenment, he certainly stood with the advanced Radicals and Freethinkers, with Anaxagoras, with the sophists and rhetoricians, who were breaking down the old barriers of thought. But in politics his plays produce a strong conviction that he opposed this very party, and held with the old Conservatives and the peace policy, represented by a section of the nobility and the stout farmers of Attica. For these latter, indeed, he shows a special preference, and his praise of them must have greatly annoyed the enlightened city wits, who looked down upon such rustic simplicity as clumsy and boorish. Here, then, he actually sides with Aristophanes, whose party hated him so bitterly for his intellectual tendencies.

Now we know that though the prizes for tragedies were awarded by judges chosen at the time by lot, their decisions must have been altogether guided by the public reception of the piece, by the applause or silence or disapprobation of the great audience in the theatre of Dionysus. And it need hardly be added that party feeling, that political cabals, that previous intrigues were as common at Athens as in the theatre of Louis XIV. Accordingly the decisions of this most competent of all audiences were not only commonly reversed by the verdict of posterity, but were even a marvel to men of succeeding generations. Before such an audience what chance could a half-way politician have of success—a man who offended both sides by exposing their weaknesses, who perhaps offended them still more because he puzzled them by advocating portions of their policy with extraordinary force and clearness? So the great outsider would

be cheered by opposite sides of the house, but make enemies everywhere, for never was party spirit more violent and uncompromising than among the people who thought, as Thucydides says, *τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν συνετὸν, ἐς πὶπᾶν ἀργόν*—to be clever at everything was to be good for nothing—in politics. When the decision came, quieter poets, who did not tamper with the questions of the day, or professed party-men, carried off the prize. But for all that Euripides was more discussed, and quoted, and quarrelled about in Athenian society than any of them. Thus the popular feeling of his age corroborates and justifies the portrait which scholars have derived from his works.

CHAPTER III.

SURVEY OF HIS WORKS.

25. The ancients possessed, under the name of Euripides, ninety-two dramas, a few obviously spurious letters, and some poetical trifles, such as epigrams, of doubtful authority. Even of the dramas only seventy-five were recognised as genuine, and among them eight satyric dramas, one of which, the *Cyclops*, is fortunately preserved. Only seventeen of the tragedies are now extant, if we exclude the *Rhesus*, which is probably a later composition substituted for the lost genuine play on this subject. But of many of the remainder there have survived considerable fragments, and we know the titles in all of sixty-eight.

26. When we compare this inheritance with that left us by Æschylus or Sophocles, its relative greatness makes us forget its actual poverty; for we only possess one-fifth part of Euripides' poetry, and even in quality it is not richer than in quantity. There is no reason to think that the selection preserved was by any means chosen on the grounds of excellence. The allusions of contemporary literature rather suggest to us that many of the lost plays—the *Andromeda*, the *Antiope*, the *Erechtheus*, and others—were the most popular, while several of the poorest and least successful were, by some accident, handed down to us in a single MS., of which we have two imperfect copies (the Vatican P and the Florentine C as they are commonly designated), both MSS. of the fourteenth century.

27. This curious preservation of his inferior dramas has told greatly against the reputation of the poet as compared with that of his rivals. While the immediately succeeding public was almost unanimous upon his greater brilliancy and philosophic depth, moderns are always disparaging him as contrasted with either Æschylus or Sophocles, from whom we have but a very few plays, and these almost all their very best. Had half-a-dozen Æschylean plays of the rank of the *Supplices*, or Sophoclean of the rank of the *Trachiniæ* survived, the German and English censors might have been saved their comparisons. But it is always a dangerous thing to expose a large front to criticism, for the censor who finds a weak point anywhere, parades it to the general detriment of the author in the public mind; there being no class more unfair and even bigoted in their judgments than philologists, who differ only in degree from the public, and exhibit the same weaknesses often exaggerated in intensity.

I will add that as a larger survival of the rival Greek plays might have benefited Euripides, so also a more complete loss of them would certainly have had the same effect. If we suppose all our plays lost, and nothing extant but the fragments of the three poets, there would be no hesitation in declaring Euripides by far the greatest of the tragic poets; and learned men would doubtless have set themselves to explain away most satisfactorily those judgments of old art-critics which are now quoted to prove the superiority of his rivals. For there are no fragments in Greek literature more striking in thought or felicitous in diction, than those culled by moralists and philosophers, by orators and antiquarians, from his lost works.

28. Looking at the extant plays from a chronological point of view, as affording us evidence of the development of the poet's mind, we have been likewise fortunate in some respects, unfortunate in others. His earliest play, the *Peliades*, brought out in Ol. 81.2 (455 B.C.) would have been very valuable in showing

us the starting-point of his career. But neither this, nor apparently any of his juvenile work, survives, our first play being probably the *Alcestis*, which did not appear till 438 B.C., and which was therefore composed in his full maturity. On the other hand, his latest plays, the *Bacchæ* and the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, remain, the latter not even finished by the master's hand; and their survival has with difficulty saved the poet from the hands of the German critics, who would willingly show, from the *Helena*, the *Orestes*, and other such plays, that in advanced age he had lowered himself in tone and dignity, had condescended to careless writing, having become a foolish reflection of that ochlocracy which figures so largely in their imaginary pictures of Athens at the close of the fifth century. But his latest plays which gained the first prize in spite of, perhaps on account of, Aristophanes' venomous attack in the *Frogs* (405 B.C.), show him in the very zenith of his power, none of his works being more perfect either in plot or in execution than the *Bacchæ* and the finished portions of the *Iphigenia*.

29. Thus the favourite German theory, that we can determine the advancing dates of literary works by the advancing weakness or diffuseness of the style, is happily upset by the benevolent fate which has preserved to us these parting gifts of the aged Euripides to the human race. Their greater perfection is probably to be assigned to his Macedonian leisure, and to the relief from the pressure of competition at Athens, where, as we know, the tragic poets composed with amazing rapidity, to suit the popular temper of the season, so that possibly parts of the plays may not have been written until the poet had secured the State sanction by obtaining the grant of a chorus. It is this hurried production—a feature common to the great dramatists, indeed, the great artists, of all ages—which will best account for uneven workmanship, and for the undue prominence, in some of the plays, of the political sympathies or antipathies of the hour.

30. The following are the extant plays which can be dated from distinct notices:

B.C. 438.	Ol. 85.3,	*Alcestis*		B.C. 413.	Ol. 91.4,	*Helena.*
,, 431.	,, 87.1,	*Medea.*		,, 408.	,, 92.4,	*Orestes.*
,, 428.	,, 87.4,	*Hippolytus.*		,, 407.	,, 93.2,	*Phœnissæ.*
,, 416.	,, 91.1,	*Troades.*				

Some others can be approximately fixed from allusions in Aristophanes, when they were recent, viz. the *Heraclidæ* and *Hecuba* about Ol. 88; and the posthumous *Bacchæ* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in Ol. 93, the third year of which was the last of the poet's life. The remainder, to whose date we have no clue except inferences from style, are the *Raging Heracles*, *Andromache*, *Ion*, *Tauric Iphigenia*, *Supplices*, *Electra*, and the satyric *Cyclops*.

The fixing of the undated plays from internal evidence is of course a favourite occupation with the learned, partly on metrical grounds, such as those of Dindorf, who thinks a preference for dactylico-trochaic metres indicates early, and for glyconic metres late dates inthe poet's life; partly, again, on æsthetic grounds, such as the irrelevance of the chorus or the prominence of monodies. But all these arguments can be refuted by the very same evidence, and there is no possibility either of placing the plays in their chronological order, or, if we did, of learning aught from it concerning the mental history of this many-sided and ever-changing dramatist, who is perfectly mature in our earliest work, the *Alcestis*, and has lost nothing in power and beauty when he reached the end of his labours. Had he indeed lived to perfect the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, it would certainly have been the finest of all his extant plays.

I shall therefore discard the order of time, and seek to group together the plays according to their artistic resemblances, so that we may first inquire into the broad features of Euripides' *plots*, and then proceed to consider his *characters*.

31. Before proceeding to discuss the plots, I may premise that though the poet generally, perhaps always,

contended with four plays at a time, and though the titles of these quaternions are frequently preserved, we possess nothing but isolated pieces from different groups. This in a poet like Æschylus, whose dramas were bound together into a larger unity, would offer a capital difficulty in discussing the merits and defects of any single play; but there is good reason to think that with Sophocles the fashion came in of contending with disconnected plays, and that Euripides' tetralogies or quaternions were only connected by the accident of their performance. Not even the ingenuity of the Germans has been able to imagine any proper link between the *Bacchæ* and *Iphigenia*, which were brought out together; and the same seems the case—as far as titles can warrant—with the groups brought out by the poet himself.

We are indeed at a loss to know how the judges decided, and it seems to me, from the prominence and the preservation of isolated plays, that each poet pitted the best of his four against the best of his rival's four, leaving to the judges the selection. Thus the *Hippolytus* would be declared the winner in its group and attain special popularity, the others being only recorded in the *didascaliæ*,* and read by students. If this was the principle of the competition, it would account for the dropping out of fashion of the satyric dramas, eight of which only were composed by Euripides, and the substitution of such melodramas as the *Alcestis* in their place, which were of sufficient importance to count in the competition, and perhaps to determine the prize. But this is only one more conjecture upon the meaning of the notice, that Sophocles introduced the fashion of contending δρᾶμα πρὸς δρᾶμα, play against play—a statement simple enough, had not Euripides so constantly contended with tetralogies.

* The *didascaliæ* were collections of notes giving the victorious plays, as well as the unsuccessful, with their authors and dates. They were taken from authentic contemporary inscriptions, chiefly on the monuments commemorating victories, of which some remains are still to be seen at Athens.

32. It will be observed that in the following chapters there is little reference to the fragments, which I have already mentioned as of great number and importance. This is to be justified by the consideration that, though vital in considering Euripides as a poet and a philosopher, these fragments are too short and detached to help us in our estimate of his dramatic genius, to which we must now confine ourselves. The remains of the *Phaethon* are indeed considerable, but give us no idea of the plot of the play, and though part of the plot of the *Philoctetes* is preserved, it is only a prose paraphrase, which conceals from us the poet's treatment of his subject. The fragments are, in fact, beautiful isolated thoughts, or even famous speeches, or verses of choral songs, and as such are delightful reading. They have occupied many poets and critics. Hartung in his large work on Euripides, Valckenaer in his celebrated *Diatribe*, and many English poets in stray moments have turned their attention to this rich collection of scattered wisdom. A pleasant chapter in Mr. Symonds' *Greek Poets* is devoted to these and other fragments of the tragic poets. Now, too, they are accessible in a collected form either in Dindorf's *Poetæ Scenici*, in Nauck's edition, the older praiseworthy attempts being very incomplete. Woodhull translated all those known in his day (1787) in the appendix to his complete Euripides. But in the present work I have only used them as materials for the estimate of the poet in the second chapter, all detailed discussion of single beauties or stray thoughts in his works being out of the question.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS PLOTS.

33. When we speak of the plot of a play in the modern sense, we mean that ingenious complication of the action which keeps the spectator interested as to its progress and curious as regards the final result. In this sense very few Greek plays have any plot, and its earliest use may be traced to the inventive genius of Euripides. The earlier dramatists illustrated some well-known legend, some celebrated mythical catastrophe, and sought by loftiness of style and nobility of sentiments to instruct and awe the spectator by drawing various lessons from a familiar tradition. The deeper moral meaning, the hidden spiritual forces engaged, the display of character under the strain of great misfortunes—these were the topics which gave the Greek drama its matter, to be expressed in noble language and with dignified accessories. The dramas of Æschylus (and of Sophocles at first) were therefore not dramas of plot or intrigue, but of character or of situation. In many of them, such as the *Supplices* and *Persæ* of Æschylus, or the *Œdipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, there is no plot at all, but a series of scenes grouped around some central figure or situation, as in the *Samson Agonistes* of Milton. We find several such plays among those of Euripides also, who seems often to have reverted to this old and simple form of tragedy for peculiar reasons of his own. There is therefore a propriety in speaking of *dramas of plot* as a separate class of Greek tragedies,

which might seem unmeaning to those only acquainted with modern literature.

The other two divisions are dramas of *character* and dramas of *situation*. In the former, the human will asserts itself against the power of destiny, and even when crushed in the conflict, asserts its inalienable dignity and liberty. This is the highest and the most essential kind of Greek tragedy, and one in which Æschylus and Sophocles were never equalled except by Shakspere in his greatest character plays. In the latter class, the characters are represented as dominated by misfortunes, which pour in upon them in succession like the messengers in the Book of Job.

34. It is easy to see how the nascent drama would take this simple form, and excite the pity of the audience by a series of pathetic scenes and poetical complaints; but we marvel how Euripides, who had discovered the use of plots, should have written a whole play like the *Troades*, which is merely the pathetic history of the last day of the captives in their ruined native land. The large proportion of lyrical monodies and choral odes in this class of plays suggests to us that Euripides here intended rather a musical than a dramatic effect. We know that he was much censured by the old school for the introduction of monodies and of irrelevant odes, which can have had no intention but to display the musical effects of the school of Timotheus, and of other composers who made both voice and instrument the vehicles of strong emotions and of bitter grief. Thus a play like the *Troades* may have been partly a musical intermezzo among the more intellectual and dramatic pieces of the tetralogy. But it is also evident that a poet like Euripides, who had a peculiar talent for painting pathetic scenes, was enabled in such plays to bring up a loosely connected series of such scenes, each of which would have a powerful effect upon a sensitive audience. In both *Phœnissæ* and *Troades* this is essentially the case.

35. The few cases, like the *Supplices*, where dialogue

is also prominent, are to be explained by regarding them as occasional pieces composed for a political object, in which the plot is intended to be subordinate to political discussions and to encomiums upon Athens or attacks upon her foes. To those who rightly protest that this is no proper object of tragedy, we may reply by again calling attention to the great rapidity of production, and to the fact that, when plays were produced in groups of four, it may have been unavoidable to make some of them mere plays of occasion. It is of course easy to cite their absence from the works of Sophocles, from which only seven plays have reached us. Probably if a score had survived, we should find among them patriotic pieces with no more plot or character-painting than we find in Euripides' dramas of situation.

We will now consider examples of the three classes, which are of course not absolutely severed, no plot being possible without characters, and neither without tragic situations. But according as these elements predominate we are justified in making a division, which will be far more instructive than a mere chronological enumeration, even if such were possible.

36. It is very remarkable that any classification by sameness of subject or sameness of treatment is found impracticable, owing to the marvellous variety with which the poet handles the same characters and like situations. In one or two isolated cases we find him imitating a former plot, but seldom with any direct borrowing of ideas or situations or language. This applies to the vital parts of the play, whereas the introductions and conclusions, on which he spent little trouble, were generally formed on a fixed and seldom varied plan. I classify under the head of tragedies of plot seven of the extant plays: the *Ion*, both *Iphigenias*, the *Helena*, the *Alcestis*, the *Orestes*, and the *Electra*. Of these the *Ion* may be considered first, as the most perfect specimen of its kind.

37. **The Ion.**—We must discard the prologue as spurious, but not altogether because it details the whole

plot and anticipates the solution—a vital defect in the prologue of a modern play, and therefore contrary to modern practice. For the Greeks, even in plots of ingenuity, did not propose primarily to instruct the hearers in the solution, but rather in the manner with which a known complication was worked out. The real objection to admitting the present opening of the *Ion* is that the whole matter is expounded over again in the opening scenes of the play, so that I believe its original form was that of the lost *Andromeda*,* and perhaps of other Euripidean plays. It opened therefore with the lyrical monody of Ion, and, like both the *Andromeda* and the *Aulid Iphigenia*, with the actor's attention fixed upon the heavens, thus announcing the time and scene of the action.

38. Ion, the hallowed attendant of the Delphic temple, a youth of the beauty and purity which we imagine in the child Samuel when he ministered in the temple of Jehovah, appears and sings a descriptive hymn (vv. 82–183) in discharge of his morning duties. A chorus of Athenian women enter in separate groups, delighted sightseers of the wonders of the great shrine, wandering with questions and exclamations from one art-treasure to another, and in attendance upon a silent and troubled lady, to whom they point as their queen when questioned by Ion, after his courteous refusal to admit mere visitors within the shrine. At the sight of Apollo's temple, the queen (Creusa) bursts into tears, and betrays strange emotion, but masters herself when Ion asks with wonder why she is in sorrow where all others come with joy. It is a situation not unlike that of Samuel's mother, agitated and weeping in the temple before Eli. "Stranger," she replies (v. 247), "I hold it no rudeness in you to wonder at my tears. But the sight of the temple of Apollo brought back to me some old memories, and my mind wandered to my home from this scene. (*Aside.*) Alas!

* The opening lines of the *Andromeda*, with the statement that they are such, happen to be preserved in a quotation by the scholiast on Aristophanes (*Thesm.*, v. 1065).

the lot of women; alas! the violences of the gods; what then? whither shall we refer our plaint, if we are ruined by the injustice of heaven?" She then, in reply to his questioning, tells of her home and marriage, and of her mission to Delphi in relief of childlessness, but with many allusions to her sad fortune which do not escape the audience. Again in turn Ion answers her of his origin, how he was a foundling in the temple, and brought up to minister within its precincts. His reply that he has no clue to find his parents leads her to question him on her own case, hidden under the guise of a friend's misfortune, who had born a child to Apollo, and exposed it in his cave, from which it had disappeared. Would the god reveal its fate? Ion thinks he will be ashamed, and will not confess his fault. But the story suggests to both that Ion's mother may have endured a similar sorrow. While Creusa is expostulating with the god, her husband Xuthus enters with good news from the oracle of Trophonius, whither he had turned aside for advice on the way. They were not to leave the Delphic shrine childless. While they prepare for the solemn inquiry, Ion speaks a curious and familiar soliloquy (429–451) of expostulation with the god for his conduct in the case reported by Creusa.

The chorus pray to Athena Nike, and to Artemis, that the old house of Erechtheus may not be left childless. The epode (a passage of rare picturesqueness) sings of the grotto of Pan and the shrine of Aglauros on the Acropolis, and the violence attributed to Apollo.*

Xuthus now reappears and hails Ion, whom he forthwith meets, as his child, but the latter resents his affection till, on inquiry, he finds that the oracle has declared him to be so, and that Xuthus can explain

* The grotto is there still, and so are the ruined shrines, but no imagination can now restore the grace and holiness of the scene—Pan playing on his pipe in the cave, while the goddesses dance on the green sward above. Both rock and grotto are now defaced with ruins and with dire neglect.

it by a youthful adventure. But the boy consents with coldness, and his thoughts turn with great tenderness from Xuthus' congratulations to his unknown mother (v. 563): "Dear mother, when shall I behold thy form? Now more than ever do I desire to see thee. But perhaps thou art dead, and our wishes are of no avail." Xuthus formally sympathises with this wish, but urges him to come away to Athens and enjoy the wealth and splendour to which he is heir. But Ion hesitates and declines. He knows the pride of Athens, and their contempt of strangers. He is only with difficulty persuaded, and longs that his mother may prove an Athenian, which alone will give him his proper position. They both leave to enjoy the feast given in honour of the oracle's response.

The chorus are discontented. They suspect the oracle, and comment on the blow which it will give to the hopes of their mistress.

Accordingly, when she reappears, she extorts with difficulty from a trusty old retainer and the chorus, that the answer, though favourable to Xuthus, is ruin to her own hopes for her lost child. The splendid burst of indignation against Apollo, and her confession of the whole secret, is given in a lyrical monody which has few parallels in any tragedy (vv. 859 sqq. beginning *ὦ ψυχὰ πῶς σιγάσω*). The old pedagogue, in astonishment, questions her more closely, and then attempts to turn her from despair to vengeance. Let her burn the god's temple, or if not, at least slay the lad who has supplanted her and her child. He then discloses his plan that they shall accomplish it by aid of a subtle poison which he carries about him; and they leave the stage to accomplish it here, at Delphi, and not at Athens.

The chorus reflect generally upon the situation, but offer no opposition to the conspiracy.

Then comes a messenger in haste to say that the plot has failed. His descriptive speech (1122–1228) enters into excessive detail about the feast, and stays the interest till he tells us how a pigeon from the

tamed flock about the temple fell dead upon tasting the cup prepared by the old retainer for Ion, and how, upon the old man's interrogation and confusion, Creusa's death by stoning has been forthwith determined. Creusa rushes on in flight, and with the advice of the chorus takes refuge as a suppliant at the altar. Ion comes in pursuit, and an angry altercation ensues. But while he hesitates to slay her at the altar, and complains that a criminal should thus evade justice, the aged Pythia appears, carrying with her the swaddling clothes and tokens which she had long ago found with the infant Ion, and hidden away, and which she is now moved to restore to him on his departure for Athens—to her the loss of a dear and long-adopted child. Ion receives these tokens of his unknown mother with great emotion, and then follows a famous recognition scene, where Creusa proves that the embroidery is her work, and that she is the mother of the lad whom she had just attempted to slay, and who now seeks in turn to slay her. Ion is only half convinced, and is about to enter the temple to demand from Phœbus an explanation of his answer to Xuthus, when Athene appears aloft and removes all remaining doubts. The play ends by Ion, Creusa, and the chorus retracting their charges against Apollo, and confessing that the righteous fare well in the end, and the wicked can never continue to prosper.

39. Nothing can be more ingenious than the construction of this play, which is not a tragedy, but a melodrama. The action is sustained and the interest excited throughout, and there is, moreover, great tact in the handling of the two personages who take no very respectable part in the play. Apollo is throughout attacked and challenged, yet he never appears, and commissions Athene to explain his providence at the close. Xuthus, who is in some sort the dupe of the oracle, is in the first place painted as an obtrusive good-natured nonentity, and then is removed from sight when his position becomes awkward. The heroine is interesting—not from her character, but from her

fortunes. And her fortunes are such as come home to the sympathy of any audience, though her wild scheme of vengeance is rather too Greek to please modern readers. Thus we have in the *Ion*, a drama depending almost wholly upon the plot, and not prominent in the drawing of any of its characters, except that of Ion at the opening of the play.

We know nothing of its date beyond what can be inferred from the allusion to Rhion (v. 1592), where the Athenians made an obscure promontory famous by a victory in 429 B.C. Moreover, the Athenians built a *stoa* at Delphi in honour of this victory, which would accordingly lend interest to the scenery. If so, the play came out about 425 B.C. It is remarkable that as in the *Heracles* and *Helen* there are practically two prologues, so here there are two resolutions of the plot—as it were two *dii ex machinâ*—one by the Delphian priestess, the other by Athene, who appear at the end to dispel remaining doubts. Of Creusa's character we shall have again to speak. I will only here note that the tragic situation of a distracted mother seeking her son's death unwittingly was again used by Euripides in the *Cresphontes*, from which a beautiful choral hymn to Peace still remains, as the readers of Mr. Browning will remember (*Aristoph. Apol.*, p. 178).

There have been but few imitations of this play. It was brought out in a debased version by August Schlegel in 1803, but so unsuccessfully, that old Goethe, who had taken great interest in its preparation, was obliged to stand up and command silence in the pit. The *Ion* of Talfourd has only a general resemblance.

40. **The Helena.**—I do not think that any other play of Euripides can be ranked, as to prominence of plot, with the *Ion*, except the *Helena*; for the *Orestes* and the *Electra*, which stand next, though the plot is prominent and the chief personages disagreeable, yet contain much character painting of a peculiar kind—not ideal, but mere psychological analysis.

The *Helena* is also a melodrama, and turns upon the adventures of the real Helen, who, according to a less popular myth, was conveyed away and secreted in Egypt, while a mere phantom deluded Greeks and Trojans at Troy. Helen, who is in this play represented as a loyal and affectionate wife, is in danger of being forced to marry the young king Theoclymenus, whose prophetic sister, Theonoe, plays a small but interesting and sympathetic part. Instead of having no prologue, we have in this play two distinct prologues—first, that of Helen, who explains the general situation; and then, after Teucer has appeared and given her vague and gloomy news about the scattering of the returning Greeks, concerning which she and the chorus lament in lyrical strains, we have the prologue of Menelaus. The recognition of husband and wife, the disappearance of the phantom Helen, and the schemes by which they effect their flight from Egypt successfully, occupy the rest of the play. The text comes to us, like some other plays, through one MS. alone, in this case the Florentine C, and moreover in a very corrupt and much corrected copy. To this cause is partly due the neglect with which it has been treated. It seems to have come out, with the *Andromeda*, in 413–412 B.C., and was certainly ridiculed by Aristophanes in his *Thesmophoriazusæ* not without some reason. This play may be compared in one respect with the *Electra*, I mean as regards the curiously free handling of the celebrated legend of the rape of Helen. The version that she had never been in Troy, but had been kept in Egypt, while a phantom Helen deceived both Greeks and Trojans, was first invented by Stesichorus, and was repeated by the Egyptian priests to Herodotus, whose history did not appear till about the date of this play. The palinode of Stesichorus, in which he invented this legend to atone for having offended the heroine, was very celebrated, and is repeatedly alluded to by Plato. Nevertheless it seems very bold to transfer to the national stage at Athens the literary fancy of a few learned men, and in any case to

contradict the greatest and best known of all the epic stories.

It is evident that this innovation did not prosper. Isocrates in his *Encomium of Helen*, passes it by in silence, nor do I know of any modern reproduction, save that of the German Wieland. There is all through the play a friendly and even respectful handling of Sparta and the Spartans, which is unique among the extant tragedies. Again, though there is much scepticism expressed, especially as regards prophecies, his noblest character is here a prophetess, who possesses an unerring knowledge of the future. Menelaus again, who is elsewhere a mean and cowardly bully, is here a ragged and distressed, but honourable and adventurous hero, with no trace of his usual Euripidean attributes. Lastly, Helen is a faithful and persecuted wife, though in the shortly preceding *Troades*, and succeeding *Orestes*, she appears in most odious colours. These anomalies make the *Helena* full of difficulties to the student of Euripides' opinions. We wonder how he should have chosen that mythical couple, whose conjugal relations in all his other tragedies were most disagreeable, to exemplify the purest and most enduring domestic affection. Their recognition scene may take its place with the matchless narrative in the *Odyssey*, for the love of husband and wife was rarely idealised by the Greeks, and these exceptions are worthy of special note.

I suppose that by this bold contradiction not only of the current views about Helen, but of his own treatment of her and Menelaus in other plays, the poet meant to teach that the myths were only convenient vehicles for depicting human character and passion, and had no other value.

I have not analysed this argument minutely, as the poet has taken up an analogous subject, and treated it with far greater power and with less of miracle in his *Tauric Iphigenia*—one of the most perfect of his plays. But here again it is still the plot which affords the

main interest, though the characters are carefully and pathetically drawn. Yet they are general characters—an exiled sister longing for tidings of her family and her home; the devoted friendship of two noble youths, one of whom is afflicted with remorseful madness for a bygone crime.

41. **The Tauric Iphigenia.**—Iphigenia, priestess of Artemis among the Tauri, opens the play with a prologue, announcing her miraculous escape from the sacrifice at Aulis, and her grim duty of consecrating for sacrifice the Greek strangers who land on the coast. She then goes out to seek the attendants she had summoned to join the funeral libations for her brother Orestes. For she feels convinced of his death by a vivid dream of her shattered home, and a single pillar standing, endowed with human voice. The stage is thus left vacant for the entry of Orestes and Pylades, who have come to attempt the carrying off of the image of Artemis, in accordance with an oracle.

When they withdraw to wait for the night, Iphigenia and her attendant chorus reappear, and sing the dirge which accompanies their funeral offering. Then comes a cowherd to tell of the discovery of the youths, the sudden paroxysm of Orestes, and his mad sally against the king's cattle, together with the attack of the herdsmen, and the valiant resistance and mutual devotion of the prisoners, whom she now orders to be brought before her. The soliloquy which follows (vv. 342–392), in which she contemplates her former pity for hapless strangers, and now her cruel resolve when she thinks Orestes dead, is very touching, though it ends with that sceptical questioning of the morality of her office which imparts a cold and critical tone to a pathetic passage.

After an irrelevant chorus we have the splendid scene in which Iphigenia interrogates the prisoners with returning compassion, and learns all the family woes which have happened since her departure from Argos. She proposes to dismiss one of the

victims, if he will carry home a letter for her brother; and this gives rise to the celebrated contest between the friends, which of them shall die and which escape. But be it remarked that this conflict is here not worked out in much detail, as it is by Euripides' modern imitators, and that Pylades soon yields to the stronger will of the life-weary Orestes. When she goes out to seek the letter, they both break out into surprise at the anxious questioning of the priestess about Argos and its royal house. The reappearance of Iphigenia with the letter, which she reads aloud to Pylades, lest any accident should befall it—a frequent stage device—leads to the affecting recognition of the brother and sister. There follow the rejoicings of all, and the discussion of schemes to carry off the image. But these schemes are not successful, like the escape in the *Helena*, and though the chorus act as accomplices of the fugitives, and endeavour by false directions to prevent the announcement of their recapture reaching the king, they are only saved by the intervention of Athene, who commands them to be set at liberty and sent to their home.

Here again there is interest in the plot throughout, and in every respect higher interest than in the analogous *Helena*. The recognition scene, so gradual and yet exciting, is finer than the beautiful recognition of Menelaus and Helen. The escape of the fugitives is less triumphant, and their knavery less successful. Above all, the more than fraternal affection of Orestes and Pylades adds a new interest to the story, and makes it one of the most suggestive of plays. The deceit practised towards king Thoas was thoroughly excusable in Greek morals, though it so offended Goethe that, in his imitation, he altered the plot in order to avoid it, and made Iphigenia, in a moment of remorse, confess her schemes to the noble king, who (after the model of the *Helena*) is also turned into her romantic lover. But these modern features are fatal to the essentially Greek character of the story, as was clearly seen by all critics when the first storm of

applause had subsided. The play of Goethe is in fact an unfortunate mixture of Greek scenery and modern sentiment, and as such is rather a literary curiosity than a great play.

There were far more successful imitations of Euripides in older days. Pacuvius wrote for the Roman stage his *Dulorestes*, in which, according to Cicero, the mutual devotion of the friends in the presence of death brought down thunders of applause. After several early French versions Racine undertook the subject, and we still have his abstract of the intended scenes of the first act. Like all the other Frenchmen, he felt compelled to introduce the king *en soupirant*, after the model of the *Helena*. Among succeeding attempts we may mention Guimond de la Touche's play (1757), which pleased everybody in France at the moment except Voltaire, Grimm, and Diderot—three mighty dissenters. But Gluck's opera laid a real hold on the musical public of Europe.

42. **The Orestes.**—The *Orestes*, produced in 409 B.C., a tragedy exceedingly popular and much quoted in antiquity, but equally censured of late years, is in Euripides' later style, if there be such a distinction. Indeed there are strong reasons for asserting it from a metrical point of view, as in this, the *Phœnissæ* and the *Helena*, many licences are admitted which we do not find in the earlier plays. Yet even here the *Bacchæ* disproves the rule, being one of his latest works and yet metrically strict. But as to plot, it seems that the poet became fonder of crowding together incidents, even so far as to combine two separate actions in the same piece, as we shall see in the sequel. When such separate actions are not naturally connected, we cannot speak of the play as a *drama of plot*, and the *Orestes* narrowly escapes this charge. For with the condemnation of Orestes and Electra, and their affectionate leave-taking of one another and of Pylades, the play properly ends (v. 1070); but is started afresh by the sudden interference of Pylades, who suggests that they shall be avenged on their false

uncle, Menelaus, before they die. This suggestion, eagerly adopted by them, that they shall slay Helen and Hermione, and burn the palace, leads us on to several exciting and indeed semi-comic scenes, which are only concluded by the active interference of Apollo, who carries off Helen aloft, and makes peace among the warring relatives. It is this part of the play which has incurred the adverse criticism of modern scholars, and indeed, except in the very comic appearance of the Phrygian slave and his curious monody, no interest remains. The sudden reconciliation and betrothal of deadly enemies at the close is evidently a parody on such *dénoûments*.

These defects of the play as a whole have naturally prevented any direct imitation of it on the modern stage. But the citations and indirect imitations of the *Orestes* as well as translations of the great mad scene, have been common in every age. Thus the famous lines on the blessed comfort of sleep to the anxious and the distressed (vv. 211 sqq.) may be frequently paralleled, and nowhere more closely than in two passages of Shakspere. Here is the version of Euripides given by Mr. Symonds:

> O soothing sleep, dear friend! best nurse in sickness!
> How sweetly came you in my hour of need.
> Blest Lethe of all woes, how wise you are,
> How worthy of the prayers of wretched men!

The ravings of Orestes have suggested to Goethe in his *Iphigenia* like wanderings at the moment when his sister declares herself, but anyone who will compare the far-fetched images of Goethe's insanity with the infinite nature of Euripides' scene, will see how far the great imitator falls behind his model. The subject is the same as that of Æschylus' *Eumenides*, but instead of visible Furies in visible pursuit, the horrors of a diseased imagination, and the sufferings of feverish sleeplessness are brought upon the stage, and the purely human affection of a sister ministers relief to the woes which the very gods cannot heal in Æschylus.

But this admirable passage follows upon a very satirical drawing of the vanity and selfishness of Helen, with spiteful comments by the bitter Electra. Menelaus, when he arrives, is no better. But when old Tyndareus comes to urge the execution of Orestes, he speaks with great power and wisdom on the majesty of the law, and the necessity of submitting men's passions to its calm decrees. He will not in any way palliate the shocking crime of his daughter Clytemnestra; but still it was Orestes' duty to bring a legal action against her, and to have ejected her thus formally from his palace, instead of propagating violence from generation to generation. This argument, which was very common and popular with the Athenian democracy, is now hardly yet re-established in our modern culture, and may well be noted as one of the most modern traits in Euripides. The entry of Pylades, who comes to support the tottering Orestes to the assembly where his case is tried, is very affecting, and full of dramatic force, but in the vivid description of the debate, there is a good deal of satire, and it is not unlikely that the poet was drawing pictures of leading Athenians in describing his speakers.

43. **The Electra.**—The same leading characters appear in the *Electra*, or matricide of Orestes to avenge his father's death, a play intended as a critique of the corresponding *Choephoræ* of Æschylus, and perhaps of the *Electra* of Sophocles. For the expedients of the conspirators to entice Clytemnestra and her paramour Ægisthus within their power are all carefully altered; Electra is relegated to an obscure cottage, where she lives the pretended wife of an honest farmer, of the same type as the country-speaker in the *Orestes*; there are idyllic scenes of great charm, when the two young men appear, as strangers coming from Phocis. Ægisthus is surprised, not in the palace, which (as we are critically informed) is sure to be well guarded, but at a sacrifice in the country, and Clytemnestra is induced to come to Electra's humble cottage, where

she meets her doom. The drawing of the characters will be considered in a future chapter.

The play must have appeared during the closing years of the Peloponnesian war, and must have been fresh in men's memory, when, as Plutarch tells us (*Life of Lysander*, c. 15), the deliberations about the fate of conquered Athens were determined by a Phocian actor singing the opening monody, which moved all to pity by its picture of a whilom princess reduced to miserable poverty. There is also a distinct reassertion of the legend of Helen as told in the *Helena*, which points back to that play. We may therefore confidently refer the *Electra* to those last years of the poet's life, when he appears more prolific and various to us than in any other part of his career. The real merits of this play are not admitted by recent German critics, who make it the special object of their censure or even their amusement. It is often called the weakest production among the extant plays, and an unfortunate attempt to improve upon the treatment of the same subject by Æschylus and Sophocles. The coryphæus of these critics is August Schlegel, whose own attempt to copy the despised Euripides in his *Ion* might have taught him more modesty.

The play is indeed intended as a critique of the defects of earlier *Electras*. It is a *feuilleton spirituel*, as the French call it, and from this point of view ranks with the works of literary criticism common in the Middle Comedy. After ridiculing (vv. 524 sqq.) the various proofs of recognition adduced by Æschylus, the poet criticises the long scene of rejoicing introduced by Sophocles, by cutting short these ebullitions, and proceeding at once with the plot against the royal assassins of Agamemnon. Far more important, however, than the external improvements is the ethical tone of the piece—the hesitation of Orestes when he sees his mother approaching, and the outburst of remorse in both brother and sister after the deed is done. Here is

indeed a real advance beyond the happy piety of the pair in Sophocles' play, where the voice of Apollo sets at rest every scruple of filial piety or of natural instinct.

From another aspect we may regard the *Electra* as the most openly democratic of all Euripides' works. Elsewhere the poet has represented trusty slaves of high character and devotion, and insisted upon the fact that slavery is but an accident, and that there is nobility in men of low degree. Yet these instances occur in the retinue of princes, whereas here peasants are put upon the stage, and made the finest characters in the play. Electra's pretended husband is a moral hero, and the aged farmer from the Spartan frontier is the moving spirit in devising the plot of vengeance, whereas Orestes and Electra are the victims of oracles and family curses and crimes, which force them into exile and remorse.

44. **The Iphigenia in Aulis.**—We now turn to another example of the tragedies of plot—the *Iphigenia in Aulis*. This noble play was left unfinished by the poet, and there are great critical difficulties about many passages, which were completed or interpolated by inferior hands. The general outline, however, is fixed, and no essential feature of the plot has been lost. But the character drawing is here as prominent as the plot, so that the piece is one of the most remarkable in both respects.

It opens with a striking night-scene, in which Agamemnon appears tortured with agonising indecision as to his daughter, whose sacrifice had been suggested by Calchas and Odysseus, and whom he had summoned to Aulis with her mother under the pretence of a marriage with Achilles. He is writing missives and tearing them up again—missives to stop his child on the way, and save her from her fate. All this appears in the opening dialogue with an old and faithful retainer, who is at last despatched to stop the approach of the princess. But Menelaus meets him, and seizes his despatch, and they return in angry dispute,

the old man remonstrating with the king's brother. Agamemnon and Menelaus then enter upon a very long altercation, in which at last Menelaus gives way, but Agamemnon in his turn becomes resolved for the sacrifice through mingled ambition and fear of public opinion.* The change in Menelaus is produced by seeing his brother's despair on the sudden news that Iphigenia has arrived amid the acclamations of the host. The constancy of Agamemnon, on the contrary, is that curious obstinacy of an irresolute man who fears public opinion, and, having given way at first easily, finds himself the slave of a hasty and weak acquiescence. The entry of Queen Clytemnestra and her daughter, the further subterfuges of Agamemnon, the somewhat comic situation of Achilles—who meets Clytemnestra by chance, and is hailed to his surprise as her future son-in-law—lead to subtle developments of character, and heighten the interest of the play as it draws to its close. The courtliness and chivalry of Achilles, and the stout motherly homeliness of Clytemnestra, bring out the wretched weakness of the king and the noble resolve of the princess in striking relief. But these matters belong to another chapter.

45. **The Alcestis.**—Though the *Alcestis* is among the list at the opening of this chapter, our consideration of the characters will sufficiently convey the plot which they sustain. I will only notice here that the powerlessness of Apollo to save his friend except by means of a substitute, and the grim determination of Death, as he approaches the palace from which the god is retiring—these facts, which are brought before us in the opening scene, greatly enhance our sense of the heroism of Heracles and the terrible conflict which he undertakes. The somewhat comic scenes in the play, the jocund revelling of the unsuspecting Heracles

* This is the scene which Dryden confesses to have borrowed for his re-written or re-arranged version of Shakspere's *Troilus and Cressida*, as he tells us in his preface to that play.

as he lectures the sad attendant on the joys of life, the conflict of selfishness between Admetus and his father (for as such the Greeks understood it), and the insistence of Heracles that his sorrowing host shall receive the veiled lady into his mourning house, are probably owing to the place of the *Alcestis* as fourth in the representation, in other words, as substitute for a satyric drama. We may suppose that the audience required not only a melodrama, but some room for laughter after the witnessing of three solemn tragedies.

This comparatively early play (438 B.C.) came out with the *Cretan Women*, the *Alcmæon*, and the *Telephus*, of which the last was sufficiently remarkable to excite Aristophanes' constant ridicule, on account of its ragged and suffering hero. The whole group obtained second prize, Sophocles being first. To us the mixture of comic and vulgar life with profoundly tragic scenes is peculiarly interesting in a Greek play. This combination appears in the very prologue, in which Apollo tells us how Admetus "having tested and gone through all his friends, his aged father, and the mother who bore him," can find no other substitute except his wife.

The chorus is throughout a sympathetic spectator of the action, and the choral odes are highly poetical and beautifully constructed, as well as strictly to the point. Thus even in the ode supposed to express the poet's mind (vv. 962 sqq.)—*ἔγω διὰ Μούσας καὶ μετάρσιος ἦξα*—the learning alluded to by the chorus is that Thracian learning, which was naturally accessible to Thessalians, where the scene is laid. There is a remarkable external resemblance between the concluding scene, and that of the *Winter's Tale*, which has not escaped the commentators. Still closer is the parallel in the old Indian epic, the Mâha-Bhârata, where Sâvitri, like Alcestis, rescues her husband from the power of Yama, the lord of the nether world. These are of course accidental resemblances; the conscious reproductions have been innumerable, for no subject

could prove more attractive than this beautiful legend, and yet no one has rivalled or even approached in excellence its treatment by Euripides. This play has had its enemies too, especially among the strict classicists, who are offended by the miraculous elements, and the comic vein which it contains. It may be enough to cite among its defenders Racine, who turns aside, in the preface to his *Iphigénie*, to defend it from these shallow attacks, and Alfieri, whose first reading of it was an epoch in his intellectual life.

46. I have now said enough to indicate how far Euripides anticipated the modern notion of an intricate plot, which is intended, apart from character drawing, to fix the attention of the hearer. We see in him the originator of this kind of drama, which Sophocles seems to have adopted from him in the days of their rivalry, but which ancient critics unanimously ascribed to the fertile invention of the younger poet. The devices were indeed not very complicated: an intrigue devised by the actors, which is defeated by Destiny—as in the *Iphigenias*; a pathetic recognition (the ἀναγνωρίσις adopted by the genteel comedy), such as those in the *Ion*, the *Helena*, and *Tauric Iphigenia*; in not a few an apparent miscarriage of Divine Providence, which is only rectified after severe trials of patience and of character. But the idea of weaving a complicated web to be unravelled on the stage is there, and was sure to bear its fruit.

CHAPTER V.

DRAMAS OF CHARACTER AND OF SITUATION—THE CYCLOPS.

47. We only have two plays remaining which can strictly be called character plays—that is to say plays in which the whole interest centres on the study of a single or very few personages, as is commonly the case in the plays of Sophocles. And these two plays chance to be plays in which the passion of love is the phase of humanity specially brought out. We know that this side of human nature, especially in the female sex, was a favourite study with Euripides, and exposed him to special censure from many critics. But there is no reason to believe that he did not compose character plays in which the intellectual or ethical side was predominant. Such were apparently the *Philoctetes*, in which Ulysses played the part of a large and wise statesman, and the *Melanippe*, in which the intellectual side was so predominant as to give a title (ἡ σόφη, the wise), to the play. And, indeed, in extant plays there is no want of splendid ethical character drawing. Still the criticism is probably true, that even in such cases the intellectual side occupied our poet too exclusively, and that owing to this peculiarity none of his men (except perhaps the boy Ion) have taken a permanent place in literature. For while the portraiture of intellect may be interesting, nothing will speak to the heart of every age except moral excellence.

48. But in our two essentially character plays, the *Medea* and the *Hippolytus*, we have the passions of female jealousy and of unlawful love—each resulting in terrible revenge—drawn in imperishable colours. Though succeeding ages have equally praised and imitated them, the judgment of the Athenians, I think rightly, preferred the *Hippolytus*.

The **Medea** came out in 431 B.C., with the *Philoctetes*, *Dictys*, and the early-lost satyric Θερισταί, or *Reapers*. It is said to have been anticipated, as to subject, by a play of Neophron, a contemporary but now unknown tragic poet. Like many other great literary works, it was at first a failure, as it only gained the third prize, Euphorion (son of Æschylus) obtaining the first prize, Sophocles the second. To obtain the third prize was considered a disgrace, for even if more than three poets ever contended (which I think doubtful) nothing lower than the third place is ever mentioned. Accordingly the *Medea* was a failure, and this is justified by the criticisms upon it, which are still extant in the *Poetics* of Aristotle, who blames the poet for the introduction of king Ægeus, and for the fabulous device of the winged chariot at the conclusion of the play. Possibly some of its original defects have disappeared from our texts, for there is considerable evidence that there was a second edition, and many of the variants or supposed interpolations in our texts may arise from the two editions being imperfectly fused by a later hand. But apart from Aristotle's objections, any modern critic might bring this charge against the *Medea*, that the whole interest turns upon the delineation of the furious passion of Medea, and her devices to punish those who have offended her. For the other characters are either mean or colourless, if we except the two aged and faithful servants, the nurse and pædagogue, whose prologue and dialogue admirably introduce the play. Jason, the faithless husband, is a sort of Greek Æneas, who endeavours to justify his desertion of his wife by specious excuses, and has not even, like Virgil's hero, the excuse of a warning

voice from the gods to urge him in the direction of his inclinations. The chorus, which consists of Corinthian women, also comes under the censure of the critics, inasmuch as it coolly receives the confidences of Medea, and sees a terrible plot formed and carried out against the king of the land, without offering any resistance or objection. The famous ode (vv. 824–845) on the glories of Athens, is really irrelevant in its place, being merely suggested by the fact that the Athenian Ægeus has undertaken to harbour a sorceress and wholesale murderess in his city. It is this very episode of Ægeus, who is introduced in order that the omnipotent sorceress, with her winged chariot, may not be a homeless outcast, which Aristotle censures in his *Poetics*. It is an otiose excrescence in the play, not without offensive details. There is no interest in the characters of the unfortunate king of Corinth and his daughter, who perish by the poisoned robe.

Thus if this play be strictly judged as a play, in which all the characters should have some interest, and contribute to the development, in which moreover good and evil should be balanced, so as to excite pity as well as terror, we must endorse the verdict of the Athenian audience. It must also be remembered, that in the days of the production of these great tragedies, as in other ages of great production, acting was not a developed and lucrative profession, so that although Euripides had his favourite actor, and no longer appeared, like older poets, on the stage, the impersonation of character and of passion had not yet become a study and an art. But in the next generation, when poetic genius had died away, actors became of importance, people began to frequent the theatre, not to see a great play, but a great actor, and then it was that the *Medea* sprang at once from the third to the first place as an acting piece. For one actor was sufficient to bring out all the power of the play, and nowhere could a great actor find a more grateful subject for

his genius than the impersonation of the vehement character and furious passion of the great Colchian princess. This is the figure which has also fascinated the great majority of later critics, who like every public seem to miss finer points, and appreciate the strong outlines of ungovernable passion. We do not know whether the *Trachiniæ* of Sophocles was an earlier or a later play, but it affords so curious and interesting a contrast to the *Medea*, that I venture to suppose Sophocles consciously painted a more natural and womanly picture of the sorrows of a deserted wife, who, without the power or wickedness of Medea, still destroys her deceiver, and brings ruin upon herself, in spite of her patience and long-suffering. The external resemblance of the two plays, the foreign residence of both heroines, the pretended contentment of both in order to attain their ends, the poisoned robe of both, is very striking. Yet the *Trachiniæ*, in my opinion a finer play, with far more interest in the characters, has held no place in public favour beside the stronger and more violent *Medea*. In every respect her part is a great acting part, from her wild exclamations behind the scenes in the beginning all through her pleading with Jason, her affected calmness, up to her wild burst of joy when she has secured the help of Ægeus.

But had even all these features been commonplace, there was one scene sufficient not only to save, but to immortalise, the play. The mental conflict between the mother's affection for her children and her stern resolve to sacrifice them as a revenge upon her husband —this scene (vv. 1021–1080)—in which fury and compassion alternate, and tears of tenderness dim the eyes flashing with ungovernable rage—has laid hold of the world as one of the great portraits of human nature which never can grow old.* It is remarkable that the

* Apart from modern *Medeas*, a popular version of this scene, with the opposite resolution conquering the furious mother, as might be expected in a Christian society, is to be found in Bellini's popular opera of *Norma*.

poet has chosen iambics and not agitated lyric measures, for this immortal scene. I attribute this either to its early date among his plays, when he had not developed his fancy for lyrical monodies, or perhaps better to the nature of the scene, which requires frequent and long pauses in the acting.

We actually hear of six Greek *Medeas*, besides the early play of Neophron, not to speak of comic parodies, so powerfully did the subject lay hold of the Attic public. Ennius imitated the play in a free Latin version, and both Cicero and Brutus are said to have been reading or citing it, in their last moments—no mean distinction for any tragedy. Horace often alludes to it, and Ovid's earliest work was a *Medea*, also a free version, which was acted on the Roman stage with applause, when its author was pining in exile, and which is praised by Tacitus and Quintilian. There remains to us, however, a tragedy of this name under the title of Seneca. Anyone who will consult this piece will see how completely the taste of the Roman poet had altered and depraved the great conception of Euripides. The gloomy horrors of Medea's witchcraft are the great feature in this bombastic production.

49. The **Hippolytus,** a second and improved edition, we are told, of the poet's former treatment of the same subject,* which obtained the first prize in 428 B.C., is of greater merit and interest. For here the passion of Phædra is brought into contrast with the perfect purity and steel-cold passionlessness of Hippolytus—a sort of princely and conscious Ion. Nothing can be more unfair than the estimate of Phædra's character by adverse ancient and admiring modern critics; for we must remember that her fatal

* In Seneca's version, and in the French copies, Phædra is made to confess her passion to Hippolytus in person, and Racine has, moreover, other variations which I need not here discuss. It has been assumed without sufficient evidence by modern critics that this personal declaration was the offensive feature omitted in his second edition by Euripides. This may have been so, but it is very rash to assert it.

passion was a heaven-sent malady, against which she struggled with all the force of her nature, and which she proposed to escape by death had not her secret been extracted from her, and had she not then been seduced by the complaisance and want of principle of her aged nurse. The Greeks believed in the direct interference of the goddess Aphrodite, and on no phase of human nature is their poetry more copious and more striking than on her absolute power to instil the best minds with wild madness.* Phædra is therefore in no sense an abandoned woman, or a low character ceding to her ordinary passions, as a modern reader might at first sight suppose, but a noble and pure woman afflicted with a horrible madness, over which she in vain strives to obtain control. What is, however, though equally Greek, not so reconcilable with our ideas of a noble nature, is her dying vengeance by bequeathing to her husband a false accusation against Hippolytus. Euripides no doubt found it in the legend, and to him, and to his age, the taking of vengeance on an enemy by treacherous means was not only natural but lawful. To us it is not so, and hence modern copies of the play have commonly softened or altered this feature.

It is to be observed that nowhere does Euripides conceive a *man* afflicted with such a visitation, which would, I fancy, have seemed quite unnatural or absurd to an Athenian audience. Furthermore, this great painter of the passion of love never dreamt of composing a love-scene, which would probably have been considered indelicate. So different are the tastes of equally civilised societies! The nearest approach to such a scene is the recognition of Menelaus and Helen (in the *Helena*), where a long-separated husband and wife meet and embrace with transports of joy. Such a love-scene in a modern play—say at the court of Louis XIV.—would have excited transports of merri-

* Perhaps the modern censors of the great and good men, who have had their lives marred by errors of this kind, are wrong in underrating this dæmonic folly in human affairs.

ment or else of impatience. Before a Periclean audience it was the only open manifestation of affection between the sexes which had hitherto been tolerated; nor did Euripides here attempt the innovation which modern society has carried through so completely in all forms of the drama.

The fate of Hippolytus is indeed tragic—a lofty and pure character destroyed by his own purity; but the spectator is partly reconciled to it, and the vengeance of the deity is palliated, by the bold and somewhat impious contempt for her which he expresses at the opening of the play. The aged servant who begs him to offer the customary sacrifice to Aphrodite, and not brave her anger, touches the proper string; the bold self-opinion of the hero gives a jarring sound.

Moreover the vengeance of the goddess, who is drawn in the most repulsive colours, seems to express the retaliation of nature upon those who violate her decrees, for asceticism was not honoured by the Greeks, who even in their tragedies are never weary of recommending a moderate share in the delights of love. But in addition to this larger conception, the spite of Aphrodite, as well as the weakness of Artemis, who is the hero's patron goddess, does seem intended by the poet to lower the respect for these deities in the public mind. It is indeed a *reductio ad absurdum* of Divine Providence, when the most awful misfortunes of men are ascribed to the malice of hostile, and the impotence of friendly, deities. And even Artemis, when powerless to save her favourite, threatens (v. 920) that she will be avenged by slaying with her arrows some favourite of Aphrodite. Euripides can hardly have assigned to goddesses these miserable parts, without intending to satirise the popular creed, and to open the way for higher and better notions.

The chorus is a weak and sometimes inconvenient spectator of the action—the necessary consequence of its being present all through the play, and therefore rather a general defect in Greek plays, than a fault in uripides. But nothing will show more closely the

sort of criticism to which Euripides has been subjected, in both ancient and modern times, than the general outcry against the celebrated line uttered by Hippolytus (v. 612), ἡ γλῶσσ' ὀμώμοχ', ἡ δὲ φρὴν ἀνωμοτός, "my tongue has sworn, but my mind is free." He cries out this in his fury, when the old nurse, who had bound him over to secrecy by an oath, adjures him not to betray her mistress. It seems indeed hard that a dramatic poet should have his moral character decided by the excited utterances of his characters, but it is worse than hard, it is scandalously unjust, that these critics should not have noted that some fifty lines further on, the same Hippolytus declares (v. 657) that *were he not bound by the sanctity of his oath*, he would certainly inform Theseus. Can there possibly be a greater case of immorality in criticism?

The metrical treatment of the dramatic scenes in this play is much richer and more various than what we find in the *Medea*. More especially the alternating of feverish dochmiacs with iambics is twice used with striking effect. In the first the chorus, who cannot hear Hippolytus behind the scenes, inquire in great agitation from Phædra, who stands at the door on the stage, and who replies with the calmness of despair. In the second, the lament of Theseus over Phædra's body is written in iambic and dochmiac couplets alternately, thus conveying the changing colours of his deep and perplexed sorrow (vv. 817 sqq.). This scene has been admirably restored to its proper form in Weil's edition.

50. Beyond these two, there are no strictly character dramas of Euripides preserved; his treatment of human nature in other plays which contain remarkable heroes and heroines, will occupy us in a subsequent chapter.

We now come to that largest and most various class of plays, which I have called dramas of *situation*, and which consist in successions of scenes, brought together with less connection than that of a proper plot, for the purpose of producing affecting pictures of

human sorrow or awful pictures of the tyranny of fate. The line of demarcation between these and the dramas of plot is of course not very clear, and opinions may vary as to the classing of particular plays. But as no fair critic would claim for the *Supplices* of Æschylus any proper plot, so it is certain that this oldest and simplest form of "δρᾶμα" in which nothing was done, was revived by Euripides for the purpose of stringing together pathetic scenes and musical effects, without elaborating an ingenious and complicated story.

51. His **Supplices,** mainly intended as an encomium of Athens in the person of Theseus, turns on the rescuing of the bodies of the "Seven against Thebes" who had fallen before its gates, and were lying unburied. The woes of the bereaved suppliants, and the despair and suicide of Evadne, Capaneus' widow, alternate with political discussions between the Theban herald and Theseus in affording the matter for the play. The date is uncertain, probably about 420 B.C., shortly after the battle of Delium, and it was probably not far removed in production from the *Heracleidæ*, of which the plan is very similar, though the polities are widely different —the one supporting Argos, and the other very hostile to it. Nay, in the *Supplices* alliance and eternal friendship with Argos are solemnly inculcated. Now if it indeed be true that these two plays were produced within a short interval of time, during the shifting interests and alliances in the later part of the Peloponnesian war, it will prove how completely Euripides regarded those pieces as temporary political advices, varying with the situation, and of which the inconsistences were not more important than those in a volume of any statesman's political speeches. I think moreover that in the general discussion (between Theseus and the Theban herald) on monarchy, democracy, and general statecraft, which stops the action of the play, we may clearly perceive a growing tendency in tragedy to become a written record, and to appeal to a reading public, beyond the listening crowd in the theatre. Euripides is in this play so

conscious of the dramatic impropriety, that he makes Theseus comment on the volubility of the herald in matters not concerning him, and wonder at his own patience in replying to him. It is therefore plain that what are called rhetorical redundancies in this and other of Euripides' plays are deliberately chosen by the poet as subservient to an important purpose—that of the political education of the people from his own point of view.

52. **The Heracleidæ.**—These general remarks apply to the *Heracleidæ*, in which the children of Heracles come as suppliants to Demophon, king of Athens, and are defended by Athens, this time against Argive insolence, and with the aid of the splendid sacrifice of Macaria, one of the fugitives. But this heroine only comes in for one act of the play, which is not concluded with her death.

Although Euripides seems here again to have used his stage as a political platform, but a platform (like the modern pulpit) on which an immediate reply is impossible, he combined, along with this main idea, a great many beautiful and affecting situations, and it may be said that for tragic interest none of his plays exceed its first part, ending, unfortunately, with a huge gap after the 629th line. Many critics have censured it in ignorance of this capital fact, and also of some lesser mutilations near the end. Indeed several ancient quotations from the play are not in our present texts, and it is the merit of Kirchhoff to have first insisted upon these difficulties, and to have critically edited the text of the play in his edition of the works of Euripides.

As this is one of the less known plays, I will briefly rehearse the argument. The play opens with the altercation between the violent and brutal Argive herald, Copreus (who, very unlike the cultivated herald of the *Supplices*, is to be compared to the Egyptian herald in Æschylus' *Supplices*) and the faithful Iolaus, who in extreme age and decrepitude endeavours as best he can to protect the children of

his old comrade in arms. It is indeed curious how often the tragedians ascribe an overbearing and brutal bullying to heralds, a feature never found in Homer, and indeed wholly inconsistent with their duties. The chorus interferes, and presently Demophon, king of Athens, appears, and dismisses the herald, not without personal threats of violence. The poet evidently had before him another version of the legend, in which the herald was slain by the Athenians. But when Demophon has duly undertaken the task of protecting the fugitives, the prophets tell him that a noble virgin must be sacrificed to insure him the victory. This dreadful news leads to a pathetic outburst of despair in Iolaus, who sees himself again driven from a place of refuge, and wandering with his helpless charge, owing to the hard conditions imposed on his protectors. But the old man's idle offers of his own life are interrupted by the entrance of Macaria, one of the fugitive children, who, when she hears the oracle, calmly offers her own life. I shall speak in another chapter of the drawing of her character in comparison with other heroines in Euripides' plays. Unfortunately the narrative of her sacrifice is lost.

The interest of the spectator is then transferred to the approaching battle, and the warlike energy of the decrepit Iolaus, who insists on going to the battle; and as the putting on of armour would doubtless have been impossible to an actor stuffed out in the tragic costume, the messenger, a servant of Hyllus, discreetly offers to carry it for him to the field. The manifestly comic drawing of Iolaus in this scene seems to me as possibly a satire on some effete Athenian general, who undertook active duty when unfit for it. But by a miracle, which is presently narrated by a messenger, he recovers his youth, and with Hyllus, defeats and captures Eurystheus, his persecutor. The mutilated concluding scene raises another discussion, not of legendary but of then pressing interest—the fate of prisoners taken in battle.

Alcmene, with the ferocity which Euripides generally paints in old women, demands his instant death. The chorus insist that by the laws of Hellenic warfare an adversary not killed in battle cannot be afterwards slain without impiety. Eurystheus, however, seems to facilitate in some strange way the removal of these scruples by prophesying that his tomb will yet serve Athens against her enemies, a prophecy similar to that in the *Œdipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, with which the present play has many features in common. The actual decision of the dispute is lost.

53. **The Hecuba.**—Very much the same plan is followed in the *Hecuba*, which consists of a series of the sorrows of the Trojan queen, and in which the opening subject, the sacrifice of Polyxena, concludes in the middle of the play, artfully introducing a new catastrophe—the finding of the body of Polydorus, and Hecuba's vengeance upon his false Thracian host. Except that the ghost of Polydorus foretells this combination of subjects in the prologue, they have no connection, save as common sorrows of Hecuba.

The *Hecuba* seems to have been brought out about 425 B.C., and is an earlier treatment of the sorrows of the Trojan queen than the *Troades*, which came out eight or nine years later, and is conceived in a different style. The former has always been a favourite play, has been often imitated, and since Erasmus' time, used as a schoolbook. It is by no means so full of political allusion as the plays we have just noticed, but is perhaps for that very reason a better tragedy. It treats of the climax of Hecuba's misfortunes—the sacrifice of Polyxena at the grave of Achilles, and the murder of Polydorus, her brother, by Polymestor, his Thracian host. The chorus of Trojan women sing odes of great beauty, especially that describing the capture of Ilium (vv. 905 sqq.). The pleading of Hecuba with Odysseus, who comes to carry off her daughter, is full of pathos, and the conduct of Polyxena places her among Euripides' leading heroines. But in this

play we have the narrative of the sacrifice complete, and this concludes the former part. The passage into the later part, which is not really connected as to plot, is well devised by the circumstance that a slave going to fetch water for the funeral rites of Polyxena, finds the body of Polydorus tossing on the beach — an event announced in the prologue by the ghost of Polydorus. This brings out the fierce element in the heartbroken queen. She debates, in an *aside* not common on the Greek stage, whether she will appeal to Agamemnon, who is present, to aid her in her vengeance, and she ultimately does so with great art, if not with dignity. She then carries out her plot of slaying the Thracian king's children, and putting out his eyes, with great fierceness. The wild lamentations of the barbarian, Agamemnon's cool refusal to support him, and his gloomy prophecies, conclude the play. The change in Hecuba, when there is nothing more to plead for, from despair to savage fury, is finely conceived. She has been compared to the Margaret of Shakspere's *Richard III.* The play became a favourite at Rome, Ennius translated it, and it is cited by Cicero and Horace, not to speak of the many suggestions derived from it by Virgil. It was done into French and into Italian early in the sixteenth century, and was brought on the English stage in 1726.

54. **The Troades.**—This "heroine of situation" occupies a leading part in another play, the *Troades*, which is nothing but a picture of the miseries of the captives during their last day within sight of their ruined city. The episode of Polyxena, which is mentioned as already past, is here compensated by the more tragic fate of Cassandra (whose prophetic wildness supplies a splendid scene), and that of Andromache. Indeed the misfortunes of the latter—the murder of her child Astyanax while she is hurried away, so that the aged queen Hecuba is left alone to lament and bury him—are almost too heartrending to be truly tragic, and may be regarded as the highest

point of pathos ever reached by this most pathetic of poets.

The play was brought out in 415 B.C., as the third play with the *Alexander* (Paris) and *Palamedes*; it was followed by the *Sisyphus*, as a satyric piece. But it only obtained second prize, the first being awarded to a tetralogy of Xenocles on the Theban legends of Œdipus and Pentheus. While varying the incidents of the *Hecuba*, the poet here introduces a larger number of characters, both Cassandra and Andromache appearing. There is, however, far less plot than there is in the *Hecuba*, and except for the curious anticipation in the opening dialogue of Athene and Poseidon, we miss even the satisfaction of revenge taken by the Trojan queen in the earlier play. It is indeed nothing but "a voice in Ramah, and lamentation—Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not." It is like the prophet's roll, which is written within and without with mourning, and lamentation, and woe. Nevertheless there are passages in the wild and poetic fervour of Cassandra which remind us of her great scene in the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus. There is, moreover, a litigious scene, in which Hecuba and Helen argue before Menelaus. This, together with the repeated appearances of the herald Talthybius, are to us no agreeable diversions. The chief indication of Euripides' later style in this play is the prominence of *monodies*, or soliloquies of complaint with musical accompaniments. In these our poet excels, and in spite of the ridicule of Aristophanes, they are the finest passages in this and other plays.

Most of the imitations of this play have combined with it scenes from the *Hecuba*, by the process called *contaminatio*, which was so common in Latin borrowings from the Greek stage. Two passages in Virgil's *Æneid*, the appeal of Juno to Aeolus, and the awful picture of the fall of Troy, are borrowed from the opening and the close of the *Troades*. Among the plays of Seneca, the *Troades* is un-

doubtedly the finest, but its merits are attained not only by borrowing beauties from the *Hecuba*, but by the introduction of a splendid scene, which we cannot identify in any Greek model. It is the scene in which Odysseus comes to seek Astyanax, whom his mother has concealed in Hector's tomb. When she protests that he is "among the dead," Odysseus orders the tomb to be desecrated, and the bones of Hector scattered to the winds. This leads to a great tragic conflict in Andromache's mind and the ultimate surrender of the child. It is probably the general cioncidence of subject with the great epics of Homer and Virgil, which has made these two plays so popular among all the imitators of the classical tragedy.

55. **The Phœnissæ.**—The drama most crowded in this loose way with characters and with incidents is the *Phœnissæ*, where all the tragic events of the great war against the Seven, and the family disasters of the house of Laius, pass before us like the visions of Macbeth—a great procession rather than the connected scenes of a single plot. We cannot even say, as in the *Hecuba*, that the play divides itself into two; and so, as it were, ends to begin again.

The exact date and the companion plays are uncertain, and variously stated, but it seems, according to the best evidence, to have obtained second prize at some time during the ninety-third Olympiad. It is really a tragedy on the wars of the house of Labdacus, but is called after its chorus, which is composed of Phœnician maidens on their way to Delphi, who stopped on their way through Thebes, and were thus accidentally detained in the siege by the seven chiefs. Nevertheless there would be some difficulty in giving the play any other name, for like the *Troades* it is strictly an *episodic* play, a series of pictures, all connected with the miseries of Œdipus' family, but without one central figure among the nine characters which successively appear. The name *Thebais*, given to it in modern imitations,

naturally suggests an epic poem, and not a tragedy. Perhaps Jocasta, the mother of the hostile brothers, is the most prominent personage, but yet her death is only a sort of appendix to the sacrifice of Creon's son, Menœkeus, and to the mutual slaughter of the brothers. All the scenes of the play, though thus loosely connected, are full of pathos and beauty, and hence no play of Euripides has been more frequently copied or quoted. The conception of the two brothers is very fine, Polynices, who is the exile and the assailant, being the softer character, and relenting in his hate at the moment of his death. Eteocles, on the contrary, who is on the patriotic and popular side of defending Thebes from foreign attack, is drawn a hard and cruel despot, who defends his case by the bold assertion that he now holds the throne, that none but a fool would resign so great a prize, and who dies in silence.

Antigone is introduced near the opening of the play for the sake of the celebrated scene on the walls, when her old attendant slave (παιδαγωγός) whom Dolce calls a *Bailo*, and Schiller a *Hofmeister*, shows her the various chiefs. This scene, of which the earliest form is the discourse between Helen and Priam on the walls of Troy (in the third book of the *Iliad*), has often since been copied in various literature. The critics quote instances from the Latin poet Statius (in his *Thebaid*), from Tasso, from the Persian Firdusi (wherever he found it), and in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. The princess reappears at the close of the play, with a character combining the features of her two portraits in Sophocles' *Antigone* and second *Œdipus*. The most dramatic part of the play is the dialogue between the brothers, and Jocasta's efforts to reconcile them, followed by the narrative of their death.

If the choral odes, which are very elegant, do not aid the action, but are rather calm contemplations of the mythical history of Thebes, Euripides would doubtless defend himself by pleading that he had

intentionally assigned them to a body of foreign maidens who could only feel a general interest in the fortunes of the actors. The crowding of incident was doubtless intended as a contrast to Æschylus' *Seven against Thebes*, which with all its unity of purpose and martial fire, is wanting in dramatic interest. Indeed, the long description of the seven chiefs in that play is directly criticised by Euripides (vv. 751–752) as undramatic. Racine's *Thébaïde ou les Frères Ennemis* is the most famous modern version, but was an early play, with defects for which the poet himself apologises. But both Racine, and Alfieri (in his *Polinice*), make divers changes in the character drawing, which are not improvements on the great original. Schiller has not only given an excellent literal version of part of the play, but has copied several scenes in his *Braut von Messina*.

56. **The Andromache.**—We find a combination of two distinct subjects in two other plays; one perhaps the poorest, and the other among the best of the poet's works. The former, the *Andromache*, is, like the *Supplices*, occasional in its political complexion, being a bitter attack on Spartan honour and morals in the persons of Hermione and Menelaus. But Andromache is the bond uniting the two parts of the play, which re-opens with the appearance of Orestes and the flight of Hermione.

The date of the play is uncertain, as we are told it was not brought out at Athens, perhaps only after the poet's death. The bitter allusions to Sparta would suit any time in the Peloponnesian war. It has, indeed, quite the complexion of a political pamphlet written under the guise of a tragedy. Andromache, who is now the slave and concubine of Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles, appears as a suppliant, telling her tale and mourning her woes in elegiac lament. Her protector is absent, and she is being persecuted by Hermione, the lawful wife of Neoptolemus, and her father Menelaus, who wish to slay her child. She is persuaded to leave the altar to which she had fled, by

threats that her child will be at once put to death, and when she does, Menelaus breaks his word and sends them both to execution. The pathetic laments of mother and child are interrupted by the sudden advent of the aged Peleus, who protects them stoutly, in a long altercation with Menelaus. But then, without any sufficient reason, Hermione comes in agitated at the vengeance which her husband will take when he hears of her doings, and her paroxysms are only allayed by the arrival of Orestes, with whom she arranges to fly. Then follows a long messenger's narrative how her former husband has been slain at Delphi by the arts of Orestes. The lamentations of Peleus conclude the play.

Though justly called a second-rate play by the scholiasts, it was popular enough to be quoted at Alexander's table by Cleitus on the undue share of glory obtained by the general of an army (vv. 639 sqq.) —a quotation which cost him his life at the hands of the intoxicated monarch. It was evidently in Virgil's mind when composing his fifth *Æneid*, but the *Andromaque* of Racine is considerably altered, as the relations of the heroine to Neoptolemus are not suited to the modern stage, nor could such a character be treated with tragic dignity nowadays.

57. **The Mad Heracles.**—The other specimen is the *Hercules Furens*, which every English reader can now study in Mr. Browning's admirable version (in his *Aristophanes' Apology*), and which is so striking in its combination of two subjects that it almost deserves to be called a drama of plot. The action opens with the hopeless condition of Heracles' children and their imminent death at the hands of the tyrant Lycus. The hero, returning from Hades, actually intercepts them on their way to execution, and amid the congratulations of the chorus, and the just vengeance on Lycus, the play seems (like Mendelssohn's overture to the *Midsummer Night's Dream*) to conclude. But as the chorus are singing their ode of feasting and joy, the figure of Madness (Lytta) appears aloft, sent

forth to destroy the hero's newly-recovered happiness. Then follows the dreadful narrative of his massacre of his wife and children, and his attempted wrecking of the house. His re-appearance, lying in deathlike sleep and in bonds under the watch of his heartbroken father, his gradual awakening to sanity and his despair, are the subjects of the magnificent scenes which follow. But instead of ending his sorrows and hiding his shame by voluntary death, like the Ajax of Sophocles, he is saved from himself and carried away to Athens by his trusty friend Theseus, a noble and natural substitute for the somewhat vulgar *deus ex machinâ* of other dramas. I shall speak again, in a future chapter, of the treatment of Heracles' character in this noble play. But with all its merits it is, after all, a mere series of scenes showing rapid reverses of fortune, of which the latter are not the natural or necessary product of the former. Heracles is afflicted with his madness through the hate of Hera, not (as some would have it) on account of his vengeance upon Lycus being planned with treachery, for this was to the Greeks no crime, no meanness, but a lawful and laudable act.

58. **The Bacchæ.**—I have left for the last the famous *Bacchæ*, which is indeed constructed on a proper plan, and admits no disturbing episodes, but in which the main interest lies nevertheless not in the plot, not in the character of Pentheus, but in the striking situations brought before us, the contrast of the angry powerless king and the smiling almighty Dionysus, the wild delights of the Mænad women in the mountains, the grotesque figure of the disguised Pentheus in the lofty pine-top, then the horror of their bloody triumph as they display his mangled limbs, and lastly the awakening and despair of Agave. All these subjects are well and thoroughly connected, yet more splendid in themselves than in their connection.

The play was composed for the court of Archelaus. Instead of dealing with mere human passion or human character, the poet passes for once into the

field of the marvellous and the supernatural, and builds his drama on the subject of the introduction of a new faith, and the awful punishment of the sceptical Pentheus, who jeers at the worship of Dionysus, and endeavours to put it down by force. His mother, Agave, and his sisters, are driven into Mount Kithæron, where they celebrate the wild orgies of the god with many attendant miracles. Pentheus, who at first attempts to imprison the incarnate god, and then to put down the Bacchanals by force of arms, is deprived of reason by Dionysus. He is then made ridiculous by being dressed as a woman, and led out by the god to the mountain, where he is caught watching the Mænads from the top of a pine-tree on which Dionysus had placed him, and torn to pieces by the women of his own family. The lament of Agave, when she comes in with the bleeding head, which she had mistaken in her frenzy for a lion's, but recognises with returning sense, is now lost. But its main features can be restored from the rhetor Apsines, and from the corresponding passage in the religious drama called *Christus Patiens*, ascribed to Gregory of Nazianzen. For this play follows the *Bacchæ* closely, being little more than a cento from it. Hence, Dean Milman, in his admirable translation of the *Bacchæ*, has inserted the lament from the Christian play. The chorus does not consist of the furious Theban Mænads, but of Asiatic attendants on the god, who sing in splendid hymns the joys and blessings of the new faith. It is of course undramatic, that Pentheus, who is proceeding so violently against the votaries of the new religion, should leave this chorus to sing its dithyrambs in peace; but ordinary possibilities must often be violated for such a stage difficulty as an ever-present chorus.

The general tenor of the play, which perhaps contains the poet's latest reflections on human life, is that of acquiescence in the received faith, or in a well-attested faith, without sceptical doubts and

questionings. But it is remarkable that where the struggle is about a new cult, the old men of the play, Cadmus and Teiresias, are the only persons ready to embrace strange and violent rites, in the performance of which they even make themselves ridiculous. It is not impossible that among the half-educated Macedonian youth, with whom literature was coming into fashion, the poet may have met a good deal of that insolent second-hand scepticism which is so offensive to a deep and serious thinker, and he may have wished to show them that he was not, as they doubtless hailed him, the apostle of this random speculative arrogance.

59. This kind of play then—an episode, or a number of episodes from a legend—was most properly introduced by a prologue, bringing the story up to the moment when the action began. It was almost as often concluded by the appearance of a deity, who calmed the disputes, or when the excitement of deep passions did not admit of any prompt and peaceful solution, assured the requital of the actors. But I here only indicate what will be again treated when we come to speak of the lesser features of the tragedies. It seems from the quotations of the ancients as well as from the imitations of moderns, that this was not the highest and most successful class of Euripides' plays; and it has, moreover, lost far more than the rest by the impossibility of reproducing the musical effects, which must have been a capital feature in the lyrical expressions of lamentation or wild excitement. The tendency of the modern drama is foreign to such simple construction without prominence either of intrigue or character. We may nevertheless find specimens, not only in the Italian opera, which perhaps best represents them, but in such plays as *Wallenstein's Lager* of Schiller, a play to which the spurious *Rhesus* of Euripides bears some resemblance.

60. **The Cyclops.**—I can find no fitter place than this to say a word about the *Cyclops*, which is exceptionally interesting as the only extant relic of the

satyric drama, in which Æschylus and Pratinas were very famous. With Euripides this kind of play was unusual—he only composed eight of them, but as each tetralogy was supposed to conclude with one, he substituted short plays of a melodramatic character, like the *Alcestis*. The seriousness of the poet's face and the sadness of his other poetry might have led us to infer that the quality of humour was denied him, and that a joke from Euripides would have been a strained and unnatural phenomenon. Yet, as it were for the purpose of upsetting all such theories, it is from him alone that one of these peculiar farces is preserved; in which there is a real fund of mirth, and which, but for the coarseness of some of the jokes, would make a good acting play on a modern stage.*

The ancients carefully distinguished satyric dramas, always written by tragic poets, from comedies, which comic poets wrote; and the distinction, when closely examined, turns out to be something like the modern contrast between comedy and pantomime. In our pantomimes some well-known fairy-tale is represented by actors, who take no part in the buffoonery and the irrelevancies of a tolerably fixed and conventional group of figures with which they are surrounded. Thus, while the subject of the play or extravaganza varies, these accessories—the clown, pantaloon, columbine, and even the policeman—re-appear as fixed elements. Now this was precisely what occurred in the satyric drama so far as the *Cyclops* and other lesser evidence can warrant. The adventures of Odysseus and his companions with the atheist monster,† Polyphemus, are dramatised in close adherence to the story as told in the ninth book of Homer's *Odyssey*. There are no liberties whatever taken with the character or acts of

* The reader may judge for himself by consulting the translation by Shelley, who has effaced the objectionable passages.

† The *franchise brutale* of Polyphemus, in declaring his contempt for the gods, is quite a peculiar and a striking piece of character drawing, which merits more attention than it has yet received.

the hero, who seldom appears to such advantage in Euripides' tragedies. But Silenus, with his jovial, idle, low band of satyrs, is brought in as a captive and slave to Polyphemus, thus affording a chorus for the play as well as the buffoon who supplies its comic aspects. The cowardice and love of pleasure, as well as the joviality of the satyrs, are treated with real humour and vivacity, and the scene in which, after solemn promises, they shirk the danger of attacking the sleeping monster, is not unworthy of the best comic writer.

CHAPTER VI.

SPECIAL CHARACTERS—HEROINES.

61. It may perhaps surprise the reader that, in approaching the special character drawing of Euripides, we take up female characters first. But whether it be the accident of their preservation, or a peculiar feature in the poet's genius, there can be no doubt that all his greatest portraits are portraits of women. We have reason to think that in some of the lost plays—as, for example, the *Philoctetes*—there were really great and prominent heroes; but by a peculiar irony of fate, the poet, who was openly reviled in his own day as the hater of women and traducer of their sex, has come down to us as their noblest and most prominent advocate in all Greek literature. We know that the Socratic circle, among other social reforms, desired to improve the condition and education of women, and it is not improbable that Euripides, here as elsewhere one of the new school, contributed his share, with Aspasia, with Socrates, with Plato and Xenophon, to this all-important question. There are no doubt many angry tirades against women in the tragedies; they are commonplace in all Greek literature, and could not be absent from dramatic representations of men and manners. But most of them are spoken *in character*, by angry or suffering personages, and there is no evidence that they were intended to convey the poet's own bitter experiences. Nor did they at all affect his drawing of female character.

62. There are, in the extant tragedies, only two really disagreeable women—Medea and Hermione (in the *Andromache*)—for the savage feelings of revenge in Alcmene (*Heracleidæ*) and in Hecuba are, so to speak, extorted from them by dreadful trials, and the injustice of fate. But Medea is no Greek, she is a foreigner from a wild and gloomy race, who is moreover deeply wronged in her ungovernable but therefore strong affections. She may be a human tigress, but she is a tigress with a mother's heart, and all her violence does not destroy our sympathy with her afflictions. Hermione again is an occasional picture, not meant for a general portrait, but as a special attack on the Spartan women, who were much lauded and admired, against the poet's convictions, throughout Greece. As for his Phædra, I have already explained (§ 49) that she is in no sense drawn as a wicked or sensual woman, but rather as a noble and honourable queen, distracted by an incurable passion sent upon her through the special act of a malignant deity. Let us now turn to the other side, and examine his drawing of female virtues.

63. The ancients long since noticed the prominence of εὐψυχία, courage or fearlessness, in his principal heroines. This is specially shown in four notable instances, by the voluntary choice of death, or fearless submission to it when suddenly announced as impending. But ancient critics were not likely to lay stress on the point of greater interest to modern readers, for which indeed ancient criticism had not even a name—I mean the *unselfishness* which prompts and accompanies these instances of female heroism. There is no nobler phase of human character, and none on which Euripides has bestowed more minute and careful attention, nor do I think that I need fear contradiction, when I say that it is peculiarly the virtue of women, who show it far oftener than men. Hence, no doubt, we find it in the poet's heroines. We have in the extant plays four characters of this kind, all of whom face death with firm resolve, but each of whom shows

interesting variations both of nature and of circumstances.

64. **Polyxena.**—I will commence with Polyxena, the virgin daughter of Hecuba, who is summoned hastily from within by her distracted mother, and informed that the Greeks have determined to sacrifice her on Achilles' tomb. Her first thought (v. 198) is pity and grief for her mother's bereavement, whom she may no longer console as her fellow-slave. As for her own life she does not give it a thought. And after Hecuba's long pleading with Odysseus, she interferes to cut short the discussion; she consoles herself by enumerating the ills of slavery, in comparison with her former royal life, and departs with an affectionate farewell to her mother, and the inevitable Greek appeal to the sun, which she beholds for the last time. At the tomb she calmly prays the Greeks not to bind her, as she is ashamed, having lived a princess, to die a slave, and she offers herself without flinching to the executioner. (*Hecuba* vv. 174–584.)

There is here the greatest nobility and purity of character, but the sacrifice is softened to the victim by her family misfortunes, and but for her tender and devoted affection for her bereaved mother, she seems more ready to die than to live. But she dies at the hands of enemies, and to lay the troubled spirit of the destroyer of her house. Thus she passes from the stage, a splendid episode in the sorrows of the Trojan queen.

65. **Macaria.**—Very similar is the poet's conception of Macaria in the *Heracleidæ*, but with many variations of great interest. The harried children of Heracles, with their grandmother Alcmene, and family friend and tutor Iolaus, both decrepit with age, have at last found an apparent refuge with Demophon, king of Athens, when an oracle announces that only by the death of a noble virgin can victory be secured against the advancing host of Eurystheus. Macaria, one of the children, comes out to learn the cause of Iolaus' excitement, and apologises for her boldness in so

doing; but no sooner has she heard of the difficult position of the Athenians, who wish to protect the fugitives but cannot reconcile themselves to make a sacrifice from their own daughters, than she at once offers herself, contemptuously setting aside Iolaus' proposal to draw lots with her sisters. She paints an ironical picture of the fugitives appealing to others to make sacrifices and sparing themselves, and merely gives directions for her seemly death among women, and that in better days her tomb may be honoured. With affectionate advices to Iolaus concerning the education of her brothers and sisters, the worthy daughter of Heracles departs, hoping that death may end her troubles, and that there may be no future beyond the grave. This hopelessness in so young a creature—the result of constant adversity, is a very pathetic touch in the drawing of her character.* The whole picture is much harder than that of Polyxena; there is not even a *commos* or lyrical lamentation as she leaves the stage; there are no regrets though she is resigning the hope of marriage—to the Greek maiden a bitter loss. But all her hardness is in a noble cause; all her dying charges speak a pure and womanly anxiety for her brothers and sisters' welfare. She is, in fact, precisely such a character as the Antigone of Sophocles (in his *Antigone*), and strikes us as a nature possibly unbending and stern, but thoroughly honourable and devoted to the law of duty. But she occupies, like Polyxena, only an episode in the play, which has other interests, and not the least the glorification of the humanity and justice of Athens.

66. **Iphigenia.**—We have a far more explicitly drawn picture in Iphigenia (in Aulis) who is the chief figure in the play, and perhaps the finest gentle heroine

* Iphigenia, on the contrary, whose life has been happy, and whose hopes are fair, simply prays that she may not see "the realms beneath the earth," because it is madness to wish to abandon the present life. The real narrative of her sacrifice is unfortunately lost by a mutilation of our MSS.

in Greek tragedy. We are kept in suspense by the mental conflict of Agamemnon till she enters with her mother and her little brother, and at once fascinates us by her affectionate forwardness to greet her father, whose special favourite she is. Young and fair, full of freshness and hope, she yet has the first tinge of womanliness in her expression, as she is conscious of her coming bridal, and that she must presently leave her delightful home. Thus she retires to the cover of the tents, while the meshes of Fate are gathering about her hopes. When she first hears her father's shameful deceit and her real destiny, her mother leaves her in wild despair — *πολλὰς ἰεῖσα μεταβολὰς ὀδυρμάτων.** When she reappears to beg for her life she is calmer, but yet supplicates with an earnestness and a sympathy touching beyond expression, for she is no heartbroken captive like Polyxena, no persecuted exile like Macaria ; she is still a young, fresh, hopeful creature, strange to the woes of life, and looking forward with bright expectations to its pleasures. Therefore she begs simply for life as such, without any thought of higher responsibilities ; and when her craven father flies from her to avoid the agony of refusal, she forthwith bursts again into a lyrical paroxysm, the *μεταβολαὶ ὀδυρμάτων.*

But when a crowd approaches, and among them Achilles, she desires to fly in shame from her pretended bridegroom. Then follows the anxious dialogue of the hero with Clytemnestra, telling of the commotion in the host, and his own imminent danger in defending the maiden. When Iphigenia speaks after this brief pause, we feel that she has grown years older; all the careless freshness of her childhood is gone ;† she sees herself the turning-point in a people's fortunes ;

* Passing through every key of lamentation—a splendid metaphor from musical modulations which can hardly be adequately rendered in English.

† This sudden and great change, produced by a frightful crisis, offended the wretched scholiasts, who complain that the poet was inconsistent in his portrait.

and with inbred nobility she resigns all her fond hopes of life, to assume the loftier position of a national benefactress. It is not easy to say which of her two great speeches, her childlike supplication (1211 sqq.), or her patriotic self-devotion (1368 sqq.) is the finer. She then deprecates the chivalrous offers of Achilles to defend her, and turns to give her last moments to her mother and the infant Orestes. Nothing can be more purely womanly and deeply affectionate than this parting. She anticipates her mother's implacable wrath against Agamemnon, and prays her to forgive him. She does not even utter the just complaint against Helen which Tennyson puts into her mouth in his *Dream of Fair Women*. But she passes again at the end into lyrical excitement, this time of a religious character, as she devotes herself to the goddess whose wrath required so great a sacrifice. With an appeal to the sun and the light of day she leaves the stage.

I need hardly say one word in illustration of this magnificent conception of a gay, affectionate, heedless maiden, just entering upon the highest delights of a splendid life, passing by a sudden crisis into the depths of despair, and then, by one of those momentous changes which only such a crisis can produce, into a sad and mature heroine, in whom noble unselfishness has replaced the gaiety and exuberance of her vanished childhood. But she never ceases to love life; unlike the slave Polyxena, or the exile Macaria, she has everything to lose, and hence she cannot go to her death, as they do, with calm resolve, but with that burning excitement which has sustained the most sensitive, and therefore the greatest martyrs. When Sophocles has given the same feature, this wild excitement at the approach of death, to his stronger and more masculine Antigone, he has not, I think, been so consistent in his drawing of character.

67. **Alcestis.**—But we have not yet concluded our Euripidean portraits of female heroism. There

remains one of his early plays, the exquisite *Alcestis*, in which he has given us a quite different, and yet not less perfect example of this noblest phase of human virtue.

In this play the heroine voluntarily resigns her life under no pressure of misfortune, with no lofty patriotic enthusiasm, but simply to save the life of her husband, for whom Apollo has obtained the permission of an exchange. She has everything to lose; she is the queen of a prosperous people, a happy wife, a fond mother, young and beloved of all; and yet these things she resigns—not from a passionate love of her husband, not from an apprehension of her lot as a widow or her children as orphans (to which she only once, and in passing, alludes, vv. 287–288)—but simply from an instinct of unselfishness, and perhaps of duty. It is indeed with consummate art that Euripides, in this far subtler than any of his imitators, has made her husband a somewhat weak and selfish, though otherwise amiable and hospitable, person.* In this way the sacrifice of Alcestis becomes strictly an act of pure unselfishness, and as such has not been paralleled in the annals of the stage. The account of her last hours, her calmness and gentleness to her household, her outbreak of tears in her bridal chamber and over her children, her anxiety for their future—need no comment to show their womanly dignity and tenderness. When she is led out by her husband on the stage, her feverish weakness passes into lyrical visions of the nether world, of the gloomy Charon and his boat, of the dark visage of Hades. She faints for a moment, and then with returning consciousness becomes calm again, and speaks her parting instructions and wishes to her husband. Her last words are a farewell to her children.

68. Thus we find that if Euripides drew in his Medea

* Indeed, the whole play has sometimes been regarded as panegyric on hospitality—a virtue often combined in men with selfishness.

and Phædra, and in the heroines of other lost dramas, burning pictures of passion, he could also draw pure and devoted women, who are hardly inferior to the highest ideals of Christian civilisation. We are not, therefore, surprised that in both conceptions he created permanent types for the stage, and that not only his vindictive but his self-sacrificing heroines have been perpetually revived in modern dramas.

69. When we pass from these first-rate personages to consider his lesser creations, we find a certain poverty which surprises us. Most of them are, in fact, suffering women; who, though they are always intellectually strong and able to argue their case against their opponents, affect us rather by their circumstances than their character. Such are his Andromache (both in the *Andromache* and the *Troades*) and his Hecuba, though her savagery—like that of Alcmena at the end of the *Heracleidæ*—adds an unpleasant trait, which Euripides seems to have found common enough in the old Greek women of his time. Yet his aged Æthra (*Supplices*) and Jocasta (*Phœnissæ*) are examples of motherly and sympathetic natures, and show that here too his view was broad and comprehensive. So also the Antigone of the *Phœnissæ* and the Cassandra of the *Troades*, though not fully drawn characters, yet attract us—the one by her strong family affections, and the other by the fatal clearness of her prophetic vision, for in both cases these features are the direct cause of their tragic misfortunes.

70. Four only remain, which may here receive more special notice; two of them—Creusa and the Tauric Iphigenia—heroines of circumstance, the other two—Electra and Clytemnestra—heroines of character also. It happens that three of these, each occurring in separate plays, are drawn on consistent lines; but I must impress on the reader that this is an accident. The Greek tragic poets did not attach a fixed character to each hero or heroine who recurred constantly in

their plays.* Thus the majority of the plays in the Trojan cycle represent Helen as an abandoned and contemptible woman, and such she reappears in the *Orestes*; but in the *Helena* she is a faithful and affectionate wife, suffering unjustly under an unbearable load of calumny and hatred. Similar variations of drawing were admitted, through Euripides' plays, in Menelaus, in Odysseus, and probably in other persons. We may therefore conclude from this evidence that while consistent portraits of noted legendary personages were not the rule, they were not a rare exception.

71. The **Tauric Iphigenia** is a very beautiful conception of a Greek maiden in exile, compelled by the gloomy rites of Artemis, whose priestess she is, to sacrifice all Greeks that are cast upon the coast —a service which she performs with reluctance and with deep compassion, not without sceptical questioning concerning the morality of her office, or the interpretation of the real demands of the goddess. Her longing for her home and country gives her a special interest in every hapless Greek victim; and though the conviction of her brother's death for a moment hardens her heart with bitterness (vv. 344 sqq.), the sight of the captives brings back her better self; and her persistent sympathy, though at first rejected by her unknown victims, is the cause of a mutual recognition and their escape from a fearful fate.

72. I find in the **Creusa** (of the *Ion*), under widely different circumstances, a sort of family likeness to this Iphigenia. Both are the victims of harsh dispensations, which they cannot justify, but which they bear with patience, though not with acquiescence. Both have that sympathy for like suffering which gives so peculiar a charm to their dialogue. Both endeavour to right

* Similarly in the later comedy of Menander, and its Latin imitations, so careless were the poets in giving the same name to varying characters, that they missed one of the greatest helps to immortalising a striking portrait of human nature. Their Chremes or Pamphilus was little more than a badge to distinguish their personages within a single play.

themselves by taking the law into their own hands, and are only saved from failure by the intervention of the gods. Creusa indeed attempts a horrible and treacherous crime, thus exhibiting the latent fury which Euripides so often finds in the recesses of the female heart. But we may well excuse or palliate her offence, when we consider how her long-deferred hopes, now at the moment of expected fulfilment, are dashed to the ground, and her whole moral balance is destroyed by this crowning injustice of the god to whom she had appealed. Both heroines are only heroines of suffering, but they have nevertheless a charm which none but a great artist can convey.

73. **Electra.**—Very different is the strong but not agreeable portrait of Electra. Her devotion to her brother, in the *Orestes*, and indeed everywhere, is very touching, and is brought out into splendid relief in the opening of the *Orestes*, when she sits by her brother, who has at last fallen asleep after fierce paroxysms of insanity. The chorus enter and inquire about him with some importunity, as is the wont of the Greek chorus. Her agitated replies, the gradual awakening and grateful tenderness of Orestes, his return of madness, are all worked in with consummate skill.* But these womanly and refined features are balanced by a strong, bitter, outspoken hatred against Clytemnestra (in the *Electra*), which gives rise to painful scenes of wrangling and altercation. This is no innovation by our poet. The parallel portrait by Sophocles is not different. Her querulous irony, and downright exposure of Clytemnestra's vices, when that queen is decoyed into a visit to her humble home, her ostentation of poverty and disgrace as a protest against her mother—are not inconsistent with the unrelenting hardness which keeps the troubled and wavering Orestes to his purpose, and insists upon the murder, though she is not free from terror when

* The English reader who desires to enjoy this great scene will find an excellent poetical version of it in the first volume of Mr. Symonds' *Studies of the Greek Poets*, p. 224.

the deed is done. She is everywhere represented as a strong character, whose hate has been kept alive by constant oppression and the continual presence of her mother's sin, while Orestes comes from abroad, and has not these daily annoyances to chafe his galled spirit.

74. The **Clytemnestra** of the two plays (*Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Electra*) is not quite the same. As the good and anxious mother, coming to her daughter's marriage, she is a stronger and more decided person than she appears in her later life, and were we authorised to hold that the poet meant her for the same character, ingenious reflections might be multiplied upon his art in softening her fierceness under the influence of dark memories and the stings of remorse. But this maturer picture is in the earlier play. It is, however, in itself a masterly sketch, and well-nigh the reverse of Æschylus', perhaps still more of Alfieri's, conception, who represents the guilty queen and her paramour as reaping no happiness from their crime, but growing old in mutual dissension and increasing estrangement. Euripides represents Clytemnestra indeed as still the stronger spirit, and Ægisthus as a mere worthless and vulgar paramour; but though she is ready to argue with the bitter Electra, and justify her crime as a retaliation for her husband's injustices, she submits with patience to fierce reproaches, and expresses sorrow and pity that her daughter should incur harsh treatment on account of her violence.* She confesses that her past life is a burden to her conscience, and would if possible so far reconcile Electra with Ægisthus, as to live in peace with both. These softer lines make her punishment more affecting and tragic, though not the less just. She bears, in fact, the strongest family likeness to the queen in *Hamlet*—not the only stray coincidence between Euripides and Shakspere. But this gentler side of her character is a mere fugitive touch, for it was no part of the Greek legend to represent her

* *Electra*, vv. 1102–1110.

morally purified, but rather as justly punished for her crime. Hence the reproofs which in *Hamlet* are urged by an affectionate son, are by Euripides put into the mouth of the sarcastic revengeful Electra.

75. We have now reviewed this side of the poet's genius with as much detail as our space permits. There is but little to be said about lesser female characters, such as nurses, in the plays. The nurse of the *Medea* is merely an old and trusty but somewhat sententious servant. The nurse of Phædra is the prototype of Juliet's nurse, a person in whom attachment and complaisance replace morality, and who in the *Hippolytus* is dramatically very useful by conveying the declaration which Phædra is too noble and modest to utter. This delicacy in the drawing of Phædra was lost upon Seneca and Racine, who degrade her to be her own advocate before the astonished Hippolytus.

The total outcome of the foregoing chapter may perhaps seem poor to some readers accustomed to the study of Shakspere's characters. It is therefore but fair to observe, in conclusion, that quite apart from the injustice of comparing anyone else with so unique a genius as Shakspere, there are distinct reasons why the characters of Euripides, even were they equally well drawn, should not appear to us so various or life-like. For we do not always remember when reading Greek tragedies, that they are interpreted to us either by Greek scholiasts, the most hopelessly undramatic of men, or by modern professors, who are hardly better judges of the stage. Thus there is not a really subtle point in the Greek play which these people can appreciate, and we even find in the Greek scholia objections to the finest passages of extant plays. In no case, except when they have been acted in loose and unfaithful modern versions, has any one of them been studied by a practical actor. The plays of Shakspere, on the other hand, are handed down to us not merely with a body of textual criticism, but

with the growing tradition of what each great actor finds, or perhaps puts into the text. Thus we read Shakspere by the light of Kembles, and Keans, and Irvings—a far different kind of commentators from the Hermanns, and Valckenaers, and Elmsleys, and Musgraves, whom the classical scholar is required to read. Until, in fact, there arises a great tragic actor, who is also a thorough Greek scholar, we shall probably remain in ignorance of many of the finest acting points by which Euripides made his characters to breathe and burn before his Athenian audience.

CHAPTER VII.

HEROES, HERALDS, SLAVES.

76. The heroes of Euripides are by no means so prominent or so interesting as his heroines. While he has succeeded, among the latter, in creating immortal types, there is hardly a single hero in his extant plays of whom so much could be asserted. In Ion and in Hippolytus we have indeed charming pictures of youthful freshness and innocence, not without a certain preoccupation which seems like callousness, and shows a want of sympathy with the passions of manhood. And these have lived through in Racine's Joas, and the "Garçon insensible" of other French dramas. The fate of Hippolytus is indeed deeply tragic. Though he feels he has been tricked into an oath, and that in his heart he is unsworn, yet so honourably does he adhere to the once exacted obligation, that he abandons his country and home, and submits to the most dreadful imputations, rather than break his faith. Yet withal he is not a really great hero. For the vengeance of Aphrodite, which works his ruin, can hardly be called the natural result of his character and circumstances, and is rather the external interference of a mischievous Providence, which uses him as a toy or plaything. So also Achilles in the *Aulid Iphigenia*—a perfect gentleman, courteous, chivalrous, and sympathetic—does not play the chief or even a tragic part in the action. Such again is Pylades, always a secondary character, the affectionate friend of Orestes, the devoted supporter of

his house, ever ready to help and to encourage, but in no sense a figure of real importance in the Euripidean drama, though the mutual affection of the friends has made their relation more interesting and suggestive than the characters themselves. There are also national types, such as the kings of Athens—Theseus and Demophon—who are intended to personify all the virtues of the Athenians, and to play the anachronous part of constitutional kings in the heroic age. So also Menelaus is often the embodiment of the Spartan foes, who were devastating the fields and decimating the youth of Athens all through the poet's later life. But it is the treachery and selfishness, not the military prowess of the Spartans, that Euripides paints for his audience.

77. He is, indeed, rich in feeble querulous heroes, apart from the ragged heroes of suffering, whom Aristophanes derides. The Agamemnon of his *Iphigenia* is a palmary instance. All through the play he is drifting hither and thither, inventing paltry subterfuges, playing the king without policy or firmness, an object of contempt and of pity to his stronger subjects. All this is exceedingly dramatic, but only suited to a secondary character. Very similar is the drawing of Admetus, the hospitable but selfish and weak husband of Alcestis. We feel the protestations that he would join her in death are not in real earnest, or if so they are but momentary resolves, and his lamentations are rather for his own loss than for the sorrows of his noble wife. I have already pointed out (p. 94), how exceedingly dramatic are these very defects in the bereaved husband.

78. We find in the **Eteocles** of the *Phœnissæ* a nearer approach to a tragic hero. The conception was due to Æschylus, so that Euripides cannot be credited with originality either in the character or the situation. But the warlike energy of the man, and the boldness with which he derides the idea of surrendering his once acquired power to his brother, even though justice was against him—this was a life portrait of

the Greek despot. Nevertheless his strong patriotism and his valour enlist our sympathy for him against his feebler and more inconsistent brother. I have already noted above (p. 80), how in smaller touches Euripides has contrasted the brothers. Polynices, the gentler and weaker of the two, plays the part of the ruthless invader of his native land; the stern Eteocles is its patriotic defender, nevertheless our sympathies are with the exile, though he attempt what the Greeks would call parricide against his country.

79. Far more dramatic, but not more interesting, is the **Pentheus** of the *Bacchæ*, who may be compared in some respects with Sophocles' Œdipus, inasmuch as his headstrong obstinacy urges him into a hopeless snare. But Œdipus is stricken with a family curse, from which nothing could relieve him; he is personally respectable and interesting, whereas Pentheus is painted as a hot-headed and self-sufficient youth, who in spite of advice and warning determines to crush the new Bacchic cult, and perishes tragically in the attempt. He is therefore altogether a hero of circumstance and not of character.

80. The same may be said of **Orestes** in two of the plays in which he appears (the *Orestes* and *Electra*),* as the agent of Apollo to avenge his father's murder upon his mother, and suffers in consequence from the dreadful madness of remorse. This famous conception—the Greek Hamlet—was again due to Æschylus, and as we might expect, Euripides rehandled it rather in the direction of adding character than pathos to the hero.

It is very interesting, but would require a separate essay to compare the Greek conception of this situation with that of Shakspere. Of course the Greeks looked upon the father as much more important than the mother; and any hesitation in slaying the criminal Ægisthus would have been to them quite unnatural. But while Sophocles, at the close of his *Electra*

* His part in the *Andromache* is not worth noticing here.

suggests no difficulties of remorse even in the punishment of Clytemnestra, which Electra demands with repulsive eagerness (v. 1415), Euripides, with far truer feeling, not only makes Electra shudder, and abhor her own participation in the murder, when she perceives it accomplished (*Electra*, vv. 1181 sqq.), but—and this is perhaps the most remarkable anticipation of modern feeling in all his plays—he makes Orestes, in the intervals of his madness, challenge the holiness of Apollo's command, and add (*Orestes*, vv. 288 sqq.), "For I think that my father, had I asked him face to face whether I should slay my mother, would have urged me with many prayers by this very beard not to thrust my sword into the throat of her that bore me." Here we recognise a veritable scene in Hamlet. But in a Greek poet of Euripides' age, it is far more remarkable than after fifteen centuries of Christian preaching. This, and the remorse of Clytemnestra, to which I have already alluded, are indeed features in which Euripides has distinctly risen above the narrower standpoint of the purely Periclean poet. But we must return to the drawing of Orestes.

81. The anxious Electra sitting by him in his deep sleep, his waking again in wild anguish, his tenderness to his sister in his calmer moments, afford a splendid scene (*Orestes*, vv. 140 sqq.) in an otherwise disagreeable and overwrought play. Far more characteristic and noble is the appearance of the same Orestes in the *Tauric Iphigenia*, where he is sent with his friend Pylades to the inhospitable Tauri, to carry off the image of Artemis, but where he is seized again by his madness, captured, and brought before his sister for sacrifice. Quite apart from the tragic situation, apart, too, from the pathetic interest in the recognition of brother and sister, there are many delicate touches of character, which make this Orestes the most striking of all Euripides' heroes. If indeed the end of the play had been tragic and not melodramatic, this would have been generally recognised. But the deceitful plan of

stealing the image, of escaping from the land by combined fraud and violence, mars the conclusion and weakens our sympathy with the hero. In the earlier scenes he exhibits every element of a really noble nature. He at first refuses to tell his name, that he may die forgotten, for his troubles have made him weary of his life. Yet upon his sister's persistence he tells his country, and confesses the misfortunes of the royal house, all with stern simplicity, as being evils too signal to palliate, too crushing to lament. It is the proposal that he shall escape, and abandon Pylades, which brings him back to his only remaining hold on life—his affection for Pylades. His voluntary resigning of his life* to save a friend is a rare instance of this virtue in the heroes of Euripides, and this touching scene has not lost its hold upon the imagination of modern dramatists.

82. There remains but one more hero to be discussed, who appears in two plays, once as a hero of circumstance, once again as a hero of character—I mean the **Heracles** of the *Raging Heracles* and of the *Alcestis*. In the latter his portrait is very distinct and even somewhat comic. He eats and drinks to excess before the heartbroken servant, who is ordered by the hospitable Admetus to keep him in ignorance of the sorrows of the house. He even rallies this servant upon his doleful face, and bids him carouse with him and enjoy his life. But no sooner does he hear the real state of things, than he feels cut to the heart at his apparent want of feeling, and sets off at once, like a blunt honest creature of action, to set matters right by a desperate conflict. Even when he returns with the veiled Alcestis, his comic side comes out in the way he insists upon Admetus receiving her in spite of the strongest protestations. He is of course a secondary character in the play, but the contrast of his

* The case of Menœkeus in the *Phœnissæ* (vv. 980 sqq.), is, I think, the only other example. His speech is very splendid, but he passes across the scene like a meteor, and has not sufficien importance to take his place among the protagonists.

homely practical force with the luxurious effusiveness of Admetus is one of the happiest features in that remarkable play. His victory, moreover, is greatly enhanced by the powerlessness of Apollo, the friend of the house, to obtain more than an exchange of victims, and the grim dialogue of Apollo and Death, as they meet before the palace, is clearly intended to show the miraculous prowess of the mighty hero.

83. In the *Raging Heracles* he is not drawn with a very different character, but is made a pathetic victim of terrible circumstances, the more pathetic as he has spent all his life in labours of usefulness, and has just saved his wife and children from death at the hands of their persecutor. But no sooner has he appeared as their saviour, than a heaven-sent madness makes him their murderer, and his situation becomes more deeply tragic than that of Sophocles' Ajax. For the outburst of Ajax only brought him disgrace; Heracles is so crushed that there is no place for the display of iron resolve. He is discovered asleep, and fast bound, with his wretched father and the chorus watching him—a kindred scene to the watching of Electra over Orestes. When he wakes and gradually learns his misfortunes, he is about to commit instant suicide, when his old friend Theseus appears, and succeeds in calming his excitement. He then bursts out into a magnificent impeachment of the Providence which has dogged his steps from childhood, and marred all his splendid life. Now he is so polluted and accursed that the very earth will cry out against him, and further life is impossible. But Theseus urges that even the gods endure suffering and incur disgrace, and yet they live and inhabit Olympus. He appeals to Heracles to come with him to Athens, and spend the rest of his days in peace. To this the hero replies by denying scornfully all the legends of the disorders of the gods; but as it implies cowardice to fly from life—and the poet perhaps points at Sophocles' Ajax—he will acquiesce and depart with his friend. But he can hardly tear him-

self from the bodies of his faithful wife and beloved children, he insists on repeated directions for their funerals, and leaves the stage a subdued and broken-hearted, but not desperate, man. Thus the dignity of a great nature asserts itself against the utmost which a spiteful Providence can do to break it down, and the resigned departure of the hero for Athens is a greater victory over the enmity of Juno, than all the successes of his twelve Labours.

84. Here then we have a truly great and tragic figure, and one worthy of a permanent place in the temple of Fame. But, with these splendid exceptions, it must be confessed that Euripides has not drawn us the heroes we find in Æschylus and in Sophocles. Is it a fault of his genius, or is it the result of deliberate choice? Or, again, is it the accident of tradition, which has not handed us down his *Telephus*, his *Palamedes*, and other plays, in which he devoted himself to the portraiture of character? Probably all these causes have contributed to the result. It may be regarded as certain that time has robbed us of companion heroes to Orestes and Heracles; but it is not probable that we have lost a Euripidean Prometheus or Philoctetes equal to those of Æschylus or Sophocles. It may be that he considered the men of the older tragedy as too prominent, and unduly preferred to the equally heroic and devoted women; that he endeavoured to adjust the measure, and vindicate for the gentler sex its tragic position. But it seems also certain that he was so far the child of his age—the thorough Periclean, who worshipped intellect and cleverness, and despised or suspected simple virtues—that neither he nor his audience felt attracted by moral character in comparison to intellect, and that they preferred the excitement of a complicated plot, or a pathetic situation, to a detailed portrait of unpractical constancy and impolitic honour.

85. Little need be said on his minor characters. Here, again, we seem to see that spirit of adjusting the balance, of "putting down the mighty from their

seats and exalting the humble and meek." The gods, who appear in prologues and epilogues, are mere scene-shifters, called in to expedite the course of the play, and are kind, spiteful, or indifferent, as it suits the requirements of the moment. Many of the slaves, on the contrary, are noble and cultivated beyond the fashion of the older tragedy, and there are few finer touches than the outburst of joy in the old retainer of Menelaus, when he finds that the real Helen had not fled from her home or disgraced her royal name and race. So too the peasant, the pretended husband of Electra, who guards her as a sacred deposit from his royal master, is a remarkable character, whose nobility is specially lauded in one of the finest monologues of the play.

86. I will conclude with a word concerning Euripides' conception of old age in men and women. He often has characters of this description: the father of Heracles, the mother of Theseus, the father of Admetus, of Pentheus, and many others. In no case does he make an old man one of his chief heroes, and his Hecuba is merely a queen of suffering. For, as to the characteristics of old age, he insists perpetually either upon its weakness or its selfishness, never on its dignity, and seldom on the ripeness of its experience. In the *Alcestis*, the selfishness of Admetus' old parents in not volunteering to die for him is constantly and seriously insisted upon. In the *Heracleidæ* and in the *Bacchæ* the impotent excitement of old men is treated as ridiculous, and as introducing a comic element into tragic scenes. Here again the poet is a Periclean Athenian, in whose eyes old age was an unmixed evil; for it was a dead weight in the struggle for life, and gave the old man no chance against his younger and stronger competitors.* All

* Nothing can be stronger than the despairing speech of Iphis, in the *Supplices* (v. 1080), who concludes with these words:

ὦ δυσπάλαιστον γῆρας, ὡς μισῶ σ' ἔχων,
μισῶ δ' ὅσοι χρῄζουσιν ἐκτείνειν βίον

the fifth century poets—Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Euripides—are at one concerning it; and the finest of their lyric odes mourn the feebleness, the friendlessness, and the hopelessness of declining years.

87. Prophets and heralds are seldom agreeable personages in his plays. There is, indeed, a highly-cultivated and politically-trained herald in the *Supplices*, who argues about constitutions with Theseus; but elsewhere heralds are bold and violent assertors of injustice (Copreus), or mere slaves to carry out the worst commands of their masters (Talthybius). There is no other prominent prophet upon his stage. In the *Bacchæ* and *Phœnissæ*, Teiresias is treated with respect; and the prophetess Theonoe (*Helena*) is a merciful and tender woman. But in many plays the outspoken contempt for this profession seems to indicate the poet's feelings.

It must be remembered, before we leave these minor characters, that they occupied by no means so important a place in the Greek drama as they do in modern plays. The plays of Æschylus and Sophocles only admit (with rare exceptions) of three actors, and any additional parts must either be undertaken (with change of dress) by one of the three, or be quite insignificant. Hence a talented young actor had no opportunity of making his character by a fine reading of a small part, nor do we find that the poets attempted any elaborate character drawing by stray touches in such figures, as is often the case in good modern plays. These are the sort of contrasts which made Greek plays far more different from ours than is apparent at first reading. What we consider delicacy in play of feature, and grace of gesture, must have been impossible under the mask and tragic inflation of the figure which the Greeks thought necessary

βρωτοῖσι καὶ ποτοῖσι καὶ μαγεύμασι
παρεκτρέποντες ὄχετον ὥστε μὴ θανεῖν·
οὓς χρῆν, ἐπειδὰν μηδὲν ὠφελῶσι γῆν,
θάνοντας ἔρρειν κἀκποδὼν εἶναι νέοις.

for its dignity. But of course the less the actor could do, the more the poet must compensate by the real excellence of his dialogue, and the pathos of his scenes. Thus the shackles of an art are often the very causes of its most splendid products.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIS LYRIC POETRY—CHORAL ODES, MONODIES.

88. I have hitherto designedly kept out of sight an important feature in all Greek tragedy—the chorus, which was its origin, and which stamped upon it a peculiar character. As is well known, the first actor was originally severed from the chorus, to represent the adventures of Dionysus, and recite them to his sympathetic companions. Hence, when actor after actor was added, the chorus still held an important place in the plot, and was always there—an audience within the audience, a play within the play, like the scene in Hamlet.* We see its earliest form in the *Supplices* of Æschylus, where the fugitive daughters of Danaus are themselves the chief personages in the play. So, also, in the awful *Eumenides* of the same poet, the Furies are the leading figures, and their claims the centrepoint of the piece. When we come to the more developed character plays of Sophocles the chorus necessarily becomes a spectator, but a deeply interested and sympathetic spectator, singing, moreover, those hymns to the gods—dirges, or pæans, which come within the action of the piece, and require

* The device of a chorus within the chorus was very rare, and applied by Euripides in the *Hippolytus*, where the hero's followers are such a *παραχορήγημα*, as the Greeks call it. The same may be said of the companions of Odysseus, in the *Cyclops*, but they are silent actors; and we hear that the poet also had such a second chorus (of shepherds) in his lost *Alexander* (Paris), and in the *Antiope*.

choral music and solemn dancing for their performance. Thus every early Greek dramatist was of necessity also a lyric poet, and a lyric poet in a far more prominent sense than are our dramatists, who insert here and there an occasional song. At the same time it is absurd to speak of any of the early tragedians, or of Aristophanes and his compeers, as owing to their lyrics any large element in their fame. It is because they were great dramatists that they are immortal.

89. But in no case was there ever any heroism expected from the chorus. In no instance did it represent "an ideal spectator," but rather that average and timid morality which cannot rise above the religion of orthodoxy or the ethics of prudence, and thus either recals the chief actor from his noble extravagance, or reminds him of the traditional duties which his impatience has transgressed. To take two examples from the model of tragic perfection, Sophocles. In the opening of the *Œdipus Coloneus*, the chorus persists, with vulgar and impertinent obtrusion, in questioning the wretched Œdipus concerning his shameful history. In the *Philoctetes*, when the hero is fallen asleep, it suggests to Neoptolemus that now is the moment to steal the bow, and make off, leaving him to his fate (vv. 849 sqq.).

90. It is not, therefore, a true or sensible criticism to say that Euripides degraded his chorus, and first made them accomplices of the actor's crime. Such examples could doubtless have been found in a fuller catalogue of the older tragedies. The fact is that Euripides used his chorus with every possible variety. There are extant plays—the *Supplices*, *Troades*, *Bacchæ*—where the chorus is of capital importance and a leading feature in the play, nor is the opening chorus of the *Supplices* distinguishable in character from a chorus of Æschylus. There are other plays—the *Heraclidæ*, *Hecuba*, *Alcestis*—where they are deeply interested spectators, never singing except in harmony with the piece, and with the feelings suggested by the scenes. In

these cases Euripides adhered to the traditions of his predecessors.

91. But there are other plays, especially the melodramas, in which the chorus sympathise so deeply with the actor as to become his accomplices, and aid in the plot generally with prevarication and with deceit. Such is the part of the chorus in the *Medea*, where they side against their own royal house; in the *Tauric Iphigenia*, where they endeavour to mislead a messenger with falsehood; in the *Ion*, where they screen Creusa's crime.

This is considered an Euripidean innovation in tragedy, and perhaps the criticism is just. But in no case does this narrower sympathy prevent them from recalling the spectators, in their odes, to the broader and more philosophic aspects of the story. The dolours of old age and childlessness, the obligations of noble birth, the calamities of violent desire, the idleness of abstract speculation, these high topics are sung in the odes of his partisan chorus. There are, moreover, plays in which he went a step farther, and foreshadowed that abandonment of the chorus which marked the new comedy. He seeks out a stranger chorus, with no more than a general interest in the actors, and allows them to sing irrelevant odes, as a mere rest to the actors and the audience, in those intervals which we should mark by the close of successive acts. Such are the chorus of the *Helena* and of the *Phœnissæ*—the latter, Phœnician maidens sojourning by an accident at Thebes, and witnessing the horrors of the siege, with its suicides, fratricides, and exiles. Such again are the chorus of the *Iphigenia*, maidens of Eubœa, who have crossed over from curiosity to visit the fleet at Aulis.

This is evidently the deliberate innovation of Euripides, and it gives him far greater scope and licence in the topics which his lyric poetry embraces. Hence some of his deepest philosophic teaching was conveyed in these odes, and it was his habit, even with the most interested chorus, to open an ode with

reflections on life and morals, and at the end of the first pair of verses (strophes), turn to the special subject of the play with a change of metre and of melody.

It is, however, not true to say that the chorus generally represented the poet's own mind. As with Aristophanes, it is often in the soliloquies of the actors that we see through the mask, and find the poet behind his character. But we have lost the clue which no doubt existed, whereby some gesture or change of tone told the audience that here the poet, and not his personages or chorus, addressed them.

92. With the almost complete loss of Greek music, we have lost the melodies and musical accompaniments which are necessary to the full enjoyment of Greek lyric poetry. If we except the poets of Lesbos —Alcæus, Sappho, and Anacreon—who sang in short simple verses of uniform structure, all the higher and choral lyric poetry of the Greeks was composed in long and complicated stanzas, to which the phrasing of the melody, and the figures of the dance, gave the rhythmical key. We moderns use for a melody, which contains several musical phrases of various length and accent, the simple rhymes of our poetry, though they seldom embrace more than pairs of lines, which we expand and vary by repetitions. The Greek lyric poet made his poetical strophe to correspond with the whole melody, and thus introduced that more intricate system of long and short lines, and of various metres, which is so puzzling to the modern student. The early Greek poets seldom used refrains—the easiest way of accentuating rhythm. In addition to the splendid example in the choruses of Æschylus' *Eumenides*, where a dread incantation scene is wonderfully intensified by a refrain, there are but a few examples in Euripides' lyrics, in the *Ion* (v. 127), the *Bacchæ* (v. 877), and the *Electra* (v. 113). Yet with some practice it is possible to feel the majestic music of this larger and more artistic poetry. Here is one of the simpler specimens,

*accentuated as it should be read,** for convenience sake.

Hippol. 525 sqq.

1. Ἔ-ρως, Ἔρως, ὁ κατ᾽ ὄμματων
ψυ-χαῖς χαριν οὗς ἐπίστρατεύσῃ
μη μοί ποτε σύν κακῷ φανείης,
μήδ᾽ ἀρρύθμος ἔλθοις
οὔτε γάρ πυρος οὔτ᾽
ἀσ-τρών ὑπέρτερόν βελος
οἰ-όν το τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας
ἰ-ήσιν ἔκ χερων
Ἔ-ρώς ὁ Διός παῖς

2. Ἀλ-λώς ἀλλώς παρα τ᾽ Ἀλφεῷ
φοι-βού τ᾽ ἐπι πύθιοίς τεράμνοις
βου-τάν φονον Ἕλλας αἰ᾽ ἀέξει.
Ἔ-ρώτα δε τόν τυράννον ἄνδρων
τόν τας Ἀφροδίτας
φίλτατών θαλαμων
κλη-δούχον, οὔ σεβίζομεν
περ-θόντα καί δια πάσας
ἰ-όντα σύμφορᾶς,
θνα-τοίς ὁταν ἔλθῃ.

Mr. Browning has honoured me (Dec. 18, 1878) with the following translation of these stanzas, so that the general reader may not miss the meaning or the spirit of the ode. The English metre, though not a

* The question of Greek accentuation is a very difficult one, for the modern Greeks pronounce accurately according to the accents found in our MSS. from the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. onward; and that this pronunciation is not altogether new appears from the fact that Sanskrit accents agree remarkably with them. This, in fact, points to accentuation as an original feature in Aryan speech, and older than our oldest Greek literature. On the other hand, none of the metres from Homer to Menander can be read by accent, and the modern Greeks cannot read hexameters or lyric verse without sacrificing their pronunciation. Nay, even the subtle rhythmical laws discovered in prose writers like Isocrates and Demosthenes are altogether determined by quantity and never by accent. Hence I have ventured to accentuate in this passage the syllables marked by quantity, though the appearance of the ode will shock scholars. I cannot, however, here go at greater length into this intricate question.

strict reproduction, gives an excellent idea of the original.

I.

Oh Love, Love, thou that from the eyes diffusest
Yearning, and on the soul sweet grace inducest—
Souls against whom thy hostile march is made—
Never to me be manifest in ire,
Nor, out of time and tune, my peace invade !
Since neither from the fire—
No, nor the stars—is launched a bolt more mighty
Than that of Aphrodité
Hurled from the hands of Love, the boy with Zeus for sire.

II.

Idly, how idly, by the Alpheian river
And in the Pythian shrines of Phœbus, quiver
Blood-offerings from the bull, which Hellas heaps :
While Love we worship not—the Lord of men !
Worship not him, the very key who keeps
Of Aphrodité, when
She closes up her dearest chamber-portals :
——Love, when he comes to mortals,
Wide-wasting, through those deeps of woes beyond the deep !

93. But even where the modern scholar is not able to feel distinctly the music of the metre, there is infinite beauty and variety in the choral odes of Euripides. Thus we find him celebrating the birth and establishment of Apollo at Delphi in an ode (*Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1234) of the dignity and power of Pindar, to whose style this piece has a strong family likeness. Again the *parodos*, or opening song of the *Supplices* (vv. 42 sqq.), is thoroughly Æschylean in tone and conception, and the ode on Ares in the *Phœnissæ* (v. 784)—an ode very easy to read from its simple dactylic structure—is well worthy of the best of the older masters. The pathetic descriptive odes of the fall of Troy in both *Hecuba* and the *Troades* are more peculiar to himself, and masterpieces in their way; where he competes with Sophocles in singing the power of love, or the sad destinies of old age (*Hippolytus*, 525; *Hercules Furens*, 637), he seems to me hardly inferior to that acknowledged prince of poets. The last I will quote in full,

is a fragment from the *Cresphontes*, as we have it in Mr. Browning's version (*Arist. Apol.* p. 179).

> Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie—of the blest
> Immortals beauteousest,—
> Come ! for the heart within me dies away,
> So long dost thou delay !
> O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,
> Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy ;
> Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
> The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be.
> But come ! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
> Come to the city here !
> Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,
> With her who madly roams
> Rejoicing in the steel against the life
> That's whetted—banish Strife !

This lyric excellence is the more remarkable when we remember that Euripides was thoroughly opposed to that style which had been adopted in the lyrics of Pindar and of Æschylus, and is now again in high fashion—I mean the sacrificing of clearness, both of images and of construction, to vague grandeur and the licence of poetic inspiration. He fascinates us by the beauty of his imagery, by the striking picturesqueness of his descriptions—a rare feature in Greek poetry, and by profound and pathetic reflection upon life and character. But when his text is not corrupt, he is hardly ever difficult or obscure. It is the fashion to say that his lyrics are feeble and watery as compared with those of Sophocles or Aristophanes—and no doubt if we compare the poorest of Euripides' odes with the best of Sophocles', we may obtain such a result. But if we had a selection from the lesser works of Sophocles, it seems likely that this opinion would be found untenable, seeing that the lyrics of Euripides, in spite of the most keen and bitter censure, became popular immediately, and outran, in the estimation of society, the works of the older school. It is proved by the very complaints of Aristophanes.

94. Much of what has here been said applies to those lyrical soliloquies, or monodies, which are in Greek

tragedy the nearest approach to the *arias* of our opera, in which the chief actors express the excitement of grief, or fear, or hope, with the aid of music. One form, the *commos*, a funeral lament, in which the chorus joined in alternate strains with two actors, is common as a closing scene in Æschylus and Sophocles; but Euripides extended the lyrical expression of emotion, and applied it to various situations. Thus some of his plays, like the *Ion* and the *Andromeda*, opened with such a monody. In the *Ion* also there is a magnificent soliloquy of Creusa, set in the same form. The excitement of Iphigenia (in Aulis), as that of Sophocles' Antigone, finds vent in the same hurried irregular metre, wild imagery, and musical cadence.* Indeed the musical improvements of the age seem to have been so considerable, that the poet was tempted to exaggerate this side of tragedy, and provide a new æsthetic delight for his audience apart from mere tragic emotion. It may have been the same sort of change as we have seen from the spoken dialogue of the older opera to the carefully orchestrated recitatives of our own day, which provide the audience with musical pleasures quite apart from the formally numbered airs or concerted pieces.

This combination of a considerable proportion of lyric verse with quiet iambic dialogue is one of the features in which Greek tragedy—from many points of view so much simpler than our drama—obtains a greater lightness and variety. Any English reader may prove it for himself by comparing Mr. Browning's *Alcestis* (in *Balaustion's Adventure*) with his *Raging Heracles* (in *Aristophanes' Apology*). In the former he has neglected this variety, in the latter he has reproduced it. There can be no question as to the general effect. It is remarkable that among the many varieties of pathetic metre we have but one passage in elegiacs, the lament in the *Andromache* (vv. 104–116); thus

* I have above (§ 48) noticed the exceptional iambic scene in the *Medea*.

showing, I think, that this once popular measure was not considered appropriate in dramatic poetry.

95. I will notice in conclusion yet another use of lyric metres which is peculiarly effective in Euripides—the combination of staid iambics with the most agitated lyrics, in dialogues where the emotions of the speakers are widely different. Several signal instances occur to me. In the *Alcestis*, Admetus appears leading out and supporting his dying wife. He expresses his calmer grief in iambics, while her visions of the kingdom of the dead, of the gloomy boat and impatient Charon, interrupt him in agitated lyric verse. Similarly, in the *Raging Heracles*, when Theseus enters (v. 1163) as a dignified stranger, and marvels at the confusion of the house and the bodies of the dead, the aged Amphitryon answers his iambic questioning in extraordinarily hurried and agitated metre (resolved dochmiacs), which give a peculiarly dramatic effect to a splendid scene. I have already cited above (§ 49) similar passages from the *Hippolytus*.

CHAPTER IX.

PROLOGUES, EPILOGUES, LESSER CHARACTERISTICS, &c.

96. The use of prologues was common among the earlier dramatists. The *Eumenides* of Æschylus and the *Trachiniæ* of Sophocles afford signal examples, and other plays of both, such as the *Agamemnon* and *Electra*, the *Choephoræ* and the *Prometheus*, have substantially the same kind of opening. But Euripides is so constant in its use that critics assume a mutilation in the few cases where it is absent, very unjustly, as I have already pointed out. It was, moreover, the supplement most easily added by subsequent arrangers when they produced the old master's play before a strange or ignorant audience, which required a special introduction to the subject of the piece. This, indeed, seems from the beginning the proper intention of the prologue, and of great use to an audience who had no printed arguments, and apparently no play-bills, and may often have required some refreshing of their legendary lore. But to us these prologues reach too far into the action, and anticipate, more than we desire, the interest of the plot. I have above (p. 45) indicated that this arose from the traditional habit of the dramatists, of taking up well-known and national subjects, and depending rather upon effective treatment for their success than upon surprises or novelties of plot. Euripides followed no fixed rule as regards the characters to whom he assigned his prologue. In about an equal number of cases he has given it to the leading personage, to a secondary

personage, and to a god who does not reappear in the play at all.

97. But in two of the last cases he has even expanded the prologue into a dialogue among gods, which is very peculiar. In the first (*Alcestis*), Apollo, as he is leaving the house of Admetus, after his prologue, meets Death on the way to seize his prey, and in a short dialogue expresses his adverse will, but his powerlessness to do more than effect an exchange of victims; while Death, by his stern and gloomy harshness, increases our wonder at the extraordinary nature of the subsequent conflict and victory of Heracles. This result is, however, plainly indicated in the parting words of Apollo, evidently spoken aside. In the second case (*Troades*), the prologue of Poseidon, leaving his favourite haunt, the ruined Troy, passes into a dialogue, in which Athene expresses her anger at the insulting desecration of her temple by the Greeks, and asks the god to aid her in punishing the returning host, to which he willingly accedes. This dialogue actually reaches *beyond* the argument, and as it were an anticipated epilogue, reconciles us to the harrowing scenes which follow, by the consciousness that the Greeks will suffer condign punishment, though it is beyond the scope of the play. It need not be objected that possibly the divine vengeance was exhibited in a later play of the same group, as might be imagined, for we know that the *Troades* was the last of the three tragedies brought out together at the representation in Ol. 91.1.

Thus there is great variety and no little importance in these prologues. The gods who speak them, not being characters in the play, are not drawn as such, and seem as purely stage machinery as the mechanical contrivance in which they were sometimes shown aloft. The best and most suitable speakers of such introductions are undoubtedly, like the nurse in the *Medea*, secondary characters, who are the most natural exponents of the external circumstances of the action,

which the main heroes presently clothe and colour with their eloquence and their passion.

98. As to the epilogue, or appearance of an interfering god—the *deus ex machinâ*—Euripides is by no means so regular. This device, which also appears in the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, is absent from eight of the plays—the *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Troades*, *Heracleidæ*, *Heracles*, *Phœnissæ*, *Bacchæ*; that is to say, from extant plays of all dates. Where it occurs it is sometimes the mere authoritative declaration of the divine will, sometimes it becomes a dialogue or argument with the actors, though never approaching controversy, for its distinct purpose is to bring the action to a peaceful close, and calm the minds excited and disturbed with the calamities, and still more the apparent injustices, suffered by the actors.* The poet's intention may have been conservative; he may have wished to calm in the minds of the vulgar and thoughtless those sceptical questionings which constantly appear in his plays; but deeper students felt at once that this mechanical interference of the gods, this artificial and external righting of injustice and oppression in the course of human affairs, was no real solution of the evil, and that therefore the inner tendency of the plays was to unsettle men's minds, and produce religious, if not moral, scepticism. Thus the use of lay figures of gods—any character they do exhibit is spiteful and vindictive—seems an unfortunate concession of the poet to his age, and one which obscures the deep moral faith he feels in the ultimate supremacy of justice.

99. Far more effective are his lay figures of a very different kind—his children, who with their cry of

* It is a remarkable analogy between Greek tragedy and oratory, that great Greek speeches do not end with pathetic or exciting passages, but with some calm address to the reason, or tame recapitulation, as if the orator thought it inartistic to leave his audience in a state of high tension. No doubt the same æsthetic feeling gave rise to this curious parallelism in widely different branches of art.

pain, or still more, with their unconscious silence, enlist the spectator's profoundest sympathy for the helpless sorrows of a helpless age. Such are Eumelus the child of Alcestis, the children of the fallen Thebans in the *Supplices*, the children of Medea, and, above all, the little Orestes in the *Iphigenia*, who is brought in a mute and unwitting suppliant for the life of his sister.

100. In the other minor features, the plays even of Euripides seem very simple to modern critics. Complicated scenes were against the tradition of the Greek stage, and could not indeed be effective on the large scale in which open-air performances were held for enormous audiences. It is indeed ridiculous to assert, upon the authority of a general statement in *Plato*, that thirty thousand Athenians could attend a single performance. The unearthed theatre of Dionysus at once proves to any observer that such a thing was impossible. But, the greatest theatres elsewhere, as at Megalopolis and Syracuse, were so happily constructed that even now ordinary speaking on the site of the stage, though the scenes are gone, can be perfectly heard in the furthest and highest back seats, as I can assert from personal experiments. Still the audiences were immense, and included the common people, who were not so learned, even in Periclean Athens, as the historians would have us believe. Hence the great body of the plays are made up of soliloquy, dialogue (strictly so called), and lyrical odes. Even when more than two characters occupy the stage, or when the chorus is drawn into the action, two of them usually monopolise the attention, and the chorus either speaks as a single person in the mouth of the coryphæus (a rare case, as in the *Heracles*, v. 252), or listens as an arbiter, who, when one party has pleaded, asks what is to be said on the other side.

101. Indeed this perpetual arguing of disputes upon the stage, with all the arts of rhetoric, is one of the most Athenian, but to us disagreeable, features in the old

tragedies. The nation were awaking to the delights of legal argument, and the sophists and rhetoricians were discovering and perfecting the weapons which would assure a victory in the courts or before the assembly. Euripides shows a mastery of the art earlier than the exercises of Antiphon, and far clearer than the contorted subtleties of Thucydides. Thus a feature disagreeable to us may probably have had a peculiar zest for an Attic audience; nor did Sophocles disdain to adopt it in his later plays. It was even a rule that attack and reply should occupy the same number of lines, not only in the quick retort of the *stichomuthia* (one line each), but in longer speeches, where a slight difference might be inappreciable to the audience. And so strict is here the rule, that critics have detected mutilation and interpolation by its absence. When the chorus is to be employed in the action, the poet sometimes divides it into semi-choruses, which speak in dialogue like two actors. Of this there are instances in the older poets also. Euripides has employed it with great effect in the opening of the *Ion*, of the *Alcestis*, and in the *Cyclops*. But it is, I think, unique that Iphigenia should address the chorus of fellow-exiles one by one (*Iphigenia in Tauris*, 1068–1074) in beseeching them to aid her in her flight. The chorus being the recognised spectators of the action, *asides* of the actors not intended for their ears do not, I think, occur in any Greek play. Indeed, asides of any kind, beyond anxious exclamations, like those of Agamemnon in the *Aulid Iphigenia*, are rare, and could hardly have been effective in very large theatres, and with actors stuffed and padded out into a conventional and unwieldy majesty. I have noticed one in *Ion* (above, p. 48), and there are two others, which are a sort of double asides, in the *Alcestis* and the *Hecuba*. In the former, as Apollo and Death leave each other, one departing from, and the other entering the palace, each speaks a parting soliloquy not intended to be heard by the other. In the *Hecuba*, when Agamemnon comes in to hurry the

queen to the burial of her daughter, she soliloquises whether she will appeal to him to aid her in avenging her new grief, the murder of Polydorus; and in this scene Agamemnon observes her soliloquy, and expresses impatience at it.

102. It is remarkable that though the poet had a reputation for great learning, his plays show remarkable carelessness in certain details, where we should not have expected it. Thus Strabo was struck with the random geographical statements of both Sophocles and Euripides; and we wonder, in several plays, at the complete confusion of such places as Argos and Mycenæ, which might easily have been distinguished by the mere study of the Homeric poems. But the instances of this confusion are obtrusive in the *Orestes* and *Heracleidæ*, and elsewhere, and are no doubt owing to the very ancient destruction of Mycenæ. Still its ruins were there, and any Argive visitor could have told him the truth.

Similarly in astronomy, though the authenticity of the *Rhesus* was suspected, on account of a blunder about the position of the Eagle (a constellation) in the heavens, we find, at the opening of the *Iphigenia in Aulis*, a still greater blunder; the Pleiades are put next to Orion in the sky, and the latter is placed high in the heavens at dawn, while the fleet is wind-bound at Aulis—a position which Sirius could only occupy late in October. But of course the armament assembled in spring, and allowing for some weeks' delay, we should have a dawn in May or June, and not in October, described. Again there is the historical blunder of making the Trojan captives (*Troades*, 221) speak of Sicily as a Hellenic land rivalling in splendour Thessaly, Sparta, and Athens. These carelessnesses, however, detract nothing from our enjoyment of his poetry, and prove an important point—that though a recluse and a student, he was no pedant. To use a simile of Cicero's, provided he had rightly drawn his Hercules, he cared little about the lion's skin and the Hydra.

103. Nevertheless, he seems strict in finding dramatic blunders in his forerunner Æschylus, to whom he felt himself no doubt formally opposed in style and character, and more than once he points with ridicule at some simplicity of economy in the old poet. Thus, in the *Phœnissæ* (751–752), and again in the *Supplices* (v. 846), "One thing I will not tell you, lest I incur ridicule, to whom each was individually opposed in battle," pointing to Æschylus' enumeration in the *Seven against Thebes*. This censure is more elaborate in reviewing Æschylus' recognition scene (in the *Choephoræ*) between Orestes and his sister, in his *Electra* (vv. 524–544)—an early and interesting piece of dramatic criticism. The older poet had somewhat simply based the recognition on the similarity of Orestes' lock of hair (found at the tomb) to Electra's, on the agreement of their footprints, and on a piece of embroidery made for Orestes, when a child, by his sister. All these grounds are justly ridiculed by Euripides; and moreover, the economy of Sophocles, who makes Orestes penetrate within the palace without hindrance, is rejected as improbable (v. 615). The poet was therefore, in his *Electra*, deliberately criticising older versions. But this very critical tone has injured his own play, and though it has peculiar beauties, he has completely failed to enlist the critics for his modern version of the story against either of its rivals.

104. To us, indeed, there is one feature of peculiar interest in this tragedy. With an originality which perhaps shocked old Attic playgoers as much as it shocked the French and German critics of the last century, Euripides introduces us to idyllic scenes of peasant life, which he paints with a peculiar simplicity, vividness, and homeliness of detail. The peasant princess surprised with her pitcher upon her shoulder, the heedless hospitality of the honest great-hearted peasant, the anxiety of the housewife about supplying the sudden and noble visitors, the hurried borrowing of provisions from a good neighbour—here are scenes

which may shock a Voltaire or a Schlegel, but which impress an English critic with a sense of the power and the love of human nature shown in our best tragedies. It is indeed here that the French school, with great propriety, point out the analogies between the Greek and the wholly independent English drama, as opposed to the professed imitations of the courtly French poets. But at present I wish merely to call attention to the idyllic tone we catch at stray moments in Euripides—a tone which enriches the brilliant descriptions in the *Bacchæ* and the *Ion*, and strikes us even more directly in the opening chorus of the *Cyclops*—truly the most Theocritean passages in older Greek poetry,* which show how even the still undiscovered or little heeded loveliness of the world's quieter aspects found a place in this *cor cordium* of antiquity.

* I know of nothing else that can be cited as a parallel except the very little known and most picturesque *Hymn to Pan*, among the Homeric hymns.

CHAPTER X.

THE HISTORY AND FORTUNES OF HIS WORKS.

105. I have already explained (above, p. 37) how the small number of Euripides' tragic victories is to be reconciled with his undoubted and immediate popularity. For it required no study of generations, no growth of new light and learning, to comprehend the clear and pointed utterances of the poet. He was recognised as a master of style even by Aristophanes, and we may thank Euripides, together with the orator Lysias, for overthrowing the hard crabbed conciseness of writing which we see in Thucydides and Antiphon, and which often mars even the dialogue of Sophocles. We know that the dithyrambic poets, on the other hand, indulged in such exuberance as was destructive of all clearness of thought and chastity of taste, and to this also the deep clear stream of his lyrical diction was the best antidote. For he purged his vocabulary of all obscure and recondite terms; and while the mediæval lexicons are full of such rare and uncouth words from the works of Sophocles, hardly a single stranger to the purest Attic speech can be brought home to our poet. But in other respects, we may see traces of admiration and even of imitation of our poet in Sophocles' later work.

106. In Aristophanes, with the exception of a single remark praising the smoothness of Euripides' diction, which is corroborated by a taunt of plagiarism from a rival comedian, we have nothing but the bitterest and most uncompromising hostility. If the tragedies of

Euripides had been lost, we should have believed his opponent, that he was a degrader of his art, a panderer to the lowest taste for excitement in the mass of the people; that he sought to gain popularity by degrading gods and heroes, by detracting from ancient virtues, and setting up idle casuistry and flippant immorality in their place. We should have believed him the poet of the mob, the mouthpiece of the sophists on the stage, the corrupter of public morals and of public decency; and all this is put with such audacious assurance, and seasoned with such brilliant wit, that there are yet German students who profess to believe it.

The attacks of the comic poet are to be found in three of his plays, the *Acharnians*, the *Thesmophoriazusæ*, and the *Frogs*. In the first, an early play, he ridicules the ragged heroes so frequent in Euripides, and represents a man in distress going to seek Euripides, and borrow from him a pathetic garb of woe to soften the hearts of his judges. Euripides is represented as a recluse student, sitting in his study surrounded by his "properties," which consist of suits of rags which vie with one another in squalor. In the *Thesmophoriazusæ*, Euripides is first ridiculed as a woman-hater, whom the women in council are determined to punish. The poet is represented as dressing up a friend in woman's attire to attend their deliberations. In the sequel the various stage devices in his plays are parodied, not without suggestion of his immorality. From the scholia explaining this piece, we have many valuable quotations of lost plays of Euripides, such as the *Antiope*. In the *Frogs*, the most complete and systematic of all Aristophanes' attacks, the poet's whole moral and social tendencies are discussed in contrast to the tone of Æschylus, and he is represented as the mouthpiece of the vulgar and depraved mob, that *ochlocracy* which the Germans dislike so much. Thus we may say that no Greek poet ever received more constant and unsparing adverse criticism, and from the ablest possible critic.

To have outlived, nay, to have conquered such attacks, is in my mind an astonishing proof of genius.

The caricatures of Aristophanes have this foundation, that our poet in his pictures of passion did not shrink from painful subjects; but have we no Œdipus and Thyestes in Sophocles? Morever, in his dramatic statements of intellectual difficulties of faith and dogma, he did not shrink from speaking the most daring heresies from the stage; but was it more disturbing than Aristophanes' own theological buffoonery? Such was no doubt the judgment of the Athenians, when the poet's political ambiguities were forgotten, and when they awarded to his posthumous plays the highest prize, in reply to the savage attack upon his memory in the *Frogs* of Aristophanes.

107. We have hardly a word of information about dramatic performances elsewhere than at Athens, but that the appreciation of the great tragic masterpieces must have been diffused all over Hellenic lands, is proved first, by the activity of Æschylus in Sicily, and of Euripides in Northern Greece; secondly, by the frequent and imposing remains of theatres on the same model as that of Athens, and which the traveller may yet find in the Peloponnesus, and in Asia Minor. Lastly, we hear so much of the popularity of actors over Greece, and even of their liberties in tampering with the great texts, that we may assume them to have been an important travelling profession, and to have gone about, like our comedians, "starring it" in the provinces.

108. In the following generation, we find Plato quoting Euripides more frequently than he quotes the older tragedians, though he records a distinct preference for Sophocles. In the orators, our poet is cited not only as an acknowledged master, but as a noble and patriotic citizen. The philosophers, and among them Aristotle, naturally found more to quote in Euripides than in other poets, but so far as we can trust the *Poetics*, Sophocles was still considered by the theorists the model of tragedy, and many faults of economy are

found with Euripides, though he is called the *most tragic of poets*, and perpetually cited as a great and acknowledged model. But Attic society in the days of Alexander seems to have studied and loved him more than the rest, for in the genteel comedy of Diphilus and Menander, which reflects the tastes of the age, his influence saturated every page. The *recognitions* in his plays became the fixed models for the new comedies, and his style was so accurately copied, that the stray fragments of Menander can hardly be distinguished from those of Euripides. He was in fact the poetical idol of an age which studied to draw pictures of ordinary human nature, and here found them of inimitable grace and wonderful variety, expressed with the clearness of the purest Attic diction.

109. Thus he passed with the conquests of Alexander into the East, and with the rise of Alexandria into the treasures of the Museum. He was then commented on as one of the three masters of Attic tragedy, and it is to the collection of *didascaliæ* of Aristophanes (of Byzantium) that we owe the occasional scanty but valuable notices in the Greek arguments and scholia on the date, success, and rivals of the several plays. For the *didascaliæ* were contemporary records—many on votive tripods—of each performance at Athens, which noted the author, date, companion plays and success in each year's competitions. Had the complete transcript of this Aristophanes' work remained, it would have thrown a flood of light on the external history of the tragedies, and saved our scholars volumes of speculation. But these simple and valuable notices, to which are added a good many grammatical and explanatory notes, are handed down to us together with artistic criticisms, which, if they date from the Alexandrian age,* show a complete and ridiculous absence of all æsthetical judgment. Why, they ask, does Electra sit watching at Orestes' feet, when she ought rather to sit at his head? Medea, they say,

* The worst of these notes may be of Byzantine origin.

abandons her character when she laments over the children she is about to slay. Iphigenia, they object, who enters as a weeping and tender maiden, ought not to become a heroine in courage and resolution as the play proceeds. Such were the hands into which Euripides passed from the loving appreciation of refined Athens.

110. But while these pedants were staining his pages with the mildew of their criticism, he was delighting the semi-Hellenised courts of the far East in their relaxations, and he was teaching the conquerors of the West to transfer him in a new language to their tamer stage. Andronicus, Nævius, Ennius translated many Greek plays, and Ennius did so chiefly from Euripides. The versions of Ennius, who brought out at least a dozen Euripidean plays, must have been as free as those of Racine, and like them, without a regular chorus. Pacuvius and Attius translated Greek plays likewise, though less exclusively from our poet; while we hear that after a banquet at the Parthian court, scenes from the *Bacchæ* were being recited, when the actor seized the gory head of Crassus, which had just been brought in, and gave a horrible realism to the affecting scene where the frantic mother parades the head of Pentheus in triumph, and with returning consciousness discovers that she has mangled her own son.

The rivals of the unfortunate Crassus at Rome were doubtless able to quote the text, when they heard the striking news, for Cæsar, we are told, constantly had lines of the *Phœnissæ* in his mouth, and Cicero often refers to Euripides, whom he judges not inferior to his great contemporaries, though all three differed so widely in style. Indeed the fashion of composing free versions of the tragedies without any intention of producing them on the stage, seems a perpetual amusement among literary Romans. But Ovid's, and even Mæcenas' reputed attempts at a Latin *Medea*, seem to show that the more cosmopolitan poet, as we might expect, was the best appreciated. The fourth

book of the *Æneid* reflects a like interest in this wild picture of female passion.

111. The later Latin tragedies, handed down to us under the name of Seneca, show the same respect for Euripides as a tragic model, but the false taste of an artificial age adorned his purity with showy tinsel, and exaggerated his pathos with extravagant bombast. One great scene (in the Latin *Troades*), which we cannot identify, leaves us in doubt whether the Roman has followed some forgotten Greek model or struck out one fresh spark of genius amid the lurid glow of his diseased taste. But while this tragic school could not remain satisfied with his simplicity, the sober Quintilian warns every orator to study so admirable a master of persuasion. The so-called Longinus often quotes him for sublimity, and thus at the end of the classical days he is praised for the very qualities which he despised, at the risk of obloquy and of defeat. In the last days of the old world, the wretched days of centos, the unknown author of the *Christus Patiens* made up his poem on the death of Christ chiefly from the *Bacchæ* of Euripides—a strange but not unsuggestive borrowing, had the author sounded deeper than the mere words that suited his purpose.

112. We pass beyond the age of adaptation and imitation to that in which Euripides became an author of the study, or a handbook of education, and when his works came to struggle, not with too great celebrity and diffusion—a fruitful cause of corruption—but with the dangers of neglect and ignorance, of false transcription, of forgetfulness, and of decay. In the earlier Byzantine empire, indeed, a selection of his plays was diligently read and annotated for school use; but the selection seems gradually to have grown smaller and smaller, so that when we emerge from the Dark Ages into the Revival, we have only two MSS. (C and P) copied from a single book containing eighteen plays, and neither of them complete; thus for several—*Hercules*, *Helena*, *Electra*—we have but one MS.

authority, for others only two. A selection of nine plays is more frequently met, and in older copies; while of these again, seven, five, and three were variously selected; the last—*Hecuba, Orestes, Phœnissæ*—accordingly more copiously annotated and better preserved than the rest. Thus a large part of our treasure is not due to the greater popularity of Euripides, though such was probably the Byzantine opinion, but to the mere accident of the Florentine C and the Palatine P being preserved.

113. The first Greek tragedies printed were four plays of Euripides, in capital letters, at Venice, in 1494; an experiment attempted with only four other books, of which the *Anthologia* is the only one common in our libraries. An edition, in 1503, of all the plays (except the *Electra*, printed 1545), by Aldus, is the proper *princeps*; so that to Euripides (except the four plays) was never vouchsafed the honour, as to Homer and Isocrates, of being published in the fine old characters which disappeared before the far inferior types of Aldus. But still he kept in advance of the other tragic poets. In 1518, when *Æschylus* was being first printed, Erasmus already published a Latin verse translation of two plays (*Hecuba, Iphigenia in Aulis*), and, what was far more significant, about 1540, Ludovico Dolce began to adapt them for the Italian stage. Of his versions four are still accessible, the *Thieste*, the *Hecuba* (hardly altered), the *Ifigenia* (*in Aulis*), and *Giocasta* (considerably modified). Buchanan produced an elegant and faithful Latin *Alcestis* and *Medea* about 1570.

114. But the *Giocasta* (*Phœnissæ*) of Dolce is to us far more interesting, inasmuch as the *Iocasta* of George Gascoigne, Shakspere's predecessor, appeared in 1566, and may have directly suggested a celebrated passage in his *Henry IV.** Gascoigne's

* By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap,
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,

Iocasta, though professedly translated by him and Francis Kinwelmersh from Euripides, differs widely from the *Phœnissæ*, being a literal, though unacknowledged, rendering of Dolce's version. And it should also be noted that the speech of Eteocles, which Shakspere seems to have used, was cited in Plutarch's tract "On Brotherly Love," of which Amyot's translation was certainly accessible to the poet. In either case the passage is of considerable interest, as being (I suppose) the only instance of even indirect contact between Shakspere and the tragedies of Euripides. Indeed the idea is so general and so natural to a poet, that it may well have occurred independently to Shakspere. But the reverse seems the opinion of learned commentators, beginning with Warburton.

We hear that a *Troades* was printed in Greek by J. Daly as early as 1575. But the numerous Euripidean titles which appear in plays ranging from 1559 to 1581, some by Heywood, some by Studley, and others, refer rather to versions of Seneca's plays, which then exercised a great influence on the English stage.

115. In France, as might be expected, the example of Dolce was early emulated; there were translations of four Euripidean plays by Lazare and I. A. Baif, and by Sibillet,* in the earlier part of the sixteenth century; and even Amyot occupied his youth with poetic versions of Greek plays, which were never published. So also in the nascent drama, we find many free versions, in treatment like those of Seneca, omitting and adding according to the taste of the age. In this movement Euripides seems (after the example of Dolce) to have been preferred to the

> And pluck up drowned honour by the locks;
> So he that doth redeem her thence might wear
> Without corrival all her dignities.—Part I. i. 3.

* As I have not been able to consult these works, I am unable to say whether they are independent of Dolce or were copied from his versions.

older and stricter models. There were also the operas of Quinault, of which two at least, an *Alcestis* and a *Theseus* (*Medea*), were from Euripides; but which, as Voltaire well observes, while copying the externals of singing and of a chorus from the Greek plays, injured the true appreciation of them by bringing the musical part into such prominence that the real tragedy was neglected, and even the actor lost in the singer.

116. This brings us up to Rotrou and to the great Corneille—authors who hardly knew the difference between one classic model and another, and thought Seneca as great a poet as Euripides, perhaps indeed assumed him to be a literal translator. Thus it was through Seneca, and through modern versions like Dolce's, that Euripides told at first upon the drama of Europe. Indeed had Corneille been able to study the great originals, he would not have felt himself contesting in unequal conflict against the hostile theorists let loose upon him by Richelieu and the French Academy. These people drew from oblivion Aristotle's *Poetics*, and proved to him that his *Cid* was a direct violation of the scientific theory of drama (the unities of time, place, and circumstances, &c.) deduced from the infallible critic of antiquity. Hence, while inferior rivals composed their poor classic tragedies by rule and plummet-line, the great genius was struggling in vain against the yoke which he felt to be unjust, and which the Greek originals, especially Euripides', would have shown him to have been historically as well as æsthetically absurd. Do we not almost hear Euripides speaking in the preface to the *Don Sancho*, in which Corneille ventures on an independent theory of the drama against the essays of such as Chapelain and the Abbé Hedelin, the creatures of Richelieu, and the *apes* of Aristotle? "Why not," says he, "*chausser le cothurne un peu plus bas?* Surely terror and pity, these essentials of tragedy, may be more strongly excited in us by the sight of misfortunes happening to persons of our own

condition and like us in all respects, than by the sight of those which shake great monarchs upon their thrones, and which are quite foreign to us." But he dared not solve the problem as Euripides did, by bringing down the kings to the common level in language and in feelings.

117. Racine, coming next, had the learning but not the genius to give the true solution. He read and followed the Greek masters, especially Euripides, with full knowledge of the language, but he gave his adhesion from the first to the theorists. His famous transcripts from Euripides, the *Phèdre* and the *Iphigénie*, with all their genius, modify the essential features of the old poet's work, because they did not suit the rules of the pedants and the manners of the court. The cry of terror in Iphigenia, the motherly independence of Clytemnestra, the vindictive treachery of Phædra, are all softened and weakened by ceremonious dignity or by Christian morality. Above all, the notion of a play without declarations and intrigues of love was intolerable, and so secondary characters are created to love or be loved by Hippolytus and Achilles, and withal paragons of virtue or scape-goats of crime.

Racine's many and often successful rivals, such as Pradon, developed no new principles. But in his latest works, the *Esther* and the *Athalie*, we feel that though he does not copy, he imitates Euripides with deeper sympathy, and his Joas is the finest modern parallel to the purity and the freshness of Ion.

118. This remarkable movement failed to excite any immediate response in England, owing to the political excitement of the times, and the Puritan antipathy to the drama. Nevertheless, the two works which concern Euripides before the close of the period are perhaps more faithful and valuable than all the French imitations put together. The first great edition of the poet's text, the work of Joshua Barnes, did not issue from Cambridge till 1694. The *Samson Agonistes*

of Milton (1674), though its main figure reminds us of the *Œdipus Coloneus* of Sophocles, yet shows us in every page the author's predilection for Euripides. Nor is this preference shown in his play only. Critics have justly pointed to the description of the two brothers in *Comus* (vv. 297 sqq.) as borrowed from the herd's description of Orestes and Pylades in the *Tauric Iphigenia* (vv. 264 sqq.). I cannot find in any of the biographies that Milton was versed in French literature, or influenced by the new triumph of classical tragedy on the French stage; and, indeed, his *Samson* is a far more faithful and splendid imitation of the Greek models than anything ever done by modern poets. But this performance, if really independent of the French, is the more remarkable, because in his preface Milton evidently censures the school of Shakspere, and reverts to the Greeks as the true models of a drama suited to the sober and respectable classes of society.*

119. This great man, however, anticipated a remarkable movement. For with the Restoration, French theories and models began to be studied, and we find for nearly a century a perpetual insisting upon classical theories and an incessant copying of Greek models, often through Latin, still oftener through French, but

* Here are his words: "Heretofore men in highest dignity have laboured not a little to be thought able to compose a tragedy; of that honour Dionysius the elder was no less ambitious, than before of his attaining to the tyranny. Augustus Cæsar also had begun his *Ajax*; but, unable to please his own judgment with what he had begun, left it unfinished. Seneca, the philosopher, is by some thought the author of those tragedies (at least the best of them) that go under that name. Gregory Nazianzen, a father of the church, thought it not unbeseeming the sanctity of his person to write a tragedy, which is entitled 'Christ Suffering.' This is mentioned to vindicate tragedy from the small esteem or rather infamy, which in the acc^{t} of many it undergoes at this day with other common interludes; happening through the poet's errour of intermixing comick stuff with tragick sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath been counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people."

always professing to follow the great old masters. These copies were not literary pieces like Milton's *Samson*, but pieces for the stage, which are now forgotten, but which are profoundly interesting in the literary history of the drama. Far the most important exponents of this movement are Addison, whose *Cato* was hailed by the French as the only really first-rate tragedy ever written in English, and Dryden, whose preface to his version of *Troilus and Cressida* expounds clearly his full recognition of Shakspere's genius, but his honest criticism of its uncouthness and its want of literary culture. To us this *Troilus and Cressida* is peculiarly interesting, because Dryden introduced into it the contest of the two brothers, professedly borrowed from the *Iphigenia in Aulis* of Euripides. I will relegate the lesser names to a note.*

120. While these revivals of Euripides were taking place in England, the French had so stereotyped their tragedy according to the model of Racine, that they

* The following are a few of the documents which illustrate this now obscure period of the British drama in its relation to Euripides :

1677. Davenant's *Circe* (a combination of the *Iphigenia in Tauris* and the legend of Circe).
1685. The tracts of Thomas Rymer on tragedy, criticising Shakspere, and applauded by Dryden.
1690. Translation of the Abbé Hedelin's *Art of the Stage*, from the French.
1698. An *Iphigenia*, produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields.
1700. *Achilles* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, produced at Drury Lane.
1715. Edmund Smith's *Phædra and Hippolytus*.
1726. The *Hecuba* of Richard West, afterwards Lord Chancellor of Ireland, which the author complains of as a failure, owing to an ignorant audience.
1748. An *Iphigenia in Tauris*, by Gilbert West.
1749. A *Hecuba* by Morell.

These I have found among rare collections of old plays. They are all, I think, copies from the French, though, just like Gascoigne, they boldly profess to copy Euripides. Rymer's tracts I have not seen, and quote from Dryden's allusions. No doubt the above are only a small fraction of this literature.

actually began to test the ancients by the theory drawn from the *Poetics*, and declare them wanting. A war sprang up between the advocates of the old and the new, and the advocates of the Greek masters began now to defend them by showing that they had sacrificed the unities to greater freedom and the closer study of nature; that in fact they were rather to be compared to the school of Shakspere than to their French imitations; and this has been the course of French dramatic criticism ever since. While we feel that the buskins, and masks, and stereotyped messengers, and balanced discussions, are far too stiff for our stage, French critics are ever defending the irregularities and licences of the Greeks as compared to Racine, and this especially as regards Euripides. The most important and the fairest book during the epoch before us was Brumoy's *Théâtre des Grecs* (1715), in which he gave either full analyses or translations of most of the plays of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, with a comparison of the treatment of like subjects in each, and in the versions of Dolce, Rotrou, and Racine. This book, which earned Voltaire's sincere praise, is to the present day most instructive and useful, as it regards the Greek tragedy altogether from the theatrical and not the literary point of view. But Brumoy's tone is positively apologetic towards the evidently dominant modern school.

121. Voltaire took up the controversy in a very different spirit. When a youth of eighteen, his taste was turned to the drama by seeing a translation of the *Tauric Iphigenia* acted at the Duchess of Maine's; this translation being by M. Malespieu, a learned private tutor, who habitually read out to his pupils the Greek plays in French. Voltaire was delighted, and immediately composed his *Œdipe*; but he afterwards criticised his own work, and brought out an *Oreste* after Euripides, which he prefaced by his theoretical views.* He saw

* In this, as in most of his opinions, Voltaire was not consistent. He was at one time carried away by the admiration of

that any literal translation of Greek plays was totally out of the question on the modern stage, and that they must be re-written. Nevertheless he remarks, as Racine had done, that in the new versions, those parts had always been the most effective which were borrowed directly from the originals. This led him to censure severely the love-intrigues introduced in the French tragedies, which he described as "une coquetterie continuelle," "pour complaire au goût le plus fade et le plus faux qui ait jamais corrompu la littérature." Yet he holds firmly to the general type established, though he only admits a furious and criminal passion as a proper tragic subject. As might be expected, he regards Addison's *Cato* as the most perfect of English tragedies, and censures in the strongest terms the uncouthness of Shakspere, while he speaks enthusiastically of that untutored genius, which, because it was such, founded no school, and provoked no worthy imitators. In this age of Shaksperian enthusiasm the remarks of the great critic are not likely to find much favour.

122. It seems that as the eighteenth century waned, the English attempts at reproducing Frenchified Greek dramas on the stage were gradually discontinued, and Shakspere resumed his sway, together with the genteel comedy of Goldsmith and Sheridan. But the literary study of Euripides himself succeeded. Thus between 1770–90 we have the great Oxford edition of Musgrave, and also the only two complete poetical versions of the poet published in English—Potter's, the more poetical, and Woodhull's, the more learned and minute, inasmuch as he included all the fragments then collected.

the new against the old, and said many insolent and unjust things about the Greek masters as compared with the French. But I prefer to cite his more solid judgments in the text. The best book in which to study the views of the "moderns" is La Harpe's book on literature, in which he boldly states that the chief merit of Sophocles is to have inspired Racine, and that Euripides may be excused because he suggested a *Medea* to Corneille. The Encyclopædists began the reaction now established in public opinion.

Critical editions of the plays, such as King's, Monk's, and others, became fashionable, and attained their zenith in Porson's work.

123. In France the most important dramatic revivals were the famous operas of Gluck, the two *Iphigenias*; for the plays of Voltaire, Crebillon, and their rivals, were after all little better than Seneca's remodelling. But in Italy we have the text and metrical translation, with essays, of all Euripides' plays and fragments, by Carmelli (5 vols. Padua, 1743); an important work and undeservedly forgotten. For a man of rare genius, Alfieri—who took up the drama with a great taste for antiquity, but no knowledge of Greek—turned, late in his career and after he had long abandoned writing, to study the originals, which he had hitherto reached only through French versions. He has recorded to us his enthusiasm and his emotion on reading the real *Alcestis* (January 17th, 1796); nor could he rest till he had first translated it, and then imitated it in an independent play, the second *Alcestis*, which he printed, together with the translation, in his works. He seems never to have heard of Carmelli's work.

124. Now at last Germany was entering upon her literary greatness, and with the deeper genius of the nation adopted an independent theory of the drama. The most popular exponent was A. W. Schlegel, who in his *Lectures* set his face vehemently against the French fixity of theory and practice, and exalted national peculiarities as the proper vehicle for genius. Thus Shakspere was again set on the highest pinnacle of fame; and what was more original, Æschylus was for the first time interpreted with true reverence and understanding. The theories of Aristotle and Horace, in their French copies, were postponed to a proper study of the ancient masters themselves, and a theory of the drama was built on Æschylus and Sophocles. The weak points of Schlegel's criticism were his dislike of the French and depreciation of Euripides. Perhaps on account of Racine's, Voltaire's, and Alfieri's preference, and in

opposition to it, every fault was found with Euripides and every merit denied. More especially, the *Electra* was singled out for ridicule, in comparison with the parallel plays of Æschylus and Sophocles; and in spite of Goethe and of Schiller—the former an imitator of the *Tauric*, the other a translator of the *Aulid Iphigenia*—both of them sincere admirers of Euripides, the fashion at last set in against the poet, and the jibes of Aristophanes were exalted into canons of criticism.

125. The present century, while correcting the antipathies of Schlegel's school, has nevertheless not reinstated Euripides completely into his former position. We understand Æschylus at last, and see in him a giant genius, without parallel in the history of Greek literature. We find in Sophocles a more perfect artist, in complete harmony with his materials, and justifying the uniform favour of the Attic public. But many recent editors and historians, and one of our greatest poets, Mr. Browning, have set themselves to assert for Euripides his true and independent position beside these rivals, who have failed to obscure or displace him. The Germans, indeed, still infected by Schlegel, talk of Euripides as the poet of the *ochlocracy*, that debased democracy which they have invented at Athens after the suggestion of Thucydides. But a sounder art criticism, based upon the results of English and French scholarship, which does not spoil its delicacy and blunt its edge by the weight of erudition, has turned with renewed affection to the sympathetic genius, who delighted the wild Parthian chiefs with his Bacchic revels, who supplied the patient monk with sorrows for his suffering Christ, who witnessed (in truth a very martyr) to truth and nature in the stilted rhetoric of the Roman stage, in the studied pomp of the French court; who fed the youth of Racine and of Voltaire, who revived the slumbering flame of Alfieri's genius, who even in these latter days has occupied great and original poets of many lands —Schiller, Shelley, Alfieri, Browning—with the task

of reproducing in their tongues his pathos and his power.

126. I will mention, in conclusion, a few of the best and most accessible helps to the study of the poet.

The best complete texts are those of Kirchhoff, Dindorf (with the fragments), Fix (in Didot's series), and of Mr. Paley (with a full commentary). Editions of select plays are very numerous; among the best, containing several together, are those of King, Porson, Monk, Elmsley, Hermann, Weil; the school editions of single plays are endless. For those not familiar with Greek, I may add that in addition to Potter's and Woodhull's translations of the whole of the works, there are single versions of divers excellence, such as Shelley's *Cyclops*, Milman's *Bacchanals*, Fitzgerald's *Hippolytus*, Browning's *Heracles* (in *Aristophanes' Apology*), and *Alcestis* (paraphrased with comments in *Balaustion's Adventure*), Schiller's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Bankes' *Hecuba*, and many others which lie concealed in our larger libraries. Even musical versions of the plays, on the model of Mendelssohn's versions of Sophocles, are not wanting. For we have recently Gadsby's *Alcestis*, and what is far more interesting and almost unknown, Miss Helen Faucit appeared as Iphigenia (in Aulis) in the Dublin Theatre Royal, in November, 1848. The version was arranged for her by Mr. Calcraft, and the music of the chorus composed by R. M. Levey. The most elaborate German criticisms of the poet's genius and his works are those in Bernhardy's and Klein's histories of the Greek drama; the best French book is M. Patin's *Étude*. But the literature of the subject would occupy a separate volume.

THE END.

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