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## ARTICLE V.

## THE THEOLOGY OF SOPHOCLES.

BY REV. WILLIAM S. TYLER, D. D., PROFESSOR IN AMHERST COLLEGE.

IN the museum of the Lateran at Rome, there is a statue — discovered within the last quarter of a century among the ruins of ancient Anxur — whose faultless symmetry of form and harmony of expression suggest to the uninstructed beholder the thought, that it must be some Greek artist's ideal of perfect manly beauty, executed in the best period of Grecian art, and preserved, by a kind Providence, for the instruction of an age whose prerogative it is to collect and interpret the wisdom of the ancients. But by its resemblance to all the known likenesses, that have come down to us from antiquity, it is proved to be a portrait statue of the master who carried Greek tragedy, which is the culmination of Greek poetry, to its highest perfection. Not only the general features, and the outshining soul, bespeak this most favored of the sons of the muses; but the smallest details of dress and manner are highly characteristic. While wisdom sits enthroned on the brow, and eloquence on the lips; while every limb seems to have been shaped according to the nicest laws of proportion, and rhythm regulates every attitude and movement, the mouth seems formed for the utterance of musical harmonies; the drapery, displaying rather than veiling the fine structure of the body, images the transparent purity and refinement of his style; and the light fillet, which confines the natural and graceful tresses of this, in common with all the other statues of the poet, indicates the almost uninterrupted series of triumphs which crowned his long and prosperous life.<sup>1</sup>

With these plastic representations, the descriptions of ancient writers fully accord. Literature and art agree in repre-

<sup>1</sup> See an appreciative and graphic description of this statue in Braunn's *Ruins and Museums of Rome*. See also Müller's *Anc. Art with Welcker's Additions*, London, 1852, p. 598.

sending Sophocles as one of the most gifted and fortunate of mortals, the favorite, alike, of men and gods. Born of wealthy parents, in the most beautiful of the suburbs of Athens; educated under the best masters of gymnastics and music in that harmonious system of culture which aimed to develop a healthy mind in a healthy body; endowed with every gift of nature, and adorned with every grace of art, when the Greeks were assembled in Salamis to celebrate their victory over the barbarian hosts of Xerxes, in the sixteenth year of his age, he was chosen, among all the children and youth of Athens, naked and lyre in hand, to lead the chorus, in dance and song, around the trophy. Triumphant over the acknowledged master of tragedy at his first appearance on the stage, at the age of twenty-five; carrying off the first prize, in more than twenty of his pieces; the second, in many more, and never falling into the third rank; raised to the highest honors, civil and military, as the reward of his genius, and never, for a moment, losing the favor of the capricious multitude; enjoying the friendship of all the great and good, at Athens; the intimate friend of Herodotus; receiving his first prize at the hands of Cimon and his colleagues; himself the colleague of Pericles and Thucydides; admired by the lyric poets; envied by the tragic; and spared even by the comic Aristophanes;<sup>1</sup> outliving as well as outshining not only his older, but also his younger rival, and, at the age of ninety, turning a charge of dotage into the most magnificent of all his triumphs, by simply reading, before his judges, one of the choral songs of a recently-written tragedy; and, dying at length, at a sacred festival, a death as enviable, and almost as remarkable, as that of his own *Œdipus*; he deserved, as few mortals have ever deserved, the felicitations that were pronounced upon him, from the stage, by a contemporary comic poet:

Μάκαρ Σοφοκλέης, ὃς πολὺν χρόνον βιοῖς  
 Ἄπέθανεν, εὐδαίμων ἀνὴρ καὶ δεξιός,  
 Πολλὰς ποιήσας καὶ καλὰς τραγωδίας·  
 Καλῶς δ' ἐτελεύτησ' οὐδὲν ὑπομείνας κακόν.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Frogs*, 76 seqq.

<sup>2</sup> From the *Μούσαι* of Phrynichus.

And he was not more happy in his person and life, than he was in the circumstances in which his lot was cast. It was his good fortune to come upon the stage of active life just in season to take a leading part in celebrating the triumphs of united Greece over the wealth and power of Persia, and to leave it a little while before Athens succumbed to Sparta, in that deplorable strife of parties and nations, in which the Grecian states exhausted their resources and paved the way for their common subjugation to the yoke of Macedonia; and, if we may credit some anonymous ancient memoirs, and the traditions preserved by Pausanias,<sup>1</sup> the din of war and battle was hushed, a moment, at his death and burial: Dionysius, the father-god of tragedy, having twice appeared in vision to the Spartan general Lysander, and commanded him to allow the interment of the poet's body in the family tomb outside the walls of Athens. He saw the astonishing growth of Athenian power after the Persian wars, the forsaken and ruined city rebuilt with far more than its previous splendor, the *Ἄστυ* and the Piræus fortified by strong walls, the Agora surrounded by porticos and public edifices, the Acropolis crowned with temples and statues of the gods, Athens acquiring the *hegemony*, by sea and land, and bringing all the nations under the more powerful sway of her literature and art; and as, from year to year, the Dionysiac festivals drew together crowds, not only of citizens, but of strangers, from every part of Greece, to admire the magnificence of the city, and to enjoy the splendid entertainments of the theatre, Sophocles, more than any other man, was the host in this feast of reason, "the observed of all observers."

The Iliad and Odyssey had, long since, been written, and the poems of the mythic and the epic cycle were complete. Anacreon and Pindar had already sung; the poets of the lyre had already perfected that infinite variety and richness of metre and music which has never been equalled by any other people. Aeschylus had transformed the car of Theseus into the fixed and amply furnished stage, the troop of itine-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. PAUS. I. 21, 2.

rant players into the chorus of accomplished actors and singers, the goat-song of satyrs into the regular drama, which had taken its place among the established institutions of the state and aspired to the honor not only of amusing but instructing the people. It remained for Sophocles—and for this his well-balanced mind was admirably adapted,—to combine and harmonize the several elements of dialogue and song, action and scenic representation, and carry tragedy to its highest perfection. It was that happy period in the national existence when wealth had superseded the primitive rudeness, but had not yet passed over into luxury; when tyranny had given place to liberty, and liberty had not degenerated into licentiousness; when blind tradition or dogmatic prescription no longer ruled with absolute sway, and yet unbridled speculation had not loosened the bonds of morality and religion. The despotism of the *τύραννοι* had been abolished; the despotism of the *δῆμος* was not yet established. The age of ignorance and barbarism had passed away; the age of the sophists and rhetoricians had not yet fully come. The retiring shadows of the former still lingered upon Aeschylus; the false and artificial lights of the latter already dazzled and misled Euripides; Sophocles dwelt in the sun-light of the golden age of Athenian government, literature, and religion. Aeschylus, like some ancient prophet or oracle-declaring priest, ascended the *tripod*, and, in strains of awful sublimity, proclaimed the laws of God and the destinies of men, pointed criminals to the everlasting *Erinyes*, that were sure to overtake them; and arraigned heroes and demigods before the tribunal of divine justice. Euripides seated himself in the *chair* of the philosopher, and, interspersing his dialogues with discussions, reasoned, refined, doubted, sometimes almost scoffed, and perpetually mingled the myths of the ancients with the declamations of the sophists and the speculations of the schools. Sophocles walked the *stage* as if it were, emphatically, his own; sung in the orchestra, as if music and verse were the language of his birth; and represented the past, the present, and the future, the providence and government of God,

and the character and destiny of men, idealized but not distorted or discolored, just as they were mirrored in the pure and tranquil depths of his own harmonious nature. Aeschylus, as we said in a former Article, was the theological poet of ancient Greece. Euripides may be characterized as the philosophical and rhetorical poet. Sophocles was, emphatically, the *dramatic* poet, whose home was in the theatre; and who, from that central and elevated position, in the midst of the city, on the sunny side of the Acropolis, looking up to the temples of the gods, and around on all the diversified scenes of nature and pursuits of men, saw them all canopied by the blue sky, and bathed in the bright sunlight of Athens. We must not expect, then, to find the theology of Sophocles so strongly marked in its character, nor so ubiquitous in its presence, as that of Aeschylus; nor, perhaps, in some respects, so faithful a transmission of the universal and primeval traditions of our race; but it may, for that very reason, furnish a fairer representation of the average sentiments of the Athenian people.

Only seven out of more than a hundred tragedies which the ancients ascribed to Sophocles, have come down to us. But among those, fortunately and by a very natural law of preservation, are the very tragedies which were most admired by his contemporaries. Of these seven, all but one (the *Trachiniae*), cluster about those fruitful themes of ancient epic and tragic verse, Thebes and Troy; three (*Philoctetes*, *Ajax*, and *Electra*) attaching themselves to the latter, and three (*Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*) centring in the former. The *scenes* of the tragedies, however, conduct us, not only to Thebes (*Oedipus* and *Antigone*) and Troy (*Ajax*), but to Lemnos (*Philoctetes*), Trachis near Thermopylae (*Trachiniae*), Argos (*Electra*), and Athens (*Oedipus at Colonus*) — the chief cities of historical Greece. As the perfection of his plots is among the chief excellences of Sophocles, we shall pursue a different method from that adopted in our former Article, and, instead of a classified synopsis of doctrines, we shall present our readers with a brief analysis of each tragedy. There will be less of logical

unity in this method, but, we trust, more of variety and interest. Besides, this difference of treatment is due to the difference between the authors. The Theology of Aeschylus is uttered more fully in words and single passages, while that of Sophocles is acted out in the characters and the plots.

### *The Trachiniae.*

The scene of this drama is laid in Trachis, near Thermopylae, and there is a distinct allusion (632 seq.) to Thermopylae as the place of meeting for the Amphictyonic Council. It derives its name from the fact that the chorus consists of Trachinian women. The subject is the Death of Hercules; and the Dying Hercules would be a more characteristic title. Schlegel pronounces it so inferior to the other pieces of Sophocles, that he *wishes* he could believe it spurious; and "many critics have remarked, that the introductory soliloquy by Deianira, without any motive, is very unlike the prologues of Sophocles." The Scene opens with the wife of Hercules (Deianira) soliloquizing on her unhappy lot as having been wooed by the frightful, hateful river-god, Achelous, and since she has been won by Hercules, doomed to perpetual loneliness and anxiety, while her lord is involved by the Fates in endless labors; and, though now his allotted labors are all performed, she is peculiarly distressed by his absence for fifteen months, during which, she, an exile at Trachis, has received from him no intelligence. The soliloquy begins with an anachronous allusion to the famous maxim<sup>1</sup> of Solon: "Call no man happy before his death," in which the poet intends, perhaps, to shadow forth the tragic end of Hercules, but which his wife alludes to only by way of contrast with the palpably *unhappy* life which she has led from her birth, and is likely to lead till she rests in her grave. An attendant maid suggests that she relieve her anxiety by sending a messenger in quest of Hercules. Hylis, her son, opportunely presents himself, and, after some

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<sup>1</sup> λόγος ἀρχαῖος ἀνδρῶτων, v. 1.

conversation with his mother, departs to seek his absent father. The first chorus invokes the aid of the Sun-god (*Helios*) in discovering the abode of the hero, approves the sympathy and fidelity of his half-widowed wife, and yet reproves her for not reposing more confidence in the overruling providence of the all-controlling king, the son of Kronus (*ὁ πάντα κραίνων βασιλεὺς Κρονίδας*, 127), who does not intend unmixed good for mortals, and yet never forsakes his children :

ἐπεὶ τίς ψδε τέκνοισι  
Ζῆν' ἄβουλον εἶδεν ; (139-40.)

Spangled night, with sable sway,  
Frowns not on the world for aye ;  
Sorrow wounds not — golden store  
Doth not bless to change no more ;  
Joy and wo in turns succeed :  
Hearts, in turn, must bound and bleed.  
Lady, on my counsels dwell :  
Trust that all may yet be well ;  
When, oh when, did lofty Jove  
Reckless of his children prove ?<sup>1</sup>

Deianira responds by assigning as a special cause of her anxiety, an old tablet (*παλαιὸν δέλτον ἐγγεγραμμένην*,<sup>2</sup> 157), which Hercules put into her hands at his last departure (quite unlike his wont on former occasions), in which was inscribed his destiny (*εἰμαρμένα*) as revealed to him by the Oracle at Dodona, and his last will and testament (*ξυνθήματα*) in case he should not return at the end of fifteen months, for that was to be the crisis of his fate, when he must either die, or thereafter live an untroubled life ; and that time had already expired. While she is yet speaking,

<sup>1</sup> Dale's version, which we follow chiefly in the choruses ; though we shall make use of Franklin and Potter, when they seem to be more true to the sense and spirit of the original. It will be seen that these last lines do not include all men as the children of the universal Father, but refer exclusively to the *natural children* of Jove, born of mortal women, like Hercules.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 685: *χαλκῆς ὕπαι δύνικτον ἐκ δέλτου γραφήν* ; also 1169. These passages illustrate Sophocles's idea as to the early existence of alphabetic writing. It is not a mere unconscious anachronism ; for he *details* the form and manner.



a crowned messenger appears, and announces that Alcides lives and conquers, that he is bringing out of the battle the first-fruits for the gods of the country (*ἀπαρχὰς θεοῖσι τοῖς ἐγχωρίοις*, 183), and will soon return home in triumph. Deianira renders thanks to Zeus, who dwells in Oetas, unshorn meads for this welcome, though late news, and calls on the Trachinian maidens to join with her in celebrating the unexpected intelligence. A brief choral song follows — a general paeon to Apollo, Artemis, and Dionysus. A train of captives is now seen approaching, sent forward by the conquering hero to attest his victory, and herald his speedy return; though, for the present, he remains on the extreme northern promontory of Euboea, to erect altars, consecrate a grove (*τέλη ἐγκαρπα*,<sup>1</sup> 238), and offer purifying sacrifices (*ἀγνὰ σύματα*, 287) to paternal Jove. The sight of the captives awakens the compassion of Deianira, and excites her fears, lest, as an *offset* to her present great prosperity, similar calamities may come upon her; and she prays to *Zeὺς Τροπαῖος* (303), the giver of victory and the averter of calamity, that she may die, rather than live to see such a day; thus foreshadowing her own actual doom. Among the captives, one of noble mien and patient spirit, excites her special pity; and she inquires, who the stranger is. The messenger, who would fain conceal the hero's moral infirmities, affects ignorance, but is at length compelled by a spectator, who has heard the whole story from him in the *Agora*, to disclose the fact, that she is the daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia, and that a passion for her was the sole cause of the long delay of Hercules, and the sole motive for the slaying of Eurytus, and the destruction of Oechalia. Grieved but not maddened by these facts, the unhappy but still loving wife puts the best construction on her husband's unfaithfulness. Love rules in her own breast; love lords it over the immortal gods: why then should she not be indulgent towards her husband, if he has fallen beneath the power

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<sup>1</sup> In doubtful readings, we, for the most part, follow Wunder; though the verses are cited as numbered in the Leipzig edition.

of this disease (*τῆδε τῆ νόσῳ*, 445), and still more towards the innocent victim of his passion. This is not the first time that the son of Jove, like Jove himself, has been thus overcome :

Hath not Hercules

Of other consorts been the only lord,  
Yea, and of many : and did one receive,  
At least from me, harsh words or keen reproach ?  
Nor shall *she* meet them ; though for her his breast  
Glows with impassioned love. . . .  
Nor will we court a voluntary ill,  
Contending with the gods.

The chorus, which follows, celebrates the matchless might of Aphrodite, alluding cautiously to her triumphs over the three gods who divide the sovereignty of the world — Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades(Pluto), and dwelling at length on the strife of the river-god (Achelous) and the son of Jove (Hercules) for the hand of Deianira.

That princess now reappears from the palace, with bleeding but submissive heart, bewailing chiefly the almost certain loss of her husband's affections, yet relating to the Trachinian maidens the means which she proposes to use in order, if possible, to retain them. In obedience to the instructions of the dying Centaur — slain by Hercules for undue liberties with his bride on their bridal tour — she had carefully preserved, in a brazen vase, the clotted blood from the arrow's point — of which the Centaur said :

Forever shall it bind to thine  
The soul of Hercules, that ne'er his love  
Shall burn to others as it burns to thee — <sup>1</sup>

And now she has moistened (*ἔβαψα*, 580)<sup>2</sup> or anointed (*ἔχριον*, 676) with it a tunic, which she proposes to send, by the

<sup>1</sup> It is not difficult to see the Sardonian grin with which the Centaur thus "paltered with words in a double sense," deceiving the woman, as Satan did Eve, when he said : "Ye shall be as gods, *knowing good AND EVIL.*" Hercules never lived to love another woman, after putting on the fatal robe.

<sup>2</sup> *ἔβαψα* is not only interpreted by its synonym (*ἔχριον*) here ; but the process of applying the poison is explained at length in vs. 690-9. It was applied to the

returning messenger, to her absent lord. Encouraged by the approval of the choir, she sends it, with a charge that none be suffered to put it on but himself, and that he should let no light of sun or fire fall upon it; till, in accordance with her vow, on the day of sacrifice,

He should stand forth and to the gods display  
A new adorer clad in new attire.—(611-12).

With that blindness which is one of the most tragic elements in the character and destiny of men, the chorus now exult in the near prospect of Hercules's return. Meanwhile, however, Deianira has made a discovery, which has thrilled her with horror and fearful forebodings. The lock of wool with which she applied the poison to the robe, thrown upon the ground, in the sunshine, had crumbled to pieces like sawdust; and, from the spot on which it fell, clotted foam bubbled up, as when new wine of the vintage is poured upon the ground (700 seq.). And now, wise only when it is too late, she marvels that she did not see that the dying centaur could bear no good will to his slayer; and she has only this consolation, that if Hercules shall thus lose his life, she is resolved to die with him.

While she is thus speaking, Hyllus her son returns from Euboea, and tells the tragic story, how Hercules, while sacrificing to his father Jove, at the Cenean promontory, received the deadly robe (*θανάσιμον πέπλον*, 760) at the hands of the messenger; arrayed himself in it, slew the victims — twelve unblemished (*έντελείς*, 762) bulls, the firstlings of the spoil (*λείλας άπαρχήν*, 763), together with a hundred smaller cattle from the common herd; and, exulting, poured forth his prayers, till the sacrificial flame kindled the dormant virus,

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tunic with a lock of wool. *Έβαψα* is plainly used here as a generic word, equivalent to *wet*, or *moistened*, and the more specific word *Έχρουν*, 676, *Έχρισα*, 691, is repeatedly used to explain the process. Compare the *βαπτισμοδς . . . χαλκίων καλ κλωνών*, Mark 7 : 4, where the application must have been made in a similar way. Sophocles uses the word frequently of the sword stained with blood, and in *Ajax*, 80, uses *βαλνειν* in the same way: *νεοβήντωρ (σφαι)*; cf. 95: *Έβαψας Έγχος εδ προς Άργείων στρατφ*.

when the sweat started from his body, the robe clung as if it had been glued to his sides and every limb, and anguish shot through all his bones. Frantic with pain, he hurled the unsuspecting messenger from the precipice upon the wave-encompassed rocks, dashed himself upon the ground, and made the rocks and woods ring with his cries of agony. Then borne, helpless and distracted, by his son and attendants, he was placed on board a ship, and they would soon see him, living or dead, brought to his home.

Such were thy counsels, mother, such thy deeds  
 To my poor father; for which traitorous acts  
 May penal justice and the avenging Fury<sup>1</sup>  
 Meet recompense award thee. Thus I pray,  
 If it be lawful—lawful it *must* be,  
 Since every law towards me thyself hast spurned,  
 And slain the best and bravest of mankind,  
 One on whose like thou ne'er shalt look again.—(809 seq.)

Without a word in reply, the wretched woman, cursed by her own son as the cause of death to her husband, steals away to put in execution her threat against her own life; while the choir break forth in lamentations, and reflections on the true meaning of the oracle and its now hastening fulfilment:

Behold, dear virgins, with what fatal speed  
 The ancient oracle of heaven  
 Hastens, to its dread fulfilment driven:—  
 "When the revolving months," so Fate decreed,  
 "Had crowned the twelfth long year,  
 Rest from his toils severe  
 The son of Jove should win;" firm to its end  
 Doth the sure presage tend:  
 Who wakes to life and light no more,  
 His earthly toils are closed—his earthly bondage o'er.—(823 seq.)

At the close of the chorus, a nurse comes forth from the house and announces the death of Deianira by her own hand.

<sup>1</sup> Πολύμοσ Δίκη Ἐπίβητος γα (810-11). This dreadful prayer is softened by the filial limitation: *if it is right, al Deus γε*.

Another choral song ensues, in which the singers know not which to deplore most — the past, or the evils that are yet to come :

To feel or fear is equal pain.

Borne by attendants, Hercules now comes upon the stage, racked with pain, murmuring at Jove for the ill return he has received for his altars and sacrifices, invoking death to relieve his pangs, imprecating vengeance on her head, whom he supposes to be the guilty cause ; and dwelling, with bitter and prolonged emphasis, on the contrast between his past heroic achievements and his present helpless and suffering state :

Yet remember how, with torn and wasted frame,  
I pine, devoted with this dark, dark curse ;<sup>1</sup>  
I, who a mother of the noblest, vaunt !  
I, who in heaven was stiled the son of Jove ! (1105-8)

Hyllus, who has learned the innocence of his unhappy mother, ventures a word in her defence ; which, at first, rouses the hero almost to frenzy. But when he hears the sad story of her death, and learns how she had been misled by the artful centaur, he sees at once that his doom is sealed, and resigns himself to his fate. He now exacts from his son a promise, under dreadful penalties, that he will convey his body, already more dead than alive, to the brow of Aeta, dear to Jove,<sup>2</sup> and there build a funeral pyre, place him upon it, and, *without a tear*, set it on fire and consume him to ashes. He further extorts from his son a promise to marry the captive maiden, the daughter of Eurytus, the love of whom had been the cause of his present calamity — a promise which the son gives only in implicit obedience to the *command* of

<sup>1</sup> Τυφλῆς ὄφ' ἔρης, under that blind bewildering *Ate*, who once bewildered Zeus himself, according to Homer (Il. 19, 95), and for it was cast out of heaven, and who, according to the tragic poets, leads poor blind mortals to ruin by first leading them to sin.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above 200, 436, 754, et passim. We see everywhere among the Greeks the same disposition to worship in *groves and high places*, which so often led the Israelites into the idolatrous practices of their heathen neighbors.

his father, and to avoid his curse, leaving the responsibility with him :

*Hyl.* And would my father teach an impious deed ?

*Herc.* It is not impious if it be my pleasure.

*Hyl.* And canst thou, then, with *justice*, thus command me ?

*Herc.* I can ; and call the gods to prove my truth.

*Hyl.* Then I will do it, nor resist thee more,

Appealing to the gods, thy will constrained me :

I cannot err, if I obey my father. (1245-53.)

The passage involves, it will be seen, the question of the higher and the lower law — a question which is often raised in the Greek tragedies, and which, between the gentle Hyllus and the mighty Hercules, seems to be decided against the higher,<sup>1</sup> but which we shall see meeting with quite another solution from the uncompromising and high-souled Antigone.

Now Hercules has only one more favor to ask, and that is, to hasten the funeral pyre, since :

*This is my rest from ills, this my last end.*

Hyllus reluctantly consents, distinctly laying all the blame on the gods :

Ascribe the injustice to the gods ;

They gave him being — bear the name

Of fathers, yet can view his pangs unmoved.—(1261 seq.)

And the drama ends with this brief moral, from the chorus :

Ye have beheld the mighty fall,

Beheld these recent woes, unnumbered, strange ;

But all were wrought by Jove.

*Οὐδὲν τούτων ὄτι μὴ Ζεὺς.*

The filial love and obedience of Hyllus commend him to

<sup>1</sup> Hyllus yields his own convictions of right to the *authority* of his father. His first answer is, that he would rather die than marry her who was the occasion of his mother's death and his father's calamity, a deed which none would do, who was not smitten as with a plague by the *avenging Deities*: *θεοῖς μὴ ἑ ἀλαστέρων νοσοῖ*, 1237.

our regard. He was a pattern son; but he was more pious towards his father, and more gentle even towards his erring mother, than he was reverential to the gods or obedient to the dictates of his own conscience. The woman's love and charity of Deianira, her conjugal fidelity and submission to the will of her unfaithful lord, and the speechless agony with which she goes away to find her last consolation, and her best vindication in death, reflect the essential features of many a *tragedy in real life*. But we sorrow over the darkness of the age which knew no better remedy than suicide for heavy calamities; while we deplore the blindness of human nature, which not unfrequently brings ruin on itself in the very endeavor to shun the ills of life. The choral songs, in this piece, are not of the highest order of poetical or moral excellence, though they breathe the simplicity and purity befitting virgins.

The leading character of the drama is the least perfect, and attaches to himself the smallest measure of our sympathy. The physical hero<sup>1</sup> of a barbarous age, battling incessantly with wild beasts and savage men, he has all the faults of Samson, and many more, without all his virtues or extenuating circumstances. He was anything but a Nazarite in regard to wine and strong drink. If the lying messenger may not be believed when he represents him as expelled, in a state of intoxication, from the banquet of Eurytus, the manner in which the story is received, to say nothing of the inebriated Hercules of other dramas,<sup>2</sup> shows that the story was not, in itself, incredible. One Delilah at a time was not enough for Hercules; though, in that respect, he was no worse than his father. With all his weaknesses and imperfections, the son of Manoah was superior, morally and religiously, to the son of Jove; and though there are not a few circumstances of grandeur attending his tragical end, yet the apotheosis of Hercules, on Mt. Oeta, can scarcely be com-

<sup>1</sup> Compare his lamentation over his wasted *muscles* (1090 seq.) with that of Milo, for whom Cicero expresses so much contempt. De Senec. ix. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Eur. Alc. 799, seq.

pared, in moral sublimity, with the self-sacrificing and triumphant death of Samson, at Gaza, who slew more of his enemies and the enemies of his country and his God, in his death, than he slew in his life.

But neither his relationship to Jove, nor his numerous sacrifices, can save him from the retribution due to his sins; and, in the righteous providence of the supreme, the injured wife is made the unintentional instrument of that retribution: her robbed and wounded affections the medium through which that retribution is visited on his head. The retributive government of the Most High, his universal providence, and his particular care over his children (though they are children by natural or rather *unnatural* generation, and not by creation, still less by spiritual regeneration), the inspiration and divine authority of oracles, the acceptableness of vows and bloody sacrifices, and the divine appointment of afflictions to all of mortal race, especially to all who are raised up to be great public benefactors, are among the theological lessons, which seem to be involved in the plot of the Trachiniae, or directly inculcated in the dialogue.

Perhaps the myth of Hercules may contain an unconscious prophecy; gross indeed, darkened by ignorance, and defiled by sin, but still a prophecy, of a yet higher truth and a still deeper mystery: The son of Jove could be made perfect only through suffering; he could find life only in death, rest only by passing through life-long labors and a tragical end. While he dwelt on earth, he was an exile and a wanderer, often a sufferer and a servant; and it was only through the purifying power of suffering that he reached his apotheosis. If the *Logos* is the light of every man that cometh into the world, why may we not refer to him all the truth and goodness there is in the heroes and sages of the ancient heathen world, as well as in the prophets and kings of Israel; and see in the former, as well as in the latter, types and forerunners of the Messiah, whose office it was to awaken ideas and felt wants, which could be realized only in him who was "the Desire of all nations!"



*Philoctetes.*

The Philoctetes has one point of close contact with the Trachiniae, and also one point of close resemblance. For setting fire to the funeral pile on Mt. Oeta — a service which Hyllus shrunk, at last, from performing in person — Philoctetes was rewarded with the possession of the bow and arrows of Hercules. On the way to the siege of Troy, he lands, with the other Grecian warriors, on the island of Chrysa, to offer sacrifices to the god of the island, and there receives a deadly wound from the bite of a serpent, the guardian of the sacred enclosure; and the Greeks, disturbed in their sacrifices by his cries of anguish, and moved also by the offensive odor of the wound, convey him to an uninhabited portion of the isle of Lemnos, and there leave him to perish or to support himself, as he can, by his famous arrows. In the tenth year of the war, taught at length by the prophecies of Calchas and Helenus, that Troy cannot be taken without the arrows of Hercules, they send Ulysses and Neoptolemus to bring them, with their present owner, to the camp. Ulysses would fain take the bow and arrows by fraud, and then carry off the archer himself by force. Neoptolemus falls in, for a time, with the plan of the inventful Ulysses; but, after he has got possession of the arrows, he relents, refuses to succeed by such base means, and actually restores the arrows to their rightful owner; when Hercules appears, reconciles Philoctetes to the plan, and sends him voluntarily to aid in completing the siege of Troy. The arrows of Hercules, and the reappearance of that hero on the stage, are the point of contact of which we spoke.

The point of resemblance is the intolerable physical suffering, to which the principal character is subject, and the paroxysms of which are exhibited on the stage. But here the resemblance ceases with the mere external suffering. The spirit of the sufferers is entirely different: Hercules longs for death, and demands the coöperation of his friends in hastening his fiery apotheosis. Philoctetes clings to life,

though forsaken of all his friends (and even after he has been robbed of his faithful bow), and drags out an existence of ten long years, nursing all the while an incurable wound, obtaining a precarious subsistence by shooting the birds that chanced to come near his den, and then crawling, with extreme pain and difficulty, to the spot where they fell.

Besides the sympathy we feel for the patient toil and suffering of Philoctetes, and the painful interest which attaches to his Crusoe-like struggle to prolong life, the chief charm of the piece is the fine ethical contrast between the artful and unscrupulous son of Laertes, who holds and practises the jesuitical doctrine that the end sanctifies the means; and the frank, brave, and generous son of Achilles, who scorns lying, hates all disguise, and though he attempts, for a time, to walk in the crooked ways of his comrade, ere long breaks the shackles and acts out his own noble nature. This nice discrimination of character, like that which distinguishes the modern drama and romance, and the Shakspearean perfection of the plot, without sacrificing, however, one iota of the simplicity so characteristic of Grecian tragedy, have made this a favorite play with most modern readers.

We cannot dwell on the opening scene, in which Ulysses unfolds the web of artifice and falsehood by which he proposes to inveigle the unhappy wretch of his arrows; and then, with the ingenuity of the arch tempter, plies Neoptolemus with arguments and motives, *once for a brief portion of a day*, to be false to himself and to that father who hated falsehood as the gates of hell (Hom. II. 9, 312), and aid him in the execution of the plot. The reply of Neoptolemus is worthy of his parentage, and worthy of immortal remembrance among the noblest utterances of human lips :

If but to hear such words offends mine ear,  
 Son of Laertes, how I loathe the actions!  
 I stand prepared to seize the man by force,  
 But not by falsehood; on one foot sustained,  
 'Twere strange if he could match one manly might.  
 Yet know, O prince, I deem it nobler, far,  
 To fail with honor, than succeed by baseness.

But the artless youth is no match for the man of wiles, and soon yields to the tempter's sophistries and the tyrant's plea — alleged necessity. Ulysses goes away, offering the prayer :

May Hermes, god of wiles, be now our guide,  
And conquering Pallas, queen of rampired towns,  
Whose favoring presence evermore preserves me; (184-5.)

while Neoptolemus labors to justify himself and reconcile the choir, by the "flattering unction," that Philoctetes is but suffering the just punishment of his impiety.

Philoctetes is now seen dragging his wounded foot towards his solitary cave amid the rocks and trees, and shrieking for anguish. He welcomes the Grecian costume, in which they are clad, and anxiously inquires their errand. Neoptolemus tells him the story, partly true and partly false, in which he had been instructed by Ulysses, interweaving with it not a little of the history of the war, and the fortunes of the heroes, and eliciting from Philoctetes comments on the character of those heroes, together with the touching tale of his own misfortunes. The death of Ajax and Antilochus calls forth complaints from a heart oppressed by its own griefs, and almost despairing of divine justice :

Ah, whither, whither must I look, since these  
Have perished, and the vile Ulysses lives; (428-30.)

while, on the other hand, the safety of Thersites provokes the more rebellious comment :

Aye, fit he should; for nothing vile is lost;  
Such the gods visit with peculiar care.  
How shall I judge, or how extol the gods,  
Proved by the actions I would praise, unjust! (446 seq.)

And these remarks receive the partial assent of Neoptolemus, though in less impious language :

War never sweeps away  
The vile and worthless, but destroys the good.

As Neoptolemus, at length, rises to depart, professedly to his own land, offended by the injustice of Ulysses and the Atridae brothers, Philoctetes importunes him by his sorrows, and adjures him by Jove, the suppliant's aid (*πρὸς αὐτοῦ Ζηνὸς ἰκεσίῳ*, 484), to take him with him. This prayer is seconded by the chorus, who bid him beware of the *Nemesis* of the gods (518), if he refuse. With seeming reluctance, the request is, at length, granted, and Philoctetes retires to take a last farewell of his home that is not a home (*ἄουκον ἐσολήσιν*, 534). As he returns, bringing the herb that soothes his wound, and the much-coveted irresistible arms of Hercules, he is seized by sudden and dreadful paroxysms of pain in his foot, during which he entrusts the arms to the care of Neoptolemus, adjuring him, by the gods, not to yield them to any other hands, and charging him also to propitiate envy (*τὸν Φθόνον δὲ πρόσκυσσον*,<sup>1</sup> 776); that is, to deprecate the *jealousy* of the gods, lest those arms should become a source of many woes to him, as they had been to their former possessors; as if the possession of so great a prize were a good fortune so superhuman, as might well excite the jealousy of heaven. After a succession of pangs so unwonted that they seem to the sufferer ominous of impending evil, he finds relief, at length, in sleep, and the chorus sing a brief and beautiful ode to Sleep as the sorrow-soothing, life-blessing (*εὐάτων*), healing (*παιῶν*) power (827).

While *he* sleeps, the conflict begins in the breast of his captor; and when he awakes, and the time comes for action, the son of Achilles is paralyzed. The wretched man is now entirely at his mercy. The way is clear to take him on board the ship by fraud and then by force convey him to Troy. But he cannot do the base deed :

All must be ill,  
When man the bias of his soul<sup>2</sup> forsakes,  
And does a deed unseemly. —(902-3.)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aesch. Prom. 935 : *οἱ προσκυνούντες τὴν Ἀδρόστειαν σοφοί*; and Ps. 2, 12 : *Kiss* the son, lest he be angry, etc. The Greek word means worship, *kiss the hand to*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *τὴν αὐτοῦ φέσιν*, 902.

Great Jove direct me ! shall I twice be proved  
A villain : first, concealing sacred truth ;  
Then, uttering words of falsehood ?—(908-9.)

Truth and honor at length prevail. He frankly reveals to the exile the purpose of the voyage, and urges him by every motive of duty and interest, of patriotism and piety, to go with free consent, and help to finish the siege of Troy. But resentment for his wrongs is too deep. He refuses, demands back his bow, paints in lively colors the baseness of the fraud that has been practised upon him ; and, as if he had nothing to expect from human justice or divine compassion, calls on the rocks and trees to witness the wrong and sympathize with him in his calamities.

Unable to withstand the appeal, the generous son of Achilles is about to restore the bow to its rightful owner, when the master of the plot rushes in, from his concealment, and forbids the surrender, pleading the divine will in justification of his course :

It is Jove,  
Yes, Jove, supreme controller of the land ;  
Jove thus hath willed, and I but do his will. — (989-90.)

"Detested wretch," answers Philoctetes, pleading at once his own cause and the character of the gods :

Detested wretch ! what falsehood dost thou frame !  
The gods alleging ; thou dost tax the gods  
With lies, to gloss thine own dissembling guile !— (991-2.)

And in the dialogue which ensues, he gives vent to his sense of justice, and his religious faith, in the following strain of mingled sarcasms, arguments, and curses :

How can ye serve the gods in prayer ? how slay  
The votive victims, if I share your bark !  
How pour libations due ? Such was the plea  
On which ye first expelled me. Curses on ye !  
Ye who have wronged me thus, yourselves shall meet  
An equal doom, if Heaven cares aught for justice.  
I know, I know it does ; for, never else  
Would ye have voyaged for a wretch like me,  
Had not a goad from heaven itself constrained you.—(1022 seq.)

Ulysses bids him welcome to remain. The arms of Hercules are all they want. With them, perchance, himself can gain the prize, which Heaven intended for Philoctetes, but which he rejects. Neoptolemus waives his decision till the ship is ready, and they have offered prayers and vows to the gods (1077), in the hope that time and divine power will yet change the purpose of Philoctetes.

Meanwhile the conflict is fearful in the mind of the exile, aggravated by occasional spasms of physical pain, and expressed, now in argument with the chorus, now in pathetic apostrophes to the crags and caverns, wild beasts and birds. The chorus, loyal at once to their earthly and their heavenly lords,<sup>1</sup> argue thus :

The doom, the doom of Heaven<sup>2</sup>—no treacherous scheme,  
Framed by my hand, hath wrought thee this!—(1116.)

One moment, he bids them go and leave him to his fate. The next, he adds :

Go not, I pray, by Jove, who adds the curses.  
Μὴ, πρὸς ἀπαίου<sup>3</sup> Διός, ἔλθῃς, ἰκετεύω.—(1182.)

Resolved at length, he asks but one boon, a sword or an axe, that he may put an end to his life, and go to his father in Hades (1210).<sup>4</sup>

Ulysses and Neoptolemus now reappear on the stage, in impassioned dialogue : the latter intent on restoring the bow to its owner ; the former remonstrating with him, arguing the *inexpediency* of his course, and threatening him with the vengeance of the Greeks ; to which the latter replies, in a high tone of ethical philosophy, not always found in public men, or even in ethical systems, that justice is better (stronger) than expediency ; and that, with justice on his side, he fears

<sup>1</sup> The chorus consists of the sailors in the ship of Ulysses and Neoptolemus.

<sup>2</sup> πόντος βαμβόρων, 1116.

<sup>3</sup> Compare what is said of the goddesses, *Ἄρα*, in the Article on the Theology of Aeschylus, Bib. Sac. April 1859, p. 370 ; also below on *Electra*, 111.

<sup>4</sup> Compare the expression "gathered to his fathers," so often applied to patriarchs and pious kings in the history of the Old Testament.

not his threats. The Greek is worthy to be placed on record, and to be written in the heart of every scholar :

‘Ἄλλ’ εἰ δίκαια, τῶν σοφῶν κρείσσωπάδε.—(1248.)

Ἐὖν τῷ δικαίῳ τὸν σὸν οὐ ταρβῶ φόβον.—(1251.)<sup>1</sup>

Then, turning to Philoctetes, and finding him more resolved than ever not to go willingly to Troy, he gives him the bow. Ulysses rushes in to prevent, threatens to recover it by force; and is threatened, in turn, with the drawn bow in the hand of its owner. But Neoptolemus lays his hand upon him, and intreats him, by the gods, to forbear. The hero's heart now opened by generous treatment, Neoptolemus again plies him with arguments: tells him (invoking Jove, the god and guardian of oaths (*Ζῆνα ὄρκιον*),<sup>2</sup> to witness his unsullied truth) that he is now suffering the penalty of divine providence (*ἐκ Δεῖας τύχης*, 1326), for treading with rash foot on hallowed ground; and he never can be cured till, of his own free will, borne to Troy, he is healed by the sons of Esculapius; in proof of which he cites the prophecy of Helenus, the best of prophets (*ἀριστόμαντις*, 1338). Philoctetes is much moved, hesitates for a season, but at length refuses to submit to such dishonor, and calls on Neoptolemus to fulfil his pledge and conduct him home. Neoptolemus, finding argument unavailing, consents; and, bidding the exile lean on his shoulder, is already on his way to the ship, when, in an emergency worthy the interposition of a god, *dignus vindice nodus*, Hercules appears from his celestial seat (*οὐρανίας ἔδρας προλιπών*, 1414), bringing the mandate of Jove, revealing to him the speedy fall of Troy, bidding him bring the spoils to *his* pyre; and charging him, last of all and most of all, to be ever pious towards the gods:

Once more must Troy be taken by my arms;  
And O remember, when her lofty towers

<sup>1</sup> Compare Shakspeare's Henry VI: "Thrice is he armed, who hath his quarrel just."

And Jul. Caes.: "There is no terror, Cassius, in thy threats," etc.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 1289, where he swears by "the Sacred Majesty of Most High Zeus,"—*ἔργον Ζηνὸς ὑψίστου σέβας*.

Are laid in ruins, to revere the gods.

Second to this all else great Jove esteems.

True piety alone defies the grave ;<sup>1</sup>

Let mortals live or die, this blooms forever.—(1440—4.)

He yields immediately to the voice of the god. A few words of farewell to his rocky home, and of prayer for a safe voyage, and they set out forthwith for the shore, whither great Destiny impels him, and the advice of friends, and the all-conquering deity, who brought it to pass.

Ἐνθ' ἡ μεγάλη μοῖρα κομίζει,  
Γνώμη τε φίλων, χῶ πανδαμάτωρ  
Δαίμων ὅς ταυτ' ἐπέκρανε.

In the former part of this tragedy, the ethical element prevails over the theological. The right and the expedient are set over against each other. Duty and interest, truth and sophistry, strive for the mastery. Gratitude and resentment, desire of revenge and love of society, fear of pain and love of life, struggle for the ascendancy. The human heart is laid open, and its springs of motive, action, and passion, are laid bare, with a skill not unworthy of our own Shakspeare.

But as the drama draws towards a close, religious motives assert their native supremacy. The divine plans and purposes move on steadily and irresistibly towards their accomplishment. The light of prophecy shines on the future ; and at length heaven opens, and the son of Jove descends in person to disclose the will of the gods, and to make willing the appointed human instrument. May *we* not see, here, in the light of revelation, what was imperfectly revealed to the consciousness of the poet or his audience, a dim foreshadowing of these great truths of Christian theology? God has foreordained whatever comes to pass. Yet even these foreordained events can be accomplished only through appointed instrumentalities. Those instrumentalities may be despised and rejected by men ; but, in due time, they will be brought out, though it be from the deepest obscurity, and

<sup>1</sup> Οὐ γὰρ ἠνάσσεια συνδράσκει βροτοῖς.



exalted to the highest honor. They may be unwilling; but they shall be made willing, in the day of God's power. They may appear too feeble to achieve the appointed work; but they shall be mighty, through God. And, if need be, God himself will interpose by prophecy, and oracles, and messengers from heaven. Men have always believed in revelations, of some kind or other, from God; and though these have been but dim shadows, they foretell a substantial reality; if you pronounce them all counterfeits, they imply the genuine coin. And wherever you find the *pure metal* bearing this oft-counterfeited form and image, the presumption is, that it is the genuine coin. When you find that which purports to be a revelation from God for *all mankind*, which meets not only the general expectation of a revelation, but answers to all the highest aspirations, the purest intuitions, and the deepest longings of the *race*, there is certainly a strong presumption that it came down from heaven.

### *Ajax.*

In *Ajax*, Ulysses is again a prominent actor, exhibiting the same character as in *Philoctetes*, the tragic Ulysses being generally an exaggeration, if not also a misrepresentation of the leading traits in the much-scheming hero of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*. Here, as in the *Odyssey*, he is under the special guidance<sup>1</sup> and guardianship of Athena, who appears on the stage not, like Hercules in *Philoctetes*, to reveal the future and bring the drama to a magnificent close; but at the beginning of the piece, conversing familiarly with her favorite like another, though a wiser and more powerful, self; acquainting him with facts which no mortal eye had seen; interpreting to him the mysterious conduct of Ajax, and instructing him in those arts and wiles, of which he was himself, already, the acknowledged master — in strict accordance with the scriptural doctrine, "to him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly." It is a point

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 35: *σὴ κυβερνήματι χερσὶ.*

which has been much disputed among critics, whether Athena is seen by the bodily eye, or only by the mind of Ulysses; Hermann, Lobeck, and some others, maintaining the former opinion, but the latter being the prevailing sentiment among scholars. There is great weight in the names on the other side; still this latter is the most obvious interpretation of the language of Ajax :

ὦ Φθίγγι' Ἀθάνας, φίλτατης ἐμοὶ θεῶν,  
 ὧς εὐμαδέες σου, κἄν ἀποπτῶς ἦς, ὄμωκ  
 Φώνημ' ἀκούω, καὶ ξυναρπάζω φρενὶ.  
 O, accents of Minerva, to my soul  
 Dearest of powers immortal, how mine ear  
 Thy welcome voice perceives, and with my mind  
 I grasp the sounds, though thou art viewless still.

However that may be; it is admitted on both sides, that the goddess is seen by the audience, sustained aloft by stage-machinery; and she carries on an extended dialogue with Ulysses, and a briefer one with the frenzied Ajax.

The scene is before the tent of Ajax, on the plain of Troy. The time is shortly after the death of Achilles, whose arms, awarded to Ulysses by the Atridae brothers, have incensed Ajax to madness; and, in a fit of frenzy, blinded and made sport of by Athena, he turns his hands against the unoffending flocks, mistaking them for the Greeks; and, after dealing dreadful slaughter among them, he drives home the rest in triumph as captives, selecting two rams as Agamemnon and Ulysses, whom he reserves for further torture and a more ignominious death. Athena glories in these frantic deeds, as all the result of her agency :

I urged him still, and lured to evil toils  
 The man, misled by frenzy's impulse wild :<sup>5</sup>

She invites Ulysses to look on his fallen rival and enjoy that

<sup>1</sup> This frenzy is designated by various names, as *μανίσειν νόσος* here, 59; *θελα νόσος*, 186; and *ἐταν οὐρανίαν*, 196: and these *maddening paroxysms*, this *πλάγη* from the gods, this *judicial blindness from heaven* involves him in *ἔρκη κακῆ*, in *evil toils*. Compare the "evil net." Eccl. 9: 12. Tecmessa adds below (953), that Athena does it all for the sake of Ulysses.

sweetest of all laughs, a laugh over a fallen foe (79); a sentiment not much in the spirit of the golden rule, though uttered by the daughter of Jove and the goddess of wisdom. He looks on, while the goddess plays with her victim and mocks him in his madness, winding up with the triumphant exclamation :

Thou seest, Ulysses, Heaven's resistless might !

He is moved, first, to pity, at seeing even his enemy thus yoked up with fatal blindness (*ἄτη κακῆ*, 123) ; and then he is led to reflect, that such might easily become his own lot :

I see that we, who live, are nothing more  
Than a vain image and a fleeting shade.<sup>1</sup>

To which she adds this moral lesson, suggested by the life and fall of Ajax :

This, then observing, dare not thou to breathe  
High words of swollen pride against the gods ;  
Nor boast presumptuous, if in martial deeds,  
Or treasured wealth, thou pass thy fellow man.  
A day o'erthrows, a day to light restores  
All mortal things; and still the heavenly powers  
Regard the lowly, while they loathe the proud.—(127 seq.)

We understand, better, the reason for this warning, and the moral of the whole drama, when, towards its close (760 seq.), we learn, indirectly, from the mouth of the prophet Calchas, that Ajax, though of mortal race, has entertained thoughts not becoming a mortal. When he set out for the Trojan war, his father had given him this parting counsel :

Seek, my son, in fight  
To conquer, but still conquer through the gods.

But he made this arrogant and impious reply: [761]

Father, with heavenly aid a coward's hand  
May grasp the prize of conquest; I confide  
To win such trophies e'en without the gods. — (767 seq.)

<sup>1</sup> *Εἶδ' ἂν ἢ κόβηται σκιδν*, (126). Cf. Aesch. Prom. 447; Job 8, 9; Eccl. 8, 13; Ps. 144, 4, et passim.

Again when, in the midst of the fight, Athena incited him, in common with the others, to battle against the enemy, he replied in language dreadful and not to be spoken (*δεινὸν ἄρ-  
ρήτόν τ' ἔπος*, 773):

O, queen! to other Argives lend thine aid;  
No hostile might shall break where Ajax stands.

And now she laughs at his calamity, because he has despised her reproof.

While the frenzy still remains upon the unhappy Ajax, and none but Ulysses, under the teaching of Athena, understands fully what he has done, or why he has done it, the chorus (consisting of sailors, who followed him from Salamis), mourn over his madness, and impute it to a stroke from Jove (*πληγῇ Διὸς*, 137), or Artemis, or Enyalios (Mars), for some neglected sacrifice; at any rate, some plague from the gods (*θεία νόσος*, 186) — for surely he could not have done such a deed in his own right mind — and they pray that Zeus and Phoebus will avert the spread of the evil report. Tecmessa, the captive concubine of Ajax, now joins with them in their lamentation over his fall, recounts to them what she knows of the events of that dreadful night, and represents him as uttering dreadful words, taught him by some *δαίμων*, and no man (243).

Meanwhile Ajax recovers from his paroxysm and awakes to the sudden consciousness that he is the sport of angry gods and the scoffing of unfriendly men. He prays for darkness and the shades of Erebus to receive him, for these are indeed his brightest light (*ὠν σκότος, ἔμουν φάος κ. τ. λ.*, 394, etc.). He calls on his comrades to slay him, and intimates his purpose to take his own life, justifying that purpose by such arguments as these:

It shames a man to seek protracted life,  
Who sees no limit to encircling woes.  
I count the man most worthless, who would feed  
His wavering soul with vain delusive hope:  
To live with glory, or with glory die,  
Befits the noble. — (473 seq.)

Tecmessa entreats him, in pity to her woes, and in love to their son,<sup>1</sup> and conjures him by *Zeus ἐφέστιος*, the guardian of domestic ties, not to take his life. Ajax, not yet fully cured of his impiety, declares that he owes no reverence to the gods (590). After breathing out hatred to his enemies and impiety towards the gods for a time, he *seems* to be somewhat softened by the words of his wife and the sight of his son, and professes his intention to seek the baths of the seashore, that he may wash away his pollution (*λύμαθ' ἀγνίσας ἐμέ*, 655) and escape the weighty anger of the goddess, the gorgon-faced invincible daughter of Zeus (656, cf. 450); and on his way thither he will hide, where none but Night and Pluto will ever see it more, the hated sword, which he received from Hector at the close of their single combat, and which, from that day to the last fatal night, has been his constant curse. Moreover, he will yield obedience to the powers that be; and, as change is the law of nature (a law which the poet beautifully illustrates through his lips, 670 seq.), so he will, henceforth, change his whole course:

Henceforth we'll pay meet reverence to the gods,  
And learn submission to the sons of Atreus. — (666-7).<sup>2</sup>

And the chorus break forth into a song, accompanied by the dance, at the marvellous change and happy reconciliation.

It is only a feint, however, to escape observation and find opportunity to execute his fixed and fatal purpose. Instructed by the prophet Calchas, his brother Teucer sends a message to prevent Ajax from leaving the house. But the messenger arrives too late. He has already gone out. Tecmessa and the choir, half distracted, seek him in every direction, but find him already fallen on his sword. The choir lay the blame on Ulysses and the sons of Atreus. But the submissive and pious Tecmessa responds:

<sup>1</sup> The passage resembles in pathos the parting address of Andromache to Hector, Hom. Il. 6, 407, seq.

<sup>2</sup> The same association of duty to God and to civil rulers, as occurs often in the scriptures, cf. 1 Pet. 2 : 17.

It had not fallen thus, but Heaven decreed.

Οὐκ ἂν τὰδ' ἴστη τῆδε, μὴ θεῶν μέγα.—(950.)

'T was by the gods he perished, not by them.

Θεοῖς τέθνηκεν οὗτος, οὐ κείνουσι, οὔ.—(970.)

And she consoles herself with the assurance that his death, though sad to her and sweet to his enemies, was yet more joyous to himself :

The death

He prayed for, wished for, now hath closed his woes.

Contrary to the usual law of the Greek drama, the suicide takes place on the stage, while the wife and the choir are seeking in vain to find him; and it exhibits some characteristic, some instructive features. Ajax has now but one favor to ask of Jove: and that is, that he will send Teucer to give him due burial, that his body may not be a prey to dogs and birds. He next invokes infernal Hermes, guide of souls (*πομπαῖον Ἑρμῆν χθόνιον*, 833), to put him well to sleep by a speedy and easy death. Much of his dying breath is poured out in prayers and curses on the heads of his enemies :

I next invoke to aid me those dread powers,  
 Forever virgins, and of mortal wrongs  
 Forever conscious: swift in keen pursuit,  
 The awful Furies,<sup>1</sup> to attest my doom,  
 By the base sons of Atreus basely slain,  
 And plunge the traitors in an equal fate.  
 As they behold my blood by mine own hand  
 Poured forth, so be their best-loved children's hands  
 Imbrued in theirs — thus self-destroyers too.  
 Come, ye avenging Furies, swift and stern,  
 Quaff their warm blood, nor spare the peopled host.  
 Ἴτ', ὦ ταχέϊαι ποινμοί τ' Ἑρινύες,  
 Γεύεσθε, μὴ φείδεσθε, πανδήμου στρατοῦ. — (843, 4.)

Then, imploring the Sun to bear the tidings to his aged father and mother, he welcomes death, bids farewell to earthly scenes, and dies with these words on his lips :

<sup>1</sup> αἰεὶ δ' ὀρέσας πάντα τῶν βροτοῖς πάθη  
 σεμνὰς Ἑρινύς τανύποδας. — (836, 7.)

The rest will I say to those below in Hades.

Τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἐν Ἄιδου τοῖς κάτω μνησσομαι.<sup>1</sup>

The lamentation of Teucer over the dead body, is worthy of notice as expressive of his full belief in an overruling Providence, in *contrast* with the scepticism which is implied as more or less prevailing in the minds of others.

Did not the Furies forge that slaughtering sword,<sup>2</sup>  
And hell's dread monarch, ruthless artist, frame  
That belt ?<sup>2</sup> These things, I deem, and all the events  
Befalling mortal man, are by the gods  
Always assigned. *To these, whose mind dissents ?*  
*Let him enjoy his thoughts : But these are mine.*—(1034 seq.)

Herein, doubtless, the poet expresses his own believing, and at the same time tolerant, spirit; and both in opposition to a spirit which he saw widely prevalent around him. The higher classes were inclined to scepticism, while the masses at Athens were believing, but intolerant of any departure from the religion of the state. Sophocles has a settled faith in the providence and government of the gods; but is willing that others should enjoy, with equal freedom, their own religious opinions.

After the death of Ajax, which is the natural catastrophe of the drama, the piece is still prolonged through some four hundred verses (from one quarter to one third of the whole), in a strife between Teucer on the one hand, and the sons of Atreus on the other, touching the burial of the body; which is finally terminated in favor of his burial, by the intervention of Ulysses, who is too politic to sanction any gratuitous or unprofitable crime. Menelaus charges Ajax with treason, and

<sup>1</sup> The reader will not fail to observe how the expectation of a conscious existence after death is constantly implied, as in Aeschylus, so in Sophocles. Philoctetes wishes to go and see his departed father; and here Ajax expects soon to converse with the inhabitants of the unseen world.

<sup>2</sup> The sword which Hector gave Ajax, and the belt which Ajax gave Hector; the former of which Ajax plunged into his own breast, and the latter bound Hector to the car of Achilles, 1027 seqq., cf. Hom. Il. 7, 363. See also 665, where Ajax himself, in view of the same fact, says: ἐχθρῶν ἔδωρα δῶρα κ οἷς δνήσιμα.

argues at some length the necessity, to the state, and to the maintenance of law and order, that he should be made an example. Teucer denies, in the first place, that Ajax was ever subject to the Atridae, and then pleads the higher law of Heaven :

Conscious of right,

The soul may proudly soar.

*Men.* Is it, then, right

To grace with honor the base wretch who slew me ?

*Teuc.* Slew thee ! O, wondrous ! slain, and yet alive ?

*Men.* The gods preserved my life ; in his intent I died.

*Teuc.* Thou dare not, then, despise the gods,

Thus by the gods preserved. — (1125 seq.)

As Menelaus retires, and Teucer, with the wife and child, hasten to effect the interment, Agamemnon appears to enter his imperial prohibition, repeats his brother's reasoning, and heaps threats and abuses on the head of Teucer ; and Ulysses interposes to plead, not so much the cause of Ajax and Teucer, as the welfare of the army, the honor of the commander, and the eternal laws of Heaven :

Thus to degrade the chief, would shame thyself.

Not him alone, but *Heaven's eternal laws*,

Wouldst thou contemn. Unjust it is to wrong

The brave in death, though most abhorred in life.—(1348 seq.)

Ulysses prevails. Teucer thanks him, though still imprecating dire curses on the head of the sons of Atreus from the revered fathers of Olympus, unforgetting *Erinys*, and unailing (literally, fulfilling) *Dike* :

Τοιγάρ σφ' Ὀλύμπου τοῦδ' ὁ πρῆσβέων πατήρ,

Μνήμων τ' Ἐρινύς, καὶ τελεσφόρος Δίκη

Κακοὺς κακῶς φθείρειαν,<sup>1</sup> κ. τ. λ. — (1389 seq.)

<sup>1</sup> *Evilly destroy those evil men.* Cf. Mat. 21, 41: *κακοὺς κακῶς ἀπολέσει αὐτοὺς.* This formula, so frequent in classical and sacred Greek, is not mere *paronomasia*, but an apt expression of the great law of *justice* and *fitness*. Campbell well renders it: he will bring those wretches to a wretched death.



Preparations are made for the burial; the hollow trench (*κόλην κάπετον*), the ablution of holy water (*λουτρῶν ὁσίων*), the arms which cover the body, and which are to be buried with it; and the scene closes, where all earthly scenes, sooner or later, close upon all of mortal race, with those honors which friends pay to friends gathered around their graves. The voice of nature, which is the voice of God, has taught men, in all ages and nations however rude, to render certain offices, rights, duties, dues,<sup>1</sup> to their departed friends; and these have almost always been such as not only to honor their memories, but such as imply, more or less clearly, a belief in their continued existence after death, with the same essential nature and character, if not also with the same identical wants, and in the very same pursuits, as during the present life.

The Greeks and Romans deemed these rites essential to the repose of the soul; nay, to its very entrance into the world of spirits. Hence the burial of the dead was esteemed the most sacred duty of surviving friends. The stranger even was pronounced inhuman, who would not throw earth upon a dead body, which he might chance to find unburied; and, though it was the keenest vengeance which an enemy could inflict upon a fallen foe, not to suffer him to be buried; yet for an *enemy* to carry this vengeance too far, were to provoke the vengeance of Heaven. When Paul preached the doctrine of the resurrection on Mars' Hill, the Athenians mocked. Yet in their own view there was a mysterious connection between the burial of the body and the repose of the soul; and in this idea, as well as in the care with which they, in common with all nations, preserved the entire body or the ashes of the dead, we see an "unconscious prophecy" of the resurrection. Do no evil to the dead (1154); speak no evil of the departed, for they are with the gods, and under their special protection: these sentiments are written, everywhere, in Greek literature; in the laws of legislators, in the maxims of philosophers, in the writings of

<sup>1</sup> Τὰ δίκαια, νομιζόμενα, προσήκοντα, κτεριζόμενα, funera justa, etc., are among the expressions used by the Greeks and Romans to denote these dues.

scholars, and in the hearts of the people. The *Iliad* of Homer and the *Ajax* of Sophocles could not come to an end till the minds of the readers or hearers were put to rest respecting the burial of those whose right of interment had been called in question. And this question is the central point and subject matter of that drama of Sophocles (*Antigone*), which won for him the highest honors in the gift of the Athenian people.

Certain criminals, who had been put to death by the state, were deprived of the right of burial, as an additional punishment. Suicide did not incur this dreaded penalty, though sometimes the *hand*, which had done the deed, was cut off and buried by itself, as it were, in unconsecrated ground. Indeed, the frequency of suicide is one of the striking features of the Greek drama,<sup>1</sup> and a marked characteristic of Grecian and Roman as compared with Christian civilization. If not more frequent among the masses, it was less condemned, nay more approved, in the higher classes. It was not only celebrated by poets, but justified by moralists,<sup>2</sup> and it was expected of heroes, if they could not live honorably, to die honorably by their own hand. Christianity inspires its genuine disciples with a higher appreciation of the sacredness of life, a deeper reverence for the authority of God, a more awful dread of appearing, unbidden, before his judgment seat; and, above all, a more submissive, humble, cheerful, childlike trust in the all-wise, all-good providence of a heavenly Father.

Defective as are the morality and the theology of *Ajax* — burlesque as it almost seems to be, on heroism and on divinity — still it teaches, forcibly, one great lesson, which is most sedulously inculcated in the scriptures: and that is, the helplessness, the littleness, the nothingness of great men, when they set themselves in opposition to the laws and government of God; and the folly of wise men, when they imag-

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<sup>1</sup> There are suicides in more than half the extant dramas of Sophocles, and in some of them repeated instances.

<sup>2</sup> Even Plato's authority was claimed for, as well as against, suicide by different disciples, though it seems to us to be clear and decisive against it.

ine they can be anything, or do anything, independent of the blessing of Heaven. Nothing, short of the arrogant self-conceit and daring impiety of Ajax, could have reconciled the taste or the moral feelings of an Athenian audience, or of modern readers, to see him tossed about in the hands, and blown about by the breath, of Athena, like the feeblest prey in the paws of a sporting lion.

*Electra.*

The four remaining tragedies are all upon those fruitful themes of tragic interest, the houses of Pelops and of Labdacus. And here we come upon ground occupied in common by the three masters of Greek tragedy. The Choëphoroe of Aeschylus, the *Electra* of Sophocles, and the *Electra* of Euripides, are all on the same subject: the vengeance of Heaven on Clytemnestra and Aegistheus, for the murder of Agamemnon, of which Orestes was the appointed instrument, and for which Electra had waited, till impatience had changed almost to despair. Their different methods of treating the same high theme, afford a fine opportunity for comparing these great masters.

Euripides, partly from the necessity of avoiding the track of his predecessors, and partly from faults inherent in his nature, has failed in his *Electra*. There are not wanting, in it, lofty sentiments and single passages of great power. But, on the whole, he has almost burlesqued this grandest of tragic themes by his unbecoming trivialities. Aeschylus, by introducing the tomb of Agamemnon on the stage, and carrying the purposed vengeance into speedy execution, has given a sublime exhibition of the irresistible decree of destiny and the overwhelming march of divine justice; though in the scarcely less grand portrait which he has drawn of Clytemnestra, justifying her murderous deed and claiming to be, herself, also the executioner of justice, as well as in the appearance of the Furies to Orestes, and the bewildering madness which comes over him, he represents Loxias and the Furies, wisdom and vengeance, as, for the time, in conflict. Sophocles transfers

the conflict to the breast of mortals, where joy and grief, hope and despair, faith and scepticism, false security and fearful forebodings, in alternate billows, go over the soul, while divine justice moves on tardily and stealthily, but surely to the infliction of the penalty, which meets the harmonious approval of Heaven, earth, and the powers beneath. "Aeschylus makes the Furies, so to speak, personifications of an impulse which wreaks itself upon the violator of natural order, whether he is engaged on the side of justice or not — of a blind power, which, like the fiery furnace in scripture, burns the ministers of the highest authority. Sophocles places the whole plot in the hands of Divine Intelligence, leaves the Furies but a very subordinate part, and does not imagine that any atonement is demanded, from Orestes, for a deed which the god has justified."<sup>1</sup> The punishment of the wicked is delayed, in Sophocles, till faith and hope have almost expired in the bosom of Electra, but agreeably to the solution of this mystery of divine providence in Plutarch's admirable treatise,<sup>2</sup> this delay is only that they may be deceived with false hopes of impunity, and that in the very moment of their seeming triumph, justice may overtake them, in a form and manner more befitting their crimes. The conception is bolder in Aeschylus, the poetry grander, and the theology more awful in its sublimity; but Sophocles surpasses his rival in the harmony and beauty of his religious sentiments, not less than he does in the dramatic interest which he excites by his marvellous succession of contrasts, his power in delineating character and the varied workings of the passions, and his skilful management of all the details of the plot.

The scene opens with a dialogue between Orestes, Agamemnon's son, and the old servant who snatched him, in infancy, from the hands of his murderers, and bore him to an asylum in foreign lands, and who now, after pointing out to him the objects of chief interest in the plain of Argos, brings him to the palace of his fathers; and *thus* strikes the key-note to the whole piece:

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<sup>1</sup> Woolsey's Preface to the *Electra* of Sophocles.

<sup>2</sup> *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*.

This is the home of Pelops's race, defiled  
 With frequent murders; on thy father's death,  
 From thy true sister's hand receiving thee,  
 I bore thee hence — preserved thee — trained thee up  
 To man, *avenger of thy father's blood.* — (10 seq.)

Orestes, in reply, details his own plan for *surprising*, and thus destroying, the murderers of his father, in obedience to the command of the oracle, and in righteous retribution for the *treachery* with which Agamemnon was slain :

When to the Pythian oracle I came,  
 A suppliant, asking how I should exact  
 Just retribution for my father's blood,  
 Phoebus, as thou shalt hear, this answer gave :  
 That I, devoid of arms or martial host,  
 Should strike, by stratagem, the righteous blow. — (32 seq.)

The audience are thus put in possession of a clew to the mazes of the plot, through which poor Electra is left to wander without any such guidance or support. While Orestes offers prayers to the gods of his country and his sires for success in the work, which, sent by the gods, he comes to accomplish, as a purifier (*καθαρτής*, 70) of his father's house, Electra is heard moaning within the palace; and, as they retire to do, *first*, the will of Loxias (*μηδὲν πρόσθεν ἢ τὰ Λοξίου*, 82), and to offer libations and garlands of hair on the tomb of Agamemnon, she comes upon the stage, gives vent to her sorrows, like the hapless nightingale; and, in the following dreadful imprecation, invokes the avenging powers :

Ye dark abodes of Dis and Proserpine,  
 Thou Hermes, guide to hell, thou awful Curse,  
 And ye dread Furies, offspring of the gods,<sup>1</sup>  
 Who on the basely-murdered look,  
 On those who mount, by stealth, the unhallowed couch :  
 Come, aid me, and avenge the blood  
 Of my beloved sire,  
 And give my absent brother to mine arms.  
 Alone no longer can I bear the weight  
 Of this o'erwhelming woe. — (110–120.)

<sup>1</sup> πότνη Ἄρὰ, σεμνά τε θεῶν παῖδες Ἐρινύες.

A choral dialogue ensues, between Electra and the chorus of noble women; in which they express their sympathy and strive to comfort her, among other consolations, with the assurance that a god of justice still reigns, and will, sooner or later, punish the wicked :

Still in yon starry heaven supreme,  
Jove, all-beholding, all-directing, dwells.  
To him commit thy vengeance. — (174 seq.)

At the same time, a graphic picture is drawn of the crime, as if it were a frightful living form, begotten of Fraud, brought forth by Lust, and originated by some unknown dreadful power :

Δόλος ἦν ὁ φράσας, ἔπος ὁ κτείνας,  
Δεινὰν δεινῶς προφυντεύσαντες  
Μορφὰν, εἴτ' οὖν θεὸς εἶτε βροτῶν  
Ἦν ὁ ταῦτα πρᾶσσων. — (197-200.)

These lines will strongly remind the reader of the scriptures, of the passage in the epistle to James (1 : 13—17), in which the apostle gives a similar *genesis* of Sin; but distinctly answers, in the negative, the question in regard to the divine authorship of sin, which the heathen poet leaves unanswered.

Meanwhile, Electra complains, Aegisthus sits on the throne of her father and insults the gods with libations at the hearth which he has sprinkled with that father's blood; Clytemnestra shares his bed and joins with him in celebrating, with dance and offerings to the gods, the anniversary of the murder; while *she* is compelled to dwell beneath the same roof with the murderers, waiting in vain the return of Orestes.

Chrysothemis now comes forth, from the palace, with funeral offerings to the dead, and reproves her sister for not submitting, like herself, to the ruling powers and the necessities of their lot. Electra replies, with great severity, charging her with weakness, and falseness to her father's name. Chrysothemis endeavors to soften her asperity by disclosing the severities which Aegisthus threatens to visit upon her (Electra), when he returns home. The audience know that

Aegisthus is to return home only to fall, himself, beneath the avenging stroke of Orestes, and they enjoy the contrast. But Electra knows it not. Still threats only brace her to resist the tyrant; only provoke her to the utterance of bitter scorn for her sister's cowardice. Failing to subdue her sister, Chrysothemis says, she will go on her errand :

*Elec.* What errand? Whither dost thou bear those off'rings?

*Chry.* My mother sends me, at my father's tomb

To make the due libation.

*Elec.* What! to him

Of all mankind her most detested foe?

*Chry.* And whom she murdered, since thou'lt have me say so.

*Elec.* By whom persuaded? Who hath counselled this?

*Chry.* From some nocturnal vision, as I deem. — (405-10.)

Chrysothemis relates the vision. It is rumored, that she saw Agamemnon again before her, returned to the light of life; that he took, again, his ancient sceptre, the sceptre of Aegisthus now, and planted it in the earth, and there sprung from it a blooming branch which overshadowed all the land of Mycenae.<sup>1</sup> Electra sees, in the vision, the shadow of the returning Orestes, and begs her sister not to offer the hateful libations<sup>2</sup> of her mother, but cast them to the winds, and lay upon the tomb, instead, a lock of hair from the head of each of the sisters, and the belt of Electra; and then, kneeling down beside it, pray for the *avenging interposition* of their *father from below*,<sup>3</sup> and the coming of their long-expected brother. Chrysothemis consents, and goes away to execute

<sup>1</sup> In Aeschylus, it will be remembered, Clytemnestra has a dream of the same purport, but the sign is different. She dreamed that she gave her breast to a dragon in the cradle of her son, and suckled it with her blood. This diversity of form with identity of substance illustrates the manner in which the poets felt at liberty to deal with the fables of the Greek mythology.

<sup>2</sup> *δυσμενείς χοάς*, 440. These offerings are spoken of below, 447, as *λυτήρια τοῦ φόνου*, intended to ransom or expiate the murder. Cf. 1490, where Electra says that to give the body of Aegisthus to the dogs and birds were the only adequate *λυτήριον τῶν πάλαι κακῶν*.

<sup>3</sup> In 459, 60, Electra declares her full belief that Agamemnon was concerned in sending the ill-boding dream to Clytemnestra.

the plan. The choral song, which succeeds, is full of confident predictions of speedy vengeance :

If true prophetic skill be mine,  
 If aught of wisdom's ray divine ;  
 Soon shall avenging justice, here,  
 Her own dread harbinger appear ;  
 With hand of might and threatening brow  
 She cannot, will not, linger now ;  
 But soon, my daughter, shall pursue  
 The track of guilt, and punish too. — (472 seq.)

The Antistrophe repeats the same idea in other words :

With many a foot of matchless speed,  
 With many a hand of deadly deed,  
 Erinys, veiled in ambush now,  
 With brazen tread, shall track the foe. — (488 seq.)

And the Epode concludes with a reference to the guilt of Pelops in slaying Myrtilus, and the woes which have ever since followed his devoted race :

Since Myrtilus, in ocean deep,  
 Was headlong hurled to death's cold sleep,  
 Hurled from his radiant car of gold,  
 With insult fierce and uncontrolled,  
 Nor woe hath passed, nor dire disgrace  
 Unfelt by this devoted race !<sup>1</sup> — (508 seq.)

Clytemnestra, herself, now comes upon the stage ; and, in a conversation with Electra, justifies her act, as in Aeschylus, though with less daring ; representing it as done in righteous retaliation for the sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia. Electra, in reply, explains the dire necessity of that sacrifice, as a satisfaction to the hunting-goddess Artemis, offended at the slaying of a stag in her sacred grove ; and though beginning with the deference due to the relation, yet her indigna-

<sup>1</sup> The language of this chorus (475—515) is strong and impassioned. The epithets are singularly apt and expressive. Observe, for instance, the *πρόμαντις Dike* ; the *πολύπους, καλκόπους, πολύχειρ Erinys*, and the description of the unhallowed, incestuous strugglings of a murderous marriage (*ἄλεκτρον ἔνομηφαι μαιφόνων γάμον ἀμειλίμαδ'*) attacking those whom it ought not.



tion kindles as she speaks, and she ends with renouncing all filial regard for a mother who has not only stained her hands with a husband's blood, but shamelessly published the motive by taking a murderous paramour to that husband's bed. Clytemnestra imprecates the vengeance of Artemis, her tutelary goddess, on the unnatural daughter, and then (having begged of Electra to desist from such *ill-omened* words, at least while she brings her offerings to the gods, a favor which Electra willingly grants in the confidence that offerings made by such blood-stained hands can only provoke the displeasure of Heaven), she pours forth prayers to tutelary Phoebus, that he will confirm or avert the doubtful import of her dream, according as it is propitious or adverse; concluding with this beautiful tribute to the divine omniscience :

What still remains unsaid, though I be mute,  
Is known, I deem, to thee, a potent god :<sup>1</sup>  
Nought can be hidden from the race of Jove.<sup>2</sup> — [657 seq.]

At this moment, and as the blinded Clytemnestra thinks, in answer to her prayers, the old servant enters, announcing, according to the preconcerted plan of deception, the death of Orestes. While he sets forth, in lively detail, the narrative of Orestes, overthrown in the chariot-race and slain on the very eve of a splendid triumph — a detail fitted to work powerfully on the sympathies of friends and foes — Electra gives herself up for lost, the chorus lament the utter extinction of the house of Pelops; and Clytemnestra, though touched by a momentary pang of maternal sorrow, yet drinks in the tale with ill-concealed satisfaction, and, on the whole, concludes, the doom he met became him well. To which Electra answers :

Hear, thou avenger of the recent dead,  
Hear, Nemesis.  
\*Ακουε, Νέμεισι τοῦ θανάτου ἀπίως. — (292.)

While Clytemnestra, with her fears all lulled preparatory to

<sup>1</sup> δαίμων' ἔνν'. —

<sup>2</sup> τοὺς ἐκ Διός

the approaching catastrophe, goes within the palace to reward the old servant for his good news, thus with her own hand admitting and welcoming the avenger, Electra remains deploring the destruction of all her hopes, and the chorus half reprove and half minister to her despair, in such strains as these :

Where are the vengeful bolts of Jove,  
Or where the beaming sun,  
If, deeds like these beholding, still  
Such deeds they calmly hide? —(823 seq.)

As Electra thus despairs and refuses to be comforted, Chrysothemis returns from the tomb of Agamemnon, rejoicing in the assurance that Orestes has already come, as is proved by the libations of fresh-flowing milk, the garland of flowers, and the locks of fresh-cut hair which she found upon the tomb, and which could have proceeded from no other source. But so far from gladdening the despairing heart of her sister, her own heart falls from the heights of hope and joy to the depths of sorrow and despair, at the positive assurance, derived from an eye-witness, that Orestes is no more. Yet gathering courage from despair, Electra resolves, herself, to execute the stroke of vengeance, and invites, but invites in vain, the coöperation of the timid and passive Chrysothemis, who hears unmoved, or moved only to pity, her sister's mad appeals to a sense of duty to the dead, and the desire of undying fame; while that sister, in turn, steeled by adversity and despair, casts off the remonstrances of sisterly affection seconded by the counsel of the choir, and resolves to do the deed alone. And in the succeeding chorus, even the choir, carried away by sympathy with such heroism and such misfortunes, cannot withhold their approval of her love of honor and her fear of Jove.

Waging, with guilt, eternal war,  
That on thine honored name might rest  
A double meed — approved by far  
At once the wisest daughter and the best.

. . . . . in every law divine  
Which blooms with holiest awe above,  
A steadfast piety was thine,  
The love of honor and the fear of Jove. —(1085 seq.)

At the same time, they express their confidence, that :

. . . . . if Themis reigns on high,  
And Jove's blue lightnings rend the sky,  
Ere long shall vengeance crush the guilty pair.

To complete the pathetic scene, Orestes now enters in disguise with an attendant bearing the urn which purports to contain the ashes of the deceased brother. Electra takes the urn in her hands, and, in a strain of unaffected pathos scarcely to be equalled in the whole range of elegiac literature, mourns the sole, sad relic of all they loved and all they hoped on earth. The scene is too much for Orestes. Despite of his plans for concealment, he is constrained to make himself known to his sister, whom he convinces of his identity by showing his father's seal; and then a scene of joy succeeds, which contrasts powerfully with the previous mourning, and which finds utterance, not in the cold iambics of the usual dialogue, but in the strophe, antistrophe, and epode of choral songs from the lips of the rejoicing brother and sister. This untimely rejoicing is prolonged till the old servant, who has been keeping watch within the palace, comes out and reproves them and summons them to immediate action. Orestes yields his hearty assent, saying, as he enters :

. . . . . let us speed  
Within, adoring my paternal gods,  
All, who within this vestibule abide. —(1374, 5.)

Justice now delays no longer. The plot hastens to its consummation. Electra beseeches Apollo whom she has often served with *such as she had* (*ἀφ' ὧν ἔχομι*), and now entreats with *such as she has* (*ἐξ οἷων ἔχω*, 1379), that, he will be a helper in these righteous measures, and thus show men what penalties the gods award to impiety. The chorus see, and summon others to see, the avenging Orestes enter the palace,

guided by Hermes, the god of stealth, and followed by the Furies, those hounds of retribution, from whose pursuit there is no escape (*ἀφυκτοὶ κύνες*). And soon, from within, are heard the shrieks and cries for mercy of the dying Clytemnestra. And her death is celebrated by the chorus: now the *curse*s are fulfilled; the dead live again; the long-slain shed the blood of their slayers.

Meanwhile Aegisthus, who has heard, in the street, the tidings of Orestes's death, comes home exulting, and mocks Electra by demanding of her the details of such welcome news. Electra, whose office it is to cherish his false security till he falls into the hands of Orestes, "palters with him in a double sense,"<sup>1</sup> describing the fate of *Clytemnestra* in language which he understands of *Orestes*. He commands to open the gates, and let all Argos and Mycenæ see the blasting of their hopes in Agamemnon's son; and, blinded to the last, he draws near to the supposed body of Orestes saying:

O Jove, a sight I view that well hath chanced, — (1466 seq.)  
 If thus to speak be lawful — but my words,  
 If *Nemesis* be present, I recall.

*Nemesis* was indeed present, and heard his indecent joy at the supposed death of a near relative, and returned, at once, the poisoned chalice to his own lips. The veil is removed; he sees the lifeless body of *Clytemnestra*! and soon falls, himself, beneath the avenging stroke of him, at whose fancied death he came exulting, on the same fatal spot on which he had slain the unsuspecting Agamemnon.

Contrary to the plot of both the other masters, but with that correctness of taste which almost never errs, Sophocles has made the death of Clytemnestra precede that of Aegisthus; thus letting the mother fall beneath the first uncalculating stroke of her children's vengeance, while the more cool and deliberate slaying of Aegisthus forms the closing scene, on which the mind dwells with unmixed satisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> The reader will excuse the repetition of this form of expression. It expresses better than any other language a frequent characteristic of the tragic style.

The *Electra* furnishes the best example, in the Greek drama, of that perfect adaptation of punishment to crime, which is called "poetic justice." Of course, this nice adjustment is not often seen, in the distribution of rewards and punishments in real life. Yet there are not wanting examples, both in secular and sacred history,<sup>1</sup> which suffice to show that the *principle*, which so commends itself to the aesthetic and the moral nature of man, is recognized in the providence and government of God, and so constitute a presumptive argument from analogy, answering to the intuitive convictions of the human soul, that this principle will be fully carried out in the retributions of the life to come.

The same tragedy which develops the doctrine of retributive justice, in a manner so congenial to the aesthetic and the ethical nature of man, contains also a distinct recognition of another principle deeply rooted in the human soul: the principle of expiatory and vicarious sacrifices of one human being as a substitute and a satisfaction for the sins of others.

Artemis is offended by the slaying of a stag in her sacred grove, or rather by some boastful words uttered by Agamemnon when he slew it (569). Adverse winds detain the Grecian fleet, in port at Aulis, and they can neither set sail for Troy, nor return home, till they have propitiated the goddess. This propitiation, as they are instructed by the voice of oracle or seer, can be effected only by the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter, as a compensation (*ἀντίσταθμον*, 571) for the slain stag. The father resisted and, for a time, refused to offer the sacrifice. But there was no other means of escape (*λύσις*, 573) from the anger of the goddess and the winds that imprisoned them in the harbor. At length, though much against his will (*βίαις πολλά*), he yielded. The unwilling victim was brought and sacrificed.<sup>2</sup> The angry goddess was appeased; the ad-

<sup>1</sup> Herodotus's history of the Persian wars, and, indeed, his whole history, is a great prose drama, written to illustrate the same *moral* as that of the book of Esther and the history of the Old Testament generally. That moral, stated generally, is *Providence*, and specifically it is the doctrine of a divine *Nemesis* in human affairs.

<sup>2</sup> According to Euripides (*Iph. in Taur.*) and some other authorities, Iphige-

verse winds became favorable, and the host set sail for Troy. The mother treasured up in her memory the dreadful sacrifice, and, many years after, alleged this rending of her affections in justification of her crimes. She argues that Agamemnon had no right to offer *her* daughter to make satisfaction for the Greeks (*Ἀργείων χάριν τίνων*, 534), nor instead of Menelaus his brother (*ἀντ' ἀδελφοῦ Μενέλεω*, 537), on whose account the voyage was undertaken. The pure-minded, earnest Electra justifies her father on the ground of unavoidable necessity, and casts the blame, if blame there be, on the goddess, who demanded the sacrifice, saying: Ask the huntress Artemis, as a satisfaction for what (*τίσος ποιηῆς*, 564) she restrained the favoring winds at Aulis? Reason about the justice of it as we may, men have never been able to get rid of the idea of expiatory and vicarious sacrifice. History, Grecian, Roman, and barbarian, is full of it. In one form or another, it pervades or underlies all religions, be they Pagan, Mohammedan, Jewish, or Christian. And the law of *vicarious* sacrifice is almost universal in *nature*. Throughout the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, the higher organizations and forms of life are nourished by the destruction or decay of the lower. Life springs from death, and the nation is saved, the race is rescued and reclaimed, the species is propagated, multiplied and improved, by the sacrifice of the individual. *The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die, before it can bear much fruit.* But it is only in the gospel of Christ that we see the great propitiatory sacrifice for a sinful race provided by the *holy love* of the universal Father, made by the *willing and joyful obedience* of the Son of Man; who is, at the same time, the Son of God; and accepted, with admiring and adoring gratitude, by believing souls, as a *necessary* "*satisfaction* for the ethical nature of both God and man."

nia was rescued by the goddess herself, when on the point of being sacrificed, and conveyed in a cloud to Tauris, where she became the priestess of Artemis; while a stag (or, as others say, some other victim) was offered in her stead, thus bearing a striking resemblance to the sacrifice of Isaac as related in the book of Genesis. But Sophocles makes Electra say in so many words that Agamemnon sacrificed her (*ἔδωκεν αὐτήν*, 576).

[To be concluded.]