

these three would have sufficed to vindicate his claim to be considered a poet of paramount genius, and what we have is enough to enable us to trace the main idea that animated and inspired Greek tragedy, and to establish the position that—at any rate in ancient Athens—a great dramatist could also be a great moral teacher.

Aeschylus found tragedy existing in a rude form, which has been said to resemble nothing so much as a modern oratorio,—a form in which the choral song and dance were varied occasionally by the recitation of a single actor, or by a dialogue carried on between him and the leader of the chorus. Within fifty years from the date at which he took it in hand, it had attained its complete development.

As regards his moral teaching, Aeschylus sought to resolve the antagonism which existed in the popular belief between powers of light and powers of darkness into a higher order of things, in which both are represented as working in obedience to one supreme law—the law of Destiny or Necessity. This inexorable law Zeus himself has to obey, and the necessity of resignation to it is taught in almost every one of the plays of Aeschylus. Another conspicuous point in his teaching is his living belief in the consequences of ancestral guilt. The pride of heart which leads on to impiety and issues in crime begets a curse which is transmitted from generation to generation, till the righteousness of some late descendant wins the pardon of heaven. It is this that gives its continuity to the story of Orestes, which, as told in his great Trilogv, really contains the whole of the poet's theology.

While Aeschylus dealt with the vast and shadowy forms of demi-gods and heroes—each the victim of mysterious forces which he could not attempt to control—Sophocles descended into the human heart, and by a subtle analysis sought to explain and to justify the situations in which his personages appear. The ordinary life of men was not enough to furnish Aeschylus with the episodes in which he embodied his moral and religious ideas. But Sophocles, while still inculcating the central idea of Greek tragedy—that the guilty must suffer, and that “as a man sows so shall he reap”—no longer justifies the punishment inflicted by reference to a mystical order of things existing apart from the life of man, but finds its solution and explanation in the natural workings of the human heart. His moral ideal consists in a beautiful harmony between inclination and duty, freedom and order. Thus there is more human interest about his plays, and yet this does not mar the ideal beauty of his creations. Titanic forces such as Prometheus and the uncontrolled passion of Clytean Vesta give place in Sophocles to the sorely tried and very human Oedipus and the true womanhood of Antigone. Sophocles, in fact, brought the drama within the sphere

of idealized human life. He has been well said, moreover, to be of all ancient poets the “one whose feelings have most in common with the spirit of our religion.” He has overcome the dread of heaven's envy, which was perhaps in Aeschylus one of the last survivals of the earlier native worship, and justice is with him throughout tempered with mercy. His moral teaching is summed up in his exhortation to control the desires, to love justice, and to fear God.

Of Euripides, it may be said—in the words of Mr. Jeff—that “no one is capable of feeling that Sophocles is supreme who does not feel that Euripides is admirable.” In him, however, we trace the influences of the new school of thought that was springing up in his day under the Sophists and teachers of rhetoric. The axe had now been laid at the root of the old religion. The stories of the old mythology Euripides uses merely as the basis of the delineation of human passion and suffering. He is thus the most modern of all the dramatists, approaching more nearly than either Aeschylus or Sophocles to the tone of every-day life.

A word in conclusion about Greek comedy. The chief name connected with it is that of Aristophanes, perhaps the greatest wit the world has ever known. Throughout the flourishing era of the Athenian Empire, Aristophanes burlesqued all form of the national life—political, intellectual, moral, and social—with a licence of which the like was never seen either before or since his day. Conscious of the origin of his art in a chorus of Bacchanalian rustics, full of the wine-god's gift, he turned the whole world topsy-turvy in his plays. Relying too on the liberty that was the heritage of all the citizens of democratic Athens, he claimed in particular to exercise a direct censorship over the manners and customs of his age. His Comedies combine all the elements of burlesque and pantomime with the functions of a free press. They are all in direct relation to the politics and literature of the day, and their tone is eminently personal. Nobody escaped his lash, but his chiefest objects of detestation were the demagogues who sought to mislead a generous-hearted people, the philosopher and rhetorician who were trying to introduce a new culture, and the enthusiasts who, even in that remote age, had begun to advocate Women's Rights.

Comedy affords fewer points of contrast between the ancient and modern types of the dramatic art than Tragedy. Laughter was excited by pretty much the same causes in ancient times as now, and the nature of the ludicrous can undergo but little change. It is in Tragedy especially that we find the differences that have fixed so wide a gulf between the ancient and modern drama. To say nothing of the external contrasts afforded by the employment on the Greek stage of fixed masks and high, raised buskins—appliances rendered necessary by the actual circumstances