

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ART OF SHAKESPEARE
AND OF ÆSCHYLUS.

There are those to-day who with a fearless confidence, yet one surely not begotten of much serious consideration, make the sweeping assertion that we have long since outgrown the classical literatures of Greece and Rome, and who would have us believe that modern literatures supply something far better and something which is quite sufficient. For such Shakespeare and Milton would completely supersede Æschylus and Homer. That in many of our conceptions we have outgrown the ancient world no one will deny who has made even the most cursory study of comparative history. It is true that we are no longer obliged to grope in the darkness for a solution of the riddle of existence, dependent alone on the vagaries of human philosophy, or have recourse to Aristotle for a decalogue of moral action, or live in bondage to the belief in an external Fate against which we are miserably impotent. In the clear light of Christian revelation and nineteenth century progress it is ours to feel our freedom, ground our ethics in the teachings of Deity itself, and rejoice in the consciousness that we are the inheritors of the legacy left by every age which has preceded.

The divergence of our conceptions is noticeable not only in fundamental issues, but also in matters of more or less trivial import, which, however, go far in giving a typical, determinate color to a national spirit or even to a period. The modern, for example, can with difficulty suppress a smile of amusement when one of Homer's heroes relieves a poignant grief by bursting into a flood of tears. The act tends only to a subversion of our enjoyment of the truly heroic or tragic element, for throughout our own experience and by the tradition of preceding generations we have been schooled to regard weeping as an expression of emotion legitimate only for women or children, while among a certain fraternity, it is to be feared, a modernized Stoicism has been idealized. A return, then, from the Victorian era to a pagan one such as that of Pericles, an era of refinement though it was, would mean on the one hand the replacement of our