

INTRODUCTION TO THE FROGS.

THE Greek drama as a whole holds a unique place in the history of the literature of the world. It formed a more essential part of the life of the Greeks than has been the case with any other people. And this was not among the upper classes only. The plays were produced in a competitive exhibition at Athens during the festival of Dionysus, the patron god of the Drama, and rich and poor alike flocked to the theatre as much as a matter of course as the Londoner goes to Hampstead Heath on Bank Holiday. Indeed, so far did this go that a measure was finally passed devoting part of the State revenue every year to providing seats for those who were too poor to pay for them themselves.

Of this national institution the most unique feature was the comedy of Aristophanes, which combined the most extraordinary varieties of qualities, and performed the most varied functions. Its work in general was that of a public censorship, and in the performance of it it combined satire on persons, politics, literature and religion. It was burlesque, fairy tale, allegory and leading article all in one.

But it differed essentially from modern comedy; for while the latter partakes of the tragic spirit, and delights in moral lessons and poetic justice, the former, no matter what its aim, was always ludicrous both to the spectators and to itself. Yet underlying the extravagant burlesque and unrestrained fancy of Aristophanes, there is always a serious, definite and constant purpose. From first to last Aristophanes was an Athenian conservative, an unswerving supporter of the old spirit of Athens, in morals, politics, religion and art.

This spirit may be clearly seen in all his plays. Thus in the "Acharnians" and the "Peace" he urges the Athenians to become reconciled to Sparta; in the "Birds" he