

the destruction of the Hellenic religion, but also undermined the foundations of Greek tragedy. For when the religious and patriotic sentiment was gone there remained in Greek tragedy too little of the popular element necessary for the production of a really lasting drama.

The writer of Greek tragedy was hampered in his composition by many rules, not only arbitrary in their character, but difficult of execution.

He was tied hand and foot by the Law of the Unities. No play was to represent a period of time longer than that which was absolutely necessary for the acting of it. Change of scene from one place to another was forbidden; there had to be an absolute unity of Time and Place.

Again, in the choice of subjects the playwright was terribly hampered. Æschylus has one play—The Persæ—based on contemporary history—the Persian invasion of Greece—Phrynichus was fined heavily for harrowing the feelings of his Athenian spectators by a dramatic representation of the Siege of Miletus. The subjects of tragedies were such as could be adapted to the sacred or semi sacred character of the festivals at which they were presented—the tale of Troy divine the story of Thebes, or the legends of national gods and heroes, such as Dionysus or Herakles. This confined choice of subjects produced what it really could not help producing and what is the weak spot of the whole of the Greek drama, a poverty in the plots, a want of variety in the incidents, a general sameness in the structure and handling. It alone was sufficient to have produced the decay of the drama.

In the handling of the plays the Greek playwright was further terribly hampered by a rule which limited the number of actors allowed to be together on the stage at one time to two and later to three actors. Also by another rule which forbade him to exhibit on the stage anything of a nature calculated to shock the feelings or to make his spectators feel uncomfortable. Murders, deaths, suicides and the like were never acted on the stage. They were related in long speeches by messengers and the like. Aesthetically this may have been all right—but it spoiled the acting.

That in spite of all these difficulties the Greek tragedians produced plays which have ever since commanded the admiration of the educated world as being masterpieces of the human intellect, is a great proof of their surpassing genius. Had they been less hampered, we are disposed to say, they would assuredly have surpassed themselves. Or was it the very difficulty of their restrictions that forced them to exhibit talents which, under more favorable conditions, would have lain dormant?

We cannot say—all we know is that they produced masterpieces—and it is of one of these masterpieces that I am going to speak now.

The *Antigone* was the earliest of Sophocles' extant plays. It was first brought out in B.C. 440, and so impressed the Athenian audience with the wisdom of its composer that Sophocles was immediately appointed by the people as a colleague of Thucydides and Pericles in the conduct of the Samian war. Its main object is to exhibit the strength of the love between brother and sister—a love which can defy authority and is stronger than death.

The ill-fated Œdipus, who, on the discovery of his awful marriage with Jocasta, had forsaken Thebes and gone into voluntary exile, had left behind him two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene, under the guardianship of Creon, their mother's brother.

Polynices was the elder brother, and as such had a right to his father's throne; but he was supplanted and exiled by his younger brother Eteocles. Polynices fled to Argos, where he raised an army and invaded Thebes for the purpose of reasserting his rights. A battle ensued, and the two brothers slew each other in single combat. Creon now succeeded to the throne and immediately issued a proclama-

tion decreeing an honourable funeral to Eteocles, but forbidding anyone, under pain of death, to give sepulture to the remains of Polynices, who, though the rightful sovereign, had died in arms against his country.

Antigone, however, determines to brave Creon's anger, and to bury Polynices, and when the play opens is found discussing the question with Ismene, her less audacious, though, as the sequel proves, no less loving sister.

Ismene is too timid to join Antigone, whom she vainly tries to dissuade from what is seemingly a foolhardy undertaking.

We needs must bear in mind we are but women,
Never intended to contend with men.

But Antigone will not listen. She replies:

Be what you choose to be! This single hand
Shall bury our lost brother. Glorious
For me to take this labour and to die!
Dear to him will my soul be as we rest
In death, when I have dared this holy crime.
My time for pleasing men will soon be over,
Not so my duty toward the dead! My home
Yonder will have no end. You, if you will,
May throw contempt on laws revered on High.

You see, it is but another presentment of a very familiar Christian problem:—"We ought to obey God rather than man." To bury the dead was a divine commandmentⁿ Creon's decree was but the decree of a man.

Antigone goes—but is presently brought back again by one of the watchmen whom Creon has set over the corpse of Polynices to see that his decree is carried out. The watchman comes in twice—the first time with hesitating step and faltering lips, knowing full well that "None loves the messenger of evil news," to announce to Creon that his decree has been violated, and that some one has given a rude sepulture to the corpse: the second time, with mixed feelings of joy and sorrow—joy to have himself escaped the penalty due to his careless watching, and sorrow to have brought Antigone into trouble as the doer of the deed.

One's self to escape disaster is great joy:
Yet to have drawn a friend into distress
Is painful. But my own security
To me is of more value than aught else.

Antigone has no fear. When confronted with Creon, she answers boldly,

I deny nothing. I avow the deed.

and she goes on to tell him that his decree "cannot overrule the infallible, unwritten laws of Heaven."

Death will come—I know it—
Without thine edict; if before the time
I count it gain. Who does not gain by death,
That lives, as I do, amid boundless woe?
Slight is the sorrow of such doom to me.
But had I suffered my own mother's child,
Fallen in blood, to be without a grave,
That were indeed a sorrow. This is none.
And if thou deemst me foolish for my deed,
I am foolish in the judgment of a fool.

Creon answers her in words which are strangely prophetic of the miserable doom which awaits him.

The stubborn spirit first doth fall.
Oft ye shall see the strongest bar of steel,
That fire hath hardened to extremity
Shattered to pieces. A small bit doth rule
The fiery steel. Pride may not be allowed
In one whose life is subject to command.

But Antigone is defiant.

Whence could I have found a fairer fame
Than giving burial to my own true brother?
All here would tell thee they approve my deed,
Were they not tongue-tied to authority.
But kingship hath much profit, this in chief
That it may do and say what'er it will.

(Continued in next issue.)