

But with great hands and heart seek  
 praise of men  
 Out of sharp straits and many a grievous  
 thing,  
 Seeing the strange foam of undivided seas  
 On channels never sailed in, and by shores  
 Where the old winds cease not blowing,  
 and all the night  
 Thunders, and day is no delight to men."

Up to this point the interest has been neither dramatic nor lyrical, but narrative. The first real incident within the tragedy—and even this does not take place before our eyes, but is presumed—is the arming for the hunt. The second (the killing of the boar), and the third (the death of Toxenus and Plexippus), are both reported. One is confirmed in the narrative impression of the bulk of the piece by the epic enumeration of names in the herald's report of Althoea of the slaying of the boar. Be it said, in passing, that the vivid recital of this event does no small credit to the poet. The massive beast, the oozy marsh, the warrior-maiden, the straining hounds, the crushed reeds and the bloody waters—the whole scene is enacted before us. Seldom is simple narrative more alive with movement than are the lines that tell how Meleager met and overcame the foe.

"But Meleager, but thy son,  
 Right in the wild way of the coming  
 curse  
 Rock-rooted, fair with fierce and fastened  
 lips,  
 Clear eyes, and springing muscle and  
 shortening limb—  
 With chin aslant indrawn to a tightening  
 throat,  
 Grave, and with gathered sinews, like a  
 God—  
 Aimed on the left side his well-handled  
 spear,  
 Grasped where the ash was knottiest  
 hewn, and smote,  
 And with no missile wound, the mon-  
 strous boar  
 Right in the hairiest hollow of his hide  
 Under the last rib, seer through bulk  
 and bone,  
 Deep in : and deeply smitten, and to death.  
 The heavy horror with his hanging shafts  
 Leapt, and fell furiously, and from raging  
 lips  
 Foamed out the latest wrath of all his life."

This absence of action, as indicated by paucity of incident, the undisguised em-

ployment of the messenger scene, together with the prominence of the choruses justify us in considering the poem to be a Senecan tragedy and Greek choral drama in one. The brand is burned almost before our eyes,

## CHORUS

"I see a faint fire lightening from the  
 hall."

\* \* \* \* \*

"And a long brand that blackens ; and  
 white dust."

Then Meleager may be said to die in our presence. The curtain sinks before the final moment comes, but we know that he must pass. It will be seen that five pseudo-incidents constitute the total action of the piece.

As regards mechanism. Besides contributing its quota of song, the chorus (composed of maidens) joins in the dialogue. The dialogue is in blank verse : the choruses have rhyme and stanza-structure. Swinburne's blank verse in the "Atalanta" is, of course, not to be compared in majesty with Milton's, nor is it nearly so musical and flexuous, as say Shelley's in "Prometheus Unbound," or Byron's in "Manfred." Neither does it seem, at least in what may be called ordinary conversational passages, to be lighted up by those sensuous devices that elsewhere render this author's rhythms both attractive and unique. The above exception is made because that these devices are not present is manifestly not true of the prayer of the Chief Huntsman, or those other areas where the verse is flushed with emotion. The musical excellence of his blank verse would seem, then, to depend upon feeling. If this text be a true one, alliteration, at any rate in Swinburne's hands, is worthy of more respect than is ordinarily accorded it.

Some remarks upon the choruses will naturally be involved in a study of the lyrical elements of the poem. In Althoea's marvellous declaration of mother-love, and in Meleager's worthy response to it, the poem, for the first time, becomes lyrical. That deliverance proper begins,