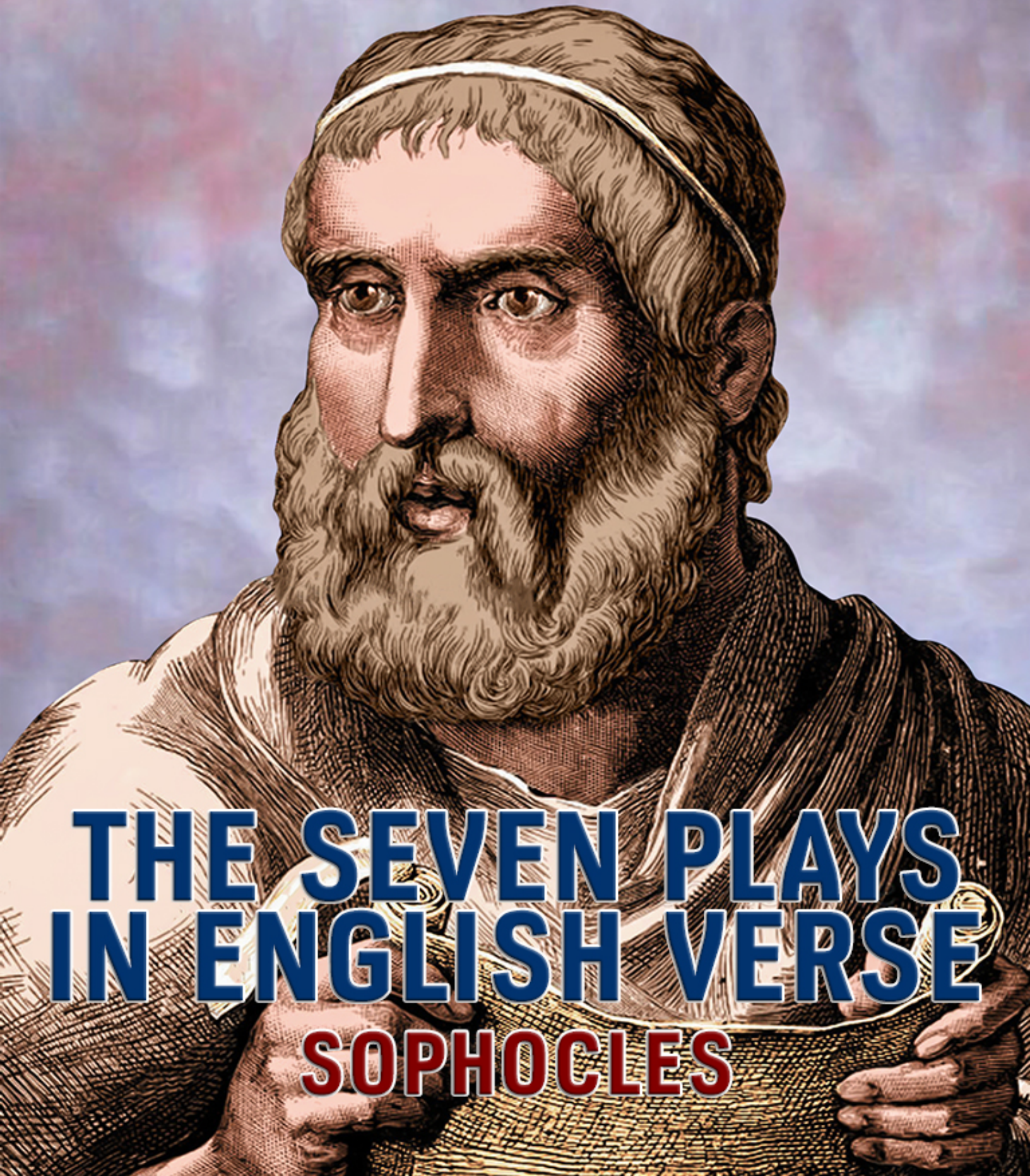
CLASSICS TO GO



THE SEVEN PLAYS IN ENGLISH VERSE

SOPHOCLES

THE SEVEN PLAY

IN ENGLISH VERSE

Sophocles

PREFACE

In 1869, having read the Antigone with a pupil who at the time had a passion for the stage, I was led to attempt a metrical version of the *Antigone*, and, by and by, of the Electra and Trachiniae.I had the satisfaction of seeing this last very beautifully produced by an amateur company in Scotland in 1877; when Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin may be said to have ‘created’ the part of Dêanira. Thus encouraged, I completed the translation of the seven plays, which was published by Kegan Paul in 1883 and again by Murray in 1896. I have now to thank Mr. Murray for consenting to this cheaper issue.

The seven extant plays of Sophocles have been variously arranged. In the order most frequently adopted by English editors, the three plays of the Theban cycle, Oedipus Tyrannus, Oedipus Coloneus, and Antigone, have been placed foremost.

In one respect this is obviously convenient, as appearing to present continuously a connected story. But on a closer view, it is in two ways illusory.

1. The Antigone is generally admitted to be, comparatively speaking, an early play, while the Oedipus Coloneus belongs to the dramatist’s latest manner; the first Oedipus coming in somewhere between the two. The effect is therefore analogous to that produced on readers of Shakespeare by the habit of placing Henry VI after Henry IV and V. But tragedies and ‘histories’ or chronicle plays are not *in pari materia*.

2. The error has been aggravated by a loose way of speaking of ‘the Theban Trilogy’, a term which could only be properly applicable if the three dramas had been produced in the same year. I have therefore now arranged the seven plays in an order corresponding to the most probable dates of their production, viz. Antigone, Aias, King Oedipus, Electra, Trachiniae, Philoctetes, and Oedipus at Colonos. A credible tradition refers the Antigone to 445 B.C. The Aias appears to be not much later—it may even be earlier—than the Antigone. The Philoctetes was produced in 408 B.C., when the poet was considerably over eighty. The Oedipus at Colonos has always been believed to be a composition of Sophocles’ old age. It is said to have been produced after his death, though it may have been composed some years earlier. The tragedy of King Oedipus, in which the poet’s art attained its maturity, is plausibly assigned to an early year of the Peloponnesian war (say 427 B.C.), the Trachiniae to about 420 B.C. The time of the Electra is doubtful; but Professor Jebb has shown that, on metrical grounds, it should be placed after, rather than before, King Oedipus. Even the English reader, taking the plays as they are grouped in this volume, may be aware of a gradual change of manner, not unlike what is perceptible in passing from Richard II to Macbeth, and from Macbeth to The Winter’s Tale or Cymbeline. For although the supposed date of the Antigone was long subsequent to the poet’s first tragic victory, the forty years over which the seven plays are spread saw many changes of taste in art and literature.

PREFATORY NOTE TO THE EDITION OF 1883

I. The Hellenic spirit has been repeatedly characterized as simple Nature-worship. Even the Higher Paganism has been described as ‘in other words the purified worship of natural forms.’One might suppose, in reading some modern writers, that the Nymphs and Fauns, the River-Gods and Pan, were at least as prominent in all Greek poetry as Zeus, Apollo, and Athena, or that Apollo was only the sweet singer and not also the prophet of retribution.

The fresh and unimpaired enjoyment of the Beautiful is certainly the aspect of ancient life and literature which most attracted the humanists of the sixteenth century, and still most impresses those amongst ourselves who for various reasons desire to point the contrast between Paganism and Judaism. The two great groups of forces vaguely known as the Renaissance and the Revolution have both contributed to this result. Men who were weary of conventionality and of the weight of custom ‘heavy as frost and deep almost as life,’ have longed for the vision of ‘Oread or Dryad glancing through the shade,’ or to ‘hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.’ Meanwhile, that in which the Greeks most resembled us, ‘the human heart by which we live,’ for the very reason that it lies so near to us, is too apt to be lost from our conception of them. Another cause of this one-sided view is the illusion produced by the contemplation of statuary, together with the unapproachable perfection of form which every relic of Greek antiquity indisputably possesses.

But on turning from the forms of Greek art to the substance of Greek literature, we find that Beauty, although

everywhere an important element, is by no means the sole or even the chief attribute of the greatest writings, nor is the Hellenic consciousness confined within the life of Nature, unless this term is allowed to comprehend man with all his thoughts and aspirations. It was in this latter sense that Hegel recognized the union of depth with brightness in Greek culture: ‘If the first paradise was the paradise of nature, this is the second, the higher paradise of the human spirit, which in its fair naturalness, freedom, depth and brightness here comes forth like a bride out of her chamber. The first wild majesty of the rise of spiritual life in the East is here circumscribed by the dignity of form, and softened into beauty. Its depth shows itself no longer in confusion, obscurity, and inflation, but lies open before us in simple clearness. Its brightness (Heiterkeit) is not a childish play, but covers a sadness which knows the baldness of fate but is not by that knowledge driven out of freedom and measure.’ Hegel’s Werke, vol. XVI. p. 139 (translated by Prof. Caird). The simplicity of Herodotus, for example, does not exclude far reaching thoughts on the political advantages of liberty, nor such reflections on experience as are implied in the saying of Artabanus, that the transitoriness of human life is the least of its evils. And in what modern writing is more of the wisdom of life condensed than in the History of Thucydides? It is surely more true to say of Greek literature that it contains types of all things human, stamped with the freshness, simplicity, and directness which belong to first impressions, and to the first impressions of genius.

Now the ‘thoughts and aspirations,’ which are nowhere absent from Greek literature, and make a centre of growing warmth and light in its Periclean period—when the conception of human nature for the first time takes definite shape—have no less of Religion in them than underlay the ‘creed outworn’. To think otherwise would be an error of the

same kind as that ‘abuse of the word Atheism’ against which the author of the work above alluded to protests so forcibly.

Religion, in the sense here indicated, is the mainspring and vital principle of Tragedy. The efforts of Aeschylus and Sophocles were sustained by it, and its inevitable decay through the scepticism which preceded Socrates was the chief hindrance to the tragic genius of Euripides. Yet the inequality of which we have consequently to complain in him is redeemed by pregnant hints of something yet ‘more deeply interfused,’ which in him, as in his two great predecessors, is sometimes felt as ‘modern,’ because it is not of an age but for all time. The most valuable part of every literature is something which transcends the period and nation out of which it springs.

On the other hand, much that at first sight seems primitive in Greek tragedy belongs more to the subject than to the mode of handling. The age of Pericles was in advance of that in which the legends were first Hellenized and humanized, just as this must have been already far removed from the earliest stages of mythopoeic imagination. The reader of Aeschylus or Sophocles should therefore be warned against attributing to the poet’s invention that which is given in the fable.

An educated student of Italian painting knows how to discriminate—say in an Assumption by Botticelli—between the traditional conventions, the contemporary ideas, and the refinements of the artist’s own fancy. The same indulgence must be extended to dramatic art. The tragedy of King Lear is not rude or primitive, although the subject belongs to prehistoric times in Britain. Nor is Goethe’s Faust mediaeval in spirit as in theme. So neither is the Oedipus Rex the product of ‘lawless and uncertain thoughts,’

notwithstanding the unspeakable horror of the story, but is penetrated by the most profound estimate of all in human life that is saddest, and all that is most precious.

Far from being naive naturalists after the Keats fashion, the Greek tragic poets had succeeded to a pessimistic reaction from simple Pagan enjoyment; they were surrounded with gloomy questionings about human destiny and Divine Justice, and they replied by looking steadily at the facts of life and asserting the supreme worth of innocence, equity, and mercy.

They were not philosophers, for they spoke the language of feeling; but the civilization of which they were the strongest outcome was already tinged with influences derived from early philosophy—especially from the gnomic wisdom of the sixth century and from the spirit of theosophic speculation, which in Aeschylus goes far even to recast mythology. The latter influence was probably reinforced, through channels no longer traceable, by the Eleusinian worship, in which the mystery of life and death and of human sorrow had replaced the primitive wonder at the phenomena of the year.

And whatever elements of philosophic theory or mystic exaltation the drama may have reflected, it was still more emphatically the repository of some of the most precious traditions of civilized humanity—traditions which philosophy has sometimes tended to extenuate, if not to destroy.

Plato’s Gorgias contains one of the most eloquent vindications of the transcendent value of righteousness and faithfulness as such. But when we ask, ‘Righteousness in what relation?’—‘Faithfulness to whom?’—the Gorgias is silent; and when the vacant outline is filled up in the Republic, we are presented with an ideal of man’s social relations, which, although it may be regarded as the

ultimate development of existing tendencies, yet has no immediate bearing on any actual condition of the world.

The ideal of the tragic poet may be less perfect; or rather he does not attempt to set before us abstractedly any single ideal. But the grand types of character which he presents to the world are not merely imaginary. They are creatures of flesh and blood, men and women, to whom the unsullied purity of their homes, the freedom and power of their country, the respect and love of their fellow-citizens, are inestimably dear. From a Platonic, and still more from a Christian point of view, the best morality of the age of Pericles is no doubt defective. Such counsels of perfection as ‘Love your enemies’, or ‘A good man can harm no one, not even an enemy’,—are beyond the horizon of tragedy, unless dimly seen in the person of Antigone. The coexistence of savage vindictiveness with the most affectionate tenderness is characteristic of heroes and heroines alike, and produces some of the most moving contrasts. But the tenderness is no less deep and real for this, and while the chief persons are thus passionate, the Greek lesson of moderation and reasonableness is taught by the event, whether expressed or not by the mouth of sage or prophet or of the ‘ideal bystander’.

Greek tragedy, then, is a religious art, not merely because associated with the festival of Dionysus, nor because the life which it represented was that of men who believed, with all the Hellenes, in Zeus, Apollo, and Athena, or in the power of Moira and the Erinyes,—not merely because it represented

‘the dread strife
Of poor humanity’s afflicted will
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny,’

but much more because it awakened in the Athenian spectator emotions of wonder concerning human life, and of admiration for nobleness in the unfortunate—a sense of the infinite value of personal uprightness and of domestic purity —which in the most universal sense of the word were truly religious,—because it expressed a consciousness of depths which Plato never fathomed, and an ideal of character which, if less complete than Shakespeare's, is not less noble. It is indeed a 'rough' generalization that ranks the Agamemnon with the Adoniazusae as a religious composition.

II. This spiritual side of tragic poetry deserves to be emphasized both as the most essential aspect of it, and as giving it the most permanent claim to lasting recognition. And yet, apart from this, merely as dramas, the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides will never cease to be admired. These poets are teachers, but they teach through art. To ask simply, as Carlyle once did, 'What did they think?' is not the way to understand or learn from them.

Considered simply as works of art, the plays of Sophocles stand alone amongst dramatic writings in their degree of concentration and complex unity.

1. The interest of a Sophoclean drama is always intensely personal, and is almost always centred in an individual destiny. In other words, it is not historical or mythical, but ethical. Single persons stand out magnificently in Aeschylus. But the action is always larger than any single life. Each tragedy or trilogy resembles the fragment of a sublime Epic poem. Mighty issues revolve about the scene, whether this is laid on Earth or amongst the Gods, issues far transcending the fate of Orestes or even of Prometheus. In the perspective painting of Sophocles, these vast surroundings fall into the background, and the feelings of

the spectator are absorbed in sympathy with the chief figure on the stage, round whom the other characters—the members of the chorus being included—are grouped with the minutest care.

2. In this grouping of the persons, as well as in the conduct of the action, Sophocles is masterly in his use of pathetic contrast. This motive must of course enter into all tragedy—nothing can be finer than the contrast of Cassandra to Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon,—but in Sophocles it is all-pervading, and some of the minor effects of it are so subtle that although inevitably felt by the spectator they are often lost upon the mere reader or student. And every touch, however transient, is made to contribute to the main effect.

To recur once more to the much-abused analogy of statuary:—the work of Aeschylus may be compared to a colossal frieze, while that of Sophocles resembles the pediment of a smaller temple. Or if, as in considering the Orestean trilogy, the arrangement of the pediment affords the more fitting parallel even for Aeschylus, yet the forms are so gigantic that minute touches of characterization and of contrast are omitted as superfluous. Whereas in Sophocles, it is at once the finish of the chief figure and the studied harmony of the whole, which have led his work to be compared with that of his contemporary Phidias. Such comparison, however, is useful by way of illustration merely. It must never be forgotten that, as Lessing pointed out to some who thought the Philoctetes too sensational, analogies between the arts are limited by essential differences of material and of scope. All poetry represents successive moments. Its figures are never in repose. And although the action of Tragedy is concentrated and revolves around a single point, yet it is a dull vision that confounds rapidity of motion with rest.

3. Sophocles found the subjects of his dramas already embodied not only in previous tragedies but in Epic and Lyric poetry. And there were some fables, such as that of the death of Oedipus at Colonos, which seem to have been known to him only through oral tradition. For some reason which is not clearly apparent, both he and Aeschylus drew more largely from the Cyclic poets than from ‘our Homer’. The inferior and more recent Epics, which are now lost, were probably more episodical, and thus presented a more inviting repertory of legends than the Iliad and Odyssey.

Arctinus of Lesbos had treated at great length the story of the House of Thebes. The legend of Orestes, to which there are several allusions, not always consistent with each other, in the Homeric poems, had been a favourite and fruitful subject of tradition and of poetical treatment in the intervening period. Passages of the Tale of Troy, in which other heroes than Achilles had the pre-eminence, had been elaborated by Lesches and other Epic writers of the Post-Homeric time. The voyage of the Argonauts, another favourite heroic theme, supplied the subjects of many dramas which have disappeared. Lastly, the taking of Oechalia by Heracles, and the events which followed it, had been narrated in a long poem, in which one version of that hero’s multiform legend was fully set forth.

The subjects of the King Oedipus, Oedipus at Colonos, and Antigone, are taken from the Tale of Thebes, the Aias and the Philoctetes are founded on incidents between the end of the Iliad and the taking of Troy, the Electra represents the vengeance of Orestes, the crowning event in the tale of ‘Pelops’ line’, the Trachiniae recounts the last crisis in the life of Heracles.

4. Of the three Theban plays, the Antigone was first composed, although its subject is the latest. Aeschylus in

the Seven against Thebes had already represented the young heroine as defying the victorious citizens who forbade the burial of her brother, the rebel Polynices. He allowed her to be supported in her action by a band of sympathizing friends. But in the play of Sophocles she stands alone, and the power which she defies is not that of the citizens generally, but of Creon, whose will is absolute in the State. Thus the struggle is intensified, and both her strength and her desolation become more impressive, while the opposing claims of civic authority and domestic piety are more vividly realized, because either is separately embodied in an individual will. By the same means the situation is humanized to the last degree, and the heart of the spectator, although strained to the uttermost with pity for the heroic maiden whose life when full of brightest hopes was sacrificed to affection and piety, has still some feeling left for the living desolation of the man, whose patriotic zeal, degenerating into tyranny, brought his city to the brink of ruin, and cost him the lives of his two sons and of his wife, whose dying curse, as well as that of Haemon, is denounced upon him.

In the Oedipus Tyrannus, Sophocles goes back to the central crisis of the Theban story. And again he fixes our attention, not so much on the fortunes of the city, or of the reigning house, as on the man Oedipus, his glory and his fall.—

‘O mirror of our fickle state
Since man on earth unparalleled!
The rarer thy example stands,
By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
Strongest of mortal men,
To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fallen.

The horror and the pity of it are both enhanced by the character of Oedipus—his essential innocence, his

affectionateness, his uncalculating benevolence and public spirit;—while his impetuosity and passionateness make the sequel less incredible.

The essential innocence of Oedipus, which survives the ruin of his hopes in this world, supplies the chief motive of the Oedipus at Colonos. This drama, which Sophocles is said to have written late in life, is in many ways contrasted with the former Oedipus. It begins with pity and horror, and ends with peace. It is only in part founded on Epic tradition, the main incident belonging apparently to the local mythology of the poet’s birthplace. It also implies a later stage of ethical reflection, and in this respect resembles the Philoctetes; it depends more on lyrical and melodramatic effects, and allows more room for collateral and subsidiary motives than any other of the seven. Yet in its principal theme, the vindication or redemption of an essentially noble spirit from the consequences of error, it repeats a note which had been struck much earlier in the Aias with great force, although with some crudities of treatment which are absent from the later drama.

5. In one of the Epic poems which narrated the fall of Troy, the figure of Aias was more prominent than in the Iliad. He alone and unassisted was there said to have repulsed Hector from the ships, and he had the chief share, although in this he was aided by Odysseus, in rescuing the dead body of Achilles. Yet Achilles’ arms were awarded by the votes of the chieftains, as the prize of valour, not to Aias, but to Odysseus. This, no doubt, meant that wisdom is better than strength. But the wisdom of Odysseus in these later Epics was often less nobly esteemed than in the Iliad and Odyssey, and was represented as alloyed with cunning.

Aias has withdrawn with his Salaminians, in a rage, from the fight, and after long brooding by the ships his wrath has

broken forth into a blaze which would have endangered the lives of Odysseus and the Atridae, had not Athena in her care for them changed his anger into madness. Hence, instead of slaying the generals, he makes havoc amongst the flocks and herds, which as the result of various forays were the common property of the whole army. The truth is discovered by Odysseus with the help of Athena, and from being next to Achilles in renown, Aias becomes the object of universal scorn and hatred. The sequel of this hour of his downfall is the subject of the Aias of Sophocles. After lamenting his fate, the hero eludes the vigilance of his captive bride Tecmessa, and of his Salaminian mariners, and, in complete solitude, falls upon his sword. He is found by Tecmessa and by his half-brother Teucer, who has returned too late from a raid in the Mysian highlands. The Atridae would prohibit Aias' funeral; but Odysseus, who has been specially enlightened by Athena, advises generous forbearance, and his counsel prevails. The part representing the disgrace and death of Aias is more affecting to modern readers than the remainder of the drama. But we should bear in mind that the vindication of Aias after death, and his burial with undiminished honours, had an absorbing interest for the Athenian and Salaminian spectator.

Philoctetes also is rejected by man and accepted by Destiny. The Argives in his case, as the Thebans in the case of Oedipus, are blind to the real intentions of the Gods.

The Philoctetes, like the Oedipus at Colonos, was a work of Sophocles' old age; and while it can hardly be said that the fire of tragic feeling is abated in either of these plays, dramatic effect is modified in both of them by the influence of the poet's contemplative mood. The interest of the action in the Philoctetes is more inward and psychological than in any other ancient drama. The change of mind in Neoptolemus, the stubborn fixity of will in Philoctetes,

contrasted with the confiding tenderness of his nature, form the elements of a dramatic movement at once extremely simple and wonderfully sustained. No purer ideal of virtuous youth has been imagined than the son of Achilles, who in this play, though sorely tempted, sets faithfulness before ambition.

6. In the Electra, which, though much earlier than the Philoctetes, is still a work of his mature genius, our poet appears at first sight to be in unequal competition with Aeschylus. If the Theban trilogy of the elder poet had remained entire, a similar impression might have been produced by the Oedipus Tyrannus. It is best to lay such comparisons aside, and to consider the work of Sophocles simply on its own merits. The subject, as he has chosen to treat it, is the heroic endurance of a woman who devotes her life to the vindication of intolerable wrongs done to her father, and the restoration of her young brother to his hereditary rights. Hers is the human agency which for this purpose works together with Apollo. But the divine intention is concealed from her. She suffers countless indignities from her father’s enemies, of whom her own mother is the chief. And, at length, all her hopes are shattered by the false tidings that Orestes is no more. Even then she does not relinquish her resolve. And the revulsion from her deep sorrow to extremity of joy, when she finds Orestes at her side and ready to perform the act of vengeance in his own person, is irresistably affecting, even when the play is only read.

Sophocles is especially great in the delineation of ideal female characters. The heroic ardour of Antigone, and the no less heroic persistence and endurance of Electra, are both founded on the strength of their affection. And the affection in both cases is what some moderns too have called the purest of human feelings, the love of a sister for a

brother. Another aspect of that world-old marvel, ‘the love of women,’ was presented in Aias’ captive bride, Tecmessa. This softer type also attains to heroic grandeur in Dêanira, the wronged wife of Heracles, whose fatal error is caused by the innocent working of her wounded love.

It is strange that so acute a critic as A.W. Schlegel should have doubted the Sophoclean authorship of the Trachiniae. If its religious and moral lessons are even less obtrusive than those of either Oedipus and of the Antigone, there is no play which more directly pierces to the very heart of humanity. And it is a superficial judgement which complains that here at all events our sympathies are distracted between the two chief persons, Dêanira and Heracles. To one passion of his, to one fond mistake of hers, the ruin of them both is due. Her love has made their fates inseparable. And the spectator, in sharing Hyllus’ grief, is afflicted for them both at once. We may well recognize in this treatment of the death of Heracles the hand of him who wrote—

συ και δικαιων αδικουσ
φρενας παρασπας επι λωβα,
…, …
αμαχος γαρ εμπαιζει θεος ’Αφροδιτα.

7. It is unnecessary to expatiate here on the merits of construction in which these seven plays are generally acknowledged to be unrivalled; the natural way in which the main situation is explained, the suddenness and inevitableness of the complications, the steadily sustained climax of emotion until the action culminates, the preservation of the fitting mood until the end, the subtlety and effectiveness of the minor contrasts of situation and character.

But it may not be irrelevant to observe that the ‘acting qualities’ of Sophocles, as of Shakespeare, are best known to those who have seen him acted, whether in Greek, as by the students at Harvard and Toronto, and more recently at Cambridge, or in English long ago by Miss Helen Faucit (since Lady Martin), or still earlier and repeatedly in Germany, or in the French version of the Antigone by MM. Maurice and Vacquerie (1845) or of King Oedipus by M. Lacroix, in which the part of Œdipe Roi was finely sustained by M. Geoffroy in 1861, and by M. Mounet Sully in 1881. With reference to the latter performance, which was continued throughout the autumn season, M. Francisque Sarcey wrote an article for the *Temps* newspaper of August 15, 1881, which is full of just and vivid appreciation. At the risk of seeming absurdly ‘modern’, I will quote from this article some of the more striking passages.

> ‘Ce troisième et ce quatrième actes, les plus émouvants qui se soient jamais produits sur aucune scène, se composent d’une suite de narrations, qui viennent l’une après l’autre frapper au cœur d’Œdipe, et qui ont leur contrecoup dans l’âme des spectateurs. Je ne sais qu’une pièce au monde qui soit construite de la sorte, c’est l’*École des Femmes*. Ce rapprochement vous paraîtra singulier, sans doute.... Mais ... c’est dans le vieux drame grec comme dans la comédie du maître français une trouvaille de génie....
>
> ‘Sophocle a voulu, après des émotions si terribles, après des angoisses si sèches, ouvrir la source des larmes: il a écrit un cinquième acte....
>
> ‘Les yeux crevés d’Œdipe ne sont qu’un accident, ou, si vous aimez mieux, un accessoire, Le poète, sans s’arrêter à ce détail, a mis sur les lèvres de son héros

> toute la gamme des sentiments douloureux qu’excite une si prodigieuse infortune....
>
> ‘À la lecture, elle est un pen longue cette scène de lamentations. Au théâtre, on n’a pas le temps de la trouver telle: on pleure de toute son âme et de tous ses yeux. C’est qu’après avoir eu le cœur si longtemps serré comme dans un étau, on épreuve comme un soulagement à sentir en soi jaillir la source des larmes. Sophocle, qui semble avoir été le plus malin des dramaturges, comme il est le plus parfait des écrivains dramatiques, a cherché là un effet de contraste dont l’effet est immanquant sur le public.’

These and other like remarks of one of the best-known critics of the Parisian stage show that the dramatic art of Sophocles is still a living power.

I am well aware how feeble and inadequate the present attempted reproduction must appear to any reader who knows the Greek original. There is much to be said for the view of an eminent scholar who once declared that he would never think of translating a Greek poet. But the end of translating is not to satisfy fastidious scholars, but to make the classics partially accessible to those whose acquaintance with them would otherwise be still more defective. Part of this version of Sophocles was printed several years ago in an imperfect form. The present volume contains the seven extant plays entire. As the object has been to give the effect of each drama as a whole, rather than to dwell on particular ‘beauties’ (which only a poet can render), the fragments have not been included. But the reader should bear in mind that the seven plays are less than a tithe of the work produced by the poet in his lifetime.

It may very possibly be asked why verse has been employed at all. Why not have listened to Carlyle's rough demand, 'Tell us what they thought; none of your silly poetry'? The present translator can only reply that he began with prose, but soon found that, for tragic dialogue in English, blank verse appeared a more natural and effective vehicle than any prose style which he could hope to frame. And with the dialogue in verse, it was impossible to have the lyric parts in any sort of prose, simply because the reader would then have felt an intolerable incongruity. These parts have therefore been turned into such familiar lyric measures as seemed at once possible and not unsuitable. And where this method was found impracticable, as sometimes in the *Commoi*, blank metres have again been used,—with such liberties as seemed appropriate to the special purpose. The writer's hope throughout has been, not indeed fully to transfuse the poetry of Sophocles into another tongue, but to make the poet's dramatic intention to be understood and felt by English readers. One more such endeavour may possibly find acceptance at a time when many causes have combined to awaken a fresh interest at once in dramatic literature and in Hellenic studies.

The reader who is hitherto unacquainted with the Greek drama, should be warned that the parts assigned to the 'Chorus' were often distributed among its several members, who spoke or chanted, singly or in groups, alternately or in succession. In some cases, but not in all, *Ch. 1*, *Ch. 2*, &c., have been prefixed, to indicate such an arrangement.

ANTIGONE

THE PERSONS

- ANTIGONE, } *Daughters of Oedipus and Sisters of*
- ISMENE, } *Polynices and Eteocles.*
- CHORUS *of Theban Elders.*
- CREON, *King of Thebes.*
- *A Watchman.*
- HAEMON, *Son of Creon, betrothed to Antigone.*
- TIRESIAS, *the blind Prophet.*
- *A Messenger.*
- EURYDICE, *the Wife of Creon.*
- *Another Messenger.*

SCENE. Before the Cadmean Palace at Thebes.

Note. The town of Thebes is often personified as Thebè.

Polynices, son and heir to the unfortunate Oedipus, having been supplanted by his younger brother Eteocles, brought an army of Argives against his native city, Thebes. The army was defeated, and the two brothers slew each other in single combat. On this Creon, the brother-in-law of Oedipus, succeeding to the chief power, forbade the burial of Polynices. But Antigone, sister of the dead, placing the dues of affection and piety before her obligation to the magistrate, disobeyed the edict at the sacrifice of her life. Creon carried out his will, but lost his son Haemon and his wife Eurydice, and received their curses on his head. His other son, Megareus, had previously been devoted as a victim to the good of the state.

ANTIGONE

ANTIGONE. ISMENE.

ANTIGONE. Own sister of my blood, one life with me,
Ismenè, have the tidings caught thine ear?
Say, hath not Heaven decreed to execute
On thee and me, while yet we are alive,
All the evil Oedipus bequeathed? All horror,
All pain, all outrage, falls on us! And now
The General's proclamation of to-day—
Hast thou not heard?—Art thou so slow to hear
When harm from foes threatens the souls we love?

ISMENE. No word of those we love, Antigone,
Painful or glad, hath reached me, since we two
Were utterly deprived of our two brothers,
Cut off with mutual stroke, both in one day.
And since the Argive host this now-past night
Is vanished, I know nought beside to make me
Nearer to happiness or more in woe.

ANT. I knew it well, and therefore led thee forth
The palace gate, that thou alone mightst hear.

ISM. Speak on! Thy troubled look bodes some dark news.

ANT. Why, hath not Creon, in the burial-rite,
Of our two brethren honoured one, and wrought
On one foul wrong? Eteocles, they tell,
With lawful consecration he lays out,
And after covers him in earth, adorned
With amplest honours in the world below.
But Polynices, miserably slain,
They say 'tis publicly proclaimed that none
Must cover in a grave, nor mourn for him;

But leave him tombless and unwept, a store
Of sweet provision for the carrion fowl
That eye him greedily. Such righteous law
Good Creon hath pronounced for thy behoof—
Ay, and for mine! I am not left out!—And now
He moves this way to promulgate his will
To such as have not heard, nor lightly holds
The thing he bids, but, whoso disobeys,
The citizens shall stone him to the death.
This is the matter, and thou wilt quickly show
If thou art noble, or fallen below thy birth.

ISM. Unhappy one! But what can I herein
Avail to do or undo?

ANT. Wilt thou share
The danger and the labour? Make thy choice.

ISM. Of what wild enterprise? What canst thou mean?

ANT. Wilt thou join hand with mine to lift the dead?

ISM. To bury him, when all have been forbidden?
Is that thy thought?

ANT. To bury my own brother
And thine, even though thou wilt not do thy part.
I will not be a traitress to my kin.

ISM. Fool-hardy girl! against the word of Creon?

ANT. He hath no right to bar me from mine own.

ISM. Ah, sister, think but how our father fell,
Hated of all and lost to fair renown,
Through self-detected crimes—with his own hand,
Self-wreaking, how he dashed out both his eyes:

Then how the mother-wife, sad two-fold name!
With twisted halter bruised her life away,
Last, how in one dire moment our two brothers
With internecine conflict at a blow
Wrought out by fratricide their mutual doom.
Now, left alone, O think how beyond all
Most piteously we twain shall be destroyed,
If in defiance of authority
We traverse the commandment of the King!
We needs must bear in mind we are but women,
Never created to contend with men;
Nay more, made victims of resistless power,
To obey behests more harsh than this to-day.
I, then, imploring those beneath to grant
Indulgence, seeing I am enforced in this,
Will yield submission to the powers that rule,
Small wisdom were it to overpass the bound.

ANT. I will not urge you! no! nor if now you list
To help me, will your help afford me joy.
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 pour contempt on laws revered on High.

ISM. Not from irreverence. But I have no strength
To strive against the citizens' resolve.

ANT. Thou, make excuses! I will go my way
To raise a burial-mound to my dear brother.

ISM. Oh, hapless maiden, how I fear for thee!

ANT. Waste not your fears on me! Guide your own fortune.

ISM. Ah! yet divulge thine enterprise to none,
But keep the secret close, and so will I.

ANT. O Heavens! Nay, tell! I hate your silence worse;
I had rather you proclaimed it to the world.

ISM. You are ardent in a chilling enterprise.

ANT. I know that I please those whom I would please.

ISM. Yes, if you thrive; but your desire is bootless.

ANT. Well, when I fail I shall be stopt, I trow!

ISM. One should not start upon a hopeless quest.

ANT. Speak in that vein if you would earn my hate
And aye be hated of our lost one. Peace!
Leave my unwisdom to endure this peril;
Fate cannot rob me of a noble death.

ISM. Go, if you must—Not to be checked in folly,
But sure unparalleled in faithful love![Exeunt

CHORUS. (entering).

Beam of the mounting Sun!I 1
O brightest, fairest ray
Seven-gated Thebè yet hath seen!
Over the vale where Dircè’s fountains run
At length thou appearedst, eye of golden Day,
And with incitement of thy radiance keen
Spurredst to faster flight
The man of Argos hurrying from the fight.

Armed at all points the warrior came,
But driven before thy rising flame
He rode, reverting his pale shield,
Headlong from yonder battlefield.

In snow-white panoply, on eagle wing,[Half-Chorus
He rose, dire ruin on our land to bring,
Roused by the fierce debate
Of Polynices' hate,
Shrilling sharp menace from his breast,
Sheathed all in steel from crown to heel,
With many a plumèd crest.

Then stooped above the domes,I 2
With lust of carnage fired,
And opening teeth of serried spears
Yawned wide around the gates that guard our homes;
But went, or e'er his hungry jaws had tired
On Theban flesh,—or e'er the Fire-god fierce
Seizing our sacred town
Besmirched and rent her battlemented crown.
Such noise of battle as he fled
About his back the War-god spread;
So writhed to hard-fought victory
The serpent struggling to be free.

High Zeus beheld their stream that proudly rolled[Half-Chorus
Idly caparisoned with clanking gold:
Zeus hates the boastful tongue:
He with hurled fire down flung
One who in haste had mounted high,
And that same hour from topmost tower
Upraised the exulting cry.

Swung rudely to the hard repellent earthII 1
Amidst his furious mirth
He fell, who then with flaring brand
Held in his fiery hand
Came breathing madness at the gate
In eager blasts of hate.
And doubtful swayed the varying fight
Through the turmoil of the night,
As turning now on these and now on those
Ares hurtled ’midst our foes,
Self-harnessed helper on our right.

Seven matched with seven, at each gate one,[Half Chorus
Their captains, when the day was done,
Left for our Zeus who turned the scale,
The brazen tribute in full tale:—
All save the horror-burdened pair,
Dire children of despair,
Who from one sire, one mother, drawing breath,
Each with conquering lance in rest
Against a true born brother’s breast,
Found equal lots in death.

But with blithe greeting to glad Thebe cameII 2
She of the glorious name,
Victory,—smiling on our chariot throng
With eyes that waken song
Then let those battle memories cease,
Silenced by thoughts of peace.
With holy dances of delight
Lasting through the livelong night
Visit we every shrine, in solemn round,
Led by him who shakes the ground,
Our Bacchus, Thebe’s child of light.

LEADER OF CHORUS.

But look! where Creon in his new-made power,
Moved by the fortune of the recent hour,
Comes with fresh counsel. What intelligence
Intends he for our private conference,
That he hath sent his herald to us all,
Gathering the elders with a general call?

Enter CREON.

CREON. My friends, the noble vessel of our State,
After sore shaking her, the Gods have sped
On a smooth course once more. I have called you hither,
By special messengers selecting you
From all the city, first, because I knew you
Aye loyal to the throne of Laïus;
Then, both while Oedipus gave prosperous days,
And since his fall, I still beheld you firm
In sound allegiance to the royal issue.
Now since the pair have perished in an hour,
Twinned in misfortune, by a mutual stroke
Staining our land with fratricidal blood,
All rule and potency of sovereign sway,
In virtue of next kin to the deceased,
Devolves on me. But hard it is to learn
The mind of any mortal or the heart,
Till he be tried in chief authority.
Power shows the man. For he who when supreme
Withholds his hand or voice from the best cause,
Being thwarted by some fear, that man to me
Appears, and ever hath appeared, most vile.
He too hath no high place in mine esteem,
Who sets his friend before his fatherland.
Let Zeus whose eye sees all eternally
Be here my witness. I will ne’er keep silence
When danger lours upon my citizens
Who looked for safety, nor make him my friend

Who doth not love my country. For I know
Our country carries us, and whilst her helm
Is held aright we gain good friends and true.
 Following such courses ’tis my steadfast will
To foster Thebè’s greatness, and therewith
In brotherly accord is my decree
Touching the sons of Oedipus. The man—
Eteocles I mean—who died for Thebes
Fighting with eminent prowess on her side,
Shall be entombed with every sacred rite
That follows to the grave the lordliest dead.
But for his brother, who, a banished man,
Returned to devastate and burn with fire
The land of his nativity, the shrines
Of his ancestral gods, to feed him fat
With Theban carnage, and make captive all
That should escape the sword—for Polynices,
This law hath been proclaimed concerning him:
He shall have no lament, no funeral,
But he unburied, for the carrion fowl
And dogs to eat his corse, a sight of shame.
Such are the motions of this mind and will.
Never from me shall villains reap renown
Before the just. But whoso loves the State,
I will exalt him both in life and death.

CH. Son of Menoeceus, we have heard thy mind
Toward him who loves, and him who hates our city.
And sure, ’tis thine to enforce what law thou wilt
Both on the dead and all of us who live.

CR. Then be ye watchful to maintain my word.

CH. Young strength for such a burden were more meet.

CR. Already there be watchers of the dead.

CH. What charge then wouldst thou further lay on us?

CR. Not to give place to those that disobey.

CH. Who is so fond, to be in love with death?

CR. Such, truly, is the meed. But hope of gain
Full oft ere now hath been the ruin of men.

WATCHMAN (entering).
My lord, I am out of breath, but not with speed.
I will not say my foot was fleet. My thoughts
Cried halt unto me ever as I came
And wheeled me to return. My mind discoursed
Most volubly within my breast, and said—
Fond wretch! why go where thou wilt find thy bane?
Unhappy wight! say, wilt thou bide aloof?
Then if the king shall hear this from another,
How shalt thou ’scape for ’t? Winding thus about
I hasted, but I could not speed, and so
Made a long journey of a little way.
At last ‘yes’ carried it, that I should come
To thee; and tell thee I must needs; and shall,
Though it be nothing that I have to tell.
For I came hither, holding fast by this—
Nought that is not my fate can happen to me.

CR. Speak forth thy cause of fear. What is the matter?

WATCH. First of mine own part in the business. For
I did it not, nor saw the man who did,
And ’twere not right that I should come to harm.

CR. You fence your ground, and keep well out of danger;
I see you have some strange thing to declare.

WATCH. A man will shrink who carries words of fear.