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## ARTICLE IV.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF GREEK LITERATURE TO  
THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

BY THE REVEREND JAMES LINDSAY, D.D.

THE religion of Greece was the dawn of a new era in the world's religious development. An external cast the popular Greek religion wore, with plenty absurd legends of the gods. The Orphic songs or legends seem to have exerted some higher influence on their mystic god-lore. In their gods man becomes, in a word, divinized. In the Homeric god-world, we find monarchical polytheism clearly developed. Zeus is king of kings. *Moirā*, or fate, may seem to be set above him, and yet fate is really regarded as his own will. His *βουλή*, or council of the gods, may meet at Olympus, but only to learn his will. And the gods were in being long before Homer: if Greek religion was fixed by Homer's poems, that is not to say that pre-Homeric religion was unimportant or is unknown. Homer and Hesiod but "composed" the "generations" of the gods. Plato tells us that early Greek religion had earth, sun, moon, and stars, for its gods. But the early Greek poets believed the gods to reward the good and punish the wicked. Homer and Hesiod alike regard Zeus as punishing the man who sins against *δίκη*, of which he is guardian. Pausanias and Herodotus alike tell us what Homer did for the early Greek religion, with its undifferentiated gods—its Pelasgian worship of fetich stones and pillars—by transforming its symbols into persons. Pelasgian religion was helped by Egypt—so Herodotus plainly tells us—in the effort to give

form and personality to its gods. But theirs was a mere beginning of things, to await, for long after, the varied and complex forms of the Homeric pantheon. Much help in these matters has in recent years been derived from prehistoric archæology. Pelasgian religion was taken up by the Hellenes of the North, to whom, according to Thucydides, Greek national unity was first due. From this unity sprang the Pantheon, with its differentiated deities. Greek theology was shaped by literature, as we see in Homer, who certainly did not take his gods—made, as they were, in the likeness of men—very seriously. These Homeric gods, however, have clearly overpassed everything that savored of conflict with hostile powers of nature, for Olympic rule over nature and man has been placed beyond dispute. What conflict obtained among the gods themselves is often seen to be due to the racial character of the Homeric gods. Plastic art had its share, as well as literature, in giving form and expression to Greek religious thought. What perplexed that early thought was the fact that the gods could do evil, guardians though they were of the moral law. It was this perplexity which, under the growth of philosophy, endangered the national faith. Though Homer does far more than represent rude and primitive thought, yet religious ritual is in Homer of the simplest, consisting of prayer and sacrifice. Herodotus tells of another ritual, that of the Olympian rites superimposed on the cult of heroes. Blood-curse and haunting ghost and magical purification—such things do not belong to Homer. Neither do the Mysteries, for Demeter and Dionysos are not even in his Olympus. Plato says<sup>1</sup> that Homer's mythological teachings as to the gods were neither "reverent" nor "profitable"—not even self-consistent. Speaking of Plato, one may say that

<sup>1</sup> See Republic, II. 380.

primitive mythology and the Orphic developments supplied Plato with the clue to some of his finest and most fruitful imaginings, his cosmic Eros and his *Anamnesis* among them. It is a wonderful thing to have to say that Greek religion never lost the stamp which, in the hour of its creation, the free imagination of Homer put upon its every feature. But never must it be forgotten that, joyous as Greek religion might be, it yet lacked not in pessimistic elements, such as the dread smitings and death agonies of which the "Iliad" speaks:—

*βᾶλλ'. αἰεὶ δὲ πυρὰ νεκίων κάοντο θάμειαι.*

Awakening reflection was not without anxiety as to its hopes and destinies, which latter lay on the knees of the gods. To the general Greek mind, Homer and Hesiod were, according to Herodotus, the original sources of their god-lore. The Hesiodic writings have the earliest mention of mystery-worship. How truly that which was physical was first, and only afterwards that which was intellectual, in the Hesiodic theology and the Orphic lore, may be seen in the lowly fact that the birth of things is therein represented as proceeding from an egg. From the Orphics, however, sprang the hope of immortality. The Homeric conception, even of Zeus, is not invariable, his official character as exponent of the common will of the gods being one thing, and his character as an individual another. Zeus is the guardian of the "Iliad," while mention is made by Agamemnon of the visitations of "the gods" upon them that swear falsely. So, in the "Odyssey," appeal is made from the gods to Zeus by Telemachus, "if perchance Zeus will punish the wickedness of the suitors." It is Zeus himself who, more than once in the "Iliad," says, "Our altar never lacked seemly feast." Around the crude naturalism of prehistoric religion there had been woven "the delicate moonlit web of poetic fiction," which might soften and spiritualize

it, but could not keep it from the onsets of critical reflection. Homeric gods, in view of the attacks of Xenophanes, were no fit subjects for man's imitation. Homer has, however, done much by his humanized divinities to register advance, at once intellectual and moral, on the crude narrations of Hesiod. But even in Homer, the gods are still treated in the purest and simplest naturalistic form possible; for every spiritual fact there is only a sensuous expression, and man is but the puppet of the gods.

Pindar has a deep sense of Divine Power, and human dependence: to him Zeus is god of gods in his power and will. *Ἐν ἀνδρῶν, ἔν θεῶν γένος*, "one is the race of men, one that of gods." Pindar has been able to say, with the significant the-anthropic addition, *ἐκ μιᾶς δὲ πνέομεν ματρὸς ἀμφότεροι* "from one mother we both draw our breath." Time, for him, was "the proof of real truth."

In Æschylus, we find an absence of conscious antagonism to the popular belief in the gods above, although we are bidden beware of overripe prosperity and avenging calamity. The Greek tragedians are interpreters of life, and Æschylus is their prophet. In his religious teachings, Æschylus seeks to harmonize many and diverse elements—law and life, fate and will, man and God: he sees primitive myth, ancient tradition, and actual event, each and all with a religious eye. Æschylus has the signal merit to bring good out of the seeming cruelty and malignancy of Zeus, and to shadow forth the supremacy of personal Will—Will which is, in him, really superior to Fate. In his reconstruction of the myth of Prometheus, Æschylus seeks to show the need of submitting to the will of Zeus, and the tragic nature of the spiritual conflict for the right. He discards the old doctrine of the envy of the gods, and works under the conception of divine or higher law—law

still external. Zeus, on his representation, appears in none too good a light; but then Zeus, we must remember, figures mainly in the statements of his adversaries. Thus Æschylus speaks of Zeus and his "tyranny"; tells us "none is free but Zeus"; asserts that "Zeus lawlessly holds sway"; further maintains that "Zeus is harsh and keeps justice to himself"; and finally avers "it is a harsh despot and irresponsible who rules."<sup>1</sup> Much of this harshness is attributed to the newness of the power of Zeus—

*ἅπας δε τραχὺς, ὅστις ἄν νέον κρατῆ.*

But, though Prometheus attracts us, and we are tempted to view him, with his unconquerable fortitude, in the light of a martyr, yet we may not forget his real disobedience and faithless distrust of Zeus, the character in which he first appears. In the "Eumenides" of Æschylus, we have the Erinyes, of old vengeful and inexorable, transformed into the Eumenides, beneficent guardians of law and order, a transformation wrought of persuasion rather than of force. An improvement upon the "Persae," certainly, wherein Zeus punishes the overweening, and ὕβρις brings on a harvest of ἄτη. Their supreme god is made subject to the law of development, passing into righteousness from lawlessness, under the teaching of Time.<sup>2</sup> The god of Æschylus may be but a god of righteousness in the making, but, at any rate, our poet will make men feel that Divine Law is inexorable in its requirements. The tragedies of Æschylus are pervaded by a strain of sorrow—there is in them a refrain of woe—but, amid all, he will have it that we can, and must, let "the good prevail." This is better than we have in Isocrates, whom we find plainly stating that calamities and visitations were some-

<sup>1</sup> See Prom. Vinc., 10, 50, 150, 188, 324, 328.

<sup>2</sup> Prom., 981.

times set down to gods wearing other than a beneficent aspect. The "Agamemnon," the "Suppliants," and the "Persae," all voice the baneful effects of wrong-doing, and the heaven-ordained calamities that await man's arrogance, insolence, and impiety. Æschylus would show a new order prevailing over the old, but he would yet set forth that new order as taking up into itself what was best in the old. Drawing from the cycle of prehistoric legend, Æschylus lifts up events from the course of earthly circumstance to higher intervention, and so becomes, in a way, the poet of the supernatural—of a Zeus who has become just, and not unfriendly to man. And, on the human side, Æschylus fails not courageously to tell men that wisdom comes through suffering, and—as in the "Eumenides"—that fear may be necessary guardian of the soul, teaching to revere the right. To Æschylus the evil of the gods is apparent rather than real. So far as monotheism is concerned, it cannot be said that Æschylus rises beyond the view of Xenophanes, that "there is one god greatest among gods and men"—

Εἰς θεὸς ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἂν θράποισι μέγιστος,  
and that He is not like to man in mind or body—

οὔτε δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμόλιος οὔτε νόημα.

Sophocles admits a more humanly operative rational element in the "unwritten and steadfast laws of the gods"—*ἀγραπτα κάσφαλή θεῶν νόμιμα*.<sup>1</sup> Peace is promised to the woe-worn Œdipus "when he shall come to the seat of awful divinities," and the prayer is breathed, "Be not harsh to Phoebus and to me":—

Φοίβω τε κάμοι μὴ γένησθ' ἀγνώμονες.<sup>2</sup>

The impartiality of the Greek spirit finds expression in Sophocles: the violation by Œdipus, unwittingly, of family

<sup>1</sup> Antig., 454.

<sup>2</sup> Œd. Col., 86-91.

law, is visited with punishment, and harmony comes at last only as he accepts his pain as not unmerited. The power of Fate, and the futility of individual will in its effort to flee from destiny, are set forth by Sophocles with definiteness exceeding far that of Æschylus. He makes Œdipus take a quite modern view of his so-called crimes—better termed misfortunes—of which it is said, they were “suffered rather than done” :—

*ἐπεὶ τὰ γ' ἔργα μου  
πεπονθότ' ἐστὶ μᾶλλον ἢ δεδρακότα.<sup>1</sup>*

And the poet gives us the lasting word of remonstrance,—  
“Dost thou with right condemn the unwilling deed?”—

*Πῶς ἂν τό γ' ἄκον πράγμ' εἰκότως ψέγοις?<sup>2</sup>*

But there is in Sophocles no glimpse of the modern mode of reconciliation of our tragic inner conflicts, only a still melancholic resignation remains before the despotic will of deity, which is being fulfilled in the order of the world. This is well seen, for example, in the unrelieved sadness of the sacrifice of Antigone, magnificent as it is in its strength. In the pathetic story of Philoctetes, in the crimes of Œdipus, in the madness of Ajax, and in the vengeance of Orestes and Electra, we have the oft-repeated exemplification of individual will or purpose colliding with the divine order, so that the relentless character of Fate may appear. In Æschylus, we have resignation to evils that are god-sent inculcated in the “*Persæ*”; in the “*Septem contra Thebes*,” submission is taught; and in the “*Agamemnon*,” it is said that justice will be done to the humble. But in Sophocles, the moral issues cannot be said to be less perplexing, even though some attempt may be here made to show that the law of Divine justice works, in some sort, in man as law of his own reason. The

<sup>1</sup> Œd. Col., 266-267. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 977.



consequences of men's acts are inexorably set forth as pursuing them, whether they have been conscious and responsible or not; as, for example, *μοίρα* in the case of Laius.<sup>1</sup> Still, in the end Sophocles would show that destiny involves something of the nature of moral law, and that the conflict of right with opposing right is one which must not cease till higher right shall prevail. For the conflict is never so tragic as when opposing claims are those of right, each with some valid grounds of its own. In Sophocles there is ethical tendency, and the play of passion is set forth as related to an end. The play of passion, indeed, is not the highest thing in the tragedies of either Æschylus or Sophocles: more than violent event or passionate movement is life itself, that life which, in its meaning and misery, in its strange affinities and superb submissiveness to unknown powers, they so grandly set before us. In Æschylus and Sophocles alike we have more than the endeavors of mortals to escape retribution and fate; we have a revelation of life, wherein are disclosed moral values, of which we had not otherwise dreamed. What a sample of this is the "Philoctetes" of Sophocles, and what light radiates from his "Antigone"! A superb cleaving to virtue—to virtue which fortune and destiny hold not in respect—and a wise discernment of the duty to which life shall devote itself, are among those needs of the soul which the Greek tragic poets have once and for all set before us with stupendous force. Such ethical endeavor might, no doubt, be helped by that heterogeneous thing called Greek religion, in so far as this latter might help keep alive a religious feeling. On the other hand, the gods do not shine by the scant aid they render to virtuous souls, such as even an Antigone or a Neoptolemus. Surely the gods might have better seen to the enforcement of some sort of

<sup>1</sup>Ed. Tyr., 711.

justice between man and man, and not have been concerned alone to inspire awe and fear before their own blind and arbitrary behests.

When we turn to Euripides, we find a large faith in the heroic capabilities of human nature, so that he greatly trusts in the power of morality apart from religion. Euripides keenly feels the difficulty of reconciling divine justice with the facts of life, but he boldly declares gods that do wrong to be "no gods" at all. The externality of the law of destiny has, in him, greatly vanished. He stands strongly marked by his rejection of the polytheistic religion; the gods, with him, lead an independent existence. In his adherence to a moral ideal, Euripides directs his criticism mainly against the Homeric poems. Euripides not only bore a part in overthrowing the mythological, but also stood, in some sense, for freedom of thought over against the power of authority. He invites us to the life of rational thought and ideals. He perceives that in this way humanity moves toward the light, and he finds the true tragedy of life in making the inner life dominate the outer. Where his theme most closely resembles that of Æschylus, however, the ethical inferiority of Euripides is sometimes strikingly manifest, even when his dramatic skill suffers not by comparison. To both of them, however, life, with its infinite awe and mystery, is more than art, in which respect they both stand contrasted with the calm, masterful, æsthetic Sophocles. Religious as both Æschylus and Euripides are, they are so with a difference. Æschylus, stern and resolute, is content to set forth the old faith. Euripides, on the other hand, found himself in midst of new influences, of which he could not but take note—influences national, domestic, intellectual, religious. Not even the speculations of early Ionic philosophers could leave him untouched, and the same

is even more true of teachings like those of Heraclitus and Anaxagoras, the latter of whom taught that Mind had turned chaos into the universe. But, of course, Euripides approaches the religious problem from the side of feeling rather than of thought, and hence the realistic character of his treatment. Small wonder if the spiritual sovereigns of the Homeric Olympus came short, in the view of Euripides, and furnished no adequate grounds for reverence. But in Euripides, the center of gravity is shifted from destiny to man, for we may surely say that to Euripides man's destiny is, in some real sense, not about him, but within. But Euripides is keenly sensitive to the moral injustices of life; there is for him no certainty before the capricious power called fate, or chance, that the man who now fares well may not yet fare ill; the gods feed their worship on human ignorance:—

Φύρουσι δ' αὐτὰ θεοὶ πάλιν τε καὶ πρόσω,  
 Ταραγμὸν ἐπιθέντες, ὡς ἀγνωσίᾳ  
 Σέβωμεν αὐτούς.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier, Euripides has made Talthybius say:—

“Zeus, shall I say that thou regardest men?  
 Or that we hold in vain this false belief,  
 Thinking there is indeed a race of gods,  
 While fortune sways all human destinies?”

The evil that men think of the gods Euripides is constrained to disbelieve; hence says Iphigenia, “I do not think any of the gods is bad.”<sup>2</sup> Besides, the gods are not the capricious and arbitrary powers they appear to be, but are themselves under law. This Hecuba is made expressly to declare:—

“The gods are strong, and law which ruleth them:  
 For 'tis by law we have our faith in gods,  
 And live with certain rules of right and wrong.”<sup>3</sup>

In the “Hippolytus” and elsewhere, Euripides makes some

<sup>1</sup> Hecuba, 959-961.

<sup>2</sup> Iph. Taur., 389.

<sup>3</sup> Hec., 799 *et seq.*

attempt to reconcile fate with Providence or Divine Will, so that they may not be thought adverse forces.<sup>1</sup> In the "Bacchae," Euripides points out the hopelessness of attaining full communion with the divine by reason alone, rather than by life in its whole scope and fullness, and sets forth the power and joy of piety with rare strength and beauty. Yet does he think no charm of music exists that can assuage the griefs and sorrows of earthly existence.<sup>2</sup> His comfort lies only in the fact that divine justice is never far off, and that the might of gods, however slowly set in motion, is sure enough in its punitive effects.<sup>3</sup> Thus we have seen how Euripides seeks to transcend the external mythical modes of thought, and to find the spiritual powers of life within man's soul, as truly as in those Divine factors that lie above and without.

In these great Greek tragic poets, we cannot help seeing how near, in their addresses to Deity, they came to Christian conceptions, but neither can we fail to see that not all the joy and splendor of Grecian life sufficed to take away the undertone of sadness and lamentation. They brought forth no solution of human life, so weak and errant in its nature, that could take away the unhappiness that remained for the Greek consciousness. The outer cheerfulness of Greek mythological religion could not conceal the tragic despair that remained within, from the struggle with adverse and inexorable fate. Already we have seen the Greek moral conscience developing, with the result that there has been a qualitative transformation in virtue of which the rather envious and quarrelsome gods of Homeric time have given way to the just and wise gods of Pindar, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. More than this, there has discernibly been at work a tendency towards unitary and monotheistic conception. This monotheistic tendency is

<sup>1</sup> Hipp., 1108 *et seqq.*    <sup>2</sup> Medea, 199 *et seqq.*    <sup>3</sup> Bacchae, 822 *et seqq.*

seen in the soaring towards the contemplation of a Zeus that should be absolute divinity—a soaring which sinks within the regional limitations of fate, almost as soon as it is made. Still, the fact remains of the dominating influence of the idea of Fate in Greek tragedy, in which the conditions and the limits of human happiness are set forth. Always the fates guide and control the destinies of men, and fulfillment of the heavenly decrees is all that is open to man. Life is seen steadily, and is seen whole, although the conception is miniature in character. There is no lack of study of its principles and boundaries; everywhere it runs up to meet the divine. Everywhere upon it the fact of superhuman control is writ large, everywhere it lies embosomed in law. It was a merit, surely, that they were not content—as even a Shakespeare was so well content to do—to depict human life or society without its due setting in the cosmos. For that alone could give it due meaning or significance. Yet is there no coldness in the Greek treatment: what greater pathos or warmth of tenderness could we wish than that of the “*Alcestis*” of Euripides, the “*Electra*” of Sophocles, or the “*Eumenides*” of Æschylus? The very perfection of the Greek drama sprang from its religious elements and associations, and its highest advantages were due precisely to the imperfections of the religion that was therein represented. That religion had enough defect and absurdity in its principles—had enough of halting and inconsistent result, with gods of so many foibles and weaknesses—to make its elements fit themes for dramatic representation. In speaking thus of the place of the gods in the Greek drama, we are not doing so in forgetfulness of the respect shown to the gods in not making the greater gods play leading parts in Greek tragedy. They are near, no doubt, but they wait till their hour has come, when they stand forth as

administrators of eternal justice, or as executioners of the decrees of destiny. The main places of their drama are held by their kings, who, as human, easily evoked the sympathy of their fellow-men. The gods did not always occupy the background, with intent to urge on or to avert some awful catastrophe, but sometimes for fulfillment of beneficent purposes; as, for example, when Æschylus makes Zeus that mild potentate "Who leads mortals in the ways of wisdom,"<sup>1</sup> or when Sophocles speaks of the "great Zeus in heaven"—

*μέγας οὐρανῶ*  
*Ζεὺς, ὃς ἐφορᾷ πάντα καὶ κρατύνει—*

as one whose aid the fatherless may implore.<sup>2</sup> It is true, nevertheless, that as it was, for the most part, due to the poetic imagination that Olympus was peopled with the humanities of the gods, there could not, to advancing reflection, be so very great difference between gods and men as to make the former unsuitable subjects for representation—even, at times, for amusement. Thus tragedy bore a religious character by reason of the fluid and shifting forms of Greek mythology.

The conception of Fate, which we have seen to bulk so largely in Greek religion, is extremely unsatisfying, containing, as it does, no manner of solution of the world's riddle. Fate supplies neither rational ground nor motive: it is a bare inevitableness that the event is thus, and not otherwise. Fate not only lacks feeling and sense, but its decrees are devoid of end. What conception could be more empty? Matters would have been much worse, had not the idea of justice taken so deep hold on the Greek mind, with the fearsome form of *δέκη* as standing by the throne

<sup>1</sup> Agam., 176.

<sup>2</sup> Elec., 175.

of Zeus: in the tragedians, each one's destiny comes to be marked out by Nemesis only with some sort of relation to guilt, personal or relative—a growth of the conception which could not be without some developing power for conscience. The burden is thus thrown on man's personal will. Passages are by no means wanting that show the relation of fate to divine will to be complementary rather than antagonistic, so that fate becomes indeed only another name for the will of Zeus. This is so, for example, in the "Suppliants," and in the "Prometheus," where "none is free but Zeus" (50), and "in no wise shall the counsels (*βουλαί*) of mortal men overstep the harmony of Zeus" (551). But it was in philosophic historians like Thucydides and Polybius, and in orators like Demosthenes, that the emphasis was to be transferred from fate to character.

Turn we now to Aristophanes, that master of ancient comedy, who, deeply religious himself, wrote for a religious people, albeit he paid but scant respect to the gods. Aristophanes waxes wroth against the relaxation in his time of ancient discipline and traditional beliefs—a relaxation due, in his view, to the new culture and dialectic training lowering the moral tone and fibre. He played a part against the teaching of the Sophists, which to him seemed subversive of religion and morality, inveighing against Socrates in the "Clouds" in this connection in no happy or illumined manner. In the "Frogs" and elsewhere, he pursues Euripides with his power of parody, turning the work of this tragedian into ingenious ridicule—the earliest instance of such a form of literary criticism. Not all the buffoonery, in which Aristophanes was fain to indulge, must keep us from doing justice to the deeper and more religious side of this superb master of Attic dialect. Even Plato was able to say, on

occasion, that the Graces had chosen his soul for their abode. Lacking the dignity and gravity of the tragic poets whom we have already considered, Aristophanes has yet extremely polished style and finely finished art, which he usually places at the service of some important aim. We must allow for the fact that he took the world as he found it, and for the fact of what that world was. Plato owed not a little of his superlative rhetorical power and graceful style of expression to the comedies of Aristophanes. Such comic poets as Menander did not in general show an absence of religious belief.

In the sphere of Greek prose, Herodotus meets us with his archaic taste and oft-repeated assertion of the envy of the gods—a Divine envy which at times wears really the guise of mercy and beneficence. Herodotus is not less pious than he is just. The simplicity which marks him does not keep him from having no faith in even Divine predictions, which to him are purposely misleading. In his pages we have reflected the pessimistic view of life, alike, for example, in the tears of Xerxes before the transient character of man's life, and in the pathetic lament of the reply which met him, that there is no man who is so fortunate as not to have felt, "not only once, but many times, the wish to die rather than to live"—

*πολλάκις, καὶ οὐκ ἅπαξ, τεθνάναι βούλεσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ζῆναι.*<sup>1</sup>

Everywhere Herodotus, who lived in the past, is a narrator of early tale and event hardly less suitable and fit than is Homer as singer of early legends. The feeling of Herodotus for Greek life, Greek event, Greek glory, Greek unity, is as perfect as we should well expect, and pervades all his history, with its stories, tales, and moral reflections on the gods and the gains of adversity. The Divine power is to Herodotus only a kind of Nemesis or fate, which keeps poor mortals within the

<sup>1</sup> Herod. vii. 46.



limits of their finitude. In his philosophy of history, there is a "forethought" (*προνοία*) or providence at work as touching things both small and great.<sup>1</sup> Final causes thus exist for him, and the world for him moves under Divine governance. Scarcely has the idea of a moral necessity become in Herodotus anything like a distinct general conception. It is against the danger of too great prosperity in the world Herodotus would warn us, as likely to awaken the jealousy of the gods, in which insistence he, though historian, is very much in accord with the dramatic representations of the poet Æschylus.

Passing to Thucydides, we find an historian of humanity, and a teacher of abstract political wisdom, to whom all vaticination was delusive. Thucydides is the complement of Herodotus, showing us the other side of the shield in his wary, skeptical, endeavors to preserve Greek balance, Greek dignity, and Greek impartiality of mind—an impartiality "grand" as Jowett termed it. Not that it is a monopoly of Thucydides, being also marked in Homer. But, in both, it saves from giving form and color to what they narrate from patriotic or personal sympathies—from anything, indeed, save a characteristic, noble, and truth-loving impartiality. Hence, to the surprise of men, Thucydides has been able to speak of Antiphon, traitor to the democracy, as "a man inferior in virtue to none of his contemporaries." One needs such a literary foil as we find in Xenophon—vain and absorbed in small passions of the moment—for bringing out the merits of Thucydides. Singular is Thucydides in his freedom from proneness to pass moral judgments. One cannot think of him without seeing in him a precursor of the spirit of a Ranke, critical, colorless, impartial, sincere, and self-controlled. Contemporary of Sophocles as he is, Thucydides speaks as if from

<sup>1</sup> Herod. iii. 108.

a different world—and the same holds good of his other contemporary, Herodotus, though for different reasons—such difference being due to the function of the historian being other than that of the poet. Dignified, and sometimes over-condensed and obscure, in style, Thucydides showed his primacy in setting events in their just relations, and tracing them to their causes. With face turned towards the future, Thucydides is lifted above the men of his own time, and his work is a treasure-house of wisdom for all time, despite the fact that he knows nothing of supernatural interference in mundane affairs. Piety, to Thucydides, counted for little against the fate of gods. Polybius, also, philosophically traced events to their causes in character.

The theanthropic relation of God and man, so wanting to Herodotus, who is quite innocent of doctrine like *ὁμολώσεις*, is strikingly voiced by Aratus, and by Cleanthes in his beautiful and astonishing Hymn, which clearly points the way to a more intelligent spiritual worship. Here we can take no account of many points of religious significance in Greek lyric poets like Sappho or Simonides, elegiac poets like Theognis and Solon, or philosophic poets like Empedocles, with his calm, didactic tone.

We are now in a position to form some sort of estimate of the contribution of Greek Literature to the world's religious thought. For, is it not evident what a splendid propædæutic of Christian thought and teaching this literature was? Can we not see that Christianity came to supply just what this literature lacked, but yet nobly strove and reached after? Partial and incomplete as might be the teachings of Æschylus and Sophocles anent the rights and claims of violated law, sombre and imperfect as might be the views of Euripides re-

garding human destiny, these all had a sense of Divine law, as holy, just, inevitable, and a feeling after some more unified and harmonious mode of existence than they here knew. No doubt, their hopes and feelings were inchoate and imperfect, such as we speak of in Wordsworth's lines of the "Excursion" :—

" Man is of dust: Ethereal hopes are his,  
Which, when they should maintain themselves aloft,  
Want due consistence: like a pillar of smoke  
That with majestic energy from earth  
Rises, but, having reach'd the thinner air,  
Melts, and dissolves, and is no longer seen."<sup>1</sup>

But still, when the Apostle of the Gentiles came to unfold on the Areopagus the truths of the seventeenth chapter of the Acts, what was he doing but giving more perfect form and full-voiced expression to those truths which the great Greek poets had dimly, inarticulately felt, to wit, the truths that the law had made nothing perfect, that religious feeling—as their *δεισιδαιμονία* showed—had its place, that the future life awaited man in its completeness, and that the reign of righteousness in God was already begun? Worship was being carried out into wider temple than any of Olympian Zeus or of Athene, even into a temple not made with hands. But in Greek literature and thought, a soil had been prepared, and a suitable *nidus* made ready for the new teachings; for men's thought, in that early springtime of humanity, had not been able of itself to wring the secrets from life and the world. But the results, however inadequate, were great and valuable, in their richness of suggestion and intuition. The greatness of that contribution has been proved by the persistent influence exerted by Greek poetry, Greek systems, and Greek ideas, on all subsequent generations. For the literature of Greece is the

<sup>1</sup> Excursion, iv.

one really original literature in Europe, and so it has been the groundwork of all later literature. Its ideas have found their way into all modern—not to speak of mediæval—literature, and have wielded the most subtle and potent influence. Surely the way in which Æschylus lives in Shelley, and Euripides in Browning, are sufficient examples. The dawn of modern tragedy already lies in Euripides, the conflict of mighty spiritual powers is already foreshadowed in Æschylus and Sophocles, and modern criticism of life is, in fact, already anticipated in Homer and his successors. We have seen how these Greek poets are to be judged by their ethical worth and religious import: we have no right to expect in them those results of moral experience and wisdom which have been won only through long centuries of suffering; but we may claim for them wondrous simplicity, beauty, balance, truthfulness, vividness, insight into essential passion, self-restraint, and moral wisdom, the whole making them founts of perennial delight. And when to them we add the philosophers of Greece, with whom in this article we are not mainly concerned, with what unruffled serenity we find a Plato contemplating life, with what sublime faith we find him holding to one eternal, never-changing God, who is good, and to the superiority, worth, and beauty of heavenly virtue. So, too, with what splendid tenacity we find an Aristotle holding to reason as supreme faculty of the soul, to whose perfect realization man must continually approximate, even though his philosophy sat loosely to positive religion. He yet loved the gods as a matter of course. But religious belief had become too much robbed of its content. Even in Homeric times, the social bond—for so it should be called—between gods and men was not without religious significance: in the days of Epaminondas, we see what rare delicacy of conscience, and fine moral earnestness, philosophy had

been able to produce. The aim of the Greek thinkers had been to make the world a more fit and worthy habitation for man: from Socrates to the Stoics they believed in the existence of the gods, but always was "Hellas the nurse of man complete as man."

The Hellenic religion, as exemplified in Greek Literature, bore to the end the character mainly of a nature-religion. This, in spite of its large infusion of ethical sentiment, and in spite, also, of the moral progress of its gods through the advances of culture and poetry. That religion made life joyous and free in its own way, for it saw in every manifestation of nature a divine element. It partook of a large and generous inclusiveness in its character, and was not poor in the peculiarly Greek sense of proportion, nor in equilibrium of powers and harmonious development of aptitudes. But, though these things were so, and though the Greek poets might ethically construe nature-myths according to their own will, yet the gods were nature-gods still, and never did they get beyond the stage of being semi-ethical only. It was a true and notable instinct that led their poets, however, not to sacrifice the interrelation subsisting between God and man, for such an element of religion could never be sacrificed. What has just been said illustrates yet further the position we have already taken up, that the Greek Literature was a superb propædeutic of the more spiritual and rational religion that was to be propounded by Saint Paul at Athens. The religious sanction was maintained, along with new ethical sanction, by Socrates, by Plato, and by the Stoics. The "growth into the likeness of God,"—*ὁμολώσις*, —which as a doctrine had been derived from the Mysteries and Pythagoreanism, was accorded high place by Plato. Foreshadowed in Socratic teaching, it

became a cardinal point with the Stoics. What wonder that Saint Paul chose to repeat, *Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμὲν*. Because neither man nor nation can continuously triumph without religious devotion, Athenian greatness was unable to survive the loss of living religious faith. But their loss was the world's religious gain, and they could have truly said, *Morientes vivimus*.