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"THE EVOLUTION OF THE ENGLISH DRAMA!"

Each human soul has an affinity to some mysterious oblivion peopled with passing dream shades. In childhood there is a tightly-drawn relationship that affords long moments of reverie, in which elusive spirits sing and recite of intangible yet intoxicating deeds of heroism carried on in an ideal region of heroic life. The whole environment is teeming with a vague and charming minstrelsy. As the ties of the world claim our thought, and as our attention is directed to all that is external and material, these cords become loosened and we remember the touch of our halcyon world only half-consciously. It is thus in the history of our drama. In the childhood of the world its race listened to an unspoken music that sank into the mind of the individual as he toiled in the field or moved toward his temple of worship. But afterwards when races multiplied and life became less simple, the introspective thought was stifled by the outward mechanism, and Time, hitherto unrecognized, became the potent factor in material existence, to wrestle with which required the concentration of all thought. Hence we proceed from the passionless lyric of unspoken imagery to the sympathetic drama of expressed struggle and heroic action.

In our Garden-of-Eden state the peaceful happiness of the tranquil solitude soothed man to gentleness. Sin had not wedded his nature with that of the lower animals, whom he controlled. While men still lived in unconsciousness of strife, their thought took shape in lyrics, but, as ambition for supremacy seized the race, the drama arose. As the brilliant sun of knowledge shed its light on the awakening world, motives and jealousies became disclosed which hitherto had lain dormant in the still twilight of consciousness. So in the history of expression. While man lived in a semi-embryonic state, while his thoughts and dreams and inward whisperings formed his field of action, while his fellow-being was no object of curiosity to a mind wholly unacquainted with investigation, so his drama was an unwritten chant of heroic deeds performed by ideal creatures in a mythical era beyond the furthest verge of Time and Tense. However, when his inward life received the shock of external
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action, when earthly struggle commenced, his energies were directed outward to grapple with material problems. Then this tangible world took form in a vital literary history of action, a passionate expression of man's ambitious life which thrilled the chords of life and love and struggle all the way down through the ages, until out of the crudities and imperfections of nascent thought was evolved the whole man of expression in Shakespeare.

The Hellenes were a race composed of several kindred tribes whose common idea of their individual origin was that they sprang from the soil which they tilled. The remarkable achievement of this race was the evolution of the Homeric Olympus. Out of the vague prehistoric chaos of tradition which abounded in repulsive forms totally hideous to the human mind Homer brought forth the clear and living types of godhead holding a definite province in the government of the world or a special relation to the energies of mankind; each too a person of a certain aspect and with certain qualities. The love of beauty was the mainspring of all Greek endeavour although the love of knowledge and love of freedom inspired their thought and action. Poetry and drama as first inspired, is the index of the capacity of the Greek--a special form of their energy in which the other forms are implicit. The part assigned them in the drama of the nations was to create forms of beauty, to unfold ideas which should remain operative, when the short bloom of their own existence was over and thus to give a new impulse, a new direction to the whole current of human life.

In its birth and in its maturity, surely drama has been strangely united. It has been said that the man of genius sometimes is such in virtue of combining the temperament distinctive of his nation with some gift of his own which is foreign to that temperament. So it was with Homer; a distinct perfection even though a dawning mind. So it is in Shakespeare, the basis is English, and the individual gift a flexibility of spirit which is not normally English.

There is no clue to these secrets of Nature's alchemy. The Hellenes appear in the dawn of dramatic history with their unique temperament already distinct. We can point only to one reason, and that a subordinate cause which must have aided its development, namely the geographical

ical position of Greece. No people of the ancient world were so fortunately placed. No where are the aspects of external nature more beautiful, more varied, more stimulating to the energies of body and mind, a climate which within three parallels of latitude nourishes the beeches of Pindus and the palms of Cyclades; mountain-barriers which at once created a frame-work for the growth of local federations and encouraged a sturdy spirit of freedom; coasts abounding in natural harbours; a sea dotted with islands and notable for the regularity of its wind currents; ready access alike to Asia and to the Western Mediterranean;---these were circumstances happily congenial to the inborn faculties of the Greek race, and admirably fitted to expand them. Such was the favoured land which saw the beginning of Western civilization and the creation of primal drama. A like cause influenced the development of the learning which in England evolved Shakespeare and his drama. The successful wars in France and the Netherlands for the religious freedom of the Protestant reformers; the conquests in the West Indies; the new discoveries in remote parts of the Globe; all contributed to stimulate the energies of the nation, to turn its attention to great enterprises and to strengthen the rising consciousness of its power and greatness. It was, however, the triumph over Philip's "Invincible Armada" that tended to elevate the national sense of self-consciousness and patriotism to the height of poetical enthusiasm.

The earliest indication of dramatic bent is the choral chant over the victor in war or tournament. The bard croons his verses to the measure of the gay dance about the altar. As the conception of music or harmony was in itself very crude and simple, so we find these first verses quite primitive in form, yet for all, displaying a clear and distinct idea of measure, which requires but the higher civilization to mould them into perfection. Pindar is the poet that unites ancient lyrical myth with actual dramatic leaning, and creates the first step in the growth of the drama. In his odes of victory, we find the vague dreamy character of the deeds of a mythical hero outshone and relieved by the clear description of the actual deeds of the living victor. The Homeric Olympus became actual, the heroes are seen under a new light,---neither that far-off, though clear, light as of a dreary twilight world which the former lyrics shed around them heretofore, nor as yet that searching sunshine of noon-

tide which was shortly to follow.

While we may be wrong in speaking of these creations of Pindar as drama, yet their affinity to the Attic production is so close as to be almost a prototype. The great human passions and living realities of existence have for the first time been thrust upon the awakening soul of man.

Aeschylus but amplifies this idea, Pindar celebrated only great events and high purposes whereas those of the Attic school produce songs inspired by wine and conviviality definitely associated with the wine-god Dionysus. It shows the affect of external and worldly prosperity and social intercourse. It is the result of a wider, more luxurious, less religious civilization.

It presents a strong contrast to the tranquil solemn chant formerly associated with the Greek celebration of a victory, whether between two Olympian gods or between one of the gods and a man. We have now sunk in our evolution of dramatic form and character to the level of man's struggle with man, and even to man's dominion over demons.

This song of Dionysus was originally sung by one voice, while the chorus always from the beginning, the moving spirit in Greek poetical conception performed the dance ever growing more complex. Arion, one of the earliest of the dramatists who followed Pindar, changed the ancient form of the chorus from a mere background or accompaniment to the actor (who was the bard) from mere human instruments to satyrs, and thus vindicated the right of the deity to an honor which had been temporarily alienated from his worship. Arion assigned the song of Dionysus to specially appropriate performers who stood in a recognized relation to that god. And he was also making the performance something more lively, more characteristic than an ordinary choral song. Still as yet there was nothing properly dramatic in such an entertainment.

Thespis, who followed Arion as the bard at these festivals, elevated the chorus from a mere adjunct to his verse measure, by addressing his song to the satyrs and hence creating a vehicle for a lively address humorous or satirical. Even here, however, action could not yet be represented as taking place before the eyes of the spectators, even though the reciter of verses ^{at} vividly related great deeds.

Aeschylus made his first appearance as a poet in five hundred B. C., and gained the first prize at the Dionysia in 484 B. C. The entertainment

tainment which he found existing was such as Thespis had made it---a goat-song or tragedy which was still essentially lyric and not yet properly dramatic. Instead of the single reciter, Aeschylus introduced two persons both, like the single reciter detached from the chorus. The two persons could hold a dialogue and could represent action. By this change, Aeschylus altered the whole character of the lyric tragedy and created a drama. The dialogue between the two actors now became the dominant feature of the entertainment; the part of the lyric chorus though still very important had now only a diminished value.

The age of Aeschylus regarded the resplendent myth of Homeric Olympus and like legends as history, and this with actual extant history supplied the tragic themes. In that picture of the past, which lived before the imagination of the men who had fought at Salamis, no heroic glory lit up the period between Homer and themselves. The essence of that tragedy was in viewing the heights of the past from the heights of the present, so blending them in a single imaginative view that the heroic past became, in very truth, the present. When Aeschylus took a subject from the heroic legends and made it into a play, his paramount aim was to present his story in the most effective and vivid manner--that which seemed to him most beautiful and impressive. He was a poet and an artist moved by the gods to give dramatic embodiment to these great forms; human but raised above common humanity; from whom the Hellenes traced their lineage and through whom their lineage ascended to the gods of their race who in the primal idea of all, had sprung from the soil of Greece. Stirred by that great endeavour Aeschylus poured forth the deepest thoughts and feelings which his life had bred in him; yes, and felt himself called to be a teacher--to move the minds and nourish the hearts of his people. But these thoughts and sentiments which he uttered as the course of the drama suggested do not warrant the assumption that the poet had a definite and coherent system of doctrine in his mind. His answers to great doctrinal questions are vague and unsatisfactory. As yet the scope of drama is limited and does not touch the soul of existence. As for the Athenian spectators in the theatre they went to see the heroes in bodily presence and to hear their living voices; they went to see what Aeschylus would make Agamemnon do and say. They looked also to hear wise thoughts from actors or from chorus, and they welcomed