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MEASURING EURIPIDES

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ISSUED BY
THE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN SECTION
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MEASURING EURIPIDES.

Convinced that a Greek letter fraternity like this should at least occasionally be regaled with a classical theme, I have chosen "Measuring Euripides" as my subject. Besides, Greek is now becoming so rare an accomplishment that anyone who has ever studied it has a feeling of aristocratic distinction, and, while he is of course careful not to cast his pearls before barbarians, still he likes to air his esoteric and exclusive knowledge upon occasion. And this is surely an appropriate occasion, for the members of this society are by no means to be classed as barbarians.

This address will not, however, be delivered in the Greek language nor even interlarded with quotations from the original. Years ago as an undergraduate I did learn by heart a few passages in both Greek and Latin, which I might innocently introduce in answering examination questions, or quote with great effect in literary and debating societies. But at least a dozen years have passed since I last heard anyone read Greek verse aloud

Moreover, this talk will not be a literary appreciation of Euripides. In my opinion he must be read in the original for that. Mr. Carl Becker, it is true, has recently stated in *The Dial* that both Shakespeare and Euripides are improved by being translated into German! But as I have compared various English translations of Euripides with the Greek text, I have found that those which make any literary pretense usually add to his words and detract from his thought. His wording is far from flowery and he uses a few adjectives over and over again. But his simple and severe diction is something like those Elgin marbles from the frieze of the Parthenon, which achieve perfection with few chiselled lines and despite bare surfaces where the sculptor seems scarcely to have touched the stone. Therefore a literal English translation seems barren, awkward, and halting, while a literary or poetical translation reminds one of Minerva's helmet replaced by modern millinery. The fact is that we must divest ourselves of over 2300 years' accumulation of vocabulary, ideas, and experience before we try to translate Euripides. Really to appreciate his eighteen extant plays and numerous fragments we must see them, like some cluster of Doric columns that still stands amid the ruins of an ancient temple, against their own cloudless Attic sky.

The oldest extant critic of Euripides is his contemporary, the comic poet Aristophanes. Besides many digs at Euripides in his other farces, Aristophanes in *The Frogs* represents him as disputing with Aeschylus in Hades the respective merits of their

tragedies. When all other methods failed to give satisfaction, or to end their dispute, a balance was brought in, and they were ordered each to place specimen verses in the opposite scales and see which weighed the most. This ancient precedent I propose to imitate, but instead of weighing Euripides' verses, I shall try to measure his ideas.

There are four great guides that lead us to the past,—history, philosophy, art, and literature. Probably all of the present initiates into this learned society have had courses in history proper and in the history of at least English Literature, but I am afraid that a majority of them will graduate from this institution without having studied either the history of philosophy or the history of art. Yet the one of them represents the supreme product of the human hand and the other the supreme product of the human mind. I think that it is a matter deeply to be regretted that in this College for Women so few courses are offered in the History of Philosophy and in the History of Art, and that those which are offered are not elected by a much greater percentage of the students.

Now my investigation this afternoon lies in the borderland between three of these fields, history, philosophy and literature. If the scope of those subjects is broadly interpreted it will come under all three of them. But if history is narrowly interpreted as nothing but past politics and a chronology of events; if philosophy is limited to the systematic reasoning of a few great thinkers; if literature is read only for amusement, or studied chiefly for its form and for its general aesthetic effects, then my subject lies outside all three.

As one reads or thinks about any past period or bygone country, one naturally wonders, how did the men and women of that time look and dress, but above all, what were their real thoughts and feelings? Behind their wars and conquests, their statutes and their political revolutions, behind all that outward activity that is often the expression more of the ambition of a few leaders than of the spirit of an entire people,—behind, too, the systems of a few leading philosophers, systems, moreover, which have often been constructed for them by modern admirers—what was the real chaos of public opinion?

Would we, if we were transported suddenly back into the midst of that time, and if we were endowed with the ability to speak and understand their language, and if we found ourselves by some magic change dressed like them and resembling them in other external details—would we fall easily into their ways and notions and standards? Or would our impulses and our different reactions to situations and our modern ideas cause them to regard us as barbarians or heretics or madmen? It would be comparatively easy to adapt ourselves to the absence of many modern

material comforts and conveniences, to dispense for instance with automobiles and moving picture shows and typewriters and running hot water and newspapers;—these things we manage to get along without, when we go camping in the woods in the summer vacation—though the absence of matches and watches and tea and coffee and soap might prove rather embarrassing.

But would we be able to rough it so successfully in the realm of thought? Would we be able to divest ourselves of that complex "cast of thought" which such things as science and history, sociology and statistics and machinery, and a long series of philosophers and inventors and writers and radicals have woven for us? Could we lay aside this intellectual clothing as readily as we change from our city clothes to the easy and unconventional costume of the woods or shore? Could we go back to the simpler stock of ideas and to the more primitive psychology and ethics of a distant past?

The city dweller who for the first time tries life in the woods or upon the farm is forced to admit his inferiority in some respects to the guide and the native, and to learn lessons from them. So if we wish to study the past we must borrow the eyes and the ideas of the men of the past. The student of history must have a native guide. And he, too, will sometimes be forced to admit his inferiority in some respects to the men of the past and to learn lessons from them.

There has been put up recently from several quarters a most deplorable howl to this effect. Why do not writers of historical text-books and teachers of history confine and limit their instruction to those facts of the past which serve to explain the present? Why burden the memory of the young with the dead facts and fancies, with bygone pictures and ideas that do not directly bear upon our modern problems and conditions? In other words, why have boys and girls learn anything that they do not know already or will not learn in the course of daily life? Why have them read about anything that lies outside of their own experience, or that cannot at least be explained and understood in terms of their own experience? Why broaden their sympathies and understanding by taking them outside this busy crowded city of modern civilization back to the glades and groves of past centuries and to times and places that they would never otherwise visit and to thoughts and fancies that could never otherwise come to them? Why increase their knowledge? Why *add* anything to their pleasure? Such is the deplorable contention of certain present day educators and historians—and it expresses an attitude, with which, as you have probably already gathered, I am by no means in complete accord.

In selecting Euripides for consideration, however, I am after all going a long way toward pleasing those people who wish to

study only those things and men of the past that have a connection with the present; for he always has been recognized as the most modern in spirit of the three great Greek tragedians, and in my opinion he has made contributions to our modern thought exceeded among extant Greek writers only by those of a few thinkers like Plato and Aristotle.

Eighteen out of perhaps a hundred plays by Euripides have come down to us as against seven each for his predecessor Aeschylus and his contemporary Sophocles. The fragments that have been preserved from his lost plays fill 260 pages in Nauck's edition as against 180 pages occupied by the fragments of Sophocles and only 98 taken up by those of Aeschylus. These statistics indicate that Euripides was more prized by posterity than his two fellows; and the greater bulk of his extant writings gives us a better notion of the range and character of his art and thought. At the same time, the recurrence of the same thoughts in the different plays, and again in the fragments, convinces us that what we do possess of his writings is enough from which to form a pretty correct idea of his writings as a whole. His fragments, I perhaps should say, have been preserved for us chiefly in the anthologies or *florilegia* of Byzantine writers, and in citations and quotations by authors of the Roman period like Cicero and Plutarch, or by the early church fathers.

I shall not consider Euripides' plays as artistic wholes, but shall tear them to pieces and classify the ideas that I find in them. For they are full of sententious utterances and of pithy sentences expressing opinions or conclusions concerning various problems of human life and interests of mankind. They give us then some measure of the number and kind of ideas and mental queries that a Greek mind harbored 2300 years ago,—some picture of the psychology of a Hellene. And for our purpose it does not much matter what Euripides' own convictions were, whether he agreed with this utterance of one of his characters, or did not approve of that. Even if he is sarcastic, it must be at the expense of someone's thought; even if he be insincere, the conception stated is none the less clearly in existence. What we want to discover is what anybody and what everybody was thinking about then, what their social and moral standards were, what their prejudices and errors and superstitions were, too. Thus the advantage in making a dramatist the basis of our investigation becomes obvious. For we listen not to one past poet or philosopher, but to a stageful of different personalities. Thus we may hope to learn varied views and obtain something approaching a consensus of opinion.

We must of course bear in mind that there were great differences between the Greek drama and modern plays. A Greek tragedy was a sort of cross between a performance of Grand Opera, a medieval miracle play, and a modern church service,

whose sermon and prayer intermingled with hymn and anthem and scriptural reading and responses, somewhat resemble the choral odes, the regular dialog of alternate lines between two actors or one principal and the chorus, and the longer set speeches of a Euripidean tragedy. The Greek drama originated as a feature of popular religious festivals and it retained this religious character in Euripides' day and his plays are full of prayers to the gods and of sermonizing. Music, dancing, and elaborateness of costume and scenic effect, were important features, however, whereas the acting, and especially character acting, was comparatively unimportant. Since only two or three speaking characters were ever on the stage at the same time, all the "parts" were taken by a few men who filled more than one role each. The three great Greek tragedians, although masters in their own way, were mere tyros and novices in many matters of stagecraft and psychological finesse. They made their characters say things of themselves that would better be said about them, or were guilty of anachronisms and other incongruities and improbabilities. These, however, are minor flaws which do not seriously affect our investigation. Moreover, the particular circumstances under which each play was written, while they may account for this or that particular utterance, need not be taken into account in our rough general measurement of the contents of Euripides' plays as a whole. In any case most of his plays cannot be dated with any approach to certainty so that it is hopeless to speculate as to the particular situation prevailing when each was composed. What is certain is that Euripides' plays as a whole were affected by the age in which he lived and that they doubtless reflect many of its features.

(We should remember therefore that he wrote his tragedies during the last half or third of the fifth century before our era. He wrote as the age of Pericles was closing, while Socrates and the sophists were teaching in the streets of Athens, and during the bitter trials and experiences of the Peloponnesian War. Among the chief influences to which he must have been subject were: first, the literary traditions from Homer on, and especially those of the earlier tragedians. Here would be a danger that he might copy the past instead of conforming his contents to the present. Second, he was bound by the religious teaching of the past, by the holy atmosphere of the festivals at which his plays were produced, and by the old stories or myths which he had to use as plots, just as preachers today have to take their texts from the Bible. Third, he lived in a Greek city state and had been brought up under its peculiar political, social, and intellectual conditions. Fourth, he could not but have felt the effects of the disastrous Peloponnesian war, which marked the end of Athens' political and commercial supremacy. But fifth and finally, he seems to have been more powerfully influenced by the great development that went on at this time in rhetoric and public speak-

ing, in philosophy and education,—by what has been collectively characterized as “the new learning”. The other four forces that have been mentioned were perhaps more outside influences working upon him, but in this last movement he took a leading part; its new spirit of free inquiry, discussion, and argument fairly bubbled up within him and overflows in every one of his extant plays, even in the grotesque and humorous satyr play *The Cyclops*.

It was some years ago during a summer vacation at the sea-shore—vacation, you see, keeps running through my mind—when I had no other books at hand to study that I began the analysis and classification of Euripides’ contents which I present to you this afternoon. At that time I did not quite finish all the eighteen plays and did not tabulate the 1091 fragments at all. This I have tried to do since I was asked to deliver this address. There are, however, still a number of loose odds and ends; and I also should need to revise the method and check up again the results of my notes of several years ago, before I could venture to present any detailed and accurate statistics concerning Euripides’ ideas. But such specific figures would bore you anyway, and to go into every detail of his thought would take far more time than we have now at our disposal. I shall therefore simply give you some general notion of my results in their present rough approximate shape, with a few illustrative passages that are typical, and a little more detail on one or two topics in which you may be especially interested.

In the almost innumerable references of Euripides to *the gods and religion* we find represented every shade of opinion and feeling from simple unquestioning faith and humble acquiescence in divine providence to the sharpest criticism of the gods and their management of the world and to utter scepticism as to the existence of any divinity. At one time the old polytheism with its myths and rites is portrayed without criticism, and the ancient customs and sacred notions, such as oaths, sacrifices, blood-pollution, and the right of sanctuary and of suppliants, are unquestioningly accepted. At another time the conduct of the gods as told in old legend is attacked as immoral and disbelief is expressed in regard to improbable myths. Sometimes men and women attribute their misfortunes and mistakes to some god, but in other passages we are told that “most ills of mortals are of their own seeking”. Often different gods and goddesses are represented as hostile to each other, or as animated towards human beings by feelings of revenge, offended dignity, and other unworthy motives. Again, the gods are depicted as benevolent and compassionate. “We must no longer believe in the gods,” says Orestes in *Electra*, “If the wrong is stronger than the right”. And someone in *Bellerophon* remarks, “I want to say to you that the gods are no gods if they do anything disgraceful”. Other passages proclaim that the gods work in a mysterious and inscrutable way, that they bring to pass the unexpected, and that

their justice is slow but sure. There are moments of exalted religious experience, as in the lines, "Golden wings are on my back and I am shod with the winged sandals of the Sirens and I am going aloft into the far ether to meet Zeus". But Euripides' characters not only with Isaiah "mount up on wings like eagles"; they also "walk and not faint". "This is the life free from evil," sings the chorus in the Bacchanals, "if a man limit his thoughts to human themes as is his mortal nature, making no pretense in heavenly things. I envy not deep subtleties. I joy rather in pursuing the great clear eternal truths, that a man live his life by day and night in purity and holiness, striving toward a noble goal, and that he honor the gods by casting from him all evil principles".

There are also, however, moments of doubt and bewilderment, as when Helen wonders who can define God amid this mortal whirl, or Melanippe says "Zeus, whoever Zeus is, for I know him only by name", or when Talthybius exclaims in *Hecuba*, "Oh Zeus, what shall I say? that you watch over men, or that this is a false opinion accepted without reason, namely, that there is a race of gods,—whereas chance rules the affairs of men". Indeed, chance, fortune, fate and necessity are so often mentioned by Euripides that his writings give considerable ground for the reproach of the Fathers of the Christian church that Tyche or Fortune was really the chief deity of paganism. But we also note in a large number of passages a close association of *nature and religion*, and of springs, glens, groves, peaks, waves, oak and pine, olive and ivy, sun, moon, and stars with myth and with cult.

There are also moments of spiritual consolation as when the chorus in *Hippolytus* finds thinking of the gods comforting despite the chaos of human affairs. There are moments of confident waiting for divine help as in the line from the *Children of Heracles*, "Zeus is my ally, I shall not fear." There are moments of religious conformity as when even the aged Tiresias joins the dance of the Bacchic revellers. There are moments of submission to the divine will as in the advice of Dionysius to Pentheus, "I would sacrifice to him rather than in a rage kick against the pricks; thou a mortal, he a god." There are moments of supreme self confidence as in the famous fragment preserved for us both by Cicero and Plutarch, by the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Julian, by the mystics Iamblichus and Hermes Trismegistus, "The mind in each of us is a god." But against this may be set another fragment much quoted in antiquity: "Do you see this lofty unexperienced ether encircling earth in its moist embrace? This consider Zeus; call this God." This apparently materialistic view of God, however, is not necessarily inconsistent with the other passage for Euripides more than once speaks of the human mind as after death losing its individuality and rejoining the immortal ether. When the dying man "breathes forth the

eternal," his body returns to the earth from which it came, but his breath or spirit likewise rejoins its native ether.

If we seek for Euripides' own belief amid the extensive and varied picture which he gives of the religious life and thought of his times perhaps we may detect it in an utterance put into the mouth of old Hecuba in the *Trojan Women*,—an utterance which elicits from Menelaus the exclamation, "What's that? A strange prayer you make to the gods." Hecuba had prayed: "Oh thou who dost support the earth and who retest thereupon, whosoe'er thou art, a riddle beyond our ken! Be Thou Zeus, or force of nature, or mind of man, to thee I pray. For thou goest everywhere with noiseless tread ruling the affairs of men with justice."

Passages have already been or will later be quoted from Euripides suggestive in thought and wording of the New Testament. Some other examples are: in a prayer to Zeus in *Helen* "If you but touch us with the tip of your finger we shall reach our desired goal." The notion found twice in Euripides and once before him in Aeschylus that on a great occasion, a house or walls would cry out or could hear what was said. A passage in the *Suppliants* to the effect that the wild beast has the rocks as a refuge and the slave the altar of the gods but that human happiness is always uncertain. A line in one of the fragments: "A healer of others, himself swollen with sores." Such passages, while not exactly corresponding in phraseology to verses of the Bible, are sufficiently similar to suggest that the writers of some of the books of the New Testament were considerably influenced by Euripides either directly or indirectly. Possibly Jesus himself was thus influenced. In the first epistle to the Corinthians, fifteenth chapter, thirty-third verse, the words translated in the King James' version as "Evil communications corrupt good manners" are an exact quotation of one of Euripides' fragments, although it might better be translated, "Evil company corrupts good morals."

Euripides' characters frequently express scepticism as to the divination of the future which often enters into his plots: but magic philtres and incantations are frequently mentioned in a matter-of-fact sort of way. Astrology seems almost unknown to Euripides.

Because of the religious origin and character of the Greek drama we expect to find in Euripides many passages concerning the gods and their dealings with men and the duties of men towards the deities. Since his plays are tragedies we also find many reflections concerning man's woes and sufferings, and the transitoriness of human happiness and that death which regularly terminates the careers of the chief actors in a

tragedy, although Euripides is not so merciless a slaughterer of his cast as were the Elizabethan dramatists. But we are not prepared for so many allusions to politics, to family life, to social classes and problems, especially concerning women, and to intellectual interests, as we find in his tragedies.]

These four categories of political, domestic, social, and intellectual life are then those to which after religion and ethics Euripides gives most space and attention. But it is very remarkable that of economic matters he says little or nothing. Business and industry pass practically unnoticed in all his eighteen plays and 1091 genuine fragments. Of ordinary daily life in the family he has something to say. He has many passages considering slavery from the social standpoint. He alludes occasionally to the fine arts and to athletics, once directly attacking athletes in a passage twenty-eight lines long, and he refers still more frequently to medicine and music. But of the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth in his time, of the different occupations and means of livelihood, he says very little, even incidentally. Yet he lived and wrote in the richest and busiest city, the greatest commercial and naval power of the Mediterranean. It is true that several allusions to men who sail the sea in an insatiate desire for wealth, and a number of metaphors drawn from maritime life; show that familiarity with and love of the sea which runs through Greek literature from the Odyssey down. But such allusions to ships and sea trade make up most of his at all specific allusions to business pursuits. In two of his tragedies he speaks of the gods having caused wars between men to relieve over-population, but even this distant approach to assigning an economic cause for wars is introduced as if a rather novel idea, and illustrates the fact that men of the past attributed many things to divine interference which we trace to economic or natural causes.

Artisans are scarcely mentioned by him; only once or twice is there an allusion to a carpenter or some such workman. Nor is agricultural economy really discussed, though peasant and pastoral life occasionally appear in the background. There are, it is true, numerous passages about wealth, but all these discuss it from the moral, not the economic standpoint, arguing concerning the uses and limitations of riches, asking whether money is essential to happiness, and whether poverty or the possession of wealth is more conducive to the development of moral character. Wealth is often extolled, sometimes, however, cynically, while in many other passages it is scorned in comparison with other moral and social values.

It can scarcely be argued that it was regard for the dignity of the tragic stage which restrained Euripides from portraying

economic conditions and discussing economic problems. For he is notorious for his disregard of all the old fashioned notions of the dignity and proprieties of the tragic stage. He brought it down to the earth and humanized it, brought in kings in tatters and nurses talking philosophy. He made the passion of love the central theme in several of his tragedies, whereas Aeschylus is represented in *The Frogs* of Aristophanes as affirming proudly that he had never put a woman in love into any of his plays. On the contrary, the boast which Aristophanes puts into Euripides' mouth is, in Murray's translation:

"I put things on the stage that came from daily
life and business
Where men could catch me, if I tripped; could
listen with dizziness
To things they knew and judge my art."

So Euripides would seem just the man to introduce economic matters on the stage if they really were of importance in his day and of interest to his audience, and had they really been the "daily life and business" referred to by Aristophanes. Indeed we have evidence that Euripides went farther in extolling wealth than his hearers wished. Seneca in one of his letters tells us that when one of the characters in Euripides' lost tragedy *Danaë* expressed the following sentiment: "O gold, best pledge of friendship to mortals. Neither has motherhood such joys, nor are children nor a father dear such a boon to men as you and those who have you in their houses. When the love-goddess sees such men, no wonder she nourishes a myriad loves." When they heard this, the entire audience rose *en masse* from their seats and rushed angrily towards the stage to cast the actor out of the theater and break up the performance. Euripides had to throw himself into their midst and implore them to wait and see the fate which would overtake this devotee of gold before the end of the play.

The chief reason then why Euripides discusses economic subjects so little must be that there was so little to discuss in the economic civilization of his time and so little interest taken in it by his contemporaries, whereas they were keenly interested in wars and government, in oratory and education. It will not even do to hold that the economic life of the city was largely in the hands of slaves and of resident foreigners who were not citizens, and that the Athenians proper were left free from such considerations to devote themselves to politics and culture. For we know that many Athenian citizens had to earn their own living. Nor can we argue that such citizens were too busy to attend the theatre and that Euripides' plays were written for, and cover the interests of, only a more aristocratic and intellectual audience. For his plays are full of passages concerning even slaves. But even slavery he discusses from the social rather than the economic standpoint.

We may, in fact, go so far as to say that the writings of Euripides give no evidence of any essential advance in economic civilization over that of the Homeric Age as portrayed in the Iliad and in the Odyssey. But Euripides' tragedies do show a great advance in political and religious thought, in moral and social standards, in intellectual life, over the earlier literature. Had there, therefore, been any great economic revolution or any steady economic advance they should have portrayed it too.

Euripides' political passages reflect especially the life of the ancient city state in which he "lived and moved and had his being." He injects fifth century politics into tenth century mythology and treats the Athens of Theseus, the Thebes of Oedipus, and the Sparta of Menelaus, as if they were the cities of his own day. The intense love of the Greek for the soil of his native town and the pangs and woe of exile are eloquently portrayed. Mothers sacrifice their daughters as well as their sons for their country's good; and duty to the state is often urged, sometimes in terms, however, which imply that many were derelict in their duty. Athens in particular is glorified in many places, Sparta is censured more than once, and heralds or the envoys of other cities are several times represented in an unfavorable light. Several passages about generalship suggest that there was considerable dissatisfaction at Athens with the conduct of the Peloponnesian War. Tyranny and liberty, running for office, the city populace and its traits, freedom of speech, the power of debate and oratory in the law courts and in politics, demagogues, and the requisites of good citizenship, are other topics treated.

But Euripides' view at times broadens beyond the individual city state and he several times speaks of devotion to Hellas as a whole and of the common law of the Hellenes or a sort of international law between the various Greek cities. This is partly in opposition to the barbarians, who are almost always mentioned unfavorably. They are cowards in war, are slaves politically compared to the Greeks, have immoral customs which Hellas does not tolerate and in general have strange ways and dress. They are even made to speak of themselves as barbarians.

The supremely complacent self-satisfaction of the Hellene with himself as compared with the barbarians and his absolute conviction that he is immeasurably superior to them, a conviction even surpassing that of the English traveler on the continent—sometimes is expressed in such absurd terms that it seems possible that Euripides is slyly poking fun at it. Iphigenia about to escape from Colchis at the eastern end of the Black Sea and return to Greece beseeches the goddess Artemis, whose shrine she has been tending among the Tauri, "graciously abandon this barbarian land for Athens. For it does not become you to dwell here when so fine a city may be thine." And Jason, who had repaid Medea for saving his life and aiding him to steal the

Golden Fleece by bringing her to Greece and then abandoning her to marry another wife, has the insolence to argue that he has given her more than he owes in that he has given her the boon of living in Hellas where law and justice prevail instead of mere might ruling and where her skill as a sorceress has won a fame that it would never have gained in far off Colchis.

But in a few passages Euripides' sympathy goes out even beyond the bounds of Hellas and he forecasts in two fragments the later Stoics' conception of one law of nature and of one world citizenship of humanity. "Nature is fatherland for every member of the race," he says, and "As the whole air is open to the eagle's flight, so the entire earth is native soil to the noble man."

War occupies a large space in Euripides' drama and messengers keep coming in who relate with gusto the details of the distant fight. But against such military narrative we must set many a reflection upon the woes entailed by war. One passage recognizes that war kills off the best citizens, and in another play the god Poseidon points out the folly of the sacker of cities who destroys temple and tomb and leaves only a desert for himself to die in. In two other tragedies, it is argued that men deceive themselves when they go to war. The longer of these passages is worth quoting in full: "Hope is man's curse and has involved many states in strife by leading them into excessive rage. For when the city has to vote on the question of war, no man ever takes his own death into account, but shifts this misfortune to another. But had death been before their eyes as they voted, Hellas would never have rushed to her doom in mad desire for battle. And yet each man among us knows which of the two to prefer, the good or evil, and how much better peace is for mankind than war,—Peace, chief friend of the Muses, foe of sorrow, whose joy is in glad throngs of children and whose delight is in prosperity. These we cast away and wickedly embark upon war, man enslaving the weaker man, and city city."

From another tragedy comes this invocation of the goddess of peace: "Eirene, exceeding rich and fairest of the blessed gods, I yearn for you as you are long in coming. And I fear lest age o'erwhelm me with troubles ere I see your gracious face and fair choral songs and dear wreathed hair. Come lady to my city, and dispel hateful faction from its homes and raging strife rejoicing in sharp steel."

In more than one passage discussion and arbitration are advocated in place of war. "For if bloody war is to decide, strife will never leave the cities of men," affirms the chorus in *Helen*, while Plutarch in his life of Pyrrhus shows us that five hundred years afterwards men still repeated the saying of Euripides: "The force of words can do whate'er is done by conquering swords."

Considering that he wrote in democratic Athens, Euripides' plays contain a surprising number of passages extolling Eugeneia or nobility of birth. The chorus in *Andromache* declare that they had rather not be born at all than not be born of good fathers and well-endowed houses. In several passages nobility is preferred to wealth and in as many more noble marriages are declared the best. Several passages also emphasize the unmistakable character, the indelible stamp which noble birth gives to one. A thought repeated especially often is that the noble should and can bear ills and adversity better than the ordinary man. In the tragedy *Helen*, however, Menelaus, shipwrecked and half starved, comes to the conclusion that when a man of high rank falls into adversity he feels it more than those who have long been unfortunate, and in the *Phoenician Women*, Polynices finds his noble birth of little use when in exile. "High birth," he says, "fed me not."

In a minority of passages nobility by birth does not escape sharp questioning and criticism. In *Electra*, Orestes complains that "there is no standard of true manliness, for mortal natures are confused. Already I have seen a nobody the son of a noble father and a worthy child from evil parents, and famine in the intellect of a rich man a great mind in a poor body." Later in the same play another character more tersely asserts that many nobles are bad men. In *Hippolytus* the nobility are charged with having set the common people the example of illicit amours. A half dozen of the fragments make such assertions as that "Noble deeds are better than noble birth" and "Earth gave to all her children the same appearance and we have no distinctive traits of our own, but those of noble birth and of low birth are alike of one race," and "Those whose natures are brave and just, even if they are born of slaves, I call more nobly born than the bearers of empty titles."

Nothing is more striking in Euripides' plays than the prominent place occupied by women, who both fill leading roles in the cast as individuals and are the subject of incessant comment as a sex. Of the very titles of his eighteen extant plays eight are the names of individual women—Alcestis, Andromache, Electra, Hecuba, Helen, Iphigenia at Aulis and Iphigenia among the Tauri, and Medea—and four others take their names from a chorus of women. As against this only two of Sophocles' seven plays and not one by Aeschylus bear the names of individual women, although four of the Aeschylus' seven plays are named after female choruses, as is one by Sophocles. But for women as an individual personality we have to look especially to Euripides.

In antiquity Euripides gained a reputation as a woman-hater; and a modern critic describes him as "drawing ideal women and yet perpetually sneering at the sex." One of the fragments reads,

"Why should we worry our heads over womankind? For when we keep them well they make us more trouble than when we pay no attention to them." Euripides himself, however, at any rate, could not keep from paying attention to them. He does contain a number of diatribes against the sex and woman is more than once pronounced "the worst" and even "the fiercest evil of all," far exceeding the waves of the sea or flames or dire poverty.

Where we possess the context, however, we generally find that these sweeping invectives against the sex as a whole are occasioned by some evil suffered at the hands of a woman. But other passages assert that there are good women as well as bad and that the whole sex should not be included in one reproach. Women may be both the greatest help and the worst ill for a man, says one fragment, and another affirms that, while there is nothing worse than a bad woman, there is absolutely nothing better than a good woman. "I hate the entire female kind except the mother who bore me," says a third fragment but the very next fragment in Nauck's edition rebuts this by asserting, "Male censure idly shoots an empty bow at women in speaking ill of them, but I say that they are better than males." It is not alone to male censure that women are subjected on Euripides' page, however; he more than once puts condemnation of their sex in their own mouths. They also, however complain that their lot is harder than that of the men and that men do not themselves live up to the moral standards which they lay down for women.

One of the longest diatribes against woman is that of the youth Hippolytus when the nurse, having wormed the secret of her mistress's unlawful love for her stepson from her, proceeds without the consent of her mistress to tempt Hippolytus to gratify that love. The modest boy, full of filial feeling towards his father, is moved with horror and moral indignation at the servant's evil suggestion. "O Zeus!" he cries, "why did you create woman." Why cannot men be procreated in some other way? He wishes that babies might be bought at temples and that men might live at home free from women. How great an evil woman is, is clear from the fact that her father has to give a dowry to get rid of her, and that her husband wastes his wealth in adorning her. And that he either marries an uncongenial wife for her family connections or has to put up with the bad relatives of a good wife. Hippolytus goes on to declare that it is best to have some simple nobody as a wife and that he hates a wise woman. He hopes that he may never have a wife who thinks more than a woman should. Clever women are all the more mischievous. And no servant, but only beasts who bite and cannot speak, should be allowed near women. After these rambling reflections, which strike the modern reader as rather ludicrous and out of keeping with their tragic context,—a type of incongruity, however, of which

Euripides is more than once guilty—Hippolytus passionately concludes his long tirade, which I have somewhat condensed, with these words, "I can never hate women enough, not though I am permitted to speak always. For they are always evil. So now let someone teach them chastity or let me go on insulting them always."

Against this may well be set a long speech by Medea when she learns that Jason has abandoned her for another bride and that, as she says, "my husband, who was everything to me, has turned out the worst of men." Of all creatures who breathe and think she declares, woman is the most miserable. She has to pay a dowry to get a husband, but does not know beforehand if he will be good or bad. Even in the latter case the remedy of divorce brings disrepute to the woman.

A wife coming into a new situation and new ways which she has not learned at home, must be gifted with second sight to tell how to get on well with her husband. He, if things do not suit him at home, can free his mind of loathing by going elsewhere, but she must gaze at his solitary personality forever. "Men say that we live a life free from danger at home while they fight with the spear," concludes Medea, "but I would stand up against spears thrice rather than once bear child."

The seclusion of woman in the home, to which Medea has just referred and which was the custom in Periclean Athens, is illustrated or enjoined by a dozen or more passages. The best wife and most excellent woman is the one who remains quietly at home, and one long passage argues against even allowing other women to visit her.

On the whole, the general assumption of the passages discussing woman in Euripides seems to be that she is inferior to man and should be humble and occupy a secondary place. "It is better that one man should see the light than a myriad women," says Iphigenia when she finally resolves to die a voluntary death at Aulis. And when among the Tauri, she argues that, if she and Orestes cannot both escape, it is better that the man should be saved. Orestes refuses this sacrifice and declares that he will live or die with her, but he does not offer to die without her, that she may escape. "Save the women first," was not a maxim of Hellenic manhood. Women are many times shown capable of supreme self-sacrifice, so many times in fact, that such conduct seems rather expected of them.

A number of passages speculate about the peculiarities of woman's nature, and besides feminine self-sacrifice, Euripides seems especially impressed by the following points: (1) Woman's physical weakness and usual lack of physical courage, but great moral courage on occasion. "We are women," says

a fragment, "cowards in some respects, but in others none can exceed us in courage." (2) Her resourcefulness in arts, wiles, tricks, strategems,—in short, in finding a way. (3) Women are more easily moved to tears and grief, and indulge in more violent lamentations than men, but are also more compassionate and more capable of arousing pity in others. (4) Love is woman's first concern and her honor is her dearest possession. (5) The women in Euripides' plays as a rule sympathize with and stand by each other, although one or two passages speak of their love of scandal and "a certain pleasure which they get from speaking ill of one another." Euripides does not enlarge much upon feminine vanity and love of dress, although he does not entirely neglect these matters. Finally, a passage or two may be classified as dealing with the psychology of sex more strictly and intimately than any of the foregoing.

How much women ought to know, and whether they do know anything or not is a question often raised. A passage from *Medea* is perhaps a fair example. She says of herself, "Often already have I gone through more refined reasonings and entered on greater arguments than it befits the female mind to investigate. But we have a muse, too, indwelling and for wisdom's sake,—not, however, in all cases, but in only a small fraction." Women would appear to have received slight book learning since Iphigenia among the Tauri has to get a captive to write a letter for her. Women often apologize when entering an argument or offering some suggestion to men, but the hero Theseus on one such occasion gallantly concedes that "there are many wise things even from females." But for all their apologies Euripides' women really argue as much and as well as the men—which indeed is not saying a great deal—and although he declares that their place is at home, he constantly portrays them upon his stage. This inconsistency and the amount of discussion devoted to women by him is a pretty sure sign that feminism was a very pressing problem in his day.

Euripides' very full and sympathetic treatment of family life we must pass over very briefly. Marriage and the sort of husband or wife one should have are themes discussed again and again. The bitter reflections of Hippolytus and *Medea* on marriage do not represent the prevailing opinion which is rather that "a man's best possession is a sympathetic wife" and that "a woman is happy if she has a loving husband." The love of husband and wife, motherhood, filial devotion, the affection of brother and sister, and other ties of family and kindred, are frequently and tenderly and knowingly depicted. Love of children is especially noticeable in Euripides' plays, although even here there are not lacking passages which argue in favor of childlessness. Stepmothers and illegitimate children are mentioned more than once in both the extant plays and the fragments. There is a

decided aversion shown to stepmothers, but it is held that illegitimate children are often as good or better than those born in lawful wedlock and that "they have a bad name but the same nature." Various questions are also raised anent heredity and eugenics. While conflicting opinions are expressed, the prevailing view seems to be that the sins of the parents are visited upon their offspring and that "no one can make the evil good by bringing it up well."

Old age and friendship are topics touched on by Euripides with great frequency nearly four centuries before Cicero summed up the sentiments of antiquity on these themes in his *De Senectute* and *De Amicitia*.

We have already described Euripides as a great representative of the New Learning of the later fifth century, of the period of Socrates and of the Sophists. The sophists were educators of the youth of the time in public speaking and in argument, and they also tried to settle all questions by discussion and reasoning. Aristophanes makes Aeschylus accuse Euripides of having "trained in the speech making arts even creeping infants" and Euripides himself to boast that he "taught all the town to talk with freedom—taught them to see, think, understand, to scheme for what they wanted, to fall in love, think evil, question all things." At any rate, his plays are full of debates and argumentative speeches. "Come now, put argument against argument," one character will say to another, and then the action of the play will halt, while they display their verbal and dialectical cleverness to the delighted Athenian audience. Euripides, however, does not sympathize with those sophists who boasted that they could make the worse cause appear the better, and many passages contrast deeds with words, or lament that the better speaker often has the weaker case or is the worse man.

For instance, when Jason has concluded his sophistical defense of his conduct in abandoning Medea for another wife, the chorus says, "Jason, you have well arranged your arguments, yet to me at least, even if I speak contrary to the generally accepted opinion, you seem to have acted unjustly in betraying your wife," and Medea herself adds, "I am different from many mortals in many things, for to my mind the unjust man who is a clever speaker deserves the greatest penalty."

Wisdom and intelligence are, however, repeatedly praised. Not only "is the mind in each of us a god," but another fragment says, "There is no other temple of persuasion than reason and her altar is in human nature." "Wrongly you blame my weakness and womanish body," says a third, "for if I can think straight, that's better than a strong right arm." "The mind must be regarded," says a fourth, "for what good is beauty of figure when it has not fair thoughts?" "Slight is man's strength," adds a fifth, "but by the resourcefulness of his mind he tames the

dread beasts of the sea and makes earth and air his pupils." Ideas, affirms a sixth, are the foundation of the welfare of the city and of the home; and the worst evil is the ignorant crowd.

Euripides even questions whether an intelligent coward is not to be preferred to a brave ignoramus and in the *Children of Heracles* says that wise men ought to pray to have a wise man rather than a fool as an enemy. Indeed wisdom is in many passages almost identified with virtue and morality, and we are constantly being told what the wise man would or would not do. Yet Decharme in his book on Euripides questions whether the great Socratic principle that morality is inseparable from knowledge is found anywhere in the poet's works.

Certainly we find already forecast there in several passages the Stoic ideal of the virtuous sage who has steeled himself to bear whatever fortune brings, to remain moderate and free from passion himself, and to regulate his transient life by "looking at the undecaying cosmos of immortal nature." "And in addition to these things," reads another fragment, "let whatever must be, be devised, and let everything be contrived against me. For it shall be well with me; and Right shall be my ally, and I shall not be caught doing evil."

Despite his praise of intellect Euripides recognizes that it does not do to be too clever in this practical unthinking world of ours. "Swiftness and light-footedness of mind has often brought mortals to woe." "Alas, alas," says Medea, "not now for the first time, but often, Croesus, has opinion injured me and worked me great harm. Whoever is a prudent man ought not to educate his children too deeply. For, aside from any other charge against them, they incur the unfavorable envy of their fellows. Moreover, if you offer fools some new found truth, you will be thought to do no service and to have no sense. But if you are considered superior to those who seem to have some vague knowledge, you appear obnoxious in the city."

This passage may apply to the philosopher, Anaxagoras from Asia Minor, who was in Athens from about 462-432 B. C. but was fined and banished on a charge of atheism, or possibly it may refer to Socrates.

In the fragments are two others of similar purport. The first, from *Alexander*, "Alack I die through using my mind, which to others is a means of safety." The second: from *Palamedes*, "Kill, kill the all-wise, O ye Greeks, the nightingale, the unoffending muse." This last Diogenes Laertius believed to be an allusion to the execution of Socrates but it would have to be prophetic, since Euripides died before "the pagan Christ."

After having heard so much of the high intelligence of the average Athenian in the age of Pericles it has been interesting

to analyze the mental pabulum put before him by Euripides. This mental diet is of a limited and simple, one might almost say elementary and primitive sort. But it is an intellectual diet, whereas the appeal of modern drama has come to be so exclusively in its plot, action, acting, scenery and facial expression that most of it can be transferred to the moving picture screen and there presented—to the complete satisfaction of the multitude—without anything being said by the actors, much less thought,—with all reflections upon life and death, ethics and politics, society and sex, completely eliminated.

Euripides, on the contrary, was known in antiquity as “the scenic philosopher.” Clement of Alexandria, a Christian writing about 200 A. D., exclaims, “Worthy indeed of the Socratic school is Euripides, who fixes his eye on truth, and despises the spectators of his plays.” It would be truer, however, to say—“And educates the spectators of his plays.” Even Aristophanes admits this, though he dislikes Euripides’ teaching and deploras its popularity. Euripides, in fine, not only revealed the thought of his age, he helped to form the thought of the future.

LYNN THORNDIKE.

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