THE TRACHINIAE OF SOPHOCLES

THE

TRACHINIAE

OF

SOPHOCLES

WITH A COMMENTARY
ABRIDGED FROM THE LARGER EDITION

OF

SIR RICHARD C. JEBB

BY

GILBERT A. DAVIES

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1955

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107429147

First published 1908
First edition 1908
Reprinted 1921 by Messrs Turnbull & Spears
Reprinted 1955
First paperback edition 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-42914-7 Paperback

PREFACE

IN preparing this abridgment I have endeavoured to follow the lines laid down by my predecessors in the volumes which have already appeared. In doubtful cases it has been my aim to omit too little rather than too much.

I have to thank my friend Mr R. K. Gaye for putting at my disposal Sir R. Jebb's unpublished corrections.

G. A. D.

April, 1908.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Divergent views of the *Trachiniae*. Difficulty of judging it rightly.

§ 1. It has been the fortune of the *Trachiniae* to provoke a singular diversity of judgments. Dissen and Bergk refer the play to a period when the powers of Sophocles were not yet fully matured. Bernhardy regards it as a mediocre production of declining age. Schlegel, in his Lectures on Dramatic Literature, goes further still; he pronounces the piece unworthy of its reputed author, and wishes that the responsibility for it could be transferred from Sophocles to some feebler contemporary,—his son, for instance, the 'frigid' Iophon. Yet there has never been a lack of more favourable estimates. In the very year when Schlegel was lecturing at Vienna (1808), Boeckh pointed out the strong family likeness between this and the other six plays; A. Jacob made a direct reply to Schlegel's censures; and Godfrey Hermann said that, whatever faults the work might have, at any rate both the spirit and the diction were unmistakably those of Sophocles. During the last half century, with the growth of a better aesthetic criticism in relation to all things Hellenic, a sense of the great beauties in the *Trachiniae* has decidedly prevailed over the tendency to exaggerate its defects; indeed, the praise bestowed upon it, in these latter days, has sometimes perhaps been a little too indiscriminate. The play is in fact an exceptionally difficult one to appreciate justly; and the root of the difficulty is in the character of the fable.

The Heracles myth.—Argive legends.

§ 2. The Argive legends are those which best preserve the primitive Dorian conception of Heracles. They are alloyed, indeed, with later elements, of a political origin. Thus, in order that the Dorian conquerors might have some hereditary title to the land, Heracles was made the son of Alcmena, and, through her, a scion of the Perseidae; Tiryns was his heritage, of which he had been despoiled. Again, the struggles between Argos and Sparta for the headship of Peloponnesus have a reflex in those wars which the Argive Heracles wages in Elis or Messenia. But, when such elements have been set aside, there remains the old-Dorian hero, slayer of monsters, purger of the earth, who triumphs over the terrors of Hades, and brings the apples of immortality from the garden of the Hesperides.

The Heracles of the Argive legends embodies a sterner ideal than the Homeric Achilles; one in which there is less of spiritual charm and of flexible intelligence, but which has a moral grandeur of its own; we might say that relatively to the Ionian view of life it is as the Hebraic ideal to the Hellenic. And this ideal may rightly be called 'Dorian,' in the sense that it presumably represents a conception of the primitive Dorian folk, bearing a general stamp which can be traced in historical expressions of the Dorian nature.

Boeotian legends.

The Boeotian legends concern the birth, childhood, and youth of Heracles. Argive tradition claimed his manhood; and this claim could not be ignored. Nor was it disputed that he sprang from the Argive Perseidae. The Boeotians sought only to reconcile his Argive lineage with a belief that he was born at Thebes. Alcmena, his mother, is the daughter of Electryon, king of Mycenae: she is betrothed to her first-cousin Amphitryon, son of Alcaeus, king of Tiryns. Amphitryon accidentally kills his uncle, Electryon, and flies, with Alcmena, to Thebes. She requires him, as the condition of their union, to avenge her on the Taphii in western Greece, who have slain her brothers. He sets forth from Thebes to do so. Just before his triumphant

return, Zeus visits Alcmena in his likeness, and becomes the father of Heracles. Amphitryon was originally a Theban hero; but the Thebans made him an Argive in order that they might make Heracles a Theban.

His last act at Thebes is that which he does in the madness sent on him by Hera,—the slaughter of the children borne to him by Megara, daughter of Creon. This Theban tradition was another compromise with Argive legend, which claimed his best years for the twelve labours. How, then, was he to be severed from Thebes, the home of his youth? He must be forced to fly from it, as blood-guilty—the guilt being excused by Hera's visitation. Further, Thebes had to account for the non-existence of Theban nobles claiming a direct descent from him. Therefore he slew his Theban children.

Thessalian legends.

Lastly, there are the Thessalian legends. These belong especially to Trachis, the chief town of Malis, and to the neighbouring region of Mount Oeta. Here, too, there is an element of disguised history; Heracles is the friend of Dorians; he works for the honour of Apollo, the god of the Thessalo-Delphic amphictyony; he conquers aliens, like Cycnus, or establishes good relations with them, as with the Trachinian king Ceÿx. But the spirit of an older conception animates one part of the Thessalian legend,—the hero's fiery death on the summit of Oeta, when Zeus receives him into heaven.

Heracles in the Homeric poems.

§ 3. The Homeric poems contain only incidental allusions to Heracles, who is associated with the generation before the Trojan war. We hear that he was born at Thebes, being the son of Zeus and Alcmena. His life-long foe, the goddess Hera, defrauded him of his inheritance, the lordship of Argos, by ensnaring Zeus into a promise that this dominion should be held by Eurystheus[1]. Heracles performed labours (ἄεθλοι) for Eurystheus, whose commands were brought by the herald Copreus: but only one

[1] *Iliad* 19. 95—136.

of these tasks is specified,—viz., the descent in quest of 'the dog of Hades[1].' He delivered Laomedon, the father of Priam, from the sea-monster (κῆτος) sent by the angry gods; and, when the false king withheld the due reward, he sacked Troy. Returning thence, he was driven by storms to Cos[2]. Further, he made war on Pylos, killing the Neleidae, Nestor's brethren, and wounding the immortals, Hera and Hades, who opposed him[3]. Under his own roof he slew his guest Iphitus; but no motive is assigned by the Homeric poet. The victim's father, Eurytus, king of Oechalia (in Thessaly), is not attacked or killed by Heracles; he is more quietly despatched by Apollo, who is jealous of his skill in archery[4]. The Homeric weapon of Heracles is the bow; there is no mention of the club. His Homeric wife is Megara, daughter of Creon. Finally he dies, 'subdued by fate and by the wrath of Hera[5].'

Speaking generally, we may say that in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* the Dorian hero is a foreign person; and the Homeric notices make us feel how difficult it would have been for epic poetry, working in the Homeric spirit, to treat the story of Heracles as a whole. His acts are too incoherent to derive a properly epic unity from his person,—such an unity as the *Odyssey*, for example, derives from the person of Odysseus. The original Dorian legend of Heracles had, indeed, the unity of a moral idea; but that is not enough for an epic.

Other epic writers.

§ 4. Little is known of the efforts made to solve this poetical problem. The Dorian Peisander, of Cameirus in Rhodes, is named as the author

[1] Labours for Eurystheus, *Il.* 8. 363, *Od.* 11. 622: Copreus, *Il.* 15 639: 'the dog of Hades' (first called Cerberus in Hes. *Th.* 311), *Il.* 8. 368.

[2] The κῆτος, *Il.* 20. 144—148: sack of Troy, 5. 638—642: Cos, 15. 28.

[3] War against Pylos, *Il.* 11. 690—693: wounding of Hera and Hades, 5. 392—397.

[4] Iphitus, *Od.* 21. 22—30: Eurytus, 8. 223—228.

[5] The bow, *Il.* 5. 393, *Od.* 8. 225, 11. 607: Megara, *Od.* 11. 269: Death of Heracles, *Il.* 18. 117—119.

of an epic poem on Heracles, a *Heracleia*; and the Ionian Panyasis of Halicarnassus, *circ.* 480 B.C., also composed a *Heracleia*, in no less than fourteen books.

But to minds in sympathy with Homeric epos it would be evident that there was another way of dealing with the theme of Heracles; a way different from that of Peisander, and still more different from that of Panyasis. Some one episode might be singled out from the mass of legends, and developed by itself, as an epic on a small scale. Hesiod and the Hesiodic school worked thus; they produced, for instance, the *Marriage-feast of Ceÿx*, relating how Heracles was entertained by that king of Trachis; the *Aegimius*, turning on the league of Heracles with that Dorian prince; and the extant *Shield of Heracles*, concerning his fight with Cycnus.

The *Capture of Oechalia*.

A notable epic of this class was the *Capture of Oechalia*, Οἰχαλίας ἅλωσις, ascribed to the Ionian Creophylus of Samos, whom tradition called the friend, or even the son-in-law, of Homer. An epigram of Callimachus[1] attests the fame of this poem, which was probably as old at least as the eighth century B.C., and must have had the genuine ring of Homeric epos. The subject was the passion of Heracles for Iolè, and the war which, in order to win her, he made on Oechalia, the city of her father Eurytus, which was placed, as by Sophocles, in Euboea. It is not known whether this epic introduced Deianeira, the envenomed robe, and the hero's death on Mount Oeta. But in any case it must have been one of the principal sources from which Sophocles derived his material.

§ 5. Lyric poetry also, from an early time, had been busied with these legends. The Ionian Archilochus (*circ.* 670 B.C.) composed a famous hymn to the victorious Heracles. It was known as the

Lyric poets on Heracles. Archilochus.

[1] *Epigr.* 6:

Κρεωφύλου πόνος εἰμί, δόμῳ ποτὲ θεῖον Ὅμηρον
δεξαμένου· κλαίω δ' Εὔρυτον, ὅσσ' ἔπαθεν,
καὶ ξανθὴν Ἰόλειαν· Ὁμήρειον δὲ καλεῦμαι
γράμμα· Κρεωφύλῳ, Ζεῦ φίλε, τοῦτο μέγα.

καλλίνικος[1], and was a counterpart, at the Olympian games, of 'See, the conquering hero comes,'—being sung at the evening procession in honour of a victor, if no special ode had been written for the occasion. But it was in the choral form, a distinctively Dorian creation, that lyric poetry rendered its loftiest tributes to the son of Alcmena. Stesichorus of Himera, a city in which Dorian and Chalcidic elements were blended, gave the spirit of Homeric epos to his choral hymns (*circ.* 620 B.C.). Into this new mould he cast three exploits of Heracles,—the triumphs over Geryon, Cycnus, and Cerberus[2]. Pindar's range of allusion covers almost the whole field of the hero's deeds; but it is in the first Nemean ode that the original significance of the legend is best interpreted. When the infant has strangled the snakes sent by Hera, the Theban seer Teiresias predicts his destiny; how he shall destroy 'many a monstrous shape of violence' on land and sea; subdue the men 'who walk in guile and insolence'; beat down the Earth-born foes of the gods; and then, for recompense of his great toils, win everlasting peace in the blest abodes, and, united to Hebè, 'dwell gladly in the divine home of Zeus[3].'

Stesichorus.

Pindar.

For readers of the *Trachiniae* this lyric literature has one point of peculiar interest. It is there that we can first trace the association of Heracles with Deianeira.

Deianeira associated with Heracles.

Pindar, in a lost poem,—of what class, is unknown,—told the story somewhat as follows[4]. Heracles, having gone down to Hades for Cerberus, there met the departed Meleager, who recommended his sister Deianeira as a wife for the hero. On returning to the upper world, Heracles went at once to Aetolia,

[1] In Pindar *Ol.* 9. 2 καλλίνικος ὁ τριπλόος, since the burden was thrice repeated. Bergk, *Poet. Lyr.* II. p. 418 (4th ed.).

[2] Bergk, *Poet. Lyr.* III. p. 207.

[3] Pind. *Nem.* 1. 60—72.

[4] Schol. on *Iliad* 21. 194. The schol. on *Il.* 8. 368 probably has the same passage in view when he quotes Pindar as saying that Cerberus had a hundred heads.

where he found that Deianeira was being wooed by the river-god Acheloüs. He fought with this formidable rival,—who wore the shape of a bull,—and broke off one of his horns. In order to recover it, Acheloüs gave his conqueror the wondrous 'cornucopia' which he himself had received from Amaltheia, daughter of Oceanus. Heracles presented this, by way of ἕδνα or 'bride-price,' to Oeneus[1], and duly received the hand of the king's daughter.

Long before Pindar, Archilochus had related how Heracles overcame the tauriform suitor[2], and won the fair maiden; how, after their marriage, Heracles and Deianeira dwelt with Oeneus at Calydon, until they were obliged to leave the country, because Heracles had accidentally slain the king's cupbearer; and how, at the river Evenus, the Centaur Nessus offered insult to the young wife, and was slain by her husband[3]. It may be added that the prose mythographer Pherecydes (*circ.* 480 B.C.) had told the story of Deianeira[4].

Heracles in drama.

§ 6. Such, then, was the position of the Heracles-myth at the time when Attic Tragedy was advancing to maturity. This legend had become the common property of Hellas; and its primitive meaning had been, to a great extent, overlaid by alien additions or embellishments. Particular episodes had been successfully treated in epic poetry of the Homeric or Hesiodic school, and also in lyrics, both Ionian and Dorian. But the whole legend had not been embodied in any poem which took rank with the foremost creations of the Greek genius.

Comedy.

As a person of drama, Heracles made his first appearance in Comedy. It was the Dorian Epicharmus who, in the first half of the fifth century B.C., thus presented the Dorian hero to Syracusan audiences. One of

[1] Strabo 10, p. 458.

[2] Schol. *Il.* 21. 237.

[3] Schol. Apoll. Rhod. 1. 1212: Dion Chrys. or. 60.

[4] This appears from schol. Apoll. 1. 1213 (frag. 38 of Pherecydes in Müller, *Frag. Hist.* 1. p. 82): and might have been inferred from the reference of Pherecydes to Hyllus (schol. *Trach.* 354, fr. 34 *ap.* Müller).

the pieces concerned Heracles in quest of the Amazon's girdle; another dealt with his visit to the jovial Centaur Pholos[1]. The Dorians of Sicily, though Dorian to the backbone in most things, had a strain of humour and vivacity which tempered the seriousness of their race; in this instance, it was much as if an Irish dramatist of English descent had applied a similar treatment to St George and the dragon.

That Ionians should feel the grotesque side of Heracles, was natural enough. Aristophanes tells us that this hero had become a stock-character of Attic comedy, and claims credit for having discarded him :—

'It was he that indignantly swept from the stage the paltry ignoble device
'Of a Heracles needy and seedy and greedy, a vagabond sturdy and stout,
'Now baking his bread, now swindling instead, now beaten and battered about[2].'

Satyr-drama.

Several comedies on Heracles are known by their titles, or by fragments. His powers of eating and drinking seem to have furnished a favourite point. He also figured much in satyr-drama,—a kind of entertainment which welcomed types of inebriety. Sophocles himself wrote a *Heracles at Taenarum*,—a satyr-play on the descent to Hades for Cerberus,—in which the Chorus consisted of Helots[3]. His contemporaries, Ion of Chios, and Achaeus, wrote each a satyr-play called *Omphalè*, depicting Heracles in servitude to the Lydian task-mistress. In Ion's piece, he performed prodigies with a 'triple row of teeth,' devouring not merely the flesh prepared for a burnt-offering, but the very wood and coals on which it was being roasted[4]. Even in the *Alcestis*, we remember, the inevitable moment arrives when this

[1] Ἡρακλῆς ὁ ἐπὶ τὸν ζωστῆρα : Ἡρακλῆς ὁ παρὰ Φόλῳ. Cp. Bernhardy, *Gk Lit.* II. pt 2, p. 529.

[2] *Pax* 741 ff., translated by Mr B. B. Rogers.

[3] Nauck, *Trag. Frag.* p. 178 (2nd ed., 1889).

[4] For the Ὀμφάλη of Achaeus, see Nauck *op. cit.* p. 754: for that of Ion, p. 735, esp. fragments 28, 29, 30.

guest, too hospitably entertained, fills the house with 'discordant howls[1].'

Tragedy.

§ 7. Recollecting such traditions of the theatre, we cannot wonder if Tragedy was somewhat shy of Heracles. At the best, the legend was difficult to manage,—even more difficult for tragic drama than for epic narrative. And the difficulty was greatly increased, now that the essential difference between this hero and the ordinary persons of tragedy had been brought into relief by frequent burlesques.

Aeschylus, indeed, in the *Prometheus Unbound*, introduced Heracles, who loosed the bonds of Prometheus; and then Prometheus described the route by which his deliverer must journey from the Caucasus to the Hesperides[2]. It was a harder matter to take the legend of Heracles as the basis of a tragedy. There are only two such experiments of which we have any clear or definite knowledge. One is the *Mad Heracles* of Euripides. The other is the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles.

The *Mad Heracles* of Euripides.

Euripides has taken his subject from the Boeotian legend. Heracles, visited with madness by Hera, slays his children,—in whose fate the Attic poet involves Megara, probably because, with his plot, it was not easy to dispose of her in any other way. Now, as we saw, this Theban story was framed to explain why Heracles, in early manhood, forsook Thebes for Argolis. The murder is discordant with the general tenour of the Heracles myth, and the discord is but thinly concealed by the resort to Hera's agency. For Euripides, however, this very discord was an attraction. It allowed him, by a bold change of detail, to put a new complexion on the whole story. That change consisted in placing the terrible deed of Heracles not before, but after, his labours for Eurystheus.

[1] Eur. *Alc.* 760 ἄμουσ' ὑλακτῶν.
[2] Strabo 4, p. 183.

The plot is briefly as follows. Heracles has long been absent from Thebes, toiling for Eurystheus; and it is known that he is now engaged in the supreme ordeal,—the quest of Cerberus. Meanwhile a certain Lycus from Euboea becomes master of Thebes, and slays Creon. Megara, her three sons, and the aged Amphitryon, are also doomed by him. They are about to die, when Heracles suddenly returns from the nether world, and kills Lycus. He then holds a sacrifice, to purify the house. While engaged in it, he is stricken with madness. He slays Megara and his children. On recovering his senses, he resolves to commit suicide. But Theseus appears,—the king of Athens whom Heracles has just delivered from Hades. Theseus combats his resolve, offering him an honourable refuge in Attica. Heracles at last accepts the offer, and departs with his friend.

This, then, is the goal of the great career; this is the result of the strength given by a divine sire, and spent in benefiting men. The evil goddess of Heracles triumphs utterly; at the very moment when his labours are finished, and when, as the old faith taught, his reward was near, he is plunged into an abyss of misery. He passes from our sight, to hide the remainder of his days in the seclusion of a land not his own. Yet, even in this extremity, he has given a proof of strength; he has had the courage to live. He has taught us that, though the mightiest human efforts may end in outward failure, yet no man, if he be true to himself, need suffer moral defeat. Zeus has been faithless to his human son, and Hera's infra-human malevolence has prevailed; but one consolation for humanity remains.

Such is the new reading of the Heracles myth which Euripides has propounded; with admirable power and subtlety, though scarcely with complete artistic success. His interpretation, though full of a deep suggestiveness, is, in fact, too modern for the fable on which it is embroidered.

The *Trachiniae* of Sophocles.

§ 8. There is no external evidence for the date of the *Mad Heracles*; but internal evidence tends to show that the play probably belongs to the years 421—416 B.C.[1] The date of the *Trachiniae* is also unattested. But some traits of the work itself appear to warrant us in placing it among the later productions of the poet[2]; if rough limits are to be assigned, we might name the years 420 and 410 B.C. It has been held that the bold example of Euripides, in making Heracles the subject of a tragedy, induced Sophocles to do likewise[3]. As to this view, we can only say that it is quite possible, but that there is absolutely no proof of it. On the other hand, one thing is certain: the *Trachiniae* exhibits a conception and a treatment fundamentally different from those adopted in the *Mad Heracles*.

The two mythic elements.

Two principal elements enter into the mythic material used by Sophocles. The first is the Aetolian legend of Deianeira, whom Heracles rescues from Acheloüs, and in whose defence he slays the Centaur Nessus. This part of the subject had been treated by Archilochus and Pindar. The second element is the Thessalian legend which set forth the love of Heracles for Iolè,—his murder of Iphitus, leading to his servitude under Omphalè,—his capture of Oechalia,—and his death upon Mount Oeta. Here the epic *Capture of Oechalia* was presumably the chief source. Pherecydes and Panyasis were also available. Hesiodic poems, such as the *Marriage-feast of Ceÿx*, may have supplied some touches. Ion of Chios, too, had written a drama called *Eurytidae*[4], but its scope is unknown. Nor can we say whether Sophocles was the first poet who brought the Aetolian and the Thessalian legend into this connection. The Argive and Boeotian legends are left in the background of the *Trachiniae*; they appear only in a few slight allusions.

[1] Wilamowitz, Eur. *Her.* vol. I. pp. 340 ff.
[2] See below, § 17.
[3] Wilamowitz, *op. cit.* p. 383.
[4] Nauck, *Trag. Frag.* p. 734.

Freedom of the fifth century poets.

In the fifth century B.C., poets were as yet untrammelled by any artificial canon of chronology, such as later mythographers introduced into the legends concerning Heracles. They could use the largest freedom in combining local legends of Heracles, so long as they were careful to preserve the leading features of the myth. We have seen that Euripides, when in his *Mad Heracles* he placed the madness *after* the labours, was making an innovation which deranged the whole perspective of Theban and Argive legend; so much so, that the Alexandrian mythographers, deferential to the Attic dramatists in much, never followed Euripides in that.

Sequence of events in the *Trachiniae*.

Sophocles has made no change of similar importance. Yet his way of arranging the fable differs in one material respect from that of the later compilers. They, as we have seen, place the marriage of Heracles with Deianeira very late in his career—after his labours for Eurystheus, and after most of his other deeds also. Sophocles puts the marriage much earlier,—so early, that Deianeira speaks as if it had preceded most, or all, of the hero's labours. Sophocles could do this, because he felt himself free to ignore the Theban legend of the hero's marriage to Megara.

The antecedents of the plot.

§ 9. The outline of the whole story, as Sophocles conceived it, can now be traced with clearness sufficient, at least, to explain the hints scattered through the play.

1. Heracles is born at Thebes (v. 116), and comes thence (v. 509), in early manhood, to Pleuron, where he wins Deianeira. We are not told whither he was taking his bride, when they met Nessus (v. 562). Since Megara is ignored, there is nothing to exclude the supposition that he was returning to his home at Thebes.

2. Constrained by Hera's wrath, he performs the labours for Eurystheus (v. 1048). The home of his family is now at Tiryns.

3. He visits Eurytus at Oechalia in Euboea (v. 262); who discountenances his passion for Iolè (v. 359)[1].

4. He goes on various campaigns, including that against the Giants (1058 ff.).

5. He slays Iphitus (the son of Eurytus), who was then his guest at Tiryns. The lapse of some considerable time since his visit to Eurytus is implied by the word αὖθις (v. 270).

Heracles, with Deianeira, his children, and his mother Alcmena, is now forced to leave Tiryns. They are given a new home at Trachis by its king, Ceÿx (v. 38).

6. As a punishment for the treacherous murder of Iphitus, Zeus dooms Heracles to serve Omphalè, in Lydia, for a year (v. 274). Heracles goes forth from Trachis, leaving his family there (v. 155). They do not know his destination. During his absence, some of his children return with Alcmena to Tiryns; others are sent to his old home at Thebes (1151 ff.).

7. The year with Omphalè being over, he sacks Oechalia (v. 259).

We are now prepared to follow the plot of the drama itself.

§ 10. The scene is laid before the house at Trachis.

Analysis of the play. I. Prologue: 1—93.

Deianeira is alone with a female slave, an old and attached domestic, who has been the nurse of her children. Communing with her own thoughts, rather than directly addressing her attendant, the wife of Heracles recalls the sorrows which have been her portion from youth upwards,—culminating now in a terrible anxiety concerning her absent lord. It is fifteen months since he left home; but no tidings have come from him. And she feels almost sure that something is amiss, when she thinks of a certain tablet which he left with her...

Here the aged Nurse ventures to interpose. Deianeira has

[1] The oblique ῥαίοιτο in v. 268 leaves an ambiguity. If the word used by Eurytus to Heracles was ἔρραιον, the labours for Eurystheus were over. But if it was ῥαίει, they were still in progress. The second supposition gives more force to the passage.

several sons; why should not one of them,—Hyllus, for example, the eldest,—go in search of his father?

Just then Hyllus himself is seen approaching, and in haste; for he has news to tell. Heracles is, or soon will be, in Euboea, warring against Oechalia, the city of Eurytus. During the past year he has been in servitude to Omphalè, a Lydian woman.

Deianeira then tells her son the purport of the tablet to which she had previously alluded. It contains an oracle, which shows that this war in Euboea must decide the fate of Heracles; he will die; or he will thenceforth live in peace.

Hyllus at once resolves to join his father in Euboea, and departs for that purpose.

Parodos: 94—140.

The Chorus now enters: it consists of fifteen Trachinian maidens, full of kindly sympathy for the Aetolian princess whom a strange destiny has brought to dwell among them. Invoking the Sun-god, they implore him to reveal where Heracles now is. Deianeira, they hear, is pining inconsolably. Fate vexes, while it also glorifies, her husband; but he is not suffered to perish. Let her keep a good courage: sorrow comes to all mortals, but joy also, in its turn; and Zeus is not unmindful of his children.

II. First episode: 141—496.

Deianeira sadly replies that the young maidens cannot measure such trouble as hers; may they ever be strangers to it! But they shall know her latest and worst anxiety. When Heracles left home, he told her that, if he did not return at the end of fifteen months, she must account him dead. He even explained how his property was to be divided in that event. But, if he survived the fifteenth month, then he would have a peaceful life. Such was the teaching of an oracle which he had written down at Dodona. And the fulfilment of that oracle is now due...

A Messenger is seen coming; the wreath on his head be-

tokens glad tidings. Heracles lives, is victorious, and will soon come home. Lichas, the herald, has already arrived; but the excited Trachinians, thronging around him, have retarded his progress towards the house.

With an utterance of thanksgiving to Zeus, Deianeira calls upon the maidens of the Chorus and the maidens of her own household to raise a song of joy.

The Chorus respond with a short ode, in the nature of a paean.

205–224. Before it ceases, Lichas is in sight; a train of captive Euboean women follows him.

In reply to the eager questions of his mistress, Lichas says that Heracles is now at Cape Cenaeum in Euboea, engaged in dedicating a sanctuary to Zeus. These maidens are captives, taken when Oechalia was destroyed: Heracles chose them out 'for himself and for the gods.'

And then Lichas tells how Heracles has been employed during the past fifteen months; how, for a year, he was the slave of Omphalè; and how, when freed, he avenged that disgrace upon its ultimate author, Eurytus. Heracles himself, the herald adds, will soon arrive.

Deianeira rejoices, though a shadow flits across her joy as she looks at the ill-fated captives: may Zeus never so visit *her* children!

Among these captives, there is one who strangely interests her; the girl's mien is at once so sorrowful and so noble. She questions her; but the stranger remains silent. 'Who is she, Lichas?' But the herald does not know,—indeed, has not cared to ask. Deianeira then directs him to conduct the captives into the house.

She herself is about to follow him, when the Messenger, who had first announced the herald's approach, begs to speak with her alone.

He tells her that Lichas has deceived her. The mysterious maiden is no other than Iolè, the daughter of Eurytus. A

passion for Iolè was the true motive of Heracles in destroying Oechalia. Eurytus had refused to give him the maiden. Lichas himself had avowed this to the Trachinians.

Lichas now re-enters, to ask for Deianeira's commands, as he is about to rejoin his master in Euboea. Confronted with the Messenger, and pathetically adjured by Deianeira, he confesses the truth. Heracles has an absorbing passion for Iolè; and, indeed, he gave no command of secrecy. But Lichas had feared to pain his mistress: let her pardon him; and let her bear with Iolè.

Deianeira requests Lichas to accompany her into the house. He is to take a message from her to Heracles, and a gift.

First stasimon. 497—530.

In the ode which follows, the Chorus celebrates the resistless power of Love,—the power which now threatens Deianeira's peace, and which, in long-past days, brought Heracles to contend for her with Acheloüs. The short but vivid picture of that combat has a singular pathos at this moment of the drama.

III. Second episode: 531—632.

Deianeira reappears. She has had time now to feel what it will be to live under the same roof with the young and beautiful girl to whom her husband has transferred his love; but she harbours no angry or cruel thoughts. Her sole wish is to regain the heart of Heracles. And a resource has occurred to her. Long ago, when Heracles was taking her from Aetolia, they came to the river Evenus, where the ferryman, the Centaur Nessus, carried her across. He insulted her, and Heracles shot him with an arrow. As he lay dying, he told her that, if she wished to possess a love-charm by which she could always control the love of Heracles, she had only to collect some of the blood from his wound. She had done so, and had preserved her treasure, according to the Centaur's direction, in a place secluded from the warmth of sun or fire. She had now applied this love-charm to the inner surface of a festal robe, which she will

send as her gift to Heracles. She brings with her a casket, in which she has placed the robe.

Lichas appears, ready to depart, and receives the casket, sealed with Deianeira's signet. She had vowed, she tells him, to send her lord this robe, whenever she should hear of his safety, in order that he might wear it on the day when he made a thank-offering to the gods. Therefore Heracles must not put it on, or produce it, before that day.

The herald promises fidelity, and departs.

In a joyous strain, the Chorus express their bright hope. The dwellers on the coasts and hills of Malis will soon welcome the long-absent hero; and he will come home full of rekindled love for his true wife.

Second stasimon: 633—662.

But Deianeira now returns to them in an altered mood. A strange thing has happened. In applying the love-charm to the robe, she had used a tuft of wool, which she had then thrown down in the courtyard of the house. After a short exposure to the sun's heat, this tuft of wool had shrivelled away, leaving only a powder. And she remembers that the arrow which slew Nessus was tinged with a venom deadly to all living things. She fears the worst. But she is resolved that, if any harm befalls Heracles, she will not survive him.

IV. Third episode: 663—820.

The Trachinian maidens are speaking faint words of comfort, when Hyllus arrives from Euboea.

He denounces his mother as a murderess. He describes how Heracles, wearing her gift, stood forth before the altar; how, as the flames rose from the sacrifice, the robe clung to him, as if glued, and spasms began to rend his frame; how, in the frenzy of those awful agonies, he slew Lichas; and how, at last, he was laid in a boat, and conveyed to the shore of Malis. He will soon be at the house,—alive, or dead.

The son ends with terrible imprecations on his mother. She goes into the house without a word.

'Behold,' cry the Chorus, 'how the word of Zeus has been fulfilled; for the dead do indeed rest from labour.

Third stasimon: 821—862.

The malignant guile of Nessus has found an unconscious instrument in Deianeira. And the goddess Aphroditè has been the silent handmaid of fate.

A sound of wailing is heard within: the aged Nurse enters.

V. Fourth episode: 863—946.

Deianeira has slain herself with a sword; bitterly mourned, now, by her son Hyllus, who has learned, too late, that she was innocent.

The Trachinian maidens, afflicted by this new calamity, are also terrified by the thought that they must soon behold the tortured son of Zeus. Footsteps are heard; men, not of Trachis, are seen approaching, the mute bearers of a litter: is Heracles dead, or sleeping?

Fourth stasimon: 947—970.

As the mournful procession enters, Hyllus, walking beside the litter, is giving vent to his grief, while an old man, one of the Euboeans, is vainly endeavouring to restrain him, lest his voice should break the sick man's slumber.

VI. Exodos: 971—1278.

Heracles awakes. At first he knows not where he is; then his torments revive, and he beseeches the bystanders to kill him; he craves that mercy from his son; he appeals for it to Zeus and to Hades. And then, in a moment of respite, his thoughts go back on his past life,—so full of suffering, yet a stranger to such anguish as this; so full of victories, and yet doomed to end in this defeat at the unarmed hand of a false woman.

A pause permits Hyllus to announce his mother's death, and to assert her innocence. In using the supposed love-charm, she was obeying the dead Nessus.

Those words send a flash of terrible light into the mind of Heracles. The oracle at Dodona had foretold the time of his 'release.' A still earlier oracle had foretold the manner of his death; namely, that he was to be slain by the dead. The time and the agency coincide. This, then, was the promised 'release.'

The oracles are fulfilled. He sets himself to prepare for death, —now seen to be inevitable and imminent.

He commands that he shall be carried to the summit of Mount Oeta, sacred to Zeus, and there burned alive. Hyllus is constrained to promise obedience,—making, however, the condition that he himself shall not put hand to the pyre[1]. A second behest is then laid upon him. He shall marry Iolè. In this also he is forced to yield,—calling on the gods to witness that he submits to a dying father's inexorable will.

All has now been made ready. Heracles summons the forces of that 'stubborn soul which must upbear him through the last of his ordeals. In the words which close the play, Hyllus gives utterance to the deepest and bitterest of the feelings inspired by his father's cruel fate. Heracles dies forsaken by Zeus. For here, as in the *Iliad*, there is no presage of his reception among the gods.

The bearers lift their burden, and set forth for Oeta; while the maidens of the Chorus pass from the house of mourning to their own homes in Trachis.

§ 11. **The characters. — Deianeira.** In the first and larger part of the play, Deianeira is the central figure, as Heracles is in the second part. The heroine of the *Trachiniae* has been recognised by general consent as one of the most delicately beautiful creations in literature; and many who feel this charm will feel also that it can no more be described than the perfume of a flower. Perhaps in the poetry of the ancient world there is only one other woman who affects a modern mind in the same kind of way,—the maiden Nausicaa.

Deianeira is a perfect type of gentle womanhood; her whole life has been in her home; a winning influence is felt by all who approach her; even Lichas, whose undivided zeal is for his master, shrinks from giving her pain. But there is no want of spirit or stamina in her nature. Indeed, a high and noble courage is

[1] The office of kindling the pyre was performed by Philoctetes; see on *Ph.* 802 f.

the very spring of her gentleness; her generosity, her tender sympathy with inexperience and misfortune, are closely allied to that proud and delicate reserve which forbids her—after she has learned the truth about Iolè—to send any messages for her husband save those which assure him that her duties have been faithfully fulfilled, and that all is well with his household. From youth upwards she has endured constant anxieties, relieved only by gleams of happiness,—the rare and brief visits of Heracles to his home. She is devoted to him: but this appears less in any direct expression than in the habitual bent of her thoughts, and in a few words, devoid of conscious emphasis, which fall from her as if by accident. Thus the precepts of Nessus had dwelt in her memory, she says, 'as if graven on bronze.' And why? Because they concerned a possible safeguard of her chief treasure. Staying at home, amidst her lonely cares, she has heard of many a rival in those distant places to which Heracles has wandered. But she has not allowed such knowledge to become a root of bitterness. She has fixed her thoughts on what is great and noble in her husband; on his loyalty to a hard task, his fortitude under a cruel destiny: of his inconstancies she has striven to think as of 'distempers,' which love, and the discipline of sorrow, have taught her to condone.

But at last the trial comes in a sharper form. After protracted suspense, she is enraptured by tidings of her husband's safety; and almost at the same moment she learns that his new mistress is henceforth to share her home. Even then her sweet magnanimity does not fail. Strong in the lessons of the past, she believes that she can apply them even here. She feels no anger against Iolè, no wish to hurt her; nay, Iolè is rather worthy of compassion, since she has been the innocent cause of ruin to her father's house.

In these first moments of discovery, the very acuteness of the pain produces a certain exaltation in Deianeira's mind. But, when she has had more time to think, she feels the difference between this ordeal and everything which she has

hitherto suffered. She is as far as ever from feeling anger or rancour. But will it be possible to live under the same roof, while, with the slow months and years, her rival's youth grows to the perfect flower, and her own life passes into autumn? Thinking of all this, she asks—not, 'Could *I* bear it?'—but, 'What woman could bear it?'

She, whose patient self-control has sustained her so long, has come to a pass where it is a necessity of woman's nature to find some remedy. Neither Iolè nor Heracles shall be harmed; but she must try to reconquer her husband's love. Having decided to use the 'love-charm,' she executes the resolve with feverish haste. The philtre is a last hope—nothing more. With visible trepidation, she imparts her plan to the Chorus. The robe has just been sent off, when an accident reveals the nature of the 'love-charm.' 'Might she not have surmised this sooner,'—it may be asked,—'seeing from whom the gift came?' But her simple faith in the Centaur's precepts was thoroughly natural and characteristic. Her thoughts had never dwelt on *him* or his motive; they were absorbed in Heracles. Now that her hope has been changed into terror, she tells the maidens, that, if Heracles dies, she will die with him. In the scene which follows, she speaks only once after Hyllus has announced the calamity, and then it is to ask where he had found his father.

Her silence at the end of her son's narrative,—when, with his curse sounding in her ears, she turns away to enter the house,—is remarkable in one particular among the master-strokes of tragic effect. A reader feels it so powerfully that the best acting could scarcely make it more impressive to a spectator. The reason of this is worth noticing, as a point of the dramatist's art. When Hyllus ends his speech, we feel an eager wish that he could at once be made aware of his mother's innocence. The Chorus gives expression to our wish:—'Why dost thou depart in silence?' they say to Deianeira: 'Knowest thou not that thy silence pleads for thine accuser?' And yet that silence is not broken.

There is one famous passage in Deianeira's part which has provoked some difference of opinion; and as it has a bearing on the interpretation of her character, a few words must be said about it here. It is the passage in which she adjures Lichas to disclose the whole truth regarding Iolè. He need not be afraid, she says, of any vindictiveness on her part, towards Iolè or towards Heracles. She knows the inconstancy of the heart, and the irresistible power of Erôs; has she not borne with much like this before[1]? According to some critics, she is here practising dissimulation, in order to draw a confession from Lichas; her real feeling is shown for the first time when, a little later, she tells the Chorus that the prospect before her is intolerable (v. 545).

But surely there is a deeper truth to nature in those noble lines if we suppose that she means what she says to Lichas just as thoroughly as she means what she afterwards says to the Chorus. Only, when she is speaking to Lichas, she has not yet had time to realise all that the new trial means; she overrates, in all sincerity, her own power of suffering. If, on the other hand, her appeal to him was a stratagem, then true dramatic art would have given some hint, though ever so slight, of a moral falsetto: whereas, in fact, she says nothing that is not true; for she *does* pity Iolè; she *has* borne much from Heracles; she does *not* mean to harm either of them. This is not the only instance in which Sophocles has shown us a courageous soul, first at high pressure, and then suffering a reaction; it is so with Antigone also, little as she otherwise resembles Deianeira[2].

Heracles.

§ 12. The Heracles of the *Trachiniae* may be considered in two distinct aspects,—relatively to that conception of the hero which he represents, and relatively to the place which he holds in the action of the play.

[1] Vv. 436—469.
[2] See Introduction to the *Antigone*.

In the first of these two aspects, the most significant point is the absence of any allusion to the hero's apotheosis. He is the son of Zeus; but the 'rest from labour' which Zeus promised him is, in this play, death, and death alone. Here, then, we have the Homeric conception of Heracles. And this is in perfect harmony with the general tone of the *Trachiniae*. The spirit in which the legend of Heracles is treated in this play is essentially the epic spirit.

The archaic conception of the hero's mission is also preserved in its leading features; he is the purger of land and sea, the common benefactor of Hellenes, who goes uncomplainingly whithersoever his fate leads him. Conscious of his origin, he fears no foe, and is stronger than everything except his own passions. He has a Dorian scorn for lengthy or subtle speech (1121). It is bitter to him that sheer pain should force him to cry aloud: and he charges Hyllus that no lament shall be made by those who stand around his pyre. All this is in the strain of the old legend. One small touch recalls, for a moment, the Heracles of the satyr-plays (v. 268, *ἡνίκ' ἦν ᾠνωμένος*). On the other hand, the Omphalè incident, one of their favourite topics, is touched with delicate skill: Sophocles alludes only to the *tasks* done for her by the hero, as a punishment imposed by Zeus; there is no hint of sensuous debasement; and it is seen that the thrall was stung by his disgrace, even though that feeling was not the mainspring of his war upon Oechalia.

The Heracles of the *Trachiniae* is thus not merely *a* hero of tragedy, who might equally well have been called, let us say, Ajax. He has a stamp of his own; he can be recognised as the hero of the Dorians.

When, however, he is considered under the second of the two aspects indicated above,—that is, relatively to his place in the action of the play,—there is more room for criticism. During the first two-thirds of the piece, our interest is centred in Deianeira. The sympathy which she wins is complete; she

passes from the scene, broken-hearted, innocent, silent; and presently we hear the news of her death. Meanwhile, we have been rather prepossessed against Heracles; he is a great hero; but his conduct to this brave, devoted, gentle wife has been what, in another than the son of Zeus, might be called brutal; and let no one too hastily assume that such a feeling is peculiar to the modern mind; it would probably have been shared, at least in a very large measure, by the poet's Athenian audience.

So, when, in the last third of the play, this hero at length appears, unstrung and shattered by physical torment,—helpless in the meshes of fate,—when we listen to his pathetic laments, and to that magnificent recital of his past achievements which ends with the prayer that he may live to rend his false wife in pieces;—then we feel, indeed, all that is pitiable and terrible in this spectacle: but are there not many readers who, if they carried the analysis of their own feelings any further, would have to avow that the contemplation of his suffering and the thought of his past greatness leave them comparatively cold? Presently he learns that Deianeira was innocent, and that she is dead; but he utters no word in revocation of his judgment upon her,—no word of affection for her memory: he merely averts all his thoughts from her, and concentrates them on the preparation for death. It is not enough to plead that any softening would be out of keeping with the situation or with the man; we do not require him to be tender, but to be human. From a dramatic point of view, the fault is that he misses his chance of removing a great impediment to sympathy.

The Deianeira of the *Trachiniae* is dramatically effective in the very highest degree,—in a manner almost unique; the Heracles of the *Trachiniae*, though grandly conceived, falls short of being perfectly effective; and he does so, because he has to follow Deianeira. In a piece of which the catastrophe was to turn on the poisoned robe, and which was to end with the death of Heracles, that hero himself ought to have been the principal