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THE
CLASSICAL MUSEUM.

I.

ON THE PROMETHEUS BOUND OF ÆSCHYLUS.

1. DIE ÆSCHYLEISCHE TRILOGIE PROMETHEUS: von F. G. Welcker. Darmstadt, 1824.
2. NACHTRAG ZUR TRILOGIE: von F. G. Welcker. Frankfurt-am-Main, 1826.
3. DE ÆSCHYLI PROMETHEO SOLUTO DISSERTATIO: scripsit God. Hermann; edita 1828, (Opusc. iv. 253.)
4. COMMENTATIO DE ÆSCHYLI PROMETHEO: auctore Dr. B. Toepelmann. Lips. 1829.
5. THEOLOGOUMENA ÆSCHYLI TRAGICI: exhibuit R. H. Klausen. Berol. 1829.
6. DE ÆSCHYLI TERNIONE PROMETHEO: auctore C. F. Bellmann. Uratislav. 1839.
7. PROMETHEUS UND SEIN MYTHENKREIS: dargestellt von B. G. Weiske. Leipzig, 1842.
8. PROMETHEUS: die Sage und ihr Sinnein Beitrag zur Religionsphilosophie: von G. von Lasaulx. Würzburg, 1842.
9. DES ÆSCHYLUS GEFESSELTER PROMETHEUS: von G. F. Schoemann. Greifswald, 1844.
10. CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN DR. JULIUS CÆSAR AND PROFESSOR SCHOEMANN on the PROMETHEUS, in the *Zeitsch-*
V. A

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2 ON THE PROMETHEUS BOUND OF ÆSCHYLUS.

rift für die Alterthums-Wissenschaft, 4ter Jahrgang. October 1846. Cassel.

11. THE PROMETHEUS OF ÆSCHYLUS, translated into English Verse by, (1.) Captain Medwyn. London, 1832.—(2.) Miss Barrett. London, 1833.—(3.) Chapman in *Blackwood's Magazine*. 1836.—(4.) Swayne. Oxford, 1846.—(5.) Prowett. Cambridge, 1846.*

“*Omnis scriptura sacra*,” says Thomas à Kempis, or whoever he be that bears that name—*Omnis scriptura sacra, eo spiritu debet legi quo scripta est*—a most admirable rule of interpretation, not for the Bible only, but for all books, and a rule to the neglect of which may well be ascribed the creation of full nine-tenths of the folios of inane criticism and impertinent commentary, under which the biblical and philological shelves of the libraries groan; but, like all very wise general maxims, this hermeneutical principle of the good Thomas, even when once thoroughly acknowledged and adopted, leaves a more wide region of doubt and difficulty behind, viz. in its own application. It is a great point gained, no doubt, in the interpretation of ancient writings, when we can get men to commence formally with an act of self-exenteration, to put themselves in the attitude of receiving instead of giving, not of mastering but of being mastered. In theology, warped as our judgment so often is by preconceived notions, how few attain to even this preliminary step! but, after all, the real difficulty, in many cases, is in what

* N.B.—It is not intended in the following remarks to make a formal review of the above works; but they are placed here merely to indicate that the writer of the present article has read them all, has reaped the benefit of their researches, and has had them in view in the expression and arrangement of his own opinions. It has at the same time been his desire to make the present paper, without being cumbrous, one of as extensive reference as possible to the results of learned speculation on the subject. The works named contain as various a range of conflicting

views, as is necessary for exhausting everything of importance that can be said on the cardinal point; nevertheless the writer regrets extremely that it has not been in his power to add to the above list, a review of Schoemann's work in the *Wiener Jahrbücher* for 1845, vol. 109, called “able” by Grote, *Hist. of Greece*, vol. i. p. 104. The most recent opinions of Hermann also he has not seen; but Schoemann, in the *Correspondence*, No. 10, above, says that he has adopted the views of Cæsar, the merits of which will be discussed below.

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spirit was this or that book originally written, this or that march of imagery originally projected? Sometimes the drift of an author may be plain enough, and then self-exenteration, coupled with the necessary capacity of sympathy, will do the perfect work of hermeneutics; but in those cases, not unfrequent in the higher literature of all nations, where such a wild thing as a poet's fancy has wedded itself to such a loose thing as a popular mythology; then, to discern clearly by what spirit the phantasmal progeny of such conjunction is inhabited, requires sometimes no vulgar divination. In investigations of this description, a curious accuracy and a philosophical profundity will often lead us as far out of the true path as a loose and rambling superficiality; and if it should happen also that the artistical creation which we would comprehend, exists no longer in its perfect shape, but only as a trunk with head and legs cut off, a yet more perplexing element of confusion and dubiety is introduced; for it is seldom or never the case with imaginative works, as with the fossil organizations which belong to the science of geology, that the glance of a Cuvier can reconstruct the harmony of a whole from the wrecks of a part. A combination of all these elements tending to trouble the æsthetical vision, and to perplex the judgment, is presented in the **PROMETHEUS BOUND** of Æschylus; and the consequence has been, that in few fields of philological criticism—always excepting the great Homeric and Roman questions started by Wolf and Niebuhr—has the recent literature of luxuriant Germany been more prolific. England also, as became a country in which classical literature is a sort of national watchword, has not been altogether silent; but our direct and practical character has on this, as on so many other occasions, shewn itself averse to enter that region of moral and religious speculation to which the profounder intelligence of the Prometheus belongs. We accordingly have more to shew in the way of translation than of speculation; and if we will boast of our imaginative sympathy with the Æschylean Prometheus—for we speak not here of mere verbal criticism—were wise to turn from the ranks of the philologists to the poets, proud to compensate ourselves for the lack of the cumbrous erudition of a Bellmann, the acuteness of a Weiske, and the ingenuity of a Welcker, with the possession of a genius at once so purely Hellenic, and so grandly Æschylean, as Percy Bysshe Shelley.

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It is indeed not the least remarkable feature of the Promethean legend, that while it received a more than common prominence in antiquity, from being adopted at different and most diverse periods by the genius of a Hesiod, an Æschylus, and a Plato—not to mention the popular persiflage of a Lucian in later times—it has, in the age which has just gone by, been transferred into the popular currency of modern literature by four men so high above the vulgar mark, as Goethe and Herder in Germany, and among our own countrymen, Byron and Shelley. This contemporary appropriation of an exotic theme by men in many respects far from similar, deserves the attention of the philosophical critic, as a most important testimony to the deep human interest and moral significancy of the mythe; and while it brings the subject out of the narrow circle of antiquarian disquisition into the wide range of living European opinion, excites further the curious and interesting inquiry, how far the general impression of the Æschylean drama made on the mind of the greatest European poets, has been identical with, or different from that which, there may be good reason to believe, it must have made on an Athenian audience. Such a question is one of the most interesting that possibly can be raised in the criticism of the classics; and we shall not, therefore, crave the pardon of the more learned reader, if we introduce the more strictly philological part of the present enquiry, by a distinct statement of the place which the Prometheus holds in the general sympathy of European readers, by virtue of the genius of the great poets just mentioned. We shall thus propose for ourselves a distinct critical problem to be solved,—how far the popular impression of the Promethean legend is, or is not, consistent with the spirit in which it was originally conceived.

None of the readers of the *Classical Museum*, we may well presume, will require from us in this place, a detailed narrative of the plot of the Prometheus, as it is presented in the play of Æschylus. The action is at once so simple in itself, and so familiar to every cultivated imagination, that to set it forth in curious detail, would seem but a pedantic attempt to fritter away the impression of a gigantic whole, that stands like a permanent background in the picture gallery of the mind. The “high-counselled son of Iapetus and Themis” chained to a rock in wintry Scythia, for a crime that appears no crime,—

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the stealing of fire from heaven, and teaching the use of it to mortal men, contrary to the will of Jove; the calm defiance which he breathes against his Olympian adversary, and the spirit of firm self-sustainment by which, through ages of unmitigated torture, he is supported; the wide untrodden waste of solitude around him, interrupted only by the sympathetic utterances of the Ocean maids, and the friendly but fruitless expostulations of father Ocean himself; then, like a darker shade upon the grand picture, (remaining stationary and unchanged through the piece,) the shrieking lamentations of the “many-wandering” Io, the “horned maid,” the persecuted daughter of Inachus, the innocent victim of the love of Jove, and the jealousy of Here; and lastly, the messenger sent direct from the Olympian himself to besiege the constancy of the rebellious Titan with threats of thunder and precipitation into Tartarus; with the actual execution of which threats the piece ends:—all this stands in grand and vivid outline so familiarly before the imagination of the scholar, that a more particular statement for the general argument may well be spared, while particular passages will more conveniently be brought forward under the different heads of the discussion to which they belong.—We proceed, therefore, without preface, to enquire what is the general impression which the Æschylean play has made upon those who, *primâ facie*, are the fittest representatives of the moral effect produced by it on cultivated minds in modern times; we mean Herder and Goethe, Byron and Shelley, in the first place; and second to them, the English translators, who, not being scholars by profession, have accompanied their versions by remarks on the æsthetical and moral character of the piece; to whom we shall add Schlegel, as representing the modern dramatic critics. We shall then bring the opinions of these parties—not the less valuable in some views because they represent in this question the laity, and not the clergy of scholarship—into contact and collision with the results of the most recent learned investigation on the subject; and out of these conflicting elements, endeavour to enquire what harmonious reconciliation of apparently incompatible views may be producible.

First, therefore, let us hear Byron, the poet who of all others in modern times has produced and reproduced a type of character in his works, that in its tones of lonely grandeur, high defiance, and self-sustained isolation, bears a strong resemblance

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to the Prometheus of Æschylus.¹ Byron's conception of the character of the Titan, is the more interesting that we have his own assurance for the fact, of the deep impression which the Æschylean drama, at an early period, made on his mind.

“Thy godlike crime was to be kind,
 To render with thy precepts less
 The sum of human wretchedness,
 And strengthen man with his own mind ;
 But baffled as thou wert from high,
 Still in thy patient energy,
 In the endurance and repulse
 Of thine impenetrable spirit,
 Which earth and heaven could not convulse,
 A mighty lesson we inherit :
 Thou art a symbol and a sign
 To mortals of their fate and force ;
 Like thee, man is in part divine,
 A troubled stream from a pure source ;
 And man in portions can foresee
 His own funereal destiny ;
 His wretchedness and his resistance,
 And his sad unallied existence :
 To which his spirit may oppose
 Itself—an equal to all woes,
 And a firm will and a deep sense,
 Which even in torture can descry
 Its own concenter'd recompense,
 Triumphant where it dares defy,
 And making death a victory.”

The author of *Manfred* therefore saw in Prometheus a type of human nature, and that in its noblest aspect—activity hal- lowed by love, and suffering consecrated by endurance. Pro- metheus is the martyr of humanity, the champion of intellectual freedom against all brutish, unreasoning powers ; “faith which worketh by love,” to adopt an apostolic phrase, oppressed be- neath the temporary ascendancy of evil, but not prostrate. In

¹ MANFRED, as Lord Jeffrey well re- marked, is, in “tone and pitch,” a true modern Prometheus. This essential kinship Byron himself at once avowed, while the connection of the same poem

with Goethe's *Faust* belongs to the form of the first scenes merely, scarcely more.—See Byron's own notes to *Man- fred*.

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this view Prometheus is an ideal of moral perfection, as his adversary is an incarnation of malignity.

“ —The inexorable Heaven
And the deaf tyranny of Fate,
The ruling principle of HATE,
Which for its pleasure doth create
The things it may annihilate.”

To the same purpose Shelley—

“ To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite,
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,
To defy power which seems omnipotent,
To love and bear ; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates ;
Neither to change, nor flatter, nor repent :
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free.
This is alone life, joy, empire and victory.”

Substantially identical with these views, though different in a not unimportant point which we shall notice anon, is the idea of Herder, who, in the Preface to his *Prometheus Unbound*,² finds the most noble, and perhaps the most natural, sense of the mythe to be “ the progress of the human race in every sort of culture ; the continued striving of the Divine Spirit in man for the awakening of all his powers.” Akin in the main tendency, though singularly modified by the peculiar mental constitution of the writer, is the representation of Goethe, who, out of the rich fulness of moral excellence, embodied by Byron and Shelley, in the character of Prometheus, has selected the one element of artistic activity, and made it the subject of a lyrical composition, as classically chaste in the execution as it is sublime and original in the conception. The whole poem, though very far removed from the Æschylean conception of Prometheus, agrees with it strikingly in one point, an attitude of defiance towards the Olympian powers, and a tone of irreverence, real or apparent, which escapes many a modern reader in the Greek drama, only because he lives habitually in the conviction that Jove is “ nothing in the world,” a mere idol, perhaps a devil,

“ And devils to adore for deities,”

² *Dramatische Stücke und Dichtungen. Aesthetische Werke*, vol. vi. Edit. 1806.

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towards whom reverence were a greater moral perversion of sentiment than contempt.

“Deem'st thou that I should hate my life,
And into deserts flee,
Because I could not see
All blossoms of my dreamings rife?
Here sit I, and with life inspire
A race that shall be like their sire;
Who shall know beneath the skies
To suffer and to weep,
To enjoy and to rejoice,
And thee and thine even so despise
As I do!”³

The reader will observe, what is a point of main importance to start with, that all these representations agree in exhibiting Prometheus, as a heroic character of the highest order, a martyr, and a champion worthy of our most unqualified love and admiration. Nor are we allowed to forget, in these modern reproductions of the pregnant old mythe, the quality so essential to the conception of Prometheus, that while he is the spokesman and representative of men, he is in his own nature no man, but a god, at least a demigod; a being with all the gigantic, intellectual, and moral proportions, but without the moral perversity of Milton's Satan. This similitude and contrast has been vividly perceived, and felicitously expressed by Miss Barrett in the following passage:—

“—But Prometheus stands eminent and alone; one of the most original and grand and attaching characters ever conceived by the mind of man. That conception sank deep into the soul of Milton, and, as has been observed, rose from thence in the likeness of his Satan. But the Satan of Milton and the Prometheus of Æschylus stand upon ground as unequal as do the sublime of sin and the sublime of virtue. Satan suffered from his ambition; Prometheus from his humanity: Satan for himself; Prometheus for mankind: Satan dared peril which he had not weighed; Prometheus devoted himself to sorrows which he had foreknown. “Better to rule in hell,” said Satan; “better to serve this rock,” said Prometheus. But in his hell Satan yearned to

³ Goethe, in this passage, has adopted that comparatively modern exaggeration of the mythe, which represents its hero as the creator of man. Hesiod knows

nothing of this, and Æschylus as little. See the masterly historical development in *Weiske*.

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associate man, while Prometheus preferred a solitary agony; nay, he even permitted his zeal and tenderness for the peace of others, to abstract him from that agony's intensesness."

After this strongly put antithesis, we shall not be surprised if other students of the Prometheus have ventured upon a comparison that to some may appear bold, and even profane; they have instituted a comparison between the tortures of Caucasus and the agonies of Calvary, and have not hesitated to employ language in reference to the mythical demigod of Greek fiction, similar to that which Christians are every day in the habit of using with regard to the historical founder of their faith. This comparison, we have said, may appear unwarrantable and even profane to some; but it is only an appearance. Nothing indeed could be more obvious than the parallel: and the simplest way to dispel all suspicion of irreverence in the writers, is to read what they have written.—Toepelmann, for one, in his excellent little tract, has the following observations, (p. 69, 70-1):—

"Nemo tam obtuso est ingenio quin animadvertat ad quantam Promethei Aeschylei argumentum aliorum populorum revelationis divinae accedat similitudinem. Dico autem doctrinam quae Dei filium in terram descendisse, homines a malis liberaturum, et meliora de rebus divinis docturum exponit. Ac certe si Christiani σωτήρος vitam et facta cum Prometheo comparemus, primum in eo conveniunt quod eorum quisque erudiendo generi humano operam navabat, Christus autem spiritualem, Prometheus temporalem hominum mortem prohibebat:

— ἐξερυσάμην βροτοὺς
τοῦ μὴ διαρραίσθέντας εἰς Ἄδου μολεῖν.—γ. 244-5.

tum vero cuique eorum propter beneficia quibus genus humanum cumulaverat cruciatus erant subeundi. Praeterea autem, quod per interest multum Christi perfectionem inter, et Promethei non perfectam naturam, hoc etiam magnum inter eos discrimen esse apparet, quod ille a Deo patre ad opus in terrâ patrandum legatus sit consentiente eodem perfecit, Prometheus, invito deorum patre et irato, generi humano multis modis benefecit, ejusque jussu poenâ est affectus. In quo discrimine si internam rei Christianae praestantiam in comparisonem non vocamus, sed solum spectamus utriusque et voluntatem et audaciam, non possumus Graeci quam de generis humani sospitatore sibi conformaverant sententiam Christianâ quanquam minus sanctam piamque, tamen audaciorem esse non judicare. Nam quod Prometheo

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propter τὸν φιλόανθρωπον τρόπον, et διὰ τὴν λίαν φιλότητα βρότων a Jove timenda erant, ea non erant Christo, cui cruciatus illi in caelis reduci a patre amantissimo resarciebantur. ILLE DEOS LAESIT, UT HOMINES BEARET; HIC HOMINES BEAVIT, UT SUAE DEIQUE PATRIS OBSECUNDARET VOLUNTATI."

To the same purpose, though in a different connection, a recent English translator :—" Prometheus himself is the personification of Divine love, willing, for the sake of man, to suffer to the utmost what divine justice could inflict or require."⁴ In the same direction, though not so far and so decidedly, do the well-known observations of A. W. Schlegel point ; from which, as translated by Black, and adopted by Captain Medwyn, we extract the following :—

" The chained Prometheus is the representation of constancy under suffering, and that the never-ending suffering of a God. Though the scene exhibits the principal person exiled to a naked rock on the shore of the encircling ocean, this drama still embraces the world, the Olympus of the gods, and the earth of mortals ; all scarcely yet reposing in a secure state above the dread abyss of the dark Titanian powers. This idea of a self-devoting divinity has been mysteriously inculcated in many religions, as a confused foreboding of the true. Here, however, it appears in a most alarming contrast with the consolations of revelation. For Prometheus does not suffer in an understanding with the powers by whom the world is governed, but he atones for his disobedience, and that disobedience consists in nothing but the attempt to give perfection to the human race. He is thus an image of human nature itself, endowed with a miserable foresight, and bound down to a narrow existence without an ally, and with nothing to oppose to the combined and inexorable powers of nature but an unshaken will, and the consciousness of elevated claims."

But the most remarkable, and in every way the most interesting, parallel drawn between the mythical tortures of Caucasus and the real agonies of Calvary, is that drawn by our countryman Shelley, who, in his supra-mundane poem of the " Prometheus Unbound," introduces a chorus of Furies, endeavouring to terrify the dauntless Titan into submission, by conjuring up the phantasmal representation of the good and the great in all ages who had suffered for the advancement of humanity, but,

⁴ Swayne's Introduction, p. 12.