

AUGUST STRINDBERG

HISTORICAL
MINIATURES

August Strindberg
Historical Miniatures

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Historical Miniatures:

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PREFACE

Maximilian Harden, the well-known critic, writes in the *Zukunft* (7th September 1907) of the *Historical Miniatures*:

“A very interesting book, as might be expected, for it is Strindberg’s. And I am bold enough to say a book which should and must be successful with the public. The writer is not here concerned with Sweden, nor with Natural History. A philosopher and poet here describes the visions which a study of the history of mankind has called up before his inner eye. Julian the Apostate and Peter the Hermit appear on the stage, together with Attila and Luther, Alcibiades and Eginhard. We see the empires of the Pharaohs and the Czars, the Athens of Socrates and the ‘Merry England’ of Henry VIII. There are twenty brief episodes, and each of them is alive. So powerful is the writer’s faculty of vision, that it compels belief in his descriptions of countries and men.”

“The question whether these cultured circles really were as described, hardly occurs to us. Never has the remarkable writer shown a more comprehensive grasp. Since the days of the *Confession of a Fool*, Strindberg has become a writer of world-

wide significance.”¹

¹ One collection of Maximilian Harden’s essays is published by Messrs. Blackwood, and another by Mr. Eveleigh Nash

THE EGYPTIAN BONDAGE

The old worker in ebony and cabinet-maker, Amram, dwelt by the river-side in a clay-hut which was covered with palm-leaves. There he lived with his wife and three children. He was yellow in complexion and wore a long beard. Skilled in his trade of carving ebony and hard wood, he attended at Pharaoh's court, and accordingly also worked in the temples. One morning in midsummer, just before sunrise, he got out of bed, placed his implements in a bag, and stepped out of his hut. He remained standing on the threshold for a moment, and, turning to the east, uttered a low prayer. Then he began to walk between fishermen's huts, following the black broken bank of the river, where herons and doves were resting after their morning meal.

His neighbour, the fisherman, Nepht, was overhauling his nets, and placing carp, grayling, and sheat-fish in the different partitions of his boat.

Amram greeted him, and wished to say some words in token of friendliness.

"Has the Nile ceased to rise?" he asked.

"It remains standing at ten yards' height. That means starvation!"

"Do you know why it cannot rise higher than fifteen yards, Nepht?"

"Because otherwise we should drown," answered the

fisherman simply.

“Yes, certainly, and that we cannot. The Nile, then, has a Lord who controls the water-level; and He who has measured out the starry vault, and laid the foundations of the earth, has set up a wall for the waters, and this wall, which we cannot see, is fifteen yards high. For during the great flood in the land of our fathers, Ur of the Chaldees, the water rose fifteen yards—no more, no less. Yes, Nepht, I say ‘we,’ for you are of our people, though you speak another tongue, and honour strange gods. I wish you a good morning, Nepht, a very good morning.”

He left the abashed fisherman, went on, and entered the outskirts of the city, where began the rows of citizens’ houses built of Nile-bricks and wood. He saw the merchant and money-changer Eleazar taking down his window-shutters while his assistant sprinkled water on the ground before the shop. Amram greeted him, “A fine morning, cousin Eleazar.”

“I cannot say,” answered the tradesman sulkily. “The Nile has remained stationary, and begins to sink. The times are bad.”

“Bad times are followed by good times, as our father Abraham knew; and when Joseph, Jacob’s son, foresaw the seven lean years he counselled Pharaoh to store up corn in the granaries....”

“May be, but that is a forgotten tale now.”

“Yes, and have you also forgotten the promise which the Lord gave to his friend Abraham?”

“That about the land of Canaan? We have waited four hundred years for its fulfilment, and now, instead of receiving it,

Abraham's children have become bond-servants."

"Abraham believed through good and through evil days, through joy and through sorrow, and that was counted to him for righteousness."

"I don't believe at all," Eleazar broke in, "or rather, I believe that things go backwards, and that I will have to put up my shutters, if there is a failure in the crops."

Amram went on with a sad face, and came to the market, where he bought a millet loaf, a piece of an eel, and some onions.

When the market-woman took the piece of money, she spat on it, and when Amram received his change, he did the same.

"Do you spit on the money, Hebrew?" she hissed.

"One adopts the customs of the country," answered Amram.

"Do you answer, unclean dog?"

"I answer speech, but not abuse."

The Hebrew went on, for a crowd began to gather. He met the barber, Enoch, and they greeted each other with a sign which the Hebrews had devised, and which signified, "We believe in the promise to Abraham, and wait, patient in hope."

Amram reached at last the temple square, passed through the avenue of Sphinxes, and stood before a little door in the left pylon. He knocked seven times with his hand; a servant appeared, took Amram by the arm and led him in. A young priest tied a bandage round his eyes, and, after they had searched his bag, they took the cabinet-maker by the hand, and led him into the temple. Sometimes they went up steps, sometimes down them,

sometimes straight-forward. Now and then they avoided pillars, and the murmur of water was heard; at one time there was a smell of dampness, at another of incense.

At last they halted, and the bandage was taken off Amram's eyes. He found himself in a small room with painted walls, some seats, and a cupboard. A richly-carved ebony door divided this room from a larger one which on one side opened on to a broad staircase leading down to a terrace facing eastward.

The priest left Amram alone after he had shown him that the door required repair, and had, with an unmistakable gesture, enjoined on him silence and secrecy.

When Amram was left alone, and found himself for the first time within the sacred walls which could not overawe a Hebrew's mind, he yet felt a certain alarm at all the mysteriousness, of which he had heard since his youth. In order to shake off his fear of the unknown, he resolved to satisfy his curiosity, though at the risk of being turned out, if he met anyone. As a pretext he took a fine plane in his hand, and entered the great hall.

It was very spacious. In the midst was a fountain of red granite, with an obelisk set upright in the basin. The walls were adorned with figures painted in simple colours, most of them in red ochre, but also in yellow and black. He drew off his sandals, and went on into a gallery where stood mummy-coffins leaning against the wall.

Then he entered a domed room, on the vault of which were painted the great constellations of the northern hemisphere. In

the middle of the room stood a table, on which lay a half-globe covered with designs resembling the outlines of a map. By the window stood another table, with a model of the largest pyramid set upon a land-surveyor's board, with a scale of measurements. Close by stood an alidade, an instrument for measuring angles.

There was no visible outlet to this room, but after some search the uninitiated Hebrew found some stairs of acacia-wood leading up through a wooden tower. He climbed and climbed, but when he looked through the loopholes, he found himself always on a level with the roof of the domed room. But he continued to ascend, and after he had again counted a hundred steps and, looked through a loop hole, he found himself on a level with the floor of the domed room. Then a wooden door opened, and an elderly man in half-priestly garb received him with a greeting as though he were a well-known and expected superior. But when he saw a stranger, he started, and the two men gazed at each other long, before they could speak. Amram, who felt unpleasantly surprised, began the verbal encounter: "Reuben? Don't you know me, the friend of your youth, and your kinsman in the Promise?"

"Amram, the husband of Jochebed, the son of Kohath! Yes, I know you!"

"And you here! After you have vanished from my sight for thirty years!"

"And you?"

"I was sent for to repair a door; that is all; and when I was left alone, I wanted to look round.

“I am a scribe in the chief school....”

“And sacrificest to strange gods....”

“No, I do not sacrifice, and I have kept my faith in the promise, Amram. I have entered this temple in order to learn the secrets of the wise, and to open from within the fortress which holds Israel captive.”

“Secrets? Why should the Highest be secret?”

“Because the common people only understand what is low.”

“You do not yourself believe in these animals which you call sacred?”

“No, they are only symbols—visible signs to body forth the invisible. We priests and scribes revere the Only One, the Hidden, under His visible shape, the Sun, giver and sustainer of life. You remember, when we were young, how Pharaoh Amenophis the Fourth forcibly did away with the ancient gods and the worship of the sacred animals. He passed down the river from Thebes proclaiming the doctrine of the Unity of God. Do you know whence he derived that doctrine? From the Israelites, who, after Joseph’s marriage to Asenath, daughter of the High Priest of On, increased in numbers, and even married daughters of the house of Pharaoh. But after the death of Amenophis the old order was restored, the King again resided at Thebes, and the ancient gods were brought out again, all to please the people.”

“And you continue to honour the Only One, the Hidden, the Eternal.

“Yes, we do.”

"Is, then, your God not the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?"

"Probably, since there is only One."

"It is strange. Why, then, do you persecute the Hebrews?"

"Foreigners are not generally loved. You know that our Pharaoh has lately conquered the Syrian race of Hittites."

"In the land of Canaan and the region round about, in the land of our fathers, and of the promise. Do you see, the Lord of Zebaoth, our God, sends him to prepare the way for our people?"

"Do you still believe in the promise?"

"As surely as the Lord liveth! And I am told that the time will be soon fulfilled when we shall leave our bondage, and go to the promised land."

The scribe did not answer, but his face expressed simultaneously doubt in Amram's declaration, and the certainty of something quite different which would soon happen. Amram, who did not wish to have his faith shaken by any kind of explanations, let the subject drop, and spoke of something indifferent.

"That is a strange staircase."

"It is an elevator, and not a staircase."

Amram glanced up at the domed roof, and found a new pretext for continuing the conversation, which he did not wish to drop.

"Does that represent the sky?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And its secrets?"

“Ah, the secrets? They are accessible to all who can understand them.”

“Tell them in a few words.”

“Astronomy is not my province, and I know little of it, but still I will tell you in a few words. The vault up there represents the sky, the board lying on the table, the earth. Now the wise speak thus: In the beginning Earth (Sibu) and Heaven (Nuit) lay near each other. But the god of air and of sunlight (Shu) raised the sky, and set it as a vault over the earth. The fixed constellations which we know form as it were an impression, like that of a seal on wax, of the earth, and when the learned study the stars, they can find out the unknown parts of our earth. Look at the constellations which you know. In the north the Great Bear; in the south, at a certain season of the year, the Hunter (Orion), with four stars at the corners and three stars in the middle. These three we Hebrews call Jacob's Staff, and through the uppermost of them passes the sky-gauge or equator, which corresponds to the earth-gauge where the sources of our Nile are said to be.

“You know also the constellation which we specially love—the River (Nile). Look, how it flees from the Hunter (Orion), and makes as many windings as the Nile here on earth. Therefore he who wishes to learn the hidden secrets of earth must learn them from the sky. Our wise men know only the lands which lie towards the east; but those which lie in the north under the Great Bear are unknown to us, as also are the lands towards the west. But it looks as though the lands of the Bear had great destinies

assigned to them. Their numbers are four and three, like those of the Hunter. Three represents the Divine with its attributes, four denotes the most perfect possible: three and four together form the mysterious number seven. To gods sacrifices are offered with the unequal number, three; to men, with the equal number four.

“This is about all that I have cursorily understood of the secrets of the sky. If you now wish to understand some of the secrets of the earth, let us consider the tombs of the Pharaohs. These, apart from their ostensible purposes of being tombs, have also a hidden one—*i.e.* to conceal in their numbers and proportions the discoveries of the learned regarding the mutual relations of Sibus and Nuits. In the first place, the sepulchre of the Pharaohs, or the Pyramid, operates with the numbers four and three; the base with four, the sides with three. That was indeed one of the secrets of the sky. But the base of the Great Pyramid is 365 ells broad. There you have the 365 days of the year. Now the triple side of the Pyramid is 186 great ells, or a stadium long. There you see where our road-measures come from.

“If you multiply the breadth of the base with the number 500, which is about double the breadth measured in great ells, you obtain a length which is equivalent to $1/360$ of the whole orbital path of the sun in a year, since the number of days in a lunar year is 360. This length represents four minutes, and those who live a degree west of us see the sun rise four minutes later than we do.

“This is all I remember about numbers and proportions. If you

wish to learn more—for example, why the sides of the pyramid are inclined at an angle of 51° —you must ask the astronomers. The steps to the funereal chamber, on the other hand, are inclined at an angle of 27° . This corresponds to the difference between the axis of the universe and the axis of the earth.”

Amram had listened with special attention to the learned scribe’s explanation of the tombs of the Pharaohs, and when Reuben mentioned numbers he concentrated his attention still more, as though he wished to fix something in his mind. Finally he interrupted him, and began to speak: “You just now mentioned 27° . Good! That is not the inclination of the axis of the universe, but of the Milky Way, which probably is the real axis and lies 27° north of the heavenly equator, while the inclination of the earth’s axis to the orbit of the sun is 23° . But you have forgotten the third Pyramid, that of Menkheres, the base of which is 107 great ells broad. This number 107 we find again three or five times in the universe; there are 107 smaller suns between the earth and the sun; 107 is the distance of the planet Venus, and also of Jupiter from the sun.”

Reuben started. “What? Where did you get all that? Here you let me stand, and make a fool of me! Where have you learnt that?”

“From our oldest and wisest, who have preserved the memories of their home at Ur in Chaldaea. You despise Assur, you men of Egypt, for you believe the Nile is the centre of the earth. But there are many centres in the infinite. Behind Assur,

on the Tigris and Euphrates, there lies another land with another river. It is called the Land of the Seven Rivers, because its river debouches into seven mouths as the Nile does.”

“The Nile has seven arms, as you say, like the seven-branched candlestick!

“That betokens the Light of the world, which shall shine from every land where a river divides itself in order to flow into the sea. The rivers, you see, are the blood-vessels of the earth, and as these carry blue and red blood alternately, so our land has its Blue Nile and its Red Nile. The Blue Nile is poisonous like dark blood, and the Red is fertilising, life-giving, like red blood. So everything created has its counterpart above in heaven and below on earth, for all is one, and the Lord of all is One—One and the Same.”

Reuben kept silence and listened. “Speak on!” he said at last.

Amram therefore continued: “The tombs of the Pharaohs have also grown out of the earth on which they rest. The first or Great Pyramid is built after the pattern of sea-salt when it crystallises in the warmth of the sun. If you could look through a dewdrop into a salt-crystal, you would find it built up of an infinite number of squares just like the Great Pyramid. But if you let alum crystallise, you will see a whole field of pyramids. Alum is the salt deposited in clay. There you have the salt of the earth and of the sea.

“But there is another kind of pyramid with blunted corners. That is the original form of sulphur when found in chalk. Now

we have water, earth, and chalk with its fire-stone. There is still a third kind of pyramid with blunted edges; these resemble crystallised flint or rock crystal. There you have the foundation of the mountains. A closer examination of the Nile-mud will discover all these primary forms and substances—clay, salt, sulphur, and flint. Therefore the Nile is the blood of the earth. And the mountains are the flesh, not the bones.”

Reuben, whose Egyptian name was Phater, had regarded Amram while he spoke with alarm and amazement. When the latter had ceased to speak, he began, “You are not Amram the worker in ebony and cabinet-maker.”

“I am certainly a worker in ebony and cabinetmaker, but I am also of Israel’s priestly line. I am the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. I am a Levite and the husband of Jochebed. Miriam, and Aaron are the children hitherto born to me; one unborn I still await. Now I go back to my work; show me the way!”

Phater went in front, but led Amram by another way than that by which he had come. As they passed by an open door, which led into a large hall lined with bookcases, Amram stopped, full of curiosity, and wished to enter, in order to look at the numerous books. But Phater held him back by his garment, “Don’t go in,” he said; “the place is full of traps and snares. The guardian of the library sits concealed in the middle of the hall, and guards his treasures jealously. He has had the floor made of dried willow-withes, which creak when they are trodden upon.

He hears anyone stealing in, and he hears if a scribe touches the forbidden books. He has heard us, and he is feeling after us! Don't you feel as if cold snake-tongues were touching your cheeks, your forehead, your eyelids?"

"Yes, I do."

"It is he, stretching out the fingers of his soul, as we stretch out an arm. But now I cut off the feeler which wants to examine us."

He took out a knife, and made a cut through the air in front of them.

Amram felt a sudden glow, and at the same moment saw a great adder writhing on the ground in its death-struggle.

"You practise magic arts here?" he said.

"Did you not know that?"

"I did not expect it."

At the same instant the wall seemed to open, and they saw a mass of Nile mud in which crocodiles and snakes twined round each other, while a hippopotamus trampled threateningly with its forefeet.

Amram was alarmed, but Phater took out an amulet in the shape of a scarabaeus, and, holding it as a shield in front of him, he passed through the terrible shapes, which dissolved like smoke, while Amram followed him.

"The magician only cheats our eyes," said Phater, and as he waved his hand the whole appearance vanished.

Now they stood again in the first hall, and, pointing to the Nilometer, Amram said, "Famine!"

“There is no doubt of that. Therefore all superfluous mouths should be stopped.”

“What!”

Phater saw that he had made a slip of the tongue.

“I mean,” he said, “Pharaoh must consider how to get corn.”

“He would find a Joseph useful just now.”

“Why?” broke in Phater more vehemently than he intended.

“Don’t you know that Joseph the son of Jacob brought the Egyptians to be Pharaoh’s bond-slaves. Your chronicles and ours relate that he made the peasants mortgage their land in return for help during the seven lean years, and that, by his doing so, Pharaoh became sole possessor of all the land of Egypt.”

“You are not Reuben; you are Phater the Egyptian, for if you were an Israelite, you would not have spoken thus. Our ways part. I go to my work.”

Amram laid his hand on the door, and Phater glided into the shadow of the columns and vanished. But Amram saw by his bent back that he had evil designs.

When Amram came home in the evening, he found that his wife had borne a son. He was like other healthy children, but did not cry; after the bath he was wrapped in linen and laid in the darkest corner of the cottage.

The next day before sunrise Amram went again to his work in the Temple of the Sun, and was again led into the chamber with his eyes bandaged. There he was left alone without receiving any counsel or advice regarding what he was to do. This carelessness

seemed to him like indifference, and indicated a general laxness in the temple servants. Therefore he again entered the columned hall. He looked uneasily at the Nilometer, in which the water had sunk. There was no hope of the fifteen ells of water which the earth needed for the harvest of the year.

He stepped out on the terrace, which looked towards the east, and entered an open colonnade. But before he went farther, he took the precaution of dropping small pieces of papyrus to show him the way back. He went through narrow courtyards, but took care not to climb steps; his experience of yesterday had warned him. At last he found himself in a forest of pillars whose tops were crowned with lotus-buds, and, as he listened, he heard what seemed a faint song of children's voices from the roof. He laid his ear to a pillar, and heard it more clearly, like the ringing music of zither and harp. He knew that this was caused by the sun, which had already warmed the stones of the roof, and was about to ascend the sky.

He went forward, and suddenly saw a terrace upon which stood a sacrificial altar. From the terrace, a flight of stairs flanked with sphinxes descended to the river. Thence there sloped a valley, bounded on the east by the mountains of the Red Sea. At the altar there stood a priest in a white linen robe with a purple border. He had raised his arms towards heaven, and stood motionless. His hands were quite white, since the blood had sunk into his arms, and the face of the old man seemed astrain with the strength he had invoked from above. Sometimes

his body shuddered as though streams of fire ran through it. He was silent, and gazed towards the East. Then the shining edge of the sun's disk rose above the mountain-ridge, and the white hands of the priest became transparently crimson like his face. And he opened his mouth and said: "Sun-god: Lord of the splendour of rays, be Thou extolled in the morning when Thou risest, and in the evening when Thou descendest. I cry to Thee, Lord of Eternity, Thou Sun of both horizons, Thou Creator who hast created Thyself. All the gods shout aloud when they behold Thee, O King of heaven; my youth is renewed when I see thy beauty. Hail to Thee, as Thou passest from land to land, Thou Father of the gods!"

He stopped speaking and remained standing, his arms outstretched towards the sun, as though he absorbed warmth from it.

Then in the forest of pillars a rattle of arms was heard, which ceased immediately, and forthwith a stately beardless man appeared, clothed in purple and gold. His walk was as noiseless as that of a panther's, and he seemed to glide over the floor which reflected his image, a bright shadow which followed him as he went. When he came out on the terrace the sun cast behind him a gigantic dark shadow which lay there like a carpet.

"Already at prayer, thou wisest of the wise!" was Pharaoh's greeting to the Chief Priest.

"My lord has called me, thy servant has obeyed. My lord has returned to his land after long and victorious campaigns in far

and foreign countries. Thy servant greets Pharaoh to his face.”

Pharaoh sat down on a chair of state, his face turned towards the rising sun, and began to speak like one who wishes to set his thoughts in order. “My chariots have rolled over the red soil of Syria, my horses have trampled the highways of Babylon and Nineveh; I have crossed the Euphrates and Tigris, and marched through the region between the two rivers; I have come to the land of the Five Rivers, and seen the Seven in the distance, where the Land of Silk begins, that stretches towards the sunrise. I have returned on my traces and gone northward towards Scythia and Colchis. Wherever I went I heard murmurs and saw movements. The people have awaked; in the temples they prophesied the return of the gods; for men had been left alone to manage their affairs and to guide their destinies, but had done both badly. Justice had become injustice, and truth, falsehood; the whole earth groaned for deliverance. At last their prayers reached the throne of the All-merciful. And now the wise, the gentle, the saintly proclaim in all tongues the joyful message, ‘The gods return again. They return in order to put right what the children of men have thrown in confusion, to give laws and to protect justice.’ This message I bring home as a spoil of victory, and thou, wisest of the wise, shalt receive it first from thy lord.”

“Thou hearest, my Lord Pharaoh, what is spoken over the whole circle of the earth; thine eyes see farther than the stars of heaven and the eye of the sun!”

“And yet only my ear has heard, but my intelligence has not

grasped what the gods have revealed to me in a dream. Interpret it for me.”

“Tell it, my lord.”

“I saw nothing, but I heard a voice, when sleep had quenched the light of my eyes. The voice spoke in the darkness, and said, ‘The red earth will spread over all lands, but the black shall be dispersed like the sand.’”

“The dream, my lord is not hard to interpret, but it forebodes nothing good.”

“Interpret it.”

“Very well; the red earth is Syria, as thou knowest, my lord, where live the wretched Hittites, that is the hereditary land of the Hebrew, Canaan. The black earth is that of the Nile, thy land, my lord.”

“Again the Hebrews, always the Hebrews! Centuries have passed since this people wandered into our land. They have increased without disturbing us. I neither love nor hate them; but now I fear them. They have had to toil, of late more severely than ever, but they do not murmur; they are patient as though they expected something to happen.”

“Let them go, my lord.”

“No! for then they will go, and found a new kingdom.”

“Let them go.”

“No, I will destroy them.”

“Let them go.”

“Certainly I will destroy them.”

“But thy dream, my lord.”

“I interpret that as a warning and exhortation.”

“Touch not that people, my lord, for their God is stronger than ours.”

“Their God is that of the Chaldaeans. Let our gods fight. I have spoken; thou hast heard; I add nothing and retract nothing.”

“My Lord, thou seest one sun in the sky, and believest that it shines over all nations: do you not believe that there is one Lord of the heaven who rules the destinies of all nations?”

“It should be so, but the Lord of heaven has made me ruler over this land, and now I rule it.”

“Thou rulest it, my lord, but thou rulest not wind and weather; thou canst not raise the water of the Nile by one inch, and thou canst not prevent the crops failing again this year.”

“Failing? What does the Nilometer say?”

“My lord, the sun has entered the sign of the Balance, and the water is sinking already. It means famine.”

“Then I will destroy all superfluous and strange mouths which take the bread from the children of the country. I will annihilate the Hebrews.”

“Let them go free, my lord.”

“I will summon the midwives, and have every boy that is born of a Hebrew woman destroyed. I have spoken; now I act.” Pharaoh rose from his chair, and departed more quickly than he had come. Amram sought to find his way back, but could only discover one piece of papyrus. Then he remained standing and

feared much, for he could not find his way.

The sun had risen, and there was no more music in the forest of pillars, but silence. But as Amram listened he began to be aware of that compressed stillness which emanates from a listener, or from children who do something forbidden and do not wish to be discovered. He felt that someone was near who wished to be concealed, but who still kept his thoughts directed towards him. In order to satisfy himself Amram went in the direction where the silence seemed to be densest. And lo! behind a pillar stood Phater. He did not show a sign of embarrassment, but only held out his open hand, in which lay all the pieces of papyrus, which Amram had strewed as he went.

“You must not strew pieces of papyrus on the ground,” said Phater with an inscrutable smile. “Yes—I am not angry, I only wish you well. For now you will follow me, and not return to your work, which was only a trap set for your life. You must return to your house, and take care that your new-born child is not killed. You see that Reuben-Phater is a true Israelite, although you would not believe him.”

Amram followed him out of the temple, and went home.

Jochebed went about in Pharaoh's garden watering cucumbers; she went to and fro with her watering pot between the Watergate that opened on the river and the cucumber-bed. But sometimes she went through the gate and remained for a while outside.

Miriam, her daughter, pruned the vines which grew against the

garden-wall, but seemed to direct her attention more towards the broad walk which led up to the summer palace of the princesses. Her head moved like the leaf of the palm-tree when the wind blows through it, looking sometimes towards the Watergate, sometimes towards the great walk, while her hands carried on her work. As her mother delayed her return, she went from the wall down to the gate, and out to the low river shore where the bulrushes swayed in the gentle south wind. A stonechat of the desert sat on a rock by the river, wagged its tail, and flapped its wings, as though it wished to show something which it saw; and chattered at the sight of something strange among the bulrushes. High up in the air a hawk hovered in spiral circles, eyeing the ground below. Miriam broke off some lotus-buds and threw them at the stonechat, which flew away, but kept its beak still pointing towards the rushes. The girl girt up her dress, waded into the water, and now saw her mother standing, hidden up to her waist in a forest of papyrus-reeds, bending over a reed-basket with a baby at her breast.

“Mother,” whispered Miriam, “Pharaoh’s daughter is approaching; she comes to bathe in the river.”

“Lord God of Israel, have mercy on my child!”

“If you have given the child enough to drink, hasten and come.”

The mother bowed herself like an arch over the child; her hair hung down like an insect-net, and two tears fell from her eyes on the little one’s outstretched hands. Then she rose, placed a sweet

date in its mouth, softly closed the cover, murmured a blessing, and came out of the water.

A gentle breeze from the land swayed the rushes and crisped the surface of the river.

“The basket swims,” she said, “but the river flows on; it is red with blood and thick as cream. Lord God of Israel, have mercy!”

“Yes, He will,” answered Miriam, “as He had mercy on our father Abraham, who obtained the promise, because he obeyed and believed, ‘Through thy seed shall all the families on the earth be blessed.’”

“And now Pharaoh slays all the first-born.”

“But not thy son.”

“Not yet.”

“Pray and hope.”

“What? That the monsters of the river do not swallow him, that the waves of the river do not drown him, that Pharaoh’s executioners do not kill him! Is that the hope?”

“The promise is greater, and it lives: ‘Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.’”

“And then Amram thy father has fled.”

“To Raamses and Pithom, where our people toil in the buildings; he has gone there to warn and advise them. He has done well. Hush! Pharaoh’s daughter comes.”

“But she cannot bathe in the blood of our child.”

“She comes, however. But she is the friend of the poor Hebrews; fear not.”

“She is her father’s daughter.”

“The Egyptians are our cousins; they are Ham’s descendants, and we are Shem’s. Shem and Ham were brothers.”

“But Ham was cursed by his father Noah, and Kanaan was Ham’s son.”

“But Noah said, ‘Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and let Kanaan be his servant.’ Have you heard? Shem received the promise, and we belong to him.”

“Lord of Hosts, help us; the basket drifts with the wind! It drifts towards the bathing-house,—and the vulture up there in the air.”

“That is a hawk, mother!” Jochebed ran up and down the bank, like a dog whom its master has deserted; she beat her breast, and wept great tears.

Steps and voices were audible. “Here is Pharaoh’s daughter!”

“But the Lord God of Israel is watching over us.”

The two women hid themselves in the reeds, and Pharaoh’s daughter appeared with her attendants at the watergate. She stepped on the bridge leading to the bath-house, which was a hut of coloured camel’s skin, supported by pillars which stood in the bed of the river. But the basket drifted against the bridge and excited the curiosity of the princess. She remained standing and waited. Jochebed and Miriam could not hear what she said on account of the wind, but by her quiet movements they saw that she expected some amusement from the strange gift brought by the river. Now she sent a slave to the bank. The latter ran and

broke off a long reed, which she handed to her mistress, who fished for the basket and brought it within reach. Then she knelt down and opened it. Jochebed saw two little arms outstretched. The princess laughed aloud, and turned to the women. She uttered an expression of joy, and then lifted the infant, which nestled in her maiden bosom and felt about in her white robe. Then the princess kissed it, pressed it to her breast, and turned back to the shore.

Miriam, who had now lost all fear, stepped forward and fell on her face. "See, Miriam," said the princess, whose name was Temma, "I have found a baby. I have received it from the Nile, and therefore it is a child of the gods. But now you must find a nurse for it."

"Where shall I find one, noble princess?"

"Search! But you must find one before evening. Do not forget, however, that it is my child, since I drew it out of the water. I have given him his name, and he shall be called Moses. And I will have him educated so that he becomes a man after our mind. Go in peace, and find me a nurse!"

Pharaoh's daughter went with her child up to the palace, and Miriam looked for her mother among the reeds, where she had waited and heard what Pharaoh's daughter had said and resolved.

"Mother, Pharaoh's daughter will bring up Amram and Jochebed's son. Ham's children will serve Shem's. Praised be the Lord, the God of Shem! Now you believe in the promise, mother!"

“Now I believe, and God be praised for His great mercy!”

THE HEMICYCLE OF ATHENS

After a hot day the sun began to sink, and the market-place lay already in shadow. The shadow rose and climbed up the Acropolis, on which the shield of Pallas still gleamed as the aegis of the city.

Before the vari-coloured colonnade stood a group of men who had assembled before the semi-circular marble seat called the Hemicyklion; they appeared to be awaiting someone's arrival before they sat down. Among them were stately and handsome men, but there was also an extraordinarily ugly one, round whom, however, the others seemed to press. His face resembled that of a slave or satyr, and there were Athenians who thought they could trace in it the marks of all kinds of wickedness and crime. On hearing of such suspicions, Socrates is said to have remarked, "Think how much Socrates must have had to contend against, for he is neither wicked nor a criminal!"

This was the man known to the whole population of Athens as an eccentric character who carried on philosophical discussions in streets and market-places, in drinking-houses and brothels. He shunned no society, and was on equally intimate terms with Pericles, the head of the state, and with the licentious Alcibiades. He sat down to table with tradesmen and artisans, drank with sailors in the Piraeus, and lived himself with his family in the suburb Ceramicus. When it was asked why Socrates was

always out of doors, his friends answered, "because he was not comfortable at home." And when his more intimate friends asked how he could be on intimate terms with seamen and tax-gatherers, Socrates himself answered, "They are also men!"

At the philosopher's side, and when he sat, standing behind him, was always to be seen a youth, whose broad brow attracted attention. This was his best disciple, whose real name was Aristokles, but who, on account of his forehead, had the nickname Plato.

Vying with him in an almost jealous rivalry to appear by the Master's side, stood the beautiful Alcibiades.

The third after them was the stately austere Euripides, the tragic dramatist. Turning his back to the company, absorbed in thought and tracing designs on the ground, as though he were always at work, stood Phidias, the man "who made gods for Athens." On the edge of the fountain sat a man with his legs dangling and his mouth perpetually moving, as though he were sharpening his tongue for thrust and counter-thrust; his brow was furrowed and worn as though with fruitless thought, his eyes glowered like those of a serpent watching for its prey. That was the Sophist, Protagoras, the reasoner for hire, who for a few figs or a pair of obols, could make black seem white, but was tolerated in this brilliant society, because he could carry on a dialogue. They used him to enliven their meetings, and pitted him in argument against Socrates, who, however, always entangled him in the meshes of his dialectic. At last came the one they

expected. It was the head of the State, who would have been king had not the kingship been abolished. His appearance was majestic, but his entrance without a body-guard was like that of a simple citizen. He ruled also only by force of his personal qualities—wisdom, strength of will, moderation, forethought.

After exchanging greetings which showed that they had already met that day, for they had been celebrating the deliverance from Persia at the Salamis festival, the company sat down on the long semicircular marble seat, called the Hemicyklion. When all had taken their seats, which were reserved for each according to prescription, a silence followed which was unusual in this circle, for they were accustomed to assemble as if for an intellectual feast at every sunset. It was a symposium of minds, at which the excesses, according to Alcibiades, were only spiritual.

Alcibiades, the second youngest, but spoilt and aggressive, was the first to break the silence. "We have been celebrating the battle of Salamis, the day of our deliverance from the barbarians and the King of Persia, and I see we are tired."

"Not too tired," answered Pericles, "to forget the birthday of our friend Euripides, for, as we all know, he first saw the daylight when the sun shone on the battle of Salamis."

"He shall have a libation," answered Alcibiades, "when we sit at table with our cups in front of us."

The Sophist, sitting by the fountain, had now collected enough yarn to commence spinning with.

“How do you know,” he began, “that our deliverance from the King of Persia was really a piece of good fortune? How do you know that Salamis was a happy day for Hellas? Has not our great Aeschylus lamented and sympathetically described the defeat of the Persians?

“Hateful to me is thy name, Salamis,
And with a sigh I think of thee, Athens!”

“For shame, Sophist!” Alcibiades broke in.

But Protagoras whetted his beak and continued, “It is not I who say that the name of Salamis is hateful, but Aeschylus, and I, as everyone knows, am not Aeschylus. Neither have I maintained that it was a good thing to serve the Persian King. I have only questioned, and a questioner asserts nothing. Is it not so, Socrates?”

The master drew his fingers through his long beard, and answered.

“There are direct and indirect assertions; a question can be an indirect and mischievous assertion. Protagoras has made such a one by his question.”

“Good! Socrates!” exclaimed Alcibiades, who wished to kindle a flame.

Pericles spoke: “Protagoras, then, has asserted that you would be happier under the Persian King. What should be done with such a man?”

“Throw him backwards in the fountain,” cried Alcibiades.

“I appeal!” protested the Sophist.

“To the mob! They will always justify you,” Alcibiades interrupted.

“One does not say ‘mob’ if one is a democrat, Alcibiades. And one does not quote Aeschylus when Euripides is present. When Phidias sits here one would rather speak of his Parthenon and his Athene, whose robe even now glitters in the sinking sun. Courtesy is the salt of social life.”

Thus Pericles sought to direct the conversation into a new channel, but the Sophist thwarted him.

“If Phidias’ statue of Athene must borrow its gold from the sun, that may prove that the gold granted by the State did not suffice, and that therefore there is a deficiency. Is it not so, Socrates?”

The master silenced with his outstretched hand the murmur of disapproval which arose, and said:

“It must first be proved that Phidias’ statue must borrow gold from the sun, but since that is unproved, it is absurd to talk of a deficit. Moreover, gold cannot be borrowed from the sun. Therefore what Protagoras says is mere babble, and deserves no answer. On the other hand, will Phidias answer this question? ‘When you have made Athene up there on the Parthenon, have you made Athene?’”

“I have made her image,” answered Phidias.

“Right! You have made her image. But after what pattern?”

“After the pattern in my mind.”

“Not after an external one, then? Have you seen the goddess with your eyes?”

“Not with my outward eyes.”

“Does she then exist outside you, or inside you?”

“If no one were listening to us, I would answer ‘She is not outside of me, therefore she is not anywhere at all.’”

Pericles interrupted him: “You are talking of the gods of the State: friends, take care!”

“Help, Protagoras! Socrates is throttling me!” cried Phidias.

“In my opinion it is not Zeus but Prometheus who has created men,” answered the Sophist. “But Zeus gave unfinished man two imperishable gifts—the sense of shame and conscience.”

“Then Protagoras was not made by Zeus, for he lacks both.” This thrust came from Alcibiades. But now the taciturn tragedian Euripides began to speak: “Allow me to say something both about Zeus and about Prometheus; and don’t think me discourteous if I cite my great teacher Aeschylus when I speak about the gods.”

But Pericles broke in: “Unless my eyes deceive me, I saw just now a pair of ears projecting from behind the pillar of Hermes, and these ass’s ears can only belong to the notorious tanner.”

“Cleon!” exclaimed Alcibiades.

But Euripides continued: “What do I care about the tanner, since I do not fear the gods of the State? These gods, whose decline Aeschylus foretold long ago! Does not his *Prometheus*

say that the Olympian Zeus will be overthrown by his own descendant—the son that will be born of a virgin? Is it not so, Socrates?”

“Certainly: ‘she will bear a son who is stronger than his father.’ But who it will be, and when he will be born, he does not say. Now I believe that Zeus already lies *in extremis*.”

Again the warning voice of Pericles was heard. “The gods of the State! Hush, friends! Cleon is listening!”

“I, on the other hand,” broke in Alcibiades, “believe that Athens is near her end. While we have been celebrating the victory of Salamis, the Spartans have risen and devastated the north. Megaris, Locris, Boeotia, and Phocis are already on her side.”

“What you say is well known,” answered Pericles deprecatingly, “but at present there is a truce, and we have three hundred ships at sea. Do you think, Socrates, that there is danger?”

“I cannot mix in the affairs of State; but if Athens is in danger, I will take up shield and lance as before.”

“When you saved my life at Potidaea,” added Alcibiades.

“No, the danger is not there,” interrupted Euripides—“not in Sparta, but here at home. The demagogues have stirred up the marsh, and therefore we have the pestilence in the Agora, and the pestilence in the Piraeus.”

“That in Piraeus is the worse of the two,” said Protagoras; “don’t you think so, Alcibiades?”

“Yes, for there are my best girls. My flute-players, who are to perform at supper this evening, live by the harbour. But, by Hercules, no one here fears death, I suppose?”

“No one fears, and no one wishes it,” answered Socrates; “but if you have other girls, that would increase our pleasure.”

“Euripides does not like girls,” interrupted Protagoras.

“That is not true,” answered Euripides; “I like girls, but not women.”

Pericles rose: “Let us go to supper, and have walls round our conversation—walls without ears! Support me, Phidias, I am tired.”

Plato approached Socrates: “Master, let me carry your mantle?” he asked.

“That is my function, boy,” said Alcibiades, intercepting him.

“It was once,” objected Socrates; “now it belongs to Plato of the broad head. Notice his name! He descends from Codrus, the last king, who gave his life to save his people. Plato is of royal birth.”

“And Alcibiades is of the race of heroes, the Alcmaeonidae, like his uncle Pericles; a noble company.”

“But Phidias is of the race of the gods; that is more.”

“I am probably descended from the Titans,” broke in Protagoras. “I say ‘probably,’ for one knows nothing at all, and hardly that. Don’t you think so, Socrates?”

“*You* know nothing at all, and least of all what you talk about.” The company passed through the Sacred Street, and went

together to the theatre of Dionysus, near which Alcibiades lived.

The demagogue Cleon had really been lurking out of sight, and listening to the conversation. And so had another man with a yellow complexion and a full black beard, who seemed to belong to the artisan class. When the brilliant company had departed, Cleon stepped forward, laid his hand on the stranger's shoulder, and said:

"You have heard their conversation?"

"Certainly I have," he answered.

"Then you can give evidence."

"I cannot give evidence, because I am a foreigner."

"Still you have heard how they spoke against the gods of the State."

"I am a Syrian, and only know one true God. Your gods are not mine."

"You are a Hebrew, then! What is your name?"

"I am an Israelite, of the family of Levi, and call myself now Cartophilus."

"A Phoenician, then?"

"No, a Hebrew. My forefathers came out of Ur of the Chaldees, then fell into bondage in Egypt, but were brought by Moses and Joshua to the land of Canaan, where we became powerful under our own kings, David and Solomon."

"I don't know them."

"Two hundred years ago our city Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and our people were carried

captive to Babylon. But when Babylon was overthrown by the King of Persia, we fell under the power of the Persians, and have groaned under the successors of your Xerxes of Salamis, whom we called Ahasuerus.”

“Your enemies, our enemies! Very well, friend; how did you come here.”

“When the Assyrian was about to carry us for the first time into captivity, those who could flee, fled to Rhodes, Crete, and the islands of Greece. But of those who were carried away some were sent northwards to Media. My ancestors came hither from Media, and I am a new-comer.”

“Your speech is dark to me, but I have heard your nation praised because they are faithful to the gods of the State.”

“God! There is only One, the Single and True, who has created heaven and earth, and given the promise to our people.”

“What promise?”

“That our nation shall possess the earth.”

“By Heracles! But the commencement is not very promising.”

“That is our belief, and it has supported us during our wanderings in the wilderness, and during the Captivity.”

“Will you give evidence against these blasphemers of the gods?”

“No, Cleon, for you are idolaters. Socrates and his friends do not believe in your gods, and that will be counted to them for righteousness. Yes, Socrates appeared to me rather to worship the Eternal and Invisible, whom we dare not name. Therefore I

do not give evidence against him.”

“Is *that* the side you are on? Then go in peace, but beware! Go!”

“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will protect me, so long as I and my house keep His laws.”

Cleon had espied his friend and fellow-artisan in the colonnade, and therefore let the inflexible Hebrew go. The latter hastened towards the sycamore avenue of the oil-market, and disappeared there.

Anytos the tanner and politician approached, rehearsing a written speech which he was intending to deliver: “Athens or Sparta,—that is the whole question at issue....”

Cleon, full of curiosity, interrupted him: “What are you rehearsing, Anytos?”

“A speech.”

“So I heard! Athens or Sparta! Government by the people, or government by donkeys. The people, the weightiest element in the State, the cultivators of the land, the producers of wealth, lie at the bottom like gold. The worthless, the drones, the rich, the aristocratic, the most frivolous, swim on the surface like chips and corks. Athens has always represented government by the people, and will always do so; Sparta represents the donkey-government.

“The oligarchy, you mean, Cleon.”

“No; donkeys. Therefore, Anytos, Athens is badly governed, for Pericles the rich man, who boasts of royal ancestors, has come

to power. How can he sympathise with these people, since he has never been down there below? How can he see them rightly from above? He sits on the gable-roof of the Parthenon, and views the Athenians as ants, while they are lions, with their claws pared and their teeth drawn. We, Anytos, born down there amid the skins of the tanyard and dog's-dung, we understand our perspiring brothers—we know them by the smell, so to speak. But like readily associates with like; therefore Sparta feels attracted to Athens, to Pericles and his followers. Pericles draws Sparta to himself, and we sink....”

Anytos, himself an orator, did not like to hear eloquence from others, therefore he cut abruptly through Cleon's speech.

“Pericles is ill.”

“Is he ill?”

“Yes, he has fever!”

“Really? Perhaps the plague.”

“Perhaps.”

This interjected remark of Anytos had crossed Cleon's prolix discourse, and a new hope glimmered before him.

“And after Pericles?” he said. “Cleon, of course.”

“Why not? The man of the people for the people, but no philosophers nor actors. So, Pericles is sick, is he? Listen, Anytos? Who is Nicias?”

“He is a grandee who believes in oracles.”

“Don't attack the oracles. I certainly do not believe in them, but a State requires for its stability a certain uniformity in

everything—laws, customs, and religion. Therefore I support the gods of the State—and what belongs to them.”

“I also support the gods of the State, so long as the people do.”

The two orators began to be mutually weary, and Cleon wished for solitude in order to hatch the eggs which Anytos had laid for him. Therefore he remarked, “You say that Nicias....”

“I am going to bathe,” broke in Anytos; “otherwise I will get no sleep to-night.”

“But Alcibiades, who is he?”

“He is the traitor Ephialtes, who will lead the Persian King to Thermopylae.”

“The Persian King in the east, Sparta in the south.”

“Macedonia in the north.”

“And in the west, new Rome.”

“Enemies in all four quarters! Woe to Athens!”

“Woe to Hellas!”

The guests had assembled at the house of Alcibiades, who on his arrival had immediately gone off, with the laudable object of procuring flute-players. Since the evening was warm, supper was served in the Aula, or inner court, which was surrounded by Corinthian colonnades, and lighted by many lamps which hung between the pillars.

After they had taken a light meal, ivy wreaths were distributed and cups were set before the guests.

Aspasia, the only woman present, had the place of honour next to Pericles. She had come at the beginning, accompanied by

her slaves, and was waiting impatiently for the verbal contests to begin. But Pericles was depressed and tired. Socrates lay on his back, silent, and looked up at the stars, Euripides chewed a wood-splinter and was morose; Phidias kneaded balls of bread, which in his hand took the shapes of animals; Protagoras whispered to Plato, who, with becoming youthful modesty, kept in the background.

Quite at the bottom of the table sat the skeleton, with a wreath of roses round its white forehead. In order to counteract the uncanny feeling likely to be aroused by this unbidden guest, Alcibiades had placed an onion between its front teeth, and in one of its hands an asphodel lily, which the skeleton appeared to smell at.

When the silence at last became oppressive, Pericles roused himself from his lethargy, and opened the conversation.

"I should like," he said, "without raising any bitterness or strife, to suggest as a subject for discussion the often-raised question of Euripides' supposed misogyny. What do you say, Protagoras?"

"Our friend Euripides has been married three times, and each time has had children. He can therefore not be a woman-hater. Is it not so, Socrates?"

"Euripides," answered Socrates, "loves Aspasia, as we all do, and can therefore not be a woman-hater. He loves, with Pericles' consent, the beauty of Aspasia's mind, and is therefore no misogynist. Not much that is complimentary can be said about

Aspasia's person, and we have nothing to do with it. Is Aspasia beautiful, Phidias?"

"Aspasia is not beautiful, but her soul is beautiful and good. Is it not, Pericles?"

"Aspasia is my friend, and the mother of our child; Aspasia is a wise woman, for she possesses modesty and conscientiousness, self-knowledge and foresight; Aspasia is prudent, for she is silent when wise men speak. But Aspasia can also cause wise men to speak wisely by listening to them; for she helps them to produce thoughts, not like Socrates' midwife, who only brings corporeal births to pass, but she incarnates their souls."

Protagoras continued: "Aspasia is like the Mother Cybele of us all; she bears us in her bosom."

"Aspasia is the scale of the zither, without whom our strings would not sound."

"Aspasia is the mother of us all," recommenced Socrates, "but she is also the midwife who washes our new-born thoughts and wraps them in beautiful swaddling-clothes. Aspasia receives our children dirty, and gives them back to us purified. She gives nothing of herself, but by receiving gives the giver the opportunity to give."

Euripides resumed the topic which they had dropped: "I was accused, and am acquitted—am I not, Aspasia?"

"If you can acquit yourself of the accusation, you are acquitted, Euripides."

"Accuse me, dear Accuser; I will answer."

"I will bring the accusation in your own words. Hippolytus says in one passage in your tragedy of that name: 'O Zeus, why, in the name of heaven, didst thou place in the light of the sun that specious evil to men—women? For if thou didst will to propagate the race of mortals, there was no necessity for this to be done by women, but men might, having placed an equivalent in thy temples, either in brass or iron, or weighty gold, buy a race of children each according to the value paid, and thus might dwell in unmolested houses, without females.'"

"But now first of all, when we prepare to bring this evil to our homes, we squander away the wealth of our houses."

"How evil woman is, is evident from this also, that the father who begat her and brought her up, having given her a dowry, sends her away in order to be rid of her."

"Now defend yourself, Euripides."

"If I were a Sophist like Protagoras, I should answer, 'It was Hippolytus who said that; not I.' But I am a poet, and speak through my characters. Very well; I said it, I meant it when I wrote it, and I mean it still. And yet I almost always love any given woman, though I hate her sex. I cannot explain it, for I was never perverse like Alcibiades. Can you explain it, Socrates?"

"Yes, a man can hate and love a woman simultaneously. Everything is produced by its opposite—love by hate, and hate by love. In my wife I love the good motherly element, but I hate the original sin in her; therefore I can hate and love her at the same time. Is it not so, Protagoras?"

“Now it is Socrates who is the Sophist. Black cannot be white.”

“Now it is Protagoras who is simple. This salt in the salt-cellar is white, but put out the lamps, and it is black. The salt therefore is not absolutely white, but its whiteness depends on the light. I should be inclined rather to believe that salt is absolutely black, for darkness is merely the absence of light, and is nothing in itself, communicates no quality of its own to the salt, which in the darkness is something independent, consequently its real nature is black.

“But in the light a thing can be both black and white. This sea-sole, for instance, is black above, but white below. In the same way something can be good and bad at the same time. Therefore Euripides is right when he says that he loves and hates woman simultaneously. The misogynist is he who only hates woman, but Euripides loves her also. Therefore he is not a misogynist. What do you think, Aspasia?”

“Wise Socrates! You confess that Euripides hates women, therefore he is a woman-hater.”

“No, my dear child, I admitted that Euripides *both* loves and hates women,—*both*, mark you. I love Alcibiades, but I abhor and hate his want of character; now I ask the friends here, am I a hater of Alcibiades?”

“No, certainly not,” they answered simultaneously. But Aspasia was roused, and wished to rouse him. “Wise Socrates, how do matters stand between you and your wife?”

“The wise man does not willingly speak of his wife,” Protagoras struck in: “nor of his weakness.”

“You have said it. One sacrifices to the earth, but unwillingly; one binds oneself, but without pleasure; one endures, but loves not; one does one’s duty to the State, but with difficulty. There is only one Aspasia, and she belongs to Pericles—the greatest woman to the greatest man. Pericles is the greatest in the State, as Euripides is the greatest on the stage.”

This was an opportunity for Protagoras, without his needing to seek it. “Is Euripides greater than Aeschylus and Sophocles?” he asked.

“Certainly, Protagoras! He is nearer to us; he speaks *our* thoughts, not those of our fathers; he does not cringe before the gods and fate; he fights with them; he loves men, knows them, and laments them; his art is more elaborate, his feelings warmer, his pictures more life-like than those of the ancients. But now I should like to speak of Pericles.”

“Stop, Socrates! In the Pnyx or the Agora, but not here! Though I should be glad of a word of encouragement since false accusations rain on me. We have come here to forget and not to remember ourselves, and Socrates delights us most when he speaks of the highest things, among which I do not count the State of Athens. Here comes Alcibiades with his following. Kindle more lights, boys, and put more ice in the wine.”

There was a noise at the entrance; the dog barked, the doorkeeper shouted, and Alcibiades entered with his

companions. These consisted of girls and of two strangers whom he had found in a wine-house.

“Papaia!” he cried. “Here is the host! And here is Aristophanes, a future dramatist. Here is the Roman Lucillus, formerly a Decemvir, who has been banished. There is one of the many Laises who have sat to Phidias. Aspasia must not take it ill. And here are flute-players from Piraeus. Whether they have the pestilence, I know not! What can they do to me? I am twenty years old, and yet have done nothing? Why, then, should I live? Now Laïs will dance. Papaia!”

Euripides rose and made a sign for silence. “Let the dance wait; Pericles is not pleased, and looks serious.” A pause followed. The heat was oppressive. It was not thunder-weather, but something like it, and a sense of uneasy expectation seemed to weigh upon all their spirits.

Then, as if by accident, the arm of the skeleton fell on its knee with a slight snap. The flower, which it had held under its nose, lay on the earth.

All started, even Alcibiades, but, angry with himself for this weakness, he took a cup and stepped forward.

“The skeleton is thirsty! I drink to it! Who pledges me?”

“Socrates can do so the best. He can drink half a jar of wine in one pull, without winking.”

As a matter of fact, Socrates was notorious for his drinking powers, but now he was not in the mood. “Not to-day! Wine is bitter to my taste,” he said.

And turning to Pericles, he whispered: “Evil eyes have come here. This Aristophanes is not our friend! Do you know him?”

“Very little, but he looks as though he would like to murder us.”

Alcibiades continued to address the skeleton: “Thus looks Athens at this moment! Sparta and the Persian King have gnawed off its flesh; Cleon has tanned its skin; the allies have gouged out its eyes; the citizens have drawn out its teeth,—those citizens whom Aristophanes knows and whom he will soon describe. Here’s to you, skeleton! ‘[Greek: *Polla metaxu pelei kulikos kai cheileos akrou*]!’”

There was a sudden change in the scene. The skeleton sank backwards like a drunken man; the lamps began to sway on their chains, the salt-cellar was spilt on the table.

“Ohioh!” cried Alcibiades, “Tralall! Ha! Ha! Ha! The table wobbles, the sofa rocks; am I drunk, or is the room drunk?”

All were alarmed, but Socrates commanded quiet. “A god is near! The earth shakes, and I hear ... does it thunder? No! That is an earthquake.”

All jumped up, but Socrates continued, “Be quiet! It is already past.”

After they had all taken their places again, he continued: “I was five years old when Sparta was visited by an earthquake; twenty thousand men perished, and only six houses remained standing. Then it was Sparta. Now it is Athens. Yes, friends, a voice says to me, ‘Before a babe can become a man, we shall

have been dispersed and destroyed like a bevy of birds.”

Again the dog barked, and the door-keeper shouted. There entered an uninvited guest in a state of excitement.

Alcibiades greeted him. “It is Nicias,” he said. “Now I will be sober; the thoughtful Nicias comes to our feast. What is the matter?”

“Allow an uninvited guest.”

“Speak, Nicias!”

“Pericles!” began the new-comer hesitatingly, “your friend, our friend, the glory of Athens and Hellas,—Phidias is accused....”

“Stop! Silence!”

“Accused! O shame and disgrace! I cannot say it without weeping: Phidias is accused of having purloined gold from the statue of Athene.”

The silence which followed was first broken by Pericles: “Phidias hides his face in his mantle; he is ashamed for Athens. But by the gods and the nether world, let us swear to his innocence.”

“We swear!” exclaimed all like one man.

“I swear also,” said Nicias.

“Athens is dishonoured, if one has to swear that Phidias has not stolen.”

Nicias had approached Pericles, and, bowing to Aspasia, he whispered, “Pericles, your son Paralos is ill.”

“Of the pestilence! Follow me, Aspasia.”

“He is not my son, but yours; therefore I follow you.”

“The house collapses, friends depart, all beauty passes away, the ugly remains.”

“And the gods sleep.”

“Or have emigrated.”

“Or are dead! Let us make new ones.”

Another shock of earthquake extinguished the lamps, and all went out into the street, except Socrates and Alcibiades.

“Phidias accused of theft! Let the walls of the world fall in!” said Socrates, and sank, as was his custom, into a fit of absent-mindedness that resembled sleep.

Alcibiades took one of the largest double-goblets, veiled it, and improvised the following dithyramb:

“May everything break up from Pindus to the Caucasus!
Then will Prometheus be unbound and bestow fire again
on frozen mortals!

And Zeus descends to Hades, Pallas sells herself;
Apollo breaks his lyre in two, and cobbles shoes;
Ares lets his war-horse go, and minds sheep;

And on the ruins of all earthly glory, stands Alcibiades
alone,

In the full consciousness of his almightiness,
And laughs!”

The pestilence had broken out in Athens accompanied by shocks of earthquake.

When Pericles, accompanied by Aspasia, reached his house, his son by his divorced wife was dead.

According to the prevailing custom, and to show that he had not been murdered, the corpse was placed in the doorway. A small coffin of cedar-wood, painted red and black, stood on a bier, and showed the dead child dressed in a white shroud. He had a garland on his head, woven of the plant of death, the strong-scented Apium or celery. In his mouth he had an obol as Charon's fee.

Pericles uttered a prayer in an undertone, without showing especially deep sorrow, for he had gone through much, and learnt to suffer.

"Two sons the gods have taken from me. Are they enough to atone?"

"What have you to atone for?" asked Aspasia.

"One must suffer for another; the individual for the State. Pericles has suffered for Athens."

"Pardon me that my tears dry sooner than yours. The thought that *our* son lives, gives me comfort."

"It comforts me also, but not so much."

"Shall I go, before your wife comes?"

"You must not leave me, for I am ill."

"You have spoken of it for a long time now. Is it serious?"

"My soul is sick. When the State suffers, I am ill.... There comes the mother of the dead."

A black-robed woman appeared in the doorway; she wore a

veil in order to hide the fact that her hair was cut off; she had a garland in her hand, and a slave followed her with a torch.

She did not immediately notice Aspasia's presence, greeted her former husband with a glance, and laid the garland at the dead boy's feet. "I only bring a funeral garland for my son," she said, "but instead of the obol, he shall take a kiss from the lips of his mother."

She threw herself on the dead child, and kissed him.

"Beware of the dead!" said Pericles, and seized her arm; "he died of the pestilence."

"My life has been a lingering death; a quick one is preferable to me."

Then she noticed Aspasia, and, rising, said with quiet dignity, "Tell your friend to go."

"She goes, and I follow her."

"That is right! For now, my Pericles, the last tie between us is dissolved! Farewell!"

"Farewell, my wife!"

And, turning to Aspasia, he said, "Give me your hand, my spouse."

"Here it is."

The mourning mother lingered: "We shall all meet again some day, shall we not? And then as friends—you, she, and he who is gone before to prepare a dwelling for the hearts which are separated by the narrow laws of life."

Pericles and Socrates wandered in the avenue of plane-trees

below the Hemicyklion, and conversed together.

“Phidias has been acquitted of theft, but re-arrested on the charge of blaspheming the gods of the State.”

“Arrested? Phidias!”

“They say that he has represented me and himself in Athene’s shield.”

“That is the mob’s doing, which hates all greatness! Anaxagoras banished because he was too wise; Aristides banished because he was too just; Themistocles, Pausanias.... What did you do, Pericles, when you gave the people power?”

“What was lawful and right. I fall certainly by my own sword, but honourably. I go about and am dying piecemeal, like Athens. Did we know that we adorned our statues for a funeral procession? that we were weaving our own shrouds? that the choruses of our tragedies were dirges?”

“Athens is dying—yes! But of what?”

“Of Sparta.”

“What is Sparta?”

“Sparta is Heracles; the club, the lion-skin, brute-strength. We Athenians are the sons of Theseus, ranged against the Heraclidae, Dorians, and Ionians. Athens dies by Sparta’s hand, but Hellas dies by her own.”

“I believe the gods have forsaken us.”

“I believe so too, but the Divine lives.”

“There comes Nicias, the messenger of misfortune.” It was Nicias; and when he read the question in the faces and glances

of the two, he answered, without waiting to be asked: "From the Agora!"

"What is the news from the Agora?"

"The Assembly seeks help from the Macedonians."

"Why not from the Persians? Good! then the end is near. Do they seek help from the enemy? From the barbarian, the Macedonian, who lies above us like a lion on a hill. Go, Nicias, and say, 'Pericles is dying.' And ask them to choose the worthiest as his successor! Not the most unworthy! Go, Nicias, but go quickly."

"I go," said Nicias, "but for a physician."

And he went.

"No physician can cure me!" answered Pericles; but in a weak voice, as though he spoke to himself. He took his old seat in the Hemicyklion. When he had rested a while, he made Socrates a sign to come near, for he did not wish to raise his voice.

"Socrates, my friend," he began, "this is the farewell of a dying man. You were the wisest, but take it not ill if I say, 'Be not too wise'; seek not the unattainable, and confuse not men's minds with subtleties; do not make the simple complicated. You wish to see things with both eyes, but he who shoots with the bow, must close one eye; otherwise he sees his mark doubled. You are not a Sophist, but may easily appear so; you are not a libertine, but you go about with such; you hate your city and your country, and rightly; but you should love them to the death, for that is your duty; you despise the people, but you should be sorry for them.

I have not admired the people, but I have given them laws and justice; therefore I die!

“Good-night, Socrates! Now it is dark before my eyes. You shall close them, and give me the garland. Now I go to sleep. When I awake, *if* I awake, then I am on the other side, and then I will send you a greeting, if the gods allow it. Good-night.”

“Pericles is dead. Hear it, Athenians, and weep as I do!”

The people streamed thither, but they did not weep. They only wondered what would now happen, and felt almost glad of a change.

Cleon the tanner stood in the orator's pulpit in the Pnyx. Among his most attentive hearers were Alcibiades, Anytos, and Nicias. Cleon said: “Pericles is dead, and Pericles is buried; now you know it. Let him rest in peace with his merits and faults, for the enemy is in Sphacteria, and we must have a commander; Pericles' shadow will not serve for that. Here below sit two adventurers, fine gentlemen both; one is called Nicias, because he never has conquered; the other Alcibiades, and we know his conquests—goblets and girls. On the other hand, we do not know his character, but you will some day know him, Athenians, and he will show his incisors himself. Such and such and such a one have been proposed for commander—oddly enough all fine gentlemen, and all grandees, of course. Athens, which has abjured all kings and their like, must now fight with royal Sparta, and must, faithful to its traditions, appear in the field under a man of the people on whom you can rely. We need no Pericles

who commissions statues and builds temples to Fame and Glory; Athens has enough of such gewgaws. But now we must have a man who understands the art of war, who has a heart in his breast and a head on his shoulders. Whom do you wish for, men of Athens?"

Alcibiades sprang up like a young lion, and went straight to the point. "Men of Athens, I propose Cleon the tanner, not because he is a tanner, for that is something different. At any rate the army may be compared to an ox-skin, and Cleon to a knife; but Cleon has other qualities, especially those of a commander. His last campaign against Pericles and Phidias closed with a triumph for him. He has displayed a courage which never failed, and an intelligence which passed all mortal comprehension. His strategy was certainly not that of a lion, but he conquered, and that is the chief point. I propose Cleon as leader of the campaign."

Now it so fell out that this patent irony was still too subtle for the mob, who took it seriously. Alcibiades also had a certain influence with them because of his relationship to Pericles, and they listened to him readily. Accordingly the whole assembly called out for Cleon, and he was elected.

But Cleon had never dreamt of the honour of being commander, and he was prudent enough not to endeavour to climb beyond his capacity. Therefore he protested against the election, shouting and swearing by all the gods.

Alcibiades, however, seized the opportunity by the forelock, and, perceiving that the election of Cleon meant his death, he

mounted an empty rostrum and spoke with emphasis: "Cleon jests, and Cleon is modest; he does not himself know what sort of a commander he is, for he has not proved himself; but I know who he is; I insist upon his election; I demand that he fulfil his duty as a citizen; and I summon him before the Areopagus if he shirks it when the fatherland is in danger." "Cleon is elected!" cried the people.

But Cleon continued to protest, "I do not know the difference between a hoplite and a peltast; [Footnote: a heavy-armed and a light-armed soldier.] I can neither carry a lance nor sit upon a horse."

But Alcibiades shouted him down. "He can do everything; guide the State and criticise art; carry on law-suits and watch Sophists; he can discuss the highest subjects with Socrates; in a word, he possesses all the public virtues and all the private vices."

Now the people laughed, but Cleon did not budge.

"Athenians!" said Alcibiades in conclusion, "the people have spoken, and there is no appeal. Cleon is elected, and Sparta is done for!"

The assembly broke up. Only Cleon remained behind with his friend Anytos. "Anytos!" he said. "I am lost!"

"Very probable!" answered Anytos.

But Alcibiades went off with Nicias: "Now Cleon is as dead as a dog. Then comes my turn," he said.

Socrates walked, deep in thought, up and down the courtyard of his house, which was very simple and had no colonnades. His

wife was carding wool, and did it as if she were pulling someone's hair.

The wise man kept silence, but the woman spoke—that was her nature. “What are you doing?” she asked.

“For the sake of old acquaintance, I will answer you, though I am not obliged to do so. I am thinking.”

“Is that a proper business for a man?”

“Certainly; a very manly business.”

“At any rate no one can see what you are doing.”

“When you were with child, it was also invisible; but when, it was born, it was visible, and especially audible. Thus occupations which are at first invisible, become visible later on. They are therefore not to be despised, least of all by those who only believe in the visible.”

“Is your business with Aspasia something of that sort?”

“Something of that, and of another sort too.”

“You drink also a good deal.”

“Yes, those who speak become thirsty, and the thirsty must drink.”

“What is it in Aspasia that attracts men?”

“Certain qualities which give zest to social intercourse—thoughtfulness, tact, moderation.”

“You mean that for me?”

“I mean it for Aspasia.”

“Is she beautiful?”

“No.”

“Anytos declares that she is.”

“He tells an untruth. Do you see Anytos, Cleon’s friend and my enemy?”

“He is not my enemy.”

“But mine. You always love my enemies and hate my friends, that is a bad sign.”

“Your friends are bad men.”

“No, on the contrary. Pericles was the greatest of the Athenians, Phidias the best, Euripides the noblest, Plato the wisest, Alcibiades the most gifted, Protagoras the most acute.”

“And Aristophanes?”

“He is my enemy, though I do not know why. I suppose you have heard of the comedy which he has written about me.”

“Anytos told me. Have you seen it?”

“I saw the *Clouds* yesterday.”

“Was it amusing—was it clever?”

“What did Anytos think?”

“He made me laugh when he described some scenes.”

“Then it must be amusing, or you would not have laughed.”

“Did you not laugh, my Socrates?”

“Yes, of course; otherwise they would have thought me a blockhead. You know that he has depicted me as a rogue and fool. Since I am neither, it was not serious; therefore it was in jest.”

“Do you think so? I think it was serious.”

“And you laugh at the serious? Do you weep, then, at jesting?”

Then you would be mad.”

“Do you think I am mad?”

“Yes, if you think me a rogue.”

“You know that Cleon is with the army.”

“I was astonished to hear it.”

“Astonished! You think, then, that he is not fit to command.”

“No, I know nothing about his fitness as commander, for I have never seen him in the field. But I am astonished at his election, as he himself was, because it was unexpected.”

“You therefore expect him to be defeated.”

“No, I wait for the result, in order to see whether he wins or loses.”

“You would be glad if he lost?”

“I do not love Cleon, but as an Athenian I would mourn if he were defeated; therefore I would not rejoice at his overthrow.”

“You hate Cleon, but you do not wish his overthrow.”

“On account of Athens—no.”

“But except for that?”

“Except for that, Cleon’s overthrow would be a blessing for the State, for he has been unjust to Pericles, to Phidias, to all who have done anything great.”

“Here comes a visitor.”

“It is Alcibiades.”

“The wretch! Are you not ashamed to be on intimate terms with him?”

“He is a man; he has great faults and great merits, and he is my

friend. I do not wish to be on intimate terms with my enemies.” Alcibiades knocked at the door, and rushed in. “Papaia! The pair are philosophising together, and talking of yesterday’s comedy! This Aristophanes is an ass! If one wishes to kill an enemy, one must hit him; but Aristophanes aims at the clouds. Hit, yes! Do you know that Cleon is defeated?”

“What a pity!” exclaimed Socrates.

“Is it a pity that the dog is unmasked?”

“I think Alcibiades is misinformed,” broke in Xantippe.

“No, by Zeus, but I wish I was!”

“Hush! here is Anytos coming,” said Socrates.

“The second tanner! It is strange that the destiny of Athens is guided by tanners.”

“The destiny of Athens! Who knows it?”

“I, Alcibiades, am the destiny of Athens.”

“[Greek: *Hubris*]! Beware of the gods!”

“I come after Cleon; Cleon is no more; therefore it is my turn.”

“Here is Anytos!”

Anytos entered: “I seek Alcibiades.”

“Here I am.”

“Must I prepare you....”

“No, I know.”

“Prepare you for the honour....”

“Have I waited long enough.”

“To go at the head....”

“That is what I was born for.”

“To take the lead....”

“That is my place.”

“And conduct the triumphal procession?”

“What procession?”

“Ah! you did not know. Cleon’s triumphal procession from the harbour.”

Alcibiades passed his hand downwards over his face, as though he wished to changed his mask, and it was done in a moment.

“Yes, certainly, certainly, certainly. I have in fact just come here to—announce his victory.”

“He lies,” broke in Xantippe.

“I jested with the pair. There will be a triumphal procession, then, for Cleon! How fine!”

“Socrates,” continued Anytos, “are you not glad?”

“I am glad that the enemy is beaten.”

“But not that Cleon has won a victory?”

“Yes, it is nearly the same thing.”

Xantippe seized the opportunity and struck in: “He is not glad, and he does not believe in Cleon.”

“I know you,” concluded Anytos. “I know you philosophers and quibblers! But take care!—And now, Alcibiades, come and receive the despised Cleon, who has saved the fatherland!”

Alcibiades took Socrates by the hand, and whispered in his ear. “What a cursed mischance! Well, not yet!—but the next time!”

ALCIBIADES

Kartaphalos, the shoemaker, sat in his shop by the Acarnanian Gate, and repaired cothurns for the Dionysian theatre, which was about to make a last attempt to revive the tragic drama, which had been eclipsed by the farces of Aristophanes. The Roman Lucillus lounged at the window-sill, and, since philosophy had been brought into fashion by Socrates and the Sophists, the shoemaker and the exiled Decemvir philosophised as well as they could.

“Roman!” said Kartaphalos, “you are a stranger in the city, as I am: what do think of the state and the Government?”

“They are exactly like the Roman. One may sum up the whole past history of Rome in two words—Patricians and Plebeians.”

“Just as it is here.”

“With the difference that Rome has a future. Hellas only a past.”

“What is known of Rome’s future?”

“The Cumaean Sibyl has prophesied that Rome will possess the earth.”

“What do you say? Rome? No, Israel will possess it; Israel has the promise.”

“I do not venture to deny that, but Rome has also the promise.”

“There is only one promise, and one God.”

“Perhaps it is the same promise, and the same God.”

“Perhaps Israel will conquer through Rome.”

“Israel will conquer through the promised Messiah.”

“When will Messiah come, then?”

“When the time is fulfilled, when Zeus is dead.”

“May we live to see it. I wait, for Zeus has gone to Rome, and is called there Jupiter Capitolinus.”

Aristophanes, who was easily recognised by his crane-like neck and open mouth, looked in through the window.

“Have you a pair of low shoes, Kartaphalos? A pair of ‘socks’? [Footnote: a low-heeled shoe worn by comic actors.] You have plenty of cothurns, I see, but the ‘sock’ has won the day.”

“At your service, sir.”

“We want them for the theatre, you understand.... Ah! there is Lucillus! ... and of raw leather, not tanned.”

“What are you going to play in the theatre, then?”

“We are going to bring on Cleon, and make him dance, and fancy! since no one dares to represent the low-born tanner, I must do it. I will play Cleon.”

“Where is the great general, Cleon, now?”

“In a new campaign against Brasidas. When the commander Demosthenes won the battle of Sphacteria, Cleon claimed the honour of the victory and received a triumph. Then, since he regarded himself as a great warrior, he marched against Brasidas. The pitcher goes so often to the well....”

“Till it is broken,” interrupted a new arrival. It was Alcibiades. “Papaia!” he exclaimed, “Cleon is beaten! Cleon has fled! Now

it is my turn! Come to the Pnyx." And he went on.

"Very well—to the Pnyx," said Aristophanes, "and I will obtain matter for a new comedy, to be called *Alcibiades*."

"You are right, perhaps," answered Lucillus. "The whole matter is not worth weeping for. Therefore let us laugh!"

Alcibiades stood again on the orator's platform in the Pnyx. He felt at home there, and he always had the ear of the people, for he was not tedious. They all spoilt him, and his grotesque impudence had an enlivening effect upon them.

Before the orator's platform, among others, was to be seen the wise, rich, and aristocratic Nicias, who had always sought to mediate between Sparta and Athens, but through his over-deliberation had done more harm than good.

Alcibiades, who knew Nicias and his political views, and feared his opposition, resolved on a master-stroke. He would not speak of Sparta and Athens as Nicias expected, but determined to make a diversion, and speak of something quite different. The people loved novelties, and to-day they should have something quite new.

"Athenians!" he began, "Cleon is defeated and dead, and I place my undoubted talents at the service of the State. You know my small failings, but now you will know my great merits. Listen, Athenians. There was a time when Hellas possessed Asia Minor and extended its wings eastward. The Persian King took these settlements from us one after the other, and he is now in Thrace. Since we cannot go farther eastward, we

must go westward, towards the sunset. You have heard more or less vaguely of the Roman Republic, which is growing and growing. Our countrymen have long ago taken possession of that part of the Italian peninsula which is called Tarentum, and we have thereby become close neighbours of Rome. And the finest of the islands, opulent Sicily, became ours. But the Romans have gradually surrounded our colonies, and threaten their independence. The Romans are pressing on us, but they are also pushing northward towards Gaul and Germany, and southward towards Africa. The Persian King, who was formerly our enemy, has now nearly become our friend, and our danger is not now Persia, but Rome. Therefore, with the future in view, I say to you Athenians, 'Let us go to Italy and Sicily. With Sicily as our base, we can dispute with the Romans the possession of Spain and the Pillars of Hercules. In Sicily we have the Key to Egypt; by means of Sicily we protect the threatened Tarentum, and can, in case of need, save sinking Hellas. The world is wide; why should we sit here and moulder in the wilderness? Hellas is an exhausted country; let us break up new ground. Hellas is an outworn ship; let us build a new one, and undertake a new Argonautic enterprise to a new Colchis to win another Golden Fleece, following the path of the sun westward. Athenians! let us go to Sicily!'"

These new prospects which the speaker opened to them pleased the people, who were tired of the everlasting Sparta and the Persian King; and stimulated by fear of Rome, the

growing wolf's-cub, they received the ill-considered proposal with applause, and raised their hands in token of assent.

Nicias sought an opportunity to speak, and warned them, but no one listened to him. The Scythian police who kept order in the Pnyx could procure him no audience. And when Nicias saw that he could not prevent the enterprise, he placed his services at Alcibiades' disposal, and began to equip the fleet.

Aspasia was now the widow of Pericles, and had mourned him for a long time. The "Hemicyklion" was no more, but her few remaining friends visited her from time to time. Socrates was the most faithful among them. One evening he sat with her in the little brick-roofed villa on the bank of the Cephisos.

"No, Aspasia," he said, "I advised against the Sicilian expedition, so did Nicias, so did the astronomer Meton, but it was to be. Alcibiades had managed to procure a favourable response from the oracle in the Temple of Ammon."

"Do you believe in oracles, Socrates?"

"Yes—and no! I have my own 'demon,' as you know, who warns but never urges—who advises, but never commands. This inner Voice has said to me, 'Hellas will not conquer the world.'"

"Will Rome do it?"

"Yes, but for another!"

"You know that Pericles' great thought was a single Hellas—a union of all the Grecian States."

"That was Pericles' wish, but the will of the gods was otherwise. Alcibiades' dream of Hellas governing the world is

also great, but the dreams of the gods are greater.”

“What gain do you think comes to Athens from Cleon’s death?”

“None! After Cleon comes Anytos. Cleon is everlasting, for Cleon is the name of an idea.”

Protagoras, grown old and somewhat dull, appeared in the inner courtyard.

“There is Protagoras!”

“The Sophist! I do not like him,” said Aspasia. “He is a file who frets all will away; his endless hair-splitting robs one of all resolution.”

“You speak truly and rationally, Aspasia, and in an earlier age you would have sat upon the Pythoness’s tripod and prophesied. Like the priestess, you know not perhaps what you say, but a god speaks through you.”

“No, Socrates; I only utter your thoughts; that is all!”

Protagoras came forward. “Mourning in Athens! Mourning in Hellas! Alas!” was his greeting.

“What is the matter, Protagoras?”

“Phidias of immortal memory lies dead in prison.”

“Alas! then they have killed him.”

“So it is rumoured in the city.”

“Phidias is dead!”

“Probably poisoned, they say; but that need not be true.”

“All die here in Athens before their proper time. When will our turn come?”

“When it does.”

“Are we falling by the arrows of the Python-slayer? We are shot like birds.”

“We are the children of Apollo. Would our father kill us?”

“Saturn has returned to devour his children.”

Socrates sank in meditation, and remained standing.

“We have angered the gods.”

Lucillus the Roman entered. “See the Roman!” said Socrates, “the lord of the future and of the world. What has he to tell us?”

“I come to warn Protagoras. He is to be banished.”

“I?”

“You are banished.”

“On what grounds?”

“As a blasphemer. You have repudiated the gods of the State.”

“Who is the informer?”

“The sycophant, the invisible, who is present everywhere.”

“All is probable; nothing is certain,” exclaimed Protagoras.

“Yes, this is certain.”

“Well, my fabric of thought is shattered against this certainty as everything else is shattered.”

“[Greek: *Pànta reî*]. Everything flows away; nothing endures; all comes to birth, grows, and dies.”

“Farewell, then, Aspasia, Socrates, friends, fatherland!

“Farewell!”

Protagoras departed with his mantle drawn over his head.

“Will Athens miss Protagoras?” asked Aspasia.

“He has taught the Athenians to think and to doubt; and doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”

“Aristophanes has murdered Protagoras, and he will murder you some day, Socrates.”

“He has done that already; my wife rejoices at it, but still I live.”

“Here comes young Plato with an ominous look. More bad news I expect.”

“Expect? I am certain! Sing your dirge, Plato.”

“Dirges, you mean. Alcibiades has been accused and recalled.”

“What has he done?”

“Before his departure he has mutilated all the images of Hermes in the city.”

“That is too much for one man; he could not do that.”

“The accusation is definite; injury to the gods of the State.”

“And now the gods avenge themselves.”

“The gods of Greece have gone to Rome.”

“There you have spoken truth.”

“Now comes number two: The Athenians have been defeated in Sicily. And number three: Nicias is beheaded.”

“Then we can buy sepulchres for ourselves in the Ceramicus.”

Near the Temple of Nemesis in the Agora stood the tanner Anytos chatting with Thrasybulos, a hitherto obscure but rising

patriot.

Anytos rattled away: "Alcibiades is in Sparta; Sparta seeks the help of the Persian King; only one thing remains for us—to do the same."

"To go over to the enemy? That is treachery."

"There is nothing else to be done."

"There were once Thermopylae and Salamis."

"But now there is Sparta, and the Spartans are in Deceleia. Our envoys have already sailed to the Persian King."

"Then we may as well remove Athene's image from the Parthenon! Anytos! look at my back; for I shall be ashamed to show my face now when I walk."

Anytos remained alone, and walked for some time up and down in front of the temple portico. Then he stopped and entered the vestibule.

The priestess Theano seemed to have been waiting for him. Anytos began: "Have you obeyed the order of the Council?"

"What order?"

"To pronounce a curse on Alcibiades, the enemy of his country."

"No, I am only ordered to bless."

"Have the avenging goddesses, then, ceased to execute justice?"

"They have never lent themselves to carry out human vengeance."

"Has Alcibiades not betrayed his country?"

“Alcibiades’ country is Hellas, not Athens; Sparta is in Hellas.”

“Have the gods also become Sophists?”

“The gods have become dumb.”

“Then you can shut the temple—the sooner, the better.”

The incorrigible Alcibiades had really fled from Sicily to the enemy at Sparta, and now sat at table with King Aegis; for Sparta had retained the monarchy, while Athens at an early date had abjured it.

“My friend,” said the King, “I do not like your dining at the common public table, after being accustomed to Aspasia’s brilliant feasts in Athens.”

“I! Oh no! My rule was always the simplest food: I went to sleep with the sun, and rose with the sun. You do not know what a severe ascetic I have been.”

“If you say so, I must believe it. Rumour, then, has slandered you?”

“Slandered? Yes, certainly. You remember the scandal about the statues of Hermes. I did not mutilate them, but they have become my destruction.”

“Is that also a lie?”

“It is a lie.”

“But tell me something else. Do you think that it is now the will of the gods that Sparta should conquer Athens?”

“Certainly, as certainly as virtue will conquer vice. Sparta is the home of all the virtues, and Athens of all the vices.”

“Now I understand that you are not the man I took you for, and I will give you the command of the army. Shall we now march against Athens?”

“I am ready!”

“Have you no scruple in marching against your own city?”

“I am a Hellene, not an Athenian, Sparta is the chief city of Hellas.”

“Alcibiades is great! Now I go to the general, and this evening we march.”

“Go, King! Alcibiades follows.”

The King went, but Alcibiades did not follow, for behind the curtains of the women’s apartment stood the Queen, and waited. When the King had gone, she rushed in.

“Hail! Alcibiades, my king!”

“Queen, why do you call your servant ‘king’?”

“Because Sparta has done homage to you, because I love you, and because you are a descendant of heroes.”

“King Aegis the Second lives.”

“Not too long! Win your first battle, and Aegis is dead.”

“Now life begins to smile on the hardly-tried exile. If you knew my childhood with its sorrows, my youth with its privations! The vine had not grown for me, woman had not been made for me; Bacchus knew me not; Aphrodite was not my goddess. The chaste Artemis and the wise Pallas guided me past the devious ways of youth to the goal of knowledge, wisdom, and glory. But when I first saw you, Timia, my queen....”

“Hush!”

“Then I thought that beauty was more than wisdom.”

“Hush! some one is listening.”

“Who?”

“I, Lysander, the General,” answered a sharp voice, and the speaker stood in the middle of the room.

“Now I know you, Alcibiades, and I have your head under my arm, but I have the honour of Sparta under the other. Fly before I strangle you!”

“Your ears have deceived you, Lysander!”

“Fly! do us the kindness to fly! Fifty hoplites stand without, waiting for your head.”

“How many do you say? Fifty? Then I will fly, for I cannot overcome more than thirty. My queen! farewell! I have thought better of Sparta. This would never have happened in Athens. Now I go to the Persian King; there they understand better what is fitting, and there I shall not be obliged to eat black broth!”

Alcibiades sat with the Persian satrap Tissaphernes, and Alcibiades the eloquent spoke. “Yes, my teacher Protagoras taught me once, that everything is born from its opposite; therefore you see my heart can embrace all opposites. Sparta and Athens are both dear to me; that is to say, both hateful—the state—gods of the one, and the virtues of the other.”

“You have a great heart, stranger! Is there room in it for Persia?”

“For the whole world.”

“What do you think of our chief city?”

“I love all large cities!”

“But at the present moment, you ought to love ours the most.”

“Yes, I do.”

“You must also love our allies.”

“Pardon me, who is your present ally?”

“At present, it is Sparta.”

“Very well, then, I love Sparta.”

“And suppose it is Athens to-morrow?”

“Then I will love Athens to-morrow.”

“Thank you. Now I understand that it is all over with Hellas. Old Greece is so corrupt, that it is hardly worth conquering.”

“Protagoras taught that man is the measure of all things; therefore I measure the value of all things by myself; what has value for me, that I prize.”

“Is that the teaching of your prophets? Then we have better ones; do you know Zarathrustra?”

“If it would do you a pleasure, I wish I had known him from childhood.”

“Then you might have been able to distinguish good and evil, light and darkness, Ormuzd and Ahriman. And you would have lived in the hope that light will eventually conquer; and that all discordances will be reconciled through suffering.”

“I can at any rate try. Is it a large book?”

“What are the names of your sacred books?”

“Sacred! What is that?”

“From whence do you get your religion, the knowledge of your gods?”

“From Homer, I believe.”

“You do not believe that Zeus is the supreme ruler of the world?”

“Yes, I do certainly.”

“But he was a false swearer and a lecher.”

“Yes! But how can that be helped?”

Tissaphernes rose. “Listen, my guest; we cannot share any common undertaking, for we do not serve the same gods. You call us barbarians. I, on my part, know no term of reproach strong enough for people who honour such gods. But the Athenians are as rotten as you, for they have pardoned you. Outside there stands an envoy from Athens come to beg you to return. Go to Athens; that is your place.”

“To Athens? Never! I do not trust them.”

“Nor they, you! That is appropriate. Go to Athens, and tell your countrymen—the Persian does not want them. The vine tendrils seek the sound elm, but turn away from the rotten cabbage-top.”

Alcibiades had begun to walk up and down the room. That meant that he was irresolute.

“Is the Athenian really outside?” he asked.

“He kneels outside in order to beg the traitor Alcibiades to be their lord. But listen, you are a democrat, are you not?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Then you must change your point of view, for now an oligarchy governs Athens.”

“Yes, ah! yes, yes—but I am an aristocrat, the most aristocratic in the State.”

“Spinning-top! Seek for a whip!”

Alcibiades stood still. “I think, I must speak with the Athenian after all.”

“Do that! Speak the Athenian language to him! He does not understand Persian.”

Alcibiades returned to Athens; the death-sentence against him was annulled; and as a commander who had won a battle, he was able to have a triumphal procession from Piraeus to the city. But popular favour was fickle, and, becoming suspected of aspiring to be king, he fled again, this time to the Persian satrap Pharnabazes. Since he could not live without intrigues, he was soon entangled in one, unmasked, and condemned, without his knowing it, to death.

One day he was sitting with his paramour, and chatting quietly at his ease: “You think, then, Timandra, that Cyrus marches against his brother Artaxerxes, in order to seize the throne of Persia.”

“I am sure of it, and equally sure that he has ten thousand Athenians under Xenophon with him.”

“Do you know whether Artaxerxes has been warned?”

“Yes, I know it.”

“Who could have warned him?”

“You did.”

“Does Cyrus know that?”

“Yes, he does.”

“Who has betrayed me?”

“I did.”

“Then I am lost.”

“Yes, you are.”

“To think that I must fall through a woman!”

“Did you expect anything else, Alcibiades?”

“No, not really! Can I not fly?”

“You cannot, but I can.”

“I see smoke! Is the house on fire?”

“Yes, it is. And there are archers posted outside!”

“The comedy is over! We return to tragedy....”

“And the satyr-play begins.”

“My feet are hot; generally cold is a precursor of death.”

“Everything is born from its opposite, Alcibiades.”

“Give me a kiss.”

She kissed him, the handsomest man of Athens.

“Thank you!”

“Go to the window; there you will see!”

Alcibiades stepped to the window. “Now I see.”

At that moment he was struck by an arrow. “But now I see nothing! It grows dark, and I thought it would grow light.”

Timandra fled, as the corpse began to burn.

SOCRATES

Sparta had conquered Athens, and Athens lay in ruins. The government by the people was over, and the rule of the Thirty Tyrants had succeeded it. Socrates and Euripides walked with sad faces among the ruins on the Agora.

Socrates spoke: "We are on the ruins of Athens' walls! We have become Spartans. We would have no tyrants, and now thirty rule over us."

"I go to the North," said Euripides, "to Macedonia, whither I am invited."

"In that you are right, for the Tyrants have forbidden the acting of your tragedies."

"That is true."

"And they have forbidden me to teach."

"Have they forbidden Socrates to speak? No! Then he can teach, for he cannot speak without teaching. But they must have forbidden the oracles to speak, for they have ceased to prophesy. Everything has ceased! Hellas has ceased to be! And why?"

"You may well ask. Has Zeus begotten the son who is to overthrow him, as Aeschylus foretold?"

"Who knows? The people have introduced a new God called Adonai or Adonis. He is from the East, and his name signifies the Lord."

"Who is the new god?"

“He teaches readiness for death, and the resurrection. And they have also got a new goddess. Have you heard of Cybele, the mother of the gods, a virgin, who is worshipped in Rome like Vesta by vestal priests.”

“There is so much that is new and obscure, like wine in fermentation. There comes Aristophanes. Farewell, my friend, for the last time here in life.”

“Wait! Aristophanes beckons! No, see! he weeps! Aristophanes weeps!”

Aristophanes approached. “Euripides,” he said, “don’t go till I have spoken to you.”

“Can you speak?” answered Euripides.

“I weep.”

“Do not quit your role. Shall that represent tears?”

“Sympathise with a companion in distress, Euripides; the Tyrants have closed my theatre.”

“Socrates, shall I sympathise with my executioner?”

“I believe that the Temple of Nemesis has been opened again,” answered Socrates. “Aristophanes has never been ingenuous hitherto; now he is so with a vengeance. Very well, Aristophanes, I sympathise with you that you can no more scoff at me. I pardon you, but I cannot help you to stage your comedies. That is asking too much. Now I follow Euripides home.”

Socrates sat by Aspasia, who had grown elderly. “Euripides has gone to Macedonia,” he said.

“From his wives.”

“You have become bitter.”

“I am tired of seeing ruins and all the rest. The Tyrants are murdering the citizens.”

“That is the occupation of tyrants.”

“Shall we soon have rest?”

“In the Ceramicus, in a cedar coffin.”

“I will not die; I will live, but quietly.”

“Life is not quiet.”

“Yes, if one is well off.”

“One never is.”

“No, not if one is unhappily married, like you, Socrates.”

“My wife is certainly the worst possible; if she had not had me for a husband, she would long ago have been murdered.”

“Xantippe betrays you with her gossiping; and when she does not understand what you say, she gives others distorted ideas of your opinions and your person.”

“Yes, I know that, but I cannot alter it.”

“Why do you continue in such a state of humiliation?”

“Why should I fly? One is only justified in flying from superior force, and Xantippe is not a superior force to me.”

“You are forbidden, on pain of death, to give instruction; that is her work and that of Anytos.”

“She may bring about my death, if she likes, for then she has only brought about my freedom.... Aspasia, I hear that our friendship is on the decline; you have found new friends, you have become another person. Let me say farewell before Lysicles

comes.”

“Do you know him?”

“Yes, and the whole town speaks of your coming marriage.”

“With the cattle-dealer, Lysicles?”

“Yes, that is your affair; I don’t talk about it.”

“But you think I should have cherished Pericles’ memory better?”

“I would fain have seen Aspasia’s memory better preserved; but since I have seen Athenians adorn themselves with garlands to celebrate Athens’ overthrow; since I have seen Phidias....”

“How, then, will Socrates end?”

“Certainly not like Aspasia.”

“The gods jest with us. Beware! O Socrates!”

Socrates was at last in prison, accused of having seduced the youth, and blasphemed or repudiated the gods of the State. Among the accusers were a young poetaster, Melitos, the tanner Anytos, and the orator Lykon.

Socrates made his Apology, and declared that he had always believed on God, and the voice of his conscience, which he called his “demon.” He was condemned to drink hemlock, and kept in prison, where, however, he was allowed to see his wife and his few remaining friends.

Just now his wife was with him, and wept.

“Weep not,” said Socrates; “it is not your fault.”

“Will you see the children?”

“Why should I lacerate their little souls with a useless leave-

taking? Go to them and comfort them; divert their minds with an expedition to the woods.”

“Shall we rejoice while you are dying?”

“Rejoice that my sufferings come to an end! Rejoice that I die with honour.”

“Have you no last wish?”

“I wish for nothing, except peace and freedom from your foolish tears and sighs, and your disturbing lamentations. Go, woman, and say to yourself that Socrates wants to sleep for he is tired and out of humour; say to yourself that he will wake again, refreshed, rejuvenated, happy and amiable.”

“I wish you had taught me all this before.”

“you had nothing to learn from me.”

“Yes! I have learnt from you patience and self-control.”

“Do you forgive me?”

“I cannot, for I have done it already. Say farewell now, as though I were going on a journey. Say ‘We meet again,’ as though I were soon returning!”

“Farewell, then, Socrates, and be not angry with me.”

“No, I am always well-disposed towards you.”

“Farewell, my husband, for ever.”

“Not for ever. You wish to see me again, don’t you? Put on a cheerful face, and say, ‘We meet again.’”

“We meet again.”

“Good! and when we meet again, we will go with the children together into the woods.”

“Socrates was not what I thought he was.”

“Go! I want to sleep.”

She went, but met in the doorway Plato and Crito.

“The hour approaches, friends,” said Socrates wearily, and with feverish eyes.

“Are you calm, Master?”

“To say the truth, I am quite calm. I will not assert that I am joyful, but my conscience does not trouble me.”

“When, Socrates, when—will it happen?”

“You mean, When is it to happen,—the last thing? Plato, my friend, my dearest... it hastens.... I have just now enjoyed a sleep. I have been over the river on the other side; I have seen for a moment the original forms of imperishable Beauty, of which things on earth are only dim copies.... I have seen the future, the destinies of the human race; I have spoken to the mighty, the lofty, and the pure; I have learnt the wise Order which guides the apparent great disorder; I trembled at the unfathomable secret of the Universe of which I had a glimmering perception, and I felt the immensity of my ignorance. Plato, you shall write what I have seen. You shall teach the children of men to estimate things at their proper value, to look up to the Invisible with awe, to revere Beauty, to cultivate virtue, and to hope for final deliverance, as they work, through faithful performance of duty and self-renunciation.”

He went to the bed, and lay down.

Plato followed him, “Are you ill, Master?”

“No, I have been; but now I am getting well.”

“Have you already....”

“I have already emptied the cup!”

“Our Wisest leaves us.”

“No mortal is wise! But I thank the gods who gave me modesty and conscience.”

There was silence in the room.

“Socrates is dead!”

FLACCUS AND MARO

After the death of Socrates, the greatness of Athens was no more. Sparta ruled for a time, and then came the turn of Thebes. Subsequently the Macedonians invaded the country, and governed it till the year 196 B.C., when the Romans conquered both Macedonia and Greece, and completely destroyed Corinth, but spared Athens, which was deprived of its fortifications under Sulla, on account of the great memories which gathered round it.

Now, in Julius Caesar's time, it had become the fashion to send youths to Athens to study Grammar, Rhetoric, and Philosophy there. There was no great philosopher there, but they studied the history of philosophy. There was also no religion, for no one believed on the gods of the State, although, from old habit, they celebrated the sacrificial feasts.

Athens was dead, and so was the whole of the ancient world—Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor. In Rome they lived on the memories of the past of Greece, and the greatest Roman, Cicero, when he wished to discuss some philosophic theme, always commenced by citing the opinions of the ancient Greeks on the subject; he also closed in the same way, for he had no original opinion of his own on any subject, such as the nature of the gods, &c.

One early spring day, during the last years of Julius Caesar, two students sat in an arbour below Lykabettos, opposite the college of Kynosarges. Wine was on the table, but they did

not seem very devoted to their yellow “Chios.” They sat there with an air of indifference, as though they were waiting for something. The same atmosphere of lethargy seemed to pervade their surroundings. The innkeeper sat and dozed; the youths in the college opposite lounged at the door; pedestrians on the high road went by without greeting anyone; the peasant in the field sat on his plough, and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

The elder of the two students fingered his glass, and at last opened his mouth.

“Say something!”

“I have nothing to say, for I know nothing.”

“Have you already learnt everything?”

“Yes.”

“I came yesterday from Rome with great hopes of being able to learn something new and of hearing something remarkable, but I hear only silence.”

“My dear Maro, I have been here for years, and I have listened, but heard nothing new. I have heard in the Poikile that Thales maintained that there were no gods, but that everything had been produced from moisture. I have further heard Anaximines’ doctrine that air was the source of all things; Pherecydes’ doctrine of ether as the original principle; Heraclitus’ doctrine of fire. Anaximander has taught me that the universe came from some primitive substance; Leucippus and Democritus spoke to me of empty space with primitive corpuscles or atoms. Anaxagoras made believe that the atom had reason. Xenophanes wished to

persuade me that God and the Universe were one. Empedocles, the wisest of the whole company, despaired at the imperfection of reason, and went in despair and flung himself head foremost into Etna's burning mountain."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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