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FEMINISM IN GREEK LITERATURE

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# FEMINISM IN GREEK LITERATURE

FROM HOMER TO ARISTOTLE

BY

F. A. WRIGHT

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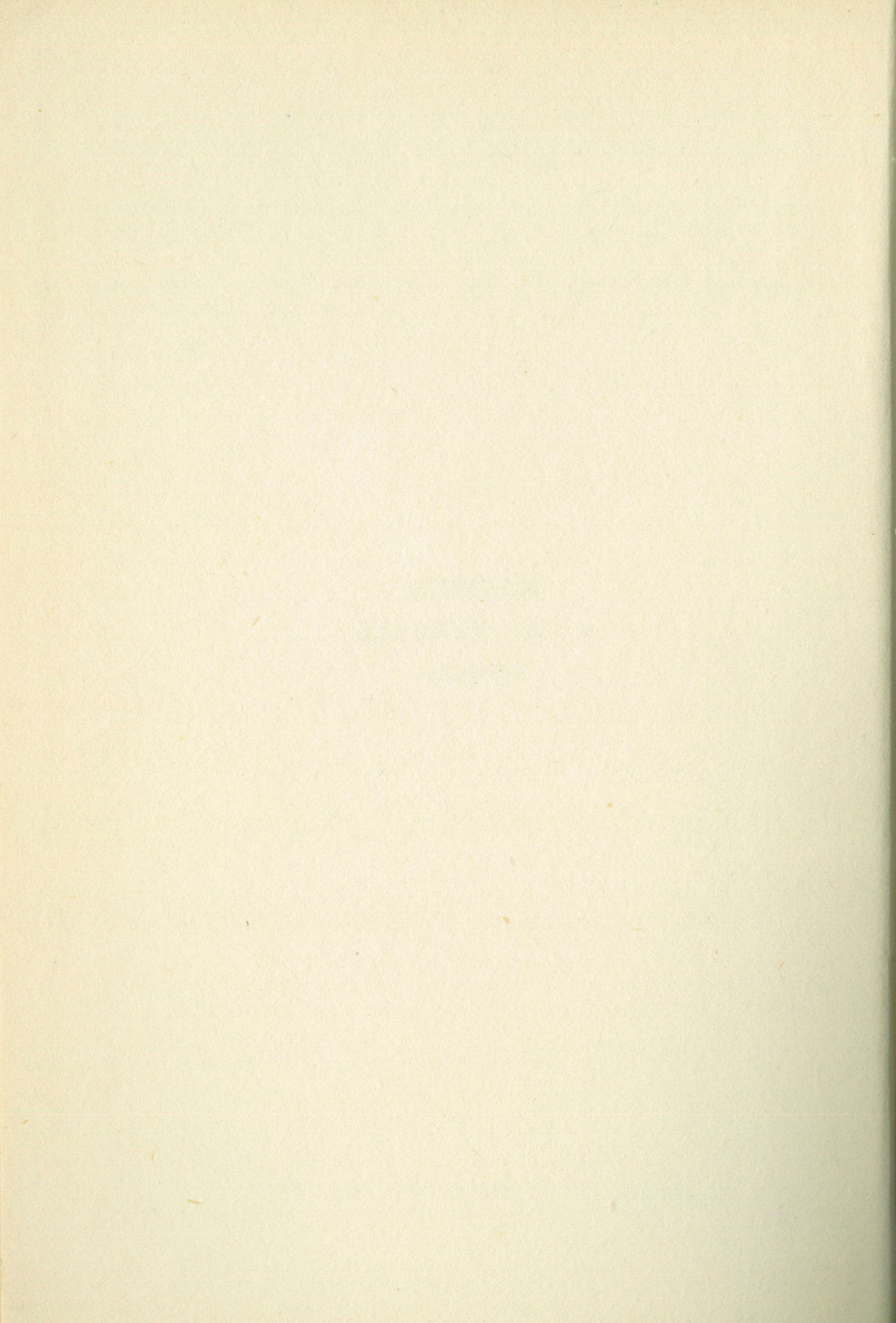
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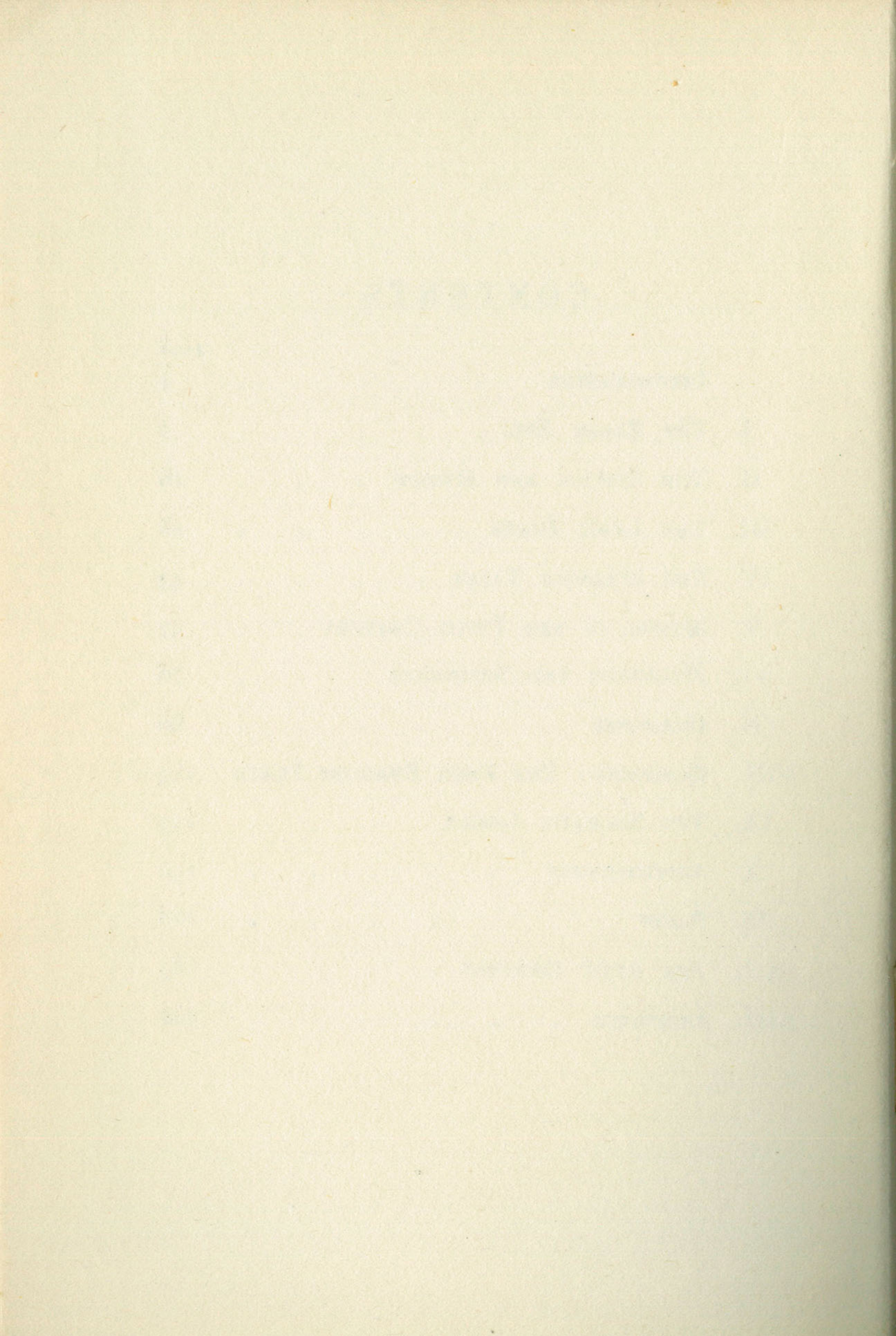


MANIBUS  
A. W. VERRALL  
ΤΡΟΦΕΙΑ



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	I
I. THE EARLY EPIC . . . . .	7
II. THE IONIANS AND HESIOD . . . . .	16
III. THE LYRIC POETS . . . . .	28
IV. THE MILESIAN TALES . . . . .	43
V. ATHENS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY . . . . .	57
VI. ÆSCHYLUS AND SOPHOCLES . . . . .	70
VII. EURIPIDES . . . . .	86
VIII. EURIPIDES : THE FOUR FEMINIST PLAYS	113
IX. THE SOCRATIC CIRCLE . . . . .	135
X. ARISTOPHANES . . . . .	150
XI. PLATO . . . . .	168
XII. THE ATTIC ORATORS . . . . .	183
XIII. ARISTOTLE . . . . .	202



## INTRODUCTION

THERE is a question sometimes put to scholars, a doubt often latent in scholars' minds—How was it that Greek civilisation, with all its high ideals and achievements, fell so easily before what seems at first sight an altogether inferior culture? The difficulty is not solved by a reference to military resources or administrative skill, for moral strength is the only thing that matters in history, and a nation has never yet succeeded merely by pure intellect or by brute force. The fact is—and it is as well to state it plainly—that the Greek world perished from one main cause, a low ideal of womanhood and a degradation of women which found expression both in literature and in social life. The position of women and the position of slaves—for the two classes went together—were the canker-spots which, left unhealed, brought about the decay first of Athens and then of Greece.

For many centuries in Ionia and Athens there was an almost open state of sex-war. At Miletus a woman never sat at table with her husband, for he was the enemy with whom bread must not be broken ;

at Athens, while all the men went free, women were kept as slaves, and a stranger in the harem might be killed at sight. The sexes were sharply separated : men and women had but few opportunities for mutual esteem and affection, and domestic life—the life of the home, the wife and the children—was poisoned at its source.

The causes and results of this war, far worse than any faction or civil strife, are lamentable enough : its manifestations in ancient literature are perhaps even more important, for it is hard to say how far current opinions of feminine disabilities are not unconsciously due to the long line of writers, Greek and Latin, from Simonides of Amorgos, in the seventh century before Christ, to Juvenal in the second century of our era, who used all their powers of rhetoric and literary skill to disparage and depreciate womankind. In the whole deplorable business men were in the wrong, and they therefore took the aggressive. They applied to women the comforting doctrine of Aristotle, that some people were slaves because they were made by nature to be slaves : women were men's moral inferiors, and therefore it was men's duty to keep them down.

At Sparta certainly, and perhaps in North Greece, women occupied a very different place. Spartan women were regarded as free human beings, and the relations between the sexes were inestimably better

than at Athens. But Sparta, Thessaly, Macedonia, have no direct representation in Greek literature ; we get their point of view only in the writings of some Athenians, such as Plato and Xenophon, who rebelled against the current institutions of their state, and in the Alexandrian poets, Apollonius and Theocritus, who, even in the midst of the luxurious city, kept some of the freshness of their native hills. Most of the great writers came from Ionia or from Athens : the Ionians are nearly all misogynists, and have succeeded in colouring many parts of the Homeric poems with their perverse immorality : the typical Athenian, and those foreigners who found their ideal in Athens—Herodotus, Sophocles, Thucydides, the Orators—usually treat women as a negligible quantity.

Æschylus was an original thinker, and in this, as in many ways, took a different view from most of his countrymen. But it is not until we come to Euripides that we get the woman's side of the case definitely stated. Euripides ventured to doubt man's infallibility : he put the doctrine of the nobility of man, as he put the other doctrines of the nobility of race and the nobility of war, to the touchstone of a really critical intelligence, and he came to a conclusion very different from that which is expressed by the great majority of his predecessors.

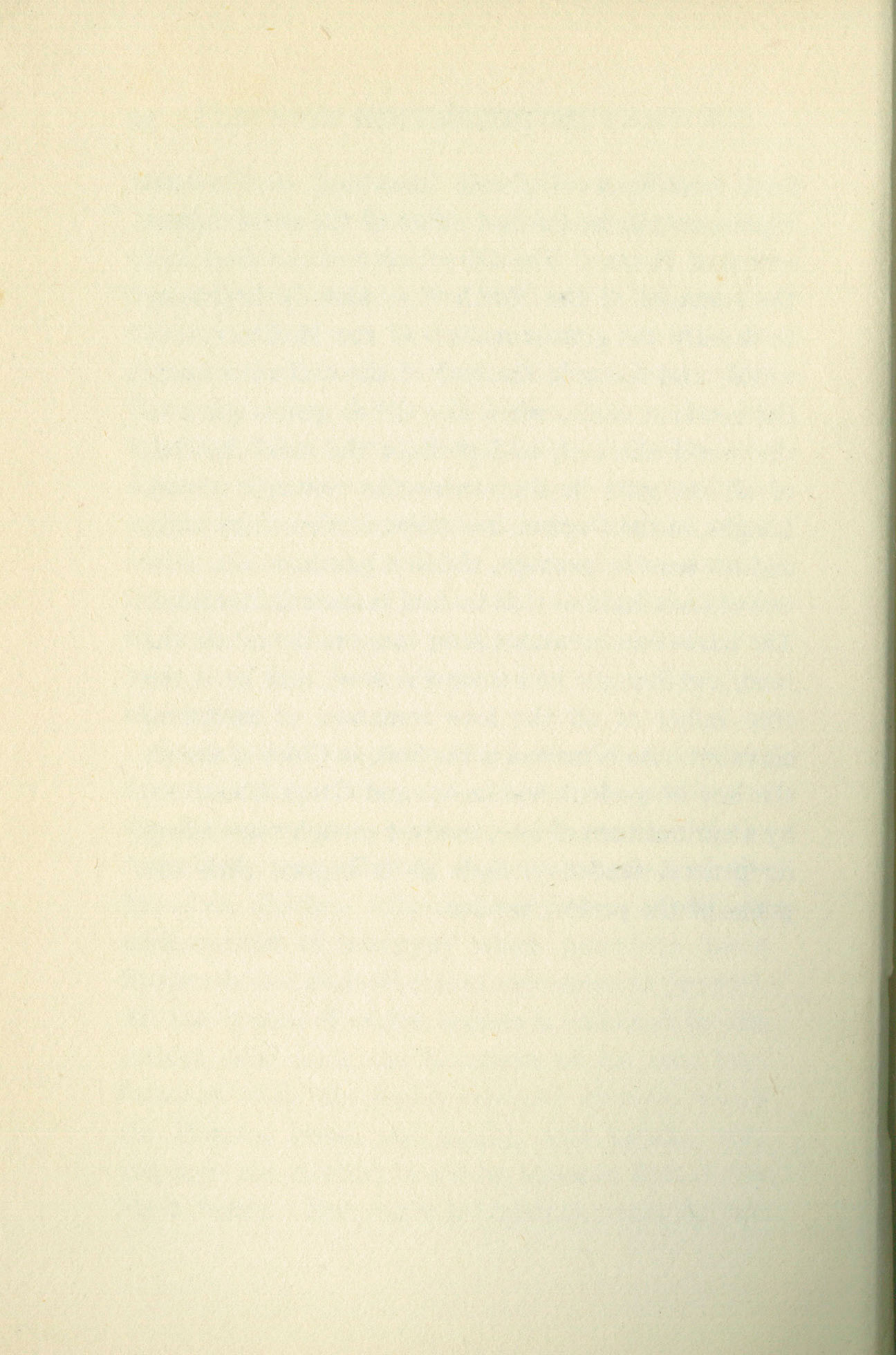
Upon his own generation Euripides had a pro-

found effect. Socrates, Aristophanes, Plato, and Xenophon are all feminists in varying degrees, and a fairly full statement of feminist doctrine may be found in their works. But the idealist did not win the day. It is true that women were never so degraded—in European civilisation at least—after Euripides' time as they had been before; but his teaching did not bear its full fruit. Aristotle—the supreme type of the practical mind—threw all the weight of his unexampled influence into the other scale, and the Aristotelian view of the natural inferiority of women prevailed: so that the poets of Ionia, libertines and profligates as most of them were, find their work completed by the philosopher of Stagirus.

Greek is the source from which most Roman writers drew their inspiration, and although the position of the Roman matron, honoured as the mother of the household, was infinitely higher than that of the too-often childless Athenian wife, there is still an undercurrent of misogyny which permeates Latin literature, and finds its fullest expression in Juvenal. All the venom of earlier writers is collected by the satirist, who adds the bitterness of his own bile, seasoned with the highly-coloured rhetoric which the Romans loved, and finally, with infinite zest, disgorges the mixture in the six hundred lines of the Sixth Satire. But, even as Aristotle sums up the



final tendencies of Greek literature, so Juvenal represents almost the last effort of the anti-feminist school at Rome. The Christianity of the East and the romance of the North were already beginning to modify the grosser realism of the Mediterranean world, and towards the end of the second century the reaction came, when the Greek genius gave to the world the last, and perhaps the most fruitful, of all its gifts in literature—the romantic novel. Longus, in the *Daphnis and Chloe*, strikes a new note, and his hero is, perhaps, the first gentleman in matters of the affections that we find in ancient literature. The barbarian invasions soon came to devastate the land, but Longus had sown the seed, and he is the true father of all the love romances of mediæval chivalry. As Nausicaa is the first, so Chloe is almost the last of ancient heroines; and Greek literature, by a curious turn of fate, ironical enough considering its general tendency, ends as it begins, with the praise of the perfect maiden.



## I.—THE EARLY EPIC

ANY discussion of Greek literature must begin with Homer, although as regards women and the social position the Epic in its first form stands somewhat aloof from the general current of ancient thought. The Homeric poems are in a very real sense the Greek Bible, for they represent a standard of morality which in many respects is far higher than that which prevailed at Athens in the great era of Greek history, and they picture a state of society very different from the complex civilisation of the city-state.

It must be remembered that the Homeric poems were not written to suit the taste of the old Mediterranean people, who, if we may trust the evidence of archæology and certain signs in their language, had but a low code of sexual morality, and were inclined to regard women as mere instruments of pleasure. The Epic, in its original shape, was composed for the Achæan chiefs who came down into Greece from Central Europe, and in sexual matters were rather of the Scandinavian type. But the Achæans were only a small ruling class, and were soon assimilated

by the conquered peoples, whose language they adopted. A second tide of invasion by the northern tribes called Dorian led to somewhat more permanent results, but the original Mediterranean race was always far superior in numbers, and unless inter-marriage was prohibited by law it was only a matter of time for the primary racial type to reappear. Hence the interest of Greek history, which is one long process of inter-blending and change: the renascence of the conquered and the gradual disappearance of the conquerors. Hence also the difference of view in all feminist matters between Homer and much of the later Greek literature.

The *Odyssey* especially, which, though perhaps later in composition than the original *Iliad*, has been less worked over and received fewer additions, is based on an entirely different idea of woman's position from that which was held after the seventh century B.C. Samuel Butler's theory that the *Odyssey* was composed by a woman, perhaps Nausicaa herself, is hardly capable of exact proof, but at any rate women in the *Odyssey* are never degraded as they are in many of the later passages of the *Iliad*, and the one lewd passage, the first lay of Demodocus (in Book 8), 'the loves of Ares and Aphrodite,' is a plain interpolation, and a clumsy one at that. Women indeed pull the strings in the

Odyssey: the goddess Athena, the nymphs, Calypso and Circe, and the mortals, Penelope and Nausicaa, are the principal actors in the drama. With both these latter there are traces of the old German custom of *Mutterrecht*: the kingship of the tribe seems to go on the woman's side. The claimants to Odysseus' chieftainship seek it through his wife; Nausicaa is the only daughter, and her marriage is of importance to all the tribe. So Calypso and Circe are represented as island-queens, living in independent sovereignty, and normally unconcerned with male companionship. Odysseus is to both very much in the position of a prince consort, and, being an active man, suffers severely from lack of occupation and lack of power. Athena is the guiding spirit of the whole action, and takes a motherly interest in the hero, but otherwise she is pure intelligence superior to man and quite free from any desire for man's society.

The women of the Odyssey follow her lead, and have little trace of that over-sexuality which is ascribed by later writers to all women as a natural trait. It cannot be said that the wise Penelope shows any womanish weakness in her constant love: she bears her husband's absence with resignation, and maintains his authority intact during a period of twenty years. On his return she is by no means over-anxious to recognise him. When the nurse

tells her of the slaughter of the suitors by Odysseus she calls her a fool, and threatens her with punishment for disturbing a busy woman with idle tales. Telemachus chides her for her wilful stubbornness : Odysseus dresses himself in royal raiment, but fails to make any impression, and finally, in disgust, calls to the nurse to make him up a bed so that he may go off and sleep by himself, for, says he, this woman has a heart of iron in her breast. When at last she is convinced, she explains that her hesitation has been due to a well-founded distrust of men and their wiles, and she is content to let her husband go off the very next morning to visit the old Laertes.

Again, Nausicaa has no traces of the timid shyness which is counted a virtue among harem women. She faces the half-naked Odysseus boldly, as he comes from the bush where he has been hiding 'like a lion of the hills, rained upon and buffeted by the wind, and his eyes are ablaze,' and in all her dealings with him she is a charming mixture of generosity and caution.

Moreover, the morality of the *Odyssey* in all sexual matters is very high, and, if it is not offensive to say so, it is women's morality. There is very little appeal to the sensual man, and although Calypso and Circe were by later writers taken as types of the voluptuous female, their fascination in the *Odyssey* is left entirely to the imagination, and they

are pictured as industrious housewives. The description is the same for both—'singing in a sweet voice within doors as she walked to and fro before the loom.' Little or nothing is said of any physical attraction they may have possessed.

So with the punishment meted out at the end of the story to the maid-servants who had accepted the embraces of the suitors. First, they carry out the corpses of their dead lovers, then they wash and cleanse the bloody floor, and finally they are hanged—twelve of them together—'like thrushes or doves caught in a snare; and they struggled with their feet for a little while, but not for long.' It is one of the few ruthless passages in the poem: there is no tendency here to err on the side of indulgence to the sins of the flesh, and for such sins harsher measure is dealt out to the woman than to the man.

But as significant as anything of the gulf between the *Odyssey* and later Greek literature is the treatment of the two famous sisters, Helen and Clytemnestra.

Helen, to the later Greeks the type of the wanton, appears in the *Odyssey* as the faithful wife, respected and self-respecting, of King Menelaus. She lives in his palace, busy with domestic duties, and when she thinks of the past it is to rejoice over her return home and escape from Troy, 'where,' she says, 'I used to mourn over the cruel fate which Aphrodite

sent upon me, when she led me from my beloved country, leaving behind me my daughter, my home, and my husband dear, who lacked nothing of perfection in mind or in body.' It is a very different picture from that of Paris' mistress, as we have her in later stories, flying with a foreign youth from her lawful lord, and betraying her too fond master.

So Clytemnestra—after the lyric poets of the seventh and sixth centuries had worked up her story—is that most dreadful figure to King Man, the regicide, the woman who dares, by craft and guile, to kill the man set over her as ruler. In all the later stories it is Clytemnestra who arranges the details of Agamemnon's death—the bath, the enveloping robe, and the axe; it is she who deals the fatal blow, while her lover, Ægisthus, is a cowardly nonentity, entirely under the dominion of the woman.

But in the *Odyssey* the story is very different. It is told twice—by Agamemnon to Odysseus in Hades, and by Nestor to Telemachus at Pylos, and this last version is significant enough to be given word for word:

We Greeks (says Nestor) were lingering over there at Troy, and many a task did we fulfil. But he—Ægisthus—at his ease in the quiet valleys of Argos, where the horses feed, tried to beguile the wife of Agamemnon with soft words. At first, of course, fair Clytemnestra refused to do the shameful thing, for she was a woman



of honest heart. Moreover, there was with her a minstrel, whom Agamemnon, when he went to Troy, had bidden to protect his wife. But soon the fate of heaven encompassed the minstrel, and brought him to his death, for Ægisthus took him to a desert island and left him there, a prey for the birds to tear asunder. As for the queen—he willing and she willing—he led her to his house. And many a sacrifice did he offer to the gods when he had done that great deed, which never in his heart had he expected to accomplish.

Such is the passage, and the last two sentences are a literal translation of the lines which appear thus in Pope's version :

Then virtue was no more : her guard away,  
She fell, to lust a voluntary prey.  
Even to the temple stalked the adulterous spouse  
With impious thanks and mockery of vows.

For these are the dangers of poetical translation.

But more important than any single character or episode is the general impression given by the whole poem, and it may fairly be said that the entire framework of the *Odyssey* presupposes a condition of society in which women are regarded as not in the least, *quâ* women, inferior to men.

In the *Iliad* things are different, and the poem, as we have it now, gives us three distinct pictures of women's position in life. The original epic, the 'Wrath of Achilles' has hardly any place for women at all. It is true that Achilles' anger has for its

cause the woman Briseis ; but Achilles is angry, not at the loss of a woman whom he loves, but at the loss of a piece of property which he knows by experience to be of considerable value and service. Briseis is a slave—a thing, not a person. In the whole Iliad she is only mentioned ten times, and nine times out of those ten she is merely catalogued as an article of value, with the slave-dealer's epithet, ' fair-cheeked,' attached.

But this is hardly surprising. All the earlier portions of the Iliad are primarily lays of battle. They are anti-social, and woman has no part or lot in them.

The Iliad however, is built up of many different strata, and one stratum—by no means the least important—was contributed by a poet who understood and sympathised with women. In thought and language he has many affinities with the author of the Odyssey, and he is probably responsible for the one passage in the poem where Briseis appears as a human being, and makes lament over the dead body of Patroclus : a speech which served Ovid as the groundwork wherefrom—with many embellishments—he expands the letter in ' the Heroines.' From the same hand as Briseis' speech comes the supreme scene of the parting between Hector and Andromache, and all the closing passages of the Iliad : the ransoming of Hector, and the lamentation

of the women—his wife, his mother, and Helen—over the corpse.

No one can read the *Iliad* without feeling that the moral spirit of all these passages is of a very different and of a very much higher quality than the brutality of the earliest lays, and the loose cynicism of the last additions to the poem, which we shall have next to consider.

## II.—THE IONIANS AND HESIOD

BETWEEN the Homeric poems in their first shape and the next stage of Greek literature there is a gap of centuries, and when the curtain goes up again on Greek history at the end of the eighth century, the centre of civilisation is in Asia Minor, the coast towns and their adjacent islands.

The period of fighting, invasions, and tribal migrations is over : there has been a revival of the old Minoan culture, the Greeks have become a nation of traders living in luxurious cities, such as Miletus and Mytilene. Politically they are dependent on the great Eastern land empires, and from the East they have taken ideas which vitally affect the position of women.

The first of these may be stated thus : a woman, even a free-born woman, is the property of the man who is her husband. The second, which follows from this, is that, love between man and his property being absurd, romantic affection is only conceivable between men ; between man and woman it is impossible. Of these two ideas, the first, which involved the seclusion of women and the harem system,

was only partially applied in ancient Greece. It flourished in Ionia and at Athens during the great period of her history, but it never took root in Sparta, or in the chief cities of Hellenistic civilisation. Its corollary, however, spread fatally from Asia to Greece, and from Greece to Italy. It lasted for many centuries, and tended to destroy all romantic love between the two sexes, and very often all the ordinary comfortable affection which may exist without romance between husband and wife. The sexes drew apart: the man, immersed in war and politics and absent from his home most of his life, had little experience of woman as a thinking animal, and unfamiliarity bred contempt. As happened again later in the world's history under the very different conditions of monastic life, the natural social intercourse between men and women was artificially hampered, and the inevitable crop of errors and perversions followed. But the monks, in their dislike of women, were at least ostensibly inspired by a strict code of sexual morality: a good deal of Ionian literature has for one of its objects a desire to defend the perverted sexual instinct which was the curse of ancient life. Of this sort are the stories of Ganymede, the young Asiatic, taken up to heaven by the ruler of the sky and displacing the maiden Hebe, and of Hylas, the minion of Heracles, whose beauty brought him to his death,

Narcissus and Hyacinthus are persons of the same type, while the heroes of this kind of literature, Jason, Heracles, and Theseus, reserve all their finer chivalrous feelings for men, and regard women as a kind of booty, to be won, if possible, by fraud ; if fraud is ineffective, by the judicious use of force. Jason deserts Medea in favour of a younger and richer woman. Heracles leaves his wife, to roam abroad, capturing by force any woman that pleases him. Theseus spends his life in betraying women, and in his old age marries Phaedra, the young sister of Ariadne. But their exploits do not at all detract from the heroic character of the three worthies, for it is now recognised that women are vile creatures who deserve vile treatment, and so we have a second class of tale invented to illustrate the innate viciousness of the female sex. There is the story of Pasiphaë and the Minotaur, Myrrha and Adonis, Leda and the swan, Europa and the bull—and so on, and so on.

The same frame of mind that invented these tales ascribed to Sappho all kinds of unnatural vice, degraded Helen into a wanton, and Penelopë into a shrew, and made it seem only logical that women, being the creatures they were, should be kept prisoners in a harem and confined to child-bearing—that indispensable function being, indeed, the main reason for their being allowed to exist at all,

The tales of Pasiphaë, Leda, and Europa, however, though useful enough in their way, are a little crude, and we have a more artistic method employed in the passages which about this time were incorporated into the *Iliad* by Ionian poets, with the idea of degrading the whole conception of the two divinities who represent womanly love, Hera and Aphrodite. Hera, the goddess of married life, the wife in her divine aspect, is represented by these decadents as an interfering termagant, spying upon her husband and seeking always to thwart him in the enjoyment of his legitimate lusts and caprices; Aphrodite, the goddess of unrestrained physical passion, becomes a calculating courtesan.

The method pursued is that same kind of false realism which has supplied our comic stage with the well-worn themes of the old maid and the mother-in-law, and it need hardly be said that it harmonises very badly with the romantic splendour of the epic lays. The heroic hexameter gives for our ears an air of nobility even to this stuff, but in its essence it is colloquial style of a rather tawdry sort, and one or two passages will illustrate its character; for example, the last hundred lines of Book I. of the *Iliad*, an episode altogether out of harmony with the rest of the book. Thetis has come to ask Zeus to avenge her son: Hera knows of

her visit, and this is the language she uses to her husband :

You crafty one—you know it's true ; who of the gods, pray, has been plotting with you again ? You know that is what you like, to get away from me and to make up your mind without me, keeping your plans secret : never yet have you had the decency to tell me outright what you mean to do.

Her husband, being a male, is far more reasonable in his tone : ' You must not expect to know all my business, my dear : it would be too hard for you, you know, though you are my wife,' and so on, gently putting her in her inferior place. But Hera refuses to listen to reason : ' What do you mean by that ? ' she cries. ' I have been only too ready in the past not to ask questions, I have left you at your ease, you have done what you liked,' and she proceeds to disclose her well-founded suspicions, until Zeus, giving up any further appeals to her better feelings, tells her bluntly to sit still and do what she is told. If not, ' All the gods in heaven, you know, won't be of any use to you when I come close and lay my irresistible hands upon you.' A further edifying touch is given by the well-meant intervention of Hera's lame son, Hephaestus, and the scene closes with the unquenchable laughter of the blessed gods.

Another similar episode is the passage in Book 14,



known as 'the beguiling of Zeus,' or, as we might say, 'the tricked husband.' Hera, it begins, saw her husband sitting on Mount Ida, and abhorred the sight of him. The story can be condensed by omitting all the ornamental epithets and turns of phrase which are used to give a very un-epic passage an epic colouring, and it runs somewhat like this.

Though she detests her lord, she still has to consider how to get the better of him, and she decides to dress herself in her finest. She goes accordingly to her bower, with its close-shut doors and its secret key, fastens the bolt, and begins an elaborate toilet. It is a sure sign of the odalisque that perfumes, jewellery, adornment of every kind are lavished upon her by the very men who really regard her as a chattel, and the whole description that follows reads like a passage in the *Arabian Nights*, themselves probably a product of the same kind of Greek genius as composed these portions of the *Iliad*. Every detail is lovingly dwelt upon; first with 'ambrosia' (the author hardly troubles himself about what ambrosia really is, and uses it as a sort of trade word), she washes her lovely skin, and then she anoints herself with oil, an 'extra-ambrosial' sort, which has been specially perfumed for her: then she combs her hair and twists it into bright, beautiful, 'ambrosial' curls. Next comes the 'ambrosial' robe with dainty patterns upon it, pinned

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Another similar episode is the passage in Book 14,

' Get first a house, and then a woman, and then a ploughing ox,' and there are also many passages plainly inspired by the new Ionian spirit.

The few facts that we know of Hesiod's life would suggest that he was an Ionian poet who migrated to Bœotia, and incorporated into his verse the ancient lore of the country, much of it as old as anything we have in Greek literature.

Hesiod's father was a merchant who lived at Kyme, on the coast of Asia Minor. The son passed most of his life at Askra, but of his life we know little, of his death a good deal. He had a friend, a citizen of Miletus, who came to stay with him in Greece. The two Ionians travelling together were entertained by one Phegeus, a citizen of Locris. They repaid his hospitality by seducing his daughter : the girl committed suicide, and her brothers, taking the law into their own hands, avenged her ruin by killing both Hesiod and his friend, who indeed was said to have been the chief culprit.

This tale, which is by far the best-authenticated fact in Hesiod's life, does not give us a very pleasant impression as to the poet's capacity for passing judgment on women, and probably the details of the Pandora myth are his own invention. The story itself is very old, but, as told by Hesiod, it has all the sham epic machinery, while it is linked on to the ancient fable of Prometheus.

going, and she repeats again the story of Oceanus and Tethys' misadventures and her projected intervention. But the god tells her brusquely, like a real master of the harem, that he needs her presence and that she can go there another day: then, as a climax of good taste, he recites the long list of his mistresses, beginning with Ixion's wife and ending with Leto. To this impassioned love-making, worthy of Don Juan himself, Hera, 'the crafty,' replies at first with an affectation of modesty, but the scene ends with the god in her arms: her purpose is accomplished and man once again is beguiled.

Dr. Leaf finds the passage full of 'healthy sensuousness,' but to other readers it may well seem thoroughly unpleasant, both in its sentiment and its language—for example, the horrible reiteration of *TOI*, 'mon chéri,' at the end of Hera's speech of invitation. Still, it is a valuable document. The brutal god and the crafty goddess are plainly the poet's ideals of man and woman; and his ideals are very low.

These two passages from the *Iliad* may serve as specimens of the second method of attack, that of sarcastic depreciation under the guise of realism, of which we have some further examples in Hesiod.

The strange medley that now bears his name is in the same position as the *Iliad*. There is much ancient wisdom, in which woman has little part.

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This tale, which is by far the best-authenticated fact in Hesiod's life, does not give us a very pleasant impression as to the poet's capacity for passing judgment on women, and probably the details of the Pandora myth are his own invention. The story itself is very old, but, as told by Hesiod, it has all the sham epic machinery, while it is linked on to the ancient fable of Prometheus.

To revenge the gift of fire to men, Zeus resolves to make a woman. 'I will give them an evil thing,' he says; 'every man in his heart will rejoice therein and hug his own misfortune.' Accordingly, Hephaestus mixes the paste and fashions the doll. Athena gives her skill in weaving, Aphrodite 'sheds charm about her head and baleful desire and passion that eats away the strength of men.' Finally, Hermes gives her 'a dog's shameless mind and thieving ways.' Then the doll is dressed with kirtle and girdle, chains of gold are hung about her body, spring flowers put upon her head, and she is sent down to earth. 'A sheer and hopeless delusion, to be the bane of men who work for their bread.'

Epimetheus takes her to wife, and when he had got her, 'then and then only did he know the evil thing he possessed.' So the tale of Pandora ends, and the story of the Jar, although it comes next in the 'Works and Days,' is not certainly connected with her history. It is 'a woman,' but not necessarily Pandora, who takes the lid from the Jar of Evil Things and lets them fly free over the world, so that only one curse now remains constant.

That curse, it will be remembered, is Elpis—not so much Hope as the gambler's belief in Luck. It is the idea that things must change for the better if you will only risk all your fortune: that the laws

of the universe will be providentially altered for your benefit ; the belief, in fact, that so often makes the elderly misogynist take a young wife.

Such is Hesiod's attitude towards women, and with Hesiod the first stage of Greek literature comes to an end.

### III.—THE LYRIC POETS

OF the literature of the seventh and sixth centuries before Christ, the lyric, iambic and elegiac poetry, we have only inconsiderable fragments. There are two reasons for the disappearance. In the case of the greatest names, Alcæus and Sappho, the Romans preferred the adaptations of Horace to the originals. With most of the other poets, the general standard of morality in their verse is so low that they fell under the ban of the Early Church, and as we know—unreasonably enough in her case—Sappho was included with them, and her poems publicly burnt. But in the fragments that we do possess there appears unmistakably the same mixture of sensual desire and cynical distaste for women which disfigures the late Epic ; until in this period it ends in sheer misogyny.

In nothing is Aristotle's great doctrine of the golden mean more valuable than in matters of sex. The sexual appetite is as natural as the appetites of eating and drinking ; and as necessary for that which is nature's sole concern, the preservation of the species. If the sexual appetite is wholly starved,

the result is as disastrous to the race as the total deprivation of food and drink would be to the individual: if it is unduly fostered, Nature revenges herself in the same way as she does upon those who exceed in the matter of food or drink, and abnormal perversities of every kind begin. In sex matters the normal man and woman alone should be considered—the father and the mother of a family—and their opinion alone is of any real value. But unfortunately in literature, and especially in this Ionian literature, the normal person is the exception, and most of the writers we now have to consider seem to have been unmarried and childless.

The paucity of material, probably no great loss either in an artistic or a moral sense, has obscured the facts, but there seems little doubt that in this period literature was definitely used for the first time to degrade the position of women. The iambic metre was invented for the express purpose of satirical calumny, and the three chief iambic poets of the Alexandrian canon, Archilochus, Simonides, and Hipponax, in their scanty fragments all agree on one point: the chief object of their lampoons is—woman. At the beginning of this period the two sexes are fairly equal in their opportunities; at the end the female is plainly the inferior. Sappho and Erinna mark the turning-point in literature. Living at a time when it had not been made impossible for



women to write, they showed that a woman could equal or surpass the male poets of her day. The few fragments of Erinna's verse that we possess, *e.g.*, the epigram on the portrait of Agatharchis and the pathetic elegy on the dead Baucis, reveal a talent at least as fine and strong as that of Alcæus; while of all the Greek lyrists, Sappho, both in reputation and as far as we can judge in actual achievement, holds by far the highest place.

Later ages, indeed, found it difficult to believe that Sappho was a woman at all. The scandal of male gossip was inspired by a genuine and pathetic belief that such a genius as hers must at least have been touched with masculine vices. But in Sappho's writings, which are our only real evidence, there is nothing distinctively 'mannish': she is neither gross nor tedious. In the technique of her art, metrical skill, the music of verse, she is at least the equal of any poet who has lived since her day; in thought and diction she is far superior to all her contemporaries.

In dealing with the Ionian poetry, exact dates are impossible, but the lyric age extends roughly from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the sixth century. The earliest writer in order of time, and in some ways the most important, is Archilochus, the Burns or Villon of Greece—outlaw, soldier of

fortune, poet, the first man to introduce his own personal feelings into literature.

Archilochus has his own special reasons for hating women—'Archilochum proprio rabies armavit iambo'—and, as he says, he had learned the great lesson, 'If anyone hurts you, hurt her in return.' Betrothed to Cleobule, the daughter of a wealthy citizen of Paros, he found his marriage forbidden by the lady's father, Lycambes. The father's reasons may be guessed, even from the few fragments of Archilochus that still remain. But the poet turned abruptly from amorist to misogynist, and spent the rest of his life in railing against his lost mistress and womankind in general.

Both in love and war he is uncompromisingly frank. He tells us how he threw away his shield '*beside the bush in battle; but deuce take the shield, I will get another just as good, and at any rate I have escaped from death.*' His love poems are equally free-spoken. It is the actual image of his mistress that torments him when he cries, '*With myrtle boughs and roses fair she used to delight herself*'; and again, '*All her back and shoulders were covered by the shadow of her hair.*' But to his fierce spirit such love brings little comfort: '*Wretch that I am, like a dead man I lie, captive to desire, pierced with cruel anguish through all my bones*'; and, '*The longing*

*that takes the strength from a man's limbs, it is that which overcomes me now.'*

Soon his love turns to hate and loathing, and he imputes to the woman the fault that is really his own: '*I was wronged, I have sinned. Aye! and many another man, methinks, will fall like me to ruin.*' His mistress now for him has lost her beauty. '*No longer does your soft flesh bloom fair; even as dry leaves it begins to wither.*' Like all women, she is false and full of guile: '*In one hand she carries water, in the other the fire of craft.*' To marry a woman now is, '*To take to one's house manifest ruin.*'

The folly of men and the falsity of women seem to have been the themes of the animal stories which Archilochus, like Æsop, composed. Woman is the fox; man is now the eagle, now the ape; but the fragments are too short for a certain judgment. What remains, indeed, of Archilochus is always tantalising in its incompleteness. Of his epigrams, for example, only three are left; here is a free translation of one of them: '*Miss High-and-mighty, as soon as she became a wedded wife, kicked her bonnet over the moon.*'

Fortunately, however, we have preserved for us in Herodotus a much longer specimen of Archilochus' manner—a real Milesian tale, the story of Gyges and Candaules. The tale is handed down to us in Herodotus' prose, and it is impossible to disentangle

the shares contributed by the Ionian poet and the Ionian historian ; nor is it necessary ; the story is typical of both.

Candaules makes the initial mistake of being enamoured of his own wife, and the second mistake of not believing Gyges when he is enlightened on the subject of female modesty. His folly naturally brings him to a bad end.

The story is interesting, but it is especially significant when we compare it with the tale of the same Gyges as told by Plato. There the sensual elements disappear, the interest centres in the magic ring, and the seduction of the queen and murder of the king form merely the hasty conclusion of the narrative. The difference between the two stories is the measure of the difference between the feminist philosopher and the libertine turned woman-hater.

But Archilochus at least has once loved a woman. Our next poet, Simonides of Amorgos, seems to have been a misogynist from birth. His work now only exists in fragments, but it is so significant of a frame of mind that the two longest passages that survive deserve a verbatim translation. The first runs thus :

Women, they are the greatest evil that God ever created. Even if they do appear to be useful at times, they usually turn out a curse to their owners. A man who lives with a wife never gets through a whole day

without trouble, and it is no easy matter for him to drive away from his house that fiend abhorred, the foul fiend, Hunger. Moreover, just when a man is thinking to be merry at home—by God's grace or man's service—the woman always finds some ground of fault and puts on her armour for battle. Where there is a wife, you can never entertain a guest without fear of trouble. Again, the woman who seems to be most virtuous, mind you, may well be the most mischievous of all. Her husband gapes at her in admiration, but his neighbours laugh to see him, and the mistake he is making.

Every one will praise his own wife—men are shrewd enough for that—and then will talk scandal about his neighbour's, and all the time we do not realise that we are all in the same plight, for, as we said before, this is the greatest evil that God ever created.

The other fragment, the catalogue of women, is longer and better known. It begins :

From the first God made women's characters different. Into one kind of woman He put the mind of a pig, lank and bristly, and in her house everything lies about in disorder, bedraggled with mud and rolling on the floor, while she herself, unwashed, in dirty clothes sits in the mire and waxes fat.

The second woman God made out of a mischievous fox. She is cunning in all things alike ; she knows everything, all that is bad and all that is good ; often her speech is fair, but often it is evil, and her mood changes every day.

The third sort of woman was made out of a dog, and she is the true child of her mother, ever restless. She wants to hear and know about everything ; she is always peering about and roaming around, growling even though there is no one in sight. A man cannot stop

her with threats ; no, not even if in sudden anger he break her teeth with a stone. Soft talk is useless, too ; it is all the same even if she happen to be sitting among strangers : a man finds her a continual and hopeless nuisance.

The fourth woman the gods in heaven made out of mud—or rather they half made her—and then gave her to man. Such a one knows nothing, good or bad ; the only business she has sense enough for is eating. Even if God sends a bitter winter's day and she be shivering, she never will draw her chair closer to the fire.

The fifth woman was made out of the sea, and she has two minds within her. One day she is all smiles and gladness. A stranger seeing her in the house will praise her. ' In all the world,' says he, ' there is not a better or a fairer lady.' But another day she is insupportable to look at or to approach. She is filled with fury, like a bitch guarding her cubs : savage to all alike, friends and foes, detestable. Even so the sea often stands quiet and harmless, a joy to sailors in the summer tide, and often again is driven to madness by the thunderous waves. It is to the sea that such a woman is most like.

The sixth woman was made from an ass, grey of hide and stubborn against blows. Though you use reproaches and force, it is with difficulty you get her to give way to you and do her work satisfactorily. She is always eating, day and night ; she eats in her bedroom, she eats by the fireside. But if a man approaches to make love to her, she comes forward quickly enough to welcome him.

The seventh was made out of a polecat, a plaguy and a grievous kind. There is nothing fair or lovable in her, nothing pleasant, nothing charming, and any man who comes near she fills with nausea. She is a thief

and annoys her neighbours, and often she gobbles up the sacrifice herself without offering any to the gods.

The eighth woman was the daughter of a mare, stepping daintily with flowing mane. She shudders at the thought of any servant's work or labour. She will never lay her hand to the millstone, nor lift up the sieve, nor throw the dung out of doors: she won't even sit near the kitchen stove, because she is afraid of the soot, and she makes her husband well acquainted with adversity. Every day, two or three times, she washes every speck of dirt off her, and anoints herself with unguents. Her hair is always luxuriant and well combed, with garlands of flowers upon it. Of course, such a woman is a fine sight for the men to see, but she is a curse to her owner, unless indeed he be a tyrant or sceptred king who has a fancy to pride himself on such delights.

The ninth woman came from a monkey: this sort is, indeed, pre-eminently the very greatest curse that God ever sent to men. Her features are shamefully ugly; such a woman, as she walks through a town, is a mockery to all men. She has a short neck, and moves with difficulty; she has no buttocks, her legs are all bone. Alas for the poor wretch who holds such an evil thing in his arms! But as for guile and tricks, she knows them all, and like a monkey she does not mind being laughed at. She never renders anyone a service, but all day long this is what she is seeking and looking for—how to do some one as much harm as she can.

The tenth woman was made out of a bee: happy the man who gets her! On her alone no breath of scandal lights, but she brings a life of happiness and prosperity. Husband and wife grow old together in love, and fair and glorious are her children. Famous among all women is she, and a grace divine encompasses her

about. She takes no delight in sitting with other women when they are telling bawdy tales.

Such women as she are the best and wisest given by God to men : all the other kinds are a bane to men, and by God's decree a bane they always will be.

And so the fragment ends.

All this is pure misogyny ; but it is interesting to notice the especial faults which our poet imputes to womankind. They are chiefly the two vices which a surly master will always find in his servants, gluttony and idleness ; they work too little and eat too much. We are far removed in this world from our 'Feed the brute,' and it must be remembered that in a Greek household the work was hard, monotonous, and continual. There were no labour-saving appliances, for the hard work was chiefly done by women. Every mouthful of bread or porridge eaten in a Greek home had come into the house as a sack of dirty grain. First it was winnowed, and cleaned by hand ; then the grain was put into a small hand-mill, and by a laborious process of pestle and mortar it was ground into flour ; the flour was then made into dough, kneaded and baked ; every process being attended with the maximum of manual labour and general inconvenience, borne by the women of the house, while the master strolled about the city.

So also with the clothes and household fabrics :



every operation in their manufacture was done at home by the women. The master contented himself with buying the sheep-skins—and, as Theocritus lets us see, often did that very badly—which he then handed to his wife. First, the skins had to be washed and dried; then the wool was cut off and carded; then by a laborious process of spinning the wool was turned into yarn, and finally on a hand-loom the yarn was woven into cloth: the same piece of stuff, so excellent was the workmanship, often serving for coat, blanket and shroud.

It is obvious, then, that an idle wife—if such a thing existed—or a wife who ate more than her share of the laboriously prepared bread, would be a great grief to her lord and master, who was himself too busy with the higher work of politics to attend to such things, and that the machinery of the household would be put very much out of gear. It may well be that Simonides was unfortunate in his choice of a helpmate, for as Hipponax, the third of this company, mournfully complains, '*It is hard to get a wife who will both bring you a good dowry and then do all the work.*' Hipponax, if we may judge him by some forty short fragments, was a thoroughly disagreeable person; he is always asking and being refused; he varies complaints with abuse or downright threats. '*Hold my coat,*' he cries, '*and I will knock out his eye. I've got two right hands, and I never miss when I*

*throw.*' On the subject of women he does not say so much as the other two, for the range of his thought is almost confined to carnal delights. A fair sample of his style is this fragment : ' *There are only two days in your life that your wife gives you pleasure: the day you marry her and the day you bury her.*'

This insistence on the physical side of love runs through all the elegiac and lyric poetry of the age. Love to Mimnermus is a thing of secret kisses, of chambering and wantonness, and it depends alone on physical attractions. A young man is happy, for he is handsome and desirable ; an old man is wretched, to women an object of scorn. The satiety that comes from excess of sensual pleasure is the main cause of the melancholy pessimism that broods over much of Ionian literature. Of Alcæus and his Lycus, Anacreon and his Bathyllus, Theognis and Cyrnus, it is unnecessary now to speak, but it is difficult to believe such amiable apologists as Mr. Benecke when they try to show that a fine idealism was the inspiration of these relationships. Neither the character of the men's writings nor that of their time and country give much ground for such confidence, and if we seek the purity of love's passion we must turn to Sappho.

Among all the foulness of her time Sappho shines out like a star. No loss in literature is so lamentable as the loss of the nine books of her poems that the

Alexandrian library possessed ; no treasure in literature is quite so precious as the fragments that various chances have preserved for us. And, luckily, the number of those fragments is still increasing, as will be seen by a comparison of the two best studies of Sappho in recent years, the exquisite collection of translations issued by Mr. Wharton in 1886, and the brilliant monograph on the new fragments by Mr. J. M. Edmonds in 1912. Even since that date fresh poems have come to light, and we do not know what Egypt may have yet in store.

In all the fragments, new or old, there is an indefinable quality of personal feeling. Sappho, it has been said, has left us only a fragment of her work, but it is a fragment of her soul. Her friend and rival, Alcæus, is a great poet, but he lacks the fiery intensity of her inspiration, which gives life even to the briefest phrase that some grammarian has quoted for a rare word. Take the lines that Rossetti adapted :

Like the sweet apple which reddens upon topmost  
bough,  
A-top on the topmost twig—which the pluckers  
forget somehow,  
Forget it not—nay, but got it not, for none could  
get it till now.  
Like the wild hyacinth flower, which on the hills is  
found,  
Which the passing feet of the shepherds for ever  
tear and wound,  
Until the purple blossom is trodden into the ground.

Or, again, this other :

Dead, dead.—In death,  
 Below the ground, bereft of breath,  
 Silent, alone, the close-shut tomb enfoldeth thee.  
 To my songs thou wouldst not hearken, and songless  
 shalt thou be ;  
 Thou wouldst not love me here on earth,  
 In death thou shalt loveless be.

Mr. Edmonds, in his translations, has kept much of  
 the simple charm of the Greek :

I have a little daughter rare,  
 That's like the golden flowers fair,  
 My Cleis.  
 I would not take all Lydia wide,  
 No, nor lovely Greece beside,  
 For Cleis.

And this, a portion of a new fragment :

And often as her way she wanders,  
 And on gentle Attis ponders,  
 With sad longing love opprest,  
 Her heart devours her tender breast  
 Till she cries, in pain,  
 ' Oh, come to me,' for you and I  
 Know the burden of her cry,  
 Since Night, which hath the myriad ears,  
 Sends her word of what she hears  
 Across the severing main.

This tender simplicity is the soul of Sappho, and  
 in her verse even a few words will suggest a picture :

Come to me, O Love :  
 O Love, the inheritor, enter in.

Everywhere is swept and garnished,  
Everything is prepared.  
The fire of my heart burns brightly,  
All my body is food for thee,  
And on my bosom thou shalt sleep the long night  
through.

*ἐπὶ δὲ στήθεος ἐννυχεύσεις.* Surely no one save  
Sappho has touched so closely the heart of love and  
poetry.

#### IV.—THE MILESIAN TALES

THE chief characteristic of Ionian literature is a certain softness, a kind of laxity of morals corresponding to a looseness of political organisation. The Ionian man was a convinced believer in freedom—for himself; but he was by no means a believer in the discipline which alone makes freedom possible. Both in sexual matters and in politics, his desire for freedom and his desire for pleasure were constantly at cross-purposes. He wished to be independent of women; but he was not meant by nature to be a monk, and he purchased his apparent freedom by yielding to a sensuality far more degrading than that of women's love. He wished to be independent of Persia; but he was not a born soldier, and he finally bought a pretence of autonomy by the payment of tribute to a Persian satrap, forfeiting his manhood for the sake of peace.

The Ionians were, indeed, a strange medley of qualities, and with them intellectual activity stood in sharp contrast with moral and physical sloth. They were essentially a race of city dwellers; for them the charm of the country and of nature had

little attraction, and their civilisation found its most perfect expression during the seventh and sixth centuries in the splendid luxury of such towns as the Ionian Miletus, in Asia Minor, and the Achæan Sybaris, in South Italy. The two cities were closely connected by ties of trade and social intercourse, and in both places material prosperity led quickly to moral corruption, and voluptuousness became the rule of life. Like Buenos Ayres to-day, Miletus and Sybaris were trading ports founded in a new country, and the rapid growth of riches discouraged the manlier virtues. The mixture of races was a danger, the climate favoured voluptuous pleasures, and the bracing stimulus of war was, until too late, absent. The moral and sexual degradation that resulted from this unbridled pursuit of pleasure found its expression, as we have seen, in literature. The tale of Ganymede, the episode of the tricked husband in the *Iliad*, and the catalogue of women in Simonides, are fair samples of Ionian thought. No one of the three has any moral value ; indeed, a strict Puritan would probably refuse to let them soil his lips ; but they are at least decent enough to be written down in a literary form, and to pass muster, if they are not too closely examined.

There was, however, another and even less creditable class of story of which literary historians tell us little, but which, probably, was first invented

in such towns as Miletus and Sybaris in the seventh and sixth centuries, during the time of their greatest prosperity—the so-called Milesian Tales. Usually circulating by word of mouth, they endured for centuries, and occasionally make a furtive appearance in history, but their significance in sexual morality has not always been appreciated. In dealing with them as literature we are confronted with a threefold difficulty: firstly, many of the most typical specimens of this style were never written down at all; secondly, most of the stories that found a footing in literature were blotted out by the righteous indignation of Christian moralists; thirdly, in the case of the few that do survive, it is neither possible nor desirable to introduce them to a modern audience. But, though they are the least estimable part of our inheritance from ancient literature, their influence on ancient morals was very great, and their tendency was so definitely to ruin any reasonable conception of sex relationships that they force themselves into notice.

Though sometimes written in prose, their natural medium was the iambic measure, invented by Archilochus, and they were meant both for a male and female audience. Iambus the jester, *Pierrot*, has his female counterpart in Iambë, *Pierrette*, who appears in the Homeric hymn to Demeter, and by her capers forces the sad goddess to smile once



more. This is, perhaps, the one justification of the tales; in their more innocent form they were intended to purge away that feeling of melancholy of which, as the precursor of madness, the Greeks were so much afraid, by exciting the emotion of laughter; just as tragedy effects the same purpose by exciting the emotions of pity and fear. But this sort of humour in Athens and Ionia soon degenerated into coarseness, and Iambe, her name now changed to Baubo, as we see her in the ritual statuette, a woman sitting on a pig, played a prominent and a shameful part in the Eleusinian mysteries of Demeter. The worship of the sorrowing mother—Mater Dolorosa—was made the cloak for nameless obscenities, and the influence of religion was added to that of literature to degrade men's conception of women. These were the sort of verses and images to which Aristotle alludes in the Seventh Book of the *Politics*; and this is one of the reasons for Plato's objection to poetry; better no literature at all, he thinks, than literature degraded to these ends.

The worst type of Milesian or Sybaritic tale was definitely meant to stimulate the animal passions, and owed little to any qualities of humour or imagination. The sense of artistic fitness which the Athenians always possessed kept this kind of stories out of written literature during the great period, and confined them to the gossip of the per-

fumers' and barbers' shops. But as soon as the decadence began, these 'Ionian poems,' as Athenæus calls them, became a recognised branch of letters, and we hear of their chief practitioners, writers of 'facetiae,' the 'Hilarodoi,' the 'Simodoi,' and the 'Lysiodoi.'

Among the more notorious authors were Simus the Magnesian, Alexander the Ætolian, Pyres the Milesian, and Sotades of Maronea, who gives his name to that whole class of licentious writings which is represented in modern times by the sotadic satire of Nicholas Chorier. Sotades, however, did not confine himself to the comparatively safe pastime of libelling women. He ventured to write lampoons upon Ptolemy Philadelphus and his sister Arsinoe, was caught on the island where he had taken refuge, put into a jar with a leaden top, and drowned.

But the most famous, or infamous, of all the class is Aristides, usually called, but on very little evidence, 'of Miletus,' who lived perhaps in the second century before Christ. Of the man and his book we have little direct knowledge, but he was translated into Latin by Sisenna, the companion of Sulla in his voluptuous debauchery, and copies of this version were found by the Parthians in the tents of the Roman officers after the battle of Carrhæ. Even the Parthians, as Plutarch tells us, were disgusted by Aristides, and Ovid tries to use him as a

shelter for himself against the charge of immoral writing. The Roman poet who, though a libertine, was at least free from some of the grosser vices of his age, complains bitterly in his exile of the difference in treatment meted out to Aristides and himself. '*Aristides was not banished,*' he cries, '*and yet he fathered all the scandalous stories of Miletus: the authors amongst us who now put together Sybaritic stories go unpunished.*'

Sybaritic and Milesian were the descriptive adjectives used even in Ovid's time for this kind of writing, and we can trace its popularity and influence in Rome. Quotations are obviously impossible, and indeed the *genre* does not depend on literary grace. One author alone, Petronius, possesses sufficient skill to make it tolerable, and the viler portions of the 'Satyricon' are the most real examples of the literature that was inspired by Miletus, and by Milesian ideas of womankind. The natural coarseness of the Roman mind gave this sort of story a greater prominence than the Greeks ever allowed, but it will probably be correct to trace its first origin to the coast of Ionia in the seventh century and especially to the metropolis of the Ionian States.

From the beginning at Miletus the relations between men and women were notoriously bad, and, as Herodotus tells us, they had some historical justification. 'The first settlers at Miletus,' he says,

'having no wives of their own, killed the men and seized the women of the country.' On account of this massacre, the women established the law and imposed upon themselves an oath, which they handed down to their daughters, to this effect :

They should never eat at the same table with their husbands, nor should any woman ever call her husband by his name. For they had killed their fathers, their husbands, and their sons, and after so doing had forced them to become their wives.

This is the first incident in the history of Miletus, an episode not unlike the story of the Lemnian women, and it explains a great deal. In the chief city of Ionia, enmity, not love, was the law between husband and wife. Domestic life was poisoned, and literature caught the infection. By action and reaction the mischief spread, and it is impossible for us now fully to estimate its extent. But we cannot doubt the effect that Ionian literature had in lowering men's estimate of women, and thereby degrading all their ideals of social life. The three great curses of Greek civilisation—sexual perversion, infanticide, and the harem system—all come into prominence during the sixth century, and there is good reason to believe that it was just at this time that the natural increase of population was checked, and the slow process of race suicide begun. If Ionia was the cradle of Greek culture, as we know

it, from Ionia also came the germs of that moral disease which made a fatal counterpoise to the intellectual supremacy of Greece.

In the worse type of Milesian Tale immorality takes its most revolting form ; but there was another and more pleasing form of story, also invented in Ionia about this time, which occasionally is called by the same title, and is best known to us in the collection of Æsop's Fables. Æsop himself, the lame slave who was made by tradition the fellow-servant of the fair courtesan, Rhodopis, and so a contemporary of Sappho, is hardly more a real person than Homer, and his name was used as a convenient shelter for two slightly different kinds of humorous story. There were the well-known animal fables which are common to the whole Mediterranean and Asiatic world, and in Æsop find a Greek dress, and beside them a sort of humorous anecdote, sometimes trivial, sometimes coarse, but always strongly realistic.

They were especially popular at Athens. 'Tell them a funny tale of Æsop, or of Sybaris,' says the old gentleman in Aristophanes' 'Wasps,' 'something you heard at the club' ; and later on in the play, when Bdelycleon is intoxicated, we get two specimens of the style. Like our Limericks, they are in verse, with a catch refrain : '*A woman at Sybaris once,*' and '*Æsop one day,*' and although

they are not particularly humorous, it must be remembered that they are the witticisms of a drunken man. The first runs thus :

Æsop one night was going back from dinner, when a bitch began to bark at him, a bold, drunken creature. Thereupon said he : ' Dear, dear ! my good bitch, if you were to sell that foul tongue of yours and buy some flour, you would be more sensible.'

The other is this :

A woman of Sybaris once broke a jug. The jug got a friend to act as witness, and laid a claim for damages. Thereupon the lady said : ' By the virgin, if you would but let the lawyers alone and buy some sticking-plaster you would show more wisdom.'

The fables of Æsop are now a nursery classic, for, like the *Arabian Nights* and *Gulliver's Travels*, they have been turned by the kindly irony of time to a use which their authors hardly contemplated. But in their Milesian shape there was always an underlying vein of satire, even in the animal stories. The male animals, the eagle and the lion, are brave and generous ; the females, the fox and the weasel, are cunning and treacherous.

Moreover, as we see in the Greek version of Babrius and the Latin of Phædrus, separated though they be from the original by a gap of centuries, there was a great deal of matter in the Æsopian stories which was plainly misogynistic,

As examples, we may take from Babrius, Fable 10 :

A man fell in love with an ugly, dirty slave-girl, his own property, and readily gave her all she asked. She had her fill of gold: fine purple robes trailing at her ankles, and soon she began to rival the mistress of the house. 'The goddess of love,' thought she, 'is the cause of all this,' and she honoured her with votive tapers, going every day to sacrifice and prayer with supplications and requests. But at last the goddess came in a dream while they were asleep, and appearing to the slave-girl, she said, 'Do not thank me, or suppose that I have made you beautiful: I am angry with that fellow there, and so he thinks you fair.'

Belief in women's beauty, we see, is mere infatuation, and so is belief in their truth, as No. 16 shows :

A country nurse once threatened a whining child: 'Stop, or I will throw you to the wolf.' The wolf heard the words, and supposing that the old dame was speaking the truth, waited patiently for the meal which he thought would soon be ready. It was not till evening that the child fell asleep, and the wolf, who had been waiting on slow hope, went off home very hungry, his mouth really agape. 'How is it you have come home empty-handed?' said his wife, who had been keeping house. 'It's very unusual.' But the wolf replied: 'What would you have? I have trusted a woman.'

No. 32 is a curious reminiscence of Simonides :

Once upon a time a cat fell in love with a comely man, and glorious Cypris, the mother of Desire, allowed her to change her shape and take a woman's body, one so fair that all men desired her. The young man

saw her, fell captive in his turn and arranged to wed. The marriage feast was just prepared when a mouse ran by, and the bride, jumping down from the high couch, rushed after it. So the banquet came to an end, and Love, who had had a merry jest, departed too—for even he could not fight against nature.

No. 22 is more outspoken :

Once upon a time a middle-aged man—not young, but not yet old, his hair a mixture of black and white—feeling that he still had leisure for love and merriment, took two mistresses, one young, one old. Now the young woman wanted to see in her lover a young man, the old dame desired some one as old as herself. So, every time, the girl plucked out any hairs that she could find turning white, while the old lady did the same to the black hairs, until young and old together at last pulled out all the hair he had and left him bald. *Moral* : Pitiab!e is the man who falls into the hands of women : they bite and bite until they strip him to the bone.

So in the fable of the lion who falls in love with a maiden, the noble animal strips himself of claws and teeth, and everything that makes him formidable, to please the girl, and for his reward is beaten to death.

In all these stories there is a note of satirical depreciation, but the best example of the cynical humour which inspires the whole class is to be found in the tale of the Ephesian Widow. Phædrus gives a brief version ; in Petronius the story is put into the mouth of the satyr-poet Eumolpus, and in a



condensed form it will perhaps bear quotation. 'There was once a matron of Ephesus so notoriously virtuous that all the women of the neighbouring towns used to come and gaze upon her as at a wonderful spectacle.' So it begins, and the first sentence, which might come from Voltaire's *Candide*, gives the spirit in which it is written. The lady's husband died, and not satisfied with the ordinary signs of grief, the bereaved wife insisted on following the corpse to the underground chamber where it was laid. There the lady 'with singular and exemplary constancy,' remained with it for five days, deaf to the entreaties of relatives and magistrates, refusing all food, and attended only by one servant-girl whose business it was to share her mistress' grief and renew the taper which alone lit up the sepulchral chamber.

'The whole country was full of the story,' so the tale runs, 'and men of every class agreed that this was a real and brilliant example of virtue and affection in a woman—the only one they had ever known.'

In the meantime, however, some robbers had been crucified near the place, and a soldier on guard over the crosses noticed the light of the taper gleaming in the darkness. Yielding to the weakness of human nature, he made his way down to the vault, and was surprised to find a pretty woman, where

he had expected to see a ghost. But he soon realised the situation—that the lady could not get over the loss of her man—and so he brought his traps down to the cellar and began to address some words of comfort to her. ‘Do not persist in useless grief,’ said he, ‘do not rend your breast with unavailing sobs; all of us will come to this; we all have but one final resting-place.’ His attempt at consolation—which, though well-meant, is certainly somewhat commonplace—only irritated the lady, and he turned his attention to the servant (for in this sort of stories there is always a soubrette) and induced her to partake of his rations.

The girl was then able to persuade her mistress to follow her example, and soon all three were eating and drinking together.

‘You know,’ so says Eumolpus, ‘the result of a good meal: the soldier was soon as successful in overcoming the matron’s resolute virtue as he had been in overcoming her resolute desire for death.’

The doors of the vault were closed, so that it might appear that the good lady had breathed her last over her husband’s body; the soldier brought down all sorts of comestibles, and two or three days and nights were spent in dalliance.

Meanwhile the crucified robbers were quite forgotten, and on the third morning the soldier found that one of the crosses was empty, for the body had

been removed for burial by the relatives in the night. He explained his plight to the lady, and announced his intention of committing suicide, the proper penalty, as he said, for his neglect of duty.

But the matron was as compassionate as she was virtuous, and 'Heaven forbend!' she cried. 'I cannot bear to see two such dear men both depart from life. I would rather pay over the dead than lose the living.' So she told the soldier to take the husband's body out of its receptacle and fix it on the vacant cross. 'The soldier gladly followed the clever lady's ingenious idea, and the next day people were wondering how it was that a dead man had found his way to the cross.'

The Ephesian Widow represents the Milesian Tales at their best; at their worst they are only to be read by those who can touch pitch and not be defiled. In themselves they are beneath contempt, but they have a very considerable importance in the history of the world, and especially in the history of the relations of the sexes. The perverse ideas that underlie them were transplanted from Ionia to Athens, and, recommended by the literary genius of Athenian writers, they have had an influence on later thought which the Ionian pornographers would never have secured.

## V.—ATHENS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY

WE have traced the main tendencies of Ionian thought, and have seen how the degradation of women involved a corresponding degradation of literature. Its very offensiveness protects a great deal of Ionian work from notice, but it has been necessary to quote some of the less noisome specimens, for it must be remembered that this immorality of literature was both the cause and the result of the low opinion in which women were held. The motives which inspired the whole school of writers were utterly contemptible, the means they employed were not much better; but they were successful in their purpose. When Athens took over the leadership of Greece, she took over from Ionia the idea of women as inferior creatures, and during all the great period of Athenian history women were a subject class. It became no longer necessary to slander them; they were simply neglected.

A woman's life at Athens in the fifth century B.C. was a dreary business. She was confined closely to the house, a harem prisoner, but without any of that luxurious ease which the harem system has

sometimes offered as a solace for the loss of freedom. An Athenian house was small, dark, and uncomfortable, and a woman's day was occupied with a long round of monotonous work. Occasionally she was allowed out of prison to walk in some sacred procession, as we see the quiet line of girls marshalled on the Parthenon frieze, but all the amusements of the town were closed against her. From the school and the gymnasium, from the Odeon and the Academy, from public meetings and from private banquets, women were jealously debarred. It is doubtful whether they were permitted even to enter the theatre of Dionysus ; and their shopping quarter, where they bought their rouge and white lead, was in the most remote and inaccessible part of the city.

The whole structure of social life was arranged to suit men and to exclude women. It is true that the patron divinity of the state was a woman, Athena, but the goddess was divested of feminine attributes. She became the ideal Athens, a conception as far remote from an anthropomorphic divinity as any race has ever possessed.

The stages by which women were reduced to this condition of inferiority are, in the general obscurity of early Athenian history, quite unknown ; but there can be little doubt that the whole position was due to Ionian influence. The legal status of women, especially in relation to property, seems to have been

changed by definite enactment about the end of the sixth century B.C., and in the *Suppliant Maidens* of Æschylus there are traces of the conflict of principles on which the change was based. Henceforward, in the eyes of the Athenian law, a woman was merely an appanage of any property which she chanced to inherit, and her nearest male relative had to take charge of her person—a *damnosa hereditas* for which the material advantages of her estate served as compensation.

Moreover, women in Athens were married far too young, for the average age was about fifteen, and the result of these early marriages was that by the time a woman had arrived at years of discretion and might have been an intellectual companion for her husband, her beauty too often was gone and she herself was worn out, a premature old woman. For girls no education was considered necessary, and throughout their childhood they were kept in constant seclusion. They were regarded only as potential bearers of children, and the most extreme precautions known to modern eugenics were apparently practised before marriage. But even as mothers they were not very efficient, for their physique suffered from the narrowness of their lives, and the wet-nurse—*Titthe*—was to be found in most families. Just as the Breton and Norman girls migrate to Paris, so those Athenian households that could afford the expense would hire

the robust women of Sparta to take the mother's place. Alcibiades, for example, was suckled by a Lacedæmonian nurse, and was not altogether an alien when, exiled from Athens, he took refuge in the Peloponnese. It was not in Athens, but at Sparta, or in the islands where girls wrestled and raced with young men, that Paionios found the model for his 'Victory,' with her flying feet, deep bosom, and firm, rounded limbs; and in Aristophanes, when Lysistrata assembles the women of Greece, the Athenians can scarcely refrain their half-envious admiration of the buxom vigour of the Spartan Lampeto.

At Athens the restriction of women to one function meant that even that one function was badly performed, and all through the great period the Athenian race was slowly declining in numbers.

In one respect alone was there little difference between the sexes at Athens—that of dress. There was no distinction of sex, as there was no distinction of rank. In an Attic tragedy a chorus of generals, of fishermen, and of flower-girls would all appear in much the same garb. In Asia both sexes wore trousers (*θύλακοι*, 'bags'), which the Greeks regarded with amused contempt. In Athens neither sex did. There were some slight varieties in shape, material, and colour, but, speaking generally, it is correct to say that an Athenian lady—or an Athenian gentleman

was dressed informally when she or he had one blanket draped about their person. Full dress consisted of another blanket over the first, and the art of dress consisted in suitable pinning and the proper arrangement of the folds.

But when a woman left her husband's house and went abroad, she had to don the symbol of her slavery, the 'kredemnon.' This article was a kind of yashmak-veil, drawn across the face to protect a woman from the gaze of strange men, not her lawful owners. It gave its wearer the white cheeks of the odalisque, and shut her off from the freedom of the outside world. It was, like our cap and apron, the badge of servitude, and to escape from it the only way was to become a slave indeed, for the slave-woman alone could walk abroad with open face.

This is what Euripides means when he makes the captive Andromache sob: 'And I, even I, was dragged from my royal bower down to the sea-beach with nothing about my head save hideous slavery.' (*And.* 109.)

And so Hecuba, in the *Trojan Women*, a slave bare-footed and bare-headed, crouches on the ground to escape from the gaze of men, and cries: 'Guide me to my bed of straw and to the stones which now will hide my face.' (*Trojan Women*, 508.) Slavery in ancient times was a hard fate, but for many an



Athenian woman it could have had but little terror. A wife was already the property of her husband, and slaves and women are commonly classed together.

The Athenian, however, with all his faults was a genuine lover of freedom, and did not care for slaves. Neither his wife nor the flute-girls, whose charms could be bought by any bidder, could really satisfy him, strange mixture that he was of sensuality and intellect. The only women whose company he desired were those called, half in jest, half in earnest, the Hetairai, 'the close companions,' the same word being used for those political associations which formed the closest link between man and man.

The Hetairai were foreign women, and stood outside the law : they were not Athenian citizens, and so had no privileges ; but, on the other hand, they were not under restraint. Often highly educated, it was their business to take part in all men's interests : they were their own mistresses, engaged freely in the political life of Athens, and in many cases exercised very great influence even in affairs of state. To their personal attractions they added social charm and a long training in the arts of pleasure, and the contrast between them and the Athenian wives may be illustrated if we compare the life of an actress of the *Comédie Française* with that of an inmate of a Turkish harem. The French actress and the Jap-