THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS, TRANSLATED LITERALLY AND RHYTHMICALLY

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649465088

The Agamemnon of Æschylus, translated literally and rhythmically by W. Sewell

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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TRANSLATED LITERALLY AND RHYTHMICALLY,

BY

W. SEWELL, B.D.

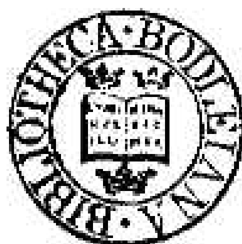
FELLOW AND TUTOR OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

WITH

A PREFACE AND NOTES.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS,
PATERNOSTER-ROW.
1846.

557.



LONDON:
Printed by A. SPOTTISWOODE,
New-Street-Square.

PREFACE.

It is a maxim of sound education, that the young should be brought up from their childhood surrounded by an atmosphere of all that is good, beautiful and true; that they should have constantly before them objects intrinsically excellent, whether or not they are at first agreeable to their imperfect nature. Not that this mere presence of external good is sufficient to make man good; but to a certain degree it moulds and colours the mind: to a still greater degree it excludes the presence of evil. And thus, when evil does come, it will come under a greater contrast, and with more of repulsiveness. To be able to distinguish evil instinctively by its mere discordance with previous associations and prejudices is no slight advantage. And in the mean while there is scope for imbuing the mind with a deeper and more critical knowledge of its real nature and relations, so far as they can ever require to be known.

It is not uncommon at present to cast ridicule on our old system of education, which has taken classical literature as its basis, and especially endeavours to familiarize the mind with the dramatic poetry of the Greeks. And the answer to the cavil is to be found in the trite general *principle* assumed above; the same principle by

which we address creeds of authenticated truth to the intellect of the child before he can understand them; and imbue his conscience with moral maxims before his actions are subordinated to his will; and place before him the highest standards of beauty to mature and perfect his taste, while as yet he is incapable of appreciating them: that having thus pre-occupied his whole nature with certain germs and outlines of truth, and goodness, and beauty, we may afterwards complete at leisure the process by which he learns critically to reason on and distinguish them.

That the application of this principle to classical education is so often overlooked, may arise from several causes; partly, that having lost sight of a deep and comprehensive view of human nature, and of the relations between its several faculties, we do not understand the connexion between art (of which poetry is the great exhibition) and the general development of the human mind, especially in the child. Secondly, that having permitted the functions and philosophy of art to degenerate from the high and noble office assigned to it by Providence, as the handmaid of reason, and the incorporator of truth, we cannot appreciate its purest forms, and therefore estimate wrongly the Greek poetry. But there is still a third cause bearing more immediately on our present subject.

When we would form a child's mind to a sense of true beauty in sculpture, we take him into a gallery full of the noblest productions of antiquity, and there allow his eye to be *insensibly* familiarized with grandeur and purity

of design. But if, while exhibiting to the child these ancient models, we accustomed him only to take casts of them, and in taking those casts to break an arm off here, to leave a muscle out there, to distort one limb, and to misplace another; and if all the time we gravely paraded these monsters before his eye as the great specimens and models of ancient beauty, probably he himself, as he advanced in life, would look back with little reverence to his earliest associations in sculpture; and bystanders might fairly be excused if they hesitated to recognize the wisdom of our process. Nor would the result be different, if, at the same time, we adopted another plan; and if, laying aside the casts, and bringing the child's mind directly into contact with the original forms in all their untravestied majesty, instead of fixing his attention on their high elements of beauty, we engaged him in some chemical or anatomical process; breaking off a chip from the Venus to analyse the marble, or criticising the surgical structure of a muscle in the Laocoon.

Perhaps, if careful search were made into the history of education, we might be able to trace more of design, deep and evil design, than we should at first imagine, in certain steps, which have brought us to an exact parallel to these absurdities, in our application of classical literature to the purposes of education. Our classical education has passed through hands, and the works chiefly used in it for a long time have come to us from parties, who, to a great extent, have been interested in suppressing and stifling genuine taste and real cultiva-

tion of mind; while they were, also, deeply interested in affecting to stimulate the intellect, and so in engrossing the whole work of instruction. And perhaps the character of the notes in the classical editions of the seventeenth century, especially those of France, might, if examined, form no unimportant link even in ecclesiastical history. One effect they undoubtedly have produced. They have deadened our sensibility to the real perfections of classical literature, at the very time that they were employed in exhibiting it to us. And they have accustomed us to the two processes in poetry, which were suggested in sculpture, first, of taking casts from the antiques, that is, of seeing them in translations rather than in the originals, and those translations our own caricatures, and travestied during the process of translation by the hands of stupid or mischievous schoolboys; and, secondly, of submitting these noble remains of ancient art, of the highest and purest art which ever proceeded from man, consecrated as they are by their own good destination, and by the best sympathies of our nature; submitting them, we repeat, as subjects to be operated on by the blundering, unfeeling, untutored hands of the merest tyros in grammar, to be broken up, and examined, or played with as lessons in syntax and prosody, instead of keeping them inviolate from all meaner associations, and preserving them in their wholeness and vitality.

The question here opened is one of no little importance. And on a return to some sounder mode of studying classical literature, appears to depend not only our hope of preserving our *higher systems* of education from the influx of

great corruptions, in the shape of modern languages, modern history, and modern science, so called; but the still better hope of elevating it in its office, and making it what all scholars feel that it may be made, however we may have neglected the right method of accomplishing our object.

One defect in our present system appears to be, that neither teacher nor pupil enters upon his work with a full sense of its object and use. And though young minds must be taught to do, as to believe, much of which they cannot see the reasons, there is a natural scepticism and diffidence in human nature which requires consideration, and can best be supported and stimulated by giving it some insight into the end of the work set before it. Perhaps there would be no great difficulty in explaining, even to a schoolboy, that the great end and perfection of his nature was the attainment of truth; that this truth was not to be held in a mere speculative form, but to be incorporated with his actions, and placed as a rule over his affections; that, as a boy, he is incapable of grasping it in an abstract and metaphysical shape, but must have it placed before him in living and breathing personifications, pictured and coloured to the senses, moving before the eye, speaking to the ear, and clothed in bodily and sensible forms; that he is, moreover, at present, a creature of feeling, and by feeling must be mainly swayed; and, therefore, that his affections are to be roused, and pity and terror, love and admiration, the sense of power and of greatness, and all the finer sympathies of the heart, are to be awakened at proper times by a machinery constructed for