

**THE REMAINS OF  
STESICHORUS, IN AN  
ENGLISH VERSION**

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The remains of Stesichorus, in an English version by Sir Edward Ffrench Bromhead

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BY

SIR EDWARD FFRENCH BROMHEAD, BART.,

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1. *Scriptores Græci Minores.* By DR. GILES. OXON. Talboys. 1831.
2. *Stesichori Himerensis Fragmenta.* By O. F. KLEINE. Berolini Typis et Impensis Ge. Reimari. 1828.

LET our readers imagine the works of Shakspeare to have perished. Let them imagine our whole knowledge of that inimitable genius to be gleaned from the scattered references made to him by other writers. Sometimes we should find stray expressions, idioms, and allusions, current as household words. Sometimes the meaning alone would be referred to, while the words were altered or parodied. Sometimes a few lines might be quoted, or even a passage of some length, as the 'Seven Ages,' for example. By some rare chance, one might even drop upon a scene, or upon the 'Beauties of Shakspeare.' Then the Scholia, or notes of commentators might turn up; dissertations upon the genius of the great author, analyses of some of his more striking characters, or even 'Lamb's Tales.' But after all, what a deplorable deficiency would be presented by the total result! Let us imagine the most elaborate German criticism, or even the desperate researches of the 'Shakspeare Club,' to be enlisted in the cause. Let us fancy them collecting the fragments, arranging them under the dramas from which they were taken, and placing them in the proper order of their succession. One can see them rummaging the most despised authors, old grammarians, scribblers on prosody, and collectors of wretched 'Elegant Extracts,' but all in vain, all lamentably inadequate, the mere shadow of a mighty reality, the 'baseless fabric of a vision.'

If such must have been the result in the case of a modern writer, referred to by thousands of his contemporaries and ours, what can we expect to find of the lost works of writers who belonged to a remote antiquity, though the civilized world once rang to the echo of their names? Thus we have lost Menander, quoted by S. Paul; and with infinite labour some beautiful fragments have been collected, while in Terence 'Dimidiated Menander' are found paraphrases of a few of his dramas; but of Menander himself what adequate conception can be formed?

Little comparatively remains of the calumniated Sappho,—her, whom the ancients called ‘the Poetess,’ without any other appellation, as they called Homer ‘the Poet;’—her, whom the gravest and the sagest moralists denominated ‘the charming and the wise, the tenth muse;’—her, of whom her contemporary Alcæus writes—

‘Sappho the pure, the golden-tress’d,  
In smiles of gentle sweetness dress’d.’

For an edition of her fragments, and those of Alcæus and Stesichorus, fit to meet the eye of a scholar, we are indebted to Dr. Blomfield’s severe and elegant criticism of the true Porson school (in two numbers of the ‘*Museum Criticum*’) written in his younger days, when the calls of high and solemn duty had not yet forbidden him to wander among the meads of classic Asphodel. Why should we enumerate the eight poetesses of Greece, or Bacchylides, or Alcæus, Solon, Mimnermus, Archilochus, Simonides, Alcman? We might add to the list without end; to say nothing of poets of whom some pieces still exist, which make us more bitterly deplore the fragmentary references to the remainder. But when we come to historians, whose works would have thrown light upon the darkest recesses of the past, the loss is more to be lamented than in the department of fine taste and elegant literature. How eagerly would a modern turn over the Etruscan history of the emperor Claudius, the diaries of Augustus, or the writers who illustrated the primordial annals of Egypt, and Babylon, and Nineveh, and primitive Greece!

Modern scholars have not been wanting in their efforts to repair our loss, as far as it is within the reach of industry, learning, and acute criticism; and those of Germany, in particular, deserve the highest praise in researches of this nature. We may now fairly look upon the fragmentary writers as a distinct branch of erudition, presenting results of a most unexpected and striking nature, in reference to authors whom time has swept away. This department of learning abounds in difficulties, and justifies a recourse to conjectures wholly inadmissible on the text of a surviving classic. There is every possible danger of corrupt readings. The copyist has no context for his guide, either in the subject matter, the style, or the metre. The writer who quotes the passage, may have quoted from memory, and misquoted the words; or he may have referred them to another author; or he may have modified them, especially at the commencement, for the purposes of quotation; or he may have quoted the passage solely on account of its anomalous and obscure turn of expression. In the case of Stesichorus, Kleine deserves the highest praise. Indeed, it would be very difficult to point out any fragmentary writer

edited with more learning, judgment, and good taste. More, however, remains to be done. A future editor will find that subsequent improvements of the text have been made; as, for example, by Sir E. F. Bromhead, in the 'Classical Journal,' No. 46, and some more hinted at in the version of the fragments which we subjoin; nor would the discovery of additional fragments be too much to expect.

It were much to be wished that a systematic English version of the fragmentary writers could be published. At an early period the renowned Grotius did not think it beneath him to turn many such fragments into very polished Latin. England can boast of some valuable anthological collections; and of the poet Simonides, we have in one of our Quarterly Journals a complete version, abounding in tasteful scholarship. Stesichorus we are ourselves about to present to our readers in an English dress; but we will first give some account of a writer, once so much, and in all appearance so deservedly renowned.

According to Suidas, Eusebius, and others, Stesichorus, surnamed the Himerean, was born in the 37th Olympiad, attained to eminence in the 48th, and died in the 55th, or 56th, about 556 years before the Christian era. He was the contemporary of Phalaris, somewhat the junior of Alcman, and the predecessor of Simonides, who speaks of him as an old writer in connexion with Homer. The Marmor Parium, indeed, makes Stesichorus coeval with Simonides, in direct contradiction to this testimony, but more than one or two members of the poet's family bore the same name with himself, to one or other of whom the author of the inscription most probably refers. It was by no means uncommon to bestow on some of his descendants the name of an illustrious ancestor, either to commemorate the honours of the dead, or stimulate the ambition of the living.

That Himera was the native country of Stesichorus, was so firmly established by ancient opinion, that the Himerean poet was his most common designation. All, however, do not agree upon the point. Italy has been assigned by some as his birth-place. Suidas mentions Matauria; Lascaris, Metaurus; Stephanus Byzantius speaks of Metaurus in *Sicily*, but the geographer seems to be mistaken as to the situation of the city. We may safely believe that both Stesichorus and Himera equally owed their origin to Italy. It is certain that no long time before the poet's birth, the city was founded by some Chalcideans from Zancle, who, together with the Metaurian branch of the Locrians, sprang, in the first instance, from *Ceolia*; and that Stesichorus had lived among the Locrians, may be collected from other quarters. In addition to this, the name of Tisias,



which, according to Suidas, was the poet's original appellation, and that of his brother the geometrician, whether we read it Mamertius or Mamertinus, recall to our recollection two cities of a similar name among the Brutii. It may, indeed, be doubted whether it was himself or his father who migrated to Himera; but that the migration took place, and that it was from Italy, not from the Peloponnesus, there can be no dispute.

Five different names have been assigned to the father of Stesichorus,—Euphorbus, Euphemus, Euclides, Hyetes, and Hesiod. It is singular that both Aristotle and the learned Philochorus have identified the Hesiod here mentioned with the celebrated Ascrean. But if we regard the supposed connexion between these two eminent men as a myth, it is neither inapt nor unlearned. After Orpheus had been torn to pieces, his head and his lyre were thrown together into the sea. Borne along by the waves, or carried on a dolphin's back, they reached the Æolian Lesbos, where they were interred; and the Lesbians, as Hyginus adds, became afterwards well-skilled in music. Now from that same region, if we may trust to Tzetzes, from the same race certainly, sprang Hesiod. When, therefore, we are told by Hellanicus that Hesiod derived his origin from Orpheus, what more is meant than this, that he transfused into his own didactic poetry the Orphic hymns which had ceased to be sung in Greece. After the mournful catastrophe, which transferred the head and lyre of Orpheus to the shores of Lesbos, Hesiod also, who was nearly, if not quite, of Lesbian extraction, met with a similar fate. He, too, was carried by dolphins to that part of the continent which is situated between Locris and Eubœa, as Proclus somewhat strangely relates; or, according to Plutarch, that which is opposite to Rhyum or Molycria, where the sacred rites of the Locri were wont to be celebrated. Taking for granted, therefore, that Stesichorus was of Locrian extraction, all that is meant by his alleged relationship with the elder poet may be, that the epos of Hesiod was transferred to him by their mutual connexion with the same tribe or family. We know as well by the testimony of Quintilian, as by his own fragments, that he sustained by his lyre the weight of epic song, and may, therefore, be numbered both with the epic and lyric poets. Certain kinds of poetry, moreover, were cultivated by certain races, and followed their migrations. Thus Stesichorus imitated the Ascrean in the choice of his fables, and in great part of his mythology, though he did not adhere to the form of epic verse. Not unjustly, therefore, have Mueller and others brought down the series of Hesiodic poets to his time; for, although we *call* him not the son of the poet of Ascrea, yet, as his principal imitator among the Italians

of Æolia, and the most celebrated poet of that region, he justly deserves the title. We may suppose him, then, to have had no natural connexion with the Ascrean, but to have been the son of Clymene, by an obscure individual of the same name. The hidden sense of the myth might easily escape the understanding of the many, and thus lead them into the error. Of the other names given to the father of Stesichorus, we need only add, that where several individuals of the same race and name devote themselves in succession to the same intellectual pursuits, as was probably the case here, and where it must consequently be difficult to distinguish between them, we need not wonder if all should be confounded with the name of their celebrated progenitor.

Suidas speaks with approbation of Mamertinus the geometrician, and Halianax the legislator, the two brothers of Stesichorus. The accounts handed down to us respecting his daughters, spring entirely from the spurious epistles ascribed to Phalaris and Diodorus, and are utterly unworthy of credence or attention. The friendship of Stesichorus with the tyrant of Agrigentum rests upon the same unreal foundation. That he was the contemporary of Phalaris has been already stated; but no one can suppose him to have been his friend, who has weighed the forcible arguments of Bentley against the dreams of the sophist. 'When Pindar,' says the learned commentator, 'was exhorting Hiero, the tyrant of Syracuse, to treat poets and literary men with affability, he represented to him the immortal reputation which Cræsus acquired by behaving to them with kindness and humanity, while the cruel and inhospitable Phalaris was universally hated. Would Pindar have written thus if he had ever heard of the tyrant's singular love for the poet? For if we might trust the epistles, their intimacy and friendship rivalled that of Cræsus with Æsop and Solon. Had such a feeling been known to Pindar, he would not have branded the character of Phalaris with such a mark of infamy.' So far was Stesichorus from being the tyrant's friend, that, according to the testimony of Aristotle, he excited the inhabitants of Himera against him by narrating the fable of the Horse and Stag.

Whether Stesichorus ever visited Greece or not, it would be difficult to decide. The only external testimony in favour of the affirmative is the mention made by Suidas of the poet's flight from Palantium, in Arcadia; but this is more than doubtful. Still, when we look at his various writings, and the improvements of which he was the inventor, it is difficult to believe that he had not drunk at the fountain head of Grecian song. It is more clearly ascertained that he migrated from *Metaxia* into

Sicily, not, indeed, immediately to Catana, but in the first instance to Himera. He seems to have taken refuge at the former place towards the close of his life, perhaps disturbed by the civil dissensions excited among the Himeraeans by the intrigues of Phalaris. The change of his name from Tisias to Stesichorus may not improbably be dated from this period. He died in his 85th year, and was buried at Catana, with much expense, at the gate called from him the Stesichorean. His tomb was octangular; it was ascended by eight steps, and adorned with eight columns. According to some, the proverbial expression πάντα ὀκτώ, denoting perfection, derived its origin from the number eight, so conspicuous in every part of the poet's monument; while the throw of eight upon the dice was called for the same reason the Stesichorus. Two epitaphs in honour of the poet are still extant; one in Greek, by Antipater; another of a later age, in Latin, in the 'Musæ Lapidariæ' of Ferretius. Of these, for the benefit of the English reader, we give the following versions:—

'In Catana's Ætnean plains  
Rest here Stesichorus' remains,  
His to whose living lips belong  
Immeasurable streams of song:  
The sage Pythagoras said well,  
That souls in divers bodies dwell;  
Thy soul, Stesichorus, the same,  
That animated once old Homer's frame.'

'The bones of sweet Stesichorus repose!  
His bones, the bones of Ætna here enclose,  
By me, by Ops enshrined! Of him the rest,  
That now remains, is by the world possess'd.'

Cicero speaks of the honours heaped upon Stesichorus by the people of Himera. Among the brazen statues which adorned the Thermæ, was one of the aged poet, in a stooping posture, with a book in his hand, executed with rare skill and beauty. Christodorus describes another placed in the Byzantian Gymnasium. Finally, a coin is in existence, supposed by some to have been struck in commemoration of him. On one side is a head enclosed in a helmet; on the reverse, a man in a standing posture, holding in one hand a crown, in the other a lyre. There is no absurdity in supposing that an honour which had been paid to Sappho, Alcæus, and Anacreon, should have been paid to Stesichorus also; but the fact does not rest upon sufficient authority.

The testimony borne to the poet's merit by the most celebrated writers of antiquity, is of the highest order. The 'Stesichorique graves Camæne' of Horace, is known to all. Aristides, Cicero, Dionysius, Longinus, vie with each other in