

**THE BIRDS OF
ARISTOPHANES: WITH
NOTES, AND A METRICAL
TABLE, PP. 6-236**

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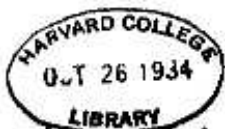
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GREEK LITERATURE.

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P R E F A C E .

THE *Birds* of Aristophanes has always been regarded as one of his most delightful pieces. Like the *Clouds*, it is comparatively free from the objectionable license of thought and language, which deforms several of his plays to such a degree that they cannot be used in schools or colleges. It is true there are some passages in this play also too freely executed: but it has been decided, on mature reflection, to let them stand, so as to offer the drama entire, on the principles which guided my decision in editing the *Clouds*.

The text of this edition is reprinted from the *Poetae Scenici* of Dindorf. In the preparation of the notes, I have used Commentaries of Christian Daniel Beck, together with the notes and Scholia edited by Invernizius; the notes of Bothe, to whose valuable edition I am under great obligations; and the brief, but excellent, annotations of Blaydes. Credit is always given for what has been taken from the labors of these distinguished scholars.

In addition to the critical apparatus just mentioned, I have endeavored to explain from other sources a branch of the subject to which less attention has heretofore been given; — I mean the natural history of the birds, which are very entertaining figures among the persons of the play. I have carefully examined Aristotle's *History of Animals*,

from which I have drawn illustrative descriptions. But it is well known that a considerable portion of the birds of Aristophanes are not mentioned in Aristotle's work, and some of them are thought to be unknown. Several branches of the natural history of Greece has been almost entirely neglected since the researches of the philosopher of Stagira ; and here is an opportunity for a naturalist, who is at the same time a good classical scholar, to make valuable contributions both to science and philology. Sibthorp's magnificent work, the "Flora Hellenica," is ample on the Botany of Greece ; but comparatively little has been done in the departments of ornithology and ichthyology.

I suspected that the poet's selection of birds was not made at random, but that, in every instance, they were chosen with a special meaning, and to effect a particular purpose, in point of art. In considering the play from this point of view, I have been much indebted to my friend and colleague, Professor Agassiz, of whose profound and comprehensive knowledge of ornithology I have been permitted to avail myself in attempting to determine the species of some of the birds not hitherto identified ; and I have come to the conclusion, that, in all cases, the character and habits of the birds are exactly and curiously adapted to the parts they perform in the comedy, showing Aristophanes to have been a careful observer of nature, as well as a consummate poet. I have also used with profit a little work, entitled "Beitraege zur Ornithologie Griechenlands, von Heinrich Graf von der Mühle," or, *Contributions to the Ornithology of Greece, by Henry Count von der Mühle* ; a work of interest and importance, though written without any reference to the classical bearings of the subject.

Great care has been taken to illustrate the political allusions, and the application of judicial expressions, in the course of the piece. For this purpose the excellent writings of Hermann, Smith, and Boeckh have been freely cited. St.

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John's admirable work on the Manners and Customs of the Hellenes has also been consulted.

It is probably impossible, at present, to feel the full force of the wit and gayety of Aristophanes, much of which turned upon temporary and local relations. Still, a careful study of contemporary history, political and judicial institutions, popular prejudices and delusions, and the influence of oracles and other means of working upon ignorant or even cultivated credulity, will make all the material points of the comedy of Aristophanes sufficiently clear.

The satire of the Birds is more playful, comprehensive, and genial than that of any other of the poet's comedies. The spirit of parody and burlesque, which is a general trait of the Aristophanic drama, here displays itself most freely and amusingly. Even the solemn genius of Pindar does not escape entirely the poet's whimsical perversions. The dithyrambic poets in general are unsparingly ridiculed; the philosophers and men of science are not allowed to pass untouched; while profligates and impostors of every class and description are here, as well as in the Clouds, held up to scorn and contempt.

Much discussion has been held upon the question as to the specific object the poet aimed at in his plan. Some have endeavored to show that the main drift of the piece is to expose the folly of the Athenians in their dreams of universal empire, at the time of the Sicilian Expedition; and these critics have fancied they could identify, not only the political parties in the Peloponnesian War, but individual characters in the history of the times. This is pressing matters of fact too far in judging of a poetical work. No doubt Aristophanes sought to lay the foundation of all his pieces in the actual life, public and private, of his age. But his genius could not so completely bind itself to the prosaic realities around him. His Pegasus trod the firm earth, but never bowed his neck to the yoke. Some of the leading ideas were unques-

tionably suggested by the popular madness which the versatile and profligate genius of Alcibiades had done so much to kindle among the Athenians of his time ; but the groundwork only of the play was laid in political passions and historical events. That established, the poet gave free scope to his brilliant fancy, boundless wit, and unsurpassed powers of invention, and produced a poem, not only fitted to amuse and delight his countrymen, but to interest the lovers of literature in future ages, by the richest union of sportive satire and creative imagination that the comic theatre of Athens ever witnessed.

The following Argument is somewhat condensed from the works of the poet Gray. It is prefixed to the spirited translation of the Rev. Henry Francis Cary.

This new edition has been carefully revised, not only by myself, but by my friend Professor Goodwin, who has added valuable notes and illustrations. His excellent work on the Greek Moods and Tenses has been constantly used, as the student will find by numerous references, indicated by the letter G., scattered through the commentary.

C. C. FELTON.

CAMBRIDGE, March 1, 1861.

ARGUMENT.*

"EUELPIDES and PISTHETAERUS, two ancient Athenians, thoroughly weary of the folly, injustice, and litigious temper of their countryman, determine to leave Attica for good and all; and having heard much of the fame of Epops, king of the birds, who was once a man under the name of Tereus, and had married an Athenian lady, they pack up a few necessary utensils, and set out for the court of that prince, under the conduct of a jay and a raven, birds of great distinction in augury, without whose direction the Greeks never undertook anything of consequence. Their errand is to inquire of the birds, who are the greatest travellers of any nation, where they may meet with a quiet, easy settlement, far from all prosecutions, lawsuits, and sycophant informers, to pass the remainder of their lives in peace and liberty.

"The scene is a wild, unfrequented country, which terminates in mountains; there the old men are seen, (accompanied by two slaves, who carry their little baggage,) fatigued and fretting at the carelessness of their guides, who, though they cost them a matter of a great in the market, are good for nothing but to bite them by the fingers and lead them out of the way. They travel

* Works of Gray, edited by Mathias, Vol. II. pp. 151 - 160.