

THE BACCHANALS: AND OTHER PLAYS

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The Bacchanals: And Other Plays by Euripides & Henry Hart Milman & Michael Wodhull

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EURIPIDES & HENRY HART MILMAN & MICHAEL WODHULL

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BY

EURIPIDES

THE BACCHANALS TRANSLATED BY
HENRY HART MILMAN

THE OTHER PLAYS TRANSLATED BY
MICHAEL WODHULL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HENRY MORLEY

L.L.D., PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AT
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON



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"Marvels of clear type and general neatness."—Daily Telegraph.

The style and taste of Euripides changes
in his ^{later} age, like that of Wordsworth,
from democratic simplicity to the grand
style

INTRODUCTION.

THE beautiful translation of "The Bacchanals" which opens this volume was made by the late Henry Hart Milman, who was Dean of St. Paul's when he died in 1868. It had its origin in English verse translations made to illustrate a course of Latin Lectures on the History of Greek Poetry, delivered when Milman had made his own reputation as a dramatic poet with "Fazio" in 1815, "The Fall of Jerusalem" in 1820, and "The Martyr of Antioch" in 1821. In that year 1821, Milman—who was then Vicar of St. Mary's, Reading—was elected to the Oxford Professorship of Poetry. He had been known in Oxford as a poet from his student years. In 1812 he had carried off the Newdigate Prize for an English Poem on the Apollo Belvedere, and he had three times obtained the Chancellor's Prize. As Poetry Professor he translated specimens of the Greek Dramatists upon whose art he lectured. These translations he published in 1865, with a development of two of the plays—"The Agamemnon" of Æschylus and "The Bacchanals" of Euripides—into complete versions. The volume in which these plays were published,* with the translated Passages of Greek Poetry which had been set in the lectures given many years before, is a beautiful book, illustrated with woodcuts drawn from antique gems—the sort of book that ranks with the best ornaments of a well-furnished home. I thank most heartily the poet's son, Mr. Arthur Milman, and Mr. John Murray the publisher, for leave to borrow from the volume this translation of "The Bacchanals," for the purpose of giving to English readers a fuller sense of the genius of Euripides than they might get from the faithful last century translators upon whom we have chiefly to depend.

The other plays in this volume are given in the translations of Michael Wodhull, who published in 1809 his version of "The Nineteen Tragedies and Fragments of Euripides." Wodhull had published

* "The Agamemnon of Æschylus and the Bacchanals of Euripides with Passages from the Lyric and Later Poets of Greece." Translated by Henry Hart Milman, D.D., Dean of St. Paul's. John Murray. 1865.

a limited edition of 150 copies of his own Poems in 1772, and published also in 1798 a poem on "The Equality of Mankind;" but he did not win, as Milman has won, enduring recognition as an English poet. He spent, however, many years of patient work, with great enjoyment, upon the endeavour to produce an accurate translation of the whole works of Euripides that now remain. His first design was to translate selected plays, but where choice was difficult and zeal was active there was nothing that could be left out. Wodhull's verse has too many prosaic turns, but it is well that the English reader should see Euripides through the eyes of more than one translator.

Dean Milman translated "The Bacchanals" because he regarded it as, on the whole, entitled to the highest place among the plays of Euripides, though there may be passages of more surpassing beauty in "The Medea" and "The Hippolytus;" in "The Alcestis" and "Iphigenia" of greater tenderness. He observed that even Lord Macaulay, with his contemptuous depreciation of Euripides, acknowledged the transcendent excellence of "The Bacchæ," the only surviving Greek tragedy connected with the worship and mystic history of Dionysus—Bacchus.

In the "Christus Patiens," ascribed to Gregory of Nazianzen, who was made Bishop of Constantinople in the year 380 and died in 389, some lines given by Euripides to Agave in "The Bacchanals" were transferred to the Virgin Mary's lament over her son, and this use of the passage led to its omission from all texts of Euripides that have come down to us. "I have been audacious enough," said Dean Milman, "to endeavour to make restitution to the Heathen; and from the hints furnished by the 'Christus Patiens,' and of course other images more suited to her tragic state as the murderess of her son, to supply the speech of Agave, distinguishing it by a different type."

Michael Wodhull includes in his volumes as a guide among the incidents of many of the Greek Plays a "History of the House of Tantalus." In short, it runs thus, to the siege of Troy.

Tmolus, a Lydian king, married Pluta, and, Jupiter intervening, Pluta was mother of Tantalus. Tantalus lived at Sipylus, with riches that became proverbial. The gods came to dine with him, but, through vanity, he told again their counsels that he heard, for which he was placed after death to thirst in the midst of a lake from which it was impossible to drink, or according to Euripides (in "Orestes") had an enormous stone hanging over his head. That he dished up for the gods the limbs of his son Pelops, Iphigenia in Tauris calls a fable of savages who excuse their own cruelty by finding its like in higher places. Tantalus by his wife Euryanassa had two sons, Pelops and Broteas, and one daughter, Niobe. Niobe married Amphion, who raised the walls of Thebes by music of his lyre. Having seen all her children slain by the shafts of Apollo and Diana, Niobe, all tears, was changed into a rock.

The tomb of her seven daughters is spoken of in the play of "The Phœnician Damsels" as not far from the gates of Thebes. Sipylus, in which Tantalus ruled, was swallowed by an earthquake, and Tantalus, having by a false oath denied a pledge, was killed by Jupiter, who hunted him down the mountain at the foot of which Sipylus stood.

Pelops succeeded his father Tantalus. Defeated in contests with Ilius, founder of the Trojan nation, he sought alliance with Greece by marrying Hippodamia, daughter of CEnomaus, king of Pisa. She was to be given to the man who overcame her father in a chariot race, but he who did not overcome was to be slain. CEnomaus was first always, because his chariot was driven by Myrtilus, the son of Mercury. But Pelops made a base compact with Myrtilus, who joined the wheels of CEnomaus to his chariot with wax, and caused his overthrow when in the race with Pelops. A dispute followed, in which Pelops killed CEnomaus with a spear. He killed also Myrtilus, the son of Mercury, rather than fulfil the compact he had made. This drew down the vengeance of Mercury upon Atreus and Thyestes, the two eldest of the seven sons of Pelops. Pelops himself thrived, made prosperous alliances, and gathered into one the territories of Apia and Pelasgia, so that the whole peninsula of Greece was called after him the Peloponnesus. One of his sons, Pittheus, whom Euripides celebrates for piety, was the father of Æthra who was the mother of Theseus, who was the father of Hippolitus. Pelops had for one daughter Anaxibia, who married Strophius, king of Phocis, and was the mother of Pylades, friend to his kinsman Orestes; for another daughter, Lysidice, who married Electryon, king of Mycene, and was the mother of Alcmena, who married Amphitryon, and became the mother of Hercules. Pelops had also another daughter, Nicippe, who married Sthenelus. He seized the throne of Mycene when Amphitryon had accidentally killed Electryon his father-in-law. Nicippe and Sthenelus had a son Eurystheus, who succeeded his father in Mycene, and whose ill-treatment of Hercules and of the children of Hercules is treated of by Euripides in his play of "The Children of Hercules."

Pelops had also a natural son, Chrysippus, who was treacherously stolen from him by Laius his guest. For this breach of hospitality Laius, as the oracle foretold, died by the hands of his own son CEdipus.

After the death of Pelops his eldest sons Atreus and Thyestes ruled together in Argos; until Mercury caused a ram with a golden fleece to appear among the flocks of Atreus, who took it as a sign that he alone should rule. The citizens of Argos were invited to decide. Before they met, Thyestes, by collusion with Ærope the wife of Atreus, conveyed the Golden Ram into his own stalls and obtained the vote of the people. Atreus in revenge caused the two children of his

false wife and Thyestes to be served up to Thyestes at a feast. At this horror portents appeared in the skies. Atreus drowned Ærope, drove Thyestes out of Argos, and not only ruled in Argos but added Mycene when Eurystheus had been slain by the sons of Hercules. But Ægisthus, a son of Thyestes by his own daughter Pelopia, murdered his uncle Atreus and made his father again king in Argos. Atreus had by his wife Ærope, before she gave herself to Thyestes, two sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus. They were sent for protection against their uncle Thyestes to the court of Polyidas, king of Sicyon, who sent them on to Ceneus, king of Cætolia.

Agamemnon, while thus in difficulties, killed a Tantalus junior, grandson to the founder of the family. He killed this Tantalus that he might take possession of his wife Clytemnestra, daughter to Tyndarus, king of Sparta. Euripides in the "Iphigenia in Aulis" makes Clytemnestra reproach Agamemnon with having also killed the infant child of her first marriage by tearing it out of her arms and dashing it upon the floor. Castor and Pollux, sons of Leda by Jupiter Swan, made war then upon Agamemnon and reduced him to submission. Tyndarus king of Sparta then gave Clytemnestra to Agamemnon for a wife, and also helped him and his brother Menelaus to subdue Thyestes, who took refuge at an altar of Juno, and gave himself up to his nephews on promise that they would spare his life. They deposed him and confined him for the rest of his days in the island of Cithera.

Clytemnestra's sister, the other daughter of Tyndarus, king of Sparta, was Helen, who had the chief princes of Greece for suitors. Tyndarus made them swear to support whatever man she might herself choose for husband, and her choice fell upon Menelaus. But soon after the marriage Paris, one of the sons of Priam, king of Troy, came with a splendid following to Sparta, and while her husband was away on business at Crete, Paris persuaded Helen to elope with him. Menelaus sent to demand her back from Troy. The Trojans kept her, and war followed with the siege of Troy, during which, according to Euripides in his play of "Helen," the real Helen had been conveyed by Mercury through the air and placed in the care of Proteus, king of Egypt, where she remained of stainless character, while Paris at Troy had only a cloud-image of her. Menelaus on his return from the ten years' war, driven upon the coast of Egypt, found his own Helen all that he could wish.

H. M.

EURIPIDES.



THE BACCHANALS.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

DIONYSUS.	ATTENDANT.
CHORUS OF BACCHANALS.	MESSENGER.
TIRESIAS.	SECOND MESSENGER.
CADMUS.	AGAVE.
PENTHEUS.	

DIONYSUS.

UNTO this land of Thebes I come, Jove's son,
Dionysus ; he whom Semele of yore,
'Mid the dread midwifery of lightning fire,
Bore, Cadmus' daughter. In a mortal form,
The God put off, by Dirce's stream I stand,
And cool Ismenos' waters ; and survey
My mother's grave, the thunder-slain, the ruins
Still smouldering of that old ancestral palace,
The flame still living of the lightning fire,
Here's immortal vengeance 'gainst my mother.

And well hath reverent Cadmus set his ban
On that heaven-stricken, unapproached place.
His daughter's tomb, which I have mantled o'er
With the pale verdure of the trailing vine.

And I have left the golden Lydian shores,
The Phrygian and the Persian sun-seared plains,
And Bactria's walls ; the Medes' wild wintry land.