

**THE AGONISTS; A  
TRILOGY OF  
GOD AND MAN**

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The agonists; a trilogy of God and man by Maurice Hewlett

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**MAURICE HEWLETT**

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**THE AGONISTS**



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TORONTO

# THE AGONISTS

## A TRILOGY OF GOD AND MAN

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

MINOS KING OF CRETE  
ARIADNE IN NAXOS  
THE DEATH OF HIPPOLYTUS

O hapless race of men, who when they charged  
Such work, such wrath upon immortal gods,  
Begot what groanings for themselves, for us  
What wounds, and for our children's sons what tears!

LUCRATIUS, *De Rer. Nat.* v. 1183.

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## INTRODUCTION

HERE are three barbarous old tales treated dramatically, the first and most barbarous never so treated before, I should suppose ; the second a favourite with the Italians of the Cinquecento, and the third the theme of tragic poets from Euripides onwards. Here, for the first time, they are related as they should be, so that, under one cover, the reader has, for what it may be worth, the fate of Minos and his family express before him. Primitive the tales certainly are ; but they are in the great manner. It will be my fault, not theirs, if in the presentation of them here they suffer any eclipse.

A good story well told will carry almost anything the author is capable of packing into it ; and in these three, I must explain, I have wished to present more than legend

alone. I have thought to find in them taken *seriatim*, and then together, a philosophical underflow which, if I have been rightly inspired, ought to be discernible in my music. There is an effort to express dramatically in *Minos King of Crete*, *Ariadne in Naxos*, and *The Death of Hippolytus*, respectively and collectively, the fallacies which underlay the ancient conceptions of Godkind and Mankind and accounted for the ancient views of their relationships. You take, as a starting point, the three essential qualities of God to be Power, Love, and Knowledge, and admit the essential qualities of Man to be the more excellent as they more nearly approach those of God ; and you have in each of these plays an example of the failure of a typical personage, God or man, for lack of one or other quality. Minos was the son of Zeus, and failed because, although he had Knowledge from his Father, he had not Power. In *Ariadne in Naxos* the God Dionysus is the protagonist, and his tragedy (and the woman's) lay in this, that he had Power over men, but could not win their Love. Lastly, in *The Death of Hippolytus*, we have a case of Love without

Knowledge—that is, self-knowledge. Collectively, the trilogy presents a tragic story of the failure of God to implant himself in man, and of man to receive into his nature the divine substance ; and the inference, or one of them, is, or may be, that the divine qualities can only mate with human faculty in the ideal presented to mankind in the Incarnate God of the Christians. To my mind that is clear. I hope some day to complete my trilogy with an Epilogue concerning the Passion of Christ. So much, then, for the under-current of this work, never obtrusive I hope ; for I realise exactly that a play cannot succeed upon philosophical excellence. If the story is dramatic and the numbers give it due lyrical expression, the philosophy may be interesting in itself and may enhance the interest in the plot ; but otherwise it can avail the poet nothing.

I should like to add a word as to the versification, to which I have, in every line, in every phrase, endeavoured to give an immediate, personal and musical impress. I mean by that that the prosody has varied throughout with the mood of the personages, and as the dramatic situation called forth