

**THE MEDEA OF EURIPIDES,
WITH BRIEF NOTES FOR
THE USE OF SCHOOLS**

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The Medea of Euripides, with Brief Notes for the Use of Schools by Euripides & F. A. Paley

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EURIPIDES & F. A. PALEY

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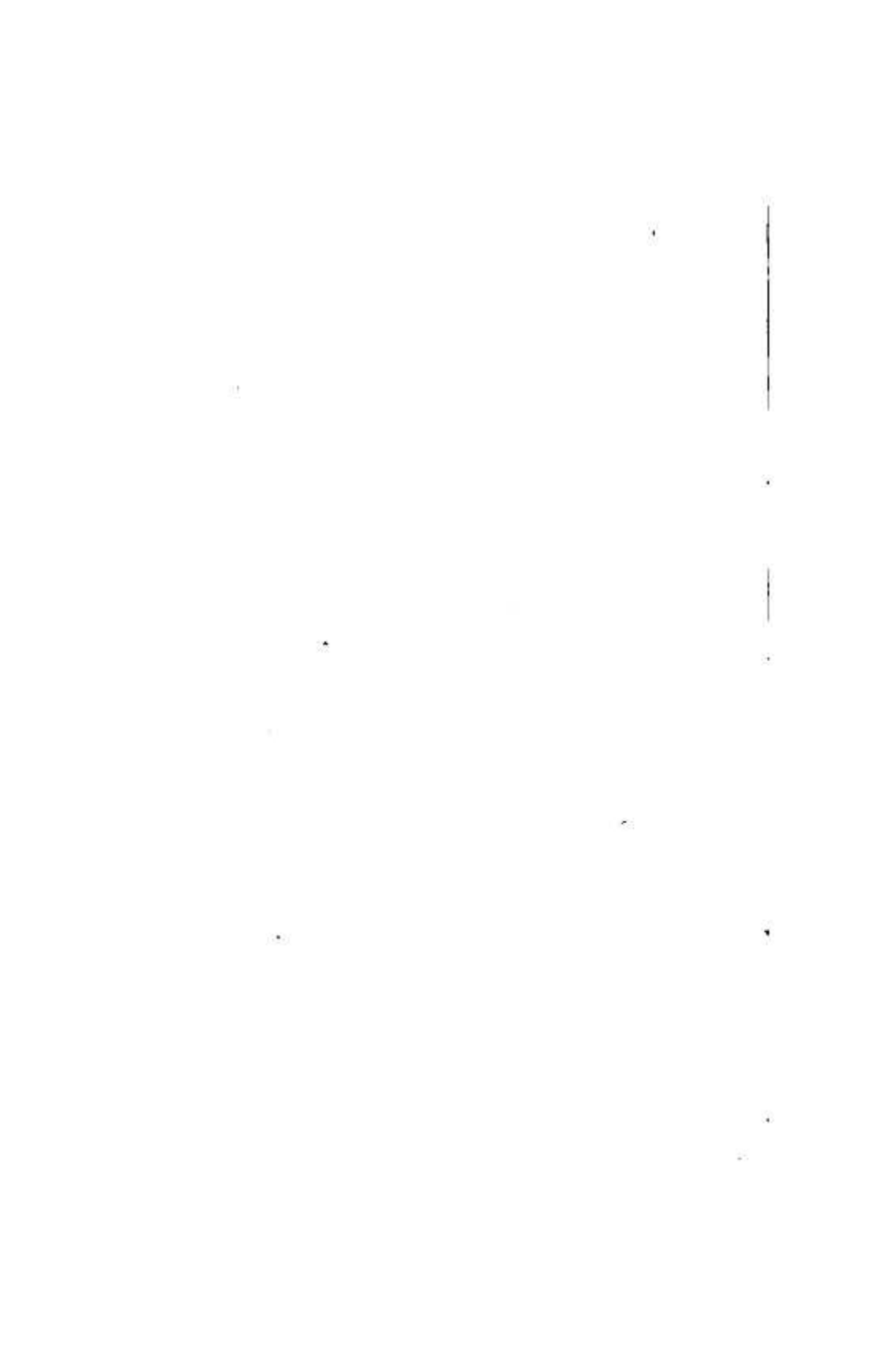
With Brief Notes for the Use of Schools.

BY
F. A. PALEY, M.A.
CLASSICAL EXAMINER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.



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INTRODUCTION.

THE *Medea* was brought out in the year B.C. 431, immediately after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. It was the first of a *tetralogy* which included the 'Philoctetes,' the 'Dietya,' and the Satyric drama of the 'Theristae,' or 'Reapers.' The *Philoctetes* is mentioned in the *Acharnians* of Aristophanes, v. 424, a play which was acted six years after the *Medea*¹. Euripides was forty-nine years of age when he gained the third prize with this play, Euphorio, the son of Aeschylus, carrying off the first, and Sophocles the second. The author of the *Greek Argument* quotes the authority of Dicaearchus and Aristotle² for the statement that Euripides adapted (*δανείσθαι*) his *Medea* from Neophron³.

The legend was evidently very famous in antiquity, and there were many versions of it. The beautiful poem of Apollonius of Rhodes, the *Argonautica*, describes Medea's love for Jason and the aid rendered by her in his dangerous adventure; but it makes no allusion to the second marriage with the Corinthian bride Glauco. The story of the golden fleece, of which this is an episode—a tale, perhaps, of some early adventurers who went eastward in the vain attempt

¹ The mention in that play of Aspasia's influence over Pericles in virtually provoking the war (527) adds probability to the view, that Aspasia is pointedly alluded to in 842 and 1085 of this play. See Schol. on Ar. *Ach.* 527, *ἡ δὲ Ἀσπασία Περικλέους τοῦ σοφίστριας καὶ διδάσκαλος λόγων ῥητορικῶν*. *Ἐστραπὸν δὲ καὶ γαμετὴν γέγονε*. An opinion has recently been expressed that the famous *Μεγαρικὸς ψέφισμα*, which was carried by Pericles on that occasion, is hinted at in Medea's expulsion from Corinth; but this inference seems rather far-fetched.

² Perhaps a mistake for Aristophanes, viz. the grammarian.

³ Neophron of Sicyon is generally (but see K. O. Müller, *Hist. Gr. Lit.* p. 381) believed to have been junior to Euripides. The text may perhaps be corrupt, and rightly read may have meant that Neophron took it from Euripides.

of finding the home of the Sun-god,—was evidently a solar legend. For the fiery robe given by Medea, herself the grand-daughter of the Sun (1821), differs in no respect from that sent by Deianira to Hercules in the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles; and Hercules, we know, personified the Sun-god¹. The aegis of Athena, the goddess of the Dawn, and the web of Penelope, are all representatives of the sun-lit mists which appear to us as fringed clouds². Medea herself typifies, in her human aspect, the sorceress or wise woman; but the notion of supernatural birth was commonly associated with witchcraft, as in the Calypso and the Circe of the *Odyssey*³. In all ages and all religions the wizard or the sacred influence of woman over man's destiny has found a prominent place.

In her semi-divine character, in which Medea appears as the companion and advisor of the Argonauts in the fourth Pythian ode of Pindar, she seems to represent an eastern cult of Hera, or perhaps (if that be really different) of the Moon, just as Helen was an impersonation of Aphrodite. The word probably contains the root of *μήδεσθαι*, and implies the care bestowed on the objects of regard⁴. As the wife of Jason, she is the heroine of one of the most romantic stories of antiquity. Her attachment to Jason⁵,

¹ His being burnt alive on a pyre on Mount Oeta (*Trach.* 1191 seqq.) is obviously the sun setting behind a hill.

² That the idea is a natural one is further shown by the expression in Psalm civ. 3, *ἀναβλέποντες φάος ἀπ' ἰσθμίων*.

³ Diodor. Sic. iv. 45, says that Circe and Medea were both daughters of Aetes, by Hecate the daughter of Persea. Strabo (i. 46) contends that Homer represented Circe as a sorceress who was the own-sister of the cruel Aetes (*Od.* x. 137), from this well-known story of Medea.

⁴ Her habit, according to the legend in Diod. Sic. iv. 45, was to save the lives of strangers, who might fall into his hands, from the ferocity of her father Aetes;—*διατρέφει τοὺς καταπλέοντας τῶν ξένων ἐξαιρουμένην ἢ τῶν κυβήτων*. Some accounts associated Medea with the name of Medea, or her son by Aegeus, Medus (Diodor. iv. 56; Strabo, xi. 16, c. 526, and id. 14, c. 541; Pausan. ii. 3, 8). Schol. on *Med.* 16, *ὅτι δὲ καὶ ἀδελφεὶς ἦν τῇ Μήδᾳ, Μενναῖος δὲ τῇ περὶ Ἰσθμίων ἱερῶν*.

⁵ Pindar, *Pyth.* iv. 79, represents him as a strikingly handsome man, *ὄντις ἄκρως*.

her flight with him to Corinth, her love turning into a hate not less passionate, and her terrible vengeance on her faithless husband and his intended bride, the daughter of Creon king of Corinth, are splendidly depicted. As in the *Hippolytus*, the poet shows himself well acquainted with the workings of a woman's mind. The ancient critics, according to the Greek argument, blamed Euripides for making Medea shed tears and seem to relent when about to slay her children (800-5); but we may be content to think that the poet understood a mother's feelings better than his critics did. K. O. Müller observes (*Hist. Gr. Lit.* p. 368), "The scene, which paints the struggle in Medea's breast between her plans of revenge and her love for her children, will always be one of the most touching and impressive ever represented on the stage."

The poet represents the children of Medea as two sons (1895); and so we have it in the well-known fresco painting found at Pompeii¹, where the two boys are playing at knuckle-bones (*ἀντρίχια*) in the presence of the *παῖδες*, while Medea with scowling brow is drawing the sword to slay them. Diodorus (iv. 54) enumerates three sons, Theseus, Alcimenes, Tisandrus, of whom one escaped with his life. Pausanias (ii. 3, 6) gives two, Marmarus and Pharsa, but quotes Hellanicus for the statement that Medea's son by Aegæus, or as others said, by Jason, was Polyxenus (ib. § 8). These varieties are unimportant except as showing the wide scope and popularity of the legend.

The poet has made use of an incident, in itself simple, viz. Jason's apology for entering, as a matter of policy rather than of affection, into an alliance with the royal family of Corinth, for exhibiting his skill in sophistical argument. The speeches of Jason and Medea on this topic are as characteristic as those of Phæras and Admetus in the *Alceste*, of Hecuba and Helen in the *Troades*, Electra and her mother in the play of that name, or of Phædra and the Nurse in the *Hippolytus*. The impassioned earnestness of Medea completely demolishes the time-serving

¹ Published in *Raccolta di pitt. dell' Dipinti, &c.* Naples, 824, Plate 6.