

**CLASSICAL  
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PROCEEDINGS;  
1908; VOL. VI**

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# CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION

PROCEEDINGS

1908

(VOLUME VI)

WITH RULES AND  
LIST OF MEMBERS

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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## SIXTH GENERAL MEETING, BIRMINGHAM, 1908.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8TH.

THE first session of the Association was held at the New University Buildings, Bournbrook, at 3 p.m., Mr. S. H. BUTCHER, M.P., in the chair.

The Rev. Professor HENRY BROWNE read a paper on :

### THE TEACHING OF GREEK CHORAL METRE.

In advocating a radical change in our method of dealing with the external form of Greek lyrical poetry I believe that I shall have the sympathy of this audience. Our Association exists before all things for the bringing of life and reality into Classical education, and if you grant there are any weak spots at all in our prevailing system I think you will admit that I am calling your attention to one of them. In our grammar teaching we have learnt, or are learning, to subordinate theory to the practical needs of our students—in the teaching of metre this principle has yet, I think, to be enforced. When treated merely on theoretical lines nothing can be made more repulsive than Greek metre, nothing more utterly barren. It is my aim to show that the subject may be made, I will not say exactly easy, but at least fairly interesting, and most practical. It is practical in education to do anything towards giving the student a real knowledge of and sympathy with his subject, and especially if the subject be literature to give him a real insight into his author's mind and heart.

Now literature can hardly ever be studied, at least seriously, apart from its external form. Hence translations, however good, must be always inadequate. I do not say wholly useless. To-morrow we hope to listen to a translation of Euripides done by a masterly hand, and we shall not be losing our time. Besides, we have recently been informed of a very interesting experiment



now being made in this University—namely, the attempt to communicate some knowledge of the great masterpieces of Greece by means of translations. With that experiment I am heart and soul in sympathy; but I know I can appeal to Professor Sonnenschein and to Dr. Murray for support in saying that the beauty of literature consists very principally in its external form, and that of that form rhythm in poetry and even in prose is, as it were, of the very essence.

The question I am raising, however, has nothing to do with translations, but with Pindar's work in the original, with the work of Aeschylus and Sophocles, of Euripides and Aristophanes. To pretend to teach these authors to our students, and at the same time in the lyrical, that is in the more personal parts, to neglect all question of their metrical form and rhythmic intonation, is something marvellous. I should call it a crime. But on the other hand to pretend to deal with this feature, as it is usually dealt with, on a sort of algebraical basis, is something worse than a crime. I should call it a heinous blunder. I do not mean that metrical theory is to be entirely neglected. Of course, in order to be able to teach metre practically we must also study it theoretically. Grammar may be useful at times, but only so long as we remember that it is a means to the end; and, I repeat, we are only learning now this great lesson. As to choral metres I am certain that a great deal can be done with a modicum of theory, and certainly without all the jargon and all the controversy which many well-meaning persons believe to be the pith and marrow of the study.

We have got to use our ears as well as our calculating faculty. We must not be like the learned judge who decided that "when the spectacles are on the nose the eyes must be shut." If we want to appraise the music of Shelley or Milton, or even the rhythmical lilt of Rudyard Kipling, we know that we must keep our ears open: why should we close our ears to the lyric of Pindar and Aeschylus by treating it as though it were prose—bad and inflated prose it must certainly be. Prose indeed can be beautiful, almost as beautiful as verse, but not if its form can be mistaken for that of verse. Neither can verse be beautiful when it is stripped of its metrical form and invested with one that is alien to it.

But, it may be objected, metre and especially Greek Choral Metre is a difficult subject to impart to ordinary students at school or college. Certainly I grant it is a difficult subject, full of grave theoretical difficulties. But is not English metre also a very difficult and a very thorny topic? Yet what intelligent lecturer on English poetry of any epoch ever left out the question of rhythm—I mean the real rhythm, not merely the discussion of metrical problems which are perhaps well-nigh insoluble?

My advice, then, is, first of all be practical, put theory into the background, no matter what school of Metrical science you adhere to. Treat lyrical form as something real, something emotional, something human and humanising. Begin, of course, with the easier sorts of Metre. Take a single stanza, say from one of the easier logaoedic odes of Sophocles, or even Pindar, and hammer away at it till its sound is fairly mastered by the pupils. It will also be a great help to supply them with an English version, metrically equivalent to the Greek, observing not merely the quantities but the important caesuras. Such a translation may not attain the highest literary standard, though many Greek Metres when so treated will yield a fairly smooth and pleasant effect in an English form.

But here I come to what is more special in my own experiments—namely, the attempt to give a melodic equivalence to the various choral rhythms. For doing this no very profound musical knowledge is required. Besides, I feel certain that when in carrying out this method the assistance of musicians is desired, they will be always found most ready to give it. For myself it would be ungracious if I failed to acknowledge my obligation to several gifted musicians in Ireland for the help they gave me in preparing the records which I am going to use to-day. It is hardly necessary to say that any melodic rendering of any rhythm will aim at expressing the particular emotion which such rhythm may represent. It will follow the intonation, the repetitions, the cadences. If there is any contrast of one part with another, of course the melody will aim at marking it. At the same time the tune will be one fitted to “catch on.” All this may sound formidable to the non-musical person; but if you try it, if necessary with the assistance of a musical expert, you have no idea how easy it will become after a little practice. It will at

first be perhaps merely entertaining to the class (of course they must learn to sing the melody, not merely to hear it played or sung), and it will by degrees lead them on to ask many questions about the construction of the Metre, the sections, the pauses, the syncopations and resolutions, and the very choice of feet. They will want to know the reason for everything, and thus from practice they will be led on to theory.

After one stanza, or rather pair of strophes, is mastered, it will be surprising how much easier the second specimen submitted to the process will become. The same sort of cadences is constantly occurring, especially in the dramatists; and the prevailing forms are quite easily marked in spite of all the wonderful variety and elasticity which exist in genuine choral Metre, so different from the rigid second-hand imitations occurring so widely in Horace and other metrical plagiarists. Is it not sad to think how many Classical students there are who have read their *Bacchae*, probably with the most conscientious attention to very unlikely various readings, and yet whose knowledge of rising Ionic Metre is confined to *miserarum est neque amori*, just as they can tell you a great deal more about the Sapphics of Horace or even of Tennyson than they can about those of Sappho?

Proceeding by degrees to more difficult Metres, by far the larger part of them will lend themselves to melodic treatment. A residuum there will be found which is really difficult, and which must be left to the tender mercy of the mere theorist to discuss. But the residuum is small: a few odes, chiefly Paeonic, of Pindar and Bacchylides; and some of the experiments of Euripides, made at a period when the decadence of music, and I may add of the dramatic art, was setting in.

I propose to give you examples of logaoedic metre from Pindar and Sophocles, of Dorian (or Dactylo-epitrite) metre from Pindar, of Dochmiacs from Aeschylus, ending with a musical version of the "Ode to Love" from the *Hippolytus* of Euripides. Some of the melodies have been adapted from our existing fragments of Greek music, others have been derived immediately from the rhythm itself. Incidentally I shall touch on some theoretic points connected with the analysis of Dorian and Dochmiac metres, which are also illustrated by diagrams setting forth suggestions of different authorities.