

**THE PROMETHEUS
BOUND OF
ÆSCHYLUS**

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The Prometheus Bound of Æschylus by Æschylus & Paul Elmer More

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ÆSCHYLUS & PAUL ELMER MORE

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TRANSLATED
WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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INTRODUCTION

I

ORIGIN OF GREEK TRAGEDY

ONE of the peculiar features of Greek literature is its regular and harmonious development. First comes the rise of the epic; when this form has been thoroughly worked over, lyric poetry expands and becomes predominant; out of the lyric grows the drama; and last of all comes the splendid harvest of prose. Yet in one sense the lyric is in Greece, as elsewhere, the mother of all poetical forms. The epos is but a development and interknitting of the old songs of the minstrels celebrating the deeds of heroes and ancestors; the drama grew directly from the chants, now passionate and now ribald, sung in honor of Dionysus. And in both cases the genius of a single man was so predominant as to establish once and forever the model which all were to follow. What Homer did for epic, Aeschylus accomplished for tragic poetry.

This lyric origin of tragedy, together with its

persistent religious character, must always be held in mind. Unfortunately we know less about the dithyramb, from which tragedy sprang, than almost any other form of Greek lyric poetry. Even the meaning of the name is involved in complete obscurity. It arose apparently from the wild singing and dancing at the season of harvesting the grapes. Dionysus, or Bacchus, to whom the revellers naturally addressed their praises, lent his double character to the occasion. He was the god of riotous joy; he was also the leader of the enthusiasts who found in intoxication a symbol of their spiritual frenzy when seized by the indwelling deity, and in this capacity, under the name of Iacchus, he was associated with the mystic rites of the Great Goddesses at Eleusis. From the graver side of the revels tragedy was born, from the riot and noise and scoffing were developed the satyr drama and comedy.

One name must be mentioned in connection with the growth of the dithyramb itself,—Arion, a half-fabulous poet the story of whose rescue on a dolphin is so graphically recounted by Herodotus. In some way Arion changed the rude dithyrambic revel into a regular literary production. Did he reduce the number of the

chorus to fifty and institute a prescribed circular dance? did he disguise the revellers as satyrs, *tragoi*, whence the name tragic chorus? Did he introduce set dialogue into the chant? It is impossible to say; but whatever his achievement, the innovation was so important that he was styled the creator of the dithyramb, and is reckoned a true herald of Aeschylus.

To Thespis, however, is due the change which made tragedy something distinct from its dithyrambic source. The verses of Horace are often quoted: "Thespis is said to have discovered the unknown form of the tragic muse and to have carried about in carts his poems, which they sung and acted with faces smeared with wine-lees." This hardly sounds promising for the creator of a great art, but then his position was not so very unlike the young Molière's.

Thespis was born in the village of Icaria, near Marathon, where the worship of Dionysus was especially prominent. After some experience in leading the Dionysiac revels in the country towns he came up to Athens, some time about the year 560 B. C., and began to exhibit his minstrelsy in the market-place. We may suppose that his innovations were gradual. The all-important step was taken when he set apart one