Sociological Remarks on Greek Poetry.

By
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The traditional conception that the masterpieces of the Greeks in literature and sculpture are models for others to imitate, are in fact „classics", has led to many divergent views of their character. Each generation has to some extent sought to justify its own artistic ideals by claiming that they belonged to the Greeks and to interpret Greek civilisation in the light of later experience. This kind of interpretation is always natural and often useful. The richness of the Greek achievement allows many different opinions to be held of it. When Winckelmann and Gœthe praised Greek art for its „blitheness and repose", they could call in Roman copies of Hellenistic sculpture to defend their case; when Stefan George and Hugo von Hoffmansthal chose to dwell on its elemental, even barbarous, qualities, they could claim the support of Dionysiac religion and point to the stark passions of Attic tragedy. But not all interpretations can be explained by artistic motives like these. With the advance of the social sciences the Greeks have tended to be regarded as the precursors of modern theories and systems, as experimenters who tried out on a small scale what the modern world has tried out on a vast field. In England a liberal conception of them has persisted from George Grote to Gilbert Murray, and in its desire to claim them as individualists has neglected their attachment to custom and the severity of their institutional life. In Germany the tendency has been in a different direction. Under the influence of Hegel and Fichte German scholars tended to regard Greek civilisation as the product of a national spirit — „Volksseele" — and its art as a national art — „Volkskunst". This notion is popular to-day and plays some part in Greek scholarship. But it rests on assumptions which have been inadequateley pondered and are in some cases demonstrably wrong.

The notions of „Volkskunst" and „Volksseele" have taken different forms in the last hundred years, but through all of them runs the same fundamental belief. Briefly stated, this is that the Greeks had, throughout their history, certain permanent qualities which determined the character of their fine arts, and these fine

arts are not the product of individuals following their own tastes and views but of men who were so deeply rooted in a homogeneous civilisation that they worked and spoke not for themselves but for a whole people, whose ideas they shared and whose traditional technique they used. It is claimed that in spite of superficial differences the qualities of Greek art remained essentially unchanged throughout their history and were the expression of a national spirit. Such notions have penetrated deeply into the study of Greek literature, and in it especially they may be examined. For it is still the best evidence for the nature of Greek civilisation, and, in the earlier centuries of Greek history poetry, is the only first-hand evidence which has survived. From time to time the visual arts may be called in to supplement the literature, but they begin later, are less copious and less informative. Of course the evidence of the fine arts does not cover the whole of Greek life, but it is more comprehensive than it would be for any modern culture, and at least it is all that we have got for long periods of time. The advocates of „Volkskunst" have tried to base their case on it, and through it they may with reason be examined.

The view that Greek art was popular or national is largely directed against the very different view that it was the product of different classes of society, successively coming to power and giving expression to their characteristic feelings and thoughts. Those who believe in a national spirit are not usually willing to believe that this spirit may be manifested in widely different forms according to what section of the populace happens to be in the political ascendant. Still less are they likely to believe that the special artistic character of a given epoch may have more in common with a similar epoch in another country than with preceding or succeding epochs in its own. The assumption of permanent national characteristics tends to neglect differences of circumstances and to ascribe to a whole people what really belongs only to a part of it. In the case of the Greeks this tendency is strengthened by the traditional method of treating the history of Greek literature and art in isolation and of considering it without reference either to its historical background or to similar developments in other countries. It is too often seen as the story of a logical growth in which each form passes by a natural process into a new form and owes nothing to social or political forces. And yet this isolation is almost certainly unfounded. So far from being a national art in every stage of its history, Greek art was hardly ever national. Its greatest achievements were due to small sections of the population, and it may well be doubted whether these sections were truly representative of the Greek people as a whole.

The problem may be clearly seen in the case of Homer. In the Iliad and the Odyssey we have the first monuments of Greek poetry and the first intelligible records of Greek history. Before them we have archaeological remains but no written word and therefore no history in the true sense. But these two poems, composed probably in the eighth century B. C., show not merely a picture of a society but a view of life, which is consistent and eminently clear. Even if the events which they describe are entirely imaginary, and it is hard to believe that in the Iliad at least there is not some basis of fact behind the fiction, they are still first-hand evidence for an epoch and a society. For our purpose they are of a twofold importance. In the first place the circumstances of their composition have been a matter of prolonged debate and have provided much material for those who believe that they are the creations of a popular spirit. In the second place, the ideas and ideals expressed in them have often been taken to be characteristic of the Greeks throughout their history. In fact, the first belief is that in „Volkskunst" and the second that in „Volksseele". Both require closer examination than is usually given to them.

Ever since F. A. Wolf published his Prolegomena in 1792 many scholars have maintained that the Homeric epics are not the work of one or of two but of many poets. There has been much disagreement on the method and details of composition, but there has been a common tendency to believe that the Iliad and the Odyssey were the work of many men working on traditional material in a traditional manner. In theory it is not inconceivable that the two great epics should have been built up from smaller poems by additions and alterations. The different forms in which English ballads are preserved show that when a poem is transmitted orally and has a wide circulation it may be expanded and altered and take many forms. Moreover there are undoubtedly real cases of popular epics. In the Balkans and especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina the singing of epic lays is still an art practised by many men and appreciated by large sections of the public. In Russia the peasants listened to epic lays at a time when there was no cultivated poetry among the educated classes. This epic poetry is the popular art of lands where peasants form the vast bulk of the population. It is traditional in its choice of ancient history for its subject, in its use of stock recurring formulae in its language, in its standard epithets, in its simple metres and stanzas. It is popular in its love of a good story, in its lack of detailed characterization, and above all in its lack of structure. It is essentially episodic, and it is easy to believe that a new bard can make addi-

tions to an old poem without spoiling its shape and balance or making his addition seem out of place and discordant with what was already there. With such poems the Iliad and the Odyssey have undoubtedly something in common. The subjects of both belong to a distant past when the gods walked on the earth and men were stronger than in the poet's own day. In both the language is largely built up from traditional phrases which are used not merely for recurring actions such as the coming of dawn or evening or the death of a warrior but even for more unusual themes such as the brightness of a great palace or the way in which the moon dims the stars. The familiar epithets — the „loudly-resounding" sea, the „long-shadowing spear", and all the other members of a famous company — have something in common with the simpler but no less traditional epithets of the Slavonic and French epics. In both, old stories are told again because of their tense, dramatic interest. In the Iliad, the wrath of Achilles leads to the death of his dear friend ; in the Odyssey, the adventures of the hero are full of breathless excitement and high tension. Even the splendid hexameter, full of resonance and variety as it is, may be developed from a simpler line which allowed great freedom to bards unwilling or unable to be strict metrists. In these points the Greek epics have certainly something in common with popular epics as they are found in other parts of the world. But in other respects differences emerge and are vitally important.

Between the Greek epics and popular epics of the Slavonic type there are four main differences. First, despite an easiness of construction inevitable in poems intended for piece-meal recitation, both are built on an architectural plan. The Iliad is the story of the wrath of Achilles and of its dire results for himself, his friends and his enemies. The different stages of this wrath are marked clearly, and the poem closes with its healing when he gives back the dead body of Hector to Priam. The Odyssey is more closely knit than the Iliad. It falls into three main parts, but these are intimately connected, and the whole story is the complete story of a man who, after thrilling adventures, comes home to find his wife beset by suitors on whom he takes a fearful vengeance. In both poems incidents may be detached and enjoyed for their own sake, but in both these incidents have a place in a larger design which has in Aristotle's words „a beginning, a middle and an end." Secondly, the characterization of both poems is far more vivid, detailed and consistent than in any popular epic. The chief actors and actresses are seen clearly with considerable knowledge of human nature and from a single point of view. In each poem the whole company of characters is arranged on a

recognizable system by which different sets of them complement and balance each other, and those characters of the Iliad who reappear in the Odyssey have the same idiosyncrasies and characteristics even if they appear in a new setting. Thirdly, the language of both poems is not merely remarkably homogenous but extraordinarily flexible and rich throughout. All attempts to dismember them by linguistic texts have failed, and it must now be admitted that the Homeric language, which can never have been a spoken vernacular, is maintained with complete regularity and consistency. Fourthly, though each poem deals with a traditional theme, it transforms this theme by what can only be called an ethical outlook alien to the original story. The wrath of Achilles and his revenge on Hector are seen not as a simple story of revenge but as a moral tragedy of great import, and the punishment exacted by Odysseus on the suitors of Penelope is no mere feat of skill but the triumph of right over wrong.

These four essential characteristics of the two poems point to a single conclusion — that each poem, as we now have it, is the work of a single poet. He certainly used traditional material and traditional methods of composition, but he imposed his own individuality on the language and on the characters, and he left the marks of his own work on the shape of the whole which he gave to each poem. Here there can be no case of „Volkskunst". However much the poet owed to anonymous predecessors, he was enough of a conscious artist to know the value of giving to his poem its own shape, style, and character. Compared with the Iliad and the Odyssey even poems so individual as Beowulf and la Chanson de Roland are primitive and popular. In them it is possible to believe that the absence of real artistry is the result of an attempt to retell stories much as they had already been told. With Homer this is impossible. His epics are not an accidental accumulation of lays or expansions by different poets of older poems. What he borrowed or inherited, he remade, and on all lies the remarkable impress of his own personality. Indeed the superior quality of the Homeric epics to other early epics must be due to the poet's work on them. He has passed beyond the tradition into art and given a real harmony and style to what would otherwise have been much simpler and far less moving. If we would find a real parallel to his artistic achievement, we are more likely to find it in Chaucer, who gave a new life and character to the decadent medieval epic, than in the anonymous Slavonic and French bards who composed in a strictly traditional manner.

Homer's art is not „Volkskunst", but his voice might still be that of a „Volksseele", and his poetry might still be the expression

of the Greek character and of the Greek view of life. In so far as his works were an essential part of Greek education in later centuries, he entered into Greek culture and had a large influence on it, so that Plato practically excluded him from his ideal state and Alexander felt that he resembled Achilles. But this does not mean that when Homer composed, his ideas were accepted by a whole society or that he had a whole people in mind as his audience. The evidence is entirely to the contrary. Homer sang not even for nobles but for princes, and was concerned almost entirely with them. The bards whom he depicts in the Odyssey are the servants of kings, at whose court they live and for whose pleasure they sing. His own condition must have been like theirs, for his portrayal of them is too detailed and too sympathetic to be anything but a transcript from life. Moreover his whole story is of kings, whom he calls „Zeus-born". Their only critic, Thersites, is presented in an unfavourable, even hostile, light, and the harsh punishment meted out to him by Odysseus is regarded as perfectly justified. Being of humble position as the servant of princes, Homer says nothing about himself and passes no moral judgments. He is not the social equal of his patrons, and he attributes all that he says to the divine power of the Muse. Moreover, the conception of manhood which he accepts is that of an age when the only men who mattered were kings who had power enough to fight successful battles and to be leaders of armies. Such men need more than physical prowess; they must be wise in counsel and eloquent of tongue. The basis of their ethics is highly individualistic. What matters is the great man's sense of honor. Achilles can no more forgive the insult paid him by Agamemnon than Roland can admit the gibes of Ganelon. Great position has, of course, its obligations, and the Homeric king must be generous to suppliants, to beggars, to conquered enemies. Since he lives by combination with others like himself, he owes certain debts to his confederates. But on the whole his obligations are few, and for him the mass of mankind hardly exist. In Homer's narrative the princes are all who matter. The common soldiers have no names and play little part. Even his swineherd was once a king's son.

Homer, then, composed for the ruling class which in his day consisted of independent princes. This form of society was indeed nearing its end, and in the Odyssey, where the house of Odysseus is assailed by upstarts, Homer may have depicted the change from old established families to others of more recent origin. He certainly felt, that men were no longer so great as they once had been. So far from being the spokesman of an unchanging people he seems

to have been the last post of a great age. He summarised its ideals and its way of life, but he knew that they were coming to an end. Just as Dante summarized the whole achievement of the Middle Age at a time when the first breath of the Renaissance was coming with Petrarch and Giotto, just as Camões sang the glories of imperial Portugal in the years before they passed into oblivion at Alcazar Kebir, so Homer sang of the heroic age of Greece when the age of roving warriors and conquerors was yielding to the new phase of the established city-state. He points not forward but backward. He sees his princely society as something great and grand, but already on the way to destruction. He accepted its standards because his profession was otherwise impossible. He had a genuine admiration for the great heroic qualities — courage, loyalty, eloquence, physical fitness. But he saw that even these had the roots of decay in them, and his figure of Achilles, magnificent and disastrous and destined to an early death, is the fit emblem of the society of which he sang.

The picture which Homer gives of his Zeus-born kings is so complete, so richly human, that it is easy to be deluded into the belief that it is the picture of a complete society. But the picture may be supplemented both from Homer himself and from another contemporary source, Hesiod. If Homer could not mention humble contemporaries in his narrative, he could introduce them, as it were accidentally, into his similes. Here are the child who builds sand-castles, the boys who cannot keep an ass from straying into a corn-field, the man who turns a haggie over a fire, the old woman who works late into the night to win a „shameful wage", the young wife led into slavery when the husband is killed in battle. In these pictures Homer supplements his heroic presentation of life, and his view is not heroic nor tragic but pitiful. He is sorry for these people. To them he must have belonged ; perhaps his own life was not unlike theirs. His mere mention of them shows that in his society there was a great division between the powerful and the humble. He was conscious of it, but he could say little about it. What little he did say, shows that in his wide charity he saw the importance of many kinds of man. This division is shown with much more directness by Hesiod. He was a struggling farmer, living in a hard land and harassed by financial embarrassments. For him the petty kings of his country are not heroes but simply enemies. He has his philosophy of history which consists of the simple theory that the ruling class has gradually degenerated until in his day they have forgotten the elementary rules of justice. Of this he speaks with great bitterness, complaining that their treatment of common men is that of the hawk which destroys

the nightingale. Against this prevailing injustice he can only invoke divine aid and he warns the princes that Zeus has his three thousand guardians who keep watch against cruelty. The pessimism of Hesiod is due to his conviction that life is hard and full of injustice. He gives the opposite side of the picture to Homer. Homer idealised the past; Hesiod saw the present as something only to be endured by hard toil and suffering. He shows that Homer's world, for all its humanity and grandeur, was that of a privileged few.

The difference between Homer and Hesiod shows that even in the eighth century the Greeks had no single and homogeneous view of society. Nor was this difference confined to views about the nature of kings. Hesiod does not share Homer's view of what a man should be. He has little to say about the heroic virtues, and his own ideal is hard work. This is the burden of his Works and Days, whose central doctrine is that achievement comes only through sweat and labour. He is concerned not with life as it ought to be, but as it is, and he has a great scorn for those who neglect the hard facts of the struggle for existence. His difference from Homer may be seen with great clearness in his theology. Homer, on the whole, regards the gods as what men would be if they were free from responsibility, old age and death. He depicts them as living a life of pleasure and ease, the counterpart of that which earthly princes live in their hours of ease. Hesiod sees them with different eyes. His theology is that of a man who feels that the world is governed by incalculable powers, who are usually unreasonable and often cruel. Therefore he accepts all the ancient stories of war in heaven and does not scruple to tell stories of the gods from which Homer would have turned away. Even his belief in a righteous Zeus is very different from Homer's. Homer did not feel called upon to stress the fundamental rightness of the supreme god; in his world there was not sufficient injustice crying for punishment. Hesiod, cramped and hindered by his circumstances, felt that in heaven at least there must be some redress for social wrongs.

The world of Homer and Hesiod came to an end when the desire for conquest was satisfied and the Greeks settled down to organise themselves into city-states. The process had begun before them, but it began to show results in the seventh century and reached its height in the sixth. Its first political result was that power passed from kings to landowning aristocrats. Basing their claim largely on royal descent and connected by ties of blood, the nobles formed a singularly united and homogeneous class. Rebels, like Archilochus, who did not fit into their scheme of things, passed

lives of poverty and misery away from home. Unlike the Homeric kings, the nobles were great advocates of solidarity and evolved a form of society and a view of life in which the chief virtues were obedience and loyalty. Within these limits great freedom was allowed. Personality was still important; an increased sense of security developed a greater sense of the joy and adventure of life; style and honesty seem to have come almost naturally to these privileged masters of the city-state. The strength and the limitations of this system can be seen most clearly in Sparta. Here the conquering landowners lived on the labours of the conquered who were reduced to the position of serfs and compared by Tyrtaeus to asses labouring under burdens. In the seventh century the landowners felt secure and developed their own brilliant culture. Its life and gaiety may be seen in its ivory-carvings and gold-work, in its wide trade reaching to Carchemish and Egypt, and above all in the poetry of Alcman. In his sprightly gaiety, his taste for the good things of life, his unaffected sincerity, Alcman is the perfect poet of an age which was not only sure of itself but aware of the many delightful pleasures which were open to it. Convention had not dulled its enjoyments, nor had bitter experience undermined its ethical standards. In the sixth century the Spartans lost confidence in themselves and developed a political system in which everything was sacrificed to the state. Its civilisation declined, and it left little of value to the world. But in Alcman's time the noble families were not afraid or exhausted. In it, more than at any other time of Greek history, the aristocratic spirit may be seen in its full strength and freshness. But it was still an aristocratic spirit. To this select society the conquered peoples, who were of Greek origin no less than their masters, were not admitted. They lived a life of their own, hostile to the Spartan aristocrats and based on customs not shared with them. Alcman spoke only for a class. The serfs who lay outside it were beyond his view.

A later and more self-conscious form of aristocracy than the Spartan may be seen in Lesbos in the last years of the seventh and first years of the sixth centuries. Here, too, there was a high degree of individualism and a wonderful sense of style. But here the opposition was less controlled than in Sparta and the landowners were challenged by the new class of merchants. The result was a great development of class-consciousness and class-hatred. Alcaeus, who was charming to his friends, spared no abuse for his political enemies. His chief opponent, Pittacus, whom posterity honoured as one of the Seven Wise Men, was for Alcaeus a low fellow for whom no abuse was too bad. Alcaeus takes any

stick to beat him with, but in every attack we can see that the real basis of Alcaeus' hatred was that this man was not one of his own class but an alien who was trying to usurp powers to which his birth did not entitle him. The poetry written about this quarrel has certain fine, direct qualities, but in it, on the whole, hate obscures beauty. Alcaeus' best gifts can be seen in the poems which he wrote for his friends. In these he allows his love of natural beauty and his buoyant gaiety to assert themselves. When Pittacus crossed his mind, he wrote in spite, and his delicate touch was obscured. He has both the strength and the weakness of a man who lives in a small, established circle. Inside it he saw and enjoyed many delightful things. But outside it he was capable of seeing little except bad. The preference of his fellow citizens for Pittacus was incomprenhensible to him; he thought them mad. Rooted in his own world he failed to foresee the future or even to sympathise with many of his contemporaries.

Alcaeus was a man and accepted what he thought to be the responsibilities of manhood. His contemporary, Sappho, had no such responsibilities and was far less the creature of her times. Indeed every word she wrote seems to have been written for eternity, so simple and enduring are the emotions which made her verse. Yet a success such as her was perhaps only possible in an aristocratic society. In it she was certainly allowed more liberty than she would have been allowed by a later century in democratic Athens. And the very circumstances which made her art possible, the training of young girls in art and song as the servants of Aphrodite, were themselves part of the aristocratic life which showed its solidarity in such shared ceremonies. Her extreme directness and honesty were possible because she wrote for a few friends who knew her well and would not misunderstand her. Because of this her poetry is far more intimate than any poetry written for an anonymous public or for posterity, and this intimacy is as far removed from irony as it is from rhetoric. Hardly noticing the political struggles of her time and feeling that political action belonged to men, she led a life of extraordinary fullness and depth. Her unfailing taste and sincerity saved her from sentimentality, her strong emotions were disciplined by consummate art. But neither in her circumstances nor her outlook was she a popular figure. She lived in a small circle and drew much of her strength from it.

The poetry of Alcaeus and Sappho is, then, the special product of an aristocratic society. And yet in a way it has, at least technically, a close relation to what was really a popular art. Behind it lies a tradition of folk-song which must have been vigorous on

Lesbos and well known to both of them. On this tradition both made great improvements. They elaborated its metres and must have written on many themes which lay outside its range. But from it they took a simple vernacular style and occasional traditional subjects such as the girl who cannot work at her loom for thinking of her lover, of the man and woman who quarrel and end by a renewal of love. But their poetry has not the unsophisticated artlessness of folksong. They remodelled its themes and language by trained judgment and a refined sense of style. Their attitude towards it was that of cultivated people who saw both its excellences and its defects. A close parallel may be seen in the brilliant Portuguese poetry of the thirteenth century. Behind this, too, lies an abundant and vigorous folk-song, which was followed in its themes and manner by kings like Dinis and nobles like Pai Gomez Charinho. But the noble Portuguese poets refined and improved on the rustic songs of countrymen and hillmen and gave to their work a delicacy which must have been lacking in their originals. They stood apart from the populace by virtue of their greater taste and sensibility. So too Sappho and Alcaeus, deeply rooted though they were in popular tradition, were as artists above and beyond it.

The political movement which destroyed the established aristocracies had considerable democratic support and represented the emergence of the mercantile classes. But since its political power was consolidated by „tyrants", that is by individuals with almost royal position, its art was of a special character. It was an age of patronage, and the tyrants, who encouraged the arts, also determined their direction and had considerable influence over them. Men like Polycrates in Samos and the sons of Peisistratus in Athens were princely connoisseurs like the men of the Renaissance. To them both sculpture and painting owed a great debt. Sculpture they needed both to adorn the temples which they built and endowed to perpetuate the memory of their parents or of themselves. In their architecture they had a taste for the grandiose, so that Polycrates built his great temple of Hera and Peisistratus the Hecatompedon on the Acropolis. But the real spirit of their arts may be seen in the Athenian vase-painting of the early red-figured period. This exquisite and delightful art reached at this time a delicacy and gaiety such as it never again reached. In its own way there is no vase-painting so fine or so accomplished as that of Oltus and Epictetus. But these painters worked for a definite end and their range was narrowed in consequence. They concentrated on giving pleasure and amusement to a small circle whose activities lay in public life and who needed

recreation. Their scenes from the playground or the feast, their figures of dancers and horsemen, are chosen simply to give pleasure. They have no dramatic interest, no deep emotional content. Their world is not so artificial as that of Watteau and Boucher, but it is at least as limited, and for the same reason. The tyrants did not wish art to be a criticism of life. They wanted it to be a relaxation and to throw its emphasis on moments of pleasure. Therefore their artists painted subjects suitable for men sitting over their wine and resting from affairs of state.

The conditions which obtained in painting obtained also in poetry. Polycrates invited to his court two men of genius, Ibycus and Anacreon, and in their work we have the first specimens of courtly poetry known to the world. It has not the faults of most courtly poetry. It is not insincere or over-elaborated. It is concerned with matters of vital and perennial interests. But it bears the marks of a society where a powerful patron knew what he wanted from his poets. It is primarily concerned with wine and with love because its place was at the tyrant's feasts when he wished to amuse himself after the day's labours. As befits such occasions, it is extremely gay. It is also witty and ironical. Anacreon keeps his more serious self in rigid control and is prepared to dismiss his emotions with a jest in case others should have the first laugh on him. Ibycus invented what was almost a mythology of love, which at times recalls Provence. Both avoid political and public themes; even ethical maxims are rare with them. They aim at giving pleasure with their songs, not at teaching or expressing their own emotions. For them poetry mirrors only a small part of life. This does not interfere with their skill but it limits their field. They cannot claim to be interpreters of their time, and they lack the sweep of Homer or even of Sappho. In different circumstances they might have written differently but at the tyrant's court they wrote what he wanted, and this was a poetry of relaxation. With them poetry ceased even to be the mirror of a class. It became the plaything of a single man and of his circle.

Until the end of the sixth century Greek poetry, in spite of certain popular affinities, cannot be called popular. It took no account of large sections of the populace and was usually composed for a small circle of privileged people. This did not in any way interfere with its success. The men who demanded it were the most lively and cultivated of their time, and the poets, who usually were members of a privileged aristocracy, felt at ease with their hearers. For this reason they spoke directly and freely and lacked those inhibiting forces which prevent a poet from being

at home in his world. They felt behind them not merely a similarity of tastes and interests but a certainty that they would be understood and appreciated. At few other times have poets been so fortunate. Even the Elizabethan songwriters were more dependent on the favours of the Court than Sappho and Alcaeus were on the circles in which they lived. Within their limited circle the Greek poets possessed freedom of speech and could write without worrying about punishment and disgrace. Even if, as in Samos, their sphere was limited, they could say what they liked inside it, and Anacreon seems to have expressed himself with some candour to Polycrates. The Greek aristocrats felt that the world belonged to them, and while this confidence lasted, their poets always assayed new subjects and lively sensibilities.

In the fifth century the political scene changed. Cleisthenes had created, and Pericles developed, the Athenian democracy. Every Athenian was politically as good a man as his neighbour, and if we exclude the slaves, who were often of foreign birth, there is no doubt that Periclean Athens was genuinely democratic. As such it needed new forms of expression and found them in Tragedy and Comedy. Athenian plays were not written for a few friends but were performed in a vast theatre before the whole population of Athens. Here then we might at last see an example of „Volkskunst" grown after long years of political and literary evolution. The occasion was solemn, and everyone's duty was to attend it. The views expressed by the tragedians, the figures assailed by the comedians, were of public interest and contemporary relevance. Aeschylus dealt with the supramundane aspects of questions so vital as the reform of the Areopagus, and Aristophanes pilloried politicians like Cleon and preached peace to a warring world. In their choral songs the tragedians often attempted to give a criticism of the events which they presented on the stage and to instruct their audiences in the right view of the problems involved. They were careful not to offend public opinion, and even Euripides, who made sly fun of the gods, never brought them into open ridicule. They observed the traditionalism of their form, and their drama never had the ease and sweep of the Elizabethan but kept its small numbers of actors, its choral songs, its formal speeches. It drew most of its plots from the heroic age and it kept, in spite of divergences, to the authorities on which it drew. It was then both traditional and popular, and in it we might expect to find an example of „Volkskunst" and the expression of „Volksseele".

If Greek drama is a popular art, it is certainly such in quite a different sense from popular epics and folk-song. For it was

not a spontaneous and natural growth in which many men shared. On the contrary, it owed its inception to the establishment of the Greater Dionysian Festival by Peisistratus and its yearly performance was strictly official. Prizes were given for the best plays and the expenses were borne by prominent citizens as a part of their public duty. In its early stages it existed because the tyrants wished to give the Athenian people a sense of solidarity by instituting great festivals at which all could attend, and when the tyrants disappeared from the scene, the festivals survived because they met a real need and still seemed useful to those who managed the state. It was, then, not a popular growth in the sense that the Elizabethan drama was. It did not pay for itself, and its plays were performed only on a few days in each year. But in spite of its official origins and character Greek drama was certainly deeply based on popular approval. This is clear from the jokes and parodies which Aristophanes makes on it. They would have been unintelligible and certainly not profitable if his audiences had not had a good knowledge of tragedy and of the chief mannerisms of its exponents. The almost technical criticism which Aristophanes makes of Euripides in his Frogs shows how well Euripides must have been known and what discussion he must have provoked.

In this sense, then, Greek drama was certainly popular, but it may still be doubted whether it was a „Volkskunst". The poet addressed a vast audience but he made few concessions to it. It is not merely that Greek tragedy lacks passages „to tickle the ears of the groundlings" such as seem to have been inevitable to the Elizabethans. Such omissions may well have been due to the solemnity and religious character of the festival at which the plays were performed. Far more striking is the language which the poets used and the demands it must have made on its hearers to understand it. The language of Aeschylus is complex, highly metaphorical, elliptic, and above all difficult. In his choral songs, which must in any case have been hard to follow, it is at its most elaborate and obscure. The choral songs of Sophocles are in their own way no less elaborate, and though Euripides is certainly more lucid than either of his predecessors, his language is by no means easy. All three tragedians use a highly poetical vocabulary which is no less artificial than the language of Homer or the earlier writers of choral odes. In this respect they resembled their aristocratic predecessors who wrote for small circles of cultivated people and they do not seem to have made any concessions for the far greater numbers of their hearers. They derived the traditions of their art from an earlier age, and in their language

especially they remained faithful to them. In this they are characteristic of their time. The Athenian system of the fifth century can only be understood if we regard it as an attempt to impart the standards and life of an aristocracy to a democracy, to give the grace and ease of life, hitherto enjoyed by a few, to a large number. Just as its citizens enjoyed leisure and took part in government, so in its art the dignity and difficulty of aristocratic art was maintained. Its painting was the natural development of the art of the sixth century, and its poetry rose out of the earlier choral songs and kept much of their style. It had neither the ease nor the simplicity of truly popular art. The poets expected their audiences to rise to their own level and took no trouble to explain themselves or to cater to more vulgar ideas.

If the poets made no concessions to the public in their technique they did not make any more in their opinions. Indeed, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides equally used the stage for the expression of their highly individual views of life. Aeschylus attacked problems of theology in a revolutionary manner which must have surprised many of his hearers. His Prometheus Bound is an astonishing analysis of divine power, and his Oresteia attacked the deeply founded belief in blood-guiltiness. Euripides often showed up the gods as impostors or worse, and when he accepted their existence in his Hippolytus and Bacchae, he made them almost monsters and certainly beyond good and evil. Even Sophocles, who is known to have been a devout and reverent man in private life, raised questions about the problem of evil in the Trachiniae which were neither comfortable nor orthodox. In his own way each tragedian certainly departed from accepted views of religion and felt that his own opinions were more important than those current in his time. Each spoke for himself and not for others, not to express what was already accepted but to alter it and correct it. Although all Athenians were equal before the law, in their attitude towards tragedy they were prepared to accept the superior knowledge and wisdom of their poets and to acquiesce in the expression of opinions which differed from their own.

Tragedy then can hardly be regarded as a „Volkskunst" except in a very unusual sense, and it does not even seem to be the expression of a „Volksseele." For the views propounded in it were often not the traditional or usual views of Athenians but the creation of remarkable and original poets who belonged to an aristocratic tradition and endeavoured to impart their conclusions to men who must have found them strange if not hostile. Even Sophocles, conventional as he was, was certainly not a typical Athenian in the last twenty years of his life. In the age of Cleon he must

have seemed rather oldfashioned and out of date. Tragedy was a national institution and called to its service men who would in another place at another time have composed in quite different forms. But the fact of its existence was in a sense accidental. We can imagine an Athens without it, and we know that in its first stages it was the creation of the tyrants. Even comedy, which seems to have answered a deep need of the Athenians, was originally a foreign importation. It owed its strength and popularity to the belief in free speech at Athens, and it derived its fantastic dialogue from the language of the streets and the marketplace. But Aristophanes wrote with an extremely independent outlook and seems really to have disliked most of the more popular movements of his day. He looked back to a past generation and was frankly romantic about it. The present struck him as more worthy of ridicule than of serious admiration.

Despite its popularity the best poetry of the Greeks was not popular; it was the creation of small classes of educated men who refined on traditional forms and made them the vehicle for their own ideas. It is indeed remarkable that some important aspects of Greek life were untouched by then. There were many stories and themes which found their way onto vases but not into poetry. There was a popular art of story-telling, such as still exists in the Islamic Orient, which has left some traces in Herodotus and the Fables attributed to Aesop, but was never transformed into a great form of art. There must have been a considerable body of religious literature connected with the salvationist cults of Orphism which had a wide vogue among humble people, but of this few traces survive and their aesthetic merit is negligible. There may even have been popular epics akin to the Slavonic which were well known as repositories of myths but not seriously regarded as poetry. The poets, who filled the gaps of narrative between the Iliad and the Odyssey, were regarded as much inferior to Homer, and those who told the exploits of Heracles or Theseus have fallen into the oblivion which they seem to have deserved. In Greece there existed a genuinely popular poetry, a „Volkskunst", which had its roots among common men and a wide circulation, but it seems never to have reached any artistic excellence and it was never treated seriously by the Greeks. What they liked and admired was the much more conscious art of poets who did not claim to be speaking for the whole people and whose technical skill was a matter of trained judgment and invididual sensibility. It would, of course, be absurd to deny that Greek poetry as a whole possesses certain qualities which are acking or less prominent in other languages. Both in its positive

and negative qualities it has a certain historical unity. But this unity may be explained by two simple facts. In the first place, as we have seen, it was normally the product of a small privileged class and it shows the marks of its origin. So long as this class was vigorous and vital, its poetry reflected its life. When it failed or decayed, as at Alexandria, the marks of decadence are on its poetry. In the second place Greek poetry was remarkably traditional. All later poets owed much to Homer, and Homer himself was the child of tradition. Therefore their vocabulary and certain points of their technique were also traditional. The forerunners of Greek poetry set an impress on it which later generations observed. All artists must to some extent live on the achievements of their predecessors, and the Greek poets owed a great deal to Homer. But in spite of the apparent logic of their growth, in spite of their traditionalism and attachment to the past, they can not really be regarded as typical products of their race. It is unwise to assume that they owed their technique and artistry to popular art or their thoughts and feelings to a nebulous entity called the Greek Spirit.

Soziologische Bemerkungen zur griechischen Dichtung.

Während sich in England eine rein individualistische Interpretation griechischer Dichtung herausgebildet hat, steht die deutsche Forschung heute noch stark unter dem Einfluss der Konzeption der „Volksseele" : Die Gestalten und Epochen der griechischen Dichtung werden als die Formungen eines einheitlichen Volkscharakters aufgefasst. Demgegenüber will der Aufsatz hervorheben, dass die griechische Kunst das Produkt jeweils sehr verschiedener gesellschaftlicher Schichten ist, nicht aber ein isoliertes Phänomen, das sich nach immanenten Entwicklungsgesetzen entfaltet. Die homerischen Gesänge, basiert auf überliefertem Material und überlieferten Gestaltungsmethoden, aber das Werk eines einzelnen Autors, waren für die herrschende Oberschicht abgefasst und empfingen ihre Inhalte und ihre Ideale von dieser kleinen Gruppe. Demgegenüber repräsentiert Hesiod den kleinen Bauern, für den die Könige nicht Helden, sondern Feinde waren und dessen Weltanschauung völlig der homerischen widerspricht. Mit dem Aufkommen des Stadtstaates und des ihn beherrschenden, grundbesitzenden Adels erscheinen neue Kunstformen und neue Inhalte. Und selbst innerhalb der städtischen Kultur finden sich weitgehende Verschiedenheiten, wie durch einen Vergleich des Tyrtaeus und Alcman in Sparta mit der lyrischen Dichtung auf Lesbos deutlich wird, wo den Grundbesitzern ein starker Kaufmannsstand gegenübertrat. Das folgende Zeitalter der Tyrannen produzierte vor allem eine höfische Kunst, die nur der Erholung und dem Vergnügen diente : Spiel für einen einzelnen Herrscher und seinen Kreis. Der Aufsatz schliesst mit einer Diskussion der Tragödiendichtung des 5. Jahrhunderts in ihren Beziehungen zur Demokratie und deren Bedürfnissen und Forderungen.

Remarques sociologiques à propos de la poésie grecque.

Tandis que, en Angleterre, s'est développée une interprétation purement individualiste de la poésie grecque, la science allemande subit, aujourd'hui encore, fortement l'influence du concept de „l'âme d'un peuple" : les figures et les époques de la poésie grecque apparaissent comme les formes successives dans lesquelles s'est exprimé le caractère d'un peuple un en son essence. Contre cette interprétation, l'article montre que l'art grec, loin d'être un phénomène isolé qui se développe d'après des lois immanentes, est le produit de couches sociales diverses selon les époques. Les poèmes homériques, œuvre d'un seul auteur, étaient fondés sur une tradition qui transmettait à la fois la matière et les méthodes de mise en forme ; ils s'adressaient à la classe dominante. Hésiode, en revanche, représente le petit paysan aux yeux duquel les rois étaient non des héros mais des ennemis — sa conception du monde s'oppose entièrement à celle d'Homère. L'état urbain, la cité, et la noblesse qui la domine de propriétaires de terre, amènent des genres et des thèmes nouveaux. A l'intérieur même de la culture de la cité, on observe des différences très poussées, comme le montre une comparaison entre Tyrtée et Alcman de Sparte, et la poésie de Lesbos, où aux propriétaires de terre s'opposait la puissance des marchands. L'époque suivante des tyrans produit surtout un art de cour, qui ne servait qu'à la récréation et au plaisir — divertissement offert au seul prince et à son entourage. L'article se termine par une discussion de la poésie tragique du v^{e} siècle, dans ses rapports avec les besoins et les exigences de la démocratie.