(see below). But, even where they existed, such motives *were* collateral and subsidiary; they were never primary. All else was subordinated to the dramatic, or, in other words, the purely human, interest of the fable. This central interest is even more dominant and pervading in Sophocles than the otherwise supreme influence of religious and ethical ideas. The idea of destiny, for example, was of course inseparable from Greek tragedy. Its prevalence was one of the conditions which presided over the art from its birth, and, unlike Aeschylus, who wrestles with gods, Sophocles simply accepts it, both as a *datum* of tradi­tion and a fact of life. But in the free handling of Sophocles even fate and providence are adminicular to tragic art. They are instruments through which sympathetic emotion is awakened, deepened, intensified. And, while the vision of the eternal and unwritten laws was holier yet, for it was not the creation of any former age, but rose and culminated with the Sophoclean drama, still to the poet and his Periclean audience this was no abstract notion, but was inseparable from their impassioned contemplation of the life of man—so great and yet so helpless, aiming so high and falling down so far, a plaything of the gods and yet essentially divine. This lofty vision subdued with the serenity of awe the terror and pity of the scene, but from neither could it take a single tremor or a single tear. Emotion was the element in which Greek tragedy lived and moved, albeit an emotion that was curbed to a serene stillness through its very depth and intensity.

The final estimate of Sophoclean tragedy must largely depend upon the mode in which his treatment of destiny is conceived. That Aeschylus had risen on the wings of faith to a height of prophetic vision, from whence he *saw* the triumph of equity and the defeat of wrong as an eternal process moving on toward one divine event—that he realized sin, retribution, responsibility as no other ancient did—may be gladly conceded. But it has been argued that because Sophocles is saddened by glancing down again at actual life—because in the fatalism of the old fables he finds the reflection of a truth—he in so far takes a step backward as a tragic artist. This remark is not altogether just. His value for what is highest in man is none the less because he strips it of earthly rewards, nor is his reverence for eternal law less deep because he knows that its workings are sometimes pitiless. Nor, once more, does he disbelieve in Providence, because experience has shown him that the end towards which the supreme powers lead forth mankind is still unseen. Not only the utter devotion of Antigone, but the lacerated innocence of Oedipus and Deianira, the tempted truth of Neoptolemus, the essential nobility of Ajax, leave an impress on the heart which is ineffaceable, and must elevate and purify while it remains. In one respect, however, it must be admitted that Sophocles is not before his age. There is an element of unrelieved vindictiveness, not merely inherent in the fables, but inseparable from the poet’s handling of some themes, which is only too consistent with the temper of the "tyrant city.” Aeschylus represents this with equal dramatic vividness, but he associates it not with heroism, but with crime.

Sophocles is often praised for skilful construction. But the secret of his skill depends in large measure on the profound way in which the central situation in each of his fables has been conceived and felt. Concentration is the distinguishing note of tragedy, and it is by greater concentration that Sophocles is distinguished from other tragic poets. In the *Septem contra Thebas* or the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus there is still somewhat of epic enlargement and breadth; in the *Hecuba* and other dramas of Euripides separate scenes have an idyllic beauty and tender­ness which affect us more than the progress of the action as a whole, a defect which the poet sometimes tries to compensate by some novel *dénouement* or catastrophe. But in following a Sophoclean tragedy we are carried steadily and swiftly onward, looking neither to the right nor to the left; the more elaborately any scene or single speech is wrought the more does it contribute to enhance the main emotion, and if there is a deliberate pause it is felt either as a welcome breathing space or as the calm of brooding expectancy.

The result of this method is the union, in the highest degree, of simplicity with complexity, of largeness of design with absolute finish, of grandeur with harmony. Superfluities are thrown off without an effort through the burning of the fire within. Crude elements are fused and made transparent. What look like ornaments are found to be inseparable from the organic whole. Each of the plays is admirable in structure, not because it is cleverly put together, but because it is so completely alive.

The seven extant tragedies probably owe their preservation to some selection made for educational purposes in Alexandrian times. A yet smaller “ syllogè ” of three plays *(Ajax, Electra, Oedipus Tyrannus)* continued current amongst Byzantine stu­dents and many more copies of these exist than is the case with the other four. Of these four the *Antigone* seems to have been the most popular, while an inner circle of readers were specially attracted by the *Oedipus Coloneus.*

No example of the poet’s earliest manner has come down to us. The *Antigone* certainly belongs to the Periclean epoch, and while Creon’s large professions (lines 175-190) have been supposed to reflect the policy of the Athenian statesman, the heroine’s grand appeal to the unwritten laws may have been suggested by words which an Attic orator afterwards quoted as having been spoken by Pericles himself: "They say that Pericles once exhorted you that in the case of persons guilty of impiety you should observe not only the written laws, but also those unwritten, which are followed by the Eumolpidae in their instructions—laws which no man ever yet had power to abrogate, or dared to contradict, nor do the Eumolpidae themselves know who enacted them, for they believe that whoso violates them must pay the penalty not only to man, but to the gods” ([Lysias] *contra Andocidem,* § x. p. 104).

Modern readers have thought it strange that Creon when convinced goes to bury Polynices before attempting to release Antigone. It is obvious how this was necessary to the cata­strophe, but it is also true to character, for Creon is not moved by compunction for the maiden nor by anxiety on Haemon’s account, but by the fear of retribution coming on himself and the state, because of the sacred law of sepulture which he has defied. Antigone is the martyr of natural affection and of the religion of the family. But, as Kaibel pointed out, she is also the high-born Cadmean maiden, whose defiance of the oppressor is accentuated by the pride of race. She despises Creon as an upstart, who has done outrage not only to eternal ordinance, but to the rights of the royal house.

The *Ajax,* that tragedy of wounded honour, still bears some traces of Aeschylean influence, and may be even earlier than the *Antigone.* But it strikes the peculiarly Sophoclean note, that the great and noble spirit, although through its own or others’ errors it may be overclouded for a time and rejected by con­temporaries amongst mankind, is notwithstanding accepted by the gods and shall be held in lasting veneration. The con­struction of the *Ajax* has been adversely criticized, but without sufficient reason. If it has not the concentration of the *Anti­gone,* or of the *Oedipus Tyrannus,* it has a continuous movement which culminates in the hero’s suicide, and develops a fine depth of sympathetic emotion in the sequel.

In the *King Oedipus* the poet attains to the supreme height of dramatic concentration and tragic intensity. The drama seems to have been produced soon after the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, but certainly not in the year of the plague— else Sophocles, like his predecessor Phrynichus, might be said to have reminded his countrymen too poignantly of their home troubles. “The unwritten laws ” are now a theme for the chorus. The worship of the Delphic Apollo is associated with a profound sense of the value and sacredness of domestic purity, and in the command to drive out pollution there is possibly an implied reference to the expulsion of the Alcmaeonidae.

The *Electra,* a less powerful drama, is shown by the metrical indications to be somewhat later than the *Oedipus Rex.* The harshness of the *vendetta* is not relieved as in Aeschylus by long- drawn invocations of the dead, nor, as in Euripides, is it made a subject of casuistry. Electra’s heroic impulse, the offspring