SAPPHO.*

The results of alliance between scepticism and scholarship are better understood now than of yore. Within sixty years, enlightened incredulity has stripped the history of Greek letters of nearly all the tinsel with which the taste of later Greece and of Rome bedizened it. Many traditions both profitless and bad have ended; for ended they are, in spite of belated and believing defenders. Such defenders should not move our fear, since there are always those who find nothing so simple as rebellion against scrupulous questioning. In fact, each generation for itself discovers and extols the comfortable value of established and accepted facts, and learns

> "How easier than a moment's thought it is
> To laugh where wise men doubt."

But not the ineradicable orthodoxy of those who are in favor of progress, but progress backward, shall make plain that the ridiculous details of Demosthenes's schooling were not invented by schoolmasters at Athens and Rome. Demosthenes can hardly have shaved the hair and beard from one-half of his head that he might retire to a cave and there learn his lessons freed from the temptations of fashionable society, nor is it probable that cramming his mouth full of pebbles helped him to speak more distinctly and fluently. It is not reasonable to suppose that Sophocles died of reading a long sentence in his own Antigone, since on authority of apparent weight we have it that he died of swallowing a grape-stone.

All this trumpery gossip about Sophocles and Demosthenes we could certainly accept without losing sight of the main features of their character. Demosthenes certainly struggled against many disadvantages in perfecting his power of speech. Sophocles certainly has composed long periods, in the reading of which it is difficult to find opportunity for taking breath. The case of the poetess Sappho is different. To lose the vile gossip which was long current about her is priceless gain. To believe what many have believed about her is never really to be "stung by the sudden splendors" of her fervent thoughts, as we still have them in the scanty fragments spared for our wonder and our praise by the fury of early Christian fanaticism. And thus we see that cynic-doubt may have its enthusiasms. Critical scholarship does not destroy only—it sometimes creates by removing the obstacles between us and the inspiration of undisguised truth.

The charming story of the loves of Sappho and Alcæus must be doubted, and it is out of the question to allow that Anacreon, Archilochus, and Hipponax were her suitors. Phaon, for love of whom Sappho is said to have killed herself, is a myth, and the reader of the last published and most exhaustive account of Sappho, which it is the object of the present article to discuss, is of course prepared to hear that Sappho never can have taken the long journey by land and sea from Lesbos to Leucas in order to make the desperate lover's leap about which so much has been written and sung. Such facts as are credibly ascertained about Sappho are given by our editor, Mr. Henry Thornton Wharton. The idea of making a book of Greek poetry look tempting by all the arts which are used in the case of modern poets, is an inspiring one. Surely, something of the proverbial disinclination felt by college men to read Greek after college days are over may be due to the conventionally unappetizing shape in which alone they have hitherto been able to get hold of Greek classics. Since, therefore, the outfittings of this book are due to the special pains taken by its editor and publishers, they deserve the special thanks of all who are striving for the advancement of Greek letters and of the civilizing humanities.

As this volume is called "A Memoir and a Translation," it is perhaps necessary to explain that "memoir" is used in the sense of a biography which does not lay claim to be a detailed one—a biographical sketch, in fact. It may be regretted that the necessity of sifting

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true from false and of weighing various authorities make the memoir of Sappho seem diffuse and ill arranged. After this has been said in criticism of the introduction, there remains little but praise for the way in which our editor presents all of the unfortunately scant remnants of poetry by the *Sapphica puella musa doctior*, or, as the Greek epigrammatist chose to call her, "the tenth muse." Among great lyric poets belonging to that wild and restless era ushered in among the Greeks when the patriarchal peace of Homeric times was fled from earth forever, only two can be vividly present to our imaginations, only two can forcibly and in their own persons possess our fancy to-day; the two are Sappho and Archilochus. We know that Alcæus wrote vigorous and graceful verse; we are swept away by the storm of intense political feeling of which some of his political verses are full; but the man Alcæus we cannot know. How should we make his acquaintance in the few scattered fragments that late writers have quoted? The same is true of Anacreon and of Tyrtæus. Not so with Sappho, nor yet with Archilochus. Archilochus will always be known to those who have read his fragmentary verses as the master hater, the man whose words could bite. It seems as if the perfect womanliness of Sappho would stand revealed to us in any single line. Take the line (fr. 33)—

οηράμαν μὶν ἐγω ζίθεν, Ἄτθι, πάλαί ποτα,

fulfilled with the gentleness and sweet fervor of matchless womanhood; Swinburne has deluged her perfect brevity with multiplied metrical trills and quavers, but has brought to its meaning nothing new, in his "Songs of the Springtide." Our editor does well, however, to quote him as follows:

> "*I loved thee*,—hark, one tenderer note than all—
> *Allhis, of old time, once*—one low long fall,
> Sighing—one long low lovely loveless call,
> Dying—one pause in song so flamelike fast—
> *Allhis, long since in old time overpast*—
> One soft first pause and last.
> One,—then the old rage of rapture's fleriest rain
> Storms all the music maddened night again."

Perhaps the last two lines, which none but a barbarian should admire, could be amputated. It certainly does not seem probable that Sappho, who was young whenever she spoke in verse, no matter if she does in one place admit that she is rather old, would have found any use for Swinburne's "old rage of rapture's fieriest rain," and it is reasonably certain that "burning Sappho loved and sung" without ever storming anything like the music-maddened night. Barring these last two lines, Swinburne in the generosity of his plentiful periphrases has marvellously interpreted the exquisite and incommunicable charm of what Dio Chrysostom calls the "perfect beauty" of Sappho's diction.

The most original feature in Mr. Wharton's book is undoubtedly to be found in the perfect good-taste and triumphant self-restraint of the prose translations which he supplies for every existing fragment of our poetess. With this book, a person wholly unacquainted with Greek may certainly come very near to the thought in its original form, since the best poetical translations that have been made are printed after the more scrupulously faithful one in prose. Altogether, it is plain that our editor has succeeded in making his "Sappho" so complete—a carefully compiled bibliography is introduced at the end,—and so beautiful—with the aid of the Chiswick press, and in spite, be it said, of the medallion-like frontispiece,—that whoever catches sight of the book may well say in his heart: "I must not die till I have read the book." At all events, Athenæus gives some countenance to this state of mind when he tells how Solon, the lawgiver of Athens, on hearing one of Sappho's songs, exclaimed: "I must not die till I have learned the song."

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