

ORIGIN OF GREEK TRAGEDY.¹

THE object of this, Prof. Ridgeway's latest contribution to the early history of the stage, is to expand and reinforce with additional evidence the thesis which he formulated in his "Origin of Tragedy," published in 1910. The doctrine of this earlier work asserted that the drama of the Greeks was not, as had hitherto been supposed, derived from the cult of Dionysus, but was based on the worship of the dead, and reflects the primal tragedy of human life. In order to secure this position it was necessary to controvert the theories of two allied schools of interpretation of primitive religion, and, as often happens, the constructive part of the work is inferior in interest to the polemical, when the attack falls into the hands of a critic so acute, learned, and witty as the writer.

In dealing with the school represented by "The Golden Bough," Prof. Ridgeway begins by stating that "it is with extreme reluctance and with genuine sorrow that I have found myself compelled to differ on this fundamental question from one of my oldest and best friends." The gulf fixed between Sir James Frazer and himself is, indeed, great. The former holds that vegetation spirits and the phenomena embraced under the term Totemism are primary and absolutely independent of the belief in the existence of the soul after the death of the body. Prof. Ridgeway, on the other hand, asserts that vegetation spirits and Totemic beliefs are merely secondary phenomena, all depending on the primary belief of mankind in the continued existence of the soul after the death of its carnal covering. He rejects the famous explanation of the Nemi story, which he holds to be largely based on suppositions and suggestions. The priest of the Arician grove is not the personification of the oak, which is not the sacred tree at Olympia, the centre of the worship of Pan-Hellenic Zeus, but derives its sanctity from its association with a death cult, the worship of Egeria suggesting that honour was paid to the burial place of the Egerii.

¹ "The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races in special reference to the Origin of Greek Tragedy." By Prof. W. Ridgeway. Pp. xv+448. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1915.) Price 15s. net.

The attempt of Sir James Frazer to account for dramatic performances by the dramatisation of the seasons is also necessarily rejected; magic is not antecedent to religion; and with the abandonment of the vegetation hypothesis goes the doctrine of Dr. Farnell that dramatic performances of this type are primitive, and antecedent to dramas based on human life. The criticism of the



FIG. 1.—Scene in a Rama play: Ram Chandra and Lakshmana. From "The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races."

school represented by Miss J. E. Harrison and her fellow-workers, Prof. G. G. Murray and Mr. F. M. Cornford, who postulate the Eniautos Daimon and heroes as a projection from certain *choses sacrées*, is even more drastic. An important part of the material adduced to support the supremacy of ancestor worship as the basis of primitive cult and belief comes from India, and

the euhemeristic views of the late Sir A. Lyall, which regard most of the gods of Hinduism as deified men, are fully accepted. The *mana* of Dr. Marett resolves itself into a development from relic worship, and his dogma that religion develops from the undifferentiated to the differentiated is criticised on the ground of the complexity of savage society, and in particular its highly developed system of relationship.

It would be premature to discuss these positions, which are still the subject of acute controversy, and the forces now on the defensive may be in a position to make a successful counter-attack. This much may be said: while Prof. Ridgeway has doubtless succeeded in proving that

introductory chapter, in which the learning, acumen, and wit of the author are conspicuous. The material on dance and drama among barbaric and savage races is of the highest value, and must be studied by all future historians of the stage. The facts from India, due to help received from Sir John Marshall and the staff of the Archæological Survey, are of special interest, and the fine collection of photographs taken for this work is admirable. Two of the illustrations are here given, by the courtesy of the publishers. When we are told that the Shiah form of Islam is dominant in India, it may be pointed out that though this sect is more active and fanatical than that of its rivals, the Sunnis, the latter holds a decided numerical superiority. It is to be regretted that the proofs of the chapter on Hindustan were not read by a competent Oriental scholar, who would have been able to detect some irritating perversions of names which detract from the scientific accuracy of the work.



FIG. 2.— The Buffoon (*Tcheu*). From "The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races."

the cult of the dead has exercised potent influence on the development of drama—indeed, his leading opponent, Prof. Murray, admits that "it can be shown that every extant tragedy contains somewhere towards the end the celebration of a *tabu* romb"—many will hesitate to refer such a complex as dance and drama throughout the world to a single concept; and, to take India alone, Sir A. Lyall's view, which excludes the cult of spirits other than human, leaves unexplained the devotion to Siva, who was in origin a storm god, later developed into a deity of fertility, or to the still potent spirits of mountain, river, or spring.

We have almost exhausted our space in discussing the important problems raised in the

THE METRIC SYSTEM AND DECIMAL COINAGE.

THERE are probably few readers of NATURE who do not realise that what is being referred to in the Press as "The War after the War" is nothing more than a tardy appreciation of the "war before the war" which Germany has been waging against England for a quarter to half a century in the applications of science to commerce. It has been stated over and over again that German firms have been ousting British trade in many countries by issuing price lists containing quotations in the metric system of weights and measures. A further element of success has been that the enterprising Germans have in many cases told prospective purchasers the exact amount of money in their own currency which they would have to pay in order to have the goods delivered at their house, free of carriage, customs dues, or all other charges.

Now scientific men have been preaching the adoption of the metric system for years. The advantages which this country would gain by discarding British weights and measures, and using those which have now become international, are well known to every thinking man. In these circumstances it must be regarded as regrettable that the *Electrical Review*, in a series of articles entitled "Decimal Coinage and the Metric System" (October 15 to November 26), has associated these undoubted claims for standardisation of units with the advocacy of a change of monetary system which nobody understands, and which does not appear calculated to advance the cause of international uniformity.