

## A MESSAGE FROM ARISTOPHANES.

BY FRED. C. CONYBEARE.

A VOLUME of Aristophanes lies open on my knees, as I sit perched on a rock well above the clear gliding waters of the river Minho, which here divides Spain from Portugal. I am on the Spanish bank, and all is peace around me. Left and right extend vineyards and plantations of maize, both shining in this season like emeralds under the level rays of the setting sun. Amidst their greenery nestle peasants' cots, of which one can discern only the roofs, picturesque as deeply corrugated brown tiles and up-curling evening smoke can make them; for these humble dwellings are seldom of more than a single story, and the vines encircling them are trailed, not as in the Provence low along the earth, but high up along wires and wooden rafters hung on countless goodly uprights of solid granite. Under such a screen of foliage the land remains cool, for even the midday sun cannot penetrate it, and even the wayfarer is protected as well as the soft-eyed bullocks that draw the rude carts of ancient type, for in order to utilize every yard of the rich soil the careful peasants carry their narrow roads for miles under such pergolas.

Behind me runs at a somewhat higher level where the land becomes steeper and uneven, the margin of a pine wood, dark and mysterious, except where clearings afford space for the white and purple heather to grow. In the background lofty hills clad with such heather close in the fertile valley. These great lineaments of the landscape are more visible from where I sit, if I cast my glance across the stream into the neighboring land of Portugal. There the eye can rove from ridge to ridge dimly interfolding in purple depths, and crowned not seldom with fantastic coronets of rugged rocks. The glens and hollows are beginning to be filled with mist and smoke, and along the eastern slopes that take the setting sun,

as Horace wrote, *duplicantur umbrae*, "the shadows are doubled" of the loftier crests that intercept its radiance.

Here no echoes of the war that is wasting Europe and destroying the civilizing work of a hundred years of peace; no rival battle-cries, no strident hymns of interracial hatred, reach this blessed retreat. Most of the peasants are as illiterate as I would like to be myself until the wickedness be overpast, and so are immune from newspapers; even if they have heard talk of the war, they probably regard it with the same unconcern with which in England we would regard a civil war in China. If you chance on one of their parish priests, he of course will know more about it; and if you ask him what he thinks of it, will answer that it is the greatest *locura y impiedad*, the worst madness and impiety that has ever disgraced the world, and that the pope, who supplicates the nations to end it, is the only prince in Europe—always excepting the king of Spain—that retains his sanity.

A little up the stream I see industrious village wives still hard at work washing their household linen; and as they kneel at the water's edge they are chanting a weird Galician folk-song that varies from grave to gay, glad outbursts dying away into melancholy cadences. One hears also further away a still stranger music, a rhythmless chaos of shrill shrieks and low deep groans, such as might arise from an inferno full of lost souls. It is nothing worse than the medley of rough dissonances given off by wooden axles revolving in wooden sockets, as the oxen drag homeward the heavily laden carts with solid wooden wheels along the stony lanes. On the other bank of the river I also catch the voices of children, collecting their little flocks of sheep and goats along the strip of grass that skirts the river.

It is twilight now. The angelus begins to toll from the white-washed village church, and it is time that I should wend my way homeward, threading the rough forest paths before darkness overtakes me; so I close my book and quit my rocky seat.

I have been scanning two plays, the "Lysistrata" and the "Peace" of Aristophanes, in the hope of winning therefrom some ray of humor to cheer me; and in these few pages I will summarize for my readers, not so much the wit I found there, and in plenty, as the profound moral truths with which these plays are still fraught for us to-day, though some 2300 years have elapsed since they awakened the mirth of Athenian audiences.

But to Aristophanes, prince of comedians, first let me apologize for the way in which he is treated by that intelligent body of men,

the censors of the British War Office. The better to understand certain passages which his editor, Brunck, for all his learning, has left obscure in his Latin version, I lately wrote home to have sent me from my library in Oxford a French translation made by an excellent scholar fifty years ago, and issued by a Paris firm that exists no more. The book reached me not, but, instead of it, I received a communication from these wiseacres that, not having been addressed to me by the publishers, it is to be destroyed at the end of fourteen days. O Aristophanes, are wit and humor extinct in Old England, that thou shouldst be treated like a stray cur or an old-time sorcerer? Or dost thou really contain military secrets, so dangerous to the successful conduct of this glorious war, that Lord Kitchener's subordinates need to guard against their being divulged in Spain?

I must therefore be content with Brunck, though he was a German; and, unassisted by the Frenchman, will now, in despite of British censors, and even at the risk of being held up to public indignation by the English press as a traitor and a spy, try to reveal the message which Aristophanes can in this evil season convey to our understanding.

The Peloponnesian war which filled the last three decades of the fifth century before Christ, and of which the great critical historian Thucydides has left us his record, in many essential features resembled that which to-day convulses Europe. As England with her oversea colonies and fleets confronts the greatest of military organizations, the German nation, so Athens, mistress of the Egean and head of a confederation of island states, confronted a Sparta, organized as a garrison and armed camp to overawe surrounding populations of doubtful loyalty. It was a fratricidal war, for Greek was fighting Greek and Hellas was divided against herself, a momentous struggle, for it ended in the downfall of the ancient city state and inaugurated a new political era. The rivalries of these states had waxed too bitter, their patriotism too narrow. They had indeed early in the fifth century B. C. held together for a time and successfully faced the forces of Xerxes and Darius; but no further concert was possible, and the seeds of dissolution now sown in the struggle for the hegemony of Greece bore fruit later on when Philip and Alexander of Macedon arose. The unity once sacrificed could not be restored, the feuds engendered could not be composed, and a foreign and Macedonian militarism presently made an easy conquest of a divided Hellas in spite of the eloquence of a Demosthenes. Hellenism, no doubt, did not perish, it could not, for Philip of

Macedon and Alexander prided themselves on their Greek culture, and they carried it, though not as a political system, as far even as Persia and the confines of India; they founded new dynasties more or less Greek, and established new cities, like Alexandria, whose inhabitants spoke and wrote a kind of Attic. But the golden age of Greek art, literature and philosophy was at an end. It could not survive the city state. The new Hellenistic communities which covered Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, continued to reverence the artists, poets and thinkers of Athens; but the old spirit had evaporated; they Atticized, but were not Athenians. It needed the ferment and compost of a free democracy to throw up such flowers of the drama as Æschylus and Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes; such historians as Thucydides, such thinkers as Plato and Aristotle, and freedom was incompatible with the absolute sway of kings. The Macedonian conquerors aspired, as I have said, to be regarded as Greeks, and claimed to share the traditions of the conquerors of Salamis and Marathon, but the result of their suppression—and it was final and inevitable—of the old city states, was to sterilize the Greek intelligence and water down its wine for all succeeding ages.

Our grandfathers, still spellbound by bibliolatry, believed all the languages of the world to be descended from Hebrew; and it is barely a hundred years ago that the application of the comparative method to philology revealed to an astonished world that, apart from the Mongolian and Semitic groups, the languages of nearly all civilized races, ancient and modern Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, Persian, Slavonic, Gothic or Teutonic, Armenian, Celtic, are sister tongues, daughters of one mother, in the same way as the modern Romance idioms of Castile, Italy, France, Catalonia, Portugal, Provence and probably Roumania, are descended from Latin. In appreciating the Romance tongues we enjoy the advantage that their parent dialect is preserved to us in ancient monuments, whereas the early tongue of which the members of the other group are the offspring, is irrevocably lost; of it we have no written records, and it can only be conjecturally reconstructed from a careful comparison of its descendants. Philologists, anxious to lay stress on the connection between the East and the West, have agreed to call it Aryan or Indo-European,—Aryan being the appellation which the old Persians gave to their own civilization. It is as significant as it is deplorable that the nations participating in the present war are all members, except the Japanese, Turks and Hungarians (who are all three Mongolians), of the Aryan group; and what is still more

deplorable is the fact that with insignificant exceptions the entire Aryan group it at war with itself, for through the influence of England even the Hindus are involved. In Europe the Spanish and the Scandinavian units, the Dutch and a handful of polyglot Swiss, alone have had the good sense to hold aloof. It threatens ere long to engulf even the United States, as it already has Canada and the Southern Pacific colonies of England. The bitterest feature is that the two most closely allied races of all, the English and the Germans, are opposed to one another in this struggle, although more than any other two races they resemble one another in moral character and intellectual gifts, and although their languages are so closely allied that philologists infer that they lay together and had a common history long after they split off from the original Indo-European unity. St. Boniface, an Englishman and bishop of Mainz little over a thousand years ago, ever referred to his kinsmen in England as the Saxons beyond the sea. Entire populations in England and along the Rhine and Elbe still spoke the same tongue.

Just as Pope Benedict XV has recently addressed to the warring governments, in the name of their common race, religion and civilization, a solemn protest against a war which is the suicide of Europe, so in the *Lysistrata*, under the cover of comedy, Aristophanes appeals to his countrymen to stop a war which was the suicide of Hellas; and he chooses as his mouthpieces the women of the belligerent states, perhaps out of genuine compassion, for then as now women, though they lacked the excitement of fighting and had no voice in the making of peace and war, nevertheless bore their share and even more than their share, of the privations, suffering and sorrow that hostilities entailed. The play in effect sets before us the tragicomic proceedings of a female stop-the-war committee organized by Lysistrata, a name aptly chosen, since etymologically it means the lady who disbands an army. The opening scene, of which the time is early dawn, represents a first meeting of her committee; and she has previously beaten up recruits and arranged that they shall thus assemble to listen to her program and deliberate about how best to realize it.

Her first words are indicative of disappointment. She had expected her fellow women to assemble in force, yet only three present themselves, of whom one is from Sparta. "Why," she complained, "if it were a feast of Bacchus or Pan or even of some obscurer deity, you would find the street rendered impassable by the drummers and bandsmen, and now not a single woman is here."

As she speaks she catches sight of one of her gossips, named

Calonice, who, noticing her distress, asks what has upset her and covered her pretty face with frowns." "My heart," answers Lysistrata, "is aflame with compassion for my sex. Are we not looked down upon by men as mischievous beings?"

Calonice's answer is as frivolous as that of a modern anti-suffragette: "And so, by Zeus, we are." Her friend disdains such flippancy, and goes on to deplore the fact that her friends have not come to the meeting, although they had been notified of it beforehand and although there were such important matters to discuss.

Thereon Calonice, the embodiment of unromantic common sense, tries to calm her leader's misgivings: "They will turn up," she says, "only give them time. You forget how difficult it is for women to quit their homes at so early an hour. One has to fuss about her husband, another is waking up her servant, a third is dangling the baby, a fourth giving it a bath, a fifth is feeding it." "All the same," protests the prophetess of peace, "we have business on hand much more important to us than these petty home interests. It is a matter in pondering which I have spent many a sleepless night." "Hey!" remarks her friend, "then it must be something very clever." "Not clever at all," answers the other. "It is this, that on women now depends the salvation of Hellas."

"On women," replies her friend. "Then it is in a mighty poor way." Her mentor disdains afresh her interruption and resumes: "Yes, it all depends on us, whether our state is to survive or not, nay, and even whether the Peloponnesians shall continue to exist." "If that's all," interjects Calonice in a sudden fit of patriotism, "it surely is better to make an end of them." For a good Athenian had to wish for their destruction, just as good Britishers of to-day demand that Germany should be annihilated. "Yes, but the people of Boeotia also will perish. "Oh, no, I hope not all," cries the irrepressible Calonice. "Save the eels, they are so toothsome."

"I'll not hint at the same fate for the Athenians," continues Lysistrata, respectful of her audience, "nor have you dreamed of such a thing! Nevertheless, if we could get the women to meet together here from Boeotia and the Peloponnese, along with ourselves, then we could all join in our effort to save Hellas."

But her friend remains as sceptical as ever of the good sense of her sex. They are fit for nothing, she argues, except to paint their faces and dress up in fineries by way of attracting the men.

"You've hit the very thing," cries Lysistrata. "It is just finery will do it"—a dark saying, of which the purport is revealed later on. Meanwhile other ladies make their appearance: Myrrhina from

Anagyrus,—who apologizes for being so late, but in the dark she could not find her girdle,—and Lampito, a vigorous lady from Lacedaemon, looking as if she could strangle an ox. “I guess I could,” says Lampito in her broad Doric idiom. “Don’t I frequent the gymnasium, and devote myself to the strengthening of my hams?”—a coarse allusion to the athletic training of Spartan girls. In reply Lysistrata compliments her upon her bust, but is requested not to stroke her up and down as if she was a victim for the altar.

A Boeotian and a Corinthian lady next arrive. Lysistrata is then voted into the chair, but before she will disclose her plan for stopping the war, she insists on putting a question to her friends, which for millions of women to-day has a most pathetic ring:

“Do you not miss the fathers of your children when they are away campaigning? For I’m sure you have, every one of you, husbands at the front.”

“Alas,” answers the gay Calonice, at last touched to the heart, “my man has already been five months away in Thrace watching Eucrates.” “And mine,” chimes in Lysistrata, “seven whole months in Pylos.” “And as for mine,” cries Lampito, “he is no sooner home, than off he rushes again in full armor with lance and buckles.”

Thus appealed to, the ladies now profess their anxiety to see an end put to the war, and boast of the heroic sacrifices they would make to secure peace. Calonice would submit to be cut in two like a turbot, Lampito would run up the precipices of Taygetus, if Peace should greet her on the summit. So they press Lysistrata to enunciate her plan, and before an audience astretch with expectation, she does so. It is that the women of the belligerent states should deny their husbands conjugal rights until they leave off fighting. The proposal, much to Lysistrata’s chagrin, is received with little enthusiasm, and they all exclaim that they would sooner pass through fire. Lampito, the stalwart Spartan lady, alone is sympathetic, and Lysistrata in recognition calls her a darling and the only true woman of the lot.

In the hands of an Aristophanes and before an Athenian audience, such a theme as this lent itself to much coarseness, which we would not try to excuse, though we must bear two things in mind, firstly that women were not allowed in ancient Athens to listen to comedies, and secondly that on the modern English stage, much more on the French, plays full of scarcely veiled lubricity are acted before audiences of women, while in any bookstall in France are exhibited for sale books which far surpass in obscenity anything in Aristophanes’s comedies.

Lysistrata's audience at length agree, but it is now Lampito's turn to express misgivings of another kind. Will peace, she asks, ever be secure so long as the Athenians keep up a gigantic fleet and a huge war chest in the temple of their goddess, a very abyss of silver, she terms it, the silver bullets of which an English statesman boasts? A German of to-day affects to entertain similar misgivings about Great Britain. Lysistrata hastens to reassure her on the latter point. She has foreseen and provided against it. For while the younger women prosecute the first article of her program, the older ones are, under pretext of offering a sacrifice to Athene, to seize the Parthenon in which the war fund of Athens was lodged and to hold the fort resolutely against all comers. Accordingly they all proceed to swear a solemn oath to stick to the double program, and there follows an amusing discussion of the best and most binding ritual to adopt. The idea of using a shield to catch the libations of the victim's blood is scouted as savoring too strongly of militarism, and, as they cannot procure a white horse for sacrifice, they are ultimately content to use wine only without water, and to pretend that it is blood. Robertson Smith has shown that the use of wine as a ritual surrogate for blood was common in antiquity, so that Aristophanes, though he is jesting, may here glance at well-established religious custom.

Lysistrata dictates to her friends an oath, not to be uttered before a polite audience, which they severally repeat after her word for word, and the ceremony is barely ended when an uproar is heard without. It proceeds from the older women who have seized the Acropolis and are bolting and barring the gates.

A new and stirring scene ensues. A party of old men (the young are presumably away at the war) stagger up the steep slope of the Acropolis laden with faggots, a pot of fire to set them alight. They mean to smoke the women out of their stronghold and even burn them alive. "Who would ever have dreamed that women whom we fed in our homes, though we knew what imps they were, would ever have seized on the holy image, and with bolts and bars have blocked the approaches of the Goddess's temple?"

The old men have scaled the approaches, and presently we hear issuing from the temple the despairing appeal of the lady in command to her aide-de-camp: "Fly, Nicodice, fly for water, before Kalyce is burned alive, and Critylla too, for they are being suffocated by iniquitous laws and by these deadly old men."

The dialogue which ensues between the old men and the women who hasten to the rescue with their jars of water, is very amusing.



In one of his plays Euripides had stigmatized the sex as shameless, and one of the old men quotes him; the women are enraged and threaten, if they are touched, to tear out his liver and break his ribs. "Why have you come here with fire, you old Tombs?" they cry. "Yes," answer the old men in chorus, "we mean to heap up your funeral pyre and set it alight." Thereupon the women threaten them with a veritable nuptial bath, and raising their pails, souse them from head to foot, much to their discomfiture, and well before they have time to set light even to the ladies' hair. "I have watered you well," cry the latter, "to give you a chance of becoming young again." "I am sere and dry as ever," wail the old men, "and all of a tremble." "Well, then," answer their tormentors, "as you have got fire with you, you can heat it up and take it warm."

The male victims hereupon retaliate by recounting the sins of the opposite sex; they tell how superstitious women give themselves up to the wild rites of Bacchus and to the obscene orgies of Adonis; how the fashionable ones get their husbands out of the way in order to flirt with their jewelers and bootmakers. The ladies retort in kind, and rail at the imbecilities of the Athenian parliament, and their demeanor shortly becomes so threatening that the Scythian constables who attend the aged counsellor, instead of obeying the latter's behests and setting on the women with their cudgels, take to their heels and run away.

The Counsellor is then reduced to asking the women civilly what is their motive in thus taking possession of the "mighty rock, the inaccessible Acropolis, the holy precincts of the Goddess Athene," and the following instructive dialogue ensues:

*Lysistrata*: We want to keep your money safe and prevent your going to war with it.

*Counsellor*: Do you mean to say we have gone to war with it?

*Lys*: Yes, and you have made a mess of everything. You just let Pisander (Lloyd George) steal it, and the rest of the office seekers, who are always up to some hankey pankey or other. But let them do what they like, we will take care they don't appropriate any more of this fund.

*Couns*: And what will you do?

*Lys*: Do? Why we will administer the fund ourselves.

*Couns*: What, you turn chancellor of the exchequer?

*Lys*: And, pray, why not? Is it not we and no one else that manage your home finances?

*Couns*: Ah, but that's another story.

*Lys*: How, another?

*Couns:* This fund is for carrying on the war.

*Lys:* Well, in the first place, there is no need to go on with the war. It's wrong.

*Couns:* And how else are we to save ourselves (from Germany)?

*Lys:* We'll save you.

*Couns:* You save us!

*Lys:* Yes, we.

*Couns:* Oh, horror!

*Lys:* Yes, you shall be saved, whether you like it or not.

*Couns:* I never heard such nonsense.

*Lys:* Now, you are getting angry. All the same it has got to be done.

*Couns:* But by Demeter, it's not right.

*Lys:* Never mind, my friend, we've got to save you.

*Couns:* And suppose I don't want to be saved?

*Lys:* Why, that is all the more reason for saving you.

*Couns:* And who and what put it into your heads to meddle with questions of war and peace?

*Lys:* We will tell you.

*Couns:* Out with it quick, or you shall rue it.

*Lys:* Listen then, and keep your hands off us.

*Couns:* But I can't, I'm so angry, I can hardly restrain them.

*Lys:* Then it's you that will rue it, not we.

*Couns:* Your pate shall suffer, you old hag, but out with it.

*Lys:* I will. After the war first broke out, we women, with our natural modesty, put up for a good long time with your antics; for you would not let us even whisper a complaint. At last we came to be disgusted with your doings and saw through it all, and, time and again, as we sat at home, we heard of how you had in your council of war muddled and messed some great undertaking. Then we would ask you with a smile: "Well, what of the resolution you have passed to-day in parliament about a treaty of peace to be inscribed on a pillar?" Then the men answered us: "What business is it of yours? Hold your tongues." And we held them.

Here one of the ladies present interjects the remark: "I never would have held mine," which provokes this rejoinder from the counsellor: "And you would have been just about sorry for yourself if you hadn't." Lysistrata disregards this interlude and continues:

*Lys:* So I held my tongue at home. But presently I heard of some plan, still more imbecile, that you had resolved upon,

and then I would say to my husband: "How comes it that you are acting so senselessly?" But he would stare at me askance and say: "If you don't go on with your spinning, I'll break your head. It is men's business, not women's, to look after the war."

*Couns:* And, by Zeus, he was quite right.

*Lys:* How right, you wretch? When your plans were so rotten, was it not our duty to warn you? And when it came to this that we heard you running about the streets saying: "There's not a man left in the city. Our last reserves are abroad!"—then we made up our minds that the time had come for the women to lay their heads together and by a joint effort save Hellas. For what was the good of waiting any longer? So then, if you will just return us the compliment of holding your tongues as we did ours, and listening while we give you some advice, we can get you out of your difficulties.

The counsellor explodes in wrath at hearing such sentiments from a mere woman, from one who wears a veil. Lysistrata in turn loses patience: she takes her veil and throws it over his face, and follows that up by clapping her wool basket over his head; she then advises him to stay quietly at home carding wool with his spouse and eating his rations of beans, for in future it's the women who mean to look after the war, and not the men.

There follows some amusing satire directed by the women against the "swank" of the militarists. Lysistrata says:

"We mean to put an end to your swaggering about the market place in full armor, as if you were mad."

Here a woman in the audience interrupts: "By the Paphian Venus, that's a good idea."

*Lys:* Yes, for at present, when we are vending our crockery and vegetables, they come rampaging about in armor like so many Corybants.

*Couns:* Of course, what else would you have our brave fellows do?

*Lys:* Well, it's fit to laugh at, to see a fellow chaffering over the price of nuts, and all the while holding up a great shield bedizened with the head of a Gorgon.

Here again a woman in the crowd interjects: "Yes, and by heaven, I saw a long-haired captain sitting on his charger and throw-

ing into his brazen casket the eggs he had just bought of an old woman."

*Couns:* And how, please, would you put an end to the general embroglio?

*Lysistrata* answers that she would unravel it as she would a tangled skein of wool. Above all she would be fair all round and recognize the rights of aliens settled in their midst, and give a voice in the management of affairs to their own colonists and friends, who at present pay the piper while others call the tune. The counsellor is more than ever horrified at women interfering who have nothing to do with war. "Nothing to do, you scoundrel," answers *Lysistrata*. "Is it not we that bear our sons and let them go to the battle front?"

*Couns:* Shut up and don't be ill-natured.

*Lys:* And then, just when we ought to be having a good time and making the best of our youth, we are left single because of the war. I don't complain of my own lot, but I hate to see the girls growing old in their chambers.

*Couns:* And don't the men too grow old?

*Lys:* Yes, but it's not the same thing by any means for them. For a man turns up, no matter whence; and however bald-pated or grayhaired he be, he at once finds a girl to marry him. On the other hand a woman's bloom is brief and quickly over; and unless she can avail herself of it, no one wants to marry her, and she has to sit and angle for anything she can catch.

As we read these lines we think with *Lysistrata* of the tens of thousands of young women in all the countries now at war, doomed to early widowhood or to solitary lives unblest by husband or children. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

Athenian citizens never forgot that they had once been the victims of tyrants, as those were termed who contrived to usurp supreme power and dictatorship; and the comedian now sets himself to ridicule this, the most familiar of all bogies. "I scent the tyranny of Hippias," cries the aged counsellor. "These accursed women have plotted with the Lacedæmonians, who are as little to be trusted as ravening wolves, to undermine our liberties." He straightway vows to wreath his sword in a myrtle branch, and take his stand armed in the market-place beside the statue of Aristogeiton. "If," he exclaims, "we give these women the least encouragement, there

is no devilry they will shrink from. Nay, ere long they will be building ships and try their hand at a naval battle, sailing against us, as Artemisia did." And he ends by calling them Amazons, such as the painter Micon had depicted fighting against men.

The poet continues in this strain to chaff his countrymen, mingling with his humor much that is regrettably indecent, and the play ends with a visit to Athens of ambassadors from Sparta, where Lysistrata's plan of campaign has been no less effective than in her own city. It has influenced them to come with proposals of peace, and Lysistrata delivers an harangue in the presence of the representatives of the two belligerent states which is replete with good sense and undoubtedly reflects the author's own feelings. She says:

"Men of Lacedæmon, come and stand close by me, and you Athenians there, and listen to my words. I am but a woman, but I have some common sense, and nature has endowed me with a fair faculty of judgment, and after listening to many an oration of sires and elders, my education is reasonably complete. Now having got hold of you, I mean to scold you both, as you deserve. For is it not from one and the same lustral ewer that you besprinkle your altars, being kinsmen, as you are, in Olympia, in Pylæ, Delphi, and in how many other shrines which I could enumerate, had I time? And yet in the presence of enemy barbarians, you destroy with your armies Greek men and cities."

Then, turning to the Spartans, she continues: "Next you men of Lacedæmon, for I now turn to you, know you not that once on a time Pericles the Spartan came hither, and sat down a suppliant of the men of Athens at these altars, pale in his purple robe, and asking for armed assistance, for Messene was then oppressing you, and no less the God who shakes the earth; and our Cimon went with 4000 hoplites and saved the whole of Lacedæmon. Yet after being so treated by the men of Athens you ravage the lands of those who dealt so kindly by you."

Here an Athenian present interjects the remark: "They do wrong, by Zeus, O Lysistrata." Whereupon the latter, turning to him, continues: "But think you, O Athenians, that I can acquit you? Wit ye not of how, when you wore the garb of slaves, the Lacedæmonians in turn came armed, and destroyed many a man of Thrace, and many partisans and allies of Hippias, and they alone that day fought it out at your side, and freed you, and once more clad your people that were in servile garb in the robe of liberty? . . . Wherefore, then, when ye have rendered one another such signal services do ye continue to fight, and not cease from your wicked-

ness? Why are you not reconciled? Come, what stands in the way?"

The belligerents forthwith agree to give back the fortresses and territory they have wrested from one another, and an Athenian present hails the chance of returning to his farm; "Now," he exclaims, "I'll off with my coat and start my plough," and the Spartan envoy answers: "And as for me, I'll lose no time carrying the dung to my fields," and Lysistrata continues thus:

"So soon as ever you are reconciled, you shall both do it. But if you are so inclined, hie to your council chamber, and go to your allies and communicate the news to them. Now then see that ye cleanse yourselves, that we, the women, may entertain you in the citadel out of what we have in these chests. There shall ye plight your oaths and troth one to the other, and then shall each of you take his wife and wend homeward."

There ensues a scene of much jollity. The counsellors and the Spartan legates begin to dance and sing, the latter invoking *Mnemosyne*, the muse of history, and praying her to sing of how the Athenians fought like gods and vanquished the Persian fleet at *Artemisium*, and of how they themselves under the lead of *Leonidas* fought like wild boars and vanquished the host of Persians as countless as the sand on the seashore.

The play ends with some noble hymns, the first addressed to *Artemis*, woodland huntress and virgin. "Come hither," is the invocation, "to witness our peacemaking, that thou mayest hold us together forever. May this friendship, as now ratified, be nevermore disturbed, and may we cast off the crafty manner of foxes. Hither come, O virgin huntress." Two more such hymns follow, one of the Athenian chorus, appealing to *Artemis* and *Apollo*, *Zeus* and *Here*, to be witnesses of their generous peace, more worthy of paeans than any victory in war; the other sung by the legates is an appeal to the muse of *Lacedæmon*, to quit fair *Taygetus* for a while and join them in their praise of the God of *Amyclæ* and of *Athena* of the brazen house, and of the doughty sons of *Tyndarus* that sport on the *Eurotas's* bank.

In such passages as these *Aristophanes* rises almost to the level of *Æschylus*, and makes us some amends for the deplorable obscenity of his dramas. It is sad that a message so full of charity, good sense and genuine patriotism (for there are other modes of being patriotic than shooting down your fellow men and brother Christians) had to be enveloped in such nauseous wrappings, in order to recommend it to the citizens of Athens. Are we, who

affect to believe that the Sermon on the Mount was a divine message, any readier to listen to it than were they to give ear to the humor and irony of their great comedian? Just as Athenian and Spartan had common shrines and religion, just as they had fought shoulder to shoulder against the Persians, so Germans and Englishmen have a common religion, now alas mute and silent; so too they have the memory of Waterloo and of many another battlefield on which they fought as friends.

But the *Lysistrata* is not the only play of Aristophanes, reading which we are constrained to turn to ourselves and our German cousins and exclaim *De te Fabula narratur*. In the one entitled "Irene" or "Peace" he chose the same theme. The plot is one of grotesque humor: an Athenian citizen, Trygæus, whose very name betokens peace and plenty, is grown weary of a war which has involved him and his neighbors in famine and misery. He conceives the idea of ascending to heaven, in order to interview Zeus and entreat him to bring it to an end. Like Don Quixote, Trygæus resolves to soar upward, but on a huge beetle; and the first scene is laid in the atrium of his house, where two of his servants are feeding up the gigantic insect on dung, by way of collecting its energies for the flight. It is an unsavory job, and one of them exclaims: "O where can I buy an imperforate nose? For what task can be more horrible than this, of kneading dung into cakes and giving them to a beetle to devour? . . . What a loathesome brute, ill-smelling and voracious! I know not which of the gods can be his patron, not Aphrodite, I'm sure, nor the Graces either."

However Trygæus has read in Æsop that the beetle was the only winged creature that ever reached the presence of the gods, so he determines to make the attempt. He mounts and soars upward, having previously exhorted his neighbors to close their latrines for three days, because otherwise his beetle, attracted by their fragrance, might make for them instead of for the gates of heaven; and he apostrophizes his noble steed thus:

"But come, my Pegasus, away with thee for very joy,  
Rattling the golden chains of thy bridle,  
As thou shakest thy gleaming ears.  
What art thou doing? What? Wouldst thou incline  
Thy nostrils to the sewers?  
Nay, direct thy flight boldly away from earth,  
And spreading wide thy fleet wings  
Hie thee straight for the Courts of Zeus."

He reaches the gate of heaven, where the God Hermes dis-

charged the role of St. Peter. Hermes hears him approaching, peeps out and cries: "By Hercules! What monster is this?" "A horse-beetle," answers the rider, who is much disappointed to learn that Zeus and the rest of the gods are away from home, Hermes alone remains to look after their pots and pans. And "why," asks Trygæus, "have they migrated?"

*Hermes:* Because they were angry with the Hellenes. And here, where they were themselves, they have settled war, and have handed you over to him to deal with you as he likes. But they have settled themselves as high as possible, so as not any longer to behold you fighting, nor hear a single word of your supplications.

*Trygæus:* And why have they done so? Tell me.

*Herm:* Because you preferred to go on fighting, though they so often tried to make peace between you—in vain, for if the Lacedæmonians won a small advantage, they would say: Now, by the Gods, those Athenians shall pay for it. While if you Athenians scored any success, and the Lacedæmonians came to treat for peace, then you would at once say: Beware, for by Athene, we are being tricked. By Zeus, we must not agree, and what's more they will come again as soon as we have got Pylos.

*Tryg:* I can't deny that that is the way we talk.

*Herm:* Wherefore I doubt if you will ever again behold Peace.

*Tryg:* Why, where has she gone?

*Herm:* War has thrown her into an antre vast.

*Tryg:* Into what?

*Herm:* Into this abyss. And then, look for yourself, and see how many stones he has piled atop of her, to prevent your ever getting her again.

*Tryg:* Tell me, what is it he is getting ready for us?

*Herm:* I only know this much, that last evening he brought in here an enormous mortar.

*Tryg:* And what does he want a mortar for?

*Herm:* He purposes to pound up in it your cities.

Here a noise inside heaven disturbs the colloquy, and Trygæus is admitted to see War with his huge mortar, making ready to pound up the cities of Greece. He will begin with the towns of Prasiæ and Megara, and imprecates terrible woes on them. Presently he comes to Sicily, the Athenians' attack on which ruined



their chances of success, as it is to be feared our attack on Constantinople will ruin ours; and here War cries with supreme irony:

“Ho, Sicily. Thou too art to perish. How fine a city to be so miserably crushed! Come, I will pour into thy wounds this Attic honey.”

At this moment, in response to the call of War, another figure comes to the scene, Tumult, and we are forcibly reminded of Coleridge’s war eclogue in which Fire, Famine and Slaughter hold colloquy together. Tumult is dispatched to Athens to fetch a pestle for War’s mortar. The pestle wanted is the popular statesman who had hatched the war and turned Hellas upside down. Tumult returns and announces that he is dead.

“Hurrah,” exclaims Trygæus, “that’s a good thing for our city.”

Tumult is next sent off to Sparta to bring back as pestle their chief fire-eater, whose role was to crush Athens at all costs. Tumult returns and announces that the Spartan pestle is not available either. He had been lent to the Thracians and they had lost him.

Trygæus now sees his chance. Before War can obtain a new pestle for his deadly mortar there may be time to haul up the Goddess of Peace out of the pit into which they have cast her, and reinstate her on her throne. So he appeals to all his fellow Hellenes to lend a hand and bring their ropes and pulleys:

“Hither come with willing hearts and hands before it is too late,  
Hellenes all, and save yourselves from bloodshed, war and mutual hate.”

In the humorous scene which follows, the different states of Greece are represented hauling up Peace out of her grave, and the stage resounds with such cries and vociferations as greet our ears on an English beach where sailors are hauling up a heavy boat. A few states remain sulky and fail to pull as they should, but the worst slackers are the manufacturers of arms who in ancient as in modern states formed a powerful guild. Like the Krupps and Vickers Maxims of our own day, they preferred war, because they fattened on it. They hang back and Trygæus has to menace them:

“If any polisher of spears, or shield merchant, desires war, the better to sell his wares, let brigands get hold of him and give him plain barley to eat.”

The farmers pull best, and next the scythe-makers who are represented as pointing a finger of scorn at the manufacturers of swords.

When Peace at last appears, rescued from her pit, Trygæus addresses his fellows thus:

“Hear, O ye peoples; let the cultivators depart, bearing the implements of their tillage to their fields, losing no time, and without spear or sword or javelin. For the world is once more blest with ancient Peace, so let each man repair to his farm, singing pæans.”

And the chorus sing:

“O day, long wished for by the just and by husbandmen,  
With what delight I hail thee. I fain would address my vines,  
And my fig-trees, which I planted when I was a younger man,  
I am minded to greet them after so long a time.”

Trygæus resumes:

“And now, my fellows, first of all, this Goddess greet with praise and prayer,  
Relieving us of crested helm and shields with Gorgon’s head that scare.”

The rest of the play represents the joyful sacrifices and jollity of the country people, allowed at last to return to their farms and gardens. It ends with a humorous scene in which the manufacturers of arms try to get rid of their sadly depreciated stocks. One brings a helmet magnificently crowned with crest and plumes. Trygæus has no use for it, but thinks he could use it as a broom to dust his dinner table with. He offers a hundredth part of its value, but finding, when he tries it, that the hairs come out, he refuses to take it at any price. He takes a handsome cuirass and turns it into an appurtenance of his privy; also a trumpet, which can be turned into a machine for weighing out his figs; and he is ready to cut the spear in two and use them as stakes. The despair of the armament firms is portrayed in the most comical manner, and their representatives are treated with the contumely they deserve.

One interesting feature in these plays remains to be noticed. It is the tolerance with which an Athenian public listened to criticism of their army and of the conduct of a war which was no less a life and death struggle for them than the present is for the nations engaged in it. Not only so, but they could sit in their theater and listen patiently to the bitterest irony directed against the war policy and its authors and upholders. Thus in this play, the god Hermes is allowed to assail even Pericles, for inflaming his “froward” fellow citizens to war. “He it was that blew up the flame of war, so that the eyes of all Hellenes are watering in its smoke, those of Attica, and those of other lands. . . . No one was left who could

stop it, and Peace vanished utterly." Trygæus answers: "By Apollo, I never learned that before of any one." "Nor I, either," answers the chorus.

The poet equally rebukes the Athenians for their spymongering. "Let an ally be rich and affluent, and, no matter how loyal he be, the demagogues, to ingratiate themselves with the starving victims of war, raise a hue and cry, accusing him then of being 'in league with Brasidas,'" the Spartan Moltke. As we read such a passage we are reminded of the denunciation of Sir Edgar Speyer in the columns of the *Morning Post*, and the following lines are as true of England or France or Germany to-day as they were of Athens:

"Like the hounds you are you tore him asunder; for the city was pale with fear and sat in terror, the while you devoured like cannibals any one who was thus denounced."

And when Hermes mentions "the chief author of the devastation of Hellas," Trygæus exclaims:

"Stop, stop, O Lord Hermes, mention him not. Let that man rest where he is now, in hell, for he no longer belongs to us, but to thee; whatever thou sayest of him, even if he was a villain when alive, a chatterer and chicaner, a meddler and a disturber of the peace, he is amenable to thee now and thy rebukes fall on thine own subjects."

To understand the above we must remember that Hermes conducted the souls of the dead before their judges Minos and Rhadamanthus. It is before these judges of the underworld that Hermes must indict the authors of the war, already deceased.

Thus the fratricidal war of ancient Greece was an emblem of what we witness to-day. Let any one in Berlin or London or Paris to-day raise his voice in favor of peace and the entire press will denounce him as a traitor. Even the pope has execrations leveled at his head because he has not quite forgotten or abjured the message of peace and goodwill. The clergy in all the countries at war are either silent or resort to sophistry to reconcile rampant cruelty and wickedness with the religion they profess. Most of them are appealing to God to help their own particular cause. If there be a Divine Power that listens to the prayers of men, he may well have turned away in disgust, as Aristophanes imagines the gods of Greece to have done.