

writers of our MSS. were already, it cannot be doubted, seriously corrupted. And with regard to these writers themselves, it must not be forgotten what their ordinary qualifications were. They were usually men who spoke and wrote the Greek of their age (say from the 11th to the 16th century) as it was commonly spoken and written by men of fair education. On the other hand, as we can see, they were usually very far from being good scholars in old classical Greek; of classical metres they knew almost nothing; and in respect of literary taste or poetical feeling they were, as a rule, no less poorly equipped. In the texts of the dramatists they were constantly meeting with things which they did not understand, and in such cases they either simply transmitted a fault of the archetype, or tried to make sense by some expedient of their own. On the whole, the text of Sophocles has fared better in the MSS. than that of either Aeschylus or Euripides. This needs no explanation in the case of Aeschylus. The style of Euripides, apparently so near to common life, and here analogous to that of Lysias, is, like the orator's, full of hidden snares and pitfalls for a transcriber: *λείη μὲν γὰρ ἰδεῖν*, as the old epigram says of it, *εἰ δέ τις αὐτὴν | εἰσβαίνοι, χαλεποῦ τρηχυτέρη σκόλοπος*. Where, however, our MSS. of Sophocles do fail, the corruption is often serious and universal. His manuscript text resembles a country with generally good roads, but an occasional deficiency of bridges.

Its general condition.

Is there reason to hope that, in such places, more light will yet be obtained from the manuscripts or scholia now known to exist? It appears hardly doubtful that this question must be answered in the negative. The utmost which it seems prudent to expect is a slightly increased certitude of minor detail where the text is already, in the main, uncorrupted. I need scarcely add that the contingency of a new MS. being discovered does not here come into account.

§ 6. Such, then, are the general conditions under which an editor of Sophocles is required to consider the treatment of conjectural emendation. It would seem as if a conservative *tendency* were sometimes held to be desirable in the editor of a text. When a text has been edited, we might properly speak of the *result* as 'conservative' or the contrary. But an editor has no more right to set out with a conservative tendency than with a tendency of the opposite kind. His task is simply to give, as nearly as he can ascertain it, what the author wrote. Each particular point affecting the text must be considered on its own merits. Instances have not been wanting in which, as I venture to think, editors of Sophocles have inclined too much to the side of unnecessary or even disastrous

Textual criticism should have no bias.