

were unmistakably those of Sophocles<sup>1</sup>. During the last half century, with the growth of a better aesthetic criticism in relation to all things Hellenic, a sense of the great beauties in the *Trachiniae* has decidedly prevailed over the tendency to exaggerate its defects; indeed, the praise bestowed upon it, in these latter days, has sometimes perhaps been a little too indiscriminate. The play is in fact an exceptionally difficult one to appreciate justly; and the root of the difficulty is in the character of the fable. A necessary prelude to the study of the *Trachiniae* is to consider the form in which the Heracles-myth had been developed, and the nature of the materials available for the dramatist.

The  
Heracles  
myth.—  
Argive  
legends.

§ 2. The Argive legends are those which best preserve the primitive Dorian conception of Heracles. They are alloyed, indeed, with later elements, of a political origin. Thus, in order that the Dorian conquerors might have some hereditary title to the land, Heracles was made the son of Alcmena, and, through her, a scion of the Perseidae; Tiryns was his heritage, of which he had been despoiled. Again, the struggles between Argos and Sparta for the headship of Peloponnesus have a reflex in those wars which the Argive Heracles wages in Elis or Messenia. But, when such elements have been set aside, there remains the old-Dorian hero, slayer of monsters, purger of the earth, who triumphs over the terrors of Hades, and brings the apples of immortality from the garden of the Hesperides.

We do not know exactly when the 'twelve labours' of Heracles became a definite legend. The earliest evidence for it is afforded by the temple of Zeus at Olympia, about 450 B.C. The twelve labours were there portrayed on the metopes,—six on those of the western front, and six on those of the eastern. All the twelve subjects are known from the existing remains<sup>2</sup>. The list agrees, in much the larger part, with twelve labours

<sup>1</sup> G. Hermann, Preface to the *Trachiniae*, p. vi: 'Ego quidem, quomodo qui Sophoclem cognitum habeat, an genuina sit haec fabula dubitare possit, non video. Nam quae duae res in poesi maxime produnt a quo quid scriptum sit, ingenium poesis et dictio, eae ita sunt in hac fabula eadem atque in ceteris, ut miraturus sim, si quis proferat aliquid, quod alienum ab Sophocle iudicari debeat.'

<sup>2</sup> The subjects of the western metopes, in order from left to right, were: (1) Nemean