

## INTRODUCTION.

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The speech of Andocides on the Mysteries is of great interest not merely for its unaffected and colloquial style, but more especially for the picture which it presents to us of the religious views and political condition of the Greeks at the time of that futile invasion of Sicily, which ended so disastrously and which eventually caused the downfall of Athens herself. For two or three months succeeding the final resolution taken by Athenians to invade Syracuse, the whole city was alive with preparations for the expedition. All classes embraced the project with an ardor and a confidence that had never been entertained before, and the generals had no difficulty in forming an army and fleet composed of picked men already provided with the best arms and accoutrements. Everything seemed favorable to the enterprise, and such was the confidence of success that every man provided himself for trading as well as for war. The oracles and signs were propitious, the State, exempted for nearly five years from any considerable warlike operations, had increased her treasury, repaired her fleet, and reinforced her standing army; and was, on the whole, able to put forth an armament superior in numbers to that of any

previous war. This prosperity and promising state of affairs was for the most part apparent to all, and the greatest excitement reigned throughout the city.

But in May, 415, just as the expedition was ready to start, an event occurred which destroyed all these favorable conditions.

Standing beside the outer doors of the temples and houses throughout the city were blocks of marble the height of a human figure, the upper part of which was a bust of the god *Hermes*. And as the legends of the Greeks taught that wheresoever the statue stood there stood the god also, the guardianship of *Hermes* was closely associated with every phase of life in Athens. These statues were in the course of one night mutilated and reduced to shapeless masses of stone by unknown hands. The ruin was almost universal, as *Plutarch* tells us, confirming the declaration of *Andocides* in his oration that the only image which escaped the general desecration was the great statue which was placed near his house.

To the Athenian mind such an act of impiety presented but one solution, that the motive of the mutilators had been to insult and estrange the tutelary Gods of the city, and it was immediately taken to heart as an ill omen in reference to the projected expedition. It seems probable that the conspiracy which had effected this work had in view two objects, first to ruin *Alcibiades*, and secondly to delay the expedition, as I shall attempt

to show later on. But such a solution did not present itself to the minds of the Athenians, whose attention was entirely taken up with the immediate results which must, according to their faith, follow such an offence. There had come to them a sense of helplessness against impending doom and a feeling of desolation which portended some dire misfortune. Their terror was increased by vague rumors that the Eleusinian Mysteries were being travestied in private houses of the city, a sacrilege of far greater proportions than the Mutilation of the Hermae, though more remote in its effect upon the prosperity of the State. After the first shock had passed away, the Athenians set themselves to work to discover the perpetrators of the crime; and large rewards were offered for information. Andocides has vividly narrated the scenes that followed, and it is only necessary in this sketch to outline the course of the investigation.

The first evidence in the matter was given by Teucer, who under a pledge of personal impunity, denounced twelve persons as guilty in regard to the Mysteries, and eighteen as mutilators of the Hermae. These were promptly dealt with, some being put to death, and others taking refuge in flight. But the evidence of Teucer was not sufficient to quiet the public suspicions and to satisfy the demand for complete reparation, as there was a general belief that the conspiracy was far more widely spread. This distrust was greatly encouraged by those who had been appointed commissioners of inquiry, and shortly

after the information of Teucer had been acted upon, one Diocles came forward and stated that the conspiracy included about three hundred persons. He denounced forty-two, amongst whom was Andocides with many of his relations. At their request, and in order to save them, Andocides then came forward as an informer, confirming the testimony of Teucer and supplementing that testimony by the addition of four names to the eighteen who were implicated in the Mutilation of the Hermae. This being accepted as the true and complete account, the affair of the Hermae was dropped and attention was turned to the affair of the Mysteries. In this Andocides was less fortunate, for although he had made his disclosures under a decree of general amnesty by which he was promised personal security; a new decree was passed on the motion of Isotimides which provided that those who had committed impiety and confessed it should be excluded from the market place and from the temples. This was virtually equivalent to banishment, and as Andocides fell under this decree, he was forced to leave the city.

In 402 B. C., under favor of the general amnesty which followed the overthrow of the Thirty Tyrants, he returned to the city, and after about three years' residence there, he was again attacked during the Eleusinian Festival by his old enemies, who claimed that he still came under the decree of Isotimides. A few years before his return he had attempted to have this disfranchisement

annulled, and although he had been unsuccessful, nothing had been said about the matter on his return. His accusers now contended that he had broken the decree of Isotimides by entering the Eleusinian Temple during the Festival. Whereupon he delivered his speech, "De Mysteriis," to prove that he had not committed impiety either by profaning the Mysteries or mutilating the Hermae; and the effect of this speech was his final acquittal.

Such is the history of the case in its relation to Andocides, a man who seems to have been marked as an object of hatred both to the oligarchs and to the democrats; but the religious and political aspect of the matter show the deep and far-reaching influence which it exerted upon the minds of the Athenians and the management of their affairs.

The reception of the views of Protagoras, the prosecution of Socrates and Anaxagoras, and the complaints of Aristophanes are sufficient to show the mind of the general public on matters of religion. It is quite true that there were a few advanced philosophers who were exceptions to this general orthodoxy, but to the mass of Athenians their mythology was a living faith; it was the source of their morals and their highest culture, and above all, upon it rested the safety and stability of their government. However false it may have been, however thin and fictitious its doctrines and legends may have seemed, through belief in it and through its punctilious

practice, Athens had reached a height in splendor, culture and refinement to which her sister states had never attained; and, with such a past to look back upon, the average Athenian could not and would not surrender his belief in those ancient legends whose influence had made his state what it was.

That faith took the form, not of a collection of dogmas, but of a devout feeling of awe and reverence for those mighty unseen powers which "hold alike the keys of darkness and of morn," and which should be propitiated at any cost. To the thoughtful Greek the pictures drawn by the poets were but paltry details with which to illustrate the conception of God in His entity and perfection and in His care of human affairs—the general conception of the powers that from a higher sphere than ours are overseeing men and chastising and rewarding them according as they deserve. And with such a conception before their minds it is natural that their first care should be to propitiate and please these powers as particular deities. Accordingly they accepted the personifications of the poets as gods, and to them they made their invocations and prayers. But to invoke the aid of Hermes, for instance, means that the guardianship of Hermes is sought for that occasion only. Therefore, in order to obtain a continued guardianship and companionship, statues of those gods whose influence is desired are placed beside the hearth as perpetual invocations. There is no form of daily worship required, and

only on special occasions are any ceremonies attached to these statues; but their presence on the hearth or by the door is considered sufficient worship and ample warrant for the presence and protection of the gods. Thus what began upon a foundation of pure reverence and awe for the unseen powers developed in the course of time into a superstitious fear of particular deified powers, which finally resulted in mere fetish worship. Such degeneration is universal; it has developed in Judaism, Brahminism, Buddhism, and even in Christianity itself. Such was the position which the statues of Hermes held in the daily life of the Athenians; they had become fetishes, warrants for the good-will and protection of Hermes himself. In their eyes, Hermes, as well as the other gods of Olympus, was a superior being whose good-will is to be courted and whose anger is to be avoided, or if incurred, to be speedily propitiated; and the same feeling which impelled them to call the Furies by the flattering title of Eumenides impelled them to respect the statues of the gods—a feeling of reverence together with deep-seated and wholesome fear.

With such a view of the case, it is not difficult to understand the excitement and sense of helplessness which spread throughout the city upon the discovery of the wholesale mutilation of the Hermae. That which they had for years carefully guarded against had at length come—the tutelary god of the city had been sorely insulted, his good-will lost forever, his protection removed,

and his consuming wrath aroused against the state. Parallel cases of this effect on the minds of men are not hard to find. We may read them in the misty legends of the Talmud, and advancing to the early ages of Christianity we may find the records of similar effects in the wars of the Iconoclasts; or we can imagine the excitement and terror which would reign in a modern Italian city were the citizens to awake some morning to find the statues and images of the Virgin mutilated or destroyed. It was the expression of an outraged religion, and above all, it was the feeling of utter desolation and helplessness which accompanies the loss of a mighty protector or the death of an army's general, intensified by the superstition of supernatural agencies involved.

This desolation was increased by a greater sacrilege in the violation of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The annual sacred festival of the Eleusinia took place in the month of Boedromion, about September, in honor of Demeter at Eleusis. The whole festival consisted of two parts, of which the first was held at Athens, the second at Eleusis. On the first day, those who had been initiated in the lesser Eleusinia assembled at the Stoa Poikile where public addresses were delivered to the community and where also the Hierophant acquainted the candidates for initiation with the arrangements for the festival and the conditions on which the ceremony depended. On the second day the *Mystae* went in solemn procession to the sea coast, where they and the sacrificial animals, which on



this occasion were swine, underwent a purification. On the following days, sacrifices were offered, after which followed the main part of the festival, the great procession which escorted Iachus, the sacred child of Demeter, from Athens to Eleusis. In this procession the priests and other officials, as well as the whole band of Mystae, were decked with myrtle and ivy leaves and carried ears of corn and agricultural instruments in their hands. The sacred image of Iachus was carried at the head of the procession, which moved along singing and dancing. During the course of the march, which lasted about four hours, they stopped to worship at various shrines along the way and entertained each other with jokes, such as were customary at the festivals of Demeter and Dionysus. At Eleusis, besides solemn sacrifices and the festive banquets connected with them, there was the ceremony of seeking the maiden, an imitation of the wanderings of Demeter when seeking her daughter who had been stolen from her. The main feature, however, was the performance in the sanctuary of the mysterious sacred dramas which presented the secret doctrines of the Eleusinian Mysteries to the new initiates. With these dramas the ceremonies were closed, the last act of worship being to fill two vessels with water or wine and to throw the contents of one to the east and those of the other to the west, while those who performed the rite uttered some mystical song.

In modern times many efforts have been made to discover the nature of the mysteries revealed to the initiates,

but so closely guarded was the secret that the best efforts of scholars have only resulted in varied and fanciful conjectures, but whether they concerned the immortality of the soul and the future rewards of good and evil, or whether justification by faith was their standard doctrine, we are able nevertheless to discern in this phase of their faith a higher object than the mere propitiation of the gods of Olympus. Its worship and its doctrines seem to have been the outcome of that longing that comes to every man and nation in their highest moods for a true conception of the Perfect, the Pure, and the Good; and it must have enjoined a deeper research into the mystery of human and divine nature than the conceptions of the Olympian theogeny demanded. In its worship, however obscure its details may be, we may see the yearning after higher things and the effort to break the bonds in which they were bound by the ancient mythology, a yearning similar to that exhibited in the sublime mysticism of the Egyptian religion and analogous to the profounder and supernatural doctrines of Christianity.

The travesty and disclosures of these mysteries, which were by far the most sacred and holy articles of the Greek religion, must have been a greater sacrilege than the Mutilation of the Hermae, though its effect was not so closely related to the proposed expedition or the immediate welfare of the city. But although its effect on the prosperity of the city may have seemed at first vague and undefined, it was sufficient to heighten the

terror produced by the mutilation. It was feared, in the first place, that the tutelary god of the city would be completely estranged, and it was further suspected that the highest and most sacred conceptions of the Greek mind had been profaned by ridicule and travesty. Either of these was in itself sufficient to excite the superstitious terror of the Athenians, and their combination seemed fraught with impending disaster.

There were some who put forth the theory that these two sacrileges were but the mad pranks of young men in their drunken revels, but such a solution of the mystery was too improbable, and amidst the gloomy terrors, political blended with religious, which distracted their minds, all the ancient stories of the last and worst oppressions of the Pisistratids were revived. The frequency and succession of these irreligious acts pointed to a definite conspiracy the object of which they were unable to fathom. That the ringleaders were powerful citizens was certain, but they were as unable to lay hands on them as to ascertain the motive of the conspiracy; and the alarm, the distress, the suspicion in the public mind were increased rather than diminished by each successive examination. Informers were numerous, but their information was contradictory and in many cases palpably false, so that all they could learn was only a succession of disclosures all attesting a frequency of acts of impiety but giving no clue to the real conspirators or their motives.

Meanwhile it was made evident to those at home that the gods were already wreaking their vengeance on the army in Sicily, for as Alcibiades had been sent for to answer the charges made against him by the Commissioners of Inquiry, the command had been left to Nicias and Lamachus, neither of whom were capable of accomplishing anything. The necessity, therefore, for immediate action was enforced by the Commissioners and was promptly used by Androcles to the ruin of Alcibiades, the object which had probably been in the minds of the conspirators from the beginning.

Since the time of Pericles, Athenian politics had undergone a complete change. His cautious, straightforward and wholesome precepts of domestic as well as foreign interests were almost entirely forgotten and were substituted by trickery, fraud, and a desire for increased power abroad that had hitherto been wanting in the dealings of Athens with the Barbarian states. The advice of Nicias, who was anxious to follow the methods of his predecessor, was overruled, while the fanciful schemes of Alcibiades were hailed with ardor. Further than this there were the incessant strifes between the democratic party and the oligarchs of whom Alcibiades was a strong and energetic leader. His popularity, however, was by no means universal, and his conduct in public and private matters had gained for him a number of enemies even among his own party, who were at the same time firm friends of the state and exceeding zealous for its welfare. They were great

men too, who looked upon his behavior and his radical notions with indignation and uneasiness. Plutarch says of their feelings toward him, "They regarded his foreign manners, his profusion and contempt of the laws, as so many means to make himself absolute." And Aristophanes well expresses how the bulk of the people were disposed towards him—

"They love, they hate, but cannot live without him."

However, this latest and wildest project of his—the invasion of Sicily—which he carried with such great enthusiasm over the veto of Nicias, offered his enemies a means of ruining him, and at the same time of hindering an expedition which they knew to be hazardous and unprofitable. Therefore in order to gain their political ends, they use religious means, very much as modern politicians are inclined to do; and since they were unable to curb his power on political charges, they brought him under the heavy hand of religion. The Mutilation of the Hermae was undoubtedly a conspiracy whose ulterior purpose was the ruin of Alcibiades, and through religious indignation they accomplished what their political machinery had failed to effect. The first sacrilege was increased by the further impiety displayed in the travesty of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Craftily did they temper the first feelings of anger on the part of the Athenians until the expedition had started, when they promptly

excited the popular indignation against Alcibiades until they effected his recall. The outraged feelings of the Athenians so excited by his enemies could only be appeased by his death or exile, and when once that was accomplished, when once he in his fear was driven to flight, the affair was allowed to rest, showing in the first place that his enemies had been satisfied, and in the second place that the Athenians had only acted according to their law and for their public welfare, with comparative mildness and tolerance. Grote says in his conclusion of the discussion of the subject: "It is among the darkest chapters of Athenian political history indicating on the part of the people strong religious excitability without any injustice towards Alcibiades; but indicating on the part of his enemies as well as of the Hermokopids generally, a depth of wicked contrivance rarely paralleled in political warfare."

The result of the conspiracy was injurious to Athens in various ways, as the later history of that state shows. It transferred to Sparta an angry exile who was well acquainted with everything concerning her government and who could give effectual aid to Sparta in the ensuing war; and, worst of all, it left the Sicilian armament under the weak command of Nicias and Lamachus, who were totally unable to carry on the campaign. Disaster followed disaster and the downfall of Athens may be practically dated from the Mutilation of the Hermae and the Profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Such is the history of the events surrounding the speech of Andocides, and while he was only one of many who were crushed in the ruin of the great man, as surrounding saplings are by the fall of some forest king, nevertheless his speech is of great interest and importance for its delineation of the varied characters and events of that crisis in Athenian history.

E. J. B.