IV. ALCAEUS

THE island of Lesbos is well fitted by nature to be the home of a distinctive culture. Its southern shore looks across the sea to Chios, the traditional dwelling-place of Homer and those 'sons of Homer' who recited his poems and composed preludes to them in the form of Hymns. In full view from Mytilene and the eastern shore lies the coast of Asia Minor, which had begun in the seventh century to come under the sway of the Lydian kings and to absorb some of their oriental ways. To the north lies the Adramyttian promontory and the site of Troy, where Greek story-tellers placed the deeds of their heroic ancestors. In contrast with its neighbours Lemnos and Chios Lesbos is a rich land. Olive-trees grow up to the tops of the high hills; an abundance of natural springs fills the valleys with plane-trees and lush grass; in the spring the ground is covered with anemones, orchids, and wild tulips. The island still deserves the epithet of *ἠγαθέη* given to it by the Chian poet who wrote the Delian Hymn to Apollo[1]. Protected by the sea and well supplied with means of subsistence, its inhabitants developed a lively and independent life, based on ancient traditions which went back to the heroic age and the Trojan War. Here Orestes was said to have led the first colonists;[2] here in later centuries noble families traced their descent from men who had fought for Helen.[3] In surroundings favourable to ease and security, Lesbian society reached its zenith in the seventh and sixth centuries, and the record of that life is its poetry.

Lesbian poetry seems to have been helped, if not begotten, by religious needs. In the seventh century two Lesbian musicians, who were also poets, Terpander and Arion, won a wide renown. While Terpander composed 'preludes' in hexameters, which suggest a resemblance to the Homeric Hymns,[4] Arion composed

[1] Hom. Hymn 3. 37. For doubts on the meaning of *ἠγαθέη* see F. Bechtel, *Lexilogus zu Homer*, pp. 149–50. For a romantic but not entirely false picture of the Lesbian landscape cf. Longus i. 1 *κτῆμα κάλλιστον, ὄρη θηροτρόφα, πεδία πυροφόρα, γήλοφοι κλημάτων, νομαὶ ποιμνίων.* [2] Strab.582.

[3] Aristot. *Pol.* 1311 b 27; Plut. *de Soll. An.* 36.

[4] 'Plut.' *Mus.* 4 *πεποίηται δὲ τῷ Τερπάνδρῳ καὶ προοίμια κιθαρῳδικὰ ἐν ἔπεσιν.*

dithyrambs and gave a new significance to the form.[1] Much of their work seems to have been done away from their own home, but even before this date Lesbos was already famous for its songs. Archilochus specifically associates the Paean with it:

αὐτὸς ἐξάρχων πρὸς αὐλὸν Λέσβιον παιήονα,[2]

and his words show that well before the time of Alcaeus and Sappho Lesbos was renowned as a home of song. Perhaps Sappho referred to this, as well as to her own eminence, when she wrote

πέρροχος ὡς ὅτ' ἄοιδος ὁ Λέσβιος ἀλλοδάποισιν[3]

'towering as the Lesbian singer over foreigners'. The idea passed into a proverb and was known to Cratinus.[4] When Alcaeus began to write, the art of song was not only well established in Lesbos but had a considerable fame abroad.

Among the poems composed by Terpander Pindar included *σκόλια*.[5] We do not know precisely what these were, nor has any hint of their contents survived, but we may assume that they were in some sense convivial songs, intended for social occasions. If they were solo songs, they would help to account for the special direction which Lesbian poetry took with Alcaeus and Sappho. Though both Terpander and Arion wrote for choruses, Alcaeus and Sappho on the whole did not. The more characteristic part of their work is monody, composed in short stanzas and in varied but simple metres. Nor is there much evidence that it was attached to formal ceremonies. A large part of it had a social, rather than a ritual, background, and is the work of poets who felt the need to express their feelings and thoughts in song and had a brilliant technique for doing so. They could hardly have done this if they had not inherited some kind of tradition and been helped by favourable circumstances. What this tradition was we hardly know, but one or two hints suggest that it owed something to popular song.

A precious example of such a song is the Mill Song, which, Plutarch says, was sung at Eresus:[6]

[1] Hdt. 1. 23 *διθύραμβον πρῶτον ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν ποιήσαντά τε καὶ ὀνομάσαντα καὶ διδάξαντα ἐν Κορίνθῳ*; 'Suid.' s.v. *Ἀρίων*. In general see A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, Comedy*, pp. 19–22. [2] Fr. 76 D.

[3] Fr. 106 L.-P.

[4] Fr. 243 K.; Zenob. 5. 9 *μετὰ Λέσβιον ᾠδόν· παροιμία ταττομένη ἐπὶ τοῖς τὰ δεύτερα φερομένοις.*

[5] 'Plut.' *Mus.* 28 *ἔτι δέ, καθάπερ Πίνδαρός φησι, καὶ τῶν σκολιῶν μελῶν Τέρπανδρος εὑρετὴς ἦν.*

[6] *Conv. Sept. Sap.* 14.

ἄλει, μύλα, ἄλει·
καὶ γὰρ Πίττακος ἄλει,
μεγάλας Μυτιλήνας βασιλεύων.

Grind, mill-wheel, grind;
Even Pittacus ground,
Who was king of great Mytilene.

Tryphon, quoted by Athenaeus,[1] gives a list of different kinds of song, among which is the ἰμαῖος or Mill Song, which men sang while they ground corn; for the word ἰμαῖος seems to be connected with ἰμάλις, the 'return' or 'over-measure' of wheat-flour. Pollux goes a step farther and distinguishes between the ἐπὶ μύλιος ᾠδή and the ἰμαῖος καὶ ἰμαλίς, of which the first was sung over the mill-wheel and the second was more formal and sung by a ἰμαοιδός.[2] Our song evidently belongs to the first class. The mention of Pittacus means that it cannot be earlier than 600 B.C., and its first known appearance was when it was heard by Clearchus, the pupil of Aristotle,[3] but of course it may have been old when he heard it. Even if it is later than Alcaeus and Sappho, it is relevant to their art for two reasons. First, it is a truly popular song and, like all such songs, it may have a long past behind it. Its metrical units have not yet fully matured into those of lyric verse, and the first line is certainly puzzling, but the second line is a Pherecratean and the third is Ionic.[4] To this degree it shares, at a humbler level, the metrical practice of the Lesbian poet. Secondly, it has a political reference, such as we often find in Alcaeus. We can hardly believe that the notion of grinding is as innocent as it appears, or that Pittacus ground simply for exercise or pleasure, and though we need not necessarily assume that there is an obscene reference,[5] we may suspect at least some deliberate ambiguity, such as that Pittacus ground the faces of the rich.[6]

[1] 14. 618 d. [2] 4. 53.
[3] Wilamowitz, *Hermes*, xxv, p. 227.
[4] Id. *Gr. Versk.* p. 401 rewrites the poem

ἄλει, μύλα, ἄλει·
καὶ γὰρ βασιλεύων
μεγάλας Μυτιλήνας
Πίττακος ἄλει,

and claims that this gives three Reiziana, followed by an Adonius. But this reduces the emphatic βασιλεύων to comparative impotence.
[5] A. von Blumenthal, *Hermes*, lxxv (1940), pp. 225 ff.
[6] Cf. Sext. Emp. *Adv. Math.* 1. 287. ὀψὲ θεῶν ἀλέουσι μύλαι, ἀλέουσι δὲ λεπτά.

Even if we add to these examples of popular songs in Lesbos those which are mentioned by Longus[1] and may have some basis in local practice, they do not take us very far. More illuminating are two poems, one by Alcaeus and one by Sappho, which look as if they were modelled on traditional folk-songs. Hephaestion preserves a line from Alcaeus, which he says was the beginning of a poem:[2]

ἔμε δείλαν, ἔμε παῖσαν κακοτάτων πεδέχοισαν[3]

'me, poor woman, who have a part in every misery . . .'. If this is the start, the poem is dramatic in the sense that it is spoken by a woman in the first person without introduction or preliminary, and we suspect that this is a traditional theme of a love-lorn girl. This impression is confirmed when, after three fragmentary lines, we have

ἐλάφω δὲ βρόμος ἐν στήθεσι φυίει φοβέροισιν

'the belling of the deer grows in the timid heart'. Though ἐλάφω can be either masculine or feminine,[4] its connexion with βρόμος suggests that here it is masculine, and that the girl who speaks recalls her lover. His mating-cry remains with her and grows stronger in her breast. Deer are a traditional image in more than one country,[5] and we may surmise that here the girl speaks of the violent emotions which assail her, as she contrasts her

[1] 2. 31 songs in praise of nymphs; 2. 35 songs of herdsmen; 2. 36 Dionysiac songs.
[2] p. 65. 17 Consbruch. [3] Fr. 10 L.–P.
[4] For a full discussion see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 291–4.
[5] A Chinese example, before 600 B.C. is given by A. Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p. 60:

In the wilds there is a dead doe;
With white rushes we cover her.
There was a lady longing for the spring;
A fair knight seduced her.

In the wood there is a clump of oaks,
And in the wilds a dead deer
With white rushes well bound;
There was a lady fair as jade.

The Portuguese poet, Pero Meogo, *c.* A.D. 1250, associates deer with unsatisfied love:

En as verdes ervas
vi anda-las cervas,
meu amigo!

en os verdes prados
vi os cervos bravos,
meu amigo!

present misery with the excitement which her lover's desires have awoken in her. Alcaeus would not have written this poem, even as a literary exercise, if he had not been well acquainted with songs on such subjects among his own people.

Beside this we may set two lines from Sappho. They too make a girl speak in the first person. We do not know that it is the beginning of a poem, though this is not impossible, since Hephaestion quotes it for its metre:

γλύκηα μᾶτερ, οὔτοι δύναμαι κρέκην τὸν ἴστον,
πόθωι δάμεισα παΐδος βραδίναν δι' Ἀφροδίταν.[1]

Sweet mother, I cannot weave my web; for because of slender Aphrodite I am overcome with desire for a boy.

This too is a song of an ancient and widespread kind, a *chanson de toile*, such as girls sang over the loom, lamenting their loves. We recognize Sappho's characteristic touch both in δάμεισα and in the attachment of the adjective βραδίναν to Aphrodite, but we cannot doubt that, like the lines of Alcaeus, it is derived ultimately from a popular tradition.

These two fragments suggest that, whatever Alcaeus and Sappho learned from pioneers like Terpander and Arion, they also learned something from songs which they heard around them. It is permissible to speak of these as folk-songs, but we need not assume that they were sung only by humble people. It is more likely that they were popular songs in the sense that all kinds of people composed and sang them. They would probably be quite simple in form and in content, but none the less they may account for some features in Lesbian song as we know it. First, the use of the short stanza, so unlike the long stanza of the choral ode, looks as if it were a popular inheritance. Secondly, the way in which Alcaeus and Sappho both write largely in their local vernacular suggests that they worked in a Lesbian tradition and did not look outside it for models. Thirdly, though their metres are indeed varied with many happy combinations, they are not so complex or so various as those of choral poetry, and their dominating *metra*, whether μέτρα μονοειδῆ, such as dactyls, ionics, and choriambs, or μέτρα ἐπισύνθετα, such as the Glyconic and the various expansions of it, are essentially based on easy rules and a simple practice. We may assume that both poets

[1] Fr. 102 L.–P. Heph. p. 34. 9 Consbruch.

learned something from popular art, but transformed it to their own needs and standards, rather as the courtly Portuguese poets of the thirteenth century took popular forms and themes and made graceful and accomplished poems from them. This art was essentially aristocratic and showed the trained taste of men and women who had a natural feeling for style and saw that a refined simplicity is a remarkable instrument for self-expression. Above all, Alcaeus and Sappho wished to speak freely for themselves and had enough self-knowledge and self-command to do so without either rhetoric or defensive irony. In them different tendencies met in harmony and produced an art which moves confidently within its own chosen boundaries.

The poetry of Alcaeus is to a large extent the immediate reflection of a life given to action, especially to politics and civil war. He may have been born *c.* 630 B.C., and he lived through a period when Lesbos, free from foreign invasion, was convulsed by intestine feuds. This was partly the result of the collapse of the old monarchy not later than the middle of the seventh century.[1] Its obvious successors were the noble families, who were in a position to divide its powers between themselves, but failed to do so because one or other man or group aimed at getting supreme power. This meant a series of struggles, in which Alcaeus was usually in opposition to the rising or risen power. When *c.* 612–608 B.C. the tyrant Melanchros was overthrown by Pittacus and the brothers of Alcaeus, he himself seems to have been too young to take part,[2] but soon afterwards he fought on the side of Pittacus against the Athenians at Sigeum.[3] Then the coalition broke up, and Alcaeus turned against Pittacus, who had found an ally in Myrsilus and seems to have governed Mytilene with him.[4] The result was that Alcaeus retired into exile, not far away, at Pyrrha,[5] and it may have been here that he heard of Myrsilus' death.[6] He returned from Pyrrha, but before long his opposition to Pittacus sent him again into exile, and between 604 and 591 he seems to have gone so far as Egypt,[7] while his brother Antimenidas took service with the army of Babylon.[8] From 590 to 580 Pittacus

[1] A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants*, p. 92. Some details of the fall are given by Aristot. *Pol.* 1311 b.
[2] Fr. 75 L.–P.
[3] Hdt. 5. 94 ff.; frs. 306 (7) 15 ff.; 167 L.–P.
[4] Fr. 70. 7 L.–P.
[5] Schol. ad fr. 113 L.–P.; fr. 130.
[6] Fr. 332 L.–P.
[7] Strab. 37 Ἀλκαῖος . . . φήσας ἀφῖχθαι καὶ αὐτὸς εἰς Αἴγυπτον.
[8] Fr. 350 L.–P.

governed Mytilene, and in due course is said to have forgiven Alcaeus,[1] who must have returned from exile and lived again in his native city. In 580 Pittacus retired from power and lived as a private citizen until his death in 570.[2] This provides the bare outline of Alcaeus' career, and though the details and the dates are uncertain, it shows the kind of life that he lived and the circumstances in which he wrote his poetry. Much of it must have been composed in the excitement of civil war and political conspiracy, almost on the spur of the moment, and it reflects what this passionate, uncompromising aristocrat thought of the events in which he took so active and so futile a part. Through his political poems Alcaeus found a vent for violent feelings and a means to bind his supporters more closely to his cause.

Though Alcaeus' political life consisted largely of a struggle for power against men who wanted it for themselves, we must not assume that the different parties did not have some kind of principles or convictions. In the case of Pittacus we can see why Alcaeus failed. While Alcaeus based his claims on hereditary rights,[3] Pittacus had some degree of popular backing. He was not a tyrant in the sense that he seized power by violence, but an *αἰσυμνήτης* chosen by the people to restore order with a limited tenure of office.[4] When Alcaeus says that the choice was unanimous[5] and made by the city,[5] he admits that it was not arbitrary or unpopular. We do not know what comprised the *δᾶμος* in Mytilene or how large it was, but it was presumably the whole body of citizens who had political rights. Even if Pittacus himself was not of humble birth, his power may have depended to some degree on others who were, and it cannot be by accident that Alcaeus more than once refers to *κακοπάτριδαι* in the plural.[6] The achievement of Pittacus was not that, like Solon, he created a new political system, but that he restored the existing system and made it work.[7] In this process his sumptuary legislation against expensive funerals and offences committed in drunkenness[8] shows that he disapproved of the rich displaying their wealth too arrogantly and that to this extent he marked a stage in the movement towards a more democratic government. Nor can we

[1] Diog. Laert. 1. 76. [2] Id. i. 79. [3] Fr. 130. 19 ff. L.–P.
[4] Aristot. *Pol.* 1285 a 35. [5] Fr. 348 L.–P. [6] Frs. 67. 4 and 75. 12.
[7] Aristot. *Pol.* 1274 b 18 *νόμων δημιουργὸς ἀλλ' οὐ πολιτείας.*
[8] Ibid. b 20; Id. *Rhet.* 1402 b 12; Plut. *Sept. Sap. Conv.* 13; Diog. Laert. 1. 76; Cic. *de Leg.* 2. 26; Stob. 44. 22.

absolve Alcaeus of designs against law and order. Strabo, who is well informed on the whole business and got information from Alcaeus' own poems, says that 'Alcaeus is not himself clear of the suspicion of revolutionary ambitions',[1] and we may be certain that Alcaeus' idea of a revolution was not to give more power to the people. He seems rather to have fought for hereditary privileges which had been taken from him and to have had no liking for the rule of law which Pittacus gave to Mytilene. We can hardly be surprised that Alcaeus was not successful.

Alcaeus' *στασιωτικά* show how the old heroic temper, as we see it in the Homeric poems, had been assimilated into an aristocratic world without losing its chief characteristics. The cult of personal honour and glory is still of paramount importance, but it is tempered in different ways to suit a society in which men of the same class live closely together and have the same conventions and manners. The fragments of Alcaeus do not tell much about actual fighting or what he thought about it, but one piece is concerned with preparations for it, and presents from the inside the kind of scene which Homer presents from the outside, when he describes a warrior arming himself. Alcaeus relates in detail the stock of weapons which he and his friends have in readiness before action:

μαρμαίρει δὲ μέγας δόμος χάλκωι, παῖσα δ' ἄρ' εὖ κεκόσμηται στέγα

λάμπραισιν κυνίαισι, κὰτ τᾶν λεῦκοι κατέπερθεν ἵππιοι λόφοι
νεύοισιν, κεφάλαισιν ἄνδρων ἀγάλματα· χάλκιαι δὲ πασσάλοις

κρύπτοισιν περικείμεναι λάμπραι κνάμιδες, ἄρκος ἰσχύρω βέλεος,
θόρρακές τε νέω λίνω κόιλαί τε κὰτ ἄσπιδες βεβλήμεναι·

πὰρ δὲ Χαλκίδικαι σπάθαι, πὰρ δὲ ζώματα πόλλα καὶ κυπάσσιδες.
τῶν οὐκ ἔστι λάθεσθ' ἐπεὶ δὴ πρώτιστ' ὑπὰ τῶργον ἔσταμεν τόδε.[2]

The great house glitters with bronze, and the whole roof is well decked with gleaming helmets, from which white plumes of horsehair hang waving, to deck the heads of men. Bright greaves of bronze lie round pegs and hide them—a protection against the strong arrow, —and corslets of new linen and hollow shields lie thrown upon the

[1] Strab. 617 *οὐδ' αὐτὸς καθαρεύων τῶν τοιούτων νεωτερισμῶν.*
[2] Fr. 357 L.–P. with Page's correction of *ἄρ' εὖ* for *Ἄρηι* of the MSS. in 1 and a suggestion of Lobel at the end of 7.

floor. With them are swords from Chalcis, and with them many belts and tunics. These we may not forget, ever since we first stood to this task.

Alcaeus marks the arms and the armour with a keen eye and registers each item in turn. Though such an armoury is clearly intended for use, it has its own charm for him, and he delights in it as an aristocrat delights in the apparatus of his sport. The arms so described are contemporary and the best that money can buy. If the helmets, with their horse-hair plumes, are not so up to date as the plumeless Corinthian helmet, which was already in full use on the Greek mainland,[1] but have a Homeric air, the 'hollow' shields came into existence with the introduction of hoplite tactics in the seventh century,[2] and the adjective is much to the point. The linen corslets are not so much a means of protection as a military elegance; they recall those which Amasis of Egypt dedicated in the temple of Athene at Lindos[3] and sent to Sparta.[4] The ζώματα and the κυπάσσιδες complete the inventory of what a full uniform required. The whole passage suggests an officer who enjoys the inspection of kit and looks forward with confidence to the good use that will be made of it.

Yet though Alcaeus enjoys the panoply of war, he does not seem always to have treated war itself with the gravity which we might perhaps expect from him. When as a young man he fought on the same side as Pittacus at Sigeum against the Athenians, he dropped his weapons and ran away. That he was not ashamed of this is clear from the poem which he sent to his friend Melanippus saying in effect: 'Alcaeus is safe; his weapons are not. The Athenians hung them up in the temple of the grey-eyed goddess.'[5] In allowing himself this degree of candour Alcaeus may have owed something to the precedent of Archilochus, who in somewhat similar circumstances wrote:

ἀσπίδι μὲν Σαΐων τις ἀγάλλεται, ἣν παρὰ θάμνῳ
ἔντος ἀμώμητον κάλλιπον οὐκ ἐθέλων.
αὐτὸς δ' ἐξέφυγον θανάτου τέλος. ἀσπὶς ἐκείνη
ἐρρέτω· ἐξαῦτις κτήσομαι οὐ κακίω.[6]

[1] H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments*, p. 250.
[2] Tyrtaeus fr. 1. 11 D and Mimnermus ap. B. Wyss, *Antimachi Colophonii Reliquiae*, p. 83, both of whom speak of κοίληισ' ἀσπίσι φραξάμενοι.
[3] Hdt. 2. 182. 1.
[4] Id. 3. 47. 2.
[5] Fr. 428 (a) L.–P.
[6] Fr. 6 b D.

Some Saian rejoices in my shield, which unwillingly I left by a bush, a piece of armour unspoiled. But I myself escaped the end of death. Let that shield go. I shall soon get another no worse.

Archilochus liked to deride himself, but we hardly expect it from Alcaeus. It is true that the new hollow shield, which gave a great advantage in attack, was nothing but a nuisance in retreat,[1] and that Alcaeus was probably wise to throw his away, but the same would not apply to his other arms. At this point he shows his difference from the Homeric heroes, who fight over armour as if to lose it were a fearful dishonour. He knows that his friends will judge his action correctly and be pleased that he is alive at the cost of his weapons.

A similar touch of gaiety in the treatment of war may be seen in some lines which Alcaeus wrote for his brother Antimenidas, when he came home from soldiering in foreign parts. Antimenidas seems to have fought as a mercenary in Palestine[2] with the army of Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, in the campaigns which culminated in the capture of Jerusalem on 15/16th March, 597 B.C. Alcaeus is proud of his brother's exploits and welcomes him home with a tribute to one particular feat:

ἦλθες ἐκ περάτων γᾶς ἐλεφαντίναν
λάβαν τὼ ξίφεος χρυσοδέταν ἔχων . . .
συμμάχεις δ' ἐτέλεσσας Βαβυλωνίοισ'
ἄεθλον μέγαν, εὐρύσαο δ' ἐκ πόνων
κτέννηις ἄνδρα μαχαίταν βασιλήίον
παλάσταν ἀπυλείποντα μόναν ἴαν
παχέων ἀπὺ πέμπων.[3]

You have come from the ends of the earth with an ivory hilt, bound with gold, on your sword. Fighting with the Babylonians you achieved a great feat, and saved them from their troubles by killing a warrior who lacked only a single span from five royal cubits in height.

Here affection and admiration are disguised with a playful familiarity. The man slain by Antimenidas was certainly a giant, for the royal cubit was twenty-one inches, and the height here

[1] A. Andrewes, *The Greek Tyrants*, p. 32.
[2] Fr. 48. 10–11 L.–P. [Βαβύλωνος ἴρας
[ν Ἀσκάλωνα
Ascalon was destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar in 604 B.C., D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, p. 69; for Jerusalem see ibid, p. 73.
[3] Fr. 350 L.–P. I have reconstructed 3 from Strab. 617 τὸν ἀδελφὸν Ἀντιμενίδαν . . . φησιν Ἀλκαῖος Βαβυλωνίοις συμμαχοῦντα τελέσαι.

indicated is eight feet four inches. This was taller by some four inches than the traditional height of Heracles,[1] and shorter by a span than the five cubits credited to the Giants.[2] No doubt Alcaeus improves on the truth, as befits his welcome to a returning brother, but it is curious that Herodotus says that the tallest man in the army of Xerxes lacked four inches from five royal cubits.[3] The East had its giants like Goliath, and perhaps Herodotus, half-conscious of Alcaeus' lines, made a contribution to the height of Artachaies. Alcaeus is proud of his brother's exploit, but treats it lightly and gaily.

Though the actual conduct of war provoked a variety of responses in Alcaeus, he was serious enough about his own cause and the calls which it made on his companions. He believed in it without qualm or question, and saw nothing but baseness in his adversaries. If he stood for anything, it was for the aristocratic order in which he had been brought up and which he did not wish to be changed. Though he speaks of the δᾶμος, it is not clear that he has its interests at heart. No doubt he felt that it was best for himself and his friends to be in power, and that others could do little but harm. His honour, as that of an individual and an aristocrat, was engaged. His violent feelings seem to have blinded his political vision, and he shows little sign of understanding what was happening to his world. On one point he can be checked. Two mysterious stanzas refer to the Lydians, in what we may assume to be the reign of Alyattes:

Ζεῦ πάτερ, Λύδοι μὲν ἐπα[σχάλαντες
συμφόραισι δισχελίοις στά[τηρας
ἄμμ' ἔδωκαν, αἴ κε δυνάμεθ' ἴρ[αν
ἐς πόλιν ἔλθην,

οὐ πάθοντες οὐδάμα πῶσλον οὐ[δ' ἔ]ν
οὐδὲ γινώσκοντες· ὁ δ' ὡς ἀλώπα[
ποικ[ι]λόφρων εὐμάρεα προλέξα[ις
ἤλπ[ε]το λάσην.[4]

Father Zeus, the Lydians, in distress at our misfortunes, gave us two thousand gold pieces, if we could enter the holy city, though they had never yet had anything good from us, and did not know us; but *he*,

[1] Schol. Pind. *Isthm.* 4. 87; Apollodor. *Bibl.* 2. 64; Schol. Lyc. 663.
[2] Philostrat. *Vit. Ap.* 2. 4. [3] 7. 117. 1.
[4] Fr. 69 L.–P.

like a crafty fox, foretold easy success and thought that we should not mark him.

We are hampered at the start by not knowing either what is the 'holy city' or who is the 'crafty fox'. Though there was a city called Hira on Lesbos,[1] and we might read either Ἴρας ἐς πόλιν or Ἶραν ἐς πόλιν, this may perhaps be counted out, since Alcaeus does not seem to attach πόλις to the name of a place. It is more likely that he refers to Mytilene, since he calls it simply πόλις elsewhere,[2] though of course there is always a possibility that it is some other place, even on the Asiatic mainland. The Fox is a suitable enough epithet for Pittacus, as Alcaeus saw him, but no less suitable for anyone else whom Alcaeus thought to be double-faced. He seems to have discouraged Alcaeus and his friends from taking Lydian money, on the grounds that they would easily get what they wanted without it. If this refers to an attempt to return to Mytilene, the Fox is not likely to be Pittacus, who would hardly wish to have Alcaeus and his companions in his own city, and it looks as if it were some other man who had more political sense than Alcaeus. For it is clear that the Lydians were trying to buy a place in Lesbos. The sum of two thousand staters is very large indeed, since Croesus is said to have raised an army with half the amount,[3] and the offer implies that the goal was worth the expense. Indeed we are almost forced to the conclusion that Alyattes was trying to further his policy of bringing the coastal Greeks under his dominion. For this end he made a treaty with Thrasybulus of Miletus,[4] attacked Clazomenae, and captured Smyrna.[5] That he had an eye on Lesbos may be inferred from his colonization of Adramyttium with men from Sardis[6] and his establishment of a fortress in Bithynia.[7] That he tried to establish relations with Pittacus may be deduced from the story that he wrote Pittacus a haughty, dictatorial letter and that Pittacus replied telling him to eat onions and new bread,[8] no doubt with the implication that he should keep his wind to himself. In his hatred of local opponents Alcaeus regarded the Lydians as friends and saw in their offer of money no more than an act of noble

[1] Plin. *N.H.* 5. 31 (39). 139; Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἱρά; Eustath. 743. 17.
[2] Frs. 70. 7; 129. 24; 141. 4; 348. 2 L.–P.
[3] Nic. Dam. 90 F 65 Jacoby; see Page, *S. and A.*, p. 232. [4] Hdt. 1. 21. 1.
[5] Id. 1. 16. 2. [6] Strab. 613. [7] Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἀλύαττα.
[8] *Conv. Sept. Sap.* 10 ἀποκρινάμενος οὐδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ μόνον κελεύσας κρόμμυα καὶ θερμὸν ἄρτον ἐσθίειν.

generosity. The Fox, whether he was Pittacus or another, knew better.

Just as in his dealings with the Lydians Alcaeus was moved by purely personal considerations of what he thought to be a generous offer of help, so in his opposition to Pittacus it was primarily personal considerations that counted. The alliance with him first against Melanchros and then against the Athenians broke up, and Pittacus joined Myrsilus. What Alcaeus felt can in part be deduced from a song of hate which this provoked:

]. ρά. α τόδε Λέσβιοι
. . .]. . . . εὔδειλον τέμενος μέγα
ξῦνον κά[τε]σσαν, ἐν δὲ βώμοις
ἀθανάτων μακάρων ἔθηκαν,

κἀπωνύμασσαν ἀντίαον Δία,
σὲ δ' Αἰοληίαν [κ]υδαλίμαν θέον
πάντων γενέθλαν, τὸν δὲ τέρτον
τὸν Σεμελήϊον ὠνύμασσ[α]ν

Ζόννυσσον ὠμήσταν. ἄ[γι]τ' εὔνοον
θῦμον σκέθοντες ἀμμετέρα[ς] ἄρας
ἀκούσατ', ἐκ δὲ τῶν[δ]ε μόχθων
ἀργαλέας τε φύγας ῥ[ύεσθε.

τὸν Ὕρραον δὲ πα[ῖδ]α πεδελθέτω
κήνων Ἐ[ρίννυ]ς ὥς ποτ' ἀπώμνυμεν
τόμοντες ἄ. .[. .]ν. .
μηδάμα μηδ' ἕνα τῶν ἑταίρων,

ἀλλ' ἢ θάνοντες γᾶν ἐπιέμμενοι
κείσεσθ' ὑπ' ἄνδρων οἳ τότ' ἐπικ.'ην
ἤπειτα κακκτάνοντες αὔτοις
δᾶμον ὑπὲξ ἀχέων ῥυέσθαι.

κήνων ὀ φύσγων οὐ διελέξατο
πρὸς θῦμον, ἀλλὰ βραϊδίως πόσιν
ἔ]μβαις ἐπ' ὀρκίοισι δάπτει
τὰν πόλιν ἄμμι δέδ[.]. .[.]ί. αις

οὐ κὰν νόμον[.]ον. .[
γλαύκας ἀ[
γεγρά.[
Μύρσιλ[ο[1]

[1] Fr. 129 L.–P.; see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 161–9. In 8 I follow A. J. Beattie in reading *τὸν Σεμελήϊον* for the unintelligible *τόνδε κεμήλιον* of the papyrus.

The Lesbians established this precinct, conspicuous, large, for all to share, and in it set altars of the immortal Blessed Ones. Zeus they named the God of Suppliants, and you, the Aeolian, glorious goddess, Mother of All, and third they named the son of Semele, Dionysus, eater of raw flesh. Come with friendly spirit and hearken to our prayer, and deliver us from these toils and grievous exile. Let *their* Fury pursue the son of Hyrrhas, since once we took a solemn oath, . . . and swore that never any comrade of ours . . . but either dead and clothed in earth we would lie conquered by men who were then in power (?), or else would kill them and deliver the people from its woes. Of these things the Pot-belly did not discourse to his heart, but trod the oaths lightly underfoot and devours the city . . . against the law . . . Myrsilus . . . .

These lines were evidently composed in a place which held the shrines of the three great divinities of Lesbos, Zeus, Hera, and Dionysus.[1] *φύγας* in 12 shows that Alcaeus is in exile, but whether at Pyrrha or elsewhere we do not know. The whole is a curse upon Pittacus for breaking his oath to his former companions, and it looks as if the gods who are now called on for vengeance were the same as those who presided over the oath. The seriousness of the occasion is emphasized by the way in which Alcaeus gives the gods their full titles and invokes them through this solemn approach before proceeding to the supplication which follows. At 11 the object of the prayer becomes clear. Through the treachery of Pittacus Alcaeus and his friends have been made to suffer sorrows and exile, and for this they demand vengeance. The vengeance is an *Ἐρίννυς*, an avenging Fury, who is qualified by *κήνων* as the representative of those men whom Pittacus has most grievously harmed.

This impressive introduction leads up to a brief summary of the oath which the companions took. It was that they would go on fighting until either they died, or, preferably, succeeded in delivering the people from its troubles. Before this in 15 there must have been some general undertaking that no one would forsake the rest until one of these things occurred.[2] Presumably the oath contained a clause that anyone who broke it should be punished, probably by death.[3] Alcaeus does not seem to mention

[1] Sappho refers to the same three deities at fr. 17 L.–P.

[2] This means that the last word of 15 was probably a future infinitive with some such meaning as 'betray'. *προδώσην* is said not to suit the traces.

[3] See Ziebarth, *R.-E.* v. 2076 ff.

this, but perhaps that is because he takes it for granted and his mention of the *'Ερίννυς* is all that he needs. His wrath against Pittacus is based on his conviction that he has been betrayed, and he conforms to Homeric and heroic standards when he demands that a Fury should punish the perjurer.[1] So far he speaks with power and authority, but when in 25–28 he moves on to speak of Pittacus' actual breach of his oath, he abandons his majestic tone and adopts a special and almost colloquial sharpness. His point is that Pittacus has acted all the worse because he gave no thought at all to the matter and 'never discussed it with his heart'. Here the *θῦμος* is not the mere intelligence, but the spirit which makes a man what he is and informs his actions,[2] and the charge against Pittacus is that he has paid no attention to his sworn obligations, but has trodden them underfoot, as Menelaus claims that the Trojans have in his duel with Paris,[3] or as Archilochus, if it be he, charges a friend with falseness.[4] A man who can do this may be expected to turn against his city and devour it, *δάπτει*, as a lion[5] or a wolf[6] devours its prey. After the solemn invocation of the gods the anger, which has been kept in control during it, comes to the surface, and we see how violent Alcaeus' feelings were.

Alcaeus not only hates Pittacus; he also despises him. He accuses him of perjury, but he also calls him a *φύσγων*, or 'potbelly'. This seems to have been characteristic of the abuse which Alcaeus flung at Pittacus after their quarrel. Diogenes Laertius gives a striking list of epithets,[7] which recall a capacity for mudslinging worthy of Archilochus or Hipponax and show that Alcaeus did not spare his opponent's physical or social defects. He strikes hard and low. Pittacus is called *σαράπους* because of his splay toes, *χειροπόδης* because of the cracks in his feet, *γαύρης* because of his boastful bearing, *φύσκων* (*φύσγων*) and *γάστρων* because of his big belly, *ζοφοδορπίδας* because of his midnight carousals, and *ἀγάσυρτος* because of his unkempt appearance. If we may judge by our piece, such words were not limited to special poems of

[1] *Il.* 19. 258–60; Hes. *Op.* 803 ff.

[2] For the phrase cf. Theocr. 30. 11 *πολλὰ δ' εἰσκαλέσαις θῦμον ἐμαύτῳ διελεξάμαν*, and its Homeric precedent *φίλος διελέξατο θυμός Il.* 11. 497; 17. 97, and in general such cases as when a man, speaking to himself, addresses his *θυμός*, Archiloch. fr. 67, 1 D; Pind. *Ol.* 2. 89; *Nem.* 3. 26; Theogn. 695, 877, 1029; Aristoph. *Ach.* 480.

[3] *Il.* 4. 157.

[4] Fr. 79. 13–14 D.

[5] *Il.* 11. 481.

[6] *Il.* 16. 159.

[7] 1. 81.

abuse but might be introduced into serious and even solemn situations. The point is of interest because it shows how Alcaeus' poetical spirit worked. His changes of temper in a single poem are matched by changes of style, and the whole effect is of a man passing through a rapidly shifting series of moods. Alcaeus is carried by his strong temperament from august solemnity to vulgar abuse, and yet there is nothing inappropriate or inartistic in the process. The purpose of the poem is to express as forcibly as possible what Alcaeus feels, and if the occasion itself is varied, his reactions are hardly less so.

A similar variation of moods and effects may be seen from some other lines, also written from exile in Lesbos and conceivably from the same place, since they mention a *μακάρων τέμενος θέων* which may be the same precinct of Zeus, Hera, and Dionysus. The lines are exceedingly obscure, and much of their interpretation eludes us. We do not know where the poem begins, and, though we know that it ended on the papyrus, the last four lines yield almost nothing. What seems fairly clear is that Alcaeus is almost alone, since he mentions no companions, and addresses the poem to a friend, who may have been with him, or to whom he may have sent it:

ἀγνοισ . . σβιοτοισ. .ις ὀ τάλαις ἔγω
ζώω μοῖραν ἔχων ἀγροϊωτίκαν
ἰμέρρων ἀγόρας ἄκουσαι
19 *καρυ[ζο]μένας, ὤγεσιλαΐδα,*

καὶ β[ό]λλας· τὰ πάτηρ καὶ πάτερος πάτηρ
καγγ[ε]γήρασ' ἔχοντες πεδὰ τωνδέων
τὼν [ἀ]λλαλοκάκων πολίταν
23 *ἔγ[ωγ' ἀ]πὺ τούτων ἀπελήλαμαι*

φεύγων ἐσχατίαισ', ὡς δ' 'Ονυμακλέης
ἔνθα[δ'] οἷος ἐοίκησα λυκαιμίαις
]ον [π]όλεμον· στάσιν γὰρ
27 *πρὸς κρ.[. . . .]. οὐκ †ἄμεινον ὀννέλην·*

.].[. . .].[. .]μακάρων ἐς τέμ[ε]νος θέων
ἐοι[. . . . .] με[λ]αίνας ἐπίβαις χθόνος
χλι.[.].[.].[.]ν συνόδοισί μ' αὔταις
31 *οἴκημ⟨μ⟩ι κ[ά]κων ἔκτος ἔχων πόδας,*

ὄππαι Λ[εσβί]αδες κριννόμεναι φύαν
πώλεντ' ἐλκεσίπεπλοι, περὶ δὲ βρέμει

ἄχω θεσπεσία γυναίκων
ἴρα[ς ὀ]λολύγας ἐνιαυσίας

].[.].[.]. ἀπὺ πόλλων πότα δὴ θέοι
].[ ]σκ . . .ν 'Ολύμπιοι
].....
.να[ ]... μεν.[1]

. . . I, poor wretch, live with a yokel's lot, longing to hear the Assembly summoned, and the Council, o Agesilaidas; what my father and my father's father have grown old possessing, among these citizens who do evil to one another, from all these things I have been driven forth, an exile on the boundaries; and like Onomacles, I have settled here a lonely wolf-man, (plotting?) war; for it is not good (?) to give up rebellion against the . . . to the precinct of the Blessed Gods, . . . treading the black earth; . . . assemblies . . . I dwell, keeping my steps out of troubles, where Lesbian girls, with trailing robes, go to and fro, being judged for their beauty, and around rings the wonderful echo of the holy cry of women in every year . . . from many (woes?) when will the Olympian gods (deliver me)?

In his rustic exile Alcaeus thinks of his normal life in Mytilene, and especially of the Council and the Assembly, of which he must have been a member. We know very little about them, but it is reasonable to assume that they were not unlike the similar institutions in Homer and had survived from the collapse of the monarchy into the aristocratic age. Alcaeus feels warmly towards them because they represent the political life which he enjoyed before everything was spoiled by the tyrants. In so far as he had any political theory, it was that things were best managed by men like himself and his father through institutions of this kind in which their opinions carried weight. He regards his deprivation of them as a personal wrong. His contempt and disapproval of his countrymen come out in the epithet *ἀλλαλοκάκων*, which contrasts with his own pride of birth in the preceding lines. From this he turns to his present situation and compares himself with Onomacles, of whom nothing is known, but who must come from fable or legend or folk-lore as a wild man of the woods. The word *λυκαιμίαις* is no easier to explain, but whether it means a man who frequents thickets, *αἰμοί*, where wolves live,[2] or a man

[1] Fr. 130 L.-P.; see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 198–209. In 27 *ἄμεινον* cannot be right as the metre requires – ∪ ∪. Page's *κάλλιον* is open to the objection that it is a comparative when we expect a positive with some sense like 'good'.

[2] So Page, *S. and A.* p. 205, quoting Hesych. *αἰμοί· δρυμοί.*

who is thought to have the blood of wolves in his veins, it indicates someone savage and solitary and alien to the haunts of men. So exile forces Alcaeus to compare himself first with a yokel and then with some creature which is as much beast as man.

In his exile Alcaeus enjoys the spectacle of the girls who compete for prizes in beauty in an annual competition. His mind turns happily to this from his regrets and his complaints, and for a moment he catches its excitement and its clamour. Then, presumably, he closes the poem with a question asking when the gods are going to deliver him from his troubles. The poem records a sequence of different moods, each one of which arises from the unusual situation in which Alcaeus finds himself, and, because he is alone and not with his companions, he is quieter and more reflective than usual. Here, as in the previous poem, he touches on each theme with remarkable concentration and economy and gives to it its right place in a complex whole. His method is different from Sappho's straightforward development of a single topic and creates its own dramatic effect by approaching its subject from more than one angle.

This technique creates considerable difficulties in the interpretation of the less well-preserved poems of Alcaeus. His habit of moving abruptly from one theme to another may confound us if clues are lacking. Such is a poem which has, reasonably enough, been connected with Pittacus. Pittacus enacted that, if drunkards committed a misdemeanour, they should pay a bigger penalty than if they had been sober.[1] Alcaeus, who liked wine, naturally attacked him for this, not, as we might expect, for undue puritanism, but for hypocrisy, for being himself given to habits which he penalized in others. Some such situation seems to lie behind some lines which refer to junketings on a large scale:

λάβρως δὲ συν στει[.] . .[. .]ειαπ . .
πίμπλεισιν ἀκράτω [τὸ δ' ἐ]π' ἀμέρα[ι
καὶ νύκτι παφλάσδει [λάτ]αχθεν,
ἔνθα νόμος θάμ' ἐν . . . . .νην.

κῆνος δὲ τούτων οὐκ ἐπελάθετο
ὤνηρ ἐπεὶ δὴ πρῶτον ὀνέτροπε,
παίσαις γὰρ ὀννώρινε νύκτας,
τὼ δὲ πίθω πατάγεσκ' ὀ πύθμην.

[1] Aristot. *Pol.* 1274 b 20; *Rhet.* 1402 b 9.

σὺ δὴ τεαύτας ἐκγεγόνων ἔχηις
τὰν δόξαν οἵαν ἄνδρες ἐλεύθεροι
ἔσλων ἔοντες ἐκ τοκήων . . .,[1]

Violently . . . he fills . . . with unmixed wine, and by day and night it seethes as it is thrown, where often the law. . . . But that man did not forget these things once he had upset them; for he kept every night awake, and the bottom of the jar kept on ringing. Do *you*, who are born of such a woman, have the renown which men bred of noble parents . . .?

The gaps in the text add to the difficulties of interpretation, which are already formidable enough owing to Alcaeus' abrupt changes of theme. D. L. Page has advanced a theory which takes full note of the text and introduces three different characters.[2] This makes Pittacus σὺ δή, his father κῆνος ὤνηρ, and his mother τεαύτας, and the sequence of thought is that in the first stanza a general habit of revelry is described, in the second we hear of the debauches of Pittacus' father, and in the third Alcaeus turns to Pittacus himself and asks him: 'Have you, the son of such a woman, the repute which free nobles have?' We thus get a piece of family history, a drunken father, whose propensities the son inherits, and a mother, whose low parentage should make him realize that he has no right to behave like the son of noble parents. This imaginative flight is not backed by much evidence. First, we know nothing about Pittacus' mother except that she was a woman of Lesbos,[3] and this tells us nothing about her social origins. Secondly, there is no scrap of evidence that his father was a drunkard. Thirdly, in the extant fragments Alcaeus nowhere addresses Pittacus as σύ or speaks of him except in the third person. Indeed he seems to reserve σύ for friends or gods. Fourthly, even if the third stanza is cast as a question, which is not certain,[4] we do not know the force of ἐκγεγόνων, whether it is causal or concessive. Fifthly, both ὀνέτροπε and ὀννώρινε are transitive verbs but are left in the air without clear objects, and lastly, τούτων is thought to mean 'these barbarous manners', which is, to say the least, adventurous. This chapter of family history is a happy work of fiction but hardly a serious hypothesis.

In the presence of so many unknown factors, it is not easy to

[1] Fr. 72 L.–P. In 4 [τὸ δ' ἐ]π' is Page's suggestion.
[2] *S. and A.* pp. 172–5. [3] 'Suid.' s.v. *Πίττακος· μητρὸς δὲ Λεσβίας.*
[4] For the use of σὺ δή in questions cf. J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles*, 2nd ed. p. 207, 'the emphasis is often ironical, contemptuous, or indignant in tone'.

provide an alternative explanation, but perhaps some few points may be established. The first stanza describes in the present tense continual drinking by day and night. That Alcaeus should ascribe this to Pittacus is at least probable, since the note of disapproval in λάβρως implies that he speaks of an enemy. In the second stanza there is no reason why κῆνος ὤνηρ should not refer to Pittacus, whom Alcaeus calls ὤνηρ οὗτος at one place[1] and κῆνος at another,[2] and if we feel that the phrase is too emphatic for someone of whom Alcaeus has just been speaking, that is just what happens in fr. 70, where an account of lavish drinking precedes the mention of Pittacus as κῆνος. In the second stanza Alcaeus proceeds to say that this revelry is no new thing, but began when Pittacus first ὀνέτροπε. Since elsewhere the word is used with reference to the city in the sense of 'upset' or 'overturned',[3] it must surely have a similar sense here. It is not easy to take it absolutely in the sense of 'caused the upset', and we should probably supply either τὰν πόλιν from the general context or ταῦτα from the preceding τούτων, 'upset these things', and the reference would then be to such Lesbian customs as drinking in the Prytaneum, which Pittacus has indeed not forgotten but to which he has given a new and vulgar prominence by his addiction to them. The notion of the 'upset' is followed by a reference to his behaviour from the first, when he παίσαις ὀννώρινε νύκτας, and since ὀννώρινε is transitive, παίσαις νύκτας must be its object, and the sense is 'stirred up all the nights', that is, he made them loud with carousal and the noise of the wine-butt struck when the wine was running out. In the third stanza Alcaeus turns from the third person to the second and addresses someone as σὺ δή. It is impossible to say who this is. It may of course be Pittacus, but there is no evidence that it is, and the change from the third person to the second is certainly unexpected. Nor do we know the precise intonation of τεαύτας upon which so much depends. It could be derogatory and refer to someone of low birth who claims and gets the glory that is the right of free men, but it might equally be perfectly straightforward, and then Alcaeus asks a friend why he, who comes of a good family, dishonours the name which one of his birth should have. The words then look like a reproof, and their point may be that such a man should have nothing to do with the revelries of Pittacus.

[1] Fr. 141 L.–P. [2] Fr. 70 L.–P. [3] Fr. 141 L.–P.

Alcaeus' στασιωτικά are too passionate and too unpremeditated to deserve the name of propaganda, but they have some of its qualities in their ability to ram a point home and to give it considerable force and appeal. His direct and unqualified approach to his problems is characteristic of his unrestrained and outspoken nature. When Solon foresaw the approaching tyranny of Peisistratus in Athens, he spoke of it in allusive words as snow and hail coming from the storm-cloud,[1] but Alcaeus has none of this oracular gravity. His forecast of the tyranny of Pittacus goes straight to the point:

ὤνηρ οὗτος ὁ μαιόμενος τὸ μέγα κρέτος
ὀντρέψει τάχα τὰν πόλιν· ἃ δ' ἔχεται ῥόπας.[2]

In his desire for the great power this fellow will soon upset the city. It hangs by a thread.

His approach is direct and immediate and realistic. He sees the situation with the clarity that comes from dislike and fear, and expresses himself with instinctive power.

In this struggle Alcaeus took a low view of Pittacus and his supporters and attacked them from more than one angle. When Pittacus was elected, or acclaimed, as αἰσυμνήτης by the Mytileneans, Alcaeus turned with passion against them:

τὸν κακοπατρίδαν
Φίττακον πόλιος τὰς ἀχόλω καὶ βαρυδαίμονος
ἐστάσαντο τύραννον, μέγ' ἐπαίνεντες ἀόλλεες.[3]

One and all praising him greatly, they have made the low-born Pittacus tyrant of the city, which has no bile and is cursed by a heavy fate.

Each word does its duty. Pittacus may not have been a τύραννος in the worst sense of the word, but he was an autocrat, and for Alcaeus that was the same thing. The people who choose him are treated contemptuously, as having no bile and, pityingly, as being the victims of a δαίμων, which drives them to such an action. The combination of adjectives shows Alcaeus' feelings towards the δᾶμος. While he despised them, he also in some sense pitied them, no doubt feeling that they did not know what they were doing. The implications of κακοπατρίδαν are more interesting.

[1] Fr. 10 D. [2] Fr. 141 L.–P. [3] Fr. 348 L.–P.

This can only mean 'low-born'.[1] That Pittacus really was of humble origin is on the whole unlikely. The man who was an ἕταιρος of Alcaeus and his brothers in the struggle against Melanchros and who married into the royal family of the Penthilids could hardly be low-born in any real sense. On the other hand he need not have belonged to quite the same social group as Alcaeus. His father was in fact a Thracian,[2] who is said once to have been a 'king', that is, some kind of magistrate, in Mytilene.[3] The foreign origin of Pittacus may have made Alcaeus despise him, and the gibes at his drinking unmixed wine in fr. 72 may indicate that he followed his native customs in Mytilene; for this was notoriously a Thracian habit.[4] But probably Alcaeus' real reason for using κακοπατρίδαν was that Pittacus was against the circle of aristocrats who had held power and wished to continue to hold it. Such an ambition would be enough to unclass him and to justify abuse of him for his coarse ways. It is significant that Alcaeus applies the word to other men and uses it once at least in the plural,[5] as if he regarded his opponents as a low lot. This does not necessarily mean that they were, but it shows what Alcaeus felt about them.

Once Alcaeus threw himself into this struggle he did not question either his ends or his means. His attitude is revealed in some lines which must have been written when Pittacus was already in power:

κῆνος δὲ παώθεις Ἀτρεΐδα[ν γένει
δαπτέτω πόλιν ὡς καὶ πεδὰ Μυρσί[λ]ω,
θᾶς κ' ἄμμε βόλλητ' Ἄρευς ἐπὶ τ[ε]ύχε[α
9 τρόπην· ἐκ δὲ χόλω τῶδε λαθοίμεθ' αὖ.

χαλάσσομεν δὲ τὰς θυμοβόρω λύας
ἐμφύλω τε μάχας, τάν τις Ὀλυμπίων
ἔνωρσε, δᾶμον μὲν εἰς ἀνάταν ἄγων,
13 Φιττάκωι δὲ δίδοις κῦδος ἐπήρ[ατ]ον.[6]

Let him, who has married a daughter of the race of the Atridae, devour the city as he did with Myrsilus, until Ares consents to turn

[1] J. Wackernagel, *Glotta*, xiv (1925), 50 ff.
[2] Diog. Laert. 1. 74; 'Suid.' s.v. *Πιττακός*.
[3] Schol. Dion. Thrac. p. 368. 15 Hilg. Ὕρρας δὲ Μυτιληναίων ἐγένετο βασιλεύς, οὗ υἱὸς ὁ Πιττακός.
[4] Athen. 9. 432 a. [5] Frs. 67. 4 L.–P.
[6] Fr. 70.; see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 233–6. In 6 I supply γένει as the simplest word that meets the needs of the sense and the metre.

us to our weapons; and may we forget again this our wrath. Let us abate our heart-eating discord and intestine fighting, which some Olympian has aroused among us, bringing the people to ruin, but giving to Pittacus the glory which he desires.

In this there is no concession to Pittacus, still less any forgiveness for him. Alcaeus merely expresses his intention to wait until the military situation is more in his favour. The strife to which he refers is the *στάσις* in Mytilene, for which he and his friends are in fact largely responsible, but he does not see it like that. He sees himself as the champion of a cause, whose admirable plans have been frustrated by the gods and the doom which they have laid on the people. His hope is simply that in due time he will win his way by arms and that then the intestine strife will cease. Since, according to Aristotle,[1] the people elected Pittacus *αἰσυμνήτης* against the menace of the exiles led by Antimenidas and Alcaeus, the hope was illusory, and perhaps Alcaeus may be excused for ascribing the existing state of affairs to the inscrutable will of the gods which fooled the people into preferring Pittacus to himself.

The operations and conspiracies in which Alcaeus engaged excited in him emotions which have an almost heroic quality. It was this which Horace had in mind when he wrote:

> et te sonantem plenius aureo,
> Alcaee, plectro dura nauis,
> dura fugae mala, dura belli.[2]

Things that were *dura*, hard, brought out the best in Alcaeus, and he turned his talents to convey the severe nature of the struggle in which he delighted. For him the efforts which he and his friends made were aptly compared with a ship in trouble at sea. He transposed his own knowledge of seafaring to situations in which the imagery of ships represents the strain and the dangers of his struggle. In this he was not, as has been claimed for him, a pioneer,[3] but he developed a theme which had already been exploited by Archilochus.[4] Alcaeus uses the image for a wider variety of purposes and perhaps with a greater sense of its implications. His passages on ships are not strictly concerned with the 'Ship of State', which was later to become a commonplace of

[1] *Pol.* 1285 a 35.
[2] *C.* 2. 13. 26–28.
[3] Page, *S. and A.* p. 182.
[4] Fr. 56 D; see F. Rodríguez Adrados, *Aegyptus*, xxxv (1955), pp. 206–10.

poetry and rhetoric, nor with the comparison of his own party with a ship. He uses seafaring to convey the significance of more than one situation and to present it in a new light. So in one place he speaks of a ship in a rough sea and draws the conclusion that the crew must patch up the timbers and get at once into harbour.[1] The point is that the situation is getting out of hand, and that it is wise to find some refuge, not as an escape from action but as a good base for future operations. The imagery is applicable to his position. The mounting waves indicate growing danger; the need to bale out implies foresight, the strengthening of the timbers the strengthening of their resources, and the safe harbour a proper base for action. From this Alcaeus moves easily to an appeal for courage, and the image has done its work by showing how serious the danger is and what action is needed at once. To a seafaring people each word would strike home, and they would respond to the need for courage in such a crisis.

In another poem Alcaeus develops the theme of a ship with more elaboration and with such an air of actuality that we can understand Heraclitus asking 'Who would not think this to be a picture of men in trouble at sea?',[2] if he himself had not told us that the subject is Myrsilus and the stirring of a tyrannical conspiracy at Mytilene. Here too Alcaeus seems to be speaking of his own friends and political colleagues when he describes their situation as that of a ship troubled by contrary winds:

> *ἀσυννέτημι τὼν ἀνέμων στάσιν·*
> *τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἔνθεν κῦμα κυλίνδεται,*
> *τὸ δ' ἔνθεν, ἄμμες δ' ὂν τὸ μέσσον*
> *νᾶϊ φορήμμεθα σὺν μελαίναι,*
>
> *χείμωνι μόχθεντες μεγάλωι μάλα·*
> *πὲρ μὲν γὰρ ἄντλος ἰστοπέδαν ἔχει,*
> *λαῖφος δὲ πὰν ζάδηλον ἤδη,*
> *καὶ λάκιδες μέγαλαι κὰτ αὖτο.*[3]

I do not understand the strife of the winds; for one wave rolls from this side, and another from that, and in the middle we are borne in our black ship, much vexed by the great storm; for the bilge is over the masthold, and the sail is all transparent, and there are great rents in it.

[1] Fr. 6 L.–P.; see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 182–5.
[2] *Quaest. Hom.* 5.
[3] Fr. 326 L.–P.; see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 185–6, for the connexion with frs. 305 and 208.

Alcaeus describes a difficult feat of sailing, for much damage has been done to the ship, but, as appears from the fragmentary lines that follow, she is still saved by the sheets holding firm. The image can be pressed in its details. The conflicting winds are the different political forces through which he has to pass and which he does not understand. He has been badly buffeted and is in trouble, but he still continues his voyage. The method is not really that of allegory, still less of a 'one–one correspondence', but of a poetical imagery which gives a concrete precision and imaginative significance to events which might otherwise remain somewhat vague and indeterminate. We identify Alcaeus' struggle with that of a ship in a storm, and it excites similar responses from us.

Just because Alcaeus had to fight for his position and his beliefs, on the whole without success, he was occasionally forced to conclusions which were to become characteristic of his century and of the class to which he belonged, when it found itself on the losing side. In spite of his belief in birth and its privileges, in spite of his contempt for the 'low-born' Pittacus, he was forced by hard facts to recognize that the aristocratic creed did not conform to realities. He saw especially that, if a man was poor, his birth was useless to him:

ὡς γὰρ δήποτ' Ἀριστόδαμον φαῖσ' οὐκ ἀπάλαμνον ἐν Σπάρται λόγον
εἶπην, χρήματ' ἄνηρ, πένιχρος δ' οὐδ' εἷς πέλετ' ἔσλος οὐδὲ τίμιος.[1]

For, as they say, Aristodemus spoke no foolish saying once in Sparta, 'Money makyth Man', and no poor man is noble or held in honour.

So long as the old nobles were entrenched in power, they could assume that wealth and nobility were almost synonymous terms. Facts supported them, and exceptions did not shake the general validity of their belief. But all was changed when men of low birth expropriated men of ancient lineage. Alcaeus saw the change and realized that the values of established society were being severely tested by events. Of course the Greeks, like everyone else, had always known that poverty robs a man of everything desirable, but Alcaeus makes a good point when he says that, if a man is poor, he is no longer ἔσλος. The theme was dear to Theognis, who shared Alcaeus' views and put them epigrammatically:

[1] Fr. 360 L.–P.

Πλοῦτε, θεῶν κάλλιστε καὶ ἱμεροέστατε πάντων,
σὺν σοὶ καὶ κακὸς ὢν γίνεται ἐσθλὸς ἀνήρ.[1]

Wealth, most beautiful and most desired of all the gods, with you even a base man becomes noble.

The sixth century was a time of social struggles, and though in Lesbos the results do not seem to have been very notable, Alcaeus represents the older point of view and acknowledges that it does not always work.

This conviction forced on Alcaeus another almost political theory. He had to explain the apparent slavishness of the Mytilenaeans, who preferred the rule of Pittacus to that of himself and his friends. He may have found comfort in the thought that some god had infatuated them, but he was not so blind as to shirk a more realistic appraisal of the situation. The people were servile because they were poor:

ἀργάλεον Πενία κάκον ἄσχετον, ἃ μέγαν
δάμναι λᾶον Ἀμαχανίαι σὺν ἀδελφέαι.[2]

Poverty is a grievous thing, an uncontrollable evil, who with her sister Helplessness subdues a great people.

Theognis again tells the same story, when he warns Cyrnus against the way in which poverty breaks a man's spirit:

ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν πενίη πάντων δάμνησι μάλιστα
καὶ γήρως πολιοῦ, Κύρνε, καὶ ἠπιάλου·
ἣν δὴ χρὴ φεύγοντα καὶ ἐς βαθυκήτεα πόντον
ῥιπτεῖν καὶ πετρέων, Κύρνε, κατ' ἠλιβάτων.
καὶ γὰρ ἀνὴρ πενίῃ δεδμημένος οὔτε τι εἰπεῖν
οὔθ' ἔρξαι δύναται, γλῶσσα δέ οἱ δέδεται.[3]

Poverty, Cyrnus, most of all things, breaks a good man, more than hoary age or fever. You must fly from it, Cyrnus, and hurl yourself into the yawning sea from sheer rocks. For a man bound by poverty cannot do or say anything. His tongue is tied.

Nobody can say that Alcaeus and Theognis were wrong. It was the hardness of Greek life which forced the less privileged to dispute the power of their traditional rulers and to expect too much from changes of government. Alcaeus saw the process with unsympathetic eyes, but at least he saw it and, from his own angle, understood it.

As an alternative to the new conditions Alcaeus offered his

[1] 1117–18. [2] Fr. 364 L.–P.; cf. Hdt. 8. 111. 3. [3] 173–8.

aristocratic creed. He emphasized the value of courage and loyalty, and in this too he resembles Theognis. Experience taught him that the life of a community depends on them, and in this spirit he wrote

ἄνδρες γὰρ πόλιος πύργος ἀρεύιος[1]

'For *men* are a city's warlike tower', and said elsewhere that 'it is not stones nor timbers nor the craft of craftsmen, but wherever there are men knowing how to defend themselves, there are walls and a city.'[2] If he was not the inventor of this notion, he gave it an impressive form, and in later times it appealed alike to Sophocles[3] and to Nicias.[4] Alcaeus' interest and belief in personality were the natural results of his upbringing and of his heroic scale of values. The same conviction underlies his statement that weapons are useless if the bearer of them is not brave.[5] It finds a vivid form in the oath which he took with Pittacus against their common opponents,[6] and even more emphatically when, having spoken of himself and his companions as a crew in trouble at sea, he appeals to them to show courage worthy of their ancestors:

καὶ μή τιν' ὄκνος μόλθ[ακος ἀμμέων
λάχηι· πρόδηλον γὰρ μέγ' [ἄέθλιον.
μνάσθητε τὼ πάροιθα μ[όχθω·
νῦν τις ἀνὴρ δόκιμος γε[νέσθω,

καὶ μὴ καταισχύνωμεν [ἀναλκίαι
ἔσλοις τόκηας γᾶς ὕπα κε[ιμένοις . . .[7]

And let not soft fear take hold of any one of us; for a great task lies clear before us. Remember our earlier labour. Now let a man prove himself steadfast, and let us not dishonour by cowardice our noble forefathers who lie under the earth.

It is this mood which gives distinction to Alcaeus' unsuccessful enterprises and shows what really lay behind them. He felt the need to show through a display of ἀρετή that he was an ἀνὴρ

[1] Fr. 112. 10 L.–P. [2] Fr. 426 L.–P.
[3] *O.T.* 56–57 ὡς οὐδέν ἐστιν οὔτε πύργος οὔτε ναῦς
ἐρῆμος ἀνδρῶν μὴ ξυνοικούντων ἔσω.
[4] Thuc. 7. 77. 7 ἄνδρες γὰρ πόλις, καὶ οὐ τείχη οὐδὲ νῆες ἀνδρῶν κεναί.
[5] Fr. 427 L.–P. [6] Fr. 129. 17–20 L.–P.
[7] Fr. 6. 9–14 L.–P. The supplements are not certain but give what seems to be the right kind of sense.

ἀγαθός, and it is a pity that he did not find a more distinguished field in which to prove himself.

The strength of Alcaeus' poetry of action lies in his immediate and powerful response to events. He is not subtle, nor even very imaginative, but he has a gift for saying firmly and impressively certain things which have always belonged to a masculine outlook and concern all who feel the call of adventure and risk and struggle. Even when he relaxes and takes his pleasure, the same spirit is at work. He passes without effort from war to conviviality, and treats a drinking-party with the same energetic attention with which he treats politics. He throws himself wholly into it, and at one place seems quite happy to let the ship of state founder while he takes to drink.[1] At another he dismisses the thought of some trouble or disaster and says:

οὐ χρῆ κάκοισι θῦμον ἐπιτρέπην,
προκόψομεν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἀσάμενοι,
ὦ Βύκχι, φαρμάκων δ' ἄριστον
οἶνον ἐνεικαμένοις μεθύσθην.[2]

We must not surrender our heart to evils; for we shall do no good by vexing ourselves, Bycchis, and the best of medicines is to send for wine and get drunk.

Conversely, when the news is good, the same remedy is sought, as when he hears of the death of Myrsilus:

νῦν χρῆ μεθύσθην καί τινα πὲρ βίαν
πώνην, ἐπεὶ δὴ κάτθανε Μύρσιλος . . .[3]

Now must a man get drunk and drink with all his strength, for Myrsilus has died . . .

Alcaeus gave to relaxation the same whole-hearted, practical attention that he gave to more violent kinds of action.

Alcaeus' drinking-songs have an air of being spontaneous and almost extemporary. He looks to the immediate occasion and not to some ideal drinking-party, and speaks of it as it is or as he wishes it to be. He enjoys its correct ceremonial and likes to dwell on the details of the arrangements or the time of day or the season of the year. An excuse can always be found for a party, and Alcaeus is an adept at it. So he calls for wine because the day is coming to an end:

[1] Fr. 73 L.–P.; see Page, *S. and A.* p. 190.
[2] Fr. 335 L.–P. [3] Fr. 332 L.–P.

πώνωμεν· τί τὰ λύχν' ὀμμένομεν; δάκτυλος ἀμέρα.
κὰδ δἄερρε κυλίχναις μεγάλαις αἶψ' ἀπὸ πασσάλων.
οἶνον γὰρ Σεμέλας καὶ Δίος υἱος λαθικάδεον
ἀνθρώποισιν ἔδωκ'. ἔγχεε κέρναις ἕνα καὶ δύο
πλήαις κὰκ κεφάλας, ⟨ἀ⟩ δ' ἀτέρα τὰν ἀτέραν κύλιξ
ὠθήτω.[1]

Let us drink. Why do we wait for the lamps? The day has but an inch to go. Lift down the big cups at once from the pegs. For the son of Semele and Zeus gave wine to men to forget their cares. Mix one of water and two of wine, pour them in to the brim, and let one cup jostle another.

Here is the essential ritual of Greek drinking—the mention of the time of day, the drill of taking the cups from their pegs, the justification of wine because it gets rid of cares, the precise proportions of wine and water, and the call to keep the proceedings going by emptying the cups quickly and calling for more. All is in order, but not quite usual. The drink is a good deal stronger than normally. When Alcaeus says ἕνα καὶ δύο he can only mean one part of water to two of wine, since in such phrases the water comes first and the wine second.[2] This is evidently a special occasion when the wine is not only abundant but taken strong. That perhaps is why Alcaeus prepares the way by invoking the patronage of Dionysus.

Another excuse for drink could be found in the weather. So when rain and frost keep him indoors, Alcaeus sees no alternative to convivial relaxation:

ὔει μὲν ὁ Ζεὺς, ἐκ δ' ὀράνω μέγας
χείμων, πεπάγαισιν δ' ὐδάτων ῥόαι . . . .
κάββαλλε τὸν χείμων', ἐπὶ μὲν τίθεις
πῦρ, ἐν δὲ κέρναις οἶνον ἀφειδέως
μέλιχρον, αὐτὰρ ἀμφὶ κόρσαι
μόλθακον ἀμφι⟨τίθεις⟩ γνόφαλλον.[3]

Zeus rains. From the sky comes a great storm, and the water-streams are frozen. . . . Put down the storm, pile up the fire, and mix the sweet wine without stint, putting a soft pillow about your brows.

The physical scene is conjured up in a few dexterous words, and we feel the sense of relief and comfort which Alcaeus has in

[1] Fr. 346 L.–P. In 2 I read Ahrens's αἶψ' ἀπὸ πασσάλων for the meaningless αιταποικιλλις of the MSS.

[2] Page, *S. and A.* p. 308, quoting Hes. *Op.* 596; Anacr. fr. 43. 3 D; Athen. 10. 430 d.

[3] Fr. 338 L.–P.

defying the elements safely indoors. By this we may set a song from the high heat of summer:

τέγγε πλεύμονας οἴνωι, τὸ γὰρ ἄστρον περιτέλλεται,
ἀ δ' ὥρα χαλέπα, πάντα δὲ δίψαισ' ὑπὰ καύματος,
ἄχει δ' ἐκ πετάλων ἄδεα τέττιξ, πτερύγων δ' ὕπα
κακχέει λιγύραν ⟨πύκνον⟩ ἀοίδαν, ⟨θέρος⟩ ὄπποτα
φλόγιον †καθέταν πεπτάμενον πάντα καταυάνηι
⟨ ⟩
ἄνθει δὲ σκόλυμος· νῦν δὲ γύναικες μιαρώταται,
λέπτοι δ' ἄνδρες, ἐπεὶ ⟨δὴ⟩ κεφάλαν καὶ γόνα Σείριος
ἄσδει.[1]

Soak your lungs with wine, for the Star is on the turn, and the season is harsh, and everything thirsts with the heat. From the leaves the cicada chirps sweetly, and from under its wings pours down a shrill song incessantly, when the blazing summer is spread abroad and withers everything. . . . The golden thistle is in bloom; now women are at their worst, and men are feeble, for the Dog-star shrivels their head and knees.

The poem is a close adaptation of some lines by Hesiod which also describe the high summer and suggest that it calls for wine. Each item in Alcaeus has its source in Hesiod, and the imitation shows not only how little Greek poets worried about borrowing from others, but with what ease Alcaeus transforms Hesiod's hexameters into Asclepiads:

ἦμος δὲ σκόλυμός τ' ἀνθεῖ καὶ ἠχέτα τέττιξ
δενδρέῳ ἐφεζόμενος λιγυρὴν καταχεύετ' ἀοιδὴν
πυκνὸν ὑπὸ πτερύγων, θέρεος καματώδεος ὥρῃ,
τῆμος πιόταταί τ' αἶγες καὶ οἶνος ἄριστος,
μαχλόταται δὲ γύναικες, ἀφαυρότατοι δέ τοι ἄνδρες
εἰσίν, ἐπεὶ κεφάλην καὶ γούνατα Σείριος ἄζει,
αὐαλέος δέ τε χρὼς ὑπὸ καύματος· ἀλλὰ τότ' ἤδη
εἴη πετραίη τε σκιὴ καὶ βίβλινος οἶνος.[2]

[1] Fr. 347 L.–P.; see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 303–6. In 5 Bergk's καταυάνηι seems the best proposal yet made.

[2] *Op.* 582–9. The *Shield of Heracles*, 393–9, also develops the theme, but in rather a different way:

ἦμος δὲ χλοερῷ κυανόπτερος ἠχέτα τέττιξ
ὄζῳ ἐφεζόμενος θέρος ἀνθρώποισιν ἀείδειν
ἄρχεται, ᾧ τε πόσις καὶ βρῶσις θῆλυς ἔέρση,
καὶ τε πανημέριός τε καὶ ἠώιος χέει αὐδὴν
ἴδει ἐν αἰνοτάτῳ, ὅτε τε χρόα Σείριος ἄζει,
τῆμος δὴ κέγχροισι πέρι γλῶχες τελέθουσι
τούς τε θέρει σπείρουσιν, ὅτ' ὄμφακες αἰόλλονται.

Though everything comes from Hesiod, Alcaeus' own imprint can be seen when he puts the summons to drink emphatically at the start instead of keeping it to the end. That after all is to be expected from the imperative temper of a drinking-song. Alcaeus has indeed been forced by the difference of metre to change one or two important words, and μαχλόταται becomes μιαρώταται and ἀφαυρότατοι becomes λέπτοι. It is not clear whether by λέπτοι he means 'thin' or 'weak'. Though the first is a normal usage and would suit the hot weather, the second is closer to Hesiod's ἀφαυρότατοι and provides a better contrast with μιαρώταται. This is a word of moral disapproval, not necessarily very harsh but a colloquial equivalent of the epic μαχλόταται, which recalls Homer's use of μαχλοσύνη for Paris.[1] In both substitutions Alcaeus keeps the main purport of his original. It is also perhaps worth noting that he delays the mention of the flowering of the σκόλυμος until later than Hesiod and makes it come immediately before his account of the summer condition of men and women. For Hesiod it merely indicates the time of year, and perhaps it does no more for Alcaeus, who may have kept it till late simply because his beginning is occupied with a summons to drink. Pliny, however, uses this passage to argue that the σκόλυμος mixed with wine is an aphrodisiac.[2] It is just possible that Alcaeus may have gone on to say something of the kind, but we must reckon that, since Pliny says the same of Hesiod and is plainly wrong in doing so, he may also be wrong about Alcaeus.

Alcaeus has his own philosophy of wine and forms maxims about it. As a landowner he appreciated the value of vines and said

μηδ' ἓν ἄλλο φυτεύσηις πρότερον δένδριον ἀμπέλω[3]

'Do not plant any other tree before the vine', and no doubt he meant what he said. But he knew that drink had its social justification, and was an early proponent of the thesis that wine reveals the true man. When he wrote

οἶνος, ὦ φίλε παῖ, καὶ ἀλάθεα[4]

[1] *Il.* 24. 30.

[2] *N.H.* 22. (43). 86–87, 'traditur (scolymus) . . . Venerem stimulare in uino Hesiodo et Alcaeo testibus, qui florente ea cicadas acerrimi cantus esse et mulieres libidinis auidissimas uirosque in coitum pigerrimos scripsere, uelut prouidentia naturae hoc adiumento tunc ualentissimo'.

[3] Fr. 342 L.–P. Cf. Hor. *C.* 1. 18. 1 'nullam, Vare, sacra uite prius seueris arborem'.

[4] Fr. 366 L.–P. Cf. Theocr. 29. 1 with Gow's note.

'Wine, dear boy, and also truth', or

οἶνος γὰρ ἀνθρώπω δίοπτρον[1]

'Wine is a spy-hole into a man', he justifies drink by an argument which was well suited to a society which attached paramount importance to truthfulness and candour between friends. Greek poetry often plays with the notion that men need some means of testing one another's fidelity, and Alcaeus found his own answer to it.

Alcaeus seems also to have been one of the first to use wine as an element in the theme of *carpe diem* and to insist that, since life is short, it is wise to spend it in pleasure and especially in drink. Mimnermus had indeed put forward his own philosophy on these lines, but love, not wine, was the centre of his interest. Though Alcaeus was an inveterate man of action, or even perhaps because he was one, when he relaxed, he relaxed fully, and found consolation in the thought that, since we shall soon be dead beyond recall, it is wise to drink:

πῶνε [καὶ μέθυ', ὦ] Μελάνιππ', ἄμ' ἔμοι· τί [φαῖς
†ὄταμε[. . . .]διννάεντ'† Ἀχέροντα μέγ[
ζάβαι[ς ἀ]ελίω κόθαρον φάος [ἄψερον
ὄψεσθ'; ἀλλ' ἄγι μὴ μεγάλων ἐπ[ιβάλλεο·
καὶ γὰρ Σίσυφος Αἰολίδαις βασίλευς [ἔφα
ἄνδρων πλεῖστα νοησάμενος [θάνατον φύγην,
ἀλλὰ καὶ πολύιδρις ἔων ὑπὰ κᾶρι [δὶς
διννάεντ' Ἀχέροντ' ἐπέραισε, μ[έμηδε δ' ὦν
ἀ]ύτωι μόχθον ἔχην Κρονίδαις βα[σίλευς κάτω
μελαίνας χθόνος· ἀλλ' ἄγι μὴ τά[δ' ἐπέλπεο.
θᾶς] τ' ἀβάσομεν, αἴ ποτα κἄλλοτα, [νῦν πρέπει
φέρ]ην ὄττινα τῶνδε πάθην τά[χα δῶι θέος.
. . . . .] ἄνεμος βορίαις ἐπι[.[2]

Drink and get drunk, Melanippus, with me. Why do you think that when you have crossed (?) eddying Acheron you will see the clean sunlight again? Come, aim not at great things. For even king Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, who was the wisest of men, claimed that he had

[1] Fr. 333 L.–P. Cf. Theogn. 500; Aesch. fr. 393 N; Ion fr. 1. 12 D.

[2] Fr. 38 L.–P.; Page, *S. and A.* pp. 300–3, whose readings and suggestions I follow except in 6 and 11. Line 2 must have been corrupt in the papyrus as διννάεντ' cannot stand at this place in the metre.

fled from death, but despite all his cunning he twice crossed whirling Acheron at the orders of fate. And the king, the son of Cronus, devised for him a labour to have under the black earth. But come, hope not for these things. While we are young, now, if ever, is it fit to endure whatever of these things the gods give us to suffer . . . the wind Boreas . . .

It is not certain that the last line belongs to this poem, and it may be the first line of another. So we cannot press its relevance. What is clear is Alcaeus' view that a man has only one life and must make the best of it. But this best, though for the moment it is to be found in drink, is to be found mainly in taking whatever the gods send and getting the most from it, whether it is good or bad. Alcaeus drives home his point by the story of Sisyphus, who escaped once from the dead but nevertheless died in due course. His cunning earned him the title of *κέρδιστος ἀνδρῶν* from Homer,[1] and similar tributes from Hesiod,[2] Theognis,[3] and Pindar.[4] The story was told by Pherecydes.[5] When Zeus carried off Aegina, Sisyphus told her father, Asopus. Zeus sent Death to Sisyphus, but Sisyphus chained him up, with the result that nobody could die. Ares freed Death, and Sisyphus was surrendered to him, but before dying he told his wife Merope to omit the funeral rites. So Hades sent him back to remonstrate with her and, once he was back, he did not return but lived to an old age. For this, in his second sojourn below earth, he was punished by having to roll a boulder up hill, which rolled down as soon as it reached the top. The story is a warning against trying to escape from death, and Alcaeus uses it as an example of the dangers of asking for too much. If Melanippus is wise, he will make the most of the passing hour and be content with it. The poem looks as if it were written when Alcaeus and Melanippus were both young, and it has a certain youthful seriousness and elegance. It may even be more or less complete, in the sense that it had no more than twelve lines, and in that case we can see how neatly and effectively Alcaeus makes his point.

The theme of wine is closely allied to the theme of love. The fragments contain almost nothing about women, except a

[1] *Il.* 6. 153.
[2] Fr. 7. 4 R. *Σίσυφος αἰολόμητις.*
[3] 701 ff. *οὐδ' εἰ . . . πλείονα δ' εἰδείης Σισύφου Αἰολίδεω.*
[4] *Ol.* 13. 52 *Σίσυφον μὲν πυκνότατον παλάμαις ὡς θεόν*
[5] 3 F 119 Jacoby.

remark on the futility of giving anything to a harlot[1] and a reference to 'lovely Abanthis'.[2] More revealing is the line

δέξαι με κωμάσδοντα δέξαι, λίσσομαί σε λίσσομαι[3]

Welcome me, welcome me, the reveller, I beg you, I beg.

This is an early example of a favourite Greek custom, when young men, after their wine, would roam the streets and sing serenades, *παρακλαυσίθυρα*. Such songs would normally be addressed to women of easy character, and Alcaeus' line evidently was composed for such an occasion. But so far as love was concerned, he seems to have been more interested in boys and young men than in women. At least this is the impression that he left on Horace:

> Liberum et Musas Veneremque et illi
> semper haerentem puerum canebat
> et Lycum nigris oculis nigroque
> crine decorum.[4]

But the fragments do not mention Lycus and indeed say very little about love. It is true that Bycchis is addressed in two drinking-songs,[5] and he may have been an *ἐρώμενος*, but there is no evidence for it. More substantial are the claims of Menon, who is mentioned in two lines:

κέλομαί τινα τὸν χαρίεντα Μένωνα κάλεσσαι,
αἰ χρῆ συμποσίας ἐπόνασιν ἔμοιγε γένεσθαι.[6]

I bid someone call the charming Menon, if I am to take pleasure in our drinking together.

So too the scholiast says that two other lines were written *εἰς τὸν ἐρώμενον*, and they seem to concern some friend who has deserted Alcaeus, though he once enjoyed the pleasures of his hospitality:

φίλος μὲν ἦσθα κἀπ' ἔριφον κάλην
καὶ χοῖρον· οὕτω νομίσδεται.[7]

You were my friend, to be invited to kid and pork. This is what happens.

In these scanty fragments there is little trace of emotion, still less of love. Nor should we treat as serious evidence for Alcaeus the *παιδικὰ Αἰολικά* of Theocritus, in which he uses an imitation

[1] Fr. 117 (b) 26 L.–P.
[2] Fr. 261 (b) i. 8 L.–P.
[3] Fr. 374 L.–P.; see Headlam–Knox, *Herodas*, p. 83.
[4] *C.* 1. 32. 9–12.
[5] Frs. 73 and 335 L.–P.
[6] Fr. 368 L.–P.
[7] Fr. 71 L.–P.

of the Aeolic dialect and two favourite metres of Alcaeus, the Aeolic Dactylic Pentameter and the Greater Asclepiad, to speak of the misery which his boy-loves bring him. Though he quotes Alcaeus at the beginning of *Idyll* XXIX and plainly treats him as a model, his mawkish spirit is alien to anything that we know of Alcaeus and seems characteristic of the Alexandrian age. That Alcaeus wrote erotic poems we cannot doubt, but we do not know what they were like.

Alcaeus saw his life against a background of gods and goddesses, who gave or withheld their favours as they chose, and were for him an indispensable part of the daily round. In the poems that he wrote for them he shows that he had his own vivid vision of them and gave them an intimate place in his life. His hymns were written in the same style and the same metres as his other poems and show little affinity with the choral hymns of Alcman or Stesichorus. They may well have been quite short, since Alcaeus is economical of words and makes his effects in a brief compass. To Apollo he wrote a hymn in the Alcaic stanza, and the first line survives:

ὦναξ Ἄπολλον, παῖ μεγάλω Δίος[1]

'King Apollo, son of mighty Zeus'. This simple but stately opening may be supplemented by the account which Himerius gives of the poem:

When Apollo was born, Zeus decked him with a golden head-band and a lyre and gave him also a chariot to drive, and swans drew the chariot. He sent him to Delphi and the streams of Castalia, thence to speak as a prophet of justice and right to the Hellenes. He mounted on the chariot and made the swans fly to the Hyperboreans. When the Delphians heard of this, they composed a Paean and a tune and established dances of young men round the tripod, and summoned the god to come from the Hyperboreans. But for a whole year he gave laws to the men there, and when he thought that it was time for the Delphian tripods to give sound, he ordered his swans to fly back from the Hyperboreans. It was summer, indeed midsummer, when Alcaeus brings Apollo back from the Hyperboreans. Hence with the summer blazing forth and Apollo in the land the lyre also puts on a summer wantonness about the god. To him the nightingales sing the sort of song that you expect birds to sing in Alcaeus, and the swallows and cicadas also sing, not announcing their own fortune among men but voicing all their tunes at the god. Castalia, in poetic

[1] Fr. 307 L.–P.

style, flows with silver streams, and Cephisus rises great with purple waves, imitating Homer's Enipeus. For, like Homer, Alcaeus is forced to make the water know the presence of gods.[1]

The paraphrase shows that Alcaeus treated Apollo in an original and striking way. He accepts the belief of his time that he is the god of law and order. Such a notion is mentioned three times in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo,[2] and Plato says that Minos and Lycurgus established the laws of the Pythian Apollo.[3] In historical times Zaleucus, the law-giver of Locri, was nominated by Apollo,[4] and Delphi gave a constitution to Cyrene.[5] Alcaeus, despite his own lawless instincts, accepts and celebrates this side of Apollo's character. But we suspect that it means less to him than another side in which Apollo is the god of song and music. As such he is given the lyre at birth, and it may have been in this hymn that he was presented by Alcaeus as the inventor of lyre-playing and flute-playing.[6] Certainly music was associated with the Hyperboreans, and it may have been from Alcaeus that Pindar ultimately derived his notion of their gay life at the end of the world:

Μοῖσα δ' οὐκ ἀποδαμεῖ
τρόποις ἐπὶ σφετέροισι· παντᾷ δὲ χόροι παρθένων
λυρᾶν τε βοαὶ καναχαί τ' αὐλῶν δονέονται.[7]

And the Muse never leaves that land,
For this is their life:—
Everywhere the girls are dancing
And the sound of the lyres is loud
and the noise of the flutes.

Though Alcaeus appreciated Apollo's function as a law-giver, his imagination seems to have been more splendidly fired by his functions as the lord of song.

Against the Hymn to Apollo we may set the Hymn to Hermes. It began with an invocation:

χαῖρε Κυλλάνας ὁ μέδεις, σὲ γάρ μοι
θῦμος ὕμνην, τὸν κορύφαισιν ἄγνα
Maῖα γέννατο Κρονίδαι μίγεισα
παμβασίληϊ.[8]

[1] *Or.* 48. 10–11 Colonna; see Page, *S. and A.* pp. 244 ff. [2] 253, 293, 394.
[3] *Laws* 1. 632 d. [4] Aristot. fr. 548 R. [5] Hdt. 4. 161. 1.
[6] 'Plut.' *Mus.* 4. [7] *Pyth.* 10. 37–39.
[8] Fr. 308 (b) L.–P. In 2 no sense can be made of *αὔγαις*, and I suggest *ἄγνα* as a suitable epithet for Maia.

Hail, ruler of Cyllene; for it is of you that I would sing, whom on the mountains holy Maia bore, when she had lain with the son of Cronus, the king of all.

Alcaeus seems to have told how Hermes was brought to birth by the Graces and nursed by the Hours,[1] but the episode of which we know most is that in which Hermes stole Apollo's bow and arrows at the very moment when Apollo threatened to punish him for having stolen his cattle. It is a delightful addition to the adventures of the mischievous young god and shows how little he cared for authority. It is this to which Horace refers in his poem to Mercury:

> te, boues olim nisi reddidisses
> per dolum amotas, puerum minaci
> uoce dum terret, uiduus pharetra
> risit Apollo.[2]

Porphyrio, who says that the whole of this poem is a 'hymnus in Mercurium ab Alcaeo lyrico poeta', need not be taken too literally, but he may well be right, within the limits of his knowledge, when he calls the stanza just quoted 'fabula . . . ab Alcaeo ficta'. Yet we can perhaps see how the episode was born. The Homeric Hymn to Hermes is concerned at length with the theft of the cattle, but, when they have been returned, Apollo is still suspicious of Hermes and says to him:

> δεῖδια, Μαιάδος υἱέ, διάκτορε, ποικιλομῆτα,
> μή μοι ἅμα κλέψῃς κίθαριν καὶ καμπύλα τόξα.[3]

The theme is not developed because Hermes swears that he will not steal the bow. Alcaeus took the point and gave it a new intention and importance. It added something to the rascally youth of Hermes and ended happily with Apollo laughing at the young god's mischief. The Hymn to Hermes was evidently less majestic than the Hymn to Apollo, as was natural with a very different god. But it too appealed to something in Alcaeus, to his admiration of cunning and his love of gay adventure.

[1] Fr. 308 (a) L.–P.; Philostrat. *Vit. Ap.* 5. 15. See Wilamowitz, *S.u.S.* p. 311; Page, *S. and A.* p. 256.

[2] *C.* 1. 10. 9–12.

[3] Hom. Hymn 4. 514–15. See L. Radermacher, *Der homerische Hermeshymnus*, p. 162.

These two Hymns dealt with two of the great Olympians, and the contrast between them conformed to the contrast which we find in Homer's treatment of the gods, sometimes as figures of august majesty, sometimes as delightful and irresponsible pleasure-seekers. Another Hymn written by Alcaeus probably comes from nearer home since it embodies a real experience and would suit many occasions in his active life:

> δεῦτέ μοι νᾶ]σον Πέλοπος λίποντε[ς,
> παῖδες ἴφθ]ιμοι Δ[ίος] ἠδὲ Λήδας,
> εὐνόω]ι θύ[μ]ωι προ[φά]νητε, Κάστορ
> καὶ Πολύδε[υ]κες,
>
> οἳ κὰτ εὔρηαν χ[θόνα] καὶ θάλασσαν
> παῖσαν ἔρχεσθ' ὠ[κυπό]δων ἐπ' ἴππων,
> ῥῆα δ' ἀνθρώποι[ς] θα[ν]άτω ῥύεσθε
> ζακρυόεντος,
>
> εὐσ[δύ]γων θρώισκοντ[ες ὄν] ἄκρα νάων
> πήλ]οθεν λάμπροι πρό[τον' ὀν]τρ[έχο]ντες,
> ἀργαλέαι δ' ἐν νύκτι φ[άος φέ]ροντες
> ναῒ μ[ε]λαίναι.[1]

Come hither, leaving Pelops' island, strong sons of Zeus and Leda, appear with kindly heart, Castor and Polydeuces; who go on fast horses over the broad earth and all the sea, and easily rescue men from freezing death, leaping on the peaks of their well-benched ships, shining from afar as you run up the fore-stays and bring light to the black ship in the night of horror.

The whole poem had six stanzas, of which these are the first three, invoking the Dioscuri in the first stage of a prayer. Of the rest we know nothing. The Dioscuri are addressed in their special function of watching over men at sea. Their visible presence was thought to be manifest in the 'fuoco di Sant' Elmo', the natural electric lights which are familiar in the Mediterranean and thought to portend the passing of a storm.[2] Whether Alcaeus wrote this poem as a thanksgiving after returning from a rough voyage, or before setting out to sea, or even at sea, or for some

[1] Fr. 34 L.–P. Page's εὐνόωι in 3 gets support from fr. 129. 9–10 εὔνοον θῦμον. For my πρό[τον' ὀν]τρ[έχο]ντες in 10 cf. *Et. Gud.* 483. 13 for the neuter form.

[2] For the phenomenon in antiquity cf. Eur. *Hel.* 1495 ff.; Lucian *Deor. Dial.* 26. 2; Plin. *N.H.* 2. 101. The verbal similarities between Alcaeus' poem and Hom. Hymn 33 and Theocr. 22 probably indicate that certain themes were common in praise of the Dioscuri.

festival of the Dioscuri we do not know. But it is clear that Alcaeus speaks from experience and through it gives a special touch of intimacy and reality to the Dioscuri.

Alcaeus' Hymns to the gods introduced myths incidentally to illustrate some special aspects of divine power, but elsewhere he uses myths with a somewhat different intention, to point what is in effect a moral lesson. This is clear from two places where he speaks of Helen. Homer passes no judgements on her and treats her with a compassionate understanding, but in the sixth century she is treated in a new spirit, and to this Alcaeus made his contribution:

ὡς λόγος κάκων ἄ[χος ἔννεκ' ἔργων
Περράμωι καὶ παῖσ[ί ποτ', Ὤλεν', ἦλθεν
ἐκ σέθεν πίκρον, π[ύρι δ' ὤλεσε Ζεὺς
Ἴλιον ἴραν.

οὐ τεαύταν Αἰακίδαι[ς γύναικα
πάντας ἐς γάμον μάκ[aρας καλέσσαις
ἄγετ' ἐκ Νή[ρ]ηος ἔλων [μελάθρων
πάρθενον ἄβραν

ἐς δόμον Χέρρωνος· ἔλ[υσε δ' ἄγνας
ζῶμα παρθένω· φιλό[τας δ' ἔγεντο
Πήλεος καὶ Νηρεΐδων ἀρίστ[as,
ἐς δ' ἐνίαυτον

παῖδα γέννατ' αἰμιθέων [φέριστον
ὄλβιον ξάνθαν ἐλάτη[ρα πώλων·
οἱ δ' ἀπώλοντ' ἀμφ' Ἐ[λέναι Φρύγες τε
καὶ πόλις αὔτων.[1]

As story tells, bitter woe came once because of evil doings, Helen, from you to Priam and his sons, and Zeus destroyed holy Ilium with flame. Not such was the woman whom the son of Aeacus, summoning all the Blessed Ones to his wedding, married, when he took from the halls of Nereus a delicate maiden to the house of Chiron. He loosed the chaste maiden's girdle, and the love was accomplished of Peleus and the best of Nereus' daughters. In a year she bore him a son, the

[1] Fr. 42 L.–P.; Page, *S. and A.* pp. 278–81. I accept his choice of supplements, except in 5, where *γύναικα* gives a better balance to the sentence than some such epithet as *ἄγανος*, and in 10, where *ἔγεντο* avoids the not very pointed metaphor implicit in *ἔθαλε*.

mightiest of demigods, happy driver of tawny horses. But they, the Phrygians and their city, were destroyed for Helen's sake.

The moral is pointed plainly, and the chief aim of the poem seems to be the emphasis which it gives to the good wife, Thetis, in antithesis to the faithless Helen. An attempt has been made to read more into it, and the claim made that it is eristic and gives the answer to a poem just sung in which Helen's beauty has been praised; Alcaeus replies by pointing out its disastrous consequences and setting Thetis as an alternative to Helen.[1] On this view the song resembles the Attic *σκόλια* in that one singer caps another. It is also claimed that there is a riddling element in the style, which refers both to Thetis and to Achilles by periphrasis instead of by name. This seems unjustified as the periphrases are familiar and immediately intelligible. In the main the theory fails; for the words *ὡς λόγος* can hardly refer to a preceding poem, and the emphatic *κάκων* is unsuitable if that poem has praised Helen. *ὡς λόγος* seems rather to be the tradition which told what disaster Helen brought to Troy, and this is what Alcaeus is concerned to demonstrate. He does not dispute the facts but draws a moral from them, which is simply that an evil action leads to disaster.

This poem is supplemented by another which also speaks of Helen and the destruction which she caused. The legible portion does not allow us to say what the subject of the first sentence is, though it may be Aphrodite or love or something of the kind:

κ'Ἀλένας ἐν στήθ[ε]σιν [ἐ]πτ[όαισε
θῦμον Ἀργείας, Τροΐω δ' ὑ]π' ἄν[δρος
ἐκμάνεισα ξ[εν]ναπάτα 'πὶ π[όντον
ἔσπετο νᾶι,

παῖδά τ' ἐν δόμ[ο]ισι λίποισ' [ἐρήμαν
κἄνδρος εὔστρωτον [λ]έχος ὤ[ς ῥ' ὑπείκην
πεῖθ' ἔρωι θῦμο[ς διὰ τὰν Διώνας
παῖ]δα Δ[ίο]ς τε

]πιε . . μανι[
κ]ασιγνήτων πόλεας μ[έλαινα
γα]ῖ ἔχει Τρώων πεδίωι δά[μεντας
ἔν]νεκα κήνας,

[1] H. J. Jurenka, *Wien. Stud.* xxxvi, p. 229.

πόλ]λα δ' ἄρματ' ἐν κονίαισι[
ἤρι]πεν, πό[λ]λοι δ' ἐλίκωπε[ς ἄνδρες
ὔπτι]οι 'στείβοντο. φόνωι δ' [ἔχαιρε
δῖος Ἀ]χί[λλ]ευς.[1]

and fluttered the heart of Argive Helen in her breast; driven mad by the man from Troy, who betrayed his host, she followed in a ship over the sea, leaving her child desolate at home, and her husband's richly decked bed, since her heart persuaded her to yield to love because of the son of Dione and Zeus. . . . Many of his brothers the dark earth holds, laid low on the Trojan plain for her sake, and many chariots fell in the dust . . . and many dark-eyed men were trampled as they lay on their backs, and god-like Achilles delighted in the slaughter.

In Helen's unfaithfulness Alcaeus sees the cause of a huge slaughter, and the view is characteristic of him. With his strong loyalties and hatred of treachery he was likely to draw such a moral from the old story. In this he represents a change in the literary tradition. Helen, who excited the loyalty and chivalry of heroic Greece, was herself a traitress and brought the fall of Troy. Alcaeus sees the issue clearly, and, true to his standards, draws his own conclusions.

Alcaeus does not make that straight appeal to universal emotions which Sappho does, and some of the issues which meant so much to him cannot mean so much to others. He suffers because he writes too directly for his friends, and at times he fails to capture our full interest because his subjects are too transitory or too narrow. But if we make allowances for this, he remains a poet of considerable power and charm. His foursquare personality passes without distortion into his verse and displays all the vigour and passion with which he responded to anything that concerned him. Though his poetry is often obscure to us, it is mainly the fault of our incomplete texts and our ignorance of the events through which he lived. Even so his masculine strength is manifest everywhere. He is a master of plain statement, and often uses it, but when he wants to drive something home, he uses imagery with a firm understanding of its worth, as in his various accounts of ships, and at times he builds up a picture with care and precision.

[1] Fr. 283 L.–P.; Page, *S. and A.* pp. 275–8. The supplements are mostly his, but in 16 I see no objection to ἄνδρες, even if it does not specify whether they are Greeks or Trojans, and in 17 I suggest ὔπτι]οι and [ἔχαιρε as giving the right kind of sense.

For instance, at one place he compares a failure in some action with that of men who are disappointed in their vintage:

σοὶ μὲν [γ]ὰρ ἤ[δ]η περβέβα[τ]αι χρό[νος
κ]αὶ κάρπος ὄσσ[ο]ς ἦς συνα[γ]άγρετ[αι,
τὸ κλᾶμμα δ' ἐλπώρα, κάλον γά[ρ,
12 ο]ὐκ ὀλ[ί]γαις σταφύλαις ἐνείκη[ν,

ἀλλ]' ὄψι· τοιαύτας γὰρ ἀπ' ἀμπέ[λω
βότρ]υς γ . . . . . ι σκοπιάμ[ενοι
τά]ρβη⟨μ⟩μι μὴ δρόπ[ω]σιν αὔταις
16 ὄμφ]ακας ὠμοτέραις ἐοίσαις.[1]

For already the time has passed for you, and all the fruit there was has been gathered. The hope was that the vine-branch, which was good, would bear not a few clusters, but it is too late; for I am afraid lest the . . . after expecting bunches from such a vine, gather grapes which are too sour.

The imagery, which would be completely familiar to his hearers, is worked out with precision and neatness, and the implications of the unsuccessful vintage hit the temper of a chance which has been missed and brings only disappointment.

Alcaeus varies his style with phrases which may be either colloquial or traditional but have a smack of the spoken word. He says for instance:

οἶδ' ἦ μὰν χέραδος μὴ βεβάως ἐργάσιμον λίθον
κίνεις καί κεν ἴσως τὰν κεφάλαν ἀργαλέαν ἔχοι.[2]

I know indeed, that if a man moves silt, stone not firmly to be worked, he may perhaps have a sore head.

There seems to have been a proverbial saying μὴ κίνη χέραδος, known to Sappho,[3] and Alcaeus develops it in a practical way, no doubt with reference to some ill-chosen task which will bring trouble to him who undertakes it. Even more colloquial, and no doubt equally proverbial, is

πάλιν ἀ σῦς παρορίνει[4]

'Again the sow stirs a little.' The image, which comes from the

[1] Fr. 119, 9–16 L.–P. I still hanker for γεώμοροι or for some word with a like meaning in 14, but yield to Page's pronouncement, *S. and A.* p. 242, that 'it is an impossible form in Lesbian'.

[2] Fr. 344 L.–P. [3] Fr. 145 L.–P.

[4] Fr. 393 L.–P. Cf. Diogen. 8. 64 ὗς ὀρίνει. ἐπὶ τῶν βιαίων λέγεται καὶ ἐριστικῶν.

farm, is said to have been applied to violent and quarrelsome people. More literary but perhaps equally familiar is

κεῖται πὲρ κεφάλας μέγας, ὦ Αἰσιμίδα, λίθος[1]

'About my head, Aesimides, hangs a great stone.' This comes from the myth of the stone which was supposed to hang over the head of Tantalus in the underworld and was an early equivalent of the sword of Damocles. It had already been used by Archilochus of impending danger:

μηδ' ὁ Ταντάλου λίθος
τῆσδ' ὑπὲρ νήσου κρεμάσθω,[2]

and was used later by Pindar soon after the Persian Wars to express the relief which he felt at the peril having passed.[3] When an image, whether homely or literary, will clinch a point, Alcaeus will use it, and vary his texture by these brief, vivid divagations from his more usual manner.

Alcaeus' attachment to the visible world meant that he noticed many things in it, and, when nature caught his attention, he spoke of it with truth and sensibility, as we might expect from a man who spent much of his life in the open air. He must have visited Thrace, for he describes, as only an eye-witness could, the river Hebrus as it flows into the sea:

Ἔβρε, κ[άλ]λιστος ποτάμων πὰρ Α[ἶνον
ἐξί[ησθ' ἐς] πορφυρίαν θάλασσαν
Θραικ[ίας ἐρ]ενγόμενος ζὰ γαίας . . .[4]

Hebrus, you are the most beautiful of rivers, as you flow past Aenus into the purple sea, surging through the Thracian land. . . .

He describes in lively and appropriate words a flight of birds which are so unfamiliar to him that they seem to come from the edge of the world:

ὄρνιθες τίνες οἵδ' Ὠκεάνω γᾶς ἀπὺ πειράτων
ἦλθον πανέλοπες ποκιλόδειροι ταννσίπτεροι;[5]

What birds are these that have come from Ocean, the limits of the earth, widgeon with dappled necks and long wings?

[1] Fr. 365 L.–P.
[2] Fr. 55 D.
[3] *Isthm.* 8. 10–12. ἐπειδὴ τὸν ὑπὲρ κεφαλᾶς
λίθον γε Ταντάλου παρά τις ἔτρεψεν ἄμμι θεός,
ἀτόλματον Ἑλλάδι μόχθον.
[4] Fr. 45 L.–P.
[5] Fr. 345 L.–P. See Thompson, *Greek Birds*, pp. 147–8.

In a moment of unexpected insight he fancies that he has heard the spring coming:

ἦρος ἀνθεμόεντος ἐπάϊον ἐρχομένοιο,[1]

'I heard the flowery spring coming.' He is no less conscious of something quite gentle and quiet, like a soft wind:

βλήχρων ἀνέμων ἀχείμαντοι πνόαι[2]

'The stormless breaths of gentle winds.' Alcaeus was not primarily interested in nature, but at moments it became more to him than a background for action or an excuse for drink. He would suddenly notice something and record it in happy, exact, and lively words.

Alcaeus differs from Sappho, and still more from Anacreon, in his attachment to certain phrases which he learned from the epic repertory. Though at times he hits on just the right unusual and unforeseen word, at other times he is content with a short, conventional phrase, which does not add very much to his immediate effect. Homeric influence is apparent in such combinations as εὔρηαν χθόνα, ἐν στήθεσιν θῦμον, Ἴλιον ἴραν, νᾶϊ μελαίναι, μέγαν ὄρκον, οἰνοπα πόντον, ἄρματ' ἐν κονίαισι, μελαίνας χθόνος, πολέμω δότερραν, ὠκυπόδων ἵππων, θέων μακάρων, πολίας ἄλος, εὔστρωτον λέχος, Τρώων πεδίωι, ὄρνιθες ταννσίπτεροι. But though such phrases fall naturally from him because he is soaked in the epic and relies on its help in dealing with heroic themes, they do not interfere with the straightforward movement of his poetry and are never misfits. As he was ready sometimes to admit an epic phrase like Ἄϊδαο δῶμα in defiance of Lesbian local usage, so too he admitted Lesbian adaptations of epic formulas because they fitted his subjects and his temper. Just because they make no great demand from us, they help the easy movement of his verse, and it is notable that, when he deals with strictly contemporary subjects, he uses them less. They are part of his mental and artistic equipment, and on certain matters he falls naturally into them.

Alcaeus differs from most known Greek poets in being an aristocrat in an aristocratic age, whose ideas and ideals he embodies with almost unquestioning conviction. He has indeed something of Archilochus, but Archilochus was always rather a misfit and had no such position as Alcaeus in society. He has also

[1] Fr. 367 L.–P.
[2] Fr. 319 L.–P.

much that reminds us of the poems ascribed to Theognis, but shows a more confident and less melancholy temper. Though the world which he represents was already on the defensive and was soon after his death to be absorbed by Persian overlords, he shows how vigorous it was even in its intestine convulsions. As a poet he was an amateur, as the Homeric rhapsodes before him were not, and as many poets after him were equally not, whether like Ibycus and Anacreon, they were the clients of tyrants, or like Simonides and Pindar, the guests of rich patrons in different parts of Greece. Alcaeus sang not for money but because he wished to, and if he had any ulterior purpose, it was to make his views known to his contemporaries and to win adherents for his cause or to comfort his companions in their troubles. Sometimes he seems to write in a hurry without undue care, as when he repeats the same word within a few lines; at other times he is so carried away by controversy that he may not rise to a high level of poetry and deserves what Dionysius says of him: 'Often if you were to remove the metre, you would find political rhetoric.'[1] He has not the imagination of Alcman or the concentrated power of Sappho. His gifts are circumscribed by his outlook, and at times his prejudices and his spleen make him unsympathetic. Even as a poet of hate, he has not the nip and bite of Archilochus. But at his best he has a rare quality of directness, of going straight to the point and hitting his target with apt and lively words. He is all sinew and muscle and goes into action with an effortless confidence. If we pick odd lines almost at random, they may indeed serve very different purposes, but they all have the same kind of balance and clarity and unaffected vigour, whether

ὄλβιον ξάνθαν ἐλάτηρα πώλων

or

πάμπαν δ' ἐτύφωσ' ἐκ δ' ἔλετο φρένας

or

τερένας ἄνθος ὀπώρας

or

τὼ δὲ πίθω πατάγεσκ' ὀ πύθμην

or

αἴ κ' εἴπηις τὰ θέληις ⟨καί κεν⟩ ἀκούσαις τά κεν οὐ θέλοις.

[1] *de Imit.* 421 πολλαχοῦ γοῦν τὸ μέτρον τις εἰ περιέλοι ῥητορικὴν ἂν εὕροι πολιτικήν.

straitness of his outlook, after all, made Alcaeus see things more clearly and feel them with undivided emotions. He does not attempt themes beyond his power or lose himself in subjects which do not mean very much to him, and even in his most savage moods his verse has a toughness which keeps it well above the level of any prose. He wrote because he had something to say. Sometimes he tumbles roughly into poetry; at other times he rides easily and lightly over his obstacles with a power that is the more admirable because it is unadorned.

GREEK LYRIC POETRY

From Alcman to Simonides

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