

OF HERODOTUS'S MALICE.

1. THE style, O Alexander, of Herodotus, as being simple, free, and easily suiting itself to its subject, has deceived many; but more, a persuasion of his dispositions being equally sincere. For it is not only (as Plato says) an extreme injustice, to make a show of being just when one is not so; but it is also the highest malignity, to pretend to simplicity and mildness and be in the mean time really most malicious. Now since he principally exerts his malice against the Boeotians and Corinthians, though without sparing any other, I think myself obliged to defend our ancestors and the truth against this part of his writings, since those who would detect all his other lies and fictions would have need of many books. But, as Sophocles has it, the face of persuasion is prevalent, especially when delivered in good language, and such as has power to conceal both the other absurdities and the ill-nature of the writer. King Philip told the Greeks who revolted from him to Titus Quinctius, that they had got a more polished, but a longer-lasting yoke. So the malice of Herodotus is indeed more polite and delicate than that of Theopompus, yet it pinches closer, and makes a more severe impression, — not unlike to those winds which, blowing secretly through narrow chinks, are sharper than those that are more diffused. Now it seems to me very convenient to delineate, as it were, in a rough draught,

those signs and marks that distinguish a malicious narration from a candid and unbiassed one, applying afterwards every point we shall examine to such as appertain to them.

2. First then, whoever in relating a story shall use the most odious terms when gentler expressions might do as well, is not to be esteemed impartial, but an enjoyer of his own fancy, in putting the worst construction on things; as if any one, instead of saying Nicias is too much given to superstition, should call him fanatic, or should accuse Cleon of presumption and madness rather than of inconsiderateness in speech.

3. Secondly, when a writer, catching hold of a fault which has no reference to his story, shall draw it into the relation of such affairs as need it not, extending his narrative with circumlocutions, only that he may insert a man's misfortune, offence, or discommendable action, it is manifest that he delights in speaking evil. Therefore Thucydides would not clearly relate the faults of Cleon, which were very numerous; and as for Hyperbolus the orator, having touched at him in a word and called him an ill man, he let him go. Philistus also passed over all those outrages committed by Dionysius on the barbarians which had no connection with the Grecian affairs. For the excursions and digressions of history are principally allowed for fables and antiquities, and sometimes also for encomiums. But he who makes reproaches and detractions an addition to his discourse seems to incur the tragedian's curse on the "collector of men's calamities."

4. Now the opposite to this is known to every one, as the omitting to relate some good and laudable action, which, though it may seem not to be reprehensible, yet is then done maliciously when the omission happens in a place that is pertinent to the history. For to praise unwillingly is so far from being more civil than to dispraise willingly, that it is perhaps rather more uncivil.

5. The fourth sign of a partial disposition in writing of history I take to be this: When a matter is related in two or more several manners, and the historian shall embrace the worst. Sophisters indeed are permitted, for the obtaining either of profit or reputation, to undertake the defence of the worst cause; for they neither create any firm belief of the matter, nor yet do they deny that they are often pleased in maintaining paradoxes and making incredible things appear probable. But an historian is then just, when he asserts such things as he knows to be true, and of those that are uncertain reports rather the better than the worse. Nay, there are many writers who wholly omit the worse. Thus Ephorus writes of Themistocles, that he was acquainted with the treason of Pausanias and his negotiations with the King's lieutenants, but that he neither consented to it, nor hearkened to Pausanias's proffers of making him partaker of his hopes; and Thucydides left the whole matter out of his story, as judging it to be false.

6. Moreover, in things confessed to have been done, but for doing which the cause and intention is unknown, he who casts his conjectures on the worst side is partial and malicious. Thus do the comedians, who affirm the Peloponnesian war to have been kindled by Pericles for the love of Aspasia or the sake of Phidias, and not through any desire of honor, or ambition of pulling down the Peloponnesian pride and giving place in nothing to the Lacedaemonians. For those who suppose a bad cause for laudable works and commendable actions, endeavoring by calumnies to insinuate sinister suspicions of the actor when they cannot openly discommend the act,—as they that impute the killing of Alexander the tyrant by Theba not to any magnanimity or hatred of vice, but to a certain feminine jealousy and passion, and those that say Cato slew himself for fear Caesar should put him to a more

shameful death,—such as these are manifestly in the highest degree envious and malicious.

7. An historical narration is also more or less guilty of malice, according as it relates the manner of the action; as if one should be said to have performed an exploit rather by money than valor, as some affirm of Philip; or else easily and without any labor, as it is said of Alexander; or else not by prudence, but by Fortune, as the enemies of Timotheus painted cities falling into his nets as he lay sleeping. For they undoubtedly diminish the greatness and beauty of the actions, who deny the performers of them to have done them generously, industriously, virtuously, and by themselves.

8. Moreover, those who will directly speak ill of any one incur the reproach of moroseness, rashness, and madness, unless they keep within measure. But they who send forth calumnies obliquely, as if they were shooting arrows out of corners, and then stepping back think to conceal themselves by saying they do not believe what they most earnestly desire to have believed, whilst they disclaim all malice, condemn themselves also of farther disingenuity.

9. Next to these are they who with their reproaches intermix some praises, as did Aristoxenus, who, having termed Socrates unlearned, ignorant, and libidinous, added, Yet was he free from injustice. For, as they who flatter artificially and craftily sometimes mingle light reprehensions with their many and great praises, joining this liberty of speech as a sauce to their flattery; so malice, that it may gain belief to its accusations, adds also praise.

10. We might here also reckon up more notes; but these are sufficient to let us understand the nature and manners of Herodotus.

11. First therefore,—beginning, as the proverb is, with Vesta,—whereas all the Grecians affirm Io, daughter to

Inachus, to have been worshipped with divine honor by the barbarians, and by her glory to have left her name to many seas and principal passages, and to have given a source and original to most noble and royal families; this famous author says of her, that she gave herself to certain Phoenician merchants, having been not unwillingly deflowered by a mariner, and fearing lest she should be found by her friends to be with child.* And he belies the Phoenicians as having delivered these things of her, and says that the Persian stories testify of her being carried away by the Phoenicians with other women.† Presently after, he gives sentence on the bravest and greatest exploits of Greece, saying that the Trojan war was foolishly undertaken for an ill woman. For it is manifest, says he, that had they not been willing they had never been ravished.‡ Let us then say, that the Gods also acted foolishly, in inflicting their indignation on the Spartans for abusing the daughters of Scedasmus the Leuctrian, and in punishing Ajax for the violation of Cassandra. For it is manifest, if we believe Herodotus, that if they had not been willing they had never been defiled. And yet he himself said that Aristomenes was taken alive by the Spartans; and the same afterwards happened to Philopoemen, commander of the Achaeans; and the Carthaginians took Regulus, the consul of the Romans; than whom there are not easily to be found more valiant and warlike men. Nor is it to be wondered, since even leopards and tigers are taken alive by men. But Herodotus blames the poor women that have been abused by violence, and patronizes their ravishers.

12. Nay, he is so favorable to the barbarians, that, acquitting Busiris of those human sacrifices and that slaughter of his guests for which he is accused, and attributing by his testimony to the Egyptians much religion and

* Herod. I. 5.

† Herod. I. 1.

‡ Herod. I. 4.

justice, he endeavors to cast that abominable wickedness and those impious murders on the Grecians. For in his Second Book he says, that Menelaus, having received Helen from Proteus and having been honored by him with many presents, showed himself a most unjust and wicked man; for wanting a fair wind to set sail, he found out an impious device, and having taken two of the inhabitants' boys, consulted their entrails; for which villany being hated and persecuted, he fled with his ships directly into Libya.* From what Egyptian this story proceeds, I know not. For, on the contrary, many honors are even at this day given by the Egyptians both to Helen and Menelaus.

13. The same Herodotus, that he may still be like himself, says that the Persians learned the defiling of the male sex from the Greeks.† And yet how could the Greeks have taught this impurity to the Persians, amongst whom, as is confessed by almost all, boys had been castrated before ever they arrived in the Grecian seas? He writes also, that the Greeks were instructed by the Egyptians in their pomps, solemn festivals, and worship of the twelve Gods; that Melampus also learned of the Egyptians the name of Dionysus (or Bacchus) and taught it the other Greeks; that the mysteries likewise and rites of Ceres were brought out of Egypt by the daughters of Danaus; and that the Egyptians were wont to beat themselves and make great lamentation, but yet he himself would not tell the names of their Deities, but concealed them in silence. As to Hercules and Bacchus, whom the Egyptians named Gods, and the Greeks very aged men, he nowhere feels such scruples and hesitation; although he places also the Egyptian Hercules amongst the Gods of the second rank, and Bacchus amongst those of the third, as having had some beginning of their being and not being eternal, and yet he pronounces those to be Gods; but to the Greek

* See Herod. II 45.

† Herod. I. 135.

Bacchus and Hercules, as having been mortal and being now demi gods, he thinks we ought to perform anniversary solemnities, but not to sacrifice to them as to Gods. The same also he said of Pan, overthrowing the most venerable and purest sacrifices of the Greeks by the proud vanities and mythologies of the Egyptians.*

14. Nor is this impious enough ; but moreover, deriving the pedigree of Hercules from Perseus, he says that Perseus was an Assyrian, as the Persians affirm. "But the leaders" says he, "of the Dorians may appear to be descended in a right line from the Egyptians, reckoning their ancestors from before Danae and Acrisius."† Here he has wholly passed by Epaphus, Io, Iasus, and Argus, being ambitious not only to make the other Herculese Egyptians and Phoenicians, but to carry this also, whom himself affirms to have been the third, out of Greece to the barbarians. But of the ancient learned writers, neither Homer, nor Hesiod, or Archilochus, nor Pisander, nor Stesichorus, nor Alcman, nor Pindar, makes any mention of the Egyptian or the Phoenician Hercules, but all acknowledge this our own Boeotian and Argive Hercules.

15. Now of the seven sages, whom he calls Sophisters, he affirms Thales to have been a barbarian, descended of the Phoenicians.‡ Speaking ill also of the Gods under the person of Solon, he has these words: "Thou, O Croesus, askest me concerning human affairs, who know that every one of the Deities is envious and tumultuous."§ Thus attributing to Solon what himself thinks of the Gods, he joins malice to blasphemy. Having made use also of Pittacus in some trivial matters, not worth the mentioning, he has passed over the greatest and gallantest action that was ever done by him. For when the Athenians and

* For the passages referred to in this chapter, see Herod. II. 48-51, 145, 146, 171.

† Herod. VI. 53, 54.

‡ Herod. I. 170.

§ Herod. I. 32.

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