VI.—CASSANDRA'S APOLOGIA.

BY F. C. S. SCHILLER.

Woe is me, alas, alas! Oh that I had never met you, or had never gained from you the baleful gift of prophecy! Oh that these eyes might once more be blind to the impending doom of sacred Ilium and the fall of Priam's kingly house! Surely it is better for mortals not to get what they most desire nor to have prescience of the future they seek to know so eagerly!

Yes, my dear Cassandra, I thought you would soon begin to regret the way you tricked me. But it is no use your making up to me now. Your repentance is too late. The gifts of a god are irrevocable, and even if I would I could not change the past. You will continue to foresee the evils you will be powerless to avert.

Woe is me, what shall I do?

You had better betake yourself to a wholly contemplative life, and devote yourself to the prevision of eternal truth which you are privileged to behold. I admit that the life of action is more fun, but I sometimes think it would be better, even for us gods, to become just contemplators of all time and all existence and to cease from interfering with the order of the world, whether to reward or to punish mortals. Anyhow the vision of Truth should be enough for you.

Even though it makes me wretched?

Not all visions are beatific; or rather the vision of a god alone is that. But this you would not see when you beheld me. So it serves you right. You are justly doomed to foresee the hideous truth, but whatever you predict, it will never be believed. Hence your prevision will be vain. If that annoys you, as I see it may, you can become indifferent to what is fated, and take delight merely in your prescience of it. That is how we gods, and Professor Alexander, 'enjoy' whatever happens.

But how can I, being mortal, become indifferent to mortal woes?

That is your look-out. I am merely telling you that you can make your prescience painless and your life endurable by imitating me. After all, as you can now no doubt foresee, I am merely telling you, what Aristotle is going to prove, in another 1000 years or so, that the best life for mortals to lead is that which apes that of the immortals as far as may be, however vainly.

No, I will *not* imitate you. You are horrid. I would rather

die a thousand deaths than live like you. I detest you, and I do not believe a word you say! Why should I believe the atrocious vision you have conjured up before my eyes by some unholy magic? How do I know it is true? How do I know that you have not been trying to deceive me in this matter also? How do I know your gift is not an illusion and your promise false?

When a god swears by Styx his promises are kept to the very letter. If you will not now believe me, you will have to later on. See, and wait, until what you have seen has come to pass.

What precisely has been promised me? Do tell me again; for at the time I hardly grasped what you said.

I promised you that whatever you prophesied should come true, but, to rebuke your insolence, I added that, whatever you prophesied, no one should believe you.

I can understand that at first they might not believe me, if I prophesied unpleasant things. Men are always reluctant to believe in the coming of evils, especially if they themselves have brought them about. But if my prophecies came true and they had frequently experienced this, how could they help believing?

They would not, I tell you, however often you succeeded. Experience would make no difference.

How is that possible?

They would be under a necessity of thought, stronger than any fact, to think that false which you had asserted to be true.

But would not that be belief in necessary error? How very strange!

No stranger than the belief in necessary truth.

Well it seems to me very queer. But tell me, Apollo, should I be under the same necessity myself? Should I too think false what I myself had prophesied?

I had not considered this point—which would you prefer?

I do not think that you need consider *my* feelings; the point is that whatever you say *you* will get into a difficulty.

Nonsense! How?

Well, unless I too did not believe that what I said was true, you would be convicted of having promised falsely, and this you swore by Styx you would not do. For it would not then be true that no one at all believed what I prophesied. You will have therefore to make an exception in my favour.

I will do no such thing. I had better say that what you prophesy will be true whether you think it so or not, and so even if you think it false. For your thinking it can make no difference to the truth.

That sounds well, but I am not so sure about it. At any rate, I wish you would tell me how I can at the same time both believe that what I prophesy is false and know that it will come true?

Is not belief different in kind from knowledge? You *know* the truth, but *believe* the false. Where then is the difficulty?

'Knowledge' only seems to me to be a confident belief that is not doubted: I wish therefore that you would prove to me what is the difference between them and how a belief may be known to be knowledge.

Gods never prove anything; it would be most undignified. They only speak with divine authority. If you want proofs you will have to foresee those of Plato, the divinest of philosophers, or the most philosophic of divines, and moreover (probably) a son of mine!

That does not satisfy me, but before I inquire further, let me thank you for the great privilege your gift bestows. I shall now be able to lie as much as ever I please. It will be great fun.

What do you mean?

Did you not say that whatever I said should come true?

I did.

Well then whatever I say *thinking it false* will come true nevertheless?

Certainly.

Then I can *lie* with entire impunity.

I do not understand you.

Pardon my lapse into our barbarous Phrygian. But I do not think there is any Greek word to express what I meant, namely to say what is false willingly and knowing it to be false. Do you not see what an enormous difference this makes?

I do not see that it makes any. What you say is either true or not, whatever you think about it. There is no third possibility, is there?

I suppose not.

You seemed to me therefore to be speaking nonsense when you said just now that you would be able to prophesy false things as much as you pleased. You could not prophesy falsely. You could only prophesy truly. It would be impossible for you to utter what you call a 'lie'. Nor could you do so with impunity; you would always be punished for spreading false news—because no one would believe you.

What an intellectualist you are, Apollo! I am afraid that though you are a god and love some Trojans, you are very Greek at bottom. Are you not entirely leaving out the speaker in arguing about the spoken word? Do you really think it makes no difference what *he* thinks about the truth or falsehood of what he says?

Most certainly. None at least that it is reasonable to take account of.

Then you think it makes no difference whether I prophesy what I believe to be true or what I believe to be false, if only it comes true? Nor again whether I prophesy what is false voluntarily or involuntarily, so long as it does not come true?

In either case the true is true and the false is false.

Then you do not care whether an error is voluntary or involuntary?

I care only whether it is great or small.

And you do not resent the attempt to deceive you which the liar makes?

Whoever speaks falsely deceives me, if I believe him.

You are at any rate a consistent intellectualist, Apollo.

The reasonable are always consistent.

Ah, but are the consistent always reasonable?

Being a woman, Cassandra, you naturally do not admire the logical virtues.

At any rate I should like to ask your opinion about a further question.

What is it?

Have you not given me the power in certain cases to make what is false true, simply by declaring it true, and in others to make it true, by declaring it false?

Why should I listen to such nonsense, seeing that not even a god has the power of making the false true?

If you will listen nevertheless, you will I think understand my difficulty. Is it not possible to tell a sick man he is going to get well, without believing this?

Certainly, even my son Asklepios often says this.

Well then, may not the giving of this assurance sometimes so encourage the patient as to enable him to recover?

Possibly.

Yet he would have died, if he had not received this assurance?

Probably.

Then the assurance being false would have made true what would otherwise have been false, simply by declaring it true?

My son would say it was not by his assurance but either by his superhuman skill, or by a miracle, that his patient was cured.

Again, may not a wicked physician frighten a patient to death by telling him he is certain to die?

If he is fool enough to believe a doctor!

Nevertheless in this case too his belief will make a difference to the truth.

I suppose I can escape from admitting this by telling you that all is fated and no man can escape his fate.

Is that what you are going to tell me?

No, I had rather let you go on.

Very well then, do you not think that if you prophesied that the harvest will be bad, or again that it will be good, and if men believed you, the price of food will be raised or lowered in the markets?

I dare say, but you cannot expect a god to concern himself with market prices.

But you say you are concerned about the truth, and in all these cases the truth does seem to be affected by what men believe about it. The belief that something will happen seems to make it happen, or else to make people take measures to frustrate it.

At any rate, Cassandra, *you* cannot make things happen in this way. For whatever you say you will not be believed.

I cannot perhaps make the false true by declaring it true and getting men to believe it true. But does it follow that I cannot make the false true by declaring it false and so getting men to believe it true?

I should think it did. If you cannot make the false true by declaring it true, how can you by declaring it false?

You must remember that you have promised me that I shall always be disbelieved. Hence by prophesying one thing I can make men believe the opposite. If I prophesy a scarcity, they will believe in an abundant harvest; so they will sell me their corn, believing that the price will go down. But as the harvest will be bad, I shall be able to re-sell it for much gold when my despised prophecy comes true. Thus I shall be able not only to make that come true which I believe to be false but declare true, but I can also get the others to believe true the opposite of this which I shall seem to them to have declared false.

I did not understand. Only a devil, not a god, could follow all this.

Surely, Apollo, my point is simple enough for a child to follow. If whatever I predict is disbelieved, I can in certain cases foresee that what will be believed will be the opposite of what I predict. I know also that what all believe is false. If therefore I act *as if* what is universally believed true is false and *as if* what is believed false is true, I shall be prepared for what will happen, and can guide my life by always behaving as if that were false which all believe to be true.

Such was not the use I intended you to make of my gift.

Perhaps you did not understand what you were doing, and do not understand even yet what I am intending to do.

I understand at least, that you intend to set at naught the punishment I inflicted.

Does it come to so much as that?

Yes, for by acting as if what you believe true were false, and what you believe false true, you would be escaping all the evil consequences of your false beliefs.

Well, why shouldn't I?

Because it makes me doubt whether you really believe the false things you say you believe, and disbelieve the truths you predict.

Why should you disbelieve what I say?

Because you *act* so differently. And I suspect that your acts are better witnesses to your beliefs than your words. For it is easier to deceive by words than by deeds.

It seems to me, Apollo, that you are now speaking like a pragmatist.

What is that?

Oh, something that no one will understand for ever so long, for another 3000 years at least. And when they understand it, men

will say that it is nothing new and that they have always been pragmatists.

Then talking pragmatism must be very like talking prose. I remember I once asked Momus to tell me what that meant.

And he replied, I suppose, that it was what you always did, especially in your oracular hexameters?

Your impertinence equals his. Have you already forgotten the woes that are in store for you? If so, may I trouble you to turn your prophetic eye upon your latter end, and to foresee by what a death you are fated to perish? It is better for mortals to meditate upon such things than to bandy words with gods.

It is easier at any rate. But I was not unaware, even before my eyes were opened, how piteous is the lot of mortals. I shall suffer as bravely as Prometheus. And I divined also that you gods were merciless and had no human feelings. That is why I spurned your 'love'.

Like the silly girl you are! Had you not done so, you might have escaped from the doom of Troy. Had you continued to please me, I might have made you an immortal, or if not, at least have turned you into an evergreen, like dear Daphne, which is the next best thing.

I had no thought of escaping my doom. But do not you gods too think of your future?

No, of course not. We live lightly, in the present, knowing that the future holds no terrors for us.

Then the fate I shall prophesy will be news to you?

If it is new, it will not be true.

Nevertheless it may be unpleasant.

Nonsense.

Shall I prophesy?

If it amuses you.

Well then I prophesy that you too will be changed—into a butterfly, Apollo,¹ but will still remain Parnassian, and haunt the mountain tops.

Do you expect me to believe that?

Certainly not; but it will come true. However it may console you to learn that you will still be beautiful.

Thank you for that! If I believed you, I should say that so long as I remain beautiful I am still Apollo. And I suppose that even though I became a butterfly on Parnassus I should still remain a god on Olympus.

There will be no gods left on Olympus and the rest will fare worse than you.

I must say, Cassandra, that though of course I know your prophecies are jokes, they are in the worst possible taste. Go home to my temple and devote yourself to your priestly functions. I am sure my sacred image has not been dusted for a week.

¹ *Parnassius Apollo.*