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DE RIDDER'S *L'IDÉE DE LA MORT*.

De l'idée de la mort en Grèce à l'époque classique, par A. DE RIDDER, Docteur ès Lettres, etc. Paris, Thorin et fils. 1897. 5 francs.

THIS tract of 200 pages is interesting, readable, and well-timed. The general proposition which it illustrates is one which, however familiar and incontestable in theory, needs constant reinforcement to keep it sufficiently before our minds. Of the religion, or even the religious ideas, which prevailed in Greece during the classical period, we must not speak, as if it or they were fixed and definite. At Athens—and it is only with reference to Athenian thought that we have information copious and continuous enough to found a history—it is a development, which we have to study, an evolution, a passing forwards, or perhaps backwards and forwards, from certain ideas to certain others quite different and even contradictory, in religion as in other departments. The 'state' of things is a term scarcely applicable. In dealing with our own times or those near to us we are apt to exaggerate differences and distinctions; in remote times, the shades and contrasts, which were of vital importance at the moment, are easily lost in the one broad opposition of which we are naturally conscious, the opposition between now and then. In spite of many formulae, we do not without effort actually realize that between the contemporaries of Aristotle and the contemporaries of Aeschylus there were differences as deep as any which separate either age from our own, as deep and for the practical purposes of the hour far more important. In religion, as in life generally, the lines of division and lines of union, upon which European thought was to be planned, were traced in Greece, and more particularly in Athens, between the epochs of Pisistratus and Alexander. M. de Ridder, starting from the true proposition that religion, in the sense commonly understood, depends for its character essentially upon the question 'What is the nature of death?', proposes to demonstrate

que sur ce point essentiel les idées des Hellènes ont changé du tout au tout dans la période même que nous étudions. La mort, d'abord tenue, ou peu s'en faut, pour complète et totale, est bientôt presque universellement regardée comme un moment de transition et comme un simple changement de l'être : par suite, la vie, d'abord principe unique d'action, tend à n'être bientôt plus que la préparation, plus ou moins directe et sérieuse, à une existence ultérieure et prochaine.

In pursuance of this plan we have a 'first part' to show the all-sufficiency of human life as conceived during the period of intense energy covered by the Persian wars and the rise of the Athenian empire, and a 'second part' on the 'tendances contraires et nouvelles', distributed between the laws and traditions relating to the disposition of the dead, the influence of individual thinkers and writers, and, most significant of all, the religions of the mysteries. In a third part, which stands to the rest in a different relation, reviewing the ground from a particular point of view, the author endeavours to point out the influence of the fundamental change as exhibited in the funeral monuments of Attica. On this sequel or appendix, which is really a little treatise in itself, those must pronounce whose acquaintance with the subject-matter is greater than mine. It is evident that here the estimation of the evidence is embarrassed by some peculiar difficulties; nor am I sure, though I would assert nothing positive, that these difficulties are practically surmountable. There are at present radical doubts as to the interpretation of the marble documents. M. de Ridder, for instance, disagrees altogether with Dr. Furtwängler as to what is represented or signified by those monuments which exhibit a group of persons, or a pair, with clasped hands. Where, and in what life, the scene of these interviews is laid, this, and other fundamental positions, are still open to debate. Then again there is the question of the artist's competence to express his meaning, and how far we can assume that it is intelligibly expressed, questions of small scope when we deal with the art of the pen, but troublesome when we turn to the chisel. So far as I can judge, the author merits in this portion the attention at any rate of competent archaeologists; this said, we will confine ourselves to the cardinal antithesis of the book, as exhibited in the two previous parts.

On the broad issues and main lines the author's account seems to be just, and is certainly expressed in a clear and instructive form. The doctrine of an after-life, if it was not newly evolved, so far as concerned Hellas, in the course of the classical period, did then for the first time assume that aspect, form, and colour which made it important and dominant in the field of morality. Of the agencies by which it was evolved, the

most active by far would appear to have been the 'mystic' cults, if we give to that somewhat vague term a sufficiently large and also a sufficiently precise signification. Whether Eleusis, in its proper function, did much, may be doubted, but the 'Bacchic' and 'Orphic' movements cover between them almost the whole operation, and achieved so much, that, without grave exaggeration, the history of Europe, down to the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Empire, might be described as the conversion of the Mediterranean peoples to 'Bacchism'. The general account of 'the mystic religions,' given by M. Ridder, is so well put, that, though it contains perhaps little or nothing positively new to students of Rohde and other investigators, it deserves to be quoted textually so far as space will permit:

Tout grec, pour peu qu'il fût citoyen prenait part, de plein droit, aux sacrifices offerts aux dieux de la cité. Le rituel exigeait bien que certains actes solennels fussent réservés aux prêtres, mais ces prêtres étaient et des magistrats et des citoyens; de plus, leurs actes étaient publics. Les sectes mystiques recueillaient partout leurs adhérents, sans conditions civiques ni droits exclusifs. . . . Enfin leurs cérémonies étaient secrètes. . . . *Originalité plus grande encore, ces religions mystiques avaient, pour la plupart, un dogme, si imparfait d'ailleurs et si grossier qu'il fût.* Qui sacrifiait à Zeus ou à Héra, n'avait pas besoin de se faire de Zeus ou d'Héra une idée déterminée. . . . Par contre on n'était pas libre de croire ou ne pas croire aux religions mystiques. Qui se faisait initié était d'abord éprouvé, puis instruit. . . . Une dernière différence était que ces doctrines, distinctes entre elles, se ressemblaient en ce qu'elles étaient mystiques. Honorer les divinités de la cité était s'assurer de leur protection, ou était tout au moins un moyen d'éviter leur malveillance. Mais l'adorant avait beau faire les dieux à son image, il se sentait loin des êtres auxquels il sacrifiait. Le culte ni diminuait ni n'augmentait la distance; c'était un moyen de plaire, une simple demande faite aux dieux. *Au contraire, les religions mystiques tendaient à rapprocher l'homme de la divinité. L'idéal était d'élever et de soulever l'être humain, de le transporter d'un enthousiasme divin, de faire qu'il s'exaltât au point de devenir Dieu.* Rien n'était plus que cette conception opposée au culte officiel et populaire. Rien aussi n'importe davantage à notre étude.

It is indeed obvious that the possibility of receiving such doctrines as are here outlined must depend absolutely upon a corresponding conception of the human soul, of its separation from mortality, of its affinity to the immortal, its essential immortality; and on the other hand that from such conceptions of the soul and of death, religious doctrines substantially identical with those of 'the mystic religions' would necessarily grow. The field of M. de Ridder's investigation is really co-extensive with that of these religions and their diffusion, perhaps more exactly coincident than the form of the tract

would suggest. But at all events the chapter devoted to them specially is worthy of its beginning, and presents the matter in a trustworthy and serviceable way.

It would be scarcely fair to criticise minutely the chapter on 'the philosophers and authors.' If we must compress into sixteen pages an account of what is to be found, bearing on the general problem of life and death, in philosophy from Protagoras to Plato inclusive, and in literature from Aeschylus to Euripides inclusive, we cannot have completeness, or even exactness, more especially when allowance is made for the fact that the authors themselves, even the most elaborate and systematic, cannot be pinned to a fixed and absolutely consistent opinion. Plato, says M. de Ridder, 'has strictly banished from the soul every element of matter, everything which pertains to body and the imperfections of existence upon earth.'

Sans doute, sur la terre et dans la vie l'être individuel est complexe. L'énergie et l'activité (τὸ θυμοειδές) lui viennent de ce qu'il est double, à la fois pensée et corps, idée et matière. . . . Aussi l'esprit ne survit pas plus que le courage à l'union de l'âme et du corps. Le seul élément qui ne périsse pas, le seul être véritable de l'âme, sa substance et son tout, c'est la faculté qu'elle a de raisonner.

This is perhaps as true to Plato as the limits permit, and sufficiently true for the purpose of the treatise; yet the gaps in the statement, as an exposition of Platonism, are plain enough. But in truth neither Plato nor Platonism, nor any of the great doctors, had very much to do with the revolution which concerns M. de Ridder, the revolution which, once launched, never stayed till it had destroyed and rebuilt the whole of the European world. The future, for better or for worse, was not with the schools, nor even with the theatre, but with certain obscure little congregations and *cenacula*, of which neither drama nor lecture had much to tell, which assembled obstinately, by night, if it might not be by day, in the hills, if it might not be in the market-place, to receive the instruction of a *bacchus*, (or whatever name might be most in vogue for the divinified man), to perform the *hora*, and through the innate capacity of their own spirits, to become themselves *bacchi* and divine, even now and here, but in expectation of that time when 'the journey' should be accomplished, 'the haven' reached, and the initiate joined for ever to the rites of the blest.

It is no fault of M. de Ridder, but on the contrary, a proof of his true historical sense,

that of his 'second part,' which deals nominally with 'tendencies contrary' to the ancient Hellenic views of life '*and new*', not a little is given to showing us that the tendencies in question were not precisely new, but grew out of seeds long planted, which now had found their spring. Shadowy and unreal as was the world of the dead to the Greek of the earliest historical age, there was and had been for ages an abundance of practices which depended for their meaning on the supposition that the dead person was *something*, nay, a power. To the sections upon 'the worship of the dead,' 'the fear of the dead,' 'heroes,' and 'Hades,' there is in general little to object. But upon one point the author, as it appears to me, lays down principles which, if not altogether without foundation, go far beyond the warranty. Curiously enough, and creditably rather for the candour of the author, the effect of this exaggeration is to diminish, not to increase, the apparent importance of the revolution which he desires to signalize. Manifestly, the larger the function performed in Greek life, before the classical epoch, by supposed personal activity and power residing in the souls of the dead, the less the importance of that development in popular thought, by which the 'after-world' became real and significant to the inhabitants of this. Now, according to M. de Ridder, that function governed, among other things, nothing less than the whole theory and practice of the highest criminal justice. Trial and punishment for murder, according to him, rested, in the conception of the Greeks, essentially upon the necessity of respecting the will of the dead:

Le principe est l'essentiel, et comme nous l'avons vu, ce principe est très net : la sentence est ou doit être l'expression de la volonté du mort (p. 73).

The wide bearing of this proposition, if true, upon the whole evolution of Hellenic society and thought, is sufficiently manifest. But what is the proof of it? Really it seems that there is substantially no evidence at all. That the alleged evidence is almost confined to the one case of Athens is not perhaps the fault of the author. In all 'Hellenic' questions we are but too likely to find ourselves no better provided. But what is the evidence from Athens? Practically nothing else, if we do not misunderstand, but that the chief Athenian murder court, the Areopagus, was closely connected, by its place of sitting, with 'the sanctuary of the Erinyes,' and that 'the Erinyes' were evolved, as persons, from a more vague

conception of 'avenging spirits,' that is to say, of the dead themselves regarded as avengers. This latter proposition is undoubtedly true, and the evidence for it is well stated by M. de Ridder (pp. 87 foll.); the 'three Furies' of poetic mythology, with their snakes and other attributes, were an invention of historical times; and the first beginning of them, so far as the existing materials enable us to judge, can hardly be traced beyond Aeschylus. But, given that primitively an 'Erinyes' was virtually a self-avenging ghost, we are still no nearer to the conclusion that the functions of the Areopagus, as a court of murder, were based upon duty towards ghosts, unless it can further be proved that the court, by origin and tradition, owed especial duty to 'Erinyes.' As a matter of fact, it is more than doubtful whether, before the famous drama of Aeschylus, 'Erinyes' or 'the Erinyes' had the slightest connexion with the court, except (upon one single legendary occasion) in the capacity of suitors. They were said to have prosecuted Orestes there; but that the court was first instituted for this purpose was not alleged; on the contrary the origin of the court was connected with Ares and the name of the hill, by a story which Aeschylus (to make room for his new view) has to displace and contradict. Nor were the 'Erinyes' worshipped there, either by the court or by its suitors. There was close by a certain cavern-sanctuary, dedicated to the 'good fairies' of Attica, who bore, like other such powers, a mysterious name, that of the *Semnai*. That the court, and those who underwent trial there, paid respect to these powers, as local powers, followed as a matter of course, according to the spirit of Hellenic observances, from the fact of their local presence, and needs no explanation to be sought in the function of the tribunal. Aeschylus, who, for certain political reasons and for still more powerful reasons connected with his theological belief and religious feelings, was bent on the conversion of all 'Erinyes' to gentleness and subordination, chose to assert, not indeed in terms but by manifest spectacular implication, that '*the Erinyes*,' whom for this very purpose he endowed with a fixed and limited individualities such as before they had never possessed, were in some mysterious manner identifiable with these local *Semnai* or 'good fairies.' That the legendary and traditional conception of the respective powers afforded any ground for this the play itself would hardly allow us to believe; nor is there any external proof of it. Nor did the identification succeed, so

far at least as concerned the local usage. The Furies of the dramatist had indeed a prodigious literary and artistic success, giving birth to a whole train of poetry and art. But the 'Semnai' did not become 'Erinyes'; they did not even become 'Euménides'; they remained the 'Semnai'. A modern author, dominated by the great drama and its sequel of associations, may write 'Les trois hiéropes des *Érinyes* étaient choisis parmi les membres [de l'Aréopage], et chaque partie invoquait, avant de plaider, l'assistance des *Euménides*,' and may refer us without suspicion to 'Demosthenes 21, 115.' But if we turn to the Greek, we read simply, *περιεῖδε δὲ ταῖς σεμναῖς θεαῖς ἱεροποῖον αἰρεθέντα ἐξ Ἀθηναίων ἀνάντων τρίτον αὐτὸν καὶ καταξάμενον τῶν ἱερῶν*. What proof is here that the local deities of the cavern were conceived by this orator as avengers of murder or as personifications of ghosts, or as 'Euménides,' at all, not to say as 'Erinyes', or that, even if in those days the not very numerous readers of Aeschylus may sometimes have applied his conception to real life, that conception had already been established at the epoch when the council of Athens began to sit as a court for murder upon 'Ares' Hill'? When it has been shown that the 'Semnai' of the Areopagus (not the 'Erinyes') were originally or ever conceived as ghosts, one step at least will have been taken towards establishing, for Athens, a special connexion between the duty of the state to repress murder and obligation towards the spirits of the dead. At present it does not appear that this obligation was more important to the Hellenic law of homicide than to any other. It may, perhaps, have had some influence, in Hellas as elsewhere; but we are far indeed from the 'well-marked and essential principle' that 'the sentence (of the court) expresses or should express the will of the dead.'

Let us hasten to add that the exaggeration (to say the least) in this matter is by no means characteristic of the author. In general he uses his evidence quite legitimately. A few queries marked in passing may be noticed rapidly. The statement concerning those who die in battle that 'seuls en effet ils sont enterrés dans la terre paternelle' (p. 32) does not stand very firmly upon 'Aeschylus, *Agam.* 511-2.' On p. 38 the question 'what epitaph the Greeks can put

upon the tomb of Astyanax?' (*Eur. Tro.* 1188) is assigned by a slip of the pen to Astyanax himself. The 'envie' (*φθόνος*) which according to *Eur. El.* 29, deters Clytaemnestra from putting Electra to death is surely not specially, or at all, the fear of her ghost. It is the fear of the *vox populi*, and, in a secondary way, of the gods. Is it certain or probable that (p. 90) the Harpies, the Gorgons, and the Sirens 'représentaient la vengeance des morts'? The ghosts, at this rate, threaten to become as rapacious in mythology as the Sun. That 'le drame sortit de la religion dionysiaque' is doubtless a commonplace of school-tradition ancient and modern, and must, as would seem, be true in some sense. But in what sense, and whether the proposition, rightly understood and limited, would have much to do with 'Dionysiac religion' in its true essence, as properly understood by M. de Ridder, may be doubted. 'Si Hérakles ose affronter vivant les ténèbres d'Hades, c'est qu'il est initié (*Eur. Hérakles* 611-613)' (p. 140). It seems that in this case the *mystae*, whose sacred emblems Heracles saw, were themselves celebrating their rites in Hades. However a like grace could no doubt have been attributed to the rites of this world. The author (p. 142) seems disposed to deny or minimise any sacramental or symbolic meaning in the rites of Eleusis. That Aristophanes understood them, or some of them, sacramentally, appears to me certain from the *Δήμητερ, ἥ θρέψασα τὴν ἐμὴν φρένα* which he put into the mouth of Aeschylus. But the obscurity of the whole subject probably comes in no small part from the fact that the worshippers saw and interpreted according to their various tendencies, and that there was no efficient tribunal of orthodoxy.

To return however in conclusion to the main proposition. We must agree with M. de Ridder in thinking that, during the classical age of Greece, certain tendencies, some of them new, some of them old as time but revived and modified by the hour, produced a revolution in religion. That revolution was not less important to the history of Europe than the other innovations of that extraordinary age. And the author's account of it, whatever questions may be raised upon points of detail, is true, fresh, and interesting.

A. W. VERRALL.