

THE MENEXENUS:

OR,

AN ORATION

IN PRAISE OF THOSE ATHENIANS WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE OF THEIR
COUNTRY.

INTRODUCTION

TO

THE MENEXENUS¹.

THIS piece of Plato, though entitled a Dialogue, consists chiefly of an Oration, to which the Dialogue was intended to serve only for an introduction or vehicle; and is accordingly very short. The subject of this Oration is the commemoration of all those Athenians, who, from the beginning of the commonwealth to the time of Plato, had died in the service of their country; a subject that takes in so considerable a portion of the history of Athens, that I rather choose to refer the reader to those authors who have treated at large of the transactions of that state, than to set down the several events here alluded to in notes, which would soon swell to a bulk much larger than the Oration itself. It may not, however, be improper to premise a short account of the custom, which gave birth to this and many other orations, spoken by some of the greatest orators of Athens; as such an account may tend to put the reader into a proper situation of mind to judge of the beauties of this famous panegyric, by leading him as it were to Athens, and making him one of the audience. Take it, therefore, in the words of Thucydides, thus translated.

“ In the same winter (namely, in the first year of the Peloponnesian war) the Athenians, in obedience to the laws of their country, performed, at the public expense, the obsequies of those citizens who first lost their lives in

¹ This Introduction is extracted from the Argument of Mr. West to this Dialogue, by whom also it was translated into English. I have adopted his version of it wherever I found it to be sufficiently faithful, and given my own translation where it was otherwise.—T.

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this war: the manner of which is as follows. Three days before that appointed for the funeral, they erect a pavilion, underneath which they lay out the bones of the deceased, allowing to their respective friends and relations the liberty of bringing whatever they judge proper to add, by way of showing their particular concern or regard for those who belonged to them. On the day of the interment there are brought in waggons (or hearfes) so many chests (or coffins) made of cypress, one for every tribe, in which are put the bones of the deceased, each man according to his tribe. Besides these there is an empty bier, properly covered in honour of those whose bodies could not be found and brought away in order for their interment. In the funeral procession, whoever is disposed, whether he be a citizen or foreigner, has leave to march, together with the female kindred of the deceased, who assist at the sepulchre, making great lamentations. After this they deposite the bones in the public cœmety, which is situated in the most beautiful suburb of the city; and here they have always been accustomed to bury all who fall in battle, those only excepted who were slain at Marathon, to whom, as to men of distinguished and uncommon virtue, they performed their obsequies in the very place where they lost their lives. As soon as the remains are buried in the ground, some Athenian, eminent as well for his wisdom as his dignity, is appointed by the state to pronounce a suitable oration in honour of the dead: after which the whole company depart. This is the manner in which the Athenians perform the funerals of those who are slain in battle, and this custom they constantly observe in every war, as often as the case happens, in conformity to a law enacted for that purpose."

From this account, and some other particulars mentioned in the ensuing Oration, it is evident that these public funerals were performed with great pomp and solemnity by the whole body of the Athenian people; to whom therefore, considered upon this occasion under two heads, namely, as citizens of Athens and as relations and friends of the deceased, the orator was in reason obliged to accommodate his discourse: which from hence he was under a necessity of dividing likewise into two heads. Under the first he was to apply himself to the citizens of Athens in general; under the second, to the parents, children, and kindred of the deceased in particular. For the topics proper to be insisted upon under these two heads, he was left at liberty to

to select such as he judged most suitable to the occasion on which he was to speak. The occasion was solemn and mournful. Consolatories, therefore, were to be administered as well to the public as to individuals, who were there come together to perform the last offices to their fellow-citizens and relations. To the public, no topic of consolation could be so effectual as that which, by setting before them the glory and advantages accruing to the commonwealth from the actions of those brave citizens who had lost their lives in the service of their country, tended to call off their attention from the calamity which they were then assembled to commemorate. And this topic was very naturally suggested to the orator by the many public monuments erected in honour of those who had fallen in battle, and scattered up and down the place where he was to pronounce his oration. Plato accordingly made choice of this topic; and hath dwelt upon it with equal judgment and eloquence through the greater part of the following panegyric.

The remaining part of this first division contains an artful and noble panegyric in honour of the state and people of Athens; which evidently proves, what indeed will appear to any one who attentively examines the Grecian history, that the Athenians were unquestionably the first and greatest people of Greece.

The second part, in which the orator addresses himself to the relations of the deceased, is as beautiful a piece of oratory as is to be met with in all antiquity. I shall not here forestall the reader's judgment or pleasure, by pointing out the particular passages worthy of admiration. They are so striking that he cannot fail taking notice of them; and the more they surprise, the more they will please.

THE MENEXENUS.

THE PERSONS OF THE DIALOGUE.

SOCRATES AND MENEXENUS.

SOCRATES.

FROM the Forum, Menexenus? Or whence come you?

MEN. From the Forum, Socrates, and from the Senate-house.

SOC. What particular business called you to the Senate-house? Is it that you think yourself, O wonderful young man, arrived at the summit of learning and philosophy, and as being every way sufficiently qualified, you are purposing to turn yourself to affairs of greater importance; and that we may never want a supply of magistrates out of your family, you yourself are thinking, young as you are, of governing us old fellows.

MEN. Indeed, Socrates, I should most readily entertain such an ambition, encouraged by your permission and advice; but otherwise, I would by no means think of it. The occasion of my going to the Senate-house to-day was the having heard that they intended to make choice of the orator who is to speak the funeral oration in praise of the dead. For you know they are now preparing to celebrate their obsequies.

SOC. Entirely so. But whom have they chosen?

MEN. No one as yet. They have deferred that consideration till to-morrow: but I think that either Dion or Archinus will be appointed.

SOC. Sure, Menexenus, it must needs be a fine thing for a man to die in battle; for he he ever so poor and inconsiderable, he will have the good fortune at least to be buried with splendour and magnificence, and to have his praises set forth by wise and ingenious men; not in crude and extemp-

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rary panegyrics, but in discourses well considered and prepared for a long time before. And indeed so magnificent, so copious, and even exuberant upon every topic, and so beautifully variegated with fine names and words are the panegyrics which our orators give us upon these occasions, that they as it were bewitch our souls; and what with the encomiums which they so plentifully pour out upon the city, upon those who have at any time died in battle, upon the whole series of our ancestors, even to the remotest ages, and what with those which they bestow upon the audience, I myself, Menexenus, have often been very generously disposed; and, listening to their panegyrics, have for the time been charmed into an opinion that I was grown greater, more noble, and more illustrious, and have fancied that not only I myself appeared more considerable in the eyes of those strangers, who at any time accompanied me upon those occasions, but that they also were affected in the same manner, and persuaded by the orator to look upon me and Athens with more admiration than before. And this veneration of myself has often remained upon me for more than three days. Nay, with so powerful a charm has the discourse and even the voice of the speaker sunk into my ears, that for four or five days I have scarcely been able to recollect myself, or perceive in what part of the earth I was; but imagined myself sometimes an inhabitant of the Fortunate Islands. So dexterous are our orators!

MEN. You are always, Socrates, rallying the orators. However, I am afraid the person they shall now appoint will not perform his part very well; for, as he will be chosen on a sudden, he will be obliged to speak without any preparation.

Soc. How so, my good friend? Each of these has orations ready prepared. Besides, it is no difficult matter to speak extempore upon such topics. For if it were requisite to celebrate the praises of the Athenians, in an assembly of Peloponnesians, or of the Peloponnesians in an assembly of Athenians, a man must be an excellent orator indeed to gain the assent and approbation of his auditory. But when a man is to perform before an audience, whose praises are the subject of his discourse, it seems to be no great affair to make a good speech.

MEN. Is that your opinion, Socrates?

Soc. It is, by Jupiter.

MEN. Do you think that you should be able to make a speech if it were requisite, and the senate should appoint you?

Soc. If I should, O Menexenus, it would not be wonderful, considering I have been instructed by a mistress, who is by no means contemptible in rhetoric, but who has made many good orators, one in particular who excelled all the Greeks, Pericles, the son of Xanthippus.

MEN. Who is she? I suppose you mean Aspasia †.

Soc. I mean her, and Connus, the son of Metrobius, also. For these two

† Aspasia, the lady to whom Socrates gives the honour of the ensuing Oration, as well as of that spoken formerly by Pericles on the like occasion, was born at Miletus, and was indeed in great favour with Pericles, as may be seen in Plutarch. What is here said of her having instructed Pericles, and many other good orators besides Socrates, in rhetoric, whether strictly true or not, flows at least that she had as great a reputation for wit as for beauty. But it appears from this passage that rhetoric, which is the art of composition, was not, in the opinion of the Athenians, alone sufficient to make a complete orator: music, which, as far as it relates to oratory, and whenever it is put in contradistinction to rhetoric (as in this passage) can only mean an harmonious pronunciation, or a melodious modulation of the voice; music, I say, in the sense now mentioned, was likewise deemed a science necessary to be learnt by all who intended to speak in public. And hence I am confirmed in an opinion, which I have entertained many years, and in which I find I am not single, viz. that accents were originally musical notes set over words to direct the several tones and inflections of the voice requisite to give the whole sentence its proper harmony and cadence. The names of the Greek accents, *ὄξυς*, *βαρὺς*, *περισπωμενός*, *acute*, *grave*, and *circumflex*, speak their musical origin, and correspond exactly to three terms made use of in our modern music, namely, *sharp*, *flat*, and a *grave*, called the *turn*, consisting, like the *circumflex*, of a *sharp* and a *flat* note. I shall not here enter into the question concerning the antiquity of accents, which many learned men take to be of modern invention; though if they were used for musical marks, as I am persuaded they were, they were probably as antient as the application of that science, from whence they were borrowed to form a right pronunciation and harmonious cadence, which was as antient at least as the time of Plato. It is no wonder, however, that many old manuscripts and inscriptions are found without accents: as they were intended solely for the instruction of those who were desirous of reading and speaking properly, they were in all likelihood made use of only by masters of music in the lessons which they gave their scholars upon pronunciation. Neither is it surprising that the antient Greeks should descend to such minute niceties in forming their orators, when it is considered that oratory, from its great use and importance in their public assemblies, was in the highest esteem among them, and carried by them to its utmost perfection.

From what has been said I am induced to beg leave to observe, that from not understanding, or not attending to the original and right use of accents in the Greek, however transmitted down to these times, has arisen one of the grossest perversions and abuses that ignorance or barbarism itself could possibly have introduced into any language; and that is, reading by accent, as it is called, and practised in most of the schools (Eton excepted), and in the universities of this kingdom, not to say

two are my masters: he in music, she in rhetoric. That a man thus educated should be a skilful speaker is nothing wonderful, since, even one who has been worse educated than I have, and who has indeed learnt music from Lamprius, but rhetoric from Antiphon the Rhamnufian;—I say, it is not impossible even for such a one to gain the good opinion of the Athenians when he makes their praises the theme of his oration.

MEN. And what would you have to say were you to speak?

Soc. From myself perhaps nothing. But yesterday I heard Aspasia pronounce a funeral oration concerning these very persons; for she had heard what you tell me, that the Athenians were going to choose an orator for the occasion: upon which she immediately ran over to me such things as it would be proper to say; and what she had formerly made use of, when

say of all Europe. For by this method of reading, in which no regard is paid to the long or short vowels or diphthongs, the natural quantity of the words is overturned; and the poets, who never wrote, and indeed are never read, and can never be read by accent, must be supposed to have measured the language by a rule different from that followed by the writers and speakers in prose, that is, all the rest of their countrymen; which indeed is an absurdity too great to be supposed; and therefore I imagine it will not be pretended that the antient Greeks spoke by accent. If this therefore be an absurdity too great to be charged upon the antient Greeks, why should it be imposed upon those who now study that language, and who, by this method, are obliged, when they read poetry, to neglect the accent, and when they read prose to disregard the quantity; which is to make two languages of one? Much more might be said against this preposterous usage of accents, which seems to me to have arisen at first from the ignorance and idleness of school-masters, who not knowing the true quantity of the words, and not caring to acquaint themselves with it, took the short and easy way of directing themselves and their scholars by those marks which they saw placed over certain syllables. These they took for their guides in reading prose, though in poetry, as has been said, they were necessitated to observe a different rule, viz. the measure of the verse where known, as that of hexameters, iambics, anapaests, &c.; but in the great variety of measures made use of by Pindar, and the dramatic writers, they were still at a loss, and therefore in reading those odes, were obliged to have recourse to accents, to the utter subversion of all quantity and harmony. If it should be thought worth the while to correct this illiterate abuse in our schools and seminaries of learning, it may be proper either to print such books as are put into the hands of young beginners without accents, or to substitute in their stead such marks as may serve to show the quantity of the several syllables: to which end I would recommend to all future compilers of lexicons and grammars, to mark, after the example of many Latin lexicographers, the quantities of all the syllables: many of which are reducible to general rules, and others may be discovered and ascertained by carefully comparing the correspondent measures of the strophé, antistrophé, epode, &c. in the Greek ode.—W.

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she composed the funeral oration spoken by Pericles; out of the scraps of which she patched up this discourse.

MEN. Can you remember what she said?

Soc. Else I should be unjust; for I learnt it from her, and there wanted but little of my being beaten for forgetfulness.

MEN. Why then do you not repeat it?

Soc. My mistress may be offended, if I make her discourses public.

MEN. By no means, Socrates: however, speak and oblige me; whether you are willing to speak what Aspasia said, or any thing else, it is of no consequence if you will but speak.

Soc. But you will perhaps laugh at me, if I, being an elderly man, should appear to you still to jest.

MEN. Not at all, Socrates: speak, I entreat you, by all means.

Soc. Well, I find I must gratify you, though you should even order me to fall a dancing. Besides, we are alone. Attend then. She began her oration, I think, with mentioning the deceased in the following manner:

Whatever was requisite to be done for these brave men, has been performed on our part. They have received their dues, and are now proceeding on their fated journey, dismissed with these public honours, paid them as well by the whole state as by their own families and friends. But to make these honours complete, something remains to be said; which not only the laws require to be rendered to them, but reason also. For an eloquent and well-spoken oration impresses on the mind of the audience a lasting admiration of great and virtuous actions. But the present occasion demands an oration of a particular kind; an oration that may at one and the same time do justice to the dead; benevolently admonish the living; excite the children and brethren of the deceased to an imitation of their virtues; and administer comfort to the fathers and the mothers, and whoever of their remoter ancestors are yet alive. Where then shall we find such an oration as this? Or whence shall we rightly begin the praises of those brave men, who when living made their friends happy by their virtues, and by their deaths procured the safety of those who survive.

As they were naturally good, it is in my opinion necessary to begin their panegyric with an account of their original: for that they were virtuous was
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owing to their being descended from virtuous ancestors. Let us then celebrate, in the first place, their noble birth; in the second, their nurture and education; and afterwards, by exhibiting their actions to view, make it appear that *these* also were virtuous, and such as corresponded to all those advantages. First, then, as to the nobility of their descent: they are sprung from a race of ancestors, not adventitious, not transplanted from I know not where, but natives of the *soil*, dwelling and living really and properly in their own country; nursed, not like other nations, by a step-mother, but a parent, the very land which they inhabited, in which they now lie buried; the soil which bred, which nursed them, and which, as her own, has again received them into her bosom. It is most just, therefore, to bestow some encomiums, in the first place, on this mother; for thus the nobility of these her children will at the same time be adorned. This country, indeed, deserves to be celebrated by all mankind, not only by us, and that upon many accounts; but principally because she is dear to divinity, of which the strife of the gods, who contended for her, and the decision that followed thereupon, is a clear evidence. And how is it possible that it should not be just for all men to celebrate that which the gods have praised? Another topic of deserved praise is this, that at the very time when the earth bred and produced animals of all kinds, both wild and tame, this country of ours preserved her purity; was unprolific of savage beasts; and among all animals chose to produce man only, who surpasses the rest in understanding, and who alone legally cultivates justice and the gods. As a great argument in confirmation of what I here advance, that this earth is the genuine parent of our forefathers, I must observe that every thing that brings forth is provided with nourishment adapted to what it has produced; and that a woman is proved to be really and in fact a mother, from her being supplied with native fountains of nourishment for the sustenance of the child. In like manner our country and mother affords a sufficient argument of her having procreated men; for she alone at that time and first produced the grain of wheat and barley, the proper and the best food of man; as being in reality the parent of this species of animals; and to her these proofs apply more strongly than to a woman. For the earth did not in breeding and producing imitate woman, but woman imitated earth: neither did she enviously withhold these her fruits, but distributed them to others. For her
offspring,

offspring, in the next place, she produced the olive, the support of toil; and after she had thus nourished and reared them up to manhood, she introduced to them gods for their governors and instructors, whose names it is unnecessary to mention in this place. We all know who furnished us with the necessaries and securities of life; who instructed us in the arts requisite for our daily support; who gave us and who taught us the use of arms for the defence of our country. Our ancestors, thus born, and thus brought up, framed a polity of which it may not be improper to speak a few words. For a polity is the nurse of men; a good one of virtuous men, a bad one of wicked men. That those who went before us, therefore, were educated under a good polity, it is necessary to show; for indeed it was owing to this that both they and their descendants, the fathers of the deceased, became virtuous. The polity then was, as it now is, an aristocracy. Under this form of government we still live, and for the most part have done so from that time to this. Let others call it a democracy, or by what name they please: it is in truth an aristocracy accompanied with renown. We have always had magistrates invested with kingly power, some of whom were hereditary, others elective: but the people were generally the most powerful; and they always bestowed the authority and power of the state upon those whom they judged most worthy. No man was excluded for the meanness, the obscurity, or the poverty of his family; nor advanced for the contrary qualifications of his ancestors, as is practised in other cities. Their choice was confined by one boundary. Whoever was esteemed to be wise and good, he had the authority, and he the power. The cause of this our polity was the equality of our original. For other states are composed of men of every country, and of different extractions; whence their governments are unequal, tyrannies, or oligarchies; in which one part of the people consider the other as their slaves, and those who are considered as slaves look upon the other part as their masters. But we, who are all brethren, born of one mother, do not think it fit that we should be the slaves or the lords of one another. On the contrary, the natural equality of our births compelled us to seek after a legal equality in our government; and forbade us to yield subjection to any thing, except to the opinion of virtue and wisdom. Hence it came to pass that all our ancestors, the fathers of the deceased, and they themselves, being thus excellently born, thus nurtured

tured in all liberty, exhibited to all men many and beautiful deeds, both privately and publicly, thinking it their duty as well to protect Grecians against Grecians, as to maintain the general liberty of Greece against the Barbarians. How they repelled the invasions of Eumolpus, of the Amazons, and of other enemies before them, and in what manner they defended the Argives against the Thebans, and the Heracleide against the Argives, the time will not permit me fully to relate: besides, their virtues having been finely celebrated by the poets in their melodious songs, they have been made public to all men; so that we should but disgrace ourselves in attempting the same subject in simple prose. For these reasons, therefore, I think proper to pass over these matters. Justice has been done to their merits. But I think myself obliged to recall the memory of those exploits which, worthy as they were, the poets have not thought worthy of their notice, and which are now almost buried in oblivion; that by setting forth the praises of the great men who performed them, I may woo the poets to admit them into their songs and verses. The chief of these are the actions of our forefathers, the progeny of this soil, who held the hands of those lords of Asia, the Persians, when they attempted to enslave Europe; whose virtue, therefore, in the first place deserves to be commemorated and to be praised. To praise them as they deserve, we ought to take a view of it in that period of time, when all Asia was in subjection to the third king of the Persian race. The first of these was Cyrus, who by his own great abilities freed his countrymen the Persians, enslaved the Medes his masters, and brought under his dominion the rest of Asia, as far as Egypt. His son subdued Egypt, and as much of Lybia as was accessible, by his arms. Darius, the third king, extended the limits of his empire by his land forces as far as Scythia, and by his fleets made himself master of the sea and of the islands; so that no one durst oppose him. The very opinions of all mankind seem to have been subdued: so many, so powerful, and so warlike were the nations which the government of the Persians involved. This Darius accusing us and the Eretrians of an attempt upon Sardis, made that a pretence for sending an army of five hundred thousand men on board his ships and transports, and a fleet of three hundred sail, over which he appointed Datis to be general, ordering him, under the forfeiture of his head, to bring back the Eretrians and Athenians captive. Datis failing to Eretria, against a nation

which of all the Greeks had at that time the greatest reputation for valour, and was moreover very numerous, subdued them in three days; and that none of them might escape, he took this method of searching the whole island. Causing his troops to march to the utmost limits of the Eretrians, and extend themselves from sea to sea, he ordered them to join their hands, and sweep the country, that he might be able to assure the king that not a man had escaped him. With the like design he passed from Eretria to Marathon, imagining he had nothing to do but to place the same inevitable yoke upon the neck of the Athenians, and carry them off as he had done the Eretrians. During these transactions, part of which were accomplished and part attempted, no nation of the Greeks came to the assistance either of the Eretrians or the Athenians, except the Lacedæmonians, and they did not join us till the day after the battle. The rest, struck with terror, and preferring their present safety, kept quiet at home. By this a judgment may be formed of the bravery of those men who received the attack of the Barbarians at Marathon, chastised the arrogance of all Asia, and were the first who erected trophies for their victory over a barbarous enemy; by their example instructing others that the power of Persia was not invincible, and that wealth and numbers must yield to virtue. I call these men, therefore, not only the fathers of our bodies, but also of our liberty, and of the liberty of all Europe. For the Grecians, surveying this day's work, were taught by their Marathonian masters to hazard new battles in the defence of their country. Upon these, therefore, ought we in reason to bestow the first palm, and give the second to them who afterwards fought and conquered in the sea-fights of Salamis and Artemisium. He who would discuss the several actions of these brave men, enumerate the many difficulties they had to encounter both by sea and land, and tell how they surmounted them, would have much to say. But I shall only mention what appears to me to be the greatest exploit after that of Marathon: for by that victory the Greeks had been only taught, that upon land it was possible for a small number of Grecians to overcome a multitude of Barbarians; but that at sea they were able to effect the same thing was not yet evident. The Persians had the reputation of being invincible at sea, by the superiority of their numbers, their riches, their naval skill, and strength. Now what is most praise-worthy in those brave men, who signalized themselves at sea, is, that they

they did thereby, as it were, loosen those bands of terror, what had held the Grecians so fast bound, and caused them no longer to stand in awe of numbers, whether of ships or men. From these two actions, this of Salamis, and that of Marathon, all Greece was instructed and accustomed not to be afraid of the Barbarians, either by land or sea. The third great exploit for the deliverance of Greece, as well in order as in degree, is the action of Platæa; in the glory of which the Lacedæmonians and Athenians had an equal part. This great, this arduous enterprise was achieved, I say, by these two nations; and for this their merit are they now celebrated by us, and will be by our posterity to the latest times. After this, many states of Greece still sided with the Barbarian, and the king himself was reported to have a design of invading Greece once more. It would then be highly unjust not to take notice of those also, who completed the work of their forefathers, and put the finishing hand to our deliverance, by scouring and expelling from the sea every thing that had the name of Barbarian. These were they, who were engaged in the naval fight at Eurymedon, in the expeditions to Cyrus, to Egypt, and many other places. These ought we therefore, to commemorate, and to acknowledge our obligations to them, for having taught the *great king* to fear; to attend to his own safety, and not to be plotting the overthrow of Greece. This war against the Barbarians did our commonwealth, with her own forces only, draw out to the very dregs, for her own security, and that of her allies. Peace being made, and the city honoured, there came upon her that which usually falls on each that are successful, first emulation, and from emulation envy, which drew this city, though unwilling, into a war against the Grecians: upon the breaking out of which war the Athenians fought a battle with the Lacedæmonians at Tanagra, for the liberties of Bœotia. Though the issue of this battle was doubtful, yet the following action proved decisive: for some of the allies of the Bœotians having deserted those, to whose assistance they came, our countrymen having on the third day after obtained a victory, we recovered to a sense of their duty those who, without reason, had fallen off from it. These brave men having fought against Grecians for the liberties of Grecians, and delivered those whose cause they had undertaken to defend, were the first, after the Persian war, upon whom the commonwealth conferred the honour of being buried in this public cœmetary. After this the war became more general; all Greece

attacked us at once, and ravaged our country, ill requiring the favours they had received from this city. But the Athenians, having defeated their enemies in a sea-fight, and taken prisoners in the island of Sphacteria their leaders the Lacedæmonians, when it was in their power to have put them to death, spared their lives, forgave them, and made peace with them; thinking, that although in a war against Barbarians nothing less than their utter ruin should be aimed at, yet that in a war between Grecians and Grecians the contest should be carried on as far as victory indeed, but that the common interest of Greece ought not to be sacrificed to any particular resentment. Are not these brave men, therefore, worthy to be praised, who were engaged in that war, and who now lie buried here? They who made it appear, if indeed it was a question, whether in the first Persian war another nation was not at least equal to the Athenians: they, I say, who made it appear that such a question was entirely groundless. These men made the superiority of the Athenians sufficiently evident, by being victorious in that war, in which all Greece took part against them, and vanquishing in battle, with the forces of Athens only, those who had set themselves up for the chiefs of Greece, though they could pretend to no more than an equal share with the Athenians in their victories gained over the Barbarians. After the peace, arose a third dreadful and unexpected war, in which many brave men fell, who here lie buried. Some of these erected many trophies in Sicily; to which country they had sailed in order to protect the Leóntines in their liberties, whom we were by oath bound to assist. But before they could arrive, the passage being long, the Leontines were reduced to extremities, and disabled from yielding them any assistance; for which reason they gave over the attempt, and were unfortunate; though it must be owned, their enemies, those against whom they came to fight, behaved with such virtue and moderation, that they deserved far greater praise than some who were only confederates in that war. Others signalled themselves in the Hellespont, by taking all the ships of the enemy in one day, and by several other victories. I called this a dreadful and unexpected war, because some of the states of Greece carried their enmity to this city so far, as to presume to send an embassy to the king of Persia, *their* and *our* most inveterate enemy, to invite, upon their own particular views, that barbarian into Greece, whom, for the common cause, they had formerly joined with

with us to drive out of Europe; thus uniting in a league against Athens all the Greeks and Barbarians. Upon which occasion the strength and valour of this state became most conspicuous. For our enemies considering Athens as already vanquished, and having seized some of our ships at Mitylene, these gallant men (for so they confessedly were) whom we now commemorate, went to their relief with sixty sail, and boarding the enemy's ships, gained a victory over them, and delivered their own allies, but met with a lot unworthy of their valour; for their bodies were not, as they ought to have been, taken up out of the sea, but had their burial there. And surely they deserve to be remembered ever with praise and honour. For by their valour we became victorious, not in that engagement only, but throughout the whole war; and through their bravery was it that our city gained the reputation of being invincible, though attacked by the united forces of all mankind. Neither has this reputation been falsified in fact. For we were conquered; not by our enemies, but by our own dissensions. As to them, we remain invincible even to this day. But we have vanquished, have subdued ourselves. After these transactions a calm ensuing, and a peace between us and all other nations, a civil war broke out, which was carried on in such a manner, that if, by the decrees of fate, dissensions must necessarily arise, a man would pray that his country might be so and no otherwise distempered. For how benevolently and familiarly did the people of the Piræus, and those of the city, mingle with each other! And with how much moderation did they lay aside their hostility against those of Eleusis, contrary to the expectations of all Greece! All which is to be ascribed to no other cause than their real consanguinity, which imparts firm friendship not in words but in deeds. We ought not, therefore, to pass over in silence even those, who in this war were slain on either side, but as far as in us lies endeavour to reconcile them to each other; praying and sacrificing upon these occasions to those powers who have the command and direction over them, in as much as we ourselves are reconciled. For they did not attack each other out of hatred and malice, but from the malignity of their fortune. Of this we ourselves are living evidences; who, being of the same common original with them, have forgiven each other, both what we did and what we suffered. After this the city had rest, and enjoyed a profound peace, easily pardoning the Barbarians, who having been ill enough treated
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by this state, returned it but as they ought. But she was indignant with the Greeks, when she called to mind the benefits they had received, and the retribution they made, by uniting with the Barbarians, depriving us of our ships, to which they formerly owed their own deliverance, and pulling down our walls, in return for our having saved theirs from ruin. The city then having taken the resolution not to give for the future any assistance to the Greeks, whether oppressed by Grecians or Barbarians, remained quiet: upon which the Lacedæmonians, imagining that Athens, the patroness of liberty, was fallen, and that now was the time for them to pursue their proper business, the enslaving of others, set immediately about it. I need not enlarge upon what followed. Those transactions are neither of an antient date, nor perplexed by the variety of actors. We all know in what a consternation the chief states of Greece, the Argives, the Bœotians, the Corinthians, applied to this city for succour; and what was the most divine of all, that the king of Persia himself was reduced to such a strait, as to have no hopes of safety from any other quarter than from this very city, whose destruction he had so eagerly pursued. And, indeed, if Athens can be justly accused of any thing, it is of having been always too compassionate, too much inclined to heal the wounds of the fallen. For at this very time she was not able to persevere, and to keep to her resolution, of not assisting those in the preservation of their liberties, who had maliciously and designedly injured her. She yielded, she assisted them, and by that assistance rescued them from slavery, and gave them their liberty, till they should think fit to enslave themselves again. She had not indeed the assurance to act so preposterous a part as to send the king of Persia any succours; she bore too great a reverence to the trophies of Marathon, of Salamis, and Platæa: yet, by conniving at the assistance given him by fugitives, and such as voluntarily entered into his service, she was confessedly the cause of his preservation. At this time she repaired her fortifications and her fleets, and prepared again for war; finding herself under the necessity of entering into one with the Lacedæmonians for the protection of the Parians. The king of Persia, on his part, as he saw the Lacedæmonians had given over all thoughts of carrying on a war by sea, took unbrage at the Athenians, and resolving to break the peace, demanded those Grecian states which were upon the continent of Asia to be delivered up to him (those very states which the Lacedæmonians had formerly

merly consented to give up) as the condition of his continuing his amity with us and our allies. This demand he did not imagine would be complied with, and he made it only that he might, upon its being rejected, have a fair pretence for breaking the treaty. But he was mistaken as to some of his allies; for the Corinthians, the Argives, and the Bœotians, determined to comply with his demand, and even entered into a treaty with him, which they confirmed by oath, to give up the Greeks upon the continent of Asia, provided he would furnish them with money. But we, and we alone, had not the assurance to abandon those states, much less to swear to such a treaty. That the city of Athens is so generous, free, and firm, that she is so found, and as it were by nature so averse to the Barbarian, must be ascribed to her being wholly *Greek*, and unmingled with Barbarians. For none of your foreign heroes, Pelops, Cadmus, Ægyptus, Danaus, and many others, who, though living under Grecian laws, were Barbarians by extraction; none of these, I say, are of the number of our citizens. We are genuine Greeks, no half-barbarians. Hence proceeds the genuine and unadulterated enmity of Athens to all Barbarians. Wherefore we were once more left alone, for refusing to do an action so infamous, and so impious as that of delivering up Grecians into the hands of Persians. But being restored to what we had been deprived of in the former war, by the assistance of divinity, we prosecuted this with more success. For, becoming once again masters of a fleet, having rebuilt our walls, and recovered our colonies, we were soon freed from a war, from which our enemies were very glad to be liberated. In this war we lost indeed many gallant men, some at Corinth, by the disadvantage of their situation, others at Lechæum by treachery. Nor were they less gallant, who saved the king of Persia, and drove the Lacedæmonians out of the seas. These are the men I would recall to your remembrance, and in honouring and praising such as these it becomes all of you to join.

Such were the exploits of those brave men who here lie buried; such were the exploits of those others also who, though unhappily deprived of burial, died like them in the service of their country; exploits many and great indeed, as has been related: but more and still greater yet remain untold; to enumerate all which many whole days and nights would scarce suffice. It is the duty, therefore, of all and of every particular man to bear these things in mind, and as in battle to exhort the children of such fathers

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not to quit the rank, in which their ancestors have placed them, by a base and cowardly retreat. Accordingly, I myself, O ye sons of virtuous men, do now exhort you, and as long as I shall remain among you will never cease reminding and exhorting you, to use your utmost endeavours to become the best of men. But upon this occasion it is my duty to tell you what your fathers, when they were going to expose their lives for their country, commanded us to say to those whom they left behind, in case any accident should befall themselves. I will repeat to you what I heard from their own mouths, and what, if I may judge from the discourse they then held, they would now gladly say to you themselves, were it in their power. Imagine, therefore, you hear them speaking what I shall now relate. These were their words: O children! that ye are the sons of virtuous fathers is evident from our present circumstances. For having it in our option to live with dishonour, we have generously made it our choice to die, rather than bring ourselves and our posterity into disgrace, and reflect infamy back upon our parents and forefathers; persuaded as we were, that the life of one who dishonours his family is not worth living, and that such a man can have no friend either here upon earth among mankind, or among the gods hereafter in the realms beneath. It behoves you, therefore, to bear these our words in remembrance, to the end that all your undertakings may be accompanied with virtue; assuring yourselves that without virtue every acquisition, every pursuit, is base and infamous. For wealth can add no splendour to an unmanly mind. The riches of such an one are for others, not for himself. Neither are beauty, and strength of body, when joined with baseness and cowardice, to be deemed ornamental, but disgraceful: since if they make a man more conspicuous, they at the same time make the baseness of his soul conspicuous also. Science too, when separated from justice and the rest of the virtues, is not wisdom but cunning. Wherefore, in the first place, and in the last, and throughout the whole course of your lives, it is incumbent upon you to labour with all your faculties to surpass us and your progenitors in glory. Otherwise be assured that, in this contest of virtue, if we remain victorious, the victory will cover us with confusion, which, on the contrary, if obtained by you, will make us happy. The most effectual way for you to surpass us, and obtain this victory, is so to order your conduct, as neither to abuse nor waste the glory left you by your ancestors. For can any thing be more ignominious

nious for a man, who would be thought something, than to receive honour, not from his own merit, but from the reputation of his forefathers. Hereditary honour is indeed a beautiful and magnificent treasury. But to enjoy a treasury of riches and honours, and, for want of a proper supply of wealth and glory of your own, not to be able to transmit it to your posterity, is infamous and unmanly. If you endeavour after these things, you will be welcome to us and we to you, whenever your respective fates shall conduct you to us in the world below: but if you disregard them and become profligate, not one of us shall be willing to receive you. Thus much be spoken to our children: but to our fathers and mothers, if any of them should survive us, and it should be thought necessary to administer comfort to them, say, that it is their duty patiently to bear misfortunes, whenever they happen, and not give themselves up to grief: otherwise they will never be without sorrow; for the ordinary occurrences of life will afford sufficient matter for affliction. They should seek to heal and mitigate their troubles in the remembrance, that as to the most considerable point the gods have heard their prayers. For they did not pray that their children might be immortal, but virtuous and renowned. And this, the greatest of all blessings, they have obtained. It is not easy for mortal man to have every thing happen according to his wishes in this life. Besides, by bearing their misfortunes with resolution and fortitude, they will gain the opinion of being the genuine parents of magnanimous children, and of being themselves men of courage and magnanimity; whereas by sinking under their sorrows, they will raise a suspicion of their not being our fathers, or those who shall praise us will be thought to have spoken falsely; neither of which things ought to come to pass. They themselves rather should bear chief testimony to our praise, showing by their actions that they are indeed men and the fathers of men. The old proverb, "Not too much of any thing," seems to be well said, and in fact it is so. For he who has within himself all that is necessary to happiness, or nearly so, and who does not so depend upon other men, as to have himself and his affairs in a perpetual fluctuation, according to their good or ill conduct, he, I say, is best provided for this life; he is moderate, he is prudent, he is brave; and he, upon all occasions, whether he obtains or loses an estate or children, will pay the greatest regard to this proverb: for placing all his confidence in himself, he will neither be

too much elevated with joy, nor depressed with sorrow. Such men we should think worthy to be our fathers; such we wish them to be, and such we affirm they are; such likewise are we now proved to be, by neither murmuring nor trembling at death, though we were to meet it this instant. And this same state of mind do we recommend to our fathers and our mothers; entreating them to make use of such sentiments as these through the remaining part of their lives; and to be persuaded that they will do us the greatest pleasure by not weeping and lamenting for us; that if the dead have any knowledge of what passes among the living, their afflicting themselves, and bearing their misfortunes heavily, will be very unacceptable to us; whereas, on the contrary, by bearing their afflictions lightly, and with moderation, they will be most pleasing to us. Our lives and actions are now going to have an end; but such an end as among men is deemed most glorious, and which therefore ought rather to be graced with honour than sullied with lamentations. By taking care of our wives and children; by educating the latter, and turning themselves and their minds wholly to such-like employments, they will the more readily forget their misfortunes, and lead a life more exemplary, more agreeable to reason, and more acceptable to us. Let this suffice to be spoken on our part to our relations and friends. To the commonwealth we recommend the care of our parents and children; beseeching her to give these an honourable education, and to cherish those in their old age, in a manner worthy of them: but we are sensible that without this recommendation, all proper care will be taken of both."

These things, O ye children, and ye parents of the deceased, have they given me in charge to say to you on their part; and I have most willingly, and to the best of my power, executed their commands. On my own part and for their sakes I beseech you, ye sons! to imitate your fathers: you fathers, to take comfort for the loss of these your sons; assuring yourselves, that both in our public and private capacities, we will take care of you, and cherish your old age, as the respective duties and relations of every one of us may require. You yourselves well know what provisions the commonwealth has made; that by express laws she has ordered care to be taken of the children and parents of those who die in battle; and has given it in charge to the chief magistrate, to take them, above all others, into his particular protection; that the latter may be guarded from all injuries, and the
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former not be sensible of their orphan state, nor feel the want of a father; whose place the commonwealth supplies, by assisting in the care of their education while they are children, and when they are grown up to manhood, dismissing them to their several vocations with an honourable present of a complete suit of armour. And this she does, not only with a view of intimating to them, and reminding them of the occupations of their fathers, by presenting them with those implements of valour which their fathers had so gloriously employed; but also that being arrived to the full strength, and furnished with the armour of a man, when they first go to take possession of their household gods, they may set out with a good omen. Moreover, she fails not from time to time to pay these anniversary honours to the deceased; taking upon her to perform in general, with regard to them, whatever is due to each from their respective relations; and to complete all, by exhibiting games of different kinds, equestrian and gymnastic, musical and poetical, she effectually supplies the office of sons and heirs to fathers; of fathers to sons; and that of guardians and protectors to their parents and kindred: discharging at all times all and every part of the duties that belong to all. Learn, therefore, by reflecting upon these things, to bear your afflictions with more patience; for by so doing you will act the most friendly part as well to the dead as to the living, and be better able to give and receive comfort, to cherish and assist each other. And now, having jointly paid the tribute of your sorrow to the deceased, as the law directs, you may all depart.

This, Menexenus, is the speech¹ of Aspasia the Milesian.

¹ This Oration, which Plato (either from undervaluing his own performance, or with a view of abating the too great esteem which the Athenians entertained for their orators, whom he rallies very finely in the beginning of the dialogue) hath here given to Aspasia the Milesian, was however held in such estimation at Athens, that, as Tully informs us, it was ordered to be repeated every year, on the day appointed for the commemoration of those who had been slain in battle: a plain evidence of the preference which the Athenians gave to this Oration of Plato before all others spoken on the same occasion, though some of them were composed by their greatest orators, as Pericles, Lyfias, Hyperides, and Demosthenes. Those of Hyperides and Demosthenes are not now extant. That ascribed to Pericles by Thucydides, and preserved in his History, was most probably written by that historian. Lyfias's Oration is yet remaining. We have therefore but one genuine oration of any of these orators, upon this subject, with which we can compare this Oration of Plato; to whom I shall not scruple to give the advantage upon the comparison. For the rest, we have the decision of the Athenians, who were acquainted with all the others, in favour of Plato; and in their judgment, I think, we may safely acquiesce.—W.

MEN. By Jupiter, Socrates, you say that Aspasia is blessed, if being a woman she can make such speeches as these.

Soc. If you doubt it, come along with me, and you shall hear her herself.

MEN. I have often been in her company, and know what she is.

Soc. Well then, do you not admire her, and are you not obliged to her for this Oration?

MEN. I am greatly obliged, Socrates, either to her or to him, whoever was the author of it, but more particularly to you, who have repeated it to me.

Soc. Very well: but remember not to speak of it, that I may hereafter be at liberty to communicate to you some more of her fine political discourses.

MEN. You may depend upon my not betraying you. Do you only relate them.

Soc. I will not fail.

THE END OF THE MENEXENUS.