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III.—THE SYMPLEGADES AND THE PLANCTAE.

Among the numerous allusions in Homer to deeds of an earlier day, none is more famous than that to the Argonautic expedition in Od. XII. This allusion is usually explained by the passage of Argo through the Symplegades or clashing rocks, also called Cyaneae, and this appears to have been the received explanation among the ancient as well as among modern writers.

Herodotus (IV 85) says that the Symplegades were formerly called Planctae. Pliny (N. H. VI 12) has 'insulae in Ponto Planctae sive Cyaneae sive Symplegades,' and (IV 13) says that they were called by the last name 'quoniam parvo discretæ intervallo, ex adverso intransitibus geminae cernebantur, paulumque deflexa acie coeuntium speciem praebebant'—which explanation is like that often given of the *θοαὶ νῆσοι* of Od. XV 299, as islands that seem "to shift and move as you pass them rapidly on shipboard" (Merry). It is easy to see that the Symplegades might well have been called Planctae, giving to that word the derivation from the same root as *πλήσσω*, but Juvenal goes the whole length of identification when (XV 19) he refers to the Planctae of Homer as 'concurrentia saxa Cyaneis.' Now the Symplegades were localized at the Bosphorus, while the traditional site of the Homeric Planctae is the coast of Italy; so, in order to satisfy the requirements of geography, it has been by some supposed that Homer transferred the Symplegades to the neighborhood of the Italian shore. Strabo indeed says so (p. 149), *ταῖς δὲ Κυανέαις ἐποίησε παραπλησίως τὰς Πλαγκτάς, ἀεὶ τοὺς μύθους ἀπὸ τινῶν ἱστοριῶν ἐνάγων*. Strabo's belief was that Homer deliberately introduced allusions to historical events (as e. g. the Argonautic expedition was considered) in order to make his fictions appear more credible (see *ib.* p. 21). If this were the only objection to the identity of the Symplegades and the Planctae, the discrepancy need not be considered of much moment, inasmuch as the scene of the wanderings of Odysseus is in fairy-land, a region which, like the abode of the Hyperboreans, one can reach "neither by sea nor by land." The descriptions we have received of the Symplegades and the

Planctae are, however, so different that the difficulty is rather how to account for their having been identified.

The "clashing rocks" are, as every one knows, intimately connected with the Argonautic expedition; indeed, the safe passage through them, although effected by divine agency, is the chief exploit of the Argonauts on their voyage to Colchis. In Pindar (Pyth. IV 370) they are called *σύνδρομοι πέτραι* and are described as tumbling about like animals, which has led Dr. Paley to suggest that there may be some lurking allusion to the existence of icebergs near the mouth of the Euxine at an early date—a highly ingenious suggestion, which seems to me more probable as an explanation than the tame rationalism of Pliny. In the Tragic poets they are called *Συμπληγάδες* or *Κυάνεαι* or *κύνεαι Συμπληγάδες* (Byron's 'blue Symplegades'), also *συνδρομάδες πέτραι*. The Roman poets called them indifferently Symplegades and Cyaneae. In Apoll. Rhod. their usual name is *Κύνεαι πέτραι*. Twice they are called *Πληγάδες*, once *σύνδρομα πετράων*, and once (IV 786) they are alluded to as *πλαγκταί*. This line is remarkable, because, as we shall soon see, Apollonius has *Πλαγκταί* of his own quite distinct from the Symplegades, and so for *διὰ πλαγκτὰς* here O. Schneider attempted *δι' ἀπλάστας*, but there is no variation in the MSS. Merkel understands the word in this line in the sense of *πλωτή*, in which sense it certainly occurs III 42, but it is possible, he adds, that the derivation of the word in Od. XII 61 may have been a subject of dispute among Apollonius and his friends, and that while he himself rejected the derivation from the root of *πλίσσω*, he may have wished here 'contrariae sententiae monumentum quoddam facere.' The Cyaneae were later identified with two islands at the mouth of the Euxine and are described by Pliny in IV 13 above quoted and by Strabo, p. 319. Now we know not only that the Symplegades "clashed together," but that it was also fated that when a ship had once passed between them they should remain fixed for all future time. This is as much a part of the myth as their clashing properties, and we are distinctly told by all the authorities that when Argo had made the passage they did in fact become and remain fixed (Ap. Rh. II 605; Apollod. I 9, 22, 5; Orph. Arg. 710; Theocr. XIII 24; Luc. II 716; Val. Fl. IV 708; Amm. Marc. XXII 8), and Pindar, still speaking of them as animals, says simply *ἀλλ' ἤδη τελευτᾶν κείνος αὐταῖς ἡμιθέων πλόος ἄγαγεν*. We afterwards read in Ap. Rh. that part of the Colchian host sent by Aectes in pursuit of Jason and Medea took the route through the Symple-

gades. They passed through without difficulty, apparently, and afterwards fell in with the Argonauts at the court of Alcinous.

Let us now compare the Homeric account of the Planctae, Od. XII 58 foll. Circe is telling Odysseus of the dangers that beset his homeward voyage. After describing how he must avoid the Sirens, she says that after leaving them there are two ways. On one side are "beetling rocks" (*πέτραι ἐπηρεφέες*), and against them a great wave breaks. The gods call them *Πλαγκταί*, and she adds:

τῇ μὲν τ' οὐδὲ ποτητὰ παρέρχεται οὐδὲ πέλειαι
τρήρωνες, ταί τ' ἀμβροσίην Διὶ πατρὶ φέρουσιν,
ἀλλὰ τε καὶ τῶν αἰὲν ἀφαιρεῖται λῖς πέτρῃ·
ἀλλ' ἄλλην ἐνίησι πατὴρ ἐναρίθμιον εἶναι.

No ship escapes them, but the waves of the sea and storms of baleful fire snatch away the planks of the ships and the bodies of their crews—

οἷη δὴ κείνη γε παρέπλω ποντοπόρος νηῦς
'Ἄργῶ πᾶσι μέλουσα, παρ' Αἰήταο πλέουσα,

and she too would have perished had not Here helped her through. The second of the two ways—that by Scylla and Charybdis—is then described by Circe, and she recommends Odysseus to take this latter route. Then after a little comes the description of the actual voyage. After safely passing the Sirens *καπνὸν καὶ μέγα κῦμα ἴδον καὶ δούπον ἄκουσα* (202), Odysseus tells the pilot to keep away from the smoke and surf and make for the rocks (219); i. e. to take the passage between Scylla and Charybdis in preference to that near the Planctae. This is done, and we hear no more of the Planctae until the 23d book, where, in the rapid summary of his travels which Odysseus gives to Penelope, we merely find the words *ὥς θ' ἴκετο Πλαγκτὰς πέτρας* (327). There is nothing in this account to show that the Planctae moved, or rather, which is more to the point, that the danger to be dreaded from them arose from their motion. The derivation of the word *πλαγκταί* from the same root as *πλήσσω* is now generally given up. It is undoubtedly connected with *πλάζεσθαι*, and so they are properly "wandering" or "floating rocks." In his note to Il. I 403 Mr. Monro says that where two names are given, one said to be used by the gods, the other only by men, it will be found that the divine name is the one which has the clearer meaning. Here only the divine name is given, but the gods have not been as clear as might be wished. The context no more explains the word *πλαγκταί* as

connected with *πλάζεσθαι* than as connected with *πλήσσω*, for the harm the rocks are supposed to do can be done by them just as well if they are stationary. On this account Liddell and Scott interpret the word in an active sense as meaning "deceivers, beguilers," but this is unnecessary, for it may mean "floating," like the isle of Aeolus which is called *πλωτή* (Od. X 3), and, as noticed above, the isle of Nephaestus is called *πλαγκτή* by Ap. Rh. (III 42). It is, then, possible, as Mr. Merry says on Od. XXIII 327, that there may be an allusion to those islets that rose from time to time only to sink again, and that the fire and smoke denote their volcanic nature. Schol. on Ap. Rh. IV 834 speaks of fire bursting up through the water, *ὥστε καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν θερμαίνεσθαι*. Anaphe and Thera in the Aegaeon were thought to be islands of this description. If ships approach too near the rocks the danger is obvious. It may here be asked, how could a dove be destroyed or spirited away unless the rocks clashed? This is the strong point of those who with Eustathius (*συγκρούονται πελάζουσαι*) maintain the Symplegadic theory. But birds do not try to fly *between* them, but *by* them; we have not *διέρχεται* but *παρέρχεται*. The meaning of *ἀφαιρείται* is certainly obscure. Perhaps it refers to some magical influence supposed to be exerted by the rocks, and Mr. Merry thinks there may be a reference to a "lost Pleiad," a group of seven stars, one of which is generally invisible. Here Dr. Hayman makes a remark which, though probably true in itself, does not really help to prove the point against those who may be called *οἱ συμπλήσσοιτες*. He says that there is "no suggestion of the rocks closing in and crushing, they are *ἐπιηρέφεις* and would meet sooner at the summit than at the base," meaning apparently (though I am not quite sure) that a bird would have no difficulty in flying between below the place where they touched. In poetry the most literal criticism is often the most useful in order that we may "keep within the limits of the knowable," and no poet can bear this test better than Homer. Poetry is first of all common sense. It is of course a good deal more, but it is that certainly. But here we have, I venture to think, an example of that *kind* of literal criticism which is not applicable to poetry. As a matter of fact every one knows that no two rocks in nature would meet so closely at sea (assuming they were floating like icebergs), all the way up from base to summit, that a bird—except perhaps a very large albatross—could not fly between, but (granting for a moment that the Symplegadic theory is correct) it is an

imaginative description which sets before the hearer or reader (*πρὸ ὀμμάτων ποιεῖ*) the notion of two rocks meeting as closely as possible far better than any minute measurement of exact distances would do. I am here tempted to quote the celebrated words of Webster in which in one magnificent sentence he sets before us, by the force of his imagination, the might and extent of the British empire, "a power," he says, "which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts; whose morning drum-beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England." Can any amount of statistics compare for effect with a sentence like this?

Having now, *tant bien que mal*, disposed of the Symplegades and the Planctae separately, let us see the points of difference between the passage of Argo through the Symplegades and her passage as described by Homer.

(1). In Homer, Argo sails *past* the Planctae, she sails *between* the Symplegades.

(2). In Homer, this happens on the return voyage *from* the country of Aeetes, whereas she sails through the Symplegades on her voyage thither.

(3). In Homer there are fire and smoke at the Planctae, there is none at the Symplegades. In Ap. Rh. IV 787 we have, it is true, *ἐνθα πύρὸς δεινὰ βρομέουσι θέλλαι* referring to the Symplegades, but *πάρος*, the correction of Merkel for *πυρὸς*, will probably commend itself to most readers. Otherwise it is an oversight of Apollonius due probably to Od. XII 68.

(4). After the passage by Argo the Symplegades become fixed and are henceforth harmless, whereas the danger from fire at the Planctae was always to be apprehended.

I do not say anything of the difference that in Apollonius Argo is helped through the Symplegades by Athena, while in Homer Here is the *dea ex machina*, because in Ap. Rh. IV 786 Here says that she saved them (apparently a lapse of memory on the part of Apollonius), and in Apollodorus it is Here who helps them through. If, then, there are so many differences between the Symplegades and the Planctae, and if Homer does not allude to the former in connection with Argo, to what does he allude? I reply simply, to what he says, to the passage of the Planctae. In one of the numerous versions of the return journey of the Argonauts, after sailing up the Ister, they found themselves in the

Tyrrhenian sea, in defiance of geography, ancient and modern, and coasting along Italy, sailed through the Planctae after safely passing the Sirens' isle, and between Scylla and Charybdis. This is the version followed by Apoll. Rhod. and Apollodorus, and perhaps by the author of Orph. Arg., who, however, merely speaks of the Ἐγκελάδοιο Αἰτναίῃ φλόξ of which the Argonauts were in danger (l. 1251). Probably the two former writers followed old chroniclers, and it may in this case have been Timagetus, who brings the Argonauts to Italy (see Schol. on Ap. Rh. IV 259). The smoke and flame in Apollonius are referred to the forge of Hephaestus, i. e. to one of the Lipari islands. The only differences between Homer on the one hand and Apollonius and Apollodorus on the other are that in the latter the passage of Scylla and Charybdis precedes that of the Planctae, and that Argo is certainly represented as being pushed *between* the Planctae by Thetis and her sisters, in obedience to the command of Here. Many will say, no doubt, that Apollonius here copies Homer. That is possible, of course, inasmuch as he had the Homeric account before him, but it seems far more probable that they both followed older legends. But I have no wish here to drift out into the open sea of the Homeric Question, and this point is not necessary to my argument, for whether Apollonius copied Homer or not at this place, it is clear that he considered the passage of the Symplegades and the passage of the Planctae as two separate transactions. I must now call a moment's attention to the following extraordinary note of Dr. Hayman upon Od. XII 72: "The passage (that of Argo through the Planctae) is described as effected by Thetis and the nymphs pushing her through in a way very unsuited to the previous formidable description given by Phineus." Thus Dr. Hayman takes the prophetic description by Phineus of the passage of the Symplegades in the 2d book and fits it on to the passage of the Planctae in the 4th book, with which it has nothing on earth (or on sea) to do! Surely the elaborate description of the passage of the Symplegades which soon follows the prophecy of Phineus is sufficiently formidable to satisfy Dr. Hayman, and if he had even read to the end of Phineus' speech he would have seen that the prophet expressly guards himself against giving any information about the return journey καὶ δέ με μηκέτι τῶνδε παροιτέρω ἐξέρεεσθε (II 425). Had he not already been punished by blindness for revealing his "mystical lore" too freely? This blunder is so obvious that I should not have noticed it were

it not that the mistakes of so distinguished a scholar as Dr. Hayman might not unreasonably lead the reader astray.

But I must now deal with a solid objection to all that I have been urging. One may say, "Very well; but if your theory is correct, how does it happen that the Symplegades and the Planctae have been so persistently identified? If they are so distinct, must not the distinction have been always apparent?" To this I cannot give a complete answer, but I would say first that it was not until comparatively late times that they were identified, as we need not infer from Herodotus that he held that opinion when he gives Planctae as another name of the Symplegades; and next, there are certain superficial resemblances which might lead to the mistake. It might be thought, for instance, that if Homer alluded to the passage of Argo he would allude to the principal adventure connected with her voyage, the passage of the Symplegades, and some consider that the suppressed human name of Planctae is in fact Symplegades. And Homer would know all about it because, in mythical chronology, the Argonautic expedition was only one generation earlier than the Trojan war.

It is singular that Diod. Sic. in his account of the Argonautic expedition does not mention the passage of the Symplegades. Then again, the dove in Homer is paralleled by the dove in Apollonius and Apollodorus (in Orph. Arg. it is a heron), but in the later writers the function of that bird is quite different, and bears more resemblance to that of the dove let loose from Noah's ark. Then the word *κυνέη*, occurring a few lines on in Homer, may have led to confusion with the Cyanaeae, but in Homer *κυνέη* is an epithet of the rock beneath which Scylla has her home, and has no connection with the Planctae. Lastly, not much emphasis can be laid on the interpretation of the word *πλαγκταί* as "clashing," because that interpretation itself may have been the effect of identification with the Symplegades as much as the cause of it.

In conclusion, the remark of Strabo above quoted to the effect that Homer transferred the Symplegades to the coast of Italy to render his account more credible, does not appear to me of much weight, because if at the time when Od. XII was written the Symplegades were thought to be at the mouth of the Euxine and the Planctae near the coast of Italy, it seems scarcely likely that Homer would have made such a transference, which, if made, might, it seems to me, have had the opposite effect of making his account less credible.

But in the absence of any certain date for Homer these speculations are rather unsubstantial, and if, as Grote thinks, in Homer's time the Symplegades were no more fixed to the Bosphorus than the Planctæ to Italy, no inference whatever can be drawn from geography. Conversely, however, the fact that in Strabo's opinion the site of the Symplegades was in the time of Homer what it was in later times, may have some slight bearing on the date of Homer.

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