

**SEPTEM CONTRA THEBAS, A
TRAGEDY OF ÆSCHYLUS.
EDITED, WITH ENGLISH NOTES,
FOR THE USE OF COLLEGES**

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Septem Contra Thebas, a Tragedy of Æschylus. Edited, with English Notes, for the Use of Colleges by Augustus Sachtleben

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AUGUSTUS SACTLEBEN

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A

TRAGEDY OF ÆSCHYLUS.

EDITED,

WITH ENGLISH NOTES, FOR THE USE OF COLLEGES,

BY

AUGUSTUS SACHTLEBEN,

PRINCIPAL OF A CLASSICAL SCHOOL IN CHARLESTON, S. C.

*ὄξει Ἐρινός
Ἰεφευε * σὺν ἀλλολοφονίᾳ γένος ἀρήϊον.*

PUNBAR.

BOSTON:
WILLIAM H. DENNET.
1864.

TO

C. C. FELTON,

PROFESSOR OF GREEK LITERATURE IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY,

THIS VOLUME

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE EDITOR.

P R E F A C E.

Among the mythological legends of ancient Greece, which furnished material to the Attic dramatists for their poetical compositions, there was none of a more truly tragical character than that of the house of Labdakus, because none exhibited on a grander scale the vicissitude of human affairs, as the result of that conflict between individual freedom and a higher necessity, which constitutes the chief element of all tragedy among the ancients. Hence it is that the misfortunes of Laius and his descendants formed one of the favorite subjects for representation on the Athenian stage. All the great dramatists of whom we have any account handled the subject with more or less success, and some of the finest specimens of dramatic poetry which have come down to our times treat of the fate of the royal house of Thebes.

Whilst we possess, in the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus Rex* and *Coloneus*, three entire tragedies of Sophocles on the history of the Labdakids, there remain to us, with the exception of the "*Seven against Thebes*," only the names and

a few insignificant fragments of the various dramas which Æschylus composed on the same subject; viz. the *Laius*, *Œdipus*, *Sphinx*, and the *Eleusinians*. From the early date of the first performance of the "Septem" (B. C. 471), we may safely conclude that it formed part of a trilogy or tetralogy; for, as it is well known that Sophocles was the first poet who departed from the custom of composing his dramas in trilogies, but did not exhibit his first play, the *Triptolemus*, until the year B. C. 468, Æschylus cannot have written detached plays previous to that period. Until lately, there was generally assigned to the "Septem" the second place in the tetralogy which our author wrote on materials drawn from the *Cyclic Thebaid*, the *Eleusinians* forming the concluding play; but according to an ancient *ἀδελφαλία*, or theatre-roll, which has been recently discovered, the "Septem" formed the third part of this tetralogy, the *Laius* and *Œdipus* being the first two, and the *Sphinx* the satiric drama. There are, however, serious objections to both these arrangements. If, according to Plutarch (in *Theſ.* cap. 29), the *Eleusinians* represented the burial, through the mediation of *Theseus*, of the *Argive* chiefs who had fallen before *Thebes*,—the correctness of which statement the name of the play seems to corroborate,—its subject was altogether foreign to the misfortunes of the house of *Œdipus*, and had little or no connection with the "Septem"; and if it contained an account of the fate of *Antigone*, for which the conclusion of the "Septem" evidently prepares the mind of the spectator, *together with* the burial of the *Argive* chiefs, its subject was far too extensive to be

comprehended in one play. On the other hand, it is equally difficult to believe the statement of the Didaskalia to be correct, because it assigns to the "Septem" the concluding part of the trilogy. A poet like Æschylus, however crude and irregular his plots may occasionally have been, could never have committed so egregious an error as to leave his audience entirely in the dark about the fate of Antigone, after having excited their deepest sympathy in behalf of the heroic maiden by stating her determined opposition to the decree of the Theban senate, and the awful doom which awaited her in case she should persist in her resolve of burying her outlawed brother. Nothing prevented him from concluding his drama with the funeral song over the slain bodies of the two brothers, and it is paying poor homage to the genius of Æschylus to believe him capable of having added to one of his sublimest conceptions an appendage, the utter uselessness and impropriety of which must be perceived by the most superficial observer. Æschylus himself is said to have been prouder of the "Seven against Thebes" than of any other of his works, and Aristophanes, a very acute critic, indorses the author's high opinion of his play, at least indirectly, by introducing him, in the *Frogs* (v. 1085), as priding himself on his work, without ridiculing him on account of these boasts; and could both have been insensible to a blunder which almost every school-boy in Athens might have pointed out to them? We are, therefore, compelled, in the face of the statement of the Didaskalia, (the genuineness of which is probably far from being firmly established,) to

believe that the "Septem" formed the second part of a trilogy, whatever the concluding play may have been.

Of the merits of the "Seven against Thebes" as a work of art, it is scarcely necessary to say any thing. The gorgeousness of the description of the warlike host encamped before the gates of Thebes, and of the preparations for defence within the walls of the Kadmea; the regal dignity and calm composure of young Eteocles, which no danger, however imminent, can disturb, and which, if compared with the passionate impetuosity of Polyneikes, forces the conviction irresistibly on our minds that the older brother alone was *fit* to rule, however defective his *right* to the throne may have been; the gentle timidity of the Chorus of Theban ladies, which so happily relieves the manly sternness of the Kadmean warriors; the skilful contrast between the wild ferocity and daring impiety of the Argive chiefs, and the wise and manly caution of their Theban opponents, which assures us beforehand that the issue of the impending contest will be in favor of the besieged city, — are all so exquisitely beautiful, as to make the "Septem contra Thebas" one of the noblest remains of the literature of Greece. It breathes in almost every line those lofty sentiments of valor and patriotism which sustained our poet on the battle-field of Marathon, and which, with the progress of the glorious struggle of Hellas against the Persian invader, grew more and more intense in his breast, approving the remark of Gorgias the Sophist *

* Cfr. Plutarch. Symp. vii. 9.

to be not more elegant than true, — that Mars himself inspired *Æschylus* when he wrote the play.

In preparing the notes which accompany the present edition of the "*Septem*," I have been guided by the conviction, that nothing is more injurious to the cause of classical learning than that system of indiscriminate annotation and translation which leaves no room for the student's own exertions. Whilst I have therefore endeavored to explain every grammatical difficulty that presented itself, I have abstained from giving the translation of any passage which the student may, with a reasonable effort on his own part, understand without that aid. Whenever a suitable parallel passage, especially in the dramatists, occurred to me, I have quoted it, believing that an habitual careful comparison of similar passages in different authors is one of the easiest, and at the same time most interesting, roads to the attainment of a thorough knowledge of the classics. The text of this edition is that of *W. Dindorf*, as printed in the "*Poetæ Scenici Græci*," published at Oxford in 1846. For obvious reasons I have left it unaltered, although in the notes I have occasionally given preference to the readings of other editors. The editions of *Æschylus* which I have used in preparing the commentary are: —

1. That of *Thomas Stanley* and *Samuel Butler*, in eight volumes. Cambridge, 1816.

2. That of *Augustus Wellauer*, published in 1823 at Leipzig, in four volumes.