

**SOPHOCLES**

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Sophocles by Clifton W. Collins

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**CLIFTON W. COLLINS**

# **SOPHOCLES**



S O P H O C L E S

BY

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WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

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M D C C C L X X I

THE Writer desires to express his acknowledgments to Professor Plumptre for permission to make use of his translation of these tragedies ; and to Mr D'Arcy Thompson for a similar courtesy in the case of his 'Sales Attici.'

Use has also been made of M. Patin's 'Studies on Sophocles,' Mr Jebb's edition of the 'Ajax and Electra,' and the last chapter of Lord Lytton's 'Athens.'

Of the translations, those marked (A.) are by the late Professor Anstice ; those marked (D.) are by Dale ; and those distinguished by (P.) are from Professor Plumptre's translation, to which reference has been made above.

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# SOPHOCLES.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

THE materials for our poet's life are few and untrustworthy. The real biographies have perished; and all that we have in their place is a brief anonymous memoir, some notices in Suidas, and a few anecdotes retailed to us from different sources by Athenæus, the great collector of the scandal and gossip of his day—and these last probably belong to the mock pearls of history. The mere attempt, then, to compile a detailed life of Sophocles out of this "rubbish heap of tradition," is (to use Professor Plumptre's illustration) like "making bricks without straw." As in the case of Shakspeare, we know little of the man except what we can glean from his writings. Some few facts, however, rest on higher testimony; and these may be shortly noticed.

Colonus, a small village about a mile to the north of Athens, was the birthplace of Sophocles; and every feature of its scenery has been vividly described by him in a famous choral ode, to be hereafter noticed.

The landscape must have been strikingly picturesque, with its white limestone cliffs, its dark grove sacred to "the gentle goddesses," and echoing with "all throats that gurgle sweet," with the pure clear stream of the Cephissus, never failing in the hottest summer, and watering this garden of Attica.

Whatever may have been his father's calling, Sophocles was himself a gentleman. "His natural gifts," says Lord Lytton, "were the rarest that nature bestows on man, genius and beauty." Body and mind were carefully trained under the best masters; and he received the complete liberal education of his age. We can imagine how the boy grew up to manhood, feeding his poetic fancy with those ancient founts of inspiration,—the adventures of the Argonauts or the "tale of Troy divine;" just as the genius of Spenser and Milton was nourished on the old romances of our country. We can imagine, too, how he must have been inspired with the eternal ideas of truth and beauty—wafted, as in Plato's State, "like gales of health blowing fresh from salubrious lands,"\*—by the constant sight and presence of that noble city, robed in her "imperial mantle of architecture," adorned by the paintings of Panæus and by the sculpture of Phidias,—her streets crowded with strangers from all lands, and her harbours filled with the masts of a thousand triremes.

Sophocles made an early entrance on public life. At the age of sixteen his grace and beauty were such that he was selected from the youth of Attica to lead the

\* *Republ.* iii. 401.