

**THE MUSES' PAGEANT:
MYTHS & LEGENDS OF
ANCIENT GREECE. VOL. 3**

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The Muses' pageant: myths & legends of ancient Greece. Vol. 3 by W. M. L. Hutchinson

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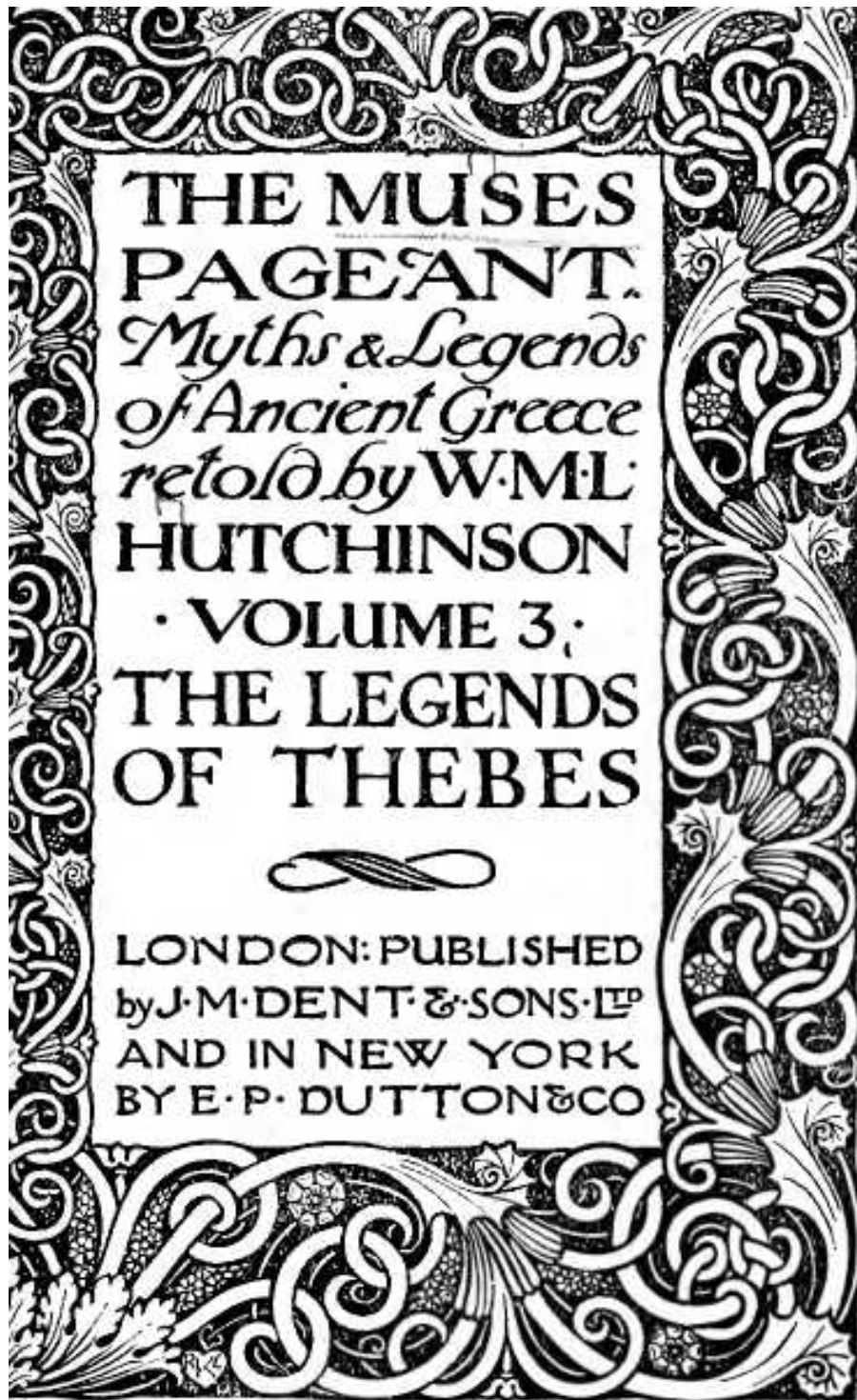
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W. M. L. HUTCHINSON

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THE
M**S**AGES
OF OLD
L**L**IVE
A**A**GIN
IN US
GLANVILLE



THE MUSES
PAGEANT.
*Myths & Legends
of Ancient Greece
retold by W. M. L.
HUTCHINSON*
· VOLUME 3;
THE LEGENDS
OF THEBES



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INTRODUCTION

THEBES, a city that played always a minor part in Greek history, save when raised to transient supremacy by the genius of Epaminondas, could yet boast legendary glories which far outshone those of Sparta or Athens. The story of her founding by CADMUS the Dragon-killer was the most marvellous of fairy-tales; his good fortune, crowned by marriage with a daughter of the gods, remained proverbial in Hellas; as did also the wisdom of his descendant OEDIPUS, who solved the riddle of the Sphinx. Her seven-gated walls, builded by the magic of AMPHION'S lyre, had endured a siege only less famous than that of Troy; within them had been born the most human of gods and the most divine of heroes—DIONYSUS and HERACLES. These were captain jewels in the carcanet of praises that Pindar dedicated to his mother-city. But, as he does not fail to remind us, the law that "for every good a mortal receives from the gods, he must likewise receive two evils," was awfully exemplified by the Theban royal house; and this made their history a stock subject of Greek tragedy. Besides a host of plays of which only the titles are extant, the *Seven against Thebes* of Aeschylus, the *Bacchae* and *Phoenissae* of Euripides, the *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles dealt

with various chapters of that dark chronicle. When Milton spoke of gorgeous Tragedy "Presenting Thebes or Pelops' line, or the tale of Troy divine," his phrase summed up the main sources of the Attic dramatists; and of the three great legend-cycles he names, the Theban is not the least richly shrined by their art. For while "Pelops' line" furnished Aeschylus with the theme for that trilogy which stands unrivalled among the works of human genius, the sorrows of Cadmus and his race inspired alike Euripides' swansong—the *Bacchae*, and that flawless masterpiece of Sophocles—*Oedipus the King*.

With such a wealth of material at command, it seemed best to devote a whole Volume of the *Muses' Pageant* to the Legends of Thebes. But the general plan of the work required that the story of DIONYSUS should be included among the Myths of the Gods in our First Volume; and though HERACLES was by birth a Theban, his Pan-Hellenic character and unique importance, no less than the multiplicity of his adventures, induced the compiler to reserve an account of his Life and Death to the concluding Volume.

Information as to the literary sources used in the present volume may be more conveniently given here than, as usual, in the form of an appendix.

Chapter I. contains material scattered up and down in the writings of dramatists, lyric poets, and mythographers.

Chapters II.—V. give prose narrative versions of four plays mentioned above, viz., *Oedipus the King*, *The Seven against Thebes*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and

Antigone, in the order of the episodes they present. The chronological order of the plays themselves is entirely different; the earliest being Aeschylus' *Seven against Thebes* (467 B.C.), while the sequence of the three Sophoclean plays is *Antigone* (442 or 441 B.C.), *Oedipus the King* (probably circa 429-420), *Oedipus at Colonus* (brought out in 401, after the poet's death).¹ Thus the three latter tragedies, though related in subject, did not form a trilogy, and there are even some discrepancies of detail and character between them, which have been harmonised in our version. The reader may be reminded that while Greek tragedies were produced by custom in groups of three, two kinds of such trilogies were used concurrently—the one consisting of plays which were parts of a single story, the other of plays unconnected in subject. Aeschylus usually, though not always, employed the former kind, which gave ampler room to the mighty sweep of his creative imagination; the latter was introduced by Sophocles, and its narrower compass was better suited to an artist whose supreme interest and excellence lay in the minute portrayal of character. That each of his three Theban tragedies has a unity of its own, like a faultless statue, will be apparent, I hope, even in a version which can give but a faint impression of their poetic beauty.

¹ An interesting explanation of the priority of the *Antigone* will be found in the introduction to Jebb's edition of that play.

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