

**THE 'SEVEN AGAINST THEBES' OF
AESCHYLUS, WITH AN
INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY,
AND TRANSLATION**

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The 'Seven against Thebes' of Aeschylus, with an Introduction, Commentary, and Translation
by A. W. Verrall

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ΑΙΣΧΥΛΟΥ ΕΠΤΑ ΕΠΙ ΘΗΒΑΣ.

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INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY, AND
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BY

A. W. VERRALL, M.A.,

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

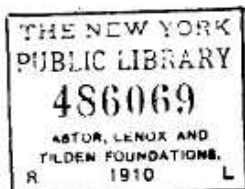
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PREFACE.

THE play here edited presents, with other kinds of interest common to Aeschylus' works in general, the problem of a wide and most unusual divergence between the judgment of antiquity and the judgment of modern times. It was profoundly admired by the Athenian spectators of the great dramatic age, and frequently cited by readers throughout the times of Graeco-Roman civilization. In modern times even the magnificence of the verse and the splendour of detached pieces have not been thought sufficient to support so favourable a view, when balanced against the supposed want of any merit properly called dramatic. Whether this disagreement may be explained or perhaps removed is the question which it will be our first business to consider.

I have but a few words to say by way of preface to (1) the text, (2) the explanation, (3) the translation.

For the critical foundation I am indebted almost entirely to the text and apparatus of Dr Wecklein.

The Introduction and explanatory notes are in the main the product of independent work. The collection of 'uncertain conjectures', appended by Dr Wecklein to his text, extends over nearly 300 pages, of which nearly 50 are filled with those on this single play. This appalling catalogue, if it proves, as it

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does, the dangers of conjecture, also proves not less distinctly that a very large part of Aeschylus still awaits explanation. I have endeavoured to profit by both lessons. Where I am conscious of a particular debt I have of course acknowledged it. Doubtless however I am much more indebted than I am aware, particularly to Professor Paley, whose work was my sole 'Aeschylus' for many years.

As to the translation, it is intended merely to supplement the commentary, and not as a literary equivalent for the original. I have aimed at nothing more, perhaps nothing more is in this case attainable, than the negative merit of not offending the ear and taste: and even this I am far from supposing that I have always secured.

Mr J. D. Duff, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, has kindly aided me in the preparation of the book for the press.

TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

December 13, 1886.

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INTRODUCTION.

1. *The Legend of the House of Laius according to Aeschylus. The Plot of the Play.*

The 'Seven against Thebes'—for it is certainly too late to change the not very happy description attached to the play for ever by a verse of Aristophanes¹, and current perhaps even earlier still—takes its plot from the great attempt made by Adrastus king of Argos and a confederacy under his leadership, to restore Polynices son of Oedipus to his country and throne. This expedition was in Greek legendary history the most famous event excepting, perhaps not even excepting, the Trojan war. It was the subject of more than one ancient epic poem known to us by tradition, and probably of many others not now traceable. The most successful of these, the *Thebais*, was thought worthy to be attributed to Homer, and seems to have ranked next in reputation after the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The details of the story were variously told and it received both before and after Aeschylus many developments, among them some of great literary importance, not accordant with each other and not always harmonizing with the spirit of the original². What was the authority followed by Aeschylus in this play, or whether he followed any one version exactly, there is no external evidence to show.

Under these circumstances it is desirable, if we would avoid confusion, first to trace clearly, as far as possible, the story actually given by Aeschylus, and to keep distinct the question how far we may supplement it from other sources. This is the more worth attention, because it appears that the Aeschylean version was simple, harmonious, and in some respects singularly faithful to very ancient traditions.

¹ Aristoph. *Ran.* 1022.

² A general view of the Theban legends

will be found in Grote, *History of Greece*, Part 1. Chap. xiv.