

**PITT PRESS SERIES.
THE OEDIPUS
TYRANNUS**

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Pitt Press Series. The Oedipus Tyrannus by R. C. Jebb

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R. C. JEBB

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TYRANNUS**

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THE OEDIPUS TYRANNUS

EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

IN preparing the present school-edition, I have enjoyed the advice and assistance of my friend the Rev. M. A. BAYFIELD, Assistant Master at Malvern College, who has regulated the abridgment from the larger edition with a view to the requirements of the higher Forms in Public Schools. I am anxious to take this opportunity of expressing my warm acknowledgments to him, both for the very great kindness with which he has bestowed much time and trouble on a self-imposed task, and also for several valuable suggestions made by him in the

course of the work. In so far as the present edition may be found adapted to the purpose for which it is designed, that result will be largely due to the experience and judgment by which he has allowed me to profit.

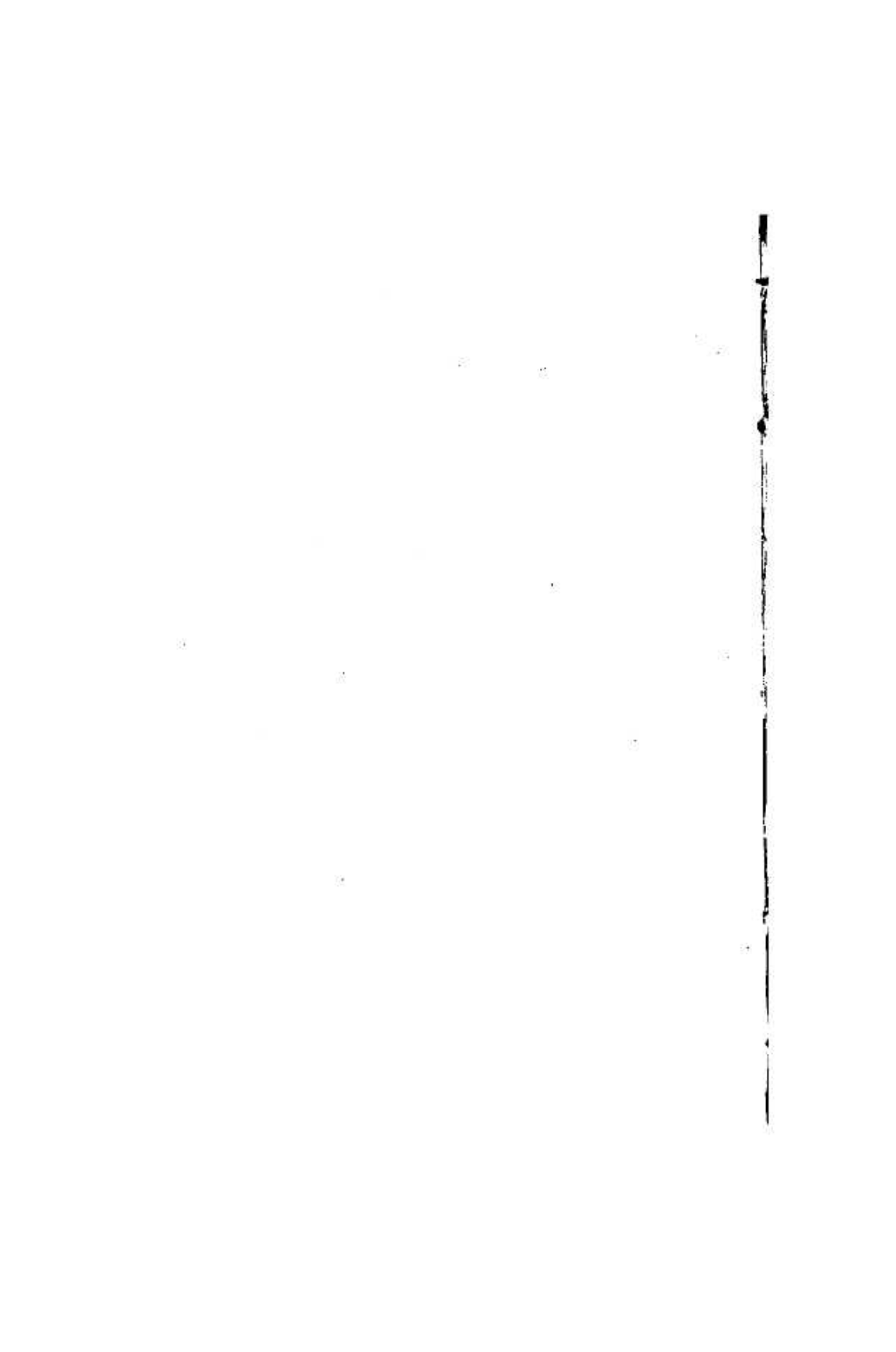
R. C. JEBB.

CAMBRIDGE :

August, 1884.

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

Treatment of the legend before the time of the dramatists.

§ 1. The *Oedipus Tyrannus* is in one sense the masterpiece of Attic Tragedy. No other shows an equal degree of art in the development of the plot; and this excellence depends on the powerful and subtle drawing of the characters. Modern drama, where minor parts can be multiplied and scene changed at will, can more easily divorce the two kinds of merit. Some of Voltaire's plays, for instance, not first-rate in other ways, are models of ingenious construction. The conditions of the Greek stage left less room for such a result. In the *Oedipus Tyrannus* the highest constructive skill is seen to be intimately and necessarily allied with the vivid delineation of a few persons.

Here it is peculiarly interesting to recover, so far as we can, the form in which the story of Oedipus came to Sophocles; to remark what he has altered or added; and to see how the same subject has been handled by other dramatists.

The essence of the myth is the son slaying his unknown father, and thereby fulfilling a decree of fate. The subsequent marriage, if not an original part of the story, seems to have been an early addition. The central ideas are, (1) the irresistible power of destiny, and (2) the sacredness of the primary natural ties, as measured by the horror of an unconscious sin against it. The direct and simple form in which these ideas are embodied gives the legend an impress of high antiquity. This might be illustrated by a comparison with the story of Sohrab and Kustum as told in Mr Matthew Arnold's beautiful poem. The slaying of the unknown son by the father is there surrounded with a pathos and a chivalrous tenderness which have no counterpart in the grim simplicity of the Oedipus myth, as it appears in its earliest known shape.

§ 2. The *Iliad*, which knows the war of Polyneices and his allies against Thebes (4. 378), once glances at the tale of Oedipus—where Mecisteus, father of Euryalus, is said to have visited Thebes in order to attend the funeral games which were celebrated after the death of Oedipus (23. 679 f.) :—

ὅς ποτε Θήβαδ' ἦλθε δεδουπότος Οἰδιπόδου
εἰς τάφον, —

—'who came to Thebes of yore, when Oedipus had fallen, to his burying.'

The word *δεδουπότος* plainly refers to a violent death in fight, or at the hand of an assassin; it would not be in accord with the tone of epic language to understand it as a figurative phrase for a sudden fall from greatness. But more than this the *Iliad* does not tell. The poet of the 23rd book imagines Oedipus as having died by violence, and received burial at Thebes, in the generation before the Trojan war.

The *Nekyia* in the *Odyssey* gives the earliest sketch of an integral story (II. 271 ff.) :—

Μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδου ἴδον, καλὴν Ἐπικάστην,
ἣ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν ἀδρείῃσι νόοιο
γημαμένη ἃ υἱεὶ ὃ δ' ἐν πατέρ' ἔξεταρίξας
γῆμεν ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποισιν.
ἀλλ' ὃ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυμήτα ἄλγεα πάσχων
Καδμείων ἤρασσε θεῶν ὀλοῶς διὰ βουλᾶς
ἣ δ' ἔβη εἰς Ἄϊδαο κυλιάρτω κρατεροῖο,
ἀφαιμένη βρόχον ἀπὸν ἀμ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρον,
ἃ ἀγέει σχομένη τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν.

* And I saw the mother of Oedipodes, fair Epicastè, who wrought a dread deed with unwitting mind, in that she wedded her son; but he had slain his father ere he wedded her; and presently the gods made these things known among men. Yet he still ruled over the Cadmeans in lovely Thebes, suffering anguish by the dire counsels of the gods; but she went to the house of Hades, the strong warder, when she had fastened a noose on high from the roof-beam, possessed by her pain; and to him she bequeathed sorrows full many, even all that a mother's Avengers bring to pass.'

With regard to this outline in the *Odyssey*, it is to be noted that it ignores (a) the deliverance of Thebes from the Sphinx—though this may be implied in the marriage with Epicastè; (b) the self-blinding of Oedipus; (c) the expulsion of Oedipus from Thebes—herein agreeing with the indication in the *Iliad*. It further seems to exclude the notion of Epicastè having borne children to Oedipus, since the discovery followed.