

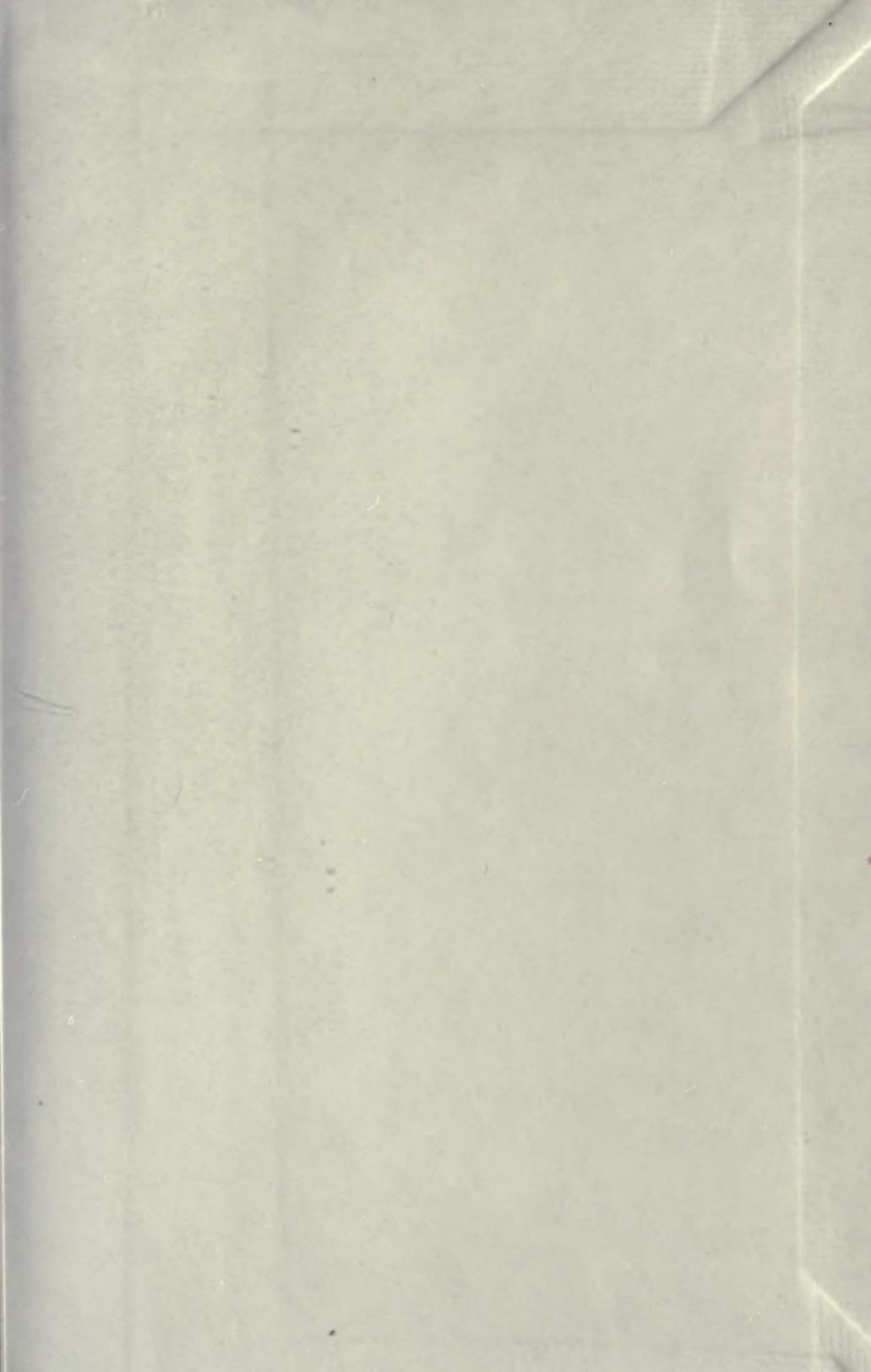
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THE CRIMES OF THE OEDIPODEAN CYCLE

HENRY NEWPHER BOWMAN



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THE GORHAM PRESS, BOSTON, U. S. A.

PREFACE

Concerning the details of the myths of the Oedipodean cycle, little is popularly known—which is as it should be—because the Sophoclean accounts which do not require special training for their understanding are most widely read, and by the general reader, further knowledge would be misunderstood if interpreted from a modern standpoint. But for a classical scholar who has followed the adventures of Oedipus through one or more plays there is a natural curiosity aroused as to the events immediately preceding or following the narrative with which he is familiar, and he may be pardoned if this interest leads him into the unearthing of a deal of matter not always pleasant in content, and at times even revolting.

It is, then, for those acquainted to some extent with the classics, but without inclination to read in any language but English for the satisfaction of their curiosity, that this account aims to be of service, in that it presents the most noteworthy variations of the myth, together with occasional attempts at explanation and elucidation.

PREFACE

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INTRODUCTION

WHY WE LONG FOR THE DEATH OF OUR RELATIVES

“IF one dreams of the death of a near and dear relative—an uncle or a mother—it is not at all necessary to draw the conclusion that the dreamer now has such a wish. He need merely have had it at some former time. To be sure, no son likes to admit even to himself that he wants his father to die. Yet such a wish is natural, instinctive, even if it become less acute with the passage of time and in the end be put down in the subconsciousness. The daughter, too, wants her mother’s death. That is why she dreams of it at times so frequently. For that matter, we all want the death of our relatives, subconsciously if not consciously, however dear we deem them.

For an explanation of this circumstance we are referred by its discoverer, Doctor Sigmund Freud, of Vienna, the world’s most renowned psychologist, to the conditions of child life.* The child up to a certain age is free from

*This entire introduction is a review of Dr. William I. White’s translation of “Dreams and Myths” by Dr. Karl Abraham. It originally appeared in *Current Opinion* and is used through their courteous permission.

altruistic feelings. He lives in a simple egoism. It is erroneous to assume that the feeling of the child for its parents and brothers and sisters is from the beginning one of affection. On the contrary, there exists instead among the children of a family a certain rivalry. When a second child is born the first clearly shows jealousy. The younger child reacts in the same egoistic manner. It sees in the elder an oppressor. Normally these states of mind disappear to a certain extent, but they are never wholly uprooted from consciousness. This hostile attitude of the child towards the other finds its expression in the wish that the other were dead. The child really means that he wishes the other were away. But let us consider the wish of the child for the death of the father or the mother. Few laymen will admit the existence of such a thing normally. The most that will be granted refers to the abuse of the child by the parents—the idea being that this is an exceptional instance. Altogether different is the elucidation of Doctor Karl Abraham in the monograph on Freudian psychology just cited and which has been followed here:

“The dream of the death of the father or mother, as it occurs to every one, contains the sought for explanation. Freud shows from it that ‘the dream of the death of parents is preponderatingly common concerning that one of the pair of the same sex as the dreamer; so the son,

for the most part, dreams of the death of the father, the daughter of the death of the mother.' This behavior is explained in part as due to an early sexual preference of the son for the mother, the daughter for the father. Out of this preference grows a certain rivalry of the son with the father for the love of the mother, and a similar situation between daughter and mother for the love of the father. The son rebels earlier or later against the patria potestas, in some cases openly, in others inwardly. At the same time the father protects his dominance against the growing son. A similar relation occurs between mother and daughter. As much as culture may soften or change this rivalry, through piety towards the parents, through love of the children, still its traces cannot be extinguished. In the most favorable cases these tendencies become repressed in the unconscious. Straightway they express themselves in dreams. Children who are disposed to nervous or psychic disease show, already in the early years, a very strong love or a very strong repulsion towards the parents or towards one of them. In their dreams they show these tendencies especially clearly; not less clearly, however, in the symptoms of their later disease. Freud gives very instructive examples of this kind. He cites, among others, the case of a mentally ill girl who for the first time, in a period of confusion, expressed violent aversion for her mother. As the patient became clearer she

dreamed of the death of her mother. Finally she no longer contented herself with repressing in the unconscious her feelings against her mother, but proceeded to over-compensate for that feeling by constructing a phobia, that is, a morbid fear, that something might happen to the mother. The aversion became transposed, the more the patient gained composure, into an excessive apprehension about her mother's goings and comings. I have myself lately observed a quite similar case.

"As complementary it may be mentioned that the dreams of adults not infrequently turn on the death of a child. Pregnant women who suffer from their condition dream of an abortion. Fathers or mothers who in the waking state tenderly love their child dream under special conditions that it is dead, for example, when the existence of the child interferes with the attainment of an object.

"The typical dream then contains wishes which we in our waking life will not admit. In the dream life these secret wishes find expression. These wishes, common to many or to all mankind, we meet also in the myths."

In Freud's opinion a very large proportion of the repressed wishes which realize themselves in the dreams of adults originate in early childhood. So much we learn in a study of the desire for the death of our relatives which Doctor William Brown, head of the psychological

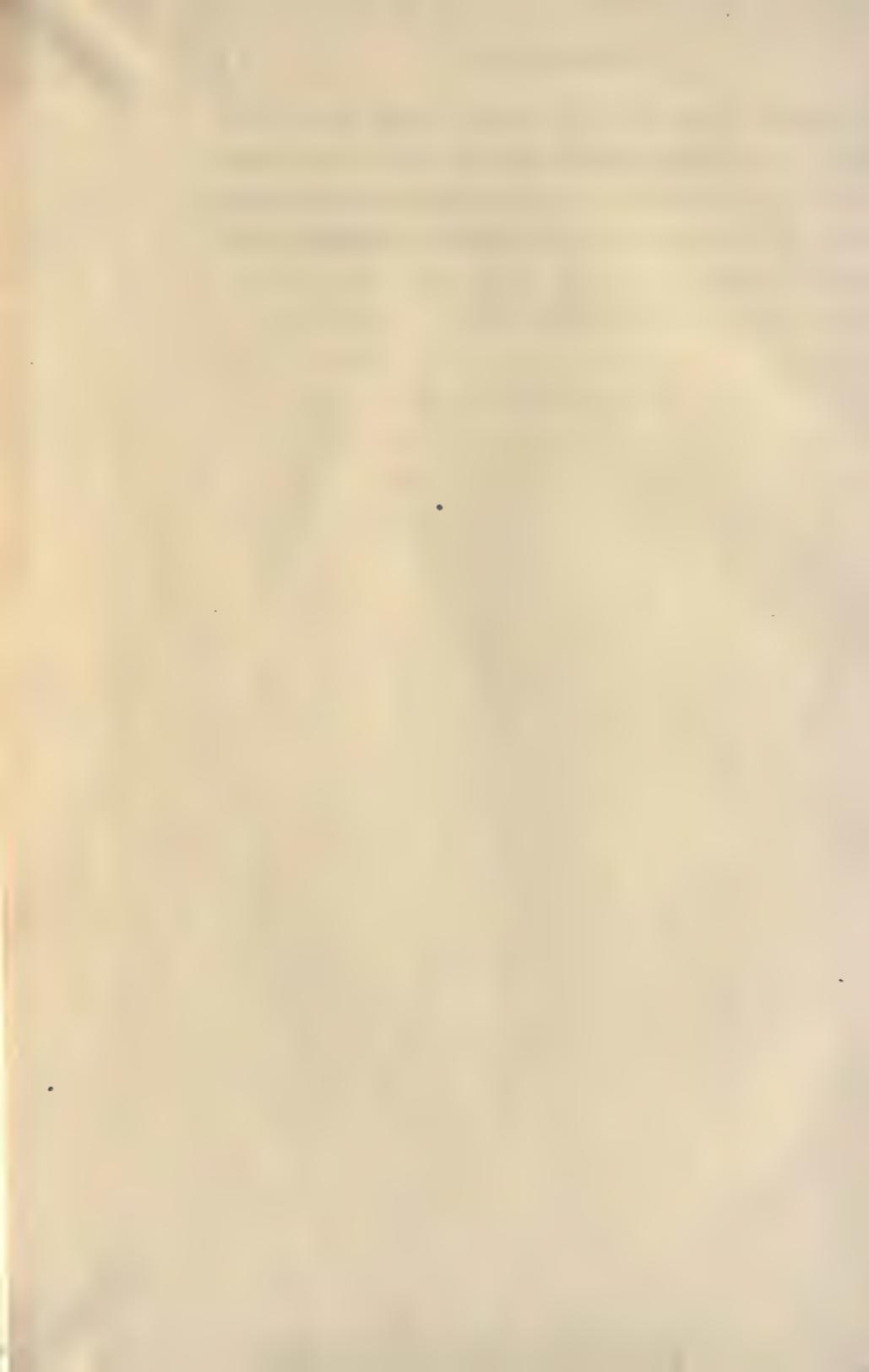
department at the University of London, makes in *The Lancet*. The repressed wishes of which Freud makes so much are, he thinks, conditioned by the sex of the child. Sex is a theme to which children devote their minds at a much earlier period than scientists have hitherto suspected. The child's ideas on the subject bring about a hatred of the father or of the mother, attraction in one case being accompanied by hatred and jealousy towards the parent of the opposite sex. These are repressed under the influence of education and environment; but in later life they produce dreams of the death of the father or of the mother:

“The legend of Oedipus, who unwittingly marries his own mother, Jocasta, and, though guiltless in intent, pays the penalty for this unholy act, is a mythical representation of this general tendency in human nature. Freud would explain the mystery of Hamlet in the same way. Hamlet is unable to take vengeance on the man who has supplanted and murdered his father because he himself in his early youth had wished his father's death. The wish has been vigorously repressed and he is at present unconscious of it, but it still exists in him unconsciously and produces the inhibitory effects depicted in the play. Freud considers that repressed wishes of this nature are the principal factor in the production of all the psychoneuroses.

“If we bear in mind that children’s ideas of death are very vague and in most cases correspond simply to ‘permanent absence,’ the theory is not so outrageous as it might otherwise seem to be. The ‘naturalness’ of family affection has undoubtedly been greatly exaggerated by earlier thinkers, and the passions of hostility aroused within the family circle are often very fierce. As the children grow up these feelings generally disappear and make way for the more conventional and intellectualized forms of sentiment; but deep down in the unconscious recesses of their souls persist the traces of earlier conflicts.”

It may be thought surprising that such an immoral wish as that of the death of so near a relative should pass the “censor.” The censor is that portion of the mental apparatus which stands on guard to repress thoughts we wish to hide. Two facts sufficiently explain the failure of the censor. In the first place the wish is the last in the world that we should ever consciously entertain, and for this reason the censor is unprepared for its appearance. In the second place the wish fulfillment is accompanied in the dream by a feeling of intense sorrow which seems to receive a sufficient explanation in the anxiety for the person’s welfare which the dreamer has actually felt in recent times. Freud records the case of a woman who dreamed that she saw her fifteen-year-old daughter lying dead in a box. Psychoanalysis showed that

the latent content of the dream was a wish dating back fifteen years that the child might die before it was born. This is a good illustration of the way in which wishes may persist for years in the consciousness, uninfluenced by later experience.



THE CRIMES OF THE OEDIPODEAN CYCLE

THE CRIMES OF THE OEDIPODEAN CYCLE

CHAPTER I

THE HERITAGE OF OEDIPUS

TO take up the story of the ill-fated family at the time of the death of Polydorus, son of Cadmus, and grandson of Agenor, puts us in possession of a number of facts sufficient for the understanding of the events in the life of Laius, which led to his residence in exile with Pelops, King of Pisa.

Nycteus, the father of Antiope (who is hence called Nycteis, mother of Labdacus by Polydorus), and guardian of Thebes for Labdacus, invaded Sicyon to revenge the carrying off of Antiope by Epopeus, the king of that country; was there defeated; and shortly afterward died of his wounds. On his deathbed he handed over the regency to his brother, Lycus, son of Poseidon and the Pleiad Celaeno, who assumed the government for the young Labdacus.

When, at length, Labdacus became of age and ascended the throne, he met a fate like that of Pentheus in opposing the cult of Bacchus, and Lycus was left as regent for the king's infant son, Laius. In this office he now put

away his former wife, Antiope, who had born to Zeus two sons, Zethus and Amphion, and married Dirce, who treated Antiope with contempt. Zethus and Amphion, having heard of this ill treatment of their mother obtained possession of Thebes, slew Lycus,¹ and took revenge upon Dirce, whom they bound to a wild bull which dragged her about until she perished, and then, not yet satisfied, they cast her body into a fountain or spring. This work of destruction accomplished, they set about building walls around the city to the rock-moving strains of Amphion's lyre, and cast out Laius, who sought protection at the court of Pelops. Here, however, he proved false to his position as guest-friend. One day while teaching Pelop's son, Chrysippus, the art of chariot-driving, he seized this opportunity to bear him away; for he was filled with an unnatural love for the boy.²

Such is the account given by Apollodorus, with whom Pausanias³ is not at variance, except in that he adds "Laius was stealthily removed out of the way, by those who had it at heart that the house of Cadmus should not be forgotten in after ages." Still earlier accounts⁴ say that Zethus and Amphion occupied Thebes before the time of Cadmus, but it is not for us to attempt to reconcile variant accounts dealing with this early period.

This youth, Chrysippus,⁵ who had inflamed Laius, was the son of Pelops and the nymph Axioche,⁶ or Danaïs,⁷

or Hippodameia;⁸ the character of the evidence favouring Axioche being the best, that supporting Hippodameia, allowing of the possibility of her being the mother, but not accounting for her later conduct toward her son, while the authority for Danais is weakest. Of Hippodameia he is the last named of six sons; of Axioche, the only son; while, according to other accounts, he is not the son of Hippodameia but of another woman.⁹

But whatever his descent, he must have been a comely youth¹⁰ so to have stirred the lust of Laius that he was seized by him and borne to Thebes from his home—as we conclude from the fact that most authors mention no particular *locus raptandi*—or from the Nemean¹¹ games. This was the first example of *Knabenliebe* among the Hellenes,¹² as was that of Zeus and Ganymede among the gods or, perhaps that of Poseidon and Pelops.

Later, however, this unnatural passion became more common,—a fact that M. Paul Decharme clearly¹³ has pointed out: “To speak first of that which is most repugnant to our moral sense, need we be surprised that Aristophanes never dreamt of reproaching Euripides for the subject of his *Chrysippus*? And yet the main incident of this drama was the rape of Pelops’s young son by Laius, who was enamoured of his beauty.¹⁴ Cicero speaks of it only in veiled words ‘Who does not understand, in reading Euripides, what Laius means to say and what are his

desires?"¹⁵ The Greeks undoubtedly expressed themselves more freely. As a love of this kind has found expression in the *Myrmidons* of Aeschylus, and in *The Women of Colchis* and *Niobe* of Sophocles,¹⁶ we must believe that it shocked people on the stage no more than it did in real life."

The rape of Chrysippus generally is attributed to Laius,¹⁷ but as well to Zeus,¹⁸ and Theseus,¹⁹ and even to Oedipus;¹⁸ however, a comparison of the authorities makes it almost certain that the reading, Laius, is correct, and that the others arose, either from misconceptions on the part of the writer or through corruption of the text. And, too, it is hardly probable that the choice of the dramatists would have fallen so unanimously upon the Laius version, if it had not been substantiated by existing myths then and had it not been most widely known among the people who composed the audiences in the theatre. Plays as a rule set forth that version which had become most popular, and the audience, unusual in that it was familiar with a mass of lore gained through everyday conversation, was apt to criticize a deviation from the accepted story. Certainly it was the version that lent itself most readily to the constructing of a plot, and offered a plausible explanation of the subsequent ills of the Labdacidae which otherwise would have been hanging in air, or, lacking a ready-made explanation, would have

been supplied by an invention.

About the origin of the evils of Laius and his race, ancient authorities are not agreed. That the sinful love of Laius for Chrysippus provoked the anger of Hera²⁰ is one explanation; another is practically the same, that after Chrysippus had pierced himself with his sword out of shame for his condition, Teiresias, seeing in his capacity of seer that Laius was hated by the gods, turned him from going to consult Apollo and advised him rather to offer sacrifice to Hera Gamostolos.²¹ Again we find that Laius has violated an order of Apollo forbidding him to have a son, which order evidently had been given him to punish him for his *amour coupable*.²² M. Legras²³ believes that, in as much as the "*Septem*" of Aeschylus was inspired by the "*Thebais*," it is possible that this epic had itself confused the two stories, i. e. the rape of Chrysippus and Apollo's revenge. Probably the Laius-Chrysippus episode was the nucleus of this part of the myth.

From what is known of Laius, we think of him as a man singularly weak before temptation, impetuous, reckless of consequences and basely sensual. Pelops was justly wrathful over this outrage and called down upon the head of Laius the curse that he might never have a son, yet should a child be born to him, that he might die by this son's hand. Here, then, we have the source of the curse that sat so heavily upon the Labdacidae. Laius, however,

was not the man to submit passively to a fate like this, and, in the face of the tragic outcome that he knew his act must have, begat a son, probably out of the very spirit of perversity which might have possessed him. True, the authorities we have do not so much as hint at perversity, the act being attributed to drunkenness,²⁴ or incontinence either on the part of Laius²⁵ or the part of Jocasta,²⁶ yet might the drunkenness not have been intentionally brought on to inspire a feeling of bravado and irresponsibility?

A man in Laius's position naturally would nurse his wrongs and fall into a state of *aboulia*, as did Hamlet, and require some powerful stimulus to induce him to take a decisive step. This view derives some support from the fact that Laius was mentally abnormal in his unnatural love,¹⁷ in being utterly devoid of the affection which a father should feel for his child,²⁷ in perverting the natural pride in fatherhood to positive cruelty against his offspring,²⁷ and in his violent, unreasoning anger toward Oedipus at the cross-roads.²⁸

Heredity seems to have taken its wonted course and reserved the evil traits of Laius for the sons of Oedipus, who himself was a man of exemplary character although retaining the hot-headedness of his father, as we see in the slaughter of lord and servants at the cross-roads, in his anger at the aged sire Tiresias²⁹ and at Creon, and

in his curse upon his sons.³⁰

If we were asked to name the predominating emotion which is stirred in our hearts by the history of Oedipus, almost without exception we would answer that it is pity. Not pity throughout the life of the hero, for at times he is to be envied, but pity at the tragedy of a man so exalted by the gods to be ultimately so crushed through actions, the entrance upon, and the outcome of, which, were beyond his power to avert. He is the unhappy wight,³¹ the great example of *fortunatus infoelix*,³² the tragic myrrour of misery,³² as he is quaintly called. Even before the time when he came something saucily into the world,³³ we anticipate a world of sadness for this misbegotten, unwelcome, unloved child. Perverted mother-love and the selfish fears of his father brought him pain on the third day of his new life,³⁴ and exposure in winter-time, although he was only a tender infant.³⁵

The woman who became his mother as a result of uncontrolled passion would not have the same love for her child as would a woman with whom the act had been one of love and whose soul was hungry for a child. Yet mother-love would be strong even in the former case, and we can look upon Jocasta's indifference only as something unnatural.

In his father there was much to be desired. A man guilty of the affair of Chrysippus, or of direct disobedi-

ience to Apollo, for in the face of clear warnings, he begat a son with Jocasta, would be unable to experience the finer joys of fatherhood. Laius was a criminal in thought, in giving life to a being whom he previously must have resolved to remove from his path by foul means. Assigned to a momentary sense of irresponsibility or even to drunkenness,²⁴ it was, nevertheless, criminal thoughtlessness; assigned to the purpose of making away with the child, it is clearly a deliberate crime. But upon the questions of right and wrong as they were felt in those far-off days, there can be no last word from our time which however closely it may ally itself in spirit with the former age, must always feel the lacuna of centuries forbidding satisfaction at our conclusions—*quot homines, tot sententiae*—or nearly so.

CHAPTER II

THE MURDER OF LAIUS

ACCOUNTS of the slaying of Laius agree only in the essential fact that the son slew the father. Oedipus was said to have gone to the assistance of Chrysippus and to have slain his father in the effort to save the lad,³⁶ but a statement so at variance with the generally accepted form of the myth may be regarded as due to a lack of knowledge on the part of the scholiast, otherwise he would have seen that to make Oedipus and Chrysippus contemporaries would be to wipe out the cause for the painful events of Oedipus's early life, the exposure and its consequences, which are so essential to the later development of the story, and which we would expect to be well known to a commentator of the post-Euripidean period.

As strange a version is that which explains Laius's death at the hands of his son by the fact that both were enamoured of Chrysippus,³⁷ leaving to our imagination the rivals' contest which ensued.

Again we hear that Laius was accompanied by his wife, Epicaste, and that she was not touched by Oedipus, who fled into the mountains,³⁸ and how he took Laius's belt and sword,³⁹ and brought his opponent's chariot home to Polybus.⁴⁰

A Latin Thebais tells how Laius and his guest-friend, Naubolus, were slain by Oedipus at the cross-roads, and the armour-bearer, or esquire, escaped.⁴¹

Strangest of all is the statement, "Some say that his mother was also slain by him,"³⁶ which is difficult to explain in the light of our knowledge of the Oedipus story. The son could not have killed the mother before he had married her, thus fulfilling the second half of the oracle, and before he had discovered the crimes he had committed.

Perhaps we are judging the matter from the point of view formed by adherence to the extant account, without considering the existence at that time of a possible variant, which may have mentioned only one condition of the oracle. It is next to impossible to explain the slaying of both together if Oedipus already had had innocent relations with the mother, and how could he have had these relations if the husband still lived? There is nothing to tell us that Laius had made a long journey before this, or had been given up as lost, the only conditions under which Jocasta would have been approached.

A strong, virile character was exhibited by Laius in the last event of his life. Born to power, and later deprived of it, he came again into his own with the resolve to exercise the royal command to his soul's content, which action was bound to make him querulous, impatient of

delay, in short, something of a curmudgeon, but in the blinding glare of his restoration it gave him courage to bid Apollo and his oracle go to—⁴¹ Yet the haughty king wins our admiration and sympathy in his encounter with his son, unknown to him. The elder man was in the right. He travelled in a chariot, bore himself as a person of consequence, notwithstanding his scanty attendance, and demanded the right of way, because, as the road consisted of two deep ruts, to turn aside his retinue together with removing his chariot to the side of the passage to allow a pedestrian to go on his way, would have been, without a doubt, yielding to an unreasonable demand,⁴² Peremptory as may have been his words to Oedipus, they were a king's words, and looked to compliance with a fair request, but to the person addressed they must have been lashes to a mind raw from the oracle's wound. There was, then, righteous anger on the part of Laius; in Oedipus, the torn spirit finding vent for its suffering in a deed of violence that saw nor right nor wrong—truculence induced by cares.

Perhaps we are going too far when we look for the motives that prompted Oedipus, for it may have been that the fate which was upon him manifested itself in a numbing of consciousness, and the resulting deed was a negative rather than a positive action. Whatever view is held will not be greatly at variance with the explanation

that, as a man with a bitter, doubt-breeding anxiety gnawing at his heart, he was not accountable for his conduct. A flash of anger, a death-blow, and he was on his way again, apparently unruffled, and too absorbed in his own gloomy thoughts to notice the escape of one of the attendants. DeQuincy would have looked with scorn upon the incompleteness of the murderer's operations, upon the lack of dramatic effect, and upon the absence of a plan, comprehensive, and at the same time concerned with details.⁴³ Oedipus was, then, a poor murderer solely from a lack of motive.

Later we learn that in his mind there must have been a veritable hiatus, a lacuna corresponding exactly with the time of this affair. In the discussions of the former king's death, which must certainly have arisen at the time when he married the widowed queen, there is an inexplicable silence on his part which cannot be accounted for on the grounds of cowardice,⁴⁴ because directly he had had the truth forced into his mind, he did not hesitate to inflict extreme physical pain upon himself.⁴⁵ Another circumstance that leads us to think that his mind was a total blank is from a variant account of Nicolaus Damascenus,³⁸ who describes the slaying of Laius, but states that Oedipus did not touch Epicaste, who accompanied her husband. Now if he saw Epicaste so short a time before he married her it is strange, to say the least, that he failed

to recognize her at a second meeting. Evidently his mind was a blank at the time.

On her part the failure to recognize in her new husband the travel-stained wayfarer who slew Laius, is not remarkable. Probably she even fainted at the time and had no opportunity to observe Oedipus. Höfer,⁴⁶ however, thinks she should have recognized him. But if we call it hiatus, we have to explain how a man swinging along at a round pace on a lonely mountain road, could have suffered lapse of memory upon suddenly encountering a royal party going to consult the oracle at Delphi. In support of this arbitrary term, we may show that in the first place, hiatus is not always brought on by bodily shock, but is sometimes, though less frequently, the result of a mental paroxysm, a sudden changing from one form of intense thought to another; in the second place, that this was precisely what happened in this instance, for the black despair of Oedipus was converted instantly into boiling rage; and finally that the acceptance of this explanation will account for the freedom from suspicion which we find in the quondam murderer's mind.

Very interesting is the discussion of this episode in *The Makers of Hellas*⁴⁷: "The encounter in the Triple Way is an encounter of passions. 'Like father, like son'—neither Laius nor Oedipus will give way; each of them has not on but in him 'the curse of the race,' the 'hybris that makes

the tyrant,' the imperious haughty temper that will brook no opposition."

This is the key to the situation. The comment of Teiresias would have been: "'Twas not the meeting was thy bane—'twas thou thyself unto thyself."⁴⁸

At least one authority, Pausanias,⁴⁹ states in connection with the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta (or Epicaste as he calls her) that of this union there were no children: "(Oedipus) married his mother. But I think he had no children by her, and Homer is my witness, who says in the *Odyssey*⁵⁰ :—

'And the mother of Oedipodes I saw, fair Epicaste,
Who, all unwitting, wrought a fearful deed,
Wedding her son. But he his father slew
And wedded her, and straightway the gods revealed it
to mankind.'

Now how could they have revealed it straightway if Jocasta was the mother of four children by Oedipus? In point of fact, the mother of his children was Euryganea,⁵¹ daughter of Hyperphas. This is proved by the author of the poem they call the *Oedipodea*,⁵² and Onasias has painted a picture at Plataea of Euryganea bowed with grief at the battle between her sons."

CHAPTER III

THE MARRIAGE OF OEDIPUS TO HIS MOTHER

IN view of this we have the alternatives before us in the question of Oedipus's incest: either he did have children by his mother, or he did not. The authority for the latter is not a negligible quantity, but gives way before the older sources which affirm that the children, Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles, and Polynices were born to Jocasta, notwithstanding the (*ἄφαρ*), *plötzlich* in the text of Homer. Of course it is absurd to stretch the meaning to "immediately after sixteen years"—which time would be long enough to account for the intervening events—, and, moreover, it is unnecessary, for the *ἄφαρ* may have been used loosely to express a relatively short lapse of time, days, months, or years, as the case might have been.

An account differing from the two just mentioned is given by Epimenides,⁵³ who says that Oedipus was the son of Laius and Eurycleia, and Epicaste the second wife of Laius, so that Oedipus married not his own mother but his stepmother. However, the only weight this has is lent by the writer's title of genealogist, and in this instance he may have been smoothing over this detail for

the benefit of a client who wished his ancestry traced back to Oedipus, provided the stain of incest could be removed.

Assuming the truth of the incestuous union, we have now to consider the nature of the deed. It was far from being a natural occurrence even in the days when license was great; even though

“——— in Saturn’s reign

Such mixture was not held a stain.”⁵⁴

Always, we have reason to believe, such mixture has been deemed disgraceful, even among the lowest tribes, and it has been thought to bring with it a punishment upon the tribe in which it was practised. An African traveller relates that there is a belief entertained by the Khasis of Assam, that if a man defiles tribal custom by marrying a woman of his own clan, the women of the tribe will die in childbed and the people will suffer from other calamities.⁵⁵ Another tells how the ground which has been polluted, must be shunned.⁵⁶ This throws some light upon the condition of Thebes at the opening of Sophocles’s *“Oedipus Tyrannus.”*

J. G. Frazer,⁵⁷ in his discussion of the point, mentions the dire results which come upon such a land. “It would seem that the ancient Greeks and Romans entertained similar notions (to those of the Jews) as to the

wasting effects of incest. According to Sophocles (O. T. 22 sqq., 95 sqq.) the land of Thebes suffered from blight, from pestilence, and from sterility both of women and of cattle under the reign of Oedipus, who unwittingly had slain his father and married his mother, and the Delphic oracle declared that the only way to restore the prosperity of the country was to banish the sinner from it, as if his mere presence withered plants, animals, and women. No doubt the poet and his hearer set down these public calamities in great part to the guilt of parricide, which rested on Oedipus, but they hardly can have failed to lay much also of the evil at the door of the incest with his mother."

Mention of three wives of Oedipus is made by Pherecydes.⁵⁸ The first, Jocasta, bore him two sons, Phrastor and Laonytus; the second, Euryganea, daughter of Periphas, four children, Antigone, Ismene, Eteocles and Poly-nices; while of the third, Astymedusa, the mere fact that he married her is given, but the possibility is that she bore him no children. Accepting this, we cannot retain the episode of the blinding,⁴⁵ nor can we see why the sons of Jocasta should be totally dropped from subsequent revivals of the myth in poetry and drama. More unusual even than this is the account that tells how "Oedipus had intercourse with Jocasta—who had come to the burial of her dead husband—and begot children. But later

when he had solved the Sphinx's riddle he became aware of what he had done."⁵⁹ The expression "begot children" or "begot the children" (*μυγέντα γεννησαι τους παιδας*) seems to mean that he begot all the children at the same time, manifestly an absurd conclusion, but in keeping with the extraordinary sequence of events which makes the discovery of his incest the result of his solving the riddle.

This turning about of the cause (the solving of the riddle) and the effect (the marriage) puts us at a loss to explain why Oedipus should have married his mother. She was many years his senior, and nowhere do we read that she was particularly attractive, so we must fall back upon the explanation that it is most probable that Creon gave her to Oedipus out of gratitude for the deliverance of the city. The wife, Astymedusa, whom, according to another account,⁶⁰ he married directly he had put aside Jocasta, stirred up trouble by accusing the stepsons of attempting to violate her honour. If this was an accepted version, and not pure invention on the part of the scholiast, it never, to our knowledge at least, recommended itself to another writer.

CHAPTER IV

OEDIPUS'S CURSING OF HIS SONS

SOME may not see in Oedipus's cursing of his sons an act deserving to be called criminal, but it assumes a more serious aspect when we consider its consequences, and for that reason, if for no other, it may be discussed along with actual crimes. Years before this, he had experienced the sensation of pronouncing unconsciously an eloquent curse upon his own head by directing it publicly at the murderer of Laius,⁶¹ and might have been expected to show greater caution in calling down curses on the heads of his sons. But this was no random imprecation; it was directed against the definite objects of his displeasure, and besides, he was furious at the treatment he had received at their hands. After his blinding, Oedipus was neglected by his sons, and, one day in a rage at the scantiness of his food, he asked the gods to let his sons share his kingdom between them "with sword-wielding hand."⁶²

Or it was because Polynices (without being held back by his brother)⁶³ set before his father the precious silver vessels of Laius,⁶⁴ or because, instead of sending him the shoulder of the sacrificial victim, as was their custom, they sent the rump, an action which he regarded as an insult.⁶⁵

Astymedusa, their step-mother, was said to have slandered them to Oedipus, saying that they had assailed her honour, and for this her husband was justly angry.⁶⁰

Still another reason for his curse was the fact that they had caused him to be locked up in the palace in order that, in his absence,⁶⁶ they might the better forget the fate hanging over them.

Sophocles has left us in detail the events that led up to the curse in order to secure dramatic effect and to justify Oedipus. Polynices has come to the aged, blind Oedipus in the grove of the Eumenides at Athens there to plead with him to return to Thebes as a help to him and Adrastus, but Oedipus recounts his expulsion from Thebes at the hands of his ungrateful sons, and, with mounting anger at the very thought of the indignity, hurls out a dire curse upon them.⁶⁷

To avert its fulfillment by abandoning the struggle for the throne was in Polynices' power, and we look for him to do this, because he has before him, in the person of his father, a vivid picture of the blighting effects wrought by such a curse. But he continues in his purpose, defying the gods to harm him—the contrary of what Oedipus had done when, the oracle consulted, he went humbly away with the resolve to avert its fulfillment.

As the character of Creon changes for the worse during

the progress of the story, that of Oedipus becomes nobler in its humbleness, and we have before us an Oedipus purified, cleansed, bent down with suffering, feeble, blind, dependent on the bounty of strangers, miserable, travel-stained, and with unkempt hair fluttering around his sightless head, yet withal, free from curse and penalty; whereas, in the earlier part of his life, he was sensitive, imaginative, tender, passionate, impetuous, short-sighted, zealous, generous, pious, brooding, and dignified. So, "in spite of the scene in which he spurns his suppliant son, we feel that Oedipus at Coloneus is a different being from Oedipus at Thebes. If not softened he is at least chastened and enlightened."⁶⁸

E. E. G. upholds Oedipus in cursing his sons on the grounds that, according to the ethics of his age,⁶⁹ he did not sin. He was only passing on to the following generation the ill fortune he had received from his father in the form of a fate. ¹ Looking back upon the swift rise to power and the damning discoveries of his unwitting crimes which made his life wretched from that time forth, he looked upon himself "as neither pure nor yet guilty, but as a person set apart by the gods to illustrate their will,"⁷⁰ as a kind of plaything of fate to warn other men,² and at this thought his bitterness welled to his lips in a curse that a calmer moment would have smothered.

CHAPTER V

FATE

IN the words of the chorus of the *Antigone*⁷¹ we have the keynote to the Oedipus myth, "In mortal life nothing is wholly free from *ἄτη*." This *ἄτη*, according to E. E. G.⁷² "is both sin and its consequences, its punishment, and in the age of Sophocles, as in Homeric days, men still clung to the comfortable notion that *ἄτη* was a sort of fate which could not be resisted—a notion which found expression in the current ideas regarding the doom on a house, the curse on a family or race. Sophocles sets himself with all his might to resist this notion. He shows men in the plainest way that they are their own *ἄτη*, that they bring their own curse, their own doom upon themselves—that what they are pleased to call curse, doom, even the fulfilling of the oracles, is nothing else than the natural working out of obedience to the great laws."

This thought does not originate with Sophocles—we read of it in Homer⁷³—, but there is ground for believing that in the character of Oedipus we see a mortal actually living out a curse. He was *not* his own *ἄτη*. Long before he was born there was a curse upon his

father,⁷⁴ and his very birth was a violation of a divine oracle. But here E. E. G.⁷⁵ declares that "the *penalty*, not the 'fate' of Laius is that, since by his crime he has deprived another of his child, he himself shall perish at the hands of his own child," which is a possible interpretation, but in the end this penalty assumes the proportions of a *fate* in its wasting effects upon posterity, and so becomes equivalent to a 'curse.' " In his early manhood the slaying of his father was the rising within him of the unrecognized impulse which had been latent throughout his youth. It was a fulfillment, as was his later marriage with his mother, which involved no moral responsibility on his part.

An extraordinary view of Oedipus's conduct is taken by Karl Abraham,⁷⁶ who explains his actions as the result of the human instinct—of a man in particular—to dream of the death of his father and feel an exceedingly close attachment to the mother. These childish impulses were acted out when the dreamer grew to manhood.

The fate of Oedipus is the high water mark of misery in the tide of suffering which overwhelmed the Labdacidae. He was not the last sufferer but he was the man upon whom the force of the curse seems to have spent itself, for his descendants were cut off from normal lives with no lingering agonies of body and soul, and for this reason it is that the name of Oedipus calls up, even today,

the image of a man succumbing to an irresistible fate, whereas the others of his race are totally forgotten or survive merely as names.

NOTES

- 1 Nicol. Damasc. 8 v. 15 sq. (ed. L. Dindorf).
 Apollod. Bibl. 3, 5, 4.
- 2 Apollod. Bibl. 3, 5, 5-10.
- 3 Paus. IX, 5, 3.
- 4 Schol. Hom. Il. 13, 301.
 Eustath. on Od. 11, 262.
 cf. Mueller, Orchom. S. 191.
- 5 Vid. L. Legras "*Les Légendes Thebaines*" pp. 155
 sqq.
- 6 Schol. Pind. Ol. 1, 144.
 Schol. Eur. Orest. 5.
 cf. Hellan. in Schol. Hom. Il. 2,105; and
 Mantissa Proverba in Paroemiogr. gr. ed. Got-
 ting. II, 773.
- 7 Plut. parall. Gr. et Rom. h. 33.
- 8 Schol. Pind. Ol. 1,144.
- 9 Aristoph. Byzant. in Hypoth. Eur. Phoen.
 “(Chrysippus) who was his son by another woman,
 and not by Hippodameia, daughter of Oinomaos.”
 Schol. Hom. Il. 2,105 “Pelops, having a son,
 Chrysippus, by a former wife, married Hippo-
 dameia, daughter of Oinomaos.”
- 10 Hyg. Fab. 271—Chrysippus is mentioned among
 the youths of extraordinary beauty, i. e., Adonis,
 Hyacinthus, Narcissus, Hylas, etc., and meets with

a similar fate.—

cf. the tale of Argennos who was loved by Agamemnon.

cf. Hyg. Fab. 85 "*Laius Labdaci filius Chrysippum, Pelopis filium nothum, propter formae dignitatem Nemeae ludis rapuit.*"

11 Hyg. Fab. 85.

12 Pseudo-Pisandros in Schol. Eur. Phoen. 1760 (transl. Legras. p. 34) "*Laios le premier s'abandonna à cet amour contre nature.*"

For Ps.-Pisand. cf. Macrob. V, 2, 4, "*Qui (Pisander) inter graecos poetas eminet opere quod a Nuptiis Jovis incipiens.*"

Arist. Byz. in Hypoth. Eur Phoen.

Athenaeus XIII, 79-603 a: "paederasty first came over to the Greeks from the Cretans, as Timaeus relates. But others say that Laius, when he was the guest friend at Pelops's court, made a beginning of this kind of love in his passion for his host's son, Chrysippus, whom he seized, placed in his chariot and fled with to Thebes." He goes on to tell how the Celti, a barbarian tribe, preferred boys to their beautiful wives, sometimes indeed, enjoying both; and how Herodotus mentions that this *μαθεῖν το παισὶ χρῆσθαι* was known to the Persians.

Laius was clearly not a homosexual because he had prolonged relations with Jocasta, and even procreated a son, so his criminal sensuality may be regarded as a perversion which might have come to any heterosexual under similar conditions.

cf. Block *The Sexuality of our Times*. Rebman, London, 1908, p. 547.

- 13 P. Décharme *Euripides and the Spirit of his Dramas* (transl. Loeb) p. 159.
- 14 Ael. De Nat. Anim. VI, 15.
Var. Hist. II, 21.
- 15 Cic. Tusc. Disp. IV, 33, 71. "*Atque, ut muliebris amores omittam, quibus maiorem licentiam natura concessit, quis aut de Ganymedi raptu dubitat, quid poëtae velint, aut non intellegit, quid apud Euripidem et loquatur et cupiat Laius?*" (Cited by L. Constans, "*La Légende d'Oedipe*," p. 18).
- 16 Athen. XIII, 79-602a, 601a.
Plato. Symp. p. 180a.
- 17 Nicol. Damasc. F. H. G. III, 366, 15.
Cic. Tusc. Disp. IV, 33, 71.
Apollod. Bibl. 3, 5, 5, 10.
Schol. Eur. Phoen. 1760.
Dositheos F. H. G. IV, 402, 7.
- 18 Praxilla frg. 6 (Athen. XIII, 79, 5, 603a).
cf. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, "*Trag. Graec. fr.*

Proöem." Gött. 1893. "It is better to read here ὑπο Διός than ὑπ'Οιδίποδος, the latter being the emendation of Valckmaer (*Diatrbie* 23)." Valckmaer joins this with Schol. Eur. Phoen. 60.

19 Hyg. Fab. 271 "*Chrysiippus, Pelopis filius, quem Theseus rapuit.*" Probably due to a blunder. (O. Gruppe. "Gr. Myth. u. Rel., p. 508 N. 2).

20 Apollod. Bibl. 3, 5, 8, 2 "for Hera sent the Sphinx."

Dio Chrysost. or 11 p. 169 (Dind.).

cf. Overbeck, *Her. Gall.*, I, 1.

21 Pseudo-Pisand. in Schol. Eur. Phoen. 1760.

22 Pind. Ol. II, 24 sqq.

cf. the probable form of the oracle as given in:

I Hypoth. Soph. O. T.

II Hypoth. Eur. Phoen.

Aesch. Sept. c. Theb. 745 sqq. "For I speak of the ancient transgression with its speedy punishment; yet it abides unto the third generation; since Laius, in spite of Apollo, who had thrice declared in the central oracles of Pytho that, dying without issue, he would save the state, did, notwithstanding, overcome by his friends, in his infatuation beget his own destruction, the parricide Oedipus."

23 "*Les Légendes Thebaines,*" p. 51.

24 Eur. Phoen. 21.

Alexander of Aphrodisias, "*De Fato*" 31, p. 98 (Orelli).

Apollod. Bibl. 3, 5, 7, 1 ὁδε οἴνωθεὶς συνηλθε τη γυναικί.

Hypoth. Eur. Phoen.

25 Aesch. Sept. c. Theb. 750 sqq. ("Acc. to Schneidewin" S. v. O., p. 179 the ἀβουλιαν or ἀβουλιὰς refer to the wife).

26 Hypoth. Eur. Phoen.

(prob. Aesch. Sept. c. Theb. 750 sqq.)

27 Vide nn. 34 and 35.

28 Soph. O. T. vv. 807 sqq.

29 Soph. O. T. vv. 334 sqq.

30 This curse probably implied more than we generally understand.

cf. J. C. Lawson *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* in which the author thinks that Sophocles called down upon his sons the curse of the *vrykolakas*, the meaning of which term will be explained later.

pp. 419 sqq. "But he (Euripides) was not alone in employing it (superstition of *vrykolakas*) for dramatic purposes. In the pages of Sophocles too and of Aeschylus there are passages which only a knowledge of this superstition can explain adequately. First among these is the climax of that

speech in which Oedipus, blind and outcast, denounces his undutiful son (O. C. 1383 sqq.) The last phrase of this denunciation, ('and I call on Tartarus in whose hated gloom my father lies, to drive thee from his home') is that with which I am concerned.—Now even if the word ἀποκίζω could in this context bear any of the meanings ascribed to it such an euphemism following upon the explicit threats that Polynices should be slain by his own brother's hand would be an imbecile anticlimax—., Tartarus is here besought, as plainly as language can express it, to drive Polynices out, not to take him in. There can be only one explanation of that prayer. Polynices' death already has been foretold; but his father's curse pursues him beyond death. Tartarus, in whose keeping the dead should lie, is conjured to drive him forth from the home of the dead, even as the peasants now pray that the earth may cast out those whom they hate. Thus Sophocles . . . proclaims that the belief in the non-dissolution or the rejection of the body by the earth and the powers under the earth was a terror as potent then as it is now, and an ever effective weapon of malediction."

p. 364. (In explanation of the *vrykolakas*). "The most common form of the Greek name for this

species of vampire (causing abnormal condition of the dead) is Βρυκόλακας. I prefer henceforth to adopt a transliteration of the Greek word, and . . . to employ the name *vrykolakas*. (plu.-kes.)

“(Quotes Leo Allatius) ‘The *vrykolakas*,’ he writes, ‘is the body of a man of evil and immoral life—very often of one who has been excommunicated by his bishop. Such bodies do not, like those of other men, suffer decomposition after burial nor turn to dust, but having, as it appears, a skin of extreme toughness become swollen and distended all over, so that the joints can scarcely be bent; the skin becomes stretched like the parchment of a drum, and when struck gives out the same sound; from this circumstance the *vrykolakas* has received the name *tympanios* (“drum-like”).’ Into such a body,’ he continues, ‘the devil enters, and issuing from the tomb goes about, chiefly at night, knocking at doors and calling one of the household. If such a one answers, he dies next day, but a *vrykolakas* never calls twice, so the inhabitants of Chios secure themselves by always waiting for a second call at night before replying.’”

31 G. Gascoigne (and F. Kinwelmersh), *Jocasta* translated from the Italian of Lodovico Dolce. Ed. Cunliffe. *Jocasta* I, 3, 2.

- 32 Ibid. Argument to Jocasta. (p. 131).
- 33 Shak. Lear I, 1, 20 sq. (Said of Edmund by Gloucester).
- 34 Soph. O. T. 717 sqq.
- 35 Aesch. in Arist. Ran. 1190.
 Vide Höfer in Roscher's "Ausf. Lex. d. Gr. u. Röm. Myth." (v. sub. Oedipus,—Aussetzung u. Errettung. Sp. 705 sqq.)
- 36 Schol Eur. Phoen. 26.
- 37 Schol. Eur. Phoen. 60. (cf. note 18).
- 38 Nicol. Damasc. frg. 15 (Mueller, F. H. G. III, 366) or frg. 9 (Dind. Hist. Gr. Min. vol. I, p. 15).
 Vide Schneidewin "Die Sage vom Oedipus," p. 174.
- 39 In the Oedipodeia: acc. to Schol. Eur. Phoen. 1760 and Zenob. 2, 68.
- 40 Eur. Phoen. 44 sq. and Schol. ad. loc.
 Schol. Eur. Phoen. 1760.
- 41 Stat. Theb. 7, 354 sqq.
 Schol. Stat. Theb. 2, 68.
 (Naubolus is referred to as *Lai auriga* in Schol. Stat. Theb. 7, 355 and 358).
- 42 cf. E. E. G. in *Makers of Hellas*, a critical inquiry into the philosophy and religion of ancient Greece. (introd. notes and concl. by E. B. Jevons; Lon-

don, Griffith, 1903) p. 402. In justification of Laius's demand he says we must bear in mind—

- I That an old man, bound on an official mission, and especially one of a sacred character (as the immediate vicinity of Delphi here betokened), was himself sacred for the time.
- II That the person of a herald was universally regarded as inviolable.
- III That it was absolutely impossible for the chariot to move out of the wheel-ruts for the passage of vehicles in the rocky path (vide C. Curtius "*Gesch. des Wegbahns bei den Griechen*," pp. 14, 15). Hence it was here part of the herald's duty to clear the way before it."

43 cf. De Quincy's *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* works, vol. XIII (ed. Masson).

44 cf. Soph. O. T. 558 sqq. Oedipus asks Creon how long ago Laius met his end. Presumably he himself did not know, or had thought so little on it that it had slipped his memory.

45 Soph. O. T. 1252 sqq.

46 Höfer, in Roscher (vid. n. 35) Sp. 731, Z 35 sqq.

47 E. E. G. *Makers of Hellas*, p. 402.

48 cf. Soph. O. T. 379.

49. Pausanias IX, 5, 10 sqq. (Frazer).

50 Hom. Od. 11, 271 sqq.

51 For Euryganeia's not having children cf.—Pherecydes in Schol. Eur. Phoen. 63.

Apollod. Bibl. 3⁷ 5, 28, 7.

Paus. IX, 5, 11

For Eurygane, wife of Oedipus and mother of his children after the death of Jocasta cf.—Scholl. Eur. Phoen. 1760 and 13.

52 Cinaethon (author), but about this there can be no certainty.

53 Epimenides in Schol. Eur. Phoen. 13.

54 John Milton "*Il Penseroso*" vv. 25 sq.

55 Gurdon, P. R. T. (Colonel). *The Khasis* (London, 1907) pp. 94 and 123. Cited by J. G. Frazer in *Golden Bough* (*The Magic Art*, vol. II, p. 114).

56 B. F. Matthes, "*Over de âdâ's of gewoonten der Makassaren en Boegineezer,*" *Verslagen en Mededeelingen der koninklijke Adakemie van Wetenschappen, Afdeeling Letterkunde, Derde Reeks*, II. (Amsterdam, 1885) p. 182. "In the Buginese language this misdeed (Incest) is called *sâpa-tâna*, which, literally translated, signifies that the *ground* (*tâna*) which has been polluted with the blood of such a person must above all be *shunned* (*sâpa*)." (Quoted in J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough, Magic*

Art, vol. II, p. 110).

57. J. G. Frazer, *Golden Bough* (*Magic Art*, vol. II, p. 114)' "among the Hebrews we read how Job, passionately protesting his innocence before God, declares that he is no adulterer (Job XXXI, 11 sqq.—rev. vers.). Job affirms adultery to be destructive of the fruits of the ground which is just what many savages still believe. This interpretation of his words is strongly confirmed by the narrative in Genesis (Gen. XII. 10-20; XX, 1-18), where we read how Sarah, Abraham's wife, was taken into the harem by a king who did not know her to be the wife of the Patriarch, and how thereafter God visited the king and his household with great plagues, especially by closing up the wombs of the king's wives and his maid servants, so that they bore no children. It was not till the king had discovered and confessed his sin, and Abraham had prayed God to forgive him, that the king's women again became fruitful. These narratives seem to imply that adultery, even when it is committed in ignorance, is a cause of plague and especially of sterility among women. Again, in Leviticus, after a long list of sexual crimes, we read (Lev. XVIII, 24 sqq.) 'Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled

which I cast out before you: (25) *And the land is defiled*: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.' This passage appears to imply that the land itself was somehow physically tainted by sexual transgressions so that it could no longer support the inhabitants." (The following is quoted in the text). The author adds the statement, supported by examples to prove it, that "the Romans, like other people, attributed to sexual immorality a tendency to blast the fruits of the earth and of the womb."

- 58 Pherecydes (frg. 48) in Schol. Eur. Phoen. 53.
 59 Schol. Eur. Phoen. 26.
 60 Schol. Hom. Il. 4, 376.
 61 Soph. O. T. vv. 216-275.
 62 Aesch. Sept. c. Theb. 785 sqq. (Dind.).
 63 Höfer, in Roscher's "*Ausf. Lex. d. Gr. u. Röm. Myth.*" v. sub Oedipus. Sp. 731, Z 67.
 64 Athen. XI, 465 I.
 Theb, frg. 2.
 65 Schol. Laur. ad. Soph. Oed. Col. 1375.
 Theb. Frg. 3.
 66 Eur. Phoen. 64 sqq.
 67 Soph. O. C. 1370 sqq.
 68 John Adam *The Religious Teachers of Greece*, pp.

170 sqq.

- 69 E. E. G. *Makers of Hellas*, p. 411. "Barring this last hot outburst, let us note that, in cursing his unnatural sons, Oedipus sinned not, *according to the ethics of his age*. He is only giving them up to the punishment which, even among the chosen people, would have overtaken them. Here the unwritten law of the Greek met the written law of the Hebrew. Under the Mosaic law the sentence stood fast: 'He that curseth his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death' (Exod. XXI, 17), a sentence which embraced not merely the cursing of the lips, but the unnatural spirit which would withhold from father or mother the necessities of life or the honour due to them. (cf. Matt. XV, 4-6) (Vide n. 30 for Lawson's explanation of the *vrykolakas* in connection with the curse).
- 70 R. C. Jebb. *Introd. to Soph. O. C.* p. XXII.
- 71 *Soph. Antig.* 614 (vid. 604 sqq.).
- 72 *Makers of Hellas*, p. 386.
- 73 *Hom. Od.* 1, 32 sqq. (*Zeus loquitur*) "Lo, you now, how vainly mortal men do blame the gods! For of us they say comes evil, whereas they even of themselves, through the blindness of their own hearts, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained." (transl. Butcher and Lang.)

- 74 Hypoth. Vat. Eur. Phoen.
 Aristoph. Byz. Hypoth. Eur. Phoen.
 Hypoth. Aesch. Sept. c. Theb.
 Schol. Eur. Phoen. 60, 69.
- 75 *Makers of Hellas*, p. 396.
- 76 *Dreams and Myths*, by Karl Abraham. (Berlin)
 Translated by Dr. William I. White. (New York
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 ing Company). (Following quotation from an ar-
 ticle *Why We Long for the Death of Our Rela-
 tives* in *Current Opinion*, vol. LV. no. 1, July,
 1913) "The legend of Oedipus, who unwittingly
 marries his own mother, Jocasta, and, though
 guiltless in intent, pays the penalty for this unholy
 act, is a mythical representation of this general
 tendency in human nature. Freud would explain
 the mystery of Hamlet in the same way. Hamlet
 is unable to take vengeance on the man who has
 supplanted and murdered his father because he
 himself in his early youth had wished his father's
 death. The wish has been vigorously repressed and
 he is at present unconscious of it, but it still exists
 in him unconsciously and produces the inhibitory
 effects depicted in the play. Freud considers that
 repressed wishes of this nature are the principal
 factor in the production of all the psychoneuroses."

(cf. *Introd.*).

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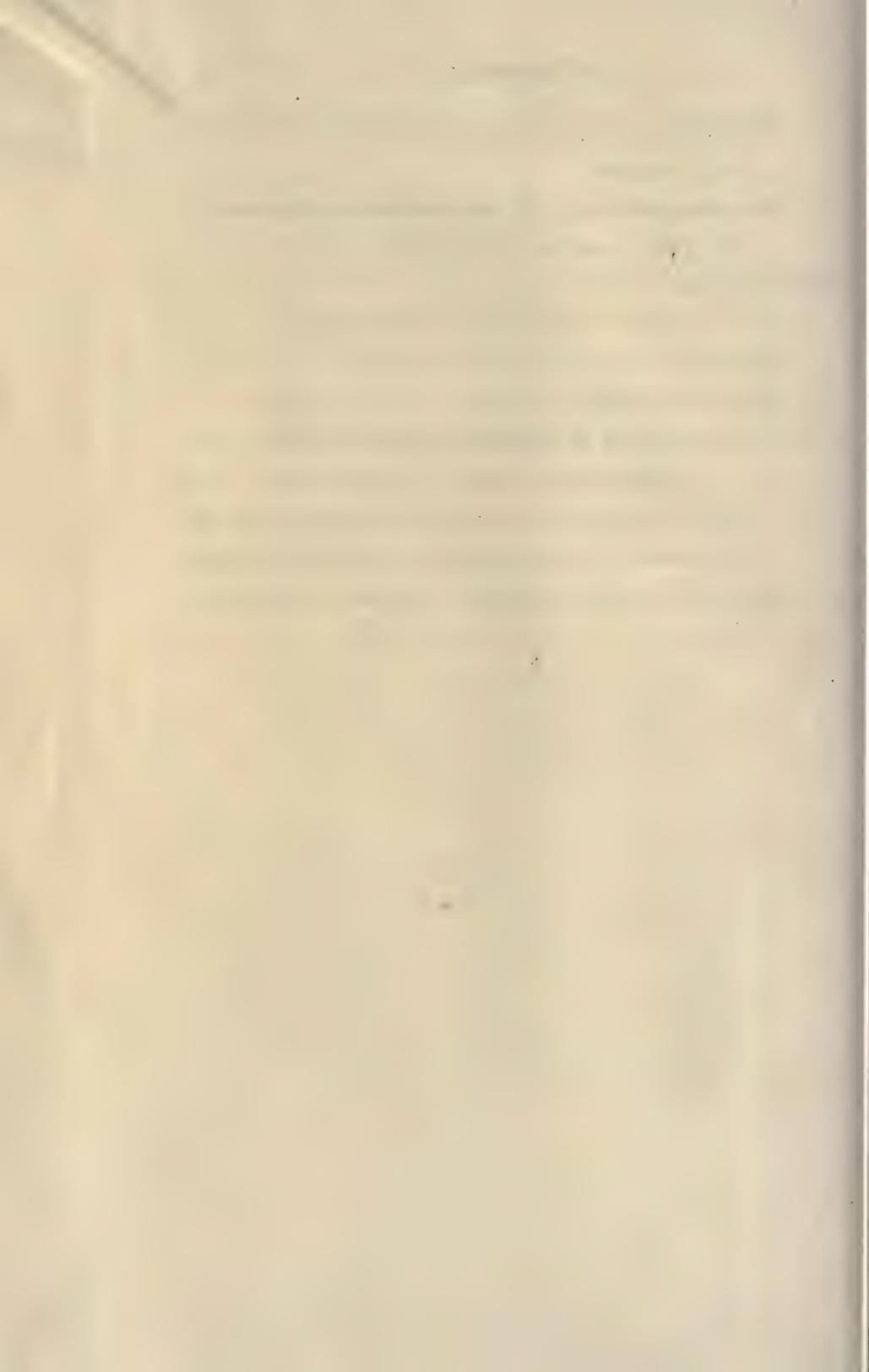
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note 1.



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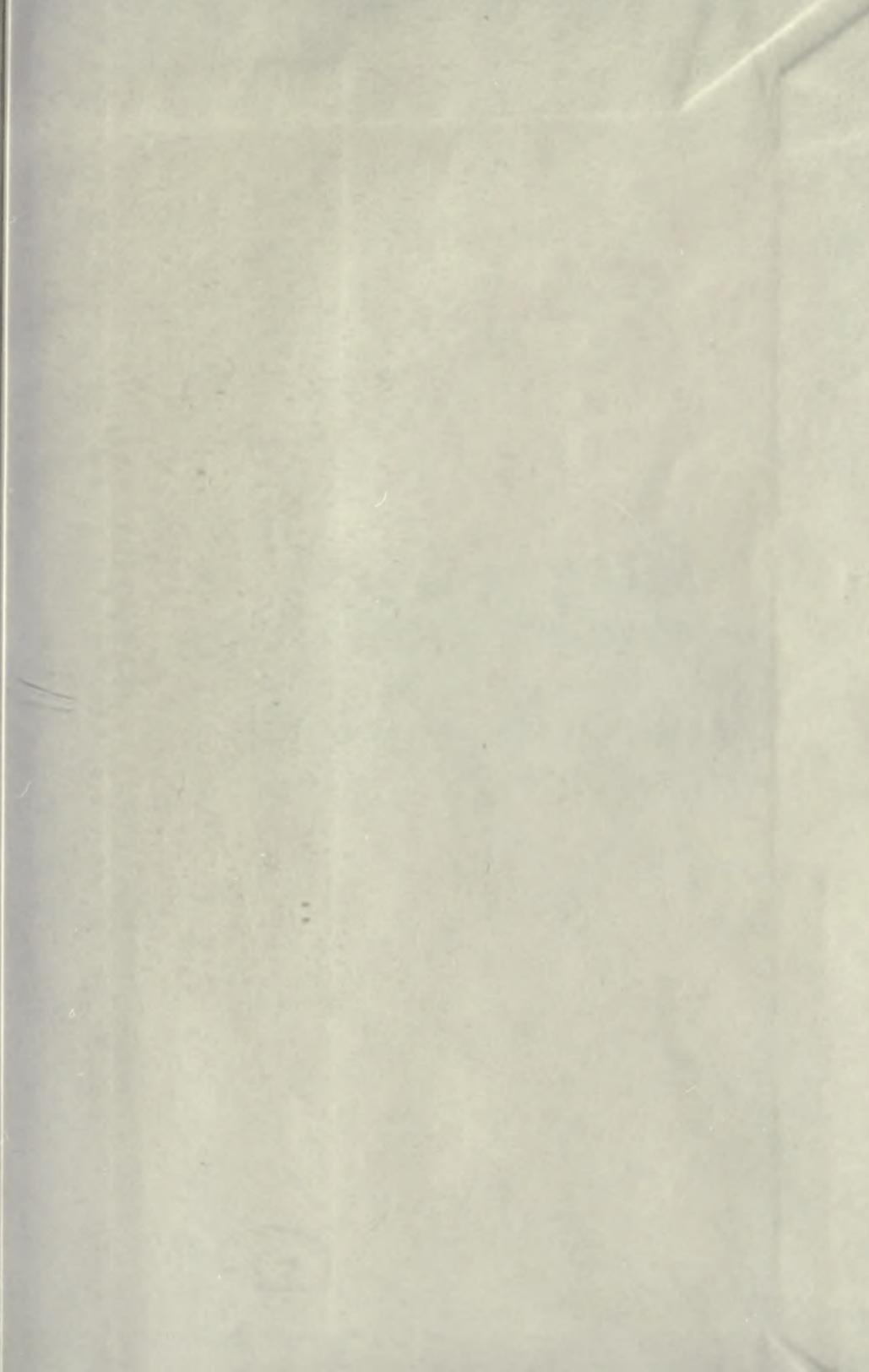
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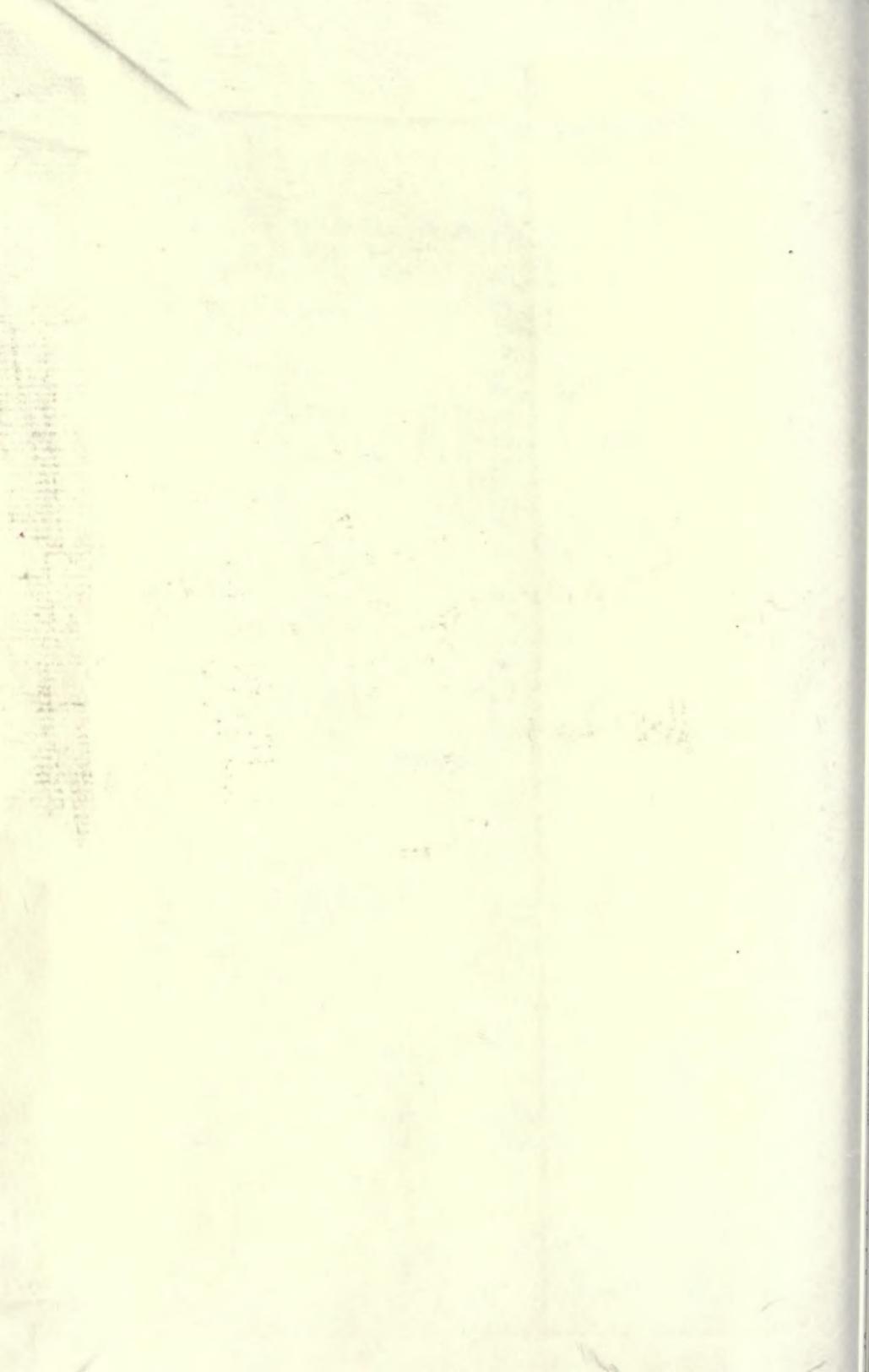
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