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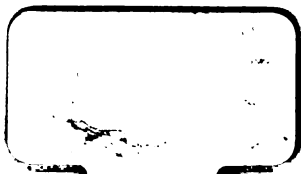
THE GIFT OF

SAMUEL ABBOTT GREEN, M.D.,

OF BOSTON.

(Class of 1851.)

20 Jan. 1887.



Cover

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REMARKS UPON

A Coin of Sicyon,

—BY—

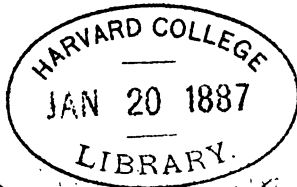
HENRY PHILLIPS, JR.

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*Dr. J. A. Allen,
of Boston.*

Remarks upon a Coin of Sicyon in Achaia.

The coin which has attracted my attention is a hemidrachm, struck about 250 B. C., bearing on the obverse a chimæra, with the inscription Sigma Iota ; reverse, a dove flying, Sigma in field.

Sicyon, now *Basitico*, in the Peloponnesus, was the capital of the country of the same name. It was among the most ancient of the inhabited portions of Greece, preserving an autonomy under varying vicissitudes, and ultimately becoming a member of the Achaian League. It had the reputation of being a very dissolute and luxurious city, full of effeminacy. It was in Sicyon that the woes of Adrastus were sung by the Bacchic choir, and it was here that Cleisthenes "animated by a desire to suppress the national mythology, restored the ancient Dionysiac function."

The first thought which presents itself to our minds is that the emblems impressed upon this coin were not mere idle devices chosen at random, but that there has been a time when they were living representatives of ideas, and symbolized something commonly known and well understood. But that day has long passed, and we must now delve for what remains of meaning under the accumulations of ages of ignorance and superstition. By certain authors the myth is thought to have emanated from the brains of priests and sages, "in order to convey some weighty doctrine or momentous truth which could not be communicated in abstract terms to weak intelligences ; each myth was a dark speech uttered in parables." After the lapse of twenty centuries it is not possible, in the case of the majority of these creations which have survived, to formulate a system of philosophy, body of divinity, or historical sketch of men

and manners. Yet much remains that may be understood, and with a reasonable prospect of success we may undertake to find the abstruse meanings of some of the most promising of these old-time traditions. Whether we assume that myths arose from the degradation of language and thought, or whether they had originally a historical foundation in the exploits of men in ages long gone by, or whether they were relics and emanations of Nature-worship,—in any event something may be found at the basis of many of these archaic legends; something that they once meant, and that those who heard and saw them received and comprehended.

What then was the signification on this coin of the dove, and that of the chimæra?

Among the ancients the dove was held to be especially sacred; it was the interpreter which bore the messages of the gods to mankind, and was looked upon as an important bird of presage. Seamen frequently sent forth a dove from their vessels, and from its movements would draw an augury as to the probable success or failure of their voyage.

Upon a coin of Eryx is found on the obverse a head of Janus, on the reverse a dove, the meaning of the emblem, according to Bryant, being identical in each case; Janus (EANUS, OINAΞ), is the same word as the Hebrew Jonah, which signifies a dove. The colony which settled at Cumæ, the seat of the Sibyl, was said to have been conducted to the place of their abode by a dove.

Herodotus tells the story of two black pigeons which flew away from Thebes in Egypt. One settled in Libya, the other arrived at Dodona, where it alighted on a beech tree, and, speaking with a human voice, ordered that an oracle to the honor of Zeus should be erected on that spot. The explanation offered of this fable was that two of the females who officiated as priestesses in the temple of Zeuth at Thebes, were carried away into captivity by the Phœnicians, one sold to Libya, the other taken to Greece. The color of the so-called doves of course refers to the complexion of the priestesses; their being called doves, and said to

minister food to the gods, refers to their sacerdotal services and sacrifices in the honor of their tutelar divinity; their speaking with a human voice, to their ability to converse in the Hellenic tongue. The Greeks considered all dwellers outside of the charmed circle of Hellas as barbarians, and their languages as not being much better than the inarticulate expressions of animals; hence their surprise that these black pigeons could speak with a human voice, *i. e.*, that these African women could converse in Greek, and bear to the rude country of early heroes, the refined civilizations of the morning land.*

Hesychius says that the Peleiai were a species of doves, and that also the same name was given to the priestesses of Dodona. The learned Bryant mentions the fact that in many of the temples sacred to the worship of Zeuth, that divinity was represented as a dove. In the Greek stories, Zeus is fabled to have visited Phthia, in the form of that bird; the daughters of Anius were changed into doves; Aphrodite cured Aspasia of a tumor by means of a dove; and an important feature of the funereal games of Patroclus consisted in the shooting of arrows at a dove, which was hung to the mast of a ship. The dove (according to De Gubernatis) appears in the Rig Vedas, sometimes dark or gray colored, the funereal dove, the messenger of the nocturnal or wintry darkness, and is also a form of *Agnis*, fire. In the Bible we find that Noah let loose from the ark a dove on an exploring expedition; that Jonah, which signifies a dove, was sent by God to announce as his messenger the doom which was impending over the city of Nineveh; the Psalmist longs for "the wings of a dove," when if only speed were desirable, many other birds would have as well or better served the purpose. Evidently the sanctity of the dove was a consideration.

Going further, we find that this bird was the national ensign of the Babylonians, and the standard of the fabulous

* These doves were said to repeat continually, "Zeus is, Zeus was, Zeus will be, Zeus is the greatest of the gods."

Semiramis, who herself was said to have been metamorphosed into a dove. According to Bryant, the name of this queen signifies "the emblem of the Most High;" the same name which was given to one of the gates of Babylon, probably on account of the sacred badge, the SAMA-RAMIS, or dove, being engraved above its portals as an ornament or by way of distinction.

The worship of this bird prevailed at Emesa in Syria, and Hieropolis, at which latter place a sacred statue upon whose head rested two golden doves was an especial object of reverence. Isis occasionally is represented in a similar manner.

We pass now to the consideration of the obverse, from birds to beasts.

The Chimæra is boldly drawn, with the muscular relief which is always so prominent in the coinage of the ancient Greeks. It was a beast having the heads of a lion, a goat, and a dragon, which vomited fire and flames from each of its three mouths. The foreparts of its body were those of a lion, the middle of a goat, and the hinder those of a dragon.

Ante leo, retroque draco, medioque capella ;

or as Lucretius says :

Prima leo, posterna draco, media ipsa chimæra.

This beast lived in Lycia, and was subjugated by Bellerophon,* aided by his steed Pegasus. According to some authors this story is supposed to refer to a burning mountain in that country bearing the name of *Chimæra*, whose summit being wild and inaccessible was the resort of lions; whose sides being fruitful and full of herbage were the haunt of goats; and whose base being boggy and marshy abounded in serpents. That Bellerophon was the first person who dwelt near or upon this mountain, and so, naturally enough, by a use of figurative language familiar in those days and well understood, was reported to have

* Iliad, VI. 198.

conquered the Chimæra. Even at the present time, by a figure of speech, we refer to the wildness of nature, and speak of subduing her, both mentally and physically.

Plutarch's opinion is that this monster was a pirate, whose vessel bore depicted upon its prow the figure of a lion, upon the stern a dragon, and amidships a goat. Other authors hold that the Chimæra represented three robber chieftains, named respectively *Argo* (lion), *Arzalo* (mountain goat), and *Tosibis* (serpent's head), whom Bellerophon slew.

It is not possible after the lapse of more than twenty centuries to say which, if any of these solutions is the correct one. The imagination of the ancients never wearied of inventing fabulous monsters, a circumstance very plausibly explained by the supposition that the later Greeks forgot the explanation of the early myths, and ignorant that they had sprung from hieroglyphics and symbols, accepted these latter as exponents of living realities, and then invented meanings to account for the things which they signified. They thus created out of circumstances or qualities, according to some writers, actual existent beings, more or less monstrous in their natures.

Upon ancient coins have been preserved to us, as well as by other means, representations of the Centaur, Chimæra, Capricornus, Cerberus, Dragon, Gryphon, Hydra, Minotaur, Phœnix, Pegasus, Siren, Sphynx, Scylla and other of the mythological creations of the Greek mind. The meanings of these emblems have been explained in various ways.

Hecatæus says that Cerberus was a serpent which haunted the deep and gloomy caverns of Cape Jænarus. Eusebius, citing Plutarch, is of opinion that Cerberus meant the sun, although the term really signified the temple of the Sun. According to Bryant, that deity was styled by the Amonians, OR and ABOR, that is, "*light the parent*," and "*the parent of light*;" that Cerberus probably in its primitive form was written KIRABOR, "the place of Abor." The same temple was often worshiped in by votaries of different

divinities, and hence was called TOR-CAPHEL, a term easily corrupted by the Greeks into tri kephalos; hence Cerberus was supposed to have three heads.

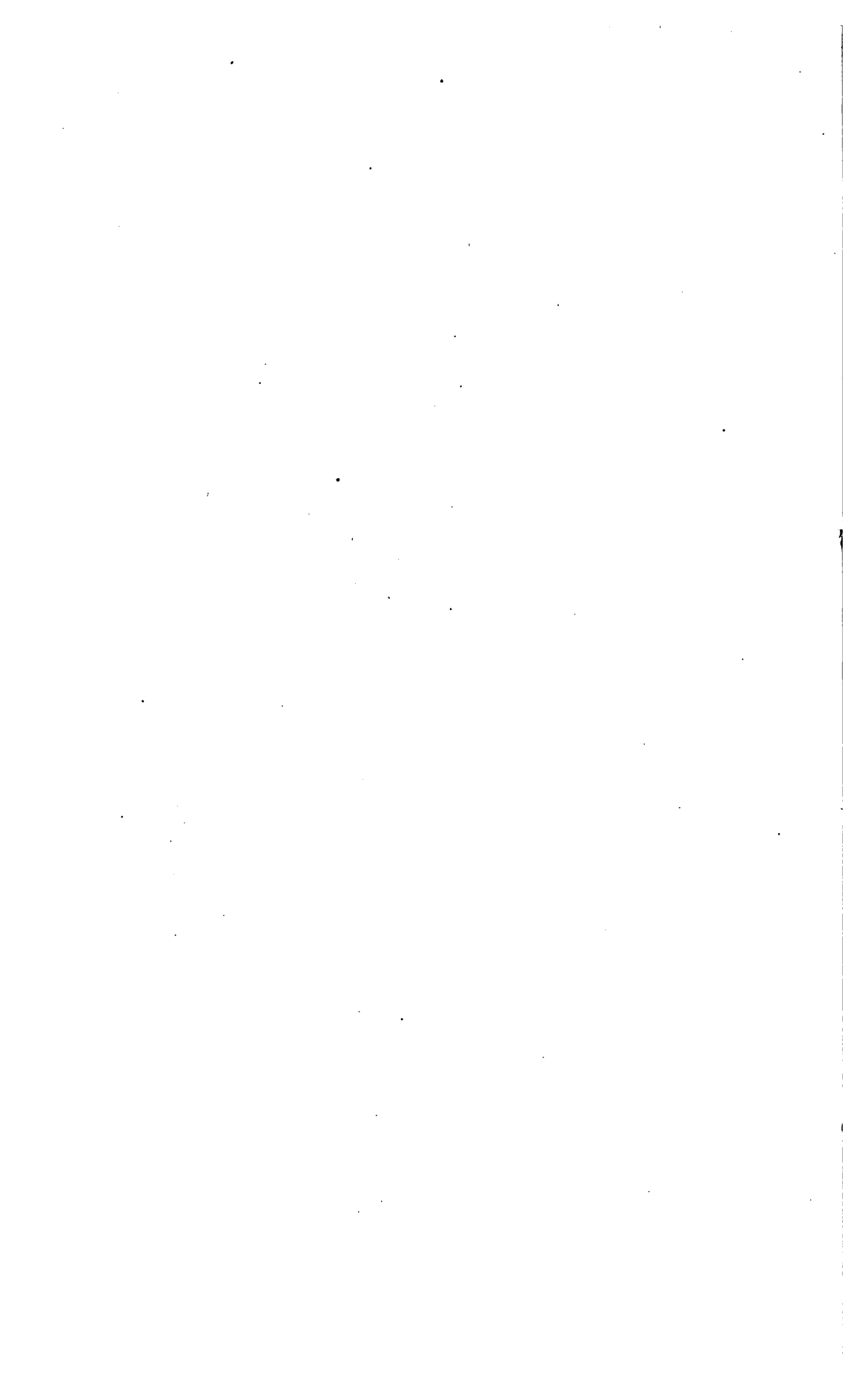
The Gryphon, grups, guardians of treasure, and ever watchful and ever wakeful, are thought by Bryant to have originated from the temples of Apis and Oupis; Kir upis being easily altered into grups or grupes. In these temples were deposited great stores of wealth and precious articles, and their custodians were as wary and as vigilant as these fabled monsters. According to the Grecian stories, and which harmonize very well with this view, the gryphon was of a dual nature, sometimes propitious and benignant, at others malignant and harmful. Ktesias states that they lived in India; that they were quadrupeds as large as wolves, with the legs and claws of a lion, breasts covered with feathers, eyes of flame, and that their nests were of gold. They were sacred in the Hellenic mythology to Nemesis; in latter times to Apollo, whose chariot they drew, thus forming the germ of the superstition so prevalent in the middle ages of the enchanter to whose magic car were harnessed the fearful hippogriffs.

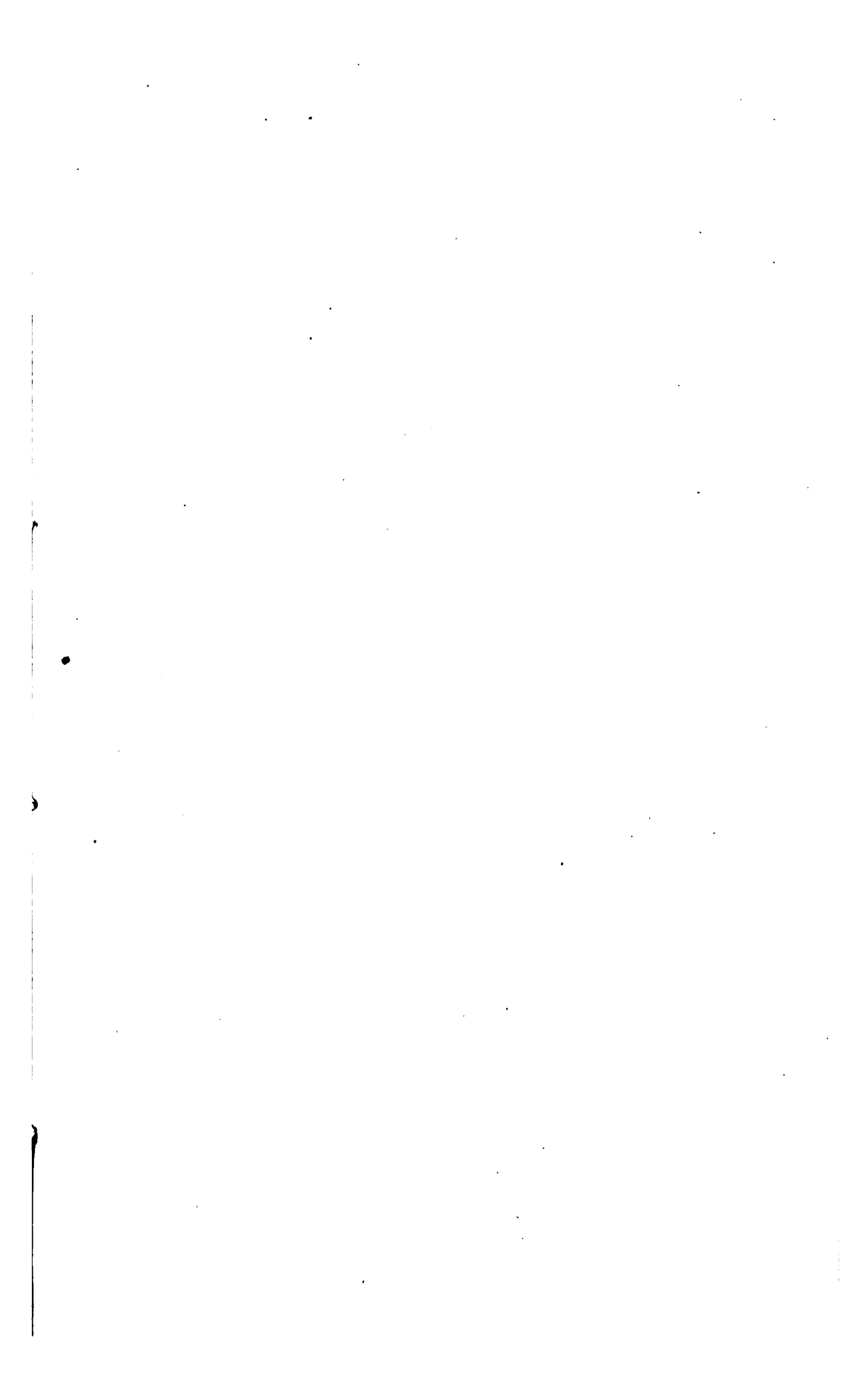
And hence, also, from this source sprang the idea of dragons, Drakon, according to Bryant, being a corruption of Tarchon, or Trachon, a temple erected upon a hillock or mound, and which being a treasure house was frequently also a royal residence. So, when we read of rich hoards of gold and silver and precious stones guarded by a dragon, it may be that such is only the tale of a lofty, well-watched, inaccessible fortress-temple. The dragons of Mauritania, which covered acres of ground, and upon whose backs tall trees and herbage grew, were evidently similar enclosures.

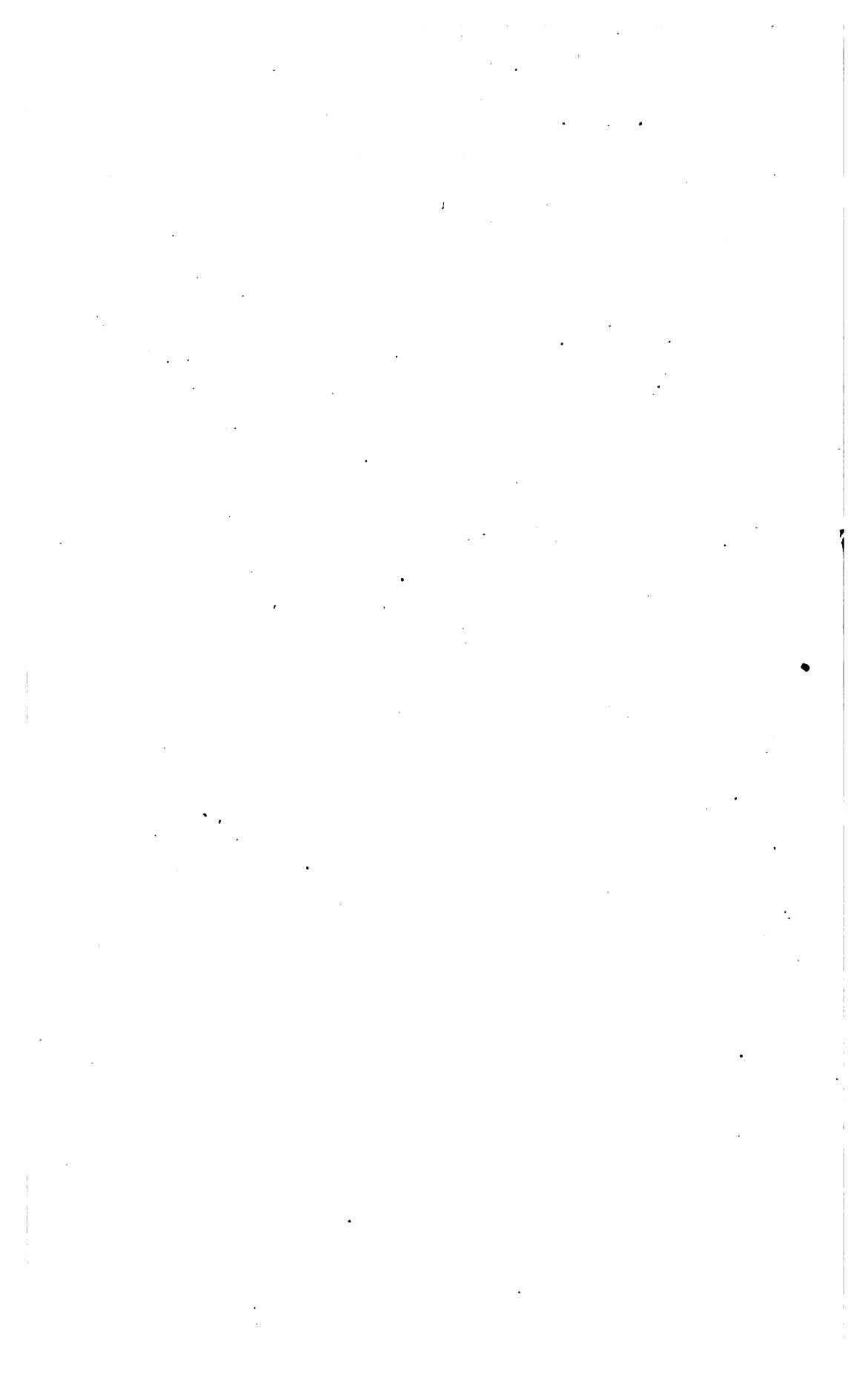
Perhaps the destruction or capture of a dragon was the reduction of one of these colonies or groves in a high place sacred to Ophite worship, and the offering of virgins in exposed situations to dragons or sea monsters, or the demands and devastations of similar beasts among young maidens, may refer to the violent carrying away of such by

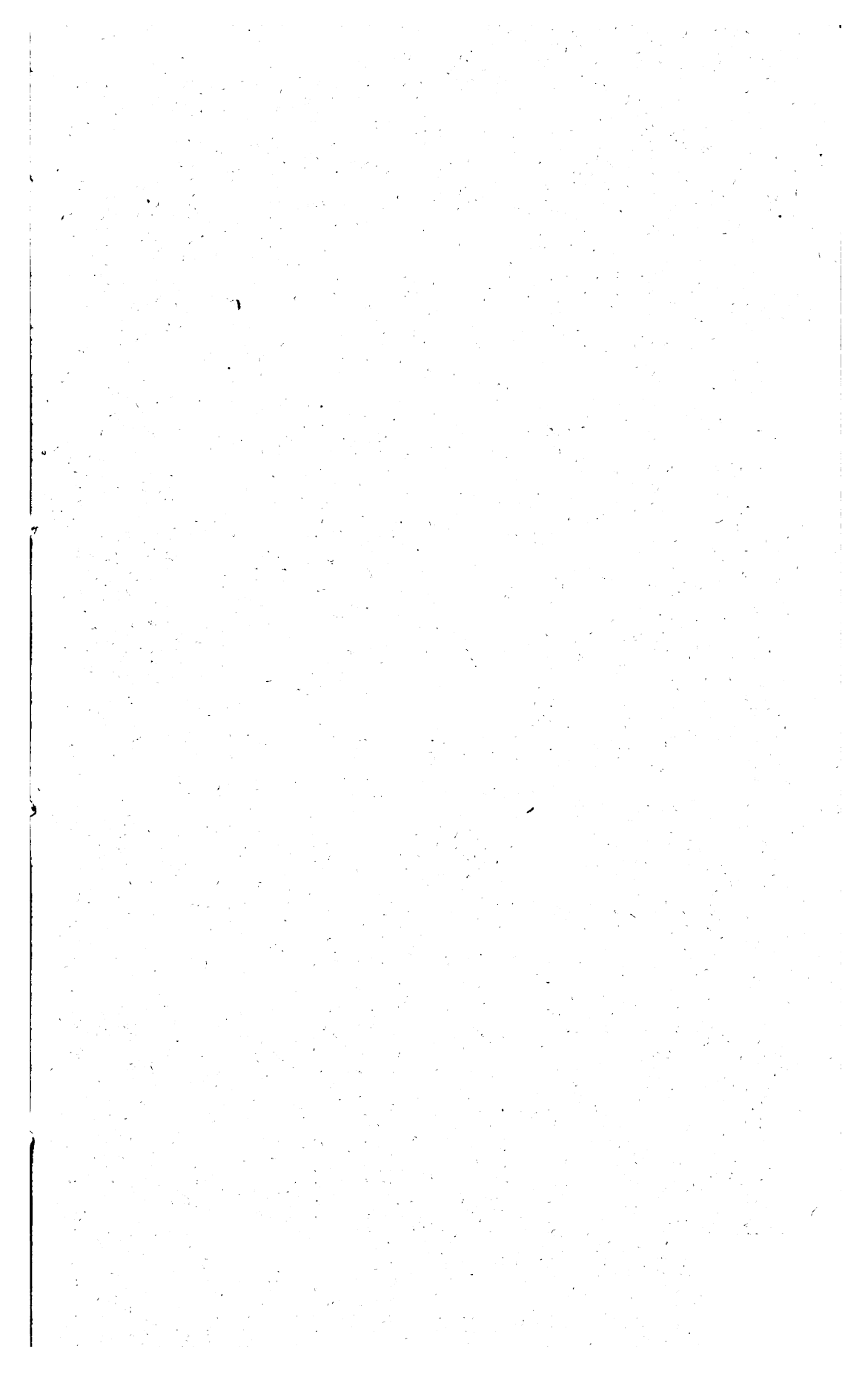
pirate bands; or the tribute of females demanded by colonies of freebooters dwelling in one of these Tarchon, who levied contributions, and in their secure fastnesses, like the robbers of the Rhine in mediæval times, laughed to scorn all the impotent opposition and efforts of resistance of a less hardy race. Through the windows or openings in the upper stories of these towers could always be seen the ever-burning flame sacred to the tutelar divinity of the tarchon, and the glow of the sacrifices offered in his honor. Hence arose the story of the fiery eyes of the dragon.

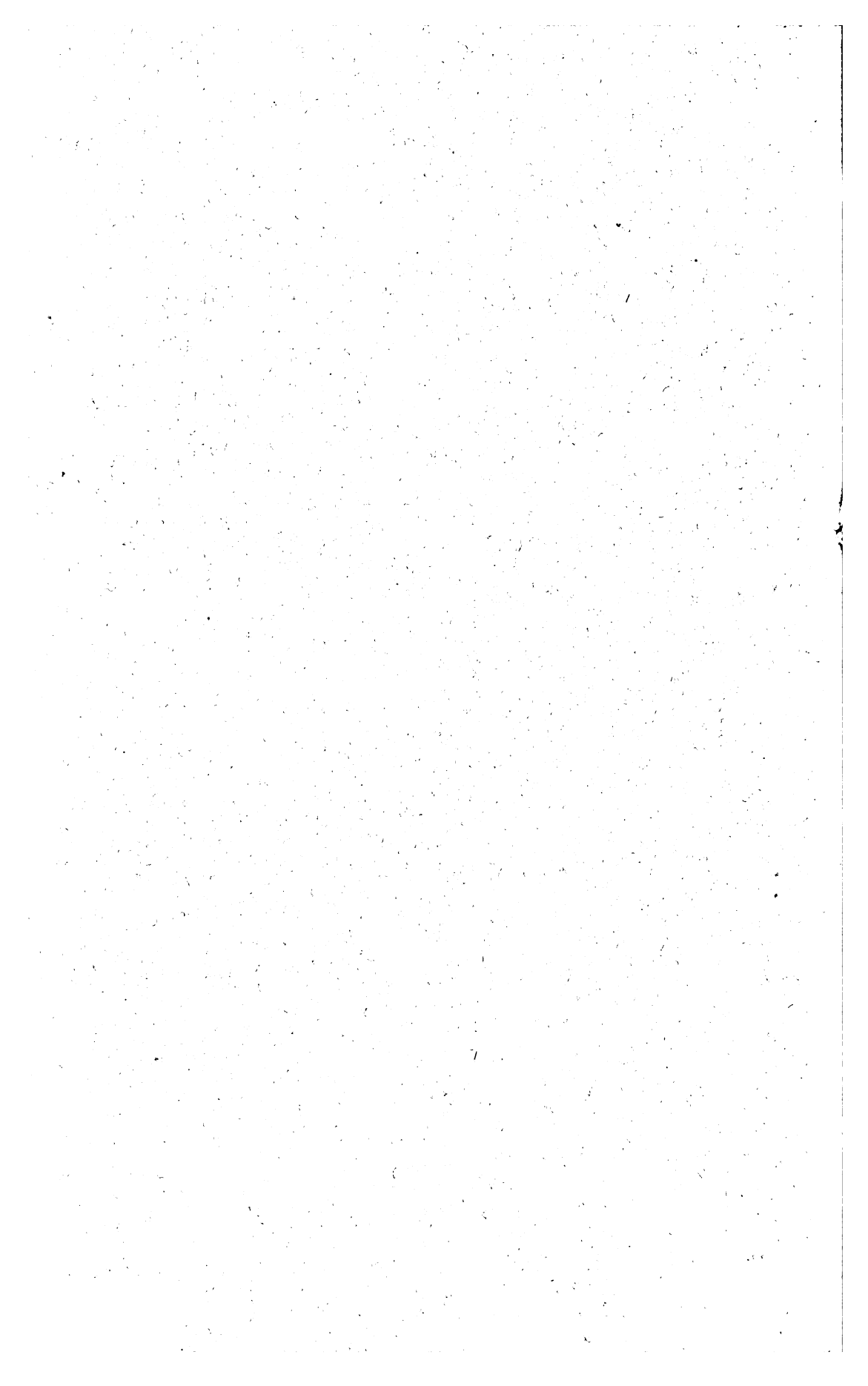
It is needless to go further into detail to give a just idea of the mythological ideas of the ancients. Yet after all we may fairly doubt as to whether truth lies in these interpretations of time-honored myths. It may be that their true solution lies in Nature. "Nature," says Symonds, "is the first, the chief element by which we are to conceive the spirit of the Greeks. The key to their mythology is here. Here is the secret of their sympathies, the wellspring of their deepest thoughts, the primitive potentiality of all they have achieved in art. But Nature alone cannot inform us what that spirit was. In thought the Greeks grew in the same scenes which we may visit; they gazed on them with Greek eyes,—eyes different from ours, and dwelt upon them with Greek minds,—minds how unlike our own! Unconsciously in their long and unsophisticated infancy, the Greeks absorbed and assimilated to their own substance that loveliness which it is left for us only to admire. Between them and ourselves, even face to face with mountain, sky and sea, unaltered by the lapse of years—flow the rivers of Death and Lethe, and the mists of thirty centuries of human life are woven like a veil."

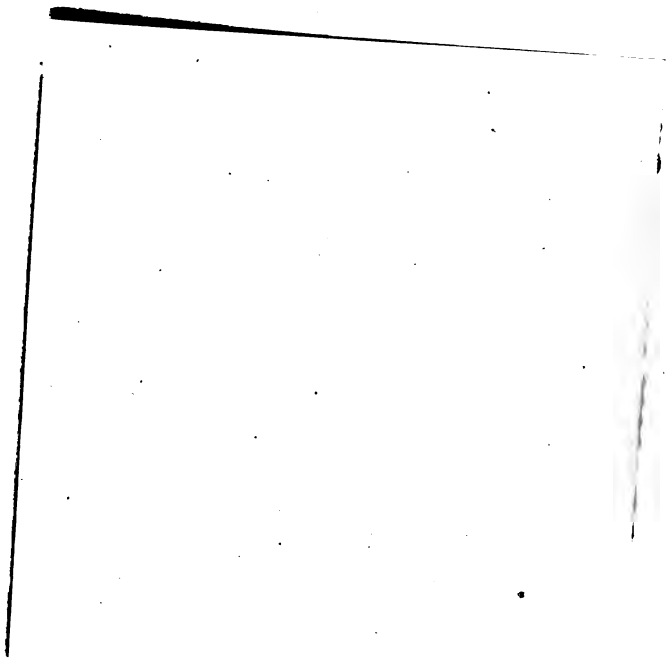












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