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978-1-108-01082-5 - Account of the Harvard Greek Play

Henry Norman

Frontmatter

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### Account of the Harvard Greek Play

In May 1881, students of Harvard University performed Sophocles' masterpiece, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in the original Greek. Witnessed by 6,000 people, this performance was reported far and wide, and has gone down in theatre history as a huge success which excited almost universal enthusiasm. Henry Norman's 1882 book commemorates the performance, providing a record of permanent value for every student of Sophocles. Norman describes the background to the decision to stage the play, and presents key information on Sophocles and the characteristics of Greek tragedy. He then recounts the performance in detail, describing the aspects of the play which made it such a memorable experience, including the music, the setting and the scholarship. The book includes a transcript of the programme and illustrations showing some of the costumes and key moments of the play. It provides a fascinating contemporary account of this landmark in the modern revival of classical Greek theatre.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,  
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108010825](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108010825)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1882  
This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-01082-5 Paperback

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AN ACCOUNT  
OF THE  
HARVARD GREEK PLAY.

BY  
HENRY NORMAN.

To have seen a Grecian play is a great remembrance.

DE QUINCEY.

BOSTON:  
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY.  
1882.

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TO  
PROFESSOR JOHN WILLIAMS WHITE,  
*παρθένου φίλας φίλφ,*  
THIS VOLUME  
IS GRATEFULLY DEDICATED.

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### Note.



THE performance of the Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles in the Theatre of Harvard University in May, 1881, was a memorable event in our quiet academic life. After months of preparation and anxious thought, it took us all by surprise. We had hoped to have a dignified academic performance, which should give classical scholars a vivid impression of one of those tragedies “of stateliest argument,” whose full power is beyond the reach of the mere student, which might revive pleasant recollections in some whose Greek was chiefly a memory of the past, and which might perhaps also interest a few others, who would regard an ancient tragedy, like any other ancient curiosity, with kind and charitable consideration. None were more surprised at the almost universal enthusiasm which the actual performance excited — none, indeed, were more surprised at the effect of the performance upon themselves —

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**Note.**

than those of us who should have understood best the power and grandeur of a tragedy of Sophocles. This was due in no small measure to the scrupulous fidelity with which every one who took part in the performance devoted his best strength to its success ; but it was due also, and more than to all else, to the native power of Attic tragedy, which suddenly revealed itself, even to those who were ignorant of its form and its language alike, as a veritable “possession for all time.”

It is eminently proper that the first performance of a Greek tragedy in America should be commemorated in some permanent record ; and all who were interested in our play will be glad to know that this volume has been prepared for that purpose by one whose intimate relations to the play give him a special right to be its chronicler.

W. W. GOODWIN.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY,  
December, 1881.