

received. The incident marks the uneasy feeling with which the Thebans still regarded the blind exile, and their unwillingness that he should share such light on his own destiny as they could obtain from Apollo.

Oedipus had now grown old in his destitute wanderings, when a sacred mission sent from Thebes to Delphi brought back an oracle concerning him which excited a lively interest in the minds of his former subjects. It was to the effect that the welfare of Thebes depended on Oedipus, not merely while he lived, but also after his death. The Thebans now conceived the desire of establishing Oedipus somewhere just beyond their border. In this way they thought that they would have him under their control, while at the same time they would avoid the humiliation of confessing themselves wrong, and receiving him back to dwell among them. Their main object was that, on his death, they might secure the guardianship of his grave.

The new oracle.

The new oracle obviously made an opportunity for the sons of Oedipus at Thebes, if they were true to their banished father. They could urge that Apollo, by this latest utterance, had condoned any pollution that might still be supposed to attach to the person of Oedipus, and had virtually authorised his recall to his ancient realm. Thebes could not be defiled by the presence of a man whom the god had declared to be the arbiter of its fortunes.

Unhappily, the sons—Polyneices and Eteocles—were no longer in a mood to hear the dictates of filial piety. When they had first reached manhood, they had been oppressed by a sense of the curse on their family, and the taint on their own birth. They had wished to spare Thebes the contamination of their rule; they had been desirous that the regent,—their uncle Creon,—should become king. But presently,—‘moved by some god, and by a sinful mind,’—compelled by the inexorable Fury of their house,—they renounced these intentions of wise self-denial. Not only were they fired with the passion for power, but they fell to striving with each other for the sole power. Eteocles, the younger¹ brother, managed to win over the citi-

The strife between the sons.

¹ See note on v. 375.