T. W. Lumb, excerpt from *Authors of Greece*

No man can ever do justice to this masterpiece. It is so constructed that every detail leads up inevitably to the climax. Slowly, and playing upon all the deepest human emotions, anxiety, hope, gloom, terror and horror, Sophocles works on us as no man had ever done before. It is a sin against him to be content with a mere outline of the play; the words he has chosen are significant beyond description. Again and again they fascinate the reader and always leave him with the feeling that there are still depths of thought left unsounded. The casual mention of the shepherd at the beginning of the play is the first stroke of perfect art; Jocasta's disbelief in oracles is the next; then follows the contrast between the Queen's real motive for leaving and the reason assigned to it by her son; finally, the shepherd in torture is forced to tell the secret which plunges the torturer to his ruin. Where is the like of this in literature? To us it is heart-searching enough. What was it to the Greeks who were familiar with the plot before they entered the theatre? When they who knew the inevitable end watched the King trace out his own ruin in utter ignorance, their feelings cannot have remained silent; they must have found relief in sobbing or crying aloud.

The fault in Oedipus is his ungovernable temper. It is firmly drawn in the play; he is equally unrestrained in anger, despair and hope. He is the typical instance of the lack of good counsel which we have seen was to Sophocles the prime source of a tragedy. Indeed, only a headlong man would hastily marry a widowed queen after he had committed a murder which fulfilled one half of a terrible oracle. He should have first inquired into the history of the Theban royal house. Imagining that the further he was fleeing from Corinth the more certain he was to make his doom impossible of fulfilment, he inevitably drew nearer to it. This is our human lot; we cannot see and we misinterpret warnings; how shall not weaker men tremble for themselves when Oedipus' wisdom could not save him from evil counsel?