

Preface.

THE story of Gyges and Nyssia is an old, old story, belonging to what Giordano Bruno termed the youth of the world of man. It was first told by Herodotus ("Clio," VIII.-XII.), and since then has been re-told by many who have found a psychological interest and study in this historical development of what Gibbon defined as "the soft insinuation of an odious idea"—the idea being murder and regicide.

The name of the guilty queen, parent of this idea, is not found in Herodotus, but has been preserved by Hephaestion of Alexandria. The legend of the magic ring comes to us from Plato, a truly respectable source. A somewhat similar story to that of Nyssia is told by Gibbon, in Chapter XLV. of the "Decline and Fall," concerning Rosamond, wife of Alboin, king of the Lombards, and the armour-bearer, Helmichis. Unlawful passion and ambition have in all ages found kindred manifestation, and it is especially true that, as Horace puts it, in a passage ("Sat.," I. iii. 107-110) not to be translated here, in every such tragedy the historian finds the key only when he has found the woman. But, despite section II. of this poem, the main burden of the iniquity may not always be hers. *Not always*,—it is better to think so.

My own proper excuse for taking a theme so hoary is that, as I believe, it is here treated from a new standpoint, where whosoever will may take his place beside the author, and question the theory of retribution when used as an auxiliary to the decalogue.