

A painting of a woman in a black shawl with her arms raised, set against a background of a tree and a classical column.

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**THE WORKS OF
AESCHYLUS**

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The Works of Aeschylus.

These are late 19th, early 20th-century translations by E. D. A. Morshead.

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Agamemnon

Dramatis Personae

A WATCHMAN
A HERALD
CHORUS
AGAMEMNON
AEGISTHUS
CLYTEMNESTRA
CASSANDRA

The Scene is the Palace of Atreus at Mycenae. In front of the Palace stand statues of the gods, and altars prepared for sacrifices.

Agamemnon

A Watchman:

I pray the gods to quit me of my toils,
 To close the watch I keep, this livelong year;
 For as a watch-dog lying, not at rest,
 Propped on one arm, upon the palace-roof
 Of Atreus' race, too long, too well I know
 The starry conclave of the midnight sky,
 Too well, the splendours of the firmament,
 The lords of light, whose kingly aspect shows--
 What time they set or climb the sky in turn--
 The year's divisions, bringing frost or fire.

And now, as ever, am I set to mark
 When shall stream up the glow of signal-flame,
 The bale-fire bright, and tell its Trojan tale--
 "Troy town is ta'en:" such issue holds in hope
 She in whose woman's breast beats heart of man.

Thus upon mine unrestful couch I lie,
 Bathed with the dews of night, unvisited
 By dreams--ah me!--for in the place of sleep
 Stands Fear as my familiar, and repels
 The soft repose that would mine eyelids seal.
 And if at whiles, for the lost balm of sleep,
 I medicine my soul with melody
 Of trill or song--anon to tears I turn,
 Wailing the woe that broods upon this home,
 Not now by honour guided as of old.

But now at last fair fall the welcome hour
 That sets me free, whene'er the thick night glow
 With beacon-fire of hope deferred no more.
 All hail!

A beacon-light is seen reddening the distant sky.

Fire of the night, that brings my spirit day,
 Shedding on Argos light, and dance, and song,
 Greetings to fortune, hail!

Let my loud summons ring within the ears
 Of Agamemnon's queen, that she anon
 Start from her couch and with a shrill voice cry
 A joyous welcome to the beacon-blaze,
 For Ilion's fall; such fiery message gleams
 From yon high flame; and I, before the rest,
 Will foot the lightsome measure of our joy;
 For I can say, "My master's dice fell fair--
 Behold! the triple sice, the lucky flame!"

Now be my lot to clasp, in loyal love,
 The hand of him restored, who rules our home:
 Home--but I say no more: upon my tongue
 Treads hard the ox o' the adage.
 Had it voice,
 The home itself might soothliest tell its tale;
 I, of set will, speak words the wise may learn,
 To others, nought remember nor discern.

Exit. The chorus of old men of Mycenae enter, each leaning on a staff. During their song Clytemnestra appears in the background, kindling the altars.

Chorus:

Ten livelong years have rolled away,
 Since the twin lords of sceptred sway,
 By Zeus endowed with pride of place,
 The doughty chiefs of Atreus' race,
 Went forth of yore,
 To plead with Priam, face to face,
 Before the judgment-seat of War!

A thousand ships from Argive land
 Put forth to bear the martial band,
 That with a spirit stern and strong
 Went out to right the kingdom's wrong--
 Pealed, as they went, the battle-song,
 Wild as the vultures' cry;
 When o'er the eyrie, soaring high,
 In wild bereaved agony,
 Around, around, in airy rings,
 They wheel with oarage of their wings,
 But not the eyas-brood behold,
 That called them to the nest of old;
 But let Apollo from the sky,
 Or Pan, or Zeus, but hear the cry,
 The exile cry, the wail forlorn,
 Of birds from whom their home is torn--
 On those who wrought the rapine fell,
 Heaven sends the vengeful fiends of hell.

Even so doth Zeus, the jealous lord
 And guardian of the hearth and board,
 Speed Atreus' sons, in vengeful ire,
 'Gainst Paris--sends them forth on fire,
 Her to buy back, in war and blood,
 Whom one did wed but many woo'd!
 And many, many, by his will,
 The last embrace of foes shall feel,
 And many a knee in dust be bowed,
 And splintered spears on shields ring loud,
 Of Trojan and of Greek, before
 That iron bridal-feast be o'er!

But as he willed 'tis ordered all,
 And woes, by heaven ordained, must fall--
 Unsoothed by tears or spilth of wine
 Poured forth too late, the wrath divine
 Glares vengeance on the flameless shrine.

And we in gray dishonoured eld,
 Feeble of frame, unfit were held
 To join the warrior array
 That then went forth unto the fray:
 And here at home we tarry, fain
 Our feeble footsteps to sustain,
 Each on his staff--so strength doth wane,
 And turns to childishness again.
 For while the sap of youth is green,
 And, yet unripened, leaps within,
 The young are weakly as the old,
 And each alike unmeet to hold
 The vantage post of war!
 And ah! when flower and fruit are o'er,
 And on life's tree the leaves are sere,
 Age wendeth propped its journey drear,
 As forceless as a child, as light
 And fleeting as a dream of night
 Lost in the garish day!

But thou, O child of Tyndareus,
 Queen Clytemnestra, speak! and say
 What messenger of joy to-day
 Hath won thine ear? what welcome news,
 That thus in sacrificial wise
 E'en to the city's boundaries
 Thou biddest altar-fires arise?
 Each god who doth our city guard,
 And keeps o'er Argos watch and ward
 From heaven above, from earth below--
 The mighty lords who rule the skies,
 The market's lesser deities,
 To each and all the altars glow,
 Piled for the sacrifice!
 And here and there, anear, afar,
 Streams skyward many a beacon-star,
 Conjur'd and charm'd and kindled well
 By pure oil's soft and guileless spell,
 Hid now no more
 Within the palace' secret store.

O queen, we pray thee, whatsoe'er,
 Known unto thee, were well revealed,
 That thou wilt trust it to our ear,
 And bid our anxious heart be healed!
 That waneth now unto despair--

Now, waxing to a presage fair,
 Dawns, from the altar, Hope--to scare
 From our rent hearts the vulture Care.

List! for the power is mine, to chant on high
 The chiefs' emprise, the strength that omens gave!
 List! on my soul breathes yet a harmony,
 From realms of ageless powers, and strong to save!

How brother kings, twin lords of one command,
 Led forth the youth of Hellas in their flower,
 Urged on their way, with vengeful spear and brand,
 By warrior-birds, that watched the parting hour.

"Go forth to Troy", the eagles seemed to cry--
 And the sea-kings obeyed the sky-kings' word,
 When on the right they soared across the sky,
 And one was black, one bore a white tail barred.

High o'er the palace were they seen to soar,
 Then lit in sight of all, and rent and tare,
 Far from the fields that she should range no more,
 Big with her unborn brood, a mother-hare.

And one beheld, the soldier-prophet true,
 And the two chiefs, unlike of soul and will,
 In the twy-coloured eagles straight he knew,
 And spake the omen forth, for good and ill.

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

"Go forth," he cried, "and Priam's town shall fall.
 Yet long the time shall be; and flock and herd,
 The people's wealth, that roam before the wall.
 Shall force hew down, when Fate shall give the word.

But O beware! lest wrath in Heaven abide,
 To dim the glowing battle-forge once more,
 And mar the mighty curb of Trojan pride,
 The steel of vengeance, welded as for war!

For virgin Artemis bears jealous hate
 Against the royal house, the eagle-pair,
 Who rend the unborn brood, insatiate--
 Yea, loathes their banquet on the quivering hare."

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

"For well she loves--the goddess kind and mild--
 The tender new-born cubs of lions bold,
 Too weak to range--and well the sucking child
 Of every beast that roams by wood and wold.

So to the Lord of Heaven she prayeth still,
 "Nay. if it must be, be the omen true!
 Yet do the visioned eagles presage ill;
 The end be well, but crossed with evil too!"

Healer Apollo! be her wrath controll'd,
 Nor weave the long delay of thwarting gales,
 To war against the Danaans and withhold
 From the free ocean-waves their eager sails!

She craves, alas! to see a second life
 Shed forth, a curst unhallowed sacrifice--
 'Twixt wedded souls, artificer of strife,
 And hate that knows not fear, and fell device.

At home there tarries like a lurking snake,
 Biding its time, a wrath unreconciled,"
 "A wily watcher, passionate to slake,
 In blood, resentment for a murdered child."

Such was the mighty warning, pealed of yore--
 Amid good tidings, such the word of fear,
 What time the fateful eagles hovered o'er
 The kings, and Calchas read the omen clear.

(In strains like his, once more,
 Sing woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

Zeus--if to The Unknown
 That name of many names seem good--
 Zeus, upon Thee I call.
 Thro' the mind's every road
 I passed, but vain are all,
 Save that which names thee Zeus, the Highest One,
 Were it but mine to cast away the load,
 The weary load, that weighs my spirit down.

He that was Lord of old,
 In full-blown pride of place and valour bold,
 Hath fallen and is gone, even as an old tale told!
 And he that next held sway,
 By stronger grasp o'erthrown
 Hath pass'd away!
 And whoso now shall bid the triumph-chant arise
 To Zeus, and Zeus alone,
 He shall be found the truly wise.
 'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way
 Of knowledge: He hath ruled,
 Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

In visions of the night, like dropping rain,
 Descend the many memories of pain
 Before the spirit's sight: through tears and dole
 Comes wisdom o'er the unwilling soul--
 A boon, I wot, of all Divinity,
 That holds its sacred throne in strength, above the sky!

And then the elder chief, at whose command
 The fleet of Greece was manned,

Cast on the seer no word of hate,
 But veered before the sudden breath of Fate--
 Ah, weary while! for, ere they put forth sail,
 Did every store, each minish'd vessel, fail,
 While all the Achaean host
 At Aulis anchored lay,
 Looking across to Chalics and the coast
 Where refluent waters welter, rock, and sway;
 And rife with ill delay
 From northern Strymon blew the thwarting blast--
 Mother of famine fell,
 That holds men wand'ring still
 Far from the haven where they fain would be!--
 And pitiless did waste
 Each ship and cable, rotting on the sea,
 And, doubling with delay each weary hour,
 Withered with hope deferred th' Achaeans' warlike flower.

But when, for bitter storm, a deadlier relief,
 And heavier with ill to either chief,
 Pleading the ire of Artemis, the seer avowed,
 The two Atridae smote their sceptres on the plain,
 And, striving hard, could not their tears restrain!
 And then the elder monarch spake aloud--
 "Ill lot were mine, to disobey!
 And ill, to smite my child, my household's love and pride!
 To stain with virgin Hood a father's hands, and slay
 My daughter, by the altar's side!
 Twixt woe and woe I dwell--
 I dare not like a recreant fly,
 And leave the league of ships, and fail each true ally;
 For rightfully they crave, with eager fiery mind,
 The virgin's blood, shed forth to lull the adverse wind--
 God send the deed be well!"

Thus on his neck he took
 Fate's hard compelling yoke;
 Then, in the counter-gale of will abhorr'd, accursed,
 To recklessness his shifting spirit veered--
 Alas! that Frenzy, first of ills and worst,
 With evil craft men's souls to sin hath ever stirred!

And so he steeled his heart--ah, well-a-day--
 Aiding a war for one false woman's sake,
 His child to slay,
 And with her spilt blood make
 An offering, to speed the ships upon their way!

Lusting for war, the bloody arbiters
 Closed heart and ears, and would nor hear nor heed
 The girl-voice plead,

"Pity me, Father!" nor her prayers,
Nor tender, virgin years.

So, when the chant of sacrifice was done,
Her father bade the youthful priestly train
Raise her, like some poor kid, above the altar-stone,
From where amid her robes she lay
Sunk all in swoon away--
Bade them, as with the bit that mutely tames the steed,
Her fair lips' speech refrain,
Lest she should speak a curse on Atreus' home and seed,

So, trailing on the earth her robe of saffron dye,
With one last piteous dart from her beseeching eye
Those that should smite she smote--
Fair, silent, as a pictur'd form, but fain
To plead, "Is all forgot?
How oft those halls of old,
Wherein my sire high feast did hold,"
"Rang to the virginal soft strain,
When I, a stainless child,
Sang from pure lips and undefiled,
Sang of my sire, and all
His honoured life, and how on him should fall
Heaven's highest gift and gain!"
And then--but I beheld not, nor can tell,
What further fate befel:
But this is sure, that Calchas' boding strain
Can ne'er be void or vain.
This wage from Justice' hand do sufferers earn,
The future to discern:
And yet--farewell, O secret of To-morrow!
Fore-knowledge is fore-sorrow.
Clear with the clear beams of the morrow's sun,
The future presseth on.
Now, let the house's tale, how dark soe'er,
Find yet an issue fair!--
So prays the loyal, solitary band
That guards the Apian land.

They turn to Clytemnestra, who leaves the altars and comes forward.

O queen, I come in reverence of thy sway--
For, while the ruler's kingly seat is void,
The loyal heart before his consort bends.
Now--be it sure and certain news of good,
Or the fair tidings of a flatt'ring hope,
That bids thee spread the light from shrine to shrine,
I, fain to hear, yet grudge not if thou hide.

Clytemnestra:

As saith the adage, "From the womb of Night
Spring forth, with promise fair, the young child Light."

Ay--fairer even than all hope my news--
By Grecian hands is Priam's city ta'en!

Chorus:

What say'st thou? doubtful heart makes treach'rous ear.

Clyemnestra:

Hear then again, and plainly--Troy is ours!

Chorus:

Thrills thro' my heart such joy as wakens tears.

Clyemnestra:

Ay, thro' those tears thine eye looks loyalty.

Chorus:

But hast thou proof, to make assurance sure?

Clyemnestra:

Go to; I have--unless the god has lied.

Chorus:

Hath some night-vision won thee to belief?

Clyemnestra:

Out on all presage of a slumb'rous soul!

Chorus:

But wert thou cheered by Rumour's wingless word?

Clyemnestra:

Peace--thou dost chide me as a credulous girl.

Chorus:

Say then, how long ago the city fell?

Clyemnestra:

Even in this night that now brings forth the dawn.

Chorus:

Yet who so swift could speed the message here?

Clyemnestra:

From Ida's top Hephaestus, lord of fire,
Sent forth his sign; and on, and ever on,
Beacon to beacon sped the courier-flame.
From Ida to the crag, that Hermes loves,
Of Lemnos; thence unto the steep sublime
Of Athos, throne of Zeus, the broad blaze flared.
Thence, raised aloft to shoot across the sea,
The moving light, rejoicing in its strength,
Sped from the pyre of pine, and urged its way,
In golden glory, like some strange new sun,
Onward, and reached Macistus' watching heights.
There, with no dull delay nor heedless sleep,
The watcher sped the tidings on in turn,
Until the guard upon Messapius' peak
Saw the far flame gleam on Euripus' tide,

And from the high-piled heap of withered furze
 Lit the new sign and bade the message on.
 Then the strong light, far flown and yet undimmed,
 Shot thro' the sky above Asopus' plain,
 Bright as the moon, and on Cithaeron's crag
 Aroused another watch of flying fire.
 And there the sentinels no whit disowned,
 But sent redoubled on, the hest of flame--
 Swift shot the light, above Gorgopis' bay,
 To Aegiplanctus' mount, and bade the peak
 Fail not the onward ordinance of fire.
 And like a long beard streaming in the wind,
 Full-fed with fuel, roared and rose the blaze,
 And onward flaring, gleamed above the cape,
 Beneath which shimmers the Saronic bay,
 And thence leapt light unto Arachne's peak,
 The mountain watch that looks upon our town.
 Thence to th' Atrides' roof--in lineage fair,
 A bright posterity of Ida's fire.
 So sped from stage to stage, fulfilled in turn,
 Flame after flame, along the course ordained,
 And lo! the last to speed upon its way
 Sights the end first, and glows unto the goal.
 And Troy is ta'en, and by this sign my lord
 Tells me the tale, and ye have learned my word.

Chorus:

To heaven, O queen, will I upraise new song:
 But, wouldst thou speak once more, I fain would hear
 From first to last the marvel of the tale.

Clyemnestra:

Think you--this very morn--the Greeks in Troy,
 And loud therein the voice of utter wail!
 Within one cup pour vinegar and oil,
 And look! unblent, unreconciled, they war.
 So in the twofold issue of the strife
 Mingle the victor's shout, the captives' moan.
 For all the conquered whom the sword has spared
 Cling weeping--some unto a brother slain,
 Some childlike to a nursing father's form,
 And wail the loved and lost, the while their neck
 Bows down already 'neath the captive's chain.
 And lo! the victors, now the fight is done,
 Goaded by restless hunger, far and wide
 Range all disordered thro' the town, to snatch
 Such victual and such rest as chance may give
 Within the captive halls that once were Troy--
 Joyful to rid them of the frost and dew,
 Wherein they couched upon the plain of old--
 Joyful to sleep the gracious night all through,

Unsummoned of the watching sentinel.
 Yet let them reverence well the city's gods,
 The lords of Troy, tho' fallen, and her shrines;
 So shall the spoilers not in turn be spoiled.
 Yea, let no craving for forbidden gain
 Bid conquerors yield before the darts of greed.
 For we need yet, before the race be won,
 Homewards, unharmed, to round the course once more.
 For should the host wax wanton ere it come,
 Then, tho' the sudden blow of fate be spared,
 Yet in the sight of gods shall rise once more

The great wrong of the slain, to claim revenge.
 Now, hearing from this woman's mouth of mine,
 The tale and eke its warning, pray with me,
 "Luck sway the scale, with no uncertain poise.
 For my fair hopes are changed to fairer joys."

Chorus:

A gracious word thy woman's lips have told,
 Worthy a wise man's utterance, O my queen;
 Now with clear trust in thy convincing tale
 I set me to salute the gods with song,
 Who bring us bliss to counterpoise our pain.

Exit Clytemnestra.

Zeus, Lord of heaven! and welcome night
 Of victory, that hast our might
 With all the glories crowned!
 On towers of Ilion, free no more,
 Hast flung the mighty mesh of war,
 And closely girt them round,
 Till neither warrior may 'scape,
 Nor stripling lightly overleap
 The trammels as they close, and close,
 Till with the grip of doom our foes
 In slavery's coil are bound!

Zeus, Lord of hospitality,
 In grateful awe I bend to thee--
 Tis thou hast struck the blow!
 At Alexander, long ago,
 We marked thee bend thy vengeful bow,
 But long and warily withhold
 The eager shaft, which, uncontrolled
 And loosed too soon or launched too high,
 Had wandered bloodless through the sky.

Zeus, the high God!--whate'er be dim in doubt,
 This can our thought track out--
 The blow that fells the sinner is of God,
 And as he wills, the rod

Of vengeance smiteth sore. One said of old,
 "The gods list not to hold
 A reckoning with him whose feet oppress
 The grace of holiness--"
 An impious word! for whensoever the sire
 Breathed forth rebellious fire--
 What time his household overflowed the measure
 Of bliss and health and treasure--
 His children's children read the reckoning plain,
 At last, in tears and pain.
 On me let weal that brings no woe be sent,
 And therewithal, content!
 Who spurns the shrine of Right, nor wealth nor power
 Shall be to him a tower,
 To guard him from the gulf: there lies his lot,
 Where all things are forgot.
 Lust drives him on--lust, desperate and wild,
 Fate's sin-contriving child--
 And cure is none; beyond concealment clear,
 Kindles sin's baleful glare.
 As an ill coin beneath the wearing touch
 Betrays by stain and smutch
 Its metal false--such is the sinful wight.
 Before, on pinions light,
 Fair Pleasure flits, and lures him childlike on,
 While home and kin make moan
 Beneath the grinding burden of his crime;
 Till, in the end of time,
 Cast down of heaven, he pours forth fruitless prayer
 To powers that will not hear.

And such did Paris come
 Unto Atrides' home,
 And thence, with sin and shame his welcome to repay,
 Ravished the wife away--
 And she, unto her country and her kin
 Leaving the clash of shields and spears and arming ships,
 And bearing unto Troy destruction for a dower,
 And overbold in sin,
 Went fleetly thro' the gates, at midnight hour.
 Oft from the prophets' lips
 Moaned out the warning and the wail--Ah woe!
 Woe for the home, the home! and for the chieftains, woe
 Woe for the bride-bed, warm
 Yet from the lovely limbs, the impress of the form
 Of her who loved her lord, a while ago!
 And woe! for him who stands
 Shamed, silent, unreprouchful, stretching hands
 That find her not, and sees, yet will not see,
 That she is far away!
 And his sad fancy, yearning o'er the sea,

Shall summon and recall
 Her wraith, once more to queen it in his hall.
 And sad with many memories,
 The fair cold beauty of each sculptured face--
 And all to hatefulness is turned their grace,
 Seen blankly by forlorn and hungering eyes!
 And when the night is deep,
 Come visions, sweet and sad, and bearing pain
 Of hopings vain--
 Void, void and vain, for scarce the sleeping sight
 Has seen its old delight,
 When thro' the grasps of love that bid it stay
 It vanishes away
 On silent wings that roam adown the ways of sleep.

Such are the sights, the sorrows fell,
 About our hearth--and worse, whereof I may not tell.
 But, all the wide town o'er,
 Each home that sent its master far away
 From Hellas' shore,
 Feels the keen thrill of heart, the pang of loss, to-day.
 For, truth to say,
 The touch of bitter death is manifold!
 Familiar was each face, and dear as life,
 That went unto the war,
 But thither, whence a warrior went of old,
 Doth nought return--
 Only a spear and sword, and ashes in an urn!
 For Ares, lord of strife,
 Who doth the swaying scales of battle hold,
 War's money-changer, giving dust for gold,
 Sends back, to hearts that held them dear,
 Scant ash of warriors, wept with many a tear,
 Light to the hand, but heavy to the soul;
 Yea, fills the light urn full
 With what survived the flame--
 Death's dusty measure of a hero's frame!

"Alas!" one cries, "and yet alas again!
 Our chief is gone, the hero of the spear,
 And hath not left his peer!
 Ah woe!" another moans--"my spouse is slain,
 The death of honour, rolled in dust and blood,
 Slain for a woman's sin, a false wife's shame!"
 Such muttered words of bitter mood
 Rise against those who went forth to reclaim;
 Yea, jealous wrath creeps on against th' Atrides' name.

And others, far beneath the Ilian wall,
 Sleep their last sleep--the goodly chiefs and tall,
 Couched in the foeman's land, whereon they gave
 Their breath, and lords of Troy, each in his Trojan grave.

Therefore for each and all the city's breast
 Is heavy with a wrath suppress,
 As deep and deadly as a curse more loud
 Flung by the common crowd;
 And, brooding deeply, doth my soul await
 Tidings of coming fate,
 Buried as yet in darkness' womb.
 For not forgetful is the high gods' doom
 Against the sons of carnage: all too long
 Seems the unjust to prosper and be strong,
 Till the dark Furies come,
 And smite with stern reversal all his home,
 Down into dim obstruction--he is gone,
 And help and hope, among the lost, is none!

O'er him who vaunteth an exceeding fame,
 Impends a woe condign;
 The vengeful bolt upon his eyes doth flame,
 Sped from the hand divine.
 This bliss be mine, ungrudged of God, to feel--
 To tread no city to the dust,
 Nor see my own life thrust
 Down to a slave's estate beneath another's heel!

Behold, throughout the city wide
 Have the swift feet of Rumour hied,
 Roused by the joyful flame:
 But is the news they scatter, sooth?
 Or haply do they give for truth
 Some cheat which heaven doth frame?
 A child were he and all unwise,
 Who let his heart with joy be stirred,
 To see the beacon-fires arise,
 And then, beneath some thwarting word,
 Sicken anon with hope deferred.
 The edge of woman's insight still
 Good news from true divideth ill;
 Light rumours leap within the bound
 That fences female credence round,
 But, lightly born, as lightly dies
 The tale that springs of her surmise.

Soon shall we know whereof the bale-fires tell,
 The beacons, kindled with transmitted flame;
 Whether, as well I deem, their tale is true.
 Or whether like some dream delusive came
 The welcome blaze but to befool our soul.
 For lo! I see a herald from the shore
 Draw hither, shadowed with the olive-wreath--
 And thirsty dust, twin-brother of the clay,
 Speaks plain of travel far and truthful news--
 No dumb surmise, nor tongue of flame in smoke,

Fitfully kindled from the mountain pyre;
 But plainlier shall his voice say, "All is well,"
 Or--but away, forebodings adverse, now,

And on fair promise fair fulfilment come!
 And whoso for the state prays otherwise,
 Himself reap harvest of his ill desire!

Enter Herald:

O land of Argos, fatherland of mine!
 To thee at last, beneath the tenth year's sun,
 My feet return; the bark of my emprise,
 Tho' one by one hope's anchors broke away,
 Held by the last, and now rides safely here.
 Long, long my soul despaired to win, in death,
 Its longed-for rest within our Argive land:
 And now all hail, O earth, and hail to thee,
 New-risen sun! and hail our country's God,
 High-ruling Zeus, and thou, the Pythian lord,
 Whose arrows smote us once--smite thou no more!
 Was not thy wrath wreaked full upon our heads,
 O king Apollo, by Scamander's side?
 Turn thou, be turned, be saviour, healer, now!
 And hail, all gods who rule the street and mart
 And Hermes hail! my patron and my pride,
 Herald of heaven, and lord of heralds here!
 And Heroes, ye who sped us on our way--
 To one and all I cry, "Receive again
 With grace such Argives as the spear has spared."

Ah, home of royalty, beloved halls,
 And solemn shrines, and gods that front the morn!
 Benign as erst, with sun-flushed aspect greet
 The king returning after many days.
 For as from night flash out the beams of day,
 So out of darkness dawns a light, a king,
 On you, on Argos--Agamemnon comes.
 Then hail and greet him well! such meed befits
 Him whose right hand hewed down the towers of Troy
 With the great axe of Zeus who righteth wrong--
 And smote the plain, smote down to nothingness
 Each altar, every shrine; and far and wide
 Dies from the whole land's face its offspring fair.

Such mighty yoke of fate he set on Troy--
 Our lord and monarch, Atreus' elder son,
 And comes at last with blissful honour home;
 Highest of all who walk on earth to-day--
 Not Paris nor the city's self that paid
 Sin's price with him, can boast, "Whate'er befall,
 The guerdon we have won outweighs it all."
 But at Fate's judgment-seat the robber stands

Condemned of rapine, and his prey is torn
 Forth from his hands, and by his deed is reaped
 A bloody harvest of his home and land
 Gone down to death, and for his guilt and lust
 His father's race pays double in the dust.

Chorus:

Hail, herald of the Greeks, new-come from war.

Herald:

All hail! not death itself can fright me now.

Chorus:

Was thine heart wrung with longing for thy land?

Herald:

So that this joy doth brim mine eyes with tears.

Chorus:

On you too then this sweet distress did fall--

Herald:

How say'st thou? make me master of thy word.

Chorus:

You longed for us who pined for you again.

Herald:

Craved the land us who craved it, love for love?

Chorus:

Yea till my brooding heart moaned out with pain.

Herald:

Whence thy despair, that mars the army's joy?

Chorus:

"Sole cure of wrong is silence," saith the saw.

Herald:

Thy kings afar, couldst thou fear other men?

Chorus:

Death had been sweet, as thou didst say but now.

Herald:

'Tis true; Fate smiles at last. Throughout our toil,
 These many years, some chances issued fair,
 And some, I wot, were chequered with a curse.
 But who, on earth, hath won the bliss of heaven,
 Thro' time's whole tenor an unbroken weal?
 I could a tale unfold of toiling oars,
 Ill rest, scant landings on a shore rock-strewn,
 All pains, all sorrows, for our daily doom.
 And worse and hatefuller our woes on land;
 For where we couched, close by the foeman's wall,
 The river-plain was ever dank with dews,
 Dropped from the sky, exuded from the earth,

A curse that clung unto our sodden garb,
 And hair as horrent as a wild beast's fell.
 Why tell the woes of winter, when the birds
 Lay stark and stiff, so stern was Ida's snow?
 Or summer's scorch, what time the stirless wave
 Sank to its sleep beneath the noon-day sun?
 Why mourn old woes? their pain has passed away;
 And passed away, from those who fell, all care,
 For evermore, to rise and live again.

Why sum the count of death, and render thanks
 For life by moaning over fate malign?
 Farewell, a long farewell to all our woes!
 To us, the remnant of the host of Greece,
 Comes weal beyond all counterpoise of woe;
 Thus boast we rightfully to yonder sun,
 Like him far-fleeted over sea and land.
 "The Argive host prevailed to conquer Troy,
 And in the temples of the gods of Greece
 Hung up these spoils, a shining sign to Time."
 Let those who learn this legend bless aright
 The city and its chieftains, and repay
 The meed of gratitude to Zeus who willed
 And wrought the deed. So stands the tale fulfilled.

Chorus:

Thy words o'erbear my doubt: for news of good,
 The ear of age hath ever youth enow:
 But those within and Clytemnestra's self
 Would fain hear all; glad thou their ears and mine.

Re-enter 'Clymemnestra:

Last night, when first the fiery courier came,
 In sign that Troy is ta'en and razed to earth,
 So wild a cry of joy my lips gave out,
 That I was chidden--"Hath the beacon watch
 Made sure unto thy soul the sack of Troy?
 A very woman thou, whose heart leaps light
 At wandering rumours!"--and with words like these
 They showed me how I strayed, misled of hope.
 Yet on each shrine I set the sacrifice,
 And, in the strain they held for feminine,
 Went heralds thro' the city, to and fro,
 With voice of loud proclaim, announcing joy;
 And in each fane they lit and quenched with wine
 The spicy perfumes fading in the flame.
 All is fulfilled: I spare your longer tale--
 The king himself anon shall tell me all.

Remains to think what honour best may greet
 My lord, the majesty of Argos, home.
 What day beams fairer on a woman's eyes

Than this, whereon she flings the portal wide,
 To hail her lord, heaven-shielded, home from war?
 This to my husband, that he tarry not,
 But turn the city's longing into joy!
 Yea let him come, and coming may he find
 A wife no other than he left her, true
 And faithful as a watch-dog to his home,
 His foemen's foe, in all her duties leal,
 Trusty to keep for ten long years unmarred
 The store whereon he set his master-seal.
 Be steel deep-dyed, before ye look to see
 Ill joy, ill fame, from other wight, in me!

Herald:

'Tis fairly said: thus speaks a noble dame,
 Nor speaks amiss, when truth informs the boast.

Exit Clytemnestra.

Chorus:

So has she spoken--be it yours to learn
 By clear interpreters her specious word.
 Turn to me, herald--tell me if anon
 The second well-loved lord of Argos comes?
 Hath Menelaus safely sped with you?

Herald:

Alas--brief boon unto my friends it were,
 To flatter them, for truth, with falsehoods fair!

Chorus:

Speak joy, if truth be joy, but truth, at worst--
 loo plainly, truth and joy are here divorced.

Herald:

The hero and his bark were rapt away
 Far from the Grecian fleet? 'tis truth I say.

Chorus:

Whether in all men's sight from Ilion borne,
 Or from the fleet by stress of weather torn?

Herald:

Full on the mark thy shaft of speech doth light,
 And one short word hath told long woes aright.

Chorus:

But say, what now of him each comrade saith?
 What their forebodings, of his life or death?

Herald:

Ask me no more: the truth is known to none,
 Save the earth-fostering, all-surveying Sun,

Chorus:

Say, by what doom the fleet of Greece was driven?
How rose, how sank the storm, the wrath of heaven?

Herald:

Nay, ill it were to mar with sorrow's tale
The day of blissful news. The gods demand
Thanksgiving sundered from solicitude.
If one as herald came with rueful face
To say, "The curse has fallen, and the host
Gone down to death; and one wide wound has reached
The city's heart, and out of many homes
Many are cast and consecrate to death,
Beneath the double scourge, that Ares loves,
The bloody pair, the fire and sword of doom"--
If such sore burden weighed upon my tongue,
'Twere fit to speak such words as gladden fiends.
But--coming as he comes who bringeth news
Of safe return from toil, and issues fair,
To men rejoicing in a weal restored--
Dare I to dash good words with ill, and say
How the gods' anger smote the Greeks in storm?
For fire and sea, that erst held bitter feud,
Now swore conspiracy and pledged their faith,
Wasting the Argives worn with toil and war.
Night and great horror of the rising wave
Came o'er us, and the blasts that blow from Thrace
Clashed ship with ship, and some with plunging prow
Thro' scudding drifts of spray and raving storm
Vanished, as strays by some ill shepherd driven.
And when at length the sun rose bright, we saw
Th' Aegaeon sea-field flecked with flowers of death,
Corpses of Grecian men and shattered hulls.
For us indeed, some god, as well I deem,
No human power, laid hand upon our helm,
Snatched us or prayed us from the powers of air,
And brought our bark thro' all, unharmed in hull:
And saving Fortune sat and steered us fair,
So that no surge should gulf us deep in brine,
Nor grind our keel upon a rocky shore.

So 'scaped we death that lurks beneath the sea,
But, under day's white light, mistrustful all
Of fortune's smile, we sat and brooded deep,
Shepherds forlorn of thoughts that wandered wild,
O'er this new woe; for smitten was our host,
And lost as ashes scattered from the pyre.
Of whom if any draw his life-breath yet,
Be well assured, he deems of us as dead,
As we of him no other fate forebode.
But heaven save all! If Menelaus live,

He will not tarry, but will surely come:
 Therefore if anywhere the high sun's ray
 Descries him upon earth, preserved by Zeus,
 Who wills not yet to wipe his race away,
 Hope still there is that homeward he may wend.
 Enough--thou hast the truth unto the end.

Chorus:

Say, from whose lips the presage fell?
 Who read the future all too well,
 And named her, in her natal hour,
 Helen, the bride with war for dower?
 Twas one of the Invisible,
 Guiding his tongue with prescient power.
 On fleet, and host, and citadel,
 War, sprung from her, and death did lour,
 When from the bride-bed's fine-spun veil
 She to the Zephyr spread her sail.

Strong blew the breeze--the surge closed o'er
 The cloven track of keel and oar,
 But while she fled, there drove along,
 Fast in her wake, a mighty throng--
 Athirst for blood, athirst for war,
 Forward in fell pursuit they sprung,
 Then leapt on Simois' bank ashore,
 The leafy coppices among--
 No rangers, they, of wood and field,
 But huntsmen of the sword and shield.

Heaven's jealousy, that works its will,
 Sped thus on Troy its destined ill,
 Well named, at once, the Bride and Bane;
 And loud rang out the bridal strain;
 But they to whom that song befel
 Did turn anon to tears again;
 Zeus tarries, but avenges still
 The husband's wrong, the household's stain!
 He, the hearth's lord, brooks not to see
 Its outraged hospitality.

Even now, and in far other tone,
 Troy chants her dirge of mighty moan,
 "Woe upon Paris, woe and hate!
 Who wooed his country's doom for mate"--
 This is the burthen of the groan,
 Wherewith she wails disconsolate
 The blood, so many of her own
 Have poured in vain, to fend her fate;
 Troy! thou hast fed and freed to roam
 A lion-cub within thy home!

A suckling creature, newly ta'en
 From mother's teat, still fully fain
 Of nursing care; and oft caressed,
 Within the arms, upon the breast,
 Even as an infant, has it lain;
 Or fawns and licks, by hunger pressed,
 The hand that will assuage its pain;
 In life's young dawn, a well-loved guest,
 A fondling for the children's play,
 A joy unto the old and gray.

But waxing time and growth betrays
 The blood-thirst of the lion-race,
 And, for the house's fostering care,
 Unbidden all, it revels there,
 And bloody recompense repays--
 Rent flesh of time, its talons tare:
 A mighty beast, that slays and slays,
 And mars with blood the household fair,
 A God-sent pest invincible,
 A minister of fate and hell.

Even so to Ilion's city came by stealth
 A spirit as of windless seas and skies,
 A gentle phantom-form of joy and wealth,
 With love's soft arrows speeding from its eyes--
 Love's rose, whose thorn doth pierce the soul in subtle wise.

Ah, well-a-day! the bitter bridal-bed,
 When the fair mischief lay by Paris' side!
 What curse on palace and on people sped
 With her, the Fury sent on Priam's pride,
 By angered Zeus! what tears of many a widowed bride!

Long, long ago to mortals this was told,
 How sweet security and blissful state
 Have curses for their children--so men hold--
 And for the man of all-too prosperous fate
 Springs from a bitter seed some woe insatiate.

Alone, alone, I deem far otherwise;
 Not bliss nor wealth it is, but impious deed,
 From which that after-growth of ill doth rise!
 Woe springs from wrong, the plant is like the seed--
 While Right, in honour's house, doth its own likeness breed.

Some past impiety, some gray old crime,
 Breeds the young curse, that wantons in our ill,
 Early or late, when haps th' appointed time--
 And out of light brings power of darkness still,
 A master-fiend, a foe, unseen, invincible;

A pride accursed, that broods upon the race
 And home in which dark Atè holds her sway--

Sin's child and Woe's, that wears its parents' face;
 While Right in smoky cribs shines clear as day,
 And decks with weal his life, who walks the righteous way.

From gilded halls, that hands polluted raise,
 Right turns away with proud averted eyes,
 And of the wealth, men stamp amiss with praise,
 Heedless, to poorer, holier temples hies,
 And to Fate's goal guides all, in its appointed wise.

Hail to thee, chief of Atreus' race,
 Returning proud from Troy subdued!
 How shall I greet thy conquering face,
 How nor a fulsome praise obtrude,
 Nor stint the meed of gratitude?
 For mortal men who fall to ill
 Take little heed of open truth,
 But seek unto its semblance still:
 The show of weeping and of ruth
 To the forlorn will all men pay,
 But, of the grief their eyes display,
 Nought to the heart doth pierce its way.
 And, with the joyous, they beguile
 Their lips unto a feigned smile,
 And force a joy, unfelt the while;
 But he who as a shepherd wise
 Doth know his flock, can ne'er misread
 Truth in the falsehood of his eyes,
 Who veils beneath a kindly guise
 A lukewarm love in deed.

And thou, our leader--when of yore
 Thou badest Greece go forth to war
 For Helen's sake--I dare avow
 That then I held thee not as now;
 That to my vision thou didst seem
 Dyed in the hues of disesteem.
 I held thee for a pilot ill,
 And reckless, of thy proper will,
 Endowing others doomed to die
 With vain and forced audacity!
 Now from my heart, ungrudgingly,
 To those that wrought, this word be said--
 "Well fall the labour ye have sped--"
 Let time and search, O king, declare
 What men within thy city's bound
 Were loyal to the kingdom's care,
 And who were faithless found.

Enter Agamemnon in a chariot, accompanied by Cassandra. He speaks without descending.

Agamemnon:

First, as is meet, a king's All-hail be said

To Argos, and the gods that guard the land--
 Gods who with me availed to speed us home,
 With me availed to wring from Priam's town
 The due of justice. In the court of heaven
 The gods in conclave sat and judged the cause,
 Not from a pleader's tongue, and at the close,
 Unanimous into the urn of doom
 This sentence gave, "On Ilion and her men,
 Death:" and where hope drew nigh to pardon's urn
 No hand there was to cast a vote therein.
 And still the smoke of fallen Ilion
 Rises in sight of all men, and the flame
 Of Atè's hecatomb is living yet,
 And where the towers in dusty ashes sink,
 Rise the rich fumes of pomp and wealth consumed.
 For this must all men pay unto the gods
 The meed of mindful hearts and gratitude:
 For by our hands the meshes of revenge
 Closed on the prey, and for one woman's sake
 Troy trodden by the Argive monster lies--
 The foal, the shielded band that leapt the wall,
 What time with autumn sank the Pleiades.
 Yea, o'er the fencing wall a lion sprang
 Ravening, and lapped his fill of blood of kings.

Such prelude spoken to the gods in full,
 To you I turn, and to the hidden thing
 Whereof ye spake but now: and in that thought
 I am as you, and what ye say, say I.
 For few are they who have such inborn grace,
 As to look up with love, and envy not,
 When stands another on the height of weal.
 Deep in his heart, whom jealousy hath seized,
 Her poison lurking doth enhance his load;
 For now beneath his proper woes he chafes,
 And sighs withal to see another's weal.

Agamemnon:

I speak not idly, but from knowledge sure--
 There be who vaunt an utter loyalty,
 That is but as the ghost of friendship dead,
 A shadow in a glass, of faith gone by.
 One only--he who went reluctant forth
 Across the seas with me--Odysseus--he
 Was loyal unto me with strength and will,
 A trusty trace-horse bound unto my car.
 Thus--be he yet beneath the light of day,
 Or dead, as well I fear--I speak his praise.

Lastly, whate'er be due to men or gods,
 With joint debate, in public council held,
 We will decide, and warily contrive

That all which now is well may so abide:
 For that which haply needs the healer's art,
 That will we medicine, discerning well
 If cautery or knife befit the time.

Now, to my palace and the shrines of home,
 I will pass in, and greet you first and fair,
 Ye gods, who bade me forth, and home again--
 And long may Victory tarry in my train!

Enter Clytemnestra, followed by maidens bearing purple robes.

Clytemnestra:

Old men of Argos, lieges of our realm,
 Shame shall not bid me shrink lest ye should see
 The love I bear my lord. Such blushing fear
 Dies at the last from hearts of human kind.
 From mine own soul and from no alien lips,
 I know and will reveal the life I bore,
 Reluctant, through the lingering livelong years,
 The while my lord beleaguered Ilion's wall.

First, that a wife sat sundered from her lord,
 In widowed solitude, was utter woe--
 And woe, to hear how rumour's many tongues
 All boded evil--woe, when he who came
 And he who followed spake of ill on ill,
 Keening "Lost, lost, all lost!" thro' hail and bower.
 Had this my husband met so many wounds,
 As by a thousand channels rumour told,
 No network e'er was full of holes as he.
 Had he been slain, as oft as tidings came
 That he was dead, he well might boast him now
 A second Geryon of triple frame,
 With triple robe of earth above him laid--
 For that below, no matter--triplly dead,
 Dead by one death for every form he bore.
 And thus distraught by news of wrath and woe,
 Oft for self-slaughter had I slung the noose,
 But others wrenched it from my neck away.
 Hence haps it that Orestes, thine and mine,
 The pledge and symbol of our wedded troth,
 Stands not beside us now, as he should stand.
 Nor marvel thou at this: he dwells with one
 Who guards him loyally; 'tis Phocis' king,
 Strophius, who warned me erst, "Bethink thee, queen,
 What woes of doubtful issue well may fall!
 Thy lord in daily jeopardy at Troy,
 While here a populace uncurbed may cry
 "Down with the council, down!" bethink thee too,
 Tis the world's way to set a harder heel
 On fallen power."

For thy child's absence then
 Such mine excuse, no wily afterthought.
 For me, long since the gushing fount of tears
 Is wept away; no drop is left to shed.
 Dim are the eyes that ever watched till dawn,
 Weeping, the bale-fires, piled for thy return,
 Night after night unkindled. If I slept,
 Each sound--the tiny humming of a gnat,
 Roused me again, again, from fitful dreams
 Wherein I felt thee smitten, saw thee slain,
 Thrice for each moment of mine hour of sleep.

All this I bore, and now, released from woe,
 I hail my lord as watch-dog of a fold,
 As saving stay-rope of a storm-tossed ship,
 As column stout that holds the roof aloft,
 As only child unto a sire bereaved,
 As land beheld, past hope, by crews forlorn,
 As sunshine fair when tempest's wrath is past,
 As gushing spring to thirsty wayfarer.
 So sweet it is to 'scape the press of pain.
 With such salute I bid my husband hail!
 Nor heaven be wroth therewith! for long and hard
 I bore that ire of old.
 Sweet lord, step forth,
 Step from thy car, I pray--nay, not on earth
 Plant the proud foot, O king, that trod down Troy!
 Women! why tarry ye, whose task it is
 To spread your monarch's path with tapestry?
 Swift, swift, with purple strew his passage fair,
 That justice lead him to a home, at last,
 He scarcely looked to see.
 For what remains,
 Zeal unsubdued by sleep shall nerve my hand
 To work as right and as the gods command.

Agamemnon:

Daughter of Leda, watcher o'er my home,
 Thy greeting well befits mine absence long,
 For late and hardly has it reached its end.
 Know, that the praise which honour bids us crave,
 Must come from others' lips, not from our own:
 See too that not in fashion feminine
 Thou make a warrior's pathway delicate;
 Not unto me, as to some Eastern lord,
 Bowing thyself to earth, make homage loud.
 Strew not this purple that shall make each step
 An arrogance; such pomp beseems the gods,
 Not me. A mortal man to set his foot
 On these rich dyes? I hold such pride in fear,
 And bid thee honour me as man, not god.

Fear not--such footcloths and all gauds apart,
 Loud from the trump of Fame my name is blown;
 Best gift of heaven it is, in glory's hour,
 To think thereon with soberness: and thou?
 Bethink thee of the adage, "Call none blest
 Till peaceful death have crowned a life of weal."
 Tis said: I fain would fare unvexed by fear.

Clymemnestra:

Nay, but unsay it--thwart not thou my will!

Agamemnon:

Know, I have said, and will not mar my word.

Clymemnestra:

Was it fear made this meekness to the gods?

Agamemnon:

If cause be cause, 'tis mine for this resolve.

Clymemnestra:

What, think'st thou, in thy place had Priam done?

Agamemnon:

He surely would have walked on broidered robes.

Clymemnestra:

Then fear not thou the voice of human blame.

Agamemnon:

Yet mighty is the murmur of a crowd.

Clymemnestra:

Shrink not from envy, appanage of bliss.

Agamemnon:

War is not woman's part, nor war of words.

Clymemnestra:

Yet happy victors well may yield therein.

Agamemnon:

Dost crave for triumph in this petty strife?

Clymemnestra:

Yield; of thy grace permit me to prevail!

Agamemnon:

Then, if thou wilt, let some one stoop to loose
 Swiftly these sandals, slaves beneath my foot:
 And stepping thus upon the sea's rich dye,
 I pray, "Let none among the gods look down
 With jealous eye on me"--reluctant all,
 To trample thus and mar a thing of price,
 Wasting the wealth of garments silver-worth.
 Enough hereof: and, for the stranger maid,
 Lead her within, but gently: God on high
 Looks graciously on him whom triumph's hour

Has made not pitiless. None willingly
 Wear the slave's yoke--and she, the prize and flower
 Of all we won, comes hither in my train,
 Gift of the army to its chief and lord.
 --Now, since in this my will bows down to thine,
 I will pass in on purples to my home.

Clytemnestra:

A Sea there is--and who shall stay its springs?
 And deep within its breast, a mighty store,
 Precious as silver, of the purple dye,
 Whereby the dipped robe doth its tint renew.
 Enough of such, O king, within thy halls
 There lies, a store that cannot fail; but I--
 I would have gladly vowed unto the gods
 Cost of a thousand garments trodden thus,
 (Had once the oracle such gift required)
 Contriving ransom for thy life preserved.
 For while the stock is firm the foliage climbs,
 Spreading a shade what time the dog-star glows;
 And thou, returning to thine hearth and home,
 Art as a genial warmth in winter hours,
 Or as a coolness, when the lord of heaven
 Mellows the juice within the bitter grape.
 Such boons and more doth bring into a home
 The present footstep of its proper lord.
 Zeus, Zeus, Fulfilment's lord! my vows fulfil,
 And whatsoever it be, work forth thy will!

Exeunt all but Cassandra and the Chorus.

Chorus:

Wherefore for ever on the wings of fear
 Hovers a vision drear
 Before my boding heart? a strain,
 Unbidden and unwelcome, thrills mine ear,
 Oracular of pain.
 Not as of old upon my bosom's throne
 Sits Confidence, to spurn
 Such fears, like dreams we know not to discern.
 Old, old and gray long since the time has grown,
 Which saw the linked cables moor
 The fleet, when erst it came to Ilion's sandy shore;
 And now mine eyes and not another's see
 Their safe return.

Yet none the less in me
 The inner spirit sings a boding song,
 Self-prompted, sings the Furies' strain--
 And seeks, and seeks in vain,
 To hope and to be strong!

Ah! to some end of Fate, unseen, unguessed,
 Are these wild throbbings of my heart and breast?
 Yea, of some doom they tell?
 Each pulse, a knell.
 Lief, lief I were, that all
 To unfulfilment's hidden realm might fall.

Too far, too far our mortal spirits strive,
 Grasping at utter weal, unsatisfied--
 Till the fell curse, that dwelleth hard beside,
 Thrust down the sundering wall. Too fair they blow,
 The gales that waft our bark on Fortune's tide!
 Swiftly we sail, the sooner all to drive
 Upon the hidden rock, the reef of woe.

Then if the hand of caution warily
 Sling forth into the sea
 Part of the freight, lest all should sink below,
 From the deep death it saves the bark: even so,
 Doom-laden though it be, once more may rise
 His household, who is timely wise.

How oft the famine-stricken field
 Is saved by God's large gift, the new year's yield!
 But blood of man once spilled,
 Once at his feet shed forth, and darkening the plain,--
 Nor chant nor charm can call it back again.

So Zeus hath willed:
 Else had he spared the leech Asclepius, skilled
 To bring man from the dead: the hand divine
 Did smite himself with death--a warning and a sign.

Ah me! if Fate, ordained of old,
 Held not the will of gods constrained, controlled,
 Helpless to us ward, and apart--
 Swifter than speech my heart
 Had poured its presage out!
 Now, fretting, chafing in the dark of doubt,
 Tis hopeless to unfold
 Truth, from fear's tangled skein; and, yearning to proclaim
 Its thought, my soul is prophecy and flame.

Re-enter 'Clymemnestra:

Get thee within thou too, Cassandra, go!
 For Zeus to thee in gracious mercy grants
 To share the sprinklings of the lustral bowl,
 Beside the altar of his guardianship,
 Slave among many slaves. What, haughty still?
 Step from the car; Alcmena's son, 'tis said,
 Was sold perforce and bore the yoke of old.
 Ay, hard it is, but, if such fate befall,
 'Tis a fair chance to serve within a home

Of ancient wealth and power. An upstart lord,
 To whom wealth's harvest came beyond his hope,
 Is as a lion to his slaves, in all
 Exceeding fierce, immoderate in sway.
 Pass in: thou hearest what our ways will be.

Chorus:

Clear unto thee, O maid, is her command,
 But thou--within the toils of Fate thou art--
 If such thy will, I urge thee to obey;
 Yet I misdoubt thou dost nor hear nor heed.

Clytemnestra:

I wot--unless like swallows she doth use
 Some strange barbarian tongue from oversea--
 My words must speak persuasion to her soul.

Chorus:

Obey: there is no gentler way than this.
 Step from the car's high seat and follow her.

Clytemnestra:

Truce to this bootless waiting here without!
 I will not stay: beside the central shrine
 The victims stand, prepared for knife and fire--
 Offerings from hearts beyond all hope made glad.
 Thou--if thou reckest aught of my command,
 'Twere well done soon: but if thy sense be shut
 From these my words, let thy barbarian hand
 Fulfil by gesture the default of speech.

Chorus:

No native is she, thus to read thy words
 Unaided: like some wild thing of the wood,
 New-trapped, behold! she shrinks and glares on thee.

Clytemnestra:

'Tis madness and the rule of mind distraught,
 Since she beheld her city sink in fire,
 And hither comes, nor brooks the bit, until
 In foam and blood her wrath be champ'd away.
 See ye to her; unqueenly 'tis for me,
 Unheeded thus to cast away my words.

Exit Clytemnestra.

Chorus:

But with me pity sits in anger's place.
 Poor maiden, come thou from the car; no way
 There is but this--take up thy servitude.

Cassandra:

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou
 Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus:

Peace! shriek not to the bright prophetic god,
Who will not brook the suppliance of woe.

Cassandra:

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou
Apollo, Apollo!

Chorus:

Hark, with wild curse she calls anew on him,
Who stands far off and loathes the voice of wail.

Cassandra:

Apollo, Apollo!
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,
Once and again, O thou, Destroyer named,
Thou hast destroyed me, thou, my love of old!

Chorus:

She grows presageful of her woes to come,
Slave tho' she be, instinct with prophecy.

Cassandra:

Apollo, Apollo!
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,
O thou Apollo, thou Destroyer named!
What way hast led me, to what evil home?

Chorus:

Know'st thou it not? The home of Atreus' race:
Take these my words for sooth and ask no more.

Cassandra:

Home cursed of God! Bear witness unto me,
Ye visioned woes within--
The blood-stained hands of them that smite their kin--
The strangling noose, and, spattered o'er
With human blood, the reeking floor!

Chorus:

How like a sleuth-hound questing on the track,
Keen-scented unto blood and death she hies!

Cassandra:

Ah! can the ghostly guidance fail,
Whereby my prophet-soul is onwards led?
Look! for their flesh the spectre-children wail,
Their sodden limbs on which their father fed!

Chorus:

Long since we knew of thy prophetic fame,--
But for those deeds we seek no prophet's tongue.

Cassandra:

God! 'tis another crime--
Worse than the storied woe of olden time,

Curelessabhorred, that one is plotting here--
 A shaming death, for those that should be dear!
 Alas! and far away, in foreign land,
 He that should help doth stand!

Chorus:

I knew th' old tales, the city rings withal--
 But now thy speech is dark, beyond my ken.

Cassandra:

O wretch, O purpose fell!
 Thou for thy wedded lord
 The cleansing wave hast poured--
 A treacherous welcome!
 How the sequel tell?
 Too soon 'twill come, too soon, for now, even now,
 She smites him, blow on blow!

Chorus:

Riddles beyond my rede--I peer in vain
 Thro' the dim films that screen the prophecy.

Cassandra:

God! a new sight! a net, a snare of hell,
 Set by her hand--herself a snare more fell!
 A wedded wife, she slays her lord,
 Helped by another hand!
 Ye powers, whose hate
 Of Atreus' home no blood can satiate,
 Raise the wild cry above the sacrifice abhorred!

Chorus:

Why biddest thou some fiend, I know not whom,
 Shriek o'er the house? Thine is no cheering word.
 Back to my heart in frozen fear I feel
 My waning life-blood run--
 The blood that round the wounding steel
 Ebbs slow, as sinks life's parting sun--
 Swift, swift and sure, some woe comes pressing on!

Cassandra:

Away, away--keep him away--
 The monarch of the herd, the pasture's pride,
 Far from his mate! In treach'rous wrath,
 Muffling his swarthy horns, with secret scathe
 She gores his fenceless side!
 Hark! in the brimming bath,
 The heavy splash--the dying cry--
 Hark--in the laver--hark, he falls by treachery!

Chorus:

I read amiss dark sayings such as thine,
 Yet something warns me that they tell of ill.
 O dark prophetic speech,

Ill tidings dost thou teach
 Ever, to mortals here below!
 Ever some tale of awe and woe
 Thro' all thy windings manifold
 Do we unriddle and unfold!

Cassandra:

Ah well-a-day! the cup of agony,
 Whereof I chant, foams with a draught for me.
 Ah lord, ah leader, thou hast led me here--
 Was't but to die with thee whose doom is near?

Chorus:

Distraught thou art, divinely stirred,
 And wailest for thyself a tuneless lay,
 As piteous as the ceaseless tale
 Wherewith the brown melodious bird
 Doth ever Itys! Itys! wail,
 Deep-bowered in sorrow, all its little life-time's day!

Cassandra:

Ah for thy fate, O shrill-voiced nightingale!
 Some solace for thy woes did Heaven afford,
 Clothed thee with soft brown plumes, and life apart from wail?
 But for my death is edged the double-biting sword!

Chorus:

What pangs are these, what fruitless pain,
 Sent on thee from on high?
 Thou chantest terror's frantic strain,
 Yet in shrill measured melody.
 How thus unerring canst thou sweep along
 The prophet's path of boding song?

Cassandra:

Woe, Paris, woe on thee! thy bridal joy
 Was death and fire upon thy race and Troy!
 And woe for thee, Scamander's flood!
 Beside thy banks, O river fair,
 I grew in tender nursing care
 From childhood unto maidenhood!
 Now not by thine, but by Cocytus' stream
 And Acheron's banks shall ring my boding scream.

Chorus:

Too plain is all, too plain!
 A child might read aright thy fateful strain.
 Deep in my heart their piercing fang
 Terror and sorrow set, the while I heard
 That piteous, low, tender word,
 Yet to mine ear and heart a crushing pang.

Cassandra:

Woe for my city, woe for Ilion's fall!

Father, how oft with sanguine stain
 Streamed on thine altar-stone the blood of cattle, slain
 That heaven might guard our wall!
 But all was shed in vain.
 Low lie the shattered towers whereas they fell,
 And I--ah burning heart!--shall soon lie low as well.

Chorus:

Of sorrow is thy song, of sorrow still!
 Alas, what power of ill
 Sits heavy on thy heart and bids thee tell
 In tears of perfect moan thy deadly tale?
 Some woe--I know not what--must close thy piteous wail.

Cassandra:

List! for no more the presage of my soul,
 Bride-like, shall peer from its secluding veil;
 But as the morning wind blows clear the east,
 More bright shall blow the wind of prophecy,
 And as against the low bright line of dawn
 Heaves high and higher yet the rolling wave,
 So in the clearing skies of prescience
 Dawns on my soul a further, deadlier woe,
 And I will speak, but in dark speech no more.
 Bear witness, ye, and follow at my side--
 I scent the trail of blood, shed long ago.
 Within this house a choir abidingly
 Chants in harsh unison the chant of ill;
 Yea, and they drink, for more enhardened joy,
 Man's blood for wine, and revel in the halls,
 Departing never, Furies of the home.
 They sit within, they chant the primal curse,
 Each spitting hatred on that crime of old,
 The brother's couch, the love incestuous
 That brought forth hatred to the ravisher.
 Say, is my speech or wild and erring now,
 Or doth its arrow cleave the mark indeed?
 They called me once, "The prophetess of lies,
 The wandering hag, the pest of every door--"
 Attest ye now, She knows in very sooth
 "The house's curse, the storied infamy."

Chorus:

Yet how should oath--how loyally soe'er
 I swear it--aught avail thee? In good sooth,

Agamemnon:

My wonder meets thy claim: I stand amazed
 That thou, a maiden born beyond the seas,
 Dost as a native know and tell aright
 Tales of a city of an alien tongue.

Cassandra:

That is my power--a boon Apollo gave.

Chorus:

God though he were, yearning for mortal maid?

Cassandra:

Ay! what seemed shame of old is shame no more.

Chorus:

Such finer sense suits not with slavery.

Cassandra:

He strove to win me, panting for my love.

Chorus:

Came ye by compact unto bridal joys?

Cassandra:

Nay--for I plighted troth, then foiled the god.

Chorus:

Wert thou already dowered with prescience?

Cassandra:

Yea--prophetess to Troy of all her doom.

Chorus:

How left thee then Apollo's wrath unscathed?

Cassandra:

I, false to him, seemed prophet false to all.

Chorus:

Not so--to us at least thy words seem sooth.

Cassandra:

Woe for me, woe! Again the agony--
 Dread pain that sees the future all too well
 With ghastly preludes whirls and racks my soul.
 Behold ye--yonder on the palace roof
 The spectre-children sitting--look, such things
 As dreams are made on, phantoms as of babes,
 Horrible shadows, that a kinsman's hand
 Hath marked with murder, and their arms are full--
 A rueful burden--see, they hold them up,
 The entrails upon which their father fed!

For this, for this, I say there plots revenge
 A coward lion, couching in the lair--
 Guarding the gate against my master's foot--
 My master--mine--I bear the slave's yoke now,
 And he, the lord of ships, who trod down Troy,
 Knows not the fawning treachery of tongue
 Of this thing false and dog-like--how her speech
 Glozes and sleeks her purpose, till she win
 By ill fate's favour the desired chance,

Moving like Atè to a secret end.
 O aweless soul! the woman slays her lord--
 Woman? what loathsome monster of the earth
 Were fit comparison? The double snake--
 Or Scylla, where she dwells, the seaman's bane,
 Girt round about with rocks? some hag of hell,
 Raving a truceless curse upon her kin?
 Hark--even now she cries exultingly
 The vengeful cry that tells of battle turned--
 How fain, forsooth, to greet her chief restored!
 Nay then, believe me not: what skills belief
 Or disbelief? Fate works its will--and thou
 Wilt see and say in ruth, "Her tale was true."

Chorus:

Ah--'tis Thyestes' feast on kindred flesh--
 I guess her meaning and with horror thrill,
 Hearing no shadow'd hint of th' o'er-true tale,
 But its full hatefulness: yet, for the rest,
 Far from the track I roam, and know no more.

Cassandra:

'Tis Agamemnon's doom thou shalt behold.

Chorus:

Peace, hapless woman, to thy boding words!

Cassandra:

Far from my speech stands he who sains and saves.

Chorus:

Ay--were such doom at hand--which God forbid!

Cassandra:

Thou prayest idly--these move swift to slay.

Chorus:

What man prepares a deed of such despite?

Cassandra:

Fool! thus to read amiss mine oracles.

Chorus:

Deviser and device are dark to me.

Cassandra:

Dark! all too well I speak the Grecian tongue.

Chorus:

Ay--but in thine, as in Apollo's strains,
 Familiar is the tongue, but dark the thought.

Cassandra:

Ah ah the fire! it waxes, nears me now--
 Woe, woe for me, Apollo of the dawn!

Lo, how the woman-thing, the lioness
 Couched with the wolf--her noble mate afar--
 Will slay me, slave forlorn! Yea, like some witch
 She drags the cup of wrath, that slays her lord
 With double death--his recompense for me!
 Ay, 'tis for me, the prey he bore from Troy,
 That she hath sworn his death, and edged the steel!
 Ye wands, ye wreaths that cling around my neck,
 Ye showed me prophetess yet scorned of all--
 I stamp you into death, or e'er I die--
 Down, to destruction!
 Thus I stand revenged--
 Go, crown some other with a prophet's woe.
 Look! it is he, it is Apollo's self
 Rending from me the prophet-robe he gave
 God! while I wore it yet, thou saw'st me mocked
 There at my home by each malicious mouth--
 To all and each, an undivided scorn.
 The name alike and fate of witch and cheat--
 Woe, poverty, and famine--all I bore;
 And at this last the god hath brought me here
 Into death's toils, and what his love had made
 His hate unmakes me now: and I shall stand
 Not now before the altar of my home,
 But me a slaughter-house and block of blood
 Shall see hewn down, a reeking sacrifice.
 Yet shall the gods have heed of me who die,
 For by their will shall one requite my doom.
 He, to avenge his father's blood outpoured,
 Shall smite and slay with matricidal hand.
 Ay, he shall come--tho' far away he roam,
 A banished wanderer in a stranger's land--
 To crown his kindred's edifice of ill,
 Called home to vengeance by his father's fall:
 Thus have the high gods sworn, and shall fulfil.

And now why mourn I, tarrying on earth,
 Since first mine Ilion has found its fate
 And I beheld, and those who won the wall
 Pass to such issue as the gods ordain?
 I too will pass and like them dare to die!

Turns and looks upon the palace door.

Portal of Hades, thus I bid thee hail!
 Grant me one boon--a swift and mortal stroke,
 That all unwrung by pain, with ebbing blood
 Shed forth in quiet death, I close mine eyes.

Chorus:

Maid of mysterious woes, mysterious lore,
 Long was thy prophecy: but if aright

Thou readest all thy fate, how, thus unscared,
 Dost thou approach the altar of thy doom,
 As fronts the knife some victim, heaven-controlled?

Cassandra:

Friends, there is no avoidance in delay.

Chorus:

Yet who delays the longest, his the gain.

Cassandra:

The day is come--flight were small gain to me!

Chorus:

O brave endurance of a soul resolved!

Cassandra:

That were ill praise, for those of happier doom.

Chorus:

All fame is happy, even famous death.

Cassandra:

Ah sire, ah brethren, famous once were ye!

She moves to enter the house, then starts back.

Chorus:

What fear is this that scares thee from the house?

Cassandra:

Pah!

Chorus:

What is this cry? some dark despair of soul?

Cassandra:

Pah! the house fumes with stench and spilth of blood.

Chorus:

How? 'tis the smell of household offerings.

Cassandra:

'Tis rank as charnel-scent from open graves.

Chorus:

Thou canst not mean this scented Syrian nard?

Cassandra:

Nay, let me pass within to cry aloud
 The monarch's fate and mine--enough of life.

Ah friends!

Bear to me witness, since I fall in death,
 That not as birds that shun the bush and scream
 I moan in idle terror. This attest
 When for my death's revenge another dies,
 A woman for a woman, and a man
 Falls, for a man ill-wedded to his curse.
 Grant me this boon--the last before I die.

Chorus:

Brave to the last! I mourn thy doom foreseen.

Cassandra:

Once more one utterance, but not of wail,
Though for my death--and then I speak no more.

I thou whose beam I shall not see again,
To thee I cry, Let those whom vengeance calls
To slay their kindred's slayers, quit withal
The death of me, the slave, the fenceless prey.

Ah state of mortal man! in time of weal,
A line, a shadow! and if ill fate fall,
One wet sponge-sweep wipes all our trace away--
And this I deem less piteous, of the twain.

Exit into the palace.

Chorus:

Too true it is! our mortal state
With bliss is never satiate,
And none, before the palace high
And stately of prosperity,
Cries to us with a voice of fear,
"Away! 'tis ill to enter here!"

Lo! this our lord hath trodden down,
By grace of heaven, old Priam's town,
And praised as god he stands once more
On Argos' shore!
Yet now--if blood shed long ago
Cries out that other blood shall flow--
His life-blood, his, to pay again
The stern requital of the slain--
Peace to that braggart's vaunting vain,
Who, having heard the chieftain's tale,
Yet boasts of bliss untouched by bale!

A loud cry from within.

Voice of Agamemnon:

O I am sped--a deep, a mortal blow.

Chorus:

Listen, listen! who is screaming as in mortal agony?

Voice of Agamemnon:

O! O! again, another, another blow!

Chorus:

The bloody act is over--I have heard the monarch cry--
Let us swiftly take some counsel, lest we too be doomed to die.

One of the Chorus:

'Tis best, I judge, aloud for aid to call,
Ho! loyal Argives! to the palace, all!

Another:

Better, I deem, ourselves to bear the aid,
And drag the deed to light, while drips the blade.

Another:

Such will is mine, and what thou say'st I say:
Swiftly to act! the time brooks no delay.

Another:

Ay, for 'tis plain, this prelude of their song
Foretells its close in tyranny and wrong.

Another:

Behold, we tarry--but thy name, Delay,
They spurn, and press with sleepless hand to slay.

Another:

I know not what 'twere well to counsel now--
Who wills to act, 'tis his to counsel how.

Another:

Thy doubt is mine: for when a man is slain,
I have no words to bring his life again.

Another:

What? e'en for life's sake, bow us to obey
These house-defilers and their tyrant sway?

Another

Unmanly doom! 'twere better far to die--
Death is a gentler lord than tyranny.

Another:

Think well--must cry or sign of woe or pain
Fix our conclusion that the chief is slain?

Another:

Such talk befits us when the deed we see--
Conjecture dwells afar from certainty.

Leader of the Chorus:

I read one will from many a diverse word,
To know aright, how stands it with our lord!

The scene opens, disclosing Clytemnestra, who comes forward. The body of Agamemnon lies, muffled in a long robe, within a silver-sided laver; the corpse of Cassandra is laid beside him.

Clytemnestra:

Ho, ye who heard me speak so long and oft
The glozing word that led me to my will?
Hear how I shrink not to unsay it all!
How else should one who willeth to requite
Evil for evil to an enemy
Disguised as friend, weave the mesh straitly round him,
Not to be overleaped, a net of doom?
This is the sum and issue of old strife,

Of me deep-pondered and at length fulfilled.
 All is avowed, and as I smote I stand
 With foot set firm upon a finished thing!
 I turn not to denial: thus I wrought
 So that he could nor flee nor ward his doom,
 Even as the trammel hems the scaly shoal,
 I trapped him with inextricable toils,
 The ill abundance of a baffling robe;
 Then smote him, once, again--and at each wound
 He cried aloud, then as in death relaxed
 Each limb and sank to earth; and as he lay,
 Once more I smote him, with the last third blow,
 Sacred to Hades, saviour of the dead.
 And thus he fell, and as he passed away,
 Spirit with body chafed; each dying breath
 Flung from his breast swift bubbling jets of gore,
 And the dark sprinklings of the rain of blood
 Fell upon me; and I was fain to feel
 That dew--not sweeter is the rain of heaven
 To cornland, when the green sheath teems with grain,

Elders of Argos--since the thing stands so,
 I bid you to rejoice, if such your will:
 Rejoice or not, I vaunt and praise the deed,
 And well I ween, if seemly it could be,
 'Twere not ill done to pour libations here,
 Justly--ay, more than justly--on his corpse
 Who filled his home with curses as with wine,
 And thus returned to drain the cup he filled.

Chorus:

I marvel at thy tongue's audacity,
 To vaunt thus loudly o'er a husband slain.

Clyemnestra:

Ye hold me as a woman, weak of will,
 And strive to sway me: but my heart is stout,
 Nor fears to speak its uttermost to you,
 Albeit ye know its message. Praise or blame,
 Even as ye list,--I reckon not of your words.
 Lo! at my feet lies Agamemnon slain,
 My husband once--and him this hand of mine,
 A right contriver, fashioned for his death.
 Behold the deed!

Chorus:

Woman, what deadly birth,
 What venom'd essence of the earth
 Or dark distilment of the wave,
 To thee such passion gave,
 Nerving thine hand
 To set upon thy brow this burning crown,

The curses of thy land?
 "Our king by thee cut off, hewn down!
 Go forth--they cry--accursèd and forlorn,
 To hate and scorn!"

Clyemnestra:

O ye just men, who speak my sentence now,
 The city's hate, the ban of all my realm!
 Ye had no voice of old to launch such doom
 On him, my husband, when he held as light
 My daughter's life as that of sheep or goat,
 One victim from the thronging fleecy fold!
 Yea, slew in sacrifice his child and mine,
 The well-loved issue of my travail-pangs,
 To lull and lay the gales that blew from Thrace.
 That deed of his, I say, that stain and shame,
 Had rightly been atoned by banishment;
 But ye, who then were dumb, are stern to judge
 This deed of mine that doth affront your ears.
 Storm out your threats, yet knowing this for sooth,
 That I am ready, if your hand prevail
 As mine now doth, to bow beneath your sway:
 If God say nay, it shall be yours to learn
 By chastisement a late humility.

Chorus:

Bold is thy craft, and proud
 Thy confidence, thy vaunting loud;
 Thy soul, that chose a murd'ress' fate,
 Is all with blood elate--
 Maddened to know
 The blood not yet avenged, the damnèd spot
 Crimson upon thy brow.
 But Fate prepares for thee thy lot--
 Smitten as thou didst smite, without a friend,
 To meet thine end!

Clyemnestra:

Hear then the sanction of the oath I swear?
 By the great vengeance for my murdered child,
 By Atè, by the Fury unto whom
 This man lies sacrificed by hand of mine,
 I do not look to tread the hall of Fear,
 While in this hearth and home of mine there burns
 The light of love--Aegisthus--as of old
 Loyal, a stalwart shield of confidence--
 As true to me as this slain man was false,
 Wronging his wife with paramours at Troy,
 Fresh from the kiss of each Chryseis there!
 Behold him dead--behold his captive prize,
 Seeress and harlot--comfort of his bed,
 True prophetess, true paramour--I wot

The sea-bench was not closer to the flesh,
 Full oft, of every rower, than was she.
 See, ill they did, and ill requites them now.
 His death ye know: she as a dying swan
 Sang her last dirge, and lies, as erst she lay,
 Close to his side, and to my couch has left
 A sweet new taste of joys that know no fear.

Chorus:

Ah woe and well-a-day! I would that Fate--
 Not bearing agony too great,
 Nor stretching me too long on couch of pain--
 Would bid mine eyelids keep
 The morningless and unawakening sleep!
 For life is weary, now my lord is slain,
 The gracious among kings!
 Hard fate of old he bore and many grievous things,
 And for a woman's sake, on Ilian land--
 Now is his life hewn down, and by a woman's hand.
 O Helen, O infatuate soul,
 Who bad'st the tides of battle roll,
 Overwhelming thousands, life on life,
 Neath Ilion's wall!
 And now lies dead the lord of all.
 The blossom of thy storied sin
 Bears blood's inexpiable stain,
 O thou that erst, these halls within,
 Wert unto all a rock of strife,
 A husband's bane!

Clymemnestra:

Peace! pray not thou for death as though
 Thine heart was whelmed beneath this woe,
 Nor turn thy wrath aside to ban
 The name of Helen, nor recall
 How she, one bane of many a man,
 Sent down to death the Danaan lords,
 To sleep at Troy the sleep of swords,
 And wrought the woe that shattered all.

Chorus:

Fiend of the race! that swoopest fell
 Upon the double stock of Tantalus,
 Lording it o'er me by a woman's will,
 Stern, manful, and imperious?
 A bitter sway to me!
 Thy very form I see,
 Like some grim raven, perched upon the slain,
 Exulting o'er the crime, aloud, in tuneless strain!

Clymemnestra:

Right was that word--thou namest well

The brooding race-fiend, triply fell!
 From him it is that murder's thirst,
 Blood-lapping, inwardly is nursed--
 Ere time the ancient scar can sain,
 New blood comes welling forth again.

Chorus:

Grim is his wrath and heavy on our home,
 That fiend of whom thy voice has cried,
 Alas, an omened cry of woe unsatisfied,
 An all-devouring doom!

Ah woe, ah Zeus! from Zeus all things befall--
 Zeus the high cause and finisher of all!--
 Lord of our mortal state, by him are willed
 All things, by him fulfilled!

Yet ah my king, my king no more!
 What words to say, what tears to pour
 Can tell my love for thee?
 The spider-web of treachery
 She wove and wound, thy life around,
 And lo! I see thee lie,
 And thro' a coward, impious wound
 Pant forth thy life and die!
 A death of shame--ah woe on woe!
 A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

Clyemnestra:

My guilt thou harpest, o'er and o'er!
 I bid thee reckon me no more
 As Agamemnon's spouse.
 The old Avenger, stern of mood
 For Atreus and his feast of blood,
 Hath struck the lord of Atreus' house,
 And in the semblance of his wife
 The king hath slain.--
 Yea, for the murdered children's life,
 A chieftain's in requital ta'en.

Chorus:

Thou guiltless of this murder, thou!
 Who dares such thought avow?
 Yet it may be, wroth for the parent's deed,
 The fiend hath holpen thee to slay the son.
 Dark Ares, god of death, is pressing on
 Thro' streams of blood by kindred shed,
 Exacting the accmpt for children dead,
 For clotted blood, for flesh on which their sire did feed.

Yet ah my king, my king no more!
 What words to say, what tears to pour
 Can tell my love for thee?

The spider-web of treachery
 She wove and wound, thy life around,
 And lo! I see thee lie,
 And thro' a coward, impious wound
 Pant forth thy life and die!
 A death of shame--ah woe on woe!
 A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

Clymemnestra:

I deem not that the death he died
 Had overmuch of shame:
 For this was he who did provide
 Foul wrong unto his house and name:
 His daughter, blossom of my womb,
 He gave unto a deadly doom,
 Iphigenia, child of tears!
 And as he wrought, even so he fares.
 Nor be his vaunt too loud in hell;
 For by the sword his sin he wrought,
 And by the sword himself is brought
 Among the dead to dwell.

Chorus:

Ah whither shall I fly?
 For all in ruin sinks the kingly hall;
 Nor swift device nor shift of thought have I,
 To 'scape its fall.
 A little while the gentler rain-drops fail;
 I stand distraught--a ghastly interval,
 Till on the roof-tree rings the bursting hail
 Of blood and doom. Even now fate whets the steel
 On whetstones new and deadlier than of old,
 The steel that smites, in Justice' hold,
 Another death to deal.
 O Earth! that I had lain at rest
 And lapped for ever in thy breast,
 Ere I had seen my chieftain fall
 Within the laver's silver wall,
 Low-lying on dishonoured bier!
 And who shall give him sepulchre,
 And who the wail of sorrow pour?
 Woman, 'tis thine no more!
 A graceless gift unto his shade
 Such tribute, by his murd'ress paid!
 Strive not thus wrongly to atone
 The impious deed thy hand hath done.
 Ah who above the god-like chief
 Shall weep the tears of loyal grief?
 Who speak above his lowly grave
 The last sad praises of the brave?

Clymemnestra:

Peace! for such task is none of thine.
 By me he fell, by me he died,
 And now his burial rites be mine!
 Yet from these halls no mourners' train
 Shall celebrate his obsequies;
 Only by Acheron's rolling tide
 His child shall spring unto his side,
 And in a daughter's loving wise
 Shall clasp and kiss him once again!

Chorus:

Lo! sin by sin and sorrow dogg'd by sorrow--
 And who the end can know?
 The slayer of to-day shall die to-morrow--
 The wage of wrong is woe.
 While Time shall be, while Zeus in heaven is lord,
 His law is fixed and stern;
 On him that wrought shall vengeance be outpoured--
 The tides of doom return.
 The children of the curse abide within
 These halls of high estate--
 And none can wrench from off the home of sin
 The clinging grasp of fate.

Clymemnestra:

Now walks thy word aright, to tell
 This ancient truth of oracle;
 But I with vows of sooth will pray
 To him, the power that holdeth sway
 O'er all the race of Pleisthenes--
 "Tho' dark the deed and deep the guilt,
 With this last blood, my hands have spilt,
 I pray thee let thine anger cease!
 I pray thee pass from us away
 To some new race in other lands,
 There, if than wilt, to wrong and slay
 The lives of men by kindred hands."

For me 'tis all sufficient meed,
 Tho' little wealth or power were won,
 So I can say, "'Tis past and done.
 The bloody lust and murderous,
 The inborn frenzy of our house,
 Is ended, by my deed!"

Enter Aegisthus.

Aegisthus:

Dawn of the day of rightful vengeance, hail!
 I dare at length aver that gods above
 Have care of men and heed of earthly wrongs.
 I, I who stand and thus exult to see

This man lie wound in robes the Furies wove,
 Slain in requital of his father's craft.
 Take ye the truth, that Atreus, this man's sire,
 The lord and monarch of this land of old,
 Held with my sire Thyestes deep dispute,
 Brother with brother, for the prize of sway,
 And drave him from his home to banishment.
 Thereafter, the lorn exile homeward stole
 And clung a suppliant to the hearth divine,
 And for himself won this immunity?
 Not with his own blood to defile the land
 That gave him birth. But Atreus, godless sire
 Of him who here lies dead, this welcome planned--
 With zeal that was not love he feigned to hold
 In loyal joy a day of festal cheer,
 And bade my father to his board, and set
 Before him flesh that was his children once.
 First, sitting at the upper board alone,
 He hid the fingers and the feet, but gave
 The rest--and readily Thyestes took
 What to his ignorance no semblance wore
 Of human flesh, and ate: behold what curse
 That eating brought upon our race and name!
 For when he knew what all unhallowed thing
 He thus had wrought, with horror's bitter cry
 Back-starting, spewing forth the fragments foul,
 On Pelops' house a deadly curse he spake?
 "As darkly as I spurn this damned food,
 So perish all the race of Pleisthenes!"
 Thus by that curse fell he whom here ye see,
 And I--who else?--this murder wove and planned;
 For me, an infant yet in swaddling bands,
 Of the three children youngest, Atreus sent
 To banishment by my sad father's side:
 But Justice brought me home once more, grown now
 To manhood's years; and stranger tho' I was,
 My right hand reached unto the chieftain's life,
 Plotting and planning all that malice bade.
 And death itself were honour now to me,
 Beholding him in Justice' ambush ta'en.

Chorus:

Aegisthus, for this insolence of thine
 That vaunts itself in evil, take my scorn.
 Of thine own will, thou sayest, thou hast slain
 The chieftain, by thine own unaided plot
 Devised the piteous death: I rede thee well,
 Think not thy head shall 'scape, when right prevails,
 The people's ban, the stones of death and doom.

Aegisthus:

This word from thee, this word from one who rows
 Low at the oars beneath, what time we rule,
 We of the upper tier? Thou'lt know anon,
 'Tis bitter to be taught again in age,
 By one so young, submission at the word.
 But iron of the chain and hunger's throes
 Can minister unto an o'ersworn pride
 Marvellous well, ay, even in the old.
 Hast eyes, and seest not this? Peace--kick not thus
 Against the pricks, unto thy proper pain!

Chorus:

Thou womanish man, waiting till war did cease,
 Home-watcher and defiler of the couch,
 And arch-deviser of the chieftain's doom!

Aegisthus:

Bold words again! but they shall end in tears.
 The very converse, thine, of Orpheus' tongue:
 He roused and led in ecstasy of joy
 All things that heard his voice melodious;
 But thou as with the futile cry of curs
 Wilt draw men wrathfully upon thee. Peace!
 Or strong subjection soon shall tame thy tongue.

Chorus:

Ay, thou art one to hold an Argive down--
 Thou, skilled to plan the murder of the king,
 But not with thine own hand to smite the blow!

Aegisthus:

That fraudulent force was woman's very part,
 Not mine, whom deep suspicion from of old
 Would have debarred. Now by his treasure's aid
 My purpose holds to rule the citizens.
 But whoso will not bear my guiding hand,
 Him for his corn-fed mettle I will drive
 Not as a trace-horse, light-caparisoned,
 But to the shafts with heaviest harness bound.
 Famine, the grim mate of the dungeon dark,
 Shall look on him and shall behold him tame.

Chorus:

Thou losel soul, was then thy strength too slight
 To deal in murder, while a woman's hand,
 Staining and shaming Argos and its gods,
 Aailed to slay him? Ho, if anywhere
 The light of life smite on Orestes' eyes,
 Let him, returning by some guardian fate,
 Hew down with force her paramour and her!

Aegisthus:

How thy word and act shall issue, thou shalt shortly understand.

Chorus:

Up to action, O my comrades! for the fight is hard at hand
Swift, your right hands to the sword hilt! bare the weapon as for
strife--

Aegisthus:

Lo! I too am standing ready, hand on hilt for death or life.

Chorus:

'Twas thy word and we accept it: onward to the chance of war!

Clyemnestra:

Nay, enough, enough, my champion! we will smite and slay
no more.

Already have we reaped enough the harvest-field of guilt:
Enough of wrong and murder, let no other blood be spilt.
Peace, old men! and pass away unto the homes by Fate decreed,
Lest ill valour meet our vengeance--'twas a necessary deed.
But enough of toils and troubles--be the end, if ever, now,
Ere thy talon, O Avenger, deal another deadly blow.
Tis a woman's word of warning, and let who willist thereto.

Aegisthus:

But that these should loose and lavish reckless blossoms of the tongue,
And in hazard of their fortune cast upon me words of wrong,
And forget the law of subjects, and revile their ruler's word--

Chorus:

Ruler? but 'tis not for Argives, thus to own a dastard lord!

Aegisthus:

I will follow to chastise thee in my coming days of sway.

Chorus:

Not if Fortune guide Orestes safely on his homeward way.

Aegisthus:

Ah, well I know how exiles feed on hopes of their return.

Chorus:

Fare and batten on pollution of the right, while 'tis thy turn.

Aegisthus:

Thou shalt pay, be well assured, heavy quittance for thy pride

Chorus:

Crow and strut, with her to watch thee, like a cock, his mate beside!

Clyemnestra:

Heed not thou too highly of them--let the cur-pack growl and yell:
I and thou will rule the palace and will order all things well.

Exeunt.

The Libation Bearers (Choephoroi)

Dramatis Personae

ORESTES, son of AGAMEMNON and CLYTEMNESTRA

CHORUS OF SLAVE WOMEN

ELECTRA, sister of ORESTES

A NURSE

CLYTEMNESTRA

AEGISTHUS

AN ATTENDANT

The Libation Bearers (Choephoroi)

Scene

By the tomb of Agamemnon near the palace in Argos. ORESTES and PYLADES enter, dressed as travellers. ORESTES carries two locks of hair in his hand.

ORESTES

Lord of the shades and patron of the realm
 That erst my father swayed, list now my prayer,
 Hermes, and save me with thine aiding arm,
 Me who from banishment returning stand
 On this my country; lo, my foot is set
 On this grave-mound, and herald-like, as thou,
 Once and again, I bid my father hear.
 And these twin locks, from mine head shorn, I bring,
 And one to Inachus the river-god,
 My young life's nurturer, I dedicate,
 And one in sign of mourning unfulfilled
 I lay, though late, on this my father's grave.
 For O my father, not beside thy corse
 Stood I to wail thy death, nor was my hand
 Stretched out to bear thee forth to burial.

What sight is yonder? what this woman-throng
 Hitherward coming, by their sable garb
 Made manifest as mourners? What hath chanced?
 Doth some new sorrow hap within the home?
 Or rightly may I deem that they draw near
 Bearing libations, such as soothe the ire
 Of dead men angered, to my father's grave?
 Nay, such they are indeed; for I descry
 Electra mine own sister pacing hither,
 In moody grief conspicuous. Grant, O Zeus,
 Grant me my father's murder to avenge-
 Be thou my willing champion!
 Pylades,
 Pass we aside, till rightly I discern
 Wherefore these women throng in suppliance.

PYLADES and ORESTES withdraw; the CHORUS enters bearing vessels for libation; ELECTRA follows them; they pace slowly towards the tomb of Agamemnon.

CHORUS *singing*

strophe 1

Forth from the royal halls by high command
 I bear libations for the dead.
 Rings on my smitten breast my smiting hand,
 And all my cheek is rent and red,
 Fresh-furrowed by my nails, and all my soul

This many a day doth feed on cries of dole.
 And trailing tatters of my vest,
 In looped and windowed raggedness forlorn,
 Hang rent around my breast,
 Even as I, by blows of Fate most stern
 Saddened and torn.

antistrophe 1

Oracular thro' visions, ghastly clear,
 Bearing a blast of wrath from realms below,
 And stiffening each rising hair with dread,
 Came out of dream-land Fear,
 And, loud and awful, bade
 The shriek ring out at midnight's witching hour,
 And brooded, stern with woe,
 Above the inner house, the woman's bower
 And seers inspired did read the dream on oath,
 Chanting aloud In realms below
 The dead are wrath;
 Against their slayers yet their ire doth glow.

strophe 2

Therefore to bear this gift of graceless worth-
 O Earth, my nursing mother!-
 The woman god-accurs'd doth send me forth
 Lest one crime bring another.
 Ill is the very word to speak, for none
 Can ransom or atone
 For blood once shed and darkening the plain.
 O hearth of woe and bane,
 O state that low doth lie!
 Sunless, accursed of men, the shadows brood
 Above the home of murdered majesty.

antistrophe 2

Rumour of might, unquestioned, unsubdued,
 Pervading ears and soul of lesser men,
 Is silent now and dead.
 Yet rules a viler dread;
 For bliss and power, however won,
 As gods, and more than gods, dazzle our mortal ken.

Justice doth mark, with scales that swiftly sway,
 Some that are yet in light;
 Others in interspace of day and night,
 Till Fate arouse them, stay;
 And some are lapped in night, where all things are undone

strophe 3

On the life-giving lap of Earth
 Blood hath flowed forth;

And now, the seed of vengeance, clots the plain-
 Unmelting, uneffaced the stain.
 And Ate tarries long, but at the last
 The sinner's heart is cast
 Into pervading, waxing pangs of pain.

antistrophe 3

Lo, when man's force doth ope
 The virgin doors, there is nor cure nor hope
 For what is lost,-even so, I deem,
 Though in one channel ran Earth's every stream,
 Laving the hand defiled from murder's stain,
 It were in vain.

epode

And upon me-ah me!-the gods have laid
 The woe that wrapped round Troy,
 What time they led me down from home and kin
 Unto a slave's employ-
 The doom to bow the head
 And watch our master's will
 Work deeds of good and ill-
 To see the headlong sway of force and sin,
 And hold restrained the spirit's bitter hate,
 Wailing the monarch's fruitless fate,
 Hiding my face within my robe, and fain
 Of tears, and chilled with frost of hidden pain.

ELECTRA

Handmaidens, orderers of the palace-halls,
 Since at my side ye come, a suppliant train,
 Companions of this offering, counsel me
 As best befits the time: for I, who pour
 Upon the grave these streams funereal,
 With what fair word can I invoke my sire?
 Shall I aver, Behold, I bear these gifts
 From well-loved wife unto her well-loved lord,
 When 'tis from her, my mother, that they come?
 I dare not say it: of all words I fail
 Wherewith to consecrate unto my sire
 These sacrificial honours on his grave.
 Or shall I speak this word, as mortals use-
 Give back, to those who send these coronals,
 Full recompense-of ills for acts malign?
 Or shall I pour this draught for Earth to drink,
 Sans word or reverence, as my sire was slain,
 And homeward pass with unreverted eyes,
 Casting the bowl away, as one who flings
 The household cleansings to the common road?
 Be art and part, O friends, in this my doubt,
 Even as ye are in that one common hate

Whereby we live attended: fear ye not
 The wrath of any man, nor hide your word
 Within your breast: the day of death and doom
 Awaits alike the freeman and the slave.
 Speak, then, if aught thou know'st to aid us more.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thou biddest; I will speak my soul's thought out,
 Revering as a shrine thy father's grave.

ELECTRA

Say then thy say, as thou his tomb reverest.

LEADER

Speak solemn words to them that love, and pour.

ELECTRA

And of his kin whom dare I name as kind?

LEADER

Thyself; and next, whoe'er Aegisthus scorns.

ELECTRA

Then 'tis myself and thou, my prayer must name.

LEADER

Whoe'er they be, 'tis thine to know and name them.

ELECTRA

Is there no other we may claim as ours?

LEADER

Think of Orestes, though far-off he be.

ELECTRA

Right well in this too hast thou schooled my thought.

LEADER

Mindfully, next, on those who shed the blood-

ELECTRA

Pray on them what? expound, instruct my doubt.

LEADER

This: Upon them some god or mortal come-

ELECTRA

As judge or as avenger? speak thy thought.

LEADER

Pray in set terms, Who shall the slayer slay.

ELECTRA

Beseemeth it to ask such boon of heaven?

LEADER

How not, to wreak a wrong upon a foe?

ELECTRA praying at the tomb

O mighty Hermes, warder of the shades,

Herald of upper and of under world,
 Proclaim and usher down my prayer's appeal
 Unto the gods below, that they with eyes
 Watchful behold these halls. my sire's of old-
 And unto Earth, the mother of all things,
 And lofter-nurse, and womb that takes their seed.

Lo, I that pour these draughts for men now dead,
 Call on my father, who yet holds in ruth
 Me and mine own Orestes, Father, speak-
 How shall thy children rule thine halls again?
 Homeless we are and sold; and she who sold
 Is she who bore us; and the price she took
 Is he who joined with her to work thy death,
 Aegisthus, her new lord. Behold me here
 Brought down to slave's estate, and far away
 Wanders Orestes, banished from the wealth
 That once was thine, the profit of thy care,
 Whereon these revel in a shameful joy.
 Father, my prayer is said; 'tis thine to hear-
 Grant that some fair fate bring Orestes home,
 And unto me grant these-a purer soul
 Than is my mother's, a more stainless hand.

These be my prayers for us; for thee, O sire,
 I cry that one may come to smite thy fops,
 And that the slayers may in turn be slain.
 Cursed is their prayer, and thus I bar its path,
 Praying mine own, a counter-curse on them.
 And thou, send up to us the righteous boon
 For which we pray; thine aids be heaven and earth,
 And justice guide the right to victory.

To the CHORUS

Thus have I prayed, and thus I shed these streams,
 And follow ye the wont, and as with flowers
 Crown ye with many a tear and cry the dirge
 Your lips ring out above the dead man's grave.

She pours the libations.

CHORUS *chanting*

Woe, woe, woe!
 Let the teardrop fall, plashing on the ground
 Where our lord lies low:
 Fall and cleanse away the cursed libation's stair.,
 Shed on this grave-mound,
 Fenced wherein together, gifts of good or bane
 From the dead are found.
 Lord of Argos, hearken!
 Though around thee darken
 Mist of death and hell, arise and hear

Hearken and awaken to our cry of woe!
 Who with might of spear
 Shall our home deliver?
 Who like Ares bend until it quiver,
 Bend the northern bow?
 Who with hand upon the hilt himself will thrust with glaive,
 Thrust and slay and save?

ELECTRA

Lo! the earth drinks them, to my sire they pass-
 She notices the locks of ORESTES.

Learn ye with me of this thing new and strange.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Speak thou; my breast doth palpitate with fear.

ELECTRA

I see upon the tomb a curl new shorn.

LEADER

Shorn from what man or what deep-girded maid?

ELECTRA

That may he, guess who will; the sign is plain.

LEADER

Let me learn this of thee; let youth prompt age.

ELECTRA

None is there here but I, to clip such gift.

LEADER

For they who thus should mourn him hate him sore.

ELECTRA

And lo! in truth the hair exceeding like-

LEADER

Like to what locks and whose? instruct me that.

ELECTRA

Like unto those my father's children wear.

LEADER

Then is this lock Orestes' secret gift?

ELECTRA

Most like it is unto the curls he wore.

LEADER

Yet how dared he to come unto his home?

ELECTRA

He hath but sent it, clipped to mourn his sire.

LEADER

It is a sorrow grievous as his death,
 That he should live yet never dare return.

ELECTRA

Yea, and my heart o'erflows with gall of grief,
 And I am pierced as with a cleaving dart;
 Like to the first drops after drought, my tears
 Fall down at will, a bitter bursting tide,
 As on this lock I gaze; I cannot deem
 That any Argive save Orestes' self
 Was ever lord thereof; nor, well I wot,
 Hath she, the murd'ress, shorn and laid this lock
 To mourn him whom she slew-my mother she,
 Bearing no mother's heart, but to her race
 A loathing spirit, loathed itself of heaven!
 Yet to affirm, as utterly made sure,
 That this adornment cometh of the hand
 Of mine Orestes, brother of my soul,
 I may not venture, yet hope flatters fair!
 Ah well-a-day, that this dumb hair had voice
 To glad mine ears, as might a messenger,
 Bidding me sway no more 'twixt fear and hope,
 Clearly commanding, Cast me hence away,
 Clipped was I from some head thou lovest not;
 Or, I am kin to thee, and here, as thou,
 I come to weep and deck our father's grave.
 Aid me, ye gods! for well indeed ye know
 How in the gale and counter-gale of doubt,
 Like to the seaman's bark, we whirl and stray.
 But, if God will our life, how strong shall spring,
 From seed how small, the new tree of our home!-
 Lo ye, a second sign-these footsteps, looks-
 Like to my own, a corresponsive print;
 And look, another footmark,-this his own,
 And that the foot of one who walked with him.
 Mark, how the heel and tendons' print combine,
 Measured exact, with mine coincident!
 Alas, for doubt and anguish rack my mind.

ORESTES and PYLADES enter suddenly.

ORESTES

Pray thou, in gratitude for prayers fulfilled,
 Fair fall the rest of what I ask of heaven.

ELECTRA

Wherefore? what win I from the gods by prayer?

ORESTES

This, that thine eyes behold thy heart's desire.

ELECTRA

On whom of mortals know'st thou that I call?

ORESTES

I know thy yearning for Orestes deep.

ELECTRA

Say then, wherein event hath crowned my prayer?

ORESTES

I, I am he; seek not one more akin.

ELECTRA

Some fraud, O stranger, weavest thou for me?

ORESTES

Against myself I weave it, if I weave.

ELECTRA

Ah, thou hast mind to mock me in my woel

ORESTES

'Tis at mine own I mock then, mocking thine.

ELECTRA

Speak I with thee then as Orestes' self?

ORESTES

My very face thou see'st and know'st me not,
 And yet but now, when thou didst see the lock
 Shorn for my father's grave, and when thy quest
 Was eager on the footprints I had made,
 Even I, thy brother, shaped and sized as thou,
 Fluttered thy spirit, as at sight of me!
 Lay now this ringlet whence 'twas shorn, and judge,
 And look upon this robe, thine own hands' work,
 The shuttle-prints, the creature wrought thereon-
 Refrain thyself, nor prudence lose in joy,
 For well I wot, our kin are less than kind.

ELECTRA

O thou that art unto our father's home
 Love, grief and hope, for thee the tears ran down,
 For thee, the son, the saviour that should be;
 Trust thou thine arm and win thy father's halls!
 O aspect sweet of fourfold love to me,
 Whom upon thee the heart's constraint bids call
 As on my father, and the claim of love
 From me unto my mother turns to thee,
 For she is very hate; to thee too turns
 What of my heart went out to her who died
 A ruthless death upon the altar-stone;
 And for myself I love thee-thee that wast
 A brother leal, sole stay of love to me.
 Now by thy side be strength and right, and Zeus
 Saviour almighty, stand to aid the twain!

ORESTES

Zeus, Zeus! look down on our estate and us,
 The orphaned brood of him, our eagle-sire,
 Whom to his death a fearful serpent brought,

Enwinding him in coils; and we, bereft
 And foodless, sink with famine, all too weak
 To bear unto the eyrie, as he bore,
 Such quarry as he slew. Lo! I and she,
 Electra, stand before thee, fatherless,
 And each alike cast out and homeless made.

ELECTRA

And if thou leave to death the brood of him
 Whose altar blazed for thee, whose reverence
 Was thine, all thine,-whence, in the after years,
 Shall any hand like his adorn thy shrine
 With sacrifice of flesh? the eaglets slain,
 Thou wouldst not have a messenger to bear
 Thine omens, once so clear, to mortal men;
 So, if this kingly stock be withered all,
 None on high festivals will fend thy shrine.
 Stoop thou to raise us! strong the race shall grow,
 Though puny now it seem, and fallen low.

LEADER

O children, saviours of your father's home,
 Beware ye of your words, lest one should hear
 And bear them, for the tongue hath lust to tell,
 Unto our masters-whom God grant to me
 In pitchy reek of fun'ral flame to seel

ORESTES

Nay, mighty is Apollo's oracle
 And shall not fail me, whom it bade to pass
 Thro' all this peril; clear the voice rang out
 With many warnings, sternly threatening
 To my hot heart the wintry chill of pain,
 Unless upon the slayers of my sire
 I pressed for vengeance: this the god's command-
 That I, in ire for home and wealth despoiled,
 Should with a craft like theirs the slayers slay:
 Else with my very life I should atone
 This deed undone, in many a ghastly wise.
 For he proclaimed unto the ears of men
 That offerings, poured to angry powers of death,
 Exude again, unless their will be done,
 As grim disease on those that poured them forth-
 As leprous ulcers mounting on the flesh
 And with fell fangs corroding what of old
 Wore natural form; and on the brow arise
 White poisoned hairs, the crown of this disease.
 He spake moreover of assailing fiends
 Empowered to quit on me my father's blood,
 Wreaking their wrath on me, what time in night
 Beneath shut lids the spirit's eye sees clear.
 The dart that flies in darkness, sped from hell

By spirits of the murdered dead who call
 Unto their kin for vengeance, formless fear,
 The night-tide's visitant, and madness' curse
 Should drive and rack me; and my tortured frame
 Should be chased forth from man's community
 As with the brazen scorpions of the scourge.
 For me and such as me no lustral bowl
 Should stand, no spilth of wine be poured to God
 For me, and wrath unseen of my dead sire
 Should drive me from the shrine; no man should dare
 To take me to his hearth, nor dwell with me:
 Slow, friendless, cursed of all should be mine end,
 And pitiless horror wind me for the grave.
 This spake the god-this dare I disobey?
 Yea, though I dared, the deed must yet be done;
 For to that end diverse desires combine,-
 The god's behest, deep grief for him who died,
 And last, the grievous blank of wealth despoiled-
 All these weigh on me, urge that Argive men,
 Minions of valour, who with soul of fire
 Did make of fenced Troy a ruinous heap,
 Be not left slaves to two and each a woman!
 For he, the man, wears woman's heart; if not,
 Soon shall he know, confronted by a man.

ORESTES, ELECTRA, and the **CHORUS** gather round the tomb of Agamemnon. The following lines are chanted responsively.

CHORUS

Mighty Fates, on you we call!
 Bid the will of Zeus ordain
 Power to those, to whom again
 Justice turns with hand and aid!
 Grievous was the prayer one made
 Grievous let the answer fall!
 Where the mighty doom is set,
 Justice claims aloud her debt.
 Who in blood hath dipped the steel,
 Deep in blood her meed shall feel
 List an immemorial word-
 Whosoe'er shall take the sword
 Shall perish by the sword.

ORESTES

Father, unblest in death, O father mine!
 What breath of word or deed
 Can I waft on thee from this far confine
 Unto thy lowly bed,-
 Waft upon thee, in midst of darkness lying,
 Hope's counter-gleam of fire?
 Yet the loud dirge of praise brings grace undying
 Unto each parted sire.

CHORUS

O child, the spirit of the dead,
 Altho' upon his flesh have fed
 The grim teeth of the flame,
 Is quelled not; after many days
 The sting of wrath his soul shall raise,
 A vengeance to reclaim!
 To the dead rings loud our cry-
 Plain the living's treachery-
 Swelling, shrilling, urged on high,
 The vengeful dirge, for parents slain,
 Shall strive and shall attain.

ELECTRA

Hear me too, even me, O father, hear!
 Not by one child alone these groans, these tears are shed
 Upon thy sepulchre.
 Each, each, where thou art lowly laid,
 Stands, a suppliant, homeless made:
 Ah, and all is full of ill,
 Comfort is there none to say!
 Strive and wrestle as we may,
 Still stands doom invincible.

CHORUS

Nay, if so he will, the god
 Still our tears to joy can turn.
 He can bid a triumph-ode
 Drown the dirge beside this urn;
 He to kingly halls can greet
 The child restored, the homeward-guided feet.

ORESTES

Ah my father! hadst thou lain
 Under Ilion's wall,
 By some Lycian spearman slain,
 Thou hadst left in this thine hall
 Honour; thou hadst wrought for us
 Fame and life most glorious.
 Over-seas if thou hadst died,
 Heavily had stood thy tomb,
 Heaped on high; but, quenched in pride,
 Grief were light unto thy home.

CHORUS

Loved and honoured hadst thou lain
 By the dead that nobly fell,
 In the under-world again,
 Where are throned the kings of hell,
 Full of sway, adorable
 Thou hadst stood at their right hand-
 Thou that wert, in mortal land,

By Fate's ordinance and law,
 King of kings who bear the crown
 And the staff, to which in awe
 Mortal men bow down.

ELECTRA

Nay, O father, I were fain
 Other fate had fallen on thee.
 Ill it were if thou hadst lain
 One among the common slain,
 Fallen by Scamander's side-
 Those who slew thee there should be!
 Then, untouched by slavery,
 We had heard as from afar
 Deaths of those who should have died
 'Mid the chance of war.

CHORUS

O child, forbear! things all too high thou sayest.
 Easy, but vain, thy cry!
 A boon above all gold is that thou prayest,
 An unreached destiny,
 As of the blessed land that far aloof
 Beyond the north wind lies;
 Yet doth your double prayer ring loud reproof;
 A double scourge of sighs
 Awakes the dead; th' avengers rise, though late;
 Blood stains the guilty pride
 Of the accursed who rule on earth, and Fate
 Stands on the children's side.

ELECTRA

That hath sped thro' mine ear, like a shaft from a bow!
 Zeus, Zeus! it is thou who dost send from below
 A doom on the desperate ere long
 On a mother a father shall visit his wrong.

CHORUS

Be it mine to upraise thro' the reek of the pyre
 The chant of delight, while the funeral fire
 Devoureth the corpse of a man that is slain
 And a woman laid low!
 For who bids me conceal it! out-rending control,
 Blows ever the stern blast of hate thro' my soul,
 And before me a vision of wrath and of bane
 Flits and waves to and fro.

ORESTES

Zeus, thou alone to us art parent now.
 Smite with a rending blow
 Upon their heads, and bid the land be well:
 Set right where wrong hath stood; and thou give ear,

O Earth, unto my prayer-
Yea, hear O mother Earth, and monarchy of hell

CHORUS

Nay, the law is sternly set-
Blood-drops shed upon the ground
Plead for other bloodshed yet;
Loud the call of death doth sound,
Calling guilt of olden time,
A Fury, crowning crime with crime.

ELECTRA

Where, where are ye, avenging powers,
Puissant Furies of the slain?
Behold the relics of the race
Of Atreus, thrust from pride of place!
O Zeus, what borne henceforth is ours,
What refuge to attain?

CHORUS

Lo, at your wail my heart throbs, wildly stirred;
Now am I lorn with sadness,
Darkened in all my soul, to hear your sorrow's word
Anon to hope, the seat of strength, I rise,-
She, thrusting grief away, lifts up mine eyes
To the new dawn of gladness.

ORESTES

Skills it to tell of aught save wrong on wrong,
Wrought by our mother's deed?
Though now she fawn for pardon, sternly strong
Standeth our wrath, and will nor hear nor heed.
Her children's soul is wolfish, born from hers,
And softens not by prayers.

CHORUS

I dealt upon my breast the blow
That Asian mourning women know;
Wails from-my breast the fun'ral cry,
The Cissian weeping melody;
Stretched rendingly forth, to tatter and tear,
My clenched hands wander, here and there,
From head to breast; distraught with blows
Throb dizzily my brows.

ELECTRA

Aweless in hate, O mother, sternly brave!
As in a foeman's grave
Thou laid'st in earth a king, but to the bier
No citizen drew nears-
Thy husband, thine, yet for his obsequies,
Thou bad'st no wail arise!

ORESTES

Alas, the shameful burial thou dost speak!
 Yet I the vengeance of his shame will wreak-
 That do the gods command!
 That shall achieve mine hand!
 Grant me to thrust her life away, and
 Will dare to die!

CHORUS

List thou the deed! Hewn down and foully torn,
 He to the tomb was borne;
 Yea, by her hand, the deed who wrought,
 With like dishonour to the grave was brought,
 And by her hand she strove, with strong desire,
 Thy life to crush, O child, by murder of thy sire:
 Bethink thee, hearing, of the shame, the pain
 Wherewith that sire was slain!

ELECTRA

Yea, such was the doom of my sire; well-a-day,
 I was thrust from his side,-
 As a dog from the chamber they thrust me away,
 And in place of my laughter rose sobbing and tears,
 As in darkness I lay.
 O father, if this word can pass to thine ears,
 To thy soul let it reach and abide!

CHORUS

Let it pass, let it pierce, through the sense of thine ear,
 To thy soul, where in silence it waiteth the hour!
 The past is accomplished; but rouse thee to hear
 What the future prepareth; awake and appear,
 Our champion, in wrath and in power!

ORESTES

O father, to thy loved ones come in aid.

ELECTRA

With tears I call on thee.

CHORUS

Listen and rise to light!
 Be thou with us, be thou against the foe!
 Swiftly this cry arises-even so
 Pray we, the loyal band, as we have prayed!

ORESTES

Let their might meet with mine, and their right with my right.

ELECTRA

O ye Gods, it is yours to decree.

CHORUS

Ye call unto the dead; I quake to hear.
 Fate is ordained of old, and shall fulfil your prayer.

ELECTRA

Alas, the inborn curse that haunts our home,
 Of Ate's bloodstained scourge the tuneless sound!
 Alas, the deep insufferable doom,
 The stanchless wound!

ORESTES

It shall be stanch'd, the task is ours,-
 Not by a stranger's, but by kindred hand,
 Shall be chased forth the blood-fiend of our land.
 Be this our spoken spell, to call Earth's nether powers!

CHORUS

Lords of a dark eternity,
 To you has come the children's cry,
 Send up from hell, fulfil your aid
 To them who prayed.

The chant is concluded.

ORESTES

O father, murdered in unkingly wise,
 Fulfil my prayer, grant me thine halls to sway.

ELECTRA

To me, too, grant this boon-dark death to deal
 Unto Aegisthus, and to 'scape my doom.

ORESTES

So shall the rightful feasts that mortals pay
 Be set for thee; else, not for thee shall rise
 The scented reek of altars fed with flesh,
 But thou shalt lie dishonoured: hear thou me!

ELECTRA

I too, from my full heritage restored,
 Will pour the lustral streams, what time I pass
 Forth as a bride from these paternal halls,
 And honour first, beyond all graves, thy tomb.

ORESTES

Earth, send my sire to fend me in the fight!

ELECTRA

Give fair-faced fortune, O Persephone!

ORESTES

Bethink thee, father, in the laver slain-

ELECTRA

Bethink thee of the net they handselled for thee!

ORESTES

Bonds not of brass ensnared thee, father mine.

ELECTRA

Yea, the ill craft of an enfolding robe.

ORESTES

By this our bitter speech arise, O sire!

ELECTRA

Raise thou thine head at love's last, dearest call!

ORESTES

Yea, speed forth Right to aid thy kinsmen's cause;
Grip for grip, let them grasp the foe, if thou
Willest in triumph to forget thy fall.

ELECTRA

Hear me, O father, once again hear me.
Lo! at thy tomb, two fledglings of thy brood-
A man-child and a maid; hold them in ruth,
Nor wipe them out, the last of Pelops' line.
For while they live, thou livest from the dead;
Children are memory's voices, and preserve
The dead from wholly dying: as a net
Is ever by the buoyant corks upheld,
Which save the flax-mesh, in the depth submerged.
Listen, this wail of ours doth rise for thee,
And as thou heedest it thyself art saved.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

In sooth, a blameless prayer ye spake at length-
The tomb's requital for its dirge denied:
Now, for the rest, as thou art fixed to do,
Take fortune by the hand and work thy will.

ORESTES

The doom is set; and yet I fain would ask-
Not swerving from the course of my resolve,-
Wherefore she sent these offerings, and why
She softens all too late her cureless deed?
An idle boon it was, to send them here
Unto the dead who recks not of such gifts.
I cannot guess her thought, but well I ween
Such gifts are skillless to atone such crime.
Be blood once spilled, an idle strife he strives
Who seeks with other wealth or wine outpoured
To atone the deed. So stands the word, nor fails.
Yet would I know her thought; speak, if thou knowest.

LEADER

I know it, son; for at her side I stood.
'Twas the night-wandering terror of a dream
That flung her shivering from her couch, and bade her-
Her, the accursed of God-these offerings send.

ORESTES

Heard ye the dream, to tell it forth aright?

LEADER

Yea, from herself; her womb a serpent bare.

ORESTES

What then the sum and issue of the tale?

LEADER

Even as a swaddled child, she lull'd the thing.

ORESTES

What suckling craved the creature, born full-fanged?

LEADER

Yet in her dreams she proffered it the breast.

ORESTES

How? did the hateful thing not bite her teat?

LEADER

Yea, and sucked forth a blood-gout in the milk.

ORESTES

Not vain this dream-it bodes a man's revenge.

LEADER

Then out of sleep she started with a cry,
 And thro' the palace for their mistress' aid
 Full many lamps, that erst lay blind with night,
 Flared into light; then, even as mourners use,
 She sends these offerings, in hope to win
 A cure to cleave and sunder sin from doom.

ORESTES

Earth and my father's grave, to you I call-
 Give this her dream fulfilment, and thro' me.
 I read it in each part coincident
 With what shall be; for mark, that serpent sprang
 From the same womb as I, in swaddling bands
 By the same hands was swathed, lipped the same breast,
 And sucking forth the same sweet mother's-milk
 Infused a clot of blood; and in alarm
 She cried upon her wound the cry of pain.
 The rede is clear: the thing of dread she nursed,
 The death of blood she dies; and I, 'tis I,
 In semblance of a serpent, that must slay her.
 Thou art my seer, and thus I read the dream.

LEADER

So do; yet ere thou doest, speak to us,
 Bidding some act, some, by not acting, aid.

ORESTES

Brief my command: I bid my sister pass
 In silence to the house, and all I bid
 This my design with wariness conceal,
 That they who did by craft a chieftain slay
 May by like craft and in like noose be talen,
 Dying the death which Loxias foretold-
 Apollo, king and prophet undisproved.

I with this warrior Pylades will come
 In likeness of a stranger, full equipt
 As travellers come, and at the palace gates
 Will stand, as stranger yet in friendship's bond
 Unto this house allied; and each of us
 Will speak the tongue that round Parnassus sounds,
 Feigning such speech as Phocian voices use.
 And what if none of those that tend the gates
 Shall welcome us with gladness, since the house
 With ills divine is baunted? If this hap,
 We at the gate will bide, till, passing by,
 Some townsman make conjecture and proclaim,
 How? is Aegisthus here, and knowingly
 Keeps suppliants aloof, by bolt and bar?
 Then shall I win my way; and if I cross
 The threshold of the gate, the palace' guard,
 And find him throned where once my father sat-
 Or if he come anon, and face to face
 Confronting, drop his eyes from mine-I swear
 He shall not utter, Who art thou and whence?
 Ere my steel leap, and compassed round with death
 Low he shall lie: and thus, full-fed with doom,
 The Fury of the house shall drain once more
 A deep third draught of rich unmingled blood.
 But thou, O sister, look that all within
 Be well prepared to give these things event.
 And ye-I say 'twere well to bear a tongue
 Full of fair silence and of fitting speech
 As each beseems the time; and last, do thou,
 Hermes the warder-god, keep watch and ward,
 And guide to victory my striving sword.

ORESTES, PYLADES, and ELECTRA depart.

CHORUS *singing*

strophe 1

Many and marvellous the things of fear
 Earth's breast doth bear;
 And the sea's lap with many monsters teems,
 And windy levin-bolts and meteor gleams
 Breed many deadly things-
 Unknown and flying forms, with fear upon their wings,
 And in their tread is death;
 And rushing whirlwinds, of whose blasting breath
 Man's tongue can tell.

antistrophe 1

But who can tell aright the fiercer thing,
 The aweless soul, within man's breast inhabiting?
 Who tell how, passion-fraught and love-distraught,

The woman's eager, craving thought
 Doth wed mankind to woe and ruin fell?
 Yea, how the loveless love that doth posses
 The woman, even as the lioness,
 Doth rend and wrest apart, with eager strife,
 The link of wedded life?

strophe 2

Let him be the witness, whose thought is not borne on light wings thro' the air,
 But abideth with knowledge, what thing was wrought by Althea's despair;
 For she marr'd the life-grace of her son, with ill counsel rekindled the flame
 That was quenched as it glowed on the brand, what time from his mother he came,
 With the cry of a new-born child; and the brand from the burning she won,
 For the Fates had foretold it coeval, in life and in death, with her son.

antistrophe 2

Yea, and man's hate tells of another, even Scylla of murderous guile,
 Who slew for an enemy's sake her father, won o'er by the wile
 And the gifts of Cretan Minos, the gauds of the high-wrought gold;
 For she clipped from her father's head the lock that should never wax old,
 As he breathed in the silence of sleep, and knew not her craft and her crime-
 But Hermes, the guard of the dead, doth grasp her, in fulness of time.

strophe 3

And since of the crimes of the cruel I tell, let my singing record
 The bitter wedlock and loveless, the curse on these halls outpoured,
 The crafty device of a woman, whereby did a chieftain fall,
 A warrior stern in his wrath, the fear of his enemies all,-
 A song of dishonour, untimely! and cold is the hearth that was warm,
 And ruled by the cowardly spear, the woman's unwomanly arm.

antistrophe 3

But the summit and crown of all crimes is that which in Lemnos befell;
 A woe and a mourning it is, a shame and a spitting to tell;
 And he that in after time doth speak of his deadliest thought,
 Doth say, It is like to the deed that of old time in Lemnos was wrought;
 And loathed of men were the doers, and perished, they and their seed,
 For the gods brought hate upon them; none loveth the impious deed.

strophe 4

It is well of these tales to tell; for the sword in the grasp of
 Right
 With a cleaving, a piercing blow to the innermost heart doth smite,
 And the deed unlawfully done is not trodden down nor forgot,
 When the sinner out-steppeth the law and heedeth the high God not;

antistrophe 4

But justice hath planted the anvil, and Destiny forgeth the sword
 That shall smite in her chosen time; by her is the child restored;
 And, darkly devising, the Fiend of the house, world-cursed, will repay
 The price of the blood of the slain, that was shed in the bygone day.

The scene now is before the palace. **ORESTES** and **PYLADES** enter, still dressed as travellers.

ORESTES knocking at the palace gate
 What ho! slave, ho! I smite the palace gate
 In vain, it seems; what ho, attend within,-
 Once more, attend; come forth and ope the halls,
 If yet Aegisthus holds them hospitable.

SLAVE from within
 Anon, anon!

Opens the door

Speak, from what land art thou, and sent from whom?

ORESTES

Go, tell to them who rule the palace-halls,
 Since 'tis to them I come with tidings new-
 Delay not-Night's dark car is speeding on,
 And time is now for wayfarers to cast
 Anchor in haven, wheresoe'er a house
 Doth welcome strangers-that there now come forth
 Some one who holds authority within-
 The queen, or, if some man, more seemly were it;
 For when man standeth face to face with man,
 No stammering modesty confounds their speech,
 But each to each doth tell his meaning clear.

CLYTEMNESTRA comes out of the palace.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Speak on, O strangers: have ye need of aught?
 Here is whate'er beseems a house like this-
 Warm bath and bed, tired Nature's soft restorer,
 And courteous eyes to greet you; and if aught
 Of graver import needeth act as well,
 That, as man's charge, I to a man will tell.

ORESTES

A Daulian man am I, from Phocis bound,
 And as with mine own travel-scrip self-laden
 I went toward Argos, parting hitherward
 With travelling foot, there did encounter me
 One whom I knew not and who knew not me,
 But asked my purposed way nor hid his own,
 And, as we talked together, told his name-
 Strophius of Phocis; then he said, "Good sir,
 Since in all case thou art to Argos bound,
 Forget not this my message, heed it well,
 Tell to his own, Orestes is no more.
 And-whatsoever his kinsfolk shall resolve.
 Whether to bear his dust unto his home,
 Or lay him here, in death as erst in life
 Exiled for aye, a child of banishment-

Bring me their hest, upon thy backward road;
 For now in brazen compass of an urn
 His ashes lie, their dues of weeping paid."
 So much I heard, and so much tell to thee,
 Not knowing if I speak unto his kin
 Who rule his home; but well, I deem, it were,
 Such news should earliest reach a parent's ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah woe is me! thy word our ruin tells;
 From roof-tree unto base are we despoiled.-
 O thou whom nevermore we wrestle down,
 Thou Fury of this home, how oft and oft
 Thou dost descry what far aloof is laid,
 Yea, from afar dost bend th' unerring bow
 And rendest from my wretchedness its friends;
 As now Orestes-who, a brief while since,
 Safe from the mire of death stood warily,-
 Was the home's hope to cure th' exulting wrong;
 Now thou ordainest, Let the ill abide.

ORESTES

To host and hostess thus with fortune blest,
 Lief had I come with better news to bear
 Unto your greeting and acquaintanceship;
 For what goodwill lies deeper than the bond
 Of guest and host? and wrong abhorred it were,
 As well I deem, if I, who pledged my faith
 To one, and greetings from the other had,
 Bore not aright the tidings 'twixt the twain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Whate'er thy news, thou shalt not welcome lack,
 Meet and deserved, nor scant our grace shall be.
 Hadst thou thyself not come, such tale to tell,
 Another, sure, had borne it to our ears.
 But lo! the hour is here when travelling guests,
 Fresh from the daylong labour of the road,
 Should win their rightful due.

To the slave

Take him within
 To the man-chamber's hospitable rest-
 Him and these fellow-farers at his side;
 Give them such guest-right as beseems our halls;
 I bid thee do as thou shalt answer for it,
 And I unto the prince who rules our home
 Will tell the tale, and, since we lack not friends,
 With them will counsel how this hap to bear.

CLYTEMNESTRA goes back into the palace.

ORESTES and **PYLADES** are conducted to the guest quarters.

CHORUS *singing*

So be it done-
 Sister-servants, when draws nigh
 Time for us aloud to cry
 Orestes and his victory?

O holy earth and holy tomb
 Over the grave-pit heaped on high,
 Where low doth Agamemnon lie,
 The king of ships, the army's lord!
 Now is the hour-give ear and come,
 For now doth Craft her aid afford,
 And Hermes, guard of shades in hell,
 Stands o'er their strife, to sentinel
 The dooming of the sword.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I wot the stranger worketh woe within-
 For lo! I see come forth, suffused with tears,
 Orestes' nurse.

The NURSE enters from the palace.

What ho, Kilissa-thou
 Beyond the doors? Where goest thou? Methinks
 Some grief unbidden walketh at thy side.

NURSE

My mistress bids me, with what speed I may,
 Call in Aegisthus to the stranger guests,
 That he may come, and stinding face to face,
 A man with men, way thus more clearly learn
 This rumour new. Thus speaking, to her slaves
 Laughter for what is wrought-to her desire
 Too well; but ill, ill, ill besets the house,
 Brought by the tale these guests have told so clear.
 And he, God wot, will gladden all his heart
 Hearing this rumour. Woe and well-a-day!
 The bitter mingled cup of ancient woes,
 Hard to be borne, that here in Atreus' house
 Befell, was grievous to mine inmost heart,
 But never yet did I endure such pain.
 All else I bore with set soul patiently;
 But now-alack, alack!--Orestes dear,
 The day and night-long travail of my soul
 Whom from his mother's womb, a new-born child,
 I clasped and cherished! Many a time and oft
 Toilsome and profitless my service was,
 When his shrill outcry called me from my couch!
 For the young child, before the sense is born,
 Hath but a dumb thing's life, must needs be nursed
 As its own nature bids. The swaddled thing
 Hath nought of speech, whate'er discomfort come,-

Hunger or thirst or lower weakling need,-
 For the babe's stomach works its own relief.
 Which knowing well before, yet oft surprised,
 'Twas mine to cleanse the swaddling clothes-poor
 Was nurse to tend and fuller to make white:
 Two works in one, two handicrafts I took,
 When in mine arms the father laid the boy.
 And now he's dead-alack and well-a-day!
 Yet must I go to him whose wrongful power
 Pollutes this house-fair tidings these to him!

LEADER

Say then, with what array she bids him come?

NURSE

What say'st thou! Speak. more clearly for mine ear.

LEADER

Bids she bring henchmen, or to come alone?

NURSE

She bids him bring a spear-armed body-guard.
 Nay, tell not that unto our loathed lord,
 But speed to him, put on the mien of joy,
 Say, Come alone, fear nought, the news is good:
 A bearer can tell straight a twisted tale.

NURSE

Does then thy mind in this new tale find joy?

LEADER

What if Zeus bid our ill wind veer to fair?

NURSE

And how? the home's hope with Orestes dies.

LEADER

Not yet-a seer, though feeble, this might see.

NURSE

What say'st thou? Know'st thou aught, this tale belying?

LEADER

Go, tell the news to him, perform thine hest,-
 What the gods will, themselves can well provide.

NURSE

Well, I will go, herein obeying thee;
 And luck fall fair, with favour sent from heaven.

She goes out.

CHORUS *singing*

strophe 1

Zeus, sire of them who on Olympus dwell,
 Hear thou, O hear my prayer!
 Grant to my rightful lords to prosper well

Even as their zeal is fair!
 For right, for right goes up aloud my cry-
 Zeus, aid him, stand anigh!

refrain 1

Into his father's hall he goes
 To smite his father's foes.
 Bid him prevail by thee on throne of triumph set,
 Twice, yea and thrice with joy shall he acquit the debt.

antistrophe 1

Bethink thee, the young steed, the orphan foal
 Of sire beloved by thee, unto the car
 Of doom is harnessed fast.
 Guide him aright, plant firm a lasting goal,
 Speed thou his pace,-O that no chance may mar
 The homeward course, the last!

strophe 2

And ye who dwell within the inner chamber
 Where shines the stored joy of gold-
 Gods of one heart, O hear ye, and remember;
 Up and avenge the blood shed forth of old,
 With sudden rightful blow;
 Then let the old curse die, nor be renewed
 With progeny of blood,-
 Once more, and not again, be latter guilt laid low!

refrain 2

O thou who dwell'st in Delphi's mighty cave,
 Grant us to see this home once more restored
 Unto its rightful lord!
 Let it look forth, from veils of death, with joyous eye
 Unto the dawning light of liberty;

antistrophe 2

And Hermes, Maia's child, lend hand to save,
 Willing the right, and guide
 Our state with Fortune's breeze adown the favouring tide.
 Whate'er in darkness hidden lies,
 He utters at his will;
 He at his will throws darkness on our eyes,
 By night and eke by day inscrutable.

strophe 3

Then, then shall wealth atone
 The ills that here were done.
 Then, then will we unbind,
 Fling free on wafting wind
 Of joy, the woman's voice that wailleth now
 In piercing accents for a chief laid low;

refrain 3

And this our song shall be-
 Hail to the commonwealth restored!
 Hail to the freedom won to me!
 All hail! for doom hath passed from him, my well-loved lord!

antistrophe 3

And thou, O child, when Time and Chance agree,
 Up to the deed that for thy sire is done!
 And if she wail unto thee, Spare, O son-
 Cry, Aid, O father-and achieve the deed,
 The horror of man's tongue, the gods' great need!
 Hold in thy breast such heart as Perseus had,
 The bitter woe work forth,
 Appease the summons of the dead,
 The wrath of friends on earth;
 Yea, set within a sign of blood and doom,
 And do to utter death him that polilites thy home.

AEGISTHUS enters alone.

AEGISTHUS

Hither and not unsummoned have I come;
 For a new rumour, borne by stranger men
 Arriving hither, hath attained mine ears,
 Of hap unwished-for, even Orestes' death.
 This were new sorrow, a blood-bolter'd load
 Laid on the house that doth already bow
 Beneath a former wound that festers deep.
 Dare I opine these words have truth and life?
 Or are they tales, of woman's terror born,
 That fly in the void air, and die disproved?
 Canst thou tell aught, and prove it to my soul?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What we have heard, we heard; go thou within
 Thyself to ask the strangers of their tale.
 Strengthless are tidings, thro' another heard;
 Question is his, to whom the tale is brought.

AEGISTHUS

I too will meet and test the messenger,
 Whether himself stood witness of the death,
 Or tells it merely from dim rumour learnt:
 None shall cheat me, whose soul hath watchful eyes.

He goes into the palace.

CHORUS *singing*

Zeus, Zeus! what word to me is given?
 What cry or prayer, invoking heaven,
 Shall first by me be uttered?
 What speech of craft-nor all revealing,

Nor all too warily concealing-
 Ending my speech, shall aid the deed?
 For lo! in readiness is laid
 The dark emprise, the rending blade;
 Blood-dropping daggers shall achieve
 The dateless doom of Atreus' name,
 Or-kindling torch and joyful flame
 In sign of new-won liberty-
 Once more Orestes shall retrieve
 His father's wealth, and, throned on high,
 Shall hold the city's fealty.
 So mighty is the grasp whereby,
 Heaven-holpen, he shall trip and throw,
 Unseconded, a double foe.
 Ho for the victory!

A loud cry is heard within.

VOICE OF AEGISTHUS

Help, help, alas!

CHORUS

Ho there, ho I how is't within?
 Is't done? is't over? Stand we here aloof
 While it is wrought, that guiltless we may seem
 Of this dark deed; with death is strife fulfilled.

An ATTENDANT enters from the palace.

ATTENDANT

O woe, O woe, my lord is done to death!
 Woe, woe, and woe again, Aegisthus gone!
 Hasten, fling wide the doors, unloose the bolts
 Of the queen's chamber. O for some young strength
 To match the need! but aid availeth nought
 To him laid low for ever. Help, help, help
 Sure to deaf ears I shout, and call in vain
 To slumber ineffectual. What ho!
 The queen! how fareth Clytemnestra's self?
 Her neck too, hers, is close upon the steel,
 And soon shall sing, hewn thro' as justice wills.

CLYTEMNESTRA enters.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What ails thee, raising this ado for us?

ATTENDANT

I say the dead are come to slay the living.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Alack, I read thy riddles all too clear-
 We slew by craft and by like craft shall die.
 Swift, bring the axe that slew my lord of old;

I'll know anon or death or victory-
So stands the curse, so I confront it here.

ORESTES rushes from the palace; his sword dripping with blood. **PYLADES** is with him.

ORESTES

Thee too I seek: for him what's done will serve.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Woe, woe! Aegisthus, spouse and champion, slain!

ORESTES

What, lov'st the man? then in his grave lie down,
Be his in death, desert him nevermore!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Stay, child, and fear to strike. O son, this breast
Pillowed thine head full oft, while, drowsed with sleep,
Thy toothless mouth drew mother's milk from me.

ORESTES

Can I my mother spare? speak, Pylades.

PYLADES

Where then would fall the hest Apollo gave
At Delphi, where the solemn compact sworn?
Choose thou the hate of all men, not of gods.

ORESTES

Thou dost prevail; I hold thy counsel good.

To **CLYTEMNESTRA**

Follow; I will to slay thee at his side.
With him whom in his life thou loved'st more
Than Agamemnon, sleep in death, the meed
For hate where love, and love where hate was due!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I nursed thee young; must I forego mine eld?

ORESTES

Thou slew'st my father; shalt thou dwell with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Fate bore a share in these things, O my child

ORESTES

Fate also doth provide this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Beware, O child, a parent's dying curse.

ORESTES

A parent who did cast me out to ill!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not cast thee out, but to a friendly home.

ORESTES

Born free, I was by twofold bargain sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where then the price that I received for thee?

ORESTES

The price of shame; I taunt thee not more plainly.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, but recount thy father's lewdness too.

ORESTES

Home-keeping, chide not him who toils without.

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis hard for wives to live as widows, child.

ORESTES

The absent husband toils for them at home.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thou growest fain to slay thy mother, child.

ORESTES

Nay, 'tis thyself wilt slay thyself, not I.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Beware thy mother's vengeful hounds from hell.

ORESTES

How shall I 'scape my father's, sparing thee?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Living, I cry as to a tomb, unheard.

ORESTES

My father's fate ordains this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah me! this snake it was I bore and nursed.

ORESTES

Ay, right prophetic was thy visioned fear.
Shameful thy deed was—die the death of shame!

He drives her into the house before him.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lo, even for these I mourn, a double death:
Yet since Orestes, driven on by doom,
Thus crowns the height of murders manifold,
I say, 'tis well—that not in night and death
Should sink the eye and light of this our home.

CHORUS *singing**strophe 1*

There came on Priam's race and name
A vengeance; though it tarried long,

With heavy doom it came.
 Came, too, on Agamemnon's hall
 A lion-pair, twin swordsmen strong.
 And last, the heritage doth fall
 To him, to whom from Pythian cave
 The god his deepest counsel gave.

refrain 1

Cry out, rejoice! our kingly hall
 Hath 'scaped from ruin-ne'er again
 Its ancient wealth be wasted all
 By two usurpers, sin-defiled-
 An evil path of woe and bane!

antistrophe 1

On him who dealt the dastard blow
 Comes Craft, Revenge's scheming child.
 And hand in hand with him doth go,
 Eager for fight,
 The child of Zeus, whom men below
 Call justice, naming her aright.
 And on her foes her breath
 Is as the blast of death;

strophe 2

For her the god who dwells in deep recess
 Beneath Parnassus' brow,
 Summons with loud acclaim
 To rise, though late and lame,
 And come with craft that worketh righteousness.

For even o'er Powers divine this law is strong-
 Thou shalt not serve the wrong.

refrain 2

To that which ruleth heaven beseems it that we bow
 Lo, freedom's light hath come!
 Lo, now is rent away
 The grim and curbing bit that held us dumb.
 Up to the light, ye halls I this many a day
 Too low on earth ye lay.

antistrophe 2

And Time, the great Accomplisher,
 Shall cross the threshold, whensoever
 He choose with purging hand to cleanse
 The palace, driving all pollution thence.
 And fair the cast of Fortune's die
 Before our state's new lords shall lie,
 Not as of old, but bringing fairer doom.
 Lo, freedom's light hath come!

The central doors of the palace open, disclosing **ORESTES** standing over the corpses of **AEGISTHUS** and **CLYTEMNESTRA**; in one hand he holds his sword, in the other the robe in which **AGAMEMNON** was entangled and slain.

ORESTES

There lies our country's twofold tyranny,
 My father's slayers, spoilers of my home.
 Erst were they royal, sitting on the throne,
 And loving are they yet,-their common fate
 Tells the tale truly, shows their trothplight firm.
 They swore to work mine ill-starred father's death,
 They swore to die together; 'tis fulfilled.
 O ye who stand, this great doom's witnesses,
 Behold this too, the dark device which bound
 My sire unhappy to his death,-behold
 The mesh which trapped his hands, enwound his feet
 Stand round, unfold it-'tis the trammel-net
 That wrapped a chieftain; hold it that he see,
 The father-not my sire, but he whose eye
 Is judge of all things, the all-seeing Sun!
 Let him behold my mother's damned deed,
 Then let him stand, when need shall be to me,
 Witness that justly I have sought and slain
 My mother; blameless was Aegisthus' doom-
 He died the death law bids adulterers die.
 But she who plotted this accursed thing
 To slay her lord, by whom she bare beneath
 Her girdle once the burden of her babes,
 Beloved erewhile, now turned to hateful foes-
 What deem ye of her? or what venom'd thing,
 Sea-snake or adder, had more power than she
 To poison with a touch the flesh unscarred?
 So great her daring, such her impious will.
 How name her, if I may not speak a curse?
 A lion-springs! a laver's swathing cloth,
 Wrapping a dead man, twining round his feet-
 A net, a trammel, an entangling robe?
 Such were the weapon of some strangling thief,
 The terror of the road, a cut-purse hound-
 With such device full many might he kill,
 Full oft exult in heat of villainy.
 Ne'er have my house so cursed an indweller-
 Heaven send me, rather, childless to be slain!

CHORUS *chanting*

Woe for each desperate deed!
 Woe for the queen, with shame of life bereft!
 And ah, for him who still is left,
 Madness, dark blossom of a bloody seed!

ORESTES

Did she the deed or not? this robe gives proof,

Imbrued with blood that bathed Aegisthus' sword:
 Look, how the spurted stain combines with time
 To blur the many dyes that once adorned
 Its pattern manifold! I now stand here,
 Made glad, made sad with blood, exulting, wailing-
 Hear, O thou woven web that slew my sire!
 I grieve for deed and death and all my home-
 Victor, pollution's damned stain for prize.

CHORUS *chanting*

Alas, that none of mortal men
 Can pass his life untouched by pain!
 Behold, one woe is here-
 Another loometh near.

ORESTES

Hark ye and learn-for what the end shall be
 For me I know not: breaking from the curb
 My spirit whirls me off, a conquered prey,
 Borne as a charioteer by steeds distraught
 Far from the course, and madness in my breast
 Burneth to chant its song, and leap, and rave-
 Hark ye and learn, friends, ere my reason goes!
 I say that rightfully I slew my mother,
 A thing God-scorned, that foully slew my sire.
 And chiefest wizard of the spell that bound me
 Unto this deed I name the Pythian seer
 Apollo, who foretold that if I slew,
 The guilt of murder done should pass from me;
 But if I spared, the fate that should be mine
 I dare not blazon forth-the bow of speech
 Can reach not to the mark, that doom to tell.
 And now behold me, how with branch and crown
 I pass, a suppliant made meet to go
 Unto Earth's midmost shrine, the holy ground
 Of Loxias, and that renowned light
 Of ever-burning fire, to 'scape the doom
 Of kindred murder: to no other shrine,
 So Loxias bade, may I for refuge turn.
 Bear witness, Argives, in the after time,
 How came on me this dread fatality.
 Living, I pass a banished wanderer hence,
 To leave in death the memory of this cry.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, but the deed is well; link not thy lips
 To speech ill-starred, nor vent ill-boding words-
 Who hast to Argos her full freedom given,
 Lopping two serpents' heads with timely blow.

ORESTES

Look, look, alas!

Handmaidens, see-what Gorgon shapes throng up
 Dusky their robes and all their hair enwound-
 Snakes coiled with snakes-off, off,-I must away!

LEADER

Most loyal of all sons unto thy sire,
 What visions thus distract thee? Hold, abide;
 Great was thy victory, and shalt thou fear?

ORESTES

These are no dreams, void shapes of haunting ill,
 But clear to sight another's hell-hounds come!

LEADER

Nay, the fresh bloodshed still imbrues thine hands,
 And thence distraction sinks into thy soul.

ORESTES

O king Apollo-see, they swarm and throng-
 Black blood of hatred dripping from their eyes!

LEADER

One remedy thou hast; go, touch the shrine
 Of Loxias, and rid thee of these woes.

ORESTES

Ye can behold them not, but I behold them.
 Up and away! I dare abide no more.

He rushes out.

LEADER

Farewell then as thou mayst,-the god thy friend
 Guard thee and aid with chances favouring.

CHORUS *chanting*

Behold, the storm of woe divine
 That raves and beats on Atreus' line
 Its great third blast hath blown.
 First was Thyestes' loathly woe
 The rueful feast of long ago,
 On children's flesh, unknown.
 And next the kingly chief's despite,
 When he who led the Greeks to fight
 Was in the bath hewn down.
 And now the offspring of the race
 Stands in the third, the saviour's place,
 To save-or to consume?
 O whither, ere it be fulfilled,
 Ere its fierce blast be hushed and stilled,
 Shall blow the wind of doom?

The Eumenides

Dramatis Personae

The Pythian Priestess
Apollo
Orestes
The Ghost of Clytemnestra
Chorus of the Furies
Athena
Attendants of Athena
Twelve Athenian Citizens

Drama

The Scene of the Drama is the Temple of Apollo, at Delphi: afterwards the Temple of Athena, on the Acropolis of Athens, and the adjoining Areopagus.

The Eumenides

The Temple at Delphi

The Pythian Priestess:

First, in this prayer, of all the gods I name
 The prophet mother Earth; and Themis next,
 Second who sat--for so with truth is said--
 On this her mother's shrine oracular.
 Then by her grace, who unconstrained allowed,
 There sat thereon another child of Earth--
 Titanian Phoebe. She, in after time,
 Gave o'er the throne, as birthgift to a god,
 Phoebus, who in his own bears Phoebe's name.
 He from the lake and ridge of Delos' isle
 Steered to the port of Pallas' Attic shores,
 The home of ships; and thence he passed and came
 Unto this land and to Parnassus' shrine.
 And at his side, with awe revering him,
 There went the children of Hephaestus' seed,
 The hewers of the sacred way, who tame
 The stubborn tract that erst was wilderness.
 And all this folk, and Delphos, chieftain-king
 Of this their land, with honour gave him home;
 And in his breast Zeus set a prophet's soul,
 And gave to him this throne, whereon he sits,
 Fourth prophet of the shrine, and, Loxias hight,
 Gives voice to that which Zeus his sire decrees.

Such gods I name in my preluding prayer,
 And after them, I call with honour due
 On Pallas, wardress of the fane, and Nymphs
 Who dwell around the rock Corycian,
 Where in the hollow cave, the wild birds' haunt,
 Wander the feet of lesser gods; and there,
 Right well I know it, Bromian Bacchus dwells,
 Since he in godship led his Maenad host,
 Devising death for Pentheus, whom they rent
 Piecemeal, as hare among the hounds. And last,
 I call on Pleistus' springs, Poseidon's might,
 And Zeus most high, the great Accomplisher.
 Then as a seeress to the sacred chair
 I pass and sit; and may the powers divine
 Make this mine entrance fruitful in response
 Beyond each former advent, triply blest.
 And if there stand without, from Hellas bound,
 Men seeking oracles, let each pass in
 In order of the lot, as use allows;
 For the god guides whate'er my tongue proclaims.

She goes into the interior of the temple; after a short interval, she returns in great fear.

Things fell to speak of, fell for eyes to see,
 Have sped me forth again from Loxias' shrine,
 With strength unstrung, moving erect no more,
 But aiding with my hands my failing feet,
 Unnerved by fear. A beldame's force is naught--
 Is as a child's, when age and fear combine.
 For as I pace towards the inmost fane
 Bay-filleted by many a suppliant's hand,
 Lo, at the central altar I descry
 One crouching as for refuge--yea, a man
 Abhorred of heaven; and from his hands, wherein
 A sword new-drawn he holds, blood reeked and fell:
 A wand he bears, the olive's topmost bough,
 Twined as of purpose with a deep close tuft
 Of whitest wool. This, that I plainly saw,
 Plainly I tell. But lo, in front of him,
 Crouched on the altar-steps, a grisly band
 Of women slumbers--not like women they,
 But Gorgons rather; nay, that word is weak,
 Nor may I match the Gorgons' shape with theirs!
 Such have I seen in painted semblance erst--
 Winged Harpies, snatching food from Phineus' board,--
 But these are wingless, black, and all their shape
 The eye's abomination to behold.
 Fell is the breath--let none draw nigh to it--
 Wherewith they snort in slumber; from their eyes
 Exude the damned drops of poisonous ire:
 And such their garb as none should dare to bring
 To statues of the gods or homes of men.
 I wot not of the tribe wherefrom can come
 So fell a legion, nor in what land Earth
 Could rear, unharmed, such creatures, nor avow
 That she had travailed and brought forth death.
 But, for the rest, be all these things a care
 Unto the mighty Loxias, the lord
 Of this our shrine: healer and prophet he,
 Discerner he of portents, and the cleanser
 Of other homes--behold, his own to cleanse!

Exit.

The scene opens, disclosing the interior of the temple: Orestes clings to the central altar; the Furies lie slumbering at a little distance; Apollo and Hermes appear from the innermost shrine.

Apollo:

Lo, I desert thee never: to the end,
 Hard at thy side as now, or sundered far,
 I am thy guard, and to thine enemies
 Implacably oppose me: look on them,

These greedy fiends, beneath my craft subdued!
 See, they are fallen on sleep, these beldames oid,
 Unto whose grim and wizened maidenhood
 Nor god nor man nor beast can e'er draw near.
 Yea, evil were they born, for evil's doom,
 Evil the dark abyss of Tartarus
 Wherein they dwell, and they themselves the hate
 Of men on earth, and of Olympian gods.
 But thou, flee far and with unfaltering speed;
 For they shall hunt thee through the mainland wide
 Where'er throughout the tract of travelled earth
 Thy foot may roam, and o'er and o'er the seas
 And island homes of men. Faint not nor fail,
 Too soon and timidly within thy breast
 Shepherding thoughts forlorn of this thy toil;
 But unto Pallas' city go, and there
 Crouch at her shrine, and in thine arms enfold
 Her ancient image: there we well shall find
 Meet judges for this cause and suasive pleas,
 Skilled to contrive for thee deliverance
 From all this woe. Be such my pledge to thee,
 For by my hest thou didst thy mother slay.

Orestes:

O king Apollo, since right well thou know'st
 What justice bids, have heed, fulfil the same,--
 Thy strength is all-sufficient to achieve.

Apollo:

Have thou too heed, nor let thy fear prevail
 Above thy will. And do thou guard him, Hermes,
 Whose blood is brother unto mine, whose sire
 The same high God. Men call thee guide and guard,
 Guide therefore thou and guard my suppliant;
 For Zeus himself reveres the outlaw's right,
 Boon of fair escort, upon man conferred.

Exeunt Apollo, Hermes, and Orestes The Ghost of Clytemnestra near.

Ghost of Clytemnestra:

Sleep on! awake! what skills your sleep to me--
 Me, among all the dead by you dishonoured--
 Me from whom never, in the world of death,
 Dieth this curse, "'Tis she who smote and slew",
 And shamed and scorned I roam? Awake, and hear
 My plaint of dead men's hate intolerable.
 Me, sternly slain by them that should have loved,
 Me doth no god arouse him to avenge,
 Hewn down in blood by matricidal hands.
 Mark ye these wounds from which the heart's blood ran,
 And by whose hand, bethink ye! for the sense
 When shut in sleep hath then the spirit-sight,

But in the day the inward eye is blind.
 List, ye who drank so oft with lapping tongue
 The wineless draught by me outpoured to soothe
 Your vengeful ire! how oft on kindled shrine
 I laid the feast of darkness, at the hour
 Abhorred of every god but you alone!
 Lo, all my service trampled down and scorned!
 And he hath balked your chase, as stag the hounds;
 Yea, lightly bounding from the circling toils,
 Hath wried his face in scorn, and flieth far.
 Awake and hear--for mine own soul I cry--
 Awake, ye powers of hell! the wandering ghost
 That once was Clytemnestra calls--Arise!

'The Furies mutter grimly, as in a dream.

Mutter and murmur! He hath flown afar--
 My kin have gods to guard them, I have none!

'The Furies mutter as before.

O drowsed in sleep too deep to heed my pain!
 Orestes flies, who me, his mother, slew.

The Furies give a confused cry.

Yelping, and drowsed again? Up and be doing
 That which alone is yours, the deed of hell!

The Furies give another cry.

Lo, sleep and toil, the sworn confederates,
 Have quelled your dragon-anger, once so fell!

The Furies: (*muttering more fiercely and loudly*)

Seize, seize, seize, seize--mark, yonder!

Ghost:

In dreams ye chase a prey, and like some hound,
 That even in sleep doth ply his woodland toil,
 Ye bell and bay. What do ye, sleeping here?
 Be not o'ercome with toil, nor sleep-subdued,
 Be heedless of my wrong. Up! thrill your heart
 With the just chidings of my tongue,--such words
 Are as a spur to purpose firmly held.
 Blow forth on him the breath of wrath and blood,
 Scorch him with reek of fire that burns in you,
 Waste him with new pursuit--swift, hound him down!

Ghost sinks.

First Fury: (*awaking*)

Up! rouse another as I rouse thee; up!
 Sleep'st thou? Rise up, and spurning sleep away,
 See we if false to us this prelude rang.

Chorus of Furies:

Alack, alack, O sisters, we have toiled,
 O much and vainly have we toiled and borne!
 Vainly! and all we wrought the gods have foiled,
 And turnèd us to scorn!
 He hath slipped from the net, whom we chased: he
 hath 'scaped us who should be our prey--
 O'ermastered by slumber we sank, and our quarry hath stolen away!
 Thou, child of the high God Zeus, Apollo, hast robbed us and wronged;
 Thou, a youth, hast down-trodden the right that is godship more
 ancient belonged;
 Thou hast cherished thy suppliant man; the slayer the God-forsaken,
 The bane of a parent, by craft from out of our grasp thou hast taken:
 A god, thou hast stolen from us the avengers a matricide son--
 And who shall consider thy deed and say, "It is rightfully" done?
 The sound of chiding scorn
 Came from the land of dream;
 Deep to mine inmost heart I felt it thrill and burn,
 Thrust as a strong-grasped goad, to urge
 Onward the chariot's team.
 Thrilled, chilled with bitter inward pain
 I stand as one beneath the doomsman's scourge.
 Shame on the younger gods who tread down right,
 Sitting on thrones of might!
 Woe on the altar of earth's central fane!
 Clotted on step and shrine,
 Behold, the guilt of blood, the ghastly stain!
 Woe upon thee, Apollo! uncontrolled,
 Unbidden, hast thou, prophet-god, imbrued
 The pure prophetic shrine with wrongful blood!
 For thou too heinous a respect didst hold
 Of man, too little heed of powers divine!
 And us the Fates, the ancients of the earth,
 Didst deem as nothing worth.
 Scornful to me thou art, yet shalt not fend
 My wrath from him; though unto hell he flee,
 There too are we!
 And he the blood defiled, should feel and rue,
 Though I were not, fiend-wrath that shall not end,
 Descending on his head who foully slew.

Re-enter Apollo from the inner shrine.

Apollo:

Out! I command you. Out from this my home--
 Haste, tarry not! Out from the mystic shrine,
 Lest thy lot be to take into thy breast
 The winged bright dart that from my golden string
 Speeds hissing as a snake,--lest, pierced and thrilled
 With agony, thou shouldst spew forth again
 Black frothy heart's-blood, drawn from mortal men,

Belching the gory clots sucked forth from wounds.
 These be no halls where such as you can prowl--
 Go where men lay on men the doom of blood,
 Heads lopped from necks, eyes from their Sphere plucked out,
 Hacked flesh, the flower of youthful seed crushed or
 Feet hewn away, and hands, and death beneath
 The smiting stone, low moans and piteous
 Of men impaled--Hark, hear ye for what feast
 Ye hanker ever, and the loathing gods
 Do spit upon your craving? Lo, your shape
 Is all too fitted to your greed; the cave
 Where lurks some lion, lapping gore, were home
 More meet for you. Avaunt from sacred shrines,
 Nor bring pollution by your touch on all
 That nears you. Hence! and roam unshepherded--
 No god there is to tend such herd as you.

Chorus:

O king Apollo, in our turn hear us'
 Thou hast' not only part in these ill things,
 But art chief cause and doer of the same.

Apollo:

How? stretch thy speech to tell this, and have done.

Chorus:

Thine oracle bade this man slay his mother.

Apollo:

I bade him quit his sire's death,--wherefore not?

Chorus:

Then didst thou aid and guard red-handed crime.

Apollo:

Yea, and I bade him to this temple flee.

Chorus:

And yet forsooth dost chide us following him!

Apollo:

Ay--not for you it is, to near this fane.

Chorus:

Yet is such office ours, imposed by fate.

Apollo:

What office? vaunt the thing ye deem so fair.

Chorus:

From home to home we chase the matricide.

Apollo:

What? to avenge a wife who slays her lord?

Chorus:

That is not blood outpoured by kindred hands.

Apollo:

How darkly ye dishonour and annul
 The troth to which the high accomplishers,
 Hera and Zeus, do honour. Yea, and thus
 Is Aphrodite to dishonour cast,
 The queen of rapture unto mortal men.
 Know, that above the marriage-bed ordained
 For man and woman standeth Right as guard,
 Enhancing sanctity of troth-plight sworn;
 Therefore, if thou art placable to those
 Who have their consort slain, nor will'st to turn
 On them the eye of wrath, unjust art thou
 In hounding to his doom the man who slew
 His mother. Lo, I know thee full of wrath
 Against one deed, but all too placable
 Unto the other, minishing the crime.
 But in this cause shall Pallas guard the right.

Chorus:

Deem not my quest shall ever quit that man.

Apollo:

Follow then, make thee double toil in vain!

Chorus:

Think not by speech mine office to curtail.

Apollo:

None hast thou, that I would accept of thee!

Chorus:

Yea, high thine honour by the throne of Zeus:
 But I, drawn on by scent of mother's blood,
 Seek vengeance on this man and hound him down.

Apollo:

But I will stand beside him; 'tis for me
 To guard my suppliant: gods and men alike
 Do dread the curse of such an one betrayed,
 And in me Fear and Will say "Leave him not".

Exeunt omnes

The scene changes to Athens. In the foreground, the Temple of Athena on the Acropolis; her statue stands in the centre; Orestes is seen dinging to it.

Orestes:

Look on me, queen Athena; lo, I come
 By Loxias' behest; thou of thy grace
 Receive me, driven of avenging powers--
 Not now a red-hand slayer unannealed,
 But with guilt fading, half-effaced, outworn
 On many homes and paths of mortal men.
 For to the limit of each land, each sea,
 I roamed, obedient to Apollo's hest,

And come at last, O Goddess, to thy fane,
And clinging to thine image, bide my doom.

Enter the Chorus of Furies, questing like hounds.

Chorus:

Ho! clear is here the trace of him we seek:
Follow the track of blood, the silent sign!
Like to some hound that hunts a wounded fawn,
We snuff along the scent of dripping gore,
And inwardly we pant, for many a day
Toiling in chase that shall fordo the man;
For o'er and o'er the wide land have I ranged,
And o'er the wide sea, flying without wings,
Swift as a sail I pressed upon his track,
Who now hard by is crouching, well I wot,
For scent of mortal blood allures me here.
Follow, seek him—round and round
Scent and snuff and scan the ground,
Lest unharmed he slip away,
He who did his mother slay!
Hist--he is there! See him his arms entwine
Around the image of the maid divine--
Thus aided, for the deed he wrought
Unto the judgment wills he to be brought.

It may not be! a mother's blood, poured forth
Upon the stained earth,
None gathers up: it lies--bear witness, Hell!--
For aye indelible!
And thou who sheddest it shalt give thine own
That shedding to atone!
Yea, from thy living limbs I suck it out,
Red, clotted, gout by gout,--
A draught abhorred of men and gods; but I
Will drain it, suck thee dry;
Yea, I will waste thee living, nerve and vein;
Yea, for thy mother slain,
Will drag thee downward, there where thou shalt dree
The weird of agony!
And thou and whatso'er of men hath sinned--
Hath wronged or God, or friend,
Or parent,--learn ye how to all and each
The arm of doom can reach!
Sternly requiteth, in the world beneath,
The judgment-seat of Death;
Yea, Death, beholding every man's endeavour
Recordeth it for ever.

Orestes:

I, schooled in many miseries, have learnt
How many refuges of cleansing shrines

There be; I know when law alloweth speech
 And when imposeth silence. Lo, I stand
 Fixed now to speak, for he whose word is wise
 Commands the same. Look, how the stain of blood
 Is dull upon mine hand and wastes away,
 And laved and lost therewith is the deep curse
 Of matricide; for while the guilt was new,
 'Twas banished from me at Apollo's hearth,
 Atoned and purified by death of swine.
 Long were my word if I should sum the tale,
 How oft since then among my fellow-men
 I stood and brought no curse. Time cleanses all--
 Time, the coeval of all things that are.
 Now from pure lips, in words of omen fair,
 I call Athena, lady of this land,
 To come, my champion: so, in aftertime,
 She shall not fail of love and service deal,
 Not won by war, from me and from my land
 And all the folk of Argos, vowed to her.

Now, be she far away in Libyan land
 Where flows from Triton's lake her natal wave,--
 Stand she with planted feet, or in some hour
 Of rest conceal them, champion of her friends
 Where'er she be,--or whether o'er the plain
 Phlegraean she look forth, as warrior bold--
 I cry to her to come, where'er she be,
 (And she, as goddess, from afar can hear,)
 And aid and free me, set among my foes.

Chorus:

Thee not Apollo nor Athena's strength
 Can save from perishing, a castaway
 Amid the Lost, where no delight shall meet
 Thy soul--a bloodless prey of nether powers,
 A shadow among shadows. Answerest thou
 Nothing? dost cast away my words with scorn,
 Thou, prey prepared and dedicate to me?
 Not as a victim slain upon the shrine,
 But living shalt thou see thy flesh my food.
 Hear now the binding chant that makes thee mine.

Weave the weird dance,--behold the hour
 To utter forth the chant of hell,
 Our sway among mankind to tell,
 The guidance of our power.
 Of Justice are we ministers,
 And whosoe'er of men may stand
 Lifting a pure unsullied hand,
 That man no doom of ours incurs,
 And walks thro' all his mortal path
 Untouched by woe, unharmed by wrath.

But if, as yonder man, he hath
 Blood on the hands he strives to hide,
 We stand avengers at his side,
 Decreeing, "Thou hast wronged the dead:
 We are doom's witnesses to thee".
 The price of blood, his hands have shed,
 We wring from him; in life, in death,
 Hard at his side are we!

Night, Mother Night, who brought me forth, a torment
 To living men and dead,
 Hear me, O hear! by Leto's stripling son
 I am dishonourèd:
 He hath ta'en from me him who cowers in refuge,
 To me made consecrate,--
 A rightful victim, him who slew his mother.
 Given o'er to me and fate.

Hear the hymn of hell,
 O'er the victim sounding,--
 Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,
 Sense and will confounding!
 Round the soul entwining
 Without lute or lyre--
 Soul in madness pining,
 Wasting as with fire!

Fate, all-pervading Fate, this service spun, commanding
 That I should bide therein:
 Whosoe'er of mortals, made perverse and lawless,
 Is stained with blood of kin,
 By his side are we, and hunt him ever onward,
 Till to the Silent Land,
 The realm of death, he cometh; neither yonder
 In freedom shall he stand.

Hear the hymn of hell,
 O'er the victim sounding,--
 Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,
 Sense and will confounding!
 Round the soul entwining
 Without lute or lyre--
 Soul in madness pining,
 Wasting as with fire!

When from womb of Night we sprang, on us this labour
 Was laid and shall abide.
 Gods immortal are ye, yet beware ye touch not
 That which is our pride!
 None may come beside us gathered round the blood feast--
 For us no garments white
 Gleam on a festal day; for us a darker fate is,
 Another darker rite.

That is mine hour when falls an ancient line--
 When in the household's heart
 The god of blood doth slay by kindred hands,--
 Then do we bear our part:
 On him who slays we sweep with chasing cry:
 Though he be triply strong,
 We wear and waste him; blood atones for blood,
 New pain for ancient wrong.

I hold this task--'tis mine, and not another's.
 The very gods on high,
 Though they can silence and annul the prayers
 Of those who on us cry,
 They may not strive with us who stand apart,
 A race by Zeus abhorred,
 Blood-boltered, held unworthy of the council
 And converse of Heaven's lord.
 Therefore the more I leap upon my prey;
 Upon their head I bound;
 My foot is hard; as one that trips a runner
 I cast them to the ground;
 Yea, to the depth of doom intolerable;
 And they who erst were great,
 And upon earth held high their pride and glory,
 Are brought to low estate.
 In underworld they waste and are diminished,
 The while around them fleet
 Dark wavings of my robes, and, subtly woven,
 The paces of my feet.

Who falls infatuate, he sees not, neither knows he
 That we are at his side;
 So closely round about him, darkly flitting,
 The cloud of guilt doth glide.
 Heavily 'tis uttered, how around his hearthstone
 The mirk of hell doth rise.
 Stern and fixed the law is; we have hands t'achieve it,
 Cunning to devise.
 Queens are we and mindful of our solemn vengeance.
 Not by tear or prayer
 Shall a man avert it. In unhonoured darkness,
 Far from gods, we fare,
 Lit unto our task with torch of sunless regions,
 And o'er a deadly way--
 Deadly to the living as to those who see not
 Life and light of day--
 Hunt we and press onward. Who of mortals hearing
 Doth not quake for awe,
 Hearing all that Fate thro' hand of God hath given us
 For ordinance and law?
 Yea, this right to us, in dark abysm and backward

Of ages it befel:
 None shall wrong mine office, tho' in nether regions
 And sunless dark I dwell.

Enter Athena from above.

Athena:

Far off I heard the clamour of your cry,
 As by Scamander's side I set my foot
 Asserting right upon the land given o'er
 To me by those who o'er Achaia's host
 Held sway and leadership: no scanty part
 Of all they won by spear and sword, to me
 They gave it, land and all that grew thereon,
 As chosen heirloom for my Theseus' clan.
 Thence summoned, sped I with a tireless foot,--
 Hummed on the wind, instead of wings, the fold
 Of this mine aegis, by my feet propelled,
 As, linked to mettled horses, speeds a car.
 And now, beholding here Earth's nether brood,
 I fear it nought, yet are mine eyes amazed
 With wonder. Who are ye? of all I ask,
 And of this stranger to my statue clinging.
 But ye--your shape is like no human form,
 Like to no goddess whom the gods behold,
 Like to no shape which mortal women wear.
 Yet to stand by and chide a monstrous form
 Is all unjust--from such words Right revolts.

Chorus:

O child of Zeus, one word shall tell thee all.
 We are the children of eternal Night,
 And Furies in the underworld are called.

Athena:

I know your lineage now and eke your name.

Chorus:

Yea, and eftsoons indeed my rights shalt know.

Athena:

Fain would I learn them; speak them clearly forth.

Chorus:

We chase from home the murderers of men.

Athena:

And where at last can he that slew make pause?

Chorus:

Where this is law--"All joy abandon here."

Athena:

Say, do ye bay this man to such a flight?

Chorus:

Yea, for of choice he did his mother slay.

Athena:

Urged by no fear of other wrath and doom?

Chorus:

What spur can rightly goad to matricide?

Athena:

Two stand to plead--one only have I heard.

Chorus:

He will not swear nor challenge us to oath.

Athena:

The form of justice, not its deed, thou willest.

Chorus:

Prove thou that word; thou art not scant of skill.

Athena:

I say that oaths shall not enforce the wrong.

Chorus:

Then test the cause, judge and award the right.

Athena:

Will ye to me then this decision trust?

Chorus:

Yea, reverencing true child of worthy sire.

Athena: (*to Orestes*)

O man unknown, make thou thy plea in turn
 Speak forth thy land, thy lineage, and thy woes;
 Then, if thou canst, avert this bitter blame--
 If, as I deem, in confidence of right
 Thou sittest hard beside my holy place,
 Clasping this statue, as Ixion sat,
 A sacred suppliant for Zeus to cleanse,--
 To all this answer me in words made plain.

Orestes:

O queen Athena, first from thy last words
 Will I a great solicitude remove.
 Not one blood-guilty am I; no foul stain
 Clings to thine image from my clinging hand;
 Whereof one potent proof I have to tell.
 Lo, the law stands--"The slayer shall not plead,
 Till by the hand of him who cleanses blood
 A suckling creature's blood besprinkle him".
 Long since have I this expiation done--
 In many a home, slain beasts and running streams
 Have cleansed me. Thus I speak away that fear.
 Next, of my lineage quickly thou shalt learn:

An Argive am I, and right well thou know'st
 My sire, that Agamemnon who arrayed
 The fleet and them that went therein to war--
 That chief with whom thy hand combined to crush
 To an uncitied heap what once was Troy;
 That Agamemnon, when he homeward came,
 Was brought unto no honourable death,
 Slain by the dark-souled wife who brought me forth
 To him,--enwound and slain in wily nets,
 Blazoned with blood that in the laver ran.
 And I, returning from an exiled youth,
 Slew her, my mother--lo, it stands avowed!
 With blood for blood avenging my loved sire;
 And in this deed doth Loxias bear part,
 Decreeing agonies, to goad my will,
 Unless by me the guilty found their doom.
 Do thou decide if right or wrong were done--
 Thy dooming, whatsoever it be, contents me.

Athena:

Too mighty is this matter, whatsoever
 Of mortals claims to judge hereof aright.
 Yea, me, even me, eternal Right forbids
 To judge the issues of blood-guilt, and wrath
 That follows swift behind. This too gives pause,
 That thou as one with all due rites performed
 Dost come, unsinning, pure, unto my shrine.
 Whate'er thou art, in this my city's name,
 As uncondemned, I take thee to my side,--
 Yet have these foes of thine such dues by fate,
 I may not banish them: and if they fail,
 O'erthrown in judgment of the cause, forthwith
 Their anger's poison shall infect the land--
 A dropping plague-spot of eternal ill.
 Thus stand we with a woe on either hand:
 Stay they, or go at my commandment forth,
 Perplexity or pain must needs befall.
 Yet, as on me Fate hath imposed the cause,
 I choose unto me judges that shall be
 An ordinance for ever, set to rule
 The dues of blood-guilt, upon oath declared.
 But ye, call forth your witness and your proof,
 Words strong for justice, fortified by oath;
 And I, whoe'er are truest in my town,
 Them will I chose and bring, and straitly charge,
 "Look on this cause, discriminating well,
 And pledge your oath to utter nought of wrong.

Exit Athena.

Chorus:

Now are they all undone, the ancient laws,

If here the slayer's cause
 Prevail; new wrong for ancient right shall be
 If matricide go free.
 Henceforth a deed like his by all shall stand,
 Too ready to the hand:
 Too oft shall parents in the aftertime
 Rue and lament this crime,--
 Taught, not in false imagining, to feel
 Their children's thrusting steel:
 No more the wrath, that erst on murder fell

From us, the queens of Hell.
 Shall fall, no more our watching gaze impend--
 Death shall smite unrestrained.

Henceforth shall one unto another cry
 "Lo, they are stricken, lo, they fall and die
 Around me!" and that other answers him,
 "O thou that lookest that thy woes should cease,
 Behold, with dark increase
 They throng and press upon thee; yea, and dim
 Is all the cure, and every comfort vain!"

Let none henceforth cry out, when falls the blow
 Of sudden-smiting woe,
 Cry out in sad reiterated strain
 "O Justice, aid! aid, O ye thrones of Hell!"
 So though a father or a mother wail
 New-smitten by a son, it shall no more avail,
 Since, overthrown by wrong, the fane of Justice fell!

Know, that a throne there is that may not pass away,
 And one that sitteth on it--even Fear,
 Searching with steadfast eyes man's inner soul:
 Wisdom is child of pain, and born with many a tear;
 But who henceforth,
 What man of mortal men, what nation upon earth,
 That holdeth nought in awe nor in the light
 Of inner reverence, shall worship Right
 As in the older day?

Praise not, O man, the life beyond control,
 Nor that which bows unto a tyrant's sway.
 Know that the middle way
 Is dearest unto God, and they thereon who wend,
 They shall achieve the end;
 But they who wander or to left or right
 Are sinners in his sight.
 Take to thy heart this one, this soothfast word--
 Of wantonness impiety is sire;
 Only from calm control and sanity unstirred
 Cometh true weal, the goal of every man's desire.

Yea, whatsoe'er befall, hold thou this word of mine:
 "Bow down at Justice' shrine,
 Turn thou thine eyes away from earthly lure,
 Nor with a godless foot that altar spurn."
 For as thou dost shall Fate do in return,
 And the great doom is sure.
 Therefore let each adore a parent's trust,
 And each with loyalty revere the guest
 That in his halls doth rest.
 For whoso uncompelled doth follow what is just,
 He ne'er shall be unblest;
 Yea, never to the gulf of doom
 That man shall come.
 But he whose will is set against the gods,
 Who treads beyond the law with foot impure,

 Till o'er the wreck of Right confusion broods--
 Know that for him, though now he sail secure,
 The day of storm shall be; then shall he strive and fail,
 Down from the shivered yard to furl the sail,
 And call on Powers, that heed him nought, to save
 And vainly wrestle with the whirling wave,
 Hot was his heart with pride--
 "I shall not fall", he cried.
 But him with watching scorn
 The god beholds, forlorn,
 Tangled in toils of Fate beyond escape,
 Hopeless of haven safe beyond the cape--
 Till all his wealth and bliss of bygone day
 Upon the reef of Rightful Doom is hurled,
 And he is rapt away
 Unwept, for ever, to the dead forgotten world.

Re-enter Athena, with twelve Athenian citizens.

Athena:

O herald, make proclaim, bid all men come.
 Then let the shrill blast of the Tyrrhene trump,
 Fulfilled with mortal breath, thro' the wide air
 Peal a loud summons, bidding all men heed.
 For, till my judges fill this judgment-seat,
 Silence behoves,--that this whole city learn,
 What for all time mine ordinance commands,
 And these men, that the cause be judged aright.

Apollo approaches.

Chorus:

O king Apollo, rule what is thine own,
 But in this thing what share pertains to thee?

Apollo:

First, as a witness come I, for this man

Is suppliant of mine by sacred right,
 Guest of my holy hearth and cleansed by me
 Of blood-guilt: then, to set me at his side
 And in his cause bear part, as part I bore
 Erst in his deed, whereby his mother fell.
 Let whoso knoweth now announce the cause.

Athena: (*to the Chorus*)

'Tis I announce the cause--first speech be yours;
 For rightfully shall they whose plaint is tried
 Tell the tale first and set the matter clear.

Chorus:

Though we be many, brief shall be our tale.
 (*To Orestes*) Answer thou, setting word to match with
 word;
 And first avow--hast thou thy mother slain?

Orestes:

I slew her. I deny no word hereof.

Chorus:

Three falls decide the wrestle--this is one.

Orestes:

Thou vauntest thee--but o'er no final fall.

Chorus:

Yet must thou tell the manner of thy deed.

Orestes:

Drawn sword in hand, I gashed her neck. Tis told.

Chorus:

But by whose word, whose craft, wert thou impelled?

Orestes:

By oracles of him who here attests me.

Chorus:

The prophet-god bade thee thy mother slay?

Orestes:

Yea, and thro' him less ill I fared, till now.

Chorus:

If the vote grip thee, thou shalt change that word.

Orestes:

Strong is my hope; my buried sire shall aid.

Chorus:

Go to now, trust the dead, a matricide!

Orestes:

Yea, for in her combined two stains of sin.

Chorus:

How? speak this clearly to the judges' mind.

Orestes:

Slaying her husband, she did slay my sire.

Chorus:

Therefore thou livest; death assoils her deed.

Orestes:

Then while she lived why didst thou hunt her not?

Chorus:

She was not kin by blood to him she slew.

Orestes:

And I, am I by blood my mother's kin?

Chorus:

O cursed with murder's guilt, how else wert thou
The burden of her womb? Dost thou forswear
Thy mother's kinship, closest bond of love?

Orestes:

It is thine hour, Apollo--speak the law,
Averting if this deed were justly done;
For done it is, and clear and undenied.
But if to thee this murder's cause seem right
Or wrongful, speak--that I to these may tell.

Apollo:

To you, Athena's mighty council-court,
Justly for justice will I plead, even I,
The prophet-god, nor cheat you by one word.
For never spake I from my prophet-seat
One word, of man, of woman, or of state,
Save what the Father of Olympian gods
Commanded unto me. I rede you then,
Bethink you of my plea, how strong it stands,
And follow the decree of Zeus our sire,--
For oaths prevail not over Zeus' command.

Chorus:

Go to; thou sayest that from Zeus befel
The oracle that this Orestes bade
With vengeance quit the slaying of his sire,
And hold as nought his mother's right of kin!

Apollo:

Yea, for it stands not with a common death,
That he should die, a chieftain and a king
Decked with the sceptre which high heaven confers--
Die, and by female hands, not smitten down
By a far-shooting bow, held stalwartly
By some strong Amazon. Another doom
Was his: O Pallas, hear, and ye who sit
In judgment, to discern this thing aright!--
She with a specious voice of welcome true

Hailed him, returning from the mighty mart
 Where war for life gives fame, triumphant home;
 Then o'er the laver, as he bathed himself,
 She spread from head to foot a covering net,
 And in the endless mesh of cunning robes
 Enwound and trapped her lord, and smote him down.
 Lo, ye have heard what doom this chieftain met,
 The majesty of Greece, the fleet's high lord:
 Such as I tell it, let it gall your ears,
 Who stand as judges to decide this cause.

Chorus:

Zeus, as thou sayest, holds a father's death
 As first of crimes,--yet he of his own act
 Cast into chains his father, Cronos old:
 How suits that deed with that which now ye tell?
 O ye who judge, I bid ye mark my words!

Apollo:

O monsters loathed of all, O scorn of gods,
 He that hath bound may loose: a cure there is,
 Yea, many a plan that can unbind the chain.
 But when the thirsty dust sucks up man's blood
 Once shed in death, he shall arise no more.
 No chant nor charm for this my Sire hath wrought.
 All else there is, he moulds and shifts at will,
 Not scant of strength nor breath, whate'er he do.

Chorus:

Think yet, for what acquittal thou dost plead:
 He who hath shed a mother's kindred blood,
 Shall he in Argos dwell, where dwelt his sire?
 How shall he stand before the city's shrines,
 How share the clansmen's holy lustral bowl?

Apollo:

This too I answer; mark a soothfast word,
 Not the true parent is the woman's womb
 That bears the child; she doth but nurse the seed
 New-sown: the male is parent; she for him,
 As stranger for a stranger, hoards the germ
 Of life; unless the god its promise blight.
 And proof hereof before you will I set.
 Birth may from fathers, without mothers, be:
 See at your side a witness of the same,
 Athena, daughter of Olympian Zeus,
 Never within the darkness of the womb
 Fostered nor fashioned, but a bud more bright
 Than any goddess in her breast might bear.
 And I, O Pallas, howsoe'er I may,
 Henceforth will glorify thy town, thy clan,
 And for this end have sent my suppliant here

Unto thy shrine; that he from this time forth
 Be loyal unto thee for evermore,
 O goddess-queen, and thou unto thy side
 Mayst win and hold him faithful, and his line,
 And that for aye this pledge and troth remain
 To children's children of Athenian seed.

Athena:

Enough is said; I bid the judges now
 With pure intent deliver just award.

Chorus:

We too have shot our every shaft of speech,
 And now abide to hear the doom of law.

Athena: (*to Apollo and Orestes*)

Say, how ordaining shall I 'scape your blame?

Apollo:

I spake, ye heard; enough. O stranger men,
 Heed well your oath as ye decide the cause.

Athena:

O men of Athens, ye who first do judge
 The law of bloodshed, hear me now ordain.
 Here to all time for Aegeus' Attic host
 Shall stand this council-court of judges sworn,
 Here the tribunal, set on Ares' Hill
 Where camped of old the tented Amazons,
 What time in hate of Theseus they assailed
 Athens, and set against her citadel
 A counterwork of new sky-pointing towers,
 And there to Ares held their sacrifice,
 Where now the rock hath name, even Ares' Hill.
 And hence shall Reverence and her kinsman Fear
 Pass to each free man's heart, by day and night
 Enjoining, "Thou shalt do no unjust thing",
 So long as law stands as it stood of old
 Unmarred by civic change. Look you, the spring
 Is pure; but foul it once with influx vile

And muddy clay, and none can drink thereof.
 Therefore, O citizens, I bid ye bow
 In awe to this command, "Let no man live
 Uncurbed by law nor curbed by tyranny;"
 Nor banish ye the monarchy of Awe
 Beyond the walls; untouched by fear divine,
 No man doth justice in the world of men.
 Therefore in purity and holy dread
 Stand and revere; so shall ye have and hold
 A saving bulwark of the state and land,
 Such as no man hath ever elsewhere known,
 Nor in far Scythia, nor in Pelops' realm.

Thus I ordain it now, a council-court
 Pure and unsullied by the lust of gain,
 Sacred and swift to vengeance, wakeful ever
 To champion men who sleep, the country's guard.
 Thus have I spoken, thus to mine own clan
 Commended it for ever. Ye who judge,
 Arise, take each his vote, mete out the right,
 Your oath revering. Lo, my word is said.

The twelve judges come forward, one by one, to the urns of decision; the first votes; as each of the others follows, the Chorus and Apollo speak alternately.

Chorus:

I rede ye well, beware! nor put to shame,
 In aught, this grievous company of hell.

Apollo:

I too would warn you, fear mine oracles--
 From Zeus they are,--nor make them void of fruit.

Chorus:

Presumptuous is thy claim, blood-guilt to judge,
 And false henceforth thine oracles shall be.

Apollo:

Failed then the counsels of my sire, when turned
 Ixion, first of slayers, to his side?

Chorus:

These are but words; but I, if justice fail me,
 Will haunt this land in grim and deadly deed.

Apollo:

Scorn of the younger and the elder gods
 Art thou: 'tis I that shall prevail anon.

Chorus:

Thus didst thou too of old in Pheres' halls,
 O'errcaching Fate to make a mortal deathless.

Apollo:

Was it not well, my worshipper to aid,
 Then most of all when hardest was the need?

Chorus:

I say thou didst annul the lots of life,
 Cheating with wine the deities of eld.

Apollo:

I say thou shalt anon, thy pleadings foiled,
 Spit venom vainly on thine enemies.

Chorus:

Since this young god o'errides mine ancient right
 I tarry but to claim your law, not knowing
 If wrath of mine shall blast your state or spare

Athena:

Mine is the right to add the final vote,
 And I award it to Orestes' cause.
 For me no mother bore within her womb,
 And, save for wedlock evermore eschewed,
 I vouch myself the champion of the man,
 Not of the woman, yea, with all my soul,--
 In heart, as birth, a father's child alone.
 Thus will I not too heinously regard
 A woman's death who did her husband slay,
 The guardian of her home; and if the votes
 Equal do fall, Orestes shall prevail.
 Ye of the judges who are named thereto,
 Swiftly shake forth the lots from either urn.

Two judges come forward, one to each urn.

Orestes:

O bright Apollo, what shall be the end?

Chorus:

O Night, dark mother mine, dost mark these things?

OSESTES

Now shall my doom be life, or strangling cords.

Chorus:

And mine, lost honour or a wider sway.

Apollo:

O stranger judges, sum aright the count
 Of votes cast forth, and, parting them, take heed
 Ye err not in decision. The default
 Of one vote only bringeth ruin deep,
 One, cast aright, doth stablish house and home.

Athena:

Behold, this man is free from guilt of blood,
 For half the votes condemn him, half set free!

Orestes:

O Pallas, light and safety of my home,
 Thou, thou hast given me back to dwell once more
 In that my fatherland, amerced of which
 I wandered; now shall Grecian lips say this,
 "The man is Argive once again, and dwells
 Again within his father's wealthy hall,
 By Pallas saved, by Loxias, and by Him,
 The great third saviour, Zeus omnipotent--"
 Who thus in pity for my father's fate
 Doth pluck me from my doom, beholding these,
 Confederates of my mother. Lo, I pass
 To mine own home, but proffering this vow
 Unto thy land and people: "Nevermore,

Thro' all the manifold years of Time to be,
 Shall any chieftain of mine Argive land
 Bear hitherward his spears for fight arrayed."
 For we, though lapped in earth we then shall lie,
 By thwart adversities will work our will
 On them who shall transgress this oath of mine,
 Paths of despair and journeyings ill-starred
 For them ordaining, till their task they rue.
 But if this oath be rightly kept, to them
 Will we the dead be full of grace, the while
 With loyal league they honour Pallas' town.
 And now farewell, thou and thy city's folk--
 Firm be thine arm's grasp, closing with thy foes
 And, strong to save, bring victory to thy spear.

Exit Orestes, with Apollo.

Chorus:

Woe on you, younger gods! the ancient right
 Ye have o'erridden, rent it from my hands.

I am dishonoured of you, thrust to scorn!
 But heavily my wrath
 Shall on this land fling forth the drops that blast and burn
 Venom of vengeance, that shall work such scathe
 As I have suffered; where that dew shall fall,
 Shall leafless blight arise,
 Wasting Earth's offspring,--Justice, hear my call!--
 And thorough all the land in deadly wise
 Shall scatter venom, to exude again
 In pestilence on men.
 What cry avails me now, what deed of blood,
 Unto this land what dark despite?
 Alack, alack, forlorn
 Are we, a bitter injury have borne!
 Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood
 Of mother Night!

Athena:

Nay, bow ye to my words, chafe not nor moan:
 Ye are not worsted nor disgraced; behold,
 With balanced vote the cause had issue fair,
 Nor in the end did aught dishonour thee.
 But thus the will of Zeus shone clearly forth,
 And his own prophet-god avouched the same,
 "Orestes slew: his slaying is atoned".
 Therefore I pray you, not upon this land
 Shoot forth the dart of vengeance; be appeased,
 Nor blast the land with blight, nor loose thereon
 Drops of eternal venom, direful darts
 Wasting and marring nature's seed of growth.

For I, the queen of Athens' sacred right,
 Do pledge to you a holy sanctuary
 Deep in the heart of this my land, made just
 By your indwelling presence, while ye sit
 Hard by your sacred shrines that gleam with oil
 Of sacrifice, and by this folk adored.

Chorus:

Woe on you, younger gods! the ancient right
 Ye have o'erridden, rent it from my hands.
 I am dishonoured of you, thrust to scorn!
 But heavily my wrath
 Shall on his land fling forth the drops that blast and burn.
 Venom of vengeance, that shall work such scathe
 As I have suffered; where that dew shall fall,
 Shall leafless blight arise,
 Wasting Earth's offspring,--Justice, hear my call!--
 And thorough all the land in deadly wise
 Shall scatter venom, to exude again
 In pestilence of men.
 What cry avails me now, what deed of blood,
 Unto this land what dark despite?
 Alack, alack, forlorn
 Are we, a bitter injury have borne!
 Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood
 Of mother Night!

Athena:

Dishonoured are ye not; turn not, I pray.
 As goddesses your swelling wrath on men,
 Nor make the friendly earth spiteful to them.
 I too have Zeus for champion--'tis enough--
 I only of all goddesses do know.
 To ope the chamber where his thunderbolts
 Lie stored and sealed; but here is no such need.
 Nay, be appeased, nor cast upon the ground
 The malice of thy tongue, to blast the world;
 Calm thou thy bitter wrath's black inward surge,
 For high shall be thine honour, set beside me
 For ever in this land, whose fertile lap
 Shall pour its teeming first fruits unto you,
 Gifts for fair childbirth and for wedlock's crown:
 Thus honoured, praise my spoken pledge for aye.

Chorus:

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,--
 Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth
 Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,
 Woe, woe, for thee, for me!
 From side to side what pains be these that thrill?
 Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!
 Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust

And brought me to the dust--
Woe, woe is me!--with craft invincible.

Athena:

Older art thou than I, and I will bear
With this thy fury. Know, although thou be
More wise in ancient wisdom, yet have I
From Zeus no scant measure of the same,
Wherefore take heed unto this prophecy--
If to another land of alien men
Ye go, too late shall ye feel longing deep
For mine. The rolling tides of time bring round
A day of brighter glory for this town;
And thou, enshrined in honour by the halls
Where dwelt Erechtheus, shalt a worship win
From men and from the train of womankind,
Greater than any tribe elsewhere shall pay.
Cast thou not therefore on this soil of mine
Whetstones that sharpen souls to blood-shedding.
The burning goads of youthful hearts, made hot
With frenzy of the spirit, not of wine.
Nor pluck as 'twere the heart from cocks that strive,
To set it in the breasts of citizens
Of mine, a war-god's spirit, keen for fight,
Made stern against their country and their kin.
The man who grievously doth lust for fame,
War, full, immitigable, let him wage
Against the stranger; but of kindred birds
I hold the challenge hateful. Such the boon
I proffer thee--within this land of lands,
Most loved of gods, with me to show and share
Fair mercy, gratitude and grace as fair.

Chorus:

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,--
Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth
Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,
Woe, woe for thee, for me!
From side to side what pains be these that thrill?
Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!
Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust,
And brought me to the dust--
Woe, woe is me!--with craft invincible.

Athena:

I will not weary of soft words to thee,
That never mayst thou say, "Behold me spurned,
An elder by a younger deity,
And from this land rejected and forlorn,
Unhonoured by the men who dwell therein".
But, if Persuasion's grace be sacred to thee,
Soft in the soothing accents of my tongue,

Tarry, I pray thee; yet, if go thou wilt,
 Not rightfully wilt thou on this my town
 Sway down the scale that beareth wrath and teen
 Or wasting plague upon this folk. 'Tis thine,
 If so thou wilt, inheritress to be
 Of this my land, its utmost grace to win.

Chorus:

O queen, what refuge dost thou promise me?

Athena:

Refuge untouched by bale: take thou my boon.

Chorus:

What, if I take it, shall mine honour be?

Athena:

No house shall prosper without grace of thine.

Chorus:

Canst thou achieve and grant such power to me?

Athena:

Yea, for my hand shall bless thy worshippers.

Chorus:

And wilt thou pledge me this for time eterne?

Athena:

Yea: none can bid me pledge beyond my power.

Chorus:

Lo, I desist from wrath, appeased by thee.

Athena:

Then in the land's heart shalt thou win thee friends.

Chorus:

What chant dost bid me raise, to greet the land?

Athena:

Such as aspires towards a victory
 Unrued by any: chants from breast of earth,
 From wave, from sky; and let the wild winds' breath
 Pass with soft sunlight o'er the lap of land,--
 Strong wax the fruits of earth, fair teem the kine,
 Unfailing, for my town's prosperity,
 And constant be the growth of mortal seed.
 But more and more root out the impious,
 For as a gardener fosters what he sows,
 So foster I this race, whom righteousness
 Doth fend from sorrow. Such the proffered boon.
 But I, if wars must be, and their loud clash
 And carnage, for my town, will ne'er endure
 That aught but victory shall crown her fame.

Chorus:

Lo, I accept it; at her very side
 Doth Pallas bid me dwell:
 I will not wrong the city of her pride,
 Which even Almighty Zeus and Ares hold
 Heaven's earthly citadel,
 Loved home of Grecian gods, the young, the old,
 The sanctuary divine,
 The shield of every shrine!
 For Athens I say forth a gracious prophecy,--
 The glory of the sunlight and the skies
 Shall bid from earth arise
 Warm wavelets of new life and glad prosperity.

Athena:

Behold, with gracious heart well pleased
 I for my citizens do grant
 Fulfilment of this covenant:
 And here, their wrath at length appeased,
 These mighty deities shall stay,
 For theirs it is by right to sway
 The lot that rules our mortal day,
 And he who hath not inly felt
 Their stern decree, ere long on him,
 Not knowing why and whence, the grim
 Life-crushing blow is dealt.
 The father's sin upon the child
 Descends, and sin is silent death,
 And leads him on the downward path,
 By stealth beguiled,
 Unto the Furies: though his state
 On earth were high, and loud his boast,
 Victim of silent ire and hate
 He dwells among the Lost.

Chorus:

To my blessing now give ear.--
 Scorching blight nor singèd air
 Never blast thine olives fair!
 Drouth, that wasteth bud and plant,
 Keep to thine own place. Avaunt,
 Famine fell, and come not hither
 Stealthily to waste and wither!
 Let the land, in season due,
 Twice her waxing fruits renew;
 Teem the kine in double measure;
 Rich in new god-given treasure;
 Here let men the powers adore
 For sudden gifts unhopèd before!

Athena:

O hearken, warders of the wall

That guards mine Athens, what a dower
 Is unto her ordained and given!
 For mighty is the Furies' power,
 And deep-revered in courts of heaven
 And realms of hell; and clear to all
 They weave thy doom, mortality!
 And some in joy and peace shall sing;
 But unto other some they bring
 Sad life and tear-dimmed eye.

Chorus:

And far away I ban thee and remove,
 Untimely death of youths too soon brought low!
 And to each maid, O gods, when time is come for love,
 Grant ye a warrior's heart, a wedded life to know.
 Ye too, O Fates, children of mother Night,
 Whose children too are we, O goddesses
 Of just award, of all by sacred right
 Queens who in time and in eternity
 Do rule, a present power for righteousness,
 Honoured beyond all Gods, hear ye and grant my cry!

Athena:

And I too, I with joy am fain,
 Hearing your voice this gift ordain
 Unto my land. High thanks be thine,
 Persuasion, who with eyes divine
 Into my tongue didst look thy strength,
 To bend and to appease at length
 Those who would not be comforted.
 Zeus, king of parley, doth prevail,
 And ye and I will strive nor fail,
 That good may stand in evil's stead,
 And lasting bliss for bale.

Chorus:

And nevermore these walls within
 Shall echo fierce sedition's din
 Unslaked with blood and crime;
 The thirsty dust shall nevermore
 Suck up the darkly streaming gore
 Of civic broils, shed out in wrath
 And vengeance, crying death for death!
 But man with man and state with state
 Shall vow "The pledge of common hate
 And common friendship, that for man
 Hath oft made blessing out of ban,
 Be ours unto all time".

Athena:

Skill they, or not, the path to find
 Of favouring speech and presage kind?

Yea, even from these, who, grim and stern,
 Glared anger upon you of old,
 O citizens, ye now shall earn
 A recompense right manifold.
 Deck them aright, extol them high,
 Be loyal to their loyalty,
 And ye shall make your town and land
 Sure, propped on Justice' saving hand,
 And Fame's eternity.

Chorus:

Hail ye, all hail! and yet again, all hail
 O Athens, happy in a weal secured!
 O ye who sit by Zeus' right hand, nor fail
 Of wisdom set among you and assured,
 Loved of the well-loved Goddess-Maid! the King
 Of gods doth reverence you, beneath her guarding wing.

Athena:

All hail unto each honoured guest!
 Whom to the chambers of your rest
 'Tis mine to lead, and to provide
 The hallowed torch, the guard and guide.
 Pass down, the while these altars glow
 With sacred fire, to earth below
 And your appointed shrine.
 There dwelling, from the land restrain
 The force of fate, the breath of bane,
 But waft on us the gift and gain
 Of Victory divine!
 And ye, the men of Cranaos' seed,
 I bid you now with reverence lead
 These alien Powers that thus are made
 Athenian evermore. To you
 Fair be their will henceforth, to do
 Whate'er may bless and aid!

Chorus:

Hail to you all! hail yet again,
 All who love Athens, Gods and men,
 Adoring her as Pallas' home!
 And while ye reverence what ye grant--
 My sacred shrine and hidden haunt--
 Blameless and blissful be your doom!

Athena:

Once more I praise the promise of your vows,
 And now I bid the golden torches' glow
 Pass down before you to the hidden depth
 Of earth, by mine own sacred servants borne,
 My loyal guards of statue and of shrine.
 Come forth, O flower of Theseus' Attic land,

O glorious band of children and of wives,
 And ye, O train of matrons crowned with eld!
 Deck you with festal robes of scarlet dye
 In honour of this day: O gleaming torch,
 Lead onward, that these gracious powers of earth
 Henceforth be seen to bless the life of men.

Athena leads the procession downwards into the Cave of the Furies, under Areopagus: as they go, the escort of women and children chant aloud.

Chant:

With loyalty we lead you; proudly go,
 Night's childless children, to your home below!
 ("O citizens, awhile from words forbear!")
 To darkness' deep primeval lair,
 Far in Earth's bosom, downward fare,
 Adored with prayer and sacrifice.
 ("O citizens, forbear your cries!")
 Pass hitherward, ye powers of Dread,
 With all your former wrath allayed,
 Into the heart of this loved land;
 With joy unto your temple wend,
 The while upon your steps attend
 The flames that fed upon the brand--
 ("Now, now ring out your chant, your joy's acclaim!")
 Behind them, as they downward fare,
 Let holy hands libations bear,
 And torches' sacred flame.
 All-seeing Zeus and Fate come down
 To battle fair for Pallas' town!
 "Ring out your chant, ring out your joy's acclaim!"

Exeunt omnes

The Persians

Argument

Xerxes, son of Darius and of his wife Atossa, daughter of Cyrus, went forth against Hellas, to take vengeance upon those who had defeated his father at Marathon. But ill fortune befell the king and his army both by land and sea; neither did it avail him that he cast a bridge over the Hellespont and made a canal across the promontory of Mount Athos, and brought myriads of men, by land and sea, to subdue the Greeks. For in the strait between Athens and the island of Salamis the Persian ships were shattered and sunk or put to flight by those of Athens and Lacedaemon and Aegina and Corinth, and Xerxes went homewards on the way by which he had come, leaving his general Mardonius with three hundred thousand men to strive with the Greeks by land: but in the next year they were destroyed near Plataea in Boeotia, by the Lacedaemonians and Athenians and Tegeans. Such was the end of the army which Xerxes left behind him. But the king himself had reached the bridge over the Hellespont, and late and hardly and in sorry plight and with few companions came home unto the Palace of Susa.

Dramatis Personae

CHORUS OF PERSIAN ELDERS.

ATOSSA, WIDOW OF DARIUS AND MOTHER OF XERXES.

A MESSENGER.

THE GHOST OF DARIUS.

XERXES.

The Persians

The Scene is laid at the Palace of Susa.

CHORUS.

Away unto the Grecian land
 Hath passed the Persian armament:
 We, by the monarch's high command,
 We are the warders true who stand,
 Chosen, for honour and descent,
 To watch the wealth of him who went—
 Guards of the gold, and faithful styled
 By Xerxes, great Darius' child!

But the king went nor comes again—
 And for that host, we saw depart
 Arrayed in gold, my boding heart
 Aches with a pulse of anxious pain,
 Presageful for its youthful king!
 No scout, no steed, no battle-car
 Comes speeding hitherward, to bring
 News to our city from afar!
 Erewhile they went, away, away,
 From Susa, from Ecbatana,
 From Kissa's timeworn fortress grey,
 Passing to ravage and to war—
 Some upon steeds, on galleys some,
 Some in close files, they passed from home,
 All upon warlike errand bent—
 Amistres, Artaphernes went,
 Astaspes, Megabazes high,
 Lords of the Persian chivalry,
 Marshals who serve the great king's word
 Chieftains of all the mighty horde!
 Horsemen and bowmen streamed away,
 Grim in their aspect, fixed to slay,
 And resolute to face the fray!
 With troops of horse, careering fast,
 Masistes, Artembáres passed:
 Imaeus too, the Bowman brave,
 Sosthánes, Pharandákes, drave—
 And others the all-nursing wave
 Of Nilus to the battle gave;
 Came Susiskánes, warrior wild,
 And Pegastágon, Egypt's child:
 Thee, brave Arsámes! from afar
 Did holy Memphis launch to war;
 And Ariomardus, high in fame,
 From Thebes the immemorial came,

And oarsmen skilled from Nilus' fen,
 A countless crowd of warlike men:
 And next, the dainty Lydians went—
 Soft rulers of a continent—
 Mitragathes and Arcteus bold
 In twin command their ranks controlled,
 And Sardis town, that teems with gold,
 Sent forth its squadrons to the war—
 Horse upon horse, and car on car,
 Double and triple teams, they rolled,
 In onset awful to behold.
 From Tmolus' sacred hill there came
 The native hordes to join the fray,
 And upon Hellas' neck to lay
 The yoke of slavery and shame;
 Mardon and Tharubis were there,
 Bright anvils for the foemen's spear!
 The Mysian dart-men sped to war,
 And the long crowd that onward rolled
 From Babylon enriched with gold—
 Captains of ships and archers skilled
 To speed the shaft, and those who wield
 The scimitar;—the eastern band
 Who, by the great king's high command,
 Swept to subdue the western land!

Gone are they, gone—ah, welladay!
 The flower and pride of our array;
 And all the Eastland, from whose breast
 Came forth her bravest and her best,
 Craves longingly with boding dread—
 Parents for sons, and brides new-wed
 For absent lords, and, day by day,
 Shudder with dread at their delay!

Ere now they have passed o'er the sea, the manifold host of the king—
 They have gone forth to sack and to burn; ashore on the Westland they spring!
 With cordage and rope they have bridged the sea-way of Helle, to pass
 O'er the strait that is named by thy name, O daughter of Athamas!
 They have anchored their ships in the current, they have bridled the neck of the sea—
 The Shepherd and Lord of the East hath bidden a roadway to be!
 From the land to the land they pass over, a herd at the high king's best;
 Some by the way of the waves, and some o'er the planking have pressed.
 For the king is a lord and a god: he was born of the golden seed
 That erst upon Danae fell—his captains are strong at the need!
 And dark is the glare of his eyes, as eyes of a serpent blood-fed,
 And with manifold troops in his train and with manifold ships hath he sped—
 Yea, sped with his Syrian cars: he leads on the lords of the bow
 To meet with the men of the West, the spear-armed force of the foe!
 Can any make head and resist him, when he comes with the roll of a wave?
 No barrier nor phalanx of might, no chief, be he ever so brave!

For stern is the onset of Persia, and gallant her children in fight.
 But the guile of the god is deceitful, and who shall elude him by flight?
 And who is the lord of the leap, that can spring and alight and evade?
 For Até deludes and allures, till round him the meshes are laid,
 And no man his doom can escape! it was writ in the rule of high Heaven,
 That in tramp of the steeds and in crash of the charge the war-cry of Persia be given:
 They have learned to behold the forbidden, the sacred enclosure of sea,
 Where the waters are wide and in stress of the wind the billows roll hoary to lee!
 And their trust is in cable and cordage, too weak in the power of the blast,
 And frail are the links of the bridge whereby unto Hellas they passed.

Therefore my gloom-wrapped heart is rent with sorrow
 For what may hap to-morrow!
 Alack, for all the Persian armament—
 Alack, lest there be sent
 Dread news of desolation, Susa's land
 Bereft, forlorn, unmanned—
 Lest the grey Kissian fortress echo back
 The wail, *Alack, Alack!*
 The sound of women's shriek, who wail and mourn,
 With fine-spun raiment torn!
 The charioteers went forth nor come again,
 And all the marching men
 Even as a swarm of bees have flown afar,
 Drawn by the king to war—
 Crossing the sea-bridge, linked from side to side,
 That doth the waves divide:
 And the soft bridal couch of bygone years
 Is now bedewed with tears,
 Each princess, clad in garments delicate,
 Wails for her widowed fate—

*Alas my gallant bridegroom, lost and gone,
 And I am left alone!*

But now, ye warders of the state,
 Here, in this hall of old renown,
 Behoves that we deliberate
 In counsel deep and wise debate,
 For need is surely shown!
 How fareth he, Darius' child,
 The Persian king, from Perseus styled?
 Comes triumph to the eastern bow,
 Or hath the lance-point conquered now?

Enter ATOSSA.

See, yonder comes the mother-queen,
 Light of our eyes, in godlike sheen,
 The royal mother of the king!—
 Fall we before her! well it were

That, all as one, we sue to her,
And round her footsteps cling!

Queen, among deep-girded Persian dames thou highest and most royal,
Hoary mother, thou, of Xerxes, and Darius' wife of old!
To godlike sire, and godlike son, we bow us and are loyal—
Unless, on us, an adverse tide of destiny has rolled!

ATOSSA.

Therefore come I forth to you, from chambers decked and golden,
Where long ago Darius laid his head, with me beside,
And my heart is torn with anguish, and with terror am I holden,
And I plead unto your friendship and I bid you to my side.

Darius, in the old time, by aid of some Immortal,
Raised up the stately fabric, our wealth of long-ago:
But I tremble lest it totter down, and ruin porch and portal,
And the whirling dust of downfall rise above its overthrow!

Therefore a dread unspeakable within me never slumbers,
Saying, *Honour not the gauds of wealth if men have ceased to grow,*
Nor deem that men, apart from wealth, can find their strength in numbers—
We shudder for our light and king, though we have gold enow!

No light there is, in any house, save presence of the master—
So runs the saw, ye aged men! and truth it says indeed—
On you I call, the wise and true, to ward us from disaster,
For all my hope is fixed on you, to prop us in our need!

CHORUS.

Queen-Mother of the Persian land, to thy commandment bowing,
Whate'er thou wilt, in word or deed, we follow to fulfil—
Not twice we need thine high behest, our faith and duty knowing,
In council and in act alike, thy loyal servants still!

ATOSSA.

Long while by various visions of the night
Am I beset, since to Ionian lands
With marshalled host my son went forth to war.
Yet never saw I presage so distinct
As in the night now passed.—Attend my tale!—
A dream I had: two women nobly clad
Came to my sight, one robed in Persian dress,
The other vested in the Dorian garb,
And both right stately and more tall by far
Than women of to-day, and beautiful
Beyond disparagement, and sisters sprung
Both of one race, but, by their natal lot,
One born in Hellas, one in Eastern land.
These, as it seemed unto my watching eyes,
Roused each the other to a mutual feud:
The which my son perceiving set himself
To check and soothe their struggle, and anon
Yoked them and set the collars on their necks;

And one, the Ionian, proud in this array,
 Paced in high quietude, and lent her mouth,
 Obedient, to the guidance of the rein.
 But restively the other strove, and broke
 The fittings of the car, and plunged away
 With mouth un-bitted: o'er the broken yoke
 My son was hurled, and lo! Darius stood
 In lamentation o'er his fallen child.
 Him Xerxes saw, and rent his robe in grief.

Such was my vision of the night now past;
 But when, arising, I had dipped my hand
 In the fair lustral stream, I drew towards
 The altar, in the act of sacrifice,
 Having in mind to offer, as their due,
 The sacred meal-cake to the averting powers,
 Lords of the rite that banisheth ill dreams.
 When lo! I saw an eagle fleeing fast
 To Phoebus' shrine—O friends, I stayed my steps,
 Too scared to speak! for, close upon his flight,
 A little falcon dashed in winged pursuit,
 Plucking with claws the eagle's head, while he
 Could only crouch and cower and yield himself.
 Scared was I by that sight, and eke to you
 No less a terror must it be to hear!
 For mark this well—if Xerxes have prevailed,
 He shall come back the wonder of the world:
 If not, still none can call him to account—
 So he but live, he liveth Persia's King!

CHORUS.

Queen, it stands not with my purpose to abet these fears of thine,
 Nor to speak with glazing comfort! nay, betake thee to the shrine!
 If thy dream foretold disaster, sue to gods to bar its way,
 And, for thyself, son, state, and friends, to bring fair fate to-day.
 Next, unto Earth and to the Dead be due libation poured,
 And by thee let Darius' soul be wistfully implored—
*I saw thee, lord, in last night's dream, a phantom from the grave,
 I pray thee, lord, from earth beneath come forth to help and save!
 To me and to thy son send up the bliss of triumph now,
 And hold the gloomy fates of ill, dim in the dark below!*
 Such be thy words! my inner heart good tidings doth foretell,
 And that fair fate will spring thereof, if wisdom guide us well.

ATOSSA.

Loyal thou that first hast read this dream, this vision of the night,
 With loyalty to me, the queen—be then thy presage right!
 And therefore, as thy bidding is, what time I pass within
 To dedicate these offerings, new prayers I will begin,
 Alike to gods and the great dead who loved our lineage well.
 Yet one more word—say, in what realm do the Athenians dwell?

CHORUS.

Far hence, even where, in evening land, goes down our Lord the Sun.

ATOSSA.

Say, had my son so keen desire, that region to o'errun?

CHORUS.

Yea—if she fell, the rest of Greece were subject to our sway!

ATOSSA.

Hath she so great predominance, such legions in array?

CHORUS.

Ay—such a host as smote us sore upon an earlier day.

ATOSSA.

And what hath she, besides her men? enow of wealth in store?

CHORUS.

A mine of treasure in the earth, a fount of silver ore!

ATOSSA.

Is it in skill of bow and shaft that Athens' men excel?

CHORUS.

Nay, they bear bucklers in the fight, and thrust the spear-point well.

ATOSSA.

And who is shepherd of their host and holds them in command?

CHORUS.

To no man do they bow as slaves, nor own a master's hand.

ATOSSA.

How should they bide our brunt of war, the East upon the West?

CHORUS.

That could Darius' valiant horde in days of yore attest!

ATOSSA.

A boding word, to us who bore the men now far away!

CHORUS.

Nay—as I deem, the very truth will dawn on us to-day.

A Persian by his garb and speed, a courier draws anear—

He bringeth news, of good or ill, for Persia's land to hear.

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER.

O walls and towers of all the Asian realm,

O Persian land, O treasure-house of gold!

How, by one stroke, down to destruction, down,

Hath sunk our pride, and all the flower of war

That once was Persia's, lieth in the dust!

Woe on the man who first announceth woe—

Yet must I all the tale of death unroll!

Hark to me, Persians! Persia's host lies low.

CHORUS.

O ruin manifold, and woe, and fear!
Let the wild tears run down, for the great doom is here!

MESSENGER.

This blow hath fallen, to the utterance, And I, past hope, behold my safe return!

CHORUS.

Too long, alack, too long this life of mine,
That in mine age I see this sudden woe condign!

MESSENGER.

As one who saw, by no loose rumour led,
Lords, I would tell what doom was dealt to us.

CHORUS.

Alack, how vainly have they striven!
Our myriad hordes with shaft and bow
Went from the Eastland, to lay low
Hellas, beloved of Heaven!

MESSENGER.

Piled with men dead, yea, miserably slain,
Is every beach, each reef of Salamis!

CHORUS.

Thou sayest sooth—ah well-a-day!
Battered amid the waves, and torn,
On surges hither, thither, borne,
Dead bodies, bloodstained and forlorn,
In their long cloaks they toss and stray!

MESSENGER.

Their bows availed not! all have perished, all,
By charging galleys crushed and whelmed in death.

CHORUS.

Shriek out your sorrow's wistful wail!
To their untimely doom they went;
Ill strove they, and to no avail,
And minished is their armament!

MESSENGER.

Out on thee, hateful name of Salamis,
Out upon Athens, mournful memory!

CHORUS.

Woe upon this day's evil fame!
Thou, Athens, art our murderess;
Alack, full many a Persian dame
Is left forlorn and husbandless!

ATOSSA.

Mute have I been awhile, and overwrought
At this great sorrow, for it passeth speech,
And passeth all desire to ask of it.

Yet if the gods send evils, men must bear.

(*To the MESSENGER*)

Unroll the record! stand composed and tell,
Although thy heart be groaning inwardly,
Who hath escaped, and, of our leaders, whom
Have we to weep? what chieftains in the van
Stood, sank, and died and left us leaderless?

MESSENGER.

Xerxes himself survives and sees the day.

ATOSSA.

Then to my line thy word renews the dawn
And golden dayspring after gloom of night!

MESSENGER.

But the brave marshal of ten thousand horse,
Artembares, is tossed and flung in death
Along the rugged rocks Silenian.
And Dadaces no longer leads his troop,
But, smitten by the spear, from off the prow
Hath lightly leaped to death; and Tenagon,
In true descent a Bactrian nobly born,
Drifts by the sea-lashed reefs of Salamis,
The isle of Ajax. Gone Lilaëus too,
Gone are Arsames and Argestes! all,
Around the islet where the sea-doves breed,
Dashed their defeated heads on iron rocks;
Arcteus, who dwelt beside the founts of Nile,
Adeues, Pheresseues, and with them
Pharnuchus, from one galley's deck went down.
Matallus, too, of Chrysa, lord and king
Of myriad hordes, who led unto the fight
Three times ten thousand swarthy cavaliers,
Fell, with his swarthy and abundant beard
Incarnadined to red, a crimson stain
Outrivaling the purple of the sea!
There Magian Arabus and Artames
Of Bactra perished—taking up, alike,
In yonder stony land their long sojourn.
Amistris too, and he whose strenuous spear
Was foremost in the fight, Amphistreus fell,
And gallant Ariomardus, by whose death
Broods sorrow upon Sardis: Mysia mourns
For Seisames, and Tharubis lies low—
Commander, he, of five times fifty ships,
Born in Lyrnessus: his heroic form
Is low in death, ungraced with sepulchre.
Dead too is he, the lord of courage high,
Cilicia's marshal, brave Syennesis,
Than whom none dealt more carnage on the foe,
Nor perished by a more heroic end.

So fell the brave: so speak I of their doom,
Summing in brief the fate of myriads!

ATOSSA.

Ah well-a-day! these crowning woes I hear,
The shame of Persia and her shrieks of dole!
But yet renew the tale, repeat thy words,
Tell o'er the count of those Hellenic ships,
And how they ventured with their beakèd prows
To charge upon the Persian armament.

MESSENGER.

Know, if mere count of ships could win the day,
The Persians had prevailed. The Greeks, in sooth,
Had but three hundred galleys at the most,
And other ten, select and separate.
But—I am witness—Xerxes held command
Of full a thousand keels, and, those apart,
Two hundred more, and seven, for speed renowned!—
So stands the reckoning, and who shall dare
To say we Persians had the lesser host?

ATOSSA.

Nay, we were worsted by an unseen power
Who swayed the balance downward to our doom!

MESSENGER.

In ward of heaven doth Pallas' city stand.

ATOSSA.

How then? is Athens yet inviolate?

MESSENGER.

While her men live, her bulwark standeth firm!

ATOSSA.

Say, how began the struggle of the ships?
Who first joined issue? did the Greeks attack,
Or Xerxes, in his numbers confident?

MESSENGER.

O queen, our whole disaster thus befell,
Through intervention of some fiend or fate—
I know not what—that had ill will to us.
From the Athenian host some Greek came o'er,
To thy son Xerxes whispering this tale—
*Once let the gloom of night have gathered in,
The Greeks will tarry not, but swiftly spring
Each to his galley-bench, in furtive flight,
Softly contriving safety for their life.*
Thy son believed the word and missed the craft
Of that Greek foeman, and the spite of Heaven,
And straight to all his captains gave this charge—
*As soon as sunlight warms the ground no more,
And gloom enwraps the sanctuary of sky,*

*Range we our fleet in triple serried lines
 To bar the passage from the seething strait,
 This way and that: let other ships surround
 The isle of Ajax, with this warning word—
 That if the Greeks their jeopardy should scape
 By wary craft, and win their ships a road.
 Each Persian captain shall his failure pay
 By forfeit of his head.* So spake the king,
 Inspired at heart with over-confidence,
 Unwitting of the gods' predestined will.
 Thereon our crews, with no disordered haste,
 Did service to his bidding and purveyed
 The meal of afternoon: each rower then
 Over the fitted rowlock looped his oar.
 Then, when the splendour of the sun had set,
 And night drew on, each master of the oar
 And each armed warrior straightway went aboard.
 Forward the long ships moved, rank cheering rank,
 Each forward set upon its ordered course.
 And all night long the captains of the fleet
 Kept their crews moving up and down the strait.
 So the night waned, and not one Grecian ship
 Made effort to elude and slip away.
 But as dawn came and with her coursers white
 Shone in fair radiance over all the earth,
 First from the Grecian fleet rang out a cry,
 A song of onset! and the island crags
 Re-echoed to the shrill exulting sound.
 Then on us Eastern men amazement fell
 And fear in place of hope; for what we heard
 Was not a call to flight! the Greeks rang out
 Their holy, resolute, exulting chant,
 Like men come forth to dare and do and die
 Their trumpets pealed, and fire was in that sound,
 And with the dash of simultaneous oars
 Replying to the war-chant, on they came,
 Smiting the swirling brine, and in a trice
 They flashed upon the vision of the foe!
 The right wing first in orderly advance
 Came on, a steady column; following then,
 The rest of their array moved out and on,
 And to our ears there came a burst of sound,
 A clamour manifold.—*On, sons of Greece!
 On, for your country's freedom! strike to save
 Wives, children, temples of ancestral gods,
 Graves of your fathers! now is all at stake.*
 Then from our side swelled up the mingled din
 Of Persian tongues, and time brooked no delay—
 Ship into ship drave hard its brazen beak
 With speed of thought, a shattering blow! and first

One Grecian bark plunged straight, and sheared away
 Bowsprit and stem of a Phoenician ship.
 And then each galley on some other's prow
 Came crashing in. Awhile our stream of ships
 Held onward, till within the narrowing creek
 Our jostling vessels were together driven,
 And none could aid another: each on each
 Drave hard their brazen beaks, or brake away
 The oar-banks of each other, stem to stern,
 While the Greek galleys, with no lack of skill,
 Hemmed them and battered in their sides, and soon
 The hulls rolled over, and the sea was hid,
 Crowded with wrecks and butchery of men.
 No beach nor reef but was with corpses strewn,
 And every keel of our barbarian host
 Hurried to flee, in utter disarray.
 Thereon the foe closed in upon the wrecks
 And hacked and hewed, with oars and splintered planks,
 As fishermen hack tunnies or a cast
 Of netted dolphins, and the briny sea
 Rang with the screams and shrieks of dying men,
 Until the night's dark aspect hid the scene.
 Had I a ten days' time to sum that count
 Of carnage, 'twere too little! know this well—
 One day ne'er saw such myriad forms of death!

ATOSSA.

Woe on us, woe! disaster's mighty sea
 Hath burst on us and all the Persian realm!

MESSENGER.

Be well assured, the tale is but begun—
 The further agony that on us fell
 Doth twice outweigh the sufferings I have told!

ATOSSA.

Nay, what disaster could be worse than this?
 Say on! what woe upon the army came,
 Swaying the scale to a yet further fall?

MESSENGER.

The very flower and crown of Persia's race,
 Gallant of soul and glorious in descent,
 And highest held in trust before the king,
 Lies shamefully and miserably slain.

ATOSSA.

Alas for me and for this ruin, friends!
 Dead, sayest thou? by what fate overthrown?

MESSENGER.

An islet is there, fronting Salamis—
 Strait, and with evil anchorage: thereon

Pan treads the measure of the dance he loves
 Along the sea-beach. Thither the king sent
 His noblest, that, whene'er the Grecian foe
 Should 'scape, with shattered ships, unto the isle,
 We might make easy prey of fugitives
 And slay them there, and from the washing tides
 Rescue our friends. It fell out otherwise
 Than he divined, for when, by aid of Heaven,
 The Hellenes held the victory on the sea,
 Their sailors then and there begirt themselves
 With brazen mail and bounded from their ships,
 And then enringed the islet, point by point,
 So that our Persians in bewilderment
 Knew not which way to turn. On every side,
 Battered with stones, they fell, while arrows flew
 From many a string, and smote them to the death.
 Then, at the last, with simultaneous rush
 The foe came bursting on us, hacked and hewed
 To fragments all that miserable band,
 Till not a soul of them was left alive.
 Then Xerxes saw disaster's depth, and shrieked,
 From where he sat on high, surveying all—
 A lofty eminence, beside the brine,
 Whence all his armament lay clear in view.
 His robe he rent, with loud and bitter wail,
 And to his land-force swiftly gave command
 And fled, with shame beside him! Now, lament
 That second woe, upon the first imposed!

ATOSSA.

Out on thee, Fortune! thou hast foiled the hope
 And power of Persia: to this bitter end
 My son went forth to wreak his great revenge
 On famous Athens! all too few they seemed,
 Our men who died upon the Fennel-field!
 Vengeance for them my son had mind to take,
 And drew on his own head these whelming woes.
 But thou, say on! the ships that 'scaped from wreck—
 Where didst thou leave them? make thy story clear.

MESSENGER.

The captains of the ships that still survived
 Fled in disorder, scudding down the wind,
 The while our land-force on Boeotian soil
 Fell into ruin, some beside the springs
 Dropping before they drank, and some outworn,
 Pursued, and panting all their life away.
 The rest of us our way to Phocis won,
 And thence to Doris and the Melian gulf,
 Where with soft stream Spercheus laves the soil.
 Thence to the northward did Phthiotis' plain,

And some Thessalian fortress, lend us aid,
 For famine-pinched we were, and many died
 Of drought and hunger's twofold present scourge.
 Thence to Magnesia came we, and the land
 Where Macedonians dwell, and crossed the ford
 Of Axius, and Bolbe's reedy fen,
 And mount Pangaeus, in Edonian land.
 There, in the very night we came, the god
 Brought winter ere its time, from bank to bank
 Freezing the holy Strymon's tide. Each man
 Who heretofore held lightly of the gods,
 Now crouched and proffered prayer to Earth and Heaven!
 Then, after many orisons performed,
 The army ventured on the frozen ford:
 Yet only those who crossed before the sun
 Shed its warm rays, won to the farther side.
 For soon the fervour of the glowing orb
 Did with its keen rays pierce the ice-bound stream,
 And men sank through and thrust each other down—
 Best was his lot whose breath was stifled first!
 But all who struggled through and gained the bank,
 Toilfully wending through the land of Thrace
 Have made their way, a sorry, scanted few,
 Unto this homeland. Let the city now
 Lament and yearn for all the loved and lost.
 My tale is truth, yet much untold remains
 Of ills that Heaven hath hurled upon our land.

CHORUS.

Spirit of Fate, too heavy were thy feet,
 Those ill to match! that sprang on Persia's realm.

ATOSSA.

Woe for the host, to wrack and ruin hurled!
 O warning of the night, prophetic dream!
 Thou didst foreshadow clearly all the doom,
 While ye, old men, made light of woman's fears!
 Ah well—yet, as your divination ruled
 The meaning of the sign, I hold it good,
 First, that I put up prayer unto the gods,
 And, after that, forth from my palace bring
 The sacrificial cake, the offering due
 To Earth and to the spirits of the dead.
 Too well I know it is a timeless rite
 Over a finished thing that cannot change!
 But yet—I know not—there may come of it
 Alleviation for the after time.
 You it beseems, in view of what hath happed,
 T' advise with loyal hearts our loyal guards:
 And to my son—if, ere my coming forth,
 He should draw hitherward—give comfort meet,

Escort him to the palace in all state,
Lest to these woes he add another woe!

[*Exit* **ATOSSA.**]

CHORUS.

Zeus, lord and king! to death and nought
Our countless host by thee is brought.
Deep in the gloom of death, to-day,
Lie Susa and Ecbatana:

How many a maid in sorrow stands
And rends her tire with tender hands!
How tears run down, in common pain
And woeful mourning for the slain!
O delicate in dole and grief,
Ye Persian women! past relief
Is now your sorrow! to the war
Your loved ones went and come no more!
Gone from you is your joy and pride—
Severed the bridegroom from the bride—
The wedded couch luxurious
Is widowed now, and all the house
Pines ever with insatiate sighs,
And we stand here and bid arise,
For those who forth in ardour went
And come not back, the loud lament!

Land of the East, thou mournest for the host,
Bereft of all thy sons, alas the day!
For them whom Xerxes led hath Xerxes lost—
Xerxes who wrecked the fleet, and flung our hopes away!

How came it that Darius once controlled,
And without scathe, the army of the bow,
Loved by the folk of Susa, wise and bold?
Now is the land-force lost, the shipmen sunk below!

Ah for the ships that bore them, woe is me!
Bore them to death and doom! the crashing prows
Of fierce Ionian oarsmen swept the sea,
And death was in their wake, and shipwreck murderous!

Late, late and hardly—if true tales they tell—
Did Xerxes flee along the wintry way
And snows of Thrace—but ah, the first who fell
Lie by the rocks or float upon Cychrea's bay!

Mourn, each and all! waft heavenward your cry,
Stung to the soul, bereaved, disconsolate!
Wail out your anguish, till it pierce the sky,
In shrieks of deep despair, ill-omened, desperate!

The dead are drifting, yea, are gnawed upon
By voiceless children of the stainless sea,

Or battered by the surge! we mourn and groan
For husbands gone to death, for childless agony!

Alas the aged men, who mourn to-day
The ruinous sorrows that the gods ordain!
O'er the wide Asian land, the Persian sway
Can force no tribute now, and can no rule sustain.

Yea, men will crouch no more to fallen power
And kingship overthrown! the whole land o'er,
Men speak the thing they will, and from this hour
The folk whom Xerxes ruled obey his word no more.

The yoke of force is broken from the neck—
The isle of Ajax and th' encircling wave
Reek with a bloody crop of death and wreck
Of Persia's fallen power, that none can lift nor save!

Re-enter ATOSSA, in mourning robes.

ATOSSA.

Friends, whosoe'er is versed in human ills,
Knoweth right well that when a wave of woe
Comes on a man, he sees in all things fear;
While, in flood-tide of fortune, 'tis his mood
To take that fortune as unchangeable,
Wafting him ever forward. Mark me now—
The gods' thwart purpose doth confront mine eyes,
And all is terror to me; in mine ears
There sounds a cry, but not of triumph now—
So am I scared at heart by woe so great.
Therefore I wend forth from the house anew,
Borne in no car of state, nor robed in pride
As heretofore, but bringing, for the sire
Who did beget my son, libations meet
For holy rites that shall appease the dead—
The sweet white milk, drawn from a spotless cow,
The oozing drop of golden honey, culled
By the flower-haunting bee, and therewithal
Pure draughts of water from a virgin spring;
And lo! besides, the stainless effluence,
Born of the wild vine's bosom, shining store
Treasured to age, this bright and luscious wine.
And eke the fragrant fruit upon the bough
Of the grey olive-tree, which lives its life
In sprouting leafage, and the twining flowers,
Bright children of the earth's fertility.
But you, O friends! above these offerings poured
To reconcile the dead, ring out your dirge
To summon up Darius from the shades,
Himself a shade; and I will pour these draughts,
Which earth shall drink, unto the gods of hell.

CHORUS.

Queen, by the Persian land adored,
 By thee be this libation poured,
 Passing to those who hold command
 Of dead men in the spirit-land!
 And we will sue, in solemn chant,
 That gods who do escort the dead
 In nether realms, our prayer may grant—
 Back to us be Darius led!

O Earth, and Hermes, and the king
 Of Hades, our Darius bring!
 For if, beyond the prayers we prayed,
 He knoweth aught of help or aid,
 He, he alone, in realms below,
 Can speak the limit of our woe!

Doth he hear me, the king we adored, who is god among gods of the dead?
 Doth he hear me send out in my sorrow the pitiful, manifold cry,
 The sobbing lament and appeal? is the voice of my suffering sped
 To the realm of the shades? doth he hear me and pity my sorrowful sigh?
 O Earth, and ye Lords of the dead! release ye that spirit of might,
 Who in Susa the palace was born! let him rise up once more to the light!

There is none like him, none of all
 That e'er were laid in Persian sepulchres!
 Borne forth he was to honoured burial,
 A royal heart! and followed by our tears.
 God of the dead, O give him back to us,
 Darius, ruler glorious!
 He never wasted us with reckless war—
 God, counsellor, and king, beneath a happy star!
 Ancient of days and king, awake and come—
 Rise o'er the mounded tomb!
 Rise, plant thy foot, with saffron sandal shod
 Father to us, and god!
 Rise with thy diadem, O sire benign,
 Upon thy brow!
 List to the strange new sorrows of thy line,
 Sire of a woeful son!

A mist of fate and hell is round us now,
 And all the city's flower to death is done!
 Alas, we wept thee once, and weep again!
 O Lord of lords, by recklessness twofold
 The land is wasted of its men,
 And down to death are rolled
 Wreckage of sail and oar,
 Ships that are ships no more,
 And bodies of the slain!

The GHOST OF DARIUS rises.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Ye aged Persians, truest of the true,
 Coevals of the youth that once was mine,
 What troubleth now our city? harken, how
 It moans and beats the breast and rends the plain!
 And I, beholding how my consort stood
 Beside my tomb, was moved with awe, and took
 The gift of her libation graciously.
 But ye are weeping by my sepulchre,
 And, shrilling forth a sad, evoking cry,
 Summon me mournfully, *Arise, arise*.
 No light thing is it, to come back from death,
 For, in good sooth, the gods of nether gloom
 Are quick to seize but late and loth to free!
 Yet among them I dwell as one in power—
 And lo, I come! now speak, and speed your words,
 Lest I be blamed for tarrying overlong!
 What new disaster broods o'er Persia's realm?

CHORUS.

With awe on thee I gaze,
 And, standing face to face,
 I tremble as I did in olden days!

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Nay, but as I rose to earth again, obedient to your call,
 Prithée, tarry not in parley! be one word enough for all—
 Speak and gaze on me unshrinking, neither let my face appal!

CHORUS.

I tremble to reveal,
 Yet tremble to conceal
 Things hard for friends to feel!

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Nay, but if the old-time terror on your spirit keeps its hold,
 Speak thou, O royal lady who didst couch with me of old!
 Stay thy weeping and lamenting and to me reveal the truth—
 Speak! for man is born to sorrow; yea, the proverb sayeth sooth!
 'Tis the doom of mortal beings, if they live to see old age,
 To suffer bale, by land and sea, through war and tempest's rage.

ATOSSA.

O thou whose blissful fate on earth all mortal weal excelled—
 Who, while the sunlight touched thine eyes, the lord of all wert held!
 A god to Persian men thou wert, in bliss and pride and fame—
 I hold thee blest too in thy death, or e'er the ruin came!
 Alas, Darius! one brief word must tell thee all the tale—
 The Persian power is in the dust, gone down in blood and bale!

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Speak—by what chance? did man rebel, or pestilence descend?

ATOSSA.

Neither! by Athens' fatal shores our army met its end.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Which of my children led our host to Athens? speak and say.

ATOSSA.

The froward Xerxes, leaving all our realm to disarray.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Was it with army or with fleet on folly's quest he went?

ATOSSA.

With both alike, a twofold front of double armament.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

And how then did so large a host on foot pass o'er the sea?

ATOSSA.

He bridged the ford of Helle's strait by artful carpentry.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

How? could his craft avail to span the torrent of that tide?

ATOSSA.

'Tis sooth I say—some unknown power did fatal help provide!

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Alas, that power in malice came, to his bewilderment!

ATOSSA.

Alas, we see the end of all, the ruin on us sent.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Speak, tell me how they fared therein, that thus ye mourn and weep?

ATOSSA.

Disaster to the army came, through ruin on the deep!

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Is all undone? hath all the folk gone down before the foe?

ATOSSA.

Yea, hark to Susa's mourning cry for warriors laid low!

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Alas for all our gallant aids, our Persia's help and pride!

ATOSSA.

Ay! old with young, the Bactrian force hath perished at our side!

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Alas, my son! what gallant youths hath he sent down to death!

ATOSSA.

Alone, or with a scanty guard—for so the rumour saith—

GHOST OF DARIUS.

He came—but how, and to what end? doth aught of hope remain?

ATOSSA.

With joy he reached the bridge that spanned the Hellespontine main.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

How? is he safe, in Persian land? speak soothly, yea or nay!

ATOSSA.

Clear and more clear the rumour comes, for no man to gainsay.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Woe for the oracle fulfilled, the presage of the war
 Launched on my son, by will of Zeus! I deemed our doom afar
 In lap of time; but, if a king push forward to his fate,
 The god himself allures to death that man infatuate!
 So now the very fount of woe streams out on those I loved,
 And mine own son, unwisely bold, the truth hereof hath proved!
 He sought to shackle and control the Hellespontine wave,
 That rushes from the Bosphorus, with fetters of a slave!—
 To curb and bridge, with welded links, the streaming water-way,
 And guide across the passage broad his manifold array!
 Ah, folly void of counsel! he deemed that mortal wight
 Could thwart the will of Heaven itself and curb Poseidon's might!
 Was it not madness? much I fear lest all my wealth and store
 Pass from my treasure-house, to be the snatcher's prize once more!

ATOSSA.

Such is the lesson, ah, too late! to eager Xerxes taught—
 Trusting random counsellors and hare-brained men of nought,
 Who said *Darius mighty wealth and fame to us did bring,*
But thou art nought, a blunted spear, a palace-keeping king!
 Unto those sorry counsellors a ready ear he lent,
 And led away to Hellas' shore his fated armament.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Therefore through them hath come calamity
 Most huge and past forgetting; nor of old
 Did ever such extermination fall
 Upon the city Susa. Long ago
 Zeus in his power this privilege bestowed,
 That with a guiding sceptre one sole man
 Should rule this Asian land of flock and herd.
 Over the folk a Mede, Astyages,
 Did grasp the power: then Cyaxares ruled
 In his sire's place, and held the sway aright,
 Steering his state with watchful wariness.
 Third in succession, Cyrus, blest of Heaven,
 Held rule and 'stablished peace for all his clan:
 Lydian and Phrygian won he to his sway,
 And wide Ionia to his yoke constrained,
 For the god favoured his discretion sage.
 Fourth in the dynasty was Cyrus' son,
 And fifth was Mardus, scandal of his land
 And ancient lineage. Him Artaphrenes,

Hardy of heart, within his palace slew,
 Aided by loyal plotters, set for this.
 And I too gained the lot for which I craved,
 And oftentimes led out a goodly host,
 Yet never brought disaster such as this
 Upon the city. But my son is young
 And reckless in his youth, and heedeth not
 The warnings of my mouth. Mark this, my friends,
 Born with my birth, coeval with mine age—
 Not all we kings who held successive rule
 Have wrought, combined, such ruin as my son!

CHORUS.

How then, O King Darius? whitherward
 Dost thou direct thy warning? from this plight
 How can we Persians fare towards hope again?

GHOST OF DARIUS.

By nevermore assailing Grecian lands,
 Even tho' our Median force be double theirs—
 For the land's self protects its denizens.

CHORUS.

How meanest thou? by what defensive power?

GHOST OF DARIUS.

She wastes by famine a too countless foe.

CHORUS.

But we will bring a host more skilled than huge.

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Why, e'en that army, camped in Hellas still,
 Shall never win again to home and weal!

CHORUS.

How say'st thou? will not all the Asian host
 Pass back from Europe over Helle's ford?

GHOST OF DARIUS.

Nay—scarce a tithe of all those myriads,
 If man may trust the oracles of Heaven
 When he beholds the things already wrought,
 Not false with true, but true with no word false
 If what I trow be truth, my son has left
 A chosen rear-guard of our host, in whom
 He trusts, now, with a random confidence!
 They tarry where Asopus laves the ground
 With rills that softly bless Boeotia's plain—
 There is it fated for them to endure
 The very crown of misery and doom,
 Requital for their god-forgetting pride!
 For why? they raided Hellas, had the heart
 To wrong the images of holy gods,
 And give the shrines and temples to the flame!

Defaced and dashed from sight the altars fell,
 And each god's image, from its pedestal
 Thrust and flung down, in dim confusion lies!
 Therefore, for outrage vile, a doom as dark
 They suffer, and yet more shall undergo—
 They touch no bottom in the swamp of doom,
 But round them rises, bubbling up, the ooze!
 So deep shall lie the gory clotted mass
 Of corpses by the Dorian spear transfixed
 Upon Plataea's field! yea, piles of slain
 To the third generation shall attest
 By silent eloquence to those that see—
Let not a mortal vaunt him overmuch.
 For pride grows rankly, and to ripeness brings
 The curse of fate, and reaps, for harvest, tears!
 Therefore when ye behold, for deeds like these,
 Such stern requital paid, remember then
 Athens and Hellas. Let no mortal wight,
 Holding too lightly of his present weal
 And passionate for more, cast down and spill
 The mighty cup of his prosperity!
 Doubt not that over-proud and haughty souls
 Zeus lours in wrath, exacting the account.
 Therefore, with wary warning, school my son,
 Though he be lessoned by the gods already,
 To curb the vaunting that affronts high Heaven!
 And thou, O venerable Mother-queen,
 Beloved of Xerxes, to the palace pass
 And take therefrom such raiment as befits
 Thy son, and go to meet him: for his garb
 In this extremity of grief hangs rent
 Around his body, woefully unstitched,
 Mere tattered fragments of once royal robes!
 Go thou to him, speak soft and soothing words—
 Thee, and none other, will he bear to hear,
 As well I know. But I must pass away
 From earth above, unto the nether gloom;
 Therefore, old men, take my farewell, and clasp,
 Even amid the ruin of this time,
 Unto your souls the pleasure of the day,
 For dead men have no profit of their gold!

[*The GHOST OF DARIUS sinks.*]

CHORUS.

Alas, I thrill with pain for Persia's woes—
 Many fulfilled, and others hard at hand!

ATOSSA.

O spirit of the race, what sorrows crowd
 Upon me! and this anguish stings me worst,
 That round my royal son's dishonoured form

Hang rags and tatters, degradation deep!
 I will away, and, bringing from within
 A seemly royal robe, will straightway strive
 To meet and greet my son: foul scorn it were
 To leave our dearest in his hour of shame.

[*Exit ATOSSA.*]

CHORUS.

Ah glorious and goodly they were, the life and the lot that we gained,
 The cities we held in our hand when the monarch invincible reigned,
 The king that was good to his realm, sufficing, fulfilled of his sway,
 A lord that was peer of the gods, the pride of the bygone day!
 Then could we show to the skies great hosts and a glorious name,
 And laws that were stable in might; as towers they guarded our fame!
 There without woe or disaster we came from the foe and the fight,
 In triumph, enriched with the spoil, to the land and the city's delight.
 What towns ere the Halys he passed! what towns ere he came to the West,
 To the main and the isles of the Strymon, and the Thracian region possess'd!
 And those that stand back from the main, enringed by their fortified wall,
 Gave o'er to Darius, the king, the sceptre and sway over all!
 Those too by the channel of Helle, where southward it broadens and glides,
 By the inlets, Propontis! of thee, and the strait of the Pontic tides,
 And the isles that lie fronting our sea-board, and the Eastland looks on each one,
 Lesbo and Chios and Paros, and Samos with olive-trees grown,
 And Naxos, and Myconos' rock, and Tenos with Andros hard by,
 And isles that in midmost Aegean, aloof from the continent, lie—
 And Lemnos and Icaros' hold—all these to his sceptre were bowed,
 And Cnidos and neighbouring Rhodes, and Soli, and Paphos the proud,
 And Cyprian Salamis, name-child of her who hath wrought us this wrong!
 Yea, and all the Ionian tract, where the Greek-born inhabitants throng,
 And the cities are teeming with gold—Darius was lord of them all,
 And, great by his wisdom, he ruled, and ever there came to his call,
 In stalwart array and unailing, the warrior chiefs of our land,
 And mingled allies from the tribes who bowed to his conquering hand!
 But now there are none to gainsay that the gods are against us; we lie
 Subdued in the havoc of wreck, and whelmed by the wrath of the sky!

Enter XERXES in disarray.

XERXES.

Alas the day, that I should fall
 Into this grimmest fate of all,
 This ruin doubly unforeseen!
 On Persia's land what power of Fate
 Descends, what louting gloom of hate?
 How shall I bear my teen?
 My limbs are loosened where they stand,
 When I behold this aged band—
 Oh God! I would that I too, I,
 Among the men who went to die,
 Were whelmed in earth by Fate's command!

CHORUS.

Ah welladay, my King! ah woe
 For all our heroes' overthrow—
 For all the gallant host's array,
 For Persia's honour, pass'd away,
 For glory and heroic sway
 Mown down by Fortune's hand to-day!
 Hark, how the kingdom makes its moan,
 For youthful valour lost and gone,
 By Xerxes shattered and undone!
 He, he hath crammed the maw of hell
 With bowmen brave, who nobly fell,
 Their country's mighty armament,
 Ten thousand heroes deathward sent!
 Alas, for all the valiant band,
 O king and lord! thine Asian land
 Down, down upon its knee is bent!

XERXES.

Alas, a lamentable sound,
 A cry of ruth! for I am found
 A curse to land and lineage,
 With none my sorrow to assuage!

CHORUS.

Alas, a death-song desolate
 I send forth, for thy home-coming!
 A scream, a dirge for woe and fate,
 Such as the Asian mourners sing,
 A sorry and ill-omened tale
 Of tears and shrieks and Eastern wail!

XERXES.

Ay, launch the woeful sorrow's cry,
 The harsh, discordant melody,
 For lo, the power, we held for sure,
 Hath turned to my discomfiture!

CHORUS.

Yea, dirges, dirges manifold
 Will I send forth, for warriors bold,
 For the sea-sorrow of our host!
 The city mourns, and I must wail
 With plashing tears our sorrow's tale,
 Lamenting for the loved and lost!

XERXES.

Alas, the god of war, who sways
 The scales of fight in diverse ways,
 Gives glory to Ionia!
 Ionian ships, in fenced array,
 Have reaped their harvest in the bay,

A darkling harvest-field of Fate,
A sea, a shore, of doom and hate!

CHORUS.

Cry out, and learn the tale of woe!
Where are thy comrades? where the band
Who stood beside thee, hand in hand,
A little while ago?
Where now hath Pharandákes gone,
Where Psammis, and where Pelagon?
Where now is brave Agdabatas,
And Susas too, and Datamas?
Hath Susiscanes past away,
The chieftain of Ecbatana?

XERXES.

I left them, mangled castaways,
Flung from their Tyrian deck, and tossed
On Salaminian water-ways,
From surging tides to rocky coast!

CHORUS.

Alack, and is Pharnuchus slain,
And Ariomardus, brave in vain?
Where is Seualces' heart of fire?
Lilaeus, child of noble sire?
Are Tharubis and Memphis sped?
Hystaechmas, Artembáres dead?
And where is brave Masistes, where?
Sum up death's count, that I may hear!

XERXES.

Alas, alas, they came, their eyes surveyed
Ancestral Athens on that fatal day.
Then with a rending struggle were they laid
Upon the land, and gasped their life away!

CHORUS.

And Batanochus' child, Alpistus great,
Surnamed the Eye of State—
Saw you and left you him who once of old
Ten thousand thousand fighting-men enrolled?
His sire was child of Sesamas, and he
From Megabates sprang. Ah, woe is me,
Thou king of evil fate!
Hast thou lost Parthus, lost Oebares great?
Alas, the sorrow! blow succeedeth blow
On Persia's pride; thou tellest woe on woe!

XERXES.

Bitter indeed the pang for comrades slain,
The brave and bold! thou strikest to my soul

Pain, pain beyond forgetting, hateful pain.
My inner spirit sobs and sighs with dole!

CHORUS.

Another yet we yearn to see,
And see not! ah, thy chivalry,
Xanthis, thou chief of Mardian men
Countless! and thou, Anchaes bright,
And ye, whose cars controlled the fight,
Arsaces and Diaixis wight,
Kegdadata, Lythimnas dear,
And Tolmus, greedy of the spear!
I stand bereft! not in thy train
Come they, as erst! ah, ne'er again
Shall they return unto our eyes,
Car-borne, 'neath silken canopies!

XERXES.

Yea, gone are they who mustered once the host!

CHORUS.

Yea, yea, forgotten, lost!

XERXES.

Alas, the woe and cost!

CHORUS.

Alas, ye heavenly powers!
Ye wrought a sorrow past belief,
A woe, of woes the chief!
With aspect stern, upon us Ate looms!

XERXES.

Smitten are we—time tells no heavier blow!

CHORUS.

Smitten! the doom is plain!

XERXES.

Curse upon curse and pang on pang we know!

CHORUS.

With the Ionian power
We clashed, in evil hour!
Woe falls on Persia's race, yea, woe again, again!

XERXES.

Yea, smitten am I, and my host is all to ruin hurled!

CHORUS.

Yea verily—in mighty wreck hath sunk the Persian world!

XERXES (*holding up a torn robe and a quiver*)

See you this tattered rag of pride?

CHORUS.

I see it, welladay!

XERXES.

See you this quiver?

CHORUS.

Say, hath aught survived and 'scaped the fray?

XERXES.

A store for darts it was, erewhile!

CHORUS.

Remain but two or three!

XERXES.

No aid is left!

CHORUS.

Ionian folk such darts, unfearing, see!

XERXES.

Right resolute they are! I saw disaster unforeseen.

CHORUS.

Ah, speakest thou of wreck, of flight, of carnage that hath been?

XERXES.

Yea, and my royal robe I rent, in terror at their fall!

CHORUS.

Alas, alas!

XERXES.

Yea, thrice alas!

CHORUS.

For all have perished, all!

XERXES.

Ah woe to us, ah joy to them who stood against our pride!

CHORUS.

And all our strength is minished and sundered from our side!

XERXES.

No escort have I!

CHORUS.

Nay, thy friends are whelmed beneath the tide!

XERXES.

Wail, wail the miserable doom, and to the palace hie!

CHORUS.

Alas, alas, and woe again!

XERXES.

Shriek, smite the breast, as I!

CHORUS.

An evil gift, a sad exchange, of tears poured out in vain!

XERXES.

Shrill out your simultaneous wail!

CHORUS.

Alas the woe and pain!

XERXES.

O, bitter is this adverse fate!

CHORUS.

I voice the moan with thee!

XERXES.

Smite, smite thy bosom, groan aloud for my calamity!

CHORUS.

I mourn and am dissolved in tears!

XERXES.

Cry, beat thy breast amain!

CHORUS.

O king, my heart is in thy woe!

XERXES.

Shriek, wail, and shriek again!

CHORUS.

O agony!

XERXES.

A blackening blow—

CHORUS.

A grievous stripe shall fall!

XERXES.

Yea, beat anew thy breast, ring out the doleful Mysian call!

CHORUS.

An agony, an agony!

XERXES.

Pluck out thy whitening beard!

CHORUS.

By handfuls, ay, by handfuls, with dismal tear-drops smeared!

XERXES.

Sob out thine aching sorrow!

CHORUS.

I will thine best obey.

XERXES.

With thine hands rend thy mantle's fold—

CHORUS.

Alas, woe worth the day!

XERXES.

With thine own fingers tear thy locks, bewail the army's weird!

CHORUS.

By handfuls, yea, by handfuls, with tears of dole besmeared!

XERXES.

Now let thine eyes find overflow—

CHORUS.

I wend in wail and pain!

XERXES.

Cry out for me an answering moan—

CHORUS.

Alas, alas again!

XERXES.

Shriek with a cry of agony, and lead the doleful train!

CHORUS.

Alas, alas, the Persian land is woeful now to tread!

XERXES.

Cry out and mourn! the city now doth wail above the dead!

CHORUS.

I sob and moan!

XERXES.

I bid ye now be delicate in grief!

CHORUS.

Alas, the Persian land is sad and knoweth not relief!

XERXES.

Alas, the triple banks of oars and those who died thereby!

CHORUS.

Pass! I will lead you, bring you home, with many a broken sigh!

[*Exeunt.*]

The Seven Against Thebes

Dramatis Personae

ETEOCLES, son of Oedipus, King of Thebes

A SPY

CHORUS OF THEBAN WOMEN

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

sisters of ETEOCLES

A HERALD

The Seven Against Thebes

Scene

Within the Citadel of Thebes. There is an altar with the statues of several gods visible. A crowd of citizens are present as ETEOCLES enters with his attendants.

ETEOCLES

Clansmen of Cadmus, at the signal given
 By time and season must the ruler speak
 Who sets the course and steers the ship of State
 With hand upon the tiller, and with eye
 Watchful against the treachery of sleep.
 For if all go aright, thank Heaven, men say,
 But if adversely-which may God forefend!-
 One name on many lips, from street to street,
 Would bear the bruit and rumour of the time,
 Down with Eteocles!-a clamorous curse,
 A dirge of ruin. May averting Zeus
 Make good his title here, in Cadmus' hold!
 You it beseems now-boys unripened yet
 To lusty manhood, men gone past the prime
 And increase of the full begetting seed,
 And those whom youth and manhood well combined
 Array for action-all to rise in aid
 Of city, shrines, and altars of all powers
 Who guard our land; that ne'er, to end of time,
 Be blotted out the sacred service due
 To our sweet mother-land and to her brood.
 For she it was who to their guest-right called
 Your waxing youth, was patient of the toil,
 And cherished you on the land's gracious lap,
 Alike to plant the hearth and bear the shield
 In loyal service, for an hour like this.
 Mark now! until to-day, luck rules our scale;
 For we, though long beleaguered, in the main
 Have with our sallies struck the foemen hard.
 But now the seer, the feeder of the birds
 (Whose art unerring and prophetic skill
 Of ear and mind divines their utterance
 Without the lore of fire interpreted)
 Foretelleth, by the mastery of his art,
 That now an onset of Achaea's host
 Is by a council of the night designed
 To fall in double strength upon our walls.
 Up and away, then, to the battlements,
 The gates, the bulwarks! don your panoplies,
 Array you at the breast-work, take your stand
 On the floorings of the towers, and with good heart

Stand firm for sudden sallies at the gates,
 Nor hold too heinous a respect for hordes
 Sent on you from afar: some god will guard!
 I too, for shrewd espial of their camp,
 Have sent forth scouts, and confidence is mine
 They will not fail nor tremble at their task,
 And, with their news, I fear no foeman's guile.
A Spy enters.

THE SPY

Eteocles, high king of Cadmus' folk,
 I stand here with news certified and sure
 From Argos' camp, things by myself descried.
 Seven warriors yonder, doughty chiefs of might,
 Into the crimsoned concave of a shield
 Have shed a bull's blood, and, with hands immersed
 Into the gore of sacrifice, have sworn
 By Ares, lord of fight, and by thy name,
 Blood-lapping Terror, Let our oath be heard-
 Either to raze the walls, make void the hold
 Of Cadmus-strive his children as they may-
 Or, dying here, to make the foemen's land
 With blood impasted. Then, as memory's gift
 Unto their parents at the far-off home,
 Chaplets they hung upon Adrastus' car,
 With eyes tear-dropping, but no word of moan.
 For their steeled spirit glowed with high resolve,
 As lions pant, with battle in their eyes.
 For them, no weak alarm delays the clear
 Issues of death or life! I parted thence
 Even as they cast the lots, how each should lead,
 Against which gate, his serried company.
 Rank then thy bravest, with what speed thou may'st,
 Hard by the gates, to dash on them, for now,
 Full-armed, the onward ranks of Argos come!
 The dust whirls up, and from their panting steeds
 White foamy flakes like snow bedew the plain.
 Thou therefore, chieftain! like a steersman skilled,
 Enshield the city's bulwarks, ere the blast
 Of war comes darting on them! hark, the roar
 Of the great landstorm with its waves of men
 Take Fortune by the forelock! for the rest,
 By yonder dawn-light will I scan the field
 Clear and aright, and surety of my word
 Shall keep thee scatheless of the coming storm.

ETEOCLES

O Zeus and Earth and city-guarding gods,
 And thou, my father's Curse, of baneful might,
 Spare ye at least this town, nor root it up,
 By violence of the foemen, stock and stem!

For here, from home and hearth, rings Hellas' tongue.

Forbid that e'er the yoke of slavery
Should bow this land of freedom, Cadmus' hold!

Be ye her help! your cause I plead with mine-

A city saved doth honour to her gods!

ETEOCLES, his attendants and most of the crowd go out. The CHORUS OF THEBAN WOMEN enters. They appear terror-stricken.

CHORUS *singing*

I wail in the stress of my terror, and shrill is my cry of despair.

The foemen roll forth from their camp as a billow, and onward they bear!

Their horsemen are swift in the forefront, the dust rises up to the sky,

A signal, though speechless, of doom, a herald more clear than a cry!

Hoof-trampled, the land of my love bears onward the din to mine ears.

As a torrent descending a mountain, it thunders and echoes and nears!

The doom is unloosened and cometh! O kings and O queens of high

Heaven,

Prevail that it fall not upon us! the sign for their onset is given-

They stream to the walls from without, white-shielded and keen for the fray.

The rush of their feet? to what shrine shall I bow me in terror and pray?

They rush to pray to the gods.

O gods high-throned in bliss, we must crouch at the shrines in your home!

Not here must we tarry and wail: shield clashes on shield as they come

And now, even now is the hour for the robes and the chaplets of prayer!

Mine eyes feel the flash of the sword, the clang is instinct with the spear!

Is thy hand set against us, O Ares, in ruin and wrath to o'erwhelm

Thine own immemorial land, O god of the golden helm?

Look down upon us, we beseech thee, on the land that thou lovest of old.

strophe 1

And ye, O protecting gods, in pity your people behold!

Yea, save us, the maidenly troop, from the doom and despair of the slave,

For the crests of the foemen come onward, their rush is the rush of a wave

Rolled on by the War-god's breath! almighty one, hear us and save

From the grasp of the Argives' might! to the ramparts of Cadmus they crowd,

And, clenched in the teeth of the steeds, the bits clink horror aloud

And seven high chieftains of war, with spear and with panoply bold,

Are set, by the law of the lot, to storm the seven gates of our hold!

antistrophe 1

Be near and befriend us, O Pallas, the Zeus-born maiden of might!

O lord of the steed and the sea, be thy trident uplifted to smite

In eager desire of the fray, Poseidon! and Ares come down,

In fatherly presence revealed, to rescue Harmonia's town!

Thine too, Aphrodite, we are! thou art mother and queen of our race,

To thee we cry out in our need, from thee let thy children have grace!

Ye too, to scare back the foe, be your cry as a wolf's howl wild,

Thou, O the wolf-lord, and thou, of she-wolf Leto the child!

strophe 2

Woe and alack for the sound, for the rattle of cars to the wall,
 And the creak of the griding axles! O Hera, to thee is our call!
 Artemis, maiden beloved! the air is distraught with the spears,
 And whither doth destiny drive us, and where is the goal of our fears?

antistrophe 2

The blast of the terrible stones on the ridge of our wall is not stayed,
 At the gates is the brazen clash of the bucklers-Apollo to aid!
 Thou too, O daughter of Zeus, who guidest the wavering fray
 To the holy decision of fate, Athena! be with us to-day!
 Come down to the sevenfold gates and harry the foemen away!

strophe 3

O gods and O sisters of gods, our bulwark and guard! we beseech
 That ye give not our war-worn hold to a rabble of alien speech!
 List to the call of the maidens, the hands held up for the right,

antistrophe 3

Be near us, protect us, and show that the city is dear in your sight!
 Have heed for her sacrifice holy, and thought of her offerings take,
 Forget not her love and her worship, be near her and smite for her sake!
ETEOCLES and his retinue re-enter.

ETEOCLES *addressing the CHORUS*

Hark to my question, things detestable!
 Is this aright and for the city's weal,
 And helpful to our army thus beset,
 That ye before the statues of our gods
 Should fling yourselves, and scream and shriek your fears?
 Immodest, uncontrolled! Be this my lot-
 Never in troublous nor in peaceful days
 To dwell with aught that wears a female form!
 Where womankind has power, no man can house,
 Where womankind feeds panic, ruin rules
 Alike in house and city! Look you now-
 Your flying feet, and rumour of your fears,
 Have spread a soulless panic on our walls,
 And they without do go from strength to strength,
 And we within make breach upon ourselves!
 Such fate it brings, to house with womankind.
 Therefore if any shall resist my rule
 Or man, or woman, or some sexless thing-
 The vote of sentence shall decide their doom,
 And stones of execution, past escape,
 Shall finish all. Let not a woman's voice
 Be loud in council! for the things without,
 A man must care; let women keep within-
 Even then is mischief all too probable!
 Hear ye? or speak I to unheeding ears?

CHORUS *chanting*

Ah, but I shudder, child of Oedipus!

I heard the clash and clang!
 The axles rolled and rumbled; woe to us,
 Fire-welded bridles rang!
 Say-when a ship is strained and deep in brine,
 Did eer a seaman mend his chance, who left
 The helm, t' invoke the image at the prow?

CHORUS *chanting*

Ah, but I fled to the shrines, I called to our helpers on high,
 When the stone-shower roared at the portals!
 I sped to the temples aloft, and loud was my call and my cry,
 Look down and deliver, Immortals!

ETEOCLES

Ay, pray amain that stone may vanquish steel!
 Where not that grace of gods? ay, ay-methinks,
 When cities fall, the gods go forth from them!

CHORUS *chanting*

Ah, let me die, or ever I behold
 The gods go forth, in conflagration dire!
 The foemen's rush and raid, and all our hold
 Wrapt in the burning fire!

ETEOCLES

Cry not on Heaven, in impotent debate!
 What saith the saw?-Good saving Strength, in verity,
 Out of Obedience breeds the babe Prosperity.

CHORUS *chanting*

'Tis true: yet stronger is the power divine,
 And oft, when man's estate is overbowed
 With bitter pangs, disperses from his eyne
 The heavy, hanging cloud!

ETEOCLES

Let men with sacrifice and augury
 Approach the gods, when comes the tug of war:
 Alais must be silent and abide within.

CHORUS *chanting*

By grace of the gods we hold it, a city untamed of the spear,
 And the battlement wards from the wall the foe and his aspect of fear!
 What need of displeasure herein?

ETEOCLES

Ay, pay thy vows to Heaven; I grudge them not,
 But-so thou strike no fear into our men-
 Have calm at heart, nor be too much afraid.
 Alack, it is fresh in mine ears, the clamour and crash of the fray,
 And up to our holiest height I sped on my timorous way,
 Bewildered, beset by the din!

ETEOCLES

Now, if ye hear the bruit of death or wounds,

Give not yourselves o'ermuch to shriek and scream,
For Ares ravins upon human flesh.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, but the snorting of the steeds I hear!

ETEOCLES

Then, if thou hearest, hear them not too well

LEADER

Hark, the earth rumbles, as they close us round!

ETEOCLES

Enough if I am here, with plans prepared.

LEADER

Alack, the battering at the gates is loud!

ETEOCLES

Peace! stay your tongue, or else the town may hear!

LEADER

O warders of the walls, betray them not!

ETEOCLES

Beshrew your cries! in silence face your fate.

LEADER

Gods of our city, see me not enslaved!

ETEOCLES

On me, on all, thy cries bring slavery.

LEADER

Zeus, strong to smite, turn upon foes thy blow!

ETEOCLES

Zeus, what a curse are women, wrought by thee!

LEADER

Weak wretches, even as men, when cities fall.

What! clasping gods, yet voicing thy despair?

LEADER

In the sick heart, fear maketh prey of speech.

ETEOCLES

Light is the thing I ask thee-do my will!

LEADER

Ask swiftly: swiftly shall I know my power.

ETEOCLES

Silence, weak wretch! nor put thy friends in fear.

LEADER

I speak no more: the general fate be mine!

ETEOCLES

I take that word as wiser than the rest.

Nay, more: these images possess thy will-

Pray, in their strength, that Heaven be on our side!
 Then hear my prayers withal, and then ring out
 The female triumph-note, thy privilege-
 Yea, utter forth the usage Hellas knows,
 The cry beside the altars, sounding clear
 Encouragement to friends, alarm to foes.
 But I unto all gods that guard our walls,
 Lords of the plain or warders of the mart
 And to Ismenus' stream and Dirce's rills,
 I swear, if Fortune smiles and saves our town,
 That we will make our altars reek with blood
 Of sheep and kine, shed forth unto the gods,
 And with victorious tokens front our fanes-
 Corslets and casques that once our foemen wore,
 Spear-shattered now-to deck these holy homes!
 Be such thy vows to Heaven-away with sighs,
 Away with outcry vain and barbarous,
 That shall avail not, in a general doom!
 But I will back, and, with six chosen men
 Myself the seventh, to confront the foe
 In this great aspect of a poised war,
 Return and plant them at the sevenfold gates,
 Or e'er the prompt and clamorous battle-scouts
 Haste to inflame our counsel with the need.
ETEOCLES and his retinue go out.

CHORUS *singing*
strophe 1

I mark his words, yet, dark and deep,
 My heart's alarm forbiddeth sleep!
 Close-clinging cares around my soul
 Enkindle fears beyond control,
 Presageful of what doom may fall
 From the great leaguer of the wall!
 So a poor dove is faint with fear
 For her weak nestlings, while anew
 Glides on the snaky ravisher!
 In troop and squadron, hand on hand,
 They climb and throng, and hemmed we stand,
 While on the warders of our town
 The flinty shower comes hurtling down!
 Gods born of Zeus! put forth your might
 For Cadmus' city, realm, and right!

antistrophe 1

What nobler land shall e'er be yours,
 If once ye give to hostile powers
 The deep rich soil, and Dirce's wave,
 The nursing stream, Poseidon gave
 And Tethys' children? Up and save!

Cast on the ranks that hem us round
 A deadly panic, make them fling
 Their arms in terror on the ground,
 And die in carnage! thence shall spring
 High honour for our clan and king!
 Come at our wailing cry, and stand
 As throned sentries of our land!

strophe 2

For pity and sorrow it were that this immemorial town
 Should sink to be slave of the spear, to dust and to ashes gone down,
 By the gods of Achaean worship and arms of Achaean might
 Sacked and defiled and dishonoured, its women the prize of the fight-
 That, haled by the hair as a steed, their mantles dishevelled and torn,
 The maiden and matron alike should pass to the wedlock of scorn!
 I hear it arise from the city, the manifold wail of despair-
 Woe, woe for the doom that shall be-as in grasp of the foeman they fare!

antistrophe 2

For a woe and a weeping it is, if the maiden inviolate flower
 Is plucked by the foe in his might, not culled in the bridal bower!
 Alas for the hate and the horror-how say it?-less hateful by far
 Is the doom to be slain by the sword, hewn down in the carnage of war!
 For wide, ah! wide is the woe when the foeman has mounted the wall;
 There is havoc and terror and flame, and the dark smoke broods over all,
 And wild is the war-god's breath, as in frenzy of conquest he springs,
 And pollutes with the blast of his lips the glory of holiest things!

strophe 3

Up to the citadel rise clash and din,
 The war-net closes in,
 The spear is in the heart: with blood imbrued
 Young mothers wail aloud,
 For children at their breast who scream and die!
 And boys and maidens fly,
 Yet scape not the pursuer, in his greed
 To thrust and grasp and feed!
 Robber with robber joins, each calls his mate
 Unto the feast of hate-
 The banquet, lo! is spread-seize, rend, and tear!
 No need to choose or share!

antistrophe 3

And all the wealth of earth to waste is poured-
 A sight by all abhorred!
 The grieving housewives eye it; heaped and blent,
 Earth's boons are spoiled and spent,
 And waste to nothingness; and O alas,
 Young maids, forlorn ye pass-
 Fresh horror at your hearts-beneath the power
 Of those who crop the flower!

Ye own the ruffian ravisher for lord,
 And night brings rites abhorred!
 Woe, woe for you! upon your grief and pain
 There comes a fouler stain.

On one side the SPY enters; on the other, ETEOCLES and the SIX CHAMPIONS.

LEADER OF THE FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Look, friends! methinks the scout, who parted hence
 To spy upon the foemen, comes with news,
 His feet as swift as wafting chariot-wheels.

LEADER OF THE SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Ay, and our king, the son of Oedipus,
 Comes prompt to time, to learn the spy's report-
 His heart is fainer than his foot is fast!

THE SPY

Well have I scanned the foe, and well can say
 Unto which chief, by lot, each gate is given.
 Tydeus already with his onset-cry
 Storms at the gate called Proetides; but him
 The seer Amphiaraus holds at halt,
 Nor wills that he should cross Ismenus' ford,
 Until the sacrifices promise fair.
 But Tydeus, mad with lust of blood and broil,
 Like to a cockatrice at noontide hour,
 Hisses out wrath and smites with scourge of tongue
 The prophet-son of Oecleus-Wise thou art,
 Faint against war, and holding back from death!
 With such revilings loud upon his lips
 He waves the triple plumes that o'er his helm
 Float overshadowing, as a courser's mane;
 And at his shield's rim, terror in their tone,
 Clang and reverberate the brazen bells.
 And this proud sign, wrought on his shield, he bears,-
 The vault of heaven, inlaid with blazing stars;
 And, for the boss, the bright moon glows at full,
 The eye of night, the first and lordliest star.
 Thus with high-vaunted armour, madly bold,
 He clamours by the stream-bank, wild for war,
 As a steed panting grimly on his bit,
 Held in and chafing for the trumpet's bray!
 Whom wilt thou set against him? when the gates
 Of Proetus yield, who can his rush repel?

ETEOCLES

To me, no blazon on a foeman's shield
 Shall e'er present a fear! such pointed threats
 Are powerless to wound; his plumes and bells,
 Without a spear, are snakes without a sting.
 Nay, more-that pageant of which thou tellest-
 The nightly sky displayed, ablaze with stars,

Upon his shield, palters with double sense
 One headstrong fool will find its truth anon!
 For, if night fall upon his eyes in death,
 Yon vaunting blazon will its own truth prove,
 And he is prophet of his folly's fall.
 Mine shall it be, to pit against his power
 The loyal son of Astacus, as guard
 To hold the gateways-a right valiant soul,
 Who has in heed the throne of Modesty
 And loathes the speech of Pride, and evermore
 Shrinks from the base, but knows no other fear.
 He springs by stock from those whom Ares spared,
 The men called Sown, a right son of the soil,
 And Melanippus styled. Now, what his arm
 To-day shall do, rests with the dice of war,
 And Ares shall ordain it; but his cause
 Hath the true badge of Right, to urge him on
 To guard, as son, his motherland from wrong.
MELANIPPUS goes out.

CHORUS *chanting*

Then may the gods give fortune fair
 Unto our chief, sent forth to dare
 War's terrible arbitrament!
 But ah! when champions wend away,
 I shudder, lest, from out the fray,
 Only their blood-stained wrecks be sent!

THE SPY

Nay, let him pass, and the gods' help be his!
 Next, Capaneus comes on, by lot to lead
 The onset at the gates Electran styled:
 A giant be, more huge than Tydeus' self,
 And more than human in his arrogance-
 May fate forefend his threat against our walls!
 God willing, or unwilling-such his vaunt-
 I will lay waste this city; Pallas' self,
 Zeus's warrior maid, although she swoop to earth
 And plant her in my path, shall stay me not.
 And, for the flashes of the levin-bolt,
 He holds them harmless as the noontide rays.
 Mark, too, the symbol on his shield-a man
 Scornfully weaponless but torch in hand,
 And the flame glows witbin his grasp, prepared
 For ravin: lo, the legend, wrought in words,
 Fire for the city bring I, flares in gold!
 Against such wight, send forth-yet whom? what man
 Will front that vaunting figure and not fear?

ETEOCLES

Aha, this profits also, gain on gain!
 In sooth, for mortals, the tongue's utterance

Bewrays unerringly a foolish pride!
 Hither stalks Capaneus, with vaunt and threat
 Defying god-like powers, equipt to act,
 And, mortal though he be, he strains his tongue
 In folly's ecstasy, and casts aloft
 High swelling words against the ears of Zeus.
 Right well I trust-if justice grants the word-
 That, by the might of Zeus, a bolt of flame
 In more than semblance shall descend on him.
 Against his vaunts, though reckless, I have set,
 To make assurance sure, a warrior stern-
 Strong Polyphontes, fervid for the fray;-
 A sturdy bulwark, he, by grace of Heaven
 And favour of his champion Artemis!
 Say on, who holdeth the next gate in ward?
POLYPHONTES goes out.

CHORUS *chanting*

Perish the wretch whose vaunt affronts our home!
 On him the red bolt come,
 Ere to the maiden bowers his way he cleave,
 To ravage and bereave!

THE SPY

I will say on. Eteoclus is third-
 To him it fell, what time the third lot sprang
 O'er the inverted helmet's brazen rim,
 To dash his stormers on Neistae gate.
 He wheels his mares, who at their frontlets chafe
 And yearn to charge upon the gates amain.
 They snort the breath of pride, and, filled therewith,
 Their nozzles whistle with barbaric sound.
 High too and haughty is his shield's device-
 An armed man who climbs, from rung to rung,
 A scaling ladder, up a hostile wall,
 Afire to sack and slay; and he too cries
 (By letters, full of sound, upon the shield)
 Not Ares' self shall cast me from the wall.
 Look to it, send, against this man, a man
 Strong to debar the slave's yoke from our town.

ETEOCLES *pointing to MEGAREUS*

Send will I-even this man, with luck to aid-
MEGAREUS departs as soon as he has been marked out.
 By his worth sent already, not by pride
 And vain pretence, is he. 'Tis Megareus,
 The child of Creon, of the Earth-sprung born!
 He will not shrink from guarding of the gates,
 Nor fear the maddened charger's frenzied neigh,
 But, if he dies, will nobly quit the score
 For nurture to the land that gave him birth,
 Or from the shield-side hew two warriors down-

Eteoclus and the figure that he lifts-
 Ay, and the city pictured, all in one,
 And deck with spoils the temple of his sire!
 Announce the next pair, stint not of thy tongue!

CHORUS *chanting*

O thou, the warder of my home,
 Grant, unto us, Fate's favouring tide,
 Send on the foemen doom!
 They fling forth taunts of frenzied pride,
 On them may Zeus with glare of vengeance come

THE SPY

Lo, next him stands a fourth and shouts amain,
 By Pallas Onca's portal, and displays
 A different challenge; 'tis Hippomedon!
 Huge the device that starts up from his targe
 In high relief; and, I deny it not,
 I shuddered, seeing how, upon the rim,
 It made a mighty circle round the shield-
 No sorry craftsman he, who wrought that work
 And clamped it all around the buckler's edge!
 The form was Typhon: from his glowing throat
 Rolled lurid smoke, spark-litten, kin of fire!
 The flattened edge-work, circling round the whole,
 Made strong support for coiling snakes that grew
 Erect above the concave of the shield:
 Loud rang the warrior's voice; inspired for war,
 He raves to slay, as doth a Bacchanal,
 His very glance a terror! of such wight
 Beware the onset! closing on the gates,
 He peals his vaunting and appalling cry!

ETEOCLES

Yet first our Pallas Onca-wardress she,
 Planting her foot hard by her gate-shall stand,
 The Maid against the ruffian, and repel
 His force, as from her brood the mother-bird
 Beats back the wintered serpent's venom'd fang.
 And next, by her, is Oenops' gallant son,
 Hyperbius, chosen to confront this foe,
 Ready to seek his fate at Fortune's shrine!
 In form, in valour, and in skill of arms,
 None shall gainsay him. See how wisely well
 Hermes hath set the brave against the strong!
 Confronted shall they stand, the shield of each
 Bearing the image of opposing gods:
 One holds aloft his Typhon breathing fire,
 But, on the other's shield, in symbol sits
 Zeus, calm and strong, and fans his bolt to flame-
 Zeus, seen of all, yet seen of none to fail!
 Howbeit, weak is trust reposed in Heaven-

Yet are we upon Zeus' victorious side,
 The foe, with those he worsted-if in sooth
 Zeus against Typhon held the upper hand,
 And if Hyperbius (as well may hap
 When two such foes such diverse emblems bear)
 Have Zeus upon his shield, a saving sign.
HYPERBIUS goes out.

CHORUS *chanting*

High faith is mine that he whose shield
 Bears, against Zeus, the thing of hate.
 The giant Typhon, thus revealed,
 A monster loathed of gods eterne
 And mortal men-this doom shall earn
 A shattered skull, before the gate!

THE SPY

Heaven send it so! A fifth assailant now
 Is set against our fifth, the northern, gate,
 Fronting the death-mound where Amphion lies
 The child of Zeus. This foeman vows his faith,
 Upon a mystic spear-head which he deems
 More holy than a godhead and more sure
 To find its mark than any glance of eye,
 That, will they, nill they, he will storm and sack
 The hold of the Cadmeans. Such his oath-
 His, the bold warrior, yet of childish years,
 A bud of beauty's foremost flower, the son
 Of Zeus and of the mountain maid. I mark
 How the soft down is waxing on his cheek,
 Thick and close-growing in its tender prime-
 In name, not mood, is he a maiden's child-
 Parthenopaeus; large and bright his eyes
 But fierce the wrath wherewith he fronts the gate:
 Yet not unheralded he takes his stand
 Before the portal; on his brazen shield,
 The rounded screen and shelter of his form,
 I saw him show the ravening Sphinx, the fiend
 That shamed our city-how it glared and moved,
 Clamped on the buckler, wrought in high relief!
 And in its claws did a Cadmean bear-
 Nor heretofore, for any single prey,
 Sped she aloft, through such a storm of darts
 As now awaits her. So our foe is here-
 Like, as I deem, to ply no stinted trade
 In blood and broil, but traffick as is meet
 In fierce exchange for his long wayfaring!

ETEOCLES

Ah, may they meet the doom they think to bring-
 They and their impious vaunts-from those on high!
 So should they sink, hurled down to deepest death!

This foe, at least, by thee Arcadian styled,
 Is faced by one who bears no braggart sign,
 But his hand sees to smite, where blows avail-
 Actor, own brother to Hyperbius!
 He will not let a boast without a blow
 Stream through our gates and nourish our despair,
 Nor give him way who on his hostile shield
 Bears the brute image of the loathly Sphinx!
 Blocked at the gate, she will rebuke the man
 Who strives to thrust her forward, when she feels
 Thick crash of blows, up to the city wall.
 With Heaven's goodwill, my forecast shall be true.
ACTOR goes out.

CHORUS *chanting*

Home to my heart the vaunting goes,
 And, quick with terror, on my head
 Rises my hair, at sound of those
 Who wildly, impiously rave!
 If gods there be, to them I plead-
 Give them to darkness and the grave.

THE SPY

Fronting the sixth gate stands another foe,
 Wisest of warriors, bravest among seers-
 Such must I name Amphiaraus: he,
 Set steadfast at the Homoloid gate,
 Berates strong Tydeus with reviling words-
 The man of blood, the bane of state and home
 To Argos, arch-allurer to all ill,
 Evoker of the Fury-fiend of hell,
 Death's minister, and counsellor of wrong
 Unto Adrastus in this fatal field.
 Ay, and with eyes upturned and mien of scorn
 He chides thy brother Polyneices to
 At his desert, and once and yet again
 Dwells hard and meaningly upon his name
 Where it saith glory yet importeth feud.
 Yea, such thou art in act, and such thy grace
 In sight of Heaven, and such in aftertime
 Thy fame, for lips and ears of mortal men!
 "He strove to sack the city of his sires
 And temples of her gods, and brought on her
 An alien armament of foreign foes.
 The fountain of maternal blood outpoured
 What power can staunck? even so, thy fatherland
 Once by thine ardent malice stormed and ta'en,
 Shall ne'er join force with thee." For me, I know
 It doth remain to let my blood enrich
 The border of this land that loves me not-
 Blood of a prophet, in a foreign grave!

Now, for the battle! I foreknow my doom,
 Yet it shall be with honour. So he spake,
 The prophet, holding up his targe of bronze
 Wrought without blazon, to the ears of men
 Who stood around and heeded not his word.
 For on no bruit and rumour of great deeds,
 But on their doing, is his spirit set,
 And in his heart he reaps a furrow rich,
 Wherefrom the foison of good counsel springs.
 Against him, send brave heart and hand of might;
 For the god-lover is man's fiercest foe.

ETEOCLES

Out on the chance that couples mortal men,
 Linking the just and impious in one!
 In every issue, the one curse is this-
 Companionship with men of evil heart!
 A baneful harvest, let none gather it!
 The field of sin is rank, and brings forth death
 At whiles a righteous man who goes aboard
 With reckless mates, a horde of villainy,
 Dies by one death with that detested crew;
 At whiles the just man, joined with citizens
 Ruthless to strangers, recking nought of Heaven,
 Trapped, against nature, in one net with them,
 Dies by God's thrust and all-including blow.
 So will this prophet die, even Oecleus' child,
 Sage, just, and brave, and loyal towards Heaven,
 Potent in prophecy, but mated here
 With men of sin, too boastful to be wise!
 Long is their road, and they return no more,
 And, at their taking-off, by hard of Zeus,
 The prophet too shall take the downward way.
 He will not-so I deem-assail the gate-
 Not as through cowardice or feeble will,
 But as one knowing to what end shall be
 Their struggle in the battle, if indeed
 Fruit of fulfilment lie in Loxias' word.
 He speaketh not, unless to speak avails!
 Yet, for more surety, we will post a man,
 Strong Lasthenes, as warder of the gate,
 Stern to the foeman; he hath age's skill,
 Mated with youthful vigour, and an eye
 Forward, alert; swift too his hand, to catch
 The fenceless interval 'twixt shield and spear!
 Yet man's good fortune lies in hand of Heaven.
LASTHENES goes out.

CHORUS *chanting*

Unto our loyal cry, ye gods, give ear!
 Save, save the city! turn away the spear,

Send on the foemen fear!
 Outside the rampart fall they, rent and riven
 Beneath the bolt of heaven!

THE SPY

Last, let me name yon seventh antagonist,
 Thy brother's self, at the seventh portal set-
 Hear with what wrath he imprecates our doom,
 Vowing to mount the wall, though banished hence,
 And peal aloud the wild exulting cry-
 The town is ta'en-then clash his sword with thine,
 Giving and taking death in close embrace,
 Or, if thou 'scapest, flinging upon thee,
 As robber of his honour and his home,
 The doom of exile such as he has borne.
 So clamours he and so invokes the gods
 Who guard his race and home, to hear and heed
 The curse that sounds in Polyneices' name!
 He bears a round shield, fresh from forge and fire,
 And wrought upon it is a twofold sign-
 For lo, a woman leads decorously
 The figure of a warrior wrought in gold;
 And thus the legend runs-I Justice am,
 And I will bring the hero home again,
 To hold once more his place within this town,
 Once more to pace his sire's ancestral hall.
 Such are the symbols, by our foemen shown-
 Now make thine own decision, whom to send
 Against this last opponent! I have said-
 Nor canst thou in my tidings find a flaw-
 Thine is it, now, to steer the course aright.

ETEOCLES

Ah me, the madman, and the curse of Heaven
 And woe for us, the lamentable line
 Of Oedipus, and woe that in this house
 Our father's curse must find accomplishment!
 But now, a truce to tears and loud lament,
 Lest they should breed a still more rueful wail!
 As for this Polyneices, named too well,
 Soon shall we know how this device shall end-
 Whether the gold-wrought symbols on his shield,
 In their mad vaunting and bewildered pride,
 Shall guide him as a victor to his home!
 For had but justice, maiden-child of Zeus,
 Stood by his act and thought, it might have been!
 Yet never, from the day he reached the light
 Out of the darkness of his mother's womb,
 Never in childhood, nor in youthful prime,
 Nor when his chin was gathering its beard,
 Hath justice hailed or claimed him as her own.

Therefore I deem not that she standeth now
 To aid him in this outrage on his home!
 Misnamed, in truth, were justice, utterly,
 If to impiety she lent her hand.
 Sure in this faith, I will myself go forth
 And match me with him; who hath fairer claim?
 Ruler, against one fain to snatch the rule,
 Brother with brother matched, and foe with foe,
 Will I confront the issue. To the wall!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O thou true heart, O child of Oedipus,
 Be not, in wrath, too like the man whose name
 Murmurs an evil omen! 'Tis enough
 That Cadmus' clan should strive with Argos' host,
 For blood there is that can atone that stain!
 But-brother upon brother dealing death-
 Not time itself can expiate the sin!

ETEOCLES

If man find hurt, yet clasp his honour still,
 'Tis well; the dead have honour, nought beside.
 Hurt, with dishonour, wins no word of praise!

CHORUS *chanting*

Ah, what is thy desire?
 Let not the lust and ravin of the sword
 Bear thee adown the tide accursed, abhorred!
 Fling off thy passion's rage, thy spirit's prompting dire!

ETEOCLES

Nay-since the god is urgent for our doom,
 Let Laius' house, by Phoebus loathed and scorned,
 Follow the gale of destiny, and win
 Its great inheritance, the gulf of hell!

CHORUS *chanting*

Ruthless thy craving is-
 Craving for kindred and forbidden blood
 To be outpoured-a sacrifice imbrued
 With sin, a bitter fruit of murderous enmities!

ETEOCLES

Yea, my own father's fateful Curse proclaims-
 A ghastly presence, and her eyes are dry-
 Strike! honour is the prize, not life prolonged!

CHORUS *chanting*

Ah, be not urged of her! for none shall dare
 To call thee coward, in thy throned estate!
 Will not the Fury in her sable pal
 Pass outward from these halls, what time the gods
 Welcome a votive offering from our hands?

ETEOCLES

The gods! long since they hold us in contempt,
Scornful of gifts thus offered by the lost!
Why should we fawn and flinch away from doom?

CHORUS *chanting*

Now, when it stands beside thee! for its power
May, with a changing gust of milder mood,
Temper the blast that bloweth wild and rude
And frenzied, in this hour!

ETEOCLES

Ay, kindled by the curse of Oedipus-
All too prophetic, out of dreamland came
The vision, meting out our sire's estate!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Heed women's voices, though thou love them not!

ETEOCLES

Say aught that may avail, but stint thy words.

LEADER

Go not thou forth to guard the seventh gate!

ETEOCLES

Words shall not blunt the edge of my resolve.

LEADER

Yet the god loves to let the weak prevail.

ETEOCLES

That to a swordsman, is no welcome word!

LEADER

Shall thine own brother's blood be victory's palm?

ETEOCLES

Ill which the gods have sent thou canst no-shun!

ETEOCLES goes out.

CHORUS *singing**strophe 1*

I shudder in dread of the power, abhorred by the gods of high heaven,
The ruinous curse of the home till roof-tree and rafter be riven!
Too true are the visions of ill, too true the fulfilment they bring
To the curse that was spoken of old by the frenzy and wrath of the king!
Her will is the doom of the children, and Discord is kindled amain,

antistrophe 1

And strange is the Lord of Division, who cleaveth the birthright in twain,-
The edged thing, born of the north, the steel that is ruthless and keen,
Dividing in bitter division the lot of the children of teen!
Not the wide lowland around, the realm of their sire, shall they have,
Yet enough for the dead to inherit, the pitiful space of a grave!

strophe 2

Ah, but when kin meets kin, when sire and child,
 Unknowing, are defiled
 By shedding common blood, and when the pit
 Of death devoureth it,
 Drinking the clotted stain, the gory dye-
 Who, who can purify?
 Who cleanse pollution, where the ancient bane
 Rises and reeks again?

antistrophe 2

Whilome in olden days the sin was wrought,
 And swift requital brought-
 Yea on the children of the child came still
 New heritage of ill!
 For thrice Apollo spoke this word divine,
 From Delphi's central shrine,
 To Laius-Die thou childless! thus alone
 Can the land's weal be won!

strophe 3

But vainly with his wife's desire he strove,
 And gave himself to love,
 Begetting Oedipus, by whom he died,
 The fateful parricide!
 The sacred seed-plot, his own mother's womb,
 He sowed, his house's doom,
 A root of blood! by frenzy lured, they came
 Unto their wedded shame.

antistrophe 3

And now the waxing surge, the wave of fate,
 Rolls on them, triply great-
 One billow sinks, the next towers, high and dark,
 Above our city's bark-
 Only the narrow barrier of the wal
 Totters, as soon to fall;
 And, if our chieftains in the storm go down,
 What chance can save the town?

strophe 4

Curses, inherited from long ago,
 Bring heavy freight of woe:
 Rich stores of merchandise o'erload the deck,
 Near, nearer comes the wreck-
 And all is lost, cast out upon the wave,
 Floating, with none to save!

antistrophe 4

Whom did the gods, whom did the chief of men,
 Whom did each citizen
 In crowded concourse, in such honour hold,

As Oedipus of old,
When the grim fiend, that fed on human prey,
He took from us away?

strophe 5

But when, in the fulness of days, he knew of his bridal unblest,
A twofold horror he wrought, in the frenzied despair of his breast-
Debarred from the grace of the banquet, the service of goblets of gold
He flung on his children a curse for the splendour they dared to withhold.

antistrophe 5

A curse prophetic and bitter-The glory of wealth and of pride,
With iron, not gold, in your hands, ye shall come, at the last, to divide!
Behold, how a shudder runs through me, lest now, in the fulness of time,
The house-fiend awake and return, to mete out the measure of crime!
THE SPY enters.

THE SPY

Take heart, ye daughters whom your mothers' milk
Made milky-hearted! lo, our city stands,
Saved from the yoke of servitude: the vaunts
Of overweening men are silent now,
And the State sails beneath a sky serene,
Nor in the manifold and battering waves
Hath shipped a single surge, and solid stands
The rampart, and the gates are made secure,
Each with a single champion's trusty guard.
So in the main and at six gates we hold
A victory assured; but, at the seventh,
The god that on the seventh day was born,
Royal Apollo, hath ta'en up his rest
To wreak upon the sons of Oedipus
Their grandsire's wilfulness of long ago.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What further woefulness besets our home?

THE SPY

The home stands safe-but ah, the princes twain-

LEADER

Who? what of them? I am distraught with fear.

THE SPY

Hear now, and mark! the sons of Oedipus-

LEADER

Ah, my prophetic soul! I feel their doom.

THE SPY

Have done with questions!-with I-with their lives crushed out-

LEADER

Lie they out yonder? the full horror speak!

Did hands meet hands more close than brotherly?
 Came fate on each. and in the selfsame hour?

THE SPY

Yea, blotting out the lineage ill-starred!
 Now mix your exultation and your tears,
 Over a city saved, the while its lords,
 Twin leaders of the fight, have parcelled out
 With forged arbitrament of Scythian steel
 The full division of their fatherland,
 And, as their father's imprecation bade,
 Shall have their due of land, a twofold grave.
 So is the city saved; the earth has drunk
 Blood of twin princes, by each other slain.

CHORUS *chanting*

O mighty Zeus and guardian powers,
 The strength and stay of Cadmus' towers!
 Shall I send forth a joyous cry,
 Hail to the lord of weal renewed?
 Or weep the misbegotten twain,
 Born to a fatal destiny
 Each numbered now among the slain,
 Each dying in ill fortitude,
 Each truly named, each child of feud?
 O dark and all-prevailing ill,
 That broods o'er Oedipus and all his line,
 Numbing my heart with mortal chill!
 Ah me, this song of mine,
 Which, Thyad-like, I woke, now falleth still,
 Or only tells of doom,
 And echoes round a tomb!
 Dead are they, dead! in their own blood they lie
 Ill-omened the concert that hails our victory!
 The curse a father on his children spake
 Hath faltered not, nor failed!
 Nought, Laius! thy stubborn choice availed-
 First to beget, then, in the after day
 And for the city's sake,
 The child to slay!
 For nought can blunt nor mar
 The speech oracular!
 Children of teen! by disbelief ye erred-
 Yet in wild weeping came fulfilment of the word!

ANTIGONE and ISMENE approach, with a train of mourners. bearing the bodies of ETEOCLES and POLYNEICES.

Look up, look forth! the doom is plain,
 Nor spake the messenger in vain!
 A twofold sorrow, twofold strife-
 Each brave against a brother's life!

In double doom hath sorrow come
 How shall I speak it?-on the home!
 Alas, my sisters! be your sighs the gale,
 The smiting of your brows the splash of oars,
 Wafting the boat, to Acheron's dim shores
 That passeth ever, with its darkened sail,
 On its uncharted voyage and sunless way,
 Far from thy beams, Apollo, god of day-
 The melancholy bark
 Bound for the common bourn, the harbour of the dark!

Look up, look yonder! from the home
 Antigone, Ismene come,
 On the last, saddest errand bound,
 To chant a dirge of doleful sound,
 With agony of equal pain
 Above their brethren slain!
 Their sister-bosoms surely swell,
 Heart with rent heart according well
 In grief for those who fought and fell!
 Yet-ere they utter forth their woe
 We must awake the rueful strain
 To vengeful powers, in realms below,
 And mourn hell's triumph o'er the slain!

Alas! of all, the breast who bind,-
 Yea, all the race of womankind-
 O maidens, ye are most bereaved!
 For you, for you the tear-drops start-
 Deem that in truth, and undeceived,
 Ye hear the sorrows of my heart!

To the dead

Children of bitterness, and sternly brave-
 One, proud of heart against persuasion's voice,
 One, against exile proof! ye win your choice-
 Each in your fatherland, a separate grave!
 Alack, on house and heritage
 They brought a baneful doom, and death for wage!
 One strove through tottering walls to force his way,
 One claimed, in bitter arrogance, the sway,
 And both alike, even now and here,
 Have closed their suit, with steel for arbiter!
 And lo, the Fury-fiend of Oedipus, their sire,
 Hath brought his curse to consummation dire
 Each in the left side smitten, see them laid-
 The children of one womb,
 Slain by a mutual doom!
 Alas, their fate! the combat murderous,
 The horror of the house,
 The curse of ancient bloodshed, now repaid!
 Yea, deep and to the heart the deathblow fell,

Edged by their feud ineffable-
 By the grim curse, their sire did imprecate
 Discord and deadly hate!
 Hark, how the city and its towers make moan-
 How the land mourns that held them for its own!
 Fierce greed and fell division did they blend,
 Till death made end!
 They strove to part the heritage in twain,
 Giving to each a gain-
 Yet that which struck the balance in the strife,
 The arbitrating sword,
 By those who loved the twain is held abhorred-
 Loathed is the god of death, who sundered each from life!
 Here, by the stroke of steel, behold! they lie-
 And rightly may we cry
 Beside their fathers, let them here be laid-
 Iron gave their doom, with iron their graves be made-
 A lack, the slaying sword, alack, th' entombing spade!
 Alas, a piercing shriek, a rending groan,
 A cry unfeigned of sorrow felt at heart!
 With shuddering of grief, with tears that start,
 With wailful escort, let them hither come-
 For one or other make divided moan!
 No light lament of pity mixed with gladness,
 But with true tears, poured from the soul of sadness,
 Over the princes dead and their bereaved home
 Say we, above these brethren dead,
 On citizen, on foreign foe,
 Brave was their rush, and stern their blow-
 Now, lowly are they laid!
 Beyond all women upon earth
 Woe, woe for her who gave them birth!
 Unknowingly, her son she wed-
 The children of that marriage-bed,
 Each in the self-same womb, were bred-
 Each by a brother's hand lies dead!

 Yea, from one seed they sprang, and by one fate
 Their heritage is desolate,
 The heart's division sundered claim from claim,
 And, from their feud, death came!
 Now is their hate allayed,
 Now is their life-stream shed,
 Ensanguining the earth with crimson dye-
 Lo, from one blood they sprang, and in one blood they lie!
 A grievous arbiter was given the twain-
 The stranger from the northern main,
 The sharp, dividing sword,
 Fresh from the forge and fire
 The War-god treacherous gave ill award
 And brought their father's curse to a fulfilment dire!

They have their portion-each his lot and doom,
 Given from the gods on high!
 Yea, the piled wealth of fatherland, for tomb,
 Shall underneath them lie!
 Alas, alas! with flowers of fame and pride
 Your home ye glorified;
 But, in the end, the Furies gathered round
 With chants of boding sound,
 Shrieking, In wild defeat and disarray,
 Behold, ye pass away!
 The sign of Ruin standeth at the gate,
 There, where they strove with Fate-
 And the ill power beheld the brothers' fall,
 And triumphed over all!

ANTIGONE, ISMENE, and the CHORUS all take part in the following responsive dirge.

Thou wert smitten, in smiting,
 Thou didst slay, and wert slain-
 By the spear of each other
 Ye lie on the plain,
 And ruthless the deed that ye wrought was, and ruthless the death of the twain!

Take voice, O my sorrow!
 Flow tear upon tear-
 Lay the slain by the slayer,
 Made one on the bier!
 Our soul in distraction is lost, and we mourn o'er the prey of the spear!

Ah, woe for your ending,
 Unbrotherly wrought!
 And woe for the issue,
 The fray that ye fought,
 The doom of a mutual slaughter whereby to the grave ye are brought!

Ah, twofold the sorrow-
 The heard and the seen!
 And double the tide
 Of our tears and our teen,
 As we stand by our brothers in death and wail for the love that has been!

O grievous the fate
 That attends upon wrong!
 Stern ghost of our sire,
 Thy vengeance is long!
 Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are. strong!

O dark were the sorrows
 That exile hath known!
 He slew, but returned not
 Alive to his own!
 He struck down a brother, but fell, in the moment of triumph hewn down!

O lineage accurst,
 O doom and despair!

Alas, for their quarrel,
 The brothers that were!
 And woe! for their pitiful end, who once were our love and our care!

O grievous the fate
 That attends upon wrong)
 Stern ghost of our sire,
 Thy vengeance is long!
 Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are strong!

By proof have ye learnt it!
 At once and as one,
 O brothers beloved,
 To death ye were, done!
 Ye came to the strife of the sword, and behold! ye are both overthrown!

O grievous the tale is,
 And grievous their fall,
 To the house, to the land,
 And to me above all!
 Ah, God! for the curse that hath come, the sin and the ruin withal!

O children distraught,
 Who in madness have died!
 Shall ye rest with old kings
 In the place of their pride?
 Alas for the wrath of your sire if he findeth you laid by his side!
A HERALD enters.

HERALD

I bear command to tell to one and all
 What hath approved itself and now is law,
 Ruled by the counsellors of Cadmus' town.
 For this Eteocles, it is resolved
 To lay him on his earth-bed, in this soil,
 Not without care and kindly sepulture.
 For why? he hated those who hated us,
 And, with all duties blamelessly performed
 Unto the sacred ritual of his sires,
 He met such end as gains our city's grace,-
 With auspices that do ennoble death.
 Such words I have in charge to speak of him:
 But of his brother Polyneices, this-
 Be he cast out unburied, for the dogs
 To rend and tear: for he presumed to waste
 The land of the Cadmeans, had not Heaven-
 Some god of those who aid our fatherland-
 Opposed his onset, by his brother's spear,
 To whom, tho' dead, shall consecration come!
 Against him stood this wretch, and brought a horde
 Of foreign foemen, to beset our town.
 He therefore shall receive his recompense,
 Buried ignobly in the maw of kites-

No women-wailers to escort his corpse
 Nor pile his tomb nor shrill his dirge anew-
 Unhouselled, unattended, cast away
 So, for these brothers, doth our State ordain.

ANTIGONE

And I-to those who make such claims of rule
 In Cadmus' town-I, though no other help,
Pointing to the body of POLYNEICES
 I, I will bury this my brother's corpse
 And risk your wrath and what may come of it!
 It shames me not to face the State, and set
 Will against power, rebellion resolute:
 Deep in my heart is set my sisterhood,
 My common birthright with my brothers, born
 All of one womb, her children who, for woe,
 Brought forth sad offspring to a sire ill-starred.
 Therefore, my soul! take thou thy willing share,
 In aid of him who now can will no more,
 Against this outrage: be a sister true,
 While yet thou livest, to a brother dead!
 Him never shall the wolves with ravening maw
 Rend and devour: I do forbid the thought!
 I for him, I-albeit a woman weak-
 In place of burial-pit, will give him rest
 By this protecting handful of light dust
 Which, in the lap of this poor linen robe,
 I bear to hallow and bestrew his corpse
 With the due covering. Let none gainsay!
 Courage and craft shall arm me, this to do.

HERALD

I charge thee, not to flout the city's law!

ANTIGONE

I charge thee, use no useless heralding!

HERALD

Stern is a people newly 'scaped from death.

ANTIGONE

Whet thou their sternness! burial he shall have.

HERALD

How? grace of burial, to the city's foe?

ANTIGONE

God hath not judged him separate in guilt.

HERALD

True-till he put this land in jeopardy.

ANTIGONE

His rights usurped, he answered wrong with wrong.

HERALD

Nay-but for one man's sin he smote the State.

ANTIGONE

Contention doth out-talk all other gods!
Prate thou no more-I will to bury him.

HERALD

Will, an thou wilt! but I forbid the deed.
The HERALD goes out.

CHORUS *singing*

Exulting Fates, who waste the line
And whelm the house of Oedipus!
Fiends, who have slain, in wrath condign,
The father and the children thus!
What now befits it that I do,
What meditate, what undergo?
Can I the funeral rite refrain,
Nor weep for Polyneices slain?
But yet, with fear I shrink and thrill,
Presageful of the city's will!
Thou, O Eteocles, shalt have
Full rites, and mourners at thy grave,
But he, thy brother slain, shall he,
With none to weep or cry Alas,
To unbefriended burial pass?
Only one sister o'er his bier,
To raise the cry and pour the tear-
Who can obey such stern decree?

SEMI-CHORUS

Let those who hold our city's sway
Wreak, or forbear to wreak, their will
On those who cry, Ah, well-a-day!
Lamenting Polyneices still!
We will go forth and, side by side
With her, due burial will provide!
Royal he was; to him be paid
Our grief, wherever he be laid!
The crowd may sway, and change, and still
Take its caprice for justice' will
But we this dead Eteocles,
As Justice wills and Right decrees,
Will bear unto his grave!
For-under those enthroned on high
And Zeus' eternal royalty-
He unto us salvation gave!
He saved us from a foreign yoke,-
A wild assault of outland folk,
A savage, alien wave!

The Suppliants

Dedication

Take thou this gift from out the grave of Time.
 The urns of Greece lie shattered, and the cup
 That for Athenian lips the Muses filled,
 And flowery crowns that on Athenian hair
 Hid the cicala, freedom's golden sign,
 Dust in the dust have fallen. Calmly sad,
 The marble dead upon Athenian tombs
 Speak from their eyes "Farewell": and well have fared
 They and the saddened friends, whose clasping hands
 Win from the solemn stone eternity.
 Yea, well they fared unto the evening god,
 Passing beyond the limit of the world,
 Where face to face the son his mother saw,
 A living man a shadow, while she spake
 Words that Odysseus and that Homer heard,—
*I too, O child, I reached the common doom,
 The grave, the goal of fate, and passed away.*
 —Such, Anticleia, as thy voice to him,
 Across the dim gray gulf of death and time
 Is that of Greece, a mother's to a child,—
 Mother of each whose dreams are grave and fair—
 Who sees the Naiad where the streams are bright
 And in the sunny ripple of the sea
 Cymodoce with floating golden hair:
 And in the whisper of the waving oak
 Hears still the Dryad's plaint, and, in the wind
 That sighs through moonlit woodlands, knows the horn
 Of Artemis, and silver shafts and bow.
 Therefore if still around this broken vase,
 Borne by rough hands, unworthy of their load,
 Far from Cephissus and the wandering rills,
 There cling a fragrance as of things once sweet,
 Of honey from Hymettus' desert hill,
 Take thou the gift and hold it close and dear;
 For gifts that die have living memories—
 Voices of unreturning days, that breathe
 The spirit of a day that never dies.

Argument

Io, the daughter of Inachus, King of Argos, was beloved of Zeus. But Hera was jealous of that love, and by her ill will was Io given over to frenzy, and her body took the semblance of a heifer: and Argus, a many-eyed herdsman, was set by Hera to watch Io whithersoever she strayed. Yet, in despite of Argus, did Zeus draw nigh unto her in the shape of a bull. And by the will of Zeus and the craft of Hermes was Argus slain. Then Io was driven over far lands and seas by her madness, and came at length to the land of Egypt. There was she restored to herself by a touch of the hand of Zeus, and bare a child called Epaphus. And from Epaphus sprang Libya, and from Libya, Belus; and from Belus, Aegyptus and Danaus. And the sons of Aegyptus willed to take the daughters of Danaus in marriage. But the maidens held such wedlock in horror, and fled with their father over the sea to Argos; and the king and citizens of Argos gave them shelter and protection from their pursuers.

The Suppliants

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DANAUS.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Chorus of the Daughters of Danaus.

Attendants.

Scene.—A sacred precinct near the gates of Argos: statue and shrines of Zeus and other deities stand around.

CHORUS.

Zeus! Lord and guard of suppliant hands!
 Look down benign on us who crave
 Thine aid—whom winds and waters drave
 From where, through drifting shifting sands,
 Pours Nilus to the wave.
 From where the green land, god-possess,
 Closes and fronts the Syrian waste,
 We flee as exiles, yet unbanned
 By murder's sentence from our land;
 But—since Aegyptus had decreed
 His sons should wed his brother's seed,—
 Ourselves we tore from bonds abhorred,
 From wedlock not of heart but hand,
 Nor brooked to call a kinsman lord!

And Danaus, our sire and guide,
 The king of counsel, pond'ring well
 The dice of fortune as they fell,
 Out of two griefs the kindlier chose,
 And bade us fly, with him beside,
 Heedless what winds or waves arose,
 And o'er the wide sea waters haste,
 Until to Argos' shore at last
 Our wandering pinnace came—
 Argos, the immemorial home
 Of her from whom we boast to come—
 Io, the ox-horned maiden, whom,
 After long wandering, woe, and scathe,
 Zeus with a touch, a mystic breath,
 Made mother of our name.
 Therefore, of all the lands of earth,
 On this most gladly step we forth,
 And in our hands aloft we bear—
 Sole weapon for a suppliant's wear—
 The olive-shoot, with wool enwound!
 City, and land, and waters wan

Of Inachus, and gods most high,
 And ye who, deep beneath the ground,
 Bring vengeance weird on mortal man,
 Powers of the grave, on you we cry!
 And unto Zeus the Saviour, guard
 Of mortals' holy purity!
 Receive ye us—keep watch and ward
 Above the suppliant maiden band!
 Chaste be the heart of this your land
 Towards the weak! but, ere the throng,
 The wanton swarm, from Egypt sprung,
 Leap forth upon the silted shore,
 Thrust back their swift-rowed bark again,
 Repel them, urge them to the main!
 And there, 'mid storm and lightning's shine,
 And scudding drift and thunder's roar,
 Deep death be theirs, in stormy brine!
 Before they foully grasp and win
 Us, maiden-children of their kin,
 And climb the couch by law denied,
 And wrong each weak reluctant bride.
 And now on her I call,

Mine ancestress, who far on Egypt's shore
 A young cow's semblance wore,—
 A maiden once, by Hera's malice changed!
 And then on him withal,
 Who, as amid the flowers the grazing creature ranged,
 Was in her by a breath of Zeus conceived;
 And, as the hour of birth drew nigh,
 By fate fulfilled, unto the light he came;
 And Epaphus for name,
 Born from the touch of Zeus, the child received.
 On him, on him I cry,
 And him for patron hold—
 While in this grassy vale I stand,
 Where Io roamed of old!
 And here, recounting all her toil and pain,
 Signs will I show to those who rule the land
 That I am child of hers; and all shall understand,
 Hearing the doubtful tale of the dim past made plain.
 And, ere the end shall be,
 Each man the truth of what I tell shall see.
 And if there dwell hard by
 One skilled to read from bird-notes augury,
 That man, when through his ears shall thrill our tearful wail,
 Shall deem he hears the voice, the plaintive tale
 Of her, the piteous spouse of Tereus, lord of guile—
 Whom the hawk harries yet, the mourning nightingale.
 She, from her happy home and fair streams scared away,
 Wails wild and sad for haunts beloved erewhile.

Yea, and for Itylus—ah, well-a-day!
 Slain by her own, his mother's hand,
 Maddened by lustful wrong, the deed by Tereus planned.
 Like her I wail and wail, in soft Ionian tones,
 And as she wastes, even so
 Wastes my soft cheek, once ripe with Nilus' suns
 And all my heart dissolves in utter woe
 Sad flowers of grief I cull,

Fleeing from kinsmen's love unmerciful—
 Yea, from the clutching hands, the wanton crowd,
 I sped across the waves, from Egypt's land of cloud¹

Gods of the ancient cradle of my race,
 Hear me, just gods! With righteous grace
 On me, on me look down!
 Grant not to youth its heart's unchaste desire,
 But, swiftly spurning lust's unholy fire,
 Bless only love and willing wedlock's crown
 The war-worn fliers from the battle's wrack
 Find refuge at the hallowed altar-side,
 The sanctuary divine,—
 Ye gods! such refuge unto me provide—
 Such sanctuary be mine!
 Though the deep will of Zeus be hard to track,
 Yet doth it flame and glance,
 A beacon in the dark, 'mid clouds of chance
 That wrap mankind
 Yea, though the counsel fall, undone it shall not be,
 Whate'er be shaped and fixed within Zeus' ruling mind—
 Dark as a solemn grove, with sombre leafage shaded,
 His paths of purpose wind,
 A marvel to man's eye

Smitten by him, from towering hopes degraded,
 Mortals lie low and still
 Tireless and effortless, works forth its will
 The arm divine!
 God from His holy seat, in calm of unarmed power,
 Brings forth the deed, at its appointed hour!
 Let Him look down on mortal wantonness!
 Lo! how the youthful stock of Belus' line
 Craves for me, uncontrolled—
 With greed and madness bold—
 Urged on by passion's sunless stress—
 And, cheated, learns too late the prey has 'scaped their hold!
 Ah, listen, listen to my grievous tale,
 My sorrow's words, my shrill and tearful cries!

¹ “ἀερίας ἀπὸ γᾶς.” This epithet may appear strange to modern readers accustomed to think of Egypt as a land of cloudless skies and pellucid atmosphere. Nevertheless both Pindar (*Pyth* iv 93) and Apollonius Rhodius (iv 267) speak of it in the same way as Aeschylus. It has been conjectured that they allude to the fog banks that often obscure the low coasts—a phenomenon likely to impress the early navigators and to be reported by them.

Ah woe, ah woe!
 Loud with lament the accents use,
 And from my living lips my own sad dirges flow!
 O Apian land of hill and dale,
 Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail—
 Have mercy, hear my prayer!
 Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear
 My woven raiment, and from off my hair
 Cast the Sidonian veil!

Ah, but if fortune smile, if death be driven away,
 Vowed rites, with eager haste, we to the gods will pay!
 Alas, alas again!
 O wither drift the waves? and who shall loose the pain?

O Apian land of hill and dale,
 Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail!
 Have mercy, hear my prayer!
 Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear
 My woven raiment, and from off my hair
 Cast the Sidonian veil!

The wafting oar, the bark with woven sail,
 From which the sea foamed back,
 Sped me, unharmed of storms, along the breeze's track—
 Be it unblamed of me!
 But ah, the end, the end of my emprise!
 May He, the Father, with all-seeing eyes,
 Grant me that end to see!
 Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore
 I may escape the forced embrace
 Of those proud children of the race
 That sacred Io bore.

And thou, O maiden-goddess chaste and pure—
 Queen of the inner fane,—
 Look of thy grace on me, O Artemis,
 Thy willing suppliant—thine, thine it is,
 Who from the lustful onslaught fled secure,
 To grant that I too without stain
 The shelter of thy purity may gain!

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore
 I may escape the forced embrace
 Of those proud children of the race
 That sacred Io bore!

Yet if this may not be,
 We, the dark race sun-smitten, we
 Will speed with suppliant wands
 To Zeus who rules below, with hospitable hands
 Who welcomes all the dead from all the lands:

Yea by our own hands strangled, we will go,
Spurned by Olympian gods, unto the gods below!

Zeus, hear and save!

The searching, poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave,
Was of a goddess: well I know
The bitter ire, the wrathful woe
Of Hera, queen of heaven—
A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!
Bethink thee, what dispraise
Of Zeus himself mankind will raise,
If now he turn his face averted from our cries!
If now, dishonoured and alone,
The ox-horned maiden's race shall be undone,
Children of Epaphus, his own begotten son—
Zeus, listen from on high!—to thee our prayers arise.

Zeus, hear and save!

The searching poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave,
Was of a goddess: well I know
The bitter ire, the wrathful woe
Of Hera, queen of heaven—
A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

DANAUS.

Children, be wary—wary he with whom
Ye come, your trusty sire and steersman old:
And that same caution hold I here on land,
And bid you hoard my words, inscribing them
On memory's tablets. Lo, I see afar
Dust, voiceless herald of a host, arise;
And hark, within their grinding sockets ring
Axles of hurrying wheels! I see approach,
Borne in curved cars, by speeding horses drawn,
A speared and shielded band. The chiefs, perchance,
Of this their land are hitherward intent
To look on us, of whom they yet have heard
By messengers alone. But come who may,
And come he peaceful or in ravening wrath
Spurred on his path, 'twere best, in any case,
Damsels, to cling unto this altar-mound
Made sacred to their gods of festival,—
A shrine is stronger than a tower to save,
A shield that none may cleave. Step swift thereto,
And in your left hands hold with reverence
The white-crowned wands of suppliance, the sign
Beloved of Zeus, compassion's lord, and speak
To those that question you, words meek and low
And piteous, as beseems your stranger state,
Clearly avowing of this flight of yours
The bloodless cause; and on your utterance
See to it well that modesty attend;

From downcast eyes, from brows of pure control,
 Let chastity look forth; nor, when ye speak,
 Be voluble nor eager—they that dwell
 Within this land are sternly swift to chide.
 And be your words submissive: heed this well;
 For weak ye are, outcasts on stranger lands,
 And froward talk beseems not strengthless hands.

CHORUS.

O father, warily to us aware
 Thy words are spoken, and thy wisdom's best
 My mind shall hoard, with Zeus our sire to aid.

DANAUS.

Even so—with gracious aspect let him aid.

CHORUS.

Fain were I now to seat me by thy side.

DANAUS.

Now dally not, but put our thought in act.

CHORUS.

Zeus, pity our distress, or e'er we die.

DANAUS.

If so he will, your toils to joy will turn.

CHORUS.

Lo, on this shrine, the semblance of a bird.²

DANAUS.

Zeus' bird of dawn it is; invoke the sign.

CHORUS.

Thus I invoke the saving rays of morn.

DANAUS.

Next, bright Apollo, exiled once from heaven.

CHORUS.

The exiled god will pity our exile.

DANAUS.

Yea, may he pity, giving grace and aid.

CHORUS.

Whom next invoke I, of these other gods?

DANAUS.

Lo, here a trident, symbol of a god.

CHORUS.

Who³ gave sea-safety; may he bless on land!

² The whole of this dialogue in alternate verses is disarranged in the MSS. The re-arrangement which has approved itself to Paley has been here followed. It involves, however, a hiatus, instead of the line to which this note is appended. The substance of the lost line being easily deducible from the context, it has been supplied in the translation.

³ Poseidon

DANAUS.

This next is Hermes, carved in Grecian wise.

CHORUS.

Then let him herald help to freedom won.

DANAUS.

Lastly, adore this altar consecrate
 To many lesser gods in one; then crouch
 On holy ground, a flock of doves that flee,
 Scared by no alien hawks, a kin not kind,
 Hateful, and fain of love more hateful still.
 Foul is the bird that rends another bird,
 And foul the men who hale unwilling maids,
 From sire unwilling, to the bridal bed.
 Never on earth, nor in the lower world,
 Shall lewdness such as theirs escape the ban:
 There too, if men say right, a God there is
 Who upon dead men turns their sin to doom,
 To final doom. Take heed, draw hitherward,
 That from this hap your safety ye may win.

Enter the KING OF ARGOS.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Speak—of what land are ye? No Grecian band
 Is this to whom I speak, with Eastern robes
 And wrappings richly dight: no Argive maid,
 No woman in all Greece such garb doth wear.
 This too gives marvel, how unto this land,
 Unheralded, unfriended, without guide,
 And without fear, ye came? yet wands I see,
 True sign of suppliance, by you laid down
 On shrines of these our gods of festival.
 No land but Greece can read such signs aright.
 Much else there is, conjecture well might guess,
 But let words teach the man who stands to hear.

CHORUS.

True is the word thou spakest of my garb;
 But speak I unto thee as citizen,
 Or Hermes' wandbearer, or chieftain king?

THE KING OF ARGOS.

For that, take heart and answer without fear.
 I am Pelasgus, ruler of this land,
 Child of Palaichthon, whom the earth brought forth;
 And, rightly named from me, the race who reap
 This country's harvests are Pelasgian called.
 And o'er the wide and westward-stretching land,
 Through which the lucent wave of Strymon flows
 I rule; Perrhaebia's land my boundary is
 Northward, and Pindus' further slopes, that watch

Paeonia, and Dodona's mountain ridge.
 West, east, the limit of the washing seas
 Restrains my rule—the interspace is mine.
 But this whereon we stand is Apian land,
 Styled so of old from the great healer's name;
 For Apis, coming from Naupactus' shore
 Beyond the strait, child of Apollo's self
 And like him seer and healer, cleansed this land
 From man-devouring monsters, whom the earth,
 Stained with pollution of old bloodshedding,
 Brought forth in malice, beasts of ravening jaws,
 A grisly throng of serpents manifold.
 And healings of their hurt, by knife and charm,
 Apis devised, unblamed of Argive men,
 And in their prayers found honour, for reward.
 —Lo, thou hast heard the tokens that I give:
 Speak now thy race, and tell a forthright tale;
 In sooth, this people loves not many words.

CHORUS.

Short is my word and clear. Of Argive race
 We come, from her, the ox-horned maiden who
 Erst bare the sacred child. My word shall give
 Whate'er can 'stablish this my soothfast tale.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

O stranger maids, I may not trust this word,
 That ye have share in this our Argive race.
 No likeness of our country do ye bear,
 But semblance as of Libyan womankind.
 Even such a stock by Nilus' banks might grow;
 Yea and the Cyprian stamp, in female forms,
 Shows to the life, what males impressed the same.
 And, furthermore, of roving Indian maids
 Whose camping-grounds by Aethiopia lie,
 And camels burdened even as mules, and bearing
 Riders, as horses bear, mine ears have heard;
 And tales of flesh-devouring mateless maids
 Called Amazons: to these, if bows ye bare,
 I most had deemed you like. Speak further yet,
 That of your Argive birth the truth I learn.

CHORUS.

Here in this Argive land—so runs the tale—
 Io was priestess once of Hera's fane.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Yea, truth it is, and far this word prevails:
 Is't said that Zeus with mortal mingled love?

CHORUS.

Ay, and that Hera that embrace surmised.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

How issued then this strife of those on high?

CHORUS.

By Hera's will, a heifer she became.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Held Zeus aloof then from the horned beast?

CHORUS.

'Tis said, he loved, in semblance of a bull.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

And his stern consort, did she aught thereon?

CHORUS.

One myriad-eyed she set, the heifer's guard.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

How namest thou this herdsman many-eyed?

CHORUS.

Argus, the child of Earth, whom Hermes slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Still did the goddess vex the beast ill-starred?

CHORUS.

She wrought a gadfly with a goading sting.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Thus drave she Io hence, to roam afar?

CHORUS.

Yea—this thy word coheres exact with mine.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Then to Canopus and to Memphis came she?

CHORUS.

And by Zeus' hand was touched, and bare a child.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Who vaunts him the Zeus-mated creature's son?

CHORUS.

Epaphus, named rightly from the saving touch.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

And whom in turn did Epaphus beget?⁴

CHORUS.

Libya, with name of a wide land endowed.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

And who from her was born unto the race?

⁴ Here one verse at least has been lost. The conjecture of Bothe seems to be verified, as far as substance is concerned, by the next line, and has consequently been adopted.

CHORUS.

Belus: from him two sons, my father one.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Speak now to me his name, this greybeard wise.

CHORUS.

Revere the gods thus crowned, who steer the State.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Awe thrills me, seeing these shrines with leafage crowned.

CHORUS.

Yea, stern the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord.

Child of Palaichthon, royal chief

Of thy Pelasgians, hear!

Bow down thine heart to my relief—

A fugitive, a suppliant, swift with fear,

A creature whom the wild wolves chase

O'er toppling crags; in piteous case

Aloud, afar she lows,

Calling the herdsman's trusty arm to save her from her foes!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Lo, with bowed heads beside our city shrines

Ye sit 'neath shade of new-plucked olive-boughs.

Our distant kin's resentment Heaven forefend!

Let not this hap, unhop'd and unforeseen,

Bring war on us: for strife we covet not.

CHORUS.

Justice, the daughter of right-dealing Zeus,

Justice, the queen of suppliants, look down,

That this our plight no ill may loose

Upon your town!

This word, even from the young, let age and wisdom learn:

If thou to suppliants show grace,

Thou shalt not lack Heaven's grace in turn,

So long as virtue's gifts on heavenly shrines have place.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Not at my private hearth ye sit and sue;

And if the city bear a common stain,

Be it the common toil to cleanse the same:

Therefore no pledge, no promise will I give,

Ere counsel with the commonwealth be held.

CHORUS.

Nay, but the source of sway, the city's self, art thou,

A power unjudged! thine, only thine,

To rule the right of hearth and shrine!

Before thy throne and sceptre all men bow!

Thou, in all causes lord, beware the curse divine!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

May that curse fall upon mine enemies!
 I cannot aid you without risk of scathe,
 Nor scorn your prayers—unmerciful it were.
 Perplexed, distraught I stand, and fear alike
 The twofold chance, to do or not to do.

CHORUS.

Have heed of him who looketh from on high,
 The guard of woeful mortals, whose'er
 Unto their fellows cry,
 And find no pity, find no justice there.
 Abiding in his wrath, the suppliants' lord
 Doth smite, unmoved by cries, unbent by prayerful word.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

But if Aegyptus' children grasp you here,
 Claiming, their country's right, to hold you theirs
 As next of kin, who dares to counter this?
 Plead ye your country's laws, if plead ye may,
 That upon you they lay no lawful hand.

CHORUS.

Let me not fall, O nevermore,
 A prey into the young men's hand;
 Rather than wed whom I abhor,
 By pilot-stars I flee this land;
 O king, take justice to thy side,
 And with the righteous powers decide!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Hard is the cause—make me not judge thereof.
 Already I have vowed it, to do nought
 Save after counsel with my people ta'en,
 King though I be; that ne'er in after time,
 If ill fate chance, my people then may say—
In aid of strangers thou the state hast slain.

CHORUS.

Zeus, lord of kinship, rules at will
 The swaying balance, and surveys
 Evil and good; to men of ill
 Gives evil, and to good men praise.
 And thou—since true those scales do sway—
 Shall thou from justice shrink away?

THE KING OF ARGOS.

A deep, a saving counsel here there needs—
 An eye that like a diver to the depth
 Of dark perplexity can pass and see,
 Undizzied, unconfused. First must we care
 That to the State and to ourselves this thing
 Shall bring no ruin; next, that wrangling hands

Shall grasp you not as prey, nor we ourselves
 Betray you thus embracing sacred shrines,
 Nor make the avenging all-destroying god,
 Who not in hell itself sets dead men free,
 A grievous inmate, an abiding bane.—
 Spake I not right, of saving counsel's need?

CHORUS.

Yea, counsel take and stand to aid
 At Justice' side and mine.
 Betray not me, the timorous maid
 Whom far beyond the brine
 A godless violence cast forth forlorn.
 O King, wilt thou behold—
 Lord of this land, wilt thou behold me torn
 From altars manifold?
 Bethink thee of the young men's wrath and lust,
 Hold off their evil pride;
 Steel not thyself to see the suppliant thrust
 From hallowed statues' side,
 Haled by the frontlet on my forehead bound,
 As steeds are led, and drawn
 By hands that drag from shrine and altar-mound
 My vesture's fringed lawn.
 Know thou that whether for Aegyptus' race
 Thou dost their wish fulfil,
 Or for the gods and for each holy place—
 Be thy choice good or ill,
 Blow is with blow requited, grace with grace
 Such is Zeus' righteous will.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Yea, I have pondered: from the sea of doubt
 Here drives at length the bark of thought ashore;
 Landward with screw and windlass haled, and firm,
 Clamped to her props, she lies. The need is stern;
 With men or gods a mighty strife we strive
 Perforce, and either hap in grief concludes.
 For, if a house be sacked, new wealth for old
 Not hard it is to win—if Zeus the lord
 Of treasure favour—more than quits the loss,
 Enough to pile the store of wealth full high;
 Or if a tongue shoot forth untimely speech,
 Bitter and strong to goad a man to wrath,
 Soft words there be to soothe that wrath away:
 But what device shall make the war of kin
 Bloodless? that woe, the blood of many beasts,
 And victims manifold to many gods,
 Alone can cure. Right glad I were to shun
 This strife, and am more fain of ignorance

Than of the wisdom of a woe endured.
The gods send better than my soul foretells!

CHORUS.

Of many cries for mercy, hear the end.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Say on, then, for it shall not 'scape mine ear.

CHORUS.

Girdles we have, and bands that bind our robes.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Even so; such things beseem a woman's wear.

CHORUS.

Know, then, with these a fair device there is—

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Speak, then: what utterance doth this foretell?

CHORUS.

Unless to us thou givest pledge secure—

THE KING OF ARGOS.

What can thy girdles' craft achieve for thee?

CHORUS.

Strange votive tablets shall these statues deck.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Mysterious thy resolve—avow it clear.

CHORUS.

Swiftly to hang me on these sculptured gods!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Thy word is as a lash to urge my heart.

CHORUS.

Thou seest truth, for I have cleared thine eye

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Yea, and woes manifold, invincible,
A crowd of ills, sweep on me torrent-like.
My bark goes forth upon a sea of troubles
Unfathomed, ill to traverse, harbourless.
For if my deed shall match not your demand,
Dire, beyond shot of speech, shall be the bane
Your death's pollution leaves unto this land.
Yet if against your kin, Aegyptus' race,
Before our gates I front the doom of war,
Will not the city's loss be sore? Shall men
For women's sake incarnadine the ground?
But yet the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord
I needs must fear: most awful unto man
The terror of his anger. Thou, old man,
The father of these maidens, gather up

Within your arms these wands of suppliance,
 And lay them at the altars manifold
 Of all our country's gods, that all the town
 Know, by this sign, that ye come here to sue.
 Nor, in thy haste, do thou say aught of me.
 Swift is this folk to censure those who rule;
 But, if they see these signs of suppliance,
 It well may chance that each will pity you,
 And loathe the young men's violent pursuit;
 And thus a fairer favour you may find:
 For, to the helpless, each man's heart is kind.

DANAUS.

To us, beyond gifts manifold it is
 To find a champion thus compassionate;
 Yet send with me attendants, of thy folk,
 Rightly to guide me, that I duly find
 Each altar of your city's gods that stands
 Before the fane, each dedicated shrine;
 And that in safety through the city's ways
 I may pass onwards: all unlike to yours
 The outward semblance that I wear—the race
 that Nilus rears is all dissimilar
 That of Inachus. Keep watch and ward
 Lest heedlessness bring death: full oft, I ween,
 Friend hath slain friend, not knowing whom he slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Go at his side, attendants,—he saith well.
 On to the city's consecrated shrines!
 Nor be of many words to those ye meet,
 The while this suppliant voyager ye lead.

[*Exit DANAUS with attendants.*]

CHORUS.

Let him go forward, thy command obeying.
 But me how biddest, how assured thou?

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Leave there the new-plucked boughs, thy sorrow's sign.

CHORUS.

Thus beckoned forth, at thy behest I leave them.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Now to this level precinct turn thyself.

CHORUS.

Unconsecrate it is, and cannot shield me.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

We will not yield thee to those falcons' greed.

CHORUS.

What help? more fierce they are than serpents fell.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

We spake thee fair—speak thou them fair in turn.

CHORUS.

What marvel that we loathe them, scared in soul?

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Awe towards a king should other fears transcend.

CHORUS.

Thus speak, thus act, and reassure my mind.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Not long thy sire shall leave thee desolate.
 But I will call the country's indwellers,
 And with soft words th' assembly will persuade,
 And warn your sire what pleadings will avail.
 Therefore abide ye, and with prayer entreat
 The country's gods to compass your desire;
 The while I go, this matter to provide,
 Persuasion and fair fortune at my side.

[*Exit the KING OF ARGOS.*]

CHORUS.

O King of Kings, among the blest
 Thou highest and thou happiest,
 Listen and grant our prayer,
 And, deeply loathing, thrust
 Away from us the young men's lust,
 And deeply drown
 In azure waters, down and ever down,
 Benches and rowers dark,
 The fatal and perfidious bark!
 Unto the maidens turn thy gracious care;
 Think yet again upon the tale of fame,
 How from the maiden loved of thee there sprung
 Mine ancient line, long since in many a legend sung!
 Remember, O remember, thou whose hand
 Did Io by a touch to human shape reclaim.
 For from this Argos erst our mother came
 Driven hence to Egypt's land,
 Yet sprung of Zeus we were, and hence our birth we claim.
 And now have I roamed back
 Unto the ancient track
 Where Io roamed and pastured among flowers,
 Watched o'er by Argus' eyes,
 Through the lush grasses and the meadow bowers.
 Thence, by the gadfly maddened, forth she flies
 Unto far lands and alien peoples driven
 And, following fate, through paths of foam and surge,
 Sees, as she goes, the cleaving strait divide
 Greece, from the Eastland riven.

And swift through Asian borders doth she urge
 Her course, o'er Phrygian mountains' sheep-clipt side;
 Thence, where the Mysian realm of Teuthras lies
 Towards Lydian lowlands hies,
 And o'er Cilician and Pamphylian hills
 And ever-flowing rills,
 And thence to Aphrodite's fertile shore,⁵
 The land of garnered wheat and wealthy store
 And thence, deep-stung by wild unrest,
 By the winged fly that goaded her and drave,
 Unto the fertile land, the god-possess,
 (Where, fed from far-off snows,
 Life-giving Nilus flows,
 Urged on by Typho's strength, a fertilizing wave)
 She roves, in harassed and dishonoured flight
 Scathed by the blasting pangs of Hera's dread despite.
 And they within the land
 With terror shook and wanned,
 So strange the sight they saw, and were afraid—
 A wild twy-natured thing, half heifer and half maid.
 Whose hand was laid at last on Io, thus forlorn,
 With many roamings worn?
 Who bade the harassed maiden's peace return?
 Zeus, lord of time eterne.
 Yea, by his breath divine, by his unscathing strength,
 She lays aside her bane,
 And softened back to womanhood at length
 Sheds human tears again.
 Then, quickened with Zeus' veritable seed,
 A progeny she bare,
 A stainless babe, a child of heavenly breed.
 Of life and fortune fair.
His is the life of life—so all men say,—
His is the seed of Zeus.
Who else had power stern Hera's craft to stay,
Her vengeful curse to loose?
 Yea, all from Zeus befell!
 And rightly wouldst thou tell
 That we from Epaphus, his child, were born:
 Justly his deed was done;
 Unto what other one,
 Of all the gods, should I for justice turn?
 From him our race did spring;
 Creator he and King,
 Ancient of days and wisdom he, and might.
 As bark before the wind,
 So, wafted by his mind,
 Moves every counsel, each device aright.

⁵ Cyprus.

Beneath no stronger hand
 Holds he a weak command,
 No throne doth he abase him to adore;
 Swift as a word, his deed
 Acts out what stands decreed
 In counsels of his heart, for evermore.

Re-enter DANAUS.

DANAUS.

Take heart, my children: the land's heart is kind,
 And to full issue has their voting come.

CHORUS.

All hail, my sire; thy word brings utmost joy.
 Say, to what issue is the vote made sure,
 And how prevailed the people's crowding hands?

DANAUS.

With one assent the Argives spake their will,
 And, hearing, my old heart took youthful cheer,
 The very sky was thrilled when high in air
 The concourse raised right hands and swore their oath:—
Free shall the maidens sojourn in this land.
Unharried, undespoiled by mortal wight:
No native hand, no hand of foreigner
Shall drag them hence; if any man use force—
Whoe'er of all our countrymen shall fail
To come unto their aid, let him go forth,
Beneath the people's curse, to banishment.
 So did the king of this Pelasgian folk
 Plead on behalf of us, and bade them heed
 That never, in the after-time, this realm
 Should feed to fulness the great enmity
 Of Zeus, the suppliants' guard, against itself!
 A twofold curse, for wronging stranger-guests
 Who are akin withal, confrontingly
 Should rise before this city and be shown
 A ruthless monster, fed on human doom.
 Such things the Argive people heard, and straight,
 Without proclaim of herald, gave assent:
 Yea, in full conclave, the Pelasgian folk
 Heard suasive pleas, and Zeus through them resolved.

CHORUS.

Arouse we now to chant our prayer
 For fair return of service fair
 And Argos' kindly will.
 Zeus, lord of guestright, look upon
 The grace our stranger lips have won.
 In right and truth, as they begun,
 Guide them, with favouring hand, until
 Thou dost their blameless wish fulfil!

Now may the Zeus-born gods on high
 Hear us pour forth
 A votive prayer for Argos' clan!—
 Never may this Pelasgian earth,
 Amid the fire-wrack, shrill the dismal cry
 On Ares, ravening lord of fight,
 Who in an alien harvest mows down man!
 For lo, this land had pity on our plight,
 And unto us were merciful and leal,
 To us, the piteous flock, who at Zeus' altar kneel!
 They scornèd not the pleas of maidenhood,
 Nor with the young men's will hath their will stood.
 They knew right well.

Th' unearthly watching fiend invincible,
 The foul avenger—let him not draw near!
 For he, on roofs ill-starred,
 Defiling and polluting, keeps a ghastly ward!
 They knew his vengeance, and took holy heed
 To us, the sister suppliants, who cry
 To Zeus, the lord of purity:
 Therefore with altars pure they shall the gods revere.

Thus, through the boughs that shade our lips, fly forth in air,
 Fly forth, O eager prayer!
 May never pestilence efface
 This city's race,
 Nor be the land with corpses strewed,
 Nor stained with civic blood!
 The stem of youth, unpluckt, to manhood come,
 Nor Ares rise from Aphrodité's bower,
 The lord of death and bane, to waste our youthful flower.
 Long may the old
 Crowd to the altars kindled to consume
 Gifts rich and manifold—
 Offered to win from powers divine
 A benison on city and on shrine:
 Let all the sacred might adore
 Of Zeus most high, the lord
 Of guestright and the hospitable board,
 Whose immemorial law doth rule Fate's scales aright:
 The garner of earth's store
 Be full for evermore,
 And grace of Artemis make women's travail light;
 No devastating curse of fell disease
 This city seize;
 No clamour of the State arouse to war
 Ares, from whom afar
 Shrinketh the lute, by whom the dances fail—
 Ares, the lord of wail.
 Swarm far aloof from Argos' citizens

All plague and pestilence,
 And may the Archer-God our children spare!
 May Zeus with foison and with fruitfulness
 The land's each season bless,
 And, quickened with Heaven's bounty manifold,
 Teem grazing flock and fold.
 Beside the altars of Heaven's hallowing
 Loud let the minstrels sing,
 And from pure lips float forth the harp-led strain in air!
 And let the people's voice, the power
 That sways the State, in danger's hour
 Be wary, wise for all;
 Nor honour in dishonour hold,
 But—ere the voice of war be bold—
 Let them to stranger peoples grant
 Fair and unbloody covenant—
 Justice and peace withal;
 And to the Argive powers divine
 The sacrifice of laurelled kine,
 By rite ancestral, pay.
 Among three words of power and awe,
 Stands this, the third, the mighty law—
Your gods, your fathers deified,
Ye shall adore. Let this abide
 For ever and for aye.

DANAUS.

Dear children, well and wisely have ye prayed;
 I bid you now not shudder, though ye hear
 New and alarming tidings from your sire.
 From this high place beside the suppliants' shrine
 The bark of our pursuers I behold,
 By divers tokens recognized too well.
 Lo, the spread canvas and the hides that screen
 The gunwale; lo, the prow, with painted eyes
 That seem her onward pathway to descry,
 Heeding too well the rudder at the stern
 That rules her, coming for no friendly end.
 And look, the seamen—all too plain their race—
 Their dark limbs gleam from out their snow-white garb;
 Plain too the other barks, a fleet that comes
 All swift to aid the purpose of the first,
 That now, with furled sail and with pulse of oars
 Which smite the wave together, comes aland.
 But ye, be calm, and, schooled not scared by fear,
 Confront this chance, be mindful of your trust
 In these protecting gods. And I will hence,
 And champions who shall plead your cause aright
 Will bring unto your side. There come perchance
 Heralds or envoys, eager to lay hand
 And drag you captive hence; yet fear them not;

Foiled shall they be. Yet well it were for you
 (If, ere with aid I come, I tarry long),
 Not by one step this sanctuary to leave.
 Farewell, fear nought: soon shall the hour be born
 When he that scorns the gods shall rue his scorn

CHORUS.

Ah but I shudder, father!—ah, even now,
 Even as I speak, the swift-winged ships draw nigh!

I shudder, I shiver, I perish with fear:
 Overseas though I fled,
 Yet nought it avails; my pursuers are near!

DANAUS.

Children, take heart; they who decreed to aid
 Thy cause will arm for battle, well I ween.

CHORUS.

But desperate is Aegyptus' ravening race,
 With fight unsated; thou too know'st it well.

In their wrath they o'ertake us; the prow is deep-dark
 In the which they have sped,
 And dark is the bench and the crew of the bark!

DANAUS.

Yea but a crew as stout they here shall find,
 And arms well steeled beneath a noon-day sun.

CHORUS.

Ah yet, O father, leave us not forlorn!
 Alone, a maid is nought, a strengthless arm.
 With guile they pursue me, with counsel malign,
 And unholy their soul;
 And as ravens they seize me, unheeding the shrine!

DANAUS.

Fair will befall us, children, in this chance,
 If thus in wrath they wrong the gods and you.

CHORUS.

Alas, nor tridents nor the sanctity
 Of shrines will drive them, O my sire, from us!
 Unholy and daring and cursed is their ire,
 Nor own they control
 Of the gods, but like jackals they glut their desire!

DANAUS.

Ay, but *Come wolf, flee jackal*, saith the saw;
 Nor can the flax-plant overbear the corn.

CHORUS.

Lustful, accursèd, monstrous is their will
 As of beasts ravening—'ware we of their power!

DANAUS.

Look you, not swiftly puts a fleet to sea,
 Nor swiftly to its moorings; long it is
 Or e'er the saving cables to the shore
 Are borne, and long or e'er the steersmen cry,
The good ship swings at anchor—all is well.
 Longest of all, the task to come aland
 Where haven there is none, when sunset fades
 In night. *To pilot wise, the adage saith,*
Night is a day of wakefulness and pain.
 Therefore no force of weaponed men, as yet
 Scatheless can come ashore, before the bank
 Lie at her anchorage securely moored.
 Bethink thee therefore, nor in panic leave
 The shrine of gods whose succour thou hast won
 I go for aid—men shall not blame me long,
 Old, but with youth at heart and on my tongue.

[*Exit* DANAUS.]

CHORUS.

O land of hill and dale, O holy land,
 What shall befall us? whither shall we flee,
 From Apian land to some dark lair of earth?

O would that in vapour of smoke I might rise to the clouds of the sky,
 That as dust which flits up without wings I might pass and vanish and die!
 I dare not, I dare not abide: my heart yearns, eager to fly;
 And dark is the cast of my thought; I shudder and tremble for fear.
 My father looked forth and beheld: I die of the sight that draws near.
 And for me be the strangling cord, the halter made ready by Fate,
 Before to my body draws nigh the man of my horror and hate.
 Nay, ere I will own him as lord, as handmaid to Hades I go!
 And oh, that aloft in the sky, where the dark clouds are frozen to snow,
 A refuge for me might be found, or a mountain-top smooth and too high
 For the foot of the goat, where the vulture sits lonely, and none may descry
 The pinnacle veiled in the cloud, the highest and sheerest of all,
 Ere to wedlock that rendeth my heart, and love that is loveless, I fall!
 Yea, a prey to the dogs and the birds of the mount will I give me to be,—
 From wailing and curse and pollution it is death, only death, sets me free:
 Let death come upon me before to the ravisher's bed I am thrust;
 What champion, what saviour but death can I find, or what refuge from lust?
 I will utter my shriek of entreaty, a prayer that shrills up to the sky,
 That calleth the gods to compassion, a tuneful, a pitiful cry,
 That is loud to invoke the releaser. O father, look down on the fight;
 Look down in thy wrath on the wronger, with eyes that are eager for right.
 Zeus, thou that art lord of the world, whose kingdom is strong over all,
 Have mercy on us! At thine altar for refuge and safety we call.
 For the race of Aegyptus is fierce, with greed and with malice afire;
 They cry as the questing hounds, they sweep with the speed of desire.
 But thine is the balance of fate, thou rulest the wavering scale,
 And without thee no mortal emprise shall have strength to achieve or prevail.

Alack, alack! the ravisher—
 He leaps from boat to beach, he draweth near!
 Away, thou plunderer accurst!
 Death seize thee first,
 Or e'er thou touch me—off! God, hear our cry,
 Our maiden agony!
 Ah, ah, the touch, the prelude of my shame.
 Alas, my maiden fame!
 O sister, sister, to the altar cling,
 For he that seizeth me,
 Grim is his wrath and stern, by land as on the sea.
 Guard us, O king!

Enter the HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Hence to my barge—step swiftly, tarry not.

CHORUS.

Alack, he rends—he rends my hair! O wound on wound!
 Help! my lopped head will fall, my blood gush o'er the ground!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Aboard, ye cursèd—with a new curse, go!

CHORUS.

Would God that on the wand'ring brine
 Thou and this braggart tongue of thine
 Had sunk beneath the main—
 Thy mast and planks, made fast in vain!
 Thee would I drive aboard once more,
 A slayer and a dastard, from the shore!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Be still, thou vain demented soul;
 My force thy craving shall control.
 Away, aboard! What, clingest to the shrine?
 Away! this city's gods I hold not for divine.

CHORUS.

Aid me, ye gods, that never, never
 I may again behold
 The mighty, the life-giving river,
 Nilus, the quickener of field and fold!
 Alack, O sire, unto the shrine I cling—
 Shrine of this land from which mine ancient line did spring!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Shrines, shrines, forsooth!—the ship, the ship be shrine!
 Aboard, perforce and will-ye nill-ye, go!
 Or e'er from hands of mine
 Ye suffer torments worse and blow on blow.

CHORUS.

Alack, God grant those hands may strive in vain

With the salt-streaming wave,
 When 'gainst the wide-blown blasts thy bark shall strain
 To round Sarpedon's cape, the sandbank's treach'rous grave.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Shrill ye and shriek unto what gods ye may,
 Ye shall not leap from out Aegyptus' bark,
 How bitterly soe'er ye wail your woe.

CHORUS.

Alack, alack my wrong!
 Stern is thy voice, thy vaunting loud and strong.
 Thy sire, the mighty Nilus, drive thee hence
 Turning to death and doom thy greedy violence!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Swift to the vessel of the double prow,
 Go quickly! let none linger, else this hand
 Ruthless will hale you by your tresses hence.

CHORUS.

Alack, O father! from the shrine
 Not aid but agony is mine.
 As a spider he creeps and he clutches his prey,
 And he hales me away.
 A spectre of darkness, of darkness. Alas and alas! well-a-day!
 O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!
 Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Peace! I fear not this country's deities.
 They fostered not my childhood nor mine age.

CHORUS.

Like a snake that is human he comes, he shudders and crawls to my side;
 As an adder that biteth the foot, his clutch on my flesh doth abide.
 O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!
 Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Swift each unto the ship; repine no more,
 Or my hand shall not spare to rend your robe.

CHORUS.

O chiefs, O leaders, aid me, or I yield!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Peace! if ye have not ears to hear my words,
 Lo, by these tresses must I hale you hence.

CHORUS.

Undone we are, O king! all hope is gone.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Ay, kings enow ye shall behold anon,
 Aegyptus' sons—Ye shall not want for kings.

Enter the KING OF ARGOS.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Sirrah, what dost thou? in what arrogance
Darest thou thus insult Pelasgia's realm?
Deemest thou this a woman-hearted town?
Thou art too full of thy barbarian scorn
For us of Grecian blood, and, erring thus,
Thou dost bewray thyself a fool in all!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Say thou wherein my deeds transgress my right.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

First, that thou play'st a stranger's part amiss.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Wherein? I do but search and claim mine own.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

To whom of our guest-champions hast appealed?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

To Hermes, herald's champion, lord of search.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Yea, to a god—yet dost thou wrong the gods!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

The gods that rule by Nilus I revere.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Hear I aright? our Argive gods are nought?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

The prey is mine, unless force rend it from me.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

At thine own peril touch them—'ware, and soon!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

I hear thy speech, no hospitable word.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

I am no host for sacrilegious hands.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

I will go tell this to Aegyptus' sons.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Tell it! my pride will ponder not thy word.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Yet, that I have my message clear to say
(For it behooves that heralds' words be clear,
Be they or ill or good), how art thou named?
By whom despoiled of this sister-band
Of maidens pass I homeward?—speak and say!
For lo, henceforth in Ares' court we stand,

Who judges not by witness but by war:
 No pledge of silver now can bring the cause
 To issue: ere this thing end, there must be
 Corpse piled on corpse and many lives gasped forth.

THE KING OF ARGOS.

What skills it that I tell my name to thee?
 Thou and thy mates shall learn it ere the end.
 Know that if words unstained by violence
 Can change these maidens' choice, then mayest thou,
 With full consent of theirs, conduct them hence.
 But thus the city with one voice ordained—

No force shall bear away the maiden band.

Firmly this word upon the temple wall
 Is by a rivet clenched, and shall abide:
 Not upon wax inscribed and delible,
 Nor upon parchment sealed and stored away.—
 Lo, thou hast heard our free mouths speak their will:
 Out from our presence—tarry not, but go!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

Methinks we stand on some new edge of war:
 Be strength and triumph on the young men's side!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

Nay but here also shall ye find young men,
 Unsodden with the juices oozed from grain.⁶

[*Exit* HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.]

But ye, O maids, with your attendants true,
 Pass hence with trust into the fenced town,
 Ringed with a wide confine of guarding towers.
 Therein are many dwellings for such guests
 As the State honours; there myself am housed
 Within a palace neither scant nor strait.
 There dwell ye, if ye will to lodge at ease
 In halls well-thronged: yet, if your soul prefer,
 Tarry secluded in a separate home.
 Choose ye and cull, from these our proffered gifts,
 Whiche'er is best and sweetest to your will:
 And I and all these citizens whose vote
 Stands thus decreed, will your protectors be.
 Look not to find elsewhere more loyal guard.

CHORUS.

O godlike chief, God grant my prayer:
Fair blessings on thy proffers fair,
Lord of Pelasgia's race!

⁶ For this curious taunt, strongly illustrative of what Browning calls "nationality in drinks," see Herodotus, ii. 77. A similar feeling may perhaps be traced in Tacitus' description of the national beverage of the Germans: "Potui humor ex hordeo aut frumento, *in quandam similitudinem vini corruptus*" (*Germania*, chap. xxiii).

Yet, of thy grace, unto our side
 Send thou the man of courage tried,
 Of counsel deep and prudent thought,—
 Be Danaus to his children brought;
 For his it is to guide us well
 And warn where it behoves to dwell—
 What place shall guard and shelter us
 From malice and tongues slanderous:
 Swift always are the lips of blame
 A stranger-maiden to defame—
 But Fortune give us grace!

THE KING OF ARGOS.

A stainless fame, a welcome kind
 From all this people shall ye find:
 Dwell therefore, damsels, loved of us,
 Within our walls, as Danaus
 Allots to each, in order due,
 Her dower of attendants true.

Re-enter DANAUS.

DANAUS

High thanks, my children, unto Argos con,
 And to this folk, as to Olympian gods,
 Give offerings meet of sacrifice and wine;
 For saviours are they in good sooth to you.
 From me they heard, and bitter was their wrath,
 How those your kinsmen strove to work you wrong,
 And how of us were thwarted: then to me
 This company of spearmen did they grant,
 That honoured I might walk, nor unaware
 Die by some secret thrust and on this land
 Bring down the curse of death, that dieth not.
 Such boons they gave me: it behoves me pay
 A deeper reverence from a soul sincere.
 Ye, to the many words of wariness
 Spoken by me your father, add this word,
 That, tried by time, our unknown company
 Be held for honest: over-swift are tongues
 To slander strangers, over-light is speech
 To bring pollution on a stranger's name.
 Therefore I rede you, bring no shame on me
 Now when man's eye beholds your maiden prime.
 Lovely is beauty's ripening harvest-field,
 But ill to guard; and men and beasts, I wot,
 And birds and creeping things make prey of it.
 And when the fruit is ripe for love, the voice
 Of Aphrodite bruiteth it abroad,
 The while she guards the yet unripened growth.
 On the fair richness of a maiden's bloom
 Each passer looks, o'ercome with strong desire,

With eyes that waft the wistful dart of love.
 Then be not such our hap, whose livelong toil
 Did make our pinnace plough the mighty main:
 Nor bring we shame upon ourselves, and joy
 Unto my foes. Behold, a twofold home—
 One of the king's and one the people's gift—
 Unbought, 'tis yours to hold,—a gracious boon.
 Go—but remember ye your sire's behest,
 And hold your life less dear than chastity.

CHORUS.

The gods above grant that all else be well.
 But fear not thou, O sire, lest aught befall
 Of ill unto our ripened maidenhood.
 So long as Heaven have no new ill devised,
 From its chaste path my spirit shall not swerve.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Pass and adore ye the Blessed, the gods of the city who dwell
 Around Erasinus, the gush of the swift immemorial tide.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Chant ye, O maidens; aloud let the praise of Pelasgia swell;
 Hymn we no longer the shores where Nilus to ocean doth glide.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Sing we the bounteous streams that ripple and gush through the city;
 Quickening flow they and fertile, the soft new life of the plain.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Artemis, maiden most pure, look on us with grace and with pity—
 Save us from forced embraces: such love hath no crown but a pain.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Yet not in scorn we chant, but in honour of Aphrodite;
 She truly and Hera alone have power with Zeus and control.
 Holy the deeds of her rite, her craft is secret and mighty,
 And high is her honour on earth, and subtle her sway of the soul.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Yea, and her child is Desire: in the train of his mother he goeth—
 Yea and Persuasion soft-lipped, whom none can deny or repel:
 Cometh Harmonia too, on whom Aphrodite bestoweth
 The whispering parley, the paths of the rapture that lovers love well.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Ah, but I tremble and quake lest again they should sail to reclaim!
 Alas for the sorrow to come, the blood and the carnage of war.
 Ah, by whose will was it done that o'er the wide ocean they came,
 Guided by favouring winds, and wafted by sail and by oar?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Peace! for what Fate hath ordained will surely not tarry but come;
 Wide is the counsel of Zeus, by no man escaped or withstood:

Only I pray that whate'er, in the end, of this wedlock he doom,
We as many a maiden of old, may win from the ill to the good.⁷

SEMI-CHORUS.

Great Zeus, this wedlock turn from me—
Me from the kinsman bridegroom guard!

SEMI-CHORUS.

Come what come may, 'tis Fate's decree.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Soft is thy word—the doom is hard.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Thou know'st not what the Fates provide.

SEMI-CHORUS.

How should I scan Zeus' mighty will,
The depth of counsel undescried?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Pray thou no word of omen ill.

SEMI-CHORUS.

What timely warning wouldst thou teach?

SEMI-CHORUS.

Beware, nor slight the gods in speech.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Zeus, hold from my body the wedlock detested, the bridegroom abhorred!
It was thou, it was thou didst release
Mine ancestress Io from sorrow: thine healing it was that restored,
The touch of thine hand gave her peace.

SEMI-CHORUS.

Be thy will for the cause of the maidens! of two ills, the lesser I pray—
The exile that leaveth me pure.
May thy justice have heed to my cause, my prayers to thy mercy find way!
For the hands of thy saving are sure.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

⁷ The ambiguity of these two lines is reproduced from the original. The Semi-Chorus appear to pray, in one aspiration, that the threatened wedlock may never take place, and, *if it does take place*, may be for weal, not woe.

Prometheus Bound

Argument

In the beginning, Ouranos and Gaia held sway over Heaven and Earth. And manifold children were born unto them, of whom were Cronos, and Okeanos, and the Titans, and the Giants. But Cronos cast down his father Ouranos, and ruled in his stead, until Zeus his son cast him down in his turn, and became King of Gods and men. Then were the Titans divided, for some had good will unto Cronos, and others unto Zeus; until Prometheus, son of the Titan Iapetus, by wise counsel, gave the victory to Zeus. But Zeus held the race of mortal men in scorn, and was fain to destroy them from the face of the earth; yet Prometheus loved them, and gave secretly to them the gift of fire, and arts whereby they could prosper upon the earth. Then was Zeus sorely angered with Prometheus, and bound him upon a mountain, and afterward overwhelmed him in an earthquake, and devised other torments against him for many ages; yet could he not slay Prometheus, for he was a God.

Dramatis Personae

STRENGTH AND FORCE.

HEPHAESTUS.

PROMETHEUS.

CHORUS OF SEA-NYMPHS.

DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS.

OCEANUS.

IO.

HERMES.

Prometheus Bound

Scene—A rocky ravine in the mountains of Scythia.

STRENGTH.

Lo, the earth's bound and limitary land,
 The Scythian steppe, the waste untrod of men!
 Look to it now, Hephaestus—thine it is,
 Thy Sire obeying, this arch-thief to clench
 Against the steep-down precipice of rock,
 With stubborn links of adamantine chain.
 Look thou: thy flower, the gleaming plastic fire,
 He stole and lent to mortal man—a sin
 That gods immortal make him rue to-day,
 Lessoned hereby to own th' omnipotence
 Of Zeus, and to repent his love to man!

HEPHAESTUS.

O Strength and Force, for you the best of Zeus
 Stands all achieved, and nothing bars your will:
 But I—I dare not bind to storm-veft cleft
 One of our race, immortal as are we.
 Yet, none the less, necessity constrains,
 For Zeus, defied, is heavy in revenge!
 (*To PROMETHEUS*)

O deep-devising child of Themis sage,
 Small will have I to do, or thou to bear,
 What yet we must. Beyond the haunt of man
 Unto this rock, with fetters grimly forged,
 I must transfix and shackle up thy limbs,
 Where thou shalt mark no voice nor human form,
 But, parching in the glow and glare of sun,
 Thy body's flower shall suffer a sky-change;
 And gladly wilt thou hail the hour when Night
 Shall in her starry robe invest the day,
 Or when the Sun shall melt the morning rime.
 But, day or night, for ever shall the load
 Of wasting agony, that may not pass,
 Wear thee away; for know, the womb of Time
 Hath not conceived a power to set thee free.
 Such meed thou hast, for love toward mankind
 For thou, a god defying wrath of gods,
 Beyond the ordinance didst champion men,
 And for reward shalt keep a sleepless watch,
 Stiff-kneed, erect, nailed to this dismal rock,
 With manifold laments and useless cries
 Against the will inexorable of Zeus.
 Hard is the heart of fresh-usurpèd power!

STRENGTH.

Enough of useless ruth! why tarriest thou?
 Why pitiest one whom all gods wholly hate,
 One who to man gave o'er thy privilege?

HEPHAESTUS.

Kinship and friendship wring my heart for him.

STRENGTH.

Ay—but how disregard our Sire's command?
 Is not thy pity weaker than thy fear?

HEPHAESTUS.

Ruthless as ever, brutal to the full!

STRENGTH.

Tears can avail him nothing: strive not thou,
 Nor waste thine efforts thus unaidingly.

HEPHAESTUS.

Out on my cursed mastery of steel!

STRENGTH.

Why curse it thus? In sooth that craft of thine
 Standeth assoiled of all that here is wrought.

HEPHAESTUS.

Would that some other were endowed therewith!

STRENGTH.

All hath its burden, save the rule of Heaven,
 And freedom is for Zeus, and Zeus alone.

HEPHAESTUS.

I know it; I gainsay no word hereof.

STRENGTH.

Up, then, and hasten to do on his bonds,
 Lest Zeus behold thee indolent of will!

HEPHAESTUS.

Ah well—behold the armlets ready now!

STRENGTH.

Then cast them round his arms and with sheer strength
 Swing down the hammer, clinch him to the crags.

HEPHAESTUS.

Lo, 'tis toward—no weakness in the work!

STRENGTH.

Smite harder, wedge it home—no faltering here!
 He hath a craft can pass th' impassable!

HEPHAESTUS.

This arm is fast, inextricably bound.

STRENGTH.

Then shackle safe the other, that he know
His utmost craft is weaker far than Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS.

He, but none other, can accuse mine art!

STRENGTH.

Now, strong and sheer, drive thro' from breast to back
The adamantine wedge's stubborn fang.

HEPHAESTUS.

Alas, Prometheus! I lament thy pain.

STRENGTH.

Thou, faltering and weeping sore for those
Whom Zeus abhors! 'ware, lest thou rue thy tears!

HEPHAESTUS.

Thou gazest on a scene that poisons sight.

STRENGTH.

I gaze on one who suffers his desert.
Now between rib and shoulder shackle him—

HEPHAESTUS.

Do it I must—hush thy superfluous charge!

STRENGTH.

Urge thee I will—ay, hound thee to the prey.
Step downward now, enring his legs amain!

HEPHAESTUS.

Lo, it is done—'twas but a moment's toil.

STRENGTH.

Now, strongly strike, drive in the piercing gyves—
Stern is the power that oversees thy task!

HEPHAESTUS.

Brutish thy form, thy speech brutality!

STRENGTH.

Be gentle, an thou wilt, but blame not me
For this my stubbornness and anger fell!

HEPHAESTUS.

Let us go hence; his legs are firmly chained.

STRENGTH (To PROMETHEUS).

Aha! there play the insolent, and steal,
For creatures of a day, the rights of gods!
O deep delusion of the powers that named thee
Prometheus, the Fore-thinker! thou hast need
Of others' forethought and device, whereby
Thou may'st elude this handicraft of ours!

[*Exeunt* HEPHAESTUS, STRENGTH and FORCE.—*A pause.*]

PROMETHEUS.

O Sky divine, O Winds of pinions swift,
 O fountain-heads of Rivers, and O thou,
 Illimitable laughter of the Sea!
 O Earth, the Mighty Mother, and thou Sun,
 Whose orb'd light surveyeth all—attest,
 What ills I suffer from the gods, a god!
 Behold me, who must here sustain
 The marring agonies of pain,
 Wrestling with torture, doomed to bear
 Eternal ages, year on year!
 Such and so shameful is the chain
 Which Heaven's new tyrant doth ordain
 To bind me helpless here.
 Woe! for the ruthless present doom!
 Woe! for the Future's teeming womb!
 On what far dawn, in what dim skies,
 Shall star of my deliverance rise?

Truce to this utterance! to its dimmest verge
 I do foreknow the future, hour by hour,
 Nor can whatever pang may smite me now
 Smite with surprise. The destiny ordained
 I must endure to the best, for well I wot
 That none may challenge with Necessity.
 Yet is it past my patience, to reveal,
 Or to conceal, these issues of my doom.
 Since I to mortals brought prerogatives,
 Unto this durance dismal am I bound:
 Yea, I am he who in a fennel-stalk,
 By stealthy sleight, purveyed the fount of fire,
 The teacher, proven thus, and arch-resource
 Of every art that aideth mortal men.
 Such was my sin: I earn its recompense,
 Rock-riveted, and chained in height and cold.

[*A pause.*]

Listen! what breath of sound,
 what fragrance soft hath risen
 Upward to me? is it some godlike essence,
 Or being half-divine, or mortal presence?
 Who to the world's end comes, unto my craggy prison?
 Craves he the sight of pain, or what would he behold?
 Gaze on a god in tortures manifold,
 Heinous to Zeus, and scorned by all
 Whose footsteps tread the heavenly hall,
 Because too deeply, from on high,
 I pitied man's mortality!
 Hark, and again! that fluttering sound
 Of wings that whirr and circle round,

And their light rustle thrills the air—
How all things that unseen draw near
Are to me Fear!

Enter the CHORUS OF OCEANIDES in winged cars.

CHORUS.

Ah, fear us not! as friends, with rivalry
Of swiftly-vying wings, we came together
Unto this rock and thee!
With our sea-sire we pleaded hard, until
We won him to our will,
And swift the wafting breezes bore us hither.
The heavy hammer's steely blow
Thrilled to our ocean-cavern from afar,
Banished soft shyness from our maiden brow,
And with unsandalled feet we come, in winged car!

PROMETHEUS.

Ah well-a-day! ye come, ye come
From the Sea-Mother's teeming home—
Children of Tethys and the sire
Who around Earth rolls, gyre on gyre,
His sleepless ocean-tide!
Look on me—shackled with what chain,
Upon this chasm's beetling side
I must my dismal watch sustain!

CHORUS.

Yea, I behold, Prometheus! and my fears
Draw swiftly o'er mine eyes a mist fulfilled of tears,
When I behold thy frame
Bound, wasting on the rock, and put to shame
By adamantine chains!
The rudder and the rule of Heaven
Are to strange pilots given:
Zeus with new laws and strong caprice holds sway,
Unkings the ancient Powers, their might constrains,
And thrusts their pride away!

PROMETHEUS.

Had he but hurled me, far beneath
The vast and ghostly halls of Death,
Down to the limitless profound
Of Tartarus, in fetters bound,
Fixed by his unrelenting hand!
So had no man, nor God on high,
Exulted o'er mine agony—
But now, a sport to wind and sky,
Mocked by my foes, I stand!

CHORUS.

What God can wear such ruthless heart

As to delight in ill?
 Who in thy sorrow bears not part?
 Zeus, Zeus alone! for he, with wrathful will,
 Clenched and inflexible,
 Bears down Heaven's race—nor end shall be, till hate
 His soul shall satiate,
 Or till, by some device, some other hand
 Shall wrest from him his sternly-clasped command!

PROMETHEUS.

Yet,—though in shackles close and strong
 I lie in wasting torments long,—
 Yet the new tyrant, 'neath whose nod
 Cowers down each blest subservient god,
 One day, far hence, my help shall need,
 The destined stratagem to read,
 Whereby, in some yet distant day,
 Zeus shall be reaved of pride and sway:
 And no persuasion's honied spell
 Shall lure me on, the tale to tell;
 And no stern threat shall make me cower
 And yield the secret to his power,
 Until his purpose be foregone,
 And shackles yield, and he atone
 The deep despite that he hath done!

CHORUS.

O strong in hardihood, thou striv'st amain
 Against the stress of pain!
 But yet too free, too resolute thy tongue
 In challenging thy wrong!
 Ah, shuddering dread doth make my spirit quiver,
 And o'er thy fate sits Fear!
 I see not to what shore of safety ever
 Thy bark can steer—
 In depths unreached the will of Zeus doth dwell,
 Hidden, implacable!

PROMETHEUS.

Ay, stern is Zeus, and Justice stands,
 Wrenched to his purpose, in his hands—
 Yet shall he learn, perforce, to know
 A milder mood, when falls the blow—
 His ruthless wrath he shall lay still,
 And he and I with mutual will
 In concord's bond shall go.

CHORUS.

Unveil, say forth to us the tale entire,
 Under what imputation Zeus laid hands
 On thee, to rack thee thus with shameful pangs?
 Tell us—unless the telling pain thee—all!

PROMETHEUS.

Grievous alike are these things for my tongue,
 Grievous for silence—rueful everyway.
 Know that, when first the gods began their strife,
 And heaven was all astir with mutual feud—
 Some willing to fling Cronos from his throne,
 And set, forsooth, their Zeus on high as king,
 And other some in contrariety
 Striving to bar him from heaven's throne for aye—
 Thereon I sought to counsel for the best
 The Titan brood of Ouranos and Earth;
 Yet I prevailed not, for they held in scorn
 My glozing wiles, and, in their hardy pride,
 Deemed that sans effort they could grasp the sway.
 But, for my sake, my mother Themis oft,
 And Earth, one symbol of names manifold,
 Had held me warned, how in futurity
 It stood ordained that not by force or power,
 But by some wile, the victors must prevail.
 In such wise I interpreted; but they
 Deigned not to cast their heed thereon at all.
 Then, of things possible, I deemed it best,
 Joining my mother's wisdom to mine own,
 To range myself with Zeus, two wills in one.
 Thus, by device of mine, the murky depth
 Of Tartarus enfoldeth Cronos old
 And those who strove beside him. Such the aid
 I gave the lord of heaven—my meed for which
 He paid me thus, a penal recompense!
 For 'tis the inward vice of tyranny,
 To deem of friends as being secret foes.
 Now, to your question—hear me clearly show
 On what imputed fault he tortures me.
 Scarce was he seated on his father's throne,
 When he began his doles of privilege
 Among the lesser gods, allotting power
 In trim division; while of mortal men
 Nothing he recked, nor of their misery
 Nay, even willed to blast their race entire
 To nothingness, and breed another brood;
 And none but I was found to cross his will.
 I dared it, I alone; I rescued men
 From crushing ruin and th' abyss of hell—
 Therefore am I constrained in chastisement
 Grievous to bear and piteous to behold,—
 Yea, firm to feel compassion for mankind,
 Myself was held unworthy of the same—
 Ay, beyond pity am I ranged and ruled
 To sufferance—a sight that shames his sway!

CHORUS.

A heart of steel, a mould of stone were he,
 Who could complacently behold thy pains
 I came not here as craving for this sight,
 And, seeing it, I stand heart-wrung with pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Yea truly, kindly eyes must pity me!

CHORUS.

Say, didst thou push transgression further still?

PROMETHEUS.

Ay, man thro' me ceased to foreknow his death.

CHORUS.

What cure couldst thou discover for this curse?

PROMETHEUS.

Blind hopes I sent to nestle in man's heart.

CHORUS.

This was a goodly gift thou gavest them.

PROMETHEUS.

Yet more I gave them, even the boon of fire.

CHORUS.

What? radiant fire, to things ephemeral?

PROMETHEUS.

Yea—many an art too shall they learn thereby!

CHORUS.

Then, upon imputation of such guilt,
 Doth Zeus without surcease torment thee thus?
 Is there no limit to thy course of pain?

PROMETHEUS.

None, till his own will shall decree an end.

CHORUS.

And how shall he decree it? say, what hope?
 Seest thou not thy sin? yet of that sin
 It irks me sore to speak, as thee to hear.
 Nay, no more words hereof; bethink thee now,
 From this ordeal how to find release.

PROMETHEUS.

Easy it is, for one whose foot is set
 Outside the slough of pain, to lesson well
 With admonitions him who lies therein.
 With perfect knowledge did I all I did,
 I willed to sin, and sinned, I own it all—
 I championed men, unto my proper pain.
 Yet scarce I deemed that, in such cruel doom,
 Withering upon this skyey precipice,

I should inherit lonely mountain crags,
 Here, in a vast tin-neighbour'd solitude.
 Yet list not to lament my present pains,
 But, stepping from your cars unto the ground,
 Listen, the while I tell the future fates
 Now drawing near, until ye know the whole.
 Grant ye, O grant my prayer, be pitiful
 To one now racked with woe! the doom of pain
 Wanders, but settles, soon or late, on all.

CHORUS.

To willing hearts, and schooled to feel,
 Prometheus, came thy tongue's appeal;
 Therefore we leave, with lightsome tread,
 The flying cars in which we sped—
 We leave the stainless virgin air
 Where winged creatures float and fare,
 And by thy side, on rocky land,
 Thus gently we alight and stand,
 Willing, from end to end, to know
 Thine history of woe.

*The CHORUS alight from their winged cars.
 Enter OCEANUS mounted on a griffin.*

OCEANUS.

Thus, over leagues and leagues of space
 I come, Prometheus, to thy place—
 By will alone, not rein, I guide
 The winged thing on which I ride;
 And much, be sure, I mourn thy case—
 Kinship is Pity's bond, I trow;
 And, wert thou not akin, I vow
 None other should have more than thou
 Of my compassion's grace!
 'Tis said, and shall be proved; no skill
 Have I to gloze and feign goodwill!
 Name but some mode of helpfulness,
 And thou wilt in a trice confess
 That I, Oceanus, am best
 Of all thy friends, and trustiest.

PROMETHEUS.

Ho, what a sight of marvel! what, thou too
 Comest to contemplate my pains, and darest—
 (Yet how, I wot not!) leaving far behind
 The circling tide, thy namefellow, and those
 Rock-arched, self-hollowed caverns—thus to come
 Unto this land, whose womb bears iron ore?
 Art come to see my lot, resent with me
 The ills I bear? Well, gaze thy fill! behold

Me, friend of Zeus, part-author of his power—
Mark, in what ruthlessness he bows me down!

OCEANUS.

Yea, I behold, Prometheus! and would warn
Thee, spite of all thy wisdom, for thy weal!
Learn now thyself to know, and to renew
A rightful spirit within thee, for, made new
With pride of place, sits Zeus among the gods!
Now, if thou choosest to fling forth on him
Words rough with anger thus and edged with scorn,
Zeus, though he sit aloof, afar, on high,
May hear thine utterance, and make thee deem
His present wrath a mere pretence of pain.
Banish, poor wretch! the passion of thy soul,
And seek, instead, acquittance from thy pangs!
Belike my words seem ancients to thee—
Such, nathless, O Prometheus, is the meed
That doth await the overweening tongue!
Meek wert thou never, wilt not crouch to pain,
But, set amid misfortunes, cravest more!
Now—if thou let thyself be schooled by me—
Thou must not kick against the goad. Thou knowest,
A despot rules, harsh, resolute, supreme,
Whose law is will. Yet shall I go to him,
With all endeavour to relieve thy plight—
So thou wilt curb the tempest of thy tongue!
Surely thou knowest, in thy wisdom deep,
The saw—*Who vaunts amiss, quick pain is his.*

PROMETHEUS.

O enviable thou, and unaccused—
Thou who wast art and part in all I dared!
And now, let be! make this no care of thine,
For Zeus is past persuasion—urge him not!
Look to thyself, lest thine emprise thou rue.

OCEANUS.

Thou hast more skill to school thy neighbour's fault
Than to amend thine own: 'tis proved and plain,
By fact, not hearsay, that I read this well.
Yet am I fixed to go—withhold me not—
Assured I am, assured, that Zeus will grant
The boon I crave, the loosening of thy bonds.

PROMETHEUS.

In part I praise thee, to the end will praise;
Goodwill thou lackest not, but yet forbear
Thy further trouble! If thy heart be fain,
Bethink thee that thy toil avails me not.
Nay, rest thee well, aloof from danger's brink!
I will not ease my woe by base relief

In knowing others too involved therein.
 Away the thought! for deeply do I rue
 My brother Atlas' doom. Far off he stands
 In sunset land, and on his shoulder bears
 The pillar'd mountain-mass whose base is earth,
 Whose top is heaven, and its ponderous load
 Too great for any grasp. With pity too
 I saw Earth's child, the monstrous thing of war,
 That in Cilicia's hollow places dwelt—
 Typho; I saw his hundred-headed form
 Crushed and constrained; yet once his stride was fierce,
 His jaws gaped horror and their hiss was death,
 And all heaven's host he challenged to the fray,
 While, as one vowed to storm the power of Zeus,
 Forth from his eyes he shot a demon glare.
 It skilled not: the unsleeping bolt of Zeus,
 The downward levin with its rush of flame,
 Smote on him, and made dumb for evermore
 The clamour of his vaunting: to the heart
 Stricken he lay, and all that mould of strength
 Sank thunder-shattered to a smouldering ash;
 And helpless now and laid in ruin huge
 He lieth by the narrow strait of sea,
 Crushed at the root of Etna's mountain-pile.
 High on the pinnacles whereof there sits
 Hephaestus, sweltering at the forge; and thence
 On some hereafter day shall burst and stream
 The lava-floods, that shall with ravening fangs
 Gnaw thy smooth lowlands, fertile Sicily!
 Such ire shall Typho from his living grave
 Send seething up, such jets of fiery surge,
 Hot and unslaked, altho' himself be laid
 In quaking ashes by Zeus' thunderbolt.
 But thou dost know hereof, nor needest me
 To school thy sense: thou knowest safety's road—
 Walk then thereon! I to the dregs will drain,
 Till Zeus relent from wrath, my present woe.

OCEANUS.

Nay, but, Prometheus, know'st thou not the saw—
Words can appease the angry soul's disease?

PROMETHEUS.

Ay—if in season one apply their salve,
 Not scorching wrath's proud flesh with caustic tongue.

OCEANUS.

But in wise thought and venturous essay
 Perceivest thou a danger? prithee tell!

PROMETHEUS.

I see a fool's good nature, useless toil.

OCEANUS.

Let me be sick of that disease; I know,
Loyalty, masked as folly, wins the way.

PROMETHEUS.

But of thy blunder I shall bear the blame.

OCEANUS.

Clearly, thy word would send me home again.

PROMETHEUS.

Lest thy lament for me should bring thee hate.

OCEANUS.

Hate from the newly-throned Omnipotence?

PROMETHEUS.

Be heedful—lest his will be wroth with thee!

OCEANUS.

Thy doom, Prometheus, cries to me *Beware!*

PROMETHEUS.

Mount, make away, discretion at thy side!

OCEANUS.

Thy word is said to me in act to go:
For lo, my hippogriff with waving wings
Fans the smooth course of air, and fain is he
To rest his limbs within his ocean stall.

[*Exit* OCEANUS.]

CHORUS.

For the woe and the wreck and the doom, Prometheus I utter my sighs;
O'er my cheek flows the fountain of tears from tender, compassionate eyes.
For stern and abhorred is the sway of Zeus on his self-sought throne,
And ruthless the spear of his scorn, to the gods of the days that are done.
And over the limitless earth goes up a disconsolate cry:
Ye were all so fair, and have fallen; so great and your might has gone by!
So wails with a mighty lament the voice of the mortals, who dwell
In the Eastland, the home of the holy, for thee and the fate that befel;
And they of the Colchian land, the maidens whose arm is for war;
And the Scythian bowmen, who roam by the lake of Maeotis afar;
And the blossom of battling hordes, that flowers upon Caucasus' height,
With clashing of lances that pierce, and with clamour of swords that smite.
Strange is thy sorrow! one only I know who has suffered thy pain—
Atlas the Titan, the god, in a ruthless, invincible chain!
He beareth for ever and ever the burden and poise of the sky,
The vault of the rolling heaven, and earth re-echoes his cry.
The depths of the sea are troubled; they mourn from their caverns profound,
And the darkest and innermost hell moans deep with a sorrowful sound;
And the rivers of waters, that flow from the fountains that spring without stain,
Are as one in the great lamentation, and moan for thy piteous pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Deem not that I in pride or wilful scorn
 Restrain my speech; 'tis wistful memory
 That rends my heart, when I behold myself
 Abased to wretchedness. To these new gods
 I and none other gave their lots of power
 In full attainment; no more words hereof
 I speak—the tale ye know. But listen now
 Unto the rede of mortals and their woes,
 And how their childish and unreasoning state
 Was changed by me to consciousness and thought.
 Yet not in blame of mortals will I speak,
 But as in proof of service wrought to them.
 For, in the outset, eyes they had and saw not;
 And ears they had but heard not; age on age,
 Like unsubstantial shapes in vision seen,
 They groped at random in the world of sense,
 Nor knew to link their building, brick with brick,
 Nor how to turn its aspect to the sun,
 Nor how to join the beams by carpentry,
 In hollowed caves they dwelt, as emmets dwell,
 Weak feathers for each blast, in sunless caves.
 Nor had they certain forecast of the cold,
 Nor of the advent of the flowery spring,
 Nor of the fruitful summer. All they wrought,
 Unreasoning they wrought, till I made clear
 The laws of rising stars, and inference dim,
 More hard to learn, of what their setting showed.
 I taught to them withal that art of arts,
 The lore of number, and the written word
 That giveth sense to sound, the tool wherewith
 The gift of memory was wrought in all,
 And so came art and song. I too was first
 To harness 'neath the yoke strong animals,
 Obedient made to collar and to weight,
 That they might bear whate'er of heaviest toil
 Mortals endured before. For chariots too
 I trained, and docile service of the rein,
 Steeds, the delight of wealth and pomp and pride.
 I too, none other, for seafarers wrought
 Their ocean-roaming canvas-wingèd cars.
 Such arts of craft did I, unhappy I,
 Contrive for mortals: now, no feint I have
 Whereby I may elude my present woe.

CHORUS.

A rueful doom is thine! distraught of soul,
 And all astray, and like some sorry leech
 Art thou, repining at thine own disease,
 Unskilled, unknowing of the needful cure.

PROMETHEUS.

More wilt thou wonder when the rest thou hearest—
 What arts for them, what methods I devised.
 Foremost was this: if any man fell sick,
 No aiding art he knew, no saving food,
 No curing oil nor draught, but all in lack
 Of remedies they dwindled, till I taught
 The medicinal blending of soft drugs,
 Whereby they ward each sickness from their side.
 I ranged for them the methods manifold
 Of the diviner's art; I first discerned
 Which of night's visions hold a truth for day,
 I read for them the lore of mystic sounds,
 Inscrutable before; the omens seen
 Which bless or ban a journey, and the flight
 Of crook-clawed birds, did I make clear to man—
 And how they soar upon the right, for weal,
 How, on the left, for evil; how they dwell,
 Each in its kind, and what their loves and hates,
 And which can flock and roost in harmony.
 From me, men learned what deep significance
 Lay in the smoothness of the entrails set
 For sacrifice, and which, of various hues,
 Showed them a gift accepted of the gods;
 They learned what streaked and varied comeliness
 Of gall and liver told; I led them, too,
 (By passing thro' the flame the thigh-bones, wrapt
 In rolls of fat, and th' undivided chine),
 Unto the mystic and perplexing lore
 Of omens; and I cleared unto their eyes
 The forecasts, dim and indistinct before,
 Shown in the flickering aspect of a flame.
 Of these, enough is said. The other boons,
 Stored in the womb of earth, in aid of men—
 Copper and iron, silver, gold withal—
 Who dares affirm he found them ere I found?
 None—well I know—save who would babble lies!
 Know thou, in compass of a single phrase—
 All arts, for mortals' use, Prometheus gave.

CHORUS.

Nay, aid not mortal men beyond their due,
 Holding too light a reckoning of thyself
 And of thine own distress: good hope have I
 To see thee once again from fetters free
 And matched with Zeus in parity of power.

PROMETHEUS.

Not yet nor thus hath Fate ordained the end—
 Not until age-long pains and countless woes

Have bent and bowed me, shall my shackles fall;
Art strives too feebly against destiny.

CHORUS.

But what hand rules the helm of destiny?

PROMETHEUS.

The triform Fates, and Furies unforgiving.

CHORUS.

Then is the power of Zeus more weak than theirs?

PROMETHEUS.

He may not shun the fate ordained for him.

CHORUS.

What is ordained for him, save endless rule?

PROMETHEUS.

Seek not for answer: this thou may'st not learn.

CHORUS.

Surely thy silence hides some solemn thing.

PROMETHEUS.

Think on some other theme: 'tis not the hour,
This secret to unveil; in deepest dark
Be it concealed: by guarding it shall I
Escape at last from bonds, and scorn, and pain.

CHORUS.

O never may my weak and faint desire
Strive against God most high—
Never be slack in service, never tire
Of sacred loyalty;
Nor fail to wend unto the altar-side,
Where with the blood of kine
Stems up the offering, by the quenchless tide
Of Ocean, Sire divine!
Be this within my heart, indelible—
Offend not with thy tongue!
Sweet, sweet it is, in cheering hopes to dwell,
Immortal, ever young,
In maiden gladness fostering evermore
A soft content of soul!
But ah, I shudder at thine anguish sore—
Thy doom thro' years that roll!
Thou could'st not cower to Zeus: a love too great
Thou unto man hast given—
Too high of heart thou wert—ah, thankless fate!
What aid, 'gainst wrath of Heaven,
Could mortal man afford? in vain thy gift
To things so powerless!
Could'st thou not see? they are as dreams that drift;
Their strength is feebleness

A purblind race, in hopeless fetters bound,
 They have no craft or skill,
 That could o'erreach the ordinance profound
 of the eternal will.

Alas, Prometheus! on thy woe condign
 I looked, and learned this lore;
 And a new strain floats to these lips of mine—
 Not the glad song of yore,
 When by the lustral wave I sang to see
 My sister made thy bride,
 Decked with thy gifts, thy loved Hesione,
 And clasped unto thy side.

Enter IO, horned like a cow.

IO.

Alack! what land, what folk are here?
 Whom see I clenched in rocky fetters drear
 Unto the stormy crag? for what thing done
 Dost thou in agony atone?
 Ah, tell me whither, well-a-day!
 My feet have roamed their weary way?
 Ah, but it maddens, the sting! it burns in my piteous side!
 Ah, but the vision, the spectre, the earth-born, the myriad-eyed!
 Avoid thee! Earth, hide him, thine offspring! he cometh—O aspect of ill!
 Ghostly, and crafty of face, and dead, but pursuing me still!
 Ah, woe upon me, woe ineffable!
 He steals upon my track, a hound of hell—
 Where'er I stray, along the sands and brine,
 Weary and foodless, come his creeping eyne!
 And ah, the ghostly sound—
 The wax-stopped reed-flute's weird and drowsy drone!
 Alack my wandering woes, that round and round
 Lead me in many mazes, lost, foredone!
 O child of Cronos! for what deed of wrong
 Am I enthralled by thee in penance long?
 Why by the stinging bruise, the thing of fear,
 Dost thou torment me, heart and brain?
 Nay, give me rather to the flames that sear,
 Or to some hidden grave,
 Or to the rending jaws, the monsters of the main!
 Nor grudge the boon for which I crave, O king!
 Enough, enough of weary wandering,
 Pangs from which none can save!
 Harken! in pity hold
 Io, the ox-horned maid, thy love of old!

PROMETHEUS.

Hear Zeus or not, I hear and know thee well,
 Daughter of Inachus; I know thee driven,
 Stung by the gadfly, mazed with agony.
 Ay, thou art she whose beauty fired the breast

Of Zeus with passion; she whom Hera's hate
Now harasses o'er leagues and leagues of land.

IO.

Alack, thou namest Inachus my sire!
Wottest thou of him? how, from lips of pain,
Comes to my woeful ears truth's very strain?
How knowest thou the curse, the burning fire
The god-sent, piercing pest that stings and clings?
Ah me! in frenzied, foodless wanderings
Hither I come, and on me from on high
Lies Hera's angry craft! Ah, men unblest!
Not one there is, not one, that is unblest as I.
But thou—tell me the rest!
Utter the rede of woes to come for me;
Utter the aid, the cure, if aid or cure there be!

PROMETHEUS.

Lo, clearly will I show forth all thy quest—
Not in dark speech, but with such simple phrase
As doth befit the utterance of a friend.
I am Prometheus, who gave fire to men.

IO.

O daring, proven champion of man's race,
What sin, Prometheus, dost thou thus atone?

PROMETHEUS.

One moment since, I told my woes and ceased.

IO.

Then should I plead my suit to thee in vain?

PROMETHEUS.

Nay, speak thy need; nought would I hide from thee.

IO.

Pronounce who nailed thee to the rocky cleft.

PROMETHEUS.

Zeus, by intent; Hephaestus, by his hand.

IO.

For what wrongdoing do these pains atone?

PROMETHEUS.

What I have said, is said; suffice it thee!

IO.

Yet somewhat add; forewarn me in my woe
What time shall bring my wandering to its goal?

PROMETHEUS.

Fore-knowledge is fore-sorrow; ask it not.

IO.

Nay, hide not from me destiny's decree.

PROMETHEUS.

I grudge thee not the gift which I withhold.

IO.

Then wherefore tarry ere thou tell me all?

PROMETHEUS.

Nothing I grudge, but would not rack thy soul.

IO.

Be not compassionate beyond my wish.

PROMETHEUS.

Well, thou art fain, and I will speak. Attend!

CHORUS.

Nay—ere thou speak, hear me, bestow on me
 A portion of the grace of granted prayers.
 First let us learn how Io's frenzy came—
 (She telling her disasters manifold)
 Then of their sequel let her know from thee.

PROMETHEUS.

Well were it, Io, thus to do their will—
 Right well! they are the sisters of thy sire.
 'Tis worth the waste and effluence of time,
 To tell, with tears of perfect moan, the doom
 Of sorrows that have fallen, when 'tis sure
 The listeners will greet the tale with tears.

IO.

I know not how I should mistrust your prayer;
 Therefore the whole that ye desire of me
 Ye now shall learn in one straightforward tale.
 Yet, as it leaves my lips, I blush with shame
 To tell that tempest of the spite of Heaven,
 And all the wreck and ruin of my form,
 And whence they swooped upon me, woe is me!
 Long, long in visions of the night there came
 Voices and forms into my maiden bower,
 Alluring me with smoothly glozing words—
*O maiden highly favoured of high Heaven,
 Why cherish thy virginity so long?
 Thine is it to win wedlock's noblest crown!
 Know that Zeus' heart thro' thee is all aflame,
 Pierced with desire as with a dart, and longs
 To join in utmost rite of love with thee.
 Therefore, O maiden, shun not with disdain
 Th' embrace of Zeus, but hie thee forth straightway
 To the lush growth of Lerna's meadow-land,
 Where are the flocks and steadings of thy home,
 And let Zeus' eye be eased of its desire.*
 Night after night, haunted by dreams like these,
 Heartsick, I ventured at the last to tell

Unto my sire these visions of the dark.
 Then sent he many a wight, on sacred quest,
 To Delphi and to far Dodona's shrine,
 Being fall fain to learn what deed or word
 Would win him favour from the powers of heaven.
 But they came back repeating oracles
 Mystic, ambiguous, inscrutable,
 Till, at the last, an utterance direct,
 Obscure no more, was brought to Inachus—
 A peremptory charge to fling me forth
 Beyond my home and fatherland, a thing
 Sent loose in banishment o'er all the world;
 And—should he falter—Zeus should launch on him
 A fire-eyed bolt, to shatter and consume
 Himself and all his race to nothingness.
 Bowing before such utterance from the shrine
 Of Loxias, he drave me from our halls,
 Barring the gates against me: loth he was
 To do, as I to suffer, this despite:
 But the strong curb of Zeus had overborne
 His will to me-ward. As I parted thence,
 In form and mind I grew dishumanized,
 And horned as now ye see me, poison-stung
 By the envenomed bitings of the brize,
 I leapt and flung in frenzy, rushed away
 To the bright waters of Cerchneia's stream
 And Lerna's beach: but ever at my side,
 A herdsman by his heifer, Argus moved,
 Earth-born, malevolent of mood, and peered,
 With myriad eyes, where'er my feet would roam.
 But on him in a moment, unforeseen,
 Came Fate, and sundered him from life; but I,
 Still maddened by the gadfly's sting, the scourge
 Of God's infliction, roam the weary world.
 How I have fared, thou hearest: be there aught
 Of what remains to bear, that thou canst tell,
 Speak on! but let not thy compassion warm
 Thy words to cheering falsehood. Worst of woes
 Are words that break their promise to our hope!

CHORUS.

Woe! woe! avaunt—thou and thy tale of bane!
 O never, never dared I dream
 Such horror of strange sounds should pierce mine ear;
 Such loathly sights, such tortures hard to bear,
 Outrage, pollution, agony supreme,
 Wasting my heart with double edge of pain!
 Ah Fate, ah Fate! I gaze on Io's dole,
 And shudder to my soul!

PROMETHEUS.

Thou wailest all too soon, fulfilled of fear—
Tarry awhile, till thou have learned the whole.

CHORUS.

Say on, reveal it! suffering souls are fain
To know aright what yet remains to bear.

PROMETHEUS.

Lightly, with help of mine, did ye achieve
That which ye first desired: from Io's mouth
craved to hear, recounted by herself,
The story of her strivings. Listen now
To what shall follow, to what woefulness
The wrath of Hera must compel this maid.

(To Io)

And thou, O child of Inachus, within
Thine inmost heart store up these words of mine,
That thou may'st learn thy wanderings and their goal.
First from this spot toward the sunrise turn,
And cross the steppe that knoweth not the plough:
Thus to the nomad Scythians shalt thou come,
Who dwell in wattled homes, not built on earth
But borne along on wains of sturdy wheel—
Equipped, themselves, with bows of mighty reach.
Pass them avoidingly, and leave their land,
And skirt the beaches where the tides make moan,
Till lo! upon the left hand thou shalt find
The Chalybes, stout craftsmen of the steel—
Beware of them! no gentleness is theirs,
No kindly welcome to a stranger's foot!
Thence to the Stream of Violence shalt thou come—
Like name, like nature; see thou cross it not,
('Tis fatal to the forder!) till thou come
Right to the very Caucasus, the peak
That overtops the world, and from its brows
The river pants in spray its wrathful stream.
Thence, o'er the pinnacles that court the stars,
Onward and southward thou must take thy way,
And reach the warlike horde of Amazons,
Maidens through hate of man; and gladly they
Will guide thy maiden feet. That host, in days
That are not yet, shall fix their home and dwell
At Themiscyra, on Thermodon's bank,
Nigh whereunto the grim projecting fang
Of Salmydessus' cape affronts the main,
The seaman's curse, to ships a stepmother!
Then at the jutting land, Cimmerian styled,
That screens the narrowing portal of the mere,
Thou shalt arrive; pass o'er it, brave at heart,
And ferry thee across Macotis' ford.

So shall there be great rumour evermore,
 In ears of mortals, of thy passage strange;
 And Bosphoros shall be that channel's name,
 Because the ox-horned thing did pass thereby.
 So, from the wilds of Europe wander'd o'er,
 To Asia's continent thou com'st at last.

(To the CHORUS)

And ye, what think ye? Seems he not, that lord
 And tyrant of the gods, as tyrannous
 Unto all other lives? A high god's lust
 Constrained this mortal maid to roam the world!

(To Io)

Poor maid! a brutal wooer sure was thine!
 For know that all which I have told thee now
 Is scarce the prelude of thy woes to come.

IO.

Alas for me, alas!

PROMETHEUS.

Again thou criest, with a heifer's low.
 What wilt thou do, learning thy future woes?

CHORUS.

What, hast thou further sorrows for her ear?

PROMETHEUS.

Yea, a vext ocean of predestined pain.

IO.

What profit then is life to me? Ah, why
 Did I not cast me from this stubborn crag?
 So with one spring, one crash upon the ground,
 I had attained surcease from all my woes.
 Better it is to die one death outright
 Than linger out long life in misery.

PROMETHEUS.

Ill would'st thou bear these agonies of mine—
 Mine, with whose fate it standeth not to win
 The goal of death, which were release from pain!
 Now, there is set no limit to my woe
 Till Zeus be hurled from his omnipotence.

IO.

Zeus hurled from pride of place! Can such things be?

PROMETHEUS.

Thou wert full fain, methinks, to see that sight!

IO.

Even so—his overthrow who wrought my pain.

PROMETHEUS.

Then may'st thou know thereof; such fall shall be.

IO.

And who shall wrench the sceptre from his hand?

PROMETHEUS.

By his own mindless counsels shall he fall.

IO.

And how? unless the telling harm, say on!

PROMETHEUS.

Wooing a bride, his ruin he shall win.

IO.

Goddess, or mortal? tell me, if thou may'st.

PROMETHEUS.

No matter which—more must not be revealed.

IO.

Doth then a consort thrust him from his throne?

PROMETHEUS.

The child she bears him shall o'ercome his sire.

IO.

And hath he no avoidance of this doom?

PROMETHEUS.

None, surely—till that I, released from bonds—

IO.

Who can release thee, but by will of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS.

Fate gives this duty to a child of thine!

IO.

How? Shall a child of mine undo thy woes?

PROMETHEUS.

Yea, of thy lineage, thirteen times removed.

IO.

Dark beyond guessing grows thine oracle.

PROMETHEUS.

Yea—seek not therefore to foreknow thy woes.

IO.

As thou didst proffer hope, withdraw it not.

PROMETHEUS.

Two tales I have—choose! for I grant thee one.

IO.

And which be they? reveal, and leave me choice.

PROMETHEUS.

I grant it: shall I in all clearness show
Thy future woes, or my deliverance?

CHORUS.

Nay! of the two, vouchsafe her wish to her
 And mine to me, deigning a truth to each—
 To her, reveal her future wanderings—
 To me, thy future saviour, as I crave!

PROMETHEUS.

I will not set myself to thwart your will
 Withholding aught of what ye crave to know.
 First to thee, Io, will I tell and trace
 Thy scared circuitous wandering mark it well,
 Deep in retentive tablets of the soul.
 When thou hast overpast the ferry's flow
 That sunders continent from continent,
 Straight to the eastward and the flaming face
 Of dawn, and highways trodden by the sun,
 Pass, till thou come unto the windy land
 Of daughters born to Boreas: beware
 Lest the strong spirit of the stormy blast
 Snatch thee aloft, and sweep thee to the void,
 On wings of raving wintry hurricane!
 Wend by the noisy tumult of the wave,
 Until thou reach the Gorgon-haunted plains
 Beside Cisthene. In that solitude
 Dwell Phorcys' daughters, beldames worn with time,
 Three, each swan-shapen, single-toothed, and all
 Peering thro' shared endowment of one eye;
 Never on them doth the sun shed his rays,
 Never falls radiance of the midnight moon.
 But, hard by these, their sisters, clad with wings,
 Serpentine-curved, dwell, loathed of mortal men,—
 The Gorgons!—he of men who looks on them
 Shall gasp away his life. Of such fell guard
 I bid thee to beware. Now, mark my words
 When I another sight of terror tell—
 Beware the Gryphon pack, the hounds of Zeus,
 As keen of fang as silent of their tongues!
 Beware the one-eyed Arimasian band
 That tramp on horse-hoofs, dwelling by the ford
 Of Pluto and the stream that flows with gold:
 Keep thou aloof from these. To the world's end
 Thou comest at the last, the dark-faced tribe
 That dwell beside the sources of the sun,
 Where springs the river, Aethiopian named.
 Make thou thy way along his bank, until
 Thou come unto the mighty downward slope
 Where from the overland of Byblin hills
 Nile pours his hallowed earth-refreshing wave.
 He by his course shall guide thee to the realm
 Named from himself, three-angled, water-girt;
 There, Io, at the last, hath Fate ordained,

For thee and for thy race, the charge to found,
 Far from thy native shore, a new abode.
 Lo, I have said: if aught hereof appear
 Hard to thy sense and inarticulate,
 Question me o'er again, and soothly learn—
 God wot, I have too much of leisure here!

CHORUS.

If there be aught beyond, or aught pass'd o'er,
 Which thou canst utter, of her woe-worn maze,
 Speak on! if all is said, then grant to us
 That which we asked, as thou rememberest.

PROMETHEUS.

She now hath learned, unto its utmost end,
 Her pilgrimage; but yet, that she may know
 That 'tis no futile fable she hath heard,
 I will recount her history of toil
 Ere she came hither; let it stand for proof
 Of what I told, my forecast of the end.
 So, then—to sum in brief the weary tale—
 I turn me to thine earlier exile's close.
 When to Molossia's lowland thou hadst come,
 Nigh to Dodona's cliff and ridge sublime,
 (Where is the shrine oracular and seat
 Of Zeus, Thesprotian styled, and that strange thing
 And marvel past belief, the prophet-oaks
 That syllable his speech), thou by their tongues,
 With clear acclaim and unequivocal,
 Wert thus saluted—*Hail, O bride of Zeus*
That art to be—hast memory thereof?
 Thence, stung anew with frenzy, thou didst hie
 Along the shoreward track, to Rhea's lap,
 The mighty main; then, stormily distraught,
 Backward again and eastward. To all time,
 Be well assured, that inlet of the sea
 All mortal men shall call Ionian,
 In memory that Io fared thereby.
 Take this for proof and witness that my mind
 Hath more in ken than ever sense hath shown.
 (To the CHORUS)

That which remains, to you and her alike
 I will relate, and, to my former words
 Reverting, add this final prophecy.

(To Io)

There lieth, at the verge of land and sea,
 Where Nilus issues thro' the silted sand,
 A town, Canopus called: and there at length
 Shall Zeus renew the reason in thy brain
 With the mere touch and contact of his hand
 Fraught now with fear no more: and thou shalt bear

A child, dark Epaphus—his very name
 Memorial of Zeus' touch that gave him life.
 And his shall be the foison and the fruit
 Of all the land enriched by spreading Nile.
 Thence the fifth generation of his seed
 Back unto Argos, yet unwillingly,
 Shall flee for refuge—fifty maidens they,
 Loathing a wedlock with their next in blood,
 More kin than kind, from their sire's brother sprung.
 And on their track, astir with wild desire,
 Like falcons fierce closing on doves that flee,
 Shall speed the suitors, craving to achieve
 A prey forbidden, a reluctant bride.
 Yet power divine shall foil them, and forbid
 Possession of the maids, whom Argive land
 Shall hold protected, when unsleeping hate,
 Horror, and watchful ambush of the night,
 Have laid the suitors dead, by female hands.
 For every maid shall smite a man to death,
 Dyeing a dagger's edges in his throat—
 Such bed of love befall mine enemies!
 Yet in one bride shall yearning conquer hate,
 Bidding her spare the bridegroom at her side,
 Blunting the keen edge of her set resolve.
 Thus of two scorns the former shall she choose,
 The name of coward, not of murderess.
 In Argos shall she bear, in after time,
 A royal offspring. Long it were to tell
 In clear succession all that thence shall be.
 Take this for sooth—in lineage from her
 A hero shall arise, an archer great,
 And he shall be my saviour from these woes.
 Such knowledge of the future Themis gave,
 The ancient Titaness, to me her son.
 But how, and by what skill, 'twere long to say,
 And no whit will the knowledge profit thee.

IO.

O woe, O rending and convulsive pain,
 Frenzy and agony, again, again
 Searing my heart and brain!
 O dagger of the sting, unforged with fire
 Yet burning, burning ever! O my heart,
 Pulsing with horror, beating at my breast!
 O rolling maddened eyes! away, apart,
 Raving with anguish dire,
 I spring, by frenzy-fiends possest.
 O wild and whirling words, that sweep in gloom
 Down to dark waves of doom!

[Exit IO.]

CHORUS.

O well and sagely was it said—
 Yea, wise of heart was he who first
 Gave forth in speech the thought he nursed—
In thine own order see thou wed!

Let not the humble heart aspire
 To the gross home of wealth and pride;
 Nor be it to a hearth allied
 That vaunts of many a noble sire.

O Fates, of awful empery!
 Never may I by Zeus be wooed—
 Never give o'er my maidenhood
 To any god that dwells on high.

A shudder to my soul is sent,
 Beholding Io's doom forlorn—
 By Hera's malice put to scorn,
 Roaming in mateless banishment.

From wedlock's crown of fair desire
 I would not shrink—an idle fear!
 But may no god to me draw near
 With shunless might and glance of fire!

That were a strife wherein no chance
 Of conquest lies: from Zeus most high
 And his resolve, no subtlety
 Could win me my deliverance.

PROMETHEUS.

And yet shall Zeus, for all his stubborn pride,
 Be brought to low estate! aha, he schemes
 Such wedlock as shall bring his doom on him,
 Flung from his kingship to oblivion's lap!
 Ay, then the curse his father Cronos spake
 As he fell helpless from his agelong throne,
 Shall be fulfilled unto the utterance!
 No god but I can manifest to him
 A rescue from such ruin as impends—
 I know it, I, and how it may be foiled.
 Go to, then, let him sit and blindly trust
 His skyey rumblings, for security,
 And wave his levin with its blast of flame!
 All will avail him not, nor bar his fall
 Down to dishonour vile, intolerable
 So strong a wrestler is he moulding now
 To his own proper downfall—yea, a shape
 Portentous and unconquerably huge,
 Who truly shall reveal a flame more strong
 Than is the lightning, and a crash of sound
 More loud than thunder, and shall dash to nought

Poseidon's trident-spear, the ocean-bane
That makes the firm earth quiver. Let Zeus strike
Once on this rock, he speedily shall learn
How far the fall from power to slavery!

CHORUS.

Beware! thy wish doth challenge Zeus himself.

PROMETHEUS.

I voice my wish and its fulfilment too.

CHORUS.

What, dare we look for one to conquer Zeus?

PROMETHEUS.

Ay—Zeus shall wear more painful bonds than mine

CHORUS.

Darest thou speak such taunts and tremble not?

PROMETHEUS.

Why should I fear, who am immortal too?

CHORUS.

Yet he might doom thee to worse agony.

PROMETHEUS.

Out on his dooming! I foreknow it all.

CHORUS.

Yet do the wise revere Necessity.

PROMETHEUS.

Ay, ay—do reverence, cringe and crouch to power
Whene'er, where'er thou see it! But, for me,
I reckon of Zeus as something less than nought.
Let him put forth his power, attest his sway,
Howe'er he will—a momentary show,
A little brief authority in heaven!
Aha, I see out yonder one who comes,
A bidden courier, truckling at Zeus' nod,
A lacquey in his new lord's livery,
Surely on some fantastic errand sped!

Enter HERMES.

HERMES.

Thou, double-dyed in gall of bitterness,
Trickster and sinner against gods, by giving
The stolen fire to perishable men!
Attend—the Sire supreme doth bid thee tell
What is the wedlock which thou vauntest now,
Whereby he falleth from supremacy?
Speak forth the whole, make all thine utterance clear,
Have done with words inscrutable, nor cause
To me, Prometheus! any further toil

Or twofold journeying. Go to—thou seest
Zeus doth not soften at such words as thine!

PROMETHEUS.

Pompous, in sooth, thy word, and swoln with pride,
As doth befit the lacquey of thy lords!
O ye young gods! how, in your youthful sway,
Ye deem secure your citadels of sky,
Beyond the reach of sorrow or of fall!
Have I not seen two dynasties of gods
Already flung therefrom? and soon shall see
A third, that now in tyranny exults,
Shamed, ruined, in an hour! What sayest thou?
Crouch I and tremble at these stripling powers?
Small homage unto such from me, or none!
Betake thee hence, sweat back along thy road—
Look for no answer from me, get thee gone!

HERMES.

Think—it was such audacities of will
That drove thee erst to anchorage in woe!

PROMETHEUS.

Ay—but mark this: mine heritage of pain
I would not barter for thy servitude.

HERMES.

Better, forsooth, be bond-slave to a crag,
Than true-born herald unto Zeus the Sire!

PROMETHEUS.

Take thine own coin—taunts for a taunting slave!

HERMES.

Proud art thou in thy circumstance, methinks!

PROMETHEUS.

Proud? in such pride then be my foemen set,
And I to see—and of such foes art thou!

HERMES.

What, blam'st thou me too for thy sufferings?

PROMETHEUS.

Mark a plain word—I loathe all gods that are,
Who reaped my kindness and repay with wrong.

HERMES.

I hear no little madness in thy words.

PROMETHEUS.

Madness be mine, if scorn of foes be mad.

HERMES.

Past bearing were thy pride, in happiness.

PROMETHEUS.

Ah me!

HERMES.

Zeus knoweth nought of sorrow's cry!

PROMETHEUS.

He shall! Time's lapse bringeth all lessons home.

HERMES.

To thee it brings not yet discretion's curb.

PROMETHEUS.

No—else I had not wrangled with a slave!

HERMES.

Then thou concealest all that Zeus would learn?

PROMETHEUS.

As though I owed him aught and should repay!

HERMES.

Scornful thy word, as though I were a child—

PROMETHEUS.

Child, ay—or whatsoe'er hath less of brain—
 Thou, deeming thou canst wring my secret out!
 No mangling torture, no, nor sleight of power
 There is, by which he shall compel my speech,
 Until these shaming bonds be loosed from me.
 So, let him fling his blazing levin-bolt!
 Let him with white and winged flakes of snow,
 And rumbling earthquakes, whelm and shake the world!
 For nought of this shall bend me to reveal
 The power ordained to hurl him from his throne.

HERMES.

Bethink thee if such words can mend thy lot.

PROMETHEUS.

All have I long foreseen, and all resolved.

HERMES.

Perverse of will! constrain, constrain thy soul
 To think more wisely in the grasp of doom!

PROMETHEUS.

Truce to vain words! as wisely wouldst thou strive
 To warn a swelling wave: imagine not
 That ever I before thy lord's resolve
 Will shrink in womanish terror, and entreat,
 As with soft suppliance of female hands,
 The Power I scorn unto the utterance,
 To loose me from the chains that bind me here—
 A world's division 'twixt that thought and me!

HERMES.

So, I shall speak, whate'er I speak, in vain!
 No prayer can melt or soften thy resolve;
 But, as a colt new-harnessed champs the bit,
 Thou strivest and art restive to the rein.
 But all too feeble is the stratagem
 In which thou art so confident: for know
 That strong self-will is weak and less than nought
 In one more proud than wise. Bethink thee now—
 If these my words thou shouldst disregard—
 What storm, what might as of a great third wave
 Shall dash thy doom upon thee, past escape!
 First shall the Sire, with thunder and the flame
 Of lightning, rend the crags of this ravine,
 And in the shattered mass o'erwhelm thy form,
 Immured and morticed in a clasping rock.
 Thence, after age on age of durance done,
 Back to the daylight shall thou come, and there
 The eagle-hound of Zeus, red-ravening, fell
 With greed, shall tatter piecemeal all thy flesh
 To shreds and ragged vestiges of form—
 Yea, an unbidden guest, a day-long bane,
 That feeds, and feeds—yea, he shall gorge his fill
 On blackened fragments, from thy vitals gnawed.
 Look for no respite from that agony
 Until some other deity be found,
 Ready to bear for thee the brunt of doom,
 Choosing to pass into the lampless world
 Of Hades and the murky depths of hell.
 Hereat, advise thee! 'tis no feigned threat
 Whereof I warn thee, but an o'er-true tale.
 The lips of Zeus know nought of lying speech,
 But wreak in action all their words foretell.
 Therefore do thou look warily, and deem
 Prudence a better saviour than self-will.

CHORUS.

Meseems that Hermes speaketh not amiss,
 Bidding thee leave thy wilfulness and seek
 The wary walking of a counselled mind.
 Give heed! to err through anger shames the wise.

PROMETHEUS.

All, all I knew, whate'er his tongue
 In idle arrogance hath flung.
 'Tis the world's way, the common lot—
 Foe tortures foe and pities not.
 Therefore I challenge him to dash
 His bolt on me, his zigzag flash
 Of piercing, rending flame!
 Now be the welkin stirred amain

With thunder-peal and hurricane,
 And let the wild winds now displace
 From its firm poise and rooted base
 The stubborn earthly frame!
 The raging sea with stormy surge
 Rise up and ravin and submerge
 Each high star-trodden way!
 Me let him lift and dash to gloom
 Of nether hell, in whirls of doom!
 Yet—do he what extremes he may—
 He cannot crush my life away!

HERMES.

Such are the counsels, such the strain,
 Heard from wild lips and frenzied brain!
 In word or thought, how fails his fate
 Of madness wild and desperate?
(To the CHORUS)
 But ye, who stand compassionate
 Here at his side, depart in haste!
 Lest of his penalty ye taste,
 And shattered brain and reason feel
 The roaring, ruthless thunder-peal!

CHORUS.

Out on thee! if thy heart be fain
 I should obey thee, change thy strain!
 Vile is thine hinted cowardice,
 And loathed of me thy base advice,
 Weakly to shrink from pain!
 Nay, at his side, whate'er befall,
 I will abide, endure it all!
 Among all things abhorr'd, accurst,
 I hold betrayers for the worst!

HERMES.

Nay, ye are warned! remember well—
 Nor cry, when meshed in nets of hell,
*Ah cruel fate, ah Zeus unkind—
 Thus, by a sentence undivined,
 To dash us to the realms below!*
 It is no sudden, secret blow—
 Nay, ye achieve your proper woe—
 Warn'd and foreknowing shall ye go,
 Through your own folly trapped and ta'en,
 Into the net the Fates ordain—
 The vast, illimitable pain!

[Thunder and lightning.]

PROMETHEUS.

Hark! for no more in empty word,
 But in sheer sooth, the world is stirred!

The massy earth doth heave and sway,
And thro' their dark and secret way
The cavern'd thunders boom!
See, how they gleam athwart the sky,
The lightnings, through the gloom!
And whirlwinds roll the dust on high,
And right and left the storm-clouds leap
To battle in the skyey deep,
In wildest uproar unconfined,
An universe of warring wind!
And falling sky and heaving sea
Are blent in one! on me, on me,
Nearer and ever yet more near,
Flaunting its pageantry of fear,
Drives down in might its destined road
The tempest of the wrath of God!
O holy Earth, O mother mine!
O Sky, that biddest speed along
Thy vault the common Light divine,—
Be witness of my wrong!

[The rocks are rent with fire and earthquake, and fall, burying PROMETHEUS in the ruins.]