



PROMETHEUS BOUND

AESCHYLUS

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BY
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(TRANSLATED BY E.D.A. MORSHEAD)

Prometheus Bound By Aeschylus.

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'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 chooseth 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 ancientry to thee—
 Such, natheless, 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 febleness

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!
 Hearken! 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 full 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 Io! 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 Bosporos 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-curl'd, 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 Arimaspians 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 Byblis 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, lo, 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.]*

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