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# AJAX OF SOPHOCLES

TRANSLATED INTO LITERAL ENGLISH FROM  
THE TEXT OF PROF. JEBB, LITT. D.

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J. CLUNES WILSON, M.A.

*formerly Scholar of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.*

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# THE ARGUMENT

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AFTER the death of Achilles before Troy, his armour, which was recovered by Ajax and Odysseus, was awarded to the latter by Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus. Ajax, thinking their decision an unfair one, retired to his tent to brood over his wrongs, and in the night went forth to take vengeance on Odysseus and the Atreidae. But Athene sent madness upon him, and caused him to mistake some captured cattle for his enemies. She then summoned Odysseus to come and see the spectacle of his rival's frenzy. Here the action of the play begins.

On recovering his senses Ajax feels that death alone can atone for his mad act. Tecmessa, his spear-won bride, and the chorus of sea-men try to stay his hand, but in vain.

Teucer, the half-brother of Ajax, while making arrangements for his burial, is stopped by the Atreidae, who, however, through the intervention of Odysseus, at last give permission for the funeral rites to take place.

The scene is laid before the huts of Ajax and his followers on the Northern coast of the Troad.

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## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- |           |   |                             |
|-----------|---|-----------------------------|
| AJAX      | } | played by the First Actor.  |
| TEUCER    |   |                             |
| ODYSSEUS  | } | played by the Second Actor. |
| TECMESSA  |   |                             |
| ATHENE    | } | played by the Third Actor.  |
| MENELAUS  |   |                             |
| AGAMEMNON |   |                             |
| MESSENGER |   |                             |

CHORUS OF SALAMINIAN SAILORS.

*ERRATUM*

page 15 line 28 for *marriage-right* read *marriage-rite*.

## THE AJAX OF SOPHOCLES.

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ATHENE. Ever, O son of Lartius I have seen thee seeking to snatch some means of attacking thy foes; and now I view thee at the naval tents of Ajax, where he has his furthest station, long since tracking and measuring his foot-marks newly-printed, so that thou mayest learn whether he is within or not within. And well does thy step guide thee, like that of a keen-scenting Spartan hound. For the man happens to be now within, his head and murderous hands dripping with sweat. And there is no more need for thee to search within this gate, but rather to say on what account thou hast put forth this zeal, so that thou mayest learn from one who knows. 10

ODYSSEUS. Voice of Athene dearest of the gods to me, how clearly, though thou art but dimly seen, do I hear thy call and seize it in my soul, as of a brazen-lipped Tyrrhenian bell. And now thou hast well marked me doubling on a foeman's trail, even the shield-bearing Ajax. For him, and no other, do I track so long. For this night he has done to us a deed inexplicable, if indeed he has wrought this; for we know nothing certain, but we are perplexed; and I willingly undertook this labour. For lately we have 20

discovered all the cattle, our spoil, dead and slaughtered with the hand, together with the guardians of the flocks themselves. Now every man imputes this  
 30 crime to him, and a scout who saw him bounding alone over the plain with reeking sword told me and made it clear; and straightway I rushed upon his track, and some traces I can discern, but as to some I am perplexed, and cannot understand whose they are. But in good time hast thou come; for in all things, in the past and in the future I am guided by thy hand.

ATH. I knew it, Odysseus, and long since I came on thy path a watcher friendly to thy chase.

OD. Do I, dear mistress, labour to some purpose?

ATH. Know that these are the deeds of yonder man.

40 OD. And wherefore did he thus put forth his senseless hand?

ATH. Weighed down with wrath touching the arms of Achilles.

OD. Why then did he rush with such an onset on the flocks?

ATH. Thinking that he dyed his hand in your blood.

OD. Was this design then aimed against the Greeks?

ATH. He would even have done it, if I had been careless.

OD. By what daring and boldness of heart?

ATH. By night, secret and alone, he went forth against you.

OD. Did he come near and did he reach the goal?



ATH. Already he was at the doors of the two chiefs.

OD. And how did he stay his eager hand from slaughter? 50

ATH. I withheld him, having cast upon his eyes vexing fancies of baneful joy, and to the flocks I turned him and to the confused droves guarded of herdsmen, our undivided spoil; then he fell on, and dealt death among the horned beasts hewing them in pieces about him; and at one time he thought that he was holding and slaying the two Atreidae with his own hand, at another this, now that of the generals in his onset. But I kept urging the man on as he raved in the throes of madness, and driving him into the evil snare. And then when he ceased from this toil, he next bound together those of the oxen that were living and all the flocks and brought them home, as one who had men for captives, not horned cattle. And now in the house he torments them bound together. But to thee also will I shew this signal frenzy, that when thou hast seen it thou mayest proclaim it to all the Greeks. But remain confident, and regard not the man as a terror, for I will withhold and turn away the sight of his eyes from looking at thy face. 60 70

Ho, thou who art binding with cords the back-bent arms of thy captives, I call thee, come hither! Ajax, I summon thee, come forth from the house!

OD. What doest thou, Athene? By no means call him out.

ATH. Be silent, let not cowardice arise.

OD. Do not in heaven's name, but let it suffice that he stay within.

ATH. For fear of what? Was he not a man before?

OD. Yes, mine enemy, and still he is.

ATH. Is it not sweetest mockery to mock one's foes?

80 OD. It is enough for me that he should remain within.

ATH. Dost thou fear to look upon the man in his raging madness?

OD. Yes, were he sane I had never shunned him through fear.

ATH. But even as it is he shall not see thee, though thou art near.

OD. How, if he still sees with that same sight?

ATH. I will darken his eyes, though they see.

OD. Well, anything may be done when a god plans.

ATH. Be silent, then, as thou standest, and remain as thou art.

OD. Remain I must, but I would that it were my hap to be away.

90 ATH. Ho there Ajax! again I call to thee. Why heedest thou so slightly thine ally?

AJ. O hail Athene! hail Zeus-born maid! how kindly hast thou come! and for this capture's sake I will crown thee with spoils of pure gold.

ATH. Well said. But tell me this—hast thou dyed thy sword right well amid the Greek host?

AJ. The boast is mine and I deny it not.

ATH. Did'st thou also turn thine armed hand upon the Atreidae?

AJ. So that they will never again dishonour Ajax,

ATH. The men have died, as I understand thy word.

AJ. Now that they are dead let them rob me of the arms that are mine! 100

ATH. Enough. Now in the next place what of Laertes' son—in what plight hast thou left him placed? Has he escaped thee?

AJ. Did'st thou ask me of that accursed fox, where he is?

ATH. Yes—Odysseus thy foe I mean.

AJ. A most welcome captive he sits within, my mistress; for not yet would I have him die.

ATH. Before you do what, or win what further gain?

AJ. Before being bound to a pillar in the court

ATH. What evil then wilt thou do to the wretch?

AJ. He dies, his back first crimsoned with the scourge. 110

ATH. Do not, I pray, thus torture the wretch.

AJ. In all else, Athene, I bid thee have thy will; but this penalty, and no other, shall he pay.

ATH. Nay, then, since thus it is thy joy to do, use violence, abstain from nought that thou dost intend.

AJ. I go to my task:—but this I charge thee—that thou stand ever at my side as such a helper.

ATH. See'st thou, Odysseus, how great is the strength of the gods? What man was ever found by thee more prudent than this man or more valiant to do what the time required? 120

OD. I know none; and I pity him in his misery for all that he is my enemy, because he is bound fast to a fearful doom, regarding mine own lot no less

than his. For I see that all we who live are nought else but phantoms or fleeting shadows.

ATH. Therefore beholding such things do thou thyself utter no haughty word against the gods, and do not assume pomp at any time, if thou prevailest  
130 above another in prowess or abundance of mighty riches. For a day can humble and restore all human things; but the men of sound mind the gods love, and they hate the evil.

CHORUS. Son of Telamon, holding thy throne firm in the sea-girt isle of Salamis, when thou art prosperous I rejoice; but when the stroke of Zeus or angry calumniating rumour from the Danaï, assail  
140 thee, I suffer great alarm and am all afraid like the eyes of a winged dove. Even thus, telling of the night now spent, loud murmurs beset us to our shame, how that thou did'st visit the meadow wild with steeds and destroy the flocks and spoil, prizes of the spear which remained undivided as yet, slaying them with glittering sword. Inventing such whispered tales, Odysseus bears them to the ears of all, and  
150 persuades men mightily. For now concerning thee he tells a specious tale, and everyone who hears rejoices more than the teller, in insolent triumph at thy woes. For if one aims at mighty spirits he will not miss; but were a man to say such things against me, he would persuade none. 'Tis on the powerful that envy creeps. Yet the lowly without the great are an uncertain garrison for the walls; for best will  
160 prosper small leagued with great and great served by less. But it is not possible to instruct the foolish in these truths. By such men art thou railed at, and without thee, O king, we are powerless to defend

ourselves in this matter. But indeed, when they have escaped thine eye, they chatter like flocks of birds; but, if thou shouldest appear, forthwith in fear of the 170 mighty vulture they would cower still and voiceless.

Was it the Tauric Artemis child of Zeus, that drove thee—O mighty rumour, mother of my shame!—against the herds of oxen owned by all our people, either because of some victory that yielded her no fruit, or else disappointed of glorious spoils, or for stags slain without offerings? or did mail-clad Enyalios, resenting a slight to his aiding spear, exact vengeance by nightly wiles? 180

For never of thine own will, O son of Telamon, can'st thou have gone so far astray as to fall upon the flocks; madness sent by heaven must come; but may Zeus and Phoebus avert the evil rumour of the Greeks. And if the mighty chiefs with insinuations spread furtive tales, or one of the wicked line of the Sisyphidae, 190 do not, O King, win an evil name to my reproach, by still keeping thine eye thus fixed upon the huts by the sea.

Nay, up from thy seat, wheresoever thou art brooding in this long pause from the war, inflaming the heaven-sent plague. But the insolence of thy foes speeds fearless forth in wind-swept glens, while all mock thee grievously with their tongues; and for me 200 woe is firm fixed.

TECMESSA. Mariners of the ship of Ajax, of lineage sprung from the Erechtheidæ of the soil, we who care for the house of Telamon afar have sorrow. For now, Ajax, the dread, the mighty, the rugged lies stricken with a turbid storm of frenzy.

CHO. And by what heavy chance has this night

210 been changed from its stillness? Daughter of Phrygian Teleutas, speak, since impetuous Ajax is constant in his love for thee, his spear-won bride; so that not without knowledge wilt thou hint.

TEC. How, pray, can I tell a tale unspeakable? For equal to death is the hap thou shalt hear. For seized with madness in the night our glorious Ajax has become a wreck. Such the sight you may see within the tent, slaughtered victims weltering in their  
220 blood, slain by his hand.

CHO. What news of the fiery warrior hast thou told, intolerable, but not to be evaded, noised abroad by the mighty Greeks, which strong rumour spreads. Alas! I fear what is to come! The man will die  
230 a signal death, having slain with frenzied hand and dark-gleaming blade the herds and the horse-guiding herdsmen.

TEC. Alas! Thence, thence then he came before us bringing the captive flock; of part he cut the throats on the floor within, others, hacking their sides, he tore asunder. And having lifted up two white-footed rams, he cut off the head of one and the tongue-tip and threw them away; and the other he  
240 bound upright at a pillar, and took a great thong of horse-gear and smote it with shrill double lash, while he uttered reproaches which an evil spirit and no man taught.

CHO. 'Tis time indeed for each of us to veil his head and betake him to stealthy speed of foot, or  
250 seated on the bench at the swift oar to give her way to the sea-faring ship. Such threats the two kings, sons of Atreus, ply against us; I fear to suffer death by stoning smitten together with him whom a fate of lonely horror holds.

TEC. No longer raves he ; for, like a keen south-gale that has rushed up without the bright lightning, he desists, and now in his right mind he has new pain. For to look on self-inflicted woes, when none other 260 has had a hand therein, intensifies sharp pangs.

CHO. But if he is at rest, I have good hopes that all may be well ; for there is less account of the evil that is already past.

TEC. And which, if one were to give thee the choice, wouldst thou choose :—thyselF to have joy, while paining thy friends, or to suffer in their company share for share ?

CHO. The double evil, madam, is the greater.

TEC. Then we, though no longer plagued, are now undone.

CHO. What did'st thou mean by that ? I know 270 not what thou meanest.

TEC. Yonder man, when he was frenzied, himself delighted in the ills by which he was held, but by his presence he pained us who were sane ; but now, since he has found pause and respite from that frenzy, he is utterly afflicted with sore grief, and we likewise no less than before. Are not these woes doubled after being but single ?

CHO. Yes, I agree with thee, and I fear lest it is from heaven that a stroke has come. What else, if when he has rest he is no more glad than when 280 he was afflicted ?

TEC. Thou must know that even thus it is.

CHO. Now what was the onset of the trouble that first swooped upon him ? Declare the hap to us who sympathise.

TEC. Thou as a partner shalt learn all the

matter. For he at dead of night, when the evening fires no longer burnt, seized a two-edged sword and sought to go on a vain enterprise. And I reprove him and say, "What dost thou Ajax? Why unsummoned dost thou set out for this attack, uncalled by messenger and hearing no trumpet? Nay, the whole host now sleeps. And he replied in curt oft-uttered words:—"Woman, silence is women's most-becoming jewel." And when I heard this I held my peace, and he sped forth alone. And what happened then I cannot describe; but he came in bringing with him bulls bound together, shepherd dogs and fleecy spoil. Some he beheaded, and turning others on their backs he cut the throat or cleft the chine, and those in bonds he tormented as if they were men, falling upon the flocks. And at last he rushed through the door and began to blurt out speeches to some phantom—some against the Atreidae, and others about Odysseus—mingling many a vaunt of the vengeance he had wreaked upon them in his onset; and then he rushed back again into the tent and at last in painful wise is restored to reason. And when he surveys the room full of his wild work, he struck his head and cried aloud; and having fallen amid the fallen carcasses of slaughtered sheep, there stayed, with nails clenched tightly grasping his hair. And first, for a long while, he sat silent; then me he threatened with most dreadful words, if I should not reveal all the chance that had befallen, and asked me in what plight he was. And I, friends, in fear told all that had been done so far as I knew it. And he forthwith wailed with bitter wailings, such as I never heard from him before. For he always used to teach



that such laments were a mark of a cowardly and low- 320  
hearted man ; but with no sound of shrill mourning  
he would utter a deep groan, like a moaning bull.  
But now prostrate in such evil case, without food,  
without drink the man sits quiet where he fell amid  
the sword-slain cattle. And surely he is bent on  
doing some evil deed—to such vague purpose are his  
words and sobs. But, friends—for on this account did  
I come—enter and help, if ye can do aught. For such 330  
as he are won by comrades' words.

CHO. Tecmessa, daughter of Teleutas, dread is  
the tale thou tellest us, that the man has been  
demented by his troubles.

AJ. Woe, woe is me !

TEC. Soon, as it seems, there will be worse ;  
heard ye not Ajax, what a cry is this he utters ?

AJ. Woe, woe is me !

CHO. The man seems to be either mad, or to be  
vexed by his former frenzies haunting him in his  
presence.

AJ. O my son, my son !

TEC. Alas, unhappy am I ! Eurysaces 'tis on thy 340  
name he calls. Of what is he thinking ? Where art  
thou ? unhappy that I am !

AJ. Ho, Teucer ! where is Teucer ? will he  
stay for ever on that foray ? And I am perishing !

CHO. The man seems to be in his senses ; but  
open ! Perchance even at the sight of me he may  
gain some self-restraint.

TEC. There, I open ; and thou mayest see the  
man's deeds and the plight in which he is.

AJ. Alas, good seamen, alone of my friends,  
alone still constant to the law of honour, see what 350

a surge, under stress of the deadly storm, rushes about me and hems me in.

CHO. Alas, too true seems thy evidence! The fact proves that it is a case of madness.

AJ. Alas, my mates, staunch in sea-craft, ye who came plying the oar-blade amid the brine, you,  
360 you alone do I see the sole remaining defence against distress; come, slay me here!

CHO. Speak words of better omen, put not evil remedy to evil and add not to the bitterness of the doom.

AJ. See'st thou the bold, the stout-hearted, the intrepid in battles with the foe, see'st thou how I have been dread in attack upon unsuspecting cattle? Oh, the mockery! how have I been dishonoured!

TEC. Ajax, my lord, I beg thee, speak not so!

370 AJ. Out with thee! turn thy steps back!  
Woe, woe!

TEC. In heaven's name yield and be calm!

AJ. Wretch that I am, who let the accursed men escape my hand, while it was on horned oxen and goodly flocks that I fell, and shed their dark blood!

CHO. Why, pray, shouldest thou grieve over what is done? For these things cannot be but as they are.

AJ. Ah, thou who seest all things, and art ever  
380 the instrument of all evil, son of Lartius, thou vilest knave in the host, I warrant thou laughest loud and long for joy!

CHO. With heaven's consent every man laughs or laments.

AJ. Still I would see him, thus shattered though I am. Ah me! Ah me!

CHO. Speak no big words. See'st thou not in what evil case thou art?

AJ. O Zeus, ancestor of my sires, would that I might slay that master of craft, that hateful knave, and the two chiefs of joint power, and lastly die myself. 390

TEC. When thou dost utter that prayer, pray for me also to die with thee; for why should I live when thou art dead?

AJ. Alas, thou darkness—my light! O gloom most clear to me, take me, take me to dwell with thee, take me; for I am no longer worthy to look to the race of the gods nor to men, the children of a day, for help. Nay, the daughter of Zeus, the mighty goddess, vexes me to the death; whither then can one flee, whither shall I go and rest? Since the past vanishes, comrades, and vengeance comes withal, and we are engaged in a madman's raids, and all the host with brandished spears would slay me amain. 400

TEC. Ah, unhappy me! to think that a man, good and true, should utter such words as heretofore he never deigned to speak! 410

AJ. Alas, ye paths by the wild waves, ye caves by the sea, ye forests by the shore, long, long and very weary is the time ye have been detaining me by Troy; but no more, no more shall ye know me with the breath of life; this let the wise know. Ah, ye neighbouring streams of Scamander, kindly to the Greeks, no more shall ye look upon this man the like of whom, (great is the boast I will utter) Troy never saw amid the host that came from the land of Hellas: but now I lie prostrate here disgraced. 420

CHO. Indeed I know not how to check thee,

nor how to let thee speak, involved as thou art in such woes.

430       Aj. Ay me! who could have ever imagined that my name so well-named would match my woes? For now may I cry 'Ay me' yea twice and thrice; such are the woes amid which I am fallen, I, whose father from this land of Ida, having won the chief prize for valour in the host, went home bearing all honour; but I his son, having come to this same land of Troy with no less might, and having done with my right  
440 hand services not less, perish thus dishonoured by the Greeks. And yet of this much I think I am certain, if Achilles were alive and in the matter of his own arms were about to adjudge the prize of valour to some man, no one would have seized them before me. But now the Atreidae have got them for an all daring schemer, after putting aside my might. And if these eyes, if this mind perverted had not swerved from my own purpose, never would they thus have given  
450 sentence against another man. But as it was, the daughter of Zeus, the fierce-eyed unconquerable goddess foiled me as I was just preparing my hand against them, having smitten me with a plague of frenzy, so that I stained my hands with the blood of these poor cattle: but they mock at me, having escaped in spite of my desire; but if the hands of a god should arrest, even the mean man may escape the better. And now what must I do? I who am clearly hateful to the gods, while the host of the Greeks detests me, and all Troy and all these plains hate me.  
460 Shall I leave the station of the ships and the Atreidae alone, and go homeward across the Aegean sea? And what face shall I show to my father Telamon when I

appear before him? how will he ever endure to look upon me when I appear ungraced—without meed of valour, of which he himself had a great crown of fame? That cannot be endured. But then shall I go to the Trojans' line, attack alone where all are foes, and while doing some noble deed then lastly die? But thus I might haply make the Atreidae glad. That must not be. Some enterprise must be sought whereby I shall shew my aged father that at least his son is no coward at heart. For it is a shame that a man should desire the full span of life, who in his troubles finds no change. For what pleasure can day by day give, now threatening, now delaying—death? I would not buy a man at any price who glows with vain hopes. Nay, the noble must either live gloriously or die gloriously. Thou hast heard all. 470

CHO. No man shall ever say that thou hast spoken one word that is not genuine, but what springs from thine own heart. Yet forbear: dismiss these thoughts and let thy friends over-rule thy purpose. 480

TEC. Ajax, my lord, there is no greater evil among men than necessity's hap. I was sprung from a free-born sire, powerful and wealthy if any Phrygian was; and now I am a slave. Such, I ween, was the purpose of heaven and above all of thy hand. Therefore, as I am wedded to thee, I wish thee well, and I beg thee by the Zeus of our hearth and by that marriage-right whereby thou wast united to me, condemn me not to hear the bitter taunts of thy foes, when thou hast abandoned me to another's hand. For on what day soever thou die and part me from thee by death, on that very day know that I, seized forcibly by the Greeks, will with thy son 490

500 have a slave's portion. And one of my masters will name me in bitter phrase levelling taunts at me: "see the concubine of Ajax, who was once most powerful in the host, what slavery she experiences instead of what distinction! Such things will some one say. And my lot will vex me, but for thee and for thy race these words are full of shame. Nay, regard thy father whom thou wouldest forsake in gloomy old age, regard thy mother with many years for her lot; who oft prays to heaven that thou reach home alive; and  
510 pity thy son, O king, if deprived of childhood's nurture he shall live bereft of thee, ward of unloving guardians, and think how great an evil is this that thou wilt bequeath to him and me when thou diest. I have nothing to which I can look but thee. Thou did'st bring my home-land to nothing with the spear, and another fate has brought low my mother and my sire to dwell in Hades after death. What home-land can I have, pray, in place of thee? What wealth? On thee depends all my welfare. Nay, have thought even of me. He that is a man indeed ought to  
520 cherish remembrance, if anywhere he chance to reap a joy. For it is kindness that ever begets kindness; but he from whose mind the recollection of benefits fades away can no more rank as noble.

CHO. Ajax, I would that thou couldest have pity in thy soul even as I; for so thou wouldest approve her words.

AJ. And verily she shall win approval on my part, if only she takes heart to do my bidding well.

TEC. Nay, dear Ajax, I will be obedient in all things.

AJ. Then bring me my boy that I may see him. 530

TEC. Yes, but in my fears I let him quit me.

AJ. In these late troubles? or what meanest thou I pray?

TEC. Yes, lest the poor child should somewhere meet thee, and die.

AJ. Aye truly, that would have matched well with my fortune.

TEC. Nay, then, I watched to avert that woe.

AJ. I commend thine act and the foresight thou didst shew.

TEC. How then, as the matter stands, can I serve thee?

AJ. Let me address him and see him before me.

TEC. Oh, he is quite near, in charge of attendants.

AJ. Why then does he delay to come into my 540 presence?

TEC. My child, thy father calls thee. Bring him hither, servant, whosoever of you happens to be guiding him with the hand.

AJ. Dost thou speak to one coming, or to one who is left behind of thy words?

TEC. Even now this servant hard by is bringing him.

AJ. Lift him, lift him up hither. He will feel no fear, I ween, on beholding this blood newly shed, if he is really mine on the father's side. But he must at once be broken into his father's rugged ways and moulded to the likeness of his nature.

Ah boy, mayest thou prove more happy than thy 550 sire, but in other respects like him; and thou wilt not prove base. Yet even now I can envy thee in this at least, because thou dost feel nought of these woes.

For in the slumber of the feelings is life sweetest, for lack of feeling is a most painless ill, until thou hast learnt joy and sorrow. But when thou hast come to that, thou must take heed to shew among thy father's foes what thou art and from what sire sprung. But awhile feed on light breezes, cherishing thy young life, 560 a joy to thy mother here. Not one of the Greeks, I know, will insult thee with hateful outrage, even when deprived of me. So trusty a warder will I leave to guard thee, even Teucer who will not falter in his care at all, though now he has gone afar, in pursuit of his foes. But upon you, shield-bearing warriors, band of sea-men, I lay this common task of love, and bear ye my command to Teucer, that he take this child to my home and shew him to Telamon and my mother, Eriboea, that he may be a continual support to them 570 in their old age, until they come to the dark places of the god below, and that no stewards of games nor my destroyer offer my arms a prize to the Greeks. No, this take thou my son, this Broad-shield from which thou hast thy name;—hold, wielding it by the well-wrought armlet, the sevenfold invulnerable target! But the rest of my arms shall be buried with me. But now with all speed take the child here, and close the tent, and utter not laments before the house. A 580 plaintive thing of a truth is a woman. Quick, make all fast! 'Tis not for a skilful surgeon to sing charms over a sore that needs the knife.

CHO. I tremble when I hear this eager haste, for thy keen speech delights me not.

TEC. Ajax, my lord, on what deed is thy heart set?

AJ. Ask not, question not; to be discreet is good.



TEC. Ah, what despair I feel! by thy son, by heaven, be not guilty of forsaking us!

AJ. Nay, thou vexest me overmuch. Knowest thou not that I no longer owe any service to heaven?

TEC. Speak words of better omen.

AJ. Talk to those who hear.

TEC. And thou, wilt thou not hearken?

AJ. Already thy speech is more than enough.

TEC. Yea, prince, I shudder—

AJ. Close the doors at once!

TEC. In heaven's name relent!

AJ. Thou art not wise, methinks, if now thou dost expect to school my nature.

CHO. O glorious Salamis, thou liest, I ween, surf-beaten, blest, to all illustrious ever; but I, hapless, 'tis long time that I wait the reward for the field of Ida, losing count of months, ever worn by the ceaseless march of time, having a sorry expectation that I shall one day reach Hades, horrible, unseen.

And a fresh trouble in reserve is Ajax, incurable —woe is me! visited with heaven-sent frenzy; whom in some bygone day thou didst send forth from thee a victor in impetuous war; but now a lonely pasturer of his thoughts he has been found a heavy sorrow to his comrades. And the former deeds of his hands, deeds of highest prowess, have fallen dead nor lit a spark of love in the loveless miserable Atreidae.

Surely his mother,—as she spends her declining day and white old age,—when she hears that he is stricken with loss of sense, will cry alas; alas,—nor vent her sorrow in the nightingale's plaintive note, but raise the dirge in shrill-toned strains, and on her breast will fall the sound of beating hands, which will also make a rending of hoary locks.

Better hid with Hades is he that is unreasonably distressed, who by ancestral lineage noblest in descent of the toiling Achaeans, is no more constant to his  
640 wonted mood, but is conversant with what is outside its influence. O hapless sire, how intolerable a curse upon thy son does it rest for thee to hear, a curse which no life of the Aeacidae, save his, has ever fostered.

AI. All things does long and infinite time bring from obscurity and then bury from light; and nought is past hope, but even the dread oath and stubborn will  
650 are overcome. For even I, who was once so wondrous firm, like iron in the dipping, had my keen edge softened by yon woman's words; and I shrink from leaving her a widow among foes, and my boy an orphan. But I will go to the bathing place and the meadows by the shore, that having purged my stains I may escape the heavy anger of the goddess; and having gone where I may find an untrodden spot I will bury this my sword, most hateful of weapons,  
660 having dug in the earth where none shall see; but may night and Hades keep it below. For since I took with my hand this gift from Hector my bitterest foe, I have received no good from the Greeks. Nay, true is the saying of men: Foe's gifts are no gifts and no good. Therefore for the future we shall know how to yield to heaven, and learn to respect the Atreidae. They are rulers, so we must be obedient. Why not?  
670 Dread things and things most strong are obedient to authority; thus the snow-strewn winters yield before fruitful summer; and the vault of weary night retires before day with her white steeds that she may kindle light; and the blast of dread winds lulls the moaning

deep; and withal almighty sleep looses what he has bound, nor keeps it in his grasp for ever. And we—how shall we fail to learn discretion? I chiefly, for I have just been learning that our enemy is to be hated but as one who hereafter will be a friend, 680 and towards my friend I would wish so far as to shew aid and service as if he will not always so remain. For to most mortals friendship's haven is treacherous. But in these matters it will be well; but do thou, madam, go within and pray to the gods that what my heart desires may be fulfilled in all fulness. And do ye, comrades, respect for me these same wishes that she does, and charge Teucer, when he comes, that he have care for me and good will to you as well. For I will go to that place whither I must pass; but 690 do ye what I say, and soon perhaps, though now I suffer, ye will learn that all is well.

CHO. I thrill with rapture and soar aloft in joy! O Pan, O Pan, sea-roaming Pan! appear from the rocky ridge of snow-beaten Cyllene, O dance-making king of the gods, that in company with me thou mayest fling self-taught measures of Nysa or of 700 Cnosus! For now dancing is my care. And may Apollo, lord of Delos come over the Icarian waters and be with me in presence visible and in spirit ever kind.

Ares has removed dread sorrow from our eyes. Joy, joy! Now again, now O Zeus, may the bright light of good days come upon the swift sea-cleaving barks, since Ajax once more forgetful of grief has fulfilled the exact ritual of the gods, honouring them 710 with fullest conformity. Mighty time wastes all things, and I would not say that aught was im-

possible, since beyond hope Ajax has repented of his wrath against the Atreidae and his mighty feuds.

MESSENGER. Friends, first I would announce  
 720 this—Teucer is here, just come from the Mysian heights; he has reached the general's tent in mid-camp and is being reviled by all the Greeks at once. For when they knew him as he approached from afar they stood all about him, and then assailed him with taunts from this side and from that, every one of them, terming him the kinsman of the maniac, of the plotter against the host, saying that he should not save himself from dying, all o'erwhelmed by stones.  
 730 So far had they gone that swords plucked from sheaths were drawn by their hands. But the strife, which had reached the crisis, ceases through the soothing words of the elders. But, we pray you, where is Ajax that I may tell him this? For one must needs show every matter to those in authority.

CHO. He is not within, but has just gone forth, having wedded a new purpose to his new mood.

MES. O! O! Too late then did he send me who sent me on this errand, or too late am I here.

740 CHO. And what part of this urgent mission has failed?

MES. Teucer enjoined that the man should not go out from within the house till he himself should be here.

CHO. Nay, then, he is gone, turned to the best of thoughts—to cease from wrath and be at one with the gods.

MES. These words are full of exceeding folly, if Calchas prophesies with right understanding.

CHO. What? what knows he of this matter?

MES. Thus much I know, and I happened to be present. For from the council and circle of chiefs Calchas alone withdrew apart from the Atreidae, and put his right hand like a friend into Teucer's hand and spoke and charged him by every means to keep Ajax in his tent during this present day now shining and not to let him go forth, if he would look again upon him in life. For on this day alone will the wrath of divine Athene pursue him, as he rehearsed. For, said the seer, overbearing and useless lives fall before heaven in heavy misfortunes, when one sprung from mortal stock yet has thoughts that befit not mortals. But Ajax when first he started from home was found the foolish son of a wise-speaking sire. For he addressed him thus: "My son, desire victory with the spear, but ever victory with heaven's aid." But he replied proudly and senselessly: "Sire by heaven's aid even one who is naught may gain victory; but I without such aid trust to win this glory." Such was the boast he uttered. Then again in answer to divine Athene,—when she urged him, and bade him turn his murderous hand upon his foes, at that time he replied with words dread and scarce to be spoken: "Queen, 'tis hard by the other Greeks that thou must stand, where we stand the storm of fight shall never burst." By such words it was that he brought on himself the implacable wrath of the goddess, with thoughts that become not a mortal. But if he lives this day, haply with heaven's aid we may save him. Thus spake the seer: and quitting the council forthwith Teucer sends me bearing these mandates for thee to observe. But if we have failed, that man lives not, if Calchas has wisdom,

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CHO. Hapless Tecmessa, ill-fated being, come and see what words this man utters. This touches in the quick, so that none can be glad.

TEC. Why do ye rouse me again from my rest, a poor wretch just relieved from wearisome troubles?

CHO. Hearken to this man, how he is come  
790 announcing the plight of Ajax, to my sorrow.

TEC. Alas! what sayest thou, man? are we undone?

MES. I know not thy plight, but I have no confidence concerning that of Ajax, if he is abroad.

TEC. Abroad he is, so that thy words torture me.

MES. Teucer charges to keep him under shelter of the tent, and not let him go forth alone.

TEC. And where is Teucer, and wherefore speaks he thus?

MES. He is just here; and forebodes that this going forth is fraught with death for Ajax.

800 TEC. Unhappy me! from whom of men can he have learnt it?

MES. From the seer, son of Thestor, this very day he portends life or death for him.

TEC. Ah me, friends, shelter me from my hard fate! Be speedy—some that Teucer may come right quickly—let some go to the westward bays, others to the eastward, and seek the man's ill-fated path. For now I see that I have been deceived by my lord and deprived of my former honour. Alas! what shall I do, my child? I must not loiter:—nay, I too will  
810 go whither I have strength. Away! haste! 'tis no time to rest if we would save a man who hastes to die.

CHO. Ready am I to go, and not in word only

will I prove it. For speed of act and foot shall go therewith.

AJ. The slayer stands so that to slay is easiest, if indeed one has time to think, gift of the warrior Hector most abhorred of my acquaintance and most hateful in my sight; fixed is it in hostile earth, in that of Troy, fresh-whetted by the stone that gnaws 820 the steel; and with good heed I fixed it, my best friend in a speedy death. Thus are we well prepared; and hereafter do thou, O Zeus, first aid me as is right. No large boon will I ask to win. Send me some messenger to carry the bad news to Teucer, that he may be the first to raise me fallen on this reeking sword, and that I may not ere that be spied by some enemy and cast out abandoned, a prey to dogs and 830 birds. Thus much, O Zeus, I beg of thee; and I also call on Hermes, guide to the land below to lay me well to rest, without a struggle, at one quick bound, when with this sword I have rent my side. And I call for help upon the maids who live for ever, who ever look upon all mishaps among men, the dread Erinyes, far striding,—I call on them to mark how I, ill fated, am ruined by the Atreidae. And may they overtake those evil men with doom most evil and 840 utter ruin, even as they see me falling self-slain, so slain by their own may they perish at the hand of their best-loved offspring. Come, swift avenging Erinyes, taste, spare not all the host! and thou, sun-god, chariot driver amid the lofty heavens, when thou dost scan my ancestral land, check thy gilded rein and tell my disasters and my fate to my aged father and to my unhappy mother. Ill-fated, when she hears 850 such tidings well do I know that she will utter a loud

wail in all the city. But it is useless to lament this in vain, rather should the matter be begun with what speed it may. O Death, Death, come now and visit me; and yet even elsewhere I shall be with thee and address thee. But thee, thou present light of brilliant day and car-driving sun I accost for the last, last time, as never shall I again hereafter. O sunlight,  
 860 O sacred plain of Salamis, mine own land, O seat of my father's hearth, and famous Athens, and kindred nation, and springs and rivers here and plains of Troy I address, fare ye well, ye that have fostered me! To you Ajax utters this last word: for the rest to those below in Hades will I speak.

SEMI-CHORUS A. Toil brings toil upon toil.  
 870 Where, where have I not gone? And no place is conscious that I share its secret. Hark! again I hear a sound.

SEMI-CHORUS B. Yes, from us the shipmates of your voyage.

SEMI-CHO. A. What news?

SEMI-CHO. B. All the side westward of the ships has been traversed.

SEMI-CHO. A. Hast thou found aught?

SEMI-CHO. B. Yes, abundance of toil, and nothing more to see.

SEMI-CHO. A. Nay, nor anywhere on the path  
 879 from the sun-rising does the man appear to have been seen.

CHO. Who, I pray, who of the toiling fishers, busied in sleepless quest, or who of the nymphs of Olympus or of the streams that flow to the Bosphorus, who will tell if anywhere he has seen the man of fierce heart roaming? For cruel is it, that I wandering



with long toil cannot approach him with prospered course, but fail to see where the sick man is.

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TEC. Ah me, ah me!

CHO. Whose cry, sheltered near us, burst from the wood?

TEC. Ah, ill-fated!

CHO. I see the spear-won bride, hapless Tecmessa, plunged in this misery.

TEC. I am undone, lost, destroyed, my friends!

CHO. What is it?

TEC. Here lies our Ajax but this moment slain, fallen on the buried sword.

CHO. Alas for my return! alas, my chief, thou hast slain me thy shipmate, O unhappy man; O unhappy woman!

TEC. Since this is so one may cry alas.

CHO. By whose hand then can the hapless man have done it?

TEC. Himself, by his own hand, clearly. For this sword on which he fell, fixed by him in the ground, proves it.

CHO. Alas for my folly, how then hast thou fallen in thy blood, unguarded of friends! And I, most fatuous and ignorant, neglected thee! Where, where lies Ajax the stubborn, of ill-omened name?

TEC. He must not be gazed upon: but in this enfolding robe wholly will I shroud him, since no man, though he should be a friend, could bear to see him spurting up, at nostril and from red gash, the dark gore from the self-dealt wound. Ah, what shall I do? who of thy friends shall bear thee? where is Teucer? How opportune his coming, should he come to compose the corpse of this his brother. O hapless

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Ajax, how great thou wert, how little now! How worthy to win even foemens' lamentations!

CHO. Thou wert destined, hapless, thou wert destined, then, with stern resolve, at last to accomplish thus an evil doom of boundless woes. Such through  
930 the hours of darkness and in the light were the complaints of ill-omen to the Atreidae which thou didst fiercely utter with deadly passion. Then was that day a mighty source of sorrows, when a contest of prowess was ordained concerning those arms!

TEC. Woe, woe is me!

CHO. Unfeigned grief, I know, affects the heart.

TEC. Woe, woe, is me!

940 CHO. Madam, I nothing doubt that thou wilt cry woe even again, lately bereft of such a friend.

TEC. 'Tis for thee to imagine these things, but for me to feel them too well.

CHO. I agree.

TEC. Alas, my child, to what a yoke of slavery are we coming! What mean masters are being set over us!

CHO. Ah me, in this affliction thou hast named an act unspeakable of the two Atreidae,—that makes them pitiless. But may heaven forefend.

950 TEC. This could have not been determined thus except by the will of the gods.

CHO. They have got us a burden far beyond our power to bear.

TEC. Yet such is the woe that Pallas, dread goddess, daughter of Zeus engenders for Odysseus' sake.

CHO. In truth the patient warrior exults in his gloomy soul, and mocks with keen mockery at these

frenzied woes, alas, alas! and with him the two 960  
sovereign sons of Atreus as they hear.

TEUC. Then let them mock and rejoice in this  
man's woes. Perhaps, though they missed him not  
alive, dead they will bewail him in the straits of war.  
Those weak in judgment know not that they hold a  
blessing in their hands till one strikes it away. His  
death is more bitter to me than sweet to them, while  
it is his own joy. For what he longed to win he has  
gained for himself,—the death which he desired. Why  
then should they exult over him? By the gods' hand 970  
he died, not by theirs,—no. Therefore let Odysseus  
be insolent with vain taunts. Ajax is theirs no more:  
he is gone, leaving sorrow and mourning for me.

TEUCER. Woe, woe is me!

CHO. Hush! for methinks I hear the voice of  
Teucer uttering a strain respective of this woe.

TEU. Ah, dearest Ajax, ah, form of my kinsman,  
have I found thee even as the rumour runs?

CHO. The warrior is no more, Teucer, of this  
be sure.

TEU. Woe is me then for my heavy fate! 980

CHO. Since thus it is——

TEU. Ah, hapless, hapless am I!

CHO. One may well lament.

TEU. O fierce, sudden blow!

CHO. Too true, Teucer.

TEU. Ah, hapless!—what then of this child—  
where may I chance to find him in the land of Troy?

CHO. Alone, by the huts.

TEU. Then bring him hither with all speed, lest  
some enemy seize him as a whelp from a lioness  
robbed of young! Go, hasten, help! All are wont to  
triumph over the dead when they lie low.

990 CHO. Yes, and while he still lived, Teucer, the dead man charged thee to have care for the boy, as indeed thou dost care.

TEU. O sight most sad of all that I have looked upon, way of all ways most painful to my heart, even this which I have now trod, when I learned thy fate, dearest Ajax, while seeking and tracking thee out! For a swift report of thee, like the whisper of some god, went through the Achaean host, saying that thou  
1000 wast dead and gone. Unhappy, I though far away heard it and moaned low, but now as I behold thee, I am undone. Ah me! Come, lift the shroud, that I may look on all the woe. O ghastly sight and full of cruel rashness, what anguish hast thou sown for me by thy death. Whither can I go, to what people, since I helped thee not in thy distress? Doubtless will Telamon, thy sire and mine, greet me with glad  
1010 and gracious welcome when I come without thee. No doubt he will—he who even when prosperous can summon no brighter smile. What will he forbear to say? What taunt will he not utter against the bastard begotten from the spoils of war, who betrayed thee, dearest Ajax, in a coward, unmanly spirit,—or by treachery, that at thy death I might enjoy thy prerogatives and heritage. Such will be the words of a man ever prone to wrath, now passionate in old age, who unreasonably waxes angry unto strife. Finally I shall be thrust from the land and banished,  
1020 by taunts proved a slave instead of a freeman. Such my lot at home; but at Troy I have many enemies and little profit. And all this I have got by thy death. Ah me, what shall I do? how draw thee, hapless, from this cruel gleaming point, the slayer

whereby thou seemest to have breathed thy last? Seest thou how Hector in the end though dead was fated to take thy life? In heaven's name regard the fortune of the two men. With the very girdle given to him by Ajax Hector was lashed to the chariot-rail and mangled unceasingly until he breathed his last; and Ajax, having this gift from Hector, has perished by it in deadly fall. Was it not then the Fury that forged this sword and Hades cruel artificer that wrought that belt? I indeed should say that heaven contrives this and all things ever for men; but if there be a man to whom this is not acceptable in his judgment, let him cherish his own thoughts as I mine.

CHO. Speak not at length, but think how thou wilt hide the warrior in the grave and what thou wilt say anon. For I see an enemy, and haply he will come mocking at our bad fortune as a bad man does.

TEU. What man from the host is it that thou dost behold?

CHO. Menelaus, for whom we planned this voyage.

TEU. I see; he is not hard to know when near.

MENELAUS. You there, I bid thee bear no hand in raising this corpse, but to leave it as it is.

TEU. On what account dost thou waste words so big?

MEN. Good seem they to me and to him who rules the host.

TEU. Wilt thou not say what cause thou dost put forward?

MEN. Because, when we hoped that we were bringing him from home an ally and friend to the

Greeks, on trial we found him more hostile than the Phrygians; who having plotted murder against all the host by night did sally forth against it, to slay with the spear; and had not one of the gods quenched this attempt, we, fallen by that fate which he has won would have been laid low by a most shameful  
1060 death, while he would have been living. But as it is heaven has turned this violence of his to fall on sheep and flocks. Wherefore there is no man so strong as to entomb his corpse, no, exposed upon the pale sand he shall become food for sea-birds. Then uplift not stormy wrath at all. Even if we were not able to control him in life, in death at all events rule him we will, even against thy will, constraining  
1070 him by force. For never when alive was he willing to hearken to my words. Yet it is the mark of a base man when a subject deigns not to obey the rulers. For never can the laws work well in a city where reverence is not established, and an army too cannot be tactfully commanded if it lack the lines of fear and awe. But although his frame be waxen great a man must remember that he may fall even by a slight mishap. He who has reverence and shame  
1080 as well, be sure that he possesses safety; but where there is license to be insolent and to act just as one chooses, be sure that ship-of-state, though sped by favouring winds, will sink at last into the deep. No, let fear also in season be set before me, and let us not suppose that if we do whatsoever we please we shall not hereafter pay for it in what will please us not. These things move by turns. This man was once a fiery bully, but now it is my turn to have high thoughts. And I charge thee not to bury this

man, lest by so doing thou thyself shouldest come 1090  
to burial.

CHO. Do not after suggesting wise counsels,  
Menelaus, then become guilty of outrage to the dead.

TEU. Sirs, never would I wonder more if a man,  
who is nothing by descent, makes a mistake when  
those who are accounted noble make such false state-  
ments in their speech. Come tell me from the first  
once more—dost thou say that thou broughtest the  
man hither, as an ally to the Greeks found by thee?  
Of his own will sailed he not forth, and as his own  
master? On what ground art thou his chief? On 1100  
what ground shouldest thou lord it over the people  
he led from home? As Sparta's lord thou didst come,  
not as our master. Nowhere was an ordinance of  
command established for thee to dictate to him any  
more than for him to dictate to thee. Under the  
command of others didst thou sail hither, not as  
captain of all, so as ever to be Ajax' leader. No,  
lord it over those whose lord thou art, vex them  
with thy proud words; but this man, whether thou  
or that other chief forbid, I will lay duly in the tomb, 1110  
in no fear of thy mouth. For not on account of  
thy wife did he go to the war, like men o'erwhelmed  
with hard labour, but on account of the oaths by  
which he was bound, and not on thy account, for  
he would not consider men who are of no account.  
Wherefore come hither bringing more heralds and  
the Captain; for thy noise I would not turn me  
about, so long as thou art what thou art.

CHO. This tongue again I love not amid woes.  
Hard words sting, though they be more than justified.

MEN. The bowman seems to have no lowly 1120  
thoughts.

TEU. Not sordid is the craft that I have got.

MEN. Great would thy vaunt be shouldst thou gain a shield.

TEU. Though light-armed I could match thee armed to the teeth.

MEN. How dread the courage that inspires thy tongue!

TEU. With justice on one's side one may be bold.

MEN. Was it just for him to prosper who would have slain me?

TEU. Slain thee? strange words if thou, though dead, dost live!

MEN. Heaven grants me safety: by his will I am dead.

TEU. Dishonour not heaven if preserved thereby.

1130 MEN. What, I quarrel with the laws of those above?

TEU. If thou being here forbid'st to bury the dead.

MEN. Yes, the dead that were my foes: it is not meet.

TEU. As public foe did Ajax e'er confront thee?

MEN. The hater hated he: that thou too knewest.

TEU. His despoiler thou didst prove, suborning votes.

MEN. Through the judge's hands, not mine, he thus was balked.

TEU. Full many a wrong couldest thou do by evil stealth.

MEN. That saying tends to someone's suffering.

TEU. Suffering not more, methinks, than we shall cause.



MEN. One thing I'll say : this man must not be 1140  
buried.

TEU. Nay, hear thou this : buried he soon  
shall be.

MEN. Ere now have I seen a man bold of tongue,  
who urged seamen to sail in time of storm, in whom  
thou would'st have found no voice when mastered  
by the foul weather, but hidden under his cloak he  
would suffer any of the crew that would to trample on  
him. Even so with thee and thy violent tongue—  
from a little cloud, perchance, a mighty storm may  
burst and quench the loud din.

TEU. Yes, and I have seen a man full of folly, 1150  
who was wont to triumph in his neighbours woes.  
And then one like me and of the same temper beheld  
him and spake such words : "Man, do not evil to the  
dead ; for if thou dost, be sure that thou wilt suffer."  
So he warned the unhappy man before him. And  
know that I see him, and I think he is no other than  
thyself. Surely I have not spoken in riddles ?

MEN. I will depart ; for it would be shameful  
were anyone to learn that he was chiding who had 1160  
force at his command.

TEU. Begone then : for me also it is most shame-  
ful to listen while a vain fellow utters silly talk.

CHO. There will be a trial of great strife. But  
do thou, Teucer, with what speed thou canst, haste to  
find a hollow trench for yonder man, where he shall  
occupy his dark, dank tomb, ever-memorable among  
men.

TEU. And lo ! at the fittest moment here are  
close at hand our lord's child and wife to prepare the 1170  
tomb for the ill-fated dead. My child, come hither,

and standing near as a suppliant touch the father that begat thee. And kneel as one who turns to heaven, holding in thy hands locks of hair,—mine, hers and thirdly thine,—the symbol of the suppliant. And if any man of the host should tear thee violently from this corpse, may that vile man be vilely cast unburied from the land, his whole clan root and branch cut-off, even as I sever this lock. Take and keep it, boy, and let no man move thee, but kneel and cling to the dead. And do ye stand at his side, not as women when ye should be men; nay, be helpful till I return after providing for his burial, though all forbid it.

CHO. What, I wonder, will be the end, when will the series of toilsome years cease, ever bringing on me the endless curse of warriors' toils throughout the wide plains of Troy, a miserable reproach of the Greeks? Would that the man had first plunged into the wide air or universal Hades, who taught Greeks the duty of united warfare with hateful arms! Ah, toils beyond all toils! He brought destruction on mankind. He suffered not to rest with me the joy of chaplets or of the deep bowls; he suffered me not to enjoy the sweet note of the flutes or nights' pleasure—ill stard that he was! From love, from love, he has made me to cease, alas! And I lie uncared for thus, my hair ever wet with heavy dews, reminder of cheerless Troy. Aforetime indeed brave Ajax was my bulwark against nightly alarms and missiles; but now he is the victim of a malignant fate. What joy then, what joy shall rest upon me more? Would I might be where the wooded cape sea-beaten rests upon the deep, beneath the level top of Sunium, that we might greet sacred Athens.

TEU. Lo, I hastened on seeing Agamemnon, leader of the host speeding hither to our danger; and plain it is to me that he will let loose speech perverse.

AGAMEMNON. So 'tis thou, they tell me, who hast dared to utter thus with impunity these blustering words against us? Yes, thee I mean, the captive woman's son, no doubt, hadst thou been born of a noble mother, lofty would have been thy boast and proud thy gait, when being naught thou hast stood up for him who is as naught, and hast declared that we came not as leaders by land or sea of the Greeks or of thee;—no, as thou sayest, it was as chief himself that Ajax sailed! Is it not a great shame to hear these things from slaves? What was the man about whom thou hast loudly uttered such proud words? Whither went he, or where stood, that I did not? Are there then no men but him among the Greeks? To our cost, it seems, we on that day proclaimed a contest for Achilles' arms to the Greeks, if in any case we shall be made out base by Teucer, and if ye never will be satisfied, though defeated, to acquiesce in what was pleasing to most of the judges, but ever will either assail us with reproaches, or stab us treacherously—ye who have been left behind in the struggle. Now where such ways prevail there never could be the establishment of any law, if we are to thrust aside those that fairly win, and bring the rear into the van. No, this must be stopped; 'tis not the burly and broad-shouldered men that are the surest, but the men of sense are always first. A large-ribbed ox is yet brought straight into the way by a little whip. And that corrective I perceive must soon come upon thee, if thou wilt not get some sense; thou who, when a

man no longer lives, but is now a shade, art boldly insolent and free of speech! Be sober! know what  
1260 thou art by birth, bring some other hither—a freeborn man,—who in thy stead shall plead thy cause before us. When thou dost speak I shall take heed no more; I understand not thy rude tongue.

CHO. Would that ye both had wisdom to be sober! No better counsel than this can I offer you.

TEU. Ah, gratitude to the dead—how quickly it slips away and is found a traitor, when this man has no longer any remembrance of thee, Ajax, even on slight accounts, though for him thou didst toil often  
1270 exposing thine own life to the spear; no, all this is flung aside and gone. Thou who hast but now uttered many useless words, hast thou no longer any remembrance of the time when he came alone and saved you shut within your lines when ye were brought to naught in the battle rout, when the fire was already blazing about the topmost rowers' benches of the ships, and Hector was leaping high over the trench to board the  
1280 vessels? Who averted that? Was not he the doer of the deed, who nowhere, thou sayest, so much as stood up beside thee? Did he, in thy opinion, do his duty there? And when again alone he met Hector in single combat, by lot, at no man's bidding, for the lot he cast in was no shirking lot, no lump of crumbling earth, but one which would lightly leap the first from the well-crested helmet? He was the doer of these deeds, and I was helping near him, I the slave, offspring  
1290 of the barbarian mother. Wretch, with what face canst thou utter the words? Knowest thou not that thy sire's sire was Pelops of old, a barbarian, a Phrygian? And that Atreus, who begat thee most

impious, set before his brother a meal of his own children? And that thou thyself wast born of a Cretan mother, with whom her sire found a paramour, and consigned her as a prey to the dumb fishes. Being such, dost thou reproach one like me with his origin? I who on my father's am of Telamon who won the prize for valour in the host and gained my mother for his bride, who was a princess by birth, child of Laomedon; and as a choice offering Alkmene's son gave her to him. Thus born to the nobleness of two noble lines could I shame my kinsman whom now that he is laid low amid such ills thou seekest to repulse from burial, and art unabashed when saying it? Now be well assured of this: if ye shall cast this man out anywhere, ye will cast out with him our three corpses also. For it is seemly for me to die publicly, striving on his behalf, rather than on behalf of thy wife, or rather thy brother's wife I mean. Wherefore look not to my interest, but to thine own. For if thou shouldest do me any harm, thou wilt wish some day that thou hadst been even a coward rather than a bully in my case.

CHO. King Odysseus, know that in season thou has come, if thou art here not to embroil, but to mediate.

ODYSSEUS. And what is it, sirs? For from afar I perceived the voice of the Atreidae loud over this brave man's body.

AG. Now, King Odysseus, have we not just been hearing the vilest taunts from yonder man?

OD. What taunts? I can make allowance for a man engaging in wordy war if he be evil spoken of.

AG. Reviled he was; his deeds to me were vile.

OD. What then hath he done to thee so grievous that thou art hurt?

AG. He says that he will not leave this corpse without burial, but will bury it in spite of me.

OD. May a friend be permitted to speak out the truth and ply his oar with thine no less than before?

1330<sup>o</sup> AG. Speak: for otherwise I should not be in my right mind, since I consider thee my greatest friend among the Greeks.

OD. Hear then. Do not, in heaven's name, have the heart to cast forth this man unburied so ruthlessly; and in no wise let violence prevail with thee to feel such hatred as to trample upon justice. For to me also this man was once the worst foe in the host,—from the day when I won Achilles' arms, but though he was such, still, I could not dishonour him, so as not to confess that in him I beheld the one man  
1340<sup>o</sup> who was most valiant of all us Greeks who came to Troy—save Achilles. So he could not fairly be slighted by thee; not Ajax, but the laws of heaven wouldst thou hurt. It is not right to injure a brave man when dead, even if thou hate him.

AG. Art thou, Odysseus, thus his champion against me?

OD. Yes; but I hated him when I could hate with honour.

AG. Then shouldst thou not even trample on him when dead?

OD. Delight not, son of Atreus in gains that bring dishonour.

1350<sup>o</sup> AG. For a monarch to observe heaven's law is no easy matter.

OD. But easy to honour his friends when they say well.

AG. The good man should listen to those in authority.

OD. Enough! Thou conquerest when friends conquer thee.

AG. Remember on what a man thou bestowest grace.

OD. This man was once a foe, but a generous one.

AG. What wilt thou do? Dost thou so reverence a foeman's corpse?

OD. Yes, with me his worth far outweighs his enmity.

AG. Nay, men like thee the world calls fickle.

OD. Full many are friends now and foes anon.

AG. Dost thou then approve of gaining such 1360 friends?

OD. I am not wont to approve a stubborn spirit.

AG. Us thou wilt make seem cowards on this day.

OD. Not so, but men of honour before all Greeks.

AG. Dost thou then charge me to let them bury their dead?

OD. Yes, for I myself must come to that.

AG. Truly in all alike each man works for himself.

OD. And for whom could I work more fitly than for myself?

AG. Thy deed then, not mine, shall it be called.

OD. Howsoever thou doest it, in any case a good doer wilt thou be.

AG. Nay, but of this be very sure, that to thee I 1370 would grant even a greater boon than this; Ajax, whether in this world or in the other, will still be most

hateful to me. But thou mayest do what thou must.

CHO. Whosoever says, Odysseus, that thou hast not inborn wisdom, that man lacks sense.

OD. Yes, now to Teucer and from henceforth I announce myself to be a friend—as firm as I was once a foe. And I would join in burying this corpse and share the toil and omit nothing which mortals should render to the bravest heroes.

TEU. Noble Odysseus, I can wholly commend thee in word; and thou hast much deceived my expectation. Thou, though his deadliest foe of all the Greeks, alone didst stand by with help, thou hadst no heart in this presence to exult—the living over the dead, like the crazy chief that came, he and his brother, and would have cast out the dishonoured dead without burial. Therefore may the Sire supreme in the heaven above us, and the mindful Fury and Justice that brings the end lay a wretched doom upon those wretches, as they sought to cast forth the warrior with insults undeserved. But, son of aged Laertes, I scruple to permit thee to have a hand in these rites, lest so I do displeasure to the dead; but in all else work with me, and if thou would'st bring any man of the host, we shall shew no resentment. I will provide all else; and be assured that in our regard thou art a noble man.

OD. Well, the wish was mine; but if it is not thy wish that I join in this, I will depart, acquiescent in thy will.

TEU. Enough; already delay has been long drawn out. Now haste some of you to prepare the hollow trench,—place some the high-set cauldron amid the flames, meet for holy lustration; and let



one band of men bear from his tent the armour worn beneath the shield. And do thou too, child, with what strength thou hast, lovingly touch thy father's side and help me to raise him; for still the warm channels are spouting up their dark tide. But come, let everyone who says that he is here as a friend haste and begone, serving this all-brave man, than whom better was never served among men, than Ajax,—I speak of the time when he still lived.

CHO. Verily mortals may know many things by experience; but before he has had proof no man can foretell the future, how he shall fare therein.



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