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THE  
LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION



# ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY:

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES

BEING THE

*LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION*

BY

ROBERT BROWNING



BOSTON

JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY

(LATE TICKNOR & FIELDS, AND FIELDS, OSGOOD, & CO.)

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οὐκ ἔσθω κενέβρει· ὅποταν δὲ θύῃς τι, κάλει με.

I eat no carrion ; when you sacrifice  
Some cleanly creature — call me for a slice !





## ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY.

WIND, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,  
Balaustion, from — not sorrow but despair,  
Not memory but the present and its pang!  
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart :  
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,  
Never again may these repugnant orbs  
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,  
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow  
— Death's entry, Haidēs' outrage !

Doomed to die, —

Fire should have flung a passion of embrace  
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,  
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,  
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)

TO *ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY.*

Some vaporous sigh of soul had lightly 'scaped,  
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back!  
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,  
Buried below Olumpos and its gods,  
Akropolis to dominate her realm  
For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea,  
What if thy watery plural vastitude,  
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,  
Might upon might, a moment, — stood, one stare,  
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave  
Glassing that marbled last magnificence, —  
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the gray,  
And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked  
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,  
And land again breathed unconfused with sea,  
Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.  
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs  
To blinding, — bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!  
Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,



Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,  
Bear to my birth-place, Helios' island-bride,  
Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,  
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away  
From horror, and a sunset nearer Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above  
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind  
And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul  
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low, —  
Since disembodied soul anticipates  
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)  
Above all crowding, crystal silentness,  
Above all noise, a silver solitude: —  
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time  
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"  
There live in peace, there work in hope once more,  
O nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,  
Hatred and cark and care, what place have they  
In yon blue liberality of heaven?  
How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise

Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be  
Rhodes!

Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant — in their name,  
Believe — o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,  
O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world  
Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"  
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides  
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!  
A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep  
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,  
Quieted out of weakness into strength.  
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense  
Staggered to apprehend: for, disinvolved  
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,  
Slowly a justice centred in a doom  
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,  
Oppression met the oppressor and its match.  
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence  
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low  
Rampart and bulwark lay, as, — timing stroke  
Of hammer, axe, beam hoist and poised and swung, —

The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,  
In dance about the conqueror while he bade  
Music and merriment help enginery  
Batter down, break to pieces all their trust,  
Those citizens once, slaves now. See what walls  
Play substitute for the long double range  
Themistoklean, heralding a guest  
From harbor on to citadel! Each side  
The senseless walls demolished stone by stone,  
See, — outer wall as stonelike, — heads and hearts, —  
Athenai's terror-stricken populace!  
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness, —  
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords —  
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,  
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)  
Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,  
Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout  
O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,  
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite, —  
Rivalities at truce now each with each,  
Stupefied mud-banks, — that's the use they serve!

While the one order which performs exact  
 To promise, functions faithful last as first,  
 What is it but the city's lyric troop,  
 Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?  
 Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care  
 Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,  
 But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!  
 There let it grind to powder! Perikles!  
 The living are the dead now: death be life!  
 Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?  
 Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply  
 Inviolate the structure,—true to type,  
 Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,  
 As Pheidias may inspire thee; slab on slab,  
 Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,  
 Convert to gold yon west extravagance!  
 'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis  
 By vapory grade and grade, gold all the way,  
 Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,

Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through  
That shall be better and more beautiful  
And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!  
Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre  
Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,  
Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!  
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides  
Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.  
Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise —  
Their noble want the unworthy, — as of old,  
(How otherwise should patience crown their might?)  
What if each find his ape promoted man,  
His censor raised for antic service still?  
Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,  
Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,  
Eruxis — I suspect, Euripides,  
No brow will ache because with mop and mow  
He gibes my poet? There's a dog-faced dwarf  
That gets to godship somehow, yet retains  
His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,  
More decent yet indecorous enough:

Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,  
 Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou  
 sigh

Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,  
 Better no sentiency than turbulence ;  
 Death cures the low contention." Be it so !  
 Yet progress means contention, to my mind.

Euthukles, who, except a love that speaks,  
 Art silent by my side while words of mine  
 Provoke that foe from which escape were vain  
 Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall, —  
 Do I amiss, who wanting strength use craft,  
 Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,  
 Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?  
 That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,  
 Roots itself past upwrenching ; but coaxed forth  
 Encouraged out to practise fork and fang, —  
 Possibly, satiate with prompt sustenance,  
 It may pine off far likelier than left swell  
 In peace by our pretension to ignore,

Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp  
Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course.

What hinders that we treat this tragic theme  
As the Three taught when either woke some  
    woe,

—How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride  
Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove  
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,  
We felt our puny hates refine to air,  
Our prides as poor prevent the humbling hand,  
Our petty passion purify its tide.

So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy  
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,  
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!  
Majestic on the stage of memory,  
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall  
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,  
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou,  
What else in life seems piteous any more

After such pity, or proves terrible  
Beside such terror?

Still — since Phrunichos  
Offended, by too premature a touch  
Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed —  
(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy  
Was — fine the poet, not reform thyself!)  
Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse  
Rather the prologue, well a year away,  
Than the main misery, a sunset old.  
What else but fitting prologue to the piece  
Style an adventure, stranger than my first  
By so much as the issue it enwombed  
Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?  
Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,  
That eve I told the earlier to my friends!  
Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth  
Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched  
Could disengage the lip-flower furled to bud  
For fear Admetos, — shivering head and foot,



As with sick soul and blind averted face  
He trusted hand forth to obey his friend,—  
Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,  
Nor see the disenshrouded statue start  
Alkestis, live the life and love the love!  
I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,  
Out-smoothing galingal and watermint  
Its mat-floor? while at brim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,  
What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,  
Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,  
Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms!  
Lenaia was a gladsome month ago,—  
Euripides had taught "Andromédé:"  
Next month, would teach "Kresphontes" — which  
    same month,  
Some one from Phokis, who companioned me  
Since all that happened on those temple-steps,  
Would marry me and turn Athenian too.  
Now! if next year the masters let the slaves  
Do Bacchic service and restore mankind  
That trilogy whereof, 'tis noised, one play

Presents the Bacchai,—no Euripides  
Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged  
By any such grand sunset of his' soul,  
Exiles from dead Athenai,—not the new  
That's in the cloud there with the star above!

Speak to the infinite intelligence,  
Sing to the everlasting sympathy!  
Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine  
Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free!  
Condense our voyage into one great day  
Made up of sunset-closes: eve by eve,  
Resume that memorable night-discourse  
When,—like some meteor-brilliance, fire and filth,  
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity  
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassy,  
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff—  
We made acquaintance with a visitor  
Ominous, apparitional, who went  
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.  
Let us attempt that memorable talk,

Clothe the adventure's every incident  
With due expression: may not looks be told,  
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified  
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ, they  
lose?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace,  
One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house,  
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive!  
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.  
Not *you*, but — Euthukles had entered, grave,  
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch  
And message from the tripod: such it proved.

He first removed the garland from his brow,  
Then took my hand and looked into my face.  
"Speak good words!" much misgiving faltered I.

"Good words, the best, Balaustion! He is crowned,  
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast,

Since Aischulos required companionship.

Pour a libation for Euripides!"

When we had sat the heavier silence out—

"Dead and triumphant still!" began reply

To my eye's question. "As he willed, he worked:

And, as he worked, he wanted not, be sure,

Triumph his whole life through, submitting work

To work's right judges, never to the wrong,

To competency, not ineptitude.

When he had run life's proper race and worked

Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try

Its turning, should strength dare the double course.

Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays

Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed

To lift along the athlete and insure

A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,

The statist's olive as the poet's bay.

Wiselier, he suffered not confuse his sight,

Retard his pace a twofold aim, at once

Poet and statist; though the multitude

Girded him ever 'All thine aim thine art?  
The idle poet only? No regard  
For civic duty, public service, here?  
We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles!  
Not only could he write "Antigoné,"  
But—since, we argued, whoso penned that piece  
Might just as well conduct a squadron,—straight  
Good-naturedly he took on him command,  
Got laughed at and went back to making plays,  
Having allowed us our experiment  
Respecting the fit use of faculty.'  
No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.  
Soon the jeers grew: 'Cold hater of his kind,  
A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth!  
What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store  
Would stock ten cities?' Shadow of an ass!  
No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark,  
And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn  
O' the scorners to that final trilogy  
'Hupsipule,' 'Phoinissai,' and the Match  
Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,

Zethos against Amphion. Ended so?  
Nowise! — began again; for heroes rest  
Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man;  
And he who thus took Contemplation's prize,  
Turned stade-point but to face Activity.  
Out of all shadowy hands extending help  
For life's decline pledged to youth's enterprise,  
Whatever renovation flatter age, —  
Society with pastime, solitude  
With peace, — he chose the hand that gave the heart,  
Bade Macedonian Archelaos take  
The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.  
For fifty politicians' frosty make,  
One poet's ash found ample and to spare,  
He propped the state and filled the treasury:  
Counselled the king as might a meaner soul,  
Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead  
Of crown and sceptre, star his name about  
When these are dust; for him, Euripides  
Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,  
Clashed thence 'Alkaion,' maddened 'Pentheus' up;

Then music sighed itself away, one moan  
Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand ;  
With her and music died Euripides.

“The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,  
Agathon, wrote thus much: the merchant-ship  
Moreover brought a message from the king  
To young Euripides, who went on board  
This morning at Mounuchia: all is true.”

I said, “Thank Zeus for the great news and good!”

“Nay, the report is running in brief fire  
Through the town's stubbly furrow,” he resumed:  
—“Entertains brightly what their favorite styles  
'The City of Gapers' for a week perhaps,  
Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday  
Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month:  
How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,  
Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel  
A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize

Not proper conger-fashion but in oil  
And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish-kind ;  
How all the captains of the triremes, late  
Victors at Arginousai, on return  
Will, for reward, be straightway put to death ;  
How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime  
Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,  
Against Leogoras' blood-mare koppa-marked,  
Valued six talents, —swore, accomplished so,  
The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe,  
A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine ;  
And having lost the match will —dine on herbs !  
Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,  
Out-blazed by just ' Euripides is dead ' !

“ I met the concourse from the Theatre,  
The audience flocking homeward : victory  
Again awarded Aristophanes  
Precisely for his old play chopped and changed  
' The Female Celebrators of the Feast ' —  
That Thesmophoria : tried a second time,



'Never such full success!' — assured the folk,  
Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth  
With 'Euthukles, the bard's own intimate,  
Balaustion's husband, the right man to ask.'

"'Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance know?  
You were the couple constant at his cave:  
Tell us now, is it true that women, moved  
By reason of his liking Krateros' . . .

"I answered, 'He was loved by Sokrates.'

"'Nay,' said another, 'envy did the work!  
For, emulating poets of the place,  
One Arridaios, one Krateues, both  
Established in the royal favor, these' . . .

"'Protagoras instructed him,' said I.

'*Phu*,' whistled Comic Platon, 'hear the fact!  
'Twas well said of your friend by Sophokles,  
'He hate our women? In his verse, belike.

But when it comes to prose-work, — ha, ha, ha!”  
 New climes don't change old manners: so, it  
     chanced,  
 Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night  
 With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,  
 (Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)  
 Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on  
 But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?  
 Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help.'

“I asked: ‘Did not you write, “The Festivals”?’  
 You best know what dog tore him when alive.  
 You others, who now make a ring to hear,  
 Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,  
 Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize  
 Than this, myself assisted at, last year,  
 And gave its worth to, — spitting on the same?  
 Appraise no poetry, — price cuttlefish,  
 Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,  
 Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy  
 Of midnights! I interpret no foul dreams.”

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,  
Balaustion, say. After "Lusistraté"  
No more for me of "people's privilege,"  
No witnessing "the grand old Comedy  
Coeval with our freedom, which, curtailed,  
Were freedom's deathblow: relic of the past,  
When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,  
Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with  
flowers,

Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast  
Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the bone!"  
I was a stranger: "For first joy," urged friends,  
"Go hear our Comedy, some patriot piece  
That plies the selfish advocates of war  
With argument so unevadible  
That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play  
Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit  
Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk!  
No: you hear knave and fool told crime and fault,  
And see each scourged his quantity of stripes.  
'Rough dealing, awkward language,' whine our fops:

The world's too squeamish now to bear plain words  
 Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough :  
 But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,  
 We've still our stage where truth calls spade a spade !  
 Ashamed? Phuromachos' decree provides  
 The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,  
 Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,  
 Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.  
 A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long?  
 Go hear next play !”

I heard “Lusistraté.”

Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,  
 Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught  
 As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece  
 By one appalled at Phaidra's fate,—the chaste,  
 Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained  
 To that same serpent of unchastity  
 She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died distraught  
 Rather than make submission, loose one limb  
 Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue,  
 Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow

—I say, the piece by him who charged this piece  
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,  
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,  
May prove their match by willing to be good)  
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure —  
“Such outrage done the public—Phaidra named!  
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,  
Such insult cast on female character!” —  
Why, when I saw that bestiality —  
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,  
That when, to point the moral at the close,  
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair  
Was “Reconciliation,” stripped her charms,  
That exhibition simply bade us breathe,  
Seemed something healthy and commendable  
After obscenity grotesqued so much  
It slunk away revolted at itself.  
Henceforth I had my answer when our sage  
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave,  
“You fail to fathom here the deep design!  
All's acted in the interest of truth,

Religion, and those manners old and dear  
 Which made our city great when citizens  
 Like Aristeides and Miltiades  
 Wore each a golden tettix in his hair."  
 What do they wear now under — Kleophon?

Well, for such reasons, — I am out of breath,  
 But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past, —  
 I did not go to see, nor then nor now,  
 The "Thesmophoriazousai." But, since males  
 Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand  
 Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,  
 Euthukles had not missed the first display,  
 Original portrait of Euripides  
 By "Virtue laughingly reproving Vice :"  
 "Virtue," — the author, Aristophanes,  
 Who mixed an image out of his own depths,  
 Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time  
 No more pretension to recondite worth!  
 No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue  
 Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance

Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith!  
All now was muck, home-produce, honestman  
The author's soul secreted to a play  
Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought, "How thoroughly death alters things!  
Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great?  
How natural seems grandeur in relief,  
Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm!"

Euthukles interposed — he read my thought —

"O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.  
The crowd's enthusiastic, to a man:  
Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap  
Because of certain sparkles presumed ore,  
At first flash of true lightning overhead,  
They look up, nor resume their search too soon.  
The insect-scattering sign is evident,  
And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,  
Nor bustles any beetle of the brood

With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.  
 Contrariwise, the cry is, 'Honor him!' —  
 'A statue in the theatre!' wants one;  
 Another, 'Bring the poet's body back,  
 Bury him in Peiraios: o'er his tomb  
 Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,  
 The songstress-seiren, meed of melody:  
 Thoukudides invent his epitaph!' —  
 To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus."

Our tribute should not be the same, my friend!  
 Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands!  
 As for the vest outgrown now by the form,  
 Low flesh that clothed high soul, — a vesture's fate —  
 Why, let it fade, mix with the elements  
 There where it, falling, freed Euripides!  
 But for the soul that's tutelary now  
 Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless —  
 How better hail its freedom than by first  
 Singing, we too, its own song back again,  
 Up to that face from which flowed beauty — face



Now abler to see triumph and take love  
Than when it glorified Athenai once?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,  
Secured me — you, ends nowise, to my mind,  
In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain  
To follow cheerful weary Herakles  
Striding away from the huge gratitude,  
Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,  
Bound on the next new labor "height o'er height  
Ever surmounting — destiny's decree!"  
Thither He helps us: that's the story's end;  
He smiling said so, when I told him mine —  
My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.  
Afterward, when the time for parting fell,  
He gave me, with two other precious gifts,  
This third and best, consummating the grace,  
"Herakles," writ by his own hand, each line.

"If it have worth, reward is still to seek.  
Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize

And proved arch-poet : time must show !” he smiled :  
“ Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge me —  
Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody —  
Who? I forget — proves nobody at all !”

Is not that day come? What if you and I  
Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame?  
We have not waited to acquaint ourselves  
With song and subject: we can prologuize  
How, at Eurustheus' bidding, — hate strained hard, —  
Herakles had departed, one time more,  
On his last labor, worst of all the twelve ;  
Descended into Haidēs, thence to drag  
The triple-headed hound, which sun should see  
Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.  
Down went the hero, “back — how should he come?”  
So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy,  
Who in that prolonged absence, plain defeat  
Of the land's loved one, — for he saved the land  
And for that service wedded Megara  
Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule, —

Saw his occasion, seized the tempting prey,  
 The Heracleian House, defenceless left,  
 Father and wife and child, to trample out  
 Trace of its hearth-fire: since extreme old age  
 Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,  
 And the child grows the man and takes revenge.  
 Hence see we that, from out their palace-home  
 Hunted, for last resource they cluster now  
 Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants  
 About their court-yard altar, — Household Zeus, —  
 Delaying death so, till deliverance come —  
 When did it ever? — from the deep and dark.  
 And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's voice. . .  
 Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?

Suddenly, torchlight! knocking at the door,  
 Loud, quick, "Admittance for the revel's lord!"  
 Some unintelligible Komos-cry —  
*Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,*  
*Dionusos, Eacchos, Phales, Iacchos,*  
*In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel,*

*Where it buries in the spread of the bushy mirtle-bed!*  
(Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that!)  
Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,  
Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,  
And ever "Open, open, Bacchos bids!"

But at last — one authoritative word!  
One name of an immense significance:  
For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.

There trooped the Chorōs of the Comedy  
Crowned and triumphant; first, those flushed Fifteen,  
Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.  
Then marched the Three, — who played Mnesilochos,  
Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,  
Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content  
That morning in Athenai. Masks were down  
And robes doffed now; the sole disguise was drink.  
Mixing with these — I know not what gay crowd,  
Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent  
Among them, — doubtless draped with such reserve

As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine  
(Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)  
Which women pay who in the streets walk bare, —  
Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance!  
Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,  
— All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith,  
The Conservation of True Poesy —  
Could I but penetrate the deep design!  
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as "Phaps,"  
Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band  
Who came in front now, as the first fell back;  
And foremost — the authoritative voice,  
The revel-leader, he who gained the prize,  
And got the glory of the Archon's feast —  
There stood in person Aristophanes.  
And no ignoble presence! On the bulge  
Of the clear baldness, — all his head one brow, —  
True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there surged  
A red from cheek to temple, — then retired  
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame, —  
Was never nursed by temperance or health.

But huge the eyeballs rolled black native fire,  
Imperiously triumphant: nostrils wide  
Waited their incense; while the pursed mouth's pout  
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,  
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back,  
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,  
These made a glory, of such insolence —  
I thought, — such domineering deity  
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine  
For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path  
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.  
Impudent and majestic: drunk, perhaps,  
But that's religion; sense too plainly snuffed:  
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most, proved most true.  
There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning  
At ease of undisputed mastery  
Over the body's brood, those appetites.  
Oh, but he grasped them grandly, as the god  
His either struggling handful, — hurtless snakes

Held deep down, strained hard off from side and side!  
Mastery his, theirs simply servitude,  
So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.  
Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed?  
At mandate of one muscle, order reigned.  
They had been wreathing much familiar now  
About him on his entry; but a squeeze  
Choked down the pests to place: their lord stood free.

Forward he stepped, I rose and fronted him.  
"Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides!"  
(So he began) "Hail, each inhabitant!  
You, lady? What, the Rhodian? Form and face,  
Victory's self upsoaring to receive  
The poet? Right they named you . . . some rich  
name,  
Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants,  
Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched  
By the Isle's unguent: some diminished end  
In *ion*, Kallistion? delicater still,  
Kubelion or Melittion, — or, suppose,

(Less vulgar love than bee or violet)  
 Phibalion, for the mouth split red-fig-wise,  
 Korakinidion, for the coal-black hair,  
 Nettarion, Phabion, for the darlingness?  
 But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,  
 We near the balsam-bloom — Balaustion! Thanks,  
 Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you know?  
 Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,  
 As Pindaros sings somewhere prettily,  
 Here blooms his offspring; earth-flesh with sun-fire,  
 Rhodes' blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, boy!  
 Why does the boy hang back and baulk and ode  
 Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,  
 Sunshine frays torchlight. Witness whom you scare,  
 Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!  
*Pho*, you have quenched my Komos by first frown,  
 Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs  
 From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?  
 You've eaten cuckoo-apple? Dumb, you dogs?  
 So much good Thasian wasted on your throats  
 And out of them not one *Threttanelo*?



*Neblaretai!* Because this earth-and-sun  
Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?  
Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most  
Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!  
You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps,  
Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,  
Who late, supremely unabashable,  
Propped up my play at that important point  
When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?  
Ha, ha, — thank Hermes for the lucky throw, —  
We came last comedy of the whole seven,  
So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed  
For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,  
We two between us! What, you fail your friend?  
Away then, free me of your cowardice!  
Go, get you the goat's breakfast! Fare afield,  
Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,  
Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,  
So you but rid me of such company!  
Once left alone, I can protect myself  
From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled

On much disapprobation and mistake!  
 She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside!  
 Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well  
 As Phoibos' bay.

"They take me at my word!  
 One comfort is, I shall not want them long,  
 The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, 'Curtail expense!'  
 The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth!  
 Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,  
 Save birds' wings, beetles' armor, spend the cash  
 In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,  
 Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,  
 And what not: any cost but Comedy's!  
 'No Choros'—soon will follow; what care I?  
 Archinos and Agurrhios, scrape your flint,  
 Flay your dead dog, and curry favor so!  
 Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,  
 We lose the boy's vote, lose the song and dance,  
 Lose my Elaphion! Still, the actor stays.  
 Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard

Kudathenaian and Pandionid,  
Son of Philippos, Aristophanes  
Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,  
Though stunted to mere sober prosy verse —  
'Manners and men,' so squeamish gets the world!  
No more 'step forward, strip for anapæsts!'  
No calling naughty people by their names,  
No tickling audience into gratitude  
With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,  
No setting Salabaccho" . . .

As I turned —

"True, lady, I am tolerably drunk:  
The proper inspiration! Otherwise,—  
Phrunichos, Choirilos!—had Aischulos  
So foiled you at the goat-song? Drink's a god.  
How else did that old doating driveller  
Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece  
The 'Clouds'? I swallowed cloud-distilment—dew  
Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow

And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest ;  
While he worked at his 'Willow-wicker-flask,'  
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,  
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,  
Somehow result was — what it should not be  
Next time, I promised him and kept my word !  
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I'll be bound,  
Mendesian, merely : triumph-night, you know,  
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,  
And, since war worsens all things, stingily  
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,  
Choros and actors and their lord and king  
The poet ; supper, still he needs must spread —  
And this time all was conscientious fare :  
He knew his man, his match, his master — made  
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor  
wine :  
So merriment increased, I promise you,  
Till — something happened."

Here he strangely paused.

“ After that, — well, it either was the cup  
To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,  
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed,—  
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose  
Of new libation? Did you only know  
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk.”

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,  
Watch, in the water! But a second since,  
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea,  
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.  
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,  
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the cause?  
Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud  
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport!  
Just so, some overshadow, some new care  
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face,  
And left there only such a dark surmise  
— No wonder if the revel disappeared,  
So did his face shed silence every side!  
I recognized a new man fronting me.

“So!” he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,  
“You see myself? Balaustion’s fixed regard  
Can strip the proper Aristophanes  
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style  
His accidents? My soul sped forth but now  
To meet your hostile survey,—soul unseen,  
Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence  
With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,  
Just as my visible body paced the street,  
Environed by a boon companionship  
Your apparition also puts to flight.  
Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,  
I front my foe—no comicality  
Round soul, and body-guard in banishment?  
Thank your eyes’ searching, undisguised I stand:  
The merest female child may question me.  
Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion!”

I did speak:

“Bold speech be—welcome to this honored hearth,  
Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow

O' the humorist who castigates his kind,  
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays  
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,  
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile  
After a moment's laying black earth bare.  
Splendor of wit that springs a thunderball —  
Satire — to burn and purify the world,  
True aim, fair purpose : just wit justly strikes  
Injustice,— right, as rightly quells the wrong,  
Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armory  
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,  
No damage else, sagacious of true ore ;  
Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath  
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton,—  
Though alien gauds be singed,— undesecrate,  
The genuine solace of the sacred brow.  
Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star  
Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,  
To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,  
Athenai from the rock she steers for straight !  
O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,

No matter for the murk that was, — perchance,  
That will be, — certes, never should have been  
Such orb's associate !

“Aristophanes !

‘The merest female child may question you?’

Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave  
Appalled our coast : for many a darkened day,  
Intolerable mystery and fear.

Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied peak,  
Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb, —  
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,  
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.

‘’Tis Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,’  
Declared the priests, ‘no way appeasable  
Unless perchance by virgin-sacrifice !’

Thus grew the terror and o’erhung the doom—  
Until one eve a certain female-child  
Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,  
And there sate down and sang to please herself.  
When all at once, large-looming from his wave,



Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,  
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,  
Divine with yearning after fellowship.  
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw ;  
So much she sees now, and does reverence !”

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin !  
Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.  
No very godlike trace retained the mouth  
Which mocked with —

“ So, He taught you tragedy !  
I always asked, ‘ Why may not women act ? ’  
Nay, wear the comic visor just as well ;  
Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise  
And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,  
Real women playing women as men — men !  
I shall not wonder if things come to that,  
Some day when I am distant far enough.  
Do you conceive the quite new Comedy  
When laws allow ? laws only let girls dance,  
Pipe, posture, — above all, Elaphionize,

Provided they keep decent — that is, dumb.  
 Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,  
 Had I but two lives : one were overworked !  
 How penetrate incrusted prejudice,  
 Pierce ignorance three generations thick  
 Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary ?  
 He battered with a big Megaric stone ;  
 Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence  
 This club I wield now, having spent my life  
 In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine ;  
 Somebody else must try mere polished steel !”

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,  
 “Meanwhile,” said I, “since planed and studded club  
 Once more has pashed competitors to dust,  
 And poet proves triumphant with that play,  
 Euthukles found last year unfortunate, —  
 Does triumph spring from smoothness still more  
     smoothed,  
 Fresh studs sown thick and threefold ? In plain words,  
 Have you exchanged brute-blows, which teach the brute

Man may surpass him in brutality,  
For human fighting, or true god-like force  
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all?  
Have you essayed attacking ignorance,  
Convicting folly, by their opposites,  
Knowledge and wisdom? not by yours for ours,  
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old,  
Greater for less, your crime for our mistake!  
If so success at last have crowned desert,  
Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern  
At late discovery — such wild waste of strength  
(And what strength!) went so long to keep in  
vogue  
Such warfare (and what warfare!) shamed away,  
Made obsolete forever, as foe fell  
By the first arrow native to the orb,  
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes) —  
Was this conviction's entry that same strange  
'Something that happened' to confound your feast?"

"Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,

First 'Thesmophoriazousai?' Well and good!  
 But did he also see,—your Euthukles,—  
 My 'Grasshoppers' which followed and failed too,  
 Three months since, at the 'Little-in-the-Fields'?"

"To say that he did see that First—should say  
 He never cared to see its following."

"There happens to be reason why I wrote  
 First play and second also. Ask the cause!  
 Fit answer, authorizing either act,  
 I warrant you receive ere talk be done.  
 But here's the point: as Euthukles made vow  
 Never again to taste my quality,  
 So I was minded next experiment  
 Should tickle palate—yea, of Euthukles!  
 Not by such utter change, such absolute  
 A topsyturvy of stage-habitude  
 As you and he want,—Comedy built fresh,  
 By novel brick and mortar, base to roof,—  
 No, for I stand too near and look too close!

Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,  
Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!  
Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!  
Not overtasks, though: give fit strength fair play,  
And strength's a demiourgos!

“ Art renewed?

Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out — first  
The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer:  
‘ More of the old provision, none supplies  
So bounteously as thou, — our love, our pride,  
Our author of the many a perfect piece!  
Stick to that standard, change were decadence!’  
Next, the unfriendly: ‘ This time, strain will tire,  
He's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist!’  
— Or better, in some Salaminian cave  
Where sky and sea and solitude make earth  
And man and noise one insignificance,  
Let strength propose itself, — behind the world, —  
Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies  
Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost!  
After which, — clap-to closet and quit cave, —

Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,  
 And yet esteem the silken company  
 So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,  
 For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve:  
 May lead the still life, ply the wordless task:  
 Then only, when seems need to move or speak,  
 Moving—for due respect, since statesmen pass,  
 (Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin!)  
 Speaking—when fashion shows intelligence,  
 (Strength, in the cave, had whistled to the gulls!)  
 Despise the world and reverence yourself,—  
 Why, you may unmake things and remake things,  
 And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,  
 What's made or marred: 'you teach men, are not  
     taught!'

So marches off the stage Euripides!

“No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine,  
 No such faint fume the Aristophanic soul,  
 No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,  
 Suits either like our Iostephanos

Worth making happy what coarse way she will —  
The happy-maker, when the cries increase  
About the favorite! 'Aristophanes!  
More grist to mill, here's Kleophon to grind!  
He's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede  
Even Dekeleia! Here's Kleonumos  
Declaring — if he threw away his shield,  
He'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside!  
Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights:  
He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling.  
Here's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,  
The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist!  
So, bustle! Pounce on opportunity!  
Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,  
Find food for folk agape at either end,  
Mad for amusement! Times grow better too,  
And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.  
In no case, venture boy-experiments!  
Old wine's the wine: new poetry drinks raw:  
Two plays a season is your pledge, beside;  
So, give us 'Wasps' again, grown hornets now!"

Then he changed.

“Do you so detect in me —  
Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curved cheek, carved lip,  
Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye —  
What suits the — stigma, I say, — style say you,  
Of ‘Wine-lees-poet?’ Bravest of buffoons,  
Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene  
Than Murtilos, Hermippos: quite a match  
In elegance for Eupolis himself,  
Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?  
Graced with traditional immunity  
Ever since, much about my grandsire’s time,  
Some funny village-man in Megara,  
Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,  
As due religious drinking-bouts came round,  
To daub his phiz, — no, that was afterward, —  
He merely mounted cart with mates of choice  
And traversed country, taking house by house,  
At night, — because of danger in the freak, —  
Then holloaed, ‘Skin-flint starves his laborers !



Clinch-fist stows figs away, cheats government!  
Such an one likes to kiss his neighbor's wife,  
And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!  
Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale,  
Dancing and verse, and there's our Comedy,  
There's Mullos, there's Euetes, there's the stock  
I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!  
Protected? Punished quite as certainly  
When Archons pleased to lay down each his law, —  
Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort, —  
Each season, 'No more naming citizens,  
Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!  
Observe, henceforth no Areopagite  
Demean his rank by writing Comedy!'   
(They one and all could write the 'Clouds' of course)  
'Needs must we nick expenditure, allow  
Comedy half a choros, supper — none,  
Times being hard, while applicants increase  
For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy.'  
Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof  
Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,

Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank  
Concession to mere mortal levity,  
Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world!  
Your proud Euripides from first to last  
Doled out some five such, never deigned us more!  
And these — what curds and whey for marrowy wine!  
That same Alkestis you so rave about  
Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,  
The prig! — why trifle time with toys and skits  
When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise  
With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,  
Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, 'Life's not Life,'  
'The tongue swore, but unsworn the mind remains,'  
And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree-fruit  
Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,  
He lay, let Comics laugh — for privilege!  
Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off,  
But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,  
Buffet by blow: plenty of proverb-pokes  
At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs!  
No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,

No protest against infamous abuse,  
 Malignant censure, — nought to prove I scourged  
 With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!  
 If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,  
 The aggriever must be — Aischulos perhaps:  
 Or Sophokles he'd take exception to.  
 — Do you detect in me — in me, I ask,  
 The man like to accept this measurement  
 Of faculty, contentedly sit classed  
 Mere Comic Poet — since I wrote 'The Birds'?"

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise.

"Thanks!" he resumed, so quick to construe smile  
 "I answered — in my mind — these gapers thus:  
 Since old wine's ripe and new verse raw, you judge —  
 What if I vary vintage-mode and mix  
 Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,  
 Fining, refining, gently, surely, till  
 The educated taste turn unawares  
 From customary dregs to draught divine?"

Then answered — with my lips: More 'Wasps' you  
want?

Come next year and I give you 'Grasshoppers'!  
And 'Grasshoppers' I gave them, — last month's play.  
They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,  
No longer Triphales but Trilophos,  
(Whom I call Darling-of-the-Summertime,  
Born to be nothing else but beautiful  
And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)  
Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,  
That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch  
Above the ant-and-emmet populace)  
To summon all who meadow, hill and dale  
Inhabit, bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly,  
To band themselves against red nipper-nose  
Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess —  
Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,  
Because her sons are grown effeminate  
To that degree — so morbifies their flesh  
The poison-drama of Euripides,  
Morals and music — there's no antidote

Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,  
And brings us back perchance the blessed time  
When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty  
Firm in primæval virtue, antique faith,  
Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire sage,  
Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,  
Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon,  
But just employed their brains on '*Ruppapai*,  
Row, boys, munch barley-bread, and take your ease —  
Mindful, however, of the tier beneath !'  
Ah, golden epoch ! while the nobler sort  
(Such needs must study, no contesting that !)  
Wore no long curls, but used to crop their hair,  
Gathered the tunic well about the ham,  
Remembering 'twas soft sand they used for seat  
At school-time, while — mark this — the lesson long,  
No learner ever dared to cross his legs !  
Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough  
And sing for supper — 'twas some grave romaunt  
*How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,*  
*Jumped into hedge, by mortals quickset called,*

*And there anticipating Oidipous,*  
*Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.*  
None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,  
To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle-trash,  
Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete !  
Next, my Antistrophé was — praise of Peace :  
Ah, could our people know what Peace implies !  
Home to the farm and furrow ! Grub one's vine,  
Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,  
When wife's busy bathing ! Eat and drink,  
And drink and eat, what else is good in life ?  
Slice hare, toss pancake, gayly gurgle down  
The Thasian grape in celebration due  
Of Bacchos ! Welcome, dear domestic rite,  
When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,  
Pour peasoup as we chant delectably  
*In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels !*  
Enough, you comprehend, — I do at least !  
Then, — be but patient, — the Parabasis !  
Pray ! For in that I also pushed reform.  
None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag,

Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much!  
No! If some merest word in Art's defence  
Justice demanded of me, — never fear!  
Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.  
A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know)  
What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?  
'I have flown far,' chirped he, 'North, East, South,  
West,  
And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig  
If matched with Bald-head here, Aigina's boast,  
Who in this play bids rivalry despair  
Past, present and to come, so marvellous  
His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!  
Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak  
Of dinner every day at public cost  
I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves,  
My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!  
No more! no sort of sin against good taste!  
Then, satire, — Oh, a plain necessity!  
But I won't tell you: for — could I dispense  
With one more gird at old Ariphrades?

How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh —  
Ever finds out some novel infamy  
Unutterable, inconceivable,  
Which all the greater need was to describe  
Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . .  
Now, what's your gesture caused by? What you loathe,  
Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains  
To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!  
My audience justified you! Housebreakers!  
This pattern-purity was played and failed  
Last Rural Dionusia — failed! for why?  
Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.  
He had been mindful to engage the Four —  
Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family —  
Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops,  
Choros gigantically poked his fun,  
The boy's frank laugh relaxed the seniors' brow,  
The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,  
Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose  
Of wisdom for the future. Purity?  
No more of that next month, Athenai mine!



Contrive new cut of robe who will, — I patch  
The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!  
The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up  
With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you!

“Yes, I took up the play that failed last year,  
And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in, —  
No Parachoregema, — men to match  
My women there already; and when these  
(I had a hit at Aristullos here,  
His plan how womankind should rule the roast)  
Drove men to plough — ‘A-field, ye cribbed of cape!’  
Men showed themselves exempt from service straight  
Stupendously, till all the boys cried, ‘Brave!’  
Then for the elders, I bethought me too,  
Improved upon Mnesilochos’ release  
From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:  
I made his son-in-law Euripides  
Engage to put both shrewish wives away,  
‘Gravity,’ one, the other, ‘Sophist-lore,’  
And mate with the Bald Bard’s hetairai twain —

'Goodhumor' and 'Indulgence:' on they tripped,  
 Murrhiné, Akalanthis, — 'beautiful  
 Their whole belongings' — crowd joined choros there!  
 And while the Toxotes wound up his part  
 By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,  
 The woman-choros celebrated New  
 Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite.  
 Brief, I was chairéd and caressed and crowned,  
 And the whole theatre broke out a-roar,  
 Echoed my admonition — choros-cap —  
*Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces!*  
*Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,*  
*Since here by my side they have chosen their places!*  
 And so we all flocked merrily to feast, —  
 I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes  
 And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,  
 At the Priest's supper; and hilarity  
 Grew none the less that, early in the piece,  
 Ran a report, from row to row close-packed,  
 Of messenger's arrival at the Port  
 With weighty tidings, 'Of Lūsandros' flight,'

Opined one ; ' That Euboia penitent  
Sends the Confederation fifty ships,'  
Preferred another ; while ' The Great King's Eye  
Has brought a present for Elaphion here,  
That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes !'  
Such was the supposition of a third.  
' No matter what the news,' friend Strattis laughed,  
' It won't be worse for waiting : while each click  
Of the klepsudra sets a-shaking grave  
Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled  
By this time : dished in Sphettian vinegar,  
Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce !  
So, swift to supper, Poet ! No mistake,  
This play ; nor, like the unflavored ' Grasshoppers,'  
Salt without thyme !' Right merrily we supped,  
Till — something happened.

“ Out it shall, at last !

“ Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned  
To the Triumphant ! ' Kleonclapper erst,  
Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides

Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké  
 For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,  
 Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak  
 Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon!  
 Ha ha, he he!' When suddenly a knock—  
 Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

“‘*Babaiax!* Sokrates a-passing by,  
 A-peering in, for Aristullos' sake,  
 To put a question touching Comic Law?’

“No! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,  
 Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as mute,  
 (Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak!)  
 Gray brow still bent on ground, upraised at length  
 When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision paused.

“‘Priest!’—the deep tone succeeded the fixed gaze—  
 ‘Thou carest that thy god have spectacle  
 Decent and seemly; wherefore, I announce  
 That, since Euripides is dead to-day,

My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month,  
Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded !'

"Then the gray brow sank low, and Sophokles  
Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed  
'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly  
With certain gods who convoy age to port ;  
And night resumed him.

"When our stupor broke,  
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

"'Dead — so one speaks now of Euripides !'  
'Ungarlanded his Choros, did he say ?  
I guess the reason: in extreme old age  
No doubt such have the gods for visitants.  
Why did he dedicate to Herakles  
An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,  
Told him in dream who took the crown of gold ?  
He who restored Akropolis the theft,  
Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge  
At thought of certain other crowns he filched

From — who now visits Herakles the Judge.  
Instance “Medeia!” that play yielded palm  
To Sophokles ; and he again — to whom?  
Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!  
Ungarlanded, just means — economy!  
Suppress robes, chaplets, every thing suppress  
Except the poet’s present! An old tale  
Put capitally by Trugaios — eh?  
‘News from the world of transformation strange!  
How Sophokles is grown Simonides,  
And, — aged, rotten, — all the same, for greed  
Would venture on a hurdle out to sea!’  
So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos  
Retorts, ‘Mistake! Instead of stinginess —  
The fact is, in extreme decrepitude,  
He has discarded poet and turned priest,  
Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited  
In his own house too by Asklepios’ self,  
So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate  
Lies fallow ; Iophon’s the manager, —  
Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,

Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink  
 After your dozen-dozen prodigies!  
 Looking so old — Euripides seems young,  
 Born ten years later.'

“‘Just his tricky style!  
 Since, stealing first away, he wins first word  
 Out of good-natured rival Sophoklēs,  
 Procures himself no bad panegyric.  
 Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed  
 To pay survivor's-tribute, — harder squeezed  
 From anybody beaten first to last,  
 Than one who, steadily a conqueror,  
 Finds that his magnanimity is tasked  
 To merely make pretence and — beat itself!’

“So chirped the feasters though suppressedly.

“But I — what else do you suppose? — had pierced  
 Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes' mock-  
 praise,

And reached conviction hearted under all.  
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account  
And cut off, left unalterably clear  
The summed-up value of Euripides.

“Well, it might be the Thasian! Certainly  
There sang suggestive music in my ears;  
And, through — what sophists style — the wall of sense  
My eyes pierced: death seemed life and life seemed  
    death,  
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,  
Conceived was just a moon-struck mood. Quite plain  
There re-insisted, — ay, each prim stiff phrase  
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,  
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,  
Should life prove half true life's term — death, the rest.  
As for the other question, late so large  
Now all at once so little, — he or I,  
Which better comprehended playwright craft, —  
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.  
As clear recurred our last word-interchange



Two years since, when I tried with 'Ploutos.' 'Vain !'  
Saluted me the cold grave-bearded age —  
'Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes !  
None baulks the genius with impunity !  
You know what kind's the nobler, what makes grave  
Or what makes grin ; there's yet a nobler still,  
Possibly, — what makes wise, not grave, — and glad,  
Not grinning : whereby laughter joins with tears,  
Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,  
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth —  
Nay, greatest ! Never needs the Art stand still,  
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you,  
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside  
Undoes the march : defection checks advance  
Too late adventured ! See the "Ploutos" here !  
This step decides your foot from old to new —  
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest,  
Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,  
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,  
Make veritable men think, say and do.  
Here's the conception : which to execute,

Where's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was breath  
O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool —  
Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame :  
How should the night receive her due of fire  
Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and Birds,  
Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content!  
The new adventure for the novel man  
Born to that next success myself foresee  
In right of where I reach before I rest.  
At end of a long course, straight all the way,  
Well may there tremble somewhat into ken  
The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze!  
None may live two lives: I have lived mine through,  
Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.  
I leave my life's work. *I* compete with you,  
My last with your last, my "Antiope" —  
"Phoinissai" — with this "Ploutos?" No, I think!  
Ever shall "great and awful Victory  
Accompany my life" — in Maketis  
If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend!  
Friend, — for from no consummate excellence

Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,  
 Do I profess estrangement: murk the marsh,  
 Yet where a solitary marble block  
 Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch!  
 You show — what splinters of Pentelikos,  
 Islanded by what ordure! Eagles fly,  
 Rest on the right place, thence depart as free;  
 But ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire  
 Untainted! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.'

"Balaustion! Here are very many words,  
 All to portray one moment's rush of thought, —  
 And much they do it! Still, you understand.  
 The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum  
 And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,  
 So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned  
 The parting cup, — 'To the Good Genius, then!'

"Up starts young Strattis for a final flash:  
 'Ay, the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,  
 She who evolves superiority,

Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsuccess  
And all that's incomplete in human life ;  
Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,  
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed —  
Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank —  
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit  
To soul and body, 're-instate them Man :  
Beside which perfect man, how clear we see  
Divergency from type was earth's effect !  
Escaping whence by laughter, — Fancy's feat, —  
We right man's wrong, establish true for false, —  
Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,  
Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence —  
Above unseemliness, reach decent law, —  
By laughter : attestation of the Muse  
That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed  
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,  
Or, if here, — why, still high-and-fair exists  
In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul  
Lift by the Muse. Hail then her ministrant !  
Hail who accepted no deformity

In man as normal and remediless,  
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme  
That outraged we protest by eye's recoil  
The opposite proves somewhere rule and law!  
Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos,  
'Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war!'  
Philokleon — 'better bear a wrong than plead,  
Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth  
Of dikast with the due three-obol fee!'  
The Paphlagonian — 'stick to the old sway  
Of few and wise, not rabble-government!'  
Trugaios, Pisthetairōs, Strepsiades, —  
Why multiply examples? Hail, in fine,  
The hero of each painted monster — so  
Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape!  
Pour out! A laugh to Aristophanes!'

"Stay, my fine Strattis" — and I stopped applause —  
"To the Good Genius — but the Tragic Muse!  
She who instructs her poet 'Bid man's soul  
Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods'

Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,  
Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed  
When will's last effort breaks in impotence!  
No power forego, elude: no weakness, — plied  
Fairly by power and will, — renounce, deny!  
Acknowledge, in such miscalled weakness, strength  
Latent: and substitute thus things for words!  
Make man run life's race fairly, — legs and feet,  
Craving no false wings to o'erfly its length!  
Trust on, trust ever, trust to end — in truth!  
By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,  
Shame back all false display of either force —  
Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow,  
That cowardice shall shirk contending, — cant,  
Pretension, shrivel at truth's first approach!  
Pour to the Tragic Muse's ministrant  
Who, as he pictured pure Hippolutos,  
Abolished our earth's blot Aripgrades;  
Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,  
Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible;  
Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more,

Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!  
A tear — no woman's tribute, weak exchange  
For action, water spent and heart's-blood saved —  
No man's regret for greatness gone, ungraced  
Perchance by even that poor meed, man's praise —  
But some god's superabundance of desire,  
Yearning of will to 'scape necessity, —  
Love's overbrimming for self-sacrifice,  
Whence good might be, which never else may be,  
By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere, —  
Effort expressible one only way —  
Such tear from me fall to Euripides!'

"The Thasian! — All, the Thasian, I account!

"Whereupon outburst the whole company  
Into applause and — laughter, would you think?

"The unrivalled one! How, never at a loss,  
He turns the Tragic on its Comic side  
Else imperceptible! Here's death itself —

Death of a rival, of an enemy, —  
Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch  
Made it acknowledge Aristophanes!  
Lo, that Euripidean laurel-tree  
Struck to the heart by lightning! Sokrates  
Would question us, with buzz of "how" and "why,"  
Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,  
Till we all wished him quiet with his friend;  
Agathon would compose an elegy,  
Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,  
And, stones responsive, we might wince, 'tis like;  
Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,  
Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake  
While we confess to a remorseful twinge: —  
Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,  
Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand,  
Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,  
Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,  
For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face!  
Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top,  
And we recover the true mood, and laugh!'



"I felt as when some Nikias, — ninny-like  
 Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse, —  
 At fault a little, sees no choice but sound  
 Retreat from foeman; and his troops mistake  
 The signal, and hail onset in the blast,  
 And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,  
 Back the old courage brings the scattered wits;  
 He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms  
 The happy error, blows the charge amain.  
 So I repaired things.

"Both be praised' thanked I.

'You who have laughed with Aristophanes,  
 You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears!  
 Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,  
 Tragic and Comic function of the god,  
 Help with libation to the blended twain!  
 Either of which who serving, only serves —  
 Proclaims himself disqualified to pour  
 To that Good Genius — complex Poetry,  
 Uniting each god-grace, including both:  
 Which, operant for body as for soul,

Masters alike the laughter and the tears,  
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.  
Who dares disjoin these, — whether he ignores  
Body or soul, whichever half destroys, —  
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates  
Again the inexpiable crime we curse —  
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape  
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence  
Of august head and enthroned intellect,  
With homelier symbol of asserted sense, —  
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.  
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,  
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,  
Mutilate nature — what avails the Head  
Left solitarily predominant, —  
Unbodied soul, — not Hermes, both in one?  
I, no more than our City, acquiesce  
In such a desecration, but defend  
Man's double nature — ay, wert thou its foe!  
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides,  
Encounter thee, in nought would I abate

My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack  
On thee whose life-work preached "Raise soul, sink  
sense!

Evirate Hermes!" — would avenge the god,  
And justify myself. Once face to face,  
Thou, the argute and tricky, shouldst not wrap,  
As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn  
Those breast-beats quickened at the sting of truth;  
Nor turn from me, as, if the tale be true,  
From Lais when she met thee in thy walks,  
Demanded why she had no rights as thou.  
Not so shouldst thou betake thee, be assured,  
To book and pencil, deign me no reply!  
I would extract an answer from those lips  
So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance!  
Gone from the world! Does none remain to take  
Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill?  
No sun makes proof of his whole potency  
For gold and purple in that orb we view;  
The apparent orb does little but leave blind  
The audacious, and confuse the worshipping.

But, close on orb's departure, must succeed  
The serviceable cloud, — must intervene,  
Induce expenditure of rose and blue,  
Reveal what lay in him, was lost to us.  
So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,  
If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,  
We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,  
The Rhodian rosy with Euripides?  
Not of my audience on my triumph-day,  
She and her husband! After the night's news  
Neither will sleep, but watch; I know the mood.  
Accompany! my crown declares my right!

“And here you stand with those warm golden eyes!

“In honest language, I am scarce too sure  
Whether I really felt, indeed expressed  
Then, in that presence, things I now repeat:  
Nor half, nor any one word, — will that do?  
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn  
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base —

The live rock latent under wave and foam :  
Superimposure these! Yet solid stuff  
Will ever and anon, obeying star,  
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye?)  
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame,  
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

“Anyhow, I have followed happily  
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,  
Since, come to see you, I am shown — myself!”

I answered :

“One of us declared for both  
‘Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.’  
The other adds, ‘and,—if that glory last,  
Nor marsh-born vapor creep to veil the same,—  
Once entered, share in our solemnity!  
Commemorate, as we, Euripides!’”

“What?” he looked round, “I darken the bright  
house?”

Profane the temple of your deity?  
 That's true! Else wherefore does he stand portrayed?  
 What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,  
 Beard, freckled face, brow — all but breath, I hope!  
 Come, that's unfair: myself am somebody,  
 Yet my pictorial fame's just potter's work, —  
 I barely figure on men's drinking-mugs!  
 I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,  
 Oft make a pair. But what's this lies below?  
 His table-book and graver, playwright's tool!  
 And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,  
 Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-é-és*  
 And *ke-é-é-é-és* and turns and trills,  
 Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight!  
 Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood  
 Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings!  
 With . . . what, and did he leave you 'Herakles'?  
 The 'Frenzied Hero,' one unfractured sheet,  
 No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous wax —  
 Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen!  
 This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere

Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch,—  
No wonder! This might crown 'Antiope.'  
'Herakles' triumph? In your heart perhaps!  
But elsewhere? Come now, I'll explain the case,  
Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet!"

I interrupted:

"Aristophanes!

The stranger-woman sues in her abode —  
'Be honored as our guest!' But, call it — shrine,  
Then 'No dishonor to the Daimon!' bids  
The priestess 'or expect dishonor's due!'  
You enter fresh from your worst infamy,  
Last instance of long outrage; yet I pause,  
Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip,  
Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence, —  
So you but suffer that I see the blaze  
And not the bolt, — the splendid fancy-fling,  
Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie  
Whence heavenly fire has withered; impotent,  
Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look

Of yon impassive presence! What he scorned,  
His life long, need I touch, offending foot,  
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie  
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came?  
I marvel, I deplore,—the rest be mute!  
But, throw off hate's celestialty,—  
Show me, apart from song-flash and wit-flame,  
A mere man's hand ignobly clinched against  
Yon supreme calmness,—and I interpose,  
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's blow!"

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,  
Aught I had spoken, save the final phrase:  
Arrested there.

“Euripides grown calm!

Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,”  
He muttered: then more audibly began—

“Dead! Such must die! Could people comprehend!  
There's the unfairness of it! So obtuse



Are all: from Solon downward with his saw  
'Let none revile the dead,—no, though the son,  
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!'—  
To him who made Elektra, in the act  
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,  
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults  
Too much the very villain life-released.  
Now, *I* say, only after death, begins  
That formidable claim,—immunity  
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!  
The living, who defame me,—why, they live:  
Fools,—I best prove them foolish by their life,  
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,  
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!  
Then—where's the vital force, mine froze beside?  
The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?  
The school-correctness, sure of wise award  
When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?  
Where's censure that must sink me, judgment big  
Awaiting just the word posterity  
Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries—  
*whom,*

Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence?  
 But die, ere next Lenaia, — safely so  
 You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,  
 Stupidity and malice, to that hole  
 O'er which survivors croak 'Respect the dead!'

Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch  
 Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,  
 (Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)  
 And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,  
 Whose cant was, certain years ago, my "Clouds"  
 Might last until the swallows came with Spring —  
 Whose chatter, "Birds" are unintelligible,  
 Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?  
 List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!  
*O man of Mitulené, wondrous wise!*  
 — Would not I rub each face in its own filth  
 To tune of 'Now that years have come and gone,  
 How does the fact stand? What's demonstrable  
 By time, that tries things? — your own test, not mine  
 Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,  
 Though somehow fools confute fools, — as these, you!

Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes  
You cornered and called "audience!" face this *me*  
Who know, and can, and — helped by fifty years —  
Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!

"Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood,  
Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe  
Would hide head safe when hand had flung its stone,  
I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,  
But flogged while skin could purple and flesh start,  
To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with.  
First face a-splutter at me got such splotch  
Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw,  
Made its concern thenceforward not so much  
To criticise me as go cleanse itself.  
The only drawback to which huge delight, —  
(He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold  
Sagacity you call Euripides!)  
— Why, 'tis that, make a muckheap of a man,  
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,  
Immortally immerded. Not so he!

Men pelted him but got no pellet back.  
 He reasoned, I'll engage, — 'Acquaint the world  
 Certain minuteness butted at my knee?  
 Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist, —  
 What better would the manikin desire  
 Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable  
 As who so far up fouled me in the flank?'  
 So dealt he with the dwarfs: we giants, too,  
 Why must we emulate their pin-point play?  
 Render imperishable — impotence,  
 For mud throw mountains? Zeus, by mud unreached, —  
 Well, 'twas no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at!"

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

"And why must men remember, ages hence,  
 Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too —  
 Strattis might steal from! mixture-monument,  
 Recording what? 'I, Aristophanes,  
 Who boast me much inventive in my art,  
 Against Euripides thus volleyed muck

Because, in art, he too extended bounds.  
I — patriot, loving peace and hating war, —  
Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,  
Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves  
However multiplied their mastery, —  
Despising most of all the demagogue,  
(Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along  
By kindred breath of knave and fool below,  
Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face  
Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,  
Vacuity, just bellied out to break  
And righteously bespatter friends the first)  
Loathing, — beyond a less puissant speech  
Than my own god-grand language to declare, —  
The fawning, cozenage and calumny  
Wherewith such favorite feeds the populace  
That fan and set him flying for reward :—  
I who, detecting what vice underlies  
Thought's superstructure, — fancy's sludge and slime  
'Twixt fact's sound floor and thought's mere surface-  
growth

Of hopes and fears which root no deeplier down  
Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat —  
Namely, man's misconception of the God : —  
I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul  
That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,  
— Why, all my soul's supremacy of power  
Did I pour out in volley just on him  
Who, his whole life long, championed every cause  
I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,  
Hating my hates, one false one true for both, —  
Championed my cause — not flagellating foe  
With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,  
Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze  
Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the lip,  
Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too, —  
No, the balled fist broke brow like thunderbolt,  
Battered till brain flew! Seeing which descent,  
None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,  
The avenger's with the vice he crashed through bone,  
Still, he displeased me; and I turned from foe  
To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud, —

But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see.  
 Pah! stop more shame deep-cutting glory through,  
 Nor add, this poet, learned, — found no taunt  
 Tell like 'That other poet studies books!'  
 Wise, — cried 'At each attempt to move our hearts,  
 He uses the mere phrase of daily life!'  
 Witty, — 'His mother was a herb-woman!'  
 Veracious, honest, loyal, fair-and-good, —  
 'It was Kephisophon who helped him write!'

"Whence, — O the tragic end of Comedy! —  
 Balaustion pities Aristophanes.  
 For, who believed him? Those who laughed so loud?  
 They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese!  
 Had he called true cheese — curd, would muscle move?  
 What made them laugh but the enormous lie?  
 'Kephisophon wrote "Herakles"?' ha, ha,  
 What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the soul,  
 And set a-lying Aristophanes?  
 Some accident at which he took offence!  
 The Tragic Master in a moody muse

Passed him unhailing, and it hurts — it hurts!  
Beside, there's license for the Wine-lees-song!'"

Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye flashed  
fierce.

"But this exceeds our license! Stay a while —  
That's the solution! both are foreigners,  
The fresh-come Rhodian lady, and her spouse  
The man of Phokis: newly resident,  
Nowise instructed — that explains it all!  
No born and bred Athenian but would smile,  
Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance.  
These strangers have a privilege!

"You blame"

(Presently he resumed with milder mien)

"Both theory and practice — Comedy:  
Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend  
Rose to, and upraised friends along with him,  
No matter how. Once there, all's cold and fine,



Passionless, rational; our world beneath  
Shows (should you condescend to grace so much  
As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross—  
A population which, mere flesh and blood,  
Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,  
Then hugs as hugely: speaks too as it acts,  
Prodigiously talks nonsense,—townsmen needs  
Must parley in their town's vernacular.  
Such world has, of two courses, one to choose:  
Unworld itself,—or else go blackening off  
To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy  
Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.  
Now, since the world demurs to either course,  
Permit me,—in default of boy or girl,  
So they be reared Athenian, good and true,—  
To praise what you most blame! Hear Art's defence!  
I'll prove our institution, Comedy,  
Coeval with the birth of freedom, matched  
So nice with our Republic, that its growth  
Measures each greatness, just as its decline  
Would signalize the downfall of the pair.

Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!  
You and your master don't acknowledge gods:  
'They are not, no, they are not!' well,—began  
When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,  
Found,—on recurrence of festivity  
Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will  
To children, as they took her vintage-gifts,—  
Found—not the least of many benefits—  
That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed  
The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,  
Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts aside.  
So, emulating liberalities,  
Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at least,  
Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,  
Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.  
Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms  
With skins; beast-fashion, daubed each phiz with dregs,  
Then holloaed, 'Neighbor, you are fool, you—knave,  
You—hard to serve, you—stingy to reward!'  
The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,  
And good folks gained thereby, 'twas evident.

Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,  
 The notion came — not simply this to say,  
 But this to do — prove, put in evidence,  
 And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,  
 Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw purse-string tight,  
 As crowd might see, which only heard before.

“So played the Poet, with his man of parts;  
 And all the others, found unqualified  
 To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,  
 Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,  
 Anticipated the community,  
 Gave judgment which the public ratified.  
 Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,  
 They flung, for word-artillery, why — filth;  
 Still, folks who wiped the unsavory salute  
 From visage, would prefer the mess to wit —  
 Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech,  
 As now the way is: then, the kindlier mode  
 Was — drub not stab, ribroast not scarify!  
 So did Sousarion introduce, and so,

Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art :  
Club, — if I call it, — notice what's implied !  
An engine proper for rough chastisement,  
No downright slaying : with impunity —  
Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,  
Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.  
I kept the gained advantage : stickled still  
For club-law — stout fun and allowanced thumps :  
Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke  
As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

“ Next, whom thrash ?

Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave ?  
Higher, more artificial, composite  
Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm !  
Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,  
Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,  
Or gives a pheasant to his neighbor's wife :  
No ! strike malpractice that affects the State,  
The common weal — intriguer or poltroon,  
Venality, corruption, what care I

If shrewd or witless merely?— so the thing  
Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright  
And happy, change her customs, lead astray  
Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,  
The sophist in Palaistra, or— what's worst,  
As widest mischief, — from the Theatre  
Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,  
Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult.  
Are such to be my game? Why, then there wants  
Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep!  
Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel  
Each boss, if I would bray— no callous hide  
Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof,  
Or Kleon cased about with impudence!  
Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced sparkling so  
That none smiled 'Sportive, what seems savagest,  
— Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth!  
Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well,  
Since I pursued my warfare till each wound  
Went through the mere man, reached the principle  
Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos?

No, I attacked war's representative ;  
Kleon? No, flattery of the populace ;  
Sokrates? No, but that pernicious seed  
Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught  
To jabber argument, chop logic, pore  
On sun and moon, and worship whirligig.  
Oh, your tragedian, with the lofty grace,  
Aims at no other and effects as much?  
Candidly: what's a polished period worth,  
Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,  
When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps  
From just that selfsame moon he maunders of,  
And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,  
Proposes to rich earth-blood — purity?  
In me, 'twas equal-balanced flesh rebuked  
Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes  
Or starveling Chairephon ; I challenged both, —  
Strong understander of our common life,  
Staple sustainment of humanity.  
Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace —  
He's silent as to cheesecake Peace may chew ;

Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye  
To what were better done than crowding Pnux—  
Dancing '*Threttanelo*, the Kuklops drunk!'

"My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!  
Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:  
'No naming names in Comedy!' votes one,  
'Nor vilifying live folk!' legislates  
Another, 'urge amendment on the dead!'  
'Don't throw away hard cash,' supplies a third,  
'But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!'  
Then Kleon did his best to bully me:  
Called me before the Law Court: 'Such a play  
Satirized citizens with strangers there,  
Such other,'—why, its fault was in myself!  
I was, this time, the stranger, privileged  
To act no play at all,—Egyptian, I—  
Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginete,  
Lindian, or any foreigner he liked—  
Because I can't write Attic; probably!  
Go ask my rivals,—how they roughed my fleece,

And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep  
Shiver at distance from the clapping shears!  
Why must they needs provoke me?

“All the same,

No matter for its triumph, I foretell  
Subsidence of the day-star: quench his beams?  
No Aias e'er was equal to the feat  
By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times seven,  
'Twixt sky and earth! 'tis dullards soft and sure  
Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh  
And there a 'So let be, we pardon you!'  
Till the minute mist hangs entire, has tamed  
Noonblaze to 'twilight mild and equable,'  
Vote the old women spinning out of doors.  
Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped  
And the bull gendered in the brave gold flare!  
O you shall have amusement,—better still,  
Instruction! no more horse-play, naming names,  
Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve!  
Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,



What's worthier limning than his household life?  
His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse,  
And how the son, instead of learning knead  
Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire  
By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,  
From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware:  
While pretty daughter Kepphé too much haunts  
The shop of Sporgilos the barber! brave!  
Out with Thearion's meal-tub politics  
In lieu of Pisthetairos, Strepsiades!  
That's your exchange? O Muse of Megara!  
Advise the fools '*Feed babe on weasel-lap  
For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,  
And rear, for man — Aripgrades, mayhap!*'  
Yes, my Balaustion, yes, my Euthukles,  
That's *your* exchange, — who, foreigners in fact  
And fancy, would impose your squeamishness  
On sturdy health, and substitute such brat  
For the right offspring of us Rocky Ones,  
Because babe kicks the cradle, — crows, not  
mewls!

“Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck  
Whence all the plague springs — that first feud of all  
'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.

'Unworld the world' frowns he, my opposite.  
I cry, 'Life!' 'Death,' he groans, 'our better Life!'  
Despise what is — the good and graspable,  
Prefer the out of sight and in at mind,  
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,  
The jolly club-feast when our field's in soak,  
Roast thrushes, haresoup, peasoup, deep washed down  
With Peparethian; the prompt paying off  
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavored wench  
We caught among our brushwood foraging:  
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,  
And fall to magnifying misery!  
Or, if you condescend to happiness,  
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name  
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath your nose!  
I need particular discourtesy  
And private insult from Euripides  
To render contest with him credible?

Say, all of me is outraged! one stretched sense,  
I represent the whole Republic, — gods,  
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets, — prone,  
And pummelled into insignificance,  
If will in him were matched with power of stroke.  
For see what he has changed or hoped to change!  
How few years since, when he began the fight,  
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through!  
Plenty and peace, then! Hellas thundersmote  
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,  
That morn salvation broke at Salamis,  
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles —  
Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still  
Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus? — he  
Holding as surely on to Herakles, —  
Who touched Zeus, link and link, the unruptured  
chain!  
Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail —  
With Pindaros, Theognis, — whom for sire?  
Homeros' self, departed yesterday!  
While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus, —

Ah, people, — ah, lost antique liberty !  
We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth :  
Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop  
To constitute our title — ours such land !  
Outside of oil and breadstuff, — barbarism !  
What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve !  
Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,  
Content with peerless native products, home,  
Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,  
Such men, such women, and such gods their guard !  
The gods? he worshipped best who feared them most,  
And left their nature uninquired into,  
— Nature? their very names! pay reverence,  
Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be  
To prove benignantest of playfellows.  
With kindly humanism they countenanced  
Our emulation of divine escapes  
Through sense and soul : soul, sense are made to use !  
Use each, acknowledging its god the while !  
Crush grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos' sake ;  
'Tis Aphrodité's feast-day — frisk and fling,

Provided we observe our oaths, and house  
Duly the stranger: Zeus takes umbrage else!  
Ah, the great time — had I been there to taste!  
Perikles, right Olympian, occupied  
As yet with getting an Olumpos reared  
Marble and gold above Akropolis, —  
Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed  
For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?  
Who writes the Oresteia?

“Ah, the time!

For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue,  
A cold wind creeps through the close vineyard-rank,  
The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close  
Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash  
(Your pardon!) There's a restlessness, a change,  
Deterioration. Larks and nightingales  
Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim  
Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.  
Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,  
A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed.

Occupy altar-base and temple-step,  
Are minded to indoctrinate our youth!  
How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude?  
'Wise men,' their nomenclature! Prodikos —  
Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps  
From way Theseia to the Tripod's way, —  
This empty noddle comprehends the sun, —  
How he's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit  
His way from east to west, nor wants a steed!  
And here's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,  
Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean,  
Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance  
Yet knowledge also, since, on either side  
Of any question, something's straight to say,  
Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb!  
And shall youth go and play at kottabos,  
Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed?  
Or dare keep Choes ere the problem's solved —  
Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?  
'But sure the gods permit this, censure that?'  
So tell them! straight the answer's in your teeth:

'You relegate these points, then, to the gods?  
 What and where are they?' 'What my sire supposed,  
 And where yon cloud conceals them!' . . . 'Till they  
     'scape

And scramble down to Leda, as a swan,  
 Europa, as a bull! why not as — ass

To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!  
 Either — away with such ineptitude!

Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,  
 Stick to the good old stories, think the rain  
 Is — Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve!

Think thunder's thrown to break Theoros' head  
 For breaking oaths first! So you let ourselves

Instruct your progeny what fools are you  
 For fearing Zeus, who is the atmosphere,  
 Brother Poseidon, otherwise called — sea,

And son Hephaistos — fire and nothing else!  
 Over which nothings there's a something still,

• "Necessity," that rules the universe

And cares as much about your Choes-feast  
 Performed or intermitted, as you care

Whether gnats sound their trump from head or tail!  
 When, stupefied at such philosophy,  
 We cry, 'Arrest the madmen, governor!  
 Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles!'  
 Would you believe? The Olympian bends his brow,  
 Scarce pauses from his building! 'Say they thus?  
 Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,  
 I had not known how simple proves eclipse  
 But for thy teaching! Go, men, learn like me!'

“Well, Zeus nods: man must reconcile himself,  
 So, let the Charon's-company harangue,  
 And Anaxagoras be — as we wish!  
 A comfort is in nature: while grass grows  
 And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,  
 And honey from Brilesian hollow melts  
 On mouth, and Bacchis' lip beats both, my boy,  
 You will not be untaught life's use, young man?’  
*Pho!* My young man just proves that panniered ass  
 Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,  
 Who bargained with a serpent, let him swap



The priceless boon for — water to quench thirst!  
What's youth to my young man? In love with age,  
He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and prates,  
Denies the plainest rules of life, long since  
Proved sound; sets all authority aside,  
Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,  
And think out thoroughly how youth should pass —  
Just as if youth stops passing, all the same!

“One last resource is left us — poetry!

‘Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help,

Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,

To save Sense, poet! Bang the sophist brood

Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance

By swearing wine is water, honey — gall

Saperdion — The Empousa! Panic-smit,

Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve.

Be yours to disenchant them! Change things back!

Or better, strain a point the other way

And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth!

Lend wine a glory never gained from grape,

Help honey with a snatch of him we style  
 The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,  
 And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe !'

“‘I, his successor,’ gruff the answer grunts,  
 ‘Incline to poetize philosophy,  
 Extend it rather than restrain ; as thus —  
 Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much,  
 Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?  
 Behold them ragged ! sick? lame, halt and blind !  
 Do they use speech? Ay, street-terms, market-phrase !  
 Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next  
 But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky?  
 Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,  
 For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.  
 Lift earth? I drop to, dally with, earth’s dung !  
 — Recognize in the very slave — man’s mate,  
 Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,  
 And reasonable as his lord, in brief.  
 “I paint men as they are” — so runs my boast —  
 “Not as they should be :” paint — what’s part of  
 “man,”

—Women and slaves, — not as, to please your pride,  
They should be, but your equals, as they are.

O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,  
Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants  
“Zeus, — with thy cubit's length of attributes, —  
May I, the ephemeral, ne'er scrutinize  
Who made the heaven and earth and all things there!”  
Myself shall say' . . . Ay, 'Herakles' may help!  
Give me, — I want the very words, — attend!”

He read. Then — “Murder's out, — ‘There are no  
gods,’

Man has no master, owns, by consequence,  
No right, no wrong, except to please or plague  
His nature: what man likes be man's sole law!  
Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,  
Man may reach freedom by your roundabout!  
‘Never believe yourselves the freer thence!  
There are no gods, but there's “Necessity,” —  
Duty enjoined you, fact in figment's place,  
Throned on no mountain, native to the mind!

Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs,  
 And honey, for the sake of—what I dream,  
 A-sitting with my legs up!’

“Infamy!

The poet casts in calm his lot with these  
 Assailants of Apollon! Sworn to serve  
 Each Grace, the Furies call him minister—  
 He, who was born for just that rosy world  
 Renounced so madly, where what’s false is fact,  
 Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,  
 Where he lives, life itself disguised for him  
 As immortality—so works the spell,  
 Enthusiastic mood which marks a man  
 Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,  
 Encircled still with poet-atmosphere,  
 As lark emballed by its own crystal song,  
 Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!  
 No, this were unreality! the real  
 He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,  
 Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—

That's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt  
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No!  
Strength and utility charm more than grace,  
And what's most ugly proves most beautiful.  
So much assistance from Euripides!

“Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,  
To a concluding ‘Go and feed the crows!  
Do! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,  
Poetize your so precious system, do,  
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,  
Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers,—  
Your castigation follows prompt enough!  
When all's concocted up stairs, heels o'er-head,  
Down must submissive drop the masterpiece  
For public praise or blame: so, praise away,  
Friend Sokrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon!  
Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song,  
Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men,  
slaves  
And women jumbled to a laughing-stock

Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split!  
Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say!

“She has it and she says it—there’s the curse!—  
She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,  
The noble slaves, wise women, move as much  
Pity and terror as true tragic types:  
Applauds inventiveness—the plot so new,  
The turn and trick subsidiary so strange!  
She relishes that homely phrase of life,  
That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts;  
Accords him right to chop and change a myth;  
‘What better right had he, who told the tale  
In the first instance, to embellish fact?  
This bard may disembellish yet improve!  
Both find a block: this man carves back to bull  
What first his predecessor cut to sphynx:  
Such genuine actual roarer, nature’s brute,  
Intelligible to our time, was sure  
The old-world artist’s purpose, had he worked  
To mind; this artist means and makes the thing!

Then, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed  
In unctuous music: say, effeminate —  
You also say, like Kuthereia's self,  
A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle  
Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.  
That's Hellas' verdict!

“Does Euripides

Even so far absolved, remain content?  
Nowise! His task is to refine, refine,  
Divide, distinguish, subtilize away  
Whatever seemed a solid planting-place  
For footfall, — not in that phantasmal sphere  
Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth  
Where people used to tread with confidence.  
There's left no longer one plain positive  
Enunciation incontestable  
Of what's good, right and decent here on earth.  
Nobody now can say, 'this plot is mine,  
Though but a plethron square, — my duty!' — 'Yours?  
Mine, or at least not yours,' snaps somebody!

And, whether the dispute be parent-right  
Or children's service, husband's privilege  
Or wife's submission, there's a snarling straight,  
Smart passage of opposing 'yea' and 'nay,'  
'Should,' 'should not,' till, howe'er the contest end,  
Spectators go off sighing, 'Clever thrust!  
Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,  
Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,  
And set my name down "for a trireme, good"?  
Something I might have urged on t'other side!  
No doubt, Chresphontes or Bellerophon  
We don't meet every day; but Stab-and-stitch  
The tailor — ere I turn the drachmas o'er  
I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks,  
I'll pose the blockhead with an argument!'

"So has he triumphed, your Euripides!  
Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize:  
That's quite another matter! cause for that!  
Still, when 'twas got by Ions, Iophons,  
Off he would pace confoundedly superb,



Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth  
Till Sokrates winked, whispered: out it broke!  
And Aristullos jotted down the jest,  
While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow,  
Looked queerly, and the foreigners—like you—  
Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile  
—'And so, you value Ions, Iophons,  
Euphorions! How about Euripides?'  
(Eh, brave bard's-champion? Does the anger  
boil?

Keep within bounds a moment,—eye and lip  
Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst!)  
What strangers? Archelaos heads the file!  
He sympathizes, he concerns himself,  
He pens epistle, each successful play:  
'Athenai sinks effete; there's younger blood  
In Makedonia. Visit where I rule!  
Do honor to me and take gratitude!  
Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,  
Which also means the statesman's: he who wrote  
'Erechtheus' may be rawly politic

At home where Kleophon is ripe ; but here  
My council-board permits him choice of seats.'

"Now, this was operating, — what should prove  
A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit  
For many a year, — when I was moved, first man,  
To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.  
So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,  
And dared what I am now to justify.  
A serious question first, though !

"Once again !

Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,  
I made no estimate of power at all,  
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class  
Of fighters I might claim to join, beside  
That class wherewith I cast in company?  
Say, you — profuse of praise no less than blame —  
Could not I have competed — franker phrase  
Might trulier correspond to meaning — still,  
Competed with your Tragic paragon?

Suppose me minded simply to make verse,  
To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,  
Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy, —  
Where was the hinderance? But my soul bade 'Fight!  
Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;  
Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!' —  
How? With degeneracy sapping fast  
The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old  
To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help  
— How did I fable? — War and Hubbub mash  
To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood,  
Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,  
That greed might gorge, the while frivolity  
Rubbed hands and smacked lips o'er the dainty dish!  
Authority, experience — pushed aside  
By any upstart pleading throng and press  
O' the people! 'Think, say, do thus!' Wherefore,  
pray?  
'We are the people: who impugns our right  
Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,  
Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,

Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles  
Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter's son,  
Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work  
To go round bottles, and Nausikudes  
The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their mates,  
To think and say and do in our behalf!  
While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,  
Found matter to propose, contest, defend,  
'Stablish, turn topsyturvy, — all the same,  
No matter what, provided the result  
Were something new in place of something old, —  
Set wagging by pure insolence of soul  
Which needs must pry into, have warrant for  
Each right, each privilege good policy  
Protects from curious eye and prating mouth!  
Everywhere lust to shape the world anew,  
Spurn this Athenai as we find her, build  
A new impossible Cloudcuckooburg  
For feather-headed birds, once solid men,  
Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,  
Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants,

King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,  
Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms!

“Where was I? Oh! Things ailing thus — I ask,  
What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-heaped  
Abomination with the exquisite

Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?

‘Erechtheus’ shall harangue Amphiktuon,

And incidentally drop word of weight

On justice, righteousness, so turn aside

The audience from attacking Sicily! —

The more that Choros, after he recounts

How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,

Shall add — at last fall of grave dancing-foot —

‘Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus!’

That helps or hinders Alkibiades?

As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus’ self

And set him up, some half a mile away,

His frown would frighten sparrows from your field!

Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,

But as for vulgar sparrows, — change the god,

And plant some big Priapos with a pole!  
I wield the Comic weapon rather—hate!  
Hate! honest, earnest, and directest hate—  
Warfare wherein I close with enemy,  
Call him one name and fifty epithets,  
Remind you his great-grandfather sold bran,  
Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat  
He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,  
Protest he voted for a tax on air!  
And all this hate—if I write Comedy—  
With tolerance, most like—applause, perhaps  
True veneration; for I praise the god  
Present in person of his minister,  
And pay—the wilder my extravagance—  
The more appropriate worship to the Power  
Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest:  
Otherwise,—that originative force  
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,  
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,  
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,  
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones,

Phales Iacchos.

“Comedy for me!

Why not for you, my Tragic masters? Sneaks  
Whose art is mere desertion of a trust!  
Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club,  
The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch,—  
Arms fit to bruise the boar's neck, break the chine  
O' the wolf,—and you must impiously—despise?  
No, I'll say, furtively let fall that trust  
Consigned you! 'Twas not 'take or leave alone,'  
But 'take and, wielding, recognize your god  
In his prime attributes!' And though full soon  
You sneaked, subsided into poetry,  
Nor met your due reward, still,—heroize  
And speechify and sing-song and forego  
Far as you may your function,—still its pact  
Endures, one piece of early homage still  
Exacted of you; after your three bouts  
At hoitytoity, great men with long words,  
And so forth,—at the end, must tack itself  
The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,

Concession, with its wood-boys' fun and freak,  
To the true taste of the mere multitude.  
Yet, there again! What does your Still-at-itch,  
Always-the-innovator? Shrugs and shirks!  
Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five  
Are somehow suited: Satyrs dance and sing,  
Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,  
Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth on  
edge,  
Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport,  
Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,  
Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare —  
When throats were promised Thasian! Five such  
feats, —  
Then frankly off he threw the yoke: next Droll,  
Next festive drama, covenanted fun,  
Decent reversion to indecency,  
Proved — your 'Alkestis!' There's quite fun  
enough,  
Herakles drunk! From out fate's blackening wave  
Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,



Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh  
On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste!

“For which sufficient reasons, in truth’s name,  
I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,  
Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld  
Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep  
Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze  
With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,  
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,  
Gem, no rough iron joints its strength around,  
From hand of — posturer, not combatant!

“Such was my purpose: it succeeds, I say!  
Have not we beaten Kallikratidas,  
Not humbled Sparté? Peace awaits our word,  
In spite of Theramenes, and his like.  
Since my previsions, — warranted too well  
By the long war now waged and worn to end —  
Had spared such heritage of misery,  
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.  
Athenai, taught prosperity has wings,

Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see,  
From folly's premature decrepitude  
Boiled young again, emerges from the stew  
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,  
One brilliance and one balsam,—sways and sits  
Monarch of Hellas! ay and, sage again,  
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,  
No longer loves the brutish demagogue  
Appointed by a bestial multitude,  
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they?  
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good!  
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,  
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff?)  
Still, the right grain is proper to right race;  
What's contrary, call curious accident!  
Hold by the usual! Orchard-grafted tree,  
Not wilding, race-horse-sired, not rouncey-born,  
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob!  
Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back  
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,  
Frailty,—say, youthfulness that's all at fault,—

Renewed to Perikles and something more?  
— Being at least our duly born and bred, —  
Curse on what chaunoproct first gained his ear  
And got his . . . well, once true man in right place,  
Our commonalty soon content themselves  
With doing just what they are born to do,  
Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs  
And leave state-business to the larger brain!  
I do not stickle for their punishment;  
But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch,  
A purse to pay the piper: flog, say I,  
Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,  
Who choose to play the important! Far from side  
With us, their natural supports, allies, —  
And, best by brain, help who are best by birth  
To fortify each weak point in the wall  
Built broad and wide and deep for permanence  
Between what's high and low, what's rare and vile, —  
They cast their lot perversely in with low  
And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob  
To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.

And then, simplicity become conceit, —  
 Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,  
 Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims, —  
 These must be taught next how to use their heads  
 And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule!  
 What fellows thus inflame the multitude?  
 Your Sokrates, still crying, 'Understand!'  
 Your Aristullos, — 'Argue!' Last and worst,  
 Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate,  
 Remember there's degree in heaven and earth,  
 Cry, 'Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,  
 And Sophokles advised respect the kings!'  
 Why, your Euripides informs them — Gods?  
 They are not! Kings? They are, but . . . do not I,  
 In 'Suppliants,' make my Theseus, — yours, no  
 more, —

Fire up at insult of who styles him King?  
 Play off that Herald, I despise the most,  
 As patronizing kings' prerogative  
 Against a Theseus proud to dare no step  
 Till he consult the people?

“Such as these —

Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight?  
 Nowise, Balaustion! All my roundabout  
 Ends at beginning, with my own defence!  
 I dose each culprit just with — Comedy.  
 Let each be doctored in exact the mode  
 Himself prescribes: by words, the word-monger —  
 My words to his words, — my lies, if you like,  
 To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,  
 Quack, necromancer; Aristullos, — say,  
 Male Kirké who bewitches and bewrays  
 And changes folk to swine; Euripides, —  
 Well, I acknowledge! Every word is false,  
 Looked close at; but stand distant and stare through,  
 All's absolute indubitable truth  
 Behind lies, truth which only lies declare!  
 For come, concede me truth's in thing not word,  
 Meaning not manner! Love smiles 'rogue' and  
     'wretch'  
 When 'sweet' and 'dear' seem vapid; Hate adopts  
 Love's 'sweet' and 'dear,' when 'rogue' and 'wretch'  
     fall flat;

Love, Hate — are truths, then, each, in sense not  
sound.

Further: if Love, remaining Love, fell back  
On 'sweet' and 'dear,' — if Hate, though Hate the  
same,

Dropped down to 'rogue' and 'wretch,' — each  
phrase were false.

Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom  
With reason: I must therefore fight my foe,  
Finish the mischief which made enmity.

How? By employing means to most hurt him  
Who much harmed me. What way did he do harm?  
Through word or deed? Through word? with word,  
wage war!

Word with myself directly? As direct  
Reply shall follow: word to you, the wise,  
Whence indirectly came the harm to me?  
What wisdom I can muster waits on such:  
Word to the populace which, misconceived  
By ignorance and incapacity,  
Ends in no such effect as follows cause

When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,  
So damages what I and you hold dear?  
In that event, I ply the populace  
With just such word as leavens their whole lump  
To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*  
Arbitrate properly between us both?  
*They* weigh my answer with his argument,  
Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence?  
All they attain to understand is — blank!  
Two adversaries differ! which is right  
And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,  
Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!  
Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole,  
They fall a-laughing! Add, — his household drudge  
Of all-work justifies that office well,  
Kisses the wife, composing him the play, —  
They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,  
And go off — 'Was he such a sorry scrub?  
This other seems to know! we praised too fast!' —  
Why then, my lies have done the work of truth,  
Since 'scrub,' improper designation, means

Exactly what the proper argument  
— Had such been comprehensible — proposed  
To proper audience — were I graced with such —  
Would properly result in ; so your friend  
Gets, an impartial verdict on his verse,  
'The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn !

“There, my Balaustion ! All is summed and said.  
No other cause of quarrel with yourself !  
Euripides and Aristophanes  
Differ : he needs must round our difference  
Into the mob's ear ; with the mob I plead.  
You angrily start forward 'This to me ?'  
No speck of this on you the thrice refined !  
Could parley be restricted to us two,  
My first of duties were to clear up doubt  
As to our true divergence each from each.  
Does my opinion so diverge from yours ?  
Probably less than little — not at all  
To know a matter, for my very self  
And intimates — that's one thing ; to imply



By 'knowledge' — loosing whatsoe'er I know  
Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake,  
May brain themselves and me in consequence, —  
That's quite another. 'O the daring flight!  
This only bard maintains the exalted brow,  
Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods!'  
Did *I* fear — *I* play superstitious fool,  
Who, with the due proviso, introduced,  
Active and passive, their whole company  
As creatures too absurd for scorn itself?  
Zeus? I have styled him — 'slave, mere thrashing-  
block!'

I'll tell you: in my very next of plays,  
At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honor, full  
In front of Bacchos' representative,  
I mean to make main-actor — Bacchos' self!  
Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,  
A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief,  
Demonstrated all these by his own mere  
Xanthias the man-slave: such man shows such god  
Shamed to brute-beastship by comparison!

And when ears have their fill of his abuse,  
And eyes are sated with his pommelling,—  
My Choros taking care, by, all the while  
Singing his glory, that men recognize  
A god in the abused and pommelled beast,—  
Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,  
Should one spectator shut revolted eye,—  
Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice  
'Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!  
Does not most license hallow best our day,  
And least decorum prove its strictest rite?  
Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool,  
And there's no fooling like a majesty  
Mocked at,— who mocks the god, obeys the law—  
Law which, impute but indiscretion to,  
And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides  
Is evidently active in the world!'  
Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!  
See Hermes! what commotion raged,— reflect!—  
When imaged god alone got injury  
By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared

Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit,—  
Ever the last, the longest! At this hour,  
The craze abates a little; so, my Play  
Shall have up Hermes: and a Karion, slave,  
(Since there's no getting lower) calls our friend  
The profitable god, we honor so,  
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth—  
Bids him go earn more honest livelihood  
By washing tripe in well-trough—wash he does,  
Duly obedient! Have I dared my best?  
Asklepios, answer!—deity in vogue,  
Who visits Sophokles familiarly,  
If you believe the old man,—at his age,  
Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door  
Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times  
When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched,—  
At any rate, to memorize the fact,  
He has spent money, set an altar up  
In the god's temple, now in much repute.  
That temple-service trust me to describe—  
Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls,

Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts  
'And consecrate the same into a bag,'  
For whimsies done away with in the dark!  
As if, a stone's throw from that theatre  
Whereon I thus unmask their dupery,  
The thing were not religious and august!

"Of Sophokles himself—nor word nor sign  
Beyond a harmless parody or so!  
He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,  
But, living, lets live, the good easy soul  
Who, — if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,  
Loves wine and — never mind what other sport,  
Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,  
Proves but queer captain when the people claim,  
For one who conquered with 'Antigone,'  
The right to undertake a squadron's charge, —  
And needs the son's help now to finish plays,  
Seeing his dotage calls for governance  
And Iophon to share his property, —  
Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe

Not one word—true or false, I like the man!  
Sophokles lives, and lets live: long live he!  
Otherwise,—sharp the scourge and hard the blow!

“And what’s my teaching but—accept the old,  
Contest the strange! acknowledge work that’s done,  
Misdoubt men who have still their work to do!  
Religions, laws and customs, poetries,  
Are old? So much achieved victorious truth!  
Each work was product of a lifetime, wrung  
From each man by an adverse world: for why?  
He worked, destroying other older work  
Which the world loved and so was loath to lose.  
Whom the world beat in battle—dust and ash!  
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,  
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,  
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.  
I mean to show you on the stage! you’ll see  
My Just Judge only venture to decide  
Between two suitors, which is god, which man,  
By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear.

You shall agree, — whichever bellows first,  
He's human ; who holds longest out, divine :  
That is the only equitable test !  
Cruelty ? Pray, who pricked them on to court  
My thong's award ? Must they needs dominate ?  
Then I — rebel ! Their instinct grasps the new ?  
Mine bids retain the old : a fight must be,  
And which is stronger the event will show.  
O but the pain ! Your proved divinity  
Still smarts all reddened ? And the rightlier served !  
Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all ?  
Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment  
There's nature common to both gods and men !  
All of them — spirit ? What so winced was clay !  
Away pretence to some exclusive sphere  
Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few  
Fume-fed with self-superiority !  
I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay  
Existence, — stamp and ramp with heel and hoof  
On solid vulgar life, you fools disown !  
Make haste from your unreal eminence,

And measure lengths with me upon that ground  
Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!  
I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends  
And how it drops apace and dies away.  
I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match!  
I too can lead an airy life when dead,  
Fly like Kinesias when I'm cloudward bound;  
But here, no death shall mix with life it mars!

“So, my old enemy who caused the fight,  
Own I have beaten you, Euripides!  
Or,—if your advocate would contravene,—  
Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!  
I have not done my utmost,—treated you  
As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed,—  
Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!  
Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment  
Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist  
Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!  
Fancy yourself my Aristonumos,  
Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!

Three cuckoos who cry 'cuckoo!' much I care!  
They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*"

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Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?  
Day by day glides our galley on its path:  
Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,  
And still, my patient scribe! no sunset's peace  
Descends more punctual than that brow's incline  
O'er tablets which your serviceable hand  
Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth,  
These relics of a night that left me rich,  
But, in remembrance merely, makes less poor  
None, stranger to Athenai and her past?  
For—how remembered! As some greedy hind  
Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due,  
To yield its hoarding,—heedless what alloy  
Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold  
Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity,—  
So would you fain relieve of load this brain,



Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with  
strength,

What words and weakness, strength's receptacle —  
Wax from the store! Yet, — aching soothed away, —  
Accept the compound! No suspected scent  
But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost  
Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh.  
No need of farther squeezing! What remains  
Can only be Balaustion, just her speech!

Ah, but — because speech serves a purpose still! —

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He ended with that flourish. I replied,

“Fancy myself your Aristonumos?  
Advise me, rather, to remain myself,  
Balaustion, — mindful what mere mouse confronts  
The forest-monarch Aristophanes!  
I who, a woman, claim no quality

Beside the love of all things lovable  
Created by that power pre-eminent  
In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,  
— You, the consummately-creative! How  
Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust  
To any process aiming at result  
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with?  
Result, all judge: means, let none scrutinize  
Save those aware how glory best is gained  
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,  
Constant in faith that only good works good,  
While evil yields no fruit but impotence!  
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means!  
Nay, if result itself in turn become  
Means, — who shall say? — to ends still loftier yet, —  
Though still the good prove hard to understand,  
The bad still seemingly predominate, —  
Never may I forget which order bears  
The burden, toils to win the great reward,  
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,  
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield!

Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil  
From what may prove man's-work permissible,  
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise: what then?  
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash  
Of thorn and bramble ere those shrubs, those flowers,  
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,  
Are sown, matured, are garlanded for boys  
And girls, who know not how the growth was gained.  
Finally, am I not a foreigner?  
No born and bred Athenian, — isled about,  
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,  
Just some particular doctrine which may best  
Explain the strange thing I revolt against —  
How — by involvement, who may extricate? —  
Religion perks up through impiety,  
Law leers with license, folly wise-like frowns,  
The seemly lurks inside the abominable.  
But opposites, — each neutralizes each  
Haply by mixture: what should promise death,  
May haply give the good ingredient force,  
Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.

This institution, therefore, — Comedy, —  
By origin, a rite ; by exercise,  
Proved an achievement tasking poet's power  
To utmost, eking legislation out  
Beyond the legislator's faculty,  
Playing the censor where the moralist  
Declines his function, far too dignified  
For dealing with minute absurdities ;  
By efficacy, — virtue's guard, the scourge  
Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid  
Of all that's righteous, customary, sound  
And wholesome ; sanctioned therefore, — better say,  
Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age  
By, not alone the long recorded roll  
Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day —  
(The multitude as prompt recipient still  
Of good gay teaching from that monitor  
They crowned this morning — Aristophanes —  
As when Sousarion's car first traversed street) —  
This product of Athenai — *I* dispute,  
Impugn ? There's just one only circumstance

Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel ;  
But eyes, ears, senses prove me — foreigner !  
Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest  
Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side  
Of — larger than your stage — life's spectacle,  
Convention here permits and there forbids  
Impulse and action, nor alleges more  
Than some mysterious ' So do all, and so  
Does no one: ' which the hasty stranger blames  
Because, who bends the head unquestioning,  
Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,  
By failure of a reference to law  
Beyond convention ; blames unjustly, too —  
As if, through that defect, all gained were lost  
And slave-brand set on brow indelibly ;—  
Blames unobservant or experienceless  
That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,  
Show stem no more affected at the root  
By bough's exceptional submissive dip  
Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray  
To windy fitfulness in wayward sport, —

No more lie prostrate, — than low files of flower  
Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise  
Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck  
Of thorn and thistle that refractory  
Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.  
Why shall not guest extend like charity,  
Conceive how, — even when astounded most  
That natives seem to acquiesce in muck  
Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold, —  
Such may still bring to test, still bear away  
Safely and surely much of good and true  
Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, unspoiled?  
Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass  
A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame:  
And who has read your 'Lemnians,' seen 'The Hours,'  
Heard 'Female-Playhouse-seat-Pre-occupants,'  
May feel no worse effect than, once a year,  
Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags  
And play the mendicant, conform thereby  
To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint  
Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.

What if I share the stranger's weakness then?  
Well, should I also show his strength, his sense  
Untutored, ay! — but then untampered with!

“I fancy, though the world seems old enough,  
Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,  
Years may conduct to such extreme of age,  
And outside Hellas such new isles may lurk,  
That haply, — when and where remain a dream! —  
In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,  
In novel lands as strange where, all the same,  
Their men and women yet behold, as we,  
Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope and  
fear,

Over again, unhelped by Attiké —  
Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,  
Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance  
Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard  
To metal — ay, those Kassiterides!  
Then asks: ‘Ye apprehend the human form.  
What of this statue, made to Pheidias’ mind,

This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint?  
Ye too feel truth, love beauty: judge of these!'  
Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like:  
'Each hair too indistinct—for, see our own!  
Hands, not skin-colored as these hands we have,  
And lo, the want of due decorum here!  
A citizen, arrayed in civic garb,  
Just as he walked your streets apparently,  
Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,  
In thronged Athenai! foolish painter's-freak!  
While here's his brother-sculptor found at fault  
Still more egregiously, who shames the world,  
Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,  
Atrociously exposed from head to foot!'  
Sure, the Immortal would impart at once  
Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths sup-  
pressed  
Conduce to the far greater truth's display,—  
Would replace simple by instructed sense,  
And teach them how Athenai first so tamed  
The natural fierceness that her progeny



Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man :  
Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude,  
Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize  
For man's mind, body, each in excellence, —  
When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,  
And only irreligion grudged the gods  
One naked glory of their master-work  
Where all is glorious rightly understood, —  
The human frame ; enough that man mistakes :  
Let him not think the gods mistaken too !

“ But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye  
Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight !  
Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me —  
How on your faultless should I fasten fault  
Of my own framing, even ? Only say, —  
Suppose the impossible were realized,  
And some as patent incongruity,  
Unseemliness, — of no more warrant, there  
And then, than now and here, whate'er the time  
And place, — I say, the Immortal, — who can  
doubt ? —

Would never shrink, but own 'The blot escaped  
Our artist: thus he shows humanity!'

"May stranger tax one peccant part in thee,  
Poet, three-parts divine? May I proceed?

"'Comedy is prescription and a rite.'

Since when? No growth of the blind antique time,  
'It rose in Attiké with liberty;

When freedom falls, it too will fall.' Scarce so!

Your games,—the Olympian, Zeus gave birth to  
these;

Your Pythian,—these were Phoibos' institute.

Isthmian, Nemeian,—Theseus, Herakles

Appointed each, the boys and barbers say!

Earth's day is growing late: where's Comedy?

'Oh, that commenced, an age since,—two, belike,—  
In Megara, whence here they brought the thing!'

Or I misunderstand, or here's the fact—

Your grandsire could recall that rustic song,

How suchanone was thief, and miser such,

And how,—immunity from chastisement  
Once promised to bold singers of the same  
By daylight on the drunkard's holiday,—  
The clever fellow of the joyous troop  
Tried acting what before he sang about,  
Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too:  
While his companions ranged a-row, closed up  
For Choros,—bade the general rabblement  
Sit, see, hear, laugh,—not join the dance themselves.  
Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,  
And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,  
Still closer in approach to Tragedy,—  
So led the way to Aristophanes,  
Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire—  
Chionides; yourself wrote 'Banqueters'  
When Aischulos had made 'Prometheus,' nay,  
All of the marvels; Sophokles,—I'll cite,  
'Oidipous'—and Euripides—I bend  
The head—'Medeia' henceforth awed the world!  
'Banqueters' 'Babylonians'—next come you!  
Surely the great days that left Hellas free

Happened before such advent of huge help,  
Eighty-years-late assistance? Marathon,  
Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think,  
Before new educators stood reprov'd,  
Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to!  
Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise?  
Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,  
Plainly authentic, incontestably  
Adequate to the helpful ordinance?  
Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from  
source ;

'Tis there we taste the god's benign intent :  
Not when, — fatigued away by journey, foul  
With brutish trampling, — crystal sinks to slime,  
And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.  
Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure?  
'Nowise !' yourself protest with vehemence ;  
'Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break ;  
Every successor paddled in the slush ;  
Nay, my contemporaries one and all  
Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game ;

Then was I first to change buffoonery  
For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,  
Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine,  
Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law —  
“Drop knave’s-tricks, deal more neighbor-like, ye  
boors!” —

With such new glory of poetic breath  
As, lifting application far past use  
O’ the present, launched it o’er men’s lowly heads  
To future time, when high and low alike  
Are dead and done with, while my airy power  
Flies disengaged, as vapor from what stuff  
It — say not, dwelt — but fitlier, dallied with  
To forward work, which done, — deliverance brave, —  
It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.  
Say then, myself invented Comedy!’

“So mouths full many a famed Parabasis!  
Agreed! No more, then, of prescriptive use,  
Authorization by antiquity, -  
For what offends our judgment! ’Tis your work,

Performed your way: not work delivered you  
Intact, intact producible in turn.  
Everywhere have you altered old to new —  
Your will, your warrant: therefore, work must stand  
Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth?  
Its aim and object! Peace, you advocate,  
And war would fain abolish from the land:  
Support religion, lash irreverence,  
Yet laughingly administer rebuke  
To superstitious folly, — equal fault!  
While innovating rashness, lust of change,  
New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,  
Make your main quarry, — 'oldest' meaning 'best.'  
You check the fretful litigation-itch,  
Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,  
Punish mob-favorites; most of all press hard  
On sophists who assist the demagogue,  
And poets their accomplices in crime.  
Such your main quarry, — by the way, you strike  
Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,  
Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate:

Still with a bolt to spare when dramatist  
Proves haply unproficient in his art.  
Such aims — alone, no matter for the means —  
Declare the unexampled excellence  
Of their first author — Aristophanes !

“Whereat — Euripides, oh, not thyself —  
Augustlier than the need! — thy century  
Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before  
‘Banqueters’ gave dark earth enlightenment,  
Or ‘Babylonians’ played Prometheus here, —  
These let me summon to defend thy cause!  
Lo, as indignantly took life and shape  
Labor by labor, all of Herakles, —  
Palpably fronting some o’erbold pretence  
‘Eurustheus slew the monsters, purged the world!’  
So shall each poem pass you and imprint  
Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised Peace?  
Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! ‘Peace’ the theme?  
‘Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie, — of the blest  
Immortals beauteousest, —

Come! for the heart within me dies away,  
So long dost thou delay!  
O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,  
Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,  
Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,  
The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be.  
But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,  
Come to the city here!  
Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,  
With Her who madly roams  
Rejoicing in the steel against the life  
That's whetted — banish Strife!

“Shall I proceed? No need of next and next!  
That were too easy, play so presses play,  
Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,  
Each eager to confute the idle boast!  
What virtue but stands forth panegyricized,  
What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books  
Which bettered Hellas, — beyond graven gold  
Or gem-indenture, sung by Phoibos' self



And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house —  
Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?  
— Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised  
By sly admixture of the blameworthy  
And enforced coupling of base fellowship. —  
Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,  
'Allow one glance on horrors — laughable!' —  
This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged  
Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,  
On objects worthy either; earnestness,  
Attribute him, and power! but novelty?  
Nor his nor yours a doctrine — all the world's!  
What man of full-grown sense and sanity  
Holds other than the truth, — wide Hellas through, —  
Though truth he acts discredit truth he holds?  
What imbecile has dared to formulate  
'Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!' —  
And so preach on, reversing rule of right  
Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?  
No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh  
According to heart's temper 'Peace were best,

Except occasions when we put aside  
Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift  
Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!

“Nay, you reply; for one, whose mind withstands  
His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake  
Wants war,—you find a crowd of hypocrites  
Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.  
On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts  
Distilled like universal but thin dew  
Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,  
No doubt, to universal crop and clown,  
Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry  
With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit  
The droppings to his neighbor. No! collect  
All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads  
Which nowise need a washing, save and store  
And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout  
On some one evildoer, sheltered close,—  
Fond he supposed,—till you beat guard away,  
And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,

But Lamachos absurd, — case, crests and all, —  
Not that democracy was blind of choice,  
But Kleon and Huperbolos accurst :  
Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed, —  
The concrete for the abstract ; that's the wag !  
What matters Choros crying, ' Hence, impure !'  
You cried, ' Ariphrades does thus and thus !'  
Now, earnestness seems never earnest more  
Than when it dons for garb — indifference ;  
So, there's much laughing : but, compensative,  
When frowning follows laughter, then indeed  
Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony ! —  
Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze  
From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain  
O' the commonalty — whom, unless you prick  
To purpose, what avails that finer pates  
Succumb to simple scratching ? Those — not these —  
'Tis Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,  
Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,  
House over head, or, better, poisons him.  
Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,

Club-drub the callous numsculls! In and in  
Beat this essential consequential fact  
That here they have a hater of the three,  
Who hates in word, praise, nickname, epithet  
And illustration, beyond doubt at all!  
And similarly, would you win assent  
To — Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide  
With good plain pleasure her concomitant —  
And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace —  
Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,  
Hare-slice-and-peasoup season, household-joy;  
Theoria's beautiful belongings match  
Oporia's lavish condescendings: brief,  
Since here the people are to judge, you press  
Such argument as people understand:  
If with exaggeration — what care you?

“Have I misunderstood you in the main?  
No! then must answer be, such argument,  
Such policy, no matter what good love  
Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,

Useless and null: henceforward intercepts  
Sober effective blow at what you blame,  
And renders nugatory rightful praise  
Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed —  
What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark?  
Blame? You curse, rather, till who blames must  
blush —

Lean to apology or praise, more like!  
Does garment, simpered o'er as white, prove gray?  
'Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black  
Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black.'  
You bawl, till men sigh 'nearer snowiness!'  
What follows? What one faint-rewarding fall  
Of foe belabored ne'er so lustily?  
Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart?  
He died, commanding, 'hero,' say yourself!  
Gibe Nikias into privacy? — nay, shake  
Kleon a little from his arrogance  
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds? I think,  
He ruled his life-long and, when time was ripe,  
Died fighting for amusement, — good tough hide!

Sokrates still goes up and down the streets  
And Aristullos puts his speech in book,  
When both should be abolished long ago.  
Nay, wretchedest of rags, Aripgrades —  
You have been fouling that redoubtable  
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect?  
Still he strums on, strums ever cheerily,  
And earns his wage, — who minds a joke? men say.  
No, friend! The statues stand — mudstained at most —  
Titan or pygmy: what achieves their fall  
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent,  
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning — truth!

“Your praise, then — honey-smearing helps your friend,  
More than blame's ordure-smirch hurts foe, perhaps?  
Peace, now, misunderstood, ne'er prized enough,  
You have interpreted to ignorance  
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,  
And for the first time knows Peace means the power  
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,  
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,

Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw,  
Peace sits at cosey feet with lamp and fire,  
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling gay.  
How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War  
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin  
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates  
To give Peace, over War, the preference?  
Ah, friend — had this indubitable fact  
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,  
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!  
It cannot be that even his few wits  
Were addled to the point that, so advised,  
Preposterous he had answered — 'Cakes are prime,  
Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have worth,  
And yet — for country's sake, to save our gods  
Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs,  
Save wife and child and home and liberty, —  
I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow — nay, starve,  
If need were, — and by much prefer the choice!'  
Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,  
Has been — who served precisely for your butt —

Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away  
On battle-ground ; cried, 'Cake my buckler be,  
Embossed with cream-clot! peace, not war, I choose,  
Holding with Dikaiopolis!' Comedy  
Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent,  
When next Miltiades shirks Marathon,  
Themistokles swaps Salamis for — cake,  
And Kimon grunts, 'Peace, grant me dancing-girls !'  
But sooner, hardly! twenty-five years since,  
The war began, — such pleas for Peace have reached  
A reasonable age. The end shows all!  
And so with all the rest you advocate!  
'Wise folk leave litigation! ware the wasps!  
Who loves the law and lawyers, heliast-like,  
Wants hemlock!' None shows that so funnily.  
But, once cure madness, how comports himself  
Your sane exemplar, what's our gain thereby?  
Philokleon turns Bdelukleon! just this change, —  
New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,  
Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk,  
Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth



With his own son who cured his father's cold  
By making him catch fever — funnily!  
But as for curing love of law-suits — faugh!

“And how does new improve upon the old  
—Your boast—in even abusing? Rough, may be—  
Still, honest was the old mode. ‘Call thief—thief!’  
But never call—thief even—murderer!  
Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit  
Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your brains  
For adequate invective,—cut the life  
Clean out each quality,—but load your lash  
With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!  
Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,  
Inculcate foul deeds? There's the fault to flog!  
You vow, ‘The rascal cannot read nor write,  
Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,  
Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,  
His uncle deals in crockery, and last,—  
Himself's a stranger!’ That's the cap and crown  
Of stinging-nettle, that's the master-stroke!

What poet-rival, — after 'housebreaker,'  
'Fish-gorging,' 'midnight footpad,' and so forth, —  
Proves not, beside, 'a stranger?' Chased from charge  
To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court, —  
Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource —  
All, from Kratinos downward — 'strangers' they!  
Pity the trick's too facile! None so raw  
Among your playmates but have caught the ball  
And sent it back as briskly to — yourself!  
You too, my Attic, are styled 'stranger' — Rhodes,  
Aigina, Lindos or Kameiros, — nay,  
'Twas Egypt reared (if Eupolis be right)  
Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)  
Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self  
Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled  
My poet into court, and o'er the coals  
Hauled and re-hauled 'the stranger, — insolent,  
Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!'  
Why must you Comics one and all take stand  
On lower ground than truth from first to last?  
Why all agree to let folks disbelieve,

So laughter but reward a funny lie?  
 Repel such onslaughts — answer, sad and grave,  
 Your fancy-fleerings — who would stoop so low?  
 Your own adherents whisper, — when disgust  
 Too menacingly thrills Logeion through  
 At — Perikles invents this present war  
 Because men robbed his mistress of three maids —  
 Or — Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head, —  
 'What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?  
 Our poet means no mischief! All should know —  
 Ribaldry here implies a compliment!  
 He deals with things, not men, — his men are things —  
 Each represents a class, plays figure-head  
 And names the ship: no meaner than the first  
 Would serve; he styles a trireme "Sokrates" —  
 Fears "Sokrates" may prove unseaworthy,  
 ('That's merely — "Sophists are the bane of boys")  
 Rat-riddled ("they are capable of theft")  
 Rotten or whatso'er shows ship-disease,  
 ("They war with gods and worship whirligig.")  
 You never took the joke for earnest? scarce

Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,  
And Sokrates — the whole fraternity?'

“This then is Comedy, our sacred song,  
Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure :  
Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,  
Which, born a twin with public liberty,  
Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane !  
Liberty? what so exquisitely framed  
And fitted to suck dry its life of life  
To last faint fibre? — since that life is truth !  
You who profess your indignation swells  
At sophistry, when specious words confuse  
Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say —  
(Though all that's done is — dare veracity,  
Show that the true conception of each deed  
Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, 'wrong' or 'right,'  
Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold,  
But, change your side, shoots light, where dark alone  
Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)  
You who put sophistry to shame, and shout,

'There's but a single side to man and thing ;  
A side so much more big than thing or man  
Possibly can be, that — believe 'tis true ?  
Such were too marvellous simplicity !' —  
Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,  
(— Abide by your own painting ! ) what they teach,  
They wish at least their pupil to believe,  
And, what believe, to practise ! did *you* wish  
Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in hand,  
And fire the horrid Speculation-shop ?  
Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob  
What man was your so monstrous Sokrates ;  
Himself received amusement, why not they ?  
Just as did Kleon first play magistrate  
And bid you put your birth in evidence —  
Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here  
To shame us all when foreign guests may mock —  
Then, — birth established, fooling licensed you, —  
He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,  
Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,  
Kukloboros-roaring, and the camel-rest.

Nay, Aristullos, — once your volley spent  
On the male-Kirké and her swinish crew, —  
PLATON, — so others call the youth we love, —  
Sends your performance to the curious king —  
'Do you desire to know Athenai's knack  
At turning seriousness to pleasantry?  
Read this! One Aristullos means myself.  
The author is indeed a merry grig!'  
Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent  
On laying down the law 'Tell lies I must —  
Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!'  
When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage,  
'Here you behold the King of Comedy —  
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece  
From each and all my predecessors' filth,  
Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid  
The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one  
Least sample but would make my hair turn gray  
Beyond a twelvemonth's ravage! I renounce  
Mountebank-claptrap, such as firework-fizz  
And torch flare, or else nuts and barleycorns

Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for  
And stop their mouths with ; no such stuff shames me!  
Who, — what's more serious, — know both when to  
strike

And when to stay my hand : once dead, my foe,  
Why, done, my fighting ! *I* attack a corpse ?  
I spare the corpse-like even ! punish age ?  
I pity from my soul that sad effete  
Toothless old mumbler called Kratinos ! once  
My rival, — now, alack, the dotard slinks  
Ragged and hungry to what hole's his home ;  
Ay, slinks through byways where no passenger  
Flings him a bone, to pick. You formerly  
Adored the Muses' darling : dotard now,  
Why, he may starve ! O mob most mutable !'  
So you harangued in person ; while, — to point  
Precisely out, these were but lies you launched, —  
Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,  
No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,  
Full-fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,  
And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh ;

While daft Kratinos — home to hole trudged he,  
 Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,  
 Decanted them to 'Bottle,' — beat, next year, —  
 'Bottle' and dregs — your best of 'Clouds' and dew!  
 Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect  
 Improvement on your predecessors' work  
 Except in lying with audacity?

"Why — genius! That's the grandeur, that's the  
 gold —

That's *you* — superlatively true to touch —  
 Gold, leaf or lump — gold, anyhow the mass  
 Take manufacture and prove Pallas' casque  
 Or, as your choice falls, simply cask to keep  
 Corruption from decay! Your rivals' hoard  
 May ooze forth, lacking such preservative:  
 Yours cannot — gold plays guardian far too well!  
 Genius, I call *you*: dross, your rivals share;  
 Ay, share and share alike, too! says the world,  
 However you pretend supremacy  
 In aught beside that gold, your very own.



Satire? 'Kratinos for our satirist!'  
The world cries. Elegance? 'Who elegant  
As Eupolis?' resounds as noisily.  
Artistic fancy? Choros-creatures quaint?  
Magnes invented 'Birds' and 'Frogs' enough,  
Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied,  
To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.  
Moral invective? Eupolis exposed  
'That prating beggar, he who stole the cup,'  
Before your 'Clouds' rained grime on Sokrates;  
Nay, what beat 'Clouds' but 'Konnos,' muck for mud?  
Courage? How long before, well-masked, you poured  
Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,  
Did Telekleides and Hermippos pelt  
Their Perikles and Kumon? standing forth,  
Bare-headed, not safe crouched behind a name,—  
Philonides or else Kallistratos,  
Put forth, when danger threatened,—mask for face,  
To bear the brunt,—if blame fell, take the blame,—  
If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes  
'They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!'

Rather, I see all true improvements, made  
Or making, go against you — tooth and nail  
Contended with! 'tis still Moruchides,  
'Tis Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,  
Argurrhios and Kinesias, — common sense  
And public shame, these only cleanse your style!  
Coerced, prohibited, — you grin and bear,  
And, soon as may be, hug to heart again  
The banished nastiness too dear to drop!  
Krates could teach and practise festive song  
Vet scorn scurrility; as gay and good,  
Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,  
Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more?  
Did your particular self advance in aught,  
Task the sad genius — steady slave the while —  
To further — say, the patriotic aim?  
No, there's deterioration manifest  
Year by year, play by play! survey them all,  
From that boy's-triumph when 'Acharnes' dawned,  
To 'Thesmophoriazousai,' — this man's-shame!  
There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent

Allowed friends' plea perhaps: the baser stuff  
Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle.  
Who would imprison, unvolatilize  
A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils  
Essence too fugitive in flower alone;  
So, calling unguent — violet, call the play —  
Obscenity impregnated with 'Peace'!  
But here's the boy grown bald, and here's the play  
With twenty years' experience: where's one spice  
Of odor in the hogs'-lard? what pretends  
To aught except a grease-pot's quality?  
Friend, sophist-hating! know, — worst sophistry  
Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,  
Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads  
'I detail sin to shame its author' — not  
'I shame Aripgrades for sin's display'!  
'I show Oporia to commend Sweet Home' —  
Not 'I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake!'  
  
"Yet all the same — O genius and O gold —  
Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use

Worthy the temple, to do copper's work  
And coat a swine's trough — which abundantly  
Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne !  
Had you, I dream, discarding all the base,  
The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch  
And ward against invading decency,  
Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,  
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,  
Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,  
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,  
Euripides with Aristophanes  
Co-operant ! this, reproducing Now  
As that gave Then existence : Life to-day,  
This, as that other — Life dead long ago !  
The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,  
But — why call crowning the reward of quest ?  
Tell him, my other poet, — where thou walk'st  
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed !

“ But dream goes idly in the air. To earth !  
Earth's question just amounts to — which succeeds,

Which fails of two life-long antagonists?  
Suppose my charges all mistake! assume  
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best —  
The only! you and he, a patriot-pair,  
Have striven alike for one result — say, Peace!  
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters —  
Our people: have you made them end this war  
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies  
And postures of Oporia? Sadly — No!  
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,  
May yet endure until Athenai falls,  
And freedom falls with her. So much for you!  
Now, the antagonist Euripides —  
Has he succeeded better? Who shall say?  
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd  
To a dim future, and if there he fail,  
Why, you are fellows in adversity.  
But that's unlike the fate of wise words launched  
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart,  
Arrive, Glad Welcome! Not my single wish —  
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,

Your nature too is kingly. All beside  
I call pretension — no true potentate,  
Whatever intermediary be crowned,  
Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky  
Lacks not Triballos to complete the group.  
I recognize, — behind such phantom-crew, —  
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,  
Else never had I dared approach, appeal  
To poetry, power, Aristophanes!  
But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,  
Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign  
More or less royally — may prayer but push  
His sway past limit, purge the false from true!  
Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue  
But that the other king stands suddenly,  
In all the grand investiture of death,  
Bowing your knee beside my lowly head —  
Equals one moment!

“Now, arise and go!

Both have done homage to Euripides!”

Silence pursued the words : till he broke out—

“ Scarce so ! This constitutes, I may believe,  
Sufficient homage done by who defames  
Your poet’s foe, since you account me such ;  
But homage-proper, — pay it by defence  
Of him, direct defence and not oblique,  
Not by mere mild admonishment of me ! ”

“ Defence ? The best, the only ! ” I replied.  
“ A story goes — When Sophokles, last year,  
Cited before tribunal by his son  
(A poet — to complete the parallel)  
Was certified unsound of intellect,  
And claimed as only fit for tutelage,  
Since old and doating and incompetent  
To carry on this world’s work, — the defence  
Consisted just in his reciting (calm  
As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell  
And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)  
That choros-chant ‘ The station of the steed,

Stranger! thou comest to, — Kolonos white!'  
Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.  
You know the one adventure of my life —  
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.  
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell,  
'I sang another "Herakles,"' smiled he;  
'It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!  
Take it — the tablets also where I traced  
The story first with stulos pendent still —  
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift,  
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,  
Yourself shall modulate — same notes, same strings —  
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once.'  
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,  
We were about to honor him once more  
By reading the consummate Tragedy.  
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;  
May I go on, and read, — so make defence,  
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,  
— Beating the god, affords such test: *I* hold  
That when rash hands but touch divinity,



The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,  
And — fire — he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we try?"

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.



## HERAKLES.



### AMPHITRUON.

ZEUS' Couchmate, — who of mortals knows not me,  
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaios sired  
Of old, as Perseus him, I — Herakles?  
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike  
Of Sown-ones burgeoned: Ares saved from these  
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day  
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.  
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,  
King of the country, — Kreon that became  
The father of this woman, Megara,  
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all  
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,

While to my dwelling that grand Herakles  
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes — where I  
Abode perforce — this Megara and those  
Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son  
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,  
Kuklopian city, which I fly, myself,  
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so  
To ease away my hardships and once more  
Inhabit his own land, for my return  
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there —  
The letting in of light on this choked world!  
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad  
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.  
The other labors — why, he toiled them through;  
But for this last one — down by Tainaros,  
Its mouth, to Haidés' realm descended he  
To drag into the light the three-shaped hound  
Of Hell: whence Herakles returns no more.  
Now, there's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have,  
How Dirké's husband was a Lukos once,  
Holding the seven-towered city here in sway

Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,  
Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus the twins.  
This Lukos' son, — named like his father too,  
No born Kadmeian but Euboa's gift, —  
Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,  
Falling upon our town sedition-sick.  
To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond  
Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly;  
For, since my son is in the earth's abysses,  
This man of valor, Lukos, lord and king,  
Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,  
And slay his wife as well, — by murder thus  
Thinking to stamp out murder, — slay too me,  
(If me 'tis fit you count among men still, —  
Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,  
Grown men one day, exact due punishment  
Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.  
I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes,  
The children's household guardian, — left, when earth's  
Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine, —  
I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,

Sit at this altar of the savior Zeus  
Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised  
Conquering — my nobly-born! — the Minuai.  
Here do we guard our station, destitute  
Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground  
Couched side by side: sealed out of house and home  
Sit we in a resourcelessness of help.  
Our friends — why, some are no true friends, I see!  
The rest, that are true, want the means to aid.  
So operates in man adversity:  
Whereof may never anybody — no,  
Though half of him should really wish me well, —  
Happen to taste! a friend-test faultless, that!

## MEGARA.

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,  
Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,  
Of speared Kadmeians — how gods play men false!  
I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire,  
Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,  
Having supreme rule, — for the love of which

Leap the long lances forth at favored breasts,—  
And having children too: and me he gave  
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles,  
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.  
And now these things are dead and flown away,  
While thou and I await our death, old man,  
These Herakleian boys too, whom — my chicks —  
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird.  
But one or other falls to questioning,  
“O mother,” cries he, “where in all the world  
Is father gone to? What’s he doing? when  
Will he come back?” At fault through tender years,  
They seek their sire. For me, I put them off,  
Telling them stories; at each creak of door,  
All wonder, “Does he come?”—and all afoot,  
Make for the fall before the parent knee.  
Now then, what hope, what method of escape  
Facilitatest thou?—for, thee, old man,  
I look to,—since we may not leave by stealth  
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong  
Than we, are at the outlets; nor in friends

Remain to us the hopes of safety more.  
Therefore, whatever thy decision be,  
Impart it for the common good of all!  
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,  
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

AMPHITRUON.

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,  
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass.

MEGARA.

You want some sorrow more, or so love life?

AMPHITRUON.

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

MEGARA.

And I ; but hope against hope — no, old man !

AMPHITRUON.

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.



## MEGARA.

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites.

## AMPHITRUON.

O there may be a run before the wind  
From out these present ills, for me and thee,  
Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse !  
But hush ! and from the children take away  
Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm,  
Steal them by stories — sad theft, all the same !  
For, human troubles — they grow weary too ;  
Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength,  
Nor happy men keep happy to the end :  
Since all things change — their natures part in twain ;  
And that man's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,  
Hopes ever : to despair is cowardly.

## CHOROS.

These domes that overroof,  
This long-used couch, I come to, having made

*Song*  
 A staff my prop, that song may put to proof  
 The swan-like power, age-whitened,—poet's aid  
 Of sobbed-forth dirges — words that stand aloof  
 From action now: such am I—just a shade  
 With night for all its face, a mere night-dream—  
 And words that tremble too: howe'er they seem,  
 Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,  
 O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns—  
 Unhappy mother—only us above,  
 Nor reaches him below in Haidēs' realm, thy love!  
 —(Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and limb  
 Way-weary, nor lose courage— as some horse  
 Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him  
 Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course!  
 Take by the hand, the peplos, any one  
 Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordone!  
 Aged, assist along me aged too,  
 Who,—mate with thee in toils when life was new,  
 And shields and spears first made acquaintanceship,—

Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip  
 Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.)—  
 See now, how like the sire's  
 Each eyeball fiercely fires!  
 What though ill-fortune have not left his race?  
 Neither is gone the grand paternal grace!  
 Hellas! O what — what combatants, destroyed  
 In these, wilt thou one day seek — seek, and find all  
 void!

Pause! for I see the ruler of this land,  
 Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

## LUKOS.

The Herakleian couple — father, wife —  
 If need I must, I question: "must" forsooth?  
 Being your master — all I please, I ask.  
 To what time do you seek to spin out life?  
 What hope, what help see, so as not to die?  
 Is it you trust the sire of these, that's sunk  
 In Haides, will return? How past the pitch,

Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe —  
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts  
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son ;  
And thou, that thou wast stiled our best man's wife !  
Where was the awful in his work wound up,  
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake  
Or the Nemeian monster whom he snared  
And — says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew ?  
With these do you outwrestle me ? Such feats  
Shall save from death the sons of Herakles  
Who got praise, being nought, for bravery  
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank ?  
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,  
Not he, nor get in spear's reach ! bow he bore —  
True coward's weapon : shoot first and then fly !  
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,  
But who keeps rank, — stands, one unwinking stare  
As, ploughing up, the darts come, — brave is he.  
My action has no impudence, old man !  
Providence, rather : for I own I slew  
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.

Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown up,  
Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

## AMPHITRUON.

As to the part of Zeus in his own child,  
Let Zeus defend that! As to mine, 'tis me  
The care concerns to show by argument  
The folly of this fellow, — Herakles,  
Whom I stand up for! since to hear thee styled  
Cowardly — that is unendurable.  
First then, the infamous (for I account  
Amongst the words denied to human speech,  
Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles!)  
This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.  
Zeus' thunder I appeal to, those four steeds  
Whereof he also was the charioteer  
When, having shot down the earth's Giant-growth —  
(Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)  
Triumph he sang in common with the gods.  
The Kentaur-race, four-footed insolence —  
Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of kings,

*Whom* they would pick out and pronounce best man,  
If not my son, "the seeming brave," say'st thou!  
But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,  
Question her, and she would not praise, I think!  
For there's no spot, where having done some good,  
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.  
Now, that allwise invention, archer's-gear,  
Thou blamest: hear my teaching and grow sage!  
A man in armor is his armor's slave,  
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,  
He dies because his neighbors have lost heart.  
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains  
Of warding death off, — gone that body-guard,  
His one and only; while, whatever folk  
Have the true bow-hand, — here's the one main  
good, —  
Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,  
Others remain wherewith the archer saves  
His limbs and life, too, — stands afar and wards  
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares  
Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself

Offers no full front to those opposite,  
But keeps in thorough cover: there's the point  
That's capital in combat — damage foe,  
Yet keep a safe skin — foe not out of reach  
As you are! Thus my words contrast with thine,  
And such, in judging facts, our difference.  
These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay?  
What have they done thee? In a single point  
I count thee wise — if, being base thyself,  
Thou dreadst the progeny of nobleness.  
Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,  
If we must die — because of fear in thee —  
A death 'twere fit thou suffer at our hands,  
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all.  
If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,  
Thyself, here — suffer us to leave the land,  
Fugitives! nothing do by violence,  
Or violence thyself shalt undergo  
When the gods' gale may chance to change for thee!  
Alas, O land of Kadmos, — for 'tis thee  
I mean to close with, dealing out the due

Revilement, — in such sort dost thou defend  
Herakles and his children? Herakles  
Who, coming, one to all the world, against  
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye  
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with!  
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook  
Ever to keep in silence that I count  
Towards my son, craven of cravens — her  
Whom it behooved go bring the young ones here  
Fire, spears, arms — in exchange for seas made  
safe,

And cleansings of the land, his labor's price.  
But fire, spears, arms, — O children, neither Thebes  
Nor Hellas has them for you! 'Tis myself,  
A feeble friend, ye look to: nothing now  
But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone  
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake  
And force a-flicker! Were I only young,  
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew,  
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks  
Of this insulter would I bloody so —



Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds  
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery!

## CHOROS.

Have not the really good folk starting-points  
For speech to purpose, — though rare talkers they?

## LUKOS.

Say thou against us words thou towerest with!  
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.  
Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos  
Some, and the clefts there! Bid the woodmen fell  
Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside  
The city, pile the altar round with logs,  
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,  
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules  
The land here, but 'tis I, by acts like these!  
As for you, old sirs, who are set against  
My judgments, you shall groan for — not alone  
The Herakleian children, but the fate  
Of your own house beside, when faring ill

By any chance : and you shall recollect  
 Slaves are you of a tyranny that's mine !

CHOROS.

O progeny of earth, — whom Ares sowed  
 When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw —  
 Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,  
 And bloody this man's irreligious head?  
 Who, being no Kadmeian, rules, — the wretch, —  
 Our easy youth : an interloper too !  
 But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy  
 Thy lordship ever ; nor my labor's fruit, —  
 Hand worked so hard for, — have ! A curse with thee,  
 Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize !  
 For never while I live shalt thou destroy  
 The Herakleian children : not so deep  
 Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord !  
 But we bear both of you in mind, — that thou,  
 The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,  
 While he who saved it, loses every right.  
 I play the busy-body — for I serve

My dead friends when they need friends' service most?  
 O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear  
 And serve indeed! in weakness dies the wish,  
 Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,  
 And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes  
 Where thou exultest! — city that's insane,  
 Sick through sedition and bad government,  
 Else never had she gained for master — thee!

## MEGARA.

Old friends, I praise you: since a righteous wrath  
 For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no!  
 On our account in anger with your lord,  
 Suffer no injury! Hear my advice,  
 Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.  
 O yes, I love my children! how not love  
 What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to die —  
 Sad I esteem too; still, the fated way  
 Who stiffens him against, that man I count  
 Poor creature; us, who are of other mood,  
 Since we must die, behooves us meet our death

Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh —  
To me, worse ill than dying, that! we owe  
Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay.  
Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate  
For spear-work, so that unendurable  
Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.  
And for my glorious husband, where wants he  
A witness that he would not save his boys  
If touched in their good fame thereby? since birth  
Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,  
— My husband needs must be my pattern here!  
See now thy hope — how much I count thereon!  
Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light:  
And, of the dead, who came from Hades back?  
But we with talk this man might mollify:  
Never! Of all foes, fly the foolish one!  
Wise, well-bred people, make concession to!  
Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft.  
Already it was in my mind — perchance  
We might beg off these children's banishment;  
But even that is sad — involving them

In safety, ay — and piteous poverty !  
Since the host's visage for the flying friend  
Has, only one day, the sweet look, 'tis said.  
Dare with us death, which awaits thee, dared or no !  
We call on thine ancestral worth, old man !  
For who out-labors what the gods appoint,  
Shows energy, but energy gone mad.  
Since what must — none e'er makes what must not be.

## CHOROS.

Had any one, while yet my arms were strong,  
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.  
But we are nought, now ; thine henceforth to see —  
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates !

## AMPHITRUON.

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life  
Stops me from dying : but I seek to save  
My son his children. Vain ! I set my heart,  
It seems, upon impossibility.  
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat

To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice !  
 But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate !  
 Slay me and this unhappy one before  
 The children, lest we see them — impious sight ! —  
 Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while  
 On mother and on father's father ! Else,  
 Do as thy heart inclines thee ! No resource  
 Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

## MEGARA.

And I too supplicate : add grace to grace,  
 And, though but one man, doubly serve us both !  
 Let me bestow adornment of the dead  
 Upon these children ! Throw the palace wide !  
 For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share  
 At least so much of wealth, was once their sire's !

## LUKOS.

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid  
 My servants ! Enter and adorn yourselves !  
 I grudge no peploi ; but when these ye wind

About your bodies, — that adornment done, —  
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

## MEGARA.

O children, follow this unhappy foot,  
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,  
Where others have the power, are lords in truth,  
Although the empty name is left us yet!

## AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,  
In vain I called thee father of my child!  
Thou wast less friendly far than thou didst seem.  
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee  
The mighty god: for I have not betrayed  
The Herakleian children, — whereas thou  
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely  
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,  
Another's place; and when it comes to help  
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed!  
Thou art some stupid god, or born unjust.

## CHOROS.

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit  
In song to music jubilant  
For all its sorrow: making shoot  
His golden plectron o'er the lute,  
Melodious ministrant.  
And I, too, am of mind to raise,  
Despite the imminence of doom,  
A song of joy, outpour my praise  
To him — what is it rumor says? —  
Whether — now buried in the ghostly gloom  
Below ground, — he was child of Zeus indeed,  
Or mere Amphitruon's mortal seed —  
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labor's meed.  
For, is my hero perished in the feat?  
The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,  
These save the dead in song, — their glory-garland  
meet!

First, then, he made the wood  
Of Zeus a solitude,



Slaying its lion-tenant ; and he spread  
The tawniness behind — his yellow head  
Enmuffed by the brute's, backed by that grin of dread.  
The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race  
He strewèd with deadly bow about their place,  
Slaying with winged shafts : Peneios knew,  
Beauteously-eddyng, and the long tracts too  
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well  
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,  
And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell  
Whence, having filled their hands with pine-tree  
plunder,  
Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue  
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.  
The golden-headed spot-backed stag he slew,  
That robber of the rustics : glorified  
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride  
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.  
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed  
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed  
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede

Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore  
For grain, exultant the dread feast before —  
Of man's flesh: hideous feeders they of yore!  
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow  
Accomplished he such labor, toiling so  
For Mukenaian tyrant; ay, and more —  
He crossed the Melian shore  
And, by the sources of Amauros, shot  
To death that strangers'-pest  
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia: not  
Of fame for good to guest!

And next, to the melodious maids he came,  
Inside the Hesperian court-yard: hand must aim  
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves,  
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,  
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves  
Himself all round, one spire about the same.  
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived  
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,  
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.

And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,  
At home with Atlas: and, for valor's sake,  
Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry.

Also, the rider-host of Amazons  
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went  
To conquer through the billowy Euxeine once,  
Having collected what an armament  
Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent  
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase!  
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace  
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still—  
Go wonder there, who will!

And the ten-thousand-headed hound  
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake  
He burned out, head by head, and cast around  
His darts a poison thence,—darts soon to slake  
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore  
Of Erutheia. Many a running more  
He made for triumph and felicity,  
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry

Of tears, he sailed: and there he, luckless, ends  
His life completely, nor returns again.

The house and home are desolate of friends,  
And where the children's life-path leads them, plain  
I see, — no step retraceable, no god  
Availing, and no law to help the lost!  
The oar of Charon marks their period,  
Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost! —  
To thee, though absent, look their uttermost!

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,  
Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will  
In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,  
They would, — and I, — when warfare was to wage,  
Stand by these children; but I am bereft  
Of youth now, lone of that good genius left!

But hist, desist! for here come these, —  
Draped as the dead go, under and over, —  
Children long since, — now hard to discover, —  
Of the once so potent Herakles!

And the loved wife dragging, in one tether  
About her feet, the boys together ;  
And the hero's aged sire comes last !  
Unhappy that I am ! Of tears which rise, —  
How am I all unable to hold fast,  
Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes !

## MEGARA.

Be it so ! Who is priest, who butcher here  
Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath  
Of me, the miserable ? Ready, see,  
The sacrifice — to lead where Haides lives !  
O children, we are led — no lovely team  
Of corpses — age, youth, motherhood, all mixed !  
O sad fate of myself and these my sons  
Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time !  
I, indeed, bore you : but for enemies  
I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,  
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff !  
Woe's me !  
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down

From what I used to hope about you once —  
The expectation from your father's talk!  
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to:  
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,  
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow;  
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about  
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,  
That which himself went wearing armor-wise.  
And thou wast King of Thebes — such chariots there!  
Those plains I had for portion — all for thee,  
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth  
To thee, his boy: and into thy right hand  
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos, —  
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false!  
And upon thee he promised to bestow  
Oichalia — what, with those far-shooting shafts,  
He ravaged once; and so, since three you were,  
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up  
To very towers, your father, — proud enough,  
Prognosticating, from your manliness  
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.

For my part, I was picking out for you  
Brides, suiting each with his alliance — this  
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes —  
Whence, suited — as stern-cables steady ship —  
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!  
Fortune turns round and gives us — you, the Fates  
Instead of brides — me, tears for nuptial baths,  
Unhappy in my hoping! And the sire  
Of your sire — he prepares the marriage-feast  
Befitting Haides who plays father now —  
Bitter relationship! Oh me! which first —  
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold?  
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine?  
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go?  
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,  
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,  
Give them you back again, a crowded tear!  
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men  
Dungeoned in Haides, thee — to thee I speak!  
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys!  
And I too perish, famed as fortunate

*fortune  
wife.*

By mortals once, through thee ! Assist them ! Come !  
But come ! though just a shade, appear to me !  
For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice,  
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these  
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned !

## AMPHITRUON.

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist !  
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,  
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent  
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,  
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough !  
And yet thou hast been called and called ; in vain  
I labor : for we needs must die, it seems.  
Well, aged brothers — life's a little thing !  
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly  
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while !  
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes, —  
To save them, — but his own work done, flies off.  
Witness myself, looked up to among men,  
Doing noteworthy deeds : when here comes fate



Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,  
In one day! Riches then and glory, — whom  
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends,  
Farewell! the man who loved you all so much,  
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA.

Ha!

O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON.

No more than thou canst, daughter — dumb like thee!

MEGARA.

Is this he whom we heard was underground?

AMPHITRUON.

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA.

What do I say? what dreams insanely view?

This is no other than thy son, old sire!

Here, children! hang to these paternal robes,  
Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here's your true  
Zeus that can save — and every whit as well!

## HERAKLES.

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula, —  
How glad I see thee as I come to light!  
Ha, what means this? My children I behold  
Before the house in garments of the grave,  
Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,  
My very wife — my father weeping too,  
Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take  
My station nearer these and learn it all!  
Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home?

## MEGARA.

O dearest! light flashed on thy father now!  
Art thou come? art thou saved and dost thou fall  
On friends in their supreme extremity?

## HERAKLES.

How say'st thou? Father! what's the trouble here?

MEGARA.

Undone are we!—but thou, old man, forgive  
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him!  
For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.  
Here are my children killed and I undone!

HERAKLES.

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins!

MEGARA.

Dead are my brothers and old father too.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou?—doing what?—by spear-stroke  
whence?

MEGARA.

Lukos destroyed them—the land's noble king!

HERAKLES.

Met them in arms? or through the land's disease?

MEGARA.

Sedition : and he sways seven-gated Thebes.

HERAKLES.

Why then came fear on the old man and thee ?

MEGARA.

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou ? Fearing what from orphanage ?

MEGARA.

Lest they should some day pay back Kreon's death.

HERAKLES.

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus ?

MEGARA.

These wraps of death we have already donned.

HERAKLES.

And you had died through violence? Woe's me!

MEGARA.

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard.

HERAKLES.

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA.

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES.

And why was it you left my house and hearth?

MEGARA.

Forced thence: thy father — from his very couch!

HERAKLES.

And no shame at insulting the old man?

MEGARA.

Shame, truly! no near neighbors *he* and Shame!

HERAKLES.

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends?

MEGARA.

Friends, — are there any to a luckless man?

HERAKLES.

The Minuai-war I waged, — they spat forth these?

MEGARA.

Friendless, — again I tell thee, — is ill-luck.

HERAKLES.

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair  
 And look on light again, and with your eyes  
 Taste the sweet change from nether dark to day?  
 While I — for now there needs my handiwork —  
 First I shall go, demolish the abodes

Of these new lordships; next hew off the head  
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.  
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find  
Were craven though they owed me gratitude,—  
Some I intend to handle with this club  
Renowned for conquest; and with winged shafts  
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full  
With bloody corpses,—Dirké's flow so white  
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,  
Behooves me rather help than wife and child  
And aged father? Farewell, "Labors" mine!  
Vainly I wrought them: my true work lay here!  
My business is to die defending these,—  
If for their father's sake they meant to die.  
Or how shall we call brave the battling it  
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,  
If yet I must not labor death away  
From my own children? "Conquering Herakles"  
Folks will not call me as they used, I think!  
The right thing is for parents to assist  
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

AMPHITRUON.

True, son! thy duty is — be friend to friends  
And foe to foes: yet — no more haste than needs!

HERAKLES.

Why, father, what is over-hasty here?

AMPHITRUON.

Many a pauper, — seeming to be rich,  
As the word goes, — the king calls partisan.  
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob  
Their neighbor: for, what good they had at home  
Was spent and gone — flew off through idleness.  
You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,  
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,  
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

HERAKLES.

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I.  
But seeing as I did a certain bird



Not in the lucky seats, I knew some woe  
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,  
By stealth I made my way into the land.

## •AMPHITRUON.

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise  
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see!  
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons  
To drag-forth — slaughter — slay me too, — this king!  
But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee —  
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town  
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here!

## HERAKLES.

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well; my home  
Let me first enter! Since at the due time  
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells  
Haides' wife Koré, let me not affront  
Those gods beneath my roof, I first should hail!

AMPHITRUON.

For didst thou really visit Haides, son?

HERAKLES.

Ay — dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

AMPHITRUON.

By fight, didst conquer — or through Koré's gift?

HERAKLES.

Fight: well for me, I saw the Orgies first!

AMPHITRUON.

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute?

HERAKLES.

Chthonia's grove, Hermion's city, holds him now.

AMPHITRUON.

Does not Eurustheus know thee back on earth?

HERAKLES.

No: I would come first and see matters here.

AMPHITRUON.

But how wast thou below ground such a time?

HERAKLES.

I stopped, from Haidēs, bringing Theseus up.

· AMPHITRUON.

And where is he?—bound o'er the plain for home?

HERAKLES.

Gone glad to Athens—Haidēs' fugitive!  
But, up, boys! follow father into house!  
There's a far better going-in for you  
Truly, than going-out was! Nay, take heart,  
And let the eyes no longer run and run!  
And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul

Nor tremble now! Leave grasping, all of you,  
My garments! I'm not winged, nor fly from friends!  
Ah, —

No letting go for these, who all the more  
Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed  
The razor's edge? Why, then I'll carry them —  
Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow  
Just as a ship would. There! don't fear I shirk  
My children's service! this way, men are men,  
No difference! best and worst, they love their boys  
After one fashion: wealth they differ in —  
Some have it, others not; but each and all  
Combine to form the children-loving race.

## CHOROS.

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me;  
But age on my head, more heavily  
Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,  
And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the rays.  
Never be mine the preference  
Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet

Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth  
That's beauty, whatever the gods dispense!  
Whether in wealth we joy, or fret  
Paupers,— of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth!

But miserable murderous age I hate!  
Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,  
Nor ever by rights plague tower or town  
Where mortals bide, but still elate  
With wings, on ether, precipitate,  
Wander them round—nor wait!

But if the gods, to man's degree,  
Had wit and wisdom, they would bring  
Mankind a twofold youth, to be  
Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,  
In those with whom life's winter thus grew spring.  
For when they died, into the sun once more  
Would they have traversed twice life's racecourse o'er;  
While ignobility had simply run  
Existence through, nor second life begun.

And so might we discern both bad and good  
As surely as the starry multitude  
Is numbered by the sailors, one and one.  
But now the gods by no apparent line  
Limit the worthy and the base define ;  
Only, a certain period rounds, and so  
Brings man more wealth, — but youthful vigor, no !

Well ! I am not to pause  
Mingling together — wine and wine in cup —  
The Graces with the Muses up —  
Most dulcet marriage : loosed from music's laws,  
No life for me !  
But where the wreaths abound, there ever may I be !  
And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné —  
Still chant of Herakles the triumph-chant,  
Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell  
And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,  
God of the grape, with man participant !  
Not yet will we arrest their glad advance —  
The Muses who so long have led me forth to dance !

A paian — hymn the Delian girls indeed,  
 Weaving a beauteous measure in and out  
 His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed ;  
 And paians — I too, these thy domes about,  
 From these gray cheeks, my king, will swan-like  
 shout —

Old songster! Ay, in song it starts off brave —  
 "Zeus' son is he!" and yet, such grace of birth  
 Surpassing far, to man his labors gave  
 Existence, one calm flow without a wave,  
 Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the earth.

## LUKOS.

From out the house Amphitruon comes — in time!  
 For 'tis a long while now since ye bedecked  
 Your bodies with the dead-folks' finery.  
 But quick! the boys and wife of Herakles —  
 Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact  
 To die, and need no bidding but your own!

AMPHITRUON.

King! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,  
 And give me scorn—beside my dead ones here.  
 Meet in such matters were it, though you reign,  
 To temper zeal with moderation. Since  
 You do impose on us the need to die—  
 Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

LUKOS.

Where's Megara, then? Alkmené's grandsons, where?

AMPHITRUON.

She, I think,—as one figures from outside,—

LUKOS.

Well, this same thinking,—what affords its ground?

AMPHITRUON.

—Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps,—

LUKOS.

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life!



AMPHITRUON.

—And calls on her dead husband, vainly too!

LUKOS.

For he's not come, nor ever will arrive.

AMPHITRUON.

Never—at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS.

Go to her, and conduct her from the house!

AMPHITRUON.

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS.

We, — since thou hast a scruple in the case, —  
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads,  
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk —  
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

## AMPHITRUON.

Thou—go then! March where needs must! What  
remains—

Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,  
Expect some ill be done thee!

Ha, old friends!

On he strides beautifully! in the toils  
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast—  
Minded to kill his neighbors—the arch-knave!  
I go, too—I must see the falling corpse!  
For he has sweets to give—a dying man,  
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

## CHOROS.

Troubles are over! He the great king once,  
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!  
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

## AMPHITRUON.

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays crime—  
These insults heaped on better than thyself!

CHOROS.

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again  
Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old  
He never dreamed himself was to endure —  
King of the country! But enough, old man!  
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand —  
If somebody be faring as I wish!

LUKOS.

Ah me — me!

CHOROS.

This strikes the keynote — music to my mind,  
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune!  
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

LUKOS.

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

## CHOROS.

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,  
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!  
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness —  
Mortal himself, threw up his fools'-conceit  
Against the blessed heavenly ones — as though  
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man  
Exists not any more! The house is mute.  
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love,  
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting  
To Thebes, the sacred city through,  
Are a care! for, change and change  
Of tears to laughter, old to new,  
Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!  
He is gone and past, the mighty king!  
And the old one reigns, returned — O strange!  
From the Acherontian harbor too!  
Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range!

To the gods, the gods are crimes a care,  
And they watch our virtue, well aware  
That gold and that prosperity drive man  
Out of his mind—those charioteers who hale  
Might-without-right behind them: face who can  
Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail?  
—He who evades law and in lawlessness  
Delights him,—he has broken down his trust—  
The chariot, riches haled—now blackening in the  
dust!

Ismenos, go thou garlanded!  
Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed  
O' the seven-gated city! Dirké, thou  
Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,  
Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival  
Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now!  
O woody rock of Puthios and each home  
O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come  
With joyous shouting to my walls, my town  
Where saw the light that Spartan race, those "Sown,"

Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band  
With children's children renovates our land,  
To Thebes a sacred light!

O combination of the marriage rite —  
Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched  
Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny!  
For credible, past hope, becomes to me  
That nuptial story long ago avouched,  
O Zeus! and time has turned the dark to bright,  
And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan might —  
His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left  
Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.  
Thou wast the lord that nature gave me — not  
That baseness born and bred — my king, by lot!  
— Baseness made plain to all, who now regard  
The match of sword with sword in fight, —  
If to the gods the Just and Right  
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror!

Are we come to the selfsame passion of fear,

Old friends? — such a phantasm fronts me here  
 Visible over the palace-roof!  
 In flight, in flight, the laggard limb  
 Bestir! and haste aloof  
 From that on the roof there — grand and grim!  
 O Paian, king!  
 Be thou my safeguard from the woful thing!

## IRIS.

Courage, old men! beholding here — Night's birth —  
 Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,  
 Iris: since to your town we come, no plague —  
 Wage war against the house of but one man  
 From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.  
 Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,  
 Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus  
 Let us oncé hurt him, Heré nor myself.  
 But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task,  
 Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him —  
 Slaying his children: I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,  
Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag  
Frenzy upon the man here — whirls of brain  
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!  
Let go the bloody cable its whole length!  
So that, — when o'er the Acherousian ford  
He has sent floating, by self-homicide,  
His beautiful boy-garland, — he may know  
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,  
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed  
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free!

## MADNESS.

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too  
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and Heaven's;  
But here's my glory, — not to grudge the good!  
Nor love I raids against the friends of man.  
I wish, then, to persuade, — before I see  
You stumbling, you and Heré! trust my words!  
This man, the house of whom ye hound me to,



Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among ;  
Since, having quelled waste land and savage sea,  
He alone raised again the falling rights  
Of gods — gone ruinous through impious men.  
Desire no mighty mischief, I advise !

IRIS.

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes !

MADNESS.

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free !

IRIS.

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here !

MADNESS.

Sun, thee I cite to witness — doing what I loath to do !  
But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must subserve,  
And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds  
a-hunt with the huntsman,

— Go I will ! and neither the sea, as it groans with its  
waves so furiously,  
Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder gasping  
out heaven's labor-throe,  
Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into  
the bosom of Herakles !  
And home I scatter, and house I batter,  
Having first of all made the children fall, —  
And he who felled them is never to know  
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,  
Till the Madness, I am, have let him go !

Ha, behold, already he rocks his head — he is off  
from the starting-place !  
Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from their  
sockets wrenched in the ghastly race !  
And the breathings of him he tempers and times no  
more than a bull in act to toss,  
And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres, daugh-  
ters of Tartaros.  
Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe  
thee quite out of thy mind with fear !

So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to  
Olumpos, leave me here!  
Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful shape  
no mortal sees,  
And now are about to pass, from without, inside of  
the home of Herakles!

## CHOROS.

Otototoi, — groan! Away is mown  
Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City!  
Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)  
Who worked thee all the good,  
Away from thee, — destroyest in a mood  
Of Madness him, to death whom pipings dance!  
There goes she, in her chariot, — groans, her brood, —  
And gives her team the goad, as though adrift  
For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose glance  
Turns man to marble! with what hissings lift  
Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's inherit-  
ance!  
Quick has the god changed fortune: through their sire

Quick will the children, that he saved, expire!  
O miserable me! O Zeus! thy child —  
Childless himself — soon vengeance, hunger-wild,  
Craving for punishment, will lay how low —  
Loaded with many a woe!

O palace-roofs! your courts about,  
A measure begins all unrejoiced  
By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist  
Of the Bromian revel-rout!  
O ye domes! and the measure proceeds  
For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds  
Of the Dionusian pouring-out!

Break forth, fly, children! fatal this —  
Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis!  
Ay, for he hunts a children-chase —  
Never shall madness lead her revel  
And leave no trace in the dwelling-place!  
Ai ai, because of the evil!  
Ai ai, the old man — how I groan

For the father, and not the father alone!  
 She who was nurse of his children, — small  
 Her gain that they ever were born at all!

See! See!

A whirlwind shakes hither and thither  
 The house — the roof falls in together!  
 Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus?  
 A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,  
 Such as once Pallas on the Titan thundered,  
 Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered and wall-  
 sundered!

MESSENGER.

O bodies white with age!—

CHOROS.

What cry, to me—

*What*, dost thou call with?

MESSENGER.

There's a curse indoors!

CHOROS.

I shall not bring a prophet : you suffice !

MESSENGER.

Dead are the children !

CHOROS.

Ai ai !

MESSENGER.

Groan ! for, groans

Suit well the subject ! Dire the children's death,

Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate.

No one could tell worse woe than we have borne !

CHOROS.

How dost thou that same curse — curse, cause for  
groan —

The father's on the children, make appear ?

Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven

Against the house — these evils ; and recount

The children's hapless fate, O Messenger !

## MESSENGER.

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,  
A household-expiation: since the king  
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast  
From out the dwelling; and a beauteous choir  
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.  
And now the basket had been carried round  
The altar in a circle, and we used  
The consecrated speech. Alkmené's son, —  
Just as he was about, in his right hand,  
To bear the torch, that he might dip into  
The cleansing-water, — came to a stand-still;  
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys  
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself  
No longer: lost in rollings of the eyes;  
Out-thrusting eyes — their very roots — like blood!  
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,  
And said, — together with a madman's laugh —  
“Father! why sacrifice, before I slay  
Eurustheus? why have twice the lustral fire,

And double pains, when 'tis permitted me  
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here?  
Then, — when I hither bring Eurustheus' head, —  
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all!  
Now, — cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets down!  
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club?  
I go to that Mukenai! One must match  
Crowbars and mattocks, so that — those sunk stones  
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line red —  
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble fown!" *ol*  
Which said, he goes and, — with no car to have —  
Affirms he has one! mounts the chariot-board,  
And strikes, as having really goad in hand!  
And two ways laughed the servants — laugh with awe;  
And one said, as each met the other's stare,  
"Playing us boys' tricks? or is master mad?"  
But up he climbs, and down along the roof,  
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains  
He's come to Nisos city, when he's come  
Only inside his own house! then reclines  
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,



Makes himself supper ; goes through some brief stay,  
Then says he's traversing the forest-flats  
Of Isthmos ; thereupon lays body bare  
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with  
—No one! and is proclaimed the conqueror—  
He by himself—having called out to hear  
—Nobody! Then, if you will take his word,  
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,  
He's at Mukenai. But his father laid  
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus :  
“ O son, what ails thee ? Of what sort is this  
Extravagance ? Has not some murder-craze,  
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,  
Danced thee drunk ? ” But he, — taking him to crouch,  
Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched  
His hand, a suppliant, — pushes him aside,  
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against  
His children — thinking them Eurustheus' boys  
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear,  
Rushed here and there, — this child, into the robes  
O' the wretched mother — this, beneath the shade

O' the column,—and this other, like a bird,  
Cowered at the altar-foot. The mother shrieks  
“Parent—what dost thou?—kill thy children?” Sc  
Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.  
But he, outwinding him, as round about  
The column ran the boy,—a horrid whirl  
O' the lathe his foot described!—stands opposite,  
Strikes through the liver! and supine the boy  
Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.  
But “Victory” he shouted! boasted thus:  
“Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus—dead—  
Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate!”  
Then bends bow on another who was crouched  
At base of altar—overlooked, he thought—  
And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,  
Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.  
“O dearest!” cries he “father, kill me not!  
Yours, I am—your boy: not Eurustheus' boy  
You kill now!” But he, rolling the wild eye  
Of Gorgon,—as the boy stood all too close  
For deadly bowshot,—mimicry of smith

Who batters red-hot iron, — hand o'er head  
Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair  
Hurls it and breaks the bone. This second caught,—  
He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice  
He and the couple ; but, beforehand here,  
The miserable mother catches up,  
Carries him inside house and bars the gate.  
Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,  
Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenches doorposts out,  
Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.  
And this done, at the old man's death he drives ;  
But there came, as it seemed to us who saw,  
A statue — Pallas with the crested head,  
Swinging her spear — and threw a stone which smote  
Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,  
And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground —  
Striking against the column with his back —  
Column which, with the falling of the roof,  
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.  
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,  
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds

Of rope-noose to the column, so that he,  
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds  
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor wretch,  
No gift of any god! since he has slain  
Children and wife. For me, I do not know  
What mortal has more misery to bear.

## CHOROS.

A murder there was which Argolis  
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,  
As, at that time, best and famousst:  
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.  
A murder indeed was that! but this  
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed.  
I am able to speak of a murder done  
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too —  
Prokné's son, who had but one —  
Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say  
Rather, who Itus sing alway,  
Her single child! But thou, the sire  
Of children three — O thou consuming fire! —

In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire!  
And this outrageous fate —  
What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,  
Or choric dance of Haides shall I urge  
The Muse to celebrate?

Woe! woe! behold!  
The portalled palace lies unrolled,  
This way and that way, each prodigious fold!  
Alas for me! these children, see,  
Stretched, hapless group, before their father — he  
The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out  
The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep!  
And bonds, see, all about, —  
Rope-tangle, ties and tether, — these  
Tightenings around the body of Herakles  
To the stone columns of the house made fast!

But — like a bird that grieves  
For callow nestlings, some rude hand bereaves —  
See, here, a bitter journey over-past,  
The old man — all too late — is here at last!

## AMPHITRUON.

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians !  
Will ye not suffer my son, diffused  
Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep ?

## CHOROS.

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,  
And the children too, and the head there — used  
Of old to the wreaths and paians !

## AMPHITRUON.

Farther away ! Nor beat the breast,  
Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest  
The slumberer — asleep, so best !

## CHOROS.

Ah me — what a slaughter !

## AMPHITRUON.

Refrain — refrain !

Ye will prove my perdition !

CHOROS.

Unlike water,  
Bloodshed rises from earth again!

AMPHITRUON.

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain —  
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!  
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,  
And bury the city in ravage — bray  
Father and house to dust away!

CHOROS.

I cannot forbear — I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON.

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!  
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS.

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON.

Ay, — sleeps ! A horror of slumber keeps  
The man who has piled  
On wife and child  
Death and death, as he shot them down  
With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS.

Wail —

AMPHITRUON.

Even so !

CHOROS.

— The fate of the children —

AMPHITRUON.

Triple woe !

CHOROS.

— Old man, the fate of thy son !



## AMPHITRUON.

Hush, hush! Have done!  
He is turning about!  
He is breaking out!  
Away! I steal  
And my body conceal,  
Before he arouse,  
In the depths of the house!

## CHOROS.

Courage! The Night  
Maintains her right  
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight!

## AMPHITRUON.

See, see! To leave the light  
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,  
I do not avoid; but if he kill  
Me his own father, and devise  
Beyond the present miseries

A misery more ghastly still —  
And to haunt him, over and above  
Those here who, as they used to love,  
Now hate him, what if he have with these  
My murder, the worst of Erinues?

## CHOROS.

Then was the time to die, for thee,  
When ready to wreak in the full degree  
Vengeance on those  
Thy consort's foes  
Who murdered her brothers! glad, life's close,  
With the Taphioi down,  
And sacked their town  
Clustered about with a wash of sea!

## AMPHITRUON.

To flight — to flight!  
Away from the house, troop off, old men!  
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight!

He is rousing himself right up: and then,  
Murder on murder heaping anew,  
He will revel in blood your city through!

## CHOROS.

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate,  
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes?

## HERAKLES.

Hah, —

In breath indeed I am — see things I ought —  
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts!  
But then — some billow and strange whirl of sense  
I have fallen into! and breathings hot I breathe —  
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.  
See now! Why bound, — at moorings like a ship, —  
About my young breast and young arm, to this  
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I  
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighborhood?  
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow  
Which played my brother-shieldman, held in hand, —

Guarded my side, and got my guardianship!  
I cannot have gone back to Haides — twice  
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence?  
But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,  
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid!  
I am struck witless sure! Where can I be?  
Ho there! what friend of mine is near or far —  
Some one to cure me of bewilderment?  
For nought familiar do I recognize.

## AMPHITRUON.

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes?

## CHOROS.

Ay, and let me too, — nor desert your ills!

## HERAKLES.

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up  
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son?

## AMPHITRUON.

O child! — for, faring badly, mine thou art!

HERAKLES.

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow?

AMPHITRUON.

Ill,—would cause any god who bore, to groan!

HERAKLES.

That's boasting, truly! still, you state no hap.

AMPHITRUON.

For, thyself seest—if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES.

Heyday! How riddlingly that hint returns!

AMPHITRUON.

Well, I am trying—art thou sane and sound!

HERAKLES.

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge!

AMPHITRUON.

If thou no more art Haides-drunk, — I tell!

HERAKLES.

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON.

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what?

HERAKLES.

And who was binder, tell! — not *that*, my deed!

AMPHITRUON.

Mind that much of misfortune — pass the rest!

HERAKLES.

Enough! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work?

HERAKLES.

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence?

AMPHITRUON.

Let be the goddess — bury thine own guilt!

HERAKLES.

Undone! What is the sorrow thou wilt say?

AMPHITRUON.

Look! See the ruins of thy children here!

HERAKLES.

Ah me! What sight do wretched I behold?

AMPHITRUON.

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst  
On thine own children!

HERAKLES.

What fight? Who slew these?

AMPHITRUON.

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES. .

How say'st? What did I? Ill-announcing sire!

AMPHITRUON.

— Go mad! Thou askest a sad clearing up!

HERAKLES.

And am I also murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRUON.

All the work here was just one hand's work — thine!

HERAKLES.

Ai ai — for groans encompass me — a cloud!

AMPHITRUON.

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate!



HERAKLES.

Did I break up my house or dance it down?

AMPHITRUON.

I know just one thing — all's a woe with thee!

HERAKLES.

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON.

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES.

Ah me! why is it then I save my life —  
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys?  
Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,  
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become  
My children's blood-avenger? or, this flesh  
Burning away with fire, so thrust away  
The infamy, which waits me there, from life?

Ah, but, — a hindrance to my purposed death,  
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here!  
Eyes will be on me! my child-murder-plague  
In evidence before friends loved so much!  
O me, what shall I do? Where, taking wing  
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out  
A solitariness from misery?  
I will pull night upon my muffled head!  
Let this wretch here content him with his curse  
Of blood: I would pollute no innocents!

## THESEUS.

I come, — with others who await beside  
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth, —  
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship!  
For a bruit reached the Erectheidai's town  
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,  
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.  
So, paying good back, — Herakles began,  
Saving me down there, — I have come, old man,  
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want.

What's here? Why all these corpses on the ground?  
 Am I perhaps behindhand — come too late  
 For newer ill? Who killed these children now?  
 Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?  
 Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear!  
 Some other woe than war, I chance upon!

· AMPHITRUON.

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height! —

·THESEUS.

Why hail'st thou me with woful prelude thus?

AMPHITRUON.

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

THESEUS.

These boys, — who are they, thou art weeping o'er?

AMPHITRUON.

He gave them birth, indeed, my hapless son!  
 Begot, but killed them — dared their bloody death.

THESEUS.

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON.

Would I might obey!

THESEUS.

O teller of dread tidings!

AMPHITRUON.

Lost are we—

Lost—flown away from life!

THESEUS.

What sayest thou?

What did he?

AMPHITRUON.

Erring through a frenzy-fit,  
He did all, with the arrows dipped in dye  
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS.

Heré's strife!

But who is this among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRUON.

Mine, mine, this progeny — the labor-plagued,  
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,  
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield!

THESEUS.

Woe — woe! What man was born mischanceful thus!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou couldst not know another mortal man  
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings.

THESEUS.

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head?

AMPHITRUON.

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness  
And kinship, — nor that children's-blood about!

THESEUS.

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me!  
Uncover him!

AMPHITRUON.

O child, put from thine eyes  
The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun!  
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears in  
thee.

I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek  
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear!  
O son, remit the savage lion's mood,  
Since to a bloody, an unholy race  
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute  
To go on adding ill to ill, my child!

THESEUS.

Let me speak! Thee, who sittest — seated woe —  
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye!  
For there's no darkness has a cloud so black  
May hide thy misery thus absolute.

Why, waving hand, dost sign me—murder's done?  
 Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech?  
 Nought care I to — with thee, at least — fare ill:  
 For I had joy once! *Then*,—soul rises to,—  
 When thou didst save me from the dead to light!  
 Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,  
 And him who likes to share when things look fine,  
 But, sail along with friends in trouble—no!  
 Arise, uncover thine unhappy head!  
 Look on us! Every man of the right race  
 Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

HERAKLES.

Theseus, hast seen this match—my boys with me?

THESEUS.

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st.

HERAKLES.

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS.

Why? mortals bring no plague on aught divine!

HERAKLES.

Fly, O unhappy, me — an impious plague!

THESEUS.

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends.

HERAKLES.

I praise thee! But I helped thee, — that is truth.

THESEUS.

And I, advantaged then, now pity thee.

HERAKLES.

— The pitiable, — my children's murderer!

THESEUS.

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.



HERAKLES.

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS.

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge distress!

HERAKLES.

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

THESEUS.

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods?

HERAKLES.

Gods please themselves: to gods I give their like.

THESEUS.

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe!

HERAKLES.

I am full fraught with ills — no stowing more!

THESEUS.

Thou wilt do — what, then? Whither moody borne?

HERAKLES.

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS.

Thou hast used words of — what man turns up first!

HERAKLES.

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS.

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus? —

HERAKLES.

Not the so much-enduring: measure's past!

THESEUS.

— Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend?

HERAKLES.

They nowise profit me: but Heré rules.

THESEUS.

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES.

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments  
Against thy teachings! I will ope thee out  
My life — past, present — as unlivable.  
First, I was born of this man, who had slain  
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,  
Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth.  
Now, when the basis of a family  
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall;  
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe  
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man!  
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee)  
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes  
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes, —  
That bed-fellow of Zeus! — to end me so.

But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,  
The labors I endured — what need to tell?  
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,  
Tuphons or giants, or the four-legged swarms  
Of Kentaur-battle, did not I end out?  
And that hound, headed all about with heads  
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain —  
I both went through a myriad other toils  
In full drove, and arrived among the dead  
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light  
Haides' three-headed dog and door-keeper.  
But then I, — wretch, — dared this last labor — see!  
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.  
To such a strait I come! nor my dear Thebes  
Dare I inhabit, — and, suppose I stay?  
Into what fane or festival of friends  
Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost!  
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?  
But say, — I hurry to some other town!  
And there they eye me, as notorious now, —  
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key —

“Is not this he, Zeus’ son, who murdered once  
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!”  
To any man renowned as happy once,  
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom  
Evil is old acquaintance, there’s no hurt  
To speak of, he and misery are twins.  
To this degree of woe I think to come:  
For earth will utter voice forbidding me  
To touch the ground, and sea — to pierce the wave,  
The river-springs — to drink, and I shall play  
Ixion’s part quite out, the chained and wheeled!  
And best of all will be, if so I ’scape  
Sight from one man of those Hellenes, — once.  
I lived among, felicitous and rich!  
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues  
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead?  
In fine, let Zeus’ brave consort dance and sing,  
Stamp foot, the Olympian Zeus’ own sandal-trick!  
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass —  
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,  
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray

To such a goddess?— that, begrudging Zeus  
Because he loved a woman, ruins me —  
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

## THESEUS.

This strife is from no other of the gods  
Than Zeus' wife; rightly apprehend, as well,  
Why, to no death — thou meditatest now —  
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!  
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,  
Nor gods — if poets' teaching be not false.  
Have not they joined in wedlock against law  
With one another? not, for sake of rule,  
Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,  
All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads  
High there, notorious sinners though they be!  
What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born,  
Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?  
Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law,  
And follow me to Pallas' citadel!  
There, when thy hands are purified from stain,

House will I give thee, and goods shared alike.  
What gifts I hold too from the citizens  
For saving twice seven children, when I slew  
The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.  
And everywhere about the land are plots  
Appportioned me : these, named by thine own name,  
Shall be henceforward styled by all men — thine,  
Thy life long ; but at death, when Haidēs-bound,  
All Athens shall uphold the honored one  
With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps :  
For that's a fair crown our Hellenes grant  
Their people — glory, should they help the brave !  
And I repay thee back this grace for thine  
That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends —  
Since, when the gods give honor, friends may flit :  
For, a god's help suffices, if he please.

## HERAKLES.

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes !  
I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,  
Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands,

Have I judged worthy faith, at any time ;  
Nor shall I be persuaded — one is born  
His fellows' master ! since God stands in need —  
If he is really God — of nought at all.  
These are the poets' pitiful conceits !  
But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed —  
“ Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice  
Somehow in leaving thus the light of day ! ”  
For whoso cannot make a stand against  
These same misfortunes, neither could withstand  
A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to strength.  
Therefore unto thy city I will go  
And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.  
There ! I have tasted of ten thousand toils  
As truly — never waived a single one,  
Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes !  
Nor ever thought it would have come to this —  
That I from out my eyes do drop tears ! Well !  
At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.  
So be it ! Old man, thou seest my exile —  
Seest, too, me — my children's murderer !



'These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead,  
Doing them honor with thy tears — since me  
Law does not sanction! Propping on her breast,  
And giving them into their mother's arms,  
— Re-institute the sad community  
Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness —  
Not by my will! And, when earth hides the dead,  
Live in this city! — sad, but, all the same,  
Force thy soul to bear woe along with me!  
O children, — who begat and gave you birth —  
Your father, has destroyed you! nought you gain  
By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,  
As by main-force I labored glory out  
To give you, — that fine gift of fatherhood!  
And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,  
Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st  
My marriage-bed inviolate, — those long  
Household-seclusions draining to the dregs  
Inside my house! O me, my wife, my boys —  
And — O myself, how, miserably moved,  
Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife!

O bitter those delights of kisses now —  
And bitter these my weapons' fellowship!  
For I am doubtful whether shall I keep  
Or cast away these arrows which will clang  
Ever such words out, as they knock my side —  
“Us — thou didst murder wife and children with!  
Us — child-destroyers — still thou keepest thine!”  
Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then? What  
Say for excuse? Yet, naked of my darts  
Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through,  
Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,  
Shall I die basely? No! relinquishment  
Of these must never be, — companions once,  
We sorrowfully must observe the pact!  
In just one thing, co-operate with me  
Thy sad friend, Theseus! Go along with him  
To Argos, and in concert get arranged  
The price my due for bringing there the Hound!  
O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,  
Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament,  
Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,

Lament the whole of us — my dead and me —  
Since all together are fordone and lost,  
Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate!

THESEUS.

Rise up now from thy dead ones! Tears enough,  
Poor friend!

HERAKLES.

I cannot: for my limbs are fixed.

THESEUS.

Ay: even these strong men fate overthrows!

HERAKLES.

Woe!

Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more!

THESEUS.

Cease! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now!

HERAKLES.

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes!

THESEUS.

Squeeze out and spare no drop! I take it all!

HERAKLES.

Of sons bereaved, I have thee like my son!

THESEUS.

Give to my neck thy hand! 'tis I will lead.

HERAKLES.

Yoke-fellows friendly — one heart-broken, though!  
O father! such a man we need for friend!

AMPHITRUON.

Certes, the land that bred him boasts good sons!

HERAKLES.

Turn me round, Theseus — to behold my boys!

THESEUS.

What? will the having such a love-charm soothe?

HERAKLES.

I want it; and to press my father's breast.

AMPHITRUON.

See here, O son! for, what I love thou seek'st!

THESEUS.

Strange! Of thy labors no more memory?

HERAKLES.

All those were less than these, those ills I bore!

THESEUS.

Who sees thee grow a woman,—will not praise!

HERAKLES.

I live low to thee? Not so once, I think!

THESEUS.

Too low by far! "Famed Herakles" — where's he?

HERAKLES.

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou*?

THESEUS.

As far as courage — least of all mankind!

HERAKLES.

How say'st, then, *I* in evils shrink to nought?

THESEUS.

Forward!

HERAKLES.

Farewell, old father!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou too, son!

HERAKLES.

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HERAKLES.

Bury the boys as I enjoined!

AMPHITRUON.

And *me*—

Who will be found to bury now, my child?

HERAKLES.

Myself!

AMPHITRUON.

When, coming?

HERAKLES.

When thy task is done.

AMPHITRUON.

How?

## HERAKLES.

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes  
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth  
Is burthened by! Myself, — who with these shames  
Have cast away my house, — a ruined hulk,  
I follow — trailed by Theseus — on my way;  
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength  
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein!

## CHOROS.

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,  
Sobs that increase with tears that start;  
The greatest of all our friends of yore,  
We have lost forevermore!

---

When the long silence ended, — “Our best friend —  
Lost, our best friend!” he muttered musingly.  
Then, “Lachares the sculptor” (half aloud)  
“Sinned he or sinned he not? ‘Outrageous sin!’



Shuddered our elders, 'Pallas should be clothed:  
He carved her naked.' 'But more beautiful!'  
Answers this generation: 'Wisdom formed  
For love not fear!' And there the statue stands,  
Entraps the eye severer art repels.  
Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt,  
Yet has not struck the artist all this while.  
Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides  
And Lachares? But youth will have its way!  
The ripe man ought to be as old as young —  
As young as old. I too have youth at need.  
Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare!

"And who's 'our best friend'? You play kottabos;  
Here's the last mode of playing. Take a sphere  
With orifices at due interval,  
Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit  
Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside  
To where, in hollow midst, a manikin  
Suspended ever bobs with head erect  
Right underneath whatever hole's a-top

When you set orb a-rolling : plumb, he gets  
Ever this benediction of the splash.  
An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed :  
Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,  
And only when that one, — and rare the chance, —  
Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too :  
He can't turn all sides with the turning orb.  
Inside this sphere of life, — all objects, sense  
And soul perceive, — Euripides hangs fixed,  
Gets knowledge through the single aperture  
Of High and Right : with visage fronting these  
He waits the wine thence ere he operate,  
Work in the world and write a tragedy.  
When that hole happens to revolve to point,  
In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.  
But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong —  
When these enjoy the moment's altitude,  
His heels are found just where his head should be !  
No knowledge that way ! *I* am movable, —  
To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,  
Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,

And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every turn, —  
Equally favored by their opposites.

Little and Bad exist, are natural :

Then let me know them, and be twice as great

As he who only knows one phase of life !

So doubly shall I prove 'best friend of man,'

If I report the whole truth — Vice, perceived

While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.

Man's made of both : and both must be of use

To somebody : if not to him, to me.

While, as to your imaginary Third

Who, — stationed (by mechanics past my guess)

So as to take in every side at once,

And not successively, — may reconcile

The High and Low in tragicomic verse, —

He shall be hailed superior to us both

When born — in the Tin-Islands ! Meantime, here

In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,

Call myself Iostephanos' 'best friend,'

Who took my own course, worked as I descried

Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty !

"For, listen! There's no failure breaks the heart,  
 Whate'er be man's endeavor in this world,  
 Like the rash poet's when he — nowise fails  
 By poetizing badly, — Zeus or makes  
 Or mars a man, so — at it, merrily!  
 But when, — made man, — much like myself, — equipped  
 For such and such achievement, — rash he turns  
 Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat  
 From — who's the appointed fellow born thereto, —  
 Crows take him! — in your Kassiterides?  
 Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,  
 That were the failure! Here I stand, heart-whole,  
 No Thamuris!

"Well thought of, Thamuris!  
 Has zeal, pray, for 'best friend' Euripides  
 Allowed you to observe the honor done  
 His elder rival, in our Poikilé?  
 You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,  
 Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,  
 Our Sophokles, — youth, beauty, dedicate

To Thamuris who named the tragedy.  
The voice of him was weak ; face, limbs and lyre,  
These were worth saving : Thamuros stands yet  
Perfect as painting helps in such a case.  
At least you know the story, for 'best friend'  
Enriched his 'Rhesos' from the Blind Bard's store ;  
So haste and see the work, and lay to heart  
What it was struck me when I eyed the piece !  
Here stands a poet punished for rash strife  
With Powers above his power, who see with sight  
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly  
A song, which he must needs dare emulate !  
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse !

"But — lend me the psalterion ! Nay, for once —  
Once let my hand fall where the other's lay !  
I see it, just as I were Sophokles,  
That sunrise and combustion of the east !"

And then he sang — are these unlike the words ?

Thamuris marching, — lyre and song of Thrace —  
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were,  
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race !)

'Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there  
By kingly Eurutus of late, now bound  
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios, (ore with earth enwound  
Glittered beneath his footstep) — marching gay  
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned,

From triumph on to triumph, 'mid a ray  
Of early morn, — came, saw and knew the spot  
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura — happier while its name was not —  
Met him, but nowise menaced ; slipped aside  
Obsequious river, to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide  
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,  
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed “Each flake of foam”  
(As sparkingly the ripple raced him by)  
“Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome!”

For Autumn was the season; red the sky  
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun  
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one  
All pomps produced themselves along the tract  
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact  
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished now,  
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,  
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,  
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow?

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined  
About it, joined the rush of air and light  
And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

Say not the birds flew! they forbore their right —  
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.  
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight —

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?  
Such earth's community of purpose, such  
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings, —

So did the near and far appear to touch  
I' the moment's transport, — that an interchange  
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much;



And had the rooted plant aspired to range  
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned  
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange —

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned  
To actual music, sang itself aloft ;  
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft  
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,  
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip  
Born of the fiery transport ; lyre and song  
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip —

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long  
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand  
Pedestalled 'mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,  
(Ay, for we see them) — Thamuris of Thrace  
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,  
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again  
From flush of pride ; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,  
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed?  
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music ; but his own outburst  
Of victory concluded the account,  
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount !  
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto !  
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount !

Here I await the end of this ado:  
Which wins—Earth's poet or the Heavenly Muse." . . .

But song broke up in laughter. "Tell the rest,  
Who may! *I* have not spurned the common life,  
Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse  
Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,  
I shall not decorate her vestibule—  
Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain,  
Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!  
— Not *Thamuris* but *Aristophanes*!

"There! I have sung content back to myself,  
And started subject for a play beside.  
My next performance shall content you both.  
Did 'Prelude-Battle' maul 'best friend' too much?  
Then 'Main-Fight' be my next song, fairness' self!  
Its subject—Contest for the Tragic Crown.  
Ay, you shall hear none else but *Aischulos*  
Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove  
'Best friend' a stray-away, — no praise denied

His manifold deservings, never fear —  
Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends!  
Sound admonition has its due effect.  
Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe!  
Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,  
In judgment, regular, legitimate.  
Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay —  
For there's a buzz about those 'Bacchanals'  
Rumor attributes to your great and dead  
For final effort: just the prodigy  
Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!  
— Until we make acquaintance with our fate  
And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive  
Perchance to honor more the patron-god,  
Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.  
Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,  
Earth blossoms youthfully! Athenai breathes!  
After a twenty-six years' wintry blank  
Struck from her life, — war-madness, one long swoon,  
She wakes up: Arginousai bids good cheer!  
We have disposed of Kallikratidas;

Once more will Sparté sue for terms,— who knows?  
Cede Dekeleia, as the rumor runs :  
Terms which Athenai, of right mind again,  
Accepts— she can no other! Peace declared,  
Have my long labors borne their fruit or no?  
Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain?  
Enough — it simply saved you! saviors — praise  
Theoria's beauty and Oporia's breadth!  
Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,  
Forget the Bald Bard, Envy! but go burst  
*As the cup goes round, and the cates abound,*  
*Collops of hare, with roast spinks rare!*  
Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served  
A purpose: guttlings, guzzlings, had their use!  
Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,  
Or 'best friend's' Heavy-hand, Melpomené,  
Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,  
And built Athenai to the skies once more!  
Farewell, brave couple! Next year, welcome me!"

---

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere!  
One story he referred to, false or fact,  
Was not without adaptability.

They do say — Lais the Corinthian once  
Chancing to see Euripides (who paced  
Composing in a garden, tablet-book

In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)

“Answer me,” she began, “O Poet, — this!

What didst intend by writing in thy play

*Go hang, thou filthy doer?*” Struck on heap,

Euripides, at the audacious speech —

“Well now,” quoth he, “thyself art just the one

I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!”

She laughingly retorted his own line

“What’s filth, — unless who does it, thinks it so?”

So might he doubtless think. “Farewell,” said we.

And he was gone, lost in the morning-gray,

Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we dream?

Could the poor twelve hours hold this argument

We render durable from fugitive,  
 As duly at each sunset's droop of sail,  
 Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,  
 I still remember, you as duly dint  
 Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style,  
 Into — what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes

From eloquence made captive: thus mere words  
 — Ah, would the lifeless body stay! But no:  
 Change upon change till, — who may recognize  
 What did soul service, in the dusty heap?  
 What energy of Aristophanes  
 Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?  
 Ashes be evidence how fire — and smoke —  
 All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.  
 The poet — I shall say — burned up and, blank,  
 Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,  
 Comes yet! Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first,—he gone, if jollity went too,  
Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred,  
Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope  
Has this meek consolation: neither ills,  
We dread, nor joys, we dare anticipate,  
Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed—  
Euripides and Aristophanes;  
Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives;  
But germinates,—perhaps enough to judge,—  
Next year?

Whereas, next year brought harvest-time!  
For, next year came, and went not, but is now,  
Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes  
That's all but reached!—and harvest has it brought,  
Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop!  
Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,  
Happy as ever; though men mournfully  
Plausive,—when only soul could triumph now,  
And Iophon produced his father's play,—  
Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous



Dared the descent 'mid earthquake-thundering,  
And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard  
Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged  
Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,  
Triumphant also, followed with his "Frogs :"  
Produced at next Lenaia, — three months since, —  
The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free !  
As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,  
(Himself swore — wine that conquers every kind  
For long abiding in the head) could fix  
Thenceforward any object in its truth,  
Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew,  
Nor miss the borrowed medium, — vinous drop  
That colors all to the right crimson pitch  
When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge  
Of malice !

All was Aristophanes :

There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame !  
Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God

In person! and when duly dragged through mire,—  
Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward,  
flung

The boys their dose of fit indecency,  
And finally got trounced to heart's content,  
At his own feast, in his own theatre  
(— Oh, never fear! 'Twas consecrated sport,  
Exact tradition, warranted no whit  
Offensive to instructed taste,— indeed,  
Essential to Athenai's liberty,  
Could the poor stranger understand!) why, then —  
He was pronounced the rarely-qualified  
To rate the work, adjust the claim to worth,  
Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,  
This same appreciative poet pleased  
To say "He's all one stiff and gluey piece  
Of back of swine's neck!") — and the Chatterbox  
Who, "twisting words like wool," usurped his seat  
In Plouton's realm: "the arch-roguer, liar, scamp  
That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts,"  
— Who failed to recognize Euripides?

'Then came a contest for supremacy —  
 Crammed full of genius, wit and fun and freak.  
 No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish  
 Of all sorts, — for the Mystics matched the Frogs  
 In poetry, no Siren sang so sweet! —  
 Till, pressed into the service (how dispense  
 With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display?)  
 The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,  
 Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain  
 How baby-work like "Herakles" had birth!  
 Last, Bacchos, — candidly disclaiming brains  
 Able to follow finer argument, —  
 Confessed himself much moved by three main facts:  
 First, — if you stick a "Lost his flask of oil"  
 At pause of period, you perplex the sense —  
 Were it the Elegy for Marathon!  
 Next, if you weigh two verses, "car" — the word,  
 Will outweigh "club" — the word, each word-packed  
     line!  
 And — last, worst fact of all! in rivalry  
 The younger poet dared to improvise

Laudation less distinct of Triphales —

(Nay, that served when ourself abused the  
youth!)

Pheidippides — (nor that's appropriate now!)

Then, — Alkibiades, our city's hope,

Since times change and we Comics should change  
too!

These three main facts, well weighed, drew judgment  
down,

Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate —

“Fate due” admonished the sage Mystic choir,

“To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates,

Neglecting music and each tragic aid!”

— All wound-up by a wish “We soon may cease  
From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them!”

— Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,

War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain

Had Sparté cried once more “For granted Peace

We give you Dekeleia back!” Too shrewd

Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,

The enemy — at final gasp, besides!

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize,  
And so Athenai felt she had a friend  
Far better than her "best friend," lost last year ;  
And so, such fame had "Frogs" that, when came  
round

This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again  
At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month.  
Only—there happened Aigispotamoi !  
And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,  
Plump o' the sudden, pounces stern King Stork  
On the light-hearted people of the marsh !  
Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate,  
Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay  
With oars which brought a hundred triremes back  
Captive !

And first word of the conqueror  
Was "Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios' pride !  
Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks ! Peace needs  
none !"

And "We obey" they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposition of decree —  
 “No longer democratic government!  
 Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves  
 Please to appoint you!” — then the horror stung  
 Dreamers awake; they started up a-stare  
 At the half-helot captain and his crew  
 — Spartans, “men used to let their hair grow long,  
 To fast, be dirty, and just — Socratize” —  
 Whose word was “Trample on Themistokles!”

So, as the way is with much misery,  
 The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts  
 Sunk as they stood in stupor. “Wreck the Walls?  
 Ruin Peiraios? — with our Pallas armed  
 For interference? — Herakles apprised,  
 And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls low?”

Three days they stood, stared, — stonier than their walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke:  
 Saw the prostration of his enemy,

Utter and absolute beyond belief,  
 Past hope of hatred even. I surmise  
 He also probably saw fade in fume  
 Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,  
 Nor apprehended any more that gods  
 And heroes, — fire, must glow forth, guard the  
 ground

Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay  
 Powerless Athenai, late predominant  
 Lady of Hellas, — Sparté's slave-prize now !  
 Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs?  
 What was to move his circumspection? Why  
 Demolish just Peiraios?

“Stay!” bade he:

“Already promise-breakers? True to type,  
 Athenians! past, and present, and to come, —  
 The fickle and the false! No stone dislodged,  
 No implement applied, yet three days' grace  
 Expire! Forbearance is no longer lived.  
 By breaking promise, terms of peace you break —

Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness !  
All must be reconsidered — yours the fault !”

Wherewith, he called a council of allies.  
Pent-up resentment used its privilege, —  
Outburst at ending : this the summed result.

“Because we would avenge no transient wrong  
But an eternity of insolence,  
Aggression, — folly, no disasters mend,  
Pride, no reverses teach humility, —  
Because too plainly were all punishment,  
Such as comports with less obdurate crime,  
Evadible by falsehood, fickleness —  
Experience proves the true Athenian type, —  
Therefore, 'tis need we dig deep down into  
The root of evil ; lop nor bole nor branch.  
Look up, look round and see, on every side,  
What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit !  
We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed,  
Build barns for temples, prize mud-monuments,



Nor show the sneering stranger aught but — men, —  
Spartans take insult of Athenians just  
Because they boast Akropolis to mount,  
And Propulaia to make entry by,  
Through a mad maze of marble arrogance  
Such as you see — such as let none see more!  
Abolish the detested luxury!  
Leave not one stone upon another, raze  
Athenai to the rock! Let hill and plain  
Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground  
Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend  
From shapeless crags once columns! so at last  
Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough.”

Whereon, a shout approved “Such peace bestow!”  
Then did a Man of Phokis rise — O heart!  
Rise — when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,  
No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,  
Rise — when mere human argument could stem  
No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce,  
Baffle no wrath-wave that o’er barrier broke —

*Who* was the Man of Phokis rose and flung  
A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,  
Which — stop for? — nay, had stamped down sword's  
assault!

Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch  
“Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,  
Elektra, palaced once, a visitant  
To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come?”

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust  
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease  
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now —  
Full in the hideous faces — last resource,  
He flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind  
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush  
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags  
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm —  
So did the power of that triumphant play  
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!

Triumphant play, wherein our poet first  
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two  
Down to the level of our common life,  
Close to the beating of our common heart.  
Elektra? 'Twas Athenai, Sparté's ice  
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed —  
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault  
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,  
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,  
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,  
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags,  
Patient performer of the poorest chares,  
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past  
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear  
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's brood,  
And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,  
And poetry is power, and Euthukles  
Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same —  
Sudden, the ice-thaw! The assembled foe,

Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness,  
Cried "Reverence Elektra!" — cried "Abstain  
Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate  
The sanctity of such reverse! Let stand  
Athenai!"

Mindful of that story's close,  
Perchance, and how, — when he, the Herdsman chaste,  
Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep, —  
All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,  
Knocks at the door: with searching glance, notes  
    keen,  
Knows quick, through mean attire and disrespect,  
The ravaged princess! Ay, right on, the clutch  
Of guiding retribution has in charge  
The author of the outrage! While one hand,  
Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast  
On fate, — the other strains, prepared to push  
The victim-queen, should she make frightened pause  
Before that serpentining blood which steals  
Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,

Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow  
Dreadful Orestes !

Klutaimnestra, wise

This time, forbore ; Elektra held her own ;  
Saved was Athenai through Euripides,  
Through Euthukles, through — more than ever — me,  
Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,  
Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so !

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,  
The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,  
Grew sudden sober at the enormity,  
And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift ;  
Splenetically must repay its cost  
By due increase of rigor, doglike snatch  
At aught still left dog to concede like man.  
Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,  
Smoothly the land-line reached as for repose —  
Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway ;  
But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loath,

Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.  
 So, harsh Lusandros — pinioned to inflict  
 The lesser penalty alone — spoke harsh,  
 As minded to imbitter scathe by scorn.

“Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre!  
 If Tragedy withdraws her presence — quick,  
 If Comedy replace her, — what more just?  
 Let Comedy do service, frisk away,  
 Dance off stage these indomitable stones,  
 Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks! Hew and heave,  
 Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence!  
 Not to the Kommos — *eleleleleu*

With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,  
 But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow  
 At kordax-end — the hearty slapping-dance!  
 Collect those flute-girls — trash who flattered ear  
 With whistlings, and fed eye with caper-cuts,  
 While we Lakonians supped black broth or crunched  
 Sea urchin, conchs and all, unpricked — coarse brutes!  
 Command they lead off step, time steady stroke

To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie  
Athenai's pride in powder!"

Done that day —  
That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month!  
The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,  
The very day Euripides was born,  
Those flute-girls — Phaps-Elaphion at their head —  
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while  
Sparté pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the works,  
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,  
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away!

We would not see its passing! Ere I knew  
The issue of their counsels, — crouching low  
And shrouded by my peplos, — I conceived,  
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears, — by count  
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time, —  
Athenai's doom was signed and signified  
In that assembly, — ay, but knew there watched  
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all

The stranger's licensed duty, — speak the word  
Allowed the Man from Phokis! Nought remained  
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,  
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,  
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea  
That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.  
Help rose to heart's wish; at the harbor-side,  
The old gray mariner did reverence  
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight  
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised  
The hospitable port and pushed to sea.  
“Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake  
Of her and her Euripides!” laughed he.  
Rhodes, — shall it not be there, my Euthukles,  
Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,  
That solitude — two make so populous! —  
For food finds memories of the past suffice,  
May be, anticipations, — hope so swells, —  
Of some great future we, familiar once  
With who so taught, should hail and entertain?  
He lies now in the little valley, laughed



And moaned about by those mysterious streams,  
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate  
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly  
course.

They mix in Arethousa by his grave.  
The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,  
Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold!

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so  
Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there  
Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.  
A gold-graved writing tells—"I also loved  
The poet, Free Athenai cheaply prized—  
King Dionusios, — Archelaos-like!"

And see if young Philemon, — sure one day  
To do good service and be loved himself, —  
If he too have not made a votive verse!  
"Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same,  
Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,  
I'd hang myself — to see Euripides!"

Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,  
But pen the prime plays, labor the right life,  
And die at good old age as grand men use, —  
Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the  
while, —

That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!  
“He lives!” hark, — waves say, winds sing out the  
same,

And yonder dares the citted ridge of Rhodes  
Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts  
North bay from south, — each guarded calm, that guest  
May enter gladly, blow what wind there will, —  
Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!  
All in one chorus, — what the master-word  
They take up? — hark! “There are no gods, no gods!  
Glory to God — who saves Euripides!”









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