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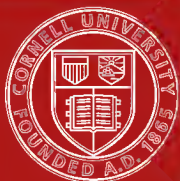
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BELLS' CLASSICAL TRANSLATIONS.

THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES

G. 304!

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A SHORT MEMOIR OF EURIPIDES.

AS with so many other authors of classical antiquity, considerable obscurity veils the details of Euripides' life; nor is it easy in the case of a dramatist, to gather from chance utterances, spoken in character, the real sentiments of the writer on any particular subject.

It is true that, apart from the numerous unfounded scandals and legends which invariably surround any person of eminence, certain broad facts regarding his life stand out with tolerable clearness; but, for the rest, we are thrown back upon conjecture based upon the weak evidence of later writers or the gossip and undisguised malice of contemporary opponents.

Taking, first, the few details which are regarded as tolerably certain, we are informed that he was born in B.C. 480, on the very day of the battle of Salamis, and in the island itself, though others place his birth five years earlier. His parents must have been wealthy people, and not improbably of some rank, for their son was not only able to attend the expensive lectures of Prodicus, Anaxagoras, and other famous sophists and teachers of the day, but also held in his youth certain offices, for which none but the nobly born seem to have been eligible. As for the scandalous attacks and ribald jests of the comic poets of the period regarding his mother and her antecedents, the evidence of their having any foundation in fact is so very slight that we may dismiss them without serious consideration. The legend, for in-

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stance, which makes the poet's mother a seller of herbs and not a very honest woman either, no doubt served Aristophanes for many a good joke at his enemy's expense ; but it should be borne in mind that this brilliant caricaturist's avowed object was to depreciate Euripides, and he certainly was not very careful what use he made of current scandal and perverted truth, so long as he could raise a laugh and amuse his audience. Similarly, too, the stories which make Euripides a man of dissolute habits, given up to vice and pursuing it throughout his life till it led him to a violent end, will be found, on examination, to rest on the flimsiest evidence, and probably originated in the prurient imagination of his numerous enemies or of readers who either misunderstood their author or too rashly inferred that they had found a key to his character in some isolated passage, considered without reference to its context.

Passing to better authenticated facts, it is recorded that the poet's father had him trained with extreme care to contend in the footrace at Olympia, but that after winning two prizes at less important games, he was rejected at Olympia on account of some technical difficulty connected with his age. From his own bitter remarks on the subject of athletes and their habits in some interesting fragments of a play, entitled "Autolycus," we may fairly infer that he carried away no very pleasant memories of that epoch in his life. Further, we learn that he applied himself to painting and sculpture, in the first of which arts he must have attained considerable proficiency, for pictures of his were exhibited at Megara many years after his death, and there are frequent allusions in his plays pointing to an intimate and appreciative acquaintance with this subject.

He was twice married, each time, it is said, unhappily ; some indeed have gone so far as to refer the constant diatribes and sneers in his plays against women to his own personal experiences, forgetting perhaps, in their eagerness to

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advance this theory, that the poet has quite as frequently drawn female characters of almost ideal tenderness, devotion, and beauty. Of the three sons born to him, the youngest, called after his father, produced his last plays, and was himself also a dramatist by profession.

Late in life Euripides retired from Athens to Magnesia, and finally accepted the invitation of Archelaus, King of Macedon, to his court, then a home for men of letters and savants of all kinds. Here his genius speedily advanced him to royal favour, and it is even said that he was called in to give his advice at the monarch's council-table. Possibly the distinction, with which he was treated, excited the jealousy of rival court poets, for there is a story current that he met his death from the bites of dogs set upon him by his enemies as he was going to keep an assignation. This wild story no doubt may have arisen from a confusion between the poet and the plot of his last play, "The Bacchæ," in which Pentheus is torn to pieces by infuriated women. But it is interesting both as showing the sort of calumny with which vulgar scandal will assail the great, and also as pointing to the state of feeling which must have existed for such an idle tale to originate at all. On his death in B.C. 406, he was buried with great pomp at Pella, the Macedonian capital, in spite of the request of his countrymen that his remains might be sent to Athens.

Such are the few meagre details we are able to collect from reliable authorities of the poet's life. From his own writings and from somewhat doubtful sources a little more has been conjecturally assumed. Thus we are told, with great probability, that he was the friend of Pericles, of Socrates, and Alcibiades, and that his friendship with the two latter caused him to leave his native city rather than risk the chance of incurring the odium and unpopularity which eventually brought them to their deaths. Legend, busy on this point as on others, has set down his retire-

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ment into Magnesia to the irritation caused him by the merciless satire of Aristophanes on the poet's unhappy experiences of married life, and it is unfortunately only too likely that one who could make capital out of the death of the man he disliked, would not hesitate to pour out his venomous abuse on domestic scenes which modern decency prefers to regard as sacred.

Born, as Euripides was, some time between B.C. 490 and 480, and dying in B.C. 406, his life comprised the whole brilliant period of Athenian supremacy. Thus he would have witnessed the successive steps by which Athens attained in a short time a pinnacle of material prosperity and artistic glory never reached before or after by any other state in Hellas; he would have admired the masterly organization of the Delian Confederacy, have shared in the varied splendours and triumphs of the age of Pericles, rejoiced at the victories of Cimon, watched the successful schemes of Athenian colonization, and followed with attentive eye the many phases of that long and disastrous war, which brought such suffering on his countrymen, and finally left his city ruined and humbled at the feet of Sparta. Amongst the circle of his acquaintance he might have counted poets, painters, sculptors, historians, and philosophers, whose productions are still the wonder of the world and the despair of modern imitators.

Indeed, to know any one character of that great period thoroughly it is necessary to know something of them all, and only in this way can one hope to find the right starting-point for a proper appreciation of this many-sided poet, and to see how far he influenced and how far he was influenced by his environment.

Euripides produced his first play, the "Peliades," in B.C. 455, a year after the death of Æschylus; it obtained the third prize, but considering the poet's age and the rivals he probably had to meet, this is no evidence

of inferior work. Having once started it is probable that he brought out tetralogies at regular intervals, till in B.C. 441 he attained the coveted distinction and won the first prize, but the names of his plays on this occasion have not been identified. Thrice again was he proclaimed victor, on the last occasion with plays that appeared after his death. This small measure of immediate success may at first sight appear strange, for we know that he was a prolific writer, some seventy-five or even ninety-two plays being attributed to him.

But the reason is not really far to seek. He was not the advocate of any party; for though he was inclined towards a war-like policy, and entertained a lively hatred of Sparta and things Spartan, yet he was equally ready to point out to Athens her mistakes and the inevitable consequences of her follies. Such a man was not likely to please the judges of his day, who almost inevitably must have been influenced by party considerations; and so others, who abstained from politics altogether in their compositions, or consistently supported one side, stepped in to carry off the prize which "the great outsider," as Mahaffy so aptly calls him, must often on his merits and in accordance with the judgment of posterity have better deserved. Nor, again, was Euripides, strictly speaking, a public man, that is, in the sense of keeping himself before the people; doubtless he was well versed in all that went on around him, as indeed is abundantly proved by his writings; but he did not mix much with his fellows in the way, for example, that his friend Socrates did; his mind was more purely speculative; the quiet of his study was therefore more congenial to him than the noise of the market-place, and the silent perusal of his books than the wordy warfare of the law-courts.

In all the great social problems of the day he took a deep interest, and passages abound in his plays proving

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how thoroughly he had mastered some of them and how far in advance of his age he had gone in his efforts to arrive at the solution of others. The treatment of slaves, the relations of women towards the other sex, the popular theology, new discoveries in science,—these are only a few of the questions which occupied his thoughts and attracted his cosmopolitan sympathies.

Living, as he did, in the age of the Sophists, an age of daring speculation and unbounded scepticism, when old beliefs were giving way to new theories, it is not strange that Euripides was affected by the movement, and that the influence of sophistic teaching is everywhere discernible in his pages. In no writer of the period is the spirit of this new learning more clearly mirrored; never before were conventional methods treated with such scant respect; and this it is which roused the apprehensions of the more conservative Aristophanes, and threw him into such violent opposition to this new-fangled poet—opposition, which, after all, was doomed to fall powerless before overmastering genius.

A certain melancholy pervades all the poetry of Euripides. Whether, as some say, he was naturally morose, or whether his experiences soured his disposition, we have no means of deciding now. The ceaseless rancour of malevolent foes, the despair that at length drags down a man who is persistently and purposely misunderstood, the fate of his best friends, the sad contrast of the closing years of the Peloponnesian War to its early promise, his own domestic troubles—all these causes may well have succeeded in inspiring him with that gloomy view of life which is reflected so deeply in his writings.

To enter into any examination of the exaggerated attacks made on the poet by his detractors, ancient and modern, would be too long a subject in so brief a memoir, even had it not been already most ably treated by Professor Mahaffy

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in his little volume on "Euripides"; two remarks from which I take the liberty of quoting. Speaking of the atheism laid to Euripides' charge, he says:

"The only declared atheist in his extant plays is the brutal and ignorant Cyclops, whose coarse and sensual unbelief is surely intended for a keen satire on such vulgarity in speculation."

In another passage, after discussing the rival views that have prevailed about our poet, and the anomalies and contradictions of his character which make it so easy to blame, so hard to understand his many-sidedness, he concludes:

"We must combine all these portraits with their contradictions to obtain an adequate idea of that infinitely various, unequal, suggestive mind, which was at the same time practically shrewd and mystically vague, clear in expression but doubtful in thought, morose in intercourse and yet a profound lover of mankind, drawing ideal women and yet perpetually sneering at the sex, doubting the gods and yet reverencing their providence, above his age and yet not above it, stooping to the interests of the moment and yet missing the reward of momentary fame, despairing of future life and yet revolving problems which owe all their interest to the very fact that they are perpetual."

Euripides is the last of the Greek tragedians properly so called. "The sure sign of the general decline of an art," says Macaulay, "is the frequent occurrence, not of deformity, but of misplaced beauty." How hard this criticism hits Euripides must be obvious to all who are familiar with his choral odes. Many of the most beautiful of these have no direct connection with the plot of the play in which they occur; they might be introduced with equal propriety elsewhere; they are exquisite hymns, and, as such, often recommend a poor play; but they are irrelevant and out of place.

In spite, however, of all that was said and written against

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him, the great fact remains that he was by far the most popular of all the tragedians. He appealed directly to men's hearts ; as Aristotle said of him, he represented men as they are, not as they ought to be ; and if he thereby lost in dignity, he yet gained by being able to extend a wider sympathy to the sufferings of his fellow-men. And this no doubt will explain much that has been most bitterly blamed in his method ; it is said that he vulgarized tragedy, bringing it down to the level of melodrama with his excessive love of pathos, his reliance on striking scenery and novelties in music to create an effect, his rhetorical subtlety and exaggerated patriotism ; but an unerring insight had taught how he could best reach his audience, and this was enough for him. The sentiment expressed by Terence many years later might very well have issued from the lips of Euripides : "Homo sum ; humani nihil a me alienum puto."

INTRODUCTION.

BY F. A. PALEY, LL.D.

(Reprinted from the "Cambridge Texts with Notes.")

THIS beautiful play is the earliest of the extant works of Euripides. It was acted B.C. 439, in the archonship of Glaucus (Ol. 85. 2), when the poet carried off the second prize with the tetralogy comprising the "Cressæ," the "Alcæon at Psophis," the "Telephus," and the "Alcestis." References to the "Telephus" and the "Alcestis" occur in the "Acharnians" of Aristophanes, which was brought out B.C. 425.

The plot of the play turns on the well-known myth of Apollo serving in the guise of a mortal man in the house of Admetus, King of Pheræ in Thessaly, and in return for the kindness received from that prince, obtaining from the Fates a release from death for Admetus, on condition of some substitute being found. Upon which (to use the words of Plato, "Sympos.," p. 179 c) "Alcestis so far exceeded Admetus' parents in affection through her love, that she made them appear aliens to their son and related only in name. And in consenting to die for him she was thought both by gods and men to have done so noble a deed, that although many others had performed many honourable exploits, to her almost alone the gods gave this special prerogative, viz., the permission that her soul might return from Hades."

The play is full of highly poetical passages, and has a pathos exceeded perhaps by none. The self-devotion of the wife is well contrasted with the selfishness of the father of Admetus, Pheres, who argues the point with his son, and

contends that the senior is by no means bound to die for the junior, or the parent for the son. The plot required, of course, that Admetus should save his own life at the cost of his wife's, so that we must reconcile as we can the strong affection he shows for her with his preference of his own life to hers. And perhaps we cannot justly say that there is anything really unnatural in the poet's treatment of the subject. It is not given to every one to be a martyr or a hero. Admetus shows (v. 956) his consciousness that he will be ever after taunted as a coward. Perhaps, too, we may say that the life of a prince was fairly regarded in a somewhat higher light than that of a private individual, and that of a man generally as of greater value than that of a woman.

In the midst of his grief for the decease of his wife, Admetus is surprised by the arrival of Hercules, who is on his way to Thrace in the performance of one of his labours. The strong sense which the Greeks had of the duties of hospitality induces the prince to insist on his guest remaining even in a house of mourning. After a somewhat boisterous enjoyment of the banquet, Hercules learns the facts of the case; and to requite his kind host, he lies in wait for the demon Death, and by grappling with him recovers Alcestis from his grasp. At first he conceals the real nature of the service, and merely asks permission to leave under the care of Admetus a woman whom he pretends that he has won as a prize in a contest.

The myth is capable of a plausible explanation. Apollo, as the sun-god, was supposed to visit the earth when he descended from the sky in the far west. Thus, according to a well-known Indian (and indeed Egyptian) doctrine, the god was believed to have taken a human form. Hercules himself is a sun-god, but in the different attribute of the all-powerful benefactor and preserver of mankind.

The character of Alcestis shows a calm resignation, a motherly and conjugal love, and a faith in the reward of a well-spent life hereafter that is only equalled by the aspiration of Socrates in the *Phaedo*. The affection of Admetus too is as deep as sincere, and his despair on entering his deserted mansion after the funeral (935-961) is most touchingly described.

The style of the play is generally simple, and the versifying is of a less artificial kind than in many of the later plays. It has been thought by some to partake of the character of a tragi-comedy, the representative of the satyric drama which usually followed a "trilogy" of three continuous and connected tragedies. In whatever light it is viewed, it is a very fine play, though to modern readers the rhetorical arguments and quibbles may seem to savour of affectation. Euripides was called by Aristophanes ("Pac." 534) ποιητῆς ὀημάτων δεικνυμένων, but the fault lay perhaps rather in the taste of the audience than in the special predilections of the poet. He was, in fact, a most humane and right-feeling man. He had known troubles himself, and he knew human nature well, and how to express his sympathy with others.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

APOLLO.

DEATH.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN OF PHERÆ.

MAID.

ALCESTIS.

ATTENDANT.

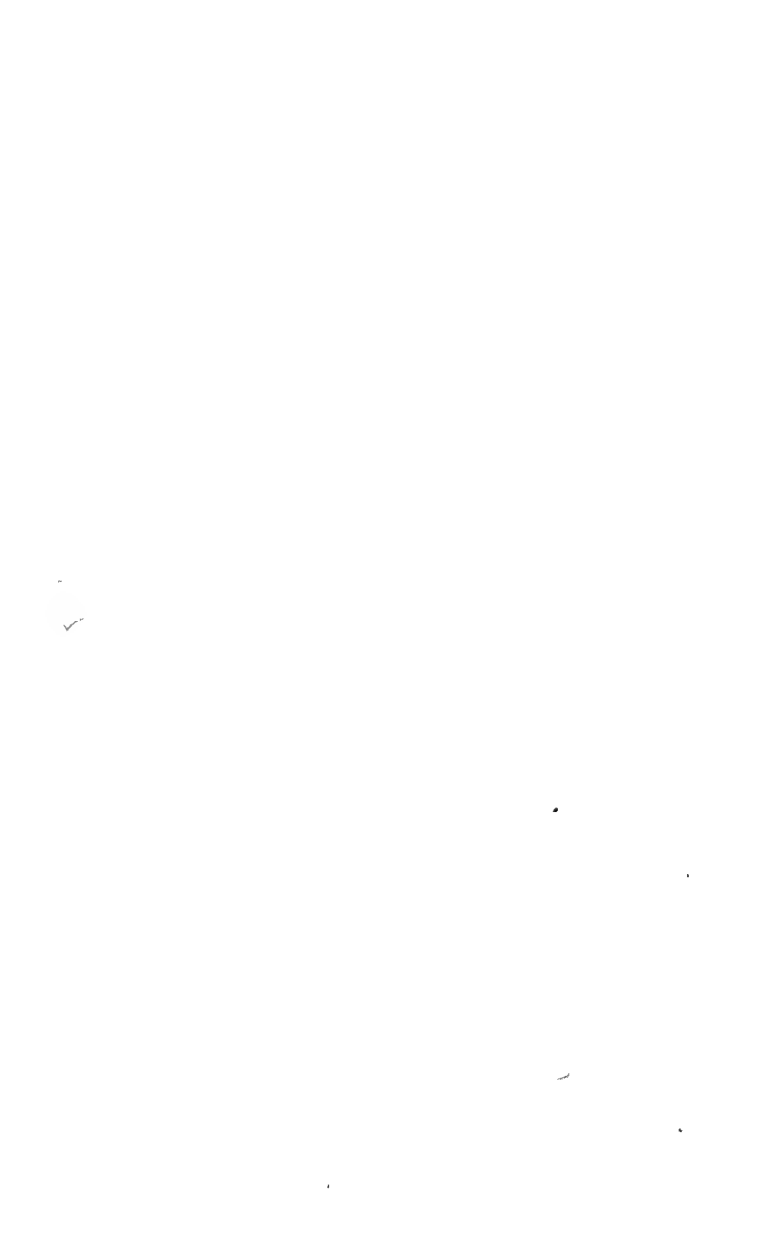
ADMETUS.

EUMELUS.

HERACLES.

PIERES.

SCENE.—Before Admetus' palace in Pheræ



ALCESTIS.

APŌ. Halls of Admetus, wherein I steeled my heart to be content with a servant's board, god though I was. Zeus was to blame; he slew my son Asclepius, piercing his bosom with a thunderbolt; whereat I was enraged and smote his Cyclopes, forgers of the heavenly fire; so my sire in recompense for this forced me to become a slave in a mortal's home. Then came I to this land and kept a stranger's flocks, and to this day have been the saviour of this house. For in Pheres' son I found a man as holy as myself, and him I saved from death by cheating Destiny, for they promised me, those goddesses of fate, that Admetus should escape the impending doom, if he found a substitute for the powers below. So he went through all his list of friends, made trial of each, his father and the aged mother that bare him,¹ but none he found save his wife alone that was willing to die for him and forego the light of life; she now within the house is upheld in his arms, gasping out her life; for to-day is she doomed to die and pass from life to death. But I, for fear pollution overtake me in the house, am leaving the shelter of this roof I love so well, for already I see Death hard by, the priest of souls departed, who is on his way to lead her to the halls of Hades; true to time he comes, watching this day that calls her to her doom.

DEA. Ha! What dost thou at this house? why is it thou art ranging here, Phœbus? Once again thou wrongest me, circumscribing and limiting the honours of the nether

¹ Dindorf has good reason for suspecting this line here.

world. Wert thou not content to hinder the death of Admetus, by thy knavish cunning baulking Destiny? but now again hast thou armed thee with thy bow and art keeping guard o'er her, this daughter of Pelias, who undertook, of her free will, to die for her lord and set him free.

APO. Never fear; I have, be sure, justice and fair pleas to urge.

DEA. What has that bow to do, if thou hast justice on thy side?

APO. 'Tis my habit ever to carry it.

DEA. Ay, and to help this house more than is right.

APO. The reason is, I cannot bear a friend's distress.

DEA. Wilt rob me of this second corpse likewise?

APO. Come! I did not take the other from thee by violence.

DEA. Then how is it he lives above the earth and not beneath?

APO. He gave his wife instead, her whom now thou art come to fetch.

DEA. Yea, and I will bear her hence to the nether world.

APO. Take her and go, for I do not suppose I can persuade thee.

DEA. To slay my rightful victim? Why, that is my appointed task.

APO. Nay, but to lay thy deadly hand on those who soon would die.

DEA. I see thy drift, thy eager plea.

APO. Is it then possible that Alcestis should attain old age?

DEA. It is not possible; I too, methinks, find a pleasure in my rights.

Thou canst not anyhow take more than one life.

DEA. When young lives die I reap a higher honour.

APO. Should she die old, a sumptuous funeral will she have.

DEA. Phœbus, the law thou layest down is all in favour of the rich.

APO. What mean'st thou? art so wise, and I never knew it?

DEA. Those who have wealth would buy the chance of their dying old.

APO. It seems then thou wilt not grant me this favour.

DEA. Not I; my customs well thou knowest.

APO. That I do, customs men detest and gods abhor.

DEA. Thou canst not realise every lawless wish.

APO. Mark me, thou shalt have a check for all thy excessive fierceness; such a hero shall there come to Pheres' halls, by Eurystheus sent to fetch a team of steeds from the wintry world of Thrace; he, a guest awhile in these halls of Admetus, will wrest this woman from thee by sheer force. So wilt thou get no thanks from me but yet wilt do this all the same, and earn my hatred too.¹

DEA. Thou wilt not gain thy purpose any the more for all thy many words; that woman shall to Hades' halls go down, I tell thee. Lo! I am going for her, that with the sword I may begin my rites, for he whose hair this sword doth hallow is sacred to the gods below.

SEMICHO. I.² What means this silence in front of the palace? why is the house of Admetus stricken dumb?

SEMICHO. II. Not one friend near to say if we must mourn our queen as dead, or if she liveth yet and sees the sun, Alcestis, daughter of Pelias, by me and all esteemed the best of wives to her husband.

SEMICHO. I. Doth any of you hear a groan, or sound of hands that smite together, or the voice of lamentation, telling all is over and done? Yet is there no servant sta-

¹ Dindorf rejects these two lines.

² In the arrangement of the following dialogue between the divided chorus I have mainly been guided by Paley, though I believe the last three lines assigned by him to a Semichorus are said as the two bands are re-uniting preparatory to chanting their ode.

tioned about the gate, no, not one. O come, thou saving god, to smooth the swelling waves of woe !¹

SEMICHO. II. Surely, were she dead, they would not be so still.

SEMICHO. I. Maybe her corpse is not yet from the house borne forth.

SEMICHO. II. Whence that inference? I am not so sanguine. What gives thee confidence?

SEMICHO. I. How could Admetus let his noble wife go unattended to the grave?

SEMICHO. II. Before the gates I see no lustral water from the spring, as custom doth ordain should be at the gates of the dead, no shorn lock lies on the threshold, which, as thou knowest, falls in mourning for the dead, no choir of maidens smites its youthful² palms together.

SEMICHO. I. And yet this is the appointed day.

SEMICHO. II. What meanest thou by this?

SEMICHO. I. The day appointed for the journey to the world below.

SEMICHO. II. Thou hast touched me to the heart, e'en to the soul.

CHO. Whoso from his youth up has been accounted virtuous, needs must weep to see the good suddenly cut off. 'Tis done; no single spot in all the world remains whither one might steer a course, either to Lycia³ or to the parched abodes⁴ of Ammon to release the hapless lady's soul; on comes death with step abrupt, nor know I to whom I should go of all who at the gods' altars offer sacrifice. Only the son of Phœbus,⁵ if he yet saw this light of day—Ah! then

¹ μετακόμιος. Liddell and Scott "between two waves of misery," *i.e.* causing a short lull.

² Dindorf restores νεαλῆς for νεολαία, a doubtful word, apparently not used as an adjective. Cf. Liddell and Scott.

³ To a shrine of Apollo.

⁴ The temple of Zeus Ammon in the deserts of Libya.

⁵ Asclepius, who had been slain by Zeus, for raising the dead to life.

might she have left the dark abode and gates of Hades and have come again, for he would raise the dead to life, till that the thunderbolt's forked flame, hurled by Zeus, smote him. But now what further hope of life can I welcome to me? Our lords have ere this done all they could; on every altar streams the blood of abundant sacrifice; yet our sorrows find no cure.

Lo! from the house cometh a handmaid weeping; what shall I be told hath chanced? Grief may well be pardoned, if aught happeneth to one's master; yet I fain would learn whether our lady still is living or haply is no more.

MAID. Alive, yet dead thou may'st call her.

CHO. Why, how can the same person be alive, yet dead?

MAID. She is sinking even now, and at her last gasp.

CHO. My poor master! how sad thy lot to lose so good a wife!

MAID. He did not know his loss, until the blow fell on him.

CHO. Is there then no more a hope of saving her?

MAID. None; the fated day comes on so fast.

CHO. Are then the fitting rites already taking place o'er her body?

MAID. Death's garniture is ready, wherewith her lord will bury her.

CHO. Well let her know, though die she must, her fame ranks far above any other wife's beneath the sun.

MAID. Far above! of course it does; who will gainsay it? What must the woman be who hath surpassed her? For how could any wife have shown a clearer regard for her lord than by offering in his stead to die? Thus much the whole city knows right well; but thou shalt hear with wonder what she did within the house. For when she knew the fatal day was come, she washed her fair white skin with water from the stream, then from her cedar chests drew forth vesture and ornaments and robed herself becomingly; next,

standing before the altar-hearth, she prayed, "Mistress mine, behold ! I pass beneath the earth ; to thee in suppliant wise will I my latest prayer address ; be mother to my orphans, and to my boy unite a loving bride, to my daughter a noble husband. Let them not die, as I, their mother, perish now, untimely in their youth, but let them live their glad lives out, happy in their native land." To every altar in Admetus' halls she went and crowned them and prayed, plucking from myrtle boughs their foliage, with never a tear or groan, nor did her coming trouble change the colour of her comely face. Anon into her bridal bower she burst, and then her tears brake forth and thus she cried, "O couch, whereon I loosed my maiden state for the man in whose cause I die, farewell ! no hate I feel for thee ; for me alone hast thou undone, dying as I die from fear of betraying thee and my lord. Some other wife will make thee hers, more blest maybe than me, but not more chaste." And she fell upon her knees and kissed it, till with her gushing tears the whole bed was wet. At last, when she had had her fill of weeping, she tore herself from the bed and hurried headlong forth, and oft as she was leaving the chamber turned she back and cast herself once more upon the couch ; while her children were weeping as they clung to their mother's robes ; but she took them each in turn in her arms and kissed them fondly, as a dying mother might. And all the servants in the house fell a-crying in sorrow for their mistress ; but she held out her hand to each, nor was there one so mean but she gave him a word and took his answer back. Such are the sorrows in the halls of Admetus. Dying he had died once for all, but by avoiding death he hath a legacy of grief that he will ne'er forget.

CHO. Doubtless Admetus sorrows in this calamity, if he must lose so good a wife.

MAID. Ah yes ! he weeps, holding in his arms his darling wife, and prays her not to leave him, impossible request !

for she is worn and wasted with illness, and lies ¹ exhausted, a sad burden in his arms. Still, though her breath comes short and scant, she yearns to gaze yet on the sunshine, for nevermore, but now the last and latest time her eye shall see his radiant orb.² But I will go, thy presence to announce, for 'tis not all who have the goodwill to stand by their masters with kindly hearts in adversity. But thou of old hast been my master's friend.

CHO. O Zeus, what way out of these sorrows can be found? how can we loose the bonds of fate that bind our lord?

Comes some one forth? Am I at once to cut my hair, and cast the sable robe about me?

Too plainly, ay too plainly, friends; still let us to heaven pray; for the gods' power is very great.

O king Pæan, devise for Admetus some means of escape from his sorrows.

Yes, yes, contrive it; for thou in days gone by didst find salvation for him, so now be thou a saviour from the toils of death and stay bloodthirsty Hades.

Woe! woe! alas! Thou son of Pheres, woe! Ah, thy fate in losing thy wife!

Is not this enough to make thee slay thyself, ah! more than cause enough to tie the noose aloft and fit it to the neck?

Yea, for to-day wilt thou witness the death of her that was not merely dear, but dearest of the dear.

Look, look! she cometh even now, her husband with her, from the house.

Cry aloud and wail, O land of Pheræ, wail for the best of women, as with sickness worn she passes 'neath the earth to Hades, lord below.

¹ Elmsley was the first to detect that a line has probably been lost here, containing some finite verb to complete the sense, which I have endeavoured to give by introducing "lies" into my translation.

² These two lines, of frequent recurrence in Greek tragedy, are here rejected by Nauck.

Never, never will I say that marriage brings more joy than grief, as I conjecture by the past and witness these misfortunes of our king, for he when widowed of this noble wife will for the future lead a life that is no life at all.

ALC. O sun-god, lamp of day ! O scudding clouds that dance along the sky !

ADM. He sees us both with anguish bowed, albeit guiltless of any crime against the gods, for the which thy death is due.

ALC. O earth, O sheltering roof, and ye my maiden chambers in my native land Iolcos !

ADM. Lift thyself, unhappy wife, forsake me not ; entreat the mighty gods to pity us.

ALC. I see the two-oared skiff, I see it ; and Charon, death's ferryman, his hand upon the boatman's pole, is calling me e'en now, " Why lingerest thou ? Hasten. Thou art keeping me." Thus in his eager haste he hurries me.

ADM. Ah me ! bitter to me is this voyage thou speakest of. † Unhappy wife, what woes are ours !

ALC. One draws me, draws me hence, seest thou not ? to the courts of death, winged Hades glaring from beneath his dark brows. What wilt thou with me ? Unhand me. On what a journey am I setting out, most wretched woman I !

ADM. Bitter journey to thy friends, yet most of all to me and to thy babes, the partners in this sorrow.

ALC. Hands off ! hands off at once !

Lay me down, I cannot stand. Hades standeth near ; and with its gloom steals night upon my eyes.

O my children, my children, ye have no mother now. Fare ye well, my babes, live on beneath the light !

ADM. Woe is me ! this is a message of sorrow to me, worse than aught that death can do. Steel not thy heart to leave me, I implore, by heaven, by thy babes whom thou wilt make orphans ; nay, raise thyself, have courage. For if thou die I can no longer live ; my life, my death are in thy hands ; thy love is what I worship.

ALC. Admetus, lo ! thou seest how it is with me ; to thee I fain would tell my wishes ere I die. Thee I set before myself, and instead of living have ensured thy life, and so I die, though I need not have died for thee, but might have taken for my husband whom I would of the Thessalians, and have had a home blest with royal power ; reft of thee, with my children orphans, I cared not to live, nor, though crowned with youth's fair gifts, wherein I used to joy, did I grudge them. Yet the father that begat thee, the mother that bare thee, gave thee up, though they had reached a time of life when to die were well, so saving thee their child, and winning noble death. For thou wert their only son, nor had they any hope, when thou wert dead, of other offspring. And I should have lived and thou the remnant of our days, nor wouldst thou have wept thy wife's loss, nor have had an orphan family. But some god hath caused these things to be even as they are. Enough ! Remember thou the gratitude due to me for this ; yea, for I shall never ask thee for an adequate return, for naught is prized more highly than our life ; but just is my request, as thou thyself must say, since thou no less than I dost love these children, if so be thou think'st aright. Be content to let them rule my house, and do not marry a new wife to be a stepmother to these children, for she from jealousy, if so she be a woman worse than me, will stretch out her hand against the children of our union. Then do not this, I do beseech thee.¹ For the stepmother that succeeds, hateth children of a former match, cruel as the viper's are her tender mercies. A son, 'tis true, hath in his sire a tower of strength, [to whom he speaks and has his answer back] ;² but thou, my daughter, how shall thy maidenhood be passed in honour ? What shall thy experience

¹ Nauck suspects this line, and Hirzel thinks the two next are spurious.

² Paley encloses this line in brackets as suspicious. Nauck omits it in his text.

be of thy father's wife? She may fasten on thee some foul report in thy youthful bloom, and frustrate thy marriage. Never shall thy mother lead thee to the bridal bed, nor by her presence in thy travail hearten thee, my child, when a mother's kindness triumphs over all. No, for I must die; and lo! this evil cometh to me not to-morrow nor yet on the third day of the month, but in a moment shall I be counted among the souls that are no more. Fare ye well, be happy; and thou, husband, canst boast thou hadst a peerless wife, and you, children, that you had such an one for mother.

CHO. Take heart; I do not hesitate to answer for him; he will perform all this, unless his mind should go astray.

ADM. It shall be so, fear not, it shall; alive thou wert the only wife I had, and dead shalt thou, none else, be called mine; no Thessalian maid shall ever take thy place and call me lord; not though she spring from lineage high nor though besides she be the fairest of her sex. Of children I have enough; god grant I may in them be blessed! for in thee has it been otherwise. No year-long mourning will I keep for thee, but all my life through, lady: loathing the mother that bare me, and hating my father, for they were friends in word but not in deed. But thou didst give thy dearest for my life and save it. May I not then mourn to lose a wife like thee? And I will put an end to revelry, to social gatherings o'er the wine, forego the festal crown and music which once reigned in my halls. For nevermore will I touch the lyre nor lift my soul in song to the Libyan flute, for thou hast taken with thee all my joy in life. But in my bed thy figure shall be laid full length, by cunning artists fashioned; thereon will I throw myself and, folding my arms about thee, call upon thy name, and think I hold my dear wife in my embrace, although I do not; chill comfort this, no doubt, but still I shall relieve my soul of its sad weight; and thou wilt come to me in dreams and gladden

me. For sweet it is to see our friends, come they when they will, e'en by night.

Had I the tongue, the tuneful voice of Orpheus to charm Demeter's daughter or her husband by my lay and bring thee back from Hades, I had gone down, nor Pluto's hound, nor Charon, ferryman of souls, whose hand is on the oar, had held me back, till to the light I had restored thee alive. At least do thou await me there, against the hour I die, prepare a home for me to be my true wife still. For in this same cedar coffin I will bid these children lay me with thee and stretch my limbs by thine; for never even in death may I be severed from thee, alone found faithful of them all.

CHO. Lo! I too will share with thee thy mourning for her, friend with friend; for this is but her due.

ALC. My children, ye with your own ears have heard your father's promise, that he will never wed another wife to set her over you, nor e'er dishonour me.

ADM. Yea, so I promise now, and accomplish it I will.

ALC. On these conditions receive the children from my hand.

ADM. I receive them, dear pledges by a dear hand given.

ALC. Take thou my place and be a mother to these babes.

ADM. Sore will be their need when they are reft of thee.

ALC. O my children, I am passing to that world below, when my life was needed most.

ADM. Ah me, what can I do bereft of thee?

ALC. Thy sorrow Time will soothe; 'tis the dead who are as naught.

ADM. Take me, O take me, I beseech, with thee 'neath the earth.

ALC. Enough that I in thy stead am dying.

ADM. O Destiny! of what a wife art thou despoiling me!

ALC. Lo! the darkness deepens on my drooping eyes.

ADM. Lost indeed am I, if thou, dear wife, wilt really leave me.

ALC. Thou mayst speak of me as naught, as one whose life is o'er.

ADM. Lift up thy face, leave not thy children.

ALC. 'Tis not my own free will ; O my babes, farewell !

ADM. Look, look on them but once.

ALC. My end is come.

ADM. What mean'st thou ? art leaving us ?

ALC. Farewell !

ADM. Lost ! lost ! woe is me !

CHO. She is gone, the wife of Admetus is no more.

EUM. O my hard fate ! My mother has passed to the realms below ; she lives no more, dear father, 'neath the sun. Alas for her ! she leaves us ere her time and to me bequeaths an orphan's life. Behold that staring eye, those nerveless hands ! Hear me, mother, hear me, I implore ! 'tis I who call thee now, I thy tender chick, printing my kisses on thy lips.

ADM. She cannot hear, she cannot see ; a heavy blow hath fortune dealt us, you children and me.

EUM. O father, I am but a child to have my loving mother leave me here alone ; O cruel my fate, alas ! and thine, my sister, sharer in my cup of woe. Woe to thee, father ! in vain, in vain didst thou take a wife and hast not reached the goal of eld with her ; for she is gone before, and now that thou art dead, my mother, our house is all undone.

CHO. Admetus, these misfortunes thou must bear. Thou art by no means the first nor yet shalt be the last of men to lose a wife of worth ; know this, we all of us are debtors unto death.

ADM. I understand ; this is no sudden flight of ill hither ; I was ware of it and long have pined. But since I am to carry the dead forth to her burial, stay here with me and to that inexorable god in Hades raise your antiphone. While

to all Thessalians in my realm I do proclaim a general mourning for this lady, with hair shorn off and robes of sable hue; all ye who harness steeds for cars, or single horses ride, cut off their manes with the sharp steel. Hush'd be every pipe, silent every lyre throughout the city till twelve full moons are past; for never again shall I bury one whom I love more, no! nor one more loyal to me; honour from me is her due, for she for me hath died, she and she alone.

[*Excunt ADMETUS and EUMELUS, with the other children.*]

CHO. Daughter of Pelias, be thine a happy life in that sunless home in Hades' halls! Let Hades know, that swarthy god, and that old man who sits to row and steer alike at his death-ferry, that he hath carried o'er the lake of Acheron in his two-oared skiff a woman peerless amidst her sex. Oft of thee the Muses' votaries shall sing on the seven-stringed mountain shell and in hymns that need no harp,¹ glorifying thee, oft as the season in his cycle cometh round at Sparta in that Carnean² month when all night long the moon sails high o'erhead, yea, and in splendid Athens, happy town. So glorious a theme has thy death bequeathed to tuneful bards. Would it were in my power and range to bring thee to the light from the chambers of Hades and the streams of Cocytus with the oar that sweeps yon nether flood! For thou, and thou alone, most dear of women, hadst the courage to redeem thy husband from Hades in exchange for thy own life. Light lie the earth above thee, lady! And if ever thy lord take to him a new wife, I vow he will earn my hatred and thy children's too. His mother had no heart to plunge into the darkness of the tomb for her

¹ *i.e.* Epic poetry.

² A reference to the Carnean festival, held in honour of Apollo, by the Dorians of Peloponnesus, especially by the Spartans, for nine successive days in the month Metageitnion, *i.e.* April, hence called the Carnean month.

son, no ! nor his aged sire.¹ Their own child they had not the courage to rescue, the wretches ! albeit they were grey-headed. But thou in thy youth and beauty hast died for thy lord and gone thy way. O be it mine to have for partner such a loving wife ! for this lot is rare in life. Surely she should be my help-meet all my life and never cause one tear.

HER. Mine hosts, dwellers on this Pheræan soil ! say, shall I find Admetus in the house ?

CHO. The son of Pheres is within, Heracles. Tell me what need is bringing thee to the Thessalian land, to visit this city of the Pheræans ?

HER. I am performing a labour for Tirynthian Eurystheus.

CHO. And whither art thou journeying ? on what wandering art thou forced to go ?

HER. To fetch the chariot-steeds of Thracian Diomedes.

CHO. How canst thou ? art a stranger to the ways of thy host ?

HER. I am ; for never yet have I gone to the land of the Bistones.

CHO. Thou canst not master his horses without fighting.

HER. Still I cannot refuse these labours.

CHO. Then shalt thou slay them and return, or thyself be slain and stay there.

HER. It will not be the first hard course that I have run.

CHO. And what will be thy gain, suppose thou master their lord ?

HER. The steeds will I drive away to the Tirynthian king.

CHO. No easy task to bit their jaws.

HER. Easy enough, unless their nostrils vomit fire.

CHO. With ravening jaws they rend the limbs of men.

HER. Thou speakest of the food of mountain beasts, not of horses.

CHO. Their mangers blood-bedabbled thou shalt see.

¹ A line is here wanting in the MSS., but its absence does not destroy the sense.

HER. Whose son doth he who feeds them boast to be?

CHO. Ares' son, king of the golden targe of Thrace.

HER. This toil again is but a piece of my ill-luck; hard it ever is and still is growing steeper, if I with Ares' own-begotten sons must fight, first with Lycaon, next with Cycnus, while now I am bound on this third contest to engage the horses and their master. Yet shall no man ever see Alcmena's son trembling at his foemen's prowess.

CHO. See where Admetus, lord of this land, comes in person from the palace forth.

ADM. Hail! son of Zeus, from Perseus sprung.

HER. Joy to thee also, Admetus, king of Thessaly.

ADM. Would there were! yet thy kindly heart I know full well.

HER. Why dost thou appear with head shorn thus in mourning?

ADM. To-day I am to bury one who is dead.

HER. Heaven avert calamity from thy children!

ADM. The children I have begotten are alive within my house.

HER. Thy father maybe is gone; well, he was ripe to go

ADM. No, Heracles, he lives; my mother too.

HER. It cannot be thy wife is dead, thy Alcestis?

ADM. I can a twofold tale tell about her.

HER. Dost mean that she is dead, or living still?

ADM. She lives, yet lives no more; that is my grief.

HER. I am no wiser yet; thy words are riddles to me.

ADM. Knowest thou not the doom she must undergo?

HER. I know she did submit to die in thy stead.

ADM. How then is she still alive, if so she promised?

HER. Ah! weep not thy wife before the day, put that off till then.

ADM. The doomed is dead; the dead no more exists.

HER. Men count to be and not to be something apart.

ADM. Thy verdict this, O Heracles, mine another.

HER. Why weepest then? which of thy dear ones is the dead?

ADM. 'Tis a woman; I spoke of a woman just now.

HER. A stranger, or one of thine own kin?

ADM. A stranger, yet in another sense related to my house.

HER. How then came she by her death in house of thine?

ADM. Her father dead, she lived here as an orphan.

HER. Ah! would I had found thee free from grief, Admetus!

ADM. With what intent dost thou devise this speech?

HER. I will seek some other friendly hearth.

ADM. Never, O prince! Heaven forefend such dire disgrace!

HER. A guest is a burden to sorrowing friends, if come he should.

ADM. The dead are dead. Come in.

HER. To feast in a friend's house of sorrow is shameful.

ADM. The guest chambers lie apart, whereto we will conduct thee.

HER. Let me go; ten thousandfold shall be my thanks to thee.

ADM. Thou must not go to any other hearth. (*To a Servant.*) Go before, open the guest-rooms that face not these chambers, and bid my stewards see there is plenty of food; then shut the doors that lead into the courtyard; for 'tis not seemly that guests when at their meat should hear the voice of weeping or be made sad. [*Exit HERACLES.*]

CHO. What doest thou? With such calamity before thee, hast thou the heart, Admetus, to welcome visitors? What means this folly?

ADM. Well, and if I had driven him from my house and city when he came to be my guest, wouldst thou have praised me more? No indeed! for my calamity would have been no whit less, while I should have been more churlish. And this would have been another woe to add to mine, that

my house should be called no friend to guests. X Yea, and I find him myself the best of hosts whene'er to Argos' thirsty land I come.

CHO. Why then didst thou conceal thy present misfortune, if, as thy own lips declare, it was a friend that came?

ADM. He would never have entered my house, had he known aught of my distress. Maybe there are who think me but a fool for acting thus, and these will blame me; but my halls have never learnt to drive away or treat with scorn my guests.

CHO. O home of hospitality, thrown open by thy lord to all now and ever! In thee it was that Pythian Apollo, the sweet harper, deigned to make his home, and in thy halls was content to lead a shepherd's life, piping o'er the sloping downs shepherd's madrigals to thy flocks. And spotted lynxes couched amid his sheep in joy to hear his melody, and the lions' tawny troop left the glen of Othrys and came; came too the dappled fawn on nimble foot from beyond the crested pines and frisked about thy lyre, O Phoebus, for very joy at thy gladsome minstrelsy. And so it is thy lord inhabits a home rich in countless flocks by Boëbe's lovely mere, bounding his tilled corn-land and his level pastures with the clime of the Molossi near the sun's dark stable, and holding sway as far as the harbourless strand of the Ægean 'neath Pelion's shadow. Now too hath he opened wide his house and welcomed a guest although his eye is wet with tears in mourning for his wife so dear but lately dead within his halls; yea, for noble birth to noble feeling is inclined.¹ And in the good completest wisdom dwells; and at my heart sits the bold belief that heaven's servant will be blesed.

ADM. Men of Pheræ, kindly gathered here, lo! even now my servants are bearing the corpse with all its trappings

¹ In Nauck's text the word *ἀγαμαι* is here inserted, but it is omitted by Paley.

shoulder-high to the funeral pyre for burial; do ye, as custom bids, salute the dead on her last journey starting.

CHO. Look! I see thy father advancing with aged step, and servants too bearing in their arms adornment for thy wife, offerings for the dead.

PHE. My son, I come to share thy sorrow, for thou hast lost a noble, peerless wife; that no man will deny. Yet must thou needs bear this blow, hard though it be. Accept this garniture, and let it go beneath the earth, for rightly is her body honoured, since she died to save thy life, my son, and gave me back my child, suffering me not to lose thee and pine away in an old age of sorrow. Thus by the generous deed she dared, hath she made her life a noble example for all her sex. Farewell to thee, who hast saved this son of mine and raised me up when falling; be thine a happy lot even in Hades' halls! Such marriages I declare are gain to man, else to wed is not worth while.

ADM. Thou hast come uncalled by me to this burial, nor do I count thy presence as a friendly act. Never shall she be clad in any garniture of thine, nor¹ in her burial will she need aught of thine. Thou shouldst have shewn thy sympathy at the time my doom was sealed. But thou didst stand aloof and let another die, though thou wert old, the victim young; shalt thou then mourn the dead? Methinks thou wert no real sire of mine nor was she my true mother who calls herself and is called so, but² I was sprung of slave's blood and privily substituted at thy wife's breast. Brought to the test thou hast shewn thy nature; I cannot think I am thy child by birth.

By heaven, thou art the very pattern of cowards, who at thy age, on the borderland of life, wouldst not, nay! couldst not find the heart to die for thy own son; but ye, my parents, left to this stranger, whom I henceforth shall

¹ Nauck brackets this line as spurious.

² Nauck refuses to credit Euripides with lines 638 and 639.

justly hold e'en as mother and as father too, and none but her. And yet 'twas a noble exploit to achieve, to die to save thy son, and in any case the remnant of thy time to live was but short; and¹ I and she would have lived the days that were to be, nor had I lost my wife and mourned my evil fate. Moreover thou hast had all treatment that a happy man should have; in princely pomp thy youth was spent, thou hadst a son, myself, to be the heir of this thy home, so thou hadst no fear of dying childless and leaving thy house desolate, for strangers to pillage. Nor yet canst thou say I did dishonour thy old age and give thee up to die, seeing I have ever been to thee most dutiful, and for this thou, my sire, and she, my mother, have made me this return. Go then, get other sons to tend thy closing years, prepare thy body for the grave, and lay out thy corpse. For I will never bury thee with hand of mine; for I am dead for all thou didst for me; but if I found a saviour in another and still live, his son I say I am, and his fond nurse in old age will be. 'Tis vain, I see, the old man's prayer for death, his plaints at age and life's long weariness. For if death do but draw near, not one doth wish to die; old age no more they count so burdensome.

CHO. Peace! enough the present sorrow, O my son; goad not thy father's soul to fury.

PHE. Child, whom think'st thou art reviling? some Lydian or Phrygian bought with thy money? Art not aware I am a freeborn Thessalian, son of a Thessalian sire? Thou art too insolent; yet from hence thou shalt not go as thou camest, after shooting out thy braggart tongue at me. To rule my house I begat and bred thee up; I own no debt of dying in thy stead; this is not the law that I received from my ancestors that fathers should die for children, nor is it a custom in Hellas. For weal or woe, thy life must be thine own; whate'er was due from me to thee, thou hast. Dominion

¹ Lines 651 and 652 are bracketed by Nauck as spurious.

wide is thine, and acres broad I will leave to thee, for from my father did I inherit them. How, pray, have I wronged thee? of what am I robbing thee? Die not thou for me, nor I for thee. Thy joy is in the light; think'st thou thy sire's is not? By Heaven! 'tis a weary while, I trow, that time beneath the earth, and life, though short, is sweet. Thou at least didst struggle hard to 'scape thy death, lost to shame, and by her death dost live beyond thy destined term. Dost thou then speak of cowardice in me, thou craven heart! no match for thy wife, who hath died for thee, her fine young lord? A clever scheme hast thou devised to stave off death for ever, if thou canst persuade each new wife to die instead of thee; and dost thou then taunt thy friends, who will not do the like, coward as thou art thyself? Hold thy peace; reflect, if thou dost love thy life so well, this love by all is shared; yet if thou wilt speak ill of me, thyself shalt hear a full and truthful list of thy own crimes.

CHO. Too long that list both now and heretofore; cease, father, to revile thy son.

ADM. Say on, for I have said my say; but if it vexes thee to hear the truth, thou shouldst not have sinned against me.

PHE. My sin had been the deeper, had I died for thee.

ADM. What! is it all one for young or old to die?

PHE. To live one life, not twain, is all our due.

ADM. Outlive then Zeus himself!

PHE. Dost curse thy parents, though unharmed by them?

ADM. Yea, for I see thy heart is set on length of days.

PHE. Is it not to save thyself thou art carrying to the tomb this corpse?

ADM. A proof of thy cowardice, thou craven heart!

PHE. At any rate her death was not due to me; this thou canst not say.

ADM. Ah! mayst thou some day come to need my aid!

PHE. Woo many wives, that there may be the more to die.

ADM. That is thy reproach, for thou didst refuse to die.

PHE. Dear is the light of the sun-god, dear to all.

ADM. A coward soul is thine, not to be reckoned among men.

PHE. No laughing now for thee at bearing forth my aged corpse.

ADM. Thy death will surely be a death of shame, come when it will.

PHE. Once dead I little reck of foul report.

ADM. Alas ! how void of shame the old can be !

PHE. Hers was no want of shame ; 'twas want of sense in her that thou didst find.

ADM. Begone ! and leave me to bury my dead.

PHE. I go ; bury thy victim, thyself her murderer. Her kinsmen yet will call for an account. Else surely has Acastus ceased to be a man, if he avenge not on thee his sister's blood.

ADM. Perdition seize thee and that wife of thine ! grow old, as ye deserve, childless, though your son yet lives, for ye shall never enter the same abode with me ; nay ! were it needful I should disown thy paternal hearth by heralds' voice, I had disowned it. (*Exit PHERES*). Now, since we must bear our present woe, let us go and lay the dead upon the pyre. [*Exit ADMETUS*.

CHO. Woe, woe for thee ! Alas, for thy hardihood Noble spirit, good beyond compare, farewell ! May Hermes in the nether world, and Hades, too, give thee a kindly welcome ! and if even in that other life the good are rewarded, mayst thou have thy share therein and take thy seat by Hades' bride !

ATT. Many the guests ere now from every corner of the world I have seen come to the halls of Admetus, for whom I have spread the board, but never yet have I welcomed to this hearth a guest so shameless as this ; a man who, in the first place, though he saw my master's grief, yet entered and

presumed to pass the gates, then took what cheer we had in no sober spirit, though he knew our sorrow; no! was there aught we failed to bring? he called for it. Next in his hands he took a goblet of ivy-wood and drank the pure juice of the black grape, till the mounting fumes of wine heated him, and he crowned his head with myrtle-sprays, howling discordantly, while two-fold strains were there to hear, for he would sing without a thought for the troubles in Admetus' halls, while we servants mourned our mistress, though we did not let the stranger see our streaming eyes, for such was the bidding of Admetus. So now here am I entertaining as a guest some miscreant thief maybe, or robber, while she is gone forth from the house, nor did I follow her nor stretch my hand towards her bier, in mourning for my lady, who, to me and all her servants, was a mother, for she would save us from countless trouble, appeasing her husband's angry mood. Have I not good cause then to loathe this guest who cometh in our hour of woe?

HER. Ho! sirrah, why that solemn, thoughtful look? 'Tis not the way for servants to scowl on guests, but with courteous soul to welcome them. But thou, seeing a friend of thy master arrive, receivest him with sullen, lowering brow, though 'tis but a stranger that is the object of thy mourning. Come hither, that thou too mayst learn more wisdom. Dost know the nature of this mortal state? I trow not; how shouldst thou? Well, lend an ear to me. Death is the common debt of man; no mortal really knows if he will live to see the morrow's light; for Fortune's issues are not in our ken, beyond the teacher's rule they lie, no art can master them. Harken then to this and learn of me, be merry, drink thy cup, and count the present day thine own, the rest to Fortune yield. And to Cypris too, sweetest of the gods by far to man, thy tribute pay, for kindly is her mood. Let be those other cares, and heed my counsel if thou think'st I speak aright; methinks I do. Come, banish

this excessive grief, and drink a cup with me when thou hast passed beyond these doors and wreathed thy brow ; and I feel sure the splash of wine within the cup will bring thee to a better haven from this crabbed mood, this cabined state of mind.¹ Mortals we are, and mortals' thoughts should have ; for all they who frown and scowl do miss,—leastways I think so,—the true life and get themselves misfortune.

ATT. I know all that, but our present state has little claim on revelry or laughter.

HER. The dead was a stranger woman ; grieve not to excess ; for the rulers of thy house are living.

ATT. How, living ? Thou knowest not the trouble in the house.

HER. I do, unless thy master did in aught deceive me.

ATT. Too hospitable is he.

HER. Was I to miss good cheer because a stranger had died ?

ATT. A stranger surely ! quite a stranger she !

HER. Is there some trouble that he withheld from me ?

ATT. Farewell, go thy way ! my master's troubles are my care.

HER. This word of thine heralds not a grief for strangers felt.

ATT. Had it been, the sight of thy merriment had not grieved me so.

HER.² Can it be mine host hath strangely wronged me ?

ATT. Thou camest at no proper time for our house to welcome thee, for sorrow is come upon us ; lo ! thou seest our shorn heads and robes of sable hue.

HER. Who is it that is dead ? Is it a child or his aged sire that hath passed away ?

ATT. Nay, sir guest, 'tis Admetus' wife that is no more.

¹ Reading *φρενῶν*, which Nauck, however, doubts.

² There is some doubt whether the next four lines are genuine. Nauck brackets them.

HER. What sayest thou? and did ye then in spite of that admit me to your cheer?

ATT. Yes, for his regard would not let him send thee from his door.

HER. Unhappy husband, what a wife hast thou lost!

ATT. We are all undone, not she alone.

HER. I knew it when I saw his streaming eye, shorn head and downcast look, yet did he persuade me, saying it was a stranger he was bearing to burial. So I did constrain myself and passed his gates and sat drinking in his hospitable halls, when he was suffering thus. And have I wreathed my head and do I revel still? But—thou to hold thy peace when such a crushing sorrow lay upon the house! Where is he burying her? Whither shall I go to find her?

ATT. Beside the road that leadeth straight to Larissa, shalt thou see her carved tomb outside the suburb.

HER. O heart, O soul, both sufferers oft, now show the mettle of that son Tiryinthian Alcmena, daughter of Electryon, bare to Zeus. For I must save this woman, dead but now, setting Alcestis once again within this house, and to Admetus this kind service render. So I will go and watch for death the black-robed monarch of the dead, and him methinks I shall find as he drinks of the blood-offering near the tomb. And if, from ambush rushing, once I catch and fold him in my arms' embrace, none shall ever wrest him thence with snarling ribs, ere he give up the woman unto me. But should I fail to find my prey and he come not to the clotted blood, I will go to the sunless home of those beneath the earth, to Persephone and her king, and make to them my prayer, sure that I shall bring Alcestis up again, to place her in the hands of him, my host, who welcomed me to his house nor drove me thence, though fortune smote him hard, but this his noble spirit strove to hide out of regard for me. What host more kind than him in Thessaly? or in

the homes of Hellas? Wherefore shall he never say his generous deeds were lavished on a worthless wretch.

[*Exeunt HERACLES and Servant.*]

ADM. Ah me! I loathe this entering in, and loathe to see my widowed home. Woe, woe is me! Whither shall I go? Where stand? what say? or what suppress? Would God that I were dead! Surely in an evil hour my mother gave me birth. The dead I envy, and would fain be as they, and long to dwell within their courts. No joy to me to see the light, no joy to tread the earth; such a hostage death hath reft me of and handed o'er to Hades.

CHO. Move forward, go within the shelter of thy house.

ADM. Woe is me!

CHO. Thy sufferings claim these cries of woe.

ADE. Ah me!

CHO. Through anguish hast thou gone, full well I know.

ADM. Alas! alas!

CHO. Thou wilt not help the dead one whit.

ADM. O misery!

CHO. Nevermore to see thy dear wife face to face is grief indeed.

ADM. Thy words have probed the sore place in my heart. What greater grief can come to man than the loss of a faithful wife? Would I had never married or shared with her my home! I envy those 'mongst men who have nor wife nor child. Theirs is but one life; to grieve for that is no excessive burden; but to see children fall ill and bridal beds emptied by death's ravages is too much to bear, when one might go through life without wife or child.

CHO. A fate we cannot cope with is come upon us.

ADM. Woe is me!

CHO. But thou to sorrow settest no limit.

ADM. Ah! ah!

CHO. 'Tis hard to bear, but still--

ADM. Woe is me!

CHO. Thou art not the first to lose—

ADM. O ! woe is me !

CHO. A wife ; misfortune takes a different shape for every man she plagues.

ADM. O the weary sorrow ! O the grief for dear ones dead and gone ! Why didst thou hinder me from plunging into the gaping grave, there to lay me down and die with her, my peerless bride ? Then would Hades for that one have gotten these two faithful souls at once, crossing the nether lake together.

CHO. I had a kinsman once, within whose home died his only son, worthy of a father's tears ; yet in spite of that he bore his grief resignedly, childless though he was, his hair already turning grey, himself far on in years, upon life's downward track.

ADM. O house of mine, how can I enter thee ? how can I live here, now that fortune turns against me ? Ah me ! How wide the gulf 'twixt then and now ! Then with torches cut from Pelion's pines, with marriage hymns I entered in, holding my dear wife's hand ; and at our back a crowd of friends with cheerful cries, singing the happy lot of my dead wife and me, calling us a noble pair made one, children both of highborn lineage ; but now the voice of woe instead of wedding hymns, and robes of black instead of snowy white usher me into my house to my deserted couch.

CHO. Hard upon prosperous fortune came this sorrow to thee, a stranger to adversity ; yet hast thou saved thy soul alive. Thy wife is dead and gone ; her love she leaves with thee. What new thing is here ? Death ere now from many a man hath torn a wife.

ADM. My friends, I count my dead wife's lot more blest than mine, for all it seems not so ; for nevermore can sorrow touch her for ever ; all her toil is over, and glorious is her fame. While I, who had no right to live, have passed the bounds of fate only to live a life of misery ; I know it now.

For how shall I endure to enter this my house? Whom shall I address, by whom be answered back, to find¹ aught joyful in my entering in? Whither shall I turn? Within, the desolation will drive me forth, whensoever I see my widowed couch, the seat whereon she sat, the floor all dusty in the house, and my babes falling at my knees with piteous tears for their mother, while my servants mourn the good mistress their house hath lost. These are the sorrows in my home, while abroad the marriages among Thessalians and the thronging crowds of women will drive me mad,² for I can never bear to gaze upon the compeers of my wife: And whoso is my foe will taunt me thus, "Behold him living in his shame, a wretch who quailed at death himself, but of his coward heart gave up his wedded wife instead, and escaped from Hades; doth he deem himself a man after that? And he loathes his parents, though himself refused to die." Such ill report shall I to my evils add. What profit, then, my friends, for me to live, in fame and fortune ruined.

CHO. Myself have traced the Muses' path, have soared amid the stars, have laid my hold on many a theme, and yet have found naught stronger than necessity, no spell inscribed on Thracian tablets written there by Orpheus, the sweet singer, no! nor aught among the simples culled by Phœbus for the toiling race of men, and given to Asclepius' sons. The only goddess she, whose altar or whose image man cannot approach; victims she heedeth not. O come not to me, dread goddess, in greater might than heretofore in my career. Even Zeus requires thy aid to bring to pass whatso he wills. Thou too it is that by sheer force dost bend the steel among the Chalybes; nor is there any pity in thy relentless nature.

This is the goddess that hath gripped thee too in chains thou canst not 'scape; yet steel thy heart, for all thy weeping ne'er will bring to light again the dead from the realms

¹ Nauck brackets this line as spurious.

² Or, "drive me away."

below. Even sons of gods perish in darkness ' in the hour of death. We loved her while she was with us, we love her still though dead; noblest of her sex was she, the wife thou tookest to thy bed. Her tomb let none regard as the graves of those who die and are no more, but let her have honours equal with the gods, revered by every traveller; and many a one will cross the road and read this verse aloud, "This is she that died in days gone by to save her lord; now is she a spirit blest. Hail, lady revered; be kind to us!" Such glad greeting shall she have. But see, Admetus! yonder, I believe, comes Alcmena's son toward thy hearth.

HER. Admetus, to a friend we should speak freely, not hold our peace and harbour in our hearts complaints. I came to thee in thy hour of sorrow and claimed the right to prove myself thy friend, but thou wouldst not tell me that she, thy wife, lay stretched in death; but didst make me a welcome guest in thy halls, as though thy whole concern was centred on a stranger's loss. So I crowned my head and poured drink-offerings to the gods in that thy house of sorrow. Wherefore I do blame thee for this treatment of me, yet would not grieve thee in thy trouble. So now the reason I have turned my steps and come hither again, I will tell. This lady take and keep for me until I come bringing hither the steeds of Thrace, after I have slain the lord of the Bistones. But should I fare as fare I fain would not, I give her to thee to serve within thy halls. With no small toil she came into my hands. 'Twas thus: I found folk just appointing an open contest for athletes, well worth a struggle, and there I won her as a prize and brought her thence; now those who were successful in the lighter contests had horses for their prize, but those who conquered in severer feats, in boxing and wrestling, won herds of oxen, and this woman was to be added thereto; with such a chance 'twere shame indeed to pass so fair

¹ σκότωι, or "the sons of gods by mortal women."

a guerdon by. So thou must take her in thy charge, as I said; for not by theft but honest toil I won the prize I bring; and maybe e'en thou in time wilt thank me.

ADM. 'Twas not because of any slight or unkind thought of thee that I concealed my wife's sad fate; but this were adding grief to grief if thou hadst gone from hence to the halls of some other friend; and it sufficed that I should mourn my sorrow. But I do beseech thee, prince, if 'tis possible, bid some other Thessalian, one who hath not suffered as I have, keep the maiden for thee,—and thou hast many friends in Pheræ; remind me not of my misfortune. For I could not see her in my house and stay my tears. Oh! add not new affliction to my stricken heart, for sure by sorrow am I bowed enough. And where within my halls could a tender maiden live? for such she is, as her dress and vesture show. Is she to dwell where men consort? Then how shall she retain her maiden purity, if 'mid our youths she come and go? O Heracles, it is no easy task to check a young man's fancy, and I am anxious for thy sake. Or am I to take her to my dead wife's bower and care for her? How can I bring her there to fill the other's bed? Twofold reproach I fear; first, some fellow-townsmen may taunt me with betraying my benefactress in eagerness to wed a new young bride; next, there is my dead wife, whom I should much regard, for she doth merit all my reverence. Thou too, lady, whosoe'er thou art, believe me, art the very counterfeit presentment of Alcestis, the picture of her form, ah me! O take this maiden, I conjure thee, from my sight; slay me not already slain. For in her I seem once more to see my wife; and my heart is darkly troubled, and the fountains of my eyes are loosed. Ah, woe is me! Now do I taste the bitterness of this my grief.

CHO. Indeed I cannot call thy fortune blest, yet heaven's gift must thou endure, whoe'er the god that come to bring it.

HER. Would I had the power to bring thy wife up to the light from the halls of death, and confer this kindness on thee !

ADM. Right well I know thou wouldst. But what of that ? The dead can never come to life again.

HER. Do not exceed the mark, but bear thy grief with moderation.

ADM. 'Tis easier to advise than to suffer and endure.

HER. Yet what thy gain, if thou for aye wilt mourn ?

ADM. I too know that myself, but some strange yearning leads me on.

HER. Love for the dead compels a tear.

ADM. Her death was mine, more than any words of mine can tell.

HER. Thou hast lost a noble wife ; who shall gainsay it ?

ADM. Life henceforth hath lost all charm for me.

HER. Time will soothe the smart ; as yet thy grief is young.

ADM. "Time !" use that word, if death and time are one.

HER. A new wife and a longing for a fresh marriage will stay thy sorrow.

ADM. Peace ! What words are these ? I ne'er of thee had thought it.

HER. What ! wilt never wed, but preserve thy widowed state ?

ADM. There is no woman living that shall share my couch.

HER. Dost think that this will help the dead at all ?

ADM. My reverence she deserves, where'er she is.

HER. I praise thee, yes ; but still thou bringest on thyself the charge of folly.

ADM. So that thou never call'st me bridegroom, praise me if thou wilt.

HER. I praise thee for thy loyalty to thy wife.

ADM. Come death ! if ever I betray her, dead though she be.

HER. Well, take this maiden to the shelter of thy noble house.

ADM. Spare me, I entreat thee by Zeus, thy sire.

HER. Be sure, if thou refuse, 'twill be a sad mistake.

ADM. If I comply, remorse will gnaw my heart.

HER. Yield ; for in god's good time maybe thou wilt give me thanks.

ADM. Ah ! would thou hadst never won her in the games !

HER. Yet thou too sharest in my victory.

ADM. True ; still let this maiden go away.

HER. Go she shall, if go she must ; but first see if this is needful.

ADM. I needs must, else wilt thou be wroth with me.

HER. I have a reason good to press the matter thus.

ADM. Have thy way then. Yet know well thy deed I disapprove.

HER. A day will come that thou wilt praise me ; only yield.

ADM. (*to his servants*). Take her in, if I needs must give her welcome in my house.

HER. To thy servants will I not hand her over.

ADM. Conduct her then thyself within, if so thou thinkest good.

HER. Nay, but into thy hands shall mine consign her.

ADM. I will not touch her, though she is free to go within my halls.

HER. To thy hand, and thine alone I her entrust.

ADM. Prince, against my will thou dost constrain me to this deed.

HER. Boldly stretch out thy hand and touch the stranger maid.

ADM. There, then, I stretch it out as toward the Gorgon's severed head.¹

HER. Hast hold of her?

ADM. I have.

HER. (*removes the veil*). So; keep her safely then, and in days to come thou wilt confess the son of Zeus proved himself a noble guest. Look well at her, if haply to thy gaze she have a semblance of thy wife; and now that thou art blest, cease from sorrowing.

ADM. Great gods, what shall I say? a marvel past all hope is here! My wife, my own true wife I see, or is some mocking rapture sent by heaven to drive me mad?

HER. No, no; 'tis thy own wife thou seest here.

ADM. Beware it be not a phantom from that nether world.

HER. No necromancer was this guest whom thou didst welcome.

ADM. Do I behold my wife, her whom I buried?

HER. Be well assured thereof; still I marvel not thou dost distrust thy luck.

ADM. May I touch her, may I speak to her as my living wife?

HER. Speak to her. For thou hast all thy heart's desire.

ADM. O form and features of my well-loved wife! past all hope I hold thee, never expecting to see thee again.

HER. So thou dost; may no jealous god rise against thee!

ADM. O noble son of almighty Zeus, good luck to thee! may the father that begat thee hold thee in his keeping; for thou and none else hast raised my fallen fortunes. How

¹ Lobeck, whom Nauck follows, to avoid the elision of the final ϵ on the dative singular, conjectured Γοργόν' ὡς καρπομῶν "as if beheading a Gorgon," *i.e.* with averted gaze, thus gaining very considerable point. Paley notices the clever suggestion, without however adopting it.

didst thou bring her from the world below to this light of day?

HER. By encountering the god¹ who had her in his power.

ADM. Where didst thou engage with Death? tell me this.

HER. Just by the tomb I from my ambush sprang and caught him in my grip.

ADM. But why thus speechless stands my wife?

HER. 'Tis not lawful yet for thee to hear her speak, ere she be purified from the gods below and the third day be come. So lead her in; and hereafter, e'en as now, be just and kind to guests, Admetus. Now farewell! for I must go to perform my appointed task for the lordly son of Sthenelus.

ADM. Abide with us and be our welcome guest.

HER. Another time; now must I use all haste.

ADM. Good luck to thee! and mayst thou come again! To the citizens and all my realm I make this proclamation, that they institute dances in honour of the glad event, and make the altars steam with sacrifice, and offer prayers; for now have I moored my bark of life in a happier haven than before, and so will own myself a happy man.

CHO. Many are the shapes that fortune takes, and oft the gods bring things to pass beyond our expectation. That which we deemed so sure is not fulfilled, while for that we never thought would be, God finds out a way. And such hath been the issue in the present case.

¹ Reading *δαιμόνων τῷ κυρίῳ*. Nauck has *κοιρανῶ*—apparently regarding the Death-god as supreme over all deities, but surely this is incorrect. Jacobs, seeing the difficulty, conjectured *νεπτέρων*. But the translation in the text seems a possible one, and makes the emendation unnecessary.



