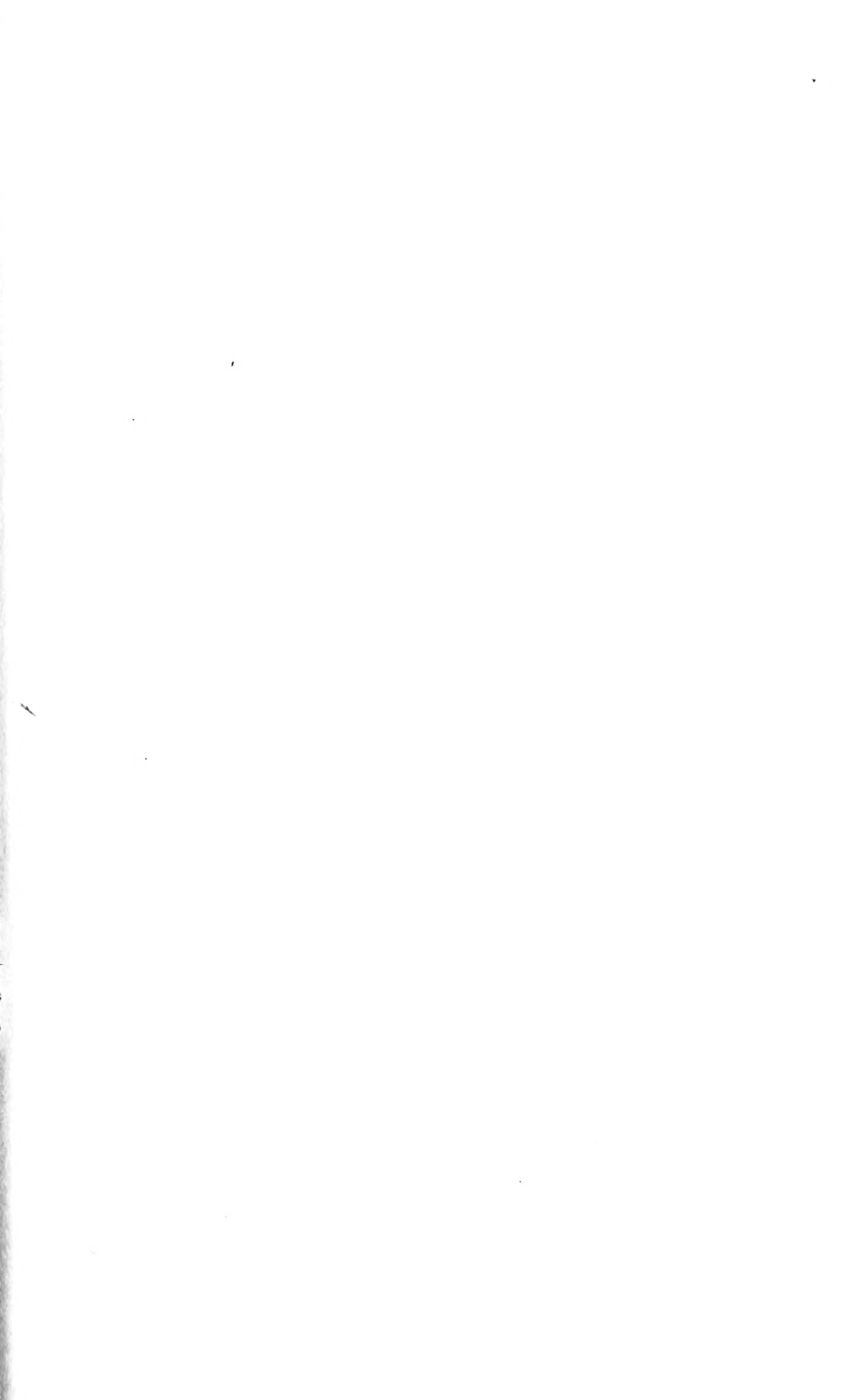


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Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,
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EURIPIDES, son of Mnesarchus and Cleito, born at Phyla in Attica, *c.* 484 B.C. Produced his first play in 455 at Athens, where he resided until 408. He then withdrew to Asia Minor and later to Macedonia, where he died at the court of Archelaus in 407 B.C.

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VOL. 1

EURIPIDES: PLAYS

IN TWO VOLUMES · VOLUME ONE

TRANSLATED BY
A. S. WAY

INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN WARRINGTON



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EURIPIDES

SEARCHER OF HUMAN HEARTS, TO THEE WAS GIVEN
TO UNSEAL THE FOUNTAINS OF THE SOUL THAT WELL
PITY AND LOVE, IN SYMPATHY TO DWELL
WITH ALL THAT IN LIFE'S AGONIES HAVE STRIVEN :
FETTERS BY MAGIC OF THY MUSIC RIVEN
FROM CAPTIVES DROPPED IN THAT SICILIAN HELL :
THY DEAD LIPS ON THE SPARTAN BREATHED A SPELL
WHENCE BLESSING-INCENSE SOARED TO THAT HIGH HEAVEN
WHERE HE, WHO SANG OF TRIUMPH-CRIMSONED SEAS,
AND THOU, THROUGH WHOM THINGS COMMON TOUCHED THE SPHERES,
TWIN-THRONED, WHILE HAND TO HAND OF BROTHER CLAVE,
SMILED SCORN OF GODS ON ARISTOPHANES,—
A SATYR MOCKING ORPHANED ATHENS' TEARS,—
SAW FROM THE STARS FROGS CROAKING O'ER A GRAVE

INTRODUCTION

EURIPIDES, son of a merchant named Mnesarchus (or Mnesarchides), was born at Phyla, an Attic village, about 484 B.C. His mother, Cleito, came of good family; there are no historical grounds for the contempt with which both she and his wife Melite are referred to in the *MS Life*, which is based on an earlier biography by Satyrus,¹ and in the *Attic Chronicle* of Philochorus. As a youth, the poet is said to have distinguished himself in athletics, winning prizes at Athens and Eleusis. He also painted: there are several references to painting in his extant plays, and some of his work was afterwards discovered at Megara. Euripides exhibited his first play (*The Daughters of Pelias*, now lost) in 455 B.C.; but although he was famous throughout Greece long before his death, he won the first prize only five times in twenty-three competitions.

Little else is known for certain of his life; but more interesting than a string of conjectural events are the influences revealed by the tragedies themselves and the criticism which his reputation has survived. Mercilessly ridiculed by Aristophanes in the *Acharnians* (423), in the *Thesmophoriazusae* (411), and posthumously in the *Frogs* (405), he won the admiration of Socrates who was prepared to walk 'as far as the Piraeus' in order to be present at a play by the author of *Medea*. Aristotle, though considering him 'faulty in other respects', describes him as 'the most tragic (of all dramatists) on the stage'. The Stagirite's judgement is borne out by those scenes of self-sacrifice, of madness, of thrilling rescue, and of warfare which occur respectively in *Hecuba*, *Orestes*, *Helen*, and *Andromachê*. By 'faulty in other respects' he no doubt referred to Euripides's concentration upon the effect of individual scenes and songs at the cost of general structure; but the grandeur of such episodes, for example in *Medea* and *The Trojan Women*, and the mighty choruses of the *Bacchae*, amply compensate for structural defects. More recently, we find Euripides condemned by Schlegel, Elmsley, and Swinburne; yet praised by Milton, and above all by Goethe who believed him to have no equal. Modern opinion recognizes the true genius of his creative

¹ A Peripatetic philosopher and historian (*fl.* 210 B.C.). Four pages of his *Life of Euripides* were discovered at Oxyrynchus in 1911.

intellect and (at its best) the unsurpassed beauty of his verse. The cause of these divergent opinions is not far to seek: it lies in the gulf between the poet's own convictions and the art-form within which he chose to work.

The Persian Wars were followed at Athens by a spiritual and intellectual awakening on a scale comparable with that of the Italian Renaissance. Men became conscious of the value of 'knowledge' (*σοφία*), or what we might call liberal education, and 'virtue' (*ἀρετή*). This realization brought into being a class of teachers known as Sophists¹ ready to initiate their pupils into the various arts and sciences covered by the twin gifts of *σοφία* and *ἀρετή*, which Socrates and his school tended to identify and of which Euripides, with passionate sincerity, at first conceived Athens as the living embodiment. At the same time, notable advances were made in the realm of philosophical speculation.

Chief among the Sophists was Protagoras of Abdera (c. 485–c. 415 B.C.), with whom Euripides was well acquainted. Protagoras denied all knowledge of the gods, studied the principles of human society, distinguished Nature (*Φύσις*) from Custom (*Νόμος*), and above all stressed the relativity of human judgments. His doctrine is summed up in the celebrated phrase: 'Man is the measure of all things.'²

Euripides is also stated, upon good grounds, to have conversed with Socrates and to have studied under the great pluralist philosopher Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (500–428 B.C.), whose principal contribution to human thought was his theory that Mind (*Νοῦς*) is the efficient cause of universal order.

It is remarkable that a man of keen intelligence trained along these lines should have been drawn to exercise his brilliant gifts upon an art so rigid as that of Attic tragedy. This allowed him no freedom either in form or in subject-matter, since he was obliged from the outset to compose within the limits of an unvarying religious framework. The performance of a Greek tragedy was a sacred rite, celebrating the mystery of death and resurrection to the accompaniment of ceremonial rubrics no less strict than those which now regulate the Christian liturgy. It took place, indeed, at the festival of Dionysus, whose priest presided in the theatre, while its subject-matter was confined to a small *corpus* of legendary lore.

Still more remarkable, however, is the fact that Euripides was able to treat his theme with so much originality while

¹ At this period the word had no derogatory connotation.

² For a criticism of this theory, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A 4–6.

adhering even more closely than did Aeschylus himself to the age-long ritual forms. The tenderness and pathos with which his characters are endowed reduced their heroic figures to the stature of ordinary men and women, showing them not as they ought to be but as they are. Euripides, a true son of the Athenian 'renaissance', was inevitably doomed to shock his audience, who were for the most part as old-fashioned as the rite in which they took a silent part. He was accused of dangerous sophistry, of impiety, of defending perjury and adultery. But it is surely part of a dramatist's right, if not of his duty, to present both sides of a human problem (even when the human is a hero) with complete impartiality; nor does every word spoken by the characters of a play necessarily represent the beliefs and sympathies of its author. In any case, Euripides was too confirmed an adherent of the new ideas to accept even the modified view of divine government as found in Aeschylus and Sophocles. *Heracles* contains an explicit denial of popular myths; in *Ion* Apollo tells a brazen lie; while the former play shows us the spouse of Zeus driving Alcmena's son to raving madness out of petty spite. Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* and Dionysus in *The Bacchae* are simply personifications of those natural forces with which man must be reconciled or perish.

But Euripides turned away from convention in other things besides theology, moral and dogmatic. His ingenuity in contriving plot is illustrated by *Phoenissae* and *Iphigeneia at Aulis*; his exceptional stagecraft by an astounding epiphany in the last scene of *Orestes*. His romantic melodramas—*Helen*, *Iphigeneia in Taurica*, and *Ion*—had much influence on Comedy during the next century, and also on the novel. His studies of womanhood, its wrongs, its passions, and its revenge, as also the ethical problem raised in *Heracles*, are due to Protagoras's distinction of Nature from Custom as well as from the Socratic identification of virtue with knowledge; while the debate as to the respective merits of light and heavy armour in *Heracles* bears witness to the playwright's interest in sophistic technique.

Finally, there is the political factor. We have seen that Euripides thought of Athens as the centre of humanity and enlightenment. In the first phase of the Peloponnesian War he exhibited two patriotic plays, *Heraclidae* and *The Suppliant Women*, in which the civilizing function of Athena's city is represented by Demophon and Theseus. On the other hand, *Hecuba* and *The Trojan Women* recognize the misery and

degradation brought about by war, and prove Euripides to have been no mere chauvinist. This latter play, in fact, is of considerable interest from another point of view; not only does it rank among the supreme works of tragic drama, but it marks also a turning-point in the author's career. Together with the first two 'acts' of the trilogy (*Alexandros* and *Palamedes*, both lost), it is a scarcely veiled denunciation of the sack of Melos (416), that crime which roused the fury of Thucydides and led Athens to irreparable disaster. Athens had failed his trust, and Euripides henceforth sided with the anti-war party, a gesture which added fuel to the fires of Athenian animosity. The last plays, following the *débâcle* at Syracuse, are inspired by romance and fantasy or by personal and family feuds; but neither they nor the failure of a prosecution for impiety could allay suspicion and consequent estrangement between the dramatist and his fellow countrymen. Soon after the production of *Orestes* in 408 Euripides went into voluntary exile, first at Magnesia near Ephesus and later at the semi-barbarian court of Archelaus in Macedonia, where he died in 407 B.C.

It is true that much of Euripides's work has justified critics in describing him as a rationalist. As a disciple of Anaxagoras he knew the sun to be no god but a mass of incandescent metal, 'large as the Peloponnese'; as a follower of Protagoras he disclaimed acquaintance with the gods of current mythology. He was perhaps one of the first to realize with blinding certitude the independence and dignity of the human person, the variety of human nature, and the 'tears of things'. Nevertheless, it is probable that his alleged atheism and impiety were handy sticks wherewith to beat one who had offended on more material but less convenient ground. For religion in fifth-century Athens was a matter of ritual and observance rather than of personal faith or unbelief. Euripides might profess ignorance of the divine nature and of divine providence, but he made no pretence to have solved the ultimate mystery of life. He refers in *Hippolytus* to a life beyond the grave 'dearer to man than this', and in *Orestes* (line 418) we read the celebrated words *δουλεύομεν θεοῖς, ὅτι ποτ' εἰσὶν οἱ θεοί* 'we are slaves of the gods—what ever the gods may be'.

It is essential for a right appreciation of Euripides not to forget the religious character of Greek tragedy through which the dramatist-philosopher expressed his thoughts. Bearing that in mind, we may perceive through the mist of ancient forms, and hear through anguished cries, something prophetic in the poet's achievement. He revealed the true depths of the human

heart, transcended myth, and amidst solemn ceremonial invested man with all the splendour of divinity.

According to Alexandrian bibliographers, Euripides wrote 32 plays,¹ which were first edited by Aristophanes of Byzantium (c. 200 B.C.). Of these only eighteen² and more than one thousand fragments have survived the vicissitudes of two thousand years. The dates of their production, as nearly as can be ascertained, are as follows: *Alcestis* (438); *Medea* (431); *Hippolytus* (428); *The Trojan Women* (415); *Electra* (413); *Helen* (412); *Orestes* (408); *The Bacchae* (406); *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (405); *Heracidae*, *Hecuba*, and *Andromachê* (between 430 and 420); *The Suppliant Women* and *Heracles* (between 420 and 415); *Ion*, *Iphigeneia in Taurica*, and *Phoenissae* (between 415 and 406); *The Cyclops* (the only complete satyric drama extant, before 415).

The best MS containing all the plays is one known as P, of which part is in the Vatican (Pal. 287) and the remainder in the Medicean Library (Laur. 172). Numerous *scholia*, ancient and more recent, are found in a variety of MSS. The fragments have been preserved in papyri and other literary sources. *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Alcestis*, and *Andromachê* were published by J. Lascaris at Florence in 1496. The Aldine edition of M. Musurus was printed at Venice in 1503, but omitted *Electra*, which was first published in 1545 by P. Victorius.

The present translation of the tragedies³ by A. S. Way appeared originally in three volumes (1894-8), and is still regarded as one of the best English renderings. It avoids the pedantry of certain eighteenth-century renderings, and also the still more dangerous pitfalls into which more modern translators have been led through their attempts to give Euripides a touch of twentieth-century sophistication. Way never forgets the ritual character of Greek drama; that is the key to his enduring worth.

JOHN WARRINGTON

¹ This view, however, cannot be taken as certainly correct.

² Nineteen if we include the *Rhesus*, which is of doubtful authenticity.

³ Way's version does not include *The Cyclops*, a satyric play. Shelley's rendering as given here needs neither commendation nor apology.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The most important critical editions are those of Matthiae (1829), Kirchoff (1855), Wecklein (1898-1901), and Gilbert Murray (Oxford Classical Texts, 1902-9). There are numerous editions of separate plays or groups of plays with commentaries.

Gilbert Murray has translated *Hippolytus*, *The Bacchae*, *The Trojan Women*, *Electra*, *Medea*, *Iphigeneia in Taurica*, and *Alcestis*. Later versions of individual plays by Rex Warner and F. L. Lucas are also worthy of attention.

The fragments are contained in A. Nauck's *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (1926), in Hunt's *Fragmenta Tragica Papyracea* (1910), in H. von Arnim's *Supplementum Euripideum* (1913), and in D. L. Page's *Greek Literary Papyri* (1942). See also Wilamowitz-Moellendorf's introduction to his edition of *Heracles*; A. W. Verrall, *Euripides the Rationalist*, 1895; Gilbert Murray, *Euripides and his Age*, 1914; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *New Chapters in Greek Literature*, 3rd series, 1933; Sir P. Harvey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, 1946; R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Euripides and Dionysus*, 1948; F. L. Lucas, *Greek Drama for Everyman*, 1953.

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ALCESTIS

ARGUMENT

APOLLO, being banished for a season from Olympus, and condemned to do service to a mortal, became herdman of Admetus, King of Pherae in Thessaly. Yet he loathed not his earthly taskmaster, but loved him, for that he was a just man, and hospitable exceedingly. Wherefore he obtained from the Fates this boon for Admetus, that, when his hour of death should come, they should accept in ransom for his life the life of whosoever should have before consented to die in his stead. Now when this was made known, none of them which were nearest by blood to the king would promise to be his ransom in that day. Then Alcestis his wife, the daughter of Pelias King of Iolkos, pledged her to die for him. Of her love she did it, and for the honour of wifehood. And the years passed by, and the tale was told in many lands; and all men praised Alcestis, but Admetus bore a burden of sorrow, for day by day she became dearer to him, a wife wholly true, a mother most loving, and a lady to her thralls gentle exceedingly. But when it was known by tokens that the day was come, Admetus repented him sorely, but it availed not, for no mortal may recall a pledge once given to the Gods. And on that day there came to the palace Apollo to plead with Death for Alcestis' sake; and a company of Elders of Pherae, to ask of her state and to make mourning for her. And when she was dead, ere she was borne forth to burial, came Herakles, son of Zeus, in his journeying, seeking the guest's right of meat and lodging, but not knowing aught of that which had come to pass. Of him was a great deliverance wrought, which is told herein.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

APOLLO

DEATH

CHORUS, *composed of Elders of Pherae*

HANDMAID

ALCESTIS, *daughter of Pelias, and wife of Admetus*

ADMETUS, *King of Pherae*

EUMELUS, *son of Admetus and Alcestis*

HERAKLES

PHERES, *father of Admetus*

SERVANT, *steward of the palace*

Guards, attendants, handmaids, and mourners

The scene throughout is in front of the palace of Admetus at Pherae.

ALCESTIS

Enter APOLLO.

Ap. Halls of Admetus, where I stooped my pride
To brook the fare of serfs, yea I, a God ;—
The fault was fault of Zeus : he slew my son
Asklêpius—hurled the levin through his heart.
Wroth for the dead, his smiths of heavenly fire
I slew, the Cyclopes ; and, for blood-atonement,
Serf to a mortal man my father made me.
To this land came I, tended mine host's kine,
And warded still his house unto this day.
Righteous myself, I lighted on the righteous, 10
The son of Pheres : him I snatched from death,
Cozening the Fates : to me the Sisters pledged them
That imminent death Admetus should escape
If he for ransom gave another life.
To all he went—all near and dear,—and asked
Grey sire, the mother that had given him life ;
But, save his wife, found none that would consent
For him to die and never more see light.
Now in his arms upborne within yon home
She gaspeth forth her life : for on this day 20
Her weird it is to die and part from life.
I, lest pollution taint me in their house,
Go forth of yonder hall's belovèd roof.

Enter DEATH.

Lo, yonder Death !—I see him nigh at hand,
Priest of the dead, who comes to hale her down
To Hades' halls—well hath he kept his time,
Watching this day, whereon she needs must die.
Death. Ha, thou at the palace !—Wilt not make room,
Phoebus ?—thou wrestest the right yet again.
Thou removest the landmarks of Gods of Gloom. 30
And thou makest their honours vain.

Did this not suffice thee, to thwart that doom
 Of Admetus, when, all by thy cunning beguiled
 Were the Fates, that thou now must be warding the wife
 With thine hand made ready the bowstring to strain,
 Though she pledged her from death to redeem with her life
 Her lord,—she, Pelias' child?

Ap. Fear not: fair words and justice are with me.

Death. Justice with thee!—what needeth then the bow?

Ap. This?—'tis my wont to bear it evermore. 40

Death. Yea, and to aid yon house in lawless wise.

Ap. Mine heart is heavy for my friend's mischance.

Death. What, wilt thou wrest from me this second corpse?

Ap. Nay, not that other did I take by force.

Death. Not?—why on earth then?—why not underground?

Ap. She was his ransom, she for whom thou comest.

Death. Yea, and will hale her deep beneath the earth.

Ap. Take her and go: I trow I shall not bend thee—

Death. To slay the victim due?—mine office this.

Ap. Nay, but to smite with death the ripe for death. 50

Death. Ay, I discern thy plea,—thy zeal, good sooth!

Ap. And may Alcestis never see old age?

Death. Never:—should I not love mine honours too?

Ap. 'Tis soon or late,—thou canst but take one life.

Death. Yet mine the goodlier prize when die the young.

Ap. Think—royal obsequies if old she die!

Death. Lo, Phœbus making laws to shield the rich!

Ap. How say'st thou?—thou a sophist unawares!

Death. Would wealth not buy the boon of dying old?

Ap. So then thou wilt not grant this grace to me? 60

Death. Nay surely—dost not know my wonted way?

Ap. Hateful to mortals this, and loathed of Gods.

Death. All things beyond thy rights thou canst not have.

Ap. Surely thou shalt forbear, though ruthless thou,

So mighty a man to Pheres' halls shall come,

Sent of Eurystheus forth, the courser-car

From winter-dreary lands of Thrace to bring.

Guest-welcomed in Admetus' palace here,

By force yon woman shall he wrest from thee.

Yea, thou of me shalt have no thank for this, 70

And yet shalt do it, and shalt have mine hate.

[Exit APOLLO.]

Death. Talk on, talk on: no profit shalt thou win.

This woman down to Hades' halls shall pass.

For her I go: my sword shall seal her ours:

For sacred to the Nether Gods is he,
He from whose head this sword hath shorn the hair.

[Exit DEATH.]

Enter CHORUS, dividing to right and left, so that the sections answer one another till they unite at l. 112.

Half-Chor. 1. What meaneth this hush afront of the hall?
The home of Admetus, why voiceless all?

Half-Chor. 2. No friend of the house who should speak of its
plight

Is nigh, who should bid that we raise the keen 80
For the dead, or should tell us that yet on the light
Alcestis looketh, and liveth the Queen,
The daughter of Pelias, the noblest, I ween,
Yea, in all men's sight
The noblest of women on earth that have been.

(*Str. 1*)

Half-Chor. 1. Or hearest thou mourning or sighing
Or beating of hands,
Or the wail of bereaved ones outcrying?
No handmaid stands
At the palace-gate. 90

O Healer, appear for the dying, appear as a bright bird flying
'Twi'xt the surges of fate!

Half-Chor. 2. Ah, they would not be hushed, had the life of her
flown!

Half-Chor. 1. Not forth of the doors is the death-train gone.

Half-Chor. 2. Whence cometh thine hope, which I boast not
mine own?

Half-Chor. 1. Would the King without pomp of procession
have yielded the Grave the possession
Of so dear, of so faithful an one?

(*Ant. 1*)

Half-Chor. 2. Nor the cup in the gateway appeareth,
From the spring that they bear
To the gate that pollution feareth, 100
Nor the severed hair

In the porch for the dead,
Which the mourner in bitterness sheareth, neither beating of
hands one heareth

On maiden's head.

Half-Chor. 1. Yet surely is this the appointed day—

Half-Chor. 2. Ah! what wilt thou say?

Half-Chor. 1. Whereon of her doom she must pass to the tomb.

Half-Chor. 2. With a keen pang's smart hast thou stabbed mine heart.

Half-Chor. 1. It is meet, when the good are as flowers plucked away,

That in sorrow's gloom

Should the breast of the old tried friend have part. 110

(*Str. 2*)

Chor. Though ye voyage all seas,
Ye shall light on no lands,
Nor on Lycia's leas,
Nor Ammonian sands,

Whence redemption shall come for the wretched, or loosing of Death's dread bands.

Doom's imminent slope

Is a precipice-steep.

In no God is there hope, 120

Though his altars should weep

With the crimson atonement, should veil them in clouds of the hecatomb-sheep.

(*Ant. 2*)

Ah, once there was one!—

Were life's light in the eyes

Of Phoebus's son,

Then our darling might rise

From the mansions of darkness, through portals of Hades return to our skies;

For he raised up the dead,

Ere flashed from the heaven,

From Zeus' hand sped,

That bolt of the levin.

But now what remaineth to wait for?—what hope of her life is given? 130

No sacrifice more

Unrendered remaineth:

No God, but the gore

From his altars down-raineth:

Yet healing is none for our ills, neither balm that the spirit sustaineth.

Enter HANDMAID.

But hither cometh of the handmaids one,
Weeping the while. What tidings shall I hear?
To grieve at all mischance unto thy lords
May be forgiven; but if thy lady lives
Or even now hath passed, fain would we know. 140

Han. She liveth, and is dead: both may'st thou say.

Chor. Ay so?—how should the same be dead and live?

Han. Even now she droopeth, gasping out her life.

Chor. Noble and stricken—how noble she thou locest.

Han. His depth of loss he knows not ere it come.

Chor. And hope—is no hope left her life to save?

Han. None—for the day foredoomed constraineth her.

Chor. Are all things meet, then, being done for her?

Han. Yea, ready is her burial-attire.

Chor. Let her be sure that glorious she dies 150
And noblest woman 'neath the sun's wide way.

Han. Noblest?—how not?—what tongue will dare gainsay?

What must the woman be who passeth her?

How could a wife give honour to her lord

More than by yielding her to die for him?

And this—yea, all the city knoweth this.

But what within she did, hear thou, and marvel.

For when she knew that the appointed day

Was come, in river-water her white skin

She bathed, and from the cedar-chests took forth 160

Vesture and jewels, and decked her gloriously,

And stood before the hearth, and prayed, and said:

'Queen, for I pass beneath the earth, I fall

Before thee now, and nevermore, and pray:—

Be mother to my orphans: mate with him

A loving wife, with her a noble husband.

Nor, as their mother dieth, so may they,

My children, die untimely, but with weal

In the home-land fill up a life of bliss.'

To all the altars through Admetus' halls 170

She went, with wreaths she hung them, and she prayed,

Plucking the while the tresses of the myrtle,

Tearless, unsighing, and the imminent fate

Changed not the lovely rose-tint of her cheek.

Then to her bower she rushed, fell on the bed;

And there, O there she wept, and thus she speaks:

'O couch, whereon I loosed the maiden zone

For this man, for whose sake I die to-day,
 Farewell: I hate thee not. Me hast thou lost,
 Me only: loth to fail thee and my lord
 I die: but thee another bride shall own,
 Not more true-hearted; happier perchance.
 Then falls thereon, and kisses: all the bed
 Is watered with the flood of melting eyes.
 But having wept her fill of many tears,
 Drooping she goeth, reeling from the couch;
 Yet oft, as forth the bower she passed, returned,
 And flung herself again upon the couch.
 And the babes, clinging to their mother's robes,
 Were weeping: and she clasped them in her arms,
 Fondling now this, now that, as one death-doomed.
 And all the servants 'neath the roof were weeping,
 Pitying their lady. But to each she stretched
 Her right hand forth; and none there was so mean
 To whom she spake not and received reply.
 Such are the ills Admetus' home within.
 Now, had he died, he had ended: but, in 'scaping,
 He bears a pain that he shall ne'er forget.

180

190

200

210

[Exit.

Nine members of the CHORUS chant successively:

Chor. 1. O Zeus, for our lords is there nought but despair?
 No path through the tangle of evils, no loosing of chains that
 have bound them?

Chor. 2. No tidings?—remaineth but rending of hair,
 And the stricken ones turned to the tomb with the garments
 of sorrow around them?

Chor. 3. Even so—even so! yet uplift we in prayer

Our hands to the Gods, for that power from the days everlasting hath crowned them.

Chor. 4. O Healer-king, 220
Find thou for Admetus the balm of relief, for the captive deliverance!

Chor. 5. Vouchsafe it, vouchsafe it, for heretofore
Hast thou found out a way; even now once more
Pluck back our belovèd from Hades' door,
Strike down Death's hand red-reeking with gore!

Chor. 6. Woe's me! woe's me!—let the woe-dirge ring!
Ah, scion of Pheres, alas for thy lot, for love's long severance!

Chor. 7. For such things on his sword might a man not fall,
Or knit up his throat in the noose 'twixt the heaven and the earth that quivereth? 230

Chor. 8. For his dear one—nay, but his dearest of all
Shall he see on this day lying dead, while her spirit by Lêthê shivereth.

Chor. 9. O look!—look yonder, where forth of the hall
She cometh, and he at her side whose life by her life she delivereth.

Chor., united. Cry, Land Pheraian, shrill the keen!
Lift up thy voice to wail thy best
There dying, and thy queenliest
Slow wasting to the Gates Unseen!

Tell me not this, that wedlock brings
To them that wed more bliss than woe.
I look back to the long-ago; 240
I muse on these unhappiest things.

Lo, here a king—he forfeiteth
The truest heart, the noblest wife:
And what shall be henceforth his life?
A darkened day, a living death.

Enter FEMALE ATTENDANTS bearing ALCESTIS, accompanied by ADMETUS and CHILDREN.

Alc. O Sun, and the day's dear light,
And ye clouds through the wheeling heaven in the race everlasting flying!

Adm. He seeth thee and me, two stricken ones,
Which wrought the Gods no wrong, that thou shouldst die.

Alc. O Land, O stately height

Of mine halls, and my bridal couch in Iolkos my fatherland
lying!

Adm. Uplift thee, hapless love, forsake me not, 250
And pray the mighty Gods in ruth to turn.

Alc. I see the Boat with the oars twin-sweeping,
And, his hand on the pole as in haste aye keeping,
Charon the Ferryman calleth, 'What ho, wilt thou linger and
linger?
Hasten,—'tis thou dost delay me!' he crieth with beckoning
finger.

Adm. Ah me! a bitter ferrying this thou namest!
O evil-starred, what woes endure we now!

Alc. One haleth me—haleth me hence to the mansion
Of the dead!—dost thou mark not the darkling expan-
sion

Of the pinions of Hades, the blaze of his eyes 'neath their
caverns out-glaring? 260

What wouldst thou?—Unhand me!—In anguish and pain by
what path am I faring!

Adm. Woeful to them that love thee: most to me
And to thy babes, sad sharers in this grief.

Alc. Let be—let me sink back to rest me:
There is no strength left in my feet.
Hades is near, and the night
Is darkening down on my sight.
Darlings, farewell: on the light 270
Long may ye look:—I have blessed ye
Ere your mother to nothingness fleet.

Adm. Ah me! for thy word rusheth bitterness o'er me,
Bitterness passing the anguish of death!
Forsake me not now, by the Gods I implore thee,
By the babes thou wilt orphan, O yield not thy breath!
Look up, be of cheer: if thou diest, before me
Is nothingness. Living, we aye live thine,
And we die unto thee; for our hearts are a shrine
Wherein for thy love passing word we adore thee!

Alc. Admetus,—for thou seest all my plight,— 280
Fain would I speak mine heart's wish ere I die.
I, honouring thee, and setting thee in place
Before mine own soul still to see this light,
Am dying, unconstrained to die for thee.
I might have wed what man Thessalian
I would, have dwelt wealth-crowned in princely halls;

Yet would not live on, torn away from thee,
 With orphaned children : wherefore spared I not
 The gifts of youth still mine, wherein I joyed.
 Yet she that bare, he that begat, forsook thee, 290
 Though fair for death their time of life was come,
 Yea, fair, to save their son and die renowned.
 Their only one wert thou : no hope there was
 To get them sons thereafter, hadst thou died.
 So had I lived, and thou, to after days :
 Thou wert not groaning, of thy wife bereaved,
 Thy children motherless. Howbeit this
 Some God hath brought to pass : it was to be.
 Let be :—remember thou what thank is due
 For this : I never can ask full requital ;— 300
 For nought there is more precious than the life ;—
 Yet justly due : for these thy babes thou lovest
 No less than I, if that thine heart be right.
 Suffer that they have lordship in mine home :
 Wed not a stepdame to supplant our babes,
 Whose heart shall tell her she is no Alcestis,
 Whose jealous hand shall smite them, thine and mine.
 Do not, ah, do not this—I pray thee, I.
 For the new stepdame hateth still the babes
 Of her that's gone with more than viper-venom. 310
 The boy—his father is his tower of strength
 To whom to speak, of whom to win reply :
 But, O my child, what girlhood will be thine ?
 To thee what would she be, thy father's yoke-mate ?
 What if with ill report she smirched thy name,
 And in thy youth's flower marred thy marriage-hopes ?
 For thee thy mother ne'er shall deck for bridal,
 Nor hearten thee in travail, O my child,
 There, where nought gentler than the mother is.
 For I must die, nor shall it be tomorn, 320
 Nor on the third day comes on me this bane :
 Straightway of them that are not shall I be.
 Farewell, be happy. Now for thee, my lord,
 Abides the boast to have won the noblest wife,
 For you, my babes, to have sprung from noblest mother

Chor. Fear not ; for I am bold to speak for him
 This will he do, an if he be not mad.

Adm. It shall, it shall be, dread not thou : for thee
 Living I had ; and dead, mine only wife
 Shalt thou be called : nor ever in thy stead 330

Shall bride Thessalian hail me as her lord.
 None is there of a father so high-born,
 None so for beauty peerless among women.
 Children enough have I: I pray the Gods
 For joy in these—our joy in thee is nought.
 Not for a year's space will I mourn for thee,
 But long as this my life shall last, dear wife,
 Loathing my mother, hating mine own sire,
 For in word only, not in deed, they loved me.
 Thou gav'st in ransom for my life thine all
 Of precious, and didst save. Do I not well
 To groan, who lose such yokefellow in thee?
 Revels shall cease, and gatherings at the wine,
 Garlands, and song, which wont to fill mine house.
 For never more mine hand shall touch the lyre:
 Nor will I lift up heart to sing to flute
 Of Libya: thou hast robbed my life of mirth.
 And, wrought by craftsmen's cunning hands, thy form
 Imaged, upon a couch outstretched shall lie,
 Falling whereon, and clasping with mine hands,
 Calling thy name, in fancy shall mine arms
 Hold my belovèd, though I hold her not:—
 A chill delight, I wot: yet shall I lift
 The burden from my soul. In dreams shalt thou
 Haunt me and gladden: sweet to see the loved,
 Though but a fleeting presence night-revealed.
 But, were the tongue and strain of Orpheus mine,
 To witch Demeter's Daughter and her lord,
 And out of Hades by my song to win thee,
 I had fared down: nor Pluto's Hound had stayed me,
 Nor Spirit-wafter Charon at the oar,
 Or ever I restored thy life to light.
 Yet there look thou for me, whenso I die;
 Prepare a home, as who shall dwell with me.
 For in the selfsame cedar chest, wherein
 Thou liest, will I bid them lay my bones
 Outstretched beside thee: ne'er may I be severed,
 No, not in death, from thee, my one true friend.

340

350

360

Chor. Yea, I withal will mourn, as friend with friend,
 With thee for this thy wife, for she is worthy.

Alc. My children, ye yourselves have heard all this,
 Have heard your father pledge him ne'er to wed
 For your oppression and for my dishonour.

Adm. Yea, now I say it, and I will perform.

370

- Alc.* On these terms take the children from mine hand.
- Adm.* I take them—precious gift from precious hand.
- Alc.* Be to these babes a mother in my stead.
- Adm.* Sore is their need, who are bereft of thee.
- Alc.* Darlings, I should have lived; and lo, I die.
- Adm.* Ah me!—what shall I do, forlorn of thee?
- Alc.* Time shall bring healing:—but the dead is nought. 380
- Adm.* Take me, ah take me with thee to the grave!
- Alc.* Suffice it that one dies—she dies for thee.
- Adm.* O Death, of what a wife dost thou bereave me!
- Alc.* Dark—dark—mine eyes are drooping, heavy-laden.
- Adm.* Oh, I am lost if thou wilt leave me, wife!
- Alc.* No more—I am no more: as nought account me.
- Adm.* Uplift thy face: forsake not thine own children!
- Alc.* Sore loth do I—yet O farewell, my babes!
- Adm.* Look unto them—O look!
- Alc.* I am no more. 390
- Adm.* Ah, leav'st thou us?
- Alc.* Farewell. [*Dies.*]
- Adm.* O wretch undone!
- Chor.* Gone,—gone!—No more is this Admetus' wife!
- Eum.* Woe for my lot!—to the tomb hath my mother descended,
descended!
- Never again, O my father, she seeth the light of the sun!
In anguish she leaves us forsaken: the story is ended, is
ended,
Of her sheltering love, and the tale of the motherless life is
begun.
- Look—look on her eyelids, her hands drooping nerveless!
O hear me, O hear me! 400
- It is I—I beseech thee, my mother!—thine own little, own
little bird!
- It is I—O, I cast me upon thee—thy lips are so near me, so
near me,
Unto mine am I pressing them, mother!—I plead for a
word—but a word!
- Adm.* With her who heareth not, nor seeth: ye
And I are stricken with a heavy doom.
- Eum.* And I am but a little one, father—so young, and forsaken,
forsaken,
Forlorn of my mother—O hapless! a weariful lot shall be
mine!
And thou, little maiden, my sister, the burden hast taken, hast
taken,

Which thy brother may bear not alone, and a weariful lot
shall be thine. 410

O father, of long-living love was thy marriage uncherished,
uncherished :

Thou hast won not the goal of old age with the love of thy
youth at thy side ;

For, or ever she won to the fulness of days, she hath perished,
hath perished ;

And the home is a wreck and a ruin, for thou, O my mother,
hast died !

Chor. Admetus, this mischance thou needs must bear.

Not first of mortals thou, nor shalt be last

To lose a noble wife ; and, be thou sure,

From us, from all, this debt is due—to die.

Adm. I know it : nowise unforeseen this ill 420

Hath swooped upon me : long I grieved to know it.

But—for to burial must I bear my dead—

Stay ye, and, tarrying, echo back my wail

To that dark God whom no drink-offerings move.

And all Thessalians over whom I rule

I bid take part in mourning for this woman,

With shaven head and sable-shrouding robe.

And ye which yoke the cars four-horsed, or steeds

Of single frontlet, shear with steel their manes.

Music of flutes the city through, or lyres, 430

Be none, while twelve moons round their circles out :

For dearer dead, nor kinder unto me

I shall not bury : worthy of mine honour

Is she, for she alone hath died for me.

[*Exit.*

(*Str.* 1)

Chor. O Pelias' daughter, I hail thee :

I waft thee eternal farewell

To thine home where the darkness must veil thee,

Where in Hades unsunned thou shalt dwell.

Know, Dark-haired, thy grey Spirit-wafter

Hath sped not with twy-plashing oar 440

Woman nobler, nor shall speed hereafter

To Acheron's shore.

(*Ant.* 1)

For the seven-stringed shell, or for paean

Unharped, shall thy fame be a song,

When o'er Sparta the moon Karnean

High rideth the whole night long.

And in Athens the wealthy and splendid
 Shall thy name on her bards' lips ring,
 Such a theme hast thou left to be blended
 With the lays that they sing.

450
 (Str. 2)

O that the power were but in me,
 From the chambers of Hades, to light,
 And from the streams of Cocytus, to win thee
 With the oar of the River of Night!

O dear among women, strong-hearted
 From Hades to ransom thy lord!

Never spirit in such wise departed.

Light lie on thee, Lady, the sward!

And, if ever thine husband shall mate him

460

Again with a bride in thy stead,

I will loathe him, his children shall hate him,

The babes of the dead.

(Ant. 2)

When his mother would not be contented

To hide her for him in the tomb,

Nor his grey-haired father consented,

Unholpen he looked on his doom.

Whom they bare—the hard-hearted!—they cared not,

Though hoary their locks were, to save!

Thou art gone, for thy great love spared not

Thy blossom of youth from the grave.

470

Ah, may it be mine, such communion

Of hearts!—'tis vouchsafed unto few:—

Then ours should be sorrowless union

Our life-days through.

Enter HERAKLES.

Herak. Strangers, who dwell in this Pheraian land,

Say, do I find Admetus in his home?

Chor. Herakles, in his home is Pheres' son.

Yet say, what brings thee to Thessalian land,

That thou shouldst come to this Pheraian town?

480

Herak. A toil for King Eurystheus, lord of Tiryns.

Chor. And whither journeyest? To what wanderings yoked?

Herak. For Thracian Diomedes' four-horsed chariot.

Chor. How canst thou? Sure he is unknown to thee!

Herak. Unknown: to land Bistonian fared I never.

- Chor.* Not save by battle may those steeds be won.
Herak. Yet flinch I may not from the appointed toils.
Chor. Thy life or his—a triumph or a grave.
Herak. Not this the first time I have run such course. 490
Chor. What profit is it if thou slay their lord?
Herak. Those steeds shall I drive back to Tiryns' king.
Chor. Hard task, to set the bit betwixt their jaws.
Herak. That shall I, if their nostrils breathe not fire.
Chor. Yea, but with ravening jaws do they rend men.
Herak. Go to—thus banquet mountain-beasts, not horses.
Chor. Nay, thou shalt see their cribs with gore bespattered.
Herak. Whom boasteth he for father, he that reared them?
Chor. Arês, the king of Thracia's golden shield.
Herak. Thou say'st: such toil my fate imposeth still,
 Harsh evermore, uphillward straining aye, 500
 If I must still in battle close with sons
 Gotten of Arês; with Lykaon first,
 And Kyknus then: and lo, I come to grapple—
 The third strife this—with yon steeds and their lord.
 But never man shall see Alkmênê's child
 Quailing before the hand of any foe.
Chor. Lo, there himself, the ruler of the land,
 Admetus, cometh forth his palace-hall.

Enter ADMETUS.

- Adm.* Hail, O thou sprung from Zeus' and Perseus' blood!
Herak. Admetus, hail thou too, Thessalia's king. 510
Adm. Hale?—Would I were! Yet thy good heart I know.
Herak. Wherefore for mourning shaven show'st thou thus?
Adm. This day must I commit to earth a corpse.
Herak. Now heaven forefend thou mourn'st for children
 dead!
Adm. In mine home live the babes whom I begat.
Herak. Sooth, death-ripe were thy sire, if he be gone.
Adm. He liveth, and my mother, Herakles.
Herak. Surely, O surely, not thy wife, Admetus?
Adm. Twofold must be mine answer touching her.
Herak. Or hath she died, say'st thou, or liveth yet? 520
Adm. She is, and she is not: here lies my sorrow.
Herak. Nothing the more I know: dark sayings thine.
Adm. Know'st not the doom whereon she needs must light?
Herak. I know she pledged herself to die for thee.

Adm. How lives she then, if she to this consented?

Herak. Mourn not thy wife ere dead: abide the hour.

Adm. Dead is the doomed, and no more is the dead.

Herak. Diverse are these—to be and not to be.

Adm. This, Herakles, thy sentence: that is mine.

Herak. But now, why weep'st thou? What dear friend is dead?

530

Adm. A woman—hers the memory we mourn.

Herak. Some stranger born, or nigh of kin to thee?

Adm. A stranger born; yet near and dear to us.

Herak. How died a stranger then in house of thine?

Adm. An orphan here she dwelt, her father dead.

Herak. Would we had found thee mourning not, Admetus.

Adm. Ay so?—what purpose lurketh 'neath thy word?

Herak. On will I to another host's hearth-welcome.

Adm. It cannot be: may no such evil come!

Herak. A burden unto mourners comes the guest.

540

Adm. Dead are the dead:—but enter thou mine house.

Herak. 'Twere shame to banquet in the house of weeping.

Adm. Aloof the guest-bowers are where we will lodge thee.

Herak. Let me pass on, and have my thanks unmeasured.

Adm. Unto another's hearth thou canst not go.

[To an attendant] Ho thou, lead on: open the guest-bowers looking

Away from these our chambers. Tell my stewards

To set on meat in plenty. Shut withal

The mid-court doors: it fits not that the guests,

The while they feast, hear wailings, and be vexed.

550

[Exit HERAKLES.]

Chor. What dost thou?—such affliction at the door,

And guests for thee, Admetus? Art thou mad?

Adm. But had I driven him from my home and city

Who came my guest, then hadst thou praised me more?

Nay, sooth; for mine affliction so had grown

No less, and more inhospitable I;

And to mine ills were added this beside,

That this my home were called 'Guest-hating Hall.'

Yea, and myself have proved him kindest host

Whene'er to Argos' thirsty plain I fared.

560

Chor. Why hide then the dread Presence in the house,

When came a friend?—Thyself hast named him friend.

Adm. Never had he been won to pass my doors,

Had he one whit of mine afflictions known.

To some, I wot, not wise herein I seem,

Nor wilt thou praise : but mine halls have not learnt
To thrust away nor to dishonour guests.

(Str. 1)

Chor. Halls thronged of the guests ever welcome, O dwelling
Of a hero, for ever the home of the free,
The Lord of the lyre-strings sweet beyond telling, 570
Apollo, hath deignèd to sojourn in thee.
Amid thine habitations, a shepherd of sheep,
The flocks of Admetus he scorned not to keep,
While the shepherds' bridal-strains, soft-swelling
From his pipe, pealed over the slant-sloped lea.

(Ant. 1)

And the spotted lynxes for joy of thy singing
Mixed with thy flocks ; and from Othrys' dell 580
Trooped tawny lions : the witchery-winging
Notes brought dancing around thy shell,
Phoebus, the dappled fawn from the shadow
Of the tall-tressed pines tripping forth to the meadow,
Beating time to the chime of the rapture-ringing
Music, with light feet tranced by its spell.

(Str. 2)

Wherefore the flocks of my lord unnumbered
By the Boebian mere fair-rippling stray : 590
Where the steeds of the sun halt, darkness-cumbered,
By Molossian marches, far away
The borders lie of his golden grain,
And his rolling stretches of pasture-plain ;
And the havenless beach Aegean hath slumbered
Under Pelion long 'neath the peace of his sway.

(Ant. 2)

And now, with the tears from his eyes fast-raining,
Thrown wide are his palace-doors to the guest,
While newly his heart 'neath its burden is straining,
For the wife that hath died in his halls distressed. 600
For to honour's heights are the high-born lifted,
And the good are with truest wisdom gifted ;
And there broods on mine heart bright trust unwaning
That the god-reverer shall yet be blest.

Adm. O kindly presence of Pheraian men,
This corpse even now, with all things meet, my servants
Bear on their shoulders to the tomb and pyre.
Wherefore, as custom is, hail ye the dead,
On the last journey as she goeth forth. 610

Chor. Lo, I behold thy sire with aged foot
Advancing, and attendants in their hands
Bear ornaments to deck the dead withal.

Enter PHERES with ATTENDANTS bearing gifts.

Phe. I come in thine afflictions sorrowing, son :
A noble wife and virtuous hast thou lost,
None will gainsay : yet these calamities
We needs must bear, how hard to bear soever.
Receive these ornaments, and let her pass
Beneath the earth : well may the corpse be honoured
Of her who for thy life's sake died, my son ; 620
Who made me not unchilded, left me not
Forlorn of thee to pine in woeful eld.
In all her sisters' eyes she hath crowned her life
With glory, daring such a deed as this.
O saviour of my son, who us upraisedst
In act to fall, all hail ! May bliss be thine
Even in Hades. Thus to wed, I say,
Profiteth men—or nothing worth is marriage.

Adm. Bidden of me thou com'st not to this burial,
Nor count I thine the presence of a friend. 630
Thine ornaments she never shall put on ;
She shall be buried needing nought of thine.
Thou grieve !—thou shouldst have grieved in my death-hour !
Thou stood'st aloof—the old, didst leave the young
To die :—and wilt thou wail upon this corpse ?
True father of my body thou wast not ;
Nor she that said she bare me, and was called
My mother, gave me birth : of bondman blood
To thy wife's breast was I brought privily.
Put to the test, thou showedst who thou art, 640
And I account me not thy true-born son.
Peerless of men in soulless cowardice !
So old, and standing on the verge of life,
Yet hadst no will, yet hadst no heart to die
For thine own son !—Ye suffered her, a woman
Not of our house, whom I with righteous cause
Might count alone my mother and my father.
Yet here was honour, hadst thou dared the strife,
In dying for thy son. A paltry space
To cling to life in any wise was left. 650

Then had I lived, and she, through days to come,
 Nor I, left lorn, should thus mine ills bemoan.
 Yet all that may the fortunate betide
 Fell to thy lot; in manhood's prime a king:
 Me hadst thou son and heir unto thine house,
 So that thou wast not, dying, like to leave
 A childless home for stranger folk to spoil.
 Nor canst thou say that flouting thy grey hairs
 I gave thee o'er to death, whose reverence
 For thee was passing word:—and this the thank 660
 That thou and she that bear me render me!
 Wherefore, make haste: beget thee other sons
 To foster thy grey hairs, to compass thee
 With death's observance, and lay out thy corpse.
 Not I with this mine hand will bury thee.
 For thee dead am I. If I see the light,—
 Another saviour found,—I call me son
 To her, and loving fosterer of her age.
 For nought the agèd pray for death's release,
 Plaining of age and weary-wearing time. 670
 Let death draw near—who then would die? Not one:
 No more is eld a burden unto them.

Chor. O hush! Suffice the affliction at the doors.

O son, infuriate not thy father's soul.

Phe. Son, whom, think'st thou—some Lydian slave or
 Phrygian

Bought with thy money?—thus beratest thou?
 What, know'st thou not that I Thessalian am,
 Sprung from Thessalian sire, free man true-born?
 This insolence passeth!—hurling malapert words 680
 On me, not lightly thus shalt thou come off!
 Thee I begat and nurtured, of mine house
 The heir: no debt is mine to die for thee.
 Not from our sires such custom we received
 That sires for sons should die: no Greek law this.
 Born for thyself wast thou, to fortune good
 Or evil: all thy dues from us thou hast.
 O'er many folk thou rulest; wide demesnes
 Shall I leave thee: to me my fathers left them.
 What is my wrong, my robbery of thee?
 For me die thou not, I die not for thee.
 Thou joy'st to see light—shall thy father joy not? 690
 Sooth, I account our time beneath the earth
 Long, and our life-space short, yet is it sweet.

Shamelessly hast thou fought against thy death :
 Thy life is but transgression of thy doom
 And murder of thy wife :—*my* cowardice !
 This from thee, dastard ! worsted by a woman
 Who died for thee, the glorious-gallant youth !
 Cunning device hast thou devised to die
 Never, cajoling still wife after wife
 To die for thee !—and dost revile thy friends
 Who will not so—and thou the coward, thou ?
 Peace ! e'en bethink thee, if thou lov'st thy life,
 So all love theirs. Thou, if thou speakest evil
 Of us, shalt hear much evil, and that true.

700

Chor. Ye have said too much, thou now, and he before.
 Refrain, old sire, from railing on thy son.

Adm. Say on, say on ; I have said : if hearing truth
 Gall thee, thou shouldest not have done me wrong.

Phe. I had done more wrong, had I died for thee.

710

Adm. What, for the young and old is death the same ?

Phe. One life to live, not twain—this is our due.

Adm. Have thy desire—one life outlasting Zeus.

Phe. Dost curse thy parents, who hast had no wrong ?

Adm. Ay, whom I marked love-sick for dateless life.

Phe. What ?—art not burying her in thine own stead ?

Adm. A token, dastard, of thy cowardice.

Phe. I did her not to death : thou canst not say it.

Adm. Mayest thou feel thy need of me some day !

Phe. Woo many women, that the more may die.

720

Adm. This taunt strikes thee—'tis thou wast loth to die.

Phe. Sweet is yon sun-god's light, yea, it is sweet.

Adm. Base is thy spirit, and unmeet for men.

Phe. No agèd corpse thou bearest, inly laughing !

Adm. Yet shalt thou die in ill fame, when thou diest.

Phe. Nought reck I of ill-speaking o'er my grave.

Adm. Ah me ! how full of shamelessness is eld !

Phe. Not shameless she,—but senseless hast thou found her.

Adm. Begone : leave me to bury this my dead.

Phe. I go : her murderer will bury her.

730

Thou shalt yet answer for it to her kin.

Surely Akastus is no more a man,

If he of thee claim not his sister's blood.

[Exit PHERES.]

Adm. Avaunt, with her that kennelleth with thee !

Childless grow old, as ye deserve, while lives

Your child : ye shall not come beneath one roof

With me. If need were to renounce by heralds
 Thy fatherhood, I had renounced it now.
 Let us—for we must bear the present ill—
 Pass on, to lay our dead upon the pyre.

740

Chor. Alas for the loving and daring!
 Farewell to the noblest and best!
 May Hermes conduct thee down-faring
 Kindly, and Hades to rest
 Receive thee! If any atonement
 For ills even there may betide
 To the good, O thine be enthronement
 By Hades' bride!

[Exeunt omnes in funeral procession.]

Enter SERVANT.

Ser. Full many a guest, from many a land which came
 Unto Admetus' dwelling, have I known,
 Have set before them meat: but never guest
 More pestilent received I to this hearth:
 Who first, albeit he saw my master mourning,
 Entered, and passed the threshold unashamed;
 Then, nowise courteously received the fare
 Found with us, though our woeful plight he knew,
 But, what we brought not, hectoring bade us bring.
 The ivy cup uplifts he in his hands,
 And swills the darkling mother's fiery blood,
 Till the wine's flame enwrapped him, heating him.
 Then did he wreath his head with myrtle sprays,
 Dissonant-howling. Diverse strains were heard:
 For he sang on, regardless all of ills
 Darkening Admetus' house; we servants wept
 Our mistress: yet we showed not to the guest
 Eyes tear-bedewed, for so Admetus bade.
 And now within the house must I be feasting
 This guest,—a lawless thief, a bandit rogue!
 She from the house hath passed: I followed not,
 Nor stretched the hand, nor wailed unto my mistress
 Farewell, who was to me and all the household
 A mother, for from ills untold she saved us,
 Assuaging her lord's wrath. Do I not well
 To loathe this guest, intruder on our griefs?

750

760

770

Enter HERAKLES.

Herak. Ho, fellow, why this solemn brooding look?

The servant should not lower upon the guest,
But welcome him with kindly-beaming cheer.

Thou, seeing here in presence thy lord's friend,
With visage sour and cloud of knitted brows
Receiv'st him, fretting o'er an alien grief.

Hither to me, that wiser thou may'st grow.

The lot of man—its nature knowest thou?

I trow not: how shouldst thou? Give ear to me.

From all mankind the debt of death is due,

Nor of all mortals is there one that knows

If through the coming morrow he shall live:

For trackless is the way of fortune's feet,

Not to be taught, nor won by art of man.

This hearing then, and learning it from me,

Make merry, drink: the life from day to day

Account thine own, all else in fortune's power.

Honour withal the sweetest of the Gods

To men, the Cyprian Queen—a gracious Goddess!

These thoughts put by, and hearken to my words,

If words of wisdom unto thee they seem.

I trow it. Hence with sorrow overwrought;

Pass through yon doors and quaff the wine with me,

Thy brows with garlands bound. Full well I wot,

From all this lowering spirit prison-pent

Thine anchor shall Sir Beaker's plash upheave.

What, man!—the mortal must be mortal-minded.

So, for your solemn wights of knitted brows,

For each and all,—if thou for judge wilt take me,—

Life is not truly life, but mere affliction.

Ser. All this we know: but now are we in plight

Not meet for laughter and for revelry.

Herak. The woman dead is alien-born: grieve not

Exceeding much. Yet live the household's lords.

Ser. Live, quotha!—know'st thou not the house's ills?

Herak. Yea, if thy master lied not unto me.

Ser. Guest-fain he is—ah, guest-fain overmuch

Herak. A stranger dead—and no guest-cheer for me?

Ser. O yea, an alien she—o'ermuch an alien!

Herak. Ha! was he keeping some affliction back?

Ser. Go thou in peace: our lords' ills are for us.

780

790

800

810

Herak. Grief for a stranger such talk heralds not.

Ser. Else had I not sore vexed beheld thy revelling.

Herak. How! have I sorry handling of mine hosts?

Ser. Thou cam'st in hour unmeet for welcoming,

For grief is on us; and thou see'st shorn hair

And vesture of black robes.

Herak. But who hath died?

Not of the children one, or grey-haired sire?

820

Ser. Nay, but Admetus' wife is dead, O guest.

Herak. How say'st thou?—Ha, even then ye gave me welcome?

Ser. For shame he could not thrust thee from these doors.

Herak. O hapless! what a helpmeet hast thou lost!

Ser. We have all perished, and not she alone.

Herak. I felt it, when I saw his tear-drowned eyes,

His shaven hair, and face: yet he prevailed,

Saying he bare a stranger-friend to burial.

I passed this threshold in mine heart's despite,

And drank in halls of him that loves the guest,

When thus his plight!—And am I revelling

With head wreath-decked?—That thou should'st ne'er have told,

830

When such affliction lay upon the home!

Where doth he bury her? Where shall I find her?

Ser. By the straight path that leads Larissa-wards
Shalt see the hewn-stone tomb without the walls.

Herak. O much-enduring heart and soul of mine,

Now show what son the Lady of Tiryns bare,

Elektryon's child Alkmênê, unto Zeus.

For I must save the woman newly dead,

And set Alcestis in this house again,

And render to Admetus good for good.

I go. The sable-vestured King of Corpses,

Death, will I watch for, and shall find, I trow,

Drinking the death-draught hard beside the tomb.

And if I lie in wait, and dart from ambush,

And seize, and with mine arms' coil compass h.m.,

None is there shall deliver from mine hands

His straining sides, or e'er he yield his prey.

Yea, though I miss the quarry, and he come not

Unto the blood-clot, to the sunless homes

Down will I fare of Korê and her king,

And make demand. I doubt not I shall lead

Alcestis up, and give to mine host's hands,

840

850

Who to his halls received, nor drave me thence,
 Albeit smitten with affliction sore,
 But hid it, like a prince, respecting me.
 Who is more guest-fain of Thessalians?
 Who in all Hellas?—O, he shall not say
 That one so princely showed a base man kindness.

860
 [Exit.]

*Enter ADMETUS, with CHORUS and ATTENDANTS, returning
 from the funeral.*

Adm. O hateful returning!
 O hateful to see
 Drear halls full of yearning
 For the lost—ah me!

What aim or what rest have I?—silence or speech, of what
 help shall they be?

Would God I were dead!
 O, I came from the womb
 To a destiny dread!
 Ah, those in the tomb—

How I envy them! How I desire them, and long to abide in
 their home!

To mine eyes nothing sweet
 Is the light of the heaven,
 Nor the earth to my feet;
 Such a helpmeet is riven

870
 By Death from my side, and my darling to Hades the spoiler
 hath given.

Chor. Pass on thou, and hide thee
 In thy chambers.

Adm. Ah woe!

Chor. Wail the griefs that betide thee:
 How canst thou but so?

Adm. O God!

Chor. Thou hast passed through deep waters of anguish—I
 know it, I know.

Adm. Alas and alas!

Chor. No help bringeth this
 To thy love in that place.

Adm. Woe!

Chor. Bitter it is

The face of a wife well-belovèd for ever and ever to miss.

Adm. Thou hast stricken mine heart
Where the wound will not heal.

What is worse than to part
From the loving and leal? 880

Would God I had wedded her not, home-bliss with Alcestis to
feel!

O, I envy the lot
Of the man without wife,
Without child: single-wrought
Is the strand of his life:

No soul-crushing burden of sorrow, no strength-over-
mastering strife.

But that children should sicken,
That gloom of despair
Over bride-beds should thicken,
What spirit can bear,

When childless, unwedded, a man through life's calm journey
might fare?

Chor. Thee Fortune hath met,
Strong wrestler, and thrown;
Yet no bounds hast thou set— 890

Adm. Woe's me!—

Chor. To thy moan.

O, thy burden is heavy!

Adm. Alas!

Chor. Yet endure it: thou art not alone.
Not thou art the first
Of bereaved ones.

Adm. Ah me!

Chor. Such tempest hath burst
Upon many ere thee.

Unto each his mischance, when the surges roll up from
Calamity's sea.

Adm. O long grief and pain
For belovèd ones passed!

Why didst thou restrain
 When myself I had cast
 Down into her grave, with the noblest to lie peace-lulled at the
 last ?

Not one soul, but two 900
 Had been Hades' prey,
 Souls utterly true
 Together for aye,

Which together o'er waves of the underworld mere had passed
 this day.

Chor. Of my kin was there one,
 And the life's light failed
 In his halls of a son,
 One meet to be wailed,
 His only beloved: howbeit the manhood within him pre-
 vailed ;

And the ills heaven-sent
 As a man did he bear,
 Though by this was he bent
 Unto silvered hair,

Far on in life's path, without son for his remnant of weakness
 to care. 910

Adm. O, how can I tread
 Thy threshold, fair home ?
 How shelter mine head
 'Neath thy roof, now the doom
 Of the Gods' dice changeth ?—ah me, what change upon all
 things is come !

For with torches aflame
 Of the Pelian pine,
 And with bride-song I came
 In that hour divine,
 Upbearing the hand of a wife—thine hand, O darling mine !

Followed revellers, raising
 Acclaim : ever broke
 From the lips of them praising,
 Of the dead as they spoke,
 And of me, how the noble, the children of kings, Love joined
 'neath his yoke. 920

But for bridal song
 Is the wail for the dead,
 And, for white-robed throng,
 Black vesture hath led
 Me to halls where the ghost of delight lieth couched on a
 desolate bed.

Chor. To the trance of thy bliss
 Sudden anguish was brought.
 Never lesson like this
 To thine heart had been taught :
 Yet thy life hast thou won, and thy soul hast delivered from
 death :—is it nought ?

Thy wife hath departed :
 Love tender and true 930
 Hath she left :—stricken-hearted,
 Wherein is this new ?
 Hath Death not unyoked from the chariot of Love full many
 ere you ?

Adm. Friends, I account the fortune of my wife
 Happier than mine, albeit it seems not so.
 For nought of grief shall touch her any more,
 And glorious rest she finds from many toils.
 But I, unmeet to live, my doom outrun,
 Shall drag out bitter days : I know it now. 940
 How shall I bear to enter this mine home ?
 Speaking to whom, and having speech of whom,
 Shall I find joy of entering ?—whither turn me ?
 The solitude within shall drive me forth,
 Whenso I see my wife's couch tenantless,
 And seats whereon she sat, and, 'neath the roof,
 All foul the floor ; when on my knees my babes
 Falling shall weep their mother, servants moan
 The peerless mistress from the mansion lost.
 All this within : but from the world without 950
 Shall bridals of Thessalians chase me : throngs
 Where women gossip ; for I shall not bear
 On those companions of my wife to look.
 And, if a foe I have, thus shall he scoff :
 ' Lo there who basely liveth—dared not die,
 ' But whom he wedded gave, a coward's ransom,
 ' And 'scaped from Hades. Count ye him a man ?
 ' He hates his parents, though himself was loth
 ' To die ! ' Such ill report, besides my griefs,

Shall mine be. Ah, what profit is to live,
O friends, in evil fame, in evil plight? 960

(*Str. 1*)

Chor. I have mused on the words of the wise,
Of the mighty in song;
I have lifted mine heart to the skies,
I have searched all truth with mine eyes;
But nought more strong
Than Fate have I found: there is nought
In the tablets of Thrace,
Neither drugs whereof Orpheus taught,
Nor in all that Apollo brought 970
To Asklepius' race,

When the herbs of healing he severed, and out of their
anguish delivered

The pain-distraught.

(*Ant. 1*)

There is none other Goddess beside,
To the altars of whom
No man draweth near, nor hath cried
To her image, nor victim hath died,
Averting her doom.
O Goddess, more mighty for ill
Come not upon me
Than in days overpast: for his will
Even Zeus may in no wise fulfil
Unholpen of thee.

Steel is molten as water before thee, but never relenting came
o'er thee, 980

Who art ruthless still.

(*Str. 2*)

Thee, friend, hath the Goddess gripped: from her hands
never wrestler hath slipped.

Yet be strong to endure: never mourning shall bring our
belovèd returning

From the nethergloom up to the light.
Yea, the heroes of Gods begotten,
They fade into darkness, forgotten
In death's chill night. 990

Dear was she in days ere we lost her,
Dear yet, though she lie with the dead.
None nobler shall Earth-mother foster
Than the wife of thy bed.

(Ant. 2)

Not as mounds of the dead which have died, so account we
 the tomb of thy bride,
 But O, let the worship and honour that we render to Gods
 rest upon her :

Unto her let the wayfarer pray.
 As he treadeth the pathway that trendeth 1000
 Aside from the highway, and bendeth
 At her shrine, he shall say :
 ' Her life for her lord's was given ;
 With the Blest now abides she on high.
 Hail, Queen, show us grace from thine heaven ! '
 Even so shall they cry.

But lo, Alkmênê's son, as seemeth, yonder,
 Admetus, to thine hearth is journeying.

Enter HERAKLES, leading a woman wholly veiled.

Herak. Unto a friend behoveth speech outspoken,
 Admetus, not to hide within the breast
 Murmurs unvoiced. I came mid thine affliction. 1010
 Fair claim was mine to rank amidst thy friends.
 Thou told'st me not how lay thy wife a corpse :
 Thou gavest me guest-welcome in thine home,
 Making pretence of mourning for a stranger.
 I wreathed mine head, I spilled unto the Gods
 Drink-offerings in a stricken house, even thine.
 I blame thee, thus mishandled, yea, I blame thee.
 Yet nowise is my will to gall thy grief.
 But wherefore hither turning back I come,
 This will I tell. Take, guard for me this maid, 1020
 Till, leading hitherward the Thracian mares,
 I come from slaughter of Bistonía's lord.
 But if—not that, for I would fain return,—
 I give her then, for service of thine halls.
 Prize of hard toil unto mine hands she came :
 For certain men I found but now arraying
 An athlete-strife, toil-worthy, for all comers,
 Whence I have won and bring this victor's meed.
 Horses there were for them to take which won
 The light foot's triumph ; but for hero-strife, 1030
 Boxing and wrestling, oxen were the guerdon :

A woman made it richer. Shame it seemed
 To hap thereon, and slip this glorious gain.
 But, as I said, this woman be thy care :
 For no thief's prize, but toil-achieved, I bring her.
 Yea, one day thou perchance shalt say 'twas well.

Adm. Not flouting thee, nor counting among foes,
 My wife's unhappy fate I hid from thee.
 But this had been but grief uppled on grief,
 Hadst thou sped hence to be another's guest ; 1040
 And mine own ills sufficed me to bewail.
 But, for the woman—if in any wise
 It may be, prince, bid some Thessalian guard her,
 I pray thee, who hath suffered not as I.
 In Pheræ many a friend and host thou hast.
 Awaken not remembrance of my grief.
 I could not, seeing her mine halls within,
 Be tearless : add not hurt into mine hurt.
 Burdened enough am I by mine affliction.
 Nay, in mine house where should a young maid lodge ?—
 For vesture and adorning speak her young :— 1050
 What, 'neath the men's roof shall her lodging be ?
 And how unsullied, dwelling with young men ?
 Not easy is it, Herakles, to curb
 The young : herein do I take thought for thee.
 Or shall I ope to her my dead wife's bower ?
 How !—cause her to usurp my lost love's bed ?
 Twofold reproach I dread—from mine own folk,
 Lest one should say that, traitor to her kindness,
 I fall upon another woman's bed,—
 And of the dead, to me most reverence-worthy, 1060
 Needs must I take great heed. But, woman, thou,
 Whoso thou art, know that thy body's stature
 Is as Alcestis, and thy form as hers.
 Ah me !—lead, for the God's sake, from my sight
 This woman !—Take not my captivity captive.
 For, as I look on her, methinks I see
 My wife : she stirs mine heart with turmoil : fountains
 Of tears burst from mine eyes. O wretched I !
 Now first I taste this grief's full bitterness.

Chor. In sooth thy fortune can I not commend : 1070
 Yet must we brook a God's gift, whoso cometh.

Herak. O that such might I had as back to bring
 To light thy wife from nethergloom abodes,
 And to bestow this kindness upon thee !

Adm. Fain would'st thou, well I know. But wherefore this?
It cannot be the dead to light should come.

Herak. O'ershoot not now the mark, but bear all bravely.

Adm. Easier to exhort than suffer and be strong.

Herak. But what thy profit, though for aye thou moan?

Adm. I too know this; yet love constraineth me. 1080

Herak. Love for the lost—ay, that draws forth the tear.

Adm. She hath undone me more than words can tell.

Herak. A good wife hast thou lost, who shall gainsay?

Adm. So that this man hath no more joy in life.

Herak. Time shall bring healing: now is thy grief young.

Adm. Time—time?—O yea, if this thy Time be Death!

Herak. A wife, and yearning for new love, shall calm thee.

Adm. Hush!—what say'st thou?—I could not think thereon!

Herak. How?—wilt not wed, but widowed keep thy couch?

Adm. Lives not the woman that shall couch with me. 1090

Herak. Look'st thou that this shall profit aught the dead?

Adm. I needs must honour her where'er she be.

Herak. Good—good—yet one with folly so might charge thee.

Adm. So be it, so thou call me bridegroom never.

Herak. I praise thee for that leal thou art to her.

Adm. Death be my meed, if I betray her dead.

Herak. Receive this woman now these halls within.

Adm. Nay!—I beseech by Zeus that did beget thee!

Herak. Yet shalt thou err if thou do not this thing.

Adm. Yet shall mine heart be grief-stung, if I do it. 1100

Herak. Yield thou: this grace may prove perchance a duty.

Adm. O that in strife thou ne'er hadst won this maid!

Herak. Yet thy friend's victory is surely thine.

Adm. Well said: yet let the woman hence depart.

Herak. Yea—if need be. First look well—need it be?

Adm. Needs must—save thou wilt else be wroth with me.

Herak. I too know what I do, insisting thus.

Adm. Have then thy will: thy pleasure is my pain.

Herak. Yet one day shalt thou praise me: only yield.

Adm. [to Attendants]. Lead ye her, if mine halls must needs receive. 1110

Herak. Not to thy servants' hands will I commit her.

Adm. Thou lead her in then, if it seems thee good.

Herak. Nay, but in thine hands will I place her—thine.

Adm. I will not touch her!—Open stand my doors.

Herak. Unto thy right hand only trust I her.

Adm. O king, thou forcest me: I will not this!

Herak. Be strong: stretch forth thine hand and touch thy guest.

Adm. I stretch it forth, as to a headless Gorgon.

Herak. Hast her?

Adm. I have.

Herak. Yea, guard her. Thou shalt call
The child of Zeus one day a noble guest.

II20

[*Raises the veil, and discloses ALCESTIS.*

Look on her, if in aught she seems to thee

Like to thy wife. Step forth from grief to bliss.

Adm. What shall I say?—Gods! Marvel this unhopéd for!

My wife do I behold in very sooth,

Or doth some god-sent mockery-joy distract me?

Herak. Not so; but this thou seest is thy wife.

Adm. What if this be some phantom from the shades?

Herak. No ghost-upraiser hast thou ta'en for guest.

Adm. How?—whom I buried do I see—my wife?

Herak. Doubt not: yet might'st thou well mistrust thy fortune.

II30

Adm. As wife, as living, may I touch, address her?

Herak. Speak to her: all thou didst desire thou hast.

Adm. O face, O form of my beloved wife,

Past hope I have thee, who ne'er thought to see thee!

Herak. Thou hast: may no God of thy bliss be jealous.

Adm. O scion nobly-born of Zeus most high,

Blessings on thee! The Father who begat thee

Keep thee! Thou only hast restored my fortunes.

How didst thou bring her from the shades of light?

Herak. I closed in conflict with the Lord of Spirits.

II40

Adm. Where, say'st thou, didst thou fight this fight with
Death?

Herak. From ambush by the tomb mine hands ensnared him.

Adm. Now wherefore speechless standeth thus my wife?

Herak. 'Tis not vouchsafed thee yet to hear her voice,

Ere to the Powers beneath the earth she be

Unconsecrated, and the third day come.

But lead her in, and, just man as thou art,

Henceforth, Admetus, reverence still the guest.

Farewell. But I must go, and work the work

Set by the king, the son of Sthenelus.

II50

Adm. Abide with us, a sharer of our hearth.

Herak. Hereafter this: now must I hasten on.

Adm. O prosper thou, and come again in peace!

Through all my realm I publish to my folk

That, for these blessings, dances they array,

And that atonement-fumes from altars rise.

For now to happier days than those o'erpast
Have we attained. I own me blest indeed.

Chor. O the works of the Gods—in manifold forms they reveal
them :

Manifold things unhopèd-for the Gods to accomplishment
bring. 1160

And the things that we looked for, the Gods deign not to fulfil
them ;

And the paths undiscernèd of our eyes, the Gods unseal them.
So fell this marvellous thing.

[Exeunt omnes.]

MEDEA

ARGUMENT

WHEN the Heroes, who sailed in the ship *Argo* to bring home the Golden Fleece, came to the land of *Kolchis*, they found that to win that treasure was a deed passing the might of mortal man, so terribly was it guarded by monsters magical, even fire-breathing bulls and an unsleeping dragon. But *Aphrodite* caused *Medea* the sorceress, daughter of *Aiëtes* the king of the land, to love *Jason* their captain, so that by her magic he overcame the bulls and the dragon. Then *Jason* took the Fleece, and *Medea* withal, for that he had pledged him to wed her in the land of Greece. But as they fled, *Absyrtus* her brother pursued them with a host of war, yet by *Medea's* devising was he slain. So they came to the land of *Iolkos*, and to *Pelias*, who held the kingdom which was *Jason's* of right. But *Medea* by her magic wrought upon *Pelias's* daughters so that they slew their father. Yet by reason of men's horror of the deed might not *Jason* and *Medea* abide in the land, and they came to *Corinth*. But there all men rejoiced for the coming of a hero so mighty in war and a lady renowned for wisdom unearthly, for that *Medea* was grandchild of the *Sungod*. But after ten years, *Kreon* the king of the land spake to *Jason*, saying, 'Lo, I will give thee my daughter to wife, and thou reign after me, if thou wilt put away thy wife *Medea*; but her and two sons will I banish from the land.' So *Jason* consented. And of this befell things strange and awful, which are told herein.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

NURSE OF MEDEA'S CHILDREN

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN*

MEDEA

CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN LADIES

KREON, *King of Corinth*

JASON

— AIGEUS, *King of Athens*

MESSENGER

CHILDREN OF MEDEA

The Scene is in front of Jason's House at Corinth.

* *Paedagogus*.—A trusted servant, responsible for keeping the boys out of harm's way: he was present at their sports, accompanied them to and from school, and never let them be out of his sight.

MEDEA

Enter NURSE of MEDEA's Children.

Nur. Would God that Argo's hull had never flown
Through those blue Clashing Rocks to Kolchis-land,
Nor that in Pelion's glens had fallen ever
The axe-hewn pine, nor filled with oars the hands
Of hero-princes, who at Pelias' hest
Quested the Golden Fleece! My mistress then,
Medea, to Iolkos' towers had sailed not
With love for Jason thrilled through all her soul,
Nor had on Pelias' daughters wrought to slay
Their sire, nor now in this Corinthian land
Dwelt with her lord and children, gladdening
By this her exile them whose land received her,
Yea, and in all things serving Jason's weal,
Which is the chief salvation of the home,
When wife stands not at variance with her lord.
Now all is hatred: love is sickness-stricken.
For Jason, traitor to his babes and her,
My mistress, weddeth with a child of kings,
Daughter of Kreon ruler of the land.
And, slighted thus, Medea, hapless wife,
Cries on the oaths, invokes that mightiest pledge
Of the right hand, and calls the Gods to witness
From Jason what requital she receives.
Foodless she lies, her frame to griefs resigned,
Wasting in tears all those long weary hours
Since first she knew her outraged by her lord,
Never uplifting eye, nor turning ever
From earth her face; but like a rock or sea-wave
So hearkens she to friends that counsel her;
Saving at whiles, when, turning her white neck,
All to herself she wails her sire beloved,
Her land, her home, forsaking which she came
Hither with him who holds her now dishonoured.
Now knows she, hapless, by affliction's teaching,
How good is fatherland unforfeited.
She loathes her babes, joys not beholding them.

I fear her, lest some mischief she devise.
 Grim is her spirit, one that will not brook
 Mishandling: yea, I know her, and I dread
 Lest through her heart she thrust the whetted knife, 40
 Through the halls stealing silent to her bed,
 Or slay the king and him that weds his child,
 And get herself therefrom some worse misfortune:
 For dangerous is she: who begins a feud
 With her, not soon shall sing the triumph-song.
 But lo, her boys, their racing-sport put by,
 Draw near, unwitting of their mother's ills,
 For the young heart loves not to brood in grief.

Enter CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN, with boys.

Ch. G. O ancient chattel of my mistress' home, 50
 Why at the gates thus lonely standest thou,
 Thyself unto thyself discoursing ills?
 How wills Medea to be left of thee?

Nur. O grey attendant of the sons of Jason,
 The hearts of faithful servants still are touched
 By ill-betiding fortunes of their lords.
 For I have come to such a pass of grief,
 That yearning took me hitherward to come
 And tell to earth and heaven my lady's fortunes.

Ch. G. Ceaseth not yet the hapless one from moan?

Nur. Cease!—her pain scarce begun, the midst far off! 60

Ch. G. Ah fool!—if one may say it of his lords—
 Little she knoweth of the latest blow.

Nur. What is it, ancient? Grudge not thou to tell me.

Ch. G. Nought: I repent me of the word that 'scaped me.

Nur. Nay, by thy beard, from fellow-thrall hide not—
 Silence, if need be, will I keep thereof.

Ch. G. I heard one saying—feigning not to hear,
 As I drew near the marble thrones,¹ where sit
 The ancients round Peirênê's hallowed fount,—
 That Kreon, this land's lord, will shortly drive 70
 These boys from soil Corinthian with their mother?
 Howbeit, if the tale I heard be true
 I know not: fain were I it were not so.

Nur. Will Jason brook his children suffering this,
 What though he be estrangèd from their mother?

¹ So Mahaffy, adopted by Paley.

Ch. G. The old ties in the race lag far behind

The new :—no friend is *he* unto this house.

Nur. We are undone then, if we add fresh ill

To old, ere lightened be our ship of this.

Ch. G. But thou—for 'tis not season that thy lady

Should know—keep silence, and speak not the tale.

Nur. Hear, babes, what father this is unto you !

I curse him—not : he is my master still :

But to his friends he stands convict of baseness.

Ch. G. What man is not ?—Hast learnt this only now,

That each man loves self better than his neighbour,

For just cause some, and some for greed of gain ?

So, for a bride's sake, these their father loves not.

Nur. Pass in, dear children, for it shall be well.

But thou, keep these apart to the uttermost :

Bring them not nigh their mother angry-souled.

For late I saw her glare, as glares a bull

On these, as 'twere for mischief ; nor her wrath,

I know, shall cease, until its lightning strike.

To foes may she work ill, and not to friends !

Med. (behind the scenes). O hapless I !—O miseries heaped on mine head !

Ah me ! ah me ! would God I were dead !

Nur. Lo, darlings, the thing that I told you !

Lo the heart of your mother astir !

And astir is her anger : withhold you

From her sight, come not nigh unto her.

Haste, get you within : O beware ye

Of the thoughts as a wild-beast brood,

Of the nature too ruthless to spare ye

In its desperate mood.

Pass ye within now, departing

With all speed. It is plain to discern

How a cloud of lamenting, upstarting

From its viewless beginnings, shall burn

In lightnings of fury yet fiercer.

What deeds shall be dared of that soul,

So haughty, when wrong's goads pierce her,

So hard to control ?

[*Exeunt* CHILDREN *with* GUARDIAN.

Med. (behind the scenes). Woe ! I have suffered, have suffered
foul wrongs that may waken, may waken,

Mighty lamentings full well! O ye children accursed from
the womb,

Hence to destruction, ye brood of a loathed one forsaken,
forsaken!

Hence with your father, and perish our home in the black-
ness of doom!

Nur. Ah me, in the father's offences

What part have the babes, that thine hate
Should blast them?—forlorn innocences,

How sorely I fear for your fate!

Ah princes—how fearful their moods are!—

Long ruling, unschooled to obey,—

120

Unforgiving, unsleeping their feuds are.

Better life's level way.

Be it mine, if in greatness I may not,

In quiet and peace to grow old.

Sweeter name than 'The Mean' shall ye say not;

But to taste it is sweetness untold.

But to men never weal above measure

Availed: on its perilous height

The Gods in their home of displeasure

The heavier smite.

130

Enter CHORUS of CORINTHIAN LADIES.

Chor. I have hearkened the voice of the daughter of Kolchis,
the sound of the crying

Of the misery-stricken; nor yet is she stilled. Now the
tale of her tell,

Grey woman; for moaned through the porch from her
chamber the wail of her sighing;

And I cannot, I cannot be glad while the home in affliction is
lying,

The house I have loved so well.

Nur. Home?—home there is none: it hath vanished away:

For my lord to a bride of the princes is thrall;

140

And my lady is pining the livelong day

In her bower, and for nought that her friends' lips say

On her heart may the dews of comfort fall.

Med. (behind the scenes). Would God that the flame of the
lightning from heaven descending, descending,

Might burn through mine head!—for in living wherein
 any more is my gain?
 Alas and alas! Would God I might bring to an ending, an
 ending,
 The life that I loathe, and behind me might cast all its
 burden of pain!

(Str.)

Chor. O Zeus, Earth, Light, did ye hear her,
 How waileth the woe-laden breath
 Of the bride in unhappiest plight?
 What yearning for vanished delight, 150
 O passion-distraught, should have might
 To cause thee to wish death nearer—
 The ending of all things, death?
 Make thou not for this supplication!
 If thine husband hath turned and adored
 New love, that estranged he is,
 O harrow thy soul not for this.
 It is Zeus that shall right thee, I wis.
 Ah, pine not in over-vexation
 Of spirit, bewailing thy lord!

Med (behind the scenes). O Lady of Justice, O Artemis' Majesty,
 see it, O see it— 160
 Look on the wrongs that I suffer, by oaths everlasting who
 tied
 The soul of mine husband, that ne'er from the curse he might
 free it, nor free it
 From your vengeance!—O may I behold him at last, even
 him and his bride,
 Them, and these halls therewithal, all shattered in ruin, in
 ruin!—

Wretches, who dare unprovoked to do to Medea despite!
 O father, O city, whom erst I forsook, for undoing, undoing,
 And for shame, when the blood of my brother I spilt on the
 path of my flight!

Nur. Do ye hear what she saith, and uplifteth her cry
 Unto Themis and Zeus, to the Suppliant's King,
 Oath-steward of men that be born but to die? 170
 O my lady will lay not her anger by
 Soon, making her vengeance a little thing.

(Ant.)

Chor. If she would but come forth where we wait her,
 If she would but give ear to the sound
 Of our speech, that her spirit would learn

From its fierceness of anger to turn,
 And her lust for revenge not burn!
 O ne'er may my love prove traitor,
 Never false to my friends be it found!

But go thou, and forth of the dwelling 180
 Thy mistress hitherward lead.
 Say to her that friends be we all.
 O hasten, ere mischief befall
 The lords of the palace-hall.
 For her grief, like a tempest upswelling,
 Resistless shall ruin-ward speed.

Nur. I will do it: but almost my spirit despaireth
 To win her; yet labour of love shall it be.
 But my queen on her thralls as a mad bull glareth,
 Or a lioness couched mid her whelps, whoso dareth
 With speech to draw near her, so tameless is she.

He should err not, who named the old singers in singing 190
 Not cunning, but left-handed bards, for their lays
 Did they frame for the mirth-tide, the festal in-bringing
 Of the wine, and the feast, when the harp-strings are ringing
 To sweeten with melody life's sweet days:
 But the dread doom of mortals, the anguish heart-rending—
 Never minstrel by music hath breathed on them peace,
 Nor by song with his harp-notes in harmony blending;
 Albeit of these cometh death's dark ending
 Unto many a home that is wrecked of these.

And yet were it surely a boon to bring healing 200
 Of sorrow to mortals with song: but in vain
 Mid the fulness of feasting ring voices clear-pealing,
 And the banquet itself hath a glamour, concealing
 From mortals their doom, flinging spells over pain.

[Exit NURSE.]

Chor. I have heard it, the sigh-laden cry of the daughter
 Of Kolchis, the woe-shrilling anguish of wailing
 For the traitor to love who with false vows caught her,
 Who in strength of her wrongs chideth Heaven, assailing
 The Oath-queen of Zeus, who with cords all-prevailing
 Forth haled her, and brought her o'er star-litten water, 210
 Where the brine-mists hover o'er Pontus' Key,
 Unto Hellas far over the boundless sea.

Enter MEDEA.

Med. Corinthian dames, I have come forth my doors
 Lest ye should blame me. Many folk I know
 Accounted haughty, some, for proud staid mien,¹
 Some, stranger-shy :² and some, that softly go,
 Have gotten ill repute of indolence.
 For justice sits not in the eyes of man,
 Who, ere he hath discerned his neighbour's heart, 220
 Hates him at sight, albeit nowise wronged.
 The sojourner must learn the city's wont ;
 Nor praise I citizens-born, law to themselves,
 Mannerless churls, which flout their fellow-folk.
 But me—unlooked-for fell this blow on me,
 And brake mine heart. Undone I am ; have lost
 All grace of life, and long to die, my friends.
 For he that was mine all,—thou know'st it well,—³
 My lord, of all men basest hath become.
 Surely, of creatures that have life and wit, 230
 We women are of all things wretchedest,
 Who, first, must needs, as buys the highest bidder,
 Thus buy a husband, and our body's master
 So win—for deeper depth of ill is this.
 Nay, risk is dire herein,—or shall we gain
 An evil lord or good ? For change is shame
 To woman, nor may she renounce her spouse.
 And, coming to new customs, habits new,
 Seer need she be, to know the thing unlearnt,
 What manner of man her couch's mate shall be. 240
 But if we learn our lesson, if our lord
 Dwell with us, plunging not against the yoke,
 Happy our lot : if not—no help but death.
 For the man, when at home they fret his soul,
 Goes forth, and stays his loathing heart's disgust,
 Unto a friend or age-mate turning him.
 We have but one, one heart to seek for comfort.
 But we, say they, live an unperilled life
 At home, while they do battle with the spear.
 Falsely they deem : twice would I under shield 250
 Stand, rather than bear childbirth peril once.
 Yet thee and me the selfsame reasons touch not.

¹ *lit.* ' from their looks.'

² *lit.* ' as being σεμνοὶ (reserved) when amongst strangers.'

Or, reading γιγνώσκειν—' For he, to know whom rightly was mine all.'

Thine is this city, thine a father's home ;
 Hast bliss of life and fellowship of friends.
 But I, lone, cityless, and outraged thus
 Of him who kidnapped me from foreign shores,
 Mother nor brother have I, kinsman none,
 For port of refuge from calamity.

Wherefore I fain would win of thee this boon :—

If any path be found me, or device,
 Whereby to avenge these wrongs upon mine husband,
 On her who weds, on him who gives the bride,
 Keep silence. Woman quails at every peril,
 Faint-heart to face the fray and look on steel ;
 But when in wedlock-rights she suffers wrong,
 No spirit more bloodthirsty shall be found.

Chor. This will I ; for 'tis just that thou, Medea,
 Requite thy lord : no marvel thou dost grieve.
 But I see Kreon, ruler of this land,
 Advancing, herald of some new decree.

260

270

Enter KREON.

Kre. Thee the black-lowering, wroth against thy lord,
 Medea, bid I forth this land to fare
 An exile, taking thy two sons with thee,
 And make no tarrying : daysman of this cause
 Am I, and homeward go I not again
 Ere from the land's bounds I have cast thee forth.

Med. Ah me ! undone am I in utter ruin !
 My foes crowd sail pursuing : landing-place
 Is none from surges of calamity.

Yet, howso wronged, one question will I ask—
 For what cause, Kreon, dost thou banish me ?

280

Kre. I fear thee—need is none to cloak my words—
 Lest on my child thou wreak some ill past cure.
 And to this dread do many things conspire.
 Wise art thou, cunning in much evil lore ;
 Chafed art thou, of thine husband's couch bereft :
 I hear thou threatenest, so they bring me word,
 To wreak on sire, on bridegroom, and on bride
 Mischief. I guard mine head ere falls the blow.
 Better be hated, woman, now of thee,
 Than once relent, and sorely groan too late.

290

Med. Not now first, Kreon,—many a time ere now
 Rumour hath wronged and wrought me grievous harm.

Ne'er should the man whose heart is sound of wit
Let teach his sons more wisdom than the herd.

They are burdened with unprofitable lore,
And spite and envy of other folk they earn.

For, if thou bring strange wisdom unto dullards,
Useless shalt thou be counted, and not wise :

And, grant they name o'er top the self-extolled 300
Wits, in the city odious shalt thou be.

Myself too in this fortune am partaker.

Of some my wisdom wins me jealousy,

Some count me idle ; some, o'erbusy ; some

Unsocial :—yet not over-wise am I.

And thou, thou fear'st me, lest I mar thy music.

Not such am I—O Kreon, dread not me—

That against princes I should dare transgress.

How hast thou wronged me ? Thou hast given thy child
To whomso pleased thee. But—I hate mine husband : 310

And, doubtless, this in prudence hast thou done ?

Nay, but I grudge not thy prosperity.

Wed ye, and prosper. But in this your land

Still let me dwell : for I, how wronged soe'er,

Will hold my peace, o'er mastered by the strong.

Kre. Soft words to hear : but lurks mine heart within

Dread lest thou plottest mischief all the while ;

And all the less I trust thee than before.

The vehement-hearted woman—yea, or man—

Is easier watched-for than the silent-cunning. 320

But forth with all speed : plead me pleadings none.

For this is stablished : no device hast thou

To bide with us, who art a foe to me.

Med. Nay,—by thy knees, and by the bride, thy child !

Kre. Thou wastest words ; thou never shalt prevail.

Med. Wilt drive me forth, respecting nought my prayers ?

Kre. Ay : more I love not thee than mine own house.

Med. O, how I call thee now to mind, my country !

Kre. Ay, dear to me is Corinth, next my children.

Med. Alas ! to mortals what a curse is love ! 330

Kre. Blessing or curse, I trow, as fortune falls.

Med. Zeus, may the cause of this 'scape not thy ken !

Kre. Hence, passionate fool, and rid me of my trouble.

Med. Troubled am I, nor need I troubles new.

Kre. Soon shalt thou be by servants' hands thrust out.

Med. Nay—nay—not this, O Kreon, I beseech thee !

Kre. A coil thou wilt make, woman, as it seems.

Med. I will flee forth:—not this the boon I crave.

Kre. Why restive then?—why rid not Corinth of thee?

Med. Suffer me yet to tarry this one day,
 And somewhat for our exile to take thought,
 And find my babes a refuge, since their sire
 Cares nought to make provision for his sons.
 Compassionate these: a father too art thou
 Of children: meet it is thou show these grace.
 Not for myself I fret, if I be banished:
 For them in their calamity I mourn.

340

Kre. My spirit least of all is tyrannous.

Many a plan have my relentings marred:
 And, woman, now I know I err herein,
 Yet shalt thou win this boon. But I forewarn thee,
 If thee the approaching Sun-god's torch behold
 Within this country's confines with thy sons,
 Thou diest:—the word is said that shall not lie.
 Now, if remain thou must, remain one day—
 Too short for thee to do the deeds I dread.

350

[Exit.

Chor. O hapless thou!

Woe's me for thy misery, woe for the trouble and anguish that
 meet thee!

Whitherward wilt thou turn thee?—what welcoming hand
 mid the strangers shall greet thee?

What home or what land to receive thee, deliverance from evils
 to give thee,

360

Wilt thou find for thee now?

How mid surge of despair to o'erwhelm thee in ruin
 God's hand on thine helm

Hath steered, O Medea, thy prow!

Med. 'Tis ill done every way; who shall gainsay?

Yet nowise ill in this: deem not so yet.

Bridegroom and bride grim conflicts yet await;

Nor troubles light abide these marriage-makers.

Think'st thou that I had cringed to yon man ever,

Except to gain some gain, or work some wile?

Nor word nor touch of hand had I vouchsafed him.

370

But to such height of folly hath he come,

That, when he might forestall mine every plot

By banishment, this day of grace he grants me

To stay, wherein three foes will I lay dead,

The father, and the daughter, and mine husband.

And, having for them many paths of death,

Which first to take in hand I know not, friends;

Whether to set the bridal bower aflame,
 Or through the heart to thrust the whetted knife,
 Through yon halls stealing silent to their couch. 380
 Yet one thing bars the way—if I be found
 Crossing the threshold of the house and plotting,
 Die shall I, and make mirth unto my foes.
 Best the straight path, wherein my nature's cunning
 Excels, by poisons to destroy them :—yea.
 Now, grant them dead : what city will receive me,
 What host vouchsafe a land of refuge, home
 Secure, and from the avenger shield my life ?
 There is none. Tarrying then a little space,
 If any tower of safety shall appear, 390
 These deaths by guile and silence will I compass ;
 But if misfortune drive me desperate forth,
 Myself will grip the sword,—yea, though I die,—
 And slay, and dare the strong hand's reckless deed :
 For, by the Queen of Night, whom I revere
 Above all, and for fellow-worker chose,
 Hekaté, dweller by mine hearth's dark shrine,
 Not one shall vex my soul, and rue it not.
 Bitter and woeful bridal will I give them,
 Bitter troth-plight and banishing of me. 400
 Up then !—spare nought of all thy sorcery-lore,
 Medea, of thy plotting and contriving ;
 On to the dread deed ! Now is need of daring.
 Look on thy wrongs : thou must not make derision
 For sons of Sisyphus, for Jason's bride,—
 Thou, sprung from royal father, from the Sun !
 Thou know'st means. Yea, our woman-nature 'tis—
 Say they—to be most helpless for all good,
 But fashioners most cunning of all ill.

(Str. 1)

Chor. Upward aback to their fountains the sacred rivers are
 stealing ; [410
 Justice is turned to injustice, the order of old to confusion :
 The thoughts of the hearts of men are treachery wholly, and,
 reeling
 From its ancient foundations, the faith of the Gods is
 become a delusion.
 Changes—and changes !—the voice of the people shall crown
 me with honour :
 My life shall be sunlit with glory ; for woman the old-time
 story.

Is ended, the slanders hoary no more shall as chains be upon
her.

(*Ant.* 1)

And the strains of the singers of old generations for shame
shall falter,

420

Which sang evermore of the treason of woman, her faith-
lessness ever.

Alas, that our lips are not touched with the fire of song from
the altar

Of Phoebus, the Harper-king, of the inspiration-giver!
Else had I lifted my voice in challenge of song high-ringing
Unto men: for the roll of the ages shall find for the poet-
sages

Proud woman-themes for their pages, heroines worthy their
singing.

(*Str.* 2)

But thou from the ancient home didst sail over leagues of
foam,

430

On-spied by a frenzied heart, and the sea-gates sawest dispart,

The Twin Rocks. Now, in the land
Of the stranger, thy doom is to waken
To a widowed couch, and forsaken
Of thy lord, and woe-overtaken,
To be cast forth shamed and banned.

(*Ant.* 2)

Disannulled is the spell of the oath: no shame for the broken
troth

In Hellas the wide doth remain, but heavenward its flight
hath it ta'en.

No home of a father hast thou

440

For thine haven when trouble-storms lower.

Usurped is thy bridal bower

Of another, in pride of her power,

Ill-starred, overqueening thee now.

Enter JASON.

Jas. Not now first, nay, but oft-times have I marked
What desperate mischief is a froward spirit.
For in this land, this home, when thou might'st stay
Bearing unfractiously thy rulers' pleasure,
Banished thou art for wild and whirling words.
Me they vex not—cease never, an thou wilt,

450

Clamouring, ' Jason is of men most base !'
 But, for thy words against thy rulers spoken,
 Count it all gain—mere exile punishing thee.
 For me—still strove I to appease the wrath
 Of kings incensed : fain would I thou shouldst stay.
 But thou rein'st not thy folly, speaking still
 Evil of dignities ; art therefore banished.
 Yet, for all this, not wearied of my friends,
 With so much forethought come I for thee, lady,
 That, banished with thy babes, thou lack not gold,
 Nor aught beside. Full many an ill is brought
 In exile's train. Yea, though thou hatest me,
 Ne'er can I harbour evil thought of thee.

460

Med. Caitiff of caitiffs !—blackest of reproaches
 My tongue for thine unmanliness can frame—
 Thou com'st to me—thou com'st, most hateful proved
 To heaven, to me, to all the race of men !
 This is not daring, no, nor courage this,
 To wrong thy friends, and blench not from their eyes,
 But, of all plagues infecting men, the worst,
 Even shamelessness. And yet 'tis well thou cam'st,
 For I shall ease the burden of mine heart
 Reviling thee, and thou be galled to hear.
 And with the first things first will I begin.
 I saved thee, as they know, what Greeks soe'er
 Entered with thee the self-same Argo's hull,
 Thee, sent to quell the flame-outbreathing bulls
 With yoke-bands, and to sow the tilth of death.
 The dragon, warder of the Fleece of Gold,
 That sleepless kept it with his manifold coils,
 I slew, and raised deliverance-light for thee.
 Myself forsook my father and mine home,
 And to Iolkos under Pelion came
 With thee, more zealous in thy cause than wise,
 And Pelias slew by his own children's hands—
 Of all deaths worst,—so cast out all thy¹ fear.
 And thus of me, basest of men, entreated,
 For a new bride hast thou forsaken me,
 Though I had born thee children. Wert thou childless,
 Not past forgiving were this marriage-craving.
 But faith of oaths hath vanished. I know not
 Whether thou deem'st the olden Gods yet rule,
 Or that new laws are now ordained for men ;

470

480

490

¹ Or ' Yea, cast out all their fear.'

For thine heart speaks thee unto me forsworn.
 Out on this right hand, which thou oft wouldst clasp,—
 These knees!—how vainly have we been embraced
 By a base man, thus frustrate of our hopes!
 Come, as a friend will I commune with thee—
 Yet what fair dealing should I hope from thee?— 500
 Yet will I: questioned, baser shalt thou show.
 Now, whither turn I?—to my father's house,
 Which, with my country, I for thee cast off?
 To Pelias' hapless daughters?—Graciously
 Their father's slayer would they welcome home!
 For thus it is: a foe am I become

To mine own house. Whom I should ne'er have harmed,
 For grace to thee I made mine enemies. ✱
 So then midst Hellas' daughters hast thou made me
 Blest in return for all: in thee have I— 510
 O wretched I!—a wondrous spouse and leal,¹
 If from the land cast forth I pass to exile
 Forlorn of friends, alone with children lone.
 A proud reproach for our new bridegroom this—
 In poverty thy babes, thy saviour, wander!
 O Zeus, ah wherefore hast thou given to men
 Plain signs of gold which is but counterfeit,
 But no assay-mark nature-graven shows
 On man's form, to discern the base withal?

Chor. Awful is wrath, and past all balm of healing,
 When they that once loved clash in feud of hate. 520

Jas. Needs must I be not ill at speech, meseems,
 But, like the careful helmsman of a ship,
 With close-reefed canvas run before the gale,
 Woman, of thy tempestuous-railing tongue.
 I—for thy kindness tower-high thou pilest—
 Deem Kypris saviour of my voyaging,
 Her, and none other or of Gods or men.
 A subtle wit thou hast—what need to force me
 To tell the tale how Love, by strong compulsion 530
 Of shafts unerring, made thee save my life?
 Yet take I not account too strict thereof;
 For, in that thou didst save me, thou didst well.
 Howbeit, more hast thou received than given
 Of this my safety, as my words shall prove:—
 First, then, in Hellas dwell'st thou, in the stead
 Of land barbaric, knowest justice, learnest

¹ Or, reading *κάμιστον*, 'Woe's me!—a marvellous spouse beyond belief.'

To live by law without respect of force.
 And all the Greeks have heard thy wisdom's fame.
 Renown is thine : but if on earth's far bourn 540
 Thou dwelledst yet, thou hadst not lived in story.
 Now mine be neither gold mine halls within,
 Nor sweeter song be mine than Orpheus sang,
 If my fair fortune be to fame unknown.
 Thus far of my great labours have I spoken,—
 Since thou flung'st down this challenge to dispute :—
 But, for thy railings on my royal marriage,
 Herein will I show, first, that wise I was ;
 Then, temperate ; third, to thee the best of friends
 And to my children—nay, but hear me out. 550
 When I came hither from Iolkos-land
 With many a desperate fortune in my train,
 What happier treasure-trove could I have found
 Than to wed—I, an exile—with a princess ?
 Not—where it galls thee—loathing couch of thine,
 And for a new bride smitten with desire,
 Nor eager I to multiply mine offspring ;—
 Suffice these born to me : no fault in them :—
 But that we might with honour live—grave import,—
 And be not straitened,—for I know full well 560
 How all friends from the poor man stand aloof,
 And I might nurture as beseems mine house
 Our sons, and to these born of thee beget
 Brethren, and, knitting in one family all,
 Live happy days. Thou, what wouldst thou of children ?
 But me it profits, through sons to be born
 To help the living. Have I planned so ill ? *So long*
 Not thou wouldst say it, but the lost couch galls thee.
 But ye—ye women—so unreasoning are
 That, wedlock-rights unmarred, ye count all well ; 570
 But to the couch if aught untoward hap,
 With the best, fairest lot are ye at feud
 Most bitter. Would that mortals otherwise
 Could get them babes, that womankind were not,
 And so no curse had lighted upon men.
Chor. Words, Jason, words, tricked out full cunningly :
 Yet to me—though I speak not to thy mind—
 Unjust thou seem'st, betraying thus thy wife.)
Med. Of many things I think not as think many.
 For in my sight the villain subtle-tongued 580
 Getteth himself for gain exceeding loss,

Who, confident his tongue can gloze the wrong,
 Becomes a bold knave :—no great wisdom this.
 So be not thou, as touching me, fair-seeming
 And crafty-tongued : one word shall overthrow thee :
 Thou shouldest, if not base, have wed this bride
 With my consent, not hid it from thy friends.

Jas. Ay, nobly hadst thou helped in this my purpose,
 Had I a marriage named, who even now
 Canst not refrain thy heart's exceeding wrath !

Med. Not this thine hindrance, but the alien wife
 No crown of honour was as eld drew on.

Jas. Now know this well—not for the woman's sake
 I wed the royal bride whom I have won,
 But, as I said, of my desire to save
 Thee, and beget seed royal, to my sons
 Brethren, and for mine house a tower of strength.

Med. No prosperous life 'neath sorrow's cloud for me,
 Nor weal, with thorns of conscience in mine heart !

Jas. Know'st how to change thy prayer, and show the
 wiser ?

May thy good never seem to thee thy sorrow ;
 Nor in fair fortune deem thy lot misfortune.

Med. O yea, insult !—Thou hast a refuge, thou ;
 But desolate I am banished from this land.

Jas. Thyself hast chosen this : none other blame.

Med. I ?—sooth, by wedding and betraying thee !

Jas. By cursing princes with an impious curse.

Med. Even so,—and thus am cursing now *thine* house ?

Jas. With thee no more I wrangle touching this.

But if, or for the children or thyself,
 For help in exile thou wilt take my gold,
 Speak : ready am I to give with hand ungrudging,
 And send guest-tokens which shall find thee friends.
 If this thou wilt not, foolish shalt thou be :
 Refrain wrath, and advantaged shalt thou be.

Med. Thy friends !—nothing will I of friends of thine.

No whit will I receive, nor offer thou.

No profit is there in a villain's gifts.

Jas. In any wise I call the Gods to witness

That all help would I give thee and thy sons ;

But thy good likes thee not : thy stubborn pride

Spurns friends : the more thy grief shall therefore be.

Med. Away !—impatience for the bride new-trapped
 Consumes thee while thou loiterest at the doors !

590

600

610

620

Wed: for perchance—and God shall speed the word—
Thine shall be bridal thou wouldst fain renounce.

[Exit JASON.

(Str. 1)

Chor. Love bringeth nor glory nor honour to men when it
cometh restraining [630

Not its unscanted excess: but if Kypris, in measure raining
Her joy, cometh down, there is none other Goddess so
winsome as she.

Not upon me, O Queen, do thou aim from thy bow all-golden
The arrow desire-venomed that none may avoid—not on
me!

(Ant. 1)

But let Temperance shield¹ me, the fairest of gifts of the
Gods ever-living:

Nor ever with passion of jarring contention, nor feuds un-
forgiving,

In her terrors may Love's Queen visit me, smiting with
maddened unrest

For a couch mismated my soul: but the peace of the bride-
bed be holden 640

In honour of her, and her keen eyes choose for us bonds
that be best.

(Str. 2)

O fatherland, O mine home,
Not mine be the exile's doom!

Into poverty's pathways hard to be trod may my feet not be
guided!

Most piteous anguish were this.

By death—O by death ere then may the conflict of life be
decided,

Ended be life's little day! To be thus from the homeland
divided— 650

No pang more bitter there is.

(Ant. 2)

We have seen, and it needeth nought
That of others herein we be taught:

For thee not a city, for thee not a friend hath compassionated
When affliction most awful is thine.

But he, who regardeth not friends, accursed may he perish,
and hated, 660

¹ στέγιοι (Verrall), *vice* MSS. στέργοι, 'befriend.'

Who opes not his heart with sincerity's key to the hapless
fated—

Never such shall be friend of mine !

Enter AIGEUS.

Aig. Medea, hail !—for fairer greeting-word
None knoweth to accost his friends withal.

Med. All hail thou also, wise Pandion's son,

Aigeus. Whence art thou journeying through this land ?

Aig. Leaving the ancient oracle of Phoebus.

Med. Why didst thou fare to earth's prophetic navel ?

Aig. To ask how seed of children might be mine.

Med. 'Fore Heaven !—aye childless is thy life till now ? 670

Aig. Childless I am, by chance of some God's will.

Med. This, with a wife, or knowing not the couch ?

Aig. Nay, not unyoked to wedlock's bed am I.

Med. Now what to thee spake Phoebus touching issue ?

Aig. Deep words of wisdom not for man to interpret.

Med. Without sin might I know the God's reply ?

Aig. O yea—good sooth, it needs the wise heart most.

Med. What said he ? Say, if sin be not to hear.

Aig. The wine-skin's prominent foot I should not loose.

Med. Till thou shouldst do what thing, or reach what land ?

Aig. Till to the hearth ancestral back I came. [680

Med. And thou, what wouldst thou sailing to this shore ?

Aig. There is one Pittheus, king of Troezen he,—

Med. A man most pious, Pelops' son, they say.

Aig. To him the God's response I fain would tell.

Med. Yea—a wise man, and having skill herein.

Aig. Yea, and my best-belovèd spear-ally.

Med. Now prosper thou, and win thine heart's desire.

Aig. Why droops thine eye ?—why this wan-wasted hue ?

Med. Aigeus, of all men basest is mine husband. 690

Aig. What say'st thou ? Clearly tell me thine heart's pain.

Med. He wrongs me—Jason, nothing wronged of me.

Aig. What hath he done ? More plainly tell it out.

Med. Another wife he takes, his household's mistress.

Aig. Ha ! hath he dared in truth this basest deed ?

Med. Yea : I am now dishonoured, once beloved.

Aig. Another love was this ?—or hate of thee ?

Med. Love ?—yea, of the highest :—traitor he to love !

Aig. Away with him, if he be base as this !

- Med.* His love was for affinity with princes. 700
- Aig.* Who giveth him his daughter? End the tale.
- Med.* Kreon, who ruleth this Corinthian land.
- Aig.* Sooth, lady, reason was that thou shouldst grieve.
- Med.* 'Tis death to me! Yea, also am I banished.
- Aig.* Of whom? A new ill this thou namest is.¹
- Med.* Kreon from Corinth driveth me an exile.
- Aig.* Doth Jason suffer this?—I praise it not.
- Med.* In pretence, no: but to stand firm—not he!
 But I beseech thee, touching this thy beard,
 Clasping thy knees, and so become thy suppliant;— 710
 Pity, O pity me the evil-starred,
 And see me not cast forth to homelessness:
 Receive to a hearth-place in thy land and homes.
 So by heaven's blessing fruitful be thy love
 In children, and in death thyself be blest.
 Thou know'st not what good fortune thou hast found:
 For I will end thy childlessness, will cause
 Thy seed to grow to sons; such drugs I know.
- Aig.* For many causes am I minded, lady,
 This grace to grant thee: for the Gods' sake first; 720
 Then, for the seed of children thou dost promise;
 For herein wholly extinct is Aigeus' name.
 But thus it is—if to my land thou come,
 I thy defence essay, in bounds of justice.
 Howbeit of this do I forewarn thee, lady,
 From this land will I not consent to lead thee.
 But, if thou reachest of thyself mine homes,
 Safe shalt thou bide: to no man will I yield thee.
 But from this land thou must thyself escape;
 For blameless will I be to allies too. 730
- Med.* So be it. Yet, were oath-pledge given for this
 To me, then had I all I would of thee.
- Aig.* Ha, dost not trust me?—Or at what dost stumble?
- Med.* I trust thee: but my foes are Pelias' house
 And Kreon. Oath-bound, thou couldst never yield me
 To these, when they would drag me from the land.
 Hadst thou but promised, to the Gods unpledged,²
 Thou mightest turn their friend, might'st lightly yield
 To herald-summons. Strengthless is my cause:
 Wealth is on their side, and a princely house. 740

¹ Or 'Another's crime thou namest now,' reading *ἄλλου vice ἄλλο* (Verrall).

² Reading *ἀνώμοτος* (737) and *τάχ'* (739).

Aig. Foresight exceeding, lady, in thy words!¹

Yet, if this be thy will, I draw not back ;
 Since for myself is this the safest course,
 To have a plea to show unto thy foes ;
 And surer is thy part. The Oath-gods name.

Med. Swear by Earth's plain, and by my father's father
 The Sun, and join the Gods' whole race thereto.

Aig. That I will do or not do—what? Say on.

Med. That from thy land thyself wilt never cast me,
 Nor, if a foe of mine would hale me thence,
 Wilt, while thou liv'st, consenting yield me up. 750

Aig. By Earth, the Sun's pure majesty, and all
 The Gods, I swear to abide by this thou hast said.

Med. Enough. For broken troth what penalty?

Aig. Whatso befalleth God-despising men.

Med. Pass on thy way rejoicing : all is well.

I too will come with all speed to thy burg,
 When mine intent is wrought, my wish attained.

[Exit AIGEUS.]

Chor. Now the Scion of Maia, the Wayfarer's King,
 Bring thee safe to thine home, and the dream of thine
 heart, 760

The sweet visions that wing thy feet, may'st thou bring
 To accomplishment, Aigeus, for now this thing
 Hath taught me how noble thou art.

Med. Zeus, Justice child of Zeus, and Light of the Sun,
 Over my foes triumphant now, my friends,
 Shall we become : our feet are on the path.
 Now is there hope of vengeance on my foes.

For this man, there where lay my chiefest weakness,
 Hath for my plots a haven in storm appeared.

To him my bark's stern-hawser make I fast,
 To Pallas' burg and fortress when I go. 770

And all my plots to thee now will I tell ;

Nor look I that my words should pleasure thee :—

One of mine household will I send to Jason,

And will entreat him to my sight to come ;

And soft words, when he cometh, will I speak,

Saying, ' Thy will is mine,' and, ' It is well.'

How that his royal marriage, my betrayal,

Is our advantage, and right well devised.

I will petition that my sons may stay— 780

Not for that I would leave on hostile soil

¹ v.l. *προθυμίαν* : ' Much eagerness to help thy words imply ! ' (ironical).

Children of mine for foes to trample on,
 But the king's daughter so by guile to slay.
 For I will send them bearing gifts in hand
 Unto the bride, that they may not be banished,
 A robe fine-spun, a golden diadem.
 If she receive and don mine ornaments,
 Die shall she wretchedly, and all who touch her,
 With drugs so dread will I anoint my gifts.

Howbeit here I pass this story by, 790

And wail the deed that yet for me remains
 To bring to pass; for I will slay my children,
 Yea, mine: no man shall pluck them from mine hand.
 Then, having brought all Jason's house to wrack,
 I leave the land, fleeing my dear babes' blood,
 And having dared a deed most impious.

For unendurable are mocks of foes.

Let all go: what is life to me? Nor country

Nor home have I, nor refuge from mine ills.

Then erred I, in the day when I forsook

My father's halls, by yon Greek's words beguiled,

Who with God's help shall render me requital.

For never living shall he see hereafter

The sons I bare him, nor shall he beget

Of his new bride a son, for doomed is she,

Wretch, to die wretchedly by drugs of mine.

Let none account me impotent, nor weak,

Nor meek of spirit!—Nay, in other sort,

Grim to my foes, and kindly to my friends,

For of such is the life most glorious. 810

Chor. Since thou hast made me partner of this tale,—

Wishing to help thee, championing withal

The laws of men, I say, do thou not this.

Med. It cannot be but so: yet reason is

That thou say this, who are not wronged as I.

Chor. Woman, wilt have the heart to slay thy sons?

Med. Yea: so mine husband's heart shall most be wrung.

Chor. But thou of wives most wretched shouldst become.

Med. So be it: wasted are all hindering words.

But ho! [*to the NURSE*] go thou and Jason bring to
 me— 820

Thou whom I use for every deed of trust.

And look thou tell none aught of mine intent,

If thine is loyal service, thou a woman.

[*Exit MEDEA and NURSE.*]

(Str. 1)

Chor. O happy the race in the ages olden
 Of Erechtheus, the seed of the blest Gods' line,
 In a land unravaged, peace-enfolden,
 Aye quaffing of Wisdom's glorious wine,
 Ever through air clear-shining brightly
 As on wings uplifted pacing lightly,
 Where they tell how Harmonia of tresses golden
 Bare the Pierid Muses, the stainless Nine.

830

(Ant. 1)

And the streams of Cephisus the lovely-flowing
 They tell how the Lady of Cyprus drew,
 And in Zephyr-wafts of the winds sweet-blowing
 Breathed far over the land their dew.
 And she sendeth her Loves which, throned in glory
 By Wisdom, fashion all virtue's story,
 Over her tresses throwing, throwing,
 Roses in odorous wreaths aye new.

840

Re-enter MEDEA.

(Str. 2)

How then should the hallowed city,
 The city of sacred waters,
 Which shields with her guardian hand
 All friends that would fare through her land,
 Receive a murderess banned,
 Who had slaughtered her babes without pity,
 A pollution amidst of her daughters?

850

In thine heart's thoughts set it before thee—
 To murder the fruit of thy womb!
 O think what it meaneth to slay
 Thy sons—what a deed this day
 Thou wouldst do!—By thy knees we pray,
 By heaven and earth we implore thee,
 Deal not to thy babes such a doom!

(Ant. 2)

O whence, and O whence wilt thou gain thee
 Such desperate hardihood
 That for spirit so fiendish shall serve,
 That shall strengthen thine heart, that shall nerve
 Thine hand, that it shall not swerve
 From the ruthless deed that shall stain thee
 With horror of children's blood?

O how, when thine eyes thou art turning
 On thy little ones, wilt thou refrain
 The motherhood in thee, to feel
 No upwelling of tears?—Canst thou steel
 Thy breast when thy children kneel,
 To crimson thine hand, with unyearning
 Heart for thy darlings slain?

860

Enter JASON.

Jas. Summoned I come: for, though thou be my foe,
 This grace thou shalt not miss; but I will hear
 What new thing, lady, thou dost wish of me.

Med. Jason, I ask thee to forgive the words
 Late-spoken, and to bear with that my mood:
 Well mayst thou, for remembrance of old loves.
 Now have I called myself to account, and railed
 Upon myself—'Wretch, wherefore am I mad?

And wherefore rage against good counsellors,
 And am at feud with rulers of the land,
 And with my lord, who works my veriest good,
 Wedding a royal house, to raise up brethren
 Unto my sons? Shall I not cease from wrath?
 What aileth me, when the Gods proffer boons?
 Have I not children? Know I not that we
 Are exiles from our own land, lacking friends?
 Thus musing, was I ware that I had nursed
 Folly exceeding, anger without cause.

Now then I praise thee; wise thou seem'st to me
 In gaining us this kinship, senseless I,
 Who in these counsels should have been thine ally,
 Have furthered all, have decked the bridal couch,
 And joyed to minister unto the bride.

But we are—women: needs not harsher word.
 Yet evil shouldst thou not for evil render,
 Nor pit against my folly folly of thine.
 I yield, confessing mine unwisdom then,
 But unto better counsels now am come.
 Children, my children, hither: leave the house;

880

890

Enter CHILDREN.

Come forth, salute your father, and with me
 Bid him farewell: be reconciled to friends

Ye, with your mother, from the hate o'erpast.
 Truce is between us, rancour hath given place.
 Clasp ye his right hand.—Woe for ambushed ills !
 I am haunted by the shadow of hidden things !
 Ah children, will ye thus, through many a year
 Living, still reach him loving arms ? Ah me,
 How swift to weep am I, how full of fear !
 Feuds with your father ended—ah, so late !—
 Have filled with tears these soft-relenting eyes.

900

Chor. And from mine eyes start tears of pale dismay.
 Ah may no evil worse than this befall !

Jas. Lady, I praise this mood, yet blame not that :
 'Tis nothing strange that womankind should rage
 When the spouse trafficketh in alien marriage.
 But now to better thoughts thine heart hath turned,
 And thou, though late, upon the victor side
 Hast voted : a wise woman's deed is this.
 And for you, children, not unheedfully
 Your sire hath ta'en much forethought, so help heaven.
 For ye, I ween, in this Corinthian land
 Shall with your brethren stand the foremost yet.
 Grow ye in strength : the rest shall by your sire,
 And whatso God is gracious, be wrought out.
 You may I see to goodly stature grown,
 In manhood's prime, triumphant o'er my foes.
 Thou, why bedew'st thou with wan tears thine eyes,
 Turning aback from them thy pallid cheek,
 And dost not hear with gladness this my speech ?

910

920

Med. 'Tis nought : but o'er these children broods mine heart.

Jas. Fear not : all will I order well for them.

Med. This will I :—'Tis not I mistrust thy words ;
 But woman is but woman—born for tears.

Jas. Why, hapless one, dost make moan over these ?

Med. I bare them. When thou prayedst life for them,
 Pity stole o'er me, whispering, ' Shall this be ? '
 But that for which thou cam'st to speech of me
 In part is said ; to speak the rest is mine :—¹
 Since the king pleaseth forth the land to send me,
 For me too this is best,—I know it well,—
 That I bide not, a stumblingblock to thee

930

¹ Verrall here says ' There is no apparent reason for the emphatic pronoun ' (ἐγώ). Is it not that the object of the interview was twofold, first, to ask Jason's pardon,—that had now been spoken to him,—secondly, to introduce a proposal of her own, involving independent action on her part ?

And the land's lords, whose house's foe I seem,
So fare I forth to exile from this land.

But, that my sons by thine hand may be reared,
Entreat thou Kreon that they be not banished.

940

Jas. Prevail I may not, yet must I essay.

Med. Nay then, thy bride bid thou to pray her sire
That thy sons be not banished from this land.

Jas. Yea surely; and, I trow, her shall I win,
If of her sister women she is one.

Med. I too will bear a part in thine endeavour;
For I will send her gifts unmatched for beauty
Of all that men see now, I know, by far,
A robe fine-spun, a golden diadem;
Our sons to bear them. Now must an attendant
With all speed hither bring the ornaments. 950
Blessings shall hers be, not one, but untold,
Who winneth thee for lord, a peerless spouse,
Who owneth ornaments which once the Sun,
My father's father, gave unto his offspring!
Take in your hands, my sons, these bridal gifts,
And to the happy princess-bride bear ye
And give: with gifts shall she be satisfied.

Jas. But, fond one, why make void thine hands of these?
Deem'st thou a royal house hath lack of robes, 960
Or gold, deem'st thou? Keep these and give them
not.

For, if my wife esteems me aught, my wish
Will she prefer to treasures, well I wot.

Med. Nay, speak not so: gifts sway the Gods, they say.
Gold weigheth more with men than words untold.
Hers fortune is; God favoureth now her cause;
Young is her power. Life would I give for ransom
Of my sons' banishment, not gold alone.
Now, children, enter ye the halls of wealth.
Unto your sire's new wife, my lady-queen, 970
Make supplication, pray ye be not exiled,
Giving mine ornaments. Most importeth this,
That she into her hands receive my gifts.
Haste ye, and to your mother bring glad tidings
Of good success in that she longs to win.

[*Exeunt* JASON and CHILDREN.

(*Str.* 1)

Chor. Now for the life of the children mine hope hath been
turned to despairing.

No hope any more! On the slaughterward path even now
are they faring!

The bride shall receive it, the diadem-garland that beareth
enfolden

Doom for the hapless mid glittering sheen :
And to set the adorning of Hades about her tresses golden 980
She shall take it her hands between.

(*Ant.* 1)

For its glamour of beauty, its splendour unearthly, shall
swiftly persuade her

To bedeck her with robe and with gold-wrought crown : she
shall soon have arrayed her

In attire as a bride in the presence of phantoms from Hades
uprisen ;

In such dread gin shall her feet be ta'en :
In the weird of death shall the hapless be whelmed, and from
Doom's dark prison

Shall she steal forth never again.

(*Str.* 2)

And thou, wretch, bridegroom accurst, who art fain of a
princely alliance, 990

Blasting thou bringest—unknowing, unthinking!—
Of life on thy sons, and thy bride shall to foul death plight her
affiance.

How far from thy fortune of old art thou sinking!

(*Ant.* 2)

And amidst my lamentings I mourn for thine anguish, O
hapless mother

Of children, who makest thee ready to slaughter
Thy babes, to avenge thee on him who would lawlessly wed
with another, 1000

Would forsake thee to dwell with a prince's daughter.

Enter CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN, *with* CHILDREN.

Ch. G. Mistress, remission for thy sons of exile!

Thy gift the princess-bride with joy received

In hand ; and there is peace unto thy sons.

Med. Alas!

Ch. G. Why dost thou stand confounded mid good hap?

Now wherefore turnest thou thy face away,

And dost not hear with gladness this my speech?

Med. Woe's me!

Ch. G. This cry is to the tidings not attuned.

Med. Woe yet again!

Ch. G. Can I have brought ill hap

Unwitting—erred in deeming these glad tidings? 1010

Med. As they are, are thy tidings: thee I blame not.

Ch. G. Why down-drooped is thine eye? Why flow thy tears?

Med. Needs must they, ancient; for these things the Gods

And I withal—O fool!—have ill contrived.

Ch. G. Fear not: thy children yet shall bring thee home.

Med. Others ere then shall wretched I send home.

Ch. G. Not thou alone art severed from thy sons.

Submissively must mortals bear mischance.

Med. This will I: but within the house go thou,

And for my children's daily needs prepare. 1020

[Exit CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.]

O children, children, yours a city is,

And yours a home, where, leaving wretched me,

Dwell shall ye, of your mother aye bereft.

I shall go exiled to another land,

Ere I have joyed in you, have seen your bliss,

Ere I have decked for you the couch, the bride,

The bridal bower, and held the torch on high.

O me accurst in this my ruthless mood!

For nought, for nought, my babes, I nurtured you,

And all for nought I laboured, travail-worn, 1030

Bearing sharp anguish in your hour of birth.

Ah for the hopes—unhappy!—all mine hopes

Of ministering hands about mine age,

Of dying folded round with loving arms,

All men's desire! But now—'tis past—'tis past,

That sweet imagining! Forlorn of you

A bitter life and woeful shall I waste.

Your mother never more with loving eyes

Shall ye behold, passed to another life.

Woe! woe! why gaze your eyes on me, my darlings? 1040

Why smile to me the latest smile of all?

Alas! what shall I do?—Mine heart is failing

As I behold my children's laughing eyes!

Women, I cannot! farewell, purposes

O'erpast! I take my children from the land.

What need to wring the father's heart with ills

Of these, to gain myself ills twice so many?

Not I, not I!—Ye purposes, farewell!

Yet—yet—what ails me? Would I earn derision,

Letting my foes slip from mine hand unpunished? 1050

I must dare this. Out on my coward mood
That from mine heart let loose relenting words!
Children, pass ye within.

[*Exeunt* CHILDREN.]

Now, whoso may not

Sinless be present at my sacrifice,
On his head be it: mine hand faltereth not.
Oh! oh!
O heart, mine heart, do not—do not this deed!
Let them be, wretched heart, spare thou thy babes!
There dwelling with me shall they gladden thee.—
No!—by the nether fiends that dwell with Hades,
Never shall this betide, that I will leave
My children for my foes to trample on.
They needs must die. And, since it needs must be,
Even I will slay them, I, who gave them life.
All this is utter doom:—she shall not 'scape!
Yea, on her head the wreath is; in my robes
The princess-bride is perishing—I know it.
But—for I fare on journey most unhappy,
And shall speed these on yet happier—
I would speak to my sons.

1060

Re-enter CHILDREN.

Give, O my babes,

Give to your mother the right hand to kiss.
O dearest hand, O lips most dear to me,
O form and noble feature of my children,
Blessing be on you—*there!*—for all things here
Your sire hath reft. O sweet, O sweet embrace!
O children's roseleaf skin, O balmy breath!
Away, away! Strength faileth me to gaze
On you, but I am overcome of evil.

1070

[*Exeunt* CHILDREN.]

Now, now, I learn what horrors I intend:
But passion overmastereth sober thought:
And this is cause of direst ills to men.

1080

I

Chor. Full oft ere this my soul hath scaled
Lone heights of thought, empyreal steeps,
Or plunged far down the darkling deeps,
Where woman's feebler heart hath failed.

Yet wherefore failed? Should woman find
 No inspiration thrill her breast,
 Nor welcome ever that sweet guest
 Of Song, that uttereth Wisdom's mind?

Alas! not all! Few, few are they,—
 Perchance amid a thousand one
 Thou shouldest find,—for whom the sun
 Of poesy makes an inner day.

II

Now this I say—calm bliss, that ne'er
 Knew love's wild fever of the blood,
 The pains, the joys, of motherhood,
 Passeth all parents' joy-blent care. 1090

The childless, they that never prove
 If sunshine comes, or cloud, to men
 With babes, far lie beyond their ken
 The toils, the griefs, of parent-love.

But they whose halls with laughter sweet
 Of children ring—I mark them aye
 Care-fretted, travailing alway 1100
 To win their loved ones nurture meet.

III

One toils with love more strong than death:
 Yet—yet—who knoweth whether he
 A wise man or a fool shall be
 To whom he shall his wealth bequeath?

But last, but worst, remains to tell:
 For though ye get you wealth enow,
 And though your sons to manhood grow,
 Fair sons and good:—if Death the fell,

To Hades vanishing, bears down 1110
 · Your children's lives, what profit is
 That Heaven hath laid, with all else, this
 Upon mankind, this sorrow's crown?

Med. Friends, long have I, abiding fortune's hap,
 Expected what from yonder shall befall.

And lo, a man I see of Jason's train
 Hitherward coming, and my eager heart
 Foretelleth him the herald of new ills.

1120

Enter MESSENGER.

Mes. O thou who hast wrought an awful deed and lawless,
 Flee, O Medea, flee, nor once leave thou
 The sea-wain, or the car that scours the plain.

Med. Now what hath happed that calleth for such flight?

Mes. Dead is the princess even now, and dead
 Kreon her father, by thy poison-drugs.

Med. A glorious tale thou tellest: thou henceforth
 Art of my benefactors and my friends.

Mes. What say'st?—Of sound mind art thou, and not mad,
 Who, hearing of the havoc of the hearth
 Of kings, art glad, and hast no fear for this?

1130

Med. O yea; I too with words of controversy
 Could answer thee:—yet be not hasty, friend,
 But tell how died they: thou shouldst gladden me
 Doubly, if these most horribly have perished.

Mes. When, with their father, came thy children twain,
 And passed into the halls for marriage decked,
 Glad were we thralls who sorrowed for thy woes.
 And straightway buzzed from ear to ear the tale
 Of truce to old feuds 'twixt thy lord and thee.

1140

The hand one kisseth, one the golden head
 Of those thy sons: myself by joy on-drawn
 Followed thy children to the women's bowers.
 Now she which had our worship in thy stead,
 Ere she beheld thy chariot-yoke of sons,
 Aye upon Jason turned her yearning gaze.
 But then her veil before her eyes she cast,
 And swept aback the scorn of her white neck,
 Loathing thy sons' approach: but now thy lord,
 To turn the maiden's wrath and spite aside,
 Thus spake: 'Nay, be not hostile to thy friends:
 Cease from thine anger, turn thine head again,
 Accounting friends whomso thy spouse accounts.
 Their gifts receive, and plead thou with thy sire
 To pardon these their exile:—for my sake.'
 She, when she saw the attire, could not refrain,
 But yielded her lord all. And ere their father

1150

Far from her bower with those thy sons had gone,
 She took the rich-wrought robes and clad herself,
 Circling her ringlets with the golden crown, 1160
 And by a shining mirror ranged her tresses,
 Smiling at her own phantom image there.
 Then, rising from her seat, she paced adown
 The halls with mincing tread of ivory feet,
 Exulting in the gifts, and oftentimes
 Sweeping her glance from neck to ankle-hem.
 But then was there a fearful sight to see.
 Suddenly changed her colour : reeling back
 With trembling limbs she goes ; and scarce in time
 Drops on the couch to fall not on the ground. 1170
 Then a grey handmaid, deeming peradventure
 That frenzy was of Pan or some God sent,
 Raised the prayer-cry, before she saw the foam
 White-frothing from her lips, or marked how rolled
 Her eyeballs, and her face's bloodless hue.
 Then a scream, unaccordant, long and loud,
 She shrilled forth. Straight to her father's chambers one
 Darted, and one unto her new-made spouse,
 To tell the bride's mischance : and all the roof
 Echoed with multitudinous-hurrying feet. 1180
 And a swift athlete's straining limbs had won
 By this the goal of the six-plethra course :
 Then she from trance all speechless of closed eyes
 Awoke—ah wretch !—with horrible-shrilling shriek :
 For like two charging hosts her agony came :—
 The golden coil about her head that lay
 'Gan spurt a marvellous stream of ravening fire ;
 While the fine robes, the gift thy children brought,
 Devoured the white flesh of the unhappy one. 1190
 Upstarting from her seat she flees, all flame,
 Shaking her hair, her head, this way and that,
 To cast from her the crown ; but firmly fixed
 The gold held fast its clasp : the fire, whene'er
 She shook her locks, with doubled fury blazed.
 Then misery-vanquished falls she on the floor,
 Past recognising, save for a father, marred.
 No more was seen her eyes' imperial calm,
 No more her comely features ; but the gore
 Dripped from her head's crown flecked with blended fire.
 The flesh-flakes from her bones, like the pine's tears, [1200
 'Neath that mysterious drug's devourings melted,—

Dread sight!—and came on all folk fear to touch
 The corpse: her hideous fate had we for warning.
 But, ignorant of all, her wretched sire,
 Suddenly entering, falls upon her corpse,
 And straightway wailed and clasped the body round,
 And kissed it, crying, ‘O my hapless child,
 What God thus horribly hath thee destroyed?
 Who maketh this old sepulchre bereft
 Of thee? Ah me, would I might die with thee!’ 1210
 But, when from wailing and from moans he ceased,
 Fain would he have upraised his aged frame,
 Yet clave, as ivy clings to laurel boughs,
 To those fine robes: then was a ghastly wrestling:
 For, while he laboured to upraise his knee,
 She strained against him: if by force he haled,
 Then from the bones he tare his agèd flesh.
 At last refrained he, and gave up the ghost,
 Ill-starred, who could no more withstand his bane.
 There lie the corpses, child by agèd sire 1220
 Clasped;—such affliction tears, not words, must mourn.
 And of thy part no word be said by me:—
 Thyself from punishment wilt find escape.
 But man’s lot now, as oft, I count a shadow,
 Nor fear to say that such as seem to be
 Wise among men and cunning in speech-lore,
 Even these are chargeable with deepest folly;
 For among mortals happy man is none.
 In fortune’s flood-tide might a man become
 More prosperous than his neighbour: happy?—no! 1230

[Exit.]

Chor. Meseems the God with many an ill this day
 Will compass Jason,—yea, and rightfully.
 But O the pity of thy calamity,
 Daughter of Kreon, who to Hades’ halls
 Hast passed, because with thee would Jason wed!

Med. Friends, my resolve is taken, with all speed
 To slay my children, and to flee this land,
 And not to linger and to yield my sons
 To death by other hands more merciless.
 They needs must die: and, since it needs must be, 1240
 Even I will give them death, who gave them life.
 Up, gird thee for the fray, mine heart! Why loiter
 To do the dread ill deeds that must be done?
 Come, wretched hand of mine, grasp thou the sword;

Grasp it ;—move toward life's bitter starting-post,
 And turn not craven : think not on thy babes,
 How dear they are, how thou didst bear them : nay,
 For this short day do thou forget thy sons,
 Thereafter mourn them. For, although thou slay,
 Yet dear they are, and I a wretched woman.

1250

[Exit MEDEA.
 (Str.)

Chor. O Earth, O all-revealing splendour
 Of the Sun, look down on a woman accurst,
 Or ever she slake the murder-thirst
 Of a mother whose hands would smite the tender
 Fruit of her womb.

Look down, for she sprang of thy lineage golden,
 And by terror of men is the Gods' seed holden¹
 And the shadow of doom.

But thou, O heaven-begotten glory,
 Restrain her, refrain her : the wretched, the gory
 Erinnys by demons dogged, we implore thee,
 Cast forth of the home !

1260

(Ant.)

For nought was the childbirth-travail wasted ;
 For nought didst thou bear them, the near and the dear,
 O thou who hast fled through the Pass of Fear,
 From the dark-blue Clashing Crags who hast hasted
 Speeding thy flight !

Alas for her !—wherefore hath grim wrath stirred her
 Through depths of her soul, that ruthless murder
 Her wrongs must requite ?

For stern upon mortals the vengeance falleth
 For kin's blood spilt ; from the earth it calleth,
 A voice from the Gods, and the slayers appalleth
 On whose homes it shall light.

1270

[CHILDREN'S cries behind the scenes.]

Ch. 1. What shall I do?—How flee my mother's hands !

Ch. 2. I know not, dearest brother. Death is here !

Chor. Ah the cry !—dost thou hear it ?—the children's cry !
 Wretch !—woman of cursèd destiny !

Shall I enter ?—My heart crieth, 'Rescue the children from
 murder drawn nigh !'

Ch. 1. Yea, for the Gods' sake, help ! Sore is our need——

Ch. 2. For now we are hemmed in by the sword's death-toils ! ;

¹ Conjecturing πίτνει for MSS. πίτνειν.

Chor. Wretch! of what rock is thy breast?—of what steel is
the heart of thee moulded,
That the babes thou hast born, with the selfsame hands that
with love have enfolded 1280

These, thou hast set thee to slay?
Of one have I heard that laid hands on her loved ones of old,
one only,
Even Ino distraught of the Gods, when Zeus' bride drave her,
lonely

And lost, from her home to stray:
And she fell—ah wretch!—on the brink as she stood
Of the sea-scaur: guilt of her children's blood
Dragged downwards her feet to the salt sea-flood,

And she died with her children twain.
What ghastlier horror remains to be wrought?
O bride-bed of women, with anguish fraught, 1290
What scathe upon mortals ere now hast thou brought,
What manifold bane!

Enter JASON.

Jas. Women, which stand anear unto this roof—
Is she within the halls, she who hath wrought
Dread deeds, Medea, or in flight passed thence?
For either must she hide her 'neath the earth,
Or lift on wings her frame to heaven's far depths,
Or taste the vengeance of a royal house.
How, trusts she, having murdered the land's lords,
Scatheless herself from these halls forth to flee? 1300
Yet not for her care I, but for my sons.
Whom she hath wronged shall recompense her wrong:
But I to save my children's life am come,
Lest to my grief the kinsmen of the dead
Avenge on them their mother's impious murder.

Chor. Wretch, thou know'st not what depth of woe thou hast
reached,

Jason, or thou hadst uttered not such words.

Jas. What now?—and is she fain to slay me too?

Chor. Thy sons are dead, slain by the mother's hand.

Jas. Ah me!—what say'st thou?—thou hast killed me, woman!

Chor. Thy children are no more: so think of them. [1310

Jas. How?—slew them?—Where?—within, without, the
halls?

Chor. Open, and thou shalt see thy children's corpses.

Jas. Shoot back the bolts with all speed, serving-men!
 Unbar, that I may see this twofold woe,—
 The dead, and her, with slaughter to requite her.

MEDEA appears in mid air in a chariot drawn by dragons.

Med. Why shakest thou these doors and wouldst unbar,
 Seeking thy dead and me who wrought the deed?
 Cease this essay. If thou wouldst aught of me,
 Say what thou wilt: thine hand shall touch me never. 1320
 Such chariot hath my father's sire, the Sun,
 Given me, a defence from foeman's hand.

Jas. O thing abhorred! O woman hatefullest
 To Gods, to me, to all the race of men,
 Thou that couldst thrust the sword into the babes
 Thou bar'st, and me hast made a childless ruin!
 Thus hast thou wrought, yet look'st thou on the sun
 And earth, who hast dared a deed most impious?
 Now ruin seize thee!—clear I see, who saw not
 Then, when from halls and land barbarian 1330
 To a Greek home I bare thee, utter bane,
 Traitress to sire and land that nurtured thee!
 Thy guilt's curse-bolt on me the Gods have launched;
 For thine own brother by his hearth thou slewest
 Ere thou didst enter fair-prowed Argo's hull.
 With such deeds thou beganest. Wedded then
 To this man, and the mother of my sons,
 For wedlock-right's sake hast thou murdered them.
 There is no Grecian woman that had dared
 This:—yet I stooped to marry thee, good sooth, 1340
 Rather than these, a hateful bride and fell,
 A tigress, not a woman, harbouring
 A fiercer nature than Tyrrhenian Scylla.
 But—for untold revilings would not sting
 Thee, in thy nature is such hardihood:—
 Avaunt, thou miscreant stained with thy babes' blood!
 For me remains to wail my destiny,
 Who of my new-wed bride shall have no joy,
 And to the sons whom I begat and nurtured
 Living I shall not speak—lost, lost to me! 1350

Med. I might have lengthened out long controversy
 To these thy words, if Father Zeus knew not
 How I have dealt with thee and thou with me.
 'Twas not for thee to set my couch at nought
 And live a life of bliss, bemocking me!

Nor for thy princess, and thy marriage-kinsman,
 Kreon, unscathed to banish me this land!
 Wherefore a tigress call me, an thou wilt,
 Or Scylla, haunter of Tyrrhenian shore;
 For thine heart have I wrung, as well behoved.

1360

Jas. Ha, but thou sorrowest too, thou shar'st mine ills!

Med. O yea: yet grief is gain, so thou laugh not.

Jas. O children mine, what miscreant mother had ye!

Med. O sons, destroyed by your own father's lust!

Jas. Sooth, 'twas no hand of mine that murdered them.

Med. Nay, but thine insolence and thy new-forged bonds.

Jas. How, claim the right for wedlock's sake to slay them!

Med. A light affliction count'st thou this to woman?

Jas. So she be wise:—in thy sight nought were good.

Med. These live no more: this, this shall cut thine heart!

Jas. They live—ah me!—avengers on thine head.

[1370

Med. The Gods know who began this misery.

Jas. Yea, verily, thy spirit abhorred they know.

Med. Abhorred art thou: I loathe thy bitter tongue.

Jas. And I thine:—yet were mutual riddance easy.

Med. How then?—what shall I do?—fain would I this.

Jas. Yield me my dead to bury and bewail.

Med. Never: with this hand will I bury them,

To Mountain Hêrê's precinct bearing them,

That never foe may do despite to them,

Rifling their tomb. This land of Sisyphus

Will I constrain with solemn festival

And rites to atone for this unhallowed murder.

But I—I go unto Erechtheus' land,

With Aigeus to abide, Pandion's son.

Thou, as is meet, foul wretch, shalt foully die,

By Argo's wreckage smitten on the skull,

Now thou hast seen this bridal's bitter ending.

1380

Jas. Now the Fury-avenger of children smite thee,

And Justice that looketh on murder requite thee!

1390

Med. What God or what spirit will heed thy request,

Caitiff forsworn, who betrayest the guest?

Jas. Avaunt, foul thing by whose deed thy children have died!

Med. Go hence to thine halls, thence lead to the grave thy
 bride!

Jas. I go, a father forlorn of the two sons reft from his home!

Med. Not yet dost thou truly mourn: abide till thine old age
 come.

Jas. O children beloved above all!

Med. Of their mother beloved, not of thee.

Jas. Yet she slew them!

Med. That thou mightest fall in the net that thou spreadest
for me.

Jas. Woe's me! I yearn with my lips to press
My sons' dear lips in my wretchedness.

1400

Med. Ha, now art thou calling upon them, now wouldst thou
kiss,

Who rejectedst them then?

Jas. For the Gods' sake grant me but this,
The sweet soft flesh of my children to feel!

Med. No—wasted in air is all thine appeal.

Jas. O Zeus, dost thou hear it, how spurned I am?—

What outrage I suffer of yonder abhorred

Child-murderess, yonder tigress-dam?

Yet out of mine helplessness, out of my shame,

I bewail my beloved, I call to record

High heaven, I bid God witness the word,

1410

That my sons thou hast slain, and withholdest me

That mine hands may not touch them, nor bury their clay!

Would God I had gotten them never, this day

To behold them destroyed of thee!

Chor. All dooms be of Zeus in Olympus; 'tis his to reveal
them.

Manifold things un hoped-for the Gods to accomplishment
bring.

And the things that we looked for, the Gods deign not to fulfil
them;

And the paths undiscerned of our eyes, the Gods unseal them.

So fell this marvellous thing.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]



HIPPOLYTUS

ARGUMENT

HIPPOLYTA, *Queen of the Amazons, bore to Theseus, king of Athens and Troezen, a son whom he named from her, Hippolytus. Now this youth grew up of all men most pure in heart, reverencing chiefly Artemis the Maiden, Goddess of the chase, and utterly contemning the worship of Aphroditè. Wherefore the wrath of the Queen of Love was kindled against him, and she made Phædra, his father's young wife, mad with love for him; and although she wrestled with her malady, and strove to hide it in her heart, till by the fever of it she was brought nigh to death's door, yet in the end it was revealed, and was made destruction to her and to Hippolytus also.*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

APHRODITÊ (or KYPRIS), *the Queen of Love*

HIPPOLYTUS, *son of Theseus and Hippolyta Queen of the Amazons*

PHAEDRA, *daughter of Minos king of Crete, and wife of Theseus*

NURSE OF PHAEDRA

THESEUS, *king of Athens and Troezen*

ARTEMIS, *Goddess of Hunting*

SERVANT OF HIPPOLYTUS

MESSENGER, *henchman of Hippolytus*

CHORUS, *composed of women of Troezen*

Attendants, huntsmen, and handmaids.

SCENE :—Before the palace of Theseus at Troezen, where Theseus dwelt, being self-exiled for a year from Athens, to expiate the shedding of the blood of kinsmen who had sought to dethrone him.

HIPPOLYTUS

Enter APHRODITÊ.

Aph. Mighty on earth, and named by many a name
Am I, the Goddess Kypris, as in heaven.
And of all dwellers 'twixt the Pontic Sea
And Atlas' bourn, which look on the sun's light,
I honour them which reverence my power,
But bring the proud hearts that defy me low.
For even to the Gods this appertains,
That in the homage of mankind they joy.
And I will give swift proof of these my words. 10
For Theseus' son, born of the Amazon,
Hippolytus, pure-hearted Pittheus' ward,
Sole mid the folk of this Troezenian land
Sayeth that vilest of the Gods am I ;
Rejects the couch ; of marriage will he none ;
But Phoebus' sister Artemis, Zeus' child,
Honours, of all Gods chiefest holding her :
And through the greenwood in the Maid's train still
With swift hounds sweeps the wild beasts from the earth,
Linked with companionship for men too high.
Yet this I grudge not : what is this to me ? 20
But that his wrong to me will I avenge
Upon Hippolytus this day : the path
Well-nigh is cleared ; scant pains it needeth yet.
For, as from halls of Pittheus once he sought
Pandion's land, to see and to be sealed
In the Great Mysteries, Phaedra, high-born wife
Of his own father, saw him ; and her heart
Of fierce love was enthralled by my device.
And, ere she came to this Troezenian land,
Hard by the Rock of Pallas, which looks down 30
On this land, built she unto me a shrine
For love of one afar ; and his memorial
That fane divine she named for days to be.
But since from Kekrops' land forth Theseus passed
Fleeing the blood-guilt of the sons of Pallas,
And unto this shore with his wife hath sailed,

From his land brooking one year's banishment,
Thenceforward, sighing and by stings of love
Distraught, the hapless one wastes down to death
Silent : her malady no handmaid knows.

40

Ah, but not so shall this love's issue fall.
Theseus shall know this thing ; all bared shall be :
And him that is my foe his sire shall slay
By curses, whose fulfilment the Sea-king
Poseidon in this boon to Theseus gave,
That, to three prayers, he should ask nought in vain.
She, how high-born soe'er, yet perisheth,
Phaedra :—I will not so regard her pain
That I should not exact such penalty
Of them which hate me as shall do me right.
But,—forasmuch as Theseus' son I see
Yonder draw near, forsaking hunting's toil,
Hippolytus,—forth will I from this place.
And a great press of henchmen following shout,
Honouring with songs the Goddess Artemis.
He knows not Hades' gates wide flung for him,
And this day's light the last his eyes shall see.

50

[Exit.

Enter HIPPOLYTUS and ATTENDANT HUNTSMEN.

Hipp. Follow on, follow on, ring out the lay
Unto Artemis high enthroned in the sky
Zeus' child, in her keeping who hath us aye.

60

Chor. of Huntsmen. O Majesty, Daughter of Zeus, dread
Queen,

I hail thee, Artemis, now,
O Leto's Daughter, O Zeus's child,
Loveliest far of the Undeiled !
In the Hall, ' of the Mighty Father ' styled,
The palace of Zeus, mid the glory-sheen
Of gold—there dwellest thou.

O Fairest, to theeward in greeting I call,
O fairest Artemis thou of all
The Maidens Divine in Olympus' hall !

70

Hipp. For thee this woven garland from a mead
Unsullied have I twined, O Queen, and bring.
There never shepherd dares to feed his flock,
Nor steel of sickle came : only the bee
Roveth the springtide mead undesecrate :

And Reverence watereth it with river-dews.
 They which have heritage of self-control
 In all things,—not taught, but the pure in heart,—
 These there may gather flowers, but none impure.
 Now Queen, dear Queen, receive this anadem
 From reverent hand to deck thy golden hair ;
 For to me sole of men this grace is given,
 That I be with thee, converse hold with thee.
 Hearing thy voice, yet seeing not thy face.
 And may I end life's race as I began.

80

Ser. Prince,—for the Gods we needs must call our Lords,—
 Wouldst thou receive of me good counselling ?

Hipp. Yea surely : else were I fool manifest.

90

Ser. Knowest thou then the stablished wont of men ?

Hipp. Not I : whereof is this thou questionest me ?

Ser. To hate the proud reserve that owns few friends.

Hipp. Rightly : what proud man is not odious ?

Ser. And in the gracious is there nought of charm ?

Hipp. Yea, much, and profit won with little pains.

Ser. And deem'st thou not this same may hold with Gods ?

Hipp. Yea, if men live by laws derived from Gods.

Ser. Why not then greet a Goddess worshipful ?

Hipp. Whom ?—have a care thy lips in no wise err.¹

100

Ser. Even Kypris, there above thy portals set.

Hipp. From far I greet her, who am undefiled.

Ser. Worshipful is she, glorious among men.

Hipp. Of Gods, of men, each maketh still his choice.

Ser. Now prosper thou ;—be needful wisdom thine !

Hipp. No God who hath night-homage pleaseth me.

Ser. Guerdons of Gods, my son, ought men to use.

Hipp. Depart, mine henchmen, enter ye the halls,

And set on bread. The full board welcome is

When hunting's done. And one must groom my steeds, 110

That I may yoke them to the chariot-pole,

Being full of meat, and breathe them in the race.

But to thy Kypris wave I long farewell.

[Exit.

Ser. But we, who must not tread in steps of youth,
 Who are wise²—so far as thralls dare claim to be,—
 Make supplication to thine images,
 Queen Kypris. It beseems thee to forgive,
 If one that bears through youth a vehement heart

¹ 'The Worshipful Goddesses' was the peculiar title of the Eumenides, whom it was ill-omened to name.

² φρονούντες sc. εὖ.

Speak folly. Be as though thou heardest not;
For wiser Gods should be than mortal men.

120
[Exit.

town by Athens
Enter CHORUS of TROEZENIAN LADIES.

(Str. 1)

background to address illness
visions of typhoid fever
Chor. A rock there is, wherefrom, as they tell, the springs of
the heart of the Ocean well,

Whence the rifts of the crags overbeetling send

For the plunging urns their founts outstreaming:

Even there did I light on a maiden my friend,

As she drenched the mantles purple-gleaming

In the riverward-glittering spray,

And spread the dye of the Tyrian shell on the rocks where
glowing the sunbeams fell.

Hers were the lips that I first heard say

How wasteth our lady away:

130

(Ant. 1)

For a tale they told of a fevered bed, of the feet that forth of
her bower ne'er tread,

Of the dainty-woven veil that is cast

For a darkness over the tresses golden.

Yea, and by this hath the third day past

That the queen from her fainting lips hath withholden

The gift of the Lady of Corn,

Keeping her body thereof unfed, as though 'twere pollution
to taste of bread,

With anguish unuttered longing forlorn

One haven to win—death's bourn.

140

(Str. 2)

O queen, what if this be possession

Of Pan or of Hekatê?—

Of the Mother of Dindymus' Hill?—

Or the awful Corybant thrill?—

Or Dictynna hath found transgression

Of offerings unrendered in thee—

If the hand of the Huntress be here?—

For she flasheth o'er mountain and mere,

And rideth her triumph-procession

Over surges and swirls of the sea.

150

(Ant. 2)

Or thy princely lord, in whose leading

Be the hosts of Erechtheus' race,

Hath one in his halls beguiled,
 That thy couch is in secret defiled ?
 Or hath some sea-trafficker, speeding
 From Crete over watery ways
 To the haven where shipmen would be,
 Brought dolorous tidings to thee
 That hath bowed thee with anguish exceeding
 On thy bed through thy soul's prison-days ? 160
(*Epode*)

Or shall this be the discord mournful, weirdly haunting,
 That ofttimes jarreth and jangleth the strings of woman's
 being ?

'Tis the shadow of travail-throes nigh, a delirium spirit-
 daunting :

Yea, I have known it, through mine own bosom have felt it
 shiver :

But I cried to the Queen of the Bow, to the Helper in travail-
 throe for refuge fleeing ;

And by grace of the Gods she hearkeneth ever my fervent
 request, she is there to deliver. 170

But lo, through the doors where cometh the grey-haired
 nurse

Leading the stricken one forth of her bowers :

On her brows aye darker the care-cloud lowers.

My spirit is yearning to know what is this strange curse,
 Wherefore the queen's cheek ever is paling,
 And her strength is failing.

Enter PHAEDRA, NURSE, and HANDMAIDS.

Nur. O afflictions of mortals, O bitter pain !

What shall I do unto thee, or refrain ?

Lo here is the light of the sun, the sky :

Brought forth of the halls is thy bed ; hereby 180

Thy cushions lie.

Hitherward wouldst thou come ; it was all thy moan :

Yet aback to thy bowers wilt thou fret to be gone.

Thou art soon disappointed, hast pleasure in nought,

Nor the present contents thee ; a thing far-sought

Thy fancy hath caught.

*Nothing
 in a
 a view -
 don't try to
 be perfect,
 moderate*

Better be sick than tend the sick :
 Here is but one pain ; grief of mind
 And toil of hands be there combined.
 O'er all man's life woes gather thick ;

190

Ne'er from its travail respite is.
 If better life beyond be found,
 The darkness veils, clouds wrap it round ;
 Therefore infatuate-fond to this

We cling—this earth's poor sunshine-gleam :
 Nought know we of the life to come,
 There speak no voices from the tomb :
 We drift on fable's shadowy stream.

Phaed. Uplift ye my body, mine head upraise.
 Friends, faint be my limbs, and unknit be their bands.
 Hold, maidens, my rounded arms and mine hands.
 Ah, the coif on mine head all heavily weighs :
 Take it thence till mine hair o'er my shoulders strays !

200

Nur. Take heart, my child, nor in such wild wise
 Toss thou thy body so feveredly.
 Lighter thy sickness to bear shall be,
 If thine high-born courage in calm strength rise :
 For the doom of sorrow on all men lies.

Phaed. O but to quaff, where the spray-veil drifteth
 O'er taintless fountains, the dear cool stream !
 Oh to lie in the mead where the soft wind lifteth
 Its tresses—'neath poplars to lie and dream !

210

Nur. My child, my child, what is this thou hast cried ?
 Ah, speak not thus, with a throng at thy side,
 Wild words that on wings of madness ride !

Phaed. Let me hence to the mountain afar—I will hie me
 To the forest, the pines where the stag-hounds follow
 Hard after the fleet dappled hinds as they fly me !
 Oh, I long to cheer them with hunter's hollo,—
 Ah God, were I there !—

And to grasp the Thessalian shaft steel-gleaming,
 And to swing it on high by my hair outstreaming—
 My golden hair !

220

Nur. What wouldst thou, my darling, of suchlike things ?
 Will nought save the hunt and the hounds content ?
 And why art thou yearning for fountain-springs ?
 Lo, nigh to thy towers is a soft-sloped bent
 With streams for thy drinking dew-besprent.

Phaed. Lady of Limnê, the burg looking seaward,
Of the thunder of hoofs on the wide race-courses,
Oh for the plains where the altars to theeward 230
Flame, there to be curbing the Henetan horses !

Nur. What speech in thy frenzy outflingest thou ?
The mountain-ward path then fain hadst thou taken
On the track of the beasts ; and thou yearnest now
For the steeds on the sea-sands wave-forsaken !
Of a surety the lore of a seer we lack
To tell what God, child, reineth thee back,
And scourgeth thy spirit from reason's track.

Phaed. O hapless I—what is this I have done ?
Whitherward have I wandered from wisdom's way ? 240
I was mad, by a God's curse overthrown.
Oh ill-starred—welladay !

Dear Nurse, veil over mine head once more ;
For I blush for the words from my lips that came.
Veil me : the tears from mine eyes down pour,
And mine eyelids sink for shame.

For anguish wakes when re-dawneth the mind.
Though a curse be madness, herein is it kind,
That the soul that it ruins it striketh blind.

Nur. I veil thee :—ah that death would veil 250
Me too !—with many a lesson stern
The years have brought, this too I learn—
Be links of mortal friendship frail :

Let heart-strings ne'er together cling,
Nor be indissolubly twined
The cords of love, but lightly joined
For knitting close or severing.

Ah weary burden, where one soul
Travails for twain, as mine for thee ! 260
Ruin, not bliss, say they, shall be
Care's life-absorbing heart-control.

Yea, that way sickness, madness, lies.
Therefore ' the overmuch ' shall be
Less than ' the nought-too-much ' for me :
So say I ; so shall say the wise.

Chor. Thou grey-haired dame, queen Phaedra's loyal nurse,
In sooth I mark her lamentable plight,
Yet what her malady, to us is dark.
Fain would we question thee and hear thereof. 270

Nur. I know not, thou I ask: she will not tell.

Chor. Nor what was the beginning of these woes?

Nur. The same thy goal: nought sayeth she of all.

Chor. How strengthless and how wasted is her frame!

Nur. No marvel, being three days foodless now.

Chor. Madness is this, or set resolve to die?

Nur. To die: she fasteth to make end of life.

Chor. Strange is thy tale, if this content her lord.

Nur. Nay, but she hides her pain, nor owns she ails.

Chor. Should he not guess?—one glance upon her face? 280

Nur. Nay, absent is he from this land of late.

Chor. But thou—dost not constrain her, strive to learn
Her malady and wandering of her wit?

Nur. All have I tried, and nought the more availed.

Yet will I not even now abate my zeal:

So stand thou by and witness unto me

How true am I to mine afflicted lords.

Come, darling child, the words said heretofore

Forget we both; more gracious-souled be thou:

Thy lowering brow, thy wayward mood, put by. 290

And I, wherein I erred in following thee,

Refrain, and unto wiser counsels seek.

If thy disease be that thou mayst not name,

Lo women here to allay thy malady.

But if to men thy trouble may be told,

Speak, that to leeches this may be declared.

Ha, silent?—silence, child, beseems thee not.

Or thou shouldst chide me if I speak not well,

Or unto pleadings wisely uttered yield.

One word!—look hitherward!—ah, woe is me! 300

Women, we toil and spend our strength for nought,

And still are far as ever: of my words

Unmelted was she then, nor hearkeneth now.

Howbeit know thou—then be waywarder

Than is the sea,—thy death shall but betray

Thy sons, who shall not share their father's halls.

Yea, by that chariot-queen, the Amazon,

Who bare unto thy sons a bastard lord,—

Not bastard-thoughted,—well thou knowest him,

Hippolytus—

Phaed. Woe's me!

Nur. It stings thee, this? 310

Phaed. Thou hast undone me, nurse: by heaven, I pray,
Speak thou the name of this man nevermore.

- Nur.* Lo there!—thy wit is sound: yet of thy wit
Thou wilt not help thy sons nor save thy life!
- Phaed.* I love them: in that storm of fate I toss not.
- Nur.* Sure, thine are hands, my child, unstained with blood?
- Phaed.* Pure be mine hands: the stain is on my soul.
- Nur.* Not, not of sorcery-spells by some foe cast?
- Phaed.* A friend—unwitting he, nor wilful I.
- Nur.* Hath Theseus wrought against thee any sin? 320
- Phaed.* May I be found as clear of wrong to him.
- Nur.* What then is this strange thing that deathward drives
thee?
- Phaed.* Let be my sin!—Not against thee I sin.
- Nur.* Of my will, never!—On thine head my failure!
[Clings to PHAEDRA'S hands.]
- Phaed.* Violence to me!—on mine hand hangest thou?
- Nur.* Yea, and thy knees I never will let go.
- Phaed.* Thy bane, unhappy, shouldst thou hear in mine.
- Nur.* What greater bane for me than thee to lose?
- Phaed.* Thy death:—the selfsame thing shall save mine
honour.
- Nur.* Still dost thou hide it, when I pray thy good? 330
- Phaed.* Yea, for I fashion honour out of shame.
- Nur.* If then thou tell me, more shall be thine honour.
- Phaed.* For God's sake hence away: let go mine hand.
- Nur.* No!—while thou grantest not the boon my due.
- Phaed.* I will, in reverence of thy suppliant hand.
- Nur.* I am dumb: henceforth thy part it is to speak.
- Phaed.* O hapless mother¹!—what strange love was thine!
- Nur.* Love for the bull, my child?—or what wouldst name?
- Phaed.* And thou, sad sister, Dionysus' bride!²
- Nur.* What ails thee, child?—dost thou revile thy kin? 340
- Phaed.* And I the third—how am I misery-wrecked!
- Nur.* I am 'wildered all—whereunto tend thy words?
- Phaed.* To the rock that wrecks us all, yea, from of old.
- Nur.* None the more know I that I fain would know.
- Phaed.* Ah, couldst thou say for me what I must say!
- Nur.* No seer am I to interpret hidden things.
- Phaed.* What mean they when they speak of this—to love?
- Nur.* The sweetest thing, my child—the bitterest too.
- Phaed.* For me, the second only have I proved.
- Nur.* What say'st thou?—child, dost thou love any man? 350
- Phaed.* Whate'er his name—'tis he—the Amazon's—

¹ Pasiphaë, wife of Minos King of Crete, and mother of the Minotaur.

² Ariadne.

Nur. Hippolytus!

Phaed. Thou sayest it, not I.

Nur. Woe, child! What wilt thou say? Thou hast dealt me death!

Friends, 'tis past bearing. I will not endure
To live. O hateful life, loathed light to see!
I'll cast away, yield up, my frame, be rid
Of life by death! Farewell, I am no more.
The virtuous love—not willingly, yet love
The evil. Sure no Goddess Kypris is,
But, if it may be, something more than God,
Who hath ruined her, and me, and all this house.

360

(*Str. to 669-79*)

Chor. Hast thou heard?—the unspeakable tale hast thou hearkened,

The wail of my lady's anguish-throe?
O may I die, ah me! ere I know,
Dear lady, a spirit as thine so darkened.
O misery burdened, O whelmed in woe!
O troubles that cradle the children of men!
Undone!—all's bared to the daylight's ken.

Ah, weariful season for thee remaining!

Dark looms o'er the household the shadow of doom. 370
Plain now where the star of thy love is waning,
O hapless daughter of Crete's proud home!

Phaed. Troezenian women, ye which here abide

Upon the utmost march of Pelops' land,
Oft sleepless¹ in the weary-wearing night
Have I mused how the life of men is wrecked.
And not, meseems, through evil thoughts inborn
So ill they fare,—discretion dwells at least
With many,—but we thus must look hereon:—
That which is good we learn and recognise,
Yet practise not the lesson, some from sloth,
And some preferring pleasure in the stead
Of duty. Pleasures many of life there be—
Long gossip, idlesse,—pleasant evils sooth,—
And sense of shame—twofold: no ill the one,
But one drags houses down. Were men's choice clear,
These twain had never borne the self-same names.
Forasmuch then as I knew this before,
No philtre-spell was like to change mine heart
To make me fall away from this my faith.

390

¹ Reading *ἄυπνος* (Nauck) *vice* ἄλλως, 'idly.'

Thee will I tell the path my reason trod ;—
 When love's wound smote me, straight I cast about
 How best to bear it : wherefore I began
 Thenceforth to hush my moan, to veil my pang. *(1) Silence*
 For the tongue none may trust, which knoweth well *(2) hear no more*
 To lesson rebel thoughts of other men,
 Yet harboureth countless evils of its own. *(3) like silent*
 Then did I take thought nobly to endure
 My folly, triumphing by self-control.
 Lastly, when even so I nought availed
 To o'ermaster Love's Queen, then I deemed it best
 To die : no man shall gainsay my resolve. 400
 For be it mine to do not good unseen,
 Nor ill before a cloud of witnesses.
 I knew the deed, the very pang, was shame.
 Yea, well I knew withal myself a woman,
 The all-abhorred. Foul curses upon her
 Who showed the way the first, with alien men
 To shame the couch ! Ah, 'twas from princely homes
 That first this curse on womankind had birth. 410
 For, when the noble count their shame their good,
 The lowly sure will hold it honourable.
 And O, I hate the continent-professed
 Which treasure secret recklessness of shame.
 How can they, O Queen Kypris, Sea-born One,
 Look ever in the faces of their lords,
 Nor shudder lest their dark accomplice, night,
 And their own bowers may utter forth a voice ?
 Me—friends, 'tis even this dooms me to die,
 That never I be found to shame my lord, 420
 Nor the sons whom I bare ; but free, with tongues
 Unfettered, flourish they, their home yon burg
 Of glorious Athens, blushing ne'er for me.
 For this cove man, how stout of heart soe'er,
 To know a father's or a mother's sin.
 And this alone can breast the shocks of life,
 An honest heart and good, in whomso found.
 But vile ones Time unmasketh in his hour,
 Holding his mirror up, as to a maid.
 With such consorting ne'er may I be seen. 430
Chor. Lo now, how fair is virtue everywhere,
 Which yieldeth fruit of good repute mid men !
Nur. Mistress, thy mischance, suddenly revealed
 But now, wrought in me terrible dismay.

Represents not idealism but practicality

Yet I discern my folly now. 'Tis strange
 How second thoughts for men are wisest still.
 Thine is the common lot, not past cool weighing :
 The Goddess's passion-bolts have smitten thee.
 Thou lov'st—what marvel this?—thou art as many—
 And lo, for love's sake wouldst fling life away! 440
 Sooth, 'twere small gain for them which love their fellows,
 Or yet shall love, if help be none save death.
 For Kypris crusheth, swooping in her might ;
 Yet gently stealeth she on whoso yield.
 But whom she findeth wayward, arrogant-souled,
 She graspeth, mocketh, past imagining.
 Through air she roveth, in the ocean-surge
 Is Kypris ; all things have their birth of her.
 'Tis she that sows love, gives increase thereof,
 Whereof all we that dwell on earth are sprung. 450
 Whoso have scrolls writ in the ancient days,¹
 And wander still themselves by paths of song,
 They know how Zeus of yore desired the embrace
 Of Semelê ; they know how radiant Dawn
 Up to the Gods snatched Kephalus of yore,
 And all for love ; yet these in Heaven their home
 Dwell, neither do they flee the face of Gods,
 Content, I trow, in their mischance's triumph.
 Thou—wilt not yield ? Thy sire by several treaty
 Thee should have gotten, or with other Gods 460
 For lords, if thou wilt bow not to these laws.
 How many men, think'st thou, and wise men they,
 Knowing their beds dishonoured, shut their eyes ?
 How many a father in his son's transgression
 Playeth love's go-between ?—the maxim this
 Of wise men, that dishonour be not seen.
 Why should men toil to over-perfect life ?
 Lo, even the house-roof's pitch the craftsman's rule
 Can make not utter-true. How thinkest thou,
 Plunged in fate's deep abyss, to swim thereout ? 470
 Tush—if more good than evil is in thee,
 Who art but human, thou shalt do full well.
 Nay, darling, from thy deadly thoughts refrain
 And from presumption—sheer presumption this,
 That one should wish to be more strong than Gods.
 In love, flinch not ; a God hath willed this thing.
 In pain, victorious wrestle with thy pain.

¹ Or, ' pictures of the olden time.'

Lo, charms there be, and words of soothing spell.
Some cure for this affliction shall appear.

Sooth, it were long ere *men* would light thereon, 480
Except we women find devices forth.

Chor. Phaedra, she speaketh words that more avail
For this thine imminent plight: yet thee I praise.
But haply this my praise shall gall thee more
Than those her words, and harsher sound to thee.

Phaed. This is it which doth ruin goodly towns
And homes of men, these speeches over-fair.
It needeth not to speak words sweet to ears,
But those whereby a good name shall be saved.

Nur. Out on thine high-flown talk! No speech tricked
fair 490

Thou needest! Haste we must and learn the mind
Of this man, telling all thy tale straight out.
For, were thy life not in such desperate case,
Or thou a woman strong in self-control,
Never for thy lust's sake and pleasure I
To this would bring thee: but we must fight hard
Now for thy life, and void of blame is this.

Phaed. Speaker of horrors!—wilt not seal thy lips?
Wilt not refrain from utter-shameful words?

Nur. Shameful—yet better than the good for thee. 500
Better this deed, so it but save thy life,

Than that name, whose proud vaunt shall be thy death.

Phaed. No, by the Gods!—fair words, but words of shame!—
No farther go: I have schooled mine heart to endure
This love: but if thou plead shame's cause so fair,
I shall be trapped in that sin which I flee.

Nur. If such thy mind, thine heart should not have sinned:

But now—obey me: thank me or thank me not:—
I have within some certain charms to assuage
Love: 'twas but now they came into my thought.

These, not with shame, nor hurt unto thy mind,
Shall lull thy pang, so thou be not faint-hearted.

Howbeit there needs of him thou yearnest for
Some token, or a word, or fragment caught
From vesture, so to knit two loves in one.

Phaed. A salve, or potion, is this charm of thine?

Nur. I know not: be content with help, not knowledge.

Phaed. I fear lest over-cunning thou shalt prove.

Nur. Then know thyself all fears. What darest thou?

Phaed. Lest thou show aught of this to Theseus' son. 520

a lie - she
simply
510
tells him

Nur. Let be, my child: this will I order well.
 Only do thou, Queen Kypris, Sea-born One,
 Work with me. Whatso else I have in mind
 Shall it suffice to speak to friends within.

[Exit NURSE.
 (Str. 1)]

Chor. O Eros, O Eros, how melts love's yearning
 From thine eyes, when thy sweet spell witcheth the heart
 Of them against whom thou hast marched in thy might!
 Not me, not me for mine hurt do thou smite,
 My life's heart-music to discord turning.
 For never so hotly the flame-spears dart, 530
 Nor so fleet are the star-shot arrows of light,
 As the shaft from thy fingers that speedeth its flight,
 As the flame of the Love-queen's bolts fierce-burning,
 O Eros, the child of Zeus who art!

(Ant. 1)

O vainly, O vainly by Alpheus'¹ river
 And in Phoebus's Pythian shrine hath the land
 Of Hellas the blood of her oxen outpoured.
 But Eros, but Love, who is all men's lord,
 Unto whom Aphroditê is wont to deliver
 Her keys, that the doors be unsealed by his hand
 Of her holy of holies, we have not adored,
 Though he marcheth through ruin victory-ward, 540
 Though he raineth calamity forth of his quiver
 On mortals against his on-coming that stand.

(Str. 2)

For I call to remembrance Oechalia's daughter,²
 Who, ere Love 'neath his tyrannous car-yoke had brought
 her,
 Had been spouseless and free—overseas how she hasted,
 When Kypris the dear yoke of home had departed,
 Like a bacchanal fiend out of hell that hath darted, 550
 And with blood, and with smoke of a palace flame-wasted,
 And with death-shrieks for hymns at her bridal-feast chanted,
 By Love's Queen to the son of Alkmene was granted—
 Woe, woe for the joys of espousal she tasted!

¹ Usually Alpheus ('In vain, O in vain by Alpheus the river'); but in this passage Euripides gives it the Doric form as above.

² Iolê, daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia, promised by her father to the victor in a contest of archery. Herakles proved victorious, but her father refused to fulfil his promise. Herakles thereupon sacked Oechalia, slew Eurytus' sons, and bore away his bride.

(Ant. 2)

And ye, O ye ramparts of hallowed Thêbê,
 And ye lips wave-welling of Dirkê, might ye be
 Witness how dire was the Love-queen's coming,
 When a slumber that knoweth not waking was given
 Of her spells by the flame-enfolded levin
 To the mother of Zeus' seed Bacchus: for dooming 560
 Of death had she blent with the bride-chant's singing.
 For the Dread One breatheth on all life, winging
 Softly her flight as a bee low-humming.

[Voices within.]

Phaed. Hush ye, O hush ye, women! . . . Lost am I!
Chor. What is this dread thing, Phaedra, in thine halls?
Phaed. Peace—let me hear the voice of them within.
Chor. I am dumb: an ominous prelude sure is this.
Phaed. Ah me! ah me! alas!
 O wretched, wretched!—ah, mine agonies! 570
Chor. What cry dost thou utter? What word dost thou
 shriek?
 What boding of terror hath rushed on thy soul?—O lady,
 speak!
Phaed. I am undone! O stand ye by these doors,
 And hear what clamour clasheth in the house.
Chor. Nay, thou art thereby, and the cry from the palace sped
 forth is for thee.
 O tell me what evil came forth—tell it me! 580
Phaed. The son of the Amazon, Hippolytus,
 Shouts, hurling fearful curses at mine handmaid.
Chor. A noise do I hear; yet it passeth me clearly to tell
 whereby
 It came—through the doors to thee came that cry.
Phaed. Ah clear—ah clear!—yea, pandar of foul sin,
 Traitor to her lord's bed, he calleth her. 590
Chor. Woe! Thou art betrayed, belovèd one!
 What shall I counsel? Thy secret is bared: thou art wholly
 undone.
Phaed. Woe's me! ah woe!
Chor. From the hand that loved came the traitor's blow.
Phaed. She hath undone me, telling my mischance:
 In love, in shame, she sought these pangs to heal.
Chor. What wilt thou do, O thou in desperate plight?
Phaed. No way save one I know—straightway to die—
 The one cure for the ills that compass me. 600

Enter HIPPOLYTUS, followed by the NURSE.

Hipp. O mother Earth, unveilings of the sun,

What words unutterable have I heard!

Nur. Hush, O my son, ere one have heard thy cry.

Hipp. I have heard horrors—should I hold my peace?

Nur. Yea, I beseech thee by thy fair right hand.

Hipp. Hence with thine hand!—touch not my vesture thou.

Nur. Oh, by thy knees, do not—ah, slay me not!

Hipp. How, if thou hast said no wrong, as thou dost say?

Nur. No tale is this, my son, for all men's ears.

Hipp. Tush, a fair tale is fairer told to the world.

Nur. My son, thine oath!—dishonour not thine oath.

Hipp. My tongue hath sworn: no oath is on my soul.

Nur. O son, what wilt thou do?—wilt slay thy friends?

Hipp. Avaunt the word!—no villain is my friend.

Nur. Forgive, son: men are men, they needs must err.

Hipp. Why hast thou given a home beneath the sun,

Zeus, unto woman, specious curse to man?

For, were thy will to raise a mortal seed,

This ought they not of women to have gotten,

But in thy temples should they lay its price,

Or gold, or iron, or a weight of bronze,

And so buy seed of children, every man

After the worth of that his gift, and dwell

Free in free homes unvexed of womankind.

But now—soon as we go about to bring

This bane to the home, we hurl to earth its weal.

Hereby is woman proved a grievous bane—

He, who begat and reared her, banishes,

Yea, adds a dower, to rid him of his bane;

While he which taketh home the noisome weed

Rejoices, decks with goodly bravery

The loathly image, and tricks out with robes,—

Filching away, poor wretch! his household's wealth.

He may not choose: who getteth noble kin

With her, content must stomach his sour feast:

Who getteth a good wife, but worthless kin,

Must muffle up the evil 'neath the good.

Happiest who wins a cipher, in whose halls

A brainless fadge¹ is throned in uselessness.

¹ 'And I sall hae naething to mysel'
But a fat fadge by the fyre.'

Euripides
- women
later -
do so ->

610

my son
& not
my
said it

620

630

But the keen-witted hate I : in mine house 640
 Ne'er dwell one wiser than is woman's due ;
 For Kypris better brings to birth her mischief
 In clever women : the resourceless 'scapes
 That folly by the short-weight of her wit.
 Handmaids should ne'er have had access to wives,
 But brutes, with teeth, no tongue, should dwell with them,
 That so they might not speak to any one,
 Nor win an answering word from such as these.
 But now the vile ones weave vile plots within,
 And out of doors their handmaids bear the web : 650
 As thou hast come, foul quean, to tender me
 Commerce in mine own father's sacred couch !—
 Words that with fountain-streams I'll wash away,
 Sluicing mine ears. How should I be so vile,
 Who even with hearing count myself defiled ?
 Woman, I fear God : know, that saveth thee.
 For, had I not by oaths been trapped unwares,
 I had ne'er forborne to tell this to my sire.
 Now from mine home, while Theseus yet is far,
 I go, and I will keep my lips from speech. 660
 But—with my father I return, to see
 How thou wilt meet his eye, thou and thy mistress,
 And so have taste of thy full shamelessness.
 Curse ye ! My woman-hate shall ne'er be sated,
 Not though one say that this is all my theme :
 For they be ever strangely steeped in sin.
 Let some one now stand forth and prove them chaste,
 Or leave me free to trample on them ever.

[Exit.

(Ant. to 362-72)

Chor. O drear dark doom that on women hath lighted !
 By what cunning of pleading, when feet once trip,
 Shall we loose the accuser's iron grip ?¹

Phaed. O earth, O sun, I am justly requited ! 670
 Through the snares of calamity how shall I slip ?
 How, friends, shall I cloke my woe, how hide ?

¹ κάβαμμα λόγου (wrestling metaphor) is the now irresistible force ('the hammerlock') of the indictment just uttered by Hippolytus. The Chorus know in their hearts that the sweeping denunciation is unjust, but the facts of this apparently typical case seem to be dead against them ; and, though they would fain enter the lists in defence of their sex, they feel that their feet have, as it were, been knocked from under them, and they are like a wrestler who is thus placed at his opponent's mercy.

What God or what man shall stand forth on my side,
Shall consent in my sin to be made partaker?

For all life's anguish, and all life's shame,
Are upon me, and overwhelm like a shipwrecking breaker!
Most accurst of my fate among women I am.

Chor. Woe, woe! 'Tis done. Queen, it hath nought availed,
Thy bower-maid's device: 'tis ruin all. [680]

Phaed. Vilest of vile! destroyer of thy friends!
How hast thou ruined me! May Zeus my sire
Smite thee with flame, and wholly abolish thee!
Did I not tell thee—not divine thy purpose?—
To speak not that whereby I am now dishonoured?
But thou wouldst not forbear. I shall not now
Even die unshamed! [*A pause.*]

Some new plea must I find.

For yonder boy with soul keen-edged with wrath
Shall to his sire accuse me of thy sin,
Shall tell to aged Pittheus my mischance,
Shall blaze the shameful tale through every land.
Curses on thee, and whoso thrusteth in
To do base service to unwilling friends!

690

Nur. Mistress, thou may'st revile mine evil work,
For rankling pain bears thy discernment down:
Yet somewhat might I answer, wouldst thou hear.
I nursed thee, loved thee, sought for thy disease
A healing balm,—and found not that I would.
Had I sped well, right wise had I been held;
For, as we speed, so is our wisdom's fame.

700

Phaed. Ha! is this just?—should this suffice me now,
To have stabbed me, and then close in strife of words?

Nur. We waste the time in speech. I was not wise.
Yet even from this there is escape, my child.

Phaed. Peace to thy talk. Thy counsel heretofore
Was shame, and mischief thine endeavour was.
Hence from my sight: for thine own self take thought.
I with my needs will deal—and honourably.

[*Exit NURSE.*]

But ye, O Troezen's daughters nobly born,
Grant to my supplication this, but this—
With silence veil what things ye here have heard.

710

Chor. I swear by reverend Artemis, Zeus' child,
Never to bare to light of thine ills aught.

Phaed. Thou hast well said. Now, as I muse, I find
One refuge, one, from this calamity,

So to bequeath my sons a life of honour,
 And what I may from this day's ruin save.
 For never will I shame the halls of Crete,
 Nor will I meet the face of Theseus ever,
 For one poor life's sake, after all this shame.

720

Chor. Ah, wilt thou do a deed of ill past cure?

Phaed. Die will I. How—for this will I take thought.

Chor. Ah hush!

Phaed. O yea, advise me wisely thou.

But I shall gladden Kypris my destroyer
 By fleeting out of life on this same day,
 And vanquished so by bitter love shall be.
 Yet in my death will I become the bane
 Of one beside, that he may triumph not
 Over my woes, and taking of my pain
 His share, may learn sound wisdom's temperance.

730

[Exit PHAEDRA.
 (Str. I)]

Chor. Under the arched cliffs O were I lying,

That there to a bird might a God change me,
 And afar mid the flocks of the winged things flying
 Over the swell of the Adrian sea

I might soar—and soar,—upon poised wings dreaming,
 O'er the strand where Eridanus' waters be,
 Where down to the sea-swell purple-gleaming
 The tears of the Sun-god's daughters are streaming,
 Of the thrice-sad sisters for Phaëthon sighing,
 Star-flashes of strange tears amber-beaming!¹

740

(Ant. I)

O to win to the strand where the apples are growing
 Of the Hesperid chanters kept in ward,
 Where the path over Ocean purple-glowing
 By the Sea's Lord is to the seafarer barred!

O to light where Atlas hath aye in his keeping
 The bourn twixt earth and the heavens bestarred,
 Where the fountains ambrosial sunward are leaping
 By the couches where Zeus in his halls lieth sleeping,
 Where the bounty of Earth the life-bestowing
 The bliss of the Gods ever higher is heaping!

750

¹ Phaëthon, for his presumption in attempting to drive the horses of the Sun, his father, was smitten by the thunderbolt of Zeus, and hurled to the depths of the river Eridanus (Po), where his corpse lay for ever smouldering. His sisters, mourning unceasingly beside his watery grave, were changed into poplars, and their tears, as they fell, became drops of amber.

(Str. 2)

O white-winged galley from Crete's far shore,
 Whose keel over deep-sea surges speeding,
 Through their flying brine and their battle-roar,
 Onward and onward my lady bore,
 From a bliss-fraught palace a princess leading
 To the joy of a bridal of woe exceeding!—
 For, a bird ill-boding, thy sail flitted o'er, [760
 For a curse to the Cretan land and to Athens' glorious strand,
 When the seafarers lashed to the beach Munychian the
 hawser-band,
 And sprang unto earth's firm floor.

(Ant. 2)

Wherefore, with love-pangs all unblest
 For her gift, entered in Aphroditê, wringing
 Her heart-strings asunder, a fearful guest.
 Like a wrecked ship sinking, disaster-oppressed
 Over her bride-bower's rafters flinging
 The noose, shall she cast the coil close-clinging
 Round the neck that was whitest and loveliest, 770
 Because that with shuddering shame she shrank from a
 loathèd name,
 And she chose, for its foulness, the stainless renown of a wife's
 fair fame,
 And, for anguish of love, heart-rest.

[A cry within.]

Run to the rescue, all ye nigh the house!
In the strangling noose is Theseus' wife, our mistress!
 Chor. Woe! Woe! 'Tis done! No more—no more is she,
 The queen—in yon noose rafter-hung upcaught!

[Cry within.]

O haste!—will no one bring the steel two-edged, 780
 Wherewith to loose this cincture of her neck?

Semi-Chor. 1. What shall we do, friends? Deem ye we should
 pass

The doors, and from the noose-grip loose the queen?

Semi-Chor. 2. Wherefore?—Are no young handmaids at her
 side?

The busy meddler treadeth perilous paths.

[Cry within.]

Uncramp the limbs, streak out the hapless corpse.
Bitter house-warding this is for my lords!

Chor. Dead is the woeful lady, by that cry :
Even now they streak her as a corpse is streaked.

Enter THESEUS.

Thes. Women, know ye what means this cry within? 790

A dolorous shriek of handmaids reached mine ears.
Nor deigns the house to open doors and greet me
Blithely, as from the oracle come home.

Hath aught untoward happed to Pittheus' eld ?
Well-stricken in years is he, yet dole were ours
If haply fare his feet from these halls forth.

Chor. Not to the old pertains this thy mischance,
Theseus : the young have died, for grief to thee.

Thes. Woe !—is a child's life by the spoiler reft ?

Chor. They live, their mother dead—alas for thee ! 800

Thes. What say'st thou ?—dead—my wife ?—by what mishap ?

Chor. The strangling noose she coiled about her neck.

Thes. By grief's touch frozen, or of what mischance ?

Chor. No more I know, for to thine halls but now,
Theseus, I came, o'er these thine ills to mourn.

Thes. Woe ! with these wreathèd leaves why is mine head
Crowned—ill-starred harbinger of oracles ?

Shoot back the bolts, my servants, of the doors :

Loose bars, that I may see this bitter sight,

My wife, who hath destroyed me by her death. 810

*The Palace is thrown open, and the corpse of PHAEDRA disclosed,
with her handmaids grouped round it.*

Chor. Woe for thy misery ! Woe for thine ills, who hast
suffered and wrought

Such a thing as in ruin shall whelm thine home !

Ah for thy desperate deed, who by violence unhallowed hast
sought

Death, who with hand despairing the all-quelling wrestler
hast caught !

Who shroudeth thy life, O hapless, in gloom ?

(*Str.*)

Thes. Ah me for my woes !—I have suffered calamity, great

Beyond all ills overpast !—O foot of fate,

How hast thou heavily trampled me and mine,

Unlooked-for blight from some avenging fiend—

Nay, but destruction that blasteth my life evermore !

*It's not
respon.
820 himself
blame on
just*

On a sea of disaster I look, on a sea without shore,
So vast, that never can I swim thereout,
Nor ride the surge of this calamity.

What word can I speak unto thee?—how name, dear wife,
The doom that on thee hath descended and crushed thy life?
Like a bird hast thou fled from mine hands,
And with swift leap hast rushed to Hades' halls.

Never sorrow of sorrows was like unto mine.

830

On mine head have I gathered the load

Of the far-off sins of an ancient line;

And this is the vengeance of God.

*Amazone
Prologue little 500*

Amazone
Chor. Not to thee only, king, this grief hath come;
With many more a dear wife's loss thou sharest.

(Ant.)

Thes. In the darkness under the earth—ah me, to have died,
That in blackness of darkness under the earth I might hide,
Who am left of thy most dear companionship!

For thou hast dealt worse death than thou hast suffered.

Of whom shall I hear whence came it, the deadly stroke 840

Of doom, that the heart of thee, my beloved, broke?

Will none speak what befell?—or all for nought

Doth this my palace roof a menial throng?

Woe's me, my beloved, stricken because of thee!

Ah for the grief of mine house, for the travail I see,

Past utterance, past endurance!—lost am I:

Mine house is desolate, motherless my babes.

O my darling, my wife, thou are gone, thou art gone,

O best upon whom the light

Looketh down of the all-beholding sun,

850

Or the splendour of star-eyed night!

Chor. Woe's me for thine house! woe's me for its burden of ill!

With ruth for thy fate running o'er do mine eyelids the tear-
drops pour:

[*Aside.*] But for woe which must follow I shudder and
shudder still.

Thes. Ha!

What is this tablet, what, to her dear hand

Fastened? What new thing meaneth it to tell?

Now hath she writ, unhappy one, to pray

Touching my marriage or my children aught?

Fear not, lost love: the woman is not born

860

Shall lie in Theseus' couch, or tread his halls.

Lo, how the impress of the carven gold

Of her that is no more smiles up at me!

Come, let me uncoil the seal's envelopings,
And see what would this tablet say to me.

Chor. Woe, woe! How God bringeth evil following hard on
the track

Of evil! I count for living unmeet
The lot of a life such as this, as on deeds that are wrought I
look back :¹

For the house of my lords standeth not any more, but in ruin
and wrack

I behold it hurled from its ancient seat. 870

Ah God, if this may be, wreck not the house,
But hearken my beseeching, for I trace,
Seer-like, an evil omen from his face.²

Thes. Ah me!—a new curse added to the old,
Past utterance, past endurance! Woe is me!

Chor. What is it? Speak, if I may share the tale.

Thes. It shrieketh,—ah, horrors the tablet outshrieketh! O
how can I flee

My burden of woes? I am utterly ruin-spel!
What incantation of curses is this I have read
Graved on the wax—woe's me!

Chor. Alas! thou utterest speech that heralds ill.

Thes. No more within my lips' gates will I pen
The horror that chokes utterance—ah wretch!
Hippolytus hath dared assail my bed
With violence, flouting Zeus's awful eye!
Father Poseidon, thou didst promise me
Three curses once. Do thou with one of these
Destroy my son: may he not 'scape this day,
If soothfast curses thou hast granted me.

880

*Etched I
wish to
get rid of
son*

Chor. O King, recall thou from the Gods this prayer!
Thou yet shall know thine error: yield to me.

Thes. Never! Yea, I will drive him from the land,
And, of two dooms, with one shall he be scourged:—
Either Poseidon, reverencing my prayers,
Shall slay and speed him unto Hades' halls,
Or, banished from this land, a vagabond
On strange shores, shall he drain life's bitter dregs.

890

Chor. Lo, where thy son's self comes in season meet,
Hippolytus: refrain thy wrath, O king
Theseus, and for thine house the best devise.

900

¹ Reading ἐμοί γ' ἄν οἶν, 'in my opinion would the lot, etc.'

² Taking τινος as referring to Theseus: cf. Portia watching Bassanio's expression as he reads Antonio's letter. *Merch. Ven.* iii, 2.

Enter HIPPOLYTUS.

- Hipp.* Father, I heard thy crying, and I came
 In haste: yet for what cause thou makest moan
 I know not, but of thee I fain would hear.
 Ha! what is this?—Father, thy wife I see—
 Dead!—matter this for marvel passing great.
 But now I left her, who upon this light
 Looked, it is not yet a long season since.
 What hath befallen her? How perished she?
 Father, I fain would learn it from thy mouth. 910
 Silent!—In trouble silence nought avails.
 The heart that yearns to know all cares of thine
 Fain shall be found to prove thy troubles too.
 Sure from thy friends—yea, and thy more than friends,
 Father, it is not right to hide thy griefs.
- Thes.* O men that oftentimes err, and err in vain,
 Why are ye teaching ever arts untold,
 And search out manifold inventions still,
 But one thing know not, no, nor hunt for it,
 To teach them wit, in whom no wisdom dwells? 920
- Hipp.* A cunning sophist hast thou named, of power
 Them to constrain to sense who sense have none:
 But—so ill-timed thy speculations are—
 Father, I fear thy tongue for grief runs wild.
- Thes.* Out! There should dwell in men some certain test
 Of friendship, a discerner of the heart,
 To show who is true friend and who is false.
 Yea, all men should have had two several voices,
 One honest, one—how it might chance soe'er;
 That so the traitor voice might be convict 930
 Before the honest, nor we be deceived.
- Hipp.* How?—to thine ear hath some friend slandered me,
 That I the innocent am in evil case?
 Astonied am I, for thy words amaze me,
 Thus wandering wide astray from reason's throne.
- Thes.* Out on man's heart!—to what depths will it sink?
 Where shall assurance end and hardihood?
 For if it swell with every generation,
 And the new age reach heights of villainy
 Above the old, the Gods must needs create 940
 A new earth unto this, that room be found
 For the unrighteous and unjust in grain.
 Look on this man, who, though he be my son,

Hath shamed my couch, and shall be manifest proved
Most vile, by testimony of the dead.

Hither,—since to this foulness thou hast come,—
And set thy face against thy father's face.

Dost thou with Gods—O thou no common man!—
Consort? Art thou the chaste, the stainless one?

I will not trust thy boasts, for so should I
Impure to Gods un wisdom's ignorance.

950

Now vaunt, ay now!—set out thy paltry wares
Of lifeless food:¹ take Orpheus for thy king:

Rave, worship vapourings of many a scroll:

For ah, thou'rt caught! I warn all men to shun
Such hypocrites as this; for they hunt souls

With canting words, the while they plot foul sin.

Dead is she: thinkest thou this saveth thee?

Hereby thou art most convicted, basest thou!

What oaths, what protestations shall bear down

960

[Shows tablet.

This, for thine absolution of the charge?

And wilt thou say, 'She hated me: the bastard
Is foe by blood of those in wedlock born?'

Fools' traffic this in life—to fling away

For hate of thee the dearest thing she owed!

Or—say'st thou?—'Frailty is not in men,

But in the blood of women.' Youths, I have proved,
Are no whit more than women continent

When Kypris stirs a heart in flush of youth:

Yet all the strength of manhood helpeth them.

970

But wherefore thus contend against thy pleas,

When there the corpse lies, witness faithful and true?

Hence from this land, an exile, with all speed.

Never come thou to god-built Athens more,

Nor any marches where my spear hath sway:

For if 'neath thy mishandling I sit still,

Never shall Isthmian Sinis testify

That I slew him, but name it idle vaunt;

Nor those Skironian Rocks that skirt the sea

Shall call me terrible to evil-doers.

980

Chor. I dare not name of mortals any man

Happy, for lo, the first is made the last.

Hipp. Father, thy rage and strong-strained fury of soul

Are fearful: yet, fair-seeming though the charge,

¹ Abstinence from animal food was a feature of the ascetic doctrines attributed to Orpheus, as of those of Pythagoras.

If one unfold it, all unfair it is.

I have no skill to speak before a throng :

My tongue is loosed with equals, and those few.

And reason : they that are among the wise

Of none account, to mobs are eloquent.

Yet needs I must, now this mischance hath lighted,

Unrein my tongue. And first will I begin

Where thou didst first assail, as thou wouldst crush me, 990

And I find no reply. See'st thou yon sun

And earth?—within their compass is no man—

Though thou deny it—chaster-souled than I.

For I have learnt, first, to revere the Gods,

Then, to have friends which seek to do no wrong,

Friends who think shame to proffer aught of base,

Yea, or to render others shameful service.

No mocker am I, father, at my friends,

1000

But to the absent even as to the present :

In one thing flawless,—where thou think'st me trapped,—

For to this day my body is clean of lust.

I know this commerce not, save by the ear

And sight of pictures,—little will have I

To look thereon, who keep a virgin soul.

Yet, grant my virtue wins not thy belief,

Sure 'tis for thee to show whereby I fell.

Wilt say this woman's form in grace outshone

All women?—that I hoped thy state to inherit

1010

By winning for mine own thine heiress-queen?

Vain fool were I—nay rather, wholly mad!

'Nay,' (say'st thou) 'sweet is power, though one be chaste.'

Nay verily!—save the lust of sovereignty

Poison the wit of all who covet it.

Fain would I foremost victor be in games

Hellenic, and be second in the realm,

And with pure-hearted friends be happy still.

For there is true well-being, peril far,

Which giveth sweeter joys than sovereignty.

1020

So hast thou all my counterpleas, save one:—

Had I a witness,—one who knows mine heart,—¹

And made defence while she stood living there,

By deeds shouldst thou search out and know the wicked :

But now—by Zeus Oath-warden, by Earth's plain,

Swear I, I ne'er attempted couch of thine,

¹ Or, according to the Scholiast's interpretation—'Had I a witness, upright as myself.'

No, nor had wished it, nor had dreamed thereof.

God grant I perish nameless, fameless all,

Cityless, homeless, exile, vagabond

On earth,—may sea nor land receive my corpse 1030

When I am dead, if I be this vile thing!

Now if through fear she flung away her life

I know not:—more I cannot sinless say.

Honest she was, yet honest could not be:¹

I, caught at disadvantage, bore with wrong.

Chor. Thou hast said enough to turn this charge from thee

In tendering the Gods' oath, that dread pledge.

Thes. Lo, is not this a mountebank, a juggler,

Who thinks by his unruffled calm to outface²

My mood, when his own father he hath shamed? 1040

Hipp. Nay, but I marvel, father, at this in thee:—

For, if my son thou wert, and I thy sire,

I had slain thee: exile should not be thy mulct,

If on my wife thou hadst dared to lay a hand.

Thes. Good sooth, well said: yet not so shalt thou die

After the doom thou speakest for thyself;

For easiest for the wretched is swift death.

But from the home-land exiled, wandering

To strange soil, shalt thou drain life's bitter dregs.

For this is meet wage for the impious man. 1050

Hipp. Woe's me!—what wilt thou do? Wilt not receive

Time's witness in my cause, but banish now?

Thes. Beyond the sea, beyond the Atlantic bourn,

If this I could; so much I hate thy face.

Hipp. Nor oath, nor pledge, nor prophet's utterance

Wilt test, but cast me forth the land untried?

Thes. This tablet, though it bear no prophet's sign,

Accuseth thee, nor lieth:—but the birds

That roam o'erhead, I wave them long farewell.³

¹ There is a play on words in the Greek which seems to be rendered by the word *honest* in its twofold Shakespearean sense, first, of chastity, second, of truthfulness. In 1035, taking οὐ καλῶς with ἔχοντες, I understand him to refer to having been entrapped into a pledge of silence, and to his accepting the situation (ἐχράμεθα), sooner than violate his oath. Retaining the ordinary punctuation, the sense of 1035 might be—

'I was not, who might have been, circumspect.'

i.e. in letting myself be so entrapped.

² A mountebank, a threadbare juggler . . . outfacing me. *Comedy of Errors*, V. i.

³ cf. Hector's words, *Iliad* xii, 237–240 (where see Leaf's note), and *Odyssey* ii, 141–2.

- Hipp.* (*aside*). O Gods, why can I not unlock my lips, 1060
 Who am destroyed by you whom I revere?
 No—whom I need persuade, I should not so,
 And all for nought should break the oaths I swore.
- Thes.* Faugh!—how it chokes me, this thy saintly mien!
 Out from thy fatherland! Straightway begone!
- Hipp.* Unhappy! whither shall I flee?—What home
 Of what friend enter, banished on such charge?
- Thes.* Of whoso joys in welcoming for guests
 Defilers of men's wives, which dwell with sin.
- Hipp.* Alas! this stabs mine heart well-nigh to weeping, 1070
 If I be published villain, thou believe it!
- Thes.* Then shouldest thou have moaned and taken thought,
 Then, when thou dar'dst insult thy father's wife.
- Hipp.* O halls, could ye but find a voice for me,
 And witness if I be a wicked man!
- Thes.* To speechless witnesses thou fleest?—Clearly
 This deed, though it speak not, declares thee vile.
- Hipp.* Ah, to stand face to face and see myself,
 That for the wrongs I suffer I might weep!
- Thes.* Yea, 'tis thy wont to gaze on thy perfections 1080
 More than to render parents righteous honour.
- Hipp.* Ah, hapless mother!—ah, my bitter birth!
 Base-born be never any that I love!
- Thes.* Will ye not hale him hence, thralls?—heard ye not
 Long since his banishment pronounced of me?
- Hipp.* Who layeth hand on me of them shall rue!
 Thou thrust me from the land if such thy mood.
- Thes.* That will I, an thou wilt not heed mine hest.
 No pity for thine exile visits me.
- [*Exit* THESEUS.]
- Hipp.* So then my fate is sealed. Ah, woe is me! 1090
 I know the truth, yet know not how to tell it.
 Dearest of Gods to me, O Lêtô's Child,
 Companion, fellow-huntress, I shall flee
 Athens the glorious. Farewell ye, O burg,
 Land of Erechtheus! O Troezenian plain,
 How many pleasant paths of youth hast thou!
 Farewell: I see thee, hail thee, the last time.
 Come, O ye youths, mine age-mates in this land,
 Speak parting word: escort me from this soil:
 For never shall ye see a chaster man, 1100
 Albeit this my sire believeth not.

[*Exit.*]

(Str. 1)

Chor. When faith overfloweth my mind, God's providence all-
embracing

marked
Banisheth griefs: but when doubt whispereth 'Ah but to
ni
re
singer
know!'

No clue through the tangle I find of fate and of life for my
tracing:

There is ever a change and many a change,
And the mutable fortune of men evermore sways to and fro
Over limitless range. 1110

(Ant. 1)

Ah, would the Gods hear prayer!—would they grant to me
these supplications—

A lot with prosperity sweet, and a soul unshadowed of pain,
And a faith neither fixed foursquare on the flint, nor on sandy
foundations!

Quick-shifting my sail to the coming breeze
Of the morrow, so may I fleet, ever voyaging life's wide
main

Over stormless seas. 1120

(Str. 2)

For my mind is a fountain stirred, and I see things all un-
dreamed:

For the Star of Athens, that beamed
The brightest withal in Hellas-land,
We have seen him driven to an alien strand,
By the wrath of a father have seen him banned.
Ah, cityward sands, ye shall wait him in vain,

And ye mountain woods, where streamed
'Twixt the oaks the pack on the wild boar's track
In dread Dictynna's hunter-train, 1130
Till the quarry was slain.

(Ant. 2)

Nevermore shall he harness the Henetan horses and leap on
his car,

O'er the race-course of Limnê afar
To speed the coursers' feet of fire:
And the songs, that once 'neath the strings of the lyre
Slept never, shall cease in the halls of his sire.

Ungarlanded Artemis' bowers shall be

In the greenwood depths that are.

By thine exile have perished the sweet hopes cherished
Of our maids, and their gentle rivalry 1140
In love for thee.

(Epode)

For thy woeful fate shall I pass amid tears fast-flowing
A fortuneless fortune. O mother evil-starred,

This day thy birth-joy effaces!

I am wroth with the Gods:—O Graces

Aye linkèd in loving embraces,

Why do ye suffer that he from his land should be going,
From his home, who hath nowise earned a doom so bitter-
hard?

1150

But lo, I see Hippolytus' henchman nigh

Hasting unto the halls with clouded brows.

*very humorous
re-imagined scene -
Antimachus Prologuizer - Robt Browning*

Enter MESSENGER.

Mes. Where should I go and find this country's king,
Theseus, ye women? If ye know, declare
Straightway to me. Within these halls is he?

Chor. Lo yonder where he cometh forth the halls.

Enter THESEUS.

Mes. Theseus, I bring a sorrow-kindling tale
To thee and all the citizens which dwell
In Athens and the bounds of Troezen-land.

Thes. What now?—Hath some disaster unforeseen
Fallen on these two neighbour-citied states? 1160

Mes. Hippolytus is no more, one may say,
Though yet a little space he seeth light.

Thes. Of whom slain?—Hath one met him in his wrath,
Whose wife he had outraged, even as his sire's?

Mes. His proper chariot-team hath dealt him death,
And thy mouth's curses, which thou didst call down
From the Sea's Lord, thy father, on thy son.

Thes. O Gods! Poseidon! how thou wast indeed
My father, who hast heard my malison! 1170
How perished he? In what way did the gin
Of justice snap on him who wrought me shame?

Mes. We, hard beside the beach that greets the surf,
With combs were smoothing out his horses' manes
Weeping: for word had come to us to say
That no more in this land Hippolytus
Might walk, of thee to wretched exile doomed.

Then came he, bringing the same tale of tears
 To us upon the strand : a countless throng
 Of friends his age-mates following with him came. 1180
 But, ceasing at the last from moan, he cried :
 ' Why rave I thus ? I must obey my sire.
 Harness the horses to the chariot-yoke,
 My thralls : this city is no more for me.'
 Then, then did every man bestir himself.
 Swifter than one could say it were the steeds
 Harnessed, and by our lord's side set we them.
 Then the reins caught he from the chariot-rail,
 Settling his feet, all buskined as he was ;¹
 And to the Gods first stretched his hands and cried : 1190
 ' Zeus, may I die if I a villain am !
 May my sire know that he is wronging me,
 When I am dead, if not while I see light !'
 Then in his hands he took the scourge² and smote
 At once the steeds. We henchmen by the car
 Fast by the reins attended on our lord
 Towards Argos straight and Epidauria.
 And, as we entered on a desert tract,
 Beyond this Troezen's border lies a beach
 Sloping full down to yon Saronic Sea. 1200
 There from earth's womb a noise like Zeus's thunder
 Made muffled roaring, a blood-curdling sound.
 Then the steeds lifted head and pricked the ear ;
 And thrilled through us most vehement dismay
 Whence might the sound be. To the sea-lashed shores
 Then glanced we, and a surge unearthly saw
 Up-columned to the sky, that from my sight
 Shrouded was all the beach Skironian ;
 Veiled was the Isthmus and Asklepius' Crag.
 Then swelling higher, higher, and spurting forth 1210
 All round a cloud of foam and sea-blown spray,
 Shoreward it rusheth toward the four-horse car.
 Then from the breaker's midst and hugest surge
 The wave belched forth a bull, a monster fierce,
 With whose throat-thunder all the land was filled
 And echoed awfully, as on our gaze
 He burst, a sight more dread than eyes could bear.

¹ Better perhaps,

' And set his feet fair in the car's foot-rests.'

² For the identity of *κέντρον* and *μάστιξ*, see Leaf's most valuable note on Iliad xxiii, 387.

Straightway wild panic falleth on the steeds :
 Yet their lord, wholly conversant with wont
 Of horses, caught the reins in both his hands, 1220
 And tugs, as shipman tugs against the oar,
 Throwing his body's weight against the reins.
 But on the fire-forged bits they clenched their teeth,
 And whirl him on o'er-mastered, recking not
 Of steering hand, or curb, or strong car's weight.
 And if, yet holding to the chariot-helm,
 Toward the smooth ground he strove to guide their course,
 Aye showed that bull in front, to turn them back,
 Maddening with fright the fourfold chariot-team.
 If toward the rocks they rushed with frenzied heart, 1230
 Fast by the rail in silence followed he
 On, till he fouled and overset the car,
 Dashing against a rock the chariot felly.
 Then all was turmoil : upward leapt in air
 Naves of the wheels and linchpins of the axles.
 And he, unhappy, tangled in the reins,
 Bound in indissoluble bonds, is haled
 Dashing his head against the cruel rocks,
 Rending his flesh, outshrieking piteous cries—
 ' O stay, ye horses nurtured at my cribs, 1240
 Destroy me not !—ah, father's curse ill-starred !
 Who wills to save an utter-innocent man ? '
 Ah, many willed, but far behind were left
 With feet outstripped. Loosed from the toils at last
 Of clean-cut reins,—I know not in what wise,—
 He falls, yet breathing for short space of life.
 Vanished the steeds and that accursèd monster,
 The bull, mid rock-strewn ground, I know not where.
 Thrall am I verily of thine house, O king ;
 Howbeit so foul a charge—I never can 1250
 Believe it of thy son, that he is vile,
 Not though all womankind should hang themselves,
 Though one should fill with writing all the pine
 In Ida :—he is righteous, this I know.

Chor. Woe for accomplishment of new disaster !
 No refuge is there from the doom of fate.

Thes. For hatred of the man who thus hath fared,
 Glad for this tale was I : but now, for awe
 Of heaven, and for that he is yet my son,
 Nor glad am I nor sorry for these ills.

Mes. How then ?—must we bear yonder broken man

*Am neither
 pleased or grieved*

Hither?—or in what wise perform thy pleasure?
 Bethink thee: if my counsel thou wilt heed,
 Harsh to thy stricken son thou wilt not be.

Thes. Bear him, that I may see before mine eyes
 Him who denied that he had stained my bed,
 By words and heaven's judgment to convict him.

[*Exit* MESSENGER.]

Chor. Love, under thy dominion
 Unbending hearts bow low
 Of Gods, and hearts of mortals,
 When, flashing through thy portals
 On glory-gleaming pinion,
 Flits Eros to and fro;
 Love, under thy dominion
 Unbending hearts bow low.

1270

Gold-glittering wings wide-soaring,
 They rain down witchery,
 O'er maddened hearts prevailing,
 O'er earth triumphant sailing,
 O'er music of the roaring
 Of spray-bemantled sea,
 Gold-glittering wings wide-soaring,
 They rain down witchery.

He kindleth with his yearning
 All things of earth-born race;
 The mountain's whelps he thrilleth,
 The ocean's brood he filleth,
 Where'er the sun's eye burning
 Down-looketh on earth's face,
 He kindleth with his yearning
 All things of earth-born race.

They bend—all, all are bending,
 Love-queen, beneath thy hand!
 O crownèd brows, whom loyal
 Vassals acclaim sole-royal
 By spells all-comprehending
 In sky and sea and land;
 They bend—all, all are bending,
 Love-queen, beneath thy hand!

1280

Enter ARTEMIS.

any ex machina lowered down to stage
Art. Thou high-born scion of Aigeus, I call upon thee :
 Theseus, give ear unto me.

It is Artemis, Lêto's Daughter, that nameth thy name :
 Why dost thou joy in thy shame ?

Thou hast murdered thy son unrighteously, thereto moved
 Of the lies of thy wife unproved.

By infatuate folly all-manifest, lo, thou wast bound.

How wilt thou hide underground 1290

Thy dishonour, or soar to the heaven, by changing thy life
 To escape from this anguish-strife ?

For the part that was erstwhile thine in the good man's lot,
 Behold, it is not.

Theseus, hear thou the posture of thy woes ;—

Yet have I no help for thee, only pain ;

But I have come to show the righteousness

Of thy son, that in fair fame he may die,

And thy wife's fever-flame,—yet in some sort 1300

Her nobleness,—who, stung by goads of her

Whom most we loathe, who joy in purity,

Of all the Gods, was lovesick for thy son,

Yet strove by reason to o'er-master passion,

And died through wiles unsanctioned of her nurse,

Who under oath-seal told thy son her pangs ;

And he, even as was righteous, would not heed

The tempting ; no, nor when sore-wronged of thee
 Broke he the oath's pledge, for he feared the Gods.

But she, adread to be of sin convict,

Wrote that false writing, and by treachery so 1310

Destroyed thy son :—and thou believedst her !

Thes. Ah me !

Art. Is it torture, Theseus ?—Nay, but hear me out,
 That hearing all thou mayst the more lament.

Three soothfast curses hadst thou of thy sire :

One hast thou thus misused, O villain thou,

Against thy son, which might have quelled a foe !

Thy sire the Sea-king, in his love's despite,

Gave as he needs must, seeing he had pledged him :

Yet wicked in his eyes and mine art thou, 1320

Who wouldst not wait for proof, nor prophet's voice,

Nor yet make inquisition, nor wouldst trace

Time's slow step, but with haste that did thee wrong

Didst hurl the curse upon thy son, and slay.

*rings in
 u
 character
 turn
 vents
 when done
 when what
 else to do
 No!
 his
 destroying
 error
 back to
 win—
 she tells
 truth*

Thes. Queen, ruin seize me!

Art. Deep thy sin; but yet

Even thou for this mayst win forgiveness still:
For Kypris willed that all this should befall
To glut her spite. And this the Gods' wont is:—
None doth presume to thwart the fixed design
Willed by his fellow: still aloof we stand.

1330

Else be thou sure that, but for dread of Zeus,
I never would have known this depth of shame,
To suffer one, of all men best beloved
Of me, to die. But thy transgression, first,
Thine ignorance from utter sin redeems;
Then, by her death thy wife made void all test
Of these her words, and won thy credence so.
Now, most on thee this storm of woe hath burst;
Yet grief is mine: for when the righteous die
The Gods joy not. The wicked, and withal
Their children and their homes, do we destroy.

place blank
on Approval

1340

Chor. Lo, lo, the stricken one borne
Hitherward, with his young flesh torn
And his golden head of its glory shorn!
Ah, griefs of the house!—what doom
Twofold on thine halls hath come
By the Gods' will shrouded in sorrow's gloom!

Enter bearers with HIPPOLYTUS.

Hipp. Woe, woe for a son
By the doom of his sire
All marred and undone!

Through mine head leapeth fire
Of the agony-flashes, and throbbeth my brain like a hard-
stricken lyre.

1350

Let me rest—ah forbear!
For my strength is sped.
Cursèd horses, ye were
Of mine own hands fed,

Yet me have ye wholly destroyed, yet me have ye stricken
dead!

For the Gods' sake, bear
Me full gently, each thrall!

Thou to right—have a care!— 1360
Soft let your hands fall;

Tenderly bear the sore-mangled, on-stepping in time, one
and all,

The unhappy on-bearing,
And cursèd, I ween,
Of his father's own erring:—
Ah Zeus, hast thou seen?

Innocent I, ever fearing the Gods, who was wholly heart-
clean

Above all men beside,—
Lo, how am I thrust
Unto Hades, to hide
My life in the dust!

All vainly I revered God, and in vain unto man was I
just.

Let the stricken one be!— 1370
Ah, mine anguish again!—

Give ye sleep unto me,
Death-salve for my pain,

The sleep of the sword for the wretched—I long, oh I long to
be slain.

Dire curse of my father!—
Sins, long ago wrought
Of mine ancestors, gather: 1380
Their doom tarries not,

But the scourge overfloweth the innocent—wherefore on me
is it brought?

Ah for words of a spell,
That my soul might take flight
From the tortures, with fell
Unrelentings that smite!

Oh for the blackness of Hades, the sleep of Necessity's night!

Art. Unhappy, bowed 'neath what disaster's yoke!
Thine own heart's nobleness hath ruined thee. 1390

Hipp. Ah, perfume-breath celestial!—mid my pains
I feel thee, and mine anguish is assuaged.

Lo in this place the Goddess Artemis!

Art. Yea, hapless one, of Gods best friend to thee.

Hipp. O Queen, seest thou my plight—the stricken one?

Art. I see—but tears are to mine eyes forbid.

Hipp. None now shall hark thine hounds, nor do thee service—

Art. Ah no!—Yet dear to me thou perishest.

Hipp. Nor tend thy steeds, nor guard thine images.

Art. This all-pernicious Kypris hath contrived— 1400

Hipp. Ah me! what Goddess blasts me now I know—

Art. Jealous for honour, wroth with chastity.

Hipp. Three hath one hand destroyed; I see it now.

Art. Thy father—thee—thy father's wife the third.

Hipp. Yea, and I wail my father's misery.

Art. By plots of deity was he beguiled.

Hipp. Ah father, woe is thee for this mischance!

Thes. I am slain, my son: no joy have I in life!

Hipp. More than myself I mourn thee for thine error.

Thes. Would God I could but die for thee, my son! 1410

Hipp. Ah, bitter gifts of that Sea-god, thy sire!

Thes. Ah that the word had never passed my lips!

Hipp. Wherefore?—thou wouldst for wrath have slain me still.

Thes. Yea, for the Gods had caused my wit to stumble.

Hipp. Oh that men's curses could but strike the Gods!

Art. Let be: for even in the nether gloom

Not unavenged shall be the stroke that fell

Upon thy frame through rage of Kypris' spite,

For thy pure soul's and for thy reverence' sake.

For upon one, her minion, with mine hand— 1420

One who is dearest of all men to her—

With these unerring shafts will I avenge me.

And to thee, hapless one, for these thy woes

High honours will I give in Troezen-town.

Ere their espousals shall all maids unwed

For thee cut off their hair: through age on age

Full harvests shalt thou reap of grief in tears.

Ever of thee song-waking memory

Shall live in virgins; nor shall Phaedra's love

Forgotten in thy story be unhymned. 1430

But thou, O son of ancient Aigeus, take

Thy child into thine arms, and fold him close.

Not of thy will thou slewest him, and well

May men transgress when Gods are thrusting on.

Thee too I charge, Hippolytus—hate not

Thy father: 'tis by fate thou perishest.

Farewell: I may not gaze upon the dead,

Nor may with dying gasps pollute my sight:

And now I see that thou art near the end.

[Exit ARTEMIS.]

Hipp. Farewell to thy departing, maiden blest.

1440

Light falls on thee long fellowship's severance!¹

Lo, I forgive my father at thy suit,
As heretofore have I obeyed thy word.

Ah, o'er mine eyes even now the darkness draws!

Take, father, take my body, and upraise.

Thes. Ah me! what dost thou, child, to hapless me?

Hipp. I am gone—yea, I behold the gates of death!

Thes. Wilt leave me—and my conscience murder-stained?

Hipp. No, no! I do absolve thee of my death.

Thes. How say'st thou?—dost assoil me of thy blood? 1450

Hipp. I call to witness Bow-queen Artemis.

Thes. Dearest, how noble show'st thou to thy sire!

Hipp. Father, farewell thou too—untold farewells!

Thes. Woe for thy reverent soul, thy righteous heart!

Hipp. Pray to have such sons—sons in wedlock born.

Thes. Forsake me not, my son!—be strong to bear!

Hipp. My strength is overborne—I am gone, my father.

Cover my face with mantles with all speed.

[*Dies.*

Thes. O bounds of Athens, Pallas' glorious realm,

What hero have ye lost! Ah, woe is me!

1460

Kypris, how oft shall I recall thy wrong!

Chor. On the city hath lighted a stroke without warning,

On all hearts desolation.

Rain down, O ye fast-falling tears of our mourning!

When the mighty are fallen, their burial-oblation

Is the wail of a nation.²

[*Exeunt omnes.*

¹ This line has been a stumbling-block to editors. It has been interpreted as a reproach, and so quite out of harmony with Hippolytus' attitude to her, besides being unjust. In reality it is a very natural touch—this sigh (not reproach) of the mortal who cannot but feel how much more it must, by the necessities of their natures, mean to him than to her. To him it is the end, the going into outer darkness: to her a spot of shadow on a bright unending existence. The idea is by no means unique in literature, any more than in life. A single poem of Tennyson's furnishes many parallels:—*cf. In Memoriam xl vv. 5-8, and xli. lx-lxiv, lxxxv vv. 6, 7, 8, ciii, 12.*

² 1462-66 allude to the death of Pericles, which happened shortly before the representation of this play. The poet in fact changed, to meet the occasion, the original ending, which ran thus:—

O blest one, what honours have fallen to thee,

O hero, because of thy chastity!

Never shall aught be more of worth

Than virtue unto the sons of earth;

For soon or late on the fear of God

Goodly reward shall be bestowed.

[*Stobaeus, Florilegium.*]

HECUBA

ARGUMENT

WHEN Troy was taken by the Greeks. Hecuba, the wife of Priam, and her daughters, Cassandra the prophetess, and Polyxena, with the other women of Troy, were made slaves, being portioned among the victors, so that Cassandra became the concubine of Agamemnon. But Polydorus, the youngest of Priam's sons, had long ere this been sent, with much treasure of gold, for safe keeping to his father's friend, Polymestor king of Thrace, so that his mother had one consolation of hope amidst her afflictions. Now the host of Greece could not straightway sail home, because to the spirit of their dead hero Achilles was given power to hold the winds from blowing, till meet sacrifice were rendered to him, even a maiden of Troy, most beautiful of the seed royal; and for this they chose Polyxena. And now king Polymestor, lusting for the gold, and fearing no vengeance of man, slew his ward, the lad Polydorus, and flung his body into the sea, so that it was in process of time cast up by the waves on the shore whereby was the camp of the Greeks, and was brought to Hecuba. And herein are told the sorrow of Hecuba and her revenge.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Phantom of POLYDORUS, *son of Priam, King of Troy, and Hecuba*

HECUBA, *wife of Priam, and mother of Polydorus and Polyxena*

POLYXENA, *youngest daughter of Priam and Hecuba*

ODYSSEUS, *chiefest in subtlety of the Greeks, King of Ithaca*

TALTHYBIUS, *herald of King Agamemnon*

AGAMEMNON, *King of Mycenae, and captain of the host of Greece*

POLYMESTOR, *King of Eastern Thrace, which is called the Chersonese*

HANDMAID *of Hecuba*

CHORUS *of captive Trojan women*

Attendants, Greek and Thracian guards, captive women

SCENE :—Before Agamemnon's tent in the camp of the Greeks on the coast
of the Thracian Chersonese.

HECUBA

*The phantom of POLYDORUS appears hovering over the tent of
AGAMEMNON.*

Polyd. I come from vaults of death, from gates of darkness,
Where from the Gods aloof doth Hades dwell,
Polydorus, born of Hecuba, Kisseus' child,
And Priam, who, when peril girt the town
Of Phrygians, by the spear of Greece to fall,
In fear from Troyland privily sent me forth
To Polymestor's halls, his Thracian friend,
Lord of the fair tilth-lands of Chersonese,
Who with the spear rules that horse-loving folk.
And secretly with me my sire sent forth 10
Much gold, that, should the towers of Ilium fall,
His sons yet living might not beggared be.
Youngest of Priam's house was I: for this
He sent me forth the land, whose youthful arm
Availed not or to sway the shield or spear.
So, while unbowed the land's defences stood,
And yet unshattered were the towers of Troy,
While triumphed yet my brother Hector's spear,
Fair-nurtured by the Thracian, my sire's friend,
Like some young sapling grew I—hapless I! 20
But, when Troy perished, perished Hector's soul,
And my sire's hearths were made a desolation,
And himself at the god-built altar fell
Slain by Achilles' son, the murder-stained,
Then me for that gold's sake my father's friend
Slays, and the slaughtered wretch mid sea-surge cast,
That in his halls himself might keep the gold.
Here on the beach I welter, surf-borne there
Drift on the racing waves' recoil and rush,
Tombless, unwept. O'er my dear mother's head 30
Now flit I, leaving tenantless my body.
This is the third day that I hover so,
Even all the time that in this Chersonese
My hapless mother tarrieth, haled from Troy.
And all the Achaians idle with their ships

Sit on the beaches of this Thracian land.
 For Peleus' son above his tomb appeared,
 And all the Hellenic host Achilles stayed,
 Even as they homeward aimed the brine-dipt oar,
 And claimed for his Polyxena my sister, 40
 For sacrifice and honour to his tomb ;
 Yea, and shall win, nor of his hero-friends
 Giftless shall be. And Fate is leading on
 Unto her death my sister on this day.
 And of two children shall my mother see
 Two corpses, mine, and that her hapless daughter's.
 For I, to gain a tomb, will—wretch—appear
 Before her handmaid's feet amidst the surge.
 For with the Lords of Death have I prevailed
 'Twixt mother-hands to fall, and win a tomb. 50
 Accomplished shall be all for which I longed.
 But agèd Hecuba's sight will I avoid ;
 For forth of Agamemnon's tent she sets
 Her feet, appalled by this my ghostly phantom.

HECUBA, *dressed as a slave, and supported by fellow-captives,*
appears coming out of Agamemnon's tent.

Mother, who after royal halls hast seen
 The day of thralldom, how thy depth of woe
 Equals thine height of weal ! A God bears down
 The scale with olden bliss heaped, ruining thee.

[Exit.

Hec. Lead forth, O my children, the stricken in years from the
 tent.

O lead her, upbearing the steps of your fellow-thrall 60
 Now, O ye daughters of Troy, but of old your queen.
 Clasp me, uphold, help onward the eld-forspent,
 Laying hold of my wrinkled hand, lest for weakness I fall ;
 And, sustained by a curving arm, thereon as I lean,
 I will hasten onward with tottering pace,
 Speeding my feet in a laggard's race.
 O lightning-splendour of Zeus, O mirk of the night,
 Why quake I for visions in slumber that haunt me
 With terrors, with phantoms ? O Earth's majestic might, 70
 Mother of dreams that hover in dusk-winged flight,
 I cry to the vision of darkness 'Avaunt thee !'—
 The dream of my son who was sent unto Thrace to be saved
 from the slaughter,

The dream that I saw of Polyxena's doom, my dear-loved daughter,

Which I saw, which I knew, which abideth to daunt me.

Gods of the Underworld, save ye my son,

Mine house's anchor, its only one, 80

By the friend of his father warded well

Where the snows of Thrace veil forest and fell!

But a strange new stroke draweth near,

And a strain of wailing for them that wail.

Ah, never as now did the heart in me quail

With the thrilling of ceaseless fear.

O that Cassandra I might but descry

To arrede me my dreams, O daughters of Troy,

Or Helenus, god-taught seer!

For a dappled fawn I beheld which a wolf's red fangs were tearing, 90

Which he dragged from my knees whereto she had clung in her piteous despairing.

This terror withal on my spirit is come,

That the ghost of the mighty Achilles hath risen, and stood

High on the crest of his earth-heaped tomb;

And he claimeth a guerdon of honour, the spilling of blood,

And a woe-stricken Trojan maiden's doom.

O Gods, I am suppliant before you!—in any wise turn, I implore you,

This fate from the child of my womb!

Enter CHORUS of TROJAN CAPTIVE WOMEN.

Chor. I have hasted hitherward; the pavilions of my lord, 100

O my queen, have I forsaken, in the which I sojourn here,

Whom the lot hath doomed to fall unto a king, a thrall

From Ilium chased, the quarry of Achaian hunters' spear,—

Not for lightening of thy pain; nay, a burden have I ta'en

Of heavy tidings, herald of sore anguish unto thee,

For that met is the array of Achaia, and they say

That thy child unto Achilles a sacrifice must be. 110

For thou knowest how in sheen of golden armour seen

He stood upon his tomb, and on the ocean-pacing ships

Laid a spell, that none hath sailed,—yea, though the halliards brailed

The sails up to the yards;—and a cry rang from his lips:

‘ Ho, Danaans ! whither now, leaving unredeemed your vow
 Of honour to my tomb, and my glory spurned away ? ’
 Then a surge of high contention clashed : the spear-host in
 dissension 120
 Was cleft, some crying, ‘ Yield his tomb the victim ! ’—
 others, ‘ Nay ! ’

Now the King was fervent there that thy daughter they should
 spare,
 For that Agamemnon loveth thy prophet-bacchanal.
 But the sons of Theseus twain,¹ Athens’ scions, for thy bane
 Pleaded both, yet for the victim did their vote at variance
 fall.

‘ Ye cannot choose but crown with the life-blood streaming
 down
 Achilles’ grave ! ’ they clamoured—‘ and, for this Kassan-
 dra’s bed,
 Shall any dare prefer to Achilles’ prowess her— 130
 A concubine, a bondslave ?—It shall never be ! ’ they said.

But the vehemence of speech, each contending against each,
 Was balanced, as it were, till the prater subtle-souled,
 The man of honied tongue, the truckler to the throng,
 Laertes’ spawn, ’gan fashion the host unto his mould :

‘ We may not thrust aside like an outcast wretch,’ he cried,
 ‘ The bravest Danaan heart and the stoutest Danaan hand,
 All to spare our hands the stain of the blood of bondmaid
 slain,
 Neither suffer that a voice from the ranks of them that stand

In the presence of Hell’s Queen should with scoffing bitter-
 keen
 Cry, “ Thankless from the plains of Troy the Danaans have
 sped, 140
 Thankless unto Danaan kin whose graves are thick therein,
 Who died to save their brethren—the soon-forgotten
 dead ! ” ’

And Odysseus draweth near—even now shall he be here
 From thy breast to rend thy darling, from thine age-
 enfeebled grasp.

¹ Demophon and Akamas, sons of Theseus by Phaedra.

Hie thee to the temples now : haste, before the altars bow :
Crouch low to Agamemnon, his knees in suppliance clasp.

Lift up thy voice and cry to the Gods that sit on high :
Let the Nether-dwellers hear it through their darkness
ringing wild. [150
For, except they turn and spare, and thy prevalence of prayer
Redeem thee from bereavement of thy ruin-stricken child,
Thou must surely live to gaze where a maiden on her face
On a grave-mound lieth slaughtered, while the darkly-
gleaming tide
Welleth, wellet from the neck which the golden mockeries
deck,
And all her body crimsons in the bubbling horror dyed.

Hec. Woe for mine anguish ! what outcry availeth
To thrill forth its agony-throes ?
What wailing its fulness of torment outwaileth—
Wretched eld—bitter bondage where heart and flesh faileth ?
Ah me for my woes !
What champion is left me ?—what sons to defend me ?—
What city remains to me ? Gone
Are my lord and my sons ! Whither now shall I wend me ?
Whither flee ?—Is there God—is there fiend shall befriend
me ? 160
Alone—alone !

Daughters of Troy—O ye heralds of ruin, ye heralds of
ruin !—
What profits my life any more, whom your words have
undone, have undone ? [170
Now unto yonder pavilion, to tell to my child her undoing,
Lead, O ye wretchedest feet, lead ye the eld-stricken
one !

O daughter, O child of a mother most wretched, forth faring,
forth faring,
Come from the tent, O hearken the voice of thy mother's
word,
To the end thou mayst know what a rumour of awful despair-
ing, despairing,
Concerning the life of thee, my belovèd, but now have I
heard !

Enter POLYXENA.

Polyx. O mother, my mother, what meaneth thy crying?
 What strange dread thing
 Is this that thou heraldest
 That hath scared me, like to a bird forth-flying 180
 On startled wing
 Out of the peace of her nest?

Hec. Alas! woe's me, my daughter!

Polyx. What word of ill-boding is thine? From thy preluding
 ills I divine.

Hec. Ah me, life doomed unto slaughter!

Polyx. Tell it out, tell it out, neither hide o'erlong;
 For mine heart, my mother, is heavy with dread
 For the tidings that come in thy moan.

Hec. O child, O child of the grief-distraught!

Polyx. Ah, what is the message to me thou has brought?

Hec. Death: for the Argive warrior-throng
 Are in one mind set, that thy blood be shed 190
 On the grave of Peleus' son.

Polyx. Ah me, my mother, how can thy tongue
 Speak out the horror?—Let all be said:
 O mother mine, say on.

Hec. O child, I have heard it, the shame and the wrong,
 Of the Argive vote, of the doom forth sped,
 Of the hope of thy life gone—gone!

Polyx. O stricken of anguish beyond all other!
 O filled with affliction of desolate days!
 What tempest, what tempest of outrage and shame, 200
 Too loathly to look on, too awful to name,
 Hath a fiend uproused, that on thee it came,
 That thy woeful child by her woeful mother
 Nevermore down thralldom's paths shall pace!

For me, like a youngling mountain-pastured,
 Like a child of the herd, shalt thou see torn far,
 In woe from thy woeful embraces torn,
 And, with throat by the steel of the altar shorn,
 Down to the underworld darkness borne,
 In the Land Unseen to lie, overmastered
 Of misery, there where the death-stricken are. 210

For thee, for the dark days closing around thee,
 Mother, with uttermost wailings I cry:

But for this, the life that I now must lack,
 For all the ruin thereof and the wrack,
 I wail not, I, as I gaze aback :—

O nay, but a happier lot hath found me,
 Forasmuch as to me it is given to die.

Chor. But lo, Odysseus comes with hurrying foot,
 To tell thee, Hecuba, the new decree,

Enter ODYSSEUS.

Od. Lady, thou know'st, I trow, the host's resolve,
 And the vote cast, yet will I tell it thee :
 The Achaians will to slay Polyxena
 Thy child, upon Achilles' grave-mound's height. 220
 Me they appoint to usher thitherward
 And bring the maid : the president and priest
 Of sacrifice Achilles' son shall be.
 Know'st thou thy part then ?—be not torn away
 Perforce, nor brave me to the strife of hands ;
 But know thy might, thine imminence of ills.
 Wise is it even mid ills to hearken reason.

Hec. Woe ! A sore trial is at hand, meseems,
 Burdened with groanings, and fulfilled of tears. 230
 I died not there where well might I have died ;
 Nor Zeus destroyed, but holdeth me in life
 To see—O wretch !—ills more than ills o'erpast.
 Yet, if the bond may question of the free
 Things that should vex them not, nor gall the heart,
 Then fits it that thou be the questioned now,
 And that I ask, and hearken thy reply.

Od. So be it : ask, I grudge not the delay.

Hec. Rememberest thou thy coming unto Troy
 A spy, in rags vile-vestured ; from thine eyes 240
 Trickled adown thy cheeks the gout of gore ?

Od. I do, for deep it sank into mine heart.

Hec. And Helen knew thee, and told none save me ?

Od. I call to mind : mid peril grim I fell.

Hec. And to my knees didst cling, wast lowly then ?

Od. With grasp of death closed on thy robes mine hand.

Hec. Ay, and what saidst thou—thou my bondman then ?

Od. Words—words full many found I, death to 'scape.

Hec. I saved thee—saved thee,—sent thee forth the land ?

Od. Ay, thanks to thee, I see the sun's light now. 250

Hec. Art thou not caitiff proved then by these plots,

Who wast by me so dealt with as thou sayest,
 Yet dost us nought good, but thine utmost ill?
 A thankless spawn, all ye that grasp at honour
 By babbling to the mob!—let me not know you,
 Who injure friends, and nothing reckon thereof,
 So ye may something say to please the rabble!
 What crafty wiliness imagined ye

This, on my child to pass your murder-vote?
 Was't duty drew them on to human slaughter
 Upon a grave more meet for oxen slain?

260

Or doth Achilles, fain to requite with death
 His slayers, justly aim death's shaft at her?
 Now never aught of harm wrought she to him.
 Helen should he demand, his tomb's fit victim:
 'Twas she to Troy that drew him, and destroyed.

But if some chosen captive needs must die,
 In beauty peerless, not to us points this;
 For Tyndareus' daughter matchless is in form,
 And was found wronging him no less than we.

270

This plea against his 'justice' I array.
 But what return thou ow'st me, on my claim,
 Hear—thou didst touch mine hand, as thou dost own,
 And wrinkled cheek, low cowering at my feet.
 Lo, in my turn thine hand, thy beard, I touch,
 That grace of old reclaiming, now thy suppliant.
 Not from mine arms tear thou my child away,
 Nor slay ye her: suffice the already dead.

In her I joy, in her forget my woes.

For many a lost bliss she my solace is:

280

My city she, nurse, staff, guide for my feet.
 Not tyrannously the strong should use their strength,
 Nor they which prosper think to prosper aye.

I too once was, but now am I no more,
 And all my weal one day hath reft from me.

O, by thy beard, have thou respect to me!

Pity me: go thou to Achaia's host;

Persuade them how that shame it is to slay
 Women, whom first ye slew not, when ye tore
 These from the altars, but for pity spared.

290

Lo, the same law is stablished among you
 For free and bond as touching blood-shedding.

Thine high repute, how ill soe'er thou speak,
 Shall sway them: for the same speech carrieth not
 Like weight from men contemned and men revered.

Chor. There is no human nature so relentless
That, hearkening to thy groanings and thy wails
Long lengthened out, would not let fall the tear.

Od. Receive instruction, Hecuba, nor him
For wrath count foe, who wisely counselleth. 300
Thy life, through whom I found deliverance,
Ready am I to save; I stand thereto.

But what to all I said, I unsay not—

That now, Troy taken, we should yield thy child,
At our great champion's claim, for sacrifice.

For of this cometh weakness in most states,
That, though a man be brave and patriot-souled,
No guerdon gains he more than baser men.

But we, we deem Achilles honour-worthy,
Who died for Hellas nobly as man may. 310

Were this not shame then, as a friend to treat
Him living, but no more when he is gone?

Yea, what will one say then, if once again
The host must gather for the strife with foes.

'Fight shall we,' will they cry, 'or cling to life,
Beholding how unhonoured go the dead?'

Yea, for myself, how scant soe'er in life

My fare for daily need, this should suffice:

Yet fain would I my tomb were reverence-crowned—
Mine; for no fleeting gratitude is this. 320

But, if thou plain of hardship, hear mine answer:

With us there be grey matrons, agèd sires,

Not any whit less wretched than art thou,

And brides of noblest bridegrooms left forlorn,

Whose corpses yonder dust of Ida shrouds.

Endure this: we, if err we do to honour

The brave, content will stand convict of folly.

But ye barbarians, neither count as friends

Your friends, nor render your heroic dead

Homage, that Hellas so may prosperous rise, 330

And your reward may match your policy.

Chor. Woe! What a curse is thralldom's nature, aye
Enduring wrong by strong constraint o'erborne!

Hec. My daughter, wasted are my words in air,
Flung vainly forth my pleadings for thy life.

If thou canst aught prevail beyond thy mother,

Be instant; as with nightingale's sad throat

Moan, moan, that thou be not bereft of life.

Fall piteously at this Odysseus' knee:

Melt him. A plea thou hast—he too hath babes ; 340
Well may he so compassionate thy lot.

Polyx. I see, Odysseus, how thou hid'st thine hand
Beneath thy vesture, how thou turn'st away
Thy face, lest I should touch thy beard. Fear not :
From Zeus safe art thou, from the Suppliant's Champion.
I will go with thee, both for that I must,
And that I long to die. And, were I loth,
A coward girl life-craving were I proved.
For, wherefore should I live, whose sire was king
Of all the Phrygians? Such was my life's dawn : 350
Thereafter was I nurtured mid bright hopes,
A bride for kings, for whose hand rivalry
Ran high, whose hall and hearth should hail me queen.
And I—ah me!—was Lady of the Dames
Of Ida, cynosure amidst the maidens,
Peer of the Gods—except that man must die :—
And now a slave! The name alone constrains me
To long for death, so strange it is to me.

More—haply upon brutal-hearted lords
I might light, one that would for silver buy me,— 360
Sister of Hector and of many a chief,—
Force me to grind the quern his halls within,
And make me sweep his dwelling, stand before
The loom, while days of bitterness drag on.
And, somewhere bought, some bondslave shall defile
My couch, accounted once a prize for princes.
Never!—free light mine eyes shall last behold :
To Death my body will I dedicate.

Lead on, Odysseus, lead me to my doom ;
For I see no assurance, nor in hope, 370
No, nor in day-dreams, of good days to be.
Mother, do thou in no wise hinder me
By word or deed ; but thou consent with me
Unto my death, ere shame unmeet befall.
For whoso is not wont to taste of ills
Chafes, while he bears upon his neck the yoke,
And death for him were happier far than life ;
For life ignoble is but crushing toil.

Chor. Strange is the impress, clear-stamped upon men,
Of gentle birth, and aye the noble name 380
Higher aspires in them that worthily bear it.

Hec. My daughter, nobly said : yet anguish cleaves
Unto that ' nobly '. But if Peleus' son

Must gain this grace, and ye must flee reproach,
Odysseus, slay not her in any wise ;

But me, lead me unto Achilles' pyre :

Stab me, spare not : 'twas I gave Paris birth

Who with his shafts smote Peleus' son and slew.

Od. Not thee, grey mother, did Achilles' ghost

Require the Achaian men to slay, but her.

390

Hec. Yet ye—at least me with my daughter slay :

Then twice so deep a draught of blood shall sink

To earth and to the dead who claimeth this.

Od. Thy daughter's death sufficeth : death on death

Must not be heaped. Would God we owed not this !

Hec. I must—I must die where my daughter dies !

Od. *Must?*—I knew not that I had found a master !

Hec. As ivy clings to oak will I clasp her.

Od. Not if thou heed a wiser than thyself.

Hec. Consent I will not to let go my child.

400

Od. Nor I will hence depart and leave her here.

Polyx. Mother, heed me : and thou, Laertes' son,

O bear with parents which have cause to rage.

Mother, poor mother, strive not with the strong.

Wouldst thou be earthward hurled, and wound thy flesh,

Thine agèd flesh, with violence thrust away ?—

Be hustled shamefully, by young strong arms

Haled ?—This shouldst thou. Nay, 'tis not worthy thee.

But mother, darling mother, give thine hand,

Thy dear, dear hand, and lay thy cheek to mine :

410

Since never more, but this last time of all

Shall I behold the sun's beam and his orb.

Receive of all my greetings this the last :—

O mother—breast that bare me—I pass deathward.

Hec. O daughter, I shall yet live on in bondage !

Polyx. Bridegroom nor bridal !—nought of all my due !

Hec. Piteous thy plight, my child, and wretched I.

Polyx. There shall I lie in Hades, far from thee.

Hec. Ah me, what shall I do ?—where end my life ?

Polyx. To die a slave, whose father was free-born !

420

Hec. In fifty sons nor part nor lot have I !

Polyx. What shall I tell to Hector and thy lord ?

Hec. Report me of all women wretchedest.

Polyx. O bosom, breasts that sweetly nurtured me !

Hec. Woe is thee, daughter, for thy fate untimely !

Polyx. Mother, farewell : Cassandra, fare thee well.

Hec. Others *fare well*—not for thy mother this.

Polyx. Mid Thracians lives my brother Polydorus.

Hec. If he doth live. I doubt: so dark is all.

Polyx. He lives, and he shall close thy dying eyes. 430

Hec. I—I have died ere dying, through my woes.

Polyx. Muffle mine head, Odysseus, and lead on.

For, ere ye slay me, hath my mother's moan
Melted mine heart, and mine is melting hers.

O Light!—for yet on thy name may I call—

Yet all my share in thee is that scant space

Hence to the sword-edge and Achilles' pyre.

[*Exeunt* ODYSSEUS and POLYXENA.]

Hec. Ah me! I swoon—beneath me fail my limbs!

O daughter, touch thy mother—reach thine hand—

Give it, nor childless leave me!—Friends—undone!— 440

Oh thus to see that sister of Zeus' sons,

Helen the Spartan!—for by her bright eyes

In shameful fall she brought down prosperous Troy.

[*Swoons.*
(*Str.* 1)]

Chor. O breeze, O breeze, over sea-ways racing,

Who onward waftest the ocean-pacing

Fleet-flying keels o'er the mere dark-swelling,

Whitherward wilt thou bear me, the sorrow-laden?

From what slave-mart shall the captive maiden

Pass into what strange master's dwelling?

To a Dorian haven?—or where, overstreaming 450

Fat Phthia-land's meads, laugh loveliest-gleaming

Babe-waters from founts of Apidanus welling?

(*Ant.* 1)

Or, to misery borne by the oars brine-sweeping,

In the island-halls through days of weeping

Shall we dwell, where the first-born palm, ascending

From the earth, with the bay twined, glorifying

With enshrining frondage the couch where lying

Dear Lêto attained to her travail's ending, 460

There chanting of Artemis' bow all-golden,

And the brows with the frontlet of gold enfolden,

With the Delian maidens our voices blending?

(*Str.* 2)

Or in Pallas's Town to the car all-glorious

Shall I yoke the steeds on the saffron-glowing¹

¹ *i.e.*, Embroider thereon the chariot and horses of Athênê, bearing the Goddess to battle against the Giants. The allusion is to the great saffron-dyed mantle (*peplos*) which was carried, outspread like a sail, in solemn

Veil of Athênê, where flush victorious

The garlands that cunningest fingers are throwing
In manifold hues on its folds wide-flowing,— 470
Or the brood of the Titans whom lightnings, that fell
Flame-wrapt from Kronion, in long sleep quell?

(*Ant.* 2)

Woe for our babes, for our fathers hoary!

Woe for our country, mid smoke and smoulder
Crashing to ruin, and all her glory
Spear-spoiled!—and an alien land shall behold her 480
Bond who was free; for that Asia's shoulder
Is bowed under Europe's yoke, and I dwell,
An exile from home, in a dungeon of hell.

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

Tal. Where shall I find her that of late was queen
Of Ilium, Hecuba, ye maids of Troy?

Chor. Lo there, anigh thee, on the ground outstretched,
Talthybius, lies she muffled in her robes.

Tal. What shall I say, Zeus?—that thou look'st on men?
Or that this fancy false we vainly hold 490
For nought, who deem there is a race of Gods,
While chance controlleth all things among men?
This—was she not the wealthy Phrygians' queen?
This—was she not all-prosperous Priam's wife?
And now her city is all spear-o'erthrown;
Herself a slave, old, childless, on the earth
Lieth, her hapless head with dust defiled.
Ah, old am I, yet be it mine to die
Ere into any shameful lot I fall!
Arise, ill-starred, and from the earth uplift
Thy body and thine head all snow-besprent. 500

Hec. Ha, who art thou that lettest not my frame
Rest?—why disturb my grief, who'er thou be?

Tal. Talthybius I, the Danaans' minister,
Of Agamemnon sent, O queen, for thee.

Hec. Friend, friend, art come because the Achaians will
To slay me too?—How sweet thy tidings were!
Haste we—make speed—O ancient, lead me on.

procession through the streets of Athens to the temple on the Acropolis,
every fourth year, at the Great Panathenaic Festival.

- Tal.* Lady, that thou mayst bury thy dead child
 I come in quest of thee; and sent am I
 Of Atreus' two sons and the Achaian folk. 510
- Hec.* Woe!—what wouldst say? Not as to one death-doomed
 Cam'st thou to us, but all to publish ills?
 Child, thou hast perished, from thy mother torn!
 Childless, as touching thee, am I—ah wretch!
 How did ye slay her?—how?—with reverence meet,
 Or with brute outrage, as men slay a foe,
 Ancient? Tell on, though all unsweet thy tale.
- Tal.* Twofold tear-tribute wouldst thou win from me
 In pity for thy child. Mine eyes shall weep
 The tale, as by the grave when she was dying. 520
 There met was all Achaia's warrior-host
 Thronged at the grave to see thy daughter slain.
 Then took Achilles' son Polyxena's hand,
 And on the mound's height set her: I stood by.
 And followed of the Achaians chosen youths
 Whose hands should curb the strugglings of thy lamb.
 Then taking 'twixt his hands a chalice brimmed,
 Pure gold, Achilles' son to his dead sire
 Drink-offerings poured, and signed me to proclaim 530
 Silence unto the whole Achaian host.
 By him I stood, and in the midst thus cried:
 ' Silence, Achaians! Hushed be all the host!
 Peace!—not a word!'—so breathless stilled the folk.
 Then spake he: ' Son of Peleus, Father mine,
 Accept from me these drops propitiatory,
 Ghost-raising. Draw thou nigh to drink pure blood
 Dark-welling from a maid. We give it thee,
 The host and I. Gracious to us be thou:
 Vouchsafe us to cast loose the sterns and curbs
 Of these ships, kindly home-return to win 540
 From Troy, and all to reach our fatherland.'
 So spake he; in that prayer joined all the host;
 Then grasped his golden-plated falchion's hilt,
 Drew from the sheath, and to those chosen youths
 Of Argos' war-host signed to seize the maid.
 But she, being ware thereof, spake forth this speech:
 ' O Argives, ye which laid my city low,
 Free-willed I die: on my flesh let no man
 Lay hand: my neck unflinching will I yield.
 But, by the Gods, let me stand free, the while 550
 Ye slay, that I may die free; for I shame

Slave to be called in Hades, who am royal.'

'Yea!' like a great sea roared the host: the King
Spake to the youths to let the maiden go.

And they, soon as they heard that last behest
Of him of chiefest might, drew back their hands.
And she, when this she heard, her masters' word,
Her vesture grasped, and from the shoulder's height
Rent it adown her side, down to the waist,

And bosom showed and breasts, as of a statue, 560
Most fair; and, bowing to the earth her knee,
A word, of all words most heroic, spake: ¹

'Lo here, O youth, if thou art fain to strike
My breast, strike home: but if beneath my neck
Thou wouldest, here my throat is bared to thee.'
And he, loth and yet fain, for ruth of her,
Cleaves with the steel the channels of the breath:
Forth gushed the life-springs: but she, even in death,
Took chiefest thought decorously to fall,
Hiding what hidden from men's eyes should be. 570

But when she had spent her breath 'neath that death-stroke,
Each Argive 'gan his task—no man the same:
But some upon the dead were strawing leaves
Out of their hands, and some heap high the pyre,
Bringing pine-billets thither: whoso bare not
Heard such and such rebukes of him that bare:
'Dost stand still, basest heart, with nought in hand—
Robe for the maiden, neither ornament?
Nought wilt thou give to one in courage matchless,
Noblest of soul?'

Such is the tale I tell 580

Of thy dead child. Most blest in motherhood
I count thee of all women, and most hapless.

Chor. Dread bale on Priam's line and city hath poured
Its lava-flood:—'tis heaven's resistless doom.

Hec. Daughter, I know not on what ills to look,
So many throng me: if to this I turn,
That hindereth me: thence summoneth me again
Another grief, on-ushering ills on ills.
And now I cannot from my soul blot out
Thine agony, that I should wail it not. 590

Yet hast thou barred the worst, proclaimed to me
So noble. Lo, how strange, that evil soil

¹ But the Scholiast interprets—

'She spake a word, of all most pitiful:.'

Heaven-blest with seasons fair, bears goodly crops,
 While the good, if it faileth of its dues,
 Gives evil fruit : but always among men
 The caitiff nothing else than evil is,
 The noble, noble; nor 'neath fortune's stress
 Marreth his nature, but is good alway.
 By blood, or nurture, is the difference made?
 Sooth, gentle nurture bringeth lessoning 600
 In nobleness; and whoso learns this well
 By honour's touchstone knoweth baseness too :—
 Ah, unavailing arrows of the mind !¹
 But go thou, to the Argives this proclaim,
 That none my daughter touch, but that they keep
 The crowd thence : in a war-array untold
 Lawless the mob is, and the shipmen's license
 Outraveneth flame. 'Tis sin if one sin not.²

[Exit TALTHYBIUS.]

But, ancient handmaid, take a vessel thou,
 And dip, and of the sea-brine hither bring, 610
 That with the last bath I may wash my child,—
 The bride unwedded, maid a maid no more,³—
 And lay her out—as meet is, how can I?
 Yet as I may; for lo, what plight is mine!
 Jewels from fellow-captives will I gather
 Which dwell my neighbour-thralls these tents within,
 If haply any, to our lords unknown,
 Hath any stolen treasure of her home.
 O stately halls, O home so happy once!
 O rich in fair abundance, goodliest offspring, 620
 Priam!—and I, a grey head crowned with sons!
 How are we brought to nought, of olden pride
 Stripped bare! And lo, we men are puffed up,
 One of us for the riches of his house,
 And one for honour in the mouths of men!
 These things be nought. All vain the heart's devisings,
 The vauntings of the tongue! Most blest is he
 To whom no ill befalls as days wear on.

(Str.)

Chor. My doom of disaster was written,
 The doom of mine anguish was sealed, 630

¹ No philosophic moralizing can avail to assuage my sorrow.

² 'They think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot' (1 *Pet.* iv., 4).

³ As being united to Achilles in death.

When of Paris the pine-shafts were smitten
 Upon Ida, that earthward they reeled,
 To ride over ridges surf-whitened
 Till the bride-bed of Helen was won,
 Woman fairest of all that be lightened
 By the gold of the sun.

(Ant.)

For battle-toils, yea, desolations
 Yet sorer around us close ;
 And the folly of one is the nation's
 Destruction ; of alien foes
 Cometh ruin by Simois' waters.
 So judged is the doom that was given
 When on Ida the strife of the Daughters
 Of the Blessed was striven,

640

(Epode)

For battle, for murder, for ruin
 Of mine halls :—by Eurotas is moan,
 Where with tears for their homes' undoing
 The maidens Laconian groan,
 Where rendeth her tresses hoary
 The mother for sons that are dead,
 And her cheeks with woe-furrows are gory,
 And her fingers are red.

650

Enter HANDMAID, with bearers carrying a covered corpse.

Han. Women, O where is Hecuba, sorrow's queen,
 Who passeth every man, all womankind,
 In woes ? No man shall take away her crown.

660

Chor. What now, O hapless voice of evil-boding ?
 Shall they ne'er sleep, thy publishings of grief ?

Han. To Hecuba I bring this pang : mid woes
 Not easily may mortal lips speak fair.

Chor. Lo where she cometh from beneath the roofs :
 In season for thy tale appeareth she.

Han. O all-afflicted, more than lips can say !
 Queen, thou art slain—thou seest the light no more !
 Unchilded, widowed, cityless—all-destroyed !

Hec. No news this : 'tis but taunting me who knew.
 But wherefore com'st thou bringing me this corpse,
 Polyxena's, whose burial-rites, 'twas told,
 By all Achaia's host were being sped ?

670

Han. She nothing knows : Polyxena—ah me !—

Still wails she, and the new woes graspeth not.

Hec. O hapless I !—not—not the bacchant head
Of prophetess Cassandra bring'st thou hither ?

Han. Thou nam'st the living : but the dead—this dead,
Bewailest not,—look, the dead form is bared !

[*Uncovers the corpse.*

Seems it not strange—worse than all boding fears ?

680

Hec. Ah me, my son !—I see Polydorus dead,
Whom in his halls I deemed the Thracian warder^d
O wretch ! it is my death—I am no more !

O my child, O my child !

Mine anguish shall thrill

Through a wail shrilling wild

In the ears of me still

Which pealed there but now from the throat of a demon, a
herald of ill.

Han. Didst thou then know thy son's doom, hapless one ?

Hec. Beyond, beyond belief, new woes I see.

Ills upon ills throng one after other :

690

Never day shall pass by without tear, without sigh, nor mine
anguish refrain.

Chor. Dread, O dread evils, hapless queen, we suffer.

Hec. O child, O child of a grief-stricken mother !

By what fate didst thou die ?—in what doom dost thou lie ?—
of what man wast thou slain ?

Han. I know not : on the sea-strand found I him.

Hec. Cast up by the tide, or struck down by the spear in a
blood-reddened hand

On the smooth-levelled sand ?

700

Han. The outsea surge in-breaking flung him up.

Hec. Woe's me, I discern it, the vision that blasted my sight !
Neither flitted unheeded that black-winged phantom of night,
Which I saw, which revealed that my son was no more of the
light.

Chor. Who slew him ? Canst thou, dream-arreder, tell ?

Hec. 'Twas my friend, 'twas my guest, 'twas the Thracian
chariot-lord

710

To whose charge his grey father had given him to hide and to
ward.

Chor. Oh, what wouldst say ?—slew him to keep the gold ?

Hec. O horror unspeakable, nameless, beyond all wonder !—
Impious, unbearable !—Where are they, friendship and
truth ?

O accursèd of men, lo, how hast thou carved asunder
His flesh!—how thy knife, when my child's limbs quivered
thereunder,

Hath slashed him and mangled, and thou wast unmelted of
ruth!

720

Chor. O hapless, how a God, whose hand on thee
Is heavy, above all mortals heaps thee pain!
But lo, I see our master towering nigh,
Agamemnon: friends, henceforth hold we our peace.

Enter AGAMEMNON.

Ag. Why stay'st thou, Hecuba, thy child to entomb
According to Talthybius' word to me
That of the Argives none should touch thy daughter?
Wherefore we let her be, and touch her not.
Yet loiterest thou, that wonder stirreth me. 730
I come to speed thee hence; for all things there
Are well wrought—if herein may aught be well.
Ha, who is this that by the tents I see?
What Trojan dead?—No Argive this, the robes
That shroud the body make report to me.

*Hec. (aside).*¹ Hapless!—myself I name in naming thee—
O Hecuba, what shall I do?—or fall
At the king's feet, or silent bear mine ills?

Ag. Wherefore on me dost turn thy back, and mourn,
Nor tellest what is done, and who is this? 740

Hec. (aside). But if, a slave and foe accounting me,
He thrust me from his knees, 'twere pang on pang.

Ag. No prophet born am I, to track the path
Of these thy musings, if I hear them not.

Hec. (aside). Lo, surely am I counting this man's heart
O'er much my foe, who is no foe at all.

Ag. Sooth, if thou wilt that nought hereof I know,
At one we are: I care not, I, to hear.

Hec. (aside). I cannot, save with help of him, avenge
My children—wherefore do I dally thus? 750
I must needs venture, or to win or lose:—
Agamemnon, I beseech thee by thy knees,
And by thy beard, and thy victorious hand—

Ag. What matter seekest thou? Wouldst have thy days
Free henceforth? Sooth, thy boon is lightly won.

¹ cf. *Hen. VI*, Part 1, Act v, iii, for a closely similar series of asides.

Hec. No—no! Avenge me of mine adversary,
And I will welcome lifelong bondage then.

Ag. But to what championship dost summon me?

Hec. To nought of all whereof thou dreamest, king.

Seest thou this corpse, for which my tears rain down? 760

Ag. I see,—yet what shall come I cannot tell.

Hec. Him once I bare, and carried 'neath my zone.

Ag. One of thy sons is this, O sorrow-crushed?

Hec. Nay, not of Priam's sons by Ilium slain.

Ag. How? didst thou bear another more than these?

Hec. Yea—to my grief, meseems: thou seest him here.

Ag. Yet where was he what time the city fell?

Hec. Dreading his death his father sent him thence.

Ag. And whither drew him from the rest apart?

Hec. Unto this land, where dead hath he been found. 770

Ag. To Polymestor, ruler of the land?

Hec. Yea—sent in charge of thrice-accursed gold.

Ag. And of whom slain, and lighting on what doom?

Hec. Of whom save one?—that Thracian friend slew him.

Ag. O wretch!—for that he lusted for the gold?

Hec. Even so, when Phrygia's fall was known of him.

Ag. Where found'st thou him?—or who hath brought thy
dead?

Hec. She there: upon the strand she chanced on him.

Ag. Seeking him, or on other task employed?

Hec. Sea-brine she sought to lave Polyxena. 780

Ag. So then this guest-friend slew and cast him forth.

Hec. Yea, on the sea to drift, his flesh thus hacked.

Ag. O woe is thee for thine unmeasured pains!

Hec. 'Tis death—there is no deeper depth of woe.

Ag. Alas, was woman e'er so fortune-crost?

Hec. None, except thou wouldst name Misfortune's self.

But for what cause I bow thy knees to clasp,

Hear:—if my righteous due my sufferings seem

To thee, I am content: if not, do thou

Avenge me on that impious, impious friend, 790

Who neither feared the powers beneath the earth,

Nor those on high, but wrought most impious deed,—

Who oft-times at my table ate and drank,

For welcome foremost in my count of friends,

Having all dues, yea, all his need forestalled,¹—

¹ Another interpretation—

'Yet scheming this the while!'

Slew him, nor in his thoughts of murder found
 Room for a grave, but cast him mid the sea.
 And I—a slave I may be, haply weak ;
 Yet are the Gods strong, and their ruler strong,
 Even Law ; for by this Law we know Gods are, 800
 And live, and make division of wrong and right :
 And if this at thy bar be disannulled,
 And they shall render not account which slay
 Guests, or dare rifle the Gods' holy things,
 Then among men is there no righteousness.
 This count then shameful ; have respect to me ;
 Pity me :—like a painter so draw back,¹
 Scan me, pore on my portraiture of woes.
 A queen was I, time was, but now thy slave ;
 Crowned with fair sons once, childless now and old, 810
 Cityless, lone, of mortals wretchedest.
 Woe for me !—whither wouldst withdraw thy foot ?
 Meseems I shall not speed—O hapless I !
 Wherefore, O wherefore, at all other lore
 Toil men, as needeth, and make eager quest,
 Yet Suasion, the unrivalled queen of men,
 Nor price we pay, nor make ado to learn her
 Unto perfection, so a man might sway
 His fellows as he would, and win his ends ?
 How then shall any hope good days henceforth ? 820
 So many sons—none left me any more !
 Myself mid shame a spear-thrall ruin-spel'd ;—
 Yon smoke o'er Troy upsoaring in my sight !
 Yet—yet—'twere unavailing plea perchance
 To cast Love's shield before me—yet be it said :
 Lo, at thy very side my child is couched,
 Cassandra, whom the Phrygians called the Inspired :—
 Those nights of love, hath their memorial perished ?
 Or for the lovingkindness of the couch
 What thank shall my child have, or I for her ? 830
 For of the darkness and the night's love-spells
 Cometh on men the chiefest claim for thank.

¹ This transition will not appear abrupt and artificial if we suppose that Agamemnon, apprehensive of the obligation thrust upon him, makes a movement to draw back, which Hecuba, with the quick wit of desperation, converts to a simile which arrests him till l. 812, when she is driven to make a more direct appeal to his sense of honour. Note, that she uses just such words as a Greek painter might have used in pointing out to a patron the merits of his work—' ἰδοῦ, κἀνάθηρσον οἱ ἔχει καλά.'

Hearken now, hearken : seest thou this dead boy ?
 Doing him right, to thine own marriage-kin
 Shalt thou do right. One plea more lack I yet :—
 O that I had a voice in these mine arms
 And hands and hair and pacings of my feet,
 By art of Daedalus lent, or of a God,
 That all together to thy knees might cling
 Weeping, and pressing home pleas manifold !
 O my lord, mightiest light to Hellas' sons,
 Hearken, O lend thine hand to avenge the aged ;
 What though a thing of nought she be, yet hear !
 For 'tis the good man's part to champion right,
 And everywhere and aye to smite the wrong.

840

Chor. Strange, strange, how all cross-chances hap to men !
 These laws shift landmarks even of friendship's ties,¹
 Turning to friends the bitterest of foes,
 Setting at enmity the erstwhile loving.

Ag. I am stirred to pity, Hecuba, both of thee,
 Thy son, thy fortune, and thy suppliant hand ;
 And for the Gods' and justice' sake were fain
 Thine impious guest should taste for this thy vengeance,
 So means were found thy cause to speed, while I
 Seem not unto the host to plot this death
 For Thracia's king for thy Cassandra's sake.
 For herein is mine heart disquieted :—
 This very man the host account their friend,
 The dead their foe : that dear he is to thee
 Is nought to them, nor part have these in him.
 Wherefore take thought : in me thou hast one fain
 To share thy toil, and swift to lend thee aid,
 But slow to face the Achaians' murmurings.

850

860

Hec. Ah, among mortals is there no man free !

To lucre or to fortune is he slave :
 The city's rabble or the laws' impeachment
 Constrains him into paths his soul abhors.
 But since thou fear'st, dost overrate the crowd,
 Even I will set thee free from this thy dread.
 Be privy thou, what ill soe'er I plot
 For my son's slayer, but share not the deed.
 If tumult mid the Achaians rise, or cry
 Of rescue, when the Thracian feels my vengeance,

870

¹ The laws of right and wrong, and the obligation to avenge the blood of kin, compel Hecuba to ally herself with Agamemnon, her late enemy, against Polymestor, her late friend.

Thou check them, not in seeming for my sake.

For all else, fear not: I will shape all well.

Ag. How? what wouldst do? Wouldst in thy wrinkled hand

A dagger clutch, and yon barbarian slay?—

With poisons do the deed, or with what help?

What arm shall aid thee? whence wilt win thee friends?

Hec. These tents a host of Trojan women hide. 880

Ag. The captives meanest thou, Greek hunters' prey?

Hec. By these will I avenge me on my slayer.

Ag. How?—women gain the mastery over men?

Hec. Mighty are numbers: joined with craft, resistless.

Ag. Ay, mighty, yet misprize I womankind.

Hec. What? did not women slay Aigyptus' sons?—

The males of Lemnos wholly extirpate?

Yet be it so: forbear to reason this.

But to this woman give thou through the host

Safe passage.

(*To a servant*) Thou, draw nigh our Thracian guest, 890

Say, 'Hecuba, late Queen of Ilium,

Calls thee on thy behoof no less than hers,

Thy sons withal; for these must also hear

Her words.' The burial of Polyxena

Late-slaughtered, Agamemnon, thou delay;

So sister joined with brother in one flame,

A mother's double grief, shall be entombed.

Ag. So shall it be: yet, might the host but sail,

No power had I to grant this grace to thee:

But, seeing God sends no fair-following winds, 900

Needs must we tarry watching idle sails.

Now fair befall: for all men's weal is this,—

Each several man's, and for the state,—that ill

Betide the bad, prosperity the good.

[*Exit* AGAMEMNON.

(*Str. 1*)

Chor. O my fatherland, Ilium, thou art named no more

Mid burgs unspoiled,

Such a battle-cloud lightening spears enshrouds thee o'er,

All round thee coiled! 910

Thou art piteously shorn of thy brows' tower-diadem,

And smirched with stain

Of the reek; and thy streetways—my feet shall not tread them,

Ah me, again!

(Ant. 1)

At the midnight my doom lighted on me, when sleep shed
 O'er eyes sweet rain,
 When from sacrifice-dance and from hushed songs on his bed
 My lord had lain,
 And the spear on the wall was uphung, for watchman's ken
 Saw near nor far [920
 Overtrampling the Ilian plains those sea-borne men,
 That host of war.

(Str. 2)

I was ranging the braids of mine hair 'neath soft snood-fold :
 On mine eyes thrown
 Were the rays from the limitless¹ sheen, the mirror-gold,
 Ere I sank down
 To my rest on the couch ;—but a tumult's tempest-blast
 Swept up the street,
 And a battle-cry thundered—' Ye sons of Greeks, on fast !
 Be the castles of Troy overthrown, that home at last [930
 May hail your feet !'

(Ant. 2)

From my dear bed, my lost bed, I sprang, like Dorian maid
 But mangle-veiled,
 And to Artemis' altar I clung—woe's me, I prayed
 In vain, and wailed.
 And my lord I beheld lying dead ; and I was borne
 O'er deep salt sea,
 Looking back upon Troy, by the ship from Ilium torn
 As she sped on the Hellas-ward path : then woe-forlorn
 I swooned,—ah me !— [940
 (Epode)

Upon Helen the sister of Zeus' sons hurling back,
 And on Paris, fell shepherd of Ida, curses black,
 Who from mine home
 By their bridal had reft me—'twas bridal none, but wrack 950
 Devil-wrought :—to her fatherland home o'er yon sea-track
 Ne'er may she come !

*Enter POLYMESTOR with his two little sons attended by a
 guard of Thracian spearmen.*

Polym. Priam of men most dear !—and dearest thou,
 O Hecuba, I weep beholding thee,

¹ The Greek word, for which I cannot find any English equivalent in this sense, expresses that apparent absence of any bounding surface in a perfect mirror, which has sometimes betrayed the unwary into walking through such.

Thy city, and thine offspring slain so late.
 Nought is there man may trust, nor high repute,
 Nor hope that weal shall not be turned to woe ;
 But the Gods all confound, hurled forth and back,
 Turmoiling them, that we through ignorance
 May worship them :—what skills it to make moan 960
 For this, outrunning evils none the more ?
 But if mine absence thou dost chide, forbear ;
 For in the mid-Thrace tracts afar was I
 When thou cam'st hither : soon as I returned,
 At point was I to hasten forth mine home ;
 When lo, for this same end thine handmaid came
 Telling a tale whose tidings winged mine haste.

Hec. I shame to look thee in the face, who lie,
 O Polymestor, in such depth of ills.

Thou sawest me in weal : shame's thrall I am, 970
 Found in such plight wherein I am this day.
 I cannot look on thee with eyes undrooped.
 Yet count it not as evil-will to thee,
 Polymestor ; therebeside is custom's bar
 That women look not in the eyes of men.

Polym. No marvel :—but what need hast thou of me ?
 For what cause from mine home hast sped my feet ?

Hec. A secret of mine own I fain would tell
 To thee and thine. I pray thee, bid thy guards
 Aloof from these pavilions to withdraw. 980

Polym. Depart ye, for this solitude is safe.

[*Exeunt* GUARDS.]

My friend art thou, well-willed to me this host
 Achaian. Now behoves thee to declare
 Wherein the prosperous must render help
 To friends afflicted : lo, prepared am I.

Hec. First, of the son whom in thine halls thou hast,
 Polydorus, of mine hands, and of his sire's—
 Liveth he ?—I will ask thee then the rest.

Polym. Surely : as touching him thy lot is fair.

Hec. Dear friend, how well thou speak'st and worthy thee !

Polym. Prithee, what next art fain to learn of me ? [990

Hec. If me, his mother, he remembereth ?

Polym. Yea—fain had come to thee in secret hither.

Hec. Is the gold safe, wherewith from Troy he came ?

Polym. Safe—warded in mine halls in any wise.

Hec. Safe keep it : covet not thy neighbours' goods.

Polym. Nay, lady : joy be mine of that I have !

Hec. Know'st what I fain would tell thee and thy sons?

Polym. I know not: this thy word shall signify.

Hec. Be it sweet to thee as thou to me art dear! 1000

Polym. But what imports my sons and me to know?

Hec. Gold—ancient vaults of gold of Priam's line.

Polym. This is it thou art fain to tell thy son?

Hec. Yea, by thy mouth: thou art a righteous man.

Polym. What needeth then the presence of my sons?

Hec. Better they knew, if haply thou shouldst die.

Polym. Well hast thou said: yea, 'twere the wiser way.

Hec. Dost know where stood Athênê's Trojan fane?

Polym. There?—is the gold there?—and the token, what?

Hec. A black rock from the earth's face jutting forth. 1010

Polym. Hast aught beside to tell me of that hoard?

Hec. Some jewels I brought forth with me—wouldst keep these?

Polym. Where?—where?—beneath thy raiment, or in hiding?

Hec. In yon tents, safe beneath a heap of spoils.

Polym. Safe?—there?—Achaian ships empale us round.

Hec. Inviolatè are the captive women's tents.

Polym. Within is all safe? Be they void of men?

Hec. Within is no Achaian, only we.

Enter the tents,—for fain the Argives are

To unmoor the ships for homeward flight from Troy,—

That, all well done, thou mayst with thy sons fare 1020

To where thou gav'st a home unto my child.

HECUBA and POLYMESTOR with Children enter the tent.

Chor. Not yet is the penalty paid, but thy time is at hand,
As who reeleth adown an abyss wherein foothold is none
Slant-slipping, from sweet life hurled, for the life thou hast
ta'en.

For wherever it cometh to pass that the rightful demand 1030

Of justice's claim and the laws of the Gods be at one,

Then is ruinous bane for the sinner, O ruinous bane!

It shall mock thee, thy wayfaring's hope; to the Unseen
Land,

To the place of the dead hath it drawn thee, O wretch
undone!

By the hand not of warriors, thou hero, shalt thou be slain.

Polym. (*within*). Ah, I am blinded of mine eyes' light—wretch!

Chor. Heard ye the yell of yonder Thracian, friends?

Polym. (*within*). Ah me, my children!—ah the awful murder!

Chor. Friends, strange grim work is wrought in yonder tent.

Polym. (within). Surely by swift feet shall ye not escape!

My blows shall rive this dwelling's inmost parts! 1040

Chor. Lo, crasheth there swift bolt of giant hand.

Shall we burst in?—the peril summoneth us

To help of Hecuba and the Trojan dames.

Enter HECUBA.

Hec. Smite on—spare not—ay, batter down the doors!

Ne'er shalt thou set bright vision in thine orbs,

Nor living see thy sons whom I have slain.

Chor. Hast vanquished?—overcome thy Thracian guest,

Lady?—hast done the deed thou threatenedst?

Hec. Him shalt thou straightway see before the tents,

Blind, pacing with blind aimless-stumbling feet, 1050

And his two children's corpses, whom I slew

With Trojan heroines' help: now hath he paid me

The vengeance-dues. There comes he forth, thou seest.

I from his path will step; the seething rage

Of yonder Thracian monster will I shun.

Enter POLYMESTOR.

Polym. Ah me, whitherward shall I go?—where stand?

Where find me a mooring-place?

Must I prowl on their track with foot and with hand

As a mountain-beast should pace? [1060

Or to this side or that shall I turn me, for vengeance pursuing

The slaughterous hags of Troy which have wrought mine
undoing?

Foul daughters of Phrygia, murderesses

Accursèd, in what deep-hidden recesses

Are ye cowering in flight?

O couldst thou but heal these eye-pits gory—

O couldst thou but heal the blind, and restore me,

O Sun, thy light!

Hist—hist—their stealthy footfalls creep—

I hear them—whither shall this foot leap, 1070

That their flesh and their bones I may gorge, and may slake
me

With their blood, and a banquet of wild beasts make me,
 Requiring their outrage well
 With grimmer revenge?—Woe! where am I borne
 Forsaking my fenceless babes to be torn
 Of the bacchanals of hell,
 Butchered and cast away for the dogs' blood-boultured prey
 On a desolate mountain-fell?
 Ah, where shall I stand?—whither go?—where rest?
 As a ship furls sail that hath havenward pressed, 1080
 I would dart into that death-haunted lair,
 I would shroud my babes in my linen vest,
 I would guard them there!

Chor. Wretch! wreaked on thee are ills intolerable:
 Foul deeds thou didst, and awful penalty
 A God hath laid on thee with heavy hand.

Polym. What ho! spear-brandishers, nation arrayed in
 warrior's weed!

Thracians possessed of the War-god, lords of the gallant
 steed! 1090

What ho, ye Achaians!—Atreus' seed!

Rescue! Rescue! I raise the cry.

O come, in the name of the Gods draw nigh!

Hears any man?—wherefore delay?—will no man help me
 nor heed?

Of women undone, destroyed, am I—

The women of Troy's captivity.

Horrors are wrought on me—horrors! Woe for the felon
 deed!

Whitherward shall I turn me? Whitherward fare?

Shall I leap as on wings to the height of the heaven, to the
 mansions of air, 1100

To Orion or Sirius, fearful-gleaming

With the burning flames from his eyes out-streaming,

Or plunge to the blackness of darkness, to Hades' gorge in
 despair?

Chor. Small blame, if he which suffereth heavier woes
 Than man may bear, should flee his wretched life.

Enter AGAMEMNON.

Ag. Hearing a shout I came; for in no whispers
 The mountain-rock's child Echo through the host
 Cried, waking tumult. Knew we not the towers

Of Phrygia by the spear of Greeks had fallen,
No little panic had this clangour roused.

Polym. Dear friend—for, Agamemnon, 'tis thy voice
I hear and know—see'st thou what I endure?

Ag. Ha, wretched Polymestor, who hath marred thee?
Who dashed with blood thine eyes, and blinded thee?—
Slew these thy sons? Sooth, against thee and thine
Grim was his fury, whosoe'er it was.

Polym. Hecuba, with the captive woman-throng, 1120
Destroyed me—nay, destroyed not—O, far worse!

Ag. What say'st thou?—Thine the deed, as he hath said?
Thou, Hecuba, dare this thing impossible!

Polym. Ha! what say'st thou?—and is she nigh at hand?
Tell where is she, that I may in mine hands
Clutch her and rend, and bathe her flesh in blood.

Ag. (holding him back). Ho thou, what ails thee?

Polym. By the Gods I pray thee,
Unhand me—loose my frenzied hand on her!

Ag. Forbear: cast out the savage from thine heart.
Speak, let me hear first thee, then her, and judge 1130
Justly for what cause thus thou sufferest.

Polym. Yea, I will speak. 'Twas Priam's youngest son
Polydorus, Hecuba's child—from Troy to me

Him his sire sent to nurture in mine halls,
Misdoubting, ye may guess, the fall of Troy.

Him slew I. For what cause I slew him, hear:

Mark how I dealt well, wisely, prudently:—

I feared their son might, left alive thy foe,

Gather Troy's remnant and repeople her,

And, hearing how a Priamid lived, Achaia 1140

To Phrygia-land again should bring her host;

Then should they trample down these plains of Thrace

In foray, and the ills that wasted us

But now, O king, should on Troy's neighbours fall.

And Hecuba, being ware of her son's death,

With this tale lured me, that she would reveal

Hid treasures of Priam's line in Troy

Of gold. Me only with my sons she leads

Within the tents, that none beside might know.

Bowing the knee there sat I in their midst; 1150

While, on my left hand some, some on the right,

As by a friend, forsooth, Troy's daughters sat

Many: the web of our Edonian loom

Praised they, uplifting to the light my cloak;

And some my Thracian lance admiring took,
 And stripped me so alike of spear and shield.
 As many as were mothers, loud in praise
 Dandled my babes, that from their sire afar
 They might be borne, from hand to hand passed on.
 Then, after such smooth speech,—couldst thou believe?—
 Suddenly snatching daggers from their robes, [1160
 They stab my sons; and others all as one
 In foemen's fashion gripped mine hands and feet,
 And held: and, when I fain would aid my sons,
 If I essayed to raise my face, by the hair
 They held me down: if I would move mine hands,
 For the host of women, wretch! I nought prevailed.
 And last—O outrage than all outrage worse!—

A hideous deed they wrought: for of mine eyes
 These wretched eyeballs—grasping their brooch-pins— 1170
 They stab, they flood with gore. Then through the tents
 Fleeing they went. Up from the earth I leapt,
 And like a wild beast chased the blood-stained hounds,
 Groping o'er all the wall, like tracking huntsman,
 Smiting and battering. All for my zeal's sake
 For thee, I suffered this, who slew thy foe,
 Agamemnon. Wherefore needeth many words?
 Whoso ere now hath spoken ill of women,
 Or speaketh now, or shall hereafter speak,
 All this in one word will I close and say:— 1180
 Nor sea nor land doth nurture such a breed:
 He knoweth, who hath converse with them most.

Chor. Be nowise reckless, nor, for thine own ills,
 Include in this thy curse all womankind.
 For some, yea many of us, deserve not blame,¹
 Though some by vice of blood count midst the bad.

Hec. Agamemnon, never should this thing have been,
 That words with men should more avail than deeds,
 But good deeds should with reasonings good be paired, 1190
 And caitiff deed be ranged by baseless plea,
 And none avail to gloze injustice o'er.
 There be whose craft such art hath perfected;
 Yet cannot they be cunning to the end:

¹ I venture to propose οὐκ for εἶσ' in 1185. In a copy from a cursive MS especially one like Harl. 5724, in which the contracted εἰ and οὐ are so similar εἶσ' would be more likely to have crept in for οὐκ, than τῶν for μὴ (1186) as suggested by Paley; and the Chorus would be more likely to claim that the majority of their sisters were good, than that they were bad.

Foully they perish : never one hath 'scaped.
 Such prelude hath my speech as touching thee.
 Now with plea answering plea to him I turn :—
 To spare the Greeks, say'st thou, a twice-toiled task,
 For Agamemnon's sake thou slew'st my son.
 Villain of villains, when, when could thy race,
 Thy brute race, be a friend unto the Greeks ? 1200
 Never. And, prithee, whence this fervent zeal
 To serve his cause ?—didst look to wed his daughter ?
 Art of his kin ?—Or what thy private end ?
 Or were they like to sail again and waste
 Thy crops ? Whom think'st thou to convince hereby ?
 That gold—hadst thou the will to tell the truth—
 Murdered my son : that, and thy greed of gain.
 For, hearken : why, when all went well with Troy,
 When yet her ramparts girt the city round,
 And Priam lived, and triumphed Hector's spear, 1210
 Why not then, if thou fain wouldst earn kings' thanks,
 When in mine halls ye had my son and fostered,
 Slay him, or living bring him to the Greeks ?
 But, soon as in the light we walked no more,
 And the smoke's token proved our town the foe's,
 Thou slew'st the guest that came unto thine hearth.
 Nay more, hear now how thou art villain proved :
 Thou oughtest, if thou wert the Achaians' friend,
 Have brought the gold thou dar'st not call thine own,
 But for him held in trust, to these impoverished 1220
 And long time exiled from their fatherland.
 But thou not yet canst ope thine heart to uncloset
 Thy grip ; thy miser-clutch keeps it at home.
 Yet hadst thou, as behoved thee, reared my son
 And saved alive, thine had been fair renown.
 For in adversity the good are friends
 Most true : prosperity hath friends unsought.
 Hadst thou lacked money, and his lot been fair,
 A treasury deep my son had been to thee :
 But now thou hast not him unto thy friend ; 1230
 Gone is the gold's avail, thy sons are gone,—
 And this thy plight ! Now unto thee I say,
 Agamemnon, if thou help him, base thou showest.
 The godless, false to whom he owed fair faith,
 The impious host unrighteous shalt thou comfort.
 Thou joyest in the wicked, shall we say,
 If such thou be—but on my lords I rail not.

Chor. Lo, how the good cause giveth evermore
To men occasion for good argument.

Ag. It likes me not to judge on others' wrongs; 1240
Yet needs I must, for shame it were to take
This cause into mine hands, and then thrust by.
But,—wouldst thou know my thought,—not for my sake,
Nor the Achaians', didst thou slay thy guest,
But even to keep that gold within thine halls.
In this ill plight thou speak'st to serve thine ends.
Haply with you guest-murder is as nought,
But to us which be Greeks foul shame is this.
How can I uncondemned adjudge thee guiltless?
I cannot. Forasmuch as thou hast dared 1250
To do foul deeds, even drain thy bitter cup.

Polym. Woe's me!—by a woman-slave o'ercome, meseems,
'Neath vengeance of the viler must I bow!

Hec. Is it not just, if thou hast vileness wrought?

Polym. Woe for my babes and for mine eyes!—ah wretch!

Hec. Griev'st thou?—and I?—dost deem my son's loss
sweet?

Polym. Thou joyest triumphing over me, thou fiend!

Hec. Should I not joy for vengeance upon thee?

Polym. Ah, soon thou shalt not, when the outsea surge—

Hec. Shall bear me to the coasts of Hellas-land? 1260

Polym. Nay, but shall whelm thee fallen from the mast.

Hec. Yea?—forced of whom to take the leap of death?

Polym. Thyself shalt climb the ship's mast with thy feet.

Hec. So?—and with shoulders winged, or in what guise?

Polym. A dog with fire-red eyes shalt thou become.

Hec. How know'st thou of the changing of my shape?

Polym. This Dionysus told, the Thracian seer.

Hec. But nought foretold to thee of these thine ills?

Polym. Nay; else with guile thou ne'er hadst trapped me
thus.

Hec. There shall I die, or live my full life out? 1270

Polym. Die shalt thou: and thy grave shall bear a name—

Hec. Accordant to my shape?—or what wilt say?

Polym. The wretched Dog's Grave, sign to seafarers.

Hec. Nought reck I, seeing thou hast felt my vengeance.

Polym. Yea, and thy child Kassandra too must die.

Hec. A scorn and spitting!—back on thee I hurl it.

Polym. Slay her shall this king's wife, a houseward grim.

Hec. Never so mad may Tyndareus' daughter be!

Polym. Yea—slay him too, upswinging high the axe.

Ag. Ho, fellow, ravest thou? Dost court thy bane? 1280

Polym. Slay on: a bath of blood in Argos waits thee.

Ag. Haste henchmen, hale him from my sight perforce.

Polym. Art galled to hear?

Ag. Set curb upon his mouth!

Polym. Ay, gag: my say is said.

Ag. Make speed, make speed,

And on some desert island cast him forth,
Seeing his bold mouth's insolence passeth thus.

Hecuba, hapless, fare thou on, entomb

Thy corpses twain. Draw near, ye dames of Troy,

To your lords' tents, for I discern a breeze

Upspringing, home to waft us, even now.

1290

Fair voyage be ours to Hellas, fair the plight

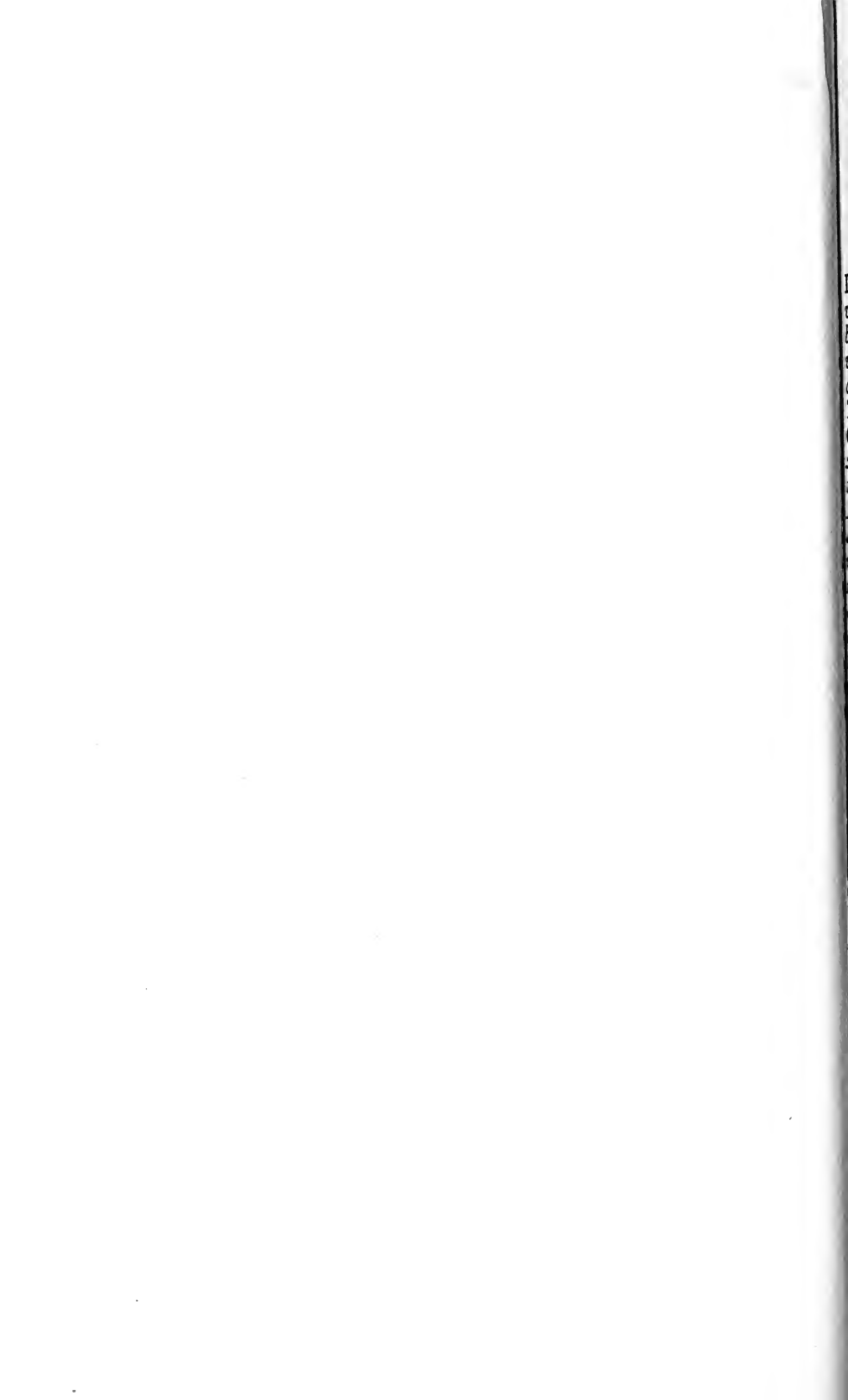
Wherein, from these toils freed, we find our homes.

Chor. To the tents, O friends, to the haven fare;

The yoke of thraldom our necks must bear.

Fate knows not pity, fate will not spare.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]



ION

ARGUMENT

IN the days when Erechtheus ruled over Athens, Apollo wrought violence to the king's young daughter Kreusa. And she, having borne a son, left him, by reason of her fear and shame, in the cave wherein the God had humbled her. But Apollo cared for him, and caused the babe to be brought to Delphi, even to his temple. Therein was the child nurtured, and ministered in the courts of the God's house. And in process of time Erechtheus died, and left no son nor daughter save Kreusa, and evil days came upon Athens, that she was hard bestead in war. Then Xuthus, a chief of the Achaian folk, fought for her, and prevailed against her Eubaeen enemies, and for guerdon of victory received the princess Kreusa to wife, and so became king-consort in Athens. But to these twain was no child born; so, after many years, they journeyed to Delphi to inquire of the oracle of Apollo touching issue. And there the God ordered all things so that the lost was found, and an heir was given to the royal house of Athens. Yet, through the blind haste of mortals, and their little faith, was the son well-nigh slain by the mother, and the mother by the son.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HERMES, *the messenger of the Gods*

ION, *son of Apollo and Kreusa*

KREUSA, *Queen of Athens, Daughter of Erechtheus, and wife of Xuthus*

XUTHUS, *an Achaian chief, king-consort of Athens*

OLD SERVANT (*of Erechtheus formerly, then of Kreusa*)

SERVANT (*of Xuthus*)

PYTHIA, *the Prophetess of the temple*

ATHENE, *Patron-goddess of Athens*

CHORUS, *consisting of Handmaids attendant on Kreusa*

Attendants, priests, guards, and Delphian citizens

SCENE :—At Delphi, in the fore-court of the temple of Pythian Apollo, who is called also Phoebus, and Loxias. The great altar of sacrifice stands in the centre.

ION

Enter HERMES.

Herm. Atlas, whose brazen shoulders wear the base
Of heaven, the ancient home of Gods, begat
Of a certain Goddess¹ Maia, which bare me,
Hermes, to Zeus most high, heaven's messenger.
Now to this Delphian land I come, where Phoebus
Hath at earth's navel his prophetic seat
Revealing things that are and things to be.
There is a famous city of the Greeks,
Named Burg of Pallas of the Golden Spear.
There Phoebus forced Erechtheus' child Kreusa 10
Where the north-facing rocks, beneath the Mount
Of Pallas in the Athenian land, are called
The Long Cliffs by the lords of Attica.
Nought knew her sire—for this was Phoebus' will—
The burden 'neath her heart; but in due time
She travailed in his halls; and brought the babe
Unto the selfsame cave wherein the God
Had humbled her, and left it there to die
In the fair-rounded hollow of an ark,
Still keeping the tradition of her race 20
And earth-born Erichthonius,² by whom
Zeus' Daughter set for warders of his life
Two serpents, ere to the Agraulid maids
She gave the babe to nurse. For this cause there
The Erechtheids use to hang about their babes
Serpents of gold. Yea, broidery from her robe
She tied to her babe, and left him, as for death.

¹ Pleione, daughter of Ocean.

² Erichthonius was the son of Earth. Athênê placed the newborn babe, with two serpents, in a chest, which she delivered to the daughters of Agraulus, wife of Kekrops, forbidding them to open it. They disobeyed, and, at the sight of the serpents, became mad through terror, and leapt to their death down the cliffs of the Acropolis (see ll. 265-74). After death they haunted the spot, dancing upon the cliff's brink beneath the moon, while Pan piped to them from his cave far below. See Chorus-song, 491-502.

Then did my brother Phoebus ask me this :
 ‘ Go, brother, to the earth-born folk of Athens
 The glorious,—for thou know’st Athênê’s burg,—
 And from the rock-cleft take a babe new-born,
 With cradle and with swaddling-bands withal,
 And bear to Delphi, to mine oracle,
 And set him at my temple’s entering-in.
 All else be mine : for this—that thou mayst know,—
 Is my son.’ For a grace to Loxias
 My brother, took I up the woven ark,
 And bare, and on the basement of this fane
 I set him, opening first the cradle’s lid
 With-woven, that the boy might so be seen.
 And, as the sun drove forth his chariot, passed
 A priestess into the prophetic shrine,
 Who, casting eyes upon the wordless babe,
 marvelled that any Delphian maid should dare
 Into the God’s house fling her child of shame,
 And o’er the holy pale in zeal had thrust ;
 But pity banished cruelty : yea, the God
 Wrought that the boy be not cast forth his fane.
 So took she him and nursed, nor knew the sire
 Was Phoebus, nor the reckling’s mother knew ;
 Nor knows the boy who brought him into life.
 So did the youngling round the altars sport
 That fed him. When to manhood waxed his frame,
 The Delphians made him treasurer of the God,
 And steward of all trust ; and in the fane
 He liveth to this day a hallowed life.
 But she, Kreusa, that had born the lad,
 Was wed to Xuthus, by such hap as this :—
 A surge of war ’twixt Athens rose and them
 That in Euboea hold Chalkidikê,
 Wherein triumphant toiled that chieftain’s spear,
 And won Kreusa for his guerdon bride ;
 An alien he, of Aiulus sprung and Zeus,
 Achaian born : but after wedded years
 He and his wife be childless. For this cause
 To this shrine of Apollo have they come,
 Yearning for seed. Now Loxias guides their fate
 To this, nor hath forgotten, as might seem.
 He shall give Xuthus, when he entereth,
 His own child, saying to him, ‘ Lo, thy son,’
 That the lad, coming home, made known may be

30

40

50

60

70

Unto Kreusa, Loxias' deed abide
 Unknown, and so the child may have his right.
 And Ion shall he cause him to be called
 Through Greece, the founder of an Asian realm.
 Now to yon hollow bay-embowered I go
 To watch how destiny dealeth with the lad.
 For yonder see I Loxias' child come forth
 To make the temple-portals gay with boughs
 Of bay. And by the name that he shall bear,
 Ion, do I first name him of the Gods.

80
 [Exit.

Enter ION, followed by a throng of Delphian worshippers.

Ion. Lo, yonder the Sun-god is turning to earthward his
 splendour-blazing

Chariot of light ;

And the stars from the firmament flee from the fiery arrows
 chasing,

To the sacred night :

And the crests of Parnassus untrodden are flaming and
 flushed, as with yearning

Of welcome to far-flashing wheels with the glory of daylight
 returning

To mortal sight.

To the roof-ridge of Phoebus the fume of the incense of Araby
 burning

As a bird taketh flight.

90

On the tripod most holy is seated the Delphian Maiden
 Chanting to children of Hellas the wild cries, laden

With doom, from the lips of Apollo that ring.

Delphians, Phoebus's priesthood-train,

Unto Castaly's silvery-swirling spring

Pass ye, and cleanse with the pure spray-rain

Your bodies, or ever ye enter his fane.

Set a watch on the door of your lips ; be there heard

Nothing but good in the secret word

That ye murmur to them whose hearts be stirred

100

To seek to his shrine, that they seek not in vain.

And I in the toil that is mine—mine now,

And from childhood up,—with the bay's young bough,

And with wreathèd garlands holy, will cleanse

The portals of Phoebus ; with dew from the spring

Will I sprinkle his pavement, and chase far thence

With the shaft from the string

The flocks of the birds: the defilers shall flee
 From his offerings holy. Nor mother is mine
 Neither father: his temple hath nurtured me,
 And I serve his shrine.

110

(Str.)

Come, branch in thy freshness yet blowing,
 God's minister, loveliest bay,
 Over the altar-steps glide.
 In the gardens, immortal, beside
 His temple, hath burgeoned thy pride,
 Where the sacred waters are flowing
 Through a veil of the myrtle spray,
 A fountain that leapeth aye
 O'er thy tresses divine to pour.
 I wave thee o'er Phoebus' floor
 As the sun's wing soars sudden-glowing.
 Such service is mine each day.
 O Healer, O Healer-king,
 Let blessing on blessing upring
 Unto Lêto's Son as I sing.

120

(Ant.)

'Tis my glory, the service I render
 In thy portals, O Phoebus, to thee!
 I honour thy prophet-shrine.
 Proud labour is mine—it is thine!
 I am thrall to the Gods divine:
 Not to men, but Immortals, I tender
 My bondage; 'tis glorious and free:
 Never faintness shall fall upon me.
 For my father thee, Phoebus, I praise,
 Who hast nurtured me all my days:
 My begetter, mine help, my defender
 This temple's Phoebus shall be.
 O Healer, O Healer-king,
 Let blessing on blessing upring
 Unto Lêto's Son as I sing.

130

140

But—for now from the toil I refrain
 Of the bay-boughs softly trailing,—
 From the pitchers of gold shall I rain
 The drops from the breast unfailing
 Of the earth that spring
 Where the foambell-ring
 Round Castaly's fount goeth sailing.

It rains, it rains from my fingers fast,
 From the hands of the undefiled wide-cast. 150
 O that to Phoebus for ever so
 I might render service, nor respite know,
 Except unto happier lot I go!

[Flights of birds are seen approaching.]

Ho there, ho there!
 Even now are they flocking, the fowl of the air,
 On Parnassus forsaking each crag-hung lair.
 Touch not, I warn ye, the temple's coping,
 Nor the roofs with the glistening gold slant-sloping.
 Ha, my bow shall o'ertake thee again from afar,
 Zeus' herald, whose talons victorious war
 On the birds that strongest are. 160

Lo, yonder the pinion-oars come rowing
 Of another, a swan, to the altar:—away!
 Speed hence thy feet in the dawn rose-glowing;
 Else Phoebus's lyre, that accordeth its lay
 To thy notes, from death shall redeem not thee.
 Waft onward thy wings of snow:
 Light down on the Delian mere oversea,
 Lest the blood-rush choke, if thou do not so,
 Thy sweet throat's melody.

Ha, what new fowl cometh hitherward winging? 170
 Under our coping fain would he build
 A nest for his young from the stubble-field?
 It shall hold thee aloof, my bow's fierce singing!
 Wilt thou heed not?—Away, let thy nurslings hide
 Where the swirls of Alpheius coil and slide,
 Or mid Isthmian glens and groves,
 That the offerings undefiled may abide,
 And the temples that Phoebus loves.

Loth were I to slaughter such as ye,
 Which bear unto mortals the augury 180
 Of the Gods: but a burden is laid upon me:
 I am Phoebus' thrall, and I will not refrain
 My service to them that my life sustain.

Enter Chorus of KREUSA'S HANDMAIDS. They move to right and left, admiring the sculptures on the walls of the temple. Members of Chorus chant in turn:—

(Str.)

Chor. 1.—Not in Athens alone then, the city divine,
Stand courts of the Gods, with line on line
Of stately columns; nor service is thine
There only, O Highway-king.

Lo here, how in Loxias' holy place
The Son of Latona hath splendour and grace
Of a twofold-gleaming temple-face.

Chor. 2. Ah, look thou, behold this thing— 190
How with golden scimitar Zeus' Son here
Slayeth the hydra of Lerna's mere:
Dear, one glance hitherward fling!

(Ant.)

Chor. 1. I see it:—but lo, where another anigh
Is uplifting a flame-wrapped torch on high!
Who is it—who? On my broidery
Is the hero's story told?—
Is it not Iolaüs, the warrior there,
Who had part in the dread emprise, and a share
In the burdens that Zeus's scion bare? 200

Chor. 3. Lo, lo, this other behold
Who rideth a winged horse, dealing death
To a dragon that vomiteth fiery breath,
A monster of shape threefold.

Chor. 1. O yea, mine eyes turn swiftly on all . . .
But O, see there on the marble wall
The battle-rout of the giant-horde!

Chor. 4. Yea, friends, we be gazing thitherward.

Chor. 5. Dost mark who there on the stricken field
O'er Enkeladus waveth her gorgon-shield? 210

Chor. 6. Pallas, my Goddess!—I see her stand!

Chor. 7. Lo, lo, where the bolt flame-flashing
Gleameth in Zeus' far-hurling hand
In resistless rush down-crashing.

Chor. 8. I see:—upon Mimas his foe is the brand
With its blasting wildfire dashing.

Chor. 9. And the earth-born there—no battle-wand
Is the ivy-encircled thyrsus-rod
That slays him, of Bromius, Reveller-god.

Chor. 10 (*addressing ION*). Sir,—thou by the fane,—I would speak unto thee :

Prithee say, if with bare feet lawful it is 220

That the threshold we pass of the sanctuary.

Ion. Nay, strangers, forefended is this.

Chor. 11. Yet haply a thing I would learn wouldst thou show ?

Ion. What is this that thou cravest to know ?

Chor. 11. Is it so, that the walls of Phoebus rise
Even there, where Earth's mid-navel lies ?

Ion. Yea : and with wreaths is it hung, and watched by the
Gorgon-eyes.

Chor. 12. Ay, rumour hath published it so.

Ion. If a cake ye have cast on the forecourt's altar-fire,
And if there be aught that of Phoebus ye fain would enquire,
Draw nigh to the altar-steps :—into the inner fane
Pass none, but with bloodshed of sheep for the sacrifice slain.

Chor. 13. All this understand I aright : 230

We would trespass on nought by the God's law hidden :
Enough is without for our feast of sight.

Ion. Let your eyes gaze on upon all unforbidden.

Chor. 14. Our lady had given us leave,—‘ Upon all
These shrines,’ hath she said, ‘ may ye gaze.’

Ion. And the servants ye name you of what lord's hall ?

Chor. 15. In Pallas's dwelling-place
Is the mansion of princes that nurtured me ;—
But of whom thou enquirest, lo, here is she.

Enter KREUSA.

Ion. High birth is thine, and carriage consonant
Thereto, O lady, whosoe'er thou be.

For in a man oft-times may one discern,
Marking his bearing, strain of gentle blood. 240

Ha, thou dost move me strangely !—down-dropt eyes,
And noble cheeks all wet with rain of tears,
At sight of Loxias' pure oracle !

How cam'st thou, lady, 'neath such load of care ?

Where all beside, beholding the God's shrines,
Rejoice, a fountain is thine eye of tears.

Kre. Stranger, I count it not discourtesy
That thou shouldst marvel touching these my tears.

But, looking on Apollo's dwelling-place,
I traversed o'er an ancient memory's track. 250

Afar my thoughts were, and my body here.

Ah, wrongs of women!—wrongful-reckless deeds
Of Gods! For justice where shall we make suit,
If our Lords' tyranny shall ruin us?

Ion. Lady, for what veiled grief art thou cast down?

Kre. Nought: I have sped my shaft: as touching this,
Nothing I say, nor thou conjecture aught.

Ion. Who art thou? What thy country? Of what sire
Wert born? What name is meet we name thee by?

Kre. Kreusa I, of King Erechtheus born;
The Athenian city is my fatherland.

260

Ion. O dweller in a glorious burg, and sprung
Of noble sires!—blest I account thee, lady.

Kre. Thus far, nor farther, stranger, goes my weal.

Ion. Ah, is it true, the legend told to men—

Kre. What wouldst thou, stranger, ask? I fain would learn.

Ion. That from the earth thy father's grandsire sprang?

Kre. Yea, Erichthonius:—me his birth avails not.

Ion. And did Athênê take him forth the earth?

Kre. Yea, in her maiden arms: no mother she.

270

Ion. And gave it, as the pictured legend tells—

Kre. To Kekrops' daughters to be nursed unseen.

Ion. The maids unsealed, I heard, Athênê's ark.

Kre. Dashing the rocks with blood for this they died.

Ion. Ah, so

And this—true is it, or an idle tale?—

Kre. What wouldst thou ask? My leisure serveth me.

Ion. Thy sisters did thy sire Erechtheus slay?

Kre. He sacrificed his daughters for his land.

Ion. How wast thou only of thy sisters saved?

Kre. A babe new-born in mother's arms was I.

280

Ion. And did earth yawning verily hide thy sire?

Kre. The Sea-god's trident smote him and destroyed.

Ion. The Long Cliffs—is a place so named therein?

Kre. Why dost ask this?—thou wak'st a memory.

Ion. Doth Phoebus honour them, and Pythian lightnings?¹

Kre. Honour them, quotha! O to have seen them never!

Ion. What?—hatest thou the God's haunt well-beloved?

Kre. Nought.—I and that cave know a deed of shame.

¹ Near the Long Cliffs was an altar of 'Zeus the Lightning-lord.' From this the priests kept watch on three days and three nights of three months in the year, looking north-west towards the gap between the border-ranges of Cithaeron and Parnes, where lay the village of Harma. If lightnings were at such seasons observed in that quarter, they were regarded as a token from Apollo, and an embassy was sent to Delphi.

- Ion.* And what Athenian, lady, is thy lord ?
Kre. No citizen. An outland alien. 290
Ion. Who?—sooth, of princely birth must he have been.
Kre. Xuthus, the seed of Aiolus and Zeus.
Ion. How might an alien win thee, native-born ?
Kre. A neighbour state, Euboea, Athens hath ;—
Ion. Sundered by watery marches, as they tell.
Kre. This smote he, spear-ally of Kekrops' sons.
Ion. Their war-aid :—and thereafter won thine hand ?
Kre. His dower of battle, guerdon of his spear.
Ion. With thy lord com'st thou hither, or alone ?
Kre. With him. He lingereth at Trophonius' cave. 300
Ion. To gaze thereon, or for an oracle ?
Kre. One thing of him and Phoebus would he learn.
Ion. For increase of the land, or sons, come ye ?
Kre. Childless we are, who have been wedded long.
Ion. Never hast thou born issue, barren all ?
Kre. Phoebus doth know what childlessness is mine.
Ion. Blest in all else, sad heart, unblest in this !
Kre. And who art thou?—Blessèd the womb that bare thee !
Ion. Lady, the God's thrall I am called, and am.
Kre. The city's offering?—or of some one sold ? 310
Ion. I know but this—I am called Loxias' thrall.
Kre. I then in turn, O stranger, pity thee.
Ion. As one that never sire nor mother knew.
Kre. Dwellest thou in this temple, or a house ?
Ion. The God's wide halls be mine when I would sleep.
Kre. A child, or stripling, cam'st thou to the fane ?
Ion. A babe was I, say they who best should know.
Kre. And who of Delphi's daughters gave thee suck ?
Ion. Never I knew the breast. Mine only nurse—
Kre. Who, child of sorrow?—How my wound finds thine !¹
Ion. Was Phoebus' priestess : her I count my mother. [320
Kre. How nurtured hast thou come to man's estate ?
Ion. The altars fed me : each chance stranger gave.
Kre. Woe is thy mother, who she be soe'er.²

¹ ' Searching of thy wound
 I have by hard adventure found mine own.'

As You Like It, ii. 4.

² The interruption to the sequence of thought in the lines which follow has given rise to various suggestions for their re-arrangement, *e.g.* by placing 324-5 after 328-9. Doubtless this would be a more logical arrangement, yet perhaps less womanlike than Kreusa's recurring, after a breathing-space, as it were, of unimportant query, to that feature in his history which really

- Ion.* I am record haply of a woman's wrong.
- Kre.* And hast thou wealth?—for rich is thine attire.
- Ion.* Of Him is mine adorning, whom I serve.
- Kre.* But on thy birth's track hast thou never pressed?
- Ion.* Ah, lady, clue hereunto have I none.
- Kre.* (*Sighs.*) There's one was even as thy mother wronged.
- Ion.* Who?—would she share my burden, glad were I. [330
- Kre.* For her sake came I, while delays my lord.
- Ion.* And what thy quest?—Lady, mine help is thine.
- Kre.* Craving a secret oracle of Phoebus.
- Ion.* Speak it: myself will undertake for thee.
- Kre.* Hear then the story:—but ashamed am I.
- Ion.* Shame shall not help thy strait,—a deedless Goddess!
- Kre.* She saith—my friend—that Phoebus humbled her.
- Ion.* Phoebus!—a woman!—Stranger, say not so.
- Kre.* And the God's child she bare, nor knew her sire. 340
- Ion.* Never!—a man's crime this, and hers the shame.
- Kre.* No!—herself saith. She hath suffered griefs beside.
- Ion.* Suffered?—for what sin wrought—this bride of heaven?
- Kre.* The son she bare she cast forth from her halls.
- Ion.* Where is her cast-out child? Doth he see light?
- Kre.* None knows. For this I seek the oracle.
- Ion.* But, if he be no more, how perished he?
- Kre.* Wild beasts, she troweth, slew the hapless babe.
- Ion.* And by what token knew she this had been?
- Kre.* She came where she had left him, and found not. 350
- Ion.* And blood-gouts—were there any on the track?
- Kre.* Nay, saith she: yet she traversed oft the ground.
- Ion.* How long the time since this child's taking-off?
- Kre.* Living, he had had the measure of thy years.
- Ion.* And hath she born no offspring after this?
- Kre.* Still the God wrongs her: childless grief is hers.
- Ion.* What if in secret Phoebus fostereth him?
- Kre.* Unjust!—alone to enjoy what he should share.
- Ion.* Ah me! her heart-strings are attuned to mine!
- Kre.* For thee yearns some sad mother too, I ween. 360
- Ion.* Ah, wake not thou mine half-forgotten grief.
- Kre.* I am dumb: whereof I question thee, say on.
- Ion.* Seest thou where lies the weakness of thy plea?
- Kre.* Ah, hapless one, wherein is she not weak!
- Ion.* How should the God reveal that he would hide?

interests her, and so deeply that she cannot trust her self-command to follow it continuously.

Kre. Why then on Greece's tripod sitteth he?

Ion. His shame the deed is. Question not of him.

Kre. O yea, the sufferer in her lot may pine!

Ion. There's none will ask the God of this for thee.

For, in his own halls were he villain proved,
Vengeance on him who brought thee that response
Would Phoebus justly wreak. Ah lady, go:
We must not seek his shrine to flout the God.

370

For lo, what height of folly should we reach
If in the Gods' despite we wrest their will,
By sacrifice of sheep on altars, or
By flight of birds, to tell what they would veil.
Could we of force wring aught from Gods full loth,
Profitless blessings, lady, should we grasp;
But what they give free-willed are boons indeed.

380

Chor. Strange chances many on many mortals fall,
And manifold their forms. Ye scarce shall find
One happy lot in all the life of men.

Kre. O Phoebus, there and here unjust art thou
Unto the absent one whose plea is here.

Thou shouldst have saved thine own, yet didst not save;
Nor heeds the Seer the mother's questioning,
That, if her babe live not, his tomb may rise,
Or, if he live, that she may see his face.

Yet must I let this be, if by the God
I am barred from learning that which I desire.

390

But, stranger,—for I see my princely lord,
Xuthus, anigh us yonder, who hath left
Trophonius' crypt,—of this that we have said
Speak to my lord nought, lest I get me shame
For handling secrets, and the tale fall out
Not after our unravelling thereof.

For woman's lot as touching men is hard;
And, since the good are with the bad confused,
Hated we are:—ill-starred we are from birth.

400

Enter XUTHUS.

Xuth. First, to the God the firstfruits of my greetings:
All hail to him, and hail to thee, my wife.

Hath my late-lingering thrilled thee with dismay?

Kre. Nay, 'tis but care that meets thee. Tell to me
What answer from Trophonius bringest thou,
How we shall have joint issue, thou and I?

Xuth. He took not on him to forestall the word
Of Phoebus. This he said—nor thou nor I
Childless shall wend home from the oracle.

Kre. Queen, Phoebus' mother, grant our home-return 410
Prosperous: all our dealings heretofore
Touching thy son, to happier issue fall!

Xuth. This shall be. Who speaks to the God for men?

Ion. Without, I; others for the things within,
Stranger, which nigh unto the tripod sit,
The Delphian lords, in order of their lot.

Xuth. 'Tis well: now know I all I sought to know.
I will pass in; for, as I hear it told,
To strangers of the forecourt hath there chanced
An open oracle. I would fain this day— 420
This day fair-omened—gain the God's response.
Thou to the bay-crowned altars bear the boughs,
My wife, and pray the Gods that I may win
Promise of fair sons from Apollo's fane.

Kre. Yea, this shall be.

[*Exit XUTHUS to inner Temple.*

If Loxias consent

Now at the last to atone for olden wrongs,
Not utterly should he become my friend,
Yet, as a God's, will I accept his pleasure.

[*Exit.*

Ion. Why doth this stranger rail upon the God 430
In riddles of dark sayings evermore?
For love of her for whom she seeks the shrine?
Or keeping back a thing she must not speak?—
But with Erechtheus' daughter what have I
To do? She is nought to me. But I will go
Unto the lavers with the golden ewers
To pour in water-dews. Yet must I plead
With Phoebus—what ails him? He ravisheth
Maids, and forsakes: begetteth babes by stealth
And heeds not, though they die. Do thou not so!
Being strong, be righteous. For what man so'er 440
Transgresseth, the Gods visit this on him.
How were it just then that ye should enact
For men laws, and yourselves work lawlessness?
For if—it could not be, yet put it so—
Ye should pay mulct to men for lawless lust,¹

¹ The fine for violence to a virgin was, by Solon's laws, a thousand drachmas.

Thou, the Sea-king, and Zeus the lord of heaven,
 Paying for wrongs should make your temples void.
 For, following pleasure past all wisdom's bounds,
 Ye work unrighteousness. Unjust it were
 'To call men vile, if we but imitate
 The sins of Gods :—they are vile which teach us this.

450

[Exit.
 (Str.)

Chor. My Queen, at whose birth-tide was given
 Of the Lady of Travail-pang
 No help, hear, Pallas, my prayer,
 Whom the crown of a God's head bare
 By Prometheus the Titan riven
 When the Daughter of Zeus forth sprang.

Come, Victory-queen, to the dwelling
 Pythian, speeding thy wing
 From Olympus' chambers of gold
 To the streets that the World's Heart hold, 460
 Where the bodings of Phoebus are told,—
 Yea, brought to pass in the telling,—
 At the tripod that dances enring.

Thou also, Latona's Daughter,—
 Two Goddesses, maidens twain,
 Phoebus's sisters divine,
 With us interceding O join,
 That Erechtheus' ancient line
 Through bodings clear-lucid as water 470
 Fair offspring at last may attain.

(Ant.)

For a fountain is this ever-welling
 Of happiness passing the lot
 Of mortals, when stalwart and tall
 Shines fair in a father's hall
 The presence of sons, foretelling
 A line that shall perish not ;

Sons, that, when death bringeth severance,
 Shall receive to pass on to their seed
 The wealth that their sires' hands hold : 480
 Yea, by these be our sorrows consoled,
 And a joy within joy they enfold,

And their spear flasheth light of deliverance¹
 In the hour of the fatherland's need.

Ah, far above golden treasure
 Or than princely halls do I praise
 Dear children to cherish—mine own!
 Mine horror were life all lone:
 Who loveth it, wit hath he none:
 But give to me substance in measure,
 And children to brighten my days!

490

(Epode)

O haunts of Pan's abiding,
 O sentinel rock down-gazing
 On the Long-cliff caves dim-glimmering,
 Where, with shadowy feet in the dance soft-sliding,
 Agraulus' daughters three go pacing
 O'er the lawns by Athênê's fane dew-shimmering
 In moonlight, while upward floats
 A weird strain rising and falling,
 Wild witchery-wafting notes,
 O Pan, from thy pipes that are calling
 Out of thy sunless grotts!²

500

Ah, a maid-mother there most woe-forlorn
 Cast Phoebus's child for a banquet gory—
 Bitter outrage's fruit!—by the birds to be torn
 And the beasts. Nor in woven web nor in story
 Ever heard I of happiness blent with the glory
 Of Gods' seed woman-born.

Enter ION.

Ion. Bower-maidens, ye which keeping watch the altar-steps
 beside 510
 Of the incense-clouded fane, your master's coming forth
 abide,
 Say, hath Xuthus left by this the holy tripod and the shrine,
 Or within yet lingering asks he touching that long-childless
 line?

Chor. In the temple is he, stranger, treads not yet the threshold-
 stone.

¹ αἴγλαν (Herwerden) *vice* ἀλκάν.

² See note to l. 21.

List, a sound at yonder portal—through the porchway passeth one :—

Lo, where now he cometh forth—our master, plain for eyes to see.

Enter XUTHUS: attempts to embrace Ion.

Xuth. Hail, my son!—for fitting prelude this is of my speech to thee.

Ion. Hale I am: but thou, control thee; then were twain in happy case.

Xuth. Let me kiss thine hand, and let me fold thy form in mine embrace!

Ion. Stranger, hast thy wits?—or is thy mind distraught by stroke of heaven? 520

Xuth. Right my wit is, if I long to kiss my best-beloved regiven.

Ion. Hold—hands off!—the temple-garlands of Apollo rend not thou!

Xuth. Touch thee will I!—No man-stealer; but I find my darling now.

Ion (*starting back, and fitting an arrow to his bow*). Wilt not hence, or ever thou receive my shaft thy ribs within?

Xuth. Wherefore dost thou flee me, who hast learnt to know thy nearest kin?

Ion. Nought I love to admonish aliens mannerless and sensebereft.

Xuth. Slay—then burn me;¹ for a father's heart thine arrow shall have cleft.

Ion. Thou my father!—Is not this a laughter-scoff for me to hear?

Xuth. Nay, the eager-hurrying word shall show thee all my meaning clear.

Ion. Ay, and what wilt tell?

Xuth. Thy father am I, and thou art my son. 530

Ion. Who the voucher?

Xuth. Loxias, who reared the child that I have won.

Ion. Thou art thine own witness.

Xuth. Nay, the God's own oracle I heard.

Ion. Heardest riddles and misreadest.

¹ It being the sacred duty of the son to lay the father's corpse upon the pyre.

- Xuth.* Then mine ears can hear no word.
Ion. What was this, the word of Phoebus?
Xuth. That the man who met my face—
Ion. Met thee—met thee?
Xuth. As I came from out Apollo's holy place—
Ion. Ay, and what should be his fate?
Xuth. My true-begotten son is this.
Ion. Born thy son, or given of others?
Xuth. Given—and born from me he is.¹
Ion. So on me thy foot first stumbled?
Xuth. Yea, my son, on none beside.
Ion. Ay, and whence this happy chance?
Xuth. We marvel both it should betide.
Ion. Ha, what mother bare me to thee?
Xuth. Sooth, thereof can I say nought. 540
Ion. Neither Phoebus told?
Xuth. For joy of this thing, that I never sought.
Ion. Ah, a child of mother Earth!
Xuth. Nay, children spring not from the sod.
Ion. How then thine am I?
Xuth. I know not: I refer it to the God.
Ion. Come, to other reasonings turn we.²
Xuth. Better so, my son, in sooth.
Ion. Hadst thou ever part in lawless love?
Xuth. Mid follies of my youth.
Ion. Ere Erechtheus' daughter wed thee?
Xuth. Since, to her have I been true.
Ion. Haply then didst thou beget me?
Xuth. Time is consonant thereto.³
Ion. Were it so, how came I hither?
Xuth. Nay, I cannot fathom it.
Ion. Long the journey for a babe!
Xuth. This too o'erpasseth all my wit.
Ion. Hast thou seen ere this the Pythian Rock?
Xuth. At Bacchus' festal rite. 550
Ion. Lodging with a Public Host?
Xuth. Yea; and with Delphian girls by night—

¹ There may be oracular ambiguity here; ἐξ being (like 'from' in a common Shakesperian usage) susceptible of the sense 'apart, or remote from', as in the oracle given to Odysseus respecting his own end, *Odys.* xi, 134. cf. note on l. 1546.

² Ion's incredulity has so far made all his questions and comments bitterly sarcastic: but now, impressed by Xuthus' unshaken faith, he thinks the matter worth investigation.

³ *i.e.* Your apparent age fits the supposition.

Ion. Made initiate—this thy meaning?¹

Xuth. They were maidens Bacchanal.²

Ion. Sober, or of wine o'ercome?

Xuth. Of Bacchus' joys did this befall.

Ion. This is my begetting's story!

Xuth. Fate, my son, hath found it out.

Ion. Yet, how came I to the fane?

Xuth. The maiden cast thee forth, I doubt.

Ion (aside). So, I 'scape the taint of serfdom——³

Xuth. Son, thy father now receive.

Ion (aside). 'Tis the God: I may not doubt him—

Xuth. Yea, 'tis wisdom to believe.

Ion (aside). What thing higher can I wish for——

Xuth. Now thou seest clear and true.

Ion (aside). Than the fatherhood of Zeus?

Xuth. O yea, by birth is this thy due.⁴

Ion. Shall I clasp him, my begetter?

Xuth. If with Phoebus thou comply. 560

Ion. Hail to thee, my father!

Xuth. Joyfully I welcome this thy cry.

Ion. Hail the day that sees our meeting!

Xuth. Happy man it maketh me.

Ion. Ah, belovèd mother, when thy visage also shall I see?

More than ever now I long to see thee, who thou be soe'er.

Ah, but thou perchance art dead, and all in vain should be my prayer.

Chor. Ours too the house's happy fortune is:

Yet fain were I our queen were also blest

With offspring, and Erechtheus' ancient line.

Xuth. My son, as touching thy discovery

The God spake sooth, and so joined thee and me. 570

Thou has found thy dearest, erst to thee unknown.

For thy just yearning, this is also mine,

That thou mayst find thy mother, O my son,

¹ cf. 'Convey, the wise it call.' No resident of Delphi could affect to be ignorant of the excesses veiled under the expression 'Initiated into the Orgiastic Mysteries of Bacchus.'

² *i.e.*, The religious license (perhaps obligation) of the occasion furnishes an excuse, if not a justification.

³ As none but free-born Delphian woman could take part in the 'Orgies'. But the 'temple-slaves' were commonly bought of slave-dealers: hence the relief to Ion's mind.

⁴ Xuthus being descended from Zeus. But this is an example of 'Tragic Irony,' wherein a speaker 'speaks truer than he knows;' Ion being in reality the son of Apollo, son of Zeus.

And I, the woman of whose womb thou art.
 This shall we find forth haply, left to time.
 Now, leave the God's floor, and thine homeless state :
 To Athens come, with thine heart even as mine.
 There waiteth thee thy father's sceptred bliss,
 And much wealth. None shall cast into thy teeth
 One of these taunts, base birth or poverty. 580
 High-born art thou, a mighty man of wealth.
 Silent?—Now wherefore earthward droops thine eye,
 And thou art deep in thought, and from thy joy
 Art changed, and strikest dread into thy sire ?

Ion. The face of things appeareth not the same
 Far off, and when we scan them nigh at hand.
 So do I greet with gladness this my lot
 Who find a sire : howbeit hear what burden
 Weighs on my soul. The glorious earth-born state,
 Athens, men say, hath nought of alien strain. 590
 I shall thrust in, stained with a twofold taint—
 An outland father, and my bastard self.
 And, bearing this reproach, nor strong in friends,
 ' Nobody ' shall be called—' Nobody's Son.'
 Then, if I press to Athens' highest ranks,
 And seek a name, of them that fail shall I
 Win hate : with climbers aye climbs jealousy.
 And noble souls, born guides of men, which yet
 Are silent, meddling not with things of state,
 To them shall I be laughing-stock and fool, 600
 Who, in a town censorious,¹ go not softly.
 Yea, if mid men of mark, which helm the state,
 I win repute, I shall be hedged in more
 By checking votes.² Thus is it ever, father :
 They which sway nations, and have won repute,
 To young ambitions are the bitterest foes.
 Then, coming to a strange house, alien I,
 And to a childless lady, who hath shared
 With thee her sorrow heretofore, but now
 Shall bear in bitterness her reproach alone, 610
 How shall I not, with reason, have her hate,
 When by thy knee I stand, she on thy love
 Looketh with bitter eyes of childlessness,—

¹ v.l. φόβου πλέα, 'suspicious.'

² Shall be hampered in action by the votes of the people, which, in a democratic state (for Euripides is describing the Athens of his own day), may check him at every turn.

When thou must cast me off and cleave to her,
 Or honour me, and wreck thine household's peace?
 How oft the dagger and the deadly bowl
 Have women found to slay their lords withal!
 Nay, father, more—I pity this thy wife
 Who grows grey childless. 'Tis not worthy her,
 Sprung from proud sires—this curse of childlessness. 620
 And power—this power men falsely praise so oft,
 Winsome its face is, but behind the veil
 Is torment. Who is happy, fortunate who,
 That, fearing violence, glancing aye askance,
 Weareth out life? Nay, rather would I live
 Happy-obscure, than be exalted prince,—
 One who must joy to have for friends the vile,
 Who hates the good, and ever dreads to die.
 'Ah,' thou wilt say, 'gold overbears all this,
 And wealth is sweet.' Would I clutch lucre—groan 630
 Under its load, with curses in mine ears?
 Nay, wealth for me in measure, sorrowless.
 But, father, hear what blessings here were mine:—
 First, leisure, dearest of delights to men:
 Friendly the folk; no villain jostleth me
 Out of the path: it galls the very soul
 To yield the pass, and vail to baser men.
 My life was prayer to Gods, converse with men,
 Ministrant unto joy and not to grief,
 Welcoming coming, speeding parting guests, 640
 A new face smiling still on faces new.
 And that which men, though loth, must ask in prayer,
 Uprightness, use and nature bred in me
 For Phoebus' service. Thinking on all this,
 Father, I more esteem things here than there.
 Mine own life let me live. Content with little
 Hath charm no less than joy in great estate.

Chor. Well hast thou said, so be that those I love
 In these thy words may find their happiness.

Xuth. Of this no more: but learn to bear thy fortune. 650
 For, where I found thee, there would I begin,
 By making thee a solemn public feast,
 And thy birth-sacrifice,¹ not offered yet.
 Now to the feast as my guest bringing thee,
 I'll make thee cheer: then to the Athenians' land

¹ Customarily offered on the day of birth, and again on the fifth day after, when the child received its name.

Bring thee as one that travelleth, not as mine.
 For, sooth, I have no heart to vex my wife
 With mine own bliss, while she is childless still.
 And I shall find a time to bring my queen
 To suffer thee to take my sceptred sway.

660

Ion¹ I name thee, of that happy chance
 In that, as forth Apollo's shrine I came,
 First lighted I on thee. Now all thy friends
 To this glad feast of sacrifice gather thou,
 To bid, as leaving Delphi soon, farewell.
 You, handmaids, I command, speak not hereof.
 Death—if ye say to my wife anything!

Ion. I go: yet to my fortune one thing lacks:

For, save I find her who gave life to me,
 My life is naught. If one prayer be vouchsafed,
 Of Athens' daughters may my mother be,
 That by my mother may free speech be mine.
 For, if a stranger pass into a burg
 Of pure blood, burgher though he be in name,
 Bond is his tongue, and he hath not free speech.

670

[*Exeunt.*
 (*Str.*)]

Chor. O vision of tears, and of fierce heart-burning
 Breaking forth into shrieks and the onrush of sighing,²

When my lady beholdeth her chieftain returning
 In glory of fatherhood—knoweth that yearning

Of childlessness waiteth her, hunger undying!

680

Seer-son of Latona, what strain hast thou chanted?

Whence came he, the waif in thy temple-porch lying?
 Thy fosterling—yea, but a mother yet wanted!

And the oracle stirreth mine heart to defying
 Of its tones with the whisper of treachery haunted.

I fear whereunto it will grow,

This fate thou hast caused us to know.

Too strange for my credence it is.

690

Child fathered of fortune and treason!

Child alien of blood!—it were reason

That all should cry yea unto this.

(*Ant.*)

Friends, shall I bear to my lady the story?

Shall I speak in her ear, her lord's baseness revealing?

¹ Ἴων, 'coming,' because met at his *coming forth*.

² Reading ἀλαλαγὰς στεναγμάτων τ'.

Whom she counted her all and in all—heretofore he
Had share in her dreams of a yet-coming glory.

Now in woe is she whelmed, but his heart hath found
healing,

That he flouts the dear tresses and eld's silver-strewing! 700

O caitiff and outlander, he that came stealing

On the wealth of a house he saved not from undoing!¹—

Who would cozen my lady with treacherous dealing—

False one, away to thy ruin, thy ruin!

O'er the consecrate cake he shall lay

Mid your altar-flames, Gods, let them play

Unavailingly!²—Ah but my queen

710

Shall know that I hold her the dearer!

Lo, this strange feast draweth nearer

When the sire's strange son shall be seen.

(*Epode*)

Heights of Parnassus, rock-ridges upbearing

The watchtower crags and the cloudland dome,

Where Bacchus, uptossing the pines flame-glaring,

Leaps mid his Bacchants through darkness that roam,

May never yon boy to my city come faring!

Be his birth-day the day of his doom!

720

For in sooth should our city be hard bestead

If an alien host to her hearths shall be led.

Suffice us Erechtheus, the kingly head

Of the Ancient Home!

*Enter KREUSA and OLD SERVANT, climbing the ascent to
the Temple.*

Kre. Thou reverend child-ward of my sometime sire

Erechtheus, while he walked yet in the light,

Bear up, and press to yon God's oracle,

That thou mayst share my joy, if Loxias King

One boding-pledge of sons hath uttered forth.

'Tis sweet with friends to share prosperity:

730

And if—which God forbid—if ill befall,

'Tis sweet to gaze in eyes of sympathy.

¹ Xuthus, though, by his marriage with the princess of Athens, he came into possession of the wealth of the royal house of Erechtheus, had not, by perpetuating the race of true-born Erechtheids, saved that house from extinction, since Ion was so far known only as the son of an alien father and of an (unknown) alien mother.

² *i.e.*, May the birth-sacrifice about to be offered be unblest.

- Now time old loving tendance of my sire
I, though thy lady, render back to thee.
- O. S. My daughter, spirit worthy of noble sires
Thou keepest, and thou hast not put to shame
Thine old forefathers, children of the soil.
Draw, draw me towards the shrines, and bring me on.
Steep is the god-ward path : be thou physician
Unto mine age, and help my toiling limbs. 740
- Kre. Follow : take heed where thou dost plant thy feet.
- O. S. Lo there !
Slow is the foot, still by the mind outstripped.
- Kre. Bear up thy foot's tread with the groping staff.¹
- O. S. Blind guide is this when mine eyes serve so ill.
- Kre. Sooth said : yet yield not thou to weariness.
- O. S. I would not, but my lost strength I command not.
- Kre. Women, which do leal service at my loom
And shuttle, show what fortune hath my lord
Found touching issue, for which cause we came.
For, if ye speak good tidings unto me, 750
Your queen shall not forget the debt of joy.
- Chor. Ah fate !
- O. S. (*aside*). No happy-boding prelude of their speech !
- Chor. Ah hapless !
- O. S. (*aside*). Ha, sinks mine heart for my lords' oracle ?
- Chor. What shall we do when death is in the path ?
- Kre. What means this strain, and wherefore is your fear ?
- Chor. Speech ?—silence ?—what is it that we should do ?
- Kre. Speak : something ye keep back that toucheth me.
- Chor. Thou shalt be told,—yea, though I die twice over. 760
'Tis not for thee, my queen, in arms to fold
Children, nor press them ever to thy breast.
- Kre. Ah, would I might die !
- O. S. Daughter—
- Kre. Ah wretch !—ah me for my misery !
I have gotten sore hurt, my friends : what is life unto me ?
- O. S. Undone—thou and I !
O child !
- Kre. Ah me, ah me ! for the anguish-dart
Hath pierced me through, and hath plunged deep into mine
heart.

¹ Reading *ποδός* and *περιφερει*. If *περιφερῆ*, we might render 'Prop with thy staff thy foot's uncertain tread' ; referring to the manner in which the foot nervously tries the ground round about ; its inequalities being dimly seen.

O. S. Nay, moan not yet—

Kre. But wailings the soul of me fill!

O. S. Ere we shall learn—

Kre. What tidings remain for me still? 770

O. S. If in the same calamity our lord
Have part, or thine alone misfortune be.

Chor. Ancient, to him hath Loxias given a son,
And private joy is his, unshared of her.

Kre. Ah sorrow on sorrow, for crown of sorrow, and woes for
my sighing!

O. S. But of some woman must he yet be born,
This child?—or did the God proclaim him born?

Chor. Already born—nay more, a stripling grown 780
Doth Loxias give him. I was there, and heard.

Kre. How sayest thou?—nameless, unspeakable things in mine
ears art thou crying—

O. S. And mine. But how works out the oracle?
More clearly tell me: who the lad is, tell.

Chor. Whomso thy lord should first meet as he passed
From the God's fane, the God gave him for son.

Kre. Ah me! ah me!—and my weird
Of barrenness, barrenness grippeth my life!—desolation-
oppressed 790

Shall I live on, living in childless halls!

O. S. Who was the child foretold? whom met he first,
Our sad queen's lord? How saw he him, and where?

Chor. Rememberest thou, O dear my queen, the youth
That swept the temple's floor? That son is he.

Kre. Oh to flee on the wings of a bird
Through the ocean of air, and from Hellas afar to the stars of
the west!

Such pain on me, friends, such anguish falls!

O. S. And what name hath his father given to him? 800
Know'st thou? Or brideth this unfix'd, unsaid?

Chor. Ion, since he was first to meet his sire.

O. S. His mother, who?

Chor. Thereof can I say nought.
My lady's spouse hath stol'n—that all my tale
Be known of thee—into the festal tent,
To sacrifice for welcoming and birth,
And spread a public feast for this new son.

O. S. Betrayed, Queen, are we—for thy pain is mine—
Of this thy lord; by treason-stratagems
Insulted; from Erechtheus' palace-halls

Cast forth! And this I say, as hating not
 Thy lord, but better loving thee than him,
 Who came a stranger to thy burg and home,
 Wedded thee, and received thine heritage,
 And of another woman gat him sons
 Clandestine: this 'clandestine' will I prove:—
 Knowing thee barren, he was not content
 To share thy fortune, to partake thy lot,
 But took a slave to his clandestine bed,
 Begat this son, from Athens sent him, gave
 Unto some Delphian's fostering: for concealment
 Was he reared in the temple, consecrate.
 So, when he knew the stripling fully grown,
 He drew thee hither by the hope of sons.
 So, not the God hath lied, but this man lied,
 Rearing so long the lad, weaving such plots.
 Detected here, he would cast it on the God:
 But, once in Athens, he would set her crown
 Upon him, guarding 'gainst the chance of time.
 But this *new name's* misdated forgery!—
 Ion—set eye on him then first, forsooth!

820

830

Chor. Ah me! how evermore I loathe the knave
 That plotteth wrongs, and then with stratagem
 Tricks forth! Be mine the friend of simple soul
 Yet honest, rather than the craftier villain.

O. S. And a worse ill than all this must thou know,
 To take into thine house for lord thereof
 A slave's brat, motherless, of none account!
 'Twere but one ill, if from a free-born womb,
 With thy consent, pleading thy barrenness,
 He found an heir. Or, if this liked thee not,
 He ought to have sought a wife of Aiolus' race.
 Now, something worthy of woman must thou do—
 Or grasp the sword, or by some wiliness
 Or poison slay thine husband and his son,
 Or ever death shall come from them to thee.
 For, if thou flinch,¹ 'tis thou shalt lose thy life:
 For, when two foes beneath one roof be met,
 This one or that one must the victim be.
 Willing am I with thee to share this work,
 To enter the pavilion, slay the lad
 Where he prepares the feast:—repaying so
 My lords their nurture, let me die or live!

840

850

¹ Retaining the MS. *ὑφήσεις*, *vice* *σὺ φείσει*, 'spare' (Badham).

There is but one thing bringeth shame to slaves,
The name : in all else ne'er a slave is worse
Than free men, so he bear an upright soul.

Chor. I too, dear mistress, I consent to share
Thy fate, or death, or honourable life.

Kre. O, how keep silence, my soul ?

Yet how shall I dare to unroll 860

Deeds hidden of darkness, and cast the shame behind me ?
Yet what thing remaineth to fetter me, what thing to bind me ?
With whom can I stand in virtue's glorious strife ?
Hath not mine husband a traitor been shown to his wife ?
I am wholly of home bereft, of my children bereft :
Of the hopes unavailing I cherished not one is left,
Who dreamed I should order all things well,
Yet nought of that bridal of horror tell,
Nought of the birth amid tears that befell.

Now nay—by the palace of Zeus star-brightened, 870
By the watchtower crag where my Goddess's throne is,
By the holy shore of the mere Tritonis

Full-brimming mid Libya's plain,

Mine outrage no more will I hide, that lightened
My bosom may be of its pain.

Mine eyes are a fountain of tears fast-welling,
And mine heart is betrayed and anguish-riven,
Betrayed of lovers on earth, in heaven !

I will speak it, that thankless name forth telling,
And the tale of the traitor to love shall be given. 880

Lord of the sevenfold lyre, who attunest the voice of its strings,
Under whose fingers the lifeless awaketh, the melody sings
From the horn-sherds of oxen, the chant of the Muses in
sweetness outrings—

Child of Latona, I cry to the Sun—I will publish thy shame !
Thou, with thy tresses a-shimmer with gold, through the
flowers as I came

Plucking the crocuses, heaping my veil with their gold-litten
flame, 890

Cam'st on me, caughtest the poor pallid wrists of mine hands,
and didst hale

Unto thy couch in the cave,—‘ Mother ! mother ! ’ I shrieked
out my wail,—

Wroughtest the pleasure of Kypris : no shame made the god-
lover quail.

Wretched I bare thee a child, and I cast him with shuddering
 throe
 Forth on thy couch where thou forcedst thy victim, a bride-
 bed of woe 900
 Lost—my poor baby and thine! for the eagles devoured him:
 —and lo,

Victory-songs to thy lyre dost thou chant!—Ho, I call to thee,
 son
 Born to Latona, Dispenser of Boding, on gold-gleaming
 throne
 Midmost of earth who art sitting:—thine ears shall be pierced
 with my moan! 910

Ah, ravisher-bridegroom thou!
 What ailed thee to give to my spouse—
 Requiting no service, I trow!—
 A son to be heir to his house?
 But my baby and thine, O heartless, was taken
 For a prey of the eagles: long ere now
 Were the swaddling-bands of his mother forsaken.

Thy Delos doth hate thee, thy bay-boughs abhor thee,
 By the palm-tree of feathery frondage that rose 920
 Where in sacred travail Latona bore thee
 In Zeus's garden-close.¹

Chor. Ah me, what mighty treasure-house is opened
 Of woes, whereat shall each and all shed tears!

O. S. Ah daughter, gazing on thy face I fill
 With pity: yea, my mind is all distraught
 For, while one surge of ills yet drowns my soul,
 High rolls astern another from thy words.
 For, soon as thou hadst told thy present ills,
 Thou followedst the foul track of other woes. 930
 What say'st thou? What dost lay to Loxias' charge?
 What child hast born? In Athens where didst cast him
 To gladden a living grave?—tell yet again.

Kre. Ancient, I blush before thee, yet will tell.

O. S. To weep with friends that weep, full well I know.

Kre. Hear then:—the Rocks of Kekrops knowest thou
 The Long Cliff named?—the northward-facing cave?

O. S. I know: Pan's shrine and altars stand thereby.

¹ Reading *κάποις* (Badham, etc.) *vice καρποῖς*, 'Unto Zeus for the fruit of her throes.'

Kre. Even there I agonized in that dread strife—

O. S. What?—lo, how start my tears to meet thy words! 940

Kre. With Phoebus linked sore loth in woeful bridal.

O. S. Ah daughter, was it this myself had marked?

Kre. Had marked?—If sooth thou sayest, I will tell.

O. S. Thy secret sighing as with hidden pain?

Kre. Yea; then befell the ills I now lay bare.

O. S. And how didst thou conceal Apollo's rape?

Kre. I travailed—bear to hear my tale, old friend!—

O. S. Who tended thee? . . . alone in trial's hour!

Kre. Alone within the cave that saw my rape.

O. S. And the boy, where?—that thou no more be childless.

Kre. Dead is he, ancient,—unto beasts cast out. [950

O. S. Dead?—and Apollo, traitor! helped thee nought?

Kre. Helped not. The child is nursed in Hades' halls.

O. S. Who cast him forth?—Not thou—O never thou!

Kre. Even I. My vesture darkling swaddled him.

O. S. Nor any knew the exposing of the child?

Kre. None—Misery and Secrecy alone.

O. S. How couldst thou leave thy babe within the cave?

Kre. Ah how?—O pitiful farewells I moaned!

O. S. Poor heart of steel!—O God's heart harder yet! 960

Kre. Ah, hadst thou seen the babe's hands stretched to me!

O. S. Seeking the breast, or cradle of thine arms?

Kre. Where he lay not, and so had wrong of me.

O. S. And in what hope didst thou cast forth the babe?

Kre. That the God yet would save him—his own child.

O. S. Ah me, what tempest wrecks thine house's weal!

Kre. Why dost thou, ancient, veil thine head, and weep?

O. S. Seeing calamity, thy sire's and thine.

Kre. 'Tis man's lot: nought continueth at one stay.

O. S. Cling we no more to wailings, daughter, now. 970

Kre. What must I do?—so helpless misery is.

O. S. Avenge thee on the God who wronged thee first.

Kre. How?—I, a mortal, triumph o'er the strong?

O. S. Set thou the torch to Loxias' holy shrine.

Kre. I fear:—even now I have enough of woes.

O. S. Then dare the thing thou canst: thine husband slay.

Kre. I cannot—for old love and loyalty's sake.

O. S. The boy, at least, thus foisted upon thee.

Kre. How?—would 'twere possible!—how fain would I!

O. S. With daggers arm the servants of thy train. 980

Kre. I will go straight:—but when to strike the blow?

O. S. In the pavilion, where he feasts his friends.

- Kre.* Murder in public—and weak hearts of thralls !
O. S. Woe ! thine heart fails. Do thine own plotting now.
Kre. Ha, mine is secret guile and triumph sure.
O. S. Yea, both ?—then will I be thy minister.
Kre. Hear then :—thou knowest of the Earth-born War ?
O. S. Yea, giants stood in Phlegra 'gainst the Gods.
Kre. There Earth brought forth the Gorgon, monster dread—
O. S. To help her sons, and press the Gods full hard ? 990
Kre. Yea, and Zeus' Daughter, Goddess Pallas, slew it.
O. S. What was the fashion of its grisly form ?
Kre. A breastplate fenced with ring on ring of snakes.
O. S. Meseems I heard this legend long ago—
Kre. How on her breast Athênê bore its skin.
O. S. Ay, named the Aegis, Pallas's array ?
Kre. Of Gods named, from her battle-eager¹ charge.
O. S. But, daughter, how shall this thing harm thy foes ?
Kre. Knowest thou Erichthonius ?—thou must.
O. S. First father of your line, whom earth brought forth ?
Kre. To him gave Pallas in his hour of birth— [1000
O. S. What ?—thy word falters in the utterance.
Kre. Two drops of blood—of that same Gorgon's blood.
O. S. What power have they upon the life of man ?
Kre. For death one, one for healing of disease.
O. S. And hung them on the child—wherein enclosed ?
Kre. A golden clasp. He gave it to my sire.
O. S. And, when Erechtheus died, to thee it passed ?
Kre. Yea ; and I bear it ever on my wrist.
O. S. How is the Goddess' gift twofold ordained ? 1010
Kre. Each drop that welled forth from the hollow vein—
O. S. To what serves this ? What virtue beareth it ?
Kre. Averts diseases, fostereth the life.
O. S. The second thou hast named—what doeth it ?
Kre. Slayeth : 'tis venom of the Gorgon's snakes.
O. S. Mingled in one, or several, dost thou bear it ?
Kre. Several : good with evil blendeth not.
O. S. O child, O darling, thou hast all thy need !
Kre. Hereby the lad shall die, the slayer thou.
O. S. Where ?—by what deed ? Thou tell, and I will dare.
Kre. In Athens, when he cometh to mine home. [1020
O. S. Thou say'st not well.—Nay, thou didst blame my rede.²
Kre. Ha, doth thine heart's misgiving jump with mine ?
O. S. Thou shouldst be murderess held, though innocent.

¹ Reading ἡξεν, with Paley, *vice* MSS. ἡλθεν.

² In answer to her movement of impatience at his criticism of her plan.

Kre. Even so—the old tale of stepdame's jealousy.

O. S. Here slay him—now : so shall avail denial.

Kre. At least I shall the sooner taste that joy.

O. S. Nor thy lord know thy knowledge of his secret.

Kre. Know'st then thy part? Receive thou from mine hand
Athênê's golden vial, wrought of old. 1030

Go where my lord holds this false sacrifice ;

And, in the banquet's pause, when men will pour
Wine to the Gods, this have thou 'neath thy robes,

And swiftly drop into the stripling's cup,—

That for his drinking, not the general bowl,—

Even his who seeks to lord it o'er mine house.

If once it pass his lips, ne'er shall he come

To glorious Athens : here shall he stay—dead.

O. S. Unto thine host's house now withdraw thy foot ;

And I through mine appointed task will toil. 1040

Come, agèd foot, for deeds must thou grow young,

Though this be not by time vouchsafed to thee.

On, with thy mistress on, against the foe !

Help her to slay and cast him forth her home.

Fair faith?—O yea, fair faith for fortune fair :

But, when ye would wreak vengeance on your foes,

There is no law that lieth in the path.

[*Exeunt* KREUSA and OLD SERVANT.

(*Str.* 1)

Chor. Goddess of Highways,¹ Demeter's Daughter,

Queen of the nightmare darkness-ranger,

Guide thou the hand that for noontide slaughter 1050

Shall fill up the chalice, my lady's avenger,

Which beareth the venom-gouts that fell

From the neck of the Gorgon, the fiend of hell,

My lady's greeting-gift to the stranger

That usurpeth Erechtheus' royal sway, [1060

That an alien of alien strain in our Athens never may reign,

But the noble Erechtheids—none save they !

(*Ant.* 1)

But—the death unaccomplished?—the deed unabettèd

Of the hour, and my mistress's purposes ended,

And the hopes that upbore her?—remains the sword

whettèd ;

¹ Hekatê (here, as elsewhere, identified with Persephonê), goddess of sorcery and secret poisoning (and so invoked by Medea, 394-6). She haunted places where roads crossed each other, and at night sent up demons and phantoms from Hades.

Remaineth the neck in the death-noose suspended ;
 And, by agony ending the agony-strife,
 Shall she pass to the life beyond this life.
 For never this queen from kings descended [1070
 Shall endure that the splendour-light of her eyne,
 No, not while she liveth, should fall on the shame of the
 ancient hall
 Ruled by the upstart of alien line.

(Str. 2)

Shame for the God oft-chanted¹
 In hymns, if *he*,²
 Beside the fountains haunted
 Of dances, see
 With eyes long held from sleep
 That Twentieth Dawn upleap,
 See the torch-river's sweep, ere darkness flee,

When dances heaven star-glancing³
 Adoringly,
 When the white moon is dancing, 1080
 And 'neath the sea
 The Nereids' dance enrings
 The eternal river-springs,
 And their full chorus sings Persephonê

Gold-crowned, and our Earth-mother—
 Awful is she!—
 Shall *he* press in, that other,
 To sovranty?
 Shall not his hopes be foiled?—
 Where kings and heroes toiled,
 Shall that proud realm be spoiled, a vagrant's fee?

¹ Dionysus, or Bacchus, who, in the Eleusinian Mysteries here referred to, was worshipped along with Demeter and Persephonê. The 20th of the month Boëdromion (about beginning of October) was the great day of the feast, and was ushered in by a vast torch-light procession (of 30,000 persons sometimes) conducting with dances the statue of Bacchus along the sacred road. In this procession those newly initiated into the mysteries, and who had kept vigil in the temple the night before, joined.

² Ion, whose presence, as that of an alien by blood, would be profanation, yet whose initiation could, as a matter of policy, not be avoided.

³ The very elements were said to unite in this dance-worship of the Mighty Mother and her Daughter.

(Ant. 2)

1090

Mark—ye whose strains of slander
 Scourge evermore
 Woman in song, and brand her
 Wanton and whore,—
 How high in virtue's place
 We pass men's lawless race,
 Nor spit in viper-lays your venom-store ;

But let the Muse of taunting
 On men's heads pour
 Her indignation, chanting
 Her treason-lore ;
 Sing of the outraged maid ;
 Tell of the wife betrayed
 Of him who hath displayed his false heart's core,—

This son of Zeus,¹ who flouted
 A queen's heart, sore
 With childless hunger, scouted
 Troth-plight of yore :
 Her right aside he thrust,
 And mocked a nation's trust
 For one that to his lust this bastard bore !

1100

Enter SERVANT in haste.

Ser. Where, damsels, shall I light upon our mistress,
 Erechtheus' daughter ? All throughout the town
 Seeking her have I ranged, and find her not.

Chor. What is it, fellow-thrall ? What hot-foot haste
 Possesseth thee ? What tidings bearest thou ?

1110

Ser. We are hunted ! Yea, the rulers of the land
 Are seeking her, that she may die by stoning.

Chor. Ah me ! what say'st thou ? Are we taken then
 Plotting the secret murder of yon lad ?

Ser. Yea, thou wilt share the doom—nor thou the last.

Chor. How were the hidden stratagems laid bare ?

Ser. The assay of right to vanquish wrong the God
 Discovered ; for he would not be defiled.²

¹ Xuthus, descended through Aiolus from Zeus.

² *i.e.* by a murder within the temple-precincts.

Chor. How?—I beseech thee suppliant, tell it out.

For, knowing all, if I indeed must die,

1120

Death should be easier—yea, or sweeter life.

Ser. Soon as Kreusa's lord had left the fane

Of Phoebus, taking his new son with him,

For that thanksgiving-feast and sacrifice,

To where the Wine-god's Bacchic fire leaps up

Went Xuthus, to make wet with victims' blood

Dionysus' twin rocks for the son new-found ;

And spake, ' Abide now, son, and set thou up

A wide-embracing tent by craftsmen's toil.

If sacrificing to the Birth-gods long

1130

I tarry, feast thy friends assembled there.'

So took the calves and went. And now the youth

The unwall'd pavilion's compass solemnly

With tall masts reared, and fenced with heed therefrom

The javelins of the sun, his midnight flame,

And in like wise the beams of dying day.

A hundred feet he meted out foursquare,—

Having for compass of its space within

Ten thousand, as the cunning craftsmen say,—

As bidding to the feast all Delphi's folk.

1140

With sacred tapestries from the treasuries

He screened it, marvellous for men to see.

First with a canopy of shawls he ceiled it,

The offering of Zeus' son, which Herakles

Brought to the God, the Amazonian spoils.

Therein were webs of woven blazonry :—

Heaven shepherding his stars in folds of air :

His steeds the Sun drove to their goal of fire,

After him drawing the bright Evening Star.

And sable-vestured Night with team of twain

1150

Upfloated ; and the stars companioned her.

The Pleiad swam her mid-sky path along,

And sword-begirt Orion ; and, above,

The Bear's tail wheeled around the gold-gemmed sphere.

The Moon's full circle of the parted month

Shot silver shafts : the Hyads, surest sign

To shipmen ; and the Light-uplifter, Dawn,

Chasing the star-rout. And upon the walls

Draped he yet other orient tapestries :

Galleys with oars that charged on ships of Greece,

1160

Monsters half-brute, steeds flying in the chase,

Hunting of stags and lions of the world.

At the doors Kekrops coiling spire on spire
 Amidst his daughters—some Athenian's gift
 Of worship. In the banquet's midst he set
 The golden bowls. Forth stately pacing then
 A herald cried, 'What Delphian will soe'er,
 Come to the feast!' And when the tent was thronged,
 With garlands crowned they satisfied their souls
 With plenteous meat. And when they would no more, 1170
 An old man entered in, and in their midst
 Stood, and to laughter loud the feasters stirred,
 Meddling unasked. He drew from drinking ewers
 Water for cleansing hands; for incense burnt
 Balsam of myrrh, and of the golden cups
 Took charge—yea, laid this office on himself.
 But when the flutes 'gan play, and mazer-bowls
 Were mixed, the greybeard spake, 'Take hence forthright
 These tiny wine-cups—ample beakers bring,
 That my lords' hearts the sooner may be merry.' 1180
 Then toiled we bearing goblets silver-chased
 And golden; and he took a chosen one,
 As rendering worship to his new-made lord,
 And gave the chalice brimmed, first casting in
 The drug death-working, which our mistress gave,
 Men say, that her new son might leave the light.
 None marked;—but as the god-discovered heir
 Raised with the rest the God's cup in his hand,
 He heard some servant speak a word unmeet.
 He, temple-reared, perfect in bodement lore, 1190
 Held it for ominous, bade fill up with wine
 Another bowl; that first drink-offering
 He cast to earth, and bade all do the like.
 Then fell a hush. With water brimmed we up
 And Bybline wine the sacred mixing-bowls.
 Then midst our toils a flight of doves dropt down
 In the pavilion; for in Loxias' halls
 Unfrayed they dwell, and when men spilled the wine,
 The thirsty innocents dipped their beaks therein,
 And drew it down their dainty-feathered throats. 1200
 And none the God's libation harmed—save one:
 But she lit where the new heir spilled the wine.
 She sipped the drink—her dainty-feathered frame
 Quivered and staggered: an unmeaning scream¹

¹ The ordinary note of the bird was significant in augury.

She shrilled of anguish : marvelled all the throng
 Of banqueters to see her agonies.
 One fierce convulsion—the pink claws uncramped ;
 And she was dead. That child of prophecy
 Bared of his robe his limbs, leapt o'er the board,
 Shouting ' Who goeth about to murder me ?
 Old man, declare !—thine was the eager zeal,—
 Yea, from thine hand did I receive the cup !'
 He clutched his withered arm, he searched him o'er
 To take the ancient in the very fact.

1210

Detected, under strong constraint he told
 Kreusa's desperate deed, the poison-plot.
 Straightway, the feasters with him, hurries forth
 The stripling given by Loxias' oracle,
 Before the Pythian nobles stands, and cries,
 ' O hallowed land, by poison is my death
 Sought of Erechtheus' child, the alien dame !'
 Then Delphi's kings by general vote decreed
 That from the precipice hurled my queen should die,
 As compassing a priest's death, planning murder
 Within the Precinct. All the city seeks her
 Who sped on wretched mission wretchedly.
 Drawn by desire of babes to Phoebus' fane,
 She hath lost her life and children therewithal.

1220

Chor. There is no hiding-place from death for me,
 None : woe is me, it is the end !

1230

All is laid bare for all men's eyes to see—
 The cup, the murder-blend
 Of gout of viper-blood swift for life's quelling,
 Mid Bacchus' clusters shed ;
 Drink-offering—yea, to them in darkness dwelling,
 Gods of the dead.

Ruin is my life's portion—ah, *her* doom !
 Stones raining death upon my queen !
 Oh had I wings, or could but plunge to gloom
 Under the earth, to screen
 Mine head from horror of the stones down-beating !
 Oh, borne on four-horsed car,
 To hear the hurrying hoofs !—to see waves fleeting
 Astern afar !

1240

There is no hope,—except a God befriending
 Should snatch us from men's sight.

O hapless queen, upon thy life what ending
 Of agony shall light!
 O God! is justice' sword on *us* descending,
 Who thought to smite?

Enter KREUSA in haste.

Kre. Maidens, I am chased: the blood-hounds are upon my
 track to slay; 1250
 For the Pythian vote hath doomed me, given me up to be their
 prey!

Chor. Hapless queen, we know it, know the ruin over-shadow-
 ing thee.

Kre. Whither fly? What refuge? Scarce from forth the
 house my feet could flee

Ere the death rushed in. Through throngs of foemen slipt I
 stealthily.

Chor. What thy refuge save the altar?

Kre. How shall this avail my need?

Chor. Impious 'tis to slay the suppliant.

Kre. Yet the law my death decreed.

Chor. Ay, but first their hands must hold thee.

Kre. Lo, the swords!—they come, the feet
 Of the ministers of death!

Chor. Upon the altar take thy seat.

For, if here they slay thee, shall thy blood to heaven for ven-
 geance call

On the murderers.

[*KREUSA seats herself on the altar, grasping it with her hands.*

So :—and now to bear what fate soe'er befall. 1260

Enter ION with armed men followed by a crowd.

Ion. O form bull-shapen of her sire Kephisus,¹
 What viper of thy blood is this, or what
 Dragon up-glaring murderous flame of fire!
 Full of all hardihood, not less fell she is
 Than Gorgon's blood wherewith she sought my death.
 Seize her!—Parnassus' jagged terraces
 Shall card the dainty tresses of her hair

¹ Praxithea, Kreusa's mother, was grand-daughter of this River-god. River-gods were represented under the form of a bull, perhaps from the impetuous rush of their streams. The short rivers of Greece all became rushing mountain-torrents in winter.

When quoitwise down the rocks she shall be hurled.
 O grace of fortune, ere to Athens town
 I came, and fell beneath a stepdame's power! 1270
 Begirt with friends I sounded thy soul's depths,
 Knew thee my bane, and measured all thine hate.
 For, had thy nets been staked around me there,
 Me with one fling thou hadst hurled to Hades' halls.
 Nay—not the altar, not Apollo's house
 Shall save thee! Ruth for thee!—Rather for me
 And for my mother:—though she be afar
 In body, ever her name is in mine heart.
 See her, vile monster! Webs on webs of guile
 She weaves! At Phoebus' altar hath she crouched, 1280
 As though she should not suffer for her deeds!

[Beckons to the guards, who advance irresolutely.]

Kre. I warn thee, slay me not—in mine own cause,
 And the God's cause, upon whose floor we stand!
Ion. Phoebus—and thou! What part hast thou in Phoebus?
Kre. Myself I give to the God, a sacred thing.
Ion. Sacred?—and poison the God's minister!
Kre. Thou, thou wert none of Loxias', but thy sire's.
Ion. His I became while father I had none.
Kre. Ay, then:—now, I am his, thou his no more.
Ion. Blasphemer!—his? His reverent child was I. 1290
Kre. I did but seek to slay mine house's foe.
Ion. I came not sword in hand against thy land.
Kre. No?—Thou wouldst set Erechtheus' halls aflame.
Ion. Yea? With what brands or with what flame of fire?
Kre. In mine house wouldst thou dwell, take mine by force.
Ion. Take?—my sire *gives* the land that he hath won.
Kre. What part have Aiolus' sons in Pallas' land?
Ion. He was her saviour—and with arms, not words.
Kre. Should allies in possession take the land!
Ion. So thou wouldst slay for fear of what might fall? 1300
Kre. Ay, lest thou fall upon me, and I die.¹
Ion. Childless, dost grudge my father finding me?
Kre. What, shalt thou seize all childless parents' homes?
Ion. Had I no part at least in my sire's wealth?
Kre. His wealth!—a shield and spear. Take that thine is.
Ion. Hence!—leave the altar and the hallowed seat!
Kre. Thy mother teach her part, where'er she be.
Ion. Shalt thou not suffer, who wouldst murder me?

¹ See lines 846-49.

Kre. Yea—if thou dare to slay me mid the shrines.

Ion. What joy hast thou mid Phoebus' wreaths to die? 1310

Kre. One shall I vex of whom I was sore vexed.

Ion. Out upon this!

Shame, that a God ordained unrighteous laws

For mortals, statutes not in wisdom framed!

Never should crime have altar-sanctuary,

But hounding thence. Unmeet it is that hands

Sin-stained should touch the Gods: but righteous men,

Whoso is wronged, should claim their sanctuary,

And not the good and evil come alike

Hither to win the same boon of the Gods.

Enter the PYTHIA, bearing a cradle, the contents of which are concealed by a wrapping which partially envelopes it.

Pyth. Forbear, my son. The seat of prophecy 1320

I leave, and step across this temple-fence,

Priestess of Phoebus, chosen of Delphi's daughters

To guard his tripod's immemorial use.

Ion. Hail, dear my mother, though thou bar'st me not.

Pyth. So was I called; nor did the name mislike me.

Ion. Hast heard of yonder woman's plot to slay me?

Pyth. I heard: yet is thy ruthlessness all wrong.

Ion. Shall I not pay death-wage to murderers?

Pyth. To stepsons from of old have wives been foes.

Ion. Yea, I withal of stepdames have foul wrong. 1330

Pyth. Ah hush!—Thou leav'st the fane, thou farest home—

Ion. What must I do then at thy counselling?

Pyth. With clean hands and fair omens go to Athens.

Ion. Clean are the hands of whoso slays his foes.

Pyth. Nay, nay!—but hear the tale I bring to thee.

Ion. Speak: it shall come of love, whate'er thou say.

Pyth. Seest thou this chest that's cradled in mine arms?

Ion. I see an ancient ark with fillets dight.

Pyth. In this I found thee once, a new-born babe.

Ion. What say'st thou? Strange the story hither brought!

Pyth. Yea, I kept silence. I reveal it now. [1340

Ion. Why hide so long whom thou didst find that day?

Pyth. The God would have thee minister in his house.

Ion. Nor needeth now?—How shall I know it so?

Pyth. Showing thy sire, he sends thee forth the land.

Ion. Thou, by commandment keptest thou these things?

Pyth. On that day Loxias put it in mine heart—

Ion. To do what deed? Say on, tell out the tale.

Pyth. To keep this treasure-trove against this day.

Ion. What profit or what hurt hath this for me? 1350

Pyth. This hides the swaddling-bands that wrapped thee then.

Ion. My mother!—clues be these for finding her?

Pyth. Yea, 'tis the God's will now—not heretofore.

Ion. O day of blessèd revelations this!

Pyth. Take them—rest not until thou find thy mother,

Though thou search Asia through, search Europe's bounds:

Thou shalt not err, thou. For the God's own sake

I nursed thee, son: these give I back to thee,

Which his unspoken will then made me take

And guard. Why thus he willed I cannot tell: 1360

But none of mortal men was ware that I

Had these, nor hidden in what place they lay.

Farewell . . . for as a mother kiss I thee.

Turns to go, but resumes—

Where thou shouldst seek thy mother, there begin—

First, did a Delphian bride unwedded bear

And cast thee forth upon these temple-steps?

Then, any maid of Greece? . . . So hast thou all

Of me, and Phoebus, pilot of thy fate.

[*Exit.*

Ion. Ah me, mine eyes are drowned in streaming tears, 1370

As leaps my thought to that day when the bride

Betrayed, who bare, by stealth to thralldom sold me,¹

Nor ever suckled me; but nameless all

In the God's courts I lived a servant's life.

Kind was the God's part, but my fortune's hand

Heavy; for while I should of right have lain

Soft in a mother's arms, and known life's joy,

Of a sweet mother's care was I bereft.

O hapless she who bare me, who hath suffered

Like me, hath lost the joys of motherhood!

But this ark will I bear unto the God, 1380

An offering—lest I find aught I would not.

For, if perchance a slave-girl gave me birth,

'Twere worse to find a mother than let be.

Phoebus, I offer this unto thy fane;—

¹ The reference seems to be to the selling of a child by its nurse to kid-nappers (as in the *Odyssey* xv, 450-4), to which, in its consequences to himself, his exposure furnished a parallel.

What ails me? Lo, I fight against the favour
Of Him which saved for me my mother's tokens!
This must I open, face what must be faced;
For never can I overstep my doom.

Ah, sacred fillets, what have ye hid for me,
O bands wherein mine heart's desire was kept?

1390

Lo, the enwrapping of the ark's fair curve,
How by a miracle it waxed not old;

The osier-plaitings mouldless!—yet long time
Since then hath o'er these treasure-relics passed.

Kre. What, O what vision see I, past all hope!

Ion. Peace!—for thou canst be silent—as the grave.¹

Kre. Not for me silence!—Teach not me my part!

I see the ark wherein I set thee forth,—

Thee, O my child, my babbling baby then,—

In Kekrops' cave, beneath the Long Cliff's brow!

1400

This altar will I leave, yea, though I die.

[Flings her arms round his neck.]

Ion. Seize her!—she hath been driven god-distraught

To leave the carven altar!—Bind her arms.

Kre. Slay on—spare not—for I will cling, will cling

To this, and thee, and what is hidden there.

Ion. Foul outrage! I am kidnapped by her tongue!

Kre. No, no!—but found, O love, of her that loves!

Ion. I thy beloved—whom thou wouldst slay by stealth!

Kre. Yes—yes! my son!—Is aught to parents dearer?

Ion. Cease!—I shall take thee mid thy webs of guile— 1410

Kre. Take me?—ah take! I strain thereto, my child.

Ion. Void is this ark, or somewhat doth it hide?

Kre. Yea, that which wrapped thee when I cast thee forth.

Ion. Speak out and name them ere thine eyes behold.

Kre. Yea, if I tell not, I submit to die.

Ion. Say on:—'tis passing strange, thy confidence!

Kre. See there the web I wove in girlhood's days.

Ion. Its fashion?—girls be ever weaving webs.

Kre. No perfect work; 'twas but a prentice hand.

Ion. The pattern tell:—thou shalt not trick me so. 1420

¹ Retaining the reading of the MSS. (σιγᾶν σὺ πολλὰ . . . οἴσθᾶ), and understanding it to refer to her previous (πάρουθεν) absolute (πολλὰ) secrecy in plotting, which, as he had cause to know (μοι), had so nearly proved fatal to him. Paley's emendation—'Silence!—my foe thou art as heretofore,' undoubtedly gives a clear and relevant sense (as resenting an impertinent intrusion), but is a less direct and telling reference to his ever-present burning sense of wrong, to which he continually recurs, as in 1286, 1300, 1308, 1326, 1408.

Kre. A Gorgon in the mid-threads of a shawl.

Ion (aside). O Zeus, what weird is this that dogs our steps?

Kre. 'Tis fringed with serpents—with the Aegis-fringe.

Ion. Behold! (*lifts and spreads it forth*).

This is the web:—lo, here the oracle!

Kre. O work of girlhood's loom, so long unseen!

Ion. Is there aught else?—or this thy one true shot?

Kre. Serpents, an old device, with golden jaws—¹

Ion. Athênê's gift, who biddeth deck babes so?

Kre. Moulded from Erichthonius' snakes of old.

Ion. What use, what purpose, tell me, hath the jewel? 1430

Kre. A necklace for the new-born babe, my child.

Ion. Even these be here. The third I long to know.

Kre. A wreath of olive set I on thee then:

Athênê brought it first unto our rock.

If this be there, it hath not lost its green,

But blooms yet, from the sacred olive sprung.

Ion. Mother!—dear mother!—glad, O glad, I fall,

Beholding thee, on thy cheeks gladness-flushed.

Kre. Child!—light to mother better than the sun—

He will forgive²—I have thee in mine arms, 1440

Unhoped treasure-trove!—as a dweller in Hades, so thought I
of thee,

An abider mid nethergloom shades with Persephonê.

Ion. Ah no, dear mother mine; within thine arms

Revealed is he that liveth and was dead.

Kre. Ho ye, ye unfoldings of ether, ye sunlit expanses,

In what cry shall I peal out my rapture? O whence unto

me

Came it, this sweetness undreamed of? By what strange

chances

Such bliss do I see?

Ion. Nought were so strange, but I had looked for that, 1450

O mother, rather than to know me thine.

Kre. Still I tremble with dread—

Ion. Lest holding thou hold me not?

Kre. I had seen hope flee

So long ago!

O prophetess, whence and O whence to thine arms came he,

My little one?

¹ So the MSS. Paley suggests *πάγχρυσον γάνος*—'an ancient golden ornament': Verrall, *γένει*—'an old badge of our golden (*i.e.*, glorious) race.'

² The Sun-god will pardon the apparent slight.

Upborne by what hand unto Loxias' halls was he sped ?

Ion. A miracle : but through our lot to be

May we be happy as our past was sad.

Kre. At thy birth-travail, O my child, was there many a tear :

Thou wert torn from the arms of thy mother with many a
moan : [1460

And now on thy cheeks is my breath : my darling is here !

The uttermost bliss of the Blessèd, lo, now have I known !

Ion. Thou speakest for mine heart and thine, as one.

Kre. No more are we childless, no more unto barrenness
banned :

The home hath the hearth-glow again, and her kings hath the
land.

The strength of his youth doth Erechtheus renew :

The house of the Earth-born Race no longer to nightward shall
gaze,

But the sun's beam cleaveth its darkness through.

Ion. Mother, my sire is here : let him too share

This happiness which I have given to you.

Kre. O child, child, what sayest thou ?—must the shame be
laid bare of thy mother ? 1470

Ion. What is this thou hast said ?

Kre. Of another thou camest—oh, of another !

Ion. Woe's me ! a bastard ?—child of maiden's shame ?

Kre. No torches were gleaming, no raiment outstreaming
In the dance, my child, for the bridal bed
Which brought to the birth thy dear-loved head !

Ion. Alas ! base-born am I ?—O mother, whence ?

Kre. Be witness the Gorgon-slaying Maid—

Ion. What is this ?—what meaneth the word thou hast said ?

Kre. Who hath set on my watch-tower crags her throne

On the hill with her olives overgrown,— 1480

Ion. Dark sayings are these, and I cannot interpret the thing.

Kre. Unto Phoebus beside the rock where the nightingales
sing—

Ion. What should of Phoebus by thee be said ?

Kre. In a bridal from all men hid was I wed.

Ion. Say on : glad tidings this and fortune fair !

Kre. And the months swept round, till the tenth month came,
And I bare unto Phoebus a child of shame.

Ion. O happy words, if this thou say'st be true !

Kre. And these, these mother's swathing-bands

About thee cast, my maiden hands

Wrought, my loom's skillless fashionings. 1490

Nor to thy lips for suck I gave
 The breast, nor with mine hands did lave :
 But forth into a lonesome cave,
 A banquet-spoil for swooping wings,
 To Hades thee thy mother flings.

Ion. O mother, what horror to do, to dare !

Kre. I was thrall unto terror—I flung away
 Thy life, my baby : I steeled me to slay

When mine heart was moaning ‘ Spare ! ’

1500

Ion. And of me nigh slain !—foul horror it were !

Kre. O fearful chances of that dark day,

And of this withal ! We are tossed to drift

On the surge of calamity hither and thither :

Yet anon do the winds of heaven shift,

And behold, we are gliding through summer weather !

Oh may it last !—for the ills overpast should surely suffice.

Fair winds, my son, now are wafting us on, after stormy
 skies.

Chor. Let none e’er deem aught in the lot of man
 Past hope, who marketh what to-day befalls.

1510

Ion. O Fortune, thou that shiftest countless mortals
 Unto misfortune, and anon to weal,

Lo, to what fearful pass came we, that I

Should slay my mother, should endure like wrong !

Ah strange !

Yet—midst the bright embraces of the sun

Somewhere such things day after day befall !

Sweet, mother, is my treasure-trove of thee ;

And this my birth, I find no fault therein.

Yet somewhat would I say to thee apart.

1520

Come hither : I would speak it in thine ear,

And fold about with darkness that thy past :—

See to it, mother, lest thy steps have slipped,

As maids infatuate yield to love—to shame,

And now thou chargest this upon the God,

And, striving to escape the shame of me,

Phoebus thou nam’st my sire, who sire was none.

Kre. No !—by Athênê, Lady of Victory, who

With car and shield on the earth-born charged for Zeus,

No mortal man was sire to thee, my son,

1530

But he which reared thee, Loxias the King.

Ion. How gave he then his own son to another,

And named me Xuthus’ son—begotten son ?

Kre. Nay, not begotten ; but his gift art thou,

Sprung from himself,—as friend to friend should give
His own son, that his house might have an heir.

Ion. Is the God true?—or naught his prophecies?

Mother, my soul it troubleth: well it may.

Kre. Hear now what cometh to my mind, my son.

Of kindness Loxias giveth thee a place 1540

In a proud house: hadst thou been called his son,

Thou hadst had none inheritance thereof,

Nor a sire's name:—how couldst thou, when myself

Still hid his rape, yea, by thy secret death?

Thee for thy good to another sire he gives.

Ion. Nay, not thus lightly on the quest I press.

I will ask Phoebus, entering his fane,

'Am I of Loxias or a mortal sire?'

[Athênê appears above the temple in her chariot.]

Ha! high above the incense-breathing house

What God reveals a face that fronts the Sun? 1550

Let us flee, mother, lest we gaze on Gods,

Except in season meet for that great vision.

Ath. Fly not; no foe am I that ye should flee;

But as in Athens, so here, gracious-willed.

I come from thy land—land that bears my name:

I Pallas from Apollo speed in haste,

Who deigned not to reveal him to your sight,

Else must he chide you for things overpast,¹

But sendeth me to tell to you his words:—

Thee this queen bare, begotten of Apollo: 1560

He gives to whom he gave, not that they gat thee,

But for thy bringing home to a princely house.

But, when the matter was laid bare and told,

Fearing lest thou shouldst of her plot be slain,

And she of thee, saved thee by that device.

¹ For unfaith and impatient interference with his providential dealings: Kreusa, in particular, for her hasty upbraidings and her attempt at murder; Ion, for proposing to violate the right of sanctuary. The result was to thwart Apollo's design of bringing about a happy issue in his own good time. But to chide them at this juncture would have entailed that mingling in one communication of good (promises) and evil (rebukes) which the Greeks with religious scrupulosity avoided. The interpretation which assumes that Apollo was afraid lest *he* should be chidden by those whose lives he was crowning with blessing, by two Greeks whose reverential awe made them fear even to gaze on divinity, is little in harmony with Ion's own words in ll. 370-73, and with the fact that the whole plot of the 'Andromache' turns on the vengeance visited by Apollo on Neoptolemus, despite his repentance, for having presumed to upbraid him for a far deeper and more irreparable wrong.

Now the God would have kept the secret hid
 Until in Athens he revealed her thine,
 And thee the son of her and Phoebus born.
 But—to make end, and tell his oracles,
 For which I yoked my chariot, hearken ye. 1570
 Take this thy son, and go to Kekrops' land,
 Kreusa, and on thrones of sovereignty
 Seat him; for, of Erechtheus' lineage sprung,
 Worthy he is to rule o'er mine own land.
 Famed shall he be through Hellas; for the sons
 Born to him, even four from this one root,
 Shall give their names unto the several tribes
 Of the land's folk which dwell upon mine hill.
 Teleon the first shall be; the second tribe 1580
 Hoplêtes; Argades the third: the fourth,
 One tribe, of my shield named Aegikores.
 And their sons in the fulness of the time
 Shall found them cities in the Cyclad Isles,
 And seaboard realms, for strength unto my land.
 Yea, they shall people either mainland's plains
 On either side the strait, of Asia-land
 And Europe: and because of thy son's name
 Ionians shall be named, and win renown.
 From Xuthus too and thee a seed shall spring,
 Dorus, of whom shall Doris song-renowned 1590
 Arise: the second goeth to Pelops' land,
 Achaius; o'er the seaboard shall he reign
 Nigh Rhion, and the people of his name
 Among the nations shall be sealed therewith.
 Well hath Apollo all things done: for, first,
 He gave thee health in travail; so none knew:
 And, when thou hadst born this child, and cast him out
 In swaddling-bands, bade Hermes in his arms
 Snatch him away, and hither waft thy babe;
 And nurtured him, nor suffered him to die. 1600
 Now therefore say not that this lad is thine,
 That Xuthus in his phantasy may joy,
 And thine the substance, lady, be of bliss.
 Farewell ye: after this relief from woes
 I bring you tidings of a happy lot.

Ion. Pallas, Daughter of the Highest, child of Zeus, we will
 receive
 These thy words with no unfaith, but Loxias do I believe
 Sire to me, and her my mother:—never was this past belief.

Kre. Hear me : Phoebus praise I, whom I praised not in mine
hour of grief,

For that whom he set at nought, his child, to me he now
restores. 1610

Lovely is his oracle, and fair to me these temple-doors,
Hateful though they were aforetime. Now unto the portal-
ring,

As I bid his gates my blithe farewell, with loving hands I
cling.

Ath. Well dost thou to turn to praises of the God : so is it
still—

Slow the Gods' hands haply are, but mightily at last fulfil.

Kre. Homeward let us pass, my son.

Ath. Pass on : myself shall following come.

Ion. Best way-warden art thou !

Kre. Thou who holdest dear our city-home.

Ath. Seat thee on the ancient throne.

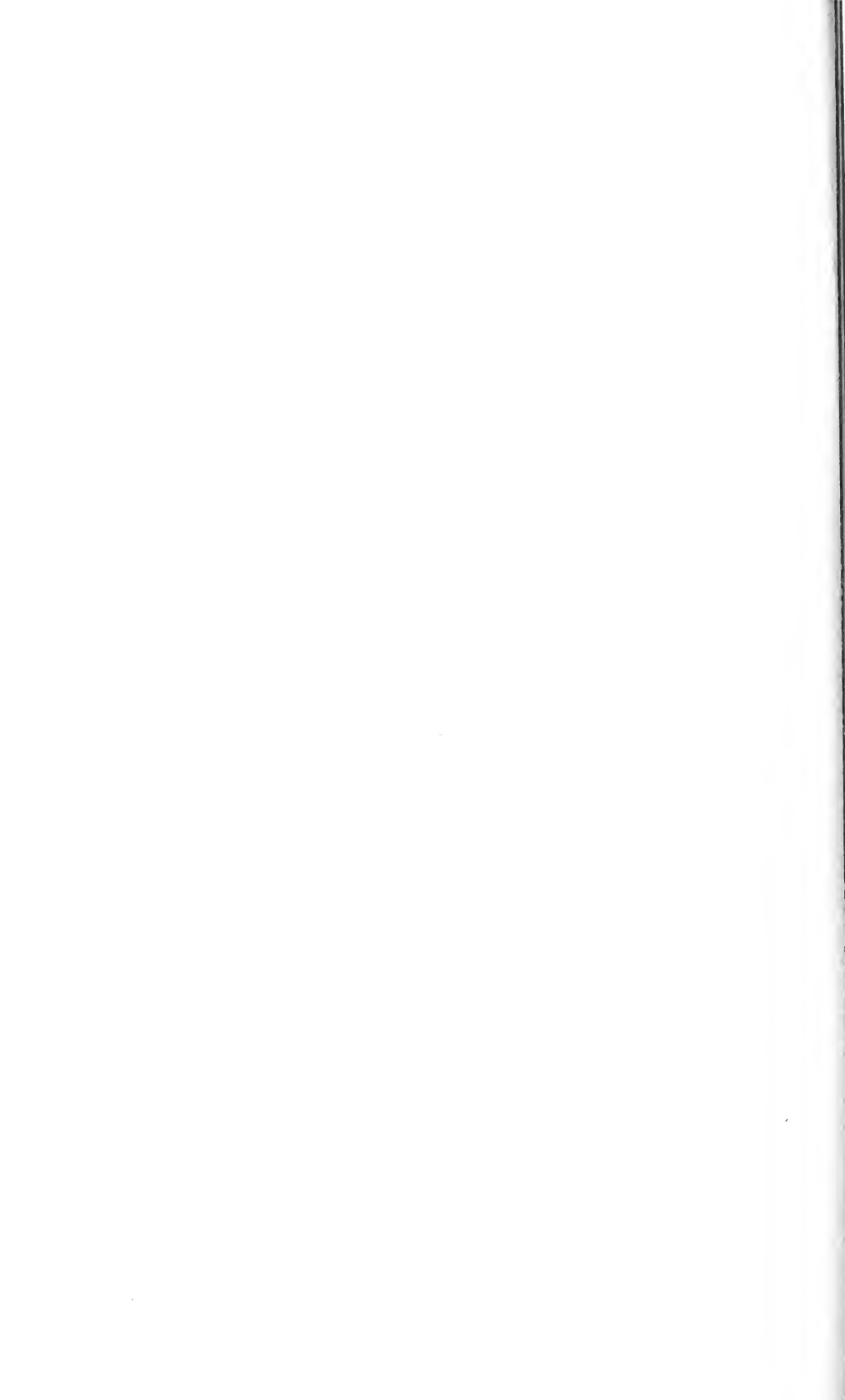
Ion. A goodly heritage is mine.

Chor. Zeus' and Lêto's Son Apollo, hail ! Let him to powers
divine

Render homage undismayed, whose house affliction's buffets
smite : 1620

For the good at last shall overcome, at last attain their right ;
But the evil, by their nature's law, on good shall never light.

[Exeunt in procession to marching music.]



SUPPLIANTS

ARGUMENT

IN the days when Theseus ruled in Athens, there was war between Argos and Thebes. For the two sons of Oedipus, being mindful of their father's curse, that they should divide their inheritance with the sword, covenanted to rule in turn, year by year, over Thebes. So Eteokles, being the elder, became king for the first year, and Polyneikes his brother departed from the land, lest any occasion of offence should arise. But when after a year's space he returned, Eteokles refused to yield to him the kingdom. Then went he to Adrastus king of Argos, who gave him his daughter to wife, and led forth a host of war under seven chiefs against Thebes. But, forasmuch as in going he set at nought oracles and seers, his array was utterly broken in battle, and of those seven captains none returned, but Adrastus only. Thereafter, according to the sacred custom of Hellas, and the law of war, the Argives sent to require the Thebans to suffer them to bear away their slain that they might bury them. For, among the Greeks, if a man being dead obtained not burial, this was accounted a calamity worse than death, forasmuch as he was thereby made homeless and accurst in Hades. Yet did the Thebans impiously and despitefully reject that claim, being minded to wreak vengeance on their enemies after death. Then king Adrastus, with the mothers of the slain chiefs, came to Eleusis in Attica, and made supplication at the altar of Demeter to Aithra the mother of Theseus, and to the king's self. So Theseus consented to their prayer, and led the array of Athens against Thebes, and there fought and prevailed, and so brought back the bodies of those chiefs, and rendered to them the death-rites at Eleusis.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

AITHRA, *mother of Theseus*

THESEUS, *son of Aigeus, king of Athens*

ADRASTUS, *king of Argos*

HERALD *from Kreon king of Thebes*

MESSENGER *from the army of Theseus before Thebes*

EVADNÊ, *wife of Kapaneus one of the seven chiefs*

IPHIS, *father of Evadnê*

SONS *of the slain chiefs*

ATHENÊ, *Patron-goddess of Athens*

CHORUS, *consisting of the mothers of the slain chiefs, with their Handmaids*
Athenian herald, guards, attendants, Athenian soldiers

SCENE:—In the forecourt of the temple of Demeter and Persephonê at Eleusis. The great altar stands in the midst.

SUPLIANTS

On the steps of the altar AITHRA is seated; and around her sit the members of the CHORUS. The olive-boughs of suppliance lie upon the altar, and from these are stretched woollen fillets, attaching them to Aithra and the Chorus.

Aith. Demeter, warder of Eleusis-land,
And ye which keep and serve the Goddess' fanes,
To me and my son Theseus be propitious,
And unto Athens and to Pittheus' land,
Where my sire nursed me in a happy home,
Aithra, and gave me to Pandion's son
Aigeus, to wife, by Loxias' oracles.
Thus pray I as on these grey dames I look,
These which have left their homes in Argos-land, 10
And fall with suppliant bough before my knee,
Stricken with grievous stroke: for round the gates
Of Kadmus lying are their seven sons dead,
Sons of the childless, whom the Arigve king
Adrastus led, in Oedipus' heritage
To win his share for Polyneikes exiled,
His daughter's lord. The mothers now of these,
Spear-slain, are fain to lay them in the grave,
Wherefrom the victors let them, and refuse
The corpses, setting the Gods' laws at nought. 20
Sharing the burden of their need of me,
Adrastus lieth here, his eyes with tears
Drowned, mourning for the battle-shivered spear
And that ill-starred array led forth of him.
Sore pleadeth he with me to bend by prayers
My son to be redeemer of the dead
By speech or spear, and helper to the grave,
Laying this charge alone upon my son
And Athens. Now it chanceth that I come
For the land's harvest's sake from forth mine halls
To this god's-acre, where first rose to light 30
Above this earth's face bristling ears of corn.

And, bound in this strong gossamer-chain of leaves,¹
 At the two Goddesses' holy hearths I stay,
 Demeter's and her Daughter's, both for ruth
 Of these unchilded mothers silver-haired,
 And awe of the holy bands. To Athens sped
 Mine herald is, to summon Theseus hither,
 That he may banish from the land these mourners,²
 Or loose this strong constraint of suppliance
 By rendering heaven its due. Seemly it is 40
 That women, which be wise, still act through men.

(Str. 1)

Chor. Reverend Queen, with agèd lips do I implore thee ;
 In my suppliance at thy knee I fall before thee.
 O redeem thou unto me from that assemblage of the dead
 My belovèd, from the harvest that the hand of death hath
 spread
 For the mountain-beasts to ravin on the children of my
 womb !

(Ant. 1)

Look upon me :—from mine eyes in my despairing [50
 Tears are streaming, and my frenzied hands are tearing
 Crimson furrows on my wrinkled cheeks. What should I do
 but mourn,
 Who have laid not out my dead unto their burial to be borne,
 And who see not any heaping of the earth-mound for their
 tomb ?

(Str. 2)

Thou hast born a little one, thou hast given a princely son
 To thy lord, that marriage-treasure made his heart to joy in
 thee :

Let the full soul deal its bread to the sad ones famishèd :
 Give according to the measure of my childless agony.
 Bend the spirit of thy scion, that he come, whose help we
 crave, 60

To Ismenus, that he give them, goodly bodies of our dead,
 To the arms of her that loveth, who shall lay them in the
 grave.

¹ Lit. ' a (real) chain which is (apparently) no chain.' The woollen fillets and boughs could not be removed without sacrilege. cf. ' Those ties which, light as air though strong as iron, bind the colonies to the mother-land.' *Burke*.

² The presence of such, especially at the temple of Demeter, was ominous of evil, which the king only could avert, either by granting their request or by refusing it and ordering them to depart.

(Ant. 2)

Not according unto rite,¹ but as overmastering might
Of Necessity constraineth, at the altars do I bend
Whence to heaven leaps the flame; and the right is that I
claim.

Thou art strong, thy son remaineth; thou canst make my
sorrows end.

Out of depths of sorest anguish rings my supplication wild
That thou give me but a corpse, in mine embrace to hold
the same,

And to fling mine arms around the piteous body of my
child. 70

*The attendant HANDMAIDS, beating their breasts and marring
their faces, wail in unison with the Mothers.*

(Str. 3)

O hearken yon wails to our wailing replying,
To the hands of our handmaidens smiting hard
On their bosoms! Come, ye that re-echo our crying
With a burden of mourning, who sigh with our sighing—
Come ye to the one dance Death doth regard;
Rend, rend ye the cheek, till the red stains streak
White fingers:—the dues that our dear dead seek
Shall be all our reward.

(Ant. 3)

Unsatisfied mourning my soul is enthralling
Sorrow-burdened, as forth from a precipice flows 80
A spring with its rain ever flashing and falling.
Unrestingly wailing to wailing is calling;
For the heart's love of woman but one path knows,
Nor can choose but to moan for the dear dead son:—
And oh that the days of my life were done,
And forgotten my woes!

Enter THESEUS.

The. What wailings heard I, smittings upon breasts,
And dirges for the dead, as rang the sound
From the holy place? How throbs mine heart with fear
Lest to my mother, who hath drawn me hither 90
By her long absence, some mischance betide.
Ha!

What see I here? What strange tale is to tell?

¹ There was no place in the temple-ritual for mourning.

- At the altar sitting my grey mother is,
 And alien dames with her in diverse guise
 Of sore affliction ; for the piteous tear
 Unto the ground from agêd eyes they drop.
 Shorn hair and garb unmeet for worshippers !
 What means it, mother ? 'Tis thy part to tell,
 And mine to hear. I look for some strange thing.
- Aith.* My son, these dames the mothers are of those,
 The chieftains seven, that in battle fell
 By gates Kadmean. And with suppliant boughs
 Compassed they hold me, captive, as thou seest.
- The.* Who yonder at the gates makes piteous moan ?
- Aith.* Adrastus, as they tell, the Argive king.
- The.* And yon lads at his side, his boys are they ?
- Aith.* Nay, but the sons of those dead which have died.
- The.* Wherefore to us came they with suppliant hand ?
- Aith.* I know :—but these must tell the rest, my son.
- The.* Thee, in thy mantle muffled close, I ask—
 Unshroud thine head, speak, let thy mourning be ;
 Nought shalt thou profit, if nought pass thy tongue.
- Adr.* O triumph-glorious king of Athens' land,
 Theseus, I come thy suppliant and thy city's.
- The.* What seekest thou, and whereof hast thou need ?
- Adr.* Thou know'st what host I to destruction led.
- The.* Yea, not in silence passedst thou through Greece.
- Adr.* The chiefest men of Argos lost I there.
- The.* Such desolation worketh woeful war.
- Adr.* And these my dead I went to ask of Thebes.
- The.* Did heralds sanctify thy burial-claim ?
- Adr.* Yea : even so the slayers grant them not.
- The.* What say they to thy plea of holy right ?
- Adr.* Ay, what ?—prosperity hath puffed them up.
- The.* For counsel com'st thou then, or what wouldst thou ?
- Adr.* That thou shouldst rescue, Theseus, Argos' sons.
- The.* Where is your Argos ? Is her vaunting vain ?
- Adr.* We are fallen and undone. To thee we come.
- The.* Dost thou alone will this, or all thy state ?
- Adr.* All Danaus' sons beseech thee entomb their dead.
- The.* Why didst thou march those seven hosts to Thebes ?
- Adr.* To my two daughters' lords this grace I showed.
- The.* Thy daughters ? To what Argives gav'st thou them ?
- Adr.* With no man native-born I linked mine house.
- The.* Ha ! gavest thou to aliens Argive maids ?
- Adr.* To Tydeus, and to Thebes' son Polyneikes.

The. Whence thy strong love for such affinity ?
Adr. Phoebus' dark saying wrought upon my mind.
The. What spake Apollo to control their marriage ?
Adr. ' *Thy daughters give to a lion and a boar.*' 140
The. And the God's precept how unfoldest thou ?
Adr. There came by night two exiles to my gates.
The. Who this, who that ?—for thou dost speak of twain.
Adr. Tydeus and Polyneikes : there they fought.
The. To these, as those wild beasts, gav'st thou thy daughters ?
Adr. Yea : like those monsters twain, methought, they
 strove.

The. How left they home-land's bounds, and came to thee ?
Adr. Tydeus, for shedding blood of kin exiled.
The. And Oedipus' son, for what cause left he Thebes ?
Adr. His father's curse, lest he should slay his brother. 150
The. Wise was that self-sought exile, named of thee.
Adr. But they that tarried wrought the absent wrong.
The. Ha ! did his brother take his heritage ?
Adr. To claim his right I came : I was undone.
The. Didst seek to seers, and gaze on altar-flames ?
Adr. Ah me ! thou pressest me where most I erred !
The. Not with heaven's blessing didst thou go, methinks.
Adr. Nay, worse ; in Amphiaraus' despite I went.
The. Didst thou thus lightly flout the will divine ?
Adr. The clamour of the young men daunted me. 160
The. Valour instead of wisdom favouredst thou.
Adr. Even that hath ruined many a battle-chief.

O thou in prowess first all Hellas through,
 O king of Athens, sore ashamed am I
 To fall to earth, and to embrace thy knee,
 A grey-haired king in time past prosperous.
 Yet to mine evil plight I needs must bow.
 Save thou my dead, compassionate my woes,
 And these the mothers of the slaughtered sons
 Whom hoary eld hath found in childlessness ; 170
 Who have endured to come, on alien soil
 To set their feet, who scarce for eld may creep ;
 No mission to Demeter's mysteries,
 But seeking burial for their dead, a boon
 Themselves should have obtained of young strong hands.¹
 Wisely doth wealth consider poverty :
 Wisely to wealth the poor uplifts his eyes

¹ In the natural course of things, the mothers might have expected to be
 committed to the grave by their sons.

Aspiring, that desire of good may spur him :

So ought the prosperous to look on woe.

[The poet's self in gladness should bring forth

His offspring, song ; if he attain not this,

He cannot from a heart distraught with pain

Gladden his fellows : reason sayeth nay.]¹

Perchance thou askest, ' Why pass by the land
Of Pelops, and on Athens lay this charge ? '

Sooth, right it is that I should answer this :—

Sparta is heartless, never at one stay ;

The rest be small and weak : but this thy burg

Alone can stand beneath the mighty strain.

'Twas ever pitiful, and hath in thee

A young and valorous chief, for lack of whom

To lead their hosts, have many cities fallen.

Chor. I too put up to thee the selfsame prayer,

Theseus, to have compassion on my lot.

The. With others oft in wrestle of argument

I have grappled touching this :—there be that say

That evil more abounds with men than good.

Opinion adverse unto these I hold,

That more than evil good abounds with men :

Were this not so, we were not of the light.

Praise to the God who shaped in order's mould

Our lives redeemed from chaos and the brute,

First, by implanting reason, giving then

The tongue, word-herald, to interpret speech ;²

Earth's fruit for food, for nurturing thereof

Raindrops from heaven, to feed earth's fosterlings,

And water her green bosom ; therewithal

Shelter from storm, and shadow from the heat,

Sea-tracking ships, that traffic might be ours

With fellow-men of that which each land lacks ;

And, for invisible things or dimly seen,

Soothsayers watch the flame, the liver's folds,

Or from the birds divine the things to be.

Are we not arrogant then, when all life's needs

God giveth, therewith not to be content ?

But our presumption stronger fain would be

Than God : we have gotten overweening hearts,

And dream that we be wiser than the Gods.

And thou art of this fellowship of folly,

¹ Lines 180-3 are by most editors bracketed as an irrelevant interpolation

² cf. Horace, *Odes* I, x, 2-3.

Who didst by Phoebus' hest thy daughters wed,¹ 220
 And gav'st to aliens, even as though Gods lived ;
 Yet, mingling thy clear blood with turbid, so
 Didst mar thine house : thou oughtest ne'er to have blent,
 So thou wert wise, just lives with lives unjust,
 But for thine house to have gotten heaven-blest friends :
 For God, adjudging fates joined hand in hand,²
 Destroyeth by the sinner's stroke whoe'er
 Partaketh with him, though he have not sinned.
 Thou ledest forth the Argives all to war,
 Though seers spake heaven's warning, sett'st at nought 230
 These, floutedst Gods,—so ruinedst thy state,
 By young men led astray, which love the praise
 Of men, and multiply wars wrongfully,
 Corrupting others, one, to lead the host,
 One, to win power, and use it for his lust,
 And one for lucre's sake, who recketh nought
 Of mischief to a people thus misused.

For in a nation there be orders three :—
 The useless rich, that ever crave for more ;
 The have-nots, straitened even for sustenance, 240
 A dangerous folk, of envy overfull,
 Which shoot out baleful stings at such as have,
 Beguiled by tongues of evil men, their ' champions ' :
 But of the three the midmost saveth states ;
 They keep the order which the state ordains.
 Shall I then make me ally unto thee ?
 How to my nation should I make defence ?
 Depart in peace : if thou hast ill devised,
 It must not be that thy fate drag us down.³

hor. He erred ; yet on the young men lieth this : 250
 But meet it is that he find grace with thee.

dr. Not for a judge I chose thee of mine ills,
 But as to a healer of them, king, I came ;
 Nor, if I have calamitously sped,
 Need I thy chastisement and chiding, king.
 No, but thine aid. And if thou wilt not this,
 I must content me with thy choice :—what help ?

¹ The argument is, that, while recognizing the authority of the Gods in one matter, your daughters' marriage, you disregarded it in another ; or they had not told you also to bind up the fortunes of your house with those of the bridegrooms ; nay, they warned you against doing so.

² cf. Horace, *Odes* III, ii, 29–30, and Prov. xiii, 20.

³ Reading, with Paley, *ὁ δέ* for *αὐτός*.

Come, agèd dames, depart :—yet leave ye here
 The grey-green boughs to roof the altar o'er,¹
 Calling to witness heaven and earth, Demeter,
 Fire-bearing Goddess, and the Sun-god's light,
 That nought our prayers unto the Gods availed.
 [On thine head be it, grandson thou of Pittheus]²
 Old Pelops' son !—Lo, we of Pelops' land
 The selfsame blood ancestral share with thee.

*Aith.*³—How ?—wilt thou flout these prayers, cast forth the land
 Grey mothers, which have gained of their dues nought ?
 Nay, nay !—the beast finds refuge in the rock,
 The slave at the Gods' altars ; and a state
 Storm-tossed must cower beneath another's lee ;
 For in man's lot nought prospereth to the end.

270
 (Str.)

Chor. O thou afflicted, arise from Persephonê's hallowèd floor ;
 Rise thou, and bow at his knees, flinging round them thine
 hands, and implore
 That he rescue the clay of my dead, my belovèd—ah, woe is
 me, woe !—
 Of the sons I have lost, under ramparts of Kadmus in dust
 lying low.

(Mesode)

Woe for me !—clasp me, uplift me, help onward, upholding
 The palsied hand of the woe-forspent !
 By thy beard, O thou chiefest of champions of Hellas, O
 friend, I beseech thee,
 In the clasp of the wretched thy knees and thy fingers
 enfolding !
 Pity me, for my children in suppliance bent
 Like a beggar I bow : let my pitiful, pitiful outcryings reach
 thee !

(Ant.)

Ah, not unburied on Kadmus's soil, for a ravin and glee
 Unto beasts of the wold do thou leave them, the young men
 like unto thee !
 O look on the tears from mine eyes that are streaming !—
 and all that I crave
 Falling low at thy knees, is a grave—that thou win for my son
 but a grave !

¹ If the petitioner's prayer was granted, he carried away with him his suppliant-bough ; if not, he left it on the altar.

² A line inserted, to supply an obvious gap in the MSS., in accordance with Paley's suggestion.

³ Various assigned by other editors to Chorus, and to Adrastus.

The. Mother, why weepest thou, before thine eyes
 Casting thy fine-spun veil? Dost weep to hear
 Their mournful wails? Sooth, mine own heart was thrilled.
 Raise thy white head; be not a fount of tears,
 There sitting at Demeter's holy hearth. 290

4ith. Ah me!

The. 'Tis not for thee to wail their woes,—

4ith. Oh hapless dames!

The. Thou art not of their blood.

4ith. Son, may I speak for thine and Athens' honour?

The. Yea, wisdom oft hath flowed from women's lips.

4ith. Yet—yet, it gives me pause, the word I hide.

The. Nay, this were shame, to hide from friends good rede.

4ith. I will not hold my peace, to blame hereafter

Myself for coward silence of this day;

Nor by that taunt abashed, 'that woman's best

Is worthless,' will refrain my lips from good. 300

My son, I bid thee look to this first, lest

Thou err, despising their appeal to heaven.

In this alone thou err'st, in all else wise.

Nay more—I had endured, and murmured not,

Wert thou not *bound* to champion the oppressed:

Lo, this is the foundation of thy fame.

Therefore I fear not to exhort thee, son,

That thou wouldst lay thy strong constraining hand

On men of violence which refuse the dead

The dues of burial and of funeral-rites, 310

And quell the folk that would confound all wont

Of Hellas: for the bond of all men's states

Is this, when they with honour hold by law.

Ay, some will say faint heart made feeble hand:

'Twas thine to win for Athens glory's crown,

Yet didst thou flinch for fear; with that wild swine¹

Thou grappledst in a strife of little toil;

But when behoved to face the helm, bear brunt

Of the spear's point, a craven wert thou found.

Ah, do not so, my son, as thou art mine! 320

Hast marked—bemocked for spiritless policy,

How on the mockers glares with Gorgon eyes

Thy country?—in her energy is her life.

But states which work in darkness, cautelous,

Grope in the darkness, for their caution's meed.

¹ Phaia, the wild sow of Krommyon, slain by Theseus in his first journey
 Athens.

What, to the dead, and women misery-worn
 Wilt thou not bring help, son, in this their strait?
 I fear nought: justice is with thine assay;
 And, though the folk of Kadmus prosper now,
 Far otherwise yet for them the dice of doom
 Shall fall, I trust:—God bringeth low the proud.

Chor. O best-beloved, well hast thou said, for him
 And me alike; herein is twofold joy.

The. Mother, the words I spake were words of truth
 Unto this man, wherein I showed my mind
 Touching the counsels by the which he fell.
 Yet these thy warnings—yea, I see their force,
 That with my life's use it accordeth not
 To flinch from peril. Many a glorious deed
 Hath shown to sons of Hellas this my wont,
 Ever to be a punisher of wrong.

Toil's challenge therefore cannot I refuse:
 For what will they which hate me say of me,
 When she that bare me—who, beyond all, fears
 For me,—first bids me undertake this toil?
 I will unto the deed, redeem their dead
 By fair words, if I may; if not, the might
 Of spears shall do it, nor the Gods shall grudge.
 Yet I require all Athens' sanction here.

My wish should win their sanction; yet, if I
 Show cause withal, the loyaller shall they be.
 For I have made the land one single realm,
 A free state, with an equal vote for all.

Adrastus for my witness will I take,
 And meet their concourse; their consenting won,
 With muster of chosen youths Athenian
 Will I return; and, tarrying under arms,
 Will send to Kreon, asking back the dead.
 But ye, grey women, from my mother take
 The holy wreaths, that I may clasp her hand,
 And lead to Aigeus' halls. A sorry son
 Is he that pays not service-debt to parents.
 Who giveth of love's best, by his own sons
 For all he hath given his parents is repaid.

[*Exeunt* THESEUS and AITHRA

(*Str.* I

Chor. O Argos, mead of the battle-steed, O land where my
 fathers abode of yore,

Ye have heard it, have heard the changeless word of the
 hero-king,
 His sacred plight in Pelasgia's sight, the pledge to be published
 all Argos o'er.

(*Ant.* 1)

O may he gain—yea, more than attain to the goal that seeth
 my miseries end!

Forth let him go, let him wrest from the foe, to the mother
 to bring 370
 Her darling's clay blood-stained, and for aye have our own
 dear Inachus' land to friend.

(*Str.* 2)

Memorial fair shall the cities share of the sacred labour of
 love: evermore

The grace thereof shall abide, and the love aye lingering.
 Ah, what shall come of their rede?—what doom?—shall
 Athens bestow the grace I implore?
 Shall she league her might with me, and the right of the tomb
 to my slaughtered sons restore?

(*Ant.* 2)

O Pallas' Town, for my help step down; the holy cause of the
 mother defend;
 So the laws of men shall be made not then a polluted thing.
 Thou reverencest great Justice' hest: injustice beneath thy
 yoke shall bend;
 And through all the lands thy champion hands to the helpless
 oppressed deliverance send. 380

Enter THESEUS with Athenian Herald.

The. O thou that usest still thine art to serve
 Athens and me, wide publishing mine hests,
 Pass thou Asopus and Ismenus' stream,
 And to the proud Kadmean despot say:
 'Theseus of grace asks corpses for the tomb:
 He dwells thy neighbour, and he claims but right:
 So make thou the Erechtheid folk thy friend.'
 If they consent to grant it, turn thou back.
 If they refuse, my second message speak,
 That for my shielded war-array they look. 390
 Mine host is camped and marshalled hard at hand
 By sacred Kallichorus for fight prepared.
 Yea, Athens of good will, and glad withal,
 Took up this task, made ware of my desire.

Ha!—breaking in upon my speech who comes?
 Theban, I deem, yet know not certainly:—
 A herald!—stay: thy toil perchance is spared.
 His coming meets my purpose in mid way.

Enter THEBAN HERALD.

Her. Your despot, who?—To whom must I proclaim
 The words of Kreon, lord of Kadmus' land
 Since Eteokles by the hand was slain
 Of Polyneikes by the sevenfold gates?

400

The. First, stranger, with false note thy speech began,
 Seeking a despot here.¹ Our state is ruled
 Not of one only man: Athens is free.
 Her people in the order of their course
 Rule year by year, bestowing on the rich
 Advantage none; the poor hath equal right.

Her. One vantage hast thou given me, as to one
 That playeth draughts:—the city whence I come
 By one man, not by any mob, is swayed.
 There is none there who, slaving them with talk,
 This way and that way twists them for his gain,
 Popular now, and humouring all their bent,
 Now an offence: but still fresh calumnies²
 Gloze past faults, and he slips through justice' net.
 How should the mob which reason all awry
 Have power to pilot straight a nation's course?
 For time bestoweth better lessoning
 Than haste. But yon poor delver of the ground,
 How shrewd soe'er, by reason of his toil
 Can nowise oversee the general weal.
 Realm-ruining in the wise man's sight is this,
 When the vile tonguester getteth himself a name
 By wooing mobs, who heretofore was naught.

410

420

The. An eloquent herald this, a speech-crammed babbler!
 But, since thou hast plunged into this strife, hear me:—
 'Twas thou flung'st down this challenge unto parley:—
 No worse foe than the despot hath a state,
 Under whom, first, can be no common laws,
 But one rules, keeping in his private hands

430

¹ cf. *Henry V*, pt. 1, I, ii. Henry, in answer to first words of the ambassador of France, replies, 'We are no tyrant, but a Christian King.'

² He lays the blame of his misconduct upon others, when impeached for failure.

The law : so is equality no more.

But when the laws are written, then the weak
And wealthy have alike but equal right.

Yea, even the weaker may fling back the scoff
Against the prosperous, if he be reviled ;

And, armed with right, the less o'ercomes the great.

Thus Freedom speaks¹ :—' What man desires to bring
Good counsel for his country to the people ? '

Who chooseth this, is famous : who will not, 440
Keeps silence. Can equality further go ?

More—when the people piloteth the land,
She joyeth in young champions native-born.

But in a king's eyes this is hatefullest ;

Yea, the land's best, whose wisdom he discerns,
He slayeth, fearing lest they shake his throne.

How can a state be stablished then in strength,
When, even as sweeps the scythe o'er springtide mead,
One lops the brave young hearts like flower-blooms ?

What boots it to win wealth and store for sons, 450
When all one's toil but swells a despot's hoard ?

Or to rear maiden daughters virtuously
To be a king's sweet morsels at his will,
And tears to them that dressed this dish for him ?

May I die ere I see my daughters ravished !
Such is the answering shaft that I hurl back.

But thou, what wouldst thou have of this our land ?
Except thy state had sent thee, thou shouldst rue

Thine insolent prating ! 'Tis the herald's part 460
To speak his message, and to get him back

With speed. Henceforth let Kreon to my town
Send a less wordy messenger than thee.

Chor. Out on it ! When God prospereth evil men,
Wanton they wax, as who should prosper aye.

Her. Now will I speak my charge. For our dispute,
Be this thy mind, contrariwise be mine.

But I and all the folk Kadmean warn thee—
Receive Adrastus not into this land.

If in the land he is, ere set of sun 470
Free from yon wreaths your sacred Mysteries,²

And drive him forth, nor go about by force
To take those dead : ye have nought to do with Argos.

¹ He quotes the formula with which the herald opened the proceedings of the popular assembly at Athens.

² Of which this temple of Demeter at Eleusis was the seat.

If thou obey me, thou by storm unscathed
 Shalt helm thy city ; if not, our great surge
 Of war on thee and thine allies shall fall.
 Look to it, nor, being chafed at these my words,—
 Because forsooth a city free thou hast,—
 Make arrogant answer from a weaker cause.
 Hope is men's curse : full many a state hath this
 Embroiled, by kindling it to mad emprise. 480
 For, when for war a nation casteth votes,
 Then of his own death no man taketh count,
 But passeth on to his neighbour this mischance.
 But, were death full in view when votes were cast,
 Never war-frenzied Greece would rush on ruin.
 Yet, of elections twain, we know—all know—
 Whether is best, the blessing or the curse,
 And how much better is peace for men than war,
 Peace, which is to the Muses chiefest friend,
 But mourning's foe, which joyeth in fair children, 490
 In wealth delighteth. Fools let all these slip,
 And rush on war : man bringeth weaker man
 To bondage ; city is made city's thrall.
 Thou helpst men our foes, and dead men they,
 Wouldst win for graves them whom their insolence slew !
 Good sooth, then, wrongfully did levin blast
 Kapaneus' frame upon yon ladder's height,
 Which he had reared against our gates, and swore
 To sack the town, whether God willed or no :—
 Wrongly earth's chasm snatched from sight the seer, 500
 Shrouding with yawning gulf his four-horse car ;
 And other captains lie before our gates,
 The knittings of their bones with crags to-shattered !
 Or boast thee now in wisdom more than Zeus,
 Or say that rightly Gods destroy the wicked.
 Behoves the wise to love his children first,
 Parents and country next,—to make her great,
 Not break her down. Rash leaders, pilots heady,
 Mean ruin : the wise in season sitteth still.
 This too is manful valour, even discretion. 510

Chor. The punishment of Zeus might well suffice !
 Shall *he* insult with wanton arrogance ?

Adr. Villain of villains !—

The. Hold, Adrastus, peace,
 And thrust not in before my words thine own ;
 For not to thee yon fellow doth his message,

But unto me : 'tis I must make reply.
 Now, thy first utterance will I answer first :—
 I know no Kreon despot over me,
 Nor more of might than I, that he should force
 Athens to do this. Sourceward back should flow 520
 Life's stream, if we shall brook such hest as his !
 It is not I that launch upon this war,
 Seeing with these I sought not Kadmus' land.
 But lifeless bodies—harming not your state,
 Nor thrusting man-destroying strife on her,—
 I claim to bury : lo, all Hellas' law
 Do I uphold. How is not this well done ?
 For if of Argives ye have suffered aught,
 They are dead : with glory ye hurled back your foes,
 With shame to them :—but there your right hath end. 530
 Let now the dead be hidden in the earth,
 And each part, whence it came forth to the light,
 Thither return,¹ the breath unto the air,
 To earth the body ; for we hold it not
 In fee, but only to pass life therein ;
 Then she which fostered it must take it back.
 Dost think thou woundest Argos through her dead ?
 Not so : the common cause of Greece is this,
 If one shall rob the dead of rightful dues,
 And hold them from the tomb : this shall unman 540
 Even heroes, if such law shall be ordained.
 And to me comest thou to bluster threats,
 While ye fear corpses, if they be entombed ?
 What fear ye ? Lest they undermine your land,
 There buried ?—or in earth's dark womb beget
 Children, of whom shall vengeance fall on you ?
 'Twere idle waste of speech, good sooth, to unmask
 Your caitiff terrors and your empty fears !
 O fools, learn ye the real ill of men :—
 Our life is conflict all : of mortals some 550
 Succeed ere long, some late, and straightway some ;
 While Fortune sits a queen : worship and honour
 The unblest gives her, so to see good days ;
 The blest extols her, lest her wafting breath
 Should fail him. Therefore should we think on this :
 Wronged, temperately bear it, not with wrath ;
 Neither on one whole nation visit wrong.
 How shall it be then ?—grant to us, who will,

¹ Reading ἀπελθεῖν vice ἀπηλθε.

To entomb the dead and render heaven its due.

Else, clear is the issue: this will I by force.

560

For never unto Greeks shall it be told

That the Gods' ancient law was set at nought

In mine and in Pandion's city's charge.

Chor. Fear not: for while thou wardest justice' light,

Thou shalt not fear what men can say of thee.

Her. Wouldst thou I summed up this thy claim in brief?

The. Speak, an thou list: no tongue-tied wight art thou.

Her. Thou ne'er shalt win from our land Argos' sons.

The. Now, if thou wilt, give ear to me in turn.

Her. Yea—since I cannot choose but hear in turn.

570

The. From thy land will I take and bury them.

Her. First must thou face the hazard of the shield.

The. Full many a harder emprise have I dared.

Her. A champion born to match him with all men!

The. With all proud scorers: not the right I scourge.

Her. Ay, thou wilt still be meddling—thou and Athens.

The. Much glorious toil is hers, and much good speed.

Her. Come!—let the dragon-seed but find thee there!

The. What valorous host should spring from dragons' teeth?

Her. This shalt thou learn, and rue. Thou art yet but young.

The. Tush, man, thou canst not move mine heart to wrath [580

With all thy vauntings. Get thee forth the land:

The idle words thou broughtest, bear them back;

For nought can come of this.

[*Exit* HERALD.

Behoves set forth

Each man-at-arms, each rider of the car.

Now let the charger's cheek-piece, dashing foam

About his jaws, hurl into Kadmus' land.

For on to Kadmus' seven gates will I march,

Bearing myself the whetted steel in hand,

Myself mine herald. Thee I bid remain,

590

Adrastus: mingle not with mine thy fate.

For I 'neath mine own fortune's star will lead

Mine host, a chief renowned with glorious spear.

One only thing I need, all Gods to have

Which reverence right: for where these are, they give

Victory. Naked valour nought avails

To men, except it have the Gods' good will.

[*Exit.*

(Str. 1)

Half-Chor. 1. Ye hapless mothers of hapless chieftains dead,
Ah, how is mine heart storm-tossed with pale dismay—

Half-Chor. 2. What ominous word and strange of thee was
said? 600

Half-Chor. 1. For what shall befall Queen Pallas' war-array!

Half-Chor. 2. Through battle, or peace-fraught parley, wouldst
thou say?

Half-Chor. 1. Ay, this last should be well; but if warrior-
quelling

Slaughters and battles again shall be seen,
With the beating of breasts in each desolate
dwelling

Of the land, what reproaches bitter-keen
Should I win, through whom this sorrow hath
been!

(Ant. 1)

Half-Chor. 1. Yet doom may the victor bring down low in dust;
This comforteth me, and bids be dauntless-souled. [610

Half-Chor. 2. Thou speakest of Gods that fail not, ever just

Half-Chor. 1. Of whom but of such be all our fates controlled?

Half-Chor. 2. Ah, many a change in God's ways I behold!

Half-Chor. 1. By the terrors o'erpast is the heart in thee
stricken:

Yet justice aloud unto justice doth call;
Blood calleth for blood, and the Gods shall re-
quicken

Our souls, for to mortals all blessings befall
From the hands that encompass the goal of all.

(Str. 2)

Half-Chor. 1. O might I speed from the Goddess's springs,
Even Kallichorus, to the fair-towered plain!

Half-Chor. 2. O would the Gods but vouchsafe to me wings,
So to win to the city of rivers twain!¹ [620

Half-Chor. 1. Ah then shouldst thou clearly discern—
How thy champions speed shouldst thou learn.

Half-Chor. 2. Ah God, what fate, what doom doth await
The king of the mighty hand,
The hero of Kekrops' land?

(Ant. 2)

Half-Chor. 1. We have cried to the Gods, and we cry once more
To the first best trust of the sore afraid.

¹ Thebes: round the base of the hill on which stood the old fortress, towarded, on one side, the Ismenus, on the other, the Dirke.

- Half-Chor.* 2. Zeus, hear us, whose offspring was born of yore
Of Inachus' daughter, the heifer-maid!
- Half-Chor.* 1. Oh be our champion thou,
To our city be gracious now! 630
- Half-Chor.* 2. Thy belovèd are we, it was planted of thee,
This city whose sons we would gain
For the tomb from the outrage-stain.

Enter MESSENGER.

- Mes.* Women, I come with tidings full of joy,—
Myself escaped, for I was ta'en in fight,
What time those seven bands of chieftains slain
Hard by the fount of Dirکہ strove their strife,—
Tidings of Theseus' triumph. I will spare thee
Question :—a vassal I of Kapaneus
Whom Zeus did blast with blazing levin-bolt. 640
- Chor.* Dear friend, glad tidings this of thy return,
Glad news of Theseus: but if Athens' host
Is safe withal, thou heraldest all joy.
- Mes.* Safe: and hath fared—I would Adrastus so
Had fared with Argos' sons whom forth he led
From Inachus to that Kadmean burg.
- Chor.* How then did Aigeus' son uprear to Zeus
The trophy, he and those his spear-allies?
Tell; thou wast there: them that were not make glad.
- Mes.* Bright the sun's beam, true-levelled shaft of light, 650
Smote on the earth. Beside Electra's gate
On a far-looking tower I stood to watch.
And three tribes I beheld of war-bands three:¹
A mail-clad host far-stretching up the slopes
Unto the height Ismenian, as men said;
And the king's self, even Aigeus' glorious son,
And those about him, marshalled on the right;
In Kekrops' ancient land abiders they:
To left, the Seaboard Men, arrayed with spears
By Arês' fountain, and the clouds of horse 660
Drawn out upon the fringes of the host,
Equal by tale: the battle-cars stood ranged
On levels 'neath Amphion's hallowed tomb.
Before their ramparts marshalled, Kadmus' folk
Behind them had those corpses, cause of strife.

¹ See Appendix B.

There against horsemen panoplied horsemen stood,
 And chariots facing four-yoked chariots set.
 Then Theseus' herald cried in all men's ears :
 ' Silence, ye people ! Hush ye, ranks of Kadmus !
 Hearken—we come but for the corpses' sake, 670
 To bury them, and keep all Hellas' law
 Inviolate ; nor would lengthen bloodshed out.'
 But Kreon let his herald answer not,
 But silent under shield abode. Thereat
 The four-horsed chariot-lords began the fray.
 On, down the battle-lanes of foes they swept,
 Set down their warriors, spear opposing spear,
 And, while these strove with bickering steel, those wheeled
 Their steeds about, to aid their fighting-men.
 Then Phorbas, captain of the Erechtheid horse, 680
 And they withal which led the Theban riders,
 Marking the tumult of the battle-cars,
 Down charging clashed, now triumphing, rolled back now.
 This saw I, and not heard ; for I was there,
 There where the chariots and the warriors grappled.
 Of thousand horrors there, which first to tell
 I know not—or of dust that surged and soared
 Upward unto the heavens, clouds on clouds,—
 Of men, by tangling reins snatched from the cars, 690
 Slung earthward,—of the murder-streams of gore,—
 Men falling here, and there, as crashed the chariots,
 With violence hurled head downwards to the earth,
 And battered out of life by chariot-shards.
 But Kreon, marking how our horse prevailed
 On one wing, grasped his buckler in his hand,
 And vanward pressed, ere allies' hearts should faint.
 Ha, but the heart of Theseus fainted not !
 On charged he, tossing high his flaming shield.
 There clashed they in the midmost of the fray :
 Men slew—were slain—a thunder of battle-cries 700
 Rang, roared, of men on-cheering each his fellow—
 ' Smite ! '—' Drive the spear against Erechtheus' sons ! '
 But the host wrought to man of dragon-teeth
 Was a grim wrestler : back it bowed our wing
 Far on the left ; but, by our right o'erborne,
 Fled theirs : so equal-balanced was the fight.
 Then did our captain well and worshipfully ;
 His triumph on the right sufficed him not,
 But he to his hard-pressed half-array sped fast,

And sent a shattering shout,—earth rang again,— 710
 ‘ My sons, except ye stay the stubborn spear
 Of the Dragon-seed, your Pallas’ cause is lost !’
 So thrilled with courage all the Danaid host.
 Himself that Epidaurian weapon seized,
 The fearful mace, and slingwise swung it round,
 Down-mowing and clean-logging with his club
 Alike their necks and heads in helmets cased :
 And scarce even then those stubborn feet would fly.
 And I, for joy I shouted, yea, I danced,
 And clapped mine hands. On strained they to the gates.
 Then rang a cry and wailing through the town [720
 Of young and old : the panic-stricken thronged
 The fanes. But, though the way within lay clear,
 There Theseus stayed :—‘ Not to destroy the town
 Came I,’ spake he, ‘ but to reclaim the dead.’
 Well might men choose such battle-chief as this,
 Who is in peril’s midst a tower of strength,
 But hates the scorers who, in fortune’s hour
 Seeking to mount the ladder’s topmost round,
 Let slip the bliss that lay within their hands. 730
Chor. Now I, beholding this unhopèd-for day,
 Know that Gods live, and feel my load of ill
 Lighter, since these have paid the penalty.
Adr. Zeus, wherefore do they say that wretched man
 Is wise ? For lo, we hang upon thy skirts,
 And that we do, it is but as thou wilt.
 We deemed before our Argos none might stand,
 Ourselves, a countless host of lusty arms ;
 And, when Eteokles proffered terms of peace,
 Fair was his offer, yet we would not hear ; 740
 So were undone. Now, prospering in their turn,
 Like beggar-wight with sudden-gotten wealth,
 Wanton they waxed, and perished in their pride
 Kadmus’ mad-hearted sons. O foolish men,
 Who, straining with the bow beyond the mark,
 And suffering many ills at justice’ hand,
 To friends at last yield not, but circumstance !
 Ye states, which might by parley end your feuds,
 By bloodshed, not by words, decide your wrongs.
 Yet wherefore this ?—Fain would I know of thee 750
 How thou didst ’scape ; then will I ask the rest.
Mes. When tumult’s battle-earthquake shook the town,
 Through that gate slipt I where the host poured in.

- Adr.* And the dead bring ye, cause of all the strife?
Mes. Even all which captained those seven bands renowned.
Adr. Ha!—and the rest which perished, where be they?
Mes. Laid in the tomb, hard by Kithairon's folds.
Adr. On that side, or on this?¹—who buried them?
Mes. Theseus, where hangs Eleutherae's shadowing rock.
Adr. Where leftest thou those whom he buried not? 760
Mes. At hand: for earnest haste brings all things near.
Adr. I wot, with loathing thralls took up the slain.
Mes. Never a slave set hand unto the toil.
Adr. [How?—did the *king* endure this, of his love?]²
Mes. Hadst thou but seen his ministry of love!
Adr. He washed, himself, the poor youths' slaughter-stains!
Mes. And spread the biers, and veiled the bodies o'er.
Adr. An awful burden was it, fraught with shame!
Mes. Nay, but what shame to men are brethren's ills?
Adr. Ah me, far liever had I died with them!
Mes. Bootless thy mourning, stirring these to tears. 770
Adr. I trow themselves this mourning-lore have taught.

But now I raise mine hand to greet the dead,
 And pour out songs of death with streaming eyes,
 Hailing our loved, bereft of whom—ah me!—
 Forlorn I weep: for the one loss is this³
 That never mortal maketh good again,—
 The life of man, though wealth may be re-won.

(Str. 1)

- Chor.* There is joy, there is sorrow this day; for our town
 Hath a garland of glory;
 And the chiefs of the spear-host, lo, twofold renown 780
 Maketh splendid their story.
 But to see my sons' limbs!—sight bitter for me,
 Yet proud, for the day that I hoped not to see
 Hath uprisen before me
 Who have seen earth's ghostliest misery.

¹ *i.e.* On the Theban or the Attic side of the range: the tombs would be the possession of the people in whose land they were. Eleutherae was in Attica.

² Inserted conjecturally, to complete the defective *stichomuthia*.

³ Might have been suggested by the words of Achilles:—

'For kine may ye get you in foray, and flocks of goodly sheep;
 There be tripods to win, and the bright-maned war-steed's gallant head:
 But neither by foray nor price returneth the life to the dead,
 When once through the fence of the teeth the soul of a man hath fled.'

Iliad ix, 406-9.

(Ant. 1)

Ah that Time the father, the ancient of days,
 Had but caused me unmarried
 To abide! Was I wholly in evil case
 While childless I tarried?
 Nay, no dark bodings of anguish broke
 My peace, when I thought to refuse love's yoke:
 But of dear sons harried
 Now see I mine home, no visioned stroke.

790

Ah, yonder I see the forms draw nigh
 Of our perished children; alas!
 O but with these my belovèd to die,
 Unto union in Hades to pass!

*Enter THESEUS, with Athenian soldiers marching in procession
 with corpses on biers.*

(Str. 2)

Adr. Mothers, ring out the moan
 For dear dead 'neath the ground;
 Echo my crying with accordant groan
 Of mournful-wailing sound.

800

Chor. O my son!—bitter word
 For mothers' lips to know!
 I cry on thee, in ears that have not heard:
 Ah for my woe!

Adr. We suffered—

Chor. Deepest anguish!

Adr. Ah, fair town
 Of Argos, see my fate!

Chor. O yea, upon our sorrows she looks down,
 The childless desolate!

810

(Ant. 2)

Adr. Bring them, the blood-besprent
 Forms of the evil-starred,
 When to unrighteous foes the victory went,
 Slain, an unmeet reward!

Chor. Give them, that I may cast
 Mine arms round these, and lull,
 In death's sleep clasped, my children.

Adr.

This thou hast.

Chor.

Grief's cup is full!

Adr. Woe!

Chor. Blend thy wails with ours!
Adr. Hear me!
Chor. Thy moan
 For us, for thee, is sped. 820

Adr. Oh had the foe slain me!
Chor. Oh had I known
 Never a husband's bed!
 (Str. 3)

Adr. Ah mother!—ah, dead child!
 Lo, what a trouble-sea!
Chor. Our cheeks are furrow-scarred, and our white heads are
 marred
 With ashes all defiled.

Adr. Woe's me, ah woe is me!
 (Ant. 3)
 Yawn for my grave, earth's floor!
 Storm-blast, in pieces break! 830
 O that on mine head dashed the flame of Zeus down flashed!
Chor. Ruin thy bridal's bore:
 Thy ruin Phoebus spake.
 (Epode)

The curse of Oedipus, with sighing fraught,
 Childless hath left his house, and thee hath sought.¹

The. (to leader of CHORUS). Thee had I asked, but, for thy
 mourning poured

Forth to the host, refrain, and my request
 To thee forego, and ask Adrastus now:—² 840
 Of what race sprang these chiefs, above all men
 Which shone in valour? To my young Athenians
 Tell, of thy fuller wisdom; for thou know'st.
 Their gallant deeds, too great for words to speak,
 Thou sa'wst, whereby they hoped to win yon Thebes.
 One question, meet for laughter, I ask not—
 Whom each of these encountered in the strife,
 Or from what foeman's spear received his wound.
 For they that hear such tales as much could say³

¹ Reading *ἐρημά σ'* for *ἐγγίμας*.

² Lines 838-40 are, by general consent, corrupt, and have been variously emended. The translation given is an approximation to the sense of the text as it stands in the MSS.

³ I have retained the MSS. reading of *κοινοὶ* and *ἀκουόντων*. Literally—Such tales are as much the property of the listener as of the narrator, i.e., one has as much right to tell them as the other. The sarcasm, that the latter on a point of fact knows no more than the former, is materially weakened by

As he which tells. Who, that hath stood in fight,
 When spear on spear is flying before men's eyes,
 Can certainly report who bravely bears him?
 I could not ask such vanity as this,
 Nor them believe whose impudence would tell.
 For scarce a man can see what see he must,
 What time he standeth foot to foot with foes.

850

Adr. Hear then. To no unwilling lips thou givest
 The praise of these: full fain am I to speak
 Both truth and justice touching men I loved.
 Seest thou yon corpse wherethrough leapt Zeus's bolt?
 Kapaneus he, a mighty man of wealth,
 Yet nought thereby exalted, but he bare
 A spirit no whit loftier than the poor,
 Shunning the man whose pomp of banquets scorned
 That which sufficeth. 'Not in gluttony,'
 Said he, 'is good: enough is as a feast.'
 True friend to friends was he, alike when near
 And far: of such is there no multitude.
 A guileless heart, a mouth of gracious speech,
 Who left no dues unrendered, or to servants
 Or citizens. Now of the next I speak,
 Eteoklus, graced, he too, with excellence.
 A young man he, not rich in this world's goods,
 But in the Argive land dowered rich with honour;
 Who oft, when friends would lavish on him gold,
 Received it not his doors within, to make
 His life a slave stooped 'neath the yoke of wealth.
 He loathed wrong-doers, not his erring country;
 Seeing the guilt is nowise in the state
 That through an evil pilot wins ill fame.
 Such too Hippomedon was, the third with these.
 From childhood up he deigned not turn aside
 Unto the Muses' joys for ease of life;
 But in the field abode, enduring hardness
 Gladly for valour's sake, and, hunting still,
 Joyed in the steed and hands that strain the bow,

[860

870

880

the emendations (*κενὸν* and *ἔρωτῶντων*) of Grotius and Nauck, adopted by Paley, which gives the sense—

'For empty words are these of whoso asks
 And whoso tells.'

i.e. Of the caste-distinctions of Greek society, which made an alien permanently inferior to citizens born, and excluded him from politics.

Eager to yield his land his body's best.
 The fourth was huntress Atalanta's son,
 Parthenopæus, unmatched in goodlihead :
 Arcadian he, but came to Inachus, 890
 And lived his youth at Argos. Fostered there,
 First, as beseems the sojourner in the land,
 He vexed not, nor was jealous of the state,
 Nor was a wrangler, whereby citizens
 Or aliens most shall jar with fellow-men ;
 But in the ranks¹ stood like an Argive born,
 Fought for the land, and, whenso prospered Argos,
 Rejoiced, and grieved when it went ill with her ;—
 Beloved of many a man, of maids how many !
 Yet from transgression did he keep him pure. 900
 Tydeus' high praise next will I sum in brief.
 In speech he shone not ; a dread reasoner he
 In logic of the shield, and war's inventions :
 In counsel not as his brother Meleager,
 Yet of like fame, through science of the spear
 Getting him ripest scholarship of war.
 A soaring soul was his, a spirit rich²
 Where deeds might serve ; in speech of less avail.
 Hearing my words, O Theseus, marvel not
 That these before yon towers feared not to die : 910
 For noble nurture harvest bears of honour ;
 And whosoe'er hath practised knightly deeds
 Shames to be callèd base. It may be taught,
 This chivalry ; for even the babe is taught
 To speak and hear things not yet understood ;
 And what one learneth, that he is wont to keep
 To hoary hairs. So train ye well the child.
chor. O son, for thy sorrow I gave thee
 Life of my life 'neath my zone,
 And I bore for thee travail-pain : 920
 And now is my loss death's gain ;
 Of my labours no fruit doth remain,
 Nor to foster mine eld may I have thee.
 Woe's me that I bare a son !

¹ Or, ' But even in ambush '—a service of special danger, evincing peculiar devotion to the cause, like the ' forlorn hope ' of modern warfare (cf. *Iliad* i, 27, xiii, 277).

² Retaining MSS. reading ἦθος, πλούσιον φρόνημα, etc. Paley's emendation conveys a reflection on rich men, which would by implication be a disparagement of Kapaneus (861).

- The.* Yea; and for Oikleus' noble son withal,—
 Him the Gods living snatched down earth's abyss,
 Him and his car;—his praise is manifest.¹
 But Oedipus' son—I tell of Polyneikes—
 Myself shall praise, nor falsely speak herein.
 My guest was he, ere, leaving Kadmus' town
 Self-banished, unto Argos he crossed o'er. 930
 But knowest thou my wish as touching these?
- Adr.* Nought know I, save one thing—to heed thy words.
- The.* Kapaneus, stricken by the fire of Zeus—
- Adr.* Wouldst bury him apart, a hallowed corpse?
- The.* Yea, but the rest all on one funeral-pyre.
- Adr.* Where wilt thou set for him that several tomb?
- The.* Here, by these halls I have built his sepulchre.
- Adr.* He then shall have the tendance of thy thralls.
- The.* These, mine. Now let the biers of death move on. 940
- Adr.* Come, hapless mothers, to your sons draw nigh.
- The.* Adrastus, this thou say'st were all unmeet.
- Adr.* How should the mothers choose but touch their sons?
- The.* 'Twere death to look on them so sorely marred.
- Adr.* A ghastly sight is death, even in death's hour.
- The.* Why then wouldst add fresh anguish to their grief?
- Adr.* Sooth said. Ye, tarry patiently, for well
 Speaks Theseus. When to fire we have given these,
 Yourselves the bones shall gather. Hapless mortals!
 Why do ye get you spears and deal out death 950
 To fellow-men?—Stay, from such toils forbear,
 And peaceful mid the peaceful ward your towns.
 Short is life's span: behoves to pass through this
 Softly as may be, not with travail worn.

*The funeral procession passes on to the pyres, which are
 kindled in sight of the stage.*

(*Str.* 1)

- Chor.* Crowned with fair sons above others
 No more am I seen,
 Neither blessèd mid Argive mothers;
 Nor the Travail-queen
 To the childless shall give fair greeting! 960
 Forlorn is my life, as the fleeting

¹ And he therefore needs none from me. Amphiarus was 'the righteous taken away from the evil to come', being thus rescued from the pursuit of the enemy, and entombed by the Gods themselves.

Clouds that flee fast from the beating
Of the storm-scourges keen.

(Ant. 1)

Seven mothers—and heroes seven
To our sorrow we bare :
None princelier to Argos were given.
Now in childless despair
Drear old age creepeth upon me ;
Yet the ranks of the dead have not known me,
Nor the count of the living may own me ;
But an outcast I fare.

970

(Epode)

For me are but tears remaining :
Saddest memorials rest
In mine halls of my son—shorn hair
For mourning, and garlands are there ;
Libations—for dead lips' draining ;¹
Songs—which the golden-tressed
Apollo shall turn from in scorn ;
And with wails shall I greet each morn,
Ever drenching with tears fast raining
The vesture-folds on my breast.

Lo, yonder the fiery bower,
Even Kapaneus' sacred pyre :
I see it without the fane,
With Theseus' gifts to the slain.
Lo, Evadnê his bride, in this hour
By the slain of the levin-fire !
King Iphis' daughter renowned,
On yon cliff why is she found
Whose crags above this fane tower ?
And she climbs, and she climbs ever higher !

980

EVADNÊ appears on the cliff above the pyre of Kapaneus, dressed in festal attire.

Ev. Where now that light that shone
When flashed thy wheels, O Sun,
Or when the moon raced on,
And star-lamps glancing
Raced through a lowering sky,
When Argos tossed on high

990

¹ ' In ordinary circumstances, libations and songs were signs of festivity ; here they are so qualified as to signify the reverse.' (Paley).

The gladsome bridal-cry,
 And throbb'd with dancing,
 And thrilled with song, to see
 Mine hero wed with me?—

O love, I rush to thee

1000

From mine home, raving,
 Seeking thy tomb, thy pyre,
 Longing with strong desire
 To end in that same fire

Mine anguish, braving
 Hades—to end life's woe;
 For death is sweetest so
 With dear dead to lie low:—

God grant my craving!

Chor. Lo, the pyre nigh,—above it dost thou stand,—
 Zeus' own possession, on the which is laid
 Thy lord, o'erthrown by flash of levin-bolt.

1010

Ev. The end!—I see it now,
 Here standing. Friend art thou,
 Fortune! From this cliff's brow,
 For wifhood's glory,
 With spurning feet I dart
 Down into yon fire's heart
 To meet him, ne'er to part,—

Flames reddening o'er me,—
 To nestle to his side,
 In Cora's¹ bowers a bride!—
 O love, though thou hast died,
 I'll not forsake thee.

1020

Farewell life, bridal bed!—
 By happier omens led,²
 Ah, be our children wed!
 May leal love make ye,
 Bridegrooms to be, life through
 Unto my daughters true:
 One love-breath breathe in you.

Now, Death, come—take me!

1030

Chor. Lo, here himself, thy sire, is drawing nigh,
 Old Iphis, within sound of thy strange speech,
 Which, heard not yet, shall wring his heart to hear.

¹ Persephonê, queen of Hades.

² Lines 1026-30 are imperfect in the MSS. The most probable sense, (reading *φανῆεν τέκνοισιν ἐμοῖς· εἶη δ'*—etc.), is that her orphan daughters may find loving husbands and a wedded lot more fortunate than hers.

Enter IPHIS.

- Iph.* O hapless thou!—O hapless ancient I!—
 Burdened with twofold grief for kin I came
 To bear unto his fatherland o'ersea
 My son Eteoklus, slain by Theban spear,
 And seeking for my daughter, who hath fled
 Forth of mine halls, the wife of Kapaneus,
 Longing with him to die. Through days o'erpast 1040
 Guarded she was at home: but soon as I
 Slackened the watch, for ills that pressed on me,
 Forth did she pass. Howbeit here, methinks,
 Is she most like to be. Say, have ye seen her?
- Ev.* Wherefore ask these? Here am I on the rock.
 Even as a bird, my father, hang I poised
 In misery o'er the pyre of Kapaneus.
- Iph.* My child, what wind hath blown, what journeying led thee?
 Why flee thine home and come unto this land?
- Ev.* Thou wouldst be wroth to hear my purposes. 1050
 O father, I would not that thou shouldst hear.
- Iph.* How?—were't not just thy very father knew?
- Ev.* Thou wouldst be no wise judge of my resolve.
- Iph.* And why in this attire array thy form?
- Ev.* Father, strange meaning this my vesture hath.
- Iph.* Thou seemest not as one that mourns her lord.
- Ev.* For deed unheard-of have I decked me thus.
- Iph.* By tomb and pyre appear'st thou in such guise?
- Ev.* Yea, I for victory's triumph hither come.
- Iph.* What victory this? Fain would I learn of thee. 1060
- Ev.* Over all wives on whom the sun looks down.
- Iph.* Or in Athênê's toils,¹ or prudent wit?
- Ev.* In courage. With my lord will I lie dead.
- Iph.* How sayest thou?—what sorry riddle this?
- Ev.* I plunge to yon pyre of dead Kapaneus.
- Iph.* O daughter, speak not so before a throng!
- Ev.* Even this would I, that all the Argives hear.
- Iph.* Nay, surely will I let thee from this deed.
- Ev.* Let or let not—thou canst not reach nor seize me.
 Lo, hurled my body falls, to thee no joy, 1070
 But to me and my lord with me consumed.

[Throws herself from the cliff on to the pyre.]

¹ 'The daughters of that land still surpass all other, to whom
 Athênê hath given rare skill in the beautiful works of the loom.'

Chor. O lady, what awful deed hath been compassed of thee!

Iph. O Argos' daughters, wretched I!—undone!

Chor. Woe for thee, woe, who hast borne this misery!

Yet its fulness of horror remaineth for thee to see.

Iph. None other shall ye find more sorrow-crushed.

Chor. O ancient, O sore-stricken heart,

In the fortune partaker thou art

Of Oedipus: thou and mine hapless city therein have part.

Iph. Ah me, why is not this to men vouchsafed, 1080

Twice to see youth, and twice withal old age?

Now in our homes, if aught shall fall out ill,

By wisdom's second thoughts this we amend.

Our life we may not. Might we but be young

And old twice o'er, if any man should err,

We would amend us in that second life.

For I, beholding others rich in sons,

For children yearned, and by my longing perished.

Had I to this come first,—by suffering proved

What to a father child-bereavement means,

1090

I had never come to this, to this day's woe,

I, who begat a young son of my loins

Most goodly, and am now of him bereft!

No more!—what must I do, the sorrow-fraught?

Wend home?—and see with desolation filled

Home—for my life the hunger of despair?

Or seek the mansion of yon Kapaneus?—

Erst sweet, O sweet, when this my daughter lived!

Ah, but she is no more, who wont to draw

Down to her lips my face, fold in her arms

1100

Mine head:—nought sweeter than a daughter is

To grey-haired sire: son's hearts be greater-framed,

But not, not theirs the dear caressing wiles!

Lead me, with speed O lead me to mine home,

And hide in darkness, there to make an end

Of this old frame, by fasting pined away.

What profit if I touch my daughter's bones?

Strong wrestler Eld, O how I loathe thy grasp,

Loathe them which seek to lengthen out life's span,

By meats and drinks and magic philtre-spells

1110

To turn life's channel, that they may not die,

Who, when they are but cumberers of the ground,

Should hence, and die, and make way for the young.

Ah shall I ever bear shield, an avenger to be
Of thy blood?

Third Mother. God grant it, my child, to thy destiny!
(*Ant.* 2)

Fourth Child. My father's avenging!—one day unto me shall it
come,

If God will:—the wrong sleepeth not by his side in the
tomb.

Fourth Mother. Ah, to-day's disaster and sorrow suffice:
Sufficeth the grief on mine heart that lies! 1150

Fifth Child. Ha, yet shall they greet me, Asopus' ripples of
light,

Leading the Danaans onward in brass-mail dight?

Fifth Mother. A champion thou of thy perished father's right.
(*Str.* 3)

Sixth Child. O father mine, methinks I see thee now!

Sixth Mother. Laying the kiss of love upon thy brow.

Sixth Child. But thy words of exhorting are come to nought;
They are wafted afar on the wind's wing caught.

Sixth Mother. Unto twain is anguish bequeathed, unto me,
And grief for thy father shall ne'er leave thee.

(*Ant.* 3)

Seventh Child. By this my burden am I all undone! 1160

Seventh Mother. Let me embrace the ashes of my son!

Seventh Child. I weep to hearken thy piteous word,
Most piteous—the depths of mine heart hath it stirred.

Seventh Mother. O son, thou art gone: never more shall I
gaze

On the light of thy mother, thy glorious face!

The. Adrastus, and ye dames of Argive race,

Ye see these children bearing in their hands

The dust of gallant sires whom I redeemed:

Even these do I and Athens give to thee.

And ye must guard the memory of this grace,

Keeping my boon for aye before your eyes.

1170

And on these boys I lay the selfsame charge,

To honour Athens, and from son to son

To pass on like a watchword this our boon.

And Zeus is witness, and the Gods in heaven,

How honoured and how favoured hence ye pass.

Adr. Theseus, our hearts know all thy noble deeds

To Argos, and thy kindness in her need.

Our love shall ne'er wax old: ye have dealt with us

Nobly: your debtors owe you like for like.

The. What service yet remains that I may render? 1180

Adr. Fare well: for thou art worthy—thou and Athens.

The. So be it. The same fortune light on thee.

[ATHÊNÊ appears in her chariot above the temple-roof.

Ath. Give ear, O Theseus, to Athênê's hest

What thou must do—for Athens' service do:—

Yield thou not up thus lightly yonder bones

For these their sons to bear to Argive land;

But, for thine and thy city's travail's sake,

First take an oath. Let yon Adrastus swear—

He answereth for them, despot of their folk,

For all troth of the land of Danaus' sons:—

1190

Be this the oath,—that never Argive men

Shall bear against this land array of war;

If others come, their spear shall bar the way.

If ye break oath, and come against our town,

Call down on Argos miserable ruin.

And where to slay the victims hear me tell:

Thou hast a brazen tripod in thine halls,

Which Herakles, from Ilium's overthrow

Hasting upon another mighty task,

Bade thee to set up at the Pythian hearth.

1200

O'er this three throats of three sheep sever thou,

And in the tripod's hollow grave the oath.

Then give it to the Delphian God to guard,

Token of oaths and witness unto Hellas.

And that keen knife, wherewith thou shalt have gashed

The victims with the death-wound, bury thou

In the earth's depths hard by the seven pyres.

For, if they march on Athens ever, this,

Shown them, shall daunt, and turn them back with shame.

This done, then send the dead dust forth the land.

1210

The precinct where fire purified their limbs

Be the God's Close, by those three Isthmian ways.

This to thee: now to the Argives' sons I speak.

Ye shall, to man grown, waste Ismenus' town

In vengeance for the slaughter of dead sires.

Thou in thy sire's stead, Aigialeus,¹ shalt be

Their young chief: from Aetolia Tydeus' son,

Named Diomedes of his sire, shall come.

When beards your cheeks are shadowing, tarry not

To hurl a brazen-harnessed Danaïd host

1220

On the Kadmean seven-gated hold.

¹ Son of Adrastus.

Bitter to them as lions' whelps full-grown
 To strength, to sack their city shall ye come.
 This is sure doom. 'The After-born' through Hellas
 Named, shall ye kindle song in days to be ;
 Such war-array with God's help shall go forth.

The. Athênê, Queen, thy words will I obey :
 Thou guid'st me ever that I may not err.
 Him will I bind with oaths : only do thou
 Still lead me aright ; for, gracious while thou art 1230
 To Athens, shall we ever safely dwell.

Chor. On pass we, Adrastus, and take oath-plight
 Unto Theseus and Athens. That worship requite
 Their travail for us, is meet and right.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

ANDROMACHÊ

ARGUMENT

WHEN Troy was taken by the Greeks, *Andromachê*, wife of that *Hector* whom *Achilles* slew ere himself was slain by the arrow which *Apollo* guided, was given in the dividing of the spoils to *Neoptolemus*, *Achilles*' son. So he took her oversea to the land of *Thessaly*, and loved her, and entreated her kindly, and she bare him a son in her captivity. But after ten years¹ *Neoptolemus* took to wife a princess of *Sparta*, *Hermionê*, daughter of *Menelaus* and *Helen*. But to these was no child born, and the soul of *Hermionê* grew bitter with jealousy against *Andromachê*. Now *Neoptolemus*, in his indignation for his father's death, had upbraided *Apollo* therewith: wherefore he now journeyed to *Delphi*, vainly hoping by prayer and sacrifice to assuage the wrath of the God. But so soon as he was gone, *Hermionê* sought to avenge herself on *Andromachê*; and *Menelaus* came thither also, and these twain went about to slay the captive and her child. Wherefore *Andromachê* hid her son, and took sanctuary at the altar of the Goddess *Thetis*, expecting till *Peleus*, her lord's grandsire, should come to save her. And herein are set forth her sore peril and deliverance: also it is told how *Neoptolemus* found death at *Delphi*, and how he that contrived his death took his wife.

¹ See *Odyssey*, iv, 3-9.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ANDROMACHÊ

HANDMAID, *a Trojan captive*

HERMIONE, *daughter of Menelaus, wife of Neoptolemus*

MENELAUS, *king of Sparta, brother of Agamemnon*

MOLOSSUS, *son of Neoptolemus and Andromachê*

PELEUS, *father of Achilles*

NURSE *of Hermionê*

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon*

MESSENGER

THETIS, *a Sea-goddess, wife of Peleus*

CHORUS *of maidens of Phthia in Thessaly*

Attendants of Menelaus, Peleus, and Orestes

SCENE :—At the temple of Thetis, beside the palace of Neoptolemus, in Phthia of Thessaly.

ANDROMACHÊ

ANDROMACHÊ sitting on the steps of the altar of Thetis.

Andr. Beauty of Asian land, O town of Thebes,
 Whence, decked with gold of costly bride-array,
 To Priam's royal hearth long since I came
 Espoused to Hector for his true-wed wife,—
 I, envied in time past, Andromachê, —
 But now above all others most unblest — → echoes Homer
 Of women that have been or shall be ever,
 Who saw mine husband by Achilles slain,
 Hector; the child I bare unto my lord
 Hurl'd from the towers' height, my Astyanax, 10
 That day the Hellenes won the plain of Troy.
 Myself a slave, accounted erst the child
 Of a free house, none freer, came to Hellas,
 Spear-guerdon chosen out for the island-prince,¹
 From Troy's spoil given to Neoptolemus.
 Here on the marches 'twixt Pharsalia's town
 And Phthia's plains I dwell, where that Sea-queen,
 Thetis, with Peleus dwelt aloof from men,
 Shunning the throng: wherefore Thessalians call it,
 By reason of her bridal, 'Thetis' Close.' 20
 Here made Achilles' son his dwelling-place,
 And leaveth Peleus still Pharsalia's king,
 Loth, while the ancient lives, to take his sceptre.
 And I have borne a manchild in these halls
 Unto Achilles' son, my body's lord;
 And, sunk albeit in misery heretofore,
 Was aye lured on by hope, in my son's life
 To find some help, some shield from all mine ills.
 But since my lord hath wed Hermionê
 The Spartan, thrusting my thrall's couch aside, 30
 With cruel wrongs she persecuteth me,
 Saying that I by secret charms make her
 A barren stock, and hated of her lord,
 Would in her stead be lady of this house,

¹ Neoptolemus was born in Skyros, an island in the Aegean sea.

Casting her out, the lawful wife, by force :—
 Ah me! with little joy I won that place,
 And now have yielded up : great Zeus be witness
 That not of mine own will I shared this couch.
 Yet will she not believe, but seeks to slay me ;
 And her sire Menelaus helpeth her. 40
 He hath come from Sparta, now is he within
 For this same end, and I in fear have fled
 To Thetis' shrine anigh unto this house,
 And crouch here, so to be redeemed from death.
 For Peleus and his seed revere this place,
 This witness to the bridal of Nereus' child.
 But him, mine only son, by stealth I send
 To another's home, in dread lest he be slain.
 For now his father is not nigh to aid,
 Nor helps his son, being gone unto the land 50
 Of Delphi, to atone to Loxias
 For that mad hour when Pytho-ward he went
 And claimed redress of Phoebus for his sire,
 If haply prayer for those transgressions past
 Might win the God's grace for the days to be.

Enter HANDMAID.

Han. Queen,—for I shun not by this name to call
 Thee, which I knew thy right in that old home,
 Thine home what time in Troyland we abode,—
 I love thee, as I loved thy living lord ;
 And now with evil tidings come to thee, 60
 In dread lest any of our masters hear,
 And ruth for thee ; for fearful plots are laid
 Of Menelaus and his child : beware !

Andr. Dear fellow-thrall,—for fellow-thrall thou art
 To her that once was queen, is now unblest,—
 What do they ?—what new web of guile weave they
 Who fain would slay the utter-wretched, me ?

Han. Thy son, O hapless, are they set to slay
 Whom forth the halls thou tookest privily.

Andr. Woe !—hath she learnt the hiding of my child ?
 How ?—O unhappy, how am I undone ! 70

Han. I know not : but themselves I heard say this.
 Menelaus on his quest is now gone forth.

Andr. Undone !—undone !—O child, these vultures twain

Will clutch thee and will slay ! He that is named
Thy father, yet in Delphi lingereth.

Han. I ween thou shouldst not fare so evilly
If he were here : but friendless art thou now.

Andr. Of Peleus' coming is there not a word ?

Han. Too old is he to help thee, were he here. 80

Andr. Yet did I send for him not once nor twice.

Han. Ah, dost thou think their messengers¹ heed thee ?

Andr. How should they ?—Wilt thou be my messenger ?

Han. But how excuse long absence from the halls ?

Andr. Thou shalt find many pleas—a woman thou.

Han. 'Twere peril : keen watch keeps Hermionê.

Andr. Lo there !—thy friends in woe dost thou renounce.

Han. No—no ! Cast thou no such reproach on me !

Lo, I will go. What matter is the life
Of a bondwoman, though I light on death ? 90

Andr. Go then : and I to heaven will lengthen out
My lamentations and my moans and tears,
Wherein I am ever whelmed.

[*Exit HANDMAID.*

'Tis in the heart

Of woman with a mournful pleasure aye
To bear on lip and tongue her present ills.
Not one have I, but many an one to moan—
The city of my fathers, Hector slain,
The ruthless lot whereunto I am yoked,
Who fell on thraldom's day unmerited.
Never may'st thou call any mortal blest, 100
Or ever thou hast seen his dying day,
Seen how he passed therethrough and came on death.

No bride was the Helen with whom unto steep-built Ilium
hasted

Paris ;—nay, bringing a Curse to his bowers of espousal he
passed,

For whose sake, Troy, by the thousand galleys of Hellas wasted,
With fire and with sword destroyed by her fierce battle-
spirit thou wast ;

And Hector my lord by the scion of Thetis the Sea-king's
daughter—

O for mine anguish !—was dragged round the ramparts of
Ilium dead ;

¹ The courier-slaves of Neoptolemus, who in his absence are not likely to offend their mistress by doing Andromachê a service.

And myself from my bowers was haled to the strand of the
exile-water, [110

Casting the sore-loathed veil of captivity over mine head.
Ah but my tears were down-streaming in flood when the
galley swift-racing

Bore me afar from my town, from my bowers, from my
lord in the tomb.

Woe for mine anguish!—what boots it on light any more to be
gazing,

Who am yonder Hermionê's thrall?—ever harried and
hunted of whom

Suppliant I cling to the Goddess's feet that mine hands
are embracing,

Wasting in tears as a spring welling forth from the rock-
riven gloom.

Enter CHORUS of Phthian Maidens.

(Str. 1)

Chor. Lady, who, suppliant crouched on the pavement of
Thetis' shrine,

Clingest long to thy sanctuary,

I daughter of Phthia, yet come unto thee of an Asian line,

If I haply may find for thee 120

Some healing or help for the tangle of desperate trouble
Whose meshes of bitterest feud around thee and Hermionê
twine,

For that, O thou afflicted one,

Ye twain are unequally yoked in the bride-bands double

That compass Achilles' son.

(Ant. 1)

Look on thy lot, take account of the ills whereinto thou art
come.

Thy lady's rival art thou,—

An Ilian to rival a child of a lordly Laconian home!

Forsake thou the temple now

Wherein sheep to the Sea-queen are burned. What boots
it with wailing 130

And tears to consume thy beauty, aghast at oppression's
doom

Upon thee by thy lords' hands brought?

The might of the strong overbeareth thee: all unavailing

Is thy struggling—lo, thou art naught.

(Str. 2)

Nay, leave thou the holy place of the Lady of Nereus' race :
 Discern how thou needs must abide
 In a land of strangers, an alien city
 Where thou seest no friend, neither any to pity,
 O thou who art whelmed in calamity's tide,
 Unhappiest bride !

140

(Ant. 2)

Sore grieved I, O Ilian dame, when thy feet unto these halls
 came ;

But I feared, for my lords be stern,
 That I held my peace : but thy lot ill-fated
 In silence aye I compassionated,
 Lest the child of the daughter of Zeus¹ should discern
 O'er thy woes how I yearn.

Enter HERMIONÊ.

Herm. With bravery of gold about mine head,
 And on my form this pomp of broidered robes,
 Hither I come :—no gifts be these I wear
 Or from Achilles' or from Peleus' house ;
 But from the Land Laconian Sparta-crowned
 My father Menelaus with rich dower
 Gave these, that so my tongue should not be tied.²
 To you³ I render answer in these words.
 But thou, a woman-thrall, won by the spear,
 Wouldst cast me out, and have this home thine own ;
And through thy spells I am hated by my lord ;
My womb is barren, ruined all of thee :
 For cunning is the soul of Asia's daughters
 For such deeds. Yet therefrom will I stay thee :
 And this the Nereid's fane shall help thee nought,
 Altar nor temple ;—thou shalt die, shalt die !
 Yea, though one stoop to save thee, man or God,
 Yet must thou for thy haughty spirit of old
 Crouch low abased, and grovel at my knee,
 And sweep mine house, and sprinkle water dews
 There from the golden ewers with thine hand,

150

160

¹ Hermionê, daughter of Helen.

² That, feeling herself independent of her husband, she might speak as freely as she pleased.

³ The Chorus, who had said nothing to her, but whose sympathies had been indicated in their choral-chant.

And where thou art, know. Hector is not here,
 Nor Priam, nor his gold: a Greek town this.
 Yet to such folly¹ hast thou come, O wretch,
 That with this son of him who slew thy lord
 Thou dar'st to lie, and to the slayer bear
 Sons! Suchlike is the whole barbaric race:—
 Father with daughter, son with mother weds,
 Sister with brother: kin the nearest wade
 Through blood: no whit hereof doth law forbid.
 Bring not such things midst us, who count it shame
 That o'er two wives one man hold wedlock's reins;
 But to one lawful love they turn their eyes,
 Content—save such as fain would live in sin.

170

Chor. In woman's heart is jealousy inborn,

'Tis bitterest unto wedlock-rivals aye.

180

Andr. Out upon thee!

A curse is youth to mortals, when with youth
 A man hath not implanted righteousness!
 I fear me lest with thee my thraldom bar
 Defence, though many a righteous plea I have,
 And even my victory turn unto mine hurt.
 They that are arrogant brook not to be
 In argument o'er mastered by the lowly:
 Yet will I not abandon mine own cause.
 Say, thou rash girl, in what assurance strong
 Should I thrust thee from lawful wedlock-rights?
 Is Sparta meaner than the Phrygians' burg?
 Soareth my fortune?—dost thou see me free?
 Or by my young and rounded loveliness,
 My city's greatness, and my noble friends
 Exalted, would I wrest from thee thine home?
 Sooth, to bear sons myself instead of thee—
 Slave-sons, a wretched drag upon my life!
 Nay, though thou bear no children, who will brook
 That sons of mine be lords of Phthia-land?
 O yea, the Greeks love me—for Hector's sake!—
 Myself obscure, nor ever a Phrygian queen!
 Not of my philtres thy lord hateth thee,

190

200

But that thy nature is no mate for his.

That is the love-charm: woman, 'tis not beauty

That witcheth bridegrooms, nay, but nobleness.

Let aught vex thee—O then a mighty thing

Is thy Laconian city, Skyros naught!

210

¹ ἀμαθία, used of a woman, had the same sense as 'folly' in the A.V.

Thy wealth thou flauntest, settest above Achilles'
Menelaus : therefore thy lord hateth thee.

A wife, though low-born be her lord, must yet
Content her, without wrangling arrogance.

But if in Thrace with snow-floods overstreamed
 Thou hadst for lord a prince, where one man shares
 His couch's boon in turn with many wives,
 Wouldst thou have slain these?—ay, and so be found
 Branding all women with the slur of lust—
 A shameful thing! Yet herein more than men's
 Is our affliction; but we bear up bravely.

Ah, dear, dear Hector, I would take to my heart
 Even thy leman, if Love tripped thy feet.

Yea, often to thy bastards would I hold
 My breast, that I might give thee none offence.
 So doing, I drew with cords of wifely love
 My lord:—but thou for jealous fear forbiddest
 Even gloaming's dews to drop upon thy lord!
Seek not to o'erpass in lavishness of love

Thy mother, lady. Daughters in whom dwells
Discretion, ought to flee vile mothers' paths.

Chor. Mistress, so far as lightly thou may'st do,
 Deign to make truce with her from wordy strife.

Herm. And speak'st thou loftily, and wranglest thou,
 As thou wert continent, I of continence void?

Andr. Void?—Yea, if thou be judged by this thy claim.

Herm. Never in my breast thy discretion dwell!

Andr. A young wife thou for such immodest words.

Herm. Words?—thine are deeds, to the uttermost of thy power.

Andr. Cannot thy hungry jealousy hold its peace? 240

Herm. Why? Stands not this right first with women ever?

Andr. With whom it is for honour: else, 'tis shame.

Herm. We live not under laws barbaric here.

Andr. There, even as here, the foul deed brings disgrace.

Herm. Keen-witted! keen!—yet shalt thou surely die.

Andr. Seest thou the eye of Thetis turned on thee?

Herm. In hate of thy land for Achilles' blood.

Andr. Helen slew him, not I; thy mother—thine!

Herm. And wilt thou dare yet deeper prick mine hurt?

Andr. Lo, I am silent, and I curb my mouth. 250

Herm. Tell me that thing for which I came to thee.¹

Woman's
 place & position
 Shows Andromache's
 nobleness.

Chorus urges
 a truce.

¹ i.e. Confess the sorceries by which you have stolen my husband's love. Andromaché's reply may express both contempt for her ignorant credulity, and a reference to ll. 205-12.

Andr. I say thou hast less wit than thou dost need.
Herm. Wilt leave this hallowed close of the Sea-goddess?
Andr. If I shall not die: else, I leave it never.
Herm. 'Tis fixed: I wait not till my lord return.
Andr. Yet will I yield me not ere then to thee.
Herm. Fire will I bring: thy plea will I not heed,—
Andr. Kindle upon me!—this the Gods shall mark.
Herm. And to thy flesh bring anguish of dread wounds.
Andr. Hack, crimson her altar: she shall visit for it. 260
Herm. Barbarian chattel! Stubborn impudence!
 Dost thou brave death!—Soon will I make thee rise
 From this thy session, yea, of thine own will;
 Such lure have I for thee:—yet will I hide
 The word: the deed itself shall soon declare.
 Ay, sit thou fast!—though clamps of molten lead
 Encompassed thee, yet will I make thee rise,
 Ere come Achilles' son, in whom thou trustest.

[Exit.

Andr. I do trust . . . Strange that God hath given to men
 Salves for the venom of all creeping pests, 270
 But none hath ever yet devised a balm
 For venomous woman, worse than fire or viper:
So dire a mischief unto men are we.

(Str. 1)

Chor. Herald of woes, to the glen deep-hiding
 In Ida came Zeus's and Maia's son¹;
 As who reineth a triumph of white steeds, guiding
 The Goddesses three, did the God pace on.
 With frontlet of beauty, with trappings of doom,
 For the strife to the steadings of herds did they come, 280
 To the stripling shepherd in solitude biding,
 And the hearth of the lodge in the forest lone.

(Ant. 1)

They have passed 'neath the leaves of the glen: from the
 plashing

Of the mountain-spring radiant in rose-flush they rise.
 To the King's Son they wended, while to and fro flashing
 The gibes of their lips matched the scorn of their eyes. 290
 But 'twas Kypris by promise of guile overcame—
 Ah sweet to the ear, but for deathless shame
 And confusion to Phrygia, when Troy's towers crashing
 Ruinward toppled—her bitter prize!

¹ Hermes, who brought Hera, Athèna, and Aphroditè to the judgment of Paris.

(Str. 2)

Oh had she dealt him, that mother which bore him,
 A death-blow cleaving his head in twain,
 When shrieked Kassandra her prophecy o'er him,—
 Ere his eery on Ida o'erlooked Troy's plain,—
 By the sacred bay shrieked ' Slay without pity
 The curse and the ruin of Priam's city !'
 Unto prince, unto elder, she came, to implore him
 To slay it, the infant foredoomed their bane.

300

(Ant. 2)

Then had he never been made an occasion
 Of thralldom to Ilium's daughters : O queen,
 Thy suppliant seat were the throne of a nation ;
 Nor the ten years' agony then had ye seen,
 With the war-cries of Hellas aye rolling their thunder
 Round Troy, with spear-lightnings aye flashing thereunder ;
 Nor the couch of the bride were a desolation,
 Nor bereft of their sons had the grey sires been.

Enter MENELAUS, with attendants, bringing MOLOSSUS.

Men. I have caught thy son, whom thou didst hide, unmarked
 Of this my daughter, in a neighbour house. 310
 So thee this Goddess' image, was to save,
Him, they that hid him !—but thou hast been found,
 Woman, less keen of wit than Menelaus.
 Now if thou leave not and avoid this floor,
 He shall be slaughtered, he, in thy life's stead.
Weigh this then, whether thou consent to die,
Or that for thy transgression he be slain,
Even thy sin against me and my child.

Andr. Ah reputation !—many a man ere this
 Of none account hast thou set up on high. 320
 Such as have fair fame based upon true worth
 Happy I count : but for these living lies
 I grant no claim to wisdom save chance show.
 Thou, captaining the chosen men of Greece,
 Didst thou, weak dastard, wrest from Priam Troy,
 Who at thy daughter's bidding, she a child,
 Dost breathe such fury, interest the lists
 With a woman, a poor captive ? I count Troy
 Shamed by thy touch, thee by her fall unraised !
 Goodly in outward show be they which seem

330

Wise, but within they are as other men,
 Save in wealth haply; this is their great strength.
 Menelaus, come now, reason we together:—
 Grant that thy child have slain me, grant me dead:
 Ne'er shall she flee my blood's pollution-curse;
 And in men's eyes shalt thou too share this guilt:
 Thy part in this her deed shall weigh thee down.
 But if I 'scape your hands, that I die not,
 Then will ye slay my son? And the child's death—
 Think ye his sire shall hold it a little thing?

340

So void of manhood Troy proclaims him not.
 Nay, he shall follow duty's call, be proved,
 By deeds, of Peleus worthy and Achilles.
 He shall thrust forth thy child. What plea wilt find¹
 For a new spouse?—This lie—'the saintly soul
 Of this pure thing shrank from her wicked lord?'
 Who shall wed such? Wilt keep her in thine halls
 Spouseless, a grey-haired widow? O thou wretch,
Seest not the floods of evil bursting o'er thee?

350

How many a wedlock-wrong wouldst thou be fain
 Thy child knew rather than the ills I name!
 We ought not for slight cause court grievous harm;
 Nor, if we women be a baleful curse,
 Ought men to make their nature woman-like.

For, if I practise on thy child by philtres,
 And seal her womb, according to her tale,
 Willingly, nothing loth, nor low at altars
 Crouching, myself will face the penalty
 At her lord's hands, to whom I am guilty of wrong
 No less, in blasting him with childlessness.

360

Hereon I stand:—but one thing in thy nature
I fear—'twas in a woman's quarrel too

Thou didst destroy the hapless Phrygians' town.

Chor. Thou hast said too much, as woman against man:
Yea, and thy soul's discretion hath shot wide.

Men. Woman, these are but trifles, all unworthy
 Of my state royal,—thou say'st it,—and of Greece.
 Yet know, when one hath set his heart on aught,
 More than to take a Troy is this to him.

I stand my daughter's champion, for I count
 No trifle robbery of marriage-right.

370

Nought else a wife may suffer matcheth this.

¹ To explain away, when you wish to find her a new husband, the stigma of her previous divorce.

Losing her husband, she doth lose her life.
 Over my thralls her lord hath claim to rule,
 And over his like right have I and mine :
For nought that friends have, if true friends they be,
Is private : held in common is all wealth.

Waiting the absent, if I order not
 Mine own things well, weak am I, and not wise.

But I will make thee leave the Goddess' shrine.

For, if thou die, this boy escapeth doom ;

But, if thou wilt not die, him will I slay.

Choice
again.

380

One of you twain must needs bid life farewell.

Andr. Woe ! Dire lot-drawing, bitter choice of life,
 Thou giv'st me ! If I draw, I am wretched made ;
 And if I draw not, all unblest I am.

O thou for paltry cause that dost great wrong,
 Harken : why slay me ?—for what crime ?—what town
 Have I betrayed ?—have slain what child of thine ?—
 Have fired what home ? Beside my lord I couched
 Perforce—and lo, thou wilt slay me, not him,
 The culprit ; but thou passest by the cause,
 And to the after issue hurriest.

390

Woe for these ills ! O hapless fatherland,
 What wrongs I bear ! Why must I be a mother,
 And add a double burden to my load ?

Why wail the past, and o'er the present woes
 Shed not a tear, nor take account thereof ?

I saw dead Hector trailed behind the car,
 Saw Ilium piteously enwrapped in flame.

400

I passed aboard the Argive ships, a slave
Haled by mine hair, and when to Phthia-land

I came, to Hector's murderers was I wed.

What joy hath life for me ?—what thing to look to ?

Unto my present fortune, or the past ?

This one child had I left, light of my life :

Him will these slay who count this righteousness.

No, never !—if my wretched life can save !

For him, for him, hope lives, if he be saved ;

And mine were shame to die not for my child.

410

Lo, I forsake the altar—yours I am

To hack, bind, murder, strangle with the cord !

[Rises.

O child, thy mother, that thou may'st not die,
 Passeth to Hades. If thou 'scape the doom,
 Think on thy mother—how I suffered—died !

And to thy sire with kisses and with tears
Streaming, and little arms about his neck,
Tell how I fared! To all mankind, I wot,
Children are life. Who scoffs at joys unproved,
Though less his grief, a void is in his bliss. 420

Chor. Pitying I hear: for pitiful is woe
To all men, alien though the afflicted be.
Thou shouldest, Menelaus, reconcile
Her and thy child, that she may rest from pain,

[ANDROMACHÈ leaves the altar.]

Men. Seize me this woman!—round her coil your arms,
My thralls! No words of friendship shall she hear.
I, that thou mightest leave the holy altar,
Held forth the lure of thy child's death, and drew thee
To slip into mine hands for slaughtering.
And, for thy fate, know thou that this is so: 430
But for thy son, my child shall be his judge,
Whether her pleasure be to slay or spare.
Hence to the house, that thou, slave as thou art,
May'st learn no more to rail against the free.

Andr. Woe's me! By guile thou hast stoln on me!—be-
trayed!

Men. Publish it to the world! Not I deny it.

Andr. Count ye this wisdom, dwellers by Eurotas?

Men. Yea, and in Troy—that wronged ones should revenge.

Andr. Is there no God, think'st thou, nor reckoning-day?

Men. I'll meet it when it comes. Thee will I kill. 440

Andr. And this my birdie, torn from 'neath my wings?

Men. O nay—I yield him to my daughter's mercy.

Andr. Woe! Why not wail for thee straightway, my
child?

Men. Good sooth, but sorry hope remains for him.

Andr. O ye in all folk's eyes most loathed of men,
Dwellers in Sparta, senates of treachery,
Princes of lies, weavers of webs of guile,
Thoughts crooked, wholesome never, devious all,— 450
A crime is your supremacy in Greece!
What vileness lives not with you?—swarming murders?
Covetousness?—O ye convict of saying
This with the tongue, while still your hearts mean that!
Now ruin seize ye! Yet to me is death
Not grievous as thou think'st. That was my death
When Phrygia's hapless city was destroyed,
And my renowned lord, whose spear full oft

Made thee a seaman, dastard, from a landsman.¹
 Thou meet'st a woman, soul-appalling hero,
 Now,—and wouldst kill. Slay on!—my tongue shall fawn
 In flattery never on thy child or thee. 460
 What if thou be in Sparta some great one?
 Even so in Troy was I. Am I brought low?
 Boast not herein :—thine hour shall haply come.

(Str. 1)

Chor. Never rival brides blessed marriage-estate,
 Neither sons not born of one mother :
 They were strife to the home, they were anguish of hate.
 For the couch of the husband suffice one mate :
 Be it shared of none other. 470

(Ant. 1)

Never land but hath borne a twofold yoke
 Of kings with wearier straining :
 There is burden on burden, and feud mid her folk :
 And 'twixt rival lyres ever discord broke
 By the Muses' ordaining.

(Str. 2)

When the blasts hurl onward the staggering sail,
 Shall the galley by helmsmen twain be guided? 480
 Shall the wisdom of many in counsel avail
 As the purpose untrammelled, the strength undivided?
 Even this in the home, in the city, is power
 Unto such as have wit to discern the hour.

(Ant. 2)

The child of the chieftain of Sparta's array
 Hath proved it. As fire is her jealousy burning :
 Troy's hapless daughter she lusteth to slay,
 And her son, in her hatred's vengeance-yearning. 490
 Godless and lawless and heartless it is !—
 Queen, thou shalt yet be requited for this.

Lo, these I behold, twain yoked as one *And her son*
 In love, in sorrow, afront of the hall :

For the vote is cast and the doom forth gone.
 O woeful mother, O hapless son,
 Who must die since her master hath humbled his thrall,
 Though nought death-worthy hast thou, child, done, 500
 That in condemnation of kings thou shouldst fall !

¹ *i.e.* Drove thee to seek refuge in the galleys that lay along the shore.
 See *Iliad*, bk. xv.

Andr. Lo, blood my wrists red-staining
From cruel bonds hard-straining,
Lo, feet the grave's brink gaining!

Mol. O mother, 'neath thy wing
I crouch where death-shades gather.

Andr. Death!—Phthians, name it rather
Butchery!

Mol. O my father,
Help to thy loved ones bring!

Andr. There, darling, shalt thou rest 510
Pillowed upon my breast,

Where corpse to corpse shall cling.

Mol. Ah me, the torture looming
O'er me, o'er thee!—the coming,
Mother, of what dread thing?

Men. Down, down to the grave!—from our foemen's towers
Ye came: and for several cause unto slaughter
Ye twain be constrained. The sentence is ours
That condemneth thee, woman: this boy my daughter
Hermionè dooms. Utter folly it were 520
For our foemen's avenging their offspring to spare,
When into our hands they be given to slay,
That fear from our house may be banished for aye.

Andr. Oh for that hand I cry on!
Ah husband, to rely on
Thy spear, O Priam's scion!

Mol. Ah woe is me! What spell
Find I for doom's undoing?

Andr. Pray, at thy lord's knees suing,
Child!

Mol. (kneeling to MENELAUS). Friend, in mercy ruing 530
My death, of pardon tell!

Andr. My streaming eyelids weep,
As from a sheer crag's steep
The sunless waters well.

Mol. Woe's me! O might revealing
But come of help, of healing,
Our darkness to dispel!

Men. What dost thou to fall at my feet, making moan
To a rock of the sea, to a wave doom-crested?
True helper am I, good sooth, to mine own:
No love-spell from thee on my spirit hath rested. 540

Too deeply it drained my life-blood away
To win yon Troy and thy dam for a prey.

Herein be thy joy and be this thy crown

When thou passest to Hades' earth-dens down!

Chor. Lo, lo, I see yon Peleus drawing nigh!
In haste his aged foot strides hitherward.

Enter PELEUS, attended.

Pel. Ho ye! ho thou, the overseer of slaughter!

What meaneth this?—how is the house, and why,

In evil case? What lawless plots weave ye?

Menelaus, hold! Press not where justice bars.

550

[*To attendant*] Lead the way faster! 'Tis a strait, methinks,

Brooks no delay; but now, if ever, fain

Would I renew the vigour of my youth.

But first, like breeze that fills the sails, will I

Breathe life through her:—say, by what right have these

Pinioned thine hands in bonds, and with thy son

Hale—for like ewe with lamb thou goest to death—

Whilst I and thy true lord be far away?

Andr. These, ancient, deathward hale me with my child,

As thou dost see. Why should I tell it thee?

560

Seeing not once I sent thee instant summons,

But by the mouth of messengers untold.

Thou know'st, hast heard, I trow, the household-strife

Of yon man's daughter, that means death to me.

And now from Thetis' altars,—hers who bare

Thy noble son, hers whom thou reverencest,—

They tear, they hale me, with no form of trial

Condemning, for the absent waiting not,

My lord, but knowing my defencelessness,

And this poor child's, the utter-innocent,

570

Whom they would slay along with hapless me.

But I beseech thee, ancient, falling low

Before thy knees—I cannot stretch my hand

Unto thy beard, O dear, O kindly face!—

In God's name save, else I shall surely die,

To your shame, ancient, and my misery.

Pel. Loose, I command, her bonds, ere some one rue,

And set ye free this captive's pinioned hands.

Men. This I forbid, who am no less than thou,

And have more right of lordship over her.

580

Pel. How?—hither wilt thou come to rule mine house?

Sufficeth not thy sway of Sparta's folk?

Men. 'Twas I that took her captive out of Troy.

Pel. Ay, but my son's son gained her, prize of war.

Men. All mine are his, his mine—is this not so?

Pel. For good, not evil dealing, nor for murder.

Men. Her shalt thou rescue never from mine hand.

Pel. This staff shall make thine head to stream with blood.

Men. Touch me, and thou shalt see!—ay, draw but near!

Pel. Thou, thou a man?—Coward, of cowards bred! 590

What part or lot hast thou amongst true men?

Thou, by a Phrygian from thy wife divorced,
Who leftest hearth and home unbarred, unwarded,

As who kept in his halls a virtuous wife,—

And she the vilest! Though one should essay,

Virtuous could daughter of Sparta never be.

They gad abroad with young men from their homes,

And with bare thighs and loose disgirdled vesture

Race, wrestle with them,—things intolerable

To me! And is it wonder-worthy then 600

That ye train not your women to be chaste?

This well might Helen have asked thee, who forsook

Thy love, and from thine halls went revelling forth

With a young gallant to an alien land.

Yet for her sake thou gatheredst that huge host

Of Greeks, and leddest them to Ilium.

Thou shouldst have spued her forth, have stirred no spear,

Who hadst found her vile, but let her there abide,

Yea, paid a price to take her never back.

But nowise thus the wind of thine heart blew. 610

Nay, many a gallant life hast thou destroyed,

And childless made grey mothers in their halls,

And white-haired sires hast robbed of noble sons;—

My wretched self am one, who see in thee,

Like some foul fiend, Achilles' murderer;—

Thou who alone unwounded cam'st from Troy,

And daintiest arms in dainty sheaths unstained,

Borne thither, hither back didst bring again!

I warned my bridegroom-grandson not to make

Affinity with thee, nor to receive 620

In his halls a wanton's child: such bear abroad

Their mothers' shame. Give heed to this my rede,

Wooers,—a virtuous mother's daughter choose.

Nay more—how didst thou outrage thine own brother,

Telemus

was against

the marriage

Bidding him sacrifice his child—poor fool!
 Such was thy dread to lose thy worthless wife.
 And, when Troy fell,—ay, thither too I trace thee,—
 Thy wife thou slew'st not when thou hadst her trapped.

253
 Iphigenia's death
 by Agamemnon - her
 father.

Thou saw'st her bosom, didst let fall the sword,
 Didst kiss her, that bold traitress, fondling her, 630
 By Kypris overborne, O recreant wretch!

And to my son's house com'st thou, he afar,
 And ravagest, wouldst slay a hapless woman
 Unjustly, and her boy?—this boy shall make
 Thee, and that daughter in thine halls, yet rue,
 Though he were thrice a bastard. Oft the yield
 Of barren ground o'erpasseth deep rich soil;
 And better are bastards oft than sons true-born.

Take hence thy daughter! Better 'tis to have
 The poor and upright, or for marriage-kin, 640
 Or friend, than the vile rich:—thou, thou art naught!

Chor. From small beginnings bitter feuds the tongue
Brings forth: for this cause wise men take good heed
That with their friends they bring not strife to pass. } almost
 moralizing

Men. Now wherefore should ye call the greybeards wise,
 And them which Greece accounted prudent once?
 When thou, thou Peleus, son of sire renowned, irony?
 Speakest, my marriage-kinsman, thine own shame,
 Rail'st on me for a foreign woman's sake,
 Whom thou shouldst chase beyond the streams of Nile, 650

And beyond Phasis, yea, and cheer me on,—
 This dame of Asia's mainland, wherein fell
 Unnumbered sons of Hellas slain with spears,—

This woman who had part in thy son's blood;

For Paris, he that slew thy son Achilles,

Was Hector's brother, and she Hector's wife.

And wouldst thou pass beneath one roof with her,

And stoop to break bread with her at thy board,

In thine house let her bear our bitterest foes,

Whom I, of forethought for thyself and me, 660
 Would slay?—and lo, from mine hands is she torn!¹

Come, reason we together—no shame this:—

If my child bear no sons, this woman's brood

Grow up, wilt thou establish these as lords

Of Phthia-land?—shall they, barbarians born,

Rule Greeks? And I, forsooth, am all unwise,

Who hate the wrong, but wisdom dwells with thee!

¹ Or (Paley), 'Would from thine hands pluck with intent to slay!'

Memelau
defends
his
actions

Consider this, too—hadst thou given thy daughter
To a citizen, and she were thus misused,
Hadst thou sat still? I trow not. Yet thou raillest
Thus for an alien's sake on friends, on kin!
'Yet husband's cause'—say'st thou—'and wife's alike
Are strong, if she be wronged of him, or he
Find her committing folly in his halls.'
Yea, but in his hands is o'ermastering strength,
But upon friends and parents leans her cause.
Do I not justly then to aid mine own?

670

Dotard—thou dotard!—thou wouldst help me more
By praise than slurring of my leadership!

Not of her will, but Heaven's, came Helen's trouble;
And a great boon bestowed she thus on Greece;
For they which were unschooled to arms and fight
Turned them to brave deeds: fellowship in arms
Is the great teacher of all things to men.
And if I, soon as I beheld my wife,
Forebore to slay her, wise was I herein.
'Twere well had Phokus ne'er been slain by thee.¹

680

classic

Thus have I met thee in goodwill, not wrath.
If thou wax passionate, thou shalt but win
An aching tongue: my gain in forethought lies.

690

Chor. Refrain, refrain you—better far were this—
From idle words, lest both together err.

Pel. Ah me, what evil customs hold in Greece!
When hosts rear trophies over vanquished foes,
Men count not this the battle-toiler's work;
Nay, but their captain filcheth the renown:
Amidst ten thousand one, he raised a spear,
Wrought one man's work—no more; yet hath more praise.
In proud authority's pomp men sit, and scorn

The city's common folk, though they be naught.
Yet are those others wiser a thousandfold,—
Had wisdom but audacity for ally.

700

Even so thou and thy brother sit enthroned,
For Troy puffed up, and that your generalship,
By others' toils and pains exalted high.
But I will teach thee nevermore to count
Paris of Ida foe more stern than Peleus,
Except thou vanish from this roof with speed,
Thou and thy childless daughter, whom my son

¹ Half-brother of Peleus and Telamon, murdered because he surpassed them in heroic exercises.

By the hair shall grasp and hale her through these halls,—
 The barren heifer, who will not endure [710

The fruitful, seeing herself hath children none!

What, if her womb from bearing is shut up,
 Childless of issue must mine house abide?
 Hence from her, thralls!—E'en let me see the man
 Will let me from unmanacling her hands!

Uplift thee, that the trembling hands of eld
 May now unravel these thongs' twisted knots.
 Thus, O thou dastard, hast thou galled her wrists?
 Didst think to enmesh a bull or lion here? 720

Didst fear lest she should snatch a sword, and chase
 Thee hence? Steal hither 'neath mine arms, my bairn:
 Help loose thy mother's bonds. I'll rear thee yet
 In Phthia, their grim foe. If spear-renown
 And battle-fame be ta'en from Sparta's sons,
 In all else are ye meanest of mankind.

Chor. This race of old men may no man restrain,
 Nor guard him 'gainst their sudden-fiery mood.

Men. O'erhastily thou rushest into railing.

I came to Phthia not for violent deeds,¹ 730

And will do nought unkingly, nor endure.
 Now, seeing that my leisure serveth not,
 Home will I go; for not from Sparta far
 Some certain town there is, our friend, time was,
 But now our foe: against her will I march,
 Leading mine host, and bow her 'neath my sway.

Soon as things there be ordered to my mind,
 I will return, will meet my marriage-kin
 Openly, speak my mind, and hear reply.

And, if he punish her, and be henceforth 740

Temperate, he shall find me temperate too,
 But, if he rage, shall meet his match in rage,
 Yea, shall find deeds of mine to match his own.

But, for thy words, nothing I reckon of them;
 Thou art like a creeping shadow, voice thine all,
 Impotent to do anything save talk.

Memelaus will go seek Neoptolemus
insults Pel. honor

[Exit.

Pel. Pass on, my child, sheltered beneath mine arms,
 And, hapless, thou. Caught in a raging storm,
 Thou hast come into a windless haven's calm.

Andr. The Gods reward thee, ancient, thee and thine, 750
 Who hast saved my son and me the evil-starred!

¹ Or 'in mine own despite.'

Yet see to it, lest, where loneliest is the way,
 These fall on us, and hale me thence by force,
 Marking how thou art old, how I am weak,
 This boy a babe: give thou heed unto this,
 Lest, though we 'scape now, we be taken yet.

Pel. Out on thy words—a woman's faint-heart speech!
 Pass on: whose hand shall stay you?—He shall rue
 Who toucheth. By heaven's grace o'er hosts of horsemen
 And countless men-at-arms I rule in Phthia. 760
 I am yet unbowed, not old as thou dost think.
 Yea, if I flash but a glance on such an one,
 Shall I put him to rout, old though I be.
 Stronger a stout-heart greybeard is than youths
 Many: what boots a coward's burly bulk?

[*Exeunt* PELEUS, ANDROMACHÊ, MOLOSSUS and
 ATTENDANTS.
 (*Str.*)

Chor. Thou wert better unborn, save of noble fathers
 Descended, in halls of the rich thou abide.
 If the high-born have wrong, for his championing gathers 770
 A host that shall strike on his side.
 There is honour for them that be published the scions
 Of princely houses: the tide
 Of time never drowneth the story
 Of fathers heroic: it flasheth defiance
 To death from its deathless glory.

(*Ant.*)

But a victory stained—ah, best forego it,
 If thy triumph must wrest to thy shame the right: 780
 Yea, 'tis sweet at the first unto mortals, I know it;
 But barren in time's long flight
 Doth it wax: 'tis as infamy's cloud o'er thy towers.
 Nay, this be my song, the delight
 Of my days, and the prize worth winning,—
 That I wield no dominion, in home's bride-bowers,
 Nor o'er men, that I may not unsinning.

(*Epode*)

O ancient of Aiakus' line,¹ 790
 Now know I, when Lapithans dashing on Centaurs charged
 victorious,

¹ The following lines refer to Peleus' share in (1) the victory of the Lapithae over the Centaurs, (2) the Argonauts' quest of the Golden Fleece, (3) the expedition of Herakles against Troy.

There did thy world-famed war-spear shine,—
 That, on Argo riding the havenless brine,
 Thou didst burst through the gates of the Clashing Rocks on
 the sea-quest glorious ;
 And when great Zeus' son in the days overpast
 Round Ilium the meshes of slaughter had cast,
 As ye sped unto Europe returning, there too was thy fame's
 star burning, 800
 For the half of the glory was thine.

Enter NURSE.

Nur. O dear my friends, how evil in the steps
 Of evil on this day still followeth !
 For now my lady Hermionê within,
 Deserted by her father, conscience-stricken
 For that her plotted crime of slaughtering
 Andromachê and her son, is fain to die,
 Dreading her husband, lest for these her deeds
 He drive her from yon halls with infamy,
 Or lest she die, who would have slain the guiltless. 810
 And scarce, when she essayed to hang herself,
 Her watching servants stayed her, from her hand
 Catching the sword and wresting it away ;
 With such fierce anguish seeth she her sins
 Already wrought. O friends, my strength is spent
 Dragging my mistress from the noose of death !
 Oh, enter ye yon halls, deliver her
 From death : for oft new-comers more prevail
 In such an hour than one's familiar friends.

Chor. Lo, in the palace hear we servants' cries 820
 Touching that thing whereof thou hast made report.
 Hapless !—she is like to prove how bitterly
 She mourns her crimes : for, fleeing forth the house
 Eager to die, she hath 'scaped her servants' hands.

HERMIONE rushes on to the stage.

(*Str. 1*)

Herm. Woe's me ! with shriek on shriek
 I will make of mine hair a rending, will tear with ruining
 fingers my red-furrowed cheek !

Nur. Daughter, what wilt thou do ?—wilt mar thy form ?

(Ant. 1)

Herm. Alas, and well-a-day!
Hence from mine head, thou gossamer-thread of my wimple!
float on the wind away! 830

Nur. Child, veil thy bosom, gird thy vesture-folds!
(Str. 2)

Herm. What have I to do, with my vesture to veil
My bosom, when bared are the crimes I have dared against
my lord, bared naked to light?

Nur. Griev'st thou to have contrived thy rival's death?
(Ant. 2)

Herm. O yea, for my murderous daring I wail,
For my fury-burst, O woman accurst!—O woman accurst in
all men's sight!

Nur. Thy lord shall yet forgive thee this thy sin. 840

Herm. O why didst thou wrest that sword from mine hand?
Give it back, give it back, dear friend; be the brand
Thrust home!—mine hanging why didst thou withstand?

Nur. What, should I leave thee thus distraught to die?

Herm. Woe's me for my destiny!
O for the fire!—I would hail it my friend!
O to the height of a scaur to ascend—

To crash through the trees of the mountain, to plunge mid the
sea,

To die, that the nethergloom shadows may welcome me! 850

Nur. Why fret thyself for this? Heaven's visitation
Sooner or later cometh on all men.

Herm. Thou hast left me, my father, hast left, as a bark by the
tide

Left stranded and stripped of the last sea-plashing oar!

He shall slay me, shall slay! 'Neath the roof that knew me a
bride

Shall I dwell never more!

To the feet of what statue of Gods shall the suppliant fly?
Or crouched at a bondwoman's knees like a slave shall I lie?
O that from Phthia, a bird dark-winged, I were soaring, [86c

Or were such as the pine-wrought galley, that flew
The first of the ships of earth her swift course oaring
Through the Crags dark-blue!

Nur. My child, thy frenzy of rage I praised not then
When thou against the Trojan dame didst sin,
Nor praise the frenzy of dread that shakes thee now.
Not thus thy lord will thrust his wife away,
By weak words of barbarian woman swayed.

In thee he wed no captive torn from Troy,
Nay, but a prince's child, and gat with thee
Rich dowry from a city of golden weal.
Nor will thy father, as thou fearest, child,
Forsake and let thee from these halls be driven.

Nay, pass within ; make not thyself a show
 Before this house, lest thou shouldst get thee shame,
 Before this palace seen of men, my child.

Chor. But lo, an outland stranger, alien-seeming,
 With hasty steps to usward journeyeth.

*Nurse consoles
 her, & tells her
 not to make
 a public show
 of her grief.*

880

Enter ORESTES.

Orestes &

Or. Dames of a foreign land, be these the halls *Hermione's*
 And royal palace of Achilles' son? *and*

Chor. Thou sayest : but who art thou that askest this? *cousins.*

Or. Agamemnon's son and Klytemnestra's I

My name Orestes : to Zeus' oracle
 Bound, at Dodona. Seeing I am come
 To Phthia, good it seems that I enquire
 Of my kinswoman, if she lives and thrives,
 Hermionê of Sparta. Though she dwell
 In a far land from us, she is all as dear.

890

Herm. O haven in a storm by shipmen seen,
 Agamemnon's son, by these thy knees I pray,
 Pity me of whose lot thou questionest,
 Afflicted me ! With arms, as suppliant wreaths
 Strong to constrain, I clasp thy very knees.

Or. What ails thee ? Have I erred, or see I clear
 Menelaus' daughter here, this household's queen ?

Herm. Yea, the one daughter Helen Tyndareus' child
 Bare in his halls unto my sire : doubt not.

Or. O Healer Phoebus, grant from woes release !
 What ails thee ? Art thou wronged of Gods or men ?

900

Herm. Of myself partly, partly of my lord,
In part of some God : ruin is everywhere !

Or. Now what affliction to a childless wife
 Could hap, except as touching wedlock-right ?

Herm. That mine affliction is : thou promptest well.

Or. What leman in thy stead doth thy lord love ?

Herm. The captive woman that was Hector's wife.

Or. An ill tale, that a man should have two wives !

Herm. Even so it was, and I against it fought.

910

Or. Didst thou for her devise a woman's vengeance?

Herm. Ay, death for her and for her base-born child.

Or. And slewest them?—or some mischance hath foiled thee?

Herm. Old Peleus, championing the baser cause.

Or. Did none in this blood-shedding take thy part?

Herm. My father came from Sparta even for this;—

Or. How?—and o'ermastered by the old man's hand?

Herm. Nay, but by reverence;—and forsakes me now.

Or. I see it: for thy deeds thou fear'st thy lord.

Herm. Death is within his right. What can I plead? 920

*But I beseech thee by our Kin-god Zeus,
Help me from this land far as I may flee,
Or to my father's home. These very halls
Seem now to have a voice to hoot me forth:
The land of Phthia hates me. If my lord
Come home from Phoebus' oracle ere my flight,
On shamefullest charge I die, or shall be thrall
Unto his paramour, till now my slave.*

'How then,' shall one ask, 'cam'st thou so to err?'

'Twas pestilent women sought to me, and ruined, 930

Which spake and puffed me up with words like these:

'Thou, wilt thou suffer yon base captive thrall
Within thine halls to share thy bridal couch?

By Heaven's Queen, wer't in mine halls, she should not
See light and reap the harvest of my bed!'

And I gave ear unto these sirens' words,
These crafty, knavish, subtle gossip-mongers,
And swelled with wind of folly. Why behoved

To spy upon my lord? I had all my need,—

Great riches; in his palace was I queen; 940

The children I might bear should be true-born;

But hers, the bastards, half-thrall unto mine.

But never, never—yea, twice o'er I say it,—

Ought men of wisdom, such as have a wife,

Suffer that women visit in their halls

The wife: they are teachers of iniquity.

One, for her own ends, beckons on to sin;

One, that hath fallen, craves fellowship in shame;

And of sheer wantonness many tempt. And so

Men's homes are poisoned. Therefore guard ye well 950

With bolts and bars the portals of your halls;

For nothing wholesome comes when enter in

Strange women, nay, but mischief manifold.

Chor. Thou hast loosed a reinless tongue against thy sisters.

In thee might one forgive it ; yet behoves

Woman with woman's frailty gently deal.

Or. Wise was the rede of him who taught that men (*Eumenides*)
Should hear the reasonings of the other side.

I, knowing what confusion vexed this house,
 And of the feud 'twixt thee and Hector's wife,
 Kept watch and waited, whether thou wouldst stay
 Here, or, dismayed with dread of that spear-thrall,
 Out of these halls wert minded to avoid.

960

I came, not by thy message drawn so much,
 As from this house to help thee, shouldst thou grant me
 Speech of thee, as thou dost. Mine wast thou once,
 But liv'st with this man through thy father's baseness,
 Who, ere he marched unto the coasts of Troy,
 Betrothed thee mine, thereafter promised thee
 To him that hath thee now, if he smote Troy.

*She was
originally
betrothed
to Onastes*

970

Soon as to Greece returned Achilles' son,
 Thy father I forgave : thy lord I prayed
 To set thee free. I pleaded mine hard lot,—
 The fate that haunted me,—that I might wed
 From friends indeed, but scarce of stranger folk,
 Banished as I am banished from mine home.

Then he with insolent scorn cast in my teeth
 My mother's blood, the gory-visaged fiends.¹] *treated by Aeschylus
in the Oresteia*

And I—my pride fell with mine house's fortunes—
 Was heart-wrung, heart-wrung, yet endured my lot,
 And loth departed, of thy love bereft.

980

But, now thy fortune's dice have fallen awry,
 And in affliction plunged dost thou despair,
 Hence will I lead and give thee to thy sire ;
 For mighty is kinship, and in evil days

There is naught better than the bond of blood.

Herm. My marriage—'tis my father shall take thought
 Thereof : herein decision is not mine. *Her father
contracted the
marriage.*

But help thou me with all speed forth this house,
 Lest my lord coming home prevent me yet,
 Or Peleus learn my flight from his son's halls,
 And follow in our track with chasing steeds.

990

Or. Fear not the greybeard's hand : yea, nowise fear
 Achilles' son : his insolence-cup is full ;
 Such toils of doom by this hand woven for him
 With murder-meshes round him steadfast-staked
 Are drawn : thereof I speak not ere the time ;

¹ The Furies, who haunted him after her murder.

But, when I strike, the Delphian rock shall know.
 This mother-murderer¹—if the oaths be kept
 Of spear-confederates in the Delphian land—
 Shall prove none else shall wed thee, mine of right.
 To his sorrow shall he ask redress of Phoebus
 For a sire's blood! Nor shall repentance now
 Avail him, who would make the God amends.
 But by his wrath, and slanders sown of me,
 Die shall he foully, and shall know mine hate:
 For the God turns the fortune of his foes
 To overthrow, nor suffereth their high thoughts.

1000

[*Exeunt* ORESTES and HERMIONE.

(*Str.* 1)

Chor. O Phoebus, who gavest to Ilium a glory
 Of diadem-towers on her heights,—and O Master
 Of Sea-depths, whose grey-gleaming steeds o'er the hoary
 Surf-ridges speed,—to the War-god, the Waster
 With spears, for what cause for a spoil did ye cast her,
 Whom your own hands had fashioned, dishonoured to lie
 In wretchedness, wretchedness—her that was Troy?

1010

(*Ant.* 1)

And by Simois ye yoked to the chariots fleet horses
 Unnumbered, in races of blood which contended,
 Whose lords for no wreaths ran their terrible courses,
 Where the princes of Ilium to Hades descended,
 Where upstreameth no more with the altar-flames blended
 The odour of incense to dream through the sky
 Round the feet of Immortals—from her that was Troy!

[1020

(*Str.* 2)

And Atreides hath passed; for on him lighted slaughter
 At the hands of a wife: and with murder she bought her
 Death, at the hands of her child to receive it:
 For a God's, O a God's hest levin-wise glared
 Bodings of death on her, doomings declared
 In the hour Agamemnon's son forth fared
 To his temple from Argos; then thundered it o'er him;
 And he slew her, he murdered the mother that bore him!
 God, Phoebus!—ah must I, ah must I believe it?

1030

(*Ant.* 2)

And wherever the Hellenes were gathered was mourning
 Of wives for their lost ones, the sons unreturning,
 And of brides from their bowers of espousal departing
 To another lord's couch:—O, not only on thee

[1040

¹ *i.e.* The speaker; a reference to the taunt in l. 978.

Down swooping fell anguish of misery,
 Nor alone on thy loved ones ; but Hellas must be
 Bowed 'neath the plague, 'neath the plague ; and onswEEPing
 Like a cloud whence the death-rain of Hades was dripping,
 Passed the scourge, o'er the Phrygians' fair harvest-fields
 darting.

Enter PELEUS, attended.

Pel. Women of Phthia, unto that I ask
 Make answer, for a rumour have I heard
 That Menelaus' child hath left these halls
 And fled away. In haste I come to learn 1050
 If this be sooth ; for we which bide at home
 Should bear the burdens of our absent friends.

Chor. Peleus, truth hast thou heard : 'twere for my shame
 To hide the ills wherein my lot is cast.

O yea, the queen is gone—fled from these halls.

Pel. With what fear stricken ? Tell me all the tale.

Chor. Dreading her lord, lest forth the home he cast her.

Pel. For that her murder-plot against his son ?

Chor. Yea : of the captive dame adread withal.

Pel. Forth with her father went she, or with whom ? 1060

Chor. Agamemnon's son hath led her from the land.

Pel. Yea ?—furthering what hope ?—would he wed her ?

Chor. Yea : and for thy son's son he plotteth death. — *The grandson*

Pel. Lying in wait, or face to face in fight ?

Chor. With Delphians, in Loxias' holy place.

Pel. Ah me ! grim peril this ! Away with speed

Let one depart unto the Pythian hearth,

And to our friends there tell the deeds here done,

Or ever Achilles' son be slain of foes.

Enter MESSENGER.

Mes. Woe's me, woe's me !

Bearing what tidings of mischance to thee,

Ancient, and all that love my lord, I come ! 1070

Pel. O my prophetic soul, what ill it bodes !

Mes. Thy son's son, ancient Peleus, is no more,

Such dagger-thrusts hath he received of men

Of Delphi, and that stranger of Mycenæ.

Chor. Ah, what wilt do, O ancient ?—fall not thou !

Uplift thee !

*Neoptolemus,
 MESSAS IS
 Killed at
 Apollo's
 Shrine.*

Pel. I am naught: it is my death.

Faileth my voice, my limbs beneath me fail.

Mes. Hearken, if thou wouldst also avenge thy friends.

Upraise thy body, hear what deed was done.

1080

Pel. O Fate, how hast thou compassed me about,

The hapless, upon eld's extremest verge!

How perished he, my one son's only son?

Tell: though it blast mine ears, fain would I hear.

Mes. When unto Phoebus' world-famed land we came,

Three radiant courses of the sun we gave

To gazing, and with beauty filled our eyes.

This bred mistrust: the folk in the God's close

That dwelt, drew into knots and muttering rings,

While Agamemnon's son passed through the town, ^{-Orestes} 1090

And whispered deadly hints in each man's ear:—

'See ye yon man who prowls the God's shrines through,

Shrines full of gold, the nations' treasures,

Who on the selfsame mission comes again

As erst he came, to rifle Phoebus' shrine?'

Therefrom ill rumour surged the city through:

Their magistrates the halls of council thronged;

And the God's treasure-warders, of their part,

Set guards along the temple colonnades.

But we, yet knowing nought of this, took sheep,

1100

The nurslings of the glades Parnassian,

And went and stood beside the holy hearths

With public-hosts and Pythian oracle-seers.

And one spake thus: 'Prince, what request for thee

Shall we make to the God? For what com'st thou?'

'To Phoebus,' said he, 'would I make amends

For my past sin: for I required of him

Once satisfaction for my father's blood.'

Then was Orestes' slander proved of might

In the hoarse murmur from the throng, 'He lies!¹

1110

He hath come for felony!' On he passed, within

The temple-fence, before the oracle

To pray, and was in act to sacrifice:—

Then rose with swords from ambush screened by bays

A troop against him: Klytemnestra's son

Was of them, weaver of this treason-web.

Full in view standing, still to the God he prayed,—

When lo, with swords keen-whetted unawares

They stab Achilles' son, a man unarmed.

¹ Adopting Paley's explanation of the scene.

Back drew he, stricken, yet not mortally, 1120
 Draweth his sword, and, snatching helm and shield
 Upon a column's nails uphung, he stood
 On the altar-steps, a warrior grim to see ;
 And cried to Delphi's sons, and this he asked :
 ' Why would ye slay me, who on holy mission
 Have come ?—on what charge am I doomed to die ?'
 But of the multitude that surged around
 None answered word, but ever their hands hurled stones.
 Then, by that hail-storm battered from all sides,
 With shield outstretched he warded him therefrom, 1130
 To this, to that side turning still the targe ;
 But nought availed, for in one storm the darts,
 The arrows, javelins, twy-point spits outlaunched,
 And slaughter-knives, came hurtling to his feet.
 Dread war-dance hadst thou seen of thy son's son
 From darts swift-swerving ! Now they hemmed him round
 On all sides, giving him no breathing space.
 Then from the altar's hearth of sacrifice
 Leaping with that leap which the Trojans knew,
 He dashed upon them. They, like doves that spy 1140
 The hawk high-wheeling, turned their backs in flight.
 Many in mingled turmoil fell, by wounds,
 Or trampled of others in strait corridors.
 Unhallowed clamour broke the temple-hush,
 And far cliffs echoed. As in a calm mid storm,
 My lord stood flashing in his gleaming arms,
 Till from the inmost shrine there pealed a voice
 Awful and thrilling, kindling that array
 And battleward turning. Then Achilles' son
 Fell, stabbed with a brand keen-whetted through the side
 By a man of Delphi, one that laid him low 1150
 With helpers many : but, when he was down,
 Who did not thrust the steel, or cast the stone,
 Hurling and battering ? All his form was marred,
So goodly-moulded, by their wild-beast wounds.
Then him, beside the altar lying dead,
They cast forth from the incense-breathing shrine.
 But with all speed our hands uplifted him,
 And to thee bear him, to lament with wail
 And weeping, ancient, and to ensepulchre. 1160
 Thus he that giveth oracles to the world,
 He that is judge to all men of the right,
 Hath wreaked revenge upon Achilles' son,—

*Apollo's
 revenge*

Yea, hath remembered, like some evil man,
An old, old feud! How then shall he be wise?

Enter bearers with corpse of NEOPTOLEMUS.

Chor. Lo, lo, where the prince, high borne on the bier,
From the Delphian land to his home draweth near!
Alas for the strong death-quelled! Alas for thee, stricken
with eld!

Not as thou wouldest, Achilles' scion 1170
To his home dost thou welcome, the whelp of the lion.
In oneness of weird, in affliction drear,
Art thou linked with the dead lying here.

(*Str.* 1)

Pel. Woe for the sight breaking on me,
That mine hands usher in at my door!
Ah me, 'tis my death! ah me,
O city of Thessaly,

he didn't
die w/
honour.

No child have I,—this hath undone me,—
Neither seed in mine halls any more.

Woe for me!—whitherward turning
Shall mine eyes see the gladness of yore?
O lips, cheek, and hands of my yearning!
O had a God but o'erthrown thee
'Neath Ilium on Simoïs' shore!

1180

Chor. Yea, he had fallen with honour, had he died
Thus, ancient, and thy lot were happier so.

(*Ant.* 1)

Pel. Woe's me for the deadly alliance
That hath blasted my city, mine home!
Ah my son, that the curse-haunted line¹
Of thy bride,—unto me, unto mine
Evil-boding,—had trapped not my scion's 1190
Dear limbs in the toils of the tomb,
In the net of Hermionê's flinging!
O that lightning had first dealt her doom!
And alas that the arrow, death-bringing²

¹ Taking ἐμόν γένος in apposition to παῖ and τέκνον (the repetition enhancing the pathos), and understanding τὸ δυσώνυμον σῶν λεχέων as the ill-omened nature of the alliance with the daughter of Helen and the niece of Klytemnestra, the latter of whom had literally 'flung around her lord the net of Hades.'

² See ll. 52, 53. The arrow of Paris, which slew Achilles, was guided by Apollo.

To thy sire, stirred a man, for defiance
Of a God, against Phoebus to come !

(Str. 2)

Chor. With a wail ringing up to the sky
In the measures of Hades' abiders will I
Uplift for my lord stricken low lamentation's outcry.

(Ant. 2)

Pel. With a wail to the heavens upborne 1200
I take up the strain, ah me, and I mourn
And I weep, the unblest, the ill-fated, the eld-forlorn.

(Str. 3)

Chor. 'Tis God's doom : thine affliction God hath wrought.

Pel. O my belovèd one, lone in his halls hast thou left
An old, old man of his children bereft.

(Str. 4)

Chor. Before thy sons shouldst thou have died, have died !

Pel. And shall I not rend mine hair ?
And shall I from smiting spare 1210
Mine head, from the ruining hand ? O city, see
How Phoebus of children twain hath despoilèd me !

(Str. 5)

Chor. Ill-starred, who hast seen and suffered evil's stress,
What life through the rest of thy days shalt thou have ?

(Ant. 5)

Pel. Childless, forlorn, my woes are limitless :
I shall drain sorrow's dregs till I sink to the grave.

(Ant. 3)

Chor. Gods crowned with joy thy spousals all for nought.

Pel. Fleeted and vanished and fallen my glories are,
Far from my boasts high-soaring, O far ! 1220

(Ant. 4)

Chor. Lone in the lonely halls must thou abide.

Pel. No city is mine—none now !
Down, sceptre, in dust lie thou !
Thou, Daughter of Nereus, from twilight of thy sea-hall
Shalt behold me, in ruin and wrack to the earth as I fall.

Chor. What ho ! what ho !
What stir in the air, what fragrance divine ?
Look yonder !—O mark it, companions mine !
Some God through the stainless sky doth speed ;
And the car swings low
To the plains of Phthia the nurse of the steed.

1230

THETIS descends to the stage.

Thet. Peleus, for mine espousals' sake of old
 To thee, I Thetis come from Nereus' halls.
 And, first, I counsel thee, repine not thou
 Overmuch for the woes that compass thee.
 I too, who ought to have borne no child of sorrow,
 Lost him I bare to thee, my fleetfoot son,
 Achilles, who in Hellas had no peer.
 Now hearken while I tell my coming's cause :
 Thou to the Pythian temple journey ; there
 Bury thou this thy dead, Achilles' seed, 1240
 Delphi's reproach, that his tomb may proclaim
 His death, his murder, by Orestes' hand.
 And that war-captive dame, Andromachê,
 In the Molossian land must find a home
 In lawful wedlock joined to Helenus,
 With that child, who alone is left alive
 Of Aiakus' line. And kings Molossian
 From him, one after other long shall reign
 In bliss : for, ancient, nowise thus thy line
 And mine is destined to be brought to nought : 1250
 No, neither Troy ; the Gods yet hold her dear,
 Albeit by Pallas' eager hate she fell.
 Thee too—so learn what grace comes of my couch ;
 A Goddess I, whose father was a God—
 Will I deliver from all mortal ills,
 And set thee above decay and death, a God.
 Henceforth in Nereus' palace thou with me,
 As God with Goddess, shalt for ever dwell.
 Thence rising dry-shod from the sea, shalt thou
 Behold Achilles, thy belovèd son 1260
 And mine, abiding in his island home
 On the White Strand, within the Euxine Sea.
 Now fare thou to the Delphians' God-built burg
 Bearing this corpse, and hide it in the ground.
 Then seek the deep cave 'neath the ancient rock
 Sepias ; abide there : tarry till I rise
 With fifty chanting Nereids from the sea,
 To lead thee thence ; for all the doom of fate
 Must thou accomplish : Zeus's will is this.
 Refrain thou then from grieving for the dead ; 1270
 For unto all men is this lot ordained
 Of heaven : from all the debt of death is due.

Pel. O couch-mate mine, O high-born Majesty,
 Offspring of Nereus, hail thou! Worthy thee,
 Worthy thy children, are the things thou dost.
 Goddess, at thy command my grief shall cease.
 Him will I bury, and go to Pelion's glens,
 Where in mine arms I clasped thy loveliest form.

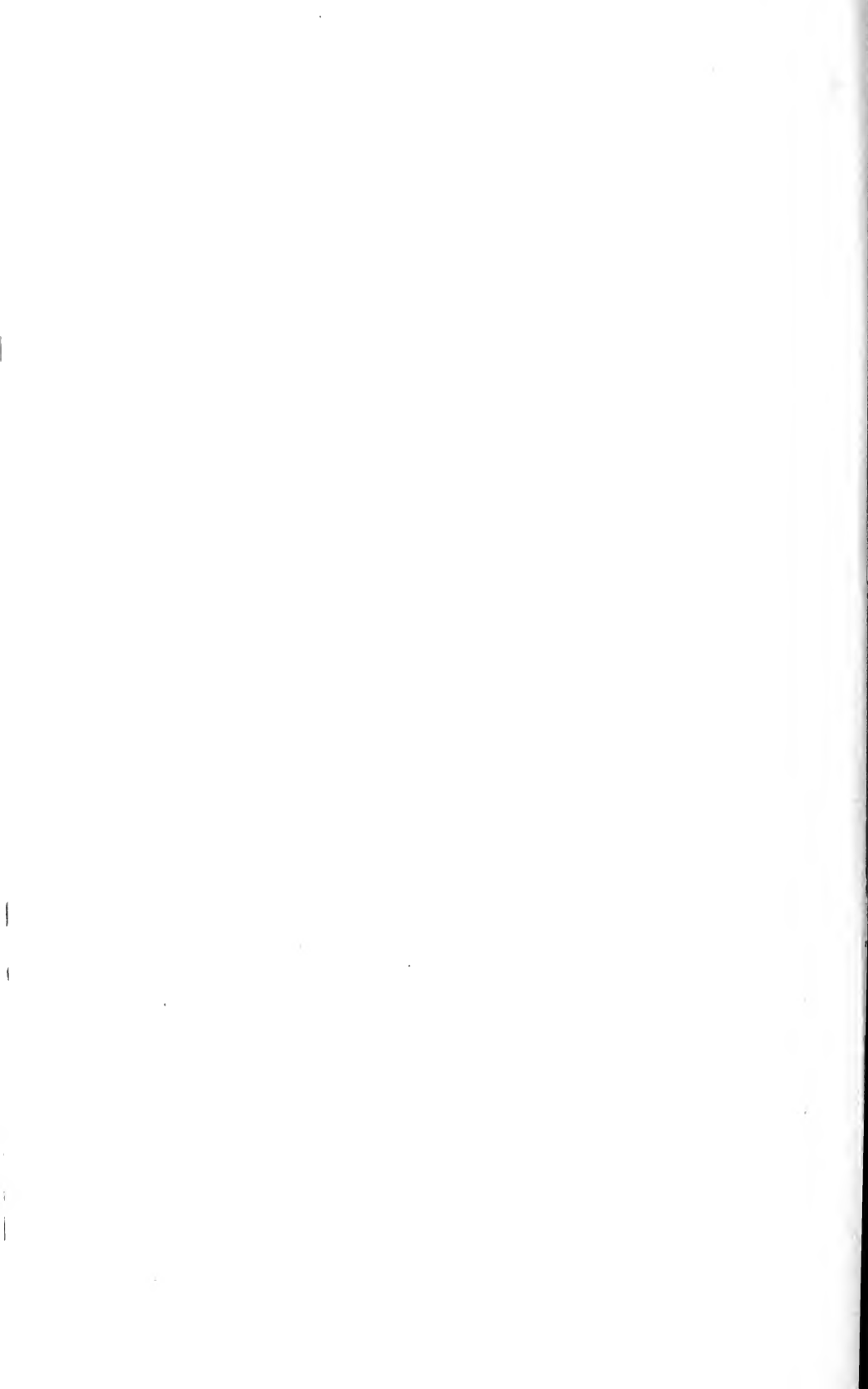
[*Exit* THETIS.]

Now, shall not whoso is prudent choose his wife,
 And for his children mates, of noble strain? 1280
 And nurse no longing for an evil bride,
 Not though she bring his house a regal dower?
 So should men ne'er receive ill of the Gods.

Chor. O the works of the Gods—in manifold forms they reveal
 them :

Manifold things unhoped-for the Gods to accomplishment
 bring.
 And the things that we looked for, the Gods deign not to fulfil
 them ;
 And the paths undiscerned of our eyes, the Gods unseal them.
 So fell this marvellous thing.

[*Exeunt omnes.*]



THE CHILDREN OF HERAKLES

ARGUMENT

EURYSTHEUS, king of Argos, hated Herakles all his life through, and sought to destroy him by thrusting on him many and desperate labours. And when Herakles had been caught up to Olympus from the pyre whereon he was consumed on Mount Oeta, Eurystheus persecuted the hero's children, and sought to slay them. Wherefore Iolaus, their father's friend and helper, fled with them. But in whatsoever city they sought refuge, thence were they driven; for Eurystheus ever made search for them, and demanded them with threats of war. So fleeing from land to land, they came at the last to Marathon which belongeth to Athens, and there took sanctuary at the temple of Zeus. Thither came the folk of the land compassionating them, and Eurystheus' herald requiring their surrender, and the king of Athens, Theseus' son, to hear their cause. And herein is told the tale of the war that came of his refusal to yield them up, of the sacrifice of a noble maiden which the Gods required as the price of victory, of an old warrior by miracle made young, and of the vengeance of Alkmæna.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

IOLAUS, *an old man, formerly friend of Herakles*

KOPREUS, *herald of Eurystheus*

DEMOPHON, *king of Athens, son of Theseus*

MAKARIA, *daughter of Herakles*

HENCHMAN *of Hyllus, Herakles' eldest son*

ALKMENA, *mother of Herakles*

SERVANT *of Alkmene*

MESSENGER, *a captain from the army*

EURYSTHEUS, *king of Argos*

CHORUS *of old men of Marathon*

Young sons of Herakles, guards and attendants

SCENE:—At Marathon, in the forecourt of the temple of Zeus. The great altar stands in the midst.

THE CHILDREN OF HERAKLES

IOLAUS, *with HERAKLES' children, discovered sitting on the altar-steps.*

Iol. I hold it truth,—a lesson learnt long since,—
Born is the just man for his neighbours' help :
But he whose soul uncurbed speeds after gain,
To the state useless, in his dealings hard,
Is but his own friend ;—nor by hearing know it ;
Since I, for honour's sake and kinship's bond,
Who might in Argos peacefully have dwelt,
Bore chief share in the toils of Herakles
When he was with us. Now that in the heaven
He dwells, his babes I shelter 'neath my wings 10
Defending, who myself sore need defence.
For, soon as from the earth their sire had passed,
Us would Eurystheus at the first have slain,
But we fled. Now our city, our home, is lost,
Life only saved. We are exiled wanderers
From city unto city moving on.
For on our other wrongs this coping-stone
Of outrage hath Eurystheus dared to set,—
Heralds to each land where we bide he sends,
Demandeth us, and biddeth drive us forth, 20
Warning them that no weakling friend or foe
Is Argos, and himself a mighty king.
And they, discerning that my cause is weak,
These, but young children orphaned of their sire,
Bow to the strong, and drive us from their land.
I with his banished babes share banishment,
And with their ill plight am in evil plight.
Forsake them I dare not, lest men should say :
' See, now the children's father is no more,
Iolaus wards them not,—their kinsman he ! ' 30
And so, from all the soil of Hellas banned,
To Marathon and the federate land we come,
At the Gods' altars sitting suppliant,
That they may help ; for Theseus' scions twain,
Saith rumour, in the plains of this land dwell,

By lot their heritage, Pandion's seed,
 And kin to these, for which cause have we come
 This journey unto glorious Athens' bounds,
 Old captains we that lead this exile-march,—
 I, for these lads heart-full of troubled thought; 40
 And she, Alkmena, in yon temple folds
 Her arms about the daughters of her son,
 And guards: for we think shame to let young girls
 Stand, a crowd's gazing-stock, on altar-steps.
 Now Hyllus and his brethren elder-born
 Seek some land for our refuge and our home,
 If from this soil we be with violence thrust.
 —O children, children, hither!—seize my robes!
 Yonder I see Eurystheus' herald come
 Against us, him of whom we are pursued, 50
 The homeless wanderers barred from every land.

Enter KOPREUS.

Loathed wretch! Now ruin seize thee and him that sent,
 Who ofttimes to the noble sire of these
 From that same mouth hast published evil hests.
Kop. Ha, deem'st thou this thy session bravely chosen,
 This state thou hast reached thine ally? O thou fool!
 There is no man shall choose that impotence
 Of thy poor strength before Eurystheus' power.
 Away! Why make this coil? Thou must depart
 To Argos, where the doom of stoning waits thee. 60
Iol. Never: for the God's altar shall avail,
 And the free land whereunto we have come.
Kop. Ha! wouldst thou find some work for this mine hand?
Iol. Nor me nor these by force shalt thou hale hence.
Kop. That shalt thou prove: ill seer thou art in this.
 [Seizes children.]
Iol. (resisting). This shall not be!—no, never while I live!
Kop. Hands off!—these will I hale, though thou say nay,
 Accounting them Eurystheus': his they are.
 [Hurls IOLAUS to the ground.]
Iol. O ye, in Athens dwellers from of old,
 Help! Suppliants we of Zeus of the Market-stead 70
 Are evil-entreated, holy wreaths defiled,
 To Athens' shame and to your Gods' dishonour!

Enter CHORUS.

Chor. What ho! what outcry by the altar wakes?

Now what calamity shall this reveal?

Iol. Behold ye!—the eld-stricken see

In his feebleness hurled to the ground, woe's me

Chor. Of whom thus pitiably wast thou dashed down?

Iol. This man, O strangers, sets thy Gods at naught,¹

And drags me from the altar-floor of Zeus.

Chor. But from what land, O ancient, hast thou come 80

To the folk of the Four Burgs' federal home?

Were ye sped overseas by the brine-dipt oar

To our land from Euboea's craggy shore?

Iol. Strangers, no island-dweller's life is mine;

But from Mycenae come we to thy land.

Chor. And by what name, ancient of days, did they call

Thee, they which be fenced with Mycenae's wall?

Iol. Herakles' henchman haply do ye know,

Iolaus, for not fameless was my name.

Chor. I know; long since I heard: but whose are they, 90

The fosterling lads that thine hand leadeth hitherward?—say.

Iol. Strangers, the sons they are of Herakles,

Which have to thee and Athens suppliant come.

Chor. Say, what is your need that here ye are?

Would ye plead your cause at the nation's bar?

Iol. Given up we would not be, nor torn away

Hence, in thy God's despite, and sent to Argos.

Kop. Ay, but this shall not satisfy thy masters

Whose lordship o'er thee holds, who find thee here. 100

Chor. God's suppliants, stranger, must we reverence,

And not with hands of violence tear them hence,

From this place where the Holy Presence is;

The majesty of Justice shall not suffer this.

Kop. Then from your land send these, Eurystheus' thralls.

And this mine hand shall do no violence.

Chor. Now nay, 'twere an impious thing

To cast off suppliant hands to the knees of our city that cling!

Kop. 'Tis well to keep thy foot from trouble's snare,

And in good counsel find the better part. 110

Chor. Thou shouldst have shown respect to this free land,

And told her King, ere thy presumption tore

Therefrom the strangers in her Gods' despite.

¹ Iolaus, in his agitation, addresses himself sometimes to the whole Chorus as though still appealing for their aid), and sometimes to their spokesman.

Kop. And who is of this land and city king?

Chor. Demophon, Theseus' child, a brave sire's son.

Kop. With him then must all strife of this dispute
Be held alone: all else is idle talk.

Chor. Lo, hitherward himself in haste draws nigh,
And Akamas his brother, to hear thy claim.

Enter DEMOPHON, AKAMAS, and attendants.

Dem. Since thou, the old, preventedst younger men
In rescue-rush to Zeus's altar-hearth,
Tell thou what chance hath gathered all this throng.

Chor. Here suppliant sit the sons of Herakles,
Who have wreathed the altar, as thou seest, O king,
And Iolaus, leal henchman of their sire.

Dem. What need herein for lamentable cries?

Chor. Yon man essayed to drag them from the hearth
By force; raised outcry so, and earthward hurled
The ancient, that for ruth burst forth my tears.

Dem. Yet is the fashion of his vesture Greek;
But deeds of a barbarian hand are these.
Man, thine it is to tell me, tarrying not,
From what land's marches hither thou hast come.

Kop. An Argive I, since this thou wouldest know.
Wherefore I come, and from whom, will I tell:
Mycenae's king Eurystheus sends me hither
To lead these hence. Stranger, I bring with me
Just pleas in plenty, both for act and speech.
Myself an Argive would lead Argives hence,
Who find them runaways from mine own land,
By statutes of that land condemned to die.
For, dwellers in a state subject to none,
The right is ours to ratify her decrees.
And, though they have come to hearths of many folk.
Still on the same plea did we take our stand,
And ruin on his own head none dared bring.
But these came hither, haply spying folly
In thee, or staking on one desperate throw
Their venture, or to win or lose it all:—
For sure they deem not thou, if sound of wit,
Alone in all this Hellas they have traversed,
Wilt have compassion on their hopeless plight.
Weigh this and that:—if thou grant these a home,
Or let us hale them hence—what then thy gain?

As touching us, these boons thou mayest win :
Argos' strong hand and all Eurystheus' might
Thou mayest range upon this city's side.

If thou regard their pleadings, by their whinings
Be softened, to the grapple of the spear

The matter cometh. Never think that we

160

Will yield this strife but by the sword's award.

What canst thou plead? Of what lands art thou robbed,

That with Tiryinthian Argives thou wouldst war?—

What allies so defending?—In whose cause

Shall those thou buriest fall? Ill fame were thine

With thine Athenians, if for yon old man,

That sepulchre,—mere naught, as men might say,—

And these boys, in deep waters thou wilt sink.

What is thy best plea? Hope for days to come?

Scant satisfaction for the present this!

170

For against Argos these, armed, grown to man,

Should make but feeble stand,—if haply this

Uplift thine heart;—and long years lie between,

Wherein ye may be ruined. Nay, heed me :

Give naught, but suffer me to take mine own ;

So gain Mycenæ :—not, as your wont is,

Thus fare, that, when 'tis yours to choose for friend

The stronger cause, ye take the weaker side.

Chor. Who can give judgment, who grasp arguments,

Ere from both sides he clearly learn their pleas?

180

Iol. King, this advantage have I in your land,

I am free to speak and in my turn to hear ;

None, as from other lands, will first expel me.

We and this man have nought in common now ;

We have nought to do with Argos any more

Since that decree : we are exiled from her soil.

What right hath he to hale us, whom they banished,

As we were burghers of Mycenæ yet ?

Aliens we are :—or from all Hellas banned

Are men whom Argos exiles?—claim ye this?

190

Sooth, not from Athens : she shall drive not forth,

For fear of Argives, sons of Herakles.

She is no Trachis, no Achaian burg,¹

As that whence thou didst drive these—not of right,

But, even as now, by vaunting Argos' power,—

These, suppliant at the altar as they sat!

If this shall be, if she but ratify

¹ The Heracleidae had first fled to Trachis, a town in Thessaly.

Thine hests, free Athens then no more I know.
 Nay, her sons' nature know I, know their mood :
 They will die sooner ; for in brave men's eyes 200
 The honour that fears shame is more than life.
 Suffice for Athens this ; for over-praise
 Is odious : yea, myself have oftentimes,
 Praised above measure, been but galled thereby.
 But that thou canst not choose but save these boys
 I would show thee, who rulest o'er this land.
 Pittheus was Pelops' son : of Pittheus sprang
 Aithra ; of her was thy sire Theseus born.
 Again, the lineage of these lads I trace :
 Zeus' and Alkmena's son was Herakles : 210
 She, child of Pelops' daughter : cousins then
 Shall be thy father and the sire of these.
 So their near kinsman art thou, Demophon :
 But what requital—ties of blood apart—
 Thou owest to these lads, I tell thee :—once
 Shield-bearer to their sire, I sailed with him
 To win for Theseus that Belt slaughter-fraught ;¹
 And from black gulfs of Hades he brought up
 Thy sire : all Hellas witnesseth to this.
 This to requite, one boon they crave of thee,— 220
 Not to be given up, nor torn by force
 From thy Gods' fanes, and banished from thy land ;
 For this were thy shame, Athens' bane withal,
 That homeless suppliants, kinsmen,—ah, their woes !
 Look on them, look !—be dragged away by force.
 O, I beseech—I lay the wreath-spell on thee—
 By thine hands and thine head, set not at naught
 Herakles' sons, who hast them in thine hands.
 Prove thee to these true kinsman, prove thee friend,
 Their father, brother, lord—better all these,² 230
 Than into hands of Argive men to fall !
Chor. I pity these in their affliction, king.
 High birth by fortune crushed I now behold
 As ne'er before : born of a noble sire
 Are these, yet suffer woes unmerited.
Dem. Three influences, that meet in one, constrain me,
 Iolaus, not to thrust these from my land :

¹ The belt of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, the winning of which cost many lives.

² The special reference being to the last. They had better become even vassals of Athens than victims of Argos.

The chiefest, Zeus, upon whose altar thou
 Art sitting with these nestlings compassed round ;
 Then, kinship, and the debt of old, that these 240
 Should for their sire's sake fare well at mine hands ;
 Third, dread of shame,—this must my soul regard :
 For if I let this altar be despoiled
 By alien force, I shall be held to dwell
 In no free land, but cowed by fear of Argos
 To yield up suppliants :—hanging were not worse !
 I would that thou hadst come in happier plight ;
 Yet, even so, fear not that any man
 Shall from this altar tear thee with these boys.
 Thou, (*to the herald*) go to Argos ; tell Eurystheus this : 250
 And, if he implead these strangers in our courts,
 He shall have right. These shalt thou hale hence never.

Kop. Not if my cause be just, my plea prevail ?

Dem. Just ?—to hale hence by force the suppliant ?

Kop. Then mine the shame : no harm befalleth thee.¹

Dem. My shame too, if I let thee drag these hence.

Kop. Banish them thou : then I will lead them thence.

Dem. O born a fool, who wouldst outwit the God !

Kop. So hither felons must for refuge flee !

Dem. The God's house gives to all men sanctuary. 260

Kop. Haply not so shall think Mycenae's folk.

Dem. Am I not master then in mine own land ?

Kop. Not unto Argos' hurt,—so thou be wise.

Dem. The hurt be yours, so I flout not the Gods.

Kop. I would not thou with Argos shouldst have war.

Dem. I too : yet will I not abandon these.

Kop. Yet will I take mine own and hale them hence.

Dem. Not lightly shall thou win to Argos back.

Kop. That will I now try, and be certified.

[*Attempts to seize them.*]

Dem. [*with threatening gesture*]. Touch these, and thou shalt
 rue, and that right soon. 270

Chor. Dare not to strike a herald, for heaven's sake !

Dem. That will I, if the herald learn not wisdom.

Chor. [*To HERALD*] Depart thou :—touch thou not this man,
 O king.

Kop. I go ; for feeble fight one hand may make.

But I will hither come with brazen mail

¹ Or οὐκουν . . . ἀλλὰ : 'No shame to me, but thine own hurt is this.'
i.e. this resistance on your part, which, while it will not (as the event will
 prove) disgrace me, will turn to your own hurt.

And spears of Argos' war: warriors untold
 Await me; and Eurystheus' self, our king,
 Their chief, expecting what shall come from hence,
 Waits on the marches of Alkathous.¹

He shall flash forth, being told thine insolence,
 On thee, thy folk, this land, and all her fruits.
 For all this warrior youth were ours for nought
 In Argos, if we avenge us not on thee.

Dem. Begone! I fear not that thine Argos, I!
 'Twas not for thee to shame me and to drag
 These hence by force. This city which I hold
 Is not to Argives subject: she is free.

[*Exit KOPREUS.*

Chor. It is time to prepare, ere the Argive array
 O'er our marches on-sweepeth;
 For Mycenae's war-spirit more hot for the fray
 For these tidings upleapeth.

Yea, and after his kind will yon herald be swelling
 His wrongs—such aye double a tale in the telling:—
 In the ears of his lords, think ye, how will he cry
 On the foulness of outrage ' that brought him this day
 Unto death well-nigh!'

Iol. No fairer honour-guerdon may sons win
 Than this, to spring from noble sires and good,
 And so wed noble wives. Who, passion's thrall,
 Links him with base folk, ne'er shall have my praise,
 Who, for his lust's sake, stamps his seed with shame.
 For noble birth stands in the evil day
 Better than base blood. We, to deepest depths
 Of evil fallen, yet have found us friends
 And kin in these: in all the peopled breadth
 Of Hellas these alone have championed us.
 Give, children, unto these the right hand give,
 And to the children ye; draw near to them.
 Boys, we have put our friends unto the test:—
 If home-return shall ever dawn for you,
 And your sires' halls and honours ye inherit,
 Saviours and friends account them evermore,
 And never against their land lift hostile spear,
 Remembering this, but hold them of all states
 Most dear. They are worthy of your reverence,
 Who have ta'en our burden on them, enmity

¹ *i.e.* in Megara, of which Alkathous had shortly before been king.

Of that great land, that folk Pelasgian.¹
 Beggars they saw us, homeless : for all this
 They gave not up nor chased us from their land.
 And I, in life,—in death, when death shall come,— 320
 With high laud will extol thee, good my lord,
 At Theseus' side ; and this shall make him glad,
 My tale how thou didst welcome, didst defend
 Herakles' sons, how nobly Hellas through
 Thou guard'st thy sire's renown : thy father's son
 Shames not the noble line wherefrom he sprang.
 Few such there be : amid a thousand, one
 Thou shouldst find undegenerate from his sire.

Chor. Ever of old she chooseth, this our land,
 To help the helpless ones in justice' cause. 330
 Wherefore unnumbered toils for friends she hath borne.
 Now see I this new struggle looming nigh.

Dem. Well said of thee ; and sure am I that these
 Shall so prove ; unforgot shall be our boon.
 Now will I muster for the war my folk,
 And marshal, that a goodly band may greet
 Mycenæ's host. Scouts first will I send forth
 To meet it, lest unwares it fall on me ;
 For swift the Argives throng to the gathering-cry.
 Seers will I bring, and sacrifice. Thou, leave 340
 Zeus' hearth, and enter with the boys mine halls :
 Therein be they which, though I be afar,
 Shall care for thee. Pass, ancient, to mine halls.

Iol. I will not leave the altar. Let us sit,
 Abiding Athens' triumph, suppliant here.
 And, when thou hast brought this strife to glorious end,
 Then will we enter. Champion-gods have we
 Not weaker than the Argive Gods, O king.
 Though Hera, bride of Zeus, before them go,
 Ours is Athena ; and this tells, say I, 350
 For triumph, to have gotten mightier Gods :
 For Pallas never shall brook overthrow.

[Exit DEMOPHON.

(Str.)

Chor. Ay, vaunt as thou wilt, yet uncaring
 Will we swerve none the more from the right,

¹ So Paley. But according to Beck,

'Who have chosen to have for foes that mighty land,
 That folk Pelasgian, in the stead of us.'

O thou stranger from Argolis faring
 To Athens, thou shalt not affright
 Our souls by thy bluster high-swelling.
 Not yet such dishonour be done
 To the land great and fair beyond telling!
 Fools—thou and thy despot-lord dwelling
 In Argos, this Sthenelus' son!

360

(Ant.)

Thou who com'st to a city no lesser
 Than Argos, essaying to seize—
 And thou alien, O violent oppressor!—
 The suppliants that cling to her knees,
 The homeless that cry from her altars!
 And thou hast not respect to our king,
 And with justice thy false tongue palters:—
 Who, except from truth's pathway he falters,
 But shall count it an infamous thing?

370

(Epode)

Peace love I well, but I warn thee,
 O tyrant, O treacherous-souled,
 Though thou march to the gates of our hold,
 Not the crown of thine hopes shall adorn thee.
 Not for thine hand the war-spear alone
 Nor the brass on the buckler hath shone!
 O thou that in battle delightest,
 Trouble not, trouble not with thy spear
 The burg that the Graces make brightest
 Of cities:—dread thou and forbear.

380

Re-enter DEMOPHON.

Iol. My son, why com'st thou with care-clouded eyes?
 Tellest thou evil tidings of the foe?
 Tarry they?—are they on us?—what hast heard?
 No empty promise was yon herald's threat.
 Their captain, aye triumphant heretofore,
 Shall march, I know, with heart uplifted high,
 Against our Athens. Notwithstanding Zeus
 Chastiseth overweening arrogance.

Dem. They are come, the Argive host and king Eurystheus.
 Myself beheld them; for behoves the man,
 Whoso makes claim to know good generalship,
 To see—nor that with eyes of scouts—his foes.

390

But to the plains not yet hath he marched down
 His bands, but, couched upon the rocky brow,
 Watcheth—I but make guess of that I tell thee—
 Where without conflict to push on his host,
 And in the land's heart camp him safety-girt.

Yet all my preparations well are laid :

Athens is all in arms, the victims ready
 Stand for the Gods to whom they must be slain.

400

By seers the city is filled with sacrifice
 For the foes' rout and saving of the state.

All prophecy-chanters have I caused to meet,
 Into old public oracles have searched,
 And secret, for salvation of this land.

And, mid their manifold diversities,
 In one thing glares the sense of all the same :—

They bid me to Demeter's Daughter slay
 A maiden of a high-born father sprung.

Full am I, as thou seest, of good will

410

To you : yet neither will I slay my child,
 Nor force thereto another of my folk :

And of his own will who hath heart so hard
 As from his hands to yield a most dear child ?
 Now gatherings may'st thou see of angry mood,
 Where some say, right it is to render help
 To suppliant strangers, some cry out upon
 My folly :—yea, and if I do this thing,
 Even this day is civil war afoot.

See thou to this then : help me find a way

420

Whereby yourselves and Athens shall be saved.

And I shall not be of my folk reproached.

For mine is no barbarian despot's sway :

Only for fair deeds win I guerdon fair.

Chor. How?—do the Gods forbid that Athens help
 The stranger, though she yearn with eager will ?

Iol. O children, we are like to shipmen, who,

Escaped the madding fury of the storm,
 And now in act to grasp the land, have yet
 By blasts been driven from shore to sea again.

430

Even so are we from this land thrust away,
 When, as men saved, even now we touched the strand.

Ah me, why didst thou cheer me, wretched hope,
 Erst, when thy mind was not to crown thy boon ?

The king I cannot blame, who will not slay
 His people's daughters : yea, I am content

With Athens' dealings with us : if it please
 Gods that I fare thus, gratitude dies not.
 Ah boys, for you I know not what to do !
 Whitherward flee ?—what Gods rest unimplored ? 440
 What refuge upon earth have we not sought ?
 Die shall we, children, yielded up to foes.
 I reckon not of myself, if I must die,—
 Except that o'er my death yon foes shall gloat :
 But for you, babes, I weep in utter ruth,
 And for your sire's grey mother, even Alkmena.
 O lady, hapless in thy length of days !
 And hapless I, who have greatly toiled in vain !
 Doomed were we, doomed into a foeman's hands
 To fall, and die in shame and agony ! 450
 King, help me !—wouldst know how ?—not every hope
 Of their deliverance hath fled my soul :—
 Me to the Argives yield up in their stead.
 So be imperilled thou, the lads be saved.
 No right have I to love life : let it go !
 Me would Eurystheus most rejoice to seize,—
 Herakles' ally, me,—and evil-entreat ;
 For churl he is. Let wise men pray to strive
 With wise men, not with graceless arrogance.
 So, if one fall, he stoops to a chivalrous foe. 460

Chor. O ancient, upon Athens cast not blame !
 Haply 'twere false,¹ yet foul reproach were this
 That we abandoned stranger-suppliants.

Dem. Noble thine offer : yet it cannot be.
 Not craving thee doth this king hither march :
 For of what profit to Eurystheus were
 An old man's death ? Nay, these he lusts to slay.
 For dangerous to foes are high-born youths
 Growing to man, and brooding on sires' wrongs :²
 And all this he foresees, he needs must so. 470
 If any rede thou knowest more than this
 In season, set it forth : I am desperate,
 Hearing those oracles, and full of fear.

Enter MAKARIA from the temple.

Mak. Strangers, impute not for my coming forth
 Boldness to me ; this is my first request ;

¹ The Aldine κέρδος has no MS. authority (Paley).

² cf. *Andromache*, l. 521.

Since for a woman silence and discretion
 Be fairest, and still tarrying in the home.
 But, Iolaus, I heard thy moans, and came,—
 Though I be not ordained mine house's head,
 Yet in some sort it fits me, for I love 480
 These brethren more than all : yea, mine own fate
 Fain would I learn,—lest to the former ills
 Some new pang added may torment thy soul.

Iol. Daughter, long since have I had righteous cause
 To praise thee chieffiest of Herakles' seed.
 Our house, that seemed but now to prosper well,
 Once more hath fallen into desperate case.
 For oracle-chanters, saith this king, proclaim
 That he must bid to slay nor bull nor calf,
 But a maid, daughter of a high-born sire, 490
 If we, if Athens, must not cease to be.
 This then is our despair : the king refuseth
 To slay his own or any other's child,
 And saith to me,—albeit not in words,—
 Except we find for this some remedy,
 We must needs forth and seek another land ;
 But his own land he cannot choose but save.

Mak. On these terms hangeth our deliverance ?

Iol. On these,—if in all else our fortune speed.

Mak. Then dread no more the Argive foemen's spear. 500

Myself—I wait no bidding, ancient—am
 Ready to die, and yield me to be slain.
 What can we say, if Athens count it meet
 To brave a mighty peril for our sake,
 And we to others pass the struggle on,
 And flee death, when that way deliverance lies ?
 Never !—a scoffing to us this should be,
 To sit and moan on, suppliant to their Gods,
 And—born of that sire of whose loins we sprang—
 To show us craven ! Is this like the brave ? 510
 Better, forsooth, this town—which God forbid !—
 Were ta'en, that into hands of foes I fell,
 And suffered—I, from hero-father sprung—
 Horrors, and looked on Hades none the less !
 Or, banished, shall I wander from this land,
 And not be utterly shamed, if one should say,
 ' Wherefore comé hither with your suppliant boughs,
 O ye that so love life ?—hence from our land !
 For we to cravens will not render help ? '

Nay, and not even if all these were slain
 And I saved, have I hope of happy days ;—
 Many, so tempted, have betrayed their friends ;—
 For who would stoop to take a friendless girl
 To wife, or care to raise up seed of me ?
 Better to die than light on such a doom
 Unworthy ! Haply this might well beseem
 Another maid who hath not my renown.
 Lead on to where this body needs must die :
 Wreathe me, begin the rite, if this seem good.
 Vanquish your foes ; for ready is this life,
 Willing, ungrudging. Yea, I pledge me now
 For these my brothers' sake, and mine, to die.
 For treasure-trove most fair, by loving not
 Life, have I found,—with glory to quit life.

520

Chor. What shall I say, who hear this maid's high words
 Consenting for her brethren's sake to die ?
 What man could utter nobler words than these,
 Or who do nobler deed henceforth for ever ?

530

Iol. O child, thine heart is of none other sire—
 Thou art his own seed, of that godlike soul,
 Herakles, sprung !—No shame, no shame, is mine
 For these thy words, but grief for this hard lot.
 Yet how 'twere done more justly will I tell :
 Hither be all this maiden's sisters called ;
 Then for her house let whom the lot dooms die :
 But that thou die without lot is not just.

540

Mak. I will not perish by the lot's doom, I ;
 For then is no free grace : thou, name it not.
 But if ye will accept me, and consent
 To take an eager victim, willingly
 I give my life for these, nowise constrained.

550

Iol. Ah, marvellous one !
 Nobler thy latter speech is than thy first.
 Perfect was that, but thou o'erpassest now
 Courage with courage, word with noble word !
 Yet, daughter, thee I bid not, nor forbid
 To die :—thy brethren dost thou, dying, help.

Mak. Thou dost bid—wisely. Fear not thou to take
 Guilt-stain of me : but let me die—die free.
 Come with me, ancient : in thine arms to die¹

560

¹ Some explain *ἐνθαυεῖν*, 'die in, i.e. by, thine hands.' But (1), Iolaus, in l. 564, would surely have made some reference to such a proposal ; (2) in that case, *ἐν*, in l. 566, should mean 'by women's hands,' which is absurd.

I ask. Be near me ; veil my corse with robes,
 Since to the horror of the knife I pass—
 If I be of the sire that I boast mine.

Iol. I cannot stand and look upon thy doom.

Mak. At least ask thou the king that I may breathe
 My last breath not in men's but women's hands.

Dem. This shall be, hapless among maidens : shame
 Were mine to grace thee not with honour meet,
 For causes manifold :—for thy great heart,
 For justice' sake, and for that thou art brave
 Above all women that mine eyes have seen.
 Wouldst thou say aught to these, or this grey sire,
 Speak thy last word, or ever thou depart.

570

[*Exit.*

Mak. Farewell, old sire, farewell, and teach, O teach
 These boys to be like thee, in all things wise
 As thou art—no whit more : that shall suffice.
 And strive from death to save them, loyal soul :
 Thy children are we, fostered by thine hands.
 Thou seest how my bloom of spousal-tide
 I yield up in the stead of these to die.

580

And ye, O band of brethren at my side,
 Blessings on you ! May all be yours, for which
 The cleaving of mine heart shall pay the price.
 This old man, and the grey queen therewithin,
 Alkmena, my sire's mother, honour ye,
 And these our hosts. If there be found of heaven
 For you release from toils, and home-return,
 Remember then your saviour's burial due,—
 Fair burial, as is just. I have failed you nought,
 Have stood your champion, for mine house have died.
 My treasure this shall be, for babes unborn,
 Spousals foregone ;—if in the grave aught be :
 But ah that nought might be !—for if there too
 We mortals who must die shall yet have cares,
 I know not whither one shall turn ; since death
 For sorrows is accounted chiefest balm.

590

Iol. O thou who for high courage hast no peer,
 Above all women, know, in life, in death,
 Most chiefest honour shalt thou have of us.
 Farewell : for awe I dare not curse the Goddess,
 Demeter's child, to whom thy life is sealed.

600

[*Exit MAKARIA. IOLAUS sinks to the ground.*

O boys, we are undone !—faint fail my limbs

For anguish! Take, upbear me to a seat
 Hereby, and muffle with these robes, my sons.
 For neither can I joy in these deeds done,
 Nor might we live, the oracle unfulfilled.
 This is calamity, that were deeper ruin.

(Str.)

Chor. Never man hath been blessed save by God's dispensation,
 nor bowed under sorrow:—

Lo, this do I cry:—

[610

Nor the same house treads evermore in prosperity's ways:
 But the fate of to-day is dogged by the feet of the fate of
 to-morrow

Ever treading anigh;

And him that was highly exalted it comes to abase,
 And him that was nothing accounted it setteth on high.¹
 Ye may flee not your doom, nor repel, though the buckler of
 wisdom ye borrow,
 And whoso essayeth hath vain toil endlessly.

(Ant.)

Ah, cast thee not down, but endure heaven's stroke, nor thy
 spirit surrender

Unto anguished despair.

620

She hath won her a portion in death that the world shall
 praise,
 Who hath out of her agony risen, her brethren's, our Athens'
 defender:

And a crown shall she wear

Of renown that the worship of men on her brows shall
 place:

For through tangle of trouble doth virtue unfaltering fare.
 Of her sire is it worthily done, of her line's heroic splendour.
 In thine homage to noble death mine heart hath share.

Enter HENCHMAN of Hyllus.

Hench. Hail, children! Where stay ancient Iolaus
 And your sire's mother from their session here? 630

Iol. Here am I—such as my poor presence is.

Hench. Why dost thou lie thus? Why these down-drooped
 eyes?

Iol. A sorrow of this house is come to oppress me.

Hench. Yet now upraise thyself: uplift thine head.

¹ Reading ἀτίταν vice ἀλήταν.

Iol. Old am I, and my strength is utter naught.

Hench. But bringing tidings of great joy I come.

Iol. Who art thou?—where have I met thee unremembered?

Hench. I am Hyllus' vassal. Look, dost know me not?

Iol. Friend, com'st thou our deliverer from bane? 640

Hench. Yea: therewithal thou art fortunate this day.

Iol. Alkmēna, mother of a hero-son,

Come forth, give ear to these most welcome words;

For travailing long in spirit hast thou fainted

Lest these¹ which now are come should ne'er return.

Enter ALKMENA from the temple.

Alk. What means this outcry filling all the house?

How, hath a herald from their Argos come

Again to outrage thee? My strength is weakness;

Yet of this thing, O stranger, be assured,

Never, while I live, shalt thou hale these hence. 650

Else be I counted mother never more

Of Herakles! If thou lay hand on these,

With two old foes thou shalt inglorious strive.

Iol. Fear not, grey queen, nor quake: no herald he

From Argos cometh bearing hests of foes.

Alk. Why then didst raise a cry in-ushering fear?

Iol. That thou before this temple might'st draw nigh.

Alk. This was not in my thought:—now who is this?

Iol. He bringeth tidings. Thy son's son is here.

Alk. Hail also thou for this thine heralding! 660

But wherefore absent, if he hath set foot

In this land?—where?—what hap hath hindered him

From coming with thee to make glad mine heart?

Hench. The host he hath brought he camps, and marshals it.

Alk. Such matter appertaineth not to me.

[*Turns to go.*]

Iol. Now nay—though my part be to enquire thereof.

Hench. What wouldst thou know concerning things achieved?

Iol. How great a host of allies hath he brought?

Hench. Many: their tale I cannot tell save thus.

Iol. All this, I trow, the chiefs Athenian know? 670

Hench. They know: yea, on their left he stands arrayed.

Iol. Ha, is the host already armed for fight?

Hench. Yea, and the victims are brought nigh the ranks.

Iol. And distant how far is the Argive spear?

¹ Hyllus and the other grown-up sons of Herakles.

Hench. So that thou plainly may'st discern their chief.

Iol. What doth he?—marshals he the foemen's lines?

Hench. So made we guess: not plainly could we hear.

But I must go: I would not that without me,

Through fault of mine, my lords should clash with foes.

Iol. And I with thee: my purpose is as thine,— 680

As meet is,—to be there and help my friends.

Hench. Nay, nowise worthy thee were idle talk!

Iol. Unworthy it were to help not friends in fight.

Hench. The glance can deal no wound, if hand strike not.

Iol. How? Cannot I withal smite through a shield?

Hench. Smite?—yea, but thou thyself ere then mightst fall.

Iol. There is no foe shall dare to meet mine eye.

Hench. Thou hast not, good my lord, thine olden strength.

Iol. Yet foes by tale not fewer will I fight.

Hench. Scant weight into thy friends' scale wilt thou cast.

Iol. Hinder me not. I am wrought up for the deed. [690

Hench. For deeds no power thou hast;—hast will, perchance.

Iol. Talk as thou wilt, so I bide not behind.

Hench. With mailed men how shalt thou unarmed appear?

Iol. There hang within yon fane arms battle-won.

These will I use, and, if I live, restore;—

The God will not require them of the slain.

Pass thou within, and from the nails take down,

And bring with speed to me, that warrior-gear.

[Exit HENCHMAN.

Shameful it is—this loitering at home, 700

That some should fight, some, craven souls, hang back!

Chor. Not yet may the years quell thy spirit,

Young in heart, though thy strength be no more!

Why toil to thine hurt but in vain?

Small help of thee Athens should gain.

Let thine eld yet be wise, and refrain

From things hopeless: thou canst not inherit

Yet again the lost prowess of yore.

Alk. Art thou beside thyself?—what, meanest thou

To leave me and my children thus forlorn? 710

Iol. Yea, men must fight. For these must thou take thought.

Alk. But, if thou perish, how shall I be saved?

Iol. Thy son's sons which are left shall care for thee.

Alk. But if—which God forbid—aught hap to them?

Iol. Our hosts shall not forsake thee. Fear not thou.

Alk. Mine heart's last stay!—none other have I left.

Iol. Nay, Zeus, I know, remembereth thy griefs.

Alk. Ah! (*sighs heavily*).

Never of me shall ill be said of Zeus;
But is he just to me-ward?—Himself knows!

[*Retires within temple.*]

Re-enter HENCHMAN.

Hench. Lo, here thou seest a warrior's gear complete: 720

Make all speed to encase in these thy frame.

The fight is nigh, and most the War-god loathes

Loiterers. If thou fear the armour's weight,

Go mailless now, and lap thee mid the ranks

In this array: till then will I bear all.

Iol. Well hast thou said: yet ready to mine hand

Bring on the arms: set in mine hand a spear:

Bear up my left arm, ordering my steps.

Hench. How, lead as a little child the man-at-arms!

Iol. For the omen's sake unstumbling must I go. 730

Hench. Would thou wert strong to do, as thou art fain!

Iol. On!—woe, if I be laggard for the fray!

Hench. 'Tis thou art slow, not I, who dream'st performance.

Iol. Seest thou not how onward speed my limbs?

Hench. More thine imagining see I than thy speed.

Iol. Thou shalt not say so when thou seest me there—

Hench. Achieving what?—I fain would see thy triumph!

Iol. Smiting some foeman, yea, clear through the shield.

Hench. If we win ever thither,—this I doubt.

Iol. Would, O mine arm, that, as I call to mind 740

Thy young strength, when thou didst with Herakles

Smite Sparta, such a helper unto me

Thou wouldst become! Soon would I turn to rout

Eurystheus—craven he to abide the spear!

With high estate is this delusion linked,

Repute for courage high: for still we deem

That he who prospereth knoweth all things well.

[*Exeunt.*

(*Str. I*)

Chor. Earth!—Moon, which reign'st the livelong night!—

O glorious radiancy

Of Him who giveth mortals light, 750

Flash tidings unto me!

Shout triumph up through heaven's expansion,

Up to the throne of all men's lord,

Up to grey-eyed Athena's mansion!

I for my land am battle-dight,
 Arrayed for hearth and home to fight,
 To shear through danger with the sword,
 For right of sanctuary.

(Ant. 1)

Dread peril, that Mycenae-town—
 The mighty burg, whose hand
 The wide world through hath spear-renown,—
 Nurse wrath against my land!
 Yet shame, O shame, were thine, my city,
 If we must yield to Argos' hest
 Suppliants,—if fear must cast out pity! . . .
 Zeus champions me; I tread fear down:
 Zeus' favour is my right, my crown:
 In mine esteem above the Blest
 Never shall mortals stand.

760

(Str. 2)

But, O Queen,—for our soil, for our city is thine,
 And to thee be we given—
 O our mother, our Mistress, O Warder Divine,
 Yon despiser of heaven,
 Who from Argos brings storm-rush of spearmen upon me,
 Chase afar!—no such guerdon hath righteousness won me
 As from home to be driven!

770

(Ant. 2)

For the sacrifice-homage is rendered thee aye
 When the month waneth, bringing
 The day when young voices to thee chant the lay,
 When the dancers are singing,
 When the wind-haunted hill with the beat of the glancing
 White feet of fair girls through the night-season dancing,
 And with glad cries, is ringing.

780

ALKMENA comes again out of the temple. Enter SERVANT.

Ser. Mistress, I bring thee tidings passing brief
 To hear, and passing fair for me to tell.
 Our foes are smitten: trophies now are reared
 Hung with war-harness of our enemies.

Alk. Dear friend, this day hath wrought thy severance
 From bondage, for the tidings thou hast brought.
 Yet from one ill not yet thou freest me—
 Fear touching those I love, if yet they live.

790

Ser. They live, in all the host most high-renowned.

Alk. The old man Iolau—lives he yet?

Ser. Yea, and by Heaven's help hath done gloriously.

Alk. What is it?—hath he wrought some knightly deed?

Ser. He from an old man hath become a youth.

Alk. Marvels thou speakest: yet I pray thee tell

First how the fight was victory for our friends.

Ser. One speech of mine shall set forth all to thee.

When host against host we had ranged the array

800

Of men-at-arms far-stretching face to face,

Then from his chariot Hyllus lighted down,

And midway stood between the spearmen-lines,

And cried, 'O captain of the host, who hast come

From Argos, wherefore spare we not this land?

Lo, if thou rob Mycenæ of one man,

Nought shalt thou hurt her:—come now, man to man

Fight thou with me: so, slaying, lead away

Herakles' sons; or, falling, leave to me

My father's honour and halls to have and hold.'

810

'Yea!' the host shouted, counting this well said

For valour and for rest from battle-toil:

Yet he, unshamed for them that heard the challenge,

And his own cowardice, war-chief though he were,

Dared not draw nigh the essay of valour's spear,

But was sheer craven. And this dastard wretch

Came to enslave the sons of Herakles!

So to the ranks again went Hyllus back:

And the priests, knowing now that end of strife

Should not by clash of champion shields be attained,

Did sacrifice, nor tarried, but straightway

Spilled from the victims' throats the auspicious blood.¹

820

Then mounted these their cars: their shield-rims those

Before their bodies cast. Then Athens' king

Cried to his host, as high-born chieftain should:

'Countrymen, now must each one play the man

For the land that hath borne and nurtured him!'

The while that other prayed his battle-aid

To brook not shame to Argos and Mycenæ.

But when the Tuscan trumpet gave the sign

830

High-shrilling, and the war-hosts clashed in fight,

How mighty a crash of bucklers thundered then—

Think'st thou?—What multitudinous groan and shriek!

Now first the onset of the Argive spear

¹ The victims here referred to were those regularly slain with a view to ascertain if the omens were favourable for immediate onset: this seems to be indicated by the peculiar (yet in such connection appropriate) word *ὄριον*.

Burst through our ranks : then gave they back again.
 Anon foot stood in grapple locked with foot,
 Man fronting man, hard-wrestling in the fray :
 Fast, fast they fell. Cheers ever answered cheers—
 ‘ Dwellers in Athens ! ’—‘ Tillers of the land
 Of Argos ! ’—‘ from dishonour save your town !’

840

With uttermost endeavour and strong strain
 Scarce turned we unto flight the Argive spear.
 Thereat old Iolaus, marking where
 Hyllus charged on, with outstretched hand besought
 That he would set him on a courser-car.
 Then the reins grasped he, then the steeds he sped
 After Eurystheus. All the rest I tell
 From others’ lips : the former things I saw.

For, as he passed beyond Pallênê’s Hill
 Sacred to Pallas, spying Eurystheus’ car,
 He prayed to Zeus and Hêbê, for one day
 To be made young, and wreak the vengeance due
 On foes :—now shalt thou hear a miracle.

850

For two stars rested on the chariot-yoke,
 And into gloom of shadow threw the car ;
 And these, diviners say, were thy great son
 And Hêbê :—then from out that murky gloom
 He flashed—a youth, with mighty-moulded arms !
 And glorious Iolaus overtook

By the Skironian Rocks Eurystheus’ car.
 He hath bound his hands with gyves, and hath returned
 Bringing the crown of victory, that chief
 So prosperous once : but by his fate this day
 Clear warning to all men he publisheth
 To envy not the seeming-fortunate, ere
 He die, since fortune dureth but a day.

860

Chor. O Victory-wafter Zeus, now is it mine
 To see a day from dark fear disenthralled !

Alk. Zeus, late on mine affliction hast thou looked ;
 Yet thank I thee for all that thou hast wrought.

870

Now know I of a surety that my son
 Dwelleth with Gods :—ere this I thought not so.
 O children, now, yea now from trouble free,
 And from Eurystheus, doomed to a dastard’s death,
 Free shall ye be, shall see your father’s city,
 And tread the lot of your inheritance,
 And sacrifice to your fathers’ Gods, from whom
 Banned ye have known a wretched homeless life.

But for what veiled wise purpose Iolaus
 Hath spared Eurystheus, that he slew him not, 880
 Tell : for in our sight nothing wise is this
 To capture foes, and not requite their wrong.

Ser. Of thought for thee, that him thine eyes might see
 Held in thy power, and subject to thine hand.
 Sore loth was he whom 'neath the yoke he brought
 Of strong constraint, for nowise he desired
 Living to meet thine eye and taste thy vengeance.
 Farewell, grey queen : forget not that which erst
 Thou saidst to me when I began my tale.
 Make me free man ; for, touching suchlike boons, 890
 The lips that lie not best beseem the noble.

[*Exit.*
 (*Str. 1*)

Chor. Sweet to me is the dance, when clear-pealing
 Ring the flutes o'er the wine,
 And when Love cometh sweetly in-stealing :
 Yea, and gladness is mine
 To look on my dear ones well-faring
 Which aforetime were whelmed in despairing.
 Many blessings fate cometh on-bearing,
 With whom time paceth on, bringing healing,
 Kronos' offspring divine.

900
 (*Ant 1*)

In justice, my land, thy path lieth :
 This thy crown yield to none,
 That thou fearest the Gods ; who denieth,
 Into madness hath run.
 Lo, what sign is revealed for a token,
 How the pride of wrong-doers is broken
 Evermore, how to-day hath God spoken,
 How the voice of Omnipotence crieth
 In the deeds he hath done !

(*Str. 2*)
 910

He hath died not !—to heaven hath risen
 Thy scion, grey queen.
 Tell me never that Hades' dim prison
 His long home hath been !
 Nay, he soared through the flames leaping round him ;
 And with honour the Spusal-god crowned him,
 And to Hêbê with love-links he bound him,—
 Zeus' son to Zeus' daughter,—where glisten
 Heaven's halls with gold-sheen.

(Ant. 2)

How oft be life's strands intertwisted !
 Of Athena, men say, 920
 Was their sire in hard emprise assisted ;
 And the city this day,
 And the folk of that Goddess hath saved them,
 And hath curbed him whose blood-lust had craved them,
 Whose tyranny fain had enslaved them.
 In my cause never pride be enlisted
 Insatiate for prey.

Enter MESSENGER with guards leading EURYSTHEUS in chains.

Mes. O queen, thou seest,—yet shall it be told,—
 Leading Eurystheus unto thee we come,
 A sight unhopèd, which ne'er he looked should hap, 930
 Who ne'er had thought to fall into thine hands,
 When from Mycenæ with vast shield-essay
 He marched, his thoughts high-soaring o'er his fate,
 To smite our Athens. But our destinies
 Fortune reversed, and changed them, his for ours.
 Hyllus I left and valiant Iolaus
 Raising the victory-trophy unto Zeus.
 But me they charge to bring this man to thee,
 Being fain to glad thine heart : for 'tis most sweet
 To see a foe triumphant once brought low. 940

Alk. Loathed wretch, art come? Justice at last hath trapped thee !

Nay then, first turn thou hitherward thine head,
 And dare to look thine enemies in the face.
 No more art thou the master, but the thrall !
 Art thou he—for I would be certified—
 Who didst presume to load thine outrages,
 Caitiff, on my son—whereso now he be ?
 For wherein didst thou fear to outrage him,
 Who didst to Hades speed him living down,
 Didst send him, bidding him destroy thee Hydras 950
 And lions? All the ills thou didst devise
 I name not, for the tale were all too long.
 Nor yet sufficed thee this to dare alone ;
 But from all Hellas me and mine didst thou
 Still hunt, though suppliant to the Gods we sat,
 These stricken in years, those little children yet.

But men, and a free city, hast thou found,
Which feared thee not. Now die the dastard's death.
Yet is thy death all gain : thou ought'st to die
Not one death, who hast wrought ills manifold.

960

Mes. It may not be that thou shouldst slay this man !

Alk. Captive in vain then have we taken him !

Prithee what law withholdeth him from death ?

Mes. It pleaseth not the rulers of this land.

Alk. How ?—do these count it shame to slay their foes ?

Mes. Yea, such as they have ta'en in fight unslain.

Alk. Ay so ?—and this their doom hath Hyllus brooked ?

Mes. Should he, forsooth, defy this nation's will ?

Alk. He should no more have lived, nor seen the light.

Mes. Then was he wronged—to die not at the first.

970

Alk. So then 'twere just he suffered vengeance yet.

Mes. None is there, none, would put him now to death.

Alk. That will I—some one I account myself.

Mes. Thou shalt have bitter blame, if this thou do.

Alk. I love this city ; let no man gainsay :—

But, since this wretch hath come into mine hands,

There is of mortals none shall pluck him thence.

Wherefore who will shall rail on the overbold,

On her that nursed for woman thoughts too high :

Yet shall this deed by me be brought to pass.

980

Chor. A fearful hatred, yet a righteous, queen,

Thou hast against this man, I know full well.

Eur. Woman, be sure I will not cringe to thee,

Nor utter any word beside, to save

My life, whence cowardice might stain my name.

Yet of my will this feud I took not up.

I knew myself born cousin unto thee,

And kinsman unto Herakles thy son.

But, would I or would not, it was the God :—

Hera with this affliction burdened me.

990

But when I had made him once mine enemy,

And knew that I must wrestle out this strife,

Deviser I became of many pains,

Aye scheming—Night sat by, and counselled me—

How I might scatter and destroy my foes,

And have thenceforth for housemate fear no more,

Knowing thy son no cipher, but a man

In very deed ; for, though he be my foe,

Praise shall he have, a very hero he.

But, rid of him, was I not even constrained—

1000

Abhorred of these, ware of that heritage
 Of enmity—to move each scorpion-stone,
 By slaying, banishing, and plotting still?
 While this I did, my safety was assured.
 But thou, forsooth, had but my lot been thine,
 Hadst spared to persecute the infuriate whelps
 Left of thy foe the lion,—wisely rather
 Hadst let them dwell in Argos?—I trow not.
 Now therefore since, when I was fain to die,
 They slew me not, by all the Hellene laws
 My death pollution brings on whoso slays.
 Wisely did Athens spare me, honouring more
 God, far above all enmity of me.
 Thou art answered. I must be hereafter named
 The Haunting Vengeance, and the Heroic Dead.
 Thus is it with me—I long not for death,
 Yet to forsake life nowise shall I grieve.

1010

Chor. Suffer one word of exhortation, queen.
 Let this man go; for so the city wills.

Alk. But—if he die, and I obey her still?

1020

Chor. This should be best: yet how can this thing be?

Alk. This will I lightly teach thee:—I will slay,
 Then yield him dead to friends that come for him.
 Touching his corpse I will not cheat the state;
 But die he shall, and do me right for wrong.

Eur. Slay: I ask not thy grace. But I bestow
 On Athens, who hath spared, who shamed to slay me,
 An ancient oracle of Loxias,

Which in far days shall bless her more than seems.

1030

Me shall ye bury where 'tis fate-ordained,
 Before the Virgin's shrine Pallenian;

So I, thy friend and Athens' saviour aye,
 A sojourner shall lie beneath your soil,

But to these and their children sternest foe
 What time they march with war-hosts hitherward,
 Traitors to this your kindness:—such the guests
 Ye championed! Wherefore then, if this I knew,
 Came I, and feared not the God's oracles?
 Hera, methought, than these was mightier far,
 And would not so forsake me. Shed not ye
 Drink-offerings nor blood upon my tomb.
 For evil home-return will I give these
 For this. Of me shall ye have double gain,—
 My death shall be your blessing and their curse.

1040

Alk. Why linger then—if so ye must achieve
 Your city's safety and your children's weal,—
 To slay this man, who hear this prophecy?
 Himself the path of perfect safety points.
 Your foe he is, yet is his death your gain. [1050
 Hence with him, thralls. When ye have slain him, then
 To dogs ye ought to cast him!¹ Hope not thou
 To live, and drive me again from fatherland.

[*Exeunt guards with EURYSTHEUS.*

Chor. I also consent. On, henchman-train,
 March on with the doomed. No blood-guilt stain,
 Proceeding of us, on our kings shall remain.

[*Exeunt omnes.*

¹ This is inconsistent with 1023-4. Various explanations have been suggested. Might Euripides have written πόλει—'to Athens must ye yield him'?



THE DAUGHTERS OF TROY

ARGUMENT

WHEN *Troy was taken by the Greeks, the princesses of the House of Priam were apportioned by lot to the several chiefs of the host. But Polyxena they doomed to be sacrificed on Achilles' tomb, and Astyanax, the son of Hector and Andromachê, they hurled from a high tower. And herein is told how all this befell; and beside there is naught else save the lamentations of these Daughters of Troy, till the city is set aflame, and the captives are driven down to the sea.*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

POSEIDON, *the God of the Sea*

ATHENA

HECUBA, *wife of Priam King of Troy*

TALTHYBIUS, *herald of the host of Hellas*

KASSANDRA, *daughter of Hecuba, the prophetess whose doom was to be believed by none*

ANDROMACHÊ, *wife of Hector, mother of Astyanax*

MENELAUS, *king of Sparta, brother of Agamemnon*

HELEN, *wife of Menelaus*

CHORUS, *consisting of captive Trojan women*

Astyanax, infant son of Hector; guards, soldiers, attendants

SCENE :—The Greek camp before Troy.

THE DAUGHTERS OF TROY

HECUBA *discovered sleeping on the earth before* AGAMEMNON'S tent. Enter POSEIDON.

Pos. I come, Poseidon I, from briny depths
Of the Aegean Sea, where Nereids dance
In lovely-woven pacings of their feet.
For, since the day when round this Trojan land
Phoebus and I by line and plummet reared
Her towers of stone, from mine heart ne'er hath fled
Old lovingkindness for the Phrygians' city,
Smoke-shrouded now and wasted and brought low
By Argos' spear. For that Parnassian wright,
Phokian Epeius, by device of Pallas 10
Fashioned the horse whose womb was fraught with arms,
And sent within yon towers its ruin-load,
Whence of men yet unborn shall it be named
The Wooden Horse, enfolder of ambushed spears.
Forsaken are the groves: the shrines of Gods
With blood are dripping: on the altar-steps
Of City-warder Zeus lies Priam dead.
Measureless gold and Phrygian spoils pass down
Unto the ships Achaian. They but wait
A breeze fair-following, that in this tenth year 20
Children and wives with joy they may behold,
These Hellene men which marched against yon town.
I, overborne by Hera, Argos' Queen,
And by Athena, leagued for Phrygia's fall,
Ilium the glorious and mine altars leave.
For when grim desolation hath seized a town,
Blighted are worship and honour of the Gods.
With wails of captives multitudinous,
Marked for their lords by lot, Skamander moans:
Some have Arcadians won, Thessalians some, 30
Some fall to Athens' chieftains, Theseus' sons.
And all Troy's daughters not by lot assigned
Are 'neath these tents, for captains of the host
Set by: with these the Spartan, Tyndareus' child,
Helen, accounted captive righteously.

But, the utter-wretched if one craves to see,
 There lieth Hecuba before the gates,
 Down-raining many a tear for many woes,—
 Yet knows not that her child Polyxena
 Hath on Achilles' grave died piteously. 40
 Priam, her sons, are gone: Cassandra—whom
 Apollo left free virgin frenzy-driven,—
 Shall Agamemnon force, his leman-slave,
 Flouting the God's decree and righteousness.
 O city prosperous once, O hewn-stone towers,
 Farewell to you! Had Pallas, Zeus's child,
 Not ruined thee, firm-stablished wert thou yet!

Enter ATHENA.

- Ath.* Is it vouchsafed to bid the old feud truce,
 And speak unto my father's nearest kin,
 The mighty lord, honoured amongst the Gods? 50
- Pos.* It is: for ties of kindred, Queen Athena,
 Draw hearts with strong-constraining cords of love.
- Ath.* 'Tis well, King—thy relenting. Lo, the words
 I cast between us touch both thee and me.
- Pos.* Ha! bringest thou some message from the Gods?—
 A word from Zeus, or from some Heavenly One?
- Ath.* Nay, for Troy's sake, upon whose soil we tread,
 I seek thy might, to win it mine ally.
- Pos.* So?—hast thou cast out thine old enmity,
 To pity her, now that she is burnt with fire? 60
- Ath.* Nay—my petition first—wilt join with me?
 Wilt thou consent in that I fain would do?
- Pos.* Yea verily: yet I fain would know thy will.
 Com'st thou to help Achaian men or Phrygian?
- Ath.* Mine erstwhile foes the Trojans would I cheer,
 And deal Achaia's host grim home-return.
- Pos.* Yet why from mood to mood thus leapest thou,
 In random sort bestowing hate and love?
- Ath.* Know'st not how I was outraged, and my shrine?
- Pos.* I know—when Aias dragged Cassandra thence. 70
- Ath.* Unpunished of the Achaians—unrebuked!
- Pos.* Yea, though by thy might these laid Ilium low.
- Ath.* Therefore with thine help would I work their scathe.
- Pos.* Mine help awaits thy will. What wouldst thou do?
- Ath.* Deal them a home-return of evil speed.

Pos. Ere they leave Troy, or on the briny sea ?

Ath. When homeward-bound they sail for Ilium.

Then Zeus shall send down rain unutterable,
And hail, and from the welkin night of storm ;
And to me promiseth his levin-flame 80
To smite the Achaians and burn their ships with fire.

But thou—the Aegean sea-pass make thou roar
With surge and whirlpits of the ravening brine,
And thou with corpses choke Euboea's gulf ;
That Greeks may learn henceforth to reverence
My temples, and to fear all Gods beside.

Pos. This shall be : thy boon needs not many words.

The wide Aegean sea will I turmoil ;
The shores of Mykonus, the Delian reefs,
Skyros, and Lemnos, the Kapherean cliffs 90
With many dead men's corpses shall be strewn.
Pass thou to Olympus ; from thy father's hands
Receive the levin-bolts, and watch the hour
When Argos' host shall cast the hawsers loose.
Fool, that in sack of towns lays temples waste,¹
And tombs, the sanctuaries of the dead !
He, sowing desolation, reaps destruction.

[*Exeunt.*

HECUBA awaking, raises herself on her arm.

(*Str.* 1)

Hec. Uplift thou thine head, O fortune-accurst ; from the
earth upraise thy neck bowed low.

This ruin is not thy Troy, nor the lords are we now of Troy,
and the fate-winds blow 100

Not as of old ; thou must bear it, must drift with the stream,
as the tides of Fortune flow.

Breast not with thy prow the surges of life, who on waves of
disaster, alas ! art tost.

What remaineth to me but the misery-moan, whose country,
whose children, whose husband, are lost ?

O proud-swelling sail of a kingly line reefed now !—how a
thing but of nought thou wast !

(*Ant.* 1)

What shall I speak ?—what leave unsaid ?—woe's me for the
couch of the evil-starred ! 110

¹ Reading *ἐκπορθῶν*, with Tyrrell.

Lo, how I lie unrestfully stretched on the bed of calamity
 pitiless-hard !
 Alas for mine head, for my throbbing brows, for mine heart in
 its aching prison barred !
 I yearn to rock me and sway—as a bark whose bulwarks roll
 in the trough of the sea—
 To my keening, the while I wail my chant of sorrow and
 weeping unceasingly,
 The ruin-song never linked with the dance, the jangled music
 of misery. 120

*[Rises to her feet, and advances to front of stage.
 (Str. 2)*

O ship-prows rushing
 To Ilium, brushing
 The purple-flushing sea with swift oars,
 Till flutes loud-ringing,
 Till pipes dread-singing
 Proclaimed you swinging off Phrygian shores
 On hawsers plaited
 By Nile¹—ships fated
 To hunt the hated, the Spartan wife, 130
 Kastor's defaming,
 Eurotas' shaming,
 A Fury claiming King Priam's life !
 Though sons he cherished
 Fifty, he perished,
 His murderess she : and the misery-rife,
 Even me, hath she wrecked on the rocks of strife.

(Ant. 2)

Woe for my session
 Mid foes' oppression !
 Woe, slave-procession ! Woe, grey shorn head ! 140
 Come, wife grief-laden,
 Come bride, come maiden,
 O hearts once stayed on the brave hearts dead !
 Wail we our yearning
 O'er Ilium burning !—
 As o'er nestlings turning to her sheltering wing
 The mother screameth,
 My song-flood streameth—
 Not such, meseemeth, as wont to ring
 When I beat time, raising 150

¹ Reading *παίδευμα* (Tyrrell).

The Gods' sweet praising,
 And watched Troy's dances around me swing
 As I leaned on the sceptre of Priam my king.

Enter from the tents HALF-CHORUS of captive Trojan women.

(*Str.* 3)

Half-Chor. 1. Why call'st thou, Hecuba?—why dost thou cry?
 What mean thy words? The tents were filled
 With this lament thou wailest woefully,
 And fear through all hearts thrilled

Of Troy's sad daughters, who for thralldom wail,
 In yon pavilions while we bide.

Hec. Child, child, the Argive hands with oar and sail 160
 Are busy by the tide.

Half-Chor. 1. Ah me! what mean they? Will they straight-
 way bear us
 From fatherland far over sea?

Hec. I know not: I but bode the curse drawn near us,
 The doom of misery.

Half-Chor. 1. Woe!—we shall hear the summons, 'O ye
 daughters

Of Troy, from these pavilions come:
 The Argives launch their keels upon the waters,
 The sails are spread for home!'

Hec. Alas! let none call forth the frenzy-driven 170
 Cassandra, bacchant-prophetess,
 For Argive lust to shame, lest there be given
 Distress to my distress!

Troy, Troy, unhappy! down through depths of ruin
 Thou sinkest!—ah, unhappy they,
 Thy lost!—thy living pass to their undoing,
 Thy dead have passed away.

Enter SECOND HALF-CHORUS.

(*Ant.* 3)

Half-Chor. 2. Ah me! from Agamemnon's tents in dread
 I come, to hearken, queen, to thee,
 Lest haply now the Argive doom be said,—
 A doom of death for me;

Or haply at the galley-sterns the sweeps,
Run out, are swinging through the brine.

180

Hec. Child, I have come, since ne'er for terror sleeps
This haunted heart of mine.

Half-Chor. 2. How?—hath a Danaan herald hither wending
Spoken our doom? Whose thrall am wretched I
Ordained?

Hec. Thine anguish of suspense is ending:
The lot, thy fate, is nigh.

Half-Chor. 2. Ah me! what lord of Argos' folk shall lead me
Hence, or what chief of Phthia-land?

What island-prince to misery shall speed me
Far from the Trojan strand?

Hec. Woe! On what spot of earth shall I, eld-stricken, 190
Be thrall, a drone within the hive,
Weak as the corpse that breath no more shall quicken,
Ghost of the once-alive,

To keep with palsied hand a master's portal,
To nurse the babes of some proud foe?—
I, who was crowned with honours half-immortal
In Troy—ah, long ago!

(Str. 4)

Chor. Woe is thee!—with what wailings wilt thou lament thy
doom.

Of outrage-shame?
As I pace to and fro shall my shuttle thread no loom
In Troy again!

200

On the corpses of sons must I look my last—my last,
Whom worse ills wait,
To be thrall to the couch of a Greek—ah, ruin blast
That night, that fate!—

Or the water to draw from Peirênê's hallowed spring
With bondmaid's hand:—
Yet oh might I come unto where was Theseus king,
That heaven-blest land!—

But not to the swirls of Eurotas, not the bower 210
Of my worst foe,
Even Helen—oh not into Menelaus' power
Who brought Troy low!

(Ant. 4)

But the land of Peneius, Olympus' footstool fair,
 The hallowed vale—
 I have heard of the store of its wealth; earth's increase there
 Doth never fail.

It is there I would be, if on Theseus' sacred shore
 No home waits me.
 And the land of the Fire-god, that looks from Etna o'er 220
 Phoenicia's sea,

Even Sicily, mother of hills,—her fame I hear,
 Her prowess-pride :—
 Or content could I dwell in the land that coucheth near
 Ionia's tide,

Which is watered of Krathis, the lovely stream that stains
 Dark hair bright gold,
 Of whose fountains most holy her hero-nursing plains
 Win wealth untold.

Lo, from the Danaan war-host, laden 230
 With tidings, unto us draws nigh
 A herald speeding hastily.
 What hest brings he?—henceforth bondmaiden
 Of Dorian land am I!

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

Tal. On many journeyings, Hecuba, to and fro
 I have passed, thou knowest, 'twixt the host and Troy;
 Wherefore I come aforetime known to thee,
 Talthybius, with new tidings for thine ear.

Hec. It is come, friends—that which hath laid upon me
 Long fear as a haunting spell! 240

Tal. Your lots are cast—if this thing was your fear.

Hec. Woe!—of what city in Thessaly,
 Or in Kadmus' land, dost thou tell?

Tal. Ye have fallen each to her lord, not all together.

Hec. Unto whom hath each been allotted?—for whom
 Of Troy's dames waiteth a happy doom?

Tal. I know :—but ask of each, not all as one.

Hec. But my daughter—who winneth her for a prey,
 Cassandra the misery-bowed? O say!

Tal. King Agamemnon's chosen prize is she.

Hec. Ha! to his Spartan wife shall she be

A handmaid, a bondwoman?—woe is me!

Tal. Nay, but his concubine in secret love.

Hec. How?—Phoebus' maiden, whose guerdon-grace
Of the Golden-haired was virgin days!

Tal. The maid inspired smote him with shafts of love.

Hec. Fling, daughter, the temple-keys from thee, fling,
And the garlands around thy neck that cling,
Whose sacred arrayings thy form enring!

Tal. How? is a king's couch not high honour for her? 260

Hec. And the child that ye tore from mine arms so late—

Tal. Polyxena?—or whose lot wouldst thou ask?

Hec. Unto whom hath the lot's doom yoked her fate?

Tal. She is made ministrant to Achilles' tomb.

Hec. Woe's me!—then a sepulchre's servant I bare!

But what custom shall this be that Hellenes share,
Or what this statute?—O friend, declare.

Tal. Count thy child happy. It is well with her.

Hec. Doth she yet see light?—did thy word so sound?

Tal. She hath found her fate—deliverance from troubles. 270

Hec. But the wife of mine Hector the champion renowned—
What doom hath the hapless Andromachê found?

Tal. Achilles' son hath won her, chosen for him.

Hec. And to whom am I handmaid, whose snow-wreathed
brow

Over the prop of a staff must bow?

Tal. Thee Ithaca's king Odysseus won, his thrall.

Hec. Alas and alas! now smite on thy close-shorn head;

Now with thy rending nails be thy cheeks furrowed red! 280

Woe's me, whom the doom of the lots hath led

To be thrall to a foul wretch treacherous-hearted,

To the lawless monster, the foe of the right,

Whose double-tongued juggling, whose cursed sleight

Putteth light for darkness, and darkness for light,

By whose whisperings veriest friends are parted!—

Wail for me, daughters of Troy! I am ended

In utter calamity.

O wretch, who by doom of the lot have descended

To abysses of misery!

290

Chor. Thy fate thou knowest, queen: but of my lot
What Hellene, what Achaian, hath control?

Tal. Away!—Kassandra hither must ye bring

With all speed, thralls, that to the war-king's hand

Delivering her, I may thereafter lead
 Unto the rest the captive dames assigned.
 Ha!—therewithin what torch-glare leapeth high?
 Fire they their lair?—or what, yon dames of Troy?
 As looking to be haled from this land forth
 To Argos, do they burn themselves with fire,
 Being fain to die? In sooth the free-born soul
 In such strait chafeth fiercely against ill.
 Ho! open, lest a deed beseeming these,
 But to Achaians hateful, bring me blame.

300

Hec. Now nay, they fire no tent. My Maenad child
 Cassandra cometh rushing hitherward.

Enter KASSANDRA carrying burning torches.

(Str.)

Kas. Up with the torch!—give it me—let me render
 Worship to Phoebus!—lo, lo how I fling
 Wide through his temple the flash of its splendour:—
 Hymen! O Marriage-god, Hymen my king!
 Happy the bridegroom who waiteth to meet me;
 Happy am I for the couch that shall greet me;
 Royal espousals to Argos I bring:—
 Bridal-king, Hymen, thy glory I sing.

310

Mother, thou lingerest long at thy weeping,
 Aye makest moan for my sire who hath died,
 Mourn'st our dear country with sorrow unsleeping:
 Therefore myself for mine own marriage-tide
 Kindle the firebrands, a glory outstreaming,
 Toss up the torches, a radiance far-gleaming:—
 Hymen, to thee is their brightness upleaping;
 Hekatê, flash thou thy star-glitter wide,
 After thy wont when a maid is a bride.

320

(Ant.)

Float, flying feet of the dancers, forth-leading
 Revel of bridals: ring, bacchanal strain,
 Ring in thanksgiving for fortune exceeding
 Happy, that fell to my father to gain.
 Holy the dance is, my duty, my glory:
 Lead thou it, Phoebus; midst bay-trees before thee
 Aye have I ministered, there in thy fane:—
 Marriage-king, Hymen!—sing loud the refrain.

330

Up, mother, join thou the revel :—with paces
 Woven with mine through the sweet measure flee ;
 Hitherward, thitherward, thrid the dance-mazes :
 Sing ever ‘ Marriage-king !—Hymen ! ’ sing ye.
 Bliss ever chime through the notes of your singing,
 Hail ye the bride with glad voices outringing.
 Daughters of Phrygia, arrayed like the Graces,
 Hymn ye my bridal, the bridegroom for me
 Destined by fate’s everlasting decree.

340

Chor. Queen, wilt thou not restrain this Maenad maid,
 Lest with light step she trip to Argos’ host ?

Hec. Fire-god, in spousal-rites thou light’st the torch ;
 But O, a piteous flame thou kindlest now,
 Far from mine high hopes, far !—ah me, my child,
 How little of such marriage dreamed I ever
 For thee,—a captive, thrall of Argos’ spear !
 Give me the torch, it fits not that thou bear it
 In Maenad frenzy. Thy misfortunes, child,
 Healed not thy mind, but thou remain’st possessed.
 Daughters of Troy, bear in the torches : give
 Tears in exchange for these her marriage-hymns.

350

Kas. Mother, with wreaths of triumph crown mine head.
 Rejoice thou o’er my marriage with a king.
 Escort me to him : if thou find me loth,
 With violence thrust me : for, if Loxias lives,
 Deadlier than Helen’s shall my spousals be
 To Agamemnon, Achaia’s glorious king.
 Death shall I deal him, havoc of his home,
 Avenging so my brethren and my sire :—
 No more of that ; I will not sing the axe
 That on my neck, and others’ necks, shall fall,—
 The mother-murdering strife, my spousal’s fruit,
 Nor of the overthrow of Atreus’ house.
 But I will prove this city happier
 Than yon Achaians,—yea, possessed am I,
 Yet herein stand of bacchant ravings clear,—
 Who for one woman, for one wanton’s sake,
 In quest of Helen wasted lives untold.
 And this wise chief—for that he hated most
 He hath lost what most he loved, home-joys of children
 To his brother for a woman’s sake resigned,—
 And she a willing prey, no kidnapped victim !
 And, when these came unto Skamander’s banks,
 Fast died they, not for marches foeman-harried,

360

370

Nor home-land stately-towered. Whom Ares slew
 Saw not their children, nor by hands of wives
 In robes were shrouded : but in a strange land
 They lie. And in their homes the like befell :
 Wives widowed died, sires linger in lone halls 380
 Without sons, whom for nought they nurtured ; none
 Remains to spill earth's blood-gift at their tombs.
 Sooth, well the host hath earned such praise as this !
 Best left untold the deeds of shame—not mine
 Be voice of song to chant that evil tale !
 But, for the Trojans, first,—renown most fair,—
 For fatherland they died. Whom Ares slew,
 By friends their corpses to their homes were borne,
 And in the home-land earth's arms cradled them
 Compassed with duteous hands' observances. 390
 And whatso Phrygians not in battle died
 Ever with wife and children day by day
 Dwelt, joys whereof the Achaians tasted none.
 For Hector's woeful fate—hear thou the truth :
 He proved himself a hero ere he died ;
 And this the Achaians' coming brought to pass :
 Had they in Greece stayed, none had seen his prowess.
 And Paris wedded Zeus' child : had he not,
 His halls had hailed affiance unrenowned.
 Sooth, he were best shun war, whoso is wise : 400
 If war must be, his country's crown of pride
 Is death heroic, craven death her shame.
 Then make not moan, O mother, for thy land,
 Nor for my couch ; for my most bitter foes
 And thine shall I destroy by mine espousals.

al. Had Phoebus not with frenzy thrilled thy soul,
 Thou with such bodings shouldst not unchastised
 Speed from thy land my lords, the battle-chiefs. 410
 Lo, how these lofty ones, wise in repute,
 Are no whit better than the nothing-worth !
 For this most mighty king of allied Hellas,
 This Atreus' son, hath stooped him 'neath love's yoke
 For yon mad girl, of all maids ! Poor am I,
 Yet would I ne'er have gotten me her couch.
 Now, seeing thou hast not unshattered wit,
 Thy mocks at Argos and thy praise of Phrygia
 I fling to the winds to scatter. Follow me
 Unto the ships, our captain's goodly bride ! 420
 But thou (*to Hecuba*), whenso Laertes' seed desires

To take thee, follow. A virtuous woman's thrall¹
Shalt thou be, as say all that came to Troy.

Kas. Keen-witted varlet this! Why such repute
Have heralds, common loathing of mankind,
Menials that wait on despots and on cities?
Say'st thou my mother to Odysseus' halls
Shall come? Where be Apollo's bodings then,
Which say—to me no mystery—that she
Shall here die?—other shame I will not speak.² 430
Wretch!—he knows not what sufferings wait for him,
Such, that my woes and Phrygia's yet shall seem
As gold to him. Ten years to these past ten
Accomplished, shall he reach his land—alone;
Shall see where in the rock-rorge fell Charybdis
Hath made her lair,—where mountain-haunting Cyclops
Ravins,—see her that turneth men to swine,
Ligurian Circe,—shipwreck in salt seas,—
The lotus-cravings, the Sun's sacred kine,
Whose dead flesh with a human voice shall moan 440
A dire voice for Odysseus. To make end,
He shall see Hades living, 'scape the sea,
Yet, when he winneth home, find ills untold.
Yet—Odysseus' troubles, wherefore should I loose their
javelin-flight?
On, that I may haste to wed my bridegroom, Hades' spousal-
plight.
Vile one, vile shall be thy burial, darkling, not in light of day,
Thou that dream'st of high achievement, chief of Danaus'
sons' array.
Yea, and me, flung out a naked corse, the mountain's chasm-
rift
Foaming with the wintry floods, shall give to beasts, a ravin-
gift,
Hard beside my bridegroom's grave—Apollo's priestess-
handmaid, me! 450
Garlands of the God most dear unto me, mystic bravery,
Farewell: I have left the temple-feasts, my joy in days o'er-
past:
Hence, in rendings from my body, that, while yet my blood is
chaste,
I may give them to the blasts to waft to thee, O Prophet-
lord!

¹ *i.e.* slave to Penelopè.

² *i.e.* the manner of her death. See *Hecuba*, ll. 1259-73.

Where is Agamemnon's galley?—whither go to pass aboard?
Loiter not from eager watching for the breeze to fill the sail:
One of the Avengers Three is this that thou from Troy shalt
hale.

Fare-thee-well, my mother, weep not;—fatherland, beloved
name;—

Ye beneath the sod, my brethren;—father, of whose loins I
came;—

'Tis not long ere ye shall greet me: I unto my dead shall
come 460

Triumph-crowned from havoc of the Atreid house that
wrought our doom.

[Exit TALTHYBIUS with KASSANDRA.]

Chor. Grey Hecuba's attendants, mark ye not
Your mistress sinking speechless to the earth?
Will ye not help her, heartless ones, but leave
Her grey hairs prostrate? Bear ye up her frame.

Hec. Leave me—false kindness were unkindness, girls,—
So fallen to lie. Well may I sink 'neath all
I suffer, and have suffered, and shall suffer.
O Gods!—to sorry helpers I appeal;
Yet to invoke the Gods hath some fair show 470
When child of man on evil fortune lights.

Fain am I first to chant mine olden bliss;
So shall I wake more ruth for these my woes.

I was a princess, wedded to a king,
And mother I became of princely sons,
Nor ciphers these, but Phrygia's mightiest chiefs:
Trojan nor Greek dame, nor barbarian,
Might ever boast her mother of such as these.

Yet these I saw by Hellene spears laid low,
And shore these tresses at my dead sons' graves. 480

Their father Priam—not from other lips
I heard and wept his doom, but these mine eyes
Beheld him butchered on the altar-stone,
Troy sacked, the maiden daughters I had nursed
For pride of princely spousals without peer,
Torn from mine arms—for others reared I them!
No hope have I of being seen of them,
No, nor of seeing them for evermore.

And last, the topstone of my misery,
Old, and a slave, to Hellas shall I come; 490

And what tasks for mine eld are most unmeet,
To these will they appoint me, to keep keys,

A portress,—me, who gave to Hector birth!—
 Or knead their bread, and couch upon the ground
 The wasted form that knew a royal bed,
 With tattered rags to clothe my shrunken frame,
 Vesture unmeet for those once throned in bliss.
 O wretched I!—for one wife's bridal's sake
 What have I borne?—what am I yet to bear?
 O child, Cassandra, bacchant-fellow of Gods,
 Mid what disaster ends thy virgin state!
 And thou, my poor Polyxena, where art thou?
 Nor son nor daughter, none remains to help
 The wretched mother, of all born to her.
 Wherefore then raise me up?—by what hopes cheered?
 Guide me,—who once in Troy trod delicately,
 Who am a slave now,—to some earth-strown bed,
 Some rocky brow, to weep mine heart away,
 And hurl me then to death. Of all that prosper
 Account ye no man happy ere he die.

500

510
(Str. 1)

Chor. O Song-goddess, chant in mine ear
 The doom of mine Ilium: sing
 Thy strange notes broken with sob and tear
 That o'er sepulchres sigh where our dear dead lie:
 For now through my lips outwailing clear
 Troy's ruin-dirge shall ring,—
 How the Argives' four-foot wain¹
 Brought me ruin with spear and with chain,
 When clashed to the sky that armoury²
 That they left at our gates for our bane—
 That gold-decked thing!

520

And afar from the rock's sheer crest
 A shout did the Troy-folk fling—
 'Come, ye that from troubles have now found rest,
 And the sacred image bring
 To the Ilian Maid³ Zeus bare!
 Who then of the youths but was there?
 What hoary head but from home forth sped,
 With sons that ruin-snare
 Encompassing?

530

¹ The Wooden Horse.

² Alluding to the clang of arms from within, of which the Trojans in their infatuation took no heed, as they dragged it into the city. cf. Virgil *Aen.* ii, 243.

³ Pallas Athena, who sprang from the head of Zeus. See *Ion*, 452-6.

(Ant. I)

Swift streamed they all to the gate,
 The children of Dardanus' line,
 With the Argives' gift to propitiate
 The Maid supreme of the deathless team¹:
 And to Phrygia's curse, to the ambushed fate
 That was pent in the mountain-pine,
 The coils of the flax have they tied.
 Like a dark ship on did it glide
 To the marble-gleam of the fane, with the stream
 Of our fatherland's blood to be dyed,
 Even Pallas' shrine.

540

Now over their toil and their glee
 Spread black night's wings divine;
 But the flute still peaaleth merrily,
 Still wreathe the dancers and twine
 The fairy-footed maze;
 And the jubilant chant they raise;
 And the homes glow red with the splendours shed
 From the torches, with lurid blaze
 O'er the sleepers that shine.

550

(Epode)

In that hour to the Mountain Maiden,
 Unto Artemis, Zeus's Daughter,
 Around mine halls was I singing
 In the dance: but a fierce shout murder-laden
 Thrilled with foreboding of slaughter
 Pergamus' homes, and scared babes flying
 Round the skirts of their mothers their hands were
 flinging
 At that awful outcrying.

Then burst forth War from the place of his hiding, 560
 From the lair that Pallas had framed forth-springing;
 Troy's altar-pavements with slaughter were streaming.
 To her couches a ghastly guest came gliding—
 A spectre of headless men, Desolation—
 To the foster-mother of warriors bringing,
 Unto Hellas, a coronal triumph-gleaming,
 And a crown of grief to the Phrygian nation.

¹ Athena, one of whose titles was 'Pallas of the chariot-steeds.'

Lo Andromachê, Queen, draweth nigh on
 A wain of the foe borne high ;
 On her breast rocked, Hector's scion,
 Dear Astyanax, doth lie.

570

*Enter ANDROMACHÊ on a mule-car heaped with armour :
 her child in her arms.*

Hec. Whitherward on the height of the car dost thou ride,
 O hapless wife, with the arms at thy side
 Of Hector, and Phrygian battle-gear,
 The spoil of the spear,
 Wherewith that son of Achilles shall deck
 The shrines of Phthia from Phrygia's wreck ?

(Str. 2)

Andr. Achaians our masters to bondage are haling me.

Hec. Woe !

Andr. Why dost thou chant my paeon of misery ?

Hec. Alas !—

Andr. For our burden of woe,—

Hec. O Zeus !—

Andr. For the anguish we know !

580

Hec. Ah children !

Andr. No more are we !

(Ant. 2)

Hec. Gone is the olden prosperity, Troy is no more !

Andr. Ah wretch !

Hec. Woe's me for the hero-sons that I bore !

Andr. Woe !—

Hec. For griefs on mine head that fall !

Andr. Ah the pity of Ilium's wall—

Hec. With the smoke-pall shrouded o'er !

(Str. 3)

Andr. Come to me, husband, now !—

Hec.—Thou criest on him that is gone,
 O hapless, to Hades, my son—

Andr. Thy wife's defender thou !

(Ant. 3)

Hec. Thou on whom did Achaians heap
 Outrage, whom eldest I bare
 Unto Priam in days that were,
 To thine Hades receive me to sleep.

Andr. Sore are our yearnings, sharp anguish is come on us,
 O sorrow-stricken :

590

Ruined our city is ; cloud over cloud do our miseries thicken,
Sent by the hate of the Gods, since thy son was from Hades
delivered,¹

He for whose bridal accurst were the bulwarks of Ilium
shivered.

Pallas the Goddess is left amid corpses blood-boultered that
crowd her,²

Spoil for the vultures, and Troy 'neath the yoke-band of
thraldom hath bowed her.

Hec. Fatherland, hapless, I weep thee, who now, of our faces
forlorn,

Seest the pitiful end, and mine home where my children were
born.

Children, bereft of my city am I, and from me are ye going—
How wild is our wailing, our woe how deep !—

Tears upon tears are flowing, flowing,
Mid our desolate homes :—the dead only, unknowing 600
Of sorrow, forgetteth to weep.

Chor. How sweet unto afflicted souls are tears,
Lamentings, and the chant with sorrow fraught !

Andr. Mother of hero Hector, whose spear slew
In days past many an Argive, seest thou this ?

Hec. I see the Gods' work, who exalt on high
That which was naught, and bring the proud names low.

Andr. I with my child a spoil am haled ; high birth 610
Hath come to bondage—ah the change, the change !

Hec. Mighty is Fate :—from mine arms too but now
By violence torn Cassandra passed away.

Andr. Alas and alas !
Meseems a second Aias³ for thy child
Hath risen. Yet hast thou more afflictions still,—

Hec. Measure nor numbering whereof I know ;
For ill to rival ill comes evermore.

Andr. Slain at Achilles' tomb, Polyxena
Thy child is dead, a gift to a lifeless corpse.

Hec. O wretched I !—The riddle this that erst 620
Talthybius spake, not clearly—oh, too clear !

Andr. Myself beheld : I lighted from this car,
Veiled with my robes the corse, and smote my breast.

¹ Her statue stands deserted in her temple, which is polluted with heaps
of slain. See l. 15.

² Paris, spared at his birth, in spite of the prophecy that he should ruin
Troy.

³ See lines 69, 70.

Hec. Woe's me, my child, for thine unhallowed slaughter!

Woe yet again! How foully hast thou died!

Andr. She hath died—as she hath died: yet by a fate

More blest than mine, who yet live, hath she died.

Hec. Not one, my child, with sight of day is death;

For this is naught, in that is space for hope.

Andr. Mother, O mother, a fairer, truer word

Hear, that I may with solace touch thine heart:—

To have been unborn I count as one with death;

But better death than life in bitterness.

No pain feels death, which hath no sense of ills:

But who hath prospered, and hath fallen on woe,

Forlorn of soul strays far from olden bliss.

Thy child, as though she ne'er had looked on light,

Is dead, and nothing knoweth of her ills.

But I, who drew my bow at fair repute,

Won overmeasure, yet fair fortune missed.

All virtuous fame that women e'er have found,

This was my quest, my gain, 'neath Hector's roof.

First—be the woman smirched with other stain,

Or be she not—this very thing shall bring

Ill fame, if one abide not in the home:

So banished I such craving, kept the house:

Within my bowers I suffered not to come

The tinsel-talk of women, lived content

To be in virtue schooled by mine own heart;

With silent tongue, with quiet eye, still met

My lord; knew in what matters I should rule,

And where 'twas meet to yield him victory:

Whereof the fame to the Achaian host

Reached,—for my ruin; for, when I was ta'en,

Achilles' son would have me for his wife;

And I shall serve within his murderers' halls.

If from mine heart I thrust my love, mine Hector,

And to this new lord ope the doors thereof,

I shall be traitress to the dead: but if

I loathe this prince, shall win my masters' hate.

And yet one night, say they, unknits the knot

Of woman's hate of any husband's couch!

I scorn the wife who flings her sometime lord

Away, and on a new couch loves another!

Not even the steed, from her stall-mate disyoked,

Will with a willing spirit draw the yoke;

Yet speech nor understanding in the brute

630

640

650

660

Is found, whose nature lags behind the man.
 Thou, O mine Hector, wast my fitting mate
 In birth and wisdom, mighty in wealth and valour.
 Stainless from my sire's halls thou tookest me, 670
 And first didst yoke with thine my maiden couch.
 Now hast thou perished : sea-borne I shall be,
 Spear-won, to Hellas, unto thraldom's yoke.
 Hath not the doom then of Polyxena,
 Whom thou lamentest, lesser ills than mine ?
 With me not even is hope, which lingers last
 With all ; nor with far vision of good I cheat
 Mine heart, though sweet thereof the day-dream were.

Chor. Even as mine is thy calamity :

Thy wail doth teach me all my depth of woes. 680

Hec. Though never yet I stepped aboard a ship,

From pictures seen and hearsay know I this,
 That, if there lie a storm not passing great
 On mariners, for deliverance all bestir them :
 This standeth by the helm, that by the sail ;
 That baleth ship : but if the sea's full flood
 In turmoil overwhelm them, cowed by fate
 To the waves' driving they commit themselves.

So I withal, though many a woe is mine,
 Am dumb, and I refrain my lips from speech, 690

For the Gods' misery-surge o'ermastereth me.
 But, dear my daughter, let be Hector's fate,
 Seeing no tears of thine shall ransom him ;
 But honour him that is to-day thy lord,
 Tendering the sweet lure of thy winsomeness.
 If this thou do, thy friends shall share thy joy,
 And this my son's son shalt thou rear to man,
 To Troy a mighty aid, that children born
 Of thee hereafter may in days to come
 Build her, and yet again our city rise. 700

But—for a new fate followeth on the old—
 What servant of the Achaians see I stride
 Hitherward, herald of their new resolve ?

Enter TALTHYBIUS.

Cal. O wife of Hector, Phrygia's mightiest once,
 Abhor me not : sore loth shall I announce
 The Danaans' hest, the word of Pelops' sons.

Andr. What now ?—with what ill preface dost begin !

Cal. This child, have they decreed—how can I say it ?

Andr. Not—that he shall not have one lord with me?

Tal. None of Achaians e'er shall be his lord. 710

Andr. How?—here, a Phrygian remnant, shall he bide?

Tal. I know not gently how to break sad tidings!

Andr. Thanks for thy shrinking, save thou bring glad tidings.

Tal. Thy son must die—since thou must hear the horror.

Andr. Ah me!—a worse ill this than thralldom's couch!

Tal. Odysseus' speech to assembled Greeks prevailed—

Andr. O God! O God! what measureless ill is mine!

Tal. Warning them not to rear a hero's son.

Andr. May like rede dooming sons of his prevail!

Tal. He must be hurled from battlements of Troy. 720

Then let this be, so wiser shalt thou show,

Nor cling to him, but queenlike bear thy pain,

Nor, being strengthless, dream that thou art strong.

For nowhere hast thou help: needs must thou mark—

City and lord are gone; thou art held in thrall;

For battle with one woman strong are we.

Wherefore I would not see thee set on strife,

Nor doing aught should breed thee shame or spite,

Nor on the Achaians hurling malisons.

For, if to wrath thy words shall rouse the host, 730

This child shall find no burial, no, nor ruth.

Nay, hold thy peace, and meekly bow to fate;

So not unburied shalt thou leave his corse,

And kindlier the Achaians shalt thou find.

Andr. O darling child, O prized above all price,

Thou must leave thy poor mother, die by foes!

Thy father's heroism ruineth thee,

Which unto others was deliverance.

Ill-timed thy father's prowess was for thee!

O bridal mine and union evil-starred, 740

Whereby I came, time was, to Hector's hall,

Not as to bear a babe for Greeks to slay,

Nay, but a king for Asia's fruitful land!

Child, dost thou weep?—dost comprehend thy doom?

Why with thine hands clutch, clinging to my robe,

Like fledgling fleeing to nestle 'neath my wings?

No Hector, glorious spear in grip, shall rise

From earth, and bringing thee deliverance come,

No kinsman of thy sire, no might of Phrygians;

But, falling from on high with horrible plunge, 750

Unpitied shalt thou dash away thy breath.

O tender nursling, sweet to mother, sweet!

O balmy breath!—in vain and all in vain
 This breast in swaddling-bands hath nurtured thee.
 Vainly I travailed and was spent with toils!
 Now, and no more for ever, kiss thy mother,
 Fling thee on her that bare thee, twine thine arms
 About my waist, and lay thy lips to mine.

O Greeks who have found out cruelties un-Greek,
 Why slay this child who is guiltless wholly of wrong? 760
 Tyndareus' daughter—no Zeus' daughter thou!

Nay, but of many sires I name thee born:
 Child of the Haunting Curse, of Envy child,
 Of Murder, Death, of all earth-nurtured plagues!
 Thee never Zeus begat, I dare avouch,
 A curse to many a Greek, barbarians many!
 Now ruin seize thee, who by thy bright eyes
 Foully hast wasted Phrygia's glorious plains!
 Take him—bear hence, and hurl, if hurl ye will;—

Then on his flesh feast! For we perish now 770

By the Gods' doom, and cannot shield one child
 From death. O hide this wretched body of mine,
 Yea, cast into a ship. To a bridal fair

Have I attained—I, who have lost my son!

Chor. O hapless Troy, who hast lost unnumbered sons
 All for one woman's sake, for one loathed couch!

Tal. Come, child, from thy woeful mother's clasp
 Break away: to the height of the coronal fare

Of thy towers ancestral, for thy last gasp,
 As the doom hath decreed, must be rendered there. 780

Lay hold on him:—his should such heralding be

Who is made without pity, whose breast doth bear

A spirit more ruthless, that hateth to spare,

More than the spirit that dwelleth in me!

[*Exeunt* ANDROMACHÉ, and TALTHYBIUS with
 ASTYANAX.]

Hec. O child, O son of mine ill-starred son,
 Unrighteously reft thy life is gone

From thy mother and me! What life shall I live?

What do for thee, hapless one? All we can give

Are smittings of heads, and on breasts blows rained:

These only be ours! Woe's me for our town 790

And for thee! What scathe is of us unattained?

What lack we to hold us from fell destruction's nethermost
 hell—

From the swift plunge down?

(Str. 1)

Chor. O Telamon, king of the land where the wing of the bee
flits aye round Salamis' shore,—

Who didst make thee a home in the isle with the foam of the
sea ringed round and the surges' roar,

Which over the tide looketh up to the pride of the hallowèd
heights whose ridge first bore, 800

At Athena's hest, in the lordship-test, the olive grey,
A crown heaven-high, whose radiancy bright Athens to bind
her brows hath ta'en,—

Brother-chief didst thou go with the lord of the bow, with the
son of Alkmena, over the main¹

Unto Ilium bound, to raze to the ground our city, devising
our Ilium's bane,

When from Hellas afar thou didst wend to the war in
the olden day,

(Ant. 1)

When the flower of the land from Hellas' strand he led, whose
wrath was enkindled sore

For the steeds denied; and he stayed beside fair-rippling
Simois' flood the oar 810

Through the paths that had plashed of the sea, and lashed the
great stern-hawsers to earth's firm floor,

And bare from the ship the bow in his grip unerring
aye,

A deadly thing to the traitor king; and the walls plummet-
levelled of Phoebus in vain

With the fierce red blast of the fire he cast to earth, and he
harried the Trojan plain:

Yea, twice did it fall that the coronal of Dardanus' towers, by
spear-strokes twain

Shattered and rent, all blood-besprent in ruin lay.

(Str. 2)

In vain, O thou who art pacing now with delicate feet where
the chalices shine 820

All-golden, O Laomedon's heir,

Is the office thine to brim with the wine

The goblets of Zeus, a service fair,—

¹ Ganymede, son of King Laomedon, was caught up from earth to be cupbearer of Zeus, who gave to his father, in recompense, a team of immortal chariot-steeds. When the land was wasted by a dragon, the king promised these horses to Herakles, if he would slay it, but withheld the reward when the task was performed. So Herakles sailed against Troy with a host gathered from Hellas, and destroyed it.

And the land of thy birth in devouring flame is rolled !
 From her brine-dashed beaches a crying is heard,
 Where wail her daughters,—as shrieketh the bird
 O'er the nest of her brood left cold,— 830
 For their lost lords some, for their children's doom
 These, those for their mothers old.
 Gone are the cool baths dewy-plashing,
 And the courses where raced thy feet white-flashing :—
 But thou, with thy young face glory-litten
 With the beauty of peace, by the throne dost stand
 Of Zeus,—and the Hellene spear hath smitten Priam's
 land !

(Ant. 2)

O Love, O Love, who didst brood above Dardanian halls in
 the olden days, 840
 Thrilling the hearts of abiders in heaven,
 Unto what high place didst thou then upraise
 Troy, when to her was affinity given
 With the Gods by thee !—But the dealings of Zeus shall my
 tongue
 Attaint no more with the breath of blame :
 But the light of Aurora, the white-winged flame
 Held dear all mortals among,
 With baleful beam did on Troyland gleam, 850
 And her towers saw ruinward flung,
 Albeit in bridal bower she cherished
 A son of the land in her sight that hath perished,
 A spouse whom a chariot of gold star-splendid
 Ravished from earth, that his land might joy
 In hope—nay, all lovingkindness is ended
 Of Gods for Troy !

Enter MENELAUS with attendants.

Men. Hail, thou fair-shining splendour of yon sun, 860
 Whereby I shall make capture of my wife
 Helen,—for I am he that travailed sore,
 I Menelaus, and the Achaian host.
 Nor so much came I, as men deem, to Troy
 For her, but to avenge me on the man
 Who from mine halls stole—traitor guest !—my wife.
 He by heaven's help hath paid the penalty,
 He and his land, by Hellene spear laid low.

I come to hale the Spartan,—loth am I
 To name her wife, who in days past was mine ;— 870
 For in these mansions of captivity
 Numbered she is with others, Trojan dames.
 For they, by travail of the spear who won,
 Gave her to me, to slay, or, an I would,
 To slay not, but to take to Argos back.
 And I was minded to reprove from doom
 Helen in Troy, but with keel-speeding oar
 To bear to Greece, to yield her there to death,
 Avenging all my friends in Ilium slain.
 On, march to the pavilions, henchmen mine ; 880
 Bring her, and by her murder-reeking hair
 Hale forth to me : then, soon as favouring winds
 Shall blow, to Hellas will we speed her on.

[*Exeunt attendants.*]

Hec. O Earth's Upbearer, thou whose throne is Earth,
 Whoe'er thou be, O past our finding out,
 Zeus, be thou Nature's Law, or mind of man,
 To thee I pray ; for, treading soundless paths,
 In justice dost thou guide all mortal things !

Men. How now ?—what strange prayer this unto the Gods ?

Hec. Thanks, Menelaus, if thou slay thy wife ! 890
 Yet shun to look, lest she enthrall thee yet.
 She snareth men's eyes, she destroyeth towns,
 She burneth homes, such her enchantments are.
 I and thou know her—all who have suffered know.

Enter HELEN, haled forth by attendants.

Hel. O Menelaus, terror-fraught to me
 This prelude is ; for by thy servants' hands
 Forth of these tents with violence am I haled.
 But, though well-nigh I know me abhorred of thee,
 Fain would I ask what the decision is,
 Touching my life, of thee and of the Greeks. 900

Men. No nicely-balanced vote—with one accord
 Thee the host gave to me, the wronged, to slay.

Hel. May I then plead in answer hereunto,
 That, if I die, unjustly I shall die ?

Men. Not for debate, for slaying am I come.

Hec. Hear her, that lacking not this boon she die,
 Menelaus ; and to me vouchsafe to plead

Against her. Of her evil work in Troy
Nought know'st thou : thus arrayed shall all the tale
Doom her to death beyond all hope to 'scape.

910

Men. This asks delay : yet, if she fain would speak,
Let her. For thy words' sake I grant her this,
But not for her sake, let her be assured.

Hel. Perchance, or speak I well, or speak I ill,
Thou wilt not answer, counting me a foe.
Yet, as I deem—wouldst thou implead me now—
Thou wouldst accuse, so will I meet thy pleas,
Confronting accusations, thine and mine.
First, she brought forth the source of all these ills,
Who brought forth Paris : then, both Troy and me

920

The old king ruined, slaying not the babe
Alexander, baleful semblance of a torch.¹
Thereafter, how befell the sequel, hear :—
Judge he became of those three Goddesses.
This guerdon Pallas offered unto him—
'Troy's hosts to vanquish Hellas shalt thou lead.'

Lordship o'er Asia, and o'er Europe's bounds,
If Paris judged her fairest, Hera proffered.

Kypris, with rapturous praising of my beauty,
Cried, 'Thine she shall be if I stand preferred

930

As Fairest.' Mark what followeth therefrom :—
Kypris prevails : this boon my bridal brought
To Greece—ye are not to foreign foes enthralled,
Nor battle-crushed, nor 'neath a despot bowed.

But I by Hellas' good-hap was undone,
Sold for my beauty ; and I am reproached
For that for which² I should have earned a crown !

But, thou wilt say, I shun the issue still—
For what cause I by stealth forsook thine home.

He came, with no mean Goddess at his side ;

940

He came, mine evil genius,—be his name

Paris or Alexander, which thou wilt,—

Whom, wittol thou, thou leftest in thine halls,
Sailing from Sparta to the Cretan land !

Not thee, but mine own heart, I question next—

What impulse stirred me from thine halls to follow

That guest, forsaking fatherland and home.

Punish the Goddess ; be thou mightier

¹ Hecuba, just before the birth of Paris, dreamed that she bore a blazing torch, which set Troy on fire.

² Or 'By those from whom.'

Than Zeus, who ruleth all the Gods beside,
 Yet is her slave!—so, pardon is my due. 950
 But,—since thou mightest here find specious plea,—
 When Alexander dead to Hades passed,
 I, of whose couch the Gods were careless now,
 Ought from his halls to have fled to the Argive ships.
 Even this did I essay : my witnesses
 Gate-warders are, and watchmen of the walls,
 Who found me oftentimes from the battlements
 By cords to earth down-climbing privily.
 Yea, my new lord—yon corpse Deiphobus,—
 Kept in the Phrygians' despite his bride. 960
 How then, O husband, should I justly die
 By thine hand, since by force he wedded me,
 And my life there no victor's triumph was,¹
 But bitter thrall? If thou wouldst overbear
 Gods, this thy wish is folly unto thee.

Chor. Stand up for children and for country, Queen!
 Shatter her specious pleading; for her words
 Ring fair—a wanton's words; foul shame is this.

Hec. First, champion will I be of Goddesses,
 And will convict her of a slanderous tongue. 970
 Never, I ween, would Hera, or the Maid,
 Pallas, have stooped unto such folly's depth,
 That Hera would to aliens Argos sell,
 Or Pallas bow 'neath Phrygians Athens' neck.
 For sport they came and mirth in beauty's strife
 To Ida. Why should Goddess Hera yearn
 So hotly for the prize of loveliness?
 That she might win a mightier lord than Zeus?
 Or sought Athena mid the Gods a spouse,
 Who of her sire, for hate of marriage, craved 980
 Maidenhood?—Charge not Goddesses with folly,
 To gloze thy sin: thou cozenest not the wise.
 And Kypris, say'st thou—who but laughs to hear?—
 Came with my son to Menelaus' halls!
 How, could she not in peace have stayed in heaven,
 And thee—Amyklæ too—to Ilium brought?
 My son in goodlihead had never peer:
 Thou sawest, and thine heart became thy Kypris!
 All folly is to men their Aphroditê:
Sensual—senseless—consonant they ring! 990

¹ Or, according to Paley—'And mine own gifts no victor's triumph brought.'

Him in barbaric bravery sawest thou
 Gold-glittering, and thy senses were distraught.
 For with scant state in Argos didst thou dwell ;
 But, Sparta left afar, the Phrygians' town
 Thou hopedst, till¹ with gold it flowed, to flood
 With torrent waste : Menelaus' halls sufficed
 Not thee for all thine insolence of pomp.

And my son, say'st thou, haled thee hence by force !

What son of Sparta heard ? What rescue-cry
 Didst thou upraise, though Kastor, yet a youth, 1000
 Lived, and his brother, starward rapt not yet ?

And when to Troy thou cam'st, and on thy track
 The Argives, and the strife of raining spears,
 If tidings of his prowess came to thee,

Menelaus wouldst thou praise, to vex my son
 Who in his love such mighty rival had :

But, if the Trojans prospered, naught was he.
 Still watching fortune's flight, 'twas aye thy wont
 To follow her—not virtue's path for thee !

And thou with cords wouldst steal thy liberty, 1010
 From the towers climbing, as one loth to stay !

Where wast thou found with noose about thy neck,
 Or whetting steel, as a true-hearted wife

Had done for yearning for her spouse of old ?

Yet many a time and oft I counselled thee :—

' Daughter, go forth from Troy : my sons shall wed

New brides ; and thee to the Achaian ships

Will I send secretly : so stay the war

'Twixt Greece and us.' But this was gall to thee.

For thou didst flaunt in Alexander's halls, 1020

Didst covet Asia's reverent courtesies—

Proud state for thee !—And yet hast thou come forth

Costly arrayed, looked on the selfsame sky

As thy wronged spouse. O wanton all-abhorred,

Who oughtest, abject, and with garments rent,

Quaking with fear, with shaven head to have come,

Having regard to modesty, above

Bold shamelessness, for thy transgressions past !

Menelaus,—so to sum mine argument,—

Crown Greece, by slaying as beseemeth thee 1030

Yon woman : so ordain to all her sisters

This law—*the traitress to her lord shall die.*

Chor. Prince, worthily of thy fathers and thine house

¹ So Tyrrell : Paley renders, ' though with gold it flowed (already).'

Punish her : show thee unto foes unflinching.

So spurn the gibe of Greece that calls thee *woman*.

Men. Herein is thy conclusion one with mine,
That willingly she went forth from mine halls
For a strange couch ; and Kypris for vain show
Fills out her plea. Thou, to the stoners hence :
The Achaians' long toils in an hour requite
Dying : so learn to put me not to shame.

1040

Hel. Oh, by thy knees, impute not unto me
Heaven's visitation ! Slay me not, but pardon !

Hec. Thine allies whom she slew betray not thou :
For them I pray thee, and their children's sake.

Men. Enough, grey queen : I give no heed to her ;
But bid mine henchmen to the galley sterns
Lead her, wherein her voyaging shall be.

Hec. Oh not the same deck let her tread with thee !

Men. How, should she sink it—heavier than of old ? 1050

Hec. Lover is none but loveth evermore.

Men. Nay, love but lives while lives the loved one's faith.

Yet as thou wilt it shall be : on one ship
With me she shall not step : thou counsellest well.
And, when she wins to Argos, in foul sort
The foul shall die, as meet is, and shall teach
All women chastity :—not easy this ;
Yet her destruction shall with terror smite
Their folly, viler though they be than she.

[Exit MENELAUS with HELEN.
(*Str.* 1)

Chor. So then thy temple in Troy fair-gleaming,
And thine altar of incense heavenward steaming
Hast thou rendered up to our foes Achæan,
O Zeus, and the flame of our sacrificing,
And the holy burg with its myrrh-smoke rising,
And the ivy-mantled glens Idaean
Overstreamed with the wan snow riverward-rushing,
And the haunted bowers of the World's Wall,¹ flushing 1070
With the first shafts flashed through the empyrean !

(*Ant.* 1)

Thine altars are cold ; and the blithesome calling
Of the dancers is hushed ; nor at twilight's falling
To the nightlong vigils of Gods cometh waking.
They are vanished, thy carven images golden,

¹ The range of Mount Ida, the supposed boundary of the world on the east (Paley).

And the twelve moon-feasts of the Phrygians holden.

Dost thou care, O King, I muse, heart-aching,—
 Thou who sittest on high in the far blue heaven
 Enthroned,—that my city to ruin is given, [1080
 That the bands of her strength is the fire-blast breaking?
 (Str. 2)

O my belovèd, O husband mine,
 Thou art dead, and unburied thou wanderest yonder,
 Unwashen!—but me shall the keel thro' the brine
 Waft, onward sped by its pinions of pine,
 To the horse-land Argos, where that stone wonder
 The Cyclop walls cleave the clouds asunder.
 And our babes at the gates, in a long, long line,
 Cling to their mothers with wail and with weeping that cannot
 avail— 1090
 'O mother,' they moan, 'alone, alone, woe's me! the
 Achaeans hale

Me from thy sight—from thine—
 To the dark ship, soon o'er the surge to be riding,
 To Salamis gliding,
 To the hallowed strand,
 Or the Isthmian hill 'twixt the two seas swelling,
 Where the gates of the dwelling
 Of Pelops stand!'

(Ant. 2)

Oh that, when, far o'er the mid-sea sped, 1100
 Menelaus' galley is onward sailing,
 On the midst of her oars might the thunderbolt dread
 Crash down, the Aegean's wildfire red,
 Since from Ilium me with weeping and wailing
 Unto thralldom in Hellas hence is he haling:
 And lo, Zeus' daughter, like maid unwed,¹
 Hath joy of her mirrors of gold, and her state as of right doth
 she hold!

Nevermore may he come to Laconia, home of his sires: be his
 hearth aye cold! 1110

Never Pitanê's streets may he tread,
 Nor the Goddess's temple brazen-gated,
 With the evil-fated
 For his prize, who for shame
 Unto all wide Hellas's sons and daughters,

¹ The Chorus have no faith in Menelaus' intention of putting Helen to death, but foresee that she will be (as actually befell) restored to her old position.

And for woe to the waters
Of Simoïs, came!

Woe's me, woe's me!
Afflictions new, ere the old be past,
On our land are falling! Behold and see,
Ye wives of the Trojans, horror-aghast, 1120
Dead Astyanax, by the Danaans cast
From the towers, slain pitilessly.

*Enter TALTHYBIUS, with attendants bearing corpse of
ASTYANAX on HECTOR'S shield.*

Tal. One galley's oars yet linger, Hecuba,
Ready to waft unto the Phthian shores
The remnant of Achilles' scion's spoils.
But Neoptolemus' self hath sailed, who heard
Tidings of wrong to Peleus, how the seed
Of Pelias, even Akastus, exiles him.
Wherefore, too hasty to vouchsafe delay,
He went, Andromachê with him, who hath drawn 1130
At her departing many a tear from me,
Wailing her country, crying her farewell
To Hector's tomb. And she besought the prince
To grant his corpse a grave who from the walls
Hurled down, thine Hector's child, gave up the ghost.
And the Achaians' dread, this brass-lapped shield,
Wherewith his father fenced his body round,
She prayed him not to Peleus' hearth to bear,
Nor to Andromachê's new bridal bower,
A grief to see for her that bare the dead; 1140
But, in the stead of cedar chest or stone,
In this to entomb her child, and to thine arms
To give, to shroud the corpse with robes, and crown
With wreaths, as best thou canst of these thy means,
Since she hath gone, and since her master's haste
Withheld herself from burying her child.
I therefore, when thou hast arrayed the corpse,
Will heap his mound, and set thereon a spear.
Thou then with speed perform the task assigned.
Sooth, I have lightened of one toil thine hands; 1150
For, as I passed o'er yon Skamander's streams,
I bathed the corpse, and cleansed the wounds thereof.
Now will I go, and dig for him a grave,

That, shortened so, thy work and mine withal,
To one end wrought, may homeward speed the oar.

[Exit TALTHYBIUS.]

Hec. Set Hector's shield fair-rounded on the earth,
A woeful sight unsweet for me to see.
O ye who more in spears than wisdom boast,
Fearing this child, Achaians, why have ye wrought
Murder unheard-of?—lest he raise again 1160
Our fallen Troy? So then ye were but naught
When, even while Hector triumphed with the spear,
And countless hands struck with him, still we perished;
But now, Troy taken, all the Phrygians slain,
Ye dread this little child! Out on the fear
Which feareth, having never reasoned why!
Ah darling, what ill death is come on thee!
Hadst thou for Troy been slain, when thou hadst known
Youth, wedlock's bliss, and godlike sovereignty,
Blest wert thou—if herein may aught be blest. 1170
But now—one glimpse, one fancy's grasp, O child,
Then, all unknown, untasted, that was thine!¹
Poor child, how sadly thine ancestral walls,
Bulwark of Loxias,² from thine head have shorn
The curls that oft thy mother softly smoothed
And kissed, wherefrom through shattered bones forth grins
Murder—a ghastliness I cannot speak!
O hands, how sweet the likeness to your sire
Ye keep!—limp in your sockets, lo, ye lie.
Dear lips, that babbled many a child-boast once, 1180
Ye are dead!—'Twas false, when, bounding to my robes,
'Mother,' thou saidst, 'full many a curl I'll shear
For thee, and troops of friends unto thy tomb
Will lead, to cry the loving last farewell.'
Not I of thee, but thou, the young, of me,—
Old, homeless, childless,—wretched corpse, art buried.
Ah me, the kisses, and my nursing-cares,

¹ This passage is a great *crux* of commentators. Hermann's interpretation may be rendered—

'But now thy soul knows not that once it saw
And marked them: thine they were, unused of thee.'

implying that only experiences, not mere hopes or expectations, formed the spirit's treasures of memory in Hades.

Others would put a comma after *τε*, so rendering—

'But now—far off thou hast seen and marked them, child,
Not living known nor touched thine heritage.'

² Built by Apollo.

Thy love-watched slumbers,¹—gone! What word, ah what,
Shall bard inscribe of thee upon thy tomb?

‘This child the Argives murdered in time past 1190
Through fear’—the inscription shall be Hellas’ shame!
Yet thou, of thy sire’s wealth though nought thou hast,
Shalt in thy burial have his brazen targe.

Ah shield that keptest Hector’s goodly arm
Safe, thine heroic warder hast thou lost!
How dear his imprint on thine handle lies!
Dear stains of sweat upon thy shapely rim,
Which oft mid battle’s toil would Hector drip
Down from his brow, as to his beard he pressed thee!
Come, bring ye adorning for the hapless corse 1200
Of that ye have: our fortune gives no place
For rich array: mine all shalt thou receive.

A fool is he, who, in prosperity
Secure, rejoices: fortune, in her moods,
Even as a madman, hither now, now thither,
Leaps, and none prospers ever without change.

Chor. Lo, ready to thine hand, from spoils of Troy,
They bring adornings on the dead to lay.

Hec. Child, not for victory with steeds or bow 1210
Over thy fellows,—customs which thy folk
Honour, yet not unto excess pursue,—
The mother of thy sire adorneth thee
With gauds from wealth once thine, now reft from thee
By Helen god-accurst: she hath slain withal
Thy life, and brought to ruin all thine house.

Chor. Alas and alas! Mine heart dost thou wring, dost thou wring
Who in days overpast wert our city’s mighty king!

Hec. In that wherein thou shouldst have clad thy form 1220
For marriage, wedding Asia’s loveliest,
Splendour of Phrygian robes, I swathe thee now.
And thou, who wast the glorious mother once
Of countless triumphs, Hector’s shield beloved,
Receive thy wreath: thou with the dead shalt die
Undying, worthy of honour, far beyond
The arms Odysseus, crafty villain, won.

Chor. Alas for thee!

O child, our sorrow, the earth shall now
Receive thee to rest!—wail, mother, thou!

¹ Or, reading ὕπνοι τ’ ἀϋπνοί,—‘my broken slumbers’—disturbed by infant cries. cf. Aeschylus, *Cho.* 751. Tyrrell suggests ἀϋπνοί τε κλίνας, ‘the sleepless nights.’

- Hec.* O misery!
- Chor.* Wail the keen for the dead!
- Hec.* Ah me, ah me! 1230
- Chor.* Ah griefs whose remembrance shall ne'er be fled!
- Hec.* Some of thy wounds with linen bands I bind,
A sorry leech, in name but not in deed;
Some shall thy father tend amongst the dead.
- Chor.* Smite thou, O smite with thine hand!
Rain blows of thine hand on thine head—alas!
- Hec.* O daughters beloved of my land—
- Chor.* Speak the word through thy lips that is panting to pass.
- Hec.* For nought the Gods took thought, save woes to me 1240
And Troy, above all cities loathed of them.
In vain we sacrificed! Yet, had not God
O'erthrown us so, and whelmed beneath the earth,¹
We had faded fameless, never had been hymned
In lays, nor given song-themes to the after-time.
Pass on, lay ye in a wretched tomb the corpse;
For now it hath the garlands, dues of death.
Yet little profit have the dead, I trow,
That gain magnificence of obsequies.
'Tis but the living friends' vaingloriousness. 1250
- [The corpse is carried to burial.]*
- Chor.* Ah me! ah me!
Ah hapless mother, what goal she hath won²
Of all the proud hopes builded on thee!
O thou who wert born to exceeding bliss,
Thou hero's son,
What awful death for thy dying is this!
- What ho! what ho!
Whom see I on Ilium's tower-crowned wall,
And the tossing torches fierily glow
In the hands of them?—some new evil, I trow
Shall on Troy-town fall.

Enter TALTHYBIUS above, with soldiers bearing torches.

- Tal.* Captains, to whom the charge is given to fire 1260
This city of Priam, idle in your hands

¹ From (unsatisfactory) conjectural reading. Original hopelessly lost.

² Or, retaining *κατέκναψε* of MSS.—'in wrack undone Are shattered her proud' etc.

Keep ye the flame no more : thrust in the torch,
 That, having low in dust laid Ilium's towers,
 We may with gladness homeward speed from Troy.
 Ye—twofold aspect this one hest shall bear—
 Children of Troy, forth, soon as loud and clear
 The chieftains of the host the trumpet sound,
 To yon Greek ships, for voyage from the land.
 And thou, O grey-haired dame most evil-starred,
 Follow. These from Odysseus come for thee ;
 For the lot sends thee forth the land, his slave.

1270

Hec. Ah wretched I!—the uttermost is this,
 The deepest depth of all my miseries ;
 I leave my land ; my city is aflame !
 O agèd foot, sore-striving press thou on
 That I may bid mine hapless town farewell.
 O Troy, midst burgs barbaric erst so proud,
 Soon of thy glorious name shalt thou be spoiled.
 They fire thee, and they hale us forth the land,
 Thralls ! O ye Gods!—why call I on the Gods ?
 For called on heretofore they hearkened not.
 Come, rush we on her pyre, for gloriously
 So with my blazing country should I die.

1280

Tal. Hapless, distraught art thou of thine afflictions !
 Hence hale her—spare not. To Odysseus' hand
 Her must ye give, and lead to him his prize.

(Str. 1)

Hec. Woe is me ! ah for the woes that be mine !
 Kronion, O Phrygian Lord, our begetter, our father,
 Dost thou see how calamity's tempests around us gather,
 Unmerited doom of Dardanus' line ?

1290

Chor. He hath seen : yet is Troy, the stately city,
 A city no more, destroyed without pity.

(Ant. 1)

Hec. Woe is me, woe, and a threefold woe !
 Ilios is blazing, the ramparts of Pergamus crashing
 Down, with the homes of our city, mid flames far-flashing
 Over their ruins, a furnace-glow !
 With its wide-winged blackness the heaven's face covering,
 O'er our spear-stricken land is the smoke-cloud hovering.

(Mesode)

In madness of ruin-rush earthward they reel, [1300
 Our halls, 'neath the fire and the foemen's steel.

(Str. 2)

Hec. Hear, children, O hearken your mother's crying !

Chor. To the dead dost thou wail—can they hear thine entreating?

Hec. Low on the ground are mine old limbs lying,
And mine hands, and mine hands on the earth are beating!¹

Chor. Earthward my knee, as I follow thee, bows,
As I cry to the dweller in Hades' House,
To mine hapless spouse.

Hec. I am haled—I am borne—

Chor. Sorrow rings in thy cry! 1310

Hec. From my land unto mansions of slavery.
O hapless I!

O Priam, O Priam, slain without tomb,
Without friend, nought, nought dost thou know of my doom!

Chor. For the blackness of death hath shrouded the eyne
Of the righteous by hand of the impious slain.

Hec. O fanes of the Gods, dear city mine!

Chor. Woe!—wail the refrain!

(*Ant.* 2)

Hec. The death-flame, the spear, in your midst have
dominion,—

Chor. Swift-falling to earth your memorial shall vanish,—

Hec. And the dust, o'er the welkin wide-stretching its pinion,
Mine eyes from the home of my yearning shall banish. [1320

Chor. And the name of my land shall be heard not, and wide
Shall her children be scattered; no more doth abide
Troy's woeful pride.

Hec. Did ye mark—did ye hear?

Chor. Crashed Pergamus² down!

Hec. The earthquake thereof shall engulf the town!—
O sorrow's crown!

O tottering, tottering limbs, upbear

My steps; to the life of bondage fare.

1330

Chor. O hapless Troy!—Yet down to the strand
And the galleys Achaian thy feet must strain.

Hec. O land—of my children the nursing-land!

Chor. Woe!—wail the refrain!

[*Exeunt omnes.*

¹ This was done in invocation of the dead, as though to excite their attention.

² The citadel of Troy.



ELECTRA

ARGUMENT

WHEN Agamemnon returned home from the taking of Troy, his adulterous wife Klytemnestra, with help of her paramour Aegisthus, murdered him as he entered the silver bath in his palace. They sought also to slay his young son Orestes, that no avenger might be left alive; but an old servant stole him away, and took him out of the land, unto Phocis. There was he nurtured by king Strophius, and Pylades the king's son loved him as a brother. So Aegisthus dwelt with Klytemnestra, reigning in Argos, where remained now of Agamemnon's seed Electra his daughter only. And these twain marked how Electra grew up in hate and scorn of them, indignant for her father's murder, and fain to avenge him. Wherefore, lest he should wed a prince, and persuade husband or son to accomplish her heart's desire, they bethought them how they should forestall this peril. Aegisthus indeed would have slain her, yet by the queen's counsel forebore, and gave her, in marriage to a poor yeoman, who dwelt far from the city, as thinking that from peasant husband and peasant children there should be nought to fear. Howbeit this man, being full of loyalty to the mighty dead and reverence for blood royal, behaved himself to her as to a queen, so that she continued virgin in his house all the days of her adversity. Now when Orestes was grown to man, he journeyed with Pylades his friend to Argos, to seek out his sister, and to devise how he might avenge his father, since by the oracle of Apollo he was commanded to do.

And herein is told the story of his coming, and how brother and sister were made known to each other, and how they fulfilled the oracle in taking vengeance on tyrant and adultrass.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PEASANT, *wedded in name to Electra*

ELECTRA, *daughter of Agamemnon*

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon*

PYLADES, *son of Strophius king of Phocis*

KLYTEMNESTRA, *murderess of her husband Agamemnon*

OLD MAN, *once servant of Agamemnon*

MESSENGER, *servant of Orestes*

THE TWIN BRETHREN, *Kastor and Pollux, sons of Zeus*

CHORUS, *consisting of women of Argos*

Attendants of Orestes and Pylades; handmaids of Klytemnestra

SCENE :—Before the Peasant's cottage on the borders of Argolis.

ELECTRA

Enter PEASANT from the cottage.

Peas. Hail, ancient Argos, streams of Inachus,
Whence, with a thousand galleys battle-bound,
To Troyland's shore King Agamemnon sailed,
And, having slain the lord of Ilian land,
Priam, and taken Dardanus' burg renowned,
Came to this Argos, and on her high fanes
Hung up unnumbered spoils barbarian.
In far lands prospered he ; but in his home
Died by his own wife Klytemnestra's guile,
And by Aegisthus' hand, Thyestes' son. 10
So, leaving Tantalus' ancient sceptre, he
Is gone, and o'er the realm Aegisthus reigns,
Having the king's wife, child of Tyndareus.
Of those whom Troyward bound he left at home,
The boy Orestes and the maid Electra,
One his sire's foster-father stole away,
Orestes, doomed to die by Aegisthus' hand,
And Phocis-ward to Strophius sent, to rear :
But in her father's halls Electra stayed, 20
Till o'er her mantled womanhood's first flush,
And Hellas' princes wooing asked her hand.
Aegisthus then, in fear lest she should bear
To a prince a son, avenger of Agamemnon,
Kept her at home, betrothed her unto none.
But, since this too with haunting dread was fraught,
Lest she should bear some noble a child of stealth,
He would have slain her ; yet, how cruel soe'er,
Her mother saved her from Aegisthus' hand ;—
A plea she had for murder of her lord,
But feared to be abhorred for children's blood :— 30
Wherefore Aegisthus found out this device :
On Agamemnon's son, who had fled the land,
He set a price, even gold to whoso slew ;
But to me gives Electra, her to have
To wife,—from sires Mycenian sprung indeed

Am I, herein I may not be contemned ;¹
 Noble my line is, I in this world's goods
 Am poor, whereby men's high descent is marred,—
 To make his fear naught by this spouse of naught.
 For, had she wed a man of high repute,
 Agamemnon's slumbering blood-feud had he waked ;
 Then on Aegisthus vengeance might have fallen.
 But never I—Kypris my witness is—
 Have shamed her couch : a virgin is she yet.
 Myself think shame to take a prince's child
 And outrage—I, in birth unmeet for her !
 Yea, and for him I sigh, in name my kin,
 Hapless Orestes, if to Argos e'er
 He come, and see his sister's wretched marriage.
 If any name me fool, that I should take
 A young maid to mine home, and touch her not,
 Let him know that he meteth chastity
 By his own soul's base measure—base as he.

40

50

Enter ELECTRA, with a water-jar upon her head.

El. Hail, black-winged Night, nurse of the golden stars,
 Wherein this pitcher poised upon mine head
 I bear, to bring the river's fountain-flow,—
 Not for that of constraint I am bowed to this,
 But to show Heaven Aegisthus' tyranny,
 And wail to the broad welkin for my sire.
 For mine own mother, Tyndareus' baleful child,
 Thrust me from home, for grace to this her spouse,
 And, having borne Aegisthus other sons,
 Thrusteth aside Orestes' rights and mine.

60

Peas. Why toil'st thou thus, O hapless, for my sake,
 Nor dost refrain from labour,—thou of old
 Royally nurtured, though I bid thee so ?

El. Kind I account thee even as the Gods,
 Who in mine ills hast not insulted me.
 High fortune this, when men for sore mischance
 Find such physician as I find in thee.
 I ought, as strength shall serve, yea, though forbid,
 To ease thy toil, that lighter be thy load,
 And share thy burdens. Work enow without
 Hast thou : beseems that I should keep the house

70

¹ Or, 'gainsaid' (Keene).

In order. When the toiler cometh home,
'Tis sweet to find the household fair-arrayed.

Peas. If such thy mind, pass on : in sooth not far
The spring is from yon cot. I at the dawn
Will drive my team afield and sow the glebe.
None idle—though his lips aye prate of Gods—
Can gather without toil a livelihood.

80

[*Exeunt PEASANT and ELECTRA.*]

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

Or. Pylades, foremost thee of men I count
In loyalty, love, and friendship unto me.
Sole of Orestes' friends, thou honouredst me
In this my plight, wronged foully by Aegisthus,
Who, with my utter-baneful mother, slew
My sire. At Phoebus' oracle-hest¹ I come
To Argos' soil, none privy thereunto,
To pay my father's murderers murder-wage.
This night o'erpast to my sire's tomb I went ;
There tears I gave and offerings of shorn hair,
And a slain sheep's blood poured upon the grave,
Unmarked of despot-rulers of this land.
And now I set not foot within their walls,
But blending two assays in one I come
To this land's border,—that to another soil
Forth I may flee, if any watch and know me ;
To seek withal my sister,—for she dwells
In wedlock yoked, men say, nor bides a maid,—
To meet her, for the vengeance win her help,
And that which passeth in the city learn.
Now—for the Dawn uplifteth her bright eyne—
Step we a little from this path aside.
Haply shall some hind or some bondswoman
Appear to us, of whom we shall enquire
If in some spot hereby my sister dwell.
Lo, yonder I discern a serving-maid
Who on shorn head her burden from the spring
Bears : sit we down, and of this bondmaid ask,
If tidings haply we may win of that
For which we came to this land, Pylades.

90

100

110

[*ORESTES and PYLADES retire to rear.*]

¹ *χρηστηρίων* (Barnes). Others read *μυστηρίων*, 'From Phoebus' mystic brine.'

Re-enter ELECTRA.

(Str. 1)

El. Bestir thou, for time presses, thy foot's speed;
Haste onward, weeping bitterly.

I am his child, am Agamemnon's seed,—
Alas for me, for me!

And I the daughter Klytemnestra bore—
Tyndareus' child, abhorred of all;—

And me the city-dwellers evermore
Hapless Electra call.

Woe and alas for this my lot of sighing,
My life from consolation banned!

120

O father Agamemnon, thou art lying
In Hades, thou whose wife devised thy dying—
Her heart, Aegisthus' hand.

(Mesode)

On, wake once more the selfsame note of grieving:
Upraise the dirge of tears that bring relieving.

(Ant. 1)

Bestir thou, for time presses, thy foot's speed;
Haste onward sweeping bitterly.

Ah me, what city sees thee in thy need,
Brother?—alas for thee!

130

In what proud house hast thou a bondman's place,
Leaving thy woeful sister lone

Here in the halls ancestral of our race
In sore distress to moan?

Come, a Redeemer from this anguish, heeding
My desolation and my pain:

Come Zeus, come Zeus, the champion of a bleeding
Father most foully killed—to Argos leading

The wanderer's feet again.

(Str. 2)

Set down this pitcher from thine head:

140

Let me prevent the morn
With wailings for a father dead,

Shrieks down to Hades borne,
Through the grave's gloom, O father, ringing:

Through Hades' hall to thee I call,
Day after day my cries outflinging;

And aye my cheeks are furrowed red
With blood by rending fingers shed.

Mine hands on mine head smiting fall—
Mine head for thy death shorn.

(Mesode)

Rend the hair grief-defiled !
 As swan's note, ringing wild
 Where some broad stream still-stealeth,
 O'er its dear sire outpealeth,
 Mid guileful nets who lies
 Dead—so o'er thee the cries
 Wail, father, of thy child,

(Ant. 2)

Thee, on that piteous death-bed laid
 When that last bath was o'er !
 Woe for the bitter axe-edge swayed,
 Father, adrip with gore !
 Woe for the dread resolve, prevailing
 From Ilion to draw thee on
 To her that waited thee—not hailing
 With chaplets !—nor with wreaths arrayed
 Wast thou ; but with the falchion's blade
 She made thee Aegisthus' sport, and won
 That treacherous paramour.

I

Enter CHORUS.*(Str. 3)*

Chor. Atreides' child, Electra, I have come
 Unto thy rustic home.
 One from Mycenae sped this day is here,
 A milk-fed mountaineer.

170

Argos proclaims, saith he, a festival
 The third day hence to fall ;
 And unto Hera's fane must every maid
 Pass, in long pomp arrayed.

El. Friends, not for thought of festal tide,
 Nor carcanet's gold-gleaming pride
 The pulses of my breast are leaping ;
 Nor with the brides of Argos keeping
 The measure of the dance, my feet
 The wreathèd maze's time shall beat :
 Nay, but with tears the night I greet,
 And wear the woeful day with weeping.
 Look on mine hair, its glory shorn,
 The disarray of mine attire :
 Say, if a princess this beseemeth,

180

Daughter to Agamemnon born,
 Or Troy, that, smitten by my sire,
 Of him in nightmare memories dreameth?

(Ant. 3)

Chor. Great is the Goddess:¹ borrow then of me 190

Robes woven cunningly,
 And jewels whereby shall beauty fairer shine.
 Dost think these tears of thine,
 If thou give honour not to Gods, shall bring
 Thy foes low?—reverencing
 The Gods with prayers, not groans, shalt thou obtain
 Clear shining after rain.

El. No God regards a wretch's cries,
 Nor heeds old flames of sacrifice 200
 Once on my father's altars burning.
 Woe for the dead, the unreturning!

Woe for the living, homeless now,
 In alien land constrained, I trow
 To serfdom's board in grief to bow—
 That hero's son afar sojourning!
 In a poor hovel I abide,

An exile from my father's door,
 Wasting my soul with tears outwelling,
 Mid scaurs of yon wild mountain-side:— 210

My mother with her paramour
 In murder-bond the while is dwelling!

Chor. Of many an ill to Hellas and thine house
 Was Helen, sister of thy mother, cause.

ORESTES and PYLADES approach.

El. Woe's me, friends!—needs must I break off my moan!
 Lo, yonder strangers ambushed nigh the house
 Out of their hiding-place are rising up!
 With flying feet—thou down the path, and I
 Into the house,—flee we from evil men!

Or. (intercepting her). Tarry, thou hapless one: fear not mine
 hand. 220

El. Phoebus, I pray thee that I be not slain!

Or. (extending his hand to hers). God grant I slay some more
 my foes than thee!

El. Hence!—touch not whom beseems thee not to touch!

Or. None is there whom with better right I touch.

¹ Therefore her festival is not lightly to be neglected.

- El. Why sword in hand waylay me by mine house ?
 Or. Tarry and hear : my words shall soon be thine.
 El. I stand, as in thy power ;—the stronger thou.
 Or. I come to bring thee tidings of thy brother.
 El. Friend—friend !—and liveth he, or is he dead ?
 Or. He liveth : first the good news would I tell. 230
 El. Blessings on thee, for meed of words most sweet !
 Or. This blessing to us twain I give to share.
 El. What land hath he for weary exile's home ?
 Or. Outcast, he claims no city's citizenship.
 El. Not—surely not in straits for daily bread ?
 Or. That hath he : yet the exile helpless is.
 El. And what the message thou hast brought from him ?
 Or. Liv'st thou ?—he asks ; and, living, what thy state ?
 El. Seest thou not how wasted is my form ?—
 Or. So sorrow-broken that myself could sigh. 240
 El. Mine head withal—my tresses closely shorn.
 Or. Heart-wrung by a brother's fate, a father's death ?
 El. Ah me, what is to me than these more dear ?
 Or. Alas ! art thou not to thy brother dear ?
 El. Far off he stays, nor comes to prove his love.
 Or. Why dost thou dwell here, from the city far ?
 El. I am wedded, stranger—as in bonds of death.
 Or. Alas thy brother !—A Mycenian lord ?
 El. Not such to whom my sire once hoped to wed me.
 Or. Tell me, that hearing I may tell thy brother. 250
 El. In this his house from Argos far I live.
 Or. Delver or neatherd should but match such house !
 El. Poor, yet well-born, and reverencing me.
 Or. Now what this reverence rendered of thy spouse ?
 El. Never hath he presumed to touch my couch.
 Or. A vow of chastity, or scorn of thee ?
 El. He took not on him to insult my sires.
 Or. How, did he not exult to win such bride ?
 El. He deems that who betrothed me had not right.
 Or. I understand :—and feared Orestes' vengeance ? 260
 El. Yea, this : yet virtuous was he therewithal.
 Or. A noble soul this, worthy of reward !
 El. Yea, if the absent to his home return.
 Or. But did the mother who bare thee suffer this ?
 El. Wives be their husbands', not their children's friends.
 Or. Why did Aegisthus this despite to thee ?
 El. That weaklings¹ of weak sire my sons might prove.

¹ *i.e.* Politically and socially.

- Or. Ay, lest thou bear sons to avenge the wrong?
 El. So schemed he—God grant I requite him yet!
 Or. Knows he, thy mother's spouse, thou art maiden still? 270
 El. Nay, for by silence this we hide from him.
 Or. Friends, then, are these which hearken these thy words?
 El. Yea, true to keep thy counsel close and mine.
 Or. What help, if Argos-ward Orestes came?
 El. Thou ask!—out on thee!—is it not full time?
 Or. How slay his father's murderers, if he came?
 El. Daring what foes against his father dared.
 Or. And with him wouldst thou, couldst thou, slay thy
 mother?
 El. Ay!—with that axe whereby my father died!
 Or. This shall I tell him for thy firm resolve? 280
 El. My mother's blood for *his*—then welcome death!
 Or. Ah, were Orestes nigh to hear that word!
 El. But, stranger, though I saw, I should not know him.
 Or. No marvel—a child parted from a child.
 El. One only of my friends would know him now,—
 Or. Who stole him out of murder's clutch, men say?
 El. The sometime agèd child-ward of my sire.
 Or. And thy dead father—hath he found a tomb?
 El. Such tomb as he hath found, flung forth his halls!
 Or. Ah me, what tale is this!—Yea, sympathy 290
 Even for strangers' pain wrings human hearts.
 Tell on, that, knowing, to thy brother I
 May bear the joyless tale that must be heard.
 Yea, pity dwells, albeit ne'er in churls,
 Yet in the wise¹:—this is the penalty
 Laid on the wise for souls too finely wrought.
 Chor. His heart's desire, the same is also mine:
 For, from the town far dwelling, nought know I
 The city's sins: now fain would I too hear.
 El. Tell will I—if I may. Sure I may tell 300
 A friend my grievous fortune and my sire's.
 Since thou dost wake the tale, I pray thee, stranger,
 Report to Orestes all mine ills and his.
 Tell in what raiment I am hovel-housed,²
 Under what squalor I am crushed, and dwell!

¹ This word is used in the somewhat esoteric sense in which it was employed by Greek thinkers to denote those in whom the moral and aesthetic faculties, as well as the intellectual, were cultivated to the highest point.

² So MSS. Others would read *ἀναίνομαι*, 'wastes my life away.' Prof. Tucker suggests *ἀγλάζομαι* (ironical) 'I am fair-arrayed.'

Under what roof, after a palace-home ;—
 How mine own shuttle weaves with pain my robes,
 Else must I want, all vestureless my frame ;—
 How from the stream myself the water bear ;—
 Banned from the festal rite, denied the dance ;— 310
 No part have I with wives, who am a maid,
 No part in Kastor, though they plighted me
 To him, my kinsman, ere to heaven he passed :¹
 The while mid Phrygian spoils upon a throne
 Sitteth my mother : at her footstool stand
 Bondmaids of Asia, captives of my sire,
 Their robes Idaean with the brooches clasped
 Of gold :—and yet my sire's blood 'neath the roofs,
 A dark clot, festers ! He that murdered him
 Mounteth his very car, rides forth in state ; 320
 The sceptre that he marshalled Greeks withal
 Flaunting he graspeth in his blood-stained hand.
 And Agamemnon's tomb is set at nought :
 Drink-offerings never yet nor myrtle-spray
 Had it, a grave all bare of ornament.
 Yea, with wine drunken, doth my mother's spouse—
 The *glorious*, as men say—leap on the grave,
 And pelt with stones my father's monument ;
 And against us he dares to speak this taunt :
 ' Where is thy son Orestes ?—bravely nigh 330
 To shield thy tomb ! ' So is the absent mocked.
 But, stranger, I beseech thee, tell him this :
 Many are summoning him,—their mouthpiece I,—
 These hands, this tongue, this stricken heart of mine,
 My shorn head, his own father therewithal.
 Shame, that the sire destroyed all Phrygia's race,
 And the son singly cannot slay one man,
 Young though he be, and of a nobler sire !
Chor. But lo, yon man—thy spouse it is I name—
 Hath ceased from toil, and homeward hasteneth. 340

Enter PEASANT.

Peas. How now ? What strangers these about my doors ?
 For what cause unto these my rustic gates
 Come they ?—or seek they me ? Beseemeth not
 That with young men a wife should stand in talk.

Or, reading *ὃς ἐμνήσταιεν*, ' who, before he passed
 To heaven, wooed me, as of kin to him.'

El. O kindest heart, do not suspect me thou,
And thou shalt hear the truth. These strangers come
Heralds to me of tidings of Orestes.

And, O ye strangers, pardon these his words.

Peas. What say they? Is he man, and seeth light?

El. Yea, by their tale—and I mistrust it not. 350

Peas. Ha!—and remembereth thy sire's wrongs and thine?

El. Hope is as yet all: weak the exile is.

Peas. And what word from Orestes have they brought?

El. These hath he sent, his spies, to mark my wrongs.

Peas. They see but part: thou haply tell'st the rest?

El. They know: hereof nought lacketh unto them.

Peas. Then should our doors ere this have been flung
wide.

Pass ye within: for your fair tidings' sake
Receive such guest-cheer as mine house contains.
Ye henchmen, take their gear these doors within. 360
Say me not nay—friends are ye from a friend
Which come to me: for, what though I be poor,
Yet will I nowise show a low-born soul.

Or. 'Fore heaven, is this the man who keepeth close
Thy wedlock-secret, not to shame Orestes?

El. Even he, named spouse of me the hapless one.

Or. Lo, there is no sure test for manhood's worth;

For mortal natures are confusion-fraught.

I have seen ere now a noble father's son
Proved nothing-worth, seen good sons of ill sires, 370
Starved leanness in a rich man's very soul,
And in a poor man's body a great heart.

How then shall one discern 'twixt these and judge?
By wealth?—a sorry test were this to use.

Or by the lack of all?—nay, poverty

Is plague-struck, schooling men to sin through need.

To prowess shall I turn me?—who, that looks

On spears, shall witness to the hero-heart?

Best leave such things to fall out as they will:

For this man is not among Argives great, 380

Nor by a noble house's name exalted,

But one of the many—proved a king of men!

Learn wisdom, ye which wander aimless, swoln

With vain imaginings: by converse judge

Men, even the noble by their daily walk.

For such be they which govern states aright

And homes: but fleshly bulks devoid of wit

Are statues in the market place.¹ Nor bides
 The strong arm staunchlier than the weak in fight ;
 But this of nature's inborn courage springs. 390
 But—seeing worthy is Agamemnon's son,
 Present or absent, for whose sake we come,—
 Accept we shelter of this roof. Ho, thralls,
 Enter this house. For me the host whose heart
 Leaps out in welcome, rather than the rich !
 Thanks for the welcome into this man's house ;
 Yet fain would I it were thy brother now
 That prospering led me into prosperous halls.
 Yet may he come ; for Loxias' oracles
 Fail not. Of men's soothsaying will I none. 400

[*They enter cottage.*]

Chor. Now, more than heretofore, Electra, glows
 Mine heart with joy. Thy fortune now, though late
 Advancing, haply shall be stablished fair.

El. Poor man, thou know'st thine house's poverty.
 Wherefore receive these guests too great for thee ?

Peas. How?—an they be of high birth, as they seem,
 Will they content them not with little or much ?

El. Since then thou so hast erred, and thou so poor,
 Go to the ancient fosterer of my sire,
 Who on the banks of Tanaus, which parts 410
 The Argive marches from the Spartan land,
 An outcast from our city, tends his flocks.
 Bid him to wend home straightway, and to come²
 And furnish somewhat for the strangers' meat.
 He shall rejoice, yea, render thanks to heaven,
 To hear how lives the child whom once he saved.
 For of my mother from my father's halls
 Nought should we gain : our tidings should we rue
 If that wretch heard that yet Orestes lives.

Peas. If thus thou wilt, thy message will I bear 420
 To yon grey sire : but pass thou in with speed,
 And there make ready. Woman's will can find
 Many a thing shall eke the feasting out.
 Yea, and within the house is store enough
 To satisfy for one day these with meat.
 In such things, when my thoughts turn thitherward,

¹ One of Euripides' contemptuous references to the fine-looking, but brainless, athletes, who were held in higher honour than, in his opinion, they deserved.

² Weil reads τῶνδ' ἀφιγμένων, 'since hither these have fared.'

I mark what mighty vantage substance hath,
 To give to guests, to medicine the body
 In sickness: but for needs of daily food
 Not far it reacheth. Each man, rich and poor, 430
 Can be but filled, when hunger is appeased.

[Exit PEASANT. ELECTRA enters the cottage.
 (Str. 1)]

Chor. O galleys renowned, by your myriad-sweeping
 Oars hurled high on the Trojan strand,
 Whom the Sea-maids followed, with dances surrounding
 Your dusky prows, when the dolphin was bounding
 Around them, bewitched by your music, and leaping
 In sinuous rapture on every hand,
 Escorting Achilles, the fleetfoot son
 Of Thetis, with King Agamemnon on
 Unto where broad Simois, seaward-creeping 440
 Rippled and glittered o'er Trojan sand.

(Ant. 1)

And the Sea-maids fleted by shores Euboean
 From the depths where the golden anvils are
 Of the Fire-god, a hero's harness bearing—
 Over Pelion, over the wild spurs faring
 Of Ossa, over the glens Nymphaean;
 From the watchtower-craggs outgazing afar
 They sought where his father, the chariot-lord,
 Fostered for Thetis a sea-born ward,
 A light for Hellas, a victory-paeon, 450
 The fleetfoot help to the Atræids' war.

(Str. 2)

Of a farer from Ilium heard I the story,
 Who had stepped to the strand in the Nauplian haven,
 Heard, O Thetis' son, of thy buckler of glory,
 Of the blazonry midst of the round of it graven,
 Whose god-fashioned tokens of terror made craven
 The hearts of the Trojans in battle adread,—
 How gleamed on the border that compassed its splendour
 Perseus, on sandals swift-winged as he fled 460
 Bearing throat-severed the Gorgon-fiend's head,
 While Maia's son, Prince of the Fields, for defender,
 Herald of Zeus, at his side ever sped.

(Ant. 2)

And flamed in the midst of the buckler outblazing
 The orb of the Sun-god, his heaven-track riding
 On the car after coursers wing-wafted on-racing.

And therein were the stars in their sky-dance gliding,
The Pleiads and Hyades, evil-betiding
To Hector, for death in his eyes did they fling.

On the golden-forged helmet were Sphinxes, bearing 470
In their talons the victim that minstrels sing.

On the corslet his bosom encompassing
The fire-breathing lioness rushed, up-glaring
At the winged steed trapped by Peirênê's spring.¹

(*Epode*)

And battle-steeds pranced on his falchion of slaughter ;²

O'er their shoulders was floating the dark dust-cloud :—
And thou slewest the chieftain, O Tyndareus' daughter, 480
That captained such heroes, so godlike and proud !

'Twas thy bridal that slew him, O thou false-hearted !

Therefore the Dwellers in Heaven shall repay

Death unto thee in the on-coming day.

I shall see it—shall see when the life-blood hath started
From thy neck at the kiss of the steel that shall slay !

Enter OLD MAN.

O. M. Where shall the princess, my young mistress, be,
Agamemnon's daughter, nursed erewhile of me ?

How steep ascent hath she to this her home

For mine eld-wrinkled feet to attain thereto !

490

Howbeit to those I love must I drag on

Mine age-bowed spine, must drag my tottering knees.

Daughter,—for now I see thee at thy door,—

Lo, I am come : I bring thee from my flocks

A suckling lamb, yea, taken from the ewe,

Garlands, and cheeses from the presses drawn,

And this old treasure-drop of the Wine-god's boon,

Rich-odoured—scant store ; yet the weaker draught

Is turned to nectar, blent with a cup of this.

Let one bear these unto thy guests within ;

500

For with this tattered vesture am I fain

To wipe away the tears that dim mine eyes.

El. Whence to thine eyes, grey sire, this sorrow-rain ?

Have mine ills wakened memories long asleep ?

Or for Orestes' exile groanest thou,

And for my sire, whom in thine arms of old

Thou fosteredst ?—all in vain for thee and thine !

¹ Bellerophon, mounted on Pegasus, attacking the Chimaera.

² Reading ἄορι δ' ἐν φονίῳ. Carved probably on the scabbard.

O. M. In vain! Yet could I not endure it so.

I turned, in coming, to his tomb aside,
 There kneeling, for its desolation wept,
 Poured a drink-offering from the skin I bear
 Thy guests, and crowned the tomb with myrtle-sprays.
 But—on the grave a black-fleeced ram I saw
 New-slain, and blood but short time since outpoured,
 And severed locks thereby of golden hair!
 I marvelled, daughter, who of men had dared
 Draw nigh the tomb: no Argive he, I wot.
 Haply thy brother hath in secret come,
 And honoured so his father's grave forlorn.
 Look on the tress; yea, lay it to thine hair;
 Mark if the shorn lock's colour be the same:
 For they which share one father's blood shall oft
 By many a bodily likeness kinship show.

510

El. Not worthy a wise man, ancient, be thy words—

To think mine aweless brother would have come,
 Fearing Aegisthus, hither secretly.
 Then, how should tress be matched with tress of hair—
 That, a young noble's trained in athlete-strife,
 This, womanlike comb-sleeked? It cannot be.
 Sooth, many shouldst thou find of hair like-hued,
 Though of the same blood, ancient, never born.
 Nay, but some stranger, pitying his tomb,
 Shore it, or some one of this land, by stealth.

520

530

O. M. Set in his sandal's print thy tread, and mark
 If that foot's measure answer, child, to thine.

El. How on a stony plain should there be made
 Impress of feet? Yea, if such print be there,
 Brother's and sister's foot should never match—
 A man's and woman's: greater is the male.

O. M. Hath he not weft of thine own loom—whereby
 To know thy brother, if he should return—¹

540

Wherein I stole him, years ago, from death?

El. Know'st thou not, when Orestes fled the land,
 I was a child?—yea, had I woven vests,
 How should that lad the same cloak wear to-day,
 Except, as waxed the body, vestures grew?

O. M. Where be the strangers? I would fain behold

¹ So Weil. Paley translates—

'Nought is there, if thy brother should return,
 Whereby to know the weft of thine own loom.
 Wherein, etc.'

And of thine absent brother question them.

El. Lo, here with light foot step they forth the house.

Re-enter ORESTES and PYLADES.

O. M. (aside). High-born of mien :—yet false the coin may be ;
For many nobly born be knaves in grain. [550

Yet—(*aloud*) to the strangers greeting fair I give.

Or. Greeting, grey sire ! Electra, of thy friends
Who hath this time-worn wreck of man to thrall ?

El. This, stranger, was my father's fosterer.

Or. How say'st thou ?—this, who stole thy brother hence ?

El. Even he who saved him, if he liveth yet.

Or. Why looks he on me, as who eyes the stamp
On silver ?—likening me to any man ?

El. Joying perchance to see Orestes' friend. 560

Or. A dear friend he :—yet wherefore pace me round ?

El. I also marvel, stranger, seeing this.

O. M. Daughter Electra—princess !—pray the Gods—

El. For what—of things that are or are not ours ?

O. M. To win the precious treasure God reveals !

El. Lo, I invoke them. What wouldst say, old sire ?

O. M. Look on him now, child,—on thy best-beloved !

El. Long have I dreaded lest thy wits be crazed.

O. M. I, crazed !—who look upon thy brother,—there !

El. What mean'st thou, ancient, by a word past hope ? 570

O. M. I see Orestes, Agamemnon's son.

El. What token hast thou marked, that I may trust ?

O. M. A scar along his brow :—in his father's halls
Chasing with thee a fawn, he fell and gashed it.

El. How say'st thou ?—yea, I see the mark thereof !

O. M. Now, art thou slow to embrace thy best-beloved ?

El. No, ancient, no ! By this thy sign convinced
Mine heart is. Thou who hast at last appeared,
Unhoped I hold thee !

Or. Clasped at last of me !

El. Never I looked for this !

Or. Nor dared I hope. 580

El. And art thou he ?

Or. Yea, thy one champion I,—

So I draw in the net-cast that I seek :

And sure I shall !—we must believe no more

In Gods, if wrong shall triumph over right.

- Or. With guards how many?—or alone with thralls?
 O. M. They only of his household; Argives none.
 Or. None, ancient, who might look on me, and know? 630
 O. M. Thralls are they who looked never on thy face.
 Or. Haply my partisans, if I prevail?
 O. M. The bondman's wont, by happy chance for thee.
 Or. How then shall I make shift to approach to him?
 O. M. Pass full in view at hour of sacrifice.
 Or. Hard by the highway be his lands, I trow.
 O. M. Thence shall he see, and bid thee to the feast.
 Or. A bitter fellow-feaster, heaven to help!
 O. M. Thereafter thou take thought, as fortune falls.
 Or. Well hast thou said. My mother—where is she? 640
 O. M. In Argos, yet shall soon attend the feast.
 Or. Why went not forth my mother with her lord?
 O. M. Fearing the people's taunts there tarried she.
 Or. Yea—knowing how men look askance on her.
 O. M. Even so; a woman for her crimes abhorred.
 Or. How shall I slay together him and her?
 El. Even I my mother's slaying will prepare.
 Or. Good sooth, for *his* shall Fortune smooth the path.
 El. This man shall minister to us in both.
 O. M. Yea. How wilt thou contrive thy mother's death?
 El. Go, ancient, say to Klytemnestra this— 650
 Report me mother of a child, a male.
 O. M. Long since delivered, or but as of late?
 El. Within these ten¹ days—purifying's space.
 O. M. Yet—to thy mother how doth this bring death?
 El. At tidings of my travail will she come.
 O. M. How?—deem'st thou, child, she careth aught for thee?
 El. Yea—even to weeping for my babes' high birth!
 O. M. Haply: yet goalward turn I back thy speech.²
 El. Let her but come, and surely is she dead. 660
 O. M. Nay then, to the very house-door let her come.
 El. Ay—short the bypath thence to Hades' gates!
 O. M. Oh but to see this hour, then welcome death!
 El. First, ancient, then, be guide unto this man.
 O. M. To where Aegisthus doeth sacrifice?

¹ Adopting the reading δέχ' for λέγ'. The ceremony of purification was performed on the tenth day.

² Retaining ἄγω. The metaphor is from the race-course. Electra's reference to her mother's spite seems irrelevant, so he guides her, like a horse that has swerved from the course, in the direction of the goal, *i.e.*, the point of issue.

El. Then seek my mother, and my message tell.

O. M. Yea, it shall seem the utterance of thy lips.

El. (to ORESTES). Now to thy work. Thou drewest first blood-lot.¹

Or. I will set forth if any guide appear.

O. M. Even I will speed thee thither nothing loth. 670

*Or.*² My fathers' God, Zeus, smiter of my foes,
Pity us: pitiful our wrongs have been.

El. Ah, pity them whose lineage is of thee!

Or. Queen of Mycenae's altars, Hera, help!
Grant to us victory, if we claim the right.

El. Grant for our father vengeance upon these!

Or. Father, by foul wrong dweller 'neath the earth,
And thou, Earth, Queen, on whom I lay mine hands,
Help, help us, these thy children best-beloved.

El. Now come thou, bringing all the dead to aid, 680
All them whose spears with thee laid Phrygians low,
And all which hate defilers impious!

Or. Hear'st thou, O foolishly-entreated of my mother?

El. Our sire hears all, I know:—but time bids forth.

And for this cause I warn thee, die he must,—

If thou, o'er-mastered, fall a deadly fall,³

I die too; count me then no more alive:

For I with sword twin-edged will pierce mine heart.

Now pass I in, to set in order all,

That, if there come fair tidings touching thee, 690

The house may shout its joy: but, if thou die,

Far other shall betide. Thus charge I thee.

Or. All know I.

El. Wherefore must thou play the man.

And ye, girls, beacon-like raise signal-cry

Of this strife's issue. I will keep good watch,

Holding the sword aye ready in my grasp:

For never, over-mastered, to my foes

Will I for vengeance-outrage yield me up.

[Retires within cottage. Exeunt ORESTES, PYLADES,
and OLD MAN.
(Str. I)

Chor. In ancient song is the tale yet told⁴

¹ *i.e.* To thy lot it falls to execute the first murder, that of Aegisthus.

² The lines which follow have been variously assigned by editors. The arrangement adopted by Keene is here followed.

³ Metaphor from wrestling—'art overthrown in death.'

⁴ When Atreus and Thyestes, sons of Pelops, both claimed the throne,

How Pan, the Master of forest and mead,
 700
 Unearthly sweet while the melody rolled
 From his pipes of cunningly-linkèd reed,
 Did of yore from the mountains of Argos lead,
 From the midst of the tender ewes of the fold,
 A lamb bright-fleeced with the splendour of gold.
 From the steps of marble the herald then
 Cried all the folk to the market-place—
 ‘ To the gathering away, Mycenian men !
 On the awesome portent press to gaze
 710
 Of the lords of the heaven-favoured race ! ’
 And with blithe acclaim the dancers came, and with songs of
 praise.

(Ant. 1)

And the gold-laid pavements in glorious wise
 Were tapestry-spread : through street on street
 Flashed flames of the Argives’ sacrifice ;
 And the voices were ringing of flutes most sweet,
 Which render the Muses service meet :
 Aye richer-swelling did glad songs rise
 Of the golden lamb, of Thyestes’ prize.
 For the nets of a love with dark guile fraught
 720
 O’er the soul of Atreus’ bride did he fling ;
 And the marvel so to his halls hath he brought,
 And hath sped to the thronged folk, publishing
 How his palace had gotten that strange horned thing,
 The golden-fleeced :—and the strife so ceased, and they hailed
 him king.¹

(Str. 2)

Then, then, in his anger arose Zeus, turning
 The stars’ feet back on the fire-fretted way ;
 Yea, and the Sun’s car splendour-burning,
 And the misty eyes of the morning grey.
 730
 And with flash of his chariot-wheels back-flying
 Flushed crimson the face of the fading day :

it was decided that whichever of them should display a divine portent should be king. A lamb with golden fleece appeared amongst the flocks of Atreus ; but Aeropê, his wife, conveyed it to her paramour Thyestes. Atreus, in revenge, threw Aeropê into the sea, murdered Thyestes’ sons, and served their flesh up at a feast to their father. In horror at the deed the sun turned his course backward from west to east for one day.

¹ Euripides, perhaps on artistic grounds, perhaps as too well known, omits the details of Atreus’ horrible revenge (given in their full loathsomeness by Aeschylus, *Agam.* 1590–1602), and passes on directly to their consequences in the judgment of Heaven.

To the north fled the clouds with their burden sighing ;
 And for rains withheld, and for dews fast-drying
 The dwellings of Ammon in faintness were yearning,
 For sweet showers crying to heavens denying.

(Ant. 2)

It is told of the singers—scant credence such story,
 Touching secrets of Gods, of my spirit hath won—
 That the Sun from that vision turned backward the glory
 Of the gold of the face of his flaming throne,
 With the scourge of his wrath in affliction repaying 740
 Mortals for deeds in their mad feuds done :—
 Yet it may be the tale liveth, soul-affraying,
 To bow us to Godward in lowly obeying.
 O mother of princes,¹ it rose not before thee
 Mid thy lord's moan, staying thine hand from the slaying !

Ha, friends !

Heard ye a great voice—or am I beguiled
 Of fancy?—like earth-muffled thunder of Zeus?
 Lo there, the gale is swelling all too plain !
 Princess, come forth thine house !—Electra, come ! 750

Enter ELECTRA.

El. Friends, what befalls?—how doth our conflict speed?
Chor. I know but this, I hear a cry of death.
El. I also hear—far off—yet oh, I hear !
Chor. Faint from the distance stole the cry, yet clear.
El. A shriek of Argives?—or of them I love?
Chor. I know not : all confused rang out the strain.
El. Thine answer is my death !—why linger I?
Chor. Stay, till in certainty thou learn thy fate.
El. No—vanquished !—where be they, his messengers?
Chor. They yet shall come ; not lightly slain are kings. 760

Enter MESSENGER.

Mes. Victory ! victory, maids Mycenian !
 To all friends, tidings of Orestes' triumph !
 Low lieth Agamemnon's murderer
 Aegisthus : render thanks unto the Gods.

¹ Klytemnestra.

El. Who art thou?—what attests thy tidings' truth?

Mes. Look,—dost thou know me not,—thy brother's henchman?

El. O friend, I knew not, out of very fear,
Thy face; but now in very sooth I know.
How say'st thou?—is my sire's foul murderer dead?

Mes. Dead. Twice I say it, since thou will'st it so. 770

El. Gods! All-seeing Justice, thou hast come at last!
In what wise, and by what device of death,
Slew he Thyestes' son? I fain would know.

Mes. Soon as our feet from thine abode had passed,
The highway chariot-rutted entered we,
Where journeyed this renowned Mycenaean king.
Into his watered garden had he turned,
Plucking soft myrtle-sprays to bind his brows.
He saw, and cried, 'Hail, strangers, who be ye?
Whence journeying, and children of what land?' 780

'Thessalians we,' Orestes spake, 'who seek
Alpheus, to sacrifice to Olympian Zeus.'
Now when Aegisthus heard this, answered he,
'Nay, at this altar-feast ye needs must be
My guests: I sacrifice unto the Nymphs.
With morning shall ye rise from sleep, and speed
No less. Come, let us go into the house,'—
So speaking, did he take us by the hand,
And led us in,—'ye may not say me nay.'

And, when we stood within his doors, he spake: 790
'Let one with speed bring water for the guests,
That they may compass with cleansed hands the altar.'
But spake Orestes, 'In pure river-streams
It was but now we purified ourselves.

If strangers may with citizens sacrifice,
Ready we are, nor say thee nay, O King.'
So made they end of parley 'twixt the twain.¹
Then, laying down their spears, the tyrant's guards,
His thralls, all set their hands unto the work.
Some brought the bowl of slaughter,² some the maunds:³ 800
The fire some kindled, and the caldrons set
Over the hearths: with tumult rang the roofs.
Then took thy mother's paramour the meal,

¹ Weil's interpretation. Paley, 'So did they commune from the rest apart': Keene, 'Such speech they spake in hearing of us all.'

² The bowl to receive the victim's blood.

³ The baskets that held the sacred barley-meal and the sacrificial knife.

And thus spake, on the altars casting it :
 ' Nymphs of the Rocks, vouchsafe me oft, with her,
 Mine home-mate Tyndareus' child, to sacrifice,
 As now, blest, and my foes in like ill case.'
 Thee and Orestes meant he ; but my lord
 Reversed the prayer, low-murmuring, even to win
 Ancestral halls. Aegisthus from the maund 810
 Took the straight blade, the calf's hair shore therewith,
 And on the pure flame with his right hand cast ;
 Then, when his thralls heaved shoulder-high the calf,
 Severed the throat, and to thy brother spake :
 ' Herein, men boast, Thessalians take their pride,
 In deftly quartering the slaughtered bull,
 And taming steeds. Take thou the steel, O guest,
 And prove the fame of the Thessalians true.'
 Then grasped he a fair-wrought Dorian blade in hand,
 And from his shoulder cast his graceful cloak, 820
 Took Pylades for helper in his task,
 And put the thralls back ; seized the calf's foot then,
 And bared the white flesh, stretching forth his arm,
 And quicker flayed the hide than runner's feet
 Twice round the turnings of the horse-course speed ;¹
 So opened it. Aegisthus grasped the inwards,
 And gazed thereon. No lobe the liver had :²
 The gate-vein, the gall-bladder nigh thereto,
 Portended perilous scathe to him that looked.
 Scowling he stared ; but straight my master asks : 830
 ' Why cast down, O mine host ? ' ' A stranger's guile
 I dread. Of all men hatefullest to me,
 And foe to mine, is Agamemnon's son.'
 But he, ' Go to : *thou* fear an exile's guile—
 The King ! That we on flesh of sacrifice
 May feast, let one for this of Doris bring
 A Phthian knife :³ the breast-bone let me cleave.'
 So took, and cleft. Aegisthus grasped the inwards,
 Parted, and gazed. Even as he bowed his head,
 Thy brother strained himself full height, and smote 840

¹ *i.e.* the time it would take a foot-runner to do the half-mile, a distance sufficiently long to be a standard distance for a horse-race.

² The *quadrate lobe* of the liver, if fully developed, would overlap the portal vein and gall-bladder. When, as sometimes happens, it was but rudimentary, the latter were exposed, and this was an evil omen.

³ A heavy cleaver, better adapted both for his ostensible and for his real purpose.

Down on his spine, and through his backbone's joints
Crashed. Shuddered all his frame from head to foot,
Convulsed in throes of agony dying hard.¹

Straightway the thralls beholding sprang to arms,—

A host to fight with two,—but unafraid

Pylades and Orestes, brandishing

Their weapons, faced them: 'Not a foe,' he cried,

'To Argos, nor my servants, am I come!

I have avenged me on my father's slayer,—

Orestes I, the hapless! Slay me not,

850

My father's ancient thralls!' They, when they heard

His words, stayed spear: and recognised was he

Of an old servant, long time of the house.

Straightway a wreath upon thy brother's head

They set, with shouts rejoicing. And he comes

To show the head to thee—no Gorgon's this,

But whom thou hat'st, Aegisthus. Blood for blood,

Bitter repayment, to the slain hath come.

(Str.)

Chor. Forth to the dance, O beloved, with feet

That rapture is winging!

860

Bounding from earth, as a fawn's, let them fleet!

Lo, thy brother comes bringing

Victory-garlands more fair than they gain

By Alpheus' flow! As I dance, be thy strain

Of triumph outringing!

El. O light, O splendour of the Sun-god's steeds,

O Earth, and Night that filled my gaze till now,

Free are mine eyes now: dawn's wings open free!

My father's slayer Aegisthus is laid low!

Come, such things as I have, my dwelling's store,

870

Let me bring forth to grace his hair, O friends,

To crown my conquering brother's head withal.

(Ant.)

Chor. Crown him, the conqueror!—garlands upraise,

Thy thanksgiving-oblation!

To the dance that the Muses love forth will we pace.

Now shall rule o'er our nation

Her kings well-beloved whom of old she hath known;

For the right is triumphant, the tyrant o'erthrown:—

Ring, joy's exultation!

¹ Reading ἐσφάδαζε.

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES, with attendants bearing AEGISTHUS' body.

- El.* Hail, glorious conqueror, Orestes sprung 880
 Of father triumph-crowned in Ilium's war!
 Receive this wreath to bind thy clustering hair.
 Thou hast come home, who hast run no bootless course
 In athlete-race, but who hast slain thy foe
 Aegisthus, murderer of thy sire and mine.
 And thou, his battle-helper, Pylades,
 A good man's nursling, from mine hand accept
 A wreath; for in this conflict was thy part
 As his: in my sight ever prosper ye!
- Or.* The Gods account thou first, Electra, authors 890
 Of this day's fortune: praise thereafter me,
 Who am but minister of heaven and fate.
 I come, who not in word, but deed, have slain
 Aegisthus, and for proof for whoso will
 To know, the dead man's self I bring to thee;
 Whom, if thou wilt, for ravin of beasts cast forth,
 Or for the children of the air to rend
 Impale him on a stake: thy bondman now
 Is he, who heretofore was called thy lord.
- El.* I take shame—none the less I fain would speak— 900
- Or.* What is it? Speak: thou hast left fear's prison-house.
- El.* To mock the dead, lest ill-will light on me.
- Or.* There is no man can blame thee for such cause.
- El.* Our folk be ill to please, and censure-prone.
- Or.* Speak, sister, what thou wilt. No terms of truce
 Be in the feud betwixt us and this man.
- El.* Enough—where shall reproach of thee begin?
 Where end? Where shall the arraignment find its midst?
 Yet, morn by morn, I never wont to cease
 Conning what I would tell thee to thy face, 910
 If ever from past terrors disenthralled
 I stood. Now am I; and I pay the debt
 Of taunts I fain had hurled at thee alive.
 Thou wast my ruin, of a sire beloved
 Didst orphan me and him, who wronged thee never;
 Didst foully wed my mother, slew'st her lord,
 Hellas' war-chief,—thou who ne'er sawest Troy!
 Such was thy folly's depth that thou didst dream
 Thou hadst wedded in my mother a true wife,
 With whom thou didst defile my father's couch! 920

Let whoso draggeth down his neighbour's wife
 To folly, and then must take her for his own,
 Know himself dupe, who deemeth that to him
 She shall be true, who to her lord was false.
 Wretched thy life was, which thou thoughtest blest :—
 Thou knewest thine a marriage impious,
 And she, that she had ta'en for lord a villain.
 Transgressors both, each other's lot ye took,—
 She took thy fortune, thou didst take her curse.
 And through all Argos this was still thy name— 930
 ' *That woman's husband* ' : none said ' *That man's wife.* '
 Yet shame is this, when foremost in the home
 Is wife, not husband. Out upon the sons
 That not the man's, their father's, sons are called,
 Nay, but the mother's, all the city through !
 For, when the ignoble weddeth high-born bride,
 None take account of him, but all of her.
 This was thy strong delusion, blind of heart,
 Through pride of wealth to boast thee some great one !
 Nought wealth is, save for fleeting fellowship. 940
 'Tis character abideth, not possessions :
 This, ever-staying, lifteth up the head ;¹
 But wealth by vanity gotten, held of fools,
 Takes to it wings ; as a flower it fadeth soon.
 For those thy sins of the flesh—for maid unmeet
 To name—I pass them by : too clear the hint !
 Thou waxedst wanton, with thy royal halls,
 Thy pride of goodlihead ! Be mine a spouse
 Nor girl-faced, but a man in mien and port.
 The sons of these to warrior-prowess cleave ; 950
 Those, the fair-seeming, but in dances shine.
 Perish, O blind to all for which at last,
 Felon convict, thou'rt punished, caitiff thou !
 Let none dream, though at starting he run well,
 That he outrunneth Justice, ere he touch
 The very goal and gain the bourn of life.

Chor. Dread were his deeds ; dread payment hath he made
 To thee and this man. Great is Justice' might.

Or. Enough : now must ye bear his corpse within,
 And hide in shadow, thralls, that, when she comes, 960
 My mother ere she die see not the dead.

El. Hold :—turn we now unto another theme.

Or. How, from Mycenæ seest thou rescue come ?

¹ Reading *κάρᾱ* for *κακά*, 'maketh end of ill's.'

El. Nay, but my mother, her that gave me birth.
Or. Ha! fair and full into the toils she runs.
El. O flaunting pomp of chariots and attire!
Or. What shall we do?—our mother shall we slay?
El. How?—hath ruth seized thee, seeing thy mother's form?
Or. Woe!

How can I slay her—her that nursed, that bare me?

El. Even as she thy father slew and mine. 970

Or. O Phoebus, folly exceeding was thine hest—

El. Nay, where Apollo erreth, who is wise?

Or. Who against nature bad'st me slay my mother!

El. How art thou harmed, avenging thine own sire?

Or. Arraigned for a mother's murder—pure ere this!

El. Yet impious, if thou succour not thy sire.

Or. My mother for her blood must I requite.¹

El. And *Him*!—if thou forbear to avenge a father.

Or. Ha!—spake a fiend in likeness of the God?—

El. Throned on the holy tripod!—I trow not. 980

Or. I dare not trust this oracle's utter faith!

El. Wilt thou turn craven—be no more a man?

Lo, I will lay the selfsame snare for her²

Whereby thou didst her spouse Aegisthus slay.

Or. I will go in. A horror I essay!³—

Yea, horrors will achieve! If this please Heaven,

So be it. Bitter strife, yet sweet, for me.

[*Enters hut.*]

Enter KLYTEMNESTRA in chariot, with attendants, captive maids of Troy.

Chor. Hail, Queen of the Argive land!

All hail, O Tyndareus' daughter!

Hail, sister of Zeus' sons, heroes twain 990

In the glittering heavens mid stars who stand,

And their proud right this, to deliver from bane

Men tossed on the storm-vest water.

Hail! As to the Blest, do I yield thee thy right

Of homage, for awe of thy wealth and thy bliss.

¹ *i.e.* Her avenging Furies will exact satisfaction from me.

² Retaining MS. ἀλλ' ἤ, and ὑποστήσω.

³ Keene proposes δειῶν, and interprets, 'To shield me from one horror (*i.e.* the God's vengeance), Horrors will I achieve.'

With observance¹ to compass thy fortune's height

This, Queen, is the hour, even this !

Kly. Step from the wain, Troy's daughters ; take mine hand,
That from this chariot-floor I may light down.
As the Gods' temples are with spoils adorned 1000
Of Troy, so these, the chosen of Phrygian land,
Have I, to countervail my daughter lost :²—
Scant guerdon, yet fair honour for mine house.

El. May I not then,—the slave, the outcast I
From my sire's halls, whose wretched home is here,—
Mother, may I not take that heaven-blest hand ?

Kly. Here be these bondmaids : trouble not thyself.

El. How ?—me thou mad'st thy spear-thrall, banished home :
Captive mine house was led, and captive I,
Even as these, unfathered and forlorn. 1010

Kly. Such fruit thy father's plottings had, contrived
Against his dearest, all unmerited.

Yea, I will speak ; albeit, when ill fame
Compasseth woman, all her tongue drops gall—
As touching me,³ unjustly : let men learn
The truth, and if the hate be proved my due,
'Tis just they loathe me ; if not, wherefore loathe ?
Of Tyndareus was I given to thy sire—
Not to be slain, nor I, nor those I bare.

He took my child—drawn by this lie from me, 1020
That she should wed Achilles,—far from home
To ship-thronged Aulis, laid her on the pyre,
And shore through Iphigonê's⁴ snowy throat !
Had he, to avert Mycenæ's overthrow,—
To exalt his house,—to save the children left,—
Slain one for many, 'twere not past forgiving.

But, for that Helen was a wanton, he
That wed the traitress impotent for vengeance,
Even for such cause murdered he my child.
Howbeit for this wrong, how wronged soe'er, 1030
I had not raged, nor had I slain my lord ;—
But to me with that prophet-maid he came,

¹ There is a *double entendre* conveyed by the two meanings of which *θεραπεύεσθαι* is capable. Klytemnestra understands it of court (Shakespearean 'observance') to be paid to her high fortunes ; the Chorus, of the watchfulness which was never so necessary as now, unavailing as it must be.

² Iphigeneia, sacrificed for the Greeks' sake, who have therefore given these as some compensation.

³ So Paley. Keene renders, 'As seemeth me.'

⁴ Variant for the common form Iphigeneia.

Made her usurp my couch, and fain would keep
 Two brides together in the selfsame halls.
 Women be frail: sooth, I deny it not.
 But when, this granted, 'tis the husband errs,
 Slighting his own true bride, and fain the wife
 Would copy him, and find another love,
 Ah then, fierce light of scandal beats on us;
 But them which show the way, the men, none blame! 1040
 Now had Menelaus from his home been stoln,
 Ought I have slain Orestes, so to save
 My sister's lord? How had thy sire endured
 Such deed? Should he 'scape killing then, who slew
 My child, and I at his hands die for his?¹
 I slew him; turned me—'twas the only way—
 Unto his foes; for who of thy sire's friends
 Had been partaker with me in his blood?
 Speak all thou wilt: boldly set forth thy plea
 To prove thy father did not justly die. 1050

El. Justice thy plea!—thy 'justice'² were our shame!
 The wife should yield in all things to her lord,
 So she be wise. If any think not so,
 With her mine argument hath nought to do.
 Bethink thee, mother, of thy latest words,
 Vouchsafing me free speech to answer thee.

Kly. Again I say it; and I draw not back.

El. Yea, mother, but wilt hear—and punish then?

Kly. Nay: I grant grace of license to thy mood.

El. Then will I speak. My prelude this shall be:— 1060

O mother, that thou hadst a better heart!
 That beauty wins you worthy meed of praise,
 Helen's and thine: true sisters twain were ye!
 Ay, wantons both, unworthy Kastor's name!
 She, torn from home—yet fain to be undone;
 Thou, murderess of Hellas' noblest son,
 Pleading that for a daughter's sake thou slew'st
 A husband!—ah, men knew thee not as I,
 Thee, who, before thy daughter's death was doomed,

¹ The argument is based on the Greek axiom, that the son was physically the father's, the daughter the mother's, child. Accordingly it runs—'If Agamemnon would have been justified in killing me, had I slain *his* child to rescue my sister's husband, conversely, I was justified in killing him, because he did slay *my* child to rescue his brother's wife.

² Her assumption (1035-45) of the justice of the principle that woman has equal rights with man. All Greeks would have scouted it, and their adoption of it would but have made them the laughing-stock of the then civilized world.

When from thine home thy lord had newly passed,
 Wert sleeeking at the mirror thy bright hair !
 The woman who, her husband far from home,
 Bedecks herself, blot out her name as vile !
 She needeth not to flaunt abroad a face
 Made fair, except she be on mischief bent.
 Of Hellas' daughters none save thee I know,
 Who, when the might of Troy prevailed, was glad,
 Whose eyes were clouded when her fortunes sank,
 Who wished not Agamemnon home from Troy.
 Yet reason fair thou hadst to be true wife :
 Nor worser than Aegisthus was thy lord,
 Whom Hellas chose to lead her war-array.
 And, when thy sister Helen so had sinned,
 High praise was thine to win ; for sinners' deeds
 Lift up the good for ensamples in men's sight.
 If, as thou say'st, my father slew thy daughter,
 How did I wrong thee, and my brother how ?
 Why, having slain thy lord, didst thou on us
 Bestow not our sire's halls, but buy therewith
 An alien couch, and pay a price for shame ?
 Nor is thy spouse now exiled for thy son,
 Nor for me slain, who hath dealt me living death
 Twice crueller than my sister's : yea, if blood
 'Gainst blood in judgment rise, I and thy son,
 Orestes, must slay thee to avenge our sire :
 For, if thy claim was just, this too is just.
 Whoso, regarding wealth, or birth, shall wed
 A wanton, is a fool : the lowly chaste
 Are better in men's homes than high-born wives.

Chor. Chance ordereth women's bridals. Some I mark
 Fair, and some foul of issue among men.

Kly. Child, still thy nature bids thee love thy sire.

So likewise to the man some sons will cleave :
 Some more the mothers than the father love.
 I pardon thee. In sooth, not all so glad
 Am I, my child, for deeds that I have done.
 But thou, why thus unwashed and meanly clad,
 Seeing thy travail-sickness now is past ?
 Woe and alas for my devisings !—more
 I spurred my spouse¹ to anger than was need.

III O

¹ For the sake of clearness, I use in this scene ' spouse ' to denote Aegisthus ; ' lord,' or ' husband,' for Agamemnon. Keene interprets here ' I raged against mine husband.'

El. Too late thou sighest, since thou canst not heal.
My sire is dead : but him, the banished one,
Why dost thou not bring back, thine homeless son ?

Kly. I fear : mine own good I regard, not his.

Wroth for his father's blood he is, men say.

El. Why tarre thy spouse on ever against me ?

Kly. Nay, tis his mood : stiff-necked thou also art.

El. For grief am I ; yet will I cease from wrath.¹

Kly. Yea ?—then he too shall cease from troubling thee.

El. He is haughty, seeing he dwelleth in mine home. 1120

Kly. Lo there !—thou kindest fires of strife anew.

El. I am dumb : I fear him—even as I fear.²

Kly. Cease from this talk. Why didst thou summon me ?

El. Touching my travailing thou hast heard, I wot.

Thou sacrifice for me—I know not how—

The wonted tenth-moon offerings for the babe.

Skilless am I, who have borne no child ere this.

Kly. This were her task, who in thy travail helped.

El. Unhelped I travailed, bore alone my babe.

Kly. Dwell'st thou from friends and neighbours so remote ?

El. The poor—none careth to win these for friends ! 1130

Kly. I enter, to the Gods to pay the dues

For a son's time accomplished. Having shown thee

That grace, I pass afield, to where my lord

Worships the Nymphs. This chariot ye my maids

Lead hence, and stall my steeds. Soon as ye deem

That this my service to the Gods is done,

Attend. My spouse too must my presence grace.

El. Pass in to my poor house ; and have a care

The smoke-grimed beams besmirch not thine attire. 1140

The Gods' due sacrifice there shalt thou offer.

[KLYTEMNESTRA enters hut.

The maund is dight, and whetted is the knife

Which slew the bull by whose side thou shalt lie

Stricken. Thou shalt in Hades be his bride

Whose love thou wast in life. So great the grace

I grant thee : thine to me—to avenge my sire ! [Enters hut.

¹ Lines 1118, 1119, 1120, 1122 are examples of Tragic Irony, Electra using expressions to which the audience, from their knowledge of what has happened, attach a meaning unsuspected by Klytemnestra ; while Klytemnestra uses words which bear a construction unsuspected by herself. Perhaps ' a son's time accomplished ' (1133), may be another instance, since her own son's time of waiting was fulfilled.

² *i.e.* Not at all, since he is dead : but Klytemnestra would understand this in the usual sense, ' more than I can express.'

(Str.)

Chor. Vengeance for wrong! The stormy winds, long lashing
 The house, have veered! There was an hour saw fall
 My chief, with blood the laver's silver dashing,
 When shrieked the roof,—yea, topstones of the wall 1150
 Shrieked back his cry, ' Fiend-wife, and art thou tearing
 My life from me, who in the tenth year's earing
 Come to my dear land, mine ancestral hall? '

(Ant.)

The tide of justice whelmeth, refluent-roaring,
 The wanton wife who met her hapless lord,
 When to the towers Titanic heavenward-soaring
 He came,—with welcome met him of the sword,
 Who grasped in hand the axe keen-edged to sever
 Life's thread :—O hapless spouse, what wrong soever 1160
 Stung to the deed the murderess abhorred!

(Epode)

Ruthless as mountain lioness roaming through
 Green glades, she wrought the deed she had set her hands
 to do.

[Cry within.]

Kly. O children, in God's name slay not your mother!

Chor. Dost thou hear how thrills 'neath the roof a cry?

Kly. (within). Woe! wretched I!

Chor. I too could wail one by her children slain.

God meteth justice out in justice' day.

Ghastly thy sufferings; foully didst thou slay 1170

Thy lord for thine own bane!

They come, they come! Lo, forth the house they set

Their feet, besprent with gout's of mother's blood,

Trophies that witness to her piteous cries.

There is no house more whelmed in misery,

Nor hath been, than the line of Tantalus.¹

Enter ORESTES with ELECTRA.

(Str. 1.)

Or. Earth, Zeus, whose all-beholding eye

Is over men, behold this deed

Of blood, of horror—these that lie

Twinned corpses on the earth, that bleed

For my wrongs, and by mine hand die. 1180

¹ Great-grandfather of Agamemnon.

[Woe and alas! I weep to know
My mother by mine hand laid low!]¹

El. Well may we weep!—it was my sin, brother!
My fury was kindled as flame against her from whose womb
I came.

Woe's me, a daughter!—and *this*, my mother!

Chor. Alas for thy lot! Their mother wast thou,
And horrors and anguish no words may tell
At thy children's hands thou hast suffered now!
Yet justly the blow for their sire's blood fell.

(*Ant.* 1)

Or. Phoebus, the deed didst thou commend, 1190
Aye whispering '*Justice*'—thou hast bared
The deeds of darkness, and made end,
Through Greece, of lust that murder dared.
But me what land shall shield?—what friend,
What righteous man shall bear to see
The slayer of his mother—me?

El. Woe's me! What refuge shall what land give me?
O feet from the dance aye banned! O spousal-hopeless
hand!

What lord to a bridal-bower shall receive me? 1200

Chor. Again have thy thoughts veered round, yet again!
Now right is thine heart, which was then not right
When to deeds of horror didst thou constrain
Thy brother, O friend, in his heart's despite.

(*Str.* 2)

Or. Didst thou mark, how the hapless, clinging, clinging
To my mantle, bared her bosom in dying—
Woe's me!—and even to the earth bowed low
The limbs that bare me, mine heart-strings wringing?

Chor. I know thine agony, hearing the crying 1210
Of the mother that bare thee, her wail of woe.

(*Ant.* 2)

Or. Her hand on my cheek did she lay, and her calling
Rang in mine ears—'*My child!—I implore thee!*'
And she hung, she hung on my neck, to stay
The sword, from my palsied hand-grasp falling.

Chor. (to ELECTRA). Wretch, how couldst thou bear to behold
before thee

Thy mother, gasping her life away? 1220

¹ Conjecturally supplied to fill lacuna of two lines which have been lost, as is indicated by the gap in the metre, after 1180.

(Str. 3)

Or. I cast my mantle before mine eyes,
 And my sword began that sacrifice,
 Through the throat of my mother cleaving, cleaving!

El. Yea, and I urged thee with instant word,
 And I set with thee mine hand to the sword.
 I have done things horrible past believing!

(Ant. 3)

Or. Take, take, with her vesture the limbs shroud round
 Of my mother: O close her wide death-wound.

Thou barest them, thou, these hands death-dealing!

El. Lo, thou that wast dear and yet not dear, 1230
 With the mantle I veil thee over: here
 May the curse of the house have end and healing!

KASTOR and POLLUX appear in mid air above the stage.

Chor. Lo, lo, where over the roof-ridge high
 Demigods gleam;—or from thrones in the sky
 Stoop Gods?—it is not vouchsafed unto men
 To tread yon path: why draw these nigh
 Unto mortal ken?

Kas. Hear, child of Agamemnon: Sons of Zeus,
 Twin brothers of thy mother, call to thee;
 I Kastor, this my brother Polydeukes. 1240
 Even now the sea's shipwrecking surge have we
 Assuaged, and come to Argos, having seen
 The slaying of our sister, of thy mother.
 She hath but justice;—yet not just thine act.
 Phoebus is Phoebus: since he is my king,
 I am dumb. He is wise:—not wise his hest for thee!—
 We must needs say 'Tis well.' Henceforth must thou
 Perform what Fate and Zeus ordain for thee.
 To Pylades Electra give to wife:
 But thou, leave Argos; for thou may'st not tread 1250
 Her streets, since thou hast wrought thy mother's death.
 The dread Weird Sisters,¹ hound-eyed Goddesses,
 Shall drive thee mad, and dog thy wanderings.
 To Athens go: the awful image clasp
 Of Pallas; for their serpent-frenzied rage

¹ The Eumenides, or Erinyes (*Lat.* Furies), whose special office was to avenge such as had the claim of kindred, or some claim equally holy, upon the offender.

Shall she refrain, that they may touch thee not,
 Outstretching o'er thine head her Gorgon shield.
 There is a Hill of Ares, where first sat
 Gods to give judgment touching blood-shedding,
 When fierce-souled Ares Halirrothius slew, 1260
 The Sea-king's son, in wrath for outrage done
 His daughter. That tribunal since that hour
 Sacred and stablished stands in sight of Gods.
 There must thou for this murder be arraigned.
 And, in the judgment, equal votes cast down
 From death shall save thee: for the blame thereof
 Shall Loxias take, who bade thee slay thy mother.
 And this for after times shall rest the law,
 That equal votes shall still acquit the accused.
 Yet shall the Dread Ones, anguish-stricken for this, 1270
 Hard by that hill sink into earth's deep cleft
 Revered by men, a sacred oracle.¹
 Thou by Alpheius' streams must found a city
 Arcadian, near Lykaian Zeus's shrine;
 And by thy name the city shall be called.
 This to thee: touching yon Aegisthus' corse,
 The Argive folk shall hide it in the tomb.
 Thy mother—Menelaus, now first come
 To Nauplia, since he won the land of Troy,
 Shall bury her, he and Helen: for she comes, 1280
 Who ne'er saw Troy, from Proteus' halls in Egypt.²
 But Zeus, to stir up strife and slaughter of men,
 A phantom Helen unto Ilium sent.
 And Pylades shall take his virgin wife,
 And from the land Achaian lead her home;
 And him, thy kinsman by repute,³ shall bring
 To Phocis, and shall give him store of wealth.
 Thou, journey round the neck of Isthmian land,⁴
 Till thou attain Kekropia's blissful home.⁵
 For, when thou hast fulfilled this murder's doom, 1290

¹ As there is no record of oracles delivered at the Areopagus by the Eumenides, *οἰκητήριον* has been proposed—'their hallowed dwelling-place.'

² According to the legend followed in the 'Helena,' but not in 'The Daughters of Troy.'

³ Thy nominal brother-in-law, *i.e.* the peasant, reputed husband of Electra.

⁴ The Isthmus of Corinth.

⁵ Athens, whose citadel was called Kekropia, from its founder and first king, Kekrops.

Thou shalt be happy, freed from all these toils.

Chor. O children of Zeus, may we draw nigh
Unto speech of your Godhead lawfully?

Kas. Yea: stainless are ye of the murderous deed.

Or. I too, may I speak to you, Tyndareus' seed?

Kas. Thou too: for on Phoebus I lay the guilt
Of the blood thou hast spilt.

Chor. How fell it, that ye Gods, brethren twain
Of her that is slain,

Kept not from her halls those Powers of Bane?

1300

Kas. By resistless fate was her doom on-driven,
And by Phoebus' response, in unwisdom given.

El. Yet why hath Apollo by bodings ordained
That I with a mother's blood be stained?

Kas. In the deed ye shared, as the doom ye shared:
The curse of your sires was for twain prepared,
And it hath not spared.

Or. Ah, sister mine, after long, long space of weary waiting,
to see thy face,

And lo, from thy love to be straightway torn,
To forsake thee, be left of thee forlorn!

1310

Kas. A husband is hers and a home: this pain
Alone must she know, no more to remain
Here, ne'er know Argos again.

El. What drearier lot than this, to be banned
For aye from the borders of fatherland?

Or. But I flee from the halls of my father afar;
For a mother's blood at the alien's bar
Arraigned must I stand!

Kas. Fear not: to the sacred town shalt thou fare
Of Pallas all safely: be strong to bear.

1320

El. Fold me around, breast close to breast,
O brother, O loved!—of all loved best!
For the curse of a mother's blood must sever
From our sire's halls us, for ever—for ever!

Or. Fling thee on me! Cling close, mine own!
As over the grave of the dead make moan.

Kas. Alas and alas!—for thy pitiful wail
Even Gods' hearts fail;

For with me and with all the Abiders on High
Is compassion for mortals' misery.

1330

Or. I shall look upon thee not again—not again!

El. Nor my yearning eyes upon thee shall I strain!

Or. The last words these we may speak, we twain!

El. O city, farewell ;

Farewell, ye maidens therein that dwell !

Or. O faithful and true, must we part, part so ?

El. We part ;—my welling eyes overflow.

Or. Pylades, go ; fair fortune betide :

Take thou Electra for bride.

1340

Kas. These shall find spousal-solace :—up, be doing ;

Yon hell-hounds flee, till thou to Athens win.

Their fearful feet pad on thy track pursuing,

Demons of dragon talon, swart of skin,

Who batten on mortal agonies their malice.

We speed to seas Sicilian, from their wrath

To save the prows of surge-imperilled galleys :

Yet, as we pace along the cloudland path,

We help not them that work abomination ;

But, whoso loveth faith and righteousness

All his life long, to such we bring salvation,

Bring them deliverance out of all distress.

Let none dare then in wrong to be partaker,

Neither to voyage with the doomed oath-breaker.

I am a God : to men I publish this.

Chor. Farewell ! Ah, whosoe'er may know this blessing,

To fare well, never crushed 'neath ills oppressing,

Alone of mortals tastes abiding bliss.

1350

[*Exeunt omnes.*]

APPENDIX A.

On the Character of Admetus.

WHILE the play of *Alcestis* is, of all the remains of the ancient classical drama, the most popular with modern readers, it is, beyond question, the most misunderstood. We bring to our estimate of it judgments based on instincts inherited from our Teutonic forefathers, ideas which took form in the days of medieval chivalry, and convictions begotten in us of the teachings of Christianity. Hence, when we read of a husband who availed himself of a heaven-given opportunity of escaping death at the price of his wife's life, all our sympathies go out to the love, the unselfishness, the courage, of the willing sacrifice, and in the husband's conduct we find the meanest selfishness and the most unmanly cowardice. The invectives of Pheres appear as a well-merited castigation, unanswerable in their withering force. The sorrow of Admetus seems hypocritical, and his lamentations hollow. Browning (*Balaustion's Adventure*) describes him as doing in the death-scene everything but the one right thing, which would have been to insist on revoking the compact. It is not enough to answer that Euripides had to make the best of a legend which he could not alter; we have to account for the fact that the legend, both in its original form and in Euripides' treatment of it, was regarded as redounding to Admetus' glory rather than to his shame. For it is certain that the modern view is diametrically opposed to that of the Athenian audience. In their eyes—1. Admetus was a noble character: 2. He was in the right in respect of the *motif* and incidents of the play: 3. He reaped the just reward of the good man.

1. Admetus was a noble character, for he displayed the highest social virtue recognised by a Greek—hospitality, the crowning height of unselfishness, as truly a part of patriotism in peace, as heroism was in war. The hospitable man embodied for them the virtues, not only of the modern philanthropist, but also those of the enlightened diplomatist: he established and maintained friendly relations with other states, gaining for his city allies, and for her people friends and protectors in foreign lands, and that in days when, without such, not only was travel perilous, but even commerce was difficult and precarious. The deserts of the man who thus served his country, and his countrymen individually, without regarding the cost to his own fortune and convenience, could not be overrated. Conjugal affection shrank into insignificance beside such a trait. Admetus is the supreme type of this class, a point which is emphasized by the fact that Apollo set the seal of Heaven's approval upon his peculiar excellence, by accepting, and so consecrating, his hospitality. It was his duty to his country (quite apart from his position as her king and protector), to neglect no means of prolonging his usefulness.

2. He was in the right in respect to the *motif* and incidents of the play:—A God put forth special exertions, taxed to the utmost his divine craft in outwitting the Fates, in order to gain a conditional privilege for his earthly friend. That the man should thereupon decline to accept the boon, would have seemed to the Greeks, not false delicacy merely, but impiety; just as it

would have seemed to a Hebrew impious for Abraham to renounce the favour of God when it involved the sacrifice of his son. The acceptance of the condition was perhaps the easier, because the time of its fulfilment was indefinite, as we gather from ll. 524 and 526, where Herakles, while referring to Alcestis' pledge as a matter well known to him, yet has no idea that the time for its redemption has come. The compact once made, we may fairly infer that it was impossible to draw back from it: a mortal could not play fast and loose with the powers beneath, and 'the Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts'. Hence, though Admetus passionately cries to Alcestis to take him with her, he does not, he cannot, propose the impossible, to die instead of her. Again, it was part of the fitness of things that the less valuable life should be surrendered for the more valuable. To the Greeks of that time, the proper victim should have been the king's old father or mother. Pheres' conduct in valuing his own life before that of his son was in their eyes unnatural, unreasonable, and unpatriotic. He owed a paternal duty to his son: he had already enjoyed his share of life's pleasures; his life was no longer worth living, for the utter contempt for old age prevalent in Athens in those days, must have made its infirmities an unmitigated misfortune:¹ and his life was now useless to the community. Hence his arguments in reply to Admetus' reproaches would appear as a tissue of selfishness and shamelessness. His exclamation (l. 726) that he cares not what men may say of him after his death—a sentiment simply atrocious to a Greek²—is enough in itself to indicate that he is meant to be in the wrong throughout the altercation, in which he could have been in the right only on the supposition that he had as good a claim to live as his son, which is precisely what to the Greek was inconceivable. Failing the substitute who shirked his duty, Alcestis would be regarded as simply fulfilling hers in yielding her life. For here again, besides the obvious claims of wifely devotion, was the incontestable fact that the less precious life was given for the more precious. It was an axiom with the Greeks, which Euripides has in the *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1394) put into words, that 'the life of one man was better than that of ten thousand women.' That Alcestis did but rise to the height of her duty is in no way inconsistent with the praises lavished upon her. A soldier who throws himself in front of his king to receive in his own body the stroke of an assassin or a foe is indeed extolled, but would he not be counted false to his duty, did he, at the supreme moment, shrink behind his king? The especial pathos of the situation to the audience lay in this, that the sacrifice of a young and happy woman was forced upon her by the cowardly selfishness, not of her husband, but of a miserable old man: that Admetus should not have found a substitute at all would have seemed monstrous.

3. Admetus reaped the just reward of the good man:—All the respectable characters of the play have nothing but sympathy for him. The Chorus—the embodiment of enlightened public opinion—praise him and condemn his parents: they put up prayers on his behalf: they offer for his consolation considerations which presuppose the paramount value of the life so redeemed, and express a nascent hope (ll. 603–5) that there may yet be blessing in store for him. Herakles, the incarnation of manliness and high courage, is full of sympathy and admiration for him, and is kindled to enthusiasm by his

¹ This view of old age is again and again expressed in the plainest language both by the Dramatic and Gnostic poets.

² The current view is expressed by Odysseus in the *Hecuba* (ll. 315–319).

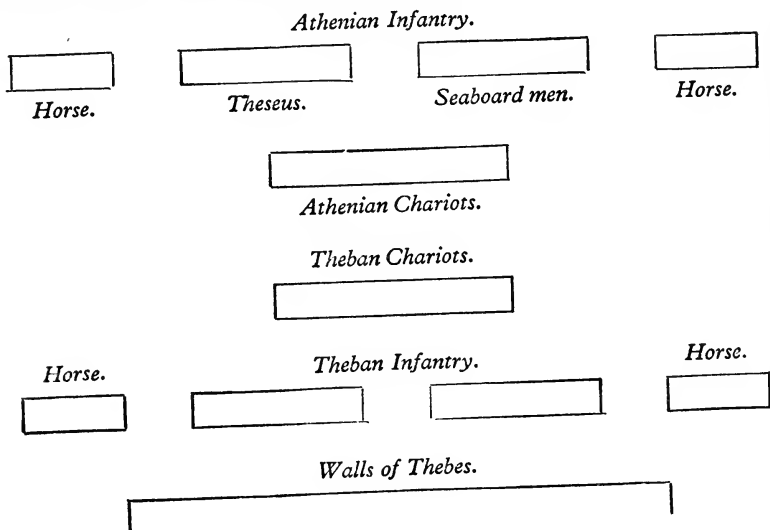
unselfish hospitality; and it is of cardinal importance to the right understanding of the situation that the turning-point of the plot is to be found in a crowning instance of Admetus' pre-eminent virtue, which is made the justification for the extreme measure by which the *dénouement* is effected, as though he alone of men were worthy to have the decrees of fate reversed in his favour. To adapt the words of a modern poet, his actions said, 'Write me as one that loves his fellow-men' . . . 'and lo, Admetus' name led all the rest.' We might go so far as to say that for the Greek audience the real theme of the play was not so much 'The devotion of Alcestis,' as 'The reward of virtue,' just as for a Hebrew the subject of the crowning episode of his first father's history was not 'The self-devotion of Isaac,' but 'The faith and obedience of Abraham.'

The foregoing remarks are, of course, not designed to change the modern reader's estimate of Admetus' action, but to show that he was not intended to be lowered in the eyes of the audience, and that whatever censure we pronounce must include also a condemnation of some fundamental principles of Greek ethics.

APPENDIX B.

Note on *Suppliants*, l. 653.

The following plan will make the disposition of the troops clear :—



EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY

A Selected List, arranged under Authors

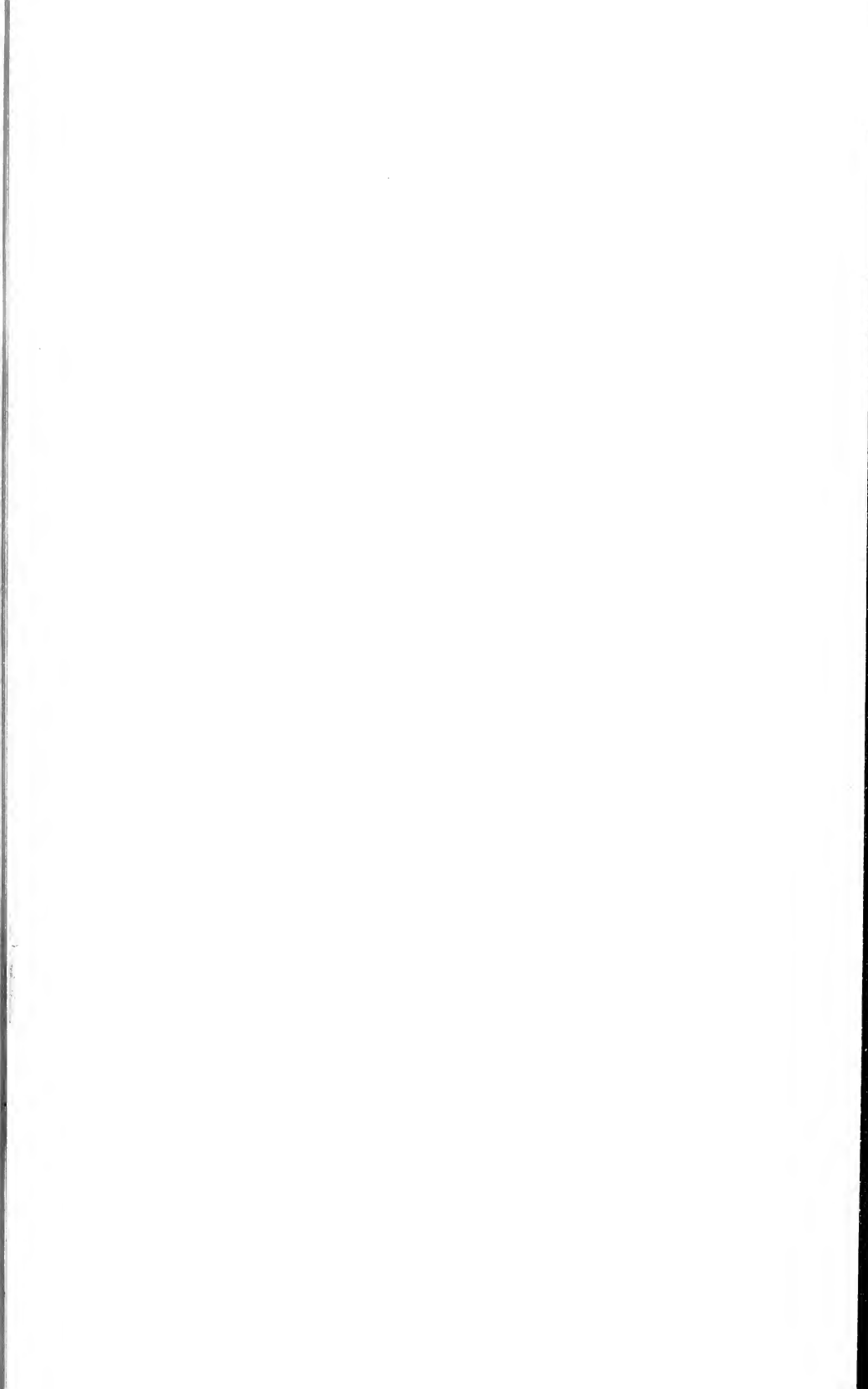
Anthologies, composite works, etc., are given at the end of the list.

- Addison's Spectator, 164-7
Aeschylus' Plays, 62
Aesop's and Other Fables, 657
Ainsworth's Tower of London, 400
" Old St Paul's, 522
" Windsor Castle, 709
" Rookwood, 870
A Kempis's Imitation of Christ, 484
Alcott's Little Women, and Good Wives, 248
" Little Men, 512
Andersen's Fairy Tales, 4
Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 624
Aquinas's (Thomas), Selected Writings, 953
Aristophanes' Acharnians, etc., 344
" Frogs, etc., 516
Aristotle's Ethics, 547
" Politics, 605
" Poetics, and Demetrius on Style, etc., 901
" Metaphysics, 1000
Arnold's (Matthew) Essays, 115
" Poems, 334
Augustine's (St) Confessions, 200
" City of God, 982-3
Austen's (Jane) Sense and Sensibility, 21
" Pride and Prejudice, 22
" Mansfield Park, 23
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