

ELECTRA

SOPHOCLES

PUBLISHED: 410 B.C

SOURCE: PROJECT GUTENBERG

TRANSLATOR: LEWIS CAMPBELL, M.A.

EDITION: NEW EDITION, REVISED, HENRY FROWDE

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PREFATORY NOTE TO THE EDITION OF 1883

I. The Hellenic spirit has been repeatedly characterized as simple Nature-worship. Even the Higher Paganism has been described as 'in other words the purified worship of natural forms.'^[1] One might suppose, in reading some modern writers, that the Nymphs and Fauns, the River-Gods and Pan, were at least as prominent in all Greek poetry as Zeus, Apollo, and Athena, or that Apollo was only the sweet singer and not also the prophet of retribution.

The fresh and unimpaired enjoyment of the Beautiful is certainly the aspect of ancient life and literature which most attracted the humanists of the sixteenth century, and still most impresses those

amongst ourselves who for various reasons desire to point the contrast between Paganism and Judaism. The two great groups of forces vaguely known as the Renaissance and the Revolution have both contributed to this result. Men who were weary of conventionality and of the weight of custom 'heavy as frost and deep almost as life,' have longed for the vision of 'Oread or Dryad glancing through the shade,' or to 'hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.' Meanwhile, that in which the Greeks most resembled us, 'the human heart by which we live,' for the very reason that it lies so near to us, is too apt to be lost from our conception of them. Another cause of this one-sided view is the illusion produced by the contemplation of statuary, together with the unapproachable perfection of form which every relic of Greek antiquity indisputably possesses.

[page xiv] But on turning from the forms of Greek art to the substance of Greek literature, we find that Beauty, although everywhere an important element, is by no means the sole or even the chief attribute of the greatest writings, nor is the Hellenic consciousness confined within the life of Nature, unless this term is allowed to comprehend man with all his thoughts and aspirations. It was in this latter sense that Hegel recognized the union of depth with brightness in Greek culture: 'If the first paradise was the paradise of nature, this is the second, the higher paradise of the human spirit, which in its fair naturalness, freedom, depth and brightness here comes forth like a bride out of her chamber. The first wild majesty of the rise of spiritual life in the East is here circumscribed by the dignity of form, and softened into beauty. Its depth shows itself no longer in confusion, obscurity, and inflation, but lies open before us in simple clearness. Its brightness (Heiterkeit) is not a childish play, but covers a sadness which knows the baldness of fate but is not by that knowledge driven out of freedom and measure.' Hegel's *Werke*, vol. XVI. p. 139 (translated by Prof. Caird). The simplicity of Herodotus, for example, does not exclude far reaching thoughts on the political advantages of liberty, nor such reflections on experience as are implied in the saying of Artabanus, that the transitoriness of human life is the least of its evils. And in what modern writing is more of the wisdom of life condensed than in the History of Thucydides? It is surely more true to say of Greek literature that it contains types of

all things human, stamped with the freshness, simplicity, and directness which belong to first impressions, and to the first impressions of genius.

Now the 'thoughts and aspirations,' which are nowhere absent from Greek literature, and make a centre of growing warmth and light in its Periclean period—when the conception of human nature for the first time takes definite shape—have no less of Religion in them than underlay the 'creed outworn'. To think otherwise would be an error of the same kind as that 'abuse [page xv] of the word Atheism' against which the author of the work above alluded to protests so forcibly.

Religion, in the sense here indicated, is the mainspring and vital principle of Tragedy. The efforts of Aeschylus and Sophocles were sustained by it, and its inevitable decay through the scepticism which preceded Socrates was the chief hindrance to the tragic genius of Euripides. Yet the inequality of which we have consequently to complain in him is redeemed by pregnant hints of something yet 'more deeply interfused,' which in him, as in his two great predecessors, is sometimes felt as 'modern,' because it is not of an age but for all time. The most valuable part of every literature is something which transcends the period and nation out of which it springs.

On the other hand, much that at first sight seems primitive in Greek tragedy belongs more to the subject than to the mode of handling. The age of Pericles was in advance of that in which the legends were first Hellenized and humanized, just as this must have been already far removed from the earliest stages of mythopoeic imagination. The reader of Aeschylus or Sophocles should therefore be warned against attributing to the poet's invention that which is given in the fable.

An educated student of Italian painting knows how to discriminate—say in an Assumption by Botticelli—between the traditional conventions, the contemporary ideas, and the refinements of the artist's own fancy. The same indulgence must be extended to dramatic art. The tragedy of King Lear is not rude or primitive, although the subject belongs to prehistoric times in Britain. Nor is Goethe's Faust mediaeval in spirit as in theme. So neither is the Oedipus Rex the product of 'lawless and uncertain thoughts,'

notwithstanding the unspeakable horror of the story, but is penetrated by the most profound estimate of all in human life that is saddest, and all that is most precious.

Far from being naive naturalists after the Keats [page xvi] fashion, the Greek tragic poets had succeeded to a pessimistic reaction from simple Pagan enjoyment; they were surrounded with gloomy questionings about human destiny and Divine Justice, and they replied by looking steadily at the facts of life and asserting the supreme worth of innocence, equity, and mercy.

They were not philosophers, for they spoke the language of feeling; but the civilization of which they were the strongest outcome was already tinged with influences derived from early philosophy—especially from the gnomic wisdom of the sixth century and from the spirit of theosophic speculation, which in Aeschylus goes far even to recast mythology. The latter influence was probably reinforced, through channels no longer traceable, by the Eleusinian worship, in which the mystery of life and death and of human sorrow had replaced the primitive wonder at the phenomena of the year.

And whatever elements of philosophic theory or mystic exaltation the drama may have reflected, it was still more emphatically the repository of some of the most precious traditions of civilized humanity—traditions which philosophy has sometimes tended to extenuate, if not to destroy.

Plato's *Gorgias* contains one of the most eloquent vindications of the transcendent value of righteousness and faithfulness as such. But when we ask, 'Righteousness in what relation?'—'Faithfulness to whom?'—the *Gorgias* is silent; and when the vacant outline is filled up in the *Republic*, we are presented with an ideal of man's social relations, which, although it may be regarded as the ultimate development of existing tendencies, yet has no immediate bearing on any actual condition of the world.

The ideal of the tragic poet may be less perfect; or rather he does not attempt to set before us abstractedly any single ideal. But the grand types of character which he presents to the world are not merely imaginary. They are creatures of flesh and blood, men and women, to whom the unsullied purity of their homes, the freedom [page xvii] and power of their country, the respect and love of their

fellow-citizens, are inestimably dear. From a Platonic, and still more from a Christian point of view, the best morality of the age of Pericles is no doubt defective. Such counsels of perfection as 'Love your enemies', or 'A good man can harm no one, not even an enemy',—are beyond the horizon of tragedy, unless dimly seen in the person of Antigone. The coexistence of savage vindictiveness with the most affectionate tenderness is characteristic of heroes and heroines alike, and produces some of the most moving contrasts. But the tenderness is no less deep and real for this, and while the chief persons are thus passionate, the Greek lesson of moderation and reasonableness is taught by the event, whether expressed or not by the mouth of sage or prophet or of the 'ideal bystander'.

Greek tragedy, then, is a religious art, not merely because associated with the festival of Dionysus, nor because the life which it represented was that of men who believed, with all the Hellenes, in Zeus, Apollo, and Athena, or in the power of Moira and the Erinyes,—not merely because it represented

'the dread strife

Of poor humanity's afflicted will

Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny,'

but much more because it awakened in the Athenian spectator emotions of wonder concerning human life, and of admiration for nobleness in the unfortunate—a sense of the infinite value of personal uprightness and of domestic purity—which in the most universal sense of the word were truly religious,—because it expressed a consciousness of depths which Plato never fathomed, and an ideal of character which, if less complete than Shakespeare's, is not less noble. It is indeed a 'rough' generalization that ranks the Agamemnon with the Adoniasusae as a religious composition.

II. This spiritual side of tragic poetry deserves to be emphasized both as the most essential aspect of it, and as giving it the most permanent claim to lasting recognition. [page xviii] And yet, apart from this, merely as dramas, the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides will never cease to be admired. These poets are teachers, but they teach through art. To ask simply, as Carlyle once

did, 'What did they think?' is not the way to understand or learn from them.

Considered simply as works of art, the plays of Sophocles stand alone amongst dramatic writings in their degree of concentration and complex unity.

1. The interest of a Sophoclean drama is always intensely personal, and is almost always centred in an individual destiny. In other words, it is not historical or mythical, but ethical. Single persons stand out magnificently in Aeschylus. But the action is always larger than any single life. Each tragedy or trilogy resembles the fragment of a sublime Epic poem. Mighty issues revolve about the scene, whether this is laid on Earth or amongst the Gods, issues far transcending the fate of Orestes or even of Prometheus. In the perspective painting of Sophocles, these vast surroundings fall into the background, and the feelings of the spectator are absorbed in sympathy with the chief figure on the stage, round whom the other characters—the members of the chorus being included—are grouped with the minutest care.

2. In this grouping of the persons, as well as in the conduct of the action, Sophocles is masterly in his use of pathetic contrast. This motive must of course enter into all tragedy—nothing can be finer than the contrast of Cassandra to Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon, —but in Sophocles it is all-pervading, and some of the minor effects of it are so subtle that although inevitably felt by the spectator they are often lost upon the mere reader or student. And every touch, however transient, is made to contribute to the main effect.

To recur once more to the much-abused analogy of statuary:—the work of Aeschylus may be compared to a colossal frieze, while that of Sophocles resembles the pediment of a smaller temple. Or if, as in considering the Oresteian trilogy, the arrangement of the pediment [page xix] affords the more fitting parallel even for Aeschylus, yet the forms are so gigantic that minute touches of characterization and of contrast are omitted as superfluous. Whereas in Sophocles, it is at once the finish of the chief figure and the studied harmony of the whole, which have led his work to be compared with that of his contemporary Phidias. Such comparison, however, is useful by way of illustration merely. It must never be forgotten that, as Lessing

pointed out to some who thought the *Philoctetes* too sensational, analogies between the arts are limited by essential differences of material and of scope. All poetry represents successive moments. Its figures are never in repose. And although the action of Tragedy is concentrated and revolves around a single point, yet it is a dull vision that confounds rapidity of motion with rest.

3. Sophocles found the subjects of his dramas already embodied not only in previous tragedies but in Epic and Lyric poetry. And there were some fables, such as that of the death of Oedipus at Colonos, which seem to have been known to him only through oral tradition. For some reason which is not clearly apparent, both he and Aeschylus drew more largely from the Cyclic poets than from 'our Homer'. The inferior and more recent Epics, which are now lost, were probably more episodical, and thus presented a more inviting repertory of legends than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Arctinus of Lesbos had treated at great length the story of the House of Thebes. The legend of Orestes, to which there are several allusions, not always consistent with each other, in the Homeric poems, had been a favourite and fruitful subject of tradition and of poetical treatment in the intervening period. Passages of the Tale of Troy, in which other heroes than Achilles had the pre-eminence, had been elaborated by Lesches and other Epic writers of the Post-Homeric time. The voyage of the Argonauts, another favourite heroic theme, supplied the subjects of many dramas which have disappeared. Lastly, the taking of Oechalia by [page xx] Heracles, and the events which followed it, had been narrated in a long poem, in which one version of that hero's multiform legend was fully set forth.

The subjects of the King Oedipus, Oedipus at Colonos, and *Antigone*, are taken from the Tale of Thebes, the *Aias* and the *Philoctetes* are founded on incidents between the end of the *Iliad* and the taking of Troy, the *Electra* represents the vengeance of Orestes, the crowning event in the tale of 'Pelops' line', the *Trachiniae* recounts the last crisis in the life of Heracles.

4. Of the three Theban plays, the *Antigone* was first composed, although its subject is the latest. Aeschylus in the *Seven against Thebes* had already represented the young heroine as defying the

victorious citizens who forbade the burial of her brother, the rebel Polynices. He allowed her to be supported in her action by a band of sympathizing friends. But in the play of Sophocles she stands alone, and the power which she defies is not that of the citizens generally, but of Creon, whose will is absolute in the State. Thus the struggle is intensified, and both her strength and her desolation become more impressive, while the opposing claims of civic authority and domestic piety are more vividly realized, because either is separately embodied in an individual will. By the same means the situation is humanized to the last degree, and the heart of the spectator, although strained to the uttermost with pity for the heroic maiden whose life when full of brightest hopes was sacrificed to affection and piety, has still some feeling left for the living desolation of the man, whose patriotic zeal, degenerating into tyranny, brought his city to the brink of ruin, and cost him the lives of his two sons and of his wife, whose dying curse, as well as that of Haemon, is denounced upon him.

In the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Sophocles goes back to the central crisis of the Theban story. And again he fixes our attention, not so much on the fortunes of the city, or of the reigning house, as on the man Oedipus, his glory and his fall.—

[page xxi]

'O mirror of our fickle state
Since man on earth unparalleled!
The rarer thy example stands,
By how much from the top of wondrous glory,
Strongest of mortal men,
To lowest pitch of abject fortune thou art fallen[2].

The horror and the pity of it are both enhanced by the character of Oedipus—his essential innocence, his affectionateness, his uncalculating benevolence and public spirit;—while his impetuosity and passionateness make the sequel less incredible.

The essential innocence of Oedipus, which survives the ruin of his hopes in this world, supplies the chief motive of the *Oedipus at Colonus*. This drama, which Sophocles is said to have written late in life, is in many ways contrasted with the former *Oedipus*. It begins with pity and horror, and ends with peace. It is only in part founded

on Epic tradition, the main incident belonging apparently to the local mythology of the poet's birthplace. It also implies a later stage of ethical reflection, and in this respect resembles the *Philoctetes*; it depends more on lyrical and melodramatic effects, and allows more room for collateral and subsidiary motives than any other of the seven. Yet in its principal theme, the vindication or redemption of an essentially noble spirit from the consequences of error, it repeats a note which had been struck much earlier in the *Aias* with great force, although with some crudities of treatment which are absent from the later drama.

5. In one of the Epic poems which narrated the fall of Troy, the figure of Aias was more prominent than in the *Iliad*. He alone and unassisted was there said to have repulsed Hector from the ships, and he had the chief share, although in this he was aided by Odysseus, in rescuing the dead body of Achilles. Yet Achilles' arms were awarded by the votes of the chieftains, as the prize of valour, not to Aias, but to Odysseus. This, no doubt, meant that wisdom is better than strength. But [page xxii] the wisdom of Odysseus in these later Epics was often less nobly esteemed than in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and was represented as alloyed with cunning.

Aias has withdrawn with his Salaminians, in a rage, from the fight, and after long brooding by the ships his wrath has broken forth into a blaze which would have endangered the lives of Odysseus and the Atridae, had not Athena in her care for them changed his anger into madness. Hence, instead of slaying the generals, he makes havoc amongst the flocks and herds, which as the result of various forays were the common property of the whole army. The truth is discovered by Odysseus with the help of Athena, and from being next to Achilles in renown, Aias becomes the object of universal scorn and hatred. The sequel of this hour of his downfall is the subject of the *Aias* of Sophocles. After lamenting his fate, the hero eludes the vigilance of his captive bride Tecmessa, and of his Salaminian mariners, and, in complete solitude, falls upon his sword. He is found by Tecmessa and by his half-brother Teucer, who has returned too late from a raid in the Mysian highlands. The Atridae would prohibit Aias' funeral; but Odysseus, who has been specially enlightened by Athena, advises generous forbearance, and his

counsel prevails. The part representing the disgrace and death of Aias is more affecting to modern readers than the remainder of the drama. But we should bear in mind that the vindication of Aias after death, and his burial with undiminished honours, had an absorbing interest for the Athenian and Salaminian spectator.

Philoctetes also is rejected by man and accepted by Destiny. The Argives in his case, as the Thebans in the case of Oedipus, are blind to the real intentions of the Gods.

The Philoctetes, like the Oedipus at Colonus, was a work of Sophocles' old age; and while it can hardly be said that the fire of tragic feeling is abated in either of these plays, dramatic effect is modified in both of them by the influence of the poet's contemplative mood. The interest of the action in the Philoctetes is more inward [page xxiii] and psychological than in any other ancient drama. The change of mind in Neoptolemus, the stubborn fixity of will in Philoctetes, contrasted with the confiding tenderness of his nature, form the elements of a dramatic movement at once extremely simple and wonderfully sustained. No purer ideal of virtuous youth has been imagined than the son of Achilles, who in this play, though sorely tempted, sets faithfulness before ambition.

6. In the Electra, which, though much earlier than the Philoctetes, is still a work of his mature genius, our poet appears at first sight to be in unequal competition with Aeschylus. If the Theban trilogy of the elder poet had remained entire, a similar impression might have been produced by the Oedipus Tyrannus. It is best to lay such comparisons aside, and to consider the work of Sophocles simply on its own merits. The subject, as he has chosen to treat it, is the heroic endurance of a woman who devotes her life to the vindication of intolerable wrongs done to her father, and the restoration of her young brother to his hereditary rights. Hers is the human agency which for this purpose works together with Apollo. But the divine intention is concealed from her. She suffers countless indignities from her father's enemies, of whom her own mother is the chief. And, at length, all her hopes are shattered by the false tidings that Orestes is no more. Even then she does not relinquish her resolve. And the revulsion from her deep sorrow to extremity of joy, when she finds Orestes at her side and ready to perform the act of vengeance

in his own person, is irresistably affecting, even when the play is only read.

Sophocles is especially great in the delineation of ideal female characters. The heroic ardour of Antigone, and the no less heroic persistence and endurance of Electra, are both founded on the strength of their affection. And the affection in both cases is what some moderns too have called the purest of human feelings, the love of a sister for a brother. Another aspect of that world-old marvel, 'the love of women,' was presented in Aias' captive bride, Tecmessa. This softer type also attains [page xxiv] to heroic grandeur in Dêanira, the wronged wife of Heracles, whose fatal error is caused by the innocent working of her wounded love.

It is strange that so acute a critic as A.W. Schlegel should have doubted the Sophoclean authorship of the Trachiniae. If its religious and moral lessons are even less obtrusive than those of either Oedipus and of the Antigone, there is no play which more directly pierces to the very heart of humanity. And it is a superficial judgement which complains that here at all events our sympathies are distracted between the two chief persons, Dêanira and Heracles. To one passion of his, to one fond mistake of hers, the ruin of them both is due. Her love has made their fates inseparable. And the spectator, in sharing Hyllus' grief, is afflicted for them both at once. We may well recognize in this treatment of the death of Heracles the hand of him who wrote—

συ και δικαιων αδικουσ
φρενας παρασπας επι λωβα,

..., ...

αμαχος γαρ εμπαιζει θεος 'Αφροδιτα[3].

7. It is unnecessary to expatiate here on the merits of construction in which these seven plays are generally acknowledged to be unrivalled; the natural way in which the main situation is explained, the suddenness and inevitableness of the complications, the steadily sustained climax of emotion until the action culminates, the preservation of the fitting mood until the end, the subtlety and effectiveness of the minor contrasts of situation and character[4].

But it may not be irrelevant to observe that the 'acting qualities' of Sophocles, as of Shakespeare, are [page xxv] best known to those

who have seen him acted, whether in Greek, as by the students at Harvard[5] and Toronto[6], and more recently at Cambridge[7], or in English long ago by Miss Helen Faucit (since Lady Martin[8]), or still earlier and repeatedly in Germany, or in the French version of the *Antigone* by MM. Maurice and Vacquerie (1845) or of *King Oedipus* by M. Lacroix, in which the part of *Œdipe Roi* was finely sustained by M. Geoffroy in 1861, and by M. Mounet Sully in 1881[9]. With reference to the latter performance, which was continued throughout the autumn season, M. Francisque Sarcey wrote an article for the *Temps* newspaper of August 15, 1881, which is full of just and vivid appreciation. At the risk of seeming absurdly 'modern', I will quote from this article some of the more striking passages.

'Ce troisième et ce quatrième actes, les plus émouvants qui se soient jamais produits sur aucune scène, se composent d'une suite de narrations, qui viennent l'une après l'autre frapper au cœur d'*Œdipe*, et qui ont leur contrecoup dans l'âme des spectateurs. Je ne sais qu'une pièce au monde qui soit construite de la sorte, c'est l'*École des Femmes*. Ce rapprochement vous paraîtra [page xxvi] singulier, sans doute.... Mais ... c'est dans le vieux drame grec comme dans la comédie du maître français une trouvaille de génie....

'Sophocle a voulu, après des émotions si terribles, après des angoisses si sèches, ouvrir la source des larmes: il a écrit un cinquième acte....

'Les yeux crevés d'*Œdipe* ne sont qu'un accident, ou, si vous aimez mieux, un accessoire, Le poète, sans s'arrêter à ce détail, a mis sur les lèvres de son héros toute la gamme des sentiments douloureux qu'excite une si prodigieuse infortune....

'À la lecture, elle est un peu longue cette scène de lamentations. Au théâtre, on n'a pas le temps de la trouver telle: on pleure de toute son âme et de tous ses yeux. C'est qu'après avoir eu le cœur si longtemps serré comme dans un étau, on éprouve comme un soulagement à sentir en soi jaillir la source des larmes. Sophocle, qui semble avoir été le plus malin des dramaturges, comme il est le plus parfait des écrivains

dramatiques, a cherché là un effet de contraste dont l'effet est immanquant sur le public.'

These and other like remarks of one of the best-known critics of the Parisian stage show that the dramatic art of Sophocles is still a living power.

I am well aware how feeble and inadequate the present attempted reproduction must appear to any reader who knows the Greek original. There is much to be said for the view of an eminent scholar who once declared that he would never think of translating a Greek poet. But the end of translating is not to satisfy fastidious scholars, but to make the classics partially accessible to those whose acquaintance with them would otherwise be still more defective. Part of this version of Sophocles was printed several years ago in an imperfect form. The present volume contains the seven extant plays entire. As the object has been to give the effect of each drama as a whole, rather than to dwell on particular 'beauties' (which only a poet can render), the fragments have not been included. But the reader should [page xxvii] bear in mind that the seven plays are less than a tithe of the work produced by the poet in his lifetime.

It may very possibly be asked why verse has been employed at all. Why not have listened to Carlyle's rough demand, 'Tell us what they thought; none of your silly poetry'? The present translator can only reply that he began with prose, but soon found that, for tragic dialogue in English, blank verse appeared a more natural and effective vehicle than any prose style which he could hope to frame. And with the dialogue in verse, it was impossible to have the lyric parts in any sort of prose, simply because the reader would then have felt an intolerable incongruity. These parts have therefore been turned into such familiar lyric measures as seemed at once possible and not unsuitable. And where this method was found impracticable, as sometimes in the *Commoi*, blank metres have again been used, —with such liberties as seemed appropriate to the special purpose. The writer's hope throughout has been, not indeed fully to transfuse the poetry of Sophocles into another tongue, but to make the poet's dramatic intention to be understood and felt by English readers. One more such endeavour may possibly find acceptance at a time when

many causes have combined to awaken a fresh interest at once in dramatic literature and in Hellenic studies.

The reader who is hitherto unacquainted with the Greek drama, should be warned that the parts assigned to the 'Chorus' were often distributed among its several members, who spoke or chanted, singly or in groups, alternately or in succession. In some cases, but not in all, *Ch. 1*, *Ch. 2*, &c., have been prefixed, to indicate such an arrangement.

ELECTRA

THE PERSONS

- An Old Man, *formerly one of the retainers of Agamemnon.*
- ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.*
- ELECTRA, *sister of Orestes.*
- CHORUS *of Argive Women.*
- CHRYSOTHEMIS, *sister of Orestes and Electra.*
- CLYTEMNESTRA.
- AEGISTHUS.
-
- PYLADES *appears with ORESTES, but does not speak.*

SCENE. Mycenae: before the palace of the Pelopidae.

[page 130] Agamemnon on his return from Troy, had been murdered by his wife Clytemnestra and her paramour Aegisthus, who had usurped the Mycenaean throne. Orestes, then a child, had been rescued by his sister Electra, and sent into Phocis with the one servant who remained faithful to his old master. The son of Agamemnon now returns, being of a full age, accompanied by this same attendant and his friend Pylades, with whom he has already concerted a plan for taking vengeance on his father's murderers, in obedience to the command of Apollo.

Orestes had been received in Phocis by Strophius, his father's friend. Another Phocian prince, named Phanoteus, was a friend of

Aegisthus.
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ELECTRA

ORESTES and the Old Man—PYLADES is present.

OLD MAN. Son of the king who led the Achaean host
Erewhile beleaguering Troy, 'tis thine to day
To see around thee what through many a year
Thy forward spirit hath sighed for. Argolis
Lies here before us, hallowed as the scene
Of Io's wildering pain: yonder, the mart
Named from [the wolf slaying God](#), and there, to our left,
Hera's famed temple. For we reach the bourn
Of far renowned Mycenae, rich in gold
And Pelops' fatal roofs before us rise,
Haunted with many horrors, whence my hand,
Thy murdered sire then lying in his gore,
Received thee from thy sister, and removed
Where I have kept thee safe and nourished thee
To this bright manhood thou dost bear, to be
The avenger of thy father's bloody death.
Wherefore, Orestes, and thou, Pylades,
Dearest of friends, though from a foreign soil,
Prepare your enterprise with speed. Dark night
Is vanished with her stars, and day's bright orb
Hath waked the birds of morn into full song.
Now, then, ere foot of man go forth, ye two
Knit counsels. 'Tis no time for shy delay:
The very moment for your act is come.

OR. Kind faithful friend, how well thou mak'st appear
Thy constancy in service to our house!

As some good steed, aged, but nobly bred,
Slacks not his spirit in the day of war,
But points his ears to the fray, even so dost thou
Press on and urge thy master in the van.
Hear, then, our purpose, and if aught thy mind,
[page 132][30-71] Keenly attent, discerns of weak or crude
In this I now set forth, admonish me.
I, when I visited the Pythian shrine
Oracular, that I might learn whereby
To punish home the murderers of my sire,
Had word from Phoebus which you straight shall hear:
'No shielded host, but thine own craft, O King!
The righteous death-blow to thine arm shall bring.'
Then, since the will of Heaven is so revealed,
Go thou within, when Opportunity
Shall marshal thee the way, and gathering all
Their business, bring us certain cognizance.
Age and long absence are a safe disguise;
They never will suspect thee who thou art.
And let thy tale be that another land,
Phocis, hath sent thee forth, and Phanoteus,
Than whom they have no mightier help in war.
Then, prefaced with an oath, declare thy news,
Orestes' death by dire mischance, down-rolled
From wheel-borne chariot in the Pythian course.
So let the fable be devised; while we,
As Phoebus ordered, with luxuriant locks
Shorn from our brows, and fair libations, crown
My father's sepulchre, and thence return
Bearing aloft the shapely vase of bronze
That's hidden hard by in brushwood, as thou knowest,
And bring them welcome tidings, that my form
Is fallen ere now to ashes in the fire.
How should this pain me, in pretence being dead,
Really to save myself and win renown?
No saying bodes men ill, that brings them gain.
Oft have I known the wise, dying in word,

Return with glorious salutation home.
So lightened by this rumour shall mine eye
Blaze yet like bale-star on mine enemies.
O native earth! and Gods that hold the land,
Accept me here, and prosper this my way!
Thou, too, paternal hearth! To thee I come,
Justly to cleanse thee by behest from heaven.
Send me not bootless, Gods, but let me found
[page 133][72-101] A wealthy line of fair posterity!
I have spoken. To thy charge! and with good heed
Perform it. We go forth. The Occasion calls,
Great taskmaster of enterprise to men.

ELECTRA (within). Woe for my hapless lot!

OLD M. Hark! from the doors, my son, methought there came
A moaning cry, as of some maid within.

OR. Can it be poor Electra? Shall we stay,
And list again the lamentable sound?

OLD M. Not so. Before all else begin the attempt
To execute Apollo's sovereign will,
Pouring libation to thy sire: this makes
Victory ours, and our success assured.[Exeunt

Enter ELECTRA.

MONODY.

EL. O purest light!
And air by earth alone
Measured and limitable, how oft have ye
Heard many a piercing moan,
Many a blow full on my bleeding breast,
When gloomy night
Hath slackened pace and yielded to the day!
And through the hours of rest,
Ah! well 'tis known
To my sad pillow in yon house of woe,
What vigil of scant joyance keeping,
Whiles all within are sleeping,
For my dear father without stint I groan,
Whom not in bloody fray

The War-god in the stranger-land
Received with hospitable hand,
But she that is my mother, and her groom,
As woodmen fell the oak,
Cleft through the skull with murdering stroke.
And o'er this gloom
No ray of pity, save from only me,
Goes forth on thee,
[page 134][101-136] My father, who didst die
A cruel death of piteous agony.
But ne'er will I
Cease from my crying and sad mourning lay,
While I behold the sky,
Glancing with myriad fires, or this fair day.
But, like some brood-bereavèd nightingale,
With far-heard wail,
Here at my father's door my voice shall sound.
O home beneath the ground!
Hades unseen, and dread Persephonè,
And darkling Hermes, and the Curse revered,
And ye, Erinyès, of mortals feared,
Daughters of Heaven, that ever see
Who die unjustly, who are wronged i' the bed
Of those they wed,
Avenge our father's murder on his foe!
Aid us, and send my brother to my side;
Alone I cannot longer bide
The oppressive strain of strength-o'er-mastering woe.

CHORUS (entering).

O sad Electra, child! 1 Of a lost mother, why still flow
Unceasingly with lamentation wild
For him who through her treachery beguiled,
Inveigled by a wife's deceit,
Fallen at the foul adulterer's feet,
Most impiously was quelled long years ago?
Perish the cause! if I may lawfully pray so.

EL. O daughters of a noble line,
Ye come to soothe me from my troublous woe.
I see, I know:
Your love is not unrecognized of mine.
But yet I will not seem as I forgot,
Or cease to mourn my hapless father's lot.
Oh, of all love
That ever may you move,
This only boon I crave—
Leave me to rave!

[page 135] CH. Lament, nor praying breath
Will raise thy sire, our honoured chief,
From that dim multitudinous gulf of death.
Beyond the mark, due grief that measureth,
Still pining with excess of pain
Thou urgest lamentation vain,
That from thy woes can bring thee no relief.
Why hast thou set thy heart on unavailing grief?

EL. Senseless were he who lost from thought
A noble father, lamentably slain!
I love thy strain,
Bewildered mourner, bird divinely taught,
For 'Itys,' 'Itys,' ever heard to pine.
O Niobè, I hold thee all divine,
Of sorrows queen,
Who with all tearful mien
Insepulchred in stone
Aye makest moan.

CH. Not unto thee alone hath sorrow come,
Daughter, that thou shouldst carry grief so far
Beyond those dwellers in the palace-home
Who of thy kindred are
And own one source with thee.
What life hath she,
Chrysothemis, and Iphianassa bright,
And he whose light
Is hidden afar from taste of horrid doom,

Youthful Orestes, who shall come
To fair Mycenae's glorious town,
Welcomed as worthy of his sire's renown,
Sped by great Zeus with kindly thought,
And to this land with happiest omen brought?

EL. Awaiting him I endlessly endure;
Unwed and childless still I go,
With tears in constant flow,
Girt round with misery that finds no cure.
But he forgets his wrong and all my teaching.
What message have I sent beseeching,
But baffled flies back idly home?
Ever he longs, he saith, but, longing, will not come.

[page 136] CH. Take heart, dear child! still mighty in the skyll 2
[173-208]

Is Zeus who ruleth all things and surveys.
Commit to him thy grief that surgeth high,
And walk in safer ways,
Let not hate vex thee sore,
Nor yet ignore
The cause of hate and sorrow in thy breast.
Time bringeth rest:
All is made easy through his power divine.
The heir of Agamemnon's line
Who dwells by Crisa's pastoral strand
Shall yet return unto his native land;
And he shall yet regard his own
Who reigns beneath upon his Stygian throne.

EL. Meanwhile my life falls from me in despair
Years pass and patience nought avails:
My heart within me fails:
Orphaned I pine without protecting care;
And like a sojourner all unregarded
At slave-like labour unrewarded
I toil within my father's hall
Thus meanly attired, and starved, a table-serving thrall.

CH. Sad was thy greeting when he reached the strand, III 1
Piteous thy crying where thy father lay
On that fell day
When the bronze edge with dire effect was driven.
By craft 'twas planned,
By frenzied lust the blow was given:
Mother and father of a monstrous birth,
Whether a God there wrought or mortal of the Earth.

EL. O day beyond all days that yet have rolled
Most hateful in thy course of light!
O horror of that night!
O hideous feast, abhorr'd, not to be told!
How could I bear it, when my father's eye
Saw death advancing from the ruthless pair,
Conjoint in cruel villany,
By whom my life was plunged in black despair?
[page 137][209-243] Oh, to the workers of such deeds as these
May great Olympus' Lord
Return of evil still afford,
Nor let them wear the gloss of sovran ease!

CH. Take thought to keep thy crying within bound. III 2
Doth not thy sense enlighten thee to see
How recklessly
Even now thou winnest undeservèd woe?
Still art thou found
To make thy misery overflow
Through self-bred gloomy strife. But not for long
Shall one alone prevail who strives against the strong.

EL. 'Twas dire oppression taught me my complaint
I know my rage a quenchless fire:
But nought, however dire,
Shall visit this my frenzy with restraint,
Or check my lamentation while I live.
Dear friends, kind women of true Argive breed,
Say, who can timely counsel give
Or word of comfort suited to my need?
Beyond all cure shall this my cause be known.

No counsels more! Ah leave,
Vain comforters, and let me grieve
With ceaseless pain, unmeasured in my moan.

CH. With kind intent
Full tenderly my words are meant;
Like a true mother pressing heart to heart,
I pray thee, do not aggravate thy smart.

EL. But have my miseries a measure? Tell.
Can it be well
To pour forgetfulness upon the dead?
Hath mortal head
Conceived a wickedness so bold?
O never may such brightness shine for me,
Nor let me peaceful be
With aught of good my life may still enfold,
If from wide echoing of my father's name
The wings of keen lament I must withhold.
[page 138][244-287] Sure holy shame
And pious care would vanish among men,
If he, mere earth and nothingness, must lie
In darkness, and his foes shall not again
Render him blood for blood in amplest penalty.

LEADER OF CH. Less from our own desires, my child, we came,
Than for thy sake. But, if we speak amiss,
Take thine own course. We still will side with thee.

EL. Full well I feel that too impatiently
I seem to multiply the sounds of woe.
Yet suffer me, dear women! Mighty force
Compels me. Who that had a noble heart
And saw her father's cause, as I have done,
By day and night more outraged, could refrain?
Are my woes lessening? Are they not in bloom?—
My mother full of hate and hateful proved,
Whilst I in my own home must dwell with these,
My father's murderers, and by them be ruled,
Dependent on their bounty even for bread.
And then what days suppose you I must pass,

When I behold Aegisthus on the throne
That was my father's; when I see him wear
Such robes, and pour libations by the hearth
Where he destroyed him; lastly, when I see
Their crowning insolence,—our regicide
Laid in my father's chamber beside her,
My mother—if she still must bear the name
When resting in those arms? Her shame is dead.
She harbours with blood-guiltiness, and fears
No vengeance, but, as laughing at the wrong,
She watches for the hour wherein with guile
She killed our sire, and orders dance and mirth
That day o' the month, and joyful sacrifice
Of thanksgiving. But I within the house
Beholding, weep and pine, and mourn that feast
Of infamy, called by my father's name,
All to myself; for not even grief may flow
As largely as my spirit would desire.
That so-called princess of a noble race
[page 139][288-327] O'ercrows my wailing with loud obloquy:
'Hilding! are you alone in grief? Are none
Mourning for loss of fathers but yourself?
'Fore the blest Gods! ill may you thrive, and ne'er
Find cure of sorrow from the powers below!
So she insults: unless she hear one say
'Orestes will arrive': then standing close,
She shouts like one possessed into mine ear,
'These are your doings, this your work, I trow.
You stole Orestes from my gripe, and placed
His life with fosterers; but you shall pay
Full penalty.' So harsh is her exclaim.
And he at hand, the husband she extols,
Hounds on the cry, that prince of cowardice,
From head to foot one mass of pestilent harm.
Tongue-doughty champion of this women's-war.
I, for Orestes ever languishing
To end this, am undone. For evermore

Intending, still delaying, he wears out
All hope, both here and yonder. How, then, friends,
Can I be moderate, or feel the touch
Of holy resignation? Evil fruit
Cannot but follow on a life of ill.

CH. Say, is Aegisthus near while thus you speak?
Or hath he left the palace? We would know.

EL. Most surely. Never think, if he were by,
I could stray out of door. He is abroad.

CH. Then with less fear I may converse with thee.

EL. Ask what you will, for he is nowhere near.

CH. First of thy brother I beseech thee tell,
How deem'st thou? Will he come, or still delay?

EL. His promise comes, but still performance sleeps.

CH. Well may he pause who plans a dreadful deed.

EL. I paused not in his rescue from the sword.

CH. Fear not. He will bestead you. He is true.

EL. But for that faith my life had soon gone by.

CH. No more! I see approaching from the house
Thy sister by both parents of thy blood,
Chrysothemis; in her hand an offering,
Such as old custom yields to those below.

[page 140][328-363]

Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS.

CHRYSOTHEMIS. What converse keeps thee now beyond the
gates,

Dear sister? why this talk in the open day?

Wilt thou not learn after so long to cease
From vain indulgence of a bootless rage?

I know in my own breast that I am pained
By what thou griev'st at, and if I had power,
My censure of their deeds would soon be known.

But in misfortune I have chosen to sail
With lowered canvas, rather than provoke
With puny strokes invulnerable foes.

I would thou didst the like: though I must own
The right is on thy side, and not on mine.

But if I mean to dwell at liberty,
I must obey in all the stronger will.

EL. 'Tis strange and pitiful, thy father's child
Can leave him in oblivion and subserve
The mother. All thy schooling of me springs
From her suggestion, not of thine own wit.
Sure, either thou art senseless, or thy sense
Deserts thy friends. Treason or dulness then?
Choose!—You declared but now, if you had strength,
You would display your hatred of this pair.
Yet, when I plan full vengeance for my sire,
You aid me not, but turn me from the attempt.
What's this but adding cowardice to evil?
For tell me, or be patient till I show,
What should I gain by ceasing this my moan?
I live to vex them:—though my life be poor,
Yet that suffices, for I honour him,
My father,—if affection touch the dead.
You say you hate them, but belie your word,
Consorting with our father's murderers.
I then, were all the gifts in which you glory
Laid at my feet, will never more obey
This tyrant power. I leave you your rich board
And life of luxury. [Ne'er be it mine](#) to feed
On dainties that would poison my heart's peace!
[page 141][364-402] I care not for such honour as thou hast.
Nor wouldst thou care if thou wert wise. But now,
Having the noblest of all men for sire,
Be called thy mother's offspring; so shall most
Discern thine infamy and traitorous mind
To thy dead father and thy dearest kin.

CH. No anger, we entreat. Both have said well,
If each would learn of other, and so do.

CHR. For my part, women, use hath seasoned me
To her discourse. Nor had I spoken of this,
Had I not heard a horror coming on
That will restrain her from her endless moan.

EL. Come speak it forth, this terror! I will yield,
If thou canst tell me worse than I endure.

CHR. I'll tell thee all I know. If thou persist
In these thy wailings, they will send thee far
From thine own land, and close thee from the day,
Where in a rock-hewn chamber thou may'st chant
Thine evil orisons in darkness drear.

Think of it, while there 's leisure to reflect;
Or if thou suffer, henceforth blame me not.

EL. And have they so determined on my life?

CHR. 'Tis certain; when Aegisthus comes again.

EL. If that be all, let him return with speed!

CHR. Unhappy! why this curse upon thyself?

EL. If this be their intent, why, let him come!

CHR. To work such harm on thee! What thought is this!

EL. Far from mine eye to banish all your brood.

CHR. Art not more tender of the life thou hast?

EL. Fair, to a marvel, is my life, I trow!

CHR. It would be, couldst thou be advised for good.

EL. Never advise me to forsake my kin.

CHR. I do not: only to give place to power.

EL. Thine be such flattery. 'Tis not my way.

CHR. Sure, to be wrecked by rashness is not well.

EL. Let me be wrecked in 'venging my own sire.

CHR. I trust his pardon for my helplessness.

EL. Such talk hath commendation from the vile.

CHR. Wilt thou not listen? Wilt thou ne'er be ruled?

[page 142][403-432] EL. No; not by thee! Let me not sink so low.

CHR. Then I will hie me on mine errand straight.

EL. Stay; whither art bound? For whom to spend those gifts?

CHR. Sent by my mother to my father's tomb

To pour libations to him.

EL. How? To him?

Most hostile to her of all souls that are?

CHR. Who perished by her hand—so thou wouldst say.

EL. What friend hath moved her? Who hath cared for this?

CHR. Methinks 'twas some dread vision, seen by night.

EL. Gods of my father, O be with me now!

CHR. What? art thou hopeful from the fear I spake of?

EL. Tell me the dream, and I will answer thee.

CHR. I know but little of it.

EL. Speak but that.

A little word hath oftentimes been the cause
Of ruin or salvation unto men.

CHR. 'Tis said she saw our father's spirit come
Once more to visit the abodes of light;
Then take and firmly plant upon the hearth
The sceptre which he bore of old, and now
Aegisthus bears: and out of this upsprang
A burgeoned shoot, that shadowed all the ground
Of loved Mycenae. So I heard the tale
Told by a maid who listened when the Queen
Made known her vision to the God of Day.
But more than this I know not, save that I
Am sent by her through terror of the dream.
And I beseech thee by the Gods we serve
To take my counsel and not rashly fall.
If thou repel me now, the time may come
When suffering shall have brought thee to my side.

EL. Now, dear Chrysothemis, of what thou bearest
Let nothing touch his tomb. 'Tis impious
[page 143][433-469] And criminal to offer to thy sire
Rites and libations from a hateful wife.
Then cast them to the winds, or deep in dust
Conceal them, where no particle may reach
His resting-place: but lie in store for her
When she goes underground. Sure, were she not
Most hardened of all women that have been,
She ne'er had sent those loveless offerings
To grace the sepulchre of him she slew.
For think how likely is the buried king
To take such present kindly from her hand,
Who slew him like an alien enemy,
Dishonoured even in death, and mangled him,

And wiped the death-stain with his flowing locks—
Sinful purgation! Think you that you bear
In those cold gifts atonement for her guilt?
It is not possible. Wherefore let be.
But take a ringlet from thy comely head,
And this from mine, [that lingers on my brow](#)
Longing to shade his tomb. Ah, give it to him,
All I can give, and this my maiden-zone,
Not daintily adorned, as once erewhile.
Then, humbly kneeling, pray that from the ground
He would arise to help us 'gainst his foes,
And grant his son Orestes with high hand
Strongly to trample on his enemies;
That in our time to come from ampler stores
We may endow him, than are ours to-day.
I cannot but imagine that his will
Hath part in visiting her sleep with fears.
But howsoe'er, I pray thee, sister mine,
Do me this service, and thyself, and him,
Dearest of all the world to me and thee,
The father of us both, who rests below.

CH. She counsels piously; and thou, dear maid,
If thou art wise, wilt do her bidding here.

CHR. Yea, when a thing is right, it is not well
Idly to wrangle, but to act with speed.
Only, dear friends, in this mine enterprise,
Let me have silence from your lips, I pray;
[page 144][470-507] For should my mother know of it, sharp pain
Will follow yet my bold adventurous feat.[Exit CHRYSOTHEMIS

CHORUS.

An erring seer am I, I
Of sense and wisdom lorn,
If this prophetic Power of right,
O'ertaking the offender, come not nigh
Ere many an hour be born.
Yon vision of the night,
That lately breathed into my listening ear,

Hath freed me, O my daughter, from all fear.
Sweet was that bodement. He doth not forget,
The Achaean lord that gave thee being, nor yet
The bronzen-griding axe, edged like a spear,
Hungry and keen, though dark with stains of time,
That in the hour of hideous crime
Quelled him with cruel butchery:
That, too, remembers, and shall testify.

From ambush deep and dreadl 2
With power of many a hand
And many hastening feet shall spring
The Fury of the adamantine tread,
Visiting Argive land
Swift recompense to bring
For eager dalliance of a blood-stained pair
Unhallowed, foul, forbidden. No omen fair,—
Their impious course hath fixed this in my soul,—
Nought but black portents full of blame shall roll
Before their eyes that wrought or aided there.
Small force of divination would there seem
In prophecy or solemn dream,
Should not this vision of the night
Reach harbour in reality aright.

O [chariot-course of Pelops, full of toil!!](#)!!
How wearisome and sore
Hath been thine issue to our native soil!—
[page 145][508-545] Since, from the golden oar
Hurled to the deep afar,
Myrtilus sank and slept,
Cruelly plucked from that fell chariot-floor,
This house unceasingly hath kept
Crime and misfortune mounting evermore.

Enter CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA. Again you are let loose and range at will.
Ay, for Aegisthus is not here, who barred
Your rashness from defaming your own kin
Beyond the gates. But now he's gone from home,

You heed not me: though you have noised abroad
That I am bold in crime, and domineer
Outrageously, oppressing thee and thine.
I am no oppressor, but I speak thee ill,
For thou art ever speaking ill of me—
Still holding forth thy father's death, that I
Have done it. So I did: I know it well:
That I deny not; for not I alone
But Justice slew him; and if you had sense,
To side with Justice ought to be your part.
For who but he of all the Greeks, your sire,
For whom you whine and cry, who else but he
Took heart to sacrifice unto the Gods
Thy sister?—having less of pain, I trow,
In getting her, than I, that bore her, knew!
Come, let me question thee! On whose behalf
Slew he my child? Was 't for the Argive host?
What right had they to traffic in my flesh?—
Menelaüs was his brother. Wilt thou say
He slew my daughter for his brother's sake?
How then should he escape me? Had not he,
Menelaüs, children twain, begotten of her
Whom to reclaim that army sailed to Troy?
Was Death then so enamoured of my seed,
That he must feast thereon and let theirs live?
Or was the God-abandoned father's heart
Tender toward them and cruel to my child?
[page 146][546-581] Doth this not argue an insensate sire?
I think so, though your wisdom may demur.
And could my lost one speak, she would confirm it.
For my part, I can dwell on what I have done
Without regret. You, if you think me wrong,
Bring reasons forth and blame me to my face!
EL. Thou canst not say this time that I began
And brought this on me by some taunting word.
But, so you'd suffer me, I would declare
The right both for my sister and my sire.

CLY. Thou hast my sufferance. Nor would hearing vex,
If ever thus you tuned your speech to me.

EL. Then I will speak. You say you slew him. Where
Could there be found confession more depraved,
Even though the cause were righteous? But I'll prove
No rightful vengeance drew thee to the deed,
But the vile bands of him you dwell with now.
Or ask the huntress Artemis, what sin
She punished, when she tied up all the winds
Round Aulis.—I will tell thee, for her voice
Thou ne'er may'st hear! 'Tis rumoured that my sire,
Sporting within the goddess' holy ground,
His foot disturbed a dappled hart, whose death
Drew from his lips some rash and boastful word.
Wherefore Latona's daughter in fell wrath
Stayed the army, that in quittance for the deer
My sire should slay at the altar his own child.
So came her sacrifice. The Achaean fleet
Had else no hope of being launched to Troy
Nor to their homes. Wherefore, with much constraint
And painful urging of his backward will,
Hardly he yielded;—not for his brother's sake.
But grant thy speech were sooth, and all were done
In aid of Menelaüs; for this cause
Hadst thou the right to slay him? What high law
Ordaining? Look to it, in establishing
Such precedent thou dost not lay in store
Repentance for thyself. For if by right
[page 147][581-620] One die for one, thou first wilt be destroyed
If Justice find thee.—But again observe
The hollowness of thy pretended plea.
Tell me, I pray, what cause thou dost uphold
In doing now the basest deed of all,
Chambered with the blood-guilty, with whose aid
Thou slewest our father in that day. For him
You now bear children—ousting from their right
The stainless offspring of a holy sire.

How should this plead for pardon? Wilt thou say
Thus thou dost 'venge thy daughter's injury?
O shameful plea? Where is the thought of honour,
If foes are married for a daughter's sake?—
Enough. No words can move thee. Thy rash tongue
With checkless clamour cries that we revile
Our mother. Nay, no mother, but the chief
Of tyrants to us! For my life is full
Of weariness and misery from thee
And from thy paramour. While he abroad,
Orestes, our one brother, who escaped
Hardly from thy attempt, unhappy boy!
Wears out his life, victim of cross mischance.
Oft hast thou taunted me with fostering him
To be thy punisher. And this, be sure,
Had I but strength, I had done. Now for this word,
Proclaim me what thou wilt,—evil in soul,
Or loud in cursing, or devoid of shame:
For if I am infected with such guilt,
Methinks my nature is not fallen from thine.

CH. (looking at CLYTEMNESTRA).

I see her fuming with fresh wrath: the thought
Of justice enters not her bosom now.

CLY. What thought of justice should be mine for her,
Who at her age can so insult a mother?
Will shame withhold her from the wildest deed?

EL. Not unashamed, assure thee, I stand here,
Little as thou mayest deem it. Well I feel
My acts untimely and my words unmeet.
But your hostility and treatment force me
[page 148][620-656] Against my disposition to this course.
Harsh ways are taught by harshness.

CLY. Brazen thing!

Too true it is that words and deeds of mine
Are evermore informing thy harsh tongue.

EL. The shame is yours, because the deeds are yours.
My words are but their issue and effect.

CLY. By sovereign Artemis, whom still I serve,
You'll rue this boldness when Aegisthus comes.

EL. See now, your anger bears you off, and ne'er
Will let you listen, though you gave me leave.

CLY. Must I not even sacrifice in peace
From your harsh clamour, when you've had your say?

EL. I have done. I check thee not. Go, sacrifice!
Accuse not me of hindering piety.

CLY. (to an attendant).
Then lift for me those fruitful offerings,
While to Apollo, before whom we stand,
I raise my supplication for release
From doubts and fears that shake my bosom now.
And, O defender of our house! attend
My secret utterance. No friendly ear
Is that which hearkens for my voice. My thought
Must not be blazoned with her standing by,
Lest through her envious and wide-babbling tongue
She fill the city full of wild surmise.
List, then, as I shall speak: and grant the dreams
Whose two-fold apparition I to-night
Have seen, if good their bodement, be fulfilled:
If hostile, turn their influence on my foes.
And yield not them their wish that would by guile
Thrust me from this high fortune, but vouchsafe
That ever thus exempt from harms I rule
The Atridae's home and kingdom, in full life,
Partaking with the friends I live with now
All fair prosperity, and with my children,
Save those who hate and vex me bitterly.
Lykeian Phoebus, favourably hear
My prayer, and grant to all of us our need!
[page 149][657-689] More is there, which, though I be silent here,
A God should understand. No secret thing
Is hidden from the all-seeing sons of Heaven.

Enter the Old Man.

OLD M. Kind dames and damsels, may I clearly know
If these be King Aegisthus' palace-halls?

CH. They are, sir; you yourself have guessed aright.

OLD M. May I guess further that in yonder dame
I see his queen? She looks right royally.

CH. 'Tis she,—no other,—whom your eyes behold.

OLD M. Princess, all hail! To thee and to thy spouse
I come with words of gladness from a friend.

CLY. That auspice I accept. But I would first
Learn from thee who of men hath sent thee forth?

OLD M. Phanoteus the Phocian, with a charge of weight.

CLY. Declare it, stranger. Coming from a friend,
Thou bring'st us friendly tidings, I feel sure.

OLD M. Orestes' death. Ye have the sum in brief.

EL. Ah me! undone! This day hath ruined me.

CLY. What? Let me hear again. Regard her not.

OLD M. Again I say it, Orestes is no more.

EL. Undone! undone! Farewell to life and hope!

CLY. (to ELECTRA).

See thou to thine own case! (To Old Man) Now, stranger, tell me
In true discourse the manner of his death.

OLD M. For that I am here, and I will tell the whole.

He, entering on the great arena famed
As Hellas' pride, to win a Delphian prize,
On hearing the loud summons of the man
Calling the foot-race, which hath trial first,
Came forward, a bright form, admired by all.
And when his prowess in the course fulfilled
The promise of his form, he issued forth
Dowered with the splendid meed of victory.—

To tell a few out of the many feats

Of such a hero were beyond my power.

[page 150][690-727] Know then, in brief, that of the prizes set
For every customary course proclaimed
By order of the judges, the whole sum
Victoriously he gathered, happy deemed
By all; declared an Argive, and his name

Orestes, son of him who levied once
The mighty armament of Greeks for Troy.
So fared he then: but when a God inclines
To hinder happiness, not even the strong
Are scatheless. So, another day, when came
At sunrise the swift race of charioteers,
He entered there with many a rival car:—
One from Achaia, one from Sparta, two
Libyan commanders of the chariot-yoke;
And he among them fifth, with steeds of price
From Thessaly;—the sixth Aetolia sent
With chestnut mares; the seventh a Magnete man;
The eighth with milk-white colts from Oeta's vale;
The ninth from god-built Athens; and the tenth
Boeotia gave to make the number full.
Then stood they where the judges of the course
Had posted them by lot, each with his team;
And sprang forth at the brazen trumpet's blare.
Shouting together to their steeds, they shook
The reins, and all the course was filled with noise
Of rattling chariots, and the dust arose
To heaven. Now all in a confused throng
Spared not the goad, each eager to outgo
The crowded axles and the snorting steeds;
For close about his nimbly circling wheels
And stooping sides fell flakes of panted foam.
Orestes, ever nearest at the turn,
With whirling axle seemed to graze the stone,
And loosing with free rein the right-hand steed
[That pulled the side-rope](#), held the near one in.
So for a time all chariots upright moved,
But soon the Oetaean's hard-mouthed horses broke
From all control, and wheeling as they passed
From the sixth circuit to begin the seventh,
Smote front to front against the Barcan car.
[page 151][728-766] And when that one disaster had befallen,
Each dashed against his neighbour and was thrown,

Till the whole plain was strewn with chariot-wreck.
Then the Athenian, skilled to ply the rein,
Drew on one side, and heaving to, let pass
The rider-crested surge that rolled i' the midst.
Meanwhile Orestes, trusting to the end,
Was driving hindmost with tight rein; but now,
Seeing him left the sole competitor,
Hurling fierce clamour through his steeds, pursued:
So drave they yoke by yoke—now this, now that
Pulling ahead with car and team. Orestes,
Ill-fated one, each previous course had driven
Safely without a check, but after this,
[In letting loose again the left-hand rein,](#)
He struck the edge of the stone before he knew,
Shattering the axle's end, and tumbled prone,
[Caught in the reins,](#) that dragged him with sharp thongs.
Then as he fell to the earth the horses swerved,
And roamed the field. The people when they saw
Him fallen from out the car, lamented loud
For the fair youth, who had achieved before them
Such glorious feats, and now had found such woe,—
Dashed on the ground, then tossed with legs aloft
Against the sky,—until the charioteers,
Hardly restraining the impetuous team,
Released him, covered so with blood that none,—
No friend who saw—had known his hapless form.
Which then we duly burned upon the pyre.
And straightway men appointed to the task
From all the Phocians bear his mighty frame—
Poor ashes! narrowed in a brazen urn,—
That he may find in his own fatherland
His share of sepulture.—Such our report,
Painful to hear, but unto us, who saw,
The mightiest horror that e'er met mine eye.

CH. Alas! the stock of our old masters, then,
Is utterly uprooted and destroyed.

CLY. O heavens! what shall I say? That this is well?
[page 152][767-799] Or terrible, but gainful? Hard my lot,
To save my life through my calamity!

OLD M. Lady, why hath my speech disheartened thee?

CLY. To be a mother hath a marvellous power:
No injury can make one hate one's child.

OLD M. Then it should seem our coming was in vain.

CLY. In vain? Nay, verily; thou, that hast brought
Clear evidences of his fate, who, sprung
From my life's essence, severed from my breast
And nurture, was estranged in banishment,
And never saw me from the day he went
Out from this land, but for his father's blood
Threatened me still with accusation dire;
That sleep nor soothed at night nor sweetly stole
My senses from the day, but, all my time,
Each instant led me on the way to death!—
But this day's chance hath freed me from all fear
Of him, and of this maid: who being at home
Troubled me more, and with unmeasured thirst
Kept draining my life-blood; but now her threats
Will leave us quiet days, methinks, and peace
Unbroken.—How then shouldst thou come in vain?

EL. O misery! 'Tis time to wail thy fate,
Orestes, when, in thy calamity,
Thy mother thus insults thee. Is it well?

CLY. 'Tis well that he is gone, not that you live.

EL. Hear, 'venging spirits of the lately dead!

CLY. The avenging spirits have heard and answered well.

EL. Insult us now, for thou art fortunate!

CLY. You and Orestes are to quench my pride.

EL. Our pride is quenched. No hope of quenching thee!

CLY. A world of good is in thy coming, stranger,
Since thou hast silenced this all-clamorous tongue.

OLD M. Then I may go my way, seeing all is well.

[page 153][800-836] CLY. Nay, go not yet! That would disgrace
alike

Me and the friend who sent you to our land.
But come thou in, and leave her out of door
To wail her own and loved ones' overthrow.

[Exeunt CLYTEMNESTRA and Old Man

EL. Think you the wretch in heartfelt agony
Weeps inconsolably her perished son?
She left us with a laugh! O misery!
How thou hast ruined me, dear brother mine,
By dying! Thou hast torn from out my heart
The only hope I cherished yet, that thou
Living wouldst come hereafter to avenge
Thy father's woes and mine. Where must I go?
Since I am left of thee and of my sire
Bereaved and lonely, and once more must be
The drudge and menial of my bitterest foes,
My father's murderers. Say, is it well?
Nay, nevermore will I consort with these,
But sinking here before the palace gate,
Thus, friendless, I will wither out my life.
Hereat if any in the house be vexed,
Let them destroy me; for to take my life
Were kindness, and to live is only pain:
Life hath not kindled my desires with joy.

CH. 1. O ever-blazing sun!! 1
O lightning of the eternal Sire!
Can ye behold this done
And tamely hide your all-avenging fire?

EL. Ah me!

CH. 2. My daughter, why these tears?

EL. Woe!

CH. 3. Weep not, calm thy fears.

EL. You kill me.

CH. 4. How?

EL. To breathe

A hope for one beneath
So clearly sunk in death,

'Tis to afflict me more
Already pining sore.

[page 154] CH. 5. [One in a woman's toils](#) | 2 [837-870]
[Was tangled](#), buried by her glittering coils,

Who now beneath—

EL. Ah woe!

CH. 6. Rules with a spirit unimpaired and strong.

EL. O dreadful!

CH. 7. Dreadful was the wrong.

EL. But she was quelled.

CH. 8. Ay.

EL. True!

That faithful mourner knew
A brother's aid. But I
Have no man now. The one
I had, is gone, is gone.
Rapt into nothingness.

CH. 9. Thou art wrung with sore distress. || 1

EL. I know it. Too well I know,
Taught by a life of woe,
Where horror dwells without relief.

CH. 10. Our eyes have seen thy grief.

EL. Then comfort not again—

CH. 11. Whither now turns thy strain?

EL. One utterly bereft,
Seeing no hope is left,
Of help from hands owning the same great sire.

CH. 12. 'Tis nature's debt. || 2

EL. To expire
On sharp-cut dragging thongs,
'Midst wildly trampling throngs
Of swiftly racing hoofs, like him,
Poor hapless one?

CH. 13. Vast, dim,
And boundless was the harm.

EL. Yea, severed from mine arm,
By strangers kept—

CH. 14. O pain!

EL. Hidden he must remain,
Of me unsepulchred, unmourned, unwept.

[page 155][871-906]

Enter CHRYSOTHEMIS.

CHR. Driven by delight, dear sister, I am come,
Reckless of dignity, with headlong speed.
For news I bear of joy and sweet relief
From ills that drew from thee ceaseless moan.

EL. Whence couldst thou hear of succour for my woes,
That close in darkness without hope of dawn?

CHR. Here is Orestes, learn it from my mouth,
As certainly as you now look on me.

EL. What? Art thou mad, unhappy one, to laugh
Over thine own calamity and mine?

CHR. No, by our father's hearth, I say not this
In mockery. I tell you he is come.

EL. Me miserable! Who hath given thine ear
The word that so hath wrought on thy belief?

CHR. Myself am the eyewitness, no one else
Gained my belief, but proofs I clearly saw.

EL. What sign hath so engrossed thine eye, poor girl?
What sight hath fired thee with this quenchless glow?

CHR. But list to me, I pray thee, that henceforth
Thou mayest account me clear eyed, or a fool!

EL. By all means, if it pleasure thee, say on.

CHR. Well, I will tell thee all I saw:—I came
Unto the ancient tomb that holds our sire;
And from the topmost mound I marked a stream
Of milk fresh-flowing, and his resting place
Ringed round with garlands of all flowers that blow.
I marvelled at the sight, and peered about,
Lest some one might be nearer than we knew.
But finding all was quiet in the spot,
I ventured closer to the tomb, and there,
Hard by the limit, I beheld a curl
Of hair new shorn, with all the gloss of youth

And straight it struck my heart, as with a sense
Of something seen, ah me! long, long ago,
And told me that my sight encountered here
The token of Orestes, dearest soul
Then, clasping it, I did not cry aloud,
But straight mine eyes were filled with tears of joy.
[page 156][907-943] And now as much as then I feel assured
He and none else bestowed this ornament.
To whom beyond thyself and me belongs
Such consecration? And I know this well,
I did it not,—nor thou. Impossible!
Thou canst not worship even the blessèd Gods
Forth of this roof, unpunished. And, most sure,
Our mother is not minded so to act,
Nor, had she done it, could we fail to know.
This offering comes then of Orestes' hand.
Take courage, dear one. Not one fate pursues
One house perpetually, but changeth still.
Ours was a sullen Genius, but perchance
This day begins the assurance of much good.

EL. Oh how I pity thine infatuate mind!

CHR. Why? Dost thou find no comfort in my news?

EL. You know not where you roam. Far wide! far wide!

CHR. Not know? when I have seen it with mine eyes?

EL. Dear, he is dead. Look not to him, poor girl!

Salvation comes to thee no more from him.

CHR. Oh me, unfortunate! Who told thee this?

EL. He who stood by and saw his life destroyed.

CHR. Amazement seizes me. Where is that man?

EL. Right welcome to the mother there within.

CHR. Me miserable! Who then can have decked
With all those ceremonies our father's tomb?

EL. I cannot but suppose some hand hath brought
These gifts in memory of Orestes dead.

CHR. O cruel fate! While I in ecstasy
Sped with such news, all ignorant, it seems,

Of our dire fortune; and, arriving, find
Fresh sorrows added to the former woe.

EL. It is so, sister; yet if thou wilt list
To me, thou mayest disperse this heaviness.

CHR. What? Shall I raise the dead again to life?

EL. I did not mean so. I am not so fond.

CHR. What bid you then that I have power to do?

EL. To endure courageously what I enjoin.

[page 157][944-981] CHR. So it make profit, I will not refuse.

EL. Remember, without toil no plan may thrive!

CHR. I know it, and will aid thee to my power.

EL. Then hearken my resolve. Thou seest now,
We have no friendly succour in the world;
But death has taken all, and we are left
Two only. I, so long as I could hear
My brother lived and flourished, still had hope
He would arise to wreak his father's blood.
But now that he is gone, to thee I turn,
To help thy sister boldly to destroy
The guilty author of our father's death,
Aegisthus.—Wherefore hide it from thee now?
—Yea, sister! Till what term wilt thou remain
Inactive? To what end? What hope is yet
Left standing? Surely thou hast cause to grieve,
Bobbed of thy father's opulent heritage,
And feeling bitterly the creeping years
That find thee still a virgin and unwed.
Nay, nor imagine thou shalt ever know
That blessing. Not so careless of his life
Is King Aegisthus, as to risk the birth
Of sons from us, to his most certain fall.
But if thou wilt but follow my resolve,
First thou shalt win renown of piety
From our dead father, and our brother too,
Who rest beneath the ground, and shalt be free
For evermore in station as in birth,
And nobly matched in marriage, for the good

Draw gazers to them still. Then seest thou not
What meed of honour, if thou dost my will,
Thou shalt apportion to thyself and me?
For who, beholding us, what citizen,
What foreigner, will not extend the hand
Of admiration, and exclaim, 'See, friends,
These scions of one stock, these noble twain,
These that have saved their father's house from woe,
Who once when foes were mighty, set their life
Upon a cast, and stood forth to avenge
The stain of blood! Who will not love the pair
[page 158][981-1018] And do them reverence? Who will not give
Honour at festivals, and in the throng
Of popular resort, to these in chief,
For their high courage and their bold emprise?'
Such fame will follow us in all the world.
Living or dying, still to be renowned.
Ah, then, comply, dear sister; give thy sire
This toil—this labour to thy brother give;
End these my sufferings, end thine own regret:
The well-born cannot bear to live in shame.

CH. In such affairs, for those who speak and hear
Wise thoughtfulness is still the best ally.

CHR. True, noble women, and before she spake
Sound thought should have prevented the rash talk
That now hath proved her reckless. What wild aim
Beckons thee forth in arming this design
Whereto thou wouldst demand my ministry?
Dost not perceive, thou art not man but woman,
Of strength inferior to thine enemies,—
Their Genius daily prospering more and more,
Whilst ours is dwindling into nothingness?
Who then that plots against a life so strong
Shall quit him of the danger without harm?
Take heed we do not add to our distress
Should some one hear of this our colloquy.
Small help and poor advantage 'twere for us

To win brief praise and then inglorious die.
Nay, death is not so hateful as when one
Desiring death is balked of that desire.
And I beseech thee, ere in utter ruin
We perish and make desolate our race,
Refrain thy rage. And I will guard for thee
In silence these thy words unrealized;
If thou wilt learn this wisdom from long time,
Having no strength, to bend before the strong.

CH. Comply. Than prudence and a heedful mind,
No fairer treasure can be found for men.

EL. Thy words have not surprised me. Well I knew
The good I offered would come back with scorn.
[page 159][1019-1052] I, all alone and with a single hand,
Must do this. For it shall not rest undone.

CHR. Would thou hadst been thus minded when our sire
Lay dying! In one act thou hadst compassed all.

EL. My spirit was the same: my mind was less.

CHR. Be such the life-long temper of thy mind!

EL. Thine admonition augurs little aid.

CHR. Yea. For the attempt would bring me certain bane.

EL. I envy thee thy prudence, hate thy fear.

CHR. Even when thou speak'st me fair, I will endure it.

EL. Take heart. That never will be thine from me.

CHR. Long time remains to settle that account.

EL. I find no profit in thee. Go thy way.

CHR. Profit there is, hadst thou a mind to learn.

EL. Go to thy mother and declare all this!

CHR. I am not so in hatred of thy life.

EL. Yet know the shame thou wouldst prepare for me.

CHR. No, no! Not shame, but care for thine estate.

EL. Must I still follow as thou thinkest good?

CHR. When thou hast wisdom, thou shalt be the guide.

EL. 'Tis hard when error wears the garb of sense.

CHR. Right. That is the misfortune of your case.

EL. Why? Feel you not the justice of my speech?

CHR. Justice may chance to bring me injury.

EL. I care not, I, to live by such a rule.

CHR. Well, if you do it, you will find me wise.

EL. Well, I will do it, nought dismayed by thee.

CHR. Speak you plain sooth? and will you not be counselled?

EL. No, for bad counsel is of all most hateful.

CHR. You take the sense of nothing that I say.

EL. Long since, not newly, my resolve is firm.

CHR. Then I will go. Thy heart will ne'er be brought
To praise my words, nor I thine action here.

EL. Then go within! I will not follow thee,
[page 160][1053-1089] Though thou desire it vehemently. None
Would be so fond to hunt on a cold trail.

CHR. If this seem wisdom to thee, then be wise
Thy way: but in the hour of misery,
When it hath caught thee, thou wilt praise my words. [Exit

CHRYSOTHEMIS

CHORUS.

Wise are the birds of air! 1
That with true filial care
For those provide convenient food
Who gave them birth, who wrought their good.
Why will not men the like perfection prove?
Else, by the fires above,
And heavenly Rectitude,
Fierce recompense they shall not long elude.
O darkling rumour, world-o'er-wandering voice
That piercest to the shades beneath the ground,
To dead Atrides waft a sound
Of sad reproach, not bidding him rejoice.

Stained is the ancestral hall, 2
Broken the battle-call,
That heretofore his children twain
In loving concord did sustain.
Alone, deserted, vexed, Electra sails,
Storm-tossed with rugged gales,
Lamenting evermore
Like piteous Philomel, and pining sore

For her lost father;—might she but bring down
That two-fold Fury, caring not for death,
But ready to resign her breath,
What maid so worthy of a sire's renown?

None who inherit from a noble race, II 1
Complying with things base
Will let their ancient glory be defiled.
So 'twas thy choice, dear child,
[Through homeless misery](#) to win a two-fold prize,
[Purging the sin and shame](#)
That cloud the Argive name,
So to be called most noble and most wise.

[page 161] May'st thou surpass thy foes in wealth and power II 2
[1090-1123]

As o'er thee now they tower!
Since I have found thee, not in bright estate,
Nor blessed by wayward fate,
But through thy loyalty to Heaven's eternal cause
Wearing the stainless crown
Of perfectest renown,
And richly dowered by the mightiest laws.

Enter ORESTES and PYLADES, with the urn.

OR. Say, dames and damsels, have we heard aright,
And speed we to the goal of our desire?

CH. And what desire or quest hath brought thee hither?

OR. I seek Aegisthus' dwelling all this while.

CH. Welcome. The tongue that told thee hath no blame.

OR. Which of you all will signify within
Our joint arrival,—not unwelcome here.

CH. This maiden, if the nearest should report.

OR. Mistress, wilt thou go yonder and make known,
That certain Phocians on Aegisthus wait?

EL. Oh! can it be that you are come to bring
Clear proofs of the sad rumour we have heard?

OR. I know not what ye have heard. Old Strophius
Charged me with tidings of Orestes' fate.

EL. What, stranger? How this terror steals on me!

OR. Bearing scant remnants of his body dead
In this small vase thou seest, we bring them home.

EL. O sorrow! thou art here: I see full well
That burden of my heart in present view.

OR. If thou hast tears for aught Orestes suffered,
Know that he lies within this vessel's room.

EL. Ah, sir! by all in Heaven, if yonder urn
Hide him, ah! give it once into my hand,
That o'er that dust I may lament and mourn
Myself and mine own house and all our woe!

OR. Bring it and give her, whosoe'er she be.

[page 162][1124-1163] For not an enemy—this petition shows it—
But of his friends or kindred, is this maid.

[The urn is given into ELECTRA'S hands

EL. O monument of him whom o'er all else
I loved! sole relic of Orestes' life,
How cold in this thy welcome is the hope
Wherein I decked thee as I sent thee forth!
Then bright was thy departure, whom I now
Bear lightly, a mere nothing, in my hands.
Would I had gone from life, ere I dispatched
Thee from my arms that saved thee to a land
Of strangers, stealing thee from death! For then
Thou hadst been quiet on that far off day,
And had thy portion in our father's tomb

Now thou hast perished in the stranger land
Far from thy sister, lorn and comfortless
And I, O wretchedness! neither have bathed
And laid thee forth, nor from the blazing fire
Collected the sad burden, as was meet
But thou, when foreign hands have tended thee
Com'st a small handful in a narrow shell
Woe for the constant care I spent on thee
Of old all vainly, with sweet toil! For never
Wast thou thy mother's darling, nay, but mine,
And I of all the household most thy nurse,
While 'sister, sister,' was thy voice to me
But now all this is vanished in one day,
Dying in thy death. Thou hast carried all away
As with a whirlwind, and art gone. No more
My father lives, thyself art lost in death,
I am dead, who lived in thee. Our enemies
Laugh loudly, and she maddens in her joy,
Our mother most unmotherly, of whom
Thy secret missives oft-times told me, thou
Wouldst be the punisher. But that fair hope
The hapless Genius of thy lot and mine
Hath reft away, and gives thee thus to me,—
For thy loved form thy dust and fruitless shade
O bitterness! O piteous sight! Woe! woe!
Oh! sent on thy dire journey, dearest one,
[page 163][1164-1197] How thou hast ruined me! Thou hast indeed,
Dear brother! Then receive me to thyself,
Hide me in this thy covering, there to dwell,
Me who am nothing, with thy nothingness,
For ever! Yea, when thou wert here above,
I ever shared with thee in all, and now
I would not have thee shut me from thy tomb.
Oh! let me die and follow thee! the dead,
My mind assures me now, have no more pain.

CH. Electra, think! Thou hadst a mortal sire,
And mortal was thy brother. Grieve not far.

OR. O me! What shall I speak, or which way turn
The desperate word? I cannot hold my tongue.

EL. What pain o'ercomes thee? Wherefore speak'st thou so?

OR. Can this be famed Electra I behold?

EL. No other. In sad case, as you may see

OR. Ah! deep indeed was this calamity!

EL. Is't possible that thou shouldst grieve for me?

OR. O ruined form! abandoned to disgrace!

EL. 'Tis me you mean, stranger, I feel it now.

OR. Woe 's me! Untrimmed for bridal, hapless maid!

EL. Why this fixed gaze, O stranger! that deep groan?

OR. How all unknowing was I of mine ill!

EL. What thing hath passed to make it known to thee?

OR. The sight of thee attired with boundless woe.

EL. And yet thine eye sees little of my pain.

OR. Can aught be still more hateful to be seen?

EL. I have my dwelling with the murderers—

OR. Of whom? What evil would thy words disclose?

EL. Of him who gave me birth. I am their slave.

OR. Whose power compels thee to this sufferance?

EL. One called my mother, most unmotherly.

OR. How? by main force, or by degrading shames?

EL. By force and shames, and every kind of evil.

OR. And is there none to succour or prevent?

EL. None. Him I had, you give me here in dust.

[page 164][1199-1229] OR. How mine eye pities thee this while,
poor maid!

EL. Know now, none ever pitied me but you.

OR. None ever came whose heart like sorrow wrung.

EL. Is't possible we have some kinsman here?

OR. I will tell it, if these women here be friendly.

EL. They are. They may be trusted. Only speak.

OR. Let go yon vase, that thou may'st learn the whole.

EL. Nay, by the Gods! be not so cruel, sir!

OR. Obey me and thou shalt not come to harm.

EL. Ah, never rob me of what most I love!

OR. You must not hold it.

EL. O me miserable
For thee, Orestes, if I lose thy tomb!
OR. Speak no rash word. Thou hast no right to mourn.
EL. No right to mourn my brother who is gone?
OR. Such utterance belongs not to thy tongue,
EL. Oh, am I thus dishonoured of the dead?
OR. Far from dishonour. But this ne'er was thine.
EL. Is't not Orestes' body that I bear?
OR. Nay, but the idle dressing of a tale.
EL. And where is his poor body's resting-place?
OR. Nowhere. Seek not the living with the dead,
EL. My son, what saidst thou?
OR. Nought but what is true.
EL. Doth he yet live?
OR. If I have life in me.
EL. Art thou Orestes?
OR. Let my signet here,
That was our father's, tell thine eyes, I am.
EL. O day of days!
OR. Time hath no happier hour.
EL. Is it thy voice?
OR. Hearken not elsewhere.
EL. Have my arms caught thee?
OR. Hold me so for aye!
EL. O dearest women, Argives of my home!
Ye see Orestes, dead in craft, but now
By that same craft delivered and preserved.
[page 165][1230-1270] CH. We see, dear daughter, and the
gladsome tear
Steals from our eye to greet the bright event.
EL. Offspring of him I loved beyond all telling!! 1
Ah! thou art come,—hast found me, eye to eye
Behold'st the face thou didst desire to see.
OR. True, I am here; but bide in silence still.
EL. Wherefore?
OR. Hush! speak not loud, lest one within should hearken.

EL. By ever-virgin Artemis, ne'er will I
Think worthy of my fear
This useless mass of woman-cowardice
Burdening the house within,
Not peering out of door.

OR. Yet know that women too have might in war.
Of that methinks thou hast feeling evidence.

EL. Ah me! thou hast unveiled
And thrust before my gaze
That burning load of my distress
No time will soothe, no remedy will heal.

OR. I know that too. But when we are face to face
With the evildoers,—then let remembrance work.

EL. All times alike are fit with instant pain
Justly to mind me of that dreadful day;
Even now but hardly hath my tongue been free.

OR. Yes, that is it. Therefore preserve this boon.

EL. Whereby?

OR. Put limits to unseasonable talk.

EL. Ah! brother, who, when thou art come,
Could find it meet to exchange
Language for silence, as thou bidst me do?
Since beyond hope or thought
Was this thy sight to me.

OR. God gave me to your sight when so he willed.

EL. O heaven of grace beyond
The joy I knew but now!
If God hath brought thee to our roof,
A miracle of bounty then is here.

[page 166] [1271-1304] OR. I hate to curb the gladness of thy spirit,
But yet I fear this ecstasy of joy.

EL. Oh! after all these years, I
Now thou at length hast sped
Thy dearest advent on the wished-for way,
Do not, in all this woe
Thou seest surrounding me—

OR. What means this prayer?

EL. Forbid me not my joy,
Nor make me lose the brightness of thy face!

OR. Deep were my wrath at him who should attempt it.

EL. Is my prayer heard?

OR. Why doubt it?

EL. Friends, I learned

A tale beyond my thought; and hearing I restrained

My passion, voiceless in my misery,

Uttering no cry. But now

I have thee safe; now, dearest, thou art come,

With thy blest countenance, which I

Can ne'er forget, even at the worst of woe.

OR. A truce now to unnecessary words.

My mother's vileness and Aegisthus' waste,

Draining and squandering with spendthrift hand

Our patrimony, tell me not anew.

Such talk might stifle opportunity.

But teach me, as befits the present need,

What place may serve by lurking vigilance

Or sudden apparition to o'erwhelm

Our foes in the adventure of to-day.

And, when we pass within, take heedful care

Bright looks betray thee not unto our mother.

But groan as for the dire calamity

Vainly reported:—Let's achieve success,

Then with free hearts we may rejoice and laugh.

EL. Dear brother, wheresoe'er thy pleasure leads,

My will shall follow, since the joys I know,

Not from myself I took them, but from thee.

And ne'er would I consent thy slightest grief

[page 167][1305-1342] Should win for me great gain. Ill should I then

Serve the divinity of this high hour!

Thou knowest how matters in the palace stand.

Thou hast surely heard, Aegisthus is from home,

And she, our mother, is within. Nor fear

She should behold me with a smiling face.

Mine ancient hate of her hath sunk too deep.

And from the time I saw thee, tears of joy
Will cease not. Wherefore should I stint their flow?
I, who in this thy coming have beheld
Thee dead and living? Strangely hast thou wrought
On me;—that should my father come alive,
I would not think the sight were miracle,
But sober truth. Since such thy presence, then,
Lead as thy spirit prompts. For I alone
Of two things surely had achieved one,
Noble deliverance or a noble death.

OR. Be silent; for I hear within the house
A footstep coming forth.

EL. (loudly). Strangers, go in!
For none within the palace will reject
Your burden, nor be gladdened by the event.

Enter the Old Man.

OLD M. O lost in folly and bereft of soul!
Is't that your care for life hath ebb'd away,
Or were you born without intelligence,
When fallen, not near, but in the midst of ill,
And that the greatest, ye perceive it not?
Had I not watched the doors this while, your deeds
Had gone within the palace ere yourselves.
But, as things are, my care hath fenced you round.
Now, then, have done with long-protracted talk,
And this insatiable outburst of joy,
And enter, for in such attempts as these
Delay is harmful: and 'tis more than time.

OR. But how shall I find matters there within?

OLD M. Well. You are shielded by their ignorance.

OR. That means you have delivered me as dead.

OLD M. Alone of dead men thou art here above.

[page 168][1343-1375] OR. Doth this delight them, or how went the talk?

OLD M. I will report, when all is done. Meanwhile,
Know, all is well with them, even what is evil.

EL. Who is this, brother? I beseech thee, tell.

OR. Dost not perceive?

EL. I cannot even imagine.

OR. Know'st not into whose hands thou gav'st me once?

EL. Whose hands? How say you?

OR. His, who through thy care

Conveyed me secretly to Phocis' plain.

EL. What! is this he, whom I, of all the band,
Found singly faithful in our father's death?

OR. He is that man. No more!

EL. O gladsome day!

Dear only saviour of our father's house,
How earnest thou hither? Art thou he indeed,
That didst preserve Orestes and myself
From many sorrows? O dear hands, kind feet,
Swift in our service,—how couldst thou so long
Be near, nor show one gleam, but didst destroy
My heart with words, hiding the loveliest deeds?
Father!—in thee methinks I see my father.

O welcome! thou of all the world to me
Most hated and most loved in one short hour.

OLD M. Enough, dear maiden! Many nights and days
Are circling hitherward, that shall reveal
In clear recountment all that came between.
But to you two that stand beside I tell,
Now is your moment, with the Queen alone,
And none of men within; but if you pause,
Know that with others of profounder skill
You'll have to strive, more than your present foes.

OR. Then, Pylades, we need no more to dwell
On words, but enter on this act with speed,
First worshipping the holy shrines o' the Gods
That were my father's, harboured at the gate.

[They pass within. ELECTRA remains in an attitude of prayer

[page 169][1376-1406] EL. O King Apollo! hear them graciously,
And hear me too, that with incessant hand
Honoured thee richly from my former store!
And now, fierce slayer, I importune thee,

And woo thee with such gifts as I can give,
Be kindly aidant to this enterprise,
And make the world take note, what meed of bane
Heaven still bestows on man's iniquity.[ELECTRA goes within

CH. Lo, where the War-god moves¹
With soft, sure footstep, on to his design,
Breathing hot slaughter of an evil feud!
Even now the inevitable hounds that track
Dark deeds of hideous crime
Are gone beneath the covert of the domes.
Not long in wavering suspense shall hang
The dreaming presage of my wistful soul.

For lo! within is led²
With crafty tread the avenger of the shades,
Even to his father's throne of ancient power,
And in his hand the bright new-sharpened death!
And Hermes, Maia's son,
Is leading him, and hath concealed the guile
Even to the fatal end in clouds of night.
His time of weary waiting all is o'er.

Re-enter ELECTRA.

EL. O dearest women! they are even now
About it. Only bide in silence still.

CH. What is the present scene?

EL. She decks the vase
For burial, and they both are standing by.

CH. And wherefore hast thou darted forth?

EL. To watch
Aegisthus' coming, that he enter not
At unawares.

CLY. (within).

Ah! ah! Woe for the house,
Desert of friends, and filled with hands of death!

EL. A cry within! Did ye not hear it, friends?

[page 170][1407-1432] CH. Would I had not! I heard, and shivered
through.

CLY. (within).
Oh me! Alas, Aegisthus! where art thou?
EL. Hark! yet again that sound!
CLY. (within). O son, have pity!
Pity the womb that bare thee.
EL. Thou hadst none
For him, nor for his father, in that day.
HALF-CH. Poor city! hapless race!
Thy destiny to-day
Wears thee away, away.
What morn shall see thy face?
CLY. (within). Oh, I am smitten!
EL. Give a second stroke,
If thou hast power.
CLY. (within). Oh me! again, again!
EL. Would thou wert shrieking for Aegisthus too!
CH. The curse hath found, and they in earth who lie
Are living powers to-day.
Long dead, they drain away
The streaming blood of those who made them die.
Enter ORESTES and PYLADES.
Behold, they come, they come!
His red hand dripping as he moves
With drops of sacrifice the War-god loves.
My 'wildered heart is dumb.
EL. How is it with you, brother?
OR. If Apollo
Spake rightfully, the state within is well.
EL. Wretched one, is she dead?
OR. No more have fear
Thou shalt be slighted by thy mother's will.
CH. Cease, for I see Aegisthus near in view.
EL. In, in again, boys!
OR. Where do ye behold
The tyrant?
EL. To our hand from yonder gate
He comes with beaming look.

[page 171] HALF-CH. Haste, with what speed ye may,² [1433-1461]
Stand on the doorway stone,
That, having thus much done,
Ye may do all to-day.

OR. Fear not: we will perform it.

EL. Speed ye now:
Follow your thought.

OR. We are already there.

EL. Leave matters here to me. All shall go well. [Exit ORESTES
with PYLADES

CH. Few words, as if in gentleness, 'twere good
To utter in his ear,
That, eager and unaware,
One step may launch him on the field of blood.

Enter AEGISTHUS.

AEGISTHUS. Which of you know where are the Phocian men
Who brought the news I hear, Orestes' life
Hath suffered shipwreck in a chariot-race?
You, you I question, you in former time
So fearless! You methinks most feelingly
Can tell us, for it touches you most near.

EL. I know: assure thee. Else had I not heard
The dearest of all fortunes to my heart.

AEG. Where are the strangers then? Enlighten me.

EL. Yonder. Their hostess entertained them well.

AEG. And did they certainly report him dead?

EL. Not only so. They showed him to our sight.

AEG. May this clear evidence be mine to see?

EL. I envy not the sight that waits you there.

AEG. Against their wont thy words have given me joy.

EL. Much joy be thine, if this be joy to thee!

AEG. Silence, I say! Wide let the gates be flung!
For all the Myceneans to behold
And all in Argolis, that if but one
Hath heretofore been buoyed on empty hopes
Fixed in Orestes, seeing him now dead,

[page 172][1462-1493] He may accept my manage, and not wait
For our stern chastisement to teach him sense.

EL. My lesson is already learnt: at length
I am schooled to labour with the stronger will.
[The body of CLYTEMNESTRA is disclosed under a veil: ORESTES
standing by

AEG. Zeus! Divine envy surely hath laid low
The form I here behold. But if the truth
Provoke Heaven's wrath, be it unexpressed.—Unveil!
Off with all hindrance, that mine eye may see,
And I may mourn my kinsman as I should.

OR. Thyself put forth thy hand. Not mine but thine
To look and speak with kindness to this corse.

AEG. I will, for thou advisest well; but thou,
Call Clytemnestra, if she be within. [AEGISTHUS lifts the shroud

OR. She is beside thee, gaze not elsewhere.

AEG. What do I see! oh!

OR. Why so strange? Whom fear you?

AEG. Who are the men into whose midmost toils
All hapless I am fallen?

OR. Ha! knowest thou not

[Thou hast been taking](#) living men for dead?

AEG. I understand that saying. Woe is me!
I know, Orestes' voice addresseth me.

OR. A prophet! How wert thou so long deceived?

AEG. Undone, undone! Yet let me speak one word.

EL. Brother, by Heaven, no more! Let him not speak.
When death is certain, what do men in woe
Gain from a little time? Kill him at once!
And, killed, expose him to such burial
From dogs and vultures, as beseemeth such,
Far from our view. Nought less will solace me
For the remembrance of a life of pain.

OR. Go in and tarry not. No contest this
Of verbal question, but of life or death.

AEG. Why drive you me within? If this you do
Be noble, why must darkness hide the deed?

Why not destroy me out of hand?

[page 173][1494-1510] OR. Command not!
Enter, and in the place where ye cut down
My father, thou shalt yield thy life to me.

AEG. Is there no help but this abode must see
The past and future ills of Pelops' race?

OR. Thine anyhow. That I can prophesy
With perfect inspiration to thine ear.

AEG. The skill you boast belonged not to your sire.

OR. You question and delay. Go in!

AEG. Lead on.

OR. Nay, go thou first.

AEG. That I may not escape thee?

OR. No, that thou may'st not have thy wish in death.
I may not stint one drop of bitterness.

And would this doom were given without reprieve,
If any try to act beyond the law,
To kill them. Then the wicked would be few.

LEADER OF CH. O seed of Atreus! how triumphantly
Through grief and hardness thou hast freedom found,
With full achievement in this onset crowned!

[page 175]

THE TRACHINIAN MAIDENS

THE PERSONS

- DÊANIRA, *wife of Heracles.*
- *An Attendant.*
- HYLLUS, *son of Heracles and Dêanira.*
- CHORUS *of Trachinian Maidens.*
- *A Messenger.*
- LICHAS, *the Herald.*
- *A Nurse.*
- *An Old Man.*
- HERACLES.
- IOLE, *who does not speak.*

SCENE. Before the temporary abode of Heracles in Trachis.

[page 176] This tragedy is named from the Chorus. From the subject it might have been called 'Deanira or the Death of Heracles'.

The Centaur Nessus, in dying by the arrow of Heracles, which had been dipped in the venom of the Hydra, persuaded the bride Deanira, whose beauty was the cause of his death, to keep some of the blood from the wound as a love-charm for her husband. Many years afterwards, when Heracles was returning from his last exploit of sacking Oechalia, in Euboea, he sent before him, by his herald Lichas, Iole, the king's daughter, whom he had espoused. Deanira, when she had discovered this, commissioned Lichas when he returned to present his master with a robe, which she had anointed with the charm,—hoping by this means to regain her lord's affection. But the poison of the Hydra did its work, and Heracles died in agony, Deanira having already killed herself on ascertaining what she had done. The action takes place in Trachis, near the Mahae Gulf, where Heracles and Deanira, by permission of Ceyx, the king of the country, have been living in exile. At the close of the drama, Heracles, while yet alive, is carried towards his pyre on Mount Oeta.

[page 177]

THE TRACHINIAN MAIDENS

DÊANIRA. Men say,—'twas old experience gave the word,
—'No lot of mortal, ere he die, can once
Be known for good or evil.' But I know,
Before I come to the dark dwelling-place,
Mine is a lot, adverse and hard and sore.
Who yet at Pleuron, in my father's home,
Of all Aetolian women had most cause
To fear my bridal. For a river-god,
Swift Achelôüs, was my suitor there
And sought me from my father in three forms;
Now in his own bull-likeness, now a serpent
Of coiling sheen, and now with manlike build
But bovine front, while from the shadowy beard
Sprang fountain-waters in perpetual spray.
Looking for such a husband, I, poor girl!
Still prayed that Death might find me, ere I knew
That nuptial.—Later, to my glad relief,
Zeus' and Alcmena's glorious offspring came,
And closed with him in conflict, and released
My heart from torment. How the fight was won
I could not tell. If any were who saw
Unshaken of dread foreboding, such may speak.
But I sate quailing with an anguished fear,
Lest beauty might procure me nought but pain,
Till He that rules the issue of all strife,
Gave fortunate end—if fortunate! For since,
Assigned by that day's conquest, I have known
The couch of Heracles, my life is spent
In one continual terror for his fate.
Night brings him, and, ere morning, some fresh toil
Drives him afar. And I have borne him seed;
Which he, like some strange husbandman that farms
[page 178] A distant field, finds but at sowing time
And once in harvest. Such a weary life
Still tossed him to and fro,—no sooner home
But forth again, serving I know not whom.
And when his glorious head had risen beyond

These labours, came the strongest of my fear.
For since he quelled the might of Iphitus,
We here in Trachis dwell, far from our home,
Dependent on a stranger, but where he
Is gone, none knoweth. Only this I know,
His going pierced my heart with pangs for him,
And now I am all but sure he bears some woe.
These fifteen months he hath sent me not one word.
And I have cause for fear. Ere he set forth
He left a scroll with me, whose dark intent
I oft pray Heaven may bring no sorrow down.

ATTENDANT. Queen Dêanira, many a time ere now
Have I beheld thee with all tearful moan
Bewailing the departure of thy lord.
But, if it be permitted that a slave
Should tender counsel to the free, my voice
May venture this:—Of thy strong band of sons
Why is not one commissioned to explore
For Heracles? and why not Hyllus first,
Whom most it would beseem to show regard
For tidings of his father's happiness?
Ah! here I see him bounding home, with feet
Apt for employment! If you count me wise,
He and my words attend upon your will.

Enter HYLLUS.

DÊ. Dear child, dear boy! even from the lowliest head
Wise counsel may come forth. This woman here,
Though a bond-maiden, hath a free-born tongue.

HYL. What word is spoken, mother? May I know?

DÊ. That, with thy father lost to us so long,
'Tis shame thou dost not learn his dwelling-place.

HYL. Yea, I have learnt, if one may trust report.

DÊ. Where art thou told his seat is fixed, my son?

[page 179] HYL. 'Tis said that through the length of this past year
He wrought as bondman to a Lydian girl.

DÊ. Hath he borne that? Then nothing can be strange!

HYL. Well, that is over, I am told. He is free.

DÊ. Where is he rumoured, then, alive or dead?

HYL. In rich Euboea, besieging, as they tell,
The town of Eurytus, or offering siege.

DÊ. Child, hast thou heard what holy oracles
He left with me, touching that very land?

HYL. What were they, mother, for I never knew?

DÊ. That either he must end his being there,
Or, this one feat performed, his following time
Should grace his life with fair prosperity.
Wilt thou not then, my child, when he is held
In such a crisis of uncertain peril,
Run to his aid?—since we must perish with him,
Or owe our lasting safety to his life.

HYL. I will go, mother. Had I heard this voice
Of prophecy, long since I had been there.
Fear is unwonted for our father's lot.
But now I know, my strength shall all be spent
To learn the course of these affairs in full.

DÊ. Go then, my son. Though late, to learn and do
What wisdom bids, hath certainty of gain.

[Exit HYLLUS. DÊANIRA withdraws

CHORUS (entering and turning towards the East).

Born of the starry night in her undoing, I 1
Lulled in her bosom at thy parting glow,
O Sun! I bid thee show,
What journey is Alcmena's child pursuing?
What region holds him now,
'Mong winding channels of the deep,
Or Asian plains, or rugged Western steep?
Declare it, thou
Peerless in vision of thy flashing ray
That lightens on the world with each new day.

[page 180] Sad Dêanira, [bride of battle-wooing](#), I 2 [104-143]
Ne'er lets her tearful eyelids close in rest,
But in love-longing breast,
Like some lorn bird its desolation rueing,
Of her great husband's way

Still mindful, worn with harrowing fear
Lest some new danger for him should be near,
By night and day
Pines on her widowed couch of ceaseless thought,
With dread of evil destiny distraught:[Enter DÊANIRA.

For many as are billows of the South|| 1
Blowing unweariedly, or Northern gale,
One going and another coming on
Incessantly, baffling the gazer's eye,
Such Cretan ocean of unending toil
Cradles our Cadmus-born, and swells his fame.
But still some power doth his foot recall
From stumbling down to Hades' darkling hall.

Wherefore, in censure of thy mood, I bring|| 2
Glad, though opposing, counsel. Let not hope
Grow weary. Never hath a painless life
Been cast on mortals by the power supreme
Of the All-disposer, Cronos' son. But joy
And sorrow visit in perpetual round
All mortals, even as circleth still on high
The constellation of the Northern sky.

What lasteth in the world? Not starry night,|| 3
Nor wealth, nor tribulation; but is gone
All suddenly, while to another soul
The joy or the privation passeth on.
These hopes I bid thee also, O my Queen!
Hold fast continually, for who hath seen
Zeus so forgetful of his own?
How can his providence forsake his son?

DÊ. I see you have been told of my distress,
And that hath brought you. But my inward woe,
Be it evermore unknown to you, as now!
[page 181][144-179] Such the fair garden of untrammelled ease
Where the young life grows safely. No fierce heat,
No rain, no wind disturbs it, but unharmed
It rises amid airs of peace and joy,
Till maiden turn to matron, and the night

Inherit her dark share of anxious thought,
Haunted with fears for husband or for child.
Then, imaged through her own calamity,
Some one may guess the burden of my life.
Full many have been the sorrows I have wept,
But one above the rest I tell to-day.
When my great husband parted last from home,
He left within the house an ancient scroll
Inscribed with characters of mystic note,
Which Heracles had never heretofore,
In former labours, cared to let me see,—
As bound for bright achievement, not for death.
But now, as though his life had end, he told
What marriage-portion I must keep, what shares
He left his sons out of their father's ground:
And set a time, when fifteen moons were spent,
Counted from his departure, that even then
Or he must die, or if that date were out
And he had run beyond it, he should live
Thenceforth a painless and untroubled life.
Such by Heaven's fiat was the promised end
Of Heracles' long labours, as he said;
So once the ancient oak-tree had proclaimed
In high Dodona through the sacred Doves.
Of which prediction on this present hour
In destined order of accomplishment
The veritable issue doth depend.
And I, dear friends, while taking rest, will oft
Start from sweet slumbers with a sudden fear,
Scared by the thought, my life may be bereft
Of the best husband in the world of men.

CH. Hush! For I see approaching one in haste,
Garlanded, as if laden with good news.

[page 182][180-212]

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER. Queen Dêanira, mine shall be the tongue
To free thee first from fear. Alcmena's child

Is living, be assured, and triumphing,
And bringing to our Gods the fruits of war.

DÊ. What mean'st thou, aged sir, by what thou sayest?

MESS. That soon thy husband, envied all around,
Will come, distinguished with victorious might.

DÊ. What citizen or stranger told thee this?

MESS. Your herald Lichas, where the oxen graze
The summer meadow, cries this to a crowd.
I, hearing, flew off hither, that being first
To bring thee word thereof, I might be sure
To win reward and gratitude from thee.

DÊ. And how is he not here, if all be well?

MESS. Crossed by no light impediment, my Queen.
For all the Maliac people, gathering round,
Throng him with question, that he cannot move.
But he must still the travail of each soul,
And none will be dismissed unsatisfied.
Such willing audience he unwillingly
Harangues, but soon himself will come in sight.

DÊ. O Zeus! who rulest Oeta's virgin wold,
At last, though late, thou hast vouchsafed us joy.
Lift up your voices, O my women! ye
Within the halls, and ye beyond the gate!
For now we reap the gladness of a ray,
That dawns unhopèd for in this rumour's sound.

CHORUS

With a shout by the hearth let the palace roof ring
From those that are dreaming of bridal, and ye,
Young men, let your voices in harmony sing
To the God of the quiver, the Lord of the free!
And the Paeon withal from the maiden band
To Artemis, huntress of many a land,
Let it rise o'er the glad roof tree,
[page 183][213-243] To Phoebus' own sister, with fire in each hand,
And the Nymphs that her co-mates be!
My spirit soars. O sovereign of my soul!
I will accept the thrilling flute's control.[They dance

The ivy-crownèd thyrsus, see!
With Bacchic fire is kindling me,
And turns my emulous tread
Where'er the mazy dance may lead.

Euoi! Euoi!

O Paeon! send us joy.

See, dearest Queen, behold!

Before thy gaze the event will now unfold.

DÉ. Think not mine eye hath kept such careless guard,
Dear maids, that I could miss this moving train.

Herald, I bid thee hail, although so late

Appearing, if thou bringest health with thee!

Enter LICHAS, with Captive Women.

LICHAS. A happy welcome on a happy way,
As prosperous our achievement. Meet it is

Good words should greet bright actions, mistress mine!

DÉ. Kind friend, first tell me what I first would know—
Shall I receive my Heracles alive?

LICH. I left him certainly alive and strong:
Blooming in health, not with disease oppressed.

DÉ. In Greece, or in some barbarous country? Tell!

LICH. Euboea's island hath a promontory,
Where to Cenean Zeus he consecrates
Rich altars and the tribute of the ground.

DÉ. Moved by an oracle, or from some vow?

LICH. So vowed he when he conquered with the spear
The country of these women whom you see.

DÉ. And who, by Heaven, are they? Who was their sire?
Their case is piteous, or eludes my thought.

[page 184][244-280] LICH. He took them for the service of the
Gods

And his own house, when high Oechalia fell.

DÉ. Was't then before that city he was kept
Those endless ages of uncounted time?

LICH. Not so. The greater while he was detained
Among the Lydians, sold, as he declares,
To bondage. Nor be jealous of the word,

Since Heaven, my Queen, was author of the deed.
Enthrallèd so to Asian Omphalè,
He, as himself avers, fulfilled his year.
The felt reproach whereof so chafed his soul,
He bound fierce curses on himself and sware
That,—children, wife and all,—he yet would bring
In captive chains the mover of this harm.
Nor did this perish like an idle word,
But, when the stain was off him, straight he drew
Allied battalions to assault the town
Of Eurytus, whom, sole of earthly powers,
He had noted as the source of his annoy,
Because, having received him in his hall
A guest of ancient days, he burst on him
With outrage of loud voice and villanous mind,
Saying, ‘with his hand upon the unerring bow,
Oechalia’s princes could o’ershoot his skill;
And born to bondage, he must quail beneath
His overlord’; lastly, to crown this cry,
When at a banquet he was filled with wine,
He flung him out of door. Whereat being wroth,
When Iphitus to the Tirynthian height
Followed the track where his brood-mares had strayed,
He, while the thought and eye of the man by chance
Were sundered, threw him from the tower-crowned cliff.
In anger for which deed the Olympian King,
Father of Gods and men, delivered him
To be a bond-slave, nor could brook the offence,
That of all lives he vanquished, this alone
Should have been ta’en by guile. For had he wrought
In open quittance of outrageous wrong,
Even Zeus had granted that his cause was just.
The braggart hath no favour even in Heaven.
[page 185][281-316] Whence they, o’erweening with their evil tongue,
Are now all dwellers in the house of death,
Their ancient city a captive;—but these women
Whom thou beholdest, from their blest estate

Brought suddenly to taste of piteous woe,
Come to thy care. This task thy wedded lord
Ordained, and I, his faithful minister,
Seek to perform. But, for his noble self,
When with pure hands he hath done sacrifice
To his Great Father for the victory given,
Look for his coming, lady. This last word
Of all my happy speech is far most sweet.

CH. Now surety of delight is thine, my Queen,
Part by report and part before thine eye.

DÊ. Yea, now I learn this triumph of my lord,
Joy reigns without a rival in my breast.
This needs must run with that in fellowship.
Yet wise consideration even of good
Is flecked with fear of what reverse may come.
And I, dear friends, when I behold these maids,
Am visited with sadness deep and strange.
Poor friendless beings, in a foreign land
Wandering forlorn in homeless orphanhood!
Erewhile, free daughters of a freeborn race,
Now, snared in strong captivity for life.
O Zeus of battles, breaker of the war,
[Ne'er may I see thee](#) turn against my seed
So cruelly; or, if thou meanest so,
Let me be spared that sorrow by my death!
Such fear in me the sight of these hath wrought.
Who art thou, of all damsels most distressed?
Single or child-bearing? Thy looks would say,
A maid, of no mean lineage. Lichas, tell,
Who is the stranger-nymph? Who gave her birth?
Who was her sire? Mine eye hath pitied her
O'er all, as she o'er all hath sense of woe.

LICH. What know I? Why should'st thou demand? Perchance
Not lowest in the list of souls there born.

DÊ. How if a princess, offspring of their King?

[page 186][317-348] LICH. I cannot tell. I did not question far.

DÊ. Have none of her companions breathed her name?

LICH. I brought them silently. I did not hear.

DÊ. Yet speak it to us of thyself, poor maid!
'Tis sorrow not to know thee who thou art.

LICH. She'll ne'er untie her tongue, if she maintain
An even tenor, since nor more nor less
Would she disclose; but, poor unfortunate!
With agonizing sobs and tears she mourns
This crushing sorrow, from the day she left
Her wind-swept home. Her case is cruel, sure,—
And claims a privilege from all who feel.

DÊ. Well, let her go, and pass beneath the roof
In peace, as she desires; nor let fresh pain
From me be added to her previous woe.
She hath enough already. Come, away!
Let's all within at once, that thou mayest speed
Thy journey, and I may order all things here.

[Exit LICHAS, with Captives, into the house. DÊANIRA is about to follow them

Re-enter Messenger.

MESS. Pause first there on the threshold, till you learn
(Apart from those) who 'tis you take within,
And more besides that you yet know not of,
Which deeply imports your knowing. Of all this
I thoroughly am informed.

DÊ. What cause hast thou
Thus to arrest my going?

MESS. Stand, and hear.
Not idle was my former speech, nor this.

DÊ. Say, must we call them back in presence here,
Or would'st thou tell thy news to these and me?

MESS. To thee and these I may, but let those be.

DÊ. Well, they are gone. Let words declare thy drift.

MESS. That man, in all that he hath lately said,
Hath sinned against the truth: or now he's false,
Or else unfaithful in his first report.

[page 187][349-384] DÊ. What? Tell me thy full meaning clearly
forth.

That thou hast uttered is all mystery.

MESS. I heard this herald say, while many thronged
To hearken, that this maiden was the cause,
Why lofty-towered Oechalia and her lord
Fell before Heracles, whom Love alone
Of heavenly powers had warmed to this emprise,
And not the Lydian thraldom or the tasks
Of rigorous Omphalè, nor that wild fate
Of rock-thrown Iphitus. Now he thrusts aside
The Love-god, contradicting his first tale.
When he that was her sire could not be brought
To yield the maid for Heracles to hold
In love unrecognized, he framed erelong
A feud about some trifle, and set forth
In arms against this damsel's fatherland
(Where Eurytus, the herald said, was king)
And slew the chief her father; yea, and sacked
Their city. Now returning, as you see,
He sends her hither to his halls, no slave,
Nor unregarded, lady,—dream not so!
Since all his heart is kindled with desire.
I, O my Queen! thought meet to show thee all
The tale I chanced to gather from his mouth,
Which many heard as well as I, i' the midst
Of Trachis' market-place, and can confirm
My witness. I am pained if my plain speech
Sound harshly, but the honest truth I tell.

DÊ. Ah me! Where am I? Whither am I fallen?
What hidden woe have I unwarily
Taken beneath my roof? O misery!
Was she unknown, as he that brought her sware?

MESS. Nay, most distinguished both in birth and mien;
Called in her day of freedom lolè,
Eurytus' daughter,—of whose parentage,
Forsooth as ignorant, he ne'er would speak.

CH. I curse not all the wicked, but the man
Whose secret practices deform his life.

[page 188][385-413] DÊ. Say, maidens, how must I proceed? The words

Now spoken have bewildered all my mind.

CH. Go in and question Lichas, who perchance
Will tell the truth if you but tax him home.

DÊ. I will; you counsel reasonably.

MESS. And I,

Shall I bide here till thou com'st forth? Or how?

DÊ. Remain. For see, without my sending for him,
He issueth from the palace of himself.

Enter LICHAS.

LICH. What message must I carry to my lord?
Tell me, my Queen. I am going, as thou seest.

DÊ. So slow in coming, and so quickly flown,
Ere one have time to talk with thee anew!

LICH. What wouldst thou ask me? I am bent to hear.

DÊ. And art thou bent on truth in the reply?

LICH. By Heaven! in all that I have knowledge of.

DÊ. Then tell me, who is she thou brought'st with thee?

LICH. An islander. I cannot trace her stock.

MESS. Look hither, man. Who is't to whom thou speakest?

LICH. Why such a question? What is thine intent?

MESS. Nay, start not, but make answer if thou knowest.

LICH. To Dêanira, Oeneus' queenly child,
Heracles' wife,—if these mine eyes be true,—
My mistress.

MESS. Ay, that is the very word
I longed to hear thee speak. Thy mistress, sayest?

LICH. To whom I am bound.

MESS. Hold there! What punishment
Wilt thou accept, if thou art found to be
Faithless to her?

LICH. I faithless! What dark speech
Hast thou contrived?

MESS. Not I at all. 'Tis thou
Dost wrap thy thoughts i' the dark.

[page 189][414-448] LICH. Well, I will go.

'Tis folly to have heard thee for so long.

MESS. You go not till you answer one word more.

LICH. One, or a thousand! You'll not stint, I see.

MESS. Thou knowest the captive maid thou leddest home?

LICH. I do. But wherefore ask?

MESS. Did you not say

That she, on whom you look with ignorant eye,

Was lolè, the daughter of the King,

Committed to your charge?

LICH. Where? Among whom?

What witness of such words will bear thee out?

MESS. Many and sound. A goodly company
In Trachis' market-place heard thee speak this.

LICH. Ay.

I said 'twas rumoured. But I could not give

My vague impression for advised report.

MESS. Impression, quotha! Did you not on oath
Proclaim your captive for your master's bride?

LICH. My master's bride! Dear lady, by the Gods,
Who is the stranger? for I know him not.

MESS. One who was present where he heard thee tell,
How that whole city was subdued and taken,
Not for the bondage to the Lydian girl,
But through the longing passion for this maid.

LICH. Dear lady, let the fellow be removed.
To prate with madmen is mere foolishness.

DÊ. Nay, I entreat thee by His name, whose fire
Lightens down Oeta's topmost glen, be not
A niggard of the truth. Thou tell'st thy tale
To no weak woman, but to one who knows
Mankind are never constant to one joy.
Whoso would buffet Love, aspires in vain.
For Love leads even Immortals at his will,
And me. Then how not others, like to me?
'Twere madness, sure, in me to blame my lord
When this hath caught him, or the woman there,

His innocent accomplice in a thing,
No shame to either, and no harm to me.
[page 190][449-490] It is not so. But if from him thou learnest
The lore of falsehood, it were best unlearn't;
Or if the instruction comes of thine own thought,
Such would-be kindness doth not prove thee kind.
Then tell me all the truth. To one free-born
The name of liar is a hateful lot.
And thou canst not be hid. Thy news was heard
By many, who will tell me. If thou fearest,
Thou hast no cause—for doubtfulness is pain,
But to know all, what harm? His loves ere now
Were they not manifold? And none hath borne
Reproach or evil word from me. She shall not,
Though his new passion were as strong as death;
Since most mine eye hath pitied her, because
Her beauty was the ruin of her life,
And all unweeting, she her own bright land,
Poor hapless one! hath ravaged and enslaved.—
Let that be as it must. But for thy part,
Though false to others, be still true to me.

CH. 'Tis fairly said. Comply. Thou ne'er wilt blame
Her faithfulness, and thou wilt earn our loves.

LICH. Yea, dear my Queen, now I have seen thee hold
Thy mortal wishes within mortal bound
So meekly, I will freely tell thee all.
It is as he avers. This maiden's love,
Piercing through Heracles, was the sole cause,
Why her Oechalia, land of plenteous woe,
Was made the conquest of his spear. And he—
For I dare so far clear him—never bade
Concealment or denial. But myself,
Fearing the word might wound thy queenly heart,
Sinned, if thou count such tenderness a sin.
But now that all is known, for both your sakes,
His, and thine own no less, look favouringly
Upon the woman, and confirm the word

Thou here hast spoken in regard to her:—
For he, whose might is in all else supreme,
Is wholly overmastered by her love.

DÊ. Yea, so my mind is bent. I will do so.

[page 191][491-519] I will not, in a bootless strife 'gainst Heaven,
Augment my misery with self-sought ill.

Come, go we in, that thou may'st bear from me
Such message as is meet, and also carry
Gifts, such as are befitting to return

For gifts new-given. Thou ought'st not to depart
Unladen, having brought so much with thee.[Exeunt

CHORUS.

Victorious in her might, I 1
The Queen of soft delight
Still ranges onward with triumphant sway.

What she from Kronos' son
And strong Poseidon won,
And Pluto, King of Night, I durst not say.

But who, to earn this bride,
Came forth in sinewy pride
To strive, or e'er the nuptial might be known

With fearless heart I tell
What heroes wrestled well,
With showering blows, and dust in clouds upthrown.

One was a river bold, I 2
Horn-crowned, with tramp fourfold,
Bull Achelôüs, Acarnania's Fear;
And one from Bacchus' town,

Own son of Zeus, came down,
With brandished mace, bent bow, and barbèd spear.
Who then in battle brunt,

Together, front to front,
Hurled, eager both to win the beauteous prize;
And Cypris 'mid the fray
Alone, that dreadful day,
Sate umpire, holding promise in her eyes.

Then clashed the fist, then clanged the bow;ll
Then horns gave crashing blow for blow,
Whilst, as they clung,
[page 192][520-555] The twining hip throw both essay
And hurtling foreheads' fearful play,
And groans from each were wrung.

But the tender fair one far away
Sate watching with an eye of piteous cheer
(A mother's heart will heed the thing I say,)
Till won by him who freed her from her fear.
Sudden she leaves her mother's gentle side,
Borne through the waste, our hero's tender bride.

Enter DÉANIRA.

DÉ. Dear friends, while yonder herald in the house
Holds converse with the captives ere he go,
I have stol'n forth to you, partly to tell
The craft my hand hath compassed, and in part,
To crave your pity for my wretchedness.
For I have taken to my hearth a maid,—
And yet, methinks, no maiden any more,
Like some fond shipmaster, taking on board
A cargo fraught with treason to my heart.
And now we two are closed in one embrace
Beneath one coverlet. Such generous meed
For faith in guarding home this dreary while
Hath the kind Heracles our trusty spouse,
Sent in return! Yet, oft as he hath caught
This same distemperature, I know not how
To harbour indignation against him.
But who that is a woman could endure
To dwell with her, both married to one man?
One bloom is still advancing, one doth fade.
The budding flower is cropped, the full-blown head
Is left to wither, while love passeth by
Unheeding. Wherefore I am sore afraid
He will be called my husband, but her mate,
For she is younger. Yet no prudent wife

Would take this angerly, as I have said.
But, dear ones, I will tell you of a way,
Whereof I have bethought me, to prevent
This heart-break. I had hidden of long time
[page 193][555-591] In a bronze urn the ancient Centaur's gift,
Which I, when a mere girl, culled from the wound
Of hairy-breasted Nessus in his death.
He o'er Evenus' rolling depths, for hire,
Ferried wayfarers on his arm, not plying
Or rowing-boat, or canvas-wingèd bark.
Who, when with Heracles, a new-made bride,
I followed by my father's sending forth,
Shouldering me too, in the mid-stream, annoyed
With wanton touch. And I cried out; and he,
Zeus' son, turned suddenly, and from his bow
Sent a wing'd shaft, that whizzed into his chest
To the lungs. Then the weird Thing, with dying voice
Spake to me:—'Child of aged Oeneüs,
Since thou wert my last burden, thou shalt win
Some profit from mine act, if thou wilt do
What now I bid thee. With a careful hand
Collect and bear away the clotted gore
That clogs my wound, e'en where the monster snake
Had dyed the arrow with dark tinct of gall;
And thou shalt have this as a charm of soul
For Heracles, that never through the eye
Shall he receive another love than thine.'
Whereof bethinking me, for since his death
I kept it in a closet locked with care,
I have applied it to this robe, with such
Addition as his living voice ordained.—
The thing is done. No criminal attempts
Could e'er be mine. Far be they from my thought,
As I abhor the woman who conceives them!
But if by any means through gentle spells
And bonds on Heracles' affection, we
May triumph o'er this maiden in his heart,

My scheme is perfected. Unless you deem
Mine action wild. If so, I will desist.

CH. If any ground of confidence approve
Thine act, we cannot check thy counsel here.

DÊ. My confidence is grounded on belief,
Though unconfirmed as yet by actual proof.

[page 194][592-627] CH. Well, do it and try. Assurance cannot
come

Till action bring experience after it.

DÊ. The truth will soon be known. The man e'en now
Is coming forth, and quickly will be there.
Screen ye but well my counsel. Doubtful deeds,
Wrapt close, will not deliver us to shame.

Enter LICHAS.

LICH. Daughter of Oeneus, tell me thy commands.
Already time rebukes our tardiness.

DÊ. Even that hath been my care, Lichas, while thou
Wert talking to the stranger-maids within,
That thou shouldst take for me this finewoven web,
A present from these fingers to my lord.
And when thou giv'st it, say that none of men
Must wear it on his shoulders before him;
And neither light of sun may look upon it,
Nor holy temple-court, nor household flame,
Till he in open station 'fore the Gods
Display it on a day when bulls are slaughtered.
So once I vowed, that should I ever see
Or hear his safe return, I would enfold
His glorious person in this robe, and show
To all the Gods in doing sacrifice
Him a fresh worshipper in fresh array.—
The truth hereof he will with ease descry
Betokened on this treasure-guarding seal.—
Now go, and be advised, of this in chief,
To act within thine office; then of this,
To bear thee so, that from his thanks and mine
Meeting in one, a twofold grace may spring.

LICH. If this my Hermes-craft be firm and sure,
Then never will I fail thee, O my Queen!

But I will show the casket as it is
To whom I bear it, and in faithfulness
Add all the words thou sendest in fit place.

DÊ. Go, then, at once. Thou hast full cognizance
How things within the palace are preserved?

LICH. I know, and will declare. There is no flaw.

[page 195][628-662] DÊ. Methinks thou knowest too, for thou hast
seen,

My kind reception of the stranger-maid?

LICH. I saw, and was amazed with heart-struck joy.

DÊ. What more is there to tell?—Too rash, I fear,
Were thy report of longing on my part,
Till we can learn if we be longed for there.[Exeunt severally

CHORUS.

O ye that haunt the strand! 1
Where ships in quiet land
Near Oeta's height and the warm rock-drawn well,
And ye round Melis' inland gulf who dwell,
Worshipping her who wields the golden wand,—
(There Hellas' wisest meet in council strong):
Soon shall the flute arise
With sound of glad surprise,
Thrilling your sense with no unwelcome song,
But tones that to the harp of Heavenly Muse belong.

Zeus' and Alcmena's son,—I 2

All deeds of glory done,—
Speeds now triumphant to his home, whom we
Twelve weary months of blind expectancy
Lost in vast distance, from our country gone.
While, sadly languishing, his loving wife,
Still flowing down with tears,
Pined with unnumbered fears.
But Ares, lately stung to furious strife,
[Frees him for ever](#) from the toilsome life.

O let him come to-day!!!
Ne'er may his vessel stay,
But glide with feathery sweep of many an oar,

Till from his altar by yon island shore
Even to our town he wind his prosperous way,
In mien returning mild,
And inly reconciled,
With that anointing in his heart ingrained,
Which the dark Centaur's wizard lips ordained.

[page 196][663-695]

Enter DÉANIRA.

DÉ. O how I fear, my friends, lest all too far
I have ventured in my action of to-day!

CH. What ails thee, Déanira, Oeneus' child?

DÉ. I know not, but am haunted by a dread,
Lest quickly I be found to have performed
A mighty mischief, through bright hopes betrayed.

CH. Thou dost not mean thy gift to Heracles?

DÉ. Indeed I do. Now I perceive how fond
Is eagerness, where actions are obscure.

CH. Tell, if it may be told, thy cause of fear.

DÉ. A thing is come to pass, which should I tell,
Will strike you with strange wonder when you learn.
For, O my friends, the stuff wherewith I dressed
That robe, a flock of soft and milkwhite wool,
Is shrivelled out of sight, not gnawn by tooth
Of any creature here, but, self-consumed,
Frittered and wasting on the courtyard-stones.
To let you know the circumstance at full,
I will speak on. Of all the Centaur-Thing,
When labouring in his side with the fell point
O' the shaft, enjoined me, I had nothing lost,
But his vaticination in my heart
Remained indelible, as though engraved
With pen of iron upon brass. 'Twas thus:—
I was to keep this unguent closely hid
In dark recesses, where no heat of fire
Or warming ray might reach it, till with fresh
Anointing I addressed it to an end.
So I had done. And now this was to do,

Within my chamber covertly I spread
The ointment with piece of wool, a tuft
Pulled from a home-bred sheep; and, as ye saw,
I folded up my gift and packed it close
In hollow casket from the glaring sun.
But, entering in, a fact encounters me
Past human wit to fathom with surmise.
For, as it happened, I had tossed aside
The bit of wool I worked with, carelessly,
[page 197][696-733] Into the open daylight, 'mid the blaze
Of Helios' beam. And, as it kindled warm,
It fell away to nothing, crumbled small,
Like dust in severing wood by sawyers strewn.
So, on the point of vanishing, it lay.
But, from the place where it had lain, brake forth
A frothy scum in clots of seething foam,
Like the rich draught in purple vintage poured
From Bacchus' vine upon the thirsty ground.
And I, unhappy, know not toward what thought
To turn me, but I see mine act is dire.
For wherefore should the Centaur, for what end,
Show kindness to the cause for whom he died?
That cannot be. But seeking to destroy
His slayer, he cajoled me. This I learn
Too late, by sad experience, for no good.
And, if I err not now, my hapless fate
Is all alone to be his murderess.
For, well I know, the shaft that made the wound
Gave pain to Cheiron, who was more than man;
And wheresoe'er it falls, it ravageth
All the wild creatures of the world. And now
This gory venom blackly spreading bane
From Nessus' angry wound, must it not cause
The death of Heracles? I think it must.
Yet my resolve is firm, if aught harm him,
My death shall follow in the self-same hour.

She cannot bear to live in evil fame,
Who cares to have a nature pure from ill.

CH. Horrid mischance must needs occasion fear.
But Hope is not condemned before the event.

DÊ. In ill-advised proceeding not even Hope
Remains to minister a cheerful mind.

CH. Yet to have erred unwittingly abates
The fire of wrath; and thou art in this case.

DÊ. So speaks not he who hath a share of sin,
But who is clear of all offence at home.

CH. 'Twere well to say no more, unless thou hast aught
To impart to thine own son: for he is here,
Who went erewhile to find his father forth.

[page 198][734-766]

HYLLUS (re-entering).

O mother, mother! I would to heaven one of three things were true:
Either that thou wert dead, or, living, wert
No mother to me, or hadst gained a mind
Furnished with better thoughts than thou hast now!

DÊ. My son! what canst thou so mislike in me?

HYL. I tell thee thou this day hast been the death
Of him that was thy husband and my sire.

DÊ. What word hath passed thy lips? my child, my child!

HYL. A word that must be verified. For who
Can make the accomplished fact as things undone?

DÊ. Alas, my son! what saidst thou? Who hath told
That I have wrought a deed so full of woe?

HYL. 'Twas I myself that saw with these mine eyes
My father's heavy state:—no hearsay word.

DÊ. And where didst thou come near him and stand by?

HYL. Art thou to hear it? On, then, with my tale!
When after sacking Eurytus' great city
He marched in triumph with first-fruits of war,—
There is a headland, last of long Euboea,
Surf-beat Cenaeum,—where to his father Zeus
He dedicates high altars and a grove.
There first I saw him, gladdened from desire.

And when he now addressed him to the work
Of various sacrifice, the herald Lichas
Arrived from home, bearing thy fatal gift,
The deadly robe: wherewith invested straight,
As thou hadst given charge, he sacrificed
The firstlings of the spoil, twelve bulls entire,
Each after each. But the full count he brought
Was a clear hundred of all kinds of head.
Then the all-hapless one commenced his prayer
In solemn gladness for the bright array.
But presently, when from the holy things,
And from the richness of the oak-tree core,
[page 199][766-802] There issued flame mingled with blood, a sweat
Rose on his flesh, and close to every limb
Clung, like stone-drapery from the craftsman's hand,
The garment, glued unto his side. Then came
The tearing pangs within his bones, and then
The poison feasted like the venom'd tooth
Of murderous basilisk.—When this began,
He shouted on poor Lichas, none to blame
For thy sole crime, 'What guile is here, thou knave?
What was thy fraud in fetching me this robe?'
He, all-unknowing, in an evil hour
Declared his message, that the gift was thine.
Whereat the hero, while the shooting spasm
Had fastened on the lungs, seized him by the foot
Where the ankle turns i' the socket, and, with a thought,
Hurl'd on a surf-vex'd reef that showed i' the sea:
And rained the grey pulp from the hair, the brain
Being scattered with the blood. Then the great throng
Saddened their festival with piteous wail
For one in death and one in agony.
And none had courage to approach my sire,—
Convulsed upon the ground, then tossed i' the air
With horrid yells and crying, till the cliffs
Echoed round, the mountain-promontories
Of Locris, and Euboea's rugged shore.

Wearied at length with flinging on the earth,
And shrieking oft with lamentable cry,
Cursing the fatal marriage with thyself
The all-wretched, and the bond to Oeneus' house,
That prize that was the poisoner of his peace,
He lifted a wild glance above the smoke
That hung around, and 'midst the crowd of men
Saw me in tears, and looked on me and said,
'O son, come near; fly not from my distress,
Though thou shouldst be consumèd in my death,
But lift and bear me forth; and, if thou mayest,
Set me where no one of mankind shall see me.
But if thy heart withhold thee, yet convey me
Out of this land as quickly as ye may.
Let me not die where I am now.' We then,
[page 200][803-833] Thus urgently commanded, laid him down
Within our bark, and hardly to this shore
Rowed him convulsed and roaring.—Presently,
He will appear, alive or lately dead.
Such, mother, is the crime thou hast devised
And done against our sire, wherefore let Right
And Vengeance punish thee!—May I pray so?
I may: for thou absolv'st me by thy deed,
Thou that hast slain the noblest of the Earth,
Thy spouse, whose like thou ne'er wilt see again. [Exit DÉANIRA.

CH. Why steal'st thou forth in silence? Know'st thou not
Thy silence argues thine accuser's plea?

HYL. Let her go off. Would that a sudden flood
Might sweep her far and swiftly from mine eye!
Why fondle vainly the fair-sounding name
Of mother, when her acts are all unmotherly?
Let her begone for me: and may she find
Such joy as she hath rendered to my sire! [Exit HYLLUS

CHORUS.

See where falls the doom, of old I 1
By the unerring Voice foretold,—
'When twelve troublous years have rolled,

Then shall end your long desire:
Toil on toil no more shall tire
The offspring of the Eternal Sire.
Lo! the destined Hour is come!
Lo! it hath brought its burden home.
For when the eyes have looked their last
How should sore labour vex again?
How, when the powers of will and thought are past,
Should life be any more enthralled to pain?

And if Nessus' withering shroud, I 2
Wrought by destiny and craft,
Steep him in a poisonous cloud.
Steaming from the venom'd shaft,
[page 201][834-870]
Which to Death in hideous lair
The many-wreathed Hydra bare,
How shall he another day
Feel the glad warmth of Helios' ray?—
Enfolded by the Monster-Thing
Of Lerna, while the cruel sting
Of the shagg'd Centaur's murderous-guileful tongue
Breaks forth withal to do him painful wrong.

And she, poor innocent, who saw I 1
Checkless advancing to the gate
A mighty harm unto her state,—
This rash young bridal without fear of law,—
Gave not her will to aught that caused this woe,
But since it came through that strange mind's conceiving,—
That ruined her in meeting,—deeply grieving,
She mourns with dewy tears in tenderest flow.
The approaching hour appeareth great with woe:
Some guile-born misery doth Fate foreshow.

The springs of sorrow are unbound, II 2
And such an agony disclose,
As never from the hands of foes
To afflict the life of Heracles was found.
O dark with battle-stains, world-champion spear,

That from Oechalia's highland leddest then
This bride that followed swiftly in thy train,
How fatally overshadowing was thy fear!
But these wild sorrows all too clearly come
[From Love's dread minister](#), disguised and dumb.

CH. 1. Am I a fool, or do I truly hear
Lament new-rising from our master's home?
Tell!

CH. 2. Clearly from within a wailing voice
Peals piteously. The house hath some fresh woe.

CH. 3. Mark!
How strangely, with what cloud upon her brow,
Yon aged matron with her tidings moves!

[page 202][871-902]

Enter Nurse.

NURSE. Ah! mighty, O my daughters! was the grief
Sprung from the gift to Heracles conveyed!

LEADER OF CH. What new thing is befallen? Why speak'st thou
so?

NUR. Our Queen hath found her latest journey's end.
Even now she is gone, without the help of feet.

CH. Not dead?

NUR. You know the whole.

CH. Dead! hapless Queen!

NUR. The truth hath twice been told.

CH. O tell us how!

What was her death, poor victim of dire woe?

NUR. Most ruthless was the deed.

CH. Say, woman, say!

What was the sudden end?

NUR. Herself she slew.

CH. What rage, what madness, clutched
The mischief-working brand?

How could her single thought

Contrive the accomplishment of death on death?

NUR. Chill iron stopped the sources of her breath.

CH. And thou, poor helpless crone, didst see this done?

NUR. Yea, I stood near and saw.

CH. How was it? Tell!

NUR. With her own hand this violence was given.

CH. What do I hear?

NUR. The certainty of truth.

CH. A child is come,

From this new bridal that hath rushed within,
A fresh-born Fury of woe!

NUR. Too true. But hadst thou been at hand to see
Her action, pity would have wrung thy soul.

CH. Could this be ventured by a woman's hand?

NUR. Ay, and in dreadful wise, as thou shalt hear.

When all alone she had gone within the gate,
And passing through the court beheld her boy
Spreading the couch that should receive his sire,
[page 203][902-946] Ere he returned to meet him,—out of sight
She hid herself, and fell at the altar's foot,
And loudly cried that she was left forlorn;
And, taking in her touch each household thing
That formerly she used, poor lady, wept
O'er all; and then went ranging through the rooms,
Where, if there caught her eye the well-loved form
Of any of her household, she would gaze
And weep aloud, accusing her own fate
And her abandoned lot, childless henceforth!
When this was ended, suddenly I see her
Fly to the hero's room of genial rest.
With unsuspected gaze o'ershadowed near,
I watched, and saw her casting on the bed
The finest sheets of all. When that was done,
She leapt upon the couch where they had lain
And sat there in the midst. And the hot flood
Burst from her eyes before she spake:—'Farewell,
My bridal bed, for never more shalt thou
Give me the comfort I have known thee give.'
Then with tight fingers she undid her robe,
Where the brooch lay before the breast, and bared

All her left arm and side. I, with what speed
Strength ministered, ran forth to tell her son
The act she was preparing. But meanwhile,
Ere we could come again, the fatal blow
Fell, and we saw the wound. And he, her boy,
Seeing, wept aloud. For now the hapless youth
Knew that himself had done this in his wrath,
Told all too late i' the house, how she had wrought
Most innocently, from the Centaur's wit.
So now the unhappy one, with passionate words
And cries and wild embracings of the dead,
Groaned forth that he had slain her with false breath
Of evil accusation, and was left
Orphaned of both, his mother and his sire.
Such is the state within. What fool is he
That counts one day, or two, or more to come?
To-morrow is not, till the present day
In fair prosperity have passed away.[Exit

[page 204][947-975]

CHORUS.

Which shall come first in my wail, I 1
Which shall be last to prevail,
Is a doubt that will never be done.

Trouble at home may be seen, I 2
Trouble is looked for with teen;
And to have and to look for are one.

Would some fair wind I 1
But waft me forth to roam
Far from the native region of my home,
Ere death me find, oppressed with wild affright
Even at the sudden sight
Of him, the valiant son of Zeus most High!
Before the house, they tell, he fareth nigh,
A wonder beyond thought,
With torment unapproachable distraught.

Hark! ... I 2
The cause then of my cry

Was coming all too nigh:
(Doth the clear nightingale lament for nought?)
Some step of stranger folk is this way brought.
As for a friend they love
Heavy and slow with noiseless feet they move.
Which way? which way? Ah me! behold him come.
His pallid lips are dumb.
Dead, or at rest in sleep? What shall I say?
[HERACLES is brought in on a litter, accompanied by HYLLUS and
an Old Man

HYL. Oh, woe is me!

My father, piteous woe for thee!
Oh, whither shall I turn my thought! Ah me!

OLD M. Hush! speak not, O my child,
Lest torment fierce and wild
Rekindle in thy father's rugged breast,
And break this rest

[page 205][976-1003] Where now his life is held at point to fall.
With firm lips clenched refrain thy voice through all.

HYL. Yet tell me, doth he live,
Old sir?

OLD M. Wake not the slumberer,
Nor kindle and revive
The terrible recurrent power of pain,
My son!

HYL. My foolish words are done,
But my full heart sinks 'neath the heavy strain.

HERACLES. O Father, who are these?
What countrymen? Where am I? What far land
Holds me in pain that ceaseth not? Ah me!
Again that pest is rending me. Pain, pain!

OLD M. Now thou may'st know
'Twas better to have lurked in silent shade
And not thus widely throw
The slumber from his eyelids and his head.

HYL. I could not brook
All speechless on his misery to look.

MONODY.

HER. O altar on the Euboean strand,
High-heaped with offerings from my hand,
What meed for lavish gifts bestowed
From thy new sanctuary hath flowed!
Father of Gods! thy cruel power
Hath foiled me with an evil blight.
Ah! would mine eyes had closed in night
Ere madness in a fatal hour
Had burst upon them with a blaze,
No help or soothing once allays!

What hand to heal, what voice to charm,
Can e'er dispel this hideous harm?
Whose skill save thine,
Monarch Divine?
Mine eyes, if such I saw,
Would hail him from afar with trembling awe.

[page 206][1004-1040] Ah! ah!
O vex me not, touch me not, leave me to rest,
To sleep my last sleep on Earth's gentle breast.
You touch me, you press me, you turn me again,
You break me, you kill me! O pain! O pain!
You have kindled the pang that had slumbered still.
It comes, it hath seized me with tyrannous will!

Where are ye, men, whom over Hellas wide
This arm hath freed, and o'er the ocean-tide,
And through rough brakes, from every monstrous thing?
Yet now in mine affliction none will bring
A sword to aid, a fire to quell this fire,
O most unrighteous! nor to my desire
Will come and quench the hateful life I hold
With mortal stroke! Ah! is there none so bold?

OLD M. Son of our hero, this hath mounted past
My feeble force to cope with. Take him thou!
Fresher thine eye and more the hope thou hast
Than mine to save him.

HYL. I support him now
Thus with mine arm: but neither fleshly vest
Nor inmost spirit can I lull to rest
From torture. None may dream
To wield this power, save he, the King supreme.

HER. Son!

Where art thou to lift me and hold me aright?
It tears me, it kills me, it rushes in might,
This cruel, devouring, unconquered pain
Shoots forth to consume me. Again! again!
O Fate! O Athena!—O son, at my word
Have pity and slay me with merciful sword!

Pity thy father, boy; with sharp relief
Smite on my breast, and heal the wrathful grief
Wherewith thy mother, God-abandoned wife,
Hath wrought this ruin on her husband's life.
O may I see her falling, even so
As she hath thrown me, to like depth of woe!
[page 207][1041-1080] Sweet Hades, with swift death,
Brother of Zeus, release my suffering breath!

CH. Horror hath caught me as I hear this, woe,
Racking our mighty one with mightier pain.

HER. Many hot toils and hard beyond report,
With sturdy thews and sinews I have borne,
But no such labour hath the Thunderer's wife
Or sour Eurystheus ever given, as this,
Which Oeneus' daughter of the treacherous eye
Hath fastened on my back, this amply-woven
Net of the Furies, that is breaking me.
For, glued unto my side, it hath devoured
My flesh to the bone, and lodging in the lungs
It drains the vital channels, and hath drunk
The fresh life-blood, and ruins all my frame,
Foiled in the tangle of a viewless bond.
Yet me nor War-host, nor Earth's giant brood,
Nor Centaur's monstrous violence could subdue,
Nor Hellas, nor the Stranger, nor all lands

Where I have gone, cleansing the world from harms.
But a soft woman without manhood's strain
Alone and weaponless hath conquered me.
Son, let me know thee mine true-born, nor rate
Thy mother's claim beyond thy sire's, but bring
Thyself from out the chambers to my hand
Her body that hath borne thee, that my heart
May be assured, if lesser than my pain
It will distress thee to behold her limbs
With righteous torment agonized and torn.
Nay, shrink not, son, but pity me, whom all
May pity—me, who, like a tender girl,
Am heard to weep aloud! This none could say
He knew in me of old; for, murmuring not,
I went with evil fortune, silent still.
Now, such a foe hath found the woman in me!
Ay, but come near; stand by me, and behold
What cause I have for crying. Look but here!
Here is the mystery unveiled. O see!
Ye people, gaze on this poor quivering flesh,
Look with compassion on my misery!
[page 208][1081-1117] Ah me!
Ah! ah! Again!
Even now the hot convulsion of disease
Shoots through my side, and will not let me rest
From this fierce exercise of wearing woe.
Take me, O King of Night!
O sudden thunderstroke.
Smite me! O sire, transfix me with the dart
Of thy swift lightning! Yet again that fang
Is tearing; it hath blossomed forth anew,
It soars up to the height!
O breast and back,
O shrivelling arms and hands, ye are the same
That crushed the dweller of the Néméan wild,
The lion unapproachable and rude,
The oxherd's plague, and Hydra of the lake

Of Lerna, and the twi-form prancing throng
Of Centaurs,—insolent, unsociable,
Lawless, ungovernable:—the tuskèd pest
Of Erymanthine glades; then underground
Pluto's three-headed cur—a perilous fear,
Born from the monster-worm; and, on the verge
Of Earth, the dragon, guarding fruits of gold.
These toils and others countless I have tried,
And none hath triumphed o'er me. But to-day,
Jointless and riven to tatters, I am wrecked
Thus utterly by imperceptible woe;
I, proudly named Alcmena's child, and His
Who reigns in highest heaven, the King supreme!
Ay, but even yet, I tell ye, even from here,
Where I am nothingness and cannot move,
She who hath done this deed shall feel my power.
Let her come near, that, mastered by my might,
She may have this to tell the world, that, dying,
As living, I gave punishment to wrong.

CH. O Hellas, how I grieve for thy distress!
How thou wilt mourn in losing him we see!

HYL. My father, since thy silence gives me leave,
Still hear me patiently, though in thy pain!
For my request is just. Lend me thy mind
[page 209][1117-1149] Less wrathfully distempered than 'tis now;
Else thou canst never know, where thou art keen
With vain resentment and with vain desire

HER. Speak what thou wilt and cease, for I in pain
Catch not the sense of thy mysterious talk

HYL. I come to tell thee of my mother's case,
And her involuntary unconscious fault.

HER. Base villain! hast thou breathed thy mother's name,
Thy father's murderess, in my hearing too!

HYL. Her state requires not silence, but full speech.

HER. Her faults in former time might well be told.

HYL. So might her fault to day, couldst thou but know.

HER. Speak, but beware base words disgrace thee not.

HYL. List! She is dead even now with new-given wound.

HER. By whom? Thy words flash wonder through my woe.

HYL. Her own hand slaughtered her, no foreign stroke.

HER. Wretch! to have reft this office from my hands.

HYL. Even your rash spirit were softened, if you knew.

HER. This bodes some knavery. But declare thy thought!

HYL. She erred with good intent. The whole is said.

HER. Good, O thou villain, to destroy thy sire!

HYL. When she perceived that marriage in her home,
She erred, supposing to enchain thy love.

HER. Hath Trachis a magician of such might?

HYL. Long since the Centaur Nessus moved her mind
To work this charm for heightening thy desire.

HER. O horror, thou art here! I am no more.

My day is darkened, boy! Undone, undone!

I see our plight too plainly. woe is me!

Come, O my son! —thou hast no more a father,—

Call to me all the brethren of thy blood,

And poor Alcmena, wedded all in vain

[page 210][1149-1185] Unto the Highest, that ye may hear me tell
With my last breath what prophecies I know.

HYL. Thy mother is not here, but by the shore

Of Tiryns hath obtained a dwelling-place;

And of thy sons, some she hath with her there,

And some inhabit Thebè's citadel.

But we who are with thee, sire, if there be aught

That may by us be done, will hear, and do.

HER. Then hearken thou unto this task, and show
If worthily thou art reputed mine.

Now is time to prove thee. My great father

Forewarned me long ago that I should die

By none who lived and breathed, but from the will

Of one now dwelling in the house of death.

And so this Centaur, as the voice Divine

Then prophesied, in death hath slain me living.

And in agreement with that ancient word

I now interpret newer oracles

Which I wrote down on going within the grove
Of the hill-roving and earth-couching Selli,—
Dictated to me by the mystic tongue
Innumerable, of my Father's sacred tree;
Declaring that my ever instant toils
Should in the time that new hath being and life
End and release me. And I look'd for joy.
But the true meaning plainly was my death.—
No labour is appointed for the dead.—
Then, since all argues one event, my son,
Once more thou must befriend me, and not wait
For my voice goading thee, but of thyself
Submit and second my resolve, and know
Filial obedience for thy noblest rule.

HYL. I will obey thee, father, though my heart
Sinks heavily in approaching such a theme.

HER. Before aught else, lay thy right hand in mine.

HYL. Why so intent on this assurance, sire?

HER. Give it at once and be not froward, boy.

HYL. There is my hand: I will gainsay thee nought.

HER. Swear by the head of him who gave me life.

[page 211][1186-1221] HYL. Tell me the oath, and I will utter it.

HER. Swear thou wilt do the thing I bid thee do.

HYL. I swear, and make Zeus witness of my troth.

HER. But if you swerve, pray that the curse may come.

HYL. It will not come for swerving:—but I pray.

HER. Now, dost thou know on Oeta's topmost height
The crag of Zeus?

HYL. I know it, and full oft
Have stood there sacrificing.

HER. Then even there,
With thine own hand uplifting this my body,
Taking what friends thou wilt, and having lopped
Much wood from the deep-rooted oak and rough
Wild olive, lay me on the gathered pile,
And burn all with the touch of pine-wood flame.
Let not a tear of mourning dim thine eye;

But silent, with dry gaze, if thou art mine,
Perform it. Else my curse awaits thee still
To weigh thee down when I am lost in night.

HYL. How cruel, O my father, is thy tongue!

HER. 'Tis peremptory. Else, if thou refuse,
Be called another's and be no more mine.

HYL. Alas that thou shouldst challenge me to this,
To be thy murderer, guilty of thy blood!

HER. Not I, in sooth: but healer of my pain,
And sole preserver from a life of woe.

HYL. How can it heal to burn thee on the pyre?

HER. If this act frighten thee, perform the rest.

HYL. Mine arms shall not refuse to carry thee.

HER. And wilt thou gather the appointed wood?

HYL. So my hand fire it not. In all but this,
Not scanting labour, I will do my part.

HER. Enough. 'Tis well. And having thus much given
Add one small kindness to a list so full.

HYL. How great soe'er it were, it should be done.

HER. The maid of Eurytus thou knowest, I ween.

HYL. Of Iolè thou speak'st, or I mistake.

HER. Of her. This then is all I urge, my son.

[page 212][1222-1258] When I am dead, if thou wouldst show thy
duty,

Think of thine oath to me, and, on my word,

Make her thy wife: nor let another man

Take her, but only thou; since she hath lain

So near this heart. Obey me, O my boy!

And be thyself the maker of this bond.

To spurn at trifles after great things given,

Were to confound the meed already won.

HYL. Oh, anger is not right, when men are ill!
But who could bear to see thee in this mind?

HER. You murmur, as you meant to disobey.

HYL. How can I do it, when my mother's death
And thy sad state sprang solely from this girl?

Who, not possessed with furies, could choose this?

Far better, father, for me too to die,
Than to live still with my worst enemy.

HER. This youth withdraws his reverence in my death.
But, if thou yield'st not to thy father's best,
The curse from Heaven shall dog thy footsteps still.

HYL. Ah! thou wilt tell me that thy pain is come.

HER. Yea, for thou wak'st the torment that had slept.

HYL. Ay me! how cross and doubtful is my way!

HER. Because you will reject your father's word.

HYL. Must I be taught impiety from thee?

HER. It is not impious to content my heart.

HYL. Then you require this with an absolute will?

HER. And bid Heaven witness to my strong command.

HYL. Then I will do it, for the act is thine.

I will not cast it off. Obeying thee,
My sire, the Gods will ne'er reprove my deed.

HER. Thou endest fairly. Now, then, O my son,
Add the performance swiftly, that, before
Some spasm or furious onset of my pain
Have seized me, ye may place me on the pyre.
Come, loiter not, but lift me. Now my end
Is near, the last cessation of my woe.

HYL. Since thy command is urgent, O my sire!
We tarry not, but bear thee to the pyre.

[page 213][1259-1278] HER. Stubborn heart, ere yet again
Wakes the fierce rebound of pain,
While the evil holds aloof,
Thou, with bit of diamond proof,
Curb thy cry, with forcèd will
Seeming to do gladly still!

HYL. Lift him, men, and hate not me
For the evil deeds ye see,
Since the Heavens' relentless sway
Recks not of the righteous way.
He who gave life and doth claim
From his seed a Father's name
Can behold this hour of blame.

Though the future none can tell,
Yet the present is not well:
Sore for him who bears the blow,
Sad for us who feel his woe,
Shameful to the Gods, we trow.

CH. Maidens from the palace-hall,
Come ye forth, too, at our call!
Mighty deaths beyond belief,
Many an unknown form of grief,
Ye have seen to-day; and nought
But the power of Zeus hath wrought.