

# Prometheus Bound

Circa 480BC

Aeschylus

# FOUR PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS

THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS THE PERSIANS  
THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES THE  
PROMETHEUS BOUND

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE BY  
E.D.A. MORSHEAD, MA.

## INTRODUCTION

The surviving dramas of Aeschylus are seven in number, though he is believed to have written nearly a hundred during his life of sixty-nine years, from 525 B.C. to 456 B.C. That he fought at Marathon in 490, and at Salamis in 480 B.C. is a strongly accredited tradition, rendered almost certain by the vivid references to both battles in his play of *The Persians*, which was produced in 472. But his earliest extant play was, probably, not *The Persians* but *The Suppliant Maidens*—a mythical drama, the fame of which has been largely eclipsed by the historic interest of *The Persians*, and is undoubtedly the least known and least

regarded of the seven. Its topic—the flight of the daughters of Danaus from Egypt to Argos, in order to escape from a forced bridal with their first-cousins, the sons of Aegyptus—is legendary, and the lyric element predominates in the play as a whole. We must keep ourselves reminded that the ancient Athenian custom of presenting dramas in *Trilogies*—that is, in three consecutive plays dealing with different stages of one legend—was probably not uniform: it survives, for us, in one instance only, viz. the Orestean Trilogy, comprising the *Agamemnon*, the *Libation-Bearers*, and the *Eumenides*, or *Furies*. This Trilogy is the masterpiece of the Aeschylean Drama: the four remaining plays of the poet, which are translated in this volume, are all fragments of lost Trilogies—that is to say, the plays are complete as *poems*, but in regard to the poet's larger design they are fragments; they once had predecessors, or sequels, of which only a few words, or lines, or short paragraphs, survive. It is not certain, but seems probable, that the earliest of these single completed

plays is *The Suppliant Maidens*, and on that supposition it has been placed first in the present volume. The maidens, accompanied by their father Danaes, have fled from Egypt and arrived at Argos, to take sanctuary there and to avoid capture by their pursuing kinsmen and suitors. In the course of the play, the pursuers' ship arrives to reclaim the maidens for a forced wedlock in Egypt. The action of the drama turns on the attitude of the king and people of Argos, in view of this intended abduction. The king puts the question to the popular vote, and the demand of the suitors is unanimously rejected: the play closes with thanks and gratitude on the part of the fugitives, who, in lyrical strains of quiet beauty, seem to refer the whole question of their marriage to the subsequent decision of the gods, and, in particular, of Aphrodite.

Of the second portion of the Trilogy we can only speak conjecturally. There is a passage in the *Prometheus Bound* (ll. 860-69), in which we learn that the maidens were somehow reclaimed by the suitors, and that all, except

one, slew their bridegrooms on the wedding night. There is a faint trace, among the Fragments of Aeschylus, of a play called *Thalamopoioi*,—i.e. *The Preparers of the Chamber*,—which may well have referred to this tragic scene. Its grim title will recall to all classical readers the magnificent, though terrible, version of the legend, in the final stanzas of the eleventh poem in the third book of Horace's *Odes*. The final play was probably called *The Danaides*, and described the acquittal of the brides through some intervention of Aphrodite: a fragment of it survives, in which the goddess appears to be pleading her special prerogative. The legends which commit the daughters of Danaus to an eternal penalty in Hades are, apparently, of later origin. Homer is silent on any such penalty; and Pindar, Aeschylus' contemporary, actually describes the once suppliant maidens as honourably enthroned (*Pyth.* ix. 112: *Nem.* x. ll. 1-10). The Tartarean part of the story is, in fact, post-Aeschylean.

*The Suppliant Maidens* is full of charm, though the text of the part which describes the arrival of the pursuers at Argos is full of uncertainties. It remains a fine, though archaic, poem, with this special claim on our interest, that it is, probably, the earliest extant poetic drama. We see in it the *tendency* to grandiose language, not yet fully developed as in the *Prometheus*: the inclination of youth to simplicity, and even platitude, in religious and general speculation: and yet we recognize, as in the germ, the profound theology of the *Agamemnon*, and a touch of the political vein which appears more fully in the *Furies*. If the precedence in time here ascribed to it is correct, the play is perhaps worth more recognition than it has received from the countrymen of Shakespeare.

*The Persians* has been placed second in this volume, as the oldest play whose date is certainly known. It was brought out in 472 B.C., eight years after the sea-fight of Salamis which it commemorates, and five years before the *Seven against Thebes* (467 B.C.). It is thought to be the second play of a Trilogy,

standing between the *Phineus* and the *Glaucus*. Phineus was a legendary seer, of the Argonautic era—"Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old"—and the play named after him may have contained a prophecy of the great conflict which is actually described in *The Persae*: the plot of the *Glaucus* is unknown. In any case, *The Persians* was produced before the eyes of a generation which had seen the struggles, West against East, at Marathon and Thermopylæ, Salamis and Plataea. It is as though Shakespeare had commemorated, through the lips of a Spanish survivor, in the ears of old councillors of Philip the Second, the dispersal of the Armada.

Against the piteous want of manliness on the part of the returning Xerxes, we may well set the grave and dignified patriotism of Atossa, the Queen-mother of the Persian kingdom; the loyalty, in spite of their bewilderment, of the aged men who form the Chorus; and, above all, the royal phantom of Darius, evoked from the shadowland by the libations of Atossa and by the appealing cries of the Chorus. The

latter, indeed, hardly dare to address the kingly ghost: but Atossa bravely narrates to him the catastrophe, of which, in the lower world, Darius has known nothing, though he realizes that disaster, soon or late, is the lot of mortal power. As the tale is unrolled, a spirit of prophecy possesses him, and he foretells the coming slaughter of Plataea; then, with a last royal admonition that the defeated Xerxes shall, on his return, be received with all ceremony and observance, and with a characteristic warning to the aged men, that they must take such pleasures as they may, in their waning years, he returns to the shades. The play ends with the undignified reappearance of Xerxes, and a melancholy procession into the palace of Susa. It was, perhaps, inevitable that this close of the great drama should verge on the farcical, and that the poltroonery of Xerxes should, in a measure, obscure Aeschylus' generous portraiture of Atossa and Darius. But his magnificent picture of the battle of Salamis is unequalled in the poetic annals of naval war. No account of the

flight of the Armada, no record of Lepanto or Trafalgar, can be justly set beside it. The Messenger might well, like Prospero, announce a tragedy by one line—

Sit still, and hear the last of our sea-sorrow.

Five years after *The Persians*, in 467 B. C., the play which we call the *Seven against Thebes* was presented at Athens. It bears now a title which Aeschylus can hardly have given to it for, though the scene of the drama overlooks the region where the city of Thebes afterwards came into being, yet, in the play itself, Thebes is *never* mentioned. The scene of action is the Cadmea, or Citadel of Cadmus, and we know that, in Aeschylus' lifetime, that citadel was no longer a mere fastness, but had so grown outwards and enlarged itself that a new name, Thebes, was applied to the collective city. (All this has been made abundantly clear by Dr. Verrall in his Introduction to the *Seven against Thebes*, to which every reader of the play itself will naturally and most profitably refer.) In the time of Aeschylus, Thebes was, of course, a notable city, his great contemporary Pindar

was a citizen of it. But the Thebes of Aeschylus' date is one thing, the fortress represented in Aeschylus' play is quite another, and is never, by him, called Thebes. That the play received, and retains, the name, *The Seven against Thebes*, is believed to be due to two lines of Aristophanes in his *Frogs* (406 B.C.), where he describes Aeschylus' play as "the Seven against Thebes, a drama instinct with War, which any one who beheld must have yearned to be a warrior." This is rather an excellent *description* of the play than the title of it, and could not be its Aeschylean name, for the very sufficient reason that Thebes is not mentioned in the play at all. Aeschylus, in fact, was poetizing an earlier legend of the fortress of Cadmus. This being premised, we may adopt, under protest as it were, the Aristophanic name which has accrued to the play. It is the third part of a Trilogy which might have been called, collectively, *The House of Laius*. Sophocles and Euripides give us *their* versions of the legend, which we may epitomize, without, however, affirming that they followed exactly the lines of

Aeschylus Trilogy—they, for instance, speak freely of *Thebes*. Laius, King of Thebes, married Iokaste; he was warned by Apollo that if he had any children ruin would befall his house. But a child was born, and, to avoid the threatened catastrophe, without actually killing the child he exposed it on Mount Cithaeron, that it should die. Some herdsmen saved it and gave it over to the care of a neighbouring king and queen, who reared it. Later on, learning that there was a doubt of his parentage, this child, grown now to maturity, left his foster parents and went to Delphi to consult the oracle, and received a mysterious and terrible warning, that he was fated to slay his father and wed his mother. To avoid this horror, he resolved never to approach the home of his supposed parents. Meantime his real father, Laius, on *his* way to consult the god at Delphi, met his unknown son returning from that shrine—a quarrel fell out, and the younger man slew the elder. Followed by his evil destiny, he wandered on, and found the now kingless Thebes in the grasp of the Sphinx monster,

over whom he triumphed, and was rewarded by the hand of Iokaste, his own mother! Not till four children—two sons and two daughters—had been born to them, was the secret of the lineage revealed. Iokaste slew herself in horror, and the wretched king tore out his eyes, that he might never again see the children of his awful union. The two sons quarrelled over the succession, then agreed on a compromise; then fell at variance again, and finally slew each other in single combat. These two sons, according to one tradition, were twins: but the more usual view is that the elder was called Eteocles, the younger, Polynices.

To the point at which the internecine enmity between Eteocles and Polynices arose, we have had to follow Sophocles and Euripides, the first two parts of Aeschylus' Trilogy being lost. But the third part, as we have said, survives under the name given to it by Aristophanes, the *Seven against Thebes*: it opens with an exhortation by Eteocles to his Cadmeans that they should "quit them like men" against the onslaught of Polynices and his Argive allies: the

Chorus is a bevy of scared Cadmean maidens, to whom the very sound of war and tramp of horsemen are new and terrific. It ends with the news of the death of the two princes, and the lamentations of their two sisters, Antigone and Ismene. The onslaught from without has been repulsed, but the male line of the house of Laius is extinct. The Cadmeans resolve that Eteocles shall be buried in honour, and Polynices flung to the dogs and birds. Against the latter sentence Antigone protests, and defies the decree: the Chorus, as is natural, are divided in their sentiments.

It is interesting to note that, in combination with the *Laius* and the *Oedipus*, this play won the dramatic crown in 467 B.C. On the other hand, so excellent a judge as Mr. Gilbert Murray thinks that it is "perhaps among Aeschylus' plays the one that bears least the stamp of commanding genius." Perhaps the daring, practically atheistic, character of Eteocles; the battle-fever that burns and thrills through the play; the pathetic terror of the Chorus—may have given it favour, in Athenian

eyes, as the work of a poet who— though recently (468 B.C.) defeated in the dramatic contest by the young Sophocles—was yet present to tell, not by mere report, the tale of Marathon and Salamis. Or the preceding plays, the *Laius* and the *Oedipus*, may have been of such high merit as to make up for defects observable in the one that still survives. In any case, we can hardly err in accepting Dr. Verral's judgment that "the story of Aeschylus may be, and in the outlines probably is, the genuine epic legend of the Cadmean war."

There remains one Aeschylean play, the most famous—unless we except the *Agamemnon*—in extant Greek literature, the *Prometheus Bound*. That it was the first of a Trilogy, and that the second and third parts were called the *Prometheus Freed*, and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*, respectively, is accepted: but the date of its performance is unknown.

The *Prometheus Bound* is conspicuous for its gigantic and strictly superhuman plot. The *Agamemnon* is human, though legendary the *Prometheus* presents to us the gods of

Olympus in the days when mankind crept like emmets upon the earth or dwelt in caves, scorned by Zeus and the other powers of heaven, and—still aided by Prometheus the Titan—wholly without art or science, letters or handicrafts. For his benevolence towards oppressed mankind, Prometheus is condemned by Zeus to uncounted ages of pain and torment, shackled and impaled in a lonely cleft of a Scythian precipice. The play opens with this act of divine resentment enforced by the will of Zeus and by the handicraft of Hephaestus, who is aided by two demons, impersonating Strength and Violence. These agents if the ire of Zeus disappear after the first scene, the rest of the play represents Prometheus in the mighty solitude, but visited after a while by a Chorus of sea nymphs who, from the distant depths of ocean, have heard the clang of the demons' hammers, and arrive, in a winged car, from the submarine palace of their father Oceanus. To them Prometheus relates his penalty and its cause: viz., his over tenderness to the luckless race of mankind.

Oceanus himself follows on a hippogriff, and counsels Prometheus to submit to Zeus. But the Titan who has handled the sea nymphs with all gentleness, receives the advice with scorn and contempt, and Oceanus retires. But the courage which he lacks his daughters possess to the full; they remain by Prometheus to the end, and share his fate, literally in the crack of doom. But before the end, the strange half human figure of Io, victim of the lust of Zeus and the jealousy of Hera, comes wandering by, and tells Prometheus of her wrongs. He, by his divine power, recounts to her not only the past but also the future of her wanderings. Then, in a fresh access of frenzy, she drifts away into the unknown world. Then Prometheus partly reveals to the sea maidens his secret, and the mysterious cause of Zeus' hatred against him—a cause which would avail to hurl the tyrant from his power. So deadly is this secret, that Zeus will, in the lapse of ages, be forced to reconcile himself with Prometheus, to escape dethronement. Finally, Hermes, the messenger of Zeus, appears with fresh threats,

that he may extort the mystery from the Titan. But Prometheus is firm, defying both the tyrant and his envoy, though already the lightning is flashing, the thunder rolling, and sky and sea are mingling their fury. Hermes can say no more; the sea nymphs resolutely refuse to retire, and wait their doom. In this crash of the world, Prometheus flings his final defiance against Zeus, and amid the lightnings and shattered rocks that are overwhelming him and his companions, speaks his last word, "*It is unjust!*"

Any spectacular representation of this finale must, it is clear, have roused intense sympathy with the Titan and the nymphs alike. If, however, the sequel-plays had survived to us, we might conceivably have found and realized another and less intolerable solution. The name *Zeus*, in Greek, like that of *God*, in English, comprises very diverse views of divine personality. The Zeus in the *Prometheus* has little but the name in common with the Zeus in the first chorus of the *Agamemnon*, or in *The Suppliant Maidens* (ll. 86-103): and parallel

reflections will give us much food for thought. But, in any case, let us realize that the *Prometheus* is not a human play: with the possible exception of Io, every character in it is an immortal being. It is not as a vaunt, but as a fact, that Prometheus declares, as against Zeus (l. 1053), that "Me at least He shall never give to death."

A stupendous theological drama of which two-thirds has been lost has left an aching void, which now can never be filled, in our minds. No reader of poetry needs to be reminded of the glorious attempt of Shelley to work out a possible and worthy sequel to the *Prometheus*. Who will not echo the words of Mr. Gilbert Murray, when he says that "no piece of lost literature has been more ardently longed for than the *Prometheus Freed*"?

But, at the end of a rather prolonged attempt to understand and translate the surviving tragedies of Aeschylus, one feels inclined to repeat the words used by a powerful critic about one of the greatest of modern poets—"For man, it is a weary way to God, but a

wearier far to any demigod." We shall not discover the full sequel of Aeschylus' mighty dramatic conception: we "know in part, and we prophesy in part." The Introduction (pp. xvi.-xviii.) prefixed by Mr. A. O. Prickard to his edition of the *Prometheus* is full of persuasive grace, on this topic: to him, and to Dr. Verrall of Cambridge—*lucida sidera* of help and encouragement in the study of Aeschylus—the translator's thanks are due, and are gratefully and affectionately rendered.

**E. D. A. M.**

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**THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS**

**DEDICATION**

Take thou this gift from out the grave of  
Time.

The urns of Greece lie shattered, and the cup  
That for Athenian lips the Muses filled,  
And flowery crowns that on Athenian hair  
Hid the cicala, freedom's golden sign,  
Dust in the dust have fallen. Calmly sad,  
The marble dead upon Athenian tombs  
Speak from their eyes "Farewell": and well  
have fared

They and the saddened friends, whose  
clasping hands

Win from the solemn stone eternity.  
Yea, well they fared unto the evening god,  
Passing beyond the limit of the world,  
Where face to face the son his mother saw,  
A living man a shadow, while she spake  
Words that Odysseus and that Homer  
heard,—

*I too, O child, I reached the common doom,  
The grave, the goal of fate, and passed away.*  
—Such, Anticleia, as thy voice to him,  
Across the dim gray gulf of death and time  
Is that of Greece, a mother's to a child,—

Mother of each whose dreams are grave and  
fair—  
Who sees the Naiad where the streams are  
bright  
And in the sunny ripple of the sea  
Cymodoce with floating golden hair:  
And in the whisper of the waving oak  
Hears still the Dryad's plaint, and, in the wind  
That sighs through moonlit woodlands, knows  
the horn  
Of Artemis, and silver shafts and bow.  
Therefore if still around this broken vase,  
Borne by rough hands, unworthy of their  
load,  
Far from Cephissus and the wandering rills,  
There cling a fragrance as of things once  
sweet,  
Of honey from Hymettus' desert hill,  
Take thou the gift and hold it close and dear;  
For gifts that die have living memories—  
Voices of unreturning days, that breathe  
The spirit of a day that never dies.

## **ARGUMENT**

Io, the daughter of Inachus, King of Argos, was beloved of Zeus. But Hera was jealous of that love, and by her ill will was Io given over to frenzy, and her body took the semblance of a heifer: and Argus, a many-eyed herdsman, was set by Hera to watch Io whithersoever she strayed. Yet, in despite of Argus, did Zeus draw nigh unto her in the shape of a bull. And by the will of Zeus and the craft of Hermes was Argus slain. Then Io was driven over far lands and seas by her madness, and came at length to the land of Egypt. There was she restored to herself by a touch of the hand of Zeus, and bare a child called Epaphus. And from Epaphus sprang Libya, and from Libya, Belus; and from Belus, Aegyptus and Danaus. And the sons of Aegyptus willed to take the daughters of Danaus in marriage. But the maidens held such wedlock in horror, and fled with their father over the sea to Argos; and the king and citizens of Argos gave them shelter and protection from their pursuers.

## **THE SUPPLIANT MAIDENS**

# DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DANAUS, THE KING OF ARGOS, HERALD OF AEGYPTUS.

*Chorus of the Daughters of Danaus.  
Attendants.*

*Scene. —A sacred precinct near the gates of Argos: statue and shrines of Zeus and other deities stand around.*

## CHORUS

ZEUS! Lord and guard of suppliant hands!  
Look down benign on us who crave  
Thine aid—whom winds and waters drave  
From where, through drifting shifting sands,  
Pours Nilus to the wave.  
From where the green land, god-possest,  
Closes and fronts the Syrian waste,  
We flee as exiles, yet unbanned  
By murder's sentence from our land;  
But—since Aegyptus had decreed  
His sons should wed his brother's seed,—  
Ourselves we tore from bonds abhorred,  
From wedlock not of heart but hand,

Nor brooked to call a kinsman lord!  
And Danaus, our sire and guide,  
The king of counsel, pond'ring well  
The dice of fortune as they fell,  
Out of two griefs the kindlier chose,  
And bade us fly, with him beside,  
Heedless what winds or waves arose,  
And o'er the wide sea waters haste,  
Until to Argos' shore at last

Our wandering pinnace came—  
Argos, the immemorial home  
Of her from whom we boast to come—  
Io, the ox-horned maiden, whom,  
After long wandering, woe, and scathe,  
Zeus with a touch, a mystic breath,  
Made mother of our name.

Therefore, of all the lands of earth,  
On this most gladly step we forth,  
And in our hands aloft we bear—  
Sole weapon for a suppliant's wear—  
The olive-shoot, with wool enwound!

City, and land, and waters wan  
Of Inachus, and gods most high,  
And ye who, deep beneath the ground,

Bring vengeance weird on mortal man,  
Powers of the grave, on you we cry!  
And unto Zeus the Saviour, guard  
Of mortals' holy purity!  
Receive ye us—keep watch and ward  
Above the suppliant maiden band!  
Chaste be the heart of this your land  
Towards the weak! but, ere the throng,  
The wanton swarm, from Egypt sprung,  
Leap forth upon the silted shore,  
Thrust back their swift-rowed bark again,  
Repel them, urge them to the main!  
And there, 'mid storm and lightning's shine,  
And scudding drift and thunder's roar,  
Deep death be theirs, in stormy brine!  
Before they foully grasp and win  
Us, maiden-children of their kin,  
And climb the couch by law denied,  
And wrong each weak reluctant bride.

And now on her I call,

Mine ancestress, who far on Egypt's shore  
A young cow's semblance wore,—  
A maiden once, by Hera's malice changed!  
And then on him withal,

Who, as amid the flowers the grazing  
creature  
    ranged,  
Was in her by a breath of Zeus conceived;  
    And, as the hour of birth drew nigh,  
By fate fulfilled, unto the light he came;  
    And Epaphus for name,  
Born from the touch of Zeus, the child  
received.

    On him, on him I cry,  
    And him for patron hold—  
While in this grassy vale I stand,  
    Where lo roamed of old!  
And here, recounting all her toil and pain,  
Signs will I show to those who rule the land  
That I am child of hers; and all shall  
understand,  
Hearing the doubtful tale of the dim past  
made plain.

    And, ere the end shall be,  
Each man the truth of what I tell shall see.  
    And if there dwell hard by  
One skilled to read from bird-notes augury,  
That man, when through his ears shall thrill

our

tearful wail,

Shall deem he hears the voice, the plaintive  
tale

Of her, the piteous spouse of Tereus, lord of  
guile—

Whom the hawk harries yet, the mourning  
nightingale.

She, from her happy home and fair streams  
scared

away,

Wails wild and sad for haunts beloved  
erewhile.

Yea, and for Itylus—ah, well-a-day!

Slain by her own, his mother's hand,  
Maddened by lustful wrong, the deed by  
Tereus

planned.

Like her I wail and wail, in soft Ionian tones,

And as she wastes, even so

Wastes my soft cheek, once ripe with Nilus'  
suns

And all my heart dissolves in utter woe

Sad flowers of grief I cull,

Fleeing from kinsmen's love unmerciful—  
Yea, from the clutching hands, the wanton  
crowd,  
I sped across the waves, from Egypt's land of  
cloud[1]

[Footnote: 1: *AeRas apogas* This epithet may appear strange to modern readers accustomed to think of Egypt as a land of cloudless skies and pellucid atmosphere. Nevertheless both Pindar (*Pyth* iv 93) and Apollonius Rhodius (iv 267) speak of it in the same way as Aeschylus. It has been conjectured that they allude to the fog banks that often obscure the low coasts—a phenomenon likely to impress the early navigators and to be reported by them.]

Gods of the ancient cradle of my race,  
Hear me, just gods! With righteous grace  
On me, on me look down!  
Grant not to youth its heart's unchaste desire,  
But, swiftly spurning lust's unholy fire,  
Bless only love and willing wedlock's crown  
The war-worn fliers from the battle's wrack  
Find refuge at the hallowed altar-side,  
The sanctuary divine,—

Ye gods! such refuge unto me provide—  
Such sanctuary be mine!  
Though the deep will of Zeus be hard to  
track,  
Yet doth it flame and glance,  
A beacon in the dark, 'mid clouds of chance  
That wrap mankind  
Yea, though the counsel fall, undone it shall  
not be,  
Whate'er be shaped and fixed within Zeus'  
ruling mind—  
Dark as a solemn grove, with sombre leafage  
shaded,  
His paths of purpose wind,  
A marvel to man's eye  
Smitten by him, from towering hopes  
degraded,  
Mortals lie low and still  
Tireless and effortless, works forth its will  
The arm divine!  
God from His holy seat, in calm of unarmed  
power,  
Brings forth the deed, at its appointed hour!  
Let Him look down on mortal wantonness!

Lo! how the youthful stock of Belus' line  
Craves for me, uncontrolled—  
With greed and madness bold—  
Urged on by passion's sunless stress—  
And, cheated, learns too late the prey has  
'scaped  
their hold!

Ah, listen, listen to my grievous tale,  
My sorrow's words, my shrill and tearful cries!  
Ah woe, ah woe!

Loud with lament the accents use,  
And from my living lips my own sad dirges  
flow!

O Apian land of hill and dale,  
Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign  
wail—

Have mercy, hear my prayer!  
Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear  
My woven raiment, and from off my hair  
Cast the Sidonian veil!

Ah, but if fortune smile, if death be driven  
away,  
Vowed rites, with eager haste, we to the gods  
will pay!

Alas, alas again!

O wither drift the waves? and who shall loose  
the pain?

O Apian land of hill and dale,  
Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign  
wail!

Have mercy, hear my prayer!  
Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear  
My woven raiment, and from off my hair  
Cast the Sidonian veil!

The wafting oar, the bark with woven sail,  
From which the sea foamed back,  
Sped me, unharmed of storms, along the  
breeze's track—

Be it unblamed of me!  
But ah, the end, the end of my emprise!  
May He, the Father, with all-seeing eyes,  
Grant me that end to see!

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore  
I may escape the forced embrace  
Of those proud children of the race  
That sacred Io bore.

And thou, O maiden-goddess chaste and  
pure—

Queen of the inner fane,—  
Look of thy grace on me, O Artemis,  
Thy willing suppliant—thine, thine it is,  
Who from the lustful onslaught fled secure,  
To grant that I too without stain  
The shelter of thy purity may gain!

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore  
I may escape the forced embrace  
Of those proud children of the race  
That sacred Io bore!

Yet if this may not be,  
We, the dark race sun-smitten, we  
Will speed with suppliant wands  
To Zeus who rules below, with hospitable  
hands

Who welcomes all the dead from all the  
lands:

Yea by our own hands strangled, we will go,  
Spurned by Olympian gods, unto the gods  
below!

Zeus, hear and save!

The searching, poisonous hate, that Io vexed  
and drave,

Was of a goddess: well I know

The bitter ire, the wrathful woe

Of Hera, queen of heaven—

A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet  
are driven!

Bethink thee, what dispraise

Of Zeus himself mankind will raise,

If now he turn his face averted from our cries!

If now, dishonoured and alone,

The ox-horned maiden's race shall be undone,

Children of Epaphus, his own begotten son—

Zeus, listen from on high!—to thee our  
prayers arise.

Zeus, hear and save!

The searching poisonous hate, that Io vexed  
and drave,

Was of a goddess: well I know

The bitter ire, the wrathful woe

Of Hera, queen of heaven—

A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet  
are driven!

# DANAUS

Children, be wary—wary he with whom  
Ye come, your trusty sire and steersman old:  
And that same caution hold I here on land,  
And bid you hoard my words, inscribing them  
On memory's tablets. Lo, I see afar  
Dust, voiceless herald of a host, arise;  
And hark, within their grinding sockets ring  
Axles of hurrying wheels! I see approach,  
Borne in curved cars, by speeding horses  
drawn,

A speared and shielded band. The chiefs,  
perchance,

Of this their land are hitherward intent  
To look on us, of whom they yet have heard  
By messengers alone. But come who may,  
And come he peaceful or in ravening wrath  
Spurred on his path, 'twere best, in any case,  
Damsels, to cling unto this altar-mound  
Made sacred to their gods of festival,—  
A shrine is stronger than a tower to save,  
A shield that none may cleave. Step swift  
thereto,

And in your left hands hold with reverence

The white-crowned wands of suppliance, the  
sign

Beloved of Zeus, compassion's lord, and  
speak

To those that question you, words meek and  
low

And piteous, as beseems your stranger state,  
Clearly avowing of this flight of yours

The bloodless cause; and on your utterance  
See to it well that modesty attend;

From downcast eyes, from brows of pure  
control,

Let chastity look forth; nor, when ye speak,  
Be voluble nor eager—they that dwell

Within this land are sternly swift to chide.

And be your words submissive: heed this  
well;

For weak ye are, outcasts on stranger lands,  
And froward talk beseems not strengthless

hands.

## **CHORUS**

O father, warily to us aware

Thy words are spoken, and thy wisdom's best

My mind shall hoard, with Zeus our sire to aid.

**DANAUS**

Even so—with gracious aspect let him aid.

**CHORUS**

Fain were I now to seat me by thy side.

**DANAUS**

Now dally not, but put our thought in act.

**CHORUS**

Zeus, pity our distress, or e'er we die.

**DANAUS**

If so he will, your toils to joy will turn.

**CHORUS**

Lo, on this shrine, the semblance of a bird.[2]

**DANAUS**

Zeus' bird of dawn it is; invoke the sign.

**CHORUS**

Thus I invoke the saving rays of morn.

[Footnote: 2: The whole of this dialogue in alternate verses is disarranged in the MSS. The re-arrangement which has approved itself to Paley has been here followed. It involves, however, a hiatus, instead of the line to which this note is appended. The substance of the lost line being easily deducible from the context, it has been supplied in the translation.]

## **DANAUS**

Next, bright Apollo, exiled once from heaven.

## **CHORUS**

The exiled god will pity our exile.

## **DANAUS**

Yea, may he pity, giving grace and aid.

## **CHORUS**

Whom next invoke I, of these other gods?

## **DANAUS**

Lo, here a trident, symbol of a god.

## **CHORUS**

Who [3] gave sea-safety; may he bless on  
land!

[Footnote: 3: Poseidon] DANAUS

This next is Hermes, carved in Grecian wise.

## **CHORUS**

Then let him herald help to freedom won.

## **DANAUS**

Lastly, adore this altar consecrate  
To many lesser gods in one; then crouch  
On holy ground, a flock of doves that flee,  
Scared by no alien hawks, a kin not kind,  
Hateful, and fain of love more hateful still.  
Foul is the bird that rends another bird,  
And foul the men who hale unwilling maids,  
From sire unwilling, to the bridal bed.  
Never on earth, nor in the lower world,  
Shall lewdness such as theirs escape the ban:  
There too, if men say right, a God there is  
Who upon dead men turns their sin to doom,  
To final doom. Take heed, draw hitherward,  
That from this hap your safety ye may win.

[*Enter the KING OF*

ARGOS.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Speak—of what land are ye? No Grecian band  
Is this to whom I speak, with Eastern robes  
And wrappings richly dight: no Argive maid,  
No woman in all Greece such garb doth wear.  
This too gives marvel, how unto this land,  
Unheralded, unfriended, without guide,  
And without fear, ye came? yet wands I see,  
True sign of suppliance, by you laid down  
On shrines of these our gods of festival.  
No land but Greece can read such signs  
aright.

Much else there is, conjecture well might  
guess,

But let words teach the man who stands to  
hear.

## **CHORUS**

True is the word thou spakest of my garb;  
But speak I unto thee as citizen,  
Or Hermes' wandbearer, or chieftain king?

# THE KING OF ARGOS

For that, take heart and answer without fear.  
I am Pelasgus, ruler of this land,  
Child of Palaichthon, whom the earth brought  
forth;

And, rightly named from me, the race who  
reap

This country's harvests are Pelasgian called.  
And o'er the wide and westward-stretching  
land,

Through which the lucent wave of Strymon  
flows

I rule; Perrhaebia's land my boundary is  
Northward, and Pindus' further slopes, that  
watch

Paeonia, and Dodona's mountain ridge.  
West, east, the limit of the washing seas  
Restrains my rule—the interspace is mine.  
But this whereon we stand is Apian land,  
Styled so of old from the great healer's name;  
For Apis, coming from Naupactus' shore  
Beyond the strait, child of Apollo's self  
And like him seer and healer, cleansed this  
land

From man-devouring monsters, whom the  
earth,  
Stained with pollution of old bloodshedding,  
Brought forth in malice, beasts of ravening  
jaws,  
A grisly throng of serpents manifold.  
And healings of their hurt, by knife and  
charm,  
Apis devised, unblamed of Argive men,  
And in their prayers found honour, for  
reward.

—Lo, thou hast heard the tokens that I give:  
Speak now thy race, and tell a forthright tale;  
In sooth, this people loves not many words.

## **CHORUS**

Short is my word and clear. Of Argive race  
We come, from her, the ox-horned maiden  
who  
Erst bare the sacred child. My word shall give  
Whate'er can 'stablish this my soothfast tale.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

O stranger maids, I may not trust this word,  
That ye have share in this our Argive race.

No likeness of our country do ye bear,  
But semblance as of Libyan womankind.  
Even such a stock by Nilus' banks might  
grow;

Yea and the Cyprian stamp, in female forms,  
Shows to the life, what males impressed the  
same.

And, furthermore, of roving Indian maids  
Whose camping-grounds by Aethiopia lie,  
And camels burdened even as mules, and  
bearing

Riders, as horses bear, mine ears have heard;  
And tales of flesh-devouring mateless maids  
Called Amazons: to these, if bows ye bare,  
I most had deemed you like. Speak further  
yet,

That of your Argive birth the truth I learn.

## **CHORUS**

Here in this Argive land—so runs the tale—  
Io was priestess once of Hera's fane.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Yea, truth it is, and far this word prevails:  
Is't said that Zeus with mortal mingled love?

## **CHORUS**

Ay, and that Hera that embrace surmised.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

How issued then this strife of those on high?

## **CHORUS**

By Hera's will, a heifer she became.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Held Zeus aloof then from the horned beast?

## **CHORUS**

'Tis said, he loved, in semblance of a bull.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

And his stern consort, did she aught thereon?

## **CHORUS**

One myriad-eyed she set, the heifer's guard.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

How namest thou this herdsman many-eyed?

## **CHORUS**

Argus, the child of Earth, whom Hermes slew.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Still did the goddess vex the beast ill-starred?

## **CHORUS**

She wrought a gadfly with a goading sting.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Thus drave she Io hence, to roam afar?

## **CHORUS**

Yea—this thy word coheres exact with mine.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Then to Canopus and to Memphis came she?

## **CHORUS**

And by Zeus' hand was touched, and bare a child.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Who vaunts him the Zeus-mated creature's son?

## **CHORUS**

Epaphus, named rightly from the saving touch.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

And whom in turn did Epaphus beget?[4]

[Footnote: 4: Here one verse at least has been lost. The conjecture of Bothe seems to be verified, as far as substance is concerned, by the next line, and has consequently been adopted.]

## **CHORUS**

Libya, with name of a wide land endowed.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

And who from her was born unto the race?

## **CHORUS**

Belus: from him two sons, my father one.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Speak now to me his name, this greybeard wise.

## **CHORUS**

Revere the gods thus crowned, who steer the State.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Awe thrills me, seeing these shrines with leafage crowned.

## **CHORUS**

Yea, stern the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord.

Child of Palaichthon, royal chief  
Of thy Pelasgians, hear!

Bow down thine heart to my relief—

A fugitive, a suppliant, swift with fear,  
A creature whom the wild wolves chase  
O'er toppling crags; in piteous case

Aloud, afar she lows,

Calling the herdsman's trusty arm to save her  
from her foes!

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Lo, with bowed heads beside our city shrines  
Ye sit 'neath shade of new-plucked olive-  
boughs.

Our distant kin's resentment Heaven

forefend!

Let not this hap, unhop'd and unforeseen,  
Bring war on us: for strife we covet not.

## **CHORUS**

Justice, the daughter of right-dealing Zeus,  
Justice, the queen of suppliants, look down,  
That this our plight no ill may loose  
Upon your town!

This word, even from the young, let age and  
wisdom learn:

If thou to suppliants show grace,  
Thou shalt not lack Heaven's grace in turn,  
So long as virtue's gifts on heavenly shrines  
have place.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Not at my private hearth ye sit and sue;  
And if the city bear a common stain,  
Be it the common toil to cleanse the same:  
Therefore no pledge, no promise will I give,  
Ere counsel with the commonwealth be held.

## **CHORUS**

Nay, but the source of sway, the city's self,  
art thou,

A power unjudged! thine, only thine,  
To rule the right of hearth and shrine!  
Before thy throne and sceptre all men bow!  
Thou, in all causes lord, beware the curse  
divine!

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

May that curse fall upon mine enemies!  
I cannot aid you without risk of scathe,  
Nor scorn your prayers—unmerciful it were.  
Perplexed, distraught I stand, and fear alike  
The twofold chance, to do or not to do.

## **CHORUS**

Have heed of him who looketh from on high,  
The guard of woeful mortals, whosoe'er  
Unto their fellows cry,  
And find no pity, find no justice there.  
Abiding in his wrath, the suppliants' lord  
Doth smite, unmoved by cries, unbent by  
prayerful word.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

But if Aegyptus' children grasp you here,  
Claiming, their country's right, to hold you  
theirs

As next of kin, who dares to counter this?  
Plead ye your country's laws, if plead ye may,  
That upon you they lay no lawful hand.

## **CHORUS**

Let me not fall, O nevermore,  
A prey into the young men's hand;  
Rather than wed whom I abhor,  
By pilot-stars I flee this land;  
O king, take justice to thy side,  
And with the righteous powers decide!

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Hard is the cause—make me not judge  
thereof.

Already I have vowed it, to do nought  
Save after counsel with my people ta'en,  
King though I be; that ne'er in after time,  
If ill fate chance, my people then may say—  
*In aid of strangers thou the state hast slain.*

## **CHORUS**

Zeus, lord of kinship, rules at will

The swaying balance, and surveys  
Evil and good; to men of ill

Gives evil, and to good men praise.  
And thou—since true those scales do sway—  
Shall thou from justice shrink away?

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

A deep, a saving counsel here there needs—  
An eye that like a diver to the depth  
Of dark perplexity can pass and see,  
Undizzied, unconfused. First must we care  
That to the State and to ourselves this thing  
Shall bring no ruin; next, that wrangling  
hands

Shall grasp you not as prey, nor we ourselves  
Betray you thus embracing sacred shrines,  
Nor make the avenging all-destroying god,  
Who not in hell itself sets dead men free,  
A grievous inmate, an abiding bane.—  
Spake I not right, of saving counsel's need?

## **CHORUS**

Yea, counsel take and stand to aid  
At Justice' side and mine.

Betray not me, the timorous maid  
Whom far beyond the brine  
A godless violence cast forth forlorn.  
O King, wilt thou behold—  
Lord of this land, wilt thou behold me torn  
From altars manifold?  
Bethink thee of the young men's wrath and  
lust,  
Hold off their evil pride;  
Steel not thyself to see the suppliant thrust  
From hallowed statues' side,  
Haled by the frontlet on my forehead bound,  
As steeds are led, and drawn  
By hands that drag from shrine and altar-  
mound  
My vesture's fringed lawn.  
Know thou that whether for Aegyptus' race  
Thou dost their wish fulfil,  
Or for the gods and for each holy place—  
Be thy choice good or ill,  
Blow is with blow requited, grace with grace  
Such is Zeus' righteous will.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Yea, I have pondered: from the sea of doubt  
Here drives at length the bark of thought  
ashore;

Landward with screw and windlass haled, and  
firm,

Clamped to her props, she lies. The need is  
stern;

With men or gods a mighty strife we strive  
Perforce, and either hap in grief concludes.  
For, if a house be sacked, new wealth for old  
Not hard it is to win—if Zeus the lord  
Of treasure favour—more than quits the loss,  
Enough to pile the store of wealth full high;  
Or if a tongue shoot forth untimely speech,  
Bitter and strong to goad a man to wrath,  
Soft words there be to soothe that wrath  
away:

But what device shall make the war of kin  
Bloodless? that woe, the blood of many  
beasts,

And victims manifold to many gods,  
Alone can cure. Right glad I were to shun  
This strife, and am more fain of ignorance

Than of the wisdom of a woe endured.

The gods send better than my soul foretells!

## **CHORUS**

Of many cries for mercy, hear the end.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Say on, then, for it shall not 'scape mine ear.

## **CHORUS**

Girdles we have, and bands that bind our robes.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Even so; such things beseem a woman's wear.

## **CHORUS**

Know, then, with these a fair device there is—

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Speak, then: what utterance doth this foretell?

## **CHORUS**

Unless to us thou givest pledge secure—

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

What can thy girdles' craft achieve for thee?

## **CHORUS**

Strange votive tablets shall these statues deck.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Mysterious thy resolve—avow it clear.

## **CHORUS**

Swiftly to hang me on these sculptured gods!

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Thy word is as a lash to urge my heart.

## **CHORUS**

Thou seest truth, for I have cleared thine eye

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Yea, and woes manifold, invincible,  
A crowd of ills, sweep on me torrent-like.  
My bark goes forth upon a sea of troubles  
Unfathomed, ill to traverse, harbourless.  
For if my deed shall match not your demand,  
Dire, beyond shot of speech, shall be the  
bane

Your death's pollution leaves unto this land.  
Yet if against your kin, Aegyptus' race,  
Before our gates I front the doom of war,  
Will not the city's loss be sore? Shall men  
For women's sake incarnadine the ground?  
But yet the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord  
I needs must fear: most awful unto man  
The terror of his anger. Thou, old man,  
The father of these maidens, gather up  
Within your arms these wands of suppliance,  
And lay them at the altars manifold  
Of all our country's gods, that all the town  
Know, by this sign, that ye come here to sue.  
Nor, in thy haste, do thou say aught of me.  
Swift is this folk to censure those who rule;  
But, if they see these signs of suppliance,  
It well may chance that each will pity you,  
And loathe the young men's violent pursuit;  
And thus a fairer favour you may find:  
For, to the helpless, each man's heart is kind.

## **DANAUS**

To us, beyond gifts manifold it is  
To find a champion thus compassionate;  
Yet send with me attendants, of thy folk,

Rightly to guide me, that I duly find  
Each altar of your city's gods that stands  
Before the fane, each dedicated shrine;  
And that in safety through the city's ways  
I may pass onwards: all unlike to yours  
The outward semblance that I wear—the race  
that Nilus rears is all dissimilar

That of Inachus. Keep watch and ward  
Lest heedlessness bring death: full oft, I  
ween,

Friend hath slain friend, not knowing whom  
he slew.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Go at his side, attendants,—he saith well.  
On to the city's consecrated shrines!  
Nor be of many words to those ye meet,  
The while this suppliant voyager ye lead.

[*Exit DANAUS with  
attendants.*]

## **CHORUS**

Let him go forward, thy command obeying.  
But me how biddest, how assurest thou?

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Leave there the new-plucked boughs, thy  
sorrow's sign.

## **CHORUS**

Thus beckoned forth, at thy behest I leave  
them.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Now to this level precinct turn thyself.

## **CHORUS**

Unconsecrate it is, and cannot shield me.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

We will not yield thee to those falcons' greed.

## **CHORUS**

What help? more fierce they are than serpents  
fell

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

We spake thee fair—speak thou them fair in  
turn.

## **CHORUS**

What marvel that we loathe them, scared in soul?

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Awe towards a king should other fears transcend.

## **CHORUS**

Thus speak, thus act, and reassure my mind.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Not long thy sire shall leave thee desolate.  
But I will call the country's indwellers,  
And with soft words th' assembly will persuade,  
And warn your sire what pleadings will avail.  
Therefore abide ye, and with prayer entreat  
The country's gods to compass your desire;  
The while I go, this matter to provide,  
Persuasion and fair fortune at my side.

*[Exit the KING OF*

*ARGOS.*

## **CHORUS**

O King of Kings, among the blest  
Thou highest and thou happiest,  
Listen and grant our prayer,  
And, deeply loathing, thrust  
Away from us the young men's lust,  
And deeply drown  
In azure waters, down and ever down,  
Benches and rowers dark,  
The fatal and perfidious bark!  
Unto the maidens turn thy gracious care;  
Think yet again upon the tale of fame,  
How from the maiden loved of thee there  
sprung  
Mine ancient line, long since in many a legend  
sung!  
Remember, O remember, thou whose hand  
Did Io by a touch to human shape reclaim.  
For from this Argos erst our mother came  
Driven hence to Egypt's land,  
Yet sprung of Zeus we were, and hence our  
birth we claim.  
And now have I roamed back  
Unto the ancient track  
Where Io roamed and pastured among

flowers,

Watched o'er by Argus' eyes,

Through the lush grasses and the meadow  
bowers.

Thence, by the gadfly maddened, forth she  
flies

Unto far lands and alien peoples driven  
And, following fate, through paths of foam  
and surge,

Sees, as she goes, the cleaving strait divide  
Greece, from the Eastland riven.

And swift through Asian borders doth she  
urge

Her course, o'er Phrygian mountains' sheep-  
clipt side;

Thence, where the Mysian realm of Teuthras  
lies

Towards Lydian lowlands hies,  
And o'er Cilician and Pamphylian hills

And ever-flowing rills,  
And thence to Aphrodite's fertile shore, [5]

[Footnote: 5: Cyprus.]

The land of garnered wheat and wealthy  
store

And thence, deep-stung by wild unrest,  
By the winged fly that goaded her and drave,  
Unto the fertile land, the god-possessed,  
    (Where, fed from far-off snows,  
    Life-giving Nilus flows,  
Urged on by Typho's strength, a fertilizing  
wave)

She roves, in harassed and dishonoured flight  
Scathed by the blasting pangs of Hera's dread  
despite.

    And they within the land  
    With terror shook and wanned,  
So strange the sight they saw, and were  
afraid—

    A wild twy-natured thing, half heifer and half  
maid.

    Whose hand was laid at last on Io, thus  
forlorn,

    With many roamings worn?  
Who bade the harassed maiden's peace  
return?

    Zeus, lord of time eterne.  
Yea, by his breath divine, by his unscathing  
strength,

She lays aside her bane,  
And softened back to womanhood at length  
Sheds human tears again.

Then, quickened with Zeus' veritable seed,  
A progeny she bare,  
A stainless babe, a child of heavenly breed.  
Of life and fortune fair.

*His is the life of life—so all men say,—*

*His is the seed of Zeus.*

*Who else had power stern Hera's craft to  
stay,*

*Her vengeful curse to loose?*

Yea, all from Zeus befell!

And rightly wouldst thou tell

That we from Epaphus, his child, were born:

Justly his deed was done;

Unto what other one,

Of all the gods, should I for justice turn?

From him our race did spring;

Creator he and King,

Ancient of days and wisdom he, and might.

As bark before the wind,

So, wafted by his mind,

Moves every counsel, each device aright.

Beneath no stronger hand  
Holds he a weak command,  
No throne doth he abase him to adore;  
Swift as a word, his deed  
Acts out what stands decreed  
In counsels of his heart, for evermore.

*[Re-enter*

DANAUS.

**DANAUS**

Take heart, my children: the land's heart is  
kind,  
And to full issue has their voting come.

**CHORUS**

All hail, my sire; thy word brings utmost joy.  
Say, to what issue is the vote made sure,  
And how prevailed the people's crowding  
hands?

**DANAUS**

With one assent the Argives spake their will,  
And, hearing, my old heart took youthful  
cheer,  
The very sky was thrilled when high in air

The concourse raised right hands and swore their oath:—

*Free shall the maidens sojourn in this land.  
Unharried, undespoiled by mortal wight:  
No native hand, no hand of foreigner  
Shall drag them hence; if any man use  
force—*

*Whoe'er of all our countrymen shall fail  
To come unto their aid, let him go forth,  
Beneath the people's curse, to banishment.*  
So did the king of this Pelasgian folk  
Plead on behalf of us, and bade them heed  
That never, in the after-time, this realm  
Should feed to fulness the great enmity  
Of Zeus, the suppliants' guard, against itself!  
A twofold curse, for wronging stranger-guests  
Who are akin withal, confrontingly  
Should rise before this city and be shown  
A ruthless monster, fed on human doom.  
Such things the Argive people heard, and  
straight,  
Without proclaim of herald, gave assent:  
Yea, in full conclave, the Pelasgian folk

Heard suasive pleas, and Zeus through them resolved.

## **CHORUS**

Arouse we now to chant our prayer  
For fair return of service fair  
And Argos' kindly will.

Zeus, lord of guestright, look upon  
The grace our stranger lips have won.  
In right and truth, as they begun,  
Guide them, with favouring hand, until  
Thou dost their blameless wish fulfil!

Now may the Zeus-born gods on high  
Hear us pour forth  
A votive prayer for Argos' clan!—  
Never may this Pelasgian earth,  
Amid the fire-wrack, shrill the dismal cry  
On Ares, ravening lord of fight,  
Who in an alien harvest mows down man!  
For lo, this land had pity on our plight,  
And unto us were merciful and leal,  
To us, the piteous flock, who at Zeus' altar  
kneel!

They scornèd not the pleas of maidenhood,

Nor with the young men's will hath their will stood.

They knew right well.

Th' unearthly watching fiend invincible,  
The foul avenger—let him not draw near!  
For he, on roofs ill-starred,  
Defiling and polluting, keeps a ghastly ward!  
They knew his vengeance, and took holy  
heed

To us, the sister suppliants, who cry  
To Zeus, the lord of purity:  
Therefore with altars pure they shall the gods  
revere.

Thus, through the boughs that shade our lips,  
fly forth in air,

Fly forth, O eager prayer!  
May never pestilence efface  
This city's race,  
Nor be the land with corpses strewed,  
Nor stained with civic blood!  
The stem of youth, unpluckt, to manhood  
come,  
Nor Ares rise from Aphrodité's bower,  
The lord of death and bane, to waste our

youthful flower.

Long may the old  
Crowd to the altars kindled to consume  
Gifts rich and manifold—  
Offered to win from powers divine  
A benison on city and on shrine:  
Let all the sacred might adore  
Of Zeus most high, the lord  
Of guestright and the hospitable board,  
Whose immemorial law doth rule Fate's scales  
aright:

The garnerers of earth's store  
Be full for evermore,  
And grace of Artemis make women's travail  
light;

No devastating curse of fell disease  
This city seize;  
No clamour of the State arouse to war  
Ares, from whom afar  
Shrinketh the lute, by whom the dances  
fail—

Ares, the lord of wail.  
Swarm far aloof from Argos' citizens  
All plague and pestilence,

And may the Archer-God our children spare!  
May Zeus with foison and with fruitfulness  
The land's each season bless,  
And, quickened with Heaven's bounty  
manifold,  
Teem grazing flock and fold.  
Beside the altars of Heaven's hallowing  
Loud let the minstrels sing,  
And from pure lips float forth the harp-led  
strain in air!

And let the people's voice, the power  
That sways the State, in danger's hour  
Be wary, wise for all;

Nor honour in dishonour hold,  
But—ere the voice of war be bold—  
Let them to stranger peoples grant  
Fair and unbloody covenant—

Justice and peace withal;  
And to the Argive powers divine  
The sacrifice of laurelled kine,  
By rite ancestral, pay.

Among three words of power and awe,  
Stands this, the third, the mighty law—  
*Your gods, your fathers deified,*

*Ye shall adore.* Let this abide  
For ever and for aye.

## **DANAUS**

Dear children, well and wisely have ye  
prayed;

I bid you now not shudder, though ye hear  
New and alarming tidings from your sire.  
From this high place beside the suppliant's  
shrine

The bark of our pursuers I behold,  
By divers tokens recognized too well.  
Lo, the spread canvas and the hides that  
screen

The gunwale; lo, the prow, with painted eyes  
That seem her onward pathway to descry,  
Heeding too well the rudder at the stern  
That rules her, coming for no friendly end.  
And look, the seamen—all too plain their  
race—

Their dark limbs gleam from out their snow-  
white garb;

Plain too the other barks, a fleet that comes  
All swift to aid the purpose of the first,  
That now, with furled sail and with pulse of

oars

Which smite the wave together, comes aland.

But ye, be calm, and, schooled not scared by  
fear,

Confront this chance, be mindful of your trust

In these protecting gods. And I will hence,

And champions who shall plead your cause

aright

Will bring unto your side. There come

perchance

Heralds or envoys, eager to lay hand

And drag you captive hence; yet fear them

not;

Foiled shall they be. Yet well it were for you

(If, ere with aid I come, I tarry long),

Not by one step this sanctuary to leave.

Farewell, fear nought: soon shall the hour be

born

When he that scorns the gods shall rue his

scorn

## **CHORUS**

Ah but I shudder, father!—ah, even now,

Even as I speak, the swift-winged ships draw

nigh!

I shudder, I shiver, I perish with fear:  
Overseas though I fled,  
Yet nought it avails; my pursuers are near!

## **DANAUS**

Children, take heart; they who decreed to aid  
Thy cause will arm for battle, well I ween.

## **CHORUS**

But desperate is Aegyptus' ravening race,  
With fight unsated; thou too know'st it well.

In their wrath they o'ertake us; the prow is  
deep-dark

In the which they have sped,  
And dark is the bench and the crew of the  
bark!

## **DANAUS**

Yea but a crew as stout they here shall find,  
And arms well steeled beneath a noon-day  
sun.

## **CHORUS**

Ah yet, O father, leave us not forlorn!  
Alone, a maid is nought, a strengthless arm.

With guile they Pursue me, with counsel  
malign,  
And unholy their soul;  
And as ravens they seize me, unheeding the  
shrine!

## **DANAUS**

Fair will befall us, children, in this chance,  
If thus in wrath they wrong the gods and you.

## **CHORUS**

Alas, nor tridents nor the sanctity  
Of shrines will drive them, O my sire, from us!  
Unholy and daring and cursed is their ire,  
Nor own they control  
Of the gods, but like jackals they glut their  
desire!

## **DANAUS**

Ay, but *Come wolf, flee jackal*, saith the saw;  
Nor can the flax-plant overbear the corn.

## **CHORUS**

Lustful, accursèd, monstrous is their will  
As of beasts ravening—'ware we of their  
power!

## **DANAUS**

Look you, not swiftly puts a fleet to sea,  
Nor swiftly to its moorings; long it is  
Or e'er the saving cables to the shore  
Are borne, and long or e'er the steersmen  
cry,

*The good ship swings at anchor—all is well.*  
Longest of all, the task to come aland  
Where haven there is none, when sunset  
fades

In night. *To pilot wise, the adage saith,*  
*Night is a day of wakefulness and pain.*  
Therefore no force of weaponed men, as yet  
Scatheless can come ashore, before the bank  
Lie at her anchorage securely moored.  
Bethink thee therefore, nor in panic leave  
The shrine of gods whose succour thou hast  
won

I go for aid—men shall not blame me long,  
Old, but with youth at heart and on my

tongue

[*Exit* DANAUS.]

## CHORUS

O land of hill and dale, O holy land,  
What shall befall us? whither shall we flee,  
From Apian land to some dark lair of earth?

O would that in vapour of smoke I might rise  
to the

clouds of the sky,

That as dust which flits up without wings I  
might pass

and evanish and die!

I dare not, I dare not abide: my heart yearns,  
eager

to fly;

And dark is the cast of my thought; I shudder  
and

tremble for fear.

My father looked forth and beheld: I die of  
the sight

that draws near.

And for me be the strangling cord, the halter  
made

ready by Fate,  
Before to my body draws nigh the man of my  
horror  
and hate.

Nay, ere I will own him as lord, as handmaid  
to

Hades I go!

And oh, that aloft in the sky, where the dark  
clouds

are frozen to snow,

A refuge for me might be found, or a  
mountain-top

smooth and too high

For the foot of the goat, where the vulture  
sits lonely,

and none may descry

The pinnacle veiled in the cloud,

the highest and sheerest of all,

Ere to wedlock that rendeth my heart,

and love that is loveless, I fall!

Yea, a prey to the dogs and the birds of the  
mount

will I give me to be,—

From wailing and curse and pollution it is

death,

only death, sets me free:

Let death come upon me before

to the ravisher's bed I am thrust;

What champion, what saviour but death can I  
find,

or what refuge from lust?

I will utter my shriek of entreaty,

a prayer that shrills up to the sky,

That calleth the gods to compassion,

a tuneful, a pitiful cry,

That is loud to invoke the releaser.

O father, look down on the fight;

Look down in thy wrath on the wronger,

with eyes that are eager for right.

Zeus, thou that art lord of the world,

whose kingdom is strong over all,

Have mercy on us! At thine altar for refuge

and safety we call.

For the race of Aegyptus is fierce,

with greed and with malice afire;

They cry as the questing hounds,

they sweep with the speed of desire.

But thine is the balance of fate,

thou rulest the wavering scale,  
And without thee no mortal emprise  
shall have strength to achieve or prevail.

Alack, alack! the ravisher—  
He leaps from boat to beach, he draweth  
near!

Away, thou plunderer accurst!  
Death seize thee first,  
Or e'er thou touch me—off! God, hear our  
cry,

Our maiden agony!  
Ah, ah, the touch, the prelude of my shame.  
Alas, my maiden fame!  
O sister, sister, to the altar cling,  
For he that seizeth me,  
Grim is his wrath and stern, by land as on the  
sea.

Guard us, O king!

[*Enter the* HERALD OF  
AEGYPTUS]

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Hence to my barge—step swiftly, tarry not.

## **CHORUS**

Alack, he rends—he rends my hair! O wound  
on

wound!

Help! my lopped head will fall, my blood gush  
o'er

the ground!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Aboard, ye cursèd—with a new curse, go!

## **CHORUS**

Would God that on the wand'ring brine  
Thou and this braggart tongue of thine  
Had sunk beneath the main—

Thy mast and planks, made fast in vain!

Thee would I drive aboard once more,  
A slayer and a dastard, from the shore!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Be still, thou vain demented soul;

My force thy craving shall control.

Away, aboard! What, clingest to the shrine?

Away! this city's gods I hold not for divine.

## **CHORUS**

Aid me, ye gods, that never, never  
I may again behold  
The mighty, the life-giving river,  
Nilus, the quickener of field and fold!  
Alack, O sire, unto the shrine I cling—  
Shrine of this land from which mine ancient  
line did spring!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Shrines, shrines, forsooth!—the ship, the ship  
be shrine!

Aboard, perforce and will-ye nill-ye, go!

Or e'er from hands of mine

Ye suffer torments worse and blow on blow.

## **CHORUS**

Alack, God grant those hands may strive in  
vain

With the salt-streaming wave,

When 'gainst the wide-blown blasts thy  
bark shall strain

To round Sarpedon's cape, the sandbank's  
treach'rous grave.

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Shrill ye and shriek unto what gods ye may,  
Ye shall not leap from out Aegyptus' bark,  
How bitterly soe'er ye wail your woe.

## **CHORUS**

Alack, alack my wrong!

Stern is thy voice, thy vaunting loud and  
strong.

Thy sire, the mighty Nilus, drive thee hence  
Turning to death and doom thy greedy  
violence!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Swift to the vessel of the double prow,  
Go quickly! let none linger, else this hand  
Ruthless will hale you by your tresses hence.

## **CHORUS**

Alack, O father! from the shrine

Not aid but agony is mine.

As a spider he creeps and he clutches his  
prey,

And he hales me away.

A spectre of darkness, of darkness. Alas and  
alas! well-a-day!

O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of  
the earth, and her child!

Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour  
and threatenings wild!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Peace! I fear not this country's deities.  
They fostered not my childhood nor mine  
age.

## **CHORUS**

Like a snake that is human he comes,  
    he shudders and crawls to my side;  
As an adder that biteth the foot,  
    his clutch on my flesh doth abide.  
O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of  
the earth,  
    and her child!  
Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour  
    and threatenings wild!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Swift each unto the ship; repine no more,  
Or my hand shall not spare to rend your robe.

## **CHORUS**

O chiefs, O leaders, aid me, or I yield!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Peace! if ye have not ears to hear my words,  
Lo, by these tresses must I hale you hence.

## **CHORUS**

Undone we are, O king! all hope is gone.

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Ay, kings enow ye shall behold anon,  
Aegyptus' sons—Ye shall not want for kings.

*[Enter the KING OF*

ARGOS.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Sirrah, what dost thou? in what arrogance  
Darest thou thus insult Pelasgia's realm?  
Deemest thou this a woman-hearted town?  
Thou art too full of thy barbarian scorn  
For us of Grecian blood, and, erring thus,  
Thou dost bewray thyself a fool in all!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Say thou wherein my deeds transgress my right.

**THE KING OF ARGOS**

First, that thou play'st a stranger's part amiss.

**HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Wherein? I do but search and claim mine own.

**THE KING OF ARGOS**

To whom of our guest-champions hast appealed?

**HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

To Hermes, herald's champion, lord of search.

**THE KING OF ARGOS**

Yea, to a god—yet dost thou wrong the gods!

**HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

The gods that rule by Nilus I revere.

**THE KING OF ARGOS**

Hear I aright? our Argive gods are nought?

**HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

The prey is mine, unless force rend it from me.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

At thine own peril touch them—'ware, and soon!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

I hear thy speech, no hospitable word.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

I am no host for sacrilegious hands.

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

I will go tell this to Aegyptus' sons.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Tell it! my pride will ponder not thy word.

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Yet, that I have my message clear to say  
(For it behooves that heralds' words be clear,  
Be they or ill or good), how art thou named?  
By whom despoiled of this sister-band  
Of maidens pass I homeward?—speak and  
say!

For lo, henceforth in Ares' court we stand,  
Who judges not by witness but by war:  
No pledge of silver now can bring the cause  
To issue: ere this thing end, there must be  
Corpse piled on corpse and many lives  
gasp'd forth.

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

What skills it that I tell my name to thee?  
Thou and thy mates shall learn it ere the end.  
Know that if words unstained by violence  
Can change these maidens' choice, then  
mayest thou,

With full consent of theirs, conduct them  
hence.

But thus the city with one voice ordained—

*No force shall bear away the maiden band.*

Firmly this word upon the temple wall  
Is by a rivet clenched, and shall abide:  
Not upon wax inscribed and delible,  
Nor upon parchment sealed and stored  
away.—

Lo, thou hast heard our free mouths speak

their will:

Out from our presence—tarry not, but go!

## **HERALD OF AEGYPTUS**

Methinks we stand on some new edge of war:  
Be strength and triumph on the young men's  
side!

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

Nay but here also shall ye find young men,  
Unsodden with the juices oozed from  
grain.[6]

[*Exit* HERALD OF

## **AEGYPTUS**

But ye, O maids, with your attendants true,  
Pass hence with trust into the fenced town,  
Ringed with a wide confine of guarding  
towers.

Therein are many dwellings for such guests  
As the State honours; there myself am  
housed

Within a palace neither scant nor strait.

There dwell ye, if ye will to lodge at ease

In halls well-thronged: yet, if your soul prefer,  
Tarry secluded in a separate home.

Choose ye and cull, from these our proffered gifts,

Whiche'er is best and sweetest to your will:  
And I and all these citizens whose vote  
Stands thus decreed, will your protectors be.  
Look not to find elsewhere more loyal guard.

[Footnote: 6: For this curious taunt, strongly illustrative of what Browning calls "nationality in drinks," see Herodotus, ii. 77. A similar feeling may perhaps be traced in Tacitus' description of the national beverage of the Germans: "Potui humor ex hordeo aut frumento, *in quandam similitudinem vini corruptus*" (*Germania*, chap, xxiii).]

## **CHORUS**

O godlike chief, God grant my prayer:  
*Fair blessings on thy proffers fair,*  
*Lord of Pelasgia's race!*

Yet, of thy grace, unto our side  
Send thou the man of courage tried,  
Of counsel deep and prudent thought,—  
Be Danaus to his children brought;  
For his it is to guide us well

And warn where it behoves to dwell—  
What place shall guard and shelter us  
From malice and tongues slanderous:  
Swift always are the lips of blame  
A stranger-maiden to defame—  
But Fortune give us grace!

## **THE KING OF ARGOS**

A stainless fame, a welcome kind  
From all this people shall ye find:  
Dwell therefore, damsels, loved of us,  
Within our walls, as Danaus  
Allots to each, in order due,  
Her dower of attendants true.

*[Re-enter*

**DANAUS. DANAUS**

High thanks, my children, unto Argos con,  
And to this folk, as to Olympian gods,  
Give offerings meet of sacrifice and wine;  
For saviours are they in good sooth to you.  
From me they heard, and bitter was their  
wrath,  
How those your kinsmen strove to work you  
wrong,

And how of us were thwarted: then to me  
This company of spearmen did they grant,  
That honoured I might walk, nor unaware  
Die by some secret thrust and on this land  
Bring down the curse of death, that dieth not.  
Such boons they gave me: it behoves me pay  
A deeper reverence from a soul sincere.  
Ye, to the many words of wariness  
Spoken by me your father, add this word,  
That, tried by time, our unknown company  
Be held for honest: over-swift are tongues  
To slander strangers, over-light is speech  
To bring pollution on a stranger's name.  
Therefore I rede you, bring no shame on me  
Now when man's eye beholds your maiden  
prime.

Lovely is beauty's ripening harvest-field,  
But ill to guard; and men and beasts, I wot,  
And birds and creeping things make prey of  
it.

And when the fruit is ripe for love, the voice  
Of Aphrodite bruiteth it abroad,  
The while she guards the yet unripened  
growth.

On the fair richness of a maiden's bloom  
Each passer looks, o'ercome with strong  
desire,  
With eyes that waft the wistful dart of love.  
Then be not such our hap, whose livelong toil  
Did make our pinnace plough the mighty  
main:

Nor bring we shame upon ourselves, and joy  
Unto my foes. Behold, a twofold home—  
One of the king's and one the people's gift—  
Unbought, 'tis yours to hold,—a gracious  
boon.

Go—but remember ye your sire's behest,  
And hold your life less dear than chastity.

## **CHORUS**

The gods above grant that all else be well.  
But fear not thou, O sire, lest aught befall  
Of ill unto our ripened maidenhood.  
So long as Heaven have no new ill devised,  
From its chaste path my spirit shall not  
swerve.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Pass and adore ye the Blessed, the gods of  
the city  
    who dwell  
Around Erasinus, the gush of the swift  
immemorial  
    tide.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Chant ye, O maidens; aloud let the praise of  
    Pelasgia swell;  
Hymn we no longer the shores where Nilus to  
ocean  
    doth glide.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Sing we the bounteous streams that ripple  
and gush  
    through the city;  
Quickening flow they and fertile, the soft new  
life of  
    the plain.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Artemis, maiden most pure, look on us with  
grace

and with pity—

Save us from forced embraces: such love  
hath no  
crown but a pain.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Yet not in scorn we chant, but in honour of  
Aphrodite;  
She truly and Hera alone have power with  
Zeus and  
control.

Holy the deeds of her rite, her craft is secret  
and  
mighty,  
And high is her honour on earth, and subtle  
her  
sway of the soul.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Yea, and her child is Desire: in the train of his  
mother he goeth—  
Yea and Persuasion soft-lipped, whom none  
can deny  
or repel:  
Cometh Harmonia too, on whom Aphrodite

bestoweth

The whispering parley, the paths of the  
rapture that  
lovers love well.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Ah, but I tremble and quake lest again they  
should  
sail to reclaim!

Alas for the sorrow to come, the blood and  
the  
carnage of war.

Ah, by whose will was it done that o'er the  
wide  
ocean they came,

Guided by favouring winds, and wafted by sail  
and  
by oar?

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Peace! for what Fate hath ordained will surely  
not  
tarry but come;

Wide is the counsel of Zeus, by no man  
escaped or

withstood:

Only I Pray that whate'er, in the end, of this  
wedlock

he doom,

We as many a maiden of old, may win from  
the ill

to the good.[7]

[Footnote: 7: The ambiguity of these two lines is reproduced from the original. The Semi-Chorus appear to pray, in one aspiration, that the threatened wedlock may never take place, and, *if* it does take place, may be for weal, not woe.]

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Great Zeus, this wedlock turn from me—  
Me from the kinsman bridegroom guard!

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Come what come may, 'tis Fate's decree.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Soft is thy word—the doom is hard.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Thou know'st not what the Fates provide.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

How should I scan Zeus' mighty will,  
The depth of counsel undescried?

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Pray thou no word of omen ill.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

What timely warning wouldst thou teach?

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Beware, nor slight the gods in speech.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Zeus, hold from my body the wedlock  
detested, the  
    bridegroom abhorred!

It was thou, it was thou didst release  
Mine ancestress Io from sorrow: thine healing  
it

    was that restored,  
The touch of thine hand gave her peace.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Be thy will for the cause of the maidens! of  
two ills,  
the lesser I pray—  
The exile that leaveth me pure.  
May thy justice have heed to my cause, my  
prayers  
to thy mercy find way!  
For the hands of thy saving are sure.  
*[Exeunt*  
*omnes.*

## **THE PERSIANS**

### **ARGUMENT**

Xerxes, son of Darius and of his wife Atossa, daughter of Cyrus, went forth against Hellas, to take vengeance upon those who had defeated his father at Marathon. But ill fortune befell the king and his army both by land and sea; neither did it avail him that he cast a bridge over the Hellespont and made a canal across the promontory of Mount Athos, and brought myriads of men, by land and sea, to subdue the Greeks. For in the strait between Athens

and the island of Salamis the Persian ships were shattered and sunk or put to flight by those of Athens and Lacedaemon and Aegina and Corinth, and Xerxes went homewards on the way by which he had come, leaving his general Mardonius with three hundred thousand men to strive with the Greeks by land: but in the next year they were destroyed near Plataea in Boeotia, by the Lacedaemonians and Athenians and Tegeans. Such was the end of the army which Xerxes left behind him. But the king himself had reached the bridge over the Hellespont, and late and hardly and in sorry plight and with few companions came home unto the Palace of Susa.

## **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

**CHORUS OF PERSIAN ELDERS. ATOSSA, WIDOW OF DARIUS AND MOTHER OF XERXES. A MESSENGER. THE GHOST OF DARIUS. XERXES.**

*The Scene is laid at the Palace of Susa.*

# CHORUS

Away unto the Grecian land  
Hath passed the Persian armament:  
We, by the monarch's high command,  
We are the warders true who stand,  
Chosen, for honour and descent,  
To watch the wealth of him who went—  
Guards of the gold, and faithful styled  
By Xerxes, great Darius' child!

But the king went nor comes again—  
And for that host, we saw depart  
Arrayed in gold, my boding heart  
Aches with a pulse of anxious pain,  
Presageful for its youthful king!  
No scout, no steed, no battle-car  
Comes speeding hitherward, to bring  
News to our city from afar!  
Erewhile they went, away, away,  
From Susa, from Ecbatana,  
From Kissa's timeworn fortress grey,  
Passing to ravage and to war—  
Some upon steeds, on galleys some,  
Some in close files, they passed from home,  
All upon warlike errand bent—

Amistres, Artaphernes went,  
Astaspes, Megabazes high,  
Lords of the Persian chivalry,  
Marshals who serve the great king's word  
Chieftains of all the mighty horde!  
Horsemen and bowmen streamed away,  
Grim in their aspect, fixed to slay,  
And resolute to face the fray!  
With troops of horse, careering fast,  
Masistes, Artembáres passed:  
Imaeus too, the Bowman brave,  
Sosthánés, Pharandákes, drave—  
And others the all-nursing wave  
Of Nilus to the battle gave;  
Came Susiskánes, warrior wild,  
And Pegastágon, Egypt's child:  
Thee, brave Arsámes! from afar  
Did holy Memphis launch to war;  
And Ariomardus, high in fame,  
From Thebes the immemorial came,  
And oarsmen skilled from Nilus' fen,  
A countless crowd of warlike men:  
And next, the dainty Lydians went—  
Soft rulers of a continent—

Mitragathes and Arcteus bold  
In twin command their ranks controlled,  
And Sardis town, that teems with gold,  
Sent forth its squadrons to the war—  
Horse upon horse, and car on car,  
Double and triple teams, they rolled,  
In onset awful to behold.

From Tmolus' sacred hill there came  
The native hordes to join the fray,  
And upon Hellas' neck to lay  
The yoke of slavery and shame;  
Mardon and Tharubis were there,  
Bright anvils for the foemen's spear!  
The Mysian dart-men sped to war,  
And the long crowd that onward rolled  
From Babylon enriched with gold—  
Captains of ships and archers skilled  
To speed the shaft, and those who wield  
The scimitar;—the eastern band  
Who, by the great king's high command,  
Swept to subdue the western land!

Gone are they, gone—ah, welladay!  
The flower and pride of our array;  
And all the Eastland, from whose breast

Came forth her bravest and her best,  
Craves longingly with boding dread—  
Parents for sons, and brides new-wed  
For absent lords, and, day by day,  
Shudder with dread at their delay!

Ere now they have passed o'er the sea,  
the manifold host of the king—  
They have gone forth to sack and to burn;  
ashore on the Westland they spring!  
With cordage and rope they have bridged  
the sea-way of Helle, to pass  
O'er the strait that is named by thy name,  
O daughter of Athamas!

They have anchored their ships in the  
current,  
they have bridled the neck of the sea—  
The Shepherd and Lord of the East  
hath bidden a roadway to be!  
From the land to the land they pass over,  
a herd at the high king's best;  
Some by the way of the waves,  
and some o'er the planking have pressed.  
For the king is a lord and a god:  
he was born of the golden seed

That erst upon Danae fell—  
his captains are strong at the need!  
And dark is the glare of his eyes,  
as eyes of a serpent blood-fed,  
And with manifold troops in his train  
and with manifold ships hath he sped—  
Yea, sped with his Syrian cars:  
he leads on the lords of the bow  
To meet with the men of the West,  
the spear-armed force of the foe!  
Can any make head and resist him,  
when he comes with the roll of a wave?  
No barrier nor phalanx of might,  
no chief, be he ever so brave!  
For stern is the onset of Persia,  
and gallant her children in fight.  
But the guile of the god is deceitful,  
and who shall elude him by flight?  
And who is the lord of the leap,  
that can spring and alight and evade?  
For Até deludes and allures,  
till round him the meshes are laid,  
And no man his doom can escape!  
it was writ in the rule of high Heaven,

That in tramp of the steeds and in crash of  
the charge

the war-cry of Persia be given:

They have learned to behold the forbidden,  
the sacred enclosure of sea,

Where the waters are wide and in stress  
of the wind the billows roll hoary to lee!

And their trust is in cable and cordage,  
too weak in the power of the blast,

And frail are the links of the bridge  
whereby unto Hellas they passed.

Therefore my gloom-wrapped heart  
is rent with sorrow

For what may hap to-morrow!

Alack, for all the Persian armament—

Alack, lest there be sent

Dread news of desolation, Susa's land

Bereft, forlorn, unmanned—

Lest the grey Kissian fortress echo back

The wail, *Alack, Alack!*

The sound of women's shriek, who wail and  
mourn,

With fine-spun raiment torn!

The charioteers went forth nor come again,

And all the marching men  
Even as a swarm of bees have flown afar,  
Drawn by the king to war—  
Crossing the sea-bridge, linked from side to  
side,

That doth the waves divide:  
And the soft bridal couch of bygone years  
Is now bedewed with tears,  
Each princess, clad in garments delicate,  
Wails for her widowed fate—

*Alas my gallant bridegroom, lost and gone,  
And I am left alone!*

But now, ye warders of the state,  
Here, in this hall of old renown,  
Behoves that we deliberate  
In counsel deep and wise debate,  
For need is surely shown!  
How fareth he, Darius' child,  
The Persian king, from Perseus styled?  
Comes triumph to the eastern bow,  
Or hath the lance-point conquered now?

*[Enter*

ATOSSA.

See, yonder comes the mother-queen,  
Light of our eyes, in godlike sheen,  
The royal mother of the king!—  
Fall we before her! well it were  
That, all as one, we sue to her,  
And round her footsteps cling!

Queen, among deep-girded Persian dames  
thou highest and most royal,  
Hoary mother, thou, of Xerxes, and Darius'  
wife of old!

To godlike sire, and godlike son, we bow us  
and are loyal—  
Unless, on us, an adverse tide of destiny has  
rolled!

## **ATOSSA**

Therefore come I forth to you, from  
chambers decked and golden,  
Where long ago Darius laid his head, with  
me beside,  
And my heart is torn with anguish, and with  
terror am I holden,  
And I plead unto your friendship and I bid  
you to my side.

Darius, in the old time, by aid of some  
Immortal,  
Raised up the stately fabric, our wealth of  
long-ago:

But I tremble lest it totter down, and ruin  
porch and portal,  
And the whirling dust of downfall rise above  
its overthrow!

Therefore a dread unspeakable within me  
never slumbers, Saying,  
*Honour not the gauds of wealth if men have  
ceased to grow,  
Nor deem that men, apart from wealth,  
can find their strength in numbers—*

We shudder for our light and king, though  
we have gold enow!

*No light there is, in any house, save presence  
of the master—*

So runs the saw, ye aged men! and truth it  
says indeed—

On you I call, the wise and true, to ward us  
from disaster,

For all my hope is fixed on you, to prop us  
in our need!

# CHORUS

Queen-Mother of the Persian land, to thy  
commandment bowing,

Whate'er thou wilt, in word or deed, we  
follow to fulfil—

Not twice we need thine high behest, our  
faith and duty knowing,

In council and in act alike, thy loyal servants  
still!

# ATOSSA

Long while by various visions of the night  
Am I beset, since to Ionian lands  
With marshalled host my son went forth to  
war.

Yet never saw I presage so distinct  
As in the night now passed.—Attend my  
tale!—

A dream I had: two women nobly clad  
Came to my sight, one robed in Persian dress,  
The other vested in the Dorian garb,  
And both right stately and more tall by far  
Than women of to-day, and beautiful  
Beyond disparagement, and sisters sprung

Both of one race, but, by their natal lot,  
One born in Hellas, one in Eastern land.  
These, as it seemed unto my watching eyes,  
Roused each the other to a mutual feud:  
The which my son perceiving set himself  
To check and soothe their struggle, and anon  
Yoked them and set the collars on their  
necks;

And one, the Ionian, proud in this array,  
Paced in high quietude, and lent her mouth,  
Obedient, to the guidance of the rein.

But restively the other strove, and broke  
The fittings of the car, and plunged away  
With mouth un-bitted: o'er the broken yoke  
My son was hurled, and lo! Darius stood  
In lamentation o'er his fallen child.

Him Xerxes saw, and rent his robe in grief.

Such was my vision of the night now past;  
But when, arising, I had dipped my hand  
In the fair lustral stream, I drew towards  
The altar, in the act of sacrifice,  
Having in mind to offer, as their due,  
The sacred meal-cake to the averting powers,  
Lords of the rite that banisheth ill dreams.

When lo! I saw an eagle fleeing fast  
To Phoebus' shrine—O friends, I stayed my  
steps,  
Too scared to speak! for, close upon his  
flight,  
A little falcon dashed in winged pursuit,  
Plucking with claws the eagle's head, while he  
Could only crouch and cower and yield  
himself.

Scared was I by that sight, and eke to you  
No less a terror must it be to hear!

For mark this well—if Xerxes have prevailed,  
He shall come back the wonder of the world:  
If not, still none can call him to account—  
So he but live, he liveth Persia's King!

## **CHORUS**

Queen, it stands not with my purpose to abet  
these fears of thine,

Nor to speak with glazing comfort! nay,  
betake thee to the shrine!

If thy dream foretold disaster, sue to gods to  
bar its way,

And, for thyself, son, state, and friends, to  
bring fair fate

to-day.

Next, unto Earth and to the Dead be due  
libation poured,

And by thee let Darius' soul be wistfully  
implored—

*I saw thee, lord, in last night's dream, a  
phantom from the grave,*

*I pray thee, lord, from earth beneath come  
forth to help and save!*

*To me and to thy son send up the bliss of  
triumph now,*

*And hold the gloomy fates of ill, dim in the  
dark below!*

Such be thy words! my inner heart good  
tidings doth foretell,

And that fair fate will spring thereof, if  
wisdom guide us well.

## **ATOSSA**

Loyal thou that first hast read this dream, this  
vision of the  
night,

With loyalty to me, the queen—be then thy  
presage right!

And therefore, as thy bidding is, what time I

pass within

To dedicate these offerings, new prayers I  
will begin,

Alike to gods and the great dead who loved  
our lineage well.

Yet one more word—say, in what realm do  
the Athenians dwell?

## **CHORUS**

Far hence, even where, in evening land, goes  
down our Lord the Sun.

## **ATOSSA**

Say, had my son so keen desire, that region to  
o'errun?

## **CHORUS**

Yea—if she fell, the rest of Greece were subject  
to our sway!

## **ATOSSA**

Hath she so great predominance, such legions  
in array?

## **CHORUS**

Ay—such a host as smote us sore upon an earlier day.

## **ATOSSA**

And what hath she, besides her men? enow of wealth in store?

## **CHORUS**

A mine of treasure in the earth, a fount of silver ore!

## **ATOSSA**

Is it in skill of bow and shaft that Athens' men excel?

## **CHORUS**

Nay, they bear bucklers in the fight, and thrust the spear-point well.

## **ATOSSA**

And who is shepherd of their host and holds them in command?

## **CHORUS**

To no man do they bow as slaves, nor own a master's hand.

## **ATOSSA**

How should they bide our brunt of war, the East upon the West?

## **CHORUS**

That could Darius' valiant horde in days of yore attest!

## **ATOSSA**

A boding word, to us who bore the men now far away!

## **CHORUS**

Nay—as I deem, the very truth will dawn on us to-day.

A Persian by his garb and speed, a courier draws anear—

He bringeth news, of good or ill, for Persia's land to hear.

*[Enter A*

MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

O walls and towers of all the Asian realm,  
O Persian land, O treasure-house of gold!  
How, by one stroke, down to destruction,  
down,  
Hath sunk our pride, and all the flower of war  
That once was Persia's, lieth in the dust!  
Woe on the man who first announceth woe—  
Yet must I all the tale of death unroll!  
Hark to me, Persians! Persia's host lies low.

## **CHORUS**

O ruin manifold, and woe, and fear!  
Let the wild tears run down, for the great  
doom is here!

## **MESSENGER**

This blow hath fallen, to the utterance, And  
I, past hope, behold my safe return!

## **CHORUS**

Too long, alack, too long this life of mine,  
That in mine age I see this sudden woe  
condign!

## **MESSENGER**

As one who saw, by no loose rumour led,  
Lords, I would tell what doom was dealt to  
us.

## **CHORUS**

Alack, how vainly have they striven!  
Our myriad hordes with shaft and bow  
Went from the Eastland, to lay low  
Hellas, beloved of Heaven!

## **MESSENGER**

Piled with men dead, yea, miserably slain,  
Is every beach, each reef of Salamis!

## **CHORUS**

Thou sayest sooth—ah well-a-day!  
Battered amid the waves, and torn,  
On surges hither, thither, borne,  
Dead bodies, bloodstained and forlorn,  
In their long cloaks they toss and stray!

## **MESSENGER**

Their bows availed not! all have perished, all,  
By charging galleys crushed and whelmed in  
death.

## **CHORUS**

Shriek out your sorrow's wistful wail!  
To their untimely doom they went;  
Ill strove they, and to no avail,  
And minished is their armament!

## **MESSENGER**

Out on thee, hateful name of Salamis,  
Out upon Athens, mournful memory!

## **CHORUS**

Woe upon this day's evil fame!  
Thou, Athens, art our murderess;  
Alack, full many a Persian dame  
Is left forlorn and husbandless!

## **ATOSSA**

Mute have I been awhile, and overwrought  
At this great sorrow, for it passeth speech,  
And passeth all desire to ask of it.  
Yet if the gods send evils, men must bear.  
*(To the*

## **MESSENGER)**

Unroll the record! stand composed and tell,  
Although thy heart be groaning inwardly,

Who hath escaped, and, of our leaders,  
whom

Have we to weep? what chieftains in the van  
Stood, sank, and died and left us leaderless?

## **MESSENGER**

Xerxes himself survives and sees the day.

## **ATOSSA**

Then to my line thy word renews the dawn  
And golden dayspring after gloom of night!

## **MESSENGER**

But the brave marshal of ten thousand horse,  
Artembares, is tossed and flung in death  
Along the rugged rocks Silenian.

And Dadaces no longer leads his troop,  
But, smitten by the spear, from off the prow  
Hath lightly leaped to death; and Tenagon,  
In true descent a Bactrian nobly born,  
Drifts by the sea-lashed reefs of Salamis,  
The isle of Ajax. Gone Lilaeus too,  
Gone are Arsames and Argestes! all,  
Around the islet where the sea-doves breed,  
Dashed their defeated heads on iron rocks;

Arcteus, who dwelt beside the founts of Nile,  
Adeues, Pheresseues, and with them  
Pharnuchus, from one galley's deck went  
down.

Matallus, too, of Chrysa, lord and king  
Of myriad hordes, who led unto the fight  
Three times ten thousand swarthy cavaliers,  
Fell, with his swarthy and abundant beard  
Incarnadined to red, a crimson stain  
Outrivalling the purple of the sea!

There Magian Arabus and Artames  
Of Bactra perished—taking up, alike,  
In yonder stony land their long sojourn.  
Amistris too, and he whose strenuous spear  
Was foremost in the fight, Amphistreus fell,  
And gallant Ariomardus, by whose death  
Broods sorrow upon Sardis: Mysia mourns  
For Seisames, and Tharubis lies low—  
Commander, he, of five times fifty ships,  
Born in Lyrnessus: his heroic form  
Is low in death, ungraced with sepulchre.  
Dead too is he, the lord of courage high,  
Cilicia's marshal, brave Syennesis,  
Than whom none dealt more carnage on the

foe,

Nor perished by a more heroic end.

So fell the brave: so speak I of their doom,  
Summing in brief the fate of myriads!

## **ATOSSA**

Ah well-a-day! these crowning woes I hear,  
The shame of Persia and her shrieks of dole!  
But yet renew the tale, repeat thy words,  
Tell o'er the count of those Hellenic ships,  
And how they ventured with their beakèd  
prows

To charge upon the Persian armament.

## **MESSENGER**

Know, if mere count of ships could win the  
day,

The Persians had prevailed. The Greeks, in  
sooth,

Had but three hundred galleys at the most,  
And other ten, select and separate.

But—I am witness—Xerxes held command  
Of full a thousand keels, and, those apart,  
Two hundred more, and seven, for speed  
renowned!—

So stands the reckoning, and who shall dare  
To say we Persians had the lesser host?

## **ATOSSA**

Nay, we were worsted by an unseen power  
Who swayed the balance downward to our  
doom!

## **MESSENGER**

In ward of heaven doth Pallas' city stand.

## **ATOSSA**

How then? is Athens yet inviolate?

## **MESSENGER**

While her men live, her bulwark standeth firm!

## **ATOSSA**

Say, how began the struggle of the ships?  
Who first joined issue? did the Greeks attack,  
Or Xerxes, in his numbers confident?

## **MESSENGER**

O queen, our whole disaster thus befell,  
Through intervention of some fiend or fate—

I know not what—that had ill will to us.  
From the Athenian host some Greek came  
o'er,

To thy son Xerxes whispering this tale—  
*Once let the gloom of night have gathered in,  
The Greeks will tarry not, but swiftly spring  
Each to his galley-bench, in furtive flight,  
Softly contriving safety for their life.*

Thy son believed the word and missed the  
craft

Of that Greek foeman, and the spite of  
Heaven,

And straight to all his captains gave this  
charge—

*As soon as sunlight warms the ground no  
more,*

*And gloom enwraps the sanctuary of sky,  
Range we our fleet in triple serried lines  
To bar the passage from the seething strait,  
This way and that: let other ships surround  
The isle of Ajax, with this warning word—  
That if the Greeks their jeopardy should scape  
By wary craft, and win their ships a road.  
Each Persian captain shall his failure pay*

*By forfeit of his head.* So spake the king,  
Inspired at heart with over-confidence,  
Unwitting of the gods' predestined will.  
Thereon our crews, with no disordered haste,  
Did service to his bidding and purveyed  
The meal of afternoon: each rower then  
Over the fitted rowlock looped his oar.  
Then, when the splendour of the sun had set,  
And night drew on, each master of the oar  
And each armed warrior straightway went  
aboard.

Forward the long ships moved, rank cheering  
rank,

Each forward set upon its ordered course.  
And all night long the captains of the fleet  
Kept their crews moving up and down the  
strait.

So the night waned, and not one Grecian ship  
Made effort to elude and slip away.

But as dawn came and with her coursers  
white

Shone in fair radiance over all the earth,  
First from the Grecian fleet rang out a cry,  
A song of onset! and the island crags

Re-echoed to the shrill exulting sound.  
Then on us Eastern men amazement fell  
And fear in place of hope; for what we heard  
Was not a call to flight! the Greeks rang out  
Their holy, resolute, exulting chant,  
Like men come forth to dare and do and die  
Their trumpets pealed, and fire was in that  
sound,

And with the dash of simultaneous oars  
Replying to the war-chant, on they came,  
Smiting the swirling brine, and in a trice  
They flashed upon the vision of the foe!  
The right wing first in orderly advance  
Came on, a steady column; following then,  
The rest of their array moved out and on,  
And to our ears there came a burst of sound,  
A clamour manifold.—*On, sons of Greece!  
On, for your country's freedom! strike to save  
Wives, children, temples of ancestral gods,  
Graves of your fathers! now is all at stake.*  
Then from our side swelled up the mingled  
din  
Of Persian tongues, and time brooked no  
delay—

Ship into ship drove hard its brazen beak  
With speed of thought, a shattering blow! and  
first

One Grecian bark plunged straight, and  
sheared away

Bowsprit and stem of a Phoenician ship.  
And then each galley on some other's prow  
Came crashing in. Awhile our stream of ships  
Held onward, till within the narrowing creek  
Our jostling vessels were together driven,  
And none could aid another: each on each  
Drove hard their brazen beaks, or brake away  
The oar-banks of each other, stem to stern,  
While the Greek galleys, with no lack of skill,  
Hemmed them and battered in their sides,  
and soon

The hulls rolled over, and the sea was hid,  
Crowded with wrecks and butchery of men.  
No beach nor reef but was with corpses  
strewn,

And every keel of our barbarian host  
Hurried to flee, in utter disarray.  
Thereon the foe closed in upon the wrecks  
And hacked and hewed, with oars and

splintered planks,  
As fishermen hack tunnies or a cast  
Of netted dolphins, and the briny sea  
Rang with the screams and shrieks of dying  
men,  
Until the night's dark aspect hid the scene.  
Had I a ten days' time to sum that count  
Of carnage, 'twere too little! know this well—  
One day ne'er saw such myriad forms of  
death!

## **ATOSSA**

Woe on us, woe! disaster's mighty sea  
Hath burst on us and all the Persian realm!

## **MESSENGER**

Be well assured, the tale is but begun—  
The further agony that on us fell  
Doth twice outweigh the sufferings I have  
told!

## **ATOSSA**

Nay, what disaster could be worse than this?  
Say on! what woe upon the army came,  
Swaying the scale to a yet further fall?

## **MESSENGER**

The very flower and crown of Persia's race,  
Gallant of soul and glorious in descent,  
And highest held in trust before the king,  
Lies shamefully and miserably slain.

## **ATOSSA**

Alas for me and for this ruin, friends!  
Dead, sayest thou? by what fate overthrown?

## **MESSENGER**

An islet is there, fronting Salamis—  
Strait, and with evil anchorage: thereon  
Pan treads the measure of the dance he loves  
Along the sea-beach. Thither the king sent  
His noblest, that, whene'er the Grecian foe  
Should 'scape, with shattered ships, unto the  
isle,

We might make easy prey of fugitives  
And slay them there, and from the washing  
tides

Rescue our friends. It fell out otherwise  
Than he divined, for when, by aid of Heaven,  
The Hellenes held the victory on the sea,

Their sailors then and there begirt themselves  
With brazen mail and bounded from their  
ships,

And then enringed the islet, point by point,  
So that our Persians in bewilderment  
Knew not which way to turn. On every side,  
Battered with stones, they fell, while arrows  
flew

From many a string, and smote them to the  
death.

Then, at the last, with simultaneous rush  
The foe came bursting on us, hacked and  
hewed

To fragments all that miserable band,  
Till not a soul of them was left alive.

Then Xerxes saw disaster's depth, and  
shrieked,

From where he sat on high, surveying all—  
A lofty eminence, beside the brine,

Whence all his armament lay clear in view.

His robe he rent, with loud and bitter wail,

And to his land-force swiftly gave command

And fled, with shame beside him! Now,

lament

That second woe, upon the first imposed!

## **ATOSSA**

Out on thee, Fortune! thou hast foiled the  
hope

And power of Persia: to this bitter end

My son went forth to wreak his great revenge

On famous Athens! all too few they seemed,

Our men who died upon the Fennel-field!

Vengeance for them my son had mind to

take,

And drew on his own head these whelming

woes.

But thou, say on! the ships that 'scaped from  
wreck—

Where didst thou leave them? make thy story  
clear.

## **MESSENGER**

The captains of the ships that still survived

Fled in disorder, scudding down the wind,

The while our land-force on Boeotian soil

Fell into ruin, some beside the springs

Dropping before they drank, and some

outworn,

Pursued, and panting all their life away.

The rest of us our way to Phocis won,

And thence to Doris and the Melian gulf,

Where with soft stream Spercheus laves the

soil.

Thence to the northward did Phthiotis' plain,

And some Thessalian fortress, lend us aid,

For famine-pinched we were, and many died

Of drought and hunger's twofold present

scourge.

Thence to Magnesia came we, and the land

Where Macedonians dwell, and crossed the

ford

Of Axios, and Bolbe's reedy fen,

And mount Pangaeus, in Edonian land.

There, in the very night we came, the god

Brought winter ere its time, from bank to

bank

Freezing the holy Strymon's tide. Each man

Who heretofore held lightly of the gods,

Now crouched and proffered prayer to Earth

and Heaven!

Then, after many orisons performed,

The army ventured on the frozen ford:  
Yet only those who crossed before the sun  
Shed its warm rays, won to the farther side.  
For soon the fervour of the glowing orb  
Did with its keen rays pierce the ice-bound  
stream,  
And men sank through and thrust each other  
down—  
Best was his lot whose breath was stifled  
first!  
But all who struggled through and gained the  
bank,  
Toilfully wending through the land of Thrace  
Have made their way, a sorry, scanted few,  
Unto this homeland. Let the city now  
Lament and yearn for all the loved and lost.  
My tale is truth, yet much untold remains  
Of ills that Heaven hath hurled upon our land.

## **CHORUS**

Spirit of Fate, too heavy were thy feet,  
Those ill to match! that sprang on Persia's  
realm.

## **ATOSSA**

Woe for the host, to wrack and ruin hurled!  
O warning of the night, prophetic dream!  
Thou didst foreshadow clearly all the doom,  
While ye, old men, made light of woman's  
fears!

Ah well—yet, as your divination ruled  
The meaning of the sign, I hold it good,  
First, that I put up prayer unto the gods,  
And, after that, forth from my palace bring  
The sacrificial cake, the offering due  
To Earth and to the spirits of the dead.

Too well I know it is a timeless rite  
Over a finished thing that cannot change!  
But yet—I know not—there may come of it  
Alleviation for the after time.

You it beseems, in view of what hath happed,  
T' advise with loyal hearts our loyal guards:  
And to my son—if, ere my coming forth,  
He should draw hitherward—give comfort  
meet,

Escort him to the palace in all state,  
Lest to these woes he add another woe!

[*Exit* ATOSSA.]

**CHORUS**

Zeus, lord and king! to death and nought  
Our countless host by thee is brought.  
Deep in the gloom of death, to-day,  
Lie Susa and Ecbatana:

How many a maid in sorrow stands  
And rends her tire with tender hands!  
How tears run down, in common pain  
And woeful mourning for the slain!  
O delicate in dole and grief,  
Ye Persian women! past relief  
Is now your sorrow! to the war  
Your loved ones went and come no more!  
Gone from you is your joy and pride—  
Severed the bridegroom from the bride—  
The wedded couch luxurious  
Is widowed now, and all the house  
Pines ever with insatiate sighs,  
And we stand here and bid arise,  
For those who forth in ardour went  
And come not back, the loud lament!

Land of the East, thou mournest for the host,  
Bereft of all thy sons, alas the day!  
For them whom Xerxes led hath Xerxes lost—

Xerxes who wrecked the fleet, and flung our hopes away!

How came it that Darius once controlled,  
And without scathe, the army of the bow,  
Loved by the folk of Susa, wise and bold?  
Now is the land-force lost, the shipmen sunk  
below!

Ah for the ships that bore them, woe is me!  
Bore them to death and doom! the crashing  
prows

Of fierce Ionian oarsmen swept the sea,  
And death was in their wake, and shipwreck  
murderous!

Late, late and hardly—if true tales they tell—  
Did Xerxes flee along the wintry way  
And snows of Thrace—but ah, the first who  
fell

Lie by the rocks or float upon Cychrea's bay!

Mourn, each and all! waft heavenward your  
cry,

Stung to the soul, bereaved, disconsolate!  
Wail out your anguish, till it pierce the sky,

In shrieks of deep despair, ill-omened,  
desperate!

The dead are drifting, yea, are gnawed upon  
By voiceless children of the stainless sea,  
Or battered by the surge! we mourn and  
groan

For husbands gone to death, for childless  
agony!

Alas the aged men, who mourn to-day  
The ruinous sorrows that the gods ordain!  
O'er the wide Asian land, the Persian sway  
Can force no tribute now, and can no rule  
sustain.

Yea, men will crouch no more to fallen  
power

And kingship overthrown! the whole land  
o'er,

Men speak the thing they will, and from this  
hour

The folk whom Xerxes ruled obey his word no  
more.

The yoke of force is broken from the neck—  
The isle of Ajax and th' encircling wave

Reek with a bloody crop of death and wreck  
Of Persia's fallen power, that none can lift nor  
save!

*[Re-enter ATOSSA, in mourning  
robes.]*

## **ATOSSA**

Friends, whosoe'er is versed in human ills,  
Knoweth right well that when a wave of woe  
Comes on a man, he sees in all things fear;  
While, in flood-tide of fortune, 'tis his mood  
To take that fortune as unchangeable,  
Wafting him ever forward. Mark me now—  
The gods' thwart purpose doth confront mine  
eyes,  
And all is terror to me; in mine ears  
There sounds a cry, but not of triumph now—  
So am I scared at heart by woe so great.  
Therefore I wend forth from the house anew,  
Borne in no car of state, nor robed in pride  
As heretofore, but bringing, for the sire  
Who did beget my son, libations meet  
For holy rites that shall appease the dead—  
The sweet white milk, drawn from a spotless  
cow,

The oozing drop of golden honey, culled  
By the flower-haunting bee, and therewithal  
Pure draughts of water from a virgin spring;  
And lo! besides, the stainless effluence,  
Born of the wild vine's bosom, shining store  
Treasured to age, this bright and luscious  
wine.

And eke the fragrant fruit upon the bough  
Of the grey olive-tree, which lives its life  
In sprouting leafage, and the twining flowers,  
Bright children of the earth's fertility.

But you, O friends! above these offerings  
poured

To reconcile the dead, ring out your dirge  
To summon up Darius from the shades,  
Himself a shade; and I will pour these  
draughts,

Which earth shall drink, unto the gods of hell.

## **CHORUS**

Queen, by the Persian land adored,  
By thee be this libation poured,  
Passing to those who hold command  
Of dead men in the spirit-land!  
And we will sue, in solemn chant,

That gods who do escort the dead  
In nether realms, our prayer may grant—  
Back to us be Darius led!

O Earth, and Hermes, and the king  
Of Hades, our Darius bring!  
For if, beyond the prayers we prayed,  
He knoweth aught of help or aid,  
He, he alone, in realms below,  
Can speak the limit of our woe!

Doth he hear me, the king we adored, who is  
god

among gods of the dead?

Doth he hear me send out in my sorrow the  
pitiful,

manifold cry,

The sobbing lament and appeal? is the voice  
of my

suffering sped

To the realm of the shades? doth he hear  
me and

pity my sorrowful sigh?

O Earth, and ye Lords of the dead! release ye  
that

spirit of might,

Who in Susa the palace was born! let him rise  
up

once more to the light!

There is none like him, none of all  
That e'er were laid in Persian sepulchres!

Borne forth he was to honoured burial,  
A royal heart! and followed by our tears.

God of the dead, O give him back to us,  
Darius, ruler glorious!

He never wasted us with reckless war—  
God, counsellor, and king, beneath a happy  
star!

Ancient of days and king, awake and  
come—

Rise o'er the mounded tomb!

Rise, plant thy foot, with saffron sandal shod

Father to us, and god!

Rise with thy diadem, O sire benign,

Upon thy brow!

List to the strange new sorrows of thy line,

Sire of a woeful son!

A mist of fate and hell is round us now,

And all the city's flower to death is done!

Alas, we wept thee once, and weep again!

O Lord of lords, by recklessness twofold  
The land is wasted of its men,  
And down to death are rolled  
Wreckage of sail and oar,  
Ships that are ships no more,  
And bodies of the slain!

[The GHOST OF

DARIUS *rises*.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Ye aged Persians, truest of the true,  
Coevals of the youth that once was mine,  
What troubleth now our city? harken, how  
It moans and beats the breast and rends the  
plain!

And I, beholding how my consort stood  
Beside my tomb, was moved with awe, and  
took

The gift of her libation graciously.

But ye are weeping by my sepulchre,  
And, shrilling forth a sad, evoking cry,  
Summon me mournfully, *Arise, arise*.

No light thing is it, to come back from death,  
For, in good sooth, the gods of nether gloom  
Are quick to seize but late and loth to free!

Yet among them I dwell as one in power—  
And lo, I come! now speak, and speed your  
words,  
Lest I be blamed for tarrying overlong!  
What new disaster broods o'er Persia's realm?

## **CHORUS**

With awe on thee I gaze,  
And, standing face to face,  
I tremble as I did in olden days!

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Nay, but as I rose to earth again, obedient to  
your call,  
Prithee, tarry not in parley! be one word  
enough for all—  
Speak and gaze on me unshrinking, neither  
let my face appal!

## **CHORUS**

I tremble to reveal,  
Yet tremble to conceal  
Things hard for friends to feel!

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Nay, but if the old-time terror on your spirit  
keeps its hold,

Speak thou, O royal lady who didst couch  
with me of old!

Stay thy weeping and lamenting and to me  
reveal the truth—

Speak! for man is born to sorrow; yea, the  
proverb sayeth sooth!

'Tis the doom of mortal beings, if they live to  
see old age,

To suffer bale, by land and sea, through war  
and tempest's rage.

## **ATOSSA**

O thou whose blissful fate on earth all mortal  
weal excelled—

Who, while the sunlight touched thine eyes,  
the lord of all wert  
held!

A god to Persian men thou wert, in bliss and  
pride and fame—

I hold thee blest too in thy death, or e'er the  
ruin came!

Alas, Darius! one brief word must tell thee all  
the tale—

The Persian power is in the dust, gone down  
in blood and bale!

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Speak—by what chance? did man rebel, or  
pestilence descend?

## **ATOSSA**

Neither! by Athens' fatal shores our army met  
its end.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Which of my children led our host to Athens?  
speak and say.

## **ATOSSA**

The froward Xerxes, leaving all our realm to  
disarray.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Was it with army or with fleet on folly's quest  
he went?

## **ATOSSA**

With both alike, a twofold front of double  
armament.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

And how then did so large a host on foot pass  
o'er the sea?

## **ATOSSA**

He bridged the ford of Helle's strait by artful  
carpentry.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

How? could his craft avail to span the torrent  
of that tide?

## **ATOSSA**

'Tis sooth I say—some unknown power did  
fatal help provide!

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Alas, that power in malice came, to his  
bewilderment!

## **ATOSSA**

Alas, we see the end of all, the ruin on us sent.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Speak, tell me how they fared therein, that  
thus ye mourn and weep?

## **ATOSSA**

Disaster to the army came, through ruin on the  
deep!

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Is all undone? hath all the folk gone down  
before the foe?

## **ATOSSA**

Yea, hark to Susa's mourning cry for warriors  
laid low!

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Alas for all our gallant aids, our Persia's help  
and pride!

## **ATOSSA**

Ay! old with young, the Bactrian force hath  
perished at our side!

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Alas, my son! what gallant youths hath he sent  
down to death!

**ATOSSA**

Alone, or with a scanty guard—for so the  
rumour saith—

**GHOST OF DARIUS**

He came—but how, and to what end? doth  
aught of hope remain?

**ATOSSA**

With joy he reached the bridge that spanned  
the Hellespontine main.

**GHOST OF DARIUS**

How? is he safe, in Persian land? speak  
soothly, yea or nay!

**ATOSSA**

Clear and more clear the rumour comes, for no  
man to gainsay.

**GHOST OF DARIUS**

Woe for the oracle fulfilled, the presage of  
the war

Launched on my son, by will of Zeus! I  
deemed our doom afar

In lap of time; but, if a king push forward to  
his fate,

The god himself allures to death that man  
infatuate!

So now the very fount of woe streams out on  
those I loved,

And mine own son, unwisely bold, the truth  
hereof hath proved!

He sought to shackle and control the  
Hellespontine wave,

That rushes from the Bosphorus, with fetters  
of a slave!—

To curb and bridge, with welded links, the  
streaming water-way,

And guide across the passage broad his  
manifold array!

Ah, folly void of counsel! he deemed that  
mortal wight

Could thwart the will of Heaven itself and  
curb Poseidon's might!

Was it not madness? much I fear lest all my  
wealth and store

Pass from my treasure-house, to be the  
snatcher's prize once more!

## **ATOSSA**

Such is the lesson, ah, too late! to eager  
Xerxes taught—

Trusting random counsellors and hare-brained  
men of nought,

Who said *Darius mighty wealth and fame to  
us did bring,*

*But thou art nought, a blunted spear, a  
palace-keeping king!*

Unto those sorry counsellors a ready ear he  
lent,

And led away to Hellas' shore his fated  
armament.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Therefore through them hath come calamity  
Most huge and past forgetting; nor of old  
Did ever such extermination fall  
Upon the city Susa. Long ago  
Zeus in his power this privilege bestowed,

That with a guiding sceptre one sole man  
Should rule this Asian land of flock and herd.  
Over the folk a Mede, Astyages,  
Did grasp the power: then Cyaxares ruled  
In his sire's place, and held the sway aright,  
Steering his state with watchful wariness.  
Third in succession, Cyrus, blest of Heaven,  
Held rule and 'stablished peace for all his  
clan:

Lydian and Phrygian won he to his sway,  
And wide Ionia to his yoke constrained,  
For the god favoured his discretion sage.  
Fourth in the dynasty was Cyrus' son,  
And fifth was Mardus, scandal of his land  
And ancient lineage. Him Artaphrenes,  
Hardy of heart, within his palace slew,  
Aided by loyal plotters, set for this.  
And I too gained the lot for which I craved,  
And oftentimes led out a goodly host,  
Yet never brought disaster such as this  
Upon the city. But my son is young  
And reckless in his youth, and heedeth not  
The warnings of my mouth. Mark this, my  
friends,

Born with my birth, coeval with mine age—  
Not all we kings who held successive rule  
Have wrought, combined, such ruin as my  
son!

## **CHORUS**

How then, O King Darius? whitherward  
Dost thou direct thy warning? from this plight  
How can we Persians fare towards hope  
again?

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

By nevermore assailing Grecian lands,  
Even tho' our Median force be double theirs—  
For the land's self protects its denizens.

## **CHORUS**

How meanest thou? by what defensive power?

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

She wastes by famine a too countless foe.

## **CHORUS**

But we will bring a host more skilled than  
huge.

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Why, e'en that army, camped in Hellas still,  
Shall never win again to home and weal!

## **CHORUS**

How say'st thou? will not all the Asian host  
Pass back from Europe over Helle's ford?

## **GHOST OF DARIUS**

Nay—scarce a tithe of all those myriads,  
If man may trust the oracles of Heaven  
When he beholds the things already wrought,  
Not false with true, but true with no word  
false

If what I trow be truth, my son has left  
A chosen rear-guard of our host, in whom  
He trusts, now, with a random confidence!  
They tarry where Asopus laves the ground  
With rills that softly bless Boeotia's plain—  
There is it fated for them to endure  
The very crown of misery and doom,  
Requital for their god-forgetting pride!  
For why? they raided Hellas, had the heart  
To wrong the images of holy gods,

And give the shrines and temples to the  
flame!

Defaced and dashed from sight the altars fell,  
And each god's image, from its pedestal  
Thrust and flung down, in dim confusion lies!  
Therefore, for outrage vile, a doom as dark  
They suffer, and yet more shall undergo—  
They touch no bottom in the swamp of doom,  
But round them rises, bubbling up, the ooze!  
So deep shall lie the gory clotted mass  
Of corpses by the Dorian spear transfixed  
Upon Plataea's field! yea, piles of slain  
To the third generation shall attest  
By silent eloquence to those that see—  
*Let not a mortal vaunt him overmuch.*  
For pride grows rankly, and to ripeness brings  
The curse of fate, and reaps, for harvest,  
tears!

Therefore when ye behold, for deeds like  
these,

Such stern requital paid, remember then  
Athens and Hellas. Let no mortal wight,  
Holding too lightly of his present weal  
And passionate for more, cast down and spill

The mighty cup of his prosperity!  
Doubt not that over-proud and haughty souls  
Zeus lours in wrath, exacting the account.  
Therefore, with wary warning, school my son,  
Though he be lessoned by the gods already,  
To curb the vaunting that affronts high  
Heaven!

And thou, O venerable Mother-queen,  
Beloved of Xerxes, to the palace pass  
And take therefrom such raiment as befits  
Thy son, and go to meet him: for his garb  
In this extremity of grief hangs rent  
Around his body, woefully unstitched,  
Mere tattered fragments of once royal robes!  
Go thou to him, speak soft and soothing  
words—

Thee, and none other, will he bear to hear,  
As well I know. But I must pass away  
From earth above, unto the nether gloom;  
Therefore, old men, take my farewell, and  
clasp,

Even amid the ruin of this time,  
Unto your souls the pleasure of the day,  
For dead men have no profit of their gold!

[ *The* GHOST OF DARIUS

*sinks.*

**CHORUS**

Alas, I thrill with pain for Persia's woes—  
Many fulfilled, and others hard at hand!

**ATOSSA**

O spirit of the race, what sorrows crowd  
Upon me! and this anguish stings me worst,  
That round my royal son's dishonoured form  
Hang rags and tatters, degradation deep!  
I will away, and, bringing from within  
A seemly royal robe, will straightway strive  
To meet and greet my son: foul scorn it were  
To leave our dearest in his hour of shame.

[*Exit* ATOSSA.]

**CHORUS**

Ah glorious and goodly they were,  
the life and the lot that we gained,  
The cities we held in our hand  
when the monarch invincible reigned,  
The king that was good to his realm,  
sufficing, fulfilled of his sway,

A lord that was peer of the gods,  
the pride of the bygone day!  
Then could we show to the skies  
great hosts and a glorious name,  
And laws that were stable in might;  
as towers they guarded our fame!  
There without woe or disaster  
we came from the foe and the fight,  
In triumph, enriched with the spoil,  
to the land and the city's delight.  
What towns ere the Halys he passed!  
what towns ere he came to the West,  
To the main and the isles of the Strymon,  
and the Thracian region possess'd!  
And those that stand back from the main,  
enringed by their fortified wall,  
Gave o'er to Darius, the king,  
the sceptre and sway over all!  
Those too by the channel of Helle,  
where southward it broadens and glides,  
By the inlets, Propontis! of thee,  
and the strait of the Pontic tides,  
And the isles that lie fronting our sea-board,  
and the Eastland looks on each one,

Lesbo and Chios and Paros,  
and Samos with olive-trees grown,  
And Naxos, and Myconos' rock,  
and Tenos with Andros hard by,  
And isles that in midmost Aegean,  
aloof from the continent, lie—  
And Lemnos and Icaros' hold—  
all these to his sceptre were bowed,  
And Cnidos and neighbouring Rhodes,  
and Soli, and Paphos the proud,  
And Cyprian Salamis, name-child of her  
who hath wrought us this wrong!  
Yea, and all the Ionian tract,  
where the Greek-born inhabitants throng,  
And the cities are teeming with gold—  
Darius was lord of them all,  
And, great by his wisdom, he ruled,  
and ever there came to his call,  
In stalwart array and unfailing,  
the warrior chiefs of our land,  
And mingled allies from the tribes  
who bowed to his conquering hand!  
But now there are none to gainsay  
that the gods are against us; we lie

Subdued in the havoc of wreck,  
and whelmed by the wrath of the sky!  
[*Enter XERXES in*  
*disarray.*

## **XERXES**

Alas the day, that I should fall  
Into this grimmest fate of all,  
This ruin doubly unforeseen!  
On Persia's land what power of Fate  
Descends, what louring gloom of hate?  
How shall I bear my teen?  
My limbs are loosened where they stand,  
When I behold this aged band—  
Oh God! I would that I too, I,  
Among the men who went to die,  
Were whelmed in earth by Fate's command!

## **CHORUS**

Ah welladay, my King! ah woe  
For all our heroes' overthrow—  
For all the gallant host's array,  
For Persia's honour, pass'd away,  
For glory and heroic sway  
Mown down by Fortune's hand to-day!

Hark, how the kingdom makes its moan,  
For youthful valour lost and gone,  
By Xerxes shattered and undone!

He, he hath crammed the maw of hell  
With bowmen brave, who nobly fell,  
Their country's mighty armament,  
Ten thousand heroes deathward sent!

Alas, for all the valiant band,  
O king and lord! thine Asian land  
Down, down upon its knee is bent!

## **XERXES**

Alas, a lamentable sound,  
A cry of ruth! for I am found  
A curse to land and lineage,  
With none my sorrow to assuage!

## **CHORUS**

Alas, a death-song desolate  
I send forth, for thy home-coming!  
A scream, a dirge for woe and fate,  
Such as the Asian mourners sing,  
A sorry and ill-omened tale  
Of tears and shrieks and Eastern wail!

## **XERXES**

Ay, launch the woeful sorrow's cry,  
The harsh, discordant melody,  
For lo, the power, we held for sure,  
Hath turned to my discomfiture!

## **CHORUS**

Yea, dirges, dirges manifold  
Will I send forth, for warriors bold,  
For the sea-sorrow of our host!  
The city mourns, and I must wail  
With plashing tears our sorrow's tale,  
Lamenting for the loved and lost!

## **XERXES**

Alas, the god of war, who sways  
The scales of fight in diverse ways,  
Gives glory to Ionia!  
Ionian ships, in fenced array,  
Have reaped their harvest in the bay,  
A darkling harvest-field of Fate,  
A sea, a shore, of doom and hate!

## **CHORUS**

Cry out, and learn the tale of woe!  
Where are thy comrades? where the band  
Who stood beside thee, hand in hand,  
A little while ago?  
Where now hath Pharandákes gone,  
Where Psammis, and where Pelagon?  
Where now is brave Agdabatas,  
And Susas too, and Datamas?  
Hath Susiscanes past away,  
The chieftain of Ecbatana?

## **XERXES**

I left them, mangled castaways,  
Flung from their Tyrian deck, and tossed  
On Salaminian water-ways,  
From surging tides to rocky coast!

## **CHORUS**

Alack, and is Pharnuchus slain,  
And Ariomardus, brave in vain?  
Where is Seualces' heart of fire?  
Lilaeus, child of noble sire?  
Are Tharubis and Memphis sped?  
Hystaechmas, Artembáres dead?

And where is brave Masistes, where?  
Sum up death's count, that I may hear!

## **XERXES**

Alas, alas, they came, their eyes surveyed  
Ancestral Athens on that fatal day.  
Then with a rending struggle were they laid  
Upon the land, and gasped their life away!

## **CHORUS**

And Batanochus' child, Alpistus great,  
Surnamed the Eye of State—  
Saw you and left you him who once of old  
Ten thousand thousand fighting-men  
enrolled?

His sire was child of Sesamas, and he  
From Megabates sprang. Ah, woe is me,  
Thou king of evil fate!  
Hast thou lost Parthus, lost Oebares great?  
Alas, the sorrow! blow succeedeth blow  
On Persia's pride; thou tellest woe on woe!

## **XERXES**

Bitter indeed the pang for comrades slain,  
The brave and bold! thou strikest to my soul

Pain, pain beyond forgetting, hateful pain.  
My inner spirit sobs and sighs with dole!

## **CHORUS**

Another yet we yearn to see,  
And see not! ah, thy chivalry,  
Xanthis, thou chief of Mardian men  
Countless! and thou, Anchaes bright,  
And ye, whose cars controlled the fight,  
Arsaces and Diaixis wight,  
Kegdadata, Lythimnas dear,  
And Tolmus, greedy of the spear!  
I stand bereft! not in thy train  
Come they, as erst! ah, ne'er again  
Shall they return unto our eyes,  
Car-borne, 'neath silken canopies!

## **XERXES**

Yea, gone are they who mustered once the  
host!

## **CHORUS**

Yea, yea, forgotten, lost!

## **XERXES**

Alas, the woe and cost!

## **CHORUS**

Alas, ye heavenly powers!

Ye wrought a sorrow past belief,

A woe, of woes the chief!

With aspect stern, upon us Ate looms!

## **XERXES**

Smitten are we—time tells no heavier blow!

## **CHORUS**

Smitten! the doom is plain!

## **XERXES**

Curse upon curse and pang on pang we know!

## **CHORUS**

With the Ionian power

We clashed, in evil hour!

Woe falls on Persia's race, yea, woe again,  
again!

## **XERXES**

Yea, smitten am I, and my host is all to ruin  
hurled!

## **CHORUS**

Yea verily—in mighty wreck hath sunk the  
Persian world!

*XERXES (holding up a torn robe and a quiver)*

See you this tattered rag of pride?

## **CHORUS**

I see it, welladay!

## **XERXES**

See you this quiver?

## **CHORUS**

Say, hath aught survived and 'scaped the fray?

## **XERXES**

A store for darts it was, erewhile!

## **CHORUS**

Remain but two or three!

## **XERXES**

No aid is left!

## **CHORUS**

Ionian folk such darts, unfearing, see!

## **XERXES**

Right resolute they are! I saw disaster  
unforeseen.

## **CHORUS**

Ah, speakest thou of wreck, of flight, of  
carnage that hath been?

## **XERXES**

Yea, and my royal robe I rent, in terror at their  
fall!

## **CHORUS**

Alas, alas!

## **XERXES**

Yea, thrice alas!

## **CHORUS**

For all have perished, all!

## **XERXES**

Ah woe to us, ah joy to them who stood  
against our pride!

## **CHORUS**

And all our strength is minished and sundered  
from our side!

## **XERXES**

No escort have I!

## **CHORUS**

Nay, thy friends are whelmed beneath the tide!

## **XERXES**

Wail, wail the miserable doom, and to the  
palace hie!

## **CHORUS**

Alas, alas, and woe again!

## **XERXES**

Shriek, smite the breast, as I!

## **CHORUS**

An evil gift, a sad exchange, of tears poured  
out in vain!

**XERXES**

Shrill out your simultaneous wail!

**CHORUS**

Alas the woe and pain!

**XERXES**

O, bitter is this adverse fate!

**CHORUS**

I voice the moan with thee!

**XERXES**

Smite, smite thy bosom, groan aloud for my  
calamity!

**CHORUS**

I mourn and am dissolved in tears!

**XERXES**

Cry, beat thy breast amain!

**CHORUS**

O king, my heart is in thy woe!

**XERXES**

Shriek, wail, and shriek again!

**CHORUS**

O agony!

**XERXES**

A blackening blow—

**CHORUS**

A grievous stripe shall fall!

**XERXES**

Yea, beat anew thy breast, ring out the doleful  
Mysian call!

**CHORUS**

An agony, an agony!

**XERXES**

Pluck out thy whitening beard!

**CHORUS**

By handfuls, ay, by handfuls, with dismal tear-  
drops smeared!

**XERXES**

Sob out thine aching sorrow!

**CHORUS**

I will thine best obey.

**XERXES**

With thine hands rend thy mantle's fold—

**CHORUS**

Alas, woe worth the day!

**XERXES**

With thine own fingers tear thy locks, bewail  
the army's weird!

**CHORUS**

By handfuls, yea, by handfuls, with tears of  
dole besmeared!

**XERXES**

Now let thine eyes find overflow—

## **CHORUS**

I wend in wail and pain!

## **XERXES**

Cry out for me an answering moan—

## **CHORUS**

Alas, alas again!

## **XERXES**

Shriek with a cry of agony, and lead the doleful train!

## **CHORUS**

Alas, alas, the Persian land is woeful now to tread!

## **XERXES**

Cry out and mourn! the city now doth wail above the dead!

## **CHORUS**

I sob and moan!

## **XERXES**

I bid ye now be delicate in grief!

## **CHORUS**

Alas, the Persian land is sad and knoweth not relief!

## **XERXES**

Alas, the triple banks of oars and those who died thereby!

## **CHORUS**

Pass! I will lead you, bring you home, with many a broken sigh! [*Exeunt*

## **THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES**

### **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

**ETEOCLES. A SPY. CHORUS OF CADMEAN MAIDENS. ANTIGONE. ISMENE. A HERALD.**

### **ETEOCLES**

Clansmen of Cadmus, at the signal given  
By time and season must the ruler speak  
Who sets the course and steers the ship of  
State

With hand upon the tiller, and with eye  
Watchful against the treachery of sleep.  
For if all go aright, *thank Heaven*, men say,  
But if adversely—which may God forefend!—  
One name on many lips, from street to street,  
Would bear the bruit and rumour of the time,  
*Down with Eteocles!*—a clamorous curse,  
A dirge of ruin. May averting Zeus  
Make good his title here, in Cadmus' hold!  
You it beseems now boys unripened yet  
To lusty manhood, men gone past the prime  
And increase of the full begetting seed,  
And those whom youth and manhood well  
combined

Array for action—all to rise in aid  
Of city, shrines, and altars of all powers  
Who guard our land; that ne'er, to end of  
time,  
Be blotted out the sacred service due  
To our sweet mother-land and to her brood.

For she it was who to their guest-right called  
Your waxing youth, was patient of the toil,  
And cherished you on the land's gracious lap,  
Alike to plant the hearth and bear the shield  
In loyal service, for an hour like this.

Mark now! until to-day, luck rules our scale;  
For we, though long beleaguered, in the main  
Have with our sallies struck the foemen hard.

But now the seer, the feeder of the birds,  
(Whose art unerring and prophetic skill  
Of ear and mind divines their utterance  
Without the lore of fire interpreted)

Foretelleth, by the mastery of his art,  
That now an onset of Achaea's host  
Is by a council of the night designed  
To fall in double strength upon our walls.

Up and away, then, to the battlements,  
The gates, the bulwarks! don your panoplies,  
Array you at the breast-work, take your stand  
On floorings of the towers, and with good

heart

Stand firm for sudden sallies at the gates,  
Nor hold too heinous a respect for hordes  
Sent on you from afar: some god will guard!

I too, for shrewd espial of their camp,  
Have sent forth scouts, and confidence is  
mine

They will not fail nor tremble at their task,  
And, with their news, I fear no foeman's  
guile.

[*Enter A*

SPY.

## **THE SPY**

Eteocles, high king of Cadmus' folk,  
I stand here with news certified and sure  
From Argos' camp, things by myself descried.  
Seven warriors yonder, doughty chiefs of  
might,

Into the crimsoned concave of a shield  
Have shed a bull's blood, and, with hands  
immersed

Into the gore of sacrifice, have sworn  
By Ares, lord of fight, and by thy name,  
Blood-lapping Terror, *Let our oath be heard—  
Either to raze the walls, make void the hold  
Of Cadmus—strive his children as they may—  
Or, dying here, to make the foemen's land  
With blood impasted.* Then, as memory's gift

Unto their parents at the far-off home,  
Chaplets they hung upon Adrastus' car,  
With eyes tear-dropping, but no word of  
moan.

For their steeled spirit glowed with high  
resolve,

As lions pant, with battle in their eyes.

For them, no weak alarm delays the clear  
Issues of death or life! I parted thence  
Even as they cast the lots, how each should  
lead,

Against which gate, his serried company.

Rank then thy bravest, with what speed thou  
may'st,

Hard by the gates, to dash on them, for now,  
Full-armed, the onward ranks of Argos come!  
The dust whirls up, and from their panting  
steeds

White foamy flakes like snow bedew the  
plain.

Thou therefore, chieftain! like a steersman  
skilled,

Enshield the city's bulwarks, ere the blast  
Of war comes darting on them! hark, the roar

Of the great landstorm with its waves of men!  
Take Fortune by the forelock! for the rest,  
By yonder dawn-light will I scan the field  
Clear and aright, and surety of my word  
Shall keep thee scatheless of the coming  
storm.

## **ETEOCLES**

O Zeus and Earth and city-guarding gods,  
And thou, my father's Curse, of baneful  
might,

Spare ye at least this town, nor root it up,  
By violence of the foemen, stock and stem!  
For here, from home and hearth, rings Hellas'  
tongue.

Forbid that e'er the yoke of slavery  
Should bow this land of freedom, Cadmus'  
hold!

Be ye her help! your cause I plead with  
mine—

A city saved doth honour to her gods!

[*Exit* ETEOCLES, *etc.* *Enter the*  
CHORUS OF MAIDENS.

## **CHORUS**

I wail in the stress of my terror,  
and shrill is my cry of despair.  
The foemen roll forth from their camp  
as a billow, and onward they bear!  
Their horsemen are swift in the forefront,  
the dust rises up to the sky,  
A signal, though speechless, of doom,  
a herald more clear than a cry!  
Hoof-trampled, the land of my love  
bears onward the din to mine ears.  
As a torrent descending a mountain,  
it thunders and echoes and nears!  
The doom is unloosened and cometh!  
O kings and O queens of high Heaven,  
Prevail that it fall not upon us:  
the sign for their onset is given—  
They stream to the walls from without,  
white-shielded and keen for the fray.  
They storm to the citadel gates—  
what god or what goddess can stay  
The rush of their feet? to what shrine  
shall I bow me in terror and pray?  
O gods high-throned in bliss,  
we must crouch at the shrines in your

home!

Not here must we tarry and wail:

shield clashes on shield as they come—

And now, even now is the hour

for the robes and the chaplets of prayer!

Mine eyes feel the flash of the sword,

the clang is instinct with the spear!

Is thy hand set against us, O Ares,

in ruin and wrath to o'erwhelm

Thine own immemorial land,

O god of the golden helm?

Look down upon us, we beseech thee,

on the land that thou lovest of old,

And ye, O protecting gods,

in pity your people behold!

Yea, save us, the maidenly troop,

from the doom and despair of the slave,

For the crests of the foemen come onward,

their rush is the rush of a wave

Rolled on by the war-god's breath!

almighty one, hear us and save

From the grasp of the Argives' might!

to the ramparts of Cadmus they crowd,

And, clenched in the teeth of the steeds,

the bits clink horror aloud!  
And seven high chieftains of war,  
with spear and with panoply bold,  
Are set, by the law of the lot,  
to storm the seven gates of our hold!  
Be near and befriend us, O Pallas,  
the Zeus-born maiden of might!  
O lord of the steed and the sea,  
be thy trident uplifted to smite  
In eager desire of the fray, Poseidon!  
and Ares come down,  
In fatherly presence revealed,  
to rescue Harmonia's town!  
Thine too, Aphrodite, we are!  
thou art mother and queen of our race,  
To thee we cry out in our need,  
from thee let thy children have grace!  
Ye too, to scare back the foe,  
be your cry as a wolf's howl wild,  
Thou, O the wolf-lord, and thou,  
of she-wolf Leto the child!  
Woe and alack for the sound,  
for the rattle of cars to the wall,  
And the creak of the grinding axles!

O Hera, to thee is our call!  
Artemis, maiden beloved!  
the air is distraught with the spears,  
And whither doth destiny drive us,  
and where is the goal of our fears?  
The blast of the terrible stones  
on the ridge of our wall is not stayed,  
At the gates is the brazen clash  
of the bucklers—Apollo to aid!  
Thou too, O daughter of Zeus,  
who guidest the wavering fray  
To the holy decision of fate,  
Athena! be with us to-day!  
Come down to the sevenfold gates  
and harry the foemen away!  
O gods and O sisters of gods,  
our bulwark and guard! we beseech  
That ye give not our war-worn hold  
to a rabble of alien speech!  
List to the call of the maidens,  
the hands held up for the right,  
Be near us, protect us, and show  
that the city is dear in your sight!

Have heed for her sacrifice holy,  
and thought of her offerings take,  
Forget not her love and her worship,  
be near her and smite for her sake!

[*Re-enter*

ETEOCLES.

ETEOCLES

Hark to my question, things detestable!  
Is this aright and for the city's weal,  
And helpful to our army thus beset,  
That ye before the statues of our gods  
Should fling yourselves, and scream and  
shriek your fears?

Immodest, uncontrolled! Be this my lot—  
Never in troublous nor in peaceful days  
To dwell with aught that wears a female  
form!

Where womankind has power, no man can  
house,

Where womankind feeds panic, ruin rules  
Alike in house and city! Look you now—  
Your flying feet, and rumour of your fears,  
Have spread a soulless panic on our walls,  
And they without do go from strength to

strength,

And we within make breach upon ourselves!  
Such fate it brings, to house with womankind.  
Therefore if any shall resist my rule—  
Or man, or woman, or some sexless thing—  
The vote of sentence shall decide their doom,  
And stones of execution, past escape,  
Shall finish all. Let not a woman's voice  
Be loud in council! for the things without,  
A man must care; let women keep within—  
Even then is mischief all too probable!  
Hear ye? or speak I to unheeding ears?

## **CHORUS**

Ah, but I shudder, child of Oedipus!  
I heard the clash and clang!  
The axles rolled and rumbled; woe to us  
Fire-welded bridles rang!

## **ETEOCLES**

Say—when a ship is strained and deep in  
brine,  
Did e'er a seaman mend his chance, who left  
The helm, t'invoke the image at the prow?

## **CHORUS**

Ah, but I fled to the shrines, I called to our  
helpers on high,

When the stone-shower roared at the  
portals!

I sped to the temples aloft, and loud was my  
call and my cry,

*Look down and deliver. Immortals!*

## **ETEOCLES**

Ay, pray amain that stone may vanquish  
steel!

Were not that grace of gods? ay, ay—  
methinks,

When cities fall, the gods go forth from them!

## **CHORUS**

Ah, let me die, or ever I behold

The gods go forth, in conflagration dire!

The foemen's rush and raid, and all our hold

Wrapt in the burning fire!

## **ETEOCLES**

Cry not: on Heaven, in impotent debate!

What saith the saw?—*Good saving Strength,*

*in verity,*

*Out of Obedience breeds the babe Prosperity.*

## **CHORUS**

'Tis true: yet stronger is the power divine,  
And oft, when man's estate is overbowed  
With bitter pangs, disperses from his eyne  
The heavy, hanging cloud!

## **ETEOCLES**

Let men with sacrifice and augury  
Approach the gods, when comes the tug of  
war;  
Maids must be silent and abide within.

## **CHORUS**

By grace of the gods we hold it,  
a city untamed of the spear,  
And the battlement wards from the wall  
the foe and his aspect of fear!  
What need of displeasure herein?

## **ETEOCLES**

Ay, pay thy vows to Heaven; I grudge them  
not,

But—so thou strike no fear into our men—  
Have calm at heart, nor be too much afraid.

## **CHORUS**

Alack, it is fresh in mine ears,  
the clamour and crash of the fray,  
And up to our holiest height  
I sped on my timorous way,  
Bewildered, beset by the din!

## **ETEOCLES**

Now, if ye hear the bruit of death or wounds,  
Give not yourselves o'ermuch to shriek and  
scream,  
For Ares ravens upon human flesh.

## **CHORUS**

Ah, but the snorting of the steeds I hear!

## **ETEOCLES**

Then, if thou hearts, hear them not too well!

## **CHORUS**

Hark, the earth rumbles, as they close us  
round!

## **ETEOCLES**

Enough if I am here, with plans prepared.

## **CHORUS**

Alack, the battering at the gates is loud!

## **ETEOCLES**

Peace! stay your tongue, or else the town may hear!

## **CHORUS**

O warders of the walls, betray them not!

## **ETEOCLES**

Bestrew your cries! in silence face your fate.

## **CHORUS**

Gods of our city, see me not enslaved!

## **ETEOCLES**

On me, on all, thy cries bring slavery.

## **CHORUS**

Zeus, strong to smite, turn upon foes thy blow!

## **ETEOCLES**

Zeus, what a curse are women, wrought by thee!

## **CHORUS**

Weak wretches, even as men, when cities fall.

## **ETEOCLES**

What! clasping gods, yet voicing thy despair?

## **CHORUS**

In the sick heart, fear machete prey of speech.

## **ETEOCLES**

Light is the thing I ask thee—do my will!

## **CHORUS**

Ask swiftly: swiftly shall I know my power.

## **ETEOCLES**

Silence, weak wretch! nor put thy friends in fear.

## **CHORUS**

I speak no more: the general fate be mine!

## **ETEOCLES**

I take that word as wiser than the rest.  
Nay, more: these images possess thy will—  
Pray, in their strength, that Heaven be on our  
side!

Then hear my prayers withal, and then ring  
out

The female triumph-note, thy privilege—  
Yea, utter forth the usage Hellas knows,  
The cry beside the altars, sounding clear  
Encouragement to friends, alarm to foes.  
But I unto all gods that guard our walls,  
Lords of the plain or warders of the mart  
And to Isthmus' stream and Dirge's rills,  
I swear, if Fortune smiles and saves our  
town,

That we will make our altars reek with blood  
Of sheep and kine, shed forth unto the gods,  
And with victorious tokens front our fannies—  
Corsets and cases that once our foemen  
wore,

Spear-shattered now—to deck these holy  
homes!

Be such thy vows to Heaven—away with  
sighs,

Away with outcry vain and barbarous,  
That shall avail not, in a general doom!  
But I will back, and, with six chosen men  
Myself the seventh, to confront the foe  
In this great aspect of a poised war,  
Return and plant them at the sevenfold gates,  
Or e'er the prompt and clamorous battle-  
scouts

Haste to inflame our counsel with the need.

[*Exit* ETEOCLES.]

## **CHORUS**

I mark his words, yet, dark and deep,  
My heart's alarm forbiddeth sleep!  
Close-clinging cares around my soul  
Enkindle fears beyond control,  
Presageful of what doom may fall  
From the great leaguer of the wall!  
So a poor dove is faint with fear  
For her weak nestlings, while anew  
Glides on the snaky ravisher!  
In troop and squadron, hand on hand,  
They climb and throng, and hemmed we  
stand,

While on the warders of our town  
The flinty shower comes hurtling down!  
Gods born of Zeus! put forth your might  
For Cadmus' city, realm, and right!  
What nobler land shall e'er be yours,  
If once ye give to hostile powers  
The deep rich soil, and Dirce's wave,  
The nursing stream, Poseidon gave  
And Tethys' children? Up and save!  
Cast on the ranks that hem us round  
A deadly panic, make them fling  
Their arms in terror on the ground,  
And die in carnage! thence shall spring  
High honour for our clan and king!  
Come at our wailing cry, and stand  
As thronèd sentries of our land!

For pity and sorrow it were  
that this immemorial town  
Should sink to be slave of the spear,  
to dust and to ashes gone down,  
By the gods of Achaean worship  
and arms of Achaean might  
Sacked and defiled and dishonoured,  
its women the prize of the fight—

That, haled by the hair as a steed,  
    their mantles dishevelled and torn,  
The maiden and matron alike  
    should pass to the wedlock of scorn!  
I hear it arise from the city,  
    the manifold wail of despair—  
*Woe, woe for the doom that shall be—*  
    as in grasp of the foeman they fare!  
For a woe and a weeping it is,  
    if the maiden inviolate flower  
Is plucked by the foe in his might,  
    not culled in the bridal bower!  
Alas for the hate and the horror—  
    how say it?—less hateful by far  
Is the doom to be slain by the sword,  
    hewn down in the carnage of war!  
For wide, ah! wide is the woe  
    when the foeman has mounted the wall;  
There is havoc and terror and flame,  
    and the dark smoke broods over all,  
And wild is the war-god's breath,  
    as in frenzy of conquest he springs,  
And pollutes with the blast of his lips  
    the glory of holiest things!

Up to the citadel rise clash and din,  
The war-net closes in,  
The spear is in the heart: with blood imbrued  
Young mothers wail aloud,  
For children at their breast who scream and  
die!

And boys and maidens fly,  
Yet scape not the pursuer, in his greed  
To thrust and grasp and feed!  
Robber with robber joins, each calls his mate  
Unto the feast of hate—

*The banquet, lo! is spread—  
seize, rend, and tear!*

*No need to choose or share!*

And all the wealth of earth to waste is  
poured—

A sight by all abhorred!  
The grieving housewives eye it;  
heaped and blent,  
Earth's boons are spoiled and spent,  
And waste to nothingness; and O alas,  
Young maids, forlorn ye pass—  
Fresh horror at your hearts—beneath the  
power

Of those who crop the flower!  
Ye own the ruffian ravisher for lord,  
And night brings rites abhorred!  
Woe, woe for you! upon your grief and pain  
There comes a fouler stain.

[*Enter, on one side, THE  
SPY;*  
*on the other, ETEOCLES  
and the SIX CHAMPIONS.*

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Look, friends! methinks the scout, who parted  
hence  
To spy upon the foemen, comes with news,  
His feet as swift as wafting chariot-wheels.

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Ay, and our king, the son of Oedipus,  
Comes prompt to time, to learn the spy's  
report—  
His heart is fainter than his foot is fast!

## **THE SPY**

Well have I scanned the foe, and well can say  
Unto which chief, by lot, each gate is given.

Tydeus already with his onset-cry  
Storms at the gate called Proetides; but him  
The seer Amphiaraus holds at halt,  
Nor wills that he should cross Ismenus' ford,  
Until the sacrifices promise fair.

But Tydeus, mad with lust of blood and broil,  
Like to a cockatrice at noontide hour,  
Hisses out wrath and smites with scourge of  
tongue

The prophet-son of Oecleus—*Wise thou art,  
Faint against war, and holding back from  
death!*

With such revilings loud upon his lips  
He waves the triple plumes that o'er his helm  
Float overshadowing, as a courser's mane;  
And at his shield's rim, terror in their tone,  
Clang and reverberate the brazen bells.

And this proud sign, wrought on his shield, he  
bears—

The vault of heaven, inlaid with blazing stars;  
And, for the boss, the bright moon glows at  
full,

The eye of night, the first and lordliest star.  
Thus with high-vaunted armour, madly bold,

He clamours by the stream-bank, wild for war,  
As a steed panting grimly on his bit,  
Held in and chafing for the trumpet's bray!  
Whom wilt thou set against him? when the gates  
Of Proetus yield, who can his rush repel?

## **ETEOCLES**

To me, no blazon on a foeman's shield  
Shall e'er present a fear! such pointed threats  
Are powerless to wound; his plumes and bells,  
Without a spear, are snakes without a sting.  
Nay, more—that pageant of which thou tellest—

The nightly sky displayed, ablaze with stars,  
Upon his shield, palter with double sense—  
One headstrong fool will find its truth anon!  
For, if night fall upon his eyes in death,  
Yon vaunting blazon will its own truth prove,  
And he is prophet of his folly's fall.

Mine shall it be, to pit against his power  
The loyal son of Astacus, as guard  
To hold the gateways—a right valiant soul,

Who has in heed the throne of Modesty  
And loathes the speech of Pride, and  
evermore

Shrinks from the base, but knows no other  
fear.

He springs by stock from those whom Ares  
spared,

The men called Sown, a right son of the soil,  
And Melanippus styled. Now, what his arm  
To-day shall do, rests with the dice of war,  
And Ares shall ordain it; but his cause  
Hath the true badge of Right, to urge him on  
To guard, as son, his motherland from wrong.

## **CHORUS**

Then may the gods give fortune fair  
Unto our chief, sent forth to dare

War's terrible arbitrament!

But ah! when champions wend away,  
I shudder, lest, from out the fray,

Only their blood-stained wrecks be sent!

## **THE SPY**

Nay, let him pass, and the gods' help be his!  
Next, Capaneus comes on, by lot to lead

The onset at the gates Electran styled:  
A giant he, more huge than Tydeus' self,  
And more than human in his arrogance—  
May fate forefend his threat against our walls!  
*God willing, or unwilling*—such his vaunt—  
*I will lay waste this city; Pallas' self,*  
*Zeus' warrior maid, although she swoop to*  
*earth*

*And plant her in my path, shall stay me not.*  
And, for the flashes of the levin-bolt,  
He holds them harmless as the noontide rays.  
Mark, too, the symbol on his shield—a man  
Scornfully weaponless but torch in hand,  
And the flame glows within his grasp,  
prepared

For ravin: lo, the legend, wrought in words,  
*Fire for the city bring I, flares in gold!*  
Against such wight, send forth—yet whom?  
what man

Will front that vaunting figure and not fear?

## **ETEOCLES**

Aha, this profits also, gain on gain!  
In sooth, for mortals, the tongue's utterance  
Bewrays unerringly a foolish pride!

Hither stalks Capaneus, with vaunt and threat  
Defying god-like powers, equeipt to act,  
And, mortal though he be, he strains his  
tongue

In folly's ecstasy, and casts aloft  
High swelling words against the ears of Zeus.  
Right well I trust—if justice grants the word—  
That, by the might of Zeus, a bolt of flame  
In more than semblance shall descend on  
him.

Against his vaunts, though reckless, I have  
set,

To make assurance sure, a warrior stern—  
Strong Polyphontes, fervid for the fray;  
A sturdy bulwark, he, by grace of Heaven  
And favour of his champion Artemis!

Say on, who holdeth the next gate in ward?

## **CHORUS**

Perish the wretch whose vaunt affronts our  
home!

On him the red bolt come,  
Ere to the maiden bowers his way he cleave,  
To ravage and bereave!

# THE SPY

I will say on. Eteoclus is third—  
To him it fell, what time the third lot sprang  
O'er the inverted helmet's brazen rim,  
To dash his stormers on Neistae gate.  
He wheels his mares, who at their frontlets  
chafe  
And yearn to charge upon the gates amain.  
They snort the breath of pride, and, filled  
therewith,  
Their nozzles whistle with barbaric sound.  
High too and haughty is his shield's device—  
An armèd man who climbs, from rung to  
rung,  
A scaling ladder, up a hostile wall,  
Afire to sack and slay; and he too cries,  
(By letters, full of sound, upon the shield)  
*Not Ares' self shall cast me from the wall.*  
Look to it, send, against this man, a man  
Strong to debar the slave's yoke from our  
town.

ETEOCLES (*pointing to*  
MEGAREUS)

Send will I—even this man, with luck to aid—  
By his worth sent already, not by pride  
And vain pretence, is he. 'Tis Megareus,  
The child of Creon, of the Earth-sprung born!  
He will not shrink from guarding of the gates,  
Nor fear the maddened charger's frenzied  
neigh,  
But, if he dies, will nobly quit the score  
For nurture to the land that gave him birth,  
Or from the shield-side hew two warriors  
down  
Eteoclus and the figure that he lifts—  
Ay, and the city pictured, all in one,  
And deck with spoils the temple of his sire!  
Announce the next pair, stint not of thy  
tongue!

## **CHORUS**

O thou, the warder of my home,  
Grant, unto us, Fate's favouring tide,  
Send on the foemen doom!  
They fling forth taunts of frenzied pride,  
On them may Zeus with glare of vengeance  
come;

# THE SPY

Lo, next him stands a fourth and shouts  
again,

By Pallas Onca's portal, and displays  
A different challenge; 'tis Hippomedon!  
Huge the device that starts up from his targe  
In high relief; and, I deny it not,  
I shuddered, seeing how, upon the rim,  
It made a mighty circle round the shield—  
No sorry craftsman he, who wrought that  
work

And clamped it all around the buckler's edge!  
The form was Typhon: from his glowing  
throat

Rolled lurid smoke, spark-litten, kin of fire!  
The flattened edge-work, circling round the  
whole,

Made strong support for coiling snakes that  
grew

Erect above the concave of the shield:  
Loud rang the warrior's voice; inspired for  
war,

He raves to slay, as doth a Bacchanal,  
His very glance a terror! of such wight

Beware the onset! closing on the gates,  
He peals his vaunting and appalling cry!

## **ETEOCLES**

Yet first our Pallas Onca—wardress she,  
Planting her foot hard by her gate—shall  
stand,

The Maid against the ruffian, and repel  
His force, as from her brood the mother-bird  
Beats back the wintered serpent's venom'd  
fang

And next, by her, is Oenops' gallant son,  
Hyperbius, chosen to confront this foe,  
Ready to seek his fate at Fortune's shrine!

In form, in valour, and in skill of arms,  
None shall gainsay him. See how wisely well  
Hermes hath set the brave against the  
strong!

Confronted shall they stand, the shield of  
each

Bearing the image of opposing gods:  
One holds aloft his Typhon breathing fire,  
But, on the other's shield, in symbol sits  
Zeus, calm and strong, and fans his bolt to

flame—

Zeus, seen of all, yet seen of none to fail!  
Howbeit, weak is trust reposed in Heaven—  
Yet are we upon Zeus' victorious side,  
The foe, with those he worsted—if in sooth  
Zeus against Typhon held the upper hand,  
And if Hyperbius, (as well may hap  
When two such foes such diverse emblems  
bear)

Have Zeus upon his shield, a saving sign.

## **CHORUS**

High faith is mine that he whose shield  
Bears, against Zeus, the thing of hate.  
The giant Typhon, thus revealed,  
A monster loathed of gods eterne  
And mortal men—this doom shall earn  
A shattered skull, before the gate!

## **THE SPY**

Heaven send it so!  
A fifth assailant now  
Is set against our fifth, the northern, gate,  
Fronting the death-mound where Amphion

lies

The child of Zeus.

This foeman vows his faith,  
Upon a mystic spear-head which he deems  
More holy than a godhead and more sure  
To find its mark than any glance of eye,  
That, will they, nill they, he will storm and  
sack

The hold of the Cadmeans. Such his oath—  
His, the bold warrior, yet of childish years,  
A bud of beauty's foremost flower, the son  
Of Zeus and of the mountain maid. I mark  
How the soft down is waxing on his cheek,  
Thick and close-growing in its tender prime—  
In name, not mood, is he a maiden's child—  
Parthenopaeus; large and bright his eyes  
But fierce the wrath wherewith he fronts the  
gate:

Yet not unheralded he takes his stand  
Before the portal; on his brazen shield,  
The rounded screen and shelter of his form,  
I saw him show the ravening Sphinx, the  
fiend

That shamed our city—how it glared and

moved,

Clamped on the buckler, wrought in high relief!

And in its claws did a Cadmean bear—  
Nor heretofore, for any single prey,  
Sped she aloft, through such a storm of darts  
As now awaits her. So our foe is here—  
Like, as I deem, to ply no stinted trade  
In blood and broil, but traffick as is meet  
In fierce exchange for his long wayfaring!

## **ETEOCLES**

Ah, may they meet the doom they think to bring—

They and their impious vaunts—from those on high!

So should they sink, hurled down to deepest death!

This foe, at least, by thee Arcadian styled,  
Is faced by one who bears no braggart sign,  
But his hand sees to smite, where blows  
avail—

Actor, own brother to Hyperbius!

He will not let a boast without a blow

Stream through our gates and nourish our

despair,

Nor give him way who on his hostile shield  
Bears the brute image of the loathly Sphinx!  
Blocked at the gate, she will rebuke the man  
Who strives to thrust her forward, when she  
feels

Thick crash of blows, up to the city wall.  
With Heaven's goodwill, my forecast shall be  
true.

## **CHORUS**

Home to my heart the vaunting goes,  
And, quick with terror, on my head  
Rises my hair, at sound of those  
Who wildly, impiously rave!  
If gods there be, to them I plead—  
*Give them to darkness and the grave.*

## **THE SPY**

Fronting the sixth gate stands another foe,  
Wisest of warriors, bravest among seers—  
Such must I name Amphiaraus: he,  
Set steadfast at the Homoloid gate,  
Berates strong Tydeus with reviling words—  
*The man of blood, the bane of state and*

*home,*

*To Argos, arch-allurer to all ill,  
Evoker of the fury-fiend of hell,  
Death's minister, and counsellor of wrong  
Unto Adrastus in this fatal field.*

Ay, and with eyes upturned and mien of scorn  
He chides thy brother Polynices too  
At his desert, and once and yet again  
Dwells hard and meaningly upon his name  
Where it saith *glory* yet importeth *feud*.

*Yea, such thou art in act, and such thy grace  
In sight of Heaven, and such in aftertime  
Thy fame, for lips and ears of mortal men!*

*"He strove to sack the city of his sires  
And temples of her gods, and brought on her  
An alien armament of foreign foes.*

*The fountain of maternal blood outpoured  
What power can staunch? even so, thy  
fatherland*

*Once by thine ardent malice stormed and  
ta'en,*

*Shall ne'er join force with thee." For me, I  
know*

*It doth remain to let my blood enrich*

*The border of this land that loves me not—  
Blood of a prophet, in a foreign grave!  
Now, for the battle! I foreknow my doom,  
Yet it shall be with honour.* So he spake,  
The prophet, holding up his targe of bronze  
Wrought without blazon, to the ears of men  
Who stood around and heeded not his word.  
For on no bruit and rumour of great deeds,  
But on their doing, is his spirit set,  
And in his heart he reaps a furrow rich,  
Wherefrom the foison of good counsel  
springs.

Against him, send brave heart and hand of  
might,

For the god-lover is man's fiercest foe.

## **ETEOCLES**

Out on the chance that couples mortal men,  
Linking the just and impious in one!

In every issue, the one curse is this—

Companionship with men of evil heart!

A baneful harvest, let none gather it!

The field of sin is rank, and brings forth death

At whiles a righteous man who goes aboard

With reckless mates, a horde of villainy,

Dies by one death with that detested crew;  
At whiles the just man, joined with citizens  
Ruthless to strangers, recking nought of  
Heaven,

Trapped, against nature, in one net with  
them,

Dies by God's thrust and all-including blow.  
So will this prophet die, even Oecleus' child,  
Sage, just, and brave, and loyal towards  
Heaven,

Potent in prophecy, but mated here  
With men of sin, too boastful to be wise!  
Long is their road, and they return no more,  
And, at their taking-off, by hand of Zeus,  
The prophet too shall take the downward  
way.

He will not—so I deem—assail the gate—  
Not as through cowardice or feeble will,  
But as one knowing to what end shall be  
Their struggle in the battle, if indeed  
Fruit of fulfilment lie in Loxias' word.  
He speaketh not, unless to speak avails!  
Yet, for more surety, we will post a man,  
Strong Lasthenes, as warder of the gate,

Stern to the foeman; he hath age's skill,  
Mated with youthful vigour, and an eye  
Forward, alert; swift too his hand, to catch  
The fenceless interval 'twixt shield and spear!  
Yet man's good fortune lies in hand of  
Heaven.

## **CHORUS**

Unto our loyal cry, ye gods, give ear!  
Save, save the city! turn away the spear,  
Send on the foemen fear!  
Outside the rampart fall they, rent and riven  
Beneath the bolt of heaven!

## **THE SPY**

Last, let me name yon seventh antagonist,  
Thy brother's self, at the seventh portal set—  
Hear with what wrath he imprecates our  
doom,  
Vowing to mount the wall, though banished  
hence,  
And peal aloud the wild exulting cry—  
*The town is ta'en*—then clash his sword with  
thine,  
Giving and taking death in close embrace,

Or, if thou 'scapest, flinging upon thee,  
As robber of his honour and his home,  
The doom of exile such as he has borne.  
So clamours he and so invokes the gods  
Who guard his race and home, to hear and  
heed

The curse that sounds in Polynices' name!  
He bears a round shield, fresh from forge and  
fire,

And wrought upon it is a twofold sign—  
For lo, a woman leads decorously  
The figure of a warrior wrought in gold;  
And thus the legend runs—*I Justice am,  
And I will bring the hero home again,  
To hold once more his place within this town,  
Once more to pace his sire's ancestral hall.*  
Such are the symbols, by our foemen  
shown—

Now make thine own decision, whom to send  
Against this last opponent! I have said—  
Nor canst thou in my tidings find a flaw—  
Thine is it, now, to steer the course aright.

**ETEOCLES**

Ah me, the madman, and the curse of  
Heaven!

And woe for us, the lamentable line  
Of Oedipus, and woe that in this house  
Our father's curse must find accomplishment!  
But now, a truce to tears and loud lament,  
Lest they should breed a still more rueful  
wail!

As for this Polynices, named too well,  
Soon shall we know how his device shall  
end—

Whether the gold-wrought symbols on his  
shield,

In their mad vaunting and bewildered pride,  
Shall guide him as a victor to his home!  
For had but Justice, maiden-child of Zeus,  
Stood by his act and thought, it might have  
been!

Yet never, from the day he reached the light  
Out of the darkness of his mother's womb,  
Never in childhood, nor in youthful prime,  
Nor when his chin was gathering its beard,  
Hath Justice hailed or claimed him as her  
own.

Therefore I deem not that she standeth now  
To aid him in this outrage on his home!  
Misnamed, in truth, were Justice, utterly,  
If to impiety she lent her hand.  
Sure in this faith, I will myself go forth  
And match me with him; who hath fairer  
claim?

Ruler, against one fain to snatch the rule,  
Brother with brother matched, and foe with  
foe,  
Will I confront the issue. To the wall!

## **CHORUS**

O thou true heart, O child of Oedipus,  
Be not, in wrath, too like the man whose  
name

Murmurs an evil omen! 'Tis enough  
That Cadmus' clan should strive with Argos'  
host,

For blood there is that can atone that stain!  
But—brother upon brother dealing death—  
Not time itself can expiate the sin!

## **ETEOCLES**

If man find hurt, yet clasp his honour still,  
'Tis well; the dead have honour, nought  
beside.

Hurt, with dishonour, wins no word of praise!

## **CHORUS**

Ah, what is thy desire?

Let not the lust and ravin of the sword  
Bear thee adown the tide accursed,  
abhorred!

Fling off thy passion's rage, thy spirit's  
prompting dire!

## **ETEOCLES**

Nay—since the god is urgent for our doom,  
Let Laius' house, by Phoebus loathed and  
scorned,

Follow the gale of destiny, and win  
Its great inheritance, the gulf of hell!

## **CHORUS**

Ruthless thy craving is—  
Craving for kindred and forbidden blood  
To be outpoured—a sacrifice imbrued  
With sin, a bitter fruit of murderous enmities!

## **ETEOCLES**

Yea, my own father's fateful Curse  
proclaims— A ghastly presence, and her eyes  
are dry— *Strike! honour is the prize, not life  
prolonged!*

## **CHORUS**

Ah, be not urged of her! for none shall dare  
To call thee *coward*, in thy throned estate!  
Will not the Fury in her sable pall  
Pass outward from these halls, what time the  
gods  
Welcome a votive offering from our hands?

## **ETEOCLES**

The gods! long since they hold us in  
contempt,  
Scornful of gifts thus offered by the lost!  
Why should we fawn and flinch away from  
doom?

## **CHORUS**

Now, when it stands beside thee! for its  
power  
May, with a changing gust of milder mood,

Temper the blast that bloweth wild and rude  
And frenzied, in this hour!

## **ETEOCLES**

Ay, kindled by the curse of Oedipus—  
All too prophetic, out of dreamland came  
The vision, meting out our sire's estate!

## **CHORUS**

Heed women's voices, though thou love them  
not!

## **ETEOCLES**

Say aught that may avail, but stint thy words.

## **CHORUS**

Go not thou forth to guard the seventh gate!

## **ETEOCLES**

Words shall not blunt the edge of my resolve.

## **CHORUS**

Yet the god loves to let the weak prevail.

## **ETEOCLES**

That to a swordsman, is no welcome word!

# CHORUS

Shall thine own brother's blood be victory's palm?

# ETEOCLES

Ill which the gods have sent thou canst not shun!

[*Exit* ETEOCLES.]

# CHORUS

I shudder in dread of the power,  
    abhorred by the gods of high heaven,  
The ruinous curse of the home  
    till roof-tree and rafter be riven!  
Too true are the visions of ill,  
    too true the fulfilment they bring  
To the curse that was spoken of old  
    by the frenzy and wrath of the king!  
Her will is the doom of the children,  
    and Discord is kindled amain,  
And strange is the Lord of Division,  
    who cleaveth the birthright in twain,—  
The edged thing, born of the north,  
    the steel that is ruthless and keen,  
Dividing in bitter division

the lot of the children of teen!  
Not the wide lowland around,  
the realm of their sire, shall they have,  
Yet enough for the dead to inherit,  
the pitiful space of a grave!

Ah, but when kin meets kin, when sire and  
child,

Unknowing, are defiled  
By shedding common blood, and when the pit  
Of death devoureth it,  
Drinking the clotted stain, the gory dye—  
Who, who can purify?  
Who cleanse pollution, where the ancient  
bane

Rises and reeks again?  
Whilome in olden days the sin was wrought,  
And swift requital brought—  
Yea on the children of the child came still  
New heritage of ill!  
For thrice Apollo spoke this word divine,  
From Delphi's central shrine,  
To Laius—*Die thou childless!* thus alone  
Can the land's weal be won!  
But vainly with his wife's desire he strove,

And gave himself to love,  
Begetting Oedipus, by whom he died,  
The fateful parricide!  
The sacred seed-plot, his own mother's  
womb,  
He sowed, his house's doom,  
A root of blood! by frenzy lured, they came  
Unto their wedded shame.  
And now the waxing surge, the wave of fate,  
Rolls on them, triply great—  
One billow sinks, the next towers, high and  
dark,  
Above our city's bark—  
Only the narrow barrier of the wall  
Totters, as soon to fall;  
And, if our chieftains in the storm go down,  
What chance can save the town?  
Curses, inherited from long ago,  
Bring heavy freight of woe:  
Rich stores of merchandise o'erload the deck,  
Near, nearer comes the wreck—  
And all is lost, cast out upon the wave,  
Floating, with none to save!

Whom did the gods, whom did the chief of  
men,

Whom did each citizen  
In crowded concourse, in such honour hold,  
As Oedipus of old,  
When the grim fiend, that fed on human  
prey,

He took from us away?

But when, in the fulness of days,  
he knew of his bridal unblest,  
A twofold horror he wrought,  
in the frenzied despair of his breast—  
Debarred from the grace of the banquet,  
the service of goblets of gold,  
He flung on his children a curse  
for the splendour they dared to withhold,  
A curse prophetic and bitter—

*The glory of wealth and of pride,  
With iron, not gold, in your hands,  
ye shall come, at the last, to divide!*

Behold, how a shudder runs through me,  
lest now, in the fulness of time,  
The house-fiend awake and return,  
to mete out the measure of crime!

[*Enter* THE

SPY.

## **THE SPY**

Take heart, ye daughters whom your  
mothers' milk

Made milky-hearted! lo, our city stands,  
Saved from the yoke of servitude: the vaunts  
Of overweening men are silent now,  
And the State sails beneath a sky serene,  
Nor in the manifold and battering waves  
Hath shipped a single surge, and solid stands  
The rampart, and the gates are made secure,  
Each with a single champion's trusty guard.  
So in the main and at six gates we hold  
A victory assured; but, at the seventh,  
The god that on the seventh day was born,  
Royal Apollo, hath ta'en up his rest  
To wreak upon the sons of Oedipus  
Their grandsire's wilfulness of long ago.

## **CHORUS**

What further woefulness besets our home?

## **THE SPY**

The home stands safe—but ah, the princes  
twain—

## **CHORUS**

Who? what of them? I am distraught with fear.

## **THE SPY**

Hear now, and mark! the sons of Oedipus—

## **CHORUS**

Ah, my prophetic soul! I feel their doom.

## **THE SPY**

Have done with questions!—with their lives  
crushed out—

## **CHORUS**

Lie they out yonder? the full horror speak!  
Did hands meet hands more close than  
brotherly?

Came fate on each, and in the selfsame hour?

## **THE SPY**

Yea, blotting out the lineage ill-starred!  
Now mix your exultation and your tears,

Over a city saved, the while its lords,  
Twin leaders of the fight, have parcelled out  
With forged arbitrament of Scythian steel  
The full division of their fatherland,  
And, as their father's imprecation bade,  
Shall have their due of land, a twofold grave.  
So is the city saved; the earth has drunk  
Blood of twin princes, by each other slain.

## **CHORUS**

O mighty Zeus and guardian powers,  
The strength and stay of Cadmus' towers!  
Shall I send forth a joyous cry,

*Hail to the lord of weal renewed?*

Or weep the misbegotten twain,  
Born to a fatal destiny?

Each numbered now among the slain,

Each dying in ill fortitude,

Each *truly named*, each *child of feud*?

O dark and all-prevailing ill,

That broods o'er Oedipus and all his line,  
Numbing my heart with mortal chill!

Ah me, this song of mine,  
Which, Thyad-like, I woke, now falleth still,

Or only tells of doom,  
And echoes round a tomb!

Dead are they, dead! in their own blood they  
lie—

Ill-omened the concert that hails our victory!  
The curse a father on his children spake  
Hath faltered not, nor failed!

Nought, Laius! thy stubborn choice availed—  
First to beget, then, in the after day

And for the city's sake,  
The child to slay!

For nought can blunt nor mar  
The speech oracular!

Children of teen! by disbelief ye erred—  
Yet in wild weeping came fulfilment of the  
word!

[ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE

*approach,*

*with a train of mourners,*

*bearing the*

*bodies of ETEOCLES and*

POLYNICES.

Look up, look forth! the doom is plain,  
Nor spake the messenger in vain!

A twofold sorrow, twofold strife—  
Each brave against a brother's life!  
In double doom hath sorrow come—  
How shall I speak it?—on the home!

Alas, my sisters! be your sighs the gale,  
The smiting of your brows the splash of oars,  
Wafting the boat, to Acheron's dim shores  
That passeth ever, with its darkened sail,  
On its uncharted voyage and sunless way,  
Far from thy beams, Apollo, god of day—  
The melancholy bark

Bound for the common bourn, the harbour of  
the dark!

Look up, look yonder! from the home  
Antigone, Ismene come,  
On the last, saddest errand bound,  
To chant a dirge of doleful sound,  
With agony of equal pain  
Above their brethren slain!  
Their sister-bosoms surely swell,  
Heart with rent heart according well  
In grief for those who fought and fell!  
Yet—ere they utter forth their woe—  
We must awake the rueful strain

To vengeful powers, in realms below,  
And mourn hell's triumph o'er the slain!

Alas! of all, the breast who bind,—

Yea, all the race of womankind—

O maidens, ye are most bereaved!

For you, for you the tear-drops start—

Deem that in truth, and undeceived,

Ye hear the sorrows of my heart!

*(To the dead.)*

Children of bitterness, and sternly brave—

One, proud of heart against persuasion's  
voice,

One, against exile proof! ye win your  
choice—

Each in your fatherland, a separate grave!

Alack, on house and heritage

They brought a baneful doom, and death for  
wage!

One strove through tottering walls to force his  
way,

One claimed, in bitter arrogance, the sway,

And both alike, even now and here,

Have closed their suit, with steel for arbiter!

And lo, the Fury-fiend of Oedipus, their sire,

Hath brought his curse to consummation dire!  
Each in the left side smitten, see them  
laid—

The children of one womb,  
Slain by a mutual doom!  
Alas, their fate! the combat murderous,  
The horror of the house,  
The curse of ancient bloodshed, now  
repaid!

Yea, deep and to the heart the deathblow  
fell,

Edged by their feud ineffable—  
By the grim curse, their sire did  
imprecate—

Discord and deadly hate!  
Hark, how the city and its towers make  
moan—

How the land mourns that held them for its  
own!

Fierce greed and fell division did they  
blend,

Till death made end!  
They strove to part the heritage in twain,  
Giving to each a gain—

Yet that which struck the balance in the  
strife,

The arbitrating sword,  
By those who loved the twain is held  
abhorred—

Loathed is the god of death, who sundered  
each from life!

Here, by the stroke of steel, behold! they  
lie—

And rightly may we cry  
*Beside their fathers, let them here be laid—  
Iron gave their doom, with iron their graves  
be made—*

*Alack, the slaying sword, alack, th'  
entombing spade!*

Alas, a piercing shriek, a rending groan,  
A cry unfeigned of sorrow felt at heart!  
With shuddering of grief, with tears that  
start,

With wailful escort, let them hither come—  
For one or other make divided moan!

No light lament of pity mixed with gladness,  
But with true tears, poured from the soul of  
sadness,

Over the princes dead and their bereavèd  
home

Say we, above these brethren dead,  
*On citizen, on foreign foe,*  
*Brave was their rush, and stern their blow—*  
*Now, lowly are they laid!*

Beyond all women upon earth  
Woe, woe for her who gave them birth!  
Unknowingly, her son she wed—  
The children of that marriage-bed,  
Each in the self-same womb, were bred—  
Each by a brother's hand lies dead!

Yea, from one seed they sprang, and by one  
fate

Their heritage is desolate,  
The heart's division sundered claim from  
claim,

And, from their feud, death came!  
Now is their hate allayed,  
Now is their life-stream shed,  
Ensanguining the earth with crimson dye—  
Lo, from one blood they sprang, and in one  
blood they lie!

A grievous arbiter was given the twain—

The stranger from the northern main,  
The sharp, dividing sword,  
Fresh from the forge and fire  
The War-god treacherous gave ill award  
And brought their father's curse to a  
fulfilment dire!

They have their portion—each his lot and  
doom,

Given from the gods on high!

Yea, the piled wealth of fatherland, for  
tomb,

Shall underneath them lie!

Alas, alas! with flowers of fame and pride

Your home ye glorified;

But, in the end, the Furies gathered round

With chants of boding sound,

Shrieking, *In wild defeat and disarray,*

*Behold, ye pass away!*

The sign of Ruin standeth at the gate,

There, where they strove with Fate—

And the ill power beheld the brothers' fall,

And triumphed over all!

ANTIGONE, ISMENE,

*and* CHORUS

*(Processional Chant)*

Thou wert smitten, in smiting,  
Thou didst slay, and wert slain—  
By the spear of each other  
Ye lie on the plain,  
And ruthless the deed that ye wrought was,  
and ruthless the death of the twain!

Take voice, O my sorrow!  
Flow tear upon tear—  
Lay the slain by the slayer,  
Made one on the bier!  
Our soul in distraction is lost,  
and we mourn o'er the prey of the spear!

Ah, woe for your ending,  
Unbrotherly wrought!  
And woe for the issue,  
The fray that ye fought,  
The doom of a mutual slaughter  
whereby to the grave ye are brought!

Ah, twofold the sorrow—  
The heard and the seen!  
And double the tide

Of our tears and our teen,  
As we stand by our brothers in death  
and wail for the love that has been!

O grievous the fate  
That attends upon wrong!  
Stern ghost of our sire,  
Thy vengeance is long!  
Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of  
thy  
kingdom are strong!

O dark were the sorrows  
That exile hath known!  
He slew, but returned not  
Alive to his own!

He struck down a brother, but fell, in the  
moment of  
triumph hewn down!

O lineage accurst,  
O doom and despair!  
Alas, for their quarrel,  
The brothers that were!  
And woe! for their pitiful end, who once were

our

love and our care!

O grievous the fate

That attends upon wrong!

Stern ghost of our sire,

Thy vengeance is long!

Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of  
thy

kingdom are strong!

By proof have ye learnt it!

At once and as one,

O brothers beloved,

To death ye were done!

Ye came to the strife of the sword, and  
behold! ye

are both overthrown!

O grievous the tale is,

And grievous their fall,

To the house, to the land,

And to me above all!

Ah God! for the curse that hath come, the sin  
and

the ruin withal!

O children distraught,  
Who in madness have died!  
Shall ye rest with old kings  
In the place of their pride?  
Alas for the wrath of your sire if he findeth  
you laid  
by his side!

[*Enter a*

HERALD.

**HERALD**

I bear command to tell to one and all  
What hath approved itself and now is law,  
Ruled by the counsellors of Cadmus' town.  
For this Eteocles, it is resolved  
To lay him on his earth-bed, in this soil,  
Not without care and kindly sepulture.  
For why? he hated those who hated us,  
And, with all duties blamelessly performed  
Unto the sacred ritual of his sires,  
He met such end as gains our city's grace,—  
With auspices that do ennoble death.  
Such words I have in charge to speak of him:  
But of his brother Polynices, this—  
Be he cast out unburied, for the dogs

To rend and tear: for he presumed to waste  
The land of the Cadmeans, had not Heaven—  
Some god of those who aid our fatherland—  
Opposed his onset, by his brother's spear,  
To whom, tho' dead, shall consecration come!  
Against him stood this wretch, and brought a  
horde

Of foreign foemen, to beset our town.  
He therefore shall receive his recompense,  
Buried ignobly in the maw of kites—  
No women-wailers to escort his corpse  
Nor pile his tomb nor shrill his dirge anew—  
Unhouselled, unattended, cast away!  
So, for these brothers, doth our State ordain.

## **ANTIGONE**

And I—to those who make such claims of rule  
In Cadmus' town—I, though no other help,  
(*Pointing to the body of POLYNICES*)  
I, I will bury this my brother's corse  
And risk your wrath and what may come of it!  
It shames me not to face the State, and set  
Will against power, rebellion resolute:  
Deep in my heart is set my sisterhood,  
My common birthright with my brothers, born

All of one womb, her children who, for woe,  
Brought forth sad offspring to a sire ill-  
starred.

Therefore, my soul! take thou thy willing  
share,

In aid of him who now can will no more,  
Against this outrage: be a sister true,  
While yet thou livest, to a brother dead!  
Him never shall the wolves with ravening  
maw

Rend and devour: I do forbid the thought!  
I for him, I—albeit a woman weak—  
In place of burial-pit, will give him rest  
By this protecting handful of light dust  
Which, in the lap of this poor linen robe,  
I bear to hallow and bestrew his corpse  
With the due covering. Let none gainsay!  
Courage and craft shall arm me, this to do.

## **HERALD**

I charge thee, not to flout the city's law!

## **ANTIGONE**

I charge thee, use no useless heralding!

## **HERALD**

Stern is a people newly 'scaped from death.

## **ANTIGONE**

Whet thou their sternness! Burial he shall have.

## **HERALD**

How? Grace of burial, to the city's foe?

## **ANTIGONE**

God hath not judged him separate in guilt.

## **HERALD**

True—till he put this land in jeopardy.

## **ANTIGONE**

His rights usurped, he answered wrong with wrong.

## **HERALD**

Nay—but for one man's sin he smote the State.

## **ANTIGONE**

Contention doth out-talk all other gods!  
Prate thou no more—I will to bury him.

## **HERALD**

Will, an thou wilt! but I forbid the deed. [*Exit*  
the HERALD.

## **CHORUS**

Exulting Fates, who waste the line  
And whelm the house of Oedipus!  
Fiends, who have slain, in wrath condign,  
The father and the children thus!  
What now befits it that I do,  
What meditate, what undergo?  
Can I the funeral rite refrain,  
Nor weep for Polynices slain?  
But yet, with fear I shrink and thrill,  
Presageful of the city's will!  
Thou, O Eteocles, shalt have  
Full rites, and mourners at thy grave,  
But he, thy brother slain, shall he,  
With none to weep or cry *Alas*,  
To unbefriended burial pass?  
Only one sister o'er his bier,  
To raise the cry and pour the tear—  
Who can obey such stern decree?

## **SEMI-CHORUS**

Let those who hold our city's sway  
Wreak, or forbear to wreak, their will  
On those who cry, *Ah, well-a-day!*  
Lamenting Polynices still!  
We will go forth and, side by side  
With her, due burial will provide!  
Royal he was; to him be paid  
Our grief, wherever he be laid!  
The crowd may sway, and change, and still  
Take its caprice for Justice' will!  
But we this dead Eteocles,  
As Justice wills and Right decrees,  
Will bear unto his grave!  
For—under those enthroned on high  
And Zeus' eternal royalty—  
He unto us salvation gave!  
He saved us from a foreign yoke,—  
A wild assault of outland folk,  
A savage, alien wave!

[*Exeunt.*

## **PROMETHEUS BOUND**

### **ARGUMENT**

In the beginning, Ouranos and Gaia held sway over Heaven and Earth. And manifold children were born unto them, of whom were Cronos, and Okeanos, and the Titans, and the Giants. But Cronos cast down his father Ouranos, and ruled in his stead, until Zeus his son cast him down in his turn, and became King of Gods and men. Then were the Titans divided, for some had good will unto Cronos, and others unto Zeus; until Prometheus, son of the Titan Iapetos, by wise counsel, gave the victory to Zeus. But Zeus held the race of mortal men in scorn, and was fain to destroy them from the face of the earth; yet Prometheus loved them, and gave secretly to them the gift of fire, and arts whereby they could prosper upon the earth. Then was Zeus sorely angered with Prometheus, and bound him upon a mountain, and afterward overwhelmed him in an earthquake, and devised other torments against him for many ages; yet could he not slay Prometheus, for he was a God.

## **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

**STRENGTH AND FORCE. HEPHAESTUS.  
PROMETHEUS. CHORUS OF SEA-NYMPHS,  
DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS. OCEANUS. IO.  
HERMES.**

*Scene—A rocky ravine in the mountains of  
Scythia.*

## **STRENGTH**

Lo, the earth's bound and limitary land,  
The Scythian steppe, the waste untrod of  
men!

Look to it now, Hephaestus—thine it is,  
Thy Sire obeying, this arch-thief to clench  
Against the steep-down precipice of rock,  
With stubborn links of adamantine chain.  
Look thou: thy flower, the gleaming plastic  
fire,

He stole and lent to mortal man—a sin  
That gods immortal make him rue to-day,  
Lessoned hereby to own th' omnipotence  
Of Zeus, and to repent his love to man!

## **HEPHAESTUS**

O Strength and Force, for you the best of  
Zeus

Stands all achieved, and nothing bars your  
will:

But I—I dare not bind to storm-vext cleft  
One of our race, immortal as are we.

Yet, none the less, necessity constrains,  
For Zeus, defied, is heavy in revenge!

(*To*

*PROMETHEUS*)

O deep-devising child of Themis sage,  
Small will have I to do, or thou to bear,  
What yet we must. Beyond the haunt of man  
Unto this rock, with fetters grimly forged,  
I must transfix and shackle up thy limbs,  
Where thou shalt mark no voice nor human  
form,

But, parching in the glow and glare of sun,  
Thy body's flower shall suffer a sky-change;  
And gladly wilt thou hail the hour when Night  
Shall in her starry robe invest the day,  
Or when the Sun shall melt the morning rime.  
But, day or night, for ever shall the load  
Of wasting agony, that may not pass,

Wear thee away; for know, the womb of Time  
Hath not conceived a power to set thee free.  
Such meed thou hast, for love toward  
mankind

For thou, a god defying wrath of gods,  
Beyond the ordinance didst champion men,  
And for reward shalt keep a sleepless watch,  
Stiff-kneed, erect, nailed to this dismal rock,  
With manifold laments and useless cries  
Against the will inexorable of Zeus.  
Hard is the heart of fresh-usurpèd power!

## **STRENGTH**

Enough of useless ruth! why tarriest thou?  
Why pitiest one whom all gods wholly hate,  
One who to man gave o'er thy privilege?

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Kinship and friendship wring my heart for him.

## **STRENGTH**

Ay—but how disregard our Sire's command?  
Is not thy pity weaker than thy fear?

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Ruthless as ever, brutal to the full!

## **STRENGTH**

Tears can avail him nothing: strive not thou,  
Nor waste thine efforts thus unaidingly.

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Out on my cursed mastery of steel!

## **STRENGTH**

Why curse it thus? In sooth that craft of thine  
Standeth assoiled of all that here is wrought.

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Would that some other were endowed  
therewith!

## **STRENGTH**

All hath its burden, save the rule of Heaven,  
And freedom is for Zeus, and Zeus alone.

## **HEPHAESTUS**

I know it; I gainsay no word hereof.

## **STRENGTH**

Up, then, and hasten to do on his bonds,  
Lest Zeus behold thee indolent of will!

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Ah well—behold the armlets ready now!

## **STRENGTH**

Then cast them round his arms and with  
sheer strength

Swing down the hammer, clinch him to the  
crag.

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Lo, 'tis toward—no weakness in the work!

## **STRENGTH**

Smite harder, wedge it home—no faltering  
here!

He hath a craft can pass th' impassable!

## **HEPHAESTUS**

This arm is fast, inextricably bound.

## **STRENGTH**

Then shackle safe the other, that he know  
His utmost craft is weaker far than Zeus.

## **HEPHAESTUS**

He, but none other, can accuse mine art!

## **STRENGTH**

Now, strong and sheer, drive thro' from  
breast to back

The adamantine wedge's stubborn fang.

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Alas, Prometheus! I lament thy pain.

## **STRENGTH**

Thou, faltering and weeping sore for those  
Whom Zeus abhors! 'ware, lest thou rue thy  
tears!

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Thou gazest on a scene that poisons sight.

## **STRENGTH**

I gaze on one who suffers his desert.  
Now between rib and shoulder shackle him—

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Do it I must—hush thy superfluous charge!

## **STRENGTH**

Urge thee I will—ay, hound thee to the prey.  
Step downward now, enring his legs amain!

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Lo, it is done—'twas but a moment's toil.

## **STRENGTH**

Now, strongly strike, drive in the piercing  
gyves—

Stern is the power that oversees thy task!

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Brutish thy form, thy speech brutality!

## **STRENGTH**

Be gentle, an thou wilt, but blame not me  
For this my stubbornness and anger fell!

## **HEPHAESTUS**

Let us go hence; his legs are firmly chained.

STRENGTH (*To* PROMETHEUS)

Aha! there play the insolent, and steal,  
For creatures of a day, the rights of gods!  
O deep delusion of the powers that named  
thee

Prometheus, the Fore-thinker! thou hast need  
Of others' forethought and device, whereby  
Thou may'st elude this handicraft of ours!

[*Exeunt*

HEPHAESTUS, STRENGTH,

*and* FORCE.—*A*

*pause.*

## **PROMETHEUS**

O Sky divine, O Winds of pinions swift,  
O fountain-heads of Rivers, and O thou,  
Illimitable laughter of the Sea!

O Earth, the Mighty Mother, and thou Sun,  
Whose orb'd light surveyeth all—attest,  
What ills I suffer from the gods, a god!

Behold me, who must here sustain

The marring agonies of pain,

Wrestling with torture, doomed to bear  
Eternal ages, year on year!

Such and so shameful is the chain

Which Heaven's new tyrant doth ordain  
To bind me helpless here.

Woe! for the ruthless present doom!  
Woe! for the Future's teeming womb!  
On what far dawn, in what dim skies,  
Shall star of my deliverance rise?

Truce to this utterance! to its dimmest verge  
I do foreknow the future, hour by hour,  
Nor can whatever pang may smite me now  
Smite with surprise. The destiny ordained  
I must endure to the best, for well I wot  
That none may challenge with Necessity.  
Yet is it past my patience, to reveal,  
Or to conceal, these issues of my doom.  
Since I to mortals brought prerogatives,  
Unto this durance dismal am I bound:  
Yea, I am he who in a fennel-stalk,  
By stealthy sleight, purveyed the fount of fire,  
The teacher, proven thus, and arch-resource  
Of every art that aideth mortal men.  
Such was my sin: I earn its recompense,  
Rock-riveted, and chained in height and cold.  
*[A pause.*  
Listen! what breath of sound,

what fragrance soft hath risen  
Upward to me? is it some godlike essence,  
Or being half-divine, or mortal presence?  
Who to the world's end comes, unto my  
craggy prison?

Craves he the sight of pain, or what would he  
behold?

Gaze on a god in tortures manifold,  
Heinous to Zeus, and scorned by all  
Whose footsteps tread the heavenly hall,  
Because too deeply, from on high,  
I pitied man's mortality!

Hark, and again! that fluttering sound  
Of wings that whirr and circle round,  
And their light rustle thrills the air—  
How all things that unseen draw near  
Are to me Fear!

[*Enter the CHORUS OF*  
OCEANIDES,

*in winged cars*]

CHORUS

Ah, fear us not! as friends, with rivalry  
Of swiftly-vying wings, we came together  
Unto this rock and thee!

With our sea-sire we pleaded hard, until  
We won him to our will,  
And swift the wafting breezes bore us hither.  
The heavy hammer's steely blow  
Thrilled to our ocean-cavern from afar,  
Banished soft shyness from our maiden brow,  
And with unsandalled feet we come, in  
winged car!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ah well-a-day! ye come, ye come  
From the Sea-Mother's teeming home—  
Children of Tethys and the sire  
Who around Earth rolls, gyre on gyre,  
His sleepless ocean-tide!  
Look on me—shackled with what chain,  
Upon this chasm's beetling side  
I must my dismal watch sustain!

## **CHORUS**

Yea, I behold, Prometheus! and my fears  
Draw swiftly o'er mine eyes a mist fulfilled of  
tears,  
When I behold thy frame  
Bound, wasting on the rock, and put to

shame

By adamantine chains!

The rudder and the rule of Heaven

Are to strange pilots given:

Zeus with new laws and strong caprice holds  
sway,

Unkings the ancient Powers, their might  
constrains,

And thrusts their pride away!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Had he but hurled me, far beneath

The vast and ghostly halls of Death,

Down to the limitless profound Of Tartarus,

in fetters bound, Fixed by his unrelenting  
hand!

So had no man, nor God on high,

Exulted o'er mine agony—

But now, a sport to wind and sky,

Mocked by my foes, I stand!

## **CHORUS**

What God can wear such ruthless heart

As to delight in ill?

Who in thy sorrow bears not part?

Zeus, Zeus alone! for he, with wrathful will,  
Clenched and inflexible,  
Bears down Heaven's race—nor end shall be,  
till hate

His soul shall satiate,  
Or till, by some device, some other hand  
Shall wrest from him his sternly-clasped  
command!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Yet,—though in shackles close and strong  
I lie in wasting torments long,—  
Yet the new tyrant, 'neath whose nod  
Cowers down each blest subservient god,  
One day, far hence, my help shall need,  
The destined stratagem to read,  
Whereby, in some yet distant day,  
Zeus shall be reaved of pride and sway:  
And no persuasion's honied spell  
Shall lure me on, the tale to tell;  
And no stern threat shall make me cower  
And yield the secret to his power,  
Until his purpose be foregone,  
And shackles yield, and he atone  
The deep despite that he hath done!

## **CHORUS**

O strong in hardihood, thou striv'st amain  
Against the stress of pain!  
But yet too free, too resolute thy tongue  
In challenging thy wrong!  
Ah, shuddering dread doth make my spirit  
quiver,  
And o'er thy fate sits Fear!  
I see not to what shore of safety ever  
Thy bark can steer—  
In depths unreached the will of Zeus doth  
dwell,  
Hidden, implacable!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ay, stern is Zeus, and Justice stands,  
Wrenched to his purpose, in his hands—  
Yet shall he learn, perforce, to know  
A milder mood, when falls the blow—  
His ruthless wrath he shall lay still,  
And he and I with mutual will  
In concord's bond shall go.

## **CHORUS**

Unveil, say forth to us the tale entire,  
Under what imputation Zeus laid hands  
On thee, to rack thee thus with shameful  
pangs?

Tell us—unless the telling pain thee—all!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Grievous alike are these things for my  
tongue,

Grievous for silence—rueful everyway.

Know that, when first the gods began their  
strife,

And heaven was all astir with mutual feud—  
Some willing to fling Cronos from his throne,  
And set, forsooth, their Zeus on high as king,  
And other some in contrariety

Striving to bar him from heaven's throne for  
aye—

Thereon I sought to counsel for the best  
The Titan brood of Ouranos and Earth;  
Yet I prevailed not, for they held in scorn  
My glozing wiles, and, in their hardy pride,  
Deemed that sans effort they could grasp the  
sway.

But, for my sake, my mother Themis oft,

And Earth, one symbol of names manifold,  
Had held me warned, how in futurity  
It stood ordained that not by force or power,  
But by some wile, the victors must prevail.  
In such wise I interpreted; but they  
Deigned not to cast their heed thereon at all.  
Then, of things possible, I deemed it best,  
Joining my mother's wisdom to mine own,  
To range myself with Zeus, two wills in one.  
Thus, by device of mine, the murky depth  
Of Tartarus enfoldeth Cronos old  
And those who strove beside him. Such the  
aid

I gave the lord of heaven—my meed for  
which

He paid me thus, a penal recompense!  
For 'tis the inward vice of tyranny,  
To deem of friends as being secret foes.  
Now, to your question—hear me clearly show  
On what imputed fault he tortures me.  
Scarce was he seated on his father's throne,  
When he began his doles of privilege  
Among the lesser gods, allotting power  
In trim division; while of mortal men

Nothing he recked, nor of their misery  
Nay, even willed to blast their race entire  
To nothingness, and breed another brood;  
And none but I was found to cross his will.  
I dared it, I alone; I rescued men  
From crushing ruin and th' abyss of hell—  
Therefore am I constrained in chastisement  
Grievous to bear and piteous to behold,—  
Yea, firm to feel compassion for mankind,  
Myself was held unworthy of the same—  
Ay, beyond pity am I ranged and ruled  
To sufferance—a sight that shames his sway!

## **CHORUS**

A heart of steel, a mould of stone were he,  
Who could complacently behold thy pains  
I came not here as craving for this sight,  
And, seeing it, I stand heart-wrung with pain.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Yea truly, kindly eyes must pity me!

## **CHORUS**

Say, didst thou push transgression further still?

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ay, man thro' me ceased to foreknow his death.

## **CHORUS**

What cure couldst thou discover for this curse?

## **PROMETHEUS**

Blind hopes I sent to nestle in man's heart.

## **CHORUS**

This was a goodly gift thou gavest them.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Yet more I gave them, even the boon of fire.

## **CHORUS**

What? radiant fire, to things ephemeral?

## **PROMETHEUS**

Yea—many an art too shall they learn thereby!

## **CHORUS**

Then, upon imputation of such guilt,  
Doth Zeus without surcease torment thee  
thus?

Is there no limit to thy course of pain?

# PROMETHEUS

None, till his own will shall decree an end.

## CHORUS

And how shall he decree it? say, what hope?  
Seest thou not thy sin? yet of that sin  
It irks me sore to speak, as thee to hear.  
Nay, no more words hereof; bethink thee  
now,  
From this ordeal how to find release.

## PROMETHEUS

Easy it is, for one whose foot is set  
Outside the slough of pain, to lesson well  
With admonitions him who lies therein.  
With perfect knowledge did I all I did,  
I willed to sin, and sinned, I own it all—  
I championed men, unto my proper pain.  
Yet scarce I deemed that, in such cruel doom,  
Withering upon this skyey precipice,  
I should inherit lonely mountain crags,  
Here, in a vast tin-neighbour'd solitude.  
Yet list not to lament my present pains,  
But, stepping from your cars unto the ground,

Listen, the while I tell the future fates  
Now drawing near, until ye know the whole.  
Grant ye, O grant my prayer, be pitiful  
To one now racked with woe! the doom of  
pain  
Wanders, but settles, soon or late, on all.

## **CHORUS**

To willing hearts, and schooled to feel,  
Prometheus, came thy tongue's appeal;  
Therefore we leave, with lightsome tread,  
The flying cars in which we sped—  
We leave the stainless virgin air  
Where winged creatures float and fare,  
And by thy side, on rocky land,  
Thus gently we alight and stand,  
Willing, from end to end, to know  
Thine history of woe.

[ *The CHORUS alight from their  
winged cars.*

*Enter OCEANUS, mounted  
on a griffin.*

**OCEANUS**

Thus, over leagues and leagues of space  
I come, Prometheus, to thy place—  
By will alone, not rein, I guide  
The winged thing on which I ride;  
And much, be sure, I mourn thy case—  
Kinship is Pity's bond, I trow;  
And, wert thou not akin, I vow  
None other should have more than thou  
Of my compassion's grace!  
'Tis said, and shall be proved; no skill  
Have I to gloze and feign goodwill!  
Name but some mode of helpfulness,  
And thou wilt in a trice confess  
That I, Oceanus, am best  
Of all thy friends, and trustiest.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ho, what a sight of marvel! what, thou too  
Comest to contemplate my pains, and  
darest—

(Yet how, I wot not!) leaving far behind  
The circling tide, thy namefellow, and those  
Rock-arched, self-hollowed caverns—thus to  
come

Unto this land, whose womb bears iron ore?

Art come to see my lot, resent with me  
The ills I bear? Well, gaze thy fill! behold  
Me, friend of Zeus, part-author of his power—  
Mark, in what ruthlessness he bows me  
down!

## **OCEANUS**

Yea, I behold, Prometheus! and would warn  
Thee, spite of all thy wisdom, for thy weal!  
Learn now thyself to know, and to renew  
A rightful spirit within thee, for, made new  
With pride of place, sits Zeus among the  
gods!

Now, if thou choosest to fling forth on him  
Words rough with anger thus and edged with  
scorn,

Zeus, though he sit aloof, afar, on high,  
May hear thine utterance, and make thee  
deem

His present wrath a mere pretence of pain.  
Banish, poor wretch! the passion of thy soul,  
And seek, instead, acquittance from thy  
pangs!

Belike my words seem ancientry to thee—  
Such, natheless, O Prometheus, is the meed

That doth await the overweening tongue!  
Meek wert thou never, wilt not crouch to  
pain,  
But, set amid misfortunes, cravest more!  
Now—if thou let thyself be schooled by me—  
Thou must not kick against the goad. Thou  
knowest,  
A despot rules, harsh, resolute, supreme,  
Whose law is will. Yet shall I go to him,  
With all endeavour to relieve thy plight—  
So thou wilt curb the tempest of thy tongue!  
Surely thou knowest, in thy wisdom deep,  
The saw—*Who vaunts amiss, quick pain is  
his.*

## **PROMETHEUS**

O enviable thou, and unaccused—  
Thou who wast art and part in all I dared!  
And now, let be! make this no care of thine,  
For Zeus is past persuasion—urge him not!  
Look to thyself, lest thine emprise thou rue.

## **OCEANUS**

Thou hast more skill to school thy neighbour's  
fault

Than to amend thine own: 'tis proved and  
plain,  
By fact, not hearsay, that I read this well.  
Yet am I fixed to go—withhold me not—  
Assured I am, assured, that Zeus will grant  
The boon I crave, the loosening of thy bonds.

## **PROMETHEUS**

In part I praise thee, to the end will praise;  
Goodwill thou lackest not, but yet forbear  
Thy further trouble! If thy heart be fain,  
Bethink thee that thy toil avails me not.  
Nay, rest thee well, aloof from danger's brink!  
I will not ease my woe by base relief  
In knowing others too involved therein.  
Away the thought! for deeply do I rue  
My brother Atlas' doom. Far off he stands  
In sunset land, and on his shoulder bears  
The pillar'd mountain-mass whose base is  
earth,  
Whose top is heaven, and its ponderous load  
Too great for any grasp. With pity too  
I saw Earth's child, the monstrous thing of  
war,  
That in Cilicia's hollow places dwelt—

Typho; I saw his hundred-headed form  
Crushed and constrained; yet once his stride  
was fierce,  
His jaws gaped horror and their hiss was  
death,  
And all heaven's host he challenged to the  
fray,  
While, as one vowed to storm the power of  
Zeus,  
Forth from his eyes he shot a demon glare.  
It skilled not: the unsleeping bolt of Zeus,  
The downward levin with its rush of flame,  
Smote on him, and made dumb for evermore  
The clamour of his vaunting: to the heart  
Stricken he lay, and all that mould of strength  
Sank thunder-shattered to a smouldering ash;  
And helpless now and laid in ruin huge  
He lieth by the narrow strait of sea,  
Crushed at the root of Etna's mountain-pile.  
High on the pinnacles whereof there sits  
Hephaestus, sweltering at the forge; and  
thence  
On some hereafter day shall burst and stream  
The lava-floods, that shall with ravening fangs

Gnaw thy smooth lowlands, fertile Sicily!  
Such ire shall Typho from his living grave  
Send seething up, such jets of fiery surge,  
Hot and unslaked, altho' himself be laid  
In quaking ashes by Zeus' thunderbolt.  
But thou dost know hereof, nor needest me  
To school thy sense: thou knowest safety's  
road—

Walk then thereon! I to the dregs will drain,  
Till Zeus relent from wrath, my present woe.

## **OCEANUS**

Nay, but, Prometheus, know'st thou not the  
saw— *Words can appease the angry soul's  
disease?*

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ay—if in season one apply their salve,  
Not scorching wrath's proud flesh with caustic  
tongue.

## **OCEANUS**

But in wise thought and venturous essay  
Perceivest thou a danger? prithee tell!

## **PROMETHEUS**

I see a fool's good nature, useless toil.

## **OCEANUS**

Let me be sick of that disease; I know,  
Loyalty, masked as folly, wins the way.

## **PROMETHEUS**

But of thy blunder I shall bear the blame.

## **OCEANUS**

Clearly, thy word would send me home again.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Lest thy lament for me should bring thee hate.

## **OCEANUS**

Hate from the newly-throned Omnipotence?

## **PROMETHEUS**

Be heedful—lest his will be wroth with thee!

## **OCEANUS**

Thy doom, Prometheus, cries to me *Beware!*

## **PROMETHEUS**

Mount, make away, discretion at thy side!

# OCEANUS

Thy word is said to me in act to go:  
For lo, my hippogriff with waving wings  
Fans the smooth course of air, and fain is he  
To rest his limbs within his ocean stall.

[*Exit*

## OCEANUS. CHORUS

For the woe and the wreck and the doom,  
Prometheus I utter my sighs;  
O'er my cheek flows the fountain of tears  
from tender, compassionate eyes.  
For stern and abhorred is the sway  
of Zeus on his self-sought throne,  
And ruthless the spear of his scorn,  
to the gods of the days that are done.  
And over the limitless earth  
goes up a disconsolate cry:  
*Ye were all so fair, and have fallen;  
so great and your might has gone by!*  
So wails with a mighty lament  
the voice of the mortals, who dwell  
In the Eastland, the home of the holy,  
for thee and the fate that befel;  
And they of the Colchian land, the

maidens whose arm is for war;  
And the Scythian bowmen, who roam  
by the lake of Maeotis afar;  
And the blossom of battling hordes,  
that flowers upon Caucasus' height,  
With clashing of lances that pierce,  
and with clamour of swords that smite.  
Strange is thy sorrow! one only I know  
who has suffered thy pain—  
Atlas the Titan, the god,  
in a ruthless, invincible chain!  
He beareth for ever and ever  
the burden and poise of the sky,  
The vault of the rolling heaven,  
and earth re-echoes his cry.  
The depths of the sea are troubled;  
they mourn from their caverns profound,  
And the darkest and innermost hell  
moans deep with a sorrowful sound;  
And the rivers of waters, that flow  
from the fountains that spring without  
stain,  
Are as one in the great lamentation,  
and moan for thy piteous pain.

# PROMETHEUS

Deem not that I in pride or wilful scorn  
Restrain my speech; 'tis wistful memory  
That rends my heart, when I behold myself  
Abased to wretchedness. To these new gods  
I and none other gave their lots of power  
In full attainment; no more words hereof  
I speak—the tale ye know. But listen now  
Unto the rede of mortals and their woes,  
And how their childish and unreasoning state  
Was changed by me to consciousness and  
thought.

Yet not in blame of mortals will I speak,  
But as in proof of service wrought to them.  
For, in the outset, eyes they had and saw  
not;

And ears they had but heard not; age on age,  
Like unsubstantial shapes in vision seen,  
They groped at random in the world of sense,  
Nor knew to link their building, brick with  
brick,

Nor how to turn its aspect to the sun,  
Nor how to join the beams by carpentry,  
In hollowed caves they dwelt, as emmets

dwell,

Weak feathers for each blast, in sunless  
caves.

Nor had they certain forecast of the cold,  
Nor of the advent of the flowery spring,  
Nor of the fruitful summer. All they wrought,  
Unreasoning they wrought, till I made clear  
The laws of rising stars, and inference dim,  
More hard to learn, of what their setting  
showed.

I taught to them withal that art of arts,  
The lore of number, and the written word  
That giveth sense to sound, the tool  
wherewith

The gift of memory was wrought in all,  
And so came art and song. I too was first  
To harness 'neath the yoke strong animals,  
Obedient made to collar and to weight,  
That they might bear whate'er of heaviest toil  
Mortals endured before. For chariots too  
I trained, and docile service of the rein,  
Steeds, the delight of wealth and pomp and  
pride.

I too, none other, for seafarers wrought

Their ocean-roaming canvas-wingèd cars.  
Such arts of craft did I, unhappy I,  
Contrive for mortals: now, no feint I have  
Whereby I may elude my present woe.

## **CHORUS**

A rueful doom is thine! distraught of soul,  
And all astray, and like some sorry leech  
Art thou, repining at thine own disease,  
Unskilled, unknowing of the needful cure.

## **PROMETHEUS**

More wilt thou wonder when the rest thou  
hearest—

What arts for them, what methods I devised.  
Foremost was this: if any man fell sick,  
No aiding art he knew, no saving food,  
No curing oil nor draught, but all in lack  
Of remedies they dwindled, till I taught  
The medicinal blending of soft drugs,  
Whereby they ward each sickness from their  
side.

I ranged for them the methods manifold  
Of the diviner's art; I first discerned  
Which of night's visions hold a truth for day,

I read for them the lore of mystic sounds,  
Inscrutable before; the omens seen  
Which bless or ban a journey, and the flight  
Of crook-clawed birds, did I make clear to  
man—

And how they soar upon the right, for weal,  
How, on the left, for evil; how they dwell,  
Each in its kind, and what their loves and  
hates,

And which can flock and roost in harmony.  
From me, men learned what deep significance  
Lay in the smoothness of the entrails set  
For sacrifice, and which, of various hues,  
Showed them a gift accepted of the gods;  
They learned what streaked and varied  
comeliness

Of gall and liver told; I led them, too,  
(By passing thro' the flame the thigh-bones,  
wrapt

In rolls of fat, and th' undivided chine),  
Unto the mystic and perplexing lore  
Of omens; and I cleared unto their eyes  
The forecasts, dim and indistinct before,  
Shown in the flickering aspect of a flame.

Of these, enough is said. The other boons,  
Stored in the womb of earth, in aid of men—  
Copper and iron, silver, gold withal—  
Who dares affirm he found them ere I found?  
None—well I know—save who would babble  
lies!

Know thou, in compass of a single phrase—  
All arts, for mortals' use, Prometheus gave.

## **CHORUS**

Nay, aid not mortal men beyond their due,  
Holding too light a reckoning of thyself  
And of thine own distress: good hope have I  
To see thee once again from fetters free  
And matched with Zeus in parity of power.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Not yet nor thus hath Fate ordained the  
end—

Not until age-long pains and countless woes  
Have bent and bowed me, shall my shackles  
fall;

Art strives too feebly against destiny.

## **CHORUS**

But what hand rules the helm of destiny?

**PROMETHEUS**

The triform Fates, and Furies unforgiving.

**CHORUS**

Then is the power of Zeus more weak than theirs?

**PROMETHEUS**

He may not shun the fate ordained for him.

**CHORUS**

What is ordained for him, save endless rule?

**PROMETHEUS**

Seek not for answer: this thou may'st not learn.

**CHORUS**

Surely thy silence hides some solemn thing.

**PROMETHEUS**

Think on some other theme: 'tis not the hour,  
This secret to unveil; in deepest dark  
Be it concealed: by guarding it shall I

Escape at last from bonds, and scorn, and pain.

## CHORUS

O never may my weak and faint desire  
Strive against God most high—  
Never be slack in service, never tire  
Of sacred loyalty;  
Nor fail to wend unto the altar-side,  
Where with the blood of kine  
Steams up the offering, by the quenchless  
tide

Of Ocean, Sire divine!  
Be this within my heart, indelible—  
*Offend not with thy tongue!*  
Sweet, sweet it is, in cheering hopes to dwell,  
Immortal, ever young,  
In maiden gladness fostering evermore  
A soft content of soul!  
But ah, I shudder at thine anguish sore—  
Thy doom thro' years that roll!  
Thou could'st not cower to Zeus: a love too  
great  
Thou unto man hast given—  
Too high of heart thou wert—ah, thankless

fate!

What aid, 'gainst wrath of Heaven,  
Could mortal man afford? in vain thy gift  
To things so powerless!  
Could'st thou not see? they are as dreams  
that drift;

Their strength is feebleness  
A purblind race, in hopeless fetters bound,  
They have no craft or skill,  
That could o'erreach the ordinance profound  
of the eternal will.

Alas, Prometheus! on thy woe condign  
I looked, and learned this lore;  
And a new strain floats to these lips of mine—  
Not the glad song of yore,  
When by the lustral wave I sang to see  
My sister made thy bride,  
Decked with thy gifts, thy loved Hesione,  
And clasped unto thy side.

[*Enter IO, horned like a  
cow.*]

**IO**

Alack! what land, what folk are here?  
Whom see I clenched in rocky fetters drear

Unto the stormy crag?

for what thing done

Dost thou in agony atone?

Ah, tell me whither, well-a-day!

My feet have roamed their weary way?

Ah, but it maddens, the sting!

it burns in my piteous side!

Ah, but the vision, the spectre,

the earth-born, the myriad-eyed!

Avoid thee! Earth, hide him,

thine offspring! he cometh—O aspect of ill!

Ghostly, and crafty of face,

and dead, but pursuing me still!

Ah, woe upon me, woe ineffable!

He steals upon my track, a hound of hell—

Where'er I stray, along the sands and brine,

Weary and foodless, come his creeping eyne!

And ah, the ghostly sound—

The wax-stopped reed-flute's weird and  
drowsy drone!

Alack my wandering woes, that round and  
round

Lead me in many mazes, lost, foredone!

O child of Cronos! for what deed of wrong

Am I enthralled by thee in penance long?  
Why by the stinging bruise, the thing of fear,  
Dost thou torment me, heart and brain?  
Nay, give me rather to the flames that sear,  
Or to some hidden grave,  
Or to the rending jaws, the monsters of the  
main!  
Nor grudge the boon for which I crave, O  
king!  
Enough, enough of weary wandering,  
Pangs from which none can save!  
Hearken! in pity hold  
Io, the ox-horned maid, thy love of old!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Hear Zeus or not, I hear and know thee well,  
Daughter of Inachus; I know thee driven,  
Stung by the gadfly, mazed with agony.  
Ay, thou art she whose beauty fired the  
breast  
Of Zeus with passion; she whom Hera's hate  
Now harasses o'er leagues and leagues of  
land.

**IO**

Alack, thou namest Inachus my sire!

Wottest thou of him? how, from lips of pain,  
Comes to my woeful ears truth's very strain?

How knowest thou the curse, the burning  
fire

The god-sent, piercing pest that stings and  
clings?

Ah me! in frenzied, foodless wanderings  
Hither I come, and on me from on high

Lies Hera's angry craft! Ah, men unblest!  
Not one there is, not one, that is unblest as I.

But thou—tell me the rest!

Utter the rede of woes to come for me;

Utter the aid, the cure, if aid or cure there be!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Lo, clearly will I show forth all thy quest—

Not in dark speech, but with such simple  
phrase

As doth befit the utterance of a friend.

I am Prometheus, who gave fire to men.

## **IO**

O daring, proven champion of man's race,  
What sin, Prometheus, dost thou thus atone?

## **PROMETHEUS**

One moment since, I told my woes and  
ceased.

**IO**

Then should I plead my suit to thee in vain?

**PROMETHEUS**

Nay, speak thy need; nought would I hide from  
thee.

**IO**

Pronounce who nailed thee to the rocky cleft.

**PROMETHEUS**

Zeus, by intent; Hephaestus, by his hand.

**IO**

For what wrongdoing do these pains atone?

**PROMETHEUS**

What I have said, is said; suffice it thee!

**IO**

Yet somewhat add; forewarn me in my woe  
What time shall bring my wandering to its  
goal?

**PROMETHEUS**

Fore-knowledge is fore-sorrow; ask it not.

**IO**

Nay, hide not from me destiny's decree.

**PROMETHEUS**

I grudge thee not the gift which I withhold.

**IO**

Then wherefore tarry ere thou tell me all?

**PROMETHEUS**

Nothing I grudge, but would not rack thy soul.

**IO**

Be not compassionate beyond my wish.

**PROMETHEUS**

Well, thou art fain, and I will speak. Attend!

**CHORUS**

Nay—ere thou speak, hear me, bestow on me  
A portion of the grace of granted prayers.  
First let us learn how Io's frenzy came—  
(She telling her disasters manifold)  
Then of their sequel let her know from thee.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Well were it, Io, thus to do their will—  
Right well! they are the sisters of thy sire.  
'Tis worth the waste and effluence of time,  
To tell, with tears of perfect moan, the doom  
Of sorrows that have fallen, when 'tis sure  
The listeners will greet the tale with tears.

## **IO**

I know not how I should mistrust your  
prayer;  
Therefore the whole that ye desire of me  
Ye now shall learn in one straightforward tale.  
Yet, as it leaves my lips, I blush with shame  
To tell that tempest of the spite of Heaven,  
And all the wreck and ruin of my form,  
And whence they swooped upon me, woe is  
me!  
Long, long in visions of the night there came

Voices and forms into my maiden bower,  
Alluring me with smoothly glozing words—  
*O maiden highly favoured of high Heaven,  
Why cherish thy virginity so long?*

*Thine is it to win wedlock's noblest crown!  
Know that Zeus' heart thro' thee is all aflame,  
Pierced with desire as with a dart, and longs  
To join in utmost rite of love with thee.*

*Therefore, O maiden, shun not with disdain  
Th' embrace of Zeits, but hie thee forth  
straightway*

*To the lush growth of Lerna's meadow-land,  
Where are the flocks and steadings of thy  
home,*

*And let Zeus' eye be eased of its desire.*

Night after night, haunted by dreams like  
these,

Heartsick, I ventured at the last to tell  
Unto my sire these visions of the dark.

Then sent he many a wight, on sacred quest,  
To Delphi and to far Dodona's shrine,

Being fall fain to learn what deed or word  
Would win him favour from the powers of

heaven.

But they came back repeating oracles  
Mystic, ambiguous, inscrutable,  
Till, at the last, an utterance direct,  
Obscure no more, was brought to Inachus—  
A peremptory charge to fling me forth  
Beyond my home and fatherland, a thing  
Sent loose in banishment o'er all the world;  
And—should he falter—Zeus should launch on  
him

A fire-eyed bolt, to shatter and consume  
Himself and all his race to nothingness.  
Bowing before such utterance from the shrine  
Of Loxias, he drove me from our halls,  
Barring the gates against me: loth he was  
To do, as I to suffer, this despite:  
But the strong curb of Zeus had overborne  
His will to me-ward. As I parted thence,  
In form and mind I grew dishumanized,  
And horned as now ye see me, poison-stung  
By the envenomed bitings of the brize,  
I leapt and flung in frenzy, rushed away  
To the bright waters of Cerchneia's stream  
And Lerna's beach: but ever at my side,  
A herdsman by his heifer, Argus moved,

Earth-born, malevolent of mood, and peered,  
With myriad eyes, where'er my feet would  
roam.

But on him in a moment, unforeseen,  
Came Fate, and sundered him from life; but I,  
Still maddened by the gadfly's sting, the  
scourge

Of God's infliction, roam the weary world.  
How I have fared, thou hearest: be there  
aught

Of what remains to bear, that thou canst tell,  
Speak on! but let not thy compassion warm  
Thy words to cheering falsehood. Worst of  
woes

Are words that break their promise to our  
hope!

## **CHORUS**

Woe! woe! avaunt—thou and thy tale of  
bane!

O never, never dared I dream  
Such horror of strange sounds should pierce  
mine ear;

Such loathly sights, such tortures hard to  
bear,

Outrage, pollution, agony supreme,  
Wasting my heart with double edge of pain!  
Ah Fate, ah Fate! I gaze on Io's dole,  
And shudder to my soul!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Thou wailest all too soon, fulfilled of fear—  
Tarry awhile, till thou have learned the whole.

## **CHORUS**

Say on, reveal it! suffering souls are fain  
To know aright what yet remains to bear.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Lightly, with help of mine, did ye achieve  
That which ye first desired: from Io's mouth  
craved to hear, recounted by herself,  
The story of her strivings. Listen now  
To what shall follow, to what woefulness  
The wrath of Hera must compel this maid.

*(To Io)*

And thou, O child of Inachus, within  
Thine inmost heart store up these words of  
mine,  
That thou may'st learn thy wanderings and

their goal.

First from this spot toward the sunrise turn,  
And cross the steppe that knoweth not the  
plough:

Thus to the nomad Scythians shalt thou  
come,

Who dwell in wattled homes, not built on  
earth

But borne along on wains of sturdy wheel—  
Equipped, themselves, with bows of mighty  
reach.

Pass them avoidingly, and leave their land,  
And skirt the beaches where the tides make  
moan,

Till lo! upon the left hand thou shalt find  
The Chalybes, stout craftsmen of the steel—  
Beware of them! no gentleness is theirs,  
No kindly welcome to a stranger's foot!

Thence to the Stream of Violence shalt thou  
come—

Like name, like nature; see thou cross it not,  
( 'Tis fatal to the forder!) till thou come  
Right to the very Caucasus, the peak  
That overtops the world, and from its brows

The river pants in spray its wrathful stream.  
Thence, o'er the pinnacles that court the  
stars,  
Onward and southward thou must take thy  
way,  
And reach the warlike horde of Amazons,  
Maidens through hate of man; and gladly  
they  
Will guide thy maiden feet. That host, in days  
That are not yet, shall fix their home and  
dwell  
At Themiscyra, on Thermodon's bank,  
Nigh whereunto the grim projecting fang  
Of Salmydessus' cape affronts the main,  
The seaman's curse, to ships a stepmother!  
Then at the jutting land, Cimmerian styled,  
That screens the narrowing portal of the  
mere,  
Thou shalt arrive; pass o'er it, brave at heart,  
And ferry thee across Macotis' ford.  
So shall there be great rumour evermore,  
In ears of mortals, of thy passage strange;  
And Bosporos shall be that channel's name,  
Because the ox-horned thing did pass

thereby.

So, from the wilds of Europe wander'd o'er,  
To Asia's continent thou com'st at last.

*(To the*

**CHORUS)**

And ye, what think ye? Seems he not, that  
lord

And tyrant of the gods, as tyrannous  
Unto all other lives? A high god's lust  
Constrained this mortal maid to roam the  
world!

*(To Io)*

Poor maid! a brutal wooer sure was thine!  
For know that all which I have told thee now  
Is scarce the prelude of thy woes to come.

**IO**

Alas for me, alas!

**PROMETHEUS**

Again thou criest, with a heifer's low.  
What wilt thou do, learning thy future woes?

**CHORUS**

What, hast thou further sorrows for her ear?

# **PROMETHEUS**

Yea, a vext ocean of predestined pain.

**IO**

What profit then is life to me? Ah, why  
Did I not cast me from this stubborn crag?  
So with one spring, one crash upon the  
ground,  
I had attained surcease from all my woes.  
Better it is to die one death outright  
Than linger out long life in misery.

# **PROMETHEUS**

Ill would'st thou bear these agonies of mine—  
Mine, with whose fate it standeth not to win  
The goal of death, which were release from  
pain!  
Now, there is set no limit to my woe  
Till Zeus be hurled from his omnipotence.

**IO**

Zeus hurled from pride of place! Can such  
things be?

# **PROMETHEUS**

Thou wert full fain, methinks, to see that sight!

**IO**

Even so—his overthrow who wrought my pain.

**PROMETHEUS**

Then may'st thou know thereof; such fall shall be.

**IO**

And who shall wrench the sceptre from his hand?

**PROMETHEUS**

By his own mindless counsels shall he fall.

**IO**

And how? unless the telling harm, say on!

**PROMETHEUS**

Wooing a bride, his ruin he shall win.

**IO**

Goddess, or mortal? tell me, if thou may'st.

**PROMETHEUS**

No matter which—more must not be revealed.

**IO**

Doth then a consort thrust him from his throne?

**PROMETHEUS**

The child she bears him shall o'ercome his sire.

**IO**

And hath he no avoidance of this doom?

**PROMETHEUS**

None, surely—till that I, released from bonds—

**IO**

Who can release thee, but by will of Zeus?

**PROMETHEUS**

Fate gives this duty to a child of thine!

**IO**

How? Shall a child of mine undo thy woes?

**PROMETHEUS**

Yea, of thy lineage, thirteen times removed.

**IO**

Dark beyond guessing grows thine oracle.

**PROMETHEUS**

Yea—seek not therefore to foreknow thy woes.

**IO**

As thou didst proffer hope, withdraw it not.

**PROMETHEUS**

Two tales I have—choose! for I grant thee one.

**IO**

And which be they? reveal, and leave me choice.

**PROMETHEUS**

I grant it: shall I in all clearness show  
Thy future woes, or my deliverance?

**CHORUS**

Nay! of the two, vouchsafe her wish to her  
And mine to me, deigning a truth to each—  
To her, reveal her future wanderings—  
To me, thy future saviour, as I crave!

# PROMETHEUS

I will not set myself to thwart your will  
Withholding aught of what ye crave to know.  
First to thee, Io, will I tell and trace  
Thy scared circuitous wandering mark it well,  
Deep in retentive tablets of the soul.  
When thou hast overpast the ferry's flow  
That sunders continent from continent,  
Straight to the eastward and the flaming face  
Of dawn, and highways trodden by the sun,  
Pass, till thou come unto the windy land  
Of daughters born to Boreas: beware  
Lest the strong spirit of the stormy blast  
Snatch thee aloft, and sweep thee to the  
void,  
On wings of raving wintry hurricane!  
Wend by the noisy tumult of the wave,  
Until thou reach the Gorgon-haunted plains  
Beside Cisthene. In that solitude  
Dwell Phorcys' daughters, beldames worn  
with time,  
Three, each swan-shapen, single-toothed,  
and all  
Peering thro' shared endowment of one eye;

Never on them doth the sun shed his rays,  
Never falls radiance of the midnight moon.  
But, hard by these, their sisters, clad with  
wings,

Serpentine-curved, dwell, loathed of mortal  
men,—

The Gorgons!—he of men who looks on them  
Shall gasp away his life. Of such fell guard  
I bid thee to beware. Now, mark my words  
When I another sight of terror tell—

Beware the Gryphon pack, the hounds of  
Zeus,

As keen of fang as silent of their tongues!

Beware the one-eyed Arimasian band

That tramp on horse-hoofs, dwelling by the  
ford

Of Pluto and the stream that flows with gold:

Keep thou aloof from these. To the world's  
end

Thou comest at the last, the dark-faced tribe

That dwell beside the sources of the sun,

Where springs the river, Aethiopian named.

Make thou thy way along his bank, until

Thou come unto the mighty downward slope

Where from the overland of Bybline hills  
Nile pours his hallowed earth-refreshing  
wave.

He by his course shall guide thee to the realm  
Named from himself, three-angled, water-  
girt;

There, Io, at the last, hath Fate ordained,  
For thee and for thy race, the charge to  
found,

Far from thy native shore, a new abode.  
Lo, I have said: if aught hereof appear  
Hard to thy sense and inarticulate,  
Question me o'er again, and soothly learn—  
God wot, I have too much of leisure here!

## **CHORUS**

If there be aught beyond, or aught pass'd  
o'er,

Which thou canst utter, of her woe-worn  
maze,

Speak on! if all is said, then grant to us  
That which we asked, as thou rememberest.

## **PROMETHEUS**

She now hath learned, unto its utmost end,  
Her pilgrimage; but yet, that she may know  
That 'tis no futile fable she hath heard,  
I will recount her history of toil  
Ere she came hither; let it stand for proof  
Of what I told, my forecast of the end.  
So, then—to sum in brief the weary tale—  
I turn me to thine earlier exile's close.  
When to Molossia's lowland thou hadst come,  
Nigh to Dodona's cliff and ridge sublime,  
(Where is the shrine oracular and seat  
Of Zeus, Thesprotian styled, and that strange  
thing  
And marvel past belief, the prophet-oaks  
That syllable his speech), thou by their  
tongues,  
With clear acclaim and unequivocal,  
Wert thus saluted—*Hail, O bride of Zeus  
That art to be—*hast memory thereof?  
Thence, stung anew with frenzy, thou didst  
hie  
Along the shoreward track, to Rhea's lap,  
The mighty main; then, stormily distraught,  
Backward again and eastward. To all time,

Be well assured, that inlet of the sea  
All mortal men shall call Ionian,  
In memory that Io fared thereby.  
Take this for proof and witness that my mind  
Hath more in ken than ever sense hath  
shown.

*(To the CHORUS)*

That which remains, to you and her alike  
I will relate, and, to my former words  
Reverting, add this final prophecy.

*(To Io)*

There lieth, at the verge of land and sea,  
Where Nilus issues thro' the silted sand,  
A town, Canopus called: and there at length  
Shall Zeus renew the reason in thy brain  
With the mere touch and contact of his hand  
Fraught now with fear no more: and thou  
shalt bear

A child, dark Epaphus—his very name  
Memorial of Zeus' touch that gave him life.  
And his shall be the foison and the fruit  
Of all the land enriched by spreading Nile.  
Thence the fifth generation of his seed  
Back unto Argos, yet unwillingly,

Shall flee for refuge—fifty maidens they,  
Loathing a wedlock with their next in blood,  
More kin than kind, from their sire's brother  
sprung.

And on their track, astir with wild desire,  
Like falcons fierce closing on doves that flee,  
Shall speed the suitors, craving to achieve  
A prey forbidden, a reluctant bride.

Yet power divine shall foil them, and forbid  
Possession of the maids, whom Argive land  
Shall hold protected, when unsleeping hate,  
Horror, and watchful ambush of the night,  
Have laid the suitors dead, by female hands.  
For every maid shall smite a man to death,  
Dyeing a dagger's edges in his throat—  
Such bed of love befall mine enemies!

Yet in one bride shall yearning conquer hate,  
Bidding her spare the bridegroom at her side,  
Blunting the keen edge of her set resolve.  
Thus of two scorns the former shall she  
choose,

The name of coward, not of murderess.  
In Argos shall she bear, in after time,  
A royal offspring. Long it were to tell

In clear succession all that thence shall be.  
Take this for sooth—in lineage from her  
A hero shall arise, an archer great,  
And he shall be my saviour from these woes.  
Such knowledge of the future Themis gave,  
The ancient Titaness, to me her son.  
But how, and by what skill, 'twere long to  
say,  
And no whit will the knowledge profit thee.

**IO**

O woe, O rending and convulsive pain,  
Frenzy and agony, again, again  
    Searing my heart and brain!  
O dagger of the sting, unforged with fire  
Yet burning, burning ever! O my heart,  
Pulsing with horror, beating at my breast!  
O rolling maddened eyes! away, apart,  
    Raving with anguish dire,  
I spring, by frenzy-fiends possest.  
O wild and whirling words, that sweep in  
gloom  
    Down to dark waves of doom!

[*Exit* IO.]

# CHORUS

O well and sagely was it said—

Yea, wise of heart was he who first

Gave forth in speech the thought he

nursed—

*In thine own order see thou wed!*

Let not the humble heart aspire

To the gross home of wealth and pride;

Nor be it to a hearth allied

That vaunts of many a noble sire.

O Fates, of awful empery!

Never may I by Zeus be wooed—

Never give o'er my maidenhood

To any god that dwells on high.

A shudder to my soul is sent,

Beholding Io's doom forlorn—

By Hera's malice put to scorn,

Roaming in mateless banishment.

From wedlock's crown of fair desire

I would not shrink—an idle fear!

But may no god to me draw near

With shunless might and glance of fire!

That were a strife wherein no chance  
Of conquest lies: from Zeus most high  
And his resolve, no subtlety  
Could win me my deliverance.

## **PROMETHEUS**

And yet shall Zeus, for all his stubborn pride,  
Be brought to low estate! aha, he schemes  
Such wedlock as shall bring his doom on him,  
Flung from his kingship to oblivion's lap!  
Ay, then the curse his father Cronos spake  
As he fell helpless from his age-long throne,  
Shall be fulfilled unto the utterance!  
No god but I can manifest to him  
A rescue from such ruin as impends—  
I know it, I, and how it may be foiled.  
Go to, then, let him sit and blindly trust  
His skyey rumblings, for security,  
And wave his levin with its blast of flame!  
All will avail him not, nor bar his fall  
Down to dishonour vile, intolerable  
So strong a wrestler is he moulding now  
To his own proper downfall—yea, a shape  
Portentous and unconquerably huge,  
Who truly shall reveal a flame more strong

Than is the lightning, and a crash of sound  
More loud than thunder, and shall dash to  
nought

Poseidon's trident-spear, the ocean-bane  
That makes the firm earth quiver. Let Zeus  
strike

Once on this rock, he speedily shall learn  
How far the fall from power to slavery!

## **CHORUS**

Beware! thy wish doth challenge Zeus himself.

## **PROMETHEUS**

I voice my wish and its fulfilment too.

## **CHORUS**

What, dare we look for one to conquer Zeus?

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ay—Zeus shall wear more painful bonds than  
mine

## **CHORUS**

Darest thou speak such taunts and tremble  
not?

## **PROMETHEUS**

Why should I fear, who am immortal too?

## **CHORUS**

Yet he might doom thee to worse agony.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Out on his dooming! I foreknow it all.

## **CHORUS**

Yet do the wise revere Necessity.

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ay, ay—do reverence, cringe and crouch to  
power

Whene'er, where'er thou see it! But, for me,  
I reckon of Zeus as something less than nought.  
Let him put forth his power, attest his sway,  
Howe'er he will—a momentary show,  
A little brief authority in heaven!

Aha, I see out yonder one who comes,  
A bidden courier, truckling at Zeus' nod,  
A lacquey in his new lord's livery,  
Surely on some fantastic errand sped!

*[Enter*

HERMES.

HERMES

Thou, double-dyed in gall of bitterness,  
Trickster and sinner against gods, by giving  
The stolen fire to perishable men!

Attend—the Sire supreme doth bid thee tell  
What is the wedlock which thou vauntest

now,

Whereby he falleth from supremacy?

Speak forth the whole, make all thine  
utterance clear,

Have done with words inscrutable, nor cause  
To me, Prometheus! any further toil

Or twofold journeying. Go to—thou seest

Zeus doth not soften at such words as thine!

**PROMETHEUS**

Pompous, in sooth, thy word, and swoln with  
pride,

As doth befit the lacquey of thy lords!

O ye young gods! how, in your youthful sway,

Ye deem secure your citadels of sky,

Beyond the reach of sorrow or of fall!

Have I not seen two dynasties of gods

Already flung therefrom? and soon shall see  
A third, that now in tyranny exults,  
Shamed, ruined, in an hour! What sayest  
thou?

Crouch I and tremble at these stripling  
powers?

Small homage unto such from me, or none!  
Betake thee hence, sweat back along thy  
road—

Look for no answer from me, get thee gone!

## **HERMES**

Think—it was such audacities of will  
That drove thee erst to anchorage in woe!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Ay—but mark this: mine heritage of pain  
I would not barter for thy servitude.

## **HERMES**

Better, forsooth, be bond-slave to a crag,  
Than true-born herald unto Zeus the Sire!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Take thine own coin—taunts for a taunting slave!

**HERMES**

Proud art thou in thy circumstance, methinks!

**PROMETHEUS**

Proud? in such pride then be my foemen set,  
And I to see—and of such foes art thou!

**HERMES**

What, blam'st thou me too for thy sufferings?

**PROMETHEUS**

Mark a plain word—I loathe all gods that are,  
Who reaped my kindness and repay with  
wrong.

**HERMES**

I hear no little madness in thy words.

**PROMETHEUS**

Madness be mine, if scorn of foes be mad.

**HERMES**

Past bearing were thy pride, in happiness.

# **PROMETHEUS**

Ah me!

# **HERMES**

Zeus knoweth nought of sorrow's cry!

# **PROMETHEUS**

He shall! Time's lapse bringeth all lessons home.

# **HERMES**

To thee it brings not yet discretion's curb.

# **PROMETHEUS**

No—else I had not wrangled with a slave!

# **HERMES**

Then thou concealest all that Zeus would learn?

# **PROMETHEUS**

As though I owed him aught and should repay!

# **HERMES**

Scornful thy word, as though I were a child—

# **PROMETHEUS**

Child, ay—or whatsoe'er hath less of brain—  
Thou, deeming thou canst wring my secret  
out!

No mangling torture, no, nor sleight of power  
There is, by which he shall compel my  
speech,

Until these shaming bonds be loosed from  
me.

So, let him fling his blazing levin-bolt!

Let him with white and winged flakes of  
snow,

And rumbling earthquakes, whelm and shake  
the world!

For nought of this shall bend me to reveal  
The power ordained to hurl him from his  
throne.

# **HERMES**

Bethink thee if such words can mend thy lot

# **PROMETHEUS**

All have I long foreseen, and all resolved.

# **HERMES**

Perverse of will! constrain, constrain thy soul  
To think more wisely in the grasp of doom!

## **PROMETHEUS**

Truce to vain words! as wisely wouldst thou  
strive

To warn a swelling wave: imagine not  
That ever I before thy lord's resolve  
Will shrink in womanish terror, and entreat,  
As with soft suppliance of female hands,  
The Power I scorn unto the utterance,  
To loose me from the chains that bind me  
here—

A world's division 'twixt that thought and me!

## **HERMES**

So, I shall speak, whate'er I speak, in vain!  
No prayer can melt or soften thy resolve;  
But, as a colt new-harnessed champs the bit,  
Thou strivest and art restive to the rein.  
But all too feeble is the stratagem  
In which thou art so confident: for know  
That strong self-will is weak and less than  
nought  
In one more proud than wise. Bethink thee

now—

If these my words thou shouldst disregard—  
What storm, what might as of a great third  
wave

Shall dash thy doom upon thee, past escape!  
First shall the Sire, with thunder and the  
flame

Of lightning, rend the crags of this ravine,  
And in the shattered mass o'erwhelm thy  
form,

Immured and morticed in a clasping rock.  
Thence, after age on age of durance done,  
Back to the daylight shall thou come, and  
there

The eagle-hound of Zeus, red-ravening, fell  
With greed, shall tatter piecemeal all thy flesh  
To shreds and ragged vestiges of form—  
Yea, an unbidden guest, a day-long bane,  
That feeds, and feeds—yea, he shall gorge  
his fill

On blackened fragments, from thy vitals  
gnawed.

Look for no respite from that agony  
Until some other deity be found,

Ready to bear for thee the brunt of doom,  
Choosing to pass into the lampless world  
Of Hades and the murky depths of hell.  
Hereat, advise thee! 'tis no feigned threat  
Whereof I warn thee, but an o'er-true tale.  
The lips of Zeus know nought of lying speech,  
But wreak in action all their words foretell.  
Therefore do thou look warily, and deem  
Prudence a better saviour than self-will.

## **CHORUS**

Meseems that Hermes speaketh not amiss,  
Bidding thee leave thy wilfulness and seek  
The wary walking of a counselled mind.  
Give heed! to err through anger shames the  
wise.

## **PROMETHEUS**

All, all I knew, whate'er his tongue  
In idle arrogance hath flung.  
'Tis the world's way, the common lot—  
Foe tortures foe and pities not.  
Therefore I challenge him to dash  
His bolt on me, his zigzag flash  
Of piercing, rending flame!

Now be the welkin stirred amain  
With thunder-peal and hurricane,  
And let the wild winds now displace  
From its firm poise and rooted base  
The stubborn earthly frame!  
The raging sea with stormy surge  
Rise up and ravin and submerge  
Each high star-trodden way!  
Me let him lift and dash to gloom  
Of nether hell, in whirls of doom!  
Yet—do he what extremes he may—  
He cannot crush my life away!

## **HERMES**

Such are the counsels, such the strain,  
Heard from wild lips and frenzied brain!  
In word or thought, how fails his fate  
Of madness wild and desperate?

*(To the CHORUS)*

But ye, who stand compassionate  
Here at his side, depart in haste!  
Lest of his penalty ye taste,  
And shattered brain and reason feel  
The roaring, ruthless thunder-peal!

## CHORUS

Out on thee! if thy heart be fain  
I should obey thee, change thy strain!  
Vile is thine hinted cowardice,  
And loathed of me thy base advice,  
Weakly to shrink from pain!  
Nay, at his side, whate'er befall,  
I will abide, endure it all!  
Among all things abhorr'd, accurst,  
I hold betrayers for the worst!

## HERMES

Nay, ye are warned! remember well—  
Nor cry, when meshed in nets of hell,  
*Ah cruel fate, ah Zeus unkind—*  
*Thus, by a sentence undivined,*  
*To dash us to the realms below!*  
It is no sudden, secret blow—  
Nay, ye achieve your proper woe—  
Warn'd and foreknowing shall ye go,  
Through your own folly trapped and ta'en,  
Into the net the Fates ordain—  
The vast, illimitable pain!

[ *Thunder and lightning.*

## **PROMETHEUS**

Hark! for no more in empty word,  
But in sheer sooth, the world is stirred!  
The massy earth doth heave and sway,  
And thro' their dark and secret way  
    The cavern'd thunders boom!  
See, how they gleam athwart the sky,  
    The lightnings, through the gloom!  
And whirlwinds roll the dust on high,  
And right and left the storm-clouds leap  
To battle in the skyey deep,  
In wildest uproar unconfined,  
An universe of warring wind!  
And falling sky and heaving sea  
Are blent in one! on me, on me,  
Nearer and ever yet more near,  
Flaunting its pageantry of fear,  
Drives down in might its destined road  
The tempest of the wrath of God!

O holy Earth, O mother mine!

O Sky, that biddest speed along

Thy vault the common Light divine,—

Be witness of my wrong!

*[ The rocks are rent with fire  
and earthquake,  
and fall, burying PROMETHEUS  
in the ruins.*