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THE HEIRS OF
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SOPHOCLES.
PLANS
SOPHOCLES.

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"This translation is remarkably close and concise, and the language is easy and natural, and suited to the sentiments. In a word, the English poet seems to have preserved that elegance and simplicity for which the Grecian is so deservedly admired."

—Monthly Review
This excellent tragic writer was born at Colone, a village in Attica, about 497 years before Christ. Although his father Sophilus is said to have exercised the humble occupation of a blacksmith, he did not neglect the education of his son, who, while he gave early indications of extraordinary genius, and a remarkable aptitude for the higher branches of literature, at the same time cultivated the accomplishments of music and dancing, in both of which arts he failed not to distinguish himself, particularly after the battle of Salamis, when he led a chorus of youths round a trophy erected in honour of that victory.

As the profession of arms was, at that period, more honourable, and probably more advantageous, than any other, Sophocles entered the army at the usual age, and had the honour to serve under the great Pericles. His valour and conduct were here so conspicuous, that in a short time he was appointed to a high military dignity, and in several battles is reported to have shared in the supreme command.
of the Athenian armies with his former leader. His services in the field were rewarded by his fellow-citizens, who raised him to the high office of archon, the duties of which he executed with credit and honour.

The first appearance of Sophocles as a dramatic writer left no room for doubting the splendour of his talents. The Athenians had captured the island of Scyros, and, in order to celebrate that memorable event, a yearly contest for tragedy was instituted. Sophocles, on this occasion, although he was but twenty-nine years of age, obtained the prize over many experienced competitors, in the number of whom was Æschylus, his former friend and preceptor.

He was less fortunate in domestic life than in his public career. His children, disappointed in their eager wishes for his death, and solicitous for the immediate possession of his fortune, summoned him before the judges, at a very advanced age, representing him as in a state of dotage, and utterly incapable of conducting his affairs. The old man appeared in court to repel this charge; and producing the tragedy of Ædipus Coloneus, which he had just finished, asked his judges if the author of such a work could be justly taxed with insanity. The judges, indignant at the imputation which had been preferred against him, confirmed him in the possession of his rights: his ungrateful children were covered with shame and confusion; and all the people who were present conducted him home in triumph. His death, at the age of ninety-one, 406 years be-
fore the Christian era, is said to have been occasioned by excessive joy at obtaining a prize at the Olympic games.

Sophocles is supposed to have written one hundred and twenty tragedies, only seven of which are now remaining: these were received by his contemporaries with that applause which they so well deserved. It is remarked, that he never acted himself in any of his plays, as Æschylus and Euripides were accustomed to do, his voice being too weak and low for the stage; though he was always present at the representation, and received the applause of the audience, who, we are told, seldom failed to signify their approbation, both at his entering and quitting the theatre. He was crowned twenty times; and though he probably sometimes shared the fate of his brother poets by unjust censure, could never be prevailed on, as his rivals were, to quit his native country, to which he took every opportunity of showing his sincerest attachment.

The drama is indebted to this great man for the introduction of a third speaker to the dialogue, into which his genius infused greater ease and elegance; to this improvement he likewise added the decoration of painted scenery, and paid a stricter attention to probability and natural incident. The Athenians erected a sumptuous monument to his memory, on which was engraved a swarm of bees, in allusion to the name generally given him on account of his verses, which are, indeed, wonderfully soft and harmonious.

So just an estimate of the merits of Sophocles is
formed by the learned and elegant writer whose translation is here adopted, that we cannot better conclude this brief sketch than in presenting it to our readers.

"Sophocles," says Dr. Francklin, "may with great truth be called the prince of ancient dramatic poets: his fables (at least, of all those tragedies now extant) are interesting and well chosen; his plots regular and well conducted; his sentiments elegant, noble, and sublime; his incidents natural; his diction simple; his manners and characters striking, equal, and unexceptionable; his choruses well adapted to the subject; his moral reflections pertinent and useful; and his numbers, in every part, to the last degree sweet and harmonious. The warmth of his imagination is so tempered by the perfection of his judgment, that his spirit, however animated, never wanders into licentiousness; while, at the same time, the fire of his genius seldom suffers the most uninteresting parts of his tragedy to sink into coldness and insipidity. His peculiar excellence seems to lie in the descriptive; and, exclusive of his dramatic powers, he is certainly a greater poet than either of his illustrious rivals. Were I to draw a similitude of him from painting, I should say that his ordnance was so just, his figures so well grouped and contrasted, his colours so glowing and natural; all his pieces, in short, executed in so bold and masterly a style, as to wrest the palm from every other hand, and point him out as the Raphael of the ancient drama."
SOPHOCLES.
A J A X.
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Minerva.
Ulysses.
Ajax.
Tecmessa, wife of Ajax.
Teucer, brother to Ajax.
Agamemnon.
Menelaus.
Messenger.
Chorus, composed of ancient men of Salamis.
AJAX.

ARGUMENT.

After the death of Achilles, the Greeks published their intention of bestowing the arms of their deceased hero on that chief who had rendered the greatest services to the common cause. Ajax and Ulysses each prosecuted their claims for this honour, which were decided in favour of the latter by the casting vote of Menelaus. Ajax, frantic with disappointment, and instigated by Minerva, slaughtered a whole flock of sheep, supposing them to be the sons of Atreus; and, after his recovery from delirium, stabbed himself through grief. His half-brother, Teucer, to whom he was tenderly attached, was about to bestow on him the usual rites of sepulture, when he was interrupted by Agamemnon and Menelaus, who sternly insisted that the body of Ajax should remain unburied, in revenge for their intended murder. Teucer, however, persevered in his pious design, and defied the power of the two princes; when Ulysses, by his influence, persuaded Agamemnon to remit the penalty, and to suffer Teucer to bury the body of Ajax without further molestation.

ACT I.

Scene,—a field near the camp of Ajax.

MINerva, UlySSeS.

MIN. Son of Laertes, thy unwearied spirit Is ever watchful to surprise the foe. I have observed thee wandering mid the tents In search of Ajax, where his station lies, At the utmost verge, measuring o'er his steps But late impress'd: like Sparta's hounds of scent,

6 The dogs of Sparta were remarkable for their swiftness and quick scent:

SOPH.—B
Sagacious dost thou trace him, nor in vain;
For know, the man thou seek'st is not far from thee
Yonder he lies, with reeking brow and hands
Deep-stain'd with gore: cease then thy search, and
tell me
Wherefore thou comest, that so I may inform
Thy doubting mind, and best assist thy purpose.

Ulyss. Minerva, dearest of the immortal powers!
(For, though I see thee not, that well-known voice
Doth like the Tyrrhene trump awake my soul.)
Right hast thou said, I come to search my foe,
Shield-bearing Ajax; him alone I seek:
A deed of horror hath he done this night,
If it be he; for yet we are to know
The certain proof, and therefore came I here
A willing messenger: the cattle all,
Our flocks and herds, are, with their shepherds,
slain!

To Ajax every tongue imputes the crime:
One of our spies, who saw him on the plam,
His sword still reeking with fresh blood, confirm'd
it:
Instant I fled to search him, and sometimes
I trace his footsteps, which again I lose,
I know not how. In happy hour thou comest
To aid me, goddess; thy protecting hand
Hath ruled me ever, and to thee I trust
My future fate.

Min. I know it well, Ulysses,
And therefore came to guard and to assist thee,
Propitious to thy purpose.

Ulyss. Do I right,
My much-lov'd mistress?

Min. Doubtless; his foul deed
Doth well deserve it.

Ulyss. What could prompt his hand
To such a desperate act?

Min. Achilles' arms;

His rage for loss of them.
AJAX.—ACT I. 15

ULYS.  But wherefore thus
Destroy the flock?

MIN. 'Twas in your blood he thought
His hands were stain'd.

ULYS. Against the Grecians, then,
Was all his wrath?

MIN. And fatal had it proved 40
To them, if I had not prevented it.

ULYS. What daring insolence could move his soul
To such a deed?

MIN. Alone by night he wander'd
In secret to attack you.

ULYS. Did he come
Close to our tents?

MIN. Even to the double portal, 45
Where rest your chiefs.

ULYS. What power could then withhold
His maddening hand?

MIN. I purposely deceived
His sight, and saved him from the guilty joy,
Turning his rage against the mingled flocks,
Your gather'd spoil; on these with violence 50
He rush'd, and slaughter'd many: now he thought
That he had slain the Atridæ, now believed
Some other chiefs had perished by his hand.
I saw his madness, and still urged him on,
That he might fall into the snare I laid. 55
Tired with his slaughter, now he binds in chains
The living victim, drives the captive herd
Home to his tent, nor doubts but they are men:
There beats with many a stripe the helpless foe.
But I will show thee this most glaring phrensy, 60
That to the Grecians what thy eyes beheld
Thou mayst report: be confident, nor fear
His utmost malice; I shall turn his sight
Askant from thee. Ajax! what, ho! come forth!
Thou, who dost bind in chains thy captive foes; 65
Ajax, I say, come forth before the portal!

ULYS. What wouldst thou do, Minerva? Do not call him.
MIN. What should Ulysses fear?  
ULYS. O! by the gods I do entreat thee, let him stay within.  
MIN. But wherefore? Thou hast seen him here before.  
ULYS. He ever was, and is, my deadliest foe.  
MIN. O! but to laugh an enemy to scorn is mirth most grateful.  
ULYS. I had rather still He came not here.  
MIN. And art thou then afraid To see a madman?  
ULYS. I should little dread The sight of Ajax in his better mind.  
MIN. He will not see thee, be thou e'er so near.  
ULYS. Impossible! his eyes are still the same.  
MIN. But I shall throw a veil of darkness e'er them.  
ULYS. By powers immortal all things may be done.  
MIN. Wait then in silence till he comes.  
ULYS. I will; and yet, 'twere better to retire.  
MIN. What, ho! Ajax, again I call thee; wherefore pay'st thou So little reverence to thy guardian power?

AJAX, MINERVA, ULYSSES.

AJAX. Hail to the daughter of great Jove! to thee, Minerva, hail! thou comest in happy hour; For I will crown thee with the golden spoils, Which I have gain'd by thy assisting hand.  
MIN. Well hast thou spoke; but say, has Ajax dipp'd His spear in Grecian blood?

82 Sophocles has closely copied his great master, Homer, in the character of Ulysses, who is drawn by them both as a man of extraordinary prudence and circumspection, with more caution than courage, and more cunning than generosity.
AJAX.—ACT I.

It is my boast;

I'll not deny it.

Did the Atridae feel
Thy vengeful arm?

They never will again

Dishonour Ajax.

If I understand thee,

They are both dead.

They are; now let them come
And take my arms away.

But tell me, Ajax;

Laertes' son, hath he escaped thy wrath?

Talk'st thou of him, that fox accursed?

I mean

Thy foe, Ulysses.

O! he is my captive,
The fairest of my spoils; I have him here;
He shall not perish yet.

What 'vantage then

Mean'st thou to draw from his confinement?

First,

I'll have him bound to the pillar.

And what then

Wouldst thou inflict?

His limbs all purpled o'er

With many a bloody strife, he shall be slain.

Do not torment him thus.

In all things else,

Minerva, would I gratify thy will;
But this, and this alone, must be his fate.

Since 'tis so pleasing to thee, be it so,

Nor quit thy purpose.

I must to my work;

Thus, great Minerva, mayst thou ever smile

Propitious on me, and assist thy Ajax!  

[Exit.

MINERVA, ULYSSES.

Behold, Ulysses, here the mighty strength
Of power divine; lived there a man more wise,
More famed for noble deeds, than Ajax was?

Ulyss. None, none indeed: alas! I pity him; Ev'n in a foe I pity such distress,
For he is wedded to the worst of woes:
His hapless state reminds me of my own,
And tells me that frail mortals are no more
Than a vain image and an empty shade.

Min. Let such examples teach thee to beware
Against the gods thou utter aught profane:
And if perchance in riches or in power
Thou shinest superior, be not insolent;
For, know, a day sufficeth to exalt
Or to depress the state of mortal man;
The wise and good are by the gods beloved,
But those who practise evil they abhor. [Execunt.

CHORUS.

To thee, O Ajax, valiant son
Of illustrious Telamon,
Monarch of the sea-girt isle,
Fair Salamis, if Fortune smile
On thee, I raise the tributary song,
For praise and virtue still to thee belong;
But when, inflicted by the wrath of Jove,
Grecian slander blasts thy fame,
And foul reproach attains thy name,
Then do I tremble like the fearful dove.

So the last unhappy night,
Clamours loud did reach mine ear
And filled my anxious heart with fear,
Which talk'd of Grecian cattle slain,
And Ajax maddening o'er the plain,
Pleased at his prey, rejoicing at the sight.

129 The chorus is formed, with great propriety, of Salamian soldiers, the countrymen and followers of Ajax, who, having heard the report, already spread through the army, of Ajax's madness, and the slaughter of the cattle, express the deepest concern for their unhappy master.
Thus false Ulysses can prevail,
Whispering to all his artful tale,
His tale, alas! too willingly received;
While those who hear are glad to know,
And happy to insult thy wo;
For, who asperse the great are easily believed.

The poor, like us, alone are free
From the darts of calumny,
While envy still attends on high estate;
Small is the aid which we can lend
Without the rich and powerful friend;
The great support the low, the low assist the great;
But 'tis a truth which fools will never know.
From such alone the clamours came
Which strove to hurt thy spotless fame,
While we can only weep, and not believe thy wo.
Happy to 'scape thy piercing sight,
Behold them wing their rapid flight,
As trembling birds from hungry vultures fly:
Sudden again shouldst thou appear,
The cowards would be mute with fear,
And all their censures in a moment die.

Cynthia, goddess of the grove,
Daughter of immortal Jove,
To whom at Tauris frequent altars rise,
Indignant might inspire the deed,
And bid the guiltless cattle bleed,
Deprived of incense due, and wonted sacrifice,
Perhaps, sad cause of all our grief and shame!
The god of war, with brazen shield,
For fancied injuries in the field,
Might thus avenge the wrong, and brand thy name:

For, never, in his perfect mind,
Had Ajax been to ill inclined:
On flocks and herds his rage had never spent:
It was inflicted from above.
May Phæbus and all-powerful Jove
Avert the crime, or stop the punishment!
If to the Atrids the bold fiction came
From Sisyphus' detested race,
No longer, Ajax, hide thy face,
But from thy tents come forth, and vindicate thy fame.

Ajax, thy too long repose
Adds new vigour to thy foes,
As flames from aiding winds still fiercer grow;
While the loose laugh, and shameless lie, and all their bitter calumny,
With double weight oppress, and fill our hearts with wo.

ACT II.

TECMESSA, CHORUS.

Tec. Sons of Erectheus, of Athenian race,
Ye brave companions of the valiant Ajax,
Oppress'd with grief behold a wretched woman,
Far from her native soil, appointed here
To watch your hapless lord, and mourn his fate.
Cho. What new misfortune hath the night brought forth!
Say, daughter of Teleutas! for with thee,
His captive bride, the noble Ajax deigns
To share the nuptial bed; and therefore thou Canst best inform us.

184 Or, in other words, from Ulysses, whom the chorus means to reproach as the reputed son of Sisyphus.
193 Erectheus is reported to have been the offspring of Vulcan and the earth; and from him the Athenians boasted their descent. Salamis was not far from Athens; Sophocles therefore salutes the followers of Ajax by the name of Athenians. For joining the inhabitants of Salamis to the Athenians, Sophocles had the authority of Homer.
199 Teleutas was a petty king in Phrygia, whose dominions being taken and plundered by Ajax, his daughter, Tecmessa, became the victor's captive, and by her he had a son named Eury- saces.
AJAX.—ACT II.

Tsc. How shall I declare,
Sadder than death, the unutterable wo!
This night, with madness seized, hath Ajax done
A dreadful deed: within thou mayst behold
The tents o’erspread with bloody carcasses
Of cattle slain, the victims of his rage.

Cho. Sad news indeed thou bring’st of that brave
man;
A dire disease, and not by human aid
To be removed; already Greece hath heard,
And wondering crowds repeat the dreadful tale.
Alas! I fear the event: I fear me much,
Lest (with their flocks and herds the shepherds slain)
Against himself he lift his murderous hand.

Tsc. Alas! this way he led his captive spoils,
And some he slew, and others tore in sunder:
From out the flock two rams of silver hue
He chose; from one the head and tongue divided,
He cast them from him; then the other, chain’d
Fast to the pillar, with a doubled rein
Bore cruel stripes, and bitterest execrations,
Which not from mortal came, but were inspired
By that avenging god who thus torments him.

Cho. Now then, my friends (for so the time de-
mands),
Each o’er his head should cast the mournful veil,
And instant fly, or to our ships repair,
And sail with speed; for dreadful are the threats
Of the Atridae; death may be our lot,
And we shall meet an equal punishment
With him whom we lament, our frantic lord.

Tsc. He raves not now; but, like the southern
blast,
When lightnings cease and all the storm is o’er,
Grows calm again; yet, to his sense restored,
He feels new griefs: for, O! to be unhappy,
And know ourselves alone the guilty cause
Of all our sorrows, is the worst of woes.
Cho. Yet if his rage subside, we should rejoice:
The ill removed, we should remove our care.

Tec. Hadst thou then rather, if the choice were given,
Thyself at ease, behold thy friend in pain,
Than with thy friend be join'd in mutual sorrow?

Cho. The double grief is sure the most oppressive.

Tec. Therefore, though not distemper'd, I am wretched.

Cho. I understand thee not.

Tec. The noble Ajax,
While he was mad, was happy in his phrensy,
And yet the while affected me with grief
Who was not so; but now his rage is o'er,
And he has time to breathe from his misfortune,
Himself is almost dead with grief, and I
Not less unhappy than I was before.

Is it not double, then?

Cho. It is indeed;
And much I fear the wrath of angry Heaven,
If from his madness ceased he yet receive
No kind relief.

Tec. 'Tis so; and 'twere most fit
You knew it well.

Cho. Say then how it began;

For, like thyself, we feel for his misfortunes.

Tec. Since you partake the sorrows of a friend,
I'll tell you all: know then, at dead of night,
What time the evening tapers were expired,
Snatching his sword, he seem'd as if he meant
To roam abroad: I saw and chid him for it:
"What wouldst thou do," I cried, "my dearest Ajax!
Unask'd, uncall'd for, whither wouldst thou go?
No trumpet sounds to battle; the whole host
Is wrapp'd in sleep." Then did he answer me
With brief but sharp rebuke, as he was wont,—
"Woman, thy sex's noblest ornament
Is silence." Thus reproved, I said no more;
Then forth he rush'd alone, where, and for what,
AJAX.—ACT II.

I knew not; but returning, he brought home,
In chains the captive herd: in pieces some
He tore, while others, bound like slaves, he lash'd
Indignant; then out at the portal ran,
And with some shadow seem'd to hold discourse;
Against the Atridae and Ulysses oft
Would he inveigh; or, laughing loud, rejoice
That he had ta'en revenge for all his wrongs:
Then back he came. At length, by slow degrees,
His phrensy ceased; when, soon as he beheld
The tents o'erwhelm'd with slaughter, he cried out,
And beat his brain; roll'd o'er the bloody heaps
Of cattle slain, and tore his clotted hair,
Long fixed in silence: then, with horrid threats,
He bade me tell him all that had befallen,
And what he had been doing: I obey'd,
Trembling with fear, and told him all I knew.
Instant he poured forth bitterest lamentations,
Such as I ne'er had heard from him before;
For grief like that, he oft would say, betray'd
A weak and little mind; and therefore ever,
When sorrow came, refrain'd from loud complaint;
And, like the lowing heifer, inly mourn'd.
But sinking now beneath this sore distress,
He will not taste of food or nourishment;
Silent he sits, amid the slaughter'd cattle;
Or, if he speaks, utters such dreadful words
As show a mind intent on something ill.
Now then, my friends (for therefore came I hither),
O! if ye have the power, assist me now:
Perhaps ye may; for oft the afflicted man
Will listen to the counsels of a friend.

Chor. O daughter of Teleutas, horrible
Indeed thy tidings are of noble Ajax,
Thus raving, and thus miserable.

AJAX. [within, groans.]

Tw. Louder you'll hear him soon. Mark'd ye, my
friends,

How deep his groans? 
AJAX. [within.] O me! He seems to rave,
Or mourns, reflecting on his madness pass'd.

AJAX. [within.] Boy! boy!

Tec. Alas! he calls Euryssaces,
Where art thou, child? What would he have with thee?

AJAX. [within.] Teucer, 'tis thee I call; where art thou, Teucer!

Still must he chase his prey, while Ajax dies?

Chor. He seems of perfect mind: open the doors;
Let him come forth. Who knows but sight of us
May keep him so?

Tec. I'll open them: now see
[The doors are thrown open and Ajax discover'd.
Your master there, and judge of his condition.

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX. My dear companions, who alone deserve
The name of friends, ye see the dreadful storm
How it o'erwhelms me.

Chor. What thou saidst, alas! [aside to Tecmessa.
Was but too true: he seems indeed distracted.

AJAX. My fellow-sailors! whose assisting hand
Plied the tough oar, and led me through the main; 321
From you alone can I expect to meet
Or love or friendship; therefore show it now,
And kill me.

Chor. Talk not thus, nor thus increase
By added woes thy dreadful malady.

AJAX. Dost thou behold this once intrepid Ajax,
The brave, the mighty, long for strength renown'd,
And dauntless courage in the bloody field;—
Dost thou behold him? O, what laughter now,
What vile reproach must he sustain!

Tec. O Ajax, 330

My lord, my master, do not talk thus sadly.

AJAX. [to Tecmessa.] Wilt thou not home! Wilt
not be gone!
Ajax.—Act II.

TEC. O me!
CHO. Be patient; by the gods, let me entreat thee,
Be more composed.

AJAX. Wretch that I was, to let
The cursed Atridæ 'scape, and shed the blood
Of harmless cattle!

CHO. But why sorrow thus
For what is past, and cannot be recalled?

AJAX. How will that subtle instrument of ill,
Laertes' praying son, insult me now,
And smile at my misfortunes!

CHO. That must be
As seems most fitting to the gods; from them
Or grief or joy must flow.

AJAX. O, would to Heaven
That I could see him, wretched as I am!

CHO. This is no time for boasting: see'st thou not
How very weak thou art?

AJAX. Almighty Jove!

My great progenitor! O grant me this:
Grant me to slay that hateful, talking slave,
With the proud princes; then, well pleased, myself
Should perish last.

TEC. O! if thou pray'st for death,
Pray too for mine; for wherefore should I live
When thou art gone?

AJAX. O darkness, my best light
And hope! O wrap me in thy friendly shade,
A willing guest! I dare not look for help,
Or from the gods above, or men below:
The powerful daughter of eternal Jove
To death devotes me. Whither can I fly,
Or where remain, my fame and glory lost
In this sad phrenzy? left without a friend,
And the whole army bent on my destruction!

346 Ajax was the son of Telamon, the son of Æacus, the son of Jove: Jupiter therefore was his great-grandfather.
TEC. Alas! how dreadful 'tis to hear such words, Which Ajax never would have spoke before! 361
AJAX. Ye well-known floods that roll into the main!
Ye caves and forests by the rocky shore!
Years heap'd on years, fast by the walls of Troy
Have ye detain'd me; but no longer now 365
Among the living shall ye ever see
The hapless Ajax. This remember all:
Nor shall thy neighbouring waves, Scamander, still
To Greece beneficent, behold me more:
Troy never saw (forgive the boastful word!)
370
A braver, nobler foe than Ajax was,
Though now dishonour'd thus, and thus oppress'd.
CHO. I would not have thee thus lament thy woes,
And yet I know not how to chide thee for it,
So hard thy lot.
AJAX. Who would have thought my name
Would e'er so well have suited my condition!
O! I have reason to lament indeed,
For sure there is not such a wretch as Ajax!
Long since at Troy my valiant father fought,
And to his native land, with glory crown'd,
Bore back the meed of his distinguish'd virtues:
Nor less renown'd for gallant deeds was once
His hapless son, though now he perish thus
Inglorious: yet Achilles, well I know,
Were he alive, and to bestow his arms 385
On him who best deserved the prize, to me,
And me alone, would judge the great reward:
But little deemed the Atridæ worth like mine,
And therefore gave them to that vile impostor,
Author of every evil work, Ulysses.
Had not my mind been wrought on by some power
Superior, and my eyes averted from them,

375 To know the meaning of this passage, the reader should understand Greek; it being nothing more than a poor pun on the name of Ajax, which in the original begins with Ai, an exclamation like our O! expressive of pain and sorrow.
They had not lived to give another sentence;
But Jove's great daughter, the invincible,
The dreadful Pallas, turn'd my arm aside,
Just raised against them, and inspired me thus
With horrid rage to dip my murderous hand
In blood of guiltless cattle; they, meantime,
Smile at the danger 'scaped, and triumph o'er me;
But, when the gods oppose us, valour bends
To cowardice, and strength to weakness yields;
What then can Ajax, hateful to the gods,
By Troy detested, and by Greece forsaken?
Shall I go leave the Atridæ here alone
To fight their cause, and seek my native land?
But how shall I appear before my father,
How will he bear to see his Ajax thus
Spoiled of his honours,—he who ever crown'd
With glory sits! It must not, cannot be.
What if I rush amid the Trojan host,
And with my single arm oppose them all;
Do something noble, and as nobly perish?
But that would please the Atridæ; therefore never
Shall it be done. No, I will do a deed,
To show my father that I still deserve
The name of son, and emulate my sire.
When life but teems with unremitted woes,
'Tis poor in man to wish a longer date:
For what can day on day, and year on year,
But put off wish'd-for death, and lengthen pain?
Of little worth is he who still depends
On fruitless hope; for it becomes the brave
To live with honour, or to die with glory!
Ye have my thoughts.

Chor. Thoughts not unworthy of thee,
Ajax; but quit, O! quit thy horrid purpose,
And yield thee to thy friends.

Tec. My lord, my master,
My dearest Ajax, dreadful are the ills
Which cruel Fortune brings on human kind.
Of noblest race (a better Phrygia boasts not)
Tecmessa was, and from a father sprung.
Happy and free, though now a wretched slave;
For so the gods and thy all-conquering arm
Decreed: but since, partaker of thy bed,
Thou knowest I ever have with tenderest care
Watch'd o'er thee; therefore, by domestic Jove! 434
Here I entreat thee, by the sacred tie
That binds us, let me not with foul reproach
And bitter scorn be taunted by thy foes,
When they surround me, as I know they will:
For, O! when thou shalt die, that very day 444
The Greeks with violence will seize on me:
Tecmessa, then, and thy loved son, shall eat
The bread of slavery; then some haughty lord,
Insulting loud, shall cry, "Behold the wife
Of Ajax, once the pride of all our host!"
445
How is she fallen from envied happiness
To servitude and wo!" Such vile upbraidings
Qft shall I hear, on thee and on thy race
Casting foul shame. O, then, relent, my Ajax!
Think on thy father in the vale of years;
Think on thy aged mother, who with vows
Incessant prays the gods to send thee back
Safe to thy native land; pity thy son,
Without a father in his tender youth
To form his mind, left to the unfriendly hands
455
Of those who love him not. Alas! what woes
Wilt thou bequeath to me and to thy child!
I have no hope, no stay, but thee alone!
Thy hand destroy'd my country and my mother;
Death snatch'd my father to the realms below:
Deprived of thee, what country will receive me,
Or where shall I subsist? Thou art my all,
My only safeguard: do not, do not leave me!
Naught so becomes a man as gratitude
For good received, and noble deeds are still
460
The offspring of benevolence; while he
With whom remembrance dies of blessings past,
Is vile and worthless.

Cho. 465
O, that thou couldst feel
Pity like mine for this unhappy woman!
Then wouldst thou say her words deserve thy praise.
Ajax. And praised she shall be, if she but perform
What I require.
Tec. In all I will obey thee,
My dearest Ajax!
Ajax. I would see my child;
Let him be brought.
Tec. I hid him from thy sight
Because of—
Ajax. My distemper, was it not? Tec. It was: I fear'd, indeed, thou mightst de-
stroy him.
Ajax. And well thou mightst: a deed like that became
My sad condition.
Tec. Therefore, to prevent it,
I kept him from thee.
Ajax. I approve thy caution.
Tec. What wouldst thou have me do?
Ajax. Let me behold And speak to him.
Tec. He is not far from hence;
The servants have him in their care.
Ajax. Then why
May I not see him?
Tec. Boy! thy father calls thee;
Let some one bring him hither.
Ajax. Is he coming?
Doth he not hear thee?
Tec. They have brought him to thee. [Enter servants with Eurytaces.

Eurytaces, TECMessa, Ajax, Chorus.

Ajax. Bring him this way; for if he be the son
Of Ajax, the fresh blood that hangs about me
Will not affright him: he must learn, like me,
In earliest years the savage laws of war,
And be inured to scenes of death and slaughter.
Mayst thou, my boy, be happier than thy father!
In all things else it will be no disgrace
To copy me. I envy thee, my child,
For that thou seest not thy own wretchedness;
The happiness of life is not to know.
Thy ignorance will keep thee free from pain,
Till time shall teach thee what it is to grieve
And to rejoice; then must thou show thy foes
From whom thou art descended. May the breath
Of life, meantime, nourish thy tender frame,
That thou mayst prove a comfort to thy mother!
I know there's not a Grecian that will dare
Insult thee, when thy father is no more;
For I shall leave thee to the best of guardians,
The faithful Teucer, who, far from thee now,
Sent forth by Greece, repels the invading foe.
Of you, my friends, companions of the war,
The only boon I ask is, that ye urge
This last request to Teucer; say, I begg'd
That straight to Telamon and Eribœa,
My aged parents, he would bear my child,
To be the joy of their declining years,
Till death shall call them to the shades below.
Let not my arms by Greece, or by that plague,
Ulysses, e'er be made the prize of glory
For rival chiefs: but do thou take, my boy,

[Turning to Eurydaces.]

The seven-fold, vast, impenetrable shield,
Whose name thou bear'st; the rest be buried with me.
Take hence the child with speed; nor in the tents
Let there be wailings: women ever love
To brood o'er sorrows, and indulge their wo.
Shut to the door. The wound that must be cut
No wise physician will attempt to heal
With incantation, elegy, or song.

518 The name of Eurydaces is derived from two Greek words, signifying "a broad shield." The custom of burying the arms of deceased warriors in the same grave with them is very ancient, and is practised among the Indians at this day.
AJAX.—ACT II.

Cho. I tremble when I hear thee threatening thus
With sharp and piercing voice.

Tec. Alas! my lord, 526
What wilt thou do?

AJAX. Guess not; inquire not of me;
Be silent, and be wise; it will become thee.

Tec. How am I tortured! by the gods, I beg thee,
By our dear child, do not destroy us both. 530

AJAX. Thou dost perplex me. Why revere the gods?
I am not bound to it, for I owe them nothing.

Tec. Be not so impious.

AJAX. Talk to those will hear thee.

Tec. Art thou resolved then?

AJAX. 'Tis too much; thy grief grows troublesome.

Tec. Alas! my lord, I fear— 535

AJAX. [to the chorus.] Will ye not take her hence?

Tec. O! by the gods I beg thee, be persuaded.

AJAX. Thou art mad
To think thy words will ever change my purpose.

[Exeunt.

ODE.—CHORUS.

STROPHE.

O happiest, best abode, my native isle,
Fair Salamis, encompass’d by the sea, 540
On thee while gods and men indulgent smile,
My country, O behold and pity me!
A long, long time on Ida’s plain,
Thus doom’d inglorious to remain,
While circling years roll o’er my wretched head: 545
New terrors still affright me here;
Still is my heart appall’d with fear,
Lest I should visit soon the mansions of the dead.

ANTISTROPHE.

The woes of Ajax too imbitter mine,
The bravest leader of the Grecian host, 550
Untimely visited by wrath divine,
    And in the desperate, cruel phrensy lost.
There was a time when, sent by thee,
    He gain'd the wreath of victory,
Though now his weeping friends lament his fall. 555
    The ungrateful chiefs revere no more
The virtues they admired before:
His gallant deeds are now forgotten all.

STROPHE II.

Weigh'd down with years, when thou, in hoary age,
    Unhappy mother, shalt these tidings hear 560
Of the dear Ajax, and his cruel rage,
    How wilt thou weep and wail with grief sincere!
Not like the plaintive nightingale
    That warbles sweet her tender tale,
But with loud shrieks of horrible despair:
    With sharpest anguish sore oppress'd
Then shalt thou beat thy aged breast,
And in deep sorrow rend thy wild dishevell'd hair.

ANTISTROPHE II.

'Tis better far to die, than, hopeless still
    Of cure, to languish under sore disease; 570
When mortals suffer such distinguish'd ill,
    The silent tomb is liberty and ease.
Ajax, the pride of all our host,
    His ancient fame and glory lost,
Sinks down at last o'erwhelm'd with foul disgrace:
    How will his hapless father bear
His son's distressful fate to hear,
Ev'n such as never fell on Æacus' race.

ACT III.

AJAX, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

AJAX. Still are the secret things of man reveal'd,
    And what is known, again in darkness hid, 580
By endless and immeasurable time;
And nothing is there, but in length and days
May come to pass: ev'n sacred oaths are broken;
AJAX.—ACT III.

And the fix'd mind, perverse and obstinate,
Subdued by time. I, who like harden'd steel
Was late inflexible, am softened now
To pity and remorse by this dear woman:
I cannot bear to leave her here a widow
Amid her foes, or to forsake my child,
A helpless orphan. No; I will retire
Along the shore, and seek the running stream,
Avert the wrath of angry Heaven, and wash
My crimes away; there haply shall I find
Some unfrequented spot where I may hide
This fatal weapon, this destructive sword.
O! I will bury it deep in earth, that none
May see it more; but Night and Erebus
Preserve it still from every mortal eye.
E'er since that hapless day when from the hand
Of Hector I received this dreadful boon,
Naught have I had from Greece but pain and wo.
True is the adage, "From the hands of foes
Gifts are not gifts, but injuries most fatal."
Hereafter will I yield me to the gods
And the Atridae: since they are my masters,
'Tis meet that I obey them: all that is strong
And mighty must submit to powers superior.
Doth not the snowy winter to the bloom
Of fruitful summer yield? and night obscure,
When by white steeds Aurora drawn, lights up
The rising day, submissively retire?
The roaring sea, long vex'd by angry winds,
Is lull'd by milder zephyrs to repose;
And oft the fetters of all-conq'ring sleep
Are kindly loosed to free the captive mind.
From Nature, then, who thus instructs mankind,
Why should not Ajax learn humility?
Logic since I knew to treat my foe like one
Whom I hereafter as a friend might love,
If he deserved it; and to love my friend
As if he still might one day be my foe:
For little is the trust we can repose
In human friendships: but to my intent.
Go thou, Tecmessa, and beseech the gods
To grant what I request; do you perform
The same kind office; and when Teucer comes,
Tell him the care of me and of my friends
I leave to him: whither I must, I must.
Obey my orders: wretched as I am,
Soon shall ye see me freed from all my woes.

[Exeunt.]

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Now let sounds of mirth and joy
Every blissful hour employ:
Borne on pleasure's airy wing,
Io Pan! to thee we sing;
Thee, whom on the rocky shore,
Wreck-scaped mariners adore,
Skill'd the mazy dance to lead;
Teach, O! teach our feet to tread
The round which Cretan Cnossus knows,
At Nyssa, which spontaneous rose,
Pan, O! guide this tuneful throng,
While to thee we raise the song
From Cyllene's snowy brow:
King of pleasures, hear us now!
From thy mountains, O! appear:
Joy and happiness are here:
And do thou, O Delian king,
Now thy aid propitious bring!
O! from the Icarian sea,
Come, Apollo, smile on me.

ANTISTROPHE.

All our sorrows now are o'er;
Grief and madness are no more:
See, the happy day appears,
Mighty Jove! that ends our fears.
Let us, free from every care,
Gladly to our ships repair:
Ajax now in sweet repose
Sinks, forgetful of his woes;
Humbly to the gods resigned,
He devotes his better mind:

Time, that withers, can restore
Human pleasures: now no more
Must we say our vows are vain:
Naught unhopeful should remain;

Since, beyond our wishes, see
Ajax from his madness free;
'Gainst th’ Atrides all his rage
See how milder thoughts assuage.
Bitter strife and quarrels cease;
All is harmony and peace.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mrs. My friends, I bear you news of highest import:
From Mysia’s rocky mountains hither comes
The noble Teucer: know, ev’n now I saw him
Amid the Grecian host, who, as he came,
Surrounded, and on every side pour’d forth
Reproaches on him: not a man but cried,
“Behold the brother of that frantic foe
To Greece and to her council.” Such their rage
That they had well-nigh stoned him; swords were drawn,
And dire had been the conflict, but that some
Among the aged chiefs, by calm advice,
Appeased the strife: but where is Ajax gone?
That I may tell him: from our masters naught
Should be concealed.

Cho. He is not now within,
But just steps forth, as if on some new act
Intent, well suited to his better mind.

Mrs. Alas! too late did Teucer send me here,
Or I am come too slowly.

Cho. Why regret
His absence thus?
MRS.  'Twas Teucer's strict command  
He should be kept within the tent, nor stir  690  
Till he arrived.  
CHO.  But, to his sense restor'd,  
He went to deprecate the wrath divine,  
And expiate his offence.  
MRS.  Thy words are vain,  
If Calchas prophesy a right.  
CHO.  What then  694  
Did Calchas say?  Dost thou know aught of this?  
MRS.  Thus far I know, for I was witness of it:  
Calchas, retiring from the assembled chiefs,  
Apart from the Atrideæ, gently press'd  
The hand of Teucer, and in tenderest friendship  
Besought him, that by every human art  700  
And means to be devised he would prevent  
Ajax's wandering forth this fatal day,  
If he did ever wish to see him more:  
This day alone, he said, Minerva's wrath  
Would last against him.  Oft the mighty fall  705  
In deep affliction, smit by angry Heaven,  
When, mortal born, to human laws they yield not,  
As mortals ought, submissively.  Thus spake  
The prophet, and long since was Ajax deem'd  
To have a mind disturb'd.  When first he left  710  
His native soil,—"Be conqueror, O my child!"  
His father said; "but conquer under God."  
Impious and proud his answer was: "The worst  
Of men," he cried, "assisted by the gods,  714  
May conquer: I shall do the work without them!"  
Such were his boastings: and when Pallas once,  
With kind assistance, urged him to the fight,  
Dreadful and horrible was his reply:  "Go, queen, to other Grecians lend thy aid;  
'Tis needless here; for know, where Ajax is,  720  
The foe will never come."  By words like these,  
And pride ill suited to a mortal's power,  
Did he offend the vengeful deity:  
But if he lives, we may preserve him still,
The gods assisting; so the prophet spake;
And Teucer bade me say you all should try
To keep him here: but if that cannot be,
And Calchas judge aright, he is no more.

Cho. [to Tecmessa within.] What, ho! Tecmessa,
most unhappy woman!

Come forth, and hear the tidings that he brings:
They wound us deep, and all our joys are gone.

TECMESSA, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Tec. Scarce do I breathe from still repeated woes,
And now again thou call'st me: wherefore? speak!
Cho. This messenger hath brought us dreadful news
Concerning Ajax: hear him.

Tec. Am I undone?
Mes. I know not what thou art;
But if thy Ajax be gone forth, my fears
Are great for him.

Tec. Alas! he is; but why?
How thou afflict'st me!
Mes. Teucer hath forbid
His wandering thus alone.

Tec. But why forbade him?
And where is Teucer?
Mes. He will soon be here:
He fears this fatal day.

Tec. Undone Tecmessa!
Whence are his fears? Who told him 'twould be fatal?

Mes. The historian Calchas did foretell this day
To life or death would fix the fate of Ajax.

Tec. [to the Chorus.] Assist me, friends, in this distressful hour:
To Teucer hasten, and bring him to my aid.
Some to yon western mountain bend your way,
And some to the east; find out which path he went.
Unhappy wanderer! O! he has deceived me,

Soph.—D
His former love forgotten all, and gone.
What must we do, my child? I must not sit
Inactive here: no, wheresoe'er I can,
I'll go to search him: let us haste, my friends.
Quick, fly this instant, if we mean to save
The wretched Ajax rushing on destruction.

Cho. Behold us ready, not in word alone,
But bent with speed to follow thee. Away.

[Execunt.

ACT IV.

AJAX.

There stands my sword, and fix'd as it may best
Perform its office; 'twas the gift of Hector,
My worst of foes, whom I detested ever.
The steel-devouring stone hath sharpen'd well
Its keenest edge: buried in Trojan earth
It lies, and now in kindness seems prepared
To end my wretched life: thus far is well.

And now, O Jove! (for first to thee 'tis fit
We pay due honours) I address my prayer:
I ask not much; I ask thee but to send
Some passing stranger here to bear the news
Of my unhappy fate to Teucer's ear,
That he may first behold and take me hence;
Lest, by my foes discover'd, I be cast
A prey to dogs and birds: forbid it, Jove!

Thee too, great leader of departed souls,
Terrestrial Hermes, thee I call. O! hear me;
With easy steps, and swift, conduct me safe
To my abode, soon as this fatal sword
Shall reach my breast; and you, ye virgin Powers,
From whom whate'er befalls of human ill
Cannot be hid; ye goddesses revered,
Swift to pursue the guilty;—O!' behold
The wretched Ajax by the Atridae fall!

O! seize the murderous! By my own sad hand
As I shall perish, let my foes be slain
By those whom most they love! Quick, fly, begone,
Ye vengeful Furies; gorge yourselves in blood,
Nor spare a man of all the Grecian host.
And thou, O Sun! who drivest the flaming car
Along the vaulted sky; when thou shalt see
My native soil, O! stop thy golden reins;
Tell the sad story to my hapless sire,
And my afflicted mother: when she hears
The mournful tale, her grief will fill the land
With dreadful lamentations: but 'tis vain
To weep my fate; the business must be done.
O Death! look on me, Death! I come to thee:
Soon shall we meet: but thee, O glorious Day,
And you bright charioteer, the Sun, no more
Shall I behold: ev'n now thou hear'st my last,
My dying words. O Light! O sacred soil
Of Salamis, my country, and her gods!
O noble Athens! O my loved companions!
Ye rivers, fountains, and fair fields of Troy!
And you, my honour'd parents! O, farewell!
'Tis the last word Ajax shall speak on earth:
The rest be utter'd to the shades below.

[ Ajax falls on his sword, and dies.]

CHORUS.

Semiché. I. Labour on labour! toil on toil! O, whither
Have we not wander'd? yet no place informs us
Where Ajax is: but soft, I hear a voice.

Semiché. II. 'Twas ours, your friends.

Semiché. I. What news?
Semiché. II. We've search'd along

The western shore.

Semiché. I. And is he found?
Semiché. II. Alas!

We met with naught but toil; no sight of him.

Semiché. I. We from the east return with like success;
For none have seen or heard of him that way.
Semele. Theo. Who will inform us? who will say
Where cruel Ajax bent his way?
Will not the watchful hind, who, void of sleep,
Hangs laborious o'er the deep?
From high Olympus will no pitying god,
Will no kind naiad of the flood,
If chance they see the cruel Ajax stray,
Tell us where he bent his way!
For O! 'tis dreadful, wearied thus, to rove,
While all our pains successless prove
To reach the destined goal, or find the man we love.

Tec. [from within.] Alas! alas!

Tec. Hark! from the neighbouring grove
I heard a voice.

Semele. It is the wretched captive,
The wife of Ajax; the poor, sad Tecmessa.

Tecmessa, Chorus.

Tec. O! I am lost, my friends! undone, destroy'd.
Cho. Ha! what hath happen'd!

Tec. Ajax lies before me.

Slain by the sword which he has buried here.

Cho. Fatal, sure, was our return,
Thy untimely death to mourn,
Me, and all thy faithful train,
Cruel Ajax, hast thou slain;
Sad event, alas! to me;
Sadder, woman! still to thee.

Tec. O! I have reason now to weep, indeed.
Cho. What hand perform'd the horrid deed?

Tec. Doubtless it was; the sword he fell upon,
Here fix'd in earth, declares it must be so.

Cho. [approaching towards the body.] Alone, without one pitying friend,
Cam'est thou to this dreadful end;
Was I not myself to blame,
Who, neglectful, never came?

Bring him, Tecmessa, to my eyes;
Tell me where thy Ajax lies.
TEC. He is not to be seen: this folded garment
Shall hide the horrid sight;—a sight no friend
Would wish to see; while from his nostrils stream
The black blood, more still issuing from the wound,
Made by his own destructive hand. O me!
What must I do? what friend will raise him up?
O! where is Teucer? He should have been here
To pay his last sad duty to a brother.
O wretched Ajax! but to think, alas!
What once thou hast been, and what now thou art,
Thy very foes must sure lament thy fate.
CHO. Ajax, long since, in thy obdurate mind,
Thy sad purpose was design'd;
Long since wert thou resolved to seek repose
From thy never-ceasing woes.
This from the daily sigh, the nightly tear,
This from thy sorrows did I fear:
This from thy hate, which naught could e'er assuage;
And 'gainst the Atridae all thy rage:
For never did thy soul contentment know,
But still with fiercest indignation glow,
Since great Achilles' arms were given to thy foe.
TEC. O me!
CHO. Alas! I know the wound must pierce
Thy inmost soul.
TEC. Unhappy, lost Tecmessa!
CHO. O! I believe thou art indeed unhappy,
Bereaved of such a friend.
TEC. Thou but believ'st it;
I am too certain, for I feel it here.
CHO. I know thou dost.
TEC. What servitude, my child,
Must we endure? Who will protect us now?
CHO. Doubtless thy fear of future pain
From the Atridae all are vain;
For never can they mean such ills to thee.
Unfeeling they of human wo,
Nor love nor piety could know.
MAY Heaven avert the sad calamity!
D
TEUCER, TECMESSA, CHORUS.

TEU. Alas! Alas!
CHO. Hark! 'tis the voice of Teucer,
In mournful sighs lamenting our sad fate.

TEU. O Ajax! is it so? My dearest brother,
Dear as these eyes to me, hath fame said true,
And art thou gone?

CHO. O Teucer! he is dead.

TEU. Unhappy fate!
CHO. 'Tis so, indeed.

TEU. Alas!

Wretch that I am!
CHO. O! thou hast cause to weep

TEU. Dreadful calamity!
CHO. It is, indeed,

Too much to bear
Ajax.—Act IV.

Teu. O wretched, wretched Teucer!
Where is the child? Is he at Troy?
Cho. Alone, 915

And in the tent.

Teu. Will ye not bring him to me,
Lest he should fall a victim to the foe;
Ev’n as the hunters seize the lion’s whelp
Left to its helpless dam? Quick! fly! assist me:
For all are glad to triumph o’er the dead. 920

Cho. To thee, O Teucer! he bequeathed the care
Of his loved child, and thou obey’st him well.

Teu. O Ajax! never did these eyes behold
A sight so dreadful. Came I then for this
With luckless speed! O melancholy journey! 925
To seek thee long in vain, and thus at last
To find thee dead before me! O my brother!
Quick through the Grecian host, as if some god
Had brought the tidings, spread the dire report
Of thy untimely fate; far from thee then
930
I heard and wept; but now, alas! I see,
And am undone. My best, my dearest Ajax!
Unveil the body; let me view it well,
And count my miseries: horrid spectacle!
O rash, adventurous deed! What weight of wo
Thy death has laid on me! Alas! to whom, 936
Or whither shall I go? O! wherefore, Teucer,
Wert thou not here to stop a brother’s hand?
What will our poor unhappy father say,
The wretched Telamon? Will he receive me
940
With looks of love and pleasure, when I come
Without his Ajax! O! he never will.

Ev’n in the best of times he was not wont
To smile or joy in aught: what then will now
His anger vent? Will he not speak of me
945
As of a faithless, base, unworthy son,
The spurious offspring of a captive mother,
Who hath betray’d and slain his best-loved Ajax,
To gain his fair possessions after death?
Thus will his wrath, sharpen’d by peevish age,
Upbraid me, guiltless; and to slavery doom'd,
A wretched exile from his native land,
Shall Teucer wander forth: such dreadful ills
Must I expect at home. At Troy, my foes
Are numerous; and my friends, alas! how few!
Thou art the cause of all; for, O my Ajax! 956
What shall I do? How can I save thee now
From this sad fate? O! who could have foreseen
That Hector, long since dead, at last should prove
The murderer of Ajax? By the gods 960
I do beseech you, mark the fate of both
The belt which Ajax did to Hector give,
Dragg'd the brave Trojan o'er the bloody field,
Till he expired; and now, behold! the sword
Which Hector gave to Ajax is the cause 965
Of Ajax' death: Erynnis' self did forge
The fatal steel, and Pluto made the belt,
Dreadful artificer! But this, and all
That happens to us is the work of Heaven:
If there be those who doubt it, let them hold 970
Their differing judgments; I shall keep my own.

Cho. Teucer, no more; but rather now prepare
To bury Ajax, and defend thyself
Against thy foe, whom yonder I behold
This way advancing, with malignant smile, 975
And looks of ill intent.

Teu. Who can it be?
From the army, think'st thou?

Cho. 'Tis the man whose cause
We came to fight, ev'n Menelaus.

Teu. 'Tis so:
As he approaches nigh, I know him well.

MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

Men. Stop there; to thee I speak: let go the body;
I will not have it touch'd.

Teu. Why touch it not? 981

Men. Because it is my will, and his who leads
The Grecian host.

Teu. But wherefore is it so?
MEN. Greece fondly hoped that she had brought a friend
And firm ally, but by experience found
That Troy herself was not so much our foe
As Ajax was, who nightly wander'd forth
With deadliest rage to murder all our host;
And, but some god did frustrate his intent,
The fate himself hath met had been our own:
Then had he triumphed; but the gods ordain'd
It should not be, and 'gainst the flocks and herds
Turn'd all his fury: wherefore, know, there lives not
A man of courage or of power sufficient
To bury Ajax: on the yellow shore
He shall be cast, to be the food of birds
That wander there. Thou mayst resent it too,
But 'twill be vain; at least we will command
When dead, whom living we could ne'er subdue,
Nor ask thy leave: he never would submit,
But now he must: yield, therefore, or we force thee.
'Tis the plebeian's duty to obey
The voice of those who bear authority,
And he who doth not is the worst of men;
For never can the state itself support
By wholesome laws, where there is no submission.
An army's best defence is modest fear
And reverence of its leaders; without these
It cannot conquer; it becomes a man,
How great soe'er his strength, still to remember,
A little, very little, may destroy him.
He, who is guarded by humility
And conscious shame, alone in safety lies;
But where licentious freedom and reproach
Injurious reign, each as his will directs
Still acting;—know, that city soon must fall
From all its bliss, and sink in deepest wo.
Remember, then, respect is due to me.
Let us not think, when pleasure is enjoy'd,
We must not suffer too and taste of pain;
For these to mortals still alternate rise.
There lived not one so proud and arrogant
As Ajax was: I will be haughty now;
It is my turn: take heed then, touch him not,
Lest, while thou strivest to bury him, thyself shouldst drop into the tomb.

Cho. O Menelaus!
Do not, with maxims grave, and wisdom's rules,
Mix foul reproach and slander on the dead.

Teu. It should not move our wonder, O my friend!
To see the vulgar err, of meaner souls,
And birth obscure, when men so nobly born
Will talk thus basely. Tell me, Menelaus!
(For 'twas thy first assertion) didst thou bring
Our Ajax here to help the Grecian host,
Or came he hither by himself alone
Conducted? Whence is thy command o'er him,
Or these his followers? Who gave thee power?
Who gave thee right? Thou mayst be Sparta's king,
But art not ours: Ajax was bound by law
No more to thee than thou wert bound to Ajax;
Thyself no general, but to others here
Subjected, therefore lord it where thou mayst;
Command thy slaves; go threaten and chastise them;
But I will bury Ajax, spite of thee
And of thy brother, for I heed thee not.

He sai'd not here to quarrel for the wife
Of Menelaus like a hireling slave,
But to fulfil the strictly-binding oath
Which he had sworn; he did not come for thee,
For he despised so poor a cause; he came

1048 Tyndarus, the father of Helen, obliged all his daughter's lovers to take an oath, that on which of them soever the lot should fall to marry her, the rest should unite in his defence, and, in case of any attempt to carry her off, should join their forces to recover her. Teucer, therefore, tells Menelaus that it was not any personal regard to him which induced Ajax to join the army, but his resolution to fulfil this solemn engagement.
With all his heralds, and a numerous train,
And brought his captains too; remember, therefore,
Thy clamours ne'er shall turn me from my purpose
While thou art what thou art.

**MEN.**

A tongue like thine
But ill becomes thy state: 'tis most unseemly.

**TEU.** A keen reproach, with justice on its side,
Is always gratting.

**MEN.**

This proud archer here
Talks loudly.

**TEU.** 'Tis no mean, illiberal art.

**MEN.** If thou couldst bear a shield, how insolent
And haughty wouldst thou be, when naked thus
Thou boast'st thy valour!

**TEU.** Naked as I am,
I should not fly from thee with all thy arms.

**MEN.** Thy tongue but speaks thy pride.

**TEU.** I should be proud
When I am just.

**MEN.** Doth justice bid me love
Him who destroy'd me?

**TEU.** And art thou then destroy'd?
That's strange indeed; living and dead at once.

**MEN.** For him I had been so: the gods preserved me.

**TEU.** Do not dishonour then the powers divine
That saved thee.

**MEN.** Do I violate their laws?

**TEU.** If thou forbid'st the burial of the dead,
Thou dost offend the gods.

**MEN.** He was my foe,
And therefore I forbid it.

**TEU.** Art thou sure
That Ajax ever was thy foe?

**MEN.** I am:
Our hate was mutual, and thou know'st the cause.

1057 Homer, whom Sophocles never loses sight of, describes Teucer as a skilful archer.
TEU. Because thou wert corrupted, thy false voice
Condemn'd him.

MEN. 'Twas the judges' fault, not mine. 1076

TEU. Thus mayst thou screen a thousand injuries.

MEN. Some one may suffer for this insolence.

TEU. Not more, perhaps, than others.

MEN. This alone
Remember, buried he shall never be. 1080

TEU. Do thou remember, too, I say he shall.

MEN. So have I seen a bold imperious man,
With forward tongue, before the storm began,
Urging the tardy mariner to sail; 1084
But when the tempest rose, no more was heard
The coward's voice, but, wrapp'd beneath his cloak,
Silent he laid, and suffer'd every foot
To trample on him: thus it is with thee,
And thy foul tongue; forth from a little cloud,
Soon as the storm shall burst, it will o'erwhelm thee,
And stop thy clamours.

TEU. I too have beheld 1091
A man with folly swoln, reproach his friends
Oppress'd with sore calamity, when straight
One came like me, with indignation fired;
Saw, and address'd him thus:—"Cease, shameless
wretch!"

Nor thus oppress the dead; for if thou dost,
Remember, thou shalt suffer for thy crime."
Thus spake he to the weak, insulting fool:
Methinks I see him here; it must be he,
Ev'n Menelaus: have I guessed aright? 

MEN. 'Tis well; I'll leave thee; 'tis a folly thus
To talk with those whom we have power to punish.

[Exit.

TEUCER, CHORUS.

TEU. Away! this babbler is not to be borne.

1075 It is said that in the famous contest between Ajax and
Ulysses for the arms of Achilles, the former lost them by the
casting vote of Menelaus.
AJAX.—ACT IV.

Cho. The contest will grow warm. O Teucer! haste,
Prepare some hollow foss for the remains of Ajax: raise him there a monument,
By after ages ne’er to be forgotten.
Teu. And lo! in happy hour this way advancing
The wife and son of our unhappy friend,
To pay due honours, and adorn his tomb.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, TEUCER, CHORUS.

Teu. Come hither, boy! bend down, and touch thy father:
There sit; and, holding in thy hands this hair,
And hers, and thine, the suppliant’s humble treasure,
Offer thy pious prayers for thy dead father.
If from yon hostile camp the foe should come To drive thee hence, far from his native land,
Whoe’er he be, unburied may he lie,
From his whole race uprooted, torn away,
Ev’n as this hair which here I cut before thee.
O! guard it well, my child! and you, my friends!
Behave like men, assist, protect him now,
Till I return; and, spite of all our foes,
Perform the rites, and raise a tomb to Ajax.

TECMESSA, EURYSACES, CHORUS.

CHORUS.—STROPH E I.

When will the happy hour appear,
That comes to calm our every fear,
From endless toil to bring us sweet repose,
To bid our weary wanderings cease,
To fold us in the arms of peace,
And put the wish’d-for period to our woes?
For since the day when first to Troy we came,
Naught have we known but grief, reproach, and shame.

ANTISTROPE I.

O! that the man, who erst, inspired
With horrid rage, our Grecians fired
To slaughterous deeds, and taught them first to fight,
E'er he had learn'd the dreadful trade,
Himself had mingled with the dead,
Or scatter'd wide in air, or sunk in endless night!
For O! from war unnumber'd evils flow,
The inexhausted source of every human wo.

STROPHE II.
By war disturb'd, the genial board
No longer will its sweets afford;
Their fragrant odours round my head,
The verdant wreaths no longer spread;
Nor music's charms my soul delight,
Nor love with rapture crowns the night,
No love, alas! for me, but grief and care;
For when I think of Troy, I still despair,
And wet with many a tear my wild dishevell'd hair.

ANTISTROPHE II.
Nor nightly fear, nor hostile dart,
While Ajax lived, appall'd my heart;
But all our pleasures now are o'er;
The valiant Ajax is no more.
O! could I climb the woody steep
That hangs incumbent o'er the deep,
From Sunium's cliff by waves for ever beat!
Thence should my eye the lovely prospect greet,
And smile on sacred Athens rising at my fee.

ACT V.

TEUCER, AGAMEMNON, CHORUS.

TEU. This way I bent my hasty steps, to meet
The Grecian chief, who hither comes prepared
To vent his keen reproaches.

AGA. I am told,
That thou, ev'n thou, the son of a vile slave,
Hast dared to utter foulest calumny
Against thy prince, and pass'd unpunish'd for it.
Mean as thy birth is, what had been thy pride
And high demeanour, had thy mother sprung
From noble blood? Barbarian as thou art,
How couldst thou praise a wretch, who, like thyself,
Was nothing? We, it seems (for thou hast sworn it),
Are not the masters or of Greece or thee:
Ajax, alone, thou say'st was leader here.
Shall we be thus insulted by our slaves?
Who is this boaster? and what mighty deed
Hath he perform'd which I could not have done!
Is there no hero in the Grecian host
But Ajax? Vain, indeed, were our resolves
In the warm contest for Achilles' arms,
If Teucer yet shall question the decree
Against the general voice; resisting still,
And still reproachful, with delusive arts,
Though conquer'd, yet opposing: wholesome laws
Will naught avail, if those whom justice deems
Superior to the vanquish'd must resign,
And first in virtue be the last in fame.
It must not be: not always the huge size
Of weighty limbs ensures the victory;
They who excel in wisdom are alone
Invincible. Thou seest the brawny ox,
How the small whip will drive him through the field:
What if the medicine be applied to thee,
For thy proud, boasting, and licentious tongue?
'Twill be thy portion soon, unless thou learn'st
More wisdom. Henceforth, mindful what thou art,
Bring with thee one of nobler blood to plead
Thy cause; for know, the language which thou talk'st
Is barbarous, and I understand thee not.
Cho. I can but wish that wisdom may attend
To guide you both.
Tsu. Alas, how very soon
Are all the merits of the dead forgotten!
O Ajax! is the memory of thee
Already lost! ev'n by the man for whom
Thy life so oft was ventur'd in the field!
But now 'tis past, and buried in oblivion.
Thou wordy slanderer! canst thou not remember,
When, baffled and unequal to the foe,
Close pent within the walls our forces lay;—
Canst thou not call to mind, who came alone
To your deliverance, when devouring flames
Tower'd o'er our ships; when Hector leap'd the
foss,
And rush'd among us! Then who sought for Greece?
Who drove him back, but Ajax? who, thou say'st,
Could never fight; did he not fight for you?
He met the noble Hector hand to hand;
Unbidden dared the fortune of the field;
He scorn'd the coward's art to fix his lot
In the moist earth; forth from the crested helmet
It sprang the first: such were the deeds of Ajax,
And I was witness of them; I, the slave,
For so thou call'st me, sprung from a barbarian.
How dares a wretch like thee to talk of birth?
Who was thy grandsire? Canst thou not remember
That old barbarian, Phrygian Pelops? Tell me,
Who was thy father? Atreus, was he not?
That worst of men, who, at a brother's table,
Served up his children; horrible repast!
Thy mother, too, a Cretan, and a slave;
A vile adulteress, whom thy father caught,
And headlong cast into the sea. Shalt thou
Talk then to me of birth? to me, the son
Of valiant Telamon, renown'd in war,
And wedded to a queen, the royal race
Of great Laomedon, and fairest gift
Of famed Alcides? Thus of noble blood
From either parent sprung, shall I disgrace
The man whom thou, inhuman! wouldst still keep
Unburied here? Dost thou not blush to think on't?
But, mark me well; if thou dost cast him forth, Not he alone inglorious on the plain
AJAX.—ACT V. 53

Shall lie; together we will perish all:
To die with glory in a brother's cause
Is better far than fighting for the wife
Of Agamemnon or of Menelaus:
For thy own sake, and not for mine, remember,
If thou provoke me, thou'llt be sorry for it,
And wish thou'dst rather feared than anger'd Teucer.

ULYSSES, AGAMEMNON, MENELAUS, TEUCER, CHORUS.

Cho. Ulysses, if thou mean'st not to inflame, 1245
But to compose this dreadful strife, thou comest
In happiest hour.

ULYS. Far off I heard the voice
Of the Atridae o'er this wretched corse.
Whence rose the clamour, friends?

MEN. With bitterest words
This Teucer, here, Ulysses, has reviled me. 1250

ULYS. What words? for if he heard the same
from thee,
I blame him not.

AGA. He did provoke me to it.

ULYS. What injury hath he done thee?

AGA. He declares

The body shall have sepulture; himself
Perforce will bury Ajax, spite of me
And of my power.

ULYS. Shall I be free, and speak
The truth to thee, without reproach or blame?

AGA. Thou mayst; for well thou know'lt I hold

Ulysses,
Of all the Greeks, my best and dearest friend.

ULYS. Then hear me: by the gods, I must entreat thee,

Do not, remorseless and inhuman, cast
The body forth unburied, nor permit
Authority to trample thus on justice.
E'er since our contest for Achilles' arms,
Hath Ajax been my foe, and yet I scorn

To use him basely: ev'n Ulysses owns,
Of all the Grecian chiefs who came to Troy
Except Achilles, Ajax was the bravest.
Do not deny him then the honours due
To worth so great; for know, it were a crime, 1270
Not against him alone, but 'gainst the gods;
A violation of the laws divine.
To hurt the brave and virtuous after death,
Ev'n though he liv'd thy foe, is infamous.
Agæ. Plead'st thou for Ajax?
Ulys. Yes: I was his foe 1275
While justice would permit me; but he's dead:
Therefore thou shouldst not triumph, nor rejoice
With mirth unseemly o'er a vanquish'd man.
Agæ. 'Tis not so easy for a king to act
By honour's strictest rules.
Ulys. 'Tis always so, 1280
To hearken to the counsels of a friend,
When he advises well.
Agæ. But know, the good
And virtuous still submit to those who rule.
Ulys. No more: when thou art vanquished by
thy friends,
Thou art thyself the conqueror.
Agæ. Still remember 1285
For whom thou plead'st, Ulysses.
Ulys. For a foe,
But for a brave one.
Agæ. Dost thou thus revere,
Ev'n after death, thy enemy?
Ulys. I do:
Virtue is dearer to me than revenge. 1289
Agæ. Such men are most unstable in their ways.
Ulys. Our dearest friend may one day be our foe.
Agæ. Dost thou desire such friends?
Ulys. I cannot love
Or praise the unfeeling heart.
Agæ. This day shall Greece
Mark us for cowards 1294
Ulys. Greece will call us just.
AGA. Wouldst thou persuade me, then, to grant
him burial? 1295
ULYS. I would, and for that purpose came I hither.
AGA. How every man consults his own advantage,
And acts but for himself!
ULYS. And who is he
Whom I should wish to serve before Ulysses?
AGA. 'Tis thy own work, remember, and not mine.
ULYS. The deed will win thee praise, and every
tongue 1301
Shall call thee good.
AGA. Thou know'st I'd not refuse
Ulysses more, much more than this; but Ajax,
Or buried or unburied, is the same,
And must be hateful still to Agamemnon: 1305
But do as it beseems thee best.
CHO. Ulysses!
The man who says thou art not wise and good,
Is senseless and unjust.
ULYS. I tell thee, Teucer,
Henceforth I am as much the friend of Ajax
As once I was his foe: ev'n now I mean 1310
To join with thee, a fellow-labourer
In all the pious offices of love;
Nor would omit, what ev'ry man should pay,
The honours due to such exalted virtue.
TEU. O best of men! thou hast my thanks and
praise, 1315
And well deservest them, for thou hast transcended
My utmost hopes. I little thought the worst
Of all his foes among the Grecian host
Would thus alone defend, alone protect
The dead from insult, when these thund'ring leaders
United came, to cast his body forth 1321
With infamy: but may the god who rules
O'er high Olympus, and the vengeful Furies
Daughters of Jove, the guilt-rewarding sisters
With all-deciding justice, soon repay 1325
The haughty tyrants: for thy offer'd aid
Son of Laertes, in the funeral rites,—
Perhaps it may offend the honour'd shade
Of our dead friend; it cannot be accepted.
For all beside we thank thee: if thou will'rt
To send assistance from the Grecian camp,
'Twill be received; the rest shall be my care.
Thou hast perform'd the duty of a friend,
And we acknowledge it.

Ulysses. I would have lent
My willing aid; but since it must not be,
I shall submit: farewell. [Exit Ulysses.

Agamemnon, Menelaus, Teucer, Eurytus, Chorus.

Teucer. Thus far is right:
The time already past doth chide our sloth.
My friends, be vigilant: let some prepare
The hollow foss; some o'er the sacred flame
Place the rich tripod for the funeral bath:
Forth from the camp a chosen band must bear
His glittering arms, and trophies of the war.
Do thou, my child, if thou hast strength, uplift
[To Eurytus.

Thy father's body: see, the veins, yet warm,
Spout forth with blood. Haste, help, assist me, all
Who bear the name of friends, and pay with me
Your last sad duties to the noble Ajax;
For never was on earth a better man.

Cho. Whate'er of good or ill weak mortals know,
Must from their best of guides, experience, flow.
Seek then no farther: for to man is given
The present state; the future left to Heaven.
ELECTRA
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Electra, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.
Orestes, brother of Electra.
Pylades, friend of Orestes.
Governor of Orestes.
Clytemnestra, wife of Ægisthus.
Chrysothemis, sister of Electra.
Ægisthus, king of Argos and Mycenæ.
Chorus, composed of the principal ladies of Mycenæ.
ARGUMENT.

AFTER Agamemnon had been assassinated by his wife Clytemnestra and her paramour Ægisthus, Orestes, then an infant, was preserved from a participation in the same fate by his sister Electra, who privately conveyed him to the court of Strophius, king of Phocis, who treated him with the utmost kindness, and educated him with his son Pylades, with whom he contracted an indissoluble friendship. On attaining years of maturity, Orestes, together with his companion, visited the city of Mycenaæ in disguise, and, by the assistance of his governor, deluded the adulterous pair into a fatal security, by a report which he propagated of his death. Having at length discovered himself to Electra, who willingly co-operated with him in the prosecution of his revenge, he slew his mother during the absence of the tyrant, who, on his return, received the just punishment of his atrocious guilt.

ACT I.

Scene,—Mycenaæ, before the palace of Ægisthus.

ORESTES, PYLADES, GOVERNOR OF ORESTES.

Gov. O son of great Atrides, he who led Embattled Greece to Troy’s devoted walls; At length behold what thy desiring eyes So long have sought; behold thy native soil, Thy much-loved Argos, and the hallow’d grove Of Io, frantic maid: on this side lies

6 Io, the daughter of Inachus, who was transformed into a heifer by Jupiter, to conceal her from the rage of Juno, who discovered and placed her under the guardianship of Argus.
The Lycian forum; on the left, the fane
Of Juno far renown'd: behold! we come
To rich Mycenæ, and the slaughterous house
Of Peop's hapless race, from whose sad walls
Long since I bore thee, at thy sister's hand
Gladly received, and with paternal care
To this bless'd day have foster'd up thy youth,
Till riper years should give thee to return,
And pay with dire revenge thy father's murder.
Now, my Orestes! and thou dear companion
Of all our sufferings, much-loved Pylades!
Let deepest counsel sway our just resolves;
For, lo! resplendent Phæbus, with his light,
Calls up the cheerful birds to early song,
And gloomy Night hath lost her starry train:
Come then, my friends, and ere the awaken'd city
Pours forth her busy throngs, this instant here
Let us consult: believe me, 'tis no time
For dull delay; 'tis the decisive hour,
And this the very crisis of our fate.

Orestes. What proofs thou givest me of the noblest
nature
And true benevolence, thou good old man!
Of servants sure the faithfulllest and best
That ever bore the name. The generous steed,
Though worn with years, thus keeps his wonted
courage,
And warns his master of approaching danger:
Like him, thou stirr'st me up to noble deeds,
And follow'st me undaunted: but attend
To what I have resolved; and, if I err,
Let thy superior judgment set me right.
When to the Delphic oracle I flew,
Eager to know how on my father's foes
I best might satiate my revenge, the god
Enjoin'd me not by force, or open arms,
To rush upon them; but with guileful arts,

7 A place sacred to Apollo.
And silent, well-conducted fraud, betray them. Such was his will; thou, therefore, soon as time Shall lend the opportunity, unknown And unsuspected (as thy absence hence For so long space, and hoary age, shall make thee), Must steal upon them, learn their secret counsels, As soon thou mayst, and quick inform us of them; Say thou'rt of Phocis, from Phanoteus sent, By one who is their friend and firm ally: Say, and confirm it with a solemn oath, Orestes is no more, by a rude shock Thrown from his chariot at the Pythian games; Be this thy tale. Meantime (for thus the god His will divine express'd) my father's tomb With due libations and devoted hair Ourselves will crown; and thence returning, bring, From the dark covert where thou know'st 'twas hid, The brazen urn; there, we shall tell the tyrant, Thrice welcome news! Orestes' ashes lie. What should deter me from the pious fraud, Since my feign'd death but gains me real fame, And I shall wake to better life! the deed Which brings success and honour must be good. Ofttimes the wisest and the best of men, From death like this, have rose with added greatness; Ev'n so thy friend to his deluded foes Shall soon return unlook'd-for, and before them Shine like a star with more distinguish'd lustre. O my loved country, and its guardian gods! Receive Orestes, and with happy omen Propitious smile; and thou, paternal seat! For, lo! by Heaven's command I come to purge thee Of vile usurpers, and avenge thy wrong.

49 Phanoteus was a small town of Phocis, a city of Greece, famous for the oracle of Delphos: according to Strabo, it was formerly called Panope.
Drive me not from thee an abandon'd exile
With infamy, but grant me to possess
My father's throne, and fix his injured race.
Thus far 'tis well: my faithful minister!
Thou to thy office, we to ours with speed;
So time and opportunity require,
On whom the fate of mortals must depend.

Exe. [from within.] O misery!
Gov. Methought a mournful voice
Spake from within.
Ores. Perhaps the poor Electra:
Shall we not stay and hearken to it?
Gov. No:
First, be Apollo's great behests obey'd
Before thy father's tomb; that pious deed
Perform'd shall fire our souls with nobler warmth,
And crown our bold attempt with fair success.

[Exeunt.

ELECTRA.

O sacred light! and, O, thou ambient air!
Oft have ye heard Electra's loud laments,
Her sighs, and groans, and witness'd to her woes,
Which ever, as each hateful morn appear'd,
I pour'd before you; what at eve retired
I felt of anguish, my sad couch alone
Can tell, which, water'd nightly with my tears,
Received me sorrowing: that best can tell
What pangs I suffer'd for a hapless father,
Whom not the god of war with ruthless hand
Struck nobly fighting in a distant soil;
But my fell mother, and the cursed Ægisthus,
The partner of her bed, remorseless slew.
Untimely didst thou fall, lamented shade!
And none but poor Electra mourns thy fate;
Nor shall she cease to mourn thee, while these eyes
View the fair heavens, or behold the sun;

Never, O! never like the nightingale,

106 Philomela, the daughter of Pandion, and sister of Procne,
ELECTRA.—ACT I.

Whose plaintive song bewails her ravish’d brood;
Here will I still lament my father’s wrongs,
And teach the echo to repeat my moan.
O ye infernal deities! and thou,
Terrestrial Hermes! and thou, Nemesis,
Replete with curses! and ye vengeful Furies!
Offspring of gods, the ministers of wrath
To vile adulterers, who with pity view
The slaughter’d innocent, behold this deed.
O! come, assist, revenge my father’s murder;
Quickly, O! quickly bring me my Orestes;
For, lo! I sink beneath oppressive wo,
And can no longer bear the weight alone.

CHORUS, ELECTRA.

Cho. O wretched daughter of an impious mother!
Wilt thou for ever mourn; for ever thus,
With unavailing tears and endless sorrow,
Lament the royal Agamemnon’s fate,
By a vile woman’s wicked arts betray’d?
Perish the hand (forgive the pious curse,
Ye heavenly powers!) that gave the deadly blow!

Elec. My noble friends, and partners in affliction,
Who thus, to sooth my sorrows, kindly try
Each art which love and friendship can inspire;
Ye come to comfort me, I know ye do:
I know my tears are fruitless all, and vain;
But, O! permit me to indulge my grieves,
For I must weep.

Cho. Thy tears can ne’er recall him
From the dark mansions of the common grave,
No, nor thy prayers; they can but make thee
wretched,

the wife of Tereus. The poet, both in this and the following
scene, takes the nightingale for Procne; as it was Procne, and
not Philomela, who served up her son Itys to Tereus, in revenge
for the injury done to her sister. Æschylus, Euripides, and
Aristophanes also, suppose Procne to have been changed into a
nightingale.
And sink thee deeper in calamity;  
Why art thou then so fond of misery?

   Elec. Devoid of sense and feeling is the heart  
That can forget an injured parent's wrongs.  
I love the airy messenger of Jove;  
The mournful bird that weeps her Itys' fate,  
And every night repeats the tender tale;  
Thee too I reverence as a goddess, thee,  
Unhappy Niobe! for still thou weep'st,  
And from the marble tears eternal flow.

   Cho. But, O! reflect that not to thee alone  
Misfortune comes, that comes to all: behold  
Iphianassa and Chrysothemis,  
And him who hides his grief, illustrious youth,  
The loved Orestes; these have suffer'd too.

   Elec. Orestes! yes, Mycenaæ shall receive  
In happy hour her great avenger; Jove  
With smiles auspicious shall conduct him to me.  
For him alone I wait; for him, a wretch  
Despised, of children and of nuptial rites  
Hopeless I wander; he remembers not  
What I have done for him, what suffer'd; still  
With airy promises he mocks my hopes,  
And yet he comes not to me.

   Cho. But he will.  
Despair not, daughter; Jove is yet in heaven,  
The god who sees, and knows, and governs all.  
Patient to him submit, nor let thy rage  
Too far transport thee, nor oblivion drown  
The just remembrance of thy matchless woes.  
Time is a kind, indulgent deity,  
And he shall give thee succour, he shall send

140 Procne, called the messenger of Jove, from ushering in  
the spring. See the note on Philomela.

144 Niobe, the daughter of Tantalus, and queen of Thebes;  
feigned by the poets to be turned into stone, after the death of  
her children.

148 The sisters of Electra.
The god of Acheron, from Chrysa’s shores
To bring Orestes, and avenge thy wrongs.

Elec. O! but the while how much of life is gone!
And I, a hopeless wretched orphan still,
Without a friend to guard or to protect me;
Disgraced, dishonour’d, like a stranger clad
In base attire, and fed with homeliest fare!

Cho. Sad news indeed the hapless messenger
To Argos brought, that spoke the wish’d return
Of thy loved father to his native soil;
Fatal the night when Agamemnon fell
Or by a mortal or immortal hand;
The work of fraud and lust, a horrid deed!
Whoe’er perform’d it.

Elec. O detested feast!
O day the bitterest sure that ever rose!
With him I perished then; but may the gods
Repay the murderers; never may they hear
The voice of joy, or taste of comfort more.

Cho. Cease thy complaints; already hast thou
suffer’d
For thy loud discontents and threaten’d vengeance.
’Tis folly to contend with power superior.

Elec. Folly, indeed, and madness! but my griefs
Will force their way; and while Electra breathes
She must lament; for who will bring me comfort,
Or sooth my sorrows? Let me, let me go,
And weep for ever.

Cho. ’Tis my love entreats;
Trust me, I feel a mother’s fondness for thee,
And fain would save thee from redoubled woes.

Elec. And wouldst thou have me then neglect the
dead?

167 Chrysa was a town of Phocis, of which Strophius, the
father of Pylades, was king. This was the place where Orestes
was privately educated, and accounts for the celebrated friend-
ship of the two princes.

193 The Chorus is composed of the principal matrons of rank
and quality in Mycenae.
Forget my father! Can there be such guilt!
When I do so, may infamy pursue me;
And if I wed, may all the joys of love
Be far removed! If vengeance doth not fall
On crimes like these, for ever farewell, justice! 200
Shame, honour, truth, and piety, farewell!

Cho. Pardon me, daughter! if my warmth offend,
Glad I submit; we'll follow and obey thee.

Elec. I am myself to blame, and blush to think
How much unfit I seem to bear the weight
Imposed upon me; but indeed 'tis great.
Forgive me, friends! a woman born as I am,—
Must she not grieve to see each added minute
Fraught with new miseries? thus to be a slave
Ev'n in my father's house, and from those hands 210
Which shed his blood to ask the means of life?
Think what my soul must suffer to behold
The cursed Ægisthus seated on the throne
Of Agamemnon, in the very robes
Which once were his! to see the tyrant pour
Libations forth ev'n on the fatal spot
Where the sad deed was done! but, worst of all,
To see the murderer usurp his bed,
Embrace my mother (by that honour'd name
If I may call a guilty wretch like her), 220
Who, pleased, returns his love, and of her crimes
Unconscious, smiles, nor fears the avenging Furies;
But ever, as the bloody day returns
Which gave the royal victim to her wiles,
Annual the dance and choral song proclaim
A solemn feast; nor impious sacrifice
Forgets she then to her protecting gods.
Shock'd at the cruel banquet, I retire,
And in some corner hide my griefs, denied
Ev'n the sad comfort to indulge my sorrows; 230
For Clytemnestra, in opprobrious terms,
Reviles me oft:—"To thee alone," she cries,
"Is Agamemnon lost, detested maid?"
Think'st thou Electra only weeps his fate?
Perdition on thee! May the infernal gods
ELECTRA.—ACT I.

Refuse thee succour, and protract thy pains!"
Thus rails she bitter; and if by chance she hear
Orestes is approaching, stung with rage,
Wild she exclaims,—"Thou art the accursed cause:
This is thy deed, who stole Orestes from me,
And hid him from my rage; but be assured,
Ere long my vengeance shall o'ertake thee for it!"
These threats her noble lord still urges on;
That vile adulterer, that abandon'd coward,
Whose fearful soul call'd in a woman's aid
To execute his bloody purposes.
Meantime Electra sighs for her Orestes,
Her wish'd avenger; his unkind delay
Destroys my hopes. Alas! my gentle friends,
Who can bear this, and keep an equal mind?
To suffer ills like mine, and not to err
From wild distraction, would be strange—indeed!
Cho. But say, Electra, is the tyrant near,
Or may we speak our thoughts unblamed?
Elec. Thou mayst;
I had not else beyond the palace dared
To wander hither.
Cho. I would fain have asked thee—
Elec. Ask what thou wilt, Ægisthus is far off.
Cho. Touching thy brother, then; inform me quick
If aught thou know'st that merits firm belief.
Elec. He promises, but comes not.
Cho. Things of moment
Require deliberation and delay.
Elec. O! But did I delay to save Orestes?
Cho. He boasts a noble nature, and will ne'er
Forget his friends: be confident.
Elec. I am;
Were I not so, I had not lived till now.
Cho. But soft; behold the fair Chrysothemis
Advance this way, and in her hand she bears
Sepulchral offerings to the shades below.

268 The sepulchral offerings here mentioned were generally
honey, wine, milk, water, and barley-flour; these were assigned
CHRYSOthemis, Electra, Chorus.

CHRY. Still, my Electra, pouring forth thy griefs! Art thou not yet by sad experience taught How little they avail? I too must feel, And could resent, as, were thy sister's power. But equal to her will, her foes should know. Meantime with lower'd sail to bear the storm Befit us best, nor, helpless as we are, With idle hopes to meditate revenge. Yield then with me; and though impartial justice Plead on thy side, remember if we prize Or life or liberty we must obey.

ELEC. It ill becomes great Agamemnon's daughter Thus to forget her noble father's worth, And take a base unworthy mother's part; For well I see from whom thy counsels flow; Naught from thyself thou say'st, but all from her; Either thy reason's lost, or if thou hast it, Thou hast forgot thy friends, who should be dear And precious to thee: of thy boasted hate Against our foes, and what thou vaunt'st to do, If thou hadst power, I reck not: while with me Thou wilt not join in great revenge, but still Dissuadest me from it. Is't not cowardly To leave me thus? Tell me, I beg thee tell me, What mighty gain awaits my tame submission, Should I suppress my griefs: I can but live; That I do now, a wretched life indeed! But 'tis enough for me, and I am happy, While I can torture them, and to the dead Pay grateful honours, if to them such care Aught grateful can bestow. Thy hate, I fear me, Is but in word; thou dost befriend the murderers. For me, not all the wealth they could bestow, Not all the gifts which they have pored on thee,

to render the ghost propitious, and were pored on the ground or grave-stone, and, together with a certain form of words, offered to the deceased.
Should bind me to them: take thy costly banquets, 
And let thy days with ease and pleasure flow: 
Give me but food, and I am satisfied. 305
I wish not for thy honours; nor wouldst thou, 
If thou wert wise, receive them at their hands. 
Thou mightst be daughter to the best of fathers, 
And art thy mother's only; take that name; 
And henceforth all shall mark thee as a wretch, 310
Who hath betray'd her father and her friends.
Cho. I do entreat you, let not anger come 
Between you thus; you both have reasoned well, 
And much of mutual benefit may flow, 
If each to other lend a patient ear. 315
Chry. Custom, my noble friends! hath made re-
proach
Familiar with me; and so well I know 
Her haughty mind, I had been silent still, 
But that I saw the danger imminent, 
And came to warn her of the fatal stroke, 320
Which soon must end her and her griefs together.
Elec. Tell me this mighty danger; if aught more 
It threaten than Electra long hath borne, 
I yield me to thy counsels.
Chry. Hear me then: 
Know thou art doomed, unless thou dost refrain 325
Thy clamorous griefs, far from the light of day, 
And this thy native soil, within a cell 
Dismal and dark to spend the poor remains 
Of thy sad life, and there lament thy fate.
Elec. Is it decreed? Must it in truth be so? 330
Chry. Soon as ægisthus shall return, it must.
Elec. Quick let him come: I long to see him here.
Chry. Alas! what dreadful imprecations these! 
Elec. Would he were present, if for this he comes!
Chry. What! to destroy thee? is thy mind dis-
turbed? 335
Elec. That I might fly for ever from thy sight.
CHRY. Wilt thou not think how to preserve thy life?
ELEC. Mine is a blessed life indeed to think of!
CHRY. It might be blessed if thou wouldst have it so.
ELEC. Teach me not basely to betray my friends.
CHRY. I do not; all I ask thee is to yield
To powers superior.
ELEC. Fawn on them thyself;
THOU dost not know Electra.
CHRY. Sure, it better
Deserves the name of wisdom to avoid
Than hasten thy destruction.
ELEC. No; to die
Were pleasure, could I but avenge my father.
CHRY. Our father, doubt it not, will pardon thee.
ELEC. 'Tis mean to think so.
CHRY. Wilt thou not consent?
ELEC. Never, O! never, be my soul so weak.
CHRY. Then to my errand; fare thee well.
ELEC. To whom, 350
Chrysothemis? and whither dost thou bear
Those sacred offerings!
CHRY. To our father's tomb.
FROM Clytemnestra.
ELEC. To the man she hated?
The man, my sister—
CHRY. Whom she kill'd, I know,
Thou wouldst say.
ELEC. Why, what should move her to it? 355
CHRY. If I mistake not, horrors late impress'd
FROM a sad vision.
ELEC. O my country's gods!
Succour me now!
CHRY. What hopes dost thou conceive
FROM this?
ELEC. The dream: and I will tell thee all.
CHRY. I know but little of it.
ELEC. Tell me that: 364
ELEKTRA.—ACT I.

Ofttimes to words, how few soo’er they be,
Is given the power to save or to destroy.

CHRY. Once more to light return’d (so fame reports),
Before her our loved father did appear,
The royal sceptre wielded in his hand,
Which now Ægisthus bears; whence seem’d to spring
A green and leafy branch, whose wide extent
O’er all Mycenæ spread its verdant shade:
This did I learn, and this alone, from one
Who listen’d long attentive, while she told
Her vision to the Sun; hence all her fears,
And hence my destined journey.

ELEC. By the gods
Let me conjure thee, hear me; if thou dost not,
Too late shalt thou repent, when for thy guilt
Evil o’ertake thee. O Chrysothemis!
Never, I beg thee, to our father’s tomb
Bear thou those offerings; ’twere a horrid deed,
From such a woman: give them to the winds,
Let them be hid, deep buried in the sands,
And not the smallest grain escape, to reach
That hallow’d place; let them remain for her,
Safe in the earth till she shall meet them there.
None but this shameless, this abandon’d woman,
Would e’er with impious offerings thus adorn
The tomb of him she murder’d: by the dead
Think’st thou such gifts can be with joy received?
Gifts from that hand, which from his mangled corse
Sever’d his lifeless limbs, and on the head
Of the poor victim wiped her bloody sword.
Madness, to think that offerings and ablutions

371 It was customary among the ancients, when they had been terrified by bad dreams, to open their windows in the morning, and relate their dreams to the Sun, who, they imagined, as he had power to dispel the darkness, could also turn aside all the evils which the preceding night had threatened them with.
Could purge such crimes, or wash her stains away!
Never, O! never: but of this no more.
Instant, my sister! thy devoted hair,
With these dishevell'd locks, and this my zone,
Plain as it is, and unadorn'd, shalt thou
Bear to our father: wretched offerings these,
But, O! 'tis all Electra now can give.
Bear them, and suppliant on thy knees implore him
To smile propitious, and assist his children.
Pray for Orestes, too, that soon with power
He may return, and trample on our foes;
So shall a fairer tribute one day grace
His honour'd tomb than now we can bestow.
Trust me, my sister! we are still his care,—
I know we are; from him the vision came,
The horrid dream, that shook her guilty soul.
Now, then, I beg thee, be a friend to me;
Be to thyself a friend, a friend to him,
Of all mankind the dearest, our dead father.

Cho. Well doth the pious virgin speak, and thou
Must yield to her requests.

Chry. And so I will.
Where reason dictates, strife should never come:
But, quick, despatch, fulfil her just commands:
Yet, O my friend! remember, our attempt
Is full of danger, and let naught escape
That may betray me to my cruel mother;
For, if it reach her ear, this daring act,
I fear me much, shall one day cost us dear.

[Exit Chrysothemis.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Or my prophetic mind is now no more
Attentive as of old to wisdom's lore,
Or Justice comes, with speedy vengeance fraught:
Behold! the goddess arm'd with power appears;
It must be so by Clytemnestra's fears,
And the dire dream that on her fancy wrought.
Thy father, not unmindful of his fate,
Shall hither come, his wrongs to vindicate;
And, in his gore imbrued,
The fatal axe with him shall rise,
Shall ask another sacrifice,
And drink with him the cruel tyrant’s blood.

ANTISTROPHE.

Lo! with unnumber’d hands, and countless feet,
The Fury comes, her destined prey to meet:
Deep in the covert hid, she glides unseen,
Hangs o’er the trembling murderer’s head,
Or steals to the adulterous bed,
An awful witness of the guilty scene.
Doubtless, the dream, with all its terrors, meant,
For crimes like these, some dreadful punish-
ment,

If mortals aught from mighty visions know;
If truth from great Apollo’s shrine
Appear in oracles divine,
Presaging bliss to come, or threatening future wo.

EPODE.

O Pelops! to thy country and to thee
The fatal course brought wo and misery;
For since the time when from his chariot thrown,
For thee the guilty wreath to gain,
The hapless Myrtillus was slain,
Naught has thy wretched race but grief and sorrow known.

Œnomaus had a beautiful daughter, named Hippodamia, whom he refused to give in marriage, because the oracle declared that a son-in-law would be fatal to him; he promised, however, to bestow his daughter on any man who should conquer him in the chariot-race, on condition that all who were vanquished by him should be put to death: many bold adventurers accepted the terms, and perished in the attempt: the horses of Œnomaus were swift as the wind, and consequently invincible. These examples, however, did not deter Pelops, who entered the lists against Œnomaus, and bribed his charioteer, Myrtillus, with a promise of half his kingdom if he succeeded. Myrtillus listened to his offers, and purposely forgot to put the pins into the wheels.
SOPHOCLES.

ACT II.

CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

Cly. Œgisthus absent, who alone could curb
Thy haughty spirit, and licentious tongue,
At large, it seems, thou rovest, and unrestrain’d, 450
No deference paid to my authority;
But on thy mother ever pouring forth
Bitter invectives, while the listening crowd
Are taught to hold me proud and fierce of soul;
A lawless tyrant, slandering thee and thine. 455
I am no slanderer; I abhor the name;
But, oft reviled, of force I must reply,
And send my soul reproaches back upon thee.
Thou say’st I slew thy father; that alone
Is left to plead for all thy insolence. 460
I do confess the deed, and glory in it.
I slew thy father; yet not I alone;
I had the hand of justice to assist me,
And should have had Electra’s: well thou know’st,
That cruel father, for whom thus thy tears 465
Incessant flow, that father slew his child.
He—he alone, of all the Grecian host,
Gave up his daughter—horrid sacrifice!
To the offended gods: he never felt
A mother’s pangs, and therefore thought not of them;
Or if he did, why slay the innocent? 471
For Greece, thou tell’st me: Greece could never claim

of his master’s chariot, which broke in pieces in the middle of
the course. Pelops espoused Hippodamia, but afterward, in-
stead of performing his promise to Myrtilus, chose rather to get
rid of this instrument of treachery by throwing him into the sea.
Mercury, who, it seems, was the father of Myrtilus, revenged
the murder of his son, by entailing curses on Pelops and all his
posterity. It appears by this that the heathens believed that
God punished the crimes of fathers on their children, to the
third and fourth generation.
A right to what was mine: or did she fall
For Menelaus? he had children too:
Why might not they have died? Their parents' guilt,
Source of the war, more justly had deserved it.
Or think'st thou Death with keener appetite
Could feast on mine, and Helen's not afford
As sweet a banquet? Why was all the love
To me and to my child so justly due,
With lavish hand bestow'd on Menelaus?
Was he not then a base, inhuman father?
He was: and so, could Iphigenia speak,
Thy breathless sister, she too would declare.
Know then I grieve not; shame or penitence
I feel not for the deed; and if to thee
It seems so heinous, weigh each circumstance;
Remember what he did, and lay the blame
On him, who well deserved the fate he suffer'd.

Elec. Thou hast no plea for bitterness like this:
Thou canst not say that I provoked thee to it.
I have been silent: had I leave to speak,
I could defend an injured father's cause,
And tell thee wherefore Iphigenia fell.

Cly. I do permit thee; and if modest thus
Thou hadst address'd me always, thy free speech
Had ne'er offended.

Elec. Hast thou not confess'd
That thou didst slay my father? Whether Justice
Approve or not, 'twas horrid to confess it:
But Justice never could persuade thee: no,
I'll tell thee who it was: it was Ægisthus,
The wretch with whom thou livest. Go, ask the goddess,
The immortal huntress, why the winds were stay'd
So long at Aulis; but thou must not ask
The chaste Diana; take it then from me.

My father once, as, for the chase prepared,
Careless he wander'd through her sacred grove,
Forth from its covert roused a spotted hind
Of fairest form, with towering antlers graced,
Pursued, and slew her: of the Deity
Something, with pride elate, he utter’d then
Disdainful: quick resenting the affront,
Latona’s daughter stay’d the Grecian fleet,
Nor would forgive, till for her slaughter’d beast
The offending father sacrificed his child.
Thus Iphigenia fell; and but for her,
Greece ne’er had seen, or Ilion’s lofty towers,
Or her own native soil: the father strove
In vain to save; and not for Menelaus
He gave her up at last, but for his country.
Suppose a brother’s fondness had prevail’d,
And she was given for him; would that excuse
Thy horrid deed! what law required it of thee?
That law alone by which thyself must fall;
It blood for blood be due, thy doom is fix’d.
Plead not so poorly then; but tell me why
Thou livest adulterous thus with a vile ruffian,
Thy base assistant? Why are those, who sprung
From thy first nuptials, cast unkindly forth,
For his new race? Was this thy piety?
Was this too to revenge thy daughter’s death?
In pure revenge to wed her deadlest foe
Was noble, was it not? but I forget,
You are my mother, so it seems you say,
And I must hold my peace; but I deny it:
I say you are my mistress, not my mother;
A cruel mistress that afflicts my soul,
And makes this weary life a burden to me.
Orestes too, the hapless fugitive,
Who once escaped thy fatal hand, now drags
A loathsome being: him, thou say’st, I look’d for
To join in my revenge, and so I did:
I would have been revenged, I tell thee so.
Say, I am base, malicious, impudent,
Abusive, what thou wilt; for if I am,
It speaks my birth, and I resemble thee.
ELECTRA.—ACT II.

Cho. Resentment deep hath fired the virgin's breast:
Whether with truth and justice on her side
She speak, I know not.

Clv. Can they plead for her?
What care, what love, or tenderness is due
To an abandon'd child, who, shameless, thus
Reviles a parent? Is there, after this,
A crime in nature she would blush to act?

Elec. I am not base, nor shameless, as thou call'st me;
For know, e'en now I blush for what is past,
Indecent warmth, and words that ill become
My tender years and virgin modesty:
But 'twas thy guilt, thy malice, urged me to it.
From bad examples bad alone we learn;
I only err'd because I follow'd thee.

Clv. Impudent wretch! and am I then the cause
Of all thy clamorous insolence?

Elec. Thou art:
Foul is thy speech, because thy deed was foul;
For words from actions flow.

Clv. By chaste Diana,
Soon as Ægisthus comes, thy boldness meets
Its just reward.

Elec. Is this thy promised leave,
So lately granted, freely to unfold
What now, incensed, thou dost refuse to hear?

Clv. Have I not heard thee; and, in base return,
With luckless omen dost thou now retard
My pious sacrifice?

Elec. O! far from me
Be guilt like that; perform it, I beseech thee:
In holy silence shall these lips be closed,
And not a word escape to thwart thy purpose.

Clv. [speaking to one of her attendants.]
Hither do thou the sacred offerings bring,
Of various fruits composed, that to the god,
Whose altars we adorn, my fervent prayer
May rise accepted, and dispel my fears.
Hear then, Apollo, great protector! hear
My secret vows, for with no friendly ear
My voice is heard; her malice would betray,
Should I unveil my heart, each word I utter'd,
And scatter idle rumours through the crowd.
Thus then accept my prayers, Lycean Phœbus!

If in the doubtful visions of the night,
Which broke my slumbers, aught presaging good
Thou seest, propitious, O! confirm it all:
But if of dire portent, and fraught with ill,
To me and mine they came, avert the omen,
And send the evil back upon my foes!

O! if there are, whose fraudulent arts conspire
To cast me forth from all my present bliss,
Let them not prosper, but protect me still.
Grant me to live and reign in quiet here,
To spend each happy hour with those I love;
With those my children who have ne'er offended
By malice, pride, and bitterness of soul;
Grant this, indulgent Phœbus! What remains
Unask'd, thou seest; for naught escapes the eye
Of gods; such knowledge have the sons of Jove.

GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

* Gov. Is this the royal palace of Ægisthus?
  Cho. Stranger, it is.
* Gov. And this (for such her form
  And look majestic speak her) is his queen;
  Is it not so?
  Cho. It is.
* Gov. Great sovereign, hail!

596 Iphianassa and Chrysothemis, who had not affronted her,
in opposition to Electra, who had.
598 Most probably the death of Orestes and Electra, which
she did not dare to mention in the presence of her daughter.
Clytemnestra's character is finely drawn; her very prayers we
see are wicked, and agreeable to her actions.
ELECTRA.—ACT II.

With joyful news I come, and from a friend, To thee, and to Ægisthus.

 Cly. Stranger, welcome! Say, first, from whom thy message?

 Gov. From Phanoteus; A Phocian sends thee things of utmost moment.

 Cly. Of moment, say'st thou? what! impart them quick!

Of friendly import, if from thence they come, I know they must be.

 Gov. Briefly, then, 'tis this;

Orestes is no more.

 Elec. Undone Electra!

Now am I lost indeed.

 Cly. What say'st thou? speak!

Regard not her; go on.

 Gov. I say again,

Orestes is no more.

 Elec. Then what am I?

I too am nothing.

 Cly. [to Electra.] Get thee hence! away! Disturb us not. Most welcome messenger!

[to the Governor.

Go on, I beg thee; let me hear it all;

Say how he died; tell every circumstance.

 Gov. For that I came, and I will tell thee all.

Know, then, Orestes, at the Pythian games,

 Eager for glory, met assembled Greece.

Soon as the herald's far-resounding voice

Proclaim'd the course, the graceful youth appear'd,

And was by all admired: successful soon

He reach'd the goal, and bore his prize away.

Ne'er did these eyes behold such feats perform'd

By mortal strength; in every course superior,

He rose victorious: theme of every tongue

Was the brave Argive, great Atrides' son,

Who led the Grecian host; but, O! in vain

Doth human valour strive when power divine

Pursues vindictive: the succeeding morn
Uprose the sun, and with him all the train
Of youthful rivals in the chariot-race; 635
One from Achaia, one from Sparta came;
Of Afric’s sons advanced a noble pair,
And join’d the throng: with these, Orestes drove
His swift Thessalian steeds; Ætolia next,
For yellow coursers famed; and next Magnesia; 640
And Athens, built by hands divine, sent forth
Her skilful charioteer; an Ænian next
Drove his white horses through the field; and last
A brave Bœotian closed the warrior train.
And now, in order ranged, as each by lot 645
Determined stood, forth at the trumpet’s sound
They rush’d together, shook their glittering reins,
And lash’d their foaming coursers o’er the plain.
Loud was the din of rattling cars, involved
In dusty clouds; close on each other press’d 650
The rival youths, together stopp’d, and turn’d
Together all. The hapless Ænian first,
His fiery steeds, impatient of subjection,
Entangled on the Libyan chariot hung.
Confusion soon and terror through the crowd 655
Disastrous spread; the jarring axles rung;
Wheel within wheel now crack’d, till Chrysa’s field
Was with the scatter’d ruins quite o’erspread.
The Athenian, cautious, view’d the distant danger,
Drew in the rein, and turn’d his car aside; 660
Then pass’d them all. Orestes, who, secure
Of conquest, lagg’d behind, with eager pace
Now urged his rapid course, and swift pursued.
Sharp was the contest; now the Athenian first,
And now Orestes o’er his coursers hung; 665
Now side by side they ran. When to the last
And fatal goal they came, Atrides’ son,
As chance with slacken’d rein he turn’d the car,
Full on the pillar struck, tore from the wheel
Its brittle spokes, and from his seat down dropp’d
Precipitate: entangled in the reins, 671
His fiery coursers dragg’d him o’er the field,
While shrieking crowds with pity view’d the youth,  
Whose gallant deeds deserved a better fate.  
Scarce could they stop the rapid car, or loose  
His mangled corse, so drench’d in blood, so changed,  
That scarce a friend could say it was Orestes.  
Straight on the pile they burned his sad remains;  
And, in an urn enclosed, a chosen few, 
From Phecis sent, have brought his ashes home,  
To reap due honours in his native land.  
Thus have I told thee all; a dreadful tale!  
But, O! how far more dreadful to behold it,  
And be, like me, a witness of the scene!  

Cho. Ah me! the royal race, the ancient house  
Of my beloved master is no more!  

Cly. Great Jove! 686  
The event was happy, but ’tis mix’d with wo.  
For, O! ’tis bitter to reflect, that life  
And safety must be purchased by misfortunes.  

Gov. Why grieve you, madam?  

Cly. ’Tis a bitter task 690  
To bring forth children: though a mother’s wrong’d,  
A mother cannot hate the babe she bore.  

Gov. Then with ungrateful news in vain I came.  

Cly. O no; most welcome is the man who brings  
Such joyful tidings, that a thankless child 695  
Is gone, who left a tender mother’s arms,  
To live a voluntary exile from me;  
Ne’er to these eyes return’d, but absent raged,  
And threaten’d vengeance for his murder’d father.  
Day had no rest for me, nor did the night 700  
Bring needful slumbers; thoughts of instant death  
Appall’d me ever; but my fears are gone;  
He cannot hurt me now; nor, worse than him,  
This vile, domestic plague, who haunts me still,  
To suck my vital blood; but henceforth safe, 705  
Spite of her threats, shall Clytemnestra live.  

Elec. Now, my Orestes! I indeed must mourn  
Thy cruel fate, imbitter’d by reproach,  
And from a mother’s tongue. This is not well
Cly. With him it is, and would it were with thee! 710
Elec. Attend, O Nemesis! and hear the dead!
Cly. She heard that voice which best deserved her ear,
And her decrees are just.
Elec. Go on, proud woman!
Insult us now, while Fortune smiles on thee.
Cly. Dost thou then hope that we shall fall hereafter? 715
Elec. No, we are fallen ourselves, and cannot hurt thee.
Cly. Thrice worthy is that messenger of joy,
Whose gladsome news shall stop thy clamorous tongue.
Gov. My task perform'd, permit me to retire.
Cly. No, stranger! that were an affront to thee,
And to our friend who sent thee here. Go in, 721
And leave that noisy wretch to bellow forth
Her sorrows, and bewail her lost Orestes.

[Exeunt Cly. and Gov.

Elec. Mark'd ye, my friends? did ye observe her tears?
Did she lament him? did the mother weep 725
For her lost child? O no; she smiled, and left me.
Wretched Electra! O my dear Orestes!
Thou hast undone me; thou wert all my hope.
I thought thou wouldst have lived to aid my vengeance
For our loved father's death: deprived of both, 730
Whither shall I betake me? left at last
A slave to those whom most on earth I hate,
The cruel murderers! Must it then be so?
Never, Oh, never! Thus, bereft of all,
Here will I lay me down, and on this spot 735
End my sad days: if it offend the tyrants,
Let them destroy me; it will be kindly done.
Life is a pain; I would not wish to keep it.
Cho. Where is thy thunder, Jove! or where thy power,
O Phæbus! if thou dost behold this deed, And not avenge it?

Elec. O!
Cho. Why mourn'st thou thus?
Elec. Alas!
Cho. O! do not groan thus.
Elec. Thou destroy'st me.
Cho. How have I hurt thee?
Elec. Why thus vainly try To give me comfort when I know he's dead?
You but insult my woes.
Cho. Yet weep not thus: Think on the golden bracelet that betray'd
Amphiaraus, who now—
Elec. O me!
Cho. In bliss
Immortal reigns among the shades below.
Elec. Alas!
Cho. No more; a woman was the cause,
The accursed cause.
Elec. She suffer'd, did she not? 750
Cho. She did; she perish'd.
Elec. Yes; I know it well:
He found a kind avenger of his wrongs;
But I have none, for he is ravish'd from me.
Cho. Thou art indeed unhappy.
Elec. 'Tis too true;
I am most wretched; it beats hard on me: 755
My sorrows never cease.
Cho. We see thy woes.

756 Amphiaraus was a famous soothsayer. During the time of the Théban war, he was solicited by Adrastus to assist Polynices, his son-in-law. Amphiaraus, foreseeing by his art that if he went he should be slain, hid himself, but was discovered by his wife Eriphyle, whom Polynices had bribed with a golden bracelet. Amphiaraus, being thus obliged to appear at the siege of Thebes, perished there. Alcmæon, his son, revenged his father's death, and slew his mother Eriphyle.
Therefore no more attempt to bring me comfort:
There is no hope.
Cho. What say'st thou?
Elec. There is none;
None left for me, my noble brother slain.
Cho. Death is the lot of human race.
Elec. But, O! Not death like his: entangled in the reins,
His mangled body dragg'd along the field.
Cho. A strange, unthought-of chance!
Elec. And then to fall
A wretched stranger in a foreign land!
Cho. O horrible!
Elec. No sister there, to close
His dying eyes, to grace him with a tomb,
Or pay the sad last tributary tear.

ACT III.

CHRYSOthemis, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

Chry. Forgive me, sister, if my hasty steps
Press unexpected on thee: but I come
With joyful tidings, to relieve thy toils,
And make thee happy.
Elec. What canst thou have found
To soften ills that will admit no cure?
Chry. Orestes is arrived: as sure as here
I stand before thee, the dear youth is come.
Elec. Canst thou then make a mockery of my woes,
Or dost thou rave?
Chry. No, by our father's gods,
I do not mean to scoff; but he is come.
Elec. Alas! who told thee so? What tongue deceived
Thy credulous ear?
Chry. Know, from myself alone
I learn'd the truth, and confirmations strong Oblige me to believe it.

Electra. What firm proof Canst thou produce? What hast thou seen or known To raise such flattering hopes?

Chry. O! by the gods I beg thee but to hear me; then approve Or blame impartial.

Electra. If to tell thy tale Can give thee pleasure, say it; I attend.

Chry. Know, then, that soon as to our father's tomb

Eager I came, my wondering eyes beheld
Down from its side a milky fountain flow,
As lately pour'd by some benignant hand.

With various flowers the sacred spot adorn'd,
Increased my doubts: on every side I look'd
And listen'd long, impatient for the tread
Of human footsteps there; but all was peace.

Fearless approaching then the hallow'd spot,

I saw it spread with fresh devoted hair.
Instant my soul recall'd its dearest hope,
Nor doubted whence the pious offerings came.

I snatch'd them up, and silent gazed, while joy
Sprang in my heart, and filled my eyes with tears.

They were, they must be his; ourselves alone

Excepted, who could bring them? 'Twas not I,

And 'tis not given to thee to leave these walls

E'on for the gods: our mother scarce would do

So good an office; or, e'en grant she might,

We must have known it soon. Be confident,

It was Orestes then; rejoice, Electra!
Sister, rejoice; the same destructive power

Doth not for ever rule: behold at last

A milder god, and happier days appear.

Electra. Madness and folly! how I pity thee!

Chry. Have I not brought most joyful tidings to thee?
Elec. Alas! thou knowest not where nor what thou art.
Chry. Not know it! not believe what I have seen!
Elec. I tell thee, wretched as thou art, he's dead;
He and thy hoped-for bliss are gone together.
Thou must not think of it.
Chry. A wretch indeed
I am, if this be so; but, O! from whom,
Where didst thou learn the fatal news?
Elec. From one
Who was a witness of his death.
Chry. Where is he? Amazement chills my soul.
Elec. He is within,
And no unwelcome guest to Clytemnestra.
Chry. Alas! who then could bring these pious gifts?
Elec. Some friend to lost Orestes placed them there.
Chry. I flew with joy to tell thee better news, And little thought to hear so sad a tale.
The griefs I came to cure are present still,
And a new weight of woes is come upon us.
Elec. But know, my sister! all may yet be well,
If thou wilt hear me.
Chry. Can I raise the dead?
Elec. I am not mad, that I should ask it of thee.
Chry. What wouldst thou have me do?
Elec. I'd have thee act
As I shall dictate to thee.
Chry. If aught good
It may produce, I do consent.
Elec. Remember,
That if we hope to prosper, we must bear:
Success, in all that's human, must depend
On patience and on toil.
Chry. I know it well,
And stand resolved to bear my part in all.
ELEC. Hear then the solemn purport of my soul. Thou know'st too well how friendless and forlorn We both are left, by death bereaved of all 841 Who could support us. While Orestes lived, I cherished flattering thoughts of sweet revenge; But he is gone, and thou art now my hope. Yes, thou must join (for I will tell thee all) 845 With thy Electra to destroy Ægisthus. To kill the murderer why should we delay? Is aught of comfort left? Thou canst but weep Thy ravish'd fortunes torn unjustly from thee; Thou canst but mourn thy loss of nuptial rites, 850 And each domestic bliss; for, O my sister! The tyrant cannot be so weak of soul, As e'er to suffer our detested race To send new branches forth for his destruction. Assist me then; so shalt thou best deserve 855 A father's praises and a brother's love; So shalt thou still, as thou wert born, be free, And gain a partner worthy of thy bed. Dost thou not hear the applauding voice of Fame, And every tongue conspire to praise the deed? 860 Will they not mark us as they pass along, And cry aloud, "Behold the noble pair! The pious sisters who preserved their race! Whose daring souls, unawed by danger, sought The tyrant's life, regardless of their own. 865 What love to these, what reverence is due! These shall the assembled nation throng to praise, And every feast with public honours crown, The fit reward of more than female virtue!" Thus will they talk, my sister! while we live, 870 And after death our names shall be immortal. Aid then a brother's, aid a sister's cause, Think on thy father's wrongs, preserve Electra, Preserve thyself; and oh! remember well, That, to the noble mind, a life dishonour'd 875 Is infamy and shame.
Cho. Be prudence now
The guide of both.
Chry. Her mind was sure disturb'd,
My friends, or she would ne'er have talked so wildly.
Tell me, I beg thee, tell me, my Electra,
How couldst thou think so rash an enterprise
Could e'er succeed, or how request my aid?
Hast thou consider'd what thou art? a woman,
Weak and defenceless, to thy foes unequal.
Fortune, thou seest, each hour flows in upon them,
Nor deigns to look on us. What hand shall deal
The fatal blow, and pass unpunish'd for it?
Take heed, my sister, lest, thy counsel heard,
A heavier fate than that we now lament
Fall on us both: what will our boasted fame
Avail us then? It is not death alone
We have to fear; to die is not the worst
Of human ills: it is to wish for death,
And be refused the boon. Consider well,
Ere we destroy ourselves and all our race.
Be patient, dear Electra! for thy words,
As they had ne'er been utter'd, here they rest.
Learn to be wise at last, and when thou know'st
Resistance vain, submit to powers superior.
Cho. Submit, convinced that prudence is the first
Of human blessings.
Elec. 'Tis as I expected;
I knew full well thou wouldst reject my counsel:
But I can act alone; nor shall this arm
Shrink at the blow, or leave its work unfinished.
Chry. Would thou hadst shown this so much
vaunted prowess
When our loved father died!
Elec. I was the same
By nature then, but of a weaker mind.
Chry. Be sure thy courage fail thee not hereafter.
Elec. Thy aid will ne'er increase it.
Chry. 'Twill be wanted.
For those who act thus rashly must expect
The fate they merit.

Elec. I admire thy prudence,

But I detest thy cowardice.

Chry. I hear thee

With patience; for the time must one day come
When thou shalt praise me.

Elec. Never.

Chry. Be that left

For time to judge; enough remains.

Elec. Away;

There's no dependence on thee.

Chry. But there is,

Hadst thou a mind disposed for its acceptance.

Elec. Go, tell thy mother all.

Chry. I am not yet

So much thy enemy.

Elec. And yet would lead me

To infamy.

Chry. To safety and to wisdom.

Elec. Must I then judge as thy superior reason

May dictate to me?

Chry. When thy better mind

Shall come, I'll not refuse to follow thee.

Elec. Pity, who talks so well should act so poorly!

Chry. That censure falls on thee.

Elec. What I have said

Is truth.

Chry. Truth, sister, may be dangerous.

Elec. Rather than thus submit I will not live.

Chry. Hereafter thou wilt praise me.

Elec. I shall act

As seems most fit, nor wait for thy direction.

Chry. Art thou resolved then? Wilt thou not repent,

And take my counsel?

Elec. Counsel such as thine

Is of all ills the worst.
CHRYS.
Because, Electra,
Thou dost not seem to understand it.

ELEC.
Know, then,
That long ere this I had determined all.

CHRYS. Then fare thee well; thou canst not bear
my words,
Nor I thy actions.

ELEC. Go thy ways; henceforth I will not commune with thee; nor thy prayers,
No, nor thy tears, should ever bend me to it:
Such idle commerce were the height of folly.

CHRYS. If thou dost think this wisdom, think so still;
But when destruction comes, thou wilt approve
My better counsel, and be wise too late. [Exeunt

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Man's ungrateful, wretched race
Shall the birds of heaven disgrace,
Whose ever-watchful, ever-pious young
Protect the feeble parent whence they sprung! But if the blast of angry Jove
Hath power to strike, or Justice reigns above,
Not long unpunish'd shall such crimes remain;
When thou, O Fame! the messenger of woe,
Shalt bear these tidings to the realms below,—
Tidings, to Grecia's chiefs, of sorrow and of pain.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Bid the sad Atridae mourn,
Their house by cruel faction torn;
Tell them, no longer by affection join'd
The tender sisters bear a friendly mind.
The poor Electra, now alone,
Making her fruitless, solitary moan,
Like Philomela, weeps her father's fate;
Fearless of death, and every human ill,
Resolved her steady vengeance to fulfil:

Was ever child so good, or piety so great?
ELECTRA.—ACT IV.

STROPHE II.
Still are the virtuous and the good
By adverse fortune unsubdued,
Nor e'er will stoop to infamy and shame:
Thus Electra dauntless rose,
The war to wage with virtue's foes,
To gain the meed of never-ending fame.

ANTISTROPHE II.
Far, far above thy enemies,
In power and splendour mayst thou rise,
And future bliss compensate present wo!
For thou hast shown thy pious love,
By all that's dear to Heaven above,
Or sacred held by mortals here below. [Exeunt.

ACT IV.

ORESTES, PYLADES, with attendants, ELECTRA, CHORUS.

ORES. Say, virgins, if, by right instruction led,
This way I tend to—

CHO. Whither wouldst thou go? 975
ORES. The palace of Ægisthus.

CHO. Stranger, well
Wert thou directed; thou art there already.
ORES. Who, then, among your train shall kindly speak
A friend's approach, who comes with joyful news
Of highest import?

CHO. Be that office hers, [pointing to Electra.] 980
Whom, bound by nature's ties, it best befits.
ORES. Go, then, and say, from Phocis are arrived
Who beg admittance to the king.

ELEC. Alas!
And comest thou, then, to prove the dreadful tale
Already told?
ORES. What you have heard I know not; 985
But of Orestes came I here to speak,
By Strophius' command.
92

SOPHOCLES.

Elec.  What is it? say.
O, how I dread thy message!

Ores. [showing the urn.] Here behold
His poor remains—

Elec. O lost, undone Electra!
'Tis then too plain, and misery is complete.

Ores. If for Orestes thus thy sorrows flow,
Know that within this urn his ashes lie.

Elec. Do they, indeed? Then let me, by the
gods
I do entreat thee, let me snatch them from thee;
Let me embrace them, let me weep my fate,
And mourn our hapless race.

Ores. Give her the urn,
Whoe'er she be; for not with hostile mind
She craves the boon: perhaps some friend; perhaps
By blood united.

Elec. [taking the urn.] O, ye dear remains
Of my Orestes, the most loved of men!
How do I see thee now! how much unlike
What my fond hopes presaged, when last we parted!
I sent thee forth with all the bloom of youth
Fresh on thy cheek; and now, O dismal change!
I bear thee in these hands an empty shade.

Would I had died ere I had sent thee hence,
Ere I had saved thee from the tyrant's hand!
Would thou hadst died thyself that dreadful day,
And join'd thy murder'd father in the tomb,
Rather than thus, a wretched exile fallen,

Far from thy sister in a foreign land!
I was not there with pious hands to wash
Thy breathless corpse, or from the greedy flame
To gather up thy ashes. What have all
My pleasing toils, my fruitless cares availed,

E'en from thy infant years; that as a mother
I watched thee still, and as a mother loved?
I would not trust thee to a servant's hand,
But was myself the guardian of thy youth,
Thy dear companion: all is gone with thee.
Alas. thy death, like the devouring storm,
Hath borne down all: my father is no more,
And thou art gone, and I am going too.
Our fues rejoice; our mother, mad with joy,
Smiles at our miseries; that unnatural mother,
She whom thou oft hast promised to destroy;
But cruel fate hath blasted all my hopes,
And for my dear Orestes left me naught.
But this poor shadow. O! the accursed place,
Where I had sent thee! O my hapless brother!
Thou hast destroy’d Electra: take me, then,
O take me to thee! let this urn enclose
My ashes too, and dust to dust be join’d,
That we may dwell together once again.
In life united by one hapless fate,
I would not wish in death to be divided;
The dead are free from sorrows.

CHO. Fair Electra!

Do not indulge thy griefs; but, O! remember,
Sprung from a mortal like thyself, Orestes
Was mortal too; that we are mortal all.

ORES. [aside.] What shall I say? I can refrain no
longer.

ELEC. Why this emotion?

ORES. [looking at Electra.] Can it be Electra?

That lovely form!

ELEC. It is, indeed, that wretch.

ORES. O dreadful!

ELEC. Stranger! dost thou weep for me?

ORES. By impious hands to perish thus!

ELEC. For me

Doubtless thou weep’st, for I am changed indeed.

ORES. Of nuptial rites, and each domestic joy

To live deprived!

ELEC. Why dost thou gaze upon me?

ORES. Alas! I did not know I was so wretched.

ELEC. Why, what hath made thee so?

ORES. I see thy woes.

ELEC. Not half of them.
Ores. Can there be worse than these?
Elec. To live with murderers?
Ores. What murderers? whom?
Elec. The murderers of my father: bound to serve them.
Ores. Who binds thee?
Elec. One who calls herself a mother:—
A name she little merits.
Ores. But say how? 1055
Doth she withhold the means of life, or act
With brutal violence to thee?
Elec. Both, alas!
Are my hard lot; she tries a thousand means
To make me wretched.
Ores. And will none assist,
Will none defend thee?
Elec. None. My only hope 1060
Lies buried there.
Ores. O, how I pity thee!
Elec. 'Tis kindly done; for none will pity me,
None but thyself. Art thou indeed a stranger,
Or doth some nearer tie unite our sorrows?
Ores. I could unfold a tale;—but, say, these virgins!
May I depend on them?
Elec. They are our friends,
And faithful all.
Ores. Then lay the urn aside,
And I will tell thee.
Elec. Do not take it from me;
Do not, dear stranger!
Ores. But I must indeed.
Elec. Do not, I beg thee.
Ores. Come, you'll not repent it. 1070
Elec. O my poor brother! if thy dear remains
Are wrested from me, I am most unhappy.
Ores. No more; thou must not grieve for him.
Elec. Not grieve
For my Orestes!
ELECTRA.—ACT IV.

Ores. No; you should not weep.
Elec. Am I unworthy of him then?
Ores. O, no! 1075

But do not grieve.
Elec. Not when I bear the ashes
Of my dear brother?
Ores. But they are not there,
Unless by fiction, and a well-wrought tale
That hath deceived thee.
Elec. Where then is his tomb?
Ores. The living need none.
Elec. Ha! what say'st thou?
Ores. Truth. 1080

Elec. Does he then live?
Ores. If I have life, he lives.
Elec. And art thou he?
Ores. Look here, and be convinced;
This mark, 'tis from our father.
Elec. O bless'd hour!
Ores. Blessed indeed!
Elec. Art thou then here?
Ores. I am.
Elec. Do I embrace thee?
Ores. Mayst thou do it long! 1085
Elec. O my companions! O my dearest friends!

Do ye not see Orestes, once by art
And cruel fiction torn from life and me,
But now by better art to life restored?
Cho. Daughter! we do; and see, mid all our woes,

From every eye fast flow the tears of joy.
Elec. O, ye are come, my friends! in happiest hour:
E'en to behold, to find again the man
Whom your souls wished for, ye are come.
Cho. We are;

But, O! in silence hide thy joys, Electra! 1095
Elec. Wherefore in silence?
Cho. Lest our foes within
Should hear thee.
Elec. Never, by the virgin power
Of chaste Diana, will I hide my joys,
Or meanly stoop to fear an idle throng
Of helpless women.

Ores. Women have their power, 1100
And that thou know'st.

Elec. Alas! and so I do;
For, O! thou hast call'd back the sad remembrance
Of that misfortune which admits no cure,
And ne'er can be forgot.

Ores. A fitter time
May come, when we must think of that.

Elec. All times, 1105
All hours, are fit to talk of justice in,
And best the present, now when I am free.

Ores. Thou art so; be so still.

Elec. What's to be done?
Ores. Talk not, when prudence should restrain
thy tongue.

Elec. Who shall restrain it? Who shall bind
Electra 1110
To fearful silence, when Orestes comes?
When thus I see thee here, beyond my thoughts,
Beyond my hopes.

Ores. The gods have sent me to thee;
They bade me come.

Elec. Indeed! more grateful still
Is thy return; if by the gods' command 1115
Thou camest, the gods will sure protect thee here.

Ores. I would not damp thy joys, and yet I fear
Lest they should carry thee too far.

Elec. O, no!
But after so long absence, thus return'd
To thy afflicted sister; sure thou would'st not—

Ores. Do what?

Elec. Thou would'st not grudge me
the dear pleasure 1121
Of looking on thee?

Ores. No; nor suffer any
To rob thee of it.
ELEc. Shall I then?
ORES. No doubt.

ELEc. I hear that voice, my friends! I never thought.
To hear again: ye know, when I received 1125
The dreadful news, I kept my grief within,
Silent and sad; but now I have thee here,
Now I behold thee, now I fix my eyes
On that dear form which never was forgotten.

ORES. Spend not thy time in fruitless words, nor tell me 1130
How Clytemnestra lives, nor how Ægisthus
Hath lavish'd all our wealth: the present hour
Demands our strict' est attention. Tell me, how,
Whether by fraud or open force, our foes
May best be vanquish'd: let no cheerful smile 1135
Betray thee to thy mother; seem to grieve
As thou Wert wont; when we have done the deed,
Joy shall appear, and we will smile in safety.

ELEc. Thy will is mine. Not to myself I owe
My present bliss; I have it all from thee, 1140
From thee, my brother! nor should aught persuade me

To give Orestes e'en a moment's pain:
That were ungrateful to the indulgent Power,
Who thus hath smiled propitious. Know, Ægisthus
Has left the palace; Clytemnestra's there; 1145
And for thy needless fears that I should smile,
Or wear a cheerful face, I never shall.
Hatred so strong is rooted in my soul,
The sight of them will make me sad enough.
The tears of joy perhaps may flow for thee, 1150
And add to the deceit; for flow they must,
When I behold thee in one happy hour
Thus snatch'd from life, and thus to life restored.
I could not hope it: O, 'tis passing strange!
If from the tomb our father should arise, 1155
And say, he lived, I think I should believe him;
And. O! when thou art come so far, 'tis fit
I yield to thee in all: do thou direct
My every step; but know, had I been left
Alone, e'en I would not have fail'd in all,
But conquer'd bravely, or as bravely fell.
Ores. No more. I hear the footsteps as of one
Coming this way.
Elec. Strangers! go in, and bear
That which with joy they cannot but receive,
But which with joy they cannot long possess. 1165

GOVERNOR OF ORESTES, ELECTRA, ORESTES, CHORUS.

Gov. Madness and folly thus to linger here!
Have ye no thought? is life not worth your care?
Do ye not know the dangers that surround you?
Had I not watch'd myself before the palace,
Ere ye had entered, all your secret plan
Had been discovered to your foes within:
Wherefore no more of this tumultuous joy,
And lengthen'd converse; 'tis not fitting now.
Go in; away; delays are dangerous
At such an hour: our fate depends upon it. 1175
Ores. May I with safety? is all well within?
Gov. None can suspect you.
Ores. Spake you of my death,
As we determined?
Gov. Living as thou art,
They do account thee one among the dead.
Ores. And are they glad? what say they?
Gov. By-and-by 1180
We'll talk of that; let it suffice, that all
Is right within; and that which most they think so
May prove most fatal to them.
Elec. [pointing to the Governor.] Who is this?
Ores. Do you not know?
Elec. I cannot recollect him.
Ores. Not know the man to whom you trusted me!
1185
Under whose care—
Elec. When? how?
ORES. To Phocis sent,
I’scaped the tyrant.

ELEC. Can it then be he,
Among the faithless only faithful found,
When our dear father fell?

ORES. It is the same.

ELEC. [to Gov.] Dearest of men! great guardian of our race!

Art thou then here? thou, who hast saved us both
From countless woes? Swift were thy feet to bring
Glad tidings to me, and thy hand stretch’d forth
Its welcome succour: but, O! why deceive me?
Why wouldst thou kill me with thy dreadful tale,
E’en when thou hadst such happiness in store? Hail, father, hail! for I must call thee so:
Know, thou hast been to me, in one short day,
Both the most hated and most loved of men.

Gov. No more of that: we shall have time enough
To talk of it hereafter. Let us go;
This is the hour; the queen is now alone,
And not a man within: if ye delay,
Expect to meet more formidable foes,
In wisdom and in numbers far superior.

ORES. We will not talk, my Pylades! but act.
Let us go in; but to the gods, who guard
This place, be first due adoration paid.

ELEC. Hear, then, Apollo! great Lycean! hear
Their humble prayer. O! hear Electra too,
Who with unsparing hand her choicest gifts
Hath never fail’d to lay before thy altars.
Accept the little all which now remains
For me to give: accept my humblest prayers,
My vows, my adorations; smile propitious
On all our counsels. O! assist us now,
And show mankind what punishment remains
For guilty mortals from offended Heaven! [Exeunt
SOPHOCLES.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Behold, he comes! the slaughter-breathing god,
Mars, ever thirsting for the murderer's blood: 1220
And see, the dogs of war are close behind.
Naught can escape their all-devouring rage:
This did my conscious heart long since presage,
And the fair dream that struck my raptured mind.

ANTISTROPHE.

The avenger steals along, with silent feet, 1225
And sharpened sword, to his paternal seat,
His injured father's wrongs to vindicate:
Conceal'd from all by Maia's fraudulent son,
Who safe conducts him till the deed be done.
Nor longer will delay the needful work of fate. 1230

[Exeunt.

ACT V.

ELECTRA, CHORUS.

Elec. O my dear friends! they are about it now;
The deed is doing: but be still. 1235
Cho. What deed?

How? where?

Elec. She doth prepare the funeral banquet;
But they are not far from her.
Cho. Why then leave them?
Elec. To watch Ægisthus, lest he steal upon us,
And blast our purpose.

1228 Mercury, the son of Jupiter and Maia, was the god of fraud and treachery. The propriety of Mercury's peculiar assistance in this place may likewise be accounted for from his relation to Myrtillus, who was slain by Pelops.

1233 The Greek funeral banquet, which was usually spread on the tomb of the deceased by the nearest relation. This banquet Electra imagines that Clytemnestra was already preparing for Orestes, whom she supposed dead: "but they," says she, "are not far from her;" that is, they who are preparing one for her. The sentence, we see, is purposely unfinished.
ELECTRA.—ACT V.

Cly. [behind the scenes.] O! I am betrayed! 1236
My palace full of murderers! not a friend
Left to protect me!

Elec. Some one cries within:
Did you not hear?

Cho. It is too horrible
For mortal ear: I tremble at the sound. 1240

Cly. [within.] Aegisthus! O! where art thou?

Elec. Hark! again

The voice, and louder.

Cly. [within.] O! my child, my child!
Pity thy mother! pity her who bore thee!
Elec. Be thine the pity which thou show'dst to
him,
And to his father.

Cho. O! unhappy kingdom! 1245
O, wretched race! thy misery is full:
This day will finish all.

Cly. [within.] O! I am wounded!

Elec. Another stroke! Another, if thou canst.

Cly. [within.] Ah me! again?
Elec. O, that Aegisthus too
Groan'd with thee now!

Cho. Then vengeance is complete: 1250
The dead arise, and shed their murderous blood
In copious streams.

Orestes, Pylades, Governor of Orestes, Electra,
Chorus.

Elec. Behold them here: their hands
Dropping with gore;—a pious sacrifice
To the great god of war. How is't, Orestes?

Ores. 'Tis very well, all's well: if there be truth
In great Apollo's oracles, she's dead. 1256
Thou need'st not fear a cruel mother now.

Cho. No more; Aegisthus comes.

Elec. Instant go in

Do you not see him? joyful he returns.
Cho. Retire; thus far is right: go on, and prosper. 1260
Ores. Fear not, we'll do it.
Cho. But immediately.
Ores. I'm gone. [Exeunt Orestes, Pylades, and Gov.
Elec. For what remains here to be done,
Be it my care; I'll whisper in his ear
A few soft flattering words, that he may rush
Unknowing, down precipitate, on ruin. 1265

Ægisthus, Electra, Chorus.
Ægis. Which of you knows aught of these Pho-
cian guests,
Who come to tell us of Orestes' death?
You first I ask, Electra! once so proud
And fierce of soul. It doth concern you most:
And therefore you, I think, can best inform me. 1270
Elec. Yes, I can tell thee: is it possible
I should not know it?—what were not to know
A circumstance of dearest import to me?
Ægis. Where are they, then?
Elec. Within.
Ægis. And spake they truth?
Elec. They did; a truth not proved by words
alone, 1275
But facts undoubted.
Ægis. Shall we see him, then?
Elec. Ay, and a dreadful sight it is to see.
Ægis. Thou art not wont to give me so much joy;
Now I am glad indeed.
Elec. Glad mayst thou be,
If aught there is in that can give thee joy. 1280
Ægis. Silence within; and let my palace gates
Be open'd all, that Argos and Mycenæ
May send her millions forth to view the sight;
And if there are who nourish idle hopes
That still Orestes lives, behold him here, 1285
And learn submission, nor indame the crowd
Against their lawful sovereign, lest they feel
An angry monarch's heaviest vengeance on them.

Elec. Already I have learn'd the task, and yield
To power superior.

[Scene opens, and discovers the body of Clytemnestra
extended on a bier and covered with a veil.

Orestes, Pylades, Governor of Orestes, Ägisthus,
Electra, Chorus, and a crowd of spectators from
the city.

Ägis. What a sight is here! 1290
O deity supreme! this could not be
But by thy will; and whether Nemesis
Shall still o'ertake me for my crime I know not.
Take off the veil, that I may view him well;
He was by blood allied, and therefore claims 1295
Our decent sorrows.

Ores. Take it off thyself;
'Tis not my office; thee it best befits
To see and to lament.

Äegis. And so it does,
And I will do it: send Clytemnestra hither.

[Taking off the veil.

Ores. She is before thee.

Äegis. Ha! what do I see? 1300
Ores. Why, what's the matter? what affrights 
thee so?
Do you not see him?

Äegis. In what dreadful snare
Am I then fallen?

Ores. Dost thou not now behold
That thou art talking with the dead?

Äegis. Alas!

Too well I see it, and thou art—Orestes. 1305
Ores. So great a prophet thou, and guess so ill?
Äegis. I know that I am lost, undone for ever:
But let me speak to thee.

Elec. Do not, Orestes!
No, not a word. What can a moment's space
 Profit a wretch like him, to death devoted? 1310
Quick let him die, and cast his carcass forth
To dogs and vultures; they will best perform
Fit obsequies for him; by this alone
We can be free and happy.

Ores. Get thee in;
This is no time for talk; thy life, thy life. 1315
Ægis. But why go in? If what thou mean'st to do
Be just, what need of darkness to conceal it?
Why not destroy me here?

Ores. It is not thine
Now to command: hence to the fatal place
Where our dear father fell, and perish there. 1320
Ægis. This palace then is doom’d to be the witness
Of all the present, all the future woes
Of Peleus’ hapless race.

Ores. Of thine, at least,
It shall be witness: that’s my prophecy,
And a most true one.

Ægis. ’Tis not from thy father. 1325
Ores. Thou talk’st, and time is lost. Away!
Ægis. I follow.

Ores. Thou shalt go first.
Ægis. Think’st thou I mean to fly?
Ores. No; but I’d make thy end most bitter to thee
In every circumstance, nor let thee choose
The softest means. Were all like thee to perish
Who violate the laws, ’twould lessen much 1331
The guilt of mortals, and reform mankind. [Exeunt.

CHORUS.

O race of Atreus! after all thy woes,
How art thou thus, by one adventurous deed,
To freedom and to happiness restored! 1335
PHILOCTETES.
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Ulysses, king of Ithaca.
Neoptolemus, son of Achilles.
Philoctetes, son of Pean, and companion of Hercules.
A Spy.
Hercules.
Chorus, composed of the companions of Ulysses and Nolemus.
PHILOCTETES.

ARGUMENT.

PHILOCTETES, the son of Pean, had been honoured with the friendship of Hercules, who at his death bequeathed to him his bow, together with the poisoned arrows dipped in the blood of the hydra. Philoctetes, after this, being in search of an altar dedicated to his deceased friend in the island of Chrysa, was there bit by a serpent: the wound festered, and an incurable ulcer ensued; notwithstanding which, he proceeded to the siege of Troy, where the wound growing desperate, his continual cries and groans so interrupted the motions of the war and disheartened the soldiers, that the Grecian chiefs thought it advisable to remove him from the army; and Ulysses was accordingly commissioned to carry him to Lemnos, an uninhabited island in the Ægean Sea, and there to leave him. In this miserable situation he remained for ten years; when the oracle informed the Greeks that Troy could never be conquered without the arrows of Hercules, then in the possession of Philoctetes. Ulysses and Neoptolemus were despatched with directions to bring him to the siege. The son of Achilles, at the suggestion of his crafty companion, introduced himself to the wounded hero with an artful enumeration of affronts, which he pretended to have received from the Greeks; and having thus insinuated himself into his confidence, he contrived to get possession of the bow and fatal arrows: and the artifice was nearly brought to a successful termination, when, struck with remorse, Neoptolemus revealed his whole design to Philoctetes; and, at his earnest entreaties, restored him his weapons, in spite of the remonstrances of Ulysses. The services thus rendered by Neoptolemus were insufficient, however, to persuade Philoctetes to accompany him to Troy; when Hercules descended from the skies, and presently overcame all his scruples by the promise of a complete cure of his wounds by the skill of Esculapius.
ACT I.

Scene, Lemnos, near a grotto, in a rock by the sea-side

ULYSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, ATTENDANT.

ULYS. At length, my noble friend! thou bravest son
Of a brave father, father of us all,
The great Achilles! we have reach'd the shore
Of sea-girt Lemnos, desert and forlorn,
Where never tread of human step is seen,
Or voice of mortal heard, save his alone,
Poor Philoctetes, Pæan's wretched son,
Whom here I left (for such were my commands
From Grecia's chiefs), when, by his fatal wound
Oppress'd, his groans and execrations dreadful
Alarm'd our hosts, our sacred rights profaned,
And interrupted holy sacrifice.
But why should I repeat the tale? The time
Admits not of delay; we must not linger,
Lest he discover our arrival here,
And all our purposed fraud to draw him hence
Be ineffectual: lend me then thy aid.
Surveying round thee, canst thou see a rock
With double entrance; to the sun's warm rays
In winter open, and in summer's heat
Giving free passage to the welcome breeze?
A little to the left there is a fountain
Of living water, where, if yet he breathes,
He slakes his thirst: if aught thou seest of this,
Inform me; so shall each to each impart
Counsel most fit, and serve our common cause.

NEO. [leaving Ulysses a little behind him.]
If I mistake not, I behold a cave,
Ev'n such as thou describest.

ULYS. Dost thou? which way

NEO. Yonder it is; but no path leading thither,
Or trace of human footprint.
ULYS. In his cell.

"Tis chance but he hath laid him down to rest;
Look, if he hath not.

NEO. [advancing towards the cave.] Not a creature there.

ULYS. Nor food, nor mark of household preparation!

NEO. A rustic bed of scatter'd leaves.
ULYS. What more?

NEO. A wooden bowl, the work of some rude hand,

With a few sticks for fuel.

ULYS. This is all
His little treasure here.

NEO. Unhappy man!

Some linen for his wounds.

ULYS. This must be, then,

His place of habitation: far from hence
He cannot roam; distemper'd as he is,
It were impossible. He is but gone
A little way, for needful food, or herb
Of power, to 'suage and mitigate his pain:
Wherefore despatch this servant to some place
Of observation, whence he may espy
His every motion, lest he rush upon us.
There's not a Grecian, whom his soul so much
Could wish to crush beneath him, as Ulysses.

[Makes a signal to the attendant, who retires.

NEO. He's gone to guard each avenue; and now,
If thou hast aught of moment to impart
Touching our purpose, say it; I attend.

ULYS. Son of Achilles! mark me well; remember,
What we are doing not on strength alone,
Or courage, but on conduct will depend;
Therefore if aught uncommon be proposed,
Strange to thy ears, or adverse to thy nature,
Reflect that 'tis thy duty to comply,
And act conjunctive with me.

NEO. Well! what is it?
ULYS. We must deceive this Philoctetes; that
Will be thy task. When he shall ask thee who
And what thou art, Achilles’ son, reply;
Thus far within the verge of truth, no more.
Add, that resentment fired thee to forsake
The Grecian fleet, and seek thy native soil,
Unkindly used by those, who long with vows
Had sought thy aid to humble haughty Troy;
And when thou camest, ungrateful as they were,
The arms of great Achilles, thy just right,
Gave to Ulysses: here thy bitter taunts
And sharp invectives liberally bestow.
On me: say what thou wilt, I shall forgive,
And Greece will not forgive thee if thou dost not;
For against Troy thy efforts are all in vain
Without his arrows: safely thou mayst hold
Friendship and converse with him, but I cannot.
Thou wert not with us when the war began,
Nor bound by solemn oath to join our host,
As I was; me he knows, and if he find
That I am with thee, we are both undone.
They must be ours, then, these all-conquering arms
Remember that. I know, thy noble nature
Abhors the thought of treachery or fraud;
But what a glorious prize is victory!
Therefore be bold; we will be just hereafter.
Give to deceit and me a little portion
Of one short day, and for thy future life
Be call’d the holiest, worthiest, best of men.

NEO. What but to hear alarms my conscious soul,
Son of Laertes! I shall never practise;
I was not born to flatter or betray;
Nor I, nor he (the voice of fame reports)
Who gave me birth. What open arms can do,
Behold me prompt to act; but ne’er to fraud
Will I descend. Sure we can more than match
In strength a foe thus lame and impotent;
I came to be a helpmate to thee, not
A base betrayer; and, O king! believe me;
Rather, much rather, would I fall by virtue,  
Than rise by guilt to certain victory.  

Ulyss. O noble youth, and worthy of thy sire! 100  
When I like thee was young, like thee of strength  
And courage boastful, little did I deem  
Of human policy; but long experience  
Hath taught me, son! 'tis not the powerful arm,  
But soft, enchanting tongue, that governs all. 106  

Neoptolemus. And thou wouldst have me tell an odious falsehood?

Ulyss. He must be gain'd by fraud.  

Neoptolemus. By fraud! and why  
Not by persuasion?  

Ulyss. He'll not listen to it,  
And force were vainer still.  

What mighty power  

Hath he to boast?  

Ulyss. His arrows, wing'd with death 110  
Inevitable.  

Neoptolemus. Then it were not safe  
Ev'n to approach him.  

Ulyss. No; unless by fraud  

He be secured.  

Neoptolemus. And think'st thou 'tis not base  
To tell a lie then?  

Ulyss. Not if on that lie  
Depends our safety.  

Neoptolemus. Who shall dare to tell it 115  
Without a blush?  

Ulyss. We need not blush at aught  
That may promote our interest and success.  

Neoptolemus. But where's the interest that should bias me?  
Come he or not to Troy, imports it aught  
To Neoptolemus?  

Ulyss. Troy cannot fall 120  

Without his arrows.  

Neoptolemus. Saidst thou not, that I  
Was destined to destroy her?
ULYS.

Without him
Naught canst thou do, and they without thee nothing.

NEO. Then I must have them.

ULYS. When thou hast, remember,
A double prize awaits thee.

NEO. What, Ulysses! 125

ULYS. The glorious names of valiant and of wise.

NEO. Away; I'll do it. Thoughts of guilt or shame
No more appal me.

ULYS. Wilt thou do it, then?
Wilt thou remember what I told thee of?

NEO. Depend on't; I have promised; that's suffi-
cient. 130

ULYS. Here, then, remain thou; I must not be
seen;
If thou stay long, I'll send a faithful spy,
Who, in a sailor's habit well disguised,
May pass unknown; of him, from time to time,
What may best suit our purpose thou shalt know. 135
I'll to the ship; farewell; and may the god
Who brought us here, the fraudulent Mercury,
And great Minerva, guardian of our country,
And ever kind to me, protect us still! [Exit Ulysses.

CHOR. Master! instruct us, strangers as we are, 140
What we may utter, what we must conceal.
Doubtless the man we seek will entertain
Suspicion of us; how are we to act?
To those alone belong the art to rule,
Who bear the sceptre from the hand of Jove: 145
To thee, of right, devolves the power supreme,
From thy great ancestors deliver'd down:
Speak, then, our royal lord, and we obey.

NEO. If you would penetrate yon deep recess,

140 The Chorus is composed of the soldiers and followers of
Ulysses and Neoptolemus; we must not be surprised, therefore,
to find them conspiring with their masters to deceive Philoct-
etes, and throughout the play aiding and assisting the designs
of their commanders.
To see the cave where Philoctetes lies, 150
Go forward; but remember to return
When the poor wanderer comes this way, prepared
To aid our purpose here, if need require.
  Cho. O king! we ever meant to fix our eyes
On thee, and wait attentive to thy will. 155
But, tell us, in what part is he conceal'd?
'Tis fit we know the place, lest unobserved
He rush upon us. Which way doth it lie?
Seest thou his footsteps leading from the cave,
Or hither bent?
  Néo. [advancing towards the cave.] Behold the
double door 160
Of his poor dwelling, and the flinty bed.
  Cho. And whither is its wretched master gone?
  Néo. Doubtless in search of food, and not far off,
For such his manner is; accustomed here
(So Fame reports) to pierce with winged arrows
His savage prey for daily sustenance; 166
His wound still painful, and no hope of cure.
  Cho. Alas! I pity him; without a friend,
Without a fellow-sufferer, left alone,
Deprived of all the mutual joys that flow
From sweet society; distemper'd too.
How can he bear it? O unhappy race
Of mortal man! doom'd to an endless round
Of sorrows, and immeasurable wo!
Second to none in fair nobility
Was Philoctetes, of illustrious race;
Yet here he lies, from every human aid
Far off removed, in dreadful solitude,
And mingles with the wild and savage herd;
With them in famine and in misery
Consumes his days, and weeps their common fate.
Unheeded, save when babbling Echo mourns,
In bitterest notes, responsive to his wo.
  Néo. And yet I wonder not; for if aright
I judge, from angry Heaven the sentence came, 185
And Chrysa was the cruel source of all:
Nor doth this sad disease inflict him still
Incurable, without assenting gods;
For so they have decreed, lest Troy should fall
Beneath his arrows, ere the appointed time
Of its destruction come.
  Cho.                  No more, my son!
  Neo. What say'st thou?
  Cho. Sure I heard a dismal groan
Of some afflicted wretch!
  Neo. Which way?
  Cho. Ev'n now
I hear it, and the sound as of some step
Slow moving this way: he is not far from us;
His plaints are louder now. Prepare, my son!
  Neo. For what?
  Cho. New troubles; for, behold, he comes
Not like the shepherd, with his rural pipe
And cheerful song, but groaning heavily.
Either his wounded foot against some thorn
Hath struck, and pains him sorely; or, perchance,
He hath espied from far some ship attempting
To enter this inhospitable port,
And hence his cries to save it from destruction.

[Exeunt.

ACT II.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

Phl. Say, welcome strangers! what disastrous fate
Led you to this inhospitable shore,
Nor haven safe, nor habitation fit,
Affording ever! Of what clime, what race?
Who are ye? Speak; if I may trust that garb,
Familiar once to me, ye are of Greece,
My much-loved country: let me hear the sound
Of your long-wished-for voices: do not look
With horror on me; but in kind compassion
Pity a wretch deserted and forlorn
In this sad place. O! if ye come as friends,
Speak, then, and answer; hold some converse with
me;
For this, at least, from man to man is due.

Neo. Know, stranger, first, what most thou
seem'st to wish;
We are of Greece.

Phi. O happiness to hear!
After so many years of dreadful silence,
How welcome was that sound! O! tell me, son!
What chance, what purpose, who conducted thee?
What brought thee hither, what propitious gale?
Who art thou? Tell me all; inform me quickly.

Neo. Native of Scyros! thither I return;
My name is Neoptolemus, the son
Of brave Achilles. I have told thee all.

Phi. Dear is thy country, and thy father dear
To me, thou darling of old Lycomede!
But tell me, in what fleet, and whence thou comest?

Neo. From Troy.

Phi. From Troy? I think thou wert not with us
When first our fleet sail'd forth.

Neo. Wert thou then there?
Or know'st thou aught of that great enterprise?

Phi. Know you not, then, the man whom you be-
hold!

Neo. How should I know whom I had never seen?

Phi. Have you ne'er heard of me, nor of my
name?

Hath my sad story never reach'd your ear?

Neo. Never.

Phi. Alas! how hateful to the gods,

225 Scyros was an island in the Ægean Sea, of which Lyco-
medes was king. Hither Achilles was brought in woman's ap-
parel to avoid the Trojan war; and, falling in love with Del-
damina, the king's daughter, had by her Pyrrhus, otherwise Ne-
optolemus. This explains what follows, where Philoctetes
calls him "the darling of old Lycomede."
How very poor a wretch must I be, then!
That Greece should never hear of woes like mine!
But they who sent me hither, they conceal'd them,
And smile triumphant, while my cruel wounds
Grow deeper still. O, sprung from great Achilles!
Behold before thee Pæan's wretched son,
With whom (a chance but thou hast heard) remain
The dreadful arrows of renown'd Alcides;
Ev'n the unhappy Philoctetes; him,
Whom the Atridae, and the vile Ulysses,
Inhuman left, distemper'd as I was
By the envenom'd serpent's deep-felt wound.
Soon as they saw that, with long toil oppress'd,
Sleep had o'ertaken me on the hollow rock,
There did they leave me, when from Chrysa's shore
They bent their fatal course: a little food,
And these few rags, were all they would bestow.
Such one day be their fate! Alas! my son,
How dreadful, think'st thou, was that waking to me,
When from my sleep I rose, and saw them not!
How did I weep, and mourn my wretched state,
When not a ship remain'd of all the fleet
That brought me here! No kind companion left
To minister or needful food or balm
To my sad wounds! On every side I look'd,
And nothing saw but wo; of that, indeed,
Measure too full; for day succeeded day,
And still no comfort came. Myself alone
Could to myself the means of life afford
In this poor grotto; on my bow I lived:
The winged dove, which my sharp arrow slew,
With pain I brought into my little hut,
And feasted there; then from the broken ice
I slaked my thirst, or crept into the wood
For useful fuel: from the stricken flint
I drew the latent spark, that warms me still
And still revives: this, with my humble roof,
Preserve me, son! but, O! my wounds remain.
Thou seest an island desolate and waste:
No friendly port, nor hopes of gain to tempt,
Nor host to welcome in the traveller:
Few seek the wild, inhospitable shore.

By adverse winds, sometimes the unwilling guests
(As well thou mayst suppose) were hither driven;
But when they came, they only pitied me,
Gave me a little food, or better garb
To shield me from the cold; in vain I pray'd
That they would bear me to my native soil,
For none would listen. Here, for ten long years,
Have I remain'd, while misery and famine
Keep fresh my wounds, and double my misfortune.
This have the Atridæ and Ulysses done,
And may the gods with equal woes repay them!

Cho. O son of Pæan! well might those who came,
And saw thee thus, in kind compassion, weep:
I too must pity thee: I can no more.

Néo. I can bear witness to thee, for I know
By sad experience what the Atridæ are,
And what Ulysses.

Phi. Hast thou suffer'd, then?
And dost thou hate them too?

Néo. O! that these hands
Could vindicate my wrongs! Mycenæ, then,
And Sparta should confess, that Scyros boasts
Of sons as brave and valiant as their own.

Phi. O noble youth! but wherefore camest thou hither?

Whence this resentment?

Néo. I will tell thee all,
If I can bear to tell it: know, then, soon
As great Achilles died—

Phi. —O! stay, my son!

Néo. He is, and not

299, 300 Two cities of Peloponnesus. Neoptolemus here threatens Agamemnon and Menelaus; the former of whom was King of Mycenæ, and the latter of Sparta.
By mortal hand, but by Apollo's shaft
Fell glorious.

Phi. O! most worthy of each other,
The slayer and the slain! Permit me, son, 309
To mourn his fate, ere I attend to thine. [He weeps.

Neo. Alas! thou need'st not weep for others'
woes;
Thou hast enough already of thy own.

Phi. 'Tis very true; and therefore to thy tale.

Neo. Thus, then, it was. Soon as Achilles died,
Phoenix, the guardian of his tender years, 315
Instant sail'd forth, and sought me out at Scyros:
With him the wary chief, Ulysses, came.
They told me then (or true or false I know not),
My father dead, by me, and me alone,
Proud Troy must fall: I yielded to their prayers; 320
I hoped to see at least the dear remains
Of him, whom living I had long in vain
Wish'd to behold: safe at Sigeum's port
Soon we arrived; in crowds the numerous host
Throng'd to embrace me, call'd the gods to witness,
In me once more they saw their loved Achilles 326
To life restored; but, he, alas! was gone.
I shed the duteous tear, then sought my friends,
The Atridae (friends I thought them) claim'd the arms
Of my dead father, and what else remain'd 330
His late possession; when (O cruel words!
And wretched I to hear them!) thus they answer'd.
"Son of Achilles! thou in vain demand'st
Those arms, already to Ulysses given;
The rest be thine." I wept; "And is it thus!" 335
Indignant I replied, "ye dare to give
My right away."—"Know, boy!" Ulysses cried,
"That right was mine, and therefore they bestow'd
The boon on me;—me, who preserved the arms,
And him who bore them too." With anger fired 340

340 Ulysses was reported to have taken away the dead body
of Achilles from the Trojans, and carried it off the field of battle
to the Grecian camp.
At this proud speech, I threaten'd all that rage
Could dictate to me, if he not return'd them.
Stung with my words, yet calm, he answer'd me:
"Thou wert not with us; thou wert in a place
Where thou shouldst not have been: and since thou
mean'st
To brave us thus, know, thou shalt never bear
Those arms with thee to Scyros; 'tis resolved."
Thus injured, thus deprived of all I held
Most precious, by the worst of men, I left
The hateful place, and seek my native soil; 350
Nor do I blame so much the proud Ulysses,
As his base masters. Army, city, all
Depend on those who rule: when men grow vile,
The guilt is theirs who taught them to be wicked
I've told thee all; and him who hates the Atridæ, 355
I hold a friend to me, and to the gods.

CHORUS.—STROPHE.

O Earth! thou mother of great Jove,
Embracing all with universal love!
Author benign of every good,
Through whom Pactolus rolls his golden flood! 360
To thee, whom in thy rapid car
Fierce lions draw, I rose, and made my prayer;
To thee I made my sorrows known,
When from Achilles' injured son
The Atridæ gave the prize, that fatal day, 365
When proud Ulysses bore his arms away.

Phi. I wonder not, my friend! to see you here,
And I believe the tale; for well I know
The men who wrong'd you, know the base Ulysses.
Falsehood and fraud dwell on his lips, and naught 370
That's just or good can be expected from him:

360 The Earth, under the various names of Cybele, Ops, Rhea, and Vesta, called the Mother of the Gods, was worshipped in Phrygia and Libya, where the river Pactolus is said to have enriched Croesus with its sands. Cybele is represented by the poets as drawn by lions.
But strange it is to me, that, Ajax present,
He dare attempt it.
    Neo. Ajax is no more;
Had he been living, I had ne’er been spoil’d
Thus of my right.
    Phi. Is he then dead?
    Neo. He is. 375
    Phi. Alas! the son of Tydeus, and that slave
Sold by his father Sisyphus;—they live,
Unworthy as they are.
    Neo. Alas! they do,
And flourish still.
    Phi. My old and worthy friend,
The Pylian sage,—how is he? He could see 380
Their arts, and would have given them better coun-
sels.
    Neo. Weigh’d down with grief, he lives; but, most
unhappy,
Weeps his lost son, his dear Antilochus.
    Phi. O double wo! Whom I could most have
wish’d
To live and to be happy, those to perish! 385
Ulysses to survive! It should not be.
    Neo. O, ’tis a subtle foe! but deepest plans
May sometimes fail.
    Phi. Where was Patroclus then,
Thy father’s dearest friend?
    Neo. He too was dead.
In war, alas! (so Fate ordains it ever,) 390
The coward ’scapes, the brave and virtuous fall.
    Phi. It is too true; and now thou talk’st of
cowards,

376 Diomed was the son of Tydeus.
377 It was reported that Anticlea was taken away by Laertes
after her marriage with Sisyphus, for which the first husband re-
ceived a sum of money: Ulysses, therefore, was often reproached
with being the son of Sisyphus.
380 Nestor, King of Pylos.
383 Antilochus was slain by Memnon in the Trojan war
PHILOCTETES.—ACT II. 121

Where is that worthless wretch, of readiest tongue,
Subtle and voluble?

Neo. Ulysses?

Phi. No;

Thersites; ever talking, never heard.

Neo. I have not seen him, but I hear he lives.

Phi. I did not doubt it: evil never dies;
The gods take care of that: if aught there be
Fraudful and vile, 'tis safe; the good and just
Perish unpitied by them. Wherefore is it?

When gods do ill, why should we worship them?

Neo. Since thus it is; since virtue is oppress'd,
And vice triumphant; who deserve to live
Are doom'd to perish, and the guilty reign;—
Henceforth, O son of Pean! far from Troy
And the Atridae will I live remote.
I would not see the man I cannot love.
My barren Scyros shall afford me refuge,
And home-felt joys delight my future days.

So fare thee well, and may the indulgent gods
Heal thy sad wound, and grant thee every wish
Thy soul can form! Once more, farewell. I go,
The first propitious gale.

Phi. What, now, my son?

Neo. Immediately; the time demands
We should be near, and ready to depart.

Phi. Now, by the memory of thy honour'd sire,
By thy loved mother, by whate'er remains
On earth most dear to thee, O! hear me now,

Thy suppliant: do not, do not thus forsake me,

Alone, oppress'd, deserted, as thou seest,

In this sad place. I shall (I know I must) be
A burden to thee; but, O! bear it kindly,
For ever doth the noble mind abhor

The ungenerous deed, and loves humanity.

Disgrace attends thee if thou dost forsake me;
If not, immortal Fame rewards thy goodness.
Thou must convey me safe to Oeta's shores.
In one short day: I'll trouble you no longer.
Hide me in any part where I may least
Molest you. Hear me, by the guardian god
Of the poor suppliant, all-protecting Jove,
I beg! Behold me at thy feet: infirm,
And wretched as I am, I clasp thy knees.
Leave me not here, then, where there is no mark
Of human footstep; take me to thy home,
Or to Eubœa's port, to Æta; thence
Short is the way to Trachin, or the banks
Of Sperchius' gentle stream, to meet my father,
If yet he lives; for, O! I begg'd him oft,
By those who hither came, to fetch me hence.
Or he is dead, or they, neglectful, bent
Their hasty course to their own native soil.
Be thou my better guide; pity and save
The poor and wretched. Think, my son! how frail
And full of danger is the state of man,
Now prosperous, now adverse: who feels no ills,
Should therefore fear them; and when fortune smiles,
Be doubly cautious, lest destruction come
Remorseless on him, and he fall unpitied.

Cho. O, pity him, my lord! for bitterest woes
And trials most severe he hath recounted.
Far be such sad distress from those I love!
O! if thou hatest the base Atridæ, now
Revenge thee on them, serve their deadliest foe;
Bear the poor suppliant to his native soil;
So shalt thou bless thy friend, and 'scape the wrath
Of the just gods, who still protect the wretched.

Neô. Your proffer'd kindness, friends! may cost
you dear!
When you shall feel his dreadful malady
Oppress you sore, you will repent it.

Cho. Never

Shall that reproach be ours.

436 Eubœa was a large island in the Ægean sea, now called Negropont. Æta, a mountain in Thessaly, now called Bunina.
Néo. In generous pity
Of the afflicted thus to be o’ercome
Were most disgraceful to me: he shall go.
May the kind gods speed our departure hence,
And guide our vessels to the wish’d-for shore! 465

Phœ. O happy hour! O kindest, best of men!
And you, my dearest friends! how shall I thank you?
What shall I do to show my grateful heart?
Le us be gone; but, O! permit me first
To take my last farewell of my poor hut, 470
Where I so long have lived. Perhaps you’ll say,
I must have had a noble mind to bear it.
The very sight, to any eyes but mine,
Were horrible; but sad necessity
At length prevail’d, and made it pleasing to me. 475

CSCO. One from our ship, my lord! and with him comes
A stranger. Stop a moment, till we hear
Their business with us.

_Enter a Spy, in the habit of a merchant, with another Grecian._

Spy. Son of great Achilles!
Know, chance alone hath brought me hither, driven
By adverse winds to where thy vessels lay 480
As home I sail’d from Troy; there did I meet
This my companion, who inform’d me where
Thou mightst be found: hence to pursue my course,
And not to tell thee what concerns thee near,
Had been ungenerous; thou perhaps meantime, 485
Of Greece and of her counsels naught suspecting;—
Counsels against thee, not by threats alone,
Or words enforced, but now in execution.

Néo. Now by my virtue, stranger! for thy news
I am much bound to thee, and will repay 490
Thy service. Tell me what the Greeks have done.

Spy. A fleet already sails to fetch thee back,
Conducted by old Phœnix, and the sons
Of valiant Theseus.
NEO. Come they then to force me!
Or am I to be won by their persuasion?

SPY. I know not that; you have what I could learn.

NEO. And did the Atridae send them?

SPY. Sent they are,
And will be with you soon.

NEO. But wherefore, then,
Came not Ulysses? Did his courage fail?

SPY. He, ere I left the camp, with Diomed
On some important embassy sail’d forth,
In search—

NEO. Of whom?

SPY. There was a man—but stay,
Who is thy friend here? Tell me, but speak softly.

[whispering him.]

NEO. The famous Philoctetes.

SPY. Ha! begone then,
Ask me no more; away immediately.

PHI. What do these dark, mysterious whispers mean?

Concern they me, my son!

NEO. I know not what
He means to say; but I would have him speak
Boldly before us all, what’er it be.

SPY. Do not betray me to the Grecian host,
Nor make me speak what I would fain conceal:
I am but poor; they have befriended me.

NEO. In me thou seest an enemy confess’d
To the Atridae; this is my best friend,
Because he hates them too: if thou art mine,
Hide nothing then.

SPY. Consider first.

NEO. I have.

SPY. The blame will be on you.

NEO. Why let it be;
But speak, I charge thee.

SPY. Since I must, then; know,
In solemn league combined, the bold Ulysses,
And gallant Diomed, have sworn, by force
Or by persuasion, to bring back thy friend:
The Grecians heard Laertes' son declare
His purpose: far more resolute he seem'd
Than Diomed, and surer of success.

Nso. But why the Atridae, after so long a time,
Again should wish to see this wretched exile;—
Whence this desire! came it from the angry god
To punish thus their inhumanity?

Spy. I can inform you; for perhaps from Greece
Of late you have not heard. There was a prophet;
Son of old Priam, Helenus by name;
Him, in his midnight walks, the wily chief,
Ulysses, curse of every tongue, espied;
Took him, and led him captive, to the Greeks
A welcome spoil. Much he foretold to all,
And added last, that Troy should never fall,
Till Philoctetes from this isle return'd.
Ulysses heard, and instant promise gave
To fetch him hence; he hoped by gentle means
To gain him; those successless, force at last
Could but compel him: he would go, he cried,
And if he fail'd, his head should pay the forfeit.
I've told thee all, and warn thee to be gone,
Thou and thy friend, if thou wouldst wish to save
him.

Phæ. And does the traitor think he can persuade
me?

As well might he persuade me to return
From death to life, as his base father did.

Sisyphus, imagined by many to be the father of Ulysses;
concerning whom a superstitious report prevailed, that, having
on his death-bed desired his wife not to bury him, on his arrival
in the infernal regions, he complained to Pluto of her cruelty
in not performing the funeral obsequies, and was by him per-
mitted, on promise of immediate return, to revisit this world, in
order to punish her for the neglect; but when he came to earth,
being unwilling to go back to Tartarus, he was compelled by
Mercury.
SPY. Of that I know not: I must to my ship.  
Farewell; and may the gods protect you both!  

PHI. Lead me, expose me to the Grecian host!  
And could the insolent Ulysses hope  
With his soft flatteries e'er to conquer me?  
No; sooner would I listen to the voice  
Of that fell serpent, whose envenomed tongue  
Hath lamed me thus. But what is there he dare not  
Or say or do? I know he will be here  
Ev'n now, depend on't; therefore, let's away;  
Quick let the sea divide us from Ulysses: —  
Let us be gone; for well-timed expedition  
(The task perform'd) brings safety and repose.  
NEO. Soon as the wind permits us, we embark,  
But now 'tis adverse.

PHI. Every wind is fair,  
When we are flying from misfortune.  
NEO. True;  
And 'tis against them too.  
PHI. Alas! no storms  
Can drive back fraud and rapine from their prey.  
NEO. I'm ready; take what may be necessary,  
And follow me.  
PHI. I want not much.  
NEO. Perhaps  
My ship will furnish you.  
PHI. There is a plant  
Which to my wound gives some relief: I must  
Have that.  
NEO. Is there aught else?  
PHI. Alas! my bow  
I had forgot; I must not lose that treasure.  

[Philoctetes steps towards his grotto, and  
brings out his bow and arrows.]  
NEO. Are these the famous arrows, then?  
PHI. They are.  
NEO. And may I be permitted to behold,  
To touch, to pay my adoration to them?
PHILOCTETES.—ACT II.

PHI. In these, my son! in every thing that's mine, Thou hast a right.

NEO. But if it be a crime, I would not; otherwise—

PHI. O! thou art full
Of piety; in thee it is no crime;
In thee, my friend! by whom alone I look
Once more with pleasure on the radiant sun;
By whom I live; who givest me to return
To my dear father, to my friends, my country.
Sunk as I was beneath my foes, once more
I rise to triumph o'er them, by thy aid.
Behold them, touch them, but return them to me,
And boast that virtue which on thee alone
Bestow'd such honour. virtue made them mine.

{ I can deny thee nothing: she, whose heart
Is grateful, can alone deserve the name
Of friend, to every treasure far superior.}

NEO. Go in.

PHI. Come with me; for my painful wound
Requires thy friendly hand to help me onward.

[Execut.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

• Since proud Ixion (doom'd to feel
  The tortures of the eternal wheel,
  Bound by the hand of angry Jove)

• Received the due rewards of impious love;
  Ne'er was distress so deep, nor wo so great,
  As on the wretched Philoctetes wait;
  Who, ever with the just and good,
  Guiltless of fraud and rapine stood.

• And the fair paths of virtue still pursued.
  Alone on this inhospitable shore,
  Where waves for ever beat and tempests roar,
  How could he e'er or hope or comfort know,

Or painful life support, beneath such weight of wo?
Exposed to the inclement skies,
Deserted and forlorn he lies;
No friend or fellow-mourner there,
To soothe his sorrows, and divide his care;
Or seek the healing plant, of power to 'suage "followed"
His aching wound, and mitigate its rage:
But if, perchance, awhile released
From torturing pain, he sinks to rest,
Awaken'd soon, and by sharp hunger pressed,
Compell'd to wander forth in search of food, "followed"
He crawls in anguish to the neighbouring wood;
Ev'n as the tottering infant in despair,
Who mourns an absent mother's kind, supporting care.

The teeming Earth, which mortals still supplies
With every good, to him her seed denies;
A stranger to the joy that flows
From the kind aid which man on man bestows:
Nor food, alas! to him was given,
Save when his arrows pierced the birds of heaven;
Nor e'er did Bacchus' heart-expanding bowl,
For ten long years relieve his cheerless soul:
But glad was he his eager thirst to slake
In the unwholesome pool, or ever-stagnant lake.

But now, behold the joyful captive freed:
A fairer fate and brighter days succeed;
For he at last hath found a friend
Of noblest race, to save and to defend;
To guide him with protecting hand,
And safe restore him to his native land;
On Sperchius' flowery banks to join the throng
Of Melian nympha, and lead the choral song
On CEta's top, which saw Alcides rise,
And from the flaming pile ascend his native skies.

635 Sperchius was a river in Thessaly.
636 Melos was an island near Candia, reckoned among the Cyclades, and now called Milo.
ACT III.

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILoctetes, CHORUS.

Neo. Come, Philoctetes! why thus silent? Wherefore
This sudden terror on thee?
Phi. O!
Neo. Whence is it? 640
Phi. Nothing; my son! go on.
Neo. Is it thy wound
That pains thee thus?
Phi. No; I am better now:
O! gods!
Neo. Why dost thou call thus on the gods?
Phi. To smile propitious, and preserve us—O!
Neo. Thou art in misery. Tell me: wilt thou
not?
What is it?
Phi. O, my son! I can no longer
Conceal it from thee. O! I die, I perish!
By the great gods let me implore thee, now,
This moment, if thou hast a sword, O! strike;
Cut off this painful limb, and end my being.
Neo. What can this mean, that unexpected thus
It should torment thee?
Phi. Know you not, my son?
Neo. What is the cause?
Phi. Can you not guess it?
Neo. No.
Phi. Nor I.
Neo. That's stranger still.
Phi. My son, my son!
Neo. This new attack is terrible indeed! 655
Phi. 'Tis inexpressible: have pity on me.
Neo. What shall I do?
Phi. Do not be terrified,
And leave me; its returns are regular,
And, like the traveller, when its appetite
Is satisfied, it will depart. O! O! 660
Néo. Thou art oppress'd with ills on every side.
Give me thy hand: come, wilt thou lean upon me?
Phi. No; but these arrows, take, preserve them for me
A little while, till I grow better: sleep
Is coming on me, and my pains will cease. 665
Let me be quiet: if, meantime, our foes
Surprise thee, let nor force nor artifice
Deprive thee of the great, the precious trust
I have reposed in thee: that were ruin
To thee and to thy friend.
Néo. Be not afraid; 670
No hands but mine shall touch them: give them to me.
Phi. Receive them, son! and let it be thy prayer
They bring not woes on thee, as they have done
To me, and to Alcides. [Gives him the bow and arrows.
Néo. May the gods
Forbid it ever! may they guide our course, 675
And speed our prosperous sails!
Phi. Alas! my son!
I fear thy vows are vain; behold, my blood
Flows from the wound: O, how it pains me! now
It comes, it hastens: do not, do not leave me;
O, that Ulysses felt this racking torture, 680
Ev’n to his inmost soul! Again it comes.
O Agamemnon! Menelaus! why
Should not you bear these pangs as I have done!
O Death! where art thou, Death? so often call’d,
Wilt thou not listen? wilt thou never come? 685
Take thou the Lemnian fire, my generous friend!
Do me the same kind office which I did

686 Alluding, most probably, to the generally received opinion that the forges of Vulcan were in the island of Lemnos.
687 Philoctetes had attended his friend Hercules in his last moments, and set fire to the funeral pile, when he expired on the top of Mount Ætna.
For my Alcides; these are thy reward.
He gave them to me; thou alone deserv'st
The great inheritance. What says my friend? 690
What says my dear preserver? O! where art thou!
Neo. I mourn thy hapless fate.
Phi. Be of good cheer;
Quick my disorder comes, and goes as soon.
I only beg thee not to leave me here.
Neo. Depend on't, I will stay.
Phi. Wilt thou, indeed? 695
Neo. Trust me; I will.
Phi. I need not bind thee to it
By oath.
Neo. O no; 'twere impious to forsake thee.
Phi. Give me thy hand, and pledge thy faith. 700
Neo. I do.
Phi. Thither, O! thither lead.
[Pointing up to heaven.
Neo. What say'st thou! where?
Phi. Above.
Neo. What, lost again? why look'st thou thus
On that bright circle?
Phi. Let me, let me go.
Neo. [lays hold of him.] Where wouldst thou go?
Phi. Loose me.
Neo. I will not.
Phi. O!
You'll kill me if you do not.
Neo. [lets him go.] There, then; now
Is thy mind better?
Phi. O! receive me, earth;
Receive a dying man: here must I lie;
For O! my pain's so great, I cannot rise.
[Philoctetes sinks down on the earth near the entrance of
the cave.]

NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

Neo. Sleep hath o'erta'en him: see, his head is laid
On the cold earth; the balmy sweat thick drops
From every limb, and from the broken vein
Flows the warm blood; let us indulge his slumbers.

INVOCATION TO SLEEP.

Cho. Sleep, thou patron of mankind!
Great Physician of the mind!
Who dost nor pain nor sorrow know;
Sweetest balm of every wo;
Mildest sovereign! hear us now;
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow:
His eyes in gentle slumbers close,
And continue his repose.
Hear thy wretched suppliants vow:
Great physician! hear us now.

And now, my son! what best may suit thy purpose
Consider well, and how we are to act.
What more can we expect? The time is come;
For better far is opportunity
Seized at the lucky hour, than all the counsels
Which wisdom dictates, or which craft inspires.

Nem. He hears us not: but easy as it is
To gain the prize, it would avail us nothing
Were he not with us. Phœbus hath reserved
For him alone the crown of victory:
But thus to boast of what we could not do,
And break our word, were most disgraceful to us.

Cho. The gods will guide us, fear it not, my son!
But what thou say'st, speak soft, for well thou know'st
The sick man's sleep is short: he may awake
And hear us; therefore let us hide our purpose.
If then thou think'st as he does,—thou know'st whom,
This is the hour: at such a time, my son!
The wisest err; but mark me, the wind's fair,
And Philoctetes sleeps, void of all help.
Lame, impotent, unable to resist,
He is as one among the dead; ev'n now

737 The Chorus here means Ulysses.
PHILOCTETES.—ACT IV.

We'll take him with us; 'twere an easy task
Leave it to me, my son: there is no danger.
Neo. No more; his eyes are open: see, he moves.

PHILOCTETES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

Phl. [Awaking.] O fair returning light, beyond my hopes!
You too, my kind preservers! O my son!
I could not think you would have stay'd so long
In kind compassion to thy friend. Alas!
The Atridae never would have acted thus:
But noble is thy nature, and thy birth;
And therefore little did my wretchedness,
Nor from my wounds the noisome stench deter
Thy generous heart. I have a little respite.
Help me, my son! I'll try to rise; this weakness
Will leave me soon, and then we'll go together.
Neo. I little thought to find thee thus restored.
Trust me, I joy to see thee free from pain,
And hear thee speak; the marks of death were on thee.
Raise thyself up; thy friends, here, if thou wilt,
Shall carry thee, 'twill be no burden to them,
If we request it.

Phl. No; thy hand alone.
I will not trouble them; 'twill be enough
If they can bear with me and my distemper,
When we embark.

Neo. Well, be it so; but rise.  

[Philoctetes rises.

Phl. O never fear; I'll rise as well as ever.

[Exeunt.

ACT IV

NEOPTOLEMUS, PHILOCTETES, CHORUS.

Neo. How shall I act?
Phl. What says my son?
Neo. Alas! I know not what to say; my doubtful mind—
Phi. Talk'd you of doubts? You did not, surely?
Neo. Ay.
That's my misfortune.
Phi. Is then my distress 770
The cause at last you will not take me with you?
Neo. All is distress and misery, when we act.
Against our nature, and consent to ill.
Phi. But, sure, to help a good man in misfortunes
Is not against thy nature.
Neo. Men will call me 775
A villain; that distracts me.
Phi. Not for this,
For what thou mean'st to do, thou mayst deserve it.
Neo. What shall I do? Direct me, Jove! To hide
What I should speak, and tell a base untruth,
Were double guilt.
Phi. He purposes at last, 780
I fear it much, to leave me.
Neo. Leave thee! No.
But how to make thee go with pleasure hence,
There I'm distress'd.
Phi. I understand thee not;
What means my son?
Neo. I can no longer hide
The dreadful secret from thee: thou art going 785
To Troy, ev'n to the Greeks, to the Atrids.
Phi. Alas! what say'st thou?
Neo. Do not weep, but hear me.
Phi. What must I hear? What wilt thou do
with me?
Neo. First, set thee free; then carry thee, my friend,
To conquer Troy.
Phi. Is this indeed thy purpose? 790
Neo. This am I bound to do.
Phi. Then am I lost.
Undone, betray'd. Canst thou, my friend! do this? Give me my arms again.

Nero. It cannot be:
I must obey the powers who sent me hither:
Justice enjoins: the common cause demands it. 795

Phi. Thou worst of men! thou vile artificer
Of fraud most infamous! what hast thou done?
How have I been deceived? Dost thou not blush
To look on me, to behold me thus
Beneath thy feet imploring? Base betrayer! 800
To rob me of my bow, the means of life,
The only means; give them, restore them to me;
Do not take all. Alas! he hears me not,
Nor deigns to speak; but casts an angry look,
That says, I never shall be free again. 805
O mountains, rivers, rocks, and savage herds!
To you I speak; to you alone I now
Must breathe my sorrows; you are wont to hear
My sad complaints, and I will tell you all
That I have suffer'd from Achilles' son;
Who, bound by solemn oath to bear me hence
To my dear native soil, now sails for Troy.
The perjured wretch first gave his plighted hand,
Then stole the sacred arrows of my friend,
The son of Jove, the great Alcides: those
He means to show the Greeks, to snatch me hence,
And boast his prize; as if poor Philoctetes,
This empty shade, were worthy of his arm.
Had I been what I was, he ne'er had thus
Subdued me, and ev'n now to fraud alone
He owes the conquest: I have been betray'd.
Give me my arms again, and be thyself
Once more. O! speak: thou wilt not; then I'm lost.

O my poor hut! again I come to thee,
Naked and destitute of food: once more 825
Receive me, here to die; for now, no longer
Shall my swift arrow reach the flying prey,
Or on the mountains pierce the wandering herd;
I shall myself afford a banquet now
To those I used to feed on; they the hunters,
And I their easy prey: so shall the blood,
Which I so oft have shed, be paid by mine;
And all this too from him whom once I deem'd
 Stranger to fraud, nor capable of ill.
And yet I will not curse thee, till I know
Whether thou still retain'st thy horrid purpose,
Or dost repent thee of it; if thou dost not,
Destruction wait thee!

Cho. We attend your pleasure,
My royal lord! we must be gone; determine
To leave, or take him with us.

Neo. His distress
Doth move me much: trust me, I long have felt
Compassion for him.

Phi. O! then by the gods
Pity me now, my son! nor let mankind
Reproach thee for a fraud so base.

Neo. Alas!
What shall I do? Would I were still at Scyros!
For I am most unhappy.

Phi. O my son!
Thou art not base by nature, but misguided,
By those who are, to deeds unworthy of thee:
Turn then thy fraud on them who best deserve it,
Restore my arms, and leave me.

Neo. Speak, my friends! What's to be done?

Enter Ulysses.

Ulys. Ha! dost thou hesitate?
Trait'or! be gone! give me the arms.
Phi. Ah me!

Ulysses here?
Ulys. Ay, 'tis Ulysses' self
That stands before thee.

Phi. Then I'm lost—betray'd:
This was the cruel spoiler.
ULYS. Doubt it not: 855
Twas I; I do confess it.

PHI. [to Neoptolemus.] O my son!
Give me them back.

ULYS. It must not be; with them
Thyself must go, or we shall drag thee hence.

PHI. And will they force me? O, thou daring villain!

ULYS. They will, unless thou dost consent to go.

PHI. Wilt thou, O Lemnos! wilt thou, mighty Vulcan!

With thy all-conqu'ring fire, permit me thus
To be torn from thee?

ULYS. Know, great Jove himself
Doth here preside: he hath decreed thy fate;
I but perform his will.

PHI. Detested wretch! 865
Makest thou the gods a cover for thy crime?
Do they teach falsehood?

ULYS. No; they taught me truth;
And therefore hence: that way thy journey lies.
[Pointing to the sea.

PHI. It doth not.

ULYS. But I say it must be so.

PHI. And Philoctetes, then, was born a slave! 870
I did not know it.

ULYS. No, I mean to place thee
Ev'n with the noblest, ev'n with those by whom
Proud Troy must perish.

PHI. Never will I go,
Befall what may, while this deep cave is open
To bury all my sorrows.

ULYS. What wouldst do? 875

PHI. Here throw me down, dash out my desperate brains
Against this rock, and sprinkle it with my blood.

ULYS. [to the Chorus.] Seize and prevent him.

PHI. Manacled! O hands.
How helpless are you now! Those arms which once
Protected, thus torn from you! Thou abandoned,

Thou shameless wretch! from whom nor truth nor justice,
Naught that becomes the generous mind, can flow,
How hast thou us’d me! how betray’d! Suborn’d
This stranger, this poor youth, who, worthier far
To be my friend than thine, was only here
Thy instrument: he knew not what he did,
And now, thou seest, repents him of the crime
Which brought such guilt on him, such woes on me.
But thy foul soul, which from its dark recess
Trembling looks forth, beheld him void of art,
Unwilling as he was, instructed him,
And made him soon a master in deceit.
I am thy prisoner now; ev’n now thou mean’st
To drag me hence, from this unhappy shore,
Where first thy malice left me, a poor exile,
Deserted, friendless, and, though living, dead
To all mankind. Perish the vile betrayer!
O! I have cursed thee often, but the gods
Will never hear the prayers of Philoctetes.
Life and its joys are thine: while I, unhappy,
Am but the scorn of thee and the Atrides,
Thy haughty masters: fraud and force compell’d thee,
Or thou hadst never sail’d with them to Troy.
I lent my willing aid; with seven brave ships
I plough’d the main to serve them; in return,
They cast me forth, disgraced me, left me here.
Thou say’st they did it; they impute the crime
To thee; and what will you do with me now?
And whither must I go? What end, what purpose,

902 Ulysses, unwilling to go among the other chiefs to the siege of Troy, feigned himself mad; but being detected by Pala- medes, was after all obliged to join them.
Could urge thee to it? I am nothing, lost
And dead already: wherefore, tell me, wherefore
Am I not still the same detested burden,
Loathsome and lame? Again must Philoctetes
Disturb your holy rites? If I am with you,
How can you make libations? That was once
Your vile pretence for inhumanity.
O, may you perish for the deed! The gods
Will grant it, sure, if justice be their care;
And that it is I know. You had not left
Your native soil, to seek a wretch like me,
Had not some impulse from the powers above,
Spite of yourselves, ordain'd it! O my country!
And you, O gods! who look upon this deed,
Punish, in pity to me, punish all
The guilty band! Could I behold them perish,
My wounds were nothing; that would heal them all.

Cho. [to Ulysses.] Observe, my lord, what bitterness of soul
His words express! he bends not to misfortune,
But seems to brave it.

Ulyss. I could answer him,
Were this a time for words; but now, no more
Than this,—I act as best befits our purpose.
Where virtue, truth, and justice are required,
Ulysses yields to none; I was not born
To be overcome, and yet submit to thee.
Let him remain. Thy arrows shall suffice;
We want thee not: Teucer can draw thy bow
As well as thou; myself, with equal strength,
Can aim the deadly shaft, with equal skill.
What could thy presence do? Let Lemnos keep thee
Farewell! perhaps the honours once design'd
For thee may be reserved to grace Ulysses.

Pm. Alas! shall Greece then see my deadliest foe
Adorn'd with arms which I alone should bear?

Ulyss. No more: I must be gone.
PHI. [to Neoptolemus.] Son of Achilles!
Thou wilt not leave me too? I must not lose 945
Thy converse, thy assistance.
ULTS. [to Neoptolemus.] Look not on him:
Away, I charge thee; 'twould be fatal to us.
PHI. [to the Chorus.] Will you forsake me, friends?
Dwells no compassion
Within your breasts for me?
CHO. [pointing to Neoptolemus.] He is our master;
We speak and act but as his will directs. 950
NEO. I know he will upbraid me for this weakness;
But 'tis my nature and I must consent,
Since Philoctetes asks it: stay you with him,
Till to the gods our pious prayers we offer,
And all things are prepared for our departure; 955
Perhaps, meantime, to better thoughts his mind
May turn relenting. We must go: remember,
When we shall call you, follow instantly.
[Exit with Ulysses.

PHI. O my poor hut! and is it then decreed
Again I come to thee to part no more, 960
To end my wretched days in this sad cave,
The scene of all my woes? For whither now
Can I betake me? Who will feed, support,
Or cherish Philoctetes? Not a hope 964
Remains for me. O, that the impetuous storms
Would bear me with them to some distant clime!
For I must perish here.
CHO. Unhappy man!
Thou hast provoked thy fate; thyself alone
Art to thyself a foe, to scorn the good
Which wisdom bids thee take, and choose misfortune. 970

PHI. Wretch that I am, to perish here alone!
O! I shall see the face of man no more,
Nor shall my arrows pierce their winged prey,
And bring me sustenance! Such vile delusions
Used to betray me! O that pains like those 975
I feel might reach the author of my woes!
CHO. The gods decreed it; we are not to blame.
Heap not thy curses, therefore, on the guiltless,
But take our friendship.

PHI. [pointing to the sea-shore.] I behold him there:
Ev'n now I see him laughing me to scorn,
On yonder shore, and in his hands the darts
He waves triumphant, which no arms but these
Had ever borne. O, my dear, glorious treasure!
Hast thou a mind to feel the indignity,
How wouldst thou grieve to change thy noble mas-
ter,

The friend of great Alcides, for a wretch
So vile, so base, so impious as Ulysses!

CHO. Justice will ever rule the good man's tongue,
Nor from his lips reproach and bitterness
Invidious flow. Ulysses, by the voice
Of Greece appointed, only sought a friend
To join the common cause, and serve his country.

PHI. Hear me, ye wing'd inhabitants of air!
And you who on these mountains love to feed,
My savage prey, whom once I could pursue;
Fearful no more of Philoctetes, fly.
This hollow rock; I cannot hurt you now.
You need not dread to enter here: alas!
You now may come, and in your turn regale
On these poor limbs, when I shall be no more.
Where can I hope for food! or who can breathe
This vital air, when life-preserving earth
No longer will assist him?

CHO. By the gods
Let me entreat thee, if thou dost regard
Our master and thy friend, come to him now,
While thou mayst 'scape this sad calamity.
Who but thyself would choose to be unhappy,
That could prevent it?

PHI. *O! you have brought back
Once more the sad remembrance of my griefs.
Why, why, my friends, would you afflict me thus?

CHO. Afflict thee, how?
PHI. Think you I'll e'er return 1011
To hateful Troy!
CHO. We would advise thee to it.
PHI. I'll hear no more. Go, leave me.
CHO. That we shall Most gladly: to the ships, my friends! away.
Obey your orders. [going.
PHI. [stops them.] By protecting Jove, 1015
Who hears the suppliant's prayer, do not forsake me.
CHO. [returning.] Be calm then.
PHI. O, my friends! will you then stay?
Do, by the gods I beg you.
CHO. Why that groan?
PHI. Alas! I die! My wound, my wound! Here after 1019
What can I do! You will not leave me; hear—
CHO. What canst thou say we do not know already?
PHI. O'erwhelm'd by such a storm of griefs as I am,
You should not thus resent a madman's phrenzy.
CHO. Comply, then, and be happy.
PHI. Never, never, (Be sure of that) though thunder-bearing Jove 1025
Should with his lightnings blast me, would I go.
No; let Troy perish, perish all the host
Who sent me here to die; but, O my friends!
Grant me this last request.
CHO. What is it. Speak. 1029
PHI. A sword, a dart, some instrument of death.
CHO. What wouldst thou do?
PHI. I'd hack off every limb.
Death! my soul longs for death.
CHO. But wherefore is it?
PHI. I'll seek my father.
CHO. Whither?
PHI. In the tomb;
There he must be. O Scyros! O my country!
How could I bear to see thee as I am? 1035
PHILOCTETES.—ACT V.

I, who had left thy sacred shores, to aid
The hateful sons of Greece! O misery!

[Goes into the cave.

[Exeunt.

ACT V.

ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS, CHORUS.

Cho. Ere now we should have ta'en thee to our ships,
But that advancing this way I behold
Ulysses, and with him Achilles' son.

ULYS. Why this return? Wherefore this haste?

NEO. I come To purge me of my crimes.

ULYS. Indeed! what crimes?

NEO. My blind obedience to the Grecian host,
And to thy counsels.

ULYS. Hast thou practised aught
Base, or unworthy of thee?

NEO. Yes, by art

And vile deceit betray'd the unhappy.

ULYS. Whom?

Alas! what mean you?

NEO. Nothing; but the son

Of Pæan—

ULYS. Ha! what wouldst thou do? My heart
Misgives me. [aside.]

NEO. I have ta'en his arms, and now—

ULYS. Thou wouldst restore them! Speak! is that thy purpose?

Almighty Jove!

NEO. Unjustly should I keep
Another's right?

ULYS. Now by the gods, thou mean'st
To mock me; dost thou not?

NEO. If to speak truth

Be mockery.
Ulys. And does Achilles' son
Say this to me?

Néo. Why force me to repeat 1055
My words so often to thee?

Ulys. Once to hear them,
Is once indeed too much.

Néo. Doubt them no more,
For I have told thee all.

Ulys. There are, remember,—
There are who may prevent thee.

Néo. Who shall dare
To thwart my purpose?

Ulys. All the Grecian host, 1060
And with them I.

Néo. Wise as thou art, Ulysses!
Thou talk'st most idly.

Ulys. Wisdom is not thine,
Either in word or deed.

Néo. Know, to be just
Is better far than to be wise.

Ulys. But where,
Where is the justice, thus unauthorized,
To give a treasure back thou ow'st to me,
And to my counsels?

Néo. I have done a wrong,
And I will try to make atonement for it.

Ulys. Dost thou not fear the power of Greece?

Néo. I fear
Nor Greece nor thee when I am doing right. 1070

Ulys. 'Tis not with Troy, then, we contend, but
thee.

Néo. I know not that.

Ulys. Seest thou this hand? Behold,
It grasps my sword.

Néo. Mine is alike prepared,
Nor seeks delay.

Ulys. But I will let thee go; 1074
Greece shall know all thy guilt, and shall revenge it.

[Exit Ulysses.]
PHILOCTETES.—ACT V. 145

Neo. "Twas well determined: always be as wise
As now thou art, and thou mayst live in safety.

[Approaching towards the cave.

Ho! son of Pean! Philoctetes! leave
Thy rocky habitation, and come forth. 1079

Phi. [from the cave.] What noise was that? Who
calls on Philoctetes?  
[He comes out.
Alas! what would you, strangers? are you come
To heap fresh miseries on me?

Neo. Be of comfort,
And hear the tidings which I bring.

Phi. I dare not:
Thy flattering tongue already hath betray’d me. 1084

Neo. And is there, then, no room for penitence?

Phi. Such were thy words, when, seemingly, sincere,
Yet meaning ill, thou stolest my arms away.

Neo. But now it is not so. I only came
To know if thou art resolute to stay,
Or sail with us.

Phi. No more of that; 'tis vain 1090
And useless all.

Neo. Art thou then fix’d?

Phi. I am?

It is impossible to say how firmly.

Neo. I thought I could have moved thee, but I’ve
done.

Phi. 'Tis well thou hast; thy labour had been
vain:
For never could my soul esteem the man 1095
Who robb’d me of my dearest, best possession,
And now would have me listen to his counsels.
Unworthy offspring of the best of men!
Perish the Atridae! perish first Ulysses!
Perish thyself!

Neo. Withhold thy imprecations,
And take thy arrows back.

Phi. A second time
Wouldst thou deceive me?

M
By the Almighty power
Of sacred Jove, I swear.
O joyful sound
If thou say'st truly.
Let my actions speak:
Stretch forth thy hand, and take thy arms again.

[Гives him the arrows.]

Enter Ulysses.

Ulyss. Witness, ye gods! here, in the name of Greece
And the Atridæ, I forbid it!
Ha!
What voice is that? Ulysses?
Ay, tis I,
I, who perforce will carry thee to Troy
Spite of Achilles' son.

[raising his arm as intending to throw an arrow
at Ulysses.] Not if I aim

This shaft aright.

[laying hold of him.] Now, by the gods, I beg thee,
Stop thy rash hand.

Let go my arm.
I will not.

Shall I not slay my enemy?
O no;

'Twould cast dishonour on us both.

Thou know'st
These Grecian chiefs are loud pretending boasters,
Brave but in tongue, and cowards in the field.

I know it; but remember, I restored
Thy arrows to thee, and thou hast no cause
For rage, or for complaint against thy friend.

I own thy goodness: thou hast shown thyself
Worthy thy birth; no son of Sisyphus,
But of Achilles, who on earth preserved
A fame unspotted, and among the dead
Still shines superior, an illustrious shade.

Joyful I thank thee for a father's praise,
And for my own; but listen to my words,
And mark me well. Misfortunes, which the gods
Inflict on mortals, they perforce must bear;
But when, oppress’d by voluntary woes,
They make themselves unhappy, they deserve not
Our pity or our pardon; such art thou. 1131
Thy savage soul, impatient of advice,
Rejects the wholesome counsel of thy friend,
And treats him like a foe: but I will speak,
Jove be my witness! therefore hear my words, 1135
And grave them in thy heart. The dire disease
Thou long hast suffer’d is from angry Heaven,
Which thus afflicts thee for thy rash approach
To the fell serpent, which on Chrysa’s shore
Watch’d o’er the sacred treasures; know, beside,
That while the sun in yonder east shall rise, 1141
Or in the west decline, distemper’d still
Thou ever shalt remain, unless to Troy
Thy willing mind transport thee: there the sons
Of Esculapius shall restore thee; there, 1145
By my assistance, shalt thou conquer Troy;
I know it well: for that prophetic sage,
The Trojan captive Helenus, foretold
It should be so; “proud Troy,” he added then,
“This very year must fall; if not, my life 1150
Shall answer for the falsehood;” therefore yield;
Thus to be deem’d the first of Grecians; thus
By Pæan’s favorite sons to be restored,
And thus mark’d out the conqueror of Troy,
Is sure distinguish’d happiness.

O life 1155
Detested! why wilt thou still keep me here?
Why not dismiss me to the tomb? Alas!
What can I do? How can I disbelieve
My generous friend? I must consent, and yet
Can I do this, and look upon the sun? 1160
Can I behold my friends? Will they forgive,
Will they associate with me after this?
And you, ye heavenly orbs, that roll around me!
How will you bear to see me link'd with those
Who have destroy'd me; ev'n the sons of Atreus,
Ev'n with Ulysses, source of all my woes? 1166
My sufferings past I could forget; but, O!
I dread the woes to come; for well I know,
When once the mind's corrupted, it brings forth
Unnumber'd crimes, and ills to ills succeed. 1170
It moves my wonder much, that thou, my friend,
Shouldst thus advise me, whom it ill becomes
To think of Troy: I rather had believed
Thou wouldst have sent me far, far off from those
Who have defrauded thee of thy just right, 1175
And gave thy arms away. Are these the men
Whom thou wouldst serve,—whom thou wouldst
thus compel me
To save and to defend? It must not be.
Remember, O my son! the solemn oath
Thou gav'st to bear me to my native soil. 1180
Do this, my friend! remain thyself at Scyros,
And leave these wretches to be wretched still.
Thus shalt thou merit double thanks, from me
And from my father; nor by succour given
To vile betrayers prove thyself as vile. 1185
Néo. Thou say'st most truly; yet confide in Hea-
ven,
Trust to thy friends, and leave this hated place.
Phr. Leave it? For whom? For Troy and the
Atrides?
These wounds forbid it.
Néo. They shall all be heal'd,
Where I will carry thee.
Phr. An idle tale 1190
Thou tell'st me, surely, dost thou not?
Néo. I speak
What best may serve us both.
Phr. But, speaking thus,
Dost thou not fear the offended gods?
Néo. Why fear them?
Can I offend the gods by doing good?
PHILOCTETES.—ACT V.

PHI. What good? To whom? To me, or to the Atridae?

NEO. I am thy friend, and therefore would persuade thee.

PHI. And therefore give me to my foes.

NEO. Alas!

Let not misfortunes thus transport thy soul
To rage and bitterness.

PHI. Thou wouldst destroy me.

NEO. Thou know'st me not.

PHI. I know the Atridae well.

Who left me here.

NEO. They did; yet they, perhaps,
Ev'n they, O Philoctetes! may preserve thee.

PHI. I never will to Troy.

NEO. What's to be done?

Since I can ne'er persuade thee, I submit:
Live on in misery.

PHI. Then let me suffer;

Suffer I must; but, O! perform thy promise;

Think on thy plighted faith, and guard me home

Instant, my friend; nor ever call back Troy

To my remembrance. I have felt enough

From Troy already.

NEO. Let us go; prepare.

PHI. O glorious sound!

NEO. Bear thyself up.

PHI. I will,

If possible.

NEO. But how shall I escape

The wrath of Greece?

PHI. O! think not of it.

NEO. What

If they should waste my kingdom?

PHI. I'll be there,—

NEO. Alas! what canst thou do?

PHI. And with these arrows

Of my Alcides—

NEO. Ha! what say'st thou?
Phil. Drive
Thy foes before me; not a Greek shall dare
Approach thy borders.

Nero. If thou wilt do this,
Salute the earth, and instant hence. Away!

Hercules descends and speaks.
Stay, son of Pæan! Lo! to thee 'tis given
Once more to see and hear thy loved Alcides,
Who for thy sake hath left thy heavenly mansions,
And comes to tell thee the decrees of Jove;
To turn thee from the paths thou mean'st to tread,
And guide thy footsteps right: therefore attend. Thou know'st what toils, what labours I endured,
Ere I by virtue gain'd immortal fame:
Thou too, like me, by toils must rise to glory;
Thou too must suffer ere thou canst be happy.
Hence with thy friend to Troy, where honour calls,
Where health awaits thee: where, by virtue raised
To highest rank, and leader of the war.
Paris, its hateful author, shalt thou slay,
Lay waste proud Troy, and send thy trophies home.
Thy valour's due reward, to glad thy sire.
On Cæta's top, the gifts which Greece bestows
Must thou reserve to grace my funeral pile,
And be a monument to after ages
Of these all-conquering arms. Son of Achilles
[turning to Neoptolemus.
(For now to thee I speak) remember this;
Without his aid thou canst not conquer Troy,
Nor Philoctetes without thee succeed.
Go, then; and, like two lions in the field
Roaming for prey, guard you each other well:
My Escholapius will I send ev'n now
To heal thy wounds; then go, and conquer Troy.
But when you lay the vanquished city waste,
Be careful that you venerate the gods;
For far above all other gifts, doth Jove,
The almighty Father, hold true piety.
Whether we live or die, that still survives
Beyond the reach of fate, and is immortal.

NÉO. Once more to let me hear that wished-for voice,
To see thee after so long a time, was bliss
I could not hope for. O! I will obey
Thy great commands most willingly.

PHI. And I.

HER. Delay not, then; for lo! a prosperous wind
Swell in thy sail: the time invites. Adieu!

[Hercules re-ascends.

PHI. I will but pay my salutations here,
And instantly depart. To thee, my cave!

Where I so long have dwelt, I bid farewell;
And you, ye nymphs! who on the watery plains
Deign to reside, farewell! Farewell, the noise
Of beating waves, which I so oft have heard
From the rough sea, which, by the black winds driven,
O'erwhelmed me shivering. Oft the Hémæan mount
Echoed my plaintive voice, by wintry storms
Afflicted, and return'd me groan for groan.
Now, ye fresh fountains! each Lycæan spring!
I leave you now. Alas! I little thought

To leave you ever: and thou sea-girt isle,
Lemnos, farewell! Permit me to depart
By thee unblamed, and with a prosperous gale
To go where fate demands, where kindest friends
By counsel urge me, where all-powerful Jove
In his unerring wisdom hath decreed.

CHO. Let us be gone, and to the ocean nymphs
Our humble prayers prefer, that they would all
Propitious smile, and grant us safe return.

1266 A mountain in Lemnos.
ANTIGONE.
DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

CREON, king of Thebes.
EURYDICE, wife of Creon.
HARMON, son of Creon.
ANTIGONE, daughter of OEdipus.
ISMENE, sister of Antigone.
TIRESIAS, a prophet.
A MESSENGER, GUARD, SERVANT, and ATTENDANTS.
CHORUS, composed of ancient men of Thebes.
ANTIGONE.

ARGUMENT.

ETEOCLES and Polynices, sons of OEdipus, having an equal claim to the kingdom of Thebes, agreed to reign year by year, alternately; but Eteocles, succeeding first to the throne by priority of birth, broke the contract, and maintained himself in the possession of his dominions. Polynices, in revenge, raised an army of Argians, and made an incursion into Thebes; where, after great slaughter on both sides, the brothers were slain by each other in single combat. The kingdom now devolved to their uncle Creon, whose first act of supreme power was an edict, forbidding all rites of sepulture to Polynices, as a traitor; and pronouncing instant death on any who should dare to bury him. This inhuman decree, and the penalty that awaited its infraction, failed, however, to deter his sister Antigone from bestowing the last duties to her unfortunate brother; and, being detected in the prosecution of her design, she was sentenced by the tyrant to imprisonment in a cave, where she was to perish with hunger. Haemon, the son of Creon, and the betrothed husband of Antigone, endeavoured, by his influence with his father, to arrest this cruel mandate; and, failing of success, slew himself. The punishment of Creon did not stop here: for his wife Eurydice, in despair for the death of her son, put a period to her existence; leaving the unhappy monarch to atone, by a fruitless remorse, for his past rigour and injustice.

ACT I.

ANTIGONE, ISMENE.

Ant. O my dear sister, my best-loved Ismene! Is there an evil, by the wrath of Jove Reserved for OEdipus' unhappy race,
We have felt not already! Sorrow and shame,
And bitterness and anguish,—all that's sad,
All that's distressful, hath been ours; and now
This dreadful edict from the tyrant comes
To double our misfortunes. Hast thou heard
What harsh commands he hath imposed on all?
Or art thou still to know what future ills
Our foes have yet in store to make us wretched?

Ism. Since that unhappy day, Antigone!
When by each other's hand our brothers fell,
And Greece dismiss'd her armies, I have heard
Nought that could give joy or grief to me.

Ant. I thought thou wert a stranger to the
tidings;
And therefore call'd thee forth, that here alone
I might impart them to thee.

Ism. O! what are they?
For something dreadful labours in thy breast.

Ant. Know, then, from Creon, our indulgent
lord,
Our hapless brothers met a different fate;
To honour one, and one to infamy,
He hath consign'd: with funeral rites he graced
The body of our dear Eteocles,
While Polynices' wretched carcass lies
Unburied, un lamented, left exposed
A feast for hungry vultures on the plain.
No pitying friend will dare to violate
The tyrant's harsh command, for public death
Awaits the offender: Creon comes himself
To tell us of it, such is our condition.
This is the crisis, this the hour, Ismene!
That must declare thee worthy of thy birth,
Or show thee mean, base, and degenerate.

Ism. What wouldst thou have me do? Defy his
power?
Contemn the laws?

Ant. To act with me, or not?
Consider, and resolve.
ANTIGONE.—ACT I.

ISM. What daring deed
Wouldst thou attempt? What is it? Speak! To join
Ant. And take the body, my Ismene.
ISM. Ha!
And wouldst thou dare to bury it, when thus
We are forbidden?
Ant. Ay, to bury him:
He is my brother, and thine, too, Ismene!
Therefore, consent or not, I have determined
I'll not disgrace my birth.
ISM. Hath not the king
 Pronounced it death to all?
Ant. He hath no right,
No power to keep me from my own.
ISM. Alas!
Remember our unhappy father's fate;
His eyes torn out by his own fatal hand,
Oppress'd with shame and infamy, he died:
Fruit of his crimes, a mother and a wife,
Dreadful alliance! self-devoted, fell;
And last, in one sad day, Eteocles
And Polynices, by each other slain.
Left as we are, deserted and forlorn,
What from our disobedience can we hope,
But misery and ruin? Poor, weak women,
Helpless, nor form'd by nature to contend
With powerful man; we are his subjects too.
Therefore to this, and worse than this, my sister,
We must submit; for me, in humblest prayer
Will I address me to the infernal powers
For pardon of that crime, which, well they know,
Sprang from necessity, and then obey;
Since to attempt what we can never hope
To execute, is folly all, and madness.
Ant. Wert thou to proffer what I do not ask,—
Thy poor assistance, I would scorn it now.
Act as thou wilt; I'll bury him myself;
Let me perform but that, and death is welcome.
I'll do the pious deed, and lay me down
By my dear brother; loving and beloved,
We'll rest together: to the powers below,
'Tis fit we pay obedience; longer there
We must remain, than we can breathe on earth;
There I shall dwell for ever; thou, meantime,
What the gods hold most precious mayst despise.

ISM. I reverence the gods; but, in defiance
Of laws, and unassisted, to do this,
It were most dangerous.

ANT. That be thy excuse,
While I prepare the funeral pile.

ISM. Alas! 80

I tremble for thee.

ANT. Tremble for thyself,
And not for me.

ISM. O! do not tell thy purpose,
I beg thee, do not! I shall ne'er betray thee.

ANT. I'd have it known; and I shall hate thee more
For thy concealment, than if loud to all
Thou wouldst proclaim the deed.

ISM. Thou hast a heart
Too daring, and ill-suited to thy fate.

ANT. I know my duty, and I'll pay it there
Where 'twill be best accepted.

ISM. Couldst thou do it;
But 'tis not in thy power.

ANT. When I know that, 90
It will be time enough to quit my purpose.

ISM. It cannot be; 'tis folly to attempt it.

ANT. Go on, and I shall hate thee: our dead broth-
er,
He too shall hate thee as his bitterest foe.

ISM. Then farewell,
Since thou wilt have it so; and know, Ismene
Pities thy weakness, but admires thy virtue.

[Exeunt.

CHORUS.

STROPHE 1.

By Dirce’s sweetly-flowing stream,
Ne’er did the golden eye of day
On Thebes with fairer lustre beam,
Or shine with more auspicious ray.
See, the proud Argive, with his silver shield
And glittering armour, quits the hostile plain;
No longer dares maintain the luckless field,
But vanquish’d flies, nor checks the loosen’d rein.
With dreadful clangour, like the bird of Jove,
On snowy wings descending from above,
His vaunted powers to this devoted land,
In bitterest wrath, did Polynices lead:
With crested helmets, and a numerous band
He came, and fondly hoped that Thebes should bleed.

ANTISTROPHE 1.

High on the lofty tower he stood,
And view’d the encircled gates below,
With spears that thirsted for our blood,
And seem’d to scorn the unequal foe:
But fraught with vengeance, ere the rising flame
Could waste our bulwarks, or our walls surround,
Mars to assist the fiery serpent came,
And brought the towering eagle to the ground.
That god, who hates the boastings of the proud,
Saw the rude violence of the exulting crowd.
Already now the triumph was prepared,
The wreath of victory, and the festal song,
When Jove the clash of golden armour heard,
And hurl’d his thunder on the guilty throng.

120 By the dragon, or fiery serpent, we are to understand the Theban army attacked by the eagle Polynices.
STROPH E II.
Then Capaneus, elate with pride,
Fierce as the rapid whirlwind came;
Eager he seem'd on every side
To spread the all-devouring flame:
But soon he felt the winged lightning's blast,
By angry Heaven with speedy vengeance sent:
Down from the lofty turrets headlong cast,
For his foul crimes he met the punishment.

135
Each at his gate, long time the leaders strove,
Then fled, and left their arms to conquering Jove:
Save the unhappy death-devoted pair,
The wretched brethren, who unconquer'd stood:
With rancorous hate inspired, and fell despair,
They wreak'd their vengeance in each other's blood.

ANTISTROPHE II.
And lo! with smiles propitious see,
To Thebes, for numerous scars renown'd!
The goddess comes, fair Victory,
With fame and endless glory crown'd!
Henceforth, no longer vex'd by war's alarms,
Let all our sorrows, all our labours cease:
Come, let us quit the din of rattling arms,
And fill our temples with the songs of peace.
The god of Thebes shall guide our steps aright,
And crown with many a lay the festive night.
But see, still anxious for his native land,
Our king, Menæceus' valiant son, appear:
With some fair omen, by the gods' command,
He comes to meet his aged council here. [Exeunt.

128 Capaneus was one of the seven captains who came
against Thebes. It is said that, after he had mounted to the
top of the scaling-ladders, he was struck dead with lightning.
ACT II.

CREON, CHORUS.

CRE. At length, our empire, shook by civil broils, 
The gods to peace and safety have restored; 
Wherefore, my friends! you had our late request 
That you should meet us here; for well I know 
Your firm allegiance to great Laius, next 
To OEdipus, and his unhappy sons; 
These by each other’s hand untimely slain, 
To me the sceptre doth of right descend, 
As next in blood. Never can man be known, 
His mind, his will, his passions ne’er appear, 
Till power and office call them forth; for me, 
’Tis my firm thought, and I have held it ever, 
That he who rules, and doth not follow that 
Which wisdom counsels, but, restrained by fear, 
Shuts up his lips, must be the worst of men; 
Nor do I deem him worthy, who prefers 
A friend, how dear soever, to his country. 
Should I behold (witness, all-seeing Jove !) 
This city wrong’d, I never would be silent; 
Never would make the foe of Thebes my friend, 
For on her safety must depend our own; 
And if she flourish, we can never want 
Assistance or support: thus would I act; 
And therefore have I sent my edict forth 
Touching the sons of OEdipus, commanding 
That they should bury him who nobly fought 
And died for Thebes, the good Eteocles, 
Gracing his memory with each honour due 
To the illustrious dead; for Polynices, 
Abandoned exile! for a brother’s blood 
Thirsting insatiate;—he, who would in flames 
Have wasted all, his country, and his gods, 
And made you slaves;—I have decreed, he lie 
Unburied, his vile carcass to the birds
And hungry dogs a prey; there let him rot Inglorious; 'tis my will: for ne'er from me Shall vice inherit virtue's due reward, But him alone, who is a friend to Thebes, Living or dead, shall Creon reverence still.

Cho. Son of Menæceus! 'twas thy great behest Thus to reward them both; thine is the power If Oe'r all supreme, the living and the dead.

Cre. Be careful, then, my orders are obey'd.

Cho. O, sir! to younger hands commit the task.

Cre. I have appointed some to watch the body.

Cho. What then remains for us?

Cre. To see that none, 201 By your connivance, violate the law.

Cho. Scarce will the man be found so fond of death As to attempt it.

Cre. Death is the reward Of him who dares it; but oftentimes by hope 205 Of sordid gain, are men betray'd to ruin.

Enter Messenger.

Mes. O, king! I cannot boast that, hither sent, I came with speed, for oft my troubled thoughts Have driven me back: oft to myself I said, "Why dost thou seek destruction? Yet again 210 If thou report it not, from other tongues Creon must hear the tale, and thou wilt suffer." With doubts like these oppress'd, slowly I came, And the short way seem'd like a tedious journey. At length I come, resolved to tell thee all: 215 Whate'er the event, I must submit to fate.

Cre. Whence are thy fears, and why this hesitation?

Mes. First for myself; I merit not thy wrath; It was not I, nor have I seen the man Who did the guilty deed.

Cre. Something of weight 220 Thou hast to impart, by this unusual care To guard thee from our anger.
Mes.Fear will come
Where danger is.

Cae. Speak, and thou hast thy pardon.

Mes. The body of Polynices some rash hand
Hath buried, scatter'd o'er his corpse the dust, 225
And funeral rites perform'd.

Cae. Who dared do this?

Mes. 'Tis yet unknown: no mark of instrument
Is left behind; the earth still level all,
Nor worn by track of chariot-wheel. The guard,
Who watch'd that day, call it a miracle; 230
No tomb was raised; light lay the scatter'd earth,
As only meant to avoid the imputed curse;
Nor could we trace the steps of dog or beast
Passing that way. Instant a tumult rose;
The guards accused each other; naught was proved,
But each suspected each, and all denied, 235
Offering, in proof of innocence, to grasp
The burning steel, to walk through fire, and take
Their solemn oath they knew not of the deed.
At length, one mightier than the rest proposed 240
(Nor could we think of better means) that all
Should be to thee discover'd: 'twas my lot
To bring the unwelcome tidings; and I come
To pour my news, unwilling, into ears
Unwilling to receive it; for I know 245
None ever loved the messenger of ill.

Cho. To me it seems as if the hand of Heaven
Were in this deed.

Cae. Be silent, ere my rage,
Thou rash old man! pronounce thee fool and dotard.
Horrid suggestion! think'st thou then the gods 250
Take care of men like these? Would they preserve
Or honour him who came to burn their altars,
Profane their rites, and trample on their laws?
Will they reward the bad? It cannot be:
But well I know, the murmuring citizens 255
Brook'd not our mandate, shook their heads in secret,
And, ill-affected to me, would not stoop
Their haughty crests, or bend beneath my yoke:
By hire corrupted, some of these have dared
The venturous deed. Gold is the worst of ills
That ever plagued mankind; this wastes our cities,
Drives forth their natives to a foreign soil,
Taints the pure heart, and turns the virtuous mind
To basest deeds; artificer of fraud
Supreme, and source of every wickedness.

The wretch, corrupted for this hateful purpose,
Must one day suffer; for, observe me well;
As I revere that Power by whom I swear,
Almighty Jove; if you conceal him from me,
If to my eyes you do not bring the traitor,
Know, death alone shall not suffice to glut
My vengeance: living shall you hang in torments,
Till you confess, till you have learn'd from me
There is a profit not to be desired;
And own, dishonest gains have ruin'd more
Than they have saved.

**Mes.** O king! may I depart,
**Cre.** Or wait thy farther orders?
**Mes.** Thy speech is hateful? Hence!
**Cre.** Know'st thou not
**Mes.** Wherefore, my lord?
**Cre.** Know you not why?
**Mes.** I but offend your ear;
They who have done the deed afflict your soul.
**Cre.** Away; thy talk but makes thy guilt appear.
**Mes.** My lord, I did not do it.

**Cre.** Thou hast sold

Thy life for gain.

**Mes.** 'Tis cruel to suspect me.
**Cre.** Thou talk'st it bravely; but remember all,
Unless you do produce him, you shall find
The miseries which on ill-got wealth await. [Exit.

**Mes.** Would he were found! that we must leave
to fate.

Be it as it may, I never will return.
ANTIGONE.—ACT II.

Thus safe beyond my hopes, 'tis fit I pay
My thanks to the kind gods who have preserved me.

[Exit.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Since first this active world began,
Nature is busy all in every part;
But, passing all in wisdom and in art,
Superior shines inventive man;
Fearless of wintry winds and circling waves,
He rides the ocean and the tempest braves:
On him, unwearied Earth, with lavish hand,
Immortal goddess! all her bounty pours;
Patient beneath the rigid plough's command,
Year after year she yields her plenteous stores.

ANTISTROPHE I.

To drive the natives of the wood
From their rude haunts, or in the cruel snare
To catch the wing'd inhabitants of air,
Or trap the scaly brood!
To tame the fiery courser, yet unbroke
With the hard rein, or to the untried yoke
To bend the mountain bull, who, wildly free,
O'er the steep rocks had wander'd unconfin'd;
These are the arts of mortal industry,
And such the subtle power of human kind.

STROPHE II.

By learning and fair science crown'd,
Behold him now full fraught with wisdom's lore,
The laws of nature anxious to explore,
With depth of thought profound:
But naught, alas! can human wisdom see
In the dark bosom of futurity:
The power of Wisdom may awhile prevail,
Awhile suspend a mortal's fleeting breath;
But never can her fruitless arts avail,
To conquer fate, or stop the hand of death.
ANTISTROPE II.

Man's ever active, changeful will,
Sometimes to good shall bend his virtuous mind;
Sometimes behold him to foul deeds inclined,
And prone to every ill.
Who guiltless keeps the laws is still approved
By every tongue, and by his country loved;
But he who doth not, from his native land
A wretched exile, far, O! far from me,
May he be driven, by angry Heaven's command,
And live devote to shame and infamy!

Cho. Amazement! can it be Antigone,
Or do my eyes deceive me? No, she comes.
O wretched daughter of a wretched father!
Hast thou transgress'd the laws, and art thou taken
In this adventurous deed, unhappy maid?

Enter Antigone and Guard.

Guard. Behold the woman who hath done the deed;
In the very act of burial we surprised her.
Where is the king?

Cho. Return'd as we could wish;
Ev'n now he comes this way.

Enter Creon.

Cre. Whom have we here?
Doth Justice smile upon us?

Guard. O my lord! Never should man too confident assert,
Much less by oath should bind himself to aught;
For soon our judgments change, and one opinion
Destroys another. By thy threats alarm'd,
But now I vow'd I never would return:

Yet, thus preserved beyond my hopes, I come,
Bound by that duty which I owe to thee
And to my country, to bring here this virgin,
Whom, as she sprinkled 'er her brother's dust
The varied wreath, we seized: the willing task
Was mine, nor as of late by lot determin'd.
Receive her, then, O king! judge and condemn
The guilty, as it best becomes thy wisdom;
Henceforth I stand acquitted.

CRE.

But say, how,
Where didst thou find her?

GUARD. To say all, 'twas she

Who buried Polynices.

CRE. Art thou sure?

GUARD. These eyes beheld her.

CRE. But say, how discover'd?

GUARD. Thus then it was: no sooner had I left thee,

Than, mindful of thy wrath, with careful hands
From off the putrid carcass we removed
The scatter'd dust; then, to avoid the stench
Exhaling noisome, to a hill retired;
There watch'd at distance, till the mid-day sun
Scorch'd o'er our heads: sudden a storm arose,
Shook every leaf, and rattled through the grove,
Filling the troubled element. We closed
Our eyes, and patient bore the wrath of Heaven:
At length the tempest ceased; when we beheld
This virgin issuing forth, and heard her cries
Distressful, like the plaintive bird, who views
The plunder'd nest, and mourns her ravish'd young:
Ev'n thus the maid, when on the naked corse
She cast her eyes, loud shriek'd, and cursed the hand
That did the impious deed; then sprinkled o'er
The crumbled earth; and from a brazen urn,
Of richest work, to the loved relics thrice
Her due libations poured; we saw, and straight
Pursued her; unappall'd she seemed, and still,
As we did question her, confess'd it all.
It pleased, and yet methought it grieved me too
To find ourselves released from wo, is bliss
Supreme; but thus to see our friends unhappy,
Imbitters all. I must be thankful still
For my own safety, which I hold most dear.
CRE. Speak thou, who bend'st to earth thy drooping head:
Dost thou deny the fact?

ANT. Deny it? no:

CRE. [to the Guard.] Retire, for thou art free; and
now, [turning to Antigone.

Be brief and tell me: heardst thou our decree?

ANT. I did; 'twas public: how could I avoid it?

CRE. And darest thou, then, to disobey the law?

ANT. I had it not from Jove, nor the just gods

Who rule below; nor could I ever think
A mortal's law of power or strength sufficient
To abrogate the unwritten law divine,
Immutable, eternal, not like these

Of yesterday, but made ere time began.
Shall man persuade me, then, to violate
Heaven's great commands, and make the gods my foes?

Without thy mandate, death had one day come;
For who shall 'scape it? and if now I fall
A little sooner, 'tis the thing I wish.
To those who live in misery, like me,
Believe me, king! 'tis happiness to die.
Without remorse I shall embrace my fate;
But to my brother had I left the rites

Of sepulture unpaid, I then indeed
Had been most wretched. This to thee may seem
Madness and folly; if it be, 'tis fit
I should act thus: it but resembles thee.

CRE. Sprung from a sire perverse and obstinate,
Like him, she cannot bend beneath misfortune:
But know, the proudest hearts may be subdued.
Hast thou not mark'd the hardest steel by fire
Made soft and flexible? Myself have seen
By a slight rein the fiery courser held.

'Tis not for slaves to be so haughty; yet
This proud offender, not content, it seems,
To violate my laws, adds crime to crime;
ANTIGONE.—ACT II.

Smiles at my threats, and glories in her guilt.
If I should suffer her to 'scape my vengeance, 420
She were the man, not I: but though she sprang
Ev'n from my sister, were I bound to her
By ties more dear than is Hercaeus Jove,
She should not 'scape: her sister too, I find
A complice in the deed. Go, call her forth: 425
[to one of the attendants.

She is within; I saw her raving there,
Her senses lost; the common fate of those
Who practise dark and deadly wickedness.
[turning to ANTIGONE.

I cannot bear to see the guilty stand
Convicted of their crimes, and yet pretend 430
To gloss them o'er with specious names of virtue.

ANT. I am thy captive; thou wouldst have my life:
Will that content thee?

CRE. Yes, 'tis all I wish.

ANT. Why this delay, then, when thou know'st my words
To thee as hateful are as thine to me! 435
Therefore despatch: I cannot live to do
A deed more glorious; and so these would all
[pointing to the Chorus.

Confess, were not their tongues restrain'd by fear.
It is the tyrant's privilege, we know,
To speak and act whate'er he please uncensur'd. 440
CRE. Lives there another in the land of Thebes,
Who thinks as thou dost?

ANT. Yes, a thousand; these,
These think so too, but dare not utter it.

CRE. Dost thou not blush?

ANT. For what? Why blush to pay
A sister's duty!

423 Jupiter Hercaeus, so called from being the guardian of every man's private habitation; in times of war and calamity altars were erected to him, to which the unhappy fled as an asylum.
CRE. But, Eteocles, Say, was not he thy brother too?

ANT. He was.

CRE. Why then thus reverence him who least deserved it?

ANT. Perhaps that brother thinks not so.

CRE. He must, if thou pay'st equal honour to them both.

ANT. He was a brother, not a slave.

CRE. One fought against that country which the other saved.

ANT. But equal death the rights of sepulture

Decrees to both.

CRE. What! reverence alike the guilty and the innocent?

ANT. Perhaps the gods below esteem it just.

CRE. A foe, though dead, should as a foe be treated still.

ANT. My love shall go with thine, but not my hate.

CRE. Go, then, and love them in the tomb; but know,

No woman rules in Thebes while Creon lives.

CHO. Lo! at the portal stands the fair Ismene;

Tears in her lovely eyes, a cloud of grief

Sits on her brow, wetting her Beauteous cheek

With pious sorrow for a sister's fate.

Enter Ismene.

CRE. Come forth! thou serpent! little did I think
That I had nourish'd two such deadly foes,

To suck my blood, and cast me from my throne.

What sayest thou? Wert thou accomplice in the deed,

Or wilt thou swear that thou art innocent?

ISM. I do acknowledge it, if she permit me,
I was accomplice, and the crime was mine.
ANTIGONE.—ACT II.

ANT. 'Tis false; thou didst refuse, nor would I hold
Communion with thee.

ISM. But in thy misfortunes
Let me partake, my sister! let me be
A fellow-sufferer with thee.

ANT. Witness, Death,
And ye infernal gods! to which belongs
The great, the glorious deed. I do not love
These friends in word alone.

ISM. Antigone!
Do not despise me; I but ask to die
With thee, and pay due honours to the dead.

ANT. Pretend not to a merit which thou hast not.
Live thou; it is enough for me to perish.

ISM. But what is life without thee?

ANT. Ask thy friend
And patron there. [pointing to Creon.

ISM. Why that unkind reproach,
When thou shouldst rather comfort me?

ANT. Alas!
It gives me pain, when I am forced to speak
So bitterly against thee.

ISM. Is there aught
That I can do to save thee?

ANT. Save thyself:

ISM. And will you not
Permit me then to share your fate?

ANT. Thy choice
Was life; 'tis mine to die.

ISM. I told thee oft
It would be so.

ANT. Thou didst, and was't not well
Thus to fulfil thy prophecy?

ISM. The crime
Was mutual, mutual be the punishment.

ANT. Fear not: thy life is safe; but mine long
Since
Devoted to the dead.
Cre. Both seem deprived of reason; one, indeed, was ever thus.
Ism. O king! the mind doth seldom keep her seat,
When sunk beneath misfortunes.
Cre. Sunk indeed
Thou wert in wretchedness to join with her.
Ism. But what is life without Antigone?
Cre. Then think not of it; for she is no more.
Ism. Wouldst thou destroy thy son's long-destin'd wife?
Cre. O! we shall find a fitter bride.
Ism. Alas!
He will not think so.
Cre. I'll not wed my son
To a base woman.
Ant. O, my dearest Hæmon!
And is it thus thy father doth disgrace thee?
Cre. Such an alliance were as hateful to me as is thyself.
Ism. Wilt thou then take her from him?
Cre. Their nuptials shall be finished by death.
Ism. She then must perish!
Cre. So must you and I.
Therefore no more delay: go, take them hence;
Confine them both: henceforth they shall not stir.
When death is near at hand, the bravest fly.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Thrice happy they whose days in pleasure flow;
Who never taste the bitter cup of wo:
For when the wrath of Heaven descends
On some devoted house, there foul disgrace,
With Grief and all her train, attends,
And shame and sorrow overwhelm the wretched race;
Ev'n as the Thracian sea, when vex'd with storms,
While darkness hangs incumbent o'er the deep,
ANTIGONE.—ACT II.  178

When the black North the troubled scene deforms,
And the black sands in rapid whirlwinds sweep:
The groaning waves beat on the trembling shore,
And echoing hills rebellow to the roar.

ANTISTROPHE I.

O Labdacus! thy house must perish all.
Ev'n now I see the stately ruin fall;
Shame heap'd on shame, and ill on ill,
Disgrace and never-ending woes;
Some angry god pursues thee still,
Nor grants or safety or repose:
One fair and lovely branch unwithered stood,
And braved the inclement skies;
But Pluto comes, inexorable god!
She sinks, she raves, she dies.

STROPHE II.

Shall man below control the gods above?
Or human pride restrain the power of Jove?
Whose eyes by all-subduing sleep
Are never clos'd, as feeble mortals' are;
But still their watchful vigils keep
Through the large circle of the eternal year.
Great lord of all, whom neither time nor age,
With envious stroke, can weaken or decay;
He who alone the future can presage,
Who knows alike to-morrow as to-day;
While wretched man is doom'd, by Heaven's decree,
To toil and pain, to sin and misery.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Ofttimes the flatterer Hope, that joy inspires,
Fills the proud heart of man with fond desires.
He. careless traveller, wanders still
Through life, unmindful of deceit;
Nor dreads the danger till he feel
The burning sands beneath his feet.
When Heaven impels to guilt the maddening mind,
Then good like ill appears;
And vice, for universal hate design'd,
The face of virtue wears.

[Exeunt.]
ACT III.

CREON, HÆMON, CHORUS.

CHO. Behold, O king! thy youngest hope appear,
The noble Hæmon; lost in grief he seems,
Weeping the fate of poor Antigone. 560

CRE. He comes, and better than a prophet, soon
Shall we divine his inmost thoughts. My son,
Com’st thou, well knowing our decree, to mourn
Thy promised bride, and angry to dispute
A father’s will; or, whatso’er we do 565
Still to hold best, and pay obedience to us!

HÆM. My father, I am thine; do thou command,
And I in all things shall obey: ’tis fit
My promised nuptial rites give place to thee.

CRE. It will become thee with obedience thus
To bear thee ever, and in every act 571
To yield submissive to a father’s will.
’Tis therefore, O my son! that men do pray
For children, who with kind officious duty
May guard their helpless age, resist their foes, 575
And, like their parents, love their parents’ friend:
But he who gets a disobedient child,
What doth he get but misery and wo?
His enemies will laugh the wretch to scorn.
Take heed, my son, thou yield not up thy reason,
In hopes of pleasure from a worthless woman; 581
For cold is the embrace of impious love,
And deep the wounds of false, dissembled friendship.
Hate, then, thy bitterest foe, despise her arts,
And leave her to be wedded to the tomb. 585

Of all the city, her alone I found
Rebellious; but I have her, nor shall Thebes
Say I’m a liar; I pronounced her fate,
And she must perish: let her call on Jove,
Who guards the rites of kindred, and the ties 590
Of nature; for if those by blood united
Transgress the laws, I hold myself more near
Ev’n to a stranger: who in private life
Is just and good, will to his country too
Be faithful ever; but the man who, proud
And fierce of soul, contemns authority,
Despiseth justice, and o’er those who rule
Would have dominion, such shall never gain
The applauding voice of Creon. He alone,
Whom the consenting citizens approve,
The acknowledged sovereign, should in all com-
mand;

Just or unjust his laws, in things of great
Or little import;—whatso’er he bids,
A subject is not to dispute his will;
He knows alike to rule and to obey;
And in the day of battle will maintain
The foremost rank, his country’s best defence.
Rebellion is the worst of human ills:
This ruins kingdoms, this destroys the peace
Of noblest families, this wages war,
And puts the brave to flight; while fair obedience
Keeps all in safety: to preserve it, ever
Should be a king’s first care. We will not yield
To a weak woman: if we must submit,
At least we will be conquered by a man,
Nor by a female arm thus fall inglorious.

Hæm. Wisdom, my father, is the noblest gift
That gods bestow on man, and better far
Than all his treasures: what thy judgment deems
Most fit I cannot, would not reprehend.
Others, perhaps, might call it wrong; for me,
My duty only bids me to inform you
If aught be done or said that casts reproach
Or blame on you. Such terror would thy looks
Strike on the low plebeian, that he dare not
Say aught unpleasing to thee: be it mine
To tell thee, then, what I of late have heard
In secret whisper’d. Your afflicted people
United mourn the unhappy virgin’s fate
Unmerited, most wretched of her sex,
To die for deeds of such distinguish'd virtue;
For that she would not let a brother lie
Unburied, to the dogs and birds a prey.
"Was it not rather," say the murmur'ring crowd,
"Worthy of golden honours and fair praise?"
Such are their dark and secret discontents.
Thy welfare and thy happiness alone
Are all my wish: what can a child desire
More than a father's honour? or a father
More than a child's? O! do not then retain
Thy will, and still believe no sense but thine
Can judge aright: the man who proudly thinks
None but himself or eloquent or wise,
By time betray'd, is branded for an idiot.
True wisdom will be ever glad to learn,
And not too fond of power. Observe the trees,
That bend to wintry torrents; how their boughs
Unhurt remain; while those that brave the storm,
Uprooted torn, shall wither and decay.
The pilot, whose unslackened sail defies
Contending winds, with shatter'd bark pursues
His dangerous course. Then mitigate thy wrath,
My father, and give way to sweet repentance.
If to my youth be aught of judgment given,
He who by knowledge and true wisdom's rules
Guides every action, is the first of men:
But since to few that happiness is given,
The next is he who, not too proud to learn,
Follows the counsels of the wise and good.

CHO. O king! if right the youth advise, 'tis fit
That thou shouldst listen to him; so to thee
Should he attend, as best may profit both.

CRE. And have we lived so long then, to be taught
A: last our duty by a boy like thee?

HAEM. Young though I am, I still may judge aright:
Wisdom in action lies, and not in years.

CRE. Call you it wisdom then to honour those
Who disobey the laws!
Hæm. I would not have thee
Protect the wicked.
Cre. Is she not most guilty?
Hæm. Thebes doth not think her so.
Cre. Shall Thebes prescribe 670

To Creon's will?
Hæm. How weakly dost thou talk!
Cre. Am I king here, or shall another reign?
Hæm. 'Tis not a city where but one man rules.
Cre. The city is the king's.
Hæm. Go by thyself then,
And rule henceforth o'er a deserted land. 675

Cre. [to the Chorus] He pleads the woman's cause.
Hæm. If thou art she,
I do; for, O! I speak but for thy sake;
My care is all for thee.
Cre. Abandoned wretch!

Dispute a father's will?
Hæm. I see thee err,
And therefore do it.
Cre. Is it then a crime 680
To guard my throne and rights from violation?
Hæm. He cannot guard them who contemns the gods,
And violates their laws.
Cre. O! thou art worse,
More impious ev'n than she thou hast defended.
Hæm. Naught have I done to merit this reproof.
Cre. Hast thou not pleaded for her? 686
Hæm. No; for thee,
And for myself; for the infernal gods.
Cre. But know she shall not live to be thy wife.
Hæm. Then she must die: another too may fall.
Cre. Ha! dost thou threaten me? Audacious traitor! 690

Hæm. What are my threats? Alas! thou heed'st them not.
Cre. That thou shalt see; thy insolent instruction
Shall cost thee dear.
HAM. But, for thou art my father,
Now would I say thy senses were impaired.
CRE. Think not to make me thus thy scorn and
laughter,
Thou woman's slave!
HAM. Still wouldst thou speak thyself,
And never listen to the voice of truth:
Such is thy will.
CRE. Now, by Olympus here
I swear, thy vile reproaches shall not pass
Unpunish'd: call her forth: before her bridegroom
[to one of the attendants.
She shall be brought, and perish in his sight.
HAM. These eyes shall never see it: let the
slaves
Who fear thy rage, submit to it; but know,
'Tis the last time thou shalt behold thy son.

[Exit Hamon.
CHO. Sudden in anger fled the youth. O king!
A mind oppress'd like his is desperate.
CRE. Why, let him go; and henceforth better
learn
Than to oppose me: be it as it may,
Death is their portion, and he shall not save them.
CHO. Must they both die then?
CRE. No; 'tis well advised:
Ismene lives; but for Antigone,—
CHO. O king! what death is she decreed to suffer?
CRE. Far from the hands of men I'll have her led,
And in a rocky cave beneath the earth,
Buried alive; with her a little food,
Enough to save the city from pollution:
There let her pray the only god she worships
To save her from this death: perhaps he will;
Or if he doth not, let her learn how vain
It is to reverence the powers below. [Exit Creon.
CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Mighty power, all powers above! 721
Great unconquerable Love!
Thou who liest in dimple sleek,
On the tender virgin's cheek;—
Thee the rich and great obey;
Every creature owns thy sway.
O'er the wide earth and o'er the main
Extends thy universal reign;
All thy maddening influence know,
Gods above and men below:
All thy powers resistless prove,
Great unconquerable Love!

ANTISTROPHE I.

Thou canst lead the just astray
From wisdom and from virtue's way:
The ties of nature cease to bind,
When thou disturb'st the captive mind.
Behold, enslaved by fond desire,
The youth contemns his aged sire;
Enamour'd of his beauteous maid,
Nor laws nor parents are obey'd:
Thus Venus wills it from above,
And great, unconquerable Love.

Cho. Ev'n I, beyond the common bounds of grief,
Indulge my sorrows; and from these sad eyes
Fountains of tears will flow, when I behold
Antigone, unhappy maid, approach
The bed of death, and hasten to the tomb.

Enter Antigone.

Ant. Farewell, my friends! my countrymen, farewell!

Here on her last sad journey you behold
The poor Antigone; for never more
Shall I return, or view the light of day.
The hand of death conducts me to the shore
Of dreary Acheron; no nuptial song
Reserved for me, the wretched bride alone
Of Pluto now, and wedded to the tomb.

Cao. Be it thy glory still, that by the sword
Thou fall'st not, nor the slow-consuming hand
Of foul distemperature; but, far distinguished
Above thy sex, and to thyself a law,
Doom'st thy own death: so shall thy honour live,
And future ages venerate thy name.

Ant. Thus Tantalus' unhappy daughter fell,
The Phrygian Niobe: high on the top
Of towering Sipylus, the rock enfolds her,
Ev'n as the ivy twines her tendrils round
The lofty oak: there still (as Fame reports)
To melting showers and everlasting snow
Obvious she stands, her beauteous bosom wet
With tears, that from her ever-streaming eyes
Incessant flow; her fate resembles mine.

Cao. A goddess she, and from a goddess sprung:
We are but mortal, and of mortals born.
To meet the fate of gods thus in thy life,
And in thy death, O! 'tis a glorious doom.

Ant. Alas! thou mock'st me. Why, while yet I
live,
Wouldst thou afflict me with reproach like this?
O my dear country, and my dearer friends,
Its bless'd inhabitants, renowned Thebes!
And ye, Dircæan fountains! you I call
To witness that I die by laws unjust;
To my deep prison unlampeted go,
To my sad tomb, no fellow-sufferer there
To sooth my woes, the living or the dead.

Cao. Rashness like thine must meet with such re-
ward:
A father's crimes, I fear, lie heavy on thee.

Ant. O, thou hast touched my worst of miseries!
My father's fate, the woes of all our house,
The wretched race of Labdacus, renown'd
For its misfortunes! O, the guilty bed
Of those from whom I sprang! unhappy offspring
Of parents most unhappy! Lo! to them
I go accursed; a virgin and a slave.
O my poor brother! most unfortunate
Were thy sad nuptials; they have slain thy sister.

Cho. Thy piety demands our praise; but know,
Authority is not to be despised:
'Twas thy own rashness brought destruction on thee
Ant. Thus friendless, un lamented must I tread
The destined path, no longer to behold
Your sacred light, and none shall mourn my fate.

Enter Creon.

Cre. Know ye not, slaves like her to death devoted
Would never cease their wailings! Wherefore is it
You thus delay to execute my orders?
Let her be carried instant to the cave,
And leave her there alone, to live, or die.
Her blood rests not on us; but she no longer
Shall breathe on earth. [Exit Creon

Ant. O dreadful marriage-bed!
O my deep dungeon! my eternal home,
Whither I go to join my kindred dead!
For not a few hath fell Persephone
Already taken; to her I go, the last
And most unhappy, ere my time was come;
But still I have sweet hope I shall not go
Unwelcome to my father; nor to thee,
My mother. Dear to thee, Eteocles,
Still shall I ever be: these pious hands
Wash'd your pale bodies, and adorn'd you both
With rites sepulchral, and libations due.
And thus, my Polynices! for my care
Of thee am I rewarded; and the good

794 Polynices married the daughter of Adrastus, who, in defense of his son-in-law, led his Argians against Thebes: thus his marriage was the cause of his death, and the decree against Antigone consequent on it.
Alone shall praise me. For a husband dead,
Nor, had I been a mother, for my children,
Would I have dared to violate the laws:
Another husband and another child
Might sooth affliction; but, my parents dead,
A brother’s loss could never be repair’d;
And therefore did I dare the venturous deed,
And therefore die by Creon’s dread command.
Ne’er shall I taste of Hymen’s joys, or know
A mother’s pleasures in her infant race;
But, friendless and forlorn, alive descend
Into the dreary mansions of the dead.
And how have I offended the just gods?
But wherefore call on them! Will they protect
me,
When thus I meet with the reward of ill
For doing good! If this be just, ye gods!
If I am guilty, let me suffer for it:
But if the crime be theirs, O! let them feel
That weight of misery they have laid on me!
    Cho. The storm continues, and her angry soul
Still pours its sorrows forth.

Enter Creon.

Cre. The slaves shall suffer
For this delay.
    Ant. Alas! death cannot be
Far from that voice.
    Cre. I would not have thee hope
A moment’s respite.
    Ant. O my country’s gods!
And thou, my native Thebes! I leave you now.
Look on me, princes; see the last of all
My royal race; see what I suffer; see
From whom I bear it;—from the worst of men,
Only because I did delight in virtue.  
[Exit Creon.]
ANTIGONE.—ACT III. 183

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Remember what fair Danae endured,
Condemned to change heaven’s cheerful light
For scenes of horror and of night,
Within a brazen tower long time immured:
Yet was the maid of noblest race,
And honour’d ev’n with Jove’s embrace.

But, O! when fate decrees a mortal’s wo,
Naught can reverse the doom, or stop the blow,
Nor heaven above, nor earth and seas below.

ANTISTROPHE I.

The Thracian monarch, Dryas’ hapless son,
Chain’d to a rock, in torment lay,
And breathed his angry soul away,
By wrath misguided, and by pride undone;
Taught by the offended god to know
From soul reproach what evils flow:
For he the rites profaned with slanderous tongue;
The holy flame he quench’d, disturb’d the song,
And waked to wrath the Muses’ tuneful throng.

STROPHE II.

His turbid waves, where Salmydessus roll’d
And proud Cyanea’s rocks divide the flood,
There from thy temple, Mars! didst thou behold
The sons of Phineus weltering in their blood.

850 Acrisius, king of the Argives, having been warned by an oracle that he should be slain by his grandson, shut up his daughter Danae in a brazen tower; Jupiter, however, according to the poets, gained access to her, by transforming himself into a golden shower.

859 Lycurgus, king of Thrace, for contemning or disturbing the rites of Bacchus, was chained to a rock, where he perished.

868 Salmydessus was a river in Thrace, near which was a temple dedicated to Mars. The Cyanæ were two rocks, or small islands, near the Thracian Bosphorus.

871 Plexippus and Pandion, whose eyes were put out by their stepmother Idæa, the wife of Phineus, after the death of their own mother Cleopatra, the daughter of Boreas and Orithyia, so fate is alluded to in the latter part of the ode.
A mother did the cruel deed;
A mother bade her children bleed:

Both, by her impious hand deprived of light,
In vain lamented long their ravish'd sight,
And closed their eyes in never-ending night.

Long time they wept a better mother's fate,
Unhappy offspring of a luckless bed!
Yet nobly born, and eminently great
Was she, and 'mid sequester'd caverns bred;

Her father's angry storms among,
Daughter of gods, from Boreas sprung.

Equal in swiftness to the bounding steed,
She skimm'd the mountains with a courser's speed;
Yet was the nymph to death and misery decreed.

[Exeunt.

ACT IV.

TIRESIAS, GUIDE, CREON, CHORUS.

TIR. 'Princes of Thebes! behold, conducted hither
By my gentle guide (such is the blind man's fate),

Tiresias comes.

CRE. O venerable prophet!

What hast thou to impart?

TIR. I will inform thee

Observe, and be obedient.

CRE. Have I not

Been ever so?

TIR. Thou hast; and therefore Thebes

Hath flourish'd still—

CRE. By thy protecting hand.

TIR. Therefore be wise; for know, this very hour
Is the important crisis of thy fate.

886 The name of princes among the Greeks was given, not
only to sovereigns, but frequently to the principal and most
honourable members of the commonwealth. Tiresias, we see,
compliments the ancient citizens of Thebes, who composed the
chorus, with this title.
Antigone.—Act IV.

CRE. Speak, then, what is it? How I dread thy words!

TIR. When thou hast heard the portents which my art
But now discover’d, thou wilt see it all.
Know, then, that sitting on my ancient throne
Augural, whence each divination comes,
Sudden a strange unusual noise was heard
Of birds, whose loud and barbarous dissonance
I knew not how to interpret: by the sound
Of clashing wings, I could discover well
That with their bloody claws they tore each other.
Amazed and fearful, instantly I tried,
On burning altars holy sacrifice;
When, from the victim, lo! the sullen flame
Aspired not; smother’d in the ashes, still
Laid the moist flesh, and, roll’d in smoke, repell’d
The rising fire; while from their fat the thighs
Were separate: all these signs of deadly omen,
Boding dark vengeance, did I learn from him.

[pointing to the guide.
He is my leader, king! and I am thine.
Then mark me well; from thee these evils flow;
From thy unjust decree; our altars all
Have been polluted by the unhallow’d food
Of birds and dogs, that prey’d upon the corse
Of wretched Ædipus’ unhappy son;
Nor will the gods accept our offer’d prayers,
Or from our hands receive the sacrifice:
No longer will the birds send forth their sounds
Auspicious, fatten’d thus with human blood.
Consider this, my son! and, O! remember,
To err is human; ’tis the common lot
Of frail mortality: and he alone
Is wise and happy, who, when ills are done,
Persists not, but would heal the wound he made;
But self-sufficient obstinacy ever
Is folly’s utmost height. Where is the glory
To slay the slain, or persecute the dead!
I wish thee well, and therefore have spoke thus:
When those who love advise, 'tis sweet to learn.
Cre. I know, old man, I am the general mark,
The butt of all, and you all aim at me:
For me, I know, your prophecies were made,
And I am sold to this detested race;
Betray'd to them. But make your gains; go, purchase
Your Sardinian amber, and your Indian gold;
They shall not buy a tomb for Polynices:
No, should the eagle seek him for his food,
And, towering, bear him to the throne of Jove,
I would not bury him; for well I know,
The gods by mortals cannot be polluted;
But the best men, by sordid gain corrupt,
Say all that's ill, and fall beneath the lowest.
Tir. Who knows this, or who dare accuse us of it?
Cre. What mean'st thou by that question? Ask'st thou who?
Tir. How far is wisdom beyond every good?
Cre. As far as folly beyond every ill.
Tir. That's a distemper thou'rt afflicted with.
Cre. I'll not revile a prophet. But thou dost;
Thou'lt not believe.
Cre. Your prophetic race
Are lovers all of gold.
Tir. Tyrants are so,
Howe'er ill gotten.
Cre. Know'st thou 'tis a king
Thou'rt talking thus to?
Tir. Yes, I know it well;
A king, who owes to me his country's safety.
Cre. Thou'rt a wise prophet, but thou art unjust.
Tir. Thou wilt oblige me then to utter that
Which I had purposed to conceal.
Cre. Speak out;
Say what thou wilt, but say it not for hire.
ANTIGONE.—ACT IV.

TIR. Thus may it seem to thee.
CRE. But know, old man, I am not to be sold.
TIR. Remember this:
Not many days shall the bright sun perform
His stated course, ere, sprung from thy own loins,
Thyself shall yield a victim: in thy turn,
Thou too shalt weep, for that thy cruel sentence
Decreed a guiltless virgin to the tomb,
And kept on earth, unmindful of the gods,
Ungraced, unburied, an unhallow’d corse
Which not to thee, nor to the gods above
Of right belonged; ’twas arbitrary power.
But the avenging Furies lie conceal’d;
The ministers of death have spread the snare,
And with like woes await to punish thee.
Do I say this from hopes of promised gold?
Pass but little time, and thou shalt hear
The shrieks of men; the women’s loud laments,
O’er all thy palace; see the offended people
Together rage; thy cities all by dogs
And beasts and birds polluted, and the stench
Of filth obscene on every altar laid.
Thus from my angry soul have I sent forth
Its keenest arrows (for thou hast provoked me);
Nor shall they fly in vain, or thou escape
The destined blow. Now, boy, conduct me home:
On younger heads the tempest of his rage
Shall fall; but, henceforth, let him learn to speak
In humbler terms, and bear a better mind.

[Exit Tiresias.]

Cho. He’s gone, and dreadful were his prophecies:
Since these gray hairs were o’er my temple spread,
Naught from these lips hath flow’d but sacred truth.

970 The heathen deities were divided into the gods above, and the gods below; to the latter of these belonged the care of the dead, whom Creon had offended by refusing burial to the corpse of Polynices.
SOPHOCLES.

CRE. I know there hath not, and am troubled much
For the event: 'tis grating to submit;
And yet the mind, spite of itself, must yield
In such distress.

CHO. Son of Mnesæcus! now 995
Thou need'st most counsel.

CRE. What wouldst thou advise?
I will obey thee.

CHO. Set the virgin free,
And let a tomb be raised for Polynices.

CRE. And dost thou counsel thus? and must I yield?

CHO. Immediately, O king: for vengeance falls
With hasty footsteps on the guilty head. 1001

CRE. I cannot, yet I must reverse the sentence:
There is no struggling with necessity.

CHO. Do it thyself, nor trust another hand.

CRE. I will; and you, my servants, be prepared;
Each with his axe quick hasten to the place. 1006
Myself (for thus I have resolved) will go,
And the same hand that bound shall set her free;
For, O! I fear 'tis wisest still through life
To keep our ancient laws, and follow virtue. 1010

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Bacchus, by various names to mortals known,
Fair Semele's illustrious son!
Offspring of thunder-bearing Jove,
Who honor'st famed Italia with thy love!
Who dwell'st where erst the dragon's teeth were strow'd,
Or where Ismenus pours his gentle flood;
Who dost o'er Ceres' hallow'd rites preside,
And at thy native Thebes propitious still reside.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Where famed Parnassus' forked hills uprise,
To thee ascends the sacrifice; 1020
ANTIGONE.—ACT V.

Corycia's nymphs attend below,
While from Castalia's fount fresh waters flow:
O'er Nysa's mountains wreaths of ivy twine,
And mix their tendrils with the clustering vine:
Around their master crowd the virgin throng, 1025
And praise the god of Thebes in never-dying song.

STROPHE II.

Happiest of cities, Thebes! above the rest
By Semele and Bacchus bless'd!
O! visit now thy once beloved abode!
O! heal our woes, thou kind, protecting god! 1030
From steep Parnassus, or the Euboean sea,
With smiles auspicious come, and bring with thee
Health, joy, and peace, and fair prosperity.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Immortal leader of the maddening choir,
Whose torches blaze with unextinguish'd fire! 1035
Great son of Jove, who guid'st the tuneful throng,
Thou, who presidest o'er the nightly song,
Come with thy Naxian maids, a festive train,
Who, wild with joy, and raging o'er the plain, 1039
For thee the dance prepare, to thee devote the strain.

[Execunt

ACT V.

MESSENER, CHORUS.

Mes. Ye race of Cadmus, sons of ancient Thebes,
Henceforth no state of human life by me
Shall be or valued or despised; for all

1021 The Muses, so called from Corycium, at the foot of Mount
Parnassus.
1023 Parnassus is described by the poets as having two tops;
one called Cirrha, sacred to Apollo; the other Nysa, sacred to
Bacchus; there was also a city in Arcadia of this name, where
Bacchus was nursed.
1038 Naxos was one of the Cyclades, islands in the Archipe-
lago, famous for its vines: of the nymphs of Naxos, it is reported,
that they ran wild and frantic about the woods, with each a torch,
or thyrsus, in her hand, singing the praises of Bacchus.
Depends on fortune: she exalts the low,
And casts the mighty down: the fate of men
Can never be foretold. There was a time,
When Creon lived in envied happiness;
Ruled o'er renowned Thebes, which from her foes
He had deliver'd, with successful power:
Bless'd in his kingdom, in his children bless'd,
He stretch'd o'er all his universal sway:
Now all is gone: when pleasure is no more
Man then is but an animated corse,
Nor can be said to live: he may be rich,
Or deck'd with regal honours: but if joy
Be absent from him, if he tastes them not,
'Tis useless grandeur all, and empty shade.

Cho. Touching our royal master, bring'st thou news
Of sorrow to us?

Mrs. They are dead; and those
Who live, the dreadful cause.

Cho. Quick, tell us who

The slayer and the slain.

Mrs. Hämon is dead.

Cho. Dead! by what hand, his father's or his own?
Mrs. Enraged, and grieving for his murder'd love,
He slew himself!

Cho. O prophet! thy predictions
Were but too true.

Mrs. Since thus it be, 'tis fit
We should consult: our present state demands it.

Cho. But see, Eurydice, the wretched wife
Of Creon, comes this way: or chance hath brought her,
Or Hämon's hapless fate hath reach'd her ear.

Enter Eurydice.

Eur. O citizens! as to Minerva's fane
Ev'n now I went to pay my vows, the doors
I burst, and heard imperfectly the sound
Of most disastrous news, which touch'd me near:
Breathless I fell amid the virgin throng,
And now I come to know the dreadful truth. Whate'er it be, I'll hear it now; for, O!
I am no stranger to calamity.

Mess. Then mark, my mistress! I will tell thee all,
Nor will I pass a circumstance unmention'd.
Should I deceive thee with an idle tale,
'Twere soon discover'd; truth is always best:
Know, then, I follow'd Creon to the field,
Where, torn by dogs, the wretched carcass lay
Of Polynices; first to Proserpine
And angry Pluto, to appease their wrath,
Our humble prayers addressing, there we laved
In the pure stream the body; then with leaves
Fresh gather'd covering, burned his poor remains,
And on the neighbouring turf a tomb upraised;
Then towards the virgin's rocky cave advanced,
When, from the dreadful chamber a sad cry,
As from afar, was heard: a servant ran
To tell the king; and still, as we approach'd,
The sound of sorrow, from a voice unknown
And undistinguish'd, issued forth. "Alas!"
Said Creon, "am I then a faithful prophet?
And do I tread a more unhappy path
Than e'er I went before? It is my son;
I know his voice: but get ye to the door,
My servants, close; look through the stony heap;
Mark if it be so. Is it Haemon's voice?"
Again he cried; "or have the gods deceived me?"
Thus spoke the king: we, to our mournful lord
Obedient, look'd, and saw Antigone
Down in the deepest hollow of the cave
By her own vestments hung; close by her side
The wretched youth, embracing in his arms
Her lifeless corse, weeping his father's crime,
His ravish'd bride, and horrid nuptial bed.
Creon beheld, and loud, approaching, cried;—
'What art thou doing? What's thy dreadful purpose?
What means my son? come forth, my Haemon, come,
Thy father begs thee.' With indignant eye,
The youth look'd up, nor scornful deign'd an answer,
But silent drew his sword, and with fell rage
Struck at his father, who by flight escaped
The blow; then on himself bent all his wrath:
Full in his side the weapon fix'd; but still,
While life remain'd, on the soft bosom hung
Of the dear maid, and his last spirit breathed
O'er her pale cheek, discolor'd with his blood.
Thus lie the wretched pair, in death united;
And celebrate their nuptials in the tomb;
To future times a terrible example
Of the sad woes which rashness ever brings. 1125

[Exit Eurydice.]

Cho. What can this mean? She's gone, without a word.

Mrs. 'Tis strange! and yet I trust she will not loud
Proclaim her griefs to all; but (for I know
She's ever prudent), with her virgin train,
In secret weep her murder'd Hæmon's fate. 1130

Cho. Clamour, indeed were vain; but such deep silence
Doth ever threaten horrid consequence.

Mrs. Within we soon shall know, if aught she hide
Of deadly purport in her angry soul: 1134
For well thou say'st her silence is most dreadful.

[Exit Messenger.]

Cho. But, lo! the king himself; and in his arms
See his dead son, the monument accursed
Of his sad fate, which, may we say unblamed,
Sprang not from other's guilt, but from his own.

Enter CREON, bearing the body of Hæmon.

CRE. Ah me! what deadly woes from the bad mind
Perpetual flow! thus in one wretched house
Have you beheld the slayer and the slain.
O fatal counsels! O unhappy son!
Thus with thy youthful bride to sink in death!
Thou diest, my child; and I alone have killed thee!

Cho. O king! thy justice comes too late.

Cre. It doth: 1146

I know it well, unhappy as I am:
For, O! the god this heavy weight of wo
Hath cast upon me, and his fiercest wrath
Torments me now, changing my joyful state
To keenest anguish. O! the fruitless toils
Of wretched mortals!

Enter Messenger.

Mes. Thus oppress'd, my lord,
With bitterest misfortune, more affliction
Awaits thee still, which thou wilt find within.

Cre. And can there be more woes? Is aught to come

More horrible than this?

Mes. The queen is dead,
Her wounds yet fresh: eager, alas! to show
A mother's love, she follow'd her lost child.

Cre. O Death insatiate! how dost thou afflict me!
What cruel news, thou messenger of ill!

Hast thou brought now?

Cho. A wretch already dead
With grief, thy horrid tale once more hath slain.

Cre. Didst thou not say a fresh calamity
Had fallen upon me? Didst not say my wife
Was dead, alas! for grief of Hæmon's fate?

[Scene opens, and discovers the body of Eurydice.

Mes. Behold her there.

Cre. O me! another blow!
What now remains? What can I suffer more,
Thus bearing in these arms my breathless son?
My wife too dead! O most unhappy mother!
And O, thou wretched child!

Mes. Close by the altar

She drew the sword, and closed her eyes in death,
Lamenting first her lost Megareus’ fate
And Hæmon’s death, with imprecations dire
Still poured on thee, the murderer of thy son.

Cre. I shudder at it. Will no friendly hand 1175
Destroy me quick? for, O! I am most wretched;
Beset with miseries!

Mes. She accused thee oft,
And said the guilt of both their deaths was thine.

Cre. Alas! I only am to blame; ’twas I
Who kill’d thee, Hæmon! I confess my crime. 1180
Bear me, my servants! bear me far from hence.
For I am—nothing.

Cho. If in ills like these
Aught can be well, thou hast determined right:
When least we see our woes, we feel them least.

Cre. Quick let my last, my happiest hour appear:
Would it were come, the period of my woes! 1186
O that I might not see another day!

Cho. Time must determine that: the present hour
Demands our care; the rest be left to Heaven.

Cre. But I have wish’d and pray’d for ’t.

Cho. Pray for nothing; 1190
There’s no reversing the decrees of fate.

Cre. Take hence this useless load, this guilty
wretch
Who slew his child, who slew ev’n thee, my wife!
I know not whither to betake me, where
To turn my eyes; for all is dreadful round me, 1195
And fate hath weighed me down on every side.

Cho. Wisdom alone is man’s true happiness.
We are not to dispute the will of heaven;
For ever are the boastings of the proud
By the just gods repaid, and man at last 1200
Is taught to fear their anger and be wise.

1172 Megareus was the first husband of Eurydice.
TRACHINIAE.
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Hercules.
Hyllus, his son.
Dejanira, wife of Hercules.
Lichas, a herald.
Attendant on Dejanira
Nurse.
Old Man.
Messenger.
Chorus, composed of virgins of Trachis.
TRACHINIAE.

ARGUMENT.

Iole, the daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia, was sought in marriage by Hercules, who, in revenge for the rejection of his addresses, killed her brother Iphitus. Hercules shortly after became a successful suitor of Dejanira, and married her. Being compelled to seek a temporary shelter in Trachis, he committed the custody of his wife to Ceyx, the king of that country, and made an incursion into Oechalia. Iole now fell into the hands of her former lover, whose affection met with reciprocal tenderness; and Dejanira, secretly informed of her husband's attachment to her more fortunate rival, sent, by the hands of Lichas, a poisoned tunic, which she had formerly received as a philtre from the centaur Nessus, when expiring; and which he then told her had the power of recalling an inconstant man from the temptations of unlawful love. The unfortunate hero, attired in this fatal garment, soon became sensible of his approaching end; and in his rage threw Lichas into the sea; after which he directed his son Hyllus to convey him immediately to Mount Oeta, and to burn him on a funeral pile to be there erected; while Dejanira, in despair for the mischief she had caused, destroyed herself.

ACT I.

Scene before the palace of Ceyx, in Trachis.

DEJANIRA, ATTENDANT.

Dej. Of ancient fame, and long for truth received,
Hath been the maxim, that nor good nor ill
Can mortal life be called before we die.
Alas! it is not so; for, O my friends!
Ere to the shades of Orcus I descend,
Too well I know that Dejanira's life
Hath ever been, and ever must be wretched.
While, in my native Pleuron, Æneus watch'd
My tender years with kind, paternal care,
If ever woman suffer'd from the dread
Of hated nuptials, I endured the worst
And bitterest woes, when Achelous came,
The river-god, to ask a father's voice,
And snatched me to his arms. With triple form
He came affrighting; now, to sight appear'd
A bull; and now, with motley scales adorn'd,
A wreathed serpent; now with human shape
And bestial head united: from his beard,
Shadow'd with hair, as from a fountain dripp'd
The overflowing water; horrid form!
This to escape, my prayers incessant rose,
That I might rather die than e'er approach
His hated bed; when, lo! the welcome hour,
Though late, arrived that brought the son of Jove
And fair Alcmena to my aid: he came,
He fought, he freed me. How the battle pass'd,
Who unconcern'd beheld it best can tell;
Alas! I saw it not, oppress'd with fear.
Lest from my fatal beauty should arise
Some sad event: at length, deciding Jove
Gave to the doubtful fight a happy end,
If I may call it so; for, since the hour
That gave me to Alcides' wish'd-for bed,
Fears rise on fears; still is my anxious heart
Solicitous for him: ofttimes the night,
Which brings him to me, bears him from my arms
To other labours, and a second toil.
Our children, too, alas! he sees them not,
TRACHINIA.—ACT I.

But as the husbandman, who ne'er beholds
His distant lands, save at the needful time
Of seed or harvest. Wandering thus, and thus
Returning ever, is he sent to serve
I know not whom: when crown'd with victory,
Then most my fears prevail; for since he slew
The valiant Iphitus, at Trachis here
We live in exile with our generous friend,
The hospitable Ceyx; he, meantime,
Is gone, and none can tell me where: he went,
And left me most unhappy. O! some ill
Hath sure befallen him! for no little time
Hath he been absent: 'tis full fifteen moons
Since I beheld him, and no messenger
Is come to Dejanira: some misfortune
Doubtless hath happen'd, for he left behind
A dreadful scroll. O! I have pray'd the gods
A thousand times it may contain no ill.
Arr. My royal mistress, long have I beheld
Thy tears and sorrows for thy lost Alcides;
But if the counsels of a slave might claim
Attention, I would speak, would ask thee wherefore,
Among thy sons, a numerous progeny,
None hath been sent in search of him, and chief
Thy Hyllus, if he holds a father's health
And safety dear: but, ev'n as we could wish,
Behold him here: if what I have advised
Seem fitting, he is come in happiest hour
To execute our purpose.

Enter Hyllus.

Dej. O, my son!
Oft from the meanest tongue the words of truth
And safety flow: this woman, though a slave,
Hath spoke what would have well become the mouth
Of freedom's self to utter.

45 Iphitus was the son of Eurytus, king of Æchalia, and
was slain by Hercules; who, as an expiation for the crime,
submitted to a voluntary exile at Trachis, under the protection
of Ceyx, the king of that country.
May I know
What she hath said?

She says, it doth reflect
Disgrace on thee, thy father so long absent,
Not to have gain'd some knowledge of his fate.

I have already, if I may rely
On what report hath said of him.

O! where,
Where is he then, my son?

These twelve months past,
If fame say true, a Lydian woman held him
In shameful servitude.

If it be so,
May every tongue reproach him!

But I hear
He now is free.

And where doth rumour say
He is? Alive or dead?

’Tis said, he leads,
Or means to lead, his forces towards Euboea,
The land of Eurytus.

Alas, my son!
Dost thou not know the oracles he left
Touching that kingdom?

No, I know not of them:

What were they?

There, he said, or he should die,
Or if he should survive, his life to come
Would all be happy. Wilt thou not, my son!
In this important crisis, strive to aid
Thy father! If he lives, we too shall live
In safety; if he dies, we perish with him.

Mother! I go: long since I had been there,
But that the oracle did never reach
Mine ears before; meantime, that happy fate,
Which on my father ever wont to smile
Propitious, should not suffer us to fear.
Thus far informed, I will not let the means
Of truth escape me, but will know it all.
Dej. Haste then away, my son, and know, good deeds,
Though late perform'd, are crown'd with sure success.

[Exit Hyllus.

Enter Chorus.

STROPHE I.

On thee we call, great god of day!
To whom the night, with all her starry train,
Yields her solitary reign,
To send us some propitious ray:
Say thou, whose all-beholding eye
Doth nature's every part descry,
What dangerous ocean, or what land unknown
From Dejanira keeps Alcmena's valiant son?

ANTISTROPHE I.

For she nor joy nor comfort knows,
But weeps her absent lord, and vainly tries
To close her ever-streaming eyes,
Or sooth her sorrows to repose:
Like the sad bird of night, alone
She makes her solitary moan;
And still, as on her widow'd bed reclined
She lies, unnumber'd fears perplex her anxious mind.

STROPHE II.

Ev'n as the troubled billows roar,
When angry Boreas rules the inclement skies,
And waves on waves tumultuous rise
To lash the Cretan shore;—
Thus, sorrows still on sorrows press'd,
Fill the great Alcides' breast.
Unfading yet shall his fair virtues bloom,
And some protecting god preserve him from the tomb.

ANTISTROPHE II.

Wherefore, to better thoughts inclined,
Let us with hope's fair prospect fill thy breast,
Calm thy anxious thoughts to rest,
And ease thy troubled mind.
No bliss on man unmix'd with wo,
Doth Jove, great lord of all, bestow;
But good with ill, and pleasure still with pain,
Like heaven's revolving signs alternate reign.

\textit{Epode.}

Not always do the shades of night remain,
Nor ever with hard fate is man oppress'd;
The wealth that leaves us may return again;
Sorrow and joy successive fill the breast:
Fearless then of every ill,
Let cheerful hope support thee still.
Remember, queen! there is a power above;
And when did the great father, careful Jove,
Forget his children dear, and kind paternal love?

\textit{Dei.} The fame, it seems, of Dejanira's woes
Hath reach'd thine ears; but, O! thou little know'st
What I have suffer'd; thou hast never felt
Sorrows like mine; and long may be the time
Ere sad experience shall afflict thy soul
With equal woes! Alas! the youthful maid
In flowery pastures still exulting feeds,
Nor feels the scorching sun, the wintry storm,
Or blast of angry winds: secure she leads
A life of pleasure, void of every care,
Till to the virgin's happy state succeeds
The name of wife: then shall her portion come
Of pain and anguish; then her terrors rise
For husband and for children; then, perchance
You too may know what 'tis to be unhappy,
And judge of my misfortunes by your own.
Long since, oppress'd by many a bitter wo,
Oft have I wept; but this transcends them all,
For I will tell thee, when Alcides last
Forth on his journey went, he left behind
An ancient scroll. Alas! before that time
In all his labours he did never use
To speak as one who thought of death; secure
Always he seem'd of victory: but now
This writing marks as if he were to die
The portion but reserved for me, and wills
His children to divide the inheritance;
Fixes the time, in fifteen moons, it says,
He should return; that past, or he must perish;
Or, if he 'scape the fatal hour, thenceforth
Should lead a life of happiness and joy.
Thus had the gods, it said, decreed his life
And toil should end; so from their ancient beech
Dodona's doves foretold. The appointed hour
Approaches that must bring the event, ev'n now,
My friends; and therefore nightly do I start
From my sweet slumbers, struck with deadly fear,
Lest I should lose the dearest, best of men.

Cho. Of better omen be thy words: behold
A messenger who bears (for on his brow
I see the laurel crown) some joyful news.

Enter Messenger.

Mes. I come, my royal mistress, to remove
Thy fears, and bring the first glad tidings to thee;
To tell thee that Alcmena's son returns
With life and victory: ev'n now he comes
To lay before his country's gods the spoils
Of glorious war.

Dej. What dost thou say, old man?
What dost thou tell me?

Mes. That thy dear Alcides,
Thy valiant lord, with his victorious bands,
Will soon attend thee.

Dej. From our citizens
Didst thou learn this, or from a stranger's tongue?

Mes. The herald Lichas, in yon flowery vale,
But now reported; and I fled impatient,
Soon as I heard it, that I first might tell thee,
And be rewarded for the welcome tale.

176 At Dodona, a city of Chaonia in Epirus, was a temple dedicated to Jupiter Dodoneus; and in a grove near it a beech-tree, on which two doves sat and prophesied.
DEJ. But wherefore tarries Lichas if he bring
Glad tidings to me?

Mes. 'Tis impossible
To reach thee, for the Melian people throng
Around him; not a man but longs to know
Some news of thy Alcides, stops his journey,
Nor will release him till he hear it all:
Spite of himself, he waits to satisfy
Their eager doubts; but thou wilt see him soon.

DEJ. O, thou, who dwell'st on Æta's sacred top!
Immortal Jove! at length, though late, thou givest
The wish'd-for boon: let every female now—
You that within the palace do reside,
And you, my followers here, with shouts proclaim
The bless'd event: for, lo! a beam of joy
I little hoped, breaks forth, and we are happy

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Quick let sounds of mirth and joy
Every cheerful hour employ:
Haste, and join the festive song,
You who lead the youthful throng;
On whom the smiles of prosperous fate,
And Hymen's promised pleasures wait.
Now all your Ío Pæans sing,
To Phæbus, your protector and your king.

ANTISTROPHE.

And you, ye virgin train, attend,
Not unmindful of your friend,
His sister huntress of the groves,
Who still her native Delos loves.
Prepare the dance and choral lays,
To hymn the chaste Diana's praise;
To her and her attendant choir
Of mountain nymphs, attune the votive lyre.

EPODE.

Already hath the god possess'd
My soul, and rules the sovereign of my breast.
TRACHINIAE.—ACT II. 205

Evoe, Bacchus! lo! I come to join
Thy throng; around me doth the thyrsus twine,
And I am fill’d with rage divine.
See! the glad messenger appears,
To calm thy doubts, and to remove thy fears. 235
Let us our Io Pæans sing
To Phoebus, our protector and our king. [Exeunt.

ACT II.

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEJ. These eyes deceive me, friends, or I behold
A crowd approach this way, and with them comes
The herald Lichas: let me welcome him, 240
If he bring joyful news.

Enter LICHAS, IOLE, SLAVES.

Li. My royal mistress,
We greet thee with fair tidings of success,
And therefore shall our words deserve thy praise.

DEJ. O thou dear messenger! inform me first
What first I wish to know: my loved Alcides,— 246
Doth he yet live? Shall I again behold him?

Li. I left him well; in health and manly strength
Exulting.

DEJ. Where? In his own native land,
Or ’mid barbarians?

Li. On Euboea’s shore
He waits, with various fruits to crown the altar,
And pay due honours to Cæsæn Jove. 251

DEJ. Commanded by some oracle divine
Performs he this, or means but to fulfil
A vow of gratitude for conquest gain’d?

Li. For victory o’er the land, whence we have
brought 255
These captive women, whom thou seest before thee.

251 So called from Ceneum, a promontory in Euboea, where altars were raised to Jupiter, and sacrifice offered up to him.
Dej. Whence come the wretched slaves? For, if I judge
Their state aright, they must indeed be wretched.
Li. Know, when Alcides had laid waste the city
Of Eurytus, to him and to the gods were these devoted.
Dej. In Òchalia, then,
Hath my Alcides been this long, long time?
Li. Not so: In Lydia (as himself reports)
Was he detain'd a slave; so Jove ordain'd,
And who shall blame the high decrees of Jove? Sold to barbarian Omphale, he served
Twelve tedious months: ill-brook'd he the foul
shame;
Then in his wrath he made a solemn vow
He would revenge the wrong on the base author,
And bind in chains his wife and all his race;
Nor fruitless the resolve; for when the year
Of slavery past had expiated the crime
Imputed, soon with gather'd force he march'd
'Gainst the devoted Eurytus, the cause
(For so he deem'd him) of those hateful bonds.
Within his palace he had erst received
Alcides, but with bitterest taunts reviled him,
Boasting, in spite of his all-conquering arrows,
His son's superior skill; and said, a slave
Like him should bend beneath a freeman's power:
Then, 'mid the banquet's mirth, inflamed with
wine,
Cast forth his ancient guest. This to revenge,
When Iphitus to search his pastured steeds
 Came to Tirynthia, Hercules surprised;
And, as he turn'd his wandering eyes aside,
Hurl'd headlong from the mountain's top. Great Jove,
Father of men, from high Olympus saw
And disapproved the deed, unworthy of him,

266 A queen of Lydia.
Who ne'er before by fraud destroy'd his foes.
With open force had he revenged the wrong,
Jove had forgiven; but violence conceal'd
The gods abhor, and therefore was he sold
To slavery; Eurytus' unhappy sons
Were punish'd too, and dwell in Erebus;
Their city is destroyed; and they, whom here
Thou seest, from freedom and prosperity
Reduced to wretchedness: to thee they come,
Such was Alcides' will; which I, his slave,
Have faithfully perform'd. Himself, ere long,
Thou shalt behold, when to paternal Jove
He hath fulfilled his vows. Thus my long tale
Ends with the welcomest news which thou couldst hear:

Alcides comes!

Cho. O queen! thy happiness
Is great indeed, to see these slaves before thee,
And know thy lord approaches.

Dej. I am happy:
To see my Hercules with victory crown'd,
'Tis fit I should rejoice; and yet, my friends
If we consider well, we still should fear
For the successful, lest they fall from bliss.
It moves my pity much when I behold
These wretched captives in a foreign land,
Without a parent, and without a home,
Thus doom'd to slavery here, who once, perhaps,
Enjoy'd fair freedom's best inheritance.
O Jove! averter of each mortal ill!
Let not my children ever feel thy arm
Thus raised against them; or, if 'tis decreed,
Let it not be while Dejanira lives.
The sight of these alarms my fears; but tell me,
Thou poor afflicted captive, who thou art. [to Iole.
Art thou a mother? or, as by thy years
Thou seem'st, a virgin, and of noble birth?
Canst thou not tell me, Lichas, whence she sprang?
Inform me; for, of all these slaves, she most
Hath won my pity; and in her alone
Have I observed a firm and generous mind.

Li. Why ask of me? I know not who she is;
Perhaps of no mean rank.

Dej. The royal race
Of Eurytus?

Li. I know not, nor did e'er
Inquire.

Dej. And didst thou never hear her name
From her companions?

Li. Never: I perform'd
My work in silence.

Dej. Tell me then thyself,
Thou wretched maid! for I am most unhappy
Till I know who thou art.

Li. She will not speak;
I know she will not: not a word hath pass'd
Her lips e'er since she left her native land;
But still in tears the hapless virgin mourns
The burden of her sad calamity.
Her fate is hard: she merits your forgiveness.

Dej. Let her go in; I'll not disturb her peace,
Nor would I heap fresh sorrows on her head;
She hath enough already: we'll retire. [to Iole.
Go where thou wilt; my cares within await me.

[Exeunt Lichas, Iole, and Slaves.

Enter Messenger.

Mes. Stay thee awhile. I have a tale to tell
Touching these captives, which imports thee nearly;
And I alone am able to inform thee.

Dej. What dost thou know? and why wouldst thou detain me?

Mes. Return, and hear me: when I spake before,
I did not speak in vain, nor shall I now.

Dej. Wouldst thou I call them back, or mean'st to tell
Thy secret purpose here to me alone?

Mes. To these and thee thy friends; no more.
TRACHINLE.—ACT II.

DEJ. They're gone;

Now speak in safety.

MES. Lichas is dishonest;

And, either now or when I saw him last,

Hath utter'd falsehood.

DEJ. Ha! what dost thou say? I understand thee not; explain it quickly.

MES. I heard him say, before attendant crowds,

It was this virgin, this fair slave, destroyed

Œchalia's lofty towers: 'twas love alone

That waged the war, no Lydian servitude.

Nor Omphale, nor the pretended fall

Of Iphitus, for so the tale he brings

Would fain persuade thee. Know, thy own Alcides,

For that he could not gain the assenting voice

Of Eurytus to his unlawful love,

Laid waste the city where her father reign'd,

And slew him: now the daughter, as a slave,

Is sent to thee; the reason is too plain.

Nor think he meant her for a slave alone,—

The maid he loves, that would be strange indeed.

My royal mistress! most unwillingly

Do I report the unwelcome news, but thought

It was my duty; I have told the truth,

And the Trachinians bear me witness of it.

DEJ. Wretch that I am! to what am I reserved?

What hidden pestilence within my roof

Have I received unknowing! Hapless woman!

She seem'd of beauteous form and noble birth:

Have you not heard her name? for Lichas said

He knew it not.

MES. Daughter of Eurytus,

Her name Iole; he had not inquired

Touching her race.

CHO. Perdition on the man,

Of all most wicked, who hath thus deceived thee!

DEJ. What's to be done, my friend! This dreadful news

Afflicts me sorely.
Go, and learn the whole
From his own lips; compel him to declare
The truth.

I will; thou counsell'st me aright.
Shall we attend you?
No; for see, he comes

Enter LICHAS, ATTENDANT.

O queen! what are thy last commands
To thy Alcides? for ev'n now I go
To meet him.

Hast thou taken so long a journey
To Trachis, and wouldst now so soon return,
Ere I can hold some further converse with thee?
If thou wouldst question me of aught, behold me
Ready to tell thee.

Wilt thou tell me truth?
In all I know; so bear me witness, Jove!
Who is that woman thou hast brought?
I hear
She's of Euboea: for her race and name,
I know them not.

Look on me: who am I?
Why ask me this?
Be bold, and answer me.
Daughter of Ceneus, wife of Hercules;
If I am not deceived, 'tis Dejanira,
My queen, my mistress.

Am I so indeed?
Am I thy mistress?
Doubtless.

Why, 'tis well
Thou dost confess it: then what punishment
Wouldst thou deserve, if thou wert faithless to her?
How faithless! Mean'st thou to betray me?
No:
The fraud is thine.
TRACHINLÆ.—ACT II.

Li. ’Twas folly thus to stay
And hear thee: I must hence.

Dej. Thou shalt not go
Till I have ask’d thee one short question.

Li. Ask it, 410
For so it seems thou art resolved.

Dej. Inform me;
This captive—dost thou know her?

Li. I have told thee:
What wouldst thou more?

Dej. Didst thou not say this slave,
Though now it seems thou know’st her not, was daughter
Of Eurytus, her name Iole?

Li. Where? 415
To whom did I say this? What witness have you?

Dej. Assembled multitudes: the citizens
Of Trachis heard thee.

Li. They might say they heard
Reports like these; but must it therefore seem
A truth undoubted?

Dej. Seem! Didst thou not swear
That thou hadst brought this woman to partake
The bed of my Alcides?

Li. Did I say so?
But tell me who this stranger is.

Dej. The man
Who heard thee say Alcides’ love for her,
And not the Lydian, laid the city waste. 425

Li. Let him come forth, and prove it: ’tis no mark
Of wisdom thus to trifle with the unhappy.

Dej. O! do not, I beseech thee, by that Power
Whose thunders roll o’er Æta’s lofty grove,
Do not conceal the truth. Thou speak’st to one
Not unexperienced in the ways of men; 431
To one who knows we cannot always joy
In the same object: ’tis an idle task
To take up arms against all-powerful love.

Love, which commands the gods, love conquer’d me,
And wherefore should it not subdue another, 436
Whose nature and whose passions are the same?
If my Alcides is indeed oppress'd
With this sad malady, I blame him not;
That were a folly: nor this hapless maid, 440
Who meant no ill, no injury to me.
'Tis not for this I speak; but mark me well:
If thou wert taught by him to utter falsehood,
A vile and shameful lesson didst thou learn;
And if thou art thy own instructor, know, 445
Thou shalt seem wicked ev'n when most sincere,
And never be believed: speak then the truth;
For to be branded with the name of liar
Is ignominy fit for slaves alone,
And not for thee. Nor think thou canst conceal it;
Those who have heard the tale will tell it me. 451
If fear deter thee, thou hast little cause;
For to suspect his falsehood is my grief;
To know it, none: already have I seen
Alcides' heart estranged to other loves,
Yet did no rival ever hear from me
One bitter word, nor will I now reproach
This wretched slave, ev'n though she pines for him
With strongest love. Alas! I pity her,
Whose beauty thus has been the fatal cause 460
Of all her misery; laid her country waste,
And brought her here, far from her native land,
A helpless captive: but no more of this;
Only remember, if thou must be false,
Be false to others, but be true to me. 465
Chor. She speaks most kindly to thee; be per-
suaded;
Hereafter thou shalt find her not ungrateful.
We too will thank thee.
Li. O, my dearest mistress!
Not unexperienced thou in human life,
Nor ignorant; and therefore naught from thee 470
Will I conceal, but tell thee all the truth.
'Tis as he said; and Hercules, indeed,
Doth love Iole: for her sake alone,
Oechalia, her unhappy country, fell;
This (for 'tis fit I tell thee) he confess'd,
Nor will'd me to conceal it; but I fear'd
'Twould pierce thy heart to hear the unwelcome tale.
And therefore own I would have kept it from thee.
That crime, if such it was, I have committed:
But since thou know'st it all, let me entreat thee,
For her sake and thy own, O! do not hate
This wretched captive; but remember well,
What thou hast promised faithfully perform.
He whose victorious arm hath conquered all,
Now yields to her, and is a slave to love.

Dei. 'Tis my resolve to act as thou advisest.
I'll not resist the gods, nor add fresh weight
To my calamity: let us go in,
That thou mayst bear my orders to Alcides,
And, with them, gifts, in kind return for those
We have received from him. 'Thou must not hence
With empty hand, who hither brought'st to me
Such noble presents, and so fair a train.  [Exeunt.

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

Thee, Venus' gods and men obey,
And universal is thy sway.

Need I recount the powers subdued by love?
Neptune, who shakes the solid ground;
The king of Erebus profound;

Or the great lord of all, Saturnian Jove?
To mortals let the song descend,
To pity our afflicted friend,

And sooth the injured Dejanira's woes:
For her the angry rivals came,
For her they felt an equal flame,
For her, behold! the doubtful battle glows.
ANTISTROPHE.

In dreadful majesty array'd,
Affrighting sore the fearful maid,
Up rose the horned monarch of the flood:
He, who through fair Ætolia's plain
Pours his rich tribute to the main;
A bull's tremendous form belied the god.
From his own Thebes, to win her love,
With him the happier son of Jove,
The great Alcides came, and in his hand
The club, the bow, and glittering spear;
While Venus, to her votaries near,
Waved o'er their heads her all-deciding wand.

EPISODE.

Warm, and more warm the conflict grows:
Dire was the noise of rattling bows,
Of front to front opposed, and hand to hand:
Deep was the animated strife
For love, for conquest, and for life;
Alternate groans re-echoed through the land:
While pensive on the distant shore,
She heard the doubtful battle roar,
Many a sad tear the hapless virgin shed;
Far from her tender mother's arms,
She knows not yet for whom her charms
She keeps, or who shall share her bridal bed.

[Exeunt.

ACT III.

DEIANIRA, CHORUS.

DEJ. My guest, in pity to the captive train
Laments their woes, and takes his kind farewell:
Meantime, my friends, in secret came I here
To pour forth all my miseries, and impart
To you my inmost thoughts, my last resolve.
Alas! within these walls I have received,
Like the poor sailor, an unhappy freight
To sink me down, no virgin, but a wife,
The wife of my Alcides; his loved arms
Now must embrace us both: my faithful lord
(Faithful and good I thought him) thus rewards
My tender cares, and all the tedious toils
I suffer’d for him; but I will be calm;
For ’tis an evil I have felt before.
And yet to live with her! with her to share
My husband’s bed! what woman could support it?
Her youth is stealing onward to its prime,
While mine is wither’d; and the eye, which longs
To pluck the opening flower, from the dry leaf
Will turn aside: her younger charms, I fear,
Have conquer’d, and henceforth, in name alone
Shall Dejanira be Alcides’ wife.
But ill do rage and violence become
The prudent matron; therefore, mark me well,
And hear what I have purposed, to relieve
My troubled heart. Within a brazen urn,
Conceal’d from every eye, I long have kept
That ancient gift which Nessus did bequeath me,
The hoary centaur, who was wont for hire
To bear the traveller o’er the rapid flood
Of deep Evenus: not with oars or sail
He stemm’d the torrent, but with nervous arm
Opposed and pass’d it; me, when first a bride.
I left my father’s hospitable roof
With my Alcides, in his arms he bore
Athwart the current; half way o’er, he dared
To offer violence: I shriek’d aloud;
When, lo! the son of Jove, his bow swift bent,
Sent forth a shaft, and pierced the monster’s breast,
Who with his dying voice did thus address me:—
“Daughter of Æneas, listen to my words,
So shalt thou profit by the last sad journey
Which I shall ever go: if in thy hand
Thou take the drops out-flowing from the wound
This arrow made, dipp’d in the envenom’d blood
Of the Lernæan hydra, with that charm
Mayst thou subdue the heart of thy Alcides,
Nor shall another ever gain his love."
Mindful of this, my friends (for from that hour
In secret have I kept the precious gift),
Behold a garment dipp'd in the very blood
He gave me: nor did I forget to add
What he enjoin'd, but have prepared it all.
I know no evil arts, nor would I learn them;
For they who practise such are hateful to me:
I only wish the charm may be of power
To win Alcides from this virgin's love,
And bring him back to Dejanira's arms,
If ye shall deem it lawful; but if not,
I'll go no farther.

Cho. Could we be assured
Such is indeed the effect, 'tis well determined.

Dej. I cannot but believe it; though, as yet,
Experience never hath confirm'd it to me.

Cho. Thou shouldst be certain; thou but seem'st to know,
If thou hast never tried.

Dej. I'll try it soon;
For see, ev'n now he comes out at the portal.
Let him not know our purpose; if the deed
Be wrong, concealment may prevent reproach:
Therefore be silent.

Enter Lichas.

Li. Speak thy last commands,
Daughter of Æneus, for already long
Have we delay'd our journey.

Dej. Know, then, Lichas, That while thou communest with thy friends, myself
Have hither brought a garment which I wove
For my Alcides: thou must bear it to him:
Tell him, no mortal must with touch profane
Pollute the sacred gift, nor sun behold it,
Nor holy temple, nor domestic hearth,
Ere at the altar of paternal Jove
Himself shall wear it; 'twas my solemn vow,
Whene'er he should return, that, clothed in this,
He to the gods should offer sacrifice:
Bear too, this token; he will know it well.
Away! remember to perform thy office,
But go no farther; so shall double praise,
And favour from us both, reward thy duty.

Li. If I have aught of skill, by Hermes right
Instructed in his art, I will not fail
To bear thy gift, and faithful to report
What thou hast said.

Dej. Begone; what here hath pass'd
Thou know'st.

Li. I do; and shall bear back the news
That all is well.

Dej. Thou art thyself a witness
How kindly I received the guest he sent me.

Li. It fill'd my heart with pleasure to behold it.

Dej. What canst thou tell him more? Alas! I fear
He'll know too well the love I bear to him:
Would I could be as certain he'd return it! [Exeunt

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

You, who on Cēta's craggy summit dwell;
Or from the rock, whence gushing rivulets flow,
Bathe in the warmer springs below;
You who, near the Melian bay,
To golden-shafted Dian hymn the lay,
Now haste to string the lyre, and tune the vocal shell.

ANTISTROPHE I.

No mournful theme demands your pensive strain;

611 This token was a seal-ring, which Dejanira sent with the vest, to convince Hercules that it came from her.
615 Hermes or Mercury always appears as messenger of the gods: he therefore naturally presided over mortal messengers, and is properly mentioned by the herald as his patron and instructor.
629 The bay of Melis was not far from Trachus, and adjoining to Artemision: near it was a temple sacred to Diana.
But such as, kindled by the sacred fire,
The Muses might themselves admire,
A loud and cheerful song; for see,
The son of Jove returns with victory,
And richest spoils reward a life of toil and pain.

STROPHÉ II.
Far from his native land he took his way;
For twelve long moons, uncertain of his fate,
Did we lament his exiled state,
What time his anxious wife deplored,
With never-ceasing tears, her absent lord;
But Mars at last hath closed his long, laborious day.

ANTISTROPHÉ II.
Let him from fair Eubœa's isle appear;
Let winds and raging seas oppose no more,
But waft him to the wish'd-for shore.
The anointed vest's persuasive charms
Shall bring him soon to Dejanira's arms.
Soon shall we see the great, the loved Alcides here.

ACT IV.

DEJANIRA, CHORUS.

Dej. Alas, my friends! I fear I've gone too far.
Cho. Great queen! in what?
Dej. I know not what; but dread
Something to come, lest, where I had most hope
Of happiness, I meet with bitterest wo.
Cho. Mean'st thou thy gift to Hercules?
Dej. I do!
Nor would I henceforth counsel those I loved
To do a dark and desperate deed like this,
Uncertain of the event.
Cho. How was it? Speak,
If thou canst tell us.
Dej. O! 'twas wonderful;
For you shall hear it: know, then, the white wool
Wherein I wrapp'd the anointed vest, untouch'd
By any hand, dropp'd self-consumed away,
And down the stone, e'en like a liquid, flow'd
Dissolving; but 'tis fit I tell you all.
Whate'er the wounded centaur did enjoin me,
Mindful to practise, sacred as the laws
On brazen tablets graved, I have perform'd.
Far from the fire, and from the sun's warm beams,
He bade me keep the charm from every eye
In secret hid, till time should call on me
To anoint and use it: this was done; and now,
The fleece in sacred pluck'd, the charm prepared,
Long from the sun within a chest conceal'd,
At length I brought it forth, and sent the gift
To my Alcides; when, behold! a wonder,
Most strange for tongue to tell, or heart of man
Ev'n to conceive! Perchance the wool I cast
Into the sunshine: soon as it grew warm,
It fell to dust, consuming all away
In most strange manner; then from the earth up rose
In frothy bubbles, ev'n as from the grape,
In yellow autumn, flows the purple wine.
I know not what to think; but much I fear
I've done a horrid deed: for, why, my friends!
Why should the dying savage wish to serve
His murderer? That could never be: O no;
He only meant by flattery to destroy
Me, his destroyer: truth is come too late,
And I alone have slain my dear Alcides.
I know that by his arrows Chiron fell;
I know, whate'er they touch'd, they still were fatal;
That very poison mingled with the blood
Of dying Nessus; will not that too kill
My Hercules? It must; but if he dies,
My resolution is to perish with him.
Those, who their honour and their virtue prize,
Can never live with infamy and shame.
Choc. 'Tis fit we tremble at a deed of horror;

Chiron was one of the centaurs, and was wounded by Hercules with one of his arrows dipped in the blood of the hydra.
But 'tis not fitting, ere we know the event,
To give up hope, and yield us to despair.

Dej. There is no hope where evil counsel's taken.
Cho. But when we err from ignorance alone, 701
Small is the crime, and slight the punishment:
Such is thy fault.

Dej. The guiltless may talk thus,
Who know no ill: not those who are unhappy.

Cho. No more, unless thou mean'st thy son should
hear thee,
Who now returns in search of thy Alcides.
Behold him here.

Enter Hyllus.

Hyl. O! would that thou wert dead!
Would I were not thy son! or, being so,
Would I could change thy wicked heart!

Dej. My son!

What means this passion?

Hyl. Thou hast slain thy husband; 710
This very day my father hast thou slain.

Dej. Alas! my child, what say'st thou!

Hyl. What is past,
And therefore must be: who can e'er undo
The deed that's done?

Dej. But who could say I did it?

Hyl. I saw it with these eyes; I heard it all 715
From his own lips.

Dej. Where didst thou see him then?
Tell me, O! quickly tell me.

Hyl. If I must,
Observe me well: when Hercules, return'd
From conquest, had laid waste the noble city
Of Eurytus, with fair triumphal spoils
He to Eubœa came, where, o'er the sea,
Which beats on every side, Cenæum's top
Hangs dreadful: thither (to paternal Jove)
His new-raised altars in the leafy wood
He came to visit; there did my glad eyes
Behold Alcides first. As he prepared
TRACHINLAE.—ACT IV.

The frequent victim, from the palace came
Lichas thy messenger, and with him brought
The fatal gift: wrapp’d in the deadly garment
(For such was thy command), twelve oxen then, 730
Without a blemish, firstlings of the spoil,
He slew; together next a hundred fell,
The mingled flock: pleased with his gaudy vest,
And happy in it, he awhile remain’d,
Offering with joy his grateful sacrifice: 735
But, lo! when from the holy victim rose
The bloody flame, and from the pitchy wood
Exhaled its moisture, sudden a cold sweat
Bedew’d his limbs, and to his body stuck
(As by the hand of some artificer 740
Close join’d to every part) the fatal vest.
Convulsion rack’d his bones, and through his veins,
Like the fell serpent’s deadly venom, raged.
Then question’d he the wretched, guiltless Lichas,
By what detested arts he had procured 745
The poison’d garb: he, ignorant of all,
Could only say it was the gift he brought
From Dejanira: when Alcides heard it,
Tortured with pain, he took him by the foot,
And hurl’d him headlong on a pointed rock 750
That o’er the ocean hung: his brains, dash’d forth,
With mingled blood flow’d through his clotted hair
In horrid streams. The multitude, with shrieks,
Lamented loud the fury of Alcides,
And Lichas’ hapless fate: none durst oppose 755
His raging phrensy; prostrate on the earth
Now would he lie and groan; and now, uprising,
Would bellow forth his griefs. The mountain tops
Of Locris, and Euboæ’s rocks return’d
His dreadful cries: then, on the ground outstretch’d,
In bitterest wrath he cursed the nuptial bed 761
Of Æneus, and his execrations pour’d
On thee, his worst of foes: at length his eyes,
Distorted forth from the surrounding smoke,
He cast on me, who mid attending crowds 765
Wept his sad fate. "Approach," he cried, "my son! Do not forsake thy father; rather come, And share his fate, than leave me here. O! haste, And take me hence; bear me where never eye Of mortal shall behold me. O, my child! Let me not perish here." Thus spake my father, And I obeyed: distracted with his pains, A vessel brings him to this place, and soon, Living or dead, you will behold him here. This have thy horrid machinations done For thy Alcides. O! may Justice doom thee To righteous punishment, if it be lawful For me to call down vengeance on a mother, As sure it is, on one who hath disclaim'd All piety like thee. The earth sustains not A better man than he whom thou hast murder'd, Nor shalt thou e'er behold his like again.

[Exit Dejanira.

Cho. Whence this abrupt departure? Know'st thou not To go in silence thus confirms thy guilt?

Hyl. Let her be gone: and may some prosperous gale Waft her far off, that these abhorring eyes May never see her more! What boots the name Of mother, when no longer she performs A mother's duty? Let her go in peace; And, for her kindness to my father, soon May she enjoy the blessings she bestow'd!

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

True was the oracle divine,
Long since delivered from Dodona's shrine,
Which said Alcides' woes should last
Till twelve revolving years were past;
Then should his labours end in sweet repose.
Behold, my friends! 'tis come to pass;
'Tis all fulfill'd; for who, alas!
In peaceful death or toil or slavery knows?
TRACHINLÆ.—ACT V.

ANTISTROPHE I.
If deep within his tortured veins
The centaur's cruel poison reigns,
That from the hydra's baleful breath
Destructive flow'd, replete with death,

On him another sun shall never rise:
The venom runs through every part,
And, lo! to Nessus' direful art
Alcides falls a helpless sacrifice.

STROPHE II.

Poor Dejanira long deplored
Her waning charms, and ever-faithless lord:
At length, by evil counsel sway'd,
Her passion's dictates she obey'd,

Resolved Alcides' doubtful truth to prove;
But now, alas! laments his fate
In ceaseless wo, and finds too late
A dying husband and a foreign love.

ANTISTROPHE II.
Another death must soon succeed,
Another victim soon shall bleed:
Fatal, Alcides! was the dart
That pierced the rival monarch's heart,

And brought Iole from her native land.
From Venus did our sorrows flow,
The secret spring of all our wo;
For naught was done but by her dread command.

[Exeunt.

ACT V.

[A noise within the palace.

CHORUS.

Or I'm deceived, or I did hear loud shrieks
Within the palace; 'twas the voice of one
In anguish. Doubtless, some calamity
Hath fallen upon us now: what can it be?

816 The Chorus here foretels the death of Dejanira.
But see, yon matron, with contracted brow
And unaccustomed sadness, comes to tell
The dreadful news.

Enter Nurse.

Nurse. What woes, my hapless daughters,
Alcides' fatal gift hath brought upon us!
Cho. What dost thou tell us?
Nurse. Dejanira treads
The last sad path of mortals.
Cho. Is she gone?
Nurse. 'Tis so, indeed.
Cho. What! dead?
Nurse. Again I say;
She is no more.
Cho. Alas! how did she perish?
Nurse. Most fearfully: 'twas dreadful to behold.
Cho. How fell she then?
Nurse. By her own hand.
Cho. But wherefore?
What madness, what disorder? What could move her
To perpetrate so terrible a deed,
Thus adding death to death?
Nurse. The fatal steel
Destroy'd her.
Cho. Didst thou see it?
Nurse. I was by,
Close by her side.
Cho. How was it?
Nurse. Her own arm
Struck the sad blow.
Cho. Indeed!
Nurse. Most veritably
Cho. In evil hour this rival virgin came
To bring destruction here.
Nurse. And so she did:
Hadst thou, like me, been witness to the deed,
Thou wouldst much more have pitied her.
Alas!

How could a woman do it?

'Twas most dreadful,

As thou shalt hear, for I will tell thee all.

Soon as she enter'd at the palace gate,

And saw her son prepare the funeral bed,

To the inmost chamber silent she retired

From every eye; there at the altar's feet

Falling lamented loud her widow'd state;

And ever as she lit on aught her hands

Had used in happier days, the tears would flow.

From room to room she wander'd; and, if chance

A loved domestic cross'd her, she would weep

And mourn her fate, for ever now deprived

Of converse sweet, and hymeneal joys:

Then would she strew her garments on the bed

Of her Alcides; for conceal'd I watch'd

Her every motion; throw herself upon it;

And, as the tears in a warm flood burst forth,

"Farewell!" she cried, "for ever farewell now,

My nuptial couch! for never shalt thou more

Receive this wretched burthen." Thus she spake,

And with quick hand the golden button loosed;

Then cast her robe aside, her bosom bared,

And seemed prepared to strike. I ran and told

The dreadful purpose to her son: too late

We came, and saw her wounded to the heart.

The pious son beheld his bleeding mother,

And wept; for well he knew, by anger fired,

And the fell centaur's cruel fraud betray'd,

Unweeting she had done the dreadful deed.

Close to her side he laid him down, and join'd

His lips to hers, lamenting sore that thus

He had accused her guiltless; then deplored

His own sad fate, thus suddenly bereaved

Of both his parents: you have heard my tale.

Who to himself shall promise length of life?

None but the fool: for, O! to-day alone

Is ours; we are not certain of to-morrow.
Cho. Which shall I weep? Which most our hearts should fill,
With grief, the present or the future ill,
The dying or the dead? ’Tis equal wo,
To feel the stroke, or fear the impending blow.

STROPHE.
O! for a breeze to waft us o’er,
Propitious to some distant shore!
To shield our souls from sore affright,
And save us from the dreadful sight!
That sight the hardest heart would move,—
In his last pangs the son of Jove:
To see the poison run through every vein,
And limbs convulsed with agonizing pain.

ANTISTROPHE.
Behold the attendant train is nigh;
I hear the voice of misery.
Ev’n as the plaintive nightingale,
That warbles sweet her mournful tale:
Silent and slow they lead him on.
Hark! I hear Alcides groan!
Again ’tis silence all! This way they tread:
Or sleeps he now, or rests he with the dead?

Enter Hercules, Hyllus, Attendants.

Hyl. Alas, my father! whither shall I go?
Wretch that I am! O, where shall I betake me?
What will become of thy afflicted son?
Attr. Speak softly, youth! do not awake his pains;
Refrain thy grief, for yet Alcides lives,
Though verging to the tomb: be calm.
Hyl. What say’st thou?

Doth he yet live?
Attr. He doth; disturb not thus
His slumbers, nor provoke the dire disease.
Hyl. Alas! I cannot bear to see him thus.

[Hercules awakes.

Her. O Jove! where am I, and with whom? What land
Trachiniae.—Act V.

Contains the wretched Hercules, oppress’d
With never-ending woes! Ah me! again
The deadly poison racks me.

_ATT. [to Hyllus.] _Seest thou not
'Twere better far to have remain’d in silence,
And not awakened him?

_Hyl._ 'Twas impossible
Unmoved to look on such calamity;
I could not do it.

_Her._ O Cenæan rocks,
Where smoke the sacred altars! Is it thus,
O Jove! thou dost reward my piety?
What dreadful punishment is this thy hand
Hath laid on me, who never could deserve
Such bitter wrath? What incantations now,
What power of medicine, can assuage my pain,
Unless great Jove assisted? Health to me
Without him were a miracle indeed.
Let me, O! let me rest; refuse me not
A little slumber: why will ye torment me?
Why bend me forward? O! ’tis worse than death.
Had you not waked me, I had been at peace.
Again it rages with redoubled force.
Where are you now, ye thankless Grecians! where,
Whom I have toil’d to serve on the rough main,
And through the pathless wood? Where are ye now,
To help the dying wretch? Will no kind hand
Stretch forth the friendly sword, or in the flame
Consume me? None, alas! will cut me off
From hated life.

_ATT._ O youth! assist thy father;
It is beyond my strength: thy quicker sight
May be more useful.

_Hyl._ My poor aid is ready;
But wheresoe’er I am, ’tis not in me
To expel the subtle poison that destroys him;
Such is the will of Jove.

_Her._ My son! my son!
Where art thou? Bear me up; assist me; O!
Again it comes, the unconquerable ill,
The dire disease. O Pallas! aid me now.
Draw forth thy sword, my son! strike, strike thy fa-
ther,
And heal the wound thy impious mother made.
O! could I see her like myself destroy'd,
I should be happy. Brother of great Jove!
Sweet Pluto! hear me. O! with speedy death
Lay me to rest, and bury all my woes.
Cho. The anguish of the unhappy man, my friends!
Is terrible: I tremble but to hear him.
Here. What hath this body suffer'd! O, the toils,
The labours I endured, the pangs I felt,
Unutterable woes! but never aught
So dreadful as this sore calamity
Oppress'd Alcides: not the wife of Jove,
Nor vile Eurystheus could torment me thus,
As, Æneus! thy deceitful daughter hath.
O! I am tangled in a cruel net
Woven by the Furies; it devours my flesh,
Dries up my veins, and drinks the vital blood.
My body's wither'd, and I cannot break
The indissoluble chain: nor hostile spear,
Nor earth-born giants, nor the savage herd,
The wild barbarian, nor the Grecian host,
Not all the nations I have journey'd o'er,
Could do a deed like this: at last I fall,
Like a poor coward, by a woman's hand,
Unarm'd and unassisted. O my son!
Now prove thyself the offspring of Alcides,
Nor let thy reverence of a mother's name
Surpass thy duty to an injured father.
Go, bring her hither, give her to my wrath,
That I may see whom thou wilt most lament,
When thou behold'st my vengeance fall on her.
Fear not, my son! but go; have pity on me,
Pity thy father: all must pity me,
While they behold, even as the tender maid,
Alcides weep, who never wept before.
I bore my sorrows all without a groan;  
But now thou seest I am a very woman.  
Come near, my child! O! think what I endure,  
For I will show thee: look on this poor body;  
Let all behold it. What a sight is here!  
O me! again the cruel poison tears  
My entrails, nor affords a moment's ease.  
O take me, Pluto! to thy gloomy reign;  
Father of lightning! mighty Jove! send down  
Thy bolt, and strike me now! Again it racks,  
It tortures me. O hands, that once had strength!  
And you, my sinewy arms! was it by you  
The terrible Nemæan lion fell,  
The dreadful hydra, and the lawless race  
Of centaurs? Did this wither'd hand subdue  
The Erymanthian boar, wide-wasting plague!  
And from the shades of Orcus drag to light  
The triple-headed monster? By this arm  
Did the fierce guardian of the golden fruit  
In Libya's deserts fall? Unnumbered toils  
Have I endured of old, and never yet  
Did mortal bear a trophy from Alcides:  
But nerveless now this arm: see from the bone  
Darts the loose flesh; I waste beneath the power  
Of this dark pestilence. O Hercules!  
Why boast thy mother sprung of noblest race,  
And vainly call thyself the son of Jove?  
But mark me well; this creeping shadow still,  
Poor as it is, shall yet revenge itself  
On her who did the execrable deed.  
Would she were here to feel my wrath; to know  
And teach mankind that Hercules, though dead,  
As while he lived, can scourge the guilty still!

998 Nemæa was a wood near Argia in Peloponnesus, where Hercules slew a lion of prodigious size and fierceness.  
1001 Erymanthus was a mountain of Arcadia, where Hercules slew a wild boar that infested the country.
Unhappy Greece! how wilt thou mourn the loss
Of such a man!

Hyl. Permit me but to speak,
Distemper'd as thou art, my father! hear me:
Naught shall I ask unfit for thee to grant.
Be calm, and listen to me; yet thou know'st not
How groundless thy complaints, and what new joy
Awaits thee still.

Her. Be brief, then, and inform me: My pains afflict me so, I cannot guess
Thy subtle purpose.

Hyl. 'Twas to speak of her
My mother; 'twas to tell thee of her state,
And how unweeting she offended thee.

Her. Thou worst of children! wouldst thou then defend
The murder of thy father? darest thou thus
Recall the sad remembrance of her crime?

Hyl. It must not be conceal'd: I know too well
I can no longer hide it.

Her. What? Her guilt?

'Tis known already.

Hyl. Thou'lt not always think so.

Her. Speak then, but take good heed thou show
thyself

Worthy thy father.

Hyl. Know then,—she is dead.

Her. O, dreadful! murder'd? By what hand?

Hyl. Her own.

Her. Would she had fallen by mine!

Hyl. Alas, my father, Didst thou know all, thy anger would be changed
To pity for her.

Her. That were strange indeed:

Why dost thou think so?

Hyl. She did mean thee well.

But err'd unknowing
HER. Meant she well to slay
Thy father!

HYL. Thy new marriage was the cause:
She had prepared a filter for thy love,
And knew not 'twas a poison.

HER. But say, who
So skill'd in magic arts at Trachis here
Could give her this?

HYL. Thy savage centaur Nessus,
Who did persuade her 'twould restore thy love
Given to another wife.

HER. Undone Alcides!
I die, my child! there is no life for me.
Alas! I see it now; I see my woes:
Hyllus, away; thy father is no more:
Begone, and call thy brothers; call Alcmena,
The wife, alas! in vain the wife of Jove:
Go, bring them here, that with my latest breath
I may declare my fate, long since foretold
By oracles divine.

HYL. Alcmena's gone
To Tirynth; with her many of thy sons
Remain: some dwell at Thebes; the rest are here,
And wait with me to hear and to obey thee.

HER. Then listen to me, for the time is come
When thou must prove thyself indeed my son.
Know, Jove, my heavenly sire, long since foretold
I was not born to perish by the hand
Of living man, but from some habitant
Of Pluto's dark abode should meet my fate.
The centaur Nessus (so was it fulfill'd),
Though dead, destroyed me; but I'll tell thee more;
New oracles confirm'd the old: for, know,
When to the Selli's sacred grove I came
(The wandering priests, who o'er the mountains roam,

1059 Tirynth or Tirynthia was a city in the neighbourhood of Argos.
And rest their wearied limbs on the cold ground,
An ancient oak prophetic did declare,
That if I lived to this decisive hour,
Here all my labours, all my toils should end.
I thought it told me I should live in peace;
Alas! it only meant that I must die;
For death will put an end to every care.
Since thus it is, my son, thou too must join
To ease Alcides; let me not reproach thee:
But yield thy willing aid, nor e'er forget
The best of laws,—obedience to a father.

Hyl. Thy words affright me, but declare thy purpose:
Behold me ready to perform thy orders.
Whate’er they be.

Her. First give me then thy hand.

Hyl. But why this pledge, and wherefore anxious
thus
Dost thou require it?

Her. Wilt thou give it me,

Or dost refuse?

Hyl. There, take it; I obey.

Her. First swear then by the head of Jove, my sire.

Hyl. I will; but what?

Her. Swear that thou wilt perform
All I enjoin thee.

Hyl. Bear me witness, Jove!

I swear.

Her. And imprecate the wrath divine,
If thou perform’st it not.

Hyl. I shall not fail;
But, if I do, may vengeance swift o’ertake me!

Her. Thou know’st the top of Æta’s sacred hill?

Hyl. I know it well, and many a sacrifice
Have offer’d there.

Her. That is the destin’d place,
Where thou, assisted by thy chosen friends,
My son! must bear the body of Alcides;
There shalt thou cut thee many a leafy branch
From the wild olive and deep-rooted oak;
Then cast me on it, take thy torch, and light
My funeral pile. Without one tear or groan
Unmanly do it, if thou art my son: 1105
For if thou fail'st, remember, after death,
A father's curses will sit heavy on thee.

Hyl. Alas, my father! what hast thou com-
mended!

What hast thou bade me do!

Her. What must be done,
Or thou art not the son of Hercules. 1110

Hyl. A dreadful deed! And must I then become
A parricide, and murder thee?

Her. O, no!

My kind physician, balm of all my woes.

Hyl. Myself to cast thee in the flames! Is that
An office fit for me?

Her. If that alone 1115
Seem dreadful to thee, yet perform the rest.

Hyl. I'll bear thee thither.

Her. Wilt thou raise the pile?

Hyl. I will do any thing but be myself

The executioner.

Her. 'Tis well, my son!

But one thing more, and I am satisfied; 1120
'Tis but a little.

Hyl. Be it e'er so great,

I shall obey.

Her. Thou know'st the virgin daughter
Of Eurytus?

Hyl. Iole?

Her. Her, my son.

Remember, 'tis a father's last command,
And thou hast sworn obedience; that Iole 1125
I do bequeath thee: take her to thy arms,
When I am dead, and let her be thy wife:
It is not fitting she, who lay by the side
Of Hercules, to any but the son
Of Hercules should e'er descend: to thee
Alone I yield her. Speak not, but obey me:
After thy kind compliance, to refuse
So slight a favour were to cancel all.
Hyl. Alas! distempered as he is, to chide him [aside.
Were most unkind; and yet, what madness this! 1135
Her. Thou wilt not do it, then?
Hyl. What! marry her
Who slew my mother? Her, who hath brought thee
To this sad state? It were an act of phrensy:
Death be my portion rather than to live
With those I hate.
Her. [turning to the Chorus.] He will not pay me
then
The duty which he owes a dying father:
But, if thou dost not, curses from the gods
Await thee.
Hyl. O, thou ravest: it is the rage
Of thy distemper makes thee talk so wildly.
Her. Thou hast awaken'd all my woes; again
They torture now.
Hyl. Alas, what doubts arise, 1146
What fears perplex me!
Her. Mean'st thou to dispute
A father's will?
Hyl. Must I then learn of thee
To do a wicked deed?
Her. It is not wicked
If I request it of thee.
Hyl. Is it just? 1150
Her. It is: the gods are witnesses 'tis just.
Hyl. Then by those gods I swear I will perform
What thou command'st: I never can be deem'd
Or base or impious for obeying thee.
Her. 'Tis well, my son! one added kindness
more, And I am satisfied: before the racks
Of dire convulsion and the pangs of madness
Again attack me, throw me on the pile.
Haste then, and bear me to it; there at last
I shall have peace, and rest from all my sorrows.

HYL. Since 'tis thy will, my father, we submit.

HER. Now, ere the dreadful malady return,
Be firm, my soul! ev'n as the harden'd steel;
Suspend thy cries, and meet the fatal blow
With joy and pleasure. Bear me hence, my friends,
For you have shown yourselves my friends indeed,
And proved the base ingratitude of those
From whom I sprang, the cruel gods, who saw
Unmoved the woes of their unhappy son.
'Tis not in mortal to foresee his fate;
Mine is to them disgraceful, and to me
Most terrible; to me, of all mankind
The most distress'd, the poor, the lost Alcides.

CHO. Iole, come not forth, unhappy virgin!
Already hast thou seen enough of wo,
And yet fresh sorrows wait thee; but remember,
All is decreed, and all the work of Jove.

1174 Iole, we may suppose, is coming on the stage, anxious
to know the fate of Hercules; but is stopped by the Chorus,
and prevented from being a witness of the melancholy scene.
Hercules is led out by Hyllus, who had promised to accompany
him to Mount Æta, where he expired.
ÆDIPUS TYRANNUS
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ŒDIPUS, king of Thebes.
JOCASTA, wife of Œdipus.
CREON, brother to Jocasta.
TIRESIAS, a blind prophet of Thebes.
A SHEPHERD from Corinth.
A MESSENGER.
AN OLD SHEPHERD, formerly belonging to Laius.
HIGH PRIEST of Jupiter.
CHORUS, composed of the priests and ancient men of Thebes, Theban youths, children of Œdipus, attendants, &c.
OEDIPUS TYRANNUS.

ARGUMENT.

LAIUS, king of Thebes, having learned from the oracle of Apollo that he was destined to perish by the hand of his son, commanded his wife Jocasta to destroy her infant as soon as it came into the world. The mother accordingly gave the child to a domestic, with orders to expose him on Mount Cithæron, where he was found by one of the shepherds of Polybus, king of Corinth; who, having no children, determined, by the advice of his queen, to keep the boy in ignorance of the circumstances of his birth, and educate him as his own son. When ÓEdipus had arrived at years of maturity, he went to consult the oracle, which terrified him with the intelligence that he would commit parricide and incest. He now therefore resolved to return to Corinth no more; and travelling towards Phocis, met Laius, and, in a dispute which ensued, slew him. As ÓEdipus was ignorant of the rank and quality of the man whom he had killed, he was attracted to Thebes by the report of the sphinx; the overthrow of which monster raised him to the throne, while the prophecy was completed by his nuptials with the widow of Laius, by whom he had four children. The Theban territories were at length desolated by a plague, which the oracle declared should cease when the murderer of Laius was banished from Boeotia. After a minute investigation, the dreadful secret was at length divulged; and Jocasta put a period to her existence, while ÓEdipus deprived himself of sight, and was, at his own request, banished from Thebes by the order of Creon, the brother of Jocasta, who then assumed the reins of government.
ACT I.

Scene, Thebes before the palace of Oedipus.

OEDIPUS, HIGH-PRIEST OF JUPITER.

Oedipus, O my loved sons! the youthful progeny
Of ancient Cadmus! wherefore sit you here,
And suppliant thus, with sacred boughs adorn'd,
Crowd to our altars? Frequent sacrifice,
And prayers, and sighs, and sorrows fill the land.
I could have sent to learn the fatal cause:
But see, your anxious sovereign comes himself
To know it all from you: behold your king,
Renowned Oedipus. Do thou, old man
(For best that office suits thy years), inform me
Why you are come. Is it the present ill
That calls you here, or dread of future wo?
Hard were indeed the heart that did not feel
For grief like yours, and pity such distress.
If there be aught that Oedipus can do
To serve his people, know me for your friend.

Priest. O king! thou seest what numbers throng
thy altars.

Here, bending sad beneath the weight of years,
The hoary priests, here crowd the chosen youth
Of Thebes, with these a weak and suppliant train
Of helpless infants: last, in me behold
The minister of Jove: far off thou seest
Assembled multitudes, with laurel crown'd,
To where Minerva's hallow'd temples rise
Frequent repair, or where Ismenus laves
Apollo's sacred shrine. (Too well thou know'st,

1 Oedipus, alarmed at the groans and lamentations of his people thronging to the altar, comes out of his palace to inquire into the cause of their distress. He calls his subjects the progeny of Cadmus, who was the founder of Thebes, about two hundred years before his time.
Thy wretched Thebes, with dreadful storms oppress'd,
Scarce lifts her head above the whelming flood:
The teeming earth her blasted harvest mourns,
And on the barren plain the flocks and herds
Unnumber'd perish; dire abortion thwarts
The mother's hopes, and painful she brings forth
The half-formed infant; baleful pestilence
Hath laid our city waste; the fiery god
Stalks o'er deserted Thebes; while, with our groans
Enrich'd, the gloomy god of Erebus
Triumphant smiles. O Oedipus! to thee
We bend: behold these youths; with me they kneel,
And suppliant at thy altars sue for aid,
To thee, the first of men, and only less
Than they, whose favour thou alone canst gain,
The gods above: thy wisdom yet may heal
The deep-felt wounds, and make the powers divine
Propitious to us. Thebes long since to thee
Her safety owed, when, from the sphinx deliver'd,
Thy grateful people saw thee, not by man
But by the gods instructed, save the land.
Now, then, thou best of kings! assist us now:
O! by some mortal or immortal aid
Now succour the distress'd! On wisdom oft
And prudent counsels, in the hour of ill,
Success awaits. O dearest prince! support,
Relieve thy Thebes; on thee, its saviour once,
Again it calls: now, if thou wouldst not see
The memory perish of thy former deeds,
Let it not call in vain; but rise, and save.

45 The sphinx, according to poetical history, was a monster
with the face of a woman, wings of a bird, body of a dog, and
claws like a lion: she dwelt near Thebes, and every day de-
stroyed many people. The oracle declared that she could never
be conquered till some one was found that could expound a cer-
tain riddle which she proposed. After many unsuccessful at-
tempts, Oedipus came, and explained it; the sphinx was de-
stroyed, the nation delivered, and Oedipus rewarded for it with
the kingdom of Thebes.
With happiest omens once, and fair success,
We saw thee crown’d: O! be thyself again,
And may thy will and fortune be the same!
If thou art yet to reign, O king! remember,
A sovereign’s riches is a peopled realm;
For what will ships or lofty towers avail,
Unarm’d with men to guard and to defend them?

Œdip. O my unhappy sons! too well I know
Your sad estate; I know the woes of Thebes:
And yet among you lives not such a wretch
As Œdipus; for O! on me, my children!
Your sorrows press. Alas! I feel for you,
My people, for myself, for Thebes, for all.
Think not I slept regardless of your ills;
O no; with many a tear I wept your fate,
And oft in meditation deep revolved
How best your peace and safety to restore.
The only medicine that my thoughts could find
I have administered: Mencæus’ son,
The noble Creon, went by my command
To Delphi, from Apollo’s shrine to know
What must be done to save this wretched land.
’Tis time he were returned; I wonder much
At his delay: if, when he comes, your king
Perform not all the god enjoins, then say
He is the worst of men.

Priest. O king! thy words
Are gracious; and, if right these youths inform me,
Creon is here.

Œdip. O Phæbus! grant he come
With tidings cheerful as the smile he wears?

Priest. He is the messenger of good; for see,
His brows are crown’d with laurel.

Œdip. We shall soon
Be satisfied: he comes.

Enter Creon, Chorus.

My dearest Creon!
O! say, what answer bear’st thou from the god?
Or good or ill?
CRE. Good, very good; for know, The worst of ills, if rightly used, may prove The means of happiness.

ŒDI. What says my friend? This answer gives me naught to hope or fear.

CRE. Shall we retire, or would you that I speak In public here?

ŒDI. Before them all declare it: Their woes sit heavier on me than my own.

CRE. Then mark what I have heard: the god commands That instant we drive forth the fatal cause Of this dire pestilence, nor nourish here The accursed monster.

ŒDI. Who? what monster? how Remove it?

CRE. Or by banishment, or death: Life must be given for life; for yet his blood Rests on the city.

ŒDI. Whose? what means the god?

CRE. O king! before thee Laius ruled o'er Thebes. I know he did, though I did ne'er behold him.

CRE. Laius was slain, and on his murderers (So Phoebus says) we must have vengeance.

ŒDI. Where, Where are the murderers? who shall trace the guilt Buried so long in silence?

CRE. Here, he said, Ev'n in this land: what's sought for may be found; But truth, unsearch'd for, seldom comes to light.

ŒDI. How did he fall, and where? at home, abroad?

Died he at Thebes, or in a foreign land?

CRE. He left his palace, fame reports, to seek Some oracle; since that we ne'er beheld him.

ŒDI. But did no messenger return? Not one Of all his train, of whom we might inquire Touching this murder?
CRE. One, and one alone,
Came back, who, flying, 'scaped the general slaughter;
But nothing, save one little circumstance,
Or knew, or e'er related.
OÆDI. What was that?
Much may be learn'd from that; a little dawn
Of light appearing, may discover all.
CRE. Laius, attack'd by robbers, and oppress'd
By number, fell; such is his tale.
OÆDI. Would they,—
Would robbers do so desperate a deed,
Unbribed and unassisted?
CRE. So indeed
Suspicion whisper'd then; but, Laius dead,
No friend was found to vindicate the wrong.
OÆDI. But what strange cause could stop inquiry
thus
Into the murder of a king?
CRE. The sphinx:
Her dire enigma kept our thought intent
On present ills, nor gave us time to search
The past mysterious deed.
OÆDI. Myself will try
Soon to unveil it: thou, Apollo! well,
And well hast thou, my Creon! lent thy aid;
Your Ædipus shall now perform his part:
Yes, I will fight for Phæbus and my country,
And so I ought; for not to friends alone
Or kindred owe I this, but to myself.
CRE. Who murder'd him perchance would murder me;
His cause is mine; wherefore, my children! rise,
Take hence your suppliant boughs, and summon here
The race of Cadmus, my assembled people.
Naught shall be left untried: Apollo leads,
And we will rise to joy, or sink for ever.
PRIEST. Haste then, my sons! for this we hither came;
About it quick; and may the god, who sent
This oracle, protect, defend, and save us! [Exeunt.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

O, thou great oracle divine!
Who didst to happy Thebes remove,
From Delphi’s golden shrine,
And in sweet sounds declare the will of Jove;
Daughter of hope! O! sooth my soul to rest,
And calm the rising tumult in my breast.
Look down, O Phæbus! on thy loved abode;
Speak, for thou know’st the dark decrees of fate,
Our present and our future state.
O Delian! be thou still our healing god!

ANTISTROPHE I.

Minerva! first on thee I call,
Daughter of Jove, immortal maid;
Low beneath thy feet we fall:
O! bring thy sister Dian to our aid.
Goddess of Thebes! from thy imperial throne
Look with an eye of gentle pity down;
And thou, far-shooting Phæbus! once the friend
Of this unhappy, this devoted land;
O! now, if ever, let thy hand
Once more be stretched to save and to defend.

STROPHE II.

Great Thebes, my sons! is now no more;
She falls, and ne’er again shall rise;
Naught can her health or strength restore;
The mighty nation sinks, she droops, she dies.
Stripp’d of her fruits behold the barren earth:
The half-form’d infant struggles for a birth;
The mother sinks, unequal to her pain:
While, quick as birds in airy circles fly,
Or lightnings from an angry sky,
Crowds press on crowds to Pluto’s dark domain.
ANTISTROPHE II.
Behold, what heaps of wretches slain,
Unburied, un lamented lie;
Nor parents now nor friends remain
To grace their deaths with pious obsequy;
The aged matron and the blooming wife,
Clung to the altars, sue for added life.
With sighs and groans united, Pæans rise;
Re-echoed still doth great Apollo’s name
Their sorrows and their wants proclaim
Frequent to him ascends the sacrifice.

STROPHE III.
Haste, then, Minerva! beauteous maid!
Descend in this afflictive hour;
Haste to thy dying people’s aid;
Drive hence this baneful, this destructive power,
Who comes not arm’d with hostile sword or shield,
Yet strews with many a corse the ensanguined field.
To Amphitrite’s wide-extending bed,
O! drive me, goddess, from thy favourite land;
Or let him, by thy dread command,
Bury in Thracian waves his ignominious head

ANTISTROPHE III.
Father of all, immortal Jove!
O! now thy fiery terrors send;
From thy dreadful stores above
Let lightnings blast him, and let thunders rend.
And thou, O Lydian king! thy aid impart;
Send from thy golden bow the unerring dart;
Smile, chaste Diana! on this loved abode,
While Theban Bacchus joins the maddening throng.
O god of wine, and mirth; and song!
Now with thy torch destroy the base, ignoble god.

[Exeunt

209 Bacchus is always described with torches: probably in remembrance of his birth, as being born in flames, when his mother Semele was consumed by Jove’s lightning.
ACT II.

Œdipus, Chorus, the People assembled.

Œd. Your prayers are heard; and, if you will obey
Your king, and hearken to his words, you soon
Shall find relief: myself will heal your woes.
I was a stranger to the dreadful deed,
A stranger ev’n to the report till now;
And yet, without some traces of the crime,
I should not urge this matter; therefore hear me.
I speak to all the citizens of Thebes,
Myself a citizen; observe me well:
If any know the murderer of Laius,
Let him reveal it; I command you all;
But if, restrain’d by dread punishment,
He hide the secret, let him fear no more;
For naught but exile shall attend the crime,
Whene’er confess’d: if by a foreign hand
The horrid deed was done, who points him out
Commands our thanks, and meets a sure reward;
But if there be who knows the murderer,
And yet conceals him from us, mark his fate,
Which here I do pronounce; let none receive,
Throughout my kingdom, none hold converse with
him,
Nor offer prayer, nor sprinkle o’er his head
The sacred cup; let him be driven from all,
By all abandon’d, and by all accursed;
For so the Delphic oracle declared:
And therefore to the gods I pay this duty,
And to the dead. O! may the guilty wretch,
Whether alone, or by his impious friends

231 Before the sacrifice, it was customary for those who partook of it to wash their hands together in the lustral water, with which they were afterward sprinkled by the priests, by way of purification; to be denied this, was always considered as a mark of guilt and infamy.
Assisted, he perform'd the horrid deed,  
Denied the common benefits of nature,  
Wear out a painful life! and, O! if here,  
Within my palace I conceal the traitor,  
On me and mine alight the vengeful curse!  
To you, my people! I commit the care  
Of this important business; 'tis my cause,  
The cause of Heaven, and your expiring country.  
Ev'n if the god had naught declared, to leave  
This crime unexpiated were most ungrateful:  
He was the best of kings, the best of men;  
That sceptre now is mine which Laius bore:  
His wife is mine; so would his children be,  
Did any live; and therefore am I bound,  
Ev'n as he were my father, to revenge him.  
Yes, I will try to find this murderer;  
I owe it to the son of Labdacus,  
To Polydorus, Cadmus, and the race  
Of great Agenor. O! if yet there are  
Who will not join me in the pious deed;  
From such may Earth withhold her annual store,  
And barren be their bed, their life most wretched,  
And their death cruel as the pestilence  
That wastes our city; but on you, my Thebans!  
Who wish us fair success, may Justice smile  
Propitious, and the gods for ever bless!  
Cho. O king! thy imprecation unappall'd  
I hear, and join thee, guiltless of the crime,  
Nor knowing who committed it. The god  
Alone, who gave the oracle, must clear  
Its doubtful sense, and point out the offender.  
Œdi. 'Tis true; but who shall force the powers divine  
To speak their hidden purpose?  
Cho. One thing more,  
If I might speak.  
Œdi. Say on, whate'er thy mind  
Shall dictate to thee.  
Cho. As among the gods
All-knowing Phoebus, so to mortal men
Doth sage Tiresias in foreknowledge sure
Shine forth pre-eminent: perchance his aid
Might much avail us.

Œdi. Creon did suggest
The same expedient, and by his advice
Twice have I sent for this Tiresias; much
I wonder that he comes not.

Cho. 'Tis most fitting
We do consult him; for the idle tales
Which rumour spreads are not to be regarded.

Œdi. What are those tales? for naught should we despise.

Cho. 'Tis said, some travellers did attack the king.

Œdi. It is: but still no proof appears.

Cho. And yet,
If it be so, thy dreadful execration
Will force the guilty to confess.

Œdi. O no!
Who fears not to commit the crime will ne'er
Be frighted at the curse that follows it.

Cho. Behold, he comes, who will discover all!
The holy prophet, see! They lead him hither:
He knows the truth, and will reveal it to us.

Enter Tiresias.

Œdi. O sage Tiresias! thou, who knowest all
That can be known, the things of heaven above
And earth below; whose mental eye beholds,
Blind as thou art, the state of dying Thebes,
And weeps her fate; to thee we look for aid;
On thee alone for safety we depend.
This answer, which perchance thou hast not heard,
Apollo gave: The plague, he said, should cease,
When those who murder'd Laius were discover'd,
And paid the forfeit of their crime by death
Or banishment. O! do not then conceal
Aught that thy art prophetic, from the flight
Of birds or other omens, may disclose.
O! save thyself, save this afflicted city,
Save Œdipus, avenge the guiltless dead
From this pollution! Thou art all our hope;
Remember, 'tis the privilege of man,
His noblest function, to assist the wretched.

Tir. Alas! what misery it is to know,
When knowledge is thus fatal! O Tiresias!
Thou art undone. Would I had never come!
Œdi. What sayest thou? Whence this strange dejection? Speak.

Tir. Let me be gone; 'twere better for us both
That I retire in silence: be advised.
Œdi. It is ingratitude to Thebes, who bore
And cherish'd thee; it is unjust to all,
To hide the will of Heaven.

Tir. 'Tis rash in thee
To ask, and rash I fear will prove my answer.
Cho. O! do not, by the gods, conceal it from us:
Suppliant we all request, we all conjure thee.

Tir. You know not what you ask: I'll not unveil
Your miseries to you.
Œdi. Know'st thou then our fate,
And will not tell it? Mean'st thou to betray
Thy country and thy king?

Tir. I would not make Myself and thee unhappy: why thus blame
My tender care, nor listen to my caution?
Œdi. Wretch as thou art, thou wouldst provoke a stone,
Inflexible and cruel, still implored,
And still refusing.

Tir. Thou condemn'st my warmth, Forgetful of thy own.
Œdi. Who would not rage,
To see an injured people treated thus
With vile contempt?

Tir. What is decreed by Heaven
Must come to pass, though I reveal it not.
ŒDIPUS TYRANNUS.—ACT II. 251

Œdi. Still ’tis thy duty to inform us of it. 335
Tir. I'll speak no more, not though thine anger swell
Ev'n to its utmost.
Œdi. Nor will I be silent.
I tell thee, once for all, thou wert thyself
Accomplice in this deed; nay more, I think,
But for thy blindness, wouldst with thine own hand
Have done it too. 341
Tir. ’Tis well; now hear Tiresias:
The sentence, which thou didst thyself proclaim,
Falls on thyself: henceforth shall never man
Hold converse with thee, for thou art accursed;
The guilty cause of this our city's woes. 345
Œdi. Audacious traitor! think'st thou to escape
The hand of vengeance?
Tir. Yes, I fear thee not;
For truth is stronger than a tyrant's arm.
Œdi. Whence didst thou learn this? Was it from thy art?
Tir. I learn'd it from thyself: thou didst compel me
To speak, unwilling as I was. 350
Œdi. Once more
Repeat it then, that I may know my fate
More plainly still.
Tir. Is it not plain already,
Or mean'st thou but to tempt me?
Œdi. No; but say,
Speak it again.
Tir. Again then I declare 355
Thou art thyself the murderer whom thou seek'st.
Œdi. A second time thou shalt not pass unpunish'd.
Tir. What wouldst thou say, if I should tell thee all?
Œdi. Say what thou wilt; for all is false.
Tir. Know then,
That Œdipus, in shameful bonds united 360
With those he loves, unconscious of his guilt,
Is yet most guilty.

Œdi. Darest thou utter more,
And hope for pardon?

Tir. Yes, if there be strength
In sacred truth.

Œdi. But truth dwells not in thee:
Thy body and thy mind are dark alike,
For both are blind; thy every sense is lost.

Tir. Thou dost upbraid me with the loss of that
For which thyself ere long shall meet reproach
From every tongue.

Œdi. Thou blind and impious traitor!
Thy darkness is thy safeguard, or this hour
Had been thy last.

Tir. It is not in my fate
To fall by thee; Apollo guards his priest.

Œdi. Was this the tale of Creon, or thy own?

Tir. Creon is guiltless, and the crime is thine.

Œdi. O riches, power, dominion, and thou far
Above them all, the best of human blessings,
Excelling wisdom, how doth envy love
To follow and oppress you! This fair kingdom,
Which, by the nation's choice and not my own,
I here possess, Creon, my faithful friend
(For such I thought him once), would now wrest
from me,

And hath suborn'd this vile impostor here,
This wand'ring hypocrite, of sharpest sight
When interest prompts, but ignorant and blind
When fools consult him. Tell me, prophet! where
Was all thy art, when the abhorred sphinx
Alarm'd our city? Wherefore did not then
Thy wisdom save us? Then the man divine
Was wanting; but thy birds refused their omens;
Thy god was silent: then came Œdipus,
This poor, unlearned, uninstructed sage,
Who not from birds uncertain omens drew,
But by his own sagacious mind explored
The hidden mystery; and now thou comest
To cast me from the throne my wisdom gain'd,
And share with Creon my divided empire.
But you should both lament your ill-got power,
You and your bold compeer; for thee, this moment,
But that I bear respect unto thy age,
I'd make thee rue thy execrable purpose.

Cho. You both are angry, therefore both to blame:
Much rather should you join, with friendly zeal
And mutual ardour, to explore the will
Of all-deciding Heaven.

Tir. What though thou rulest
O'er Thebes despotic, we are equal here;
I am Apollo's subject, and not thine;
Nor want I Creon to protect me. No;
I tell thee, king! this blind Tiresias tells thee,
Seeing thou seest not, know'st not where thou art,
What, or with whom. Canst thou inform me who
Thy parents are, and what thy horrid crimes
'Gainst thy own race, the living and the dead?
A father's and a mother's curse attend thee.
Soon shall their furies drive thee from the land,
And leave thee dark like me: what mountain then,
Or conscious shore, shall not return the groans
Of Oedipus, and echo to his woes?
When thou shalt look on the detested bed,
And in that haven where thou hopest to rest,
Shalt meet with storm and tempest; then what ills
Shall fall on thee and thine! Now vent thy rage
On old Tiresias and the guiltless Creon:
We shall be soon avenged, for ne'er did Heaven
Cut off a wretch so base, so vile as thou art.

Oed. Must I bear this from thee? Away, begone!
Home, villain, home!

Tir. I did not come to thee
Unsent for.

Oed. Had I thought thou wouldst have thus
Insulted me, I had not call'd thee hither.
Tir. Perhaps thou hold'st Tiresias as a fool
And madman; but thy parents thought me wise.

Oedi. My parents, saidst thou? Speak! who were my parents?

Tir. This day, that gives thee life, shall give thee death.

Oedi. Still dark, and still perplexing are the words Thou utter'st.

Tir. 'Tis thy business to unriddle,
And therefore thou canst best interpret them.

Oedi. Thou dost reproach me for my virtues.

Tir. They,

And thy good fortune, have undone thee.

Oedi. Since I sav'd the city, I'm content.

Tir. Farewell.

Boy, lead me hence.

Oedi. Away with him, for here His presence but disturbs us; being gone, We shall be happier.

Tir. Oedipus! I go;

But first inform thee (for I fear thee not) Wherefore I came: know, then, I came to tell thee,

The man thou seek'st, the man on whom thou pour'dst

Thy execrations, ev'n the murderer

Of Laius, now is here; a seeming stranger,

And yet a Theban. He shall suffer soon

For all his crimes: from light and affluence driven

To penury and darkness, poor and blind,

Propp'd on his staff, and from his native land

Expell'd, I see him in a foreign clime

A helpless wanderer; to his sons at once

A father and a brother; child and husband

Of her from whom he sprang. Adulterous,

Incestuous parricide! now fare thee well;
Go, learn the truth; and, if it be not so,
Say I have ne’er deserved the name of prophet.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

When will the guilty wretch appear,
Whom Delphi’s sacred oracle demands;
Author of crimes too black for mortal ear,
Dipping in royal blood his sacrilegious hands?
Swift as the storm by rapid whirlwinds driven,
Quick let him fly the impending wrath of Heaven;
For lo, the angry son of Jove,
Arm’d with red lightnings from above,
Pursues the murderer with immortal hate,
And round him spreads the snares of unrelenting fate.

ANTISTROPHE I.

From steep Parnassus’ rocky cave,
Cover’d with snow, came forth the dread command;
Apollo thence his sacred mandate gave,
To search the man of blood through every land.
Silent and sad the weary wanderer roves
O’er pathless rocks and solitary groves,
Hoping to ‘scape the wrath divine
Denounced from great Apollo’s shrine:
Vain hopes to ‘scape the fate by Heaven decreed
For vengeance hovers still o’er his devoted head.

STROPHE II.

Tiresias, famed for wisdom’s lore,
Hath dreadful ills to OEdipus divined;
And as his words mysterious I explore,
Unnumber’d doubts perplex my anxious mind:
Now raised by hope, and now with fears oppress’d,
Sorrow and joy alternate fill my breast.

How should these hapless kings be foes,
When never strife between them rose?
Or why should Laius, slain by hands unknown,
Bring foul disgrace on Polybus’ unhappy son?
ANTISTROPH El.
From Phoebus and all-seeing Jove
Naught can be hid of actions here below;
But earthly prophets may deceitful prove,
And little more than other mortals know.
Though much in wisdom man doth man excel,
In all that’s human error still must dwell.
Could he commit the bloody deed,
Who from the sphinx our city freed?
O no! he never shed the guiltless blood;
The sphinx declares him wise, and innocent, and
good. [Exeunt

ACT III.

CREON, CHORUS.

CRE. O citizens! with grief I hear your king
Hath blasted the fair fame of guiltless Creon,
And most unjustly brands me with a crime
My soul abhors. While desolation spreads
On every side, and universal ruin
Hangs o’er the land, if I in word or deed
Could join to swell the woes of hapless Thebes,
I were unworthy, nay, I would not wish
To live another day. Alas, my friends!
Thus to be deem’d a traitor to my country,
To you, my fellow-citizens, to all
That hear me; O, ’tis infamy and shame!
I cannot, will not bear it.

CHO. ’Twas the effect
Of sudden anger only; what he said,
But could not think.

CRE. Who told him I suborn’d
The prophet to speak falsely? What could raise
This vile suspicion?

CHO. Such he had, but whence
I know not.

CRE. Talk’d he thus with firm composure
And confidence of mind?
I cannot say:
*Tis not for me to know the thoughts of kings,
Or judge their actions: but, behold, he comes.

Enter Oedipus.

Oed. Ha! Creon here? And darest thou thus approach
My palace? thou, who wouldst have murder’d me,
And taken my kingdom? By the gods, I ask thee
(Answer me! traitor), didst thou think me fool
Or coward, that I could not see thy arts,
Or had not strength to vanquish them? What madness,
What strange infatuation, led thee on,
Without or force or friends, to grasp at empire,
Which only their united force can give?
What wert thou doing?

Cre. Hear what I shall answer,
Then judge impartial.

Oed. Thou canst talk it well,
But I shall ne’er attend to thee; thy guilt
Is plain; thou art my deadliest foe.

Cre. But hear
What I shall urge.

Oed. Say not thou art innocent.
Cre. If self-opinion, void of reason, seem
Conviction to thee, know, thou err’st most grossly.

Oed. And thou more grossly, if thou think’st to pass
Unpunish’d for this injury to thy friend.

Cre. I should not, were I guilty; but what crime
Have I committed? Tell me.

Oed. Wert not thou
The man who urged me to require the aid
Of your all-knowing prophet?

Cre. True, I was; I did persuade you: so I would again.

Oed. How long is it since Laius—
Cre. Laius? what
OEDE. Since Laius fell by hands unknown?
CRE. A long, 
Long tract of years.
OEDE. Was this Tiresias then
A prophet!
CRE. Ay, in wisdom and in fame,
As now, excelling.
OEDE. Did he then say aught
Concerning me?
CRE. I never heard he did.
OEDE. Touching this murder, did you ne'er inquire
Who were the authors?
CRE. Doubtless; but in vain.
OEDE. Why did not the same prophet then inform
you?
CRE. I know not that, and when I'm ignorant
I'm always silent.
OEDE. What concerns thyself
At least thou know'st, and therefore shouldst de-
clare it.
CRE. What is it? speak; and if 'tis in my power,
I'll answer thee.
OEDE. Thou know'st, if this Tiresias
Had not combined with thee, he would not thus
Accuse me as the murderer of Laius.
CRE. What he declares thou best canst tell; of
me,
What thou requirest, myself am yet to learn.
OEDE. Go, learn it, then; but ne'er shalt thou dis-
cover
That Oedipus is guilty.
CRE. Art not thou
My sister's husband?
OEDE. Granted.
CRE. Join'd with her,
Thou rulest o'er Thebes.
OEDE. 'Tis true, and all she asks
Most freely do I give her.
CRE. Is not Creon
In honour next to you?
OEIDIPUS TYRANNUS.—ACT III. 259

OE. Thou art, and therefore 565
The more ungrateful.
CRE. Hear what I shall plead,
And thou wilt never think so: tell me, prince,
Is there a man who would prefer a throne,
With all its dangers, to an equal rank
In peace and safety? I am not of those 570
Who choose the name of king before the power;
Fools only make such wishes; I have all
From thee, and fearless I enjoy it all.
Had I the sceptre, often must I act
Against my will. Know, then, I am not yet 575
So void of sense and reason as to quit
A real advantage for a seeming good.
Am I not happy? am I not revered,
Embraced, and loved by all? To me they come
Who want thy favour, and by me acquire it: 580
What then should Creon wish for? Shall he leave
All this for empire? Bad desires corrupt
The fairest mind: I never entertain'd
A thought so vile, nor would I lend my aid
To forward such base purposes. But go 585
To Delphi; ask the sacred oracle
If I have spoke the truth: if there you find
That with the prophet I conspired, destroy
The guilty Creon: not thy voice alone
Shall then condemn me, for myself will join 590
In the just sentence; but accuse me not
On weak suspicion's most uncertain test.
Justice would never call the wicked good,
Or brand fair virtue with the name of vice,
Unmerited: to cast away a friend 595
 Faithful and just, is to deprive ourselves
Of life and being, which we hold most dear:
But time, and time alone, reveal all;
That only shows the good man's excellence:
A day sufficeth to unmask the wicked. 600
CRO. O king! his caution merits your regard;
Who judge in haste do seldom judge aright.
œdi. When they are quick who plot against my life,
'Tis fit I should be quick in my defence:
If I am tame and silent, all they wish
Will soon be done, and œdipus must fall.
cre. What wouldst thou have? my banishment?
œdi. Thy death.
cre. But first inform me wherefore I should die.
œdi. Dost thou rebel then? Wilt thou not submit?
cre. Not when I see thee thus deceived.
œdi. 'Tis fit
I should defend my own.
cre. And so should I.
œdi. Thou art a traitor.
cre. What, if I should prove
I am not so?
œdi. A king must be obey'd
cre. Not if his orders are unjust.
œdi. O Thebes!
O citizens!
cre. I too can call on Thebes:
She is my country.
cho. O! no more, my lords!
For, see, Jocasta comes in happiest hour
To end your contest.

Enter Jocasta.

Joc. Whence this sudden tumult?
O princes! is this well, at such a time
With idle broils to multiply the woes
Of wretched Thebes? Home, home, for shame;
nor thus
With private quarrel swell the public ruin.
cre. Sister! thy husband hath most basely used me;
He threatens me with banishment or death.
œdi. I do confess it; for he did conspire,
With vile and wicked arts, against my life.
CRE. O! may I never prosper, but, accursed,
Unpitied, perish if I ever did!
Joc. Believe him, Oedipus! revere the gods
Whom he contests, if thou dost love Jocasta: 630
Thy subjects beg it of thee.
Cho. Hear, O king!
Consider, we entreat thee.
OED. What wouldst have?
Think you I'll e'er submit to him?
Cho. Revere
His character, his oath, both pleading for him.
OED. But know you what you ask?
Cho. We do.
OED. What is it? 635
Cho. We ask thee to believe a guiltless friend,
Nor cast him forth dishonour'd thus, on slight
Suspicion's weak surmise.
OED. Requesting this,
You do request my banishment or death.
Cho. No, by yon leader of the heavenly host, 640
The immortal sun, I had not such a thought:
I only felt for Thebes' distressful state,
And would not have it by domestic strife
Imbitter'd thus.
OED. Why, let him then depart:
If Oedipus must die, or leave his country 645
For shameful exile, be it so: I yield
To thy request, not his; for hateful still
Shall Creon ever be.
CRE. Thy stubborn soul
Bends with reluctance, and, when anger fires it,
Is terrible; but natures form'd like thine 650
Are their own punishment.
OED. Wilt thou not hence?
Wilt not be gone?
CRE. I go: thou know'st me not:
But these will do me justice. [Exit Creon
Cho. Princess! now
Persuade him to retire.
Joc. First let me know
The cause of this dissension.
Cho. From reports Uncertain, and suspicions most injurious,
The quarrel rose.
Joc. Was the accusation mutual?
Cho. It was.
Joc. What follow'd then?
Cho. Ask me no more;
Enough's already known: we'll not repeat
The woes of hapless Thebes.
OEdi. You are all blind, Insensible, unjust; you love me not,
Yet boast your piety.
Cho. I said before,
Again I say, that not to love my king
Ev'n as myself would mark me for the worst
Of men; for thou didst save expiring Thebes.
O! rise once more, protect, preserve thy country!
Joc. O king! inform me, whence this strange dis-
sension?
OEdi. I'll tell thee, my Jocasta! (for thou know'st
The love I bear thee), what this wicked Creon
Did artfully devise against me.
Joc. Speak it, If he indeed be guilty.
OEdi. Creon says
That I did murder Laius.
Joc. Spake he this
As knowing it himself, or from another?
OEdi. He had suborn'd that evil-working priest,
And sharpens every tongue against his king.
Joc. Let not a fear perplex thee, OEdipus!
Mortals know nothing of futurity,
And these prophetic seers are all impostors;
I'll prove it to thee. Know, then, Laius once,
Not from Apollo, but his priests, received
An oracle, which said it was decreed
He should be slain by his own son, the offspring
Of Laius and Jocasta; yet he fell
By strangers, murder'd (for so fame reports)
By robbers in the place where three ways meet. 685
A son was born; but ere three days had pass'd,
The infant's feet were bored; a servant took,
And left him on the pathless mountain's top,
To perish there: thus Phœbus ne'er decreed
That he should kill his father, or that Laius 690
(Which much he fear'd) should by his son be slain.
Such is the truth of oracles: henceforth
Regard them not. What Heaven would have us know
It can with ease unfold, and will reveal it. 695
Ædi. What thou hast said, Jocasta! much disturbs me:
I tremble at it.
Joc. Therefore shouldst thou fear?
Ædi. Methought I heard thee say, Laius was slain
Where three ways meet.
Joc. 'Twas so reported then,
And is so still.
Ædi. Where happened the misfortune?
Joc. In Phocis, where the roads unite that lead
To Delphi and to Daulia.
Ædi. How long since?
Joc. A little time ere you began to reign
O'er Thebes, we heard it.
Ædi. O almighty Jove!
What wilt thou do with me?
Joc. Why talk'st thou thus?
Ædi. Ask me no more; but tell me of this Laius,
What was his age and stature?
Joc. He was tall. 706
His hairs just turning to the silver hue;
His form not much unlike thy own.
Ædi. O me!
Sure I have call'd down curses on myself
Unknowing.
Joc.      Ha! what say'st thou, OEdipus! 710
I tremble while I look on thee.

OEdi.      O! much
I fear, the prophet saw too well: but say,
One thing will make it clear.

Joc.      I dread to hear it;
Yet speak, and I will tell thee.

OEdi.      Went he forth
With few attendants, or a numerous train, 715
In kingly pomp?

Joc.      They were but five in all,
The herald with them; but one chariot there,
Which carried Laius.

OEdi.      O! 'tis but too plain.

Who brought the news?

Joc.      A servant, who alone
Escaped with life.

OEdi.      That servant, is he here?  720
Joc.      O no: his master slain, when he return'd,
And saw thee on the throne of Thebes, with prayer
Most earnest he besought me to dismiss him,
That he might leave this city, where he wish'd
No longer to be seen, but to retire, 725
And feed my flocks: I granted his request:
For that and more his honest services
Had merited.

OEdi.      I beg he may be sent for
Immediately.

Joc.      He shall; but wherefore is it?

OEdi.      I fear thou hast said too much, and therefore wish

To see him.

Joc.      He shall come: but, O my lord!
Am I not worthy to be told the cause
Of this distress?

OEdi.      Thou art, and I will tell thee.

Thou art my hope; to whom should I impart
My sorrows but to thee? Know then, Jocasta! 735
I am the son of Polybus, who reigns
At Corinth, and the Dorian Merope
His queen; there long I held the foremost rank,
Honour'd and happy, when a strange event
(For strange it was, though little meriting)
The deep concern I felt) alarm'd me much.
A drunken reveller at a feast proclaim'd
That I was only the supposed son
Of Corinth's king. Scarce could I bear that day
The vile reproach; the next, I sought my parents,
And ask'd of them the truth; they too, enraged,
Resented much the base indignity.
I liked their tender warmth, but still I felt
A secret anguish; and, unknown to them,
Sought out the Pythian oracle, in vain.
Touching my parents, nothing could I learn;
But dreadful were the miseries it denounced
Against me: 'twas my fate, Apollo said,
To wed my mother, to produce a race
Accursed and abhorr'd, and last to slay
My father who begat me;—sad decree!
Lest I should e'er fulfil the dire prediction,
Instant I fled from Corinth, by the stars
Guiding my hapless journey, to the place
Where thou report'st this wretched king was slain.
But I will tell thee the whole truth: at length,
I came to where the three ways meet; when lo!
A herald, with another man, like him
Whom thou describest, and in a chariot, met me.
Both strove with violence to drive me back.
Enraged, I struck the charioteer, when straight.
As I advanced, the old man saw, and twice
Smote me on the head; but dearly soon repaid
The insult on me: from his chariot roll'd,
Prone on the earth, beneath my staff he fell,
And instantly expired; the attendant train
All shared his fate. If this unhappy stranger
And Laius be the same, lives there a wretch
So cursed, so hateful to the gods as I am?
Nor citizen nor alien must receive,
Or converse or communion hold with me,
But drive me forth with infamy and shame:
The dreadful curse pronounced with my own lips
Shall soon o'ertake me: I have stain'd the bed
Of him whom I had murder'd; am I then 780
Aught but pollution? If I fly from hence,
The bed of incest meets me, and I go
To slay my father Polybus, the best,
The tenderest parent; this must be the work 784
Of some malignant power. Ye righteous gods!
Let me not see that day, but rest in death,
Rather than suffer such calamity.

Chor. O king! we pity thy distress: but wait
With patience his arrival, and despair not. 789

Œdip. That shepherd is my only hope: Jocasta!
Would he were here!

Joc. Suppose he were; what then?

What wouldst thou do?

Œdip. I'll tell thee; if he says
The same as thou dost, I am safe, and guiltless.

Joc. What said I then?

Œdip. Thou saidst, he did report
Laius was slain by robbers: if 'tis true 795
He fell by numbers, I am innocent,
For I was unattended; if but one
Attack'd and slew him, doubtless I am he.

Joc. Be satisfied, it must be as he first
Reported it: he cannot change the tale. 800
Not I alone, but the whole city heard it:
Or grant he should, the oracle was ne'er
Fulfill'd; for Phœbus said, Jocasta's son
Should slay his father; that could never be,
For, O! Jocasta's son long since is dead. 805
He could not murder Laius; therefore, never
Will I attend to prophecies again.

Œdip. Right, my Jocasta! but, I beg thee, send
And fetch this shepherd; do not fail.

Joc. I will,

This moment; come, my lord! let us go in; 810
I will do nothing but what pleases thee. [Exeunt.
CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Grant me, henceforth, ye powers divine!
In virtue's purest paths to tread;
In every word, in every deed,
May sanctity of manners ever shine;
Obedient to the laws of Jove,
The laws descended from above;
Which, not like those by feeble mortals given,
Buried in dark oblivion lie,
Or, worn by time, decay and die:
But bloom eternal like their native heaven!

ANTISTROPHE I.

Pride first gave birth to tyranny:
That hateful vice, insulting Pride,
When, every human power defied,
She lifts to glory's height her votary;
Soon stumbling, from her tottering throne
She throws the wretched victim down.
But may the god, indulgent, hear my prayer,
That god whom humbly I adore:
O! may he smile on Thebes once more,
And take its wretched monarch to his care!

STROPHE II.

Perish the impious and profane,
Who, void of reverential fear,
Nor justice nor the laws revere;
Who leave their god for pleasure or for gain;
Who swell by fraud their ill-got store;
Who rob the wretched and the poor.
If vice, unpunish'd, virtue's meed obtain,
Who shall refrain the impetuous soul,
The rebel passions who control,
Or wherefore do I lead this choral train!

ANTISTROPHE II.

No more to Delphi's sacred shrine
Need we with incense now repair;
No more shall Phocis hear our prayer,
Nor fair Olympia see her rites divine;
If oracles no longer prove
The power of Phoebus and of Jove.
Great lord of all! from thy eternal throne
Behold how impious men defame
Thy loved Apollo's honour'd name:
O! guard his rights, and vindicate thy own. [Exeunt.

ACT IV.

JOCASTA, CHORUS.

Joc. Sages and rulers of the land! I come
To seek the altars of the gods, and there
With incense and oblations to appease
Offended Heaven. My Ædipus, alas!
No longer wise and prudent, as you all
Remember once he was, with present things
Compares the past, nor judges like himself:
Unnumber'd cares perplex his anxious mind,
And every tale awakes new terrors in him.
Vain is my counsel, for he hears me not.
First then to thee, O Phoebus! (for thou still
Art near to help the wretched), we appeal,
And suppliant beg thee now to grant thy aid
Propitious: deep is our distress; for, O!
We see our pilot sinking at the helm,
And much already fear the vessel lost.

Enter SHEPHERD from Corinth.

Shep. Can you instruct me, strangers! which way
lies
The palace of king Ædipus? himself
I would most gladly see. Can you inform me! 870
Cho. This is the palace; he is now within;
Thou seest his queen before thee.
Shep. Ever bless'd,
And happy with the happy mayst thou live!
Joc. Stranger! the same good wish to thee, for
well
Thy words deserve it: but say, wherefore comest thou, 875
And what's thy news?
Shep. To thee, and to thy husband,
Pleasure and joy!
Joc. What pleasure? and whence art thou?
Shep. From Corinth: to be brief, I bring thee
 tidings
Of good and evil.
Joc. Ha! what mean thy words
Ambiguous?
Shep. Know, then, if report say true, 880
The Isthmian people will choose Ædipus
Their sovereign.
Joc. Is not Polybus their king?
Shep. No; Polybus is dead.
Joc. What say'st thou? dead!
Shep. If I speak falsely, may death seize on
 me!
Joc. [to one of her Attendants.] Why fiest thou not
to tell thy master? Hence! 885
What are you now, you oracles divine?
Where is your truth! The fearful Ædipus,
From Corinth fled, lest he should slay the king.
This Polybus, who perish'd, not by him,
But by the hand of Heaven.

Enter Ædipus.

Ædi. My dear Jocasta! 890
Why hast thou call'd me hither?
Joc. Hear this man;
And when thou hear'st him, mark what faith is due
To your revered oracles.
Ædi. What is he,
And what doth he report?

The people of Corinth; so called from the famous Isthmus there.
SOPHOCLES.

Joc. He comes from Corinth,
And says, thy father, Polybus, is dead. 895
Œdi. What say'st thou, stranger? Speak to me,
O! speak.
Shep. If touching this thou first desirest my
answer,
Know, he is dead.
Œdi. How died he? say, by treason,
Or some disease?
Shep. Alas! a little force
Will lay to rest the weary limbs of age. 900
Œdi. Distemper then did kill him?
Shep. That in part,
And part a length of years that wore him down.
Œdi. Now, my Jocasta, who shall henceforth
trust
To prophecies, and seers, and clamorous birds
With their vain omens? they who had decreed 905
That I should kill my father? He, thou seest,
Beneath the earth lies buried, while I live
In safety here, and guiltless of his blood:
Unless, perhaps, sorrow for the loss of me
Shorten'd his days, thus only could I kill
My father; but he's gone, and to the shades
Hath carried with him those vain oracles
Of fancied ill, no longer worth my care.
Joc. Did I not say it would be thus?
Œdi. Thou didst;
But I was full of fears.
Joc. Henceforth, no more 915
Indulge them.
Œdi. But my mother's bed—that still
Must be avoided: I must fly from that.
Joc. Why should man fear, whom chance, and
chance alone,
Doth ever rule? Foreknowledge all is vain,
And can determine nothing: therefore best 920
It is to live as fancy leads, at large,
Uncurb'd and only subject to our will.
Fear not thy mother's bed: oftentimes in dreams
Have men committed incest; but his life
Will ever be most happy who contemns
Such idle phantoms.

OEDIPUS. Thou wert right, Jocasta!

Did not my mother live; but as it is,
Spite of thy words, I must be anxious still.

Joc. Think on thy father's death; it is a light
To guide thee here.

OEDIPUS. It is so; yet I fear,

While she survives him.

SHEP. Who is it you mean?

What woman fear you?

OEDIPUS. Merope, the wife
Of Polybus.

SHEP. And wherefore fear you her?

OEDIPUS. Know, stranger, a most dreadful oracle
Concerning her affrights me.

SHEP. May I know it,

Or must it be reveal'd to none but thee?

OEDIPUS. O, no, I'll tell thee: Phœbus hath declared
That OEdipus should stain his mother's bed,
And dip his hands in his own father's blood;
Wherefore I fled from Corinth, and lived here,
In happiness indeed; but still thou know'st
It is a blessing to behold our parents,
And that I had not.

SHEP. Was it for this cause
Thou wert an exile then?

OEDIPUS. It was; I fear'd

That I might one day prove my father's murderer.

SHEP. What if I come, O king! to banish hence
Thy terrors, and restore thy peace?

OEDIPUS. O stranger!

Couldst thou do this, I would reward thee nobly.

SHEP. Know, then, for this I came; I came to serve,
And make thee happy.
OEd. Back to my parents.
Shep. Son, I see thou know'st not
What thou art doing.
OEd. Wherefore think'st thou so?
By Heaven, I beg thee then do thou instruct me.
Shep. If thou didst fly from Corinth for this cause—
OEd. Apollo's dire predictions still asthrick me.
Shep. Fear'st thou pollution from thy parents?
OEd. That,
And that alone, I dread.
Shep. Thy fears are vain.
OEd. Not if they are my parents.
Shep. Polybus
Was not akin to thee.
OEd. What say'st thou? Speak;
Say, was not Polybus my father?
Shep. No;
No more than he is mine.
OEd. Why call me then
His son?
Shep. Because long since I gave thee to him:
He did receive thee from these hands.
OEd. Indeed!
And could he love another's child so well?
Shep. He had no children; that persuaded him
to take and keep thee.
OEd. Didst thou buy me then,
Or am I thine, and must I call thee father?
Shep. I found thee in Cithæron's woody vale.
OEd. What brought thee there?
Shep. I came to feed my flocks
On the green mountain's side.
OEd. It seems thou wert
A wandering shepherd.
Shep. Thy deliverer;
I saved thee from destruction.
How! what then
How! what then
Had happen'd to me? Thy own feet will best
Inform thee of that circumstance. Alas!
Why call'st thou to remembrance a misfortune Of so long date?
'Twas I who loosed the tendons Of thy bored feet.
It seems, in infancy,
I suffer'd much then. To this incident
Thou owest thy name. My father or my mother,
Who did it? Know'st thou? He who gave thee to me
Must tell thee that. Then from another's hand
Thou didst receive me?
Ay, another shepherd. Who was he? Canst thou recollect?
'Twas one,
At least so called, of Laius' family.
Laius, who ruled at Thebes?
The same: this man
Was shepherd to King Laius.
Lives he still?
And could I see him?
[pointing to the Chorus.] Some of these, perhaps,
His countrymen, may give you information.
[to the Chorus.] O! speak, my friends! if any of you know
This shepherd; whether still he lives at Thebes, Or in some neighbouring country; tell me quick,
For it concerns us near.

979 Oedipus signifies, in the Greek, "swelled foot;" taking his name from the sore and swelling of his foot
Cho. It must be he
Whom thou didst lately send for; but the queen
Can best inform thee.

Œd. Know'st thou, my Jocasta!
Whether the man whom thou didst order hither, 995
And whom the shepherd speaks of, be the same?
Joc. Whom meant he? for I know not. Œdipus!
Think not so deeply of this thing.
Œd. Good Heaven
Forbid, Jocasta! I should now neglect
To clear my birth, when thus the path is mark’d
And open to me.

Joc. Do not, by the gods 1001
I beg thee, do not, if thy life be dear,
Make farther search, for I have felt enough
Already from it.
Œd. Rest thou satisfied:
Were I descended from a race of slaves, 1005
’Twould not dishonour thee:

Joc. Yet hear me; do not,
Once more, I beg thee, do not search this matter.
Œd. I will not be persuaded: I must search,
And find it too.

Joc. I know it best, and best
Advise thee.
Œd. That advice perplexes more. 1010

Joc. O! would to Heaven that thou mayst never
know
Or who or whence thou art!
Œd. [to the Attendant.] Let some one fetch
That shepherd quick, and leave this woman here
To glory in her high descent.

Joc. Alas!
Unhappy Œdipus! that word alone 1015
I now can speak: remember, ’tis my last.

[Exit Jocasta.

Cho. Why fled the queen in such disorder hence?
Sorely distress’d she seemed, and much I fear
Her silence bodes some sad event.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text Content</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1020</td>
<td>May come of that, I am resolved to know</td>
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<tr>
<td>1025</td>
<td>The secret of my birth, how mean soever</td>
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<tr>
<td>1030</td>
<td>It chance to prove: perhaps her sex’s pride</td>
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<tr>
<td>1035</td>
<td>May make her blush to find I was not born</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Of noble parents; but I call myself</td>
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<td>The son of Fortune, my indulgent mother,</td>
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<td>Whom I shall never be ashamed to own.</td>
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<td>The kindred months, that are, like me, her children;</td>
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<td>The years, that roll obedient to her will,—</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Have raised me from the lowest state to power</td>
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<td>And splendour; wherefore, being what I am,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I need not fear the knowledge of my birth.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**CHOIR.**

**STROPHE.**

If my prophetic soul doth well divine,
Ere on thy brow to-morrow’s sun shall shine,
Cithæron! thou the mystery shalt unfold:
The doubtful Oedipus, no longer blind,
Shall soon his country and his father find,
And all the story of his birth be told:
Then shall we in grateful lays,
Celebrate our monarch’s praise,
And in the sprightly dance our songs triumphant raise.

**ANTISTROPHE.**

What heavenly power gave birth to thee, O king?
From Pan, the god of mountains, didst thou spring,
With some fair daughter of Apollo join’d?
Art thou from him who o’er Cyllene reigns,
Swift Hermes, sporting in Arcadia’s plains?
Some nymph of Helicon did Bacchus find;—
Bacchus, who delights to rove
Through the forest, hill, and grove,
And art thou, prince, the offspring of their love?

*Enter Oedipus, Shepherd from Corinth.*

**Oed.** If I may judge of one whom yet I ne’er
Had converse with, yon old man whom I see
This way advancing, must be that same shepherd
We lately sent for, by his age and mien,
Ev’n as this stranger did describe him to us.
My servants too are with him; but you best
Can say, for you must know him well.

Cio. ’Tis he,
My lord! the faithful shepherd of King Laius.

Œdi. [to the Shepherd from Corinth.] What say’st thou, stranger! is it he?

Shep. It is.

Enter Old Shepherd.

Œdi. Now answer me, old man! look this way; speak;
Didst thou belong to Laius?

O. Shep. Sir, I did:
No hireling slave, but in his palace bred,
I serv’d him long.

Œdi. What was thy business there?
O. Shep. For my life’s better part I tended sheep
Œdi. And whither didst thou lead them?
O. Shep. To Cithæron,
And to the neighbouring plains.

Œdi. Behold this man;

[Disting to the Shepherd of Corinth

Dost thou remember to have seen him?

O. Shep. Whom?

What hath he done?

Œdi. Him who now stands before thee;
Call’st thou to mind or converse or connexion
Between you in times past?

O. Shep. I cannot say
I recollect it now.

Shep. I do not wonder
He should forget me; but I will recall
Some facts of ancient date: he must remember,
When on Cithæron we together fed
Our several flocks, in daily converse join’d,
From spring to autumn, and when winter bleak.
Approach'd, retired: I to my little cot
Convey'd my sheep, he to the palace led
His fleecy care. Canst thou remember this?
O. SHEP. I do, but that is long since.

SHEP. It is so;
But say, good shepherd, canst thou call to mind
An infant, whom thou didst deliver to me,
Requesting me to breed him as my own?
O. SHEP. Ha! wherefore ask'st thou this?
SHEP. [pointing to OEDIPUS.] Behold him here,
That very child.
O. SHEP. O! say it not; away!
Perdition on thee!

OED. Why reprove him thus?
Thou art thyself to blame, old man!
O. SHEP. In what
Am I to blame, my lord?
OED. Thou wilt not speak
Touching this boy.
O. SHEP. Alas, poor man! he knows not
What he hath said.
OED. If not by softer means
To be persuaded, force shall wring it from thee.
O. SHEP. Treat not an old man harshly.
OED. [to the Attendants.] Bind his hands.
O. SHEP. Wherefore, my lord? What wouldst thou
have me do?
OED. That child he talks of, didst thou give it to
him?
O. SHEP. I did, and would to Heaven I then had
died!
OED. Die soon thou shalt, unless thou tell'st it all.
O. SHEP. Say, rather, if I do.
OED. This fellow means
To trifle with us, by his dull delay.
O. SHEP. I do not; said I not, I gave the child?
OED. Whence came the boy? Was he thy own,
or who
Did give him to thee?
From another hand 1100
O. SHEP. I had received him.
œdi. Say, what hand? from whom?
Whence came he?
O. SHEP. Do not, by the gods! I beg thee.
Do not inquire.
œdi. Force me to ask again,
And thou shalt die.
O. SHEP. In Laius' palace born.
œdi. Son of a slave, or of the king?
O. SHEP. Alas! 1105
'Tis death for me to speak.
œdi. And me to hear;
Yet say it.
O. SHEP. He was call'd the son of Laius;
But ask the queen, for she can best inform thee.
œdi. Did she then give the child to thee?
O. SHEP. She did.
œdi. For what?
O. SHEP. To kill him.
œdi. Kill her child! Inhuman 1110
And barbarous mother!
O. SHEP. A dire oracle
Affrighted and constrained her to it.
œdi. Ha!
What oracle?
O. SHEP. Which said, her son should slay
His parents.
œdi. Wherefore gavest thou then the infant
To this old shepherd?
O. SHEP. Pity moved me to it: 1115
I hoped he would have soon convey'd his charge
To some far distant country: he, alas!
Preserved him but for misery and wo;
For, O my lord! if thou indeed art he,
Thou art of all mankind the most unhappy. 1120
œdi. O me! at length the mystery's unravel'd:
'Tis plain; 'tis clear; my fate is all determined.
Those are my parents who should not have been
Allied to me: she is my wife, ev'n she,
Whom nature had forbidden me to wed;
I have slain him who gave me life, and now
Of thee, O light! I take my last farewell,
For Oedipus shall ne'er behold thee more. [Exeunt.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

O, hapless state of human race!
How quick the fleeting shadows pass
Of transitory bliss below,
Where all is vanity and woe!
By thy example taught, O prince! we see
Man was not made for true felicity.

ANTISTROPHE I.

Thou, Oedipus! beyond the rest
Of mortals wert supremely bless'd;
Whom every hand conspired to raise,
Whom every hand rejoiced to praise;
When from the sphinx thy all-preserving hand
Stretch'd forth its aid to save a sinking land.

STROPHE II.

Thy virtues raised thee to a throne,
And grateful Thebes was all thy own:
Alas! how changed that glorious name!
Lost are thy virtues and thy fame.
How couldst thou thus pollute thy father's bed?
How couldst thou thus thy hapless mother wed?

ANTISTROPHE II.

How could that bed unconscious bear
So long the vile, incestuous pair?
But Time, of quick and piercing sight,
Hath brought the horrid deed to light:
At length Jocasta owns her guilty flame,
And finds a husband and a child the same.

EPODE.

Wretched son of Laius! thee
Henceforth may I never see;
But absent shed the pious tear, And weep thy fate with grief sincere!
For thou didst raise our eyes to life and light,
To close them now in everlasting night. [Exeunt.

ACT V.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Mes. Sages of Thebes, most honour'd and revered!
If e'er the house of Labdacus was dear
And precious to you, what will be your grief,
When I shall tell the most disastrous tale
You ever heard, and to your eyes present
A spectacle more dreadful than they yet
Did e'er behold? Not the wide Danube's waves,
Nor Phasis' stream, can wash away the stains
Of this polluted palace. The dire crimes,
Long time conceal'd, at length are brought to light;
But those which spring from voluntary guilt
Are still more dreadful.

Cho. Nothing can be worse
Than what we know already; bring'at thou more
Misfortunes to us?

Mes. To be brief, the queen,
Jocasta, 's dead.

Cho. Say, by what hand?

Mes. Her own;
And, what's more dreadful, no one saw the deed:
What I myself beheld, you all shall hear.
Inflamed with rage, soon as she reach'd the palace,
Instant retiring to the nuptial bed,
She shut the door, then raved and tore her hair,
Called out on Laius dead, and bade him think
On that unhappy son who murder'd him,
And stain'd his bed: then, turning her sad eyes

1165 The Ister or Danube is one of the most considerable rivers in Europe; which, passing by Illyricum, runs into the Euxine Sea. Phasis was a famous river in Colchis.
Upon the guilty couch, she cursed the place
Where she had borne a husband from her husband,
And children from her child: what follow'd then
I know not, by the cries of Ædipus
Prevented, for on him our eyes were fix'd
Attentive: forth he came, beseeching us
To lend him some sharp weapon, and inform him
Where he might find his mother and his wife;
His children's wretched mother and his own.
Some ill-designing power did then direct him
(For we were silent) to the queen's apartment:
Forcing the bolt, he rush'd unto the bed,
And found Jocasta, where we all beheld her,
Entangled in the fatal noose; which, soon
As he perceived, loosing the pendent rope,
Deeply he groan'd; and, casting on the ground
His wretched body, show'd a piteous sight
To the beholders. On a sudden thence
Starting, he pluck'd from off the robe she wore
A golden buckle, that adorn'd her side,
And buried in his eyes the sharpen'd point,
Crying, he ne'er again would look on her,
Never would see his crimes or miseries more,
Or those whom, guiltless, he could ne'er behold,
Or those to whom he now must sue for aid.
His lifted eyelids then, repeating still
These dreadful plaints, he tore; while down his
cheeks
Fell showers of blood: such fate the wretched pair
Sustain'd, partakers in calamity;
Fall'n from a state of happiness (for none
Were happier once than they) to groans and death,
Reproach, and shame, and every human wo.
Cho. And where is now the poor unhappy man?
Mrs. "Open the doors," he cries, "and let all
Thebes
Behold his parents' murderer!" adding words
Not to be uttered: banish'd now he says
He must be, nor, devoted as he is
By his own curse, remain in this sad place.
He wants a kind conductor, and a friend
To help him now, for 'tis too much to bear.
But you will see him soon; for lo! the doors
Are open'd, and you will behold a sight
That would to pity move his deadliest foe.

Enter Œdipus.

Cho. O horrid sight! more dreadful spectacle
Than e'er these eyes beheld! What madness urged thee
To this sad deed? What power malignant heap'd
On thy poor head such complicated wo?
Unhappy man! Alas! I would have held
Some converse with thee, but thy looks affright me:
I cannot bear to speak to thee.

Œdi. O me!
Where am I, and whence comes the voice I hear?
Where art thou, fortune?

Cho. Changed to misery,
Dreadful to hear, and dreadful to behold.
Œdi. O cruel darkness! endless, hopeless night!
Shame, terrors, and unutterable wo!
More painful is the memory of my crimes
Than all the wounds my wild distraction made.

Cho. Thus doubly cursed, O prince! I wonder not
At thy affliction.

Œdi. Art thou here, my friend? I know thy voice: thou wouldst not leave the wretched;
Thou art my faithful, kind assistant still.

Cho. How couldst thou thus deprive thyself of sight?
What madness drove thee to the desperate deed?
What god inspired?

Œdi. Apollo was the cause;

1245 By delivering the oracle which foretold that Œdipus should kill his father, and afterward pronouncing the dreadful sentence against the murderer
He was, my friends, the cause of all my woes;
But for these eyes, myself did quench their light;
I want not them. What use were they to me,
But to discover scenes of endless wo?
 Cho. 'Tis but too true.

Œd. What pleasure now remains For Œdipus? He cannot joy in aught
To sight or ear delightful. Curse on him,
Who e'er he was, that loosen'd my bound feet,
And saved me, in Cithæron's vale, from death!
I owe him nothing; had I perish'd then,
Much happier had it been for you, my friends,
And for myself.

Cho. I too could wish thou hadst.
Œd. I should not then have murdered Laius;
then
I had not ta'en Jocasta to my bed:
But now I am a guilty wretch, the son
Of a polluted mother, father now
To my own brother: all that's horrible
To nature is the lot of Œdipus.

Cho. Yet must I blame this cruel act; for, sure,
The loss of sight is worse than death itself.

Œd. I care not for thy counsel or thy praise;
For with what eyes could I have e'er beheld
My honour'd father in the shades below,
Or my unhappy mother, both destroy'd
By me? This punishment is worse than death;
And so it should be. Sweet had been the sight
Of my dear children; them I could have wish'd
To gaze on; but I must never see
Or them, or this fair city, or the palace
Where I was born: deprived of every bliss
By my own lips, which doom'd to banishment
The murderer of Laius, and expelled
The impious wretch, by gods and men accursed;—
Could I behold them after this? O, no!
Would I could now with equal ease remove
My hearing too, be deaf as well as blind,
And from another entrance shut out wo!
To want our senses, in the hour of ill,
Is comfort to the wretched. O Cithæron!
Why didst thou e'er receive me, or, received, 1285
Why not destroy, that men might never know
Who gave me birth? O Polybus! O Corinth!
And thou, long time believed my father's palace!
O, what a foul disgrace to human nature
Didst thou receive beneath a prince's form! 1290
Impious myself, and from an impious race.
Where is my splendour now? O Daulian path!
The shady forest, and the narrow pass
Where three ways meet, who drank a father's blood,
Shed by these hands; do you not still remember
The horrid deed, and what, when here I came, 1296
Follow'd more dreadful? Fatal nuptials! you
Produced me, you returned me to the womb
That bare me: thence relations horrible
Of fathers, sons, and brothers came: of wives,
Sisters, and mothers, sad alliance! all 1301
That man holds impious and detestable.
But what in act is vile, the modest tongue
Should never name. Bury me, hide me, friends,
From every eye! destroy me, cast me forth 1305
To the wide ocean! let me perish there;
Do any thing to shake off hated life.
Seize me! approach, my friends! you need not fear,
Polluted though I am, to touch me. None
Shall suffer for my crimes but I alone. 1310

Ceo. In most fit time, my lord, the noble Creon
This way advances: he can best determine,
And best advise; sole guardian now of Thebes,
To him thy power devolves.

1288 That is, the palace of Polybus King of Corinth, the supposed father of Ædipus, who brought him up as his own, and educated him accordingly.

1306 Alluding to a superstitious notion among the ancients, that it was dangerous even to touch an accursed person, or one seemingly visited with misfortunes by the gods.
OEDIPUS TYRANNUS.—ACT V. 285

ŒDL. What shall I say?
Can I apply to him for aid, whom late I deeply injured by unjust suspicion?

[Exit Messenger.

Enter CREON.

CRE. I come not, prince, to triumph o'er thy woes With vile reproach; I pity thy misfortunes:
But, O my Thebans! if you do not fear
The censure of your fellow-citizens,
At least respect the all-creating eye
Of Phæbus, who beholds you thus exposing
To public view a wretch accursed, polluted,
Whom neither earth can bear, nor sun behold,
Nor holy shower besprinkle. Take him hence,
Within the palace: those who are by blood United should alone be witnesses
Of such calamity.

ŒDL. O Creon! thou
The best of men, and I the worst! How kind
Thou art to visit me! O! by the gods
Let me entreat thee, since, beyond my hopes,
Thou art so good, now hear me: what I ask
Concerns thee most.

CRE. What is it thou desirest
Thus ardently?

ŒDL. I beg thee banish me
From Thebes this moment, to some land remote,
Where I may ne'er converse with man again.

CRE. Myself had long since done it, but the gods
Must be consulted first.

ŒDL. Their will is known
Already, and their oracle declared
The guilty parricide should die.

CRE. It hath;
But, as it is, 'twere better to inquire
What must be done.

ŒDL. For such a wretch as I,
Wouldst thou again explore the will of Heaven?
Oed. Thy hapless fate should teach us to believe
And reverence the gods.

Cre. Now, Creon, list: I beg thee, I conjure thee, let a tomb
I cannot hope this city now will deign
To keep me here. O Creon! let me go,
And seek the solitary mountain's top,
My own Cithæron, by my parents doom'd
Long since to be the grave of Oedipus:
There would I die, as they decreed I should.
Alas! I cannot, must not perish yet,
Till I have suffer'd evils worse than death,
For I was only saved to be unhappy;
But I must meet my fate, whate'er it be.
My sons are men, and wheresoever fortune
May place them, cannot want the means of life.
They shall not burden thee; but O, my friend!
What will become of my unhappy daughters,
With tenderest love, beneath a father's hand
Cherish'd so long? O! take them to thy care,
Thou best of men! O! might I but embrace them,
But shed a tear o'er their disastrous fate;
Might I be suffer'd but to touch them here;
I should rejoice, and think I saw them still.
But hark! methinks e'en now I hear the voice
Of my dear daughters. Hath the gracious Creon,
In pity to my woes, already brought
My children to me? Is it so?

Cre. It is:
Thy wishes are prevented; they are here.

Enter Daughters of Oedipus.

Oed. May Heaven reward thee for this goodness
to me,
And give thee much more bliss than I have known!
Now, my dear children! come towards me, come
Towards your father and your—brother: see
These sightless eyes, pierced by my own mad hands;
Behold that wretched father who begat you
unknowingly on her who gave me birth.
I cannot see you now; I can but weep
Your fate, to think what hours of wretchedness
You have to know hereafter. Whither now
Must my poor children fly? From every feast, joyless,
Joyless, with grief and shame, shall you return;
And when the time shall come when riper years
Should give you to the nuptial bed, who then,
Careless of fame, will let his child partake
The infamy of my abhorred race,
Sprung from a wretch accursed, who kill'd his father,
And from the womb that bare him did beget
You, my unhappy daughters! Such reproach
Must still be yours, to virgin solitude
Devoted ever and a barren bed.
Son of Menoeceus! thou alone art left
Their father now; for O! Jocasta's dead,
And I am—nothing: do not then forsake
Thy kindred; nor, deserted and forlorn,
Suffer them still, in penury and wo,
To wander helpless, in their tender age.
Remember, they have no support but thee.
O generous prince! have pity on them; give me
Thy friendly hand in promise of thy aid.
To you, my daughters! had your early years
Permitted, I had given my last advice:
Too young for counsel, all I ask of you
Is but to pray the gods that my sad life
May not be long; but yours, my children! crown'd
With many days, and happier far than mine.
Cæs. It is enough: go in; thy grief transports thee
Beyond all bounds.
Oed. 'Tis hard, but I submit.
Cæs. The time demands it; therefore go.
O Creon!
Know'st thou what now I wish?
Cre. What is it? Speak.
OEdi. That I may quit this fatal place.
Cre. Thou ask'st
What Heaven alone can grant.
OEdi. Alas! to Heaven 1416
I am most hateful.
Cre. Yet shalt thou obtain
What thou desirest.
OEdi. Shall I indeed?
Cre. Thou shalt;
I never say aught that I do not mean. 1419
OEdi. Then let me go: may I depart?
Cre. Thou mayst;
But leave thy children.
OEdi. Do not take them from me.
Cre. Thou must not always have thy will; already
Thou hast suffer'd for it.
Cho. Thebans! now behold
The great, the mighty Oedipus, who once
The sphinx's dark enigma could unfold; 1425
Who less to fortune than to wisdom owed;
In virtue, as in rank, to all superior;
Yet fallen at last to deepest misery.
Let mortals hence be taught to look beyond
The present time, nor dare to say a man 1430
Is happy, till the last decisive hour
Shall close his life without the taste of wo.
ŒDIPUS COLONEUS.
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Œdipus.
Creon.
Antigone, } daughters of Œdipus.
Ismene,
Polynices, son of Œdipus.
Theseus, king of Athens.
An Athenian.
Messenger.
Attendants on Creon, Theseus, and Ismene.
Chorus, composed of ancient men of Athens.
OEDIPUS COLONEUS.

ARGUMENT.

This tragedy is a continuation of the history of OEdipus; who, condemned to perpetual banishment from Thebes, arrived at last with his daughter Antigone, at Coloneus, a little hill in the neighbourhood of Athens sacred to the Furies, where he solicited and obtained the protection of King Theseus. In this retreat he was overtaken by his daughter Ismene. In the mean time, Creon, having learned from the oracle that prosperity awaited the country which should possess the bones of OEdipus, endeavoured to remove him by entreaty or force; but the power of Theseus soon compelled him to relinquish the attempt. At this juncture Polynices arrived, with the design of reconciling his father to his intended invasion of Thebes; but the exiled monarch uttered the bitterest imprecations on his impious purpose, and prophesied the horrible fate which awaited him. Finding his end fast approaching, he sent for Theseus, and informed him that an uninterrupted course of prosperity would befall Athens so long as his burial-place was revealed to no one but the reigning monarch of the country. Having then dismissed his daughters, and being left alone with Theseus, he resigned himself to his fate; while the king faithfully complied with his injunctions of concealing the circumstances of his death and interment.

ACT I.

Scene, a grove, at the entrance to the temple of the Furies.

OEDIPUS, ANTIGONE.

OEdi. Where are we now, my dear Antigone? Know'st thou the palace? Will any here afford Their scanty alms to a poor wanderer, The banish'd OEdipus? I ask not much,
Yet less receive; but I am satisfied:
Long time hath made my woes familiar to me,
And I have learn'd to bear calamity.
But tell me, daughter! if thou seest a place
Or sacred, or profane, where I may rest:
There set me down; from some inhabitant
A chance but we may learn where now we are,
And act (so strangers ought) as he directs us.

Ant. O, Oedipus! my poor, unhappy father!
Far as my eyes can reach, I see a city,
With lofty turrets crown'd; and, if I err not,
This place is sacred, by the laurel shade,
Olive and vine thick planted, and the songs
Of nightingale sweet warbling through the grove.
Here sit thee down, and rest thy wearied limbs
On this rude stone; 'tis a long way for age
Like thine to travel.

Oed. Place me here, and guard
A sightless wretch.

Ant. Alas! at such a time
Thou need'st not tell Antigone her duty.

Oed. Know'st thou not where we are?

Ant. As I have learn'd
From passing travellers, not far from Athens;
The place I know not. Would you that I go,
And straight inquire? But now I need not leave thee,

For, lo! a stranger comes this way; ev'n now
He stands before you: he will soon inform us.

Enter an Athenian.

Oed. Stranger! thou com'st in happy hour to
tell us

What much we wish to know; let me then ask thee—

Ath. Ask nothing: speak not till thou art removed
From off that hallow'd spot where now thou stand'st,
By human footsteps not to be profaned.

Oed. To whom then is it sacred?
A TH. ’Tis a place, 35
Where but to tread is impious, and to dwell
Forbidden: where the dreadful goddesses,
Daughters of Earth and Night, alone inhabit.

O E D I. Ha! let me hear their venerable names
A TH. By other names in other climes adored, 40
The natives here call them Eumenides,
The all-seeing Powers.

O E D I. O! that they would but smile
Propitious, and receive a suppliant’s prayer,
That I might never leave this blest abode!
A TH. What dost thou mean?
O E D I. It suits my sorrows well. 45
A TH. I must inform the citizens; till then
Remain.

O E D I. O! do not scorn a wretched exile,
But tell me, stranger!—

A TH. Speak; I scorn thee not.

O E D I. What place is this?
A TH. I’ll tell you what I know.

This place is sacred all: great Neptune here 50
Presides, and he who bears the living fire,
Titan Prometheus; where thou tread’st, is called
The brazen way, the bulwark of our state:
From this equestrian hill, their safest guard,
The neighbouring villagers their general name 55
Derive, thence called Colonians all.

O E D I. But say,
Are there who dwell here then?

37 These dreadful goddesses were the three Furies, Alecto,
Megara, and Tisiphone.

52 Prometheus, according to the tales of the heathens concem-
ing him, was supposed to have stolen fire from heaven, and
with it to have made men; for which impiety he was punished
by the gods in the same manner as the rebellious Titans; he is
therefore called, in this place, Titan Prometheus.

53 Near this brazen way was supposed to be the passage to
Hades, or the shades, by which Pluto conveyed the ravished
Proserpine to his dominions.
ATH. There are, and called
From him they worship.
ŒDI Is the power supreme
Lodged in the people's voice, or in the king?
ATH. 'Tis in the king.
ŒDI. Who is he?
ATH. Theseus, son 60
Of Ægeus, their last sovereign.
Who will go
And tell him—
ATH. What, to come and meet thee here?
ŒDI. To tell him that a little help bestow'd
Would amply be repaid.
ATH. Why, what couldst thou do,
Dark as thou art?
ŒDI. My words will not be so. 65
ATH. Then mark me, that thou err not; for to me
Thy fortune seems ill suited to thy nature,
Which is most noble; therefore stay thou here
Till I return; I will not go to Athens,
But ask these villagers, who sojourn here,
If thou mayst stay. [Exit Athenian.
ŒDI. My daughter, is he gone?
ANT. He is, and thou mayst safely speak, for I
Alone am with thee.
ŒDI. Goddesses revered:
Since in your seats my wearied steps have found
Their first repose, not inauspicious smile 75
On Phæbus and on me! For, know, the god,
Who 'gainst unhappy Œdipus denounced
Unnumber'd woes, foretold that here at last
I should have rest, within this hallow'd grove,
These hospitable shades, and finish here 80
A life of misery. "Happy those," he said,
"Who should receive me, glorious their reward;
And wo to them who strove to drive me hence
Inhuman:" this he promised to confirm
By signs undoubted; thunder, or the sound 85
Of dreadful earthquake, or the lightning's blast
Launc'h'd from the arm of Jove: I doubt it not,
From you some happy omen hither led
My prosperous steps. That first to you he came
Pure to the pure, and here on this rude seat
Reposed me, could not be the work of chance.
Wherefore, ye Powers! as Phœbus hath decreed,
Here let me find a period of my woes,
Here end my wretched life; unless the man,
Who long hath groan'd beneath the bitterest ills
That mortals feel, still seem to merit more.
Daughters of ancient Night! O, hear me now!
And thou, from great Minerva call'd the best
And noblest city, Athens! pity me;
Pity the shadow of poor OEdipus!

For, O! I am not what I was:

ANT. No more;
Behold, a venerable band approach
Of ancient natives, come perchance to seek thee.

OEd. I've done; Antigone! remove me hence,
And hide me in the grove, till, by their words,
Listening I learn their purpose; such foreknowledge
Will best direct us how to act hereafter. [Exeunt.

Enter Chorus.

Cho. Where is he? Look, examine, search around
For this abandon'd exile, of mankind
The most profane, doubtless some wretched stranger:
Who else had dared on this forbidden soil
To tread, where dwell the dreadful deities
We tremble ev'n to name; and as we pass,
Dare not behold, but silently revere,
Or soft with words of fairest omen greet?

Of these regardless, here we come to find
An impious wretch. I look around the grove,
But still he lurks unseen.

Enter OEdipus, Antigone.

OEd. Behold me here;
For by your words I find you look for me.
Cho. [looking steadfastly at him.] Dreadful his voice, and terrible his aspect! 
Œdi. I am no outlaw; do not look thus on me.
Cho. Jove the defender! Who is this old man?
Œdi. One on whom Fortune little hath bestow'd
To call for reverence from you; that, alas!
Is but too plain; thus by another's eyes
Conducted here, and on her aid depending,
Old as I am.
Cho. Alas! and wert thou born
Thus sightless! Full of sorrow and of years
Indeed thou seem'st; but do not let on us
Thy curse devolve: thou hast transgress'd the bounds
Prescribed to mortals: shun the hallow'd grove,
Where, on the grassy surface, to the powers
A welcome offering flows, with honey mix'd,
The limpid stream; unhappy stranger! hence,
Away, begone: thou seest 'tis a long space
Divides us. Dost thou hear me, wretched exile?
This instant, if thou dost, depart; then speak,
But not before.
Œdi. Antigone, my daughter!
What's to be done?
Ant. Obey the citizens;
Give me thy hand.
Œdi. I will; and now, my friends! Confiding thus in you, and thus removing,
As you directed, let me not be injured.
Cho. Thou shalt not: be assured, that thou art safe;
None shall offend or drive thee hence.
Œdi. Yet more
Must I approach?
Cho. A little farther still.
Œdi. Will this suffice?
Cho. Remove him this way, virgin!
Thou hear'st us.
Ant. Thou must follow me, my father.
Weak as thou art: we are unhappy strangers,
And must submit: whate'er the city hates
Content to hate, and what she loves to love. 150
Œdi. Lead me, my daughter! to some hallow'd
spot
For mutual converse fit, nor let us strive
With dire necessity.
Cho. Stop there, nor move
Beyond that stone.
Œdi. Thus then?
Cho. It is enough.
Œdi. Where shall I sit.
Cho. A little forward lean 155
And rest thee there. [taking hold of him.
Ant. Alas! 'tis my sad office
(Let me perform it) to direct thy steps;
To this loved hand commit thy aged limbs:
I will be careful. [she seats him on the stone
Œdi. O unhappy state!
Cho. Now, wretched stranger! tell us who thou
art, 160
Thy country and thy name.
Œdi. Alas, my lords!
A poor abandon'd exile; but, O! do not—
Cho. What say'st thou?
Œdi. Do not ask me who I am;
Inquire no farther.
Cho. Wherefore?
Œdi. My sad race—
Cho. Speak on.
Œdi. [turning to Antigone.] My daughter! how
shall I proceed? 165
Cho. Thy race, thy father—
Œdi. O Antigone!
What do I suffer?
Ant. Speak, thou canst not be
More wretched than thou art.
Œdi. I will, for, O!
It cannot be conceal'd.
Cho. You do delay;
Inform us straight.
Œdi. Know you the son of Laius? 170
Cho. Alas!
Œdi. The race of Labdacus?
Cho. O Jove!
Œdi. The unhappy Œdipus.
Cho. And art thou he?
Œdi. Be not affrighted at my words.
Cho. O heaven!
Œdi. Wretch that I am! What will become of me?
Cho. Away! begone! fly from this place!
Œdi. Then where 175
Are all your promises? are they forgotten?
Cho. Justice divine will never punish those
Who but repay the injury they receive:
And fraud doth merit fraud for its reward.
Wherefore begone, and leave us, lest once more 180
Our city be compell'd to force thee hence.
Ant. O my kind friends! as you revere the name
Of virtue, though you will not hear the prayers
Of my unhappy father, worn with age,
And laden with involuntary crimes;
Yet hear the daughter pleading for her sire,
And pity her, who with no evil eye
Beholds you, but, as one of the same race,
Born of one common father, here entreats
Your mercy to the unhappy; for on you,
As on some god alone, we must rely.
Then grant this wish'd-for boon; O! grant it now;
By all that's dear to thee, thy sacred word,
Thy interest, thy children, and thy god:
"Tis not in mortal to avoid the crime 195
Which Heaven hath pre-ordain'd.
Cho. We pity thee,
Daughter of Œdipus! we pity him,
And his misfortunes; but, of wrath divine
Still fearful, dare not alter our decree.
Œdi. Now who shall trust to glory and fair fame?
What shall it profit, that your pious city
Was once for hospitable rites renown'd,
That she alone would pity and relieve
The afflicted stranger? Is she so to me,
Who drives me hence, and trembles at a name?
Me you can never fear; and for my crimes,
I am the sufferer, not the offender. What
Touching my father I have spoke (alas!
If 'tis for that you do abhor me thus),
Was I to blame? The injury received
I but repaid, and therefore had I known
The crime I acted, I were guiltless still.
Whither I came, I came unknowingly;
Not so they acted who have banish'd me.
By your commands already here removed,
O! by the gods, preserve, assist me now:
If you revere them, do not thus despise
What they decree; their eyes behold the good,
And view the evil man, nor shall the wicked
Escape their wrath: use not their sacred names
To cover crimes, and stain the fame of Athens.
As you receive the suppliant, O! remember
Your plighted faith, preserve me, save me now;
Look not contemptuous on this wretched form,
Or cast reproach unmerited: I come
Nor impious nor profane; and with me bring
To Athens much of profit and renown,
As, when your king arrives, you all shall know:
Meantime despise me not.

Cho.

Old man! thy words
Are full of weight, and merit our observance.
If those who here preside but know thy purpose,
It doth suffice.

Oed. But say, where is the king?

Cho. Within his palace; but a messenger
Is gone to fetch him hither.

Oed. O my friends!
Think you a sightless wretch like me will move
His pity or his care, that he will come?
Cho. Most readily, when he shall hear the name
Of Oedipus.

Oed. And who shall tell it him!

Cho. The journey's long; but passing travellers
Will watch the tale, and he must hear it soon. 240
Fear not; thy story is already known
On every side; 'twill quicken his slow steps,
And bring him instant hither.

Oed. May he come
In happy hour to Athens and to me! 244
He will; what good man doth not love his country?

Ant. O Jove! what shall I say or think? My
father!

Oed. What says my daughter?

Ant. This way bent, behold,
On a Sicilian steed, a woman comes,
Her face conceal'd by a Thessalian vail,
To shield her from the sun. Am I deceived, 250
Or is it she? I know not what to think.
It is my sister; now she smiles upon me:
It must, it can be none but my Ismene.

Oed. Who? my Antigone?

Ant. It is thy daughter,
My sister; but her voice will soon convince thee. 255

Enter Ismene and Attendant.

Ism. O the sweet sounds! a father and a sister!
What pains have I not suffer'd in the search,
And now for grief can scarce behold you!

Oed. My daughter! art thou here?

Ism. Alas, my father!

How terribly thou look'st!

Oed. From the same blood 260
The father and the daughter.

Ism. Wretched race!

Oed. And art thou come, my daughter?

Ism. I have reach'd thee
With toil and labour.
ŒDIPUS COLONEUS.—ACT I.

ŒDI. Touch me, O my child!
ISM. Let me embrace you both.
ŒDI. Both miserable!
ISM. [they all embrace.] Join then a third as wretched as yourselves.
OEDE. Ismene! wherefore art thou come?
ISM. My care for thee, my father! brought me here.
ŒDI. For me?
ISM. That I might speak to thee: this faithful slave alone conducted me. [pointing to her Attendant.
ŒDE. Thy brother, say,
What are they doing?
ISM. They are—what they are: For, O! between them deadliest discord reigns.
ŒDEI. How like the unmanly sons of Egypt’s clime,
Where the men sit inglorious at the loom,
And to their wives leave each domestic care!
Ev’n thus, my sons! who should have labour’d for me,
Like women idly sit at home, while you
Perform their office, and with filial care
Attend a wretched father: this kind maid,
[pointing to Antigone
Ev’n from her infant days, hath wander’d long
An exile with me, and supported still
My feeble age; oft through the savage woods,
Naked and hungry, by the wintry storms,
Or scorching heats afflicted, led me on,
And gave me food unmindful of her own.
Thou too, Ismene! wert my faithful guard,
When I was driven forth: and now art come
to tell thy father what the gods declare.
A stranger now to Thebes, I know not what
Hath pass’d between them: thou hast some sad news,
I know thou hast, to tell thy wretched father.
ISM. What I have suffer’d in the search of thee,
I pass in silence o’er, since to repeat
Were but, alas! to double my misfortunes.
I only came to tell thee the sad fate
Of thy unhappy sons; awhile they seem'd
As if they meant to yield the throne to Creon,
Nor stain their guilty hands with Theban blood,
Mindful of that pollution which remained
On thy devoted race; but now some god,
Or their own wicked minds, have raised a flame
Of dire contention, which shall gain the power
Supreme, and reign in Thebes: Eteocles
Hath drove his elder Polynices forth,
Who, now an exile, seeks (as Fame reports)
The Argians, and, in solemn contract join'd
With these his new allies, would raise their fame
Above the stars; and sink our Thebes in ruin.
These are not words alone, 'tis now in act.
Alas! ev'n now I fear; nor know I when
The gods will take compassion on thy woes.

Œdi. Hast thou no hope they'll pity me?
I have;
Their oracles have said it.
Œdi. Ha! said what,
My daughter? Tell me, what have they declared?
Ism. The time would come, they said, when Thebes
once more
Must seek thee, dead or living, for her safety.
Œdi. Why, what could such a wretch as I do for
them?
Ism. Their only hope, they say, is placed in thee.
Œdi. I, that am nothing, grown so powerful!
Whence
Can it proceed?
Ism. The gods, who once depress'd thee,
Now raise thee up again.
Œdi. It cannot be;
Who falls in youth will never rise in age.
Ism. Know, for this very purpose Creon comes;
Ere long thou mayst expect him.
Œdi. What to do,
My daughter?
Ism. To remove thee hence, and place thee
Nearer to Thebes, but not within her borders. 325
Œdi. If not within her walls, what can it be
To them?
Ism. Thy tomb, raised in a foreign land,
They fear would prove most fatal.
Œdi. But how know they
It must be so, unless some god declared it?
Ism. For this alone they wish to have thee near
The borders, in their power, and not thy own. 331
Œdi. To bury me at Thebes?
Ism. That cannot be;
Thy crime forbids it.
Œdi. Then I'll never go.
Ism. A time will come when they shall feel thy
vengeance.
Œdi. What strange vicissitude can e'er produce
This wish'd event?
Ism. Thy wrath, when at thy tomb 336
They shall be forced to meet.
Who told thee this?
Ismene, say.
Ism. The sacred ministers
Of Delphi.
Œdi. Came it from Apollo's shrine?
Ism. On their return to Thebes they did report it.
Œdi. My sons, did they hear aught of this? 341
Ism. Both heard,
And know it well.
Œdi. Yet, impious as they are,
Preferr'd a kingdom to their father's love.
Ism. With grief I tell thee what with grief I heard.
Œdi. O! may the gods doom them to endless
strife! 345
Ne'er may the battle cease, till Œdipus
Himself shall end it! Then, nor he who bears
The sceptre now should long maintain the throne,
Nor Polynices e'er to Thebes return:
They should not live, who drove a parent forth 350
To misery and exile; left by those
Who should have loved, supported, and revered him.
I know they say, the city but complied
With my request; I ask'd for banishment,
Nor then I ask'd it: in my desperate mind,
When first I raged, I wish'd indeed for death;
It had been grateful then: but no kind friend
Would minister the boon: at length, my grief
Gave way; and when they saw my troubled soul
Had taken ample vengeance on itself,
After long stay, the city drove me forth;
And those who could have saved me, my base sons,
Deaf to a father's prayers, permit me still
To roam abroad, in poverty and exile:
From these alone, far as their tender sex
Can help me, I receive the means of life,
All the sweet comfort, food, or needful rest
Earth can afford me now; while to my sons
A throne was dearer than a father’s love.
But they shall never gain me for their friend,
Ne'er reign in Thebes; these oracles declare
They never shall. I do remember too
Another prophecy, which Phebus erst
Deliver'd to me: let 'em send their Creon,
Or any other powerful citizen,
To drag me hence: my hospitable friends,
If to these all-protecting deities
Who here preside, you too will lend your aid,
Athens shall find in me its best defence,
And vengeance strike the foes of Oedipus.

Cho. Thou and thy daughters well deserve our pity;
And, for thy words are full of promised good
To our loved city, I will tell thee all
'Tis meet thou shouldst perform.

OEdi. My best of friends!

Instruct me; I am ready to obey.

Cho. An expiation instant must thou make
To the offended powers, whose sacred seat
Thou hast profaned.
Œdipus Coloneus.—ACT I.

Œd. But how must it be done?
Cho. First, with pure hands from the ever-flowing spring,
Thy due libations pour.
Œd. What follows then?
Cho. Take thou a cup wrought by some skilful hand;
Bind it with wreaths around.
Œd. Of leaves or threads Composed?
Cho. Of wool, fresh from the new-shorn lamb.
Œd. Is there aught else?
Cho. Then, turning to the sun,
Make thy libations.
Œd. From the cup, thou say'st?
Cho. The water from three fountains drawn; and last,
Remember, none be left.
Œd. With that alone Must it be fill'd?
Cho. Water with honey mix'd,
No wine; this pour on the earth—
Œd. What then remains?
Cho. Take in thy hand of olive boughs thrice nine;
And offering these, begin thy humble prayer.
Œd. But how address them? That concerns me near.
Cho. Their name, thou know'st, implies benevolent;
Entreat them, therefore, kindly now to prove
Benevolent to thee; this by thyself,
Or by another for thee. but, remember,
Low be the voice, and short the supplication.
That done, return; be careful to perform it.
I may assist thee then with confidence;
But, if thou dost it not, must tremble for thee.
Œd. My daughters, heard you this?
Ant. We did; command
What's to be done.
What I can never do, Powerless and blind as I am; one of you, My daughters, must perform it.

One alone May do the task of many, when the mind Is active in it.

Hence then, quick, away; But do not leave me here alone: these limbs, Without a guide will never find their way.

Father! I go: but how to find the place, I know not.

Stranger! t'other side of the grove; There, some inhabitant will soon inform thee, If thou shouldst want assistance or instruction.

Meantime, Antigone! remain thou here, And guard our father well: cares are not cares When we endure them for a parent’s sake. [Exit.

Stranger! albeit we know ’tis most ungrateful To raise the sad remembrance of past woes, Yet would we gladly hear—

What wouldst thou know?

The cause of thy unhappy state.

Alas!

By all the sacred hospitable rites, I beg thee do not ask me to reveal it; My crimes are horrible.

Already fame Hath spread them wide, and still talks loudly of them:

Tell us the truth.

Alas!

Let me beseech thee.

O me!

Comply: ask what thou wilt of me, And thou shalt have it.

I have suffer’d much:

The gods can witness, ’twas against my will: I knew not of it.
OEIDIPUS COLONEUS.—ACT I.

CHO. Knew not what?
OEID. The city,
Unknowing too, bound me in horrid nuptials.
CHO. And didst thou then pollute, as fame reports,
Thy mother's bed?
OEID. O death to hear! I did:

Here, here they are.
CHO. Who's there?
OEID. My crimes! my daughters!
CHO. Daughters and sisters of their father? O!
'Tis horrible indeed.
OEID. 'Tis wo on wo.
CHO. Great Jove! both daughters of one hapless
  mother!
What hast thou suffer'd!
OEID. IIs not to be borne!
CHO. Didst thou then perpetrate the horrid deed?
OEID. O no.
CHO. Not do it?
OEID. I received from Thebes
A fatal gift; would I had never taken it!
CHO. And art thou not a murderer too?
OEID. What's that
Thou say'st?
CHO. Thy father—
OEID. Thou add'st grief to grief.
CHO. Didst thou not murder him?
OEID. I did: but hear—
CHO. Hear what?
OEID. The cause.
CHO. What cause?
OEID. I'll tell thee: know then,
I murder'd others too; yet by the laws
I stand absolved: 'twas done in ignorance.
CHO. [Seeing Theseus, who enters.] But, lo! the
  king, Ægean Theseus, comes:
The fame of thee hath brought him here already.

449 Meaning the throne of Thebes, with Jocasta, whom he
married.
The O son of Laius! long ere this the tale
Of thy disastrous fate, by many a tongue
Related, I had heard; thy eyes torn forth
By thy own desperate hand, and now I see
It was too true; thy garb, and dreadful aspect
Speak who thou art. Unhappy Õedipus,
I come to ask in pity to thy woes,
What's thy request to Athens or to me;
Thine, or this hapless virgin on thy steps
Attendant, speak; for large must be the boon
I would refuse thee: I have known too well
(Myself a wretched wanderer) the woes
Of cruel exile, not to pity thine.
Of toils and dangers, in a foreign land,
Much have I suffer'd; therefore not to me
Shall the poor stranger ever sue in vain
For aid and safety; mortals as we are,
Uncertain ever is to-morrow's fate,
Alike unknown to Theseus and to thee.
Œn. Theseus! thy words declare thy noble
nature,
And leave me little to reply: thou know'st
My story, whom and whence I am; no more
Remains, but that I tell thee my request,
And we have done.
The. Proceed then, and inform me.
Œn. I come to give this wretched body to thee,
To sight ungracious, but of worth more dear
To thee than fairest forms could boast.
The. What worth?
Œn. Hereafter thou shalt know, not now.
The. But when shall we receive it?
Œn. When I am no more;
When thou shalt bury me.
The. Death is, it seems,
Thy chief concern, and life not worth thy care.
Œn. That will procure me all the means of life.
THE. And is this all thou ask'st, this little boon?
ŒDI. Not little is the strife which shall ensue. 491
THE. What strife? with whom? thy children or
my own?
ŒDI. Mine, Theseus! they would have me back
to Thebes.
THE. And wouldst thou rather be an exile here?
ŒDI. Once they refused me.
THE. Anger suits but ill
With low estate and miseries like thine. 496
ŒDI. Hear first, and then condemn me.
THE. Not unheard
All thou canst urge, would I reprove thee: speak.
ŒDI. O Theseus! I have borne the worst of ills.
THE. The curses on thy race?
ŒDI. O no; all Greece
Hath heard of them.
THE. What more than mortal wo 501
Afflicts thee then?
ŒDI. Ev'n this; my cruel sons
Have driven me from my country: never more
Must Thebes receive a parricide.
THE. Why then
Recall thee now, if thou must ne'er return?
ŒDI. Commanded by an oracle divine.
THE. Why, what doth it declare?
ŒDI. That Thebes shall yield
To thee and to thy arms.
THE. But whence shall spring
Such dire contention?
ŒDI. Dearest son of Ægeus!
From age and death exempt, the gods alone 510
Immortal and unchangeable remain,
While all things else fall by the hand of Time,
The universal conqueror: earth laments
Her fertile powers exhausted; human strength
Is withered soon; ev'n faith and truth decay,
And from their ashes fraud and falsehood rise:
Nor friendship long from man to man endures,
Or realm to realm: to each successive rise;
Bitter and sweet, and happiness and wo.
Athens and Thebes thou seest united now,
And all is well; but passing time shall bring
The fatal day (and slight will be the cause)
That soon shall change the bonds of amity
And holy faith, for feuds and deadliest hate.
Then buried long in earth, shall this cold corse
Drink their warm blood, which from the mutual
wound
Frequent shall flow: it must be as I tell thee,
If Jove be Jove, and great Apollo true.
But why should I reveal the fix'd decree
Of all-deciding Heaven? Permit me now
To end where I began: thy plighted faith
Once more confirm; and never shalt thou say
The wretched Ædipus to Theseus came
A useless and unprofitable guest,
If the immortal gods have not deceived me.

Cho. O king! already hath this man declared
The same good will to thee and to our country.

The. Can I reject benevolence and love
Like this, my friends? No; the common rites
Of hospitality, this altar here,
The witness of our mutual vows, forbid it.
He comes a suppliant to these goddesses,
And pays no little tribute both to me
And to my kingdom: he shall find a seat
Within my realms, for I revere his virtues.

If here it pleaseth him to stay, remember, [to the Chorus.

'Tis my command you guard this stranger well.
If thou wouldst rather go with me, thou mayst;
I leave it to thy choice. [to Ædipus.

Œdip. Reward them, Jove!

The. What says't thou, wilt thou follow me?
Œdip. I would, 550

If it were lawful; but it must be here;
This is the place—
The. For what? I'll not deny thee—
Oed. Where I must conquer those who banish'd me.
The. That would be glory and renown to this,
 Thy place of refuge.
Oed. If I may depend
On thy fair promise.
The. Fear not, I shall never betray my friend.
Oed. I will not bind thee to it
By oath, like those whom we suspect of ill.
The. Thou need'st not, Oedipus! my word's my oath.
Oed. How must I act then?
The. Fear'st thou aught?
Oed. I do;
A force will come against me.
The. Here's thy guard;
[Pointing to the Chorus.
These shall protect thee.
Oed. If thou goest, remember
And save me, Theseus!
The. Teach not me my duty.
Oed. Still am I fearful.
The. Theseus is not so.
Oed. Know'st thou not what they threaten'd?
The. This I know,
No power on earth shall wrest thee from this place.
Ofttimes the angry soul will vent its wrath
In idle threats, with high and empty words;
Which ever, as the mind is to itself
Restored, are—nothing; they may boast their strength,
And say they'll tear thee from me; but I tell thee,
The journey would be long and tedious to them.
They will not hazard it; they dare not: therefore
Be comforted; for if, by Phoebus sent,
Thou hither camest, thou art safe without my aid,
Ev'n if I leave thee safe; for know, the name
Of Theseus here sufficeth to protect thee.

[Exit Theseus]

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Thou art come in happy time,
Stranger! to this blissful clime,
Long for swiftest steeds renown'd,
Fertilest of the regions round,
Where, beneath the ivy shade,
In the dew-besprinkled glade,
Many a love-lorn nightingale
Warbles sweet her plaintive tale;
Where the vine in clusters pours
Her sweets, secured from wintry showers;
Nor scorching suns, nor raging storm
The beauties of the year deform;

ANTISTROPHE I.

Where the sweet narcissus growing,
Where the yellow crocus blowing,
Round the sacred altars twine,
Off'ring to the powers divine;
Where the pure springs perpetual flow,
Wat'ring the verdant meads below,
Which, with its earth-enriching waves
The fair Cephisus ever laves;
Where, with his ever-sporting train,
Bacchus wantons on the plain,
Pleased with the muses still to rove,
And golden Venus, queen of love.

STROPHE II.

Alone within this happy land,
Planted here by Nature's hand,
Which nor Asia's fertile plains,
Nor Pelops' spacious isle contains,
Pallas! thy sacred olive grows,
Striking terror on our foes;
ÆDIPUS COLONEUS.—ACT II.  

Ever free from hostile rage,  
From wanton youth, or greedy age;  
Happy in sage Minerva’s love,  
And guarded still by Moran Jove.  

ANTISTROPHE II.  
But nobler gifts and fairer fame,  
Athens! yet adorn thy name;  
Such wondrous gifts hath poured on thee  
Thy great protecting deity.  
Here first, obedient to command,  
Form’d by Neptune’s skilful hand,  
The steed was taught to know the rein,  
And bear the chariot o’er the plain;  
Here first along the rapid tide  
The stately vessels learn’d to ride,  
And swifter down the current flow  
Than Nereids cut the waves below.  
[Exeunt.

ACT II.  

ANTIGONE, ÆDIPUS, CHORUS.  

ANT. Great are thy praises, Attica! and now 624  
The time is come to show thou dost deserve them.  
new event  
Alarms thee?  
ANT. Creon, with a numerous band  
Of followers, comes this way.  
Œdi. O, now, my friends!  
If ever, help me.  
CHO. Fear not; we’ll protect thee  
Though I am old, the strength of Attica 630  
Is not decay’d.

Enter Creon, with Attendants.  

CRE. Most honour’d citizens!  
I see you look with eyes of fear upon me,  
Without a cause; for know, I came not here,
Intending aught of violence or ill
Against a city so renown'd in Greece
As yours hath ever been; I only came,
Commission'd by the state of Thebes, to fetch
This old man back, if by persuasion mild
I could induce him to return; not sent
By one alone, but the united voice
Of a whole people, who assign'd the task
To me, because, by blood united to him,
I felt for his misfortunes as my own.
Come, therefore, Oedipus! attend me home;
Thebes calls thee back; thy kingdom now demands thee;
By me she calls thee: listen to thy friend;
For surely Creon were the worst of men,
If he could look on woes like thine unmoved;
When I behold thee in a foreign land,
A wretched wand'r'er, forced to beg thy bread,
From place to place, with this unhappy maid,
Whom little did I think to see exposed
To misery and shame, of nuptial rites
Hopeless, and thus bereft of every aid.
O! 'tis reproach and infamy to us
And to our race; but 'tis already known,
And cannot be concealed. O Oedipus!
I here beseech thee, by our country's gods,
Return to Thebes; bid thou a kind farewell
(For she deserves it) to this noble city,
But still remember thy own dearer country.
Oedip. Thou daring hypocrite! whose specious wiles
Beneath fair semblance mean but to betray,
Why wouldst thou tempt me thus? why thus once more
Ensnare me in thy toils, and make me still
More wretched than I am? Long time oppress'd
By heaviest woes, I pined within my palace,
And longed for exile; but thou then refusedst
To let me go, till satiated with grief,
My soul at length was calm, and much I wish'd 670
To spend my few remaining years at home.
Then thou (for little did the kindred blood
Thou talk'st of then avail) didst banish me;
And now again thou com'st to make me wretched;
Because thou seest this kind benignant city 675
Embrace and cherish, thou wouldst drag me hence,
With sweetest words cov'ring thy bitter mind,
Professing love to those who choose it not.
He who denies his charitable aid
To the poor beggar in his utmost need, 680
And, if abundance comes, should offer that
Which is not wanted, little merits thanks.
Such is thy bounty now, in word alone,
And not in deed, the friend of OEdipus.
But I will tell them what thou art: thou camest not
To take me hence, but leave me in the borders 686
Of Thebes, that so thy kingdom may escape
The impending ills which this avenging city
Shall pour upon it: but 'twill come to pass
As I foretold; my evil genius still 690
Shall haunt thee, and my sons no more of Thebes
Inherit than shall serve them for a grave.
Thy country's fate is better known to me
Than to thyself, for my instruction comes
From surer guides, from Phæbus and from Jove. 695
Thy artful speech shall little serve thy purpose;
'Twill only hurt thy cause: therefore, begone;
I am not to be persuaded. Let me live
In quiet here; for, wretched as I am,
'Twill be some comfort to be far from thee. 700
Cæs. Think'st thou I heed thy words? Who'll suffer most
For this perverseness, thou or I?
OEdr. I trust
Thy little arts will naught avail with me
Or with my friends.
Cæs. Poor wretch! no time can cure
Thy follies; thy old age is grown delirious. 705
OEdi. Thou hast a hateful tongue; but few, how just
Soo'er they be, can always speak aright.
Cre. But to say much, and to say well, are things Which differ widely.
OEdi. What thou say'st, no doubt Is brief and proper too.
Cre. 'Twill hardly seem so 710 To those who think like thee.
OEdi. Away, nor dare Direct my steps, as if thou hadst the power To place me where thou wilt.
Cre. Remember all To witness this, for he shall answer it When he is mine.
OEdi. But who shall force me hence 715 Against the will of these my friends?
Cre. Their aid Is vain; already I have done what much Will hurt thee.
OEdi. Ha! what threats are these!
Cre. Thy daughters Must go with me: one is secured, and now, This moment will I wrest the other from thee. 720 OEdi. O me!
Cre. I'll give thee much more cause for grief.
OEdi. Hast thou my daughter?
Cre. Ay, and will have this.
OEdi. [to the Chorus.] What will you do, my friends? Will you forsake me?
Will you not drive this vile, abandon'd man Forth from your city?
Cho. Stranger? hence; away; 725 Thy actions are most shameful and unjust.
Cre. Slaves! do your office; bear her off by force If she consents not.
Ant. Whither shall I fly For aid? What god or man shall I implore To succour me?
Cho. Alas! what wouldst thou do?  
Cre. I touch not him, but I must have my own.  
Ant. O princes! aid me now.  
Cho. 'Tis most unjust.  
Cre. I say 'tis just.  
Cho. Then prove it.  
Cre. They are mine.  
Cho. O citizens!  
Ant. O, loose me! if you do not,  
You shall repent this violence.  
Cre. Go on;  
I will defend you.  
Œdi. He who injures me  
Offends the city.  
Cho. Said I not before  
It would be thus?  
Cre. [to the Chorus.] Let go the maid this instant.  
Cho. Command where thou hast power.  
Cre. Let her go.  
Cho. 'Begone thyself: what, ho! my countrymen!  
The city is in danger; haste, and save us.  
[Creon's followers seize on Antigone.  
Ant. I'm seized, my friends! O, help!  
Œdi. Where is my daughter?  
Ant. Torn from thee.  
Œdi. O! stretch forth thy hand.  
Ant. I cannot  
Cre. Away with her.  
Œdi. O wretched Œdipus!  
Cre. No longer shall these tender props support  
Thy feeble age. Since thou art still resolved,  
Against thyself, thy country, and thy friends,  
By whose command I come, remain perverse  
And obstinate, old man! but know, hereafter,  
Time will convince thee thou hast ever been  
Thy own worst foe; thy fiery temper still  
Must make thee wretched.  
Cho. Stranger! stir not hence.
CRE. I charge you, touch me not.
CRE. Thou shalt not go
Till thou restor'st the virgins.
CRE. I must have
A nobler ransom from your city; these
SHALL NOT SUFFICE.
CRE. What mean'st thou?
CRE. He shall go.

This OEdipus.
CRE. Thy threats are terrible.
CRE. I'll do it; and only he who governs here
SHALL HINDER ME.
OEdi. O insolence! Thou wilt not,
THOU DAR'ST NOT, FORCE ME.
CRE. Hold thy peace.
OEdi. Not even

The dreadful goddesses, who here preside,
Should bind my tongue from heaviest curses on thee;
For thou hast robb'd me of the only light
These eyes could boast. But may the all-seeing sun
Behold and punish thee and all thy race,
And load thy age with miseries like mine!
CRE. Inhabitants of Athens! hear ye this?
OEdi. They do, and see that but with fruitless words
I can repay the injuries I received;
For I am weak with age, and here alone.
CRE. No longer will I curb my just resentment,
But force thee hence.
OEdi. O me!
CHO. What boldness, stranger!
Could make thee hope to do a deed like this
Unpunish'd?
CRE. 'Tis resolved.
CHO. Our Athens then
IS FALLEN INDEED, AND IS NO MORE A CITY.
CRE. In a just cause the weak may foil the mighty.
OEDIPUS COLONEUS.—ACT II.  

OED. Hear how he threatens—
CHO. What he'll ne'er perform.
CRE. That Jove alone can tell.
CHO. Shall injuries like these be suffer'd?
CRE. Call it injury. Thou mayst; 'tis such as thou perforce must bear.
CHO. This is too much: ye rulers of the land!
My fellow-citizens! come forth, and save us.

Enter THESEUS.
The. Whence is this clamour? Wherefore am I call'd
From sacred rites, at Neptune's altar paid,
Our guardian god? Say, what's the cause, that thus
In haste I'm summon'd hither?
OED. O my friend! (For well I know thy voice) most cruelly
Have I been treated by this man.
THe. Who did it?
OED. This Creon, whom thou seest, hath ravish'd from me
My only help, my daughters.
THE. Ha! what sayest thou? 'Tis as I tell thee.
THe. [to his attendants.] Quick, despatch my serv-

Fly to the altar, summon all my people,
Horsemen and foot; give o'er the sacrifice,
And instant to the double gate repair,
Lest with the virgins the base ravishers
Escape unpunish'd, and my guest, thus injured,
Laugh me to scorn for cowardice. Away!
Were I to punish this oppressor here

[turning to Creon.

As my resentment bids, and he deserves,
He should this instant fall beneath my rage:
But the same justice he to others deals,
Himself shall meet from us. Thou shalt not go,
Till those, whom thou didst basely ravish hence,
Are brought before me: ’twas unlike thyself,
Unworthy of thy country and thy race,
To enter thus a cultivated city,
Where law and justice reign, with violence
And rapine snatching what thy fancy pleased.
Or didst thou think I ruled a desert land,
Or that my people were a race of slaves,
And Theseus but the shadow of a king?
Thebes never taught thee such destructive lessons,
For she abhors injustice: when she hears
That Creon, thus despising sacred laws,
Hath taken with brutal violence my right,
And would have stolen a wretched suppliant from me,
She’ll not approve thy conduct. Say, I went
To Thebes, how just soever were the cause,
I should not seize on aught without the leave
Of him who govern’d there; but, as becomes
A stranger, bear myself unblamed by all.
Thou hast disgraced thy country and thy friends,
And weight of years hath taken thy senses from thee.
Again I say, restore the virgins to me,
Or stay with me thyself, for so thou shalt,
How’er unwilling. What I’ve said, remember,
Is what I have resolved; therefore determine.
Cho. [to Creon.] Stranger! thy actions, noble as thou art,
But ill become thy family and name,
Because unjust; but thou behold’st thy fate.

Car. Theseus! it was not that I thought this city
Without or guards to save, or laws to rule,
Which brought me here, nor unadvised I came;
But that I hoped you never would receive
My kindred here against my will, nor e’er
Embrace a vile, incestuous parricide,
Or cherish and protect him, in a land
Whose court, renown’d for justice, suffers not
Such poor abandon'd exiles to reside
Within its borders; therefore did I this,
Which yet I had not done, but for the curses
Which he hath pour'd on me and all my race.
Revenge inspired me: anger, well thou know'st,
Can never be extinguish'd but by death,
Which closeth ev'ry wound. At present, Theseus!
It must be as thou wilt; my want of power,
How just soe'er my cause, demands submission:
Yet old and weak, I shall not tamely yield.

OEdip. Audacious man! think'st thou the vile re-
proach
Thou utter'st falls on me or on thyself?
Thou, who upbraid'st me thus for all my woes,
Murder and incest, which against my will
I had committed (so it pleased the gods,
Offended at my race for former crimes;
But I am guiltless); canst thou name a fault
Deserving this? For tell me, was it mine,
When to my father Phoebus did declare
That he should one day perish by the hand
Of his own child? Was OEdipus to blame,
Who had no being then? If, born at length
To wretchedness, he met his sire unknown,
And slew him, that involuntary deed
Canst thou condemn? And for my fatal marriage,
Dost thou not blush to name it? Was not she
Thy sister, she who bore me (ignorant
And guiltless woman!), afterward my wife,
And mother to my children? What she did,
She did unknowing, not like thee, who thus
Dost purposely upbraid us both. Heaven knows,
Unwillingly I wedded her, and now
Unwillingly repeat the dreadful tale:
But not for that, nor for my murder'd father,
Have I deserved thy bitter taunts; for, tell me,
Thy life attack'd, wouldst thou have stay'd to ask
The assassin if he were thy father! No,
Self-love would urge thee to revenge the insult.

В в
Thus was I drove to ill by the angry gods;
This, should my father’s soul revisit earth,
Himself would own, and pity Óedipus.
Thy bold and impious tongue still utters all;
Just or unjust, thou pour’st thy foul reproach
On me, pretending to revere the name
Of Theseus and his country; but, remember,
The city, which thou thus hast praised, is famed
For piety and reverence to the gods;
Yet wouldst thou drive a needy suppliant thence,
And lead him captive. Thou hast stolen my daughter;
But I implore the dreadful goddesses
To grant me aid, that thou mayst feel the power
Which thou contemn’st, and know the force of Athens.

Cho. [to Theseus.] O king! this stranger merits thy regard;
His woes are great; his cause should be defended.

The. No more; the ravishers are fled with speed,
While we, who suffer, stand inactive here.

Cre. Speak thy commands, for I must yield to thee.

The. Go thou before me; I shall follow close
If here thou hast conceal’d the virgins, now
Discover them; if hence, to others’ hands
Committed, they are fled, they shall not ’scape:
My servants soon will fetch them back. Meantime
Remember thy condition, for thy fate
Hath caught thee in the net which thou hadst spread
For others. But what evil means acquire
Is seldom kept: thou cam’st not naked here,
Or unattended, thus to do an act
Of violence. Ere long, I’ll know on what
Thou didst rely, nor by a single arm
Shall Athens fall ingloriously: hear’st thou this
Or are my words unheeded?

Cre. ’Tis not now
A time to answer: we shall know at home
What must be done.
OEDIPUS COLONEUS.—ACT II. 323

The. Thou threaten'st; but go on.
Stay thou in quiet here; for if I live,

[turning to Ædipus.
I will not rest till I restore thy daughters.

[Exeunt Theseus and Creon.

CHORUS.

STROPHE I.

Now the combatants prepare,
And hasten to the field of war:
Theseus, their great and godlike friend,
The hapless virgins shall defend.
O! could I hear the dreadful battle roar,
Or near Apollo's sacred shrine,
Or on the torch-enlighten'd shore,
Or, Ceres! where thy priests their rites divine
Perform, with lips in solemn silence seal'd,
And myst'ries ne'er by mortal tongue reveal'd!

ANTISTROPHE I.

At yon snowy mountain's feet
Westward perchance the warriors meet;
Chariot and horse, with mutual rage,
On Æta's flowery plains engage.
Around their Theseus now, a valiant band,
See Athens' martial sons unite
To save their native land.

All shake their glittering spears, and urge the fight;
All, who thy power, equestrian Pallas! own,
Or bow to Neptune, Rhea's honour'd son.

STROPHE II.

The bloody scene shall soon be o'er;
Creon the virgin shall restore;

920 Torches were carried in the Eleusinian rites, probably in memory of those which Ceres and her attendants are supposed to have made use of in their search after Proserpine. These mysteries were performed by night in the most solemn manner by the Eumolpides, or priests of Ceres; and none were admitted to them but the pure and unspotted, who were bound to inviolable secrecy.
My soul prophetic sees the maid
For pious duty thus repaid;
For ever active is the power of Jove,
From whom perpetual blessings flow.
O! that I now could, like the dove,
Soar through the skies, and mark the field below,
The wish'd-for conquest joyful to behold,
And triumph in the victory I foretold!

ANTISTROPHE II.
Thou power supreme, all powers above,
All-seeing, all-performing Jove!
Grant that the rulers of this land
May soon subdue the hostile band!
Then too, O Pallas! hunter Phœbus! thee
Do we invoke; with thee be join'd
Thy virgin sister Deity,
Who loves o'er lawns to chase the spotted hind:
On you we call; your aid propitious bring:
O! haste, protect our country and our king. [Exeunt.

ACT III.

ŒDIPUS, THESEUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

Cho. I'm no false prophet, stranger! for, behold
Thy daughters.
Ant. My father! O my father! what kind god
Raised up this friend, who hath restored us to thee?
Œdi. Are then my daughters with me?
Ant. Theseus' arm
Hath brought us here; to him and to his friends
We owe our safety.
Œdi. O! come nigh, my children! Let me embrace you; never did I think
Again to fold you in these arms.
Ant. We come
With joy, my father!
Œdi. O! where are you?
ANT. Here.

Œd. My dearest children!

ANT. To our father still

May every pleasure come!

Œd. [leaning on Antigone.] My best support! 965

ANT. The wretched bear the wretched.

Œd. [embracing them.] I have all

That’s precious to me: were I now to die, •

While you are here, I should not be unhappy.

Support me, daughters! to your father’s side 969

Close press’d; O! sooth to peace a wretched exile,

Long time deserted: tell me what hath happen’d;

But let the tale be short, as best becomes

Thy tender age.

ANT. [pointing to Theseus.] Here is our great pro-
tector.

He will inform you; so shall what I speak

Be brief as thou wouldst have it.

Œd. Noble Theseus! 975

My children thus beyond my hopes restored,

If I should talk too long on such a theme,

Thou wilt not wonder. ’Tis to thee alone

I owe my joys; thou didst protect and save

My much-loved daughters. May the gods repay 980

Thee and thy kingdom for this goodness to me!

Here only have I found or faith, or truth,

Or justice; you alone possess them all:

I will attest it, for I know it well.

I feel your virtues; what I have is all 985

From you. O king! permit me but to touch

Thy hand; O! stretch it forth, or let me kiss

Thy honour’d lips! But, O! what do I say?

Can such a wretch as Œdipus e’er hope,

With guilty hands, to touch a man like thee, 990

So pure, so spotless? Yet I must embrace thee:

They only who have known misfortunes feel

For others’ griefs with sympathising wo.

Hail, best of men; and mayst thou ever be,

As thou hast been, my guardian and my friend! 995
The. Thus happy as thou must be in thy children,
Hadst thou said more, much more, and talk'd to
them
Rather than me, it had not moved my wonder.
Nor think I should resent it; not by words
Would Theseus be distinguish'd, but by deeds 1000
Illustrious: this thou know'st; for what I swore
I have perform'd, restored thy daughters to thee,
Safe from the tyrant's threats; how passed the con-
lict
Why should I boast? They at their leisure best
May tell you all: meantime to what I heard, 1005
As hither coming, OEdipus attend;
Of little import seem'd the circumstance,
And yet 'twas strange: but naught should mortal
man
Deem or beneath his notice or his care.
OEdi. What is it, son of AEGeus! O! inform me,
For nothing have I heard.
The. A man, they say, 1011
Who boasts himself by blood allied to thee,
At Neptune's altar, while I sacrificed,
In humblest posture stood.
OEdi. What could it mean?
Whence came he?
The. That I know not: this alone 1015
They told me; suppliant he requested much
To talk awhile with thee.
OEdi. With me? 'Tis strange,
And yet, methinks, important.
The. He desired
But to converse with thee, and then depart.
OEdi. Who can it be?
The. Hast thou no friend at Argos? 1020
None of thy kindred there who wish'd to see
thee?
OEdi. No more, my friend!
The. What say'st thou?
OEdi. Do not ask me
The. Ask what—

Oed. I know him now; I know too well
Who's at the altar.

The. Who is it?

Oed. My son;
That hateful son, whose voice I loath to hear. 1025

The. But why not hear him? Still thou mayst refuse

What he shall ask.

Oed. I cannot, cannot bear it;

Do not oblige me.

The. But the sacred place
Where now he stands, and reverence to the gods,
Demand it of thee.

Ant. Let me, O my father! 1030

Young as I am, admonish thee. O! grant
Thy friend his just request; obey the gods,
And let our brother come; whate'er he says,
It need not draw thee from thy first resolve.

What harm to hear him? Words have oft produced

The noblest works; remember, 'tis thy child:
Thou didst beget him; though he were the worst
Of sons to thee, yet would it ill become
A father to return it. Let him come. 1039

Others, like thee, have base, unworthy children,
And yet their minds are soften'd to forgiveness
By friends' advice, and all their wrath subdued.

Think on thy own unhappy parent's fate;
Thence mayst thou learn what dreadful ills have flow'd

From anger's bitter fountain. Thou, alas! 1045

Art a sad proof; those sightless eyes too well
Bear witness to it: those who only ask
What justice warrants should not ask in vain;
Nor who receives a benefit forget

The hand that gave, but study to repay it. 1050

Oed. You have o'ercome me: with reluctant pleasure
I yield: my children! be it as you please:
But if he comes, O Theseus! guard my life.

The. I've said enough; no more; I will not boast;
But thou art safe, if Heaven forsakes not me. 1055

CHORUS.

STROPHE.

In sacred wisdom's path is seldom seen
The wretch whom sordid love of wealth inspires;
Neglectful of the happy golden mean,
His soul nor truth nor heavenly knowledge fires.
No length of days to him can pleasure bring; 1060
In death alone he finds repose,
End of his wishes and his woes,
In that uncomfortable night,
Where never music's charms delight,
Nor virgin choirs their hymeneals sing. 1065

ANTISTROPHE.

The happiest fate of man is not to be;
And next in bliss is he who, soon as born,
From the vain world and all its sorrows free,
Shall whence he came with speediest foot return:
For youth is full of folly, toils, and wo, 1070
Of war, sedition, pain, and strife,
With all the busy ills of life;
Till helpless age comes creeping on,
Deserted, friendless, and alone,
Which neither power, nor joy, nor pleasure knows.

EPODE.

The hapless Oedipus, like me, 1076
Is doom'd to age and misery;
Ev'n as around the northern shore
The bleak winds howl, and tempests roar,
Contending storms in terror meet, 1080
And dashing waves for ever beat;
Thus is the wretched king with grief oppress'd,
And woes on woes afflict his long-distemper'd breast.

[Exeunt.]
ACT IV.

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, ISMENE, CHORUS.

ANT. This way, my father! Lo! the wretched man
Approaches, unattended and in tears.  
ŒDI. Who comes, my child?
ANT. Ev'n he I told thee of, Poor Polynices.

Enter POLYNICES.

POL. O my sisters! see
Of all mankind the most unhappy. Where
Shall I begin? Shall I lament my own,
Or shall I weep an aged parent's fate?
For O! 'tis horrible to find him thus
A wandering exile in a foreign land;
In this mean garb with wild dishevell'd hair,
Bereft of sight, and destitute, perhaps,
Of needful food and nourishment. Alas!
Too late I know it, worthless as I am;
I flew to succour him, to plead my cause,
That not from others he might hear the tale
Of my misfortunes: sacred Pity sits
Fast by the throne of Jove, o'er all his works
Presiding gracious: O! let her inspire
Thy breast, my father! Crimes already done,
Which cannot be recall'd, may still be heal'd
By kind forgiveness: why then art thou silent?
O! speak, my father! do not turn aside;
Wilt thou not answer? Wilt thou let me go
Without one word, nor tell me whence thy wrath
Contemptuous springs? My sisters! you at least
Will try to move his unrelenting heart,
And loose his closed lips; that, not thus spurn'd
And thus unanswered, though a suppliant here.
At Neptune’s altar, I return with shame
And foul disgrace.

Ant. Say, wherfore didst thou come?
My hapless brother! tell thy mournful tale:
Such is the power of words, that whether sweet
They move soft pity, or when bitter urge
To violence and wrath, at least they ope
The unwilling lips, and make the silent speak.

Pol. 'Tis well advised, and I will tell thee all,
O! may that deity propitious smile,
Whose altar late I left, whence Theseus raised
This wretched suppliant, and in converse free
Mix’d gracious with me! May I hope from you
The like benevolence? And now, my father!
I’ll tell thee wherefore Polynices came:
Thou seest me banish’d from my native land, Unjustly banish’d, for no other crime,
But that I strove to keep the throne of Thebes,
By birthright mine, from him who drove me thence,
The young Eteocles: not his the claim
By justice, nor to me his fame in arms
Superior; but by soft, persuasive arts
He won the rebel city to his love.
Thy curse, my father, was the cause of all,
I know it was; for so the priests declared
In oracles divine: to Argos then
I came, and to Adrastus’ daughter join’d
In marriage, gain’d the Argive chiefs, renown’d
For martial deeds. Seven valiant leaders march
To Thebes, resolved to conquer or to die.
Therefore to thee, my father! I came I here,
To beg thy aid for me and these my friends,
Companions of the war, who threaten Thebes
With their united powers, in order thus:
The wise and brave Amphaiarus, or skill’d
To cast the spear, or with prophetic tongue
Disclose the will of Heaven, with Æneas’ son,
Ætolian Tydeus, and Eteocles,
At Argos born; to these, Hippomedon
Sent by Talaus, his renowned sire,
Bold Capaneus, who threatens soon to raze
The walls of mighty Thebes: to close the train,
Parthenopœan Arcas comes, the son
Of Atalantis, from her virgin name
So call’d: with these, thy hapless son (the child
Of dire misfortune rather) leads his force
From Argos to rebellious Thebes: for these,
And for their children, for the lives of all,
Suppliant to thee we come, in humble prayer,
To deprecate thy wrath against a wretch,
Who, injured much, but seeks the vengeance due
To a base brother, whose oppressive hand
Hath drove me from my country and my throne.
If there be truth in what the gods declare,
On him shall victory smile, for whom thy vows
Shall rise propitious; therefore, by our gods
And native fountains, O! remit thy anger,
And smile upon me, on a banish’d man,
A beggar like thyself, who lives, like thee,
By others’ bounty; in one common fate
We are united, while the tyrant sits
In ease at home, and laughs our woes to scorn.
Yet if thou wouldst but listen to my vows,
Soon might I cast him forth, restore thee soon
To thy dear native land, and seat myself
In my own kingdom. Thy assent, my father!
Is all I ask; but, O! without thy aid
I have no hope of safety or revenge.

Cho. For Theseus’ sake, O! give him answer now,
And let him go.

Œdr. But that the noble Theseus,
Who hither brought him, did request it of me,
He ne’er had heard the voice of Œdipus;
And little pleasure will it now bestow.

Ungrateful wretch! who, when the throne of Thebes,
[turning to Polynices.
Where now thy brother sits, wast thine, didst drive
Thy father hence to penury and wo;
Now, when thou seest me in this mean attire,  
Thou weep'st my fate, because 'tis like thy own.  
But I'll not weep, for I can bear it all.  
Still, wicked parricide! remembering thee,  
The cruel cause of all: thou mad'st me thus  
On others' bounty to rely for food  
And nourishment: for thee, I might have perish'd;  
But these my pious daughters, these alone,  
Beyond their sex's power, with manly aid  
Have cherish'd and protected me: for you,  
Who call yourselves my sons, ye are not mine;  
I know you not. Though Heaven hath spared you long,  
Death will o'ertake you; when thy forces come  
To Thebes, which shall not fall before thy arms,  
There soon shalt thou and thy vile brother die.  
Long since my curses did declare thy fate,  
Which here I do repeat, that you may learn  
The reverence due to parents, and no more  
Reproach a sightless father. Look on these  
My duteous daughters: did they act like you?  
They never did; and therefore to the throne,  
Which you have forfeited, shall they succeed,  
If Justice still, as she is ever wont,  
Sits at the hand of Jove: meantime, thou worst,  
Thou most abandon'd of the race of men!  
Begone! away! and with thee bear this curse,  
Which here I do pronounce: to Argos ne'er  
Mayst thou return! never may Thebes be thine!  
Soon mayst thou perish by a brother's hand,  
Slaying the slayer! May dark Erebus  
Receive them both! And now on you I call,  
Ye goddesses revered! and thou, O Mars!  
Thou, who hast raised the bitter strife between  
My impious sons, bear witness to my words!  
Farewell: now go, and tell the Thebans, tell  
Thy faithful friends, how fair an heritage  
Your OEdipus hath here bequeathed his children.  
Cxo. O Polynices! little is the joy
Which we can give thee of this fatal journey; 1225
Therefore away, and leave us.

Pol. A sad path

These steps have trod indeed, of wo to me
And to my friends. Was it for this, alas!
I came from Argos? I can never tell
My mournful story there, never return,
O! I must bury it in silence all.
My sisters! ye have heard the dreadful curse
Which he pronounced. O! if it be fulfill'd,
And some kind hand restore you back to Thebes,
At least remember me; at least perform
The funeral rites, and hide me in the tomb:
So shall your names, for pious tenderness
To an unhappy father long revered,
With added praises crown'd, exalted shine,
For this kind office to a brother's shade.

Ant. O Polynices! let me beg thee, hear
Thy sister now.

Pol. My dear Antigone!
What say'st thou?

Ant. Lead thy armies back to Argos,
Nor thus destroy thy country and thyself.

Pol. It cannot be; my forces, once dismiss'd
Through fear, what power shall e'er reunite them?

Ant. But wherefore all this rage? What canst
thou hope
Of fame or profit by the fall of Thebes?

Pol. 'Tis base to fly, and, eldest born as I am,
To be the laughter of a younger brother.

Ant. Dost thou not dread the oracles pronounced
Against you both, death by each other's hand?

Pol. I know the sentence, but we must go on.

Ant. Alas! and who shall dare to follow thee,
After this dire prediction?

Pol. None shall know it, 1255
The prudent general tells the good alone,
And keeps the threaten'd ill unknown to all.

Ant. Art thou determined then, and wilt thou go?
Pol. Do not dissuade me, for the task is mine; 1260
And though a father's fatal curse attend me,
Though vengeful Furies shall await my steps,
Yet I must go. May Jove indulgent smile
On you, my sisters! if, when I am dead
(As soon I shall be), to my breathless corpse
You pay due honours! Now farewell for ever,
For living ye shall ne'er again behold me. 1266

Ant. Alas, my brother!

Pol. Do not weep for me.

Ant. Who would not weep to see thee rushing thus
On certain death?

Pol. If I must die, I must

Ant. Yet be persuaded.

Pol. Ask me not to do 1270
A deed unworthy of me.

Ant. Losing thee,
I shall be most unhappy.

Pol. To the gods
Alone belong the fate of mortals; some
Are born to happiness, and some to wo.
You may they guard from every ill, for sure 1275
Ye merit all the good they can bestow.

[Exit Polyneices.

Cho. Fresh sorrows hath this hapless stranger
brought
On me and all; but so hath Heaven decreed,
Which nothing doth in vain; while time beholds
And orders all, inflicting wo on wo: 1280
But hark! the thunder roars: almighty Jove!

Œdri. My daughters! O my daughters! who will
bring
The noble Theseus here, that best of men?

Ant. Wherefore, my father! should we call him
hither? 1284

Œdri. This winged lightning from the arm of Jove
Must bear me to the shades below. Where's The-
seus?
Let him be sent for instantly.
Cho. Again!
Another dreadful clap! It strikes my soul
With horror, and my hairs do stand on end
With fear. Behold, again the lightnings flash!
I dread the consequence, for not in vain
These signs appear, of some calamity
Portentous ever. O, ethereal Jove!
Œdi. Alas, my children! naught can save me now;
The fatal hour of my departure hence
Draws nigh.
Ant. Why think'st thou so?
Œdi. I know it well:
Send for the king immediately.
Cho. Alas!
The thunder rolls on every side. Good Heaven
Protect us! If to this devoted land
It bodes destruction, let not ruin fall
On me! O let not that be our reward
For pitying thus a poor deserted stranger!
O Jove! on thee we call; protect and save us!
Œdi. Is Theseus come? Shall he once more
behold me,
While yet I live, and keep my perfect mind?
Œdi. What secret hast thou to reveal to him?
Œdi. I owe him much, and would repay his good-
ness,
Ev'n as I promised him.
Cho. O, haste, my son!
At Neptune's altar leave the sacrifice,
And hither fly; for Œdipus, to thee
And to thy country grateful, waits to pay
Thy bounties: haste, O Theseus, to receive them.

Enter Theseus.

The. Again this noise, this wild astonishment,
Among you all? Was Œdipus the cause,
Or did the bolt of Jove, and rushing hail,
Affright you? When the god in raging storms
Descends thus dreadful, we have cause to fear
SEOUL. O king! thou com' st in happy hour; some god
Propitious led thee hither.
THE. Son of Laius!
What new event hath happen'd?
SEOUL. Know, my life 1320
At length is verging to its latest hour.
I wish to die; but first my vows to thee
And to this city faithful must perform.
THE. But who hath told thee thou so soon shalt die?
SEOUL. The gods themselves, who never utter falsehood,
By signs infallible have warn'd me of it.
THE. How spake they to thee?
SEOUL. In repeated thunder
And lightning, from the all-powerful hand of Jove.
THE. I do believe thee, for thy prophecies
Were never false: but say, what must be done?
SEOUL. O son of Ægeus! I will tell thee all 1331
The bliss reserved for thee in thy age;
For thee, and for thy country: I must go
To my appointed place, and there shall die.
I go without a guide, nor must thou tell
To mortal ear where Ædipus doth lie,
For ever hid. O king! that sacred place
Shall be thy sure defence, and better far
Than many a shield, or all the social aid
Of firm alliance in the field of war:
What more remains, unutterable now,
Of higher import, thither when thou com'st,
To thee alone shall be deliver'd; naught
Shall I reveal, or to the citizens,
Or ev'n to these, beloved as they are,
My pious daughters. Thou must ever keep
The solemn secret; only, when thy life
Draws near its end, disclose it to thy son,
Heir of thy kingdom, and to him alone:
From king to king thus shall the tale devolve, 1350
And thus thy Athens be for ever safe.
From Theban force: even the best of cities,
Where justice rules, may swerve from virtue’s laws,
And be oppressive; but the gods, though late,
Will one day punish all who disobey
Their sacred mandates: therefore, son of Ægeus!
Be careful, and be just; but this to thee
I need not say. Quick, let us to the place,
For so the gods decree: there must I go,
Thence never to return. Come then, my daughters!
Long have ye been my pious guides; henceforth
I must be yours; follow, but touch me not.
Let me find out the tomb where I must hide
My poor remains; that way my journey lies.

[pointing with his hand.]
Away! Thou god of shades, great Mercury,
And Proserpine, infernal powers, conduct me!
O sightless eyes, where are ye? Never more
Shall these hands touch your unavailing orbs.
O light and life! farewell: at length I go
To hide me in the tomb; but, O! for thee,
My best beloved friend! and this fair land,
And these thy subjects;—may prosperity
Attend you still; and may you sometimes deign,
Amid your bliss, to think on Ædipus! [Exeunt.

CHORUS.

Goddess invisible! on thee we call,
If thee we may invoke, Proserpina! and thee,
Great Pluto, king of shades! O grant,
That not, oppress’d by torturing pain,
Beneath the stroke of death he linger long;
But swift, with easy steps, descend
To Styx’s drear abode;
For he hath led a life of toil and pain.
May the just gods repay his undeserved wo!
Ye goddesses revered! who dwell
Beneath the earth deep hid; and thou
Who, barking from the gloomy cave,
Unconquer'd Cerberus! guard'st the ghosts below;
On thee, O son of Tartarus! we call,
For thou art ever wakeful: lead, O! lead
To thy dark mansions this unhappy stranger.

[Execut.

ACT V.

MESSnger, CHORUS.

Mrs. O citizens! I come to tell a tale:
But to be brief, know, Ædipus is dead.
To speak the manner and strange circumstancces
Of his departure, will require more words.
And calls for your attention.

Cho. Is he gone?

Unhappy man!

Mrs. For ever hath he left
The path of life.

Cho. How died he? By the hand
Of Heaven dismiss'd, without disease or pain!

Mrs. O! 'twas a scene of wonder: how he left
This plain, and self-conducted, led us on,
Blind as he was, ye all remembered well.
Soon as he came to where the craggy steep,
With brazen steps, leads to the hollow gulf,
Where various paths unites, a place renown'd
For the famed league of Theseus and his friend,
Between Acherus and the Thracian rock,
On a sepulchral stone he sat him down;
Pul'd off the filthy weeds he long had worn,
And bade his daughters instantly prepare
The bath and splendid garb: with hasty steps
To Ceres' neighbouring altar they repair
Obedient, bring the vessel, and the robe
Funereal. All things done, as custom bids
For dying men, sudden a dreadful clap
Of thunder shook the ground: the virgins trembled.
And, clinging fearful round their father's knees, 1416
Beat their sad breasts, and wept. Soon as he heard
The sound portentous, he embraced his daughters;
"Children," he cried, "your father is no more;
No longer shall you lead a life of pain, 1420
No longer toil for OEdipus. Alas!
'Twas dreadful to you; but this day, my children!
Shall end your sorrows and my life together.
Never did father love his daughters more
Than I have loved, but henceforth you must live
Without your OEdipus: farewell for ever!" 1426
He spake, and long, in sad embraces join'd,
They wept aloud: at length did clamorous grief
To silent sorrow yield, and all was still;
When suddenly we heard a voice, that oft 1430
Repeated, "OEdipus! why this delay?
Where art thou, OEdipus?" The wretched king,
Attentive to the call of Heaven, desired
That Theseus might be sent for: Theseus came;
When thus the dying exile:—"O my friend! 1435
Give me thy hand; my daughters! give him yours;
Let this, my dearest Theseus! be the pledge
Of amity between you: promise here
That you will ne'er forsake my hapless children,
But henceforth cherish, comfort, and protect them."
The generous king, in pity to their woes, 1441
Vow'd to perform what OEdipus desired.
The father threw his feeble arms around
His weeping children:—"You," he cried, "must
learn
To bear your sufferings with an equal mind, 1445
And leave this place; for not to mortal eye
Is given to see my future fate: away,
Theseus alone must stay, and know it all."
This did we hear him utter, as we stood
Attentive; when his duteous daughters left him, 1450
And went their way: we wept, and follow'd them.
Soon we return'd, but OEdipus was gone:
The king alone remaining, as if struck
With terror at some dreadful spectacle,
Had with his hand o'erveil'd his downcast eye. 1455
A little after we beheld him bend
In humble adoration to the earth.
And then to Heaven prefer his ardent prayer.
How the poor exile perish'd, none can tell
But Theseus: nor the fiery blast of Jove 1460
Destroy'd, nor sea o'erwhelm'd him; but from
Heaven
Some messenger divine did snatch him hence;
Or power infernal bade the pitying earth
Open her peaceful bosom to receive him.
Without a groan, disease, or pain, he fell: 1465
'Twas wondrous all: to those who credit not
This strange report, I answer, 'tis most true.
Cho. Where are his daughters, with their weep-
ing friends
Who follow'd them?
Mes. They cannot be far off:
The voice of grief I hear proclaims them nigh. 1470

Enter Antigone, Ismene, with Attendants.

Ant. Alas! the time is come, when we must
weep
Our father's fate, the fate of all his race,
Long since unhappy: various were the toils,
The labours we endured; but this is far,
Far above all, unutterable wo. 1475
Cho. What is it?
Ant. O! it cannot be conceived.
Cho. Is he then dead?
Ant. He is: his death was strange
And wonderful; for not in war he fell,
Nor did the sea o'erwhelm him, but the earth
Hath hid him from us; deadly night hath closed 1480
Our eyes in sadness. Whether o'er the seas
We roam, or exiles in a foreign land
Lead our sad days, we must be still unhappy.
Alas! I only wish I might have died
With my poor father: wherefore should I ask 1485
For longer life?

Cho. Ye good and pious daughters?
Remember, what the will of Heaven decrees,
With patience we must bear; indulge not, then,
Excess of grief; your fate hath not deserved it.

Ant. O! I was fond of misery with him: 1490
Ev’n what was most unlovely grew beloved,
When he was with me. O my dearest father!
Beneath the earth now in deep darkness hid,
Worn as thou wert with age, to me thou still
Wert dear, and shalt be ever.

Cho. Now his course 1495
Is finish’d.

Ant. Even as he wish’d, he died
In a strange land, for such was his desire;
A shady turf cover’d his lifeless limbs:
Nor un lamented fell; for, O! these eyes,
My father! still shall weep for thee, nor time 1500
E’er blot thee from my memory.

Ism. Alas,
Alas, my sister! what must be our fate,
Forlorn and helpless, of our father thus
Bereft!

Cho. His end was happy; therefore cease
Your fruitless tears: from sorrow none is free. 1505

Ant. Let us be gone.

Ism. But where?

Ant. I wish—

Ism. O! what?

Ant. To see the tomb.

Ism. Whose tomb?

Ant. Our father’s. O!

Ism. But is it lawful? Know’st thou that?

Ant. Why thus

Reprove me, my Ismene?

Ism. He is yet

Unburied, and without—

Ant. O! lead me there, 1510
Then kill me if thou wilt; for where, alas!
Can I betake me?
Cho. Friends! be comforted.
Ant. Where shall I fly?
Cho. Thou hast already 'scaped Unnumber'd ills.
Ant. I'm thinking, my Ismene!—
Ism. What think'st thou?
Ant. How we shall get home.
Cho. No more;
Thou hast been long familiar with affliction. 1516
Ant. My life hath ever been a life of pain
And sorrow, but this far exceeds them all.
Cho. The storm beats hard upon you.
Ant. O! it doth.
Cho. I know it must.
Ant. O! whither shall we fly? 1520
Great Jove! what hope remains?
Cho. Suppress your griefs;
We should not weep for those who wish'd to die,
And meet their fate with pleasure; 'tis not just
Nor lawful to lament them.

[Exeunt Messenger and Attendants

Enter Theseus.

Ant. Son of Ægeus!
Suppliant to thee we come.

The. What would ye of me?
Ant. Permit us but to see our father's tomb. 1526
The. It is not lawful.
Ant. O! what say'st thou, king?
The. Know, pious virgins! Ædipus himself
Forbade that any should approach his tomb:
That sacred spot which he possesses there 1530
No mortal must profane: to me, he said,
If careful I perform'd his last command,
Should joy and safety come, with victory
And peace to Athens: this your gods did hear
Confirm'd by the sacred oath of Jove. 1535
ANT. If such our father's will, we must submit:
But O! permit us to revisit Thebes,
That so we may prevent the impending fate
Of our dear brothers.

THE. All that you request,
Or may be grateful to that honour'd shade,
Whose memory we revere, I freely grant;
For I must not be weary of my task.

CHO. Remember, virgins! to repress your sorrows,
And cease your fruitless grief; for know, 'tis all
Decreed by fate, and all the work of Heaven.

END OF SOPHOCLES.