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Sophocles in English Verse

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SOPHOCLES.

SOPHOCLES

IN ENGLISH VERSE

PART II.

AIAS

ELECTRA

TRACHINIAN MAIDENS

PHILOCTETES

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TRANSLATIONS INTO ENGLISH VERSE OF HOMER'S ILIAD AND ODYSSEY,
THE TRAGEDIES OF EURIPIDES AND AESCHYLUS, ETC

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AIAS.

ARGUMENT.

WHEN Achilles fell slain before Troy in the last year of the Trojan War, it was proclaimed that the armour made for him by the Fire-god should be the prize of the worthiest of the Greek heroes. Wherefore both Aias and Odysseus claimed it. Aias was indeed the mightiest of all living Greeks in battle ; yet, because Odysseus by his war-craft had done most mischief to the foe, to him did the judges award the prize. Then Aias, in bitter wrath and shame, brooded over his dishonour till madness came upon him, and he sought to avenge himself, not knowing what he did.

And herein is told what monstrous deeds he wrought in that madness, and how he came to himself at last, and made the one atonement that remained to him, and how he received after death all due honour.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

ATHENA, *the Goddess of Wisdom.*

AIAS, *son of Telamon, king of Salamis.*

ODYSSEUS, *son of Laertes, king of Ithaca.*

TEUCER, *half-brother of Aias.*

AGAMEMNON, *son of Atreus, king of Mycenae and Argos.*

MENELAUS, *son of Atreus, king of Sparta.*

TEKMESSA, *a captive, wife of Aias.*

EURYSAKES, *infant son of Aias.*

MESSENGER.

CHORUS, *consisting of crew of Aias' ship.*

SCENE.—i. In front of the tent of Aias, on the
Trojan coast.

2. A lonely place beside the sea.

AIAS.

*Outside the tent of Aias. Odysseus tracking footpnnis.
Athena appears, borne on a cloud.*

ATHENA.

EVER, Laertes' son, I mark thee hunt
To catch some vantage-chance against thy foes ;
So now I see thee by the seaward tents
Of Aias, stationed on the encampment's verge,
This long time questing houndlike, scanning still
His tracks iresh-printed, so to wot if he
Be there within or no. Thou art guided sure
As by keen-scented Spartan sleuth-hound's feet.
The man but now is entered in, with head
And slaughter-dealing hands adrip with sweat. 10
No need hast thou to spy about this door
Henceforth ; but say what this thine eager quest
Would win : so learn from her who knoweth all.

ODYSSEUS.

Voice of Athena, dearest of all Gods,
How plain-discerned thy tones are, though unseen
Thou be,—I hear, and leaps my heart thereto,—
Clear as when peals the Tyrrhene mouth of brass !
Thou hast well discerned that 'tis a foeman's slot
I quest, of Aias of the giant shield.
Yea, him, none other, all this while I track. 20

This night a deed of unimagined horror
 He hath done against us,—if 'twas he that wrought;
 For nought we surely know, but drift in doubt.
 I of my free will took this task on me.
 It was but now we found wide havoc spread
 And slaughter through the cattle of the spoil;
 Yea, even their herdmen slain by violent hands,
 The guilt whereof was none but cast on him.
 A certain scout that marked him, o'er the plain
 Leaping alone, with sword adrip with blood, 30
 Spake, and revealed it to me. Straightway I
 Sped on his track. Some prints I recognise,
 Yet some perplex me, doubting whose the deed.
 In season com'st thou : in time past thine hand
 Hath helmed me, and shall helm in days to be.

ATHENA.

I know, Odysseus : on this path long since
 Eager to watch and help thy chase I came.

ODYSSEUS.

Ah, toil I to good purpose, gracious Queen ?

ATHENA.

Yea : know, of yonder man those deeds were wrought.

ODYSSEUS.

And why thus launched he forth the unreasoning
 hand ? 40

ATHENA.

By wrath for Achilles' armour overborne.

ODYSSEUS.

Yet why in slaughter fell he on the herds ?

ATHENA.

Tw'as in your blood he deemed he dyed his hands.

ODYSSEUS.

Ha ! *this* his purpose—against Argive lives ?

ATHENA.

Yea, he had wrought it, had my vigilance slept.

ODYSSEUS.

By what bold plots, what hardihood of soul ?

ATHENA.

By night against you stole he forth alone.

ODYSSEUS.

Ha ! came he nigh ?—attained he to his goal ?

ATHENA.

Close stood he by your captains' tent-doors twain.

ODYSSEUS.

And wherefore stayed his murder-maddened hand ?

[50

ATHENA.

Tw'as I withheld him : o'er his eyes I flung
Glamour resistless of distempered joy,
Turned him against the flocks, great droves of spoil
Unshared as yet, and left in neat-herds' ward.
He fell on them, he mowed a slaughter-swath
Of cloven chines through horned hosts : he deemed
Now, that his hand slew captive Atreids twain,
Now that he swooped on this chief, now on that.

I, as the man in throes of madness raved,
 On-spurred him, cast him down mid gins of bale. 60
 Thereafter, when he paused from this wild work,
 He bound together those kine left alive,
 And all the sheep, and drave them to the tent,
 As who held captive men, no fair-horned spoil.
 Now in his tent those bound ones he torments.
 Yea, I will show thee his folly manifest,
 That, seeing, thou mayst tell the Argives all.
 Fear not: stand fast, nor look for any harm
 From this man. I will turn his glittering eyes
 Aside, that they shall not behold thy face. 70
 Ho thou, who art with bonds back-straining hands
 Of captains, thee I bid come hitherward.
 Aias ! on thee I call. Come forth the tent !

ODYSSEUS.

What dost thou, Athena ? Never call him forth !

ATHENA.

Hold thy peace ! Get thee not a craven's name.

ODYSSEUS.

By heaven, no ! Suffice that there he stay !

ATHENA.

What fearest thou ? Was he not man before ?

ODYSSEUS.

Yea, and my foe he was, and yet remains.

ATHENA.

To laugh o'er foes, is that not sweetest mirth ?

AIAS.

ODYSSEUS.

Enough for me that he abide within.

ATHENA.

Afraid to see a madman manifest!

ODYSSEUS.

Were he but sane, in fear I had shunned him not.

ATHENA.

Fear not lest now he mark thee, however nigh.

ODYSSEUS.

Nay, how, if with the same eyes he doth see ?

ATHENA.

I will make dark his eyes, though they be open.

ODYSSEUS.

There's nought but might be, so a God contrived.

ATHENA.

In silence stand then : where thou art abide.

ODYSSEUS.

I must stay—yet would God I were afar !

ATHENA.

Aias, what ho I I call thee yet again !
Why this scant courtesy to thine ally ?

Enter Aias from the tent.

AIAS.

All hail, Athena ! Zeus-begotten, hail !
How well thou hast stood by me ! With golden
spoils—
Thank-offerings for this prey—I'll hang thy shrine.

ATHENA.

Well hast thou said. Yet tell me this, hast thou
Deep dyed thy sword in blood of Argos' hosts ?

AIAS.

Such boast is mine. I will disclaim it not.

ATHENA.

Ha, did thine armed hand smite the Atreids too ?

AIAS.

So well, they shall shame Aias never more.

ATHENA.

The men are dead, so do I read thy words.

AIAS.

Dead I Of mine armour let them rob me now ! 100

ATHENA.

Ay so. And what of him, Laertes' son ?
How sped with him thy fortune ? Hath he 'scaped ?

AIAS.

That knavish fox—dost ask me where he is ?

ATHENA.

Yea, of Odysseus ask I, of thy rival.

AIAS.

O Queen, a guest most welcome, chained within
He sits ; for I would have him die not yet—

ATHENA.

Ere thou hast done what, or what vantage gained ?

AIAS.

Ere, bound unto a pillar, 'neath my roof—

ATHENA.

Ha! on the wretch what vengeance wouldst thou
wreak ?

AIAS.

His back be first scourged crimson ere he die. 110

ATHENA.

Ah no, torment not thus the hapless wretch !

AIAS.

All else I yield, Athena, to thy pleasure :
But this, none other penalty, he shall pay.

ATHENA.

Nay then, since so to do is all thy joy,
Lay to thine hand ; spare of thy purpose nought.

AIAS.

Now to my work !—this is my charge to thee :
Thus ever stand, mine ally, at my side.

[Exit.

ATHENA.

See'st thou how great the Gods' power is, Odysseus ?
 What man more prudent hadst thou found than this,
 Or in achievement mightier at need ? 120

ODYSSEUS.

Nay, none I know. Yet do I pity him
 Thus utter-wretched, though he be my foe,
 Thus bowed beneath the yoke of evil doom,
 Seeing in his fate nothing less than mine.
 For now I see how we are nought beside
 Phantoms, all we that live, or bodiless shades.

ATHENA.

Thou then, considering this, beware thou say
 No arrogant word thyself against the Gods,
 Nor be at all puffed up, if thou excel
 Thy neighbour, or in prowess or in wealth. 130
 One day brings low, one day again uplifts
 All human greatness. Men of temperate soul
 The Gods love, and abhor the wicked ones.

*[Exeunt.**Enter Chorns.*

CHORUS.

O son of Telamon, lord of Salamis
 Whose breaker-girdled throne-steps waters kiss,
 In thy fair days mine heart delighteth ;
 But when the scourge in God's hand smiteth
 Thee, or when evil tongues of Danaans hiss
 Dispraise, I am sore afraid, mine heart is shivering
 Like piteous eye of cushat terror-quivering. 140
 Yea, from the night that now hath waned to morn
 A multitudinous clamour hath been born,

Hurled thee against the flocks that for use of the host
were gathered,

Wroth for a triumph whereof unto her no tribute
came ?

Disappointed was she of her share of the war-spoils
battle-glorious ?

Did she miss the thank-offering due for a slain
stag, which is her right ?—

Was the brazen-corsleted War-god wroth for his spear
victorious 180

Unhonoured, and so by devices of darkness
avenged that slight ?

(Ant.)

Never, O Telamon's son, had thine own heart caused
thee to wander

So far from the right, as to fall on the flocks, with
intent to their hurt.

The madness that Heaven sends, who may resist ?—
but the venomous slander

Which the Argives hiss against thee may Zeus
and Apollo avert!

And if, like thieves of the night, those mighty princes
are stealing

Thy fair fame—they, or the spawn of Sisyphus'
reprobate line— 190

Do not, ah do not, my King, in the shoreward pavilions
concealing

Thy face, thus bring on thyself and on me a
rumour malign !

(Epode.)

Nay, from thy session stand up at the last, where afar
from the fray

Brooding in idleness darkling, thou sittest through
day after day

Letting the flame of the mischief blaze heavenward,
 giving free way
 Unto the insolent spite of thy foes, till it ranges un-
 cowed
 Wide through the wind-rippled glens, where the mocks
 of an envious crowd
 Hiss from the venomous tongues—and my soul under
 anguish is bowed. 200

Enter Tekmessa.

TEKMESSA.

Speeders of Aias' ship, Erechtheid-born
 Sons of the soil, we make our moan
 Who love the house of one far-off, forlorn,
 The house of Telamon.
 For now the terrible, the giant form,
 Aias, the lord of rugged might,
 Low-lieth, stricken by a spirit-storm,
 By whirling mists of night.

CHORUS.

What heavy change hath this night brought to pass
 From the fair sun of yesterday ?
 Child of a Phrygian prince, of Teleutas, 210
 Thou of thy knowledge say,
 Seeing battle-furious Aias loveth thee,
 His spear-won bride, with constant heart,
 Wherefore of knowledge shall thy whisper be,
 Though it but hint a part.

TEKMESSA.

A tale unspeakable how shall I tell ?
 A death-dark sorrow hearest thou.

Darkling on glorious Aias madness fell:
 He lies a ruin now ;
 Such horror may ye see within his tent—
 Blood-boultered many a victim lies
 Slain by that hero's hands, an innocent
 Unhallowed sacrifice. 220

CHORUS. (Str.)

Oh tidings past avoidance, past endurance,
 That of the fiery hero thou dost tell,
 Which Danaan chiefs spread with a glad assurance,
 Which mighty Rumour flying still doth swell!
 Oh but I dread the sure doom onward creeping!
 Infamy-covered shall the hero die
 Who with mad hand, with sword through darkness
 sweeping 230
 Slew herds, slew horseman-warders camped
 thereby !

TEKMESSA.

Ah thence, even thence I saw him come ; he drave
 A captive flock : on yon tent-floor
 One slew he, and another's ribs he clave
 And all asunder tore.
 Two white-foot rams he seized ; he lopped and cast
 Away from him the head and tongue
 Of this : to a pillar upright bound he fast 240
 That, and a heavy thong
 Of horse-gear grasped he, and he scourged it then,
 Hailing, as hissed the lash, a shower
 Of curses, which a God, and none of men,
 Had taught him in that hour.

CHORUS. (Ant.)

Now is the time with footfall stealthy-pacing
 To flee with heads all closely cloaked from light,
 Or set us on the rower's thwart on-racing
 To speed the ocean-faring galley's flight: 250
 So grim the threats from Atreus' sons outflashing
 At us ! — I dread lest with my lord their hate
 Deal to me death, a death by stones down-crashing—
 My lord, the prisoner of resistless fate !

TEKMESSA.

Prisoner no more : a sudden storm-burst raged ;
 But the wind lulled, the lightning leaps no more.
 Now that his blood is cool, his frenzy assuaged,
 His heart is strangely sore ;
 For to look forth on misery self-wrought, 260
 When none beside therein hath borne a part,
 Ay, this upon the rack of anguished thought
 Stretches the tortured heart.

CHORUS.

Nay, if he hath rest, he shall do well, I ween.
 Once past, affliction is of less account.

TEKMESSA.

Which wouldst thou take, if one should give thee
 choice,
 To grieve thy friends, the while thyself art glad,
 Or to be one with them in sharing pain ?

CHORUS.

Sure, the worse evil is the twofold grief.

TEKMESSA.

Then is our plight worse, though this fit be past.

CHORUS.

How meanest thou ?—I understand thee not. 270

TEKMESSA.

This hero, when that madness lay on him,
Himself joyed in the ills that compassed him,
Yet grieved us, his companions sound of wit.
But, now that he hath breathing-space from madness,
Himself by sore grief wholly is cast down,
So likewise we, no less than heretofore.
Are not two sorrows here, where erst was one ?

CHORUS.

As thine my thought is ; and, I fear, a God
Hath dealt this stroke. How else, if respite cheer
Thy lord no more than stress of malady ? 280

TEKMESSA.

Yet be thou sure that this is even so.

CHORUS.

Say, how first came the mischief's eagle-swoop ?
Tell us what happed, who sorrow in his pain.

TEKMESSA.

Thou shalt hear all, for thou hast part in him.
He then at dead of night, when evening brands
No longer burned, caught up his two-edged sword,
And rushed to fare forth on an aimless quest.
I chode with him, and cried, ' What doest thou,

Aias ? Why rush on emprise forth, unsummoned
 By messengers, nor yet by trumpet-call 290
 Roused ? Lo, the whole host now is slumbering.
 Curt answer he made—the note men harp on still—
 ' Woman, the woman's ornament is silence !'
 I heard, and held my peace. Forth rushed he alone.
 Now what befell without I cannot tell;
 But back ere long he came, and dragged in bound
 Bulls, herdmen's dogs, and sheep, a fleecy spoil.
 Some he beheaded, back wrenched others' throats,
 Slashed them across, or cleft the chine ; and some
 Bound and tormented, falling on sheep as men. 300
 At last, forth rushing, he to a shadow spoke
 Wild whirling words, now touching Atreus' sons,
 Now of Odysseus, mixed with laughter-bursts
 For the great vengeance-outrage wreaked on them.
 Then rushing back within his tent again,
 Hardly at last lie cometh to himself,
 Stares where delusion's havoc fills the tent,
 Then smote his head, and wailed. He hurled him
 down.

And crouched on wreck of slain beasts' carcasses,
 Clutching his hair with fingers frenzy-clenched. 310
 So for long time he sat, nor uttered sound :
 Then spake to me, with awful threatenings
 If I revealed not all his sore mischance.
 Yea, and he asked what meant his present plight.
 And I, friends, in my terror told him all
 That had been wrought, even all whereof I knew.
 Straight cried he exceeding great and bitter cries,
 Such as I ne'er heard theretofore from him,
 Who aye proclaimed that such laments belonged
 To none but cravens and down-hearted men. 320
 He, with no sound of wails high-shrilling, wont
 Only to groan low, like a moaning bull.

But now in this calamity prostrate flung,
 Fasting from food and drink, amidst the beasts
 Steel-slaughtered, silent sits he where he fell.
 And, plain to see, he means some desperate deed;
 To this, methinks, his words and wailings point.
 But, friends,—for to this end mine errand is,—
 Go in to his help, if aught ye can avail:
 Men in his plight are swayed by words of friends. 330

CHORUS.

Tcleutas' child, a fearful tale thou tell'st,
 Tekmessa, of our lord by ills distraught!

AIAS (*within*).

Ah me ! ah me I

TEKMESSA.

Soon 'twill be worse, methinks. Did ye not hear
 Aias—with what wild cry he shrieked aloud ?

AIAS (*within*).

Ah me ! ah me !

CHORUS.

Yet is he crazed, methinks, or racked with grief
 In presence of mad work surrounding him.

AIAS (*within*).

Ah child ! ah child!

TEKMESSA.

Woe's me ! Eurysakes, for thee he shouts ! 340
 What is his purpose ? Where art thou ? Woe's me !

AIAS (*within*).

*Ho, Teucev ! Where is Tencer ? Will his raid
For ever last ?—and lo, I perish here I*

CHORUS.

He seemeth sound of wit. Open : perchance
Even sight of me may bring self-reverence back.

TEKMESSA.

Lo there, I open. Now thou mayest see
His deeds, and in what plight himself is found.

Opens the tent-door, and discloses Aias within.

AIAS. (*Str.* i)

Ah shipmen well-beloved, ye faithful few,
Ye who alone
Unto the olden loyalty are true, 350
What surge, hurled on
By storm-stress of a hurricane blood-raining,
Sweeps round me, rings me in with doom constraining !

CHORUS,

Ah me ! thy testimony's truth is shown !
Yon sight reveals a noble mind overthrown.

AIAS. (*Ant.* 1)

O good at need in craft of seamanship,
O gallant crew
From whose oars leaping in your strenuous grip
The white foam flew,
In you against the miseries that waylay me 360
I see my one help—I beseech you, slay me !

CHORUS.

Ah hush !—with poison salve not thou thy sore,
Nor make the anguish of thy ruin more.

AIAS.

(Str. 2)

See'st thou the valiant, of the heart unfailling,
In grapple with the foemen aye unquailing ?—
And lo, I have turned this hand of mine
Against mistrustless sheep and kine !
O bitter shame ! O mocks of scoffers railing !

TEKMESSA.

Aias my lord, I implore thee, speak not so !

AIAS.

Wilt not begone ?—take hence thy feet!—away !
Woe's me ! ah me ! 370

CHORUS.

Oh, for the Gods' sake, yield to wisdom's sway !

AIAS.

Wretch evil-starred, who let slip through my hands
the accursed, my foe,
Dealt unto crook-horned cattle and sheep the mur-
derous blow,
And made their dark blood flow !

CHORUS.

O'er deeds irrevocable wherefore moan ?
These things are thus : they cannot be undone.

AIAS.

(Ant. 2)

Thou spy, who watchest all, still, still pursuing
 All paths, Laertes' son, of evil-doing, 380
 Of yonder host the offscouring thou,
 Loud and long laughter stirs thee now,
 I ween, for very joy of this my ruin !

CHORUS.

Men laugh, men mourn, only as God ordains.

AIAS.

Might I but see him, shattered though I be—
 Alas for me, for me !

CHORUS.

Ah vaunt not! Seest thou not thine evil state ?

AIAS.

O Zeus, of my fathers first Father, that I on yon vil-
 lain might fall,
 On yon loathed dissembler, yea, on the two kings
 therewithal— 390
 Then myself enter Hades' hall!

TEKMESSA.

Pray that in death I also at thy side
 May lie. Why should I live, when thou hast died ?

AIAS.

(Str. 3)

Death's night, be thou light round about me !
 O nethergloom, sunbright to me,
 Receive me, receive !—be I made
 An abider at rest in your shade !
 Receive me, who look not for aid

From Gods—even mortals shall scout me,
 Though but things of a day they be ! 400

For the mighty Goddess, the Daughter
 Of Zeus, with the hate of death
 Smites me with flails of despair.
 Whitherward shall I flee, and where
 Shall I find me a haven of rest ?

My glory is writ upon water :
 It hath fled with the parting breath
 Of the victims I slew : on a quest
 After triumphs of madness I pressed ;
 And the whole host armed for the slaughter
 For my heart's blood clamoureth.

TEKMESSA.

Ay me, that one so good at need should "say 410
 Such words as he had scorned until this day !

AIAS. (Ant. 3)

O paths where the brine breaks seething,
 Sea-caverns and woods by the strand,
 Ye have seen me on Troyland's shore
 Long, long, as the slow days more;
 But no more—ye shall see me no more,
 Not Aias in life yet breathing !
 Let whoso hears understand.

O streams of Skamander gliding
 Long time so nigh unto us,
 Kind to the Argives were ye : 420
 But this man no more shall ye see
 Who—lo, I will make my boast—

Above all that came hitherward, riding
 The sea-waves, was glorious,
 Yea, of all that warrior host
 That fared from the Hellene coast.
 Now, in shame and in darkness hiding,
 To the dust am I humbled—thus !

CHORUS.

I dare not check, yet dare not let thee so
 Speak, who hast met a fate so fraught with woe.

AIAS.

Ay me ! Who, who had thought my very name 430
 Should peal a presage-echo of my doom ?
 For well may I cry now Ay me ! not once
 Nor twice, in such afflictions am I whelmed—
 Even I, whose sire from this Idaean land
 Came home with freightage of all high renown,
 Achieved by deeds unmatched through Hellas' host !
 And I, his son—to this, the selfsame land
 Of Troy, I came, with warrior-might no less,
 Nor meaner deeds accomplished of mine hand—
 I, shamed before the Argives, perish thus ! 440
 Yet well I know no less than this, I ween,—
 If but Achilles lived, and would adjudge
 His arms for meed of prowess to some chief,
 None other man had grasped them in my stead.
 And these, by Atreus' sons' contriving, fall
 To a mean-souled knave, my prowess daffed aside !
 Yea, but, except mine eyes and mind had swerved
 Distraught, against none other man had these
 Ever pronounced doom so iniquitous !
 But that resistless Goddess, stern-eyed child 450

Of Zeus, when now to smite them I prepared
 Mine hand, with madness thrilled me, thwarting me,
 That with these dumb beasts' blood I dyed mine
 hands.

And they—they have escaped me—scoff at me !—
 Not by my will; but if a God confound,
 The veriest craven may escape the hero.
 And now what must I do, I, manifestly
 Abhorred of Gods, hated of Hellas' host,
 And of all Troy and these her champaigns loathed ?
 What, shall I leave the fleet, leave Atrens' sons 460
 Unchampioned, cross the Aegaean sea for home ?
 And with what look shall I meet Telamon
 My father ? Shall he brook to see me come
 Thus empty-handed, with no meed of valour
 Like those he won, a mighty crown of fame ?
 This may not be endured. Ha, shall I go
 Against Troy's towers, and singly make assault,
 Achieving noble deeds, then die at last ?
 So should I gladden Atreus' sons, I ween !
 This cannot be. Some emprise must I seek 470
 Such as shall prove me to mine aged sire
 His son—no son of nature spiritless.
 Base is it that a man crave length of days,
 Who from misfortune sees no hope of change.
 What joy in day still following day, that now
 Thrusteth him near death, and draws back anon ?
 Not at a straw's fee value I the man
 Who warms his hearth by fires of idle hopes.
 Either to nobly live, or nobly die
 Is worthy of the high-born. I have said. 480

CHORUS.

None e'er shall say that thou hast uttered, Aias,

A bastard word : 'tis true-born of thine heart.
 Howbeit forbear : vouchsafe that friends o'errule
 Thy purpose : put away these evil thoughts.

TEKMESSA.

O my lord Aias, greater curse is none
 To mortal men than is the lot of thralls.
 I was the daughter of a freborn sire,
 A mighty man of wealth, no Phrygian more ;
 And now am I a slave. The Gods ordained it,
 Mcthinks, and chiefly thy strong hand. So then, 490
 Since I am wed to thee, I wish thy weal;
 And I implore thee, by Hearth-warder Zeus,
 And by thy couch, whereby thou art knit to me,—
 Brook not that I should hear foul scoffs from foes
 Of thine !—yield me not up a stranger's prey !
 For on what day thou dost by death forsake
 Me, on that selfsame day be sure that I,
 Seized, with thy son, by Argives' violent hands,
 Shall taste thenceforth the portion of the slave.
 Then one of our new lords shall slioot out shafts 500
 Of bitter words—' Behold yon concubine
 Of Aias, once the mightiest in the host !
 What thrall's work knows she, after all her pride !'
 So shall they jeer. T shall be scourged of God ;
 But shame to thee and thine these words shall be.
 Nay, oh think shame to leave thy sire forlorn
 In cheerless eld—thy mother, heritress
 Of many years, think shame for her, who oft
 Prays to the Gods to bring thee living home.
 Pity thy son, King ! Robbed of fostering care, 510
 Orphaned of thee, a lone life shall he pass,
 By loveless guardians ruled : such sore distress
 Thou by thy death shalt deal to him and me.

For I no more have aught whereto to look
 Save thee. Mine home-land did thy spear lay waste :
 My mother and my sire another doom
 Brought low, to dwell in Hades' halls of death.
 What, ah, what home-land can I have but thee ?
 What wealth ? In thee all, all my safety lies.
 Nay, even me remember ! It fits that man 520
 Keep memory of all favours rendered him :
 For kindness, lord, begetteth kindness still.
 On whose mind kindness is in water writ,
 He cannot be a man of noble strain.

CHORUS.

Aias, I would thine heart might pity her,
 As mine doth. Well might'st thou commend her
 words.

AIAS.

Yea, she shall be of me commended well,
 If she but flinch not from the appointed task.

TEKMESSA.

Dear Aias, I in all things will obey.

AIAS.

Bring my son hither : I would see him now. 530

TEKMESSA.

Ah ! in my terror I conveyed him hence.

AIAS.

Mid mine affliction ?—or what meanest thou ?

TEKMESSA.

Lest the poor child should haply meet thee and die.

AIAS.

Ay, sooth such horror well had matched my doom !

TEKMESSA.

Yea, I took thought to avert that depth of ill.

AIAS.

Thanks for thy deed, and for thy provident care.

TEKMESSA.

Say, what shall I do now to help thy need ?

AIAS.

Grant me to speak to him, to see his face.

TEKMESSA.

Yea, he is near : thy servants ward him safe.

AIAS.

Why doth he linger, then, and not appear ? 540

TEKMESSA.

Child, child, thy father calls thee ! Bring him in,
Whoever of you servants guides his steps.

AIAS.

Comes he at thy call, or is out of hearing ?

TEKMESSA.

Nay, of the servants one now brings him nigh.

Enter Servant with the child Eurysakes.

AIAS.

Lift, lift him hither ; for he will not quail
 To gaze on all this slaughter newly wrought,
 If he be truly mine—his father's son.
 Straight must this colt to his father's rough-hewn
 ways

Be broken in, and to like nature wrought.
 Child, happier than thy father mayst thou be ; 550
 In all else like him : thou shalt not be base.
 Yet even now this may I envy thee,
 That thou art all unconscious of these ills :
 For life is sweetest ere we learn its lore,—
 If ignorance be an evil, ah, 'tis bliss !—
 Ere thou have learnt what meaneth joy and grief.
 But when thou comest to this knowledge, then
 Show thy sire's foes a hero's hero-son I
 Till then still feed on unsubstantial air
 Nursing thy child-heart, for thy mother's joy.
 No fear lest any Greek shall thee insult 560
 With flouts despiteous, though I be afar;
 Such gateward-watcher o'er thee will I leave,
 Teucer, a fosterer staunch, albeit now
 Far off he journeyeth, holding foes in chase.
 Now, shielded warriors, ye sea-faring folk,
 I charge you also with this grace to us :
 Withal to Teucer bear mine hest, that he
 Take this my child unto mine home, and show
 To Telamon and my mother Eriboia,
 To be for aye the staff of their old age, 570

Till to the Nether Gods' dim halls they come.
 Mine arms no stewards of their games, nor he
 That wrought me wrong, shall set for athlete's prize.
 But thou, my son, shalt take my namesake shield
 Sevenfold, the tower impregnable, and sway
 Grasping its curious work of handle-loops.
 Mine other arms be buried in my grave.
 Haste, from mine hands receive this boy straightway :
 Shut my pavilion ; raise not therewithout
 Wails :—woman is a passing plaintive thing • 580
 Haste, make all fast ! 'Tis not for prudent leech
 To wail song-spells o'er hurts that ask the knife.

CHORUS.

I shudder hearing thy stern vehemence :
 Thy tongue is a sharp swoid ; it likes me not.

TEKMESSA.

Aias, my lord, ah, what is thine intent ?

AIAS.

Ask not—enquire not! Good is self-control.

TEKMESSA.

Ah me ! how sinks mine heart! By this thy babe
 I pray, and by the Gods, forsake us not !

AIAS.

O'ermuch thou vexest me. Know'st not that I
 No more am debtor to the Gods for service ? 590

TEKMESSA.

Oh blaspheme not!

AIAS.

Speak unto who will hear !

TEKMESSA.

And wilt not yield ?

AIAS.

For thy much speaking—no !

TEKMESSA.

O King, I fear !

AIAS.

Wilt not make fast forthright ?

TEKMESSA.

By Heaven, relent!

AIAS.

Fools' thoughts, meseems, are thine,
If thou thus late dost think to school my moods.

*The tent-door is closed on Aias. Exit Tokmessa with
Child.*

CHORUS.

(Sir. I)

Ah Salamis famous in story,
Thy feet do the surges kiss
Still, and for all men a glory
Dost thou dwell in the home of thy bliss
Evermore.

But I—woe is me for the lagging 600
Long years, for the camp-vigils drear
Under Ida, the leaden-dragging
Months of my pining here
Heart-sore I—

For the looking for and the hasting
 Unto Hades, unto the brink
 Of the flood unseen, from the tasting
 Whereof men shudder, and shrink
 From its shore !

(Ant. 1)

Like a wrestler who bideth his season,
 Whose grip shall throw me at last, 610
 Is my lord's heaven-blasted reason
 By whose cureless affliction fast
 Is he bound.

Even he from thine arms who departed
 An onset-peerless chief—
 Oh the change !—now desolate-hearted
 To his lovers a measureless grief
 Is he found.

For the deeds of his hands, whose splendour
 Through the world in the days past burned,
 No love do the loveless render, 620
 By the caitiff kings are they spurned
 To the ground.

(Str. 2)

And the nursling of days far-fleeted,
 White-haired, of her son shall be told,
 Of his bosom's lord disseated,
 His thoughts uncontrolled.

Ah, not as the nightingale's wailing
 That moaneth softly and low,
 But wildly and high, heaven-scaling
 Shall shrill her woe, 630

With smiting of hands unsparing
 On her bosom with ringing blows,
 And with rending of fingers tearing
 Her brow's thin snows.

(Ant. 2)

He were better in Hades hidden,
 Who by lineage is princeliest born
 Of Achaians, than madness-ridden,
 Affliction-torn.

In the wisdom that grew with his growing
 To be one with the man, doth he stand
 No longer : the paths of his going
 Are in a strange land.

640

Woe is thee, hapless sire, when thou hearest
 Of the soul-crushing curse on thy son,
 Such as none of thy line but this nearest
 And dearest hath known !

Aias comes out of the tent with a sword in his hand.

AIAS.

All things long immemorial Time brings forth
 From hidden seed, and hides them after birth.
 Nought is too strange to look for : impotent
Alike are dread oath and the stubborn will.
 Even I, so wondrously unbending erst,
Like tempered steel, am womanlike disedged
 By yonder woman ; and I rue to leave her
 Widowed midst foes, and my son fatherless.
 I to the bath, and seaward-sloping meads
Will go, to cleanse defiling stains from me,

650

And 'scape the dread weight of Athena's wrath.
 Then will I find some spot untrodden, there
 To bury this sword, hatefullest of weapons,
 Delving the earth where none shall see the deed :
 Let Night and Hades keep it in their depths. 660
 For since the hour mine hand received this sword
 A gift from Hector, my most bitter foe,
 No good thing have I had from Argives yet.
 Ah, true the proverb is that mortals use—
 '*No gifts, and profitless, are gifts of foes.*'
 Therefore shall I know henceforth how to yield
 To Gods, and learn to reverence Atreus' sons.
 Rulers they are : one needs must yield—what help ?
 Yea, ev'n things terriblest and strongest yield
 To dignities : winters, with paths snow-paved, 670
 Make way for goodly-fruited summer-tide :
 Yea, and the weary-lagging wheels of night
 Give place to dawn's flame-splendour of white steeds.
 The blast's dread breath withal gives slumber-space
 Unto the moaning sea : all-conqueror sleep
 Unlocks his gyves, nor holds his captives aye.
 And we, shall we too not discretion learn ?
 Yea, that will I : I know, as ne'er before,
 That it behoves but so to hate a foe
 As whom one yet may love, and to a friend 680
 Be it mine in help and service so to cleave
 As who shall not be constant aye. For most
 The haven of comradeship is treacherous ground.
 Yet touching this shall all be well. But thou,
 Woman, pass in, and pray the Gods that all
 Mine heart's wish be to the uttermost fulfilled.
 And ye my comrades, honour even as she
 Mine hest; and tell ye Teucer when he comes
 To think on me, and kindly deal with you.
 For thither go I whither I must go. 690

Ye, do mine hest : ye haply soon shalt hear
That, though I am fortune-crost now, all is well.

[Exit.

CHORUS. (Sir.)

Shivers of rapture thrill through me, on wings of delight
am I lifted !—

Hail to thee, Wild wood-king !

Forest-lord, rover of seas, from the crag-eyries snow-
overdrifted

To the brow of Kyllene that cling,

Thou who arraycst all votaries' dances, appear, high
Vision !

Be with me now, and inspire

Me with thine own heart's creation, the dance-
measures Knossian and Nysian, 700

For my feet for the dance are afire !

Yea, may the King come to meward o'er surges
Icarian riding,

He whom Leto in Delos bore,

Even Apollo, a manifest Presence with me abiding
Gracious for evermore.

{Ant.)

Swept from mine eyes by the War-god's touch is the
cloud of my sorrow—

O joy ! O joy ! Now again,

Zeus, thou vouchsafest the cloudless light of a prosper-
ous morrow

To our galleys that race o'er the main ; 710

Seeing that Aias once more hath forgotten his wrongs,
is fulfilling

The high Gods' ordinance now,

Yieldeth the sacrifice due with a perfect heart and
willing

That in lowliest worship doth bow.

Time; mighty Time, maketh all things to fade : there
 is nought that transcendeth
 Belief, for that even our lord
 Turns from his anger away, and the conflict of giants
 he endeth
 With the kings whom so late he abhorred.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Friends, of my tidings the first word is this :
 Teucer is here—new-come from Mysian highlands. 720
 Soon as he reached the captains' tents mid-camp,
 By all the Greeks as one was he reviled.
 They marked his coming from afar ; they thronged
 All round him, hailed their maledictions then
 From this side and from that—was none refrained,—
 Calling him brother of the maniac plotter
 Against the host —' Thou shalt not 'scape/ they
 cried,
 ' From dying battered out of life with stones !'
 Yea, to such pass they came, that swords were
 snatched
 Out of their scabbards, clutched in furious hands. 730
 But, when to bloodshed's verge had wrangling run,
 By elders' reconciling words 'twas stilled.
 Now where is Aias ! Him would I tell this :
 Who are nearest touched, they must hear all the tale.

CHORUS.

He is not within : he is but now gone forth.
 With his changed mood hath he yoked new resolves.

MESSENGER.

Woe and alas !
 Too late upon this errand he who sends
 Hath sent me, or a laggard I am found !

CHORUS.

How hath performance fallen short of need ? 740

MESSENGER.

Saith Teucer, ' See ye suffer not the man
 Forth of his tent to go, ere I be there/

CHORUS.

Nay then, he is gone ; for he to wiser thoughts
 Turned, to be reconciled with wrathful Gods.

MESSENGER.

Of uttermost folly full are these thy words,
 If Kalchas aught in wisdom prophesies.

CHORUS.

Prophesies ?—what ?—what know'st thou of this
 thing ?

MESSENGER.

Thus much I know, who, as it chanced, was there.
 Out of the council of the ring of chiefs
 Kalchas withdrew apart from Atreus' sons : 750
 In Teucer's hand in friendly wise he laid
 His right hand, bade him with strong urgency
 To use all shifts to keep within the tent
 Aias, nor let him pass forth while this day
 Shines, if he fain would ever see him living ;
 ' Since for this one day,' boding spake the seer,
 ' Him shall divine Athena's anger scourge :

For lives grown proud, and profitless to Heaven,
 Fall by stern visitations of the Gods '—
 So spake the seer—' yea, whoso, mortal-born 760
 By nature, thinks not mortal-lowly thoughts.
 Now he, at his first setting-forth from home,
 Was found a fool, when wisely spake his sire,
 Who said to him, " Son, crave thou to prevail
 In fight, but aye with Gods' help to prevail."
 He arrogantly and witlessly replied,
 " With Gods' help might the veriest niddering
 Win mastery, father. I without their aid
 Doubt not to clothe myself with this renown."
 Such was his vaunting speech. Nay, yet again, 770
 When Pallas the divine would spur him on,
 And bade turn on the foe a slaughtering sword,
 Awful reply he made, unmeet to speak :
 " Queen, take thy stand by other Argives : never,
 Where I am, shall the battle break our line."
 By suchlike words the Goddess's dread wrath
 He earned—by thinking thoughts too high for man.
 Yet, so he but outlive this day, perchance
 With a God's help may we save Aias yet.'
 So spake the seer : then Teucer straightway rose 780
 And sent me thence to bear thee these behests,
 That thou mayst heed them. If we are foiled herein,
 He is no more—if Kalchas be inspired.

CHORUS.

Hapless Tekmessa, child of sorrow, come,
 Come forth and mark what words this man doth say.
 This steel's edge sweeps too near for any joy !

TEKMESSA.

Why rouse ye me from rest, unhappy me,
 From respite given now from harrowing ills ?

CHORUS.

Hearken to this man, who hath come to tell
A fate for Aias which hath anguished me. 790

TEKMESSA.

Ah me ! What say'st thou, man ? Are we undone ?

MESSENGER.

Thy plight I know not ; but if Aias be
Gone forth, for him my heart is sore afraid.

TEKMESSA.

He is forth—what thou meanest tortures me !

MESSENGER.

This Teucer's message is—' Within the tent
Keep him, and let him not go forth alone/

TEKMESSA.

And where is Teucer ? Wherefore saith he so

MESSENGER.

He is but now returned, and he forebodes
That this forth-going shall be Aias' death.

TEKMESSA.

O hapless I ! Of what man learnt he this ? 800

MESSENGER.

Of Thestor's son, the seer, this day whereon,
Saith he, his life or death in balance hangs.

TEKMESSA.

Ah me ! O friends, defend us from this doom !
 Haste ! Some with speed bring Teucer hitherward :
 Some to the westward gorges, eastward some
 Go, track the hero's fatal going-forth.
 For ah, I know me by my lord deceived,
 And know me from his erstwhile grace cast out !
 Woe ! What shall I do, child ?—sit still we may not !
 Thither will I too, far as strength avails. 810
 On fare we ! haste ! No time to sit at ease !
 If we would save the man who hastes to death '

CHORUS.

I am ready : this not words alone shall prove :
 Speed shall attend them both of act and feet.

[Exeunt.]

Scene changes to a lonely place on the sea-shore. Aias, standing over his sword, which is planted in the ground point upward.

AIAS.

The slayer standeth set where deadly-sure
 He shall be—were this for such thoughts a time :
 This gift of Hector,—of all foeman-friends
 Most loathed of me, most hateful to mine eyes,—
 Planted in hostile ground, in Troad soil,
 By the steel-biting whetstone newly edged. 820
 I have planted, lapped it round with earth full well,
 Most loyal to help me unto speedy death.
 So have I well planned. For the rest do thou,
 Zeus, first, vouchsafe thine aid, as well beseems.
 No mighty guerdon shall I ask of thee :
 Send, prithee, a messenger with this ill news

To Teucer, that he first may lift me up,
 When I have fall'n on this wet-reeking sword,
 Ere of some enemy I be espied,
 And cast a ravin-prey to dogs and birds. 830
 This I beseech thee, Zeus, and cry to Hermes,
 The Hades-guide, to hush me gently asleep,
 Not with convulsive throes, but one swift bound,
 When with this sword I have cleft my heart in twain.
 And help me ye, O Maids who live for aye,
 Who look on mortal sufferings evermore,
 Far-striding awful Erinnyes ! Do ye mark
 How wretchedly through Atreus' sons I perish !
 I pray you, swoop and seize these felons : blast them
 Most horribly ! Even as ye look on me 840
 Falling self-slain, be they by kinsfolk slain,
 Done by their dearest flesh and blood to death.
 Come, O ye swift Avengers, Erinnyes, come !
 Glut you, spare not this host confederate !
 And thou, who driv'st thy car up heaven's steep,
 Sun, when thou look'st down on my father's land,
 Stay there thy golden-plated chariot-rein,
 And publish thou my ruin and my doom
 To mine old father and my woeful fostress—
 Ah hapless ! when she hears the tale, I ween, 850
 Through all the city her bitter wail shall peal.
 What profits thus to raise a bootless dirge ?
 I must right swiftly take in hand the deed.
 O Death, O Death, come now and look on me !—
 Nay, there too shall I meet thee and accost.
 But thee, O splendour of radiant day, seen now—
 Thee too, Sun chariot-borne—I hail you now
 For this last time of all, and nevermore !
 O light, O hallowed soil of the homeland mine,
 Salamis, stablished hearth-floor of my sire !— 860
 O glorious Athens, folk akin to me !—

Fountains and rivers nigh me, plains of Troy !—
 On you I call! Farewell, O fosterers mine !
 This is the last word Aias saith to you :
 The rest in Hades shall I tell the dead.

[Falls on his sword.]

Enter Chorus in two bands, from east and west.

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Travail and trouble !—none other fruit
 From trouble and travail, the stem and the root !
 Whitherward have my feet not pressed,
 Whitherward, in their endless quest ?
 Yet no place knoweth the secret, none that can share
 it with me—
 Lo ye ! lo ye ! 870
 Do I hear not the sound of a footfall ?—ah, is it he ?

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Nay, only your voyaging-fellows : like you from the
 galleys we fare.

HALF-CHORUS 1.

What then ?—what tidings hast brought ?

HALF-CHORUS 2.

To the westward side of the ships have our feet
 tramped everywhere.

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Ha !—and hast *thou* found aught ?

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Ay, toil enow, but no glimpse of his face.

HALF-CHORUS I.

Nor this path, which the shafts of morning's rays
Glance down, revealeth of the man one trace.

CHORUS [*united*] (Str.)

Oh for tidings of the lost
From some toiler of the sea, 880
One of them that sleeplessly
Quest the crannies of the coast!
Oh that Oread of the mountain,
Oh that Naiad of the fountain
Would but tell us, ' I have seen
Yonder hero stern of mien
Wandering ! '

O 'tis hard, thus wearily
Roaming chartless, ne'er to see,
Wildered-souled beloved, thee,
O my King ! 890

TEKMESSA.

Ah me ! ah me !

CHORUS.

Whose cry brake from yon thicket herebeside ?

TEKMESSA.

O misery !

CHORUS.

I see the hapless maid, the spear-won bride
Tekmessa : from a broken heart she cried.

TEKMESSA.

This is my death !—friends ! friends !—O desolate
plight !

CHORUS.

What shall this be ?

TEKMESSA.

Aias !—in this hour slaughtered !—in our sight
He lies !—in his heart a sword is buried deep !

CHORUS.

O what home-coming shall mine be now ! 900
 Woe's me ! O hapless King, in thy fall
 Hast thou slain thy voyaging-fellow withal !
O wretched-hearted woman thou !

TEKMESSA.

'Tis even so ! Well may we wail and weep.

CHORUS.

Ill-starred !—whose hand in this his act should aid ?

TEKMESSA.

His own. Too plain—planted in earth the blade
Whereon he is fall'n hath accusation made !

CHORUS.

O mine infatuate folly !—alone
Didst thou fall in thy blood—no friend with thee,
 none !
And I, as one deaf in veriest deed, 910
All wit-bereft, I took no heed !
See where, ah where, now lieth our slain—
Aias, the spirit that none could rein—
Aias, whose name was a presage of bane !

TEKMESSA.

None shall gaze on him : with enfolding cloak
 The whole man will I hide, forasmuch as none
 That loved him would endure to look on him
 Thus spirting through his nostrils, through the gash
 Of death, the darkened blood himself hath shed.
 What shall I do ? What friend shall raise thee up ?
 Where tarries Tcuccr ? 'Tis high time he came [920
 To lay this corpse out of a brother dead.
 Aias ill-starred ! So noble, brought so low !—
 So low, even foes might fitly wail o'er thee !

CHORUS.

Doomed wast thou, unbending-souled
 Hapless hero, doomed to gain
 At the last a goal of pain,
 Self-accomplished woes untold !
 Ah, herein had I forewarning
 Night by night, and morn by morning, 9;0
 In thy bitter murmurings
 Fierce against the Atrei'd kings—
 Ruin's seed !
 Sorrow did that hour beget
 When the golden arms were sec
 Forth, to be, where heroes met,
 Valour's meed.

TEKMESSA.

Woe for me ! woe !

CHORUS.

This pang doth pierce thy true heart, well I wot.

TEKMESSA.

Oh anguish-throe !

CHORUS.

Well mayst thou weep and wail again thy lot, 940
 So near, so dear was he—and he is not!

TEKMESSA.

Thou canst but guess—to feel it is for me.

CHORUS.

Yea, even so !

TEKMESSA.

Ah me, my babe, to cruel slavery
 We pass : for thee and me taskmasters wait I

CHORUS.

So ruthless they cannot be, whom
 Thou dost glance at—Atreus seed—
 As to do this unspeakable deed !
 Now may Heaven avert such a doom !

TEKMESSA.

Heaven!—all this came by heaven-appointed fate. 050

CHORUS.

A load too hard to bear on us it throws.

TEKMESSA.

Yet awful Pallas, Zeus's Child, still sows
 Our path, for Odysseus' sake, with all these woes.

CHORUS.

Ah, doubtless the hero patient-souled
 In thy fall is exulting: with uncontrolled
 Long laughter his black heart mocks at thee,
 Mocks at thy frenzy, thine agony !
 Out on him ! Out on the caitiff souls
 Of the Atreids twain, who gloat as they hear—
 O kings unkingly !—and echo the jeer ! 960

TEKMESSA.

Ay, let them laugh, and triumph o'er the wrongs
 Of Aias ! Who in life desired him not,
 In straits of fight shall haply mourn him dead.
 For these warped souls, when their hands grasp their
 good,
 Discern it not, ere they have let it slip.
 His fall shall more my grief be than their joy.
 To him shall it be sweet. That which he yearned
 To win, he hath gained, even death, the boon he
 craved.
 How shall they dare, then, make a mock at him ?
 His death concerns the Gods, but yon men—no ! 970
 Then let Odysseus prate his empty taunts :
 For them no more is Aias ; but to me
 Leaving a broken heart's moan, he is gone !

A cry behind, the scenes—' Ah me ! ah me ! '

CHORUS.

Hush ! for methinks 'tis Teucer's voice I hear,
 A cry that leaps to meet this woeful sight.

Enter Teucer.

TEUCER.

Beloved ! Aias ! O my brother's face !
Hast thou, O hast thou fared as rumour cries ?

CHORUS.

Dead is the hero, Teucer : know thou this.

TEUCER.

Woe is me for mine heavy fortune then ! 980

CHORUS.

Tis even so.

TEUCER.

O wretched, wretched I !

CHORUS.

Well may we wail.

TEUCER.

O deed of passionate haste !

CHORUS.

Ay, all too hasty, Teucer.

TEUCER.

Woe is me !

Where is his son ?—where in this Troad land ?

CHORUS.

Alone amid the tents.

TEUCER *(to Tek.)*

Away with speed !

Haste, bring him hither, ere some foe shall seize,
And thou be as a lioness robbed of whelps.

Hence ! hurry ! bear thy part. When men be dead,
All folk are wont to make a mock at them.

[Exit Tekmessa.

CHORUS.

Yea, while he yet lived, Teucer, our lord bade 990
That thou shouldst care for him, as thou dost care.

TEUCER.

O woofullest of all sights unto me
That ever I have looked on with mine eyes !
O path of all paths most unto mine heart
Afflicting, path which I have trodden now,
O dear, dear Aias, when I learnt thy fate,
As, following thee, I tracked thy footsteps out!
For, as from a God, a thrilling rumour passed
Through all the Greeks, that thou wast dead, wast
gone!

I heard it—woe is me !—albeit afar, 1000
I groaned : I see now—oh, 'tis death to me !
Ah me !

Unveil him : let me see this woe's full depth. (*The
corpse is uncovered*).

Ill sight!—face full of bitter resolution,
What anguish thou hast dying sown for me!
For whither now, to what folk, can I go,
Who was not near to help thine agony ?
Good sooth, but Telamon, thy sire and mine,
With gracious mien and kind would haply welcome
Me coming without thee ! How not ?—Ay, he 1010
Who meets not even good fortune with a smile!
What taunt will he keep back ?—speak not what
daggers,
Calling me bastard born of spear-won thrall,

Who, all of craven cowardice, betrayed
 Thee, dear, dear Aias, or of traitorous guile,
 To hold the sceptre and palace of the dead !
 Thus, passion-grim, and soured by weight of years,
 He'll say, who is wont to wrangle and rage for nought ;
 And, last, shall thrust me away, flung forth the land
 With words that brand me thrall in place of free. 1020
 So shall I fare at home : but here in Troy
 I have many foes, and helpers passing few.
 All this is mine inheritance by thy death.
 Ah me ! what shall I do ? how pluck from thee
 This bitter glittering point, the slayer to whom,
 Wretch, thou hast yielded up thy breath ? Knew'st
 thou

How that dead Hector would at last destroy thee ?
 Mark, O by heaven, the fate of these two men :—
 Hector, by that same belt by Aias given
 Gripped as with wolf-fangs to the chariot-rail, 1030
 Was mangled, till he gasped his life away :
 And he, our lord, who had this gift of him,
 By this hath perished, fall'n in deadly fall.
 Did an Erinnyes, then, not forge this brand,
 And Hades, a grim craftsman, shape that belt ?
 I will aver that 'tis the Gods contrive
 These things, yea all things evermore for men.
 Whoso mislikes my judgment in his thoughts,
 Cleave he to his conviction, I to mine.

CHORUS.

No more ! Take thought how thou shalt hide this
 man 1040
 In earth, and what words thou shalt speak ere long.
 For I behold a foe : perchance to scoff
 At our affliction felon-like he comes.

TEUCER.

What man dost thou spy coming from the host ?

CHORUS.

Menelaus, he for whom we sailed to Troy.

TEUCER.

I see : he is nigh, a man not hard to know.

Enter Menelaus.

MENELAUS.

Sirrah, I warn thee, lend no hand to raise
Yon corse, but leave it even as it lies.

TEUCER.

For what cause wastest thou such arrogant breath ?

MENELAUS.

My **will** is this, and his who rules the host. 1050

TEUCER.

So ! Wilt not tell what charge thy pretext is ?

MENELAUS.

This, that we trusted we had brought from Greece
To Achaia's host an ally and a friend ;
Yet **found** him, tried, worse than all Phrygian foes—
The man who plotted death for all the host,
Marched forth by night, to slay us with the spear;
And, but some God had thwarted this essay,
We by this fate which he hath drawn on him
Had died, laid low by doom of utter shame,
And he had lived on ! God hath turned aside 1060

His outrage, that it fell on sheep and kine.
 Wherefore there is no man so strong, that he
 Shall in a grave ensepulchre this corse.
 Nay, but cast forth upon the yellow sand
 He shall be ravin for sea-haunting birds.
 Therefore blow up no flame of blustering rage,
 For, if we could not curb him living, we
 Will rule him dead in any wise, maugre thee.
 Our hands shall helm him now, though never once
 In life would he consent to heed my words. 1070
 Yet 'tis a knave's part when a citizen
 Brooks not to hearken to authority.
 For neither in a city shall the laws
 Have fair course when there lives no fear of them,
 Nor shall a host be wisely disciplined
 Without these bulwarks, fear and reverence.
 A man must, though he have gotten a giant's bulk,
 Think, ' I may fall by trivial hurt o'erthrown.'
 For he in whose heart dwelleth fear and shame,
 He, be thou sure, hath safety for his guard. 1080
 But where is insolence and wilfulness,
 That state, bethink thee, shall one day at last,
 Wrecked in a fair wind, sink into the depths.
 Stablished, say I, be seasonable fear ;
 Nor let us dream that, working our own will,
 We shall not win requital of sore hurt.
 Mark Time's reversal here : erewhile was he
 A fiery scorner ; I am now high-stomached.
 And I forewarn thee not to bury him,
 Lest, burying him, thou fall into the grave. 1090

CHORUS.

Menelaus, while thou preachest with wise saws,
 Do not thyself foul outrage to dead men.

TEUCER.

Ne'er shall I marvel more, friends, if a man
 Low-born reveal by acts his churlish blood,
 When they which are accounted nobly born
 By words reveal them churls in grain no less.
 Come, from the first say—didst thou capture, thou,
 And hither bring this man, the Greeks' ally ?
 Sailed he not hither himself, lord of himself ?
 How art thou captain o'er him ? By what right ii 00
 Claim'st kingship over folk he led from home ?
 Thou earnest Sparta's king, no lord of ours.
 No ordinance for thine office was laid down
 That thou shouldst rule him more than he rule thee.
 Subject to others hither sailedst thou,
 Not chief o'er all, that thou shouldst e'er lead Aias.
 Rule whom thou rulest: with thy pompous words
 Chastise them : but this man, though thou forbid,
 Or that thy brother-captain, I will lay
 In earth, as right is, fearing not thy tongue. 1110
 For not for thy wife's sake he came to war,
 Like yonder drudges who thy fardels bear ;
 Nay, but in honour bound by his own oaths,
 No whit by thee !—for men of nought he cared not.
 Wherefore, take yet more heralds with thee, yea,
 Yon general, and so come. Thy clamour I
 Will heed not, while thou art—the thing thou art!

CHORUS.

I like not such high tone amidst such ills :
 For hard words rankle, be they ne'er so just.

MENELAUS.

Our bowman-churl, meseems, hath no small pride.

A *IAS*.

TEUCER.

Bowman ?—no churl's art have I made mine own !

MENELAUS.

High were thy vaunts, couldst thou but get thee a shield !

TEUCER.

Fenceless I'd match mc against thee panoplied.

MENELAUS.

O me ! what lion-mood sits on thy tongue !

TEUCER.

Good right hath justice to be high of heart.

MENELAUS.

That he, my slayer, prosper, is this just ?

TEUCER.

Thy slayer ?—a portent!—dead, and yet thou livest!

MENELAUS.

A God saved me : for his part, I am dead.

TEUCER.

Then, saved by Gods, insult not thou the Gods.

MENELAUS.

Say'st thou I lightly esteem the Gods' laws—I ? 1130

TEUCER.

Thou, if thou com'st denying dead men graves.

MENELAUS.

Ay, to mine own foes. Aught beside were shame.

TEUCER.

How then, did Aias e'er stand forth thy foe ?

MENELAUS.

He hated me who hate him. This thou know'st.

TEUCER.

Ay, thieving fabricator of adverse votes !

MENELAUS.

The judges cast him in this suit, not I.

TEUCER.

Thou'ldst do much specious baseness underhand.

MENELAUS.

There's one to whom this speech shall breed annoy.

TEUCER.

Not more annoy, methinks, than I shall deal.

MENELAUS.

One thing I tell thee—this man finds no grave. 1140

TEUCER.

Hear my reply : buried this man shall be.

MENELAUS.

Ere this I have marked a man of blustering tongue
Who urged the shipmen to set sail in storm,

In whom thou hadst found no voice, when compassed
round

With stress of tempest. Muffled 'neath his cloak
He lay : what shipman would might tread on him.
Even so with thee and thy loud-raving tongue—
Haply a great storm, from a little cloud
Blowing, shall quench thy mighty clamour's fire.

TEUCER.

I too have seen a man of folly full, 1150
Who mocked despiteously his neighbour's woes.
But one looked on him—such an one as I,
In mood like me—and spake such word as this :
' Man, do not thou despite unto the dead :
If so thou do, know, thou shalt suffer too.'
So faced he and rebuked that sorry wretch—
Whom now I see ; none else he is, meseems,
Than thou. Ha ! is my riddle hard to read ?

MENELAUS.

Hence will I. This were shame, if any hear
That my words chasten whom my power can crush.
[1160

TEUCER.

Ay, get thee hence ! 'Twere deepest shame that I
Should hearken while a fool prates idle words.

[Exit Menelaus.]

CHORUS.

Full nigh doth the shadow of grim strife loom !
Nay, hasten with all speed, Teucer, and find
A place for the hero's deep-delved tomb,
Where he, borne ever by mortals in mind,
Shall dwell in gloom.

TEUCER.

And lo, in season fittest for our need
 Hither draw nigh this hero's child and wife
 To array for burial the hapless corpse. 1170
 Child, hither come : stand by in suppliant guise,
 And lay thy hand on him who gave thee life.
 Kneel thou in invocation, in thine hands
 Holding mine hair, thy mother's, and thine own,
 The suppliant's all of wealth. If of the host
 Any by force will pluck thee from this corpse,
 Vilely be that vile wretch cast forth his land,
 Unburied, rooted up with all his race,
 Ev'n in such wise as now I shear this tress !
 Hold it, O child, and guard it. Let no man 1180
 Move thee therefrom, but kneeling cling to him.
 Ye, not like women, but as men, stand by,
 And ward him, till I come, when I have made
 A grave for this man—yea, though all forbid !

[Exit,

CHORUS.

(Str. I)

When shall the final count be told,
 The endless coil be all unrolled
 Of these long homeless-wandering years
 Which bring the curse, the ceaseless strain
 Of travail of the charging spears
 Wide-swaying over Troyland's plain 1190
 For Hellas' sons' reproach and pain ?

[Ant. I)

Oh had he vanished from men's sight,
 Drowned in the heaven's abysmal height,
 Or to all-havening Hades thrust,
 Who first taught Greeks the leagued array
 Of arms abhorred !—O battle-lust

Begetting battle-lust for aye !—
He ruined nations in a day.

(*Str.* 2)

No joy of garlands to cnwreathe me,
Nor wine-draughts deep, 1200
Did that man's felon lore bequeath me ;
No, nor sweet notes of flutes outpealing.
Nor any solace travail-healing
Of nightly sleep.

Tis long since dream of love beguiled me,
From love so wholly he exiled me.
Uncared for thus, thus utter-weary
I lie, while aye with dews thick-falling
My dank hair drips—all things recalling
One nightmare thought: ' By Troy the dreary'
My watch I keep ! ' 1210

(*Ant.* 2)

Once from the terror darkling creeping
On through the night,
And from the arrows daylong leaping
Fierce Aias was my shield and tower.
Low lies he now : some demon power
Hath wreaked its spite !
What joy henceforth for me abideth ?
Oh to be in the bark that rideth
The surge 'neath Sunium's foreland fleeting,
Whose wood-crowned level brows far-gleaming
Rise from the foam-veil downward streaming, 1220
That I might cry to Athens greeting—
' Hail, holy height !'

Enter Teucer.

TEUCER.

I have hasted back ; for I spied the army-chief,

Agamemnon, posting hither for our bane.
I trow he will unrein a froward tongue.

Enter Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON.

Thou, thou, they tell me, darest brawl against us
Wide-mouthed, with swelling words, unpunished yet!
Even thee I mean, the captive woman's brat!
Hadst thou been bred of mother gently born, [1230
How high had been thy vaunts, thy strut how proud,
When thou, mere naught, dost champion this mere
naught,

Swearing that we came neither; chiefs of hosts
Nor fleet—may govern neither Greeks nor thee!
Aias, say'st thou, was chief in his own right.
Is not this infamous to hear from slaves?
O! whom thus loudly rings thine arrogant vaunt?
Where stood he, whither went he, and not I?
Were there no men among the Greeks but him?
So to our cost to Argives we proclaimed
That day a contest for Achilles' arms, 1240
If Teucer, howe'er it fall, shall brand us knaves!—
If ye, though vanquished, to the doom that pleased
The more part of the judges, cannot bow,
But aye bespatter us with revilings, or
Stab like assassins—ye, the beaten ones!
Tush!—never of such dealings should there come
Establishment of law or ordinance,
If we shall thrust aside the rightful winners,
And drag the rearmost to the foremost place.
This must be checked. 'Tis not the men of bulk 1250
And big assemblage are our surest help;
Nay, but the prudent everywhere prevail.
The huge-ribbed ox is by a little whip,

For all his bulk, straight-guided on his way.
 Yea, and this medicine see I drawing near
 To thee full soon, except thou get thee sense—
 Who for no more a man, a shadow now,
 Art bold for insolence of a tongue uncurbed.
 Wilt thou not find discretion ? Learn thy breed,
 And bring another hither, some free man, 1260
 To plead thy cause before us in thy stead !
 When thou dost speak, I cannot understand :
 The tongue of barbarous people know I not.

CHORUS.

Would that ye twain could get you temperance !
 No better counsel can I give to you.

TEUCER.

O shame ! how swiftly gratitude to the dead
 Fleets from men's memories, and is traitor found,
 When, Aias, he for thee not one poor word
 Keeps of remembrance !—he for whom so oft
 Thou toiledst, hazarding thy life in fight! 1270
 Ay, all these things are clean gone—flung away !
 Thou who hast said but now vain words enow,
 Dost thou in no wise call to mind the day
 When ye within your rampart-lines were penned,
 Were now '*mere naught*' when turned your spears
 in rout,
 And this man came alone and saved you, then
 When fire around the stern-decks of the ships
 Was blazing, when upon the galley-hulls
 Hector was leaping high above the fosse ?
 Who thrust the peril back ? Was't not his deed, 1280
 Who ne'er set foot, say'st thou, where thou wast not ?
 Did he not render you leal service there ?

And did he not again in single fight,
 Unbidden, by the lots' doom, Hector meet ?
 No skulker's lot cast he into the helm,
 No clod of damp earth ; nay, but one that first
 Light from the crested morion forth would leap.
 'Twas he who did this : at his side was I,
 The slave, the man of barbarous mother born !
 Wretch, where are thine eyes when thou say'st it—
 thou ? 1290

Know'st not that he who was thy father's sire
 Was a barbarian Phrygian, Pelops old ?
 And Atreus, who begat thee, god-contemner,
 Feasted his brother on his own son's flesh !
 And what art thou ? A Cretan mother's son,
 With whom her father found a paramour,
 And to dumb fishes doomed her for a prey.
 And such as *thou* revile my lineage—mine !—
 Seeing I had for father Telamon,
 Who wrought of all the host most valiantly, 1300
 And won for bride my mother—a princess she
 By birth, Laomedon's child : Alkmena's son
 Gave her, the choice and flower of all the spoil.
 Shall I, so nobly born of noble twain,
 Shame these that are by blood akin to me,
 Whom thou, when in misfortune low they lie,
 Wouldst thrust forth graveless, nor dost blush to say
 it?

Now know this well, that, if ye cast him forth,
 Us three shall ye cast forth to lie with him.
 More glorious were it, that in all men's sight
 I died in battle toiling for this man 1310
 Than for thy wife—O yea, thy brother's then !
 Therefore at my good look not, but thine own :
 For, if thou gall me, thou shalt wish to have been
 A craven rather than so bold toward me !

Enter Odysseus.

CHORUS.

O King Odysseus, in good time thou com'st,
If not to embroil, but mediate thou com'st.

ODYSSEUS.

What is it, warriors ? From afar I heard
The Atreids' outcry o'er this hero-corpse.

AGAMEMNON.

Ay, have we not heard words most infamous 1320
But now, O King Odysseus, from this man ?

ODYSSEUS.

What manner of words ?—for I can pardon him
Who, hearing foul speech, hurlt'h railing back.

AGAMEMNON.

Ill words he heard, who did to me ill deeds.

ODYSSEUS.

What did he then, whereby thou hast a wrong ?

AGAMEMNON.

He will not leave this man without his dues
Of burial, but will bury him, maugre me.

ODYSSEUS.

IS it vouchsafed a friend to speak the truth,
And, even as erst, still pull the oar with thee ?

AGAMEMNON.

Say on : for I were else unsound of wit ; 1330
Since of all Greeks I hold thee chiefest friend.

ODYSSEUS.

Hear then :—this man, in God's name, dare not thou
 Thus ruthlessly to cast unburied forth.
 Thee in no wise let violence constrain
 For hate of him to trample justice down.
 He was my worst foe once in all the host
 From that hour when I won Achilles' arms.
 Yet, him, though ne'er so much my foe he were,
 I would not so dishonour, as not to say
 That no man, save Achilles, have I seen 1340
 So mighty, of all the Greeks that came to Troy.
 Unjust, then, thy dishonouring of him were.
 No scathe to this man, but to laws of Gods,
 Shalt thou work. Yea, unjust it is, to abuse
 A brave man dead, how stern soe'er thine hate.

AGAMEMNON.

Thou champion him, Odysseus, against me !

ODYSSEUS.

Even I. I hated him, when honour bade.

AGAMEMNON.

Behoves thee not to trample on him dead ?

ODYSSEUS.

Joy not in shameful triumph, Atreus' son.

AGAMEMNON.

'Tis hard for kings to observe strict righteousness. 1350

ODYSSEUS.

Not hard to honour friends who counsel well.

AGAMEMNON.

A good man should give ear to them that rule.

ODYSSEUS.

No more ! Thou conquerest, if thou yield to friends

AGAMEMNON.

Bethink thee to what man thou show'st this grace.

ODYSSEUS.

O yea, my foe : yet noble once was he.

AGAMEMNON.

What wouldst thou do ?—thus reverence a dead foe ?

ODYSSEUS.

The heroism far transcends the hate.

AGAMEMNON.

Unstable in men's eyes are such as thou !

ODYSSEUS.

Full many now are friends, anon are foes.

AGAMEMNON.

How, hast thou praise for them which make such
friends ?

1360

ODYSSEUS.

'Tis not my wont to praise relentless souls.

AGAMEMNON.

Cravens wilt thou make us this day appear.

ODYSSEUS.

Nay, rather in sight of all the Hellenes just.

AGAMEMNON.

Dost thou then bid me grant the dead his grave ?

ODYSSEUS.

Even so : I too shall come to this at last.

AGAMEMNON.

Ay, 'tis thus ever—each man for himself!

ODYSSEUS.

Whom should I fitlier serve than mine own self ?

AGAMEMNON.

Thine is the deed, then. Never call it mine !

ODYSSEUS.

Howe'er done, 'tis in any wise thy kindness.

AGAMEMNON.

Nay, but of this be thou assured, that I 1370
 To thee would grant even greater grace than this :
 But he, on earth, in Hades, hath alike
 Mine hate : but thou mayst do as pleaseth thee.

[Exit.

CHORUS.

Who saith, Odysseus, that thy soul hath not
 Wisdom inborn, thus proven, is a fool.

ODYSSEUS.

Now too to Teucer this I tell:—henceforth
 As once mine hate was, shall my friendship be.
 Yea, I would fain help bury this dead man,
 Would share your toil, and nothing leave undone
 Of all that men for heroes should perform. **1380**

TEUCER.

Most noble Odysseus, praise, and nought but praise,
 Have I for thee, who hast so belied my fears.
 Thou, who of all Greeks wast his chiefest foe,
 Alone hast championed him, nor brooked to stand,
 The living, o'er the dead, with insult loud,
 As yonder moonstruck chief who came but now—
 He and his brother—fain had done, had cast
 The hero outraged forth without a tomb.
 So may the Sire who rules yon heaven, the Erinnys
 Who ne'er forgets, and Justice AU-fulfiller, **1390**
 Vilely destroy the vile ones, even as they
 Sought with despite unmeet to cast him forth!
 But thee, O seed of old Laertes sprung,
 I dread to let thee set unto these rites
 Thine hand, lest I offend the dead herein.
 Thine help in all else hail we. Wouldst thou bring
 Others with thee, there shall be none offence.
 My care the rest shall be. But thou, be sure
 We count thee a man most chivalrous to us.

ODYSSEUS.

I fain had helped : yet, if mine hand in this **1400**
 Mislike thee, I accept it : I will go. *[Exit*

TEUCER.

Enough. Suffice the time even now gone by
 n this delay. Haste, some, to dig the grave,

And some the tripod set bestriding high
The encircling flames, that hallowed streams may lave
 Him who in blood doth lie.
And let one troop of men which hold him dear
Forth of the tent his body-armour bear.
And thou, child, with such strength as is in thee
Lovingly touch thy father's corse with me, 1410
And help to lift. Life's sluices not yet chill
Well up the tide of life dark-crimson still.
Come all: forth hasten whoso claims to bear
A friend's name : let him take his station there
To render service to this man of men :
None so shall serve a nobler man again.

CHORUS.

Full many a thing do men by seeing learn ;
But, ere he see, no prophet may discern
What lot for him shall leap from fate's dark urn.

[Exeunt in procession, bearing the body of Aias.]

ELECTRA.

ARGUMENT.

WHEN Agamemnon returned home from the taking of Troy, his adulterous wife Klytemnestra, with help of her paramour Aegisthus, murdered him as he entered the silver bath in his palace. They sought also to slay his young son Orestes, that no avenger might be left alive; but his sister Electra stole him away, and sent him by the hand of an old servant unto the land of Phocis. There was he nurtured by king Strophius, and Pylades the king's son loved him as a brother. So Aegisthus dwelt with Klytemnestra, reigning in Argos, where remained now of Agamemnon's seed Electra his daughter only. So she abode in her father's palace with her father's murderers, hated and hating, nor ever submitting herself to them, as did her sister Chrysothemis. Now when Orestes was grown to man, he journeyed with Pylades his friend to Argos, to seek out his sister, and to devise how he might avenge his father, since by the oracle of Apollo he was commanded so to do.

And herein is told the story of his coming, and how brother and sister were made known to each other, and how they fulfilled the oracle by taking vengeance on tyrant and adulteress.

DRAMATIS PERSONS.

ORESTES, *son of Agamemnon.*

PYLADES, *son of Strophius, king of Phocis.*

ELECTRA, *daughter to Agamemnon.*

CHRYSOTHEMIS, *sister of Electra.*

KLYTEMNESTRA, *murderess of her husband Agamemnon.*

AEGISTHUS, *paramour of Klytemnestra, and usurper
of the throne.*

GUARDIAN, *an old servant of Agamemnon.*

CHORUS, *consisting of women of Argos.*

ELECTRA.

Enter Orestes, Pylades, and Guardian,

GUARDIAN.

SON of the whilom captain of the host
At Troy, Agamemnon, now mayst thou behold
That with thine eyes which thou hast aye desired.
The ancient Argos of thy dreams is this.
The grove of Inachus' daughter gadfly-scourged
Is there, Orestes : there the Wolf-slayer hath
His market-stead Lyceian : there, to left,
Stands Hera's glorious fane. Ay, tell thine heart,
' We are come ! We see Mycenæ gold-abounding ! '
This is the Pelopids' palace murder-haunted, 10
Whence, after thy sire's slaying, I long since
From her who shares thy blood, thy sister, took,
Bare safely hence, and fostered thee to this
Thy strength of youth, to avenge thy father's blood.
Wherefore, Orestes, and thou, lealest friend,
Pylades, swiftly must we plan the deed.
For lo, the sun's flame-splendour even now
Wakes ringing-clear the morning throats of birds,
And the black night star-vestured fades away.
Therefore, ere any man fare forth his roof, 20
Commune ye : where we stand, no time remains
For dallying : the hour is this for deeds.

GUARDIAN.

In no wise. Nought essay we ere we do
 Loxias' commands : with these must we begin,
 Pouring thy sire's drink-offerings : these shall bring
 Triumph to us, and mastery in our emprise.

[*Exeunt.*]*Enter Electra.*

ELECTRA.

O fountains of light upsoaring
 Unsullied, all-compassing air,
 Thou art witness of mine outpouring
 Of manifold dirge and prayer,
 Art witness of blows fast hailing
 On my bosom, in blood-weals traced, 90
 When the night's star-splendours are paling,
 And her feet by the day are out raced.
 And my bed ever misery-haunted
 In yonder weariful home
 Knows the long night-dirges chanted
 By a child for her father's doom.
 With no gifts did the War-god receive him
 Unto rest on the far-away shore :
 With the axe did my mother cleave him,
 Even she and her paramour—
 Cut him down as the woodman felleth
 An oak ! Yet, O father, no moan 100
 For the pity and shame of it wellet
 From any lips saving mine own !
 Yet never from lone lamentations
 Will I cease, nor from vengeance-cries,
 While the flashings of star-pulsations
 And the sunlight are seen of mine eyes ;
 But like her who was stained with the slaughter
 Of her offspring, the nightingale,

At my father's doors shall his daughter
 Cry aloud, and unceasingly wail.
 O Realms to the Dark Powers given, . 110
 Guide-god, and thou, Malison dread,
 Erinyes, great Daughters of Heaven,
 Who look on the wrongfully dead,
 And on robbers which secretly gather
 The fruits of the marriage-bed—come !
 Help us ! Avenge my father,
 The shame of his murderous doom !
 O send to me hither my brother!
 I can stand not alone : in this scale
 Is the load of my grief, in that other
 Mine own strength—ah, too frail! 120

Enter Chorus.

CHORUS.

(*Str.* 1)

Electra, hapless child
 Of mother sin-defiled,
 Why in insatiate mourning dost thou pine
 For him who long erewhile
 Ensnared by treacherous guile
 Of thine own mother's impious design,
 Died by her felon hand ?
 Ruin seize them who planned
 And wrought the deed !—if such prayer may be mine.

ELECTRA.

Daughters of noble strain,
 Ye come to salve my pain ; 130
 I know—your sympathy forget I not:
 Yet will I never leave
 This task, nor cease to grieve

Loud-wailing for mine hapless father's lot.
 O ye whose kindness shown
 More than requites mine own,
 Leave me, I pray you, thus to rave distraught!

CHORUS. (*Ant.* i)

Yet by no prayer nor wail
 Ever canst thou avail
 To upraise thy sire from that world-drowning mere.
 Ah ceaseless-sighing breath !—
 The end thereof is death,
 From self-control to madness falling sheer. 140
 Not so shall snap the chain
 That links thy life to pain.
 Why shouldst thou hold thy very misery dear ?

ELECTRA.

Fools, fools are they, I wot,
 Whose hearts remember not
 Parents whom foes to death have foully done.
 Mine heart-strings hath she stirred,
 Zeus' messenger, that bird
 Who, wild with all regret, aye wails her son.
 Queen of woe, Niobe, 150
 My goddess count I thee
 Who weepst ever in thy tomb of stone.

CHORUS. (*Sir.* 2)

Child, not alone on thee of all mankind
 Hath blown affliction's wind,
 That more than they o'er sorrow thou shouldst brood,
 The sisters of thy blood,
 Chrysothemis and Iphianassa ; yea,
 He whose young head this day—

No husband-champion : flouted, as I were
 Some alien sojourner,
 A servant am I in my father's hall
 In *this* attire—a thrall 190
 Might wear it ! At a board spread beggarly
 I stand—a princess I !

CHORUS. (Str. 3)

At his return rang out a cry heart-rending,
 Heart-rending, when couched in the feast-hall lay
 Thy father, and those fangs of brass descending
 Flashed to his brain, and smote his life away.
 Guile was the plotter, and the slayer passion,
 Hideous begetters of a hideous birth !—
 Whether it was some God who dared to fashion
 That deed of darkness, or a child of earth. 200

ELECTRA.

Woe for that day upon my memory rushing
 Ever more ghastly than all days beside !
 Woe for that night—the horror spirit-crushing
 Of that unutterable banquet-tide !—
 That foul death seen of him as lightning falling
 From those assassin hands of traitors twain,
 The treacherous hands that wrought my life's en-
 thralling—
 Nay, murdered me beside my father slain !
 To them may the great Lord Olympian render
 Such meed of misery as they meted me ! 210
 No joy gleam on them out of all that splendour
 Bought by a deed of such iniquity !

CHORUS. {Ant. 3}

Beware ! O hush thy lips from further speaking !
 Discern'st thou not how this defiant port

Is that which now in ruin of thine own seeking
 Whelmeth thee deep in pitiable sort ?
 Thou hast overbrimmed thine own cup of disasters,
 Begetting still contention by thy mood
 Implacable. Yet surely with our masters
 To close in conflict is a hopeless feud. 220

ELECTRA.

Horrors constrained me, horrors still constrain me.
 I know, I am ware of this my passionate heart:
 Yet, horror-compassed, ne'er will I refrain me
 From these wild words and deeds, till life depart.
 Ah, who could dream that any counsel spoken,
 O kindly sisterhood, should ever bring
 Solace or soothing to the heart that's broken—
 Who, that considereth rightly of this thing ?
 Let be, let be, O comforters of sorrow !
 There is no cure for misery such as this. 230
 On mine affliction's night shall dawn no morrow :
 No limit unto my lament there is.

CHORUS.

Nay, but in all love now I intercede :
 Like a true-hearted mother, so I plead :
 Ruin on ruin thus, ah, do not breed !

ELECTRA.

Tell me not, me, of due limits !—what bounds to my
 sorrows are set ?
 Answer me, touching the dead—is it well done these
 to forget ?
 Nay, was such callousness born in any of mortals yet ?
 Never may I have the praises of such nor, if haply
 I light 240

Yet on good days, may I dwell at mine ease in them,
 curbing from flight
 Wings of my wailing for loved ones and lost, so to
 flout them and slight!

Oh, if the dead is to lie dust, nothingness, ever for-
 lorn—

Oh, if on traitor assassins shall dawn no retributive
 morn,

Out of men's hearts must all honour, all fear of the
 Gods be torn. 250

CHORUS.

I, daughter, both for thy weal's sake have come
 And for mine own : but, if I aught missay,
 Let thy word still prevail: we follow thee.

ELECTRA.

Shamed were I, dames, if I should seem to you
 With many words o'ermuch to vex my soul:
 But strong constraint enforceth me to this.
 Pardon me then : for how could high-born dame,
 Seeing her father's sorrows, do not so—
 Sorrows which evermore, by day, by night,
 Not fading, burgeoning rather, I behold ? 260
 The very mother which gave birth to me
 Is grown my bitterest foe. In mine own home
 Companion to my father's murderers
 I dwell, by these am ruled, of these received
 My very sustenance is, of these withheld.
 Ay, and what manner of days think ye I pass,
 When I behold upon my father's chair
 Aegisthus seated, see him wear the raiment
 My father wore, spill wine of sacrifice
 At those hearth-altars where my father died,

And see—oh crowning outrage this of all!— 270.
 Couched on my father's bed his slaughterer
 With mine all-wretched mother—if I dare
 Name mother her who coucheth with this man ?
 Ay, so sin-hardened is she, that she lives
 With this defiler, fears no Vengeance-fiend,
 But, as who makes a mock at horrors done,
 Hath marked that very day whereon erewhile
 My father she by treachery did to death ;
 Thereon arrayeth dances, slaughters sheep,
 Her monthly victims to the Saviour-gods !
 I, wretch ill-starred, 'neath that same roof see all,
 And weep, and pine, and wail against the feast
 Named of my father—oh accursed feast!—
 All to myself : I may not even weep
 Freely as mine heart for her pleasure would ;
 For this—this woman in professions high,
 Thus rails on me, thus gives her malice voice :
 ' God-loathed abomination ! hast thou only
 A father dead ? Do no folk mourn save thee ? 290
 A curse on thee ! The Gods of the Underworld
 Never redeem thee from thy present moans !'
 So doth she taunt, save when she hears one say,
 ' Orestes cometh ! ' Fury-frenzied then
 She stands and shrieks, ' For this must I thank thee !
 Is this not *thy* deed ?—didst not steal Orestes
 Out of mine hands, and privily hide away ?
 Ha, thou shalt pay in full, be sure, for this !'
 So howls she ; and beside her, echoing her,
 Harking her on, her glorious bridegroom stands— 300
 That utter dastard, all of bane compact,
 Who fights his fights with women for allies !
 And I, expecting still Orestes' coming
 To end all this—woe's me, I daily die !
 For, aye at point to act, delaying aye,

He wrecks mine expectations and mine hopes.
 In such plight, O my friends, nor self-control
 Nor reverence can be mine. Compassed with ills,
 One needs must be to ills subservient.

CHORUS.

Tell, prithee—is Aegisthus nigh the while 310
 Thou speakest thus, or is he forth the halls ?

ELECTRA.

Yea, verily ! Think not I should walk abroad
 If he were nigh : now is he gone afield.

CHORUS.

Ha ! can I then with better courage seek
 Speech with thee, if these things are even so ?

ELECTRA.

He is not here : make question. What wouldst thou ?

CHORUS.

I ask then—of thy brother what say'st thou ?
 Yet will he come, or tarry ? I fain would know.

ELECTRA.

So saith he ; yet doth nought of all he saith.

CHORUS.

Who hath in hand great emprise, hesitates. 320

ELECTRA.

I did not, when I saved him, hesitate.

CHORUS.

Fear not: he is leal, he will not fail his friends.

ELECTRA.

I do trust—else my life should soon have end.

CHORUS.

Say now no more : lo, forth the halls I see
 Chrysothemis come, thy sister, of one sire,
 One mother sprung, with thee. Her hands bear on
 Tomb-offerings, such as to the dead are due.

Enter Chrysothemis.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Why at the palace-gate's outgoings stand
 And utter forth such speech, O sister mine,
 Nor even by time's long discipline wilt be schooled 330
 To cherish not this impotent rage in vain ?
 Yet thus far do I know mine heart, that I
 So chafe at things that are, that, were the power
 But given me, I would show them all my mind.
 But now I run close-reefed before the storm,
 Nor make pretence of vengeance, harming none.
 Thus would I have thee do, and not as now.
 But, for sheer *justice*—'tis not as I say,
 But as thou judgest. Yet, if I would live
 Free, in all things must I obey the strong. 340

ELECTRA.

Tis horrible this, that thou, thy father's daughter,
 Forgettest him, to take thy mother's part I
 For all these thine admonishings of me
 Were taught of her ; nought say'st thou of thyself.
 Now choose o twain—to be not worldly-wise,
 Or to be wise, and to forget thy friends.
 Thou, thou hast said but now that, were the power

But given thee, thou wouldst show thine hate of
these;

Yet when I, all I can, avenge my sire,
Thou helpest not, wouldst turn me from the deed. 350

Is this not crowning wrongs with cowardice ?

Come, teach me—else learn thou of me—what profit
Should I have, if from these laments I ceased.

Live I not ? Ill, I know, yet as contents me.

I gall our foes, and render homage so

Unto the dead—if kindness reach to Hades.

But thou, who hatest, hatest but in word:

In act thou sidest with our father's slayers.

Never would I, though one would load on me

All these their gifts wherein thou flauntest so, 360

Cringe to our foes ! Be that rich table spread

Beside thee ; be thy life abundance all.

For me—to outrage not mine own heart be

My meat!—thine honour I would not ask to attain !

Nor thou wouldst crave it, wert thou wise ! Thou
might'st

Be called a hero's daughter—still be called

Thy mother's ! Criminal manifest to the world !

Traitor to thy dead sire and to thy friends !

CHORUS.

Speak nought in wrath, in heaven's name ! Profit is

In either's words, wouldst thou but learn to lay 370

Her words to heart, and she give heed to thine.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Dames, I am in a manner to her words

Grown used. No mention had I made thereof,

Had I not heard of direst ill that hangs

Over her, which shall end her endless moan.

ELECTRA.

Nay, tell the dread thing. If thou canst name aught
Than this worse, I will ne'er gainsay thee more.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Yea, I will speak out whatsoever I know.
They purpose, if thou cease not from this moan,
To send thee to a place where thou shalt see 380
No more the sun's light. Far from this land living
In some vault dungeoned shalt thou chant thy wrongs.
Wherefore take thought. Mid sufferings blame not me
Hereafter. Now mayst thou be wise in time.

ELECTRA.

So ? Have they thus devised to deal with me ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Yea verily, soon as home returns Aegisthus.

ELECTRA.

Nay, let him come with speed, if this be all.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What prayer is this thou prayest, hapless one ?

ELECTRA.

That come he may, if thus he purposeth.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

That thy fate may be—what ? What thoughts are
thine ? 390

ELECTRA.

That far as may be I may flee **you all!**

CHRYSOthemis.

But this thy life—dost thou regard it not ?

ELECTRA.

O yea, fair life is mine, that I should love it I

CHRYSOthemis.

Nay, it were so, couldst thou but wisdom learn.

ELECTRA.

School thou not me in treason to my friends !

CHRYSOthemis.

I teach not that. To power, I say, submit.

ELECTRA.

Ay, cringe thou thus ! My feet tread not thy paths !

CHRYSOthemis.

Yet well it were through folly not to fall.

ELECTRA.

Fall will I, if I must, my sire's avenger.

CHRYSOthemis.

Our father, sure am I, forgiveth this. 400

ELECTRA.

Such words as these let wicked ones commend!

CHRYSOthemis.

Wilt thou not hearken to me, nor consent ?

ELECTRA.

Never ! Not yet so soulless may I be !

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Then on my mission's path will I fare on.

ELECTRA.

Whither ? To whom wouldst bear these offerings ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

My mother sends them to our father's tomb.

ELECTRA.

How say'st thou ?—sends them to her bitterest foe ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Whom herself slew—for this thy meaning is.

ELECTRA.

By what friend moved thereto ?—whose pleasure was
it?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

By some night-terror was she scared, meseems. 410

ELECTRA.

Gods of my fathers ! help us now—but now !

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Doth this her fear in aught encourage thee ?

ELECTRA.

If thou the vision tell me, might I answer.

CHRYSOthemis.

Nay, nought know I to tell, save one small thing.

ELECTRA.

Tell at the least this. Oft have words but few
Caused men to fall, or raised the overthrown.

CHRYSOthemis.

She saw, say they, the presence of our father,
Even thine and mine, a second time to light
Come. Then he took the sceptre he wont to bear—
Borne by Aegisthus now—and planted it 420
Beside the hearth. Therefrom a sapling sprang
That bloomed and burgeoned, till Mycenae's land
From end to end was shadowed by its boughs.
This heard I at the mouth of one who stood
Near by, what time she told the sun her dream.
But more than this I know not, save alone
That by this fear constrained she sendeth me.
O then, I pray by our ancestral Gods,
Hearken to me, nor by unwisdom fall!
If thou reject, in trouble shalt thou seek me. 430

ELECTRA.

Dear one, of all these things thou bear'st in hand
Lay on the grave nought: 'twere offence to men
And Gods, thereon to array death-dues, to bring
Oblations to our sire from her who hates.
Fling to the winds, or in the dust deep-delved
Hide them, where to our father's resting-place
Nothing shall come of these : then, when she dies,
In Hades treasured for her let her find them !
Nay, were she not beyond all women grown
Sin-hardened, never would she pour this cup, 440
The cup of hatred, over him she slew.

Think: is he like to welcome at her hands—
 That dead man in his grave—these honour-gifts ?—
 At hers, with shame who slew him, like a foe,
 Who lopped his hands and feet, for expiation
 Wiped off the blood-gouts on his head ! Dost dream
 That this thou bear'st can expiate her murder ?
 Never ! Put these things hence. But from thine head
 Thou of thy tresses shear the tips, from mine
 Withal, woe's me ! 'Tis little, yet 'tis all 450
 I have. That give him—this unsleeked hair,
 And this my girdle void of ornament.
 Bow down, and pray him from the earth to rise
 Against our foes, for us a gracious champion :
 Pray that with arm victorious Orestes,
 His son, may live to trample on his foes,
 So that hereafter we with wealthier hands
 May grace him, than this day we give withal.
 I think, O yea, I think some care of his
 Sent up that dream, dread dream for her to see. 460
 Oh sister, show this kindness to thyself,
 To me, to him of all men best-beloved,
 My father, thine, who low in Hades lies!

CHORUS.

For filial reverence speaks the maid ; and thou,
 So thou be wise, dear friend, wilt do this thing.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I will. When clear the Right is, place is none
 For disputation, but for speed in act.
 But, by the Gods, when I essay this deed,
 Be silence kept thereof by you, my friends;
 For, an my mother hear of this, I trow, 470
 I yet shall rue that I dared this essay.

[Exit.]

CHORUS.

(Str.)

Except I be but a witless prophet who nothing of
 wisdom understands,
 She shall come, who with prophecy heralds her coming
 —Justice, with might of the Right in her hands:
 She shall overtake us in no long season : so fearless
 confidence whispers my soul;
 Forasmuch as but now I have heard the vision whose
 breath is wafting us on to our goal. 480
 For never doth he who begat thee, the king of Hel-
 lenes, forget his vengeance due ;
 No, nor the axe forgetteth, whose fangs of brass long
 ago they dared imbrue
 In his blood, that axe two-edged that with outrage
 foul, most foul, thy father slew.

(Ant.)

She is coming!—the sound of her feet as the tramp of an
 army—she leaps from her ambush dread ! 490
 As the clashing of hosts is the clang of her sword !—
 she comes, the Erinnyes of tireless tread !
 For, blasting the troth of the bridal, the love of wed-
 lock, there came upon those for whom
 It was deadly sin—came a fury of passion for mar-
 riage-bonds woven in murder's loom.
 Therefore I know full surely that never, O never to us
 this sign doth appear
 Save for condemnation of workers of guilt and their
 helpers. In sooth in the words of a seer 500
 And in dreams divination is none, except fulfilment of
 this night-vision be near.

(Epode)

O chariot-cunning of Pelops, fraught
 With issue of woe,
 What endless disaster by thee was brought
 On this land long ago !

For since that hour when, whelmed in the deep
 From the gold-gleaming car, 510
 Myrtilus fell on the morningless sleep,
 Hurled out afar
 To destruction with violence all-unblest,
 Never unto this day
 From yon palace hath Violence, a fearful guest,
 Been driven away.

Enter Klytemnestra.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Again let loose, meseems, thou art ranging free,
 Aegisthus is not here, who curbed thee still
 From gadding thus abroad to shame thy friends.
 Now, since he is afar, thou reckest nought
 Of me : yet oft to many hast thou denounced me, 520
 Ay, me, for reckless governance and unjust,
 For insolent tyranny over thee and thine.
 Not mine the insolence : I but rebuke thee
 Who many a time by thee have been reviled.
 Thy father—nought but this is aye thy theme,
 That he was slain by me. By me : I know it
 Full well; no thought is in me of denial;
 For Justice cut him off, not I alone :
 Thou on her side shouldst fight, wert thou but wise.
 For this thy father, whom thou wailest ever, 530
 Sacrificed to the Gods thy sister—he
 Alone of Hellenes dared this ! No such pain
 Knew he when he begat, as I who bare her !
 Lo now, instruct me—for whose sake did he
 Slaughter her ? For the Argives' sake, wilt say ?
 Nay, but no claim had they to kill my child.
 But if to shield his brother he slew her,
 Should I not be avenged on him for this ?

Had not Menelaus children, even twain ?
 Should these not fitlier die, the seed of him 540
 And her, for whose sake gathered were the ships ?
 Or with some strange desire was Hades filled
 To banquet on my children more than hers ?
 Or from thy cursed sire was love cast out
 For mine, and not for Menelaus' seed ?
 Is not such father witless, evil-souled ?
 Ay, well I wot!—though I speak not thy mind !
 So would my dead girl say, could she find voice.
 Now nay, for deeds that I have done my heart
 Sinks not: if in thine eyes my thoughts be evil, 550
 Get thee a just mind, ere thou blame thy neighbour.

ELECTRA.

Thou canst not now affirm that first was I
 To vex thee, and then heard these things from thee.
 But, if thou suffer me, I will declare
 Truth in my dead sire's and my sister's cause.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

O yea, I suffer thee. If alway thus
 Thy speech began, thou wouldst not gall mine ears.

ELECTRA.

Lo then, I speak. Thou say'st, ' I slew thy father '—
 Fouler admission could there be than this,
 Whether he justly died or no ? But I 560
 Will tell thee, thou unjustly slewest him,
 By thy vile paramour's wooing drawn thereto.
 Ask Huntress Artemis for what offence
 She bridled all winds that in Aulis blow.
 Or I will tell—since none may question her.
 My sire, the tale runs, in the Goddess' grove

Taking his pleasure, roused with chasing feet
 A dappled antlered hart: he shot, he slew ;
 Then chanced to speak thereof a vaunting word.
 For this was Leto's Daughter wroth, and stayed 570
 The Achaians' sailing, till my sire, to atone
 For that slain beast, should sacrifice his child.
 Thus fell her sacrifice : release was none
 Else for the host, homeward or Ilium-ward.
 Wherefore, through strong constraint, in vain re-
 sisting,
 He sacrificed her—*not* for his brother's sake.
 But if, if—lo, I state thy plea—he did,
 All of his will to help him, this, should he
 For this by thee be murdered ? By what law ?
 Take heed lest thou, appointing men such law, 580
 Appoint thine own self suffering and repentance.
 For, if we still slay one for other's sake,
 Thou first shouldst die, if thou hadst justice' due.
 Nay, look to it lest thy plea be all unreal;
 For, an thou wilt, tell wherefore now thou art found
 Doing a deed of all deeds shamefullest,
 Who couchest with his murderer, hand in hand
 With whom erstwhile thou didst to death my sire—
 By him hast children, and those lawful ones,
 Sprung of thy lawful lord, hast thou cast out ? 590
 How shall I praise this ? Or wilt thou say thus—
 That here too thou dost but avenge thy child ?
 Foul vengeance, though thou say it ! Out on thee,
 To wed thy lord's foe for his daughter's sake !
 Nay, but I may dare to admonish thee,
 Who clamourest loud and long that I revile
 My mother ! Mother !—nay, I hold thee, I,
 Slaveowner more than mother unto me,
 Who live a life distressful, made to dwell
 With many ills by thee and thy co-mate. 600

And one afar, who scarce escaped thine hand,
 Hapless Orestes, wears out woeful days.
 Me hast thou oft reproached with rearing him
 For vengeance on thee. This, had I the power,
 I had done, be thou sure J If this be all,
 Publish me to the world a wicked woman,
 A brawler, an thou wilt, a shameless thing!
 For, were I perfect in all evil lore,
 I scarce could shame such blood as thine in me !

CHORUS.

I mark her breathing rage. If on her side 610
 Stand Right, or no, meseems she recketh nought.

KYTEMNESTRA.

Lo, of what spirit should I be toward her
 Who on her mother hath in such wise railed ?—
 And she thus old withal! Now deem ye not
 That she would dare without shame anything ?

ELECTRA.

Be well assured, for this I am full of shame,
 Albeit thou think not so. I do, I know it,
 Things all unmeet and unbecfitting me :
 But thy malicious spite, thine evil deeds,
 Against my nature force me unto this ; 620
 For evil deeds by evil deeds are taught.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Creature without shame ! I—my words, my deeds—
 Darest thou say it ?—teach thee malapert speech !

ELECTRA.

Thine is the speech, not mine. Thou dost the deed ;
 And thy deeds find out for themselves the words.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Now, by Queen Artemis, but thou shalt rue
This insolence, when comes Aegisthus back !

ELECTRA.

How now ? What burst of wrath ! Thou gav'st me
leave
Freely to speak, yet canst not even hearken !

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Will not thy clamour grant me even peace 630
For sacrifice ? I have Jet thee say thy say.

ELECTRA.

Nay, sacrifice, I pray thee. Blame not thou
My tongue. Henceforth I will not speak one word.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Take up these offerings mingled of all fruits,
Handmaid : to yon King¹ let me raise them up
For exorcism of mine haunting fears.
Thou hearken now, O Phoebus, champion mine,
To my veiled utterance—veiled, since not mid friends
My prayer is made, nor all may I unfold
Unto the light, while she stands herebeside, 640
Lest, in her spite, with manifold-clamorous tongue
She sow the city wide with slanderous rumour.
Yet even so hear. Thus I make petition :
The visions I beheld in this night past
In dubious dreams—these, O Lyceian King,
If they portend good, to fulfilment bring ;
If evil, turn the evil on my foes.

1. Apollo, whose altar was in front of the palace.

If any plot by guile to cast me out
 From this my high estate, suffer them not,
 But grant that I, aye living scatheless thus, 650
 May hold the Atreids' halls, the sceptre sway,
 And see good days, co-mate with friends which are
 My co-mates now, with children in whose hearts
 Dwelleth no hate of me or bitter spite.
 This, O Lyceian, Apollo, graciously
 Hear, and vouchsafe me, even as I pray.
 But all the rest, albeit I speak it not,
 Sure am I that thou know'st, who art a God:
 For of a surety Sons of Zeus see ail.

Enter Guardian.

GUARDIAN.

Ye stranger dames, may I be certified 660
 If this the prince Aegisthus' palace be ?

CHORUS.

This is it, stranger : thou hast guessed aright.

GUARDIAN.

Rightly do I divine withal, who hold
 This dame his wife ? She bears her like a queen.

CHORUS.

Yea verily : lo, in presence standeth she.

GUARDIAN.

Hail, Queen ! With tidings welcome unto thee
 And to Aegisthus from a friend I come.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Fair fall thy speech ! But first I crave to know
 This of thee—who of men hath sent thee forth ?

GUARDIAN.

The Phocian Phanoteus, with charge of weight. 670

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Its purport, stranger ?—speak ! If from a friend
Thou come, sure am I, glad thy tidings are.

GUARDIAN.

Dead is Orestes. Thus in brief 'tis told.

ELECTRA.

Ah, woe is me ! Death comes on me this day !

KLYTEMNESTRA.

What say'st ?—what say'st thou, stranger ? Heed
not her.

GUARDIAN.

Orestes' death I tell, now as before.

ELECTRA.

Woe's me ! It is my death ! I am nought hence-
forth !

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Heed thine own matters thou :—but thou to me,
Stranger, tell truth : in what wise perished he ?

GUARDIAN.

To this end was I sent: I will tell all. 680
Unto the festival, the world-famed boast
Of Hellas, came he for the Pythian Games.
He heard the herald's voice far-ringing publish
The footrace, for decision first ordained.
He entered, radiant-goodly : marvelled all.

Forth from the start he sped, back to the finish,
 And winner stood of victory's glorious guerdon.
 To tell thee in few words things manifold,
 In deeds and triumphs no such man I have known.
 One thing know thou—of all the athlete-trials 690
 Ordained, and by those presidents proclaimed,
 In all he won the prize of victory
 All-envied, oft as they hailed him 'Argos' son,
 Orestes named, the seed of Agamemnon
 Who mustered that famed Hellene host ercwhile.'
 Thus far of triumphs : but when by a God
 Man's feet are foiled, not even the strong may 'scape.
 He on another day, when at sunrise
 Came on the fleetfoot race of chariot-steeds,
 Entered, with many a driver of the car. 700
 One was Achaian, one from Sparta, twain
 Of Libya, lords of yoked chariot-teams :
 He, driving mares Thessalian, in their line
 Stood ranged the fifth : the sixth had chestnut fillies,
 Aetolian he : Magnesian was the seventh :
 White steeds the eighth, by lineage Ainian, drave:
 The ninth from Athens came, the god-built burg:
 Last a Boeotian closed the chariot-line.
 There stood they, as the appointed presidents
 Cast lots for them, and ranged the chariots so • 710
 The brazen trump rang—forth they dashed—together
 Cheered they their horses on—their hands the reins
 Shook. All the course was sudden-avalanched
 With thunder of rattling cars. Up spirited dust
 And hung. Together turmoil-mingled all
 Spared nought of goads, as this, as that, outstripped
 Axle of rival, snortings of his horses.
 For over backs of steeds, o'er racing wheels
 Flashed foam-flakes, beat the breathings of the horses.
 But he at each turn made his axle graze 720

The endmost pillar close, let go loose-reined
 The right trace-horse, and held the near one in.
 Thus far, unstaggered ran the chariots all :
 But now the Ainian driver's hard-mouthed mares
 Cast off control, and by a sudden swerve,
 As ended the sixth lap, the seventh began,
 Dashed full-front into the Barkaian car.
 Then, from that first mischance, one hurled to earth
 Other—was overthrown : all Krisa's plain
 Was with the shipwreck of the chariots strewn. 730
 This marked the skilled Athenian charioteer,
 And drew aside and waited, letting pass
 The surge of chariots weltering in mid-course.
 Then last came driving, keeping rearmost still
 His mares, Orestes, trusting to the end.
 He saw that other left alone his rival—
 Shrilled through his swift mares' ears the challenge-
 cry—
 Gave chase—now level drew those racing twain
 Their car-yokes—this one now, and that anon
 Pushed to the front his chariot-horses' heads. 740
 Round all those courses hitherto unharmed
 Erect he rode on car that never reeled :
 But now, in slackening the left rein, as swung
 Close round the turning-post his horse, unwares
 He struck it. Snapped in the midst the axle-nave.
 Hurlled was he o'er the car-rail, in the reins
 Uptangled ; and, as to the earth he fell,
 The steeds in mid-course this way sprang and that.
 Now when that mighty concourse saw him flung
 Thus from his car, one wild cry wailed o'er him, 750
 Wailed for his gallant deeds, his piteous fate,
 Dashed now to earth, uptossing now to heaven
 His limbs, until the chariot-grooms with pain
 Checked the wild-hurrying steeds, distangled him

All blood-bedabbled—never friend had known
 That wretched body, had he looked thereon !
 They burnt him on the pyre. In a little urn
 That goodly frame, to pitiful ashes shrunk
 Phocians thereto appointed hither bring,
 That of his fatherland he may gain—a grave. 760
 Lo, this is all—a thing most sorrowful
 To tell; but for beholders, as was I,
 Awful beyond all horrors I have seen.

CHORUS.

Woe and alas ! Our Kings' line long-descended
 Hath perished, root and branch, meseemeth, now!

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Zeus ! can I call this issue fortunate,
 Or dreadful—yet a boon ? The pity of it,
 That by mine own loss I must save my life I

GUARDIAN.

Why thus cast down, O Queen, at this my tale ?

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Mighty is motherhood ! How wronged soe'er, 770
 A mother cannot hate the child she bore.

GUARDIAN.

Meseems, then, to no profit have I come.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Not that!—how shouldst thou to no profit speak,
 If thou with certain tokens of his death
 Hast come ? Life of my life albeit he was,
 My breasts, my nurture, he disowned, estranged

An exile I Me, since forth this land he went,
 No more he saw, but of his father's murder
 Accused me still, and threatened dread revenge.
 Wherefore might slumber nor by night nor day 780
 Brood sweetly o'er me ; but the imperious hours
 Were ever onward beckoning me to death,
 But now—for this day free of fear I stand
 From him, from her—for she, a curse more baleful,
 Was housed with me, was draining evermore
 My life-blood like strong wine—at peace, I ween,
 For aught her threats avail, my days shall pass.

ELECTRA.

Alas for me ! Well may I now bewail
 Thy fate, Orestes ! Thou to this brought down,
 And by this mother mocked ! Oh, is this well ? 790

KLYTEMNESTRA.

For thee, not ! As he is, for him His well.

ELECTRA.

Hear, Vengeance-goddess of the newly-dead !

KLYTEMNESTRA.

She hath heard the Right!—and well hath she fulfilled !

ELECTRA.

Mock on, triumphant now ! It is thine hour !

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Wilt thou not, thou and Orestes, end me now ?

ELECTRA.

We are ended. Fear is none lest we end thee.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Rich should the guerdon be that thou hast earned
Stranger, if thou hast hushed her clamorous tongue.

GUARDIAN.

So then will I depart, if this is well.

KLYTEMNESTRA.

Not so : for then not worthily of me, 800
Nor of the friends that sent thee shouldst thou fare.
But pass thou in, and let this girl without
Behowl her own misfortunes and her friends'.

[Exeunt Klyt. and Guardian.]

ELECTRA.

Seems she to you as one that, sorrowful
And anguished, doth with passionate tears lament
A son who thus hath perished ?—wretch accurst!
Nay, smiling hence she passed ! Ah, woe is me !
Dear, dear Orestes, dying thou hast slain me !
For thou art gone, and from my heart hast reft
The last, last hopes that tarried yet with me, 810
That one day thou wouldst come, alive, to avenge
Thy sire and me ! Now, whither shall I turn ?
Alone, alone I am, of thee bereaved
And of my sire. Must I again be thrall
Mid folk of all folk most abhorred of me,
My father's murderers ? Oh, is it well with me ?
No, no ! I will not henceforth evermore
House me with these ; but here beside this gate
Will cast me down, friendless to pine away.
Wherefore, if my words gall them, let one slay me 820
Of those within. To slay me were a grace :
'Tis grief to live. I have no desire of life.

CHORUS. *(Str. 1)*

Where now are the lightnings of Zeus, and the Sun-
god's splendour where,
If they look on all this unmoving, and strip not hy-
pocrisy bare ?

ELECTRA.

Woe's me and alas !

CHORUS.

Nay, wherefore, my daughter,
these tears of despair ?

ELECTRA.

Out on thee !

CHORUS.

Speak not so wildly !

ELECTRA.

Mine heart by thy words shall
be broken ! 830

CHORUS.

How meanest thou ?

ELECTRA.

If, touching him who we know by manifest token
Unto Hades hath passed, thou shalt still breathe a
hope unto me,
Thou shalt trample yet more on one wasted with
misery !

CHORUS. *(Ant. 1)*

Nay, but I know how King Amphiaraus, betrayed for
a chain,
Snare of gold, by his wife, was engulfed in the earth's
ribs cloven atwain :
Yet now underground—

ELECTRA.

Ah me I

CHORUS.

In his soul's full might doth he reign. 840

ELECTRA.

Out on her!

CHORUS.

Out on her ? Yea, for she unto death who
haled him—

ELECTRA.

Was slain !

CHORUS.

Yea.

ELECTRA.

I know it, I know : for while yet mid the shades
he bewailed him,
To avenge him a champion arose. But for me is there
none ;
That one who was left hath been snatched away : he
is gone !

CHORUS. *(Str. 2)*

Hapless art thou, and hapless lot is thine !

ELECTRA.

Yea, I too know it—all too well I know, 850
Over whose head a turbid torrent-flow,
Through all the months, of woe on bitter woe
Sweeps ever onward through this life of mine.

CHORUS.

We have seen what ills have stirred thy long lament.

ELECTRA.

Ah then, no more from depths of desolation
 Essay to uplift me, seeing expectation—

CHORUS.

What cry thus utter-hopeless rings ?

ELECTRA.

Is dead, that aid shall now through him be sent,
 My brother, seed of noble kings !

CHORUS. *(Ant. 2)*

To every man comes death, the common lot. 860

ELECTRA.

The common lot!—to die as there he died
 In torment, dashed beneath the rushing tide
 Of hoofs of car-steeds, hurled from side to side
 Trapped in the reins' indissoluble knot !

CHORUS.

Beyond imagining fearful was his doom !

ELECTRA.

O yea—a stranger in a stranger nation,
 Without my loving hands' sad ministrations—

CHORUS.

O me, the pity of that end !

ELECTRA.

Thrust out of sight, not laid within the tomb
 And wailed by me, his one, one friend ! 870

Enter Chrysothemis.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

With joy I haste, beloved, back to thee
 Heedless of seemliness, so with speed I come.¹
 For joys I bring, and from the afflictions rest
 Which thou with sighing hast endured till now.

ELECTRA.

Thou, whence shalt thou for mine afflictions find
 Help, when no healing may be seen for them ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Orestes is with us—I tell thee this—
 In bodily presence plain as thou seest me !

ELECTRA.

How now ? Art mad ? Alas for thee, dost make
 A mock of thine afflictions, thine and mine ? 880

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

No ! by my father's hearth ! No mock is this
 I utter : he is verily here with us.

ELECTRA.

Ha ! woe is thee !—from whose lips hast thou heard
 This tale which all too simply thus thou trustest ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I of myself, none other—for I saw
 Clear tokens—have received and trust the tale.

1. To run in the street, or even to walk fast, was not
 'respectable' in a Greek city.

ELECTRA.

What proof, unhappy ! saw'st thou ? Whereunto
Looking, dost thou with cureless fever burn ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Nay, in the Gods' name, hearken ! Hear my tale :
Thereafter name me wise or name me fool. 890

ELECTRA.

Say on, if any joy be thine in telling.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Yea, lo, I tell thee all that I have seen.
When to our father's ancient tomb I came,
I saw how from the grave-mound's summit streamed
Milk newly shed, saw garlands of all flowers
That blow, festooning our sire's sepulchre.
Seeing, I marvelled : then glanced I around
Lest haply some one yet were hovering nigh.
But when I marked how all around was still,
Nearer the grave I stole. At that tomb's edge 900
I saw a tress of newly severed hair !
O me ! when this I spied, flashed on my soul
That face which haunts it—from Orestes, dearest
Of all men, was this token that I saw !
I raised it in mine hands, spake nought ill-boding,
But straight for joy mine eyes were brimmed with
tears.

Yea, now as then, full sure am I that this,
This bright thing, from none other came save him.
For whose concern, save thine and mine, were this ?
For me, I did it not, as well I know ; 910
Nor thou—how couldst thou, who canst leave yon roof
Not even for a temple, and not rue ?

Ay, and our mother's heart inclineth not
To do thus, nor she had done it unperceived.
Nay, from Orestes these tomb-offerings are.
Dear one, be of good cheer ! Not always bides
Fortune unchanging with the selfsame folk.
She hath frowned on us in past time : but this day
Perchance shall usher many fair days in.

ELECTRA.

Ah ! all this while thy folly have I pitied ! 920

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What means this ? Brings my tale no joy to thee ?

ELECTRA.

Thou know'st not where thou driftest, what thou
dreamest!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

How should I not know what I plainly saw ?

ELECTRA.

Dead is he, hapless child. Hope of salvation
From him is lost. In no wise look to him.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Ah, woe is me ! Of what man heard'st thou this ?

ELECTRA.

Of one that was hard by what time he died.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

And where is this man ? Wonder thrills me through !

ELECTRA.

Within, a welcome guest—yea, to our mother !

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Ah, woe is me ! Of what man then were laid 930
Those many offerings on our father's tomb ?

ELECTRA.

To me most like it seems that there one laid
These for memorials of Orestes dead.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Oh hapless one !—and I with joy sped on
Bearing these tidings, knowing not the while
Our ruinous plight ! But now that I have come,
New ills I see, while old yet compass us !

ELECTRA.

Even so. Yet, if thou hearken unto me,
Thou shalt shake off the load of present woe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

How ?—shall I ever bring to life the dead ? 940

ELECTRA.

Not that I meant. I am not so sense-bereft.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

What biddest thou of all I can achieve ?

ELECTRA.

Be brave to do the thing I counsel thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

If it avail aught, I will not refuse.

ELECTRA.

Mark—without striving no success is won.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

I mark it: I with all my might will aid.

ELECTRA.

Hear then what deed I am resolved to do.
 Surely thou knowest, even as I, that friends
 Are none to help us : all hath Hades seized
 And torn from us, and we are left alone. 950
 I, while I yet had tidings that my brother
 Lived and waxed strong, kept hope alive that he
 One day would come to avenge our father's blood.
 Now, since he is no more, to thee I look
 That thou shalt shrink not from thy sister's help,
 To slay the man who spilt our father's blood,
 Aegisthus—nought from thee must now be hid.
 To what end idly linger ? Canst thou see
 One hope unwrecked ? Thy lot it is to mourn
 Robbed of thy father's wealthy heritage : 960
 Thy lot it is to pine through all these years,
 Loveless to fade, unwedded to wax old.
 Nay, dream no more that life's dear hopes shall ever
 Be thine to attain. Oh, not so void of wit
 Aegisthus is, that he should suffer sons
 Of thee or me to spring, to vex his peace !
 Nay, if thou hearken to my counselling,
 First, praise of filial love from our dead sire
 In Hades, and our brother, shalt thou win :
 Next, thou shalt bear through life the name of free, 970
 Thy birthright, and a husband worthy thee
 Shalt win : all men look up to heroic souls.
 Nay, seest not with what glory thou shalt crown

Thyself and me, if thou my bidding do ?
 For who that looketh on us, citizen
 Or alien, shall with praises hail us not ?—
 Crying ' Behold these sisters twain, O friends,
 Who out of ruin plucked their father's house,
 Who, careless of their lives, stood forth avengers
 Of blood, in their foes' mid-prosperity ! 980
 These all men needs must love, all reverence.
 In festivals, in city-gatherings,
 These for their heroism all should honour ! '
 Lo, in such wise shall all men speak our fame :
 In life, in death, our glory shall not fail.
 Ah, dear one, heed me ! Bear thy father's burden,
 Thy brother's toil ! Give to me rest from ills,
 Rest to thyself, this knowing, that in shame
 To live is shameful for the gently-born.

CHORUS.

In such emprise must he that speaks, and he 990
 That hears, alike take forethought for ally.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Ere she had oped her lips, this girl, O friends,
 Were she not crazed of wit, had had regard
 To prudence, as she hath not had regard.
 Whereunto looking, in such recklessness
 Dost mail thyself, and callest me to aid ?
 Canst not discern ? Woman thou art, not man,
 In strength of hand by thy foes overmatched.
 And day by day their fortune prospereth more,
 While waneth ours and wasteth unto nought. 1000
 Who then, that plots to vanquish such a man,
 Unwhelmed in woeful ruin shall escape ?
 Take heed lest, ill as is our plight, we attain
 Worse ills, if any overhear these words !

Deliverance were it none, nor help for us,
 To win us fair fame and a shameful death.
 Mere death is not most awful: worse is this—
To long for death, and be denied the boon!
 I do beseech thee, ere we perish wholly
 In utter ruin, and blot out our name, 1010
 Rein thou thy wrath! The words which thou hast
 said
 Unuttered will I keep, as unperformed.
 O get thee wisdom at the last—since might
 Is none in thee—before the strong to bow!

CHORUS.

Be ruled by her. No goodlier gain may men
 Win them than prudence and a heart of wisdom.

ELECTRA.

Nought hast thou said save that I looked for. Well
 I knew that thou wouldst cast from thee my prayer.
 Yet I with mine own hand alone will do
 This deed. I will not leave it unperformed. 1020

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Alas!
 Oh that thou hadst been such in purpose, when
 Slain was our sire! All hadst thou then achieved.

ELECTRA.

In nature such I was, in judgment weaker.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Strive to be such in judgment all thy days.

ELECTRA.

Thou wilt not help me—this thy counsel means.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Yea : who essays is like to reap but ruin.

ELECTRA.

0 happy prudence !—hateful cowardice !

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

When thou shalt praise, that too will I endure.

ELECTRA.

Never ! praise shalt thou never win from me !

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Long is the future, which shall this decide. 1030

ELECTRA.

Take thyself hence ; for help in thee is none.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

There is : but will to learn is none in thee.

ELECTRA.

Go thou, and tell this to thy mother—thine I

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Not with such hatred do I hate thee, I.

ELECTRA.

Thou dost!—to such dishonour dost thou thrust me!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Dishonour ?—no, but forethought for thyself.

ELECTRA.

Thy goal of justice—must I press to that ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

When thou art sound of wit, shalt thou guide me.

ELECTRA.

Pity who speaks so well should choose so ill !

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Thy words have told thine own unhappy case. 1040

ELECTRA.

How ? say'st thou justice echoes not my words ?

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Ay, but sometimes thy justice bringeth ruin.

ELECTRA.

By such rules I desire not, I, to live.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Do this— and thou shalt yet confess me wise.

ELECTRA.

Yea, do it will I, undismayed by thee !

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Is it even so ?—will not thy purpose change ?

ELECTRA.

Nought is more hateful than a faltering purpose.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

To nought I say wilt thou give heed, meseems.

ELECTRA.

Long since have I resolved this, not of late.

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Nay then, I go. Thou canst not brook to heed 1050
My words ; nor may I brook to tread thy paths.

ELECTRA.

Pass in ! I will not follow with thee—never!—
How sorely thou mayst yearn for me soe'er.
Uttermost folly is an aimless quest!

CHRYSOTHEMIS.

Nay, if thou seemest wise in thine own sight,
Such wisdom have thou. When calamities
Beset thy path, thou shalt commend my words.

[Exit.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Why, when we look on the birds of the air
Which follow wisdom's way,
And mark their requital of them that bare 1060
And fed them, with tendance of loving care,
Do we not even as they ?

Nay, by the lightning of Zeus, by the might
Of Themis enthroned in the sky,
On the thankless ere long shall vengeance light.
O Voice, which ringest through realms of Night
To the dead, send a dolorous cry
To the Atreids there : let them know the height
Of the shame and the misery.

(*Ant.* 1)
1070

Tell of affliction on this house laid,
 Of the feud that doth now transform
 The love whereon sister-hearts were stayed
 Into strife—how Electra, alone, betrayed,
 Is tossed in the heart of the storm.

Tell how she mourneth her father aye,
 How she wails with the passionate moan
 Of the nightingale : her cannot death dismay
 Who is ready to pass from the light of day,
 If but vengeance's work may be done,
 If the Furies twain of the house she may slay— 1080
 Was there ever so noble an one ?

(*Str.* 2)

Who greatly bears a great name will not deign
 In infamy to veil
 Its chivalrous traditions, nor to stain
 By a craven life its tale.

So hast thou chosen through sorrow-laden days
 To weep with them that weep,
 To tread dishonour down, and wisdom's praise
 And loyalty's to reap.

(*Ant.* 2)
1090

O may I see thy life in wealth and power
 Exalted even as high
 Above thy foes, as thou in this dark hour
 Low 'neath their hand dost lie !

I have watched thee : thou, where clouds hung deep
 and dense,
 The stern strait path hast trod
 Traced by the royal law of reverence
 To parents and to God.

Enter Orestes, with Pylades and two attendants.

ORESTES.

Dames, have we heard aright, and journey we
Arigh unto the place where we would be ?

CHORUS.

What is thy quest ? With what desire art come ?noo

ORESTES.

Where dwells Aegisthus long have I inquired.

CHORUS.

Well comest thou. Who told thee, blameless is.

ORESTES.

Who then of you to those within will tell
The coming of us twain, long time desired ?

CHORUS.

Yon maid, if nearest kin be fittest herald.

ORESTES.

Lady, I pray thee, pass within, and say
That certain men of Phocis seek Aegisthus.

ELECTRA.

Ah, woe is me ! not—surely bearing not
Manifest tokens of that tale we heard ?

ORESTES.

Of thy report nought know I. Strophius old 1110
Bade me bring hither tidings of Orestes.

ELECTRA.

Oh, stranger, what is this ? Fear thrills me through !

ORESTES.

In this small urn the poor remains of him
Dead, as thou seest, we bear, and hither bring.

ELECTRA.

Ah, woe is me ! Now manifest is the truth !
I see—may touch—mine anguish—oh, too plain !

ORESTES.

If for Orestes' fate thou weapest, know
This vase enfolds the body that was his.

ELECTRA.

Stranger, in heaven's name, if this urn conceal him,
Vouchsafe me but to take it in mine hands, 1120
That, over this dust weeping, therewithal
I may bewail myself and all mine house.

ORESTES.

Bear it to her, and give, whoe'er she be.
Not as a foe she thus petitioneth.
A friend she is, or some one near akin.

Attendant gives the urn to Electra.

ELECTRA.

Memorial of my best-beloved of men !
Last of Orestes ! Oh the difference
Between my farewell hopes and this my greeting !
Now do mine hands upbear thee—nothingness !
Then, starlike forth thine home I sent thee, boy ! 1130

Would God I had passed from life before that hour,
 Ere my hands sent thee forth to alien land—
 The hands that stole thee, rescued thee from murder !
 Then hadst thou lain dead, in that far-off day,
 Then in thy father's tomb hadst had thy share :
 Now, banned thine home, in alien land exiled.
 Thou hast died an ill death, from thy sister far.
 Nor I with loving hands—ah, woe is me !—
 Have bathed thee fairly, nor from ravening flames
 Have ta'en the woeful burden, as is meet. 1140
 Tended by alien hands, alas ! thou comest
 A little burden in a little urn.
 Woe and alas for nursing-care of old—
 So bootless !—which unceasingly on thee
 I lavished with sweet toil! Ay, never thou
 Wast to thy mother dearer than to me.
 None of the household nursed thee, only I.
 Thy babe-lips babbled ' Sister !—sister ! ' still.
 And now in one day vanished is all this [1150
 With thy death ! Like a wind-gust thou hast wafted
 All hence, and passed. Gone is thy father—gone !
 In thee I am dead : thyself hast died, art lost.
 Our enemies laugh. Frenzied is she with joy,
 The unmotherly mother! Oft thou sentest me
 Messages privily that thyself wouldst come
 To avenge thee on her. But our fate ill-starred—
 Thine, mine, hath done away with all these hopes,
 Yea, hath to me, in thy dear presence' stead,
 Sent *this*—sent dust and shadow profitless !
 Ah me ! ah me ! 1160
 Ah piteous body, woe for thee !
 Oh thou who wast sent forth—ah me !—
 On paths most awful, dearest! Thou hast slain me I
 Yea, in thy death I die, O brother mine'
 Therefore receive me thou to that thine home—

Nothingness unto nothingness I I will dwell
 With thee henceforth in Hades. While thou wert
 On earth, I shared all with thee. Now I long
 To be not from thy tomb in death debarred.
 For well I wot the dead sorrow no more. 1170

CHORUS.

Bethink thee, Electra, mortal was thy sire,
 Orestes mortal. Moan not overmuch.
 All we must die, must pay the common debt.

ORESTES.

Alas ! what can I say, and whither turn
 When speech fails ? I no more can curb my tongue !

ELECTRA.

What is thine anguish ? Wherefore say'st thou this ?

ORESTES.

Is this thy form Electra's noble form ?

ELECTRA.

This is it—an exceeding wretched form.

ORESTES.

Alas for thine affliction ! Woe is thee !

ELECTRA.

Can it be, stranger, thou bemoan'st my state ? 1180

ORESTES.

O form dishonoured, impiously marred !

ELECTRA.

Fitlier with none accord thy cheerless words.

ORESTES.

Woe for thy life unwedded, evil-starred!

ELECTRA.

Why, stranger, gaze upon me thus, and sigh ?

ORESTES.

How little were mine own griefs known to me

ELECTRA.

How hath our converse this revealed to thee ?

ORESTES.

Sight of thee thus with many woes beset.

ELECTRA.

Nay, 'tis a small part of my woes thou seest.

ORESTES.

Ha ! what could be sight more abhorred than this ?

ELECTRA.

That with the murderers nurtured I must be. 1190

ORESTES.

Whose murderers ? What horror here is hinted ?

ELECTRA.

My sire's. Enforced am I to be their thrall.

ORESTES.

What mortal doth constrain thee unto this ?

ELECTRA.

She bears a mother's name—no mother she!

ORESTES.

How doth she this ? By blows, or by imusage ?

ELECTRA.

By blows, misusage, and all tyrannies.

ORESTES.

And was there none to hinder, none to help ?

ELECTRA.

None. Whom I had, thou bring'st me, ashes now.

ORESTES.

Hapless ! How have I long time pitied thee !

ELECTRA.

No man, save thee, hath ever pitied me. 1200

ORESTES.

Save me is none in thine affliction stricken.

ELECTRA.

Sure, from some house of our kin com'st thou not ?

ORESTES.

That will I tell, if these hereby be loyal.

ELECTRA.

Loyal they are : in true ears shalt thou speak.

ORESTES.

First, yield this urn up ; so shalt thou hear all.

ELECTRA.

Nay, by the Gods, deal not with me so hardly!

ORESTES.

Obey my voice, and thou shalt nowise err.

ELECTRA.

Nay, I implore, take not my love from me

ORESTES.

I will not suffer thee.

ELECTRA.

Ah, woe is me,
Orestes, if I may not bury thee ! 1210

ORESTES.

Ah, talk not thus ! Thou hast no cause to moan.

ELECTRA.

No cause have I to moan a brother dead

ORESTES.

It is not meet that *thou* so speak of him.

ELECTRA.

Am I so thrust dishonoured from my dead ?

ORESTES.

Thou ? Nay, from nought. But this is none of thine.

ELECTRA.

Yea!—if this burden be Orestes' body.

ORESTES.

Orestes ?—No I Here is but fiction's mask.

ELECTRA.

Then where is mine unhappy brother's grave ?

ORESTES.

There is none ; for the living hath no grave.

ELECTRA.

How say'st thou, boy ?

ORESTES.

No lie is that I say. 1220

ELECTRA.

Liveth the man ?

ORESTES.

Yea, if in me is life.

ELECTRA.

Thou !—art thou he ?

ORESTES.

Look thou on this my seal,
My father's seal, and learn if sooth I say.

ELECTRA.

O blessdd day!

ORESTES.

Blessed, as witness I.

ELECTRA.

Dear voice, art *thou* here ?

ORESTES.

Seek not elsewhere.

Never so low will I stoop as that I should tremble
 before 1240
 Hearth-keeping women, but vain earth-cumberers
 now as of yore !

ORESTES.

Nay, but take heed ! In women too is found
 The battle-mood. This know'st thou, and hast
 proved.

ELECTRA.

Woe and alas ! Thou hast smitten mine heart with
 the shaft of my pain,
 Even the wrong that will never be veiled, that will
 loose not its chain,—
 Ay, and will never forget—till at last to revenge I
 attain! 1250

ORESTES.

I know, child, this ; but when the season due
 Summons, then shall we bear those deeds in mind.

ELECTRA. *(Ant.)*

Nay, but each moment is meet as it cometh, to blazon
 the wrong,
 To tell it all through,
 Seeing that scarce even now hath the fetterlock
 dropped from my tongue !

ORESTES.

I too assent: therefore to this give heed—

ELECTRA.

What needs then to do ?

ORESTES.

Out of due season speak not many words.

ELECTRA.

How should I rein me from rapture of speech, or how
of right 1260

Curb me to silence, when thou, O my daystar, hast
flashed out of night ?

Art thou not past expectation regiven, past hope, to
my sight ?

ORESTES.

Then saw'st thou, when to me the Gods said ' Go ! '
[For He who sent could surely safely lead.]¹

ELECTRA.

Grace that transcendeth all other is named in this
saying of thine,

If thou wast verily led to our halls by the guidance
divine! [1270

Surely herein is the finger of God, and I hail the sign.

ORESTES.

In part I hate to check thy joy, in part
Fear lest delight too much o'ermaster thee.

ELECTRA.

(Epode.)

O brother mine, who after long delaying
Hast deigned to appear—O happy path thou hast
taken !—

Do not, beholding me thus anguish-shaken,—

ORESTES.

For what boon now art praying ?

I. Line conjecturally supplied to fill lacuna indicated by
atrophic arrangement.

ELECTRA.

Bereave me not, nor force me to forego
The sweetness of thy face—ah, do not so !

ORESTES.

Nay, wroth were I, should any man do this !

ELECTRA.

Thou dost consent ?

ORESTES.

How should I answer no ? 1280

ELECTRA.

O friends, I have heard, have heard past expectation
This voice, and how should I
Rein in my passionate heart's glad acclamation,
Its rapture-cry ?
Ah me !—yet now I have thee !—thou appearest,
Thou, with the face in all the world the dearest,
The unforgotten face that haunted me
Through all calamity !

ORESTES.

Yet now put from thee all superfluous words.
Needs not to tell me how this evil mother,
Nor how Aegisthus drains and spills and squanders
Recklessly wealth of our ancestral halls. [1290
Thy tale should trammel action's season due.
But point thou what shall fit the present hour:
Where shall I hide, where show me, that my coming
May dash the laughter from the lips of foes ?
Take heed that she detect thee not, thy mother,
By thy glad face, when we draw nigh the halls.

But, as for tale of ruin falsely told,
 So moan : for, when we triumph, ours shall be
 Then, to rejoice, to laugh with lips unlocked. 1300

ELECTRA.

Yea, brother mine, as seemeth good to thee,
 So shall mine acts be here. I win my joys
 At thine hands ; as mine own I gain them not.
 I could not choose, by lightly afflicting thee
 To get myself great gain : else sorrily
 Should I subserve this fortune at the doors.
 Thou know'st how stands it here : yea surely, hearing
 How not beneath yon roof Aegisthus is ;
 But there our mother waits :—O fear not thou
 That she shall see my face with smiles agleam ! 1310
 For long-nursed hatred fills mine every vein :
 And, now that I have seen thee, ne'er shall I
 Refrain from tears—of joy ! How should I so,
 Who have in this one advent seen thee dead
 And living ? Marvels hast thou wrought in me !
 If living came my sire, I should not now
 Hold it a phantom, but believe I saw.
 Since then by such strange ways thou hast won to me,
 Lead thou as pleaseth thee. I, left alone,
 Of twain had missed not one—had saved my life 1320
 With honour, or with honour I had died.

ORESTES.

Ah hush ! The step of one of those within
 Now coming forth, I hear !

ELECTRA.

Strangers, pass in,
 Welcome the more that ye bring that which none
 May there reject, and none with joy receive.

Enter Guardian.

GUARDIAN.

O fools exceeding and bereft of reason !
 Hold ye your life no longer dear to you,
 Or is there no wit native-born in you,
 That here—not nigh, but in the very heart
 Of peril standing, ye perceive it not ? 1330
 Lo, if by yonder portals I had not
 Watched all this while, your plot had been revealed
 Long ere your bodily presence in yon halls.
 This to avert have I had heedful care.
 Have done with this your endless converse now,
 And with this maid's insatiate clamour of joy;
 And pass ye in : for in such strait delay
 Is death. Tis high time ye had ended all.

ORESTES.

How for mine entering stands it therewithin ?

GUARDIAN.

Well. None there is who knoweth who thou art. 1340

ORESTES.

Thou hast, meseems, reported me as dead.

GUARDIAN.

As one of those in Hades here thou art.

ORESTES.

And are they glad for this ?—or what say they ?

GUARDIAN,

This will I tell when all is done. Thus far
 With them is all well—yea, what is not well.

ELECTRA.

Who is this, brother ? Tell me, in God's name !

ORESTES.

Dost not discern ?

ELECTRA.

Nay, I cannot divine.

ORESTES.

Know'st thou not him to whose hands erst thou gav'st
me ?

ELECTRA.

Whom ?—wiiat say'st thou ?

ORESTES.

By whose hands I was sent
Hence unto Phocis privily by thy forethought. 1350

ELECTRA.

Ha ! is this he whom out of many I
Alone found faithful when my sire was slain ?

ORESTES.

Even he. In words too many question not.

ELECTRA.

Dear light of help ! Sole saviour of the house
Of Agamemnon, com'st thou ? Art thou he
Who rescuedst him and me from many ills ?
O dear, dear hands ! O service of thy feet
Most precious !—how hast thou so long been here,
And I knew not, was shown not ? Thou didst slay me
With words, whose deeds were kind beyond all word.
Hail, father !—yea, as father I look on thee— [1360

Hail! more than all men have I hated thee
And loved thee, be assured, in one short day.

GUARDIAN.

Enough, meseems ! for what since then befell,
Manifold-circling nights and days remain
To unfold, Electra, all these things to thee.
But to you twain I say, now is the time
To act. Alone is Klytemnestra now.
Now, no man is within : but, if ye dally,
Bethink you, ye will have to fight, not these 1370
Alone, but more, more skilled in fight than these.

ORESTES.

Not many words henceforward, Pylades,
This emprise asks : in haste must we pass in,
First kissing the ancestral images
Of Gods who in this palace-porch way dwell.

[Or. Pyl. and Guard, enter palace.]

ELECTRA.

Apollo, King, hear these twain graciously,
And me withal, who oft before thy shrine
Have stood, with all I had in suppliant hand.
Lyceian Apollo, now, with all I have
I pray, beseech, implore thee :—be to us 1380
A gracious helper in this enterprise ;
And manifest to all men what reward
The Gods bestow on men for godless deeds.

[Enters palace.]

CHORUS. (Sir.)

See, breathing out slaughter the War-god is striding
On ! Of his strength who abideth the testing ?

Even now 'neath the roof that so long hath been hiding
 Murder most foul, have the hounds sure-questing
 Passed, tracking the blood-slot relentless, un-
 resting.

Therefore not long shall the dream of my soul
 Tarry straining its gaze on a doubtful goal.

[1390
 (*Ant.*)

On, on, is the champion of spirits enfolden
 In the nethergloom led, ever stealthy-stealing
 To thy sire's halls stately with splendours olden,
 With the blade in his hand new-whetted for
 dealing
 Death. Maia's son, Hermes, in darkness con-
 cealing
 Their plot, to the sure goal leadeth him on
 No more to delay, till the deed be done.

Electra comes out of palace,

ELECTRA.

Women, dear women, even now the men
 That deed are doing !—wait in silence ye.

CHORUS.

Ah what ?—what do they now ?

ELECTRA.

She for the tomb 1400
 Decks out the urn, and they stand hard beside.

CHORUS.

And thou, why hast thou darted forth ?

ELECTRA.

To watch,
 test haply, ere we know, Aegisthus come.

KLYTEMNESTRA (*within*).

*Ah me!—O dwelling
Void of all friends, and with destroyers thronged I*

ELECTRA.

One shrieks within there ! Hear ye not, O friends ?

CHORUS.

An awful cry have I heard—woe's me !—and I shudder
to hear !

KLYTEMNESTRA (*within*).

O wretched I ! Aegisthus, where art thou ?

ELECTRA.

Lo there, a second shriek !

KLYTEMNESTRA (*within*).

O son ! my son ! 1410
Pity thy mother!

ELECTRA.

No compassion of thee
Had this man, nor the father who begat him !

CHORUS.

O Argos ! O house ill-starred ! Near now and more
near
Doth the end of the doom that hath daily pursued
thee appear!

KLYTEMNESTRA (*within*).

Oh ! I am stabbed I

ELECTRA.

Strike, if thou canst, once more !

KLYTEMNESTRA *{within}*.

Woe's me!

ELECTRA.

Would it were '*Woe is Aegisthus !*' too !

CHORUS.

Now are the curses fulfilling their work ! They live
 once more
 Who were laid in the grave ! From the murderers
 they who were murdered of yore 1420
 Drain the blood of avenging—lo, they are here ! From
 yon hands drip
 Unto Ares the sacrifice-drops of death!—speech
 faints on my lip !

Enter Orestes and Pylades.

ELECTRA.

Orestes, how hast sped ?

ORESTES.

In yon house all
 Is well—if well Apollo's oracle spake.

ELECTRA.

Dead is that wretched woman ?

ORESTES.

Fear no more
 Dishonour from thy mother's spite for ever.

CHORUS.

Refrain you ! I see Aegisthus full in view.

ELECTRA.

O sons, make haste, draw back!

ORESTES.

Where do ye see 1430

The man ?

ELECTRA.

Lo, from the outer city into our power
In joy he comes.

CHORUS.

Pass ye with speed yon portals through.
Now—well ye have done at the first; at the end so
do!

ORESTES.

Fear not; I see the end.

ELECTRA.

Press to thy goal!

ORESTES.

Lo, I pass in. (*Exit*).

ELECTRA.

Now must I play my part.

CHORUS.

With bated breath and whispered humbleness
Accost yon man, that unawares to stress 1440
Of strife and Justice he may press.

Enter Aegisthus.

AEGISTHUS.

Who of you knoweth where those Phocians be
Who brought, men tell me, tidings that Orestes

In chariot-shipwreck hath foregone his life ?
Ha ! thee—I ask of thee—yea, thee, erstwhile
So bold. I trow this nearest touches thee :
And thou, as one who knoweth, best shouldst tell

ELECTRA.

I know—how should I not ? Else nought to me
The fate of all most near and dear should be.

AEGISTHUS.

Where shall the strangers be then ? Answer me ! 1450

ELECTRA.

Within : they have sped, have won their hostess'
heart.

AEGISTHUS.

Ha ! dead did they report him—verily dead ?

ELECTRA.

Nay, showed him—proved it, not by word alone.

AEGISTHUS.

Here is he ?—manifest for me to see ?

ELECTRA.

Ay, he is here—a bitter sight to see.

AEGISTHUS.

Thy words speak joy to me beyond thy wont.

ELECTRA.

Rejoice—if this to thee be food for joy.

AEGISTHUS.

I bid keep silence : be the gates flung wide
 For all Mycenæ's, Argos' sons to see,
 That if erewhile by vain hopes of this man 1460
 Upborne was any, seeing him now dead,
 Such may accept my curb, and not perforce
 Taste of my vengeance, and get wisdom so.

ELECTRA.

Lo now, my part hath end : I am schooled by time
 To wisdom, to conform me to the strong.

*The doors are flung open, disclosing a snrouded corpse
 on a bier : Orestes and Pylades stand beside it*

AEGISTHUS.

Zeus ! I behold a sight wherein I trace
 Thy jealousy ! — I unsay it, if Nemesis hear.
 Withdraw the face-cloth from before mine eyes,¹
 That of me too may kindred blood be mourned.

ORESTES.

Thyself uplift it. Not my part, but thine 1470
 It is to sec this, and greet lovingly.

AEGISTHUS.

Thou counsellest well: so will I do. But thou *{to
 Electra}*
 Call Klytemnestra, if she be within.

ORESTES.

Herself is nigh thee. Look not elsewhere.

1. Or, " from the corpse's face."

*Aegisthus raises the face-clctth, and sees the corpse of
Klytemnestra.*

AEGISTHUS.

Ah—hi What see I?

ORESTES.

Why fear ? Dost know her not ?

AEGISTHUS.

What men are these amidst whose net—woe's me I—
I am fall'n ?

ORESTES.

And hast thou known not all this while
That thou hast talked with men both quick and dead ?²

AEGISTHUS.

Woe's me ! I read the riddle ! Verily this
Shall be Orestes who thus challengeth me ! 1480

ORESTES.

Wisest of seers—and wast so long at fault!

AEGISTHUS.

Lost am I—wretched I! Yet suffer me
A moment's speech.

ELECTRA.

Nought further let him say,
Nor multiply words, my brother, in heaven's name !
What profits it, when men are trammelled up
In doom's net, this delay that bids death wait ?

**1. Or (Jebb), " That thou hast still miscalled the living
dead."**

Nay, slay him with all speed, and cast him out
 To buriers such as he hath merited,
 Far from our sight. My one salve this shall be
 For all the wrongs in time past done to me. 1490

ORESTES.

Pass thou in, and forthright. No strife of words
 Is imminent now ; but this is for thy life.

AEGISTHUS.

Within why drive me ? If this deed be good,
 What need of darkness ? Canst not slay me now ?

ORESTES.

Dictate thou not. Pass in to where thou slewest
 My father, in the selfsame place to die.

AEGISTHUS.

Ha ! must it be so ? Must this roof behold
 Present and future ills of Pelops' line ?

ORESTES.

For thee, yea : perfect seer am I herein.

AEGISTHUS.

Not through thy father came thy vaunted skill !¹ 1500

ORESTES.

Long thy tongue wrangles, while thy feet delay.
 Hence !

AEGISTHUS.

Lead thou on.

1. Since Agamemnon did not foresee his own fate.

ORESTES.

Nay, thou must pass before.

AEGISTHUS.

Lest I escape thee ?

ORESTES.

Nay, but thou shalt die not
As please th thee. Thy death must I make bitter.
This should be the swift penalty for all
Whoe'er presume to overstep the laws,
Even death. Then were not villainy so rife.

[Exeunt Orestes, Pylades, and Aegisthus.]

CHORUS.

O Atreus' house, after hard fights fought
With calamity, now is thy freedom wrought,
By this emprise to fulfilment brought. 1510

[Exeunt]

TRACHINIAN MAIDENS.

ARGUMENT.

DEIANEIRA, daughter of Oineus king of Aetolia, was wedded to Herakles after he had overcome in fight her monstrous suitor, the River Achelous. As he bore her home to Tiryns, the Centaur Nessus laid hands on her at the ford of the Evenus ; wherefore Herakles shot him with an arrow poisoned with the venom of the hydra of Lerna. The dying centaur bade Deianeira take of his blood, and keep it as a love-charm, wherewith to win back her lord's heart, if it should ever turn from her.

In process of time, when Herakles was long absent, performing his mighty Labours, Deianeira fled from Tiryns for fear of Eurystheus, and dwelt at Trachis. But when the Labours of Herakles were accomplished, he smote the city of Oichalia in Euboea, for love of Iole daughter of Eurytus the king of that land.

And herein is told of the loneliness of Deianeira, of the patience of her love, and how she sought to win back her lord's heart by the spell of the blood of the Centaur, and of all the calamity that came thereof.

DRAMATIS PERSONS.

HERAKLES, *son of Zeus and Alkme.na.*

DEIANEIRA, *wife of Herakles.*

HYLLUS, *son of Herakles and Deianeira.*

LICHAS, *herald of Herakles.*

IOLE, *captive daughter of Eurytus.*

ATTENDANT.

MESSENGER.

NURSE.

CHORUS, *consisting of Maidens of Trachis.*

SCENE :—In front of the house of Herakles at Trachis.

TRACHINIAN MAIDENS.

DEIANEIRA.

THERE is an old saw current among men—
Thou canst not know a man's life ere he die,
Whether his days be evil days or good.

But mine—yea, ere I pass to Hades' halls,
I know it fortune-crossed and weariful;
I who, yet in my father Oineus' home
Dwelling in Pleuron, terror-haunted shrank
From marriage more than any Aetolian maid.

My suitor was a river, Achelous,
Who under three forms asked me of my sire. 10

Now as a manifest bull he came to us,
Now flashed in serpent-coils, was a man's trunk now
Ox-headed ; down his tangled beard the while
Streams welled and ran as from a fountain-source.

Expecting such grim wooer day by day,
In misery evermore I prayed to die
Ere to such bridal couch I should be brought.

At last—at last—oh glad was I thereof !—
Zeus' and Alkmena's glorious scion came.

He with that monster closed in battle-strain, 20
And saved me. Now the fashion of their strife

I cannot tell: I know not. Whoso sat
At that sight unappalled, he might declare.
For there I crouched with utter fear distraught,
Lest anguish should for me be beauty's prize.

Zeus, Conflict-lord, adjudged the issue well—
 If well it was : for, joined to Herakles,
 His chosen bride, I am evermore in fear,
 Boding his bane. Night unto night succeeding
 Ushers my torment in, and banishes. 30
 Yea, born to us were sons, to whom their sire
 Is as the tiller of a lonely glebe,
 Who sees it but at earing and at harvest;
 Such fate still wont to send mine hero now
 Home, now from home, at his taskmaster's hest.
 Yea, now he hath risen sunlike from his night
 Of toils, am I fear-ridden most for him ;
 For, since he slew the might of Iphitus,
 We in this Trachis have as exiles dwelt
 In strangers' halls. Now where my lord is gone 40
 None knoweth : he hath vanished, and hath thrilled
 My heart with bitter travail-pangs for him.
 That mischief hath befallen him, sure am I :—
 For 'tis no short space, but months ten and five
 By this that he abides unheralded ;—
 Some dread mischance hath happed ! He left at
 parting
 An ominous tablet : oft I pray the Gods
 That I have not received it to my grief.

HANDMAID.

Queen Deianeira, oft-times have I marked
 Thy lamentations and thy many tears 50
 That wail the absence of Lord Herakles.
 But now, if slaves may fitly counsel folk
 Freeborn, if I may point thee out thy path—
 How is it that, being so rich in sons,
 In quest of thy lost lord thou sendest none,
 Hyllus above all, as is meet, if aught
 He cares to know how prospereth his sire ?

But lo, he cometh, bounding nigh the halls !
If then thou deem my words in season said,
My counsel and the man attend thy pleasure. 60

DEIANEIRA.

My child, my son, from low-born lips may speech
Of wisdom strangely fall. Lo, how this maid,
A thrall, hath said words worthy of the free !

HYLLUS.

What words ? Tell, mother, if I may be told.

DEIANEIRA.

That 'tis thy shame, that thou hast ne'er inquired
Where is thy sire, so long a wanderer.

HYLLUS.

Nay, but I know, if rumour may be trusted.

DEIANEIRA.

In what land dwells he ? Hast thou heard, my son ?

HYLLUS.

Through all last earing-tide, to Lydia's queen,
Say men, he did the service of a thrall;— 70

DEIANEIRA.

Nought were too strange to hear, if this he brooked !

HYLLUS.

But from this bondage is released, I hear.

DEIANEIRA.

Living or dead, where now doth rumour place him ?

HYLLUS.

Against Euboea's land, they say—the town
Of Eurytus—he marches, or will march.

DEIANEIRA.

Ha ! know'st thou—know'st thou, son, thy sire left
me
Sure oracles concerning this same land ?

HYLLUS.

What were they, mother ? I know not their tenor.

DEIANEIRA.

That either he must find his life's end there,
Or prosperously achieve this last emprise, 80
And happy pass his residue of days.
When in doom's trembling scale he lieth thus,
Son, wilt not lend thine aid, when saved we are
If he shall save his life, or with him die ?

HYLLUS.

Mother, I go. Had I but known ere this
The oracle's words, long since had I been there.
Sooth, my sire's wonted guardian-fate forbade
That we should fear, or tremble overmuch.
Now that I know, nought will I leave untried 90
To search out all the truth concerning this.

DEIANEIRA.

Go then, my son. Success, though late it come,
Bringeth reward to him who tasteth it.

Enter Chorus : they turn towards the east.

CHORUS.

(*Str.* 1)

O born of the Night and reborn at the hour when her
 star-flashing vest
 From her fainting limbs is torn, who art lulled yet
 again to rest
 By her amid splendours of flame, O Sun-god, O Sun-
 god, on thee
 I cry—I beseech thee, proclaim where the Son of
 Alkmena may be.

Tell, thou whose blaze flashes bright as the levin.
 Is he threading the Strait in his ship ?—doth he wait
 where the mainlands twain are sundered by
 sea ? 100

Speak, thou whose gaze is keenest in heaven !

{*Ant.* 1}

For they tell me, they which have seen, how the
 yearning heart of the wife,
 Of Deianeira the Queen, who was prize of a Titan
 strife,—

Like the bird o'er its harried nest which lamentetii—
 can never still

In the sleep of a tearless rest the passionate longings
 that thrill

Her heart with a fear that forgetteth never
 One far away, while she pineth aye on a widowed
 couch whose memories fill no

Her spirit with drear forebodings ever.

(*Str.* 2)

As one seeth the multitudinous waves

Evermore on the wide sea forward-sweeping,
 As the tireless tempest behind them raves—

One passeth, the next cometh onward-leaping—

So the tide of the travail of life through the world,
 Like the seas on an iron-bound coast that be hurled,
 Now doom ward hath dragged, now high hath whirled
 On its crest wind-torn the Cadmus-born ;
 Yet into the darkness of Hades never
 Hath he fallen, whom still doth a God deliver. 120

{Ant. 2}

Wherefore I praise not this thy despair—
 In reverence I speak, yet I needs must reprove
 thee—
 It beseems not to kill with the canker of care
 All the patience of hope. Let this thought move
 thee :

The Son of Kronos, the King who doth reign
 Over all, did never for mortals ordain
 The law of a life exempt from pain ;
 But to all men gladness in turn and sadness
 Come, even as the Bear with his great lights seven 130
 Ever sweepeth his circle out through the heaven.

(Epodc)

As the night star-gemmed doth abide not with mortals
 Evermore, so neither doth dark tribulation,
 Nor wealth, but its wings flash away through the
 portals
 Of our life : one knows joy's exultation,
 And another's hopes in bereavement perish.
 Wherefore I counsel thee, Queen, still cherish
 Hope in thine heart. Who hath seen the seed
 Of Zeus forsaken of him in their need ? 140

DEIANEIRA.

Thou com'st as who hath heard, I well divine,
 My trouble ; but the depth of my soul's pangs
 Thou know'st not now, and mayst thou never prove.

For youth on fancies feedeth in a world
 Of faerie all its own ; nor heat of sun,
 Nor rain, nor any storm-blast troubleth it,
 But pleasure-winged life soars above all care—
 Until the maiden maid no more is called,
 But wife, and care thereafter haunts her nights,
 Care, trembling for a husband or a child. 150

Then shall one see, when she on her own plight
 Looks, 'neath what misery's burden I am bowed.
 O yea, I have wept o'er many a woe ere now ;
 But one is here whose like I have known not yet :
 For when on this last journey Herakles,
 My king, set forth from home, then in his halls
 He left an ancient tablet graven o'er
 With symbols, which lie cared not theretofore,
 Going on many an emprise forth, to explain ;—
 Ah, then to achievement marched he, not to
 death !— 160

But now, as one doomed, named what I must take
 For widow's portion, named what share his sons
 Should severally receive of their sire's realm.
 Yea, and a time did he appoint, three months
 And one year, for his absence from his land.
 ' Then/ said he, ' I must at this season die :
 Or, if I overpass the limit-space,
 A painless life thereafter shall I live.'
 These things, he said, were by the Gods foredoomed,
 That so should Herakles' labours be fulfilled, 170
 As in Dodona spake, said he, of yore
 By those twin doves the immemorial oak.
 And the fixed certainty of all accords
 With this time, wherein they must be fulfilled ;
 So that from sweet sleep ever and anon
 I leap, friends, sore afraid lest I must live
 Aye widowed of the noblest man of men.

CHORUS.

Peace from ill-boding words ! — I see a man
Draw nigh, as for glad tidings garland-crowned.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Queen Deianeira, first of messengers 180
I will dispel thy fear. Alkmena's son
Lives, know thou, and is victor ; and he brings
Firstfruits of battle to his country's Gods.

DEIANEIRA.

Ancient, what word is this thou tellest me ?

MESSENGER.

Soon to thine home shall come the long-desired,
Thy lord, appearing with victorious might.

DEIANEIRA.

Who, citizen or stranger, told thee this ?

MESSENGER.

Lichas the herald, in yon summer-pasture
Of kine, proclaims this to a crowd. I heard,
And sped so, as first bearer of good news, 190
To have thy guerdon and thy gratitude.

DEIANEIRA.

Why comes himself not, if so well he speeds ?

MESSENGER.

Nay, Lady, nowise easy is this for him :
For round about him all the Melian folk
Stand questioning : he cannot onward fare.

Evoe ! Lo, how it whirls me away in a passion of
 dancing
 Into the rush of the ring where the Bacchanals' feet
 are glancing ! 220
 Praise to the Healer ! O praise him ! Behold, dear
 lady, behold—
 Joy lived but in hearing—in sight 'tis appearing : the
 cloud is uprolled !

DEIANEIRA.

I see, dear maidens—yea, my sentinel eyes
 Have failed me not—have yon procession spied !
 All hail, O herald, now so late appeared,
 If aught thou bring that may with joy be hailed.

Enter Lichas with attendants and captive women.

LICHAS.

Well have I come, and well thy greeting rings,
 Lady, as fits achievement. Fortune fair 230
 Ought for its guerdon welcoming words to win.

DEIANEIRA.

Friend, dearest friend, tell first what first I long
 To know—shall I greet Herakles alive ?

LICHAS.

Yea, in unminished strength of lusty life
 And health I left him, by disease unsmitten.

DEIANEIRA.

In what land ?—fatherland or alien ?—speak !

LICHAS.

On a Euboean foreland, where he assigns
 Altars and glebe unto Kcnaian Zeus.

DEIANEIRA.

Fulfilling vows, or bidden by a seer ?

LICHAS.

For vows, made when his spear o'erthrew the land 240
Of these, the women whom thine eyes behold.

DEIANEIRA.

And these—in Heaven's name, whose be they, and
who ?
Piteous, if I mistake not, is their plight.

LICHAS.

These, when he sacked the town of Eurytus,
He chose out, for his own prize and the Gods'.

DEIANEIRA.

Ha ! and before this city tarried he
Afar, that weary space of days untold ?

LICHAS.

Nay, but the more part of the time was held
In Lydia ; not, himself saith, a free man,
But sold to thrall—nay, start indignant not, 250
Lady, for here Zeus' hand was manifest.
Sold to barbarian Omphale thy lord
Fulfilled a year of thrall, as saith himself.
So was he stung through suffering this reproach,
That on himself he laid an oath, and swore
That he would yet enslave, with wife and child,
The man who laid this load of shame on him.
Nor vainly spake : when he was purified,
With a great host he marcheth to the town
Of Eurytus ; for he alone of men, 260

Said he, was guilty of this wrong to him,
 Who, when he came a guest unto his halls,
 An ancient friend withal, yet railed on him
 With much foul speech, with much infatuate spite—
 Said, ' Though thine hands bear shafts that none may
 shun,

Thee should my sons outdo in archery-test! '—
 Cried, ' Thrall of a free man, broken-spirited
 Art thou ! ' At feasting last, he cast him forth
 His doors, when filled with wine. For which things
 wroth,

When to Tirynthia's hill-slopes Iphitus¹ came 270
 Thereafter, seeking pasturing horses strayed,
 When elsewhere were turned his eyes and thoughts,
 Herakles hurled him from the towered steep.
 Because of this deed angered was the King,
 Father of all that live, Olympian Zeus,
 And spared not, but to thralldom banished him,
 Because he slew this man alone of men
 By guile. For, had he quelled him in fair fight,
 Zeus had forgiven his death, as justly wreaked :
 For the Gods too hate brutal insolence. 280

But they who vaunted with despiteous tongue,
 Even they in Hades now are dwellers all,
 Their city enslaved. These women thou seest here,
 Hurl'd from prosperity to misery,
 Thus come to thee. This was thy lord's com-
 mand,

And I, his loyal servant, this fulfil.
 When thy lord's self hath offered victims pure
 To Zeus his fathers' God for conquest made,
 Look thou that he shall come. Most sweet is this
 Unto thine ear, of all my welcome tale. 290

1. Son of Eurytus.

CHORUS.

Queen, now is manifest proof of thy content,
Half full in view, and half in story told.

DEIANEIRA.

How shall I not rejoice with fullest cause
Hearing how prosperously hath sped my lord ?
Joy's feet must needs along love's pathway run.
Yet they who well consider well may quake
For him who prospers, lest he haply fall.
Deep pity entereth mine heart, O friends,
Beholding these ill-starred ones, homeless cast
On a strange land, unfathered wanderers, 300
Who erstwhile sprang, perchance, of freeborn sires,
But now have thralldom for all heritage.
Zeus, Victory-giver, may I ne'er see thee
Ever against my seed thus march to war—
Never, if this thou wilt do, while I live !
So thrilled am I with fear, beholding these.
(*To Iole*) O hapless one, of maidens who art thou ?—
Unwedded, or a mother ?—nay, thine aspect
Speaks thee all strange to this, high-born withal.
Lichas, of mortals who is the alien maid ? 310
Her mother who ? What father gave her life ?
Tell: for of these I pity her most, as one
Who of them all alone can feel her plight.

LICHAS.

What know I ? Wherefore question me ? Perchance
By birth she is not the meanest in that land.

DEIANEIRA.

Not, sure, of the royal house ? Had Eurytus seed ?

LICHAS.

I know not. I inquired not at such length.

DEIANEIRA.

Know'st not her name from one that journeyed with
her?

LICHAS.

No whit. In silence I performed my task.

DEIANEIRA.

Speak, hapless, for thyself, at least to me. 320
Sore pity it is that thou be all unknown !

LICHAS.

She will not, if she be as heretofore,
Unlock her lips, who hath uttered not a word,
Ere this, or good or bad, in any place,
But aye in anguish-travail pours out tears
For her affliction's burden, since she left
Her tempest-beaten home. In sooth, her plight
But adds to her sorrows ; yet it hath excuse.

DEIANEIRA.

Then let her be : thus let her pass within
Unvexed, as best may please her. Let her not 330
From me have fresh grief added to her woes :
Suffice her present pain. To the palace now
Pass all, that thou be free to hasten whither
Thou wilt, and I set all in order there.

[Exit Lichas with captives.]

MESSENGER.

Here tarry a little space, that thou mayst learn,
Now these are gone, *whom* 'neath thy roof thou
bringest—

Love laid a spell on him to wage this war—
 No Lydian thraldom under Omphale,
 Nor doom of Iphitus hurled down to death,—
 This he suppressed, so gave himself the lie.
 But, when he could not bend her father's will
 To give his child as thy lord's concubine, 360
 Some paltry charge and grievance he invented,
 And marched against her country, on the throne
 Whereof sat Eurytus, as Lichas said.
 He slew the king her father, and laid waste
 Their town. He hath sent her now, as thou dost see,
 To these halls, Lady, not without design,
 Nor as a bondmaid—look not thou for this !
 How should he, being aflame with love for her ?
 I thought good, therefore, to reveal to thee
 All, Queen, which, as befell, I heard of him. 370
 Yea, many another man, no less than I,
 Heard this in the Trachinians' gathering-place :
 They can convict him. If my tale be bitter,
 Sorry am I; yet have I spoken truth.

DEIANEIRA.

Oh wretched I! In what plight am I now !
 What sorrow have I received beneath my roof
 Unwares ! Unhappy I!—what, is she nameless
 Indeed, as he who brought her sware to me ?

MESSENGER.

With splendour of beauty splendour of name she
 hath,¹
 Sprung from no less a sire than Eurytus, 380
And Iole called. Yet yon man never named
 Her parents—since, forsooth, he had nowise asked !

1. Reading *ovo/ua*, with Jebb, but taking in the same sense as in 1. 308.

TRACHINIAN MAIDENS.

CHORUS.

Perish—if not all wicked men, the man
Who doeth secret wrong to his own shame!

DEIANEIRA.

Damsels, what shall I do ? The tale that rings
Now in mine ears hath made me sore amazed.

CHORUS.

Go, ask of Lichas : he will tell truth now
Surely, if thou wilt straitly question him.

DEIANEIRA.

Yea, I will go, for wisely dost thou speak.

MESSENGER.

Shall I abide here ? Or what must I do ?

DEIANEIRA.

Abide : yon man, ere I have sent for him,
Self-summoned forth the house is coming now.

Enter Lichas.

LICHAS.

Lady, what shall I say to Herakles ?
Tell; for I am, thou seest, at point to go.

DEIANEIRA.

What haste is this of thine, who cam'st so late,
To flee, ere I have had more speech with thee !

LICHAS.

Nay, if thou fain wouldst ask aught, here am I.

DEIANEIRA.

Dost thou indeed hold fast by loyal truth ?

LICHAS.

In whatsoever I know, great Zeus be witness.

DEIANEIRA.

Who is the woman, who, whom thou hast brought ?
[400

LICHAS.

Euboean. For her birth, I cannot tell.

MESSENGER.

Ho thou ! give heed :—to whom dost speak, think'st
thou?

LICHAS.

Thou, what hast thou to do to ask me this ?

MESSENGER.

Shrink not from answering, if thou hast the wit.

LICHAS.

To the Queen Deianeira, Oineus' child,
The wife of Herakles—if I see not
In vain—and to my mistress do I speak.

MESSENGER.

Even this I sought to hear from thee. Say'st thou
That this thy mistress is ?

LICHAS.

Tis right I should.

MESSENGER.

How then ? What punishment deservest thou 410
If thou convicted stand of wronging her ?

LICHAS.

How wronging ? What is this thy subtlety ?

MESSENGER.

None. *Thou* art verily guilty of subtlety.

LICHAS.

I go. A fool was I so long to mark thee !

MESSENGER.

Not so, till answered one brief question be.

LICHAS.

Ask what thou wilt. Thy tongue is nowise tied !

MESSENGER.

Yon captive, whom thou broughtest to the halls—
Thou know'st of whom I speak ?

LICHAS.

Yea ! wherefore ask ?

MESSENGER.

This maid, whom seeing thou know'st not—didst thou
Not name her Iole, child of Eurytus ? 420

LICHAS.

Mid what men ? Who shall come, and whence, to
stand
And witness for thee that he heard me say it ?

MESSENGER.

Mid many folk. In Trachis' gathering-place
A great throng heard thee say this very thing.

LICHAS.

Ay, *said* they heard ! Tis not all one to voice
An empty fancy, and to prove the word.

MESSENGER.

A fancy, quotha ! Didst not say, with oaths,
Thou broughtest her for bride to Herakles ?

LICHAS.

A bride ?—I ! In heaven's name, dear mistress, say
Who is this stranger, who, that questioneth me. 430

MESSENGER.

He who stood by, and heard thee say, her love
O'erthrew a city—that not Lydia's queen
Smote it, but passion that outflamed for her.

LICHAS.

Queen, let this man go hence. No wise man's part
It is to waste words on a brain diseased.

DEIANEIRA.

By him whose levin-javelins pierce the glens
On Oeta's ridge, by Zeus, hide not the word !
To no revengeful woman shalt thou tell it,
Nor one who knoweth not man's nature, how
He joys not in the same things evermore. 440
Whoso against Love standeth up to fight,
As who should smite with fists, he lacketh wit.
Love ruleth over Gods as pleaseth him,

Ay, and o'er me—why not o'er such as I ?
 If then I take on me to blame my lord
 Smit with this malady, stark mad am I,
 Or if I blame this maid, who doth but share
 What brings no shame to them, no wrong to me.
 I do not so. But if thou, schooled of him,
 Liest, a sorry lesson hast thou learnt: 450
 If thou be thine own teacher, thou art proved
 Cruel, when thou desirest to be kind.
 Nay, tell me all the truth. Ill fate were this,
 That to the free should cleave the name of liar.
 It cannot be that thou shalt baffle me :
 Thou hast told many ; they will answer me.
 Know, if thou fearest, causeless is thy fear ;
 For nought save ignorance can torture me.
 Why dread the knowledge ? Hath not Herakles
 Wedded more brides than any man beside ? 460
 And none of them hath yet received from me
 Hard word or taunt: nor shall this woman, though
 His soul be melted with her love ; for I
 Beholding, from mine heart have pitied her,
 Seeing her beauty so hath wrecked her life.
 And she hath ruined and enslaved her country
 Not of her will, poor girl! Nay, let this pass,
 Tossed to the winds. But thee I warn,—be thou
 False to all else, but never lie to me.

CHORUS.

Obey her; well she speaks. Thou shalt not blame 470
 Our queen hereafter, and shalt earn my thanks,

LICHAS.

Nay then, dear mistress, since thy mood beseems
 A mortal, not an unforgiving tyrant,
 I will speak all the truth, and nothing hide.

Yea, it is even as this man doth say :
 For her did strong desire through Herakles
 Thrill, and for her sake ruined utterly
 Fell 'neath his spear her sire's Oechalia.
 And this—for I must do him justice too—
 Never he bade conceal, never denied : 480
 But I myself, Queen, out of my sore dread
 Lest by this story I should wound thine heart,
 Have sinned, if thou account this deed a sin.
 Now, seeing that thou knowest all the tale,
 Both for his sake and for thy sake withal,
 Bear with yon maid, and let thy words, but now
 Uttered, be ratified as touching her.
 For he, in all else mightiest of hand,
 Is perfect weakness, matched against her love.

DEIANEIRA.

Yea, mine own self am minded so to do. 490
 I will not load me with self-sought affliction,
 By waning with the Gods. Now^r 'neath yon roof
 Pass we, that thou mayst bear my messages,
 And gifts wherewith I must requite his gifts
 Mayst take withal. Unmeet it were that thou
 Go empty hence, who com'st with such array.

[Exeunt Deianeira and Lichas.]

CHORUS. *(Sir.)*

Mighty the victories are that the Love-queen wins
 evermore—

I will speak not of Gods oft quelled by her might,
 Neither tell how the Scion of Kronos by her was be-
 guiled of yore, 500
 Nor of Hades the dweller in Underworld-night,

Nor yet of Poseidon whose thunderous sea-mace
shaketh the shore.

I will tell of the Titan twain that strove
In the lists for Deianeira's love,
How to battle they rose with clangour of blows and
with billowing dust-clouds veiling them o'er.

(*Ant.*)

A River was one ; but his godhead's might 'neath the
form did he hide

Of a bull four-footed of towering horn—
Achelois from Oiniadae : came the other from Thebe,
pride 510

Of Bacchus ; in his hands brandished were borne
The bow and the spear, and the club wherewithal
Zeus' son defied

His foe to the fray. To the grapple they leapt :
And the Love-queen came, and the lists she kept
Sole arbitress of the battle-stress of these who were
furious to win the bride.

(*iEpodc*)

Then was hailing of blow on blow—
The clang of the hard-strained bow—
The clash as the bull's horns shocked—
Limbs straining in fierce grip locked : 520

And the horned brows dealt deadly blows,
And the laboured gasps from the deep chests rose.
And in dainty beauty the prize of their might
On a hill-side sat, on a far-seen height,
Awaiting her lord, the victor in fight.
Of such weird strife do I tell the tale.
But alas for the bride, the battle's prize,
There waiting the issue with tear-dimmed eyes !
It is ended—at last doth the Hero prevail:
From her mother's arms is she suddenly torn
Like a heifer left of its dam forlorn. 530

Enter De'ianeira.

DEIANEIRA.

The while, my friends, our guest yet speaks within,
 Ere he depart, unto yon captive maids,
 I unto you have stolen forth the doors,
 In part, to tell you what mine hands have wrought,
 In part, to mourn with you my sufferings.
 Yon maid—no maid, I ween, but wedded wife—
 Have I received, as mariner ships a freight,
 A merchandise of misery for mine heart.
 Co-tenants now, in one bed we abide
 Embraced—we twain J Such guerdon Herakles, 540
 He who is called my loyal loving lord,
 Hath sent for mine house-warding through long years !
 Yet have I no heart to be wroth with him
 So oft afflicted with this malady.
 But with yon girl what wife could brook to dwell—
 Of the same husband but to have the half ?
 I mark her bloom still waxing to the full,
 Mine waning. The eye loves to pluck the flower
 Of such as hers, from mine to turn aside.
 Therefore I dread lest Herakles be called 550
 My lord—but husband of the younger bride,
 Howbeit, as I said, unmeet is wrath
 For a wife wise-hearted . . . Friends, I have a charm
 Sliall bring me heartsease and shall break that spell.
 I from an old-world monster had a gift
 Long since, kept hidden in a brazen urn.
 This, yet a girl, from shaggy-breasted Nessus,
 As dying he lay, I took—from his life-blood
 Who wont for hire to bear men o'er the stream
 Deep-rushing of Evenus, not with stroke 560
 Of oar, nor sail of boat, but in his arms.
 Me too, when sent forth from my father's halls
 A bride, I journeyed first with Herakles,—

He on his shoulders bare ; but in mid-stream
 With wanton hands assailed me. Then I shrieked ;
 And Zeus' son straightway turned about, and sped
 A winged shaft from his hands. Whizzing it plunged
 Through chest and lungs. The monster dying spake
 Thus unto me : ' O ancient Oineus' child,
 This profit of my ferrying shalt thou have 570
 Whom last I have borne across, if thou obey me :
 The blood around my death-wound clotted, blood
 Poisoned with Lerna's hydra-venom smeared
 On thy lord's arrows, take thou in thy hands.
 A charm shall this be to enthrall the heart
 Of Herakles ; so shall he never look
With eyes of love on woman, save on thee.'
 This, friends, I called to mind,—for in mine halls
 Safe locked away it lay since died the giver,— [580
 And smeared therewith this vesture, laying thereon
 All he spake living ; and my task is finished.
 But felon deeds audacious may I never
 Know, neither learn : I loathe who dare such tilings.
 Yet, so by love-charms haply to o'ercome
 Yon girl, by spells enthralling Herakles,
 This I contrived—except ye count mine act
 Folly : if this be so, mine hand is stayed.

CHORUS.

Nay, in the essay if aught of trust may be,
 To us thou seemest to have well devised.

DEIANEIRA.

Thus much of trust is here, fair likelihood ; 590
But never have I put it to the test.

CHORUS.

Thy deed must be thy surety : likelihood
 Cannot, except thou test it, grow to knowledge.

DEIANEIRA.

Full soon I shall know. At the gates even now
 I see yon man : he will be straightway gone.
 Only guard ye my secret: even for deeds
 Of shame, in darkness wrought, one need not blush.

Enter Lichas.

LICHAS.

What needs to do ? Declare thou, Oineus' child.
 Already have I tarried overlong.

DEIANEIRA.

Even this it is that hath employed me, Lichas— 600
 While yet thou spakest to yon maids within—
 That thou shouldst bear this mantle's flowing folds
 A gift unto mine hero from mine hand.
 In giving, charge him that none other man
 Clothe therewithal his limbs before himself,
 And that the sun's light look not thereupon,
 Neither the hallowed close, nor altar-flame,
 Ere my lord stand in sight of all, and show it
 Plain to the Gods at hour of sacrifice.
 For so I vowed, if I, by sight or hearsay, 610
 Knew him safe home returned, I would array him,
 As is most meet, in this, and show the Gods
 Their worshipper, a new man in new robes.
 A token shalt thou bear which he will know,
 The sign within the circle of this seal.
 Depart; and foremost heed the messenger's rule—
Exceed not thou thy duty, even in wish.
 Next, see to it that thank, both from my lord
 And me, be earned of thee, thy double guerdon.

LICHAS.

Nay then, if trustily I practise this

The Hermes-craft, I ne'er will fail thy need.
 Inviolate this casket will I bear,
 And faithfully therewith report thy words.

DEIANEIRA.

Set forth then straightway. Thou hast marked full
 well
 How ordered all things are his halls within.

LICHAS.

I have marked, and will report all warded safe.

DEIANEIRA.

Thou knowest too—thou saw'st what greeting met
 The stranger maid, how kindly I received her.

LICHAS.

Mine heart thereat was filled with glad amaze.

DEIANEIRA.

What shouldst thou more say then ? I fear me, lest
 Thou speak too early of my desire to him, [630
 Ere thou have known my lord's desire to me.

{Exeunt Deianeira and Lichas.

CHORUS. *{Str. 1}*

Hear, O ye dwellers by the steaming fountains
 Betwixt the haven and the craggy mountains,
 Even Oeta's spurs, the land
 Where to a lake the sea of Malis narrows,
 Abiders by the strand
 Of the Maid-goddess of the golden arrows,
 Where meets the Council world-renowned
 At Hellas' Gate on holy ground.

(Ant. 1)

Soon shall ye hear the flute's voice lovely-ringing 640
 Rise, with no note of sorrow bitter-stinging
 . Blent—only such sweet sound
 As from the lyre-strings 'neath Apollo's ringers
 Speaks unto Gods spell-bound.
 For Zeus's scion and Alkmene's lingers
 Afar no more, but hasting home
 With spoils of prowess doth he come.

{Sir. 2)

He was lost to our land, gone out of our life
 Like a sea-swallowed ship : twelve slow months drew
 To their end, and we waited, and nothing we knew.
 And through all those days was a loving wife, [650
 With a heart still haunted by pain unsleeping,
 Pining away evermore with weeping.
 But at last hath the War-god, stung to the fray,
 Ended the travail of grief's long day.

(Ant. 2)

May he come! May he come ! Let the swift sea-wain,
 The oar-winged galley, nor lag nor stay
 Ere he reach this town, having hasted away
 From the altar-hearth of the island-fane
 Where rumour speaketh him sacrificing :
 Steeped in desire by the weird devising 660
 Of the spell of the robe by Witchery spread
 With her charm, O thence be he homeward sped !

Enter Deianeira.

DEIANEIRA.

Girls, how I dread lest that which I have wrought
 But now, may all too hastily have been done !

CHORUS.

What is it, Deianeira, Oineus' child ?

DEIANEIRA.

I know not : faints my heart lest I be found
To have wrought sore evil, tempted by fair hope.

CHORUS.

Not—O not in thy gift to Herakles ?

DEIANEIRA.

Even so. Ah, never more may good intent
Suffice to recommend a doubtful deed ! 670

CHORUS.

Tell, if it may be told, what prompts thy fear.

DEIANEIRA.

Such thing hath happed, that, if I tell it you,
Girls, you shall hear a marvel unimagined.
That wherewithal but now I smeared the robe,
The festal pall, white wool-tuft of a sheep,
Is gone : no dweller in mine halls destroyed it,
But by itself devoured 'tis come to nought !
It crumbled from the slab's face. Thou shalt know
All as befell: hear then the fuller tale.
Of all that centaur-monster, when his side 680
Agonized with the bitter shaft, enjoined,
No whit forgot I, but I treasured all
Like record graven on brass indelible—
Yea, so was I forewarned, and so did I—
Even to guard this charm, unwarmed by fire,
Untouched by sunbeam, in a secret place,
Till newly spread I laid it on the robe.
This I observed. Now when it was to do,
In mine own bower I privily smeared it on [690
With a wool-tuft from one of the home-flock plucked.
My gift, untouched by sunbeam, folded I,

And in that chest I laid it, as ye saw.
 But, turning back within, I saw a thing
 Past telling, past expounding by man's wit.
 I had flung, it chanced, that fragment-flock of wool,
 Wherewith I smeared the robe, full in the glow
 Of the sun's rays ; and, as it warmed, all ran
 Into a formless mass, crumbling to earth,
 Most like in semblance as when from a saw
 Thou mark'st the wood-dust sifted, as it shears. 700
 So lay it, a fallen blotch. From the earth, whereon
 It lay, upseethed strange bubble-clots of foam
 As from the thick must of green summered juice
 That drips to earth, blood of the Vine-god's tree.
 So then, woe's me ! I know not what to think,
 Yet see that I have wrought some fearful deed.
 For wherefore should that monster, at his dying,
 To me show kindness, for whose sake he died ?
 It cannot be : nay, looking to destroy him
 Who smote him, lie beguiled me. I, too late, 710
 Attain this knowledge, when it nought avails.
 I only, if mine heart deceives me not—
 O wretch !—shall be destroyer of my lord.
 The shaft that pierced him brought, I know, to Cheiron
 Agony—yea, to a god—and, where it smites,
 Destroys all monsters. And the black blood-venom
 That welled from that death-wound—how shall it not
 Destroy my lord too ? Ah, I ween it must !
 Howbeit I am resolved that, if he perish,
 I by the same fate's swoop will die with him. 720
 For life in infamy may not be borne
 By her who honours her own gentle blood.

CHORUS.

Needs must we fear when things so dread befall ;
 Yet, ere the event, speak not the doom of hope.

DEIANEIRA.

There cannot be, in counsels evil all,
One ray of hope to light the path for trust.

CHORUS.

Nay, but to one who hath erred not wilfully
Tempered is wrath : and thou art in this case.

DEIANEIRA.

Not thus speaks one who in the mischief hath
A part, but she whose soul no horror loads. 730

CHORUS.

Silence from further speech would best beseem,
Except thou wilt tell aught to thy son : lo,
He is here, who went erewhile to seek his sire.

Enter Hyllus.

HYLLUS.

O that I might of three fates choose thee one,
Mother !—to live no more, or, being spared,
To be no mother of mine, or to obtain
A better heart than this that now is thine !

DEIANEIRA.

What is there, son, to be abhorred in me ?

HYLLUS.

Know, thou hast murdered thine own husband, yea,
My father hast thou murdered on this day ! 740

DEIANEIRA.

Woe's me ! What tidings hast thou brought, my son ?

HYLLUS.

Tidings of that which cannot be undone !
The deed the world hath seen who can recall ?

DEIANEIRA.

How say'st thou, son ? From what man's lips hast
heard
That deed so hideous hath been wrought of me ?

HYLLUS.

Myself beheld my father's awful fate
With mine own eyes : from no man's tongue I heard.

DEIANEIRA.

Where didst thou meet the hero ?—where stand by
him ?

HYLLUS.

If thou need'st telling, I must utter all.
When from the sack of Eurytus' town he passed 750
With trophies and with spoils of victory,
He reached Euboea's foreland breaker-swept,
The ness Kenaian : there to ancestral Zeus
He marked out altars and a sacred grove.
There first with yearning joy I looked on him.
He was in act to slay the victim-beasts,
When Lichas came, his herald from his halls,
Bearing that gift of thine, the robe of death.
He put it on him, as thou gavest charge ;
Then set himself to slay twelve steers unblemished 760
The war-spoils' first fruits : but he brought in all
A hundred divers beasts unto the altar.
At first that hapless one, in blithesome mood,
Rejoicing in the goodly vesture, prayed.
But when from fat of solemn sacrifice,

And oaken billet, blazed the blood-fed flame,
 Sweat o'er his flesh burst forth, and to his sides
 And every limb close clung the tunic, like
 A craftsman's work new-morticed : then his bones
 Shook with convulsive agony. Now the venom 770
 'Gan gnaw like some fell murderous viper's fangs :
 Then shouted he to Lichas evil-starred,
 Who was in no wise guilty of thy crime,—
 'Thou, with what treachery hast thou brought this
 robe ?'

But he, doomed wretch, nought knowing, named the
 gift

Thine only, and delivered even as sent.
 He, when he heard this, as a shuddering spasm,
 Clutching his lungs, thrilled through him even then,
 By the foot grasped him, at the ankle's hinge,
 And down on a rock with sea-surf dashed he hurled
 him. 780

White through his hair outsprayed the brain, with
 blood

Spattered, as riven asunder was his skull.
 With one sad wail the whole throng hailed that sight—
 Thy lord's affliction, and his servant's murder.
 Yet to the hero no man dared draw nigh,
 Who earthward dashed him now, now hurled aloft,
 Yelling and shrieking. Echoed the crags all round—
 The Lokrian forelands and Euboea's heights.
 But when his strength failed, as he flung himself
 Earthward in agony oft, with wailings oft 790
 Yelled malisons on his mismated union
 With thee, wretch !—his affinity with Oineus
 Whereby he gained such ruin and wreck of life,
 Then, lifting eyes wild-rolling athwart the smoke
 Shrouding him, saw me weeping there amidst
 That great throng, then he gazed on me and spake :

' My son, draw nigh: shrink not from mine affliction—
 No, not if death to me be death to thee !—
 But have me hence, and set, O set me down
 There where of mortals none shall look on me. 800
 If pity inhibit that, yet from this land
 Ship me with all speed ; let me not die here.'
 So charged he me ; midship we laid him straight,
 And with sore travail brought him to this land
 Groaning mid fierce convulsions. Him shall ye
 Straightway behold, living, or dead but now.
 Thus hast thou plotted, thus done, to my father,
 Convicted murderess ! May the avenging Justice
 And Furies scourge thee ! Wer't God's will, I'd curse
 thee !—

It is his will, for thou hast spurned his will, 810
 Who hast slain the noblest man of all the world
 Whose like thou never shalt behold again !

[Exit Deiancira.

CHORUS.

Why steal away in silence ? Know'st thou not
 Thy silence for the accuser testifies ?

HYLLUS.

Ay, let her steal away ! A fair wind waft
 Her from my sight to steal with all speed hence !
 For what hath she to do to flaunt the pride
 Of a mother's name, who doth nought motherlike ?
 Ay, let her go !—God speed her !—and the joy
 That she hath given my sire may she receive ! 820

[Exit.

CHORUS.

(Sir. 1)

Behold, O maiden-friends, how suddenly
 That word on us hath come
 Which old foreknowledge spake, the prophecy
 Of the Gods' doom,

Which said that, when the twelfth year should have
 run
 Through its last month of all,
 The long-linked chain of toils should hold Zeus' son
 No more their thrall.

Unswerving speeds the bark before Fate's breath ;
 For how should he, who sees
 The light of life no more, have after death
 Thrall-ministries ? 830
(*Ant.* 1)

The inevitable doom, the murderous cloud
 The Centaur's cunning wrought
 Torments him, wraps him in a venom-shroud
 Which Death begot,

The gleaming Dragon nursed—how then shall he
 Look on another dawn
 Round whom the Hydra-demon horribly
 Strained coils hath drawn ?

Goads forged by lies of dark-haired Nessus pierce
 His flesh : the venom-stain,
 That smears them, boils, and racks him in a fierce
 Whirlwind of pain.

(*Sir.* 2)

Nought did the hapless queen of this foresee :
 Only she marked dire mischief drawing nigh
 Her home with this new bride. The remedy
 Did her own hand apply.

Ah, but the issue !—that fell counsel spoken
 By strange lips in that fatal meeting bears
 Its deadly fruit ! For this she weeps heart-broken
 With ceaseless-streaming tears.

On cometh Fate, and utter ruin brings,
 Of guile begotten, 'neath her shadowing wings. 850
{Ant. 2}

The fountain of our tears is broken up :
 A plague more piteous o'er his flesh is poured
 Than aught wherewith his worst foes filled the cup
 Of anguish of our lord.

Woe for thee, dark steel of the spear-head flashing
 Oft in the forefront of the fray, whose might
 Brought the bride swiftly hither from down-crashing
 Towers on Oechalia's height ! 860
 Silent the Love-queen waited on the bride—
 We know her now—and made all this betide.

HALF-CHORUS I.

Is this but fancy, or yon halls within
 Hear I a wailing even now begin ?
 Ha ! is it so ?

HALF-CHORUS 2.

One cries—no cry unmeaning !—loud and shrill
 Rings a lament ! Yon home is stricken of ill !

CHORUS.

Nay look ! for lo,
 Yonder, with mien distraught and clouded brow
 Comes forth an aged dame shall tell us now. 870

Enter Nurse.

NURSE.

O daughters, of what heavy strokes of doom
 Forerunner was that gift to Herakles sent !

CHORUS.

Of what strange mischief, mother, speakest thou ?

NURSE.

She hath trodden—Deianeira,—that last path
Of all paths, paced by feet for ever still.

CHORUS.

Not—oh, she is not dead ?

NURSE.

Thou hast heard all.

CHORUS.

Alas for her !—dead ?

NURSE.

Once again thou hear'st it.

CHORUS.

Dead ! Oh, the pity of it ! How perished she ?

NURSE.

Most fearful in the manner.

CHORUS.

Tell us, dame,
Upon what fate she came. 880

NURSE.

She made herself a nothing !

CHORUS.

Ah, what passion,
What madness, hath with point of deadly brand
Slain her ? With death she crowned death—in what
fashion
Devised it, wrought it with unaided hand ?

NURSE.

By thrust of steel—a thrust of misery !

CHORUS.

That horror, O distraught one, didst thou see ?

NURSE.

I saw it, as one sees who stands hard by.

CHORUS.

What was its guise, its manner ? Tell to me. 890

NURSE.

She with her own hand dealt herself the stroke.

CHORUS.

What say'st thou ?

NURSE.

All too plain was that I spoke.

CHORUS.

She hath brought to the birth, this bride new-come,
She hath brought to the birth a mighty doom,
A vengeance-fury for yonder home.

NURSE.

Most true. But if thou hadst stood by, and seen
What deed she did, thou hadst pitied her indeed.

CHORUS.

Could woman's hand endure to achieve this work ?

NURSE.

Ay, dreadly. Thou shalt hear, and be my witness.
When she had passed beneath yon roof, alone, 900

And saw where in the halls her son arrayed
The couch, and made it ready for his sire,
She hid herself where none might look on her ;
Before the altar bowed and fell, and moaned
Her desolation, woeful-weeping touched
Each household-thing in time past used by her.
Hither she wandered, thither, through the halls,
And, as she marked each servant's kindly face,
She wept—ah woeful one !—to look on them,
Still crying out upon her own dark fortune, 910
And on her plight, made childless evermore.
When she had ceased therefrom, I saw her straight
Rushing into the bower of Herakles.
I, stealthy-peering, keeping still in shadow,
Watched her. I saw our lady on the couch
Of Herakles spread out the coverlet-cloaks ;
And, having finished this, she leapt thereon,
And midst the night's arrayings sat her down.
Then burst her tears forth in hot-welling streams—
'O couch!' she cried, 'O bride-bower that wast mine,
Farewell henceforth for ever ! Nevermore [920
Shalt thou for slumber take me to thy bosom !'
This only cried she : then with desperate hand
She loosed her vesture, where the golden brooch
Gleamed o'er her breast: then laid she wholly bare
All her left side, her shoulder, and her arm.
Thereat I ran thence with mine utmost strength,
And told the son of her who this devised.
But 'twixt my going and our swift return
We saw her, with the brand two-edged even then 930
Through side, through midriff thrust, into the heart!
That saw her son, and shrieked. Ah wretch, he knew
That his own rage had thrust her on this deed,
Told by the thralls too late that, of the Centaur
Beguiled, she had done that thing unwittingly.

Then into wailings manifold brake forth
 That woeful son, now moaning over her,
 Now falling lip to lip, now heart to heart,
 He lay outstretched ; and groaned, and groaned again,
 ' I have smitten her, in folly, with foul slander !' 940
 And weeping cried, ° Of twain at once shall I
 Be orphaned, of my father and of thee ! '
 So is it therewithin. If any man
 Count on the morrow or on days beyond,
 A fool is he. Thy morrow shall not dawn
 Ere thou have 'scaped with life from this day's peril.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

What woe shall I wail first ?
 Which misery is worst ?
 We know not, we, with all calamity accurst.

(Ant. 1)

Here in the house grief lies : 950
 We wail with sad surmise
 Grief—one are present pain and future in our eyes.

{Str. 2}

But oh that the blast of a storm-wind would here on
 our hearth upspring,
 And waft me afar from the homes of this land on its
 rushing wing,
 Lest of the sudden horror-thrill peradventure I die
 If I look but once on the mighty scion of Zeus most
 high :
 For in torment wherefrom deliverance is none, I hear
 them say,
 He is drawing near to the house—O unspeakable sight
 of dismay !

(Ant. 2)

Ha, near was the woe that my wailing foretold, ringing
 wild and high 960

As a nightingale's note—they be strangers' feet that
are now drawing nigh I

Ah, how are they bearing him on ?—as in grief for a
dear one dead

Softly and noiselessly moveth their sorrow-burdened
tread.

Alas and alas ! not a word is uttered as onward they
pace!

What shall we think ?—is he dead, or in sleep is he
hushed for a space ? 970

*Enter procession of bearers of Herakles, with Hyllus
and Old Man.*

HYLLUS.

Woe's me, my father, for thee ! O misery !
What shall the end be ? How can I help ? Ah me !

OLD MAN.

Nay, hush, my son, wake not the anguish-thrill
That stings thy sire to fiercest fury ! Still
He lives, albeit prostrate as in death.
Speak not—with clenched teeth hold thy very breath !

HYLLUS.

How sayest thou, ancient ? Liveth he ?—O reply !

OLD MAN.

Hush ! dare not to break the bands of slumber that lie
Lightly on him, nor to rouse and rekindle again, 980
O son, the madness that haunts him, the frenzy of
pain.

HYLLUS.

Nay, but this soul-crushing grief is a fire in my brain.

HERAKLES *{waking and starting up}*).

Ah Zeus, to what land have I come ? What mortals
are these

Among whom, agonizing in torments that never cease,
I am lying ?—alas, woe's me for these my pangs I
O God ! this foul thing tears me again with its fangs !

OLD MAN.

Said I not well that better it was that thou
Shouldest muffle in silence thy grief—not dash from
his brow 990
And tear from his eyes the veil of slumber ?

HYLLUS.

Alas!

I can bear not to look on him brought unto this ill
pass !

HERAKLES.

O thou Kenaian rock, high pedestal
That bare mine offerings up, what cruel guerdon—
Ah Zeus !—hast thou repaid to me for all
Those holy offerings ! Woe's me ! With what
burden

Of ruin hast thou crushed me in this hour !

Ah, would to God mine eyes had seen thee never !
Then had I not beheld this fiery flower 1000
Of maddening pain, wherefrom no charm shall
ever

Release me. What spell-chanter, or what touch
Of cunning leech—except Zeus' help avail him—
Could lull to sleep this torment ? O, if such
There be, from far with wonder would I hail him.
Ah, touch me not!—leave me, the lost wretch, leave
me !

Let the arms of the last long sleep receive me !

Where art thou touching me ?—How wouldst
 thou lay
 This body ?—ah, thou wilt slay me, wilt slay !
 Thou hast wakened the torment that slumber seemed
 to allay !
 It hath seized me !—again like a serpent it crawls !—
 of what blood do ye come,
 O ye in all Hellas most thankless of men ?—that
 Hellas for whom 1010
 On the sea and in many a forest I spent my strength
 for nought,
 Purging her plagues away—and when now unto this
 I am brought,
 Is there none by whose hand my deliverance with fire
 or with sword shall be wrought ?
 Will none shear off with the blade swift-wheeling
 Mine head, and bring to my misery healing ?

OLD MAN.

Son of the hero, a task is this that doth wholly exceed
 My strength : help thou to upraise him. Such might
 is thine for our need,
 That there wanteth not help from me.

HYLLUS.

His frame do mine hands uphold : 1020
 But ah, neither I nor another can give to the weary-
 souled
 Oblivion from anguish—his doom is of none save
 Zeus controlled.

HERAKLES.

Where art thou, my son ?—upraise me—so, even so
 Lay hold of my body—O Fate ! O anguish of woe !
 It leapeth upon me!—fierce and fell
 It leapeth upon me once more, to quell

My life in destruction—this plague that none may
 repel. 1030
 Oh Pallas ! I cry to thee, Pallas !—once more this
 torture-flame !
 Son, pity thy father ! O draw thou the sword which
 none shall blame ;
 Thrust down to mine heart, and heal this torment,
 the maddening deed
 Of thy godless mother ! O but to see her earn such
 meed
 Of her son, who destroyeth me ! Ah, sweet Hades,
 help me at need, 1040
 Blood-brother of Zeus ! O hush me to sleep—to
 sleep !
 Let doom's swift wings to thy darkness the stricken
 one sweep !

CHORUS.

Shuddering I hear the echo of the doom,
 Friends, of the king—so mighty and so stricken !

HERAKLES.

O many fiery toils, deadly to tell,
 With stress of hand and shoulder achieved of me !
 Yet never aught like this did Zeus's Queen
 Lay on me, no, nor yet Eurystheus' hate—
 Like this, which Oineus' child, the treacherous-eyed,
 Hath to my shoulders knit, this woven net [1050
 Of Vengeance-fiends, whereby I am perishing!
 For, to my sides close-cleaving, it hath eaten
 Even to the bones my flesh : it haunts, it shrivels
 The channels of my breath, hath drunk already
 My fresh life-blood : my frame is wasted wholly
 Trapped in this gin past all thought horrible.
 This never ranks of spearmen, earthborn host

Of giants, nor the might of those man-brutes,—
 Not Hellas, alien land, nor all of earth 1060
 That conquering I o'erran, hath e'er achieved.
 A woman—yea, a creature less than man !—
 Singly, without a sword, hath murdered me !
 O son, be thou my very true-born son ;
 Honour not more than mine thy mother's name !
 With thine own hands hale forth the house thy mother,
 And give her to mine hand, that I may know
 If more for me thou grieveest than to see
 Her beauty ruined by my righteous vengeance.
 Go, son : spare not to do it. Pity me, 1070
 In men's eyes pitiable, who like a girl
 Have screamed, have wept! Was never man might say
 That he had seen me do such thing ere now :
 But with no groan I met my sufferings ever.
 Woe's me, from hero now a woman found !
 And now draw nigh, stand by thy father's side,
 And see by what calamity I am brought
 To this. Yea, I will show my plight unveiled.
 Lo, gaze ye all upon this tortured frame :
 Behold a wretch, how pitiable my case ! 1080
 Ah me, oh misery !
 Oh hellish agony-throe that scorched me then,
 That thrilled my sides! No rest will they vouchsafe me,
 I ween, these horrible devouring pangs !
 King Hades, take me to thee !
 Oh flame of Zeus, smite through me !
 Swing high o'er me, King, and dash down thy bolt,
 Father, of levin ! Again it gnaws on me !
 Flowerlike it spreads, it shoots ! Oh hands, mine
 hands,
 Shoulders and breast, O arms that were my joy, 1090
 Ye are the same, the same, which in time past
 Gripped Nemea's haunter, scourge of herds, the lion,

A monster none might face, nor any challenge,
 And by main strength destroyed ; and Lerna's hydra,
 And that twin-natured, grim, horse-hoofed array
 Of Centaurs, tyrannous, lawless, haughty in might ;
 And Erymanthus' boar : and Hades' hound
 Of Hell, three-headed, portent hard to fight,
 Whelped by that dread Echidna ; and the dragon,
 Warder at the world's end of golden apples.

Ay, toils beside unnumbered have I proved, 1100
 And never foe hath triumphed o'er mine hands.
 Now, with joints thus disjoined, with flesh in shreds,
 By an unseen destroyer wretchedly marred
 Am I, of queenliest mother son proclaimed,
 I, published seed of Zeus the star-enthroned !
 Yet know this well, though a mere naught I be,
 Strengthless to crawl, I'll yet mishandle her
 Who wrought this scathe !—ha, let her but come near,
 She shall be taught to publish through the world mo
 That, living, dead, on felons I avenge me !

CHORUS.

Woe's me for Hellas ! What grief I foresee
 Shall be her portion, if she lose her hero !

HYLLUS.

Father, since thou vouchsafest me reply,
 Vouchsafing silence, hear me, spite of pain.
 I will but ask what justly I may claim.
 Grant me thy true self, not by passion torn
 Thus fiercely. Else, thou canst not know now vain
 Thy joy would be, how causeless is thy wrath.

HERAKLES.

Peace : speak thy meaning out. Thus racked with
 pain, 1120
 I comprehend not all this riddling speech.

HYLLUS.

My mother—I come to tell thee in what plight
She now is, how she erred unwittingly.

HERAKLES.

Villain of villains ! dost thou for thy mother,
Who slew thy father, speak ? Must I hear this ?

HYLLUS.

The truth so stands, that hold my peace I may not.

HERAKLES.

Nay, verily, not of her offences past!

HYLLUS.

Nor of the deed to-day, thyself wilt own.

HERAKLES.

Speak. Have a care thou prove thyself not vile,

HYLLUS.

I speak. She is dead—new-slaughtered even now.
[1130

HERAKLES.

Of whom ? Thy portent-utterance crowns mine ills !

HYLLUS.

Herself by herself; by no stranger hand.

HERAKLES.

Ha !—ere she died by mine hand, her just due ?

HYLLUS.

Thine own heart would relent, if thou knew'st all.

HERAKLES.

An odious preface this !—speak out thy mind !

HYLLUS.

One word sums all—she erred with good intent.

HERAKLES.

Good !—villain thou !—in murdering thy father !

HYLLUS.

Nay, by a charm she sought to enchain thy love,
Seeing thy purposed bridal, and so erred.

HERAKLES.

And who in Trachis hath such witchcraft-skill ? 1140

HYLLUS.

By Centaur Nessus duped long since, she weened
This charm would kindle frenzy of love in thee.

HERAKLES.

Woe and alas for me ! It is the end !
Lost! Lost! No more of light of life for me !
What doom hath overtaken me I discern.
Go, son,—thy father lives no more for thee ;—
Call hitherward thy brethren, all my seed,
Hapless Alkmena call, in vain the bride
Of Zeus, that ye may hear mine utterance,
My death-speech, even the oracles I know. 1150

HYLLUS.

Not here thy mother is : she hath her home,
As it hath chanced, in Tiryns by the sea.
Thy sons—some took she, and there fostereth :
And some are dwelling, thou shalt know, in Thebes.

TRACHINIAN MAIDENS.

I, father, with these who be here, will hear
What needs to do, and serve thee with my might.

HERAKLES.

Hear then thy task. Now shall it be revealed
What manner of man art thou, who art called my son.
It was foretold me of my sire long since
That of no breathing man should I be slain, 1160
But of the dead, a dweller in Hades' halls.
And this then was the Centaur, so foretold
Of Zeus—the dead who should the living slay I
Yea, and like oracles that agree with these
Will I declare, new consonant with the old,
Which in the grove of Sellians mountain-haunting,
Earth-couching, I on tablets graved, as spake
My father Zeus's oak-tree many-tongued,
Saying, in days now living, present now,
Deliverance from the toils besetting me 1170
Should be achieved. I looked for happy speed ;
Yet naught was this save doom of death for me !
Yea, for no travail more befalls the dead.
Since this then manifestly comes to pass,
Son, thou must prove thee now thy sire's ally,
And tarry not, to whet my tongue to fury,
But yield, and aid, self-prompted, having learnt
Life's noblest rule, to obey a father's hest.

HYLLUS.

Father, I tremble, footing such dark paths
Of speech ; yet all thy pleasure will obey. 1180

HERAKLES.

First of all things lay thy right hand in mine.

HYLLUS.

Why urgest thou this pledge thus vehemently ?

HERAKLES.

Give thine hand quickly ! Disobey me not!

HYLLUS.

I stretch it forth : thou shalt not be gainsaid.

HERAKLES.

Now by the head of Zeus my father swear.

HYLLUS.

To do what deed ? Shall this not first be named ?

HERAKLES.

That thou wilt surely accomplish all I say.

HYLLUS.

I swear it, for oath-witness taking Zeus.

HERAKLES.

Now, imprecate thy punishment, if thou fail.

HYLLUS.

I shall not fail, but do—yet imprecate. 1190

HERAKLES.

Know'st Oeta's highest crest, the mount of Zeus ?

HYLLUS.

I know—have sacrificing oft stood there.

HERAKLES.

Thither must thou bear up with thine own hands
My frame with help of whatso friends thou choosest,

And from the oak deep-rooted many a limb
 Must lop, of tough wild olive therewithal
 Hew thee great store, must lay thereon my body,
 Must grasp the splendour of a pinewood brand,
 And fire it. Let no tear of mourning start ;
 But without groan or tear, if son thou art 1200
 Of me, perform it : else will I abide
 Ever in Hades loading curses on thee.

HYLLUS.

Woe, father ! what hast said ?—how dealt with mo ?

HERAKLES.

That which thou must do. Else, become the son
 Of other sire ; be nevermore named mine.

HYLLUS.

Woe, woe ! that thou shouldst claim this of me,
 father,
 To be thy murderer—slay thee with my hand!

HERAKLES.

Nay, no whit I : healer I bid thee be
 And sole physician of my sufferings.

HYLLUS.

How shall I heal by kindling flame on thee ? 1210

HERAKLES.

If this thou dread, in any wise do the rest.

HYLLUS.

Sooth, I may **not** begrudge to bear thee thither.

HERAKLES.

Nay, nor to heap the pyre whereof I spake ?

HYLLUS.

Yea, so far that mine own hand fire it not.
All else will I do, nor will I be slack.

HERAKLES.

Even this then shall suffice. Yet grant to me
One small grace yet, to crown the great grace done.

HYLLUS.

Though it be passing great, it shall be thine.

HERAKLES.

Knowest thou her, the child of Eurytus ?

HYLLUS.

Thou meanest Iole, as I divine. 1220

HERAKLES.

Thou say'st. This is my charge to thee, my son :
Her, when I am dead,—if thou wilt reverence
Thy father, and remember these thine oaths,—
Take to thy wife, nor disobey thy father;
And let none other, in thy stead, of men
Take to him her who by my side hath couched ;
But let her be thine own, my son, thy bride.
Obey : for disobedience in small things
Mars all grace of obedience in the great.

HYLLUS.

Woe's me !—'tis ill to chafe at a mind diseased : 1230
Yet who can bear to see thee minded thus ?

TRACHINIAN MA IDENS.

HERAKLES.

Speak'st thou as purposed to do nought I say ?

HYLLUS.

Who could do this ?—sole cause unto my mother
Was she of death, of this thy plight to thee !
Who would, except he were by fiends driven mad,
Choose this ? Twere better, father, that I died
Than lived thus co-mate with thy deadliest foes I

HERAKLES.

My son, meseemeth, will not render me
My due, now I lie dying—the Gods' curse
Shall wait thee, if thou disobey mine hest! 1240

HYLLUS.

Ah ! thine affliction soon thou art like to show !

HERAKLES.

Ay ! thou dost wake the pangs that slept but now !

HYLLUS.

Oh wretched man ! in what sore strait am I !

HERAKLES.

Ay !—claim'st the right to disobey thy father !

HYLLUS.

Must I be in impiety schooled, my father ?

HERAKLES.

'Tis no impiety if thou glad mine heart.

HYLLUS.

Dost thou with all a father's right command it ?

HERAKLES.

I do. Hereof the Gods be witnesses.

HYLLUS.

Then will I do it, and not thrust from me,
Telling the Gods 'tis *thy* deed. Never vile, 1250
Father, shall I be proved through trusting thee.

HERAKLES.

Well dost thou end. Now render thou with speed
This kindness, son : before convulsion swoop
On me, or frenzy, lay me on the pyre.
Bestir ye : lift me. Ah, 'tis rest from ills,
This ! 'Tis the end that comes at last for me !

HYLLUS.

Yea, nought withstands to accomplish this thy will,
Since thou commandest and constrainest, father.

HERAKLES.

Come, ere the anguish from its lair outspringing [1260
Seize thee : with curb of iron and adamant rein
All outcry in, strong heart ; for thou art bringing
Joy to fulfilment for thee through thy pain.

HYLLUS.

Uplift him, henchmen mine, and freely pardon
My part herein : but mark the Gods' part—they
Begat, and owned him son : and lo, they harden
Their hearts, and watch calm-eyed his pangs this
day!

The thing that shall be, no man may foreknow it : 1270
The present, 'tis our anguish and their shame ;
Crushed of all men most grievously below it
Is he, to whom this ruin-demon came.

CHORUS.

Come forth thou also from the halls, O maiden :
Deaths unimagined, awful, hast thou seen
There : with strange woes the haunted air is laden—
And none there is, but there Zeus' hand hath
been !

[Exeunt Omnes.

PHILOCTETES.

ARGUMENT.

IN *the tenth year of the Trojan War it was revealed by an oracle that Troy might not be taken save by the son of Achilles, with help of the arrows of the bow of Herakles in the hands of Philoctetes, unto whom Herakles had given them. Now this Philoctetes at his first coming to the war was bitten in the foot by a serpent, and the festering wound became so noisome that the Greeks could not endure his presence, and Odysseus took him to the isle of Lemnos, and there left him utterly alone, to eat out his heart for nine years in misery and hatred of those who had so abandoned him.*

And herein is told how Odysseus came with the son of Achilles to bring back Philoctetes to Troy.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

PHILOCTETES, *son of Poias, king of the Malians.*

ODYSSEUS, *son of Laertes, king of Ithaca,*

NEOPTOLEMUS, *son of Achilles,*

HERAKLES.

ATTENDANT, *disguised as Merchant*

CHORUS, *consisting of crew of Neoptolemus' ship.*

SCENE :—In front of a cave on the rocky coast of
Lemnos.

PHILOCTETES.

Enter Odysseus and Neoptolemus.

ODYSSEUS.

Lo here the beach of that sea-girdled land
Lemnos, by men untrod, untenanted,
Where, Neoptolemus, Achilles' son—
Yea, son of Hellas' mightiest,—in time past
I set ashore the Malian, Poias' son,
Being to this appointed of our kings ;
Since with a festering sore aye ran his foot,
And we could neither spill drink-offerings,
Nor sacrifice in peace, because he filled
The whole camp with his wild ill-omened cries, 10
Howling and groaning. Yet what boots to speak
Of that now ? 'Tis no time for many words,
Lest he discern my coming, and I waste
All the shrewd scheme whereby I think to entrap him.
But, for what followeth, 'tis thy work to help.
Look where is hereabout a cave two-mouthed,
Such as affords in cold seats east and west
For sunshine ; and in summer-heat the breeze
Breathes sleep down that long cavern-corridor.
But a short space to leftward mayst thou see 20
Haply a clear spring, if it have not failed.
Draw softly nigh, and give me sign if yet
He haunts the same place, or is elsewhere,

That thou mayst hear the rest of my device,
I tell it, and our work speed hand-in-hand.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Not far thy task shall lead me, king Odysseus :
Methinks I see the cave by thee described.

ODYSSEUS.

Below ?—above ?—for I discern it not.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Yonder, above—no sound of footfall there !

ODYSSEUS.

Take heed lest he be sleeping there within. 30

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I see an empty dwelling—no man there.

ODYSSEUS.

Nor any trace of habitation there ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

A leaf-couch as for one who sleeps therein.

ODYSSEUS.

Is all else void ?—nought 'neath the cavern-roof ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

A bowl—rough wood, the fashioning of some
Rude craftsman ; yonder fire-sticks therewithal.

ODYSSEUS.

And this thou namest all his treasure-store!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ah !—faugh ! Here also, dying in the sun,
Rags all with ulcerous foulness oversmeared !

ODYSSEUS.

The man in this place dwelleth, plain it is, 40
Nor is afar. How should a man, whose foot
Is with an ancient hurt diseased, go far ?
Either in quest of food hath he fared forth,
Or for some pain-assuaging leaf he knows.
Send therefore thine attendant to keep watch,
Lest unawares he come on me. More fain
Would he destroy me than all Greeks beside.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The man is going : the path shall be well watched.
Speak thou again, and tell me thy desire.

ODYSSEUS.

Achilles' son, in that for which thou art come 50
Be loyal, not alone with bodily strength ;
But, though thou hear a strange unheard-of thing,
Yet help ; for as our helper art thou come.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What biddest thou ?

ODYSSEUS.

Thou must beguile the soul
Of Philoctetes by the words thou sayest.
When he shall ask thee who thou art, and whence,
Say thou, ' Achilles' son '—no lie is here—
Art homeward sailing, having left the host
Of ships Achaian, filled with bitter hate

Of them whose prayers had drawn thee from thine
home 60

As their one hope of taking Ilium,
Yet who deigned not to give thee Achilles' arms
When as thy right thou carn'st demanding them,
But to Odysseus gave them—yea, say thou
Against us whatso bitter words thou wilt.
None of these things shall vex me ; but if thou
Do not this, all the Argives shalt thou grieve.
For, if the bow of this man be not won,
Thou canst not smite the land of Dardanus.
And how thy coming to this man—not mine— 70
Shall be mistrustless and unperilled, learn.
Thou hast sailed Troyward pledged by oath to none,
Unforced, and not with that first armament.
Of me all these be past denial true.
If then he see me ere he lose his bow,
Dead am I, and my fellowship brings thee death.
Even this then must be craftily devised,
How thou shalt steal the arms invincible.
I know, my son, thou art not by nature framed
To speak or to contrive dishonesty: 80
Yet victory is sweet—stoop to it then.
Hereafter will we flaunt our honesty.
But now, for one short hour, forget to blush,
And yield to me thy soul: then, all life through,
Outshine all men in reverence for right.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Words which are grief to me, Laertes' son,
To hear, I loathe to carry into act.
By nature can I do nought underhand,
Nor I, nor, men say, he who gave me life.
Yet ready am I by force to bring the man ; 90
By guile—no ! With but one foot whole, in strife

PHILOCTETES.

He cannot overcome so many as we.
Yet, sent thy fellow-worker, loth would I
Be called betrayer. But I had rather fail,
King, doing right, than triumph doing wrong.

ODYSSEUS.

Son of a noble sire, I too in youth
Was slow of tongue, but ready with mine hand.
I have learnt experience now, I see that words,
Not deeds, have sway in all things over men.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What dost thou bid me do, then, save speak lies ?

ODYSSEUS.

With guile catch Philoctetes—this I say.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why bring him not by suasion, but by guile ?

ODYSSEUS.

He will not hearken ; nor may force avail.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How ? Hath he aweless might so terrible ?

ODYSSEUS.

Unerring shafts he hath : death rides on them.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How, dare not any man approach him then ?

ODYSSEUS.

None, save with guile they take him, as I say.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Dost thou not count it shameful, then, to lie ?

ODYSSEUS.

No, if salvation by the lie is brought.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

With what face shall one dare to say such things ? no

ODYSSEUS.

When blessing crowns the deed, 'tis ill to shrink.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

For me what blessing, if he come to Troy ?

ODYSSEUS.

These shafts of his shall take Troy, these alone.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Am I not then her smiter, as ye said ?

ODYSSEUS.

Nor thou without these, nor these save with thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Then these must be our quarry, if thus it be.

ODYSSEUS.

By this thy deed two prizes dost thou win.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What prizes ? Tell, and I refuse no more.

ODYSSEUS.

Wise man and hero both shalt thou be called.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Enough ! I will do this ! I have done with shame.

[120

ODYSSEUS.

My counsel, then—dost thou bear all in mind ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ay, sooth ! I have consented once for all.

ODYSSEUS.

Here, then, remain thou, waiting till he come ;
 But I will hence, that here I be not seen,
 And I will take our watcher back to the ship.
 And, if I deem ye tarry overlong,
 Hither to you will I send back again
 This same man, craftily by me disguised
 Like some shipmaster, whom thou shalt not know.
 Be prompted by his subtle tongue, my son ; 130
 Take from his story all that helps thy need.
 I go to the ship, to thee committing this.
 Direct us, guileful Guide-god, Victory,
 And City-ward Athena, aye my guardian !

*[Exit Odysseus,**Enter Chorus.*

CHORUS.

(Sir. 1)

A stranger in a strange land, O my lord,
 What of our counsel shall I hide
 From yon mistrustful man, or with what word
 Speak to him ?—be my guide.
 Keen in devising, wise to understand,
 Beyond all other men, is he
 Who bears the hallowed sceptre in his hand,
 Ruling by Zeus' decree ; 140

And to thine hands, my son, all sovereign sway
 Hath come down from days long agoe :
 Thou therefore name the service due, and say
 What shall of me be done.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Now—for haply thou wouldst see
 Where on yon sea-marge he lies,—
 Gaze awhile all fearlessly:
 But when that wayfarer hies
 Back—that lord of shafts of doom—
 Unto this his dwelling, heed
 Ever signs from me, and come
 Prompt to render help at need.

CHORUS.

Long have I heeded this thy precept, king, 150
 To watch with never-sleeping care
 In serving thee : yet tell me this one thing—
 Where maketh he his lair
 Wherein he coucheth ?—tell the haunts wherein
 He prowls : right needful shall this be
 To know, lest from some lurking-place unseen
 He fall unwares on me.
 Where in this island is he wont to roam,
 And where to rest when toil-fordone ?
 Stayeth he now his feet within his home,
 Or roves unsheltered on ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Here his dwelling seest thou—
 Rock-doors twain, a cell of stone. 160

CHORUS.

Hapless man ! Where is he now ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Trailing weary feet alone,
 Well I ween, not far away,
 Seeking sustenance ; for so,
 Rumour saith, he smites the prey
 With the winged shafts from his bow.
 Such his life is—toil and strain,
 Solitude : for never nigh
 Comes physician ; and his pain
 Maketh life one misery.

CHORUS.

(Str. 2)

Ah, from my soul I pity him, discerning
 How he hath none his stricken strength to
 stay, 170
 No one whose eyes will answer his heart's yearning,
 Misery-ridden, lonely night and day,
 Racked by disease that like a wild beast teareth,
 Wildered by wants besetting ceaselessly
 Each after each : I marvel how he beareth
 Burden on burden of calamity.
 Woe for the watchful jealousy of heaven!
 Woe for the tribes of mortals misery-bowed !
 Woe for their perils unto whom is given
 Pre-eminence above the common crowd!

{Ant. 2)

Noble was he, I trow, as any other 180
 That of the princeliest house on earth was born :
 Lonely, afar from any human brother,
 Lieth he now, of all earth's boons forlorn ;
 Hath for companions but the forest-haunting
 Dappled or shaggy creatures ; must endure
 Torments of pain and famine spirit-daunting,
 Anguish of bitter memories passing cure !

Echo, the Mountain Maid, with sudden-hailing
 Cry, as from shadowy presence one might see
 Haply afar, makes answer to the wailing—
 She, and none other—of his misery. 190

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nought past belief is here, I trow :
 By Heaven's doom, if aught I know,
 Those first afflictions fell on him
 Through Chryse's vengeance ruthless-grim ;
 And now in friendless pain he pines
 Full surely by some God's designs,
 Lest his god-given resistless bow
 Should all too soon lay Ilium low,
 Ere comes the hour wherein, saith Doom,
 By this she shall be overcome. 200

(*Sir.* 3)

CH. Hush, O my son ! NE. What is this ? CH. LO,
 a sound on the air was borne
 Such as might live on the lips of a wight with affliction
 outworn—
 Came it thence ?—or from yonder ?—it smites on
 mine ear as a cry that is torn
 From the throat of a wretch who with travail ex-
 ceeding of painful tread
 Draggeth him on. Tis the cry of a man in anguish
 dread
 Pealing from far. I mistake not: too clearly its
 message is said !

[*Ani.* 3]

CH. Turn thee, my son—NE. Whereunto ? CH. TO
 new counsel, for great is our need. 210
 Not far away is the man : he is near us in very deed !
 Not with the light-hearted music he comes of the
 piping reed,

As a shepherd fares home ; but he heavily stumbleth,
 till wild and high
 Is the shriek that is wrung from his lips ; or he scans
 with despairing eye
 Yon haven that showeth no sail: so dread is his bitter
 cry.

Enter Philoctetes.

PHILOCTETES.

What ho, ye strangers !
 Who are ye, that with galley-oars have come 220
 To this land, havenless and tenantless ?
 What fatherland, what lineage shall I name
 Rightly for yours ? The fashion of your garb
 Speaketh of Hellas, land most dear to me.
 But I would hear your voice. Be not amazed
 With fear to see me beastlike thus transformed.
 But pitying a hapless man, alone,
 Desolate, friendless, and afflicted thus,
 Speak, if indeed as friends ye hither come.
 Nay, answer me. It fits not I should fail 230
 To gain this grace from you, nor ye from me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Stranger, of this be first assured, that we
 Are Hellenes : this thou cravest first to know.

PHILOCTETES.

O sweet, sweet accents ! O the joy to have heard,
 After so long a time, a Hellene's tongue !
 What quest, my son, hath brought thy ship and thee ?
 What emprise ? What wind ?—welcomest of winds !
 Tell all, that I may know thee who thou art.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I by my race am of the sea-girt isle
 Skyros. sail for home. Achilles' son, 240
 Neoptolemus, am I named. Thou knowest all.

PHILOCTETES.

Son of a dear, dear sire, of a land beloved !
 Old Lykomedes' nursling, to this shore
 What mission drew thee ?—whence hast hither sailed ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

From Ilium am I voyaging this day.

PHILOCTETES.

How say'st thou ? Thou wast no seafarer, sure,
 With me, when first the host to Ilium sailed.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ha ! didst thou also share this warfare-toil ?

PHILOCTETES.

Son, looking on me, dost thou know me not ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How should I know whom never yet I saw ? 250

PHILOCTETES.

NO ?—not my name, nor rumour of my wrongs
 That wrought my ruin,—nothing hast thou heard ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Know, nought I wot of all thou askest me.

PHILOCTETES.

Oh utter-wretched I! 0 heaven-aborred !
 I, of whose plight no rumour yet hath reached
 Home, neither any spot in Hellas-land !
 But they which flung me ashore unrighteously,
 Keeping the secret, laugh : and my disease
 Festereth aye, and waxeth worse and worse !
 But O my son, 0 great Achilles' child, 260
 Lo, I am he of whom thou hast haply heard
 As master of the bow of Herakles,
 Philoctetes son of Poias, whom those twain,
 The war-chiefs, and the Kephallenians' king,
 Shamefully cast forth, desolate as ye see,
 Wasting away with fierce disease, which came
 Of that fierce gash, the murderous adder's sting,—
 With this for all companion put me ashore
 Here, lone, and went, soon as, in voyaging back
 From Chrysa by the sea, they had touched this 270
 strand.
 Then, glad to see me, long tossed to and fro,
 Sleeping upon the beach within a cave,
 They left me and fled ; and, as to a wretch ill-starred,
 Cast me some scanty rags, some paltry scraps
 Of food—God grant the like befall themselves !
 Ah, think, my son, what waking then was mine,
 When I, from sleep upstarting, found them gone !—
 For what affliction then I wept and wailed,
 To find the ships wherein I voyaged hither
 All gone away, and no man in the place, 280
 No one to help me, none to minister
 To me when racked by pain I I gazed all round,
 And found there with me nought but misery-
 Ay, and of this unstinted store, my son.
 Day after day the time dragged heavily on,

And in this narrow cave must I alone
 Wrestle with hardship. For the body's need
 This bow provided, smiting as they flew
 The doves : and whatsoever mine arrow smote,
 From strained cord leaping, I—ah, woe is me !— 290
 Trailing mine anguished foot, must writhe to reach
 My quarry. If need was to quench my thirst,
 Or, when the winter scattered frost like spray,
 To break me a faggot, I must drag myself
 With wretched toil. Then fire was not to hand :
 Flint against flint I dashed, and so revealed
 The hidden spark that keeps me still in life.
 For this my sheltering roof, with fire, supplies
 Mine every need, save healing my disease.
 Now learn, my son, the nature of this isle. 300
 Hither no shipman comes of his own will;
 No port is here, nor mart whereto to sail
 For gain in traffic, nor guest-harbourage.
 Nay, never voyage hither prudent men.
 Some haply touch unwillingly ; for oft
 In men's long life such chances may befall.
 These, when they come, my son, compassionate me
 In words, have given, it may be, scraps of food
 For pity, or some garment have they given.
 But to this, when I name it, none consents, 310
 To help me home ; but one long death I die
 Now for ten years, in famine and in woe
 Aye feeding mine insatiate disease.
 This have the Atreids and Odysseus done
 To me, my son. Oh may the Olympian Gods
 Requite on them like sufferings to mine !

CHORUS.

I too, like those thy visitants, am stirred,
 Methinks, to pity thee, O Poias' son.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Myself withal am witness to these words :
 I know them true, who also have had wrong 320
 Of Atreus' sons and of Odysseus' might.

PHILOCTETES.

Ha ! thou too !—dost thou accuse the all-accurst,
 The sons of Atreus ? Art thou wroth for wrong ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

God grant that yet mine hand may glut my wrath !
 So shall Mycenæ know, and Sparta know
 That Skyros too is mother of brave sons !

PHILOCTETES.

Well said, my son ! What cause of bitter wrath
 Hadst thou against them, ere thou camest hither ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

O son of Poias, though the utterance choke me,
 The outrage they have done me will I tell. 330
 When on Achilles came the doom of death—

PHILOCTETES.

Ah me ! Tell me no more, ere I have learnt
 First this—is Peleus' scion dead indeed ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Dead is he ; slain by no man, but a God,
 Say men, by Phoebus' arrow overthrown.

PHILOCTETES.

High-born the slain is, by the high-born slain !
 Which first to do I know not, O my son,
 To question of thy wrong, or mourn for him.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Suffice thee, hapless, thine own pangs, I ween :
 Need thou hast none to mourn thy neighbour's woes.
[340

PHILOCTETES.

Well say'st thou. Wherefore tell me yet again
 Thy matter, wherein they have outraged thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In a ship gallant-showing came to me
 Odysseus and the fosterer of my sire
 To tell me—be it true or be it false—
 That fate forbade, now that my sire was dead,
 That Troy should fall by any hand but mine.
 So talked they, stranger; and it was not long
 Ere their words wrought on me to sail with them,
 Chiefly through yearning for the dead, to see, 350
 Ere he was buried, him I had not seen.
 Yea, in their words too was a dream of glory
 That I in going should take the towers of Troy.
 Now of my voyaging 'twas the second day,
 When down to loathed Sigeium ran the keel
 With a fair wind. Straight all the host poured forth,
 With greetings thronged me landing, swore they saw
 Alive again the Achilles who was not.
 Ah, but he lay dead ! I, the hapless one,
 No long time after I had wept for him, 360
 Of Atreus' sons—my friends, as well might seem—
 I asked my sire's arms, and what else was his.
 Woe's me ! a cruel word their answer was—
 'Seed of Achilles, freely mayst thou take
 All else that was thy sire's ; but of his arms
 Lord is another now, Laertes' son.'
 Then I with sudden tears rose up straightway,

And in fierce anger and in anguish cried:
 ' Villain !—and have ye dared to give mine arms
 To another man, ere ye had asked my will ? ' 370
 Then spake Odysseus, for he stood hard by :
 ' Yea, boy, they have given these, and rightfully:
 For I was there and rescued them and him.'
 Then I, in wrath, with all reproaches scourged
 These men,—there was no word I left unsaid,—
 If he, *he*, should despoil me of mine arms.
 He thus hard pushed, albeit slow to wrath,
 Stung by the words he heard, made answer thus :
 ' Thou wast not with us, heard'st not duty's call :
 And, since thou pratest thus with malapert tongue,
 Never to Skyros shalt thou sail with these !' [380
 I, with these insults ringing in mine ears,
 Sail home, bereaved of treasures rightly mine
 By this foul knave Odysseus, son of knaves.
 Yet not so much I blame him as the kings :
 For the whole state is in her rulers' hands,
 And the whole army. Men of lawless wills
 Are made ill-doers by their teachers' words.
 My tale is told. Who hateth Atreus' sons,
 Alike the high Gods' friend and mine be he 1 390

CHORUS. (*Str.*) to *ll.* 507—518.

O Mountain-queen, thou gavest being,
 All-fostering Earth, unto Zeus most high:
 Pactolus the golden by thy decreeing
 Shapeth his course:—unto thee did I cry
 When my prince by the Atreids' insolent spite
 Was flouted, and given was his heritage-right,
 The arms that his father had borne in fight,
 A marvel unmatched, to Laertes' scion !
 Thou, whose chariot is drawn by the bull-slaying Jion,
 Thou, blessed one, sawest that infamy 1 [400

PHILOCTETES.

Clear token of a common grief, meseems,
 Have ye, O strangers which have sailed to me.
 Your tale rings consonant with mine, to prove
 These the Atreidae's and Odysseus' deeds.
 I know him well: in every evil word
 And false deed ever busy is his tongue,
 Whereby *to* compass all unrighteous ends.
 At this I marvel not. I marvel Aias, 410
 The Great, stood by, and bore to see it done !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Stranger, no more he lived. I had not been
 Of these robbed ever, had that hero lived.

PHILOCTETES.

How say'st thou ? Ha ! is *he* gone ?—Aias dead !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Think of him as no more in light of life.

PHILOCTETES.

Ah, woe is me ! But Tydeus' spawn—not he t
 Nor he whom Sisyphus to Laertes sold :
 They cannot die—they never should have lived I

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Not they ! of this be sure : O nay, they stand 420
 In high repute amidst the Argive host.

PHILOCTETES.

And he, the good grey hero, he, my friend
 Lives, Pylian Nestor ? For he still would curb
 Their evil deeds, and counselled wisdom's ways.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In evil case is he : the son is dead
Who was his stay : Antilochus hath passed.

PHILOCTETES.

Woe's me, but these be heavy tidings !—death
To twain whom last I would have wished to die !
Ah, whither turn mine eyes, when these are dead
And still Odysseus liveth—liveth there [430
Where men should name him corpse instead of them !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

A cunning wrestler he : yet oftentimes,
Philoctetes, subtlest wits be trapped and thrown.

PHILOCTETES.

Tell, by the Gods, where in thy need was then
Patroclus, best-beloved of thy sire ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

He too was dead. Lo, I will tell thee all
In one brief word :—war cuts off willingly
No villain, but the noblest evermore.

PHILOCTETES.

I grant thee : and, as touching this same thing,
Will I put question of a worthless wight
Of keen and crafty tongue—how fares he now ? 440

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Whom, save Odysseus, shall these words intend ?

PHILOCTETES.

Not him, but one Thersites, mean I now,
Who ne'er would make an end of speech, where men
Hated to hear him. Know'st thou if he live ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I saw him not: I heard that yet he lived.

PHILOCTETES.

Tis like enough. No foul thing perished yet;
 But the Gods compass such with loving care.
 The knavish and the shifty with strange joy
 Back from the gates of Hades still they turn,
 Still thrust the good and righteous thitherward. 450
 How shall I deal with these things?—how commend?
 I fain would praise the Gods, yet find them evil.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I, O thou seed of an Oitaian sire,
 Henceforth will look from far on Ilium
 And Atreus' sons, and will beware of them,
 Where mightier than the brave the coward is,
 Where goodness wanes away, and cravens rule,
 Such men as these shall never have my love :
 But rocky Skyros shall henceforth for me
 Suffice : I will content me with mine home. 460
 Now to my ship I go : thou, Poias' son,
 Farewell, a kind farewell! and may the Gods
 Heal thy disease, as is thine heart's desire.
 But let me go, that, soon as God vouchsafes
 To us fair winds, we straightway may set forth.

PHILOCTETES.

Sail ye this hour, my son ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Need bids us watch
 For **fair winds** not from far, but nigh the sea.

PHILOCTETES.

Now by thy father, by thy mother, son,
 By all that in thine home thou holdest dear,
 Suppliant I pray ! Thus leave me not alone 170
 Forlorn amidst such woes as thou dost see,
 All woes that thou hast heard I dwell withal !
 Let me be as an afterthought. To thee
 A galling freightage am I, well I know.
 Yet O, endure it ! By the noble nought
 Is loathed save baseness, honoured is the good.
 Thine, if thou fail me here, is foul reproach,
 But high thy glory if thou help me, son,
 If living to the Oitaian land I win.
 Come ! lo, 'tis scarce the toil of one whole day. 480
 Shrink not: O take me ; cast me where thou wilt,—
 Hold be it, prow, or stern, yea, wheresoe'er
 Least I shall vex my fellow-voyagers.
 Consent, by Zeus the Suppliant-saviour, son !
 O yield ! I clasp thy knees, although I be
 A strengthiess wretch and lame ! Nay, leave me not
 Thus desolate afar from paths of men ;
 But either bear me safe unto thine home,
 Or to Euboea, to Chalkodon's walls,—
 To Oeta thence my journey shall not be 490
 Long, to Trachinia's ridge, and that fair stream
 Spercheius—and so show me to my sire.
 Ah, long time since have I been sore afraid
 Lest he have passed away ! By them that came
 Hither, I urged him oft with suppliant prayers
 Himself to send and bring me rescued home.
 But he is dead : or, for mine envoys' part,—
 'Tis like, I trow—they held of small account
 My need, and homeward hurried still their voyage.
 But now, as escort both and messenger 500

I seek thee : pity and save, considering
 How all things lie in dread and jeopardy
 For men, alike for good and evil fate :
 And whoso thinks he stands must look to fall.
 When life runs smooth, then most behoves to watch
 Life, lest unwares in ruin thou be whelmed.

CHORUS. (*Ant.*) to *II.* 391—402.

Show pity, my king ! Of strife hath he spoken
 With manifold crushing calamity.
 Beneath such burden never be broken
 The strength of any beloved of me !
 By thine hate of Atreus' abhorred seed, 510
 Let their wrong to the service of this man's need
 Be turned ! Let thy fair-dight swift ship speed
 Thy suppliant, O prince, to the home of his yearning !
 So shall God's indignation, in vengeance turning
 On despisers of mercy, come not nigh thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Take heed lest now thou show thee easy-won :
 But, when thy gorge shall rise at his disease, 520
 Then shall thy words no more be found the same.

CHORUS.

Nay, nay : it shall be never in thy power
 Justly to lay upon me this reproach.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay then, 'twere shame should I more slack be found
 Than thou to aid the stranger in his need !
 Then, prithee, sail we. Let him hence with speed.
 Yon ship will bear him : she will say not nay.
 Only the Gods safe bring us from this land,
 And to the land whereto we fain would sail!

PHILOCTETES.

O day most welcome ! O most gracious man ! 530
 O kindly shipmen ! how can I by deeds
 Prove how ye have filled me all with grateful love ?
 Let us depart, son, hailing with farewell
 That house unhomelike, whence thou mayest learn,
 From all I lived through, all my heart could bear.
 None else, I ween, had chosen to bear for me
 Even the sight of these things with his eyes.
 Submission have I learnt by sore constraint.

CHORUS.

Hold ! let us learn what meaneth this : two men,—
 One, of thy ship a sailor, alien one,— 540
 Draw nigh. Hear first their tale, then enter in.

Enter Attendant, disguised as merchant.

MERCHANT.

Achilles' son, I bade this voyager—
 With other twain the warder of thy ship—
 Tell me where haply mightest thou be found,
 Since I have met thee ere I looked to meet,
 And chance hath moored me off the selfsame shore.
 Sailing a shipman with scant company
 From Ilium home to Peparthus, fair
 With vines, when I had heard that all yon crew
 Were of thy ship, with thee were homeward bound, 550
 I thought not good without one word to thee—
 And guerdon fair—to speed my voyage on.
 Nought know'st thou of what most concerneth thee,
 What purposes yon Argives touching thee
 Have newly framed—nor purposes alone,
 But deeds in action, lingering now no more.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

For this thy forethought, stranger, grateful love
 Shall live in me, if I be not born churl.
 Tell that which thou hast named, that I may know
 What latest purpose of the Greeks is this. 560

MERCHANT.

With an array of ships in chase of thee
 Phoinix the old and Theseus' sons are gone.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

By force to bring me back, or pleading words ?

MERCHANT.

I know not. This I heard, and herald this.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ha ! Phoinix and his fellow-voyagers
 Do this thing in such zeal for Atreus' sons ?

MERCHANT.

Be sure it is so done, and tarrieth not.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why was Odysseus not on his own mission
 Ready to sail ?—or did fear draw him back ?

MERCHANT.

He and the son of Tydeus were at point 570
 To quest another man, when thence I sailed.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What man was this for whom Odysseus sailed ?

MERCHANT.

A man there was—but tell of this man first:
Who is he ? That thou say'st speak not aloud.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Famed Philoctetes, stranger, is this man.

MERCHANT.

Now ask me not the rest, but with all speed
Sail hence, and from this land convey thyself !

PHILOCTETES.

What saith he, son ? What privy trafficking
Of speech holds yonder stranger touching me ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I know not yet. He must speak out to light 580
That he would say, to thee and me and these.

MERCHANT.

Achilles' seed, accuse me not to the host
As telling things forbid. They have rendered me
Kindness full oft, for my poor service done.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I am the Atreids' foe ; and my best friend
Is this man, for he hateth Atreus' sons.
Thou who in kindness com'st to me must hide
Nothing from us of all which thou hast heard.

MERCHANT.

Take heed, son, what thou dost!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I have heeded long.

MERCHANT.

Thine shall I make the blame.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Make it, but speak. 590

MERCHANT.

I speak. For this man they whose names I named,
The son of Tydeus and Odysseus' might,
Are sailing, pledged by oath to bring him back,
By suasion won, or by o'ermastering strength.
And all the Achaians heard Odysseus say
This plainly ; for he hath more confidence
Than the other in the deed's accomplishment.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

For what cause to this man thus earnestly
After so long a time turn Atreus' sons,
Whom long ago they flung an outcast forth ? 600
What yearning touched them, or what might of Gods
And retribution, which avenge ill deeds ?

MERCHANT.

This will I tell thee, for thou hast not heard
Perchance. A certain noble seer there was,
A son of Priam ; and the name he bare
Helenus. Sallying forth by night alone
He who is branded with all foul reproach,
Subtle Odysseus, caught him, haled in bonds,
And in the Greeks' midst set that goodly prey :
Who told them, with much other prophecy, 610
That they should never overthrow the towers
Of Troy, except their suasion brought this man
Thither from this isle where he dwelleth now.

Then, when Laertes' scion heard the seer
 Thus boding, straightway did he pledge himself
 To bring this man and set before the Greeks,
 Yea, with his own consent, as most he deemed,
 If not, by force :—' And if I fail of this,
 Let whoso will,' said he, ' smite off mine head.'
 Son, thou hast heard all. Haste, I counsel thee, 620
 Both thou, and whomso'er thou holdest dear.

PHILOCTETES.

Woe's me ! Hath he, of mischief all compact,
 Sworn that his tongue shall wile me to the Greeks ?
 Why, thus shall I be lured from Hades' hall
 Back to the light, as came that fellow's sire !

MERCHANT.

I know not this. But I must to my ship.
 God to you twain grant whatso'er is best!

[Exit.

PHILOCTETES.

Is not this monstrous, that Laertes' spawn
 Should hope, my son, with soft words e'er to bring
 And set me from his ship amidst the Greeks ? 630
 No ! rather hearken to my bitterest foe,
 The adder which thus made me halt of foot!
 But nothing is for him too vile to say
 Or dare. And now I know he draweth nigh.
 Son, let us forth, that many a league of sea
 May from Odysseus' galley sever us.
 Away ! for diligence in season due
 Bringeth sweet rest and sleep when toil is o'er.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Yea, soon as this head-wind shall lull will we
 Set forth ; for now it bloweth contrary. 640

PHILOCTETES.

Ever the wind is fair to flee thy bane.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I know. But this to them is adverse too.

PHILOCTETES.

To robbers there is no wind contrary
When spoil and rapine is the task in hand.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay then, an't please thee, forth will we. First take
What from thy cave thou need'st, and most wouldst
miss.

PHILOCTETES.

Though scant my store, somewhat thereof I need.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What shall this be, which my ship holdeth not ?

PHILOCTETES.

Some leaves I have, wherewith I best assuage
This wound's fierce anguish, that it sleeps awhile. 650

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ay, bring them forth. What else art fain to take ?

PHILOCTETES.

If any arrow unmarked have slipped aside,
Let me not leave it, the chance-finder's spoil.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Is this, which now thou hast, **thy** bow renowned ?

PHILOCTETES.

This, and none other, which mine hand doth bear.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ha ! may one have a nearer sight thereof,
And feel, and do it reverence as a god ?

PHILOCTETES.

Thine shall this boon be, son, and what beside
Is mine to grant, that may advantage thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

O yea, I long, yet within limits yearn : 660
I would, if it be right: if not, let be.

PHILOCTETES.

Reverent is thy request and just, my son ;
For thou alone hast given me to behold
Yon sun's light, and to look on Oeta's land,
Mine aged sire, my friends,—who liftest me,
Who lay beneath my foes, beyond their clutch.
Fear not: 'tis thine to touch this bow, to give
Back to the giver, and to boast that thou
Alone hast held it, for thy goodness' sake.
I won it too as meed of kindness done. 670

To see thee, count thee friend, is joy to me.
Whoso knows how to render good for good
Shall be a friend beyond all treasure dear.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Prithee, pass in.

PHILOCTETES.

Yea, I will lead thee. Sooth,
My malady thine help and presence asks.

Neap, and Phil, enter the cave.

CHORUS.

(Str. i)

I have heard the legend told, yet the thing might ne'er
behold,

How that he who dared to trespass on the bed of
Zeus most high

On a rushing wheel was cast by Kronos' Son, and fast
There fettered down, to live whirled everlast-
ingly. 680

But I know none other wight, by hearing or by
sight,

Unto whom a lot more awful than this hath been
assigned,

Than this man's, who hath done deed of violence unto
none.

Nor defrauded, but moved ever kindly man amid
his kind,

Was above all slander's breath—yet was cast to living
death !

O, I marvel how he hearkened to the never-
ceasing moan

Of the surges as they swept round his dreary isle, and
kept

His hold upon a life so fraught with grief and
groan. 690

(Ant. I)

Lone he lived with none beside his halting steps to
guide,

No dweller in the land waiting near him in his
pain,

None to hearken or reply to his bitter-wailing cry
For the plague that gnawed his flesh, neither
ceased his blood to drain ;

None to cool the fever-glow of the flux's scalding
 flow
 Outbursting from the ulcers of that viper-
 venom'd limb ;
 None to pluck, to assuage his grief, the kind earth's
 healing leaf,
 As ever and anon his pangs tormented him. 700

Nay, but crawling to and fro, hither, thither, must he
 go,
 Like a child the nurse forsaketh and abandons to
 its fate,
 Searching all the rugged ground, where might food
 or salve be found,
 Whensoever the ceaseless gnawing of his anguish
 might abate.

(Str. 2)

No fruit of sacred earth he plucked, nor aught beside
 that toil
 Sore travailing of men doth wring from the reluctant
 soil:
 Only at whiles he won wherewith to stay the hunger-
 pang, 710
 When swift of wing from that bow-string the unerring
 arrows sprang.
 Ah me, what joyless life he knew,
 Who, all those weary ten years through,
The wine-cup's gladness tasted ne'er, but ever wearily
Crept to what standing pool so'er his straining eyes
 might see !

(Ant. 2)

But blest and mighty shall he rise from troubles mani-
 fold
Who hath lighted on the hero-son of heroes famed of
 old, 720

Who, since the tale of many months is to fulfilment
 come,

Shall waft him o'er the surges' roar unto the ancient
 home

Where feet of Malian wood-nymphs glide

Spercheius' streams and banks beside,

And where, from Oeta's flame-lit height, he of the
 Shield of brass,

All splendour-girt with levin-light, did through
 Heaven's portals pass.

Enter from the cave Neop. and Phil.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Come, an thou wilt. Ha ! wherefore for no cause 730
 Art silent thus, art as one palsy-struck ?

PHILOCTETES.

Oh me ! Oh me I

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What is it ?

PHILOCTETES.

Nought of strange. Pass on, my son.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Feel'st thou the anguish of thy malady ?

PHILOCTETES.

Nay, nay. Sooth, now methinks I have gotten ease.
 Oh Gods!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Why groan and call upon the Gods ?

PHILOCTETES.

That they may come to me to save and soothe.
Ah me ! ah me !

NEOPTOLEMUS,

What aileth thee ? Wilt speak not, but remain 740
Thus wordless ? As a man sore plagued thou seem'st.

PHILOCTETES.

Undone am I, my son ! I cannot hide
Mine ill before you. Woe, alas ! it thrills,
It thrills me through ! O wretch ! ah, woe is me !
Tis death, son I I am torn, son ! Misery !
Oh torment!—agony !—fire within my bones !
By heaven, if thou hast ready in thine hand
A sword, son, smite upon mine ankle-joint!
Shear off my foot with speed : heed not my life !
Haste, O my son ! 750

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But what is this so sudden-strange, whereby
Thou art caused to raise such bitter cry and moan ?
PH. Thou know'st. NE. What is't ? PH. Thou
know'st. NE. What aileth thee
I know not. PH. Thou not know ! Ah ! there !
—woe's me !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Dread is the stress of this thy malady !

PHILOCTETES.

Dread, more than words can tell ! Ah, pity me !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What **can** I do ?

PHILOCTETES.

In fear forsake me not!
 At intervals it comes, like gluttèd beast
 Hungry once more from prowling.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Hapless one !
 O hapless proved by tortures manifold ! 760
 Shall I lay hold on thee ?—touch thee awhile ?

PHILOCTETES.

Nay, nay, not that! But, prithee, take this bow,
 As thou but now didst ask me, till the throes
 Of my disease, that now assail, abate;
 And ward it and keep safe ; for sleep lays hold
 On me, soon as this agony departs :
 Nor can it cease ere then. I must be left
 To sleep in peace. And if within that space
 They come, by all the Gods I charge thee, yield, 770
 Willingly nor unwillingly, this bow
 To them, nor trapped by any craft, lest thou
 And I, thy suppliant, by thy deed be slain.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Fear not my forethought. None save thou and I
 Shall have it. Now, with good speed, give it me.

PHILOCTETES.

Lo there, son, take it. Pray the jealous Gods
 That this prove not thy trouble, that it be
 Not as to me, and him that had it erst.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ye Gods, be this vouchsafed us ! Be vouchsafed
 Fair voyage and prosperous to what land soe'er 780
 God deigns to guide us, and our bark, is bound.

PHILOCTETES.

Ah, son, I fear lest prayers be all in vain !
 This cancerous blood froths up, upwells again
 From the deep sore—my mind forebodeth ill !
 Ah me ! alas !
 Ah me ! O foot, what scathe thou workest me !
 It stealeth o'er me !
 It draweth near ! woe's me ! oh misery !
 Ye see my plight—ah flee not hence away !
 Oh agony ! 790
 Thou Kephallenian, would these pangs might cleave
 To thee, pierce through thy breast ! O me ! alas !
 Agony ! agony ! Army-leaders twain,
 Agamemnon, Menelaus, would that ye
 Endured these pangs in my stead, and as long !
 Ah me ! ah me !
 O death, O death, why, summoned evermore
 Thus day by day, canst thou draw never near ?
 Son, noble heart, O help me ! With this fire
 Of Lemnos, oft-invoked, consume me now, 800
 O noble heart ! I thought not scorn to do
 This for the son of Zeus, and earned thereby
 This bow in time past, which thou guardest now.
 What say'st thou, son ?
 What say'st ? why silent ?—ha ! where art thou, son ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

At thy woes grieving all this while I stand.

PHILOCTETES.

Nay, but, my son, take heart, for sudden-sharp
 This visits me, and suddenly departs.

But, I implore thee, leave me not alone !

NE. Fear not, here will I stay. PH. Wilt stay ?

NE. I will.

810

PHILOCTETES.

I scorn to put thee to thine oath, my son.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I may not sinless go without thee hence.

PH. Thine hand for pledge! NE. I give it, here
to stay.

PH. Thither, now thither! NE. Whither mean'st
thou? PH. Up!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

now, distraught again? Why skyward gaze?
Unhand, unhand me! NE. Whither wilt?

PH. Unhand me!

I will not let thee go! PH. Thy touch is
death!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay then, thou art free, if calmed thy frenzy be.

PHILOCTETES.

Earth, as I am, receive me as one dead!

I am faint with pain—I can no longer stand! 820

[Falls to the ground.]

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Sleep shall enclasp the man ere long, meseems;
For lo, his head already droopeth low;
And see, from all his limbs how drips the sweat;
And some black vein, where ends his tortured foot,
Hath burst blood-welling. Let us leave him, friends,
To lie in quiet, till he fall on sleep.

CHORUS.

(Str.)

Sleep, to whom pain is an unknown thing,
Sleep, with whom no griefs dwell,
Come, breathing thy balmy spell,

Come, wafter of peace to our lives, O King !
 Over these eyes still, still hold thou 830
 Thy shimmering veil overdrooping them now.
 Come, come, with healing under thy wing!

See to it, my son, where next thy steps shall tread,
 And whitherward now of thy wisdom shall we be sped.
 Lo, this is thine hour! Why then should we idle
 stand ?

Opportunity governeth action : at her command
 Is a mighty triumph achieved by the prompt swift
 hand.

NEOPTOLEMUS. *(Mesode.)*

Nay, but though nothing he hears, well I wot that in
 vain for a prey
 Have we taken the bow, if without its lord we shall
 sail away. 840
 His must be victory's crown : even he, saith the God,
 must be brought.
 We shall glory but in our shame, if our fraud have
 accomplished nought.

CHORUS. *(Ant)*

Nay, O my son, but the God shall provide
 For the issue himself :—but when
 Thou returnest answer again,
 Let the sound of thy words full softly slide
 Through thy lips, my son, for always sleep
 Of disease into vigilance promptly will leap,
 Is swift to perceive, is watchful-eyed.

Now therefore do thou thine endeavour, with utter-
 most heed
 Unto this, how the purpose performed undetected may
 speed; 850

For if still thou press on to the goal that before thee
lies—

Thou knowest, albeit I name not thine emprise—
Sore perils there be in the path, foreseen of the wise.
(*Epode.*)

Fair bloweth the wind, bloweth fair, my son :
Sightless the man is, hath help of none ;
In the night of slumber his senses are drowned—
Ay, slumber in midnight-heat is sound !—
Hand, foot,—not a limb obeyeth his will; 860
But as one in Hades he lieth still.
Look to it: think well if this wavering mood
Be in season ! If I may discern thy good,
My son, he striketh the surest blow
Who sounds no alarm in the ears of his foe.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Hist! I command you. Be ye not dismayed :
Lo, the man opes his eyes and lifts his head.

PHILOCTETES.

Light, who relievest slumber's guard—protection
Of stranger-friends, beyond all hope vouchsafed !
Ne'er had I triumphed in this confidence
That thou, son, shouldst of pity endure to abide 870
My sufferings' term, and wait, and help me thus.
Not Atreus' sons had brooked thus cheerfully
To bear this—they, the gallant army-chiefs !
But—for thy blood is noble, son, and drawn
From noble sires—all this hast thou as nought
Held, though beset with shrieks and evil stench.
Now, since there seems of this affliction, son,
A little respite and forgetfulness,
Son, lift thou up and set me on my way,
That, when this faintness leaveth me at last, 880
We may to sea, nor loiter from the voyage.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Glad am I to behold thee past all hope
Awaking free from pain, a breathing soul:
For as of a dead man thy semblance seemed
In presence of the pangs that lay on thee.
Now raise thyself. Or, if it like thee more,
My men shall bear thee. We grudge not the toil,
Since thus to do hath pleased both thee and me.

PHILOCTETES.

I thank thee, son : upraise me, as thou mean'st.
But spare these, that the foul stench vex them not 890
Ere need is. Hard enough shall be their task
Aboard the galley, even to dwell with me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Even as thou wilt . . . nay, stand, lay hold on me.

PHILOCTETES.

Fear not: old use and wont shall bear me up.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Alas ! what shall I do ? What next must be ?

PHILOCTETES.

What is it, son ? What change of tone is here ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I am sore perplexed : I know not what to say.

PHILOCTETES.

Perplexed ?—whereat ? Ah, say not this, my son !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ay, but in this plight am I even now!

PHILOCTETES.

Not—sure, not mine affliction's noisomeness 900
Bids thee refuse to take me in thy ship ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

All is affliction when a man forsakes
His nature's bent to tread dishonour's path!

PHILOCTETES.

Now nay, nought alien from thy sire shalt thou
Or do or speak, in helping a good man !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Dishonoured !—all this while I have writhed to think
it!

PHILOCTETES.

Not by thy deeds !—but by these words ?—I fear !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What shall I do, Zeus ?—twice be caitiff proved,
Hiding foul secrets, speaking basest words ?

PHILOCTETES.

This man, if my discernment be not blind, 910
Is like to sail, and leave me, and betray!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To leave thee ?—no ! That I should help thee hence
Unto thy grief—at this I have writhed so long.

PHILOCTETES.

What mean'st thou, son ? I comprehend thee not.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nought will I hide from thee. To Troy must thou
Sail, to the Greeks and to the Atreids' camp.

PHILOCTETES.

Woe's me ! What say'st thou ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wail not, ere thou hear—

PHILOCTETES.

What tale ? What meanest thou to do to me ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

First, of this plague to heal thee, then to go
And with thine help to smite the land of Troy. 920

PHILOCTETES.

And dost thou verily purpose this ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Constrained
By strong necessity. Chafe not thou to hear.

PHILOCTETES.

Wretch !—lost!—betrayed ! Why hast thou done
to me
This, stranger ? Give me back my bow forthright!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I cannot! Duty and expediency
Force me to hear my rulers, and obey.

PHILOCTETES.

Thou fire !—thou monster !—masterpiece abhorred
Of subtle villainy! How hast thou dealt with me ?

How tricked ? Art not ashamed to look on me,
 Thy refugee, thy suppliant, O thou knave ? 930
 Thou hast stol'n my life in filching thus my bow !
 Restore, I pray, restore ! I entreat thee, son !
 O by thy father's gods, steal not my life !
 O wretched I!—he speaks no more to me,
 But looks away, as who will ne'er restore !
 O havens, headlands, ye my fellowship
 Of mountain beasts ! O crags precipitous !
 To you—none else I know to whom to cry—
 To your familiar presences I wail
 My plaint of outrage wrought by Achilles' son, 940
 Who swore to take me home, and Troy ward hales !—
 Whose right hand sealed the pledge, who hath ta'en
 and keeps
 The sacred bow of Herakles, Zeus' son,
 And means to show it to the Argive men !
 By force would he, like some strong captive, hale me,
 Nor knows he slays a corpse, a shadow of smoke,
 A phantom only ! Were the old strength mine,
 He had ta'en me not—nor thus weak, save by guile !
 But now, ill-starred, I am tricked ! What shall I do ?
 Nay, give it back : even yet be thy true self ! 950
 What say'st thou ?—silent ! O wretch, I am lost !
 O rock two-gated, I must enter thee
 Again, bereft of sustenance, weaponless !
 Lone must I waste and wither in this den,
 Slaying nor flying fowl, nor mountain beast
 Henceforth with this bow, but myself,—woe's me !—
 Shall banquet things whereon I wont to feed :
 Things that I hunted erst shall now hunt me.
 My death shall for the deaths I dealt atone
 Through him who seemed to know no thought of ill.
 Perdition seize thee !—nay, not ere I learn [960
 If thou wilt yet repent: else, die accurst !

CHORUS.

What shall we do ? With thee it rests, to sail,
Prince, or to yield to this man's pleadings now.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Compassion passing deep hath smitten me
For him, not now first, nay, but long time since.

PHILOCTETES.

Pity me, son, by heaven ! Make not thy name
A very scorn of men, by cozening me !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What shall I do ? Oh never to have left
Skyros !—so tortured by this strait am I ! 970

PHILOCTETES.

No villain thou, but schooled in guile by villains
Hast come, meseems. To knaves leave knavery,
As meet is : yield me up my bow, and sail.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What shall I do, friends ?
(Odysseus appears from behind rock).

ODYSSEUS.

Basest, what dost thou ?
Stand back, and yield thou up that bow to me !

PHILOCTETES.

Woe I who is this ? Is this Odysseus' voice ?

ODYSSEUS.

Odysseus' voice, be sure. Yea, him thou seest.

PHILOCTETES.

Undone ! — I am bought and sold! And this was he
Who trapped me, who hath robbed me of my bow!

ODYSSEUS.

I, be thou sure : none other. I avow it. 980

PHILOCTETES.

Restore, son, yield me up my bow !

ODYSSEUS.

He shall not, though he will it. More, thou must
Go with it, or by force shall men hale thee. This thing

PHILOCTETES.

Me !—vildest villain and most brazen-browed !—
By force hale *me*!

ODYSSEUS.

If thou go not free-willed.

PHILOCTETES.

O Lemnian land ! Almighty splendour of flame
Wrought by the Fire-king, shall this be endured,
That he by force should from thy precincts drag me ?

ODYSSEUS.

'Tis Zeus, know thou, even Zeus, who sways this land,
Zeus, whose good pleasure this is : him I serve. 990

PHILOCTETES.

Abhorred thing ! what lies canst thou devise !
Dost make the Gods thy screen ?—dost make them
liars !

ODYSSEUS.

Not so, but true. This pathway must thou tread.

PHILOCTETES.

I will not, I!

ODYSSEUS.

I say thou shalt. Obey!

PHILOCTETES.

Ah, woe is me! A bondman, plain to see,
My sire begat me, and in no wise free!

ODYSSEUS.

Not so, but equal with our best, with whom
Thou must take Troy, and lay her in the dust.

PHILOCTETES.

Never! though I must taste the worst of ills!
Never, while this land's rock-foundations stand! 1000

ODYSSEUS.

What canst thou do?

PHILOCTETES.

I'll hurl me from yon cliff
Straight, and mine head shall dash the rock with
blood.

ODYSSEUS.

Seize him! Be this not in his power to do!

{Philoctetes is seized.}

PHILOCTETES.

O hands, what plight is yours, of that dear string
Bereft, now beast-like trapped by yonder man!
O thou of pestilent and slavish soul,

How hast thou stol'n on me, hast hunted, ta'en
 For stalking-horse this boy whom I knew not,
 Too good for such as thee, but worthy of me,
 Who nothing knew save to obey commands, 1010
 And now is all too plainly sore distressed
 By his own error and my sufferings !
 But thy base soul, which mines in darkness aye,—
 Though alien was his nature, loth his will,—
 Yet schooled him well in evil to be wise.
 Now, wretch, thou purposest to bind and hale
 Me from this strand where thou didst cast me forth
 Friendless, forlorn, exiled, to living death!
 Perdition seize thee !—oft I have prayed this prayer !
 Ah, but the Gods grant nought that pleasureth me ;
 For thou in life hast joy, but anguish I— [1020
 Yea, even that I live, mid countless woes,
 By thee and the Atreidae laughed to scorn,
 Those chieftains twain whose lackey art thou in this !
 Yet thou yoke-bound by craft and strong constraint
 Didst sail with them : all-hapless me, who sailed
 Unforced with seven ships, forth they cast dis-
 honoured—
 As *thou* say'st; but the deed was thine, say they.
 And for what cause now hale me, waft me hence ?—
 Me, who am nought, who died to you long since ? 1030
 O loathed by Gods, why count ye me no more
 Lame, noisome ? How can ye burn sacrifice
 To Gods, if I sail with you ?—pour libations ?
 Ay, even on that pretence ye cast me forth !
 A curse on you ! Ye *shall* be accursed, who wronged
 Me, if the Gods for justice care a whit!
 I know they do care ; else ye ne'er had sailed
 Upon this voyage to find a man forlorn,
 Had god-sent need of me not goaded you !
 O fatherland, O Gods who aye look down, 1040

Avenge, avenge me—yea, though late it be—
 On all these, if ye pity mine estate !
 I live in misery ; yet, might I but see
 Their ruin, I would dream my malady healed.

CHORUS.

Wroth is the stranger : wrathful is his speech,
 Odysseus, speech untamed by suffering.

ODYSSEUS.

Much could I say for answer to his speech,
 Were this fit time. One word must now suffice.
 Where words are needed, wordy can I be :
 And where of just and good men trial is made, 1050
 No man more righteous shalt thou find than me.
 Yet aye my nature craves for victory,
 Save touching thee :—lo, freely I give thee place.
 Unhand him ye ! Let no man touch him more.
 Here let him stay. Of thee no need have we,
 Now that we have this bow, since in our midst
 Is Teucer, who hath skill to use the same,
 And I, who count myself no worse than thee
 To wield it, and to aim the shafts thereof.
 What need we thee ? Still joy to pace thy Lem-
 nos! 1060
 Now let us go. Thy treasure and pride perchance
 Shall win me honour, which thou might'st have had.

PHILOCTETES.

Ah me ! what shall I do ? Oh misery !
 Shalt thou with mine arms mid the Argives flaunt ?

ODYSSEUS.

Ay ! Rave not thou against it ; for I go.

PHILOCTETES.

Seed of Achilles, shall I hear no more
Thy voice bespeak me ? Wilt thou so depart ?

ODYSSEUS.

Come thou. Nay, noble-hearted though thou be,
Look not on him, lest our good-speed be marred.

PHILOCTETES.

And shall I, strangers, thus be straightway left 1070
Forlorn of you ? Will ye not pity me ?

CHORUS.

This prince our captain is : whate'er he saith
To thee, the selfsame thing we say to thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I shall be chidden as too pitiful
By yon man :—yet stay ye, if this he will,
Till such time as the shipmen have set up
The good ship's gear, and we have prayed the Gods.
Haply this man may come to a better mind
Towards us. Now set we forth in any wise,
We twain. Ye, set forth quickly when we call. 1080
[Exeunt Odys. and Neopt.]

PHILOCTETES. (Str. 1)

Cleft in the caverned crag, now stifling hot,
Ice-cold anon, so then my destiny
Was that for ever I should leave thee not,
That thou shouldst see me end my wretched lot—
Alas for me, for me !
O dolorous mansion, haunted through and through
With my pain, my despair,
What, as the days drag on, what shall I do ?
Whence shall I find, and where 1090

PHILOCTETES.

Food—nay, the hope thereof?—O wretched plight I
 The doves far overhead
Through the shrill-piping air will wing their flight
 No more of me adread ;
 No more I slay them there.

CHORUS.

Nay, thyself hast so decreed,
Man ill-starred: the lot that now
Grips thee, is none other's deed
Wrought by none more strong than thou.
Wisdom wooed thee—thy self-will
Spurned the good, and chose the ill. 1100

PHILOCTETES. *(Ant. I)*

O wretched I, affliction's mangled prey !
 O wretched I, who in my misery
Must dwell companionless day after day
Henceforth in this place wasting to decay—
 Alas for me, for me !—
No longer winning sustenance, no more
 Loosing winged shafts and keen
From that good weapon which my strong hands bore !
 Nay, but all unforeseen [m o
The guileful words of treachery cheated me.
 He who contrived this thing—
Ah God, that him in my case I might see,
 Doomed to like suffering,
 Long, long as mine hath been !

CHORUS.

Fate, wrought out by Heaven's design,
Trapped thee thus—this treachery
Had no help of hands of mine.
Blast some other, then, than me 1120
With thy curse. I tender now
Friendship : never spurn it thou !

PHILOCTETES.

(Sir. 2)

Ah me !—and he sitteth, I trow,
 On the surf-whitened strand of the sea,
And he scoffs as he handles the bow
 Which was life unto hapless me,
 Which none other man living hath borne !
 Ah, comrade well-beloved,
 From the hands that have cherished thee torn,
 With compassion thou surely art moved,
 If feeling thou hast, to see 1130
 That from this time never again
 Shall Herakles' friend use thee !
 Ah the change !—thou shalt now appertain
 To a new, to a guileful lord !
 He wields thee ; thou lookest the while
 On deceit, on the caitiff abhorred,
 Mine enemy ! Knaveries vile
 Be the tools he is wont to use
 To fashion my ruin, to deal
 Mischiefs unnumbered !—O Zeus,
 Unto thee against man I appeal!

CHORUS.

This becomes a man—for Right 1140
 Still to plead, but not to dart
 Forth envenomed words of spite.
 He **but** played the envoy's part
 For the host: their hest he wrought.
 'Twas the common good he sought.

PHILOCTETES.

(Ant 2)

Ah, swift-winged quarry, and ye
 Tribes of the beasts bright-eyed,
 Leap ye no longer, to flee
 From your lairs upon yon hill-side.

For the arrows, my strength of old, 1150
 No more do mine hands upraise—
 Woe's me, the unhappy-souled !—
 Roam as ye list; for the place
 No more is a place of fear,
 No more for you !—it were good
 That for vengeance ye now drew near:
 On my leprous flesh and my blood
 Glut ye yourselves as ye please ;
 Here to resist you is none !
 Nay, in any wise soon must I cease ;
 For whence shall life's nurture be won ? 1160
 Ah, who by feeding on air
 Can sustain him in life, if his might
 Can win him no smallest share
 Of the boons earth gives to the light ?

CHORUS.

If thou dost regard a friend
 Who in love draws near to thee,
 Come !—with thee it lies to end
 This thy sore calamity.
 Dread its fangs are : time can bring
 To thy load no lightening.

PHILOCTETES.

Ha ! thou recallest mine ancient grief once more, once
 more! 1170
 Wherefore, O kinder than all which have fared to this
 isle heretofore,
 Thus hast thou stabbed mine heart ? Ha, what hast
 thou done unto me ?

CHORUS.

How meanest thou—stabbed thee ?

PHILOCTETES.

Yea, if thou hopedst deceitfully
Hence unto Troyland, the land that I loathe, to hale
me away.

CHORUS.

Nay, so I count it were best.

PHILOCTETES.

Hence I leave me ! make no delay !

CHORUS,

Welcome thy bidding is, welcome ! With joy I per-
form it—what ho !
Comrades, each man to his place in the ship ! Let
us go, let us go ! 1180

PHILOCTETES,

Nay, but by Zeus the Fulfiller of Curses, go not, I
implore !

CHORUS.

Rave not so wildly!

PHILOCTETES.

O strangers, remain, by the Gods we adore !

CHORUS.

Why criest thou thus ?

PHILOCTETES.

Ah, wretched one i
O fate, O fate, I am wholly undone!
O foot, my foot!—in the days to be
What—wretch that I am—shall I do for thee ?
Friends, friends, return ye hither again ! 1190

CHORUS.

Nay, what shall we do ? Wouldst have us refrain
From the purpose begotten of that thy word ?

PHILOCTETES.

Nay, nay !—indignation should nowise be stirred
If a man under agony's stormy strain
Shriek out he knoweth not what in his pain.

CHORUS.

Come then, thou hapless man, as we bid thee, with us.

PHILOCTETES.

Never ! O never ! Be sure, I am firm-fixed thus !
Not though the Wielder of fire, of levin-flame,
With his thunderbolt's glare to blast me against me
came !
Perish yon Ilium ! Perish Achaia's array 1200
All, even all whose hard hearts thrust me away,
Spurned me, the tortured cripple ! O friends, bestow
One boon upon me !

CHORUS.

What is this that thou pleadest for so ?

PHILOCTETES.

Bring a sword, or an axe, or a dart—if such ye may
find!

CHORUS.

On what manner of desperate deed hast thou set thy
mind ?

PHILOCTETES.

I would mangle my body ; yea, limb from limb would
I shear.
Self-slaughter is now mine intent I

CHORUS.

What purpose is here ?

PHILOCTETES.

Even to seek to my father's side. 1210

CHORUS.

In what land ?

PHILOCTETES.

There where the dead abide ;
 For he looks on the light of life no more.
 O city mine, O fatherland-shore,
 O to behold thee ! Alas for me,
 That I passed from thy sacred stream oversea !
 To my foes, to the Danaans, help I brought:
 And now—I am nought!

CHORUS.

Long ere this hadst thou seen me faring hence
 To seek my ship, but that already near
 I mark Odysseus coming, and the son 1220
 Of great Achilles, pacing hitherward.

Enter Neoptolemus, followed by Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS.

Wilt thou not say why backward thou dost turn ?—
 What path thou treadest with such eager speed ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To undo the wrong in time past done by me.

ODYSSEUS.

Strange words be these! Now what was that thy
 wrong?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In hearkening unto thee and all the host.

ODYSSEUS.

What deed hast thou done that beseems thee not ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I have trapped a man by foul deceit and guile.

ODYSSEUS.

What man ? Ah me ! dost purpose some rash deed ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

No rash deed I, but unto Poias' son— 1230

ODYSSEUS.

What wilt thou do ? Strange fear steals over me !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

From whom I took this bow, once more again—

ODYSSEUS.

Zeus!—what wilt say ? Thou mean'st not to re-
store !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Yea, for I won it basely, wrongfully.

ODYSSEUS.

By heaven, is this some bitter jest of thine ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If 'tis a bitter jest to speak the truth.

ODYSSEUS.

What say'st thou, Achilles' son ?—what word hast
said ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wouldst thou that twice and thrice I spake it o'er ?

ODYSSEUS.

Nay, ne'er had I desired to hear it once.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Now, be thou sure, my last word hast thou heard. 1240

ODYSSEUS.

There is, there is, who shall prevent the deed !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What say'st thou ?—who is there shall stay mine
hand ?

ODYSSEUS.

All the Achaian host, and with them I.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Wise art thou—yet now utterest nought of wisdom !

ODYSSEUS.

Nor in *thy* word, nor purposed deed, is wisdom.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If justice is, *that* more than wisdom is.

ODYSSEUS.

How justice, to restore again the thing
That by my counsel thou didst win ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

And will essay to atone for my foul sin. I sinned;

ODYSSEUS.

Fear'st not the Achaian host, when thus thou dost ?
[1250

NEOPTOLEMUS.

With right on my side, I fear not thy threats.

ODYSSEUS.

[Threats ?—boy, mine hand is rougher than my
tongue.]¹

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Not cowed by thine hand will I do the deed.

ODYSSEUS.

Then not on Troy, but thee, will we make war !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Let come what shall come !

ODYSSEUS.

Seest thou my right hand
Grasping the hilt ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ay, me too shalt thou see
Doing the like, and dallying now no more !

ODYSSEUS.

Nay, I will spare thee : but to all the host
Will I tell this, and they shall punish thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

So ?—thou art prudent. Be as wise henceforth,
And haply thou shalt 'scape repentant tears. 1260
Thou Poias' son ! Philoctetes, thee I call!
Come forth, leave thou thy den within the rock.

I. Inserted to supply lacuna in the text.

PHILOCTETES.

What tumult by my cave awakes again ?
 Why call me forth ? What, strangers, is your need ?
 Ah me, an evil sight! Come ye to wreak
 Foul wrong on me beside the wrong I have ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Fear not, but hear the words I bring to thee.

PHILOCTETES.

Nay, I do dread. Erstwhile from thy fair words
 Ill fared I, who gave heed unto thy words.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

But is there no space for repentance then ? 1270

PHILOCTETES.

Ay ! so wast thou—in *words*—when thou didst steal
 My bow, true-seeming, all deceit within !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay, not so now. But this I fain would hear :
 Is it thy mind here steadfast to abide,
 Or sail with us ?

PHILOCTETES.

Peace ! say not one word more :
 For all thou speakest shalt thou say in vain.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Art so resolved ?

PHILOCTETES.

More firmly than I say it.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Fain were I thou hadst hearkened to my words :
 But if my words are wholly wasted breath,
 I have done.

PHILOCTETES.

Yea, all thy pleadings shall be vain : 1280
 For never shalt thou win love's trust from me,
 Thou who by guile hast won my very life,
 And stolen it, and com'st to counsel me,
 O son most base of a most noble sire !
 Perdition seize you, chiefs of Atreus' seed,
 And Lartius' son, and thee !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay, curse no more ;
 But from mine hand receive this bow again.

PHILOCTETES.

What say'st thou ? Am I tricked a second time ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

No ! by most highest Zeus' pure majesty !

PHILOCTETES.

O welcome words, if these thy words be true ! 1290

NEOPTOLEMUS.

The deed shall prove their truth. Now reach thou forth
 Thy right hand, and lay hold upon thy bow.

Odysseus comes forward.

ODYSSEUS.

This I forbid—I call the Gods to witness—
 In name of Atreus' sons and all the host!

PHILOCTETES.

My son, whose voice—was it Odysseus' tongue ?—
Heard I ?

ODYSSEUS.

Doubt not: behold, thou seest him nigh,
He who shall force thee to the plains of Troy,
Whether Achilles' son consent or no.

PHILOCTETES.

So ?—to thy cost then, if this shaft fly true !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Ha ! do not, by the Gods, let fly the shaft! 1300

PHILOCTETES.

By heaven, let go mine hand, beloved son !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I will not let thee go ! *{Exit Odysseus.}*

PHILOCTETES.

Out on it ! Why
Didst snatch from that winged death mine hated foe ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay, this had been alike my shame and thine.

PHILOCTETES.

Tush ! doubt not this—these men in all the host
Foremost, which publish for Achaians lies,
In fight are dastards, bold in words alone.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Even so. Lo now, thou hast thy bow ; no cause
For wrath against me hast thou, nor for blame.

PHILOCTETES.

Nay, none. Thou hast shown the noble nature, son,
 Wherefrom thy stock is—from no Sisyphus, [1310
 But from Achilles, who had fairest fame
 Once mid the living, now amidst the dead.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Sweet in mine ears thy praising of my sire
 Is, and of me : yet hear what boon of thee
 I fain would win. It needs must be that men
 Patiently bear mischances heaven-sent;
 But whoso in self-courted sufferings lie,
 As thou, no claim to pardon have these men,
 Nor is it just that any pity them. 1320
 Thou art infuriate, wilt no counsel hear.
 If one in kindness would admonish thee,
 Thou hatest him, accounting him thy foe.
 Yet will I speak : to Oath-ward Zeus I appeal;
 Thou, mark my words, and grave them on thy soul:
 By visitation of God thou art stricken thus,
 Who cam'st on Chrysa's warder-snake that lurks
 A sentinel to guard the roofless fane.
 And from this sore disease shalt thou win rest
 Never, be sure, long as the selfsame sun 1330
 To eastward riseth, westward sets anon,
 Ere to Troy's plain thyself consenting come,
 And meet Asklepius' sons who bide with us,
 Be healed of thy disease, and with this bow
 And with me, smite her towers in all men's sight.
 How this for truth I know, lo, I will tell.
 A man is with us, captive ta'en from Troy,
 The mighty prophet Helenus, who declares
 That this must come to pass ; nay, furthermore,
 That in this present summer fate decrees 1340

All Troy's destruction : else, he freely offers
 His life as forfeit, if herein he lies.
 Since then thou knowest this, consent to yield.
 For goodly gain is this, that, chosen out
 The Greeks' one champion, first, to healing hands
 Thou come ; next, that thou win renown unmatched
 By smiting Troy, the source of myriad moans.

PHILOCTETES.

Loathed life !—why keep me still alive on earth,
 And hast not let me pass to Hades' halls ?
 What shall I do ?—the pleadings how reject 1350
 Of this man, who in kindness counsellcth me ?
 What, yield then ? Wretch ! how shall I face men's
 looks
 When this I have done ? Who then will speak to me ?
 How, O ye eyes which saw my wrongs, my woes,
 Will ye endure to see me thus consort
 With Atreus' sons, the men who ruined me,
 With this all-pestilent Laertes' son ?
 'Tis not the sting of past wrongs galls me so
 As what my soul forebodes I yet must bear
 From these. The heart that hath with evil plots 1360
 Travailed, schools men in all things to be vile.
 Yea, at thee also marvel I herein.
 Thou never shouldst thyself return to Troy,
 Shouldst hinder me—to these which outraged thee,
 Stealing thy father's honour ! [Who adjudged
 Unhappy Aias second to Odysseus,
 For thy sire's arms contending.]¹ And thou with
 these
 Wilt go, their ally, and wouldst thrust me on !
 Never, my son ! Nay, as thou swar'st to me,

1. This clause is generally rejected as spurious.

Speed thou me home : in Skyros then abide,
 And leave yon evil men to an evil doom.
 So shalt thou earn thee double thanks—from me 1370
 And from my father, nor wilt prove thyself
 A villain born, by rendering villains aid.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou speakest reason : yet I would that thou
 Couldst trust the Gods, couldst trust my promises,
 And from this land wouldst sail with me, thy friend.

PHILOCTETES.

Sail ?—to the plains of Troy, to Atreus' son
 My bitterest foe, with this my wretched foot ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay, but to those who shall assuage the pain
 Of thy foul sore, and ease thy malady.

PHILOCTETES.

Giver of evil counsel, what say'st thou ? 1380

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What in the end is best for thee and me.

PHILOCTETES.

Art not ashamed in heaven's sight, saying this ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay, how should one for rendering service **blush** ?

PHILOCTETES.

Service ?—to Atreus' sons, or me, is this ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

To thee : thy friend am I; as a friend I speak.

PHILOCTETES.

How, if to my foes thou wouldst yield me up ?

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Good friend, in suffering learn humility.

PHILOCTETES.

Me shalt thou ruin by thy words, I wot!

NEOPTOLEMUS.

I ? never ! But thou wilt not understand.

PHILOCTETES.

Know I not this—the Atreidae cast me forth ? 1390

PHILOCTETES.

Think—though they cast thee out, they will restore.

PHILOCTETES.

Never with my consent to look on Troy !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What shall I do then, if no words of mine
May bend thee to do aught that I advise ?
Tis best I cease from speech, that thou live on,
As now thou livest, hopeless all of cure.

PHILOCTETES.

Leave me to suffer all I am doomed to bear.
But, as thou swarest, grasping my right hand,

To speed me home, this do for me, my son ;
 And loiter not, nor say thou one word more 1400
 Of Troy. Suffice my lamentations past.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

If thou wilt then, let us go.

PHILOCTETES.

Ah, noble word pronounced of thee !

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Brace thy feet for standing now.

PHILOCTETES.

So far as strength is found in me.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

How shall I escape the Achaians' blame ?

PHILOCTETES.

For this thou shalt not care.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Nay, but if they come to lay my country waste ?

PHILOCTETES.

I will be there—

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Thou ?—what wilt thou do to help ?

PHILOCTETES.

The shafts of Herakles shall quell—

NEOPTOLEMUS.

What dost mean ?

PHILOCTETES.

The invaders' courage.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

Forth then : bid the land farewell.

Herakles appears amid clouds above the stage.

HERAKLES.

Nay, go not yet, till thou have heard,
 O son of Poias, this my word. 1410
 The voice of Herakles dost thou
 Hear, and his face thou seest now.
 For thy sake have I left mine home
 In heaven, and lo, to thee I come
 To tell thee Zeus's will, to stay
 Thy feet from this thy purposed way;
 Thou hearken to the words I say.
 First, mine own fortune will I tell to thee :
 After all toils I bare and wrestled through,
 I, as thou seest, won immortality. 1420
 Know of a surety this is thy weird too,
 After these toils to attain a glorious life.
 With this man to Troy's stronghold shalt thou go,
 And of thy grievous hurt shalt thou be healed :
 Then, chief in prowess acclaimed of all the host,
 Thou with mine arrows shalt bereave of life
 Paris, who was of all these evils cause.
 Thou shalt smite Troy, and to thine halls shalt bear
 Spoils, chiefest valour-guerdons of the host,
 To thy sire Poias, mid thine Oeta's slope. 1430
 But, of all spoils thou gainest from yon host,
 To my tomb a thank-offering for my bow
 Bring thou. To thee, Achilles' son, is this

My counsel—thou without him hast not strength,
 Nor he without thee, to o'ermaster Troy :
 But, like two lions with one hunting-ground,
 He wardeth thee, thou him. And I will send
 Asklepius to Troy to heal thy wound.
 For Troy is doomed a second time to fall
 Before my bow. Remember this, what time 1440
 Ye spoil the land, to reverence the Gods ;
 Since all things else stand second in the eyes
 Of Zeus. When men die, dies not fear of God :
 Live they, or die they, this shall perish not.

PHILOCTETES.

O voice long yearned for, and heard this day !

O thou that appearest at last—at last I
 This thy behest will I not disobey.

NEOPTOLEMUS.

In the selfsame purpose stand I fast.

HERAKLES.

Linger not: up ! be ye doing. Away !
 For the hour is ripe, and the keel waits there, 1450
 And the wind is fair.

PHILOCTETES.

I go : and I cry the land farewell.

Farewell, rock-hall, co-watcher with me,
 And Nymphs in the watered meads that dwell,
 And foreland loud with the stern-voiced sea,
 Where in rock-rifts oft as I crouched, was mine head
 By the South with his brine-rain buffeted ;
 Where many a time, as, tempest-blown,
 I have shrieked, yon mountain of Hermes hath thrown
 Back from his breast an answering moan. 1460

And now, O wells and Lycian spring,
I leave you, I leave you, who deemed this thing
Should never betide me.

Farewell, thou sea-girt Lemnian land !
Fair voyaging speed me away from thy strand
Whither fate shall guide me—
Fate, and the counsel of friends, and One,
The All-overruling, who this hath done.

CHORUS.

Let the long procession shoreward sweep [1470
With chanted prayer to the Maids of the Deep
To go beside us, and safe to the *end* of our voyaging
keep.

[Exeunt Omnes.]

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